

THE PETROLOGY OF SOUTH DAKOTA

Dickwad hadn't shaved in four days. He rubbed the blonde whiskers on his chin between his thumb and fingers, then hoisted his beat-up, army-green duffel bag over his shoulder.

"What's with that scrawny little beard," I asked him. I wasn't one to talk about appearances. I had added twenty pounds to my gut in recent months. I crossed my arms above my gut, and flexed my biceps as if to draw his eyes somewhere else, just like the roses in a painting I saw once in a coffee table book.

"It started raining four days ago." He moved past me out the front door of his home in the orange groves of Santa Paula and into the gray sky as if all questions in the world could have been answered by that phrase.

"What the hell does that mean?" I stared at the orange blossoms, little white petals drooping and collapsing under the dew of morning. They had no fragrance today.

He turned around with a smirk, a shy little smile that every girl had fallen for so far, his teeth perfectly aligned by superior genetics. "After the first rain of autumn, I don't shave again until that day the next year. It's a family tradition." He closed his eyes, tilted his head back, and stuck out his tongue, catching the first drop of rain that morning. Dickwad had a gift for predicting weather. It was as if his head was some human weather balloon, and his brain the helium.

"When did that tradition start?"

“1892.” He walked down the creaking wooden stairs from the porch of his little house, past the eggplant and squash in the vegetable garden in his front yard. He pushed the button on the trunk of his car and opened it.

His car wasn't as old as we were. His grandfather purchased it the same year Dickwad's sister was born. I guess his grandfather had forgiven the Germans by then, or just wanted a car that told the temperature outside.

At twenty-six-years-old, both the car and Dickwad's sister were in pristine condition. The navy-blue paint hugged the rear lights and fenders of the car in the same manner Dickwad's sister's jeans hugged her ass and thighs. Most of the times I had seen her, she had a lollipop in her mouth. Her tongue changed colors every day, like a chameleon covered in saliva and sugar. She sat in the backseat staring aimlessly through the windshield. She could have been thinking about losing her virginity that awkward night eleven years ago.

“What are we waiting for?” she said lightly through the window at her brother. “You're always twenty minutes late for everything.”

Dickwad nodded back towards me. “He isn't doing shit. He's just standing there.”

I lit a cigarette and waved at Dickwad's sister. She didn't wave back. She moved her eyes back to her invisible thoughts in the windshield and gently twirled a Blow-Pop into her mouth.

Dickwad came back up the stairs to the porch and grabbed my backpack. “You ready?” His veins popped out from his forearm, a subtle muscular preview to the rest of his body that would have been a turn-on to a girl.

“You look like Don Johnson in Miami Vice,” I said to him.

Dickwad hated being compared to anyone besides his grandfather, especially Don Johnson. It was his fault. He dressed up like Sonny Crockett for Halloween 22 years ago, and still hadn't lived it down. He wore a pink t-shirt and a white linen suit with sunglasses. That's when I first called him Dickwad. His parents had died that spring.

"You look like a chubby coloring book," he responded.

I stared down past the tattoos on my arms to the beer belly hovering above my belt. It had gotten bigger since I started popping pain killers like Tic-Tacs. Eleven years ago, my belly didn't exist. It pressed up squarely to his sister's and rode along on it like a pirate ship on her virgin sea. I flicked my cigarette at Dickwad. "Whatever you say, Donny boy." I was glad he hadn't said anything about my teeth. I hadn't had a professional cleaning in nine years. I didn't have the money. My ex-girlfriend told me my teeth looked like kernels of corn the day we broke up. I told her I had slept with someone else, even though I hadn't.

The interior of Dickwad's car was always in order. His compact disc cases were neatly stacked on the center console, the floor mats were spotless, and the leather upholstery smelled like it had just been rubbed with an oil treatment. He Armor-Alled his dashboard weekly, waxed the paint bi-monthly, and checked the air pressure of his tires with a small tool that his grandfather had given to him, his initials engraved on the metallic handle, "W.P."

I watched from the passenger seat as he dropped down below the fender of the car. "How's the tire pressure, Dickwad? Are the PSI's in order? We don't want to crash and die. Are you sure we're safe?" I yelled through the foggy glass.

"Suck it," he said back. He had his traditions. That was certain.

I stared in the rear view mirror, watching his sister wrap her tongue around her lollipop thinking of that night eleven years ago. It was a cold night, October 31st 1999. She had just

come home from trick-or-treating with her friends. Her tongue, from so many years of wrestling with lollipops, was the strongest muscle on her body. Her breath smelled like Peppermint Schnapps.

“Why are you staring at me?” Dickwad’s sister asked.

I didn’t answer.

When Dickwad had finished checking all four tires, he sat down in the driver’s seat and started the engine.

“Finally,” I said.

“The rear driver’s side is a little low. Let’s say our three Hail Mary’s,” he responded.

Dickwad bowed his head and closed his eyes. “Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee...”

The steam from his exhaust pipe sailed out from the car. We headed west towards Highway 101, Santa Paula disappearing behind mountains of oak and orange trees. We watched California pass through our windows like an unwinding roll of film, the ocean on our left, an opaque gray seamlessly blending into the sky.

We stopped once to use the bathroom and get gasoline in San Jose. Outside the bathroom door, I could hear Dickwad’s sister’s piss streaming out of her, carving into the toilet water. I wondered if she was still shaved down there. The bathroom door opened.

“The toilet doesn’t flush,” she said as she passed me by.

I stared into the toilet bowl and added a tint of deep yellow to her pale mustard aquatic canvas. Like the colors on Renoir’s palette, our fluids mixed divinely. If it wasn’t for Dickwad, I wouldn’t have known who Renoir was. I wouldn’t have had anything to think about staring down at a bowl of urine.

Outside of Eureka, Dickwad nodded his head at the storm clouds that brought darkness to the sky an hour early. “It wouldn’t be a road trip without thunder.”

Thunder struck a moment later. Dickwad dropped one of his hands from the 10 and 2 position on the steering wheel and sighed. “It seemed like back in the eighties whenever we had thunderstorms the power would go out. My grandfather would light oil lanterns for us to see by, then bundle me up in a blanket, make some hot cocoa, and take me outside to watch the lightning.”

I contemplated the feeling of being wrapped in a blanket. It seemed like it would have felt nice. “My grandfather used to pound whiskey and tell me stories about hanging Japs upside-down from trees and leaving them to die during The War.” I paused for a moment to think about the stinking line of people that had fucked each other until I was born. We were a royal family of idiocy. Although they were family, I didn’t really know any of them.

“We all have our stories.” Dickwad pushed a hand through his silky hair.

“You got any Dave Matthews Band in here?” I asked. Don Johnson and Dave Mathews were small episodes of Dickwad’s life he could never run away from. Luckily, he grew out of both after he lost his virginity. I lit a cigarette.

“Can you believe he used to listen to that shit?” Dickwad’s sister laughed, unwrapping another Blow-Pop and pressing it deep into her cheek. “My brother used to be so lame.”

“You can’t smoke in here,” Dickwad said. He flicked the cigarette from my lips. “I don’t want my leather to smell like a Moose Lodge.”

Dickwad only said one word over the next two hours. “Lightning.” The sky flashed.

At a motel outside Crescent City near the Oregon border, Dickwad stood before two doors with the numbers 11 and 12 on them. “I’ll take this one. You two take that one.”

Dickwad never wanted anyone around him when he slept. He had made that error in judgment when we were younger. I had made him pay for his mistake by doing everything possible to a sleeping friend to make his morning miserable. I never tea-bagged him though. That seemed gay.

“You want us to share a room?” I looked down at his sister’s ass from the corner of my eye.

“Yeah. She snores. I trust you,” Dickwad said.

Dickwad sat on his bed in the yellow light of the motel room reading a new book. I don’t have x-ray vision. I suppose that Dickwad’s ability to sense weather was somewhat like my ability to tell you what people are doing when I can’t see them. For instance, the book he was reading was by Joan Didion. I didn’t know who she was. She was probably some feminist, knowing Dickwad. He was the smartest guy I knew. If his grandfather hadn’t died, he might have even gone to college. Being a master electrician paid his grandfather’s mortgage. Still, I felt sorry for his brain. It must have been like being veal.

It didn’t take long for Dickwad’s sister to turn me on. All she had to say was, “I’m gonna take a shower.” I could hear her fumbling with the doorknob inside the bathroom, trying to work the lock. Then she sighed. I heard her bra hit the ground, then a soft cottony whisper as her underwear dropped to the tile. The shower knobs squeaked. Steam began to pour out from underneath the door. I wish I could say that she immediately started masturbating. But she didn’t. She rinsed her face first. Then she stared down at her vagina. Maybe it was too hairy for her. She washed the crack of her ass, then sat down in the tub and started to think. She could have been thinking about the last time she saw her mother. She could almost feel the woman’s cold lipstick stuck to her cheek. She sat there unmoving, taking short breaths.

I hadn't noticed the three semi-trucks parked outside of the motel. Looking out the streaked window, I could see one of the truckers smoking a cigarette and tapping a tire with the toe of his cowboy boot. He didn't have a handlebar mustache, or a mustard yellow trucker-hat on. Instead, he wore a burgundy tie and a pair of tight brown trousers, his testicles split in half by the crotch seem. A neon pink light across the highway blinked in his misty eyes. It read, "The Landing Strip." There weren't any windows on the building. He pulled a small flask from inside his coat pocket, took a pull, then tucked it back in. He didn't need to look both ways before he crossed the wet two lane highway. It was dark. No one else was coming.

Dickwad's sister emerged from the shower with a towel wrapped around her breasts. The towel wasn't very wide. It looked like an empty banner that hadn't been sloganized yet. I tried to think of something to write across it. The bottom of her butt cheeks barely dropped out from under the white cotton as she passed by me. She pointed her ass towards the window away from my eyes and pulled on a pair of underwear. They were an aquamarine color, much like her eyes. She slid into bed with her towel on, pulled the covers up to her chin, then pulled the towel off. "Goodnight," she said.

I fell asleep with Dickwad's sister blinking through my mind. I was no sloganeer. I wasn't much of anything.

Dickwad knocked on our door early in the morning.

"Can you get it?" his sister asked. "I'm naked."

Aside from the whiskers on his face, Dickwad's skin looked fresh, like an advertisement for expensive aftershave. He had already taken a shower and held in his hand two pieces of toast and a cup of coffee. "You kids ready to hit the road?" He threw a piece of toast at his sister,

then handed me the coffee and the other piece. “It’s got margarine on it already.” Everything he did was just like his grandfather. Even the way he treated his sister. She ate the toast off of the mangy comforter just like his great aunt.

Oregon had a distinct taste to it. I had never tasted another state before. I had been to Las Vegas, Nevada, twice in my life, but Vegas had no taste. If it had a taste, I wasn’t aware of it. Maybe I didn’t want it to have a taste. I think it would have tasted like a condom.

I stared out the window at the evergreen trees and watched as small waterfalls fell from jagged cliffs. The rocks were covered in a soft green moss so that the boulders looked like giant emeralds. My mother told me I had emerald eyes once. I liked her sometimes. Even though she never bailed me out of jail. “I didn’t do it,” I told her once before.

“You guys taste that?” I asked.

“Taste what?” Dickwad said.

“This state tastes like something,” I said.

Dickwad nodded his head in agreement, cracking his window another inch. “That taste, my friend, is the taste of freedom. What the United States used to taste like.”

His sister shook her head. “Smells like pine trees to me.” Her mouth was too full of cherry flavored lollipops to taste anything else.

“Chem-trail,” Dickwad said pointing up into the overcast sky. “Cloud seeding.”

Dickwad shook his head. “Here comes the rain.” He turned the windshield wipers on, and shot me a concerned look. “Roll up your window. I don’t want the mind serum they put in the rainwater to touch us.” Dickwad pushed his hair over his ears, as if trying to block an entrance.

It stopped raining by the time we hit the Idaho border. At a truck stop in Nyssa, I listened to Dickwad’s sister unzip her jeans and piss into a toilet bowl again.

“This toilet flushes,” she said to me. She smiled this time when she passed.

I looked in the bathroom mirror while I washed my hands. I wasn't a bad looking guy, aside from my teeth. I walked out of the bathroom without flushing and wandered around the mart, blending in with the potato chips and novelty shirts. I stuck a package of Crest Whitening Strips into my pocket and walked out of the market without looking back. Whenever I looked back, I got caught. “I didn't do it,” I would say. No one ever believed me.

I watched the sign that read “Welcome to Wyoming” pass by in the headlights of Dickwad's car. I thought about the last time I had read the word “Wyoming.” I couldn't remember. Wyoming.

“Custer's last stand,” I said to no one in particular. “Unlucky bastard.”

“Custer was a fascist,” his sister said.

“The Battle of Little Big Horn took place in Montana, not Wyoming,” Dickwad said.

“You barely finished high school,” his sister replied.

Dickwad didn't have anything else to say. We all knew he sacrificed straight A's for keeping his depleted family together. He turned the channel on the radio until he found a station playing big band music. “They just don't play it like this any more, do they?” The song remained the same until we finally stopped to sleep.

The motel that night looked exactly like the one in Crescent City, except for that it was in Wyoming. The sky looked bigger. There was a bar across the street that advertised “Ice Cold Beer.”

Dickwad read Joan. He kept his socks on and curled up into his pillows with a smile on his face. He drank a decaffeinated cup of coffee. He didn't want to stay up all night.

I watched Dickwad's sister move around the room. She seemed like a woman now.

“I’m gonna take a shower,” she said. Her undergarments hit the floor. The shower knobs creaked. She sat down in the tub, letting the water run down her face like counterfeit tears. She might have been thinking about how lonely she felt that day she got her period for the first time. Her vagina was hairier.

With my legs dangling over the bed, I thought about what I would say to Dickwad’s sister this time when she got out of the shower. That basketball player in high school had waited for his girlfriend to come out of the shower with a balloon tied around his dick. But he was a basketball player. He probably seemed cool.

I pulled off my clothes and got into my bed. I hadn’t slept naked since my last girlfriend twenty pounds ago. The shower turned off. Dickwad’s sister came out with her towel on, steam rising from her skin. This time she said, “Close your eyes.” I could hear the towel drop to the dirty carpet. Then her warm body hit the mattress and the sheets slid up to her chin. “You can open them now.”

I opened my eyes. She was in her bed. Her eyes were closed.

“Goodnight,” she said.

“Goodnight,” I said back.

I waited for her to start snoring before I rummaged through my jeans pocket, removing the whitening strips. I pressed them into my teeth. They didn’t have much taste to them. I popped a painkiller into my belly and fell asleep thinking of her body, sweet, unused, at 15 years old. Her tongue tasted like a synthetic grape, like a flavored condom. I assume.

In the morning, the phone rang.

“Can you get that, I’m naked,” Dickwad’s sister said.

“So am I,” I said.

“Ewww,” she replied. “Close your eyes.”

I could hear the plastic mold of the earpiece lift from the body of the telephone.

“Hello?” There was a pause. I could hear her feet shift towards me. She looked at me and her eyes went soft for a moment. It didn’t matter that I could not see. She shifted her hips like a woman after a glass of wine. “It’s Dickwad.” She dropped the phone on the table. “You can open your eyes.” I caught a glimpse of her ass as she passed me on the way to the bathroom. She had tan lines where her bra straps had been.

“Yeah?” I said into the phone.

Dickwad combed his hair in the mirror and slid his grandfather’s wristwatch over his long slender fingers. “I spoke to a woman out in Watertown a few minutes ago,” he said.

“What did she say?” I asked

“She said she’s heard of ‘a rock out in the middle of nowhere’ before,” he replied.

“Nice,” I said.

“Yeah,” he remarked.

“Where is nowhere?” I asked.

“She doesn’t know.”

I stared at my teeth in the mirror. The only thing separating Dickwad and I from a face to face conversation was a couple inch-thick pieces of drywall. “Too bad,” I said.

“Yeah. You want some toast?” he asked.

After we hung up, Dickwad smiled to himself. He smiled like his grandfather had been reborn in front of him. He twirled the keys to the car around his index finger, then fired an

invisible pistol at his reflection. He made a sound with his mouth that could have represented a bullet or a punctured tire.

I didn't catch the sign that read "South Dakota 1 Mile." I was too busy thinking about Dickwad's sister. I decided I would go on a diet, stop taking pills. "I think I'm gonna be a vegetarian," I said out loud.

Dickwad smiled. "I'm telling you, it's the only way to live. You'll feel good again, I promise." He dropped his hand to my knee and jiggled my leg. I felt around in my pocket for the remaining two whitening strips.

Dickwad's sister hadn't eaten yet that day. "I'm hungry," she said.

At a burger joint off the highway, I ordered a Caesar Salad. The brown vinyl booth squeaked underneath my palms. I think I was cold. That was why I was sitting on my hands.

"Caesar salads aren't vegetarian," Dickwad said.

"We don't have any croutons," the waitress added.

Dickwad wiped the bright red lipstick left by another customer off of his coffee mug and ordered a grilled cheese sandwich. His sister got a cheeseburger. She ate half of it, bloody juices running down her chin, before I got a hard-on.

When the waitress returned with our check, Dickwad smiled. She hated her job, but she couldn't resist his smile. His teeth were like white lotus flowers. His mouth was like a perfect Hindu shrine. I had seen a picture of one before.

"You ever hear of a rock out in the middle of nowhere near Watertown with the name William Parkman chiseled into it?" Dickwad asked the waitress.

"No, she said, "I can't say that I have."

Dickwad left her a tip only a dickwad would leave for a lipstick-stained coffee cup and a sandwich made with American cheese and expired margarine.

We reached Watertown at around 5 pm. Dickwad insisted that we head to the local bar and have a few beers on him. Maybe we would run into someone who knew where the rock was.

The bar was already silent, but it reached a level of silence unfathomable as we walked in the door. Dickwad's sister was the only human with breasts. Dickwad and I were the only two men not wearing a down vest and a mustache.

I have never heard much about bears in South Dakota. They seemed like creatures that remained loyal to Alaska and Montana. Nonetheless, a stuffed grizzly stood in a large corner behind the bar, a sign hung from his paw, "86 is a four letter word."

"Isn't 'bear' a four letter word?" I said to Dickwad's sister.

"Yeah," she said.

"That's not what it means," Dickwad said to both of us.

We ordered three Budweiser's from an old bartender who wore a purple heart pinned to his flannel shirt.

"I don't want a beer," Dickwad's sister said, sliding between us at the bar. "Gimme a blueberry press," she said to the bartender.

The bartender didn't say a word. He didn't move. It was as if the last five seconds had not happened. Perhaps the phrase "blueberry press" was a sort of time machine. Dickwad and I stared at the head of a stuffed moose above the head of the stuffed bartender and waited. He slid two Budweiser's in front of us and pushed the pomade through his yellow-gray hair.

"We don't have any blueberries here."

Dickwad's sister pulled a lollipop with a blue wrapper from her pocket. "Just make it a vodka on the rocks."

Dickwad wrapped his arm around me and took a deep breath. The stench of the brown carpet and faux wooden walls caked in cigarette smoke and dead skin cells must have burned his lungs. "This looks like a place my grandfather would have liked if he were still alive today," he said. "He was in the Knights of Columbus you know."

The white stripes on an American Flag draped above the main wall of the room had been stained yellow from years of smoky nicotine. The Monday Night Football game on the television was barely visible between the static. The bartender fidgeted with the antennas.

"Why don't you just get one of them Jap T.V.'s?" someone said. The bartender turned red. His purple heart thumped. It got quiet again.

"Shoot. I didn't bring snow chains," Dickwad said.

We got up to go outside and catch snowflakes on our tongue. The bartender joined us in the cold for a cigarette. Out from behind the bar, he looked as if he would almost smile.

"Where you kids from?" he asked.

"California," Dickwad said.

"What brings you to Watertown?" the bartender asked.

"We're looking for a rock," Dickwad's sister said.

The bartender nodded his head. I think he knew what we were talking about. But I can't read minds.

"Ever heard of a William Parkman?" Dickwad asked.

"No sir," the bartender said. Then he crushed his cigarette underneath his shoes even though it wasn't finished.

We stumbled towards the motel in town. Dickwad's sister put her hand around my waist to keep her balance, then quickly pulled it away. No one slipped on the icy sidewalk. I thought that was interesting.

Inside the motel office, Dickwad stared at the sleeping face of the elderly desk attendant. He gently pressed down on the small silver bell, a faint chime bringing her back from her travels halfway to death.

"How can I help you young folks?" she asked.

"We'd like two rooms for the evening," Dickwad said.

As Dickwad put his credit card down, he stopped, inspecting the woman's wrinkles. Her face looked like a tree trunk that had been cut in half. "How old are you, if you don't mind my asking?"

The woman smiled and straightened her spine. "I'll be ninety-two on Thursday."

"You don't look a day over thirty," Dickwad said.

The woman used what was left of her blood supply to blush.

"You ever hear of a rock somewhere in these parts with William Parkman's name on it?" Dickwad inquired.

The old woman's eyes blinked slowly. "Yes," she said. "As a matter of fact, I have."

"Do you know where it is?" Dickwad asked.

She fumbled around with the room keys. "Oh I don't know. I think it's north of here, out on the old Barksdale ranch."

"Much obliged, my darling," Dickwad said. He raised the woman's hand to his lips, and kissed her varicose veins.

In his motel room, Dickwad put his Joan Didion book down and laid on his back. He closed his eyes. He could have been thinking about his grandfather's home in Santa Paula, moving psychically through each room, running his fingertips across the man's big walnut desk, his steel filing cabinets, the yellow-flowered wallpaper in the kitchen, the brown carpet in the living room, sticking his nose in the roses in the front yard. Perhaps he had not wanted childhood to end. Maybe it was only in adulthood that he contemplated what a bad hand he had been dealt.

I kept my socks on. I thought it was a bit cold in my room, even with the heater on.

"I'm gonna take a shower," Dickwad's sister said. She closed the bathroom door, but did not bother locking it. I heard her bra hit the ground, but not her underwear. The door opened back up. She covered her breasts, a small amount of yellow light glowing behind her.

"Will you sit in here with me while I take a shower?" she asked.

"Sure," I said.

I laid down on my back on the pale pink tile floor, pressed a whitening strip to my teeth, and pushed a hand-towel behind my head for a pillow. I liked listening to the water fall from the shower to the tub. It was like an artificial waterfall. If I closed my eyes, I could imagine all the places I wished I had been.

I could hear her butt cheeks splash against the tub as she sat down. I stared at the shower curtain looking for her silhouette, but found only my shadow. She ran two fingers down between her legs. I touched myself through my jeans. It didn't take me long to come, thinking of the places I had been on her body. The water turned off. I opened my eyes to a cloud of steam. She stepped out of the shower and over my head, hot water dripping from her buttocks onto my chin.

"Goodnight" she said.

Dickwad woke us up at sunrise that morning. We hadn't bothered to lock the door the night before. He stood there staring at us in each of our beds. Maybe he felt like a father for the first time.

"Up and at em," he yelled, shaking our legs with each of his hands. "It's time to find the rock!" He handed me a beer. "To the rock!" He pressed his bottle to mine.

Dickwad's sister sat in her bed, up to her neck in covers. I took a sip, then passed it to her.

"Thank you," she said.

In the car, Dickwad popped a Mozart cassette into the tape deck and began playing an imaginary violin as he steered through the melting snow with his knees. I could feel the tires giving way to the ice as he weaved down the long narrow highway towards the Barksdale ranch. He pulled another beer from the bucket in the backseat and began to hum along to the piece.

"This is my favorite," he said. "Wolfgang." The back tires swerved a little more. His sister leaned forward, but did not say anything. She might have been worried that her words would add extra weight to the rear of the car, just enough to send us into an embankment of snowy death.

"You got snow tires on this car?" I asked. I didn't want to die, but sometimes Dickwad said he did.

"Nope," Dickwad said. "Sun's coming out."

I put on my sunglasses. His sister began squinting.

The Barksdale ranch was hardly a “ranch” anymore. What was once an impressive homestead was now a few splinters of scattered wood. The only structure left standing was an outhouse with a rope attached to it.

Dickwad inspected the frail latrine, opening and closing the limp door. “My grandfather told me that when a blizzard would come through and you had to use the can, you had to follow the rope from the front door to the outhouse, otherwise you could get lost and die. Zero visibility you know.”

We stood staring out across the Great Plains, 325 acres that at one time had belonged to someone named Barksdale. Maybe he was an engineer with Great Northern. He probably had a nice mustache.

“Finding that rock out here is the equivalent of finding that outhouse without a rope in a blizzard,” I said.

Dickwad nodded his head. “You’re probably right.” He picked up the rope attached to the outhouse and began walking.

We followed along behind him. I was amazed at how big his feet were. My little feet sunk snugly into his snowy footprints, and his sister’s into mine.

“I want to thank you guys for coming out here with me,” Dickwad said. “It means a lot to me.”

“I liked your grandfather,” I said. “I would have done the same thing.”

Dickwad kept tugging at the rope hoping to find something attached to the end of it, but only more rope slid through his hands as we wandered further away from the road.

I turned around to see if Dickwad's sister was all right. She walked solemnly in the snow with her head down, but this time, without a lollipop. She could have been thinking about the last time she made love. It wasn't her idea. She was too drunk to stop it.

"Holy shit," Dickwad said.

Gray clouds began to move in. I looked up waiting for something to happen in the sky, but instead, Dickwad dropped the rope, and began running towards a large object in the middle of the white field.

His sister and I ran after him. Next to an abandoned set of railroad tracks that once led people towards lovers and their future stood a large rock, the name "William Parkman" chiseled into it, the date "11-04-32" underneath it.

William Parkman III dropped to his knees and ran his long slender fingers across the numbers and letters. A tear froze in the corner of his eye. "It's gonna snow pretty hard," he said.

I had never seen a blizzard before. It only took a few moments for the snow to collapse upon us like a dump-truck full of icy white. We sat down next to each other in the snow, pressing our bodies together for warmth. I smiled.

Dickwad's sister looked at me. "Your teeth look yellow," she said.

There were no other colors in the world except for my yellow teeth and the stark white of a South Dakota blizzard. I fondled the last whitening strip in my pocket. "I have to go to the bathroom," I said.

"Don't get lost," Dickwad said.

I stood up and began following the rope through the snow. Dickwad and his sister sat silently, their heads pressed together, their bodies dissolving behind a curtain of white. Maybe

they were thinking of their parents and their grandfather, how everyone around them seemed to die.

I opened the door to the outhouse and pulled a knife from my pocket. I pressed the tip of the blade into the wood. "Chris Duke 11-04-10." I wondered if someone someday, a grandson or a widow, would care enough about me to come find this outhouse. I unzipped my pants. It was yellow. I was cold.