

## Do You Remember Yesterday?

by J. L. Owens

My mother never knew why I decided to leave the town I had been born in, after graduation I enrolled into the college of my choice, far from the small town of Hanford and left almost everything behind. It was a saying around town that Hanford was a black hole, when someone resides within the boundaries, they find they never get away. It was even more ironic when many of the people who did leave after high school came back within a year. I was the exception. I vowed never to return, knowing I would rather hide in every city, state, or country than be forced to see those city limit lines again.

It was no surprise when I received a phone call from my mother on a bright afternoon telling me about my high school reunion. Ten years had come and gone and still I had not set foot in that town. "It was different," my mother said, "bigger, and more exciting. It even had a mall now and a movie theatre." But my mother did not understand. It was not the place that bothered me, that churned my stomach and stomped on my heart; it was the people. The town had grown but what about their minds? I wondered if their repressed thoughts still dominated the masses, if the harsh reality of the world was masked by their small town opinions. So I went, hoping to find my childhood town changed.

When I entered the gym of my old high school I was thrown back by the size of the crowd. The masses of people recognizable to me caused moments of blurred thoughts and emotions. But the crowd of people seemed unnoticeable compared to the thoughts of the one person not there.

People gathered around me and said my name but I barely listened. They all looked familiar but it had been a long time. A woman, with red hair and a big diamond on her ring sng in the backyard instead of playing with dolls.

We were best friends back then, it is funny to think how two different people would have found a connection. Most likely it was the fact that she lived next door and we were never allowed to go any farther than a couple houses down when we were outside. That image of my mother on the front steps of our old house calling me in to dinner and the look on Chrissy's face as I slowly dragged my feet, making sure not to step on the cracks on the sidewalk, has always been an image in my mind of my childhood. My mother liked Chrissy then. She used to call her

"adorably squeezable but too dirty from fun." Mother rarely let Chrissy inside our house without giving her a good washcloth cleaning in the front bathroom. If not, Chrissy's dirty hand smudges would be all over the house, especially my bedroom and the carpet floor. It wasn't that she was an unclean child, she was just an active one, activities which included mud fights and building forts and playing with water balloons. Rarely did I ever play her games; I was fit to just watch her and the rest of the others in the game, mostly boys, and rarely would Chrissy ever sip warm water from one of the tea cups from my tea set. She would, though, with lurid curiosity, watch as we poured another glass and tried to speak in a British tongue. Her dirty hands would occasionally grab a cookie from the table but she never wanted to sit down.

The exact time when things started to change between us is a little hazy for me. I suppose it was around the time of puberty, when all of the adolescents start noticing the opposite sex, and when the talk goes from tea parties to hot boy bands. I guess, when that all started, Chrissy lost interest in my friendship and I lost interest in hers. She did not seem to care whether Bop Magazine had the latest heartthrob on the cover, but I did. She only cared that her precious playtime had come to a bitter end. Even the boys soon abandoned playtime for drooling over the opposite sex. Around that time I could remember seeing Chrissy outside, alone, digging a makeshift bomb shelter or riding her bike around the block.

I found new friends; friends who shared my interests, or rather, the interests gained my attention and the friends came along for the ride. At the time, I wished to be older so that people would treat me as an adult and not some pre adolescence with hormones in over drive. I wanted the right to date and the right to go some where by myself. Now as I look back, I suppose anyone else would have wanted the same thing, then again, Chrissy held onto her childhood until the bitter end.

Junior High went by quickly and quietly. By that time, Chrissy and I lived in two separate worlds. My friends consisted of cheerleaders and student council members who cheered at basketball games and taped pictures of their friends on their notebooks. My notebook was filled with pictures of happy, smiling adolescents. Peace signs and colorful pictures soon were replaced by the scribbling of the present boy I liked or band I listened to.

I saw Chrissy in the halls and we never exchanged glances. I rarely thought about her then, she was merely someone in my childhood I grew away from; we no longer had anything to share. By then, it was obvious she was different than the rest of us. While the rest of the children grew up into teenagers who liked to party and have fun, she chose to stay away from people and fill her own time by herself. The name-calling had already started; "dyke," was their word of choice. This confused me for a while, it was hard to believe that the innocent girl I had grown up with now was something repulsive to our peers. In my eyes, through the voices of my friends, my opinion changed about Chrissy. She became a nobody. Deep inside I felt something when I thought about her but I never knew how to pinpoint the emotion. Pity is the word that comes to mind when I think about it the most. I pitied her. Her boyish mannerisms and odd looks found her in the center of the nobodies. The nobody's included the smart nerds with the glasses and the girls with the greasy hair. They were not accepted into the real world. They were different in a bad way and were not real people in the eyes of my friends.

By high school it was known that she was a lesbian, a dyke, a confused girl who dressed in boys clothing. Teens in high school were cruel to her. Many times she was kicked out of bathrooms or spit on for walking in the hallway. Her short, straggly haircut and baggy blue jeans made her blend into the average crowd of seventeen year old boys. I remember watching her walk through the hallway with her head down, face forward, feet moving steadily as if she was always late for something. The echoes of slurs always accompanied her shadows as she turned corners. Snickers from giggling girls were also something I remember. My friends would laugh as she walked by and Chrissy would never glance their way. I felt bad, really, but then again I said nothing. Just because she was different did not mean she was not human. When I looked at her I saw two sides to her, the dyke and the girl I played with as a child. These thoughts confused me beyond anything I had ever experienced and they frustrated me. I suppose that is why I never talked to her again until that October.

It was about our sophomore year in high school when everyone noticed a change in Chrissy. She had met a girl. Her name was Rebecca and she was another one of the nobodies. With her stringy black hair and clunky combat boots she would stride up and down the halls chanting verses of odd poetry and songs, caring less what anyone thought of her. Everyone knew the drug of her choice was heroin. Her red rimmed eyes and thin,

emaciated body often seemed dead. Even the look in her eyes told people she held no breath.

Chrissy and Rebecca were seen everywhere, in the hallways, downtown by the fountain, even at Snow White s, the local teen hangout in which people went for lunch. Chrissy was sometimes seen smiling. They held hands, and embraced in front of everyone. This appalled many and rudely awoke others.

And then one day, Rebecca was gone. It looked weird to see Chrissy walking alone through the hallways at school. She was missing something, it was obvious. Her Rebecca was not with her. In the newspapers it was said she had died of an illegal substance overdose, but everyone already knew heroin killed her. She was alone, the papers said, and in her bedroom. Her parents found her the morning after it had been reported that she did not go to school.

The town took their usual stance on such an event. People wrote letters of condolences to her parents and vowed to end the drug activity through which this poor, innocent victim was taken. The high school engraved a bench with her name on it so that she would always be remembered and students wore ribbons on their shirts to fight drugs. All through the town, everyone had something to say about the matter. Even whispers were heard in the corners about how glad they were to rid the town of such vermin. A cheerleader, with her stuck up nose and her bouncy walk, said, "She was glad that the trash was finally being cleaned out of her school and that if the other one would only go too."

This caught my attention one day as I stood with a group of my friends outside the door to my Anatomy class. This was when it first came to my attention that I obviously did not have the same opinions about Chrissy as everyone else. True, I had not talked to Chrissy in many years, but I could never see myself going to school without seeing her in the hallways. It was like she was attached to it, somehow, as if seeing her was a comfort, to know things were always the same.

The scattered pictures on the wall came into focus as a small group of women noticed me alone. They smiled and waved to get my attention. As they walked towards me, making their way through the tables on the gym floor, I recalled their faces from the distant past. There was once a time when I had called Amber my best friend. Strange, how I had not seen her in years. We wrote to each other and talked a little on the phone after I had gone

to college but things were never the same. Our phone conversations in high school often lasted until the small hours of the night, until our eyes could no longer stay open, but after I left, she seemed distant, as if not knowing what to talk about. By her side were two other women, both brunette and short in height. In high school they were simply known as the twins because they were never seen apart. They were the most flamboyant, arrogant people I had met in my lifetime. They were cheerleaders, the kind that made you cringe when they called out, "Hanford," with that long vowel sound that made you wonder if you were in the deep south rather than Central California.

"Oh my God, look who it is, guys," one of the twins called. I smiled at her quickly and turned to Amber. Amber looked as if she didn't want to be there but curiosity held her feet to the floor.

"How are you?" she asked politely. Her face was older and her brown hair was dyed blonde. She no longer wore the braces of her high school year but other than that she was the same.

"Fine," I replied, "I was looking at all the old pictures. It is hard to believe it has been ten years."

They agreed and asked me if I wanted to sit at a table with them. As we walked over to the tables I could not help but notice the woman with the red hair staring intently at me. I turned away and ignored her.

Amber sat next to me as we took our seats. Not once since we had met that night had she looked me in the eye.

"So, Amber tells me that you are a psychologist down in Southern California?" One of the twins asked.

"She's written a book, too." Amber replied excitedly.

"You've read it?" I asked.

"Yes, of course, how could I not?"

"What's it about?" one of the other people at the table asked. He was a balding man with a mustache.

"Adolescent behavior, mostly, and how early stages in life impact ourselves."

Everyone at the table nodded with satisfaction.

Just then, a man across the gym picked up a microphone and tested it by thumping on it. The noise made everyone turn around and he greeted us all. He welcomed us to the reunion and the gym buzzed with clapping as a petite woman took the microphone. I shifted around uncomfortably in my chair and yawned. My thoughts ran back to the past and how that October Friday night changed my life.

Months passed since Rebecca's death and things went back to normal. Her bench by the cafeteria was by then covered in graffiti and her name was only occasionally heard. It was my senior year in high school and Adam, one of the many Varsity football players, was my steady boyfriend for about nine months. It was October, the sun was warm in the afternoon but the night air chilled just enough to wear a light jacket.

After a game on a Friday night, Adam and I went to Hickey Park, just Northwest of Hanford. I never understood why this park existed where it was; nothing around it resembled civilization. Acres and acres of cornstalks could be seen from the park and cotton plants covered the immediate surrounding areas. The only real civilization around is the old house in front of the park, with two old, dusty cars parked out in front. The park was old, the trees shadows covered most of the parking lot and the picnic tables, and one weekend every year a large crowd would gather from the local towns to watch Civil War reenactments.

It was dark enough to see the stars out, something rarely seen outside of the fog, but the park was just far enough away from downtown and the fog had not rolled in yet. We sat there in the car alone. There was a time when I always wanted to be around him and thought he was the best thing in the world. He was as handsome as anyone could be, blonde, wavy hair, bright blue eyes, muscular, he was the epitome of something people only dream of, and he was mine. But my interest in him was soon lost. Over the nine months we had been together I had found that he meant nothing to me.

For months, sex was a frequent topic of conversation and often times I was the one to say no. Back then, it didn't feel right. I believed that if you loved someone, it was only natural to show your affection, through sex if wanted, but sex with Adam did not feel right. It felt wrong. I knew I didn't love him. I knew he didn't love me.

That night was the first night I had come in contact with Chrissy since junior high. Once again Adam was insisting upon putting his hand down my pants and up my shirt. His touch grew rougher and I knew what he wanted. I felt my skin clam up and my stomach clench. Immediately, he knew I was drawing away. I pushed him away with my arms extended and he stopped. I could see his temper flaring in his eyes as he opened his mouth.

"What the fuck is wrong this time," he commented with a groan. "Do I smell, do I have cooties or something?"

This conversation had gone on before and I told him I wasn't ready for it. He hit the side of the car door violently and started to yell.

"Whatever, bitch, get the hell out of my car. I am sick of all this yes and no shit. A man has his needs."

I laughed out loud. "Do you know what you sound like, Bruno?" I said in between large bubbles of giggling. He didn't find it funny.

In the end, I watched as he sped away leaving me in the dark. By this time, I didn't find my comment very funny either. Fuck, I thought, what the hell am I going to do now? I am miles out of town and I have no way of getting back home. Just as I was about to walk to the house just outside of the park I heard laughing coming down from the trees. I looked up, only to find a dark figure sitting on a large tree limb up above.

"Who the hell are you?" I called.

They never answered. Instead, the voice laughed hysterically. I could feel my face reddening. Soon, the voice talked, "He sure as hell dumped your ass." The laughter started again. I knew the voice immediately. It had been a long time since it had talked directly towards me.

"What the fuck are you doing here watching me, you damn pervert." I yelled up to the trees. "Do you get some kick out of watching or something?"

The laughter got louder. I knew by this time I was getting nowhere trying to talk.

"Fuck you, Chrissy," I said. Her name came from my tongue and it felt smooth, almost too smooth.

This stopped Chrissy from laughing. She turned quiet for a moment and I swore I could feel her eyes staring at me from above.

"You drove in just as I got up here," Chrissy said, "I wasn't going to move just for a make out party. Although, it wasn't much fun to watch." I could picture her sneering face.

"Shut up," I yelled, "go away."

"That is fine by me, I never wanted to stick around for chit-chat anyways." I heard a loud thump and then she stood in front of me. We stood there for a moment, eyes locked inside some mysterious time warp. My mind drifted to the image of Chrissy riding her bike in front of my house.

Chrissy walked away into the darkness and I realized over in the corner of the parking lot there was a dirt bike covered in mud. I had rarely seen her riding it; in fact, I was most used to her blue Chevy truck parked in the driveway of her house. Every now and then I would see her in the garage messing with the old bike as if she was actually going to make it run. Chrissy was not a very mechanically inclined person as a child. Obviously, she had changed.

She straddled the muddy thing and then called to me, "Do you want a ride home?"

Her voice was neutral, as if trying to make amends for the past couple of minutes. I rolled my eyes and sniffed in disgust.

"No, why would I ever want to do that."

In the darkness I saw her shrug and start the engine. It was loud and roaring, almost enough that the silence, minutes before, was comforting. She started to drive away and I realized if I did not go with her that I would be stranded in that park.

"Wait," I yelled, "I change my mind." I remembered that I was stuck in the middle of nowhere and I wasn't about to be left. I ran over to her and already I could feel the heat from the engine. She pointed at the back of the bike and I got on. My thoughts were immediate as to how I was to hold on, and I realized I was going to have to touch her. I softly put my hands on her waist and she turned her head.

"You are going to have to hold on, she called from in front of me, " it is going to be a quick ride."She took off and I immediately felt the rush of wind. I had not a clue that anyone could feel so insecure in their life. My shyness at once ended as I grappled onto her like a leech and wrapped my arms around her.

The ride was long. It seemed as if she hit every bump in the road as we sped towards town. I felt her wince when my fingernails clenched into her stomach as we turned corners. It was at least 6 miles into town.

My thoughts drifted as we flew down the small two lane roads. I never expected to be riding a dirt bike down Flint Avenue with Chrissy in the middle of the night. I became aware of the fact that once we hit town, people would see us, and that anyone from high school would immediately see me and her together. I groaned, great, that was all I needed, to be taunted by people Monday morning. The rumors would start and sooner or later people would think I was one of her kind. It was bad enough to be dumped by Adam, but to be seen with a dyke? It was absurd. Guilt crept into my head as I thought about the people at school. Besides, I thought, there is more to Chrissy than just being a dyke.

Hanford became close and we turned onto one of the major streets. Before long, we were on our road to our houses. She turned into her driveway and stopped the bike. I let go of her quickly and I could feel the sweat in the palms of my hands. We got off the bike and I took a step towards my house, just beyond the bushes that separated our houses. I stopped in mid step and turned around. I wanted to say something, say anything but my mind went blank. I knew that if I didn't I would never get a chance to talk to her again.

"Chrissy," I called softly, "thank you for the ride home." She groaned and waved her hand.

"Yeah, yeah, go home."

The week after talking to Chrissy in over six years was anything but normal. I no longer had a boyfriend by my side and my thoughts of Chrissy had grown. I thought about her constantly. In class, I daydreamed and zoned out only to find my teacher staring me straight in the face pointing to the door. At lunch, I went home, in hopes that I might catch a glimpse of her at her

house. My friends were afraid; they had not seen that side of me before.

"Poor dear," they all cried, "The breakup with Adam must have hit her harder than we thought."

I ignored them. I shrugged their comments off and went on looking through the hallways of the school trying to see that somber figure against the wall or walking into a classroom. Many times I stopped myself, shaking my head and wondering why I had become so obsessed with seeing her. Although, I thought little at the time about what I felt, I knew that there was something about her I could not get away from.

One day I caught a glimpse of her walking to her truck as I was getting into my car. I put my book bag down in the passengers seat and pretended to do something outside my door. I opened my mouth to say something to her but I drew blank. She walked on by and got in her truck and left. She looked the same; silent and lonely. As I looked up I saw two girls, seniors, sitting on the fence between the school and the parking lot. They looked at me and whispered silently into each other's ear.

That night, Amber, called me for our nightly phone call. She jabbered on and on about her latest boyfriend, Jeremy, and how he was being a jerk. In our group of friends, Amber, was well known for not seeing the stupidity in the most stupid men. She seemed to attract the kind of guys who wanted weight on his shoulders as he walked through the halls. We talked a little about Jeremy and when the topic ran out of steam she fell silent. This was odd for her. Amber always had something to talk about and when she did not, it usually meant she was deep in thought. I sat listening to her breathe for a while and then asked her what was wrong.

"Well," she said awkwardly, "I heard Adam has been talking about you."

This was not unexpected. Adam was the type of guy who liked to brag and many times his mouth had gotten him into trouble.

"Is he spreading lies, or something?"

Amber was quiet. I heard her cough and shift around.

"Well?"

"It's just that he said he saw you with that girl Friday night, that's all. That dyke."

I could feel my stomach tie into a little knot and it weighed a ton. I stammered as I spoke, "What did. . . did he say we were doing?"

"You were riding with her on her motorcycle."

"Oh, that, she gave me a ride home, that is all. She lives near me you know?"

"I know," she said, "but Kara and Jodie said that you were looking at her funny today. . ."

"What?" , I said, cutting her off. "Am I not allowed to look at anyone?"

". . . and you've been acting weird lately, stalking around and every time she walks past you at school you say something about her."

"Am I not allowed to talk about anyone?"

"It's kind of freaking people out, that is all. People are starting to think something is up."

I felt as if I was being accused of some horrible crime, as if I had just murdered the whole student body at my high school. How could one chance meeting with Chrissy come to this?

"It's not true and you know it, Amber. You know me. . . don't you?"

Amber was silent on the phone again. "I m sorry, I have to get off the phone."

She hung up quickly and I threw down the phone in disgust.

The following Monday morning I became acutely aware that Chrissy was not at school. Amber had not talked to me that weekend so I walked among the hallways by myself. I looked for Chrissy's truck in the parking lot but it was not there. Since the encounter at the park, I stayed at home after school, hoping to catch a glimpse of her outside, in her garage, or something. I wanted to talk to her, although, I did not know what about. If she had come up to me I would have had nothing to say to her. I

watched through my bedroom window looking for any sign of her but I never saw one glimpse.

So it was very frustrating to find that she was not at school Monday morning. Already my eyes were tuned to any possible likeness of her and many times during the day I turned my head a few times, just to see if it was her. My thoughts were nonstop about her. Where is she? Did something happen? Is she okay? Many times I would stop myself, wondering why I was thinking so much about her. She was just Chrissy, the girl next door; the girl who has always lived next door. How could one meeting face to face linger in my thoughts?

That day, classes went smoothly but I felt different. Everyone around me was busy doing other things and left me alone. A few times I would see people whisper as I walked past, obviously the rumors had spread to the school. What did they think?

It was almost dinnertime that day when I had the urge to look for Chrissy. I drove around town, being careful not to look too suspicious, and went to all the places I thought she would be. I drove downtown, near the old water fountain and Superior Dairy, the famous ice cream parlor that is well known in the Valley. I drove past the high school wondering if she would have been there. Finally, in last attempt, I drove to Hickey Park and was surprised when I saw Chrissy's small blue truck, sitting in the parking lot. It was just about dark so I parked my car near her truck and looked around. I walked a little ways into the trees when I heard her voice. She was talking to someone so I crept closer to listen. The trees hid me from her view. She was sitting on a large rock making gestures into the wind. Her back was to me.

As she talked, I realized she was alone, and that she was talking to the air. I stepped closer to hear her.

"I stayed home today, it didn't matter anyways. I feel like I walk around here and I'm just kinda here, like I have no reason to be around, except to take up space. Mom said I was lazy and that I had to get my ass out of bed but what does she know?"

Chrissy looked tired and weary. Her shoulders were hunched and for the first time I realized I could see how skinny she was. Her bones protruded in many places and I realized her clothing was baggy, almost enveloping her body. Her skin was thin and had a tint of gray, as if she was dead. There was sadness to her.

"I drove here, today, and I heard that song you always made fun of. I couldn't listen to it, you know, I just couldn't. My eyes started that tingling feeling and my stomach got all tense, jeezus, I couldn't even listen to a damn song on the radio. I changed the station. Do you know what it is like now that you are gone? You left me here all alone and now who am I?"

She was crying now and she used the sleeve of her shirt to wipe her eyes.

"Everyday I try moving on and everyday I see you. I go to school and I remember that was your locker, I drive my truck and I feel you next to me. I lay on my bed and I touch the sheets knowing you once touched them too. Hell, your sweatshirt hangs in my closet. I walk around in the mall and think, Becca would like this or that. Everything reminds me of you, or rather, reminds me that you aren't here anymore."

My heart cried out to her. How could any soul feel so lost? I had forgotten that Rebecca was gone, and that left Chrissy alone again. Forgetting about hiding, I took a small step forward and a twig cracked underneath my shoe. The noise was apparent in the quiet park and Chrissy turned quickly to look my direction. She jumped up and in the process pointed a gun towards me. It was silver and shiny, the kind you see in old western movies. My hands immediately went into the air and I yelled.

"It's me, see, it's just me!"

Chrissy was shocked and confused. Her eyes wandered around in every which direction as if she expected other people to pop out of nowhere. Finally, her breath slowed and she lowered the gun, pointing it towards the ground.

"Go home," Chrissy said in one muttered breath, "go home."

Until that point, I had not enough time to really think about what was happening. All I knew was that I was alone in a park with Chrissy who had a gun. Then it all focused in and I realized what Chrissy wanted to do.

We stared at each other, face to face, for a long time. She looked tired and weary. She was tired of life I suppose. I think that was when I truly looked at her. She had the face of a little girl, innocent and scared, but her eyes showed wisdom beyond any human life. Her blue eyes stood out among her dirty blonde hair and pale skin. Her clothing, layered just right so

to appear she was male, did not mask her natural beauty. She was untamed, uncaged from societies hold on humanity. She was more real than anything ever conceived. In that moment, I knew I had fallen in love.

There was a minute when I thought the gun would drop out of her hand. She seemed to daydream and wander through a world not touched by anyone else. Then, the world of her own would stop turning and her reality would ground her. Each time her day dreaming would end she would look at me and her eyes would show disappointment in the view before her.

"Chrissy, do you remember when we were little?"

My voice caught her attention and she listened. I suddenly felt shy; having her full attention was something I never thought about before. Her eyes studied me with caution and her hand clenched on the gun.

"We would always go to your house after school and your mom would make those cookies, the ones with the peach filling. Those were my favorite, and sometimes," I stumbled, "Sometimes I get a craving for those after school, right at 3:10. Does your mom still make those?"

"No, she doesn't. She hasn't made those for a long time."

Chrissy's broken silence shocked me for a moment. I wasn't expecting her to speak.

"Your mom would miss you, you know?"

Her eyes grew wide and hatred flared up in them. Once again she seemed to lose all sense of reality and she pointed the gun to the side of her head. Her temples pulsed with anger as if about to burst and I screamed.

"No, wait, please...don t do it," I cried. "I would miss you too."

She seemed to look stunned for a moment, as if my words were not what she expected. I stepped forward, making sure to watch her eyes for any change, for any sudden disagreement.

"I will tell you the truth," I said, "Last week, I would have never given you any more thought than anyone else, but seeing

you that Friday night made me think. It made me think of you. I want to know you, Chrissy; I want to know who you are."

I could see her contemplating an answer but none came to her. Instead, she shook her head.

"I looked for you, today. I didn't see you at school so I was worried and I looked for you. I wanted to see you and talk to you. I thought you might be here so I came and then I found you."

"I always hurt people in the end." Her voice was rough. "Go home, before I hurt you too."

"You don't know that. How can anyone know that? And as for hurting me.... I don't care."

I stepped closer and she looked at my feet. Her hand gripped the gun harder, still pointed at her temple.

"Don't." She said.

I stopped. I could not help but notice the single tear running down her cheek and on the side of her nose.

"Why is life so cruel?" She asked. "I mean, hell, just as you think you know where you stand in life, something comes and knocks you down. I fell in love, but I fell in love with someone already taken."

"I know you loved her," I replied, "but things happen. When you are busy falling in love, life happens. No one can change that. No one can change that she is gone. Even that gun, it can't bring her back and make things the same again."

"No, but it can take my pain away. It will make it so I don't hurt no more."

She turned around with her back facing me and that is when it happened. It was instantaneous, loud; it seemed to happen like a dream, cloudy and mysterious. Her fingers pulled the trigger and she fell.

I cried out when I heard the ear throbbing noise and she fell but I do not know why, no one was there to hear me. I ran to her but it was too late. The life inside her body was already gone. I held her in my arms for a little while and brushed her hair

out of her face. Blood smeared my hands but I didn't care. Her eyes, shiny and blue, were still staring into the sky when I left her.

The ride into town was slow. It was almost as if time had a hard time pushing itself. I thought about everything. I thought about her and the town, her parents and my parents, my childhood and tomorrow. I cried. I felt alone as I pulled into my driveway and stepped out of my car. My mother opened the screen door and screamed, seeing my blood stained shirt, and she ran to me. Even then, I still felt alone.

"Are you okay?" a voice called and I suddenly realized Amber had her hand on my arm. The woman on the microphone had stopped talking and everyone was having conversations of their own. Amber looked at me with concern.

"Yes, I m fine."

"Good," she smiled.

The red haired woman was still looking at me from her chair. This time she saw me looking at her and she turned her head away.

"Who is that red haired woman?" I asked Amber.

She giggled. "That is Adam's wife."

I looked at Amber and smiled. She smiled back knowing full well what I was thinking. "She's annoying."

"I know."

After the reunion Amber and I exchanged phone numbers. It seemed we had not grown so far apart. She drove away in a white minivan and I drove away in a black Mercedes Benz. I smiled as her yellow Baby on Board sign swung from her side window. Not many people waved goodbye to me when I walked to my car. I did not care anyways. The reunion was like walking in the past and already knowing the future. I had stared the past in the eyes and I had come out alive.

I was almost to the freeway when I felt the urge to turn around. I drove back and found myself standing in Hickey Park, looking up into the stars. I sat on the hood of my car and listened to the breeze blow through the trees. It must have been at least an

hour before a single head light peaked from a distance and I watched as it drew closer. The humming of the motorcycle's engine passed and the head light faded.