

Daniel A. Hoyt

## The Inevitable

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I'm touring the Midwest folk-music circuit alone, and I need to create my own imaginary noise, the way I create my own imaginary throat nodules<sup>1</sup> that will end my singing career. I'm good at that: [...] I can create imaginary problems back at home, though if anything happens, Drew will work it out with the girls. He's a good husband. My daughters and I were lucky to acquire him. He plays stand-up bass with me when I get paid enough to tour with an acoustic trio. And when the pay sucks, he stays home with the girls, thirteen, eleven, and five: all prime numbers, and they all have blond hair, and two of the three have the same father, the other man I married. The youngest, Gracie, is the spawn<sup>2</sup> of a certain folk singer who is widely known [...].

I don't want to do this Kansas<sup>3</sup> show that I'm driving to and will not enjoy, but I've learned that you can grit your teeth<sup>4</sup> so that it looks like a smile. You can be nice to folks. You can be self-deprecating<sup>5</sup>. You can make sure you play the three songs people know. [...] You can pretend to be flirtatious. I used to have a reputation for raising hell. It was really such minor hell – barely even heck<sup>6</sup> – but folks still want that. [...]

Halfway through the set – which is going sort of kind of maybe pretty good – I think about that kid in the town in Missouri that I'd never heard of before, Ferguson. Right before I went on, I saw it on the TV in the egg-yolk-yellow greenroom: a cop killed a black teen named Michael Brown<sup>7</sup>. The sound was off, but I saw police with assault rifles. I saw tear gas. I saw black people with their hands in the air.

Here at this arts center<sup>8</sup>, one state away, the crowd's all white, like me.

Between songs I mention the trouble in Missouri. Only half joking, I say, "If I knew that rap song, I'd play it right now." I pause. "You know, the one that goes 'Fuck the police'<sup>9</sup>."

Some people laugh, and a few clap, but one guy yells, "Fuck you!"

"No, no," I say. "Fuck the *police*." And then I start playing to get myself out of that shitstorm. After the encore, I sit at a card table in the lobby and talk to people and sell copies of my new CD [...].

Maybe fifteen people are lined up, and I can guess which one is the fuck-you-er. He's handsome (maybe a little too much chin though) and rigid, almost as if he's holding his breath. He looks like a cop, his black hair short, like a buzz cut that's grown out. He's standing with a woman, but they aren't talking. She keeps turning away from him. I can tell she doesn't want to be in line. She wants to go home.

I sell six CDs. I smile a lot. I say, "Thank you kindly." Then they're standing in front of me.

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<sup>1</sup> *throat nodules*: (her) knuder på stemmebåndene

<sup>2</sup> afkom

<sup>3</sup> delstat i USA

<sup>4</sup> *grit your teeth*: bide tænderne sammen

<sup>5</sup> selvironisk

<sup>6</sup> (her) pokkers

<sup>7</sup> *Michael Brown*: 18-årig sort mand, som blev skudt og dræbt af en hvid betjent i 2014

<sup>8</sup> *arts center*: kulturhus

<sup>9</sup> *'Fuck the police'*: "Fuck tha Police" (1988), protestsang af *Niggaz Wit Attitudes*

"She wanted to come see you," the fuck-you-er says, and he shoves his chin out at the woman, probably his wife; she wears a plain gold band on her left hand.

"I wish we hadn't," she says quietly.

"Fuck the police, huh?" he says to me.

35 "No," I say, "fuck you."

He gets up close to the table and leans across until his face almost touches mine. He smells good actually: cologne with a hint of smoke.

"What did you say?" he asks.

"I told you to fuck off." I don't know if my voice shakes, but I'm guessing it does.

40 "He's a cop," the woman says.

"Was," the man says, and then he gasps, and he begins to cry.

"Fuck her," the woman says. She turns to me. "Fuck you." The guy is blubbing quietly. The woman says it again, louder: "Fuck you!" She's doing it for him. I can tell. I almost admire it.

45 The kindly gray-haired woman who runs the arts center finally arrives. I can't remember her name.

"Is there some kind of problem?" she asks.

"I was just telling these people to go fuck themselves," I say pleasantly.

The wife doesn't comfort her husband, the former cop. [...]

When I look into her eyes, she's crying, too. "Why'd you have to ruin everything?" she says to me.

50 "Call the cops," I tell the kindly woman. Martha, her name is Martha. "The real cops."

Martha just stands there.

"Call the police, Martha!" I say.

Martha scurries off<sup>10</sup>, presumably to find a phone.

"Honey," the wife says. "Honey, call the station."

55 He snuffles and pulls out his phone. He must still have the station on speed dial, because within a few seconds he is saying, "This is Jake. You're going to get a call to come to the arts center. It's fine. Don't come." He pauses. Then he says, "I know." Pause. "You too." Then he hangs up. "They're not coming," he says. "I still have some juice<sup>11</sup>."

"He *is* the cops!" the woman says to me.

60 "Would you like a copy of my new CD?" I ask her.

"I think we'd better go," the ex-cop says to his wife, and they walk away. [...]

Lacey, my tall, blond, newly Christian thirteen-year-old, believes that anything that happens to me will end up on the Internet and will embarrass her in front of the entire planet. "It's inevitable," she says every time she uncovers a maternal infraction<sup>12</sup> on the Web. I think of her as "the Inevitable,"  
65 even though I shouldn't.

I don't know if anyone pulled out their phone and filmed the scene with the ex-cop, but it's probably coming. Somehow this will matter to Lacey.

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<sup>10</sup> *scurries off*: (her) skynder sig afsted

<sup>11</sup> (her) indflydelse

<sup>12</sup> (her) grænseoverskridende adfærd

The ex-cop sounded like he took it personally, but someone telling you to fuck off isn't personal anymore. Maybe it was once. Maybe it summoned<sup>13</sup> images of the actual act, but now the phrase is  
70 dead and wooden<sup>14</sup>. For me, it's mainly a punch line.

Yup, pretty funny.

I've got a couple of guitars to put in cases and haul out to the car, some cords to unplug and coil. I get my check and load up, and when I turn around and see my name on the arts-center marquee<sup>15</sup>, I think, Show's over. Get that down<sup>16</sup>. [...]

75 Wherever Lacey found Jesus, it wasn't at our house. It happened sometime over the past year. She entered teenhood, and I was all ready to get her on the pill and confiscate Miller Lite<sup>17</sup> from her bedroom. Instead she went to church with one of her friends. She brought home a Bible. She brought home a purity ring.

80 We fought over the purity ring, which she got for vowing not to have sex before marriage. I don't think you should vow anything at thirteen. She vows, she tweets, she blogs, she prays.

She has a terrific voice that she wastes in church. [...]

I sleep just a few hours in a Motel 6<sup>18</sup> and get home early in the morning. Drew's the only one up. [...]

85 I don't want to talk to Drew about the ex-cop yet. I want to talk to Lacey first, as a form of penance<sup>19</sup>. She might already know. She Googles me. She follows all the folk-circuit blogs, keeps track of my sins.

Around noon, the Inevitable comes into the kitchen, where I'm slicing carrots into matchsticks for a stir-fry. (When I'm around, I cook healthy lunches.) I can tell she wants to make an announcement.

"What is it, honey?" I say. I keep chopping. There's something therapeutic about it.

"You kissed some girl up in Lincoln," she says. "In public and everything."

90 And I didn't even think those kisses were worth noticing, let alone capturing on a phone.

"It's true," I say, and she says, "Drew!" the way she does, and I say, "He knows."

I don't add that I kissed a boy, too.

"Do you want *me* to kiss people?" she says. "Do you?"

95 Maybe Lacey hasn't kissed anyone yet. It's possible. "Sure," I say. "If you're ready to kiss someone, and you want to, why not?"

"I don't even want to kiss anyone!" she says.

Well, don't then, I think, and I continue chopping.

"Mom!" she says.

"Honey," I say, "it was nothing." [...]

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<sup>13</sup> fremkaldte

<sup>14</sup> *dead and wooden*: (her) forældet og uden indhold

<sup>15</sup> skilt

<sup>16</sup> *Get that down*: (her) Se at komme videre

<sup>17</sup> *Miller Lite*: øl

<sup>18</sup> *Motel 6*: billig motelkæde

<sup>19</sup> *as a form of penance*: (her) som udtryk for min skyldfølelse

100 She doesn't understand what I'm saying. I could say, *Hoo boy*<sup>20</sup>, *I used to do much, much worse things. I've got a doozy of a story*<sup>21</sup> from when I was pregnant with you, but I don't think that will supply the necessary salve for her wound.

She thinks this is some form of betrayal or family tragedy, and she has a right to her opinion, to the wonderful umbrage<sup>22</sup> of childhood. I haven't been that sure of anything since the mid-1980s. She will outgrow it, that feeling of certainty.

"No one listens to your music," she says.

She wants it to hurt – and it does, a little, so I say, "Plus, I got into it with a cop. Well, a former cop, I guess."

"Mom!" she says.

110 "Don't you 'mom' me," I say, but I knew she would. I wanted this one. It felt good.

"What happened?" she says.

"Nothing really. We just yelled at each other."

"I'm Googling it," she says. "I'm Googling it right now."

115 Out of bed and in the middle of the night, I Google the photos of Michael Brown dead in the street, and I try to imagine Lacey taking his place. It's unthinkable, but I try to think of it anyway. I should be grateful. A mother in Missouri is going through that for real. [...]

I've put it off, but I have to Google him: I try "cop fired Manhattan KS"<sup>23</sup>. I try "police officer suspension Manhattan Kansas." I guess at his possible transgressions<sup>24</sup>: murder, theft, brutality.

120 Finally I find a sliver of an article<sup>25</sup> in *The Kansas City Star*<sup>26</sup>: "Partner of slain Manhattan officer takes leave." It's him. His partner was run over by a suspect fleeing arrest, mowed down as he tried to stop the car, and three days later my cop said, "I don't think I can do this anymore." He was placed on voluntary indefinite leave.

That's it. That's his story, two short paragraphs and one direct quote.

125 When I Google his name, his Facebook page comes up first and then just generic<sup>27</sup> sites: *Whitepages.com*<sup>28</sup>, background checks. He's not that cop in Missouri. He's probably never killed anyone. Neither have I. Well, I've killed a bird or two with my car. And I've killed chickens before. I didn't shed a tear. People think a folk singer must be tenderhearted, but my heart's not tender at all. That's why none of my songs are in commercials. That's why I get on people's bad side<sup>29</sup>, even people I don't know.

130 I look at two photos of the cop, the photos that anyone with an Internet connection can see on his Facebook profile: he's somber in one, laughing in the other. The dour one was taken around Christmastime. Either that or they left the marshmallow snowman on the mantel<sup>30</sup> way too long.

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<sup>20</sup> *Hoo boy*: (her) Slap af

<sup>21</sup> *doozy of a story*: (her) slem historie

<sup>22</sup> (her) uskyld

<sup>23</sup> Kansas

<sup>24</sup> overtrædelser

<sup>25</sup> *sliver of an article*: kort artikel

<sup>26</sup> avis

<sup>27</sup> generelle

<sup>28</sup> hjemmeside med kontaktoplysninger om folk

<sup>29</sup> *get on people's bad side*: (her) fremprovokerer folks vrede

<sup>30</sup> kaminhylde

I imagine that he's up, awake, somewhere in Kansas, doing what I'm doing, killing these hard minutes on the Internet. I hope he's petting a dog. I hope he's drinking bourbon.

135 Then I just fucking do it. I send him a Facebook message: "You might not believe it, but I'm sorry. I really am." It's stupid of course. Why the hell would he ever want to hear from me? It will probably go to Facebook's junk-mail purgatory<sup>31</sup>. He might not see it at all.

Then I check Lacey's Twitter.

Then I Google myself.

140 Then I get a message back from him, just two words: "Me too."

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<sup>31</sup> helvede