

New Jersey Turnpike

Laurie Anderson

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It is against the rules and regulations of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority to drive in the wrong direction on the entrance and exit ramps of the New Jersey Turnpike.

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PETER: There was an old couple who decided to drive cross country in their car. Both of them were almost legally deaf. About ten miles away from home, the burglar alarm for their car door went off and got stuck in the "on" position. They drove all the way to San Francisco like this. You could hear them coming from three miles away.

The alarm didn't seem to bother the old woman at all. She thought it was sort of pleasant. Near Chicago, she said to her husband, "It sounds like faraway bees on a summer day." Her husband said, "What?"

LAURIE: You can read the signs. You've been on this road before. Do you want to go home? Do you want to go home now?

PETER: One of the major airlines used to run a kind of lottery, mostly to give passengers something to do while the plane was waiting in line on the runway. The stewardess would hand out lottery tickets and you peeled the sticker away. If you had the right combination of numbers, you won a free trip to Hawaii. If you didn't, you didn't win a free trip. The airline discontinued the game when there were too many complaints about the timing of the lottery. They said:

Our surveys tell us that our customers felt that waiting on the

runway was the wrong time to play a game of chance.

LAURIE: In my dream, I am your customer, and the customer is always right.

PETER: He said, you know, to be really safe you should always carry a bomb on an airplane. Because the chances of there being one bomb on a plane are pretty small. But the chances of two bombs are almost minuscule. So by carrying a bomb on a plane, the odds of your becoming a hostage or of getting blown up are astronomically reduced.

LAURIE: You're driving and you're talking to yourself and you say to yourself: Why these mountains? Why this sky? Why this road? This big town. This ugly train.

PETER: In our eyes. And in our wives' eyes. In our arms and (I might add) in our wives' arms.

LAURIE: How come people from the North are so well organized, industrious, pragmatic and--let's face it--preppy? And people from the South are so devil-may-care? Every man for himself.

PETER: I know this English guy who was driving around in the South. And he stopped for breakfast one morning somewhere in southeast Georgia. He saw "grits" on the menu. He'd never heard of grits so he asked the waitress, "What are grits, anyway?" She said, "Grits are fifty." He said, "Yes, but what are they?" She said, "They're extra." He said, "Yes, I'll have the grits, please."

LAURIE: Over the river and through the woods. Let me see that map.

PETER: A sideshow. A smokescreen. A passing landscape.

LAURIE: I was living out in West Hollywood when the Hollywood Strangler was strangling women. He was strangling women all over town, but he was particularly strangling them in West Hollywood. Every night there was a panel discussion on TV about the strangler--speculations about his habits, his motives, his methods. One thing was clear about him: He only strangled women when they were alone, or with other women. The panel members would always end the show by saying, "Now, for all you women, listen, don't go outside without a man. Don't walk out to your car, don't even take out the garbage by yourself. Always go with a man."

Then one of the eyewitnesses identified a policeman as one of the suspects. The next night, the chief of police was on the panel. He said, "Now, girls, whatever happens, do not stop for a police officer. Stay in your car. If a police officer tries to stop you, do not stop. Keep driving and under no circumstances should you get out of your car." For a few weeks, half the traf

fic in L.A. was doing twice the speed limit.

PETER: I remember when we were going into outer space. I remember when the President said we were going to look for things in outer space. And I remember the way the astronauts talked and the way everybody was watching because there was a chance that they would burn up on the launching pad or that the rocket would take off from Cape Canaveral and land in Fort Lauderdale five minutes later by mistake. And now we're not even trying to get that far. Now it's more like the bus. Now it's more like they go up just high enough to get a good view. They aim the camera back down. They don't aim the camera up. And then they take pictures and come right back and develop them. That's what it's like now. Now that's what it's like.

LAURIE: Every time I hear a fire engine it seems like the trucks are running away from the fire. Not towards it. Not right into it. They seem like monsters in a panic--running away from the fire. Stampeding away from the fire. Not towards it. Not right into it.

PETER: In Seattle, the bus drivers were out on strike. One of the issues was their refusal to provide a shuttle service for citizens to designated host areas in the event of a nuclear attack on Seattle. The drivers said, "Look, Seattle will be a ghost town." They said, "It's a one-way trip to the host town, we're not driving back to that ghost town."

LAURIE: A city that repeats itself endlessly. Hoping that something will stick in its mind.