



Brad Casey

# The Handsome Man

stories

PRAISE FOR *THE HANDSOME MAN*:

"I admire the emotional openness, tenderness, and deeply uncynical tone of *The Handsome Man*, a novel-in-stories that feels unlike anything else I've read recently. Brad Casey's fiction debut is a gem that celebrates little blips of happiness and small, elusive moments of genuine human connection."  
—Guillaume Morissette, author of *New Tab* and *The Original Face*

"*The Handsome Man* is about listening and writing, it's about the dream of youth, the desire to squeeze every last shimmering drop of life out of the present moment. It's about the vague and haunting ache that comes with loss and the people who make it bearable. From couches in Rome to frozen rivers in the Canadian countryside, the top of the Berliner Dom, and graveyards in Memphis, Casey takes you on an unforgettable journey through life's wilderness."  
—Sofia Banzhaf, author of *Pony Castle*

"Brad Casey's *The Handsome Man* is an adroitly self-aware travelogue. There's an easy sensuality to his language, peppered with precious details, disarming humour, and insightful character studies rendered with unvarnished empathy. This book is gentle, sensitive, and full of longing, and reading Casey is like catching up with a long-lost friend for a big, cold beer."  
—Rollie Pemberton, aka Cadence Weapon

"if yu want a book uv amayzing n brilliyant prose short storeez that ar long in theyr implikaysyuns look no furthr ths wundrful book is what yu ar looking 4 ths is beautiful writing with full orchestraysyun n minimalist accents enjoy"  
—bill bissett

“*The Handsome Man* is a testament to the strength and resilience it takes for people to create new paths of living, being, and belonging in this world. It’s about a life given to adventure, chance, and intuition, and the various and surprising ways the world shows us care when we relinquish control. This book illustrates the struggle to create stability in this kind of life, exposing the magical and transcendent possibilities of living life on the edge without a long-term plan.”

—Ashley Obscura, author of *Ambient Technology*

## The Handsome Man





# **The Handsome Man**



**Brad Casey**

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She was glorious, burning. She didn't know yet that her husband was dead. We knew. That's what gave her such power over us. The doctor took her into a room with a desk at the end of the hall, and from under the closed door a slab of brilliance radiated as if, by some stupendous process, diamonds were being incinerated in there. What a pair of lungs! She shrieked as I imagined an eagle would shriek. It felt wonderful to be alive to hear it! I've gone looking for that feeling everywhere.

—DENIS JOHNSON, "Car Crash While Hitchhiking"

You're just someone out there in chains

You're just here on your own love again

—JESSICA PRATT, "On Your Own Love Again"



## **The American**





I LEFT MY PARTNER, L, ALONE TO MOVE INTO OUR NEW apartment in Toronto because a few months ago we were together in New York and I took all my clothes off in public and I was in front of the American flag and the cops showed up and now I have to go back for my court date for this silly thing that happened out of love, this strange and beautiful thing, and I want to go back to L because I love her. I don't want her to be away from me, to be alone in the endless air in the nothing between the clouds and the nothing that rolls on and rolls on and on and on. To what.

There's a man a few seats up from me. He's handsome and I can't stop staring at him. He has slicked-back black hair, tattoos on his neck, his eyes are deep blue almost blond. He's charming the stewardess. She touches his hand, they share little smiles, secret smiles when she passes. I turn my head away when she passes and I hope she doesn't see me, I shrink away, grip the armrest of fiery death this metal box of wires in the sky in the nothing. The handsome man drinks his drink cool, his cool drink, and he smiles and everything belongs to him.

In secondary security at the Newark International Airport I see the handsome man again. He's arguing with a US customs officer who threatens to send him back to Canada. The handsome man says he's in New York because he's in love with a woman and she's here, he's going to her and he won't leave, he'll fight to get back to her and I love him now. He'll never win. I'm with him. Now I'm the handsome man. A customs officer calls me over:

"Why are you here?"

"I have a court date tomorrow."

"When are you leaving?"

"In two days."

Silence, no eye contact.

"Welcome to America."

It was July. It was July 6. It was wedding season, we'd driven through the Independence Day states of the northeast Maine and New Hampshire, in New York, New York with L, American flags were in bloom and us too. We found one flag afternoon, massive and shining of jewels in a Williamsburg park by the baseball diamond. Shining, L dared me to pose nude in front of it, the American flag, and we laughed and I did it because I loved her and America, the centre of the

universe in motion, I loved her and now and a *click* of the camera, quick.

And then the cops came. One of the officers was young and disappointed in me like an older brother might be disappointed in me, like my actual older brother is disappointed in me. He looked me in the eyes and he said, “People have died for that flag,” and he wasn’t kidding and he was right too. He handed me a yellow ticket with a court date, disorderly conduct. I called a lawyer and she told me that up to fifteen days in jail was the worst thing that could happen, fifteen days and I’d never go back to America. The worst thing.

Back to now. I’m on a train, it’s grey and it’s raining. A woman sits next to me and she smiles and she smells like Halloween candy and she spends the entire train ride texting and I read my book, Alan Watts’s *The Way of Zen*. He quotes Chuan Tzu, saying:

*The baby looks at things all day without winking; that is because his eyes are not focused on any particular object. He goes without knowing where he is going, and stops without knowing what he is doing. He merges himself within the surroundings and moves along with it.*

Hmm, and we’re at Penn Station and the woman from the train walks next to me into the street and there, in the New York street, she smiles and the sun is shining through a mist



of the grey rising away into the nothing. A dreadlocked construction worker smiles too and her eyes are blue and she looks like she's high and I smile and we're all smiling now, smiling in America and tethered.

There's a jazz band playing behind everything, playing from a bar low beneath our feet like nostalgic non-existent 1950s, tourists gape their phones in the air aiming at their faces. I walk to 37th and 9th where a friend moved from Toronto to there, to here, and she has an apartment and she has a couch for the night and her name is Joy and when I find her building Joy buzzes me in and I find her apartment so many floors up, my feet echoing hello all the way up to Joy who hugs me on the threshold and she says, "Baby, I'm so busy, I'm sorry," and she has to leave and she puts the key in my hand, in my pocket, the key to her apartment, and she says, "I'm seeing this new guy, he's cute and tomorrow we can all grab drinks if you don't end up in jail!" We laugh. She offers me no coffee, no wine, there's a cat in the room and it's wearing a bow tie. It hides from me somewhere near, hello. I text L, I tell her I'm safe, soft words, I'm safe.

And it's night and I walk my entire life through Lower Manhattan, a feeling filling the air like if I stand here long enough something will happen. Something to change this. My phone rings in my pocket and I ignore it, I can't answer to anyone calling, no one knows I'm here. No one but L, Joy, and the state of New York and a woman passing asks me directions. She's looking for a bar called Local 138 and it's on this street and "I don't know it," I say, "but I can help

you find it, the numbers go up from here,” and she says, “That would be swell,” her drawl the wind through the wind chimes. We’re approaching 1000 and we walk.

We talk about nothing, we walk together in the night. She’s a student and she’s new and her name is Mary Lou and she’s from Needles, California, “The greatest wasteland armpit west of all of Ohio, which is also an armpit,” she says, and the bar is warm and she asks me to sit. Six men fill the table beside us, they’re watching a muted TV with the moving mouths of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney and they’re drinking beer from glasses as big as their heads, their heads that play football as big as two or three people, drunk, all of them silent but the room somehow loud like a headache heartbeat pound in your ears and Mary Lou won’t tell me who she’s voting for, she says, “We’re in New York take a wild guess, ya fool.” She tells me about the price of apartments and the price of tuition and the price of transit, I tell her about my court date and she laughs. We’re drinking flat beer in the heart of the world and she says, “So what do you suppose is gonna happen?”

“With what, exactly?”

“That court date of yours. You think you gonna win or you think you gonna lose?”

“I don’t know, I have to leave it up to fate I guess.”

“You believe in a silly thing like that?”

“I don’t know. I guess I never thought about it too much.”

“Well, you best get to thinkin. You can’t just let everyone else in the world decide who you are. Who are you anyway?”

I don’t know how to answer that question. I offer to buy another round.

“Lemme tell you somethin, boy,” she says. “When I was just a girl, like a little one no bigger than one of them legs of yours, my Daddy brought me to a ranch, the kind with all kinds of horses. Big ones, lil ones, pretty ones, ones that’ll bite you in half if you ain’t careful. All kinds. He said I was gonna ride one of them for the first time. Oh boy, if I wasn’t excited. I’d wanted to ride a horse since I’d heard one gallopin around in the big ol world just outside my Momma’s belly, God rest her soul. It was all that I thought about. And here I was, just a moment away. It felt like a lifetime. And I remember that first horse right down to its yellowin crooked teeth. It was smaller than the other horses and spotted, it had long hair and looked like a pretty little girl, just like me. It looked like me if I was a horse. I was in love with her right away. I whispered, I’ll love you always, if you let me, off into the air as if she could hear me. As if she could understand somethin like the love of a girl. And my Daddy put me up on that horse and he said now look, this horse is strong. Stronger than you. You gotta really dig yer heels into it, it won’t hurt none. Just remember this one thing: The two of you gonna work in tandem now but only one of you decides what happens to you. And you’re the

one who decides which of you that is. You in charge? Or is the horse in charge? You're both big enough and strong enough to decide on that," and she finishes her beer and says, "Well, go on. Grab me another one then."

"But wait, what happened?"

"Oh it bucked me alright. Made a mess of me. I couldn't even look at another horse for oh some odd four years at least, goddamn. I cried and I cried."

"What happened in those four years?"

"Oh nothin," she says. "Well, somethin. But it's hard to describe. But shoot, everyone has a story like mine. Everyone. Everyone got a story like that one. You'll see." She gets up saying, "Well, I changed my mind. I gotta go, boy. Keep that drink for yerself." I ask her to stay and talk more. She smiles, says good luck, have fun, maybe I'll find you in Toronto someday. She won't. And she's gone. Quick as she came. I stay with another flat beer and the six silent men then wander. Wonder descending like nets in the night. I think of L. I text her,

*thinking of you*

then:

*hey, I love you*

She doesn't text back. It's late.

## II

Morning. I wake, I learn to tie a tie. I thought of maybe a woman maybe I'd marry one day who would maybe want to tie my tie for me forever and then, outliving her, I would feel the need of her, of another, of any other as I stare at my now forever untied tie. How much I could lose, everything all at once.

The line outside the courthouse curves around the block of the great brick building of justice and scatters into the sleepy New York morning street, different than any other morning like a low longing howl. Here's what happens: I'm ushered through security, a metal detector, I stand in another long line. I hand my yellow ticket, the one the officer gave me, to a woman at a counter behind a plastic window. I'm told to go to courtroom #3. People fill the halls like we're all in high school between classes, everyone shuffling feet and slouching. I walk into courtroom #3. Pews on both sides like a church, mostly full. I sit next to a man who falls asleep and is kicked out of the room by an officer. I'm the only one, aside from the lawyer representing the hundred mostly men in this room, wearing a tie. All eyes look down complacent, mostly indifferent. The judge looks kind, her red hair to her shoulders, and she speaks and a fury of disappointment veils her face. I breathe. I think of Alan Watts. I think of Chuan Tzu. I breathe for sixty minutes and I'm quiet and the minutes pass slowly like an entire lifetime sitting there alone and after sixty minutes my name is called and I stand

next to a lawyer, in front of the judge.

The worst thing that could happen.

The judge looks down and her glasses slide to the end of her nose as she reads from a file.

“So apparently you exposed yourself in front of the American flag.”

She laughs. The officers around me all laugh, some of the indifferent men too.

The lawyer next to me shuffles. “Are you sure it was in front of the flag?”

“Oh yes. The officer was quite explicit in his language... I’ve never come across this before. I suppose it’s lewdness but...I guess he didn’t like the flag too much.”

I want to speak up, I want to say that no, she’s wrong, that I love it, that I did what I did because I loved it, because I was full of love, that I loved everything then and I was naked and I was strong and it’s L who I think of and I think of Alan Watts and of Chuan Tzu and I stand there in my tie silent in the laughter like the wind.

“Hmm...we’ll just fine you twenty-five dollars?” she says like a question.

I look to the lawyer next to me. He asks if that’s okay. I say

yes. I'm told to wait outside the room, someone will collect my money. A man in the hall asks me if I'm funny. I don't know what he means.

"You know, you funny or somethin? Like, was it a serious protest-type shit or was you just bein funny?"

I was being funny, I tell him. I thought it would make a good photo. He looks me up and down, he says, "You crazy."

I pay my punishment. Twenty-five dollars. I text L, tell her I'm safe. She asks when I'll be back. I say soon and no response.

Subway to Williamsburg. Men singing on the subway car, *if I have to beg and plead for your sympathy / please don't leave me girl*. I buy Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*. Mitch Horowitz's *Occult America*. Henry Miller's *Colossus of Maroussi*. This notebook. I'm in New York wearing a tie and I'm free and all is right with the world now, coffee. Stoops like altars on every building, I'm yearning now, this is what it feels like to want something, to worship something, I want to sit smoking cigarettes. I wonder that because I grew up Catholic all my heroes are dead or saints or both. I find a golden yellow sweater balanced perfectly on top of a garbage can and it looks clean and I put it on and it fits perfectly and this is it. This is my reward. I go back to Joy's couch, the empty apartment, and I rest. The cat with the bow tie hiding somewhere near, another life with me but hidden.

Joy comes home. She asks me how things went. I tell her,

everything, and we laugh. Soon we sit together on the L train. A woman, drunk, looks Joy in the eye and she says, "Don't you look at me, sheeit." Joy looks away. The woman says, "I'll fuck you up, don't you fuckin stick your eyes at me. Fuck." Silent. Our stop.

We're in Bushwick and we meet with Joy's new boyfriend and he's as tall as he is wide and he's handsome as he is tall and he tells me about working in film now, how he was a truck driver once, "In another life," he says. "Strange, the shit life throws your way and it just keeps going on and going on and on and on." We go to a bar and we buy some cool drinks and we drink them real cool. The presidential debate plays on every television, Obama and Romney projected on the wall, on every wall, electric in the air. Americans gathered in America, all speaking America, more and more drinks. Joy goes home with her new boyfriend, I can't remember his name now. What even happened then but a lot of things lost. I go back to Joy's alone.

I leave in the morning. I don't remember if she said good-bye. Maybe there were tears. It was so long ago and there are so many things I'll choose to forget. How much was my choosing.

My final morning in America. As I walk to Penn Station slow and alone now, barely here, New York becomes one sound magicless and grey. Blond weave, hair on the ground, I barely notice anything now. Hungover, bad dreams: My best friend leaves me, my partner upset, I'm a jerk always.



I'm a fool of the worst kind and the worst part is I romanticize it all. I sit waiting in the airport. I'm alone. Nearby an orthodox Jewish couple reading with their child, old ladies playing cards, people in suits, people on their cellphones, all of us walking to our airplanes, coming and going and leaving after all. The airport smells stale like the iron smell of seeing someone you love walk away with another person, another person who isn't you, who isn't the handsome man. I text L and she doesn't text back. Later she'll leave me.

## **The Hyena**



I'M ON A MOTORCYCLE AND I'M IN OHIO AND I DRIVE PAST a field full of cows and it smells strong of cows, their cow smell steaming in the sun. I remember driving through Quebec with Laura, who drove me from Halifax to Montreal so many years ago, and I had a ticket for the train the next day to Toronto, in that time long past, and Laura and I drove then through a heat wave that sent all the steaming smell of cow wafting through the entire province.

We're two hours into Quebec and the smell before Laura asks, "How long do you think this smell is going to last?"

"I bet it'll be the whole drive, there isn't much else out here."

"My god, I hope not. Don't they grow flowers out here? There's got to be some sweet grass or some cedar or some lilies or something in this goddamn province that doesn't smell this bad."

"Nope, just cheese curds, milk, butter, and beef."

“Oh man,” she says, steering the car with her knees, the TransCanada funnelling us all somewhere else, anywhere, somewhere sweet, and lighting a bundle of sage in her hands, waving it around the car. “You can have some of this when you get to where you’re going. It clears the bad spirits from whatever room you’re in. Just wave the smoke around.”

“No bad spirits in this car.”

“None. This car has been smudged by my grandmother’s sage since the motherfucking day she bought it. When she gave it to me I kept it up, gotta keep up the traditions. Do you know where you’re going to end up?”

“Not really. I’ll figure it out when I get there.”

“You don’t have a place to stay, no job, no nothing when you arrive?”

“Nope.”

“That’s dope, man, good for you. How long you expect you’ll stay?”

“In Toronto? I’m going to give it three years, I think.”

We stay at a loft in the Mile End. Laura’s friend who lives there is out of town and has some space and, “There might be other people crashing there,” she says.

“Who?” I ask.

“I don’t know, just other people.”

That night each of us sleep on a couch in a large, mostly bare windowless room of guitars and mic stands and dirty couches and other people sleeping, the sound of strangers breathing in the night, the smell of mould, everybody stepping light. I don’t sleep and in the morning Laura drives me to the train station and before I go she hugs me and says, “That’s not how you hug. Where did you learn to hug like that? It’s so limp.” I say I don’t know, no one ever taught me how, and she says, “You can’t love someone unless you know how to hold them. Here, I’ll show you,” and she teaches me this: Give a firm squeeze, not with your strength but with your confidence, heart to heart, a light touch on the way out maybe on the arm maybe on the face, look them in the eye. “Don’t hold on too long,” she says, “you’ll know when to let go.” Laura says goodbye and she gives me a sage bundle and she says be good to this, it’s being passed down to you from generations. It’ll clear the way for love and everything good. Take care.

## II

I remember now, ripping through Ohio, that for a long time I told people I’d jumped on the train in Halifax with a one-way ticket to Toronto, that I thought maybe I’d get off in Montreal, I didn’t know where I’d end up and when the train pulled into Montreal I stayed on, I wonder sometimes

who I would have become if I'd gotten off then, and I told that story so many times that I forgot it wasn't true and I believed it myself for so long and I don't know where the story got muddled and confused but it's three years later and I'm in Toronto and I run into Rienne in the street, a painter I'd met and become friends with recently, and I'm telling her this and if I remember right she says hey, I'm not doing anything today, want to get a drink? and I say yeah, I'm not doing anything important and the drink that we have turns into a lot more drinks and the day turns into the night and the moon is out hard I remember, big and new, loud as the sun everything blue and I don't remember much from the night but I remember meeting Matt, I remember Rienne falling in love with him that night, as soon as he walks past her like who are you and hi. How she looked at him, I'd never seen someone shine like she did then, shining like the most beautiful idiot alive. I remember his laughter blast like a gun, a hyena's face charming and sharp and menacing. I remember it being late at night, too late. I remember his tall and thin body dancing like he's dancing with the moon, dancing like a stripper. Still I remember him most at night. Rienne tells me a few days later, when they start dating, that Matt is new in town. He used to live in Brantford next to the train tracks, that he would get home from the bars downtown by hopping the train, that one night he decided to keep going and see where the train ended up and he ended up in Toronto and he just didn't go back.

Later Matt tells me he doesn't remember me from that time. He tells me this long after he does everything that

breaks everyone else's hearts because he's a runner and he leaves and he breaks hearts and I'm still here and we're driving together in the spring in the car that his father left him after his father had died, only a week ago, the funeral is that day and Matt skips it, skips town and everything and he calls me and says I can't do it, I can't let go, come with me and I'm here and we're driving toward New Mexico. No, I think we're driving toward the Grand Canyon. And I tell him about the first time we met and he says, "I remember when we all went camping, me and you and Rienne and everyone else. That was crazy. How many people came with us that time?"

"Oh there must have been fifteen of us at least."

"Yeah, that's too many people, man. We're lucky no one died. Remember that night everyone did acid?"

"Yeah. We're lucky *you* didn't die, I was so mad at you."

"Ha! What? Why?"

We were all together, I say, all of us, and then Matt ran off without saying a thing and no one knew where he went and I didn't say it then but I was envious of him because I wanted to leave too but I was scared of I don't know what, something of the dark, the wild, of leaving and anyway, "When you took off," I say, "into the woods I remember Rienne had a real bad trip, she was so worried about you. She had this silk scarf that was black with red roses on it



and she wrapped it all the way around her face, only her nose was showing, and she wouldn't talk to anyone. She just stood there by the fire, not moving, not talking to anyone, not making a sound."

"Hahaha aww, poor Rienne."

"I was mad that you hurt her. But do you remember coming back?"

"Yeah, that was crazy! I just needed to run, man, I took off into the woods, I ran until I couldn't run anymore haha it was great! I remember just stopping and catching my breath and being like, where the fuck am I? And I thought about Rienne and I was like, I think I want to go back to her. I remember just standing there, thinking about her and laughing. Then I walked back, I didn't even have a flashlight, it took me forever! I was, like, listening to everyone talking way out in the forest and moving toward the sound. Who was at the campsite when I came back? I can't remember."

"I was, it was just me."

"Oh man, yes!"

Everyone had gone out onto the lake in canoes and I stayed behind. I wanted to be alone, I tell him. "Then I fucking hear this laughter in the woods and this heavy breath like panting, I wasn't even sure it was real but then you came out of the trees like clawing your way through branches

and laughing so hard, you landed in front of the fire and you started crawling around going ‘oh man! wow!’ and you were all cut up and bloody. It looked like you were wearing face paint and you looked up at me and you were laughing like crazy and I wasn’t mad anymore. I was just glad you were there.”

“Whoooo! That’s crazy I barely remember that, yeah.”

“I think that’s the first time we ever really talked.”

“But we didn’t even talk though. We just sat by the water watching the moon. I remember that part really well. It was beautiful, man. Just sitting there together. Like magic.”

We’re driving into the Grand Canyon for sure because I remember thinking that driving into the Grand Canyon is like magic too, the kind of thing you can’t describe in words or in pictures or in art, it’s art all on its own. You have to experience it for yourself to understand. The Grand Canyon is like when you’re a kid and sex seems like such a strange thing, like alien, and you don’t understand why people go crazy for sex, why they get jealous, why they fight for it, why they seem like a whole other person when they’re having sex, more animal, more present, so present they’re possessed, they’re mystical. You see it on TV, you see it everywhere, it doesn’t make sense. Then when you’re older you have sex and you think, I understand now, I see why. That’s the Grand Canyon, the Grand Canyon is why, changing colour in the sun pink to orange to purple to blue

and black again and a distance you can't describe, it has no point of reference. The Grand Canyon is chameleons changing colour covering the entirety of a million football fields in the middle of the ocean.

And we're there, Matt and me, standing in it, and we're standing over it now both of us wearing cowboy hats and Matt looks like the great cowboy of America, the one that people think of in the mercury-grey sunset, the one that doesn't exist, and as we watch the sunset over the canyon a man with a large camera asks Matt, "Can I take your photo?" A complete stranger. Matt says, "Knock yourself out," lighting a cigarette because it seems like the most natural thing to do now and the man circles us snapping pictures and he's changing this moment, taking away from the moment by capturing it, making everything two-dimensional but it's magic and I understand. We all want to touch magic, to steal it for ourselves.

It's early spring and the temperature drops below zero that night on our bodies on our tent set up on the ground still snow underneath. Our campsite is set up on a loop of campsites and our loop is called the Juniper Loop and we laugh about it and I don't remember why, we get drunk that night to warm up our bodies, to get tired enough for sleep. We play charades just to move our bodies to keep each other warm way out here. I hate charades, I say, Matt says so do I, laughing like a hyena in the Grand Canyon wrapped drunk in black Mexican blankets that we sleep beneath later, the two of us holding each other in a tent, someone holding

me, our stomachs moving together, toward and away, his ass like a puzzle piece against me warm there in the cold of the metamorphic rocks of the Grand Canyon, sandstone and shale.

I think we drive out the next day, maybe we stay longer. I remember sitting on a spire alone in the canyon beneath a tree that looms over me like a protector, I remember writing in a journal, where did I put that? I remember throwing a rock into the great expanse like a spark, was that the day we got there? Or later? Then I remember driving out, the trains running with us along the highway. I remember the desert red like the fading red petals of a dying rose and we're there, then we're in a forest snow-covered, rolling up our windows. I remember being asleep in the back seat 3:00 a.m. waking up to a voice singing: *Jesus saves! Jeeesus saves!* and a choir behind the voice then another man screaming about devotion and the headlights are bobbing up and down into a great black nothing and Matt starts singing too and maybe some of this is a dream. I remember getting to the Canadian border and the border guard saying, "Do you have anything to declare?" and Matt says, "What do you mean?" and it's light grey outside like six in the morning a great fog like a bubble around us and the border guard says, "Are you bringing back any goods?" and Matt says, "Just some loosies," like loose cigarettes and the border guard says, "Welcome back to Canada, boys," and waves us forward.

And that morning I remember looking at Matt driving through the grey bleak morning of Ontario and he shines

against it like a bag of diamonds poured onto a thin sheet of tin foil and I wonder how it is that we, or him more specifically, are so alive and we have something inside of us like maybe beautiful men might have, beautiful men everywhere, and we are so alone in the world. We have no women with us in the world, no men either, the entire world full of women, full of love, and here we are together and I don't say it out loud but I marry him there, in that car, on that morning, an invisible cowboy hat of nostalgia hovering over our heads like halos or like ghosts, the smoke from the sage I took out that I'd carried with me all these years and I can't remember where it came from, I won't remember for years until long after someone does everything that breaks everyone else's hearts but to me only, and I light it then and the smoke fills the truck blended with the smoke of Matt's loosie hanging from his wet morning mouth, both of us laughing now like hyenas, both of us breathing in the two smokes, the smoke going into our lungs, becoming us. I'm coming down, I think. We'd dropped some acid a few hours before. How we didn't die I don't know. I can't remember why we went to the Grand Canyon, I can't remember much along the way, I don't know if he brought me because he wanted me there or I was the only one willing. He's my brother, my true brother I say to myself, and soon after this I don't see him for a long time like so long I wonder where he is, what he looks like now, the distance between us expands and he's gone and he's always with me and what's more brotherly than that? What's more brotherly than not talking. Isn't that what brothers do?

## **The Devoted**