How he grabbed his chest, and then fell backwards onto the concrete.

How the pupils in his beautiful blue eyes dilated, and how she screamed his name just before she started CPR. How the white liquid poured from his mouth as she phoned the paramedics. I don’t tell this unless I must. I wasn’t there. For a long time, because I wasn’t there, it might not have happened. For a long time, I couldn’t say he’d died, I’d just pause between words and say: he…left.

Grief is dislocation, and sometimes I think my soul is like Tony’s, dislocated by his…leaving.

I don’t tell how Emily pushed on his chest and breathed into his beautiful mouth and how she knew he was gone.

*I knew he was gone,* she tells me, the day after, *because there was nothing in his eyes, his eyes relaxed into the blue, and I knew he was gone.*

I don’t tell this, but I imagine it: his heart, his ascending aortic artery as it gave way, filling his insides with his lovely hot blood, red, highly pressured, filling up his off-limits insides where it shouldn’t go.

I don’t tell this to anyone: that I hope he had a soul, and that I hope, that when it needed to leave its casing he was as satisfied by the leaving as he was in living, and that he was held in the arms of the universe as he left, making that satisfied Tony-face, floating above as his wife dialed 911, as she called his father, as she dropped the phone and her voice rose into the air senseless and screaming like a frantic bird.

When I try to tell it, or come close, people’s faces become chasms that cannot be resolved, just as uncertain as my parents were when I told them. People don’t know how to respond, and ambushed by my honesty they are reduced to statues, uncertain, and this inverts them. I’ve tried to apologize after telling them, but this doesn’t return them to a resting state, and I fear this unalterably dislocates them.

I don’t tell how we stood outside of that same house he died behind, four days before, smoking and smoking and smoking.

*We’ll make tube amplifiers. Basement kits,* he said, *the kind that come in the mail.*

He was 36 days into his marriage, his sons, three and two years old, and we stood there under the light of the antique street lamps of St. Paul. We stood there talking about what we’d do next.

I don’t want to tell any of this.

I need to tell all of this, but I’m too tired to continue my new ambassadorship today, and most days.

Sometimes it seems like life is direction, a purpose - and death, without that purpose, a dislocation. The grief of us, left behind, isn’t sadness, it’s disorientation. For me, it’s a particularly gruesome disorientation: probing and discovering that part of me wasn’t me, but who I was in his reflection.

Whatever I thought was me has been unseated, and what remains isn’t exactly me, either. Today, I don’t want to be his ambassador, but who am I, without him, besides that ambassador?

At least 3 miles before I go home.

Since he’s gone, I’ve stopped smoking. I’ve replaced it with treadmilling, and running around a track at the university gym.

Sitting on my knit oatmeal-colored couch after work, the feelings start to come in through the cracks in the null that grief has created and surrounded me with. I don’t want to feel them, and grief doesn’t want me to, either. It’s protective. As the mists of emotion start to get thick, I don’t see the butcher’s block in the kitchen, the squat robot of my television, or the oatmeal couch around me.

Afraid that emotion will catch me unprepared, I grab my keys, and rush to the gym. Feelings are parsed out better atop a treadmill. Somehow they’re filtered. If they cause me to cry, it’s just a river of tears. On the treadmill, or turning circles around the track, I trust that I won’t totally lose my self.

As I walk through the double doors I convince myself it’s not avoidance, but a safe decanting of what I need to let come out. Down the stairs, I bypass the treadmills, headed upstairs.

A class of rock climbers unfolds up a faux-rock wall in front of me as I walk past. They’re belted in, red ropes tied to metal clips in the mottled brown of the wall, feet splayed above them, tentatively touching the wall, in tiny clown-colored shoes, bits of rubber on the toes.

I walk past the squash courts, in front of a Hispanic woman on an elliptical, a frantic and too-skinny college girl on a stair climber, nervously looking at me as I walk by, quickly looking away. I hear people upstairs bouncing basketballs and I go through the doors, I get my towel from the towel-bin.

I walk past beer-gutted men reading magazines in exercise-bicycle-recliners, turn a corner by the pilates people speaking pilates-ese on unrolled mats, through a door, and up flights of stairs to the third floor track that overlooks the basketball court.

There are two teams using the court, scheduled games with scorekeeper-lit signs, red lightbulbs, studying students on the sidelines, but instead I see him, I remember him in the eye of my memory, and counter-clock-wise, I start to run.

Tony, under the 280 bridge, fifty feet from the train tracks, earnest face, Lincoln-on-Rushmore nose, eyes following me, talking to me, fingers fast on the frets of his upright bass under the shadow of the bridge. I look down and see my hundred-and-fifty-dollar left-handed acoustic guitar. I’m puzzling my way through some Bosso, fumbling half-chords and single-string melodies.

Matty leans into the picture in my mind, trying some poetry over us. He stumbles onto a vein of rhythmic words and digs in and Tony hears it, catches the rhythm in the frets of his bass, and together we make sense, sonically.

Tony swings his bulk closer to the bend in the bass, he moves closer to it like a woman going in for a kiss, big and graceful, and I see his eyes light as his notes follow my Bosso, as my Bosso blends into his notes, and his mahogany hair’s falling into his so-blue eyes, but I can still see them. We’re all together, with each other in the Bosso, with each other in the words.

It feels like it lasts, like we’re slipping into timelessness, and then a container truck blows its horn on the bridge above us and Matty falters. The wind catches his words, juggling them, and Tony doubles down, fingers riding the hard black ebony of the bass’ fretboard, trying to catch Matty’s words back from the wind as they wobble. I’m pounding the strings but the Bosso won’t come out, I can’t put our togetherness back together, and the cohesion we’ve created is tearing.

The world and the wind pushes their way into our circle, and the moment is gone, it falls apart. It’s only us again, doing a Friday, and we look up at each other and at the bridge, and the stars above us in the deep blue and I realize I’m sweating from playing too hard, and the streetlights are coming on, and Tony smiles, sharing it all with me.

Matty yells *Fuck!* and it echoes through the underside of the bridge and I laugh. I reach out for Tony, relieved that whatever it was is gone and we’re back to Just Friends, doing a Friday, not trying to hold it up, keep whatever it was spinning in the air with some magic between us. Tony has a cigarette in his mouth and he’s lighting it around his bass, still hugging the maple of it and Matty comes over to get a cigarette from me, reaching into my front shirt pocket unbidden, and as I smile my guitar slides, goes side-saddle, like a wooden infant on my hip. We’re an accidental triangle, my palm, flat on Tony’s chest, across his upright bass, his arm around the high-middle of Matty’s back, and we stand there for a moment, laughing into each other, out of breath, sweating, looking in each other’s eyes, sharing and enjoying some satisfied exultation, lighting and smoking our cigarettes.

I’m in bed. I start crying. It’s a surprise, this swell of emotion and water, and I search in my mind for a reason. Donna Reed has just come on the television, and Mr. Ed will follow.

5 a.m.

Last week I was ambushed by the same swell, Fred Astaire-ing around my house, dancing in socks on a hardwood floor, twirling, Swing music loud on my stereo. The vintage tubes from my covetously old amplifier light up the dark corner of my living room, playing on the spines of art books on my bookshelf: a fragment of Basquiat, a sliver of Rothko, the bottom of the spine of Gerhard Richter. I pretend-ice-skate-on-imagined-pond in my stockinged feet on the hardwood floor, hands clasped behind me like the children skating in the Charlie Brown Christmas Special.

Just like now, I started crying. Tears out of nowhere —and that feeling—what did I forget? Why am I crying? And just like now, searching for the why, finding nothing, trying to convince myself that it must be Tony, it must be because of Tony, and my obsessive mind reaches for connections. In our post-high-school-music-combo we’d sketched out a cover Skating by Vince Guaraldi, Tony playing the bottom half of the piano on his bass, me daintily finger-walking the melody on a delayed Fender Jazzmaster, but we’d never played it more than a few times at practice, and never completely. We’d get halfway through, realize we were sort of doing it, making it work, and the groove would fall apart in our hands, and we’d fall apart in laughter that we’d done it, sort of successfully.

This must be why I’m crying, I thought. Jazz on the hifi + pretend-ice-skating on hardwood with my hands clasped behind my back = somehow that thwarts my usual avoidance of the fact that Tony’s dead. My brain rejects, this, and the otherness—the extra voice that OCD creates talks back: OCD is typified by odd connections, and the emotional weight within.

I remember this, and still have no idea why right now I’m crying in bed with Donna Reed on my television, or why last week, atop my stocking-skates I’m ambushed by emotion. Are these only other Crying Commutes?

In bed I circumvent the sobs. I say out loud:

*Oh, Tony.*

This sounds too intimate, like we were lovers, or I’m his mother, and I think of his mother, medicated, diving into a messy dissolve when I see her at the gravesite.

*How are you,* she says, and she doesn’t care. I don’t mind that she doesn’t care. He son’s death is a bell, constantly ringing, taking her out of every conversation, interrupting, and she’s looked lost inside since he left. I’m surprised that she can’t find her place, and in a flash of memory she’s letting the dogs out at 4AM, smoking a long white cigarette as Tony and I arrive back at his house, just coming in from the night, and then we’re in Forest Lawn, and she kneels over Tony’s grave to wipe away some speck of something I can’t see, and maybe there’s nothing there, and she says: *Oh, Tony;* and she’s gone again, vacant, inside. Her new husband walks tentatively to her and rests a hand on her shoulder, and looks around for someone to tell him what to do as he stands on Tony’s grave.

In bed, I say his name, and this doesn’t stop the sobbing. It sounds strangely intimate, and I’m don’t mind that so much anymore. I’m saying his name, and taking breath in, and pushing it out. I say it over and again:

*Tony. Tony.* I make up permutations of his name, sing-songing in the way I repeat things. *Tony. Tony. T-Billy, Tyrone,* and suddenly the plastic overlay, the neutrality and dissassociation of grief is rolled back, and I’m assaulted by feelings, and they’ve got me crying, they’ve turned me into a stutterer: *Tah-Tah-Tony.*

It’s 5AM. I’m saying his names, casting them like a spell to stop me crying, and Donna Reed is on the television.

I hear his first girlfriend, Christina, say his name at a party in the darkness of my basement, questioning: *Tony – where are you, in the dark?*

I hear his mother yelling it to us atop the stairs, as we replay songs we’ve made in the basement studio. *Tony! Cut out that boom, boom, boom shit! I can’t have you this loud in the morning!*

I think of the darkness in my life since he’s left, and the darkness of my imaginings of the afterlife, lonely, cold, both together: algid, like the clouds in my forever-death-image.

I imagine my neighbors hearing me slapping my chest and singing nonsense in my bed, and my voice falters halfway through, and then I don’t care about the neighbors. I do care, but not enough to not sing his name, and this brings me further back from crying, into a wide smile underneath/separate from the tears that stand as big as statues on my face.

I slap my naked chest twice, singing his roulette of names. I start laughing because it’s so ridiculous. *T-Billy. T-Billy. Tyrone.* The tears turn off.

I’m not alone. He’s here with me—in his name. Donna Reed is still on the television. Mr. Ed will still follow.

It feels like I’ve said his name more in the last three years without him than I did in the 27 years I had him. I like saying his name more now, and I’m in that place between crying and laughing, and I slap my chest and say his name louder: as an incantation, an adage, a precept, a battle cry.

trillion raindrops fall, according to *USA Today*, during the average thunderstorm, none of which are teardrop shaped. The actual shapes of raindrops range from tiny spheroids to middling hamburger bun shapes, to thin parachutes of water with a tube-shaped drop towards their bases.

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This knowledge is elegant, sundry, and terribly amusing, but at this moment, on the scooter, only conjecture; I don’t feel the marching army of raindrops as they storm down the beach of my head, as I sit on my scooter waiting for a stoplight to change.

Earlier, a camera watched me as I cried my way through ninety minutes on the treadmill - another version of the Crying Commute. The only common denominators were the music, the movement (one the actual movement of my limbs, the other, only movement across space and time), and my dissolve into laughter. This time, my smile came because I imagine the bored gym attendants folding towels, watching the monitor screens like televisions, the way you’ll watch anything to arrest boredom.

*Look at that fat guy on the treadmill,* they might say. *He’s working out so hard that he’s crying.* I imagine another attendant looking up at the monitor from her phone in her hand. *Aw, poor guy,* she might say.

This imagined scene made me laugh, then cry, then laugh all over again. I imagined Tony, like an immense cumulous cloud on the horizon in May, his arms resting on the broccoli forests in the deciduous belt of Minnesota that we lived in for so many years together, together, his confident face and awkward, too-long fingers—

(Jack Kerouac: “Sweet face—hard to describe…swaying to the beat, tall, majestical,”)

And it doesn’t matter what teardrops or raindrops are shaped like. I know they’re there, but I can’t feel them, and I wonder where Tony is, if Tony is.

I don’t know if he’s really here, or if I just tell myself that I feel him. Some days it matters if he is, and others it only matters that I remember what it was like to be with him.

On the scooter, I look up at the sky. The rain coming down makes it feel like I’m traveling fast, the way light-speed is shown in science fiction movies, but I’m anchored, waiting for the stoplight. This is what life is like: feeling permanent, when we’re all just waiting. This is what life is like: accepting the illusion of permanence, and not missing the brilliance of being here, the uniqueness, while we wait; finding the beauty as the sorrow passes us by, the beauty through the sorrow.

I look across the street. The road is empty, and I’m still waiting. I’m raw from the crying and the laughing, still waiting, ready to move. The scooter doesn’t weigh enough to trigger the light, and the light never changes. I just decide to go. A substantial part of the guilt that I’ve been holding calves off—that I’m still here, at the stoplight, on the Earth, in his children’s lives, and he’s not, and that I can’t see any reason that all of this should be as it is—releases from my body in waves like a flood over the prairie that surrounds me as I stop waiting for the light to change.