

On a recent commute to work, I missed my stop. I tried to switch songs on my iPod and didn't pay attention to my surroundings. This wasn't the first time something like this had happened. I've spilled coffee while flipping through my song library; I've dropped money at an ATM as I fumbled to turn up the volume; and I've tripped over my own feet when fast-forwarding to the next track. If I can't find the iPod on the way out the door in the morning, I scream in frustration and ransack every room to make sure I have it for my bus ride. If the battery runs out midday, I'm miserable and cranky.

My previous girlfriend dumped me in part because, when we were living together, she and I rode the bus together, and I'd listen to my iPod instead of paying attention to her. But she wasn't the only one I've ignored. I've talked to cashiers at the grocery store with Arcade Fire, The Decemberists, or Modest Mouse spraying out of my earphones. I've given directions to people on the street without hitting pause. One time, while jaywalking, I was so engrossed in "Bitter Sweet Symphony" that an out-of-control cabdriver almost hit me. All this told me it was time to quit listening to the damn thing. I tried for a couple of days, but without it I felt empty. I kept at it.

Of course, it wasn't always like this. While growing up in the Eighties, I had a Walkman. It was nice for long trips in the car or by plane. But those were the only times I listened to it. It was a pain to haul along a bunch of cassette tapes for variety. The iPod, however, only the size of a cigarette pack, is much easier to carry than the clunky Walkman. The Walkman got me through the tough times growing up, but it never had the depth, variety, speed, and easiness of the iPod. Discmans? Please. I had one in college, but I hardly listened to it: It skipped, it was heavy, and I hated carrying around my precious CDs.

Although I have this love affair with my iPod, I despise technology. I actually bought one well after other people simply because of my aversion to all things tech. Technology was sup-

posed to make our lives easier. But it hasn't. Remember when setting the VCR to record was the most difficult technological challenge of the day? We now own tons of remote controls; operating a new car these days is like running the *Millennium Falcon*; and tiny digital cameras come with manuals as big as the dictionary. BlackBerries, laptops, cell phones, e-mail: Disruptions. All the time I'd see someone on the bus talking on a cell phone in one hand while e-mailing someone on a BlackBerry in the other. Some of my friends carry their laptops every goddamn place they go, and too many people can't go an hour without checking their e-mail.

My general attitude toward technology kept me from working in an office for a long time. I bartended for my first five years after college. I wore holey jeans, Chuck Taylors, and Che Guevara T-shirts to work. I gave my friends free shots. We had a jukebox that constantly played the Clash, Pink Floyd, Bruce Springsteen, U2, and Whitesnake (yes, Whitesnake). The regulars would invite me to their own parties, girls I didn't know would ask me to go home with them, and I'd go to rock shows in smoky clubs on my nights off. I wouldn't touch a computer for months; my car was a 1994 model; my 13-inch cableless TV was just for porn and sports; and my commute was a four-block walk.

I resisted working in an office as long as possible, but the long nights and constant smoke got to me. I was getting behind in my student loans and credit card debt (mainly from concert tickets and CDs), and a lot of the customers were younger than I was—by only a few years, but it made all the difference. So now, I work in an office where I edit history textbooks, drink bad coffee, and have a 401(k). I shop at J.Crew, go to rock shows only once a month, have cable (including HBO), and am looking forward to getting married—and my current girlfriend Crissy could be the one. But even so, I'll never own a BlackBerry. I'll keep my beaten-up desktop that only has a modem connection; I have no interest in getting TiVo; I always have my cell phone off and only turn it on if I have to make a call; and I never check my e-mail away from work.

But without my iPod I cannot function.

**C**rissy, a local news junkie, asked me to come to the living room to watch the next news segment.

“Hey, honey, did you see this, what’s happened in our neighborhood?”

“Seen what,” I said, looking in the refrigerator, trying to figure out if I wanted to take lunch or just buy tomorrow. “Are they talking about planting trees in the park again? That was the last thing this neighborhood was on the news for.” I laughed.

“Seriously. Come here.”

Though I make fun of her obsession, she always reminds me that she’s on top of everything: the weather, local restaurant hot spots, the success and failures of college teams in the area, who’s been elected and who’s running for office, all the traffic tie-ups.

When I came in the room, she put down her Sudoku book and sat on the edge of the couch, her eyes fixed on the TV.

A commercial for toothpaste was on. “Okay,” I said.

“They had a story about a couple of people who got beat up for their iPods.”

“So, some people get mugged. No biggie.”

She looked straight at me, as her cat jumped up on the sofa and sat on her lap.

“Not in this neighborhood,” she said.

“They’re hot right now. It’s bound to happen.”

She picked up her book and was careful not to scare the cat. “I think you need to be careful.”

“Fine, fine, I’ll be careful,” I said. I remembered I had to iron. For me and for her. We split the chores, and this one fell on me. It was just ten past ten. “There probably won’t be anymore. Lightning doesn’t strike twice in the same place.”

“Sure it does.” She sipped her tea.

“This is a good area. There’ll be more cops here, and the muggers will move on,” I said. The news was back on. The anchorman took a stab at world and national news as he talked about a report on pollution in China, the war in Iraq, and several bills in Congress.

“So, what does that mean?” she said.

“It means there’ll be more police here. There’ll actually be a response.”

She sighed and stroked the cat. “Just be careful. Perhaps you shouldn’t use the iPod at night.”

“Whatever, I love that thing,” I said to myself as I turned to the other room to set up the ironing board.

I took the bus home, as I did every day. I sank into my seat, listening to Bruce Springsteen's *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. My eyes fluttered. I typically prefer softer music on the ride home. On the way to work, I need much harder stuff. I liked rock more than classical, classical more than jazz, jazz more than pop.

Besides listening to music, I tried to read: the newspaper, *The New Yorker*, *The Economist*, a mystery novel. Anything to keep me busy. Back in my bartending days, I never picked up the paper, and I read two novels a year, and they were usually *Tropic of Cancer* and *The Stranger*. Today I put down my magazine, since my eyes burned a little more than usual from sitting for eight hours in front of the computer. When I didn't proofread, I was reading *Slate*, *Salon*, *ESPN*, *Rolling Stone*, *Pitchfork*. I'd read enough today to last me a month.

I watched the pedestrian traffic while the bus passed office buildings, fancy restaurants, Kinkos, a couple of Starbucks, a hole-in-the-wall Chinese restaurant, and some apartment buildings. A skinny Asian girl talked on her cell phone, a group of twentysomethings jaywalked, and two middle-aged men in suits crushed cigarettes before returning to their building. I felt weightless, glad Monday was finished, excited for the football game on TV tonight. It was November: cold, dark, and damp.

The bus was just a few minutes from my neighborhood, and I admit I shuddered briefly at what Crissy saw on the news last night. I confess a certain kind of fear came over me that I hadn't felt since grade school.

But what thief would strike three times in the same area in such a short time?

He'd gotten what he wanted and moved on. I only had a two-block walk from the bus stop to our garden-style apartment, past brick town houses, condo buildings, places full of young professionals, college students, and some group homes with recent graduates. But the area was also full of trees and wooded areas, where a criminal could hike or get a quick getaway.

I stepped off the bus into the cold night and searched for another album to listen to. The backlight lit the menu. Just one song. I needed just one song. With all the music at my fingertips, no pun intended, it would be a waste to walk five minutes home and not listen to anything. There it was: Lil Wayne's "Hustler Musik." The fear made me look around. But I saw nothing but empty sidewalks.

I felt a tap on my back, causing me to jump and my heartbeat to double in less than a second. I turned, and a guy my age in black slacks and a dark-gray jacket stood in front of me.

My neck and shoulders relaxed.

“Sorry to scare you,” the guy said, extending his hand, holding onto a cotton hat. “You left this on your seat. Is it yours?”

“Yes, thanks,” I said, letting out a loud breath. “I forgot I’d taken it off when I got on.”

“Tomorrow morning would be cold without it.”

“Thanks again.”

**A**t home we ate chicken and rice and a salad. Over dinner Crissy talked of how driving around all day for her job was starting to wear her down. She was a regional manager at Pot-belly’s and had to drive from location to location a majority of the week. I was kind of jealous at times. Although I’d adjusted to life in an office, I never got out during the day, except for lunch and trips to the post office or CVS.

“It was two-thirty in the afternoon. Why was there so much traffic at two-thirty? At eight or nine in the morning, sure. At five or six in the evening, sure.”

“Perhaps they’re all regional managers moving from point A to point B.”

“Perhaps,” she said as she took her last bite of rice. “Hey, Carla heard about the muggings.”

“Really, she heard about them?” I said, raising my eyebrows. Her sister lived four hours from us.

She slipped on a thick sweatshirt that had been sitting on a chair. It was chilly.

“It’s a big deal, you know, when people get beat up and mugged in a place like this.”

I tuned her out for the rest of the meal and thought of what I had to do before the game: laundry, ironing, and pack a lunch for tomorrow.

After I finished my chores, I got ready for the game. I didn’t feel like drinking, so I wouldn’t bother with beer and peanuts. As I took my place on the couch and put a glass of water and some crackers on the coffee table, she put down her Sudoku on the coffee table. Doing the puzzle for an hour or so every night, she said, helps her relax.

“Aren’t you concerned that it happened just six blocks from us?” Crissy said.

“Please,” I said, sighing. “We discussed this last night. You have to stop watching the news. They’re just blowing this out of proportion. It’s sensationalism. They take one event and can’t stop talking about it.”

She nudged me in the shoulder. She looked at me with those concerned eyes again. Or were they menacing eyes? Her hair was up in a bun, and some face cream was on her chin.

“Yes, I’m concerned, but I’m not going to be alarmed,” I said.

At ten she took the remote from me. I didn’t struggle for it. The game was boring. Only two field goals so far. She, of course, flipped to the news. It wasn’t on yet. There was a commercial for Popeye’s chicken. My stomach turned over just thinking about fried food. I asked her to flip back to the game for a second. She said no.

The lead story was another mugging of a young woman who just moved to the neighborhood in August, a couple months after graduating from college. The woman on-site reported live from in front of a condo building in the back part of our neighborhood, near the community garden and the woods. Crissy cleared her throat loudly but said nothing. Since the victim went into hiding after talking to the police, the reporter had to settle on interviewing a building resident.

“It’s usually very quiet here,” the young man said. “In the early evening there’s not much going on. It is kind of dark here. I guess everyone’ll start looking over their shoulders from now on.”

The news lady reminded us this was the third in the past three days. And this one, like the other two, was because of an iPod. The attacker didn’t want her purse or jewelry, just the iPod. The victim, who was beaten, was a skinny, pale young woman with straight blond hair and wore a red jacket. Yes, he saw that girl every day on the bus. When coming home today, he recognized the red jacket—it stood out. He didn’t personally know her or anyone else on the bus, but he felt they were all part of a large commuting team.

The attacker was black, the news lady said.

“Please, honey, just don’t use it anymore, at least not at night,” Crissy said, with a hint of desperation in her voice.

“Like I told you, I need it.”

“You’ve just had it a little more than a year. You lived thirty years without it.”

I laughed. “But now that I have it, I can’t go out without it.” I leaned back on the soft cushion. “I won’t let the terrorists, sorry, muggers win.”

“You know, one day you’re going to get yourself killed, just because you’re carrying a damn iPod.”

“The chances are slim.”

“Right, you never think it’ll happen to you.”

I reached for the remote. She pulled it away.

“I’ve got a forty-five-minute bus ride, and it’s painful without it,” I said, standing up, spreading my arms. “Anyway, it’s my time to go into a different world. The music moves my soul, so to speak. It’s so close to me. The music is literally inside me. I can feel every lyric, every note. It touches somewhere deep. When I’m at work or at home, all I hear is noise: coworkers, the telephone, the TV, the dishwasher. But the music, when I listen, is all I have; it touches me, moves me.”

She rubbed her eyes. “You know, when you told me your ex broke up with you because of your iPod obsession, I thought it was ridiculous.”

“It just wasn’t that. There was much more. But her main point was that she deserved more attention, and when we rode the bus together or went for walks and I listened to music instead of talking to her, it showed what kind of personality I have.”

“Perhaps your stubbornness here could be a sign of even worse in your personality.”

“Don’t look too much into it. I don’t want to lose you. You know, for the first time, I’m really considering settling down. But I shouldn’t have to give it up.”

I met Crissy at a concert about nine months ago. A friend of hers dragged her along. But Crissy didn’t like Neko Case, arguing she was too “honky-tonk,” she told me later. At the show a couple of young drunk guys were hitting on them aggressively, and I stepped in and told the guys to back off. They did. After the show we stood outside the club, talking. Crissy, with straight brown hair parted in the middle, was looking fairly plain wearing jean shorts, open-toed sandals, and a toe ring. For some rea-

son, the toe ring made me ask her for her number instead of her blond, knockout friend. We went out the next night.

“I don’t buy it. It’s not worth your life.”

“Jesus,” I said, throwing my hands up, glancing over at the framed concert poster of Pink Floyd behind the TV. “Look, anytime I see a black guy in the neighborhood, I’ll run.”

She shrugged. “Fine, but you could still be caught off guard.”

I finally switched back to the game. But before I could sit back down I peered out the window, where the cat was sitting, also looking out. Mostly quiet. A middle-aged man walked his dog, a car slogged on by, someone inside an Acura tried to parallel park, a bus passed in the distance. My heart skipped two beats. Out there tonight a young woman was beaten by a stranger for a few dollars’ worth of technology.

Feeling down, I decided to skip the rest of the game. “Let’s not jump to conclusions here and become irrational and scare ourselves to death,” I told Crissy before I went to bed.

I sat on the bus in the morning, stuffed in the back corner. I did not read, and I searched for music to listen to, and I decided on Bob Dylan. I had some 2,500 songs on my iPod, and sometimes choosing what I wanted could be overwhelming.

Perhaps I could put it away on the ride home, the fear was telling me. But like I told Crissy last night, I was addicted to the iPod; there was too much emotional attachment now to put it down at a time when I could be listening to music. It provided the soundtrack of my life. Guns N’ Roses’ “Sweet Child of Mine” took me back to my freshman year of high school; U2’s “Ultra Violet” reminded me of my senior year and my high school sweetheart, Penny; The Beatles made me think of my parents’ outdoor parties on Sundays in the summer, when we all ate crabs at the picnic table; Pink Floyd’s “Learning to Fly” brought back the trip to Europe with my family; The Cure’s “Just Like Heaven” when I lost my virginity to Tara; “Rock the Casbah” when my father took away my car keys for getting a speeding ticket; “Heroes” when Scottie Thompson played it on his boom-box in the locker room before we took the court at regionals; “Brass Monkey” was what my friends and I sang while playing kickball in gym class; Crissy and I listened to Sarah McLachlan’s “Possession” in the car during our first date.



And, moreover, the music was a soundtrack for the world around me. When I listened to music, the kids fighting, the homeless rattling their cups, the ambulance racing through the streets, the garbage lying in the alley all took on new meanings.

I stepped off the bus and weaved through a crowd. At the light I waited and shivered. I was longing for the warm, though static, environment of the office. It was familiar, comfortable, and safe. My cheeks turned colder. Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" kicked in. As I crossed the street, the song took me back to my freshman English class—when I read the Joyce Carol Oates' story that was inspired by the song. Professor Meyerson passed out in one of the classes. One of the students said, "Well, teacher's dead, class is over." We all laughed. It turned out he just fainted. Nonetheless, class let out early, and Audrey Jenkins and I started drinking at noon that sunny Friday, and we did so until midnight. We kissed briefly, but that was it. That was all I'd wanted. A warm, sweet, tender kiss—so random and unexpected. How I wanted a day—or just a moment—like that again.

A few days passed and nothing happened in the neighborhood. The fear still made me look over my shoulder and always stride at a brisk pace. The music, however, never stopped. I read the local crime report: robbery at a liquor store, assault at two a.m., disorderly conduct, an auto theft. Crime happened every day, everywhere. The chance of it happening to me was there, but it also might never happen. Why fret when it was a fact of life, and you had no control over it? And why fret because it might never happen?

Crissy still watched the local news every night. The usual crime reports in the worst areas of the city. There was the weather: It was going to remain cold. Sports: Local college teams still thriving.

"You know, don't get complacent when walking around with your iPod," she said one night while sitting on the couch and flipping through an issue of *Vanity Fair*. "These things are hot. It beats stealing someone's wallet."

I rolled my eyes. Then I took off my glasses and cleaned them with the bottom of my shirt. I appreciated her concern, I really did. But if I was going to change my habits, I would want to do it because I decided to, not because she told me to.

“Don’t roll your eyes at me.”

“Don’t lecture me. You’re worse than my parents.”

“Your mother called today. She asked if you still used your iPod in the neighborhood.”

I heaved a loud sigh. “And what did you say?”

“I told her yes, and she said, ‘That stubborn son of a bitch.’ We’re just concerned.”

She took my hand and rubbed my palm.

“That’s it. I’m not talking about it at all anymore,” I said. “Time for bed anyway.” I kissed her on the lips. “We haven’t gone to bed at the same time in a while. Let’s go.”

She kissed me back. “Let’s go.”

“Just don’t turn on the news when we get in the bedroom.”

“I promise you I won’t.” She kissed me again.

The news a few days later hit me hard—yet it was a relief in some twisted way. A thirty-three year-old woman was killed for her iPod. She had tried to fight the mugger. Once she resisted he shot her, and she died at the hospital an hour later. Crissy held back from saying anything. On the couch, while the news-cast profiled the victim, she ran her fingers through her hair and blinked a number of times. I turned down the volume a bit. The phone rang, and neither of us moved. Like Crissy, I fixed my eyes on the TV. It showed a picture of the victim. Nice features: high cheekbones, thin eyelashes, straight black hair parted to the side. She was interning in the city and planned to finish her Ph.D. in urban planning next year.

Once I finished feeling sick for her, I thought of myself: Yes, that could’ve been me. Perhaps I should’ve listened to Crissy all along. I could simply put the thing away on the ride home. And even during the day it might not be worth it. Who knew that listening to songs while walking along the sidewalk could be so dangerous? I had thirty to forty years—if all went well—of listening to music of the past and what waited for me in the future. Why not put the damn machine away for a while, or at least at certain times, until this whole ordeal passes? But once this criminal was caught, would there be more and more?

Cristine sighed. She turned the channel to Comedy Central, and I thanked her. The cat let out a loud meow as she jumped up on the couch.

“I’m not going to say anything,” she said, her hand still in her hair.

“No need to.”

The first time I ever felt the fear came when I was eleven. My father and I were buying sandwiches and sodas in a hole-in-the-wall deli downtown around ten-thirty, after going to a baseball game. A guy wearing a thick black jacket—despite it being summer—and beat-up sneakers walked in and didn’t look around to buy anything. He just stood motionless with his hands in his pockets for about three minutes. I was sure he carried a gun and would kill everyone. As my father stood patiently waiting for the sandwiches while reading the paper, I turned red and became weak in the knees. I wanted to tell him let’s just leave. The guy finally purchased a pack of cigarettes and left. After my father and I got in the car, he asked, “What’s wrong?”

“I was scared.”

“About what?”

“It turned out to be nothing.”

Now that fear was a constant force in my life: The quick beats of the heart, the nausea bubbling in the throat, the throbbing of the temples. Was the fear irrational now, as it was in the deli? But fear trumped all other emotions. Fear could turn into paralysis. But the worst part was the paranoia. The constant belief that something bad would happen to you.

Music offered an escape from a life that was, at times, brutal—including, ironically, dealing with the fear. It was a liberation from loneliness. And it opened up my soul. I never liked it that Crissy never shared this passion. She was indifferent to music. She preferred movies, books, and TV. Although I’d met her at a concert, she never cared for live shows. I loved to walk the streets with the headphones in my ears. Songs gave meaning to the physical world around me. I was listening to my world—the music only I could hear.

In the next week or so, no new reports of any muggings surfaced, and the killer was finally found. News reports said he’d pawned the iPod he stole for \$150. Now that the guy had been caught, Crissy got off my back. Not having music while I took walks or drank coffee at a café was indeed gloomy. Thus, all I could do was keep listening. The fear never fully subsided, but it

did ebb. I still occasionally looked over my shoulder. It had become habit. Although winter had arrived, I sometimes walked the entire way home. It was more than an hour, but I needed the exercise, and as long as my iPod battery wasn't dead the walk was pleasant.

One Saturday I went to a coffee shop about ten minutes from our place, in the business strip nearby. The sun was just about to set. It was late December, and Crissy was out of town for a conference.

I searched for what to listen to on my walk home. What could fit my melancholy mood: Crissy was away, and winter had just begun. Beck's *Sea Change*. Very even and monotone.

Once I left the café, the day had turned dark. I was wondering if I should've had the coffee. I was an insomniac anyway. The coffee tasted pleasant and warmed me up.

I turned my head. A black man was several feet behind me. My heart pounded. What could he be doing here except to mug someone? No blacks lived in this neighborhood. The fear told me from the beginning: Watch for blacks. I hated that I felt like this. Perhaps he was homeless. I picked up the pace nonetheless. The cool air chilled my throat, the wind rustled my hair. I had three blocks to walk before I was home. Should I run? A few streetlights lit the area, but they were dim.

I turned again to look behind me. His hands were in his sweatshirt pockets. I considered running. But he could probably outprint me, tackle me, hit my head against the sidewalk, punch me in the ribs, then finally take my iPod. Why didn't I just listen to Crissy? Why did I insist on listening at night on isolated streets? If I were mugged, I was sure many—including Crissy—would say I deserved it.

I looked around for somebody, anybody. No one. I tripped a bit and imagined myself falling flat on my face. But I regained my balance and pushed up the hill. My legs burned, and, despite the cold, a warm sweat broke out on my forehead. Just as I approached an alley, my heart beat even faster. A cell phone rang. It wasn't mine. The guy behind me started speaking.

"Hey, I'm just two blocks away. Will be there in a second."

The muscles in my shoulders relaxed, and I turned the corner onto my street without looking back. For sure, the fear on my face had likely not yet faded. Before I reached my house, I stopped, turned down the volume so much that I could hardly

hear Beck. I stood still. I looked back just to remind myself how ridiculous I'd been. But had I been ridiculous?

A few minutes later I was in the apartment. I threw my iPod across the living room. It hit the wall but didn't break. There, on the floor, the poor thing looked lonely and useless. A few seconds later I picked it up and tossed it against the wall again. Nothing happened. I sat on the couch and spread my arms on the back of it. I wished I'd never had that paranoia. Perhaps it was normal, but the fear had enveloped me. I imagined the black guy who'd been behind me was now at a party, laughing, downing a bottle of beer, saying, "There was this white guy who was walking in front of me, and he was moving so fast, looking over his shoulder like he was scared shitless."

I kicked off my shoes and promised myself never to listen to that damn thing ever again.

**B**ut a week later I was back at it. I couldn't stand working out without it. The weather turned warmer than normal for an early winter afternoon. I went for a Sunday jog on the path through the woods behind our neighborhood. I put the iPod on shuffle and, luckily, had some good songs going: "Thunder Road," "Sympathy for the Devil," "The One I Love." My pace was good, and the ground was soft. I always enjoyed running during the winter. Never had to worry about the heat causing exhaustion. The sweat was always pleasantly chilly.

I stopped and wiped my forehead with the bottom of my shirt. My run, so far, had been roughly a half hour. I'd give myself a five-minute break, then run for another half hour. I took several deep breaths and lip-synced to an old song by The Smiths. A slight breeze tickled me on the neck.

When the five minutes ended, I started at a slow pace, just plodding along. My bones felt like they cracked as I lengthened my stride.

Springsteen's "Born To Run" kicked in, giving me more energy. I lengthened my stride some more, and I felt like screaming at the top of my lungs. I'd been listening to this song for more than twenty years, and each time it sounded new. *Sprung from cages on Highway 9 / Chrome wheeled, fuel injected / And step-pin' out over the line.* I ran on my toes, punching my arms into the air. About a third of the way into the song, I could hear my heavy breaths. Perhaps I was running too fast; perhaps I'd soon

trip on the uneven ground, where rocks and tree branches lay in my path. Regardless, I wouldn't slow down.

A middle-aged man in faded jeans, with his hands in his pockets, walked on the trail, coming in my direction. Just as I was about to nod a hello, he stretched out his arms, hit me on my left shoulder, and tackled me into the bushes. Something pricked my eye. My forearm started to bleed. I lay on my side, and I felt a sharp pain on my hip.

"What the hell?" I said.

The guy stood over me. I realized there might not be anyone around to help, and this guy could kill me right now. He had a thin beard and wavy brown hair. Didn't look too abnormal, but then again, serial killers could fit in anywhere if they wanted to, couldn't they? Crissy, of course, always told me to be careful while running on these isolated trails. Once a year, typically, a young woman in her early twenties was either beaten or killed while running.

"Give me your iPod," he said.

If I tried to get up, he'd just knock me down. Although he was a bit lanky, the guy probably stood taller than six feet. I had no chance; he could kick my head like a soccer ball. To get back onto the trail and outrun him, I'd have to somehow push him out of the way. Again, I had no chance.

*Everybody's out on the run tonight / But there's no place left to hide.*

When I was eleven I went to my first concert—Bruce Springsteen's Born In the U.S.A. tour. My father and I had seats in the last row of the stadium. When Bruce played this song, the stadium shook as the entire crowd jumped up and down. The crowd noise almost drowned out the band. My dad and I were as far away in the stands as possible. But we didn't care. The euphoria was tremendous, and it grew and grew during the song, the excitement intoxicating. Never, ever will I probably feel such bliss as I did while this song played on that warm summer night.

"Just wait till this song is over," I told the guy.

The guy frowned and leaned toward me. I held out my hand for him not to come closer and shook my head. The guy then stood motionless.

"Just let me finish this song."

The man remained motionless.

*But till then tramps like us / Baby we were born to run.*

As the song wound down with the final guitar notes, I noticed I wasn't scared. The fear was not there. Once the song ended, I unstrapped the holder and gave the iPod to him. The man bolted, and through the ringing in my ears I could hear his footsteps crunch a bunch of twigs.

For a second I thought of getting up and chasing him or finding some phone, where I could call the cops or Crissy. But I surrendered myself to just lying there. The cold dirt felt pleasant on my back. A leaf tickled my ear. The music still traveled through my head. The voices and lyric and guitar all kept at it in my mind, as if I were listening to it for real. My memories, so many to list, came back to me, and until the music faded away, I would lie here on this glorious day and relive as much of my past that I could.