

# Nixer

1.

*The abandoned forest lay in the dusk like an afterthought.*

*The daydreamer was almost asleep.*

*Before it was an airport, back when aeroplanes were still a novelty. The type that had propellers, engines that fed on petrol and later liquefied gas. Mortuary carbon lay strewn meters under the ground. Sunshine pooled in watery bunches beneath the canopy.*

*Beyond where a runaway path ended, two people appeared in a clearing. They had clothes the colour of which hadn't been seen for a long time on the Earth's surface. The eye and its cones betrayed mysteries of matter, and **the follower** slowed down and held their breath. It was a man and a woman. The man had a strange item of clothing on his head. A bowl shaped thing that drooped down like a frond. She had long yellow hair and held a long club in her left hand.*

*'They always lamented what they were doing, but had no way to stop themselves.'*

*'Progress was the word you used.'*

*'Yes, they were committed to progress, and it sped up too quickly. Everything became ultra.'*

*He had a glass sphere in his hand, like a petrified bubble, and was looking through it as he spoke.*

2.

Peter blinked and the world came back to him, with his to-do list and bad night's sleep giving it definition. He shifted in the backseat and tried to shift his body weight. The autobahn was a bland series of moving cars and a treeline that seemed unchanging but had occasional openings. He took out his mobile phone and wrote in a burst that made a quarter of an hour pass by: it was still at least three hours until Berlin, so the sense of flow was welcomed. He frowned when he wrote about the glass sphere and it being a petrified bubble. Whatever could that become, he wondered.

Frankfurt to Berlin, with the use of the car-sharing service *mitfahrgelegenheit*. How many times had he made the journey since the publication of *Sea Change for Science*? Maybe a dozen or more and every time he began a new novel in his head, either through the choice of driver (the Bengali businessman whose affairs seemed perfect for a modern day globalised novel of nested narratives, reaching out around the world that would embody some sort of take on actor-network theory), or the pick-up location (a whodunnit centered wholly on the corner of Schweizer Platz, the murder pertaining somehow to the theory of the Frankfurt School and its many ghosts), or indeed the conversation that took place amongst the passengers (but this oddly never gave him any concrete inspiration, at least he had only ever made notes that added up to a list of non-sequiturs and banalities.) He had a folder titled 'Car Pool Novels' with several sub folders, all containing thousands of words of notes, character sketches and research.

But now he looked around the backseat of the car, a blocky BMW station wagon, the driver of which was a man named Don who spoke German with an accent he couldn't place, possibly of Eastern European origin. The other passenger was Susan or Susanne, a woman in her 20s who had threatened that she wouldn't stop talking for the six hour journey when they were waiting at the designated pickup stop next to the Hauptbahnhof. She had bounded into the front seat with gusto, but had then immediately fallen asleep before they'd reached the autobahn. Don seemed to like the silence, driving with mute determination. Perhaps he'd forgotten Peter even existed. It began to spit rain, which added to the dreariness of the journey.

Peter grew excited and looked down at his phone and the words that filled the screen. How could a forest be abandoned? He didn't know, but he loved what it evoked: he thought of all those science fiction stories he'd long ago forgotten, or the novels *The Crystal World*, *The Drowned World*.

*Lonely shores of lakes of oil upon which nobody would ever walk. High above spacecraft from which people looked down upon a landscape of islands in lakes which themselves had islands. Lacustrine recursion.*

Peter stops typing and looks out at the passing verge. The evening before he had had an intense conversation with Petra, whose eyes he always got lost in. She wore baggy jeans the likes of which went out of fashion in the first years of the millennium. He wanted to impress her, but didn't need to because she had gushed about *Seachange* in a way that surprised him.

'I think the connection of science to everything else is just the best thing I've read. It's proper art.'

He had blushed almost, if he had been capable of blushing. The most important thing he had long ago decided was to remain all surface, both in his writing and his appearance. He wanted to appear from a few years in the future, always. This often meant dressing like the past. It's why he loved Petra's baggy trousers; Birkenstocks with monochrome socks; always a baseball cap.

'That's kind of you, thank you.'

'What are you working on now?'

'I don't know. I think I'd like to write about time travel. Somehow.'

'Oh, science fiction?!' The prospect had seemed to please her, in a way that seemed genuine, and therefore surprising.

'No, I think that's the thing. I'd like to try and write a time travel story that reads more like a post-internet, kind of diazepam addicted, slow-voiced first person narration.'

'I can think of one or two artworks like that.'

'Yeah, present tense and socially realist alt-lit novel, you know? Like, all surface.'

The thing about autobahns he realised was that they cut through the natural world that divorced the drivers and their passengers from the organic. He wondered if this was at all an original line of thinking. The green of the trees he realised became a blur, on purpose: occasionally a wall rose up, all gray, then a tunnel blacked everything else. He let his eyes go out of focus, crossed them slightly, so that it was hard to say what anything was exactly. Don overtook a truck and that broke the effect. He was driving faster now, well over 100 km/h and Peter wondered if they would stop at all, maybe somewhere near Jena, a place he'd never been to but associated with waterfalls and walled gardens, a sort of 19th century pleasure land he knew wasn't the case. Peter would need to take a piss, that much was certain: had spent the afternoon in the Kiosk Späti, drinking beers with Wilson, wallowing in the bahnhofsviertel's lush seediness. There was no greenery in the bahnhofsviertel, zilch, nada: no grass bloomed nor no trees grew there, it was just stained concrete and melting tar. Or so it seemed to Peter now, in Don's BMW, hurtling along the concrete artery of the A4.

‘Hey Don, do you think we will stop?’

‘For what?’

‘A pause. Coffee, or, the toilet?’

Don appears to consider this and looks sideways briefly at Susan or Susanne and seems to agree that the idea is a good one by extending his lower lip outwards and nodding his head up and down. A man of few words. Peter decides to think that Don is from the future, he just doesn’t know it yet.

‘Only if it works for you Don. I’m probably fine.’

‘Let’s see.’

The night before he had wished for the conversation to never end, and thought about his idea for a screenplay - abandoned after just three scenes - of an afternoon that perpetually looped in the hours between 2.30 and 4.30pm. Or was it just one hour, 2-3pm? There were as many ways to experience time as there were people, animals and plants on the planet’s surface and under the oceans.

The need to pee started slowly, letting itself into the room quietly and unnoticed, but by the time they were passing Leipzig he couldn’t ignore it. He thought about the time it took proteins to pass through the digestive system and become urine. How long does it take plants to become oil? He closed his eyes but that made his mind rest squarely on his bladder. He opened his eyes again and coughed slightly, looking around Don’s car, trying to see new details previously unseen.

Nothing to note. The car could be a rental and perhaps it was. Dusk hour, the gloaming made everything a black or a gray, taillights breaking up the outside now and the green all fading into the night's reserve. Peter started to worry and felt time speed up and slow down at once. The need to piss, the pressure on his bladder, speeding things up like the BMW in the fast lane, the confines of the darkening backseat and the endless hour or so until his release from it slowing things down, the parallax making him feel like he was a still point in the car's vertiginous freefall through the boundless expanse of dark, neverending motorway.

He had been here before. The need to piss, the prison of a bus without facilities. The slowing of time and the growing pressure on the bladder, all leading him to elaborate imaginings of accidents and public embarrassments. None of which ever came to pass. But the anxiety isn't forgotten: humans do such a good job at worry, Peter was no different. An overweight ape with hypertrophic lobes, with an exaggerated ability to elaborate and imagine what will happen in the future.

His opposable thumbs started to flutter across his screen.

3.

*It was clear that the sphere represented a moment in time, an impossible moment, namely the Present.*

*'The progress was predicated on ultra processed forests, like this one. But the time it took to get ultraprocessed, to become oil and industry, was another time then the one which we follow and which fills our days.'*

*They walked across the clearing, all meadow, and reached the other side where the forest undulated over ruins. Two paths diverged in opposite directions.*

*'You take it.'*

*The man offered the petrified sphere of glass.*

*'What is it?'*

*'It's a trophy that marks an attempt at order, over time. But we know that every effort to contain order leaves something out, a detail that remains outside the frame.'*

*'So why give it to me? It's useless. Pointless.'*

*The daydreamer calculated distance and time, and knowing both, knew he could hold his piss until such time as he had discretion, safety, to let it flow.*

*'We say goodbye to deny our finitude, our fleeting nature.'*

*'We say farewell because we believe we'll see each other again.'*



