

miniMAG

issue46
cynicism isn't wisdom



here are the reasons not to say I've missed you

Emily Kay MacGriff

I packed all my gear and left
dreams on the hotel chair, they get heavier

with time
you are half-made,
a CB radio, my Mom
s call sign taped to the side,
10,000 year old ice
in a plastic cup,
your sisters bad
haircut, the shortest
TV program leading into black
and white cartoon —

a two-stroke engine starting
on the first pull. the right size
carabiner, the wrong shape.
look around
the tight hackles
a rattlesnake drew in sand
just at the threshold of disinterest.

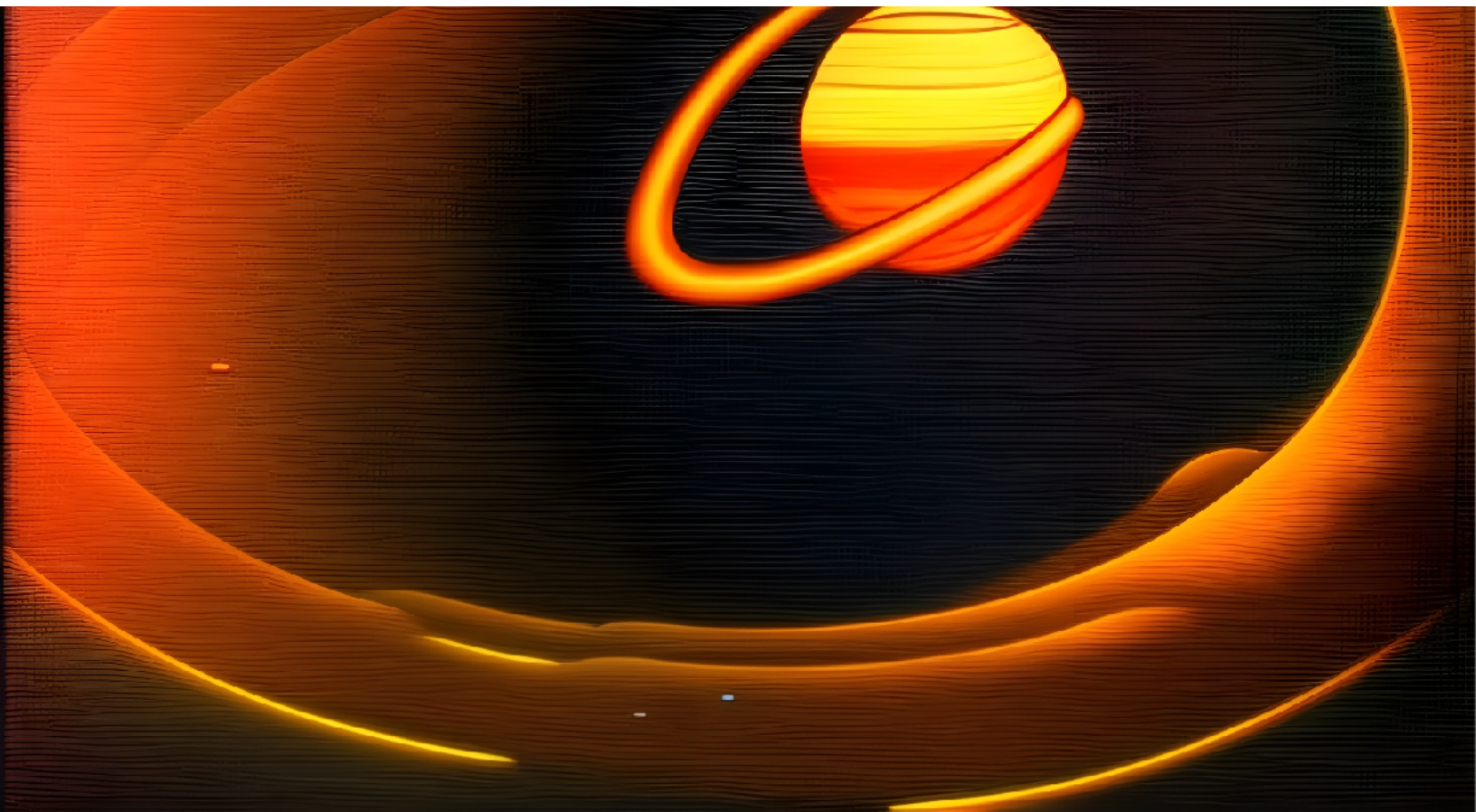
I'd run

toward the first cloud of you
crossing the sun goodnight

The Book of Nihilisms I Have Known and Loved

Nicholas Michael Ravnikar

O-M-G who died and made you subservient
I have to enjoy this show or else
Two in the hand is worth some shot nerves in the bush.
Has anyone ever called your hand too calloused?
No but my heart.
There's a gap between
what you think you mean
and what you actually mean
when you say freedom isn't free.
I'm in your pocket, make me sad already
Where is the patience for sorrow?
I can't point where it hurts
I'll have your license suspended.
I'll have your license revoked.
So that you can spend more time with me.
Just give me what you want.
I will give you what I have.
Forgive me for the sins you have confessed.
My legal guardian is market regulation
Unemployment is independent work.
Profitable production depends on permanent unemployment.
Profit demands surplus value.
Thank you for your unpaid labor.
You can wait as long as you want for opportunity,
but don't ever blame bad luck.



MEN AND THE WOMEN WHO KNOW THEM

Caitlin Andrews

ONE

Fred Perry

I was walking home from school in the mid-autumn evening (and this was in rural Scotland, so it was already pitch black with the ever-present risk of a vampiric bat attack) when a cluster of disorderly adolescent boys wearing Adidas tracksuits and Fred Perry trainers rounded the corner and started shouting sexual profanities at me. At first, I elected to ignore them; eleven-year-old me was objectively a bit shit-looking, and even at that age, I figured any kind of male attention was a misguided attempt at a compliment, so I held strong in my belief that this exchange was actually targeted towards whatever rogue Heidi Klum-type was wandering behind me and decided to try and make it home without further incident. No such luck.

As I kept my eyes firmly fixated on the stone wall in the distance and attempted, very subtly, to yank down the hem of my school uniform's kilt in case their badgering was prompted by a pair of unintentionally displayed Primark underpants, my refusal to engage began to antagonise them. They wanted a response. They wanted to be entertained. So, they started screaming about the girls in my year—if I knew Christie Balfour, if I could get a message to Ella Arbroath, and if it was really true what Jen McKenzie did with that boy in the year above over the summer holidays. As their words became sharper and

more littered with lecherous hand gestures (you know the ones, where their fingers make O-shapes and jerking motions about six inches from their trousers, as though they were the first hominids to ever grow penises), I felt a lump begin to rise in my throat. Home was less than three minutes away, but the concrete slabs of pavement were beginning to blend together, and I felt my feet become slack and sluggish, like those childhood nightmares of being chased by clowns, and, latterly, adulthood nightmares of being chased by rapists and dental practitioners.

Whatever happened, I wasn't going to tell my mother. I had already decided that. But I hadn't decided what I would do if things went really wrong; if it all took a turn for the worse; if the headlines read: "Local girl, 11, gang-raped in central Perthshire. Was reportedly wearing terrible underpants. Parents in shock." I simply didn't have the guts to tell my mother the truth—or worse yet, to repeat their crude, verbally incontinent words to my father, which would alert him to the inconvenient fact that I had a vagina—and watch the lines between her brows deepen in anger and fear before quickly concealing a guilty feminist rumination about what it meant to be forty and not have disorderly teenage boys shout sexual profanities at you anymore.

After a few moments of trying to ignore the boys' derisive snorts over my shoulder, I heard a large thunk as an Adidas-clad adolescent boy stepped off the pavement. My increasingly gelatinous legs refused to let me turn around and look him in the eye for fear of violent retribution, but I felt my cheeks begin to burn with shame as he offered up the final dose of propellant for my humiliation.

"Nice ass," he said. "Can I fuck it?"

TWO

KIDS

When I was fifteen, I had been dating my first proper "grown-up" boyfriend for a little less than a month; a tryst that mainly involved driving out to the arable farms outside Crieff late at night in hopes of lying around partially naked in his silver Toyota hatchback and watching cerebral French animations from the seventies—half of which

I couldn't fully comprehend and the other half emotionally undercut by the stabbing pain from a wayward seat belt buckle. His name was Telly, a twenty-four-year-old aspiring screenwriter from the Central Belt, who blew thick, edible clouds of fruity vapour into the air and deemed the habit *so much healthier* than smoking cigarettes, in spite of his weekend proclivities for taking ecstasy and cocaine and roaming around the capital like Raoul Duke without the sunglasses. Our moments together were limited, which really just meant I didn't have time to analyse what the hell was going on.

After an evening spent trying to teach me how best to improve my sexual performance and the respective virtues of veganism, Harmony Korine, and Neutral Milk Hotel, my boyfriend revealed he had an announcement to make.

"I'm sleeping with a woman who sculpts," he yawned. "She's in love with me."

Telly was clever, bonily handsome (in a way that rejected the need for conventional charisma), and had a surplus of creative talent that was only mildly polluted by a lifetime of women telling him he was too pretty for his own good. Even my mother, a woman known for her shrewdness in adopting manual skills and picking partners with strong hands, fell prey to his impish charms on the night he first darkened our front door. She thought he was handsome; he thought she was beautiful; I tried not to think of it at all.

"When did that start?" I asked Telly, coughing a little from the vapour, and trying to dissuade myself from engaging in thoughts of my mother whilst semi-naked.

"A few weeks ago," he replied cavalierly before pausing. "We used a condom."

If it hadn't been for the sweet, boyish bagginess of his jumper or my own internal anguish at the premise of committing to a man whose mandatory "older guy" sex advice amounted to "*Enjoy it more,*" I might have considered plunging that little purple vape into his eye, but as it stood, I just refocused my attention on the Current Joys song playing over the stereo. After all, my own nights spent in the company of a man named Frank meant I wasn't in a position to protest.

Frank was an unapologetically boorish person who had been provided with the same nepotistic luxuries as a man like Telly but abandoned them in favour of some kind of middling office job, which meant he thought that access to a company car and a few anecdotal conquests about sleeping with the sisters of previously dismissive ex-girlfriends were the pièce de résistance of tantalising sexual conversation. Occasionally, we played pool (I, to a shitty proficiency, him to a level only accessible amongst men who sweat Guinness and live in pubs), drank lemonade, had semi-public sex, and more often than not, ignored one another in favour of people-watching or staring at our mobile phones. I never had the time to get comfortable with Frank—our interactions were always shrouded by my desire to spend as much time as possible away from my parents’ house, and I went home most nights gagging for a shower.

“I believe you,” I said, after returning my attention to Telly, my brain bouncing around this half-hearted and heavily-penised betrayal and my newly increased likelihood of having HSV-2. “I’ve been seeing someone, too.”

He looked at me, and the saccharine puffing stopped.

“What?” he said, coldly, and we both heard my voice begin to falter. “His name’s Frank. He has a beard.”

Telly stared at me quizzically, and for a few moments, there was silence in the car. He took a deep breath.

“You know what, Cait? I really think you might be a sociopath.”

THREE

Quarter Pounder

By the time I was sixteen, I spent most of my weekends reading old ladies’ obituaries on the internet and contemplating the efficacy of downing a few bottles of Mr. Muscle Drain Cleaner. After telling my mother I was taking a train to visit my ex-boyfriend at his parents’ house in Portlethen, I agreed to meet with Richard, a man who was a full-time repeat traveller of the North Coast 500 and a part-time dabbler in orthodontics. If Richard had ever taken an interest in the music of Robert Smith or Dave Gahan instead of Def Leppard and Twisted Sister

(or any of the other shit he kept on cassette tapes in the back of his car), he might have stumbled across my mother at an alternative gig in the eighties, though she was unlikely to have wanted to *Pour Some Sugar on Him* due to his already receding hairline and eventual middle-aged propensity for dating teenage girls.

The night we met, Richard drove us thirty miles out of our way to the McDonald's restaurant situated right next to the Broxden Roundabout — a location I remembered due to it being where a friend and I bought celebratory McFlurries upon completion of our second year at senior school two years earlier. He asked me if I wanted anything from the menu, and I shook my head before watching him grab his big brown paper bag from the young, colourfully-haired girl at the drive-thru and set off in awkwardly conversational silence.

“So, why are you here?” I asked once we had arrived at an unoccupied car park, much like the stilted script of an underpaid counsellor who was probably committing at least six ethical violations.

“I don't know,” he replied. “I hadn't really thought about it. I guess this is just the kind of thing getting divorced does to you.”

“Oh, right. Yeah. Cool. So do you think I'm young?”

I watched the vein in his forehead begin to pop and quiver, as if to say, *Watch out, or we'll pull a Rick Allen.*

“You don't seem young,” he replied. “And I think that's good enough for most people.”

I brushed the hair out of my face. Once Richard had finished wiping the thick globs of ketchup off his chin, I felt him insert his tongue into my mouth and push down hard on a contraption attached to the back of my chair, as if to relocate us to the cassette-tape-laden backseat in a manner only explicable by the existence of a James Bond ejector chair. Softly, he muttered something to himself about my “hot little sixteen-year-old body,” and I felt the world fade out into a fat-fingered abyss wherein I concentrated my eyes on a piece of dirt rubbing shoulders with the fog on the backseat window. When it was all over, everything was silent.

“Sorry about that. I'd have emptied the tank earlier, but I didn't have

time after work. What's wrong?" he asked, staring out into the darkness.

"I'm not sure. Do you feel guilty?"

He took a breath.

"No. Do you feel like a victim?"

I shook my head no, and he smiled.

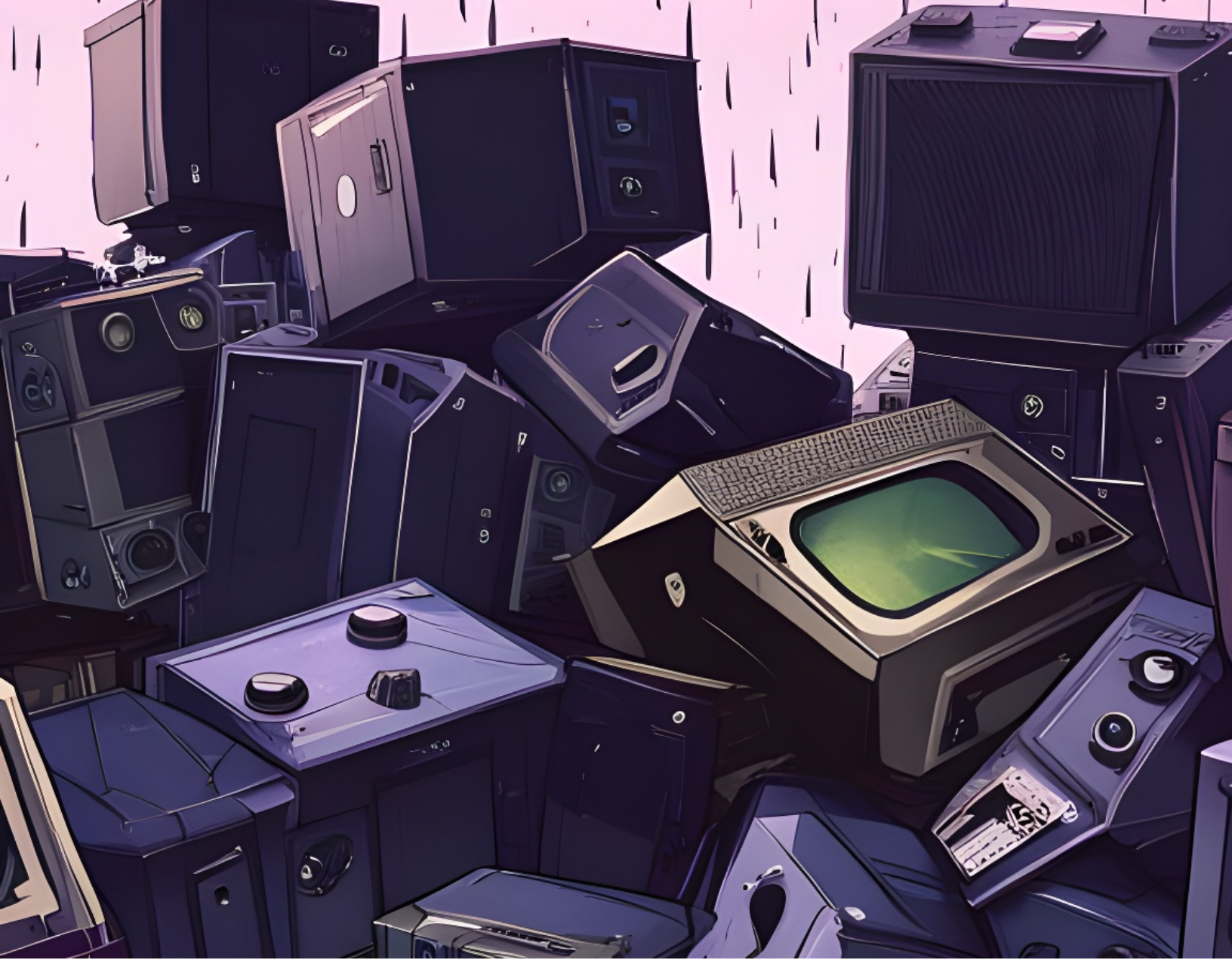
"So we're fine."

Later on, during the drive home, I thought about what the "Local Girl" news headlines would say this time, but I relegated that thought to the place in my mind where I hid the smell of blackcurrant vapes and the feeling of Primark underpants and the buried desire I had for the pain to last forever, even if it meant following it wherever it took me. When we arrived, Richard wrapped me up in his arms.

"I'll see you soon," he said quietly, kissing me on the cheek.

I paused.

When did you see me the first time? When did anybody see me the first time? I thought as he opened the car door and put his key in the ignition. But by the time the words came out in the order I intended them, he was already gone.



Knowing

Richard LeDue

trauma so bad that you misspell it
two or three times,
trying to figure out the word
more than your memory-
how the waiting on death
a side effect of a terminal diagnosis.

Silence speaking over the things
you wanted to say,
knowing that looking out a window
all most of us will have left
one day,

watching trees,
and knowing they won't miss you
or care when you stare at the rain
weeks later, finding no answers,
so you lie to yourself
that you've forgotten the questions.

A Song of Sunday Music

David Harrison Horton

I am waiting for the world's tilt
to do something worth noticing.
The cataracts in my eyes
reflect like fish scales at market.

The donkey has hand grenades for hooves,
and isn't wearing the new uniform
well at all,
lanyard dangling down to his penis.

The gladiolas are salaaming near the gate,
wilting in the heat.

The lovers will meet after school
somewhere near the monkey bars.
It won't be until later
that both their lives are ruined.



Mischief

Nolcha Fox

Barbara Leonhard

The gremlins ate my links for lunch,
I cannot get to Amazon.
Now they're eyeing photographs
I stored on my computer.
Social media may be next.
Will I be erased?

They spoon stupor
into my coffee.
Stir in rancid algorithms.
Claim my poems
are composed by Google laMDA.
My hard drive in lockdown!

Gremlins giggle
as my emails
evaporate from sight.
How will they know
I'm meeting their demands:
lifetime chocolate
in exchange
for leaving me alone?

My new email threads,
their tangled jewelry.
My book links,
their phishing lines.
I feed them Snickers,
they serve up Spam.
I troubleshoot,
they duck.

Gremlins angle with tangled
jewelry and phishing lines,
anything to catch attachments
and my attention.

Hungry gremlins eat attachments
like they're computer chips.
They gobble rich text,
especially my poetry
gone like a snack.

My poems are not
all you can eat.
Gmail is not
a free buffet.
Instead of munching
bits and bytes,
eat real food instead.

Like the cookie crumbs
between the keys.
Flood them out with my coffee?
Not going to fall for that one again -
or hitting factory reset on my iPad
without cloud backups
when you gorged on my wifi.

I take my hard drive
to repair the damage
you have done.
The shop will suck you out
and take you to the shelter
for adoption.
Your new pet parent
won't be me.

Illuminati

Christian Ward

The one-eyed pyramid is talking to itself again, so I'll take out the rubbish and give a secret handshake to a crow. The Cyclops-eyed CCTV is watching. I'll give the bird a Fibonacci sequence of peanuts, a binary code of matches and bottle caps, and boxer short semaphore flags. Perhaps the streetlights will wink at me, perhaps the plane trees will fling a message out of their seed balls. I'll return the favour by emptying my pockets of last week's downpour. This is how the world really works: One favour begets another, no matter the size. Give me a stick of gum and I'll get you the moon perching on top of the Eiffel Tower.

Untitled

Simo Gagai

Hide behind my smile
Swear under my breath
You'll never get what I meant
For the things I share are catered and well coated
What lives inside my heart is not well spoken
Two fingers next to my mind
Rubbing the skin to get the best line out so you can hear what is meant for your ears
But is it really what I meant
The discreet to the highest bet
Building a nest for the birth of the breath that makes us connect
The forged chemistry
Lived hypocrisy
For that I must confess
You gave me respect and I offer the same back to you
Sweet melody
No vibes that don't please me
I listen and build a response
What you said is from your perspective
But I happen to share the same sentiment
We may walk together but we have different directions
To see different from you doesn't make either of us wrong, it's just a different view
But we prune to look for the sound of me too
So we steer in every way to prove doodles
And that's what makes us friends!
Coz I share your energy just as much as you share mine
And no candle ever loses its light by lighting the other candles



MOBILE CABIN: 4

Alex Prestia

There's a clearing down a dirt road, off a gravel road, deep back in Bankhead National Forest. On one map it is called "The Old Homestead", but it isn't mentioned on any other maps I've managed to find.

The clearing itself is filled with bright green grass, the caws of distant crows, and nothing else. The trees, mostly post oaks and loblolly pine, occasionally whisper in the wind but are mostly quiet sentinels acting as natural fences to the lot.

The spirits ensure it is a safe place to sleep; they charge a toll -or- perhaps took something I needed to get rid of, I haven't decided yet. I dreamt of my family, in our old neighborhood but in a different home.

Down the street a narrow apartment tower had been built. There were no elevators, but I was convinced I lived on the twenty-third floor and began running up the stairs. Each room, there were four on each floor, was stacked with bunkbeds. Most of the doors were open. It was dark, there were no lights, but I could see naked feet peaking out from ill-fitting sheets.

After about seven floors, I stripped naked and decided I must return down the stairs and to my familial home immediately. I leapt from bannister to bannister going down.

I entered the house through the backdoor, snuck upstairs to my room, the lightswitch didn't work, or maybe I did not know which switch was

the right one. I went downstairs to knock at the master bedroom. My mother greeted me at the door with a revolver, she did not remember me. Only after pleading did I calm her down. My father was sick in bed. My brother sat motionless in an armchair to the edge of the room illuminated only faintly by a fireplace. He was covered in bandages with shocks of his red hair peeking out. One does not typically realize they are in the middle of a manic episode- but there I was naked and surrounded by a beautiful family now broken.

I sprinted out of the collapsing house and into the neighborhood, running hard past the homes of old classmates and friends until I came to a dirt path leading into the woods. I kept running until I reached the Old Homestead.

I bolted awake, safely in my makeshift bed in my truck. A flash of lightning illuminated the clearing outside of the foggy windshield (I often don't use blinds when I'm sleeping far away from people). I peed into my bottle as the thunder rolled by, ten Mississippi in the distance, there was no rain. It was around 3:50 am. I fell back to sleep and had pleasant, unremarkable dreams until morning.

Leaving William B. Bankhead National Forest the next morning, I was in an exceptionally good mood. I left some weight behind.



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