

# Static on the 15th

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He rang me up on a horribly damp Wednesday night.

Had I known, I would've thrown the phone against the wall, ripping the cord from out of the socket. But prescience is something I couldn't sharpen with a knife, or tighten with my hands, or mold like clay. Had I known.

He sounded exactly the same. It was odd, at first, but it made sense. "Most likely to go nowhere" is what I used to tease him with, and he never took it as injury. God bless his soul.

"How are things? Just dropping by your end of the world, you know, for work and stuff."

Not quite believable, but I entertain. Said he was in town for a construction gig, of which I was unaware of. Wished him the best of luck. Said he wants to keep in touch, agreed, hung-up.

To this day, I still can't figure out how he had my phone number.

I walked back to the couch, and I could hear the taps on the roof. The crosswords defeated me before the rain did.

Reminiscing hurt. That's all one could really do in that lonely town, back then. And if the thoughts didn't break you, it was the shoveling that would bend you. But you always snapped back right back together, like a rubber band. That's what you did. Not much of a choice, but choice was redundant; routine was prized, and plentiful.

Even more plentiful than snow was rain, as if those were the two seasons. Whoever was flicking the switch, they could've kept it on either, the folks didn't really care.

People don't stumble here. I mean, of course it can be a pit stop, or an intermittent thing. But nobody really wants to be here, by choice. Anybody who tells you otherwise is either wicked in their hearts, or has never checked in a motel here.

Things change, of course. But that's like saying paint inevitably dries, or grass always grows. If you could notice it, people would pay you a fortune. "Record it for me!" they'd say, or "Give me your eyes, how do you do it?".

The real change are the people, living here. Some settle here forever, others just for business. Some pass through, some arrive and are never seen again.

I carved out a little place for me here, after college. It isn't much, but it works. Keeps the hamster turning in its wheel, as people say.

I never called him back. It had been a month, at least. In my little hobby store, he walked in. Guess the day.

"Johnny-boy, man, how you've been? Been working out? You look real good, man"

That brought me back. I felt a lump in my throat, looking at what my best friend wore. The smell had really hit it home.

"How's construction?" I don't know why I asked that. I saw him. I knew exactly how it went.

"Oh..." he said, sullen and downward. "It didn't pan out. Guys were a bit mean to me, and it turned out not to be what I hoped for"

"Right."

There was a sudden silence. "Do you think you've got a minute, man? I'm... I'm not doing too good."

"What's the problem?"

I could see his eyes, behind that mess of a countenance. They pleaded. He took off his toque, which had been torn at the top, and underneath it, the light bouncing off his round head.

He sobbed, quietly, as if not wanting to disturb the miniatures.

"I didn't want to come here, man, but I had nowhere to go." I remember him saying, clutching tightly at his grey hat. Christ, he aged.

I couldn't speak. Reminiscing hurt my chest.

He lurched forward, arms outstretched. He hugged me but, things had changed too fast. I couldn't see it.

"I'm sorry man, I should go" he whimpered, wiping his nose with a piece of ragged cloth. He was leaving.

"David."

He turned around, and I remembered the hope in his eyes he was trying to tie down with his mouth.

"Remember those nights, in my car, with the scanner?"

He stopped and stared at me, forgetful. I took out my keychain, and jiggled the little broken bells he had given me in kindergarten. The sound had done more than my words ever could've.

The beard was rustling. "Yeah!" he blurted out, still wiping his nose. "I remember those nights!" I couldn't see it, but I knew he was smiling like a kid.

"I'll close shop in 15, it's what it usually takes me to wrap up." I said, to further his excitement.

His eyes got really wide. "Buddy, this is your shop?" he whispered, as if to contain himself.

"For a while. Boss is on vacation. Poke around, but, keep your hands to yourself!" I remember saying jokingly. It was a joke I usually said to customers. I made him sob even more. It was only after consoling him that, no, I didn't think he was dirt-poor, I could go and tidy up before the closing of the shop.

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The air had been unusually still that night, as if the clouds were holding their breath. Truth is, I was too.

The rusty key swiveled the lock in place, ringing those bells again. "How come you still scan, John?" David asked me, all the way from the wet sidewalk.

"I don't. I was too lazy to take the thing off." It was true, but I was remiss in minding the tone of my words, back then.

"Yeah..."

I threw a sly glance at him. "Plus, chicks dig it" I lied.

Good old Dave came right back to life. "I knew it!"

His smile was contagious, even when hidden. He, in his infinite ways, complimented my car, my job, my life. I could only say thanks, before quickly turning the ignition on.

Catching up was pleasant, the car ride uneventful. Reminiscing didn't hurt. It actually felt good. We grabbed food, which was about as flavourful as the town itself, and the coffee, just as nocturnal.

It was only when I parked us around the empty lot near the abandoned bus transit that we both got giddy, like kids unearthing some forlorn pirate treasure.

I had quickly switched off the radio station that had been playing that Pink Floyd song, and using the scanner extension, I fumbled around the knobs.

"It's been a while, eh?" I said as I tried to get the damn thing to work.

"Here, I remember how" he said as fast as he leaned in, taking over the reins.

The clocks felt like they were dialed back years. "All that's missing is Joey in the backseat, and Stan..." I said, half-awake.

"Remember how scared shitless he was? Thinking we were breaking the law?" he said, with the same bad boy grin etched through his beard.

I laughed harder that night than any night I could ever recall.

It was static that interrupted our reverie. The kind that muffled the air, and silenced our voices.

"Nothing, huh..." I felt resigned; my watch didn't say 1989, but twenty after eight. Routine dictated that the night ended there.

David just leaned back, defeated. "I swear I thought I heard dispatch at some point, man."

In my happiness, I suggested that we give it another go, same time next week. He gleefully nodded.

He quickly gets out of the car. I scroll down the window almost just as fast, yelling "Dave, I can give you a ride home!"

He turns around. "I'm real close" he says, with that goddamned smile. "Don't worry about it, John. Be seeing you."

"Remember, same time next week!" I remember throwing back, as if it was a high-school night.

The drive back home was quiet, as were the street, as was the town. The air was nowhere to be found, and the clouds had parted. They must've been tired too.

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The following week came slower than usual. Every day, reminiscing felt less and less painful. The wind suddenly appeared too. Shortly after, the little orange leaves lined the lanes. The change was palpable; there was an electricity in the air that I couldn't explain. It was you, wasn't it?

The store was opened, and empty, as usual. There I was, in the corner, painting away or clipping some wood. That night, fifteen minutes before the close, I was standing there, hiding something on the table for you.

I'd look up from my watch, to the door, and back again. "How would he walk in? Would he smile like he does, should I get his coat?"

Then, for food, I'd have gotten you those pasta noodles you binged on when we were roommates. I remember you grew to hate them, but I think you would've really liked them. I would've made them myself.

I locked the shop door behind me, the keys jingling, but not like they used to.

The wind howled past my ears, and before I could jump into my car, I saw it.

On the hood of my car, firmly stuck under the wiper of my windshield, an envelope was being flicked by the wind.

I warmed myself in my car seat, and my curiosity gets the better of me.

In the envelope, a folded letter. But at the bottom, brand-new keychain bells.

"Hey Johnny-boy! Figured you needed some new ones, the old ones made you look square, man. Take care, David.

PS: Your town is boring, get outta there! If not, hope you find something juicy on the scanner one day!"

Some days, David, I sit in my car without going anywhere. I sit, and I turn on the static. Every wednesday, of every week, of every month, the car comes to life. I reminisce. It's beautiful, like it always had been. It's been a year, on the 15th, and I miss you. One day, I'll get out of here.

In this town, some pass through, others stay and some are never seen again. Be seeing you, Dave. Wishing you were here.