

qVj5k [GET] My Own Devices: True Stories from the Road on Music, Science, and Senseless Love

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In her literary debut memoir, rapper and singer Dessa gives a candid account of her life in the van as a hard-touring musician, her determination to beat long odds to make a name for herself, and her struggle to fall out of love with someone in her band. Raw and intimate, Dessa demonstrates just how far the mind can travel while the body is on the six-hour ride to the next rap show. Dessa defies category--she is an academic with an international rap career; a lyrical writer fascinated by behavioral science; and a funny, charismatic performer dogged by blue moods and a perseverant case of heartache. In "The Fool That Bets Against Me," Dessa wonders if the romantic anguish that's helped her write so many sad songs might be an insurable professional asset. To find out, she applies to Geico for coverage. "A Ringing in the Ears" tells the story of her father building an airplane in their backyard garage--a task that took him almost seven years. The essay titled "Congratulations" reflects on recording a song for The Hamilton Mixtape in a Minneapolis basement, straining for a high note and hoping for a break. The last piece in the collection, "Call off Your Ghost," relays the fascinating project Dessa undertook with a team of neuroscientists that employed fMRI technology and neurofeedback to try to clinically excise her romantic feelings for an old flame. Her onstage and backstage stories are offset by her varied fascinations--she studies sign language, algebra, neuroanatomy--and this collection is a prism of her intellectual life. Her writing is infused with fascinating bits of science and sociology, philosophical insights, and an abiding tenderness for the people she tours with and the people she leaves behind to do it. Dessa finds unconventional approaches to all of her subjects--braiding her lived experience with academic research and a poet's tone and timing. In the vein of thinkers who defy categorization, we get the debut of a deft, likable, and unusual voice.

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