

SHORT STORY NIGHT



Meet author
Christopher
Chambers in
person!

Christopher Chambers

“Carl, Under His Car”

Barry Hannah

“Even Greenland”

Read these stories and join Neenah Public Library staff at Lion's Tail Brewing Monday, April 8th at 7:00 pm for a one-hour discussion featuring trivia, laughs, and other surprises. 21 and older.

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nd number on the back. She handed

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/ic. "He's got a keen interest in local

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Carl, Under His Car

Carl, under his car on a Saturday morning, stares at the bell housing of the automatic transmission that has settled heavily onto the left side of his chest, and he thinks about the conversation he had with his wife earlier this morning. The argument was not unusual. This time Angel, their sixteen-year-old daughter, wants to go on a school trip to Washington, D.C. Carl is sure this is not a good idea—a bunch of hormone-crazed teenagers on a three-day trip to a big city with only a handful of chaperones. Three days also means two nights the kids will spend in a hotel. It isn't just the money, though that is no small consideration. The thought of his Angel in a hotel room causes Carl to squirm, and when he does, a sharp pain shoots through his left side. Jesus Christ, he winces. Somewhere deep within him there is a twinge of guilt tinged almost imperceptibly with pleasure. Or vice versa. Sometimes it's as if he'd never left Holy Cross High School.

Gloria left this morning in a huff to spend the day shopping at the local mall. Carl retired to the garage to work on his project—a 1972 Buick Gran Sport in an early stage of restoration. A repair manual lies open on the workbench, grease-smearing fingerprints mark the page for automatic transmission removal and installation. Step 14. Remove the bolts that attach the transmission bell housing to the engine. Step 15. While using a pry bar to ensure that the

torque converter stays firmly mounted to the transmission, pull the transmission off the engine.

Carl doesn't recall what the next step is. He does remember that the manual states that installation is basically the reverse of removal. And he is sure the manual does not have specific instructions for removing a transmission that is wedged between the engine and a hapless shade tree mechanic, effectively pinning him under the car. He hears his dead father's voice, the sneer in it when he says the words shade tree mechanic. Carl's father, the auto mechanic. Carl Sr., a real auto mechanic with a closet full of blue work shirts, long and short sleeve, with the "Mr. Goodwrench" patch over the left pocket and his name, Carl, in script above the right.

The garage door gapes open to a mild, sunny day, and Carl worries that one of his neighbors might happen by, see him under the car, and stop to chat. He does not want to chat with any of his neighbors right now, and as much as he would like to be out from under his car, he doesn't much like the idea of asking, say, Bruce Edelbrock for help. He knows he would never hear the end of it. He imagines Bruce down at the Town Tap. *There he was, I tell ya, pinned to the floor under his own car like a goddamn bug. I don't know what woulda happened to him if I hadn't stopped by. Hub. Hub. Hub.* That laugh.

The pain is not too bad, Carl thinks. From where he is pressed to the oil-stained concrete floor, he can see the corner of his workbench, the open toolbox, a wooden shelf bowing under the weight of a row of old baby food jars filled with nails, cotter pins, assorted nuts and bolts. He sees the calendar hanging on the pegboard among the hand tools and extension cords. Even though it is late March, Miss February still smiles warmly in an orange bikini. She stands

firmly mounted to the transmission, off the engine.

That the next step is. He does remember that installation is basically the same and he is sure the manual does not say anything for removing a transmission that is on the engine and a hapless shade tree mechanic is leaning over the car. He hears the sneer in it when he says the words Carl's father, the auto mechanic. Carl has a closet full of blue work shirts, with the "Mr. Goodwrench" patch over the name, Carl, in script above the right. The doors are open to a mild, sunny day, and one of his neighbors might happen by, and he would stop to chat. He does not want to see his neighbors right now, and as much as he would like to get out from under his car, he doesn't want to ask anyone, say, Bruce Edelbrock for help. He never hears the end of it. He imagines his father in Tap. *There he was, I tell ya, pinned to the car like a goddamn bug. I don't know what he was thinking if I hadn't stopped by. Huh. Huh.*

And, Carl thinks. From where he is standing on the red concrete floor, he can see the wall, the open toolbox, a wooden shelf with a row of old baby food jars filled with various sized nuts and bolts. He sees the white pegboard among the hand tools. He remembers even though it is late March, Miss March is standing in an orange bikini. She stands

in glossy living color next to a new Ridgid pipe threader, one hand on her bare hip, the other caressing the sleek machine. Carl looked ahead, into the future, and found Miss March, sultry with a twenty-four-inch pipe wrench, somehow less aesthetically pleasing, and so has been content to remain in February in his garage.

Carl has worked a pipe threader like Miss February's. His brother-in-law, a heating and plumbing contractor, has a similar threader, though his is filthy with cutting oil. It resembles the one on the calendar, well, about like Gloria resembles Miss February, Carl thinks, and immediately he feels a twinge of guilt that is not at all like the pain in his shoulder, nor tinged with pleasure of any kind. Carl loves his wife. He has worked with her brother since being laid off from the canning company, where he'd worked since high school, as he'd always expected to. He lugs the machine from the garage and to the truck during the week and has come to resent the heavy threader.

The underside of the Buick smells of used motor oil and automatic transmission fluid. Smells that remind Carl of his father. Carl, when underneath cars, has never quite shaken the feeling that his father is watching critically his every move. This causes him to try too hard with ratchets and pry bars, to lose his cool when a bolt won't loosen or a wrench slips. Gloria teases that he can't seem to change the oil on one of their cars without barking the skin off his knuckles. And she's more right than Carl would like to admit. All the way back to auto shop. But he finds peace in the garage, under his car. More and more, it has become the only place in his house where he feels at ease. With Angel older, in high school now, Carl has become an outsider in a house full of women. He never has understood women, he admits to

himself, and they become more and more mysterious to him as time goes on. Carl's mother died when he was a child, of a weak heart, his father had told him.

Carl feels fluid trickle slowly from his shoulder to the inside of his arm and into his armpit. It tickles some, and he hopes it's transmission fluid, a bright viscous red that doesn't look at all like blood. He's afraid to move his arm. He grimaces at the tickle, and imagines how he must look, under his car, grimacing while transmission fluid runs into his armpit, and he laughs, triggering a sharp pain in his chest, like the one he felt when he first tried to move after the transmission slipped off the floor jack onto him. The transmission didn't really fall on him. He'd been almost snug beneath it, trying to free the torque converter with a pry bar when the jack kicked out, and the transmission, a Turboglide, settled into him like a bowling ball into a cheap mattress. Not to imply that Carl is anything like a cheap mattress, though Carl Sr. used to bowl league every Wednesday night at the Stardust Lanes.

Carl closes his eyes to think. The concrete is cold beneath him, and he can hear small sounds. A whir that he identifies as the electric clock on the garage wall. He stole the clock from the plant when he was laid off after twelve years of faithful service. That was what, ten years ago now? How has it come to this? he wonders, the years flying by like mere passing thoughts, like faraway dreams.

In the distance he hears a voice, constant and vaguely familiar. It's Harry Carey, he realizes. Someone in the neighborhood is listening to the Cubs game. They're playing the Reds today. Preseason. Carl thinks the pitching staff is looking better this year, but he isn't too hopeful. Being a Cubs fan, he knows, means maintaining a stubborn glimmer of

more and more mysterious to him. No one had told him that anything would happen. No one had told him that he would die when he was a child, of a fever that had been told him.

He falls slowly from his shoulder to the floor. It hits his armpit. It tickles some, and it's a little bit of oil on fluid, a bright viscous red that he doesn't know. He's afraid to move his arm. He thinks of his father, and imagines how he must look, how he would look while transmission fluid runs into his eyes, triggering a sharp pain in his head. It's the first time he tried to move after he fell off the floor jack onto him. The wrench falls on him. He'd been almost free to free the torque converter with the wrench, but he'd been kicked out, and the transmission, the wrench, to him like a bowling ball into a ball. He doesn't imply that Carl is anything like a ball. Carl Sr. used to bowl league every week at Stardust Lanes.

He thinks. The concrete is cold beneath his feet. He hears all kinds of sounds. A whir that he identifies as the garage door. He stole the clock from the garage. He was laid off after twelve years of work. He doesn't know what, ten years ago now? How has time passed, the years flying by like mere moments, like mere daydreams.

He hears a voice, constant and vaguely familiar. He realizes. Someone in the neighborhood is watching the Cubs game. They're playing the Yankees. He thinks the pitching staff is looking good. He isn't too hopeful. Being a Cubs fan, he's maintaining a stubborn glimmer of

hope in the face of almost certain disappointment. He tries to make out the radio broadcast, but Harry's words seem to be carried along on the breeze, and only the sound of them is blown into the garage. It would be nice to be able to hear the game while he lays here, he thinks. Carl is not given to panic, and he has not yet begun to worry. Not too much. He is short of breath, but Gloria will be home eventually. He can't see the clock, or the wristwatch on his immobilized left arm, but he figures it is close to noon. Which reminds him that he hasn't eaten since a coffee and Danish this morning. His stomach rumbles.

Carl tries to figure where Gloria might be, to determine when she might be coming home. He pictures her leaving the house this morning. It must have been around ten. She would drive down Palisade to the thrift store, maybe pick up some work clothes for him, an alarm clock for her collection. Half an hour or forty-five minutes there. Then on to the mall. Carl loses her at the mall. He goes there once a year, at Christmas, and it gives him heartburn just to think about it.

Hell, he has no idea where she is, or how long she'll be. She might be out with Jennie Hurst for all he knows. Maybe she and Jennie are at the Continental Lounge across from the mall right now, drinking White Russians and talking about their husbands. Carl doesn't want to think about that possibility. At the last neighborhood cocktail party, Jennie came up to Carl where he stood by the hors d'oeuvres, and she ran her long, manicured fingers lightly down his arm and smiled.

"When is that hot rod of yours going to be ready for a test ride, Carl?"

All the while, Henry, her husband, stood across the room watching, leering at them. And Hurst, the school

psychologist, was one of the chaperones for the D.C. trip. Which gets Carl back to thinking about Angel. His Angel. Carl remembers like yesterday the day she was born, a little pink bundle in his wife's arms and him feeling like he'd just come awake for the first time in his life, that everything up to this moment suddenly meant nothing. Everything beyond this moment an unwritten book. The universe shifted, and he was no longer at the center of it. This soft little bundle was. When he held her, he realized this was the most important thing he'd ever done, and he swore that he would always be there for her. Always.

But now his Angel is like a stranger to him, listening to that goddamn hip hop music. She rolls her eyes at him when he remarks on the music and the baggy pants, her bare midriff and the blue anodized ring in her pierced navel. She spends hours on the phone and can't utter a sentence without using the word "like" at least half a dozen times. He knows he sounds like his old man, but he can't help himself.

When some kid appears at the door to pick Angel up for a date, Carl makes a point of trying to scare the hell out of him. A dark look, a crushing handshake, his shirtsleeves rolled up over his tattooed, muscled biceps. He knows what is on these boys' minds and he doesn't like it one bit. He remembers getting the same treatment from Gloria's old man when he was their age and it pains him to remember how ineffectual it was, how he had his hands up under her sweater before they were two blocks away.

Carl had another Gran Sport back then. The love of his life. Red with white stripes. All the factory options. The big block 455. Early one February morning coming back from Wisconsin, where the drinking age was still eighteen, going too fast, he missed a curve on a wet country road and

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rolled the Buick three times. It only recently occurred to Carl that surviving the wreck was something like a miracle. The car was totaled. Carl and Bruce were both thrown free. Carl awoke half-buried in the wet soil and corn stubble, staring up at a fingernail moon and the white blur of the milky way arcing across the night sky. It took him some time to remember who and where he was. When he pulled himself up from the muddy field, he saw the twisted ruin of the Buick upside down above him, its headlights still dimly reaching out into the darkness. He felt as if he had died. Bruce lay back in the ditch, still drunk, and laughing. Laughing like an idiot.

A lifetime later, Carl saw an ad in the paper for a restorable Buick Gran Sport, and it seemed like the answer to something. His desire for the car was more need than want, and he borrowed from the savings account for Angel's college to get it. **There was a long bad time with Gloria over that.**

An almost full can of Old-Style sweats just beyond Carl's reach. He picks up the half inch ratchet handle with the extension and carefully extends it toward the beer can. He feels the pain in his chest again, and he lets the ratchet fall. He turns his head slightly and looks up to Miss February, still blessing the threader.

A small crack of sound in the distance. At Wrigley Field, a baseball arcs high away from a swung wooden bat. The sound of Harry Carey's voice rises in volume and intensity. Carl holds his breath, hoping that it means good news for the Cubs, a homer, runs scored at the least, a game-winning rally. But he can't make out the words, and the sound subsides to a low murmur, color commentary, the lull between batters. For Carl, the long fly ball continues to hang in the sky, its flight unresolved.

When he has calculated the reach, the foot-pounds of pull required to slide the can across the floor without tipping it, he again grasps the ratchet handle, reaches out and slowly draws the can toward him with the care of a master machinist.

When Carl has the can in his hand, he revels in its cool wetness a moment before tipping it over his mouth. Beer spills down his chin and soaks into his shirt as he drinks. He thinks again about lunch. The fried chicken left over from last night is in the refrigerator. He likes leftover fried chicken.

He can see out the garage door a square of driveway, his mailbox, the top half of the duplex across the street, blue sky above. The Shelby kid rolls by delivering papers from a skateboard. The Saturday Tribune skips across Carl's drive and into the holly bush. He almost yells after at the kid but decides against it. This is not the time to get into it with the paperboy. Carl wonders where Gloria is now. *How long can a person shop?* He knows that in Gloria's case unfortunately, the answer is a long goddamn time. He closes his eyes. The faint murmur of the ball game continues in the distance. The long fly ball still soars deep in center field. The clock on the wall whirs. Down the street a dog barks. And he hears footsteps coming down the sidewalk.

Carl holds his breath. The footsteps stop, and then start up again, coming closer. The footsteps come up the driveway. He opens his eyes. In the narrow gap between his feet and the gas tank of the Buick, he sees a pair of legs, faded blue jeans, athletic shoes, one untied, shuffling toward him. Not Bruce, he hopes. But it is Bruce, and now he hears the chuckle, low and suggestive. The sharp slap of an open hand on the top of the Buick.

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"The fuck you doing under there?" says Bruce.

"What do you think?"

"Taking a nap?" Bruce laughs. "Huh huh."

"Maybe." *Maybe I'm dreaming*, thinks Carl, under his car.

"Listening to the Cubs?" says Bruce.

"Yeah."

"Yeah?" Carl imagines Bruce looking around, seeing the
radio on the workbench, unplugged for the cord to the
trouble light. The light hangs from the underside of the
open hood, hooked into one of the ram air induction scoops,
and it casts a yellow light down around the big block V-8.
Carl, with the exception of his right arm, is in the shadows.

"I was," says Carl. "A while ago."

"I couldn't stomach it neither. Got no pitching at all this
year." Bruce belches, and shuffles over to the workbench.
Carl can see the back of his head as he leans over to get a
closer look at Miss February.

"Wouldn't mind running some pipe through that
threader." Bruce whistles. "Know what I mean."

"What do you mean, Bruce?" Carl says sharply.

"You know, man. I mean..."

"Forget it. I know what you mean."

"What's up? You sound kind of weird like."

"Yeah?"

"You need a hand?"

"No. I'm thinking."

"Thinking about what?"

"This tranny..."

"Turboglide, right?"

"Yeah."

"Them are good trannys."

"Yeah."

All I have to do is ask him to roll that floor jack back under here, Carl thinks, and we could get this thing up enough for me to get out from under it. But for some reason, he can't ask. He and Bruce went to high school together, played on the conference champion baseball team together, even dated a couple of the same girls. Carl remembers Bruce bragging once about tearing the clothes off that skinny little Muldowney girl in the bushes at a keg party, how she was so drunk she couldn't walk or talk. And Carl remembers not saying anything and he has never forgotten this.

Carl remembers sitting up in a muddy field and staring at the wreck of his car, feeling like his life was over, and Bruce's laughter ringing in his ears. *That was what, twenty years ago? Christ,* he thinks.

"I'm going to the Tap. Come with and have a cold one," Bruce says. He squats down and peers under the car at Carl, squints at him there in the shadows under the Buick.

Carl looks at the big, sideways face of his old friend and feels a powerful urge to flail at it with the heavy ratchet that lays by his hand. The urge is to hurt. To cause bodily harm. He takes a deep breath. Exhales.

"Nah. I'm in the middle of this here ..."

"Tranny?"

"Yeah."

"Anything you need before I go?"

Carl thinks about the cardboard bucket of fried chicken in the refrigerator, the cordless phone, which could be anywhere in the house, the Cubs game and the unplugged radio. He thinks, for no reason at all, about Angel.

"No," Carl says.

Bruce shuffles off down the driveway and down the street to the Tap where the usual crowd sits at their usual places

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at the bar, watching the Cubs win or lose another game. Gloria, meanwhile, browses through paperback classics at the Books-R-Us outlet. Carl, still under his car, hears from a couple blocks away the deep thumping of a high-power car stereo system with the bass pushed all the way up. A buzzing begins on the workbench as the thumping gets closer. The tools in Carl's garage begin to vibrate. Carl feels the low frequencies pulse through the transmission, through him, and through the concrete slab on which he lies. That Puerto Rican kid that Angel's been seeing, no doubt.

The kid drives a gleaming old Chevy Impala low rider with thirteen coats of hand-rubbed candy-apple lacquer, a trunk full of Die Hards and one of those hydraulic lift kits that drops the chassis down to within inches of the pavement and causes the car to hop up and down obscenely at stop-and-go lights. Carl can tell by the clatter of lifters from under the hood, and the blue-black smoke from the tailpipe that the motor is on its last legs. He wonders what kind of person would paint a car that barely runs. The batteries and the shocks are likely worth more than the whole goddamn car. Stomach acid gurgles and threatens to rise in his throat.

He refuses to learn the kid's name. Ralph, he calls the kid. Or Rudie. Ra-hoolio, if he's in a good mood. What does Angel see in a skinny, sorry-ass kid with the crotch of his pants hanging down almost to his knees? She's asserting herself, Gloria tells him. Let them be. They're just kids. That's what worries Carl. He and Gloria were just kids, too. But they weren't this stupid. Were they?

The Impala bounces to a stop at the curb outside Carl's house. The kid knows enough to turn the music down here, but Carl can still hear the insistent, muted thump of it, and the buzz and rattle of door panels and window glass. A car

door slams. Sneakers skipping up the sidewalk. Angel. The front door slams shut. Carl imagines her dropping her jacket on the floor in the hall. She will never learn. She runs to her room, maybe. He has always been uncomfortable there and will only stand in the doorway trying not to look too closely at anything in the fragrant, jumbled room. So much color and life. Carl hears water running through the pipes inside his house. Noises in the kitchen. The side door opens.

"Daddy?"

"That you, Angel?" Carl's voice breaks slightly.

"How's your car coming?"

"Fine, honey."

Carl can see her feet. Pink canvas high tops poised. Her jeans taper and end mid-calf, revealing a hands width of thin leg, the graceful curve of ankle below. Carl has a great and sudden desire to hug his daughter, to hold her tightly in his arms for a long, long time.

"Me and Raul are going to the park. To hang out, okay?"

She's lost to me, Carl thinks, and he feels his heart breaking, the weight upon it almost unbearable.

"Okay," he says.

Angel skips toward the open garage door, and the sun-drenched, dangerous world. Carl struggles to follow the pink shoes in their carefree dance away from him.

"Angel," he calls out.

She stops. Turns back, pink shoes pivoting. "Yeah?"

"Be careful, honey."

And then she is gone. Carl lies under his car, eyes closed. The clock whirs. The world outside turns. It is Saturday, and spring is near. At Wrigley Field, relief pitchers warm up in the bullpen. Carl breathes and tries not to think about anything.

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Carl looks up and sees Miss February move. Her head turns slightly so that she is looking down at him. She continues to smile, but in her smile is a look of pity and tenderness that he has not noticed before. The pipe threader beside her turns slowly, whirs smoothly, masking the far away chatter of the Cubs game. Miss February steps down from the workbench and moves toward Carl, her bare feet gliding over the cold concrete. A warm glow fills the garage.

She bends down beside the Buick, reaches under the car toward him. Carl in turn reaches out to her, his right hand outstretched, seeking her touch with neither thought nor hesitation. His right hand. He stares at her, transfixed by the vibrant, tanned skin of her arm, her hand, her fingers. Flawless, he thinks. Impossible. She touches him lightly, and in her touch, Carl feels the sure knowledge that everything will be all right. He relaxes, and only then realizes that he has been holding tension in his body, fighting against the weight that is upon him. He gives in to it. Accepts it. And it is lifted from him.

* * *

Later, when the pilgrims arrive to kneel in Carl's garage at the shrine to Our Lady of Skokie, as Miss February is christened by the media, Carl drives to a bar in another neighborhood where no one knows him and watches the Cubs with strangers. The Buick sits home in his driveway in an arrested state of partial restoration, covered with a tarp. Gloria sits inside the garage door in an upholstered chair she brought out from the family room, making change, and crocheting another afghan, or a sweater for Carl. The pilgrims pay five dollars to kneel at Carl's workbench and pray to the Ridgid Tool calendar.

Some of them believe they see Miss February's smile broaden, a light brightening in her eyes, a slight, sympathetic downward nod of her head as she looks upon them, one hand on her erotic, virginal hip, the other on the holy threader. Some reverently touch the stain on the garage floor where Carl lay pinned beneath the Buick before he was saved by Our Lady. They anoint themselves with the slick trace of the transmission fluid that coats the tips of their fingers. Some purchase small souvenir wrenches adorned with an enameled picture of the Virgin Mary (after consulting with the parish priest, Gloria decides against using the image of Miss February on the souvenirs; a letter from the Ridgid Tool company threatens legal action if their calendar, or their model is used in any type of marketing campaign. The church itself withholds judgment on the alleged miracle, issuing an ambiguous statement confirming that God does indeed work in mysterious ways, and that anything that increases faith is good, whether or not it is officially miraculous).

Gloria takes the money to the Savings and Loan to deposit into the account for Angel's college education. For the first time in years, Carl and Gloria do not argue about money, or about Angel. Carl gives Angel his blessing to go on the trip to Washington, D.C. He sees her off to O'Hare and hugs her for a long time in the terminal while the rest of the kids crowd toward the boarding gate. Angel hugs him back.

Carl, back to work with his brother-in-law, threads pipe and daydreams. On the job site, Carl runs the threader with a new proprietary air. He savors the smell of the cutting oil, the faint metallic taste in the back of his throat. Sometimes he stands next to the threader with his hand on the filthy

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By August, the pilgrims will have dwindled away, or
 Gloria will be forced by the city council (already the neigh-
 bors are complaining about the traffic and parking) to close
 the shrine. The Buick, freshly painted and rebuilt, will be
 back in the garage where Carl will work on the interior. A
 new headliner, carpeting, the seats reupholstered. Carl will
 install a new radio himself. He has a glow-in-the-dark statue
 of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the dashboard. He will take
 Gloria for a drive on a Saturday night in the fall, park by
 the lake where they can smell the water and hear the hush
 of it lapping at the beach. Tune an oldies station in low. Her
 head on his shoulder, her hand on his chest. Carl will close
 his eyes and feel what it is like to have everything he ever
 thought he wanted, and then realize that it somehow isn't
 like he imagined it would be. And still, it will be all right.

* * *

Or perhaps Gloria arrives home from the mall and walks
 into the garage, her arms filled with shopping bags. She sees
 Carl, under his car. She frowns at the tool calendar hanging
 above the workbench.

"Why's your calendar still on February?"

"Huh?" Carl, shaken from a bizarre reverie. "Gloria?"

"Are you all right?"

"Gloria . . ."

"Just a minute. I have to set these bags down before I
 drop something."

Gloria goes into the house and Carl hears her shoes
 click across the linoleum. The radio comes on. The Rolling
 Stones singing "You Can't Always Get What You Want."
 Carl hears Gloria singing along. Her voice gives him chills.

She will return soon. She will position the floor jack to lift the transmission up off him. She will stay calm. He has always admired her ability to handle a crisis.

In high school when the Weber kid almost drowned in the pool, when everyone else stood there staring at the limp body on the stark, white concrete, it was Gloria who rushed up, knelt down and breathed the life back into him. Carl thinks this might have been the moment when he fell in love with her. He remembers being paralyzed, the smell of chlorine, water running down his face, his chest, his legs. And the image of Gloria, her slim, graceful fingers clamped over Weber's nose, and spread flat on his thin chest. To place her mouth over his, in front of God and everyone. To breathe into him. Her wet hair flat against her head, clinging to her freckled shoulders. A drop of chlorinated water hanging off the end of her nose like a jewel. In between breaths she straightened up, counting, oblivious. Her bathing suit was blue. Her breasts, small and nearly perfect, rose and fell, and with them a new ache in Carl's chest. The desire to be saved by her. A wail from far off like a siren. Yes, Carl thinks. *That was the moment.*

Gloria will insist on calling an ambulance, and she will ride in the back with him. While he waits for her to return to the garage, he thinks to ask her to bring along the bucket of leftover fried chicken. He can see by the change in light out the garage door that the sun is setting. It will be dusk by the time an ambulance arrives. He imagines lying under a clean, white sheet on a stretcher, looking up at the reflections of the lights flashing on the roof of the ambulance.

The morphine is working. The IV drips slowly, each translucent drop hanging like a textbook curve ball before dropping down into the graceful tube that arcs into Carl's

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arm. The ambulance driver has the Cubs game on the radio,
turned down low, under the static of the two-way radio. It's
the bottom of the ninth, all tied up. José Cardinal steps up
to the plate. My man, José, Carl cheers silently. Gloria sits
beside him and holds a cold drumstick to his mouth. He
takes a bite of the chicken leg, and chews slowly. The taste
is incredible. Heaven. It's as if he has never truly tasted
anything until this moment, and he thinks that maybe every-
thing will be this incredible from this moment on, out from
under his car, saved.

* * *

Or perhaps Carl, under his car still, thrown from the Buick
as it rolled and flipped into a cornfield in northern Illinois
on a cold night in February, 1978. In the terrible, suspended
flight, he saw in flashes of vivid imagination his future,
and all that it would have held, lived this life in the brief
moments before he came to rest in the damp soil and corn
stubble where he would lay pinned beneath the car he loved
and had destroyed, thinking about his father, about Gloria
and their plans together. He would wait for a beautiful
woman to save him. An angelic woman filled with light
who would reach out to him a graceful flawless hand, lift the
heaviness weighing upon him, fill him with her miraculous
breath, and raise him up, up, and up.

Even Greenland by Barry Hannah

I was sitting radar. Actually doing nothing.

We had been up to seventy-five thousand to give the afternoon some jazz. I guess we were still in Mexico, coming into Mirimar eventually in the F-14. It doesn't much matter after you've seen the curvature of the earth. For a while, nothing much matters at all. We'd had three sunsets already. I guess it's what you'd call really living the day.

But then, "John," said I, "this plane's on fire."

"I know it," he said.

John was sort of short and angry about it.

"You thought of last-minute things any?" said I.

"Yeah. I ran out of a couple of things already. But they were cold, like. They didn't catch the moment. Bad writing," said John.

"You had the advantage. You've been knowing," said I.

"Yeah. I was going to get a leap on you. I was going to smoke you. Everything you said, it wasn't going to be good enough," said he.

"But it's not like that," said I. "Is it?"

The wings were turning red. I guess you'd call it red. It was a shade against dark blue that was mystical flamingo, very spacey-like, like living blood. Was the plane bleeding?

"You have a good time in Peru?" said I.

"Not really," said John. "I got something to tell you. I haven't had a 'good time' in a long time. There's something between me and a good time since, I don't know, since I was twenty-eight or like that. I've seen a lot, but you know I haven't quite seen it. Like somebody's seen it already. It wasn't fresh. There were eyes that used it up some."

"Even high in Mérida?" said I.

"Even," said John.

"Even Greenland?" said I.

John said, "Yes. Even Greenland. It's fresh, but it's not fresh. There are footsteps in the snow."

"Maybe," said I, "you think about in Mississippi when it snows, when you're a kid. And you're the first up and there's been nobody in the snow, no footsteps."

"Shut up," said John.

“Look, are we getting into a fight here at the moment of death? We going to mix it up with the plane’s on fire?”

“Shut up! Shut up!” Said John. Yelled John.

“What’s wrong?” said I.

He wouldn’t say anything. He wouldn’t budge at the controls. We might burn but we were going to hold level. We weren’t seeking the earth at all.

“What is it, John?” said I.

John said, “You son-of-a-bitch, that was mine—that snow in Mississippi. Now it’s all shot to shit.”

The paper from his kneepad was flying all over the cockpit, and I could see his hand flapping up and down with the pencil in it, angry.

“It was mine, mine, you rotten son-of-a-bitch! You see what I mean?”

The little pages hung up on the top, and you could see the big moon just past them.

“Eject! Save your ass!” said John.

But I said, “What about you, John?”

John said, “I’m staying. Just let me have that one, will you?”

“But you can’t,” said I.

But he did.

Celeste and I visit the burn on the blond sand under one of those black romantic worthless mountains five miles or so out from Mirimar base.

I am a lieutenant commander in the reserve now. But to be frank, it shakes me a bit even to run a Skyhawk up to Malibu and back.

Celeste and I squat in the sand and say nothing as we look at the burn. They got all the metal away.

I don’t know what Celeste is saying or thinking, I am so absorbed myself and paralyzed.

I know I am looking at John’s damned triumph.