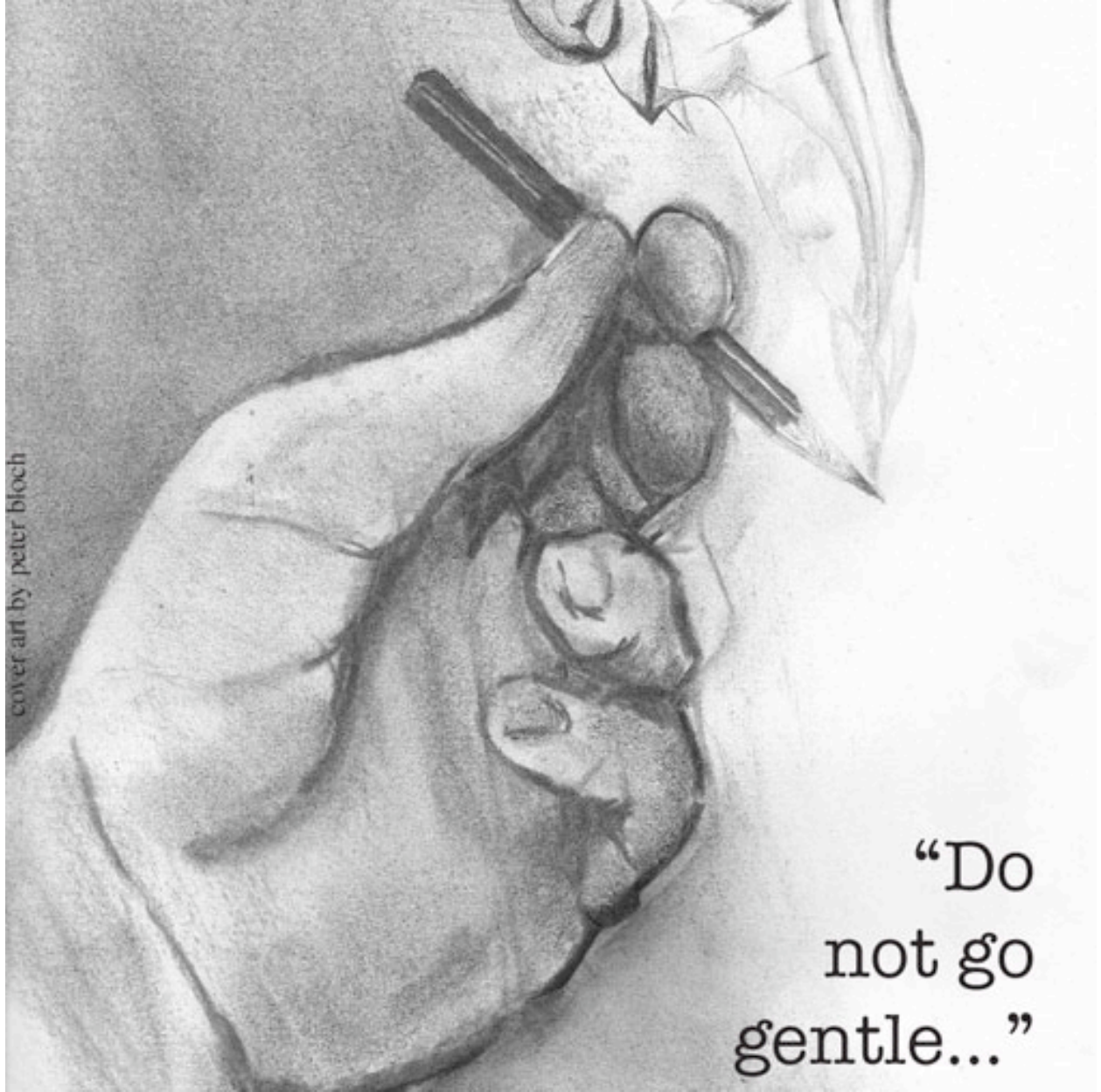


**Do Not Go Gentle**  
by The Irving Renaissance



“Do  
not go  
gentle...”



“183-W” by Christopher Brown

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## Introduction

Joshua Neu

From the era of the ancient epic all the way to the modern novel, men and women have exhibited excellence in their ability to express themselves through the written word. Every culture with a written language seems to have writers who devote themselves to creating beautiful art in that language. In view of this, we notice a recurring human desire to communicate through the written word, and not just to communicate but to do so with excellence.

Recognizing this desire within ourselves, a group of students at this university found it beneficial for their development as creative writers to work together through constructive criticism. As a means of fostering our development, we formed a creative writing group, the Irving Renaissance, which met bimonthly to discuss, review, and critique each other's original work. The authors were then able to use the criticism as suggestions for revision or for writing even better short stories, essays, or poems in the future.

Desiring not only to communicate with our colleagues in the Irving Renaissance but also with the wider audience of the college itself, we chose to publish some original works in this chapbook, "Do not go gentle." Every issue, which will be released near the end of each semester, will contain selections of written work presented at the bi-monthly meetings. This issue contains three poems followed by a short story; in the future we hope to include students' essays as well.

I do hope you enjoy these works as they have given me immense delight. As the poet Billy Collins writes, "I want them to waterski / across the surface of a poem / waving at the author's name on the shore" (Collins 2006, 59). That of course applies to Mr. Kane's short story as well. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy your fellow students' work.

We extend an invitation to anyone interested in participating in the Irving Renaissance. All of us are interested in reading your work and working with you for each of us to become better writers. If you are interested in participating or have any questions at all, please contact Mr. Alexander Misko at [amisko@udallas.edu](mailto:amisko@udallas.edu). We hope to see you at our next meeting in January 2008.

Reference List: Collins, Billy. 2006. *The Apple That Astonished Paris*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press.



Fear: An Occasion  
by John Hogan

I don't have it when I begin to write,  
mindful the only one to read is me.  
Some re will be mine always -  
its nothing that could contribute -  
Just a few and more short lines (a lot of time?),  
then I frame it and give it to a friend.  
By the way I have it and this moment something's gone,  
then three slick syllables slip from the lip of a person just like me:  
"Bad poesy."

The Window Washer  
by John Hogan

Who washes the windows,  
wide and large,  
wetting, wiping,  
the rhythm from the  
swipe.

The windows now clear -  
beautiful clarity -  
sense of knowing -  
and promise of a future  
polish.

The dirt and dust return,  
steadily and slowly,  
make a vague pane,  
while passersby can't see the  
tarnish.

Now the beauty is lost,  
the clarity gone,  
a sense obscured,  
replaced by a notion that has  
blemish.

But the washer makes purpose,  
swipes and polishes,  
saying with meaning,  
"Nutin more pratical than window  
cleanin'."

A Thought  
by John Bloch

A face, passing through the doorway,  
Slipping through the periphery of my life,  
Strikes me like an unobtrusive drizzle  
(perhaps running through the sprinkler);  
It's a lovely face, charming,  
The kind you'd love to see  
Framed at the Met or the Frick.

Where is she going? I'd rather not know;  
A painting isn't as enchanting  
If it has a true personality;  
If I knew anything at all of her  
Destination I'd watch her go, not come.

So, I'm content with nothing  
More coming of her than what I see  
For an instant and then is  
Gone.



The Reservoir  
by Peter Kane

They let me go. I guess it was evidence of my truly being a senior. Dad didn't even lift his head from his plate when he consented. Mom laughed and started talking about how lenient they were to me compared to my older sisters. I performed my best that night, not too blunt, not too fake, laughing at all my Dad's puns and enthusiastically praising the meal. It was a nice meal, as it was early enough in June where having dinner with the windows open, the sun still glowing, and eating summer-squash and fresh corn with steak tips still felt exciting and new. We sat at the table long after my dad finished his beer, talking until the sun grew red behind the scattered houses on our street. I recalled all this as I drove out that Friday morning. I had told them about our plans to skip school and go fishing, reminding them that seniors in high school do not have

homework in their last two weeks, never mind its irrelevance at this point. Rolling through the curves of the neighborhood streets, I imitated the charming smile I had used the previous night, and could see my father's knowing smirk and my mother's chuckle: "We're push-overs," she had said. The turn came when I mentioned that Nathaniel Thornsbery and even Anthony already had permission; I have learned that to mention other parents' leniency gives my parents--and especially my mother--a relaxed conscience. I did not mention Sebastian. For him, skipping class required sensitive care.

Amid thoughts of the summer meal, without realizing it I had crossed Forest Avenue. I swore softly, thinking how this happens at least once a day. I took the longer route through School Street to get to Nathaniel's house, a one-floor yellow cottage right across a lumber-yard. The hum of the engine undulated with the turns in the roads; no roads in Massachusetts fly straight. That's good, it gives them character, I thought; New York roads run straight and ugly. F-ing Yankees.

Nathaniel stood up from his front steps and submitted wholly to a yawn, letting his arms strain outwards and head tilt up. "Morning", he said as he bent down to pick up his tackle box. He walked over to my green '95 Chevy sedan and dropped his gear into the open trunk next to the cooler, then returned to his garage and fetched his mini gas-grill. He held the trunk door open with one hand as he closely examined the contents already packed. I was leaning against the driver-side door with my hands in my pockets, grinning at the concentration in his eyes. My experience thus far of Nathaniel told me he had two looks--a focused furrowing of the eyes and a satisfied grin--and here was the former.

"You all set, Nathaniel? We got the meat, the grill, and the smokes already; I'd say we're set."

"Oh, that's it, forgot the power-bait." He brushed past me back towards his house. I turned on the car, and drummed my fingers on the clutch, watching the door. After five long minutes he came out with his new pack of fake-worms in hand and a piece of bread hanging from his mouth. He wore paint-spotted jeans with massive, thick-soled beige boots he could barely squeeze past the seat to the floor in my small car. His gray T-shirt had little rips along the seams at his neck.

"You didn't get dressed-up for me, did you?" I said, putting the car in reverse. He looked down at his clothes and shrugged. As we pulled out onto the street I flipped open a pack of cigarettes and offered him one. "Let's start this day right." He picked out a cigarette and gave me a nod. "Nathaniel, it's going to be a delightful day."

“We’ll let the fish decide that.”

What a bum, I thought half-smiling, can’t even put in the effort. The fish decide? He should decide. But that’s not Nathaniel.

We had to ring the doorbell to get Anthony from his house on the far side of town. His mother let us into the kitchen, and her smirk and piercing eye reminded me of my mother’s look the night before. As Nathaniel searched the living room for embarrassing pictures of Anthony, I sat watching the stairs. Anthony came down packing a small bag with a book and a handful of odd items for the day. I met his eyes as he came to the bottom steps, and I gave a little nod and whispered to myself, “Antoine.” He grinned back and moved into the kitchen. As Anthony walked in and out of the kitchen fetching his things, Mrs. Benedict followed his movements with her head, telling him about some dinner guest he had to meet later that night. He finally was ready, and let his mother finish while he stood staring at the floor: his habit whenever friends caught him with family. Mrs. Benedict never missed a chance to tease her son on such occasions: “Am I embarrassing you in front of them or something? Too bad, you shouldn’t be afraid to be affectionate with your mother.” Nathaniel snickered and Anthony’s eyes darted towards me. I smiled and looked at him for a moment, telling him I know the feeling, then suggested we leave. Mrs. Benedict peered at me from across the kitchen and with a smirk said, “If anyone calls from the school saying you guys were seen skipping [she hissed out the “s”], I am absolutely ignorant.”

I grabbed Anthony’s shoulder and pulled him towards me. “No one will; we intend to keep Antoine far from Doverton High today.”

We pulled away from his house, a three storied colonial set on a little slope, obviously the richest of the already rich houses on the street. I looked at the dashboard clock. 7:45. “We gotta move, we’re late. He’s waiting for us now.”

Doverton High School’s red-orange brick glistened under the newly risen, bright, almost pure white sun. After a rainy May the grass burst with intense greens. Our car idled just beyond a small patch of planted pines between the road and the school lawn. I stared through the passenger side window at a dark, tinted glass door at the side of the building, while Nathaniel looked in the opposite direction across me, studying some form of clouds to the south. The bright brick looked almost inviting now that I was on the outside. I had begun to turn off the ignition when Sebastian popped out of the tinted door and stumbled onto the platform. He swung his head around and looked at the closing door with wild eyes. Nathaniel began cackling and Anthony sniggered. I was already thanking myself for inviting him, for Sebastian was an entertainer. He bounded

towards us carrying his backpack in front of him like one would a football; he caught sight of the car, grinned at us, then turned and lifted his arm to make a taunting gesture to the school. Crumpled papers and a dozen used pencils escaped his unzipped bag. All three of us convulsed in laughter; Sebastian grinned more widely than ever as he chased the strewn papers across the lawn. He stuffed what he could into his bag, then gave the finger to some papers blowing too far away, and bolted towards the car.

“Go, go, go, go! Why the hell are we still here!” he whooped as he jumped headlong into the backseat, crashing onto Anthony’s lap. His feet hung out the open door as I hit the gas. Nathaniel turned around, grabbed Sebastian’s pants at the rump, and heaved him in as Anthony shut the door behind him. Sebastian righted himself in his seat and in the rear-view mirror I could see him still grinning madly. He was only a sophomore, and despite his thick reddish stubble, he had a boyish look; his blue eyes constantly sparkled and his smile was peevish. He glanced back and forth at each one of us laughing, and seemed content with his performance. He began chuckling himself and grew red in the face, then in a frenzy yelled, “I’m ready to fish on, boys! Fish on! This was a sweet plan, Finnegan.” He looked back at the school, “We’re bad-ass.”

“Real bad-ass,” I said. “You barely made it out the school door.”

The school was close to the bait-shop. We stopped there and filled a large white bucket with live shiners. On our way to the pond Sebastian had them in his lap, and entertained Anthony by taking a fish and trying to tickle Nathaniel’s ears with it. The drive was pleasant and too short. Morning drives: the topmost leaves of the oak-trees shot through with sunlight, dense foliage keeping the winding roads shaded and damp. Nathaniel got into some argument with Sebastian, but I only heard murmuring; I thought about Liz, imagining where she was this day. The drive was too short. Days like this are too short.

We had to walk down a sandy slope to get to the pond. It was a reservoir dug out beside a one-acre cranberry bog. It is one of the great South Shore mysteries that though contaminated with pesticides, cranberry bog ponds hold some of the largest bass. Pale red leaves colored the neatly square bog, which remained dry behind a levy and a small wooden dam. A dirt path with tracks for a truck lined both the bog and the reservoir. As with most cranberry bogs, the sandy ground prevented much of June’s greenery around the bog, but forests sprouted around the pond where the soil was still fertile. The sun behind us played its light off of the pond, and the ripples on the water shot white light in all directions. We passed the owner’s house with our hands full of rods, tackle, and food. Nathaniel carried his rusty little green grill tightly under his left arm. He walked

far ahead, and Sebastian swaggered and skipped in front of him, all but dancing to the rap-song coming off his lips. Anthony and I calmly strode twenty yards behind.

“Look, Antoine. That’s beautiful. No, captivating. No, I’d call it sublime.” He was already looking, and owing to the nod he gave in response, it seemed he had already thought something similar. “Glad you came. Perhaps the best thing we could have done today,” I continued, “hours and hours to just hang out and fish. Don’t worry about anything else, just relaxing; if you forget that, I’m throwing you in the pond, deal?”

“I can do that.” He didn’t say anything else. He smiled and looked back out over the landscape. The quiet man, I thought, doesn’t force anything. When I invited him I had hoped he enjoyed fishing, but the faraway look in his eyes when I asked suggested it wasn’t the fishing that interested him. He had the same fire in his look I imagined myself to have in planning the trip; it wasn’t just fishing for me either. After thinking for a bit he had muttered something about Walden and solitude, to which I reassured him this was the trip for him. The faraway look had returned as we strolled past towards the pond. Nathaniel rigged his line first, opening his new pack of fake worms. “Check out the master-fisherman,” Sebastian remarked as Nathaniel marched down the shore. He stopped at a patch of lilies and made a sideways cast. We all waited for his bait to hit water, but it never came. Nathaniel grunted loudly. An overhanging tree branch jerked back and forth as he pulled on his rod. Sebastian gave a mocking laugh. Without another word Nathaniel took off his boots, rolled up his pant legs, and waded in. When the rest of us had ready spread out and begun the hunt, he was still poised under the leaning tree, slowly working out the hook and bait. His hands worked methodically. He focused unflinchingly on the branch, and he stayed under that tree for some time.

We spread out on the south side of the pond, absolutely confident in each spot we chose and expecting bites at each cast. Sebastian flitted around the shore; several times he yanked so hard at a disturbance in the line, his lure shot out the water and landed on the dirt path. Anthony cautiously reeled in each cast, getting in one cast to every four of Sebastian’s. I used a jig at first, as it felt right in the hand. I passed over the shiners, quick lines of silver darting all around each other in their small world. They’re for later; they’re boring when you have energy to work a jig. The first fish wasn’t raised until Sebastian complained. In the middle of yelling to me his frustration from down the shore, his rod shuddered and bent. “Fish on! How ‘bout this, Nate!” A minute later and he was running up and down the shore holding the fish by the jaw above his head. After showing everyone his trophy, he held the sparkling small-mouthed bass up to his face, said a thank you, then spun himself around and lobbed the bass in the air, laughing to himself. The bass lay sideways on the water, recovering from its fight. I couldn’t watch the ex-

hausted fish for long; I hate when people throw fish, rips the art away, and there's definitely an art. Nathaniel has it, though he doesn't enjoy it like I would.

Thus the fishing began. None of us sat down. We smoked while we fished, and had scoured almost all of the spots by late morning. I kept an eye on everyone, especially Anthony as he began to be less attentive to his casts. The sun hit us directly from above, and the air heated up. Nathaniel finally walked out from under the tree and worked the same spot for most of the morning, even when Anthony, Sebastian, and I had headed west.

By noon I switched to shiners. It's easy to hook a dead shiner; the live ones require more experience, or nerve. It took a few minutes just to pin one of the minnows to the wall of the bucket and carefully slide him up out of the water. I pinched him with my fingers, and felt the beating of his organs. His scales were slick, and his skin and muscles firm, making the hook's puncture sound particularly violent. But they are best still alive, as they still try to swim maimed, looking like easy prey. The shiners brought several catches for all of us, not only bass but strong, feisty pickerel and even an occasional eel.

Shiners let me sit. Relaxing let me think. I had looked forward to this thinking time. It was here--in my imagination--that the day could gather together into a panorama to be viewed and tasted. The heat pelted our backs, so I took off my long-sleeve white shirt and draped it over my neck, then crouched to the ground keeping the rod planted between my feet. My bobber floated ten yards from the shore. A painter basked on a half-submerged log, his wrinkled neck extended towards the blaring yellow sun, while below him murky water lapped his wooden perch. Painters: I recalled the elementary school days at recess of hunting them in the creek, getting a mud splattering on our legs and always losing our socks in the muck. A crunching sound came from the shore and the turtle slipped into the water. Anthony approached from the shore.

He did not carry a rod, but accompanied me on the grassy slope.

"Did you give up on the fish, Antoine? Can't blame you, the magic of the morning hours is over; the lively stuff'll come back later."

"Looking forward to it." He picked apart dandelions, using his fingernail to slit the stem and then scrape the watery layers. He saved the flower-part, making a pile in his lap. He wanted to say something. I was sure of it, and watched him smiling. "So, uh...when do you go? To New York?"

“Week after graduation. What’s that, three, four weeks from now? Yeah. Are you gonna miss me?” Anthony grinned shyly and continued slicing a stem. White juices wet his finger. “Yeah, I’m going away. The summer courses start June 24th.” A breeze pushed the bobber towards the shore; the hooked minnow had ceased to move about. “I stood near the main entrance yesterday, and thought about how young we all are. I guess everyone says the same, but they are. Some fatty skateboard freshman was sitting there with some punk-rock girlfriend on his lap. They both were just staring out at everybody who passed by like they were hot shit. They’ve got no reason to hang around. No reason, loving to be acknowledged, but what’s ironic is that they claim to reject the popularity game. Just kids, Antoine, just kids.” That was weird. What did I mean to say? It started so well, then, what the hell am I bringing them up for? Anthony narrowed his eyes, and tossed a broken stem into the water.

“I wish...” Anthony started, looking towards the ground, “...I don’t know, I wish teenage years weren’t so...forced. So many people change. Do you ever get the feeling that like, you’re the only one unchanged? I still want to shoot off fireworks on Friday nights, but everyone else just...forced out something. Like ah...I don’t know...you know.” His faraway look vanished briefly and he rubbed his nose a few times. He recovered and his large, glossy, almost black eyes fixed on the pond.

“I understand. I do.” We talked on, both of us knowing how to balance the conversation between spoken words and time to let the robins and chickadees chirp. This was the time I had wanted. Right now, this is it, just being, no worries, I’ll let my whole senior year rest on this day. I smoked a cigarette carefully, preparing for some thought, watching each wisp of smoke escape my lips.

“No more Doverton, Anthony. Strange. No more sketch locker room pranks or gym-class hero. No more homeroom, no more intellectualism from our dear friend Chaz. Mrs. Steinburner’s class is done. George Herzl: what a nihilist, no more of him. Remember...” I laughed a bit, “...remember when he dressed up as Voltaire for extra credit? AP kids are a weird group, man, and I don’t know how we’re part of it.”

I rested my back on the slope and let the sunlight bake my closed eyelids, trying to chase the splotches of color and light forming in place of the landscape. The grass tickled my neck and legs, and the singing birds nervously made their calls. Outdoors. Here’s your solitude, Anthony. You’re probably a step ahead of me. Breathe in the wind, inhale as it passes by the nostrils. What could be better? If only all of them--McCourt, Casey, Allie, Liz, all--could feel this and then...then they’d see. In New York, they’ll be more times like this to see clearly, beyond the silliness of these past few years. I won’t miss too many; except her, maybe Anthony here, and Nate. I imagined each of their

faces on our last meeting, how I would look somewhere far off while they stared longingly at me, stumbling to say something meaningful. I'd let them stammer for words, then say something like: "I've enjoyed everything this year, the times together. Had we but met earlier and had time enough...you are an incredible person." Well, at least I'd say that to her, maybe something similar to the rest. I will shake Nathaniel's hand, he'll give me a hard look, and I'll pat his shoulder, and that'll suffice. New York, on a bus, in four weeks. Four weeks. Not enough time, not enough time to say that thing that will make her dare to give a weak smile that reveals she wants me to stay. They're all out of my life in four weeks. I'll have a blank slate, only their faces to remember...only their faces. But that's not enough. I can't go to New York.

"Why d'you decide to do this summer program?" Anthony asked, still looking to the far shore. I shaded my eyes as I sat up. "Think you'll come back during the summer at all?" Coming back home: I'd hide my return, letting a few people know and then slowly working my way to see everyone, and maybe even Liz, and savor their excited greetings and hopeful looks.

"I don't think I can..." Now I looked down. "I was hoping to figure some of this stuff out today, you know...leaving high school and dealing with what's beyond."

He nodded his head. "I understand." This was as close as we got to something worthwhile. As soon as I whispered out loud the ideal for the day, which I had kept vague before, it was blemished, and seemed naked and defenseless in front of Anthony, seemed...silly. But he understood, and so it stayed alive.

"Four years. Four weeks. Damn." A couple of chickadees erupted from their perches right near the water and flapped away, darting around each other as they headed east, across us towards the bog. Following the birds' flight down shore, I happened to gaze upon Sebastian. I let out a laugh. Anthony turned and did the same. Sebastian sat on the sandy shore with his bare feet lying in the water. His shirt was off, and his finger twirled in his belly button while the other hand limply held the rod. He murmured a Celine Dion number. He heard us laugh, turned his head, and passionately sung out loud the rest of the chorus, then picked himself up and trotted towards us. He squatted between Anthony and me and put his hands around our shoulders. "Let's fire up that grill, we need a break."

Beneath the black encrusted rack, white coals littered the grill. These were not going to catch. And all that meat sitting there. Anthony opened up the ground beef and patted out the circles while I lit the little propane tank. My nose turned away at its gassy flame. The old coals, full of holes from overuse, were still cold and unlit after multiple tries.

Nathaniel said, "Well," and began to prepare hot-dogs, wagging his head at our efforts and snacking on potato chips. This wasn't supposed to happen.

"We are going to eat burgers." I took a raw burger and placed it over the propane flame. Cooking one at a time, the burgers browned, then blackened. Satisfied, I fitted one into a bun and bit.

Slime. Wet and chewy, nigh slippery. Beyond the thin charred crust the burger showed bloody red. Anthony spit his out and went for Nathaniel's hot dogs. Damn it, burgers are key; I planned on burgers. I ate slowly. The meat slid down the throat without needing chewing, and I ate two because of Nathaniel's teasing grin. I called it victory, and spoke nothing of the queasiness when we started to fish again.

The post-lunch fishing proceeded like the morning's. With new energy, Sebastian hailed his trophies and Anthony nursed his lure. My stomach wrenched for about an hour. Nathaniel spent the first 10 minutes after lunch tying on a neon jig, for him the only worthy choice in the early afternoon.

Lunch is over, so we're halfway done, I thought. More than half. The best part of the day: is it past? Why didn't those coals light? All I wanted was a damn burger. This Coke's no help, either. Liz and Jess--and probably some of those guys--lie on a beach, and I screw around with ground beef. No, forget it, there's more at this pond; that game I play, with her, sneaking smiles and conjuring nice comments, that's not here. Why the hell didn't those coals just light?

The fish didn't bite as much after lunch. They lay in the cool depths. I smoked more cigarettes in the afternoon; the entering smoke cut the throat harder with the heat of the afternoon. Nathaniel had worked his way along to the south side, the farthest end of the pond where the trees came out close and the path morphed into a trail. A little cove and shaded, solace from the heat. I followed him.

"Hey, Nate, did your uncle give you that job?" I fished a spoon in the open part of the cove. Nathaniel stood to the left in the water, hitting with finesse casts where the pond receded into the woods.

"That's Nathaniel, Michael. That's what my mama named me." He flicked a side cast into the shadows. I smiled and asked him again.

"Yeah, I got it." He adjusted the drag on his rod.

“Hope you like fixing cars enough to do it all summer.” I cast and listened to the neat plop of the spoon. I let it sink a little before giving it action. He’s real hard to talk to sometimes. “Do you?”

“Uh, yeah.” He tugged his line carefully, dancing the jig with delicate pulls. “There you are!” His rod doubled over and the line straightened. “She’s coming up!” He leaned back with his rod and the fish cleared the surface while running away from shore. The mix of white spray and silver froze against the deep black of the cove. “Yee!” He brought it in. Holding the fish square with his eye, he then gave a kiss on the top of the struggling bass’ head. “You wanna kiss her, Finnegan?”

“Man, you’re a hick.” Taking it as a compliment, he grinned widely, revealing two large dimples and strong teeth. He lowered the bass into the water, giving it time to rest before releasing his hold. He looked over his lure, bent a hook to its correct place, narrowed his eyes again and continued his casting.

Five o’clock arrived sooner than I expected. Class never passes this fast. Skinny pines covered up the yellowy-orange and blurring sun behind us, leaving tall and thin shadows stretched across the little cove in which we had made our home. Beyond our little cove the pond widened as it came nearer the dam sheltering the dry cranberry bog. There, as well as across the owner’s house, and on the street beyond, the land still lay exposed to the sun, baking in a dusty afternoon hue. Large cumulus clouds--the puffy kind that June breezes bring--were on their way out, floating in the east, looking playful and light opposite the heavy yellows of the sun. But we found shade in our cove.

A squirrel crunched leaves in the woods behind us, stopping occasionally to raise his head to the winds. “Time for a smoky-treat, Antoine. This calls for a bobber.” I picked a large shiner floating belly-up, and his scales detached from his flesh onto my thumb when I hooked him. Half his body ripped off during the cast, but he would do. I dug the rod into the ground, then delicately sank my fingers into the water, watching the metallic scales slide off my fingers. That fish had been dead and softening for at least half the day.

“You sure you don’t want to try one, Antoine?” I held out my cigarettes, but he put up his hand and frowned, his way of saying no. I climbed the small bank where he sat with arms clasped around his bent knees. With a sigh, I plopped myself down in the same way next to him. Anthony continued to stare out into the water, and I gladly joined him. Sliding a cigarette out of the almost empty pack, I let it hang limp from my lips for a while, surveying the waters. I lit it with a long, slow intake, and then let the thick smoke rise lazily from my mouth. “I’ll have to teach you the virtues of smoking some day, An-

toine. Then you'll get why Nathan and I do it. The problem is that in our school you have to hide it, because only Goths smoke."

"True."

"It's unfortunate for those of us who see its higher aspects but don't want to wear spikes in our ear-lobes. But there are ways to make it discreet. Me and McCourt were probably the only honors students in Doverton history to sneak off to the parking lot to smoke frenchies. In fact, you should feel quite honored sitting next to me, Anthony. And don't do that shake your head and smirk thing, don't deny it: you know I'm pretty cool."

"Clearly," he quietly answered. His slight chuckle made me happy.

I chuckled a bit and took another drag.

"Only eight days left. Damn. Eight days," I murmured to the sky. Anthony's head dropped down and he gave a smile, which he suppressed or forced, I couldn't tell. I continued: "Cross-Country season seems like it was yesterday. Running until we escaped in the woods and then walking..." I glanced at him and grinned, "...Glen and the boxer incident." Anthony lit up, showing his large white teeth: I finally had found the right spot. Anthony's laugh always got me to smile, its particular mischievousness and the way it always started with a hard snort. My mind continued to filter through the year's memories. We both agreed the year had flown by. The happier moments rose up in sequence to the memory's surface...

I watched my bobber slip up and down over the ripples, the red top hard to miss among the black water. Anthony's smile faded a bit and I worried he was getting bored. Maybe I am, too. Damn. I looked at my watch. Quarter after five. Damn. We don't have enough of these days to just be, to get away from school and stop having to project ourselves to everyone else. Though my eyes stared at the calm ripples of the little cove, I looked at the crowded halls of Doverton High, and the flapping mouths of the cliquing freshmen girls forming at the bottoms of the stairwells, and their contrast with Lizzie walking past them, alone and smiling with the light on her hair, the bustle of the parking lot after the last bell sounded, McCourt bloodied and smiling after his fight with Timmy Ryan, the senior awards night when her green eyes shone clear against her white dress.

"She told me she waited as long as she could for me to ask her to prom, Antoine. I never realized." Half of my lip curled in a smile as I shook my head, making sure he knew I wasn't too much affected.

He turned to me, "Who, Liz?" I nodded slowly and he chuckled. "Smooth, Finnegan."

"That's gone now." In my imagination I let her fade into a black backdrop, her round green eyes sad and fixed on mine. The glistening in her sad eyes against the darkening background made them even prettier. She's looking at me. Incredible, I thought. Eyes like hers make you think twice; just sticks. They're almost more beautiful in my imagination.

I closed my eyes and let her go from sight. I told Anthony enough. In reality, Liz had looked my way only a few times, and was known for being a flirt. She had some boyfriend up in some college in Boston. But when I thought of her, he didn't exist, and she always looked at me with those sad green eyes.

I knew it was a lie, but, what a lie it was.

The squirrel now munched on a stray acorn beside the path, then stopped mid-chew to sniff the wind. What more to this day, what do we lack? I am here to enjoy a day of days, get away from the bustle and silliness of school, just be, simply be with my friends. A simple project: some rods, a pond, and a beautiful sky. Yes, this is great. Anthony's brow had furrowed in thought. I hope he's enjoying this. Of course he is; he understands. He knows this is important. And the other two?

Sebastian's shirt wrapped around his head. He still fished where we had lunched, in the sun twenty yards from where I sat. Thigh-deep in the water, his hands mechanically reeled in and cast again. His lips fixed into a half-pucker and his head leaned slightly back. I laughed silently: every group needs a Sebastian. That phrase sounded pretty good; I lit another smoke, and after a slow exhale repeated it to Anthony.

"Truly. He adds a lot. Wonder who he'll hang around next year."

"Not Nick, he's moving away from us, or, from you, I should say, to Ashenton."

Nathaniel, jeans rolled up to his knees, with his little orange tackle-box held close next to his thigh and his Ugly-stick balanced in his hand, strolled down the shore eyeing the little nooks of the little cove. He puffed rhythmically from the cigarette hanging aslant from his lips. He mumbled to himself. I leaned over to Anthony. "And this guy," I

pointed to Nathaniel, “no one has ever figured out. He’s offended so many girls with his comments they’re all in love with him. Yesterday he told Alice that women shouldn’t be allowed to work outside the home.” I called out to him, “Isn’t that right, Nathaniel?”

“What?” He yelled without looking at me. He had stopped walking; his body leaned out over the water and he peered underneath an overhanging branch looking for lurking bass.

“What you said yesterday to Cindy about how women shouldn’t work?” Anthony and I waited for his reply with smiles on our faces.

“What? They shouldn’t,” he said without stopping his search. Moving away a bit from the water, he squatted down and rummaged through his tacklebox. “What the hell? Where’s my devil spoon? Where...where did I put it?”

He stood up, stared at the ground with a furrow on his forehead, and arms on his hips.

I took in the lake once more from left to right, eventually gazing again upon the white shiner bucket that was placed directly beside me. Leaning to the right over my shoulder, my nose was a foot from the pale bluish tank water. Most of the minnows floated on the top. They drifted in tangents, occasionally rubbing against their dead companions. Their eyes bulged, black and sickly. I hadn’t noticed how fragile they were until that day. The tails, which in the morning were so fast, curved off at odd angles, at times giving a tiny push: a feeble attempt to escape the beige orb staring at them from above the water. Those that still had energy to swim did so, but on their sides and at the surface, revolving continuously around the center of the bucket. Big eyes, all pupil and staring nowhere. They had a creamy film around them, and held my attention.

I thought I heard some words spoken: “Did you use my devil-spoon?” Without lifting my gaze off the shiners, I noticed two hairy legs in rolled-up jeans over the lip of the bucket. Just go away, Nate, I thought. The scales of one of the bigger shiners were raised as if they would soon fall off. His fins were rotted. I felt a jab in my side.

“Hey! Where’s my devil spoon?”

“Hold on.” The legs didn’t go away, but I was seeing something I had never seen before. I couldn’t miss it.

“Michael, they’re shiners. Come on.”

“Just a second, you wouldn’t understand.” I wanted to say it lightly but it came out flat. At least I have this; that damn minute-hand may be flying but I have this thing to look at. If only he’d leave me for a second to let this impress. If only Anthony would smile more, if only those damn burgers would cook, if only I had the guts to ever say more than a stupid-faced hello to Lizzie and all those other fair-haired girls that ever caught my imagination, or if I could just spend one more summer lying out in the front lawn with the white clouds passing over and Dad coming home when there’s still plenty of daylight to shoot the basketball until Mom calls dinner and we wash the grime off our hands and then after watch a ballgame until I fall asleep on the couch...

Mass death. Massachusetts’ death. Mass death, all in a few hours. I followed the biggest shiner with my eyes as he began to spiral down to the bottom as they sometimes do. He sailed downwards, back and forth in clockwise pattern. He was almost to the bottom.

A flash of white and a sprinkle of water. There was no bucket, no legs, no shiners, just grass. My head snapped up: Nathaniel took two large strides to the shore. There was a splash, and the shiners were in the black water, moving away from each other amidst pockets of bubbles. The bucket clanged to the ground beside Nathaniel. He observed his work. I tried to get up and realized I was already standing.

“Why the hell d’you do that?”

Sebastian was laughing from a distance. Anthony remained seated, and let out a quick confused chuckle.

Nathaniel pushed his blonde hair from his eyes and then put his hands in his jean pockets. “They’re dead.”

I walked up next to him. We stood shoulder to shoulder. I cocked my head slightly to the side, and bit my lip.

“Oh, come on, you weren’t fishing anyway.” He gave me a slow slap on the back and took out his pack of Reds.

“What? What are you talking about? What do you think I came here for?”

“I came here to fish.” He stuck one of the cigarettes between my lips and lit it; I complied, not changing my puzzled expression “Shit, Finnegan, you gotta get rid of ‘em anyhow.” I looked at him. His eyes locked on mine, and glistened, their green color

dark and solid. His eyes weren't narrowed, but looked straight at me; he wasn't grinning, but instead had a pleasant smile which looked friendly. Not one of his old two looks. "I saw you two today. You didn't come here to fish," he muttered so that Anthony couldn't hear, "I don't know what you came here for. But don't matter. Forget the minnows, let 'em be."

Let 'em be, he says. Huh. In their new bigger world they seemed weak, insignificant. I instinctively picked up the bucket next to Nathaniel. It looked naked without its bluish water, just white plastic all marked with scratches, utterly empty. It felt light in my grasp, which made my grip feel strong and ready. I lifted it up and down a few times; incredibly light after its contents were spilled. Let 'em be, he says. I wanted to smile, but a last trailing wisp of grasping vanity held my lips. But the wisp was passing.

The bucket flew for 10 yards, far past the dead shiners into the open. In the air it turned slowly, the white plastic dull in the shadows of the trees. I now watched the half-submerged bucket sway up and down. "Thanks, that was good," I said. Nathaniel grinned his old silly grin, but now I noticed the deep green in his eyes, a green that was always there.

There was brief sucking sound and a minnow I'd been watching disappeared. A few moments later another dead shiner vanished. "That thing's huge!" Nathaniel pointed down into the black water, and suddenly the shape appeared. A massive brown oval, four claws wiggling on the sides, and receding tail, and the gnarled head touching the surface: a snapper had found supper. "Now it was really worth it." Nathaniel encouraged the snapper, giving a yelp every time another shiner was sucked down. I gave a grunted laugh; Nathaniel caught it and turned to the others. "Hah! He's all right. The 'olsnappah make Mikey all bettah?" I gave him a good punch in the arm, and he snickered as he rubbed his shoulder.

I looked back at the turtle: "I guess I can't get that bucket right now." I looked at my watch. "Well, this day is about done. Let's go do something...what do you want to do, Nathaniel?" He concentrated for a moment, then said, "Wiffle-ball." Anthony shot up from his spot. Nathaniel stopped me, "Where's the damn devil spoon?"

"It's in the other tackle box, I used it after lunch. Are you ready to go?"

"I'm ready if you got a smoke for me."

We walked back in a line. Sebastian skipped on ahead, walking backwards at times so he could reenact the whole day. Behind him walked Anthony, who amused himself in watching Sebastian. I walked behind him. Nathaniel walked last.

“Hey, Nathaniel,” I said as we walked past the bog, “let’s forget about that, ok?”

“What? The Wiffle-ball?” At first I was a bit confused at his answer, but then understood.

“Uh, yeah...well...never mind, we should play.”

“Good.”

As we climbed up the hill just before the street, I held my rod low to the ground, watching it dig into the ground and then pop out again. Nathaniel asked, “You trying to do some summer planting there, hand on the plow?” I smiled and continued grazing the ground with the rod, but I didn’t turn around.