

YOUR LUCKY DAY



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She thought maybe this will help. Stop in Eureka, before I get home. Maybe that will give me some ideas. Eureka! I might say.

Nothing else had worked. Not getting high before the drive, which had seemed like a good idea at the time (she was probably high then, too—what was she, high?), but now was beginning to wear on her. Too much exuberance. She needed to take the edge off her cheerfulness. Get sad? Slow down. Eureka.

She'd parked in Eureka, downtown, near the world famous gazebo, or whatever the hell it was supposed to be, and then gone and gotten a cup of coffee. And texted her mom. "Almost there." And Mom texted back, "Almost where?"

So funny, LOL. Trying to act like it didn't bother her that Marilyn wasn't there yet. Marilyn knew perfectly well that she did care—a lot. Was probably waiting. Had said, "It's time to come home." As if that was the obvious answer. The right thing to do. How would she know?

She sipped her coffee. Okay, Eureka. Here I am. What the fuck. Okay, it was stupid to think that you would automatically have ideas in Eureka. Just because it was called Eureka. After what Archimedes had shouted in his bathtub—when he realized that getting into

the bathtub had likely displaced an amount of water related to the amount of himself he had put in. He had, according to the myth she discovered on Wikipedia, perhaps imprudently, on her phone, while driving into town, said this twice. "Eureka! Eureka!" She could just imagine how much tension she was displacing by stopping there. With one more sip of coffee and some gum, she could be home.

Probably a lot. But it was just to think, one more time, *What is it I want to say to them? What is it I'm thinking now? How do I sound when I say that? Do I sound like I'm sure? Does that mean I am?* She couldn't answer any of this to her own satisfaction.

So, okay, ideas? Am I sure? Why am I asking that? Is there a Eureka yet? Maybe I need to take a bath. Maybe I have a problem. The problem is I'm high on the highway on the way home. Why? Because going home is too much pressure. They love me but they live on another planet. I can't go back there. I wish they could all come to my planet, but they can't. So getting high means I just bring my planet with me. Eureka? Well, not really.

I should be able to deal with it. Going home for the last time, the last time it will be home. Because I know I have to find a new one. So home will be nothingness on the way to somethingness.

Mom will not be happy.

What a weird problem. She was due to go home, but it wasn't home. She wanted to go home, but the home she wanted to go to had not been created yet. It was like the off-color joke her father liked to tell when they saw the bumper sticker, "Jesus is the answer": he would say, "What's the question?"

Her mother did not like this joke.

Marilyn sipped her coffee and watched people go by.

She could come and live here in Eureka and that could be the end of all of it. Near not home but not actually not home. Write me c/o Pretend Town, Pauseville. But this was a cartoon place. The buildings were too bright for real life; that was probably because everyone spent the whole time going, "Eureka! Eureka!" and being excited and finding answers that weren't really solutions.

In the real world, where she intended to move, things would need to be a little more mellow.

She finished her coffee and got back in the car. The car frankly reeked. So it would not be a good idea to have any encounters with law enforcement. Talk about real world. That's why she was high. To keep level, drive consistently. Let her mind be peaceful. Not speed.

Her mother was going to say, "Why would you want to leave?" And it was a reasonable question in Sonoma County. *Why would anyone who didn't hate their parents want to leave this paradise?* And the answer was simple: *Why would anyone who loved their parents want to stay?* So goodbye to Eureka.

Here was the entrance to the freeway; it would be clear sailing after that. She would get on the road and keep going. She would literally have no excuse not to get there. Maybe she would even have a little extra momentum for getting out. She came up onto the shoulder and watched as a lone car went by. It was mid-afternoon. On a weekday. No traffic.

She leaned on the gas. Her car jumped forward, but then it seemed to plant itself for a cartwheel. Her parents loved her cartwheels. It was all about how you planted your hand. Called their lawn Cartwheel Hill. The car was thrown forward and so was she, as if she had tried to dive through the front window on the driver's side. She was held back by her seat belt. Then she heard a screeching, grinding noise.

She realized her eyes were closed, and she opened them. What did you do now? A list of things to do when things went wrong in a car was flashing through her mind at a hundred miles an hour. Even though she was no longer moving and was apparently fine. And the engine was still going. What to do when skidding, How to change a tire, How to figure out when a tire had too little air, How to test it to see that its pressure was still right. Her father had given her the little pressure-testing doohickey for her going away present for college. She had the feeling it might be useful for other reasons. Like she could maybe poke people to test how much pres-

sure they were under. Home had prepared her to drive; home had prepared her to leave.

What had happened was the wheel had just flown off. Yet, as it turned out, you could still drive on three wheels, even though it made a horrible grinding noise. Nobody had ever told her that. Nobody at home would have. Because it wasn't supposed to happen and wasn't a solution. Non-Eureka. She managed to drive the car over to the shoulder of the highway safely to wait for the police.

Holy shit, the police! What the hell was she going to do when the police got there? She wasn't that high anymore but the car reeked. Calm down, calm down. She opened the windows. Calm the fuck down. Calm the fuck down! Oh shit, she was not calming down. She was calming up. The cops were going to come and they were going to put her in jail for not for not for not...*what?*

Sirens in her rearview mirror and then a cop. His face in her window. Nice young guy. Sunglasses. Fit. "Do you work out?" she almost said. A guy had said that to her in a bar the week before.

Before the appropriate reaction had come into her head, which was to ignore him, a whole host of other, inappropriate things had come out of her mouth, such as, *Of course; no, I just grew up in the country; I'm healthy, if drinking was a sport, I'd be a medalist; etc.*

She was chatty to a fault, she was. Got that at home too.

"Are you okay, ma'am?" the cop asked.

Ma'am? She'd graduated from college but was not a hundred and two.

She asked and answered herself, *Yes, I am okay. As far as I know. Yes.*

"Yes."

She could see another cop walking across the street to pick up the tire.

"You know you're lucky," the first cop was saying now. "We had this happen a few weeks ago, and the wheel flew across the street and hit another car in the windshield and killed the driver."

"Oh," she said, completely terrified now and not feeling lucky. Why was she one of two people to have this happen and the last

person killed someone. Maybe there was something wrong with this part of the road. Someone should do something. Organize a commission. And was she high? This was not lucky, it was random. Someone should do something about that too. Like her. She was never getting high and driving again. She was never driving again. She was never...

"So we're going to get a tow truck out—what, wait—the tow truck is on its way, you're lucky again, you didn't have to wait at all. So just sit tight, okay?"

"Okay," she thought. *What does that mean, sit tight? I'm high, not tight. Also, I am lucky because this guy must have no sense of smell.*

So what happens now?

"Ma'am," she heard the cop say—he had apparently not left her window. "You have to get out so they can tow you."

She suddenly had a literal image of herself being towed. Bumping along the highway on her ass. *Do you work out?* She would have to say, *That did not work out the way I thought it would.* She chuckled to herself.

"Ma'am, yes, it's good to laugh about it. Yes it is. It's your lucky day."

The tow truck arrived and lifted her little car up into the air like a prize fish. She climbed into the cab with the tow truck guy, who, for someone who saved people for a living looked seriously sinister. He was obese and seemed to be growing into the cab of his truck as if he were a snail growing into its shell. The cab smelled lived in, slept in, smoked in. Not unlike her car, but like cigarettes, not pot. She pulled out her phone; now she was safe. She should call someone. Her mother. Or at least text her. Oh God. She was still not ready to talk to her mother at all.

Because what was she going to say now? None of the things she was struggling over saying or not saying. She would have to talk about the car. How was she even going to get out of here, if the car was hanging like a dead fish from a tow truck? Not just out of here, Eureka, but out of here, California. Her childhood. Everything. How was she going to grow up?

She wanted to go to New York City. Why there? It was calling her. And she couldn't stop picking up. Her family was going to say, It's smelly and mean and dangerous and horrible. We took you there so you could see. But that was not what she'd seen. New York was like a giant You Can Do It to-do list. You can write a novel, make some art, amass a fortune. Why not you? What was she waiting for? They would never understand anyway. She should just leave the car here and walk to New York.

Now they were at the auto body shop and the tow truck guy got out, pulled up his pants (snails don't wear pants)—and disconnected her car. A mechanic with wavy gray-greenish hair and a shirt opened at the collar to reveal a surfer's tanned red-brown chest came out of the garage and walked over to her. She should stop staring at him.

"I can get to it first thing in the morning. Shouldn't be a problem. Do you have somewhere to spend the night?"

She did not have somewhere to spend the night. But there was a sleeping bag in the car. A sleeping bag and all the rest of her worldly possessions.

"I do," she lied.

He checked her out, but not that way, more like taking inventory: Head? Arms? Torso? Legs? Surfer dude, she knew the type. He was probably high. "You don't have a place, do you?"

She didn't answer. She could have a place. If she told her parents her car had broken down, they would come get her right away. And she could go home and sleep in her big four-poster bed with all the poofy pillows and stuffed animals she'd left at home to start this new life in college. They were so close. But she didn't want to do that. Help! Come rescue me, my car has broken down, and by the way, I want to move to New York. It was giving away too much capital right at the beginning. She had a negotiation ahead of her. She had to have emotional capital. Something in her emotional bank account.

"I can put the car over here near the shop and leave the lights on, but be careful," he said. She was surprised at his concern. "This isn't a great part of town to be in at night."

Wait, there was a bad part of town in Eureka? Well, of course there was. That would be where bad ideas come from. What did Archimedes say then? Shit! Shit!? When he had a bad idea. Like farting in the bathtub for example. Especially when you were in there with someone else. Of course that wasn't really an idea, but she had said, "Bad idea," and they had both burst out laughing. She cracked them up.

When she pictured New York City, she didn't necessarily picture a street or a place or a way of life. What she pictured was herself sitting on a park bench in Washington Square, watching people go by. She had actually done this once. With her mother, on a family trip. They had visited Times Square, and her parents had marveled and laughed and wondered how anybody could ever live there. But she and her mother had taken a walk from the hotel into the Village and Marilyn thought she had seen it, how people actually lived there, as opposed to the way tourists believed they did.

And the park had been a better show than any of the ones they'd seen in Times Square: lives went by. This pair of friends. This couple. This pair of gorgeous men. No one batted an eyelash (batting an eyelash—ow! Ow!).

Her mother said, New York is dangerous. And what Marilyn feared her mother meant was there were lots of black people there. This made Marilyn sick to her stomach. Like her what-to-do-in-a-car-accident list, Marilyn knew her mother had a things-to-avoid list: At the top of it was *People who are not like us*.

When she asked her mother what this meant, her mother would change the subject. She would say, "You'd be so far from us."

She could answer, "That's the point."

Didn't everyone know that kids needed to separate from their parents? Wasn't there a handbook? Why was her mother the only one who hadn't read it? She had to leave to become herself. Like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. Good thing for caterpillars they didn't have to drive across the country to change.

She ate at Burger King because it was easy and cheap and then

got back into her car with her phone and her sleeping bag to wait for the night to be over. Her phone was charged, which was a good thing, and she watched a few episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to pass the time. Buffy was kickass. Then she watched *Fame*, and after that *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. And she finished it off with *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, a terrible Whoopi Goldberg movie that featured New York. She could watch anything about New York and it would make her feel in love. Even several stupid decisions down the road toward doing what she wanted. Why didn't she just call them already? Wasn't her fault the wheel had fallen off. She hadn't done anything wrong. Actually, this was a good question. Why had the wheel fallen off? She would ask the mechanic in the morning.

She looked at her phone. It was one a.m. And she was huddled in a sleeping bag in the back of her car in a junk lot in Eureka. Just this was funny. She should text *her*. Marilyn could make her laugh. But she wasn't doing that now. She had suspended that. Maybe she was being optimistic. She had put her life there on hold until she had said goodbye to the old one. Cleared it. Subtracted it. Emptied her cache. But that wouldn't happen if she stayed here. If she stayed here, she couldn't have either. She would have to go.

Well, she would try to sleep now and make this experience go away. This was too much thinking. It would be easier to sleep if she still had some weed. But she didn't. Or maybe she did. She couldn't remember. She took one last look in front of her. Streetlights illuminated a line of junk cars and an expanse of pockmarked cement. She closed her eyes. From far in the distance it seemed like she heard a kind of scraping sound. Like someone dragging something. She thought, It must be a dream, close your eyes. But the sound got louder. Another sound, like something with a squeak in it, was added, followed again by something dragging, and then a banging. She opened her eyes. Where there had been no people at all moments before, there were now three people under the streetlight. One pushing a shopping cart overflowing with bags in one direction, the other two dragging away pieces of one of the cars

near hers. She froze. They seemed to be traveling in slow motion. Where were they going?

As they crossed her field of vision—the two going left to right and the one going right to left—she realized her shoulder was hurting, and she tried, as quietly as possible, to readjust where she was. She can't have made any noise, but the person with the cart suddenly noticed her, changed direction, and moved the cart straight at her. She reached forward and locked the doors. But her window was open a little bit, and she didn't have time to do anything about it.

She didn't have any money. She had her cell phone. If she lost that, she would be in big trouble. She pushed her cell phone down underneath her and waited to see what would happen. The cart person was moving slowly, like a murderer in a movie. She did not know what to expect, what to do. Just try to be friendly, Marilyn thought.

"Hello," the person said, pulling the cart up next to her window. "This is not a very good place to be sleeping. What are you doing sleeping here?"

"Good question," she said.

The other two kept dragging things.

"It's not a good place to sleep," the person with the cart insisted.

She wore a white hat that had a familiar orange and blue logo on it—it looked like an *N* and a *Y* and a *K*: NYK. Was that the New York basketball team? She beamed. The woman stared at her for beaming. "Got any food?"

Marilyn thought about the remaining fries in the bottom of the paper bag at her feet. She should offer them, but what would she have if she got hungry? If she decided to smoke another joint and got starving. She was glad she wasn't high right now.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"I'm sorry for you too," the woman said. "Why you sleeping here?"

"Good question," she said.

"What are you, some kind of professor? I know it's a good question, that's why I asked it."

"I'm sorry."

“Don’t be sorry, be yourself. You know. Be yourself.”

“Okay.”

“Marty! That’s like I told Marty! C’mere. I told you that too, didn’t I? You gotta be yourself, right?”

“What, Eva? What?” One of the draggers turned slightly without dropping his burden.

“Didn’t I tell you to be yourself?”

“Yes, you did.”

“A lot of good it did you, hah!”

Marty frowned. “Eva, Eva. Like a fucking fortune teller, that’s Eva. Fucking fortune teller. Can’t tell her own future, though.”

“So what’s your name,” Eva asked, resuming their conversation.

“Marilyn.” She should have another name at her fingertips, some kind of alias for moments like this and that time at the bar with flirting hunky man. Because really anybody could get her name out of her. *Fred* was all she could think of. Not very helpful. “My car broke down,” she said.

“Yes, I can see *that*,” Eva said and cackled. “I wasn’t sure whether *you* could see that. But I can see that.”

“I’m waiting for them to work on it tomorrow, so I can go home.” To Marilyn’s surprise, she stumbled over the word *home*. A tear ran down her cheek. She could feel it.

“Home is where they have to let you in, am I right, Fred?” Marilyn jumped, but Eva apparently meant the other dragging guy. “Well, not you, though, Fred, they don’t let you in, do they?”

Okay, now Marilyn was really crying. They would let her in. They would. She felt for her phone. She should just call right now.

She looked down at her phone. It was dead. Now she was stuck. Why were all her machines keeping her from going home? She pressed the home button a few times. (What if it could work like the slippers in *The Wizard of Oz*? Click three times in case of emergency.)

Eva was looking at something in her front seat. “You a runaway?” she asked. Marilyn almost laughed. Was there such a thing as a runner-to?

“I did that too, and it was a mistake. I left behind too many important things. So what I’m here to tell you is, if you leave, take all your important things.”

Marilyn tried to think of what these might be. She would bring her books. This was for sure. She would bring her earphones. This time she would bring the tiny stuffed owl on her bed at home—not all the poofy pillows, or the rest of the animals, but the owl. It hadn’t made the cut the last time when she’d gone off to college, but she’d missed it. That and the piece of glass shaped into a diamond that sat in the window of her parents’ living room. In case it was dark in New York, it would cast little bits of rainbow around the room on pretty days. It could reach up and pull the sunlight down into a dark apartment. And maybe it would retain a little California sunlight. A little extra. Eureka! Eureka! She did not know if her parents would let her, but she would try to take it anyway.

“You got anything good I can sell?” Eva asked.

She did not. Other than her dead phone, she had her clothes, a laptop that was dying. She supposed that could be sold. But everything of consequence she had written in college was on it. Not that she really felt a lot of it was of consequence. And she had to transfer it onto a backup disk. She had to convince her parents to get her a new computer. She—

It had been a very fast few years, not in terms of academics, but in terms of people. It had been so different—like discovering the secret language you thought you had invented was actually spoken by hundreds of other people—many of whom came from New York City—

“Well, I guess not,” Eva said.

Marilyn crossed her fingers.

“Well, go to sleep now, you’re going to need it. Come on, boys.” Marilyn thought she could hear the two men inhale deeply.

She took a deep breath too. “Good night,” Marilyn said. And to herself she said, “Good night, Eureka.”

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In the morning she would go—she would call her brother to come and pay for the car and to help her figure out what to say to her mother. That would mean that he would have to know, and he could always betray her and tell, the way he had when they were kids. But she guessed that there wasn't as much in it for him now. It wouldn't be an easy night, and there was a good chance she would wake up again to something scary. Maybe there would be a great scream and it would turn out to be Marty, in a fit of rage, coming at her with a broken-off windshield wiper. And then she would tell her parents that she was moving east to live with a girl. The one she wasn't texting. And Marilyn would tell her mother that when she got to New York, she would sit in that park they had gone to so long ago and feed the pigeons and watch the people go by. And when she did that, she would know for sure what she was doing there.

