

Attraction Next Exit

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On a warm Saturday in late June 2010, I am driving home from Gambier, Ohio, to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The route I've chosen will take me through Amish country, over the Ohio River to West Virginia, into the Alleghenies, and across western Pennsylvania.

A black motorcycle cruises the center of the road in front of me, preceded by a red coupe, and leading the way, a milk truck, a silver canister on wheels, a thing that reminds me that I used to drink milk out of a frozen glass, something I no longer do because dairy congests me and my allergies have worsened since I moved to south-central Pennsylvania in 2004. Milk. *Lait. Leche. Latte. Milche. Maloku.* The words for *milk* sound good to me in any language. Perhaps water is the only liquid that outdoes milk in the human imagination. Who, I wonder, was the audacious herder who first thought to pull on the teats of another mammal? Who dared drink the stuff? And what animal was the first to be conscripted into this experiment, this theft and sacrifice of the inoculating fluid that nourishes the next generation?

The Canaanites understood that to consume the milk of another species, the relationship between human and goat had to be severe, that the

kid had to be separated from the nanny (how odd that we use the word *nanny* to designate a woman who fills in for a mother and the word *kid* to indicate a child). Of course, the ancient peoples of the land of milk and honey took this severance one step further, boiling the baby in its mother's milk, which probably caused, at least in the back of the collective mind, and certainly for the authors of Leviticus, the first emotional lactose intolerance.

The gleaming milk truck leads this small, unintentional caravan. Milk: it does a body good. Milkweed, milk toast, milk chocolate. Milkmaid. Milkman. Milk thistle, ice milk, Milky Way, milky white. My mother did not breastfeed me; is that what I am invoking here? Or is it the separation that she and I experienced as parent and child--imposed at first because she neglected me, then because of court orders that relieved her of my care, then because she killed herself--that is rising to the surface when milk preoccupies my thoughts?

The truck turns. The motorcycle passes the red coupe. On the left just ahead is an establishment called the Fox Hole, with a sign on its door inviting passersby to Come On In & Have A Good Time. A man I met in Gambier told me a one-armed stripper works there and now I'm sorry I didn't take the time to see her dance. I admit to being as curious as anyone else, wanting to know, for example, which arm she is missing, if she wears a prosthesis, or if she uses the pole (and if she does, what her signature maneuvers are). But it's her chutzpah that interests me most, the fuck-you-I'm-still-sexy declaration in the face of our insistence on symmetry.

We won't meet on this trip, so instead I entertain my preoccupation with odd juxtapositions, such as the one created by the Fox Hole and the sign a little further down the road that admonishes passersby to PRAY, though something tells me the sign maker may not have wanted to bestow blessings on the one-armed stripper (or her colleagues) when writing that four-letter instruction, rendering it in all caps, as if shouting.

The words *fox* and *hole* conjure such disparate images, from subterranean canine dens to soldiers in combat trenches (and the explosions that render them shell-shocked or take their limbs) to the more vulgar term for female genitalia. The expression *stone-cold fox* summons for me

the face of a young man with whom I enjoy an epistolary relationship. I wonder if he has ever been to a strip club, and before I know it, I am contemplating the various men and women whom I have loved and even those I came to dislike but who now exist in an emotionally neutral zone, and I'm wondering how many of them might have paid for lap dances, or at least dreamed about them. Having to pay for a lap dance signals a state of desperation or privilege on the part of the person who belongs to the lap in question, though sex, despite any ideas of romanticism, is a transaction--an exchange of control and abandon--regardless of whether money passes from one hand to another. Still, the Fox Hole saddens me, perhaps because there are so many layers of meaning and memory triggered by its name, not to mention the sad little shack of a building this sign is hanging from, and all the lives touched, both literally and not, by its existence. Before I know it, I'm at a turn I need to take, the motorcycle and red coupe long gone, the canister truck just a silver memory, as stone-cold cold as the milk I once enjoyed.

This part of Ohio is all about contrast. Here a straw-hatted Amish man drives a horse-drawn buggy; there a woman wearing cutoffs steers a riding lawnmower. On one side of the road a sprawling farm, on the other junked cars. Striptease on the left, prayer on the right. Signs of wanting, signs of admonition. Suddenly, I'm back in 1971, a kid listening to the radio, humming along to the hit song by Five Man Electrical Band: "Sign, sign, everywhere a sign / Blocking out the scenery, breaking my mind / Do this, don't do that, can't you read the sign?"

I've been thinking a lot about signs and juxtaposition these days, especially the collocation of what is uttered and what is left unsaid, of noise against quiet, admission contrasted with denial. So many things I never said, should have said, couldn't say, didn't know how to say; so many words I always said, shouldn't have said, couldn't take back, didn't know how not to say. So many signs I should have paid attention to: detours, stops, turns, warnings. And all the people involved: parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins, friends, lovers, spouses,

bosses, coworkers, neighbors, acquaintances, strangers (the list of which is endless). An infinite relationship of sentences and silences.

The woman driving the riding lawnmower wraps one arm around the child on her lap. Both mother and daughter are plump and blonde and pale skinned. The bearded Amish man holding the reins wears suspenders and a white shirt; his female passengers, in long dark dresses, are bonneted. I may as well be looking at portraits of excess and moderation, a let-it-all-hang-out looseness on the one hand, a buttoned-up reserve on the other.

These Amish folk, who farm, profess pacifism, and eschew electricity and cars, make me realize that I probably shouldn't dwell on the state of our nation, brought to its knees by fossil fuels, or on the conservative politics of Ohio. If I do, I'll wind up blaming patrons of the Fox Hole, the woman and child circling their lawn on the riding mower, and the slow-moving Amish farmers. And today doesn't feel like a day to lay blame; it feels more like an opportunity to attend to the majesty of green in the lush woods and the absurdity of lewd invitation side by side with holy caution. "Absolute attention," writes Simone Weil, "is a form of prayer." On my right, young black locust trees are dwarfed by old oaks and maples. Hills undulate in the distance. "Young locusts," I say aloud, as if intoning a psalm.

The word *locust* returns me to a moment five days earlier. As I was walking up a hill, I came upon a dying bumblebee being pushed down the incline by an ant. On its back, the bee quivered its legs in an unsuccessful attempt to right itself. The bee was at least fifty, perhaps one hundred times larger than the ant, who circled its quarry, pushed, circled and pushed, moving the bee one bee inch at a time. In that instant, I saw what Virginia Woolf beheld when she observed the moth in her window (the moment between life and death), felt the instinct to do as she did (use a pencil to assist the dying insect), and understood why, as she understood, that such intercession, in the face of such stark inevitability, is hopeless. As the ant circled and pushed, pushed and circled, tasked with this grave and purposeful recycling chore, I thought, *it should happen just like this*, but as that idea evaporated, my mind looped back around to Woolf, wondering

what might have happened had someone intervened when she, pockets heavy with stones, took that long walk into the river.

What might have been different had I said what I neglected to say to the four people I knew--my mother, a close friend, two former lovers--who ended their lives? What might I have said to my brothers, one dead of AIDS, another of cancer, one homeless and barely surviving?

Perhaps I would have said words that sounded beautiful but indifferent, words like *young locusts*. Or maybe I would have simply gazed at them long and hard, my lips parted enough to inhale, exactly like the fat crow who recently looked at me, with its mouth partially open, as if it were about to impart a message of great import and then had forgotten or, worse, deemed me unworthy of receiving it. There is nothing so otherworldly than the beholding by a large corvid on a hot summer day. Those black eyes, the shiny feathers, the beak thick with danger, the throat a canal of caws. That sort of absolute attention exceeds prayer, belongs to the realm of trickster shamans, and is the kind of sign best left uninterpreted. A crow looking at you with its beak slightly agape is an invitation to risk.

I spot a red-tailed hawk presiding on a pole. The bird is huge, probably a female, likely waiting for an incautious squirrel to bustle from the woods into her line of keen vision. What does it require to sit in such stone stillness? “For the one path of my flight is direct / Through the bones of the living,” asserts the hawk speaking in the poem by Ted Hughes. I pass; the hawk waits in that imperious posture of a predator, its motionlessness anathema to the bustle of humans, or, if not abhorrent, at least impossible to imitate.

Tiger lilies everywhere and the corn rising tall--it seems like the corn grew *a lot* in one week and I didn't even notice, which makes me question all the things that pass unheeded and if they are, somehow, stored with all that goes unsaid. Perhaps, though, it is simply a question of not being able to detect movement. Something thuds against the front of my car. *A low-flying bird*, I think, but I don't see its corpse on the road in my rearview mirror. *Has this really happened?* The twisting road with its too-narrow gravel shoulder prevents me from stopping. It's maddening to think that my car may have killed a creature in midflight. But why fault the vehicle? It's me

at the wheel, at the helm of this small potential murder, regardless of my intent. The summer of 1993 was the first and last time I hit a bird that flew across the road. I drove back to the scene and picked up the robin, injured but still alive. I frantically knocked on the nearest door.

A woman answered. "Do you have a shoebox?" I asked. "I've hit this robin." She looked down at the trembling bird in my palm.

"Do you know where I can take it, who might help it?" I asked.

"Just a minute," she replied. She walked away from the door into the shadows of the rooms beyond. I looked at the bird in my hand, which was not better than two in the bush; no, it was much, much worse to be the agent in this creature's suffering and likely demise. A dark panic, like one of those butterflyed inkblots, expanded in my chest. I saw the outcome ahead and knew not only that the bird was going to die but also that I was powerless to stop this death from happening. *Why persevere in trying to save it?* I asked myself, though as soon as this query surfaced, I sensed the perversion in my inability to answer it.

The woman returned, opened the door, and offered me an empty shoebox. "You might try taking it to the avian sanctuary on Route 3," she suggested. I thanked her and left. Standing beside my car in the minutes that followed, I watched as the red breast rose and fell one final time before the robin stilled against my sweaty hand.

Why *did* I persist in trying to save a bird whose death was unavoidable? Did I need a witness to my act of responsibility? Or was I motivated by guilt, a response I consider useless, a reaction I've refused to entertain ever since my mother's suicide, an act she committed, I reasoned at the time, with the intent of laying blame? Perhaps shame led me to that woman's door, and later to bury with great solemnity that dead robin in the woods behind my house.

Is regret--that twin of guilt--surfacing now as I fervently hope that I'm not riding around with a dead bird--a robin or a cardinal or a sparrow--stuck to the front of my vehicle? If there is a bird splattered against the grille of the car, I hope it remains unobserved, like other small and large acts triggered by guilt or shame or regret.

At Wheeling, West Virginia, I cross the Ohio River via the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge. My mind plays a silly word game: Vita Sackville

West Virginia Woolf. It's all I can do not to think of the dead in the context of this vibrant summer countryside. Virginia Woolf drowned herself sixty-nine years, three months, and two days ago in the Ouse, near her home in the village of Rodmell in Sussex, England. On that late March day, she donned her overcoat, weighted its pockets with rocks, and strode into the river. What would it take to let the water pull you in and down and deep? What must it feel like not only to withstand the cold of an early spring river but to abandon the urge to fight against death, an instinct possessed by even the simplest invertebrate? Three weeks would pass before Virginia's body was found. Leonard Woolf buried the ashes of his wife under an elm in the garden. She was fifty-nine. He would live another twenty-eight years. What did he think every time he looked at that tree? Did he avoid or embrace it each spring as it greened, another year gone without his wife?

Chances are Leonard could have said nothing to interrupt this suicide. I know this from my own experience--you need to be physically present to stop someone from ending a life; short of that, there is nothing you can say that will have much consequence. Still, all the things you *might* have said rise to the surface of a mind that attends, with apology and simple assistance the easiest to offer. "I'm sorry you feel so close to the edge. What can I do to make things less abrasive?" I might have asked my mother, who also ended her life in late March, at the same age as Woolf, and who admitted, as Woolf did, that she was in the throes of a mental illness without any recovery in sight.

"Why are you so obsessed with dying at twenty-seven?" I could have asked my friend Benoît, who, just before he reached that age, cut the veins behind his legs in a room in western India.

"Why are you acting so strangely?" and "Why are you doing heroin?" are questions I probably should have directed to Philippe and Andrew, the two young men I knew who also ended their lives--one jumping off a cliff into a waterfall in eastern France, the other drowning in the East River in Manhattan--before either of them reached the age of twenty-eight.

I didn't *almost say* those things, nor did I even think to say them. Instead, I was visibly impatient with my mother's inexorable depression. I helped Benoît obtain his visa for India (though he provided no clues--at least none that any of his friends noticed--as to what he intended to do

there). Philippe's and Andrew's erratic behavior I chalked up to quirkiness; it was, to my then-unevenly-romantic mind, appealing. *I would have made a terrible crisis-intervention worker*, I remember thinking after Andrew died, though I did, many years after all these deaths, wind up doing just that, answering hotline calls. Did I save anyone? I'll never know.

I stop at the first travel plaza off the Pennsylvania Turnpike, located in Claysville. At the information center, I almost walk into a taxidermied black bear. Turns out this female bruin was illegally killed in Somerset County.

"She was two years old and weighs two hundred pounds," the woman working the desk tells me. And then, this unsolicited comment: "The average bear weighs 540 pounds."

"Can I touch her?" I ask.

"Yes," the woman says.

Not your average bear, I think, images from Saturday-afternoon television, of Yogi Bear, his sidekick, Boo Boo--an entire language of childhood--rising on a wave of memory as I plunge my fingers into the dead bear's thick, bristly fur, which is softer than I expect, and which dispels the two-dimensionality of Hanna-Barbera cartoons and returns me to the welcome center off the Pennsylvania Turnpike. I touch her claws, one of which is as long as one of my fingers, and take a picture of her, though I am unsure why I'm acting like a tourist. After all, I reside in this state.

Before living here, I lived in Maine, home to a thriving black-bear population, several of which I had seen lumbering on the road at dawn. One lived near me and was fond of the berries behind the house. On several occasions, this bear came so close to the back door that my dog barked herself into the kind of alarming frenzy that makes you stop whatever you're doing and look out the window, or, if you're sleeping, rouses you and makes you check the locks on the doors. I noted the flattened areas in the blackberry and raspberry bushes that the bear had raided and wondered what I would do if I ever encountered it on one of my frequent walks. Wilderness guides advise not trying to outrun any bear, up or downhill; talking calmly to an accidentally encountered bear to let it know you're human (bruins have poor eyesight); making noise; walking slowly backward; not

making eye contact with the animal; and, in the event it charges, climbing a tree. If there are no trees to climb, and the bear attacks, fight back. If the bear keeps attacking, tuck your head and play dead.

No one suggests praying, perhaps because a bear might translate such absolute attention as an act of aggression. And while prayer appeals to me, I am certain I would be too scared to kneel in front of a bear. And yet most systems of belief implore the believer to worship--or, in some cases, simply respect--that which is feared.

"There are about fifteen hundred black bears in Pennsylvania," the woman at the welcome center says. "About three thousand are legally hunted every year."

In a short essay called "One Bear," John Berger spins a curious and affirming allegory that with each reading yields a different interpretation; today I consider the essay a prayer, offered up to fear itself. "The bear was in a room," the text begins, "a large room with links with the past, as all rooms which are really living must have." Certainly Berger was not describing this stuffed sow in the travel plaza in western Pennsylvania, a room filled with glossy brochures and maps, a room whose windows do not open. With the exception of the woman at the desk, everything--including the bear, the tired prose in the promotional literature, the display racks, the conditioned air, and the bottled water--is dead in this room. This place is a mausoleum of sorts, trapping daylight and dead bears and travelers on their way to wherever. No links here to another time; instead only the now of itinerant passage, a temporary and ubiquitous movement *through* time, which is unlinked to history or anything else endowed with what our culture defines as meaning. The bear of this room is on loan, the woman explains, and will be moved soon to another travel plaza.

In Berger's essay, the narrator and a seemingly-chained-to-the-wall-of-the-room bear converse, play wrestle, dance, fight, and then engage a fearsome pursuit through a village by the sea. When the narrator discovers that the chain, which he has thought imprisons the bear, is broken, he understands that "in every liberation . . . there is a beauty. This beauty has a kind of abandon to it." Though Berger's bear is created of ink on paper, it is alive and present, whereas here in Claysville, the stuffed bear is unfortunate and trapped. *As am I*, I think, heading back to the moveable tomb

of my car whose invisible passengers--Virginia Woolf, Ted Hughes, my mother, Benoît, Philippe, and Andrew--are simultaneously dead and alive. Dead in body, alive in idea, and trapped because I will not relinquish them.

About forty minutes outside of Pittsburgh, I stop at a Starbucks located in a huge shopping center. The local Petco is sponsoring an adopt-a-shelter-pet event. The parking lot--host to dogs on leashes and cats in cages, people wearing T-shirts that signal their allegiance to this or that organization or shelter--swells with advocates of spaying, neutering, and rescuing. It's at least ninety degrees in the shade. These dogs--"who feel lucky to get out of their kennels for the day," says a woman petting a hound-shepherd mix who resembles my dog--are the best behaved of the discarded and imprisoned canines.

I buy a coffee and call a friend whose stories, observations, and conversation I enjoy, whose company here and now alleviates the density of my solitary, heat-soaked shadow. I rant on and on about the recently passed Memorial Day weekend.

"It's just an excuse," I say, "for Americans to buy gas and burn it, congesting the roads and air, creating a dependency that has caused a war we can't stop." People lift their heads and look at me as I pass them. I complete three circuits around the parking lot, eye the dogs and cats, consider taking home one or two or three of these doomed-to-return-to-the-shelter animals, and dismiss this idea as one ungrounded in practicality. The heat is ten degrees short of unbearable.

"I'm not angry enough anymore to want to change anything," my friend says. His pessimism weights the pockets of my heart.

How can you say that? You're a grandfather, I think. "You're cynical," I say instead, which I will regret when I decide later that he's a realist. But right here, as I walk among people who so urgently proclaim their own beliefs, the juxtaposition is too jarring. How, I wonder, can he let go so easily of the anger to which I still cling (an ire that might just as well dissolve at any moment into the deep depression that claimed my mother, Virginia Woolf, and the three young men I knew who seemed possessed of such great talent and intelligence)? There is no answer to this question, and the emptiness I find instead of a response brings me to an odious melancholy

here outside of Petco, greyhounds and mutts to the right of me, tabbies and calicos to the left. Nothing I say or write will convince my friend to rage anymore, and the combination of my impotence and his abandon strips me of something--neither pride nor prejudice, but a kind of primal certainty, a thing I once thought could not be taken from me and now see is as easily removable as the petals of a daisy.

Loves me, loves me not, I think in my usual non-sequitured, a practice I indulge in to save myself from those edges I'd rather not walk. To deal in the absurdities of how thoughts connect--or, in this case, how they don't--is to use the idiom of stupor, the language of erasure. I return to my car. Back on the road.

Take Off Your Sunglasses. The sign confuses me: why would I remove my sunglasses in broad daylight? The notion that daylight might be both a broad and abroad gives me pause as I ponder a seemingly errant sign that advises drivers to diminish their visibility, which is how taking off sunglasses affects me. Then I spot the tunnel ahead and understand. Stay In Lane, the next sign instructs. I start to perspire. I do not like tunnels; you can't turn back once you enter, which means you have to commit to moving forward. But that's only part of what frightens me. Being in a tunnel means being *underneath* the water or the ground, and if the tunnel came apart, one might drown or be buried. In a place where oxygen is tricky and seeing requires artificial light, my claustrophobic self surfaces and is, so to speak, fully unearthed. I don't particularly care for this part of myself, a woman on the perpetual edge of a nervous breakdown, fidgeting with her hair, darting her eyes, unable to remain still. She is messy and complicated, and she threatens to be more fully present than me, upending my calmer, more collected self, the one behind the wheel, the one who will, ultimately, drive us through and out of this subterranean passageway.

What are the facts? I ask myself. To begin, this tunnel was unexpected; I drove west via a different route than usual and thus attribute some of my nervousness to having been surprised by an undesirable obstacle. Secondly, although I don't know its exact length, I surmise that the Allegheny Mountain Tunnel is shorter than, say, the Lincoln Tunnel, that 1.5-mile tube underneath the Hudson that connects New Jersey with Manhattan

and makes me hyperventilate whenever I have to travel through it. Third, all I have to do right now is breathe--“keep calm and carry on,” as the saying goes. *But there’s no turning back*, whispers that other panic-stricken woman, who is now sucking up all the air inside the vehicle and imagining the collapse of the structure and the slow, excruciating death of being crushed by a mountainful of dirt.

The driver part of me, the one who plays by the rules of roadside signs, turns on the headlights. The sunglasses jiggle in the console between the front seats. I stay in my lane. Vanishing quickly are all thoughts of strange juxtapositions, birds killed by cars, suicides, dead or allegorical bears, insects, the lost rage of a once enraged generation. I am under a mountain. *Would being in a tunnel under water be any worse?* I wonder, concluding that it might be more apt that I’m below the water because I was a Caesarean baby who never traveled the birth canal. Which might explain why tunnels seem so unfamiliar to me.

And then before I know it, the proverbial, and in this instance literal, light at the end of the tunnel--which will not collapse on me today--appears ahead. I reach for my sunglasses.

“The apparition of these faces in the crowd / Petals on a wet, black bough.” These lines from Ezra Pound’s poem “In a Station of the Metro” intrude. And suddenly, I am thrown back in time, to my once-urban life, when traveling in subways under earth and water produced less anxiety. Where a beneath-the-street moving populace inspired not claustrophobia but breathlessness, the headiness of perception when it effloresces into one crystalline image: “petals on a wet black bough.”

Loves me, loves me not. I would have liked to have written you a love letter and told you about the mountains. I dredge up a correspondence I once imagined, or perhaps had in another life, or that I once read about or heard as a story. These words provide solace: The mountains are blue at a certain time of day, as if a painter had drawn them onto the horizon. And here are purple flowers on a porch. And there a herd of cows under a sign for a dairy farm, round bales of hay in the field at almost sunset. I would have liked to have written you a love letter, but the market distracted me, the shape of the tomatoes and the corn and the smell of the berries and the peaches and the apricots and the whole summer just flooding over into my day, the

flowers, everything all at once. I would have liked to have folded into my love letter to you some petals from the flowers, a leaf from the black locust tree, a thread of corn silk.

My post-tunnel reverie is interrupted by another sign. It is as if I am traveling in slow motion when I see it: Attraction Next Exit.

I know what the sign makers meant, but I take it, at first sight, literally. As if it were possible to leave the highway via this exit and all of a sudden feel charged, electrified, as if you were a piece of amber producing a spark. To be immersed in the attraction of a magnetic pull, to experience brute magnetism. To feel drawn in as if you were an iron filing beckoned by a lodestone. To be pulled through the air to a destination without being able to stop. To elicit the centrifugal, to be at opposite poles yet attached because of a core. To magnetize. To attract attention, trouble, flies. To be honey. To be licked.

All of this is appealing to me, especially the attention and the honey and the licking. Maybe even the trouble (if not the flies). But most alluring is the possibility of a place where attraction is never ending and where the complacency that supplants it when it wanes is nonexistent, or, put another way, a place that offers permission to indulge an attraction without consequence. Perhaps, it occurs to me slowly, tunnels have more to offer than I think. Maybe the act of burrowing into the dark without a way to see, under water or earth (where amber resides), beneath the surface of consciousness, into a place from which one does not turn back, is exactly what attraction is all about. Certainly the unsafe nature of a tunnel is comparable to the risk of electrochemical magnetism.

“The triumph of lovers was ever / short-lived: the pole, it seems, / is peregrine. Does not stay put,” writes Linda Gregerson in “*De Magnete*,” a poem titled after the sixteenth-century treatise by William Gilbert, a man obsessed with the properties of magnetic attraction, a man who coined the word *electricus*, from which the word *electric* is derived.

I would have liked to have written you a love letter, I think, writing to the imaginary yet electrified recipient of my epistle. I would have liked to have told you about the fireflies, and how, when they started to punctuate the dusk, I finally understood, after a day of driving under and through these mountains, past signs such

as The Fox Hole and PRAY and Drink Milk and Take Off Your Sunglasses and Attraction Next Exit, that there are reasons to not finish certain things.

Of course I do not take the exit specified by the Attraction Next Exit sign. Instead, I continue east, past signs declaring Jesus Loves You and Free Air and Join Us for the Annual Ox Roast Parade. Before completing the final leg of this trip, I stop at a gas station at the junction of Routes 30 and 416 in Pennsylvania. From this place with its one pump, you can enjoy one of the loveliest views of the Alleghenies, which are now indigo in the waning light. Inside the ramshackle store, the shelves are neatly stocked with all manner of assistance for truck drivers, from screwdrivers and other tools to gloves, propellants, lubricants, and fuel cleaners. The tiny bathroom is painted powder blue.

Route 30 twists and climbs and descends through the mountains--but not underneath them--toward home. Home, where foxes sometimes wander into the yard and farmers drive pick-up trucks, where birds flock to the feeder and crows do not linger in the heat, where water runs in streams and magnets are attached to the outside of the fridge, where bears attend to me in dreams, and photographs of the dead are neatly packed in labeled boxes on closet shelves, where the only tunnels--those made by ants and gophers and voles--do not make me feel edgy, and where young locusts, dwarfed by the shaggy-bark hickory trees on the edge of the woods, rustle in the wind.