

CARISSA MARQUARDT

Putrid Pistols EP

TRACKLIST

- 01: Butterfly Jars (*written by Stevie Lloyd*)
- 02: Rome Antics (*written by Stevie Lloyd, Rhett Burke*)
- 03: Blurry Bedtime Stories (*written by Stevie Lloyd, Rhett Burke*)
- 04: Taxicab to Brooklyn (*written by Stevie Lloyd*)
- 05: Tattoos I'll Never Get (*written by Stevie Lloyd*)

TRACK 03: Blurry Bedtime Stories

I was nine when I had lemon water before bed for some reason, and for a week straight I was plagued with this recurring nightmare that had nothing to do with lemons but everything to do with water.

And yeah, I was drowning, but it wasn't like I found

myself abandoned in the middle of the sea, thrashing and sinking, life leeching out of me as if the angry waves needed it for themselves. Instead it was dark and I was outside, lying on a surface that was probably a road—it smelled like tar—while it rained and rained. Angry waves were substituted here with angry rain drops, and I'm telling you, they were pissed. I couldn't move, and they took the opportunity to fill me up; every orifice in my face, they liked those spots in particular. Soon I couldn't breathe.

I'd wake up drenched, but in my own sweat, not the rain. By that point my sister had heard me kicking around my sheets, thrashing a little, and she had crawled onto the edge of my bed.

"It's a dream again," she'd say. "Think of something nice."

Stella really sucked at giving advice. We were twins, and I remember being great at that, but *she* always said the same thing every time I woke like this that week. *Think of something nice, Stevie. Think of something nice.*

By the last few days of my nightmare plague, I'd fall asleep again to her little mantra like it was nice enough itself. I guess it was, at the time. When she got sick and died I wanted it engraved on her tombstone but our parents didn't understand it and they wouldn't listen to me because I was only nine.

Think of something nice, I remind myself nightly now. I don't have nightmares anymore (but I still avoid lemon water before bed). I don't really dream at all. Still, maybe my brain might conjure up something one of these nights if I could just *think of something nice*.

TRACK 01: Butterfly Jars

I knew I had to get out of Moorberry in high school. There was nothing wrong with the town, I just couldn't stand my parents any longer. I didn't even graduate, which I

regret (kind of).

Mom wanted to leave Dad but she couldn't afford to, and Dad thought Mom was cheating on him even though she wasn't, and they had a *lot* of hospital bills piled up thanks to Stella. I don't blame her for our family falling apart, so I hope she doesn't blame me for leaving it as soon as I could afford my own vehicle.

I got a dog that I named Anya after a character from a movie Stella and I used to watch. To be honest I didn't think this decision through, but eventually I was glad I did it. I just didn't want to be alone once I left home, and I missed having a twin. Even though Anya can't be my new twin at least I could claim to not be talking to myself when I catch strangers' eyes a lane over at stoplights.

I don't think I intended to do music when I left originally, but it happened. I was in Madison, Wisconsin, on my way to Chicago, and I had time to kill before I continued on—wanted to avoid rush hour traffic. I don't remember what the music store was called anymore, but I went inside and recalled playing clarinet for my school's band. They had clarinets in all sorts of colors at that store. The rental I used to use at school was just black.

Before I got in trouble for bringing Anya inside with me, I saw this guitar that I liked a lot. I couldn't play it, but I decided I wanted to. I didn't buy it that day because I didn't have any money, but in Chicago I stayed with an older cousin for a while, got a job at some really trashy restaurant that didn't care about their employees having diplomas, sold my car, and *then* I bought a guitar.

My favorite place to practice was on the roof of my cousin's apartment building, which he had access to because he knew the right people. But he wasn't the only one, so by the time I started claiming that spot as my own, others had already left their marks. Someone drew bad chalk drawings on the ground. Someone strung up fairy lights around the doorway that weren't plugged in. Someone left two fold-up

chairs and an umbrella in one corner, and someone left jars full of butterflies.

They were there the first time my cousin let me up there, and they were there every day after. Well, I mean, one day I noticed that one of the butterflies had died and then I knew that they all would eventually, so I released them. But while they were alive and well and the promise of death eluded them, I liked them a lot. At night especially, city lights reflected off them like little spotlights. A bokeh filter from a photo-editing app is what my every evening looked like.

The day after I set the butterflies free, all the empty jars that I'd left there had been smashed. I don't know if the person who owned them had done it or if another roof-goer was the culprit, but I felt like it was my fault, so I got a broom and cleaned up the mess. A week later I cut my foot on a shard of glass I must have missed, but I learned how to play that guitar.

TRACK 04: Taxicab to Brooklyn

I took Anya and my guitar to New York. Of course I did—that's where all aspiring musicians go. And we lived out of disgusting hotel rooms for three months before I finally met someone who was trying to do the same thing I was, and thank *god* she lived in an apartment.

Her name was Cleo and she played a keyboard that she called Salem. I never named my guitar. Cleo and I weren't similar enough in that way, and honestly we weren't very similar in any way other than wanting to make music, so that's about all we did together.

One night she left her phone at the apartment when she went out. She went out a lot, so that part wasn't weird, but what was weird was that it was three hours past the time she said she'd be home and she's never late. I don't know if we were friendly enough with each other to warrant my going out to look for her, but I did it anyway.

Anya didn't like the taxi very much. She rested her chin

on my lap the entire time and whimpered occasionally, but it felt like any other taxi to me. It smelled a bit like weed, though. The driver didn't talk to me at all until I had to pay him.

I went to this club in Brooklyn she's mentioned in passing a few times and looked for hours before I figured she must not be there. Anya didn't like the club very much either, keeping her body pressed against my leg while I searched the place.

It was interesting though, I'll admit. I usually avoided the club scene because people in general weren't really my thing. Maybe I'd go if I had a group of friends to prevent strangers from trying to talk to me, but I didn't have a group of friends. I had Anya, and most of the people we passed were wearing things they didn't want anywhere near a dog, so I guess—like usual—she's the only friend I need.

We went back to the apartment and I never saw Cleo again. She didn't come back for any of her things—not even Salem—and I heard nothing in the news that might indicate something grim. She just...vanished. New York was weird.

I couldn't afford the apartment on my own, so I had to look for a roommate, which I didn't know how to do in a city where I knew no one. I put an ad in the paper, because that's how I first came across Anya.

TRACK 02: Rome Antics

My new roommate was a girl named Gemma who didn't play any instrument and had no interest in writing music with me. But she had a lot of friends and they all kind of adopted me, and the next thing I knew, a friend whose dad owned a little college coffee joint somewhere hooked me up with a gig. So I guess Gemma and her friends weren't that bad.

I didn't have enough material to play my own songs, but I could cover a Gabrielle Aplin track pretty well and figured I could probably just make the rest up as I went along.

This was a horrible idea. I was announced—"Stevie

Lloyd, everybody,”—and my gig lasted for two songs. I remembered that I could play “Flowers in the Window” by Travis because it wasn’t very hard, and then no one had any requests I could actually play. Even Anya, sitting beside me, looked humiliated.

The guy who requested something by Fleetwood Mac caught me afterwards and asked if my name was really Stevie or if I was just copying Stevie Nicks. I hated him for that. He was probably a few years older than I was and needed a haircut, waves like defeated curls framing a sharp jawline and cheekbones that could cut glass. Anya stood on hind legs to put her front paws on his shoulders and nose at his chin, his neck, the collarbones slightly exposed beneath the loose white T-shirt he wore, before I could respond. Traitor.

I took Anya home, and then he took *me* home, but I didn’t even get his name that night. The next morning over coffee I learned it was Rhett, which was a stupid name. I asked him if it was fake, if he was just copying it from *Gone with the Wind*, and I think he laughed but never actually answered the question.

Anya liked him a lot, which made spending time with him a common occurrence. He didn’t do the singing thing, but he played guitar and taught me what he knew, which was far more than I did. We mostly practiced at his place. Gemma didn’t like the noise. *Any* noise. I guess I stopped hating him at some point.

After a month of this, Gemma’s friend got me another gig at the same college coffee joint, and it went a lot better. Rhett watched from his same table and requested the same Fleetwood Mac song, but this time I could play it. Anya sat herself beside my stool on the tiny stage the whole time. When I finished all five songs I had planned to play, I held a hand out in her direction, and she pawed at it in as close to a high five as she could manage.

Gigs like that one continued to follow, mostly thanks to Rhett, but also from being in the right place at the right

time. Eventually I started making money from them instead of having to pay to get the gigs. And I ditched the covers for my own stuff. For the first time since Stella died twelve years ago, I told someone about that stupid recurring nightmare I'd had for a week from the lemon water. He helped me translate it into sheet music and lyrics.

One night when we were both really drunk, I let Rhett cut my hair. When we were sober we realized it didn't look too bad, so I dyed it black and gave my act a name. Anya and I became the Putrid Pistols thanks to inspiration from two of Rhett's tattoos, and people actually liked us. Rhett especially, it seemed.

TRACK 05: Tattoos I'll Never Get

Drinking became a problem for me eventually. I blamed Rhett so that I didn't have to blame myself, and then I continued to blame him for a lot of things that weren't his fault. Whatever we were doing together, I called it off after about a week of arguing. We were beginning to sound too much like my parents, and I got away from them for a reason.

Gemma helped me stop drinking. It took a few months, and I failed so often it felt like I'd never succeed, but then I did. And Gemma somehow knew I would. We didn't have much in common, but she was probably the best friend outside of Anya I'd ever had, which I hadn't seen coming when she moved in.

Later that year I turned twenty-two and I was still doing music, but I was doing different music. I don't know if I liked it any more than I liked the stuff I wrote with Rhett, but I felt like *I* was different from when I was with him, so my music should reflect that. I don't know if it did. I didn't have anyone to bounce ideas off of anymore. But I didn't have anyone to argue with either.

These new songs were just as successful. I started considering recording them. Would anyone buy an album of

my lyrics? My thoughts, my feelings, my secrets, my ramblings, my babbling? It seemed unlikely. Seemed daunting. *Think of something nice.* Maybe I will. Maybe I won't.

I missed Rhett. Anya did too. Another night when we were drunk together, we came up with this ridiculous bucket list that was funny to read when we were sober. I had to tear it down from its place on my wall because it wasn't funny anymore, *especially* sober.

But a few of the things on that list weren't so weird, like visiting the deli from *When Harry Met Sally's* fake orgasm scene. Maybe I could do that alone, or with Anya. She didn't like that film as much as Rhett did, but at least she didn't fight with me (even when I deserved it).

I was finally, truly sober, though. Maybe Rhett wouldn't fight with me anymore. I should call him. Maybe not. *Think of something nice...*

TRACK 06: Chardonnay Lipstick

There was a power outage in the city one evening. I took Anya to Central Park because I didn't want to stay indoors, and the weather was nice enough. Gemma actually accompanied us.

We weren't the only ones with the idea. Soon I found myself people-watching on a bench while Gemma played fetch with Anya. One woman in particular I remember because she looked like a fictional character straight out of a book I'd read in high school.

There was a lot to notice about her, but most vivid were her lips, painted the color of



FOR ANYA

TRACKLIST

01: Putrid Pistol (*written by Rhett Burke*)

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The worst thing to happen to a writer is finding yourself unable to finish a piece of work for one reason or another. And that's what happened with Stevie and whatever song she had been working on when the college coffee joint where we met was held up at gunpoint. A lot of things happened in the nine minutes before the whole ordeal was over. Some of those things were stray bullets.

I couldn't find the notebook she was probably writing in. When I went to search for it, I started at the table I was sitting at when I watched her cover "Flowers in the Window" because that's where she would have sat. It wasn't on the floor and it wasn't on the table—it wasn't on *any* table or on the floor at all, anywhere. But she had been writing. Witnesses who recognized her had seen it.

Stevie had family, but they must not have kept in touch. Gemma gave me what few possessions Stevie had had, and I didn't really know what to do with all of it, so I found her family and sent most of it back to them. There was a keyboard called Salem that I kept, and her guitar. She never named that.

I guess I kept Anya too. And I guess I decided to try the singing thing finally, but only for her. She seemed to like it enough, although I can never seem to take away her blank puppy stare like she's given up looking at the world entirely since the one thing she was looking for wasn't in it anymore.

If only dogs could talk. Anya was with Stevie like usual that day. She was the only dog I knew who could get into almost any establishment in this city. She was a Putrid Pistol, after all. Now the only one.