

## Driver

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I am sitting in a car, impatiently awaiting the two-hour drive back to my house. Today I don't have to drive; I am in the passenger's seat. Usually I choose to be in the driver's seat because it gives me more control. People tell me that no one likes a backseat driver, but this usually doesn't stop me from giving driving suggestions when I'm sitting in the front seat. No one likes a passenger's-seat driver, either, so today I will relinquish my driver's power, and assume the quiet passenger's role, because I am tired.

Free from the responsibilities of the road, my five senses are able to roam. My nose makes the discovery that the driver reeks of sweat, as do his shoes on the back seat. My eyes observe that the driver's hair is sticking to his head in some places. He has abstained from removing his sweat-soaked socks, which smell as bad as his shoes; I'd be relieved if they were on the backseat with their stinky partners.

I notice the driver's periodical side glances. Instead of watching just the road and the rearview mirror, he is looking me over. I see him take one hand off of the steering wheel, and then feel my thigh.

Who is this creep?

My boyfriend.

With his attention split between me and the road, I am sure he can smell my sweatiness, but he says nothing. My hair is as tangled as his is sticky, but it does not matter to him. We have just spent seven hours together hiking Mount Washington and a few other summits, yet he enjoys being with me on the drive home, and lets me know so with a simple gesture. He doesn't have to speak, and wouldn't want to, because he is listening to his favorite singer, Bob Dylan, not

wanting to miss a beat.

Suddenly a noise disturbs the beat and the repeated rattling makes him look up. But he doesn't look worried, he just looks at me. "You hungry?" he smirks; it was my stomach growling, of course. I nod, and we decide to stop at a restaurant on the way home. Before anything else we need to get out of the boonies and into tourist country, where there are restaurants. When restaurants start popping up on both sides we realize that we are in need of an ATM.

The ATM decides it does not like my boyfriend's credit card, so he figures he must have misremembered his pin. A call home confirms that he entered the correct pin, so we try another ATM. Did I bring my wallet along? No; who needs a wallet in the woods? The next ATM building we see is under construction, and our remaining option is to complete the drive on empty stomachs.

I am angry because I forgot my card, and because of my growling stomach nagging "I'm hungry." There's also resentment from the driver. Although a meaningful "Sorry!" is usually the best remedy, it works insofar as I get my anger out in one quick shout. But the "Hmp" that I get for an answer doesn't mean "it's okay" in any of the languages that I know, so I decide to wait on continuing conversation and look out of the window instead. I see mountains with summits tall enough to escape the green embrace of pine tree forests. Mountain paths that we have not yet climbed are visible on the sides of the rolling hills. Behind us looms the biggest mountain in New England.

One day, about a week ago, my boyfriend surprised me by saying "I do." I felt relieved and overjoyed. He had confirmed that he wanted to hike up Mount Washington with me. I was glad to move beyond the "dinner-and-movie" stage of our relationship; the worst that could

happen there is that the chef's cuisine is below par, or that the film plot doesn't suit your fancy. Hikes are different. Everything is either your fault, or your partner's, because you made and packed the food, or forgot supplies like pocketknives and bandages. Not only do you have to stand the other person for the duration of the hike, along which your tiredness climbs as fast as your progress, you also have to drive home together, in the same car, in stinky hiking clothes. This part we are still working on.

I dig through the backpack until I find my digital camera. I scroll through the many pictures we took along the route of our hike: a really green valley, a hollow tree trunk, some soggy moss; bird's-eye views, taken from little ledges we dared to step onto; an over-the-back shot, capturing the part of the trail behind us; one of us at the summit.

These are all beautiful pictures, but also typical. Many people drive up Mount Washington every day, and pose for pictures with backpacks they fetch out of the trunks of their cars. Then a "This Car Climbed Mount Washington" sticker goes on the bumper of the car, and the drive continues. My boyfriend and I didn't drive up the mountain, we hiked it. Our journey did not finish with the summit. There are three more hours of hiking, and two hours of driving until we reach a shower.

I decided to give full worth to the dirty and unglorified part of our travels, and took a grubby picture. Not as easily understood by the masses as the typical summit snapshot, this sweaty, dirty, tired moment is more real to me than the picture-perfect Kodak shots, because it exposes our sun-kissed intimacy.