

FOLK MAGAZINE ISSUE 2: BREAK

NON-FICTION - FINAL

TITLE: 'Crying on the Train Ride Home'

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Crying on the Train Ride Home

I.

When I can't write the poem, I make a new playlist. When the words don't come, I don't try to chase them. I know I should. I know I am too easily comforted by small rituals. There's a certain feeling I can't think my way through, so I scroll through my Spotify library to revisit old songs and their strange memories. How the eternal riff at the beginning of 'Ceremony' by New Order will always remind me of being seventeen, new skin and all. Its resounding echo rings through my headphones like an instant pull; a song that feels like it should never end, drawing me into the loop of its melody. Images linger in these sounds, and I feel like I am still there, resting my head on a friend's shoulder while waiting at the bus stop. Or I'm in the front seat of Erico's car, laughing with him as his boy-music plays softly into the summer night. I watch him move so carelessly; the way I've watched him grow up after all these years. This friend, who still makes me wonder what love could be purer than a text message that says, "I'll come get you."

There's a particular kind of intimacy that intrigues me – quiet, of course, but also a gut feeling, head-spinning punch to the stomach. I find it in music, or more specifically, in the visceral pleasure of outcry and noise. And the poetry in me, which performs this act of remembering, beyond the somersaulting heart that does not forget, or refuses to forget, wants only grief and the language that we use to make sense of it. How agonising it is to hold music in the instrument of the body, but how instantly recognisable. *It's got soul*, I exclaim, to an empty room. *I can feel it in the whole of me.*

II.

These days, I find solace listening to Mitski. Layering guttural wails over distorted guitars, her screams feel like my screams. Her discography is punctuated by moments of silence that are magnified by heart-achingly tender interludes. So much has been written about Mitski that I sometimes wonder if the relationship I have with

her music is one that I have mostly read about. She navigates deeply personal spaces, alienation, and the occasionally misguided readings of her work as a larger political statement. When her lead single 'Your Best American Girl' was interpreted to be a response against the white male indie voice and the fetishization of Asian women, she turned to Facebook to say: "I wasn't trying to send a message. I was in love."

The expression of personal experiences is a layered process, in which the artist curates an empty museum made from symbols, feelings, and noise. For people of colour, and women especially, their art is often seen as inherently autobiographical and vulnerable. They are stripped of persona, of skilled craft. In an interview with *Pitchfork*, Mitski revealed: "I was always bothered when people say, 'I cry to your music, it sounds like a diary, it sounds so personal. Yes, it is personal. But that's so gendered.' There's no feeling of, 'Oh, maybe she's a songwriter and she wrote this as a piece of art.'"

I am guilty of this myself. When Mitski shouts, "I wanna see the whole world / I don't know how I'm gonna pay rent," I can't help but feel like she is singing to me. There is an undeniably post-punk cathartic rage in her song 'My Body's Made of Crushed Little Stars'—it feels good to hear what can only be communicated through a sharp cry, it feels good to hurt. However, there is also a sense of detachment and indifference. The inevitable way of things is a raw scream in the back of the throat. There are no ifs, or buts; no bridge between the two realities. In fact, there is a slight disconnect in the offhand way Mitski continues, "Would you kill me, Jerusalem? Kill me, Jerusalem. Come find me."

I am reminded of an essay Durga Chew-Bose wrote for *Vanity Fair*, where she describes earrings as the "most intimate and brutal accessory." Drawing on images of Katherine Hepburn and Amrita Sher-Gil, she explores the strange sensation of watching a woman's subconscious focus as she fastens an earring, "the way our fingers take charge with some secret intelligence. The swiftness of it all."

In 'My Body's Made of Crushed Little Stars', Mitski's voice rings through the hallways of momentary release, like pushing an earring through an already closed piercing.

This specific type of violence is followed by the detached tenderness of staring at your own body; cradling your chin in front of the living room mirror, watching your hair fall into your mouth. In this scene, I am a stranger to myself, but the moment is not unfamiliar. It is a practised art that I have inherited from all the women in my life—to revel in the kind of beauty that is delivered through absence, which is to say, the kind that always hurts, but never lingers.

III.

On the train ride home after working the night shift, I end up thinking, *crying in public is another sort of performance art*. At twenty-one, it feels inappropriate to indulge myself like this. But it's a different desire this time, and I am too young to feel so lonely. Instead, I return to ritual. I flick through my November playlist, aptly titled, 'november is a fast train to nowhere'. Even their song names remind me of poems in the same way that indexes do. Running through the lines of imaginary stanzas, making this senseless narrative sound even more oddly beautiful, though perhaps only to me.

8 songs, 26 min

mirrored heart

Liability (Reprise)

Female Energy, Part 2

bad woman

Pink in the Night

New Love Cassette

Daydreamer

home with you

The fifth track, 'Pink in the Night', is a Mitski song. I do not want to project my grief onto her grief, but when she says, "I hear my heart breaking tonight / Do you hear it too?" I think I do. What is the sound of the heart realising itself? Can it transform the unspoken? I remember stumbling across a journal entry from early August, with this line sprawled across the page like a loud exhale: "loneliness is a big fat cloud of light

swallowing me.” It sounded silly, but true. I was consumed by my own sadness, this melodrama, this crying. The distance between us: the self then, and the self now.

I am interested in intimacy, yes, but also the poetics of intimacy as a measure of control. I’m talking about restraint. The longing to connect, but only within reason. You can touch me, but only like this.

I want to feel embarrassed by strange outbursts of emotions, but they continue to surprise me. Walking past the grocery store and seeing a parade of fruit fall onto the pavement. Spilling my coffee onto a stranger on the street, noticing that slip, before the overflow. Crying on the train ride home while businessmen avert their eyes. There is always something sensual in the way intimacy exists in the public sphere. In music, in art. Those passing moments of exposure, where we see ourselves under a different light; a pierced ear, and the sharp bite of bewilderment that follows.