Travel Makes You Ravenous

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Travel makes you ravenous. It doesn't matter that you've been cooped up in that shitty Honda Civic, doing nothing but driving straight for 8 hours and gorging yourself on Cheetos. Travel will still make you ravenous.

Maybe it's because a long stretch of road makes you long for home, or wherever you're going, and one thing that is clear in your memory of that wherever place is the food. Or maybe in preparation to leave, you didn't buy any groceries, didn't cook any meals. Instead, living off of greasy fast food and takeout tacos for the last three days. Whatever it is, travel makes you ravenous for something hot and cooked with care.

And when you're ravenous, you ignore your best judgment. Normally, you wouldn't even think about stopping at some roadside diner in the middle of nowhere. The kind of place where you look up and down that flat expanse of road and don't see anything else. Well, you can only see as far as the flickering neon light of the diner sign will let you see. So maybe something is closer, but it's a secret only the sun knows.

The kind of place where you can't see through the windows. Not because they're tinted, but because the crud has built up so thick that not even the strongest window cleaner could wipe it away now. The kind of place that you know the Health Inspector doesn't know exists.

The kind of place you should just drive past. But travel makes you ravenous, so you pull in for a meal.

Once you're inside, it's not too late. If you really thought about it, you would realize your stomach isn't clinching in on itself. It's not grumbling with hunger pains. That the travel hasn't made you literally ravenous, it's something else you hunger for. And if you realize that, then there is time to leave.

But you won't leave. Because hunger is terribly hard to ignore.

You could order anything on the menu, except one thing sticks out to you. The Sloppy Joe. Sloppy Joes remind you of your grandma. And you miss your grandma. So you order the Sloppy Joe.

You shouldn't have ordered the Sloppy Joe.

One of those order-up bells will ding across the counter. You'll get a glimpse of the nostalgic sandwich only for a second before the freckled, wrinkled arm of the decrepit diner waitress blocks your line of sight.

She does not remind you of your grandma.

She'll set the plate down in front of you, and you'll forget your manners. Because travel makes you ravenous. The slop is smeared across your cheeks, and you don't bother to unravel your silverware roll. You can feel her eyes on you, the diner waitress. You don't care.

You should care.

Eventually, you'll bite into something hard, and you'll pause, and you'll fish it out of your mouth.

You should've left before looking at the hard thing. But you didn't.

Pressed between your pointer finger and thumb, you'll find a tooth. You'll know it's human. But you won't know if it's covered solely in slop.

Is that blood?

You'll tongue around your mouth, counting your teeth. You have them all.

That is not your tooth. You really wanted it to be your tooth.

You'll make your last mistake when you look to the diner waitress in horror.

Your first mistake was that travel made you ravenous.