

A Debt No Honest Man Can Pay

by Bill Yarrow

I'm sitting here listening to *Nebraska* and it's breaking my heart not because it's plaintive and brilliant but because it's taking me back to 1982 and our baby—not even two pounds—in intensive care—in New York Hospital—far away—we live in Queens—it's what we can afford—but we see her every day—well one of us does—via the subway—where I sit listening to *Nebraska* and Springsteen is singing about paying a debt no honest man can pay—and I'm thinking *What is that debt? It's marriage, right? It's love, right? It's the privilege of having a kid, right? Not in the song but in life, in someone's life, in my life, it is a debt, a brutally honest debt, but you never pay it back, no one can, not with money, not with time, not with compassion, not with care, not with what I make, not even with what you make, I'm not talking hospital bills, I'm talking what forever can never be repaid* so, listen, you listen to a song whose line hits you in your kidney and you double over as if you're pregnant—a pregnant woman—not close—not close enough to term—but you birth something anyway—and one day it becomes your heart—and then your heart gets pregnant and it gives birth to your future which you learn is made entirely of your past, a past where you are listening to a song, a concept, a whole album, again and

again, over and over, the album *Nebraska*, which never gets dull, never gets tired, never gets old.

