

STRIP

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It's not like I don't know
devastation.

I've driven across America.

I've seen every one of our great cities
from the highway.

I've seen genocide.

In the end what it comes down to
is beauty. I want to write about beauty
prescription
wolves
being eaten by maggots
neon blinking
the smell of jasmine
& puke. Ageless. Everyone swallows
dusky concrete strip mall after strip mall
billboards for God the trick being
to give it a third dimension.
Something like the way your face looks
after days in motel rooms
not fucking
when I pull down the top of my dress. That sort of
carefree intimacy
with God.
In the end I will write about dragons & elves
& say things like in the gloaming & Titian hair
& I'll make a shit ton of \$\$.

Same poem only shorter:

It's not like I don't know devastation.
I've driven through Houston.



When I said I would marry you (& we'd never even fucked!)
but only in Vegas
I meant it. If we're going to do it wrong
it's going to be so wrong it'll have sequins
sewn to its cooch. I want our marriage
to be an article out of the Enquirer.
I want it to be Siamese octuplets & gay movie stars
& fat fat Elvis living in a refrigerator box under the Huey P.
Long
Bridge. When something is so horrific you can't look away
that's also your peek at God.

How the highway is our comfortable thing.
To know exactly what sandwich I'll get at Subway
extra pickles no onions
to know exactly how to ask for honey-mustard at Burger
King
to know frappuccino. This
my American
familiar. Grey stretch of McDonald's
McDonald's Wal-Mart
a diner. God bless
the American diner sweet crunch
of iceberg lettuce & purple deodorizing spray in the bath-
room.
Sometimes I steal a bottle just to make our car
smell more like home.

At first I'm hungry
the same french fries in every state –
cacti pine forests swamp –
it's like a damn miracle those french fries
always soft on the inside always salty
they are the body & I bring them to my lips
they are the body I could sing
but eventually the miles add up & I lose my appetite
for converging
only cigarettes only the big sky & sharpening
into it two handed
a vessel. McDonald's
McDonald's Wal-Mart
a Starbucks.

We live in these places. Every day
clocking in to the same body. I've lost
my appetite but developed this hole
or lump a protrusion requires
action I cannot look in the mirror
I will be monstrous in my desire. When we stop
again how not to take my clothes off
walk right into that Starbucks
naked. How do I not exactly
force a resurrection?



These things are important –
greasy jobs & smelling of corn beef hash
the general humiliation always waiting on others
& smiling even though I walk down the street & strangers
have to tell me to smile. This is the real good stuff
cause it makes us who we are
like tough in a I-can't-care-what-you-think
kind of way but kind enough to always tip big.
& it is who we are when we're doing it
that is to say
we aren't who we will be having done it all
we are only 19 & still have to sneak into bars
but we get to spend that time as this other
sad bored despised-because-there's-no-Dijon person
& come out of it & love it love that person.
Waiting tables can teach you a lot about forgiveness
if you let it.



Did I mention the time I went through all of our
emails
& cut & pasted the juicer bits
& read them aloud to my class?



Did I mention I have a friend who has a dragon/unicorn theory?
It's kind of like the zodiac or the Chinese animals
only simpler cuz he thinks everyone is either
a dragon or a unicorn
one or the other & depending on which you are
it tells you who you can date. He says
that a dragon is not compatible with another dragon. Only
dragons & unicorns. When we met
he thought I was a unicorn – he is a dragon – but
then it turned out surprise! I'm a dragon too.
In any case we didn't last.
So when he met my best friend & her name means unicorn –
or a sort of western approximation of a Chinese mythical beast
that's got a horn – he said he'd found her.
He said that was why it was ok for him & her to fuck
on the blanket on the back porch
over-looking the apple-orchard in July.
I wasn't there or anything
I was inside
but I can imagine exactly
what it would have been like
since I'd slept with her by then
too.

You weren't the one to ask me to write about fucking
or dying cities or the dream I had about driving off the road
into an origami box
blue & silver & teal green
complete with living room & chandelier
& gilt-framed clock the kind with the pendulums
stolidly ticking off the seconds
the same way I can hear our days on the road go by
now that I'm still in love with you.

Again.



I think you might be a dragon which is problematic
as in something I'd like to address in seminar
something we probably won't come to any conclusions about
& might make some of us mad but would be good
for at least an hour of discussion & also problematic in the sense
that I'm tired of things getting in my way.

But then I wonder
because when I fuck girls I feel like I've been zipped open
& the whole world not just my
narrow feminine perspective
is landscaping my insides & I can
roam through the pink hills at my leisure each hand
clasping a big black gun.

I feel like there's this male part of me
& it's probably wrong to say it that way it's probably sexist
somehow to designate it male but what the fuck
this is the language we have. It feels male & unusual there
like if I look down my body might be different
lumpy or sharp if I look down – those landscapes you know –
I might find blood on the empty beer bottle
I'm fucking her with &
I might like to see it that way
so I wonder. Maybe us dragons
we all have a little unicorn in us too.

& Vegas where I take a picture
from the surrounding hills
you can hardly tell it's houses
down there everything in boxes
& squares everything dune colored everything
desert. It reminds me
of when I flew into Mumbai & at first
I thought we were flying over a lake
a great sea
until we got lower & I realized it was
millions of dark roofs all the same height all
leaning against each other overlapping
a shanty town that goes on
& on & on.
What frightens me about Vegas
is that here people have put a lot of \$\$
into making everything look the same
from the houses to the Eiffel Tower & Venice
with clouds painted on the ceiling
& somehow it's a sign of living life to the nth
indulgence & even sin as in
something that matters when you get down in it
no one on the streets with soccer ball no
open fire no clever plastic & rag mechanics no meat
on sticks it smells
like air-conditioning & new car outside.
Not that I'm saying those people in India have it better
we should all give up our things
& play in the crumbling facade
it's just so rich

(informal):

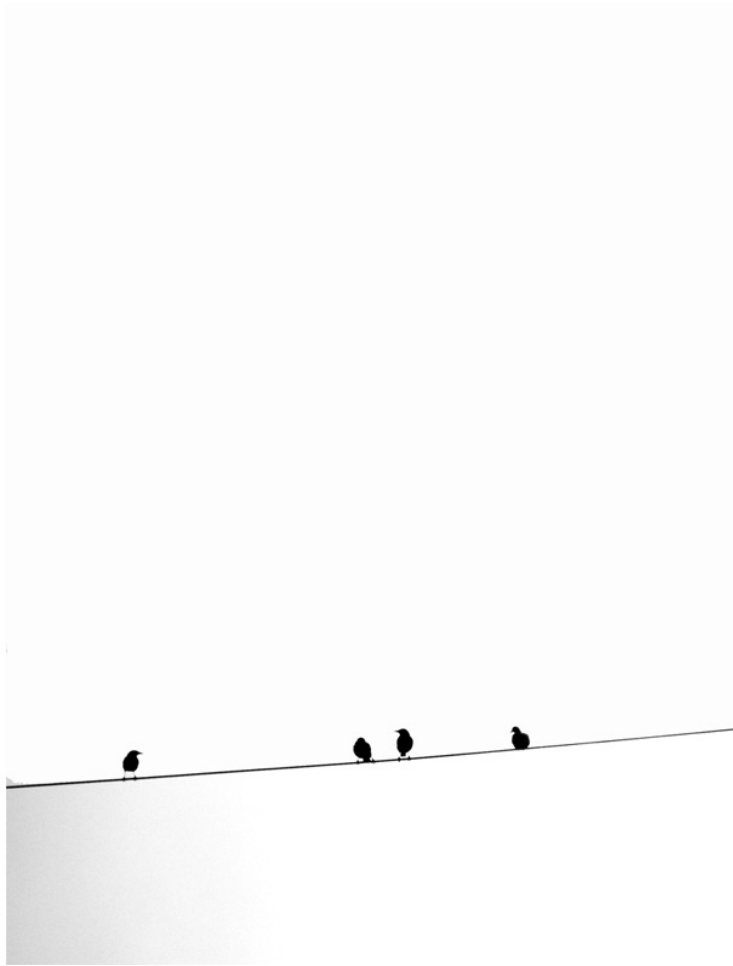
hard to believe because

ridiculous.

Someday there is no difference.
This city with its this this this.
That city with its that that that.
Your cock or mine –
a series of motel art.
It's what gets paid for the balance
it strikes with \$\$\$. Pastel ocean sunrise
maple trees in autumn
the little white sailboat on the dark seas the purple
strap-on under our pillow. There is nothing
better than motel sex no wipe up no one to disturb no
promises bloodstains immaterial. Just some voices
just some pounding in the walls.
Tomorrow you've gone & done it
again. Tomorrow is today
only pricier.
Someday we've brought it all to life around us:
the majesty!
oh!



My classmates never said a thing
about those emails.
They had all made videos & there I am
with my pieces of paper
marks on marks
smelling mostly like a human
things happen when approached.
If I'm there my voice might appear you
accidentally we'd stage another drink throwing
the audience could get
wet & when you say
I want to see you
touch yourself the audience
must comply.



The other thing is what's the thing
about getting old? I never thought I would
mind I guess I never thought I would
get old. That it wouldn't feel old
the number would fit & I would be
surrounded by such enlightened people
that age would be grace
we'd all be fucking in hot-tubs on our yachts
we would all have arrived & no one I like
would be dating 19 yr olds.
I never thought I would say things like
I have to go to bed or Just one
drink tonight. As my mother says:
"Never trust a man who doesn't drink"
& although I'm not a man
I think she may have meant it as a non-gender specific
sort of out-dated oh mo-om indication of the human race.
I believe I am still
mostly human.

The first time I drove across the country we slept in tents:
wet wet wet. Some coffee.
Now the little pink pills crunched to powder
the computer says to us so we can never
return to use beds properly
all of our pasts clattering behind us like tin cans tied.

When you told me your girlfriend was 19
I'm sorry I hung up but
it's like mentioning the holocaust.
There's nothing more to say
after sorry.

The thing is I would have married you anyway
right after I went south
you & your postcards
because what else is marriage
but the towering exclamation of stupid faith
in someone's ability
to change.
I wouldn't have even asked you
to change anything
at the time
except maybe the pussy licking
there was some room for improvement
& also maybe
the being a writer.

The more I watch TV
everything is ok now. It's all on the TV
so it's all protected &
virtual. The truth long ago was
no longer the truth now it's the lies
which are no longer lies
they're just an elbow in the ribs
just the buddy system & we know
we're the ones doing it everything
disconnecting which is sort of comforting
& also makes us laugh. The way the roads
will always be the lifeblood of America
cuz you can't discover things like rainbow Indiana key fobs
& confederate flag magnets in the same way
on the internet. The way you made so much
fun of me for saying the exits go down to zero
& as soon as we hit Texas:
Exit 0.
God bless Texas. God
bless the TV
there are less things to touch
isn't it & saving
everything
archiving everything
we don't believe in things we can touch
money is fiction
drinks remarketing as meal
all the rules we made up
are made up
the body is the biggest fiction God bless
the past in its neat boxes & the TV saying
this happened you can't just drop

a bomb & wipe it all out cuz
we're famous.
We're all famous!

When I was younger I went through a period
of terror at the thought of getting into a car.
I used to imagine what was really happening
to our bodies
leaned back legs splay hands pushed
away from our chests hurtling along the road
at 90 mph. I would picture
our soft bodies zipping along
positioned carelessly like dolls fallen
out of favor. Our hair perfectly motionless
our faces dull as mother's casual dinner plates
toes curved to the pedal like Barbie's high-heeled feet. The world
its wooden trees concrete divisions small
furry animals with teeth. There's a lot to be said
for cars their metal & plastic casings
power steering & the names we give them
how they help us forget both that we could die
& that currently we're still alive.



Q: *Who will be shot out of the cannon?*

A: *So when you told me the first time
that I look like I have nice tits
I wanted to lift my shirt up right then
and show you. But I didn't
because I am a lady. Because I am
the Valedictorian.*



I've seen you before
your face looks so familiar
have you been on the TV
on YouTube were you the one
in that video about singing cats haven't
we done this hand-holding without end?
Somewhere there's my string-bikini carwash
moving on to the soda shop somewhere
the story progresses
we'll start to go north & have to get warm.
I've been on this road too I remember the check-point
now that the police dog's in my underwear.
Someone's getting high tonight & it isn't you
or me.
We look like good kids
in short skirts & glasses
we look fuckable
like the border patrol knows like you know
how sometimes I can't come
until I put my finger in my ass & I grew up
on daddy's Playboys & how many times
you can hit me harder than that how
you go on not being my boyfriend
in bed
but their power is the power of waiting
it is desire how the best things never happen.
The border patrol know the landscape of sheets between us
the sock on your cock
why does everything feel like
USA Up All Night & why
does that make me feel
so complete?

Do you remember the night you were kicking
& I told you to come over
we watched Sex in the City
from opposite sides of the couch
& I let you sleep in my bed
just lay us down in the grey Portland dawn
& slept. I was finding little balls of tinfoil
in my sheets for days.
They fell out of your pockets
& you were so embarrassed. Maybe that's why
I feel so close to you
the made-for-TV movieness of it
I can make up all of the things we did
how I threw your laptop in the river
the time you tossed your drink in my face
when you got my roommate addicted to crack
& I slept with your best friend
still orbiting each other always on the road
to self-destruction so losing each other
is necessary & the last act when you're clean
working at a bookstore in a new town & I walk in
in a neat white dress like a saint or a nurse
or a child again there is hope
in the narrative the way it promises
an end.

Of the road.

Roads. A complete road's
roadlessness when
approaching the horizon. We with our hands
on the wheel are surely driving. We with our forward
& our sunset behind.
The roads'.



You & I we listened to the same album over & over
all through West Texas. It was somewhere outside of Houston
that the cd skipped & we stopped talking. One of the things
I like about you. I can't remember
the taste of your words
other people's words like flat cola
I only remember that your cum was sour
but I didn't care I kind of liked it
that you felt grateful & all amazed
that I would put your cock in my mouth
& swallow
as if girls don't do that.
What girls don't do that anymore?
That tiny window when there was no one but us.

It's not like I've never loved two people before
or that you've never been one of them. The time
I went back to him & left you in the backseat
of that abandoned car
down in the not-yet-artsy part of the warehouse district.
The one with the flat tire & broken-out passenger window.
It was locked but I reached through the glass teeth
& unclicked & you shook your head
& climbed in the back behind me. Again
we didn't fuck I made you
put your arms around me
the way you would snap your fingers
to keep from grabbing my tits
too hard & you would say
sweetheart
sweetheart the things I want to do to you.

There's always more to it than that.
I've been here before
in the parking lot with the lightening
whisky in hand.
Ice enough for everyone the whole bottle
old Mexican you left me
to get cigarettes & beer just tall enough
to look down my shirt. This is what's important:
stature.
They took our drugs but they'll never
take our crawl back to the Starbucks
& sleep.

Highway lulling
I've been here before I know
I don't know.
You called me come
watch the lightening – here's beauty! –
so maybe
you love me
a little.

Then you left me alone with this guy
he's drunk already guess
I'd outrun him. I know
you've got the game on
while you mix him a drink.
No matter what you say
you've always got the game on.

I've tried to leave the country before
but there's always some guy always

something pretty
to fuck. I've been here before
where you're smoking again. This is how you die
on the inside. All of the little signs
you don't know you're making. His nails
are black he's kinda stout & grey
but not bad looking. Part of me
wants to disappear under him
my body ends up in the bed
of his white pick-up you'll wish you'd held me down
first. This is how I die whisky in hand.
This is how I've died no wipe up
blood immaterial
I'm still alive where
the road goes. I haven't stopped
moving.

I promised someone I didn't love you.
Say the words aloud they become
on the road how days become
bigger. The car our best everything
here is what they mean by simplicity.
I don't need another change
of clothes. I don't need your mouth.
I've been here before the cracked asphalt
heat lightning right on the border.
I spread-eagled on the bed
have everything.

(writing is different
just a way to burn

I know we're in trouble
with our cars
& the oil
all of the burning – nothing
in heaven ever burns – but
God help us
what America
would be America
without the West Texas highway
like a Moebius strip.



Same poem only shorter:

Fuck you Nature

I've got a Master's degree



Even as we approach our destination it is still
picture. So the road
is freedom. The road is adventure.
I know everything will explode
both what was both you & I & what was
she & I & what was me
& me & me
the road is our icon
but that comes later. It is our endless icon.
A ribbon of dirt under wheels
we made the road
& the time when you tell me I'm still a dragon
the time when I drive around the lake all night
singing the time she draws the curtains over her life &
I spend months doing a puzzle with only
half the pieces & the road
is a better life. That comes later too.
If we keep driving
the road is
the road is youth &
the road is how to grow up.
The road is nobody's grown up.
Out there the road is your only companion.
Remember: the road doesn't love you best. On the road
there is only what was left behind
which is little more than \$\$
the food we bought
a magnet for the fridge
the ugly hats we bought some pictures
even the jiz you carted all the way from L.A.
to that Laundromat in Tucson.
Tell me it happened already I can see it

through the windshield. Tell me
how to take back the road.
How to make it make friends.

The road is ashamed of nothing not midgets not jazzing not fat whores or bloodied hair.
The road is not ashamed of your suitcase full of drugs or rolling down windows or the Grand
fucking Canyon all the way down. It's not ashamed of a dead man's ashes or family time little jam
hands & the deaf terrier. It's not ashamed of wrinkles or weathering it's not ashamed of informa-
tional signs or silence silence or panty-less feet on the dash the Christian station & glare. The road
is not ashamed of us & our dreams.

No wonder this is where we fall apart.

The road cannot be completed.
There is no failure out here.
We get bigger & bigger &
bigger

It is glamorous before the road.
You glamorous in the American distance.
Road rules a suggestion other
rules steady & untroubling like the faintly rose-colored
circle
of the Oregon sunset. Familiar there
over there beyond the black trees.
Ugliness under the California sunshine an impossibility.
The green hills of Texas an impossibility.
The possibility that we could break those rules
get our hands on the perpetual coin of the sun
& shake it to pieces an impossibility.
Your smell an impossibility.
I can't smoke & drink beer ever again
without you I can't walk into a Louisiana bar
without you I sit behind a guy at a reading
he is drinking a beer the smell of cigarettes plumes
I cannot listen to the words all I see are the small
curled hairs at the back of his neck
dark hirsute he is not you not yet
losing his hair not drinking fast enough not
in the seat next to me slung low to the road
roads the road's steady roadness we can't touch
I sit on my hands so as not to this stranger
up close I can't shake the glamour
it rises full & fuller at my side
do not get too close to this things melt things fall
this blind approaching
this this
the dream slicking away under our wheels &
also the blunt-nose end of it an impossibility.

