

from Zigzagger

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Waiting to Be Dangerous

You drove through the town. It was not like your town, but the people there were like the people in your town. They were Baptists, Sunday people, and proper. Your town was not by the sea, like this one, had no red clay brimming off the sidewalks. At the gas station where you stopped with him, they sold crates of peaches for fifty cents, but the peaches there were different. They were almost tropical, more red than orange. You were not alone; you were with him, and he told you to be quick at the bathroom and the old soda machine, the kind where you pull out the green-glass bottle of Coke for another fifty cents.

You wanted to act there the way you never acted in your own town. You told him to kiss you while he filled the gas tank and he refused. You told him that the people there ignored you as you went about your business, but he still said no and then asked why you wanted that kind of attention to begin with.

All along the way, on the interstate, you had made him pull close to the big rigs, their tall cabs making you feel low to the ground, and the truckers looked down at you, and you wondered if they did so to measure the gap between vehicles, checking for the white markers in the middle of the road. You remembered scaring your mother as a child, from the backseat, urging the truckers to blow their horns,

sending your mother speeding forward, yelling at you to stop that. The truckers looked down at you. You were holding his hand, resting it on your thigh, and you wondered if they could see it. You moved it playfully to your crotch. You kissed his hand and watched for the reaction.

You told your boyfriend about the guy in high school who made money from the truckers passing through Kingsburg, out by the highway, next to the Denny's. You drove there one night when the guy's car broke down, and he said he'd give you twenty dollars if you picked him up. You drove there because the guy was your friend. And there, waiting for him to appear from the flood of sleeping brake lights, you wondered how he did it, why he never had the shit beat out of him in the dark spaces between the rigs, the oily puddles, the coastal sage along the road always rustling as the cars roared by. When your friend appeared, you could see his silhouette, and he was adjusting himself. He handed you, first thing, a twenty-dollar bill that was very crisp, folded over only once.

So where the highway was not coastal sage but palmetto, where the air was in the nineties and thick, where you were told to hurry and not stay long and not say much, what made you think you could be a kid again? You thought, *Love is what I can do no matter what town.* But you forgot that places just like these held things waiting to be dangerous. You thought of your friend's knees in the oily puddles and then of the bones of children cradled in the riverbeds on the outskirts of town every summer (it seemed). You thought of the green-glass Coke suddenly broken in half, just as swiftly as you knifed right up the road when you came to your senses.

After that, you kissed only when the sun set. You said, in the dark car, My friend did a lot more than truckers. You said, He takes seven pills with every meal. You swallowed hard, then admitted he was one lucky fuck.