

He drove around Pocatello in his sky-blue 1975 Ford F-150 with the dented hood and the broken handle, swigging his Mountain Dew and orange juice from a glass jug he kept in the passenger seat. His parents had named him Jackson after his father and his father's father, but he started going by Zig somewhere around the tenth grade. The Jackson before him would always say that sometimes when life zigs, you gotta zag. The Jackson before him didn't have many original sayings, and Zig figured that if everyone was being told to zag, there would be no one left to zig. And maybe when life zigged, it was worth following just to see what life had in mind. Life had no reason to throw tricks.

He pulled his sky-blue 1975 Ford F-150 with the dented hood and the broken handle into the drugstore parking lot and let the hinges on his door wince and screech as they swung open. He leapt from his seat and landed on the asphalt with both boots at the same time. Dusty old Red Wings from the 80s that belonged to the Jackson before him, one with red laces and one with yellow.

He left the door open as he strode into the drugstore with his hands shoved into the pockets of his faded skinny jeans. He placed a bottle of Mountain Dew and a bottle of orange juice on the counter and let a crumpled five-dollar bill fall out of his hand. The girl in line behind him peered over his shoulder and told him they make orange-flavored Mountain Dew, in case he didn't know. He turned around and saw a girl with straight black hair and pale skin looking back at him. He had a mess of scraggly, rust brown hair pushed back out of his face and skin that was taut and warm to the touch from the sun. He liked the visual difference.

He said that he'd rather combine the two himself. She said she was just making a joke and that she had recognized him from history class. He said he was real sorry, but he always sat in the front row and didn't recognize her. She said it was OK. He asked her name and she said Nikki with two k's. She asked his name and he said Zig – spelled how it sounds. He asked her what she was doing that day as he collected his change and let her place her Snickers bar on the counter. She said she was studying for a math test on Monday and had stopped by for a snack because she lived walking distance from the drugstore. She returned the question. He said he was driving out to farmland. She asked him why. He said sometimes he likes to go to a place where he can really see. The more you can see, the better you understand how small you are, he told her. Farmland's flat, lets you see plenty. She laughed and asked if he was serious. He said he was and asked if she wanted to join him. Farmland's probably better with company, he told her. She thought it over, then asked if she could bring her math book.

They strode out of the drugstore together. In one hand he held the plastic bag with his Mountain Dew and orange juice, the other was in his pocket. She had already opened her

Snickers bar. As they walked up to his sky-blue 1975 Ford F-150 with the dented hood, he told her she'd have to get in through his door, the other one had a broken handle. She asked if he always left his door open when he goes into stores. He said he ain't got much to steal, and if someone took something they probably needed it more than he did. She got in, he followed, and he let the hinges on his door wince and screech as they slammed shut behind him.

He asked for the glass jug on her seat. She passed it to him, and he started pouring in his Mountain Dew and orange juice. She said that stuff would rot his teeth. He said that not appreciating the things you like in life would rot your soul, which he thought was worse. She laughed and asked why he liked Mountain Dew and orange juice. He said it reminded him of somewhere tropical. She asked him if he wanted to go somewhere tropical. He said right now he wanted to go to farmland. He held the jug between his legs as he pulled out of the drugstore parking lot.

They stopped at Nikki's house first so she could get her math book. He let the hinges on his door wince and screech as they swung open, and he landed on the asphalt with both boots at the same time so she could get out. The Jackson before him always said it was polite to open a lady's door for her. Zig figured that if he had believed in fate, he would've thought the universe was forcing him to be chivalrous. He watched Nikki go into her house and he waited, taking a couple swigs of his Mountain Dew and orange juice. He untucked his white wife-beater from his faded skinny jeans and used the bottom to wipe his mouth before tucking it back in. Nikki came out with her math book under her arm and got back into his sky-blue 1975 Ford F-150 with the dented hood and the broken handle. She asked him how far out they were going. Far enough to see, he told her.

It was Fall, and the trees lining the road were yellow and orange. He liked the way they looked against his sky-blue 1975 Ford F-150 with the dented hood and the broken handle. As he drove, Nikki read aloud problems from her math book and muttered to herself as she fumbled through the answers. It was calculus, she said. She asked if he knew calculus. He said not really. He didn't like math. She asked if he was failing his class or something. He said there's a difference between passing calculus and knowing calculus. She asked why he always talked so funny. He was quiet for a bit, watching the dashes on the road get sucked under his dented hood, before telling her that the Jackson before him wasn't much of a thinker, and the Jackson before him wasn't much of one either, and he never found either Jackson to be a particularly inspiring role model, so he decided he was gonna be a thinker. She asked if that's all it took – to just decide. He said thinking ain't hard and it don't cost nothing, long as you ain't scared to do it.

Eventually, Zig slowed down and took his sky-blue 1975 Ford F-150 with the dented hood and the broken handle onto the shoulder of the road before leaving the pavement behind and bringing the truck a ways into grass. Before them laid fields of wheat, with some low hills rising beyond. Zig let the hinges on his door wince and screech as they swung open, and he landed on the grass with both boots at the same time. He grabbed his glass jug of Mountain Dew and orange juice from his seat and held out his hand to help Nikki. He took a deep breath, raised his arms above his head and arched his back in a long stretch. He then walked to the front of his sky-blue 1975 Ford F-150 with the broken handle, put his boot with the yellow laces onto the bumper, and boosted himself up onto the dented hood. He carefully lowered himself down into the dent and took a long swig from his jug of Mountain Dew and orange juice. Nikki clambered up next to him.

They both sat in silence for a couple of minutes, reclined on the dented hood and looking at the wheat. She asked him if this was all he did. He said it was. She asked if she was supposed to be looking at something in particular. He said not really, but if it helps, she could look at those hills in the distance and imagine standing on top of one. From on top, they would seem big, but from down here they don't look so big at all. If something that's only a couple miles away can look so small, imagine how small they look to the world. They ain't nothing. Meaningless. Now, if you hold your hand up to your face, it looks big, but a hand to a hill ain't shit, and if those hills ain't nothing, just imagine how nothing we are. She asked why he liked feeling like nothing. He said it's liberating. Life feels so personal, so full of big things, but life don't give two shits about something small like you. It's just gonna keep on being life no matter what you choose to do with your slice of it. Some people deal in spreadsheets, and spend life waking up at 6:30 to shovel snow off their driveway so they can get to their spreadsheets on time. Some people deal in banana leaves, and spend life holding them up to the sun so they can see the veins and waiting for the sand to get cool enough to walk on. Life don't care what you choose to deal in. It's just life. No matter what you choose, it don't care. She said sometimes people don't get to choose. He said if you actually know what you want, you'd find a way to get there. She said passion isn't that easy. He said it should be. She asked if he had a passion. He said only cowards don't have passion, and I ain't no coward. She asked if driving around in his truck drinking Mountain Dew and orange juice was his passion. For now, he told her.

They sat quietly again for a bit. He took another swig from his jug of Mountain Dew and orange juice. She asked if she could have a sip. He handed her the jug. So, what about long term, she asked as she brought it to her lips. She drank and wiped her mouth with her sleeve. She asked him what his next passion would be. Go somewhere else, he said. Fiji. She asked why Fiji. He said he liked the way it sounds. Fiji. She asked if that was really his only reason. He said it's better than saying I don't know why. She said she couldn't imagine that kind of life

– bouncing around like that. He said life's like a planet. We're born seeing death on the horizon, and you can either run to meet it, or run the other way and go all the way around. You get there all the same but going around lets you see a lot more. Jesus, is this all you think about, she laughed. He said he comes out here a lot.

She asked which way around would let her pass her calculus test on Monday as she opened her math book. He laughed and said either, if that's what you really want to do. She asked if he thought the short way around was worse than the long way. He said worse for him, maybe not for everyone. You just see less. She said he was obsessed with seeing things. He said seeing is the only way to really understand your place. Being born blind was the worst of all the curses, he said. She said that maybe some people liked the short way. Maybe it made them feel safe. Maybe they liked spending time seeing the things that were important to them – you know, friends, family – instead of spending time trying to see everything. He said only seeing that stuff leads to trouble – might start making you feel too important yourself. She said some people like to feel important.

He didn't respond. He just leaned back in the dent and took another swig of his Mountain Dew and orange juice. She returned her attention to her math book. So, that's it, she asked as she turned the page. All that talking, now you've got nothing to say? He said it ain't worth convincing her if she don't want to be convinced. She could feel important if she wanted. She asked if he didn't like feeling important. He said he'd rather feel free than important. She rolled her eyes and kept reading.

Another quiet minute. Another swig from his Mountain Dew and orange juice. The Jackson before him would say that sometimes there's value in silence. The Jackson before him didn't have many eloquent sayings, and what he would really say was shut that damn mouth of yours, but the sentiment was the same. Zig liked to pretend he said it the other way.

After a minute, she looked up from her book and asked if he took people out here with him a lot. He said she was the first. She asked why her. He said because she was there. Zig figured that if he had believed in fate, he would've thought the universe had brought them together. But he knew that being in the drugstore at the same time as him didn't grant her any special meaning. He looked back at her. She seemed upset. Just because I was there, she asked. He said that he usually didn't stop anywhere before he came out. It was nothing personal. So, it could have been anyone, she asked. I guess, he said. She asked if he liked it better with company. He said he wasn't sure. She still seemed upset. He let her.

She closed her book, put it to the side, and turned to face him, leaning on one arm. Her sadness had quickly turned to determination to get to the bottom of him. She asked if he always came to the same spot. He said more or less. She asked why he always came to the same spot if

he was so into seeing everything. He said it was the only thing he needed to see for now. She sat with the answer for a bit before asking him about the first time he had come here.

Zig remembered an empty handle of Vodka shattering against the wall behind him and the Jackson before him screaming about getting him another fucking bottle, boy. He remembered climbing into his sky-blue 1975 Ford F-150 with the dented hood and the broken handle with tears in his eyes as he listened to the Jackson before him still shouting inside the house. He remembered driving past the liquor store and not stopping. He remembered leaving Pocatello and not stopping. He remembered not stopping until his headlights hit that wheat. It was too dark to see much, but he remembered watching that wheat sway. The wheat didn't care about the shattered Vodka bottle. The wheat didn't care about the Jackson before him. The wheat just cared about the soil and the breeze and the starlight. It wasn't important, but it was free. He looked back at Nikki. She was still waiting for an answer. He said that one day he just decided to start getting out of his house more. Wanted to get out in the country where the air was clean, and this spot seemed as good as any.

She asked how long he usually stayed out here. He said as long as it took to remember how small he was. How small everyone was. Small things make insignificant choices, he told her. They don't got no power. She asked if he felt it yet. He asked if she did. She said she didn't know. He said putting away the math book was a fine start. She laughed and said she could see why he liked it out here. It was nice. He said he didn't come here just cause it's nice. She said that for a guy who's trying so hard to feeling insignificant, he sure liked being dramatic. Maybe he should let things just be nice sometimes. He took another swig out of his glass jug with the Mountain Dew and orange juice and said he'd think about it.