

Daniel Green  
**Ballad of a Thin Man**

Before she died, my mother gave me a record player. I didn't know anything about music, but I always wanted one.

My father gave me his vinyl copy of Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* after Mom died, before he moved out of our old family home. He told me that he lost his record player, that he was giving me Highway 61 because he didn't know what else to do with it and "you have a record player and I don't," but I knew why he really gave it to me. There was an unbearable amount of sentiment attached to that record, just as there were too many memories humming in the air of our old house for staying to be possible. The stains on the couch, the rusted door hinges—that smell—the unignorable, personal characteristics of a home. The things that weren't just *things*, but the things that survived. Too many things lived. I think, generally, far too many things are kept alive for far too long.

My contribution to Dad's moveout was taking some old furniture: my great grandmother's armchair and my grandfather's dresser. The base of the armchair's fabric is green, accompanied by a light-green floral pattern: potentially hideous, potentially beautiful—depends on the angle. The fabric on the arms is ripped and I tried to cover it with blankets. I'm still not sure why we didn't throw it to the curb, or why I took it with me. I never met my great grandmother.

I lived alone above a Thai restaurant. Antique furniture and no elevator are not an ideal combo, but I made do. I put my record player on top of my grandfather's dresser, the green armchair by its side, put on *Highway 61* and sat down with a drink.

***Highway 61 Revisited, Side 1***

**Like a Rolling Stone**

I remember listening to this song with my father—it was the first time

I'd ever heard Dylan. We were sitting in the car when it came on the radio.

"Turn that up," he said. "This is my favourite song."

I rotated the volume knob. Dylan talked of dressing up and giving to the homeless, bums and dimes.

Dad took one hand off the wheel to turn it up more. By the end of the first verse, the car's speakers couldn't get any louder. Dylan's enigmatic questions rattled the windows of my father's 1993 Honda Civic. Notions of vagrancy and freedom bounced off the side mirrors like rolling stones... *How would that feel?*

My father kept readjusting his hands on the steering wheel. He stroked it with his thumbs, clenched it as hard as he could, then caressed it with his thumbs again. "Before she died, I would listen to this song... I would imagine that I was free."

I was silent.

"I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry." He turned off the stereo. "Perhaps you can relate now, too."

I broke up with my girlfriend earlier that year. Long overdue. That's normal, though. It would be irregular for one to throw something away before it expires. It's human to keep things past their expiration date; it's easier. In some ways my father and I mirror one another. In my case it was a choice, in his it wasn't, but a muddy reflection is there, nonetheless. Why do we become our fathers? It wasn't a purposeful act... or an act at all, really. But was it up to me? Or was the game rigged from the start?

When death did my parents part and Dylan asked my father how it felt, I wonder if he lied in his response.

#### **Tombstone Blues**

I think my father is going to die soon. I keep wondering about his tombstone; about tombstones in general. Do people decide what they want on their tombstone before they die? Do they spend time making drafts? Writing, rewriting, forgetting, remembering—perfecting their engraved immortalization, what will live on long after them.

At what age does that happen? When do people decide that it's time to start thinking about the scripture that will surpass their being? Was it just me that started thinking about it as a child? Or is it more of a

gradual realization for most? Or is it instant: do people just wake up one day and think, *I need to come up with what's going on my tombstone?*

#### **It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry**

I remember their biggest fight. I remember my father crying and my mother not. I remember the smell of burnt fish and the sound of the smoke detector because they were the only reason the argument ended.

#### **From a Buick 6**

My father had a 1993 black Honda Civic—no Buick 6, but Dylan's words speak to it the same way my father would speak to his Civic. He gave it to my brother, though, and it died. My brother lived in Halifax where they tow cars off the street if they expect a lot of snow.

I remember sitting beside my father on the couch when my brother called to confess. Faintly, I heard him say, "The Civic is gone, Dad."

My father's brow furrowed. "What do you mean it's *gone*?" He stood up and moved to look out the window. "Impounded? ... Well, can you get it back? ... They're asking how much? ... Oh, dear..."

As a kid, I was so comfortable in that car. My father would put me in the backseat and drive me around the block to get me to fall asleep. The vibrations, the movement, and that sensation of someone moving you from one place to another—where you're suspended in time, without worry—gave me a certain peace. It still does, which makes me wonder whose sake he was really driving for.

I have memories of sitting in the back, in a booster-seat, after he picked me up from school. I remember the materials: the grey, unclean fabric finish on the seats and the fake leather on the steering wheel. I remember looking at his hair, straw hat, and oversized sunglasses that fit over his real glasses as he swivelled his head, trying to focus on the road.

When I lost my sunglasses, he insisted that I get a similar pair to his, but I didn't want to look old like him. I didn't want to die too soon.

#### **Ballad of a Thin Man**

I've never put on any consequential weight. I can't say that I'm dissatisfied with my metabolism—it could be worse—but I can't say that

I'm satisfied either. "Ballad of a Thin Man": I think thin men tend to write ballads because of their inability to do otherwise. Big men can play sports with their big male friends.

My father was thin too.

### **Highway 61 Revisited, Side 2**

#### **Queen Jane Approximately**

My mother had a friend, Clara, who would often babysit me when my parents were away. I was five years old when my father went away for a weekend. I asked my mother why Clara was coming over when she was here.

"Clara has no family, few friends. I like to make her feel like she has a friend," my mother said.

I was woken up that night by the T.V. downstairs. I remember inching closer to the stairwell and sounds of rustling becoming clearer. Shadows were moving around, separating, becoming one, finicking. I never poked my head over, just saw the shadows and heard the movement and knew that I was too afraid to see what was happening. Even at such a young age, I knew that there would be no coming back if I went down the stairs.

Queen Jane never came over when Dad was home.

#### **Highway 61 Revisited**

God told Abraham he wanted his killing done here.

I got up to pour myself another drink.

#### **Just like Tom Thumb's Blues**

Another shot. My fingers are numb.

The doctor won't tell Dylan what he's got. Maybe it's impossible.

#### **Desolation Row**

I am a record player. If you put an ear close to my needle, a faint, haunting squeal of music is all you can hear. A dying, desolate ringing. The noise that the heart attack machine on Desolation Row makes. A noise that all of us make, if you listen close enough.

Things die. They come, and then they go. Forgotten, then remembered. There were three record shops within five minutes of my apartment. Records: forgotten, then remembered—revived, revisited. When will they die again? When will the cycle stop? When was my mother going to tell my father that the record player he lost was the one that she gave to me?