

The Oval

Volume 6
Issue 2 *Staff Issue*

Article 10

2013

Small Town Elegy

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Recommended Citation

Stanton, Emily (2013) "Small Town Elegy," *The Oval*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 2 , Article 10.

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Small Town Elegy

red, stop
yellow, wait
green, go—
I should be old enough now
to understand the order of stopping, how pain travels, only
we think of infinite things on the brink of childhood

When everyone kept their lawns trimmed and lush
for bare feet and laundry, wringing-wet, or
the way the dying bright of the stadium lingered
long enough to pass into starlight, leaving only
 the contained echo of a Friday night crowd
 the tinny reverberation of cheap speakers,
 popcorn residue and pink bubblegum-stained kisses.

I write these final words for you, Main Street,
for the brown dry patches of cracked earth and steaming
 asphalt,
once-white houses now sunburnt and peeling.
For my breaths heavy with rust, difficult enough to make me
 stay,
and the traffic exhaled away on a ribbon of bypass—
a brief promise of green.

Red stop. The dust settles.