

You wake up in a memory and wander through it and into another. You are four years old, running barefoot on the sidewalk. You step on a bee and scream and the sound makes the stop sign shake. Your mother gives a homeless woman with hair like an old Raggedy-Anne doll a bottle of water. The Raggedy-Anne woman unscrews the cap and pours the water over her hands, black as motor oil. She picks grime from her fingernails with other, grimier fingernails. You are either eight or nine years old, you think, because you're wearing the pukka shell necklace Rebecca Spradling with the blonde hair made fun of on the first day of fifth grade. You threw it away right when you got home. You get your first period while walking your dog, Ollie. You are eleven. Jean shorts and knee-high socks. Blood trickles out from one and soaks the edges of the other. Ollie tries to comfort you by licking it off. You were the first girl to get boobs and belly-button studs, too. Boys look at you differently when you're that girl. You either draw in or break out. I broke out.

Before Ed, there was that tan, track-team boy whose name was something Greek, like Stavros or Tassos. He chased me to the bus stop. He chased me to the neighborhood park at night. He chased me every which way but when we got to it all he ever did was kiss me and feel me up and he never went lower no matter how much I moved my body to tell him that I wanted him to.

There was another boy with a goatee and a Toyota 4Runner. He had a smooth way of talking and when he took it from me I didn't say yes. But I didn't say no. I didn't say much at all. There was a yellow street light as high as the starlight and the warm hood of a car and a motel poolside where the water shone bright on the walls. I never saw him

again after that.

When I was sixteen I met Ed and we've been together ever since. We were camp counselors. I remember the first time I saw him, he was showing kids how to shoot free throws and I saw his eyes and they were the color of dried foothills, right before someone on the highway tossed a cigarette and the grass turned into fire and half the county burned. From the baby-faced looks he gave me, the happy curve of his cheeks, you could tell he'd had it easy. I'd eat granola bars for lunch, and so one day he brought an extra peanut butter & jelly sandwich for me. I didn't want to eat his food. I had food at home I just didn't always like eating. But I said yes and he kept bringing them until summer was over.

I could hit fast-forward from there. A blackout prom. Staying home together for college. Big-breasted sorority girls studying with him late at night. Sophomore split. Late-night lonesome. Back together and unsure. A summer tandem bike. Realizing how stupid it was and stringing a FREE sign around the handlebars. Carving our initials on an old gnarled oak tree. Ed took out his little Swiss Army knife and I told him not to be lame. We just got back together, I didn't want my name carved into anything. There was some crack about woodworkers after he finished and this is the first time I remember thinking Ed couldn't do anything without adding a practiced look or a snarky line of self-deprecation. Subtle hedges were his addiction. Carving the tree is still probably the most permanent thing he's ever done.

You come out of it. Like waking up and not knowing where you are or what you are. Unsure what was memory and what was dream, what was a dream of a memory and a memory of a dream. Did I remember stepping on a bee or my mother telling me about

it? Was the Raggedy-Anne lady a nightmare? Maybe I did say yes to the boy with the goatee on the hood of his car and had been too drunk to remember. Maybe I almost went all the way with the Greek boy, maybe he came prematurely and I blocked it out. Maybe Ed loved me more than carving a tree could tell. But, I still avoid that tree, to this day. I can't stand seeing my name underneath his with the little plus sign in between.

#

We decide to leave Daisy with a babysitter for the first time. She is two. And I am worried.

Cigarettes and Natural Ice and babbling at each other—this is how we plan to lure nostalgia out of stale nothing. Big old dreams, you know. Blue, I tell Ed, not the yellow pack. If I keep it to one or two and wash like hell I won't get nicotine on the skin of the only thing that ever mattered to me.

I watch a group of teenage boys on skateboards. Adam's apples jutting, tan arms poking out of tiny sleeves, the 7-Eleven side parking lot with its broken air pump and ripped out payphone is their playground.

The tallest boy has eyes like dried grass and a beard that's barely there. His skin is the color of walnut shells. I watch him jump his board onto the sidewalk and roll past our front bumper. He notices me staring and smiles. So confident, like he was touching my ass from outside the car. I remembered boys like him: sleepy-eyed, spitting through chain link fences.

I can't help but smile back, shocked at the absurd rush in my chest. Every time I wear the low-cut lavender shirt—it's gross, honestly—men let their eyes linger on the overlarge, milk-swollen boobs I'm still not totally used to. The boy doesn't though. He

pivots and stops. I try to meet eyes again and the rush in my chest rains and somehow my seatbelt is undone and—*No, don't think about that. Don't.*

#

I will tell you how a day goes. You pick up your daughter. You nurse her in the backseat to calm her into a car seat that's peppered with melted crayons and mashed banana. Your butt sweats. Everything itches. You undo the hair you tied up that morning, still moist in spots from a shower you can't remember. The only thing that ever mattered to you relaxes and asks for graham crackers.

At home your husband is cooking. The smell is woody and savory. You know the smell will be better than the texture. You know the flavor won't match the smell. He probably watched a cooking show and deviated just enough to feel creative. Your daughter takes her shoes off and runs upstairs to her little pink bookshelf with the cubby full of stuffies that she likes to take out and arrange for tea parties.

Or all of this happens with a lot more crying, or a lot less, and some nights you go to sleep thinking in semi-circles. And some nights you sleep without remembering how you fell asleep. And some nights you don't sleep.

#

Adlai Stevenson University is part utilitarian concrete blocks and part wilderness. Acres and acres of it. Blackberry bushes hide an icy creek you'd have trouble finding if you looked for it. Willow trees droop over a pond where ducks and geese feed on Cheetos. The far side of campus is covered with oaks and foot-high grasses and swishing wildflowers. Bike trails lead to hidden groves with butterflies, to sudden parking lots with Port-a-Potties and muddy gravel. To the tree with Ed's name carved into it, just above

mine.

My office on campus isn't much to look at. No decorations on the wall except for a cork board with a bunch of colored tacks. Three pictures stand on my desk: Ed in sunglasses, Daisy wearing a navy sweatshirt on the beach, and another where she's smiling with a ring of yogurt around her mouth.

I turn the ceiling light off and open the blinds. Students walk along an asphalt path from dorm to class and back. A middle-aged man wanders around, wearing blue Wranglers, white tennis shoes and a tee shirt tucked in tightly over his belly. He's trying to hand the students lime-green flyers but nobody takes them. Some wave him off. Some ignore him by pulling out their phones

One lanky girl in basketball shorts and knee-high socks walks past without acknowledging him and he follows. She grips the straps of her backpack and rushes away. The man tries to keep up but his legs are stiff and stubborn. One step too fast and he stumbles and falls down. The flyers go the other way.

Hundreds of them float down and settle on bushes and bikes and mud puddles, like green warnings dropped from a plane. No one stops to help him. I have nothing else to do.

The sun is covered by a stray cloud. Two flyers flutter near the automatic doors so I scoop them up. There's a few more on the path. One has a muddy footprint.

"Thank you," a strained, gravelly voice says.

The man looks worse up close. Tiny purple veins climb across his overripe nose. A zit on his eyebrow has a bubble of blood from incessant picking. It looks like he tried to comb his hair back and style it, but it's long in weird places and thinning underneath.

“No problem,” I say, handing him the stack.

“Mind posting a few?” he asks. “Around the school?”

“Um, I work here, so...you know. I don’t think we’re allowed.”

This is a lie, but only in the sense that it’s a fake excuse. I mean it could actually be a real rule, but I have no idea. Hanging up some weirdo’s missing cat posters around campus is not something I want to get caught up in.

He shows me a flyer. A white square with a pixelated photo of a young man is in the middle of all that green. I notice a speckle of beard playing along his jaw.

“Please,” he says. “My son’s been gone for a week...we’re so worried. My wife can’t sleep, I can’t...”

It’s one of those senior yearbook pictures where boys wear prop tuxedos and the girls wear prop gowns. I recognize the boy. He rode a skateboard in the 7-Eleven parking lot and had a grin you wouldn’t trust yourself around.

#

I squeeze through the door holding grocery bags in one arm and Daisy in the other. I see my reflection in the window. *Is this what I look like?* Thin, greasy hair. Thin, greasy face. Thin, greasy eyelids. *Did the boy think this was sexy?* It was an impulse. *Is that what’s wrong, impulse control?* Something yanks on my sleeve. *I don’t know what’s wrong with me.*

Daisy needs help with her shoes and demands chocolate milk in her sweet way. Our hellos to Daddy are practiced. I change into five-thirty pajamas, the joyous slubby sweats and tee no one has to see me in.

At the table Ed asks about my day. I take a bite of wet chicken when he glances at

my plate. I'm not sure how to tiptoe around something Ed doesn't even know about. But I start talking and it's the first thing I say.

"There was a weird guy on campus today," I tell him.

"Oh yeah?"

"Not weird, I guess, but...I don't know. You know how older alcoholics get the tiny red veins all over their face?"

"Think so..."

"We always talk about your Dad having red veins on his nose from drinking. Now you don't know about it?"

"Yeah, I heard you about the veins, Es."

"Whatever," I say. "Forget it."

"I build a car today, Momma," Daisy intervenes on instinct. "Momma, *Momma!*"

"Wow, sweetie. What kind?"

She stands up in her chair like she isn't supposed to.

"My hair is crazy, Momma. Momma?"

"Yes?"

"Hey Momma, I build a car *yesterday*. Daddy! I build a car yesterday and it was really...big!"

"Honey, that's amazing." Ed pushes chicken onto her plate with his fork. "I built a *truck!*"

"No you don't Daddy."

"I'm sorry," he says. "I'm just tired. I'm sorry. What was up with the weird guy?"

You haven't hated somebody until you've loved them, until they fuck you several

hundred times and those memories string together into a B-movie you only recall when you try not to. Late Sunday, March rain, open windows and oversweet gardenias; after a strawberry waffle that didn't sit well, clenching and hoping; at the foot of a sand dune, sunny and cold; hands and knees in front of the worn, cream-colored apartment couch.

“He was handing out flyers to students on the quad. Nobody would take them.”

“Lost dog?”

A missing boy. Light eyes. A speckle of a beard. The rush at being in pub—*Don't think about that.*

“His son is missing.”

“Is he a student?”

“No,” I say. “I guess he hung around the neighborhood.”

“Poor guy.”

“Do you remember that day at 7-Eleven? When those kids were skateboarding in the parking lot?”

“Oh yeah. It's *skating*, honey,” Ed's look is amused. “You got so sick that day. That night too, jeez.”

“I think one of them was his son.”

Daisy smacks Ed and screams, knowing what's next.

“Daddy I don't *wanna* take a bathtub!”

Ed hauls her upstairs without answering.

I clear the table. Fill the sink with steaming water. The sun sank below the green and orange 7-Eleven sign and I inhaled deeply from the cigarette. A few minutes later, Ed pulled over so I could puke out the window. The sun over the tiled roofs of the shopping

center and I was under the fingernails of a swooning. *Stop thinking about it.*

Ed folds towels that naked Daisy has un-folded. I lift her into the bath and she starts to pee.

“I pee in the tub, Mama,” she says.

#

As I walk through the office lobby, the headset ladies at the front counter nod or stare blankly to say hello. Only Fran with the long black braid waves. She follows me into my office.

“Did you hear?” she asks.

“Not right now, okay? I just got in—

“They found a dead body on campus.”

Muscles quiver around my spine.

“Who told you that?” I ask.

“The landscapers found it out past the Mossy Bridge, by the creek,” she says.

All I can do is shake my head.

“Guess no walk at lunch, huh?” she says, and hands me a folder. “Anyways, can you update these? They don’t like that font.”

“You know you can just email these, right?” I call out as she heads back to her desk, leaving my office door open as some kind of answer.

The news breaks on TV that night. The newscaster drones about an unidentified male body and Adlai Stevenson University before moving to politics.

“Was that about ASU?” Ed asks out of nowhere. I hadn’t realized he’d sat down on the couch.

“What?”

“They found a dead body on campus?”

“I guess.”

“What? How?”

“How did they find it?”

“No, how’d they die?”

I shrug to answer.

“I don’t know.”

“Sweetie...Jesus, that’s *two* blocks away from us. Jesus Christ. Did you see it?”

Ed doesn’t fucking believe in Jesus. I don’t point this out. A fight bubbles around us. You learn to have a contrary reaction to your partner’s: they get angry, you think they’re being ridiculous; you get angry, they won’t put themselves in your shoes.

“The body? You think I’d see a dead body and not tell you?”

“No, I mean did you see *anything*? Cops or weird people or whatever...I don’t know.”

“There were helicopters flying around. Fran said they don’t know who it is. Was.”

I wonder what I can say so I don’t have to say anything else. “I heard they found it by the creek.”

Ed gets up from the couch to pace around the living room and I head upstairs to check on Daisy, then across the hall to curl up under the down comforter.

I have no idea what I should think about. Dreams and designs and logos with skylights embedded and inverted. An ambition without much in the way of form or construct, other than not doing what I have been doing for years. Like I stepped just to

the side of the bed. Like I saw the boy with the tan arms and eyes braided out of dying grass and just-right stubble in my medicine cabinet mirror. Like Ed never offered me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

I feel Ed walk into the bedroom. The heat changes. Or the light. He eases into bed. I feel him behind me in that hard, hard way. Right away. A man who had once worked at it, jokes and high-brow factoids and looks he totally practiced in a mirror, all to get me to say yes you can undo whatever zippers or buttons or hooks you find, pull everything down and press yourself on me. He pushes his penis on you but you've already let him be naked next to you, so you wonder what this pretense is for.

"Hey," he whispers into an unsexy portion of my hair. I don't answer.

Ed slides his hands up under my t-shirt. No, his t-shirt. My nipple hardens and he takes that as some kind of yes. It's more of a whatever. It seems like it's been awhile. A flicker of stubble, barely there. The image doesn't turn me on. I close my eyes while he does his thing.

#

It's on the air. On car radios. On the puzzled faces of people I pass on the sidewalk and in the quiet arguments students have outside of the campus café. A week later that the police identify the remains.

"Did you hear?" Fran asks me, after knocking on my office door.

"What?"

"The body. It was that boy. The boy on the flyer that man was handing out. It's his son. Was."

The man with the flyers. The boy with a smile that cracks every car window he passes. Ed buys cigarettes that will churn my stomach and ruin our night. He pours a bottle of water over the yellow vomit on the car door and I'll remember the Raggedy-Anne lady washing her horrible fingers. Later, I'll drink all of the wine in the house. Still later, house asleep, I'll search for something, anything in the night. *No, that was a dream.* But the parking lot wasn't. My seatbelt unclicks. My nipples shriek, my own hands not anyone else's pull my shirt down. The air is cool. I am exposed. The boys pump their fists and clasp their hands behind their heads. I am encouraged and give a shake and they cheer. A rush in my chest then shame, swirling like macaroni in the sink. Daisy's leftovers. I remember the only thing that ever mattered to me and hide my dangly, chewed nipples, darker than I ever could have imagined any part of my body could look. It isn't and hasn't ever been my body, you know.

"Esme?" Fran asks.

"Are you kidding?" I make my voice sound shrill, shocked. I'm past shocked, but I also haven't slept more than four hours straight since Daisy was born so every reaction feels half-real, like things are happening behind greasy lenses.

"No. It was just on TV," Fran coughs.

"It's fucked up."

Fran raises her eyebrows, but nods.

"It's awful."

#

The next day I find Ed scrolling through news stories about the dead boy on his iPad. He doesn't notice me peering over his shoulder.

“What’re you reading?” I say.

“Gah!” Ed jumps. “I thought you were putting her down for a nap?”

“Yeah, she’s asleep. You okay?”

The time he takes to continue scrolling is enough time for his eyes to sharpen.

“You know,” he says. “After you told me about the boy at 7-Eleven and the news about the murder, I remembered something.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah. I was pretty groggy that night. But I woke up and you weren’t in bed.”

Somehow, I make my face look puzzled while I scramble for an excuse that fits a memory I can barely picture.

“I called out for you,” he says. “I got out of bed but I couldn’t find you. You weren’t by Daisy. She was sleeping.”

“Huh,” I say. “Probably getting water or whatever.”

“I *know* you left that night,” he says. “I just don’t know where you went.”

A yellow streetlight. The boy who had since died smiled under it. The goateed boy who talked smooth when I was just a wildflower blooming on his car hood hadn’t smiled. And a tree. *A carved tree*. But that was a dream.

“Es?”

“What?”

“What do you mean ‘what?’ Where were you that night?”

“I don’t....totally remember, Ed. I remember throwing up, I remember us drinking Syrah, I remember feeling sick and going downstairs to get water. I kind of remember going in the back yard for fresh air. And I remember getting back into bed. I

was cold. And you were asleep. Is that okay or do I need your permission to get out of bed?”

It helps that I don't actually remember everything. Maybe I really did just go out into the back yard, see the streetlight from there, and think of the boy.

“Huh,” he stares at the screen. “I don't know it's all...so weird. And so close. Everyone I talk to, it's all they talk about. Maybe I'm on edge.”

I can't tell if he's suspicious or if he maybe he just misses me. I walk away and leave him with the iPad.

#

Ed asks me to lunch the next day. The drive is quick. The highway on the edge of town takes us past wide pastures with grazing cattle. One stoplight, then we turn onto a shady, tree-lined street. The sidewalks and storefronts are well-kept, clean and pretty. You would imagine every catalog in America had stock footage like this.

Ed is talking about work, but I barely hear him. I remember stray brown locks and a tank-top and panties and talking about the environmental impact of cows, an easy chin and subtle cheekbones and eyes like far foothills, I remember him asking me by the carved tree if I loved him and I didn't but I brought his hand to my jeans' top button and a bird trilled. And I said yes, because I was tired of thinking up ways to say things other than yes.

“So?” I hear him say.

“What?”

“Were you listening to me?”

I shake my head, wondering at the sudden tension in his voice.

“Kind of. No. I don’t know.”

“I checked your bank account and looked at your transactions. You had two more at 7-Eleven that night.” He takes his eyes from the road to stare at me in the most overwrought, dramatic way possible. “Where. Were. You?”

“How the fuck did you get into my account Ed?”

“Oh yeah, Daisy5353, real fucking hard to figure out. What have you been doing, have you been seeing someone?”

“Sure Ed, yep, I’ve been out most weeknights leaving our toddler in her room while I fuck a few guys around the neighborhood. No big deal, standard stuff. You’re a fucking idiot!”

Ed fumes, gripping the wheel. Accelerating. My chest gets tighter every second he doesn’t answer.

Then the wheels shriek. Ed has seen a car stopped at a stop sign too late. I scream. Ed loses control, blasts up a curb and there is a crash and there is my head hitting something and there is a horn honking and then there is nothing.

#

The roads are wet and the streetlights are dimmed by fog. You feel like the only person who is awake in town. The sidewalk warbles below you and you grin, body and bones soaked in wine.

You cross the street and buy a tall can of beer at the 7-Eleven. As you leave, you pass the boy with the skateboard. You stop and drink the beer, standing in the same parking spot where you pulled your shirt down from inside a station wagon.

The boys emerge through the automatic doors smashing a pack of cigarettes against his palm. He lights a cigarette and walks past you. You hear yourself call out to him.

“Hey,” I say.

The boy turns, inhaling smoke.

“What up.”

I can tell the boy is high.

“Do you...were you skateboarding around at 7-Eleven today?”

“*Skateboarding around?*” he asks.

“It wasn’t you?”

“No, I was, yeah. We just call it skating.”

“Oh, cool.”

I can tell he remembers me. I forget where I am and burp under my breath and taste all of the wine.

“I can’t believe I did that today,” I say.

“I...yeah. Yeah...”

“Sorry, it was a...weird day,” I feel my face flush.

“It’s cool.”

“So, do you need a ride or something?”

“Uh, I don’t know...you probably shouldn’t be driving right?”

I giggle.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

“Home,” he says. “What about you?”

“Wherever,” I say. My eyes feel like they belong at the town lounge. My face says dirty things without saying them.

“I guess same for me,” the boy says.

I ask him if he wants to walk with me and he says *yeah*.

We pass under the yellow streetlight as we walk across the street and then on past blocks of dorms and the library with mirrored windows. Past a concrete building, then the duck pond and the willow trees and I realize I’ve been blabbering the whole time about Ed but the boy wasn’t paying attention.

The asphalt path leads to a bridge, and the bridge hits a bike trail and we turn. I stop at a wooden bench in front of an old tree. It looms over a slope of grass and mud, and beyond, in a dark, hidden mass of blackberry bushes, a creek. The fog becomes tiny rain drops then something in between.

We sit on the bench. Leaves shaped like baggies hide most of the sky and I look for the moon and I can’t find it. I kiss him. I can taste how sour my mouth is on his. A lot of wine, not enough water.

For a second you are so awake your eyes hurt and then the world starts splashing and you remember where you are. A bench. A tree. A carved tree. You slide away from a boy, a young man with stubble like a charcoal drawing and eyes you can only see the glimmer of a streetlight in.

“What’s wrong?” he asks.

“I shouldn’t be doing this, not right here. This is weird.”

“You brought us here though.” I am on fire. Whole body coiled and burning in want. The fog turns back to rain. I point to the tree and tell him my husband carved our names in it, once upon a time.

The boy stands and looks, pawing at the mossy, overgrown bark.

“Your name’s Esme?”

You cover your face with your hands and the rain picks up. Your stomach feels like a clogged bathtub.

“Here let’s change it if it’s bothering you.”

You tell the boy you feel sick.

“Wait check this out,” he says.

He takes out a pocket knife, flips it open and moves to the tree. You realize he’s going to carve up Ed’s testament of love. You don’t care, really, but you don’t like it either. *I barely accepted Ed’s stupid carving, this idiot doesn’t get to autograph my life too*, you think. You grab him by the arm.

“Don’t,” I say. The boy laughs at me like I’m crazy.

“You flash me, get drunk, find me, then bring me here?” he says. “Come on. It’ll be funny, it’ll be funny.”

You get angry and he keeps on laughing and you scream at him to stop but he won’t and you bend his arm with a strength you didn’t expect and he tries to twist away and the ground is a slog of mud and we slip and I don’t let go and land hard and the boy gasps in pain. You finally let go. The knife’s handle sticks out of the boy’s chest.

Everything spins.

You look for the moon and can't find it. The boy tries to crawl to the bike path but no...no the grass is like a sea and he's sliding down, down into wet, wet thorns and branches and there is a gurgling sound somewhere. You remember another boy who called himself a man trying to carve a tree with his knife. You said I love you. A lie. You hear footsteps splash.

#

A mild concussion for me and three cracked ribs for Ed. The doctor tells him not to do anything strenuous. On the way home, the wind blasts through the driver-side window, which doesn't exist anymore, and everything we pass reminds me that I am not a part of it. I start ripping into Ed, and I can't stop. You neatly fold a list. You studiously build a well. Your heart fills with everything you hate about a person. Your mind is a scribbled plan of inaction detailing what you would do about it if you could make yourself do something about it. Ed doesn't answer. He's in a sleep of painkillers.

Weeks pass. Months. The entire rainy season. The days get warmer. They stay brighter for longer. Ed and I barely talk, except to keep up appearances. I wait. I stir what's sitting in the well, and sharpen every sentence on the list.

And it works. Dreams and memories become silly things I'm too busy for. It's simple enough to make a decision when it never has been before and I worry I've gone crazy but when I start I find that I can't stop. That I don't want to.

I tell Ed I'm leaving, and that I'm selling the house. He should be angry or upset but he isn't. There are questions and questions and defeat and logistics and apologies, over and over. But he says he understands.

No one can live up to what you remembered about them before they'd become someone else. I had often thought there wasn't enough life to start from scratch, to get to know someone else for thirteen years and wonder absolutely nothing about them in the end. But I missed the only thing that ever mattered to me, napping her toddlerhood away on daycare beds. I missed the memory of what Ed and I were once. But, that wasn't so much a memory as a dream that didn't come true.

I find a new home nestled in the foothills near the outskirts of town. Far from convenience stores and nineteen-year-olds. It has an extra room with a view of the valley, where I install a desk with a light table. Ed is twenty minutes away and has his weekends and we have a deal to never talk bad about each other. I start picking up contract work and give notice at the University so I can spend more time with her.

On my last day at the office, I forget my lunch. I head across the street to the 7-Eleven. I grab a bag of Funnions, a banana, a string cheese, and a peach iced tea. A young boy sits on a BMX bike outside. Floppy hair sticks out through the earholes of a black helmet. Munching on a corndog, he stares straight at me through the window. *No. Not at you.* The automatic door chimes as I leave. Instead of returning to my car, I walk up to the boy and follow his eyes. Taped to the glass, curling at the edges, stained by long months, is the green MISSING flyer with the boy's face. And the streetlight returns. And the bee sting and the stop sign. The fog and rain. A dog licking away the dripping lining of my pubescent uterus. A tree. A carved tree. *I do love you.* A lie.

"Did you know him?" I ask the kid.

He dips his corndog in a cup of ketchup, totally oblivious of me. I realize he has white headphones in his ears.