

## MUDDY BANKS by Kayla Guthrie

When he had a day off, Andrew would call and we'd talk or he'd leave a message, and he'd usually invite me to come over in the middle of the day. Often by the time I had showered and dressed it would be twilight. Under the dimming overcast sky, my clothes already damp from the chronic regional mist, I'd walk over to catch the commuter train, which traveled above ground, passing through layers of suburban development, residences growing increasingly dismal and forgotten-seeming, until I arrived at his stop, which had the same name as his street, one of the local proper names, the name of a judge or sheriff or gambler from the previous century, which was used commonly in the place where I grew up and which evokes such a stew of memories, mostly bad, that to pronounce it for me is analogous to a certain queasiness.

At first, he would meet me at the station, but I eventually got to know the long route to his place, about a twenty minute walk uphill through an area of dreary bungalows built in the seventies for working class families. He had a suite in the basement of one of the little houses. Nobody else I knew lived anywhere near there. He held menial jobs with low wages; for a long time, he worked at a mall record store. Once, I gave him \$20 to pick me up a Morton Feldman CD he told me they had there, and he promised to bring it next time we saw each other, but he just took my \$20 and never got me the CD. I didn't miss the money enough to ever remind him about it.

You had to enter around the side of the house, and I remember one time coming around the corner and seeing about five pieces of cardboard with some fresh spray paint on them. Each peice of cardboard had a different design, and the paint was in grungy, not-so-vivid hues of blue and red. He was making cliched-looking triangular patterns with the spray paint on the cardboard using smaller chunks of cardboard as stencils. He had found a vinyl pressing plant in Scotland that manufactured small editions for cheap, and he was hand-making unique album sleeves for the singles.

I could never figure out what he meant by using that punk style, whether it was the best he could do or not. He seemed to be refining and nurturing his own refusal to expand his tools. Maybe that was the point: a safe place, hiding some drug-blunted pain. I didn't think there was a way to ask him. I didn't really talk about stuff like that at the time.

He casually produced different types of recordings, and would take rough tapes of us improvising and press them straight to vinyl without any touch-ups. I remember being surprised the first time he presented me with one of these. Without any ado, he had named our project, given the songs titles, and designed a record sleeve. I didn't really get it but it was fine. The way I saw it, we were on the same page, but in different books. I liked that. People and I understood each other worse when I was stoned. I could never keep up with what was going on. And half the time I couldn't remember what had happened afterward. I was stoned most of the time, but when I wasn't, I couldn't really talk to these friends soberly, the way I talked during the day at school. These two worlds of mine were foreign to one another. Toward each of them, I felt totally loyal but indifferent at the same time.

Our sometimes-bandmate, Madison, was totally thick. Conversation with him felt like trying to talk into an empty room, with a loud fan on. His words and movements seemed to come from down a long, dark corridor, and I was never confident whether he was responding to me, or whether he was just thinking out loud. He had skin so pale it was translucent and his clothes looked like he'd been wearing them since he was eleven years old.

One night before a gig, the three of us were putting on face paint in the bathroom of the bar. Andrew held out some tabs of acid for us and I shook my head, but Madison took one and put it in his mouth. There was one more band before us, so Madison went outside to find Billy, the guy who he was borrowing a guitar from for the night. Andrew and I got beer and went to sit at one of the tables. Twenty minutes later, Billy and Madison came back. "We just got robbed in the alley," said Billy.

"With a used syringe," Madison added. "He took our weed."