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The Hopkins Review, Volume 7, Number 3, Summer 2014 (New Series),
pp. 352-367 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: [10.1353/thr.2014.0051](https://doi.org/10.1353/thr.2014.0051)



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Nathan Scott McNamara

ON APRIL 18, THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE WERE CHARGED WITH DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE IN BRADFORD COUNTY

Curtis T. Mayson, 25, of Wyalusing has been charged with failure to stop at a stop sign and speeding. A blood alcohol test later revealed that Mayson's blood alcohol content was .14 percent on the day of his arrest.

Curtis T. Mayson's girlfriend broke it off with him more than three weeks ago. Henry and Darren are hoping he can finally get past all that, and the three of them can spend the day mixing Mountain Dew with whiskey and shooting darts in the backyard.

Then Darren says, "I was thinking when my cousin comes to visit maybe I'd take him to Lowland's Chip-N-Putt."

"I'd do that," says Henry. "I haven't done that shit in ages."

Darren looks over at Curt. Curt's sulking by the dirt pile.

"Me and Elnora went mini-golfing at Lowland's Chip-N-Putt," says Curt.

And Henry's thinking, *Ah, shit. We can't even talk about Lowland's Chip-N-Putt.*

And Darren's thinking, *Goddamn it. Why did I have to say something about Lowland's Chip-N-Putt?*

And Curt says, "She hit a hole in one on nnn-number 14." He's barely able to finish his sentence.

The guys are thinking, *That's it. Here it comes.*

"The pirate hole," says Curt, and then he starts weeping.

The guys do their best to ignore it.

The dartboard is hung on the trunk of a pine tree in Darren's backyard, so every time a dart misses its mark, they spend five minutes digging through the brush to find it.

"Hey, Curt," says Darren, moving his boot through the dead grass. It's hard to concentrate on shooting darts when Curt is sitting on the muddy ground in the corner of the yard, obviously crying. "Frankie has a sister a little younger than us in Lewisburg."

Curt stops making noise for a second. He snuffles. He says, "What?"

"I'm just saying I heard Frankie's got a good-looking sister in Lewisburg. Eric went to the restaurant where she works and got a look at her one time."

"You think I just want another girlfriend?" says Curt. Curt has been trying to hang on to Elnora for two months, even though Elnora has been seen around with more guys than could be counted on one hand. There are two men for every one girl in Towanda, which Elnora doesn't seem to mind.

"Well," says Darren, "I just think you've been having a hard time lately and maybe it'd be good for you to get back out there."

"Elnora is my soul mate," says Curt.

And the feeling is, *Oh, this again. This thing about Elnora being his soul mate.*

"I know that," says Darren. "We know Elnora's your girl, but right now she's seeing some other people."

Elnora has been rotating between the two bars downtown, and the one at the Towanda Motel.

She's been seeing one guy named Cody Cassinelli and then another guy named Lance.

Curt stands up. He trudges back and forth across the yard. His boots squishing in the mud. "You guys will never understand it," he says. "I feel bad for you, but you'll never love anybody the way I love Elnora."

"I feel bad for me, too," says Darren. "That's something special you had, but I think now it's passed."

"Curt, comere," says Henry. Henry is by the cooler. He reaches down and pops open the lid.

Curt walks over. He walks like a little boy, dragging his boots through the mud.

"Drink this," says Henry. He hands him a twenty-four ounce Busch.

Curt pops open the can and doesn't wait. Darren and Henry watch him slurp down the beer.

"Coming up for air?" asks Darren.

"No, he's got it," says Henry. "He's got it, he's got it."

In one long pull, Curt finishes the beer and bangs the can back down on top of the cooler.

"You know, it's not like drinking is going to fix my problems," says Curt. He seems to be done with the crying. The drinking at least solved the crying.

"It's like I'm missing my other half," says Curt. "That's not going to go away."

"I know Elnora was a real special lady to you," says Darren. "It's just I hear Frankie's got a nice-looking sister, and we might be able to fix you two up."

"You think this is funny?" says Curt. "I'm dying over here."

"I'm not laughing," says Darren. "I'm trying to hook you up."

Curt opens the cooler and pulls out another tallboy.

"How old did you say Frankie's sister was?" asks Henry.

"Huh?" says Darren. "Hey, Curt, go easy. We've got all day."

Darren turns back to Henry and says, "Eighteen. But old for eighteen."

Henry's eyes go wide and he says, "Eighteen? Too young."

"You were eighteen once," says Darren.

"Why do you guys keep talking about Frankie's sister?" Curt's looking at them like he's disgusted—like he's taking a real moral stance—but at the same time he's got beer spilling out of his mouth and down his chin.

“Hey, bud, I’m done talking about Frankie’s sister,” says Darren. “I was trying to play darts with Henry but you want this whole day to be a pity party for you and your ex-girlfriend.”

“Elnora!” says Curt.

“Yeah, whatever,” says Darren. “Elnora.”

Curt leans back and shouts at the sky, “Elnora!”

And the guys are like, *Oh, this again.*

Then Curt’s in motion.

“I’m going to find her,” he says. “I have to tell her I love her.” He’s got his keys in his hand. He tries to kick over the cooler once and misses. He tries again and gets it. Beer and ice spill out onto the mud lawn.

“Hey, come on. Don’t do that,” says Darren. “Think about it first. Think about what you’re gonna say.”

“I’ll tell her I’m gonna kill myself if I can’t have her.”

Elnora is probably at the RV park by the river, where Cody Cassinelli lives.

“No, don’t tell her that,” says Darren.

Curt opens the door to his truck. He looks back at them. He looks like he’s trying to look brave, but his face is still a mess. There’s snot smeared across his wispy moustache.

“Elnora is my shooting star,” says Curt.

And the guys are like, *Right, this.*

Curt says, “I’ll do whatever it takes. I’ll rip out my heart and give it to her.”

“Are we gonna let him do this?” says Henry.

Curt gets into the truck. He slams the door closed and guns the engine.

And Darren stands there imagining that they will find Curt again on the other side of this embarrassment. For weeks, they tried to love him through this hurt, but maybe what he needs is to be hit hard. Maybe that will help him see straight.

Hilary Trindle, 28, of Southport has been charged with failure to use low beams while approaching an oncoming vehicle. A blood alcohol test later revealed that Trindle's blood alcohol content was .18 percent on the day of her arrest.

Hilary Trindle stuck around Towanda after her shift at Top's Friendly Market to take Shannon out for drinks. Shannon's cat was run over by a gas truck last night. Hilary wants to try to help make her feel better.

Hilary takes Shannon to The Cracked Keg, where there's a pirate theme that each year gets mixed up with an Irish theme in the six months leading up to Saint Patrick's Day. The Cracked Keg is dark; the floors are sticky and the bar top is cloudy from the work of the dishwasher and rag kept beneath the counter.

It isn't crowded, but there are half a dozen boys near the front that are making noise. They're laughing at each other's jokes. They're proudly stacking empty pitchers of beer. They're men who work in the natural gas industry; they're young and have too much money.

The men are sitting in the dining area by the front door. Hilary and Shannon are sitting on stools at the bar toward the back.

"The important thing is that Tony didn't suffer," says Hilary. "He had an amazing nine years. Just remember that."

"All of Tony's stuff is still in the house," says Shannon. "I still have to clean out his litter."

"Keith will do that," says Hilary. "You make sure Keith does that."

Hilary is buying Shannon's drinks, even though she owes twelve hundred dollars to the car mechanic and she's still twenty five hundred behind for the degree she never finished at the community college.

Hilary's here for her friend, but she can't help being distracted by the men at the front. They've been shifting in their seats, sneaking looks at Hilary and Shannon, consulting each other.

"Keith doesn't do anything," says Shannon. She rolls her eyes and laughs.

Hilary watches Shannon smiling too much and trying too hard. Hilary would like to tell her that sometimes it's OK to be sad, but she doesn't know enough about it. She knows there's one kind of sadness that's cathartic, and another that rots away at the things that are still good.

Shannon watches Hilary and wishes that the two of them could just try to have fun. That's what she needs—to just forget about everything that's wrong for a few hours.

And while they sit looking at each other, two guys come sneaking up to them at the bar.

"Hi there," says the guy wearing his t-shirt tucked into his jeans. He's grinning nervously. One of them stinks of too much aftershave.

"Hey," says Shannon.

"Hi," says Hilary, without looking at them. She takes a drink of her gin and tonic.

"Hey, Rob and I have a bet going," he says.

The bar is quieter. People are watching them.

Shannon says, "What?"

He looks anxious, like he might forget what he wants to say.

"I think you're both models, and Rob says you're actresses he's seen on TV." He smiles, pleased with himself.

"Hah," says Shannon. "Thanks."

Hilary stares straight ahead at the liquor bottles and the mirror behind the bar.

She and Shannon are pretty enough, but they aren't great beauties. Shannon has a nice smile, but noticeable gaps between each of her front teeth, and Hilary hasn't exercised since high school. They fall into a category of attractiveness that makes many men too quick to forget the things that are embarrassing about their own bodies and behavior.

"So, what is it?" says the boy with the tucked in t-shirt. Rob stands stiffly behind. He puts his hand on the bar, and then stands back up straight, then puts his hand on the stool, and then stands back up straight again.

“Um,” says Shannon. “We just work at Tops.”

“The grocery store?” asks the boy with the tucked in shirt.

Shannon says, “Yeah, the grocery store.”

He laughs and says, “That’s awesome. Sometimes I think I’d like a laid-back job like that.”

He reaches out his hand to Shannon and says, “Hey, I’m Patrick, by the way.”

Shannon shakes Patrick’s hand and says her name. Hilary shakes his hand and hardly even looks at him.

“Anyway,” says Patrick. “We needed a little help this weekend.”

Patrick looks at Rob like he wants him to do the talking, but Rob doesn’t say anything.

“We’re having a kegger this weekend at Rob’s place, and it’s just like—there are just so many *dudes* around here, and it would be nice to have some pretty girls come.”

“This weekend?” says Shannon, and she turns on her stool and looks at Hilary.

Hilary watches Shannon smiling too much, and would like to tell her, *Stop. Please stop doing that. They don’t know you don’t mean it.*

“Thanks, but we’re busy this weekend,” says Hilary. She takes a drink.

“That’s too bad,” says Patrick. “What if we—like—paid you just for coming?”

“Pay us to come to your party?” says Shannon.

Hilary doesn’t say anything.

“Yeah, I talked to the guys and we would pay you at least a thousand dollars each just to come to the party.”

“A thousand dollars to come to your party?” says Shannon. “You’d give me that much money just for showing up at a stupid party?”

“*At least*, a thousand dollars,” says Patrick. Patrick is getting bolder. Rob, on the other hand seems like he’s trying to sneak back into the shadows.

"What do we have to do?" asks Shannon.

"Well, for a thousand dollars each, you just have to show up. But for four thousand dollars each—" Patrick pauses, like he's about to say something dramatic and great. "—We'll have—" he squints like he's thinking to himself, "—clothing optional—or—maybe naked—Jell-O wrestling."

"Ew," says Shannon. "We don't do stuff like that."

"We don't do stuff like that either," Patrick says quickly. "But it's my birthday." He says 'birthday' like he's being cute. He says it like he thinks it excuses it.

Shannon wishes Hilary would say something, but she's too nervous to even turn and look at her.

"Clothes or no clothes?" asks Shannon.

Patrick looks behind him at Rob and then back at the girls. "You can wear a bra and panties," says Patrick. He looks back at Rob again, and Rob's shaking his head "no." Like the deal's not good enough.

This time as he's turning back, he says, "No, naked."

The jukebox is playing at medium volume. The sound of glasses sliding on the tables. Even the noise of the men shifting in their chairs as they try to evaluate how this proposal is going. But still it feels dead quiet. There's a suffocating feeling in the room, an awareness that someone needs to say something.

"Why do you think you're allowed to ask that?" says Hilary. She's looking at Patrick and she sees her stepfather. She sees her second and third boyfriends, her first two bosses, and her ex-husband. She sees a barrier of confused manhood that has led to so much embarrassment and anger that's inevitably directed back toward the women who are just trying to escape it. She says, "Fuck off, man."

Patrick grins and looks at Rob. He turns back to Hilary and says, "We're offering you \$4,000 each. Just to have a little fun with us."

"My husband will beat the shit out of both of you," says Hilary, even though she's been divorced for eight months. "He'll gladly cripple you."

Patrick takes a step back and says, "How were we supposed to know you were married?"

"What difference should it *really* make?" asks Hilary. "Seriously, fuck off."

Patrick grunts and says, "Jesus, lady, I guess we caught you at a bad time of the month." He looks them both up and down one last time. He says, "Neither one of you are even that good-looking."

"I'm glad you think so," says Hilary.

"We were just trying to be nice," says Patrick.

"Yeah, get lost. We don't do that stuff," says Shannon.

"We're outta here," says Patrick. "Your drinks are on us. You're welcome."

The two men walk away stiffly.

Hilary slouches back on her stool and says, "Are you OK?" She puts her hand on Shannon's shoulder.

"Yeah, I'm fine," says Shannon. "Are you OK?"

"I don't give a shit," says Hilary. "I'm over it."

"Do you wanna leave?" asks Shannon.

"I'm not leaving just because of those assholes."

"What do you want to do?" asks Shannon.

"Let's run up their tab. Fuck them."

Hilary and Shannon order drinks from the top shelf.

"Are you OK?" asks Shannon. Hilary looks at Shannon and thinks she's a good friend, that maybe Shannon really could help her if she had more money, or Keith wasn't such an asshole, or Tony hadn't just been run over by a car.

"I'm fine," says Hilary. "I could kill every one of them."

"I can't believe they thought we'd do it," Shannon says. She laughs. "Do you think any girls would do that?"

They mostly don't know what to say to each other and they quietly sip their drinks.

And Hilary's thinking, *\$1,000. \$1,000 is what I owe for my car. Just for showing up to some pervert's party. \$4,000 would solve every problem I have.*

And Shannon's thinking, *What would Keith think and would he even care? Care beyond his own pride?*

And Hilary's thinking, *\$1,000 could get me out of this place. \$4,000 could help me stay gone.*

And Shannon's thinking, *\$8,000 spent on watching two grown women take off their clothes. All for watching two strangers wrestle naked with each other in a pool of Jell-O.*

And they both sit there thinking about the bullshit in their lives, and the absurdity that some immature boys have that sort of money and arrogance to wave around.

"I better head home," Shannon finally says. "I think I got a little drunk."

They stand up from their stools and put on their jackets.

"I wish they were gone," says Shannon. "I wish we didn't even have to walk past them."

But they have to and they do. And they can feel each set of eyes on them as they walk toward and finally out the door.

Shannon and Hilary stand out on the sidewalk. Main Street Towanda is lit-up and quiet.

"Stay at my place tonight," says Shannon.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," says Hilary.

"You're drunk," says Shannon.

"I'm fine," says Hilary.

"Are you OK to drive?" Hilary asks.

"I only have to go half a mile," says Shannon. "I'm fine. It's easy for me, but you have a forty-minute drive. Are you sure you're OK?"

"I'm fine," says Hilary.

And finally 'I'm fine' is an answer that they both have to accept, because it's what they've been saying to each other all night.

"I'm sorry about your cat," says Hilary. "I'm sorry about Tony."

"Thank you," says Shannon. "It's fine."

They get into their cars. They have eleven hours until they need to return to Top's Friendly Market.

Hilary follows Shannon the half-mile down Main Street, until Shannon turns left on Chestnut. And then Hilary keeps going.

Warren Anthony Nelson III, 27, of Towanda has been charged with speeding, reckless driving, and resisting arrest. A blood alcohol test later revealed that Nelson's blood alcohol content was .24 percent on the day of his arrest.

Warren Anthony Nelson has been working the night shift on the Eshelman Pad for five weeks.

Twelve hours on, twelve hours off.

Twelve hours on, twelve hours off.

Warren has been dragging his feet back home across the muddy RV park at 8:15 AM each day, trying to fool himself into believing he can get some sleep.

Instead, he listens to the mom yelling at her kid two cars over. Yelling at him for being in her way, telling him she can't wait until he's old enough for kindergarten and he's out of her hair. Instead he tapes the shades flush against the wall, hoping to block out every hint of daylight. Instead he turns in bed, and turns in bed, thinking, *Sleep, goddamnit. Just go to sleep already.*

He turns in bed and turns in bed, until it's time to get up and go to work. He walks back across the muddy RV lot to his truck and he drives to the Eshelman Pad in the dark.

Twelve hours on. He sits in the mobile headquarters on the frac site. From a computer, he rations liquid nitrogen into the well.

Five hundred milliliters of liquid nitrogen. Stop.

Five hundred milliliters of liquid nitrogen. Stop.

Outside, the site is lit with floodlights. Every man's a shadow beneath a hardhat.

Five hundred milliliters of liquid nitrogen. Stop.

Twelve hours off.

Each morning he drives too fast down Laning Creek Road, flirting with the vicious shoulder that dumped two high school boys two hundred feet down into the water. Dead.

He buys black electrical tape at the Ben Franklin and stretches it across the windows of his RV. He thinks, *Maybe I can get some sleep if I can block out this daylight. I gotta get my head right.*

And the mom is yelling at the little boy, telling him she'll slap him if he doesn't stop bothering her. That she's trying to concentrate. The sound of *Judge Judy* echoes through the RV Park.

Warren turns in bed and turns in bed, and then he gets up and heats two Stouffer's chicken pot pies in the toaster oven. He eats until he doesn't feel good. He showers and puts on his work clothes and he goes out to his truck. He drives too fast down Laning Creek Road, not even slowing down for the sharp bend that grabbed those two high school kids.

Twelve hours on. Five hundred milliliters of liquid nitrogen. Stop.

Then he's headed back in the other direction, ripping around the same corner. Two boys dead, just like that. One with a steering column through his chest and the other thrown out the windshield. And he's half-nodding off at the wheel, and hoping he can make it home and get some sleep.

But the Roto-Rooter guy is circling the RV park, emptying the sewage tanks on each trailer. It makes the ground shake and the air vibrate with the makings of a headache. The air stinks. The little boy from next door is following the Roto-Rooter man. His mom throws open the RV door.

Warren realizes he has never really gotten a good look at her face.

He hears her constantly—she's got a voice like an antique car that's had its muffler torn off.

But she looks like Katy Longmire.

Is it?

She's fifty feet away, and the sun is slicing across the horizon, making him squint, but it looks just like Katy Longmire.

But how could it be her? What happened to her?

It can't be.

He walks quickly to his RV, shakes off his clothes, and drops into bed.

It's pitch black. He can't see a thing, but the air is alive with chaos. Katy Longmire.

He had sat in the front seat of Allan Brooke's car as they drove Katy Longmire and her boyfriend, Tucker, home from a cornfield party after homecoming.

Warren and Allan didn't have dates, and after the dance they stood on the edge of the bonfire while other boys snuck off between the corn stalks to slide their hands first beneath their girlfriends' sweatshirts and then beneath their satin dresses. But Tucker—Tucker was throwing up into the drainage ditch by the side of the road.

This was in Wellsboro, over in Tioga County, where they all grew up.

"Can you drive us back to Tucker's house?" Katy Longmire had asked Warren. She was drunk, too, and maybe a little high. She seemed to be squirming for something she couldn't get. "He's such an idiot."

Warren, Allan, and Tucker all lived in Burchill Valley, on the most desolate edge of town.

"Yeah, I think so," said Warren. "Allan's driving, but yeah we can do that."

Tucker passed out in the back of the car. Katy propped her bare legs across the front seat, and nudged her calf against Warren's cheek.

"Hey," said Warren.

She laughed and ran her leg back and forth across his face. It was smooth in a way he had never known. His heart was soaring and he was terrified.

"Do you like that?" she said.

"Knock it off," said Warren.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Isn't Tucker awake?" asked Allan.

"He's asleep," Katy Longmire said. "Leave us alone, *Allan*. You *pervert*." She laughed. "What do you want?"

"I said 'knock it off,'" said Warren, and he pushed her leg away from the headrest. He immediately missed it—the leg against his

cheek, the worry that maybe Tucker would wake up and see the two of them touching, the game they were playing where they pretended maybe there was something about him that got Katy excited.

Katy Longmire didn't belong in Wellsboro; she was too pretty, too smart, too edgy. One day, she skipped school and went and got a tattoo on the back of her neck that said, *yes I said yes I will Yes*, in flowing script. And sometimes in Spanish class, when Katy had her hair up, Warren would sit behind her and stare at those words and not care what they meant; it was mysterious in the best way.

Warren was lonely, even in high school. There was vulnerability inside him and—in that car—Katy Longmire went ahead and prodded it. They dropped Katy and Tucker off at Tucker's house, and Warren felt the cold air whistle through the car and he felt his body moaning, *She should be with me instead.*

But it would be OK, he thought. She would leave Tucker behind. She would leave this whole place behind, and thank God.

He turns on the mattress and turns back. *Go to sleep. Just go to sleep.*

But what happened to her teeth? It can't be Katy Longmire. It can't be. And how did her voice get like that? It was her. It had to be.

But it can't be.

He turns and he turns. *Just go to sleep.*

Goddamnit, he thinks.

Oh, goddamnit.

And before he knows it he's crying. And he's wiping his face against the pillow as he turns and turns, and he's thinking, *What happened?*

What happened to her?

He pushes himself up from the mattress and walks to the sink. He opens the cupboard. In the pitch black, he searches for his square bottle of gin. He retrieves it and walks back to his table and chair. He turns on a lamp. Warren hears Katy Longmire yelling, "Don't touch that! Don't you dare touch that!"

He finds a marker and he rips a sheet out of the Yellow Pages.

He gets a glass and belts back gin. Lots of gin.

He scribbles and cries.

He puts the page inside his jacket pocket, and walks out the door.

The sun blasts him in the eyes, and he blinks and blinks until he can find his way to his truck. The grass is overlong and dead beneath his feet. His boots squelch through the mud.

He takes the route to the Eshelman Pad, going sixty miles per hour until he gets on Route 6, then seventy, and then eighty by the time he's turned on Laning Creek.

His soul stirs at every curve in the road.

He looks in his rearview mirror and sees a police cruiser coming up on him quick. Lights on. Sirens on then off then on again. His stomach sinks.

Let me go. Please leave me alone. Let me go.

He pushes the gas pedal to the floor, but he's only going eighty. He whips around each corner, but the police cruiser keeps pace with him with ease. Warren still has three miles of country road to travel, and the cruiser is trying to pull up alongside him.

Let me go. Let me go.

He won't be able to get a clean shot at that corner. He imagines rolling down the hillside, crashing into trees. He imagines being laid up in a hospital for weeks with his mother saying to him, *Thank God*. Crying. *Thank you Jesus for letting me hold on to my baby boy*. He's driving eighty miles down a country road that's cautioning him to go forty.

Then he falls asleep and he dreams. He has a nightmare. He dreams this will all go back to normal:

Twelve hours on.

Twelve hours off.

Twelve hours on.

Five hundred milliliters of liquid nitrogen. Stop.

He dreams that he will see Katy Longmire again, shifting back and forth from foot to foot so she doesn't sink ankle deep into their mud lot by the Susquehanna River.

Then he wakes up and he wonders, *Was I just dreaming?*

Did I fall asleep?

Did that really happen?

And while he's wondering if that's even possible, he finds he's going sixty instead of eighty. And then forty-five instead of sixty.

He's thinking, *Goddamnit. Not this. Let me go.* And his foot is lightening on the gas pedal because he's too tired. Too tired for even a simple escape.

He eases his truck to a standstill. He takes a deep breath. He pulls the note out of his pocket and reads:

Dear Mom,

You tried to make a life for me. Thank you. But there's nothing here for me. I ran out of places to look.

I'm not having any fun mom. I'm sorry.

Warren looks in his sideview mirror and sees the police officer approaching his car, with his hand on his holster.

"Step out of the vehicle!" yells the police officer. "Step out of the vehicle with your hands up!"

Warren crumples the note in his hands and hides it amongst the fast-food wrappers littering the passenger seat.

He steps out of the car and says, "Can you please just let me go? Can you give me one more chance?"