

Hitchhiking

(old, burgundy Sedan)

Samuel picked me up in a red GMC pick up truck he more or less made. It was beautiful, and the cab I needed two attempts to clamber into. He was a low-key not-too-complicated guy, who'd put thirty grand into his ride. Not counting his time. I'm a mechanic, he said, what I drive represents me. We (his girlfriend and him?) went to Vietnam last winter. It was amazing. Every time life is crap I tell myself why didn't I stay in Vietnam? He works a lot, drove his pick up for two days to get here. The suspension on his vehicle is rough. Proudly he gives me his full name when I introduce myself.

Martin drives a white commercial pick up hauling a trailer. He says forty hit him hard, left his better half, got a younger one, blew one hundred thirty-eight thousand in coke, on a three-month binge. That's not easy to do, he tells me. Just drinking and putting it up my nose. Plus I told everyone where I stashed it. I have a company, he says. I'll save that. He's got a bunch of eighteen liter water containers on the backseat, something about a party and no water for the toilets, etc. Worn, can of beer in his lap, he drives around the whole detour to drop me off on the main road.

Sylvio drives a big white pick up, GMC too. His kid of about nine is quiet and well brought up (respectful of other people's space). Sylvio is clean, he works construction; on his way to buying a part for his boat he's making adjustments to. Fifteen years he lived in the city but traffic made no sense. Plus it's not a great place to raise children, he says. When I was very young the roads here weren't even paved. As we get to our destination, me to the bank to withdraw cash, he to the hardware store open on Sundays — bank and store side by side — he adds, I live on the street by the dock, the house with the purple shed.

Daniel drives a rental. Picks me up in the middle of nowhere, on his way to the docks where the English-speaking fishermen of ill reputation (cops don't go there anymore) come in. A former colleague of his is getting off a boat, they're going to drink, he's got a couple cold and ready for him in the trunk. We met here thirty-five years ago, I'd told two stunning girls (they were stunning he insists) I was going to fireman school, and they said they knew a guy, from this very island, who was going there too. There were six classes, we got put in the same one, fifty-six stations in the city, same one, four divisions, three detachments, same one — three years ago I'd earned my retirement, he still had a couple of years to go (careers hadn't been identical) but when he found out I was done he said we got in at the same time we'll leave together, and he retired early. Now he fishes a little, makes more than enough. Daniel is kind and heavysset, has trouble getting out of the car. Says he's in line for a hip replacement.

Today I woke up a bit after 8am. Then I had lots of coffee. Then I argued about Thoreau with a literature teacher (who also happens to write and I told him I didn't think much could come out of writing while hiding in academia, neither open-minded of me nor nice). Then, I biked through the rain and wind, up and down two hills (nothing you could really call breaks on the bike) and at the docks I bought lobster off fishermen, which didn't go smoothly. I wanted a medium and a large one, not two small not two medium not two large... The gents came close to telling me to fuck off but we figured it out, I gave them 25CAD, bagged the bugs and rode back to the hostel. I made a mess of the kitchen and ate 4.5 pounds of lobster. I cleaned the kitchen and washed my hair. After that, Chantal picked me up in a beat up car, to show me one end of the archipelago. Her wiper on the passenger side was non-existent. So I got the general gist of what the landscape maybe looks like. We laughed.

It's now 8:17pm.

My favorite person was the first, I'm a little disappointed with myself for forgetting his name. The facial skin surrounding his quiet smile was torched by the sun and the wind; gentle, barely breathing, smoking cigarettes still. We exchanged easily, and before I got off I asked if I could take a picture of him — I write poetry I said — but he said he didn't really like that kind of thing. We shook hands. I thanked him, maybe we'll run into each other we concurred. And I stepped out. He drove an old, burgundy Sedan.

An older couple in a new Honda stopped. I was happy, the wind was beating me up. They didn't say much, three cans of paint on the floor mat. At the supermarket they parked the car, and got off, as well.

Roland used to be a fisherman. He's small but his hands are big and rugged. He's been smoking weed for over forty years. Mine is the last home on the way to the lighthouse, he says. The yellow one. The next day I walk over. Part of a whale spine's exposed on a rod afore his porch. Pebbles he's carried over from the beach surround the house. On his fridge is a photo of a girl of about twelve. Last time I saw my daughter he says she was four, this is what the mother's sisters sent me after her mother died, she's autistic and in a home. Maybe one day she'll knock on the little door pane, like you.

Jasmin is rock'n'roll. Now taking it easier he's moved to the hills, running a kitesurf school. On the islands stories abound. A police officer once spent a summer giving fines to all — even for not locking your car doors — so a night at the local the officer got drunk and by the time he made it to his car somebody had defecated on his civilian vehicle seat: Who shat on my car seat, back at the bar exclaimed he, lock your car doors, Théberge, someone in the adjacent room replied. When Jasmin picked me up I was on a dirt road in the hills. He'd have had to be an a-hole not to stop. Three days later, at the supermarket, we ran into each other again. (I agree, more non-men should appear in these stories, but for one reason or another they don't.)

Louis-France is going to where I'm going. I introduce myself. We wait. He'd invited me into the car without hesitation, we roll up onto the ferry, lots of families on the boat. What a name. The boat is half-full there is plenty of space. Full, it would still be beyond spacious. Louis doesn't eat, he's had digestive tract cancer, he drinks. There are supposed to be moose by the road. I'm an alcoholic, I know, he says. No moose, I put away the phone / camera. Sometimes it's good to leave home — then, it's good to come back he says. Louis used to be married, won't let me pay for gas. Same for the bridge toll. You drive after I fill up again. We're in a Jeep. Not an aerodynamic vehicle, I'm going to where I ran away from. Louis has a son. He dials his neighbor, I'm coming! All the lobster are moving up the ocean floor, record catches each year. Neighbor's wife won't let him smoke anymore, so he smokes in Louis' garage. I don't care, he can do what he wants. Louis' other friend works in a salt mine, there are disadvantages to not being married, he says if in the morning you leave a cup of coffee on the table, in the evening it's still there. I thought that sounded like a good thing, a disadvantage? Yes he says that's a little sad. With the neighbor, sometimes, they smoke pot. In ten years, the lobster will be farther.

The piece of glass in the front I passed through that landed on the old lady driving who they said was as hurt as I was she had avoided someone who cut her off when she drove through my bicycle the helmet was split in half the person responsible drove away I was all cut up like a boxer that just stepped out of the ring (JC3).

Jean-Claude forgot his keys today (JC4).

(JC5): Today, very same day that the keys were forgotten, JC is simply going to take it easy.

Jean-Claude is nice, he snorts when he laughs. And he did a good job cleaning the WC. Finally, the temperature is coming down, I have a new blanket. Jean-Claude and I live together I refused to give him my last name. He found that strange.

Jean-Claude chapter 2 (JC2): Last night he's in the kitchen sitting alone. Sleeping was tough, too hot out there, I ask JC for a knife. Before that when I get home he's almost waiting for me, chats. My mango is a six point five on ten he says from another place he had to move out after six years, I ask why. He's one of those people who help kids cross the street on school days. The owner pushed me out, they wanted to rent for more, he says today people talk on the phone not realizing that people overhear them. Spent nine weeks in the hospital last year, first time ever in the hospital. A colleague came to see me, it's nice when people come see you, he points out. No family I ask, he scratches his head ever so briefly, explains something about siblings somewhere. Jean-Claude's still in the kitchen, a friend is on her way my phone put an end to our conversation.

Sara's ballooned. Still the same gal, a good subject. She hasn't had it easy, she hasn't made it easy for herself. She'll tell anyone to go fuck themselves, has lost a number of jobs, has gotten hired and worked like a bee. She dislikes (hates) or claims to hate some specific groups of people which technically qualifies her as a ___ist but she isn't a ___ist. She's in her forties and can still speak openly, no mask, though when I ask why the destructive behavior she says she hates life and wants to blow herself away. Like many she claims to be ill. Ill people tend to not think of themselves as ill. She works for the government. Her mother's brain has been dying for a number of years. Who knows where her path is going, I'm going to try to feel neutral about tomorrow. I'm tired. Those first moments of consciousness in the morning I know what I need to do. JC just flushed the toilet. It's past midnight, those pastries were not for me.

Sleeping here is a step in a direction.