

Teenage Fantasy: a script inspired by Natasha Matila-Smith

by Becky Hemus

Stage left. The imprint of words behind an apricot gauze curtain.

The track curves around like an embrace and I traverse my way inside (twenty-four-seven, Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau, 2019).

“if i run into you on the street i’m crossing the road”, Natasha says.

Never has a truer word been said. I’m always running, running from men who petrify me and the things who I crushed. Running from my ex-colleague and my recent ex-best friend. A life of exes. I remember posting photos from Natasha’s exhibition on Instagram and thinking, now they will all know that this is about them. They will see me and know that I only ever think of them. Nobody responded to my story.

A road is a great distance because we are separated by danger. Maybe this is what you like about me? If I run into you on the street I am absolutely crossing the road, ducking under head-on traffic. I think about this artwork by Natasha a lot when standing at a precipice that probably looks like a grassy knoll to anybody else.

Enter Natasha. She is wearing a tartan pleated skirt, freshly laundered socks that sit on the small of her ankle bone with an embroidered peach at the side. She crosses her feet delicately like she is about to pirouette.

The room is an ocean. I clamber onto the bed.

I’m so sad I’m so sad I’m so sad and I missed seeing you on the train.

There was an artist I used to have a crush on who would sometimes be on my morning commute. Each day held a lot of possibility, and felt like a visitation. Public transport is average in this city, but I can’t imagine anyone being exasperated at running late if they got to spend 45 minutes with their crush. That we did not speak was an unnecessary detail, the connection was abundant in my head. Maybe I was in love.

There was once a song by Adele where she said: “and I hear your words that I made up, you say my name like there could be an us” ... You say my name, like there could be an us.

It’s probably a concept called limerence, but I like to think I’m just a romantic. Limerence is intense and involuntary, coined by psychologist Dorothy Tennov as an attraction that borders on elaborate, obsessive fantasy. If you look it up on Wikipedia there’s an image of *Psyche Revived by Cupid’s Kiss* (1787–1793, a sculpture by Antonio Canova). I am psyche, rendered in stone and reaching up for some metaphorical being who may or may not exist. Kenny cries for me like Max Evans does on the screen. A GIF of tears.

I tried to find you yesterday but I could not see through the fog. Someone from your past was there and because of this blue light, I could not quite see if she was between or beyond where I imagined us to be.

When you left for work I traced the imprint of you next to me on the sheets. You were clearer now, without having to worry about how entertaining or sexy or nonchalant I had been. My memory was saturated with happiness and I cried because I knew it wasn’t real.

The socks are rolling down my thigh like a contraceptive sleeve. The tights were milky and thick and without the gusset they retract over themselves. I wake up from a slumber and my arm has gone dead because of the angle. My legs are imprinted with nylon.

Natasha looks so beautiful in the slivers I can see. The protagonist who is self-deprecating but gorgeous and funny, glorified in blown-up vignettes (I Think You Like Me But I’ve Been Wrong About These Things Before, Artspace Aotearoa, Tāmaki Makaurau, 2021). I don’t think I could ever produce a selfie with such finesse. Mine are always too crass.

The stockings and socks and tights form a tangle on my bed. The phone is heavy in my hand. I think about Natasha and her strength in being able to cross the road. I keep replaying that moment, and all the moments that could have happened after, in my head. And while I imagine them, I am unable to move. I lie in bed and hide.

Becky Hemus

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