

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.