

Why We Came to Target at 9:58 on a Monday Night

by Andrew Roe

Donnie remembers just in time. So we run practically every stop sign and red light in town, and get there just before they close. They're about to lock the front doors but we burst on in like we own the place, the goddamn heirs to the Target fortune, telling the puny Rent-a-Cop Guy, It's cool, it's cool, we'll be real quick, no worries T.J. Hooker. Then we prowl the aisles, through Home and Living, then Outdoors, then Sporting Goods, and we're laughing, laughing like pirates, and Donnie is still drunk from the Vodka Dewes, and I probably am too, though it's starting to wear off, it's that time where you're crashing faster than you'd like and that feeling of you can't touch me is slipping away and you're starting to realize you can be touched, you can be touched, no one can escape that sad, basic fact. The puny Rent-A-Cop Guy has one of those mustaches that looks like it's been drawn on. And he's shorter than me almost, and Donnie is big, beefy, an all-state wrestler his senior year and capable of lifting a keg like it's a six-pack. So what's the guy gonna do? He doesn't even follow us.

Next Donnie starts pulling stuff off the shelves (deodorant, denture cream, orange-flavored Metamucil), saying, Let's buy this, fuck it, let's buy everything. But I'm not laughing as much now, because I'm starting to remember why we're here, why we came to Target at 9:58 on a Monday night. I pretend to be real interested in a dress that I know I'd never buy. Donnie puts on a bright yellow baseball cap that says Bad Ass. The lights in the store dim (hint, hint). I say to Donnie, Let's go, over here, I think. He turns the cap so it's backwards and follows me. Tampons, panty liners, lady things. Then: there. So many to choose from. We should pick a good one, I tell Donnie, who says, How can you tell the difference? It's like fucking cereal there are so many.

They make that announcement where they say the store is closing and you better bring your shit up front and get out. Donnie's picking up mouthwash, toothpaste, other crap we don't need. I tell him, It's not like we're buying condoms or porn, we don't have to mask it with other stuff you know. So he dumps everything on the floor, including the Bad Ass cap, and we bail. Some minimum wage slob will have to clean it all up. Not us.

There's a long line to check out. Only one cashier open. The girl who rings us up doesn't blink or bother with hi-how-are-you-did-you-find-everything-you-were-looking-for, she's tired, she wants to go home, she has hair curled and gelled, plus this spooky lipstick and makeup like an old lady but she's not an old lady and should know better.

The drive back is quiet. We stop for the lights. We don't talk. The Vodka Dews have officially worn off. My head spinning like a pukey carnival ride. I'm young, Donnie's young. His body like a blanket I want to wrap myself in. When we first met it was right away. I'd always wanted something like that to happen to me. Then it did. It was both like I'd imagined it would be and also completely different, if that even makes sense. And it was something that got carved into me, something that was mine, something long-lasting and true. I don't want to lose that. I don't want to lose Donnie. He's concentrating on driving, he's squinting, leaning forward. Lights flash across his face, fill it with meanings I can't make out, not from this angle anyway.

Say something, I say.

Something, he says.

Come on, Donnie. What are you thinking? The question every boyfriend loves to hear.

What am I thinking? I'm thinking, actually, that my dad's one of those dads. One of those dads who everybody's always afraid of. Like he can explode anytime, anywhere. Push the wrong button and boom. You just never know. I don't want to be like that. I don't want my kid to be afraid of me. That's what I'm thinking.

This sends my heart soaring, it does a little Michael Jackson dance, flutters like a beautiful fucking butterfly.

You won't, I say. You won't be like that.

Suddenly I'm very sleepy, very aware of my body and what could be happening inside of it. Have I gained weight already? Will I start throwing up tomorrow morning? I want to touch my belly but that would be silly.

So what do you think our odds are? Donnie then asks, braking, guiding us into a left turn, the steering wheel sliding slowly back through his hands. Fifty-fifty?

I stare ahead at the road and the lights and the other cars coming toward us, and I gnaw on my lip so hard it almost makes me cry. Fifty-fifty, I say. That sounds about right to me.

