

# Green Bay Outsiders - A Coming-of-Age Novel (First Scene)

What do you do when you've graduated college, have a promising new job, a woman in love with you and a close-knit group of friends, and all you can think of is throwing it all away? 22-year-old Carl Daniels is about to start making some hard choices. This first scene at a downtown bar in Green Bay shares details about Carl's first devastating experience with the end of the life he's always known.

Below is the first scene from *Green Bay Outsiders*, a coming-of-age novel I am writing about a young man who decides to throw away a comfortable, middle-class existence in search of broader life experience. In a video (copy and paste this link: <https://youtu.be/K96RJRyEM9w>), I explain how *Green Bay Outsiders* shares similar characteristics as *Look Homeward, Angel* by Thomas Wolfe and *Into the Wild* by John Krakauer.

*Green Bay Outsiders* will be available for preorder on Amazon within the next few weeks. The novel is scheduled to be published in late 2017 or early 2018.

Feel free to contact me with any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature reads "Jay Lemming" on the top line and "Author" on the bottom line, both in a cursive script.

Jaylemming-author.com  
jay@jaylemming-author.com

## Green Bay Outsiders by Jay Lemming – First Scene

E-mail: [jay@jaylemming-author.com](mailto:jay@jaylemming-author.com)

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Carl held the beer bottle before his eyes, studying the Door County label as Brian kept on about the abortive coup attempt in the Soviet Union that failed to wrest control of the government away of Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. The roar of countless happy hour conversations intermingled in the low-lit bar, making it hard for Carl to extract his friend's discourse from the words and laughter of dozens of others at Bar D. Carl and Brian sat on adjacent stools. Lou stood, facing them both.

"The hard liners have been stewing for years," Brian continued, like a self-proclaimed member of the intelligentsia. "They're afraid all these reforms under Gorbachev are going to rip apart the Soviet Union. They shouldn't have let Yeltsin even get to the White House and challenge them. The hard liners should have acted quicker."

"The White House?" Carl frowned.

Brian leaned one elbow against the sticky bar top. "The Russian Parliament building," he explained. "Yeltsin hopped up on top of a tank and called out the members of the coup. He demanded the people hear out Gorbachev and told the military not to get involved in the takeover. Bad move by the hard liners not to shut him down before he did that."

He paused to swallow his beer, offering Lou and Carl the opportunity to exchange a look. Nothing stirred Brian's fire more than the politics of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. He'd been this way at university too. Getting his first job and fending for himself in the real world had done nothing to temper his passion.

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Carl would have preferred, if given the choice, speculation about the Packers' upcoming season, only a month away. He's heard enough about international events from his Uncle Jack who'd served in Khe Sanh during his tour in Vietnam in the late 1960s. Brian's interest in world affairs was further enflamed by his brother, a foreign service officer with the State Department in Yugoslavia. They exchanged letters several times a month.

"He'll cover international politics for the New York Times one day," Stephanie predicted at their first post-graduation happy hours two months ago. They'd been out celebrating the offer of a reporting job Brian received from the Green Bay Press Gazette. "No more than five years from now," she theorized. "No doubt about that."

That was late on a Friday afternoon, also at Bar D, not two weeks after the graduation ceremony at the University of Wisconsin gave them all a good kick into post-university life. Stephanie—tall, assertive, the de facto leader of them all—had already tapped Bar D as the best watering hole for their group of friends and they had all since dutifully arrived on all Friday afternoons since—she, Brian, Carl, Lou, Amelia, Daryl and Jim. Bar D, on North Washington Street close to the confluence of the Fox and East Rivers, was a pretty standard watering hole for that part of the city, catering to students rolling from the university off to the northeast and downtown professionals. It specialized in serving beers from local breweries and was a place where outsiders stood out quickly.

Now, as Carl waited for Brian's ongoing analysis of the coup attempt, he scanned the rest of the bar, taking in the rest of their friends. Amelia, who Carl had avoided

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looking at until now, sat alone at one of the long tables at the back of the bar, long auburn hair curtaining a face that hovered over papers she'd brought from her job. As she read, Amelia pulled thoughtfully (perhaps, anxiously?) at her auburn tresses. No one approached her. Stephanie and Jim were a few stools down, talking to someone none of them knew. And Daryl? He was nowhere to be found—unceremoniously dumped, ejected and kicked to the curb by them all three weeks ago.

“Who the fuck is that?” Lou had whispered to Carl and Brian a moment ago, checking out the stranger Stephanie and Jim were speaking with. It had been hard enough for him accepting Jim, who might have gone to high school with them more than four years ago but definitely had not gone to university or been part of their crowd there. Admitting Jim, without consensus, to their happy hours had exposed Stephanie to immediate and ongoing rumors about the nature of their friendship.

“I personally think Gorbachev is on the right path to reform,” Brian went on. “I predict within five years the Soviet Union will be history. Their economy...”

“So what do you think, Carl?” Lou said suddenly. “Terminator 1 or 2?”

Brian frowned. Carl wasn't the biggest fan of Brian's tireless commentary either but you learned to tolerate your friends' whims to get along. Unless, of course, your name happened to be Lou.

“What do you mean?” Carl asked. “Terminator 1 or 2?”

“Which was better? And on a scale of 1 to 10, how hot is Linda Hamilton?”

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Carl didn't want to remember Terminator 2. Lou had pushed pretty hard for him to go see it with him. This had been a little under a month ago and, under pressure, Carl caved, thus blowing off the plans he had with Amelia to go to Fire Over the Fox.

He glanced her way again. She frowned without turning his way.

Terminator 2 had opened in Los Angeles two days before it opened anywhere else. Lou was furious.

"Yeah, us fucking Green Bay hicks, we don't deserve the same treatment as those plastic people in Tinseltown. Our job is to stand in the back of the line." When the film finally hit Green Bay, Lou wanted to be first in line.

"I've got plans," Carl explained when Lou first pushed him to go.

"Break them," Lou demanded. He even whined about it a little. Of course he had no idea what had transpired between Carl and Amelia a few nights before or that they had plans to get together at Fire Over the Fox. "This is Terminator 2, for God's sake!"

Lou liked movies and football, and that was it. He didn't have a girlfriend and didn't talk about girls much. If Carl hadn't caught Lou sneaking a glance at Stephanie's ass from time to time, he might have thought Lou gay. Brian once offered to try to get Lou the chance to write reviews for the Gazette to channel his movie critic braggadocio but they all knew it would never happen. Lou was a bat writer. A loudmouth speaker with strong opinions and the pathological tendency to toss out expletives non-stop like hand grenades. But he was a shitty writer.

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The only things that could have prevented Lou from rambling non-stop were Brian's international commentary or Stephanie's impatience. "Shut up, Lou," she had routinely ordered over the years. It had become a staple of their strange friendship.

Carl glanced at Brian who was tapping the bar impatiently.

"Look," Carl said, "can we talk about something else?"

"Like what?" Lou shrugged. "What else is there?"

"You interrupted Brian."

"What are you guys talking about?" The bartender who materialized on the far side of the bar was around their age with a gaunt face and a strange buzzcut of orange-yellow hair. Seeing Carl's need, he slid a fresh bottle of Door County over to him.

"Thanks, Jonah."

Jonah was Lou's cousin. He didn't hang with Carl's friends—even when he wasn't working—but would occasionally come by when he was on shift and things got slow with customers.

"Carl doesn't want to talk about Terminator because he's filled with all this Catholic guilt about abandoning his lady love to go the movies with me."

Carl's stomach clenched. He stared. As far as he knew, Amelia hadn't told anyone he'd broken plans with her. It did explain all the strange looks he'd been getting the past few weeks. Daryl's excommunication from their group flashed through Carl's mind, scaring him.

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“I’ve never even seen the first Terminator movie,” Jonah admitted.

Now it was Lou who stared. He squinted at his cousin as though Jonah was some alien. “You have fucking never seen the original Terminator movie, Jonah? What the fuck is the matter with you?”

Jonah shrugged.

Lou shook his head. “Are you working this weekend?”

“Sunday.”

“All right, look, my not-so-favorite cousin,” Lou said. “I’ve got the videocassette. Do you at least have a VCR?”

Jonah nodded.

“Well, you’ve got that going for you, if not much else. Okay, I’ll bring the tape by on Sunday. But don’t fuck it up, or I’ll fuck you up? Okay?”

Jonah rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

“Lom!” someone suddenly barked from the far end of the bar. “Lom here.”

Tilting a middle finger toward his cousin, Jonah hurried that way.

“That was rude,” Lou cried, imploring Carl and Brian with a hurt expression. “Don’t you think? I offered to lend him a movie. He could have said thank you, instead.”

Carl glanced down past a long string of laughing faces, Packers caps, young women preening and tossing their hair, hands and arms curling drinks, bar top coasters and amoeba-shaped spills, and milling groups of friends toward the source of the

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shouts. Some loudmouth with jet-black hair matted to his forehead and slate eyes had pushed through a circle of twenty-something-year-olds and inserted himself against the bar. One cutie who'd clearly been shoved aside by the newcomer gave him a nasty glance but she was behind his back shoulder and he didn't notice.

Carl recognized him right away. Just over an hour ago, the guy had come in with a contingent of similar looking fellows, pushing through the front door of Bar D and headed with a confidence bordering on arrogance to the area around the foosball tables. The fellows had spread out and in an instant, the area had become theirs. That was until, not more than 10 minutes later, another contingent with the same brusque attitude entered and joined them. This was a bunch of young women.

"Fucking Greeks," Lou had said under his breath, and it took a Carl a second to realize he was referring to fraternities and sororities. Carl never considered joining a fraternity during college; he already had an unofficial one with his friends, and had no need to socialize outside this circle.

Over by the foosball tables now—the plywood frames chipped by years of use and the rubber ABS handles worn by years of sweaty hand grips—the loudmouth's friends looked askance at the bartender, inclined to judge their loud friend less for his ill treatment of the bartender and more for that bartender's slowness in hooking them up with their next Lom. The only one from their crowd not looking that way, Carl noticed, was one guy in a white Kappa Sigma t-shirt leaning against the wall. His unwavering gaze fell on Amelia who, despite the madness of the bar's rising volume and the



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crowd's increasing inebriation, seemingly remained outside it all, huddled over her papers at the table as though she were in an empty library.

“Come on, bartender,” the loudmouth motored on. “Fifteen Loms here! Move it!”

Stephanie had on several occasions declared that the beer currently in demand had the “stupidest, fucking name” in the world. But the Lom was a well-known drink at Bar D. It had been invented there—had, in fact, helped it become something of a Green Bay institution for the 10 or years that it had been around. Stephanie recently secured a job in public relations for the city. If anyone knew the value of the sound of a word, Carl figured, it was her. He personally didn't mind it—the name of the beer or the taste—but wasn't about to argue with her, especially not when she began cursing like Lou.

But if Carl avoided such unnecessary arguments, he didn't mind standing up for someone being treated badly. Carl was a big guy—tall and fit. It wasn't just that he went to the gym regularly or downed post-workout protein shakes like they were in short supply. He supposed it was something in his genes. Carl intimidated more than was intimidated, at least physically. This stood, as others had pointed out, in direct contrast to his easy-going nature. Yet as he studied the fraternity asshole abusing Jonah, wondering if he should intervene, Brian tapped him on the shoulder.

“So how's Amelia?” Brian asked. “Other than sitting over there by herself, looking like she needs company.”

Based on the way the evening had gone so far for Carl—fun and relaxed, with no threat in sight—he wasn't expecting that. But then, as Carl turned to Brian, it became suddenly clear to him that all his friends knew he'd blown off Amelia. He grew angry—

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mostly because he was suddenly scared. It seemed as though there'd been a decent amount of innuendo recently though Carl convinced himself it just his imagination. Now he recognized it was anything but. The drama with Daryl had put it on temporary hiatus. But the comments were boomeranging back and were getting pretty direct too.

Letting Lou talk him into going to see the Terminator movie had been a huge mistake. Carl didn't just have plans with Amelia to see the fireworks over the Fox River. He'd been the one who'd invited her to go in the first place that June morning on the landing outside his apartment. And then he had bailed on her too. What Carl didn't find out until after Fire Over the Fox passed was that Amelia had already arranged for them to meet up with Stephanie at the fireworks. And when Amelia showed up by herself (Carl having blown her off to go to the movies with Lou), he could only imagine Stephanie asking: "Where's Carl?"

After that June morning on the landing and Carl's invitation to see the fireworks, which Amelia accepted, smiling, she started saying "we" and "us". "We'll have a great time." Amelia called him for the first time ever a few days later. "We'll enjoy it."

If Carl had gone with Amelia to Fire Over the Fox, they would have done so as a couple. No question about it. It wouldn't have been a step on the way to a relationship—no way just an exploratory date between friends. A big step had already been taken at his apartment; going out after that would only complete the deal. And with Stephanie there to witness it everyone else would know too.

As it turned out, Stephanie ended up being at Fire Over the Fox to witness his *not* turning up. It bothered the hell out of Carl that Amelia never told him she'd invited

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Stephanie. Did she just want to show me off like some prize, he wondered? Stephanie was Amelia's best friend—they'd been roommates since sophomore year—and he imagined that decision on Amelia's part had just been a girl thing. I don't like it though, Carl thought, still judging it a kind of manipulation. She shouldn't have done that.

Nevertheless, he knew, blame lay squarely on his shoulders. What kind of guy invites a woman out and then cancels to see a movie? To avoid Brian's probing eyes, Carl lowered his head. He thought through the question as he never had before. And then the answer popped into his mind, as he'd never admitted it before. I want to know what's out there, he realized. Someone who's heard about his uncle's experience at war knows there is a lot of something else out there, and doesn't want to get caught up too soon in career and domesticity without taking a chance on the world. Carl had been born, bred and educated in Green Bay. Now he worked in the city, too. Enough already!

Brian never would have been brave enough to say something about Amelia to him unless someone else already had, in this case, Lou. Both friends peered at him now. The walls were closing in and this was a dangerous moment. The circumstances under which Daryl had been ejected from their group at Bar D were different than current ones. But the shock remained among them all, just a few weeks following that event, that things would not stay the same way forever. College was done, though evidence and memories of it were everywhere. Yet new forces and influences had invisibly begun to creep among them, and everything was changing.

This is my crew, Carl reminded himself. These are my friends...my identity.

"Brian asked you a question," Lou said. Carl stared back, unable to speak.

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Lou turned impatiently. “Hey, Stephanie!” he called out. “Stephanie, come here.”

Carl found his voice. “What are you doing?”

Stephanie, who was busy speaking with Jim and the stranger Carl didn’t know a couple bar stools down, lifted her head. Somehow, despite the din and the rank smell of body sweat and the glinting reflections of light off burnt-orange beer bottles in hands and on tables, and the green and yellow of Packers paraphernalia hanging throughout the barroom like holiday bunting, somehow she’d heard Brian call out.

Bar D was filling in. Happy hour was getting happier. But they’d all been friends a long time, and when one of them was in the midst of a situation, it wasn’t long before they all were involved though, at this point in Carl’s estimation, maybe that wasn’t for the best.

I want out, he thought. Glancing toward the long window at the front of Bar D, he spied North Washington Street and the watercolor wash of gold sunset cut through by the geometrically driven roofs and walls of the buildings. He wished he was fishing on the bay with his uncle right now.

I can’t wait until Sunday, Carl thought. I just can’t wait.

**Author’s Note: I hope you enjoyed this scene. If, afterward, you wonder what a Lom is or wonder why Daryl was ejected from Carl’s group of friends at Bar D, you can find out when the novel is published in late 2017 or early 2018. Details will be out soon about how you can preorder a copy of *Green Bay Outsiders*.**