MANY ROADS TO NOWHERE

Written by

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EXT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

Through the windows we see an assortment of electronics, jewelry and old tools.

At the counter, the fluorescent lighting casts a harsh glow on HARRY (*early 20's, cowboy boots with light-blue denim jeans and a white t-shirt with holes in it, rugged with a charming smile*).

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

Harry slides his phone across to the PAWN SHOP OWNER (*70's, a man with a frog-like face and round glasses*). The owner picks up the phone, flipping it over and inspecting it closely.

PAWN SHOP OWNER
There's a little scratch on the back here.

The Owner eyes Harry, waiting. No response.

With a grunt, he punches numbers into his ancient cash register and pulls out a bunch of cash.

PAWN SHOP OWNER (CONT'D)
You sure you don't want to buy a different phone? Got heaps of 'em. I'll give ya a good price too.

Harry takes the cash and tucks it into his pocket without a word. He turns and walks out, the bell above the door jingles as it closes behind him.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Harry hands over a bundle of cash to KYLE (*50's, mustache, nervously biting his nails*).

Kyle counts the money, licking his thumb every few bills.

KYLE
Pleasure doing business with you.

Kyle offers his hand, Harry smiles and nods.

Harry walks over to a 1996 GREEN, BANGED-UP MAZDA BONGO, its paint chipped with a dent on the driver's side door. He pulls the creaky door open.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Where you heading?

Harry shrugs casually and smiles, he tosses a weathered duffel bag into the passenger seat and slides into the driver’s seat.

INT. MAZDA BONGO - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Harry inserts the key and twists. The engine sputters, coughs, then roars to life with a reluctant growl.

He adjusts his rearview mirror and pulls out of the driveway, the Bongo kicks up a small cloud of dust as it rolls away.

OPENING TITLES OVER THE ROAD

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The Mazda Bongo drives along a sunny road in between tall, green trees. Sunlight pierces through the front window, its beams shining across Harry’s face.

INT. MAZDA BONGO - DAY

The glass is streaked with dirt, smudges and a growing collection of bug splatters. Harry cleans the window.

He inserts a TAPE into the CASSETTE PLAYER.

MUSIC CUE: ‘ASEXUAL WELLBEING’ BY OKAY KAYA

He taps his fingers lightly on the steering wheel in time with the music, as the wind tousles his hair through the open window.

He glances out the side window, his eyes linger for a moment.

The hypnotic rhythm of shadows of passing branches ripple across Harry’s face and the dashboard. His expression is distant.

The van hits a small bump, and the tape skips briefly.

EXT. GEOTHERMAL PARK - DAY

Harry walks by a thermal pool. Steam rises from bubbling pools.

He strolls through the terrain. Beneath him, the earth boils and hisses.

He stops and looks at the bubbling mud pools, their rhythmic plopping.

Harry stares into the abyss of a steaming crater. We stay on his face before cutting to a wide of the landscape.

EXT. CLIFF - SUNSET

The soft hiss of gas and the flicker of fire punctuate the serene soundscape of crashing waves. Harry places a pan on the stove and ignites the flame.

The van is parked at the edge of a cliff. The ocean stretches endlessly beneath him.

Harry stands at the back of the van, the rear doors open wide. The interior is modest: a mattress with a neatly folded blanket in the back, a small shelf holding a few books and essentials, and a compact kitchen setup in the center. A tiny stove hooked to a gas canister and a small sink are built into the van.

Harry seasons a steak on a worn cutting board and opens a bottle of red wine.

Steam rises from the pan as the steak sizzles.

He steps back, letting the pan simmer and leans against the open door of the van. He drinks the wine straight from the bottle.

FROM HIS POV: the sun sinks closer to the horizon, its reflection shimmering on the water.

He turns back to the stove and takes the steak out. He deglazes the pan with some of his wine.

EXT. CLIFF - SUNSET (CONT'D)

Harry sits on a camp chair, plate in hand. He eats slowly, eyes fixed on the horizon as the sun begins to dip below the waterline.

INT. MAZDA BONGO - NIGHT

Harry is sleeping on his makeshift bed in the back of the van.

His eyes snap open suddenly, his chest panting.

He sits up, panic in his movement. His breathing is shallow and rapid. His hands fumble around in the dark, searching for something.

Finally, his fingers close around a crooked necklace. He grips it tightly, pressing it against his heart.

He closes his eyes and begins to focus on his breathing, his lips moving silently as he counts to himself.

SOFT FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.

Gradually, his breathing slows. He leans back against the van wall, clutching the necklace.

EXT. CLIFF - MORNING

The first light of dawn creeps over the horizon. The Bongo is still parked in the same spot, its windows slightly fogged.

Harry emerges from the van, a blanket draped over his shoulders. His hair is messy.

He sits on the edge of the van's open trunk door, pulling out a a pouch of tobacco and a pack of matches. He rolls a cigarette.

Striking a match, he lights the cigarette and takes a slow drag.

An old book rests on the mattress. Harry picks it up. The morning light shines into his face as he reads.

Birds chirp softly in the distance and the ocean sparkles under the rising sun. Harry glances up from the pages, taking in the view.

He finishes the cigarette, stubbing it out in a small tin. Closing the book, he leans back on the mattress.

INT. MAZDA BONGO - ROAD - DAY

The van glides along a quiet country road. Harry sits behind the wheel, one arm resting casually on the window.

His nose twitches. He sniffs the air, catching the faint scent of something. His eyebrows furrow briefly as he looks down towards the engine.

Sniffing around, he looks at the dashboard. Everything seems fine. He shrugs it off and keeps driving.

Up ahead, a weathered wooden sign by the roadside catches his eye. It reads: "PINE-CONES $4." He looks at all the free pinecones scattered in the ditch.

HARRY
Pinecones? Who the fuck would buy pinecones?

EXT. DOCK - DAY

The Mazda Bongo pulls into an active dock, joining a line of vehicles waiting to board.

In the distance, a massive FERRY looms over the port. Seagulls circle overhead, their cries mingling with the hum of engines.

Harry steps out of the van and stretches. He glances at the ferry, its towering presence reflected in his sunglasses.

The line of cars moves, he gets back into his van and approaches the TICKET BOOTH.

TICKET AGENT
One vehicle, one passenger?

Harry nods, he pulls out his wallet and hands over cash. The Ticket Agent hands him a ticket.

TICKET AGENT (CONT'D)
Lane three. Boarding in fifteen minutes.

Harry moves into his lane alongside other cars, motorcycles and camper vans.

The line inches forward as boarding begins, vehicles rolling up the ferry's loading ramp.

Following the directions of a STAFF MEMBER, Harry drives the Bongo onto the ramp.

EXT. FERRY - DECK - DAY

Harry stands on the ferry's upper deck, bag over his shoulder, leaning against the railing.

The port shrinks in the distance as the ferry sets off.

INT. FERRY - DAY

Harry wanders through the ferry's interior amongst other passengers. Families, couples and lone travelers fill the lounges.

A BIG HAIRY GUY (*mid-30's, heavily tattooed, muscular*) strides past Harry, his boots thudding against the floor. The man's eyes scan Harry up and down. Harry, oblivious, continues walking.

He pauses at a large window, the land in the distance framed like a painting.

INT. FERRY - LOUNGE - DAY

Harry finds an empty seat and drops into it.

Across from him sits a GIRL READING A BOOK (*mid-20's, effortless charm, short hair, wearing a cozy sweater*), her head tilted slightly as she reads.

Harry notices her. His eyes drift briefly over her.

He goes through his bag, pulling out a worn book. He flips it open and starts reading, occasionally glancing at the girl over the edge of his book.

The girl, sensing his gaze, peeks up. Their eyes meet.

She holds her gaze for a beat longer than expected, then smiles before returning to her book.

Harry pretends to refocus on his book, but his eyes keep looking at her.

After a few moments of their silent back-and-forth, Harry leans forward slightly, resting the book on his knee.

Harry swallows, shifts in his seat, resting the book on his knee. Clears his throat, like he's about to say something, but no words come out.

He taps his bag. Gestures vaguely. A quick, uncertain motion that translates to - *Watch this for me? I'll be right back.*

The girl looks up, studying him for a sec before nodding.

Harry smiles, places the book on his bag and walks away. Behind him, the girl pulls his stuff closer as she watches him leave. Smiling to herself she picks up his book.

INT. FERRY - TOILET - DAY

Harry is in the stall, his mood chirpy. A smile lingering on his lips. He whistles a cheerful tune as he takes a piss.

His eyes wander to the tags on the wall. Once finished, he zips up, turns and reaches for the latch to leave.

As he opens the door, the Big Hairy Guy from before blocks his way. The man's size fills the small space, a human wall. Harry instinctively takes a small step back.

The guy doesn't move, his intense gaze fixed on Harry. Harry glances to the side, considering his options, but there's nowhere to go.

The Big Hairy Guy steps closer. He reaches out and unzips Harry's pants. Harry freezes, his breath catching in his throat.

The man studies Harry's expression as he jerks him off. Harry looks for something to grasp onto in the man's eyes.

BIG HAIRY GUY
Do you want me to stop?

Harry, trembling, gasping for air, shakes his head - "no".

EXT. FERRY - LOUNGE - LATER

Harry returns to the lounge. The Girl Reading a Book looks up, noticing him approach. She gives him a smile, ready to say something, but he takes his belongings without a word and quickly walks away.

GIRL READING A BOOK
You're welcome...

She watches him leave. Harry's steps are hurried, his body tense.

He finds a quiet corner near a window, drops his bag and leans heavily against the wall. His reflection stares back at him in the glass.

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - DAY

The Mazda Bongo drives through a valley road. Harry sits stiffly in the driver's seat, his hands gripping the wheel tightly.

His eyes remain fixed on the road ahead, unblinking. The usual hum of the engine is the only sound, no music.

Bugs splatter against the windshield, leaving streaks that Harry doesn't bother to clean.

EXT. BEACH PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The van is parked in a spot near the beach. Across the way, a lively BEACH RESTAURANT shines bright. People laugh, drink, and dance on the deck as music thumps in the background.

INT. MAZDA BONGO - BEACH PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Inside the van, Harry sits in the back, staring out through the windshield. He watches the silhouettes of strangers.

Harry's eyes water. A single tear rolls down his cheek, tracing a line across his face. He doesn't wipe it away.

EXT. BEACH PARKING LOT - NIGHT (CONT'D)

We pull back, showing Harry's van sitting between the restaurant and the dark ocean.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Harry drives the van down the winding road. The world outside is alive.

INT. MAZDA BONGO - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Inside, Harry is still. His hands grip the wheel lightly, his eyes flicking to the rearview mirror every so often.

A car approaches behind him, its headlights flashing impatiently. Harry slows down, pulling to the side to let it pass. Another car follows and he lets that one go too.

He glances out at the rolling hills and the patches of forest that blur past.

A breeze sweeps through, rustling the necklace that dangles from his neck. Harry reaches up to still it with his fingers and doesn't let go.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY (CONT'D)

Another car comes up behind him, he pulls to the side again. He watches it pass, its taillights growing smaller in the distance.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

The van sits in the gravel shoulder of a quiet road. Harry steps out with a roll of black gaffer tape in hand.

He unrolls a length of tape, tearing it off with his teeth.

Harry carefully presses the tape against the dusty green paint on the back of the van, smoothing it flat with his palm, creating the letter "P".

He tears and shapes more letters.

The letters slowly come together: "PASS WITH CARE, I'M IN NO RUSH"

He dusts his hands off on his jeans, tosses the tape into the van and gets back into the driver's seat.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

Harry walks along a narrow path going through green hills. Around him, cows graze lazily and lambs hang out in the landscape. They look like cotton balls against the green.

Harry stands still for a moment, gazing at the view of the beach in the distance.

Harry's eyes dart to a lamb struggling at the edge of the fence line, its tiny hoof caught between the wires.

Harry kneels beside the fence. The lamb jerks its leg, panicking.

HARRY
Hey, hey, easy now.

The lamb kicks weakly but settles under his touch. Harry works the wires apart just enough to free the hoof.

The lamb stumbles forward.

Harry watches the lamb rejoin its flock.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Harry is in his van, organizing groceries in the back.

An OLD MAN (*70's, fat, wearing a faded plaid shirt and shorts that have seen better days*) approaches. He leans casually against the van.

OLD MAN
You’re not from here, are you?

Harry smiles and shakes his head. The old man squints, then nods slowly.

OLD MAN (CONT’D)
America?

Harry nods.

OLD MAN (CONT’D)
It’s buggered out there, isn’t it? That’s why you’re here. Bloody Russians infiltrated your colleges seventy years ago. Poisoning the minds of your youth. Socialism creeping in like a bloody plague.

Harry places a loaf of bread in the cupboard, barely acknowledging him.

OLD MAN (CONT’D)
You traveling or moving here?

HARRY
Just passing by.

OLD MAN
Good. We’ve got enough of a mess here without more people moving in. Queenstown’s buggered. Full of foreigners. Not the white ones, mind you. But bloody Chinese and Indians everywhere. Different people, you know. They don’t mix well. No respect for our ways.

Harry pauses, his hands gripping a can of beans. He exhales through his nose and resumes his task without responding.

OLD MAN (CONT’D)
I didn’t see any of them wearing turbans, but their religion, it’s different. Doesn’t belong here.

HARRY
Hmm.

The old man leans closer, lowering his voice as though sharing a secret.

OLD MAN
I remember when New Zealand had just two million people. Back when it was good. Quiet. Proper. Now? Overrun. It’s the bloody immigrants. Globalism. You know how it is.

The Old Man looks up into the sky.

OLD MAN (CONT’D)
First nice day in three months.

HARRY
Is that why you’re so miserable?

The old man snaps his head toward Harry, frowning.

OLD MAN
What?

HARRY
Nothing.

OLD MAN
When the English come, or Germans, or even Hungarians... they fit in. Christians. Hard workers. But those others... it’s different. You can feel it. Look at the map, mate. The whole world’s buggered. Immigrants. Socialism. It’s all connected--

Harry stops mid-motion.

HARRY
Right. Well, I’ve got to go.

He slams the van’s door shut. He climbs into the driver’s seat, starts the engine and pulls away without looking back.

OLD MAN
Bugger off then alright!

EXT. DEVIL’S PUNCHBOWL TRACK - DAY

Harry walks along a gravel path, winding through dense greenery. The faint sound of rushing water growing louder with each step.

He crosses a wooden bridge over the river. Below, the water tumbles over rocks. Harry pauses, leaning against the bridge railing, watching the current swirl.

EXT. DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL - DAY

The Devil's Punchbowl waterfall comes into view, a cascade of water plummeting into a rocky basin below. Mist rises from the base, caught in the sunlight, creating a faint rainbow.

Harry's face glistens with the mist.

FROM HARRY'S POV: His eyes drift to the greenery around the falls, the moss clinging to rocks, the ferns swaying in the spray. The water begins to look surreal - like liquid nitrogen, an endless white pour dissipating into vapor.

Harry closes his eyes.

INT. MAZDA BONGO - MORNING

Harry stirs awake in the van. He rubs his eyes and looks outside. A WOMAN IN A SANTA HAT walks by, leading a small dog on a leash.

HARRY
Oh, God.

He falls back on his mattress.

EXT. TOWN ROAD - DAY

Harry drives through a small town. Christmas decorations are everywhere. Twinkling lights, ornaments strung across buildings and lampposts.

Suddenly, red and blue lights flash in his rearview mirror. Harry glances back, surprised. He sighs and pulls over to the side of the road.

EXT. TOWN ROADSIDE - DAY

A POLICE OFFICER (*60's, no-nonsense*) steps out of the patrol car and approaches Harry's van. Harry rolls down the window.

POLICE OFFICER
You were going a bit fast back there.

HARRY
Are you sure? Didn't think this thing could go fast.

POLICE OFFICER
License and ID, please.

Harry nods and rummages through his glove compartment. He pulls out his license and hands it over.

The officer takes a moment, scanning the details.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
Right. Wait here.

The officer walks back to his car. Harry sits there, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel.

After a few seconds, the officer returns, holding a small ticket pad.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
Here's your ticket.

The officer tears off the ticket and hands it to Harry. Harry nods.

The Police Officer sniffs around the van.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
You aware your van smells like burnt oil?

INT. MAZDA BONGO - ROADSIDE - DAY

Harry looks at the ticket and tosses it on the dashboard.

He rolls down the window, sniffing the air.

The police lights turn off and the patrol car heads in the opposite direction. Harry tries starting the engine, but it doesn't start.

He rests his head on the steering wheel.

INT. BAR - DAY

Harry sits at the bar, sipping on a beer. A bowl of Christmas cookies lay next to him on the counter.

At the far end of the bar, a CURLY HAIRED COWBOY lounges in a booth. Next to him, a BLONDE WOMAN in a dress leans back against the seat, sunglasses perched on her nose. They look effortlessly cool, like they've just ridden into town from another era.

Harry notices them. Steals a glance. Then another.

JANE (*early 20's, a playful energy about her*) sits next to him and pokes him with her finger. Hard.

HARRY
Ouch, what the fuck?

JANE
I was just making sure you're real.

HARRY
Are you high or what?

JANE
Yeah.

Harry shakes his head, chuckling.

JANE (CONT'D)
What are you drinking?

Harry points to his beer. She gestures with her fingers in a heart shape.

JANE (CONT'D)
We love a beer.

HARRY
Alright.

Jane orders a beer.

JANE
Ooh. Oh my God, we love these.

She plucks a cookie from the plate between them, taking a bite. Harry watches as someone else reaches over and takes one without a word.

HARRY
Everybody seems to love them.

JANE
Of course, mate. Christmas cookies.
Try one, they're nice.

He picks up a cookie.

JANE (CONT'D)
So, what are you doing here? All
alone, melancholic-like.

HARRY
Not sure, really.

JANE
I guess it would be easy to make
you cry now, huh?

HARRY
You'd think so, but unless you show me a sad movie, you're shit out of luck.

JANE
Like, what kind?

HARRY
I don't know.
(thinking)
Finding Nemo. Titanic.

Jane chuckles. Harry's eyes drift towards the cool couple in the corner.

JANE
Alright, what the fuck? You keep looking over there.

HARRY
They're hot.

Jane turns, studies them.

JANE
Okay, cowboy kink. I see you.

Harry shakes his head, chuckling, drinking his beer.

JANE (CONT'D)
Last Christmas I cried watching Home Alone.

Harry smiles and raises his beer, they clink glasses.

HARRY
I also cried during some random Christmas movie last year. No idea what it was. But it had nothing to do with the film.

JANE
What was it?

HARRY
It just hit me. Christmas at my grandfather's, same as every year. Me, my father and my grandfather. The three Harry's watching TV in one small room, disassociating from the rest of the world.

Harry grabs another cookie.

HARRY (CONT'D)
We keep having this Christmas ceremony and all of us actually find it uncomfortable.

JANE
Why is it uncomfortable?

Jane grabs another cookie. A hand reaches past them, snagging one as well.

HARRY
Because my grandfather is a widower. My father is divorced. And I don't want to be... that, you know?

Harry sips on his beer.

HARRY (CONT'D)
And for the past few years I was happy because I wasn't that.

JANE
I see.

HARRY
That's now gone and I'm back to being it.

JANE
You're still far away from that.

HARRY
(drinking)
Yeah, well, maybe...

JANE
And their life is also in their hands. The fact that you're a widower doesn't mean you can't find someone new.

HARRY
My grandfather is eighty-six.

JANE
Okay, well maybe it's a bit late for him.

They chuckle.

HARRY
I just don’t want to be the next continuation of the Harry Lazroe generation that doesn’t have anyone else to spend Christmas with beside themselves.

JANE
Do you wanna--

Before she can finish, THE BAR OWNER emerges from the toilet, holding a bucket. He glares at the room.

BAR OWNER
Alright, which one of you’s doesn’t know the three "P’s" of what can go in the toilet?

Harry squints, thinking.

HARRY
Three "P’s"?
(whispering to Jane)
Poo, pee... pets?

She bursts out laughing.

JANE
Paper, you idiot.

They laugh and drink more.

INT. JANE’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Harry is on the sofa, smoking a joint. Jane pulls out a bottle of whiskey and two glasses, pouring generously. The TV is on - The Holdovers.

HARRY
(wiping away a tear)
This is the best new Christmas movie.

JANE
I know, right?

Jane leans in, picking up the joint from Harry’s hand, her palm grazing his.

HARRY
I’ve always wanted to have this superpower--

Thank you for reading the preview of my screenplay.

If you're interested in reading more or discussing potential collaboration, please feel free to reach out to me.

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