



Susan Petrone

SUNDAY
MORNING
IN 1982

My sister at 17 is a stoner. She is anorexic. She is beautiful. Boys in rock bands play “You Really Got Me” and dedicate it to her. She drives one-handed and smokes cigarettes and pot and never gets caught. When she tells me we aren’t going to church today, I say “OK.”

Her car is a hand-me-down from our grandparents. My shirt is a hand-me-down from her from four years ago, before she was so thin. I’m three years younger than she is, but I couldn’t fit into any of her clothes now. I’m not sure if she hates me today or not. She seems to hate everything on a regular basis. If I tell her that I want to go to church, that I don’t want to disappoint our mother, that the service sometimes means something to me, that it sometimes makes me feel different or makes me feel better, she’ll think I’m a loser, so I don’t say anything but “OK.”

My sister can make you feel like the only person in the world. When she’s in a good mood, it’s just you and her in this great, wonderful place. And when she’s not, it’s just you and her as the only two people left on earth and she hates you and doesn’t need you, so it’s really like you’re all alone in the world.

There’s a guy at school, she tells me as she starts the car, a guy named Lincoln, who likes her. She likes him too. I don’t know who Lincoln is or what he looks like, but he plays hockey, so he must be strong. He likes my sister, so he must be cool. She likes him, so he must be handsome. These are irrefutable facts.



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Susan Petrone’s fiction has appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *Muse*, and *Whiskey Island*. Her plays have had performances and/or readings at the Cleveland Playhouse, The Lamb’s Club (NYC), St. Johns College (Annapolis, MD), among others. In addition, she is a regular feature contributor to CoolCleveland.com. She lives with one husband, one daughter, and three dogs in Cleveland, Ohio.



The question takes me by surprise because she's actually asking my opinion, like what I want to do actually matters. I say "sure" and try to sound nonchalant. CB&P stands for Coventry Beverage and Pizza. It's a sort of combination pizza place and convenience store. You can buy almost anything in there. It's kind of dirty and there always seems to be a few guys hanging around behind the counter, not working, just there, looking at girls and making me nervous.

she asks.

It's freezing outside, but she rolls down the window and lights a cigarette. It's a graceful movement—lick the lighter, touch the flame, inhale. "Wanna go to CB&P?"

even though there isn't. I feel like there's still some normalcy and stability in our family, much if she's pretending to go to church. It makes our mother please our mother. I figure my sister can't hate our mom too it is to go through the motions of attending church just to drag "Yeah," I say, as though I understand exactly what a drag sitting in the seat next to her.

she mumbles, kind of like she forgot for a moment that I'm "I don't know what the hell I'm gonna do to kill an hour," she takes a right turn.

where there are coffee shops and restaurants and cool stores, turn will take us down to the one interesting area of town main road, where a left turn will take us to church and a right the general direction of the church, but when we get to the she guns the car out of the snowy driveway and heads in

My sister swings the car into the parking lot without slowing down. It's kind of icy out and I can feel the car slide a little when she takes the turn. Whenever my sister drives a car, it makes pained, almost panicked sounds. Our brother says she's too rough on cars when she drives. I don't know anything about cars, but given how she treats everything else she comes into contact with, he's probably right.

There isn't anyone in CB&P when we walk in except three guys hanging out behind the counter. Almost no one orders pizza at 10:15 on a Sunday morning, but there they are, smoking cigarettes and drinking Coke and sitting on the counter next to the cash register. They all look old enough to be in college, but they aren't. They're just there, and they all check out my sister when we walk in. People always notice her. I know they'll check me out second, just because I'm there, but then they'll go back to looking at her. That's one of the safe things about being with my sister—no one pays attention to me for long.

My sister says "hi" to the three guys in a way that makes me unsure whether she actually knows them or whether she's just flirting to get something. When I turned fourteen, she told me that 1) all men lie, 2) all men are stupid because they think with their dicks, and 3) a smart woman can almost always get what she wants if she plays her cards right.

I take my lead on what to get from her. She grabs a can of orange pop. I grab a can of grape pop. You're supposed to fast before you have communion, so I haven't eaten since last

I thought, "You're okay, right?" she asks. "I didn't hurt you, did I?" I shake my head "no." "Then if you're fine, let's just go. Let's leave." "We can't. We have to get out of the car." "I don't want to talk to them," my sister says. "I don't want to talk to anybody." "It doesn't matter what we tell them, but we have to get out on our own," I say. Already I can see the policemen poking around the car and looking in and saying things like, "Are you girls all right?" and I know that in another heartbeat they're going to open the door and pull us out of the car, and that will make everything seem worse than it really is. "We'll get out of this," I tell her. "We just have to stand up on our own."

all through my body. It feels kind of nice being huddled next to my sister in the car. The radio is playing The Pretenders' "Brass in Pocket" and the car isn't moving and it almost feels cozy, like a place I'd want to stay in forever.

"You're bleeding," my sister whispers.

"Just a little bit," I say, touching my head again. My blood is so red it's almost surreal.

"What do we do now?"

"I guess we should get out of the car," I reply.

"Do we have to?"

"I don't know."

"I don't want to get out. Can't we just drive away? I don't want to see all of those people."

I don't want to either. I don't want to answer their questions. I don't want to know what they think about us or our family. But I know we can't drive away. If we try, they'll chase us and catch us, and everything will be even worse.

The police start to get out of their cars, and I see the paramedics pulling a stretcher out of the back of the ambulance. The first thing I think is that my mom can't afford to pay any hospital bills. I don't know if our father is still paying child support. I don't even know if we still have insurance. For a moment, it seems like I don't know anything except that it is safe here alone in the car with my sister, listening to the radio.

I look back at her and for the first time notice that there are tears in my sister's eyes. Maybe she got hurt worse than

as she walks out. The front doors seem to open for her or four cigarettes. "Thanks, guys," she says over her shoulder. He tells her it's no problem and she takes like three sister picks it up, saying "You mind?" to the guy in the greasy

There's an open pack of cigarettes on the counter. My sister and I, not just the little sister tagging along. I know he's only giving us a discount because he likes my sister and I'm only coat-tail cool, but for one moment it's like

"Thanks," I say, passing over the dollar as cool as possible.

smile on his face and I wonder if maybe this is Lincoln. saying this to me, he's looking directly at my sister with a little me a buck and we'll call it even." But the whole time he's the greasy jeans, who seems to actually work there, says "Give of the guys are snickering at me. The third one, the one with

"This," I reply. "The candy and stuff." I am aware that two

dropping the flip top on the floor.

"Got what?" she asks, opening her can of pop and casually

gone into the collection plate at church.

into my pocket to take out the two dollars that would have

had just been sitting, because his jeans look all greasy). I reach

bar on the counter (avoiding the spot where one of the guys

"I've got it," I say to my sister as I put my pop and candy

which is my second favorite.

I don't want her to think I'm copying, so I get a Snickers,

grabs a bag of peanut M&Ms. That's my favorite candy, but

going to communion, we can eat, and I'm relieved when she

night. I don't know when my sister last ate. Since we aren't

automatically. I say "thank you" to the guy in the greasy jeans and follow in her wake. When I get to the door, I almost break my nose because I'm expecting it to open automatically, but it's not that kind of door. It's just the way my sister moves. I can hear all three guys laughing at me again. I don't look at them, just fling the door open and walk back out into the cold January morning.

My sister leans against the car smoking a cigarette, waiting for me. She looks bored.

"Was that Lincoln?" I ask, trying to sound casual.

"No," she replies, her eyes trailing the street for something interesting to look at. "Lincoln doesn't work there."

"Just wondering." I don't say anything else, just open my can of pop and lean against the car—not too close to her, since I don't want to crowd her, but close enough that it's obvious we're hanging out together. It's cold out, but I know we'll stand outside the car until my sister has finished one or maybe two cigarettes. She only smokes in the car if the windows are open because she thinks then our mom won't know she smokes. I'm not sure what our mom knows or doesn't know. Sometimes I think she knows everything and other times she seems totally clueless.

After just one cigarette, my sister tells me to get in the car. She slams the car out of the parking lot and onto the street. There's not a whole lot of traffic at this time of day. She passes a car with just one hand on the wheel. The other hand is pounding on the radio buttons, trying to find a

either of those times—like there's a dark, warm prickliness before. I've only been drunk twice and this feels stranger than how long everything was black. I've never been unconscious starting at me. I wonder how long she's been watching me and

I look over at my sister. She hasn't moved, she's just or anything.

and scalp, but I don't think my brains are pouring out of me the one bleeding. I touch my head and feel blood and hair that my head cracked the glass of the window, and that I'm there's blood. At first I don't realize that it's coming from me, an accident. There's pop and M&Ms all over the place and to do on a Sunday morning than stand around the scene of one because cops in Cleveland Heights have nothing better ambulance. Then another police car pulls up and then a third

Through the window, I can see a police car and an pressed up against the passenger door.

my eyes and see my sister slouched up against me, and I'm

black for a while—I don't know how long—and then I open

passenger door and hit my head on the window. Everything is

My sister is thrown against me, and I'm thrown against the

us. What finally stops the car spinning is a telephone pole.

road sweating to avoid us. Somehow not one of them hits

Or at least it seems slow. I can see the few other cars on the

as well tell her I want to go to church. The car spins slowly;

my seatbelt on, although if I wore one with my sister, I might

and my arms on the dashboard and door and wish I had put

I don't say anything, just trace my legs against the floor

decent song. She flips through the stations so quickly, you can hardly hear what song is playing, but I hear a note or two of a good song.

"Wait," I say. "Go back."

"Why? Are they playing Air Supply?"

I know I'll never live down liking that band, but I say, "Blondie's on 101."

She flips back and we hear the beginning of the rap part of "Rapture." "Good pick-up," my sister says. "Nice to see you finally developed some taste in music." She almost smiles when she says this, like she's really just joking and not insulting me.

We both sing along with the rap part. I can never understand the first bit, but when Debbie Harry gets to the "Don't stop, sure shot. Go out to the parking lot" part, I know the whole thing. And then my sister and I are flying up Mayfield Road, the radio cranked as loud as it will go, and we're singing together: "Then you're in the man from Mars. You go out at night, eatin' cars. You eat Cadillacs, Lincolns too, Mercurys and Subarus." When Debbie Harry says, "Lincolns too," we both scream the name, and for a second I feel like I know Lincoln and know why my sister likes him and know everything about her and she isn't keeping any secrets from me anymore and then the car hits a patch of ice and we start to spin around in circles in the middle of the road.

"Shit," my sister says quietly.