

December 2008

## The Nature of Coincidence in Northwestern Missouri

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### Recommended Citation

Shipers, Carrie (2008) "The Nature of Coincidence in Northwestern Missouri," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 41.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol7/iss2/41>

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# Shipers: The Nature of Coincidence in Northwestern Missouri

## THE NATURE OF COINCIDENCE IN NORTHWESTERN MISSOURI Carrie Shipers

The guy in the front cell singing  
*I turned 21 in prison doing life without parole*  
is serving 6 months. He's 27,  
and he once dated the warden's daughter.  
The warden doesn't know that, even though  
her daughter used to talk about his tattoos—  
ragged Celtic band around left bicep, dragon  
and syringe on right shoulder blade—  
every night at dinner. He doesn't know  
he knows the warden's daughter,  
and if he did he isn't sure he'd mention

her naked in his twin-sized bed,  
how at the last possible second she'd opened  
her eyes and reached for her clothes.  
The warden walks by his cell on her way  
to the laundry and joins him for the chorus,  
snapping a lighter between the bars  
for the afternoon smoke. She doesn't know  
about the unmade bed, the *no*, the notes  
he wrote asking for another chance,  
and he doesn't know she doesn't, doesn't know  
the warden has a daughter or that the daughter  
has a husband who's never been arrested.

When the warden comes back from the laundry  
he will announce *I shot a man in Reno*  
and she will answer *just to watch him die*,  
the same words her daughter is singing,  
three states away, as she steps from the shower.