

Wanderlust or a room of one's own

I felt unlimited joy while traveling on my own. The world was mine. Everything. Any breath of air, every grain of dust in backlight. I took it and I owned it and I loved it wholly. The car on the other hand was only borrowed. I drove the station wagon from the West Coast to the Rocky Mountains and made the vehicle my moving home and shelter.

It was only on my way back that I hit a deer at night and was in shock. The animal died and no person was hurt so I kept on driving until I noticed that my legs were shaky and my sight was blurred. I pulled the car over in Yahk that place along the railroad that no-one has ever heard of and yet it exists. All by myself, surrounded by spotless darkness, I was reminded of the enchanting melancholy that once captured me when crossing the Black Forest by train.

I didn't do anything wrong. I drove slowly and carefully and when something hit me from the side, I slammed on the brakes. The two cars behind me managed to jerk to a halt, passed by, and left me and the animal just where we were as if they hadn't noticed. I tried to get out of the car, but the door was blocked. So I climbed out of the front passenger's door, not yet realizing that it wouldn't be possible to open the driver's door for quite a long time. I was struck by the fact that now the animal was resting on the other side of the road: beautifully with her head up high she looked at me in a moment of tranquil coexistence. Her legs must have been broken. Unable to move any further she couldn't live at all.

I was cold and detached and overwhelmingly powerless in the face of this creature, doomed-to-die yet a fully conscious indigenous animal! I returned to the car and lost track of time.

Another car stopped. The driver wound the window down and I summarized the obvious.

"I hit a deer." I said. "I feel completely helpless. - She's still alive. - What shall I do?! - Isn't there a number I should call?"

“Well, you know, that happens all the time around here.” The guy replied dryly. “But there’s really nothing we can do as long as they’re still alive. There’s nothing you can do!”

I noticed his empathy. He felt sorry for me but for the wrong reason I sensed as he smiled at me pitifully and then drove off.

The same moment a pick-up truck approached and parked parallel to my car so we blocked one lane and flanked the animal. The driver was a very skinny guy who wore a camouflage suit, heavy boots and a baseball cap that clung to his chin-length greasy hair, a combination that perfectly concealed his face. I didn’t understand a single word of his babbled idiom. However, in the circumstances I welcomed the practical. “Womme to shoot’er?” he mumbled and then went to get a rifle out of his car. Later I imagined all kinds of things he would need a loaded gun for at night, but in that instant I was filled with gratitude, and later relief.

I made him hand me the weapon and pulled the trigger. I stood close to the deer almost within reach and pointed at her head. It took only one shot and while the overly bright and cold yellow light seemed to linger for a bit the animal had turned into a dead body, a casualty. The skinny guy and I took each of her hind legs and pulled the corpse off the road. How was I able to do that? Well, I was.

We parted. He was headed towards Cranbrook, a town just passed and I continued my way southwest. Oddly enough, the time it took me from Cranbrook to the scene of accident was accompanied by thoughts of death and the dear ones who would grieve for me if I died.

On the outskirts of Cranbrook I was looking for directions and drove the car so slowly through that deserted sleepy town that I eventually came to halt. In that very moment, a grown-up deer with impressive antlers crossed the street right in front of my car. I switched off the headlights and watched his night stroll in the warm yellow streetlight. It was just he and I, and I enjoyed myself in silent pleasure. I observed him browsing the pavement as long as he would let me. He performed each movement with accomplished elegance and accepted me as his sole audience. I thanked him for his generosity and joyfully moved on towards the highway. I am so lucky, I thought, for never having been involved in an accident. What if I crashed

here? What if I died tonight? Oh, I would die in a moment of plain happiness!
However, death was not mine, and anticipation takes ambiguous shapes sometimes.
I parked the car on the lawn in front of a closed motel in Yahk and yearningly
thought of someone I love. Was it a Freudian slip that I dialed the wrong number?

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