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Approaches to the Land

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APPROACHES TO THE LAND

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A THESIS

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE STATEMENT

On behalf of the Graduate Committee for Joseph Linscott I affirm that this manuscript is the final and accepted thesis. Signatures of all committee members are on file with the Graduate School at the University of Maine, 42 Stodder Hall, Orono, Maine.

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An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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Approaches to the Land is a collection of interrelated stories centered on a small Maine mill town. These stories have several recurrent narrators who are in many phases of moving – some come while others leave, etc. These stories have an immense interest in the identification of loss and hope, and this in turn plays heavily on the identities of the characters embodying the stories. As a whole, these stories capture the only way this author knew how to document his hometown.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book interested in answers. Answers to questions we don't know we have until we've discovered the answer and then found the question. Answers we can't find to questions that haunt us. And answers we come across with no question to be found. Answers just hanging there in the open.

These stories… or rather, simply narratives… simply? These narratives are interested in picking these answers up, investigating them, finding their questions, and sometimes keeping them even if the questions can't be found.

Of course, as the narratives move along – entwined, intersecting, contradictory, and elusive of one another – these answers, more and more, lose their shape, but, somehow, pick up definition. For instance, McLaughlin meets the stranger on a rainy night in the culmination of his own story – finds the answers of his character – but goes in search of the question to that character's answer, and discovers the deeper contours of that story.

The characters playing with these answers are met with the questions they spend the entirety of the book avoiding. Questions whose answers they cannot find. Know they cannot find. I wanted to blur the lines between the questions and answers in this book.

Because these narratives circle around questions that characters don't want to find, can't find, this is also a book about revolutions. I wanted stories that didn't follow straight lines, even when they were following something. I wanted stories that circled around things, sometimes coming back and sometimes not.

At the heart of this book, at the heart of the stories that produced it, lay a void, a center, that was the mill – a structure both physical and sacred.

These narratives all contain semblances of hope and loss. At least, I hope that they do.

Nietzsche's emergence in this critical introduction is not surprising, as my reading of *The Genealogy of Morals* came at a time when I started putting all of these individual pieces together into some order that resembles what comes ahead.

In *The End(s) of Modernism* class, we focused particular attention to Yeats' "The Second Coming" – "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" – thinking of the center's inability to hold as a problem of modernity (as well as Modernism). The loss of *the* center (i.e. religion, God, etc.), and questions of what to fill it in with. Nietzsche's ascetic ideal spoke to this concern as well – "that something *was lacking*, that a tremendous *void* encircled man." Reading Nietzsche at the time that I was beginning to assemble this thesis gave me a way to think about what these narratives are doing.

These narratives are about a loss of *the* center: *the* mill.

The hope of this thesis comes from what *could* become the new center.

I started assembling these narratives in my mind long before I started writing them down into what they became here.

Growing up, I learned about my town based on what "outsiders" said about us. My experience growing up in this waning mill town taught me to examine the relationship of what newspapers and other documents said about my town, versus the experiences with what was said at home, at school, and in everyday situations.

Just as my characters struggle to hold to the centers of what drives their narrations, I struggled to find a way of directly conveying a narrative about my town. I couldn't contain it to one story. During my time here for my Master's I found in

everything I wrote some semblance of this project, of these characters, of this narrative, of Millinocket. I realized I couldn't directly address my town in my writing *with* my writing.

These "outsiders" writing about us, these writings then became the "facts" of Millinocket. However, for many in the town, these facts ran counter to the ways our experiences were perceived by us.

For instance: the phrase "the most popular hangout for teenagers is a supermarket parking lot" shows up in Abby Goodnough's article "Needing Students, Maine School Hunts in China" in the *New York Times*. This statement is true in many ways – teenagers *do* hangout in the Pangburn family-owned IGA supermarket parking lot (now a Save-A-Lot discount supermarket), at least they did when I was a teenager – but, for many others (read: not teenagers) this statement was a falsehood. At least, it was perceived as a falsehood. What was most true about this statement was that the response to it proved the loss of the center for the town. Before the *New York Times* printed this story, we could react to the loss as nothing but an odd feeling, like heartburn, but after its printing it became a fact.

We had discovered our center was gone.

Thinking back on this I realized that I could never hope to create something that could address this discrepancy with narrative. It seemed impossible to me to be able to write a self-contained narrative that could address these problems of perception. I needed to do something to relay this – a way that felt real to my experiences, but also couldn't be tied up with an "insider's" perspective.

Insert the influences of work by Danilo Kiš, Muriel Rukeyser, Curtis White, and Mark Novak. Their varied uses of documents in their work, the ways they make their writing interact with these documents, gave me a route to follow to tell this… story.

Of course, only two of these authors, Danilo Kiš and Curtis White, wrote fiction that went on to influence this work. But in their works I found experimentation with documents that drove what I wanted my fiction to do.

As I was writing this thesis, I focused a lot of my attention to documents that existed around Millinocket and the Great Northern Paper mills. Some of these documents were in the form of narratives – stories, accounts, anecdotes – while others, revolving more around the GNP mills, relayed hard economic and scientific data. Both of these types of documents were related, obviously, but I found that my narrative needed to be the connective tissue between them.

One of the early interstitial pieces, "Cries the Land," is my attempt of connecting these different types of documents and weaving them into a sort of fiction. Danilo Kiš's *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* helped me think through how I might stitch these documents and narratives together. Kiš's fiction offers concise details of the characters and political and historical events and themes that they are blended in such a way so as to not see how one *can't* relate to the other. "Cries the Land" is my attempt at this sort of historically-based writing.

Curtis White's *Memories of My Father Watching TV* offered me yet another way of including these outside sources and themes into my narration. Whereas Kiš's novel delicately balances the details of his stories to create a very "real" narrative, White's novel is abrupt and forceful in its use of television shows – the narrator and his father

become the characters in the shows that they watch. There is no denial of the fictive in *Memories…* yet the novel feels no less "real" than Kiš's because of the emotional weight behind the narrator's journey through these shows.

White's novel thus influenced "Cries the Land," as well as many of the other pieces. "Cries the Land" went from earlier drafts, where the narrator was restricting his emotions, to this version, where these constrained emotions are evident in the narration, bubbling through the surface and pushing the story forward.

Adrienne Rich says that poetry is "a human activity enmeshed with human existence." In her essay "A Human Eye," she says that "[t]he makings of art are rooted in non-art labors – repetitive, toxic, body-breaking, minimum wage or less or none – that everywhere underlie those privileged creations" (97). Thus, in using documents of working class people, and the documents of the industry that they were beholden to, I'm looking to play around with that struggle. Understanding what it is that affords me the opportunity to write this; these body-breaking labors.

Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead* and Novak's *Shut Up Shut Down* are books of poetry, and thus their books are not focused on telling a straightforward narrative. However, these are books containing narratives of struggles. These books combined poems in ways that created a sketch of what struggle looked like. In trying to do something similar with this project, I had to find a way of turning these pieces into a narrative that would function more like a sketchbook of struggles. At once avoiding subjectivity and objectivity.

There could be no grandiose statements about the struggles of the working class in this book. They are statements made available only from the broken backs of the toxic, repetitive, low wage work that the workers have done.

In "Postmodernism," Kathy Acker writes that "[i]f it wasn't for certain community consensus as to the meanings and usages of words, words would be nonsense." In this book, this collection, this narrative, I've attempted to bridge two different meanings for the same sets of words – Millinocket, mill, future, past, good, bad etc. – into some new consensus. I couldn't simply include these documents as add-ins to supplement my characters' perceptions. I needed a set of eyes to look upon the world I grew up in with a fresh set of eyes. I needed to make these meanings foreign to some viewer. I couldn't bring them to an already established world, I needed to strip it of its meaning so that the experimentation, the investigation, of the conditions of this world could happen.

This experimentation needed to happen with language. I needed a narrator who could see this world without the language of this world. But first I needed to know how this narrator could work before I could see what he would act like.

Enter Nietzsche (again): "In order to get to the secret, undiscovered, and unwitnessed suffering out of the world it was almost compulsory to invent gods and a hierarchy of intermediate beings, in short, something which wanders even among secret places, sees even in the dark, and makes a point of never missing an interesting and painful spectacle" (44).

Enter McLaughlin.

I'm not suggesting that in this narrative I've created a god for the narrator. These stories, these characters, this world couldn't be helped by a god. He would only become a new center for the characters in the book, and not one that could prove useful. I needed an intermediary body – at once seen and unseen – to navigate this narrative. A way for the narrative to show something about Nietzsche's good, perhaps. "What would beauty be… if its contradiction had not first been presented to consciousness" (59). Again I draw back to the stories of those I grew up with; always stories of the mill, of the way things used to be, of the ceaseless beating the town was getting, was going to get, from the future.

As with any mill town, even when things were good, things were bad. How then do we see a hopeful future, when even the past wasn't great?

In many ways then, this is a book about contradictions. I've said earlier that it was also a book about questions and answers. So, maybe here is where I say that this is a book about questions and answers contradicting themselves.

APPROACHES TO THE LAND I

In my older age I encountered a smell that drew me to a memory that I once never connected with that smell. The smell of burning wood.

But before I go back to that memory, there are some things which I must address.

My life started in the mud. Scratching, digging, clawing. I lived in the mud. I lived with the mud. I was the mud. I knew nothing but mud and my life felt complete.

Then came a rain. A rain which at first made the mud muddier, and thus made me me-ier, or so I thought. Then it felt like the rain was never going to stop coming. The rain kept coming and eventually I believed that the rain was a trait of my own personality, of my own character, rather than an element of nature. The rain fell, and like the mud before it, I became like the rain. I was the rain. With each new drop I was born again.

The rain was not nature, the rain was me, and I was unnatural.

It has always been unnatural to be natural for me.

Then the rain did end.

As all rains do.

But for a time, it did not stop.

When the rain did end, the mud was gone. And soon, under the heat of a sun I did not yet know to call a sun, the rain was gone. I found myself lain bare on rock. As I looked around, all I saw was rock. In the first days after the rain I wandered in hopes to find the rain again, any last drop of it. I would walk in any one direction until my feet bled. When

they bled I would stop, and I would wait until I could continue on in search of the rain. When I submitted to the rain's absence I would lift up rocks in search of a wetness under them. I searched for any I could find. Which was none. In that futility I wandered in search of the mud, but like the rain it was gone. In all my wandering all I found was rock. Under rock was only more rock. As far as I could see there was only rock.

After the rain, I was dry, and I felt like rock. This was the first time I felt like something. My identity was in relation to a thing, not in it. It was the first time I did not become what surrounded me. It was the first time that I realized I was not what surrounded me. Quickly I discovered that the rock was simply nature, and I was nature too, and as simple as rock. But we were different, the rock and I. One was not the same.

This is not to say that I did not try to become like the rock. I did. But in all my attempts I could not feel like I did when I was mud or I was rain for I knew not what that felt like. Perhaps this was how being like rock felt, always trying to fit. I did not like it, and so I stopped trying to be rock.

Without being something else, in this barren landscape of dry rock, I was forced to become myself.

Despite this, I kept wandering. No longer in search of mud or rain or rock, I wandered in search of new wanderings. To find new places. Places of not-rock, not-rain, not-mud.

Through these early wanderings the rocks began to change as I moved along. At first the rocks were large, nearly all were immovable, but slowly they became smaller and smaller. With each step I could move the rock.

And soon I came across another self.

The moment that we met – this other self and myself – was as the sun began to set. The sun was behind me as we approached one another. I looked like nothing but a black silhouette to this other. That I looked like a silhouette.

What do I look like now, I had asked him after we learned to speak to one another.

Strange, he said, yet familiar.

This made me happy.

Where have you come from, he asked me.

First from the mud then from the rain, I said.

I asked him where he came from.

He did not answer.

We agreed, later that night, to camp together and share our food with one another, in celebration of our finding each other. I asked him if he thought we were meant to find each other in our own separate wanderings, and he replied that he did not think so. He said that if he had to think about it then it must not have been the pursuit of our wanderings, that when we reach what we are in search of, we will know it without having to think about it. I

thought that this sounded right, it sounded like feeling like rock. And so that night, as I lay on the rocks, tufts of grass growing between them, I made a list of everything that I could think of so that I could have a list of everything I could know that I was not in search of in my wandering.

Not mud, not rain, no rock, not other.

The next morning we were both gone. I awoke on a field of grass. Several rocks poking above the blades within view. I gathered my things and, without thinking, decided in which direction I would continue wandering.

My progress – to what, I did not know yet – was met by more grass, and soon there were other types of life. First weeds, then bushes, then small trees, then larger trees. When the large trees surrounded me, the fauna began to approach. Both the small animals and the larger plant eaters. I approached them all with the same civility as I had with the other I had met along my wandering. We were at peace with each other for we knew we had similar intents to not hurt the other. This became the closest time, after the rain, that I ever felt close to being something other than myself.

Many times I followed the squirrels and deer and rabbits to some food source, and we shared our bounty. If I had ever known where the food was coming from, I would have let any one of them follow me to its source. But in those early days I did not find any food source, save when I followed the squirrels and deer and rabbits.

It's when I stopped wandering that things got easier.

Things always get easier when one stops wandering.

After many times of following the squirrels and deer and rabbits to food, I came to discover in which elements certain types of food grew. A spongy fungus grew in the shadows of trees, and, thanks to the animals, I knew which kinds of these fungi to avoid. And, thanks to my own perception, I learned which could grow with me on my journey. It was not until later that I knew my course changed from wandering to journey. This was just one of the sources of food I learned to grow.

Quickly I learned which wood was best for fire, and which was best for shelter. Before building the shelter, however, I found where the soil was best to grow what plants I knew how to grow. For many weeks I searched for this soil and when I could not find it I began to cut down the trees. I started with the smaller pieces. This helped me build my strength so that I could endure the strain my body took when I began taking down the larger trees and pulling up their roots. These roots, I had learned in places, grew in deep, rich soil that could grow all I would need to live.

What wood I could not use for shelter I used for fire, even if it was not the best at burning. I burned it and burned it and burned it until it burned no more. With the ashes from my fires I scattered them over the ground. I discovered, once in my wanderings – sometime after I met the other, but before the squirrels and deer and rabbits – that a plot of land which has recently been burned was growing sweet berries. Looking back on that time

as I built my shelter on my newly found land I determined that these burnings could produce a good crop, regardless of what it was. Berry or not.

Deep roots, rich soil, and ash would raise a source of life.

Or so I thought.

When the shelter was built and the fires were burned, I began to dig. At first I dug shallow, to see what was there beneath my feet, and then I dug deeper.

I dug first through the ash which had become thick through the seasonal rains. Past that came a dusty brittle soil that fell from my hands with ease. I mixed this dusty soil with the thick, muddy ash. It felt like the right thing to do. Beyond that dusty layer I discovered the rich black soil that I often saw crops growing from. I could feel the nutrients between my fingers and this gave me great pleasure.

Quickly I realized that this layer of soil, that deep, rich soil was the thinnest layer to be found, and only in the smallest swaths of land could I dig to it. Elsewhere I only found rocks and the deepest of roots from the trees. I began to have doubts that this land could grow anything.

This did not deter me, however, and I stayed with this land and did what I could to preserve it so that it could preserve me.

I did what I could on this land for many years, some better than others, and I preserved my own preservation ground. Soon, though, came a noise. It was an unnatural noise to my ears. In the earlier days of the noise it was only a dull rhythm that I could feel

more than hear, and only in the moments of the day when I, and the animals around me, rested. Day by day, the noise seemed to grow closer. From a tremor in my chest to a rattle in my ears. Day by day the noise, that was once unnatural, became evermore natural to my ears and to the rhythm of my days.

That noise. When I worked, it worked.

Everyday, closer and closer, louder and louder. It grew.

Then the day came when the trees became fewer and fewer around me. I did not see any wildlife for many days and soon grew so hungry I did not think that I could make it through the rest of my life on this land. Where once I thought I had found deep, rich soil had been nothing but dry, grey earth deeply penetrated by irregularly shaped rocks. In those stark days I longed to be the rain or the mud again.

I tried. Speaking to the rock, and speaking to the earth.

But nothing. Closer and closer I came to death.

What, I wondered, had I found when I discovered rock?

Where was the mud? Where was the rain?

Then the noise was on top of me. Its rhythm was no longer in sync with my own, but became my own. The noise was no longer a noise outside of me, but one produced by me.

In those final days on my preservation land, the men with axes came.

Afterwards comes the memory attached to burning wood.

My attempts are to strip it.

CRIES THE LAND

Money, comfort, love. In that order. And love is a fraught term.

In small Maine mill communities, these things are inextricably bound.

"[A]lthough the physical environment may be a non-social actor, our perceptions and characteristics of – and therefore interactions with – the environment are certainly social in nature."

Along the Penobscot River in Maine, hidden by miles of forest, lies the town of Millinocket. Spanning over eighteen square miles, the land is named for its nearby lake – "the land of many islands" as it is loosely translated from the Abenaki language. Established in 1901, the town earned its nickname of "The Magic City" for the speed with which it grew. The Great Northern Paper mill, which grew and prospered with the town, was, at one time, the largest of its kind in the world. People from around the country flocked to the town. Some to make money, then leave. Others to fall in love and stay.

Ahead of us lay three men's lives. The relationship these three men have to each other is tied up with the paper-making industry of this Northern Maine wood. Which is to say that they are inextricably bound by money, comfort, and love.

While these men have all led true lives, what comes now, in these notes, could be called fiction. This is not a wholly true representation of their lives. But nothing could be.

The First Man, Born Farthest Away

The story of Great Northern Paper Company "is the story of Garrett Schenck, the forceful and imaginative builder of both Great Northern and the town of Millinocket, Maine." A heavy-handed statement, I know, but it suits the needs of the present story.

Without him we could not have the stories of these other two men, and thus we should acquaint ourselves with his life.

Based on the papers here in front of me – if they are correct – Garrett Schenck was born in Trenton, New Jersey in 1854. This is all the information currently available on Garrett Schenck's early life.

The Rise of the Town

In Rumford Falls, Maine in 1892, the Rumford Falls Paper Company was built by the Rumford Falls Power Company and managed by Garrett Schenck. "He subsequently became a member of International Paper Company's first board of directors until August 1898" when – after presumably encountering an affair between his co-worker and his love interest – he became disgruntled and resigned from the company. From here, facts are few and far between, and so I will do my best to reasonably speculate on the uncertainties of his life.

After his time with the Rumford Falls Paper Company Garrett Schenck went with surveyors to begin a new paper mill. One can only imagine how Schenck felt when he first laid eyes upon Charles Power's old farm – the new site of the Great Northern Paper mill.

"It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits," Schenck probably thought.

There on the top of a hill (eventually becoming a small airport), Schenck looks down, across the river, to the plot of land that would soon produce his income (and the income of those Italian immigrants who would eventually live at the foot of that same hill across the river from the mill which they would help build).

"Why came ye here before your time?" cries the plot of land.

"You are my future," Garrett calls back to the land.

"This ground is not prepared for you."

"It doesn't matter," he responds, "I am ready for it."

"Is it not enough that I smile in the valleys?"

"But it is such a lovely smile."

"I have never made this soil for thy feet."

"Then I shall transform my feet."

"This air for thy breathing."

"My breathing then I'll change."

"These rocks for thy neighbors."

"No neighbors will I have."

"I cannot pity nor fondle thee here, but forever relentlessly drive thee hence to where I *am* kind. Why seek me where I have not called thee?"

"Because I love you," Garrett Schenck calls to the land. "You will make me rich."

With the help of "New York money men such as Oliver Payne, A.G. Payne, E.H. Haskell, R.H. Hayes, A.H. Paget, and representatives of the Wall Street firm of Grant and Schley," Garrett Schenck was able to afford the two-million dollar construction of the Great Northern mill in Millinocket, Maine. "By June 1900, Millinocket was a community of 100 homes and many business establishments." Schenck looked down, once more, around him at the land that he had transformed, and spoke gentle words to the land which we should not repeat here. "On November 1, Garrett Schenck sawed, barked, and conveyed to the grinder room the first log to be made into paper at the Millinocket Mill."

"I love you," he probably said, and then pocketed his money.

The Land's Calling

This second man – relatively unknown to us – was born in the far north of Maine in the 1930s. And, while imagination might lead us to see this second man as being born in a log cabin in the middle of a blizzarding Maine winter, fire roaring in the background as his parents handle the injection of new life into the world, he was in fact born in a house, with a midwife, in the middle of a hot summer day while his father was working (presumably in the field of some potato farm; a viable Maine crop).

After several years of bouncing between lumbering jobs, the unknown man found himself in Connecticut. Late one night in a boarding house where he and his cousin were living, while working at a paper mill, he heard a noise coming from outside. Alarmed, he put on his clothes to investigate.

"Hello?" said the man.

"Hello," said the wind.

"Who's there?"

"It's me."

"Who is this?"

"Come back."

"Chaos and ancient Night, I come no spy with purpose to explore or to disturb the secrets of your realm," the unknown man probably recited nervously. His body shook as he recognized the voice through the trees as belonging to that land which lies along the Penobscot.

"Come back to me," it whispered back. "I am the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, and I was made forever and ever to be the dwelling of man. Love me like those great men before you have done."

Though I feel uncomfortable coming to any sort of concrete understanding of this unknown man, I can estimate that he often felt critical of his own last name – Pelletier – for he used it so little in any documents. Of no or any close relation to the family who owns the successful, or once-successful (at certain economic times, it's hard to distinguish), logging company – Gerald Pelletier, Inc. of Millinocket.

Despite this, Pelletier, the man from the north, returned to Maine to begin working in the Millinocket mill, fifty-five years after its construction.

Pelletier Comes Into View

Pelletier made his first trip to the magic city of Maine's wilderness in 1954 it appears, trying to become a lumberer in the woods north of Millinocket. At some point, in either 1954 or 1955, Pelletier went on a date with a woman named Elizabeth. They went for a walk, maybe some food, any of the innocence one imagines when thinking about that time through entertainment: *Grease*, *Happy Days*, and, perhaps, to a possible extent, *American Graffiti*, though it takes place in the early '60s. Perhaps they also went for a drink – milkshake or some other.

After a short stint in the Connecticut paper mill, Pelletier returned to Millinocket, in February of 1955, to start work at Great Northern. Later that same month he would ask Elizabeth back out. They already knew each other, and so, they both thought, the date would not be filled with chattering trivialities. By mid-summer of 1955, the two were comfortably engaged.

1956 saw the two married in the church upon the hill – St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church – making Elizabeth a Pelletier. In a vibrant color photo, Elizabeth and her husband can be seen smiling and holding each other in front of a statue of Jesus, his arms open in acceptance of their marriage. By the time of this photo, he was already beginning to lose his hair, Elizabeth beginning to lose her patience with her husband's hearing loss (a result of the noise from the machines in the mill). After many children and decades of sulfur dioxide inhalation, many believed the couple would come to an end in 1983 when their youngest child moved out of their house. The couple was tired of each other, it was clear, but they were nearing retirement, and they felt companionship, whether good or bad, was better to near it with.

The Last Man, Closest to Me

The third man, named Grant, was born in the Eastern Maine General Hospital (now known as Eastern Maine Medical Center, for "hospital" implies certain death while "medical center" implies something less severe, apparently) in the 1950s in the depth of spring.

While some might presume that Grant, having been born closer to us in time, would be the one we have the most information about at this time, this presumption would be wrong. We know little about Grant because Grant's life has been, in the grander scheme of lives, relatively unimportant. While it could be said that his family finds him important – and I can assure us that they do – for the average American, his life is meaningless. He simply exists for the rest of us so that we could know that the American population, as of the 2000 United States census, was 282.2 million people. Of course, it could be said that we exist in the same way for someone like Grant. We could have no

defining characteristics and exist only to serve as a number for the census so that someone else can know that tidbit of information, in case they are ever asked to repeat it.

This is why this is being done. Grant is a person with defining characteristics, same as Pelletier and Garret before him. This is why this is being done, to discover their defining characteristics, to know that they are more than a number for someone to recall on a trivia question. So that we might think of ourselves as just as much. And that whoever else may read this one day will see themselves in the same way.

Thus, to write about Grant's life, I have to rely most on my own conjecture, and less on the documents in front of me.

"What A Beating"

In 1901, the Millinocket land agent wrote that there was to be no liquor used within the limits of the city.

Seventy-seven years later, Grant would begin Alcoholics Anonymous. Clearly, at some point in that span of time, alcohol was allowed within the magic city. In the basement of the St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church (still standing, though the Jesus statue has faded where it's colored, dirtied where it's white, and misses a finger), an AA meeting was held in 1978. This is where time collapses on the stories of Grant and Pelletier.

Grant Linscott was born in what is now known as Eastern Maine Medical Center. Grant was born with several medical complications as a child. For it being the 1950s, it is amazing that he was able to live past his fifth birthday. At the moment, there are no records that would tell us what it was that Grant was afflicted with as a small newborn, progressing through as a small infant, and ultimately well into his early adolescence

(where he was quickly no longer small). However, Grant and his family made several trips to what is commonly connoted as EMMC. Of course, at the time of Grant's childhood, the hospital was referred to as just that: a hospital. And thus Grant and his family, in the 1950s and 1960s, did not travel to what we may now call EMMC, but rather, they simply traveled to "Bangor" – the city where the hospital was. (This was, and still is, a common practice by those in the community – to call any sort of specific place which they are going as simply the name of the city that the place is located in. In most cases, the city is always Bangor, and the communities are always north of Bangor.)
"Hmm, here is Bangor, Maine – a city," says the anxious wife. "Millinocket is just north of there. Maybe it's a suburb."
"No, no!" the chortling husband says. "It is some seventy miles up the highway and off in the woods."

As for Grant's medical complications, for which I have now found the supporting documents: weak lungs, also known as asthma; and a deformed hand, leaving one of the fingers on the right hand without a bone. The hand was met with a simple solution: surgery to remove the excess skin of the boneless finger. The asthma was problematic – not only for Grant, but for the family as well. Twice a year the family would have to travel to "Bangor" for Grant to receive treatment. Grant would receive them once in the fall and once in the spring.

Eastern Maine General Hospital, during the time when Grant spent yearly visits, was also the home of patients who were, if not insane, at the very least mentally unstable. "I am suffering terribly out here…" During visits to the hospital in his later adolescent

visits, Grant remembers the voices of some of those patients, as well as the security guard who once told him he would be all right. “It would be funny if there was nothing wrong with me.” This guard, in explaining that those patients had no ability to interact with him, gave Grant a great sense of relief.

Two years after his exchange with the guard Grant would not spend any more time in Eastern Maine General Hospital – the next time he would be in the facility, it would be referred to as EMMC. Several weeks after Grant’s last visit to “Bangor,” he and his family would move to the town of Millinocket, Maine.

“God what a beating I’m taking…”

John (Jack) F. Kennedy

“God what a beating I’m about to take…”

Grant Linscott, probably.

Communion and Repentance

“My name is Grant, and I am an alcoholic.”

He still carries a headache from the night before – he and his brother’s “last hoorah,” as they called it. A “last hoorah” for Grant and his brother meant a case of Budweiser, a bottle of Jim Beam, and a carton of Marlboro Reds. None of which they finished.

“Hi Grant,” echoes the chorus of redemption-seeking alcoholics in the basement of St. Martin of Tours – the church upon the hill.

“Why’s it always gotta be in a church,” Grant’s brother asked him the night before, four beers, two shots, and three cigarettes into the “last hoorah.”

In those days, Grant and his brother both worked as laborers in the mill where their father was a foreman. Jobs were always available and so the pair, despite lacking any full-time job descriptions, worked full six day weeks with union benefits. Saturday nights meant the brothers frequented the local watering holes, as they are euphemistically called (such as the Scootic In Restaurant).

"Efforts to break the month-old strike against Great Northern Paper Co. failed Friday when striking unions voted 6-6 on the company's latest offer." But when the well runs dry, changes have to be made. Two weeks is a "temporary lay off" and you change to Pabst Blue Ribbon. After three weeks the brothers had stopped visiting their parents for Sunday dinner. "The atmosphere is civil, although men speak of one another as 'a union man' or 'a company man.'" Four weeks is a "crisis" and you've had the time to rethink a lot of things.

The basement of a church is a place to rethink.

"It's a redemptive thing," Grant wanted to answer his brother, but he didn't know how to say it. So he settles with an "I don't know."

Social Contracts

"IP [International Paper] paid high wages and their [millworkers'] families didn't complain about the foul smell referred to locally as the 'smell of money,' that was created by the paper mill's pollution."

In 1959 two children were born: one to the smell of money in Millinocket; the other to the stench of loss in Kingman, Maine (a town who, at the turn of the twentieth century, would know all too well what would happen to the magic city a hundred years later). The child in Millinocket: Abigail Pelletier. The child in Kingman: Grant Linscott.

They would be together in the same high school – named after George Stearns, much to the chagrin of Garrett Schenck – during the same period of time, though not as friends nor lovers. Not even as acquaintances. They simply shared the same physical space in the same time. Several years after they would finish school, and Abigail would go through one marriage and have a child, the two would meet again in the basement of a church upon a hill.

"Hi," one said.

"Hi there," the other one said.

What is said beyond this makes little difference. All that matters is that Abigail took Grant home with her to meet the Pelletiers and her first child.

After meeting Grant, and having no strong feelings about him, whether good or bad, Elizabeth and her husband approved of Abigail's engagement to him (though it was not needed). Shortly thereafter the two were married. They wed in the hall of Millinocket's local VFW (Post 4154) with a priest of Catholic denomination in front of a collected crowd of friends and family numbering approximately seventy. In a picture from the wedding, the pair both look happy to be wed together, though no statue of Jesus was there to accept it. Merely a picture of eating cake.

"Congratulations" was what Elizabeth and her husband had to say to Abigail before leaving the reception to go home.

At some point in the period of this town of Millinocket, a social contract seemed to exist between husbands and wives – husbands would squeeze what money they could get out from the mill, often times, for many years, they would squeeze very much, and the wives would allow their husbands to drink excessively. That combination of men and

metal which drives excess. This is a gross generalization, of course, but it serves the purposes of what is here.

Did the Pelletiers love each other? Did Abigail love Grant? Did Grant love Abigail? The answers to these questions have no effect on these stories. However, this does not mean that the answers to these questions have no effect on the person raised by these people.

Did the unknown Pelletier love Elizabeth? Yes. Did Elizabeth love her husband? Yes. Did Abigail love Grant? Yes. Did Grant love Abigail? Yes.

However, these answers are dependent upon one's interpretation and imaginings of the term love.

Are mornings of coffee, breakfast, and television in bed considered moments of love? Are phone calls from one to the other while at work, sharing jokes and laughs to pass the hour break by, considered love? Is cooking dinner to be ready when the other gets off work considered love? If so, then yes, Abigail and Grant were in love sometimes, as were Elizabeth and her husband. Are nights of heavy drinking by Grant and worrying by Abigail considered moments of love? If so, then yes, Abigail and Grant were in love always. For drinking heavily, in times of crisis, is its own form of worrying. Is leaving your wife after you retire, with no reason given to the family, love? If so, then yes, Elizabeth's husband did love her. If no, then…

Between 1980 and 2000, the employment rate in Maine dropped by twenty-eight percent. During this time Grant and Abigail had a son. This boy's name was Joseph and his story is unimportant as of now. Though I should say here that he had first-hand experience of these various amalgams of love. The mornings of television in bed. The

afternoons of car rides down back roads, picking apples off roadside trees. The nights of yelling and slamming. The early mornings of apologies.

To understand his own circumstance, he had to delve into this past, from the beginning. That is why I am here, in front of these documents, going through them, hoping to find some meaning to it all. Some meaning to any of it. A futile task, I know.

"Having Had a Spiritual Awakening"

In 1990, the Great Northern Paper Co. was bought by a pair of brothers from a Southern state. This purchase was part of what is called a hostile takeover – "a type of corporate acquisition or merger which is carried out against the wishes of the board (and usually management) of the target company." In 1994, Pelletier retired from the mill and left his wife and family. After the 1992 presidential election, work became harder to find for union laborers within the Millinocket mill. (Presumably Clinton's, but also still Carter's, fault.) When Grant could find work as a laborer it was often an hour or several hours away by car. (Presumably the union's fault.) "Hmm, here is Bangor, Maine – a city." In this time, large portions of Grant's paychecks were going towards the gasoline he needed to drive to these outside jobs.

In the early morning of a summer day, Grant awoke in his garage surrounded by empty beer cans and the sound of early morning conservative radio hosts. His mouth was dry, the taste of beer in every corner. His head hurt, though no more than usual.

"What is this Titan that has possession of me?" thought Grant.

"Not I," answered the land.

"I fear not spirits or ghosts, of which I am one."

"I cannot pity nor fondle thee," the land returned.

"Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty."

"I want there to be nothing wrong with me. Yet 'this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me.'"

"Come forward and commit yourself," called the land before Abigail entered the garage to check on her husband.

The stress of working eight hour laborer shifts, with the added hours of driving, caused Grant to return to alcohol sometime in the late 1990s. Whereas in the 1970s Grant and his brother were drinking Budweiser (approximately $22.99 per case of thirty), he was forced, due to a tight budget, to drink Milwaukee's Best (today priced at $13.99 per case of thirty) in those difficult 1990s. Grant's drinking of Milwaukee's Best continued until 2006, when, with the mill's ownership now under Brookfield Asset Management, and their continuance of the mill layoffs, Grant, with the help of Abigail, began attending Meeting again: in the basement of the same church where they met in 1978. This could also be defined as love.

"Here is No Shrine, Nor Altar"

In 2011, three years after Great Northern's last operation, with dwindling hope for new jobs to come back into the mill, Grant chose to collect his annuity and stop working as a laborer. That summer, Grant, Abigail, and Elizabeth celebrated a birthday. The celebration is sparse, with red hot dogs, Pepsi, and candy thrown from children in a recent parade. Of the three, only Abigail works anymore. Holding onto money becomes its own occupation. They are, the three of them, content in this moment. Among their

conversation topics that day: the potential consolidation of the local high schools. Both sucked dry by the land. Soon to be only documents.

APPROACHES TO THE LAND II

As I was thinking of the smell, I was reminded of all the things I could have done. And of all those things I could have done, I have done nothing.

Well… I have done some things.

I suppose my mother thought it was important when I called to tell her of my promotion – it's not a promotion, it's a new standing in society, a new viewpoint on life. Not that the call to my mother itself was important, but what I had called to tell her about. That was what she found important.

I had found myself in a transitory period – from being the brunt of jokes on cable television, to fixing cable televisions.

This is an overstatement.

Let me rephrase this: in a way, I was once on television, and my promotion took me off television.

In my youth, I was a legend of the ill-defined wilderness of the nation. Yet, for all words spread about my being, very few ever saw me. Those who did never could catch me, and thus – and this is how I became a part of television – many cameras were pointed at my residence, though I never showed myself, and because I never showed myself, they were forced to reenact what they believed I might look like.

However, after several years of my presence in the national consciousness, my legend shifted. It wasn't me they were looking for any longer, but a woman who never existed. Though, to many she does exist, and that counts for something.

And so when I did leave my residence, after many drought-filled years, no one was there to greet me with a camera. It was as though I had never existed.

But I do exist.

When I did finally meet someone, they did not ask me for a photo, but instead asked me if I could fix a thing for them. I did not know what they were asking me, but I said yes.

This was a very big step in my mother's opinion. Not that this step occurred in my mother's opinion, for opinions are not tangible, they are not like a church where one can step into anything. But this was a big step in my life (still not tangible, but more tangible than one's mother's opinion).

Others' opinions of this promotion of mine would not be so motherly – that is to say, loving – though my mother, I would not say, is loving.

I suppose it is a big step – I do not know if this step is inside or outside my house of opinion (I believe I shall go with inside) – but I've never really thought of myself as having an opinion, and if I do have one, it is not tangible, and so I cannot state that it was a big step in my opinion, perhaps it was a big step in my life, but how big this step really is in my opinion is uncertain for I do not know where my opinion is.

But then, I'm writing this, and this writing of mine is my. But then, where is the step in this opinion? How big is the step? What is the equivalent of a step in opinions? Is there a conversion table I can look at?

This whole business of opinions makes me uneasy.

I feel compelled to tell you now about my room with a view (it does calm me to think about it), but I cannot yet tell you about this room for I have not yet arrived here. I understand that you may be curious about it, but I promise that the only way to get here is to tell you about where I was before here. One must know where they have been before they can know where they are.

What I wanted to say was that I had received a promotion.

What I wanted to say was that I have done nothing important in my life. That there are things that mothers and others have and had perceived to be important in my life, but that was only merely a perception on their part.

What I have perceived of my collective life is a going-through-the-motions. (To call it my "own" life is a disservice to those who have influenced me.) The motions of what, you may ask?

It becomes harder to know because of my promotion.

For quite a while I spent my time influenced by the music of a song that was speaking to me. The song was not merely sound coming through speaker which I could hear, but it was intending for a meaning to come through to me through the sound coming through the

speakers, and that the meaning was not from the speakers but from the sound itself – not the words coupled with the sound, but from the sound itself. After a long period of infatuation with the sound, I grew to hate it. I hated it because it would not strip itself of the words that I had no patience for. (Of course, it was when I found a book with the words to this song printed on it that I realized my interpretation of those words was wrong. I felt betrayed.) Soon I grew tired, yet I felt the walls around me forever echoing that sound that I once loved. The sound grew so loud around me it penetrated me completely. I heard nothing but that sound. It echoed through the walls and through my bones. The pang of sadness I felt when I heard and felt that echo forced me out of those walls, and nearly out of my skin, and outside those walls I felt within myself an embodiment of the words.

I discovered that the words of that song spoke to me far more than the sound did.

It is difficult having an affair that you are unconsciously having.

I remember the day I went to the speakers, their fake wood grain paneling peeling from the wood composite body, and I said my final words to the sound.

Of course, in my house of opinion this was a big step in my life, wherever it was then. During my affair with the sound and the words I became aware of my perception that my life was a going-through-the-motions. In my time outside of the walls, I decided to play with the idea that my life was a going-through-motions. I wanted to go through life without the. If only to see what it was like.

In this time I found myself in a body that was unfamiliar to me roaming an earth that was unfamiliar to me. At times I would awake in a room I did not know with thoughts of walking a line. (Not a wire like a circus performing, for there was no fall if I strayed from the line, yet I was terrified from ever leaving the line in my thoughts.) At other times I would awake with cold feet in another room that I did not know, as if I had been walking in cold weather. At that point in my life, living in such a warm and humid environment like I had in the south, the notion of walking in colder weather tremendously excited me. It excited me not only in that I was tired of such warm weather, but that it created in me a notion whereas I could be seen as myself becoming an embodiment of going-through-motion. That I was going through such motion that my body refused to stop even while I sought rest.

However, my excitement dwindled when I realized that I lived in a warm climate and that my feet could not be cold from walking outside – this realization would come every time I would wake in that room and touch my toes, and though I sensed that they were cold, they remained warm to the touch. In fact, my friends had told me that walking in my sleep, if I truly was the embodiment of going-through-motions, would leave me with a sense of warm in my feet.

My friends did not often make me sad. But this was one of those times.

In response to my sadness, I went to a doctor to ask about my condition.

What is your condition he asked.

I wake with the hopes of cold feet, but they are always warm to the touch.

I see he said. You have poor circulation, here is a sample of some pills to help you with that.

I thanked the doctor, deciding not to ask him how the pills would help me. I trusted him.

The pills were blue with white lettering and numbering on the side. I had started taking them immediately. I would take them as prescribed and, as my doctor told me they would, I would begin to sense that my feet were as warm as they were to the touch. This was how it was supposed to work. But they did not work this way. I began taking two pills at a time, in the hopes that my body simply had such poor circulation that one pill was not enough.

After several weeks of taking my doctor's pills, with no results, I called my mother to see what her opinion would be – not that I could actually see where her opinion was, for as I have already mentioned, it is not tangible.

However, my mother did not answer her phone, though I did hear her voice:

Not here now, call later.

I did not know what to make of my mother's voice and so I did with it what I could, I had never experienced her saying to me these words.

Not here now.

Not, n-o-t. N-o. A negative. When paired with do, creates don't

Here. H-e-r-e. H-e. He. Me. I am a he. Me.

Now. N-o-w. Similar to No. Creates a don't.

Don't Me Don't. She had intended for me to hear her message in that way, she knew how I would respond and she had made me plead with myself to not take my doctor's pills anymore. And because she is my mother I listened.

Because I did not take my doctor's blue pills I found myself waking in unfamiliar rooms with a chill to my warm weather feet, but with a warmth from my imagined cold weather feet. In an attempt to remedy my situation I decided, with the intangible opinion of my mother kept in my intangible thoughts, to move north.

As I traveled, I would stop and admire the signs telling travelers they had arrived to a new state. It was not until I reached Maine that I felt compelled to stay.

*****

Upon my arrival into Maine I had received a job – this job was not my promotion. In this job I had helped to make newspapers and magazines. I had helped to make world matters. I had helped to make pornography (this is not as glamorous as you may think it is, my friends were quite disappointed when I told them the details of this aspect of my job). I had helped to develop (and destroy) ideas.

This job was in a mill.

This job did not last long.

That mill was sold, from one boss to the next.

I am a good employer he said. Of the seven factories acquired by myself and my associates, all are profitable and employment has increased at all but our most recent one purchased.

We all read his words at the end of a bad decade. We were all looking for the hope of a new one.

Soon, however, that became their most recent two purchased. I became part of a trend. It was flattering at first, of course, to be part of a trend. I had never been one to start anything. Of course, I did not start any of that, I was merely one of a few firsts. But even still, being part of a few firsts was more than I had ever been. I am ashamed to say, however, that while all others were saddened by losing their jobs of creating newspaper, pornography, and world matters, that I found myself joyous at the prospect of new time acquired for my own moving through the world.

As sadness and gloom crept over the town like storm clouds over a summer day no on intends to let go of, I began to feel comfortable in this town. When I awoke with cold weather feet, I would touch my toes and feel the cold.

In fact, my gaiety extended so much so that I felt compelled to bring back the. I was interested to see if the would make a difference in my new northern home. It was during my re-acquaintance with the that my time with televisions began.

In my free time, after my unemployment began, I decided to experiment with running, jogging, sprinting, walking, crawling, and rolling around the town. (I also felt

myself as part of an experiment whenever I would react to the shift horn that the town still used despite the mill's closure.) I was attempting to determine which of these motions was the motion.

Everyday, at eight in the morning and nine in the evening, a horn above the town's fire station would blare once. For weeks at a time I would use the eight o'clock horn to wake up and the nine o'clock horn to go to bed, but I found myself too rested at this interval. Uncomfortably rested. I reversed the schedule; waking at the nine o'clock horn and sleeping at the eight o'clock horn, but I found that with this schedule I only ever encountered the drunkards and night shift workers of the town. These bodies made me feel more uncomfortable than the restfulness I once had – their night lives seemingly never encountering the day lives of the rest of the town. It felt restricting.

I then used both horns as a signal for me to meditate, for an hour, every day. I did this in the parking lot of the now-empty mill. I did not know what I was meditating for, or even if you can meditate for anything, or what I was meditating on. And so I began to wonder what meditation even looked like. To experiment more with my meditations I tried a new method every day.

Stillness, in the parking lot of the now-empty mill.

Running, through the streets of the town.

Jogging, through the trails outside of the town.

Sprinting, through the halls of empty buildings in the town.

Walking, through the streets of the town.

Crawling, through the mud of the town's riverbank.

Rolling, down the hills of the town.

I understand now that I must have looked ridiculous to other townspeople – those who remained, those who did not meditate – but the experiments were necessary, and in part, helped me achieve my promotion. Of course, I never did discover which – running, jogging, sprinting, walking, crawling, or rolling – was the motion, but I did discover the television.

I call it the television, but that is only because of my re-acquaintance with the that I call it the television and not a television, for surely you have guessed as you've come along this journey with me that there was no difference between the television that I found from any other that I could have found. But then again, of all the televisions I could have found, I did find the one that I now call the television. Upon finding the television I realized that I must find a room which I could call my own (despite my move north, I still found myself waking in unfamiliar rooms), for I could not risk losing the television for who knew when another would present itself.

After a decade which was supposed to bring hope for the town, and another year of wandering with my television, I found my room.

After finding a room to call my own, I furnished my room with the television and a bed. All other furniture seemed, I thought, unnecessary. (What is this "I thought" doing ?

Of course you know that I thought that other furniture was unnecessary for you are reading my writing, and how could I write without having my thoughts first? But why have I kept this "I thought" rather than get rid of it? Because if I took it out you may find yourself arguing with me that other furniture is important and that my room that I could call my own was lacking. I do not want to face such arguments. I am beginning to see the tangibility of thoughts.) I spent those first days in the room I could call my own watching the television and sleeping on a bed. A bed is just a meaningless place for sleep.

The television was placed on the floor of the room I could call my own below a window I could look out of and see all that did (and did not) happen in the small town. I did not spend much time looking out of that window I could look out of for I had the television.

I called my mother once I had settled into the room that I could call my own to tell her of the television and the window I could look out of. She was unimpressed with what I told her, and shortly after this conversation the power went out in the small town. During this time away from the television I began to look outside of the window.

Through the window I could see the smokestack of the mill where once I was employed – it jutted out from behind the treetops, reaching towards heavenward. I could see a bench with the phrase "love + peace" carved into its back, there were no people sitting on it. I could see, farther in front of the bench, a body of water which stretched farther than I could see to my right and farther than I could see to my left. In a tree, across the body of water, I could see a bird take flight from one of its branches. However, one thing that I could

not see were people. I wondered why this could be, and, reminded by the smokestack, wondered if it were due to the shutting down of the most recently purchased mill. Three employers after that first one – the good one. I quickly remembered my landlord, whom I paid for the room I could call my own, and realized that the mill's shutdown did not result in the exodus of all townspeople (only some).

Where is everyone I asked myself.

I left this question unanswered as I went back to looking at the television. That is, until an echo began. An echoing of the silence of the television. I understand that that makes no sense – back in the room with the sound and words, my friends often told me my talk of echoes made no sense, so I am aware, but bare with me. Perhaps it was even an echo of an echo. Of an echo? An endless repetition of silence. Such has been the last thirteen years of my life spent in the town.

I thought, at first, that the power had come back on for I knew someone somewhere was attempting to fix it (power companies around this town change names so often, I do not remember who it was working on the power during that particular storm), and so I tried turning the television back on but it did not turn on. The echoing continued and I turned my ear to the television, I got so close my ear suctioned itself to the cold glass screen, hoping to hear what the television was saying but it did not tell me anything, only made the echo louder.

It gave me neither sound nor word with which I could be intimate with.

I let the echo shake me until I could stand it no longer and I left the room that I could call my own for the "love + peace" of the world outside the window.

Outside of the room that I could call my own I was witness to a new viewpoint on everything that I had seen through my window. Although the question of where is everyone remained. I then walked to the nearest house and, based on a knowledge of house floor plans that I did not have (but my guesses on such plans proved correct), found the largest window on the street-facing side of the house to look through. I was correct in guessing (as you now know) that this window would look into a room where a television would be, for I saw a family of three sitting in front of their television, motionless. I rapped my knuckles on the window, startling the family. I did so again until the one appearing to be the father figure rose from his place on a couch.

It was then that I discovered how to fix the television. And the town.

Or so I had hoped.

I ran up and down the street, rapping my knuckles twice on every street-facing window of every house – always it was the living room with the television and a family in front of it – and quickly ran back to my room that I could call my own.

When I returned to my room that I could call my own I went to the window above the television. I could see the smokestack of the factory where once I was employed, jutting out above the treetops (reaching "heavenward"). I could see, farther in front of the bench, a body of water that stretched farther than I could see to my right and farther than I could see

to my left. In a tree, across the body of water, I could see a bird take flight from one of its branches. I could see the bench with the phrase "love + peace" carved into its back, although the phrase was no longer visible to me as a young couple was sitting on the bench. I could see the children playing with each other in the street. I could see two men appearing to be father figures arguing with each other – it seemed to be about the "window knocker." I saw another young couple, not sitting on the bench with the phrase "love + peace" carved into its back, kissing. I noticed, however, that there seemed to be many fathers in the street, yet very few mothers. They were all at work.

I thought of my mother.

The men longed for the smokestacks and the good employer's return.

I opened the window of the room I could call my own to let the sound of the young lives silence the echo of an echo of the silence.

I have done things. But nothing like what I would discover needed to be done here.

THE STRANGER'S CAMERA

What's the scene?

It's summer. July. People are gathered in the streets to celebrate a holiday.

Who's the character? The person of interest?

A boy of a certain, indiscriminant age. Not too old, not too young, but a boy.

What's his focus?

This boy wanders the streets. An idle wanderer to the appearance of all others around him, a flaneur of young age. Yet subtly he moves through the crowd with a certain, discriminant purpose: the girl who has "caught his eye," as they say. We see her in the distance. Blond hair done up with a bow on the top of her head. We cut to her so that she's in focus, not the boy.

Slow motion. She turns around quickly, we just get a glimpse of her blue eyes. We do a quick close up to see that they're looking at the boy. She's looking over at him through the corner of her eye. She's young, like the boy, but not young enough to not wear make up. She's got blush on her cheeks, trying to hide the freckles that are still visible. She looks like she's emulating her mother.

But back to the boy. Every year at this time a massive wandering occurs on the streets of his town, and the boy is no exception. People – those the boy knows, as well as those he does not know – empty out of their houses to maneuver the streets. The stopping and staring at works of art: the deep fried onions, the grilled sausage, the artificially blue icy drink, the ice cream, the themed cans of beer. Staring at the works of celebration. We pan across the crowd – some people with guts, others who are skinny, most everyone is sweating. Cut to some men under a tent grilling sausages. Zoom in to see the beads of

sweat on their brows. The stains on their aprons. The dirt under their nails as they flip and stir onions and peppers and sausages around the grill.

Why are they all doing this? How's this boy feel about it?

Why? Freedom, say some. Liberty, others. Pursuit of happiness, the rest. All with a defeated, extinguished breath as they eat their hot dogs and put off the worry of next month's bills. Like most boys who have no conscious experience with these ideologies, the boy typically doesn't care much for everyone's celebration of them – least of which the freedom or the liberty. However, he's old enough this year, his parents said, to go by himself. With newfound freedom he wanders the crowd, seeing the sparklers and sausages with new eyes. This year he can get on board with the pursuit of happiness. Everyone sees him as an idle wanderer like the rest of them, but we frame him as being very much in pursuit. Not the pursuit of the girl in a predator-prey kind of way, he's too young for that to be the purpose. It's a playful pursuit. A truer pursuit of happiness than those around him, so he thinks.

It'll be a play on what it means to be in pursuit of happiness. Capitalistically, happiness means profit – thus the celebration is in the realm of capitalism. The boy's surrounded by this absurd form of pursuit where nobody's pursuing anything for any purpose other than to fill themselves with some sort of feeling that they can't define. We want to contrast that with the boy and his pursuit of his real happiness.

And real happiness is the girl?

So he thinks, and that will have been set up with those memories of him and the girl. As he follows her, he remembers her.

He does?

They've had class together, played at recess together, and had detention together after they were both caught talking in the line to go to recess. In each of these moments there is laughing and smiling. We cut to them giggling in a class room together, repeatedly writing "I will not talk in line" on a piece of paper. Yet they do not know each other outside of school. This is his chance to change that, he thinks.

How long do we follow his wandering pursuit?

A while.

Dialogue?

Very little. Some passing phrases. An *oh my god* from an exacerbated woman, a heavy guttural *ha ha ha* from a man, the muffled tones of something that sounds like *fuck*, and possibly the sounds of children laughing and playing as they run by the boy. Depending on the lighting of the shot the kids will hold sparklers. Around this time of year there's a lot of words being spoken, but not a lot being said, and that's reflected in what can be heard throughout the shot of the boy. We'll get some commonplace phrases to fill the void during the shot – words so unimportant we forget what's been said even as it's being said.

Where's the girl in all of this?

Through this all we follow the boy in this pursuit. We'll shoot from behind the boy. We mostly see the back of his head. He stays in the center of the shot. We keep her in the shot as often as possible – we have to see that she's his pursuit. The girl will be wearing something to stand out from the crowd. They'll be wearing mostly reds and blues and whites – we'll make the shades bright and vibrant. An assault of freedom we could call it. When people pass by the camera, blocking him from our view, his presence

will still be felt because she will be in the distance. She will wear black to contrast. Her blond hair and her American flag bow telling us we're still with him. So we can see her. So we can know the boy is looking at her.

While some around him wander and stop to take in the food and the art, the boy wanders without stopping. His wandering takes a direct route. And we keep our gaze directly on him as his gaze lays on the girl.

When does the boy catch up to her?

It takes time. He gets stopped along the way.

By what?

A family friend. We'd know it's a family friend because they'll say something like "you're growing up to look just like your father" or something along those lines. Something that will sound more natural. Maybe it's an actual friend of the boy? Regardless it has to be a phrase everyone would know. People should be able to respond to the phrase as though it were a question because they all know the answer that must be given when someone says a familiar phrase. Something so common it's forgotten even as it's remembered. It'll be a phrase so natural people won't even know that they didn't hear the boy respond to it.

So the boy gets stopped and he loses track of the girl. We see him panic. He can't find her. He starts hopping up and down to try and see her over the crowd. The camera tracks his view as he turns and turns, three-hundred-sixty degrees, but alas there's no black in the crowd, no blond hair with a bow that is distinctly the girl's. So his wandering becomes transparent to those around him. We start to see them looking at him strangely, like they know he's not wandering like the rest of them. A middle-aged man holding a

beer and a sausage stares, mouth open with bits of greasy bread stuck to the sides of his mouth. The man's daughter, holding a hot dog and a soda, emulates her father's expression. They know he's in pursuit of something. More and more, as he moves through the crowd, we see their upturned noses and looks of disgust which they direct at him. Two men in the process of exchanging goods glare at the boy – both hands in a frozen tug-of-war with sausage and money. They're offended that he would pursue happiness while the rest of them are wandering in idle profiteering.

Then eventually they stop moving out of his way. They start blocking him. The shot turns to black-and-white – an homage to *The Twilight Zone*. The boy spins around. Everyone's looking at him. Zoom in on a clenched fist. He tries to fight it at first. Zoom in on gritted teeth. He gives in. Zoom in on a tiny trampled American flag. He let's their bodies determine his body. He takes himself off the tracks of his pursuit. He walks in an indiscriminant manner. The boy buys himself a blue icy drink. The others around him start to lose their disgusted faces and go back to their own wanderings. We stay on him as he stands still, holding the cup in his hand, occasionally sipping through the straw. We only get the shot from behind to start, then we slowly rotate around to a close up on his face. We see his eyes darting back and forth. We pan out and he drops the cup and starts to run through the crowd.

We track him from behind, pushing people out of his way who are trying to stop him. Some *what the*'s and *hey*'s get shouted from the crowd but the boy keeps running. Eventually he gets grabbed by an old lady wearing a white American flag shirt. She glares at the boy. We cut to her makeup – her mascara, her eye shadow, her lipstick – then to her jewelry – her earrings, her necklace – then to her bracelet, wrapped around the

wrist which leads to the hand which is holding the boy. There's a short struggle between the two. He gets free from her hold and continues his run before more people can get to him.

When he clears himself through the crowd, he's stopped in his tracks.

The girl in black is no longer wearing black. She's no longer a contrast to the rest of the crowd. We realize she had been wearing a dark blue. She was part of the crowd. And the boy sees her kissing another boy. Another boy who is wearing black. We get the memory of the boy and girl in the classroom laughing. They look at each other and smile. Cut to the image of a dark, shadowy figure in the corner of the classroom. We get the memory of them playing on the playground, laughing, looking at each other and smiling. Cut to the image of a dark, shadowy figure in the distance behind them. We get the memory of them giggling in detention writing the same phrase repeatedly. However, this time the phrase is "Kissing another. Not me." The dark, shadowy figure sitting in a desk behind them.

Back in the crowd, we move the shot so that we rotate around to see his face. By the look of confusion we get from him we can tell he doesn't know this other boy. His adolescent pursuit has suddenly turned sexual. And he has lost. We move away from him a bit and see that the boy is wearing a white shirt. The shot continues so that as we rotate to get another shot of the back of his head.

The scene changes.

We're back where we started and the boy has gotten older.

But he's still a boy. Adolescence is a wide-ranging term, and he takes advantage of that. It's why he's back home. It's why we always come back home. We want freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness until we need our parents again.

The only way to look back on time is through a stranger's camera. That's how we view our earlier experiences. We are still technically an adolescent, though we've aged many years and feel nothing like our earlier adolescence.

After summers we go back to school, we laugh and giggle and play and look at other girls and boy, and then one day we go to college. Unless we don't. But I did. And after college, when things don't go well we come back home, to live with our parents. Like I did.

I'm uncomfortably standing here, in that same part of town, during that same time of year. I am free, I am liberated, and I have no happiness for which to pursue. I see that this town has changed very little from that film I play back in my mind. Yet, like all acquaintances filtered through our perceptions from memory, very little seems to have changed.

I wander the streets, taking in the fried onion rings and grilled sausages and icy blue drinks, a drink which I have once again bought. The children are laughing and screaming and running with sparklers. Music from a nearby bandstand is cascading the street in melody, while the *oh my god*'s and *ha ha ha*'s, and the muffled *fuck*, from adults buzz in and out. I could be an adult, but I'm not.

I hear from behind my name called out. A person I once knew whose life, so far removed in time from when we could say we truly knew each other, I cannot even begin to imagine what they are like and who they are now. We say some passing phrases,

within the phrases could be found some questions, yet we both choose to ignore them and not answer. We both say that it has been good to see each other, though I assume neither of us has thought what it would mean for it to be bad to have seen each other, and we depart.

As I watch him walk away I notice someone in the distance. Someone who has been behind me as I've wandered through this crowd. They are wearing white and they are looking at me. I replay memories that we could have shared – the classroom, the playground, detention – but I know that they are false. I do not remember them.

I turn around in hopes that they, like me, are just wandering. Though with their presence I am no longer wandering. Unlike my memory, no one around seems to notice or take offense. I do not hurry myself through the crowd. I keep a modest pace that's set with those around me. I do not push anyone. I move the crowd with my body – this is liberation. Once I get through to a sparser section of people I am free. I turn around to see if this other person has made progress in their pursuit.

They are gone. Or they have caught up. And I am unable to tell the difference.

APPROACHES TO THE LAND III

The day I made my discovery, nearly thirty years after my arrival to the town, started and ended with a dream. I awoke that day from a dream in which I was on display, thousands of sets of eyes staring at me. Despite what I thought about the things that I had done, it appeared in this dream that I was important, that these people were looking at me for a reason. I would have left that dream to forgetting had it not been for what I found later that day.

During the rainy night in my new room with a new view and my fixed television, I discovered something unusual. By this I mean that I discovered someone unusual during the rainy night. Of course, when I first discovered this someone I did not know that they were unusual – only that it was unusual that they would be standing there, outside of my window, in the rain. As a child I had always been told to stay out of the rain or else I would catch a cold. (Though as I grew and matured I determined it was the cold which would catch me. And so I worried that this man, standing in the rain, would be caught by a cold.)

Typically, on most nights, when I look out of my window I see the small children disobeying their parent's calls to bed. They often look for one last attempt at reaching the top of the lone tree by the stream across the street from my room. In the summer, when the sun takes longer to dip below the horizon, the color of the sky lights these acts of rebellion in such a way that, as they occur, I must ask myself if I am not looking at the rose-colored past of this town. I also will see the teenagers, in the time that it takes for the moon to relinquish the

sun's former spot in the sky, leaving their parent's homes with their near-empty bottles of soda to do whatever teenagers do when the night is born. I soon realized these bottles were for the attainment of alcohol, siphoned from parents' liquor cabinets. The occasional teenager used the bottle to spit tobacco into. Often, some will mistake the one bottle for the other and, thinking they're taking a sip of coffee-flavored liquor, end up with the blackened spit of their peer. I must say that I do admire the resiliency of these children to spit up the tabaccoed saliva and quickly reach for the alcohol. A resiliency I have noted from their parents when they too roam the town's nights. Drinking their alcohol from the glasses of the bar.

However, on that day when it rained, no one ventured outside for me to watch, only the occasional house pet looking for a dry place to use as a bathroom and one squirrel dodging the rain in that lone tree by the riverside.

But later that night, someone was there for me.

I approached my window, above my fixed television, and saw beneath a street corner lamp a man in a hat – one worn by baseball players, though others besides baseball players wear them (such as this man) – and a long dark coat. Of course, the coat might have not been dark, only that the night made it appear dark. Though, I believe I can rule out (and tell me if I am wrong here in my assumption) that the coat could have been a bright one, for if it were I should have been able to tell despite the darkness of the night.

Regardless, I did indeed discover that the coat was not as dark as I before thought, nor was it a coat, but rather a jacket. (And here I will avoid getting into a drawn out discussion of what makes one a coat and not a jacket, and what makes another a jacket and not a coat.

From my room with a new view, I could see the man exhale an ivory cloud of smoke which rose to the yellow street corner lamp above him, before vanishing from my view.

The man intrigued me. And by that I mean I had various thoughts about this man.

Who was he?

Why was he standing under the street corner lamp?

Had I seen him before?

Was he new to this town?

Was he wet?

Was he cold?

Should I approach him?

What would I say to him if I did approach him?

If I approach him should I offer him an umbrella?

Do I still have my umbrella?

Should I approach him and offer him an umbrella, or stand in the doorway of my building and yell to him and invite him into my apartment?

Will he notice me standing in the doorway of my building if I do not yell to him, while I determine if I should yell to him?

If I stand in the doorway of my building and yell to him and invite him into my apartment would I have anywhere for him to sit?

Would he want to sit?

Would I want him to sit if he is wet?

Would I have somewhere for him to put his wet things?

If I walk to him and ask him to come inside, will I get wet?

If I get too wet will a cold catch me?

How wet is too wet before a cold can reach me?

Should I have brought an umbrella?

At this point in the questioning, I discovered that I was then standing in the rain with this man.

I should have brought an umbrella.

Hello I said to him. At that point, having walked towards the man and exposing myself to the rainy night, my hair was quite wet. The lit end of his cigarette responded to my welcome with its bright orange glow. He paused for a moment and took another drag. The way the lit end of the cigarette glowed reminds me now of the beacons on the smoke stacks, warning low-flying planes at night to avoid that portion of the sky.

I wonder to myself now, as I look back at this moment of standing in the rain with the stranger in the baseball hat, if perhaps he was trying to warn me with that glow, to avoid him on that night. If this was his intent, I did not understand it.

How are you doing I asked. The ivory cloud, which he politely blew away from my direction, looked down upon our conversation until it passed above the street corner lamp. Out of sight.

Would you like to come into my apartment? Maybe dry off?

I realized, as soon as I said this to him, based on common societal views, that when one is asked by a stranger to enter a strange place – be it a car or a house or even my room with a view – that the appropriate response is for one to be defensive. To not enter the space one has been offered into. However, this man did not appear alarmed by my question. He simply responded once again with the bright orange glow of his cigarette. (Again I wonder if this were some subtle symbolic gesture of defense on his part?) I then began to think that, perhaps, in rainy night times such as that one with the man in the hat and myself, that the defense mechanism that I have heard is located inside of us all prioritizes which conditions it must be defensive of. For this man in the hat, the danger in the strangeness of my offer was outweighed by the danger of the strong precipitation and the cold which might catch him if he remained in it.

He blew his final ivory cloud which, as with all before it, floated above us towards the street lamp before leaving our sight.

The man in the hat sat on my bed as I looked up at him from my seat of blankets and pillows on the floor (not as comfortable as it may sound). He asked me if he could smoke and I told him that he could not, that it was part of my lease. My landlord would not approve was what I said. He took his hand out of his pocket and made a guttural noise in the direction of the doorway, as though the doorway were the personification of my landlord, who would not let him smoke.

I told him that smoking causes cancer.

I know he said and so did the mill.

I told him that I had heard that. Something about the smoke from the stacks and the chemicals we worked with inside the mill. I remembered hearing someone say these things before.

It still does he said.

At the time I thought that what he meant by this was that there was some chemical composition in the mill's building which emitted some sort of cancer. This is true, I would later learn. But I now think that he meant something entirely different, and that cancer was not really what he meant.

He asked me then if I had anything to drink. I responded that I had only water and a bottle of some clear, foreign liquor that a teenager dropped several nights ago when they were approached by a police officer. He looked at me and I supposed that I should explain more clearly what I meant when I said foreign – not that the liquor was from a country not

our own, for I had no real way of telling that from siphoned liquor in a plastic bottle, but only that the liquor was unfamiliar to me. I'm not sure what king it is I said.

Nevermind he responded.

I asked him where he was from and he said from Here which I found odd.

Here as in this room I had asked.

Here as in this town he responded.

In the silence following I looked at him. His eyes, cast out of the window with a view, were a deep, sky-like blue – I imagined his eyes to be what it would look like to see a bird flying in the middle of the eye of a storm. A speck of life in a blue sky circled by storm clouds.

He did not say much on that night, and what he did say he tried to make pessimistic, yet he called himself a realist, however I could see in him an ever-optimist. One had to be to grow up a Red Sox fan in the town (from what I could see from my window) – the red B on his hat growing more vibrant in color as he sat there on the bed, as it dried. That realism – as he called it – gave him a wonderful sense of humor (my opinion, not his). He said many humorous things that night, none of which I can remember exact enough to tell you now.

Perhaps it wasn't what he said that was funny, it was how he said it. He told the story of how his friend would hide his father's whiskey bottle in an attempt to get his father to quit drinking.

To stop being an alcoholic he said. But he just bought more.

We both laughed at this.

He came from a working class background – as did all who grew up in this town. For decades the sounds of the mill and the smoke from the stacks guided recent graduates of the high school to their inevitable careers and lives. That his uncles worked summers while in college at the mill, and that his father and grandfathers and great-grandfathers all worked and spent their lives in that mill. Because of this he often suffered a sore back from his dreams of working.

I remember laughing at that.

He laughed too while fingering the outline of his pack of cigarettes through the denim of his jeans.

I asked him about those dreams, but he either did not hear me due to the nature of his laughter, or knowing the nature and volume of his laughter he knew he could give this excuse, and thus ignore my question. I did not repeat myself. We continued on in a superficial discussion for several hours. He then asked me how long I had been living in his town (this possessive tone in speaking of the town is my own, not his. For I have encountered many residents of this town for whom possession is the sole vernacular. They know the town in no other way but as their own).

I had responded that I was still relatively new to the town. That I had once worked in the mill that he dreams of. Where his dreams take place.

Funny he said I've never seen you in any of them.

Perhaps you did not know to look for me I responded.

Why would I do that?

I do not know.

Perhaps I'll try next time.

At this, another long stint of silence echoed through the room. We did not look at each other nor did we move much from our seated positions. However, it was late and I did find myself very tired and in that silence I fell asleep.

When I awoke I looked out of my window to see that the morning was breaking through the trees on the other side of the stream, covering the lone tree on our side of the stream in their shadows.

When I turned from my window, I noticed that he was gone. I turned back to look out of my window, my eyes first going to the street corner lamp and then to the curb below my window.

No sign of him was left in the room but his bag which contained a CD and a journal, and his lingering tobacco smell.

THE SOUND OF CHANGE

See I ain't gettin' better

I'm only gettin' behind

Jason Molina

TRACK 1 – "FAREWELL TRANSMISSION" (7:22)

"...if I may use the heavy-handed metaphor of Jason Molina as a beautifully detailed pencil drawing that depicted a complex individual carefully treading the line between absolute light and absolute dark, that pencil drawing had been smudged considerably and had been soaked in alcohol, and all of those delicate lines swirled around into a sometimes incomprehensible shadow of his former self" (Jason Groth, "Magnolia Electric Co. Diary 08-28-2009)

One day before the start of 1974, Jason Andrew Molina was born in Lorain, Ohio.

"Many residents of the tired blue-collar town... relied on the former Ford Motor Company assembly and U.S. Steel mill to make ends meet."

"As far as Molina was concerned, Lorain offered him two career options: work on the assembly line or enlist in the military. He wanted nothing to do with either."

Jimmy lived on the edge of the Town of Unredeemed Good. In the distance were the ever-present lights of the Magic City. We were always chasing after them.

The day started with a squirrel running into the whateveryoucallit out behind the elementary school. That big metal structure with all the wires from town running into it. A power station? The whole place was dark. Well, at least half the town's wires ran to it. Every light on that side of the town. We could hear the bang from across the stream. And we lost power at the high school. It was the beginning of winter and so we thought it was just like a snow day. There was snow and no school.

At that time our parents still had jobs on Friday afternoons and so we spent that afternoon walking around town throwing snowballs at each other. We were old enough that we could've done something else – smoke weed out behind the high school, drink beer out on the golf course. But we were always doing those things. A snow day was free time for us to use for reversion back to what we thought were simpler times. Unfortunately, there's no snow days where I'm at now. No reverting back to a simpler time. I don't even know what simple means.

Mainly though, we spent our snow day that way because we were still at the age where we were scared shitless of our parents. We used what little money we had to buy a couple of pizzas from Mike's parents' restaurant. If we had been a little dryer that day they probably would have given them to us for free. We made the place a mess.

That place has been closed now for five years, they couldn't even sell it to. No one wanted it. No one wanted where it was.

We went back outside. Along the way people were going to their homes as they came near. I was the last one left. When I got home the power was still off, but my parents were home from their jobs at the hospital and the mill.

They had candles lit in the living room, and they were sitting in silence. They asked me if I wanted Chinese food from the other side of town, the part with power, and I said yes. Two C52s, General Tso's chicken, and a chicken egg foo young. Dad had a drink in his hand, "to keep warm" as he liked to say in those long winter months. He also had to keep warm in the summer months.

Later that night I went back out with my friends. Jimmy's parents were going out on a date at the River Driver's restaurant on the Rice Farm Road outside of town so we were going to go and take some of their booze. We took some coconut rum and whiskey last time we drank, so we decided we'd have the vodka and brandy this time around. My parents told me to be careful as I left them for the night in their candlelit silence. I took a near-empty soda bottle with me for the vodka.

I had spent the past summer working odd jobs at the local lumber store. That's where me and Jimmy got to know each other real well. Our parents were good friends, but they

never spent time with each other. They'd call and talk about us. Thankfully they thought we were both good kids.

When I got to Jimmy's house he was looking over his map with some of our other friends. I'd learned that past summer that Jimmy liked to walk around the town and draw maps for himself. The rest of us would joke that he had the internet for that now, but he always made his maps interesting. We lived in the town of Unredeemed Good. The Magic City was only a glimpse of happiness on the horizon. His maps only ever showed the border of that city. He was always looking to take his maps farther and farther outside of the Unredeemed City's boundaries. He wanted to reach the Magic City. After we became good friends, Jimmy asked me, real serious one time, if I had ever seen the Magic City. When I told him no he had frowned, then quickly turned it to a smile and told me we'd find it together.

His parents had already left and so we started drinking from their bottles. Jimmy was planning on finding the Magic City this night.

Of the top ten liquors sold in Maine, four spots go to Allen's Coffee Brandy – 1750ML, 1000ML, 750ML, and 325ML sizes. Orloff Vodka occupies the second spot. Both are Maine-made products.

After we all felt buzzed, we filled my empty soda bottle with some vodka and coffee brandy. We took a Nalgene bottle and filled it with Oakhurst milk for a chaser. Mike said

the vodka-brandy smelled liked shit. “You’re out of your element, Donny,” Jimmy responded to him.

Maine White Russian:

1 part Allen’s Coffee Flavored Brandy

1 part Orloff Vodka

2 parts Oakhurst Whole Milk

As we took turns drinking from the vodka-brandy mix we discussed our route for the night’s walk.

The first jail in Millinocket was a small shed with a barred window and picket fence. Add a dog and it’s the American dream. “It is said a drunk had a most surprising ride in this house when it was moved downtown to a spot behind the Charles Rush Block.”

“Smokey, my friend,” Jimmy said as we reached the edge of the woods, “you are entering a world of pain.”

“[Jason Molina] and the bottle had a complicated relationship.”

Most nights when we’d drink and walk, we’d stay within the limits of the town and avoid the cops. But Jimmy had drunk enough that night, and so he felt ambitious and wanted to

use our walk to make out a new map. In the summer the woods around the town were hard to navigate because of all the underbrush, and it was easier to get lost. In the winter though there were groomed snow sled trails that we followed. Because we weren't sure that the trails would lead us to the Magic City, the part of us not guided by the trails was guided by hope. For Jimmy and ourselves.

With snow sled trails leading out of the town and into various surrounding lakes, we all felt comfortable that night to search for the monsters we always heard were lurking among the shadows. We had only heard stories of the monsters that existed in that city. In the Magic City they embraced these monsters, they saw them as signs of prosperity. Somewhere along the way, so it goes, shadows crept over the city and the monsters went into hiding.

"Molina entered his second rehab facility in Chicago, binged upon discharge, and was quickly readmitted. Once released, he briefly disappeared, checking into a luxurious downtown hotel where he blew most of his latest royalty check. Darcie Molina and his friends followed his movement through his bank-account transactions. They panicked when he purchased a one-way train ticket to New Orleans."

In the Town of Unredeemed Good we had our monsters. They were treated as monsters often are; creatures that one should be afraid of. Our monsters were hidden beneath the surface, cast in shadows.

Those shadows were made by the lights of the Magic City in the distance.

We all passed the bottle around in the cold night until we stopped noticing the cold on the tips of our noses and ears. Cirrus clouds hung deep in the sky, providing a drapery, a cover, for our walk. We passed through the forest, each step crushing and crunching the snow, taking us deeper into its memory. We passed timber we thought was magnificent only to remember that the timber of our parents' youth was more magnificent, and even more so before them. The wind would blow at times, and when it would cumulus clouds would pass over the moon, blanketing us in darkness, giving us time to rest and Jimmy to draw, using the light of our phones. When the darkness passed we continued on.

With each new rooted magnificence we passed, one of us would wonder how much farther we'd have to travel to find what it was we were looking for. I think some of us were still trying to determine if we wanted to find the Magic City. Nowadays it seems the light of the Magic City was saving us from our monsters. I think maybe it seemed that way back then, too, but none of us knew that was the case.

Jimmy inspired us to try and find it. I don't know if we ever really thought we'd find it. I think Jimmy thought he could find it if only he could draw it. He had to make it something he could hold on to. The walks let us get drunk, and that kept us from having too many questions about any of it.

At some point along the way, Jimmy told us to stop so his map could catch up with us. The clouds had moved out of the sky completely, and the wind had settled. We stood in a patch of birch trees. I walked up close to one of them and started peeling and tearing away the bark. Carrying the tear as far as I could before it broke. I wanted to say something about the layers of a tree and its relationship to the human body. That the bark I was peeling away would grow back. That the tree would grow larger. That as the tree grew, it would grow around this tear I'd made in its being. I was drunk enough that I did say these things. The other guys laughed at me. Jimmy stopped his drawing and looked at me as I neared the end of my soliloquy. He said that he liked what I said and that he was going to label this section of his map as "The Land of Tranquility and Healing." It sat between the Magic City and Town of Unredeemed Good. Perhaps that's what was needed as one journeyed between the two.

He made a few more strokes on his pad and we kept moving.

"Molina vomited blood on the way down to Louisiana and eventually arrived at Maison Dupuy, his favorite New Orleans hotel. A worried desk clerk found him puking in the lobby's bathroom and called 911. Paramedics rushed him to a nearby hospital's intensive care unit before he could even check into his room."

We finished off the brandy-vodka mixture. Time no longer mattered to us by that point. The moon was high enough to give us enough light to know where our steps were taking

us, and to see the ones that led back to where we had come from. By the end of the Nalgene of milk, which we were still passing around after the booze was gone, we had started talking about the girls in our high school classes. The ones none of us could've gotten. The ones we might've had a shot with if we had had any interest in not smoking and drinking with each other most nights. And the ones we liked at that moment. At that point I had liked a girl named Michelle. She used to go out with Jimmy, so I couldn't talk about her on that walk, but I couldn't help but keep thinking about her, and a few times I was as removed from the conversation as Jimmy was while he mapped out our course. He interrupted our talk to tell us he thought we were getting close.

We didn't know what we were getting close to. We wouldn't have wanted to know. Except for maybe Jimmy.

We had never gone that far out before. Jimmy was clearly excited, his hand was moving furiously, trying to sculpt the surroundings on his pad. We felt like New World explorers, only we were in search of the past.

Yes, it felt like we were in search of the past.

We passed the rooted magnificence of the timber until it gave way to a clearing, barren and unfamiliar to us. Jimmy and I ventured past the threshold with his map. The others stayed in the trees. Jimmy scribbled furiously, detailing the landscape. We were no longer

in The Land of Tranquility and Healing. We had entered the realm of the monsters. Alone. In search of the Magic City.

Jimmy stopped as we moved across the barren earth. I could only hear my breath and Jimmy's breath alternating. Then the sounds of something in front of us approaching.

"7:12 PM on March 16, 2013. Both an officer and medical examiner arrived at the scene and discovered Molina's body. His organs had given out."

Me and Jimmy turned and ran as fast we could. When we reached the other guys they didn't ask us any questions but followed us.

Jason Molina was pronounced dead on March 16, 2013, at the age of 39. A half-full bottle of vodka left in the freezer.

Jimmy and I never told the others about the monster we saw in the woods that night. The silhouette and the laugh. I think it was a laugh. We never talked much about any of it, so I've never been sure.

When we all got back into town Mike leaned against a tree and puked. Jimmy, shaken, squeaked out a "This is what happens when you fuck a stranger in the ass." We all laughed at that. We all needed to laugh at that.

As we grew older, winter seemed to come sooner and sooner, but we could never remember the answers we found in the woods that first winter. Each new winter, as we got older, we'd venture farther out into the forest to discover new memories, and look for the new monsters. Each year our map got more vivid, more descriptive. Our patterns in the snow led us back home when the night was over.

We're still waiting for Jimmy's map to lead him back.

TRACK 2 – "I'VE BEEN RIDING WITH THE GHOST" (3:21)

In school we'd learn to count. One, two, three, and so on. One, two, three, and so on. One, two, three. One, two, three. Three, two, one. Four always got left out in the count downs. Typically countdowns lead to things which people are looking forward to. Countdown to the new year where people will be better with their bodies and with their relations to other bodies. Countdown to lift off where we go into space to explore the great unknown, the search for life. Countdowns always lead to new beginnings. Countdowns do not happen for the moments in the middle, apparently. No one ever celebrates a count down to death. "You have six months to live." This is not a countdown people like to think about. But people are always forgetting the "down" in countdown.

Countdowns are a downer.

In the 1950s, a husband and wife were returning home from their honeymoon. They were driving down the Brownville Road, outside of Millinocket. After the excitement of a big catholic wedding and the subsequent honeymoon up north, the couple was eager to return to their home and jobs in the prosperous mill town. As the couple approached what is often referred to as the "Green Bridge" something ran in the road. This caused their vehicle to leave the road.

The Brownville Road is a stretch of tar that connects the towns of Brownville and Millinocket, Maine. Where the road enters Millinocket one will find the town's hospital. As the couple lay in the ditch, headlights

shining into the forest's depths, a family of deer crossed through the light. The deer rustling the underbrush woke the husband. His head bleeding slightly above the right eye, he noticed his wife's unconscious body beside him. He successfully attempted to get out of the vehicle, and waited until his wife awoke before embarking for the hospital. After several impatient minutes of waiting, the husband shook his wife awake. She started moaning as she gained her consciousness. The couple quickly discovered, through blood and broken bone, that the wife would be unable to walk to the hospital with her new husband. He told her to wait for him as he would get her an ambulance.

The wife, her leg broken, watched as her new husband vanished piece by piece down the road. First his feet. Then his legs. Then his back. Then completely.

As she sat in the car, she kept her eyes in front of her where the headlights continued to shoot off into the distance, until their light met the bark of a tree or the nothingness which sometimes accompanies the forest. The pain from her leg, which was at first so agonizing, had soon diminished to a constant, dull throb echoing throughout her leg. She glanced at the dashboard clock and saw that only fifteen minutes had passed since her husband left her. She knew it would take him some time to get to the hospital.

As the husband made his way down the long road to the hospital he had begun to wish he had taken a thicker coat on the honeymoon. Though the temperature during the days had been pleasant, and one was able to wear thin layers with short sleeves, the nights had proven to be ready for the oncoming winter.

Several minutes into the husband's trek to the hospital, the wife heard a noise behind her. The red of the brake lights cast an ominous glow onto the ditch behind. Because of the broken leg she could not easily turn around to see what, or who, the noise came from. The noise was not ominous, but the red glow of the brake lights was. The noise was just a noise...

I was sixteen when I started working in the lumberyard in my summers. That's where me and Jimmy had met.

The following is an imagined conversation –

Drunkard: Hey man.

Friend: Hey man, how ya doin?

D: I've been better. I'll be better. But I'm not so good right now.

F: Ya wanna come in?

D: Can I?

F: Yeah, of course, man. How ya been?

D: I'll be better.

F: Yeah.

D: Can I spend a few nights with you?

F: Yeah, of course. What's up?

D: Just need a place to stay.

F: Where ya been, man? People have been calling, no one knows what you've been up to.

D: I've been doin.

F: Yeah. Ya wanna talk about anything?

D: Baseball, maybe.

The following is some information –

There are three brothers. In 1974, 1975, and 1982, Benjamin Molina and Gladys Matta welcomed three boys into the world. Benjamin Molina, an amateur second baseman, raised all three boys to play baseball. When he discovered that all three boys were some of the best players on the field, he taught them to play catcher, a position that many children do not learn to play, and thus, very few catchers are productive major leaguers.

Jason Molina was born to a father and mother not named Benjamin Molina and Gladys Matta. His father taught science to junior high schoolers, while his mother was a bookkeeper, so it is somewhat of a mystery as to how he

grew to be a musician. However, Molina's mother had a problem with alcohol, which was passed down to Jason.

Our dads worked in the mill together – Jimmy's dad was my dad's boss, something like that – and our moms worked in the hospital together. We became friends – moving bags of cement and cleaning up lumberyards – like our dads had become friends; through physical labor. One of the first things we talked about when we first met was the test the school handed out to us the year prior. We filled in their bubble sheets and six weeks later we spent fourth block going over the test's results: what it appeared our future careers would be.

I was told I'd be a manager. Of what? It didn't say. Just a nondescript manager.

Jimmy was told he'd be a carpenter.

We figured they just pulled jobs out of a hat to avoid telling us we'd all be unemployed, and there wasn't anything they could teach us to change that. They were giving us all a ghost that we were supposed to ride off into the sunset.

The sunset being high school graduation when we learned we'd be shit outta luck.

Once that summer ended and we went back to school, Jimmy and I spent a lot of time together, along with the other friends we made that summer. We'd go for walks at night. Eventually, though, I needed money if we were going to have any fun in the town.

That was about when I had started working at the video rental place – *Movie Gallery*. I was sixteen. It was the spring after Jimmy and I had been working in the lumberyard together. I loved to play video games and watch movies and so I thought the place would be a haven from home. I also thought I'd get discounts on rentals. Neither turned out to be true.

I did get an easy job. I'd work at the counter, and when enough movies or games got returned to fill a cart I'd wheel the cart around the store and put the movies back. It beat the hell out of carrying cement and wood.

There was a movie I rented once that had a line that went something like "This job would be great if it weren't for the fucking customers" and I thought that was a really fitting line to describe my experiences with customers.

There was the old guy who would come in every week and ask me what was "new" in the store, and every time I'd have to walk him to the portion of the wall where the new releases were. From there he'd ask me to read the back cover of the first row. From there he'd go on a tirade about how piss poor movies were "nowadays" and how everything was just a rip off or remake of an older movie. "Why can't anybody have a new idea"

he'd ask me. I'd tell him that I didn't know . "Write something new" he'd always say as I waited for him to walk to the "classics" section of the store and pick a Hitchcock film from there. *The Birds* was his favorite. He'd say: "I remember seeing that in the theaters as a young guy with my friends. We got so scared we all put our feet up on our seats, we were afraid the birds would come out from under and get us!"

Then there was the woman who wanted a refund because she found her rental to be too bloody and sexual. I told her I could do that and she thanked me. She handed over *Bordello of Blood*. Literally a bloody whorehouse. I refused her refund. "Why" she asked. "Because," I told her, "you took out a movie that means bloody whorehouse." She asked for the manager. She got her refund, and I was told not to treat a customer like that, though the manager agreed with me.

I was seventeen when I found out I'd be losing my job. That's about forty years earlier in life than Jimmy's dad and my dad would find out they were losing theirs.

I was hoping to work at the rental place until at least my high school graduation, when I'd grab my managerial ghost, look at the sunset, and realize I was fucked. They were hoping to work in the mill until retirement. By then I'd be eighteen and I'd be able to stock the room in the back. By then they'd be able to relax for once without the aid of a drink or an Advil.

I was hoping to work there long enough so that I'd be able to stock the porn. I'd have made my mother proud.

When the rental place did finally close I was forced to take on a job as a paperboy. The paperboy before me was twelve and used his bike. I had my mother's car. She'd drive me around in the mornings. I made her so proud.

It didn't take me long to figure out that paper boys were paid shit wages, and you'd get charged about twice the amount of a paper for any complaint put in about. Which sucked for me because of this one house on the route. The people had a long driveway that they'd almost never plow in the winter, and then I'd have to walk up a twenty foot walkway, which they rarely shoveled, go up a flight of stairs, which seemed to never be shoveled, and put the paper on their upper porch door, which sometimes couldn't open because there was so much snow. Well, a couple of times after bad snowstorms I said to hell with it, and I just put the paper in their front door. Well, they'd always complain that I didn't put their paper where they wanted it, and so I'd lose part of my paycheck because of it.

And they never, ever tipped.

After the paperboy gig I went to college for a bit. After you hit the sunset with your ghost and you realize your ghost is just a ghost, you look for something to keep you steady. Fortunately I didn't screw up too much in high school, and I was able to get in.

But things didn't work out the first time around for me in college. I had a job at one of the dining halls, making me wear some ridiculous looking smock and chef's hat. Even when all I was doing for my shift was sweeping the floor and picking up garbage. Got to the point my sophomore year that if I was scheduled to serve food I'd have a few drinks before coming in. I was more sociable when I had a few drinks in me. In the spring of that year my boss could smell the booze on my breath and I had drank too much that I couldn't make a coherent case for myself. They told me I couldn't work there any longer and that I'd have to see a counselor. So I dropped out.

My parents didn't say much to me when I moved back in with them. The mill wasn't running at that time, and so dad had nothing better to do than keep himself warm all day long. Mom would follow suit when she got home. Most of our meals were spaghetti that summer. It's now too hard to remember how many summers had been like that. My mom would tell me spaghetti was easy, that's why we were having it so often, but the more the cupboards were bare the more I thought this wasn't easy.

The mill became something no one talked about. Work still wasn't coming back to the town. The owner's were silent about any progress. The lights on the smokestacks, warning pilots in the night, stilled glowed red. That still gave the town hope.

When I first got back home I tried getting a job at the grocery store. When I went in to interview, the kid, only a sophomore in high school, who came in before me was wearing

a shirt and tie while all I had on was a polo and had to try and skirt around the question about why I lost my last job and dropped out of school. When the lady asked me why I left my last job I told her it was due to a conflict of interests. When she asked me why, I said “my boss played by the rules just a little too closely for my liking. And he didn’t welcome a fun work environment.” I thought I did pretty well given the circumstances, but I never got a call back. A few weeks later,when I went to buy some chasers and mixers for a party, that kid was bagging my groceries.

My next try was with the gas station.

Late in the summer the guy who owned the airport took a flight over the mill. That’s when we learned that the company that owned the mill ripped out the machinery that you couldn’t see from the town. At least, that’s when everyone finally believed it.

I got the job at the gas station, working ten to six in the morning. I picked up smoking and tried to read poetry when no one came in. I quickly ditched the poetry and kept smoking.

One night while I was working, Jimmy came in. He told me he was leaving for the City of Bright Lights to try his hand at something new. He told me he was leaving the next day. I asked him what he was going to do when he got there, and he said he wasn’t quite sure but he had a few ideas. I gave him some cigarettes and we smoked and talked for an hour until a customer came and I had to say bye to him.

We both said we'd keep in touch with each other.

A couple of weeks after Jimmy left, I picked up my grandfather's guitar one day after work when I couldn't sleep from all the Red Bull and cigarettes. I got pretty good, I thought, and so I tried writing songs. Some didn't work out, others did. Then I picked up an album that I tried to emulate. I thought I could. But something wasn't right.

I showed the songs to some people and they all said good things about it. That was the only push I needed to decide to leave my parents and the town and see if I could be a musician. I overheard my parents talking about me one night, how they thought I was just doing this to follow Jimmy, and I couldn't help but think that maybe they were right. But after following him in his map-making all those winters, I figured maybe the City of Bright Lights would be our new Magic City.

I took my grandfather's guitar with me on my way down south – he died before I could really know him, and so I thought about what songs he might have played on it.

The wife, in the car alone, heard another noise. A noise is just a noise, she tried to think.

When the husband reached the peak of a large hill on his dark journey he could see the stacks of the mill looming over the trees. He then quickly

approached the Golden Road entrance, knowing he was less than a mile from the hospital. From helping get his wife out of the woods. The husband, upon reaching this point in his travels, felt at ease. His wife would soon be picked up by the ambulance – that would make the journey in less time than he just walked it. From there, her leg would be healed and the happy couple could begin their new life. The husband working in the mill and the wife keeping their house in order.

The husband approached the railroad crossing as a train was barreling down the tracks. He wondered how his wife was doing in the car, by herself. He worried but knew she would be okay.

The husband waited for his wife's arrival to the hospital when, after nearly an hour passed, he grew increasingly worried to see the sheriff walk into the waiting room. He was informed that they could not find his wife but that the police department was, and would continue, searching the wilderness around the site of the accident.

The wife was never found, though some say when one drives down the Brownville road late at night and arrives upon that spot where the newlyweds crashed, one can see a woman in white walking the road.

TRACK 3 – "JUST BE SIMPLE" (4:20)

When he left for college the house felt empty. I thought that empty-nest thing only happened to women. He left to study some sort of business degree or something. I was proud of him. He was smarter than I'd ever be. But the house felt empty. Once he left, he didn't call much, and me and his mother didn't have much left in common to talk about. When he did call we'd talk about what he told both of us and smile knowing how well he said he was doing. Then when he came home after getting kicked out the house felt too full. I felt like I couldn't even move around without bumping into him or his mother. Not that I minded. I can't say that, no. But I just didn't feel like I had any space to be me. He was always running around with his buddies, doing whatever it was that they would do on those nights. Me and her would spend our nights drinking. If we didn't do that I think we would've spent all our time worrying about him. That's how we kept our marriage together – we worried and we drank.

When the pictures of the mill came out I knew that was about it for me and working. I couldn't put up with doing anymore laborer jobs. Before they tore the place down to rubble I was already traveling all over to work. Bucksport. Old Town. Madawaska. All of them are closed now. The job makes you old real quick. Your knees hurt by the end of every shift. Your back's hot with pain. You're coughing up a lung because of the shit they let you work in – especially in those boilers. You're covered in sweat. And that's before you have to drive one or two hours home. You'd have to wake up at four in the morning and pack clothes for every type of weather because you'd never know what it would do when you showed up to the sight; maybe it was hot, maybe it was raining. I got too old for it.

After he left for that damn city his friend wound up in, and everyone understood the mill wasn't coming back, he asked us why we didn't just move somewhere. I told him I was too old for that. We also thought the mill would still be back.

You watch the mill change hands so many times and still be productive, you can't help yourself from thinking it'll happen again. No matter if it's laid flat.

We still couldn't help but have hope. We didn't have anything left.

I couldn't help but laugh when, a few months later, he asked us again why we didn't move somewhere new. He was trying to be some sort of musician, living on his college friend's couch, and he was trying to preach to us about moving somewhere new and doing something new. I admired him. I wish I still had enough time to make those mistakes. I also pitied him.

Pretty soon after that we just stopped hearing from him. He stopped calling us, and when we tried calling him he either didn't answer or was in the middle of doing something, never telling us what. It got hard to try after a while of that.

We did our best to keep the marriage from falling apart, but without him to talk about, things got hard. We both stopped drinking. It got too expensive for us. I had stopped

working by that point and her hours were getting cut, seemed like every few months we were finding out we'd be bringing in less money than the last few months before.

She found out from one of his buddy's mother that he had started to do pretty well for himself. I was still proud of him, but didn't know if I'd be able to tell him over the phone. By the time he called again he found out I had moved out. I was living with my sister. His mother kept living in the house, a sign out front trying to sell it to whoever would take it. No one was going to take it. It's still sitting there, rotting, with our names still on the title.

TRACK 4 – "ALMOST WAS GOOD ENOUGH" (4:28)

In 1999, Jason Molina moved to Chicago, and quickly made it his unofficial home. Choosing the bright lights of the city over the decrepit façade of Lorain, Ohio.

I was in the City of Bright Lights living on a friend's couch when a huge winter storm hit the coast. The city practically shut down – the only places open were gas stations, police stations, and hospitals. We ran out to the closest gas station and bought a few cases of Milwaukee's Best and some cans of Chef-Boyardee. We knew how we would be spending our time during the storm. We were also broke. Me especially. I don't know what it takes to be not-broke, but I still don't think I've made it there.

I had been in the bright lights of the city for a few months by that point and had managed to grab a couple of solo shows based on things people saw from me at open mic's. I was feeling pretty good about my time in the city, but I was stumbling through odd jobs to make enough money to pay at least a little to my friend for putting me up.

I had run into Jimmy a couple of times. He was living on his own on the other side of the city and working on some music as well. He had a side job as a carpenter's assistant, and he was part of a labor ready crew for extra money. I laughed when he told me this, and he knew that I was thinking back to our career tests in high school. "I guess they had me pegged early on" he said. "I think they always do" I said. He asked me if I wanted him to find me a job. I told him I didn't think I'd be able to do it. He asked me why and I couldn't think of a good enough reason at the time. I still can't think of one. I guess I just

figured that being a “struggling musician” as my day job was going to break my back or my liver or both without needing the added struggles of working at a job that’s whole purpose was breaking me down. Emotional *or* physical breakage was all I could take, never emotional *and* physical breakage. I don’t have the choice now.

The apartment I lived in was cramped and not well heated, but I was thankful for a place to stay while I tried my hand at doing what I thought I loved. The buddy I was living with was going to school to be a chemical engineer. His grandfather had gone into the town’s paper mill at eighteen and retired as a chemical engineer, with no education. Yet there was my buddy, having spent four years to get his bachelors, and then spending another two years for his master’s before he could even enter a mill and make a living. He was always telling me how good the money was in the paper industry. I told him it was only good if you were capable of following it from one shuttered mill to another. He told me that’s only the northern paper industry, he was moving south after he got his master’s.

He had another friend who ended up crashing on the floor beneath the couch I was sleeping on. He showed up the night the storm was starting. All he had with him was his guitar and a bag of laundry our friend was letting him wash there in the sink.

My friend talked about how this other guy was a singer-songwriter, and he introduced himself as M., so I felt pretty confident that I would fucking hate him.

"He was a goofball. He was often an ass. Just as often he was one of the most generous people I knew. He was both extremely confident and supremely insecure" (Jason Groth, 08-24-2009)

The next night, after the storm had stopped and the plows were clearing everything so that the normalcy of the frantic city could start back up the next morning, I decided to take a walk with M. We smoked and drank the beer that we were keeping in our coat pockets. The night was warm, which made the snow, that had finished falling, wet and sticky. We took aim at a few road signs and traffic lights with the snowballs we built around our crushed, empty cans.

The sky was cloudy and choked the lights of the city. Keeping us locked in under the red din of the leaving storm. Later that night we hammered away on three chords riffing around the old "Red sky at night, sailor's delight" saying. In M. I saw something similar that I found in Jimmy. There was a drive behind both of them that caused them to only focus on what it was that they were doing in the moment. While M. and I played that night, I kept trying to move the song into different sections – trying to make a bridge or a chorus – but M. only kept with the same three chords. He'd tell me if we did that right we wouldn't need anything else. I wondered if this was what Jimmy was like with his music. Like with Jimmy I just followed M.'s lead.

Thinking back, M. seemed more interested in staying put with his music – if he didn't have to stray from his original structure, he wouldn't. I'm sure Jimmy treated his music

like he treated his maps – he was looking to explore and find what others couldn't see, like the Magic City.

The next morning all the beer was gone, along with M. He left a note for me telling me to meet him at his other friend's apartment later that day. My buddy then told me that M. knew people who could get me studio time.

I was feeling pretty good and went out to get coffee. I tried reaching Jimmy, I wanted to tell him about M. I wanted them to meet. I got Jimmy's voicemail both times I tried.

Later that day I went over to M.'s friend's apartment. I brought my guitar and we played for a few hours. Between songs we'd all have a cigarette or a beer or both. I showed them some of the songs I had been writing, and then me and M. played our "Red Sky at Night" song. What we remembered of it. We kept drinking beer, and started a plan of going to a bar where one of M.'s bands was playing that night. They asked me if I was up for it and I said yes before they finished asking. M. and I wrote down some lyrics we thought were pretty good for our song, and headed out into the lights.

I called Jimmy again and it went straight to his voice mail.

The city was cold that night. We showed up to the bar where the show as at. The band playing was some trio doing punk covers of hip-hop and folk songs. The crowd looked good – plenty of people who seemed to be into the music – and M. was talking about his

set list to us as we had our drinks at the bar. Having heard the music that M. played for me over those two days, it surprised me, upset me really, when he told us he was going to be covering a James Taylor song that night. “Fire and Rain.” But he played it in such a way that made me think it’d scare James Taylor to hear.

While another band came on and did some standard rock songs that were hard to distinguish from one another I started talking to a girl who was from Maine. We discussed our old haunts from the state, things we did in high school, things we did in college. I told her I had graduated. She said she had just finished her master’s, which meant that she was older than me. She told me she was in the city to find a job. We found out we had a few friends in common, ones we hardly knew, but enough to give us both something to talk about. We laughed about that. Pretty quickly in the night she figured I hadn’t finished college. She didn’t seem to care.

M. came over while I was talking to her and asked me if I’d be up for singing “Red Sky” during his set. I told him sure, but that I didn’t have my guitar.

“It’s all right,” he said. I could borrow someone’s guitar, he told me.

The rock band seemed to end their set with a Hoobastank cover, but I couldn’t tell which song. And then I wasn’t sure if it was Hoobastank at all, or if the band in front of me was actually Hoobastank. I texted Jimmy and said I was seeing the downfall of Hoobastank. The aftermath, I guess, is what it really was. Before M. started his set, Jimmy texted me

back asking where they had to fall from. I laughed at that. Mike played sports year-round when we were all in high school, and he loved that locker room rock – Hoobastank, Trapt's "Headstrong," Linkin Park (the whole discography) – and me and Jimmy would always give him shit. I hadn't spoken to Mike since our freshmen year of college, so I didn't text him that night.

M. started his set by himself, then the rest of his band came on and joined him. I waited to text Jimmy after the set.

You could tell M. was drunk, and the set suffered because of it, but they still did a damn good job. I told him as much after he finished. I never mentioned the fact that he didn't call me up on stage. I was too drunk to care by that point. I went home with the girl I met that night. I told her that M. probably needed to get that drunk to play a James Taylor song. She told me she really liked James Taylor, so I told her I was only joking. She was drunk that she either didn't mind, or didn't notice, that I really did mean it.

She thought it was cute that I was living on a couch. That didn't last.

The next morning I had a text from M. telling me about an opportunity to record with him and his band. I was pumped. I called him up later that day, after me and her had had lunch. I tried calling Jimmy again but he didn't respond again. So I texted him and told him about M. and the recording session. Then I called M. He told me he'd be touring the Midwest for a couple of weeks, but that afterwards he'd contact me about recording.

I went out that night and had no worries. The moon shown bright, and for the first time while I was in the city of lights I could see some stars. I spent a few nights with her while I waited for M. to come back from his tour.

At the end of two weeks M. wasn't back in the city. I was back on our buddy's couch. I asked him if he knew when M. would show back up but he said it was never certain. I asked him what he meant and he told me M. was what people call "flaky," untrustworthy. "A real piece of shit sometimes," was how he phrased it.

I still hadn't heard from Jimmy.

In the middle of the third week of waiting for M. I got myself a job busing tables at a bar down the street from her apartment. We had moved quickly, because living in a city as big as the one with lights helped to remind a person of reality. Things get too bright that you stopped looking closely at anything in the periphery. You're only focused on what you're looking at. No one wants to be blinded by the city. But the City of Bright Lights doesn't care about wants, or even needs. Me and her kept each other grounded and in a darkness that helped ease the pain of the city. I'd wake up in the morning and write music, and I'd play her the songs after we'd eat. M. still hadn't shown up, and she was telling me that my songs reminded her too much of the city.

I started to wonder if the last thing that me and Jimmy would ever talk about would be Hoobastank.

When M. finally showed back up in the city he wasn't returning mine or our buddy's phone calls. I found out he was playing a show at a club on the outskirts of the city and I went to meet him there. She came with me and when we showed up M. was nowhere to be found. We had some drinks at the bar before I went asking around for him. Finally I gathered the courage to ask one of the guys I met at the earlier show, who told me M. hadn't gotten out of his car yet. I went to the parking lot and found him drunk in the driver's seat of his car. I rattled on the window and he didn't wake up. I tried the door and found it unlocked, grabbed his shoulder and shook him awake. He reeked, but greeted me with a wide-eyed smile. He skirted every one of my questions, which I knew was more his disposition and less the booze.

I left him in his car and went back into the city.

A few weeks later we found out she was pregnant. By then I had finally heard from Jimmy. He told me he was in a similar situation, but with a girl he had only been with for one night. He seemed on edge, but asked me if I wanted a job with one of his laborer buddies. I told him that me and her were going to try and raise the kid ourselves, but that we didn't want to be in the city any longer. He asked me why and I told him about it being too bright. "But man," he said, "this place is full of magic, you just gotta find the right light."

I told him that I didn't think this city was it. That he should keep looking. He said he'd try, and then told me that if I found any magic left in Maine I needed to tell him.

So me and her decided to go back to Maine and try and find any magic it had left.

Long after the tobacco faded, I made my way through his journal, but I found I could not finish it.

I felt within that journal a haunting.

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TRACK 5 – "THE OLD BLACK HEN" (5:48)

The strangers arrived to their grandfather's house before I did. Kids grow up so quick.

"Daddy!" Dorothy said as I got out of the truck.

"Hey Dori!" I said.

She ran into my arms, I picked her up and kissed her.

"Geesh you're getting big," I tell her. She was. Now she's old and big enough that I can't pick her up. Her hair's gotten longer, more curly. She must have grown another inch since I saw her last.

"It's crazy how much they grow at that age," my ex's father said. I hate him for putting on this loving, caring act he does when the kids are around. I wanted to tell him to go fuck himself. But I withheld .

"Hey bud," I said to my son, Jon.

"Hey dad," he responds.

"How's school?" I asked him.

"Good," he says. He's always this short with me. Even now.

Dori was too young to understand anything that had happened, but Jon was at the age by then where I knew his mother was telling him shit about me. Lying about me. I could always tell by the way he talked to me. He never lied, but he doesn't ever give me the whole truth either. She was alienating them from me.

"For the next twenty years, Maine will be a labor short economy; there will not be enough people to fill the jobs available" (Maine Economic Outlook for 2014)

Maine proved to be full of luck. I heard, from some guys on a roofing crew I worked with, that there were more jobs in the state than people to fill them. Before we settled down for too long, I told Jimmy about the luck that was coming back. Pretty soon I found out it was all bad luck.

We moved back to Millinocket.

The average household income of Millinocket, ME is $17,130, putting them 235th out of 540 towns and cities in the state.

Knowing what I thought I knew about luck and jobs, I figured being close to home would work out well. Houses were cheap to buy, and so we figured we'd only be living in an apartment for a year or so before we'd have saved up enough to buy a house of our own, even with raising two kids.

Then shit went sour and no one was there to sing me a bad luck lullaby. There was no escaping it. But now I'm in East Betty Bumfuck – Millinocket, Maine – on a shit job

doing shit labor that my father did until he couldn't. And I have no idea were Jimmy is or has been.

At night their mother would call me sometimes. It always went the same:

Why are you calling?

I'd hope the kids are asleep.

Yeah, they're sleeping. Why? What do you want?

Then I'd ask myself why she would always make me go through this?

Are you drunk? No, I'm not drunk. What do you want? You sound drunk.

When we met we were both in bad places. When we split up we weren't in any better places. I'd start to wonder if maybe I didn't put us both in that situation.

Listen, if all you're doing is calling me up to bitch at me then I'm just hanging up. Ok? Yeah, fuck you too. Bye.

I'd really hope the kids were asleep, but I could always hear Jon shuffle in his bed after these talks. Some nights I'd hear Dori toss and turn and cry.

"What's the matter?" her father would always ask me as he entered the room. Like it was some play, and he was playing the part of the concerned father-in-law.

"Nothing, she was just drunk and looking to start a fight."

He'd always leave me alone without saying anything more.

Fuck you too, I'd always think.

"You can stay here when you have the kids. Otherwise I don't want a fucking thing to do with you." This is what my ex's estranged father said to me when I arrived where I am.

I asked him what I was supposed to do when I didn't have my kids.

"Sleep in your damn truck," he said before telling me "I don't all that much care," and shutting the door.

That's exactly what I did.

When I was younger the jobs were easier and they were always coming in. At least, that's what I've heard the guys older than me saying. When I was younger I was too young to work. All I knew was that the Millinocket that I was in then was the exact same one that existed when I was in high school, only it seemed all those people who used to live in it suffered some disease, died, and left behind the empty shells that used to be homes.

Even now, most days I'm the one who gets to use the jackhammer. When I'm not doing that I'm the flagger – telling lines of traffic when they can and can't go. Some men can't handle that kind of power, but I can. I can't handle the fucking sun though. The summer's are miserable. But when I joined the pavement crew, we typically worked at night. Then they realized that we could do our work at any time of the day. Nobody gives a shit what we're doing when they drive by us, they're all too pissed off at us for ruining their typical commute. They think we're all doing the same thing always. Nobody would ever notice if every day a different crew worked the same patch of road at the same time of day for a month. It doesn't matter if we're breaking up the road or paving back over it. No one pays any attention.

We're invisible to the "normal" world. We're just something in the road to be avoided, like any other kind of animal. They pay attention to us so that they won't hit us – not to save a life, but to save their own vehicles. To save themselves from a lawsuit.

Some days I wish they would hit me. If one of us did get hit they'd just replace us with another body who could handle the sun and speeding traffic. Used to be that no one wanted to work these kinds of jobs, but Maine forced the hands of too many able-bodied people.

I can't complain too much though. I have a job at least, and I can take pride in the fact that when I'm at a McDonald's late on a Friday night with nothing else to do but drink coffee and write in my notebook I've earned the money I use. Not like some of the people I see walking around this town, or worse, driving in cars. The people working here kind of know me and they give me free fries sometimes. I think they do that so that some day they can see what I'm writing.

But then again, the people I used to go to high school with who finished college look at me the same damn way. If I wasn't in their yearbooks I'd be something they'd try not to hit.

Maybe if I had listened to them back when I was in school I would've stayed in school and I'd be writing this on a computer, as opposed to my notebook, in a room in my own home, instead of the McDonald's in East Betty Bumfuck, Maine with my truck outside waiting for me when I'm ready to go to bed. I park and sleep at different spots around town so the cops don't notice my loitering. The three cops the town has left have nothing better to do than to try and give me tickets or summonses. Maybe if I had listened to my teachers I wouldn't be debating another coffee or getting a McChicken, because I'd be with my family and spending my time with them.

Then again, maybe not.

You fucking bitch.

These conversations are an endless cycle. We'll always go over the same thing. Again and again and again. Why does she do this to me?

You can't take those fucking kids from me. I've got a fucking lawyer and I'll take your ass to court. I know what it is you're doing. You're doped up. All. The fucking. Time.

It used to not be like this.

You do that and I'll get my lawyer bright and early tomorrow and make sure you get drug tested, you bitch. Try me.

This is about the time that she hangs up.

Fuck you.

I think she only ever hears the fuck.

It used to not be like this.

That's not to say things were ever good though.

If I could reach Jimmy I'd tell him to stay with the bright lights.

One of my buddy's in the union woke me up this morning to call and tell me the union needed some guys to work a concert in a town a way's away.

When's it start?

Two days from now.

How long?

Just a day.

What're they having us do?

No clue, setting up the stage and some other shit. They didn't really tell me.

I got my kids coming up this weekend.

All right man, suit yourself. You were telling me how you needed some more work so I called you, so don't go bitchin' to me the next time you want to complain.

Yeah, I know, but my kids.

Whatever man.

Fuck it, I'll do it.

All right, can you pick me up when you go?

Yeah, sure.

After that I get my shit together – meaning I put it all in a duffle bag – and I head my ex's father's house. The guy never liked me much when me and her were still together and he likes me even less now. And I didn't give a shit about him ever, but we put up with each other's shit because of the kids.

I stop at the McDonald's for a while. I bring in my book. I can't focus on the words today. I just look at the pictures. Children in black and white, walking away from a large, one-story structure, pillars and glass and brick and steel, step in step. They're out of school yet they still seem to adhere to the single file line you're teacher makes you keep as you walk through the school. "Granite Street School, 1955." Men, again in black and white, standing among a bed of rock, one of them holding a large stick, they're posing for the camera, they have thick moustaches but they look like they're smiling. Work must've been good back then, everything was still new. I'd kill to have things still be new. "Canal bed – Stone Dam (taken October 22, 1899). The pictures are shown in

order from 1899, 1954, 1923, 1902, to 1960. It doesn't matter that they aren't in an accurate order, they still tell the same story. The fragments, no matter the order, always tell the same story in this town. A rise and fall that's inescapable.

One of the regulars comes over to me and gives me a coffee. He used his senior discount on it and gave it to me. I'm able to save a few dollars because of this. I thank him for it. "Oh don'tcha worry about" he says. I'm starting to feel too visible here. I finish the coffee quickly, even though it burns my throat, and leave.

When the kids are around I don't get as much sleep as I should, even though it's a better sleep than I get in the truck. Dori wakes me up in the morning by jumping on the bed. "Dori, stop it" I tell her. "Ok, sorry daddy," she says. I tell her it's okay and to wake up her brother so that I can get them some breakfast.

"Grampy already made us breakfast."

Fuck him.

I ask her what she wants to do today. She tells me she doesn't care. She gets this from her mother. When I see Jon I ask him what he wants to do. He tells me he wants to play video games. I tell him we don't have any video games at his grandfather's. He tells me he knows. He gets that from his mother.

By lunchtime they've already watched three hours of cartoons. It's not really cartoons now that they play on Saturdays. I worry about how my kids will grow up with the kind of shit they're playing for them on television nowadays. When I go out to smoke a cigarette they're watching some show about some 3D-animated farm animals. The animals are all crossbred and have stupid names like "Cork" who's a cow and a pig

mixed together. The kids are laughing at it, but I don't understand what's funny. I just find it sad what they let on television now.

I'm halfway through my cigarette when he comes out.

"I think they'd watch that thing all day if you were to let him," he says laughing.

Fuck him.

"What kind of shit are you letting them watch?" I ask.

"It's pretty good, you might not know just looking at it but it's pretty smart. Too smart for me even, sometimes."

"Looks like a bunch of bullshit to me."

"Well, maybe if you watched it with them you might have a better idea of what it's about."

Fuck you.

"I've got my own things to do."

"Yeah, so you tell me."

Fuck you.

"What're you going to do with them today?"

"I don't know, they won't tell me what they want to do."

"Maybe they don't care. Maybe they just want to spend time with their father."

Fuck you.

I finish my cigarette and walk back inside

"It'd be nice if you didn't throw…" I slam the door on him.

I take the kids to McDonald's. I watch them eat their food. Dori plays with her nuggets and giggles when I try to steal her fries. Jon eats his hamburger in silence and only grunts when I ask him any questions.

"Is that how you're mother's been teaching you how to eat?" I ask him. He grunts and Dori finally eats her nuggets.

When I wake up on Sunday it's raining. The kids are still asleep. I shower and shit and start the coffee pot. He just watches me as I do this. I know what he's thinking – he doesn't like me acting like his house is my house. That his home is my home. It's only a home for my children. Not me. But fuck him. I wait until the rain dies down to a misting and I go to smoke a cigarette. My buddy's supposed to pick me up at seven-thirty to get to our job. When I finish the cigarette I see some blue sky cracking the clouds. It might be an all right day.

"I can't watch the kids for you today," he tells me as I'm out in the mist.

"What?"

"I've got errands to do today that I can't do with the kids."

"What the fuck am I supposed to do then?"

"I don't know," he starts, "figure it out."

When my buddy shows up I pile the kids into the back of his car.

"What the fuck, man," he asks me.

"Just drive," I tell him.

"You can't bring 'em to a work site, dude."

"I'll figure it out."

When we show up to the arena I put the kids in a couple of seats up in the nosebleeds and tell them to play there and be quiet. Jon's old enough, I think, to watch over Dori. None of the other guys saw me with the kids so I think it'll be fine.

"We put people to work.

Labor Ready puts people to work in good jobs with great companies across the United States and Canada. Together, we help our customers get work done."

When I get back down to the arena floor there's a group of twelve of us laborers. Some of the other guys I know from other jobs I've worked in the area. Some of the others I've only seen working other jobs, they're the bottom of the barrel for laborers. Nowadays they kind of have to let anyone do this kind of work for the union, which is a shame because some of them aren't fit to be working this job. But there's not enough people to fill the slots needed. Some of these people aren't willing to really work either, they're just looking to scrape by, do the bare minimum, and get paid the same as those of us who are doing all the work.

"NEW for Workers!

Are you available for work? Now you can let us know by text!

Just text the word WORK to 42800. That's it!

A confirmation text will be sent back and the branch will contact you when we have a job for you."

Some young kid in a t-shirt with a radio is telling us what to do. If only I had stayed in school.

"You three come with me," he says to me and two of the other guys. He doesn't make eye contact with us and doesn't say anything to us unless he's telling us what to do.

I look up at where Jon and Dori are playing. I ask the kid where we'll be going, but he doesn't say anything to me. I just have to assume Jon and Dori will be all right.

We follow the kid outside of the venue to a grass lot in front of the arena. He tells us to put skirting around some folding tables. It takes us a couple of hours to do this, not because it's hard, but because it's easy. These side jobs the union gives us are always easier than the shit work they make us do on the roads or in the mills, so we take our time in doing them. I figure the kid telling me what to do hasn't done any of the kind of work I've done, so I figure he can go fuck himself if he's going to tell me what to do for a day. The young kid tells us, after we ask him, that the tables are for food for the VIP ticket holders of the concert.

"Well shit, are we gonna be gettin' any?" one of the other guys asks him.

He smiles and says no.

Fuck him.

The kid's got no idea what he's doing. He's on his radio half the day, and after we set up the VIP spot we spend another hour chasing the supervisor around the arena. The

kid asks him where he is one minute, and by the time we get there the guy's in another part of the building.

"Jesus, cat and mouse, huh?" one of the other guys say.

"Yeah," is all the kid says.

"Say, how'd you get this cushy job?" I ask him. He hasn't broken a sweat all day while the rest of us have been moving shit around for him. The work might be easy but the weather's a bitch. "Just get to stand around playing with your radio. What'd it take to get that?"

"I applied," is all he says.

Fuck you.

Finally we meet up with the supervisor. Bossman we call him. He's no older than the kid we've been following. No wonder they don't have any clue what to do.

"We need you to move furniture into the dressing rooms," he tell us.

The kid leads us to the loading dock where some local furniture store unloaded some couches and end tables and coffee tables. We grab the carts next to the furniture and start loading them up. But as we do that some other kid comes by and tells us we can't use those carts and that we're going to have to carry the stuff a hundred or so feet down a narrow hallway into the dressing rooms.

"Jesus Christ," I can hear one of the other guys mutter under his breath.

The loading dock looks into the arena and so I take a roundabout way of carrying my first end table so that I could get a good look at Jon and Dori. They're still in the same spot I left them.

Just when I thought I'd never hear from Jimmy again.

"Dude i think the band playing here is hoobastank."

"Haha thats great"

"Haha"

"Hey man how ya doin.

"Im back in maine"

As we finished arranging the furniture in the room one of the guys asked the kid who it was that was playing tonight. The kid told him it was James Taylor. A couple minutes after that, as we were walking down the hallway to eat our lunches James Taylor walks down the hallway past us. As a fellow musician I wanted to introduce myself to him, even though I hate his music.

"Hey man, I love you music. I've tried my hand at music, too."

"Tried your hand?" James Taylor asks me.

"Yeah." I want to try and make him laugh. "I did it long ago and far away."

"Are you trying to be funny?" he asks me. "Am I supposed to laugh? Or do you want an autograph?"

"Well –"

"Oh no, let me guess, you've got a tape I've just got to hear?"

"I don't think people use tapes anymore."

"How would you like it if you got paid to be somewhere where you were expecting people to be professional, but instead you're just hounded by fans and 'aspiring

musicians'?" He actually used his fingers to make air quotes around "aspiring musicians."

"I'm –" I try to begin.

"No," he starts, "you know what, get away from me." Down the hall comes the Bossman's Bossman. "Excuse me, sir," James Taylor says to this Bossman, "this man is bothering me."

"Did you really expect to be able to talk to James Taylor when you're supposed to be working?" this Bossman tells me. "I'm going to need to ask you to leave immediately."

"Can I get back into the arena for a moment."

"No you cannot," he tells me.

"But dude, my kids are in there."

"How do I know your workers are dependable?

Our customer service representatives ensure that our workers are ready to go to work. You also have our service guarantee: If you are unhappy with a worker for any reason, notify us within the first two-hour period. You will not be billed for that worker, and we will send out a replacement immediately."

I spend the rest of what should have been my shift with Jon and Dori in a nearby park. They're playing together and I buy them ice cream. Jon, who's old enough to know I

should still be working, just looks at me as he eats his ice cream. Dori thinks I've just decided to give them a day in the park with ice cream.

I text Jimmy and ask him if he's worked on any songs. I decide not to tell him about James Taylor.

"I got a lullaby for all the bad luck you brought me back into" he texts me.

"I need to hear it" I text him back.

TRACK 6 – "PEORIA LUNCH BOX BLUES" (5:48)

When he was going into kindergarten we bought him a Rugrats lunchbox. I'd pack him a milkbag and some snacks and walk him to the bus stop before I left for the hospital. I can't even count the number of times I'd come home from work and he'd tell me about his milkbag leaking in his lunchbox, or breaking open and spilling all over him at lunchtime. I bought the bags because they were cheaper and took up less space than the mini cartons of milks, but I could only clean dried-up milk out of that Rugrats lunchbox so many times before it wasn't worth it anymore.

He kept that lunchbox until he went into the second grade and Rugrats wasn't cool anymore. So I had to buy him a Star Wars lunchbox. Star Wars stayed cool until middle school, then it was lunchboxes that weren't cool.

I remember packing him a full lunch in that Star Wars one, but at some point in the third grade he stopped eating any of it besides the bag of chips I gave him for a snack. After I got sick of eating the sandwiches I was making for him, I started scolding him and telling him he had to eat his lunch. "Or else," I told him, and thankfully he wasn't old enough by then to realize I had no "or else" to use.

When scolding him didn't work, I asked his father to start scolding him for me. That caused us to fight for quite a while. "I ain't scolding him if he's not gonna eat." I tried to trick them both:

"You know," I told him as he sat on the floor playing with his toys, "you're father's not happy to hear that you're wasting food. Are you honey?"

"I already told you," he yelled at me. "I'm not gonna scold him for not eating. You don't wanna eat," he looked at him, "then stop taking a lunch with you. And you," he said to me, "stop packing him food he's not gonna eat. I won't tell him he has to eat, but I won't let him throw my hard-earned money into the trash. There's not need for it."

He stopped playing with his toys and went to his room. I hoped that that had worked and that he'd start eating his lunches.

It didn't. That's when the school called me asking why I was only packing my son a lunch of chips and a drink. I was so embarrassed and anxious that they thought I was mistreating my child. I told them that he wouldn't eat anything, but they didn't believe me. The next week the school called me again, after his teacher had been going behind our backs and buying him school lunch the whole week, and seeing that he didn't eat any of it they told me that they worried something was wrong with him and wanted me to get him to see someone.

Again, I got embarrassed and anxious because we couldn't afford anything like that, and in the back of my head I could hear my husband yelling at me for even mentioning the idea. So I told the school I'd look into. Afterwards I went into his room, to talk to him about why he never ate at school, and saw that he was drawing. When I looked over his shoulder to see what he was drawing I saw it was a dark figure scribbled in all black and grey.

When I asked him who that was he told it was the seven-fingered man, then I noticed that the figure did only have seven fingers. I told him he was doing a good job at drawing. Then he scrunched up the piece of paper and threw it into the trashcan.

“Why’d you do that,” I asked him.

“He’s scary,” he said to me.

The school never called me again after asking me to get him to see someone, but he still never ate anything other than chips. I let the dark figure stay in the trash.

APPROACHES TO THE LAND IV

I stayed with the journal, picking it up and reading bits of it intermittently, and in this stay I never left my room. The haunted, I felt, had left the journal and come to hang over my room. Over me. I soon grew tired of my life as I knew it, and by that, I mean that I grew tired of hardly knowing my life. Where once I had a view of others, the others soon grew too few. In fact, the others began to dwindle, not grow.

What has happened I asked one woman as she walked her dog by my stoop. What she responded. What has happened I repeated, but she walked away before I could hear what she said.

I never saw that woman again. That's not to say the woman has left the town, I simply haven't seen her since that one occasion when she didn't answer my question.

Unless the answer to my question was what. That seemed far fetched to me. However, I have kept that answer hidden away in case I may need to come back to it.

But at the time the answer was not sufficient, and so I continued looking for answers. I investigated anything in the town that I could to help me in my search.

I went to a local storefront in the downtown with a sign that read Coffee and Donuts, but upon trying the door found it was locked and that the business was no longer running. From there I went to another store front which sold Katahdin Furniture, yet, like the Coffee and Donut shop, it too was closed and out of business (I had intended to ask them what made Katahdin furniture different from other types of furniture). My final stop along

the downtown strip came at the Scootic In, with one "n." I assumed that this was a misspelling on the sign maker's part, and that this was a hotel of sorts where I could certainly ask the desk clerk about the town. That, in being a hotel, they would quickly be able to tell me why it was I was seeing less and less people walking about the town. In tales of search discovery one usually finds the answers that they are looking for from the desk clerk of an inn. I thought that my search would be no different.

Upon my entrance to the inn I discovered that the building was not a lodging for out of town visitors, but was instead a restaurant, with an adjacent barroom. The sign was not misspelled. This was certainly not where I expected to find the answers to my questions, but I decided that this place would be as good as a true inn to find the answers.

Bar or booth the woman at the door asked me when I entered the building. What I replied (I then knew how the dog-walking woman felt as she passed by my stoop.) Where would you like to sit she said. What are my options I asked. Bar or booth she repeated. Oh I replied.

She took me to the bar. I suppose this had something to do with my being alone, for booths are always the intimate space where couples and small groups take in their reveries. I thought about old tales and figured that bars were also good places for adventurers to find the answers to their questions.

How ya doin the person behind the bar asked me. Good I responded. What'll ya have they asked. What do you have I asked. I was then told what was on the menu, from which I ordered.

As I waited for my food to arrive, there was only one other person sitting at the bar. An old man with the years of his life worn on his face, hidden under the brim of a dirty hat whose logo I could not make out. It felt odd to look upon the man, and his face, and presumably his life (or some of it at least), yet not know who was the sponsor of it all. There was no Brought to you by… anywhere on or near him. This made me feel uncomfortable as I knew everything about the man who served me my food and drink – his graphic t-shirt brought to me by Wal-Mart, and denim jeans courtesy of Ecko Unltd. I could not clearly see his shoes, but I presumed New Balance was the advertiser.

After I finished my meal I looked at the old man, still sitting at the end of the bar with his yellow pilsner, half drunk, in front of him.

Excuse me sir I said.

Huh he responded.

Could you tell me where I could learn… I began.

At a school he interrupted. …or the library he finished.

I did not know what to say. I assumed that he knew what the rest of my question was, and so I simply said okay, thank you.

I paid my meal and closed my tab with the man brought to me by Wal-Mart, Ecko Unltd., and quite possibly New Balance. I asked him if he could tell me where to find the library and the school. I'm looking to learn I told him, and he gave me a questioning look before telling me where I could find both places.

I returned to my room and retrieved the stranger's journal. I took it with me on my way to the school, the closest of the two places of learning that the old man at the bar told me about. As the sun began to dip beneath the tree tops I wondered what sort of documents I would need to find in order for me to learn about the seven-fingered man.

Government documents. Perhaps.

Mill records. Most probably.

Newspaper clippings. Indeed.

I started to wonder how long it would take me to get from the school to the library if I should find that the school is closed for the day.

United States census information. Most likely.

I tried the handle of the first door I got to. Locked.

The next door. Locked.

Books about the town. Perhaps.

IN WHICH I PROVE THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED SOME SORT OF EDUCATION

I have a memory. Though, like a newborn, it is not fully formed, and thus it is not easily defined. Unfortunately, unlike a newborn, this memory may never fully form, may never be easily defined. Yet I will try to hold it in my hands. I will try to nurture it to a full life. I will do my best to enter this memoryscape and give it definition.

Here It goes:

There are many of us. We are in a room together. We are small. I hope this doesn't fade like the others.

A text:

In this essay I will prove that I got some kind of education. [This is the thesis statement, it tells the reader what the text they are about to read is about.] This education that I received was not easy, it may not have even been "correct" – according to one of the many acronyms which grade education, such as the ACE (American Council on Education). Opportunities for education in my area have diminished from the days when my parents were in high school. Back then an education was not necessary, for jobs were plenty, and no one had to worry. When I was in school, education was the only job to be had. My family – many of whom once lived in my town but had moved far away – would come to visit, and they would often ask me how many students were in my grade, and every time I answered them they would be amazed. They would remark about the difference in number of students between the class that they graduated with and the class that I had graduated with. "The enrollment at Stearns has fallen from about 700

students in the 1970s, when the paper mill provided hundreds of jobs. Over all, the number of students in all of Millinocket's schools has dropped 43 percent since 2000, to 550 from 959" (New York Times). [This is a quote to show that I know how to use quotes. The sentence that came before it shows that I know how to introduce quotes. Here comes the following sentence to show that I know how to "sandwich" quotes –] I graduated with a class of forty-four. Towards the end of our time in school together we grew to feel like brothers and sisters in arms.

Here, the memory comes back. These brothers and sisters. We were in a class. Were they in the class of my memory? Some of them sure. Who, exactly, is hard to tell.

What were we taking up arms against? Everything which suggested that we could not do what we wanted to do. Of the forty-four of us that graduated that June 6 (the sixty-sixth anniversary of the Allied WWII invasion of Normandy, France) [This shows my reader that I am aware of myself as a historical body suspended in political space. This is an important thing for every writer to know, and I want my reader to know that I am aware. That I am not ignorant of my historical body.], approximately half went to college. Twelve of us have moved out of the state – some made the trek from Maine to Ohio, to Michigan, to Oregon, to all places not different enough to not still feel at home. "Many of Michigan's loggers and the owners who employed them came from Maine" (Knott 64-65). But still to far away fro feel at home. No matter where you move, you want to feel at home, I know. [This is to show that I have made up my own thought on this matter, while

strengthening my own thoughts by backing it up with words from an academic writer who knows more than I do.] Fewer from my class are doing what they went to college for. Those who went for biology are now dental assistants [a modest, well-paying career], those who went undeclared are now in debt. Of those who went to college, a meager amount actually finished. This is not to say that they have not succeeded in some other way: one such person is a manager at a gas station, while another is a roofer. Both pay modest wages which is nothing to scoff at.

The memory. We're in class. We? A class. Brothers and sisters in arms. We're in class. What grade? Early, maybe third? The teacher stands in the front of the room. She has white hair and glasses. She is maybe wearing a vest. When I draw this portion out, I remember that this woman was not our regular teacher, she was a substitute. A long-term substitute. A replacement. A place holder. She stood in front of the class and spoke.

Me and my classmates. Wrong. My classmates and I. We are in class. It is maybe third grade. Could it be second grade? No, not Mrs. B. First? No, not Ms. S. Kindergarten? Perhaps. But if it was then it was not a long-term substitute standing in the front of the class.

There is a specific knowledge that comes with managing a gas station, or working as a roofer, that should not be overlooked as being part of an education. Not all education is reading, writing, and arithmetic (colloquially phrased as "The Three

R's"). Sometimes there are intangibles: like how to change professions after you've lost your job; like how to face a changing job market; like how to face a new world.

My classmates and I are in class. We are in an early grade. If it is first or second, the teacher does not have white hair or glasses; if it's kindergarten or third, she does. The teacher stands in the front of the class and asks us a question. For a test? No, I don't believe so. For what then? Just a rhetorical question? Perhaps. But no.

An occurrence with another body in a small space in the basement of a church:

Gonyar (Pronounced without the "R"): Whattabout that mill?

Joseph: What?

Gonyar: The mill, huh?

Joseph: Huh? Yeah.

Gonyar: A shame.

Joseph: Mhmm.

Poetry creeping in.

*[This is the part of the essay where I introduce my first point which backs up my thesis statement and shows that I can follow a logical essayistic progression, as is defined by the Rules.] I was one of the half from my graduating class whom went to college. "**Whom.** Often incorrectly used for who before he said or similar*

expressions, when it is really the subject of a following verb" (Strunk & White 25). [I'll admit I'm not quite sure about my use of whom there, but I feel it sounds better.] I went to the state's flagship university where I entered with the hopes to become a high school teacher. My first fall semester I took my first English course. I learned everything I thought I could about writing through my instructor and my diligence to her assignments which came out of Diana Hacker's Rules For Writers (6th Edition) – the MLA's updated 2009 version. From Miss Hacker's book I learned much about the English language and what it could and couldn't do. "Use an ellipsis mark to indicate that you have deleted words from… poetry that have been run into your text" (Hacker 314-5). This was an important thing for me to learn as a wide-eyed Freshman who wanted to one day teach young students how to write. "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests… / My father… / Bends low, comes up twenty years away / Stooping in rhythm through potato drills." I've learned quite well how to maintain the poetry that runs itself into my texts.

My classmates and I, in kindergarten or third grade, or in first or second grade, are sitting in class and being asked a question. Why did we need a long-term sub in third grade? Because the teacher burned her arm.

Me and my classmates are sitting in kindergarten.

I also learned in this class that, in instances of listing subjects, one always lists "I" or "me" last. I learned to think less of those people, and their writing and ideas, who do not know how to properly structure a list including "I" or "me." I would often correct my family when I would return home on holiday breaks, but they never learned like I did. There is something to be said about being stuck in your ways.

Our teacher is in class despite burning her arm. But if this is true, then it is not a memory of kindergarten. She did not take time off for burning her arm. She was a strong woman, I imagine. This deduction cannot happen for first or second grade. So it must be third. Yes, third.

The memory I have is of a woman with grey hair and glasses – this would have been our third grade long-term substitute who used to sing us a song about a rabbit. "Here comes Peter Cottontail hopping down the bunny trail. Hippity hoppin'." These were our favorite moments in the class. We would be on our best behavior at all times so that she would sing this song with us. She taught us some things, but above all else, we remember this song. If it was not her who asked us the question when she wasn't singing the song then my memory is incorrect. Or it is completely fabricated. "Baskets full of Easter joy." But I'm not here to tell the truth, I'm here to recount a memory.

Does memory not equal truth? When has it ever?

[This is the second point to back up my thesis: that I got an education.] Those lines written by Heaney are fitting for my experience with education. "Between my finger and my thumb." Education and my town's mill were inextricably twined for decades before I entered high school – by that time the prospect of working in the mill were slim to none. "I'll dig with it." [This is where I am taking artistic license with the form of the academic essay; these quotes are left un-sandwiched because I want the reader to come to their own understanding. This would be wrong, I know, unless I knew what I was doing with it, which I clearly do.] And to do so meant you needed a college education. In this way, part of my education came, not as a result of anything taught to me in school, but in my experience and relation to the land around me, not to sound like Thoreau. "There stood Ktaadn with distinct and cloudless outline in the moonlight" (Thoreau, Ktaadn *49). You won't be seeing anything like that written in this paper. [I'm showing the reader just how little Thoreau and myself have in common in writing styles. Here I distinguish my own style by showing what my writing is not. At the same time I am holding up one of the pillars of all of writing, Thoreau, to show that I know my place in the hierarchy.] I remember many times walking to high school and seeing that massive hulk of land jettison over the horizon, its peak disappearing through the low lying fog of an early fall morning.*

Hippity hoppin' down the bunny trail. Hippity hoppin' down. Hippity hoppin' down down down the.

My friends and I would often go for rides down what is known as the Golden Road. It was named "because it passes through an area of nearly full company ownership, a status indicated on [company maps] in a golden yellow" (Wallach 544). For miles you could go down this poorly paved stretch of road and scattered along the roadside would be stacks of lumber. On these rides we'd often have to imagine what it would have been like to see that road as bustling as it once was. It was on these rides that I learned to create. Though this land was owned by others, it was free for us to use. Private land was never as private as some of the public lands around this town.

Gerald: How 'bout that mill?

Joseph: Huh?

Herald: Shame inn't it?

Joseph: Mhmm, yeah.

Gerald: Who'da thought, y'know?

Joseph: I know, right?

Herald: Right. Just a shame.

Joseph: What?

Gerald: Any word on the mill?

Joseph: What? Huh?

Herald: The mill.

Joseph: Hmm?

Gerald: The mill.

Joseph: Mhmm.

Herald: The mill.

Joseph: Yeah.

Herald: Anything moving in?

Joseph: Huh?

Herald: The mill.

Joseph: Hmm.

Herald: The mill running?

Joseph: Sure.

Gerald: Really?

Joseph: No.

“You'll wake up on Easter mornin' and you'll know that he was there.”

We were hippity hoppin’ in class, with our teacher cottontail standing in the front, when she asked us a question. It was about a park.

Wilber: Whattaya think?

Joseph: Huh?

Wilber: That park.

Joseph: What?

Wilber: Think it’ll help?

Joseph: Maybe.

Wilber: Sure couldn't hurt, I guess.

Joseph: Mhmm.

A park? Like a playground? No. We were in class when she asked "How would you feel having to pay to go into your own backyard?" We didn't know what the question meant.

My first thought ran to my own backyard, the small patch of land behind my house where my swing set stood. A memory from a memory. I imagined needing to pay a man in a suit to swing on my swing set. His suit was a mix of forest ranger and police officer. He smiled down at me. He stood behind a glass window, he had dark aviators on. I could not see his eyes. He told me that I needed to pay to use my swing set. I did not have any money. I imagined asking my parents for money to use our swing set, but they had no money and told me only to go beg to the man in the suit. To plead with him to let me use my swing set. But he only held out his empty hand, smiled his smile, stared behind his sunglasses, and refused to let me enter.

I said I would not like that and she smiled.

"You'll wake up on Easter mornin' and you'll know that he was there."… "he's hiding everywhere." "Hippity hoppity."

[In this third point, I will finalize my argument for why I feel I received an education, and look out beyond my own experiences to look on the state of

education.] In 1952, a (now former) principal of my high school wrote an article called "English for the Non-book Minded" in which he writes that "[i]t was recognized that these boys would in a few years become voters and that they should have an understanding of some of the problems common to the community and the state" (Hayes 221). This makes a lot of sense to me. We, as students, should be taught things that will help us make decisions as we are future citizens. As Town Manager says, "[t]his park idea is an effort at rural cleansing of Northern Maine of both its people and its economy" (Welcomer & Haggerty 388). Hearing these words now I feel cheated for never hearing them before. I feel that I've only now been given an education. As we note whenever we look back on the Nazi regime, tyrannies and tragedies like those only occur when citizens (both present and future) are left in the dark. I believe that students should be aware of any gentrification that is going on around them.

Another memory, collapsing into that time: "change that is perceived to impact many aspects of the institutional structure will be difficult to accomplish[… T]he park is perceived to change a way of life: culture, economic livelihood, community makeup, traditions and recreations" (W&H 389). The anger in Teacher's voice that may not have been there when we were in third grade, but it's been projected onto her now. She's still smiling. She's not angry with me. I said no. She's happy with me. She's angry with "them." Those who enter in "from away." They are the ones who must pay.

So you see, Mrs. B, I think I received an education that was more from myself than from anyone else. "[L]iving roots awaken in my head" and I'll follow them down. An education away from "true" educators. Without it I'd think a park here in my backyard would be a fine idea. This is why intangibles are needed. I know this is not a fine idea.

I know what she was doing. Be cautious of those from away. "Stranger Danger." Only it was a park you didn't get into.

That same year we held a fake presidential election. George W. Bush won with nearly 70% of the vote. Which is to say that nearly 70% of students came from a Republican household. George W. Bush would go on to lose the four electoral votes from Maine in the 2000 election to Al Gore, however he would win Penobscot county – in the midst of talks of a potential national park – by 2,752 votes, garnering nearly fifty percent of the county's voting population.

Outsider: Any word on that park?

Emigrant: A park?

Outsider: Yeah.

Emigrant: Baxter?

Outsider: No, that other one.

Emigrant: Other one what?

Outsider: That park?

Emigrant: The national one?

Outsider: Yeah.

Emigrant: Baxter?

Outsider: No.

Emigrant: Oh. Right.

Outsider: Yeah.

Emigrant: I don't know.

Outsider: Me either.

Emigrant: Please leave.

Outsider: Why?

Emigrant: Leave.

I was in third grade when I didn't understand a question, but now I do. Oh! here comes Peter Cottontail hoppin' down…

On my way to the library I could feel the sweat from my right hand wrinkling the binding of the stranger's journal. I switched it to my left and hung my right out to dry.

I wondered if the library would hold any other journals by strangers-to-me of the town.

I wondered if I would be able to look at them.

When I tried the first door of the library, it was also locked.

I tried a second. It was locked.

I found in a window next to the first a piece of paper which read:

Library closed until further notice. Lack of funding. Thank you for your interest. For more information on our situation, and to learn how to donate, please visit

And then the paper listed a string of letters and numbers and symbols which were foreign to me.

I turned from the building to look at my surroundings. Across the street were four houses: one with a sunken porch and broken windows facing the road; two with For Sale signs in the front; the fourth with no sign, no sunken porch, no broken windows, and no vehicles or any sign of life. With presumably no one around to witness, I walked behind a decorative bush and kicked in a basement window and entered the library.

What light was left of the dusk cast a dull gloom over the basement, yet I could determine, based on the bright colors of the books and carpeting of the room I had entered,

that I was in the children's section of the library. I felt my way through the darkness out of that room and found a staircase, taking me to the top floor of the building.

I began rushing through the aisles and stacks of books with what little light I could find. I found volumes that looked beneficial to me: A Year in the Maine Woods by Bernd Heinrich; Millinocket by David R. Duplisea; Maine Sublime by John Wilmerding; Millinocket - Magic City of Maine's Wilderness by Dorothy Bowler Laverty; as well as several decades worth of census data and newspapers.

The night sky was creeping over the town. In front of the house with a sunken porch and one of the For Sale houses were street lights. The light in front of the For Sale house flickered on and off while the one in front of the house with a sunken porch burned steadily. When both lights were on, enough light was in that front section of the library where I could easily read my collection of documents.

As I flipped through the books I had acquired, a small journal fell out and opened itself on the floor in front of me. The journal had fallen into the darkness, when I lifted it into the light it had tried to escape I found that the journal was empty save for a single photo. A grainy, black and white photo of a small boy waving a four fingered hand. My heart jumped as I told myself to look at the boy-in-the-photograph's other hand and saw that he only had three fingers. I turned the photo over, first day of school '71 scribbled in a hand that appeared as though it was attempting to write in cursive, but only managed to print the letters.

APPROACHING THE LAND

A hiker arrived to the land, asking the best route away from the oncoming rhythm that he felt chasing him. The man and his son were working in their field. “Why,” the man and his son asked the hiker, the wife somewhere else in the house. The hiker responded and so the man and his son led him to the mountain, the wife was left behind. The hiker, it turned out, was a vagrant named McLaughlin who no one in surrounding communities knew anything about.

Years later another man, another vagrant, this one named Thoreau, would come to the same farm to ask the same men for the same guidance to the same summit. The men, the boy then being a man, this time with a better experience of the land, once again agreed to bring this traveler to the summit. When they returned, this vagrant Thoreau wrote about his travels. But no one should care about his remarks anymore. They are nothing but faint murmurs of a forgotten wilderness.

After bringing several vagrants to the summit of the mountain, the man and his son continued to work their farm until one day, a group of men in business suits came. Before the men could gather their hiking supplies to assist these new men to the summit they were asked how much they wanted for their land. “Why,” the men asked the group of strangers. The businessmen responded, and so the man and his son sold their farm, their wife followed along.

The business men then built a mill on the old farm, which lay near a river. Many workers from all around came to the site of that old farm to work in the mill. So many men from Italy came to work in the mill that they set up their community across the river from the mill – a small footbridge leading across the river, giving access to and from the mill. After several years, a larger community grew around the mill until it became a town.

That town was named Millinocket.

Millinocket, and the mill it grew around, became known as the Magic City. After decades of prosperity another group of businessmen came to the site of the mill, the site of that man and his son's farm. They asked to buy the mill and no one asked any questions, and so these new businessmen bought the mill. They quickly sold the mill to another company. This company then sold the mill to another company and this other company sold the mill to yet another company and so on and so forth until the mill's final day. On that final day, the Magic City lost it's magic.

DRAPED IN MEMORIES

The child comes to a house in a cold night after a long journey, and knocked on the door. The man inside sits alone in a candle-lit room in a drafty house on an empty street in a quiet town. He has nothing around him but his memories. He opens the door and the child looks up at him. He asks her if she would like to come in, but she is behind him before he can finish. He closes the door. She's the youngest person he's seen in a long time. He thinks this to himself – a practice he is quite used to by this point in his life.

The child's movements around the room shuffled the memories that the man had gone about situating in it. She spun and wove herself amongst the memories. She displaced his thoughts and because of this the old man took the child in as his own.

He asked the girl what her name was. She told him that she did not have any. He asked her what she would like to be called and, after revealing that she had never been asked what she wanted, told the man to call her Aro. Which he did, and still does.

He fed Aro with the condensed milk and stale bread that he fed himself. When they would both grow tired of this meal, the man would treat her with the nourishment of a story of the Way-Back.

"I remember when a train used to come through this town," the man says to the child. Aro looks at him intently when he tells her of this train.

The stories do not sustain either of them, but it provides them with a chance to ignore the emptiness in their stomachs.

"I remember when people here raised their own animals, got their own milk, made their own bread. Now we're all dependent on the outside for it all."

This was her least favorite of the tales of the Way-Back. Once she asked him, after this story, why those still on the inside haven't tried to start doing something else.

The man's face grew red, then purple, his knuckles turned white, and he told her that wasn't an option. He fed her with neither stories nor condensed milk or bread for the rest of that week, and Aro quickly learned that one doesn't ask questions about the Way-Back, or those who lived through it.

In the summers the two take the boards off the windows and let the warm summer air into the house. In the winter the windows stay boarded and locked. At all times of the year the two never leave the house. Aro arrived to this town on a cold night, but she was born into the town after the man's stories and revelations of fears.

Aro grew in her time with the man. He raised her like she was his own, though they looked nothing alike. She grew as time went on, in part to his food, and also to his stories. At the center of many of them was the train.

His father had taken the train, he would tell her after every dinner, to another town further down the tracks. This tale was often their dessert. His father would bowl in the Town Over and come home, late at night, on the last train. Many times the father would bet on his games, and on the nights that he would win he would buy his son a treat or a toy.

The old man still had a picture of his father, along with a small ball which was the treat of one of his winning nights, that he would show to Aro on the nights when she asked – this was a question that was allowed. The old man's father looked, through the age and wear on the old photograph, lean, with calloused hands and a rigid face that looked like it never smiled.

As Aro grew with these stories, the town around them began to grow more and more quiet. When she arrived, the town was at a constant, low murmur, but by the age of

fifteen it was a subtle, irregular hum. This quiet unsettled the man. She began to think that he did not trust its silence. At night the man would stay up while the girl slept, a bat in his hands. He would sleep for only short hours at a time, once in the morning, and at another time in the afternoon. Of school Aro only knew what the man would tell her from the Way-Back. Just as real to her as the train was.

By her sixteenth birthday the girl was venturing out into this town, exploring the old businesses and homes which once held its people, while the man would sit in his house looking out the window at any who would walk by. He warned her to always be indoors, with him, before the sun went down. Though she was raised in the silence, and thus was never scared of it, she understood the old man's fear of the change of the Way-Back that the silence had brought, and so she never ignored his warnings.

Then she met another girl her age. Peno.

By her count the town had only twelve other residents besides herself and the man. With Peno and her mother, that made four of the twelve people that Aro knew. Peno's mother was much like the old man, though she told Aro that her mother had no bat, and instead used prayer to protect them from the silence. While Aro was draped in the memories of trains and fathers and condensed milk, Peno was draped in the memories of her mother's Way-Back and prayer, though she felt the prayer was only cosmetic.

"I remember when you could always hear the noises of money off in the distance," the old man began one night. He said that the trains both brought the money in and out of the town. This was a new tale that Aro had not yet heard. Or it was an old tale told in a new way, which Aro had not yet heard. "They made so much money you could smell it no matter where you were in this town. Nowadays I don't know where a person

could make any money. Everyone I've seen around us is just sitting waiting for money to come to them. But that's not how it worked in my day. Back then you'd have to go out in the wilderness and dig and scratch and cut it from the earth. You couldn't sit at home and wait for money to come. You had to wake up bright and early and use your hands to make it. That's how money was made back then. The trains could only bring the money in if the trains brought the money out."

The man continued this tale of the Way-Back until Aro fell asleep.

That night both Aro and the old man fell asleep and had dreams about the woods outside their town. The girl could not remember when last she'd been in them. She remembered little from her journey to the man's house that cold night when she arrived. The old man had spent little time in the woods in his youth, but knew many who did, and worked with the money that was brought in to the town.

In the morning Aro awoke from dreams of a barren land of lifelessness and famine. The old man awoke from dreams of milk and honey and the life- and money-giving nymphs of the woods. Their meal of stale bread and condensed milk tasted magnificent and sterile.

As Aro and Peno roamed the empty streets of the town in the humid afternoon sun of the day, they heard, amongst the silence enveloping them, a rattling cough coming from one of the houses. Lawns overgrown with weeds and full of unknown creatures, and shattered glass from the broken windows of the Older Boys of the town, the girls had been warned by their caretakers to avoid the houses and only play on the broken gravel of the streets. If the noise had been anything else the girls would have heeded this warning

and left the street quickly. But both girls took a philanthropic approach to the sound of the cough, doubting any danger from whatever sick soul may lurk in the broken house.

Peno said this philanthropy was a result of her and her mother's prayer. Aro asked her how this could be, but another cough echoed out of the house again.

The girls cut their way through the thick brush of the front lawn to reach the broken windowed door. Peno tried the handle. The door was locked. This shocked the girls for it had never occurred to them that these abandoned houses would have any locks left locked. Then, with the reminder of another rattled cough coming from inside the house, the girls began to feel unsettled and uncomfortable. Though to walk back through the brush of the lawn, which had given Peno some sort of rash, was not an option for the girls at this juncture in their journey. And so Aro ventured back into the brush to find a rock large enough to take out the window next to the door.

The girls climbed through the window and followed the sounds of the rattling cough which was persistent by the time they reached the stairs. In the broken bathtub at the end of the hallway the two girls found a small boy draped in memories indistinguishable from the rags which were keeping him warm. Peno reached down to pick up the boy and carried his tiny weight in her arms down into the first floor.

"What is your name," Aro asked the boy.

But he did not respond.

"Are you hurt," Peno asked the boy.

But he did not respond.

"Are you sick," asked Aro.

The boy shifted his eyes in her direction.

The girls took turns holding the sick boy and rocking him in their arms. When they sang the boy's cough settled in his lungs and he looked peaceful. As the sun began to set the girls put the boy back into his broken bathtub with rags from the house and soft weeds that the girls cut from the yard. They told the boy that they would be back for him in the morning. He answered them with a cough.

Later that night, Aro would take condensed milk and stale bread from the old man's pantry and hide it under her clothes, to bring to the sick boy in the morning. In the morning the old man did not notice the missing milk or bread from his pantry, yet he knew there was food hidden beneath the girl's clothes. Aro had forgotten that she was draped in his memories.

The old man kept this secret hidden from the girl like she thought she had done with the food, and when she told the old man that she and Peno were going out, the old man followed them.

It was the first time the man had left his home since Aro's tenth birthday, when he went looking around the town, with his bat, for someone to make him a cake for the girl. When he failed to find anyone in the town, he gave her a bowl of condensed milk and bread – he called it pudding and she pretended to enjoy it as though it weren't just a variation of their every meal. Since that birthday the old man had been hesitant to ask from others or to help any others he may see on the streets.

The old man did not like the streets. He did not like seeing Aro roaming the streets. The memories draped around her were made of those streets. Those memories held boastful laughter and excited conversations that the man knew he could never again

hear or have. The man did not know how they could have done it, but he blamed the streets for the silence that enveloped the town.

Though it had been six years since the old man had been on the streets of the town, he knew them well enough to be able to follow the girls without their noticing him. The house, where finally the girls stood still and waited in the street looking at each other, loomed in the shadow of the stacks of the mill in the near distance. The man grew sickly watching these girls and this unusual ritual he had found them in. The girls remained motionless in the street, looking at one another.

They knew the old man was watching them. They thought they would have been able to lose him. Aro grew sickly at the idea that she was now terrified of this old man who she could not escape, who now watched her and Peno from the bushes of a nearby lawn.

As the three of them stood in their places in silence, the small boy in the broken bathtub in the house coughed his rattled cough.

He coughed and the girls continued to look at one another.

He coughed and the old man worried what the girls were doing outside of a house with a sickly person inside of it.

He coughed and the girls continued to look at one another.

He coughed and the old man slowly moved closer to the girls and the house.

He coughed and Aro tried to think of what to do.

He coughed and the old man got closer.

He coughed and the girls ran for the door.

He coughed and the old man ran for the girls who were running for the door.

By the time the old man reached the door of the house, the girls had reach the top of the stairs.

By the time the old man reach the top of the stairs the girls were in the bathroom with the sick boy in the broken bathtub.

By the time the old man reached the door of the bathroom, the girls had locked it shut.

The man beat his fist against the wood of the door one single time before slumping to the ground. He had grown tired in his chasing and running after the girls.

The girls sat in the bathtub with the sick boy, scared of the old man in the hallway. As Aro held the boy in her arms, her heart's rhythmic beat reminding her of the condensed milk in her clothes. The boy felt for the bread in her shirt. Aro took the food out of her clothes and began feeding the small boy in her arms as Peno sang.

After several hours the boy had eaten much of the food brought to him by the girls, and his cough subsided. The only noise in the house came from the man, who could be heard snoring in the hallway. As they sat in the broken bathtub the boy looked up at Aro and simply said to her, "woods."

Aro, who knew the man's sleep well, knew that he would not wake up while he snored, and so the two girls crept out of the bathroom, the sick boy in Peno's arms, and down the hallway and past the front door. When they reached the road the boy pointed his finger in the direction of the smoke stacks.

The children made their way to the empty mill plot. They approached its rusty gates, strange patterns welded at the top that they could not define nor understand. Aro pushed on the gate and it fell before them. Beyond the gate, the mill yard looked similar

to the neighborhoods around the town that the girls had known well – weeds overgrown in every direction, broken windows, and dust marking every austere building. Aro could only think that these buildings would have looked like homes if they had not been surrounded by brick walls – once guarded from the dangers of the outside.

The children moved past the broken buildings and found what seemed to them a graveyard. Piles of timber, some in order, others fallen and scattered, lay over the ground, and the foundations of what looked to once be buildings, similar to those by the gate, were left to pockmark the ground.

Looming over this all stood two great smoke stacks.

The boy coughed in Peno's arms.

Aro could feel in the memories wrapped around her that these stacks meant something to the old man, who was still snoring in the hallway of the house. Her stomach grew tense and her knees became weak and she stared at the larger of the two pillars in the light of the moon. In that moment she thought she could hear the noise that the old man had always talked about.

She steadied herself and realized that Peno had begun to cry as she was singing to the boy and feeding him the last of the remaining stale bread. The boy refused the bread from Peno and pointed to the woods in front of them.

The two girls no longer noticed the young boy. Peno's song continued, as did the hand bringing stale bread to the young boy's mouth, not noticing his refusal of it. Both girls were struck by the enormity of the pillars, though they could not tell if it were their own sense of awe or merely that of the clothes they were covered in. Regardless, the boy sat in Peno's arm reaching his hand towards the near woods.

A voice from the woods, hidden by the distance and foliage, broke the girls' looks.

"Get out."

A loud "pop" and then a "thud" came from the base of the smallest of the smokestacks and Aro could see it beginning to fall.

The children ran in the direction of the voice.

The small boy coughed and pointed in the direction of where the voice came from, at the edge of the woods.

As the smallest pillar reached the ground another small "pop" and then a "thud" came from the base of the biggest smokestack and it soon reached the ground, adding to the graves of timber and weeds and broken glass and buildings and the smallest pillar in the mill yard.

The old man had heard both sets of "pops" and "thuds" and awoke. He ran from the hallway to the street, and he could see, alone in the night sky, only the moon. He knew what had happened, as did all other residents of the town who heard the "pops" and "thuds" and looked to the sky.

As the girls looked at the rubble of the two pillars, wrapped in their memories and clothes, they no longer felt a sadness for the pillars which, they then remembered, they had never known to be anything other than the rubble on the ground in another form. There was no life in those pillars that they had ever seen.

The girls unwrapped the memories of their caretakers and threw them to the ground. The boy stopped coughing.

GENERATION NOT GOOD ENOUGH

We don't understand why they feel it necessary to praise everything we ever attempt. We just wrote a story, or painted a picture, or hit the ball, or scored a touchdown, or got a job, or simply just showed the ability to do something that wasn't expected of us – though we've never really known what was expected of us.

"Wow," they say to us, "that's really good."

"No," we reply, "it's not"

When we were young, when we are all young, praise was good for building our sense of self. "Building a good body image" our health teacher would say, and they continued using that mentality, though never that phrase. Body image means shit if your body is shit.

"No," we always reply, "it's not."

When we're younger, in high school, and we get a good grade on a paper we wrote, a story about heroism, that we wrote the night before it was due, they congratulated us on the good grade, they asked to read the story (paper), they tell us how good it is and how proud they are of us, they tell each other how proud they are of us and how good it is.

"No," we always replied, "it's not."

Why do they have to go on like this, we think to ourselves, why can't they understand that we didn't work hard at this, that we could have done better. Why aren't they telling us to do better.

Why is it always in specific cases that they only ever have joy and enthusiasm for the work that we do. Why is it that in general they think so very little about us? So little that our shit surprised them.

We're at the bar on a Monday. The only bar open past midnight on a Monday night, especially when it's the first or the fifteenth of the month and those on welfare celebrate another month in the system. Most people who still have a job in this town – those who aren't inseparable from the mill who will always have the job that they have – seem to work irregular hours, and so at any night past midnight is a good time to grab a drink and play pool. Even they can't stay mad at those on welfare – those they blame for taking their tax dollars. How else would the bar be open this late on a Monday? Who else would they drink their night caps with?

That Monday we are at the pool table and one of them comes up to us and asks us if they can play. We tell them that they can.

They are old, older than us at least, which means they must be very old. They look worn, not only in a physically grueling kind of way, but simply tired. Tired of everything. They are wearing bifocal glasses, like they all seem to need nowadays (that we all worry we may need someday). They play pool with us.

We put our change in the table. The rumble of the balls coming to the opening at the end of the table. We lay the balls on the table in the triangle. We all always work best when we have a mutual short term goal.

They are good. The nine ball into the corner pocket, followed by the three, then a near miss. It's our turn, and we hit the twelve ball in on miraculous luck, followed by a scratch.

Yet, they seem to pay no mind to the scratch and are instead focused on the lucky shot.

"You're really good," they say to us.

"No," we reply, "we're not." We follow this up by noting that it was luck, which we believe it to be.

"No," they start, "you're really good." They then tell us – or rather, politely and graciously command us – to think about joining their pool league. It isn't until their last shot that we realize they're missing three of their fingers – the damaged hand used expertly to guide the stick. We stop to think how we could have missed this aspect about them, but the final shot has been made, they have won. They have won this one game of pool in a bar on a Monday night.

They request once more that we consider their pool league. We respond to them with courtesy and thoughtfulness, but a polite no, and ask if they want to play another game with us.

They decline, informing us that they have to start their shift at the nearby gas station. They go up to pay their tab – one beer, certainly not enough to be drunk for work, though ethically questionable, though who can be faulted for needing something to make it through an after-midnight, part-time, low wage, shift at a gas station in an old mill town – while we go up to order more drinks. We always order more drinks and play more pool. They then say goodbye to us, once again informing us of their pool league: when it meets, where they meet, that we should join them.

We don't want to look that far ahead into the future.

Once they leave and we say goodbye, we begin laughing. Riotous laughing. We cannot believe that they, after seeing us play pool in one game, believe that we are good. If it weren't for the table, we would simply have our drinks at the bar. Playing the game certainly is not a hobby for us. We laugh at them for being so enthusiastic about our

playing. We laugh at them for thinking about something, like pool, so deeply that they try to help build our self esteem by encouraging us to play more.

However, it is *no* that we reply. For we only want to drink more. And we only think about them – in the gas station shirt, or any other required clothing necessary to keep a minimum wage job – standing behind their gas station counter, for gas station attendants are not allowed to sit, and perhaps, on that night, thinking about those he played with and how good they were. And perhaps, wishing he could be us again, younger with talent for something we hardly take note of.

We jokingly wonder how they light their cigarettes with only seven fingers, and our jokes haunt us. They haunt us.

APPROACHES TO THE LAND V

When the police arrived – two officers with French names that were pronounced nothing like they were spelled – they asked me what I was doing. I was surrounded by my research. Pages torn out of books and stacked on top of other papers, put into folders whose documents lay somewhere in the corner; their analysis of a past budworm infestation of the forest no longer pertaining to the information I was looking for. The folder now contained any medical records of check-ins involving mutilations, dismemberments, ax- or chainsaw-related injuries, along with any surgeries involving amputation.

"Whatcha doin' McGlawkin," the younger officer said.

"What," I responded.

"He ast you whatcher doin' McLawflin," the other officer said.

"What?"

The younger officer found my folder and saw the contents I was collected.

"What're these?"

"What?"

I started collecting what papers I could and ordering in whatever fashion I could make sense of at a later time before the officers got their hands on them. Using the journal, the largest of any of the papers and documents, as my base, I begin picking up the scraps that I'd discovered.

The journal.

“McGlawlin.”

The folder or medical records – the younger officer having dropped it to the ground.

“McLawflin.”

Millinocket - Magic City of Maine's Wilderness by Dorothy Bowler Laverty.

“McGlawlin.”

The diary of a millworker from the early thirties.

“McLawflin.”

A Year in the Maine Woods by Bernd Heinrich.

“McGlawlin.”

Millinocket by David R. Duplisea

“McLawflin.”

On Collective Memory by Maurice Halbwachs.

“McGlawlin.”

Maine Sublime by John Wilmerding

“McLawflin.”

When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Harold S. Kushner.

“McGlawlin.”

The Birth of Tragedy by Friedrich Nietzsche.

“McLawflin.”

A series of lewd paintings involving the mill’s smoke stacks by a former art teacher.

"McGlawlin."

"I'm looking for a man with seven fingers," I said as I shielded myself with the former teacher's folio. "I can find him. I just have to figure out how."

"McGflawflin," the officers said simultaneously, in pity and in anger, as I reached for my full stack of documents before they hit me over the head.

HOLY SHIT: THE MAGIC CITY'S EPILOGUE

A demolition company working for the mill owner used explosives to take down the two remaining smoke stacks at the Great Northern Paper mill in Millinocket Friday morning.

The pillars of this town's religion lonesomely stood around the rumble-strewn wasteland of the house that once offered its flesh and blood to sustain its followers. The flesh – the trees of the northern Maine woods, once hauled to the mill by *Pelletier Brothers, IncSM*, now the once-proud owners of the Pelletier Loggers Family Restaurant, now only the owners. The blood – the waters of the Millinocket stream, powering the hydro-electric plant that fed the mill life, the chemicals used in that same water for the creation of the paper, from the pulp of that northern Maine wood.

Those who could bare to watch their fleeting idols that cold, grey morning in middle November watched with sadness and excitement as the two fell to the wasteland at their feet after initial *pops* that shook the air. Unlike many towns where the Falls would be a place (presumably to swim), the Falls for this town became a time and a place – a moment of finality and understanding.

The stacks, and the smoke they emitted, were monuments to the town's prosperity. Their iconic, capitalistic symbolism stretched into the sky to be seen from nearly every street in the town.

Two videos were taken shortly after the Falls, and were posted to social media platforms.

One commenter saying, "This breaks my heart. I wish I could have been there to see it." A yellow frowny face followed the remark.

At the point of the Falls, the loss was only symbolic. The true loss happened years ago. Not to say that loss did not occur after the true loss, or that it does not still occur in the town, or that it won't still occur. But the loss that day of the Falls was only symbolic, only religious, only meaningless.

A moment of understanding the finality of the symbolic that had been symbolized in those who watched it.

In the videos, police officers sat at the bottom of the hill, their cars parked along the road. The video was taken a short distance above the officers, still on the hill. Pickup trucks lined the hill – parked without care. Their owners talking to each other. Discussions of the weather, of future meals to eat, of the upcoming holiday and family visits, of the work they may or may not still have in the town, of the work so many lost years ago.

Pop.

Of the work so many lost and would never get back.

"For those who may not know, those smoke stacks also saved many men who where lost in the woods. They could see the lights at night and follow them out of the woods."

They, the townspeople, were not lost in the woods, but they were lost. Where now could they look for guidance? To look for something to save them?

For one boy, writes Ron Currie Jr., "[h]e wanted to witness the mill stack demolition not because it signaled the end of an era, but because teenage boys like to see things blow up… that mill stack wasn't a symbol – it was just a mill stack."

Another commenter: “[…]it's hard to sit back and watch.. Just hope someone soon will come up with a good alternative to rebuild our community before we're a complete ghost town.”

Assuming it’s at the point of “partial ghost town?”

This is the religion the town built. One of sadness and despair with ceaseless hope – building in its parish a structure of emotional dependency. Too caught up in the *a*ffect of the moment to take action to create an *e*ffect. This was how the religion sustained itself, kept itself relevant.

“Heartbreaking I grew up where you're standing in this. Both of my grandfather's worked there their entire lives. They would be so disappointed in what was once the Magic City. So extremely sad for our town and community.”

The Magic City

After my night in jail, I went, with sore head, in search of my documents. As I crawled back through the broken window and discovered that the two officers had done nothing with my research but strew it amongst the documents and books that I had discarded. I went in search of stranger's journal, hoping for it to act as a guiding light in the continuation of my research. But the officers had torn its pages – every one of them – and cast them off in the ruins of my hard work from last night.

I am forced to piece this back together, in the hopes that I may still discover what it was I was looking for.

TRACK 8 – "HOLD ON MAGNOLIA" (7:51)

Jason Molina insisted that he would only sign one-record deals with minimal terms. At one point he used a tea-bag label to finalize an agreement. Molina distrusted outsiders making decisions about his career and dismissed the idea of hiring a manager.

In 1989 Georgia-Pacific launched a hostile takeover of the company which closed in 1990 for $3.8 billion. Georgia-Pacific in turn sold the Maine holdings to Bowater of South Carolina in 1991... In 1999 Inexcon, a Canadian company, acquired the Maine holdings.

Jason Molina "was the first widely recognized artist to sign with bootstrapped Indiana record label Secretly Canadian, and he helped transform the tiny independent upstart into an internationally recognized collective with a distribution group that's been home to Antony and the Johnsons, Bon Iver, Dinosaur Jr., Okkervil River, Phosphorescent, and Sharon Van Etten."

The Inexcon holdings in Maine went into bankruptcy in 2002. They were acquired by Brascan Corporation in April 2003 and operated under the name of Katahdin Paper Company LLC. In 2003 Brookfield Asset Management bought the mills after the company filed for bankruptcy... That company continued its decline, laying off workers in 2008... In 2011

the Kathadin Paper Company LLC holdings in Maine were acquired by Cate Street Capital of Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Maine New Markets Capital Investment program "provides tax credits to investors who back businesses in low-income communities...

"Cate Street Capitol purchased the troubled paper mill in East Millinocket for $1 from Brookfield Asset Management in August 2011 and two months later returned 200 workers to their jobs making paper..."

The "resurgence of the Great Northern Paper mill...

"First, Cate Street created a new entity called GNP Maine Holdings LLL to receive [a] $40 million investment. That entity then paid the $31.8 million to GNP East, Inc., the existing Cate Street-controlled entity that owned the mill, to buy the paper machines and equipment. After the deal, GNP East was left owning only the land.

"[T]he purpose of the $31.8 million that flowed in and out of the company and back to the original lenders in the same day was to enlarge the investment total on paper, which would return the maximum amount of tax credits to the investors...

"(Both entities eventually filed for bankruptcy.)

"A year after the investment was received, the mill's owner [Cate Street Capitol] shuttered the mill and laid off more than 200 people...

"In the end, here's what really happened: Two Louisiana financial firms arrived in Maine with a plan... hired lawyers and lobbyists to get [the investment] passed... then put together the Great Northern deal using one-day loans that made an $8 million loan look like a $40 million loan."

The Magnolia Electric Co. was released by Secretly Canadian on March 4, 2003. Pitchfork wrote of the album that it "is about finding the strength to move, to grow, and to leave it all behind." After the release of the album, Jason Molina formed a band by the same name, touring for several years and releasing five albums, before Jason Molina became ill.

NOTHING SPECIAL

BUCKSPORT (maine) MILL, LLC

DEMOLITION

"the Department of Environmental Protection has considered the application of BUCKSPORT MILL, LLC… and FINDS THE FOLLOWING"

ORDER

"The applicant proposes to demolish…"

(a) history

(b) life

(c) money

(d) memory

(e) love

"…portions of the former mill"

(f) all of the above

"Current Use of Site: The site is currently" [under] "developed with a paper mill which is no longer in production"

(f) all of the above

"Please find enclosed…

the total cost of the project…

to be $4,450,000"

"The hourly sound level limit…

is 75 dBA at any time" we damn well like

but so as not to disturb residents

"It is understood that little or no excavation will be occurring during the proposed demolition, and that the possibility of discovering a historic spill during the project proposed in this application is therefore relatively low"

HOWEVER:

“The Maine Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the proposed project and stated that it will have no effect upon any structure or site of historic, architectural, or archaeological significance as defined by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966” (THANKSGIVING DAY 1930: Bucksport’s Maine Seaboard Paper Co. opens and prints its first paper)

“The Bureau of Air Quality has stated that the applicant is in the process of applying for an air emissions license and it is likely to be obtained…

THEREFORE, the Department APPROVES the application of BUCKSPORT MILL, LLC to demolish…

The Bucksport paper mill”

[MILLINOCKET]

“[IN THE MATTER

OF][BUCKSPORT][LIES][THE][TOTAL][DEMOLITION][OF][TIME]”

[OLD TOWN]

[LINCOLN]

(etc.)

TRACK 7 – "JOHN HENRY SPLIT MY HEART" (6:10)

In 1997, Jimy Williams was hired as manager of the Boston Red Sox. He won the American League Manager of the Year in 1999 when the Red Sox went 94-68 and reached the American League Championship Series, only to be defeated by the New York Yankees.

It's early October and you're just happy they're in. *It doesn't matter if they make it past this series* you say. *This means good things for the future*.

You make the pilgrimage to the stadium for game one. *I never thought they'd make it this far* you hear yourself saying. You hear your friends saying. They win that game, and the next after it. Then a loss and another win and they're onto the next series.

It doesn't matter if they make it past this series you say. *This means good things for the future*.

Then they lose the first game. Badly. They are outpitched and it looks to be a short series. But there is always game two. *They look bad* you think but don't yet say. You wait for game two.

Jimy Williams – often referred to as "Dumy" by online fans of the time – would be fired in August of 2001, after a series of arguments and disagreements with general manager Dan Duquette, when the Red Sox had

a record of 66-53. He wasn't even two years removed from his AL Manager of the Year award.

Game two starts and things look much like they did for game one. You start getting angry. Though you often said *It doesn't matter if they make it past this series* you find yourself angry. Though you said you expected this – losing – you're uncomfortable swallowing the loss. Inside you feel something. Several things. You're sure of what they are. You can't avoid them. But you refuse to let yourself believe that they're now inside you. *It doesn't matter* you continue to say, yet you feel differently.

In 2002 the Red Sox would be sold to New England Sports Ventures, whose principal owner was John Henry. A week after the sale of the Red Sox, Joe Kerrigan, the replacement of Jimy Williams, was fired and replaced with manager Grady Little.

You've caught that bug which infects so many through the month of October: hope.

Grady Little only managed the Red Sox for two seasons. In his second season he led the team to the 2003 American League Championship where, in the eighth inning and up by three runs, Little decided to leave his starting pitcher, Pedro Martinez, in the game.

And then you feel this hope getting crushed: dread.

The Yankees tied the game in the following at-bat and later went on to win the season.

Terry "Tito" Francona would be hired by the Red Sox prior to the 2004 MLB season. He would lead the Red Sox to their first World Series victory in 86 years by the end of his first season. He would do the same thing again in 2007, this time only three years since the last victory. At the end of the 2011 MLB season, after the month of September where the Red Sox would hold a 7-20 record and losing playoff contention, Francona's contract extension would not be picked up by the Red Sox.

You feel the dread of the thing which you said did not matter. You can't help but think about what would happen if they could come back and win.

This isn't '04. You were too young then to truly know what you were witnessing. Though you remember the eclipse the night they won, your mother letting you stay up to watch it, sitting in the blue light of the living room with her watching the final pitch, not knowing nearly as much about what you were seeing as she did. You remember the next day at school, with everyone exhausted from staying up to watch the game.

This also isn't '07. It wasn't as special. It felt good, but it didn't feel like '04, it didn't feel like now.

When a batter is at the plate they have to get a hit or draw a walk or get hit by the ball before they take three strikes. After three strikes, the batter is out.

Apparently, for Tito Francona, winning the World Series twice counted as his two strikes. His third and final strike came when he couldn't do it again.

You didn't yet know what now felt like. All you could do was sit in your friend's chair and watch them swing and miss for four innings (thirteen including game one). You couldn't watch anymore, you had to leave, so you left.

In 2012, the Red Sox signed Bobby Valentine. During his tenure, the Red Sox went 69-93, and sent approximately $261 million in owed player salary to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a trade. Valentine was quickly fired at the end of the season.

You had cooled down. You had a drink in your hand. They did better than you ever would have thought they could have done last year.

You begin to think of October without them. *It doesn't matter* you had yourself truly believing. There are other things.

The Red Sox started the 2013 season with John Farrell as their manager.

Then a text from Jimmy comes: *I can't believe it* is all it says. You truly began to believe *It doesn't matter* that the text doesn't make sense to you. You sit with it a minute. *I can't believe it*. *What could it mean* you wonder. Then it hits you:

Hope.

You run to the television and suddenly, October without them is unimaginable.

It matters, they can do this you start to believe.

There is a future beyond this.

The next morning you hear from someone that Jimmy was found dead. That he froze to death underneath the steps of his apartment.

There is a future beyond this.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Joseph Linscott is a writer born in Millinocket, Maine. He attended Stearns High School from 2006-2010. He graduated from the University of Maine with his Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 2014. As an undergraduate, Joseph was a member of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, as well as the Sigma Tau Delta and Phi Beta Kappa honor socieities. He has several stories published in *Stolen Island* and *Water Soup* literary journals, as well as two first place prizes for poetry in the Steve Grady Competition for Creative Writers. He is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Maine in May 2016.