

Time Traveler

I built a time machine and travelled back to the 1950's but accidentally landed on my father. It was like *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy's house lands on that witch and she walks out to find herself in a strange land.

Worse, the father was my birth father, not the kind fellow who raised me. The man I killed was not yet rich—just a greaser with slicked-back hair, too tall to fit into the coffin, with a pack of Parliaments like small bones cast against the ground.

I say *worse* because my very existence was now cast into doubt. If he and my birth mother had already copulated, fine—his job, we might say, was done and he was due to make his exit. But there was no way I could know till I returned to my own time and, perhaps on arrival, faded to thin air.

That was not, as they say, “in the plan.” But what exactly *was* the plan? Shocked, an onlooker guzzled Coke from a bottle faintly green, the product's name embossed in glass shaped vaguely like a woman's body. The same styling would be applied to the '63 Corvette which, from my time traveler's perspective, I knew the world would celebrate.

Had my poor skills as a pilot killed all chance of safe return? A woman gaped, swaying in pony tail and pleated party dress, open-mouthed at what she'd witnessed, fearful to stay or run away. Was her name Dorothy, too? A squad car, cherry-topped, gently nudged her from its path, inching toward columns of dust still rising from hot asphalt.

Did I look like the operator of an errant U.F.O., or some unlucky Soviet agent whose spy satellite crash-landed? Was this

a moving violation or vehicular homicide? I couldn't stay there to find out.

I had to pull the curtain hard and set a course back to the vortex where the debris that shapes our lives keeps surging, endlessly pristine.

Already, my father's Hush Puppies had begun to curl and steam, the Flying A sign overhead still swaying slightly from the impact.