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*Vivette, On the Road*

Vivette knew nothing about Des Moines except for the lovely ease of the letters—the way its name sounded out like a yoga chant, exotic and foreign. *Des Moines*, with those silent s’s beckoning with a sexy finger, a promise. It whispered to her as she lay in her tousled New Hampshire bedsheets. The wooden shutters on her windows escorting cross-stitched moonlight across the dusty floor. The tugboats, with their deep-throated howls, stretched at their moors, the buoys offering cowbell clangs. *Des Moines. Des Moines.* Her friends thought she was crazy.

Just like that, she was driving through Bucyrus, Ohio, the land turned from rocky, hilly East to something flat as a pancake. Silos sprouted along the pastures. Water towers loomed. Cornstalk stumps mishmashed in the fields like crooked razor stubble. Vivette sped on by.

Then at the Mayflower Bar and Grill in Plymouth, Indiana, Vivette did not, as she hoped, find a grill. Instead, thumbtacked to a post, there was a thin paper square that read: “Tunafish Sandwich \$1.75.” As she sat at the bar writing a postcard, surrounded by knotty pine walls and bustling small-town conversation, construction workers cashed paychecks with one of the two cute blondes behind the bar, the cash register already loaded down with \$20 bills in anticipation of the rush. Under Vivette’s forearms, a wooden bar stretched with thousands of names carved into it.

*VIVETTE ON THE ROAD*, Vivette scratched into the wood, tracing over the letters with her ballpoint pen.

Two plastic models of the *Mayflower* sailed along the top of a























