

Speaking. Roadside. 2020. Thoughts by Nellie.

Written by Jake Lane

Performed by Katie Beazley

*(NELLIE is sitting on the ground leaning against her car. She's right near the tire, which is flat. She has a White Claw or something equivalent in her hand. She sips it occasionally. At the start, she is on the phone. She sits across from her sister)*

NELLIE

OK... OK... So... Really? That much longer?... No, I mean, thank you. Thank you so much... OK... Yeah... Thank you. *(she hangs up)* It's gonna be another two hours. I know. Well... I guess it's my fault. Well, I mean I guess it's my fault we took this route and therefore we're at least an hour from any semblance of humanity in the 21st century, but... The tire is not my fault, obviously. The tire is entirely the fault of... the tire. I don't know what else to say. I mean who can you even blame in this situation? I don't know why I'm worried about blame anyways... It's not your fault and it's not my fault so I guess it's the tire's fault, but... I'm not mad. Janie, you understand I'm not mad, right? I'm not, okay? ... OK. Sorry, I just get so worried sometimes about being blamed for things when... well, I mean, you know how dad was. He blamed me for everything. He thought Marcus, that stupid pool guy we had, was so great and he wanted him to start taking care of our lawn too—like cutting the grass and stuff—and so he sent me out into the backyard to “charm him” in to doing it for free or whatever (I don't know what he really expected) but the guy wouldn't do it for free even though some 15 year old with braces and wretchedly-permed hair flirted with him (shocking, I know) and dad got mad at me for “not wanting to help the family save money.” And what was he doing? Whoring me off for free lawn maintenance? Whatever. But anyways, yeah, sometimes I just think people are upset with me for the most asinine things or blaming me for things I can't control or whatever, but... this isn't my fault. It's nobody's fault. *(Beat)* I mean, I didn't want to drive across the country.... that was your idea, Janie, this “sister trip” was entirely your idea, so... If any fingers are gonna be pointed... *(she waves her finger around but it doesn't land anywhere specific.)* No, I'm just playing. *(Beat. She takes a big sip of her drink.)* Thank God we aren't camping. I'm sorry, I have to say it. Just sitting here in the sun for a little bit, I'm like Thank. You. God. The heat is ridiculous. And you know bear attacks have been on the rise lately? Yeah, really. Can you imagine, first of all, the absolute horror of being in the middle of the woods, trying to make a fire to boil some water on or something when a massive bear shows up and just mauls you? If you made it out, I guess, it'd be a fantastic story, but if you didn't... Lord. I think you're supposed to feed them berries or something,

that's what I heard, that if a bear is running at you just like hold out berries and it will eat them instead of you? I don't know if that's true, but... Actually, that makes no sense! Who would have berries with them all the time? And also, I know that when I'm hungry, I'm not going for some puny little berries. Uh-uh. No. If I'm comin' in for a big slab of walking meat, THAT's what I'm eating! I don't care if that big piece of meat oh-so-humbly offers me a handful of blackberries. That's a side dish. And bears always show up for the main course. *(Beat.)* Are there even bears in this part of the country?? *(Beat. She takes a sip.)* Dad took me camping once. Mom and dad, actually, but mom stayed in a motel. To save you from have a raging meltdown, we made up a whole lie about how I had to go on a field trip—in the middle of summer—and you had to stay with grandma. It was a horrible trip, really. I mean, not at the time. At the time, it was great, yanno? Short hikes with amazing views. S'mores every night. Quiet in the mornings and so many stars. They made me lonely, I thought. They made me realize how singular I was amongst this giant crowd, this mass of individual sparkles, but when I got back to the city, and the lights diluted everything and I couldn't see stars anymore, I realized that was wrong. I felt much more lonely when the sky looked empty. *(Beat.)* Anyways, one morning dad took me fishing because we were running low on granola bars and that's sort of just the thing you do on a camping trip, but at this point I was horrified of eating anything that had been alive at one point, and he knew that, but when he pulled one in and wrangled it off the hook, he held it in his hands right in front of me, and he asked, "Nellie, do you wanna eat this?" And I thought it was the cruelest thing anyone had ever done to me. I watched that fish squirming in his hands, gasping and dying in front of me, its translucent tail jerking back and forth with such violence I thought it might whack itself in the face and somehow fall to freedom. Dad's grip was strong, though. It was such a tight grasp. And I stared at him and I said, "No. I don't want to eat that fish." And he threw it back in the water. And I learned everything I ever needed to know. *(She sips.)*

END