

SAM GREENE

WINDOWS (PART TWO)

Editor's note: This is part Two of "Windows". Part One was featured in the Winter 2007 issue of The Puritan. Part Three (the conclusion) will be featured in the Summer 2007 issue.

The subway roars and thunders, sheet metal and sparks. The tracks burn, hot rubber, the stink of friction from wheels. The sound rises in the tunnel, a windstorm, headlights illuminating the gloom ahead like some growing realization. Inside, jostling and shaking, weaving as if charmed, brown and white and black faces mingle and stare but do not speak. Lights flicker; people think of action films. Then the doors open as the car comes to a screeching halt, a collapse, and the faces file out, pressing and brushing against other shapes, shapes with mouths and limbs and eyes in the way.

Today they don't wait. They run, thin black legs hitting concrete, sneakers squeaking against steel and the stairs that lead up into air, into sunlight and morning and a million faces.

This is a picture. The southbound subway, empty.

This is a picture. Drew sitting alone in the subway car fingering the cell phone, loading film into the chamber.

This is a picture. The subway moans and squeals, familiar. At each station stop there are fewer people waiting for the southbound line. On the north side each platform is packed, teeming.

Their faces are black, brown, yellow, and white.

Drew thinks. This is a picture.

So fleeting—each stop, each detail. He wants to snap pictures through the doorways at the crowds on the north platforms. He wants to say, we remembered this together this day oh what can happen I'll always remember what I was doing when. He wants to say this but doesn't know yet that it's true: that he won't forget. That beautiful dark-haired model with her hand on her hip. That confused look as the cameras turned away. It's not you, honey.

Turn back.

That man, black face drawn tight and afraid. Click.

That woman, little Chinese face. Click.

Drew alone in the chamber thinking of the stop, thinking he'll be late. He watches for the Chambers Street Station. How close is too close?

Drew unfastens another button on his shirt, hot in the underground. The skin beneath his collar is damp. Two more stops and the doors slide open, impatient. Now. Drew hoists himself up, clutching a slick silver pole, and vaults

spryly from the car. He is alone on the platform save for three figures that run, that don't walk, from the doors to the stairs. As the subway doors shut and the cables snap and the train thunders down the tunnel Drew is already bounding three steps at a time, forget the handrail, like he's twenty, thirty years younger, his heart suddenly hammering against his ribs.

Back beneath the blue sky, the sweet breeze, Drew slows down, steps among masses moving east and north and away from what now to Drew is unnameable and expectant and veiled. Drew walks west and south.

And then through the buildings he sees it. As if I hadn't looked up. There through a mess of jagged teeth the towers, burning, the glitter and shimmer of glass in the sunlight, the red cut of impact through metal, a wound or a mouth, and the impossible plumes of smoke, black and grey, as if the earth wagged and puffed on two terrible cigars, terrible noxious cigars, burning and peeling away as two great glowing embers roll inexorably downward into nothing, into ash. And the sky goes riot with colour and darkness and then nothing again: blue beyond blue, empty, the horizon and the round edges of the world.

Drew sees this and not this.

(Drew sees the press of long overcoats, derbies and fedoras and sunglasses and the stuttering flash of bulbs. The words still ringing in the air, Bobby you son of a bitch, then the shots. The bulky men in the black and beige suits pressing the cameras and the crowd back, hands pushing and elbows digging into muscles, screams, full-throated yells. The crush of bodies smothering the swarthy face, the dark hair, holding him down, hitting him. Robert Kennedy lying on his back and his face is wan and white and leaving. Bobby's eyes still open and strange, like a puppet or a manikin, a doll. Blood already on the ground, surprisingly dark blood that seeps down from his hair and his neck through the fibres of his jacket and onto a floor that does not receive. Ethel Kennedy looking up, kneeling, staring but not believing that pictures are being taken, that before Bobby's breath is squelched and squeezed out of his lungs his face – that white perfect surprised face – is burning onto film. Lenses shut and Drew – a younger, quicker Drew – stepping forward, excited, takes the picture. Ethel's wild eyes pleading, roaming, insane.

Look for the frame. Focus the lens. Wait for her eyes. Pull the trigger.)

Drew sees two towers reflected in glass.

The streets open up. Bodies move toward the tear in the skyline. Drew starts running again. Hundreds, maybe thousands of photographers will have this. He wants, needs to get closer, and so he runs, breathing hard, sweat sliding off his cheeks.

Cars are confused. Sirens ebb anthemic as obese sisters scream libation. Drew seeing and not seeing his borders collapse; sees ships cantilever crazily

over the edge of the world. Police and Fire and Hospital workers blur into a collective, recuperative stance, bewildered. Cops finger nightsticks, flaccid. Administration becomes bureaucracy, becomes information, becomes empty. Everyone is looking for the dictator, the superhero, the caped crusader; someone who can do more than file or shuffle off; everyone shuffles and files the image, the picture clicking around them of towers and the barest glimpse. Glimpse of what? Every maliciousness, every sadistic wish for oblivion cancelled by the horror of the real, the in your face, the non-thought that this can get worse.

Every cell phone in every pocket: bells tolling. Anterior columns of uniformed guard wave, furious. A panning arm, baseball hat, home video camera; unflinching eye. Cops and firemen don't like it.

"Put it away," they say, moustached.

Who's going to listen? Not today. A question:

"Don't you have any human decency?"

Drew negotiates the bodies, the craning necks and the barked orders. The bombs – car bombs – going off in the crowds. Drew feels the urge to run, flatten his body beneath a shadow or a stone, cut through his colon. He looks left and right, wild and alert, watching for flames and shrapnel, smashed mufflers sent spinning through the air. A man – late twenties, black skin, hair pulled back into neat corn-rows – meets Drew's glance, eyes watching for the same things: fire, torn flesh, agony.

Where are the explosions?

It takes the sound of a woman's shrill, piccolo lament for Drew to realize what's happening. And Drew is relieved (relieved?), jubilant for perhaps a breath, knowing he's safe. He can look up. He can do his job.

"God! They're jumping! Oh, please God! Save their souls! Save their souls! Save their souls!"

No car bombs. Falling bodies, flattening.

The woman moans a broken, trailing note. Everything is confirmed in her heart, in the place that said all real misery is in that movie, or that picture. In that picture, and not here, not burnt indelibly into memory, shaming her, making her scared and timid and neurotic, helpless, hate-filled, making words like venom spit out in response to the barest glimpse, the total absence.

"God."

Drew presses his back against a wall, aims a 200 millimetre lens, catches the brilliant play of reflection and light, the belch of smoke.

Perfect.

Suddenly there are more screams, pointing, and Drew is there, watching, diligent, as a body plummets, impossible, from a hundred stories up. Before Drew loses the figure, the flailing limbs, the flapping jacket, he has snapped four, maybe five worthwhile shots.

Another body, arms pinioning in air. The soundless pull of gravity and then the sharp crash, the explosion of impact.

“They were using blankets,” someone says, stammering. “They were using blankets, or tablecloths, like parachutes. They were pink. The wind ripped the fabric to pieces and they fell.” Drew doesn’t look, but thinks this is a big man, sobbing.

Another body, head first, an arrow. Drew gets ten, maybe twelve shots.

That’s how it happened, he says, later. Just like that. We were shooting and then the tower made the most horrible noise. The ground shook, literally, and then things went crazy. I ran like an animal, not knowing where I was going. Just away. The tower came down and everything went white.

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Eric stands naked, motionless, watching rain rinse the city grey. The dull, prickling scent of wet clothes, wet hair, dirty things, and the roof sounding its sustained shush, water’s white noise. Lights shine more fiercely through fog. Or more subdued, softened by smoke from sewer grates, red cigarette embers lost in one limitless exhale.

Eric stares sleepily through the window. He stretches, hurting. His glasses feel large and clumsy on his face.

Eric wears a weariness immense and impractical, day-consuming, thirsty. He feels conspired against, outnumbered: under the tidal roar of rain against the roof, under David’s soft, shifting shape beneath warm sheets. Against this insane tiredness. He yawns. He gives up. The morning passes grey, a smudge.

Later, David walks across the studio, wearing blue jeans and a white t-shirt, hunting along the floor for outlets and loose cords. He plugs in the phones, the wall mount and the portable, expecting a chorus of rings as wires connect. When there is no sound, just the warm rush of rain against glass and concrete, his mind goes empty, blank. He moves to the kitchen, makes coffee.

Eric wakes to the sound of closing cupboards, the clink of silverware. The gurgle and babble of the coffee machine sounds in time with quiet thunder, somewhere remote. He watches David find mugs, muting his movements, softening contacts. He waits until the coffee is ready, David leafing through yesterday’s Post.

“Bring me one,” he says.

David pours Eric a mug, walks barefoot across the floor to the bed, smiling. Eric sits propped on his elbow and sips the coffee.

“I plugged them in,” David says, sitting on the bed. “It’s been an hour.”

“They’ll start soon,” Eric says, placing the mug on the floor and laying back down.

“I’m going to shower,” David says in between sips. “Then I’ll go.”

Eric nods.

“I don’t want to ...”

Eric nods again, knowing. “We can’t help it.”

David stands, sighing. He grabs a towel from a chair and leaves for the bathroom.

This tiredness is incredible. Eric feels like he’s been pummeled, hammered. He forces his eyes open to fight the quicksand, the deep mud, the sucking ease of sleep. The bed is low to the ground, soft, enveloping. The sound of water pounding tile from David’s shower joins the pitter-patter of drops against the window, the pipes and the puddled roof. Eric’s eyes close, uncontrollable. He forces them open as David stands, dressed, ready to leave. Time slips forward, white.

The phone is ringing.

Eric pushes through dreams of fog and steam and uncertainty to reach, clumsily, to the portable phone on the floor. After five rings his thumb presses talk.

“Hello?” he says, faking wakefulness.

“Eric?”

“Speaking.”

“Eric. It’s Jerry.”

“Hi. I mean, good morning.” Eric throws his feet over the side of the bed. Is it morning?

“Morning. I’ve been trying my best to get a hold of you. I hope everything’s all right.”

“Everything’s fine,” Eric says.

“Good. I was worried, really.”

“I’m OK, Jerry.”

“How’s April?”

“She’s fine. She’ll be home this afternoon.”

“You sure you’re all right?”

Jerry is a stranger.

“Yes. Why?”

“Bad news.”

“I know.”

“The article is bad. You don’t deserve that. Neither do we. The article is amateur, it’s posturing. That article is bad business.”

“It isn’t doing us any favours.”

“It’s, um ... unexpected.”

“Bad business, for sure.”

A pause.

“Eric, you’re not going to like this.”

“I’m not going to like what?” Eric sips the coffee and recoils, finding it cold and metallic.

“We’ve all been pushed to this. It’s no one’s fault. Things are ... tricky, Eric. It’s a minefield.”

“What’s happened?” Suddenly he can hear sirens, a mounting wail that means arrest, shame, humiliation. Things become desperate; hide the money, find the gun.

“I’m going to have to shut down the exhibit. The show’s over.”

“You’re positive?”

“It’s final. I’m sorry.”

Eric rubs his temple, thinking. Tired.

“Jerry, I feel awful. I mean, sure, we all do, but not like this. Here I do one thing that can help, can help people make sense of that awful feeling. I meant this with no ill will, you know? It hurt to build, literally, made me cry. It took me forever.”

“This wasn’t something cruel. You’re – ”

“No, it was just a glimpse, a sign saying we’re not through with this, it’s so far from being over and figured out. We haven’t figured out anything, I mean, nothing, it’s so raw still and how many months now? Nine? How many until we say anything, until we can do more than draw cartoons?”

“That’s why it has to happen. That rawness. But where – ”

“But why give in?” Eric asks, suddenly feeling some of that hot frustration David encouraged, a feeling muted by the overwhelming shame of cowardice and censure. “Why not put it out there, Jerry, like art’s supposed to be? That’s a question. Here, now, relevant. About large, profound things, things we can’t sort out by sleeping away the next ten years.” Eric hates the pull of the body, the weariness that drags him downward onto soft pillows. He stands, pulling a towel around his waist because something about walking naked, shouting past the sound of rain, seems ridiculous, Shakespearean. “I’m not some alien, some freak apparition here only to exploit, for Christ sake. I’ve been living in this city for – ”

“Eric.”

“ – fucking thirty years, I live here, I eat here, I – ”

“Eric.”

“ – I’m just as much a part of this place as Andrea Peyser, moral authority, New York Post columnist and populist bitch.”

“Eric.”

“Yes, Jerry. What?”

“I’m getting bomb threats.”

Eric winces. His lips make a ring.

“You’re getting bomb threats.”

“Yes. They want to blow me up.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know. It’s about your work. It’s about The Tumbling Woman.”

“Bomb threats.”

“There’s no other way around this. I sympathize with you, your loss, your right. But my job, my life, maybe, is at stake here. And the fact of the matter is: the Museum of Modern Art doesn’t need it. We took it, but we don’t need it.”

Eric doesn’t say anything. It has stopped raining. He looks around for cigarettes.

“These are New Yorkers, then. Not Osama bin Ladin, some fakir from – ”

“Most definitely New Yorkers. But I’m not taking any chances. I lost friends, you know ...”

“You lost friends ... what? Too? Is that what you were going to say?”

Eric realizes David took the cigarettes, inside pocket of his jacket.

Eric can hear Jerry muffle the phone, say something to someone. Business.

“Listen, Eric. This isn’t easy, obviously. Let’s sit down and talk, I mean, soon. How’s tomorrow morning?”

It starts raining again in an hour. The drops are soft, hesitant, as if the clouds were ashamed of their outburst, strutting and fretting. Eric sleeps, curled up and sweating. In a dream he finds himself imitating Rodin’s *The Thinker*, fist curled under chin in pensive contemplation. He sits in Times Square, on some sort of sound stage. He gets the occasional honk, the odd stare, but doesn’t attract the kind of attention he feels is appropriate. He is completely naked; his skin is pale and flabby, wrinkled, nothing like the chiseled stone muscles he has studied, and sketched, and finally imitated, time and again, perfection always a scent or a taste around the block.

“Honey?” says the voice on the street, flashing in time with stoplights, the endless scroll of stock figures, information. Eric opens his eyes.

“Hon?” says April, standing at the foot of the bed, hair wet, raincoat soaked.

Eric reaches out, wiggling his fingers, and what comes from his mouth is more animal, more moan than language, but the dream and the rain and the sight of April, sweet smelling April an apparition, and all guilt and pain transform to something beyond fatigue and failure. They are all confused with the sound from his mouth, halfway between home and no.

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It's a mouth full of bad breath, bad coffee. I run my tongue along a canker sore, discovered this morning, that throbs each time I chew. My head pounds. Ray-Ban sunglasses feel heavy on my nose, unnecessary, but I won't take them off. Light reflects dazzlingly through the windows. My stomach is a hollow ache; too much wine and not enough sleep, but I'm up, excited, forcing down a croissant and a ripe grapefruit, cut unevenly, sugar sprinkled on top. Drumming my fingers on the pink tablecloth in between mouthfuls that make the canker burn.

Sometimes I feel like a secret agent, living in hotels, wearing dark sunglasses at breakfast. Drinking bad coffee and staring, gaze concealed, at the waitresses and servers. I boot up my laptop, check my e-mails. Pick a piece of cereal off my lapel.

Once it looks like the pain in my temples won't get any better, I leave cash on the table, make my way to the underground garage. It is cool and cavernous, smells like spilt gasoline. I get into my car, shift uncomfortably in my coat, and stack my papers on the passenger seat. I inch up the ramp, past the hydraulic barrier, and merge with traffic in the swarming sunlight.

I don't know who the falling man is. Not really. But his photograph rests in a manila file folder on the passenger seat, blown up five times normal size. This, I suspect, will be enough evidence for his family, the men and women I think he belongs to.

Norberto Hernandez – or what was left of him – was found in the mountain of rubble that was once the North Tower. His last seconds are, for now, unknowable: spent hurtling through air or crushed under tons of falling metal. Employees at the restaurant “Windows on the World” think, from a look at the photograph, that it could be Hernandez. They're not sure. This is worth a shot.

The man who enlarged the picture was an Arab. He seemed confused, guilty. His wife sat behind the counter, counting money, her eyes roaming. I kept my sunglasses on.

Around noon I find the suburb where Tino – Norberto's brother – lives. He has invited me into his home. I expect coffee and small talk. I expect a house full of yelping, energetic Latino children. I expect hushed tones as he spies the folder. I expect a short intake of breath as he recognizes his brother, falling. We shake hands. He thanks me, wiping at tears.

I arrive, pulling up the driveway of a small bungalow. The front door opens and I spy a tall, caramel-coloured woman, visible through the screen. This, as I discover, is Milagros, Norberto's sister. She is large, doe-eyed, and extremely quiet. For a moment I try to visualize Norberto walking through this doorway, donning his chef jacket, driving to work.

I am offered tea, not coffee. There are no children. They have been sent away.

I tell them who I am, where I work. They nod. I slip them the photograph and Tino says nothing. Milagros squints, biting her lip. She hands the photo back and says, in a lilting accent, "This could be Norberto."

Tino nods, slowly.

"It's probably Norberto," she says. Tears have gathered in her eyes.

"I want you to have closure," I say.

Tino nods.

"You shouldn't show this to his wife or daughters," says Milagros, rapidly.

I scratch my chin.

"Why?"

Milagros stands. "Because they won't believe it."

I feel like an angel, descending from Heaven with secret and terrible proclamations.

"Because they won't recognize him?" I try to be diplomatic, careful.

"Because they won't accept it," she says.

Tino stands as well. "They are very religious. This picture means Norberto took his own life. They won't accept it." He shakes his head.

I picture thickets of thorn bushes, the suicide's circle. I picture this and feel a revulsion deep and irreconcilable. I have no faith in God, an afterlife of reward or chastisement. To me, hell surfaces here, and now, in burning towers, falling men.

"I understand," I say, lying.

Milagros sits back down and cries. I gather the photograph and Tino walks me out, through the screen door, and onto the porch. We shake hands.

"Here," he says. He passes me a slip of paper. Written on it is date, a location.

"It's Norberto's funeral. Come then. You can meet his family. They should see the picture."

"I will," I say. I feel a great and moving burden. My head throbs. I drive back to the hotel and go to bed, slightly numb.

I split the cab with Sandra, by the way. We rode uptown beneath the twinkling stars of Manhattan. The cab driver was the colour of dark water, like the lights running in rivulets over the windshield.

Sandra's apartment is a short walk from my hotel. We stopped in front of her building and Sandra paid the cabbie with cash. We stopped together because we were going to walk past the doorman, through the lobby, and take the swift silver elevator nine stories to her apartment, which would be clean and modern and dark. A cat would slink between our legs as we pushed against each other, all lips and tongues and fingers, and clothes coming off, awkwardly, until the bed and the dull pleasure and the quirks: how her hair smelt, the mole on her thigh, the feel of her teeth. And then swallowed by sleep and the fall-out of the morning, the same pain, different circumstances. The walk back to the hotel, the

complimentary soaps, the bible in the drawer. Small escapes from falling men, a glimpse of hell.

But instead we touched hands. Desire slinked away. She said goodbye and her body was stiff. She walked up the steps, through the door, and I walked back to my hotel, drunk, whistling to sirens that came near, then seemed far, then near again, and then were gone.

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Jonathan Briley glances over his shoulder, his hands at ten and two, watching a white minivan merge with four lanes of fluid, shimmering traffic: all smooth, round edges, sharp, ecstatic reflections, dashboards and driving dust. Jonathan pushes his foot, hears the Saturn kick with a dull, resonant groan, and is carried forward, a particle, joining the swimming, shifting cars, the hollow rub of tires on asphalt a cool, Gregorian hum.

To have a car, to have gas in that car, to feel an engine kick beneath your feet and see the road blur beneath and a horizon never diminish – these things are good, day-affirming, enough to make each day livable, durable. Jonathan thinks of twisting electric wires. He thinks of inevitable pain, exhaustion, dusk, driving homeward and the mixed delight of dinner. His day is an arrangement: movement, pain, labour, repetition, release. The horizon is fixed, unchanging, but Jonathan follows landmarks like buoys along foggy coastlines. Marks that move from miniscule to grotesque: the I-95 sign, the white cross and the withered bouquet where a child was hit, the off-ramp and the peaks of the towers.

Jonathan passes vans, semis, pickups. He thinks of driving blind, negotiating the exits, timing the turns by memory conditioned by repetition, control, immense and lonely joy. A passenger jet passes through the sky, a white plume streaking west, away from the east and the sun that shines like a late summer scandal. Jonathan thinks of the cool dew of morning, still dark, as he backed the Saturn down the driveway, the taste of mint toothpaste still chilling his lips.

Jonathan presses a button on the CD display. Buddy Guy's "Sweet Tea", torn by teeth from its plastic wrap, sounds its first ringing notes. A CD bought by Jonathan the day before, knowing the week would resound with the effortless riffing, the soul-filled voice, the newness of unheard music making sense of routine. He has never heard this song, but when Buddy moans "I done got old", picks that acoustic guitar like it was made for his hands, Jonathan smiles like it's an old favourite, a standard. He drums his palms against the steering wheel, shakes his head slowly, smiling along with Buddy and the misery and grace of the blues.

Cars pulse forward in a steady tide, competing for place in the race to obligation, to destination. Jonathan himself is an isolated body, a man wrapped in metal and pistons, glass and rubber, hurtling beyond speeds tied to bone or flesh. He casts furtive glances at other drivers, eyes fixed, jaws working, cigarettes dangling from lips. Children stare from back seats, bored, heads pressed to glass.

Things slow down, fall apart. Steady rhythm becomes hiccup. Flashing sirens, ambulance drivers, stretcher bearers; emergency crews obstruct the natural movements of

the road. A small red Honda is flattened against the concrete sidebar, its hood and windshield littering the lane with glass fragments and broken pipes. The front end is a broken nose, flat. Jonathan turns and looks for bodies, mangled in metal. Blood, tissue and pain. There: a white blanket slung over a stretcher. Jonathan moves too fast to see the telling shape beneath: evidence of certainty, dress rehearsals of endings. No Grand Guignol, instability inching through the cracks. Nothing but a white sheet, a poor Halloween costume, holes cut for eyes.

That's me, he thinks. That's everybody.

Passing the sirens and the pile-up, cars accelerate until the barest glimpse becomes memory, becomes stock footage of crash sites, anonymous suffering. Jonathan has never been in a serious accident. He has no first hand experience of whiplash, of imploding glass, of impacts like blows to the stomach. Not knowing, he wonders. He imagines himself, implicated, one tiny particle on the surface, hurting with the rest. Would it be quick? A sudden skid, heart skipping, the scream of tires and then sleep, blackness, the crash in the movie reel? Or would he know suffering, pain, hear his own voice cry out, involuntary, unbearable? Would he have faith? Jonathan thinks of groans poured out like water, sighs baked like bread.

Now I would be lying down and quiet, he thinks. I would be asleep, at rest.

Boy. Let's turn that up.

Jonathan cranks the volume, electric guitars and amplifier feedback drowning the fear and the trouble of the instant, the out of his hands. The city swells around him, roads like concrete arteries, cars and trucks like blood vessels sent swimming to the brain. This city of impossible numbers, multitudes. I go in now, Jonathan thinks, with the rest. One black face sharin' everybody's air. Move over, boy; I'm changin' lanes.

And suppose, he thinks, now in great colours of feeling, an emotional landscape without words: suppose God tested this city, looked for one good man. One honest, respectful, God-fearing man; would it be him? How could he match the millions in their buildings, the millions on the streets, passing looks and markets, eyes turned up to scrolling stock prices with something like hope? The Chinese and the Italian, the Irish and the African; Jonathan just a floating microbe, another commuter moving in to do a job for someone wealthy, be demure, finish on time, and drive out, lost again on the highway of tissue and metal and blood. Suppose he was chosen: told to gather his things, leave the city, while sulphur rained terror and finitude down upon the masses that would not submit, would not heed. Suppose he forgot a tool, forgot the batteries for Gwen; he'd have to turn back.

I'd be a pillar of salt, Jonathan thinks. A pillar of salt makes a bad father. A pillar of salt can't die happy, old and full 'o days.

Jonathan laughs. Manhattan towers above him, silent stories inching higher into clouds, the radiant sky. His heart flutters, negotiating congestion and garbled roadways, ambitious bus and taxi drivers darting between flashing signals. The string he follows, compelled, points toward a garage, past seven streets, where he can park his Saturn and walk to the North Tower. Jonathan glances down, sighs, spots a small stain of coffee on his snow-white uniform. Excitement fades to expectation, drudgery, the day over, the

morning and its potential receding implacably into routine, the past, where we were before.

To Jonathan, all terror of the highway, the impending return home, means nothing. Disaster, happening elsewhere, happening in the imagination, is just disaster; one among many.

He grasps it, this release, and it is tender and calming and forms seamlessly into a thought, expansive, intuitive, thought beyond pain and endings, beyond the streak of steam through clouds, beyond the blue sky; thought that sets the day humming like a tuning bar, strange, prophetic:

I am loved.

Jonathan parks his car, unwraps a stick of gum; smiles. He steps out into air, and morning, and a million faces.