

I am driving southeast on Interstate 84 along one of Idaho's busiest corridors. Flanking both sides of the highway are two mountain chains, in the far distance to my right are the Owyhees, which straddle the Idaho/Oregon border and leave most of their height veiled by a thin crown of mid-winter clouds. To my left is Bogus Basin, the local ski hill that towers benignly above Boise city proper like a granite keep and is surrounded by a series of jagged peaks and valleys, fronting the Sawtooth range. The summit is close enough for me to spy the chairlifts that stubble the landscape like random, wild hairs. Bogus Basin is Sun Valley's poorer cousin, with its lower elevation and slightly slushier snow, but it draws in the locals who do not want to make the longer trek to seek the legendary powder and vertical runs of Bald Mountain, the site of homegrown heroes like Picabo Street. Both ranges are snow-capped, wearing the garments of winter.

I have left work early on the pretense of running errands. Mountain Home looms unassuming ahead, followed by Twin Falls, the target of my destination.

It is early January and southwest Idaho is a portrait of browns. Even the air has a jaundiced quality to it, one of bleak thoughts and dormancy, as if winter has pulled a faded, wool blanket from an old cedar chest, and draped its dreary hues over the whole of the Treasure Valley. The sparse land before me unfurls in ribbons of volcanic rock, dormant sage and ancient buttes. Being the perpetual nerd that I am, I am fascinated with the idea that these very land born features were once hundreds of feet below the surface of an extinct lake and upon its phantom shores clopped the tiny hooves of the Hagerman Horse, the miniaturized equine ancestor of the modern day thoroughbred. I submerge myself in my mind for a moment to recreate the vision of these high-desert plains now plunged beneath the crystalline pools of prehistoric Idaho. The ubiquitous sage replaced with swaying seaweed, the plateaus, with their hidden nooks and crannies, the habitat of primitive trout and some type of proto-amphibians. I am aware that the only true witness to these early inhabitants can be produced from within the miles of buried geologic formations. It is there that their real story is told. Fortunately, metamorphic rock is a reliable archivist and covets her bounty well. Their bones will be discovered, faded and fossilized, by fervent paleontologists, millions of years after the last drops of Lake Idaho have evaporated.

I am listening to my Pandora station and for some reason I am finding that the songs played are fitting my mood very well. Each verse has its unique message, one that seems to correspond with the purpose of this trip. I think about my children, who are probably sitting in class wondering what they will eat for lunch today, as it is not even eleven o'clock in morning. Their stomachs just now starting to grumble and complain about its lack of contents, their meal is still at least an hour away. For me, lunch will be at two, barring any traffic issues or me getting lost in Twin Falls. I have picked out the restaurant due to its 4-star ratings on Trip Advisor. I viewed their menu online and have already decided upon the baked local trout, true Idaho fare.

My phone suddenly springs to life with a text from my husband. He is asking about my day. I don't respond as I am driving and responding will also ping from the nearest cell tower. A cell tower in Mountain Home, 45 minutes away from Boise. He has traveled to the Bay Area, a good 600 miles from here, and is certainly assuming I am at work, probably too busy on the computer to respond. I will apologize later for missing his text, as soon as I am back in Boise's city limits. I flip my phone face down and turn the volume up on my radio. A semi-truck filled with livestock slowly obscures my view on the right, one of the endless and sprawling horizon. As I cautiously pass, I can see the tightly-pressed bodies within, the cows' bony backs ripple like water from the swaying motion of the truck, a blocky head turns and for a brief moment, we lock eyes through the small, elliptical cutout. Its steady gaze has the heavy weight of surrender in them.

The weather has decided to remind us travelers of its winter presence and now gifts the steady stream of vehicles with the bounty of heavy snowflake. The sky is quickly filled with their vast numbers, dropping unguided out of the clouds, obese with moisture. I watch as their contents bloom upon my windshield in blurred circles. My wipers are syncing with the music, as if the weather is part accompaniment, a percussional instrument added to my playlists. Low clouds now shroud the plains, their wispy tendrils, curl and drift like smoke. An ombre of gray has been painted onto this winter canvas, making me feel as though I am driving into some kind of foreign and enchanted land, one that still believes in spells and incantations, and the word 'magick'.

I return my phone face up, leaving my husband's text unread, tapping my way to my texting app where I am rewarded with a red circle, its thrilling presence proudly displayed in the chat icon. I quickly open his message and he informs me that he is on his way. While I travel south, he heads up north. Suddenly the trout seems an impossible thing to eat but I force myself to relax. Twin Falls has been deemed a good mid-distance from each other.

The last visit I made to Twin Falls had been for my daughter's club softball tournament, two summers ago. We both hated the team and the small-minded parents, the intensity of competition created a cult-like membership, one of which we were woefully lacking. I spent the weekend sitting in my folding chair, ringed with my laptop, my earbuds and an aura of isolation. I grieved the pain of rejection that my daughter received from every moment her cleats touched upon the field. Her confidence dwindling with each ball not caught, each swing hitting empty air. The biggest stressors for fourth-graders should be spelling tests and cute boys in the class, not life lessons touted by social scientists about the devastating effects of rejection, one that hearkens to our primitive instincts for survival. In order to survive, you had the safety of your tribe, without which, you perished. Had this softball team been our familial clan, we would most certainly have been cast off, left behind to fend for ourselves, braving starvation, weather, predators, our bones might have been found a few layers above the Hagerman Horse, the two of us forever frozen in Idaho's volcanic sediment.

I pass the highway road sign and feel my stomach clamp with a surge of adrenaline. Only 23 more miles. I am desperately trying to pull in the features of his face, to remind myself of what he looks like. He is very tall, something I am unaccustomed to. My husband and I stand nearly eye-to-eye. I am not used to craning my neck to find another man's mouth. I have to stand tiptoed while he bends over. I am nearly 5'8", but even with my height, the discrepancy is great. I wonder how we would look to a passing bystander, if our embrace would seem forced or natural.

My phone buzzes with an incoming phone call from my husband, which I quickly decline, another apology to add - in addition to the unanswered text. The frequency of my husband's texts and calls have been noticeably increasing from last year. I have built up

my own personal theory about guilt-riddled minds, about projecting your past onto your unwitting spouse and the prospect of fairness and all things being equal in a marriage. I would have to spend years though, trying to accrue the same numbers as he. And only my husband would know the true count. I have had to rely upon technology and his reluctant confessions to arrive at some kind of rough estimate. But my trip today has little to do with evening the numbers. I am truly bewitched by this man. I ache for his touch, craving the taste and tenderness of him. And if I end up with only one tally on my scorecard, I am more than okay with that.

Twin Falls is now closing in on me. Traffic has thickened a bit, and the rush of watery asphalt chatters beneath my tires. I spy the Snake River Gorge in the distance, its thick, crusted edges appear like a giant scab that split under duress, the river below, like free flowing blood. I cross over the metal skeleton of the suspension bridge that gaps the two bluffs and watch as a trio of teenage boys stand in the protected pedestrian walkway, hundreds of feet above the muddy currents of the Snake River. I wonder if they are the risky type who will tether themselves to its steel framework, silently mouthing a quick prayer to the God they believe in, before leaving the confines of planet earth. Perhaps shutting their eyes before that final leap of faith, surrendering to that singular and mysterious of experiences, all hopefully, without the rotten end to it.

I recall from the website that one of the restaurant's main attractions is its proximity to the gorge. They lauded its amazing views with a series of panoramic photos. I am wondering if it will live up to its hype, or if it might just be a hazy, wintry version of its more glorious summer self. I pull into the very vacant parking lot. In the summer, this place is touted as the venue of many wedding receptions. I can imagine finding space might be a little more difficult come mid-July. Today it feels as empty as the outlying and barren farm fields. I have decided to wait for him to arrive, rather than get a table inside. I can feel my heart race with anticipation. He has texted again that he is very near. The air in my car seems claustrophobic and heady with desire, my desire, making me feel both vulnerable and anxious. My mind has still not caught up with my heart. I recognize that I have been residing in a fog of duplicity, one of routine ordinariness and parental duties and one of an unfamiliar and reckless lust. The two forces culminating in an epic

tempest of Grecian proportions. I briefly wonder how much the role of fate plays in one's life and how much is really governed by a series of premeditated choices?

My answer arrives with the sight of his truck. I am thinking life is a hybrid of both, where fate and choice meet somewhat stubbornly in the middle. We greet with an awkward embrace before we head in, both of us nervously chatty and yet reserved. I am thrilled that his appearance surpasses my cloudy memories of him; he is attractive and contains a strong male presence about him, something that appeals to a more primal part of myself. Inside the restaurant, the large picture windows frame the extensive canyon, creating a living mural of the archetypical western front, one that conjures Louis L'Amour novels, C.M. Russell paintings and John Wayne movies. I sometimes forget that there are many people in the world who will never see this view.

I eat, though I hardly taste the trout. I am trying my best to appear somewhat normal to him. Inside, my mind is a muddy swamp of disjointed thoughts, of neurons misfiring and a flood of frustrated hormones that are lacking a destination. I steady my palsied fork before bringing it to my mouth. He smiles and I feel grounded. I am once again among the living.

Before we depart we stand between our two vehicles. The air feels thick and stilted between us, despite the perpetual blustery Twin Falls wind. His boot kicks clumps of sand-crusting snow, the brownish slush has been plowed and piled up from the last snowstorm and asks me what I want. I am briefly stunned by the question and scramble to find some kind of response. My mind feels engulfed in a flame of disparity; I want him *and* I want the safety of domestication, knowing that there can never be both. The two are mutually exclusive—it comes with the territory. How does one answer truthfully while standing on the faulty ground of limbo? I tell him I am at a crossroads, an intersection of sorts. We share a kiss and a brief farewell with a tepid plan to hopefully meet again soon.

As I start my car and pull away, the sight of the expansive gorge fills my rear view mirror.

I briefly wonder how this will end. Will it be in a series of ugly exchanges, one borne of deceptions, the scars of our mutual past hurts and misplaced trust or will it simply die the slow and fateful death of silence and rejection? The very thing I fear the most.