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A Citizen of Late Hours

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

A CITIZEN OF LATE HOURS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

A CITIZEN OF LATE HOURS

BY JOHNATHAN LOVETT

Multi-genre & fragmentary-inspired storytelling with filmic potential.
Directed by thematic questions of memory & identity with regard to family.

Chronology of Influence:

Buried Child, Tongues – Sam Shepard
The Ghost Sonata – August Strindberg
Purgatory – William Butler Yeats
Bluets – Maggie Nelson

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Krapp's Last Tape – Samuel Beckett
Ozone Journal – Peter Balakian
Eraserhead – David Lynch
Seventh Seal, Wild Strawberries,
Persona – Ingmar Bergman

|

Float, Nox – Anne Carson
The Unfortunates – B.S. Johnson
For Colored Girls Who Have Considered
Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf –
Ntozake Shange

My Writing Playlist

“Side A, B” – *Eraserhead* Soundtrack
“Mo’ Better Blues” – Branford Marsalis
“Ride Into the Sun” – The Velvet Underground
“My Way” – Frank Sinatra
“Étude de concert No.3, “Un Sospiro”” – Franz Lizst, Claudio Arrau
“Strangers” – The Kinks

One

Here

dusk folds into night
or: deep blues knife sepia.

Already forgotten day vanishes cattle
once conspicuous

grazing saltgrass
& gumweed now unseen

by freights trampstamped
w/ graffiti, gone.

Grain elevators retire their pneumatic fucking
& beyond brick tenement

derricks done
vampiring for black

(but oil is easy)
puddles found near tetanus-tickled shrapnel...

the old industry, stinking, filmed w/ rust & rough
catcalls inexplicable

Goldenrod shielding its
stamen

w/ sepal-arms of Eve.
Here

landscapes of country & city melt
into another.

Here
cicada choirs

silenced by wind
over their weeping.

Signpost announces
a process

of sublimation in reverse
Here

says welcome
you are now in Bakersfield.

john,

I am resolved to see.
But you don't respond
why don't you respond?

I see you everywhere & everything
shadow of my hand thrown large
on an elm—you are

against a dark night
tow-truck flashing candy oranges
a buggy towed into pitch

never to be seen again.
my figure leans down the street
forty feet my senior.

snail i stepped on
pool of guts, opal goop
it caught moonlight

a lucky silver coin unlucky
a coin not unlike yours. palm trees
barely grazing in almosts

forever separated. beyond
the metal fence irregular
headlights screened on silent stones

of Veteran Ave. turning
the gentle bright.
I see us.

I'll be in bakersfield, friday night
meet me, eleven pm, oak st.
poolroom – you know, dumpy one

consider it,
mother

EXTERIOR – ABANDONED BAR – NIGHT
INTERIOR – POOLROOM – NIGHT

if :: you :: please
imagine honeycomb corridors of yr subconscious
keep certain chambers locked for now

[but not for long]

low lamps cast shades: guitars
fattened & flattened strum concrete floor
where off-perfect rhombus slants
table's edge into metaphor.
black painted rabbits caught mid trod
forever fucking on walls.
facial ridgelines of the departed
symbolic? something votive present
as if conjured Tobacco clouds mean rain,
john wades half-blinded & half-nostriled
scents of vomit, beer & three-day-old nostalgia.

a pool table stands
sharply, diagonally

thick patrons shoot pool thickly
shoot eyebrows at john
stereotyped ink stains
stout pints extra-large
grunts grinding
guffaws combustible
perhaps they'll break into a fight

five to ten :: this clock :: will always :: be noticed

velvet backed barstool
caught in a sneeze
mildew worn, a purple heart
bends john into.

what'll it be?
tap water
speak up, kid
tap water
stout on tap?
sure
let's see some ID
right of course
I'm only screwing w/ you
bartender pours for john out his mustache
this will be more of a prop than anything
have you seen a woman here tonight?
foot pumps rapid
no sorry, kid
she has brown hair, i think?
I'da seen em
glances thrown at the door
maybe done a little more than seeing, heh

time:.....>

bar life evaporates as breath on glass.
empty room slouches into john's palm:
inexplicable associations

time:.....> passes

Pirates
Parrots
Owls
Bats
Tiresias
Sigmund Freud
Maybe done a little more than seeing, heh
One-way mirrors
Interrogations
Concept of playing coy
Emoji's
Possums
"A Dissertation on the Semiotics of Emoji Use in Teenaged Possum
Linguistic Acquisition via Texting"
Amygdala Arm Wrestling the Hippocampus
Formspring.com
Night Terrors
Mr. Sandman by The Chordettes
Elephant Seal Mating Politics
1950's American Politics
Using Lefty to Swipe Righty
Rewriting Your Parents Vows in Crayon
Bats again
Prefrontal Lobe Pile Driving the Medulla
Chickenfeed
Editing Wittgenstein's Tractatus in Racecar Red
Bat Cave
Robin's Dissociative Identity Disorder
WebMD-pedia.org
Puberty
Damoclean Sword
Post Partum Glee
Possums
they really shouldn't be texting
Thinking about yr mother younger than you
[no tinder then]
Misguided sexual politics then
Misguided everything politics now
Raccoon

raccoon?

eyes like tunnels
without exit

deep & purpled
not a sleepers eyes

globular paunch
fragrance urinary

bald pate dotted liver spots
strewn of black threads

JOHNATHAN (50s)

character breakdown:
someone you'd DEFINITELY avoid on a metro
time of character's breakdown:
his mid 20s

JOHNATHAN
heya kiddo *belches ambergris*
ya see any uh handsome fellas
in here tonight?

JOHN
pardon?

in this uh poolroom? handsome fella?
blond? blond curly hair? tall. broad
shouldered. you get the picture. as if a statue.

no, no blonds in here tonight
nor any statues, sorry

rifles thru shorn clothing
dispenses cigarette among paw
well got a light then, squirt?

no, i don't, sorry

don't be so sorry!

*fat raccoon slinks off nodding
returns cigarette lit*

I know your face
where is it I know your face from?

i don't know
i'm afraid

you're afraid
what, of me?

no, s—no
*breathing in his smoke
face is porous now*

*if staged to face out a proscenium
pool table stands between the two men diagonally*

listen
you look mightily familiar
I might be all screwed up
but a face like yours
I might remember
smoke streams thru nostrils

hm
i have no money anyways

kid like you do you smoke sure i smoke would you like a smoke no i'm
okay thanks kid! take a smoke! menthols swiped em from a coat I insist
take a smoke sure then i'll take a menthol you're sure you'll take a smoke
young kid like you you sure yes i'm sure sure sure yes light got a light no no
light on me well then take this smoke and smoke it place it opposite mine
let me light you

*a social contract
spelt in smoke*

with a hand john with a hand johnathan
they remark on this coincidence

hold on a second
john? You?
Your name is john?

Yes.

pinball eyes bounce wild
I don't believe it for a second.

processing
No, there's no way.
as if a rainbow pinwheel
What is it you got there

frozen
in your hand?

This?
it's nothing
it's a postcard

postcard, eh?
calligraphy == real fancy
calligraphy != male calligraphy
thrfr
calligraphy 8==> female calligraphy
sweet one, is it your sweet one?
w/ that calligraphy
young kid like yourself
ought to have many
sweet ones I am sure
sweet one

really?

i don't have a sweet one

whomever sends postcards nowadays
ought 2 b ur sweet one
all u kids do nowadays
is dirt & data science

i don't know what it is
you want me to say
i don't have a sweet one

```

void YourNosyFunction (string, string);

int main() {

JOHNATHAN >> cin >> "Well who is it then?" >> endl;
JOHNATHAN >> cin >> "?" >> endl;

string MISSING = "my mother";

    cout << JOHN << MISSING << endl ;

    cin >> JOHNATHAN >> MISSING >> "?" >> endl;

    cout << JOHN << MISSING << " , yes";

string COUGHING FIT = "*What happens when you smoke
all yr life*";

    cin >> JOHNATHAN >> "yr mother?";
    cin >> JOHNATHAN >> COUGHING FIT >> endl;

return 0;
}

```

it's your mother you're waiting for, huh?
telling you I'm all screwed up
but if a shadow of a memory serves me right
yr mother is a real beauty
just a knockout
is what she is

who are you?

well john
good news
or bad news?

How do you know my mother?

Good news first then.
Actually there is no good news.
I just have bad news.
Bad news for both of us.

Well bad news is
you're me
& I'm you
in the filthy future flesh!

?

As you can see
things didn't work out great
for me—ehm—for you
but as I can see
things aren't working out great for you either
I mean look at you.
Thought you were tall! Blond! Curly haired!

??

You're rail-thin. Squirrelly. Complexion of a foot.
Far cry from a statue, that's for sure.

You're just drunk

You're right

just an old drunk

I'd hold your judgment.
You'll fall for the bottle soon enough.
When I say fall I mean fall hard.
You want proof? You've got proof baby!
smiles ever so widely
No, I mean it. Trust me.
And after all those years?
You'll have the emotional intelligence of a chair.
again, smiles
Maybe not now, but soon down the line
when your friends and family, frankly everyone
realizes what a colossal prick you've turned out to be
you're maybe lucky you have a few relatives
at best you speak to once or twice a year
you'll be alone

you'll be so supremely alone
the sound of your dog's collar shaking
or clink of your refrigerator opening
—refrigerator containing mustard, sour milk, old marijuana—
or your own voice will drive you mad
like ice
you'll go back to when you thought the world was yours, was ours
you'll take that hide belt your father left you, sorry, our father left us
& hang yourself with it
hang yourself with daddy's hide belt
do the world a favor—do me a favor!
but you'll realize you lost that belt
(colossal prick, remember)
so you'll sit down in a hot shower & cry
cry until you're tired, until tired becomes forgetfulness
exit shower, dry off,
say to yrself it's not so bad, go to sleep.
Rinse, repeat
(but just in the metaphorical sense [showers aren't to be had after 30])
Fuck you
Fuck me
is what I'm saying.

Hey.
You okay?
What's wrong?
You're not going to cry, are you?
Don't cry. I didn't mean it.
(well I obviously did mean it)
But don't cry.
Please.
It just slipped out, John.
I mean
I've been wanting to say that to you for years now.
Years!
But you know what?
Doesn't feel as good having said it.
Really.
Looking at you now.
Look at me.

Hey, look at me. Say something, John!

i'm fine. Really.

insert function:

cin >> JOHNATHAN >> COUGHING FIT² >> no/endl;

*johnathan trapped in a wheeze
reduced to floor in tabletop
black blood spews out the blowhole
as if killer whale lost its killer cred
SeaWorld working on the bronchial*

hey
hey
johnathan
are you okay?
drink this water

Drinks.

Comes to.

What are you doing here anyway?

i really don't know

you're waiting for someone, aren't you?

[yes]

who might it be you're waiting for?

might it be the author of that postcard you're waiting for?

that beautiful postcard -- are you waiting for mother?

Yes

Right, right.

well shouldn't you know all this?

You'll have to excuse my questions kiddo

I'm afraid the drinking years

interred our mind into the grave

so this mother of ours

Yes?

she writes you then she does?

she does.

your mother's name?

she does write me

and your mother's name?
john. your mother's name?

remotely

i don't know

you don't know

i don't know

yr own mother's name you don't know

yes, no

what d'you knw abt her?

INTERIOR - JOHN
[she smelled of hyacinth
& wore honey on her lips]

what d'you knw abt her?

EXTERIOR - JOHN
Sorry, sir. little.

sir?

I'm a *SIR* to you now?

Sir...

I can get used to that!

Would you like a Welsh Rabbit with Snake Wine?

A helping of Apricot Cake?

"*SIR*"?

Yes

Yes, garcon, very good, very good.

Very good indeed.

Sir! If only! If only the Guard spoke to me like that.
If the Guard spoke to me as a sir
he'd be in a different situation than he is now

what are you talking about?

save questions for now
all you have, we have, is :: time

quarter :: to :: eleven

you know, it's funny

what's funny?

it's funny how scenes from our childhood
read like movie scripts
flat, the exposition, character intros, characters, dialogue
all so flat! Flat! Flat! Flat!

really, who are you?

Say, why don't we shoot ourselves
some pool, we will
talk the questions over pool
you'll see

*silence caught in a claw
consent scuttling on ocean's floor
Johnathan racks as john watches*

thirty years since I last played pool
can you believe it?
thirty years
I was about your age

*each armed with a pool cue
a declaration of some kind is signed*

you don't shoot pool with all ten fingers

thirty years I said
teach me how many fingers

like this

I didn't hit a single one !

*john assumes aim
upon impulse
balls break like cows*

very good
very good indeed !

*a half-empty beer bottle > Johnathan sniffs > drinks > offers to john > who shakes his
head > and scores more shots*

under breath
day going pale
bloodshot eggs for eyes
tracks of tears in solid lines
fragrance of...

?

so john
what're you doing here

i told you; rather, you told me
waiting for mother

what are you doing waiting for mother
is what I'm asking
you don't know her
don't even know her name
so what's your aim your objective
rekindle?
reunite?
you don't need me to tell you that that never goes well
I pray

it's a long story really

all we :: have :: is :: time

she'll be here any minute
our train leaves at midnight

your train leaves at midnight?
what are you, a runaway?
You two eloping or something?

of some sort, sure

like that wretched song?
from the 80's?

mm?

small town girl
(small town: being this piece-a-shit bakersfield
girl: mother)

midnight train
going anywhere
(anywhere meaning anywhere
so long as it's out of this shithole bakersfield I'm guessing)

we've got our smoky room
reeks of wine & vengefully cheap perfume
or however that insult to the ears goes

just a small town girl...
just a city boy...
born and raised in South Detroit...

black ball: right pocket

a gentle push: it connects!
very good young man !

Well what happened to you?
To me...

Wouldn't you like to know

I would

mmm tell you what

as you wait for mother
I'll show you
over a game of pool
but you have to put up something

what?

your wager is your past, my past
got it? We're shooting for our memories.

Need another lesson before we play?

I think I'll manage.
We really do have chemistry
chemistry of the cue & black ball
Pick a hand

cue

*john points left
johnathan reveals black*

I break then.

*spine becomes swagger
pointer & middle fingers a protractor
precise trigonometry
yields successful breakage*

funny how
i took you for a whale
when what you are is a shark

Jaws the movie, baby!

i suppose i'll begin then

Johnathan closes his eyes

john clears his throat

Two



sounds of wood chopping fade in

EXT. HOUSE – DAY

“2 beds, 1 bath, 1,119 sqft
spacious garage
lawns with real grass
newly installed heating system
hickory wood porch
situated in the lush & rurally located
——Pacheco Rd. Bakersfield
just on quaint rural edges of town!”

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE – DAY

grass scorched by sun, weeds mostly
heaps of lumber
thin metal fence squeezes yard
overlooks expanse of telephone poles & chemical plant
'quaint' is of deceitful real-estate lexicon
like duct tape over the mouth
pleading in screams DEMOLISH ME!

BILL, 40s, chops repetitively with an ax
mesmerized by duty
he's six foot six & powerful
son of Nance & Buzz, father of John
his abilities to speak & hear have been lost
what he can do, is allowed to do, is chop wood

INT. FAMILY DINING ROOM – DAY

bill's chopping is omnipresent
in this house
sets rhythm to all things

laying in his rocker
as if a coffin
BUZZ, 70s, red sunglasses
sips out of Jim Bean
stares at a wall
blankly

what hair he has left
is grease

a cowboy
dismounted
stranger to everyone
everyone a stranger to him.

BUZZ

John. John! JOHN!

After a couple moments, John enters. He nods to the box on the table.

BUZZ

The hell took you so long. Scorched my damn vocals hollering.

JOHN

Sorry, Buzz. Was getting my paycheck together for you.

John hands the envelope of cash to Buzz.

BUZZ

Better not be holding out on me.

JOHN

It's all there.

BUZZ

Better not be thieving me!

JOHN

What's the box?

BUZZ

Never mind what it is! Install it for me.

WELL DON'T JUST STARE AT IT. GET A MOVING THEN!

John gets a moving.

BUZZ

It's a television. Since you're begging to know.

Buzz rests his head to sleep.

JOHN

You ordered a television?

BUZZ

Install it, I said!

NANCE (O.S.)

Supper's almost ready! It's delicious. You two better be hungry!

JOHN

What's with the glasses, grandpa?

BUZZ

One more question and I'll...!

John installs the TV on the opposite cabinet.

Buzz begins to snore.

John goes over and places the fallen blanket on him.

John finishes installing.

NANCE (O.S.)

I slaved away all day for these. I pray you kids are hungry!

John stares at Buzz who's well asleep.

Nance enters.

Traces of former beauty are there

but as her memory are fading,

Type to tear napkins into heaps

below the table

& smile apologetically

flashing all her teeth,

NANCE, 50s.

NANCE

Spareribs! Mmmmmmm! Everyone be seated now! Time for prayer!

Buzz snores louder.

Nance clasps her hands together

intones a low pitched, back of throat, gurgle-moan.

*Nance opens her eyes and turns her head slowly
to Buzz then John, smiling widely, painfully.*

NANCE

Oh! Did I mention what your coach said to me? About your going All American, John? Did I mention it to you? Well he said - he said "John's the finest athlete I've seen since Jim Brown stormed the Shoe." Can you believe that, sweetie?! ...The way the moon was...

Buzz wakes up sweating.

BUZZ

What the hell! What the hell! What the hell's going on around here!

NANCE

Supper time, silly.

Nance makes chewing and slurping noises.

NANCE

Just you wait and try some of this. It's delicious. Yummy!

Nance lifts the lid and reveals a plate of bones. John stares quizzically.

NANCE *beaming*

Make sure you get plenty, darling. All American doesn't feed itself!

Nance takes a bone and sucks it like a pacifier, calming herself. She lets out a great "mmmm" still smiling.

JOHN

I'm not All American, Nance. I don't even play sports.

BUZZ

Course he's not All American. Just look at him!

NANCE *giggling*

Oh, you two.

John nods outside.

JOHN

Bill was the one who went All American.

NANCE
Who's bill?

JOHN
Your son.

NANCE
My son?

JOHN
My father.

NANCE *giggles*
I don't have a son, silly. How old do you think I am?
What's a girl like me rearin critters at seventeen!

JOHN
*Yr seventy five...

NANCE
Heya Buzz! He sure thinks I'm mature! My own grandson thinks I'm
seventy five! That I have children. You dog! Little rascal!

JOHN
Bill's your son, Nance. My father.

NANCE
You have a father? I have a son? Girl like me? Girl like me, I'm seventeen!
What's his name then?

JOHN
We've been over this many times, Nance. I have a father and his name is
Bill. Buzz makes him stay outside but he's there.

NANCE
When was my son "Bill" born then?

JOHN
July fifth. You make a cake every year.

NANCE
LIAR! NO I DON'T! YOU LIE!

JOHN
Alright.

NANCE *mocking*
Well where is he then? Where is he now? If you're so sure about my life,
Where's my son?

JOHN
He's outside, grandma.

NANCE
Oh. Interesting...

BUZZ *wagging a bone at John*
Your grandmother's been looting my purse again. Snatching my money.
Ain't that right, honey?

NANCE
Sure is!

BUZZ
Damned woman. Damned woman's gonna get herself killed. And I sure as
hell won't be taking a loan out for your funeral, you hear me?

NANCE
Sure do!

BUZZ
I find you're withholding your income from me John I swear to god I will
hurt you so good. Are you withholding from me?

NANCE
Very good honey! Saving money is a very good thing to do. A very grown-
up thing to do for a critter of ten!

JOHN
i'm twenty three, and i'm not withholding anything grandpa

NANCE

Very mature, darling. A very adult thing to do, saving money like that.

BUZZ

Withholding my money - that's the family's money, you rat.
You better give it here so I can pay off this house to those goddamn
creditors, ya hear me? Mistake for a grandson.

NANCE

The creditors are back?

*Buzz clicks on the television with the remote.
Nance grabs another bone and sucks nervously.*

JOHN

What happened with the creditors?

BUZZ

Mind your own damn business.

JOHN

There's something I want to tell you two...

NANCE

Tell us what sugar? You don't want to eat your dinner, do you. Did I screw
it up again? I always screw it up. ...The light like a tunnel down the ocean...

JOHN

Never mind.

NANCE

You know what? We're gonna have a surprise party - for Bill! Yes, it'll be
magnificent. Balloons. Streamers. Cake! We'll surprise him good!

She collects everyone's dish and exits swaying, singing.

NANCE

*Happy Birthday to me! Happy birthday to mee!
Happy birthday to Nance-ee!
Happy birthday to meeee!*

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

John,

today I found a beehive
covered in swarming bees
completely covered.
So I stepped closer.
They were so free
unpredictable
just dashing
hovering
jumping.
I took another step closer
they started to notice.

BUZZ (voiceover)
as if Jim Bean were talking
JOHN! Get over here right now!!

Scared and swarming, the bees began to buzz around me.
I kept walking closer.
I put my eye to hive
looked inside the comb.

BUZZ (voiceover)
I TOLD YOU TO GET OVER HERE RIGHT NOW.
A man can't neglect his duty! Get out here! Face it like a man.
Coward.

The bees were stinging every part of me.
I couldn't move
I was magnetized
watching them
so free.

BUZZ (voiceover)
I'm counting to three.
And if you're not here, you're gonna feel my goddamn wrath!
You have chores to do you coward! Three...

Remembering the amusement park.

BUZZ (voiceover)
Two— you're gonna be sorry!

The bees were colliding
crashing, and coiling.
They looked like memories.
Like my memories of you.

BUZZ (voiceover)
Where the hell are you?
You disgrace for a grandson!
One!

What do yours look like of me?

Mom.

*John places the postcard in his drawer, filled with others like it.
He hesitantly gets up and goes to the door.
It slams*

as the cue ball strikes another ball into pocket

INTERIOR – DIVE BAR POOLROOM – NIGHT

*John takes a drag of cigarette
leaving a sleeve of ash.*

a beehive?

My earliest and only memory of her
i was two or three years old.
Mother took me to an amusement park
my dad hadn't returned when he was supposed to.
i called her mama
she never told me her name.
Mama and i were walking
i think to buy roasted peanuts
when a bee flies right into my eyeball
she thinks it's just a fly but when she looks into my eye
she sees blood trickling out as a bee carcass hangs limp from the socket
like a piñata.
We rush off to the emergency room
And the nurse is the most pretty woman i'd ever seen in my life
i mean i can only see out of one eye
but she's the most pretty woman i'm telling you.
She smelled of lavender.
She places her hand on my shoulder then plucks out the carcass.
But the stinger takes more work.
My mom looked at the bee
let out this great big sigh.
She told me that's gonna happen to me one day.
And gave me this great big smile
but i knew she wasn't smiling.
A few days after the amusement park
she left. And never
would i see my mother again.

Two ball. Left pocket.

INT. Bedroom – DAY

Bill grunts as he chops.
john watches him through the window.
He stares at the postcard
lost in its calligraphy of sweeps & curlicues.

INT. BEDROOM – DAY

John,

Ropes of lilac across the sky today
Kept safe within the umbra of night
trees whooshing under gentle magentas
yellow streetlamp whorls
night wind is howling tonight
but I can still hear the cicadas over it.
I think about you beyond ordinary terms.
And there is room here.
You ought to think about it.

Yours

*john hears a rustling outside
& sees Nance on the other side
of the threshold toying with her hands.
He stands up and she darts off*

INT. DINING ROOM – DAY

The chopping wood sounds louder. The family sits in exact same positions. Buzz drops his fork that John dutifully picks up.

JOHN

I'll go get you a new one.

He exits and returns with a new fork. Buzz snatches it.

JOHN

Here you go.

BUZZ

You keep looking at me.

JOHN

I'm not.

NANCE

I hope you like what I made for dinner! From our garden.
Took me hours.

On the plate a pile of live earthworms coil.

BUZZ

What do you want?

JOHN

What?

BUZZ

Been acting funny all day. Always means you want something.
So I'm asking you what is it you want now?

JOHN

Nothing.

NANCE

Like pillows...

BUZZ

I'm keeping my finger on you.

NANCE

Inside of me...

JOHN

Grandpa, I-I was wondering...

BUZZ

Wondering what.

JOHN

Nothing...

NANCE

Eleven seconds left. Dodge Perkins with the ball. Goes right. Then left. Pushes off a defender. Leaps. Scores! Touchdown!! Buckeyes win!

Pause

That evening: The way the moon was.

Its light like a tunnel down the ocean. We're on the pier
me and the Dodge Perkins. 1963 evening. Slips his hand around my waist.
That devil. Such powerful hands. Ergonomic hands.
It goes inside my blouse, the rascal!

Giggles

His fingers made of feather pillows
Inside of me...

Pause

All American Dodge Perkins going steady with fifteen-year-old Nance Crisp.
Told me "I was the most beautiful thing he ever looked at."
We nearly got pinned.
But you got yourself enlisted that same summer didn't ya Dodgy-boy?
Didn't ya? Did I mention he was All American? Like you, Johnny!

JOHN

I'm going to live with my mother.

Nance tosses her pile of napkin shreds like confetti.

NANCE

Congratulations honey! Hurrah! The boy has a mother!
You're going to live with her? First he's All American.
Now he has a mother! Just what's next from you, johnny darling?

JOHN

I'll still send home my checks, Buzz.

*Nance nods a thumbs up. The motionless seconds.
Buzz takes off his sunglasses reveals a nasty black eye*

BUZZ

See this? Since you're all so desperate to know.
I did speak with the creditors the other day.

Nance's fingers become listless.

BUZZ

In fact they're the one's who gave me this.
And the way I look at it, the way I see it,
well there's two ways of looking at it.
Of how I'll handle this business with my creditors.

John all looks outside.

BUZZ

One is I continue paying em off bit by bit. And you don't go anywhere.
Or, two, once we lose your steady income, we cut down on overhead and
admit your father. What do you say? What do ya say, John? You work full
time. Or we admit your father. And collect on him.

NANCE

with nails digging into skin
who's Bill?

JOHN

He's your son, Nance.

NANCE

You want to admit our son?

BUZZ

If that toad chooses his MISSING mother over the people who have SUPPORTED him his WHOLE life!

NANCE

Buzz, why?

BUZZ

Too many mouths I'm feeding here! Too many goddamn mouths! You walk away from this family, you admit your father. Simple as Pie.

The television static rises.

BUZZ

Hell when was the last time Bill did something for the family?

JOHN

He keeps us warm with furnace wood.

BUZZ

Well hell! He stopped being part of this family years ago! When he got himself wounded! Now quit it!

JOHN

You make him stay outside.

BUZZ

Sunuvabitch broke my rocker! Course he's not welcome in the house! Now quit it. Shut up. You stay or he goes. You or him. Simple as pie.

NANCE

We'll have that surprise party soon!

exeunt omnes

INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT

john strikes a match
holds it centimeters from postcard.
Watches tiny flame extinguish.
Looks out window – only his reflection.

john,

Sinking canyon
lit into auburns
makes billows
a masquerade of sky:

valley wheat hisses
mulberries coo
a dirge for what once was
now CO₂

it's all theater
when a devil sings.

like how shoulders
encase my spine
atmosphere
is folding into atmosphere.

across the way
confiscated night in red
is how I regard us.

Three



INT. POOLROOM

She said she was coming tonight.
But it's getting late.

She'll come. Don't fret.
Take your shot.

Perhaps she's elsewhere?

It's not safe for me outside.
The bloodshot eggs for eyes...
Tracks of tears...
Day going pale...
The fragrance...

What?

Take your shot.

Look at you champ!
You made your first shot on me! Where should I begin?
How about when things were not much different than your situation.

INT. CELL - NIGHT

Grunts and chinks of steel striking concrete play at all times.
Johnathan, now 40s, groomed, sits in his cell chiseling away at the ground.
Keeps working, until sounds of footsteps come.
He replaces his bed over the hole & lays in it.
His cell begins to open; he places the bed back over the hole and lays in
bed throws blankets over himself as if asleep.

GUARD
Dinner.

JOHNATHAN
Thanks, sweetheart.

GUARD
Don't call me that.

JOHNATHAN

Are we in a fight again?

GUARD

Final warning.

JOHNATHAN

Did you have a bad day at work today, darling?

Guard shoves Johnathan's head.

JOHNATHAN

Fussy today, we are?

GUARD

Take your dinner unless you want it all over you again.

JOHNATHAN

Booboo... You made this for me? You shouldn't have.
You must've slaved away all day for this...

GUARD

Final time I'll say it.

JOHNATHAN

Well are you just going to stand there or are you going to let me have you?

GUARD

I warned you!

Guard makes to throw Johnathan's dinner on him.

JOHNATHAN

Okay, okay, okay. I'm done! I'm sorry. I'm done!

Guard sets the food on the ground.

GUARD

Get up.

JOHNATHAN

I said I'm done. I'll quit it!

GUARD

Get up. Compulsory room check.

JOHNATHAN

There's no need, I'm going to eat my dinner like a good little boy and shut my yapper. There's no need, I'm telling you.

GUARD

Get up and hands on the wall. Now!

JOHNATHAN

Okay, okay. I'm going, I'm going.

Guard begins inspecting the room. As Johnathan places his hands on the wall he grabs the chisel from his pillow.

GUARD

You might be getting a roommate.

JOHNATHAN

Is that so?

Johnathan watches the Guard inspect, staring at the hole beneath his bed. He prepares his chisel.

GUARD

Whoever it is. I feel so much sympathy for them.

JOHNATHAN

Don't get jealous, dear.

GUARD

This place smells awful by the way. As if a bunch of horses sleep here.

JOHNATHAN

When all you feed me is sugar cubes & apples
how am I supposed to smell?

GUARD

Am I going to find anything troubling, John?
Save me the trouble of finding it now and you'll be thankful.

JOHNATHAN

Nothing troubling, monsieur, so I need not trouble you.

*Guard gets to the bed. He stares at it for a long while.
Johnathan readies himself with the chisel.
Guard slowly crouches down and feels around the bed.*

GUARD

Nothing troubling, you're positive?

JOHNATHAN

Only my affection for you.

*Guard reaches under the bed. Johnathan hovers over the Guard.
Guard indicates he feels something.*

GUARD

John, what is this I'm feeling... John, what is this? John?

*Johnathan gets ready to strike. He's about to...
Guard pulls out a magazine splayed with the words MILFS ISSUE, laughs.*

I should've known. I'm taking this.

Johnathan deeply exhales, laughs. He puts the chisel away.

JOHNATHAN

Caught me red-handed. I'm sorry honey, I have my vices. I'll change!

*Guard continues laughing, walks up to Johnathan, and punches him in the gut.
Johnathan keels over.*

GUARD

Hide something from me again and it won't be so funny, you hear me?

JOHNATHAN

I-I-I hear you, baby.

GUARD

Goodbye.

Guard exits. Johnathan lies back in bed.

Sound of a pool ball entering pocket.



EXT. HOUSE - DUSK

john walks to the front door, but something feels off.

INT. HALLWAY – NIGHT

He approaches step by step.

Realizes there is no wood chopping.

Just a clock ticking on edge.

He creeps slowly down the pitch hall.

INT. DINING ROOM – NIGHT

He thinks he hears something.

JOHN
Buzz? ... Nance?

Nothing.

JOHN
Hello?

Nothing.

A few moments pass accompanied by a distant howl

a lamp flicks on.

NANCE
SURPRISE!

John leaps, terrified.

Lights turn on revealing Nance and Buzz sitting at the table with extra large party hats. Many multicolored balloons stuff the room. A giant cake stands center.

NANCE
Happy birthday John!

JOHN
It's not my birthday!

NANCE
Just shut up for once and enjoy the cake! You sad clown!

Nance bursts into giggles.

NANCE
Happy birthday to my All American scholar son! Wow, yippee!
You sure were surprised just then!

*She goes to cut the cake. John's eyes widen:
Bill stands perfectly erect, staring blankly
wearing a giant party hat. John smiles.
They all sit apart from Bill, who stands where he is.
John notices on the cake is a large "7."*

NANCE
Just you wait. We've got more surprises in store. Just you wait.

JOHN
You let him in the house?

BUZZ
Long as he just stays just where he is. He may as well be here for the celebration.

Nance doles out slices of cake.

NANCE

Coach said you can have one cheat day. (points knife at John) But just one! Hehe, sure glad I'm not All American! More cake for me, yippee!

BUZZ

The boy can have more than one slice.

NANCE

Ok, fine. I won't tell coach! He told me "wish your grandson a happy happy birthday, baby!"

JOHN

Today is Bill's birthday.

NANCE

He also told me not to tell anybody about our clandestine love. Especially now as we're integrating leather, whips, and chains. So I hope none of you ask! *blushing* How about that, sweetie?

She nudges and winks John.

But ol' Buzzy-Boy was the most romantic. *Ponders.*

Well right after John's coach. And a hair behind Dodge Perkins. Two hairs behind Spiro Agnew.

Buzz gulps down his beer

BUZZ

John, you write your rotten mother yet you're not staying with her?

JOHN

Yeah.

BUZZ

Yeah?

JOHN

Yep.

BUZZ

You're telling me the truth now, aren't you, boy?

JOHN

Yes.

BUZZ

Yes, sir?

JOHN

Yessir.

Nance smiles at them nervously. Buzz opens a new beer bottle, gulps it down. Whistles a bomb dropping sound then hurls it across the room, shattering, startling Bill.

BUZZ

Now I've got a question for you, Bill. Try and keep up. Funny thing is. I went down to the post office this afternoon. Asked Postman Maples whether my grandson's been here at all. You know what Postman Maples said? Know what he told me? Told me, "yessir, he has." Yessir, he has. So naturally I asked whether he was picking up mail or dropping off. Guess what the good Maples said, you dumb sunuvabitch?

Bill stands silently

BUZZ

Mr. Maples said John was dropping off. So I asked what it was he was dropping off. "A postcard." "A postcard?" "Yessir, a postcard." "What did this postcard look like, Mr. Maples?" "Well actually I have it right here Buzz. You wanna see?" "Do I want to see? Of course I want to see, Mr. Chance Maples! What did I see? This.

a postcard with poor cursive

Who wants to take a guess what it reads? Anyone? Bill? John? Nance? Nance why don't you read it for me.

NANCE

I shouldn't...

Buzz thrusts the card into the hands of Nance, who twitches, trembles.

Mom—

I'll be with you soon.

Attending to my escape.

Once I do
I am yours.

—john

BUZZ

Did you write this baloney John?

NANCE

Honey, tell us you didn't write this baloney.

JOHN

I...

BUZZ

You, uh?

JOHN

I...

BUZZ

Tell me you filthy lout!

NANCE

It's his birthday, Buzz. Be nice!

BUZZ

It's not his birthday. And he's not telling me the truth, is he Bill?
Right. Didn't think so. He's lying! Through his rotten crooked teeth!
That's what he's doing!

*John stays silent. Buzz snatches the postcard, burns it with candle flame.
Buzz then whistles and throws another bottle. It startles Bill again.*

BUZZ

Bill, are you gonna discipline your son or do I have to?

Buzz whistles and throws another bottle that distresses Bill.

JOHN

Stop it!

BUZZ

I warned you if you cross me, you'll spend the rest of your life in a
goddamn wheelchair. Like your damned dumb father—

Nance plunges the knife into the cake.

NANCE

SILENCE!!!! EVERYBODY, SILENCE!

All is still. She regains composure and takes a breath.

Returns to cheery, soft-spoken party voice.

John hasn't gotten his surprise yet.

Do you want your next surprise, sweetie?

JOHN

Sure.

She ducks underneath the table

returns with a large, heavy oblong object

wrapped in festive paper and ribbon.

NANCE

Now don't go off about how you don't deserve this. And don't you worry about the price neither. It's a special occasion. And a special occasion deserves a special present. For a special All American scholar grandson.

She begins to hand it over then pulls back.

NANCE

And you have to remember. You deserve this. You earned it. And so its yours. Don't worry about the price. I know you were hoping to attend university and then live with your mother all that hullabaloo, but this'll be the next best thing. *giggly* I think you're gonna like it!

John curiously unwraps the present.

JOHN *agape*

It's a tombstone.

NANCE

You can design the typography and inscription yourself!

And the dates on the other side of the dash! Don't you love it? I knew it!

JOHN

You gave me a tombstone.

NANCE *smiling encouragingly*

We gave you a tombstone. And you promised you wouldn't freak out about the price! Oh! And I forgot to mention. It comes with a plot! Right next to where we'll be buried! How special!!!

John holds his head in his hands.

JOHN

Why would you give me a tombstone?
I think I'm gonna vomit.

NANCE

Darn it, Buzz. I knew he shouldn't have had all the cake! It's okay darling, you don't have to thank us now. All American, yippee!

*Buzz whistles again, tossing the beer across the room.
Bill covers and suddenly sends the television crashing
to the ground. He stands over it blankly. Everyone goes silent.*

BUZZ

...You broke my tv... You broke my tv! YOU BROKE MY TV YOU
DUMB SON-OF-A-BITCH! YOU DUMB BASTARD!!!

*Buzz breaks a bottle on the table
holds it up to Bill's throat.
Nance screams.*

JOHN

No, don't!

BUZZ

I'M GONNA KILL YOU AND COLLECT YOUR
GODDAMN INSURANCE, YOU VERMIN!
ERROR FOR A SON! YOU GODDAMN—

*John holds the cake knife up to Buzz.
Everything is motionless. All stand still.*

John begins to cry.

A long dark black out.

Four



INT. DIVE BAR POOLROOM

minute :: hand :: climbs :: forth
top-roping to midnight
w/ assailant conviction

I'm remembering father's strawberries.
Boxed in old wood & rusted screws
roots burrowed in corrugated soil.
Seedy heads
bowing in summertime. The one
we sumo-wrestled in tall grass.
Earthworms thought
they'd stolen lunch
wriggling in his hole
punched plants as
rain sought retribution.
Father released you
from the crook in his arm.
He consoled one by one
worm by worm under
the safe birch
mother on the porch
cried without sound.
Either way
he tended his garden alone.
Strawberries! There were so many
she could've made salad.
We said distinctly we'll be fine we'll
use the microwave for silent pasta.
Outside the broken
window berries wondered
at our Bolognese catastrophe,
why he never let anyone touch
the fruit filled with nectar.
A few months later Bill went off to war
& so did his Strawberries...

john's pool stick leans against table

well're you gonna shoot?

i quit

just what do you think you're you doing?

i quit. im not doing this anymore

you quit?
you can't quit

i've had enough
of this nostalgia

you can't quit john

she's not coming

you may be surprised

she's not coming

*as john makes to leave
johnathan grabs his wrist*

Hey

I said you can't quit, john

Let go of me.

We're finishing this game

Let go of me
i said i quit

It'd be very unwise to quit
means you're forfeiting the game

Yes!
That's what i'm doing
i'm forfeiting the game

now let go of me

You don't want to forfeit.

Why not?

Don't you see?

We're playing for our pasts, john!

our lives.

our futures.

one winner and one loser.

one of us gets to shoot in the eight ball

It's you or me john.

Before they find me.

Before they find you.

Who are you?

sinking in a shot

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

john opens the mailbox

beams

pulls out a postcard

clipped to it is a photograph

eyes glue onto

INT. HALLWAY – DAY

Muffled noise from somewhere.

john scans the house.

INT. DINING ROOM – DAY

Buzz and Nance at the table, she bows her head

Buzz watches john enter.

john looks at them for a

long while. He sits down.

NANCE

It's okay. It's okay. It's okay!

*After a few long moments of round silence
john looks and sees standing in the corner
a lonely ax
Silence underneath the wind's howl*

JOHN

Where's Bill?

Buzz, where's Bill?

NANCE

It's okay. It's okay. It's okay.

It's okay. It's okay. It's okay.

It's okay. It's okay. It's okay.

Who's Bill?

just sounds of a pool ball entering pocket



Five


```

int main() {

    bool WhatDoesNanceThinkAbout();
    bool RAM;

        Loop (RAM == TRUE) {

            Make dinner, make conversation, smile to make
            him happy, talk to bill like I talk to trees (he
            needs oxygen 2), hygiene, eat crackers, morning
            naproxen, don't forget stove, & no frowning!

        }

        Loop (RAM == FALSE) {

            Silver, dry, tastes bad, soft like blankets or
            fur, hurts when I pull!, Sally said it hurt with
            Jimmy, so I pulled her's, she knew I liked
            Jimmy, so tall, so blond, his hair so tasty!

        }
        if (Buzz == Gaslights me about money he spends){
            DeleteRam;
        }

    bool QuestionsIAskedGoogle {

        Q: are cyber relationships a crime in any state?

        Q: can Apple Support give me dating advice?

        Q: how to know if you're a 1 or a 0?

        Q: applying thermodynamics to your mother?

    }

    return;

}

```

INT. CELL – NIGHT

johnathan chisels, stops chiseling
makes his bed
dresses
brushes teeth

a few beats
guard enters

GUARD

You ready to meet your new roommate, Johnathan?

JOHNATHAN

Baby I told you I've got other plans!
Gonna 86 this place soon enough.

*Bill shuffles into the cell
his chains rattling as he walks.*

JOHNATHAN

Dad...

GUARD

He can't speak or hear.
With you, probably for the best.
I'll be back momentarily.

*Guard exits.
Johnathan stands there
staring at Bill
who holds a postcard*

JOHNATHAN

Hi Bill.

Do you recognize me?
It's your son, Johnathan.
What's that you've got there?



INT. DIVE BAR POOLROOM – NIGHT

Bill...

Is he okay?

How is he? Is he safe?

What happened while you were there?

How does the memory end?

*table is empty
apart from cue & black*

He wasn't much of a talker

How does the memory end?

Nor was he much of a listener

How does the memory end

You should've seen the look on their faces

Bloodshot eyes for eyes...

Tracks of tears...

Day going pale...

The fragrance...

And I came out on
the other side.

Who are you?

The memory ends
with a postcard.

INT. CELL – NIGHT

Mother,

kept within the umbra of night
streetlamp whorl & whooshing elm
cicadas coaxing sleep

I am a citizen of late hours

when city becomes desert
& I an old man with garments for hair
tattered robes my disguise

I drift thru bonewhite solitude
in a midday sun.

Lone cricket under wind's howl
lost orchestra of insects
wondering whether I've always only heard the one?

All this sand & rock.
Fondly though remembering your smile.

I feel my bristles, sagged skin
shoulders that slump out egg...

The descent was hard, I'll admit,
though distant spring of blues
put skips into my steps as I cried
fountain of youth!
worked myself into double-time
believing I'll find the grail, too.

I was five at an amusement park
when a bee seeking amusement
sought my eye, its stinger plucked out
by a pretty nurse who told me to keep
my eyes closed

because that's what it will look like
carcass of a bee
you said

In my world of hypersensitivity
a wink is a marriage plot
a yawn a murder plot
your smile my sentence
my undoing I sniff for on all fours
w/ a rubber tail wagging.

scarabs I am sure
w/ back printed skulls
will scuttle out on doomsday
& sing hallelujah in four parts.

to piquant endings!
to poetic endings!
picasso once said

Orange is the saddest color
sometimes I think he meant
Johnathan is the saddest color
because he uses it to paint
his demented paintings.

a madman
exiled
in this goddamn desert beehive of mind

until
my mornings
make my moorings

when rosy dawn nuzzles fingers
along tumescence

I arise w/ quaking vanity
compromised hairstyle
fingernails unseemly

pudding textured skin
only you in my dreams
late

doleful banana-hide breakfast
light bulbs
deodorant
empty space
flies
cascading
around my pan
thin film of egg

makes me unsure
if the corners of your mouth
when we both knew it to be true
were rising or falling

john

INT. POOLROOM - NIGHT

That was a postcard you sent,
wasn't it?

A postcard to your lover.

You can tell me your secret
Our secret

i don't know
what you're talking about

oh, don't play coy

nothing?

ah
I remember this now
all so well
what you're doing here
waiting for mother
to elope

*john's movements are
noticeably more erratic.*

How could you even assume—
Liar!

Let it go...

Let it go
Let it go?
How
am i supposed to let this go
when you accuse me of such a thing?
"Let it go."
What does that mean
let it go?
I've spent the last two hours
in this putrid poolroom listening to you
& i'm supposed to just let it go?
Fuck you i'll let it go!

You don't need to make such a fuss.
Really.
It'd be pyrrhic.

No. No, no, no, no.
Don't give me that shit.
Don't feed me your shit
about how it's all pyrrhic
you pathetic character.
Don't give me that.
That is not who i am

I'm afraid so, john. I'm afraid—

Stop talking.

I-I'm sorry...

Shut up, dammit!

You know what it means? Pyrrhic?

Shut your goddamn whacko mouth!

It means what you wanted to win—

i know what it means!
She's my mother
for chrissakes!

John
You wonder at images of future.
What does time look like?
The colors. Scents. Textures.
You remember and misremember
impressions of persons:
Windswept hair.
Hyacinth.
Cherry blossoms.
Note of Tamarind.
Honey on the lips.
Isosceles cheek bones.
Earth uninhabited.
Green eyes
green velvet eyes.
Inevitably, slowly
my ability for feeling was lost.
My blood turned to ice.
Shapes lost edges.
Shadows they cast drifted away.
Suddenly
all memories left.
My mind was a graveyard.
Tombs with inscriptions,
but inscriptions indecipherable.
Memories buried underground.

If you're here now
and i've seen what a miserable life you've led. i've led.
Why can't i change it?
Fix it? Not have you happen?

People don't fix their fortune john...
It's like a letter. Sealed.
In the mail. Coming for you.
Brought by some self-loathing asshole
who hates their job.
Dressed like an asshole.

What if i turn out different?

Different?

Different. Normal.
Not you.

There's no escape, john.
Like this game of pool: One winner.

Not unless i win.

I don't lose.

i'm not going to be like you.

Try all you want...

i'm not going to be like you.
You—loser. Deformity!
I'm never turning out like you.
Raccoon!

a wounded animal
john... Don't... Just take your shot.

I'm a pacifist. You're the vampire!
I'm not the one who's at fault.

You are! You—colossal fucking prick!

john. Just take your shot. Please...

You're the one who's gotta go!

Please just take a deep br—

FUCK YOU I'LL TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Take it back!

john

Take it back!

but

TAKE BACK WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT MOTHER!

mother is gone

She's been gone
a long time now

What are you on about now

I hate to be the one telling you
this

she wrote me a letter just last week

Bill wrote it.

He's been writing
them the whole time.

The whole time
he's been writing
as if he's mother.

what?

Bill wanted to
preserve a memory
for you

why am I here...

my design.

It'll happen one way or another.
I want to help you avoid it. Truly.
I want to help you. Help myself.
Take your shot.

faucet eyes

*john picks up the pool cue.
He calls his pocket and shoots the black ball.
It misses.*

You know. Buzz was absolutely right
about something.

johnathan goes to take his shot.

What's that?

Bill had it better- better than
every single one of us.

*johnathan points to his pocket and shoots. The ball goes in. john understands this.
long silence. johnathan sadly waves john to come along. john does. They start to leave.*

*John strikes Johnathan with his pool cue.
He strikes Johnathan again and again
sending him crashing below the table.
John continues to swing
as if the pool cue were an ax.*

*John starts to laugh. A toilet flushes.
He laughs for a while.
Leans casually on the pool table, and picks up a half-smoked cigarette.
He smokes.
The Guard enters, perhaps dressed in white, zipping up his fly.*

GUARD

Alright. Let's get a move on.

He silently handcuffs John, who acquiesces while continuing to laugh.

JOHN

Is he alright?

GUARD

He's fine.

JOHN

Are you sure? Are you sure he's fine?

GUARD

Yes, yes, I'm sure. Let's get a move on Johnathan.

JOHN

Is he alright? Is she coming?

The guard stays silent.

JOHN

Is she coming? Is she coming? Hey. Is she coming?

GUARD

No.

JOHN

Oh. But you haven't checked. Is he alright?

GUARD

Haven't checked where?

JOHN

Behind the pool table. You haven't checked.

Guard walks behind pool table.

JOHN

Is he alright? Is he?

GUARD

Yep.

JOHN

Okay.

GUARD

Come on. We don't have all night.

Guard leads john as they walk off.

*After a while a woman in her mid forties enters.
She's wearing a coat. She scans the poolroom slowly.
Pulls a postcard out her pocket. Moment of thought.
Looks around for a bit more, sighs.
Places it back into her pocket.
She turns and leaves.*

Black out.

A word of gratitude to Brian & Barb for countless hours
To Fred for revelation
To Jen, Sandy & Google for the images