

Tahoe

Allison had a golf ball. She used it to cheer herself up.

Whenever I get down because no one will buy a subscription, she said, I take out my golf ball and bounce it on the sidewalk while I walk to the next house, and it cheers me up.

You and your golf ball, Eddie said.

I've got an extra one, Allison said. You should give it a try. You'll see.

No thanks, Eddie said.

She gave it to me.

•

Allison never said much. She was pretty and sweet. Like the rest of us, she was some kind of loser. Not the same kind as the rest of us, but some kind.

•

Rick drove around in the van, supervising.

You spend too much time with the housewives, he told me. Close the sale and move on.

Eddie and Rick, they were the winning kind of losers. The rest of us on the crew, we were the ordinary kind, running away.

•

Rick was driving the van. Shannon was on the radio. We sang along till the song got to the high part and the others on the crew dropped out, but I kicked into falsetto.

Oh Shannon . . .

Sing it, Danny! Allison said. She smiled.

I would have done something for that smile.

I would have bounced golf balls to the moon. I would have sung falsetto till my head exploded.

•

Eddie drove a navy blue New Yorker.

The company bought it for me, he said. The title's not in my name yet, but they'll transfer it to me if I ever quit.

At night, he and Allison went out together in the New Yorker. One night, he told me, they climbed a mountain. City lights spangled a valley below.

I never seen a mountain like that before, Eddie said.

•

No golf balls for Eddie to cheer himself up. When someone would cut him off and close a door in his face, he would spit on the door. Spit would hang on the screen.

Motherfuckers, he would say.

Eddie! I said.

What! he said. Those fuckers aren't going to fuck with me!

He was hands down our top-grossing seller. He could sell circles around the rest of us.

This company's good to me, man, he said. We went to Tahoe last year for Christmas. We're going again this year. You hired on just in time.

•

There were distinct categories of persons home in the daytime. There were the housewives, not all of whom were bored. There were the old retired folks, not all of whom had doors that needed spitting on. There were the night workers, a surprisingly high number of whom spent their days smoking pot. They would invite us in, trays of marijuana on the coffee tables. They would give us joints. One even had a huge marijuana plant growing in a big pot in the corner of his living room, a few of the leaves already rolled up into joints, right there on the plant like thin white fruit dangling. This was far and away the best part of the job. Fuck Tahoe, man.

•

Eddie was easily as cool as he thought he was, and he knew it. He took me out at night in the New Yorker, shared a joint with me while the Moody Blues played on the tape deck.

Me and Allison were out here last night, he said. She's one sweet babe.

There was nothing I could say to that.

•

We traveled to Phoenix, stopping along the way to see The Thing. I had seen The Thing before, traveling with my mom to Tucson for a religious revival.

We have to see The Thing, I told Eddie and Allison and the girl whose name I don't remember. She wasn't as pretty as Allison. She wasn't as sweet. She didn't bounce anything anywhere. No one took her out at night.

I would have.

•

I bounced the golf ball Allison gave me on a sidewalk in a neighborhood in Phoenix. She was right. It made me feel better. It would have been hard for me to feel much worse. It was a sort of wallow for me, that point in my life.

•

The girl whose name I don't remember, she was not impressed with The Thing. She was not impressed with any thing. I never knew what she was running from. I never knew what any of us was running from.

•

Tahoe I didn't make it to. Something broke inside me and Rick sent me home on a bus.

•

Maybe I still have the golf ball Allison gave me. I hope I do. If it wasn't the middle of the night, I would turn on the lights and hunt until I found it. Then I would take it outside and bounce it on the sidewalk. It's a beautiful night, warm and still.

•

Allison! Allison! I still remember you, Allison! How could I ever forget? I still have the golf ball!

Allison!