

by Nick Hauser

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Sonderausgabe

At 6:15 I wake to the voice of AM talk radio breaking through the stony silence – a voice I've grown a little bit afraid of. Downstairs Joy is poring over the JERUSALEM GOOD NEWS with a fluorescent green highlighter in the glow of two votive candles. It's not long before Timmy comes hopping in, begging me to dab his cheeks with shaving cream so he can pretend with greater realism that he's Peter Rabbit. How can I say no?



A few minutes later I've rounded him up and we're staring at each other over our respective bowls of Rice Krispies® and favorite sections of the local newspaper. He likes the weather report with the color-coded map and goofy symbols, while I particularly enjoy one editor's reflections on scholastic sporting events, which often begin with the phrase "The critics will say", as if at high school softball games and swim meets there was inevitably a body of hardened naysayers perched in the empty bleachers.



Afterwards I stand up, drain my instant coffee
and make my standard declaration: "Well, I'm
off to jail."



Tim stays at home with Joy while I make the hour's drive north on a for the most part empty highway, out of the city not in. Thirty-three miles of fields no one bothers to plant anymore, abandoned strip malls and office parks. Exit 31B, right on Presidential Drive, show my badge at the security gate (Stan and I are on a first name basis but he still insists on seeing it).



In the lobby a life size poster of Miss America
1983 ever smiling down on us, ever decreeing:
MADE THE AMERICAN WAY, ever giving us
the thumbs up. Strange how most mornings
I think: "God, she's hot!" and most evenings:
"She's not that pretty."



(A company cheese basket and hearty Happy Holidays handshake from the plant manager at noon on Christmas Eve: oh, Holy Night.)



By the time I leave the plant, the shadows have long since crept up the grounds and enshrouded us. Before I know it I'm rolling back through the neighborhood, swerving past the paperboy on his broken bike, his deadline long since run out. The mosquito light on the front porch beckons me home. The cream corn and chicken nuggets are almost warm. Tim's pretty excited to see me. The TV is on. In a few hours it'll lull us all to sleep.

