

THIS IS A ZINE ABOUT THE MOUNTAIN GOATS

six pieces about six mountain goats songs,
a few drawings, a honda civic, and a prison
for danish princes.

"foreword"

when i was younger i used to follow vlogbrothers near religiously.

john green always said, and still says, that the mountain goats are the best band in the world. when i was thirteen, i thought, "yeah, right."

and then i listened to the mountain goats.

i think they're the best band in the world. or, at least, just as good as american rock band my chemical romance.

this isn't a zine about how great the mountain goats are, though they are. it's not meant to deify john darnielle, though that might be funny. all i intend to do is write some short passages about songs and experiences that are meaningful to me. you could probably teach an entire college course on mountain goats studies, or if you want deeper and discursive analyses, there's a podcast for that.

the following is how i first heard of the mountain goats, my relationship to a select few songs, and some honorable mentions honored by doodles.

RIVANSPOD '28

"a brief history of my personal relationship to the mountain goats"

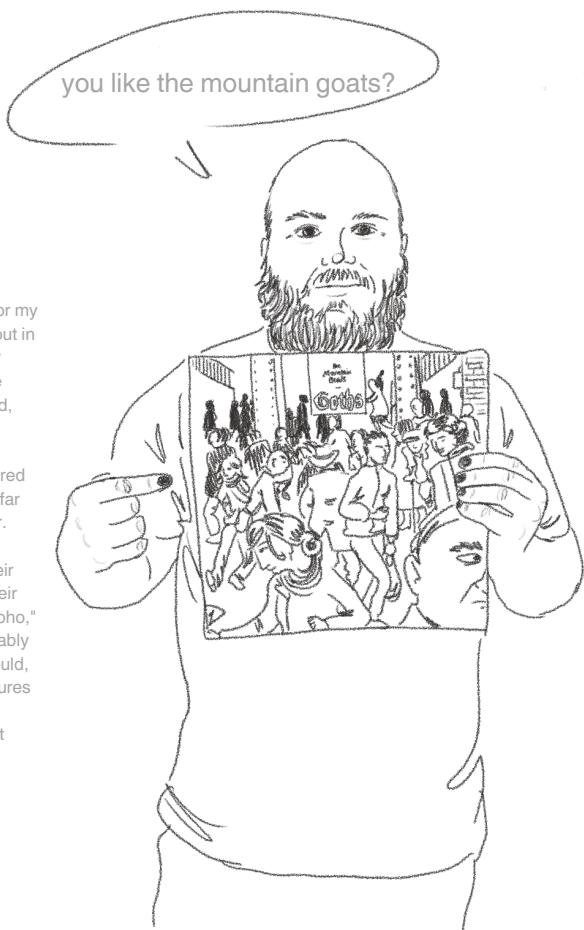
i first listened to the mountain goats for real when my friend justin told me to. justin has good taste, so when he tells me i should do something, i do it. i don't remember what song it was. (it was probably something off goths.)

i just know that all of a sudden i had a four hour playlist of my favorite songs.

their early work was a little too lo-fi for my tastes, but when tallahassee came out in '02, i think they really came into their own, commercial and artistically. the whole album has a clear, crisp sound, and a new sheen of consummate professionalism that really gives the songs a big boost. he's been compared to colin meloy, but i think john has a far more bitter, cynical sense of humour.

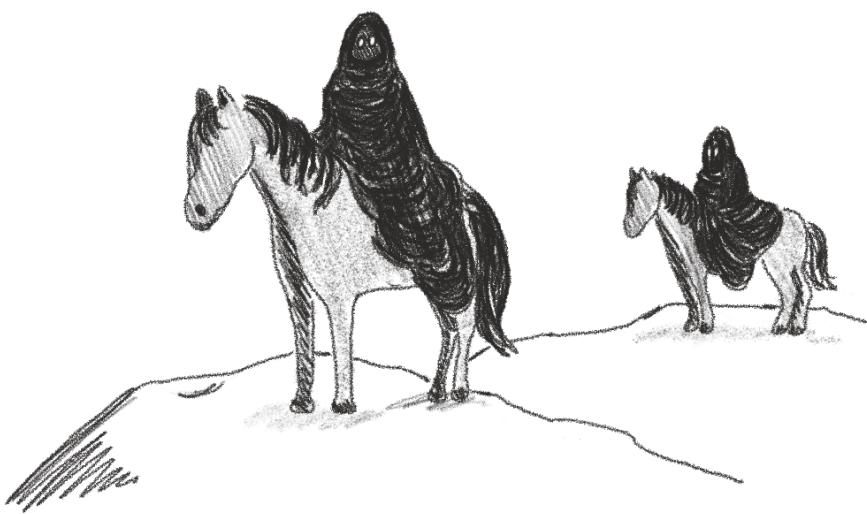
in '17, goats released this, goths, their most accomplished album. i think their undisputed masterpiece is "rain in soho," a song so catchy, most people probably don't listen to the lyrics. but they should, because it's not just about the pleasures of conformity, and the importance of trends, it's also a personal statement about the band itself.

hey, riv--





you don't wanna see these guys
without their masks on



you who stood so proud once
I can taste your fear

you blazed like torches
its dark in here

"jenny"

when i think of my top five favorite mountain goats songs, "jenny" will always be there. i don't even remember when i first heard it. but if it comes on, i never skip it. it makes me remember a uninhibited youthful love i never had, something so new and fearless and maybe destructive as jumping on the back of a new kawasaki 900, all yellow and black, fresh out of the showroom. nothing can hurt you on the back of that bike, heading into the west, aglow with the warm orange sunset. it's a pirate's life. consequences can come later.

i recently acquired this photo of my grandmother from 1961 in england when she was freshly married to my grandfather, or maybe just about to be.

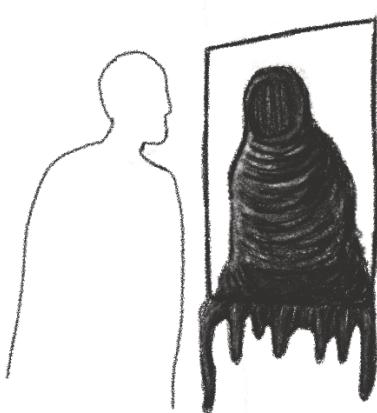
she's standing in front of a new volkswagen, the only new car my extremely practical grandfather ever purchased in his life.

unlike the titular character of this song, he would not be the type to spontaneously buy a showroom kawasaki. but there is my grandmother, smiling, eyes squinted, aglow with a possibly less warm sun than in west texas. she is 19 years old, young and in love.

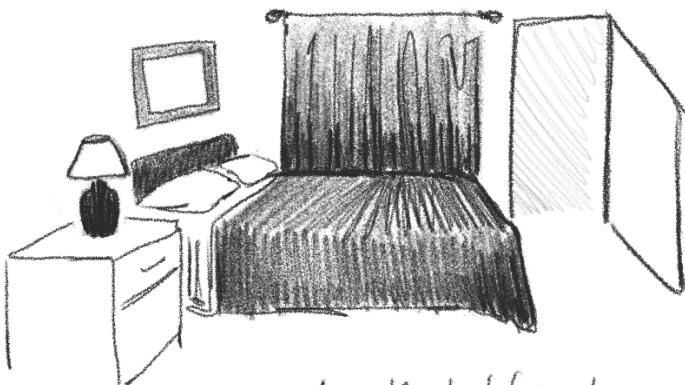
there is one word written on the back of the photo, in my grandfather's handwriting:



Jenny



sometimes you do things
just to see
how bad they'll make you feel



on the day that I forget you
I hope my heart explodes

"heel turn 2"

i once wrote a five thousand three hundred and sixty two word-long essay to annotate a playlist about hamlet, prince of denmark, that is forty six minutes long. hamlet is a foundational character to me, introduced to me at the tender age of thirteen, a very fragile and formative time in my life. he's been haunting my brain ever since. during the pandemic i did a re-read and it immediately reignited my obsession with the text and what better than to make a playlist for my favorite danish freak.

heel turn 2 is an extraordinarily hamlet song.



it captures the final scene of the play. the story depicts his heel turn, hamlet being a beloved prince who has internalized the prison and projected his grief and anger onto others, ultimately leading to his own downfall.

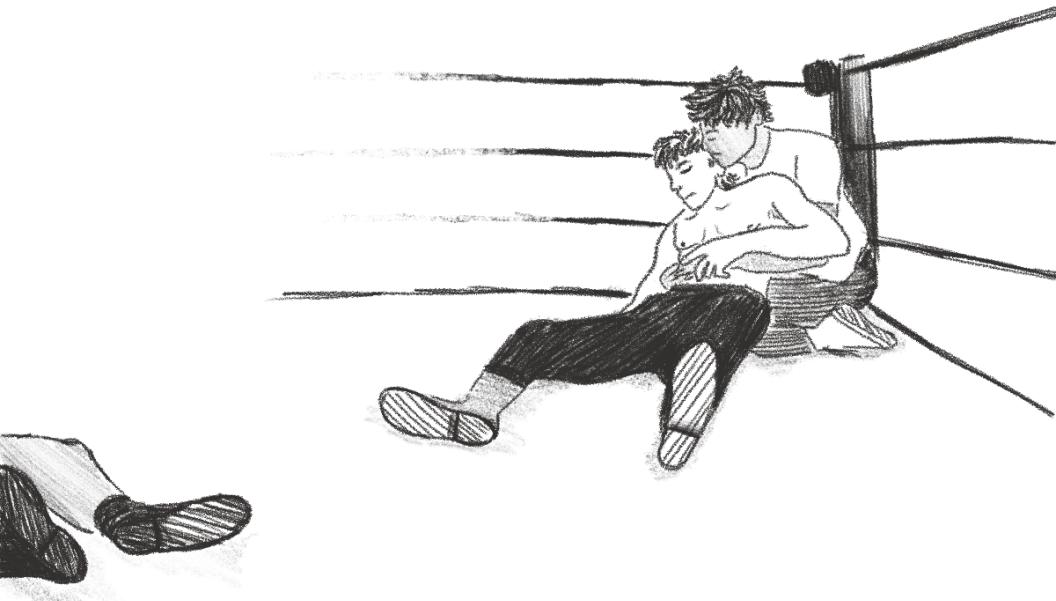
he tries the losing side in his duel with laertes, his better judgment long thrown overboard along with rosencrantz and guildenstern. his thoughts be bloody or nothing worth.

as he lay dying of a poisoned blade, he pleads to horatio to postpone the sweet relief of death awhile. horatio, the president and sole member left of hamlet's fan club, laments his friend's death:

since my dear soul was mistress of her choice, and could of men
distinguish, her election hath sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been...
give me that man that is not passion's slave, and i will wear him in my
heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart, as i do thee.

horatio will be the bearer of hamlet's legacy, the historian of his memory. he, not hamlet, will walk out of elsinore in one piece. the trash from the rafters, the soldiers' music and the rites of war speak loudly for the prince. the song ends with three minutes of a contemplative, melancholic piano.

the crowd filters out, a janitor mops the sweat and the blood, the overhead lights dim...



...the rest is silence.

"genesis 19: 1-2"

the mountain goats were my first concert post-pandemic, post-pandemic being a relative term of course. it was a john darnielle solo show in oklahoma city at the tower theatre on september 17, 2021. i don't remember much of the day, except that it was a friday, and i went with justin and rachel. we got there a few minutes before doors opened and excitedly discussed what songs we hoped to hear. but the first song on the setlist, "genesis 19: 1-2," was one i'd never heard before.



being a "fake fan" of a band is not a philosophy i subscribe to, least of all with the mountain goats, where listening to their entire discography is a little bit like finding someone who has seen every episode of *law & order*, or the long-running american procedural of your choice or something. it's certainly possible, but probably not everyone who likes *law & order*, or the long-running american procedural of your choice, has done it.



anyway, i'd never heard it. i've since downloaded *devil in the shortwave* from bandcamp because i'm trying to watch every episode of *law & order*. the reviews are in: it's a great ep. it's also a kickass title. and in retrospect, "genesis 19: 1-2" is a great show opener. i've never read the bible, nor plan to really. why read the bible when i could listen to the mountain goats?



THIS GREAT BIG YOU
and little ole me



you can bring out all your weapons
you can't make me go to war!

"no children"

i'm not sure how john darnielle personally feels about this song, like how the beastie boys hate "fight for your right (to party)." but people do definitely miss the point of it, just like "fight for your right" becoming an anthem for the very people it parodies. at the concert, john told us we were getting too rowdy, especially the people requesting "no children" in the middle of the set. when it was time for it to actually be played, he told us people ask him if he will play this at their wedding. which, honestly, is so insane it would be kind of funny, if it were not actually a deeply sad song.

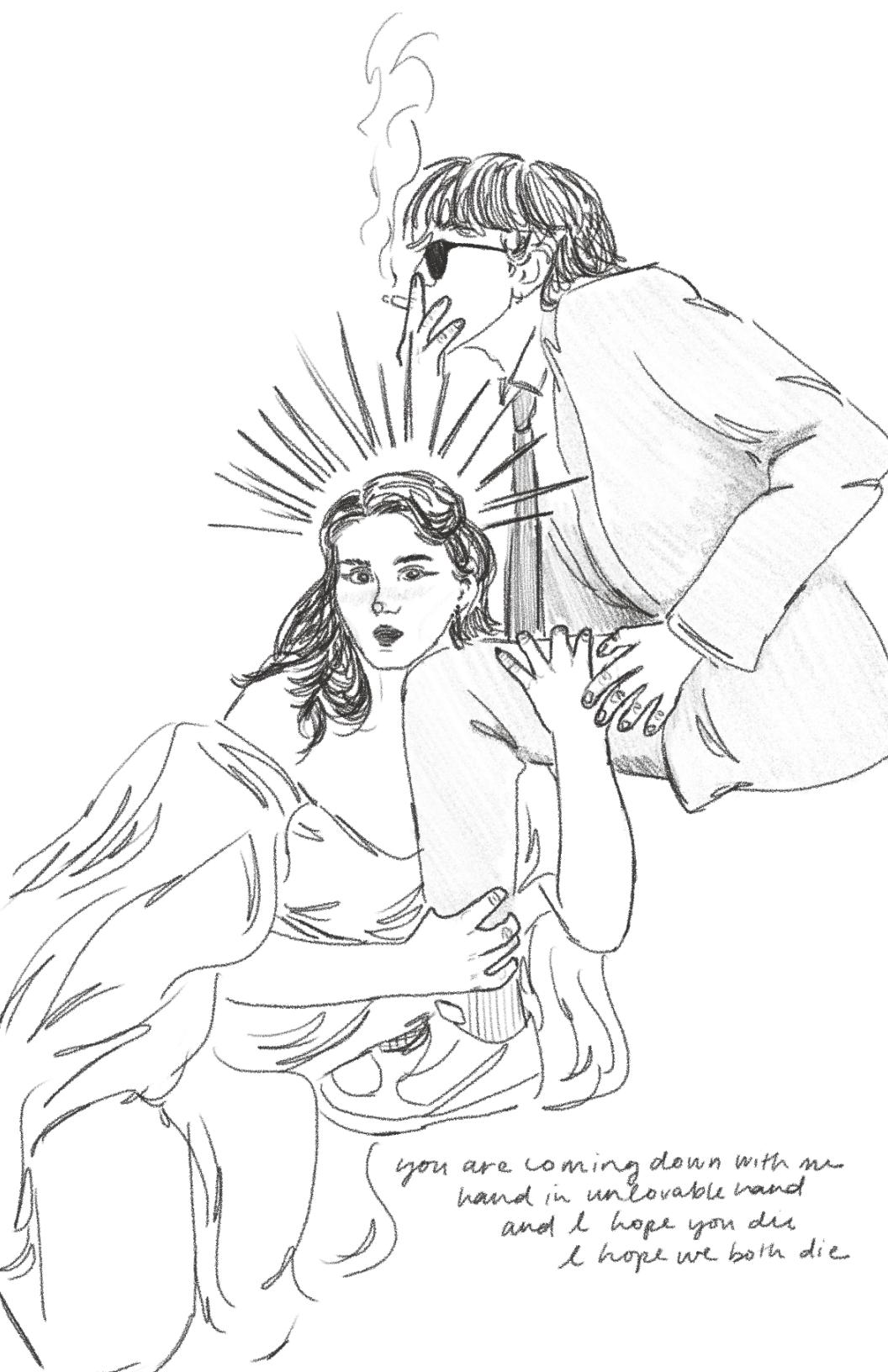
so because it is a song about fail marriages, hoping your wife dies, and hoping you both die together, it's a favorite among my friends. it specifically makes me think of one of my best friends, skylar, who i hope doesn't die, but if she does, i hope we die together. we scream-sing along to it every time it comes on, along with our other friend gus. one of my favorite memories is scream-singing it with her on a may evening, a few days from graduating college and moving away from each other, driving seventy miles an hour to sit on the lakeside and watch the sunset.



i can't bear to listen to it without her.

maybe we like it so much because we're deeply sad people underneath all that humor and anger. it feels good to sing about destruction, to give up and rot inside your crumbling house. it feels even better with another person who is rotting just like you. so maybe it isn't a deeply sad song after all. maybe we just all need to feel a little resigned to the shit shows we find ourselves in and yell about it.

maybe we could do it together, hand in unlovable hand.



you are coming down with me
hand in unlovable hand
and I hope you die
I hope we both die

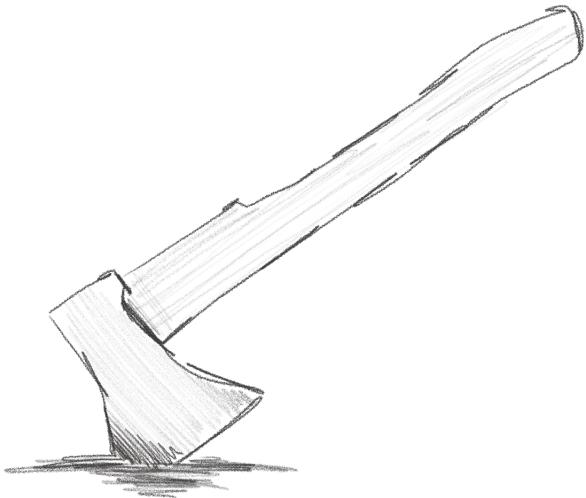
"abandoned flesh"

this song plays everytime i connect my phone to bluetooth because it's the first song in my music library listed alphabetically. it's a nice way to ease into a drive, with that jazzy saxophone and smooth beat. i always switch it, which isn't really fair to "abandoned flesh," but sometimes i'm just not in the mood.

this is probably ironic, as the song chronicles burned out and faded bands of goth lore, who never reached the heights of siouxsie and the banshees or the cure, and are only generally noticed as deep cuts brought on stage by the smashing pumpkins or mentioned in mountain goats songs. they too probably had songs that are queued to play first in someone's car, only to be skipped every time. sometimes the art you create is a marvel, and sometimes it's the first thing people skip.



you create art in the nighttime. you get a job in the daylight. such is life. the world will never know or understand the suffocated splendor of the once and future goth band, or the artist in the nighttime, or the person making a zine about random mountain goats songs. but the ruins remain, in clubs and radio stations, on wikipedia pages, or the first song people skip in their car.



I sure do love you



felt like god's
anointed
when you
didn't push
me away

"never quite free"

all eternals deck was an album i played frequently during my last semester of college. i would play it in my car during my commute, switching to my headphones for the walk to the film building. i could finish the album in the brief time sitting in the fms lounge before my afternoon class. this song always struck me; the cathartic feeling of freedom from oppression but the haunting feeling of Knowing. you escape, you move on, you grow. you will always Know.

never quite free was the first song on shuffle that played on my last day in oklahoma.

i hauled my ass out of bed that morning for brunch with justin and rachel, the ones i began this mountain goats journey with. we had a joyous breakfast, despite my incurable, inhuman non-morning personality affliction. but the haunting of Knowing lingered. later that afternoon i'd be taking me, my honda, and my whole life across the country to california, leaving my home of 23 years. we delayed, every lull in the conversation filled with some anecdote or quip to keep us distracted for a minute longer. eventually we could no longer delay in the restaurant, so we paid and delayed a little longer in the parking lot. rachel had to be at work in thirty minutes and we had to say goodbye. we walked our literal separate ways, parked on opposite sides of the restaurant. i got in my car, fighting tears, and decided to take the long way home on the backroads to take in the oklahoma countryside one more time. i plugged in my phone, chose my playlist, pushed play, i hear the opening lines. it feels too prescient to skip.

i drove the backroads of norman, down the no man's land of sunnylane where it's kind of norman, technically oklahoma city, not quite moore. i get to a stop sign. the music swells. i burst into tears.

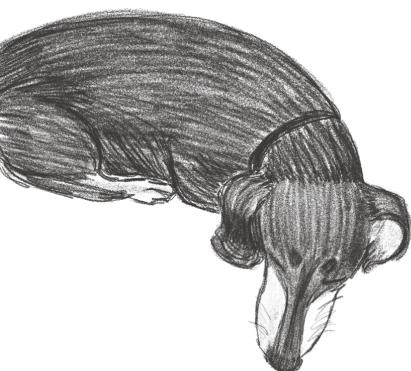
it's so good to learn that from right here
the view goes on forever
and you'll never want for comfort
and you'll never be alone
see the sunset turning red
let all be quiet in your head
and look about
the stars are coming out

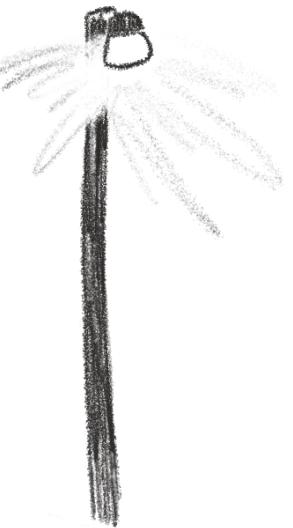


the last few months of my life to this point had been some of the most tumultuous i have ever experienced and will surely be remembered as a traumatic turning point in my life. i didn't realize later that day i'd experience another traumatic turning point. i would not have made it through without the support of my friends and loved ones, people who go beyond the scope of friendship and no doubt qualify under the category of "found family." those months are a blur. sometimes i remember. i remember the feeling. like steel swords. "never quite free" is the most succinct description of the feeling. my friends were excited for me, supportive, sympathetic. the people i was moving with were excited to leave oklahoma behind. i couldn't quite get myself to feel that feeling. i still can't.

i am free, mostly. my ties aren't severed, but geographically i am free. i am young, and as a kind stranger on a sidewalk, coincidentally also from oklahoma, told me as i changed my windshield wipers, i have the world at my feet. he wished me luck. maybe in the grand scheme of things he's right. i try to quiet my head, i still feel the steel swords. i can move on, i can feel the earth beneath my feet and know in some sense i am free.

i'm crying now as i write this, i will always know.





I will be made a new creature
one bright day

If you're reading this, thank you,
whether you're an old friend,
a mutual, or a total stranger.

If you're John Darnielle, or any
one of the Goats, reading this,
thank you, and I'm a big fan.
So is my friend Justin.

R,

River

P.S.

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