

This happened a long time ago. I was in my car, stopped at a traffic light, and I noticed in my rearview mirror that the man in the car behind me, alone behind the wheel, was having some kind of fit. Not a seizure, but a full-on eruption of rage. He was screaming and punching his dashboard hard enough to make his whole car sway. This man was surely unaware he had an audience. Enconced as he was in his skin of steel and glass, his outburst was presumably intended to be wholly private. Enconced as *I* was, and enjoying a privacy this man only imagined himself to have, I studied the rearview's reflection of him coming unglued.

As I watched, I wondered what had gotten him so upset. I recalled that a few blocks back, I'd driven past a funeral breaking up. Maybe that funeral was part of his story. Maybe the departed had been his father, or his wife, or his child. Forced to greet the guests with somber calm for the duration of the service, he was finally allowing himself to unleash the full force of his fury and sorrow.

Or maybe he just hated red lights.

The light turned green. I drove straight, and the guy behind me turned left, the brief interaction between us now complete. It wasn't really an interaction, though, because it wasn't reciprocal, but it had been a *communication*, a suggestion of a story — or part of a story — passed, however unintentionally, from him to me.

This man has come to mind many times over the years. I'll never know his full story, of course, but that would be true even if we hadn't been strangers, or if I'd initiated an actual interaction with him that day (which would have been crazy).

Suppose for a moment I had gotten out of my car, walked back to his car, knocked on his window, and asked him what the matter was. Suppose he *hadn't* told me straight off to mind my own business. Suppose he *hadn't* switched from punching his dash to punching me in the neck.