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## **My Poor Feet Have Traveled a Hot, Dusty Road**

I woke up on a moving train with my legs hanging off the side. The soles of my shoes scraped along the tops of the tracks.

The conductor was named Zeus. He had lost one of his arms, and was very open about the fact that it wasn't taken off in a war, or by a shark, or any sort of glamorous way. He had gotten a snake bite on his elbow when he was hiking in Arizona. He tied a jumper cable around the top of his arm to preemptively stop the blood, and then cut the rest off with his glasses fogged up and sand in his ears. His blood rang through the red rocks into the crust of the Earth. When he finally got real medical attention, the doctor told him it would have been a fairly routine procedure with no need for amputation. Poor guy. When he drank whiskey, he could imagine himself with two arms wrapped around a beautiful, fictitious wife.

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I still have a scar between my shoulder blades from when he kicked me off the train with his steel-toed boot. And I still have a second scar on the back of my head from my suitcase, which he heaved at my bruised body from his moving train. I don't really remember why he got rid of me, but there was probably some vague level of legitimate justification.

I still just appreciate that he gave me my suitcase back, even in the haphazard manner he did it. You can't be a man, woman, or anything in between without a suitcase. You're just a vacant human looking for inspiration.

All you really need is a suitcase, a nice pair of shoes, and a good, reliable pencil. Those are the three most important things. Nothing matters more. Some people might act like they themselves do, but people are often unreliable. Even Jesus could only last 33 years before he left the citizens of Galilee with one fish and no more wine. Once you reach deity status, people start looking for coffins your size, making you unreliable.

And even then, you gotta use your three items correctly. You see a lot of people struggling to carry their suitcase with both hands because it's so full of rocks and leaves from the places they've visited. Then it starts raining, which causes them to remove their now water-filled leather shoes—and a barefoot traveller will not get very far. These people do not understand the point of their pencil. Once you write about the contents of your suitcase, you can dump it all out into any ditch or otherwise vacant hole you like.

Zeus and I would often sit on the train, pointing and laughing at the blurry figures of forlorn creatures being weighed down by heavy suitcases and wet shoes.

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I've spent most of my consciousness traveling, surviving on benzedrine tubes and aging adrenaline. I've been to places where the dirt is dry and cracked and the brims of hats flop over people's eyes, and I've been to places where high heels slide across the pavement and the Moon can't see through the haze of cigarettes and streetlights.

I etch the names of the people I visit into the spine of my suitcase. They all guess what my name is, and they carve

that into their suitcases, if they have one. Most don't guess correctly. Some do. I revisit those people until they've forgotten my name. Few people remember my name anymore. I like it that way. It keeps my feet thinking and my brain wandering.

As long as my suitcase is in my hand, my pencil is in my pocket, and my shoes are on my feet, my name can do whatever it wants to do.

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I haven't lost sight of my identity. I'm not a martyr, I'm a Rambler. I'm an observer. I'm a shapeshifter. I don't have a beginning and I don't have an ending. I sleep on mossy forest floors beneath righteous maple trees. I stick my timeless pencil into Tom Dooley's unremorseful eye. At night, I sit by the light of the jukebox and tell stories of faded haloes, honoring the folk tradition.

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I rub my hand on the scar on the back of my head. Although it hasn't been painful for years, the feeling of its bumpy surface still gives my head residual feelings of heavy weightlessness from the corner of my suitcase being thrown into it.

It makes me wonder what Zeus is doing now. What is his boot doing? Has he found his beautiful wife? Has he drunk enough to permanently convince himself that he has two arms? Does he remember my name?

You could assume that he's dead, but you never knew Zeus. He would never stop moving. If you put someone as unsatisfied as Zeus in a six foot plot of land for his skin to fall off and for ants to eat his organs, you better be aware. Watch out for a one-armed man covered in soil wearing a steel-toed boot that justifiably wants more than anything to kick you off the train. And maybe he won't even be gracious enough to hit you in the head with your suitcase.