

I shouldn't be driving. Not now.

It's been six hours since I got the call, yet it felt like six minutes filled with packing, phone calls, texts, uneaten food, questions, blank stares, chairs, waiting, car rentals, driving, and memories.

Memories distract you with details, like what their eyes looked like rather than what they were looking at, or the way they talked rather than meaning behind their words. You care more for the players than the play; remembering entrances or exits rather than their performance.

The white noise of the road hisses under my tires, skipping at concrete intervals or popping on the sun-soaked black-top, keeping my ears filled with personal sounds of reality, grounding me with the bass of engine hum, the static of a remnant radio signal, and the whistle from a rear window not quite closed.

I try to remember my father and all I can think about is the grey in his hair. Even as a boy I remember my father had grey temples... and the way the stems of his heavy glasses tucked his hair back behind his ears, but if I try to remember my father as a whole? As the man who raised me? As the man who I debated with, then argued with, then gave up on? Instead of him, I start to remember the words he said rather than the things he was saying. The words I said back rather than what I was trying to tell him. The words we choose to use eventually use us and define us by what we said or didn't say. Words I could have used, should have used, but didn't.

Other people argue, butt heads, have differences of fucking opinion and they can get along, why couldn't we? What makes us so damn unique? Made us...

I run the fluid and wipers, to clean the window, to get a better view. I follow the drops as they the wind presses them flat and pushes them out of frame.

I want to forgive him, myself, the world, but I continue to pull memories from out of the incandescent kiln of my past. Malformed and ugly moments of black coal seething into fiery reds and yellows that burn in my mind until their grey faded embers crumble into the dust of exhaustion that fills the emptiness of the car and its hissing tires.

That's not how I want to remember him. That's not who he will be for me.

I close the kiln. I watch the road. I grip the wheel. I pass a car. The road ahead empties as headlights dim behind me.

Once again I remember his face, focusing on the details in order to distance my attention from the whole of my own prejudice. The grey temples, the heavy glasses, the way they enlarged his eyes, magnifying them as they looked down on me from a distance.

The next time I'll see that face it will be a dead face among flowers, coffins, pillows, a nice suit, and his grey hair, combed, thinning, fresh cut above shoulders that are spotless of dandruff. And his eyes, lacking the protection of those heavy glasses, appearing small and diminished, sunken, exposed, unrecognizable, and closed.

My eyes follow the road too closely. I can't tear them from the center lines, dashed, dotted, telegraph hypnosis. If I lifted them from the pattern, I don't know where they would land, and I just want this trip to be over, to be home. I grip the wheel and drive.

A memory surfaces faint and faded like a photograph bleached in the sun; now lying neglected, having fallen during a rush to get out of a home on a morning some nine years previous, never bothering to be saved from rotting among the rushes.

"Here, let me show you."

His hands are huge, enormous, like tarantulas gripping bananas, covered in coarse hair and rough calluses. Skin stained with sun and scoured with earth. Nails cracked like flint, bitten short to stubs. These hard hands engulf my small pink clumsy things into an awkward grip of a golf putter. Alien. I've never held anything like this. I don't like it.

"Thumbs do...thumbs... here, thumbs down, like... Fonzie, right, only up-side down? Look. Ayyyyy! Say it. Ayyyyy!"

I'm cool, "Ayyyyy!"

"Right, now point them down, like, here..." again his hands fold over mine, holding the club in wrist-bending-weirdness. I try to look over them, through his arms that drape around my shoulders and that press my ears flat. "See? Left first, thumb pointed down. Right? No. On top. Stop fighting."

It feels weird.

“You want to do it right, or do you want to go home?”

“Hey, buddy. Let us play through, will ya? Go on the practice green, for Pete’s sake!”

I try to look to see who’s talking, and catch a glimpse of a line forming behind us just before Dad’s forearms squeezes me back in place.

“Don’t pay them mind. Now, just keep your thumbs down, right? Got it?”

His hands release me and his weight moves away following his shadow as he steps off the green.

I lift my eyes from my grip. The Wildwood Pier Put-Put Arcade is crowded. Seagulls swing, shipwrecks sway, clams snap, octopi do what octopi do, and a whale swallows a ball next to my green causing a kid to cry in frustration. All around a summer crowd pushing for fun. I look behind me at the kids and parents waiting, waiting, waiting for me to swing, and fail. I suck.

“Come on! Let us play through, huh?”

“Sean, keep your eyes on the hole, not on them.” Dad stands in front of the lighthouse and holds his own putter out, pointing it toward the left of three mouse holes. “Just aim it here. Aim it like I showed you. Grip it like I showed you. Hit it gentle, like I showed you. Ready?”

I nod. I close my eyes.

“Open your eyes or you won’t hit damn anything.”

I open my eyes. I breath, I aim, I grip, I swing, gentle, like he showed me.

My father watches as my ball rolls toward the hole. He is leaning on his putter now, pride in his eyes behind those heavy glasses that tuck the grey behind his ears.

I don’t remember pulling over, but I did.

I’m half-way home, somewhere in the Pennsylvania moraine, just outside Jim Thorpe.

I shouldn’t be driving, not now.