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Long Way Home

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Cover Page Footnote

This piece was written and workshopped in 17F.

Long Way Home

He got off the highway early to drive through town. The student didn't need anything from the stores. He just wanted to drive more on the first nice day of spring for a little longer. He liked seeing the younger kids riding their bikes without their helmets. That gave him hope. This week's Wednesday wasn't cloudy or even grey, but the color of faded ink in a tattered copy of a poetry book. In a sadly fake accent to the dog fogging the window in the lane on his left, he started to recite some verse about kisses. The newly greened stoplight saved his ego from forgetting the third line and he accelerated to thirty. It wasn't about speeding -- he didn't need to speed, but to accelerate.

The highway exit looped so long he wondered if it was a perfect circle he'd never get off. He saw the sixth Jeep of the hour with people his age driving fast with blaring music he couldn't know. He listened mostly to the classics. He wondered if he had pitched his tent in the past and was missing what was around him. All that oozed from the four-doorless tank in front of him was bass.

Bmmmm gmm dmm BMMMM. His rear-view mirror showed unbearably soft fists pumping the air off-beat. He drowned out his imminent criticisms with the broken volume knob's twist to the right.

He was giving his right of way to any pedestrian who would take it, just so he could take a little longer, see a little more. A tiny car full of an enormous man crawled past the student. *A big man in a little car is a great joy of life*, he said. As he said it he once again saw himself publishing a book of those great joys in a big list. So far he had six entries and he knew he never would.

The short way home was drab. No people, no kids, no curving roads. Only the occasional fox that he knew killed his dog when he was fourteen. The April day was melting far too much and his old car sputtered frantically like it only did on dates. Except now there was no new crush in his passenger seat, *not that I want one*, he said. More kids pedaled bikes past him, except with a mom out in front.

His old car crumpled like a fresh love letter when it met the green van. He felt punished for trying to rid the long way home of its strangers, damned for his now empty hope of filling his passenger seat. Just before it all went black, through the grinding metal and spurting gas tanks, he heard music from his shattered speaker. It was his favorite song.