

# Texas Was Better

*by Ann Bogle*

We've come rowing in our boat for gasoline. The last place didn't have it. The first place sold us food. We ate heaps of beans and rice with plastic forks. This is better than in New York. The further the better. But there's a limit.

So I think about having not gone to Canada. Had I gone to Canada pluperfect. What Canada would have looked like from the boat, what it would have looked like from the shore, with my back to it, having already seen it, saying later in New York that the lox had been delicious. "The gardens are well-kept due to a still-thriving sense of civic pride." What people had heard.

Had I gone to Canada--but in particular had I gone to Halifax--I would have walked until I had found the three cats. It would have been like Hemingway's cats--I would have looked for the descendants of the three cats that had slept under the house where my professor had lived with her professor--married. This is how it came about, she had said.

In the story there were a large caesar salad and a guest. Her marriage ended before they ate the salad--she and the professor broke their vows over bread. The guest left hungry. The child continued. Over the course of further stories her daughter became her friend, but not in forward order.

In a story of my friend's--one my professor would not have heard--the daughter did worse things to her room than not clean it. After some months, my friend ordered my professor's daughter to watch her wash dishes.

My professor drove the mountains in spring, when the buds were red. Had she not told me about the red spring, I would have gone on

seeing the usual yellow spring from my apartment. I went out to it. Probably my windows were dirty. It was a beautiful movie. The buds were red--it seemed they were dying at the beginning. I had no idea what fall would be--bright fish composing on Beethoven Street.

If you had said, "Let's go to Canada," we would have gone, if I had thought you meant it. You didn't have a car. How many men have not been taken seriously for not having a car? You gave your reasons: the ozone layer, carbon monoxide, but really it was your DUIs. The relationship would have felt different had you driven.

Eventually, I dreaded to see you drive. Because driving one should never look small. What if you had driven and looked small? Or thin or stiff or overly law-abiding? You would not have found my back seat so congenial for your blues harp.

It was the first clean sheets in a month. The best without someone. Bugs had not wanted to come into this house. (Where were the much-prophesied cockroaches?) The cats saw the one bug on the ceiling and sat still for an hour tracking it.

Texas was better in the story of your birth in El Paso's fluke of a dust storm. I imagined your mother giving birth to you at the center of the storm, not, as she must have done, on the military base. I came here thinking that I was returning to your birthplace in your place.

Had we driven, we would have stopped in Memphis, knowing what I now know about Memphis. Even as I flew, gasoline prices went up. Had we driven, we would have beaten the panic by moving slower than it.

We would not have eaten the rice and beans en route. We would have eaten them in southern Louisiana or in New Mexico. Would you have guessed this?

Originally--a story you would not have heard--New Mexico was to be the location of our ranch. My friend and I would have lived in the house. You and my ex- would have lived in town. Not that my friend would have belonged to my ex-. I was to have both you and my ex-, and my friend would have been there to talk to. She could have had anyone she wanted.

This had been a daydream. The image of the ranch, looking back on it, prefigured my friend's affair with my ex- and her falling in love with you. The daydream as described in the letter is preserved. She got a typed copy. Her idea had not been so different except she at that time would have brought her ex- --also relegated to town.

Well, daydreams being equal and sort of meaningless, neither here nor there.

Still, it was useful to imagine the four of us in New Mexico and in the pattern I had been used to. It was a way to move without changing and to keep the terrible power I had in a new setting.

My ex- thinks about Nova Scotia--he had gone there as an Eagle Scout but dropped out after the trip.

