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The Open Road

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HCOM 434

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The Open Road



Will gets out of bed late. About ten o'clock.

Nowadays, he never gets up early if he can help it. Four months' worth of school and work back-to-back, every day of the week, with little time for sleep, takes its toll on a man.

As he sits up, Will rubs his temples and gives his cheeks a light clap. He wants to make sure he's properly awake before standing up. It works, but Will's legs send up a dull ache as he walks to the window.

Will opens the blinds, looking out at his street. It's a bright, sunny morning. A ground squirrel is scrounging in the front yard. Two crows soar above the neighborhood, towards a line of trees just beyond the house that sits opposite his. The sight is enough to make Will ignore his

legs, still sore from a whole weekend's work. He makes for the shower and gets dressed for the day ahead, making sure to open every window and let the sun in.

After a relaxing morning and light brunch, he sets about for two hours of study. It's late in the spring, and finals are coming up soon. Will's come too far to trip at the finish line and see his grades fumble. The young man ends up so wrapped up in his studies that two hours pass by rather quickly. Quicker than he thought they would.

But then, most days that don't involve eight-hour shifts at the grocery store seem to slip by quickly now.

When he closes the textbook, he steals another look outside. It's still sunny, and he can see the trees rippling in the wind.

Perfect weather for a walk.

Will stands up, but before he can go fetch his shoes, his phone rings in his pocket. Will stops in place and pulls it out, knowing it's either something important or another in the long list of robocalls he's been receiving lately.

Not a robocall at all, he thinks as he sees his girlfriend's name flashing on the screen.

"Hey Molly", he says warmly, pressing the button to answer.

"Hey," the woman answers. She sounds tired, and more than a little anxious.

"Are you okay?"

There's a crackle of static as Molly sighs. Will can picture her brown eyes closing, and her face screwing up in concentration as she tries to think of what to say.

The phone call lasts only twenty minutes. It's not that Will doesn't want to talk to Molly, he usually does. But she hasn't slept well either for a while. And with her semester ending too, there's only so much fuel in the tank for either of them. Phone calls were easier when they weren't so perpetually tired.

Will does what he can to encourage her. After all, it *is* her last semester. He still has a whole year to go.

"Just remember," he says, "In four months' time you'll be settled over here and you won't have to worry about exams."

A ray of sunlight starts to dip through the front window. The sun is past its midpoint and starting its long way down.

"Hey."

"Yeah?" Molly replies.

"I was heading out to the road today. It's beautiful out here. Want me to send you a picture?"

He can picture Molly smiling when she answers, "Yeah. That'd be nice. Wish I could see it in person, though. *God*, I can't wait for this to be over."

'This' being more than a year in quarantine, Will nods in agreement.

"Yeah, me neither. I love you."

"I love you too."

There's barely any traffic on the street when Will steps out of his house. He walks down the sidewalk to the main street that connects to his, and before he knows it, he's on the open road.

A road stretching for miles in either direction.

It's one of the most beautiful days he's seen in God knows how long. Like one of those paintings a man sees hung up on the wall of that one rich neighbor, a painting so convincing you'd think it was a photograph instead.

As Will isn't an expert painting himself, he decides to take a picture of the moment. Of the road, the rolling green hills stretching into the west, and the sun smiling down on all of it. As Will admires the shot it speaks to him on a level few could understand. He likes to think of himself as an optimist. Someone who looks forward when he can help it, not back. When standing on the open road, greeted with such a day, it's hard for Will not to feel better than he did when he woke up.

If there is one thing he can be grateful for in this long, frustrating year of quarantine, it's getting the occasional day to walk out and take in the beautiful sight before him.

Will pulls out a playlist of music on his phone, clicking the first song that shows up.

"When I walk beside her, I am the better man..."

Will smiles.

Eddie Vedder, "Hard Sun".

In August, Molly is set to move in with Will after graduation from the college she's attending far away. When the year is done, and the world is opened again after being shut down for so long, it'll be good to share days like this with her.

To share the sun, the rolling hills, and a road that never ends.

He starts the song over again, a song that speaks to him as a man who loves this beautiful world and wants only to enjoy it with the woman he loves. Putting the phone back in his pocket, Will continues his long walk.

On and on Will goes, a smiling and hopeful man on the open road.

“When I walk beside her I am the better man

When I look to leave her

I always stagger back again...”

Works Cited

Vedder, Eddie. "Hard Sun." iTunes.