

Lights, guns, screaming, so much screaming. That's all I remember from that momentous day. My therapist told me it would be a good idea to write about the events that occurred. So I decided to compose the following:

"This will help," the doctor said as she handed me yet another bottle of pills.

I thanked her saying "I'm sure they will." I said this very solemnly even though we both knew it was lathered in sarcasm. The nurse measured and weighed me, just another reminder of my weight problem. The appointment was done, thank god. I walked out and threw the pills in to the neighboring woods. They just caused weight gain. The doctor said I had anorexia, but I didn't believe her. A mirror never lies. I felt awful. I just needed to get out of this town.

I came home to a passed out mom with a shot glass resting on her only faintly rising chest. It was only a matter of time before the alcohol got to her. I went to my room and stuffed a few sets of clothes and all of the little money I had. I thought better than to take the car. I was truly stumped though; I couldn't think of a good way to get out. Then I had a eureka moment. I was thinking about my mom and her stories. She had the best stories, when she was sober enough to tell them. Some of my favorites were about her hitchhiking days. I thought to myself that's what I want to do.

It proved harder than I thought to hitch a ride. People were less likely to pick up a teenager on the side of the road than my mom was to get sober. Hostility might as well be our state motto. With no luck hitchhiking I went down to the Greyhound station hoping I had enough money for a ticket. People smelling of cigarettes, liquor, and marijuana. Everything was noisome. The people seemed so repulsive at the time, but they were soon to be my crowd.

I walked up to the counter. The cashier looked at me and said, "where ya headed," all the while chewing tobacco.

"Just give me a ticket for the next bus out of here," I said. She slid a ticket under the window. She mumbled something about where the bus was headed, but I didn't hear it.

I got on the bus three hours later. I took in the landscape as we drove away. The buildings I had come to love and hate slowly receding into the abyss. I felt the nostalgia rising up in me. I was scared of leaving. I needed a way out. So I went to sleep.

I don't even remember where the bus was going, but the first thing I noticed when I woke up was that there was snow on the ground. There isn't snow on the ground in Arizona. The second thing I noticed was the foul smelling man leaning against my shoulder. I pushed him off of me and he toppled into the aisle way. He woke up still half asleep he started muttering something about the difference between metonymic and metaphoric writing. After a few minutes when he was finally acting slightly less lethargic I asked him if he had any idea where we were. "Seattle, Washington," he said. I had absolutely no idea how he knew this, but I was much too sleepy to be inquisitive. I walked up the aisle to ask the bus driver where we were headed.

He said "to Smithtown, Arizona." I felt like I was going to faint.

I said, "but I just came from there!"

"You must have slept through the transfer," he said.

"Can I get out somewhere?" I half asked half demanded

"Sure, but I don't know how you are gonna get back to town though."

"I'll figure something out," I said. He dropped me off 35 miles outside the city. I stopped and took in the scenery. Picturesque, well if you like bleak scenery. I do though, I love it. Some would say it was glum, gray, sad. I would say reading weather, the smell of earth and rain, picturesque. I pulled out a book, sat down and started reading, using one hand to hold the book and the other to hold up my thumb.

I don't know how long I sat there. I was completely immersed in the book when he pulled up. The water from a nearby puddle sprayed right onto my book waking me from my state of musing. He called out "sorry" and beckoned me inside. I was vexed, but what choice did I have? I had been waiting for hours.

"My name is David, but I don't want to know yours," he said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"It's nice to be curious. "You can go in the back you know," he said.

“The back? Isn’t there stuff back there though?” I inquired.

He told me his clients had moved to Seattle. So he was without cargo for the time being. He told me that he just wanted to drive around the country and meet people. Take a vacation to get away from it all. I got out of my seat and opened the door behind me. I gazed around the interior of the trailer. There were boxes stacked all the way to the ceiling going along the walls. In the middle of the trailer there was a large open space. There were blankets covering the floor with people strewn across them. The sound of sleeping people filled the whole truck. Everyone was asleep except for one very thin man sitting in the corner. He was staring at his hands as he drew what seemed to be words in the air. I quietly turned around and crept back up to the front where David was.

I asked him “Who’s the man in the corner waving his hand around?”

He replied saying “Oh that’s Trippy Johnny. He’s writing a book.”

“Oh really? What’s it about?” I asked.

“You’ll have to ask him. It’s all very exciting.” David told me that I should get some rest. I went into the back of the truck lied down and went to sleep.

In retrospect I do not know why I was so trusting of David. Perhaps I shouldn’t have been.

When I woke up we were still driving. I looked around and everyone was asleep, Even Trippy Johnny. I untangled myself from the moving blankets and the limbs of a beautiful girl. Feeling chagrined I went up front to sit next to David. He told me we had stopped in the night and that he had picked up some food. He handed me a loaf of bread which I accepted reluctantly. I didn’t want to impose on him, but I hadn’t eaten in almost two days. I sat there basking in the ecstasy that was food in my stomach. Within the hour everyone had woken up. There were five people in all. Strangers at the time, but who I would come to know as: Trippy Johnny, the terrifyingly thin and brilliant author, Eileen, David’s oldest friend and the second best storyteller of all time (only after my mom of course), Jacob, the most prodigiously tall and benevolent person in the world, and Francesca, beautiful, intelligent, the most alluring person I have ever known and will ever know. I asked Francesca if that was her real name after she introduced

herself. She grinned and told me no, but that she wanted to be perceived as the most ostentatious person she could be. Not to mention sexy I thought, but somehow managed not to say. I was surprised that none of them wanted to know my name. They all shared David's love of mystery.

I soon learned how we passed the time while driving along the always unvarying highway. We told stories and played board games and laughed at Trippy Johnny's pot induced soliloquies. We read books, slept, and ate saltine crackers. We bought a lot of saltine crackers. Johnny ate a lot of saltine crackers for such a skinny guy. The third day I spent with everybody was and will probably always be the best day of my life. I felt at home in the trailer even though I barely knew any of these people. We played scrabble Francesca winning by placing the word plethora on a triple letter spot. David telling her that she was succeeding in her aspiration to be the most pretentious person possible. We asked Johnny about his novel. He told us that it was about our travels together and that I was the protagonist. I told him that wasn't possible cause we had just met that day. He told me that he already knew what was going to happen because he is a psychic. Addicted to psychedelics perhaps, but I'm not so sure about him being a psychic. We listened to Eileen and David tell stories about their hitchhiking days with other friends and fiends. Best of all was when Francesca kissed me that night.

I was just falling asleep as she tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and she kissed me. At first I was too taken aback to enjoy it. After the initial shock was over, I kissed her back. I don't think that I had ever been kissed before that moment. It was brilliant. The best thing that had ever happened to me, or so I thought.

After a while she pulled away saying "It's getting late, but let's be sure to resume this later."

At a rest stop the next day she pulled me aside and apologized for kissing me the night before. She told me that she was super baked and that it would never happen again. This continued on for a while. We would fool around and make out, but by the next morning she was all regrets. I felt awful about it. I didn't want to disappoint her by refusing her affection, but at the same time I felt like maybe she wasn't enjoying it.

The next time we stopped it was my turn to pull her aside. I told her how I felt and asked her what she really wanted. She burst into tears telling me she was terribly sorry and that she did want to, she was just embarrassed. I was nonplussed. She didn't strike me as someone who ever cried. Though we all have our insecurities.

The day we went to Eric's house was when we as a group became closer. Hysteria filled the air as we drove up the driveway. We had gone over the plan countless times although I was still beset with anxiety. Everything had to go perfectly. I was mostly just hoping I wouldn't burst out laughing. It was a truly bizarre idea, but hilarious in its own peculiar way. Eileen, Trippy Johnny and I were to walk up to the door and act as missionaries trying to recruit Eric and his wife. Meanwhile David, Jacob and Francesca were to sneak in through the window to surprise Eric. This prank was orchestrated by David for his own amusement. He knew that Eric would almost literally try to kill us, however we did not. As they crept around to the back we walked up to the door and knocked. Eric came to the door and as soon as he opened it his smile turned to a look of disgust. We composed ourselves as much as we could and said in unison.

"Hello we are Jehovah's witnesses and we are here to warn you about the fast approaching judgment day." David had gone all out, going to the area's local chapter to grab a few pamphlets, which we then gave to Eric. He started yelling at us. Saying that he hated people who pushed their religion onto others. He even chased us out into the yard yelling and cursing at us until finally David walked out and explained what was going on. Eric laughed and thankfully didn't murder us. He invited us in for dinner, which we gladly accepted. After dinner we stayed and talked and smoked cigarettes. David and Eric went outside to talk about a "business deal." Which I thought was strange, but I dismissed the idea. We thanked Eric and his wife for the lovely meal and for letting us all bum a smoke or five. Then we climbed in the truck and hit the road.

The next day began quite normally. I was the first to wake up for the exception of David. I went up to the front and sat next to David. Eric and his' "business deal" had been on my mind all night so I brought it up casually asking him about how he knew Eric, etc, etc... Finally I asked him about what him and Eric were talking about outside.

He just used the same vague saying that it was a “business deal.” I became wary and decided not to press it.

A few hours later, once everyone had woken up I noticed a black car driving very close behind us when we had been completely alone on the road for hours. I mentioned it to David and he said oh I’m sure it’s nothing, though I’m sure he sped up a little. After a few more minutes there was another and another and another. There were police cars now too and they turned on their sirens. David slammed on the gas.

Eileen asked “What’s happening, David?”

He said “I got it don’t worry.” We were very perturbed.

This time Francesca yelled at him, “What the hell is going on?”

The sirens got louder and I could hear someone speaking through a megaphone telling him to pull over. I was confused as to how we were staying ahead of the police. I later learned that the authorities were under the impression that he had abducted us and didn’t want to force him to do anything that would put the rest of us in harms way. He started driving faster. By this point we were all furious with him and demanded that he tell us what was going on. He broke down crying. He wiped the tears off his eyes as he told us what was happening. He said, “the FBI has finally found me.” He told us about how he isn’t a normal mover, but that he moves cocaine around the country. He said that the boxes lining the trailer were filled with it. He told us that he supplied for Eric and many other people around the country. He said he was sorry to bring us all into this, by that he got lonely on the road by himself.

He then slammed on the accelerator saying over and over again, “I will not rot in prison. I will not rot in prison.” We went faster and faster all the while people screaming at him to stop driving. Then it happened all of a sudden it seemed like we were being pursued for such a long time and then it was just over. He tried to go around a bend too fast and flipped the truck.

I don’t remember much after that except sitting in the hospital with Francesca. We were the only ones who survived the crash. I remember thinking that it wasn’t fair. That I was the protagonist in the story and that I was the one who was supposed to

make a big climactic decision. Sometimes in life you have to realize that not everything is fair or even in your power. You also realize that not everything is about you. Maybe David was the protagonist in this story and he was the one with the opportunity to make the climactic decision. The one that got everyone killed. In the moment when I realized this I was glad that I wasn't the one making that decision. I'm content not being the star of the show. I was so sad and upset I was shaking.

I looked at Francesca and said "what is your real name."

"Lily," she said.

"That's such a sweet name. Not pretentious whatsoever," I said. She smiled.

"What's your name?" She asked.

"Astrid," I said as I leaned into kiss her.