



A bus took them out of town and they walked a mile in the heat to the motorway. They would hitchhike to London; spend a day and night in London. Don would send a postcard to his father, they would visit some of the free museums, spend some time in the parks. From London they would hitchhike to Dover. They would catch a ferry to Calais. In the paper there had been coupons which they had cut out. With the coupons the price of the ferry from Dover to Calais was a pound. From Calais they would hitchhike to Paris. This would be the only detour. In Paris they would visit the free museums, spend some time in the parks. After Paris it was Antarctica.

They stood on the side of the motorway and took turns holding out a thumb. It didn't take long for them to find their rucksacks worked as chairs. A bag of peeled carrots sustained them.

"Every time we see a dead car we cheer," said Phoebe.

"What?" said Don.

"It's a game. It's called the dead car game. It will be fun," said Phoebe.

Morning soon slipped into midday.

"I thought we would be in London by now," said Don. He

wasn't being facetious. He sighed.

"I can't believe all these cars are passing us by and not one has stopped," said Phoebe. It was her turn to stick her thumb into the air.

"We are doing something wrong," said Don. He thought about asking Phoebe to show some leg. He knew that some motorists and lorry drivers liked to see some leg on a miserable day. Phoebe had nice legs.

It started to rain. They could not escape the rain. The rain cleared.

In the rising fog they sat and watched the train of cars fly past them.

"I used to think I was some kind of Gypsy boy," sang Don. Phoebe smiled and stood up.

"Put your favorite hat on," said Phoebe.

A woman in a big car took them to the nearest service station. The cars were getting bigger but the roads were staying the same size. The car had trouble parking. At the service station they had a cup of tea. The woman told Phoebe that she only stopped because she wanted to find out about the hat. The woman said that she was going in the opposite direction but seeing the hat made her turn around. Phoebe thanked her. Don returned from the restroom and sipped his tea. The two women laughed seeing the hat.

By the side of the road Phoebe found a pair of discarded headphones. She picked them up as though she was unsure just what they were. Still slightly perplexed she walked over to the rubbish bin.

"Keep them. They are the new kind. They are very

expensive," said Don.

Phoebe wrapped the headphones around her hand and stuffed the ball into her rucksack.

A man in a small car said they would have to climb through the passenger window. He said the passenger door was broken. The offer to the next service station was too good to pass up. Phoebe climbed in first. Don had a vision of the car with Phoebe's legs sticking out of the opened window disappearing into the night. He felt very silly. Once Phoebe was safely in the back seat and the car was not in motion Don climbed through the open space.

"I think he was a pervert," said Phoebe.

The man had offered them a room in his mansion. The mansion was deep in the woods. He said he had many acres and that the mansion was far away from nosy neighbors. The man spent the whole journey laying out the architecture of the mansion. He talked elaborately about each room. After traipsing through each luxuriant Don and Phoebe could understand why the windows were broken in the small car.

They had the first of the cheese sandwiches that Phoebe had made that morning. The bread was unbuttered. Phoebe had used a number of plastic knives to cut the cheese. The cheese was too thick. Freed from the cling film the cheese had a chance to breathe. The sandwiches tasted and smelt of plastic. They sat on the edge of the motorway and had the cheese sandwiches.

A lorry driver said that he could take them to Hull. Don looked at Phoebe. The lorry driver told them that they would save money and time by sailing from Hull to Rotterdam. Don

really wanted to go to London, but Phoebe knew that the lorry driver was right and so she nodded her head.

It was a quiet ride. Don had tried to engage the lorry driver in conversation. He asked a number of questions. Each question was met with a deadend. Phoebe wanted to say something to Don but instead stared at the car tops as they zipped by.

Phoebe cheered. The lorry driver looked at Don. It was a man thing.

The fight was over the price of the tickets. Don thought that he was fighting over London and a missed opportunity to see the city. Phoebe thought he wanted to pay for the buffet, they still had a number of cheese sandwiches, the food did sound good, but the buffet was expensive. They parted, calmed down, and came back together.

"We are here now and the boat will soon be here," said Phoebe.

They had two hours to waste. They sat facing each other, silent, each wanting to break the silence. Don watched Phoebe preen her fingernails. The act exasperated him. Finally, he attacked his thumbnail.

"Hungry?" asked Phoebe.

Don puzzled shook his head.

"They don't digest; they rot," said Phoebe.

Don expectorated the fragment of chewed nail.

The waiting room was empty, the lorry drivers stayed in their lorries. The rain tapped the windows. The sea was silent as was the television in the corner. The lady at the counter told them that an announcement would inform them of the

departure time. The heaters hummed softly. They were sat directly under a warm jet of constant air. Phoebe nodded off, while Don watched the television.

Phoebe was the first to move. The heat was too much. Don moved, but did not follow Phoebe. He lay with his back to a machine that dispensed bottles of water. The soft buzz smoothed his headache. Phoebe lay across a row of chairs. Her eyes were closed and her hands laced together.

The cheese sandwiches were washed down with water. They took turns filling up their water bottle from the taps in the restrooms. Don was excited to sail upon the sea. When he was a little boy his father and mother took him to Dublin. He could feel the sea, but he could not see the sea. A heavy fog lay above the sea. The fog was thick and reached up to the sky. The swell of the sea made him sick. He vomited and his father and mother embarrassed dragged him away from the mess. He had forgotten about the vertiginousness and orange mess.

Phoebe had never been to sea, but she had read Conrad, Melville and London.

Phoebe slept while Don watched the television. Something was happening somewhere but Don had seen it all before.

The orange glow of the setting sun made Phoebe and Don go outside and look at the port. A fuliginous glow loomed and seeped dying sunlight. The blue of the terminal building and car park looked metallic in the waning sunlight.

The waiting room slowly filled up.

"And to think we never even got to see Hull," said Phoebe.

Don hoped for a stamp, but the lady just made sure the picture in the passport matched the face before her. She was

full of yawns and nothing else.

The ferry left port.

Don and Phoebe sat in the buffet area, but could not go up to the buffet. They could see and smell the food. It smelt good. Don bit his nails surreptitiously and removed the splinters from the tip of his tongue with his fingers. Phoebe went to the bar and bought a drink. They shared the drink and watched the diners refilling their plates. The food was stretched out along one side of the dining room and was illuminated by very bright lights that kept the food warm. Phoebe hoped for the kind of seas that Conrad, Melville, and London had to deal with.

A swell upset Don.

Phoebe removed her boots and put her feet across Don's lap. He rubbed her feet, this stopped him attacking what was left of the nails - the tips were bleeding. Phoebe closed her eyes and even though the dining room was loud and bright she slept. Don stopped rubbing Phoebe's feet and allowed the roll of the sea to carry him off to sleep. He slept as though he had taken a handful of benzodiazepines.

When they awoke the dining room was full of sleepers. It was the middle or close to the middle of the night. The buffet had been cleared away. Don was disappointed. The air was still thick with the aromas. Phoebe could smell feet. They left the dining room and went out on to the deck. The sea was still. The warm air was a silk sheet that lapped gently upon their faces. The warmth of the air made the sea smell not so much of rotting fish but of the salt that Phoebe used in her bath.

They held the safety railing and looked at a waning gibbous

moon.

There was no talk of them leaving their home. They had no home.

“We are deracinated,” said Phoebe.

Don was listening to the vexed gulls.

They went back into the dining room and closed their eyes. Sleep evaded them.

Don watching the first of the light over the sea was joined by a lorry driver. He was a big man, bald, but had a jovial face.

“It used to be the biggest port in the world,” said the lorry driver.

They talked for half an hour. He agreed to take them to Amsterdam.

“The red light district is the mire smeared over a beautiful woman,” said the lorry driver.

They agreed to meet after debarkation.

Don told Phoebe that he had got them a lift to Amsterdam. She seemed pleased. They went to the restrooms and freshened up.

The Netherlands was indeed flat and dissected with overflowing canals.