

When I drove into The Cabin's driveway, the Chev's undercarriage parted the tall grass beneath. It had been over a couple of months since my last visit – a long time indeed, given my fierce love for the place – and it was time to mow again. “Again”, for the first time this year, anyway. I don't like to cut the lawn down to nothing; I love the wildflowers and their staff of bumblebees way too much. Every spring, I mow a path to the front step, one to the shed, one to the fire pit, and a couple of other key walkways. And the driveway; as far as a couple of extension cords allow me to reach. Beyond that? Stay wild, my sultry long grass.

Today, a hot afternoon in July, I came out simply because I wasn't very busy. For a Tuesday afternoon, anyway.

I began a self-employed career as a Creative Consultant about eight years ago. The most creatively fertile projects were logos & advertising campaigns, and the most not-quite-engaging were one-off gigs for ad agencies. They'd often email when they were out of time on a given project, and had days to complete work that should take a month. What can I say? I've always been pretty good at getting things right on the first try. It's not something that happens by accident; it takes a large amount of listening in a short amount of time, and a technical know-how that never gets in the way. Bing bang boom, here's a few options of the PowerPoint slideshow template that you needed, boss. You're welcome! Let me know if I can pitch in on

a logo or a campaign sometime. When you're self-employed, you always have a vague impression of how busy your week will be, but you really can't plan ahead on it. Sometimes, on a given Friday, I might have a meeting or two booked for next Tuesday; but that might be all I've got going on. Something may not knock on my door and fill the space. Or, on that same example of a Friday, my Tuesday could become royally fucked before the weekend before it even begins. And, sometimes still, that Tuesday won't be populated with to-dos until Monday afternoon. Hell, sometimes (trade secret: *most* times) I don't know what my Tuesday's going to be filled with until I check my inbox that very morning.

This Tuesday? The one at The Cabin? It was a Tuesday that never filled itself with work. So, lucky me: I decided to pack light and go away for the night. Nothing special: a half-full jug of drinking water, a pork chop & a crown of broccoli, and a freshly rolled joint too. There was a bottle of red wine already there.

I walked from the parked car along one of the overgrown-and-soon-to-be-mown walkways to the front deck's covered outdoor area, and drank the last of my coffee in the hum of the bees and the shade from the sun. As I first set my foot on the three-step stairway, I spotted a dash of movement above me. Which isn't abnormal: there are hummingbirds and grasshoppers and hornets and leaves everywhere in that place, ready to skim

the tips of your hair all day long. I didn't immediately spot what it was.

But I did spot something completely stationary. There, in the rafters of the covered deck, was a bird's nest. Not the first year that I've spotted one – every time I do find one, and it's empty, I take it down and trim away the rough edges, and save it as a keepsake. A little piece of nature's circle that I can now put on a mantel or a bookshelf in my human hubris. That movement above my head? Must've been the nest's builder. Momma Bird, or Poppa Bird; I'm actually not sure who frequents the nest in this species' gender roles.

I thought nothing of it. Crossed the deck and unlocked the door. I put my food in the fridge, put a record on the turntable, and the lawn mowing shoes on my bare feet.

The sun was hot, almost too hot to mow the lawn; but the heat always keeps the mosquitos down. In the city, they hide in your lawn until your mower sends them upward, and what they find in their first few moments of flight is your sun-soaked flesh, (I've always wondered if sun-on-skin has a particular aroma to their keen senses). In the woods (where The Cabin can be found), they hide in the forest until dusk renders the open air as cool as the treed-in air is. 3pm, though? The perfect time to get a sweat going and a lawn mown.

An hour later, the mower is put away and the record has long since stopped spinning. I'm not sure why I put one on in the first place; its music was lost to me the second I started the mower's blades, the spinning of one eclipsing the other.

I walked the front steps to treat myself to that joint, and Momma (Poppa?) Bird passes just above my head once again. And this exact point, in the blurred shadow of that flying bird; this is where I get to thinking. Feels like I can actually hear the gears start whirring between my ears. But I want to confirm my suspicions, so it's time for a little recon.

I sit. Out of sight, in the kitchen. It's right by the front door (the only door), but it's more or less beyond the view of the nest.

While waiting, I rev up my memory and try to recall everything I can about yesteryear's nesting season. For the most part, I only recall finding an empty nest, and plucking it from the two-by-fours. See, there's only one rule at The Cabin: Don't Go In May. May's a fine month for being outside, but the blackflies there can be beyond cataclysmic. They gather in a cloud around your head and take turns daring each other to be swallowed up by your hair, your nostrils, and your eyelids. And, as fine a month as May is, it's cruel-bordering-on-punishment to be cooped up inside after a whole winter's worth of it. So. Don't Go In May.

Missing a whole month in the year's calendar, I've only ever come across the aftermath of nesting season. That's all that I

knew, and all that I could summon to memory. Robins end their nesting before June starts.

As I sat at the drop-leaf table, I saw the bird return. It was a robin, sure enough, and it perched on a piece of lumber about one foot away from the nest. It stood there, wary. I shifted in my seat a bit to get a better look, and it spotted my face in turn, and flew off.

So. Lesson Number One. Robins won't go to their nest if they feel uneasy about close company.

Minutes later, still in my seat, the robin returned. This time with something in its beak; looking an earthworm (classic Robin, right?). Again, spying me, she/he took wing, and left.

Now I'm drumming my fingers on the table and making a sort of half-grin as I put two and two together. Why oh why is a robin bringing a worm to its nest? Do the math. It's easy math. I rose from my chair and stepped out onto the deck.

The underside of the roof is plenty high above the floor of the deck – it's a slope, like most roofs are, and it slants up from a low point of 8 feet to a height of 10 feet – and the nest is built in the lower rafters. At that height, I could look into it if I had a chair to stand on, but I'm not pulling all that together right now. It'll work just fine to reach up and shove my iPhone's camera into the space, snapping a half dozen blind pics.

Those photos? They showed something new. Lessons Numbers Two and Three: baby robins are ugly as hell, and they can sometimes be in the nest as late as July.

Well, shit.

That classic “gaping mouth” that you see in the nature books? Nothing like that. And barely any down on their pink little bodies. They looked like great big yellow frowns with swollen black protuberances bulging above; the thinnest neck you can imagine and a meagre imitation of a rotisserie chicken body. Their saggy skin had the look of being freshly plucked, but I knew it was just the opposite; these creatures had feathers on order that weren’t due for another week yet. If I could say one nice thing about their appearance, I’d say that they looked warm to the touch. But even that, I knew, wouldn’t last long without their mother (father?) sitting on top of them. Which they hadn’t; not since I got there.

Back to the kitchen table, where an uncorked bottle of wine and a freshly rolled joint (this evening’s entertainment) sat waiting. My Tuesday night was all set to start, lawn mown and plans made. I was even about to set another record on the turntable. But this didn’t feel fair.

Soon enough, I’d have music playing. Probably on the loud side. I’d have the deck’s string lights on. Burning bright and blinding this nesting family. I’d be fully visible in here, walking

from couch to kitchen all evening long. Probably without pants on.

And those robins would be completely and utterly upset. Absolutely upended. All so that I could indulge in an evening of weed and wine. Pantsless, no less. And yeah, I don't know that I can do that to a young family.

I bit my lip, and made an easy decision (that I wish didn't have such bummer implications).

Record player off. Pork chop un-fridged. Pants on, even. Within a few minutes of movement I was back in the car, engine running and reverse gear engaged. True, I hadn't been to the cabin in at least a couple of months, which is rare indeed; but I can make a decision and act on it pretty instantaneously. I'd be back here soon enough, and another used bird's nest richer for it. I soon also learned that robins take about three weeks to leave the nest, once hatched; so it'll be a while before I'm back. But at least the lawn got mown.

After all, the robins were here first.