



# Leaving Batesville

by Nadria Tucker

After “Mississippi Doublewide”/Caddle

his uncle said he’d leave him money, but the motherfucker lied—it’s a double-wide trailer near on top of the tracks. He sleeps through the 2 p.m. to Sardis; he wakes with the 3:18 to Courtland. Still not used to the noise. When his momma wants to know does he like the new place, he just says it’s goddamn loud.

Batesville Casket Company, third shift. Quiet. The job description for the warehouse said “meet customer needs,” but from 11 to 7 it’s just him and the caskets. He loads dozens of them into wood boxes and onto trucks that disappear into the night. Business is good, but he’s not a businessman. He’s warehouse. He listens to mixtapes (Skynyrd and such) and drives a forklift up and down rows of caskets stacked ceiling high.

Just after sun-up. He walks the four miles home. There’s a ’72 Monte Carlo in his yard—used to be his uncle’s. Weeds are clawing up through the floor-boards. He was born in ’72.

He sinks into bed without a shower. He’s sweaty and he stinks. He doesn’t care. Does *she*? He doesn’t care anymore. He snores and she elbows him in the ribs.

Two p.m. north to Sardis. Three-eighteen south to Courtland. She’s gone when he opens his eyes. He gets up and turns on the computer—*his* computer. He fought for this thing and he pays the bill. She wanted HBO. You can buy HBO with your own goddamn money, he said.

He chats with people far away and some nearby. A girl nearby.

Meet me at the diner or the bar, she writes.

Can’t. His old lady’s home.

The kid starts to cry. He sings to her. The phone rings, but he doesn’t pick up. He wants to, but he can’t.

he thinks about cutting the grass before dark, but doesn’t—he doesn’t mind it kinda wild. He sits on the porch swing, playing guitar, staring out at the cemetery across the street. How many of those caskets has he had his hands on?

She’s cooking something when he comes inside—whatever it is, it’s burnt. He sets his guitar on the table so the kid can’t reach it. She touches everything now, exploring. She pulls things apart.

They put a note on the door, he says. Second one in two weeks.

You should sell, she says. This place is a shithole.

This place is the only thing anybody ever gave me.

We could have a real house with that money, she says.

What difference does it make?

he sits in front of the TV for hours, watching whatever’s on. Nothing’s ever on.

I’m leaving, she says. I said I’d work the graveyard shift.

A lie. When she’s gone he gets on the computer. That girl wants to meet downtown. He can’t—the kid. But she wants to meet him for real, in person.

Should he? He types his address, erases it, types it again. Sends.

When?

Soon. Before I change my mind.

She’s younger in person.

How old are you?

Twenty-one, she says.

A lie.

How old are *you*? she says.

Older by the minute.

Got something to drink?

He hands her a PBR.

This is nice, she says, swaying on the porch swing. I like being by the tracks. It reminds me

**Tracklist: Leaving Batesville, after “Mississippi Doublewide”/Caddle, by Nadria Tucker | Night Moves, after Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet Band, by Zach Plague | Carousel, after Iron & Wine, by Emily Self**

**\*\*This issue springs from the Mixtape** series of readings we intro’d in Chicago July 2007, several writers casting short shorts inspired by pop songs, with subsequent events in Brooklyn, Manhattan and attendant to this issue in Birmingham, Ala. Two contributors here, Tucker and Self, both past **THE2NDHAND** contributors, were winners of a contest we sponsored attendant to Birmingham’s annual Artwalk festival. If you’re reading an early copy, see the events page at the2ndhand.com for details of our Sept. 5 reading. Otherwise, well into our 9th year our circulation and distribution is in something of an expansion period—now find THE2NDHAND in spots in L.A., New Orleans, Atlanta, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati in addition to our well-established distribution points in Chicago, Birmingham and to a lesser extent New York City and elsewhere. Thanks to all who’ve offered up their hands. If you’re reading this in another locale entirely, drop us a line: info@the2ndhand.com.

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**\*\*WRITERS:** send prose submissions (2,500 words or less Web, 5,000 print) to THE2NDHAND, c/o Todd Dills, 1827 1st Ave. N #301, Birmingham AL 35203 (todd@the2ndhand.com). THE2NDHAND is **editors** Todd Dills, C.T. Ballentine, **resident artist** Rob Funderburk, **FAQ editor** Mickey Hess, and the elusively pragmatic janitor R. Beady. Lit apes unite.

photo by Todd Dills

things are going places. Like, there are other places than here that I could be.

You wanna leave town?

Don’t you? Don’t you wanna be a famous musician or whatever?

I can’t leave.

Why not?

Inside, the kid starts to cry. This is my place, he says.

Oh. She doesn’t understand. Cool.

Wanna come in?

I should get back home.

Yeah. Send me a message, he says. Tell me about leaving Batesville.

OK, she says. Then she’s gone.

He walks inside and locks the door. He gives the kid a bottle and sings to her. Then he gets in bed and waits for the next train to roll through, away. | *Tucker, a native of South Alabama, lives and writes today in Birmingham.*

## Night Moves

by Zach Plague

After Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet Band

Bradford couldn’t wait to move out of Albuquerque. Summer was closing down. The heat was dissolving, and he was anxious to hit the road. The plan was to fix the bus and just take off. His friend Mavis worked at his uncle’s salvage yard out by Kirtland. Earlier in the summer someone had towed an old broken-down school bus onto the lot—a junker, but Mavis begged his uncle to let him work on it. Mavis and Bradford spent most of the summer messing around with it.

Mavis knew a thing or two about engines. And though the bus engine was big, it was old, and fairly simple. Mavis replaced the fuel pump, cleaned out the fuel lines, and it seemed to run pretty well. The brakes were still bad. Bradford took out most of the seats and constructed elaborate bunk beds out of lumber from Lowe’s and mattresses from an abandoned old flophouse the other side of town.

One night when they were both really drunk they spray painted the whole thing bright blue and smashed a beer bottle against its side to christen it.

After all the work he had done to it, there was no way Mavis’s uncle wouldn’t let



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ITINERARY FOR FINDING A PAD IN COCOA BEACH

1:30 p.m. Stop daydreaming about Sophie. Either it won’t happen or it’ll be a bad idea if it does. / 1:31 p.m. Walk back to Janie’s house. You’ll see Taylor on the way home. She’ll flip you a bird. Wave back. / 1:43 p.m. Get to Janie’s. Nod when Janie says, “I’m fucking serious, Knucklehead. You have to be out of here by 5:30.” / 1:44 p.m. Nod again when Janie says, “Are those my husband’s baggies you’re wearing?” Stop nodding when she adds, “You little shit.” / 1:45 p.m. Take a shower. Notice the granite walls of the shower. Wonder when your sister got so rich. Tell yourself, “I didn’t want to stay in this bourgeois pad, anyway.” / 2:01 p.m. Leave Janie’s house. You will have a few ideas as to where to go, but none of those ideas are good ones. Just start walking. / 2:12 p.m. Get to Woodland Avenue. Pay attention to everything you’ve come to associate with Woodland: weedy lawns, concrete apartments built in the sixties with names that celebrate the ocean or the Space Center north of town, scattered duplexes in the shadows of these apartment building, junk cars in carports or on the weedy lawns, rusty beach cruisers locked to skinny palm trees, a big surfing kite stretched across a live oak, yellowed surfboards behind the screens of front porches, stained mattresses by the dumpsters, the detritus of blue collar lives in trash bins as people upgrade or downgrade from one block apartment to the next depending on the winds of the local economy. Everything about this neighborhood screams out Danny McGregor. It’s your old neighborhood. A wave of optimism will build on the horizon. You’ll paddle for it, but you won’t catch it. / 2:13 p.m. Begin an hour of up and down Woodland Ave. Notice that there’s a new library at one end of Woodland. Remember when there used to be a movie theater there. A draft house. The place that would sell you beer when you were only 15 years old. The place where you could go see stoner movies after midnight and make out with Rosalie while everyone else slept through the last hour of *Tommy* or *The Wall*. / 2:59 p.m. Knock on the front door of a duplex. Your friend Rich used to live here. When an elderly woman answers, understand that Rick no longer lives here. / 3:13 p.m. Knock on the last front door that used to belong to a friend. Find a third stranger opening the door. Decide to give up. / 3:21 p.m. Pull up a stool at Sullivan’s Tavern. Order a screwdriver. You may not feel like drinking, but the bartender will actually squeeze fresh orange juice into your drink. That alone will make you feel better. / 3:22 p.m. Think about your brother Joe. He was a regular at Sullivan’s. Raise your drink to Joe. Ignore the strange look from the bartender. / 3:27 p.m. Stop thinking about Brother Joe. Notice that there’s an arcade basketball game behind you. Don’t turn to look at it. Just listen. Soemone will be playing the game. Listen to ball after ball sink into the net. Hear the computerized voice repeating, “Three, three, three,” for ten seconds. Realize that the guy playing just won a free game. Listen to his next game, a minute of balls dropping into a hoop. Remember you old buddy Bart Ceravolo, the hometown basketball star. Remember when Bart had been the next white hope, playing Division I college hoops at the University of Tennessee, only six foot tall and slow, but with a killer outside shot and enough three pointers to make the all-SEC team two years running. Wonder what’s become of Bart. Wonder if he’s still drunk and broke and homeless like he was when you left Cocoa Beach. Wonder whose couch he’s sleeping on tonight. . . —from Sean Carswell’s Train Wreck Girl, out now from San Francisco’s Manic D Press. about narrator Danny, who makes his way to back to “shit city,” or Cocoa Beach, Fla., after realizing he’s truly “too old to die young.” Carswell, cofounder of L.A.’s Razorcake magazine and Gorsky Press and a past contributor to THE2NDHAND, included several chapters written in the style of the above inspired by the2ndhand.com’s long-running (since 2000) series of Itineraries, in which the schedule is definitely less important than the point of view. See [www.the2ndhand.com/itineraries/itineraries.html](http://www.the2ndhand.com/itineraries/itineraries.html); visit Manic D at [www.manicdpress.com](http://www.manicdpress.com).

“What makes you think you can do that?”  
“Let’s make out.” He got up on the table, next to her.  
“You wish.” She flicked her cigarette into the grass, looked at him for a long minute and then grabbed his face and started kissing it. Her breath tasted like cigarettes and chewing gum, her dark hair over her eyes.  
Jailynn wasn’t his girlfriend or anything. They had been friends since middle school. Kind of like best friends, if she hadn’t been a girl. They hung out a lot. During senior year, after her boyfriend dumped her, she finally let him kiss her. After that they made out all the time. They never talked about it, though. It happened randomly. Even when she had other boyfriends.

Most of the time it would be late at night, and they would be drunk and back at her mom’s house. Her mom was always passed out and didn’t care anyway. When she looked at Bradford she didn’t seem to be seeing anyone at all. Bradford just told his parents he was spending the night at Mavis’s, and they would stay up all night, making out, and watching movies.

They were lying down on top of the picnic table, really getting into it. He had his hands down the front of her shorts, now. Every once in a while a car would slowly roll by the park, the headlights lighting the scene for a brief second.

“I love you so much.” Bradford said, seriously, gazing deep into her black eyes.  
“Oh, I love you too, forever and ever.”  
“My darling, my love for you is boundless, like a... like a...” And then he couldn’t keep a straight face anymore, and they both burst into laughter, and kissed some more.

It was a game they would play—to see who could crack up the other first. It made Bradford feel like they were smarter than everyone. Later, though, he would feel bad about it. He did want to be in love, one day. Probably with a blonde.

He was trying to unclasp her bra when a car that was rolling too slow and bumping rap music froze its lights on the picnic table. Jailynn gave a little scream, and they both jumped up and ran, trying to pull their pants back up along the way. Bradford’s pants were really tight, and hard to get back on.  
“Wait... wait...” Jailynn stopped, gasping, at the other end of the park. “My flip-flops.”

They walked back slowly to find them in the dark. “Let’s go meet Mavis and them. I bet they’re at Village Inn.” It seemed like it was going to rain, anyway.  
Everyone always hung out at the diner. It was open 24 hours, and they all sat there, high or half drunk, and drank coffee and smoked cigarettes and talked. Their friend Ward was working tonight, so Bradford wasn’t surprised to see Mavis there in a booth, building a pyramid of dairy creamers. They slid in across from him.  
“Man, you think the pyramids in Egypt were built by aliens, or what?” he asked, trying to balance the final creamer on the top of his construction. Jailynn rolled her eyes.  
“You got cigarettes?” Bradford took one from the pack on the table. Ward came up, and took one too, and sat down, despite being in uniform. There was hardly anyone in the restaurant.  
“Man, are you packed yet?” Ward asked.  
“What?” Bradford’s lighter wouldn’t light. He kept flicking it.

“Mavis told me. About the bus. Man, I would love to get out of this dump.”  
Jailynn looked down into the table. “You’re leaving town?”  
Mavis’s eyes widened. “You haven’t told her?”  
Jailynn stood up, and walked towards the door.  
“Oh man, sorry if I...” Ward started.  
Bradford jumped up and followed her. Sitting on the curb outside, she was already crying. Well, not crying, exactly. He had never seen her cry. Her eyes would get red, and tears would roll down her cheeks, but her face would remain expressionless. He sat down beside her. He couldn’t think of anything to say. They could hear thunder in the distance, past the freeway. It smelled like rain, too. In New Mexico, there were constantly flash storms in the summer. He could always smell them before they rolled in to burst over the parched city, a torrential downpour that never lasted very long.

Jailynn looked up at the gathering clouds. She wiped her cheeks off with the back of her hand. “I don’t why I’m crying, I think I probably won’t even miss you.” | *Zach Plague’s first novel of art-school satire and hedonistic youth, Boring boring boring..., is out now from Featherproof Books. Visit featherproof.com.*

Mona’s House Was Ma’s House

by Fred Sasaki  
1 Mona’s house was Ma’s House, on Wellington; down the street from the family business; across the street from her younger son and his blond counter-girl wife and three wished-for-boy girls; down the street from her future nursing home that it will pay for to grandchild protest; and upstairs her older son will in middle age live with her alone—his wife and boy and step-boy living in a condo on his pay—and he’ll collect *Playboys*, ashtrays and towels from hotels, and all the old cameras he would shoot his mother with.



2 Mona jockeyed Polack maids for the mirrors, foyer check floor, seahorses in the library, candle-ears—the Mexican workers said—ebony banister, rose half bath, and plastic glass; and some drank her brandy and pursed things for their children and tended her grandchildren, all gums; and one fell in love with her son—who sweat the bed down the hall and took and swore this enchantress a home for her and her son still in Poland—and he impregnated her and it was hell and two eggs; and Mona said in mixed company, Of all the women my son could choose that were after him this is what he does.



3 Mona’s Thanksgiving was made sincerely by the maid-now-daughter-in-law and some by herself; and Mona flourished herself upstairs with help from her son to draw the warm bath, drew on an empire in her boudoir—all but a chin-strap for her up-do—and mounted the top of the stairs, yelling her son to announce her; and his son and his wife and her son and their new son necked up to her and she wafted them to the table and looked at her son and looked down—her upper lip pinned back like a seething Yorkshire Terrier—to dismay that What a shame it is to get all dressed up and no one is here.



4 Mona tiptoed and entertained her list; a puss-cat in draping arrangements, in a tease, glued up and evoking You look gorgeous as usual, so young, and Like Cleopatra—her accountant says of her long dead, flashing his god-long fingernails and sheen tie and shirt, she was a real classy lady—and she invited gay advances; and fans rang in patted candies, in her long hands, and delivered filigree things; till she was empty cawing bird sounds. | *Sasaki is the managing editor of Chicago-based Poetry Magazine.*



excerpted from —>>

Carousel by Emily Self

*After Iron & Wine*  
The punch of knife slicing through her afternoon pear, halved and quartered and halved again, brought Louisa out of the stupor she’d been in all afternoon. Even the ritual of spring cleaning had not been able to penetrate her anxiety. Her joy in dragging dusty rugs out onto the carport to be beaten, washing the inside as well as the outside of each window until it caught her reflection in the sunshine, changing the bed linens and coverings to lighter-weight quilts— all felt tempered by Billy’s absence. She sat down on a kitchen chair to savor her fruit and try and count her blessings. Sticky juices clung to her fingertips, something else to be washed clean. The house was quiet, and though the silence wasn’t so unusual this far out in the woods, Louisa felt desperate for some noise to drown her nerves’ jangling. She picked up the phone to call her daughter-in-law Marla to see if she’d heard from Billy yet today.  
Marla jumped and grabbed at the handset—any call could be him. She tried not to think like this, tried to move about in her life and the big empty space in her head as if Billy, Billy, Billy wasn’t all her thoughts sang to her, as if she’d grown used to it like other wives.  
“You should get out, go see a movie or something nice,” Louisa said, her careful cadence singing its calming influence. “With your friends.”  
“I know.” Marla fingered the gold chain around her neck. She’d been relying too much on Louisa’s strength. “I’m just afraid if I leave the house something horrible will happen. That I’ll get lost. I’ll lose my way. I haven’t even been able to walk the dogs past the end of the street. They’re sitting at the door waiting for me right now, actually.”  
“Tell you what. Why don’t you put those big puppies on their leashes and start walking. I can meet you on the corner of Carousel if you’ll walk slow. I’m not too far from the main road. We can walk together.”  
“It won’t be enough,” she said.  
“I know,” Louisa said. “Nothing could be, but it might help.”  
“Even when he calls, I spend the whole

conversation just straining against the noise in the background. It sounds like a playground, sometimes. Or a riot.”  
Though she had to spend ten minutes untangling the worn red and blue leashes from each other, Marla still made it to Carousel before Louisa. She

sat on the dusty curb beneath a dogwood losing its bloom and watched as the dogs sniffed eagerly at every fallen leaf, blade of grass and small rock within reach. The siren call of an ice cream truck wafted down the street, and though she looked, she couldn’t see the truck at all. A few moments later Louisa, gray braid swinging, walked up with a clear plastic bottle full of pale yellow liquid.

“Tom Collins,” she said to Marla’s questioning glance. “A little ‘liquid courage,’ as Billy says. Can’t hurt, I figure. It’s almost five anyhow.”  
Louisa passed to Marla, who drank. For a while they sat, petting the dogs and taking turns at the bottle. Drinking in the street made Louisa feel a little crazy—she redundantly scanned the streets watching for creeping police—though the color returning to Marla’s cheeks and eyes was worth it. “Better?” she said.

Marla nodded and stood up. The dogs’ ears pricked at the rustle she made and they began to tug more anxiously at their restraints. She tightened her grip and stood still.  
“What is it?” Louisa said. “I know those dogs are big, but you’re strong, stronger than you think.”  
“No.” Panic crept into Marla’s voice. “My wedding band. It’s missing.”

“Did you take it off this morning in the shower? Or washing up?” Louisa’s fingers went to her own ring and the groove worn into the back of her ring finger by years.  
“I don’t think so. I don’t know. I knew something would happen. I shouldn’t have left. I have to go back. I have to find it. Billy would die if I...” Marla stopped herself. Louisa froze, right hand at her throat. The silence buzzed. Marla went on, “I didn’t mean it. I just... Will you help me find it?”  
Louisa looked up through trees, willing her dizziness to end. For a moment she thought she saw a white bird floating down toward her, brilliant as snow in moonlight, but when she blinked it had disappeared. She wondered what time it was in Iraq. She never could seem to remember the difference. “We’ll find it,” she told Marla.  
“Everything will be all right.” | *Emily Self lives and writes in Birmingham, Ala.*

END  
Next up: Spencer Dew, December 2008