

Taxi

by Bud Smith

1.

I hailed a cab at 4:30 am
falling out of a bar
on a cobblestone side street
"Need to go uptown, way far uptown."
the driver said, "I'm new"
I said, "Just drive forever,
I'll tell you when."
"Okay."
"Point this car, second star to the right
and straight on 'til morning."
"Oh."
"173rd street and Haven Ave."
"Got it."
The GPS went beep beep beep.
In the backseat, I shuttered my eyes
and the radio and dashboard
and streetlights slipping past
all had a different glow
going away.

2.

"Wake up!"
"Wuh, wuh?"
I sat up. Everything spun
until everything came into slow focus.
Out the window: suburban houses
and the sun.
"We're lost."
"Lost? Where are we?"

"Lost."
I looked up at the GPS, all black.
"Use your phone."
"No phone," he said.
A sign said, Sycamore Street.
"We're at Sycamore Street," he said.
"What town?"
He held his hands up in defeat.
"Go back, we'll figure it out."
"We're in a neighborhood, I can't
figure out what way out of the maze."
"Fuck it, drive around,
let's look for a landmark."

All the houses were the same.
Small variations in shade
"You should have woken me."
"My pride. My foolish pride."
There were no dog walkers.
There were no joggers,
or lights in the windows even
It was 6am. It started raining.

"Pull over here, I'll knock.
Wait, though, man. Wait."
"Of course, I need you to get back."
"Jesus."
I walked down the driveway
and knocked on a red door.
A man in a bathrobe answered
"Can I help you?"
"See that cab?"
"Sure."
"I got in that cab on Great Jones Street
and Bowery, New York City."

"Okay ..."
"Where the fuck are we?"
"Mt. Kisco."
"We're lost."
He laughed, "Hold on."
When he came back,
he had directions written on the back
of a pancake house receipt.

I climbed up front
in the passenger seat
"Here's how we go, it's easy."
I flapped the directions in the air
like magical currency
"Thank fucking god."
"And on the way home..." I said, "we'll stop."
He nodded. "Gas and breakfast."

3.

At Pancake Palace, I got the corned beef hash
and eggs. The driver, whose name was Paul,
got the garden omelet with bacon.
We split the blueberry pancakes.
They brought you out like, thirty.
The coffee was alright.
Just alright.
It needed sugar.

