

The End of the Road

We live in a van. We have for as long as I can remember. It took some getting used to at first, but Ivan always says that it's the price we have to pay for pure freedom. Nobody tells us what to do. All we need is some gas money and a nice parking spot. Ivan grows his own weed in a field behind a nursery school. I have to buy my wine, but I collect enough recycled bottles to pay for that. We've really got pretty much everything we need, right here in our van.

"Solea," Ivan always tells me, "you're all I ever need." To which I mostly reply, "right now you need a shower honey!" That always makes him laugh, even though I'm only partly joking. Cleanliness is never easy when you're living in a Dodge van with two humans, two cats, one dog and an iguana. Sometimes they let us use the bathroom at the Valero on Riverside Drive, but Ivan doesn't smell much better after that.

It's because of his clothes. "Clothes don't get dirty; people do," he always says. I've never really agreed with him on that one. I guess it's just one of those things that lovers can't agree upon. I wash my own clothes when I make a little extra from the recycling. Ivan always shakes his head and tells me I'm throwing away perfectly good money.

I have to put up with his little idiosyncrasies and he has to put up with mine. That's what makes a couple work. We could write a book on that. We've been together twenty-four years now. I put up with his smell and his pot smoking, and he puts up with my drinking, and of course all the books. He always says that one day all my books will catch on fire, and the whole van will go up in smoke, us included. I always tell him that they won't catch fire if he would stop smoking inside the van.

The books are a funny story. About eleven years ago, we drove by the tail end of an estate sale. That's usually where we pick up all our clothes. After everything worth selling is gone, they usually just put what's left out in the trash. I picked up this great old handbag and inside was a pink cover girl lipstick, a half a roll of Tums, and a library card. I've been reading ever since. Haven't had an overdue book in more than a decade.

I just love to read! We'll go to Goodwill early, before they open. All the donations are just sitting there on the loading dock and nobody's around. I've gotten so many great books there, and so much great clothes too! Ivan always says I have too many books and too much clothes. He says I'm still clinging to the consumerist society that we are trying to escape. I guess in a way, he's right. Sometimes I do miss my old life, even though I know it was shallow and wrong.

Ivan says people aren't meant to live like that. He says that America is filled with automatons working endlessly to pay the bills they can not afford, that came from buying things that they never needed. He says the rest of the world is just a bunch of American wannabes. I guess he's right, but sometimes I just miss having a bed, a refrigerator, and a nice clean bathroom. I've never really been as strong as Ivan, but he loves me anyway. And besides, sometimes I think that he's strong enough for both of us.

I know it's hard for other people to understand what we're doing, but I truly believe that Ivan's a visionary. At some other time, in some other place he would have been a leader among men. It's just that in this place and time, the deck is really stacked against him; against us. Ivan's not kidding when he talks about the conspiracies that surround us all. He's been there, he's seen it with his own eyes, and he's shown me too. I used to doubt him, before he showed me.

Opening your eyes to it all is terrifying! It's something you can't take back. Once you truly see, there is no more going back to pretending everything is okay. Once you see the light, the light is all you can see. Ivan says that a lot too. It makes sense to me, although I think maybe I could go back to pretending; just for a little while anyway.

Maybe just to see my friends again. They're all gone now, they didn't understand; not one of them. I guess some of them tried, but in the end they all ended up begging me to leave him. As if; as if I could leave the only man who ever loved me; the only man I've ever loved. No, they couldn't understand me, and they couldn't understand us. In the end, I guess they couldn't understand love. I think most people can't.

Ivan says that what we have is true love. Love without boundaries or borders. All love and no strings is what he always says. That took some getting used to as well. I wasn't raised very traditionally, but I wasn't exactly prepared for an open relationship. I guess in the beginning that was the worst part. The van was bad, but the open relationship was worse. I was so deeply caught in the trap of monogamy, or as Ivan calls it, "Fake Ownership."

I have to hand it to him, he put up with a lot back then. I was so jealous and possessive! It was quite a learning curve for me. It took forever for me to let go of my puritan values. Ivan used to tell me that they weren't my values anyway. He said that they were just someone else's values forced onto me. It took a long time, but he was patient, and in the end I saw that he was right.

I could see the jealousy in my friends and that's what helped me to

see his point of view. They were so jealous of us and what we had, and that's probably why they all tried so hard to ruin it. Boy did they ever try! Lucky for us that gas was cheap back then. We just drove all the way to the end of the road. I guess that's what we're still doing; driving to the end of the road. Just a little slower these days due to the hike in gas prices.