

Domino

by

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On the morning of July 4th, magnificent thunderheads towered in from the west and tarnished the skies with billowing rusts and graphites. Warm air currents heaved the bosoms of oaks and walnuts and carried an early advance of heavy droplets that drummed the red wood planks and canvas awning of the Bogart's patio. Suddenly, a gush of rain spilled from the heavens, continuing for twenty-six minutes, before it just as abruptly ceased. The storm's presumptive conductor dramatically struck the finale, held for applause, and the clouds exited to the north.

By noon, Mrs. Regina Bogart was ready for her holiday lawn to be cut. Mr. Bogart insisted that the grass was still too wet and saturated, but Mrs. Bogart said he had put it off for three days and that their Independence Day cookout and fireworks would be unthinkable without a properly trimmed lawn. Mr. Bogart said he needed to change the oil in the Buick first, but Mrs. Bogart said, "You go. Get it done. John and the boys are coming. And Spencer's on his way to spend the day with Katie, and I want that lawn cut."

From the kitchen window, Mrs. Bogart watched her husband peg forward on his thin pale legs in his lemon yellow, lightweight crinkle shorts. They were cinched by elastic beneath his comical gut.

Struggling, he lurched and pulled his mower in the now choking humidity and the slope of the yard. Freshly cut confetti of wet grass speckled his forearms. A pinecone chunked through the mower blades and mulched into the air. At the sink, his wife peeled a gray shrimp and skewered the raw sinew in preparation for the cookout.

In a bedroom, her nineteen-year-old daughter, Katie, worked at bleach-damaged hair, repositioning the brittle kinks into sprays of party streamers, improvised, poor imitation dreadlocks. Spencer, her arrogant boyfriend, jaunted up the drive and rapped once on the front door.

"Katie! Spencer's here!" Mrs. Bogart announced. She wiped shrimp flecks from her hands and opened the door for Spencer.

"Katie'll be out in a minute. She's still getting ready. You can have a seat if you like," said Mrs. Bogart.

The red, white, and blue tank-topped boyfriend acknowledged Mrs. Bogart with a nod and without speaking marched to his girlfriend's room.

"Knock first," Mrs. Bogart challenged his impertinence.

Spencer slid in and shut the door behind him. Mrs. Bogart crimped her lower lip and returned to the sink. She took another shrimp and began to peel the chitin.

"Peculiar," she thought. "They seem just like toes."

She pulled the shell away like a toenail and dipped the crustacean under running water to remove its black poop-shoot with the back of a teaspoon. In the window, her husband stopped for a moment to wipe his brow on his sleeve. He left the mower and walked ahead to remove a spent bottle rocket from the grass. The Walton's kids had a Fourth of July Eve ritual of setting off some of the lighter pyrotechnics at midnight while angering the neighborhood.

As he drew up to pointedly snap the red balsa in his neighbor's direction, the lawn mower vibrated out of its station and rolled over his left foot. A thwack banged through his sneaker and jerked his knee joint like a slapping window shade. Walter was thrown to the ground, nostrils into the must of grass. His chest sank. A clammy film gardened and raked his skin. Intestinal shock descended. He pivoted and knelt with his foot growing warm and wet behind him.

Quietly, a pain began to chisel through the hum and hammer at him. It demanded his reluctance to look. And then, amidst a gnarl in his arch that he hoped had but cramped, he timidly turned and brought the grisly damage into reality.

Half his shoe and all five toes were gone. His blood squirted thickly into the damp clumps of grass. Walter's throat clenched and he gurgled something that

couldn't reach a scream nor even a cry but was more like a choked off moan.

Immobilized, he remained knelt with a quizzical smile at his stump, mesmerized by the surrealism.

Meanwhile, the lawn mower continued down the hill until it stopped against his gas grill perched on a little concrete pad. Over the idle of the mower's motor, a squeal pushed through the ringing in his ears, and he watched as his wife leapt the steps of the deck. In an instant, she was at his side.

When she saw the grisly wound, a guttural scream escaped, "Help! Help! Somebody help us!" Her vocalization wasn't even recognizable as her own voice, so mournful and filled with life-altering reality.

"Please! Help! Help! Somebody please!"

In her bedroom's pheromone fog, Katie was pulled from Spencer's grip by her mother's cries. She cocked her head into her windowsill but the view was shrouded by a peach tree. Annoyed, she dragged Spencer through the hall and snapped the drapes away from the patio door. Immediately, she was struck grave on seeing her dad on all fours in the grass with her bawling mom trying to lift him. Was it a heart attack? Katie yanked open the sliding door, skipped over the deck, and rushed across the lawn to the side of her wailing mother. Spencer choked off the lawn mower ignition at the base of the deck as he followed her.

"Dad!" cried Katie. "What happened?"

"I bent over to pick some damn thing up and the goddamned mower just rolled over my foot."

"Let's get him up and inside," said Spencer as he leaned down to lift Mr. Bogart.

"Oh my God! No, no." As Walter rolled over to his butt, the ripped stump presented itself and Katie began to cry.

Mrs. Bogart bopped her husband. "What were you doing? You're so stupid! You don't stand in front of a running lawn mower! What were you doing?"

"Help—me—get—him—up," Spencer took control and measured his words.

Katie and her mom helped Spencer lift Mr. Bogart to his good foot, and they hopped him into the house. They eased him into his armchair with his blood puddling a red lake on the hardwood floor.

"God. This is major," said Spencer.

"Call 911," responded Katie.

Mrs. Bogart began to shake and cry. "Oh no—o! No—o!"

"By the time they get here in this traffic he'll have bled to death," Spencer continued. "We have to get him to the hospital."

"You're so stupid!" screamed Mrs. Bogart to her husband. "What were you doing?" She cried and swatted him again.

"Stop hitting me and get me some rope," said Mr. Bogart.

"You're not making things better, mother," Katie scolded.

"Where's a belt or some rope?" asked Spencer. "We have to tie off the blood flow."

"There's some rope in the kitchen drawer. I'll get it." Katie ran to the kitchen.

When Katie returned, she tossed the neat figure eight of rope across to Spencer. He cinched a tourniquet, then wrapped Mr. Bogart's foot in a towel. He and Katie each took an armpit, and they ferried Mr. Bogart around the side of the house to the back seat of the Buick Regal in the front driveway. Mrs. Bogart hopped in next to him and elevated his foot over her knee. She looked at how the terry cloth draped over the stump. Suddenly, she reached over the driver's seat and gripped Spencer's shoulder.

"Oh Lord, the toes! Someone find the toes! We can take them to the hospital! Maybe they can reattach them!" she exclaimed.

"Hell yes!" Spencer shouted. "They put those damn things back on all the time! We should've thought about that before."

"I'll get them!" Katie, who had not yet taken her seat, responded. "Get the car started."

She left the car door open and scrambled back into the house.

In the kitchen, Katie quickly grabbed a sandwich bag from a pantry drawer and raced through the den. Her sneaker, though, skidded on the floor, skiing in the slick pond of blood, and threw her legs ahead of her center of gravity. She splatted her bottom down into the crimson.

"Shit!"

She pushed herself up and twisted around to look at the damage. An enormous red orb emblazoned her constricting white jeans like an uncontrolled period flow. Blood tacked her palms and bled into her pant cuffs. It was humiliating.

"Ooherr! Ooherr! Uh—uh—" Her thoughts spun through the potential of a quick-change versus the immediacy of her task, to rejoin the hospital ferry or stay home and keep in touch by text. "Oh damn it!" she screamed and stormed out through the patio door.

In the yard, the neighbor's Boston Terrier was sniffing around in the high uncut side of the grass.

"What is that stupid dog doing?"

With the blood tacking in her jeans, she quickly danced into the yard just in time to witness the horror of the dog jerking a toe down its throat. Katie's alarmed voice box ratcheted up three octaves.

"Get-out-of here! You stupid dog! I don't need this! Now move! Scat! Go!"

The hungry beast dumbly disregarded her as she charged him. Instead, Bosley focused on another toe.

"Don't you even think about it!"

Katie galloped ahead to snatch the toe, but, as she reached in front of the myopic canine, Bosley growled and instinctively clamped onto her forearm. She screamed and drew up, but Bosley's teeth sunk into her muscle, his eyes fiercely fixed on the toe treat in Katie's hand.

"Help! Oh—oh shit damn it! Spencer! Help!"

The dog locked onto her with a vice, yanked and gyrated, staggering Katie across the yard. Her hand clenched under the attack and she was unable to drop the morsel. Pleading and squealing for anyone to intervene, Katie pounded wildly on the dog with her free hand but it only caused her to lose her balance, and she fell to the ground. Bosley tugged on her arm as if it were a rope, and her shoulder popped from its socket. As she rolled in the wet shreds of grass, the toe finally dropped from her fingers. Bosley immediately gobbled it.

Having heard Katie's cries, Spencer loped through the yard to his girlfriend. Seeing her bloody pants, an alarm sounded in his mind, and he immediately turned on Bosley.

"You damn dog! I'll kill you, you damn dog! I'll kill you! I'll kill you!"

"Forget it, Spencer! He'll attack!" Katie screamed against the wince of her drooping, throbbing shoulder. Turning on her knees, she cradled her limp arm and attempted to step up. Suddenly, Bosley reacted and bounded ferociously toward her. Spencer kicked the dog aside.

"Think again, bad boy!"

The dog spun and nipped at Spencer.

"Come on, tough guy! I'll take you on!"

When Mr. Meyer, the Bogart's neighbor, came out of his back door to feed his dog a half milk jug of dry food, he saw the punk-ass teenager menacing Bosley in the next yard.

"Yo! You badass! You want some of me!" Spencer's face pumped with fury.

"Hey!" shouted Mr. Meyer.

Spencer drilled the charging dog in the head with a left kick and then sidestepped its bite.

"Oh he's bad, uh—uh. Uh—uh."

"Hey you punk, you leave that dog alone!" Mr. Meyer dropped Bosley's chow and started toward the Bogart's yard.

Spencer bounced back and forth and threw another kick at Bosley. Bosley, however, lurched up and caught Spencer's black jeans in his teeth. Spencer tottered, the dog pulling him by the pants through the yard.

"Spencer!" Katie cried.

Spencer stumbled again toward the gas grill where Mr. Bogart had long ago dragged a patio chair to use while grilling burgers and brats.

"You damn dog! Let go!" Spencer reached for the iron chair to steady himself, then hoisted it up and clonked Bosley on the head. Bosley yiped and fell motionless as a second bash hammered down.

"Aaaaaaaaah!" Mr. Meyer kamikazed through the yard, slammed into Spencer, and tackled him to the ground.

"You freakin' nut case! Get off me!" Spencer wrestled against the ferocious retiree's navy shorts, his pale, hairy legs attempting wrestling moves.

"You killed my dog! You punk! You son-of-a-bitch!"

With his saggy arms, Mr. Meyer pummeled Spencer. He grabbed his hair with both hands and pulled the boy's head against his raging face.

"I'll kill you, you young punk!"

"Mr. Meyer, stop!" cried Katie.

"Tell him to get off me," warned Spencer.

"You don't understand! Your dog ate my dad's toes!"

"Tough guy! Hurt a poor little dog just for the fun of it!"

"You better stop this, grandpa."

"Mr. Meyer, you're going to get hurt!"

"You son-of-a-bitch."

Mr. Meyer pulled the boy's hair forward and tried to manacle his face through the strands. Spencer felt his fingernails scratching his temples.

"All right!" concluded Spencer. He turned over, pushed up through Mr. Meyer's grappling, and kneed the old man in the cheek.

"You wanna' die just like your dog, old man?"

Mr. Meyer huddled the sting of his face into his hands. Stunned, he showed no emotion to the youngster's tirade.

"Do you see what your damn dog did to my girlfriend?" Spencer whirled Katie around to present the mistaken blood evidence. "I oughta' crush your damn skull for letting a dog like that loose in the first place!"

Katie's arm dangled and thumped at her side. Her brain rang with a settling, resonating pain.

"You want to get up? Your dog ain't getting up!"

"Spencer let's go," Katie pleaded.

"Shit," Spencer strutted at Mr. Meyer. "Get the toes," he assided to Katie.

As Katie bent to pick up the sandwich bag, the slightest shift in angle stung her with a level of pain that was jaw clenching, and she gurgled a speechless note. Spencer looked at her, then took the baggie from her. He inserted his hand into it like a glove, plucked the remaining toes from the grass, and then turned the plastic

sack inside out without touching them. The little clumps didn't even look like toes. They looked like coconut shrimp where the coconut coating had been substituted with freshly cut minced grass.

"The dog ate the other two," Katie told him.

"He did what?"

"He ate two of the toes. I was trying to get them back when he bit me."

Spencer marched to the dog corpse and resolutely gathered him up.

"You got a cooler?"

"Yes."

"Let's go."

The two started into the house.

"Where're you going with my dog?" Mr. Meyer began to wobble on the ground.

"Shut up!" Spencer roared as he slammed the sliding patio door shut.

The neighbor jumped to his feet and screamed in frustration at the house.

"I want my Bosley!"

Furiously, he hammered his fists through the air as if boxing the boy. Then in his madness, he hoisted the lawn chair that Spencer had used to dispatch his dog and battered a hydrangea with it in a fit.

"I want my dog! I want my dog!"

Inside, Spencer searched the freezer but, finding no ice, packed the dog and baggy of toes in an ice chest and filled it with frozen dinners and a bag of peas. When they reached the car, Mrs. Bogart quivered at the sight of her daughter's bloody bottom.

"Oh lord heavens!"

"I slipped in Daddy's blood and fell."

"I thought the dog did that. I beat up that old man for nothing?" Spencer growled.

"What old man?" Mrs. Bogart gaped.

"Spencer beat up Mr. Meyer."

"Mr. Mey-er?"

"After he killed Bosley. But he had to—Bosley ate Daddy's toes."

"Will someone just drive for chrissakes!" shouted Mr. Bogart. "I'll sprout more toes before you get me to the hospital!"

Mr. Meyer peered over the slatted wooden back gate and spied the couple as they left the house with their booty. When the car started, he bashed the gate with his shoulder and struggled with its stubborn latch. Urgently, he rammed the pickets again and again until the latch gave way, and careened into the front yard in the wake of the Buick.

"I want my dog! You killer! You thief! You bring him back! That's my Bosley!"

Spencer braked at the stop sign at the end of the residential street, and then floored the Buick through a dangerous left turn onto a busy road. A Jeep halted, magnetized toward the curb as it avoided the Buick, its horn erupting.

"Get us there in one piece!" cried Katie.

"Just let me drive."

The group bounded on through curvy roads toward the interstate. Banking their weight like bobsledders through the turns, they bounced with their chins beating their breast bones over dips and potholes. When they approached a leisurely Ford pickup truck, Spencer brown-nosed it. When the agitated pickup slowed further, Spencer blew his horn. When the driver twisted his rearview mirror and glared at him, Spencer flashed his lights. When at last the pickup truck acceded, Mrs. Bogart tapped at the window as they passed and mouthed "thank you" and "emergency" to the red-faced bearded driver. He tossed a Dr. Pepper can at her and shot a bird.

Behind them, another car rocketed around the pickup truck and sped toward their Regal.

"Is there someplace close by where we can run in for some ice?" asked Spencer. "It's too hot in here. Those toes aren't going to make it."

"There's a Wiggy's on North Metro Avenue just before the interstate," answered Mr. Bogart.

"We don't have time to be stopping for ice," Katie responded, her eyes closed, trying to find stasis in her shoulder socket.

"Well, look at this traffic. It's going to take forever to get there. And they're not going to sew on dead toes," Spencer returned.

"Might as well put in five on gas, too. We'll need it," added Mr. Bogart. He dug into his hip pocket and fished for his sweaty leather wallet.

A mile from the busy intersection at the four lanes of North Metro, an olive Chevrolet Cavalier closed its pursuit of the Bogarts' Buick. Its horn blared directly into the Buick's trunk and its bumper inched ever closer to contact. Startled, the Bogarts craned in their seats to identify the madman.

Spencer straightened and bounced in his seat.

"What the hell's that guy trying to do?!" he shouted.

Katie swatted him with her left arm. "I told you not to drive like that! You've really done it this time!"

"Oh Lord dear God! It's Mr. Meyer!" cried Mrs. Bogart.

Mr. Bogart lifted his tender stub of foot away from its prop and twisted his neck around.

"What's gotten into Sam for crying out loud?" he bellowed.

The Cavalier grazed the Buick's fender and caused the Regal to swing toward the shoulder before Spencer was able to right the car's direction. The menacing trumpet of the Chevy's horn seemed to issue straight from Mr. Meyer's gaping growl.

"Damn fool's trying to run us off the road!" Mr. Bogart huffed.

"What, is he trying to kill us?!" Spencer squealed.

Again, the Cavalier accelerated on the Buick and dogged its bumper.

"We'll lose him on North Metro," Spencer calculated.

Locked in formation, the two cars swung around a final bend and gassed toward the traffic light. But as Spencer sidled into the turn lane, the signal arrow abruptly changed to red. A parade of traffic crossed the intersection in front of them. Leerily, Spencer stamped the brakes and the car skidded to a stop on top of the white crossing line. The Cavalier geared down and eased in, grazing against the Buick.

"Damn it!" Spencer banged his hand on the wheel.

"Just what did y'all do to poor Mr. Meyer?" Mrs. Bogart bawled.

"He wants his dog," Katie answered. "Spencer has him in the cooler."

"He swallowed two toes and attacked Katie. Tell them the whole thing," Spencer shot back. "I thought we could save the toes."

As other cars shuffled behind and beside them to wait out the light, the Cavalier edged forward and forcibly bumped the Buick. Mr. Bogart jabbed his arm out of the window and smacked his palm on the roof of the car.

"Lay off, you son-of-a-gun! Lay off!"

Mrs. Bogart covered her mouth and stared agape out the back window at her transformed neighbor. Two Shriner clowns heard the Morse code of the Chevrolet's horn and happily gathered their glazed doughnuts and change buckets for a quick sale. Again, Mr. Meyer jolted the Buick.

"I'm getting out," announced Spencer.

"Don't you dare," implored Mrs. Bogart.

"Don't be stupid," Katie echoed.

"He's blaming me for something his own dog did!"

As Spencer began to unclip his safety belt, the Cavalier wedged against their vehicle and dug in like a lineman. The auger of Mr. Meyer appeared before them in the rearview mirror, his unhinged tirade spouting curses in the reflection, and he began to grind down and push them forward. Spencer's foot locked the brakes, but under the Chevy's spinning wheels, the Buick began to slide into the rushing traffic.

"God damn." Spencer clenched the wheel.

Traffic now sped by on North Metro, and as the Buick inched forward, the cars began to slurve around them. A couple of horns sounded.

"He's going to kill us!" screamed Mrs. Bogart, and she begged her prayer-clasped hands toward Mr. Meyer. Katie braced in her seat and pumped an imaginary brake.

"Hold on!" proclaimed Spencer.

At the first gap in traffic, Spencer suddenly floored the car and hurtled through the red light across the intersection. He spun to the left and slid in front of an oncoming Trans Am. Horns blared from all directions and the Trans Am squealed its tires but managed to maneuver around the Regal. Mr. Meyer was caught unaware. With his foot flattening the accelerator, he was projected in the Buick's wake. He reflexively braked in the whoosh of cars that bore down on him.

A new Toyota Celica with three teenage girls plunged its brakes and slammed directly into the driver's side of the Cavalier. The front of the Celica T-boned the door and battered Mr. Meyer. His back snapped in half and draped his body like a spineless "S" against the seat belt restraint. A glitter of windshield glass ejected from the Celica and dusted the road from where the motionless Toyota had played croquet with the Chevrolet and whacked it with a mallet strike. The Cavalier flung across the highway amid horrible squalls and sparklers of fire, its

contorted metal grooving the road. Its tail heeled up in the spin and whipped into the two Shriner clowns. One spanked to the ground beneath the car's tangle; the other launched head over heels until his heels struck pavement and snapped his shin bones into his baggy silk clown pants. Doughnuts rolled across the road as the wreck ground to a halt sixty feet from impact. Some drivers steadied their torsos below cracked doors to remand orphaned boxes of Krispy-Kremes. As his eyes flitted out, Mr. Meyer's last awareness was of his left arm in the passenger seat beside him.

"Holy shit!" Spencer ejaculated at the side mirror.

"What?" the Bogarts jointly returned and craned their necks like bobbins.

"Oh God—he took a hit!" reported the boyfriend.

"Where?"

"Mr. Meyer?"

Spencer slowed the car and stopped in the center lane.

"Damn. If he isn't dead, he's hurt real bad."

From their position, little of the crash site was in view. But, a terrible alarm stung through them in what they could glean from Spencer's ashen face, from the lines of traffic that wrinkled together, and finally froze on seeing Samaritans leaving their vehicles and rushing toward the unfortunate Shriners.

"Sam?" Mr. Bogart's voice warbled.

"Oh God God God God God..." Katie heaved.

"What'll we do?" cried Mrs. Bogart. "Go see. Go see. Someone go see if he's alright."

"He's not alright," Spencer said lowly. "I saw him get hit and he's not alright."

"He sure did love that dog," Mr. Bogart mumbled.

"Tooessss!" Mrs. Bogart squinched an accusing face at her husband. "Your precious tooessss!"

They were mum and still gravely silent when Spencer veered into the frantic parking lot of Wiggy's convenience store. A black Honda loitered at the gas pumps. It had been gassed, but its occupants browsed about the grounds, relieving the claustrophobia of their long drive to visit relatives for the holiday.

Spencer pinched up on the Honda's bumper and jabbed his horn. A preschooler sucking a cherry icee through an insanely twisted straw stood in the shade of the self-serve island and performed an obnoxious wiggle dance at the Buick. Methodically scraping a squeegee over every glass surface of the car, his dad froze in mid-swipe to catatonically fixate on Spencer.

"Do you mind? We've got an injured man here," Spencer declared.

"I'm getting out and getting the ice while you take care of this," Mrs. Bogart announced.

"Just get the ice and go." Mr. Bogart ordered any distracted shopping opportunity out of his wife's mind.

A woman in a late-term maternity smock waddled from the public bathrooms to the Honda. A bawling toddler scampered after her. When she reached her husband, she questioned his glare. He pointed his head at the Buick and loudly challenged Spencer.

"Guy's got a *real* problem!"

A simian rage arose in Spencer. "Everywhere I go seems like some fool wants his ass kicked."

"Do me a favor and stay out of it just this once," Katie reprimanded him. "We have got to get to the hospital."

The pregnant woman admonished her husband and grappled his arm with a firm claw. Angrily, she gathered up her kids amidst temperamental protests and locked them in place within their car. She slammed herself in and wedged her forearm between her head and the window guard. Her husband gave a last aggressive flick of his squeegee to arc a trail onto the Buick's hood before he flipped the squeegee back into its brace. He stepped out, gave a terse bow and

royal sweep of his arm to the Buick, and climbed into the Honda. The brake lights lit up and he pretended to be backing up on the Buick.

"Any other time." Spencer flexed the veins in his neck.

A young black man arrived at the outside ice cooler just before Mrs. Bogart, opened the hatch, and grappled deeply into the chest. He hooked the last remaining ice sack as Mrs. Bogart opened the neighboring door. She gazed plaintively into the frosty darkness and then fixed the ebony figure beside her as he withdrew the prize.

"Sorry," he smiled.

Anxiety bounced around within her, amplifying between the urgency of her mission and her baby boomer fear of the man's dark color. She dared not meet the young man's eyes, but finally boiled over like one of her pots, spilling out words onto his feet.

"Please, please sir, please, my husband has had an accident. We need that ice. We've got to have that ice! Please, I'm begging you to have mercy!"

The man chuckled with skepticism.

"Sorry lady, the iceman goeth for the ice cream waiteth."

He took a step, but Mrs. Bogart anticipated him, scampered around and weaved like a boxer in front of the door.

"No! No! You've got to listen! Please! We need that ice! My husband's toes are going stale!"

She jabbed in the direction of the automobile where Spencer served sloshing gas into the tank, and she began a diversion dance in the black man's path. The man switched his focus from the bizarre woman to the Buick and back again to the disturbed creature that was preventing him from entering the air-conditioned store.

Katie and her father watched her mom's Hail Mary. Katie had switched to the backseat where she signaled her dad by gripping his thigh. Quickly, he lifted his bent knee from where it had been resting across Katie. He wheeled about on the side of his rump, and juttied his bloody-toweled foot through the open window. He unwrapped it to the sheared knuckle of his toes. The iceman gaped at the wound and then held out the coveted bag of rock ice in surrender. Mrs. Bogart rushed forward and clutched it to her breast.

"Oh thank you, thank you sir. You're a hero. You really are. You can tell your children about this. God will bless you. Thank you, thank you so much."

As the troupe waved appreciatively from the car, the man shrugged and walked back to his vehicle. Mrs. Bogart galloped triumphantly into the store but was immediately choked off by a stagnant twisting line at the counter that snaked down an aisle all the way back to the drink coolers. It seemed like half the town had made a quick pit stop into Wiggy's for some last minute holiday prep, wieners,

sparklers. Mrs. Bogart snorted. There was but a single register where a congenial Thai man behind the counter worked through the arithmetic of making change.

"Excuse me. Excuse me," Mrs. Bogart announced as she searched for an unguarded space to insert herself near the front.

"Emergency. Coming through. Can I pay for this? It's an emergency."

The crowd grumbled with resentment. A lumpy young woman in a bikini top and tight Daisy Dukes became livid and scowled behind her reddening tan.

"Wait your turn, old bitch. You ain't no better. We're all in a rush here."

She strangled a case of Coors Light. Mrs. Bogart held some dollars toward the clerk.

"Can't I just leave these here? My husband—"

"No no no!" Upset that his orderly procession was being disturbed, the Thai clerk glared up from his cash drawer. His congeniality flipped into outrage. "You take turns! Go to back! No break here!"

Outside at the Buick, Spencer replaced the gas nozzle and sulked into his seat to await his girlfriend's scatterbrained mother. At 101 degrees, the Fahrenheit began to stifle the passengers, stick their sweaty skin to the upholstery.

"You holding up?" Spencer called over his shoulder.

"Just get us going," Mr. Bogart exhaled his thundering head and dropped it wearily back into the coffin of the rear window.

His foot still stuck like a butcher's display haunch through the side window where it dangled near the stench of a green metal trash canister in the gas island. Three yellow-jackets, engorged in cola syrups, hummed up from the waste to investigate the territorial invader. They landed on the bloody paw to inflict their barbs but were instead captivated by its mushy crimson wine. With the tourniquet numbing his foot, Mr. Bogart was unaware of the yellow-jackets tasting party until Katie turned to relieve her restrictive, sweaty shoulder strap and screamed, "Da—aa—ad!"

Mr. Bogart snapped his head forward. Instinctively, he knew Katie's extra "aa" to mean bugs, and when he spotted the yellow-jackets relishing his innards like miniature vultures, he felt a particular and immediate revulsion. He lifted his straining thigh in one hand and pulled the tourniquet with the other to ferry the foot inside the window. In a panic, he swiped at the blood crusted core of his toes, but unable to reach it, brushed the little wasps against the front seat. This angered the yellow-jackets into a panicked retaliation and they ricocheted through the passenger compartment stinging at every defensive movement.

Spencer ignored this latest manic crisis and clamped his eyes shut and tightened his jaw. Had he realized, however, that the commotion was of a bee variety, he would have bolted the car and sought secret refuge—he was deathly

allergic. When a sting to the base of his neck was followed by two incendiary wallops down his back, it was too late.

Inside the store, Mrs. Bogart stood with her sweating bag of ice at the rear of the checkout line. A bawl came out of the pit of her stomach and sobbed against the futility.

"They'll never reattach them now! What do you care? What do you care? You have your bar-b-cues and your picnics! But we'll never have a bar-b-cue or a picnic with my husband's toes again!"

The line began to press together in an effort to elude the rambling lunatic.

"He needs his toes! He's a salesman! He needs them more than you need your stupid bar-b-cues! I hope you remember that! I hope you remember that when you're eating your pork chops—and your hamburgers—and your baked potatoes! Because you're really eating his toes! You'll always have your dumb family get-togethers, but my husband will never ever have his toes again! Can you live with that? I hope you can because that's a heavy weight to bear!"

A woman in smart business attire stuttered out of the line and without looking back deposited her clutch of items on the newspaper bin and walked out the door.

"Okay now you are bothering my customers!" the Thai ringer proclaimed. "I don't know what is your problem but I am going to have compassion on you and

get you the hell out of here hoping that you are not ever returning. This is not an establishment for crazy women."

Mrs. Bogart stiffened, unsure of whether or not she was being tossed out. She felt the regiment of customers turn their glowering eyes on her, judging her, and she began to hyperventilate, her hyperventilating sobs straining her diaphragm. The clerk waved demandingly.

"You come now. You pay. You go."

Self-consciously, Mrs. Bogart trod to the counter when she felt the breath of the man in swim trunks leaning in on the back of her neck.

"Nice act, bitch."

When the matriarch scuttled out of the store into the oppressive humidity, she immediately noticed the manic gyrations of her clan as they wildly hopped around the car. Mr. Bogart did a peg-legged hoot and then fell against the trunk. He slapped at a tiny foe on the back of his arm and nearly cried at the hunkering pain in his knee.

"Get 'em off me! Shit! Shit! Shit! Get 'em off!" Spencer screamed. He tore off his shirt, threw it on the ground, and stomped on it. "Stupid little bastards!"

Mrs. Bogart rushed to her husband.

"Dear Lord, what happened?"

Mr. Bogart pulled the ice bag toward him and pressed it into his sting.

"Yellow-jackets."

Tentatively, Katie squirreled around from the other side of the pumps and found Spencer slumped against the front driver's side tire.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm feeling sick. I can't breathe," he huffed. "I'm having a reaction. I need ephedrine."

It was lost on Katie.

"Try dealing with this shoulder. I'm in so much pain, I may piss myself. Mom's back, so let's get in the car and go."

"No! I can't get back in there!"

"All the bad bees are gone now, silly."

Spencer's heightening nausea prevented him from driving, and it fell upon Mrs. Bogart to man the helm of the expedition. Once all of the yellowjackets had committed hari kari, and everyone was again settled in the car, Mrs. Bogart anxiously fidgeted about the controls in preparation for the perilous interstate.

"Did you have enough for the gas?" Mr. Bogart asked.

"I didn't pay for the gas. You didn't tell me to pay for it. How was I supposed to know I was supposed to pay for it?" Mrs. Bogart spouted.

"Oh cuss. Well you better run it in I guess."

"There is no way on God's green Earth that you're going to get me to go back into that store! No! I'm not going in!"

Mr. Bogart hung a ten dollar bill over her shoulder from behind.

"Here. Just take it in and pay for it."

"NO!" Mrs. Bogart shouted. "You just take that right away from my face!"

"What? Are we going to steal gas? Take the money, damn it."

"I said 'no!' You want it brought in, you take it in yourself!"

"Okay. I will." Mr. Bogart obstinately opened his door.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm taking in the money."

Mrs. Bogart gave an exasperated growl. "Don't be stupid! You've got bones sticking out of your feet! Give me the idiot money!"

"I'm going to take it in."

"Give it to me!" she screamed and snatched the bill. She stamped out of the car and her head darted around the pumps.

"What are you doing?" hollered her husband.

"What does it look like I'm doing?" she responded tacitly. After considering several alternatives, she lodged the ten dollar bill between the mid-grade nozzle and lever.

"There Mr. Big-Shot. I paid for the gas."

She got back in the car and smacked the door shut. As she pulled out of Wiggy's parking lot, a Skittles-eating fifteen year old boy in baggy jeans discovered the booty. He kissed the cash and gave it an exaggerated deep-pocketing. His buddy intercepted him at the air pump and hit him with a triumphant chest-butt.

When they reached the interstate access, the Buick settled in the turn lane waiting for the red light to allow them to enter the on-ramp. With his face swollen, Spencer wheezed in the backseat next to Mr. Bogart.

"Not feeling well, son?" Mr. Bogart inquired.

Spencer looked at him through amphibious eyes but did not speak. Mr. Bogart unraveled the tie on the ice bag. "Don't worry. Won't be long now," he said.

He cracked the lid of the cooler and let the ice avalanche onto the prone body of the Boston Terrier. A hand fished through the rough rocks for the baggy of toes and suspended it within their chill. The lid closed again and sealed the doggie corpse in blackness.

Spencer's swelling neck muscles began to constrict around his esophagus. He clamped a hand to the thigh of Mr. Bogart's injured leg and rattled, "Airrrrr." Alarmed by the alien voice, Katie craned around from the front passenger seat and cock-eyed her traumatized boyfriend.

"Mom, will you drive faster? Spencer's in trouble."

"Katie, I'm nervous enough now as it is," Mrs. Bogart blathered. "I don't need your help on driving."

The ice settled in the cooler and Mr. Bogart leaned down and shimmied it. Oddly, the ice continued to move after he released it and, in fact, rattled about the ice chest with an increasing, scrambling cacophony. Startled, he lifted his leg from the spirit-possessed cooler and banged on it with his palm. It yelped back at him. Bosley was alive.

"Bosley?" Mr. Bogart opened the hatch. Still half-comatose, the Boston Terrier paddled around in the chunks. "The dumb dog is still alive!"

"Oh thank heavens!" Mrs. Bogart lauded.

Katie had a disturbed reaction as if the dog had awakened from the dead to hunt her down for her part in the evil doings.

"Close the lid! Keep it in! Don't let it out!" Katie squealed.

"Poor little doggie. You've had it rough, haven't you?" Mr. Bogart said to Bosley's blank eyes. The stymied dog suddenly kicked its legs through the ice and spun frozen gravel into Spencer's lap.

"Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad! Please shut it! Please!" Katie wailed. She held her dislocated arm pinned to her chest, but her reflex tugged at it, and she screamed. "My arm!!! Oh God! I can't take this!"

Mr. Bogart refitted the cooler top and propped his wounded leg on top of it. Peeking back, Mrs. Bogart frowned as she leaned over the steering wheel.

"He's just a little dog. He isn't going to hurt anyone. You let that dog out of there. It'll suffocate."

"No!" cried Katie. "He'll attack me again!"

"Nonsense."

Bosley began to whine from inside the chest. His muffled despair as the ice chunks froze his little pee pee began to resonate in their hearts. Mrs. Bogart glanced disgustedly at Katie.

"Oh for crying out loud! Listen to him. You want him to eat the rest of your dad's toes? Let him out of there!" Mrs. Bogart yelled.

Mr. Bogart began to articulate two distinct sounds of distress, the whimpering in the cooler and a strange drawl next to him. He listened closely and turned his head to Spencer. Slumped to the side, the young man was turning blue, croaking last breaths from his open mouth.

"Spencer! Spencer, what's wrong?!"

"What?" Katie unclipped her seatbelt and swiveled around on her knees. She ground her jaw as she reached with her good arm and grabbed Spencer's unresponsive forearm. "Spencer, can you talk to me?"

His eyes swollen shut, Spencer could only pull a trickle of air through his open mouth.

Terrified, Katie shouted. “What’s wrong with him???”

“It’s an allergic reaction to those bee stings,” Mr. Bogart diagnosed. “He’s not going to make it to the hospital.”

“Mom, drive faster!” Katie screamed.

“You see the traffic. I can’t do the impossible.” Mrs. Bogart looked offended. The traffic was thick and slowing, heading toward a meadow of bumper to bumper motorcars.

“You got a straw up there?” Mr. Bogart asked.

It made Katie angry. “A straw? Why???”

“I have to make a hole for him to breathe through.”

“For God’s sake, dad. You don’t know what you’re doing!”

Mrs. Bogart snatched a straw from the lid of a week’s old root beer left in a cup holder, and flung it over her shoulder into her husband’s lap. Mr. Bogart held it out while he stretched back and trawled his shorts pocket for his pen knife.

“You may want to look away for this,” he fixed Katie with a firm gaze as he opened the little blade.

“Dad, no!” Katie looked at him through pleading tears.

“Turn around! Do it!” Mr. Bogart shouted down her sympathetic appeal.

“He’s going to be okay. Just let me work. I’ve seen this done in the National Guard.”

With a soft sob, Katie turned and slouched in her seat, her eyes tightly pinched shut. The traffic now began to compress as they neared their exit three stops away. Finally, it halted altogether.

“Damn it!” Mrs. Bogart said with exasperation.

“For crying out loud, mom!” Katie bawled.

“I didn’t do it!” Mrs. Bogart shot back.

“Just go on the shoulder!”

“And who’s going to pay the insurance if I get a ticket?”

“Might as well,” Mr. Bogart responded. “They don’t like it, it is life or death.”

As he skillfully straightened Spencer in his seat and positioned the boy’s head back over the headrest, his bad leg lifted a little and Bosley began to pop against the lid of the cooler. The indignant horns of other vehicles sounded as the Buick ditched the gridlock and began moving over the uneven shoulder.

“Sorry, sorry. Emergency,” Mrs. Bogart said, ducking the bad juju hurled her way.

Mr. Bogart prepared the tracheotomy, stroking Spencer's throat and tapping it with his index finger. "That's it," he said to himself when he found the little sunken node beneath Spencer's Adam's apple. His sweaty fingers made holding the pen knife a challenge, and he fumbled the first attempt at puncturing Spencer's neck. He wiped both instrument and his fingers on his shirt and tried again.

Suddenly, from behind, a loud, shrill siren blasted them.

Squeep! Squeep!

A police cruiser materialized from within the caravan of cars and was on their tail, bouncing persecuting lights off the Buick.

"Oh my Lord!" shouted Mrs. Bogart.

"What now?!" Katie exclaimed.

"Walter, I'm going to have to pull over. I knew this was going to happen!"

"I told you to take that money in," Mr. Bogart replied.

"You think that's it?" Mrs. Bogart glanced at her rear view mirror, a note of defiance in her voice. "That stupid fucker's going to arrest me? I left double the gas! Bring it!"

"Mom! You swore!" Katie scolded her, aghast. She had never heard her mother curse, and it cracked her reality.

"Just see what he wants," Mr. Bogart tried to calm her. "Maybe he can escort us."

He returned to Spencer's esophagus, prying his knife into the node again.

"Hang in there, buddy. Air's on the way."

Mrs. Bogart slowed and then abruptly jammed the brakes to telegraph her anger to the officer. The cop ran up on the Buick's bumper and halted. Mrs. Bogart stared down the officer in the mirror as he sat in his cruiser and ran their plate.

"Well, what are you waiting for, pig?"

"Mom! I can't believe you."

At last, the cruiser's door opened, and Officer Mayweather walked slowly toward the Buick, a ticket in his hand.

Spencer's esophagus was proving more difficult than expected, and Mr. Bogart grimaced, pressing hard as he attempted to saw through the sinew in Spencer's neck. The effort drew the curious attention of Officer Mayweather as he strode next to the backseat. With the sun's glare, it took a moment for him to pry out what he was seeing, and then he lunged into action. The ticket dropped, and he fumbled quickly for his gun.

"Man in the rear! Drop the knife and step out of the car!" he commanded.

Mr. Bogart became incensed.

"He's going to die!" spat the madman still continuing to pry and puncture a breathing hole. "Do you understand? He's going to die!"

"Leave him alone!" Katie shouted at the officer and the chaos.

“Give me the ticket, and go shoot some criminals,” Mrs. Bogart bellowed.

The officer crept up and excitedly flipped the rear door handle. It was locked.

“I’m giving you an order,” Mayweather barked. “Drop the knife and step out of the vehicle!”

“And I’m going to tell you once,” Mr. Bogart roared. “I can’t step out! I haven’t got any toes!”

He held his foot aloft. But, it only quickened Mayweather’s heart rate, causing a flashback to his Marine tour in Afghanistan.

Mayweather slapped his lapel com. “Officer Mayweather requesting backup! Stabbing in progress!”

As Mr. Bogart lifted his leg, Bosley banged his small, black and white, square head out of the cooler. With his nails scratching the hard plastic, he scrambled and launched himself free. Panicked, he leapt wildly about the cab with Katie squealing and sliding down the upholstery, her good arm clasped around her head like in a tornado drill.

“Got it!” exclaimed Mr. Bogart as his twisting pen knife dissected the passage. There was an instant, gurgling exchange of air deep into Spencer’s lungs. Mr. Bogart patted around his lap and seat for the straw. The orange plastic stood

out on the floorboard where Bosley had kicked it in his wild dash. It was out of reach.

“That damn dog.”

Unexpectedly, the window next to him shattered under Mayweather’s billy club. Tiny bits of aquamarine glass rained over Mr. Bogart, some hurtling into his eyeballs.

“What in hell?” shouted Katie.

“I’m blind!” Mr. Bosley screamed in horror.

To Bosley, a miracle escape hatch had opened, and he took it, bounding across Mr. Bogart’s thighs and past the grappling police officer.

“When I give you an order, you comply!” Mayweather shouted.

Seizing Mr. Bogart’s wrist, he yanked and jerked his arm, dislocating his shoulder while wedging his torso in the window. With his eyelids trying to blink away the glass shards but only lodging them deeper into the rubbery sclera, Mr. Bogart could only groan with a gut wrenching bellow.

“Leave my dad alone!” Katie turned and shouted and grabbed her father’s calf.

Suddenly, the car started and began rolling. Mrs. Bogart was driving away, a fierce scowl on her face.

“Pull it over! Do it NOW!” Mayweather ordered, his arm still winged inside the window and tenaciously gripped on Mr. Bogart’s forearm.

Trying to shake him, Mrs. Bogart accelerated while pumping the brakes. The officer let go, spinning and stumbling over the pavement, but ultimately staying upright atop straining quads. He drew his gun and fired at the rear of the Buick’s escape.

“What the fuck!”

“He’s lost his mind!”

A second shot just missed Katie and bored straight through the windshield, spidering cracks across the safety glass.

“Holy damn!” Katie exclaimed.

Mrs. Bogart glanced back. An entrance hole had punctured a shaft through the back window, and poor, purple Spencer sat with a graze-wound over his left ear. A line of scalp tissue dangled from it and blood slavered down in bright red pools on his shirt and car seat.

“Spencer’s shot! Spencer’s shot!” cried Mrs. Bogart. She veered the Buick across the exit lane and lodged it into traffic to give them cover from the rogue officer.

“What’s going on?” Mr. Bogart rocked in blackness.

Katie swiveled. “Oh my God! Spencer! No!” She slid over the top of the front seat and toppled over, white hot pain stabbing her shoulder. Using her knees, she righted herself and straddled her boyfriend, compressing the loose flesh with her hand. Spencer’s only response was to splutter through the hole in his throat with the sound of a wet fart.

“Spencer, breathe! We’re almost there! Just breathe for all of us.”

“Look on the floor,” Mr. Bogart advised her. “Get that straw and poke it in the hole I made. Understand?”

Katie instantly spotted the orange neon straw. She raised it back and then stabbed it into the hole in Spencer’s esophagus, jamming and twisting it until Spencer’s lungs wheezed and began to draw regular breaths. She kissed his forehead and then collapsed crying across the seat.

As Officer Mayweather reached his patrol car, there was a muffled shout somewhere in the parade of vehicles. A Dodge Challenger attempting to squeeze and pass between lanes of packed cars skidded. There was a thud and a yipe, and Bosely was hit and thrown until he violently smacked into the curb about ten feet away from the cop. This time, there would be no icy resurrection. Mayweather watched as two small fleshy morsels tumbled across and stopped at his feet. Curiously, they looked like two, heavily mottled and half-digested human toes. He

removed a ziplock bag that had held a snack of Doritos only minutes before from his pants pocket, turned it inside out, and collected the toes as evidence.

“Move it!” Mrs. Bogart shouted at a semi truck in the middle lane. “Fuckoff, asshole!” The trucker was not having another of her forced mergers to the left, but Mrs. Bogart had strategically plotted a route to the lesser used commuter exit. It would take them directly into the hospital without impediment.

With the exit now in sight, they were dangerously close to being locked in the cattle call and forced to miss it. So, Mrs. Bogart simply stopped in the traffic with horns heckling her from all sides, and let the semi inch forward until it cleared. Immediately, she cut in on a Mazda Miata and wedged the Buick sideways between two lanes. The Miata’s horn blared for a full minute and was answered by Mrs. Bogart’s hand stabbing out the window and shooting a bird.

Behind them, Mayweather was in hot pursuit, sirens wailing and lights spinning. He desperately swerved from lane to lane in the highway’s bottleneck, but comically he was in slow motion as the traffic was nearly stopped. However, the officer owned the advantage as drivers would grant him the right of way as he gained on the criminal suburban family. He anticipated Mrs. Bogart’s leftward movement to make the approaching exit, and he radioed ahead to guide and position the already alerted units.

One more lane cut and the Buick would be released into the commuter lane. Her eyes fixated on the side mirror, Mrs. Bogart calculated the rate of speed of the passing vehicles and the gaps that presented brief opportunities to dart in and get up to speed. She practiced her reflexes, and when she was ready, she spied a nice opening and floored the Buick into it — just as an impatient Chevelle three cars to her rear also cut into the singularly moving lane. The Chevelle rushed up and jolted the Buick in the right rear bumper. The Buick spun and swiveled.

“Shit!” Mrs. Bogart shouted.

“Mom!” Katie screamed. “What did you do?”

“Just trying to get us there!”

Mr. Bogart moaned with blind, clammy nausea.

For its part, the Chevelle took a blow from an encroaching Bronco and smashed into an unspectacular five car pile up. The commuter lane quickly shut down into a fierce block of cursing and blaring horns as the newest crash victims awaited help. Mrs. Bogart reversed toward the concrete divider, turned hard like a stunt driver, and carried on unimpeded until she reached the exit. Before her, a slow moving Mustang negotiated the exit’s corkscrew by slowing even further and infuriating Mrs. Bogart by rapidly brake checking her.

“No way, honey,” Mrs. Bogart railed.

Halfway through the curve, the lane began to widen in anticipation of splitting into two lanes — the left lane merging into Thompson Street, a main downtown artery, and the right lane operating against a traffic light leading to a connecting road straight into Saint Benedict's Hospital.

In this final stretch, the loathsome, obstructing Mustang grated on Mrs. Bogart. She wanted to commit violence against it, to slam it into the retaining wall as a protest against the whole mad day, to hand off the cursed baton of self-perpetuating random suffering to a different family. She stomped on the accelerator, squeezed past the family of four, a boy and girl, both under ten years old, visions of fireworks dancing in their dreams, and she felt shame. Her burden was not punishment. It just was.

As the Buick swerved out of the corkscrew, a police barricade suddenly came into view. This was Mayweather's doing. Two police cruisers for each exit were parked in V formation, lights spinning. Officers with guns drawn were in position behind the cars, and double spike strips had been laid to the curb on either side.

Mrs. Bogart released the accelerator and allowed the Buick to drift easily down the long slope of the ramp. To her right, the sanctuary of the hospital appeared. *Just glide. Nonaggressively. Without intention. Sanctuary and healing awaits. They will let us pass,* Mrs. Bogart thought.

“BUICK! HALT!” a cop ordered over a bullhorn. “STOP YOUR ENGINE NOW!”

The cops were intractable and threatening, and Mrs. Bogart hated them. She had always supported the police, contributed to their causes, and seen them as allies, but here in the hour of her family’s greatest need, they had turned on her like jackals.

“BUICK, COMPLY!”

Katie had slipped over the seat and squeezed between him and her dad. She cradled the crown of Spencer’s head beneath her chin. His breathing was measured and relieved through the makeshift tube, but he couldn’t speak and his eyes remained swollen shut.

“What’s that out there?” Katie asked.

“Nothing,” her mom replied in a comforting tone. “Everything is okay.”

“STOP THE VEHICLE NOW! YOU WILL BE SUBJECT TO OPEN FIRE!”

“Who is that?” Mr. Bogart wondered blindly.

“Nothing to worry about, dear.”

Mrs. Bogart looked to the left and imagined faking out the assholes before she might suddenly veer right and break through their line. She began to drift to the left side and watched as the cops realigned themselves.

“STAND DOWN! FINAL WARNING!”

The Buick slowed to a near stop. Then abruptly, tires squealed, revved into full motion on a full two-wheeled turn to the right and headed straight into an impossible gap between spike strip and cop car.

“Woooooooooooo!” bugled Mrs. Bogart in triumph.

Woooooooooooo! was her last word.

A hail of gunfire rained down upon the family’s sedan, finding every cranny and pocket, blasting into and through everyone several times over. It was pure surrealism without pain, just holes and geysers, until a head shot sent it all into oblivion. The Buick clipped the rear of a cop car, ricocheted against the curb and a yield sign where it teetered in a cockeyed position. As Mayweather’s cruiser approached from behind, the engine block caught fire, almost simultaneously spreading into the dashboard. Another fire began in the rear along the gas tank. Officers ran up on it, and sprayed it with extinguishers.

Suddenly, there was a bang that sent the officers scattering. The trunk blew open and an arsenal of Fourth of July fireworks that Mr. Bogart had stashed for that night’s celebration erupted in a chaotic and thrilling show. Rockets shot with unpredictable forces and directions, whistling, banging, thundering. Roman candles pulsed into the cab and over the bumper, and loud mini-explosives concussed the sides and finished blowing off the trunk. A curtain of sparks rained onto the street.

Astonished by the pyrotechnic display, Mayweather stopped and stepped out of his cruiser. He stood and watched the Bogarts burn to a crispy barbecue amid fantastic multicolored Fourth of July fireworks. Along the highway, children in the backseats of barely moving cars pointed out of their windows at the sky and smiled at the early show. The real fireworks would come that night, but this preview whetted them with the rockets' reddish glare and the smell of gunpowder and burnt flesh.

The end.