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KEF

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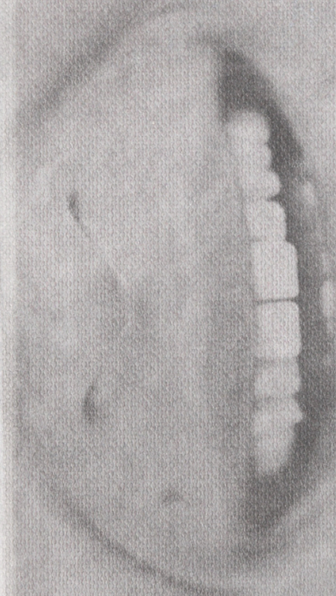

In memory of my Baba,
who showed me that to love well
is the greatest pleasure of all.

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I understand pleasure more in the context of something that nourishes my psyche as opposed to just indulging it.

One of my favorite things in the world is flipping through old photo albums at my grandmother's house in Bulgaria. They're filled with moments of ordinariness like my mom hanging laundry on the line while heavily pregnant with my brother, my grandfather roasting a lamb on a spit in the garden, and me and my cousins, sticky-faced, devouring watermelon on the stoop. These images capture the rawness of everyday life, and they're unexpectedly beautiful.

In Bulgarian, кеф (pronounced kehf) is a feeling of joy, ease, and presence. The word itself is always a bit difficult to explain because English doesn't have a true equivalent. It's a kind of everyday aliveness and a pleasure rooted in simplicity, in being where you are and letting that be enough.

I grew up between Bulgaria and the U.S., and every time I returned to the States after a summer abroad, I felt the shift immediately. Life there was louder and everyone was constantly in motion, chasing goals, filling their calendars. There was a kind of pride in being emotionally exhausted. In Bulgaria, though, there's always been room left for кеф. It's something essential which is naturally woven into the rhythm of daily life. From a young age, this mindset shaped me. I learned to pay attention, to find meaning in moments others might miss. That way of seeing the world is at the heart of this magazine.

КЕФ is a space to slow down, to reconnect with your body and mind, and to ask what really matters to you. In a world that rewards constant doing, this is a place for simply just being.

We waste so much of our lives on things that don't bring us closer to ourselves. We chase ideas of success, follow paths we didn't choose, and confuse busyness with purpose. One day, we'll wake up and realize what we've missed, but we won't ever get that time back. That's why we have to be awake now. We have to live now.

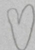
This first issue brings together voices across generations, body types, cultures, and neurodiverse experiences because there's no single way to feel joy. Pleasure should be personal, accessible, and expansive. It's something we all deserve.

I chose the chapter titles "Pleasure", "Memory", and "The Spaces We Come Home To" because the ways we remember and the spaces we inhabit play a powerful role in how we experience joy. Our memories shape what we cherish and long for, while the places we return to offer comfort and a sense of belonging. These themes are universal enough where every reader can find a piece of their own life reflected within them.

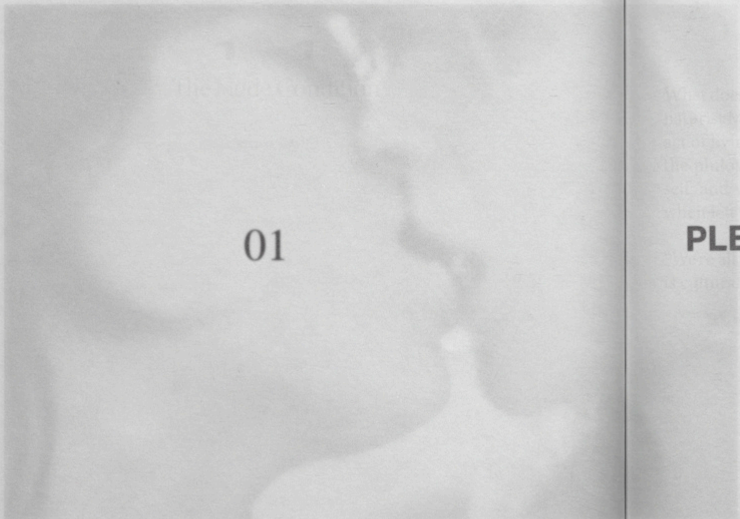
So take a breath and turn the next page.

With love,

Lina



кеф



01

PLEASURE

1.1
The Nude Condition

What does it mean to truly be yourself, stripped down to your core? For lifelong naturist Michael Williams, the answer lies in something profoundly simple: the act of living in the nude. In this conversation, Williams speaks candidly about the philosophy and liberation behind naturism – how it shaped his sense of self, and why he believes the human body, in all its forms, is most powerful when left unadorned.

“We're all born naked. It's the most natural state of all. What happens after that is cultural.”

Naturism isn't just a lifestyle for Michael Williams – it's coming back to an essential space where the body isn't hidden or judged, but simply exists.

"There's something primal about being naked in the open air," he says. "I feel especially connected to that feeling of oneness with nature when I'm laying out on Holkham beach in North Norfolk. I'm just a small, naked human between the vast sky, sea, and sands. I don't feel the same in more crowded places. It's about space, about being part of something larger."

Williams has been a naturist since his mid-teens, and he's never once been embarrassed by his body. That lack of shame, he says, is rooted in how he was raised.

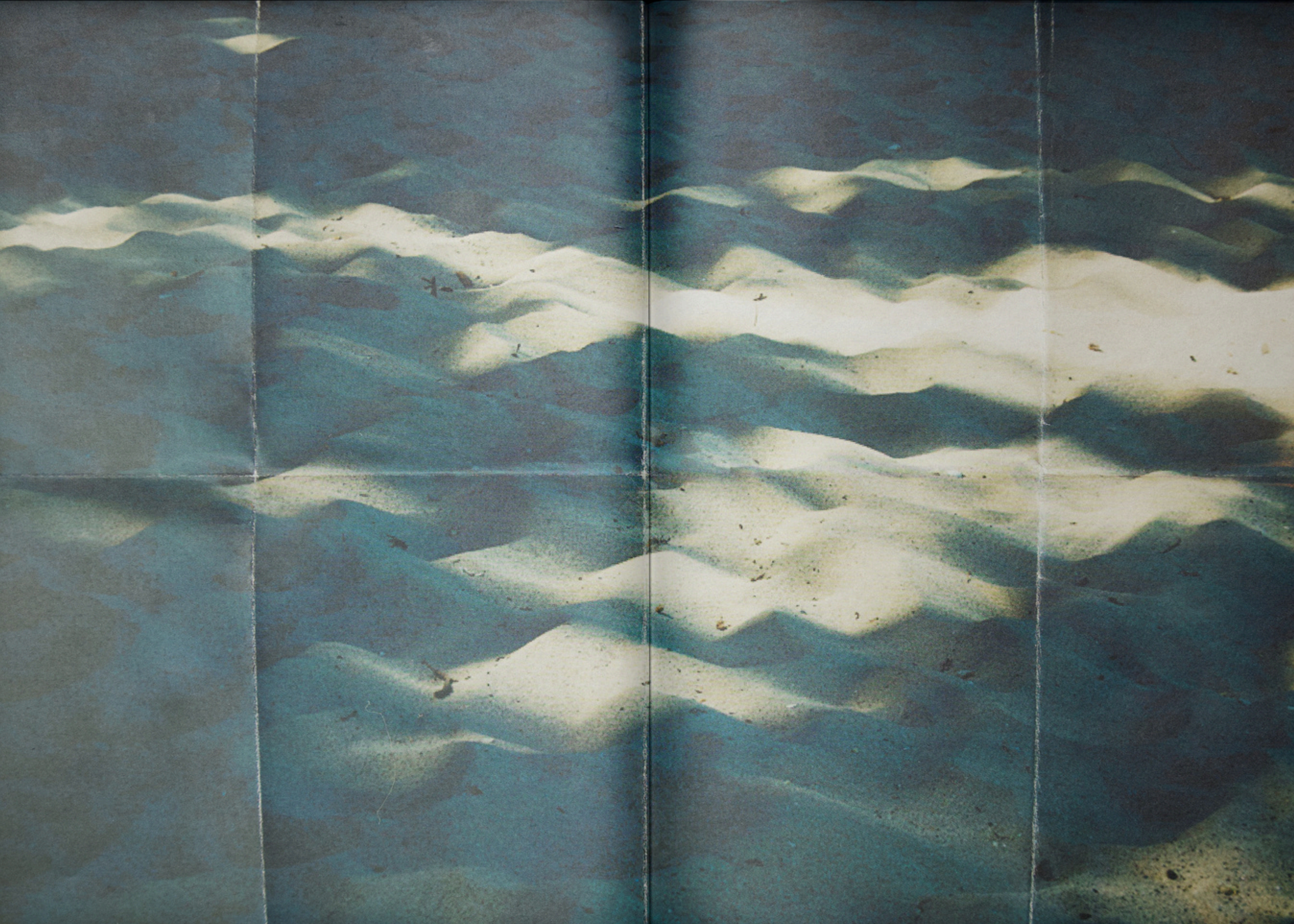
"My parents were always positive about the body and sexuality," he says. "Children are naturally unembarrassed by their naked bodies. Parents make them embarrassed. Fortunately, mine didn't."

This is a powerful message, and one that helped Williams navigate adulthood without the body anxiety so many of us inherit. He recalls being completely at ease in communal showers as a teenage boy - an early sign that he viewed his body not as something to be fixed or changed, but simply as a vessel he inhabited.

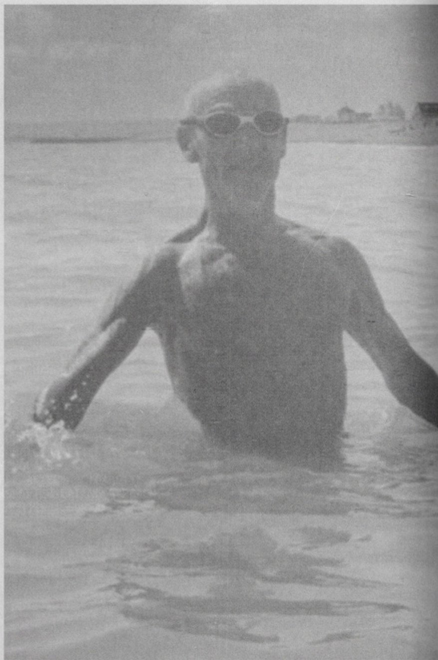
"I've always been comfortable with nudity. I think a lifelong commitment to naturism has encouraged me to take care of my body. Not out of vanity, but because I respect it."

Naturism is not just about the absence of clothing. It's about the absence of any kind of barriers between Williams and the world. "When I'm naked, I feel entirely unencumbered. My body is completely exposed to the elements, and to other people. It's simple. I don't have to think about what I'm wearing, or how I look in fabric. There's just the wind on my skin, the warmth of the sun, the feel of cold water. It's incredibly grounding."

I ask Williams if he believes nudity reconnects us to the childlike wonder of simply having a body. "Perhaps," he says. "I'd never thought of it quite that way, but there is something about being naked that clears away a lot of the noise. I felt it even as a young man: being outdoors and naked with a girlfriend. It wasn't about making a statement. It just felt good."



After the end of a long marriage, Williams found himself turning back to naturism. "It reminded me of who I was underneath all the daily layers," he says. "We all wear so many kinds of clothing, not just shirts and trousers, but identities, expectations. Being naked, outdoors, surrounded by nature is the opposite of performance."



Williams is quick to acknowledge that naturism can feel intimidating at first, especially in a world that prizes appearance and perfection. "People think they have to look a certain way to take their clothes off, but it's not about that. Everyone looks better naked than they think. There is a tension of hiding when you're dressed, but that disappears when you take it all off."

Now in his sixties, Williams continues to find comfort in the familiar rhythms of naturist life. "Just do it," he says. "Go to a naturist beach and strip off. Breathe. You'll find that the fear disappears faster than you expect, and what's left is something very simple, and very beautiful. I think we lose immensely, in all kinds of ways, by always being dressed. Not just physically, but emotionally. There's so much pleasure in our nakedness, and not just pleasure, but peace."

The act of undressing is a small but radical practice: one that returns him, again and again, to a deeper kind of pleasure: freedom without performance.

"We've been taught to think of the body as something to manage or control," he says. "But the body is just a body. It moves, it ages, it changes. When you let go of needing it to be perfect, you can finally enjoy it."

THE SMELL OF MY GRANDMOTHER'S HANDS.
BEING KISSED BEHIND MY EAR.
GOOSEBUMPS.
SCORCHING BROTH ON MY TONGUE.
PULLING OUT A TAMPON.
LAYING ON MY STOMACH, LEG BENT.
KISSING SOMEONE WHO SMELLS OF CIGARETTES AND COLOGNE.
CRUSHING ICE CUBES WITH MY MOLARS.
TAKING A SIP OF CRISP COFFEE AFTER A CIGARETTE DRAG.
LICKING YOUR STICKY FINGERS AFTER EATING A PEACH.
WHEN GOLDEN LIGHT UNFURLS ACROSS A SURFACE.

1.2 Our Invisible Language

Long before a scent reaches our awareness, it's already doing something to our cognition. Our sense of smell is among our most intimate faculties as it entwines memory, emotion, and identity more tightly than any other.

Herz is one of the world's leading experts on the psychological science of scent. She has spent her career studying how smell shapes us – not just how we perceive it, but how it embeds in us, subtly steering who we're drawn to, what we crave, and even how we know ourselves through it.

"I've always been a very sensory person, fascinated by emotion and cognition, and especially by the marriage between biology and psychology," she says.

That intersection is where scent lives. Unlike sight or hearing, which route through relatively neutral processing zones in the brain, smell is wired directly to the amygdala and hippocampus (the very structures that process emotion, learning, and memory). "So no matter what we're smelling," Herz says, "we're not having a neutral response to it. There's always some emotional resonance, even if it's subtle."

This explains why certain smellscan transport us instantly. They're not just sensory experiences, they're associative ones. "Smells don't have meaning until we apply meaning to them," Herz says. "But once we do, those meanings stick, and if the association is unique and hasn't been overwritten, it can be astonishingly vivid."

Herz has one of her own, When she was seven, a door-to-door salesman arrived with cobalt blue bottles of a bath product called Algemarin. "I begged my mom to buy it because I absolutely loved the scent, and then, all of a sudden it disappeared." For years she kept looking for it, not even knowing if she'd recognize it again. Then one day, in a soap shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Herz spotted the familiar bottle wedged between others on a shelf.

"I bought three bottles on the spot. I never use them, but every so often I take one out just to breathe it in."

Pleasure, for Herz, isn't just in olfactory appreciation – it's in recognition and return. "So much of you is in your own smell," she says. When people lose their sense of smell, as some do through trauma, the emotional effects are profound.

"People say, 'I lost my connection to myself.' I've heard that again and again. Even if you're not consciously smelling yourself all the time, the absence of that input is deeply unsettling. It's alienating."

Smell is tied to identity in a literal way. Our body odor is unique, as distinctive as a fingerprint, because it's an external representation of our immune system. "It tells other people something fundamental about us," Herz says. "It's actually more important for women than men, from a biological perspective – especially in mate selection."

But modern fragrance complicates that. Artificial scents can mask natural body odor, potentially obscuring biological compatibility. Hormonal birth control can also shift women's scent preferences. "You fall for someone while on the pill, and then later, off the pill, their smell no longer works for you," Hertz says. "It becomes a barrier."

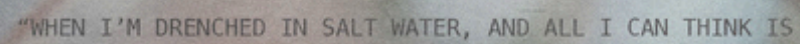
Beyond attraction, smell is deeply cultural. Scents we find repellent or delicious are not fixed. They're shaped by upbringing, media, and language. "There's nothing innate about the way we respond to smells. It's all learned," Herz says. "In the UK, for example, wintergreen and root beer are considered unpleasant, while in the US, people love them. It's all about associations." The fragrance industry knows this well and uses demographic data to engineer nostalgia, often predicting what smells will resonate with different markets, and why.

"I knew a woman who could orgasm from the smell of leather. It was linked to a memory so powerful that just the scent could reproduce the full physiological response," Herz says. With a single scent, the body remembers. Arousal surges through the body, comfort settles, and every sensation tied to memory begins to unfold.

What makes smell uniquely hard to study and to discuss is the fact that we lack the language for it. "Our ability to connect words with smell is neurologically weak," Herz explains. "We don't have a smell lexicon. We describe a scent by what it reminds us of – grass, flowers, something fruity – but we don't have words that capture the smell itself."

Its invisibility compounds this complexity. Sight dominates our perception. We see it, we believe it. "Smell is invisible," Herz says. "You don't see where it is, or what it means right away. That, plus our poor vocabulary, means we often dismiss it." Yet, scent, at its core, is about connection to yourself and to others. It can't be seen, it's easy to overlook, but it's always there, shaping our pleasures, our loves, and our histories in ways we don't fully see.

Herz wears a fragrance called Nege, made by a little-known Quebec perfumer. "I love it," she says. "And because no one else wears it where I live, it's become my signature. People hug me and say, 'That's your smell.' I like that they associate it with me. It's personal."



"WHEN I'M DRENCHED IN SALT WATER, AND ALL I CAN THINK IS

– I'VE BEEN SAVED."

1.3

Mind Over Matter: Bianca Raffaella on Art and Perception

Bianca Raffaella is a London-based artist whose practice transforms her experiences of partial sight into expressive, tactile, and visually poetic work. Born with congenital toxoplasmosis, a rare condition her mother contracted during pregnancy, Raffaella faced numerous health challenges from birth, including significant sight loss. She initially channeled her creativity into fashion, where she was drawn to textiles for their tactility, but during the 2020 lockdown, Raffaella's practice shifted. She turned to drawing and painting and immersed herself in portraiture. Art has also been a lifelong bond with her mother, a painter herself, who instilled in Raffaella both confidence and a sense of independence. Where the world often imposed limitations, painting became her way of resisting them. The act itself is a way to claim space in the sighted world while staying true to her own perception. Today, Raffaella's practice is defined by its ephemerality and captures what is both delicate and ungraspable. In this conversation, Raffaella shares insights into her process and the distinctive perspective she brings to the visual arts as a partially sighted artist.

LINA: How did you first discover painting as something that brought you joy?

BIANCA: My mom is an artist, and she's always been my inspiration. She paints in watercolors and oils and, even though she's retired now, she still paints. Growing up, she also taught art, so creativity was always part of our conversations. That created a deep connection between us, especially as we've both navigated illness. She always believed I could be an artist, even though I couldn't see in the same way as others. For me, painting was also about independence. I wanted to be part of the sighted world, not isolated or institutionalized. Art became a way to resist those restrictions and to connect more fully with the world around me.

LL: What is your process when you're creating art?

BR: I think of my fingers as my eyes. My hands are incredibly important, not only because of painting but because they've been trained through braille, which makes them extremely sensitive. That sensitivity has naturally carried into my work, so tactility is at the heart of my process. Over time, I've had to develop a very specific way of painting, especially on a large scale. I have almost no sight in my right eye and very limited peripheral vision in my left. I don't have central vision, which means I can't see distance, so I rely on other methods to orient myself. On a big canvas, I'll build up thick, wet layers of paint in certain areas. Those textured marks act as a map and tether me to where I've already been. Without that tactile guide, I'd lose my place. Layer by layer, I construct the painting this way. The image always exists clearly in my mind; it's just about finding a way to access it physically.

LL: How do you translate your vision onto the canvas?

BR: I experience color differently than fully sighted people. I don't see it as solid blocks but more like shifting layers. It's always moving, dispersing, almost disappearing as soon as I focus on it. That fleeting quality is something I try to capture in my paintings. The surface I paint on is just as important. I prefer linen over canvas. Canvas feels too smooth and uniform, almost artificial, and it even reminds me of calico, which I've never liked the smell of. Linen, on the other hand, has a beautiful irregularity to it which I find grounding. That imperfection makes it alive to me. On linen, I apply very thin layers of paint, and I work spontaneously and continuously, but as soon as I step away, the image disappears for me. It's lost. I might hold the idea clearly in my mind, but visually it vanishes once I move back. It's a surreal experience, and maybe why my palette and technique often feel delicate and ethereal to viewers. In the end, I'm always trying to paint how I see and to accurately translate that experience onto the canvas.

LL: How does memory play a role in your art? Do you paint from remembered images, feelings, or moments?

BR: For me, memory and imagination merge into something almost indescribable. They create a subconscious space that fuels my work. When I paint flowers, for example, I often choose familiar forms like roses. Each time I return to them, I find something new, whether it's the smell, the unfolding of petals, or the delicate texture when I handle them. But the more you touch a flower, the more it begins to fall apart. That fragility mirrors my own experience of trying to see something clearly: the harder I focus, the faster it fades. That's why flowers resonate with me. They don't last. They carry a fleeting beauty that we often take for granted, and for someone partially sighted like me, that impermanence feels especially poignant. You grasp the moment but almost immediately it slips away. For my upcoming show at Flowers Gallery in London, I explored this idea through monoprints. I painted directly onto copper plates where I followed the movement of my own reflection. I used my hands and tools to hold onto the image as best I could. Each print became a memory's interpretation of my face.

They're reflections not just of appearance, but of questions about portraiture, femininity, and what beauty really means. So memory plays a central role, but it's always intertwined with imagination. The two are inseparable in my creative process.

LL: What do you wish people understood about how you experience the world?

BR: For me, it has a lot to do with the time we live in. The world is overwhelmingly visual. People are constantly bombarded with images, and when you have little or no sight, you miss out on so much of that experience. You end up relying on other people's descriptions, their opinions, their visual realities, because your own perspective is limited. I don't think there's enough awareness of what that means, especially for artists with visual impairments. Their experiences are rarely seen as valuable, which is such a loss. If fully sighted people could better understand what it's like to see differently, it would not only enrich the visual arts but also expand how we think about perception itself. On the other side, those of us who are partially sighted or blind are doing our best to live fully and to express what we experience. Why shouldn't that expression be celebrated? Each perspective is unique, and there are so many degrees of sight. Even when your vision is limited, you still strive to be a visual person. You use whatever residual sight you have, and that makes your sensitivity even stronger. You're constantly grasping at the act of seeing, and in that struggle something beautiful happens. Between memory, imagination, and perception, a new kind of vision emerges – something untouchable, private, almost like a secret source of inspiration. Because when sight is not your only guide, all your other senses come alive. They weave together into your normality, your way of being, and your art.

LL: Do you find more joy in the act of creating, or in how others experience your work once it's finished?

BR: I love the act of painting [illegible] and it often happens in short bursts because my eyes tire quickly. [illegible] can seem to be too bright, and even though I don't see much, my eyes still fatigue. So I work in concentrated moments of pure enjoyment. I sometimes compare it to playing a favorite song on repeat. I build thin layers of acrylic, which dries quickly and safely, and they allow me to add more without disturbing what's beneath [illegible] layering becomes a subtle map [illegible]. What's interesting is that viewers often don't notice [illegible] at first, but when I explain it, they begin to see how certain details [illegible] within my process. The slightly [illegible] elements reflect the way I perceive the world, and I love that people try to [illegible] and connect with what it is that I [illegible]

1/1 Lost in a Daydream Bianca Raffaella

[illegible] do you think art is one of the most powerful ways humans experience pleasure?

[illegible] because it's pure, and it's [illegible]. Art gives life to things that words can't quite capture. It turns what's intangible into something you can see and hold in front of you. And each work is unique. If a painting is made by someone who is partially sighted, for instance, it's probably unrepeatable. That makes it even more precious. My monoprints are like that. They're created in a single moment, never to be replicated. I also think part of the power of art lies in how personal the experience is. In a gallery or museum, you don't always need to read the descriptions. Sometimes they push your thoughts in a direction that takes away from your own encounter. For me, the most meaningful moments are when you simply stand in front of a piece and let it speak to you or even when you realise it doesn't, and that's okay too. Art gives people permission to experience beauty in their own way and in their own time. That freedom, I think, is where its deepest pleasure lies.

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LL: Why do you think art is one of the most powerful ways humans experience pleasure?

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"THERE'S NOT A SINGULAR PHYSICAL SPACE THAT WILL MAKE ME FEEL AS MUCH AS THE STATE OF MOTION. WALKING OFTEN HOODWINKS YOUR BODY INTO BELIEVING IT HAS A PURPOSE AND THUS ALLOWS YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM TO EXPEND ENERGY ON YOUR ACHY LEGS INSTEAD OF A HYPERACTIVE MIND. "CALM" AND "CHILL" ARE NOT FAMILIAR MODES OF EXISTENCE TO ME. WALKING IS."

– ANONYMOUS

кеф

02

MEMORY

Twice a month on Tuesday afternoons, the entry hall of a quaint care home in the Netherlands transforms. Mr. Zondag, a resident with a deep love for music, carefully sets up his sound system equipment and soon, jazz, foxtrot, and Dutch folk melodies begin to echo through the tiled corridors. The tea club tables are gently moved aside and the chairs are arranged into a large circle. The usual hum of the care home fades into the background, and it's soon replaced by the inviting rhythms that beckon both residents and staff. At first, some of the residents are shy, but after some coaxing they begin to dance. Some are standing, others sway gently in their chairs, but all the while the room is filled with laughter and conversation.

Medical anthropologist Annelieke Driessen encountered and took part in this moment during her research into what it means to live a good life with dementia. "I spent over a year in two care homes, doing what we call participant observation. I helped during morning and evening routines, shadowed staff, spoke to residents, ate with them, and attended activities. I wanted to understand what people valued, both caregivers and residents. What I learned is that care, how it's done, who does it, with what training and attunement, makes a huge difference. But care itself isn't a fixed thing. It's shaped by people, time, space, and resources. That's what really drew me in, the fluidity, and how care creates the conditions for a good life, even amid loss."

2.1 The Dance

"Pleasure is something to invite, not to expect. It's something you strive for together, and when it succeeds, it creates this ping-pong effect. One person's enjoyment becomes enjoyable for the other, too." - Annelieke Driessen

Twice a month on Tuesday afternoons, the entry hall of a quaint care home in the Netherlands transforms. Mr. Zondag, a resident with a deep love for music, carefully sets up his sound system equipment and soon, jazz, foxtrot, and Dutch folk melodies begin to echo through the tiled corridors. The tea club tables are gently moved aside and the chairs are arranged into a large circle. The usual hum of the care home fades into the background, and it's soon replaced by the inviting rhythms that beckon both residents and staff. At first, some of the residents are shy, but after some coaxing, they begin to dance. Some are standing, others sway gently in their chairs, but all the while the room is filled with laughter and conversation.

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These moments – brief, tender, and often invisible to the outside world – reveal something profound. That pleasure, like identity, isn't a private possession. It's not something you lose, or give, or keep. It's something that happens between people.

"Rather than viewing identity, subjectivity, or even pleasure as fixed traits," Diessen tells me, "I see them as outcomes of relationships. With dementia, the common narrative is that a person 'loses themselves,' but what if selfhood is made through how you're seen, how you're treated, and the environments you're in?"

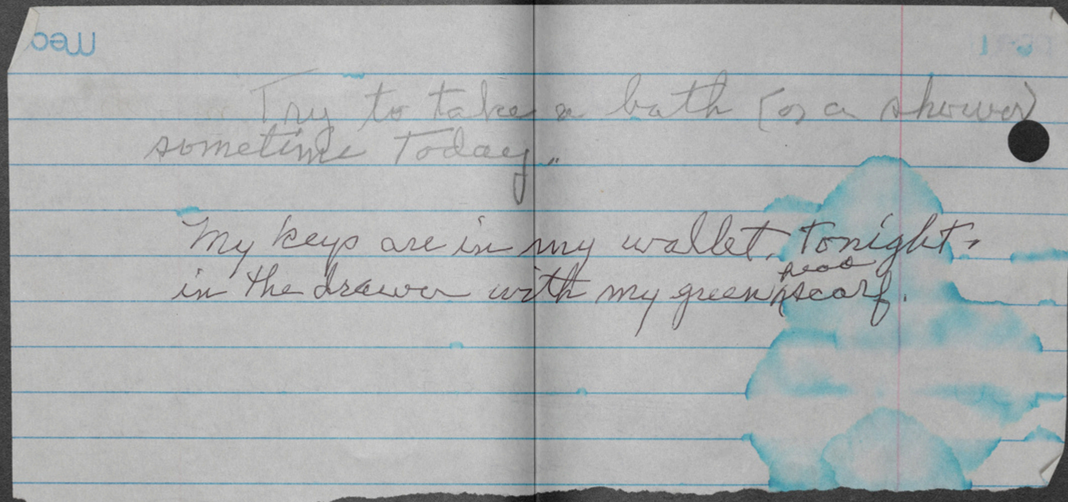
This relational view of the self invites us to rethink what it means to be "here." A person with dementia may forget names, places, or timelines, but in moments of connection, they can still very much be, and that being is no less real than before. Pleasure plays a powerful role in this. Not the big, performative pleasure often sold to us, but everyday, sensory joy.

"Dancing and bathing stood out because they were so visible," Diessen says, "but I also began noticing joy in smaller moments like getting someone out of bed gently, putting on music they liked, trying something new when their preferences had shifted. People with dementia aren't passive in this process. They have to actively surrender to it, and when that connection clicks, the joy becomes contagious."

Grief and joy are intertwined in these spaces. There is fatigue, frustration, and confusion, and yet, there are also specks of light. Caring for people does not mean preserving their past. It's about meeting them where they are, even if that place shifts from day to day.

"What if the suffering we experience around dementia is less about the disease itself and more about our resistance to change and our expectation that people should remain steady?" she says.

(From Kija Lucas's Collections from Sundown (2017). This note, written by her grandmother after a dementia diagnosis, captures the everyday negotiations of memory and the tender effort to hold onto routine and care.)


"Try to take a bath (or a shower) sometime Today."

My keys are in my wallet, Tonight in the drawer with my green scarf.

During Diessen's research, she came across "Mum", a film by Dutch filmmaker Adelheid Roosen, which follows Roosen's mother as she navigates advanced dementia. In one scene, Roosen films her mother eating flower petals. Rather than stopping her, she joins her – a gesture both strange and sweet. Some viewers found the moment shocking and uncomfortable, but Roosen's message is powerful: when we stop trying to hold people in place, we open ourselves to new ways of being with them.

This challenges our inherited ideas of what it means to be human – ideas rooted in the Enlightenment, when rationality became the gold standard for personhood. Even today, we continue to tie worth to productivity, coherence, and memory. But what happens when someone can no longer meet those standards? Too often, they are made to feel as if they no longer belong.

"We need more inclusive definitions of a good life," Diessen tells me, "ones that don't require perfect cognition or productivity. What's interesting is how, in the middle of life, we suppress these bodily pleasures. We're expected to be productive, rational, efficient and to become what some call the "neoliberal subject." That's why dementia feels so threatening because it confronts us with a different kind of selfhood, one that doesn't fit those ideas."

Her experiences during the research didn't just reshape how she viewed dementia care. They also shifted how she thinks about connection, intimacy, and the role of joy in her everyday life. What once seemed spontaneous or incidental now feels more like something that emerges through attention and relationship.

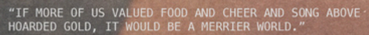
"Pleasure is something to invite, not to expect," Diessen says. "It's something you strive for together, and when it succeeds, it creates this ping-pong effect. One person's enjoyment becomes enjoyable for the other, too."

This is not about romanticizing dementia, or ignoring the real heartbreak it brings. It's about noticing where joy persists, even in the margins. It's about loosening our grip on control and choosing curiosity instead. What if being human isn't about remembering everything, or saying the right words, or moving in a straight line? What if it's about being open to connection, again and again, wherever we can find it?

The music will eventually fade, and the care worker will go back to her tasks, but for those few shared minutes,

they will dance.

(These photographs, part of Cheryle St. Onge's series Calling the Birds Home, were made in collaboration with her mother during her experience of vascular dementia. Though conversation had slipped away, the ritual of portrait-making endured. The images are at once a record of loss and a testament to the ongoing capacity for connection.)

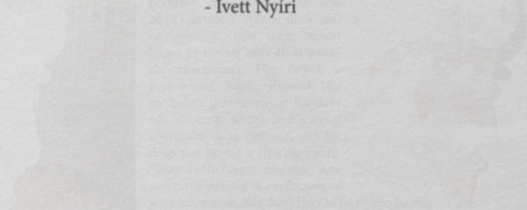


"IF MORE OF US VALUED FOOD AND CHEER AND SONG ABOVE HOARDED GOLD, IT WOULD BE A MERRIER WORLD."

J.R.R. TOLKIEN (1892–1973) – AN ENGLISH WRITER, POET, PHILOLOGIST, AND UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, BEST KNOWN AS THE AUTHOR OF THE CLASSIC HIGH FANTASY WORKS THE HOBBIT, THE LORD OF THE RINGS, AND THE SILMARILLION

Daughter Of The River

"We all come into the world alone, and we leave alone. You can't take money or things with you. What you take is the love you've given, the joy you've shared, and the way you've made others feel. That's beauty. That's the real art of living."
- Ivett Nyíri



In a small Hungarian town, right by the water's edge, childhood felt like freedom. The hours were measured not by clocks but by the changing light and the voices of neighbors drifting across the yard. Summers meant bare feet on warm soil, the metallic glint of sun on water, and hours spent wading in the river until skin puckered. Winters brought a hush to the streets, broken only by the smell of fresh bread drifting from kitchen windows.

"I always say I'm a daughter of the river," Ivett Nyíri tells me, her voice softening as though the water is still in her ears. "The river was always there, watching us, carrying the seasons past. We lived with such a strong sense of community. All the families knew each other. The parents would gather and party, and we children were outside until the evening came, inventing games, climbing trees. Even now, forty-four years later, those bonds are still there."

Nyíri's story begins at the riverbanks of her Hungarian childhood, but today it unfolds in London, where she works as a beauty therapist. Her practice is not just about outer appearance but about being present with oneself. It's about giving people the rare chance to feel seen, cared for, and restored. In this way, Nyíri's small yet significant contribution to the world lies in the way she connects with those around her.

Nyíri's memories are stitched with the colors, scents, and textures of a childhood deeply tied to place: the earthy perfume of damp leaves after rain, and the tang of vinegar water her mother used to rinse her long, black hair until it gleamed like glass. The scratchy softness of thick sweaters hand-knitted by her mother with her name woven into the wool. "Cleanliness, style, and presentation were never about vanity. They were about respect for yourself, for others, and for the life you were living," Nyíri tells me.

Her parents embodied this philosophy in their own ways. Her mother, who worked long hours, never stepped out without styled hair and a spritz of Limara perfume (the purple one was Nyíri's favorite). "When she kissed us goodbye, that scent would linger in the air after she'd gone," she remembers. Her father, a professional boxer, dressed like an Italian gentleman on his days off, all crisp whites and careful coordination. In summer, with his deep tan, he cut a striking figure. "They both taught me that how you carry yourself is a reflection of your inner state. You don't have to be rich to be elegant."

But home wasn't always a place of ease. As her father began to struggle with alcohol, the once-bright atmosphere dimmed. "It was like living between heaven and hell," she says quietly. "He was loving and funny, but there were days when the energy shifted. On those days, I'd go to my room, close the door, put on music, and start drawing. That was my therapy."

Art became a constant for Nyíri. Even as a teenager, creativity continued to be woven into her daily life. On Friday nights before a dance, she would stay up until dawn hand-sewing looks from old clothes. "If I didn't like a dress anymore, I'd turn it into trousers or a top," Nyíri laughs. "My father would wake up early and say, 'Why are you still awake?' and I'd tell him, 'I have to finish this for the party!'"

(Drawings by Nyíri from 2013, exploring detailed design, a variety of color techniques, and Hungarian folk motifs)

(Nyíri with her little brother)

Beauty, too, entered the artist's life early. She remembers sitting across from her father as a little girl, carefully trimming and cleaning his nails. "He was particular about keeping them short and neat. He'd hold out his hands and ask, 'What do you think? Does it look good?'" As she grew older, she began doing her own nails, and eventually her friends' as well. She perfected the French manicure, a skill she still considers one of her specialties.

In 2015, Nyíri moved to London, and by 2018, she had qualified as a nail technician, turning what had been a childhood pastime into a profession. She started small, running her business from home while studying. "Clients would come for their nails," she says, "but they stayed for how they felt when they left. My work is about more than surface beauty. It's about giving people a moment to breathe and to feel cared for."

Much of what she offers is rooted in the rituals of her youth. "Back in the '80s, we didn't have hundreds of products. We used what was natural: oils, vinegar rinses, herbal baths. In Hungary, bathing is a tradition, and even at home it was common to soak in chamomile tea or salty water. It was never just about beauty."

When I ask what pleasure means to her now, Nyíri says: "It's always been in the small things, like walking by the river, moving my body, cooking something healthy with care. Meditating, praying, being creative. Pleasure is always presence."

(Nyíri with her childhood toys)

She worries that modern life has pulled people away from this simplicity. "Silence makes people uncomfortable. When you're still, you start to feel everything you've been avoiding. That's why so many rush from one thing to the next, but peace comes when you stop. Everything you're looking for outside is already inside. Love, connection, the way you touch others and let them touch you – that's what lasts."

If she could speak to her younger self, Nyíri's advice would be simple but hard-earned. "Keep creating. Stay open. Don't let pain harden you. Nature will always bring you back to yourself, and don't be afraid of change and of not knowing. Move forward with love, and happiness will follow."

Nyíri pauses, then smiles, "We all come into the world alone, and we leave alone. You can't take money or things with you. What you take is the love you've given, the joy you've shared, and the way you've made others feel. That's beauty. That's the real art of living."

(Aquarelle paintings by Nyíri from her childhood)

2.3

The Culinary Diary: Safiyah Mariyah on Cooking as Archive

"... pleasure means an opportunity to explore the depth of my senses, compounding upon the empirical knowledge I have acquired so far in life."
- Safiyah Mariyah

Words by Safiyah Mariyah, Thee Culinary Artist

I am the youngest of three siblings. When it was just me left at primary school, my Nana would pick me up so my parents could go to work and then pick me up later in the evening. My earliest memories of food are definitely at my Nana's old house in Willesden. We had our own ritual on the way back from school:

(Bois cheri tea, the first and largest tea plantation in Mauritius)

- Catch the 98 or 6 bus back to Willesden.
- Pop into the corner shop on the bottom of Harlesden Rd.
- Pick out what biscuit I wanted.
- Enjoy tea and my chosen biscuit, while watching
- Countdown and then The Weakest Link in front of the telly with Grandad.

Sometimes, Nana would be in the kitchen preparing dinner and my favourite thing to do was sit and observe her (only after I had finished my tea and biscuits though). Just one thought of that house sparks a chain reaction of sensory memories: the sound of the kettle boiling, the saltiness from my buttery toast soldiers cutting through the sweetness of my vanilla tea, the sandlike feeling of the crumbs on my finger tips, the aroma of onion, garlic, ginger, cumin seeds and curry leaves sizzling in hot oil, the warmth of fresh roti melting in my mouth complemented with pungent, but delicate, chicken curry.

One thing that made my experience in that house unique was all down to one thing: I felt safe. Nana is the softest, kindest, warm, loving human you can ever meet. How I felt and continue to feel when I eat my Nana's food is a transcendent experience. Fast forward 20 plus years, I have recreated these transcendent worlds in my time as a private chef. Every single event I have catered for, was an opportunity to show the complexity of food and how it reconnects us to our subconscious selves.

PLEASURE

(Noun a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment.
Food is more than pleasurable)

From my vantage point as a culinary artist, pleasure means an opportunity to explore the depth of my senses, compounding upon the empirical knowledge I have acquired so far in life. By approaching food from this angle, I am intentional with how each sense organ is nurtured in each culinary creation of mine. Let's take texture, for example. If it's a spicy dish, having a crunchy element can intensify the heat by spattering the capsaicin compounds around the mouth. Or popping candy in a chocolate namelaka can feel like a myriad of fireworks going off in a serene, calm, deep lake. By deeply satiating the individual sense organs in new ways, the guest experiences something almost contradictory to what was most likely expected, making the whole affair deeply personal.

(Plate of Nana's food with lamb biryani, carrot salad and tomato chutney)

(Nana's biryani)

NOURISHMENT

(Noun the food necessary for growth, health, and good condition)

Food is a portal into a person's subconscious.

Growth in this context commonly relates to our physical condition. Eating food to grow either in size or strength and positively affect our health, but for a select number of people, growth in the context of food relates to all the conditions of the human experience: physical, mental and spiritual. When we prepare food with an intention beyond nourishment, we delve into a realm beyond the physical.

Food has the ability to transport people back to their childhood, with the smell of the kitchen leaking into the dining room, or the music merging with the ring of pans clinking. But bare in mind, this is all before a guest has tasted the food. The first bite of a carefully curated dish touching the guests palette is the climax. It is where they decide to trust me to guide their senses even deeper into the dining experience.

If I successfully activate all five senses in a dining experience, I can invite guests to journey beyond the conditions that we exist under, which has the potential to leave a mark on their subconscious mind. This experience imprints on someone's brain and this is what legacy means to me: to touch as many people with my food and invite them to meet themselves deeper.

ANCESTOR
(A person, typically more remote than a grandparent, from whom one is descended.)

Food is the bridge to our ancestors.

Living in alignment with all parts of ourselves, including the parts that are painful, leads to a life lived well. One cannot truly know themself without acknowledging all the people that came before them. Exploring foods integral to my culture, my family and my heritage, is how I meet myself deeper and is what I believe to be in good condition.

Discovering that my Nana didn't always know how to cook well shook my world. I had grown up idolising this woman as the best cook in the world, so to hear that once upon a time, she was doing the same thing as me, learning from another elder woman in the family, revealed a deep sense of responsibility within me. Food became more than an exploration of the culinary arts for me. Food is an archive. By archiving the way our ancestors engaged with food, leaves a time capsule for future generations.

My mission now is to archive the techniques and methods of my ancestors. Many elders use feeling as their unit of measurement when preparing food, but how can this be translated to my children? The bridge between my Nana and the day her great grandchildren experience her roti, will be a recipe that I have dedicated the last 20 years to perfecting. Otherwise, all I would be able to give my grandchildren would be stories and my memories through my lens. Archival recipes are how we ensure our ancestors continue to live through their descendents, and I am prepared to take on that responsibility. That is my calling and I am answering the call with every breath.

кеф

03

THE SPACES WE COME HOME TO

31 Little Big Things

Michal Morse's life, much like the miniature worlds she has lovingly built and curated, is made of fine details and deeply emotional textures. Born in 1937 to a journalist-turned-antique dealer father, she grew up in a world of carved oak where the past lived in the things around her. But it wasn't until adulthood, almost by accident, that she entered the world of dollhouses: a space that would eventually become her vocation and quiet revolution. In 1971, she opened the first specialist dollhouse shop in the UK, a modest endeavor that soon transformed into a haven for collectors, craftspeople, dreamers, and those simply in search of something small and beautiful to hold onto.

Across decades, Michal has witnessed how miniatures offer comfort, spark creativity, and invite both children and adults to shape their own worlds. In this conversation, she reflects on the emotional landscapes of scale, the enduring magic of make-believe, and why, in a world that moves too fast, small pleasures still matter.

LINA: What first drew you to dollhouses? Do you remember the very first one you ever saw or owned?

MICHAL: My interest in period detail was shaped early on by my father, who was both an antique dealer and, before the war, a journalist for the Glasgow Express. I was born in 1937, so I grew up surrounded by antique furniture, especially oak pieces, and developed an eye for style. Even as a child, I would sketch out designs – something that later became very useful when working with craftspeople. During the war, I remember playing with some rather unusual dollhouses. One was a small Triang house that had been given to me but was put into storage for a time. I only came across it again much later. The other was an antique mock Tudor house with painted brick walls. Someone had glued real carpet to the floors, which was far too thick and completely out of scale! I kept a little celluloid baby doll in it, and I was heartbroken when I accidentally sat on it and crushed it.

LL: How did the shop come about? Was it a spontaneous decision or something you had always dreamed of?

MM: Funnily enough, I wasn't particularly interested in dollhouses until I met a collector named Ann Griffiths in 1970. At the time, my husband had opened a model railway shop called Chuffs, and I was considering starting something of my own – not out of some grand ambition, mostly to avoid being roped into helping out at Chuffs. I was initially looking at traditional toys like bagatelle boards and skittles, but they felt too bulky. Dollhouse furniture, on the other hand, was compact and there was this small, passionate community already forming around it. So in October 1971, I opened what I believe was the first specialist dollhouse shop in the UK, on Broadley Street in Marylebone. It was a modest start, but I soon found that by offering beautiful miniature pieces, I wasn't just selling things. I was creating a new hobby for people.

It was a wonderfully eccentric world. Ann connected me with a couple who built Georgian houses and a set designer from the Festival Ballet who crafted tiny Tudor cottages. A woman in Braintree introduced me to a maker who turned beads into oil lamps and chess pawns into tables. A young man just out of school used a foot-treadle lathe to turn table legs, and a model maker from my husband's railway shop transitioned into building elegant Georgian houses and furniture. Each one of these people brought their own creativity and skill, and together they helped lay the foundations of what became my shop.

LL: Why do you think children are so drawn to make-believe, and why do some of us never grow out of it?

MM: For many, it's about having control over a space, however tiny. Some collectors, especially adults, enjoy choosing the colour schemes and furnishings in their mini houses – things they might not have freedom over in real life. One customer told me she liked trying out design ideas in miniature before committing to them in her actual home. There's a joy in shaping a world exactly as you'd like it to be without compromise.

LL: What do you think it is about small things that bring people so much delight?

MM: There's something inherently charming about seeing the world in miniature. Even people who don't collect are fascinated by tiny versions of real things. One of my friends once recreated my three dogs in 1:12 scale as a thank-you gift after staying with me in France. She even made a little plastic cone for my Shih Tzu, who had been wearing one at the time after chewing his paw. It was both touching and hilarious.

LL: Is working with miniatures calming or meditative for you?

MM: Absolutely. Immersing yourself in a miniature world can be a true escape. I had one customer who had been dealing with depression for three years. When she began working on a dollhouse, focusing entirely on the decorating, she gradually emerged from that fog. The creative space gave her a new sense of purpose.

LL: What's going through your mind when you arrange or build a miniature room?

MM: When I was writing my book, Furnish a Doll's House, I did quite a bit of research into historical colour use. Georgian homes, for example, often used cool tones in their dining and drawing rooms. The famous English writer Samuel Pepys apparently painted his study pale green to ease eye strain, and Victorian nurseries were typically light blue or green for a calming effect. They were often left unadorned since they weren't visited by guests. I've also noticed that in many antique houses, the kitchen is usually in the bottom left corner – maybe because we read left to right, and that's where the story begins.

LL: Do you think part of the appeal of dollhouses is the ability to create a small, perfect world?

MM: Yes, without question. I remember a man who spent years building a model of Euston Station in OO gauge, down to the last detail. He was painfully shy and never married – model railways were his entire world. It gave him structure, control, and comfort.

LL: Do adults still need places to escape into like children do? What makes miniatures such a special kind of escape?

MM: Of course. We all crave refuge sometimes. A deaf couple once fell in love with a Tudor cottage I had. They lived in East London and could never afford a real one, so they made do with the miniature. As she told me, there weren't many hobbies they could share and this gave them something meaningful to enjoy together.

LL: Have you ever seen someone become unexpectedly emotional in your shop?

MM: Many times. One young man came in with his older wife. He bought her a small house to see if she'd enjoy the hobby and she did – so much so that she eventually spent thousands more on additional houses and furniture. He may have regretted it in the end. It was a miniature version of a real B&B in Bibury called The Dolls House. A retired engineer had copied it for me, and he even stayed there for a weekend just to take proper measurements.

LL: Do you think this love of small things always comes from childhood?

MM: Not always. Sometimes it's about timing, or who you meet along the way.

LL: What are some of the most unusual or touching requests you've had from customers?

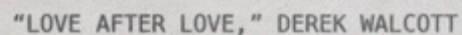
MM: A Swiss doctor once commissioned a two-room box – a waiting room and consulting room. It had a glazed front and top, three walls, and a tiny back door to suggest a corridor. The waiting room had a dining table, chairs, and newspapers; the consulting room had an exam table, nurse, and doctor in miniature lab coats.

We also created a set for the TV show Return of the Antelope, about Lilliputians arriving in England. The house had four rooms with a central staircase, but no cut-out between the floors, so the characters kept bumping their heads! They wanted a tall, narrow house, so eventually we split it vertically.

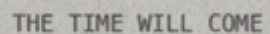
Alas Smith & Jones used to rent props from us too, and Alice in Wonderland featured a scene where she falls down the rabbit hole, passing shelves of miniatures we designed.

LL: In your experience, what role do small, quiet pleasures play in a fulfilling life? Why do we need them?

MM: In today's world, where children are often glued to televisions and phones, small, quiet pleasures are more important than ever. So many young people miss out on unstructured play which is a real loss, because those simple moments are where creativity and independence begin to grow. Dollhouses, specifically, offer more than just entertainment. They encourage children and adults to slow down, focus, and create something with care. Children who engage in this kind of play often become more self-reliant and inventive and are able to entertain themselves and think independently. And for adults, these small pleasures can become a refuge, a way to step out of the noise and stress of daily life and into something calm, ordered, and personal. In a world that moves too fast, having something small and still to return to can be deeply grounding. These joys give life texture. They're not extravagant, but they're deeply fulfilling.



"LOVE AFTER LOVE," DEREK WALCOTT



THE TIME WILL COME

WHEN, WITH ELATION
YOU WILL GREET YOURSELF ARRIVING
AT YOUR OWN DOOR, IN YOUR OWN MIRROR AND
EACH WILL SMILE AT THE OTHER'S WELCOME,

AND SAY, SIT HERE. EAT.
YOU WILL LOVE AGAIN THE STRANGER WHO WAS
YOUR SELF. GIVE WINE. GIVE BREAD. GIVE BACK
YOUR HEART
TO ITSELF, TO THE STRANGER WHO HAS LOVED
YOU

ALL YOUR LIFE, WHOM YOU IGNORED
FOR ANOTHER, WHO KNOWS YOU BY HEART. TAKE
DOWN THE LOVE LETTERS FROM THE BOOKSHELF,

THE PHOTOGRAPHS, THE DESPERATE NOTES, PEEL
YOUR OWN IMAGE FROM THE MIRROR. SIT. FEAST
ON YOUR LIFE.

A Place To Belong

The essence of dance music lies less in fleeing reality than in finding a place within it.
A place, if only for a moment, to belong.

Pretty Girl, born Emilia Predebon in Melbourne, Australia, has built her career around the intimacy she creates for others. The producer, vocalist, and DJ has spent the last two years stepping into bigger and bigger rooms. She has sold out her own headline show, supported English musician Bonobo, performed to 6,000 people at Boiler Room Melbourne, and amassed nearly 300k listeners on Spotify – all only within a few years. However, at the scale she's reaching, PG confronts a fundamental paradox: in a community built on togetherness, she is always, somehow, apart. Techno and EDM thrive on dissolving hierarchy into the collective rush of a dance floor, yet the DJ, whether she wants to or not, must guide the crowd's mood and collective body.

"My favourite sets have been the ones where I've been at eye level with the crowd, and it's amazing, but live-wise, being able to play live to a small room is something I miss a lot," PG says.

PG has never been comfortable with the imbalance of performer and crowd. "I actually hate DJing on a stage," she admits. "It separates you from the crowd so much." She's not the kind of DJ who commands the room or chases instant euphoria with every bass drop. Instead, her sets unfold slowly and ask the listener to lean in and sit with a feeling as it grows. This patience of delayed-gratification is rooted in her earliest encounters with music – years spent listening and dancing on her own.

"In my formative years, I was always alone. I think that's what made it so special for me when I first started to discover this world." For PG, sound began as a solitary meditation. "Music is like a bridge between your inner world and your reality," she says, repeating a line she's carried in her Instagram bio for years. It's that bridge that still structures her work today.

But building those bridges hasn't always been easy. "To be extremely honest, my relationship with music has gone through a bit of a rough patch the last few years," she says. "I do think about my relationship with music a lot, like a romantic relationship, honestly. I think your relationship with your art form has to be respected and honoured and cared for as much as a relationship with another human being. Imagine you're in love with someone, and it's amazing. Then you make that relationship the single most important thing in your life. Everything you do is about how much you love the other person. That relationship becomes your income, your self-worth, your day-to-day activities, the mirror you see yourself in, the topic of every conversation you have. You're probably going to eventually hate and resent them. They're probably going to feel smothered, and retreat. I think that's what happened for me and music. And now [music and I] are going to couples therapy."

Her candour is disarming, and the way in which she speaks so openly helps to understand why her music resonates so deeply with listeners. PG doesn't offer quick catharsis. Tracks like Rewind or Sun Phase move in waves and are built for dance floors but conceived from her own inner battles. "I like to think that there is an element of understanding that people find in my music, of being less alone," she says. "Because I do touch a lot on heartbreak and self-actualisation."

Now, as PG continues to intricately carve out a space for herself in the EDM scene, her work still carries that original tension between solitude and connection she began her journey with. When I asked her what she thinks people are really searching for when they go out dancing, she doesn't hesitate to say: "I think people are searching for escape, and ironically, belonging. The culture of dance music hinges on two factors: catharsis and community. I think there is a major lack of both of these in modern society. We all suppress our true selves for work and whatever else, and the dance floor becomes a haven for truth and expression and release."

And maybe that's why PG gravitates to smaller rooms, to eye-level sets where the performer and the crowd collapse into each other. In those rare spaces, the contradiction at the heart of dance music momentarily dissolves.

The essence of dance music lies less in fleeing reality than in finding a place within it.

A place, if only for a moment, to belong.

23/09/25

Every time I go to the cafe down my
street in Dalston, they're there.
Same corner table, always the sunniest
and warmest spot in the room.
An elderly couple, probably in their eighties.
She drinks tea with milk; he drinks
his coffee black.
They play chess, like it's a language,
they've shared their whole lives.
Sometimes they don't talk at all, just
move their pieces and sip from their
steaming cups.
But they always smile at each other. The
kind that says: I still love you. I still
love this.
Watching them feels like a kind of
reminder.
The smallest moments are often the
most worth returning to.

3.3

Ten in a Two-Bed Flat

The room felt untouched, as if they had only just stepped out.

A space built for four somehow cradled ten of us every summer. The walls greeted you first: white, rough beneath the fingertips, as if painted over stone. The corridors, lined with grey stone stairs with veins of black, smelled deliciously unpleasant. At the top waited a white door marked with a sign handwritten by my grandmother: "Family Terziev". Shoes spilled across the floor, with my grandfather's pair always leading the cluster. Battered leather, soles softened by decades of walking the earth.

Inside, to the right, was my uncle's old bedroom. The walls were a mosaic of photographs, faces frozen mid-laugh, and tokens of our tiny selves stack the shelves. On top of one cupboard, my mother's puppet theater mask collected dust, its hollow eyes watching. The pull-out bed was covered with blue-and-white striped sheets, thin and cool against the skin. In summer, the air was warm and dense, but my mom insisted on leaving the windows open instead of using air conditioning. "The flat breathes on its own that way," she liked to say.

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The master bedroom, where my grandparents slept, was a bit larger and the bed was lumpier. The wardrobe loomed, untouched since my grandparents' passing. My grandmother's mink coat persisted to shed and my grandfather's baseball caps and worn undershirts spilled from their drawers. Her perfumes lingered on the vanity, her hairbrushes still carried strands, and the three-paneled mirror still reflected the same light. The room felt untouched, as if they had only just stepped out.

The bathroom and toilet stood separate, both impossibly small, yet somehow sufficient for ten of us. The bathroom's bright blue tiles had dulled to a darker shade after years of steam. The hulking boiler rattled, groaned, and inevitably ran out of hot water before the final shower. Once the last person was clean, a sponge broom swept the water away before it soured into mold. Four robes hung on the back of the door. Their colors faded, their fabric thinning, passed from one body to another without a second thought.

The living and dining room had once been divided by glass, but by the time I knew it they were one. The couch bed smelled faintly of my grandfather, even beneath the rough brown wool. His chair faced the television – the news murmuring while he sat quietly, proud of the life unfolding around him: children, grandchildren, and his wife at the table. The wallpaper peeled at the edges. My mother minded, but I never did. I liked how lived-in it felt. The table was always set with embroidered fabrics from the bazaar and the plates, made from heavy brown glass carried from Libya, had never been replaced.

The kitchen was narrow, barely enough for two, though always crowded with four of us women. Pots clattered, spoons scraped, the room humming with voices. Out the window, the communist blocks stood like sentinels, and kittens gathered in the grass below, waiting. We always fed them in the end.

The apartment still stands, but it is no longer the same. The walls are quieter, the air is thinner, and the rooms less full. My grandparents were the soul of those summers – the center to which we all returned home to. Without them, the flat rests in stillness. The rooms hold their shape but the closeness belongs to another time. It has settled into the past.

кеф

Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When man is happy, he is in harmony with himself and his environment.

Oscar Wilde, Irish author, poet, and playwright who became one of London's most popular and influential dramatists in the early 1890s.

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