

The Denial of Peter: “Wish You Were Here”

The sound of ice and frozen drifts of snow beneath their tires drowned out the music on the radio. It was cold, far colder than the north-easterly town was accustomed to, frozen-nostril cold. There was no slush or puddles of water on the road; everything was stiff, rigid, especially when they tried to get their '75 Nova started that morning. As they drove down Highway 132 later that day, little could be heard above the sound of the tires and ice beneath their vehicle.

The road was nearly deserted and visibility was limited at best. The heater in the car worked less than adequately, leaving the two of them to resort to scratching at the frost on the windows with their fingernails, both of them irritated by the sound the other made. Passing them by, almost completely unnoticed, was an array of trees and jutting rocks, isolated cabins and disjointed lakes. The road rarely went straight; it seemed, rather, to double back upon itself, curve upon curve going nowhere beyond here . . . and there.

At one point, Peter turned to his wife and asked, “Do you remember . . .? Do you remember when we used to drive this stretch of road on our way back home from university?” He recalled those days with an odd, almost ambivalent, pleasure. For years they had driven this stretch of highway—a modern day pilgrimage for them and other university students who swore they’d never live in that town again, but who liked the feeling of coming home nonetheless. On this particular pilgrimage, it was as if his wife had not even heard his question, as if it didn’t really concern her or register above the noise of tires and ice.

Between them, just above the centre console, were the radio controls. Their hands met there from time to time, more often than not attempting to adjust the volume accordingly. At this particular moment, in between abbreviated conversations, both were having a difficult time distinguishing the song itself from the surrounding noise. They were also having difficulty distinguishing the road from the shoulder. As he turned up the volume, certain words could be made out, “. . . two lost souls swimming in a fish bowl year after year . . . what have we found?”¹ He glanced over at her, wondering if she was listening, wondering if she knew the next line. From what he could tell, she may have and probably did, but she happened to be looking in the other direction.

In the moments that followed, as if out of nothing, almost *ex nihilo*, she glanced over at Peter and asked him, “I wonder what it will be like when we get there.” There were certain mystic overtones to the question itself—overtones that made it difficult for Peter to respond. It was as if the question unravelled itself.

“I’m not sure,” he said, as the passenger side of the vehicle again flirted with the shoulder of the road. “I’m not sure.”

For hours, they travelled from here to there. With tiring eyes, Peter constantly strained to see what might lie beyond the next bend. The day was growing dim; they were growing weary; and their conversation was strained.

In the end, it all happened so fast; there was little he could do. At the same time, it all seemed to take so long, each rotation of the car seeming to last beyond calculable measure. Seven times, the car spun around after the initial impact; seven times, he saw things pass them by in reverse and then in fast-forward. Before he had even realized it was there, a deer had darted

¹ Pink Floyd, “Wish You Were Here,” *Wish You Were Here*, 1975.

across the highway. Slamming on the brakes, Peter managed to clip only the hind leg of the deer, and gently at that, but the passenger side of the vehicle caught the shoulder of the road. The impact with the deer seemed somewhat insignificant in the scope of things, particularly as their vehicle spun some three hundred feet down the road. It could have been anything that caused them to spin out of control; it could have been anything, perhaps even a rooster's crow.

For only but a moment, the car rested where it had come to a complete stop. Without checking for any damage or even stepping out of the vehicle, Peter placed the car in gear again. Perhaps he was scared of what he might find, what damage had been done. No words passed between the two of them; there were no sighs of relief or tears of any kind, at least not until they were moving again. And then, the two of them wept bitterly.

For the first time on that pilgrimage, it was quiet. The plows must have been there before, moments too late. With tears in their eyes, they turned to each other and said, in the same instant, "How I wish you were here. I wish you were here." And for the first time, their hands touched.