

Peter Mladinic

Ask

As Schaeffer sees it, you were wearing shorts and sandals, a gold cross on a chain. It happened on a Sunday night in late September: light traffic, clear windshield, red and white Marlboro box on the dash of the gold sedan Mr. Hanson was driving. You sat between him and Chris, your boyfriend who was changing radio channels when you're going from their house to yours stopped, split-second stopped when you were broadsided. You felt a jolt. You were spinning. The driver's door flung open.

Capitalists

Nancy Sidley owns the delegation. Pale,
seated in rows of straight-back chairs
they look like mirrors in storage.
She knows the violins will be played
not smashed over wrestlers' heads
in a ring at the armory.

She knows the ups and downs of fear,
the dead eyes of outlaws she's seen
while brushing her hair in a mirror.
Evelyn owns a compost, Adele and Adolph
a tall oak at the bottom of a hill.
Walking in that oak's shade Nancy

has heard and felt acorns crunch.
Bill owns the champagne magnums,
and the suave look he wears
at the Labor Day carnival. Someone
owns the Ferris wheel. Nancy
doesn't know who, but she knows Frank

owns lumber, Jack a pair of dice,
Dennis and Regina the Manor Tavern
and Margaret a pearl handled switchblade
found one Saturday morning in the street
after she stepped out her door.
She put it in her jeans back pocket

and kept walking. At the Candy Store
of Eternity, owned by Otto, she made sure
no one saw the knife. At home,
in her room with the door shut, Margaret,
seeing her reflection in a mirror,
pushed a button, up sprang the blade.