

HELL HORN



HELL HORN  
HELL  
HORN



The following is a loose structure upon which to hang events. A dream sequence, if you will, a fever dream of escape from the USA to fairer shores.

I fully realize that discerning a plot from this booklet might be near impossible, so allow me please a quick summation. If I switch between first, second, and third persons, it because I simply can't refrain from confusing even myself as we descend into this most flimsy, and yet compelling, of stories. Everything is drawn in broad strokes, and larger than life.

It starts in song territory, spoken drama.

The end of this booklet is a series of at least four more parallel scripts of the same events, to be realized in close proximity, and as simultaneously as possible. Characters might differ from version to version.

Charleston 21cston

in a cloud

We begin floating above the earth, above all the drama and insanity of everyday life. Do we descend into the insanity or stay high above? We descend, because heaven is boring. Though the drama makes us mad, we need it to bring shape to our lives.

We descend and are thrust into one version of the American Dream. Which part is that? Cars. The road trip. It is, in many ways the double edged sword of the American Dream – self determination, the freedom to come and go as one pleases, but with inevitable costs to Mother Earth and the dissolution of civil society.

There is a car wreck. You don't remember it. But you decide to sue, because hey, this is America. The trial is confusing. Now you are under investigation. I thought it was someone else's fault? The courtroom seems to have it out for you. This is not justice. It is a Kafka nightmare. The trial repeats, and everybody there speaks cryptically.

Eventually, the original purpose of the trial is addressed. You are awarded money for the accident. You use this money to leave America for Norway.

Norway is home to a city called Hell. Which is actually very peaceful and nice. And your journey has ended.

Does that make sense? Probably not. I recommend removing the 'sense-making' part of your brain. Just shut it off. Let it all wash over you. It is songs and speeches and moments. It is a dreamscape of most unusual shape.

## PART ONE: CLOUDS

The sky unfurled as an azure blue wonder in dazzling display. The perspective was that of god-like expansiveness – nothing out of view. The earth's curvature rolled over the horizon. The full picture from above. No inkling of the insanity below.

It's hollywood heaven, an endless rolling sky, fit as a fiddle, perfect as a picture, right before you fall screaming tumbling to the ground. Above the fray. Blink your eyes, take a picture.

This is the place where the sky opens like a file drawer.

And you pull out the blue one.

The clouds have opinions.

They talk behind your back.

Some are kind. Some, full of wind.

But they're not actually talking. That's you hearing what you think they say.

Clouds speak in shapes. Look at the clouds and see the shapes. There's a car. There's a road sign.

There's a personal injury lawyer billboard.

The clouds become what you want, or what you don't. They can speak your future.

The sky is a road

But this road has no shoulders. It does have Puffy white shoulderpads. Betty white golden girls.

Golden hind, francis drake, exploration of a postmodern, post internet wasteland.

You thought you were gliding.

But You're not. It's the moment of stillness, just before you fall.

Is the cloudscape a dream? Is it the afterlife? Are you trapped into a silicon valley hallmark card? We shall see.

Down we go. Into the fray.

*(song)*

*heaven is a boring cloud*

where obstacles have ended

whitened shroud that yawns out loud

with drama all suspended

nothing more to happen now

is nothing more to see

heaven is a boring cloud

at least it is to me

heaven is a drifting wisp  
of neverending waiting  
will the the rain ever fall  
no point in debating

nothing more to happen now  
is nothing more to see  
heaven is a boring cloud  
at least it is to me

heaven is the end of everything that you hold inside  
it may not always feel too good  
but at least you haven't died

nothing more to happen now  
is nothing more to see  
heaven is a boring cloud  
at least it is to me

nothing more to happen now  
is nothing more to do  
heaven is a boring cloud  
it will be to you

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Golden sky, silver thread  
Roll the wheel, the road's outspread  
Blue horizon bending low  
Drifting high, nowhere to go

---

I know where I am, I think I am sound  
I float and I fly, but I don't touch the ground

## clouds (freedom)

clouds float

say hi

dissolve and die

freedom, freedom, freedom

cloud slip to none

they're here then gone

freedom, freedom, freedom

to come and go at ease

exist as you please

freedom, freedom, freedom

---

Someday

Be free

Norway

Someday

Be free

Norway

Back to back we all do crawl onto the exit ramp

Cancelled as a castaway

To swipe a visa stamp

And as we wave goodbye to the setting of the sun

Mouth breathers stand agape

These colors don't run

Several seasons gone

And all the world is in flame

No more a country

Not even a name

Would you believe me then

This telling of the tale

Then come across the ocean

We set for to sail

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## **Part One-and-a-Half: America From the Perspective of a Cloud**

**(a four song suite)**

I.

## Charleton heston in a cloud

Loads his gun and shoots his shroud

charleton heston in a heat

zaps the earth below his feet

afterlife for charleton man

didn't go quite as he planned

in his life he was a king

now he isn't anything

valet parks the angel cars

polishes their twinkling stars

wishes he could ride the breeze

to planet ape

and be the big cheese

Banana suit boy bucket of bones,  
Bouncingbillboard in a cell-phone zone—  
He's got toothpaste dreams, six-pack mind,  
Sippin' on debt from a straw he can't find.

Tupperware moon in a mall-bought sky,  
Sunk in orbit, ain't no why—  
“BUY 1 GET 1!” seagull saint, freeway melts like acrylic paint.

Plastic pigeons gossip green  
Micro wave your halo screen  
selling used clouds from an eBay place.  
Visa card boogie with a coupon ghost!  
soda can bounce where the buffalo roast!  
man buys a dog for a feeling he lost!  
saved receipts, forgot the cost!

credit card candy cotton cloud

Stomp your feet and sing and sing out loud

credit card candy sweet tooth south  
dentures filling up your mouth  
credit card candy cotton cloud  
never mind the gaping crowd  
sugarfree fun it ain't allowed

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## II. Mall Survivor (Southwest Spiral)

*(heavy lurch; coffin-organ & rubber percussion)*

### LYRICS:

Pink flesh pushin' carts fulla **maybe**  
Toothless dolls weepin' "SAVE ME, BABY!"  
Escalators sighin' like an old jazz tune  
While the mannequins plot to steal the moon.

Sky full of coupons! Storm of BOGO!  
Chicken-fried dreams from Amarillo to SoHo.  
Big-box temple got a WiFi priest—  
Hissin' in tongues 'bout a Black Friday beast.

Burnt toast brains in a microwave womb,  
Bluetooth teeth in a cyber tomb.  
Look down, down, from my cirrus nest—  
And see the gods of markdown, dressed to depress.

### **(cloud incantation)**

- BUY it again, friend! You might disappear!
  - Stack it in the garage with the voices you fear!
  - Tear the tag from your shadow and wear it like pride!
  - Your soul's on clearance. No refunds. No guide.
- 

## III. Credit Slip Canoe (Midwestern Fog Float)

*(lazy drawl, with harmonica made from frozen coleslaw)*

I seen a fryin' pan float through Peoria,  
Slingin' loyalty points to the ghosts o' euphoria.  
They sold their hearts at the vending shrine—  
Got a plastic fork and a Wal-Mart wine.

Old Miss Monday bought a laugh on layaway,

Choked on a jingle in a cereal fray.  
Her TV eyes got bluer than debt,  
Tryin' to bake love from an air fryer set.

“BOOP!” goes the scanner, truth's been scanned,  
I ride above on a whipped cream land.  
Down there, folks are buyin' their own cage,  
Wrapped in bubblewrap and minimum wage.

(cloud coo)

- I float, I see, I sigh, I sneer,
  - I drop feathers of credit on the bargaineer.
  - I am the receipt that never prints,
  - The ghost in the gumball, the glitch in the rinse.
- 

#### IV. Ads in My Oatmeal (Eastern Static Drift)

Crackle-box sunrise over Amazonia,  
Push-button Buddha in a drone ambrosia—  
I floss with flag codes and nap in spam,  
I sip screen-light from a coffee cam.

Down there! Look! A child made of logos!  
Dancin' with a chatbot in brand-name togos!  
His lullaby's a commercial loop,  
His breakfast: pixels, processed goop.

A can of soup told me my name—  
Now I ride this cloud, never quite the same.  
I'm leaking coupons, raining sale signs,  
While they pledge to plastic gods in checkout lines.

(cloud riddle)

- What's got four wheels and no direction?
- What buys its food but eats affection?
- What hoards the truth in a velvet sack?
- What swipes the world and never looks back?



21 Jenuen is a

25 oring cloud

## PART TWO: CARS

The soft cloud road becomes brutal pavement and we meet our hero. It could be you, it could be me, it could be any one of us. The everyman, on the road. Benzedrine, barrell wine, and dorm room posters of rebellion. The road unfolds before you. The hero has embarked on a joyride of most ambitious aimlessness. To feel the open road, to let the road rise beneath him, the sweep of America beneath the wheels. Homer, not the simpson, but the old blind bard, ran so we could drive. Laid it all out. The road trip.

America is a car. A hamburger driving a car.

On the road. Cocktail jazz and drunk barrel chested men in cheap suits reading their thoughts. But it speaks to you.

you're moving now.

The lines are blinking. The car is humming.

You forgot to bring your name. That's okay.

You don't need one. You can create one. This is america.

There's a mirror. It shows a different highway.

You ask it: when did I turn off?

It says: you didn't.

The Greek Chorus says: "We are all traffic.

you are not in traffic. You are traffic.

You say: "I'm parked."

But we're all moving. Backward.

Back to where the off-ramp curves into a cul-de-sac of memory.

"Where are you going? Where are you going? Where are you going?"

"Where did you start?" how did it get this way?

There's a line on the road. It's splitting.

There's a sign up ahead. A fork in the road, right around 1968. the beat dream descended into psychedelic slop, sitars, and cointel pro. The black panthers gave us free school breakfasts. And for that, they paid. You took a turn. We all took a turn.

You are the car. You are the road. You are not in traffic. You are traffic.

Like I said, America is a car. Drive thru dreams in disposable packaging.

It is now too late to exit. The energy of rebellion is now on sale at your nearest big box retail. Bury your head in the sand, but they own the sand too. The road has become an ouraboros figure 8. you're always back where you were. Here we are again.

We drive, drive, drive.

This is the repetition of decision.

And it has all crashed. It's a billion car pileup. And We're all in it.

FORWARD TO HELL,  
FORWARD

*(song)*

Wir fahren, fahren, fahren–

We drive, drive, drive–

line on the road, spiraled snake  
sign up ahead, “you made a mistake”  
Ouraboros cul de sac  
when you leave youre coming back

Keep it steady, keep it straight  
But the road just changes its shape  
nevermind who you were  
nothing ever did occur

Ouraboros cul de sac  
when you leave youre coming back

never arriving, never to depart  
all that is left is thrift store broken heart  
and there you go again, right back to the start

there's a line on the road, it's starting to fray  
words in our mouths we don't know what to say  
Ouraboros cul de sac  
when you leave youre coming back

courtroom adjourns  
nothing was learned  
you played the game boy  
but you got burned

## Interstate

(A four song suite)

### 1. Crankshaft Sonata in F (for “Freedom”)

*(fast tempo; rhythm: slapping license plates on wet concrete)*

#### LYRICS:

The moon got stuck in my windshield again,  
I yelled “YEE-HAW!” through a burger bag fen.  
My engine eats vowels and spits out verbs,  
Chrome dreams bloom where the map unnerves.

Fifty states stitched in a vinyl seat,  
I got salt flat sermons stuck to my feet.  
Billboard Jesus winked at me once—  
“Sell your soul for a gas station lunch.”

The sky’s a tarp with Velcro stars,  
I steer with my spleen past haunted cars.  
The road unrolls like a holy tongue—  
And I chew its words ‘til my guts come undone.

#### (horn honks)

- Is this freedom or just a fast loop?
  - My heart’s in overdrive and my thoughts taste soup.
- 

### 2. Mergequake (I-405 Mind Spiral)

*(midtempo, hiccup-groove; percussion via hubcap & kazoo ensemble)*

#### LYRICS:

Merge left, merge right, now merge within—  
There’s a rotary war beneath my skin.  
My pancreas talks in construction cones,  
My dreams are detours paved in phones.

GPS voice got a lisp like God,  
Says “Turn left at the self you forgot.”  
Exit 666: Emotional debris—  
Where I rear-ended my own ennui.

The HOV lane’s a therapy couch—  
I sobbed into the wheel and hit the slouch.  
Brake light prayers in a four-lane faith,

As I signal shame with a turnin' wraith.

(interior echo)

- “You have arrived at: self-doubt.”
  - “Recalculating... please scream and shout.”
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### 3. Asphalt Whisperer (Love Song for an Overpass)

*(slow, drippy ballad; vocals tangled in reverb and carburetor moans)*

LYRICS:

I loved a bridge once near Cincinnati—  
Her girders whispered, “Ain’t nothin’ tidy.”  
She kissed me with pigeons and tar-stained sighs,  
I felt my pistons cry 'neath rusted skies.

She wore graffiti like lingerie lace,  
Her bolts loose-tight with industrial grace.  
Underneath her I found my past,  
Leakin’ like oil from a dream too fast.

We shared a milkshake in the breakdown lane,  
Our silence was louder than diesel rain.  
Then she arched above me— steel & might,  
And I drove away into the night.

(spoken through sparkplug static)

- I never loved a freeway the same again.
  - They all curve like liars. They all begin in sin.
- 

### 4. Clutch of the Cosmic Coupe (Finale)

*(tempo: out-of-sync blinker; features atonal trumpet made of garden hose)*

LYRICS:

My dashboard’s a shrine to dead ambitions,  
With Saint Snickers and Peppermint Ignitions.  
My glove box holds forgotten selves,  
And toll booth tokens from psychic shelves.

This car ain’t mine— it’s borrowed from doubt,  
I hotwired the cosmos and peeled right out.  
My rearview shows what I never said,

My mirrors blink Morse from the unloved dead.

Asphalt zodiacs dance under tread,  
Radio plays dreams that ain't been fed.  
The road don't end— it folds like fate,  
Into the axle of a mental state.

**(spoken like a preacher on two flat tires)**

- Drive on, oh tangled one.
- The freeway is your face,
- The detour is divine,
- And the toll is paid in grace.

## ACT TWO-AND-A-HALF: WAR AND PEACE

war and peace.

Napoleon never saw it coming.

Tolstoy did.

The battlefield is was an open field of silence, a frozen highway. The battlefield is in our hearts, to quote bono, long before he disgraced the cover of time magazine.

Who shall speak now for peace? Another ngo? John and yoko yawned in bed and the world burned. Coldplay planted trees but they died. The battlefield is in our hearts. That is where war and peace both begin.

Generals gathered in their masses,

taking communion, as it were.

But not by priest bestowed, but by a black witch in the gnarled shape of a toad.

Evil minds, etc

Peace is not a resolution.

It's a transition.

Like when the engine turns off, and the heat keeps ticking.

Like when the judge leaves the bench, but the sentence continues.

*War and peace. No cliffs notes needed. The kingdom of god is within you. Tolstoy said the same. He meant it. The kingdom of america is within you as well.*

*And so, as we wager war and peace within our hearts. And the crash on the highway.*

*For that, we now go to trial. Humanity has crashed. We are being represented by a team of personal injury lawyer billboards. They paper the landscape. Death by a thousand tiny papercuts.*

*Have you been in an accident, the personal injury lawyer with a huge grin on his face?  
Are you injured, he asks gleefully?*

*Sadly, yes. And so we go to trial. Against ourselves.*

### PART THREE: PERSONAL INJURY

#### **Courtroom without walls**

**franz kafka was a stenographer.**

The trial is now in session

The trial has always been happening.

You don't remember when it began

The courtroom is a waiting room

Your number is never called

To suffer... to endure... to register as data...

What is injury?

A state of being perceived.

Or misfiled.

Or rendered obsolete.

"Objection." / "Sustained." / "Overruled."

"Amended." / "Redacted." / "Resubmitted."

"The trial has always been happening."

"There is no verdict."

#### **SECOND VOICE (sharper, more rhythmic):**

Objection sustained.

I object.

No standing.

The plaintiff appears. She is made of static.

#### **NARRATOR:**

To endure is not the same as to resolve.

The courtroom hums to the beat of your heart.

#### **SECOND VOICE:**

The court awards—

More than you dreamed.

The gavel strikes—

But it's not the end. Not yet.

I know I am here.

I think I am sound.

The trial is now in session.  
The trial has always been happening.  
This case is under review.

Objection sustained!  
I object!  
No standing!

Chorus (spoken):  
The court awards—  
More than you dreamed.  
The gavel strikes—  
The case is closed.

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## **Settle Like Dust in a Broken Boot**

(crooned like a Courtroom Country sad man)

### **VERSE 1**

I wore my neck brace to the courtroom dance  
Judge had eyes like plastic plants  
My lawyer's tie was a python grin  
He fed the beast and said, "begin"

a Clipboard gospel on parking lot light  
priced my pain 5 nickels a night  
Now I talk sideways, but walk just fine  
a limp that spells out dollar signs

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### **CHORUS**

#### **Settle like dust on a dashboard Bible**

My lawyer smiled like a broke-down idol  
Said, "You ain't healed, but you ain't dead—"  
Now I got cash and a crooked head

my wheels still spin from crashing hoot  
my eyes explode and my words they shoot  
settle like dust in a broken boot

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Insurance man had jellyfish hands  
He said, "We'll see what the policy stands"  
my lawyer laughed with a cigarette tooth  
And sold 'em my pain like it was proof

**Settle like dust on a dashboard Bible**  
My lawyer smiled like a broke-down idol  
Said, "You ain't healed, but you ain't dead— "  
Now I got cash and a crooked head  
  
wheels still spin from crashing hoot  
my eyes explode and words they shoot  
settle like dust in a broken boot

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*(spoken, over accordion drone)*

I used to drive just to drive...  
Now I drive just to get there.  
The airbag sang,  
And I saw myself in third person –  
smiling,  
like a billboard  
with its teeth ripped out.

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#### **PART FOUR: HELL, NORWAY**

(A station. A sign: HELL. It is snowing. The music is nearly silence.)

You won the game  
took your winnings, and skipped across the ocean like a stone  
to kill a mockingbird  
to bury a mockingbird  
to mock a mockingbird  
your courtroom drama finished  
your verdict received, you drove the american dream.... overseas.... to the great north, norway.  
From your cloudlike perched beginning, you have now fully descended... into hell.  
Hell is a city in norway. You arrive.  
There is a city limits sign. It says: Welcome to HELL.  
But You are not afraid  
The snow falls like static.  
The people are kind  
They have your name printed correctly  
not your misspelled american mythological name  
not your ellis island transliteration obfuscation  
Your real name. The one that sings in your heart. That sings your new favorite song.  
Your new favorite song rings out. Ac/dc. Highway to... wherever you are now. America is a car.  
Your drive is over. You are now on foot. The world reveals itself to those on foot.  
norway doesn't ask questions.  
They hand you a glass of warm water.  
"Hell is a place with nice weather and no memory."  
"Hell is a place with just enough snow to cover the past."

Welcome to Hell. Norway.  
It's very nice this time of year.  
The trial is complete. The road no longer curves.

#### **SECOND VOICE (softly, as though from inside a coat):**

This is not punishment. This is resolution.  
Hell is kind.  
Hell is fine.  
The houses hum. The windows glow.  
Nothing breaks here. Nothing advances.  
You wake up, but you don't need to. You're already awake.  
Hell is heaven.

*(song)*

There's a town, I heard its name  
People say it's warm and strange  
Snow is falling, streets aglow  
This is Hell, but Hell's not cold

Chorus:

Oh, oh, Hell is fine  
Oh, oh, Hell is kind  
Oh, oh, the sky is bright  
Oh, oh, I sleep tonight

Final line:

I know I am here.  
I think I am sound.

# I moved to Norway

*(song)*

I left my keys in a loaf of rye  
Wrote my name on a cloud that passed me by  
Sold my couch to a man named Fern  
Who paid in soup and a stag's sideburns

## VERSE 2

The mailbox grinned as I drove away  
Said, "You'll come back when the fjords decay."  
But the snow's got teeth and the sky don't lie  
And the crows here cuss in lullabies

## CHORUS

I moved to Norway for the quiet  
For the stillness in a fishhead diet  
A place where the wind don't ask your name  
And the trees don't play that money game

## VERSE 3

I wear a coat made of borrowed time  
Drink cold light like a pantomime  
There's a goat on the roof singin' ancient news  
And a choir of moose in my bedroom shoes

## OUTRO (spoken, over fading harmonium)

I mailed myself to the middle of silence  
It came back marked:  
"Too warm for violence."

Someday  
Be free  
Norway  
Someday  
Be free  
Norway

Back to back we all do crawl onto the exit ramp  
Cancelled as a castaway  
To swipe a visa stamp

And as we wave goodbye to the setting of the sun  
Mouth breathers stand agape  
These colors don't run

Several seasons gone  
And all the world is in flame  
No more a country  
Not even a name

Would you believe me then  
This telling of the tale  
Then come across the ocean  
We set for to sail

## From Clouds to Hell

*A Chamber Opera in Four Acts for Two Female Voices*

### Dramatis Personae:

- **Soprano (S)** – *The Traveler* (Plaintiff)
  - **Mezzo-Soprano (M)** – *The Companion* (Defendant) & Various Other Roles (Lawyer, Judge, etc.)
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## Act I: Clouds

*A countryside road. The car hums beneath them. Rolling hills and endless sky. Laughter. The sun goldens the world.*

**(Soprano & Mezzo, alternating and overlapping, taking on the voice of a weatherman at times.)**

**S (dreamily, Joni Mitchell-esque):**

Rows and flows of angel hair,  
A sky cut from watercolor,  
We ride on painted ponies—

**M (interrupting, as a weatherman, slick and rhythmic):**

A high-pressure front moves in from the West!  
Light wind from the South-Southwest!  
Expect clear conditions, unlimited visibility—  
A perfect day for travel!

**S (laughing, shifting into Whitman's expansiveness):**

I sing the open road!  
The grass endless, the dust a friend,  
The wheel beneath me, an instrument divine.

**M (mocking, teasing):**

O Walt, O windblown poet,  
You never hit the brakes!

**(They laugh, but the road is bending. The joy is undercut with slight tension.)**

**S:**

Joni sings in the static—  
A song of drifting, a song of blue.  
Are we drifting? Are we blue?

**M (slowly, a small panic creeping in):**

The road narrows—  
The clouds roll in—  
Temperature dropping,  
Winds at twenty miles per hour!

**(A sudden silence. The car skids. A single, dissonant chord holds the moment.)**



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## Act II: Cars

*A shattered windshield. Time slows. The aftermath.*

**(The opening is mechanical, rhythmic—Kraftwerk’s Autobahn pulses underneath, minimal and cold.)**

**Soprano (dazed, intoning like a synth-driven chant):**

Wir fahren, fahren, fahren—  
We drive, drive, drive—  
but the road does not hold us.

**(Mezzo, urgent, guilty, almost pleading, her voice fragmented like a broken transmission.)**

**M:**

The blacktop split!  
The world reversed!  
The horizon—gone.

**(They slip into the tone of Monte Hellman’s Two-Lane Blacktop: spare, existential, emotion smothered under cool detachment.)**

**S (detached, to no one in particular):**

No speed limit in the void.  
Just the sound of tires—  
turning and turning,  
even when they stop.

**M (whispering, channeling Kerouac’s beat poetry):**

Mad ones.  
Burning, burning.  
Going, going—

**S (interrupting, sharp, angry now):**

Gone.

**(Dissonance rises, a chorus of sirens, then silence.)**

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## Act III: Personal Injury

*A courtroom. The language of justice, twisted and sung.*

**(The scene begins as a *12 Angry Men*-style drama—tense, claustrophobic, voices overlapping in legalese. Mezzo plays the Lawyer, a slick and theatrical figure, part *L.A. Law*, part Robert Ashley’s hypnotic, looping monologues.)**

**M (as Lawyer, smooth, relentless):**

The facts are clear!  
The negligence proven!  
Was my client harmed?

Yes!  
Did she suffer?  
Yes!  
Did she endure undue agony?  
Why, yes, Your Honor, yes!

**S (interrupting, dry, almost bemused, mirroring Ashley's hypnotic repetition):**

Undue agony.  
Undue agony.  
Define undue.

**M (ignoring, pressing forward, an L.A. Law closing argument swell):**

Her life, Your Honor!  
Her *joy*, Your Honor!  
Reduced to debris—  
By *that* woman!

**(She points dramatically to herself, now playing the Defendant.)**

**Soprano, weaker, but growing in conviction:**

I did suffer.  
I did fall.  
I lost my sky, my ribbons of wind.  
But I gained—  
(beat)  
Compensation.

**(Mezzo, now as the Judge, solemn but amused, more *The Trials of Annie Opie Werner* than a real courtroom.)**

**M (as Judge, slow, deliberate):**

The court awards—  
(pauses, leans in)  
More than you dreamed.

**(A gavel strike. A triumphant musical flourish, absurdly grand.)**

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## Act IV: Hell, Norway

*A snowy town. Surprisingly beautiful. A fresh start.*

**(The opening bars are drawn from Dante's *Inferno*—low, ominous, a sense of descent. The Soprano stands alone.)**

**S:**

Through me the way to the city of woe.  
Through me the way to eternal pain.  
Through me—

**(She stops. Looks around. A gentle snowfall. A warm light in a window. The music shifts—serene, simple, Hamsun's hushed prose in musical form.)**

**S (softly, surprised):**

They said I'd go to Hell.  
So I did.

**(Mezzo, now as a friendly local, chuckling, rolling the Norwegian R in "Velkommen.")**

**M:**

Velkommen til Norge.  
Hell is lovely this time of year.

**S (taking it in, smiling):**

The air is clean.  
The houses glow.  
The snow hums beneath my feet.  
And in the sky—  
(laughs)  
Clouds still race!

**(Both voices intertwine, joyful once more, the echoes of their first song returning, but softer, wiser. The final note hovers, then fades like wind over snow.)**

**Both:**

We fly, we fly—  
Through Hell and back again!

**(Final triumphant harmony. Curtain falls.)**

## FROM CLOUDS TO HELL

*A TV Opera in Four Episodes*

**Voice:** A single Chorus. One voice or many. The voices shift in tone, in speed, in distance. The words are sometimes spoken, sometimes sung, sometimes half-thought. They do not explain; they continue. The camera moves like breath.

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### EPISODE ONE: CLOUDS

(The screen: A road. Endless. Soft blue sky. Shadows of clouds moving over fields. A voice, or many voices, begin. A weatherman's voice, layered like static.)

**CHORUS (as Weatherman, precise, rhythmic):**

A high-pressure system moves in from the West.

Light wind from the South-Southwest.

Unobstructed visibility.

A perfect day for travel.

**(A different voice, far away, lost in thought.)**

**CHORUS (as Dreamer, drifting, open):**

The sky is watercolor.

The road is a song.

I remember—

Something about ponies, painted ponies.

Something about—

**(The image: A girl, driving. A window down. Her hair in the wind. Music on the radio.)**

**CHORUS (as Singer, warm, nostalgic):**

Rows and flows of angel hair—

No, wait. No, that's—

**(The camera shifts. The clouds move faster. A shift in tone. Whitman arrives, a voice like breath and dirt and the sound of a wheel turning.)**

**CHORUS (as Whitman, expansive, rolling):**

O the road, the road without end!

O the wheel, turning, turning!

O the song of the dust, the wind—

**(The car moves. The wind picks up. The road bends.)**

**CHORUS (as Weatherman, urgent now):**

Temperature dropping!

Winds at twenty miles per hour!

Hold the wheel—

**(A silence. The camera slows. The car skids. The sky tilts. The road ends.)**

---

## EPISODE TWO: CARS

(A shattered windshield. A flickering headlight. The sound of an engine cooling. The road hums underneath everything.)

**CHORUS (as Mechanic, stiff, robotic, detached):**

Wir fahren, fahren, fahren—

We drive, drive, drive—

The system is down.

The system is compromised.

**(A new voice. The voice of someone remembering, but not sure if the memory is real.)**

**CHORUS (as Drifter, slow, detached, existential):**

Speed doesn't kill you.

Time does.

The wheel spins.

The road vanishes.

The wheels keep turning,

Even when they stop.

**(The road flickers. The memory loops. The voice shifts.)**

**CHORUS (as Witness, fragmented, broken transmission):**

The blacktop split.

The line dissolved.

We were going—

Where?

**(The silence expands. The static grows. The Beat Generation whispers from nowhere, a ghost of endless highways.)**

**CHORUS (as Ghost, quiet, burning):**

Mad ones.

Going, going—

**(The road vanishes.)**

---

## EPISODE THREE: PERSONAL INJURY

(A courtroom. No walls. No ceiling. The trial begins. It has always been happening.)

**CHORUS (as Bailiff, official, ceremonial):**

This court is now in session.

This trial is now in progress.

This case is under review.

**(The voices shift, circling. A Judge. A Lawyer. A Plaintiff. A Defendant. A Jury. All the same. All the Chorus.)**

**CHORUS (as Lawyer, smooth, confident):**

Your Honor, my client suffers.

Your Honor, my client is in pain.

Your Honor, my client deserves—

**CHORUS (as Judge, amused, distant):**

Define pain.

**CHORUS (as Lawyer, unfazed):**

Your Honor, my client cannot remember the accident.

My client does not recall ever learning to drive.

My client does not know how they arrived here.

And yet—!

They suffer.

**CHORUS (as Jury, murmuring, overlapping, hypnotic):**

Does she suffer?

Yes.

Does she endure undue agony?

Yes.

And if one suffers, is one not deserving of recompense?

Yes.

And if one does not know why they suffer,

Is the suffering not greater?

Yes.

**(Kafka enters. The courtroom expands into infinity. Endless hallways. Endless doors. All locked.)**

**CHORUS (as Bureaucrat, patient, endless, looping like a broken record):**

The paperwork is incomplete.

The records are lost.

The signatures do not match.

The case is still pending.

**(A pause. The gavel lifts. The gavel falls.)**

**CHORUS (as Clerk, final, absolute):**

The court awards—

(pauses, leans in)

More than you dreamed.

---

## **EPISODE FOUR: HELL, NORWAY**

(Snow. A town. Quiet. A train station. The name on the sign: HELL.)

**CHORUS (as Inferno, deep, low, ancient):**

Through me the way to the city of woe.

Through me the way to eternal pain.

Through me—

**(A pause. A shift. Snow falls. Light from a window. A warmth.)**

**CHORUS (as Traveler, surprised, laughing softly):**

No fire. No wailing. No smoke.

Only light. Only breath.

Only the hush of winter.

**(The voice of someone who has lived here a long time. A Norwegian accent, rolling the R in "Velkommen.")**

**CHORUS (as Local, friendly, bemused):**

Velkommen til Norge.

Hell is lovely this time of year.

**(The silence deepens. The landscape softens. The prose of Knut Hamsun settles like snow.)**

**CHORUS (as Observer, quiet, steady, watching the sky):**

The air is clean.

The houses glow.

The snow hums beneath our feet.

And in the sky—

(laughs)

Clouds still race.

**(A final note, held, shimmering. The sound of wind, soft, endless. The road is gone. The sky remains.)**

**CHORUS:**

We fly, we fly—

Through Hell and back again.

**(Fade to white.)**

## EPISODE ONE: CLOUDS

*(Ray appears as a traveler, vaguely aware that something is off but unable to put his finger on it.)*

**(The scene opens as before: a countryside road, shifting clouds, the Greek chorus moving like wind and weather reports.)**

**CHORUS (as Weatherman, rhythmic, official):**

A high-pressure system moves in from the West!  
Unobstructed visibility.  
A perfect day for travel.

**(Ray enters. He wears a work jacket, as if he wandered off a construction site. He stops, looks at the sky, frowns.)**

**RAY:**

I know I am here.  
I think I am sound.

**CHORUS (soft laughter, shifting into the voice of a dreamer):**

The sky is watercolor,  
The road is a song,  
A girl sings in the static—

**RAY (interrupting, pointing at the clouds, skeptical):**

Those clouds. They're moving too fast.  
Are clouds supposed to do that?

**CHORUS (as Whitman, rolling, expansive):**

O the road! The wheel turns,  
The dust rises,  
The journey never ends—

**RAY (deadpan, muttering):**

The journey definitely ends.  
That's how roads work.

*(The wind picks up. The chorus grows louder. Ray glances around, uneasy.)*

**CHORUS (as Weatherman, urgent now):**

Temperature dropping!  
Winds at twenty miles per hour!  
Hold the wheel—

*(A moment of silence. The car skids. The world tilts. The chorus freezes. Ray remains standing, blinking.)*

**RAY:**

I know I am here.  
I think I am—

*(Blackout.)*

---

## EPISODE TWO: CARS

*(Ray now appears as an investigator, though it's unclear if he has any authority. The world has changed, but no one acknowledges it.)*

*(A flickering streetlight. The sound of a stalled engine. The road hums beneath everything.)*

**CHORUS (as Mechanic, stiff, robotic, detached):**

Wir fahren, fahren, fahren—

We drive, drive, drive—

The system is down.

The system is compromised.

*(Ray steps forward, holding a clipboard. Where did he get it? He doesn't know.)*

**RAY (reading, squinting):**

"Incident report... Unknown cause.

Blacktop distortion?

Driver claims 'road disappeared.'"

*(Looks up at the chorus.)*

**RAY:**

Anyone want to explain?

*(Silence. The chorus murmurs in scattered fragments.)*

**CHORUS (as Witnesses, broken transmission, overlapping voices):**

The blacktop split—

A line dissolved—

We were going—

Where?

*(Ray pulls a pen from his jacket, clicks it. The sound echoes.)*

**RAY:**

Okay. Okay.

Let's go one more time.

Step by step.

There was a road.

Then—?

*(The chorus shifts. The road vanishes. The camera tilts. Ray's pen vanishes from his hand.)*

**RAY (noticing):**

Wait.

*(He checks his pockets. The pen is gone.)*

**RAY (quietly):**

I know I am here.

I think I am—

*(A long silence. The sound of tires rolling on an empty highway. The camera zooms out.)*

---

## EPISODE THREE: PERSONAL INJURY

*(Ray is now both a witness and an accused party. The courtroom shifts and folds around him.)*

**CHORUS (as Bailiff, official, ceremonial):**

This court is now in session.

This trial is now in progress.

This case is under review.

*(Ray sits at a table. Papers in front of him. They are blank.)*

**RAY (muttering, flipping through them):**

Great. Very helpful.

*(A figure stands across from him. The chorus morphs into a lawyer.)*

**CHORUS (as Lawyer, smooth, relentless):**

Mr. Shamus.

Do you deny being present at the scene?

**RAY:**

I— (pauses)

I don't know.

Where was the scene?

**CHORUS (as Jury, murmuring, overlapping):**

Does he suffer?

Yes.

Did he endure undue agony?

Yes.

**RAY (holding up a hand, confused):**

Wait, am I on trial?

Or am I the plaintiff?

*(The chorus shifts. A judge now.)*

**CHORUS (as Judge, grand, absolute):**

The court awards—

(pauses, leans in)

More than you dreamed.

*(A gavel falls. The blank papers vanish. Ray looks at his hands, then at the courtroom, which is dissolving.)*

**RAY (softly):**

I know I am here.

I think I—

*(The courtroom vanishes. The sound of wind.)*

---

## EPISODE FOUR: HELL, NORWAY

*(Ray steps off a train. A sign reads: HELL.)*

**CHORUS (as Inferno, deep, low, ancient):**

Through me the way to the city of woe.

Through me the way to eternal pain.

Through me—

*(Ray checks his ticket. It's blank.)*

**RAY:**

Yeah, yeah. Eternal torment. I got it.

Listen, is there a diner around here?

*(A voice, warm, Norwegian, rolling the R in "Velkommen.")*

**CHORUS (as Local, bemused):**

Velkommen til Norge.

Hell is lovely this time of year.

*(Ray looks around. The town is... nice. Clean. Snow falls. The sky is calm.)*

**RAY:**

So this is Hell.

**CHORUS (as Observer, watching the sky):**

The air is clean.

The houses glow.

The snow hums beneath our feet.

And in the sky—

(laughs)

Clouds still race.

*(Ray exhales. A long pause.)*

**RAY:**

I know I am here.

*(Looks up at the sky. Smiles, just slightly.)*

**RAY:**

I think I am sound.

*(A final note, held, shimmering. The road is gone. The sky remains.)*

**FADE TO WHITE.**

## HIGHWAY TO HELL (NORWAY)

*A TV Opera in Four Episodes*

**For a One-Man Greek Chorus (Ray Shamus) vs. The Greek Chorus**

---

### EPISODE ONE: CLOUDS

*(A countryside road. Clouds move too fast. Wind rises. The **Greek Chorus** begins their grand poetic introduction. They are smooth, confident, lyrical. They know how this goes. But before they get too far, another voice cuts in.)*

**RAY SHAMUS (loud, interrupting):**

I know I am here. I think I am sound.

You want clouds? I'll tell you about clouds.

*(Ray stands alone, facing the **Greek Chorus**, hands on hips, as if daring them to continue.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (ignoring him, lofty, poetic):**

The sky unfurls like painted gauze,

Gold spilling, blue breaking,

Clouds wander, weightless—

**RAY (mocking, overlapping them):**

Clouds don't wander! Clouds don't weigh anything!

That's just **water** in the air, folks!

Basic meteorology! **I know things!**

*(The chorus pauses. A moment of silence. Then, smoothly, they **adjust their tone**—patronizing, indulgent.)*

**GREEK CHORUS:**

A high-pressure system moves in from the West.

Unobstructed visibility.

A perfect day for travel.

*(Ray crosses his arms, narrows his eyes.)*

**RAY:**

Oh. So now you're the **weatherman**. Cute.

Next, you'll tell me the road never ends.

**GREEK CHORUS:**

O the road! The wheel turns,

The dust rises,

The journey never ends—

*(Ray claps his hands together, once, sharply.)*

**RAY:**

WRONG!

The journey **definitely** ends.

That's how roads work.

*(He gestures wildly at the pavement beneath him. The Greek Chorus simply **smiles, waiting**. The road bends. The wind picks up. Ray looks around, suddenly uneasy.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (softer now, taunting):**

Temperature dropping.

Winds at twenty miles per hour.

Hold the wheel—

*(Ray opens his mouth to counter them, but the **car skids**. The world tilts. The road disappears. A long silence.)*

*(Ray remains standing, blinking. His voice drops to a **whisper**.)*

**RAY:**

I know I am here.

I think I—

*(Blackout.)*

---

## **EPISODE TWO: CARS**

*(A shattered windshield. A flickering streetlight. The Greek Chorus **immediately takes control** of the scene.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (mechanical, detached):**

Wir fahren, fahren, fahren—

We drive, drive, drive—

The system is down.

*(Ray **stumbles forward**, trying to reassert himself.)*

**RAY:**

The system is NOT down.

I don't even know what system you're talking about.

I just want to file a report.

*(The Greek Chorus ignores him. They fracture, becoming **multiple voices of confusion**.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (overlapping, murmuring):**

The blacktop split—

The line dissolved—

We were going—

Where?

*(Ray  **rubs his face**, exhausted. He pulls a pen from his jacket, clicks it. The sound echoes.)*

**RAY (to himself, muttering, writing in an invisible notebook):**

Okay. Okay.

Let's go one more time.

Step by step.

There was a road.

Then—?

*(The chorus **stares at him**. The road vanishes. The pen vanishes from Ray's hand. He freezes.)*

**RAY (softly, looking at his empty hand):**  
Oh, **that's not fair.**

*(The Greek Chorus laughs, victorious.)*

**GREEK CHORUS:**  
We drive, drive, drive.

*(Ray looks up at them, deadpan.)*

**RAY:**  
I know I am here.  
I think I am sound.  
**And I think you all are enjoying this way too much.**

*(A long silence. The sound of tires rolling on an empty highway. The camera zooms out.)*

---

### **EPISODE THREE: PERSONAL INJURY**

*(A courtroom. No walls. No ceiling. The trial begins. Ray immediately takes the floor.)*

**RAY (holding up a blank document):**  
I would like to enter this **evidence** into the record.  
It contains **absolutely nothing**, just like this case.

*(The Greek Chorus, unimpressed, takes over the proceedings.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Bailiff, official, unshaken):**  
This court is now in session.  
This trial is now in progress.  
This case is under review.

**RAY (squinting, to himself):**  
I don't even know if I'm the plaintiff or the defendant.  
I could be **both** at this point.

*(The Greek Chorus splits into roles—lawyer, judge, jury. They close in.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Lawyer, relentless):**  
Mr. Shamus.  
Do you deny being present at the scene?

**RAY:**  
I— (pauses)  
I don't know.  
Where **was** the scene?

*(The Greek Chorus ignores the question. The trial continues.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Jury, murmuring, overlapping):**  
Does he suffer?  
Yes.  
Did he endure undue agony?  
Yes.

**RAY (shaking his head, exhausted):**

This is **Kafka**.

This is **pure Kafka**.

*(The chorus leans in, surrounding him.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Judge, final, absolute):**

The court awards—

*(pauses, leans in)*

More than you dreamed.

*(The gavel falls. Ray winces, covering his ears.)*

**RAY (quietly, defeated):**

I know I am here.

I think I—

*(The courtroom vanishes. The sound of wind.)*

---

## **EPISODE FOUR: HELL, NORWAY**

*(A train station. A sign reads: HELL. Snow falls.)*

*(Ray looks around. The town is... nice. Too nice.)*

**RAY (narrowing his eyes):**

No fire. No wailing. No smoke.

What kind of Hell **is this?**

*(A voice, warm, Norwegian, not part of the Greek Chorus.)*

**LOCAL (bemused):**

Velkommen til Norge.

Hell is lovely this time of year.

*(Ray frowns. Looks at the town. At the quiet, beautiful landscape. Then at the Greek Chorus, who are just standing there, waiting.)*

*(A pause.)*

*(Ray sighs.)*

**RAY (resigned, softer now):**

The air is clean.

The houses glow.

The snow hums beneath my feet.

And in the sky—

*(laughs)*

Clouds still race.

*(The Greek Chorus smiles. Ray exhales. A long pause.)*

**RAY:**

I know I am here.

*(Looks up at the sky. Smirks.)*

**RAY:**

I think I am sound.

*(A final note, shimmering. The road is gone. The sky remains.)*

**FADE TO WHITE.**

## HIGHWAY TO HELL (NORWAY)

*A TV Opera in Four Episodes*

**For a One-Man Greek Chorus (Ray Shamus) vs. The Greek Chorus**

---

### EPISODE ONE: CLOUDS

*(A countryside road. Clouds move unnaturally fast. The **Greek Chorus** begins in a smooth, authoritative voice.)*

**GREEK CHORUS:**

The sky unfurls like painted gauze.  
Gold spills, blue breaks.  
Clouds wander, weightless.

*(A second voice cuts in—**Ray Shamus**, distinct, deliberate. He does not interrupt. He **corrects**.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

Clouds do not wander.  
Clouds are vapor, subject to currents.  
They are not independent agents.

*(The chorus does not acknowledge him. Their voices shift, grander now, filling the air.)*

**GREEK CHORUS:**

The road stretches unbroken, infinite.  
The journey does not end.  
The traveler flies, unbound by gravity.

*(Ray listens. He tilts his head, considering.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

The road is not infinite.  
The road is made of asphalt.  
Asphalt is derived from petroleum.  
Petroleum is finite.  
Therefore, the road is finite.

*(A pause. The **Greek Chorus** does not stop, does not engage. They speak over him, and for a moment, Ray is drowned in their voices.)*

**GREEK CHORUS:**

Temperature dropping!  
Winds at twenty miles per hour!  
Hold the wheel—

*(The **car skids**. The road tilts. The sky fractures. Ray remains standing, **watching**.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

I know I am here.  
I think I am sound.

*(Blackout.)*

---

## EPISODE TWO: CARS

*(A shattered windshield. A flickering streetlight. The **Greek Chorus** speaks first, their voices mechanical, detached.)*

**GREEK CHORUS:**

Wir fahren, fahren, fahren—  
We drive, drive, drive—  
The system is down.

*(Ray **steps forward**. His voice is measured, as if reading from a ledger.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

Incident report:  
Unknown cause.  
Blacktop distortion.  
Driver claims: "The road disappeared."

*(He looks up at the chorus. His expression does not change.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

The road does not disappear.  
It is either present or absent.

*(The **Greek Chorus** fragments, splitting into murmuring voices.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Witnesses, overlapping, uncertain):**

The blacktop split—  
The line dissolved—  
We were going—  
Where?

*(Ray does not look at them. He **retrieves a pen from his jacket**. Clicks it. The sound is sharp.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

You will describe it again.  
Step by step.  
There was a road.  
Then—?

*(The chorus does not answer. The road disappears. Ray's pen disappears from his hand. He stops. He looks at his empty fingers.)*

*(A long silence.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

I know I am here.  
I think I am—

*(The **Greek Chorus** speaks over him, victorious.)*

**GREEK CHORUS:**

We drive, drive, drive.

*(The sound of tires rolling on an empty highway.)*

---

## EPISODE THREE: PERSONAL INJURY

*(A courtroom with no walls. A gavel already falling. The **Greek Chorus** is in control.)*

**GREEK CHORUS:**

This court is now in session.

This trial is now in progress.

This case is under review.

*(Ray **does not react**. He stands before them, patient, waiting.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

The trial has always been happening.

*(The chorus continues, undeterred. They **split into roles**—judge, lawyer, jury. The structure remains.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Lawyer, relentless):**

Mr. Shamus.

Do you deny being present at the scene?

**RAY SHAMUS:**

Define "present."

Define "scene."

*(The chorus does not define. They move on.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Jury, murmuring, overlapping):**

Does he suffer?

Yes.

Did he endure undue agony?

Yes.

*(Ray does not flinch.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

To "endure" implies an endpoint.

If agony is ongoing, it cannot be endured.

It simply **is**.

*(The chorus surrounds him. The **judge speaks**.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Judge, grand, absolute):**

The court awards—

(pauses, leans in)

More than you dreamed.

*(A gavel strikes. The case is closed. The **courtroom vanishes**.)*

**RAY SHAMUS (quietly, unmoved):**

I know I am here.

I think I am sound.

---

## EPISODE FOUR: HELL, NORWAY

*(A train station. A sign: HELL.)*

**GREEK CHORUS (as Inferno, ancient, unshaken):**

Through me the way to the city of woe.

Through me the way to eternal pain.

Through me—

*(Ray does not react. He adjusts his coat. Looks at the town.)*

*(The town is... pleasant. Quiet. Snow falls. A voice—separate from the Greek Chorus—speaks.)*

**LOCAL (warm, Norwegian, simple):**

Velkommen til Norge.

Hell is lovely this time of year.

*(Ray does not respond immediately. He takes in the air. Exhales.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

The air is clean.

The houses glow.

The snow hums beneath my feet.

And in the sky—

(laughs)

Clouds still race.

*(The Greek Chorus stands motionless. Ray turns to face them.)*

*(A pause. His tone does not waver.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

I know I am here.

*(He looks up at the sky. A final moment of stillness.)*

**RAY SHAMUS:**

I think I am sound.

*(A final note, shimmering. The road is gone. The sky remains.)*

**FADE TO WHITE.**

## FROM CLOUDS TO HELL

*A Chamber Opera in Four Acts for a Single Greek Chorus*

---

### Act I: Clouds

*A countryside road. The car hums beneath them. Rolling hills and endless sky. The chorus stands in shifting patterns, weaving sound like a landscape.*

**CHORUS (bright, drifting, like a breeze):**

The sky unfurls like painted gauze,  
Gold spilling, blue breaking,  
Clouds wander, weightless—

**(The voice of a Weatherman rises from within the chorus, rhythmic, staccato.)**

**WEATHERMAN:**

A high-pressure system moves in from the West,  
Unobstructed light, dry air,  
Good conditions for travel,  
If you hold the wheel steady.

**CHORUS (sudden and intimate, a breath on the wind):**

Have you ever held the wheel steady?  
Have you ever followed the road's perfect line?  
The moment before the bend—  
The moment before the drop—  
The moment before—

**(A new voice emerges—dreamy, nostalgic, tracing the contours of a Joni Mitchell song.)**

**SINGER:**

Rows and flows of angel hair,  
Ribbons of wind undone,  
A song plays in the static,  
A girl sings to herself—

**(Another voice—wider, larger, Whitman's open road stretching before them.)**

**WHITMAN:**

O road without end,  
O earth beneath, rich and dust-worn,  
O wheel, turning, turning,  
Turn now—

**(A sudden silence. The car skids. A single, dissonant chord holds the moment.)**

---

## Act II: Cars

*A shattered windshield. Time slows. The chorus moves mechanically, becoming the road, the machine, the crash itself.*

**CHORUS (stiff, fragmented, robotic, pulsing with the hum of Kraftwerk's *Autobahn*):**

Wir fahren, fahren, fahren—  
We drive, drive, drive—  
but the road does not hold us.

**(The sound of static, then the cool, detached voice of a road-movie existentialist.)**

**DRIFTER:**

Speed doesn't kill you.  
Time does.  
The wheel spins.  
The road vanishes.  
The wheels keep turning,  
Even when they stop.

**(The Chorus fractures further, now the voice of a cracked transmission, words slipping in and out of coherence.)**

**CHORUS (broken, scattered, each phrase coming from a different voice):**

The blacktop splits.  
A line dissolves.  
We were heading somewhere—  
Where?  
Where?

**(A silence. Then a shift—low, feverish, the ghost of the Beat Generation waking from a long sleep.)**

**GHOST:**

Mad ones.  
Burning ones.  
Going, going—

**(A breath. The road vanishes. The world inverts. A long, hollow note lingers.)**

---

## Act III: Personal Injury

*A courtroom, but not a real courtroom. A dream of a trial. A nightmare of process. The chorus encircles itself, becoming judge, jury, lawyer, defendant, victim, witness, and the bureaucratic void.*

**CHORUS (mock-triumphant, grand, absurd):**

Is she guilty? Yes!  
Is she innocent? Yes!  
Is she something else entirely?  
YES.

**(The voices shift. The courtroom expands infinitely, a Kafkaesque tangle of corridors and**

**staircases leading nowhere.)**

**LAWYER:**

Your Honor, my client does not understand the charges.

My client does not remember the accident.

My client does not recall ever learning to drive.

But—!

She suffers.

**JUDGE:**

Does she suffer?

**JURY:**

Yes.

**JUDGE:**

And if one suffers, is one not deserving of recompense?

**JURY:**

Yes.

**JUDGE:**

And if one does not know why they suffer,

Is the suffering not greater?

**JURY:**

Yes.

**(The chorus murmurs, grows, splits into overlapping layers of bureaucracy. Robert Ashley-style hypnotic repetition takes over.)**

**CHORUS (looping, droning):**

The paperwork is incomplete.

The records are lost.

The signatures do not match.

The gavel strikes.

The gavel strikes.

The gavel—

**(The chorus, now in the voice of an indifferent court clerk, delivers the final verdict.)**

**CLERK:**

The court awards—

(pauses, leans in)

More than you dreamed.

**(The gavel falls. A triumphant, almost ridiculous musical flourish. The case is closed.)**

---

## **Act IV: Hell, Norway**

*A town called Hell. The Chorus breathes out. The light is soft. Snow falls. It is quiet. It is peaceful. It is nothing like they expected.*

**CHORUS (whispering, hushed, the first lines of Dante's *Inferno* rising in the cold air):**

Through me the way to the city of woe.  
Through me the way to eternal pain.  
Through me—

**(A pause. The snow continues falling.)**

**CHORUS (surprised, laughing softly):**

No fire. No wailing. No smoke.  
Only light. Only breath.  
Only the hush of winter.

**(A warm voice, the voice of someone who has lived here a long time, speaking in Norwegian.)**

**LOCAL:**

Velkommen til Norge.  
Hell is lovely this time of year.

**(The Chorus takes in the quiet beauty, shifting into the patient, steady rhythm of Knut Hamsun's prose—deep, observant, woven with solitude.)**

**CHORUS:**

The air is clean.  
The houses glow.  
The snow hums beneath our feet.  
And in the sky—  
(laughs)  
Clouds still race!

**(The final notes echo the very first—soft, joyful, wiser. The chorus, once fractured, now sings in unison. The road is gone. The sky remains.)**

**CHORUS:**

We fly, we fly—  
Through Hell and back again!

**(Final, shimmering harmony. Curtain falls.)**

## **Title: From Clouds to Hell**

*A Chamber Opera in Four Acts for Two Female Voices*

### **Dramatis Personae:**

- **Soprano (S)** – *The Traveler* (Plaintiff)
  - **Mezzo-Soprano (M)** – *The Companion* (Defendant) & Various Other Roles (Lawyer, Judge, etc.)
- 

## **Act I: Clouds**

*A countryside road. The car hums beneath them. Rolling hills and endless sky. Laughter.*

**(Soprano & Mezzo, alternating and overlapping joyfully)**

**S:** The clouds run faster than we do—

**M:** A race of silk across the sky—

**S:** The wind unfurls my hair like ribbons—

**M:** The fields are drunk with light—

**(Together, laughing)**

**Both:** We fly! We fly!

**(Mezzo slows, a note of tension enters.)**

**M:** The road is bending—

**S:** But we are fearless—

**M:** The wheels slip—

**S:** But we are safe—

**(A sudden silence. The car skids. A single, dissonant chord holds the moment.)**

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## **Act II: Cars**

*A shattered windshield. Time slows. The aftermath.*

**Soprano, dazed, in a recitative:**

Where is the road?

Where is the sky?

The song of the wheels—gone,

Replaced by sirens and shattered glass.

**Mezzo, urgent, guilty, almost pleading:**

I swerved, I swear,

The road was slick,

The light was blinding—

Forgive me!

**Soprano, now growing furious, cutting through Mezzo's pleas:**

You held the wheel!

You held my life!

And now I hold—

(looks at her broken arm)

This wreckage.

**(Dissonance rises, a chorus of sirens, then silence.)**

---

## **Act III: Personal Injury**

*A courtroom. The language of justice, twisted and sung.*

**(Mezzo transforms into a slick Personal Injury Lawyer, reveling in the absurdity of litigation.)**

**M (as Lawyer, grandiose and oily):**

Did she suffer? Yes!  
Did she fall? Yes!  
Did she lose all hope and function?  
Why, yes, Your Honor, yes!

**Soprano, weak but growing in conviction:**

I did suffer.  
I did fall.  
I lost my sky, my ribbons of wind.  
But I gained—  
(beat)  
Compensation.

**(Mezzo, now as the Judge, solemn but amused.)**

**M (as Judge):** The court awards—  
(pauses, leans in)  
More than you dreamed.

**(A gavel strike. A triumphant musical flourish.)**

---

## **Act IV: Hell, Norway**

*A snowy town. Surprisingly beautiful. A fresh start.*

**Soprano, now warm, at peace:**

They said I'd go to Hell.  
So I did.

**Mezzo, now as a friendly local, chuckling:**

Welcome to Norway.

**Soprano:**

The air is clean.  
The houses glow.  
The snow hums beneath my feet.  
And in the sky—  
(laughs)  
Clouds still race!

**(Both voices intertwine, joyful once more, the echoes of their first song returning, but softer, wiser.)**

**Both:**

We fly, we fly—  
Through Hell and back again!

**(Final triumphant harmony. Curtain falls.)**

A man in a dark suit, light blue shirt, and red tie is shouting with his mouth wide open. The background is a blurred, warm-toned landscape with yellow and orange hues.

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## PART ONE: CLOUDS

Golden sky, silver thread  
Roll the wheel, the road's outspread  
Blue horizon bending low  
Drifting high, nowhere to go

Chorus (motorik):  
I know where I am, I think I am sound  
I float and I fly, but I don't touch the ground

---

## PART TWO: CARS

Wir fahren, fahren, fahren—  
We drive, drive, drive—

There's a line on the road, but it's starting to split  
There's a sign up ahead, but I don't see it  
Keep it steady, keep it straight  
But the road just changed its shape

---

## PART THREE: PERSONAL INJURY

The trial is now in session.  
The trial has always been happening.  
This case is under review.

Objection sustained!  
I object!  
No standing!

Chorus (spoken):  
The court awards—  
More than you dreamed.  
The gavel strikes—  
The case is closed.

---

## PART FOUR: HELL, NORWAY

There's a town, I heard its name  
People say it's warm and strange  
Snow is falling, streets aglow  
This is Hell, but Hell's not cold

Chorus:

Oh, oh, Hell is fine  
Oh, oh, Hell is kind  
Oh, oh, the sky is bright  
Oh, oh, I sleep tonight

Final line:

I know I am here.  
I think I am sound.



# BILL BAIRD



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Elnuh  
(solo)

