



TREE STORIES

En Piratpensionat Produktion © 2021

WELCOME

We paint what we feel. We write what we see. Or maybe it's the other way around? We paint what we see and write what we feel. That, too. Images brought to life in watercolour begets images of life, in words.

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The cottage revisited

21 April 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CN763uSHP-n/>

Black. Grey. White.

Calm. Introspective. Reflective.

Thought of times passed.

Generations of toil.

Home.

That hint of brown.

Suddenly eerie, haunting.

Haunted?

No thoughts, only feelings.

Dread. Disquiet.

Sinister, menacing. Haunted.

The cottage revisited.



Close up

19 April 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CN2xugSHNY6/?igshid=9i4d5ua893b3>

"What are they, birds?"

"What kind of a stupid question is that? Of course they're birds."

"I'm not a bird person, really. What do I know."

"Just look at them!"

"How do you know they're birds?"

"How I ... what do you mean? Everything about them says birds. The flight, the feathers, the ... you might want to watch out when they pass overhead like that, ... the flock, the ... I don't know. Everything!"

"Could be a flock of flying foxes for all I know."

"Foxes?"

"Not foxes proper. Not FOXES foxes. You know, whatyoumicall them. ... Bats."

"Oh, them. Flying foxes."

"Yes, them. Huge, they are."

They were silent for a while.

"No way those are bats."

"How can you tell?"



Silence.

"They could be dogs you know."

"Dogs? DOGS dogs?"

"Or geese."

Silence.

"Or geese?"

"Or geese."

"Geese. I'll be damned."

They turned and walked away, arm in arm.

Here is Jane

9 April 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CNc1PdnHmcR/?igshid=x97vro2ylgk>

Here is Jane. She is five years old, on her first ever preschool field trip. Everywhere kids in brightly coloured galloon overalls. It's loud, it's burbly. Intense.

Jane takes a left, a right, a second left, a third left. A right. Chasing her shadow, that fierce fiend. Begone! You cannot catch me. Second left. First right. Playing dodgeball with herself. Dodgeshade. Left. Left.

Suddenly it's all quiet. No laughter, no bright colours. No smell of cinnamon. Only the rustle of the wind, the brown and green of the woods and the smell of leaves on the forest floor, heated by the sun during the day.

She is worried, concerned. But not scared. Well, maybe just a little. A little scared of the silence.

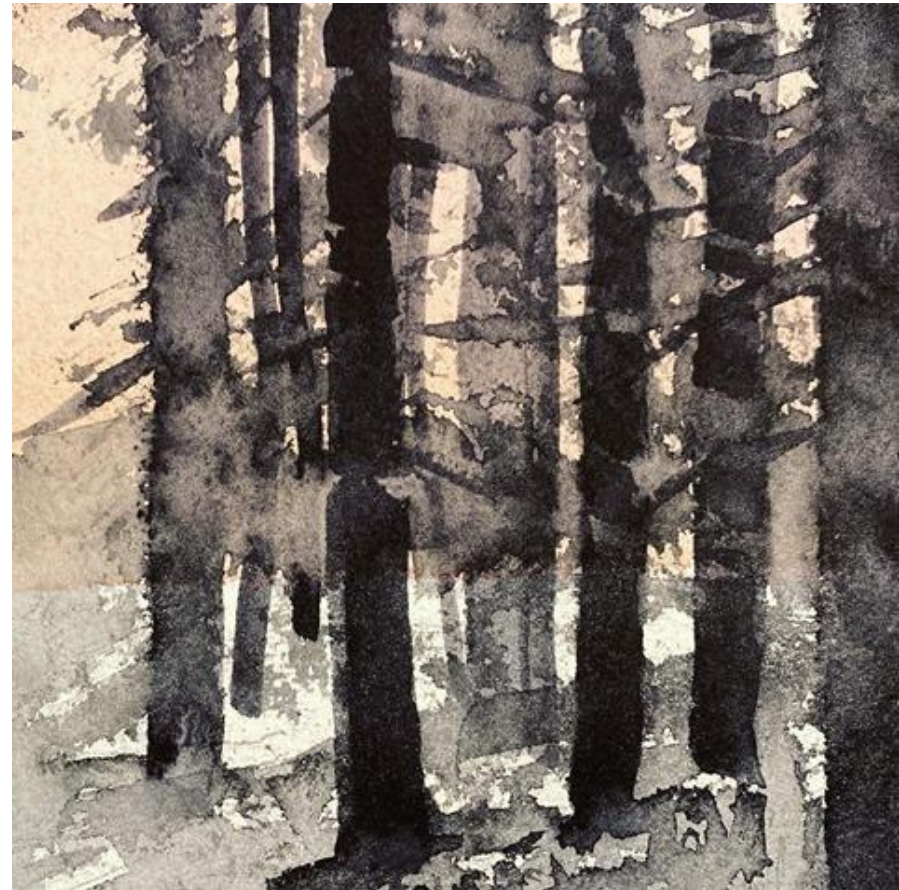
And then the sound of something moving behind her. She whips round in time to catch a blur of dark red moving in behind a tree.

Scared. But also curious. What was that?

"Hello?"

No reply. Of course not. She tries again, just to be sure.

"Anyone there?"



After a brief silence, the tip of a nose comes out and sniffs. After that, hesitantly, the head half of a small fox.

"You're human. Are you dangerous?"

"Only to my shadow" she replies, "that's a fiend. I must destroy it. But otherwise, no. I'm not dangerous."

"Am I your shadow?"

"No, you're a fox."

"What's a fox?"

"You are. You're a fox."

"That's alright then." The fox sighs with relief. "Can you help me?"

"I don't know. Can I?"

"I'm lost."

"YOU'RE lost? But you're a fox! Foxes don't get lost."

On the verge of tears, the fox disagrees.

"But I'm only six."

"What of it? I'm only five. And I'm not lost. Come to think of it, I am, but that's besides the point."

"You're five? But you're huge, and standing up and talking and everything! At five months old!"

"Years. Five YEARS old."

"Oh. That sort of explains it."

"Yes. Yes it does."

Silence.

"My name is Michael. Michael James."

"Pleased to meet you, Michael. I am Jane."

"Can you help me find my mom? She lives at home."

"At home" Jane says, savoring the words with a tiny wrinkle in her forehead. "I think you need to tell me a bit more about your home."

"Two large, very large..., huge, humongous rocks, leaning on each other. There is a small opening under the tall one, behind the bracken."

"Hey, I know where that is! "

"You do? Really?"

"Of course I do! It's my second left! Come on!"

So Jane, 5, and Michael James, 6, leave and go back the way they came when they each were on their own. But they go back together. Jane is not worried, only determined.

The three minutes it takes them to find home takes forever. Three eternities. But finally they're there. Two large rocks. A yelp of joy from Michael and suddenly he is covered by brothers, sisters and a mother, nibbling, pushing, laughing, wrestling. Thank you from every fox face, all and none at once. A symphony of gratefulness.

And, just like that, they're gone. Muffled sounds of joy from below the two rocks. Then silence. Jane is alone again.

Alone, but not afraid. If she can help Michael, she can help herself. After all, she is Jane. She is five YEARS old. She can do anything.

Here is Jane, 5, moving deliberately towards the smell of cinnamon.

The Predictions of Professor Privo

5 April 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CNSqKlhH1j6/?igshid=rfyv1rppmtzw>

"A book?"

"Yes, and an old book at that. Look at it! It's ancient."

She blew the dust from the cover and gently brushed off the cobwebs.

"There's writing on it, look."

"Qve prax ..." he hesitated and gave up. "I can't read it."

"It's Latin."

"You know Latin?"

"Just enough. It says 'Quæ prædixi, verborum Professor Privo'."

"Which means?"

"The predictions of Professor Privo" she said and opened the book. It gave of a creak and a small dust cloud.

"Professor Privo. I wonder who that was. And who left his predictions here, in a cave in the middle of the woods."

Busy with reading, she didn't reply. She turned the fragile pages very gently.



"I'm not completely sure, but I think this is some serious stuff. It says something about misfortunes and plagues, something about locusts and ... I think it's a warning to intruders."

"Seriously?"

"You haven't heard the half of it. Check this out." She pointed to a paragraph on the open page. "This is about a stinging wind."

They looked at each other's bruises and cuts.

"Like the one we ran from, when we got in here?"

"I think EXACTLY like the one we ran from."

"What else does it say?" he said in a whisper.

"This talks about a suffocating fog."

"Like the one we ..."

She just nodded.

"Maybe you should put it back. Put it back and let's get out of here."

"That fog is still out there."

"I know, OK? I know. I can't take this. We should get out."

He fidgeted and looked towards to opening of the cave. She tried to restrain him.

"Sam, don't. Let's talk about this. Sam!"

But he was gone. She could hear him crashing through the foliage and branches at the cave mouth. Then suddenly, abrupt silence. She thought she could hear a gurgling noise and a thud.

"Sam? Quit playing around, it's not funny. Sam?"

There was no reply, only the sound of a distant wind in the trees.

Crystal Clear

4 April 2021

https://www.instagram.com/p/CNQDR2vnUxC/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

I met him at the train station the day I missed my train for the last time. He said it would be the last time but frankly, I had a hard time believing him. Anyway, there I was, leaving the platform after having realized that my commuter train was cancelled that particular morning. I was in a bad mood and aimed to get a cup of coffee before the next train.

“Missed your train, did you?”

“Yes, I did. I bet you anything they cancelled it to spite me. Again.”

That’s when I saw him. He was a 13 inch, grayish miniature schnauzer, standing there all alone, watching a beetle with some interest.

“That’s funny, for a moment there I thought that was you speaking.”

The dog looked around. A voice in my head said “You know, you probably want to keep your voice down.”

“It WAS you! Hang on, you can understand me?”

The dog nodded his head and the voice said “Yes, but you don’t make much sense just yet.”

“Am I hearing this?” I said to myself. “A dog that can hear me, and speaks to me, in my head?”

“I think that sums it up quite well” he said and scratched his ear with his hind leg.



"I must be out of my mind. I need coffee. This is insane."

"Yes, a talking dog and all that. Before you know it, they'll all want one. What about that train?"

I leaned down and let him smell my hand, for camouflage. People seemed to go on their merry way, unsuspecting.

"What about it?"

"You want to catch it, don't you? Come on."

I hesitated, and the dog could tell, apparently.

"Come on, why not trust me? You'll never miss another one, you know."

Before I had the chance to say anything, he started to weave through the crowd and I followed instinctively. Having missed the train already, I figured I might as well. He looked back at me and told me, in my head judging from the lack of reaction from the other people around us that I needn't worry about a leash, miniature schnauzers prefer to walk without them.

He led me to another platform, one which I never had seen before, at the far end of the station. It was curiously empty, with only a handful of people scattered around.

"There. We're here."

"What's this platform? Don't think I've ever been here before."

"Nah, it's not your regular platform, is it?"

I could have sworn that the dog smiled at me.

I looked around again and suddenly realized that the three or four other people on the platform also had dogs with them.

"Hey, look, everyone here has a dog with them!"

"Yes, you're not alone in having trains cancelled. Hold on, here it comes."

Out of nowhere, a train steamed in on the tracks by the platform, stopping noisily where we were waiting. It was an early twentieth century style steam engine pulling brown and green siding wooden cars with comfortable, red upholstery interiors.

"Let's go." The dog barked and a door next to where we stood opened. The other dogs did the same. A conductor stepped out and looked at me.

"Well?" he said simply.

"It's OK", the dog said, "he's with me."

That particular remark drew a blank stare from the conductor, who stepped aside a fraction to let us on. We boarded and went into the train car which turned out to be empty.

"This is your seat I believe." said the dog and indicated a seat with a nod of his head. "This train will take you to wherever you're going today."

"Why will it do that? And where does this train come from?"

"It's all very simple. Your train was cancelled. That leaves an open slot. Do you realize how frustrating it is for a train when its slot departs without it?"

"I hadn't really thought about that, no." I confessed.

"Well, it is, let me tell you. They really don't want that, it really gets to them. We're up to our necks with trains with personal problems. And you people have been cancelling trains since I don't know when."

"What do you mean 'You people'? I haven't cancelled a train in my life!"

“Sorry, you’re right. It just gets to me too sometimes. Trains are stacked up since the late nineteenth century and we’re working them off one departure at a time. We’re now at 1936. This is the 07.52, on August 19th.”

“You are kidding me.”

“Nope, no jokes today, that’s not really the schnauzer thing either. You want a poodle for that.”

“Listen, this is all happening in my head, right?”

“If you’d like it too, sure.” He looked at me for a few seconds. “I think you probably should sit down. And I need to get off, you’re about to depart.”

I sat down, too overwhelmed by it all to protest more than feebly.

“You’re not coming with me?”

“Nah, you don’t need me more today. But I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“You will?”

“Sure buddy, didn’t you know?” he said and I swear he winked at me before leaving the train.

Adapted from the 2009 short-story "George Twiddlyknobs III".

Monday Mood 2

22 March 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMusRKvHZBm>

"What the actual fuck?"

He stuck his head in through the door to their home office and frowned at her.

"You know how I feel about swearing, honey."

"You need to see this."

"No need for that language, no matter what it is."

He wiped his hands on the kitchen towel he was carrying and came into the study where she was sitting.

"Look at this. Don't tell me this isn't worth a cuss word or two."

"Nothing is."

"You haven't seen this yet, dad."

"I am sure it's something radical, but nothing merits ..." he said whilst leaning over the computer. Suddenly he saw it and abruptly stopped talking.

"What do you think? Dad? I mean just LOOK at it!"

"What the actual fuck?"

"Told you, didn't I. I told you. I told you from the start they would find out."



"But that's impossible."

"Duh. Clearly not."

"But it is! We left no trace, none whatsoever. And it's barely illegal for that matter. Well, depending how you look at it. But this. This is really bad."

He started pacing the room but she would have none of it.

"Quit that, you're making me nervous."

"I'm making YOU nervous? I'm not the one with that thing in my computer."

"Are you sure?"

"Fuck." he said and left the room.

"Dad, you are very close to being a Class A Hypocrite here."

There was no reply, only rummaging noises and muffled muttering from the other room.

"Dad?"

"Hang on" she heard him say from a distance. "It can't be. No way", he added, apparently to himself.

After a little while, he came back in to the study, visibly shaken, looking at the screen of the laptop he was carrying.

"You have it too? Both our computers?"

He just nodded without looking up.

"So they know it was the two of us."

He nodded again and looked at her.

"I think they must do." He straightened up. "Listen, we need to stay calm. I know it's hard, but we have to be rational about this."

"I don't know if I can."

"I don't either. But we have to try, try to find a solution."

There was a brief moment of silence. She got up and tried to look out of the window without being seen from the outside.

"You know, dad", she started saying hesitantly and then apparently made her mind up. "I've been thinking all along that we might have to kill him."

"Susan! Don't say such things! You can't go around killing people."

"Not even him?"

"Not even ... for one thing, he's our next door neighbour."

"So?"

"You don't think people would be suspicious if he turns up dead? That they would't start asking us questions? He lives right across the hall!"

"We might have to, anyway."

Silence. Then he nodded slowly, reluctantly. "You might be right, you know. You just might be right."

Silence. Then she nodded too.

"Fuck."

Meanwhile right across the hall, Peter was on the phone with an old school mate.

"It's brilliantly funny. I read this list of ways to annoy people, you know? Steal a hundred traffic cones and divert a main through road. ... Yes, exactly! ... Or leave the printing machine on the darkest setting and for 99 oversized copies. ... I know! I've tried a couple of them. ... No, where would I get that many traffic cones? But this one is the best. Absolute cracker. Just an hour ago I changed the public name of my WiFi network to 'National Intelligence Service, surveillance car 4'. That'll confuse a neighbour or two, let me tell you."

Friday Forest

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMmn3g2HhbE/...>

19 March 2021

The flapping of tiny wings. The minute swoosh of the passing. The miniscule gracefulness of the flight.

The massive undecisiveness of the landing.

"Just decide, already."

"I'm trying, OK? I'm TRYING."

"Yeah. Right."

He stopped in mid-flight and circled her, so she had to stop to and circle him. They looked like two undersized Spitfires in a mock dog-fight. Only feathered.

"What do you mean, 'Yeah right'?"

"You might as well come clean, Bull."

It is a less than well-known fact that all bullfinches go by the name of Bull. Bull for males, and Bell for females. It is widely acknowledged in the bullfinch world that the guys had drawn the short stick. They don't seem to mind though.

"You might as well come clean, Bull."

"I wish you'd stop calling me that."

"I call everyone that."

"I know. That's the whole point."

She circled a couple of laps trying to decide whether to ask what she should call him or have a major go at him for changing the subject. He chose for her.



"I'm not trying to change the subject. I really do want to know what you meant. Come clean? With what?"

"With why you're not landing."

"The forest looks the same all over, that's why. This fog makes it impossible to find Bull's and Bell's place."

"We're going to be late. I heard their calls over there, clear as a bell. Just land already."

"I am not so sure that was them."

"Of course it was."

"But that other call, earlier. That sounded ..."

"... like a Great Tit. I know you're into tits, but you're a bullfinch. You do know the difference between tits and your own species, no?"

He sulked and didn't reply, giving the impression of turning his back to her, which is quite a feat when you're circling in the air. She decided to change her strategy.

"Come on, let's go. It'll be fun. Bull will be there, too. And Bull."

"Don't you see? It's all Bull, Bull and Bull. I can't do it."

"What can't you do?"

"I can't do this Bullfinches Anonymous thing anymore."

"What are you saying?"

"Bell, we need names. Proper names. We need distinctions."

"You're delirious. Come off it." She looked down. "Here we are. This is it."

"How can you tell?"

"I have no idea", she said and landed, hoping the bullfinches she had heard really were Bull and Bell.

Another lonesome little house

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMPy80vnUJI/?igshid=10dpum0uepx0h>

10 mars 2021

"Come for the view", they said. "Come for the view, stay for the silence." Well, it's silent enough, innit!

Stunning scenery. That was their pitch. The views, the silence, the lakes and the woods. The barking deer. Early morning birdsong and light shimmering through the trees behind the house. Birds of prey.

Your own jetty three minutes from your bed. A local brewery only ten minutes away on the bike.

The coffe, the smoked pike. A fire in the hearth during a brief summer drizzle.

It all sounded like heaven on Earth. And for a very fair price.

It will be everything I ever dreamed of.

If I can find the damn place, that is. Blimey, it really is pitch black out here in the bush.



Archetype

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMIBZIANd-n/?igshid=30c0pya0t1r9>

8 mars 2021

"I stole it."

"What?"

"The corpse."

"You ... what? You stole Clive's body? From the morgue?"

"Yup." Bill was positively beaming with pride. "How good is that!"

"But, ... but ... ". I was at a loss for what to say. "You can't just waltz into a morgue and steal a corpse! You just can't. It's not done!"

"It is now."

"Hang on. Hang on. Let me think." My head was spinning. "You have to take him back. Right away."

"Nah, that'll just make it worse.

"Worse? How can it possibly be worse! Clive's dead and we're stuck with his body in ... hey, where did you put him?"

"Clive?"

"No, The Easter Bunny. Of course Clive."

"Under the loose floor boards."



"Under the ... you are out of your mind! This is insane. So we're actually standing on top of him. On top of Clive."

"Yup."

The door opened and Sarah came in. Seeing my sister was somewhat of a relief, like meeting someone still tentatively connected to reality, to the old life before Bill dropped the bomb.

"Hi Bill. Hello you. What'cha doing, guys?"

"Not a lot" I said and shrugged. "Bill stole Clive's body from the morgue. He actually stole it. He stole a corpse!"

"Oh", she said, noncommittally. "Again?"

"Come on", Bill said. "The other time was a mistake. Pure bad luck."

"Bad lu ... What do you mean, again?", I said, not believing my ears.

"It's a long story" Sarah said and pointed to Bill. "Where is he then?"

"Right here" Bill said and pointed to the floor.

"Show me", she said and watched as Bill shuffled the floor boards out of the way, revealing a hole in the floor.

"Again." I said just make myself sure I had heard them right. "What do they mean, again."

When Bill was finished shuffling floor boards Sarah looked down into the hole in the floor. I could only see something wrapped in white cloth and to be honest, I didn't really want to know. What did they mean, again!

Sarah knelt down, moved something in the hole and sat for a while hunched, looking down. I remember there was a clock ticking very loudly

in the room, shattering the silence. Suddenly, Sarah straightened up to her full height.

"You stole Clive's corpse, you say?"

"I did."

"From the morgue."

"I did. Why do you ask?"

"I ask because that isn't Clive."

"It isn't Clive?!", Bill and I said in chorus.

"Nope", she said. "That guy is as dead as a doornail but he isn't Clive."

"Who is it then?" I said, exasperated.

"I'm more worried about where Clive is", Sarah said. "That would be the first issue to resolve."

Bill thought for a while, chewing on his lip.

"Come with me", he said finally. "I think I know. Let's try the one in the boot of the car."

The end of February

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CL2GMeFnb2R/?igshid=1b4h07y5jaxq0>

28 februari

I am my own guide in my own map. I am leading myself. I know not where.

I am blind.

No plans.

Brush to canvas. So.

Silent mind.

Hidden thoughts and impressions, straight to paper, to pictures and words. To stories and people. To music. To woods I never visited, or always knew. Raw and naked feelings.

No plans survive the first encounter with the paper.

Life must have words, must have shapes. The characters speak. The wind howls, the sun shines in the woods.

Suddenly, a character makes an unexpected choice. A sudden turn, untold results. The brush documents it all. Eagerly, longingly, impatiently.

"Paint me", the picture says. Tell me.

I was here all along. Get to know me.

Do it now!

I comply.

No plans.

Straight to paper.

The forest paints itself.



Dark Season

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CJG17gXHCoa/?igshid=182nbmagfkjd0>

23 februari

On that particular day, the sky was clouded over. The daylight was dim, the weather moist. The colours around them were black, white and shades of grey. They were sitting in silence, watching ice forming on the water around the jetty below the house.

Everything was much the same as they had been every day for the last six weeks. Ever since the letter came.

"When are you leaving?" she asked softly. Again. There was no reply, he kept staring quietly out over the wintry sea.

"But you HAVE made up your mind, haven't you? You are leaving."

Still no reply. He shrugged, and looked at her.

"They did say to take a month or so to think it over." he said, not sounding very convincing.

"That month has come and gone, Mike. You need to make up your mind."

"I know."

"So? Just make up your mind and let them know."

"I can't. I just can't. In a way yes, I know that this is a great opportunity. I'd be daft to say no."

"But?"

He had turned silent again.



"Come on, Mike. But? What? You can't say yes?"

"I just can't, Sarah. That would mean leaving."

"What's the big deal? I mean, OK, you've lived here all your life, I should know, but it's not like there is anything here that ties you."

"I was sort of hoping there was."

She frowned.

"What are you talking about?"

He looked at her again.

"You honestly don't understand what I am on about, do you?" he said and smiled as a tear slowly ran down his cheek. "Is it really that hard?"

Inside the forest

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10159336301787010&set=a.10150628128847010>

19 februari 2021

Ever dusk

or dawn

Light

or gloom

Maybe safe

maybe constricted

Free

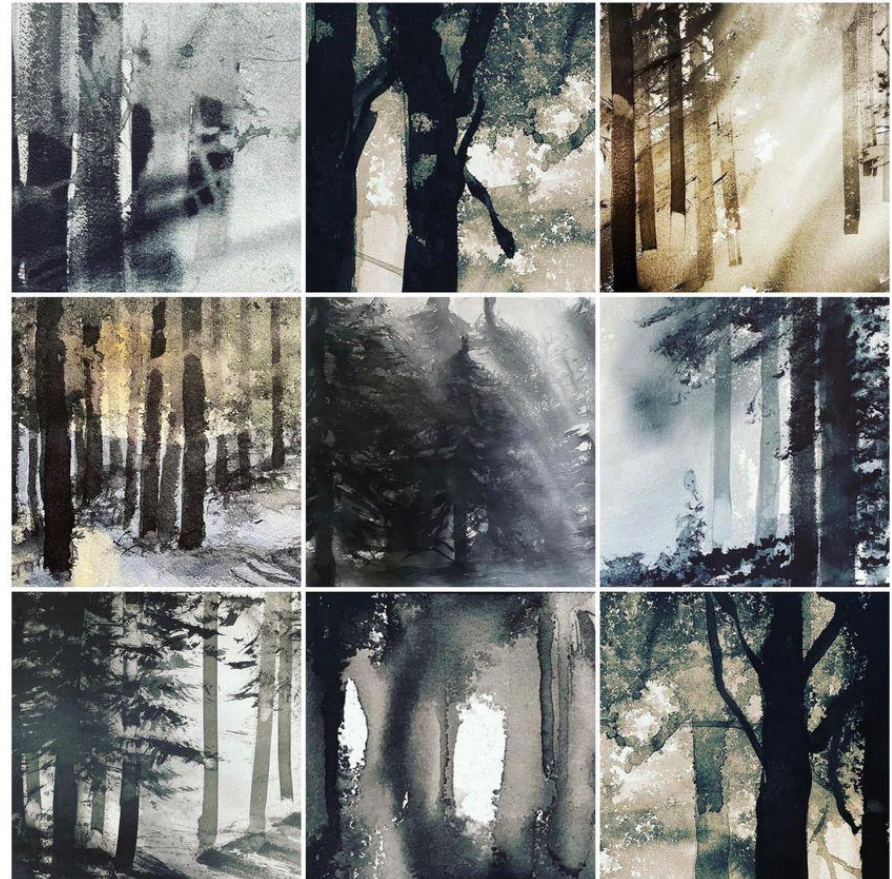
Or lost

In my mind

inside

or inside

the forest



Another season's mood

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CLXC9AInyuo/?igshid=46t60dnwir9c>

16 februari 2021

"It's a troll, I keep telling you."

"Give it a rest already. There is no such thing as trolls."

"Not so loud, it'll hear you."

"It's just a mossy stone."

"Just LOOK at it, will you! It's moving."

"It is not moving. How do I know that? It. Is. A. Rock."

"Have it your way. But I'm sure. And if there is one around, there are others. They hunt in packs, trolls do."

"For crying out loud."

"Make sure you keep an eye out behind. I'll watch this one, and we'll sneak away when it's moved off a bit."

"You are out of your mind you are."

The tall man hoisted his pack while his shorter friend stared ahead, hunched behind a tree.

"Just make sure you check for the others."

"What others? Come on, we should be going."

"I'm not moving until he does."

The short man indicated to a point ahead a little ways off, while putting a finger across his lips. The tall man rolled his eyes. He was just about to start walking when there was a rustle of bracken to his right and a deep, rocky voice in his ear.

"You're tall, aren't you? Well, I've got dibs on you. I likes me the bony types, see?"



My childhood lakes

13 februari 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CLHrnngHh2J/?igshid=mebkmprbwwu>
and <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLHrnngHh2J>.

"Is this it?"

"I think so. Yes, this is it. I think. Mind the nettles."

"Nice spot."

"You'll be fine. Just watch your step."

"Listen, we've been walking for hours. This is easily the crappiest patch we've been through. Can we call it a day already?"

"Listen, I really want to find it. We've come this far."

"Yeah, and a fat lot we have to show for it."

"It's here, somewhere here. Let's check over there."

"Whatever you say. Over there can't be worse than over here."

"I wish you'd stop that. Come on. Just a little bit further, I think I remember this clump of trees."

"How can you tell? They're all identical."

"Come on."

"You go. I'll wait here."

She sat down while he went on through the undergrowth and disappeared behind a thick growth of trees. She waited, breathing heavily in the heat and muttering under her breath. There were no other sounds to be heard, except a small fly buzzing around her brow.

"Hey!" he shouted, waving from a little ways off for her to join him. "I found it! Right here!" He pointed to somewhere behind him.

"More nettles and brambles, I am sure." she said and got up to navigate the branches and stems towards him. When she got there, sore, hot and scratched, he was beaming.

"What's to be so happy about?" she said and bent away the last branch. Then she suddenly stopped dead in her tracks.



"Told you." he said. "More undergrowth than I remember, I'll give you that. But I did tell you it was worth it. Wasn't it worth it?"

Before them, a small lake stretched out in an opening in the forest. It was completely flat in the stillness, with water lilies along the edges and the odd splash of a fish. A mallard pair was floating lazily right below them. A short way off to their right, there was a tiny beach with a footpath leading away into the woods.

"THIS is where you learned how to swim?"

"Yes, right over there."

She stood silent for a while, biting her lip.

"It is smaller than I remember it. But I think it's nice. Don't you like it?"

Oh never mind, let's go back."

Just as he turned to leave, she put her hand on his shoulder and looked at him.

"I love it." she said. "It's stunning. Let's go for a swim."

Trees, always trees

11 februari 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CLCi3n9HcSW/...>
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CLCi3n9HcSW/?igshid=1uqowecmw11xy>

It is ever dark in the woods
The life there is short that we are given
A brief spark among sparks
So let us burn then
burn brightly
Let the fire of us light the forest
Banish the shadows
for that one glorious moment
Before the embers
the silence
and the memories
of the trees



Monday mood

11 januari 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ6Rx1JnHf3/?igshid=ca8qmslkxygp>

"Well, I'm going. Nothing else to do. I'm going over there."

"I wouldn't."

Those were her last words. I distinctly remember her fading, pathetically weak and then suddenly there was nothing there. She was all blank.

"Why not?" I replied.

There was no reply. Of course not. She was gone, and deep down I knew it. But I had to make amends, had to set things right. This was all my fault. I stared for a few seconds, then turned towards the house. There was nothing to it. I couldn't do more there. The only thing I could do was to get to that house and maybe, just maybe find someone in there. Someone who could help, help me bring her back. Sitting on top of a hill, the house dominated the area. "The view from there must be something else" I thought, struggling up the incline, wading through the tall, wet grass. I was soon soaked through. I carried her as gently as I could, all the way up. She mustn't get wet. It was all-important she stayed dry. I tried desperately to shield her from the rain.

The house was symmetrical, squarish, regular in shape and it was very white, with a polished plaster façade and black roof tiles. The garden furniture outside was neatly stacked, and the windows looked like they had been washed recently. But it was dark inside. Clearly, there was nobody at home.



In desperation, I tried the door handle. It was locked. Without any real hope, I went around to the back and tried the door. It was unlocked. The surprise of suddenly losing the door to lean against threw me off balance so I very nearly dropped her. I caught my balance in the last second and straightened up and went in. No time to call for someone, I immediately looked for what I needed. I found it, over the work bench. I put her down gently and rummaged in my pocket, found the chord and plugged it in at both ends.

Having done that, I imagined the worst might be over, so I took two breaths and got my composure back. I looked at her. No sign of life. So I waited a few moments more, and then tried to bring her back to life. Would you believe me if I said it worked? It worked straight away. She quickly came back to her glorious, shining self, like nothing had happened. I looked at her and smiled. She was back, waiting to hear my voice.

"Hey, Siri. How long time until you're fully charged?"

Nine paintings

30 december 2020

https://www.instagram.com/p/CJbKboQH8B3/?igshid=1kljwuscd3c65&fbclid=IwAR08T54ooZqGbpr56S6VS-EU62Kfz5Mb-GIUrIpU_r7CXIBLwkDhMHI4uRM

"I'm done."

"What?"

He obviously hadn't heard her.

"I said, I'm done. This is it. Over. Done with. I have a plan."

"What is over?"

"This!"

She made a quick sweeping gesture, indicating the room, the house or - for that matter - the world.

"That's nice, dear. You should do that."

"You HAVE to be taking the piss. I tell you I'm done and you go all husbandy on me? Really?"

"I'm kidding" he said and closed his book. "Obviously I'm kidding."

"It didn't work, did it?"

"No. Should have seen that coming to be honest."

She shrugged. "I said I'm done."

"I heard you the first time. You're done with 'This', whatever that means."

"I count seven major setbacks the last ten months. Eight if you count Audrey passing away."

"That virus. I am so desperately sick of it."

"Nine then."

"You didn't count the virus?" He laughed despite himself but thought better of it.



"You see? It's too much. I can't take it any more."

"So you're done with mishaps, setbacks and all that. What are you planning to do about it then?"

She sat down and smiled at the whole thing.

"Nothing."

"Sounds like a cunning plan, that."

"It is. I am going to do exactly nothing. No moaning, no complaining, no arguing. I am just going to live."

He looked at her with a slight frown.

"It took you a year of nine major setbacks, including a fucking PANDEMIC with no end in sight, to come to that conclusion? That you can't do anything about it?"

"Yup. Might as well just live. Take one day at a time."

"That's brilliant. Really. Just live. Brilliant."

"Told you I had a plan."

"Does it include coffee?"

"Certainly. Black or white?"

"Surprise me."

Etched on your heart

5 december 2020

https://open.spotify.com/track/2gSPfdOaNIrYcMnlopoXic?si=KEIRvYd0T1e2_QbOWQwk9g&fbclid=IwAR2bBfcrZc4dca2OJ3jRyDSJ6grOwj5SuW3FSjZfSfiRksMwyZTj-M6xM

Dan Hylander / Raj Montana Band

"Pathetic."

There was no reply. He shrugged. No matter. That didn't change the truth.

"Pathetic" he said again, out loud.

"Come off it. You don't mean that."

"So now you voice your opinion? About bloody time."

"Well, you've never said anything like this before."

He frowned. "Maybe not. But I've thought it, seen it coming. No denying it now. Pathetic I said, and I stand by that."

"I disagree."

"Feel free" he said and shrugged again.

"Deep down you must know you're wrong. You don't disconnect so completely from the past, especially not you."

"Listen, back then you were powerful, enthusiastic. A burning flame. Unstoppable."

"I still am."

"Pull the other one."

"I am, too."

"Now you're pathetic. Old, weak. No steam left, no passion. You've dismantled your barricades."

"That's really hurtful you know. It's also wrong. The core of my being doesn't change. I still dream."

"Yeah, right. You accept everything, fight nothing. I say that is pathetic."

"The dreams are different, I'll give you that. But I know where I came from. Deep down, I'm still the young man on that barricade."

"Oh go away" he said with a roll of his eyes. "This is all too much. Besides, I need to go to bed."

"But I can't go away, can I? I'll still be here when you wake up, singing softly in your ear the songs that are etched on your heart, waiting for you to pay attention."

"Do as you will" he said and shut the mirror. There was no reply but the echo of a young man's dreams.

Advent

29 november 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CILkUOwnnol/?igshid=669mocexgejf>

"We are the hollow men. The leavers, the transient. The seekers. Ever searching, ever moving. Fallen off the shoulders of giants, for us, too much is never enough. We'll fuck anyone and run. But there is no outrunning this. Wherever we go, wherever we turn, there's this dark outline at the edge of sight."

"What ARE you talking about now?" she said, wiping her wet hands on her trouser legs.

"Not sure", he said shrugging, "It just came to me. You know, you should probably change before they arrive."

"Sounds a bit ominous" she said and left the kitchen with a nod.

He shrugged again. "Maybe. Did you want the large glasses?"

He took out four large glasses from the cupboard without waiting for an answer.

"Like a bad dream or something. Where did it come from, something you saw or heard again?" Her voice was coming from the bedroom.

"Not sure" he said again and put the glasses on the dinner table, setting it for four."

"It usually is though, isn't it? You usually don't come up with stuff without being inspired by something."

"Wouldn't want to know where that came from. You are right, it feels a bit ominous. Uncomfortable like."

"My thoughts exactly. Like something is wrong."

She came into the sitting room and looked at the dinner table.

"Are you sure we want the large glasses?"

"What do you mean?"

"Jane's alright I guess, but Steve ... He's ... you know."

"Yes. Yes, I do."

He took the large glasses off the table and went back into the kitchen with them.

"It does tend to get a bit ugly with him if he gets too much."

"If he starts, there's no bottom, so I think we'd better go with the smaller glasses tonight."

"I wonder what's eating him" he said and put the smaller glasses on the table. ""It's like he's hiding something, or fleeing from something."

"That void cannot be easy to fill."

"Pity. He's a good guy. Fun to be around."

"When he's sober."

"Yes. When he's sober."

"We are the hollow men" echoed softly in both their minds.



Occupational hazard?

26 november 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CIEFw7YnOI2/>

“We are the Robots. We are the Robots.”

Clink, clank. The pitter patter of small feet, walking stiffly and deliberately around the house. From the kitchen, through the hallway and the bedroom, into the living room and into the kitchen again. Lap after lap. Clank, clank. The cardboard robot skin taped on slightly askew looking like it was coming loose, but the metallic noises from the iPhone under the breastplate loud and clear.

“We are the Robots. We are the Robots.”

Stiff legs and rigid arms.

“We are the Robots. Out of my way, Buddy. We are the ... Buddy!”

A crash and a canine yelp.

“Mommy! Buddy keeps getting in the way!”

Mom closing her laptop, trying not to laugh out loud.

“What’s happening, Isaac?”

“Who?”

“Isaac. Asimov. The robot author.”

“I don’t know who that is.” That reference was always going to be lost on a five-year-old. “Mom, make Buddy get out of the way!”

“He just doesn’t understand what you are doing. Neither do I, to be honest.”

The smile returns to his face. “I am a robot. A real robot.” He glanced around to see that no one was listening in. “I have this army of robots. A hundred million thousand quantillion robots.”

“Do you? Where are they?”

“That’s the thing. Only other robots can see them.”

He walks away on another lap.

“We are the Robots. Come on Buddy, we need a Dog Bot. We are the Robots.”

He turns the corner into the hallway and disappears from view, sharing his metallic noises with the world.

“We are the Robots.”



Little Landscape

22 november 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CH5q4wTHXC9/?igshid=n1nmmq82zzgh>

"What have you done to your hair?" he said in a sing-song voice.

"Say what?"

She straightened up from leaning her head on his shoulder and looked at him. "My hair? What's my hair got to do with anything."

She made a gesture as if to correct her hair, thought better of it and let her hand drop back to his chest.

He smiled and shook his head slightly.

"Nothing. It just occurred to me."

"What did?"

"Manic Street Preachers. This landscape."

He left it at that, but she would have none of it.

"That explains exactly nothing."

"It's November."

"Still doesn't help."

He rested his chin on the side of her head and pulled her just that little bit closer.

"This place. The wind reminds me of the opening riff of Autumn song."

"By Manic Street Preachers."

"Yes."

"I see. So 'What have you done to your hair'...?"

"... is from that song, yeah. A bit weird, I'll give you that."

She smiled and laughed.

"You're nuts, did you know that?"

"I might well be."

"I like nuts."

They stood silent together with the wind in both their hairs.

[https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fopen.spotify.com%2Ftrack%2F0lmbYpumTlipEY0mUffz9Z%3Fsi%3D0mAPIM76T3-qBeVobPW6Q%26fbclid%3DIwAR3Srp6oABkh8owDkWebMYglyN7tH5Hu01L1gNfFWFejF4TpqWxpx8yPBEo&h=AT01YGNWgVBkFLf-oGrlykf587cp4l-kf9Am5pDJEJYopvgaYCS4gFgdIquZQz0alrAWoNPI3rPjdURnlnZ0uG1rQoNQNZlCdpqW8R0bLMUo5ZiwibtNDebK9bwf8ihktVBx&_tn_=-UK-R&c\[0\]=AT21GAz3WIKnteg-cUd1KxO_pXJuUif_qecghIXTNHg76oeZghoBsFbeoxR71BupWMSDCMvqml71_z9G0MsqeZTCWAEzFhDTIVTyeF63URs7NfC8T_E4jX2dld1FBbvBy4BkD6fM2I-BM6uyS4hmM-VEnKSIhHrdojxdsABA](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fopen.spotify.com%2Ftrack%2F0lmbYpumTlipEY0mUffz9Z%3Fsi%3D0mAPIM76T3-qBeVobPW6Q%26fbclid%3DIwAR3Srp6oABkh8owDkWebMYglyN7tH5Hu01L1gNfFWFejF4TpqWxpx8yPBEo&h=AT01YGNWgVBkFLf-oGrlykf587cp4l-kf9Am5pDJEJYopvgaYCS4gFgdIquZQz0alrAWoNPI3rPjdURnlnZ0uG1rQoNQNZlCdpqW8R0bLMUo5ZiwibtNDebK9bwf8ihktVBx&_tn_=-UK-R&c[0]=AT21GAz3WIKnteg-cUd1KxO_pXJuUif_qecghIXTNHg76oeZghoBsFbeoxR71BupWMSDCMvqml71_z9G0MsqeZTCWAEzFhDTIVTyeF63URs7NfC8T_E4jX2dld1FBbvBy4BkD6fM2I-BM6uyS4hmM-VEnKSIhHrdojxdsABA)

(Autumn Song, Manic Street Preachers)

These little houses

6 november 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CHQUsPANjvh/?igshid=auvkvhsd4ifn>

"Is that one ours? I thought you said we would be sleeping rough."

The blonde woman looked briefly at her map again.

"Yup, that'd be the one."

"But it's lovely! And look at all the sea gulls!"

"I guess the trip here qualifies as rough."

The dark woman laughed and put down her trunk.

"It does indeed! I thought we'd never get here."

She took a sip of water from her hip flask and offered it to her friend who declined with a shake of her head. A significant part of her long hair fell down in her face, so she shook her head again. That made it worse, so she ignored it, and hoisted her backpack.

"Let's get this over with", she said and started walking towards the handful of houses. They were scattered down by the water, snug in the sand.

"It's beautiful", the blonde said and started walking too, "but this sand really is chafing on my heels."

"Join the club", the dark woman said and lost her balance. She slid down a sand dune, losing her cap and a shoe somewhere half-way up.

"Geez Shania, are you OK?"

Seeing her friend struggle to get up, she suppressed a smile. Too late.

"Quit laughing, Mildred."

"Sorry", Mildred said with a giggle and lost her balance too.

When they both had got their balance and their gear back under control at the bottom of the dune, they were thoroughly miserable.

They were hot, tired and thirsty.

"I've got sand between my teeth."

Shania scoffed.



"I'm not going to tell you where I've got sand."

"Well, at least we're here."

"Yes. Bleedin' finally."

They struggled the last few steps to the houses, put their stuff down and wiped their foreheads.

"Is the key in your backpack or mine?"

"How would I know? It was you that got it from Mike."

"No, I thought you got it."

"I didn't."

"Did I tell you I really hate sea gulls?"

Friday Flowers

30 oktober 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/CG-JVFmHw0H/?igshid=1eka3ojd68bbq&fbclid=IwAR2MblUjwaJYVLuuLSj8v4s3zdYnr8DWDggaHdwXQOiw1tSFbM09xbl6cM>

"Jim? This one is humming."

"Humming? How can it be humming?"

Jim stopped in his tracks and looked back at Cynthia. She shrugged and pointed to the ground. "Beats me."

"It's a flower", Bill said and started to make his way back through the fern. "Flowers don't hum."

"Well, this one does", Cynthia said with a defiant look on her face.

"Nonsense. Which one is it?"

"That one."

"It IS humming! That's weird." He stretched out an arm towards it.

"Don't touch it."

"I wasn't going to", he said and reeled his arm back in.

"Yes you were."

They stood silent for a moment or two, watching. Listening. There was a distinct hum coming from one of the flowers where they stood. It was perfectly ordinary, bluish purple and dark green. One of a thousand identical ones at this little spot in the forest.

"What is it, do you think?"

"Damned if I know."

"Bit eerie, this."

"Definitely. Let's get out of here."

They left, moving quickly through the fern, looking back over their shoulders until the spot with the strange flower was lost from view. They breathed a sigh of relief and slowed their pace to a stroll. They had walked for maybe ten minutes when Jim stopped and took hold of

Cynthia's shoulder. He was looking intently to a clearing a little ways ahead of them.

"Sssh", he said and cocked an ear. "Can you hear something?"



Knock, knock

27 oktober 2020

Knock, knock. Who's there? My next-door neighbour. My mad, new next-door neighbour. My new local lunatic.

He was friendly enough, introduced himself and everything. But it went quickly down-hill from there.

"You've got a ghoul in your attic, mate."

"In my ... where? I don't even have an attic."

"I think you'll find that you do, if you look hard enough."

"Is this some kind of sick joke?"

"Nah, no joke. Just thought I'd let you know. Better deal with it fairly quickly."

"With what? Deal with what?"

"The ghoul. Don't want him getting all settled in on you."

And with that, he was gone.

"Mad", I thought. "my new neighbour is completely barmy."

I barely had time to close the door before there was a new knock.

"What now?" I thought, braced myself and opened. It was Steven.

Good old Steve. Nothing to worry about.

"Was that the new guy? What did he want? He looks like he's got a screw loose, that one."

"Yes, he wanted to warn me about the ghoul in my attic."

"The ... what?"

"Ghoul."

We both started laughing. We laughed till we cried. Finally, Steven dried his tears and said "What a bell-end. A ghoul, huh?"

"In my non-existing attic. Apparently, I should deal with it pronto."

"Yup, he's not right in the head. But he's right about one thing though."

"What?"

"You should deal with it. But a ghoul!"

He laughed again.

"Hang on, what should I deal with?"

"Your attic. But it's not a ghoul, no way that's a ghoul."

"You've lost me."

"Nowhere near a ghoul. Everybody knows that's a banshee you've got."

And with that, he too was gone.

Façades

26 oktober 2020

https://www.instagram.com/p/CFFS9Enn88d/?igshid=13q2b5nnqs6rm&fbclid=IwAR1v3cYcUiLNxRJnkIliggTFYNLgbVA1o234BpfA06Vt08xA4B_2INj0IFo

The heat hit like a hammer blow. It hit him the second he opened the tiny window, the only one that wasn't latched shut.

"Man, it's a scorcher."

He went back in, wet a towel with cold water smelling of rust and chlorine, put it on his neck and went back to the window. It only took a minute but that gave the heat time to sneak in behind his back, so it now filled most of his little hotel room.

His brother had been right all along. The room was indeed a dump. On the ground floor of a mostly empty hotel stuck in between dilapidated brick buildings, its only redeeming feature was that it was free. Three miles to life and hope downtown, on the other side of the train tracks, unreachable beyond the river.

A handful of washing lines were strung up between the impossibly close buildings. The lines were mostly empty. The alley behind him was full of litter and disbanded car-parts, most likely stolen. He stuck his head out of the window and heard the muffled sounds of the city, but could see no people anywhere.

This neighbourhood sure had become rougher than he remembered it. The train line was now long disused, since there were no shining new cars to move from factories that had folded or moved. So many jobs lost. The prosperity and hope of a generation, completely gone in a couple of decades. Just the people left, looking out for each other. Getting by. Or at least trying. Failing, as often as not.



The heat was just as intense as he remembered it. There was a rhythm to it. A pulse. The slow, steady beat of the heart of the beast. It always made him imagine the city being immersed in its own come-what-may twelve-bar blues. He could almost feel the thump of an old acoustic bass, hear the whisks on the snare drum, from a hundred street corners. He imagined the sound of the train, whistling as it used to come around the last bend, giving a salute to the bands, in tune and in time with the music. The students mingling with the blue collars, next to the greats. Next to Sloppy Joe and Mad Cat Jenkins. Shaking the hand of Mavis Smith.

But that was a very long time ago. A different life, in a different world.

"We were just kids", he thought, wiping his forehead with the moist towel. "We didn't know anything."

He closed the window, put the air conditioning to High, and set the temperature way down.

"We knew nothing. Except the truth." he said out loud. There was nobody there to hear him. In fact, there never was. At least not way back then, when it would have mattered.

He sat down on the bed and sighed.

"Except the truth. We always knew that."

Rainy October Sunday

26 oktober 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CGxwNq1nIRk/?igshid=1pao8iz3l2tt2&fbclid=IwAR2ZtrfJoW7GjLnGEG4BHBzpdSYtWY-gKAARCaUm0iJgU6Zv0C7GolfWj8Y>

"Look at you. You've got mascara all over your cheeks."
She continued to sob. But at least the worst seemed to be over now.
We sat in silence for a heartbeat or two. I tried to wipe her tears, but she turned her head away. I should have seen that coming. How stupid of me.

"I'm sorry", I said, "I really am."

"Then don't." she said. "Just don't."

"I have to."

"Yes, keep telling yourself that. See if it makes it any easier."

There was nothing I could say, nothing I could add.

The rain hammered the window.

She blew her nose and looked at me.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"Glasgow. I'm celebrating Halloween in Glasgow."

"Celebrating."

"For want of a better word, yes."

"With Joan and Andrew."

"Yes."

She bit her lip and looked at me.

"If you leave now, don't bother coming back."

"You don't mean that."

Her blue eyes that so often expressed her passion and excitement suddenly went blank. Slowly, ever so slowly, her expression changed.

"Try me."

"Listen, I said I'm sorry. What else can I say?"



"I don't need your words."

I got up and reached for my jacket to leave.

"Please don't make me choose."

"I'm done. Do you hear me? I'm done. You cannot have it both ways forever. This is it. Once and for all. Your call."

She turned her back to me and looked out through the rain streaming down the window.

I held up for a while with my hand on the door handle.

"I don't want it to end this way."

She shrugged and whispered "So don't go."

I didn't know what to say. I had to either stay or go, and nothing I said would make the slightest bit of difference. In seconds, life could take a completely new turn for the both of us. I had the decision in the palm of my hand. The door handle resisted my pressure.

The rain hammered the window.

Here, there and everywhere

9 oktober 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CGIXWJ6HfVg/?igshid=h7i242892if9>

So I said 'I've told you a million times, this is not the place'. He didn't seem to notice, he just walked on. 'Mind the gear' he said. That was his only contribution. Very constructive, don't you think? 'Mind the gear.'

I tried to catch up but it was hard to do while carrying all that stuff. 'John? John!' I shouted. 'Hold up, will you? John!' All he said was 'What?' and kept going.

'This is all wrong' I said - again. 'It's too dry and rocky here, and ... damn these roots ... You're going to have to face it John, you're not going to find any here!'

I thought I saw him shrug but it was difficult to see in the morning mist. 'John! These are pines. Pines, John! You need a fir or a spruce. Or a shrink. This is no good!'

'Let's try over here' I heard him say as if to himself.

'For crying out loud' I mumbled to myself, and hoisted my pack for a better fit on my back. 'And it's only October, John!' I shouted in frustration. October! Do you hear me?'

But he was gone. Something about the early bird getting the worm drifted to me through the pines.

I tell you, it was the worst ever time looking for a Christmas tree.



Moving on

8 oktober 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B7I5GBcFhU8/?igshid=1fzwegvya2dizb&fbclid=IwAR11JDbSflbdIpxgiHEgCsIRWxiNxnoNs3jhBcONXiDsraQ8mzXnkHGoHg4>

“When will I see you again?” he said as they sat down on the bench in the moist evening air. A lonely street light cast sharp shadows over the bus stop.

“I don’t know”, she replied and got up to wipe the bench off. “Now I’m all wet.” She kept wiping the bench, deliberately not meeting his eye. Finally she sat back down, looking away, towards the corner where the bus was going to appear any minute now.

“I hope we’re not too late”, she added.

“I do”, he said with an edge to his voice. “I hope we missed it.”

A brief sigh and then silence. There was nothing left to say. But they both knew that this conversation would be played out over and over, in their minds, over the telephone, perhaps in writing over a period of time. Finally, when everything had been said again and again, it would peter out.

Silence.

“It’s just hard”, he said, finally yielding to his frustration, “not knowing when I’ll see you again. Or if.”

“What do you mean? If you’ll see me again?”

“Well, you’re going, aren’t you? This might be it.”

“Don’t be silly. Of course you’ll see me again.”

“Don’t be so sure. And next time we meet, there’ll be this strange distance between us.”

She finally looked at him.

“Like we never had this at all”, he added. “Like it never happened.”

“But it did happen. Nothing can change that.”



He shrugged and got up from the bench, and started pulling on a loose corner of the bus schedule hanging behind them.

"Listen to me" she said and got up. She took his face between her hands and looked him in the eye.

"This is something we'll always share, no matter what. Whenever we meet, whenever we're apart, we'll always have had this."

He pulled his face away.

"It won't be the same."

She nodded.

"You're right. It probably won't. But that doesn't have to be a bad thing. You wouldn't want things to not change. Not really. You'd go mad of boredom."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Oh yes you would", she scoffed. "You've already done that once, remember?"

"That was different."

"Was it? How?"

"That was never going to last."

"But nothing ever is! You grow, things change, you move on."

"And leave people behind."

"Yes. Yes, you do. Just like you did. Some people are in for the whole ride, some for just a few stops. They find other rides."

"Speaking of rides, that's your bus."

He pointed to the two headlights that were approaching out of the darkness a little ways off. She bent down and picked up her suitcase and rucksack.

The two of them looked at each other as the bus came to a stop beside them, the forward doors opening as the bus stopped with a creaking noise from the brakes.

"You do leave some loved ones behind", she said. "Everyone does. And those loved ones move on too"

"Please don't get on that bus."

"I have to. Don't you know that?"

"Maybe I do. But I don't care. Please don't go."

She stroked his cheek, very gently.

"Do you remember what I said when we met?"

"Of course I do. You said that in every life, a dream needs to come true, at least once."

"At least once."

"Whose dream are we talking about, yours or mine?"

"I don't know", she said. "I just don't know. Maybe that's the point."

He stood there a little while, watching the bus pull away before it disappeared around a corner. Before he sat back down, he wiped the bench dry.

Ice

7 oktober 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CDO-41nnyof/?igshid=2ly8wzms07ox>

Ten minutes later they were right back where they started.

'I don't know how much more of this I can take' he said, slumping down heavily in the couch.

She shook her head in silence, slowly and deliberately.

'Like talking to a brick wall while riding a roller-coaster.'

She reached for a crease in the table-cloth and straightened it.

'I hate the whole business.'

There was a brief, deep silence.

'She changed her mind again.'

'Again? What did you say to her?'

'I don't know what I said! Something, nothing. Your guess is as good as mine what's going on.'

'Should I talk to her?'

He shrugged.

Another deep silence, a shroud over their thoughts.

He got up. 'I'm taking the dog for a walk. I need some air. Want to come?'

The dog got up too, excited, recognising the signs.

'That'd be nice' she said and smiled. There was no joy in her smile, no anticipation - only resignation. 'But one of us should probably stay here.'

Her looked at her with a hint of a frown.

'You do it then, you need air too.'

'No, you go. It's your thing.'

'Oh, sod it' he said and sat down. 'I don't know what my thing is anymore. Here, boy.'

The dog brushed up against his leg to get some attention.



'I can't reach her. Not when she's like this.'

A muffled voice from upstairs called for them. 'Can you come up here, please?'

'Here we go again.'

'I'll do it' she said and started to get up from the couch.

'Don't' he said and gestured for her to sit down, 'I might as well get the full treatment. You'll get yours later.'

He got up and walked up the stairs to the closed door with the many notes taped all over it.

He didn't knock but opened the door slowly. She was lying on her bed hugging a cushion. She was crying.

'I need a hug' she said through her tears. 'I don't know why I'm so angry all the time.'

He let the dog in and closed the door.

'I need a hug too' he said.

Fall

7 oktober 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CF7dnxgnlNy/?igshid=az3jb81ficn9>

"Where are you?"

His voice was shrill in the blustery wind.

"Oscar! Where are you? Oscar!"

He was getting worried now, properly worried. He hadn't seen Oscar for a good while. He was there, and suddenly he was not. Oscar tended to go on little adventures but he was way too small to be alone in a place like this and in this weather.

At first he had just been impatient but now he was getting cold. There was no sign of Oscar. Or of anyone else, for that matter. He was alone with the wind. Reeds, trees and bushes were all struggling against it. There was a cacophony of whistling sounds from the wind passing through the branches, like notes from the strings of a hundred violins. The screeching noise was getting to him. And it was getting dark. No sign of Oscar.

"Oscar! Come ON."

No reply anywhere. No movement. Even the birds seemed to have called it a night.

He turned around and went back to where he came from.

Maybe he should call someone. But who though? He gave up the thought immediately. He was on his own, this was up to him.

He looked at his watch. Time was passing. He felt a wave of desperation inside him, and tried to push it back down. He was no good to Oscar if he didn't stay calm.

He struggled up yet another sand dune that he might or might not have climbed before.

As he summited the dune he was almost blown over by the gale. The wind must be getting worse. He looked around with squinted eyelids. Below him, shielded by the dune, there was a small dog. It was busy with something in the sand and paid no attention to him whatsoever.

"Oscar! For crying out loud, I've been calling for you forever."



Gloomy and blue little landscape

29 september 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CFumlGTnEXC/>

'Wait, what?' she said with a disconcerted frown. 'Run that by me again.'

He shrugged and smiled.

'I said it reminds me of me.'

There was a moment of stunned silence. She opened her mouth slowly, hesitantly, to say something, thought better of it and shut it again.

Silence. Deep silence, while he waited for a reaction.

'But ... but it's hideous!' she finally blurted out and immediately regretted it.

'Hideous?' he said slowly. 'You think it's that bad.'

'No, of course not. Not hideous as such. But ... you know what I mean.'

He folded his arms and shook his head, once.

'I am sure I have no idea what you mean. Feel free to educate me.'

She sighed and tried again.

'You said it reminded you of you.'

'I did, yes.' His voice was as cold as his stare.

'And I thought how can THAT remind anyone of you?'

'Go on.'

'Well, just look at it! It's all ... I don't know ... but for crying out loud, it is nothing like you!'

'It's hideous.'

'No. No, it's not. Violent, dark, dramatic, yes. Not hideous as such. Only as a reminder of you. Then it's plain awful.'

He sighed and turned to the window, away from her.

'It makes me see clearly how I feel, and I hate that' he said silently, his face turned away as far as he could.

'No way that is anything like you.' she said and put her hand on his shoulder.

'Why?' he said in a whisper, still turned away.

'Because you're beautiful' she said. 'Don't you know that yet?'



Quick Seaside Sketch

8 December 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CXMRIvOIMjb/>

"This reminds me of James", she said quietly. "He would have loved this place."

"I am sure he would have", he said after a moment's hesitation. "But he is not here, is he?" he added.

"You keep rubbing it in."

He shrugged.

"It's about all that I can do, try to make you come to terms with it."

"He was never that important to you."

"You keep rubbing that in, you do."

She stopped and looked at him, for the first time since the accident she really looked at him.

"I just realised that it's all that I have left."

"Blaming me?"

"I don't blame you."

"Yes, you do."

She looked away.

"Maybe I do, a little."

There was a long silence between them, until he took her by the shoulders and looked here in the face, almost forcing her to look back.

"Tell you what."

"Don't" she said, trying to get free.

"Let's live here. Let's move house and live here."

She stopped squirming.

"What?"

"Let's remember James every day. Let's live here."

A flock of sea gulls sang their hoarse approval.



Two Houses

21 December 2021

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CXwXTOnoPnD/>

The two houses are way off the beaten track, surrounded by fields, lakes and woods. Only one road leads to them, and it almost doesn't qualify as a road. It's a path with two ruts after tractors, navigating its treacherous way over stones and roots and over ditches. The land is empty, even the wildlife seems to have deserted it. There is no one around for miles. For the two dwellers of the buildings, the other building contains the only other human contact. They remain each other's only backup, should anything happen. They represent company. Life. Another human voice.

One of the voices suddenly shouts at the top of its lungs. What is the voice saying? What is it communicating to its neighbour? What is the message it has for its only anchor in the empty wilderness?

"Will you turn that shitty music down!"



Tree stories

A brief interaction

20 September 2020

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CFSZF6aHo82/?igshid=fj63ngnuahfy>

“The thing about trees”, she said under her breath while checking that noone was listening in, “the thing about trees is this. They each have voice. They each have a story. All you need to do is to pay attention. Get it?”

I had no idea what she was talking about. “Pay attention? How so, you mean listen? Listen for what?”

She shook her head ever so slightly. “You don’t listen to trees honey. All you’ll hear is the wind. That’s nice and restful and everything but it won’t TELL you anything. No, the trees keep their secrets closer to their hearts than that.”

I shrugged and put my hands in my pockets. I didn’t like where this was going.

She leaned in close. “You don’t LISTEN, you watch. And you watch in silence. You have to pay attention. You need to focus.” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “The trees don’t share their stories easily, see.” It was all very intriguing. Intriguing and inexplicable. “Watch? I just stand there and watch?”

She shook her head again, as if I were a reluctant child.

“You make it sound like you can stand around like you were waiting for the bus. You can, but you won’t actually LEARN anything. No tree would talk to you. To you, they’d just look like ... well, trees.”

“So, what do I do? Do I do the magic dance or what? Stare at trees and make them talk, it sounds perfectly potty.”

“Not stare, I never said stare. Watch I said. Watch and pay attention. And stay at it. It takes time and patience to learn how to interpret the secret stories of the trees.”

“But HOW? How do I take in what the trees are saying?”

“With your heart.” she said. “Don’t you know that by now? You use your heart. That’s how you get the trees to speak to you.”

