

A HUNDRED FIREFLIES OUTSIDE

Written by Christian A. Dumais

It felt like this day would never come, all the planning, all the waiting, and now, they are almost there. There are six of them, three boys and three girls, looking like university students but really have three months of high school left. They are smart, clever and have a profound understanding of irony. Two of them have been dating for the last nine months and the remaining four are hoping to start something over the weekend even though they know they won't make it past the summer. Already they are making their intentions known with their eye contact and making the extra effort to laugh at one another's jokes.

Based on the directions, they are less than an hour away. Nancy remembers loving the place when she was little, but it had been, like, years since she's been there. It used to be her grandfather's cabin before he passed away a few years back. She remembers the smell of his pipe tobacco, how he knew a million different languages, and how he'd sit up all night translating the strangest books.

The man at the last gas station seemed to be familiar enough with the place to tell them not to go there. He even offered his own cabin in another part of the area for free – “You can stay as long as you want. *Seriously*. Just don't go *there*.” – but they laughed it off, the way only teenagers know how to do without regret. They bought some [product placements]. Ashley noticed a board by the bathroom which was filled with pictures of missing teenagers. When she said something about it, everyone but Jay ignored her. There goes Ashley being all serious. They all piled back into the van, spent two minutes getting the van to start – “This always happens!” – and they were off again.

After a while – thirty miles past the mental hospital, seventeen miles past the chemical plant, and four miles past the old cemetery – they turn off the main road. With every turn, the road gets narrower and the concrete eventually turns into mud. Fred decides to call his parents to let them know they are almost there – because he knows he'll forget to check in later once they open up the cooler full of alcohol – and he discovers that there is no reception. He holds the phone up high, like someone raising a torch in the darkness, and waits for a signal that will never come.

When they reach the cabin, the girls are startled at how beautiful it is. Nancy's eyes get wet. Lori reaches for her camera. She takes a picture of the surrounding forest and hills. She turns around and takes a quick picture of the cabin. Through the lens, she sees a figure in the upstairs window, but when she puts the camera away from her face, she notices that it was just the light reflecting off the window.

The key takes a few twists before the lock finally gives. They push into the cabin together, eager to get the weekend started. Mike and Jay are quick to stake out bedrooms. There is, of course, no electricity. Fred offers to go downstairs into the basement to find the fuse box, mostly because Nancy is his girlfriend and he feels it's his responsibility. The basement is cold and dark, even with Lori's flashlight, but he finds the box and brings power to the cabin. He notices a workbench near the back with tools hanging on the wall like hunting trophies. The chainsaw gets his attention only because he's always been interested in using one, and maybe this weekend he'll get his chance. He also finds some boxes of books and newspaper clippings, another box filled with, of all things, garlic, and even one of those old spool recorders plugged into the wall with the pause button pushed down, begging to be pressed. His index finger is touching the button's dusty surface when he hears a scream above.

It was Ashley, of course, scared of everything as always. She had opened the back door by the kitchen and a cat had jumped out of nowhere. The cat stands outside by a trashcan, hissing, while Mike tries to kick it away. When he closes the door, he sees that you have to really push it to get it to close. Maybe Jay can look at this later because he's always good at stuff like this.

There is loud music coming from inside the cabin. The song is by [the popular band of the day]. Fred finds Nancy outside. She's looking out into the distance. He comes from behind and puts his arms around her. She takes his right hand and kisses it gently. "I'm so glad we're here," she says. "This weekend's so important, you know?" Fred's mouth is busy working on the back of her neck, but he makes a sound of agreement. "Our lives are going to change so much. It's important for me to come back one last time just to, like, I don't know, hold onto this," she squeezes his hand, "a little longer."

Eventually, the rest come outside to appreciate the view. Mike and Lori's hands brush one another and they look at each other for a second too long before grinning. Jay stands next to Ashley and offers her a sip of his beer, which she meekly declines.

The character development is over now. The sun is descending, the yellow fading to a dark orange, and the clouds turning into upside down canyons of purple and orange. Already they can see the moon peeking through the indigo blue, full and bright, and what looks to be a hundred fireflies outside, all charging up. Soon it will be dark and the stars will shine down on them in ways they never could've imagined living in the city all their lives. It will be a night sky full of infinite possibilities, like the futures they all still believe they have.

Thank you for reading “A Hundred Fireflies Outside,” originally published in [COVER STORIES](#).

