

## But it does to me

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People are often appalled when they hear that I like country music. As someone who loves the complexities of 70's love ballads, they say, I must find the southern drawls and musical motifs of New Country unbearable. Perhaps all of this has made me a bit self-conscious, so I often find myself listening to Country alone, windows and sunglasses down on the rubber-streaked road that passes the school soccer fields and soybean plots behind our house.

Almost nobody stops on this road. When I strolled down the path this afternoon, the cars, at near highway speeds, bent around my body, veering onto the yellow paint and throwing me into their undertows. F150's, cherry red, bottom-of-the-lawnmower green. Flapping tarpaulins and flapping foldable roofs. A Mercedes, a Bugatti. So often I had seen this road from the backseat of our Volkswagen. As almost an afterthought I would watch the dilapidated farms and winding mansion driveways fly past. Now, it felt rather odd to be traversing the same road in slow motion, a few paces from a sea of rolling roughage and the stretched white skins of forgotten hay bales.

I passed what seemed to be a former barn. The sun-grayed wood was home to random shrubbery now, some staghorn and creeping vines. I remember when the barn collapsed. It was holding up for quite some time, but one day we passed it and for the brief glimmer of time it becomes visible from the backseat, I saw that it had buckled down the middle. Past the dilapidation are signs of life. A mud-brown shipping container, caution-orange plowing attachments. A Jeep emerged from a side road I had never noticed before, and as I went to investigate, I saw that the winding pavement went way back, past the blueberry-colored home of a dog trainer, kissing the driveway of an

impossibly large house, and away, disappearing along the twin rows of shade trees.

I stopped at a fence post surrounded by blue spruces and creeper vines. Its owner had nailed twin rows of plastic retroreflectors, alternating red and orange. The purpose was a mystery to me. Above were the taut power wires and splice boxes. These wooden poles I remembered only for the undulations of the wires as we sped alongside, but now I saw that these wires were suspended delicately by single insulators. They dove in and out of cylindrical transformers, flipped configurations, disappeared into the ground.

I kept walking down this thoroughfare that connected Fayetteville to Manlius, walking as the trees grew thicker and formed a shaded canopy above me. Through the ambitious plant growth I saw a sun-speckled ditch. My gaze followed it under another driveway of yet another massive house, through a rusted corrugated pipe and back into the woods. I later learned that this was Bishop brook, the stream that passes through our neighborhood. On days after strong rain it rushes, thick with mud. Most of the time it's dusty and dry, like it was today.

Such bizarreness it was, then, to be living in a tight-cut, underground-electric-line, vinyl-siding'ed neighborhood. My patch of suburbia penetrated the bucolic wash of fields and one-lane roads, as if it were the finger of a curious child. I was now in a land of NO TRESSPASSING signs and lone cherry-red mailboxes, and to my surprise it felt liberating. Never was our neighborhood silent in the summers from the hum of a push mower, and the stick-in yellow signs of herbicide applicator companies popped up as often as the weeds they sought to kill. We set our old appliances by the side of the road, and revved leaf blowers to clean its cracks. We sought perfection, perfection in the most perverted sense. To stand among these unkempt sumacs and shoddy barns, gritty roads and rogue jeeps, that was

pure bliss.

I moved on. Past the well-maintained canonical barn painted with a silhouette of a horse, past the abandoned green-glassed shed, and a right turn onto the state highway of 173. Things were different here. Where fields once sprawled were flashing school zone lights and lot-for-sale signs. I nearly tripped over tire-crushed, amputated leg of a fawn. Its tawny fuzz was matted and insect-eaten. I found a White Claw can in a ditch, and a little later, a mud-caked Fiji bottle. The pavement was fresher here, and the glassbead glint of paint followed me as I plod along. A disemboweled skunk came next, and I stuck close to the corrugated railing of the road to avoid the swarms of flies. I couldn't help but marvel at its black-and-white body, the way it lay there in advanced decay, perhaps after being thrown from a collision with a distracted vehicle. The road undulated here much more. And at the apex of the asphalt's swing, I could see way down the road, past the tree lines and over, way over, to the blue tinged hills of Central New York.

Luke Combs, in "Does to Me", sings of first bibles and fishing rods, blades and brothers. I may be non-religious, an only child, and the exact opposite of an outdoorsman. But I have these rushing fields and rushing cars, white-trailed skies and run-down barns. In two days I will be on a plane. In two days I will leave the lazy greenery, the nightly cherry glint of antenna lights. In two days, I will be leaving Syracuse for the first time in fifteen months. Without me, the amputated leg will shrivel and disintegrate, the skunk will be reduced to bones. The sumacs will blossom into elegant red cones and the air will thicken. But among them, bound permanently, are memories. Memories made driving at 50 miles per hour, tumbling back now in slow motion. That might not mean much to you, but it does to me.