

HYMN CALIFORNIA

adam gnade

part 3 of 12



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CHAPTER FIVE

RUN HIDE RETREAT SURRENDER

It is winter again and you are fighting with your woman. From outside the apartment on the hill leading up Broadway, pressed against cold window glass, the warm glow you'd see would be Norman Rockwell life—NBC and a Christmas tree—wrapping paper tubes unraveled on the couch, presents half wrapped, shoeboxes—their lids off—open and waiting, where rest the dregs of pizza boxes, chewed-on crusts, and red wine jugs. Sliced cheese or cubed provolone gone dark yellow on white paper plates.

Your hands thrown over your head; her eyes wet and red. And from outside the window you would see a tragic comedy, song and dance blues, or election year blues, wartime blues, love-life blues, growing up blues, the sorrow of ancient oak tree deep root pained.

And San Diego winter where at 6 a.m. you and her drive to work and see your breath in steam billows, to jobs you hate and to making money that goes God knows where.

Up the street the cars line Broadway, their windows fogged with dew drops dripping on concrete.

Southern California morning. The bums are staggering out of wet bushes draped with spider web trails and damp pant cuffs, scratching brown beards and wondering where their life went, how they got to *this* and whether they'd ever touch a woman again and oh, for one last grasp of warm teenage breasts they felt in the back of a car, high school homecoming night, 1985, an elegant young body or smooth long side and the eyes of shivering nervous, of a woman that wants you because you are good and you are worthy and you make her feel good. But never again and they are resigned to that—nothin' but dollar coffee at 7-11 and another day waiting for handouts and hobo death.

The nights, now, are filled with talk and then quiet, where you feel dumb and thick-mouthed—can't say nothin' but mumble and plead your case. You were never brave like she is, so you sit and drink and grow hard skeleton face and scare her, scare your family too, while your body rots, while your muscle goes to fat, then sagged skin while your brain goes evil, the squiggling worms and flitting haints, the spirits of soul leaving your body.

She delivers sermons and speeches, implores you to get the hell out of the city.

“We'd be so much *happier*,” she says.

You could quit your jobs and run away like you used to, back when you did things just because, and because it felt good to run away, and because you didn't worry so much like you do now ... just because and leave the assholes behind and *fuck 'em* anyway, they don't mean shit.

She says it doesn't matter what; run, hide, retreat, surrender or your apartment will be your grave.

SONGS OF PRAYER

Work days become work months but your friends are still jobless, talented but so broke, freaking out on coke, snorting a raw nostril snarkt! of fire and oh and chapped red skin, sitting in bare apartment rooms in North Park shooting smack and screwing

each other, unwashed, cumming into sad loins and bent-toothed mouths and asses. Bleeding into each other's bleeding holes, bleeding together with shudder of Hep C tested at 5 p.m. at Planned Parenthood, though they thought it was something worse. They're cutting rough acned skin with green Heineken bottle shards and shaking with withdrawals, with D.T.s, with laughter because it's so absurd, because you can still laugh no matter how sad you are.

They're placing pills in each other's blued lips and packing cigarette packs KAK! against bare thighs, a tangle and curl of dark black hair and white bone leg like Auschwitz.

19 years old, slipping into the Void.

Your parents are getting older. You see it over the dinner table on weekend visits, more like hospital visits than family time. Your woman's needing more than you've got. She's okay; what's your problem? The last thing you did that made you happy was your last record and even that didn't last. Doesn't seem right. Doesn't make sense anymore. Why the hassle? What's the use? You used to write and record but who wants to write and record when we're gonna die sooner rather than later? The city has gone frozen and your ship has hit an iceberg.

Songs of Prayer: Eat the barrel of the old shotgun, .410/.22 over and under Savage/Stevens your grandfather gave you when you were 10 and in love with the Vietnam War and guns and bein' a hero. Pull back the trigger and *spackle* yourself 'cross the wall, slump forward, your eyes stunned like a fish, the back of your head gone and hanging open like a surprised mouth. And do it before she gets home, no one will stop you this time.

But god, you have *options*. Lie still, wine drunk in the bathtub, and sink down, your nose bubbling out your lungs' last breath, too drunk to fight back. Run razors down your wrists and bleed out alone and naked on the bathroom tiles, shaking in the cold of morning. Overdose. Hang yourself. Eat muffler smoke, drive your car off the cliffs at Black's Beach, glory and twisted metal wreck on white sand. Starve yourself. Eat pills 'til your stomach swells and swims like aquarium rocks and you fade 'til gone-eyed.

But you're a coward and you know that. You turn on the TV—*M*A*S*H* re-runs—and settle into the couch.

SHOUT THE BATTLE CRY FOR FREEDOM

Fuck your deadlines. Fuck your editors. Fuck friends. Fuck responsibility. Fuck living long. Fuck getting up in the morning. Fuck writing the big things. The wine bottle is rising from between your legs like a dark-glassed lighthouse and you laugh, your teeth slop red-black of wine and crooked smile.

With late winter comes spiders in your synapses; they're skittering down brain tunnels to eat at happiness, ideas, sex drive, energy, ambition, passion—youth gone shriveled and frozen like rock gravel crunching beneath your sneakers and you're walking to that mine that killed your great-grandfather, black-lunged Pennsylvania coal mine, its mouth empty and fanged, its throat runs tubed, straight down.

Shadowed reapers crouch on mine tracks or lie lurking in mine cars, phantom great-grandfathers, black-eyed, Slavic, square-faced, gray-haired, beckoning with crook of finger saying, "Have a drink with me, kid. What's *taken* you so long?"

She goes distant in January.

“You haven’t been happy in months,” she says.
“I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” you say.
“I feel like a bird in a cage,” she says.
“Nothing I once loved makes me happy anymore,” you say.
“You need to go to the doctor,” she says.
“I feel like I’m losing it,” you say.
“We need to get out of this city,” she says.
“I feel like I’ve got a demon in my head,” you say.
“What do you need me for anymore?” she says.
“I feel like I’m already dead,” you say.
“You’re so selfish,” she says.
“Don’t leave me,” you say.
“I feel like getting in a car and driving away,” she says.

Don’t leave me, don’t leave me, you don’t leave me, don’t you leave me, don’t leave.

At night, at clubs and bars, you drink with friends. They buy you drinks because your name is in the magazines they read. But she’s off with the older kids across the club, in the back of the bar, the ones who’ve got it figured out ... while you seek the dark spots and rotting, doomed faces destined to grow old and sit in hospital beds connected to tubes and wires, beeping machines, yellow piss bags, sludged shit, coughing a paint can rattle, wondering if it was worth it and whether they could’ve done better.

You go home and drink more. Drink ’til everything goes muffled and warm and good and you sing to yourself and rock back ’n’ forth, happy and alone on the couch.

Then comes chill of dawn with light over the purple hills to the east and you pull the covers back up; your face is a swollen mess.

With spring comes a thaw of her heart. She’s driving you to go wild, to be good and crazy. But you’re fighting it, eating the pills Dr. Chang gave you, and faking happy every day. She knows it’s not working. And you read religious text—the Bible, Koran or fictionalized tales of End Times, Thich Nhat Hanh, giddy Buddhist koans, Krishna, book of Mormon, the Torah.

You look for something to lead you from the dark. You wear the pants and sweaters and shirts of an old man. You shake your pill bottle and toss it in your jacket pocket. Your muscles fade and flesh falls from the bone, drops like fruit gone to rot.

She tries one last time, singing the old songs, singing, “Come away with me. I’ve already quit that job. We’ll finish off the bottle and the agaves too. Take a look around; everybody is sad as you. All we need are Dos Gusanos this afternoon” and you’re fading fast.

You hold her hand as you walk past 7-11 and say, “Okay ... okay sorry ... let’s go ... okay let’s go. Let’s just go ... okay ... okay.”

AND THE BAYOU SUMMER

Open your shirt and feel the muggy haul of bayou summer Louisiana, of Tennessee terrapins poking black turtle skulls rippling above slime water, where a Confederate boy, 18 and from Memphis, fell to death escaping capture, billowing gray shirt and a hole where his heart once was, a lead ball resting hot near his spine.

But now it’s the noon shift gas station girl, dyed white-blond scarecrow hair, with stubby fingers, behind the counter, nail filing, intent! Hollow-cheeked and ragged from

her big night on speed and Jameson with the girls, her 16th birthday, no love just wide-eyed and cranked, still awake and shivering. Thirty hours no sleep, smarter than anyone in her city, in her state, but no use. She takes your money and gives you change and shakes her head as you walk out.

ROOM FOR THREE

Stare into thick of trees, of chigger bites and ticks black on white skin, of culvert run crick, of Baton Rouge roadside motel or New Orleans honk ronked in Bourbon bone street, Southern Decadence, skulled eyes of Louisiana marsh and grasshopper skipping, palmetto bugs in the weeds, bridges sloping over murked swamp water, the I-10 North pulling towards Jacksonville.

“Room for three. Two beds please. What? Oh, nonsmoking, smoking, doesn’t matter.”

She and Rostam wait in the car. Rostam Afshar, your great surrealist writer friend, crazy guy, hard drinker, lover of life but having trouble with living—his season in hell now and cooking hard. Along for the ride, Ros, of Iranian descent and brooding prince of princes eyes. Ros, with whom you eat stuffed grape leaves from a can and laugh at Right Wing billboards.

You have driven across the big raw divide, San Diego to Deep South and a million laughs there in between. She and Ros are looking out towards the lobby at you with faces like sparrows, hopeful.

The desk clerk gives you a discount, saying, “You came at the right time ... *Arnold* just got done talking.” The Republican National Convention telecast blasting behind the lobby desk like countless hours of televised war this year.

“Baton Rouge,” you think, “is a place to get old, have kids, and get happy.” But instead you hide out in Comfort Inns drinking canned beer on the back lawn patio with hurricane rain slicked grass. Ros and you in jeans with no shoes.

“Baby?” you say looking from the sliding glass door into the dark hotel room, your back to the pool and grass grounds and hot tub steaming and warm chlorine blue in black distance, but she’s asleep and you close the door and walk back across the lawn, where Ros hands you a beer and you smile and things seem okay for once.

LOUISIANA

You stop and get gas again outside Baton Rouge. There are alligator swamps out behind the station and you imagine rotting faces, murdered lovers of Southern lost teenagers, gray and belly down in the swamp, leeches on swollen death-fattened thigh, eyes gone dull and white like catfish.

In the car you blast by green tree line while Ros drives and smokes, ashing into a soda can, and you stare out the window while your favorite tapes play—loud music that makes sense when your country is run by a terrorist, when your world is ripped by madness, when you feel crazy every day and you don’t know where you’re headed.

You and your woman and your pal Ros, you are running east, you are going east. The joy hits your heart and you turn up the tape and sing along to the singer chanting “there is no path in our flight. There is no path in our flight.”

Get drunk and fall asleep in motel bathtubs. Get drunk and forget about your home

in San Diego, your lost job, your old apartment, your publisher gone mad, and from what? Get drunk and fall down on Canal Street, French Quarter, singing blues, sailor songs, sea chanteys, sloppy to kill memories ... run, hide, retreat, surrender ... it's okay, it's okay, you'll save yourself from yourself and write a book and a record about it too, and Dale will play guitar and hand you a mic and plug you in and you'll drink together and he'll run the tape all night and all will *be* alright because "we will fix ourselves" you think and we will. We will? We will.

New Orleans. You breathe in the tar and gumbo stewing stale beer puked smell from bars and pray to the immensity of soft summer night.

Afternoon in New Orleans. Your woman sees Dixieland jazz street musicians, street performers, white shirted and sweaty and she cries. They are playing brass horns and drinking beer from paper cups. They smile and sip their beers and wink and play and she cries; she loves them all.

Ros wandering up ahead with sunglasses and camera. You and her are holding hands and she is crying, "God, I love them," she says "God, I love them all."

THE OLD LOVER

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted. But the rich, in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away." Toss yourself away ... into the mud, into the dogshit, into the spit, because debasing yourself will profit you diamonds and leave your good soul intact. You and your woman and Ros drink 'til bleary-eyed and then leer and drool to lie in dark night of curb, Rampart Street, while the casino lights blink and flash neon and strip club bouncers drawl curses at you. They are laughing at you and you don't care.

But on a corner she calls an old lover while you're too drunk to stand up, your mouth open and flapped nonsense gah hagged gibberished ghost talk and sing and sing and you sing, but you don't say anything.

ON AMELIA ISLAND

The harbor in Jacksonville makes you think of white paint iron-sided shrimp boats, crab cages and fish nets, dry docked, the brine salt scrape of barnacles now scrubbed off clean with slab of red marine paint.

Along the freeway are hurricaned tree limbs, cracked and limp in sweltering heat. The *raaahaank* of slide guitar blues you hear replayed in memory from a thousand movies about the South, the deep South, and deeper 'til you find what you're looking for. Drive fast. Play music loud. Write it down feverish in notebooks. Feverish because you haven't felt shit in months. Racing hard because ... what else is there?

The I-10 glows in oil paint cowboy movie fantasies.

At night, flowered red crosses she points out while you drive and Rostam sleeps, markers beside the road reading in hand script: "Dave Jeffries 1967-2004" but meaning, "There was someone I loved and they died here and now I am alone."

You drive quiet in surreal pitch darkness. Outside the drone of cicadas and frog *horks* while AM radio plays bluegrass, and the singer drawls, "Let's paaass around that long-necked bottle and we'll aaaall go out on a spreeee. Because today's the last of Wild Bill

Jones. Tomorrow'll be the last of me."

"That's about you," you say. "You're bad news," and you both laugh and drive on.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

The raw animal stink of horseshoe crabs, died on the beach, Florida, Amelia Island Plantation outside Jacksonville, south of Fernandina Beach. Brown salad bowl helmets, prehistoric undersides and long dragon tail, rotting near the shore.

You drag one up the beach by its tail and flop it over, its belly a chassis of claws and ribbed lobster armor body.

You say, "I am sorry you died. I am sorry you're gone."

She's on a towel by the sand dunes, Rostam off on a plane back to San Diego and to work and to life. Her cousin Bethany is visiting from Georgia, both pretty and tanned on towels, in the sun, in sunglasses, reading their books.

The driftwood and soap sud sea foam hits your feet.

"I can ignore the past and fake a new name," you tell yourself. Your old name and self and face and life crawling into a mossy green grave to wake up new and smiling and sweaty earth-touched and sun-kissed. Watching yachts off the coast, white dots past crumbling breakers.

"The sea is my brother," you think and laugh insane laughs, shaking with feeling alive.

"Why do you always run at the first sign of trouble, darling?" you think while she lies next to you in the sand on a towel, the smell of sea on her skin, hair warm of coconut oil.

"Why are you afraid to run and why do you always let trouble hit you?" she probably thinks—or you imagine so and roll over to sleep a while in the sand.

INTERSTATE 13

Fog and rain in sheets over Chesapeake Bay, 2 a.m., the span of Chesapeake Bay Bridge. You left her back in Virginia with a friend, the old lover. Driving alone now to New York.

"Is this freedom?" asks the singer on your tape. "Is it?"

Delaware in the morning, dawn chill to burn off by noon. The beach goes you will speed past. Crab-shacks in beach towns, the highway slicked with sand. New Jersey Turnpike, packed and crazy! Voices in the next room, New Jersey motel, muffled, that sound miles away. Bells clang in the nautical ship cry foghorn sad harbor.

RETREAT

And now it's nighttime in Brooklyn, your expatriate San Diego friends smoking cigarettes and talking about home 3,000 miles away, now just a misty marbled dream. And you talk about old faces you'll never see again and thank god—San Diego can fall to dust and be gone with the wind.

Jeremy Willis brings home a case of beer and his roommates and you roar with applause. Someone shouts, "maestro!"

"Where we going tonight?" you ask and their eyes shine happy.

Then at 10 a.m., the filth meld of booze and summer heat—and what time is it? What day is it? God only knows when your reality becomes “move”—four letters and a purpose. Keep moving. Keep buying gas every four hours. Keep watching the signs. Keep playing the radio. Keep driving. Keep staring at oily shimmer of mirage. Keep sleeping on floors. Keep plunking postcards in mailboxes. Keep passing out on couches or sideways across friends’ beds, your dream-mind racing through old publishing deadlines, nightmares of putting out the magazine, and suddenly there’s no cover. There’s no back-page ad. Your staff writer is missing. Where’s the wine column? There’s a fire at the printer. Your computer eats the story you just typed.

But you wake up wet with sweat, your heart thumping and thank God your life is still unmoored and that it was all a dream. You dream about San Diego every night, that the magazine is still going and you still go to work every morning and you still want to die but you wake up and things are different ... you hope, anyway.

Meditate on Jeremy’s fire escape. Late night, the overhung sprawl of city shining beneath you. The rumble of Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, clatting clat roll *rack!* The fire escape of your ultimate fire escaping.

You call her from Brooklyn and she’s happy. You tell your stories and it is good. And there are angels in expressways! Flash of semi-trucks bawling! Lights of ambulance blasting down Lorimar. Black girl tries to sell you crack, “Smoke rock? You smoke rock?”

“Naw, not me.”

But drink more because it feels good when you’re already drunk. Talk writing with Jeremy because his mind is great. Enjoy life because you haven’t in years. Miss your woman because of how she brings her shoulders up slow to her chin, shrugging at the sadness of life, and ah, and oh, and somewhere across the big blazing continent in LA, Johnny Ramone died last night, prostate cancer, grizzled and unsentimental, a staunch Republican in a land of Liberals. So now in New York bars, bartenders play “I Wanna Be Sedated” three times in a row and everybody gets drunk and shouts the words.

NEEDS

Somewhere in the city, lights shine neon and flash across facades of brownstone apartments where Henry Miller once lived, where mama Maria San Ignacio-Flores—a refugee of Cuba, not yet 40—frets over her cats who stretch and stalk down the hall. Her children are sleeping—thank god—how she wishes they were never born. Because soon they’ll be awake and clamoring for breakfast.

“Cap’n Crunch!”

“Lucky Charms!”

“Trix!”

“Frosted Flakes!”

Cereals named after movies or TV shows or pop stars. Sugar cereals she couldn’t even afford when good Gilberto was still alive and bussing tables all day down on Bedford, humble and fighting for her, holding her at night, all alone and whispering sex thoughts into her ear. But her children will soon be watching screaming cartoons, toy commercials with high pitch squeal.

“Mama! Mama! *Yo necesito eso!*”

She sits at the kitchen table and stares into nothing.

HYMN

New York park, sunny while you write postcards, cross-legged in the grass. Groups of Mexican and Filipino women pushing strollers with blonde rich babies in the hot air. The Empire State Building looks like a beautiful rocket ascending to Heaven. And “New York to Mexico in under a second!” shouts the billboard.

DANCE TO THE WAR

The cardboard floor roof fire escape is rust steel scaffold built in 1938 by old Joe Palermo in Italy work pants and mud boots. And from inside comes the smell of pasta sauce and fresh garlic. Jeremy’s roommates are cooking and drinking wine and laughing, the TV broadcasting war news. 1,000 US casualties now in Iraq. Rebel insurgents. Kidnapped civilians beheaded immortally on the internet. Email it to your friends, you’re all so removed. They aren’t even people to you. Or the soldier, 20 years old, life ended by secret bearded street bombers or swarthy snipers fighting a war bigger than we know. Allah or God or country and sober-eyed and calm, leveling sights to KR-RACK! an explosion of gone life. Useless, useless, useless. The age-old squabble of pride and heart. And you can get as piss drunk as you want with your friends in a million cities and watch while so and so phony intellectual asshole passes a bong, and you decline but you keep hitting your bottle!

Nothing hangs weighty as this, but you’ll never understand. Your life safe and oh workaday troubles and love life troubles, your troubled mind not working as good as it used to—writer’s block, depression, anxiety, suicide thoughts, obsessing about your girl who’s bad news and off with who knows in Virginia, getting drunk with whoever, going around with who? When? Your worries are small; you have no idea.

NEW YORKERS

In the subway you ride and eavesdrop. Mexican family, father, son, and quiet pretty wife.

“Chucky,” whispers dad, reminding wide-eyed son about the movie they rented last night, *Child’s Play: Bride of Chucky*.

“Nooo,” whines son shaking his red brown *mestiso* puppy face, sweet face, smart and baby-minded.

“Chucky esta ... aqui!” whispers dad, pulling son up to his face, making big scary boogie man eyes.

“Nooo,” squirms son.

“Chucky ... *el terrible muneca!*” (Chucky the terrible doll.)

“Nooooo!”

Father’s eyes are bright and happy; his wife smiles and shakes her head, goes back

to *US Weekly*.

“Chucky *esta su papi ahora!*” (Chucky is your father now.)

“Nooo. Essstop eet!”

“Okay,” he concedes, laughing and bouncing son on his knee like you’re told families in America are supposed to act. But then, sly, catches son unaware whispering again “Chuuucky” in warbling ghost voice.

“Ay, no!”

“Yo soy Chucky, Chucky su papi!”

Eavesdrop again. Alone in a coffee diner, just off the phone with her. She was crying in Virginia, everything falling apart.

“It was like everybody was givin’ me the finger, all those cactuses,” says the dark, under-shirted, Ital cook, big like 9/11 fireman statues, to his regulars at the counter. He’s describing a trip he took last week to Arizona to see his sister.

“You see any lizards?” asks an old woman, Jewish.

“I saw them.”

“Geckos?”

“Them too.”

“Roadrunners?”

“Naw, only in the cah-toon.”

Later on, they’re talking about a regular who just left.

“Yeeeah, she’s a painter,” says the cook, wiping the counter with a rag.

“Like Van Gogh?” quips a young Puerto Rican wise guy, maybe 18 in a flannel shirt and Tres Flores slicked gleam hair.

“Yeah, yeah.”

New Yorkers, they don’t care about anything.

Eavesdrop at Coney Island. Nathan’s Famous Hotdog cafe table. Chill of early evening. Under crying, soaring seagulls. Air smells of salt and sand. The cold breeze of summer’s last days.

Jeremy, his roommates, and you, drink Coors Light from Styrofoam cups, which tastes delicious, and eat hot French fries with ketchup.

The homeless woman that looks like Flavor Flav stalks the tables, wanting money.

“You wanna fight now, cornbread?” she says to the black boy sweeping up smashed soda cups and hot dog wrappers.

A PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF DELAWARE

But now you’re leaving New York to save your woman, to pick her up in a hot chariot of gold and steam and rubies, and show her you’ve changed, that you’re better now, that you are healed, you are happy, you are virile, you are a man, and not scared anymore. You will take her in your arms and say, “Yes darling, I will live up to my potential. Yes, I will write what I’ve promised and I will make the best record I can.” You promise that you’ll come back to life and love her like she should be loved but you’re still hours away and you’ve got so far to go.

And it’s harrowing! The late-night dead souls at the Hollywood Motel outside Wilmington, Delaware, en route to Norfolk. Wilmington, where at 4 a.m. trucks lumber by with great cylinder tubes of gasoline or cement loads or crushed cars in flat stacks.

In the motel parking lot ghouls of girls are shivering in the night air on speed or six in one room, flicking lighters and sucking white smoke trails from tinfoil pipes, billowing out lungfuls of sweet speed smoke 'til their hearts race and climb stepladders to Heaven.

You pay the desk clerk and you get your key and park your car and they hover, looking out from TV-lit motel rooms, smoking cigarettes in shorts and wild hair, big bruises on their legs, floppy tits, no bra, big T-shirts, eyes like caves in sockets or dry wells, hovering for paid sex or to get high or higher. Just raw mule bones, big Reebok sneakers, and sweatshirts with college names on them, their faces like evil jack-o-lanterns. Open-mouthed, smoking, and vultured.

“I don't want you,” you think and lock yourself inside your room. Try to call her in Virginia but the lines are dead; your room is a ticking clock.

The hard darkness before morning, yellow-lit and cancered. Cancered! Cities 'neath overpass spans Delaware. Cancered! Snowy infomercials and softcore porn channels. Cancered! The Indian Hindu desk clerk taking your money in pajamas and red pained eyes, not tired but sick. Cancered! The smell of wet road. Wet grass pasture stink on your sneakers. Cancered! The motel sheets with ancient fleck of blood spots now brown. Cancered! The motel sign blinking, Hollywood Motel, its “H” diseased and flickering.

Cancered! The metal click of crickets outside your window. Cancered! Your doubt creeps in. Cancered! There are armies of spiders in the bathroom. Cancered! The 24-hour McDonald's down the road with boil-faced old woman sitting in the drive-through window register box, slumped and toothless, staring out into the night, once beautied and water fat with youth. Cancered! You are free but you are not free. Cancered! Summer is ending! Cancered! Your grandfather is dying! Cancered! You are getting old!

THIS IS HOW WE RUN

And now you're driving again. The sun is out and summer shade from trees tiger-stripes the road. You are together again and you are heading home.

You relate to the world through smells. Oak campfires smell like beach-fires in San Diego. Incense, car carpet, and cigarettes smell like being 18 and in love. Drying dog shit, black on green Kansas lawn, smells like summertime. Water and river brush smells like summertime in Arizona, Colorado River. Hot buds of weed burning smell like being 15 and sober while your friends laugh and grin, slant-eyed and high.

Rosewater on bare skin smells like your woman when you're heading home with her from weeks away, apologies made and nothing resolved—nothing is resolved—life is still a big hanging sulk of mystery or futility or repeating patterns or hurt feelings or too much damage done maybe. But you're together again and heading home. You are heading home.