

Whitney Groves

an excerpt of

O Taste and See

THIS is not a road story like *On the Road* or *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* or even *Pilgrim's Progress*. Things happen in those stories. They may be hallucinations, they may be allegories, but events transpire, the plot moves—things happen. In this story, nothing happens; most of the action, such as it is, takes place inside a car and inside a mind. This story is about the search for transcendence at seventy miles an hour, about divinity hovering tantalizingly close but seen through a glass darkly—in this case, through the tinted windows of an SUV. Above all, it is about the attempt to “taste and see that the Lord is good,” despite all evidence to the contrary.

We cruised down Route 90, which parallels the Gulf of Mexico and provides an up-close view of the remains of the waterfront. Nearly six months after Katrina, that little strip of the world was still a mess, so I found myself turning from the devastation, fixing my gaze on the infinite water beyond the swath of debris. The Gulf glistened like a matte-finished postcard, the waters rippling as though easing a contented sigh. I squirmed in my seat, finding the whole scene painfully reminiscent of the part of that John Donne sonnet that I didn't like, when the speaker implores God to “pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might / Drown my world with weeping earnestly.” After all, I was seeking a taste of transcendence on this trip; sorrow and destruction were not on my itinerary.

Hurricane Katrina showed what could happen when unimaginable forces manifest themselves. Oklahoma in February, barren as though creation had

stopped halfway through the third day, could fool one into thinking there *are* no other forces. Our second day of driving took us through land as empty as an abyss; I felt that if I sat there long enough, I would hear time itself—not the busy little tick of a watch, but a metronome’s snick-snack, implacable and heartless.