traffic incident

by Anthony M. Powers

driving home from work
at 8 a.m.
and i haven't slept in three days.
it's starting to feel like i never really slept
at all
in the first place.
a red light stops me cold
and as i ash my cigarette
through the driver's side window
the little burnt bits of paper
fly back at me.
one piece
that was still burning
bright orange
lands in my eye
and i start
screaming.
i check the damage in my rearview
mirror
but there's nothing.
but i see there's some sort of SVU behind me,
the kind that only people
with money
or people
with no money
drive.
this one has money.
behind the wheel is a serious looking man,
clip on tie, bright gold watch
just barely glimmering
in the gray morning dawn,

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talking on his cell phone.
in my head i hear him trying to explain to his wife
why he missed his son's birthday party the night before,
he was working late,
and why he has to go on a last minute business trip
and maybe why
he's been fucking his secretary
because he doesn't love her anymore.
he starts picking his nose with his free hand.
i don't see him flick or wipe.
he must see me looking
and he wipes his face
and scratches his nose
just like everybody does
when they get caught.
the light turns green
and a song that reminds me of the past and a girl starts playing
on the radio.
i start to cry.
i tell myself it's because i haven't slept in three days.
i take side streets
the rest of the way.