

That Weekend We Listened to The Clinks on a Loft Bed

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"You'll like them. the lead singer reminds me of you." says B. There is so much power in a closed bedroom door when you are fourteen. It makes the two of us seem so separate from the small trailer she shares with her mother and two older brothers. I'm picking pieces off of her popcorn ceiling, surrounded by a sea of empty coffee mugs, spiral notebooks, drawing pencils, the stapled pages of Arts & Culture section of the *Chicago Tribune*. We are just beginning to dream of cityscapes and apartments with framed wall art, wood floors, and good lighting. We don't describe it that way. We just know that New York, Chicago, San Francisco, are places where things like that, and a life like that, exists. We just know that's where we want to be.

Where we are is a trailer park in Central Michigan, surrounded by flat land, soy bean fields, and so many people who will vote George Bush into a second term. B. is wearing her "my vote counts" t-shirt as a sign of silent protest and because it's ironic. She discovered irony far before I did, but now I'm finding it everywhere. I find irony around the same time I start drinking coffee. I'm sipping coffee now, made from a big tub her mother bought at Sam's club, and an ancient and wheezing laptop is flipped open and balanced on B.'s legs. We've been slowly scrolling through the new music section of "Afterellen.com." B. is big words and long hair, sketchbooks and sad love songs. I am YA books and emo bands, enamored by the things about her that are so different from me. Last week, she helped me dye my hair black with a box of chemicals we bought at Family Dollar. The light hangs hazy and afternoon-like, but we just woke up an hour ago. Two best girlfriends can sleep in the same bed, so long as they hide just how close they are to one another.

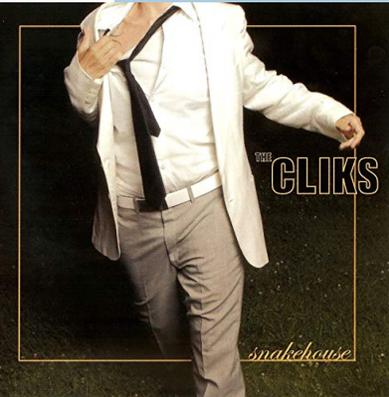
It's a small bed, so there's little about how we feel that we have to hide, at least when we sleep together on the weekends at her house. We aren't allowed to close the door or sleep in the same bad anymore at mine. My parents will voice their fear of us, of our closeness and what it means, someday, but for now, they only demand the space to make sure we're not doing what we most definitely are.

I lean in to get a better look at the picture of the band from the article: four snarls in suit jackets and edgy dress shirts stare back. Big belt buckles and tattooed forearms, clad in ties and ascots, posed in a way that makes them loom cool, even from this distant perspective, this future keyboard clicking away. I think, in this moment, I feel them as a presence I desperately want to find in my reflection.

And then, the music starts up.

The guitar is electric, distorted and growling in before the first drumbeat.

Oh yeah, oh yeah, I've fallen down, but I can get up.



The Clinks

"Oh Yeah"

Snakehouse

04/2007

Warner Music

I am jealous of her room, how she doesn't have to share it with anyone. I am jealous of her lofted bed and her desk. Most of all, I am jealous of the ethernet cord plugging us into a world other than our own.

What are we doing? I have no idea, but I think it must be love. I love the way her hand on my bare stomach sends lyrics running wild and fast through my head when I think about it later. I love when she draws intricate designs on my forearms, how her pen tip gives my skin a glimpse of what the word *simmer* sounds like. We are the type to write love notes on the front of mix CDs, to scribble rainbows on the toes of our Chuck Taylors in black sharpie marker. We do not mourn when they inevitably wash off. We just re-draw them.

I notice she's cleared most of the plaster-covered foam from the space above our heads; she's told me this is what she does with her hands when we're on the phone together, late in the night. This is what she's doing when her voice gets all scratchy, when she's describing how the skyline will shimmer from our perch on the cold steps of our future apartment building's fire escape stairs. Her words make up what I imagine, as my eyes start to involuntarily shut, quieting the melodrama of my adolescent mind, letting me softly give in to sleep with her promise of somewhere else.

We live ten miles and three freeway exits away from each other. That distance feels impossible when we're apart, on the weekdays when the last bell rings and we say bye without kissing on our way out of the high school. Her mother picks her up, drives her back here, taking the overpass to the southernmost side of town where the freeway runs past the Walmart and the Strip Mall, and the bus takes me out of the city. The small farming village of Rosebush, my hometown, is only seven miles north, but it's an hour and a half of stop and starts as all of the other rural kids get dropped off.

I want, I want, I want my baby

We know that Central Michigan is not a place for people like us. I had never heard of the website before this afternoon, but B. is finding out about how many people like us there are via the internet. She found this site on some blog and it's made for people like us, she says. *Lesbian* still feels like a strange word in my mouth, but if it means knowing her lips, then it must be true.

I want, I want, I want my baby

I want, I want, I want

But right now, we're together and that's what matters. My dad dropped me off for the weekend. B.'s mother is sound asleep on the couch, the cats moving shadow-like over stacks of newspapers and magazines, tubes of caulking, paint cans, and piles of 2x4s left over from unfinished home improvement projects. Someday, B. will call me from her grandmother's trailer next door, where she will have to shower because the water has been turned off and they're running the electricity off of the battery of her mother's jeep, but it's a slightly more stable situation now.

The man writing this down, so far away from the girl on the loft bed, will still have questions. He will wonder why his parents let him go over so much. But then he'll remember his habit of slamming doors and storming around when they didn't and add it to the other things he will have to both apologize and say thank you for. Although, maybe letting them know that they were right might backfire. Instead, he'll stick to writing it down.

We don't yet know words like *recession*, don't know anyone who pays too much attention to the stock market reports on the radio or the nightly news. There is food in the fridge, coffee on the counter. We are two fourteen-year-olds leaning in to watch a pixelated music video on Real Player. The band members arm wrestle each other and lick love notes and do a lot of dramatic scowling, which is the one thing I can relate to. I am dressed in a badly-fitted Pink Floyd t-shirt and boot cut blue jeans. B. is five pants sizes smaller than me, and we will break each other in ways we can't imagine in the magic of this moment, just a few months after our first kiss.

He's not listening

Someday, I will go by a different name and lesbian will still feel strange, not as a word I feel in my mouth, but as an indicator of a time in my life, a beginning mistaken for an end. But recognized beginnings aren't a thing when you're a queer teenager in a rust-belt town, and you're a teenager, so you feel alone, and you're a queer teenager in the Midwest, so there is the added bonus of having no visible evidence of anyone like you who has made it through. Maybe on a website, maybe on thousands of websites, but not here. Maybe they are here, the queers, or lesbians (you don't know the word queer as a reclamation, not yet), but you can't seem to find them in the pews of the small Catholic country church. Not on the metal stadium seats at the high school football games. Not reflected in the parents of your friends, no matter how with-it and liberal some of them who work at the college appear to be.

What there is right now, though, is this girl and the label that comes with liking the way she says your name. Right now, there's a band called The Cliks, made up of women who love women. Women like us.

He's not listening

Someday, the lead singer of The Cliks will come out as transgender, but right now, Lucas is a sneering, androgynous dreamboat with a cherry red electric, strumming away like he's fighting to be heard and I want so badly to be him. Someday, I will change my name and B. and I will live such separate lives, in separate cities, mine far north on the shores of Lake Superior and hers far west on the Puget Sound. Olympia and Marquette, two cities that have the most overcast days in the United States.

Of course, we don't know any of this. We are still so young. We are still just two girls in love on a loft bed in a college town. There is still so much Saturday left. And we just woke up.