

Friends For Fun

“Get your fat ass in the car,” Andrew said and shoved his brother Nathan into the backseat of my two-door Honda civic.

I scooted my seat and leaned forward. Nathan was for real fat. The seat bounced and my chin hit the steering wheel.

Kate got in the passenger seat. She sat and leaned forward too, pressing her cheek to the glove compartment. “Hello there,” she said and started laughing.

It was a sweet way of being that she had. I coughed up a chuckle.

A truck pulled up next to my car. It’s engine rumbled and the window rolled down. “You fuckers ready?” Matt said. He lifted his hat off his head, tucked his hair and brought it back down. Dan was in the truck with him and the bass player from Brown Frown, who was little and cute, unlike the rest of the band. The truck pulled out of the parking lot and onto the road.

I ejected the Tori Amos album from the stereo, tossed it under the car seat and grabbed my new Yeah Yeah Yeahs CD, harder and darker and they didn’t make me seem like a sissy.

The backseat was a hilarious mess. Kelly screamed at Nathan as he flopped headfirst into her lap. Nathan turned around and kicked at Andrew’s face as he climbed headfirst into the car. And I was nothing and nobody that had to do anything but follow these fools and that was a freedom I’d never known because I’d been a dictator all my life.

“Goddamnit Nathan, you are one disgusting smelly ass sack of shit.” Andrew rolled over his brother into the middle of the backseat.”

I lit a cigarette, took a swig off the beer I’d snuck out of the bar and started the car.

“Alright boys now,” Kelly said and put her arm around Andrew. “Can we please just get to the party and then you two can destroy each other there.”

“It’s always this way.” Kate said to me. She turned the stereo up. “Just drive.”

The song was choppy and had no melody, a screechy guitar that echoed the hard beat of the bass chord. It was what was in. Math rock. $A+B=C$ music. There was no layering, only separation because one thing lead to another and the beauty of strings and piano, the symphonic beauty was too pretty for a time when people were blowing up buildings and killing lots of people.

It took work to like it. But there was power in the music, in the way that it took me out of my soft sensitive soul and gave me thunder and bang. It made me cool. Not only by taste but music infected me, lending swagger where usually my feet stepped tender.

I backed up, turned the wheel and drove forward. The car dropped fast and scraped over a curb that I was certain wasn’t there. “Whoops.” I said and found that nobody had noticed except Kate who was smiling like a fool. She was so drunk she hadn’t stopped smiling since Brown Frown’s show had ended.

“You okay?” Kate noticed my glance.

“I’m good,” I said and felt for the beer that I’d put between my legs. “This is good.” I turned the music full blast because to talk was scary at that point because I had

nothing smart or new to say and I realized how slow I'd become after years of feeling like I'd lived on my own natural speed that came from my brain spinning wheels like it was racing for the door.

I drove and the music was loud and they were fighting in the backseat but it was just little scraps over the loud stereo and rattling speaker.

It didn't look like a place that kids should be living but then we weren't as young as I thought, I thought as I traced my finger along the side of a metal art sculpture that was standing inside the entrance of the yellow Victorian house. A hand smacked my back and it was another slap of approval, the man stamp. Dude, you're cool, you're in except it was Dan and he wasn't just labeling me.

"Hey man," he said. "Adventure of a lifetime." He used his hand to guide mine off the art piece. He pointed to a door that was far away in the kitchen.

I squinted my eyes and followed his hand but the world waved and he put the joint back in my hand. I stared at it.

"Come on, come on," he said and off he was going down the hallway that lead to the kitchen that had a backdoor.

I hit the joint and handed it back to Andrew who was sitting on a wooden bench in the room where we were. He took it back and sighed. "Your mouth is such a mess."

I stared at my hand and lifted it to my face to find my lips and wipe.

"No, no." Andrew said. "Not your lips, your mind the words that come out of your mouth."

I stared at Andrew.

“Never mind. Kiss me.” He puckered his lips.

He was gross and I didn't want to kiss but if I didn't there was nothing happening wild and it was actually just what I needed. I grew balls big and stepped to him as a man. My lips went against his and I used my tongue as far as I could, licking the insides of his cheeks.

He pulled my arms off the back of his head and stepped back like a giant. “Whoa, man kisses.”

“Paul, Paul,” Dan stood miles away at the door and he waved me on.

“Let's see that again,” Kelly said and stepped close to me and my face was close to hers, cheeks and cheeks.

“He's the beast,” Andrew said. “The warning of end times.” He grabbed me and tried to throw me off my sex game. He threw his cigarette smoke mouth around my lips and tried to swallow me whole but my hole was the biggest. I dug back out the black space that he tried to eat me with and I sucked his breath and licked his tongue with my tongue making him gag. He let go of me.

I looked to him through heavy eyelids for he knew my dark.

“Oh you're fucked man. Fucked,” He said to me and he had a smile for the ill that was in me.

I walked the hall. People were dancing in the kitchen and there was spilt beer on the floor.

“Paul!” Dan grabbed my arm. “The tree house is waiting.”

Outside there were lights strung around, going off the porch that we had stepped out onto and connecting to a big oak tree that had a swing coming off one of its wide branches.

“Come, come.” Dan said. He let me go and ran to the tree. He threw a leg over a low limb and lifted himself up to sit atop it.

I did as he did. Threw a leg over the limb that got me upside down where I hung and let blood go to my head. This wasn't right and I fell to the ground to make it better. I threw up. It felt great. I threw up again and felt better and I stuck my finger down my throat and got out another load and it was resetting things, a night started again because some of the alcohol that was slowing me was coming up and out of me and there was less haze of fog. “Hurh,” I cleared my throat and the piece of popcorn or tonsil stone that had been caught in my tonsils loosened and gagged me.

I threw it up and vomit went all over the tree roots.

The lights lit brighter and I blinked a few times to get tears out of my eyes that had come in the throws of vomit.

“Paul,” Dan was still going for it, up the tree and I could see that there was a place for rest at the top. A tree house and he was in it.

I could do this. I stood straight and found focus in my gut and there was the tiniest bit of kick still hitting and I forced it upward and climbing into a tree that would take me to the top. Leg to limb and over again. I was a dummy. I laughed at myself. I could die. It was easy. There was no need for notes and pills or poison drinks. Death was everywhere. I hung off a limb upside down and it was so heavy holding on.

“Wait for me,” Kate said from the ground and I looked upside down at her and she was coming up and I was leading the way that Dan had led.

She loved me.

I pulled myself up with my arm and over the tree limb, getting into the crook of branch and trunk. She had super blonde hair and puffy lips and she was pretty like a girl that gets picked on for looking weird when she’s a kid. She got to the branch below me and stood up to get a hold of the branch that I was on and she jumped to get her chest over it and pulled herself up to be with me. She pulled a hair tie out of her pocket and pulled her hair back into a ponytail. She had her fools smile. I kissed her and remembered what it was like to be a boy in love. Before sex and the dirty. She kissed me back. “Sorry,” I said and wiped my mouth and wanted to think of something smart to say to make things normal. “I can’t do that.” We weren’t kids.

“You don’t have to do anything.” She said because she had a brain that still worked and knew what to do to live normal.

I climbed another branch. She came along. The tree house had an opening that we crawled from the bottom through and we were in the tree house.

From up there it was a long way down. And below I could hear the voices of a party. They were all assholes. It was how it was afforded, the right house with the artwork, asshole paid. “Fuck you!” I screamed.

“Yeah tell ‘em man!” Dan said.

“Fuck all of you.” I leaned out on branch and a twig broke. It flew down and landed near a guy sitting on the swing. He looked up. “Watch it you asshole.”

Kate grabbed me by the belt loops of my pants. “Careful.”

“We know who’s the assholes don’t we.” Dan said. “We know the real assholes.” He jumped up and down on the treehouse and he was getting jacked again. “Them.” He thought it was funny and he was funny.

It was building. The night was getting later and we had less and less time for the explosion to happen and it might have been earlier when I kissed Andrew or even earlier when I’d gotten butt naked in the back room of the Engine Room and run laps to the rotten music of Brown Frown. It was all stupid. I was a fucking joke. I unbuttoned my pants, pulled out my dick and pissed off the side of the tree house.

A girl screamed down below.