



Source: Anne Gearan, 'Rice hints at Iraq pull-out, but cautious on timetable', *Sun-Herald in Sydney Morning Herald online*, 18/12/05.

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I was in a car accident in November on a Texas highway during rush hour. On the way to work, en route, ironically enough, from the doctor's office, maybe 20 miles above the speed limit (because who in Texas follows the posted signs?) Left lane, center lane, right lane, as if I had somewhere important to be.

Right lane, center lane, right lane. The car was fairly old, a hand-me-down luxury sedan that was impossible to parallel park. I had driven it to Texas a few months before, stopping in towns with impossible hybridized names: Texarkana, Arkadelphia. Huge stretches of Tennessee highway are out of the range of national public radio. I was moving for a new job and a year of waiting for my real life to start.

Center lane, left lane, center lane, right lane. I moved just two weeks before hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, where my younger brother—who'd once driven this car—was living and working. He stayed for the storm, and for three days my family and I called each other, hoping someone had heard from him. When he finally called me at midnight on Wednesday from a refugee center in Baton Rouge, relief washed over me. He was on a payphone. He might go to Atlanta, he said. I told him to stay where he was and got in the car with my broken cell phone, drove through the night to him. If love is anything at all, it is Highway 290 East in the middle of the night, pitch-darkness and the road rolling out ahead of me. I ran into his arms at 8am Thursday morning, brought him back home with me. He slept in the car, his feet propped out the window, his bag with five pairs of underwear and some cash in the back seat.

Left lane, center lane, right lane. On the highway in November I sped towards work when a car slowed suddenly. I didn't notice until the car between us pulled out, and I hit the back of some man's jeep at 60 miles an hour. The rearview mirror broke off and flew into the back seat. The car was destroyed. It probably saved my life.

Center lane, right lane, center lane. Each morning now I walk 20 minutes to the bus, a short meditation and transition. My brother is a carpenter now in some other state. He plans to return to New Orleans in January. We are both moving along with speed, toward some other life.

*Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, another traveller.*

This ride I make is to move you through me.

This is how I start riding in London. My daily travel time has been marked by your messages, waiting for the call, a word, and I have got to shift it. Navigating London alone and new to it, it takes sometimes upwards of an hour and 15 minutes to cross just a small wedge of the city. From my worker's semi, I dash along the Walworth Road (one of London's wonder streets with keycutters, the one pound shop, the Turkish 24 hour, butchers, bookies, African supermarket, five pound bling gear, bitter spill of stuff, anything you can and cannot afford and rammed with punters).

The first time I ride my bike it is Autumn and you have shocked me. I need to go fast to make you move through me, I need things to accelerate and I need to burn as much energy as I can. Brilliant and fast on a second-hand bike. I will be dogged and bloody-minded. I will be a body only, in a shower of street, road, sky.

The second period when I ride my bike daily in London I am avoiding the aftermath of the summertime bombs. I feel like travelling slowly, meandering, becoming a woman from another century, the 19th century all of a sudden, whistling while I ride, I clap eyes on people at ground level.

Right now, you rush through me and a familiar line of blood shoots up my back, cloaks and spills down my skull.

Moving fast can give sensuous effects like vertigo. Speed also provokes mysterious phenomena like the 19th century condition Railway Spine. Back when railways shot out and connected cities up, people felt the thrill of velocity in new ways and fell victim to a type of radical shock that was previously unheard of. Railway Spine was a documented condition in which train travellers, caught in early train disasters would die, apparently with no external injury. It was surmised that they would die purely from systemic shock. Sometimes up to a week after the event. They would die from the delayed impact of speed.

Train. Bus. Plane. Motorbike. Spacecraft. Motorboat. Ocean Liner. Bicycle. Truck. Tram. Hot Air Balloon. Canoe. Submarine. Car. Left lane, right lane, left lane.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from stories by Jacqui Shine and Caitlin Newton Broad.*