

Road to Hell

By

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It had been 36 hours since Parker Davis slept. His eyes were red, saggy, and dark. His white tshirt was brown in spots from immense sweating. The once crisp scent of fresh laundry turned to the smell of decaying flesh. His small 1978 AMC Gremlin was strewn with fast food wrappers, dirty clothes, and cigarette butts. Coffee had been his best friend for the last 24 hours.

He continued to drive 78 mph down Old Route 12 for 115 miles, trying to get away from the inevitable. It was night. No lights. Just the dully lit head lights of Parker's beat up Shirley.

Shirley – the only woman he ever cared about. But that's only because she always got him out of town.

Parker kept sipping his black coffee. Occasionally, he slapped his face and clicked his tongue.

“Gotta stay awake. Gotta stay awake. Gotta get to Newburn.”

He twisted the power knob of the cassette radio and Judas Priest's “Living After Midnight” blared. He immediately ejected the tape and spun the other dial to find a local station.

“...man responsible for the murder of two Concord High School girls is still at large. Witnesses have identified the vehicle as a 1978 blue AMC –”

The station squealed as Parker turned the dial to a new station.

“...under way and believe they know where the man is heading. They advise everyone to remain indoors, with their doors locked.”

“No, no, no. I don’t want to hear about this shit!” Parker repeatedly hit the radio with his bare hand, causing the dial to screech and stutter passed other stations. “I fucking swear, one more time...” He turned the dial to a clear station.

Ozzy Osborne’s new single “Crazy Train” filled the car and Parker began nodding his head to the beat. Staring at the radio, he waited. He glanced at the road then glared at the radio. He waited. The station continued playing music.

“Ok. Ok. There ya go. That’s better.”

Parker continued to drive while he sipped coffee and bopped his head to the music.

When done with his coffee, he threw the cup to the cluttered passenger floor and gripped both hands on the wheel. His eyes watered as he rubbed them. He blinked several times and squinted as he drove.

Before he knew it, a highway sign streaked by him. Parker twisted his head sharply, craning to read it.

“Shit!” He peered through the darkness – up, down, left, right – for any other signs.

“How much farther to Newburn?”

In the distance, Parker saw a plain white billboard with lights shining all around it. A soft ball of white light emanated from the center. The ball hovered as the rest of the lights moved inward to form an aggregate bullet rosette. The light glared into the night sky, piercing the darkness. *What in the* – His eyes were ensnared by the light. He gazed, his mouth gaping. *Why would something like that... be way out here?*

“Repent, sinners, repent!” a commercial blared on the radio. “For God will forgive the wicked, if only the wicked repent and ask His forgive-”

“Screw that!” Parker said, turning off the radio. “I’d rather fuck a porcupine.”

A highway sign came into view. It read: Newburn 12 Miles. A sinister smile spread across Parker’s face. He reached into his back pocket and took out an old pack of cigarettes. Three remained. He lit one and continued to drive the next few miles in silence, puffing away with a grin.

Parker was taking the last cigarette out of the pack when another sign came into view: Newburn 5 Miles. Parker’s eyes twitched as he read it. *They thought they’d catch* – He yawned, eyes twitching more – *catch me. Fuuuuuuuck theeeem!* He drove on.

With the last cigarette gone, Parker drove with both hands securely on the wheel. He kept yawning, blinking. He stared out into the night. *Just another couple of miles and I’m home free.* His body was limp, and he began sinking into the seat – his head lowering – as his eyes grew heavy as lead. Darkness engulfed him. He jerked awake and took a breath. Squeezing his eyes shut, he opened them wide, but a yawn forced them back down to half-mast. Both eyes were frozen as they twitched. Water on his eyelashes caused his eyes to blur. Parker’s breathing slowed, his body sinking into the seat again, and his eyes... slowly closed. His head bounced up and down as the Gremlin continued to drive itself, Black Sabbath’s recently released “Heaven and Hell” playing as his lullaby.

When he reopened his eyes, Parker was slumped inside a window booth at The Border Diner, a shabby place with black and white checkered flooring, red booth seating, and floor-

mounted bar stools at the counter. He was the only one there besides a red-headed waitress in a short, white uniform and a middle-aged fat male cook wearing a dingy t-shirt and white beanie hat with Zed on the front. He weakly pushed himself up, ran his hands through his greasy brown hair, and waved the waitress over.

“How’d I get here,” he asked, still a little groggy.

“They brought you in,” the waitress with the nametag Phan said, pointing passed the window to the night-drenched outside, where two females, both wearing shiny disco pants and sandal heels, were talking to a tow truck guy as he lowered an AMC Gremlin.

“My car!” Parker yelled, jumping up. He grabbed his head, winced, and slid down the booth seat.

“Careful, honey,” the waitress said. “You’ve already had one accident. Don’t want to make it two. Here come your saviors,” she said as she walked away.