

## Southward Bound, Reads *Worstward Ho*

Sun in eyes, faces east, waits for van bound for south meeting plane from west. Carries book, *Worstward Ho*.\*

In van, heading south, sits on right or west side, sun in through windows from east. Highway crosses and recrosses meandering stream passing now northeast and now northwest under. Reads *Worstward Ho*: On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.†

\*She waits near the highway before the entrance of Hojo's for the van going south. She is going south to meet a plane coming from the west. Waiting with her is a thin, dark-haired young woman who does not stop walking back and forth restlessly near her luggage. They are both early and wait for some time. In her purse she has two books, *Worstward Ho* and *West with the Night*. If it is quiet and she reads *Worstward Ho* on the way south, when she is fresh, she can read *West with the Night* on the way back up north, when it will be later and she will be tired.

†The van arrives and she takes care to sit on the right side, so that as they travel south the sun will not come in through her window but through the windows across the aisle from her. It is early morning, and the sun shines in through the windows

Road turning and van turning east and then north of east, sun in eyes, stops reading *Worstward Ho*.\*

Road turning and van turning east again and south, shadow on page, reads: As now by way of somehow on where in the nowhere all together?†

Road and van turning briefly north, sun at right shoulder, light not in eyes but flickering on page of *Worstward Ho*, reads: What when words gone? None for what then.‡

Van turning off highway, sun behind, sun around and in window and onto page, does not read.

Van pointing east motionless in station, in shadow of tree,

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from the east. Later in the day, as she returns north, she thinks, it may be late enough so that the sun will come through the windows from the west.

The highway she travels crosses and recrosses a meandering stream that passes now northeast and now northwest under her. As long as she is alone, sitting in the back of the van, she does not read but looks out the window.

Soon the van pulls up in front of a shopping mall. The restless young woman with the dark hair immediately stands up and remains standing in the aisle looking at the other passengers and out the windows. Two women board the van. They smell heavily of face powder as they walk past her to sit in the back near her. Now, since she is no longer alone, she begins to read.

The van is quiet, so she reads *Worstward Ho*. The first words are: "On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on." She is not very pleased by these words.

\*But soon after, she reads a sentence she likes better: "Whither once whence no return." After that, for a while, some sentences are pleasing and some are not.

The van travels almost due south down the highway. Sometimes it leaves the highway, the sunlight circling around behind all of them, to make a stop and pick up more passengers. At each stop, the restless young woman stands up and looks around in a commanding way. The passengers who get onto the van are mostly women.

She reads on comfortably for some miles, but when the road turns, and the van turns with it, east and then north of east, the sun is in her eyes and she cannot read *Worstward Ho*.

†She waits, and when the road turns east again and then south, a shadow falls on the page and she can read. With difficulty, though the light is good, she reads such words as "As now by way of somehow on where in the nowhere all together?"

‡If the van turns briefly north, so that the sun is at her right shoulder, the light is no longer in her eyes but flickering on the page of the book, illuminating but further confusing such already confusing words as "What when words gone? None for what then."

reads: But say by way of somehow on somehow with sight to do.\*

Van pointing south and moving, reads: So leastness on.

Van turning off highway, sun behind, sun around and in window and onto page, does not read.

Van pointing east then north of east motionless, in treeless station not in shadow, sun in face, does not read.†

Van turning, sun ahead, sun around and in opposite window, shadow on page, van pointing south and moving, reads: Longing the so-said mind long lost to longing. Dint of long longing lost to longing. Said is missaid. Whenever said said said missaid.‡

\*Now the shade of a tree by a small gas station allows her to go on to read: "But say by way of somehow on somehow with sight to do." While the driver makes a phone call, one woman leaves the van to try to find a working bathroom, fails, and returns to the van.

The van resumes going south and she reads with pleasure and some understanding: "Now for to say as worst they may only they only they." And then with more pleasure: "With leastening words say least best worse. For want of worser worst. Unlessenable least best worse." And then soon there is something a little different: "So leastward on. So long as dim still. Dim undimmed. Or dimmed to dimmer still. To dimmest dim. Leastmost in dimmest dim. Utmost dim. Leastmost in utmost dim. Unworsenable worst."

The sun in another small gas station stops her from reading, heat and brightness coming in her window, what was the west window when the van was heading south but probably must be considered the east window just at this moment. While the driver makes another phone call, two women, now, leave the van to try to find a working bathroom, fail, and return to the bus.

†The van heads south again.

‡Though she is several pages farther along, some of the words are the same again: "Next fail see say how dim undimmed to worsen. How nohow save to dimmer still. But but a shade so as when after nohow somehow on to dimmer still."

Then there is something new at the bottom of the page: "Longing the so-said mind long lost to longing. The so-missaid. So far so-missaid. Dint of long longing lost to longing."

Then a combination: "Longing that all go. Dim go."

Soon after, with confusion, she reads: "Said is missaid. Whenever said said said missaid." She misunderstands and reads again: "Whenever said said said missaid." Then a third time, and when she imagines a pause in the middle of it, she understands better.

Van turning off highway, sun behind, sun around and in window and onto page, does not read.\*

Van turning last time back onto highway, sun ahead, sun around and in opposite window, shadow on page, reads: No once. No once in pastless now.

Van turning last time off highway, sun ahead, sun around and in window, does not read.†

Van farthest south motionless in shadow, pointing north, reads last words: Said nohow on,‡

\*At the next stop, the van driver calls out for "folks Benson and Goodwin." The Benson couple and the single Goodwin, sitting forward in the van, identify themselves as "Two Benson and one Goodwin." It takes the driver a very long time to find their papers. While he is searching, three women, now, leave the van, find a working bathroom, and return to the van.

Now each time the van stops, it stops with the sun coming in what was the west window but is now the east window, preparing to turn right and head south into the sun again. Now she has grown used to waiting with the sun on her face and on the page and watching the asphalt outside and the other passengers inside until the van turns and goes on south.

†Near the end of the book, she reads: "No once. No once in pastless now," and just now the van passes a cemetery near the airport and she sees many white stone angels, their wings raised.

‡By the time she reaches the end of her trip south, the southernmost point in the van's route, from which it will head north again, she has finished the book, which is not long. Although she has liked many of the words that came in between, its last words, "Said nohow on," say as little to her as its first, "On. Say on. Be said on."