

The Get Back

I guess you'll be wanting some explanation for my past week. I didn't mean to alarm you, but I'm not sorry for the reasons that drove me to drive or to drink or to burn the rubber clean off the Subaru in a manic tear down Rt. 66.

It's been a long week and I'm tired, but I was exhausted before I left. Why'd you have to say that before work? You know how I feel about Stevie Nicks. You don't *think* before you speak you just *talk* and concoct these ill-informed sentences that make me want to slam my head into a fucking door. Could you imagine if I did that? Do I do that? And I know the Stevie thing isn't a big deal but it's comments like that that make me wonder why we ever even got married. Why did we do it? And why would we live in New Jersey? Our whole lives we've *hated* those zombies who got out of bed to go sit in that chair in an office all day. We reeled at the thought of them finishing up to go sit in that other chair back home because it had a TV. We laughed at them as they slogged up to bed because they've gotta get back to that other chair in the morning. Those A.C. abusers and calorie counters and people who believe politicians! That's us, Jim! I don't know how many times you have to go out to eat before you start considering it a hobby, but we've gotta be close, Jim. We've gotta be close.

When's the last time you felt something beautiful? When we first started dating I wondered whether or not I *deserved* to be that happy, as if I were the first to attain it without the pursuit. The day I left I wondered whether or not I deserved to feel so lost, whether there's a certain nobility in going through the motions in life. Bob Dylan sold his catalog that day and I cried. All those moments, all that time; the depths of a soul

realized through a harmonica blare, he sold it. I know you'd say that he didn't, that music can't die and souls can't be sold the way bodies can, but it was hidden, Jim. The catalog, it was his, immune to time and the claustrophobia of life. He sold it and I cried, hopped in the car in my bathrobe and drove.

I was a menace that first day. I'm smiling to myself at the jokes you would've made had we seen someone else do that: some washed up, middle aged woman careening down the turnpike in her Subaru, the raving tirades of Billy Joe Armstrong defiling a Sunday afternoon. I was furious at you for leaving and I drove like it, a fiery ball of raging metal with an appetite for nothing but destruction. I didn't sleep that night. I drove and drank and sang and cried for us. My tears were moments in time purging themselves from my body. I'm not sure where those hours went. I'm not sure how I'm still alive, although we've been strangers to the land of the living for a while now, haven't we?

You used to do that Gatsby impression where you'd angle your hand towards the stars and tell me that our lives, our lives have got to be like this. "They've got to keep going up," you'd say, and you'd shoot your hand towards the moon with all the gusto of a man who legitimately thinks he looks like DiCaprio. The confidence, the sarcasm, the ice cream still lining the contours of your lips, all were enough to insight a slight embarrassment at how obsessed I was with you, although more than ever before I knew I was back.

On the second night I lost my head completely. I found myself drifting over to the other side of the highway, moving in subtle zig zags in my tired state. I knew what I was

doing. I wanted to crash. I wanted to flip and tumble out into the desert, exploding into a million metal pieces and raining off the edge of the earth. And so I did.

The sign came out of nowhere. "Tulsa Towers" illuminated the night sky ahead of me in a fluorescent haze of wonderful opportunity. I put the pedal to the floor and angled myself at it, weaving from highway across desert and over a concrete parking lot, but she stopped me. Where did she come from? She was leaning on the sign, Jim, just standing there like she'd been waiting for me. I jammed on the breaks so hard I thought the car would flip. She dove to the side and I skid head on into the sign, it's "S" teetering back and forth before falling onto the roof of the minivan. It was dark, then, a quiet I hadn't found since you left. I rather enjoyed it.

I thought of you in Santa Fe. Remember those beach days we used to have? I can't believe we were ever that tan. I still have a running count of every time you pushed me into the ocean and I contemplated the pros and cons of dumping you on such a fine day. But I have that other count, too, of when you'd spin me in the ocean and apologize with that look in your eyes like I was the only other soul on the planet right then, and that kiss that confirmed the look. "Back," I told you, dipping my hair into the water and absorbing the warmth of the sun. "Very, very back," you agreed, and I was delighted to know that life was a perpetual joyride, inviting us into a collection of moments to be lived without thoughts of tomorrow. When's the last time we had a beach day? At what point did we decide anything else in our lives was worth sacrificing that for?

That's where I woke up, Santa Fe. Marla said I'd slept almost twelve hours. I couldn't talk, I was so damn thirsty. "Who are you" and "Where are we going" were of little importance with water and a sandwich beside me. "You want a DUI girl?" she said when I asked why she'd kidnapped me. She said I'd almost killed her anyway, so regardless of what happened the worst we could be was even. You'd love her, Jim. She's young but she's old like we were back then. God, we've had fun these past couple of days. She said she's off to Santa Monica to hook up with a movie star, get her life moving in the right direction. Who does that sound like? She offered to drop me off at a bus or something, but I stayed, deciding my leaving you in the ocean would suit us better than a car crash.

I realize there are no absolutes. I understand that nothing is gained without losing something else, but I can't help but wonder whether we traded living for surviving, Jim. I want to live with you again, and I'm not sure how I'll go on if you've really left me for good. Marla gave me a joint for my swollen face and I cried and laughed at the sight of it, puffing and not quite passing. Remember scooping ice cream from the tub with our hands back in highschool because we were too high to find the silverware drawer? I think my fingers are still sticky. I snuck up behind you and shoved your palm up into your face, sending you backwards in surprise and scrambling into the backyard. You tackled me onto the grass and we gazed up at a night sky that'd been painted just for us. "Back," I said. "Back," you agreed, but you must remember, don't you?

Marla and I slept in Arizona that third night, race chugging wine like we used to, except she didn't pull my pants down midway through and send me spewing liquid

through my nose in surprise. You're still lucky it wasn't red. "So, what were you really doing, a Jersey license plate driving like that in a place like this?" She asked me. She said she didn't have any sisters, but she was pretty sure getting black out drunk wasn't a common hobby one undertakes before a cross-country visit to them. "I was just sailing," I told her. "Untethered," I said. I lost my anchor, you see. You kept me still, Jim. But you left, and I found myself floating off into nowhere, drifting in darkness without any sense of direction or home. "Be your own anchor," Marla said, but I knew that I didn't know how. Not until tonight.

Tonight, we hit the ocean. I saw a man on the end of a pier in Santa Monica that I still can't believe wasn't you. His brown hair was curled in the back like yours always got, and he had a natural tan that I could tell came from some other source than the sun, inexplicably. He was tall, like you, and his whole presence seemed to radiate that feeling of, "it's going to be okay," that quality I've so often tried to explain to you. He was looking out into the water like you do when you're thinking of something you don't feel like adding into your concoction of nonsense, as if it were so profound its utterance would shake the very foundations of the universe. "Jim?" I asked him, uneasily, but with a hope I haven't felt since you'd point your hand towards the stars. "Excuse me?" he said as he turned, and I smiled as I shook my head to tell him I'd mistaken him for someone I used to know. He left us alone, then, and Marla and I gazed out over one of those sunsets that make you believe in God again and I knew.

"Back," I whispered. Marla looked at me, confused. "Back?" she asked, and I brushed it off as nothing, but she insisted. So I pointed a finger out in front us and

traced it along the water, up into a semi-circle around the sun and back down again. I told her what you would've said, about how it melts into the horizon like a runny egg. About how the air feels, gentle and electric at the same time. We're back, I told her. Back to where we should be, whatever you wanna call it. "We're back to the land of the living," I said, and I scattered your ashes into the wind. They blew up into the sky and settled atop the water like you were waiting for me to come in. I always did need that first push.

The air was so still though, Jim, and I swear the waves stopped crashing and the sun stopped setting for a second as I watched you blow away. Maybe Dylan was right to sell it. Maybe it's blowing in the wind, everything and all of us all the time, and no moment belongs to any one person. Maybe they're meant to be grabbed from the air without one holding more or less weight than the next, like confetti. Maybe the days we got up for work only to get back home again were just as meaningful as the days we'd raid your parents' kitchen for something sweet. Not as fun, no, but just as beautiful. Here's to maybe.

So there's my explanation. I'd appreciate it if you had yours prepared by the next time I see you in regards to the Fleetwood comment you so rudely made on your way out the door. That'll be quite the moment.