

the24project

The Patch Up | Robert John Miller

i. "We need to talk." He faintly slid a foamy pint of Goose Island across the coarse pub-booth tabletop and looked at me with eyes that transposed his "we" for my "I." I said "okay" into my glass and finished it in three or four sustained gulps. Then I told his headrest that I couldn't think in a bar, so he shot his whisky neat and sipped the water on the side and dropped a twenty and stood. He answered for the headrest and asked me where could I think, and I said I needed to walk off the haze in my head and grabbed my jacket and he followed me outside. The cement was wet and the air smelled like ozone. We turned right on Damen and walked toward Augusta and as I talked the mental clouds burst. I remember even the leaves were grey, even though they weren't.

ii. The problem with guilt is that the endemically guilty learn not to feel it. Remorse—if they ever felt remorse—becomes routine, and routine makes sense. Innocence is what torments, the remembrance of a time before this now. Meanwhile, the rest of us mope in shame of mild acts of disgrace.

iii. I told him everything. I told him how it started without intent and of the exhilaration and of the vigor of the gods and how in that moment there were no regrets no heartache no returning to anything before because anybody with the chance who had full understanding of what happened and I mean anybody would do exactly as I did because it would be impossible not to do and I told him and I told him and I told him in a single breath that I would never do it again but I would never not do it the first time even if I could change things now because I had to know then and I'm glad—I'm glad—I'm glad but I hate myself for it but yes of course it was the best mistake of my life, and it was stupid, it was stupid, it was stupid. His fist connected with my mouth which dropped me and my head bounced once against the cement. He poked my stomach gently with his boot and shot a loogie near my ear. It landed with a splat, much louder than the drizzle. My jaw only broke in the one place and his fingers didn't break at all.

So after a few weeks, we were okay again.