



Hole

Various Songs

Live Through This

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DGC / City Slang

Miss World, 2003

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Car rides are not for talking. The constant hum of the news channel fills the cabin when my mother drives, simmering with road rage or frustration at the state of the world. I have an old Discman and a stash of CDs in the glove compartment, so I don't complain, not even when we hit a road bump and the music skips a beat.

I am fifteen. I've had my copy of *Live Through This* for a few months, burned from my best friend's original and stuck in a thin plastic case that came apart at the first touch. I only have to hold the two broken halves in place, press them together to protect what's inside, to realise the album title is not a prompt: it's a demand, an imperative, a vital requirement.

Riding on the passenger seat with my headphones on, I lean against the headrest and watch closed-down stores and lifeless houses go by. I'm not the only one who has ever looked out of a car window and imagined herself the heroine in a music video, but tonight, in this sultry stillness, I might as well be. The empty streets we pass through could use a song to break the silence. *Go, take everything, take everything I want you to*, I'd scream to everyone I've ever held back from, wanting nothing more than to open up, love at less than arm's length and be seen instead. *Go, take everything, take everything I dare you to*, I'd scream to this landlocked ghost town, the moment before slamming my foot on the accelerator and getting the hell away.

There's no point asking Mum why we haven't escaped for the summer like everyone else, no point asking her why we can't escape for life. "Enough sulking now," she says. "Thought you were happy to get out for a while".

"Out" is a country festival a couple towns over, our local alternative to a television-bound and mosquito-repellent-lit night. We eat fries so salty our lips dry out, trade a handful of raffle tickets for a fly swat and a hanger set, watch old people and children dance while a cover band butchers 70s hits on a rickety stage. I trudge through wet grass on ill-fitting platform shoes, holding up my floor-length skirt so it doesn't drag in the mud. I'm at least three inches taller than all the other women, a thousand times more awkward, acutely aware of all the ways I don't fit in: every inch of black fabric and untanned skin in the sweltering July heat, every drop of pale foundation streaming down my upper lip, every dart of the eyes searching the neon-lit fairground for a place to retreat to. *Look at me, notice me*, I must seem to say. And yet I can't work out what's worse: to stand out or disappear completely, to feel everyone's eyes burn holes in my skin or melt into a backdrop I'd much rather tear out.

Back in the car and on the way home, I plug into my Discman as if holding on to a lifeline. *I'm Miss World*, Courtney Love sings in my ear, *watch me break and watch me burn*. The next verse claims no one is listening, and in my head I go *I know, I know, I know*.

Of course I don't think my mother never wonders what's going on with me; I just don't see much to gain from trying to explain. She would have questions, though not the right

kind: how's this music appropriate for a teenager, what do I know about being Miss Something, and what could I possibly understand about the world. *That's not the point*, I would answer, barely able to control my voice. *The point is you're watching, but don't realise what you see.*

We don't speak about the music that night. We will never speak about the music, because car rides are not for talking, and the hours we spend in our house too big for two are not for listening or making amends. Sometimes we hold each other in silence, seeking the respite we can't seem to ask for in words. It feels like pressing together two broken halves of the same whole: a demand, an imperative, a vital requirement.