

# Parsing We

by John Wentworth Chapin

"Let's be friends," they say. A good plan: the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the relationship eased in an instant. Two men, two egos, difficult fit. Relief, praises, a little sadness but not too much, acceptance. It was only six months, after all.

"Let's go hit a bucket of balls." A fine plan. Sunshine, activity, companionship.

"Let's go get a cocktail... or two." Wink. An excellent plan. Just like old times. Comfort. Stirrings of lust.

"I still want to tap that ass." Hand caressing a responsive lump through jeans. Smiles, slurring, second thoughts, seven cocktails.

He comes out of the bathroom in time to see the kiss. They've broken up, so the kiss isn't out of line. But it isn't supposed to happen this way. It isn't supposed to hurt. He tries to shake it off, can't. An abyss threatens to open before him; rather than melting down in the bar, he taxis home alone. A flurry of texts rattles his phone, defensive then apologetic then silent. He was the one who initiated the breakup, and yet here he is, alone with too much liquor in his belly and too much time on his hands. He walks around the empty house bellowing *fuck*, caged ego pelting exposed brick walls with its roar.

