The End Of

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What keeps Maria Wyeth playing? Or why, when Camus decided the only philosophical question worth pondering was whether or not to kill oneself, did he not? or did he just not get the chance? Might he have, were it not for the accident?

I don’t now remember in which book I found this clipping, a little square of newspaper I’ve kept since, that reads,

A teen-age girl was killed on Thursday afternoon when the car she was driving collided head-on with a car driven by her twin brother here in central Minnesota. The crash happened on a slippery road a half-mile from their home.
The girl was identified as Jacqueline Kern, 17. Her twin, Jesse, was listed in fair condition today. What, then, did Jesse do? When he woke up in the hospital, was told he killed his twin, what compels one to carry on after the world has been destroyed? What compels those around me, those older than I, who knew a different world, to keep on playing, long after the board had been so violently upset? These are not questions I’m equipped to answer, hardly even to put forth.

And anyway, their case is not my case, my world was never destroyed, my world was always destroyed. My fucking dad was always saying how the world wasn’t much different these days, people were about the same, all still worried about their little livelihoods, their little ambitions, selfish & paranoid. Then at other times he’d lament how bad I, we, the young’ns, had it, “I don’t know how things are gonna turn out for y’all, I don’t envy you.” How indeed would we make it in this world, though he was making it just fine, in the same world. A sick sort of pleasure it
seemed he got out of questioning how we’d get along in this—not hellscape, rather drabscape—perhaps taking solace that at least he was a little closer to death, fewer stresses left for him in this world. And he had all the world he wanted, ever wanted, and I guess for him, the world’s loss was his gain, so how could he complain?

I guess I bother because, well, there’s my mom to worry about. And maybe something will come along for me, and make the world an agreeable place, as I’m told used to happen.

My name is Travis Reeves. I am twenty-three, so a member of that easiest generation to identify (though perhaps not to name) the kids born after all the shit hit the fan. Call us Generation A, Ground Zero, the post-apocalyptics. Whatever, I am one of the bunch of souls that appeared right after the birth control and condoms ran out, soon after the Second Fall, as some call it. Born of those who were left, all cranking out babies like they were good Mormons.
And they were, mostly, Mormons, like my mom. Most preppers were eccentrics, outliers in their communities, and oh too happy to be proven right. But Mormons had a built-in culture of TEOTWAWKI preparation, and so survived exceptionally well.

TEOTWAWKI: The End Of The World As We Know It. Or, for most people now, the world as they knew it.

When the world ended, my dad joined a group of crustpunks headed west. Many joined the crustpunks out of romantic sentiment, those who had always dreamed of abandoning all, they no longer had anything to abandon, and so hit the road. Others joined out of necessity, they had no other options, no surviving friends nor family.

My father joined a group of crustpunks for another romantic reason, to find his ex, soon my mother. This cliche abounded post-apocalypse, sudden reorganization of priorities prompted many to set out on the generally fruitless task of finding their lost loves. Perhaps for my father there was also the
motivation that, where he was going, there would be people who were ably weathering TEOTWAHKI.

And so I was born at Smith Mesa, Utah, a place my mom had told him about it when they were dating, her family’s plan for The End. She had always stowed nearby her GOOD bag, short, I’m told of course, for Get Out Of Dodge. The bag contained various items: maps, non-perishables, etc., which would, in case of emergency, take her toward a particular spot in Zion National Park, where she would find what remained of her extended family, and there she would assume her assigned position, that of goat-herder.

And sure enough, my father found her there.

I just, don’t believe it anymore. The LDS stuff. I don’t really think any/many do, these days, but I also can’t believe pretending is worth it, or will earn me any reward. I’m tired of pretending this planet is meaningful at all, that it is tending toward anything except more destruction. Perhaps someone had an answer at some point, but if the answer’s not
compelling enough ... to change people ... compel them to change ... then what’s this all about? I’m just supposed to trust this would work?

Fuck that.
I left six years ago, just as it began to warm up that year, knowing then it would be a while before the elements on their own power would conspire towards my death. As it turned out I was painfully ill-equipped to leave, to look after myself and to sojourn in this land.

Christians talk about humanity as exiles and sojourners on the earth. Now, it seems, we have been exiled from our exile.
To me, it seems absurd that the young privileged indigent (the crustpunks) & the Mormon faithful became the two most highly-respected factions in North America when it all went to shit. They were well-equipped to live in a world that had never been that likely to occur. It could just have easily gone on the way it had been wont to do, and they would have persevered in their fashions on the specious fringes of the world. Their only great quality is that of impeccable luck.

(Well, not impeccable, I guess, for the LDS, as it seems that Jesus Christ has seen fit to tarry in heaven, even twenty-five years after the world’s end.)
The other preppers, often insane, exceptionally over-eager in terms of firepower, and all way-out-to-far-right-wing-lunch, these I had to look out for. And of course they are still around, still inexplicably stocked with ammunition, and will still kill you outright.

These tend to live on huge tracts of land, which either they owned before the Fall or declared for themselves as soon as the opportunity presented itself. These territories are hard to spot, and so hard to avoid, you've got to keep an eye out when you're not on the road. It's too bad, now with nothing to be done, that in unknown lands you've got to keep your eyes fixed straight ahead, lest some bearded coot looks up in his deer stand from his tattered copy of *The Fountainhead* and sees you ogling his land, worries you might like to settle down there, and so decides to shoot you in the head. Now with all the time to survey the land, it is of vital importance that you do not.
You can meditate, you know, while you’re walking. I fix my eyes on the horizon, if one presents itself, and slow down my breathing best I can. My eyes will glaze over a bit, and I’ll start taking inventory of my body, how the crown of my head feels, the lines around my eyes, always tense from squinting. I’ll go down the back of my neck, my shoulders, the weight of my pack. My lower back, my thighs, my calves, my ragged feet.

This does not so much accomplish relief for these members, but, having taken inventory of them, they are less powerful to distract me from my practice. When I am distracted, I tend to two replies: I notice the intruder, and bring my attention back to my breath, or,
if I am lucky, I do not notice, and so continue to float along in bliss, breathing, letting my mind ravel and unravel itself as it will.

I don't really know what all this accomplishes, but I believe I enjoy the effect.

In these pages I try to set down something that might instruct, move, or delight an other. Know that these thoughts and scenes I may relay, they are the intruders, and my life has been, in these past six years, mostly one of walking, up and down the earth, and to and fro in it, and it is there above all else that I have found any delight.
I like also to read when I'm walking, and I go through books quickly this way. I carry one book at a time, excepting my notebook, and I tend toward smaller volumes to cut down on weight. These I can finish about one a day. I pick them up and drop them off at libraries, usually, as these tend to hold kindred spirits.

Near my home in Utah, there was an old woman, a librarian, she had spent her life as a librarian, and was also perhaps the only Quaker in Utah. Her routine was not so greatly upset by TEOTWAWKI that she abandoned library. Upon the computers all shitting the collective bed, Agatha didn’t miss a beat, simply pulled out from storage all the old card catalogs.
and proceeded as usual, as if she were actually relieved for this return to a simpler age. Perhaps this reaction is not so hard to understand.

Agatha had a short dark bob & bangs, in case you wondered.

When I was little, both my parents made me read, I don’t know from where this urgency came. My father had been trying to write before everything, he hadn’t written much, but a little, some stories, some memoir, some poetry, a little of everything that all together amounted to very little. My mother, she read too, different books than my father, less literary pretension in her reading. Sometimes one of them would convince the other to read a book they’d just finished, and they’d give it their honest go. They were in love, and neither wanted to betray the other, letting them know they had missed their mark in recommending something they thought the other might like.

My mother’s urging me to read, despite Jesus
Christ’s soon return, came from her general contempt for the dumb, which she shared with my father, and though she never wrote, she made me keep a notebook, sometimes giving me specific prompts, other times just assigning me to fill a page. To subvert this task I for a little while experimented with enlarging my handwriting, so as to fill more space with fewer words. But it went too far, I began stretching out Ws into four long slanted lines, pulled so far and to such an extreme tilt that a capital W could fill about two inches of space on the line. My mother scolded me, and my penmanship returned to normal. Now these days, I write slow and small, not because there is a shortage of paper, but to keep my bag as light as I can.

My father never read my notebooks but at times he assigned my reading. More than once he went off on a loud but harmless tirade when I returned from Agatha’s library and reported she did not have such-and-such a book I was told to retrieve. For him I read all seven of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and much of Lewis Carroll. He had me memorize *The Jabberwocky*,
for seemingly no reason except that he as a boy had memorized it of his own volition, and believing himself a fine way to be, thought he might be able to form another in his image. Perhaps also he felt guilty for me, for bringing a child into a lost world, floating, anchorless, without structure or meaning or history. The only legacy he could give me was that there was a something before, but now only a nothing remained.

I guess I consider myself a fine way to be as well, at least at times I can believe this. I admit I love to read.

“He accepted books as his inheritance and spent a lifetime assaying the bequest.” Perhaps what books I find are indeed my only fortune, but in this world I find myself, of what use am I, fortunate or not?
The world is not, of course, entirely desolate. While, twenty-five years later, the LDS still live in and around Smith Mesa, they are no longer the majority of those surviving and doing alright. Perhaps they never really were the majority, though I know not who to trust to answer that question. My people are still in those days, mentally, of having just exited the ark, or perhaps the analogy better fits this way: the waters have receded, the ark has come to rest on Ararat, but Noah and his descendants refuse to leave.

But by now the world has fallen into a routine, and does indeed run itself. Not, as I imagine, and I am told, as it did before, yet relentless, it rights itself. This
seems a rule I can rest on confidently. We—I and the rest of the world, as I hope to identify in that We—have fallen in step with our lot. A few cars have been coaxed to run again. A few others ride horses, though difficult they are to care for.

Most I encounter live still in the homes they had kept before. At first, a few took the opportunity they’d apparently been on the edge of their seats for, to supplant the now-corpse residents of the rich neighborhoods and to make a home for themselves among the trappings of old wealth. But these seem to be an exception, and anyway, I avoid these folks. Most stay, it is not easy to move, and besides, these empty houses are often rank of death, even long after the bodies have been buried. Even if a mansion were fit to live in, they are morbid, constant reminders, not only of the Fall but the cause, and it seems many just want to feel safe at home again (though this is impossible).
I have found myself, writing. Constantly I question what the book to write is, now, the novel birthed by the drabscape ... Where does it all go now? Is there any teleology, any prescribed next step? Or, if not, shall we start over myth-making? And shall we ape old myths, or instead tell entirely new kinds of stories, stories about how the world is now?

There is nothing now.

A myth of these days: Ajax’s whole family dies, and all his friends, he leaves and trudges west, for months then years, he encounters almost no one of consequence, then dies eventually, somewhere, only
slightly fresher than the corpses that surround him. Indeed, future archaeologists, if ever, will make no distinction between his body & all the rest.

Or, a second myth, with a second hero: Hektor. His whole family dies, and all his friends. He remains in his home, gardens a small crop of vegetables, lives out his days in the same town as he might have anyways, except without company (as he might have anyway), and eventually he dies. Again, carbon-dating will provide no distinction between he and the rest of the town's dead, if even ever they notice him, if there is even ever anyone to notice.

Here are our legends.
Was there ever really a better world? If no, alas, a hard and dreary, gruesome life. And if yes, alas, a hard and dreary, gruesome life, all the more so, for once, there was a world, and never to be retrieved.
I mentioned before how my father had fallen in with a tribe of crustpunks right after the Fall. I’ve pieced together a good amount of the story, I believe. An OG crustpunk—this white guy called Omar, tall, with tattoos of ranging quality patchworking his body, and his dog, a huge brindle mastiff with paws the size of grapefruit—lead the crew. The other members included:

- a guy-and-girl couple, recently together and bickering constantly;
- a short curly-haired ginger who had christened himself “Bones,” introducing himself always, “call me Bones,” sounding as much like a plea as a bit of information. Bones leaned in immediately to the crustpunk style. He had
tried adjust & weather his outfit appropriately, and haphazardly acquired new tattoos whenever the opportunity presented itself;

- and a handful of others that blend together in the stories I've been told.

There are various disjointed tales from this period, but I guess the most important, to my life at least, was that at some point Andy Dick joined the troupe.

Andy Dick, before the Fall, had been, I’m told, an actor and comedian infamous for doing the most absurd and awful things, a debauchee and lech who got sober on occasion, the way you’d imagine William S. Burroughs going off to “take a cure.” Then, when his health had stabilized a bit, off again on a spree.

For my father and the group, having Andy around was a mixed blessing. He could offend with an efficiency that could only be called finesse, and to the extent that the immediate post-apocalypse resembled the Wild West, Andy inspired far more standoffs than he mollified. Especially if the offended didn’t know who Andy was, it often took much explaining, shouting at Andy to shut up, and assurance to the
offended party that he truly did not know any better.  

I guess they kept him around for the thrill. It set them apart, they were the gang that had Andy Dick. A little bit of fame in a world entirely cut off from the structures fame requires. While Omar likely relished this notoriety in secret, he generally treated Andy like shit. He knew Andy would never be able to lead the group on his own, but as Omar’s friend would be assumed to be some sort of co-leader. So to avoid this suspicion, Omar just spurned him outright. Soon Andy and my dad became fast friends, such that when my father took his leave from the crustpunks, Andy Dick went along with him. My father always stressed, “just friends.” This is probably true, but while I was growing up Andy took almost every opportunity, especially at the most solemn of moments, to lean over and whisper, “I used to blow your dad, ya know.”

Oddly, I suppose, I learned to call Andy Dick “Andy Dick,” though every other adult in my life growing up was “Brother” or “Sister” followed by their
first or last name. But Andy Dick was always Andy Dick for me, as a child and still today, all I have ever called him. All anyone ever calls him, really, except in those instances when anyone else would call their child by their full name, sternly, to chide or warn, then he is only called “Andrew.”

In The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas Gertrude Stein only ever calls herself, with Alice’s voice, “Gertrude Stein.” For this cause, I tended to conflate their personalities, or rather, I projected Andy Dick’s onto Gertrude Stein’s. Though of course my reading was grossly irregular, it was how I learned read her, as a lovable goof, a troublesome uncle-aunt, a problematic friend. Always into something or other, always reforming, always backsliding.

Note: It is fun, when it is not depressing, to note that my reading is perhaps the most popular, as I haven’t yet met anyone else who has read The Autobiography, although Susie has read Tender Buttons and Three Lives and Stanzas in Meditation.
I think he was just so hopped up on being with my mom, my dad was, he’d had so much invested in the idea of her, that he could never betray the slightest glimpse of unhappiness, living around a bunch of Mormons, sadly bereft of any vices, or barely even hobbies, in a gruesomely boring routine, one that had no meaning to him the way it did to the rest, signified no future glory nor any hope at all.

And he was disallowed to befriend the doubters, those few rebellious residents of the valley, who were tolerated but looked down upon, who did the bare minimum not to be exiled but clearly did not believe, nor care, and simply had nowhere else to go, or
be, and they’d time their myriad repentances to the elders in just such a way that the dumber of the pious even believed that they had, this time, come around.

These cutters-up had a few friends in those of the community who were true believers. Either they’d grown up together, or they just enjoyed each other’s company, or whatever, these friendships were approved of, because the faithful were good witnesses to the black sheep. Likely, these friends were just as drunk some evenings as the rabble-rousers, but they were also a little more willing to follow the rules, to play by them, and to receive the myriad benefits that went along with being a golden son.

My dad, however, could not join their poker nights or whatever-have-you, because my mother was devout as they come, and their union enough of an outlier, allowed by the rules but not necessarily encouraged, and she could permit no other exceptions. And so, my parents were model citizens, and I was of-course raised a Mormon, and I prayed often for my dear lost father.
Andy Dick, well, he was usually devout, and when he was not he went on benders, not with the LDS blackguards, whom he declared, “total fucking rookies” and “faggots,” but off my himself, or, very rarely, right in the middle of camp. My dad would, on these benders, go “talk some sense into Andy Dick” but from the stories Andy Dick tells me, the crazy shit they get up to, never really past or present tense, I imagine some of these must be recent, that my dad is just off to hang out with Andy Dick, have some fun without risking the family’s reputation.

In addition to Andy Dick’s absurd war stories, I hear that my dad’s dick is “fucking enormous,” that he has sucked it (though he claims to have sucked many dicks, including my mother’s, my uncle Travis’s, various elders in the valley’s, Mitt Romney’s—though Romney died long before Andy or my Dad got to Utah—and his own, as a much younger man).

During his benders Andy Dick always produced cigarettes from nowhere, an impressive trick not only because no one had a clue where he might
store them, but because cigarettes had been something like a prison currency right after the world ended, and no one had seen one in years, except Andy Dick's magic cigarettes-from-the-ether.

Andy Dick would tell me about the days on the road, “See, you always had to orchestrate these elaborate three-way trades. It was ridiculous. I give you a cigarette, you suck his dick, he gives me a chicken. It was crazy! It would have all been so much easier if the horny chicken farmer smoked.” If I asked why he didn’t just suck the farmer’s dick himself, he’d go off on rants about how in Nazi Germany people would be trucking whole wheelbarrows of money just to buy a little bread, or how a million Zimbabwean dollars used to be worth about twenty American cents, and these rants always ended with the clarification, if he remembered how he got there, that his sucking the smoker’s and the chicken farmer’s dicks was what economists called a “sunk cost.”
My parents were, at least in their way, lucky. Generally the quests to regain loves lost, in that the most thrilling of times (reportedly), ended in dismay. The beloved was usually dead or missing (dead). Or alive and well and living, with their spouse. Or, just not interested in rekindling a fling that the other had misremembered as profound.

My parents never spoke of it, but I believe my mother must have been married previously, and her husband must have died, either before the disasters or during. They never even hinted as much, but the machinations of LDS marriage suggest such an arrangement for any marriage of a believer and an
unbeliever to be sanctioned. It seems impossible she would have married an unbeliever, especially with the End of Days at hand, unless she had already been sealed in the Temple to another, a forever-spouse.

I do know she was in Nevada when everything happened. She made it to Smith Mesa, it took her a few weeks, and she found my grandmother there. Not my grandfather—he was killed by some roving looter soon after the disasters. My Uncle Travis, my mother’s oldest brother, was given charge of the little tribe, composed of my grandfather’s descendants. Nearby our encampment, other family, great-uncles and their broods, cousins of every variety resided.

And of course it was far more than just our extended family. Smith Mesa was, still is, near-packed with the LDS faithful, and backsliders who came looking for food and shelter, any solace, and also many converts, brought along with those who had been out on missions and had been able to make it back.
I think of them often, those still there. All a little miffed: Come Lord Jesus, come already, end it all, what the fuck’s this been about?
Before the Fall, you know, there were all these books and TV shows about the apocalypse.

Now, years later, my whole life, all anyone has talked about is “making a new world.” I think what fouls them up is the problem that there’s already a world, right down to the roads & stop signs, all still there.

Or was this too what they were scrambling about before it all, to make a world where there was one already. How are we to know when to stop? When all who came before found something, made something.

I guess there’s something to find again. Maybe
that was the whole point of the blow-up.

I unfortunately do not know how to find, nor how to treat the myriad found objects. The ten thousand things are, as ever have been, totally fucking inscrutable.
There is the distinct possibility, I suppose, that this is hell. But no angels have come to bring to us the gospel, so no Mormon hell, at least.
Outside Chicago, when I got to Chicago, I met Susie. She let me read some recent work, and I tracked down some of her earlier stuff in bookstores and libraries. The work before the Fall seemed about the same—structure, style, subject (I guessed)—as the recent work. I asked after this.

Of course, to her, it had all evolved considerably, grown, matured, doubled back, spoke for the past, the past spoke for now; but she understood my question. “Writing,” she said, “is vital material.” She stopped and looked away for a long while, then continued, “The writing has always, the work has,” she paused again. “It will look after itself.”
She lived in the same little apartment she had lived in for years before the Fall. She’d been silently and reasonable preparing for some catastrophic event, had saved away water and various non-perishables. Up on a wall there was mounted a dust-covered hatchet. “Useless,” she told me, “but I guess I knew that when I bought it. It's just fun to have around.”

She had stacks of books in every room, and boxes of books lining the living room. She’d been meaning to sell the boxed books for a while, but never got around to it, and then the world ended, and she’s been meaning to unpack them again.

Two doors propped up on cinder blocks make her long desk, it spans a wall of her living room. Stacks and stacks of pages line the edge of the desk against the wall, type-written, her work since the world was destroyed.

Susie seemed generally unfazed, both by the light fame she had been afforded by publication (all gone now), and by the literal fucking apocalypse.
Another time she sighed, “It looks after itself. And I after myself.”

I have a hard time with this writing-of-abstraction that Susie deals in, perhaps because I am insufferable, but what is there to abstract from? Or who to rebel/react against? There is nothing. I don’t know why I write.

I write in notebooks. Then, to save space I go back and rip out certain pages and save these, discarding the rest. Susie has read some of my writing. She seems to like it. She is kind, in any case, but I fear she does not know, and I cannot admit, that I am without a method, or technique, or theory whatsoever.

One morning I awoke (she let me stay awhile in her guest bedroom), and went into the living room, where sat my notebook on the coffee table. I had given it to her to read, trying not to seem too desperate, I’m sure I failed. On the notebook lay a note that read, in her perfect cursive,
Your sense of a story is conventional. That’s not at all a “bad” thing – but we do need to find new ways of saying in order to say new things. You might find yourself tending more in that direction in the future (if there is one).

I’ve read some, and I guess I have a style, just like I guess I have an accent, but it isn’t measured or thought-out (informed?). I belong (I guess obviously, she must appreciate) to no school of writers. I am alone in this world; she is my closest peer. How could I ever know what is right, which thread to follow, or if any of this deserves my pains anyway?

The whole place went to shit anyway, writing didn’t save it, nor poetry nor painting, nothing saved it. The world was not saved.

So I can have no faith, in what this (writing) does, or in what it once did. But Susie, at least, seems trustworthy. She has been critical enough at times that I have come to trust her. And most importantly, she doesn’t seem to care.
Perhaps if I set up shop like her, some place, I could write *books*, like her. I could stay in a place that might carry my work for me (I mean literally). I’m sure if I worked at it I could scavenge or buy an old typewriter. I could write a second book, because I could finish this one. Perhaps, for now, all I can do is keep pasting and tying pages and scraps together, can carry this around ... or leave the lot of them with Susie?

I really can’t think about that right now.
There’s nothing to do, and so there’s no “should.” Well perhaps. I had this sentence in my head, I stopped to write it, now ...

Living as a mendicant, a vagrant, there’s no prescribed check-out day from anywhere. You never know when to go ... so you’ve got to leave the second you suspect you should. Or you’ll be stuck again, guaranteed.
I didn’t know how to leave Susie. I know she cared for me, a little, in her way, but never exuberantly, never adopted me as I hoped she might.

So I guess I knew, I just wanted to leave differently, wanted hugs and tears, sage wisdom, hysterics. She handed me a book, but I couldn’t tell if the gift was premeditated or just near at hand, and she wished me luck on my way.

I’d spent so much time imagining the time we could have, the book I could write about her, but all told we spent so little time together, I could maybe chapter a book, and would anyone, even Susie (especially Susie), care?
I don’t know what to believe, that will make my writing real, if ever I can puncture literature, or if it got cauterized, is all stuck back before the Fall. So one must start again? How many people were reading Ovid? How to make a myth? Or whatever are my myths? And how could memoir, if we can call these journals, ever suffice to answer?

How to proceed? To mythologize for ourselves. Are we bound by any poetic structure? No, we have none. Are we bound by shared ambitions or histories? What ambition could we have, what history could we have left? Are we bound simply by having been left here, together, the refuse of the world? Perhaps this is all that binds us.
I don’t usually get to write in transit, I have to stop and pull out my notebook and pen. I guess that makes sense, doesn’t need saying, except that right now I’m on a bus, and the fields are passing quickly by, and most everyone is asleep. I’m seated near the back, on a bench of my own, heading west. The seat's gray plastic faux leather is ripped and hard, curling, and beneath is dark and dirty, tarred with smoke. It smells like pot, and the foam rubber is burnt in a few places, where someone fell asleep with something still burning.

I’ve met several crews with buses like this, this isn’t the first time I’ve ridden one, though I’ve never joined up with any for longer than a couple of days. I
have my given reasons for this: that groups are bigger targets, or, if there is nowhere to be, what’s the point of getting there quickly? Or myriad other reasons, never the truth, that I’ve never been asked to stick around, never felt welcome to. These crews are jealous, insular types, they don’t want other people around, except as sometimes-passengers, as audience. Yes, that’s why I’m ever brought along.

I had been warned about these crews as a kid, alarmist-type adults spoke often of their evils. Rapists, thieves, drug addicts, that’s what I was told. It doesn’t appear to be the case.

One guy in this crew has his knuckles tattooed, they read, “SEND HELP.” I wonder if that will work.

In the past I’ve always left with them whatever book I’d just finished. A gesture, really, I don’t expect they read them. But perhaps they can trade them somewhere down the line. And besides, I almost never have anything to smoke or drink, so it’s just about all I’ve got.
The bus crews also, I learned, act as something of a mail service, though they are not particularly trustworthy, and certainly not prompt. We are headed southeast, they picked me up outside of Chicago yesterday evening. Two rows ahead of me is their package, a runaway, she left her family in Montana, and paid her bus fare with supplies she'd stolen from her father.

I got to talk to her a little last night, Esther. Her father had been a prepper, her mother had been a survivor nearby, a young girl at the time, had married him out of necessity, she would have died without some protector. Esther realized, I guess years ago, that her father was not the benevolent king he demanded his family consider him. She tried to bring her mother along, but the woman was too afraid. Finally Esther was forced to give up on saving her mother, and left.

She's headed to Asheville, North Carolina. That's where her mother's parents were from, originally, and she'd heard her mother talking about
visiting North Carolina as a child, to her it sounded like paradise. To hear her tell it, I think it may be.

She just woke up again, she hasn’t slept for more than thirty minutes at a time, that I’ve seen. She starts awake, panting, her eyes dart around, her hands still clutching the lever-action rifle she sleeps wrapped around.

She looked back at me. I guess she looked everywhere, she scans the entire bus every time she wakes. But she did look at me.
I dreamt: it's a party, we're throwing it, back home. We're all sitting at tables that face in around a rectangular dance floor. I make some motion, a wink or a head jerk to Mel, she's seated at the opposite side. My mother's furious. Mel comes around, I tell her how lovely she is. She's dressed in some kind of drag, but still presents as female, or has circled back around to female. She is lovely. My mother's seething. I ask Mel if she'd like to dance. We dance, sillily, the music changes. A show or skit is starting. I lose Mel?
Reportedly:

Things get better,

People would like you to be yourself,

All life is sacred,

Communication is key,

America ran on Dunkin,

Everything will be OK,

We’re all in this together,

God’s got it.
I have tried writing about Mel before, it’s harder writing than all the rest. I love her. Writing about Mel—I sometimes wonder, hope, if all I’ve done is written for Mel—is like playing with two magnets, trying to push together the ends that repel each other. There is this magic invisible blister that disenjoins them from meeting, a maddening field of mystical resistance.

I think that if I could write about her …

I read some of Montaigne at Susie’s, there was a line, “All passions that allow themselves to be savored and digested are only mediocre.” With these words I will justify my inability. But how I wish she could,
would, read this, and I could read her writing, and I could hold her hand.

I know I am a bastard, but I hope she doesn’t get married. And I am afraid to return, to try to love her. Because what if I don’t?
The bus crew stopped off in a little town to eat. I imagine this is where we will part ways. Each town seems uniquely proud of their diner, but these appear in every town with any sign of life. Luckily we got there in time for lunch hours. Right after there was a town meeting scheduled, so we ate quickly and dispersed to make room for the residents, and the diner quickly converted into town hall.

The crew will spend at least the night, because this is not a temperance town, and one of the guys has heard stories about the bar here, which is of course just the diner, in a few hours.
I have found a nice spot, a park with a working fountain, to sit and write in. When the meeting is over I will go see if the library is reopened, and grab another book. Esther asked an older lady if she could stay for the meeting. She seems fascinated by everything.

*Whatcha Think*

Should I keep being myself because I am a fine way to be, or is being (Oneself) an intrinsic good and Either way, when will it feel like it

*Hanging Out Inside the Trojan Horse*

Inside it's dark & smells like shit and piss, and sweat, and vomit once, rotting bread

One, a boy barely, lies against the walled belly of the beast cooing quiet coughs & pinched for every sound
Heroes, each, no one's leaving the horse at least til someone dies that boy perhaps, thinks Ajax

& though Poseidon wills the beast inside no one's gotten 'round to bring it in & now, it smells like shit.
The librarian helped me find *In the American Grain*, which Susie always mentioned, but could not ever find her copy of.

It is spooky, the resemblance between every librarian I have ever met, as if Agnes has followed me across America, and continues to aid me in my quest to read all the books I must. These (usually) women are always kind, patient, and politely interested in my book searches, though once I have found something to take with me they return to their desks, done with me, not rudely, but they have more pressing matters to get back to. Sometimes shelving, usually the reading from which I interrupted them.
I imagine, if anyone is secretly running/taking care of the world, it is the librarians.

Esther came in to the library, she smiled my way, then found for herself a large book of photography, and has been sitting and flipping slowly through it for about an hour, her rifle resting against the table beside her.

Thinking of Mel again. A relationship feels like it can be measured as distance, as land, acres. A race that is run, and then walked, and run again. Don’t stop, or when you start again, you will have to run alone, until perhaps you find another.

Love, as it goes, is often poor enough that it could never start where it sits. Most time spent in a relationship is comprised of just sitting and waiting to love again. For when love is ready, to begin again, we hope to love her again, and not another. We keep love on the burner. Perhaps this is okay.

I dreamt: my brother sits with me in the empty
bus. He confides in me that he has wooed Mel. I am all
congratulations, so happy for him.

Then slowly I realize this is treachery, I
compare dates and accuse him of every evil. Angry, I
leave, spitting and cursing his name.

(It came out, at some point, he told me they
had sex.)

Getting off the bus, Mel comes past. I ask her
to stop, she knows something’s wrong. I tell her I love
her, I hug her and try to explain

“Did he say we had sex? We didn’t!” I hush her
and try to say I forgive her. I try to apologize, for hating
her, even for a moment.

We hold hands and walk a bit, the bus, now
full, rolls by past us.

Note/Joke: Mister Missed Her
When I got back to the diner-now-bar, I noticed all the tables and chairs had been rearranged against the walls. One corner of the room held a small pile of packs and jackets. I left mine there as well. The small window between the kitchen and main area, where the waiters had grabbed customers’ meals during the day, was now converted into the bar. Some cups of cherry wine sat on the left of the counter, cups of mead on the right. A big liquid dispenser, those kind that read “Culligan” on the side, full of beer sat next to the bar, and on the wall behind it, empty glasses hung from pegs. I suspected some of the glasses might be certain regular’s special cups. I smelled whiskey a few times during the night, I
imagined you had to talk with the guy on the other side of the bar to arrange a glass. I grabbed some cherry wine and looked around.

The room was hazy, filled with pot smoke, there were joints being lazily passed all around. Every so often someone would hand me one, and I’d take a polite puff, and hand it to someone else. The source of these was one older guy sitting at a table, talking with some friends. A huge pile of ground weed sat in the middle of their table, and an old phonebook, many of the pages already torn out, lay beside him.

Throughout their conversation, and all night, the man slowly and absentmindedly tore pages into small strips, creased the paper, and sprinkled in some weed. Then, in one quick, expert motion, he’d lick and roll the paper, all of a sudden holding a perfect joint, identical to the last. He’d pick up the table’s candle and light the joint, take a puff, and then grab the attention of whoever was closest to the table at the moment, handing them the burning joint and starting on the next.
Though everyone was smoking, the man didn’t seem particularly important. Even at his table, he and the others mostly looked at and listened to the man sitting diagonal to him. No one that I saw ever thanked him for the weed, or really acknowledged him at all, except when he got their attention to hand them a joint.

The bar was fun, though I never know how to behave in those situations. And I was the outsider of the outsiders, I don’t even have friends among the bus crew. But the wine and weed mellowed me, and the music was nice to listen to. I’d heard some of the songs before, in other towns, but most I did not recognize. They did, of course, play the song that goes, “It's the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine,” and everyone shouted along, grabbing each other dancing about obnoxiously, kicking and punching the air. I thought that everyone in the world knew it, people even sang it back home in Utah, that most insular of worlds. But as the band played, I noticed (finally, I’d
been looking around for her all night) Esther, and she seemed bewildered, wide-eyed, looking around, clutching, as always, her trusty rifle.

As the song ended someone handed me another joint, and I went up to her
The End is the first episode of the CBS All Access adaption of The Stand. It aired on December 17, 2020. When the "Captain Trips" flu epidemic wipes out more than 99% of the population, the remaining few immune to the disease, including Stu Redman, Frannie Goldsmith, and Harold Lauder, set out in search of other survivors, all the while, experiencing visions of the nurturing Mother Abigail and the menacing figure of The Dark Man. The End is the fifth studio album by German musician Nico. It was recorded in summer 1974 at Sound Techniques studio in London and produced by John Cale. It was released in November 1974, on record label Island. Nico had performed two songs from the album in concert several years prior to the album release: "Secret Side" had been performed at a John Peel session for the BBC on February 2, 1971 and she had also performed "You Forget to Answer" on TV in France and the Netherlands in early 1972. Shop the leading destination for style, sneakers, luxury, life, from over 500+ brands. Osquello's First Chapter Has Just Begun. Sign up to The END. Mailing List. Sign up for exclusive early sale access and tailored new arrivals. Title: The End (2020â€ ). 7.3/10. Want to share IMDb's rating on your own site? The End - A Escolha See more ». Filming Locations: Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia.