

## The Drive

Bob Murphy

The man gently squeezed the brake pedal as the old truck took another sharp turn. Driving down the mountain was always dangerous, but especially so at night. The man tapped the clutch with his left foot as the truck slowed. The engine trembled.

“Shit!” He put on the hazard lights and coasted off the road, being careful to leave several feet between his right tires and the edge of the gulch. He tried several times to start the truck up again, even though he knew from previous stalls that this was pointless.

*Well won't this be a story.* The man muttered to himself as he hopped out. He considered, then grabbed a winter hat from the glove box. If no one picked him up, the walk would be hours. The desert air was quite cold.

\* \* \*

“Oh man.” There apparently had been a rockslide, for there was now a gaping *hole* in the road. The man started jogging to get a closer look. From this distance, he couldn't tell whether the jagged rocks remaining along the cliff wall would support his weight. It would be a nightmare if he had to turn back after all this time.

“Oh my *God...*” The dim flashlight shone upon fresh skid marks. The man now raced to the edge of the road.

Although difficult to make out, there was clearly a car, smashed and twisted, lying in the gully below.

\* \* \*

Sally tried in vain to find a clear signal. She turned the radio off in disgust. As she looked back up, Sally saw the crazed man and let out a gasp. He was standing in the

middle of the road, jumping up and down, waving one arm, and holding a flashlight to his face with the other.

Sally instinctively checked her window and all four locks. She slowed to listen to what the man was yelling, but once she did he ran towards her door.

It may have been the absolute *determination* in his eyes, or the realization of her own frailty, but something kept Sally from stopping. As soon as she could do it safely, she veered to the right and sped past the man. He probably just had a flat tire, obviously. But he could wait another fifteen minutes for her to tell someone at the gas station.

Sally did not reach the gas station.

\* \* \*

The man lit his last cigarette. It had been over two hours since that poor woman had gone over. The man had lost his gamble by waiting for the next car. He easily could have reached a phone if he had kept walking.

But he couldn't have risked passing another car. Why didn't she stop? She slowed, everything seemed fine, and then....Should he have shone the flashlight at *her*?

Finally headlights appeared in the distance. They wound their way down the road, hugging the mountain wall. The man hopped off the truck, now parked with its front bumper three feet from the wall.

It would have been much better to roll the truck down farther, away from the bend. But at the time he didn't know when the next vehicle would come. In any event, it was too late now.

The man placed himself midway between the back of the truck and the ravine. He absolutely *had* to stop this car. They wouldn't fit around the left, and if they tried to go around on the right, he was ready with his shotgun.

Of course they'd turn around. If that woman was afraid of a flashlight, no one's going to stop for a guy holding a shotgun.

But then they'd send the police.

\* \* \*

Matt stroked Amy's hair as he strained to keep his focus on the road. He couldn't believe she'd gone for it, but then again he knew it happened to *some* guys, right?

\* \* \*

As the Camaro whipped around the bend, the man knew something was wrong. He instinctively backpedaled as he *finally* heard the tires begin to screech.

The Camaro started to spin. The rear tires were the first to go over the side. The rest followed.

\* \* \*

Henry told Mrs. Potts that she needed to get the kids in the back to sit down and *shut up*. They were always the worst after ski trips.

Henry's eyes grew wide when he saw the man. It *couldn't* be....Was that a *gun*?

"Everybody get down!" Henry yelled as his mind raced. The bus was fairly high, and it looked like a shotgun, not something automatic. Henry slid down in his seat, just keeping his head high enough to see the road. He pressed down on the gas. No *way* was someone hijacking *his* bus full of kids.

\* \* \*

"No!" the man screamed as the bus sped up. He ran to the edge of the road, and took careful aim at the rear tire.

\* \* \*

The man watched as the foreman looked up from the slip of paper. It seemed everyone in the court room was avoiding eye contact. That wasn't a good sign.

“On the charge of forty-five counts of second-degree murder, we find the defendant...guilty on all counts.”