

On a hot June day, out in the fresh hardwood and hemlock shaded forest roads, our bus-full of sightseers has embarked on what was billed as a relaxing weekend in the Alleghenies. But, to our dismay, our supersized driver has taken on Pennsylvania's western winding two-lane blacktops in rough and ready style, and scenery begins to blur. As he careens, the narrow roads seem to spin. I worry we'll never make these curves.

Our designated picnic spot eludes our grumbling driver, until tires crunch on a gravel lot, and we spy a rustic pavilion; picnic tables sheltered in Oak and Pine. Hungry and tired, we disembark. I gauge distance across the lot against thickening clouds, and wish I were back at the hotel—better yet, home. I ease onto a splintered bench, as a sudden wind whips a massive branch free. With a sharp crack and loud roll, it hits too close.

No taste for my turkey sandwich, I abandon the table for the bus. I toss my apple core to a squirrel begging in the windy weeds. Gusts blow dust and fumes from the idling bus across the lot. Rain stings my face as I mount the steps in a somber line of grim-faced passengers. As we return to the road, a storm approaches, the severity of which we cannot know.

Now, the road lurches through a threshold. Whoosh! We whiplash into waves. I shout, "Whoa!" as though my urgency has power to stop this massive, reeling craft. No vision through the foggy portal, I rub the window wildly with my sweatshirt sleeve. Thunder rolls and resonates. We plead, "Too fast! Slow down!"

But the driver is detached; a stranger, and we're his hostages. He pushes into the maelstrom, strains into his seatbelt toward the dash; squints to discern the road, pulls down the curly-wired radio, and shouts, "Base Station!" The return voice crackles back, "What's your 20? Where are you, man?" No control, no connection. Lost in hills, we hurtle to rest within awestruck trees.

*

I struggle to think. My right arm and hand, heavy. Panic swells in my gut with the dread of knowing. Stroke. The fog retreats and I hear, "...driver radioed emergency when you collapsed on the bus. Took the techs an hour to get to you. Helicopter flew you here. Bad weather in the mountains...You survived!"

Survived. What's next?

6+

 Send to Kindle

- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Tumblr](#)