Beat

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Two kids drive down Singer Ave. in the middle of the day. They give the rusty old Mustang a bored hug as each dangles a lazy arm out the window."

Cover Page Footnote
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The Old Catholic Priest

The old Catholic priest
Walks sad, but quick,
With head hung low
And case in hand.
His arm of black
Has no dents, for
It has not josted
For many years,
And lack of a mail
Has made the knight frail.
His head is gray
With many thoughts
Of another day,
When baseball and Harry S.
Were quite the rage.
Oh, what child's hand
Could he have held?
What woman's stew
Could he have smelled?
What, in the past,
Could he have foretold?
Now, in the autumn
Of his life,
What need he
Thoughts of a wife?
He chose his diverging road,
And paved it well
With his steps and Holy Code.
Now as leaves fall
From his limbs,
And light leaves
The chamber of his heart,
Where does he walk
Alone?
What parish sits
And waits
For salvation anymore?
Yet, there goes another Catholic priest,
In a hurry,
Out the door.
He feels he has a mission,
And has yet to do much more.

Roger Scalzo

Two kids drive down Singer Ave. in the middle of the day. They give the rusty old Mustang a bored hug as each dangles a lazy arm out the window.

"Damn, it's hot," says the driver, and wipes a sweaty hand across his sweaty forehead. His hair, long in the back, usually wings up at the ends and all the girls go crazy over it. But today it's matted straight against the back of his neck. "I could go for a beer."

His friend in the passenger seat grunts in agreement. His blue eyes are glazed, like windows that haven't been washed in awhile. "Man let's do something!" he whines, jerking his head around. He slams his fist onto the screeching dashboard, already faded and cracked from long hours under the sun.

The driver is getting nervous. He doesn't like to disappoint his friend. But they've already polished off the four Bud Lites he swiped from dad's stock in the garage.

"Jesus! I gotta take this damn shirt off!" the driver says. By now his brows are knit together and his lips form a thin line of concentration. "There's gotta be something man. I mean, I'd get more beers but last time that cashier dude almost took my license away. He said he was gonna call the cops."

His friend turns away and throws his head hard against the seat, his eyes half-closed. He tries to blow a few sticky strands of dark brown hair out of his eyes, but it's not working. His fingers drum an irritating rhythm against the door of the car.

The driver turns up the radio to drown out the sound. It's making him nervous. There's a lot of static on the air, and that annoys him too. But it's the only station he can get.

"Hey let's go swimming or somethin' huh?" he says to his friend. "I just can't take this heat."

They are passing their high school. The grass in front of the building is parched and withered a sickening yellow color. One of the bushes that stands by the front doors seems a skeleton of its old self: the heat has turned its green splendor into fried brown clumps that look unnatural against the stately brick backdrop of the building.

His friend runs both hands through his hair. His breathing is a little heavy. "...my last year," he mumbles.

"What?"

"I said—THIS IS MY LAST YEAR." His laugh comes out more like a short bark. "Seniors, man—that's it. He cooks an imaginary pistol and pulls an imaginary trigger. He grins.

A bunch of guys are playing basketball in the parking lot behind the building, and the driver turns in. None of them wear shirts, and the sweat from their bodies glistens and the sun is in his eyes. He looks to his right and notices that his friend has put his shades on already.

One of the guys in the lot is chugging Gator-Aid and suddenly the driver feels like his throat will close up if he
doesn't drink something soon. He also feels like playing some hoops.

"Come on now let's hit some three-pointers," the driver says.

His friend doesn't reply. His head is turned toward the school and the tall, skinny kid with long black hair who seems to be looking expectantly toward the Mustang. He is leaning against the building and he is wearing jeans and a long-sleeved shirt in this 90 degree heat. He looks unnaturally pale.

His friend drums out a sloppy beat on the dashboard with his fingertips. As he gets out of the car he lets out a long, slow breath before he turns around. He shuts the door softly, and then leans his head back in such far that the two friends noses are almost touching. A single bead of sweat drips from the friend's nose.

"I got a hit of my own to make man," he says. He grins again. "Besides, three-pointers just don't get me high anymore."

The driver feels his throat closing up again and for one ridiculous moment he feels like he might cry.

But then he reminds himself that it's no big deal. That his friend is still the guy who first taught him how to do a lay-up. The guy who taught him how to change a tire, ask a girl out and take any guy on in a fight. The guy who's been his best friend since second grade.

The driver closes his eyes tightly and covers them with two clenched fists and when he takes them away from his eyes they are wet and it is not from sweat.

As his friend heads for the school the driver gets out of the car and notices that the rest of the guys are heading home. He picks the big orange ball off the gravel and it feels heavy in his hands. He begins to bounce it, slowly at first, and then faster, and harder until it feels like the ball has a life of its own and he is just pounding the shit out of it and the stupid ball just doesn't realize it's not going to win. He lunge the ball from about mid-court and stands exhausted as he watches it clang noisily against the rim and bounce back toward him. It is still bouncing when he climbs into the car.

He waits for his friend, like he always does. They're best friends. The driver leans his head heavily against the seat and turns on the radio. His back is still drenched and he starts to feel a chill. But that's just because the sun is going down.

He won't have to worry about deciding what they're going to do for the rest of the day. When his friend gets back in the car he'll say he doesn't want to do anything. And then he'll grin.

He hears his friend's labored footsteps and then his hands searching for a way to open the door. The driver leans over and opens it for him.

He coaxes the engine over and pumps on the gas pedal, but he doesn't need to turn up the radio. There'll be no drumming fingertips on the ride home.
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