

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 10 | Issue 2

Article 33

January 2011

Now, That's a Sign

Randall Brown

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

Recommended Citation

Brown, Randall (2011) "Now, That's a Sign," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 10: Iss. 2, Article 33.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol10/iss2/33>

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.

NOW, THAT'S A SIGN
Randall Brown

His mother had been listening to astrophysicists on tape during the drive from Boston, and over eggs and ham she talked of cosmic clutter and the Theory of Everything, one sentence that defined the universe.

"And what would be your sentence?" he asked her between bites.

"Oh, I think you know that answer." She poured Tabasco sauce onto breakfast. He found himself fascinated by the folds under her neck. It took his mind off her yellow skin, the yellow eyes.

He knew her sentence. "Life without parole," he said.

"Not you." She looked at him with wonder. "You escaped it. The boy who lived." Free of addiction, of the inevitable death of liver cells, pickled and drowned. She leaned over, whispered, "What's your secret?"

"It's not a secret." If he loved her before with that desperate, clinging kind of love, it no longer registered. A myth of what might've been.

"But, oh, you did." Had he spoken aloud? He'd heard it before: how she'd let no one hold him, how they slept curled in the Green La-Z-Boy chair, she reading Dr. Seuss and telling stories of Peter the Popcorn Eater who solved mysteries, like where jewels could be found and monsters unmasked. "You were like a collie."

"Colicky," he said. "I was colicky."

"That's what I meant." She winced at some unseen pain, maybe in the bones, in the gut, and she reached for a drink that wasn't there. He knew what the failed rehab visits had indoctrinated into the families, the nature of it all, its origins in the brain, a disease, not a choice. But he wondered if there'd been something to save her, to stand against that desire. He imagined it to be the love that he'd never found to give her.

They drove around that evening, searching for her last meal, or at least that's what she called it. She said she wanted something else,

other than what the world had given them. They passed the fast food chains, the Chinese restaurants, Italian hoagie places. They drove out of town and into the hills. She leaned her head on him as he drove. The headlight caught the leaves, rusting, the color of his mother, orange-yellow.

“I wish—,” she kept saying, stopping.

He slowed down, and she looked up with that same wonder of before.

“Oh, honey,” she said. She kissed his cheek and her breath smelled of basements, long since abandoned. “It’s perfect.”

The neon blinked. The something different. The something never before seen. The last meal.

Texas Pete’s Stir-Fry Tofu.

That juxtaposition of things that didn’t belong together.

“You’ll miss me,” she’d say sometime during that meal, surrounded by Texas and tofu, and he would feel it rise, like all that her liver no longer processed—and maybe he’d let it this time, let it overwhelm him until it cried out something that sounded like ‘mommy.’