

William Carpenter

GHOSTS

Every evening I do this. I stop work, and though my body is longing for MacNeil and Lehrer, I change into sweat clothes and into my Reeboks with their spot of iridescent tape on each heel, so the runner won't be taken for raccoon or porcupine; I run down Route One to the suspension bridge over the Penobscot, as far as the highest point, the center, two hundred feet over a river luminous with ice or moonlight or a tanker's decklamps or just darkness, which my eyes adjust to, till they can see the small green light like a harbor buoy saying *jump, it would be easy*, and I think, yes, this is a place that could be right, this is a good time, before I forget what I have seen; but I want to find out if Clinton is really going to dump Lani Guinier, so I turn back, it's part of my exercise, trying on death like an old suit from my father's closet, then taking it off, hanging it gently up. It's good for the heart. It's good for the bridge, too, which loves to have someone perch on its guardrail, ready, then decide to live. I pass the long riverside cliffs, two miles without a house, no cars even in sight, I'm running the yellow line right down the middle, full of endorphin, WMJ in my headphones playing "Don't be Cruel," which was the background music for my first ticket, ninety-five miles an hour, and I think *Elvis, what happened, what did we do with all that time?* I pull the headphones off. I hear someone behind me—finally, a running companion—and it's a friend, too, huffing and panting but definitely keeping up: Dick Davis, who has been dead for eleven years but he is now running beside me in the same shirt he had on when he died. In the headlights of a semi I see he's shaved, he's lost weight, and he's got a couple of guys with him, I know them. The tall one was our conscience and our patrician;

tonight he's a mixture of moonlight and social justice.
The other's an old man, I can finally say it, and his feet, even
in this light, make the sound of slippers on linoleum.

I run

because my heart is vulnerable, because of the terrible things I
eat and think, I run so I can stop running and slip some rum and ice
into the blender and watch what happened to the world while I was
out.

None of these guys should be here. They're out of shape, the wind
blows them off course. They're slowing down even now, they can't
stay with me, I'm out in the middle of the road again, running
the yellow line; they've gone transparent, you can see the moon
right through their pale elbows and knees. I can't hear them.
I put my headphones on and listen. Now it's Fats Domino:
"Walking to New Orleans." He's still ahead of me but I'm gaining.
I raise the volume. I quicken my pace a little, to catch up.