

SPINVIS


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Spinvis

"Trein Vuur Dageraad"

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Excelsior Recordings

Dageraad

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The Flint Hills are burning tonight, creating a sunless afterglow. My cigarette's smoke joins the tall-grass ghosts blowing across Kansas. I'm alone on Interstate 35, and I'm full of teenage recklessness. I turn off my headlights, and the moonless night's inkwell spills across the Kansan canvas, blackening the prairie. The fiery horizon is the only light. I drive in darkness and imagine that I'm a Stygian helmsman oaring an underworld river, but oncoming headlights interrupt my fantasy. I turn on my headlights, and red eyeshine disappears behind the prairie's switchgrass palisade. Maybe foxes are watching me travel on the unnatural, grassless path that blemishes the land bequeathed to them by glacial retreat.

The fires are behind the horizon now. The hotel on the Kansas–Oklahoma state line is an island of light in the devil's-hour darkness. I lie down on the bed, open my laptop, and listen to a song that I've been struggling to finish. I try to find inspiration in the Flint Hills' flames, but the lyrics drift away like smoke. I fall asleep listening to the dawn chorus; the goldfinches, starlings, and sparrows are still singing when I wake up. I stop at the continental breakfast for coffee, then continue my road trip. Driving through Oklahoma during the day isn't like driving through Kansas during the night. There are no fey fires to conjure Stygian fantasies. Doubt begins to dissolve my self-confidence: I don't know where I'm going. I don't know why I left. If I turn around now, I'll be home tonight. But I'm a sucker for sunk costs.

I'm lost on the streets beneath the rat-king overpasses between Dallas and Fort Worth, and the floodwaters are rising. The intersections are confluences of rushing rainwater channeled by submerged curbs and overflowing storm drains. I feel like I'm playing *The Oregon Trail*, like I'm a pioneer fording snowmelt-swollen rivers. I speed into the next intersection: My car shudders and begins to spin in the eddying floodwaters. I steer my wheels like rudders and the floodwaters spin my car into a stop sign, then onto the street. I turn onto higher streets, stay ahead of the rising floodwaters, and reach my destination: Walmart, because I decided to leave my motel at midnight to buy cigarettes despite a flash flood warning. I don't think about the power of the floodwaters. I'm drunk on the hubris of surviving my own stupidity.

Route 84 through Texas to New Mexico is a desolation of neglected fescue fields, disused pumpjacks marking dead oil wells, and traffic-less farm-to-market roads. I'm so tired, and counting mile markers is like counting sheep, but there's nowhere to stop and sleep. I light a Djarum Black, and each drag crackles. Why am I here? Because I'm an idiot. Because I thought that it'd be a good idea to get in my car and drive without a destination; because I let an ember of ennui smolder too long; because I thought that I'd find inspiration for my songwriting; because I read *Into the Wild* and romanticized another idiot's doomed journey; because I'm...

I'm halfway to Albuquerque. I've lost an hour. Maybe the shortest distance between A and B isn't a straight line. Maybe the shortest distance between A and B is highway hypnosis. The early-afternoon sun glints off the golden sign: *Welcome to NEW MEXICO*, all-caps and black; below, in unreadable red: *The Land of Enchantment*. There's a pair of apostrophizing chili peppers on the sign. I've never been happier to see shitty graphic design.

The snowstorm reaches Albuquerque before me, blanching the junegrass- and juniper-daubed mountains. I leave the interstate and drive on Albuquerque's salted streets,

looking for somewhere to stop, to rest, to end this road trip. The first hotel I find is the 20-story Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, the second-tallest building in New Mexico. The valet drives my car into the parking garage, leaving me in front of a hotel that I can't afford. I walk through the doors.

I realize that this room is my destination—not because I want to be here, but because this is as far as I can go. The floor-length windows face the Sandia Mountains. There's no snow now; there isn't even rain. Maybe the storm was waiting for me to surrender. Maybe this is how Jonah felt as he fell into the sea: the relief of defeat, of knowing that it's over. I turn away from the sunset-reddened ridges. Nature's relentless beauty feels too contrastive. I fall onto the bed and stare at the ceiling. Something odious has been growing inside of me: a subliminal thought that, like night-blooming jasmine, only unfurls behind night's curtain. And here, at the end of a thousand-mile journey to a dark room, that subliminal thought blooms, releasing its suffusive essence like jasmine releasing its petal-held perfume. The thought is colder than the snowstorm, more dangerous than the flood, and darker than the prairie.

The dawn chorus is singing. I'm awake and I'm ready to go home, but I'm not going back through Texas and Oklahoma. I'll drive north through Colorado, then across Kansas. I'll be home tonight, and I'll leave that dark thought here in Albuquerque. I treat myself to expensive coffee in the hotel lobby. I feel like myself again. As I leave the city, I notice a spiderweb on my sideview mirror. The spider hides until I stop at a gas station; it repairs its wind-ripped web, then disappears behind my mirror when I start driving. Colorado is revitalizing, and my journey feels like a road trip again—and the spider is my passenger; when I finally park in front of my apartment, the spider is still with me. I don't understand the spider's significance. I will.