

Their illegible runes

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [August 21, 2013](#) issue

Very many years ago I dated a roaring alcoholic  
Who taught me many things about many things;  
Much of what I learned was about me—such as,  
For example, that I didn't have the guts to retire  
From what wasn't even a love affair. This is sad  
To write, even now, but I bet we all learn slowly  
In this crucial area, yes? But I learned much else  
That was haunting and poignant. Alcoholics, she  
Told me, incise a web and welter of scratches on  
Their car doors, just by the driver's side keyhole;  
They are always poking haphazardly in the dark  
For where the keyhole used to be. You hear lines  
Like that, your heart breaks a little for the busted  
Parts of us all, you know? Yes, it's a disease, yes,  
It's a social ill, a terrible one, it's haunted history,  
It's hammered children, shattered families, stolen  
Unimaginable oceans of creativity and joy, killed  
Millions of people who might have been stunning  
Bolts of light in their own amazing ways. But this  
Evening, opening my car door, I think of the poor  
Souls thrashing in the dark, desperate for an open  
Door, scratching their illegible runes, scribbling a  
Sad new alphabet in the bright glitter of their cars.