

**Kathleen Crowley**  
**from *Nap, Park, Train***

This is the thing I cannot understand: Adam used a gun. Why? He hated guns. “Too easy, too absolutely American.” But however it happened, we can’t any of us be surprised. This was a promise fulfilled. Even now I can see his liquid gray eyes, hear the morning hoarseness that his voice carried all day long, talking about suicide as though it were an appointment he had to keep, a job he had to finish. There was no gun then. It means something to me, although I am not sure what, that the gun came later.

“The gun?” his mother said when I asked, “Oh I don’t know Rebecca. It was so awful already. I guess we didn’t want to know anymore. It just...” she stopped a minute then finished, “It had been coming for so long.”

The relief of death, that’s what was coming, that’s how Adam saw it. When we first lived together I would invite people over, friends of mine, but then I stopped. Watching Adam was too painful. I could see the discomfort rising through his body like a buzz that grew steadily louder, his fists clenching and releasing, lighting cigarettes one after another, adjusting his glasses again and again. He never complained, I just stopped.

And I hated the heroin, but I came to understand why he used it. A couple of bags and he no longer played with his watch strap or bit his nails, a few more and he could smile. There should have been another drug, a safer drug, something that wouldn’t have left him passed out on the couch, the bird-like bones of his chest barely moving. There should have been another drug that could have made the world tolerable for him...but we never found it.

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Music and books were the only other things, the stanchions that saved him on all those birthdays before the last. Every Thursday night he would listen to a jazz show on the local radio station, sitting, legs crossed, on the floor, a cigarette between his finger and thumb, eyes closed. He began calling the DJ now and then, and I would hear him talking late, me already in bed. Eventually they became friends and the DJ took to inviting him down to the studio. I remember how happy he was, proud even. They wanted his opinions, his knowledge.

One Thursday night he came home and sat on the side of the bed, skinnier, paler, closed up like a folding chair, a bruise like an evening thundercloud over his left eye. He'd been mugged on his way back from the studio.

I pulled him into the bathroom but he didn't want my help. He put the ice I had given him down beside the sink. He wanted to look at his eye. He stared in the mirror as though the bruise didn't belong to him, the way I had felt when I began to grow breasts, touching them gently, pressing a little to see if they would collapse down to the chest I had always known.

“Does it hurt?” I asked him.

He turned to me, and answered slowly. “Well, something hurts...” as though he didn't quite believe that the bruise and the pain went together.

That's how his body was to him, nothing that he cared about, only something that required maintenance and occasionally did something curious or interesting or, very rarely, brought him pleasure.

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Although it is after five o'clock when we head for the park, the sun is still white and hot, the air humid. "Train," I hear James say, over and over again in the stroller. While we are at the park he will point, now and then, to the sky when he hears a sound – truck or car or airplane -- and ask, "Train?" When the train really does come, though, he points to the sky, smiles up at me triumphantly. "Train," he will whisper, then run to press his face against the fence, to see it, to feel the rush of wind and sound as it thunders past, while I sit and watch him.

The day I met Adam, he was alone on a park bench, reading. Something turned inside me when I saw him, like a stone whose damp side now suddenly faced the sun. I studied him, felt hungry for something that I thought he had. I was lost in a thicket of men -- men, boys, drugs – at the time. A few days later on the same bench he said to me, shyly, looking away, "It would feel better if you could sit here, next to me."

And then years went by and here I am, pushing a stroller through this old city neighborhood and Adam is gone.