

## Driving to Echo

When Maryann opened the door she was nothing but silhouette, and when she quietly crossed the room towards me the golden hue from the porch light seemed to follow her very step. I was sitting on the couch holding my guitar. I had called her only twenty minutes ago. I bet she ran red lights just to get here. My parents kicked me out of their house again, but with no where for me to go they handed me blankets and I had gone out back to the trailer behind the house. She sat down beside me. She wore a low cut top and her skin was so creamy white that I could see the blue veins running like ribbons underneath. I wanted to reach out and trace the curving blue with my finger, feel the warm skin and the gentle heartbeat underneath my touch. Her breath smelled like beer and it aggravated me. And then like a trance had been lifted; I suddenly had the urge to push her off the couch and watch her dainty self fall down.

She smiled when she noticed I was watching her. She thinks she knows me, as if you could ever really know a person. We met at a bar back a few months ago when I first got sober. Back when I thought I was cured and she thought love was all bare chests pressed together on wet grass. I kept my distance that night, trying to focus on playing pool. The coke I was drinking kept sweating in its glass. But its sweet taste was all I wanted. At least I didn't want a beer or a splash of rum. But really what I wasn't thinking about was how appealing I would find a Xanax or Oxycontin.

“What did you do today? Did you go to a meeting?” she said.

“No. Wrote a song earlier.”

“Oh.”

I am supposed to go to AA twice a week, part of my probation. But here's the problem with it, not to sound too full of myself, but I feel like I am smarter than everyone I know, especially there. I have to sit in a fold out chair and listen to fucking idiots talk to me about some

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12 step program that is bullshit. And most of the time the speeches I have to listen to sound like freak shows trying to tell their sad stories about how they fucked up. They can't control their alcohol. They love to get high. They messed up every part of their life. Why do I need to go someplace and hear that sad shit when I can sit in my room and replay all my pathetic memories? I know a guy who works there and he signs my release paper for me, makes it look like I am going twice a week.

“I could go with you sometime, I wouldn't mind,” she said.

“I don't need to go. I'm staying sober by myself.”

“I'm just trying to be nice.” She got silent and starting playing with her hands in her lap.

“Will you play me the song you worked on?” she said.

“Not right now, I've been playing it all day, kind of tired of it.”

The first time she heard me play was at a party in Eufaula. I was with my friend Brad and she was with her friend Sara. We spent much of the night going in and out of rooms like two lost dogs, always crossing paths but never lingering.

I was sitting on the front stairs outside, everyone drinking and talking behind me. The windows in the apartment building were open, bringing the crowds noise outside. And suddenly Maryann appeared. She said I hope you don't mind if I join and listen a bit. I was playing the Johnny Cash song, *The Long Black Veil*. I turned around to tell her it was fine but couldn't say anything for a time. She looked so beautiful in the glowing street light. All curves and shapes. I noticed she had on a red dress, always a good look, and she had on a necklace with a little red book on the end of it that hung in between her tits. I gave her a smile and said it was fine and if she knew the words to join in.

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Later that night, when the party had almost died down, the four of us were in the living room laughing and talking. Someone had given Maryann an Ambien but she wouldn't say who. She was sitting in the chair in the corner, a glazed over look on her face, I could tell it had kicked in. I jumped up without even thinking and walked right up to the chair and started thrusting my junk in her face. I was trying to make everyone laugh and part of me knew she wouldn't care. She was so laid back right then she didn't give a fuck. She started laughing which only made me thrust at her even harder. She was stuck and she couldn't get out of the chair, she was struggling to get free. She put her hands on my hips trying to move me and suddenly I got hard. I didn't even realize it till she stopped laughing. I looked down at her eyes staring right at my dick which of course only made me more turned on. Quickly I jumped off of her and we both started laughing.

We met at the park during lazy summer days, reading books to each other. Maryann liked to read out loud and I liked to listen to her. Her voice seeped out slightly deep and raspy, like you could tell she was a smoker. I thought about her when I went to work. Standing in a hot church installing stain glass windows, the colors of the glass glowing blue and purple in my face but all I could think about was her. It all shifted like I was that globe in the library and someone picked me up and turned me upside down. She made me fall for her but she fell for me too. As much as she had me I had her more.

And like a school boy lost and confused, I had the urge to be mean to her, to see her pretty big eyes grow wide with shock when I would flirt with other girls at the bar, when I would say to them I never wanted a steady girlfriend, that I liked being alone. In the fall she moved to a new apartment and I offered to help her, knowing the whole time that once all the boxes were in and the bed was set up we would fuck. And that's what we did. It was awkward; I remember

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being on top of her and her saying I felt so far away. I had my arms out straight so I could see her completely but I didn't want to lean into her, I didn't want to touch our bodies together like that.

“Well, do you want to go somewhere, go do something?”

“No, I don't feel like getting out.”

“Okay.”

I played a few songs to myself, not singing just playing the melody. We sat quiet for a while. I asked her if she had a cigarette and she said she was out.

“Let's go to the gas station, there's one down the road a bit, I'll drive,” I said.

We got into my car and pulled out of the driveway, it was after midnight and black dark. I grew up out here; know these roads better than most so I didn't need much light to get us where we were going. When I was younger I would get high and drive around, thing I learned is all these roads lead back to each other.

I took a left out of the driveway. The gas station was off the highway, a few miles away. I had the radio on NPR last so now it was playing classical music and it was giving off this real weird vibe. Like someone might have thought it was pleasant but I found it the perfect mood setter for a scary movie or something and that's when my mind started to wonder. Fantasize really, about a guy and girl in a car driving back roads and she thinks they are headed home from wherever they have been but he takes a few scary turns and suddenly they are lost and no one would notice she was missing till a few days pass.

When I pulled in, my car was the only one in the gas station parking lot. I got out and bought the cigarettes and lit one as soon as I got back into the car, passing the pack over to her. She lit one too and I put the car in reverse. Pulling out of the parking lot I took a left turn, going back the way I came, but when the fork in the road came up I didn't turn right.

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“You missed the turn I think,” she said.

“No I didn’t.”

There was a pause. She looked confused.

“I don’t know I think that was the turn, right?”

“I want to show you something.”

“What?”

“Have you ever been to Echo?”

“No.”

“My family has some land out there I want to show you.”

“It’s late. I don’t really want to go to out there tonight. Can we go back to your house?”

“It’s not scary. I want to show you something.”

“Who said anything about scary? I just don’t want to go right now.”

“I know you. You don’t want to go because you’re scared. You’re scared of everything.”

I wasn’t looking at her when I spoke, just kept my eyes straight ahead on the dark road. Out of the corner of my eye I saw her fidgeting with her hair, grabbing it all with one hand and twisting it in a bun on the top of her head. She didn’t put a hair tie around it so when she let go, it all came tumbling down her shoulders. It was something she did a lot, maybe she didn’t even know she was doing it. I saw her reach down into her purse and grab her phone. She pressed the home button; the screen flashed 12:14.

“Seriously, I want to go back to the house, we can come out here another time, I don’t want to tonight.”

“It won’t take long, a bit further down the road.”

She rolled down the window and threw her cigarette out half smoked. She was uneasy.

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“I don’t want to go, take me back to your house.” She was looking directly at me but I wasn’t responding. I glanced down at her and reached across the seat into her lap and tried to grab her phone. She yanked her hand away but I kept trying to grab it out of her hands.

“What the fuck are you doing, don’t grab my phone from me.” She sounded like she might be about to cry.

“What did you think this relationship was, huh? What did you think was going to happen between us? Give me your phone.”

“Take me back to your fucking house, I’m not kidding.” She was shaking pretty hard by now, tears falling down her cheeks one right after another. The road curved and I took a right turn. Still looking straight ahead, I felt my hands gripping the wheel hard enough that my knuckles had turned white. I felt so much power in my body, like I could break the wheel clean off.

She was almost hysterical and suddenly we were back at my house, all I had done was make a big circle. I pulled into the driveway and before I could put the car in park she opened the door and ran out. She grabbed her keys from her purse, hands still shaking.

“Wait, wait, wait a damn minute, Maryann.” She was standing at her car door; hand on the handle looking back at me.

I put the car in park and got out, tripping over a rock as I walked over to her.

“I was only joking, not funny I know sorry but I didn’t think you would freak out so much.”

“Are you fucking crazy? What the hell is wrong with you? Are you fucking laughing?”

I tried to grab her arm away from the car handle but she jumped back.

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“Don’t touch me, do not touch me.” We stood like that for a few minutes staring at each other.

“Look, I’m sorry it was a joke, I didn’t mean to make you upset.”

“Not good enough.”

“What?”

“That apology. You can’t sit there with a smirk on your face as you say sorry, not good enough.” She got quiet and I did too. “I don’t think we need to see each other anymore, think we should quit this now.”

“What? What are you talking about? It was a fucking joke, Maryann. God damn. You know I wouldn’t hurt you like that.”

“Actually no, I don’t know that. If that’s how you joke I don’t want to hang out with you anymore. I don’t think jokes like that are funny.”

“Oh my god. You can’t be serious right now.”

“I’m going.”

“Can I call you later?”

“If I want to talk I’ll call you.”

She got in the car and drove away. I didn’t move. Stood there staring at the dark sky and the few stars I could see. It got chilly but I stayed put. There was nowhere to go.

What can I say, it’s a weird fantasy of mine, to be in control of someone like that, to see them visibly shaken like the way you would imagine some pathetic animal caught in a moment when they know they could die.