

THE REAL VERSION

J.T. Bushnell

My date asked me, “Do you ever get the sense that this life, it isn’t really yours?” She waved her arms when she said “this life,” as though her life—or mine—was this tavern, a kitschy place with license plates nailed to the ceiling and a smell like year-old beer stains, and that’s it.

“What do you mean?” I said, though I knew exactly what she meant. A week earlier, driving home from my girlfriend’s place late at night, rain blurring the windshield faster than the wipers could clear it, I’d pounded my fists against the steering wheel and hollered, “What am I doing here!” I didn’t mean anything about my girlfriend. What I meant was, what in the world was I doing in Corvallis, Oregon? It rains constantly in Corvallis. When it’s not raining, it smells of cow manure. I’m from the beach. I’m from San Luis Obispo, California. Whenever I think about it, even right now, it gives me vertigo.

But I’d dated enough to know it was better to ask questions than to talk. “I mean,” my date said, and paused. She wrapped a lock of carrot-orange hair around her finger, then caught herself and let it fall. “Let me illustrate with a story,” she said, and grinned in a way that meant, *We’re on your turf now.*

Translation: Boris Deliradev