



Lamoine

BY RICK MOODY

Where we come from, his father told him, is from between the sea and the shore, between the spume and the white spruce, between civilization and the wastes of the North. We come from the edge of things, and you'll see this when we get farther east. This was after they first set out. They were inland, not coastal, and it was summer, and there was traffic, and above all there was fog. Where was the mystery of ancestry to be located in fog and traffic, when you are in a rented car, and you are logging long hours listening to baroque music and sports commentary? He was twenty-four, and his father was fifty, and his father had been raised in this state. His father had been raised Down East, and his father and his father before that, seven or eight generations of fathers, all living on this ground, most in the pursuit of animal husbandry, or in the business of cultivation. Short, hard lives, with many chil-

dren. His own father, the one who left, had brought him back here to show him. He was the first son who had grown up in the region known as Away, a place noted for its drive-thru businesses, commuter rails, and crimes against property. His father had brought him back to show him origins of things.

Where we come from, his father said, is from a simpler place, a more genuine place. It's time that you learned. But with the fog it was hard to get much of a sense. There was fog and sheets of rain. The mist hung like a moldy tarp over the volunteer fire departments, the schoolhouses, the marinas, over the innumerable businesses devoted to the sale of lobster and lobster rolls. At least lobster rolls provided some concord between the two of them. There was a near constant pursuit of lobster rolls. Likewise, the various chowders. Haddock chowder, for example. If the need overtook them they would pull over the rental car at some shack on stilts by the side of the

gummed up road, and they would pay whatever price was asked for a lobster roll. This isn't the real Maine, his father would tell him, the real Maine is farther down. You'll see. When we get beyond Bar Harbor, you'll see.

Where we come from, his father repeated, is a place of marinas and men of the sea. They were on a boat, in fact, and it was the second day. His father spoke of running his skiff in the summer—his skiff with the one-horsepower engine—back and forth across the harbor. He spoke of this little waterlogged skiff—while they too journeyed across the open water. The skiff. Its engine. The sea. The island just beyond where you could swim, that's where he was always trying to get in his skiff. The father would never dip even a toe in the water again, though it was the water that reared him up. The water was too cold. His father told these stories, because there was an itch to speak. They changed the name of that island there. That hotel, that

is a new hotel. Doesn't measure up to what preceded it. They were on the ferry, father and son, bound for that island there. The island beyond, way out in the ocean, that was where they were bound, because the place where they came from, according to the father, was like a distant island, a place where no one could get conveniently. There were just a few settled families who had grown so antagonistic to one another that they barely spoke. And there was just the one car on the island, and it had well over two hundred thousand miles on it. There was a break in the clouds, while they were on the ferry, and during this interval of sun his father extemporized about an honest day's work. It was easier to work in a place like this, a simpler place, you see. There was the tradition of craftsmanship. Yet by the time they reached the island it was already raining again, and when his father asked the man at the ferry dock, the man with the one and only car, if there was somewhere they could get a drink, the man in the car fell silent. He looked uncomfort-

able. It was a dry island.

Where we come from, his father said, there are forests, vast forested hillsides and mountains. The forests extend all the way to the border, to Canada. In the North. That forest doesn't have tourists crawling along in their recreational vehicles in the rain. Look at this town Lamoine, here on the map. His father pointed out a certain tiny dot. The dot seemed immediately significant. Your grandmother came from here, or perhaps *beyond* here, not from where all these people come from, these people with their lobster bibs and their outlet stores. We're from beyond this. This conversation took place on a third day of rain. There had been a graveyard where his father's grandfather was buried, there'd been a house where some prior generations had lived—after his father's grandfather died of whatever respiratory sickness he had contracted in the quarries. These places they had seen in the rain, and now it was rainy again, and it was impossible to tell if this tree was a larch, and this an ash, this is a fir. I grew

up climbing these trees, the father said, and there was bog rosemary and sweet-fern, juniper and witch hazel. I ate honey-suckle and wild carrots. And now there are donuts and coffee. He kept pointing to the map, saying, Really, it's going to be better when we get to Lamoine. See the turnoff for the state park? It's beyond that. It'll be like the Maine where your grandmother came from.

It *was* a beautiful place. Who could say it wasn't? Here was better by far than Away. It was better than the interior of a rental car with a crack in the windshield. He could nearly see the place as his father saw it, a craggy shoreline overlaid as with some tissue-paper transparency of the present. Maybe everything *was* a falling off from the past, everywhere, no matter where you looked? If you were old enough to take your grown son to see where you grew up, the harvest you reaped was a catalogue of things that had grown worse. It was only Lamoine, and the circle that his father had drawn around it on the map, that sustained

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their journey. It would be splendid once the recreational vehicles headed off for the state park. The weather would improve. It was unclear to the son why Lamoine had emerged as the particular destination since, in fact, it wasn't near where his grandmother grew up. Nor his grandfather. His grandfather's family was back toward Thomaston. But if you stayed on the coastal road past the state park, Lamoine was where you came first, and in this way Lamoine stood in for the Down East of memory. Here was the vestigial drama of spume and white pine or white spruce, where people made a life out of hardship, a hardship that was dignified and lasting, during long, unrelenting winters. Did his father forget to mention the winters? The snowshoes, the ice fishing, the shoveling, the sleds, the icicles?

This is where you come from, this place here, this ground, his father said, and they took the fateful right turn, and this turn brought them to the spit of land, the promontory that was Lamoine, at least as they read the map. Behind was the state park, dwindling in the rear view mirror, the coastal road, the tourists in the rain, coming out of their recreational vehicles with the fogged up windows long enough to get chowder at the seafood joint. The father and son had done better than this, they had gone farther, they had gone *beyond* chowder, and this road to Lamoine was the indication of their inexorable progress, and it was now four days they had been driving in search of the true ancestral state of Maine. The farther they drove out along the road to Lamoine, the more things fell away, and there were no houses, no seafood shacks, no churches, only that local in a patched-up pickup who drove at a relaxed velocity, some fifteen miles per hour below the limit, until even he turned off at a tumbledown bait shop. Just a little more, the father said to the son, just a little farther and we will be in Lamoine. There will be a marina, and some guys coming back at dusk with coolers full of their catch.

The roads are bad like this, the father said, when you get near to the old things. And indeed the road had grown rugged. It was down to a single-lane track, and it was impossible to see what was ahead. If another vehicle were coming from the opposite way, making the epic

trip west, there would be a head-on collision. Especially now that the fog had grown even thicker. There was some kind of sound now, some rumbling in the distance. The rental car had slowed so much that this ominous rumble was obvious. Still, it was only when the road became dirt that the son began to worry. Then the dirt gave way to pebbles, and then the pebbles gave way to *sand*.

The father threw the car into park. They flung open the doors. The road just *stopped*. The road didn't go any farther, into a town, into a grove of apple trees, or birches or spruces. Neither did the road proceed along some picturesque vista, or onto the property of a quaint farm. It just stopped, not ten feet from the breakers. For that was what the rumbling was. It was the rumbling of the chilly Atlantic surf. There was not a person here. They had driven twenty miles down a back road and practically driven the rental car into the Atlantic Ocean. The father scratched his head, looked up at the clouds. The drizzle was still drizzling. And so this was where they came from, the son realized, from here. Take a right at the middle of nowhere, and go until the sea swallows you. ■

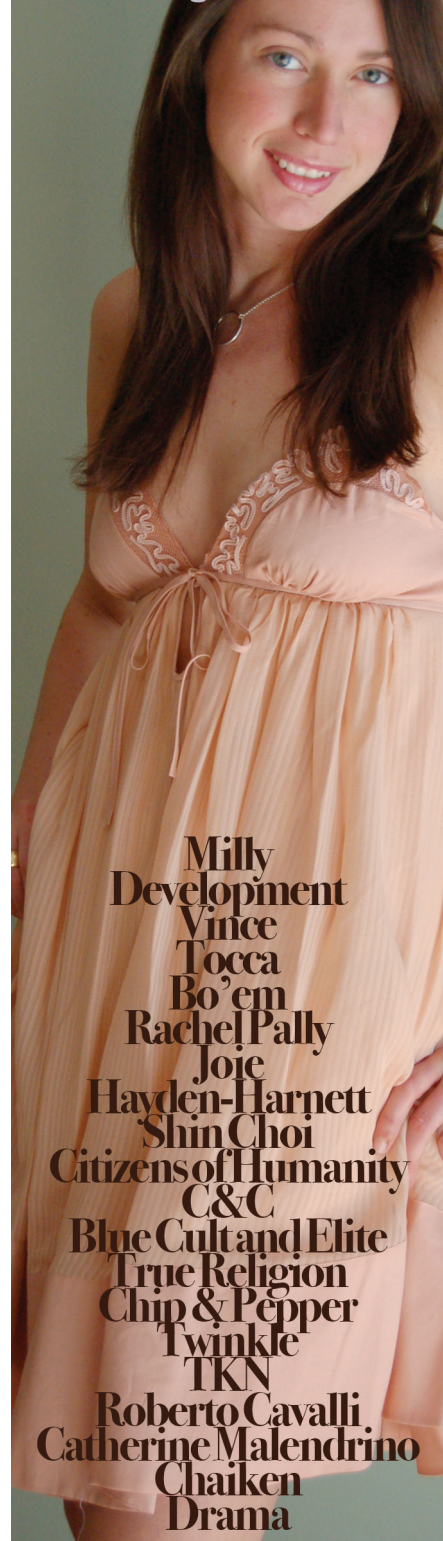
Rick Moody

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