

Live from the HEB Center

I'm at a hockey game and I feel bad about the goalie getting scored on. A forward pounds his opponent's head in. The crowd goes wild. The bloodthirst seems outsized and misplaced to me: it seems sexual. Is this Freudian or Foucauldian? The beers here are large and I'm close to the bottom of my first one, which is when I usually start thinking about the psychological disorders framing the minor league sports event I am attending.

I am in Texas at an arena off a highway whose name I refuse to know even though it's a fact of life in the city I live. Above one of the goals is an American flag, a Texas flag, and a Canadian flag. Every time I leave my city, to venture even slightly outside, I remember that everyone in the suburbs is bored and bloodthirsty and I should never expect any other form of government than authoritarianism.

People chanting in unison at the hockey game seems Catholic to me.

DEFENSE DEFENSE.

And also with you.

My father was a goalie. My brother was a defenseman. My father is dead and my brother is dead. I was a forward. My coach said defensemen were big and dumb, and everyone knows goalies are crazy. I was a forward, and not big or dumb or crazy, or at least in the way that goalies are crazy. I was five foot three and self-conscious and kept a journal. I am in an arena in Texas, a place neither my father or brother ever went.

In *Slapshot*, Paul Newman's character coaches and plays for a losing team in a crumbling town. When he's off the ice, he wears beautiful leather coats. His wife left him because he can

only truly love hockey, even though he's Paul Newman and wearing leather pants. This is not *not* how my father's life went, although he did not wear beautiful leather coats, and definitely not leather pants.

So when I said I felt bad for the goalie, I meant that every goalie is my father. My father cried during *Miracle*, about the 1980 US Olympic team beating the Russians. I cannot bear the thought of the goalie feeling bad for letting a goal in.

The away team is from Michigan. My father was from Michigan. It is a place that has had many lives before the one it is living now. It has long winters and crumbling cities that are always on the precipice of coming back. Texas is hot and brand new, with highways that float in the sky being built right now. My city's downtown sheds its skin every few months for a newer, bluer, taller and shinier one. Sometimes I put my roller blades on and stickhandle in an empty church parking lot near my house, the asphalt grinding down the wheels with every crossover I make in the thick heat .

I was raised on the Original Six NHL teams. Don't talk to me about expansion clubs, the Sunbelt teams. I had Quebec Nordiques cards in my three-ring binder in 1994. I organized my collection alphabetically by team, because my brother gave me the cards he had doubles of, and forged the players' autographs with a sharpie. In the late nineties the Detroit Red Wings were good. The playoffs happened at the end of the school year, and while studying for finals I was anxious about the playoffs and my grades in equal measure. My dad would wear his jersey and shout at the TV when the refs made the wrong call. The suspenseful *dun dun dun* of the ESPN playoff theme rang out in our living room at each commercial break, while the sprinkler watered

the garden outside in the warm May night. I decided long ago I would not marry a man who yelled at the TV.

Tonight is a playoff game. The home team fans scream YOU SUCK at the away team and I think that's fucking rude. I am here with the man I am married to and some friends. The man I married does not yell at the TV.

This Austin arena hosts the minor league feeder of the Dallas Stars, who moved down here from the upper Midwest in the nineties. Minnesota couldn't support the North Stars anymore, and Texas has the eighth largest economy in the world.

Michigan is up 4-1. "A two-goal lead is the most dangerous lead in hockey," my dad would say. So three goals means the game is set, I think. I didn't even know who was playing tonight before the game, but now I'm overly invested. Fandom everywhere is probably animated mostly by bloodlust and grievance— and I don't trust whatever lies here, on this land. The remnants of confederacy? Please. Booing the referees as they make their appearance seems to me innately anti-government. Booing the opposition when they skate on the ice is nativist behavior.

Everyone here is a natural blonde. My father and brother had big dark eyebrows and so do I. Grief is not linear, I keep hearing on podcasts. Well, grief is in these two beers while ELO rattles the boards between plays.

In college, when I returned from studying abroad in Belize, my dad took me to a minor league hockey game in Michigan. I had been studying development theory and the Zapatistas and hadn't thought about hockey in years. After five months in a small town in the jungle, the grotesqueries of American culture, the endless advertisements on every surface of the arena

seemed more crass than ever. The entire event revealed itself as nothing more than a promotion for new tires and hamburgers. I was rocked in the stands by the vertigo of overstimulation, the endless noise ringing in my ears, the deference of the crowd to the prompts on the screen. GET LOUD. MAKE SOME NOISE. IT'S FUN TO STAY AT THE YMCA. But now I am back in a minor league arena, and I cannot extricate from myself the way it feels like home.

The home team has tied the game. I am thinking about death at a minor league hockey game, and two beers in my mind settles on *The way I want to live forever I will, because my conception of forever exists only in the time I am alive*. It's dumb but maybe it's just crazy in the way you have to be a goalie, or anything else.

The game moves into overtime. The arena DJ really likes early 2000s emo. *Everybody clap your hands*. Everybody claps their hands. On the ice, tensions are high. At this point, the game will be won by the less exhausted team. The players start punching each other in the head again, and the entire crowd jumps to their feet to cheer the beating on. I do not. I look out over the arena full of people with a misplaced erotic fixation on violence.

In *Slapshot*, Ned is the player who hates the violence his team has resorted to in order to get butts in seats at the rink.

“You're the Ned,” the man I'm married to says.

I agree with him. I am the Ned.

The players are getting tired; every play is choppy and no one can score. But the goalies still look sharp. The twenty-minute overtime period is exhausted with no goals. A fifteen-minute break, and the Zamboni comes out again to lay a fresh sheet of ice in precise ovals to Jimmy Eat World.

The players on both teams are even more tired now: frantic shots on goal and incomplete passes. I reason that if I go to the bathroom, someone will score. As I'm coming back up the stairs to my seat, Texas sinks the puck straight past the goalie into the back of the net.

Sudden death.

The horn blares and I will look for a beautiful leather coat with a fur collar, to wear somewhere cold.