



# Catastrophism

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## *How To Cool Your Home*

Start by opening the window and then lowering the blinds to about four inches above the window sill. This will keep air flowing into your home without allowing sunlight in that may further raise the temperature.

It's late Spring now, so you should probably switch out the flannel bedding. Keep the covers with the floral print you like but get rid of the plaid. Find some light cotton bedding with a high thread count, as these tend to stay cooler.

If you can afford an air conditioner, install it high and in a central location with lots of airflow if possible, as this will ensure the best dispersal of cool air. Don't worry, you won't need his help to install it, these things are pretty straightforward.

Failing these, take down the photos finally and replace them with other photos, your art, or nothing at all. Throw out the gaudy fridge magnets and the fantasy novels. Sell the hockey sticks and skates, whatever has resale value, and donate the rest.

Get rid of his clothes. Get rid of the clothes he bought you. Take off your clothes. Let it go.

## '87 Camaro

The body was spray-painted a toxic, Saturday-morning shade of green, with drip marks mounding above the wheel wells. The windows were hand-tinted and bubbling off, more purple than black. The driver seat was a maroon transplant, split and spewing. The passenger seat was missing, melted metal above its bolts, and the cramped backseat was piled to the rear window with tools and oil-stained overalls. On the dash were a pair of reflective wrap-around sunglasses, a faded orange ball cap, and a photo of him and her, secured by electrical tape. There was no stereo; a pair of computer speakers were hard-wired into the deck, and their cables snaked around the floor and coiled into corners.

But the tires were brand new. They were always brand new. Every month, every week, whenever they were needed. And the engine? It idled like boiling water and revved like Mount St. Helens.

## Americana

I kissed her green, brass lips. I wore stripes, drank a pint of stars, and washed my Golden Retriever in a bath of oil. I voted for him, then threw my empty beer bottle at his bodyguard. Where's my Highway 61? My Nancy Sinatra? My Vincent Black Shadow? I grill over charcoal behind these white picket bars and this is what I get?

All I ever wanted was to die gut-shot in a bar on my birthday.

## The B-Side

He pulled the 45 from the sleeve and ran his fingers over the grooves, cataloging the scratches and, to his dismay, a deep ring from a cup. Probably a mug.

He flipped it over, the other side gleaming in the lamplight. He placed it down on the turntable and brought the needle to its edge.

“Hi,” she said, not exactly in his direction. She kicked off her heels and pulled her phone from her purse. He adjusted his glasses; her hair just a little too messy, her skirt just a little too high.

“I’m going to bed,” she said, dropping her phone in her purse and stumbling towards the bedroom.

“Are you going to your parents tomorrow still?” He asked, before she could collapse through the doorway.

“Why? Do you want to come?”

“Do you want me to come?”

He looked to her, adjusting his glasses, and she looked to him from behind her nest of hair.

“This song is horrible,” she said.

“I know,” he replied, turning to the stereo.

The sound of her falling to the bed coincided with the pop at the end of the song, as the needle, all on its own, lifted and returned to the beginning.

## Infinite Growth

When she told him she was leaving he thought:

- i. How much will this cost me?
- ii. Why didn’t we sign a prenuptial agreement?
- iii. What forms must be filled out to extricate oneself from a joint bank account?
- vi. Will the lack of a dependent negatively or positively affect my tax return?
- v. What does this mean for my RRSP?

She continued on. He wondered why she was crying. What did she know of their finances? Had she piled up bills without informing him? What financial disaster did they stand on the precipice of?

She asked him if he was listening, and he nodded. He had been. She hadn’t said anything about siphoning money off into a secret account.

He looked outside as she grabbed her suitcase. She never finished planting the tulips. The flower bed was only half planted. Fifty percent complete, by his estimation. Why hadn’t she done all the work? And how would that affect the market value of the house?

## *Amputation*

She said, “Sit down. I need to talk to you about something.” I sat, and she smiled, placing the mask over my face. She hushed me, held my hand, and told me to count down from ten.

I awoke in a bathtub of pink lemonade ice cubes, my left hand missing. I looked down and saw the stitch. Guitar string from my sternum to my collar bone. I could hear my heart ticking in my ears. I cut my feet on broken mix cds and handmade birthday cards getting out of the tub.

I wrapped myself in an afghan and pulled a bed out of the couch. I would have left, but I can't drive stick. I would have turned on the lights, but there was a black widow in the breaker box.

## *Summer Bones*

The bones are so warm but they cool so quick. They smell like coconuts and feel like wet pavement. They have rough patches and smooth sections and ridges like guitar frets. If you blow through them they sound like recorders, and if you put them to your ear you can hear salmon shooting from the tops of waterfalls.

They're perfect for drumming on the wheels of his Suburban, playing fetch with his Boston Terrier, and writing shapes and symbols on the beach of his parents' lake lot. And when he says goodbye before going back to the prairies he will hold you close and tell you the answers to questions you'd never ask and he'll give you these bones—all of them.

You'll pile them carefully in the passenger seat of your car, turning corners slowly so they don't topple. You'll lie on your bed and hold them close before stringing them like a dreamcatcher from your roof, where they will rotate slowly like solar systems, and rattle gently like wind chimes.

And months later, you will wake up and they'll be gone, leaving nothing but the fishing line flashing in the four o'clock sunset; the fishing line you used to try to keep them forever.

## *Ghost Stories*

Sure, I heard stories about him. I heard he was German. I heard he was blonde, or that he loved the band Concrete Blonde, or both. I heard his name was Roger, or Michael. Apparently he loved comic books and would always stop at the same gas station, driving home from camp for his one week off, and buy whole stacks of them. I also heard he was an alcoholic. The kind that yelled and broke garden gnomes with putters at three in the morning. The kind that called a surprise a mistake. The kind that my mother had to leave.

So when I heard the asbestos had done what asbestos does, no, I didn't try to contact him. I heard they put him in a hospice, or that he escaped the hospital and disappeared into the mountains. Whatever he did, I never heard from him. Besides, he didn't keep the comics, did he? There'd have been no point.

## *Sunburst*

He plays guitar like he's trying to cut a tree down. His fingers struggle to knit the chords together as his hand chop chop chops the strings down, clear-cutting a path. Verses burst from him; steam for an audience of mountains. Vinyl histories can only give so much. Times like these call for a song made of breath and callouses: flawed but alive.



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