

The Road

by Chanel Dubofsky

By the time I was seventeen, my parents were visibly fraying; my mother's eyes were perpetually red, the creases in my father's face deep and rough. Before then, they had tried to disguise their fighting, growing awkwardly and abruptly silent when Audrey or I would walk into the house. That summer, I was spending a lot of time driving around very late at night, like a boomerang, to the highway and back, the high school and back, over and over, until the lights came on in the dark houses.

My mother moved her things out of my parents' bedroom into the attic guest room. When I asked where guests would sleep, my father said, "Matthew, don't be an asshole." He wouldn't look at me for hours afterwards, but later, he came into my room and closed the door and stood next to where I was sitting, and told me he loved me.

"I don't think you're an asshole," he said. "I know." "You really wanted to know where we'd put the guests?" "I think so," I said.

That was when they decided, together, somehow, that I should see a therapist. "It's a waste of money," I told Audrey when she came to get some of the things out of her old room to bring to her apartment. "I'm not messed up enough." "Trust me," she said. "You will be. Think of it as a pre-emptive strike."

The therapist's office was next door to a retirement community. In the two months I saw him, I counted eleven ambulances and three body bags coming out of what seemed to be the main building. "A lot of people die around here," I said, at the beginning of our next session. "Does that bother you?" he asked, folding his legs on top of each other and leaning in towards me. He looked pleased that I was revealing anything, since every hour we'd spent together so far had been characterized by what he referred to as my "commitment to mono-syllabia." "Sure," I said. "I mean, shouldn't it? Doesn't it bother you?" "I don't that that matters," he told me. "This is your time. Is this what you want to talk about?" "I don't know," I said.

I knew he wanted me to talk about my parents, about my mother in the attic and my father in what used to be their bedroom, and my sister, limping through the world because she was too afraid to leave me alone in the middle of their mess, living a mile away when she could have been anywhere, but I didn't want to talk about any of it. It wasn't fair to him, or to my parents, and someone should be fair to someone, and that was when I knew I'd never come back there again. So I told him about what happens when I get in the car and drive for an hour, until there's nothing but desert, and this one particular hill that it seems like it takes forever to get up, but once you're up at the top, you can see all the nothing that the desert is, in front of you. On the way down, I take my foot off the brake, and for a minute, it makes up for everything.

