

AJAX

Logan and Ajax spooled out the miles along the Toronto lake-front, Logan's pale hand spinning the wheel of the Mustang as they sped farther from downtown, leaving high-rises, museums, galleries, Logan's roof-top condo, even buildings Logan had designed, behind.

In the backseat, Logan's Great Dane, Toby, hitched his head over the edge and drooled down the turquoise paint job, jowls bouncing, grey ears fluttering like flags. *Please don't shake that head*, thought Ajax.

It was hot—rays climbing to perpendicular, thermometer pulsing thirty-five. The day seemed half-mirage, the sun turning skyscraper windows to swimmable blue pools. Ice melted in their lattes. Ajax sweated between her breasts, under the nose pads on her sunglasses. Didn't matter how fast Logan drove, there'd be no relief with the top down; Ajax's sun-stung legs stuck to the leather seat. She harboured hope Logan might stop so they could swim.

But Logan, of course, didn't even sweat. Hard, like they'd designed themselves, a skyscraper. All shiny glass and downtown angles. All boi smoulder, hard between their legs.

They'd been driving through the percolating city every day that week since Ajax had arrived from Vancouver. Passing dykes, femmes, queers, passing queens and kings and strippers and hustlers. Church Street. Suits, the high heels, the shimmer of stockings, the coifed heads, people sewn so tight they

squeak-walked. Queen Street West. Queen and Dundas. The homeless, shabby with rusty supermarket carts and garbage bags. Danforth, Bloor, Yonge, the Beaches, Baldwin. Dog walks—throwing sticks by infernal numbers into Lake Ontario, Ajax keeping her lips pressed tight about the lake’s basic wrongness (pretending it was an ocean) and wishing Toby had been left at home so they could spread out on a blanket on the human-designated part of the beach instead, even though the dog was what had brought them there. Stopping for lunches and dinners, brushing the sweep of Logan’s hard thigh. Cabbie to bars for Logan’s poison, vodka.

Fucking on the conference table at Logan’s firm. Fucking in the alley behind a sex shop after Logan stepped in alone to find something to surprise Ajax. Fucking on some barely accessible part of the beach, sticks jamming into Ajax’s ass, sand fleas biting. Fucking on Logan’s rooftop.

What the fuck fucking, thought Ajax repetitively; she was behaving like a kid, a teenager, locked into limerance.

Some bridge over Lake Ontario glistened as they drove past. Ajax wanted a photo, said so, watched it tool past. On her own, she would have found a way to turn around, to get back. But Logan didn’t retrace their steps.

Logan’s goddamned singularity spinning Ajax’s head, a protractor reeling.

On the Gardiner, struggling through construction. Off the Gardiner, heading west and north out of Toronto, surprising Ajax.

“Where are we going?” A snag in Ajax’s voice.

“Baby, this is your birthday surprise. Don’t ask questions.”
Driving. Driving.

Logan’s cockeyed grin, insouciant lock of black hair loose down their forehead, their thick mobile eyebrows, their pebbled voice. It looked *good*. Toby woofed, knocked the headrest with his horse-sized head, and swung his spittle.

“I mean it, Logan.” Ajax swabbed down the dog slobber.
“We’re going north?”

“Just taking a drive. Didn’t you say you wanted a picnic for a present? I aim to please,” said Logan.

North, north. Ajax hadn’t realized how far they’d travelled. She noticed rolling pastures with cattle and goats and sheep. Just-shorn alpacas. Fields of wildflowers—Shirley poppies, candytuft, Dame’s rocket, coneflower. Plentiful white daisies thick as butter, brown cow-eye centres. Flowers caterwauling, *This is summer! Summer! Fertilize!*

Every time they slowed for a stop sign, they could see bumblebees lollygagging in the blooms—bluebells and phlox and coreopsis—and took in the explosion of summer scents—wild grass, manure, the fruity smell of wind. It was cooling, nominally, though not enough for jackets. Ajax stroked the leather upholstery beside her leg, the bumpy texture of animal pores. Going by fast: Green fields. Ochre wheat. Rustling corn. A cornflower sky puffing with cumulonimbus clouds, horizon lined with cirrus. Ajax leaned to rub Logan’s neck, feeling the urban stress go out of her too. Logan touched Ajax’s leg. Willow

trees leaned over streams. Horses swished tails. A family of quail crossed the road, babies round as tennis balls, causing Logan to slam on the brakes.

Woke Ajax right up.

Toby howled and shoved his drooling face into Logan's neck.

Logan pulled over. For awhile, the car idled on the side of the rural road, cows at the fence chewing cud and mooing, Logan held Ajax's face tenderly between their palms. They feathered kisses across Ajax's chin, cheeks, eyelids, forehead.

Ajax whispered, "Don't fucking love me."

Logan said, "I think that's exactly what somebody needs to do to you. It's what I imagine doing forever."

Ajax shivered in the heat.

"And it's too late now, anyway," said Logan dropping their hands. "I already love you. Except for your gutter mouth." Logan climbed out of the car. The quail were long gone, so they let Toby romp on a short leash through the tall grasses in the ditch, now dry with summer. They bent to plant a kiss on Ajax's forehead. "Okay, even your gutter mouth."

Ajax said quietly, "I love how you ache."

"I love that you notice," said Logan.

"I notice," said Ajax. "I notice mostly your roots. A bit of stem. Some showy blossom." Ajax touched the side of Logan's mouth. "You know what your secret weapon can be for when I'm pissed at you? Just grin. Just show me that smile and I'll turn to putty."

The dog took a crap, which, even here, mere feet from cow

patties, Logan cleaned up, and the two of them, Logan and the dog, took off jogging, Toby a galloping tank as they disappeared into heat waves.

Blue wolf, thought Ajax about her partner. *Person only half tame*. She wondered if she should feel safe or scared at how serious they were getting.

A cowbell sounded close by, making Ajax jump. She jumped the ditch and gave the cows a scratch. They liked it; they pushed hard into her hands, bone close to the surface under hides. They reminded her of childhood, the field, full of cattle lowing, that had backed onto her elementary school. Smells of un-mown grass, manure, puffballs bursting spores. The first girl she liked had lived near there; Ajax remembered sitting on a three-legged stool beside a cow's full udder, Cara's hands over hers, showing her how to milk the teat, Cara's hand stroking hers to encourage the milk to let down. Shooting milk streams at Cara, Cara giggling, the sound of milk sizzling into the pail. When the pail was half full, Cara dipped a cup, held it for Ajax while she drank, milk running down her chin, her neck.

Cara licking her clean. Their first kiss.

"We should get going," said Logan behind her, slapping the hood of the car. Heavy dog exhalations.

"I'm famished." Ajax picked her way back to the ditch, leaped over it, and grabbed Logan's hand. "How about you?"

Logan unpacked a tablecloth, a basket from the trunk. "Want to have lunch with your new friends? We have plenty of time, in fact, McIntyre. All weekend."

“We’re away for the weekend?” Ajax was pleased. “But I didn’t pack.”

“Got you covered there. I grabbed your things.”

“Sneaky,” said Ajax. “My meds?”

She followed Logan to the open meadow across from the pasture. The blanket billowed. Ajax settled against an apple tree trunk. In the speckled light, they dished out the food. Grapes, strawberries, cut kiwis, deli meats. Thick crusty slices of bread.

“Your meds. Of course your meds. You think I don’t take note, McIntyre, but I do.”

A cooler with lemonade. A steamed artichoke produced from the bottom of the basket. Gorgeous green thistle, which Logan served protractedly, dead sexily, leaf by slowly dipped leaf until, at last, the heart was exposed and cut into small manageable bites.

“We’re not going home? Really?”

Logan flopped on their back chewing on a grass stalk, and Ajax snuggled in the crook of their arm.

“We’re blowing that pop stand, honey. We’re going north, baby, all the way north.”