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Heidi Koos
College of DuPage

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Sophie Lives on a Farm

Heidi Koos

Sophie lives on a farm, and in order to get there you have to go west on 88 for probably half an hour, seventy-five miles an hour at ten o'clock at night. That's when you really settle in. The heat's going good and smoking a cigarette doesn't suck all the cold in anymore, and before you got on the highway you pulled out the CD's you wanted to listen to and put them in a stack on the seat, slightly fanned and poised over the rounded edge of the blue upholstery. Against them, creating the tension of space, are two folders, the math textbook, the marriage textbook, an apron from Starbucks, two empty packs of cigarettes, the phone, and a mechanical pencil wedged sideways in the crease, horizontal to the tip of a flattened straw wrapper sticking out like a sea anemone from the true ocean of the backseat. The beer is on the floor of the passenger seat, upright in its white plastic bags like a choir.

Sophie's been going to AA, and you've been going to AA, but tonight she called to say she'd already started drinking and you played it off just right. At first a little mad, but then you eased into it pretty good—starting to talk about TV was what started it, the roll back into normalcy. It was nine-thirty and you were going crazy. How many nights did you have to sit on the bed and pretend that the next day was crucial, or other people were important? More often than not the anxiety (you can't read, you can't be around people, you can't leave the house because the car might take you to the grocery store for wine instead of Barnes and Noble) was worth how good it felt to wake up in a sane world where the bedding wasn't pulled to the left, and the weight of everyday maintenance and upkeep wasn't a madden red. The suggestion seems natural to come over and while you're at it, bring two six-packs. It comes out of your mouth and you both agree and that ends the brief reprieve of seventeen days sober for the both of you. It was her idea to stop drinking, but you were better at it.

Sophie lives in horse country, where the highway numbers triple and there are long stretches of road where the fields are on either side of you and the dips of the telephone wires tick past, counting out the rhythm of the car as weird, isolated groups of trees occasionally appear, all tall and overreaching over the road like groups of thin girls. Once you got lost and accidentally pulled into the mud off the road that might have been an actual waiting field of corn because it was extra deep and rich, and the car raked up so much shit in the undercarriage when you backed out there's still dirt rattling under the car, and sometimes there are rocks that will suddenly ping and rumble and escape out. Not a good place to go without a cell phone necessarily. Isolated. You've never seen a horse, but you know they're out there in the dark as you head west from the main river road, the bright artery of gas stations and light poles.

Sophie's big horror house with wispy drapes in the windows and junked up front porch is quiet. The sound of the gravel under the tires always indicates the end of the trip. You stop the engine and the sudden silence feels good, the car hot now and

the gone music around you like perfume. It's not going to be a bad night—she's in the back of the house somewhere taking a bath or in her bedroom. She's not at the door door in a bathrobe, screaming at you and in that hysterically giddy mood where somehow you don't get to say a word in edgewise, and the work starts where you have to calm her down and play the student, the newly educated where everything's an opinion, a brilliant little hesitant gem you insert amongst all the joking and isn't it getting old? Isn't it time you just realize no one likes it? It's awful, but you're starting to become more and more intolerant of conversation that doesn't highlight how great you are. You've actually started to zone out when people talk about the details of a work situation or past personal events, like when they were with a guy you know you should know the name of, but you didn't listen well the first time so now it's a total blank, and this has been going on for half a year. Too many times at work people have called you crazy, like "You're so crazy!" after you do something funny and they get the look on their face that immediately indicates to you that they're figuring out how to take it back, make the use of "crazy" some benign source and not the fact that you walk around most of the time as if you're in your own little world and no one's going to behave in a way that's going to check you, make you really question if you think you're so young looking, so hot, so cool. You sing at work. You think everyone's nice to you because you're great, and you act like it.

You walk into the house and Sophie's in her bedroom and she's wearing a robe, but it's oriental and blue, and she's happy to see you. You find her lying on the bed, on her stomach, with all the lights off watching TV. In a row at the foot of the bed are six empty bottles of beer and she's holding the green seventh in her hand and you know exactly how to change this party for the better. You turn on the lights, the two by the bed and the little lamp on the card table by the window, and all the rest of the house is dark and very warm and as the night goes on you start to believe in farms again and the way they encourage the private pleasures, the misanthropic and baroque bent away from society and Taco Bell, that long blight of Ogden Avenue at rush hour, all the car dealerships and the limousine service you always see and wonder if they ever hire girls.