

The Seven-Day Forecast

Saturday: Kodachrome

Tom thought the weatherman was his only friend. He slurped a forkful of especially saucy noodles, catching the drips in the takeout box. The television was on, jingle-jangling the siren song of Charmin UltraStrong Toilet Paper before getting back to the regularly scheduled programming. Tom debated whether to get up and use the bathroom. Before he could decide, the advertisement was cut off and the awkward trumpet sounds played, indicating that the weather was imminent. He settled in. The couch squeaked in protest.

The graphics rolled, emanating a dull blue glow throughout the poorly lit room. As the camera panned, Tom sat up straighter and put the chopsticks down. There he was. Gerald Kever, the weatherman. He looked as he always did; flannel shirt dressed up with polite gray slacks, squint in the eyes, hair graying but unmistakably stylish. “Hey folks,” he said, “I hope your evening is just as full of sunshine as this afternoon was! We’ll just jump right into it, shall we?” A map of the surrounding area flashed onto the screen, highlighting the mountains in blue, the plains and valleys made green. Gerald swept his hand mightily across the map with the confidence of a minor Greek deity as the wind and weather followed his crystalline touch. A cold front was sweeping through the state. It looked very far away. “But make no mistake,” said Gerald, pointing archaically to the sky. “Cold fronts tend to sneak up on us. It’ll come, so enjoy the warm winter weather while you can, folks!”

Being the weatherman seemed so effortless. Intellectually, Tom knew that it was probably just as hard and frustrating a job as his own. But Gerald carried himself with such ease that Tom assumed part of being a meteorologist was learning how to glide like a cloud. Even his

wispy hair seemed like the gentle swirl of a cumulonimbus. “If you’ll look to the graph on your left, we’ll see this week’s seven-day forecast.” Columns of rain and sun appeared across the screen. Winters were especially unpredictable here. With a kindly smile, Gerald bid the viewers goodnight as the camera panned back to the newsroom.

Tom looked down to find that he had lifted the chopsticks absently back to his lips. He gave them a final resigned lick and turned off the television. He stood, stretching his arms and letting out a low, raspy moan. He stepped into his cramped bathroom, brushing his teeth without even glancing in the mirror. Swish-swash, spit-out, wipe-up. He surveyed the living room of his small apartment, with its meager belongings; the ugly blue couch, the bookshelves crowded with fantasy and photographs, the collection of vintage Paul Simon albums. The last thing Tom did before he went to bed was unplug the dull red and pink Christmas lights on the tree at the far side of the room.

Sunday: The Boy in the Bubble

Tom woke to the sound of his radio alarm clock playing NPR. He kept meaning to change the station; nothing was more depressing than waking up to hear the latest news of a bombing or scandal, but he always forgot. He slid out of bed, rubbing his eyes as he peered into the morning darkness. The lights of the city below were still in full illumination. After a quick breakfast of store-brand cereal and chocolate milk, he shook his head from side-to-side, letting the last slips of weariness fall from his face before getting ready for church. He put on a nice blue button-up, a pink paisley tie, and ran a comb through his hair once or twice. He cast a longing look at his bed as he exited the apartment, pausing only for a moment to replug the Christmas lights. He liked them to be on when he came home.

Down five floors, and the elevator spit Tom out into the lobby of his building, which he exited through a back door to get to his car. When he got to the little red Honda Accord, he slid gingerly into the driver's seat, quickly turning the key and activating the seat warmer. Fortunately, there was minimal frost on the windows, and when he tested the windshield wipers, they cleared the ice right off. Tom lived for these little successes in life. He pulled a sleek black CD case out of the glove compartment; the drive to church was only ten minutes, so he would have to choose his soundtrack wisely. He slid a CD into the car's player, waited a moment more for the seat to be fully warmed, and set off. The music began.

Few people understood Tom's irrational love of Paul Simon. The CD case consisted entirely of Simon albums, with the exception of 'Barry Manilow's Greatest Hits,' and a punk album from an artist Tom had never listened to. Sarah had given those to him, "To diversify your portfolio," she had said. Even Sarah couldn't wrap her head around the fact that Paul Simon was all he listened to. "Doesn't it get old, after a while?" she had asked one night, as Tom gave her a ride home and played 'Graceland' five consecutive times. He had been focused on driving, or else he would have explained to her that No, in fact; every time he listened to a song again, he discovered something new; that sometimes it felt like Paul Simon was singing just for him. Maybe it wouldn't have made sense anyway. He was snapped out of this memory by his arrival in the church parking lot.

The service was long and boring; by the end, everyone was ready to leave. "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, amen," grumbled the pastor, and the congregants rang the "Amen" like a school bell and left. In and out, in and out, doors whipping back and forth on two-way hinges, as people discussed the patience of Job, (a man who wasn't all that patient) or the wisdom of Peter, (who wasn't all that wise) or the godliness of Jesus (a

man who, despite all appearances, was in fact a man.) Tom tried to engage with his fellow worshippers, but most of them were too busy *discussing* to talk, except for the one elderly woman who remarked loudly to herself that Tom wearing a blue shirt was hardly symbolic of the purity of Christ. Even Tom, who prided himself on paying attention to the lessons and trying to tackle the teacher's questions, found his mind wandering by the third hour. He absently reached for his phone, and pulled up his conversation with Sarah. She had been *Active 7 minutes ago*. He debated whether to message her. Sometimes he would reread old conversations they had; it was almost like hearing from her. After a moment, he typed a simple *How are you?* and sent it, tucking his phone away. The teacher was off on a tangent about Noah's Ark and aliens. Tom sighed.

Pulling out of the parking lot, Tom found himself turning his car left instead of the homeward-bound right. Without really acknowledging it to himself, he arrived at the local Humane Society, and went inside to look at the cats. Tom had always wanted a cat; growing up, many of his friends had owned one; Terry Lars had owned five. He peered through the cold bars into the blanketed kennels full of purring, mewling felines, and he took a moment to play with an especially cuddly white-mitted one named Buttons. Someday, he thought, I'll own all the cats in the world. But his apartment didn't allow pets. So after several hours of cat-filled pleasantries, Tom closed the last one back in its kennel and left, spirits marginally lifted. The drive back home felt a little emptier than the drive over. He parked his car in the usual place, near the steps, and found his way back to his room, where he fixed himself a quick dinner as the weather report came on. He heard Gerald's lilting voice as he opened a can of beans. "The thing about the weather is, sometimes it seems like everything is going to be sunny and bright, but then you turn your back for a moment and the clouds roll in before you can say 'nimbostratus.' It can

be a little disconcerting. That's why I'm here for you every night, ladies and gentlemen: to try and offer some confidence to you as you travel. I can't keep the clouds away, but I can give you a map to them, so you're ready for the rain. Back to you, Dave." Tom smiled an obscure smile and turned off the TV. At least he didn't have classes tomorrow.

Monday: Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard

Tom didn't like his work uniform. In fact, he hated it; a one-size-fits-all polo shirt made of moisture-wicking material which always smelled vaguely of stale meat, even after washing. Then there was the hat; a rigid baseball cap that highlighted his prominent nose and was underscored by his glasses, giving him the appearance of a guy trying altogether too hard to be 'cool.' Both shirt and cap were the ugly red color of a dying poinsettia. Tom intensely doubted that these articles of clothing lent themselves to the air of cleanliness and uniformity his managers claimed, but professionalism was a serious business here at Hardee's Grill and Snack Shack.

He had been seeking employment elsewhere, but despite his constant applications to local libraries and bookstores, he always seemed to say or do something wrong: once, he had laughed uncomfortably loud at an interview; at another, he had tried to talk about the Dewey Decimal System and had ended up rambling about his troubles with his grandparents. Thus, until further notice, Hardee's remained his sole source of income.

He couldn't really complain about this; the pay was slightly better than reasonable, and it wasn't a *bad* place to work. It was just a soul-killing place to work. His shifts were Mondays, Wednesdays, and the occasional Friday, and they typically lasted from 7:30am to 5pm. His coworkers included teenagers proudly sharing the details of their sex life, and strange middle-

aged men who made uncomfortable jokes. The only thing getting him through most days had been Martin, the cranky old manager who griped about the *Kids these days* and was an avid Bob Dylan fan. Tom loved Martin, and was sad when he retired abruptly at the end of last year. Now, his short shifts seemed long and his long shifts seemed unbearably long.

He would stand at the cash register for hours at a time, waving to greet people who were usually too preoccupied to wave back, and answering questions about their menu that would have embarrassed *Dumb and Dumber*. Whoever came up with the phrase ‘There are no stupid questions’ clearly never worked in foodservice, Tom thought, as he informed a young couple holding hands that Yes, the chicken cashew salad has nuts in it. He spent the lunch rush frantically punching buttons with the accuracy of a long-range sharpshooter, and the slow hours sweeping and mopping the same walkway until it glistened like the tears of a raindrop. He wasn’t supposed to use his phone while on shift, but every now and then he would pop back to the lockers in the back to see whether he had gotten any messages. Sarah still hadn’t messaged him back. Since she had moved across a time zone and was attending school full-time, he knew he couldn’t expect her to cater to his wish for conversation, but he missed her, and was irrationally, quietly sad when he didn’t hear from her. That was one nice thing about work; if he was busy sweeping or button-pushing, he was able to forget about the nagging feelings that kept him staring off into space on other days.

You Have Clocked Off At 3:05pm, the computer informed him as he slid on his coat and made to leave. He thought about buying food, but his Fundamentals of Nutrition class was ruining junk food for him, so he sighed and pushed away the swinging glass doors, stepping into the expanse of the half-asphalt, half-dirt parking lot. When he got to his car, he caught a glimpse of himself in the rear-view mirror, and laughed aloud at his stupid appearance; his hair jutted out

from underneath his hat like the twigs of a sparrow's nest. I could probably pull off a hat, he thought, if it didn't look like I was auditioning for the sub-minor leagues. He turned the key and drove off, bobbing his head gently to the reeling guitar riffs blaring from his speakers. When he arrived home, he called the pretty desk attendant by name and wished her a good afternoon. She offered a noncommittal grunt of affirmation without looking up from her crossword puzzle. (9 across: Lassitude.) He took the opportunity to tip his hat to his fellow elevator passengers; he knew it was silly, but he could use a little silliness. The Christmas lights were on in his apartment. He ate the leftovers from the night before, sitting silently at his table, staring out the window.

Something about looking out a window profoundly affects the emotions of the observer. The perspective it forces on us is literal and immediate, and the sheer expansiveness and color of our world can enliven or dull the senses. When Tom looked out the window, he was reminded suddenly of the past; filled with memories of his hometown, staying up late into the night reading Ray Bradbury. He could almost see his high school from this vantage point, and he recalled standing out in the fields behind the school when the stars were out, holding hands with Sarah, still and quiet and full of love.

His brow furrowed. No, none of that, he said to himself, you're just making yourself sad again. He finished his beans and looked around the apartment. He cast his mind about for something to do, and was abruptly reminded that the first draft of his Nutrition essay was due in class tomorrow. His spirits took another dive. By the time he had tracked down his laptop, it was time for the weather.

Gerald seemed more morose than usual. His phrasing was short and choppy as he explained that cold rains would begin pouring the next morning. "Don't forget your umbrellas,

folks.” He said, smile strained. Tom made a mental note not to forget his umbrella. He wondered what had dragged Gerald’s spirits down so much tonight. Maybe he’d just spent too much time looking out his window. Tom turned off the TV, reasoning that he would go to bed now, and wake up early to finish essay. He didn’t even brush his teeth.

Tuesday: Slip Slidin’ Away

Crap. Crap crap crap. Up and out, pants on, looking around, door flung open, half-closed before he realized: his notebook, back in, back out, elevator button, long wait, not that long, taking forever, five floors down, should have taken the stairs, car, almost paused to put in a new cd but no no no just drive, of course it was a sad song, normally he loved listening to sad songs but not when he was in a hurry, something happy or at least frenetic, he would be dropped from the class if he wasn’t there, he switched to the radio, it was a sad song too gadammit, fine whatever, parking lot, no room anywhere, driving around and around and around and arouFINALLY pulled in, tight squeeze, cut off the song mid-verse, jumped out, accidentally bumped the next cars door, checked to see there was no dent, ran. He had forgotten his umbrella

Eyes gravitated towards the opening door. He hated walking into a room late; you’d think his classmates had never seen a person walk before, the way they stared. He found the first open chair and plopped down, took out his notebook, tried to pretend he had been there since the beginning of time. The professor hadn’t stopped talking, which he was grateful for. “Which of you can tell me the difference between a protein and a fat?” she asked. Tom had no especial fondness for this professor, but then again, classes had barely begun. Days bled into one another quickly, like peanut butter and jelly mushing together into an old stale sandwich. “Let’s talk for a minute about triglycerides. Complex carbohydrates include peas, beans, whole grains, and most major vegetables.” (Tom had not eaten breakfast.) “Normally I wouldn’t worry about

memorizing all these formulas, but we are going to be using these particular ones a lot over the semester.” (He had also forgotten his pencil.) “I’ll have you split up into groups now.” (Tom did not know his group number.) “I’m giving you all a one-week extension on your essay.” (Thank God.) “Class dismissed.” Tom left the classroom, intent on finding a pencil to write down all the new information crowding his brain.

Lunch hour. Tom normally packed a lackluster sandwich and some drying carrots, but given the circumstances, he decided to eat out. He found his way back to the car, notebook fully stocked with nutrition scribblings, and he drove to the nearest Subway. Last semester, he would frequent the store, which was dimly lit and tinted yellow. He even came to recognize one of the employees on sight; a heavier-set man with scruffy red facial hair who would cheerily chat your ear off about H.P. Lovecraft. Tom had come to love these Cthulhu-infused lunches, but the store was under new management, and Lovecraft guy was nowhere to be seen. Instead, the employees worked quickly and silently, offering smiles and “Have-a-nice-day”s in which Tom recognized the deadness of a prolonged stay in the realm of foodservice. There ought to be a story about that, he thought as the stringy girl behind the counter farted the mayonnaise bottle onto his steak-and-cheese. A story about a mysterious island god who trapped his subjects forever in an eternal fast-food restaurant until he was slain by a heroic mustard-wielding explorer. “Have-a-nice-day.” Tom nodded. His sandwich cost him exactly nine dollars. Round totals made him a little suspicious. Too perfect. He got back into his car, sandwich still wrapped in copious amounts of plastic and foil, and sighed. What an ordeal. He pulled out his cell phone, resisted the urge to check his texts, and pulled up the latest episode of Last Week Tonight.

Classes. Classes notes deadlines things related things sub-related things papers papercuts oh god oh god why am I doing this to myself I’m so bored I’m so fascinated the world fascinates

me this professor is driving me nuts oh god oh god I hope you're listening capitalism socialism materialism creationism each and every moment is a moment that was here but is gone now if the age of the universe was one year then humans would have only appeared at 11 minutes to midnight on December 31st most stars that we see in the night sky are probably already dead we just don't know it yet oh god oh god there can't be a test already it's only week three this room smells vaguely of urine and I keep forgetting my pencil. Class dismissed. Tom threw himself into the driver's seat, brain swirling like soft-serve cone. He put in *Graceland* and skipped to his favorite track, letting the African melody wash over his tired self like a warm shower. The bass shook his car as he went into reverse and drove away. He sang along, dancing in his seat at stoplights, playing music loud enough for neighboring cars to hear. He was happy. He was sad. The next song came on. Why did everything remind him of Sarah? He could have gone right home, but instead he pulled up to the library on Denver Street. The song was nearly over; he let it roll. When the last note played out, he twisted the key in time to the beat and stepped into the cold evening air. It was already dark. He jumped the steps to the library doors two at a time, determined to shake the hollow feeling in his heart.

He didn't make eye contact with anyone; he just wandered his way through the Classics and New Fiction until he found the small purple couch in the Art section. He sat down, the couch sighing beneath him. A Georgia O'Keeffe cow skull eyed him from the cover of a display. He pulled out his notebook and, with a pencil taken inadvertently from the college, began writing.

*I didn't used to think of you
When I saw you every day
but I think I'm now in love w/you
since the day you went away*

He stopped. He scribbled it out. He started again.

I think of you every day

I wish you'd come back to stay

Or hear me when I talk

Or run when I can't walk

And he stopped. He was no Paul Simon.

That night, the rain picked up, splattering Tom's window with tears, which seemed to lighten Gerald's mood considerably. "I love it when a good storm hits!" he declared, waving his hands with the animation of a 30s cartoon, "It means that something is happening! I can't stand the feeling I get right before the rain starts to fall, but as soon as it's falling, I'm a free man! Back to you, Dave."

Tom decided to give up writing love poetry for a while.

Wednesday: You Can Call Me Al

Buttons and number rang out with the angry declarations of a hungry populace. Do you want fries with that? Is that to go? Tom wiped the sweat from his brow, which did not go unnoticed by management. "Wash your hands." they told him. He washed; the stale soap permeated his fingers. Sometimes he would come home after work and just wash them over and over again, trying to remove the scent of cleanliness from his overwashed hands. What else can I get for you? That'll be \$24.95. Yes we have a senior discount. No, it doesn't apply if you're a senior in high school. Do you want fries with that? (It has to have been at least half an hour. (It has only been five minutes.)) Every person walking into the establishment between the hours of 11-1 is an enemy to be countered with courtesy and smiles. Gluten-free is an upcharge. We don't

do lettuce wraps. Would you like fries with that? Sniff. “Wash your hands.” He washed, ignoring the country music playlist whirling around the lobby, on repeat until the end of time. He muttered Paul Simon lyrics under his breath, disquieting anyone who happened to be standing near him as he grumble-sang about seeing Angels In The Architecture. That’ll be \$6.67. One cent away from the Mark of the Beast, he observed. Would you like fries with that? Traffic outside was crawling with the dexterity of a snail. “Wash your hands.” The line elongated as minutes stumbled into hours. A kid cried about his chicken nuggets. Still crazy after all these years. “Wash your hands.” Would you like fries with that? “Wash your hands.” “Wash your hands!” “Goddammit, Tom, wash your motherfucking hands.”

He almost didn’t hear the crash.

He looked up for half a second. The man in front of the counter was staring at the menu as though it were the Rosetta Stone, changing his mind every which-way. Through the exodus of lunchgoers, Tom saw the shattered glass as it sparkled its way across the five lanes of traffic outside. A car alarm flared. Nobody stopped. Tom took one last look at the snaking line of people and before he knew it, he was outside. His breath sputtered skyward as he stumbled across the ice-clad parking lot. Cars were coming to a stop now. The intersection was clear except for the two cars, one wailing, the other silent and still. Tom leapt past a parked Prius and almost slipped as he made it to the vehicles; a short man was standing outside the wailing car. He was talking fast. “Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my god oh please god oh please god.” Tom ran up to him. Hey, he said, Hey, what happened? “I ran a red light,” said the man, “I didn’t mean to oh my god oh please-” Take a deep breath, Tom intoned. He was suddenly in control of all his faculties. He felt his muscles like strings on a violin. There was a person in the other car. Tom walked over; the door was crunched in, a glance told him it was impossible to open. The person

inside was not moving. Tom reached across the crushed front and knocked on the intact windshield. Hey, he called out, Hey! Are you okay? Nothing. Tom knocked harder. "Are they dead? Are they dead?!" The short man had followed him. His arms hung fishlike by his sides but everything else about him was active; his eyebrows might leap off his face. No, said Tom, no I don't think- "They're dead! Fuck, fuck fuck fuck!" The short man wobbled, fell to his hands and knees. Other drivers were out and about, filling the intersection with curious bodies. Tom ran around to the other side of the car. Also crunched. Could he break a window? Get in somehow? No, the glass would fall on the person inside. Was that okay? He didn't know. The airbags hadn't even deployed. The short man was crying loudly. Tom spun around to find a slew of onlookers watching him. Waiting for his next move. A woman in a purple suit caught his eye. He pointed to her. You, he said, Call the police, right now. She fumbled in her pockets, pulled out her phone. The rest of you, he cried, get going. Don't stare. Go. He turned back to the wreck, and saw the short man on the ground. Tom dropped to his knees. Hey, he said, Hey, it's going to be okay. The man looked up at him, gasping for breath. "What have I done? Jesus god, I need to see them." A memory flashed in Tom's brain; sitting in his house, talking to Sarah on the phone. She had been crying. Tom heard himself speak in the memory, as he heard himself speak now.

It's okay, he said. We're getting help. You'll be okay. "No, no, no." Listen to me. "It's not okay." Listen to me. Take a deep breath. "I can't believe this is happening. This isn't happening." Sit down. "I didn't even see it-" Listen to my voice. "No warning, just-" I'm here. I'm here. I need you to take a deep breath. "I'm trying, I'm trying-" Let's count to ten. Count to ten with me. "Okay. Okay." One.

"One."

Two.

“Two.”

Three.

“Four.”

Five.

“Six.”

Seven.

“Eight.”

Nine.

“Ten.”

The sirens wailed. A large white car pulled into the middle of the intersection. People leaped out like rabbits, all white and red and they went straight to the crushed cars. Tom waved one of them down, then took the man’s hands in his own. He looked up to reveal red, watering eyes. It’s okay, Tom said to him. You’re okay. The man nodded, then broke down crying. An EMT squeezed his shoulders gently as he was led away. Tom watched him go. As the police arrived, onlookers got back in their cars and left. Tom heaved a rattling, bone-dry breath that whirled up in a gust of fog. He stepped backwards once, twice, then turned and jogged away from the scene of the wreck. His mind was only clear because it was empty. He only paused for a moment at the doors of Hardee’z, shaking his head and unthinkingly adjusting his cap. Then he was back inside. “Where the fuck did you go?” demanded management through their teeth. Tom shook his head. The Rosetta Stone man still had not made up his mind.

Tom sat, watching the television with a glazed stare. The ride home had been silent, checking every intersection twice. Gerald smiled. “Well, folks, we’ve made it through another day, ice and rain notwithstanding! Our seven-day forecast was a little off, it seems, but no harm done. A little ice keeps life cool, that’s what I always say.” Tom clenched his fists white-hard, and did not loosen them until he fell asleep where he sat.

Thursday: Run That Body Down

Awake. It was very early. He could tell by the stillness in the air. Outside, the whoosh of cars on the highway. In a half-lucid tangent, he wondered aloud how many people would be in accidents today. Later, he wouldn’t remember that he had asked. He rubbed his eyes slowly, deliberately. If he was awake, he might as well do something. He found his way into the bedroom, where his clock shone red and tired: 6:48am. He pulled on his jacket, suddenly bent on stepping outside. He took the stairs; it was more intentional that way. His footsteps slapped the concrete, waking his toes but not his brain. He had forgotten his shoes. There was light snow on the ground, which he stepped into, disturbing its icy perfection. Dark blue light stretched from the horizon, etching away the blackness of night with the imprecision of a crayon-wielding toddler. A handful of stars were visible. He recalled suddenly, vividly, the voice of his substitute geology professor. *Most stars we see, he said, are already dead or dying. Exploded thousands or millions of years ago. We only see them because their light hasn’t run out yet. Not to us, anyway.* A single cold tear dribbled down Tom’s cheek. His nose was running. It was only now that he noticed the cold. He took one last look at the waning stars, shivered, and went back inside. On the way up, he took the elevator, letting the wetness of his feet be sopped up by the auburn carpet.

He was unprepared for the test when it came. He had seen all the emails about study guides and lectures, but he had forgotten. The first time this had happened, Tom had been mortified; he, who had always prided himself on grades and timeliness, had simply... forgotten. No drama. No excuses. Just a slip of the mind that cost him 50 points and almost a whole letter grade. Now, it had happened enough times that Tom had a system; answer the essay questions first, hoping that his knowledge would be fresh enough to get him by; then, go over the multiple-choice and use it to back up and polish his essays. Failure was a distinct possibility. He smiled.

He had forgotten to pack lunch, too. He stopped by the campus snack bar and bought a handful of things that would make his nutrition professor weep, sat down in a hard-backed chair and ate, thumbing his way through the news. The screen was bright but the news was dark; a bombing, a shooting, an outbreak, incidents and accidents, hints and allegations. And a partridge in a pear tree, thought Tom bitterly. His thumb hung for a moment. He read. He reread. He blinked.

Influential Singer-Songwriter Paul Simon Dead at 79.

“What?” asked someone sitting a few seats down. “What’s wrong?” Tom had cried out suddenly, audibly. His neighbor was grinning mildly. Disbelievingly, Tom showed her the headline. She nodded. “Aw, yeah. I read about it this morning. It’s really sad. I love Simon & Garfunkel.” Tom didn’t say anything. He stood up, left the room. He found his car. He hadn’t noticed he was holding his breath until he sat in the driver’s seat and released it. A flood of songs hit him like a tidal wave. He just sat there, staring out the window.

Friday: René and Georgette Magritte With Their Dog After the War

“Live from NPR News in Washington, I’m Korva Coleman. Paul Simon, songwriter who changed the face of American popular music, died yesterday. Simon, who began his career as part of the celebrated folk duo Simon & Garfunkel, was famous for his use of international sounds and styles in his solo work, bringing poetry and music to a new, global revelry. Here’s an interview Simon gave to NPR in 2018:”

I’m sorry, sir. Hardee’z has taught me a lot, but I’m done. I quit.

How are you? (Active 3 minutes ago)

The drive home was silent.

Saturday: The Only Living Boy in New York

The air filled Tom’s lungs like the music of broken violins. The forecast was wrong; the day was cloudy and warm. Tom walked. The downtown streets were full of Chaplinesque figures; women carrying bags, men in suits colored all kinds of boring, and the occasional teenager peering down at their phone without regard for life or limb. The dullness of the day lent itself to looking like a black-and-white film; even the clouds, growing darker by the minute, gave the aura of some lost silent film. It wasn’t silent though. Footsteps tapped like metronomes across the pallid concrete, mingled with the voices of folks walking the streets, engaged in gossip or salestalk or talking-to-onself. Tom walked and wondered. He passed storefront windows emblazoned with fading posters, looking at his feet, taking care not to step on the cracks in the sidewalk, playing hopscotch with the universe. He wondered what he would do, how he would get a new job. It won’t be hard, he thought, I’ll just apply at another restaurant. I’ll learn to love it. He wondered how many people in the world were just as lonely as he was, and why nobody said anything about it. He whistled in a defeated major key and looked up at the

buildings scraping the sky. What a sad, beautiful place this world is, he thought, And here I am,
kicking rocks down the street as I press away the urge to stop and cry. Here I am.

I wonder what the weather will be like tomorrow.