

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 4 | Issue 2

Article 7

January 2005

Blind Spot

Roy Kesey

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate>

Recommended Citation

Kesey, Roy (2005) "Blind Spot," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, Article 7.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol4/iss2/7>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

BLIND SPOT
Roy Kesey

It's early, just barely light, and driving to work I get the feeling again, a car hanging right in my blind spot. I whip around but the street is empty as far back as I can see. That's always how it happens. Things go bad sometimes.

A few minutes later the feeling comes again, and I check my mirrors, catch a glimpse of a dented grill. I've never gotten a good look at the car, so I'm not sure how I know it's a blue convertible. I've never seen the driver, no idea who he is, but he's been showing up more and more often, cutting it closer and closer. I whip around again and the street is still empty and you don't have to tell me how weird this is. I know how weird it is.

I get to the warehouse, shut off the engine and just sit quiet until Goat pulls up alongside. Yesterday Old Red sent Goat and me to the docks to see about a crate; it went a little rough, and Goat got his arm broken, and now he's wearing one of those fiberglass casts, only this one's bright orange, so I hassle him a bit.

We go inside and say hi to Vid and Marty. Nobody wants poker or rummy this early, so we just sit there and smoke. Something's happening, no question, but we never get told until it's time to go, and for the moment we're twitchy like spiders.

We watch seagulls for a while. We watch tugs and scows. We tell stories and ask each other what about lunch, and then Old Red comes out of the office, waves me and Vid to the Cutlass, tells me to drive.

- I got a thing in my eye, I say.
 - What kind of thing? says Vid.
 - I don't know, maybe some sawdust.
 - You got a hankie, so use it, says Old Red.
 - Vid knows how to drive too, I say.
 - If I wanted Vid to drive, I'd have told him to drive.
- I take out my hankie and pretend for a second, get in and

start the engine, and we're not ten minutes out when that fucker in the blue convertible slides into my blind spot again.

- Take a right at the light, says Old Red.

I nod, signal, catch a glint off the convertible's windshield, look back at the empty lane, look again fast and there's still nothing there. I ease over, make the turn and speed up.

- Since when do you drive like a hundred years old? says Vid.

- Leave him alone, says Old Red.

So he knows something's wrong, which isn't what either of us needs; Old Red always has things on his mind but lately it's been worse. He points us down to a Chinese restaurant with dirty windows and peeling paint. In the back there's fifty or sixty small boxes wrapped tight. Then there's some kind of problem, and before things get cleared up I take a shot to the nose, gives me a real gusher, but it's mostly stopped by the time we get back to the warehouse.

- Nobody teach you to duck? says Goat.

I look at him, and he goes back to watching seagulls until Old Red comes and tells us to unload. He leaves with Marty and Vid, and it takes Goat and me almost an hour to put all the boxes away.



I get home around nine, and my boy Angus is sitting on the floor in the living room, staring at the sofa. He isn't wearing his hearing aid which means it's broken again. I put the bag on the shelf in the closet, shut the door hard, and he turns right around. The thing on his chest is infected again and leaking through his shirt, and again there's this watery white stuff dribbling out of his eyes.

As soon as he realizes it's me he starts slinging his arms around. It's the same fight as always getting him out of his clothes and into the bath; since Janey left things have been harder than I'd have thought. Usually the warm water calms him but tonight he's still at it with the arms, swinging and swinging, trying to tell

me something. It's not until I look in the mirror that I see what he's getting at: there's still some dried blood in my moustache.

I tell him it looks worse than it feels, which of course he can't hear. I rinse the blood out and he quiets down, but it takes me ten minutes with a washcloth to get the thing on his chest clean. It looks like a chunk of bad lung sticking out, all mottled pink and gray, but it feels more like rubber, hard and smooth.

Angus is the only one I've told all the stories to—I don't imagine too many details stick in whatever he's got of a brain, and he can't talk anyway. I wipe his eyes, pull him out and dry him off, cover the thing on his chest with cream and gauze and tape, get him into his pajamas.

I heat up two turkey dinners in the microwave and carry Angus to his special chair. We eat and watch some television, and then Angus wants something but I can't tell what. He doesn't make any noise, just flaps his hands, opens and closes his mouth. I take down his pens and some paper, and that's not it; I take down his model F-16 that I did for him, and that's not it either. I carry him room to room, trying to get him to point, but skinny as he is he weighs maybe a hundred and ten, and I can't keep it up for long. Finally I leave him on his mattress on the floor, get into bed and listen for hours to his hands slapping the wall.



There was a dream, something big and white and pointy but now it's gone and I'm late for work and Angus is still at it against the wall, slap slap slap. I grab his wrists to make him stop, carry him to the bathroom, wash the blood off his hands, more cream, more gauze, and ask him real loud where his hearing aid is. He doesn't understand or doesn't want to. I draw a picture of it, ridiculous, looks like a cashew but he gets it, points out the window. He gets angry like that sometimes, throws stuff around, and there's nothing you can do. I go and look. It's a long way down to the alley.

The thing on his chest looks better and his eyes are clean.

I get his breakfast on a tray on the floor, do up a sandwich for his lunch and stick it on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator. He looks at me, and I tell him I'm sorry, prop him up against the sofa, grab an apple, hit the stairs.

Everybody's waiting. I tuck my shirt in and tell Old Red that I'm sorry for being late. He nods, cocks his head kind of funny, asks me to tell him about it—first time this has ever happened, and something's not right. I tell him, Angus again, the hearing aid again, and Old Red smiles.

- Tell me more, he says.

Goat and Vid are staring at the floor, and Marty is fooling with a butterfly knife, clickety-click, back and forth. There's nothing to do but start in about Angus's eyes, but then Old Red cuts me off, says he doesn't want to hear it. I say I know and I'm sorry and he points at the wheel of the Cutlass.

It's a pawnshop this time, only a couple of blocks away. We all get out, and Old Red passes crowbars around. The owner sees us coming and heads for the back, and we swing and swing until everything's in pieces.

I hang back as we leave, hoping someone else will get the wheel for once, but they're all just standing around the car, and Old Red nods at me. I shrug, get in, put on my seatbelt.

- What the hell? says Vid.

Old Red shakes his head, tells me not to waste any time. I pull out, and the blue convertible is already tucked in tight behind us. I try not to look, not even at the mirrors, but at the intersection there's a nudge and I wrench the wheel, sideswipe a delivery truck, and now we're on the sidewalk facing the wrong way, a crate busted open and oranges rolling everywhere.

People gather, point, argue about what they saw. Old Red grabs me, makes me look in his eyes. Vid and Marty are yelling, and Goat tells them to shut the fuck up. Old Red reaches across me, opens my door, tells me to go straight home and stay there until he calls.

I take off my seatbelt and get out. Old Red slides over and guns the engine, pulls away. There's a siren getting closer. I

keep my head down, pick up a couple of oranges and push into the crowd.



Saturday I take Angus to the clinic, and there's mildew on the ceiling, a roach in the bathroom, the sound of rats in the walls as we wait. I've brought his pens, pull wrappers out of the trash for paper; he picks a red marker, holds it like an ice-pick and I move his hand in circles. This is maybe his favorite thing.

We wait an hour and then get told the ear doctor didn't come in today, not that it matters with what hearing aids cost, but still. So we go to another waiting room and draw more circles and get his chest looked at, and his eyes. The nurse has a piece of old lettuce caught in the pocket of her uniform. She tells me I need to be a little more careful with basic hygiene, and I say that one bath a day is the best I can do. She nods and says that's not enough, and she can't give me any more cream unless I pay for it, which I do with most of this week's food money. I steal half a roll of gauze from a cart, and the receptionist waves as we leave, says she hopes everything turns out okay.

On the way home the convertible slips into place. I drive a perfect line, keep a constant speed, then swerve left and brake and spin for a look. Of course the lane is empty, and I've wrenched Angus's neck, and there's stuff in his eyes again.

Back at the apartment there's nothing in the freezer so I make rice and a packet of gravy. This is fine with him. We watch the news, and then I take out the Twister; he loves the colors, and we've changed the rules to make it fair. I do all the spinning, take position, and wait for him to reach. Finally I get an impossible left-foot yellow, collapse on top of him but soft, and he laughs and laughs and laughs.



Right at kick-off the phone rings, and I wait to watch

the run-back but the kid gets stuffed at the eighteen. I answer, and it's Old Red. He says he needs me, says there's extra money in it. I look at Angus, and he's staring at the cheerleaders. I tell Old Red I'll be there in twenty minutes, he says ten, and I look around for my shoes.

Everybody's there. Old Red tells Vid to drive, and I end up squashed between Marty and Goat in back. Nobody talks. I crane my neck, pretend to watch the scenery—street-dogs, winos, trash. Finally we stop at a chop-shop we've worked with for years, and something's coming but it's hard to tell what. Goat has the key, gets the door open. We walk in, and when Old Red shuts the door it's too dark to see.

Vid nudges me forward, and I put my hands out, crack my shin on maybe a muffler, and Vid nudges me again. All the way to the back, and here there's a window, not much light but a little. There's a big metal barrel and a bunch of plastic jugs. Marty opens a jug, pours it into the barrel, and the smell takes me a second but then I know: acid.

We watch Marty pour maybe ten jugs, and Vid and Goat are tight against my shoulders. Old Red stares out the window. A last few jugs. Old Red asks me what I did with the box.

- What box?
- Quit fucking around.
- We put them in the—
- I know. And one is gone. You thought maybe you could set up a little business on the side?
- I don't have the faintest—
- You're the only one in bad enough shape to do something that stupid. Conversation's over. Marty?
- At least let me call my wife.
- You fucking hate your wife, says Vid.
- I never said I hated her.
- You never said you loved her.
- No, but she'll take care of Angus if I ask her.

Old Red waves us quiet, shakes his head, looks over at Marty and nods.

- Then let me call Angus instead.
- He can answer the phone?
- I rigged it special for him.

Old Red thinks this over, tells Goat to give me his cell phone. Goat says it costs a dollar a call and there's a perfectly good regular phone right there on the workbench. Marty picks up the receiver, listens, hands it to me. I dial, wait, drill Marty in the temple, pull him in tight and spin. He catches Old Red's bullet, and I'm up on the workbench and through the window, glass jagging deep into my arms, and I'm scrambling and up and into the street, heavy traffic both ways, a little red pick-up skids and spills me but I'm up again, haul the driver out, and there's maybe a chance I'll beat them back to the house.

I'm bleeding all over the seat but there's no time for any of it, tunnel and dark, bridge and light, hitting all the seams, a couple of stoplights but only the last one goes red as I near and I gun straight through, dodge some kid on a bike, hard left and up to my building. My fingers aren't working so well and it takes me five tries with the keys, finally in as the Cutlass slides up, rams the pick-up, and I get the door locked behind me but of course it won't hold long. Up and up and up, I kick down my door, and Angus is curled on the floor, so much stuff in his eyes he can't even see.

I pick him up, grab the box out of the bag in the closet, and head for the window. I bang it open with my elbow, no fire escape but a drainpipe, Angus wailing and swinging under one arm and the box tight under the other, and we slide, down a floor, another, dark red stains all over the wall. I feel my hands start to go, cinch Angus to my chest and then there's nothing left and we're falling, a strip of sky above us going thin and then we hit.

There's no sound, and I can't breathe, can't feel anything. Then I hear a car engine, low and smooth. A moment later the blue convertible pulls up. It stops, and a door opens, but now Angus is writhing on top of me, and he seems okay but I can't move my arms, can't hold him tighter or let go.