

1996

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Recommended Citation

Djanikian, Gregory. "The Trip." *The Iowa Review* 26.1 (1996): 53-54. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.4507>

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Gregory Djanikian

THE TRIP

For several months, he had been
untangling himself from her,
uncomfortable about what kept lingering,
the caresses that sometimes went too far now,
the flirtation that had no place at their table.

They were driving back from a week-end stay
in a city she had always wanted to see,
and he was thinking of the river which wound
through its heart, remembered his feeling
that the future was a far off place,
everyone else heading for it,
everyone waving goodbye.

She asked him suddenly
whether he had *ever* loved her, a question
which took him by surprise,
brought him back to her
where he was used to being.

“Yes” he could have said, “of course,”
the old comfortableness setting in,
but he had been led now to the edge of something,
maybe a declaration which was different from any
he had made before, something riskier
and with the notion of change in it.
“I don’t know,” he said,
“I can’t tell, maybe not.”

He saw her face tighten,
half wanted to stop the car, kiss her hard—
this is what I want, he imagined saying, this!—
half wanted to let it ride,
a turmoil inside him making him
stupid and flushed.

He let the moment pass, then for miles,
the grey silent landscape between them,
until there was no going back
with retractions, no undoing her hurt

or the way he had to think of himself now,
as a man with another man inside him
he would soon have to bargain with.