

I saw the road stretching out in front of us like every limitless possibility I had hoped for where this was going, *every beautiful thing to see*, the oncoming headlights nothing but a game to play, and the cab of the car like a submarine where I could recede, and fall, and sleep on my shoulder, like I always did as a child, but it wasn't my father in the driver's seat, it was Parker- *Parker*, the name, to me, immediately searching and reaching out- the name, to me, instantly something new despite the fact that mere weeks before I met him I had been spending my furtive flirtatious energy on reaching out for another boy, also named Parker, but without his red hair, without his physical immediacy, without his reciprocation... Without this jeep that carried me down this blacktop highway in the sacred shared space behind a dashboard.

There's something so smoothly intimate about sharing a car with someone- your every touch is to something sleek and cool, or, if not, to the person sitting next to you- who is warm, and soft, at the same time that their muscles are taut and responding to the steering wheel. Cars are where we spent our fondest memories as careening adolescents- they were the microcosms into which we could slip and ignore the world rushing past, bits of smudged nothing. They were the venues for loud music and little else, which, as you know, is the only show worth playing when you're running. We were always running. Running in our cars, running down the road, running from the harsh snarl of an adult tongue and a pointing finger, running from the banal smothering sheet settling like wet suffocating cloth over our noses and mouths, running from that feeling that no one would ever love us as much as our stereos and this road, this exact, *dark*, beautiful road.

It felt like we had been together for years. It felt like this particular domestic ritual- riding in a car together- had been our reality. We had driven to the grocery store together and bought

milk and pecans and dish soap, and we had circled the block just to finish a chorus, and we'd nearly hit a deer three miles from home, and we'd parked- yes, we'd parked- anywhere and probably everywhere and for many years, and we'd made a practiced art of it, if that can ever be called an art, or maybe the fact that we'd been doing it for so long meant that it was all the more sloppy, all the more spontaneous, more like a habit that you train so long to form just to watch slowly deteriorate.

We passed through the Bronx and saw the empire state building in the distance like a red pin sticking in the skin of the earth, a next stop so close that we didn't need to close our eyes to envision it. We'd be there soon and we'd be everywhere else (the whole trip consisted of ideas for the next one). We crisscrossed No Man's Land outside of Philly where the highways are the only life the dark stretch sees, and the city flickers far away as if it's underwater, and the barren litter is just calling to be traversed by someone cold in earmuffs, getting out of their car because they feel some sort of siren call, not sure why they're going, and walking for a long time and finding nothing meaningful. We'll do that too, we'll walk that wasteland and be disappointed, we can do whatever the hell we want.

When we rolled into Philly it was a dirty filmy skyline marked by pretty pops of lights that some girl had posited would be a good idea- you know, they were those paper cut-out types of lights like glitter accents on a stationary set. We parked the car in a garage and took our necessities in our arms and walked to the corner of some street next to some building, hoping we were in the right place. The cold was brutal. We were waiting for his friend, his best friend Jake, a college student who went to Temple and who was due to arrive here any minute, any minute, where the hell was he? Goddamn he was taking a long time we were *freezing*.

Jake's a quiet cool guy with a mess of curly brown hair who has just discovered man buns. He was always the bad cop on him and Parker's films, always the one who had something mean but true to say, and I wonder what I would be like as a guy who wore man buns and loved film: I would be acerbic and chill and I'd do drugs like he does, I'd live in this dorm room that smells like rotten Chinese food and have these posters on my wall, and the picture of my girlfriend in her black bra with the tiny lacy bit, and the hands all around her reaching for her body. Yeah, I'd have my photography right there on my wall and I'd shoot half-nudes of my best friends too. Philly does this stuff to you.

I slept on that hard floor and slipped my headphones in to listen to more nonsense, and when the sun rose I felt like I had sex hair and I felt good. I stretched and saw myself as a real part of Parker's life, as not just an impermanent fixture, but as this girl with sex hair who could take half-nude photographs and hang out with his best friend and get McDonald's in Philly because he had taken me there.

Our final destination wasn't the Chinese Food Room, it was Annapolis, his hometown, a place beautiful and quiet and so picturesque that it didn't seem plausible, seemed like a fake sort of place to grow up, seemed sort of like a tourist destination and a distant memory and your family vacation when you all needed a break from yourselves.

And in that town I couldn't help but see his past like demons trying to tell me I didn't belong once again, and yeah, it's a fragile balance, my sense of place, but I was never good at maps and even worse at self love. I saw the alleyway that people use for Instagram and saw that girl Lindsay, who he had fallen in love with, walking down it with her friends and seeing him and kissing him and I don't know, having him like a time capsule back to high school when I

didn't exist. It's okay of course, I'm not jealous of her, just jealous of time, just jealous of the time we didn't have and will never have when we get to the end of whatever length of time we make for ourselves. I saw that girl Summer too, his first love, the portrait artist who paints herself with dead hollow eyes who went through a rainbow of hair colors and now, in her natural brown, is one of the most beautiful girls I've ever seen. She must've been there somewhere in Annapolis, must've been at his school where we picked his little sister up at the end of the day, must have hollowed out spaces of her own with him and in him and around, must've had her favorite spot to eat and look at him.

It's just this dark music that makes me go crazy like this, so I'll turn that music off. The important things weren't the ghosts that I now only see roaming the memories of my memories of the trip, but the things I experienced when I was actually there, cold, walking, eating three ice creams in one day, hearing stories, taking him in- I'm always taking him in, a sponge- exploring his empty house and trying to really understand, *who are you? Who am I letting dominate my mind and my time and the stories I choose to tell, the secrets that I divulge through words and skin; who did I really see when I saw you and in how many countless ways was I wrong?*

Blues is like a hardon comes right in your mouth  
Blues is like a hardon, it comes in your mouth  
...  
Blues like a hardon, your standing on the road  
...  
Go out in night time, in streets and subways roam  
...  
Blues is like a hardon, I can't leave it alone  
...  
If I don't get it off right now, someday it'll all be gone.

Love is like a hardon comes right in your mouth. Love has to be used up quick because you never know when it's gonna slip away, when you don't want it to, when you're not asking it to, when you want anything but for the thing you're still trying to make to fade.

I fear my love is a wilting thing or a reservoir I have no idea is emptying; I fear that I need to use it and cling to it and give it out before I lose touch with it and my slipping fingers just brush the edges and it's floating away and the bank is disintegrating and it's just that inch, that millimeter too far to reach. How would I know? All I know is that I'm scared to be in love for the first time because I know that I'll fall out of love for the first time too. (Not yet, please, float closer, please, catch the current and drift towards me, please, so I can pick you up and wring you out and rinse you and have you for a while longer, please, so I can live in those moments at his mom's house, please, when he said I love you for the first time and meant it and I felt a weight off my chest at the same time I felt like I was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Well, everyone knows that when something goes up something must come down.)

So let's go back to the car then, that car that the roof comes off of, when we hurtled around the leaf-covered curves in his quiet neighborhood and I stood with my whole body out and a coat on and screaming arms up. Let's go back to that car and the quiet peace I felt just being there, just being allowed to be there, and all the ways it was better than other cars, because my dad's car was a trap- exactly a trap- because one time he got really mad and cried and didn't pull over and I thought we were going to die.

I don't want to think about dying.

I don't want to think about love dying.

I don't want to think about ghosts or Summer or winter or any other season or season-named-girl.

I want to think about roads, because roads are peaceful and they don't promise too much but they don't promise too little either, they're just an empty stretch that's full of everything, both directions, forever in front and forever behind, with a million branching options on every side and stretch, exits and turns and highlights to see, so that you're going in one direction and you can sleep on your shoulder, but at any point you can just decide to turn off.

Yes, roads are peaceful, have always been peaceful, have always made me feel like love isn't a leaking reservoir, but a running river, that doesn't always have to end but always, always leads to something bigger. That would be the ocean, reader.