Moose Crossing

On my way to Vermont in a Jeep Cherokee 4x4. Big thing. Cherry red. Eats up the road like licorice. There are no highways here, only two lanes winding through high green hills. Clusters of towns, colonial. Clean-looking churches. I’m after a woman I used to know said she lived in a small town called Rochester: post office, town hall, grocery, library. Too small for a restaurant. I feel tall, can see over guardrails, dividers. No wonder people drive these things like tanks, oblivious. At Route 89 I take a wrong turn, I’m heading south. “Moose Crossing” signs appear. I’ve never seen a moose; I’ve heard they’re partial to marshy land, swamps, fens. I scan the road, sweeping trees for the gleam that means water. Today’s as good a day as any for moose—humid, spitting something between rain and fog. New England spring.

The woman I want wears her black hair in braids. Her lips are full and wide, stained red like she’s just shoved in a handful of berries. Hips full and wide, too, something to grab on to. When she’s excited sweat lights up her top lip, beads her chest and gleams there. Our time together was the way body sounds, warm as that, substantial. I see her tucked behind that library desk piled high in rubber stamps and catalog cards. Inhaling the rich, peculiar smell of words read, reread. She’d turned down a bookstore job for this, she told me, urban, lucrative, cumulative.

I’m deeper into the woods now, a narrow twisty road, signs for ponds here, ponds there, seeing lots of water. Slow down, keep my eyes peeled for dark lumbering shapes. I’ve heard you don’t particularly want to encounter moose. Kind of like that old joke about bears—if you come upon scat with bits of berries and evergreen, it’s a black bear, no worries; if it smells of perfume and is dotted with remains of bells, it’s a grizzly. The woman I want laughs from her belly when she comes, long and loud. Wouldn’t tell me what was so funny, just that it wasn’t me. I’m not convinced. If I were a moose I’d probably be hiding out on a day like this, too, especially from the likes of me, clumsy in an overgrown-adolescent car, all testosterone and empty threat. I’m in New Hampshire now, heading toward someplace called Keene. Just one moose and I’ll turn around, drive back to her. Just give me one body assembling itself in front of my eyes, irrefutable.