

## **This is Not Sign Language.**

His upper lip twitches slightly, ever so lightly. He can feel the pinch radiating from his upper lip, creeping through his cheek and landing on his right eyelid, fluttering. The sort of simple twitch others cannot see, but one can never be too sure. He swallows. The taste of burnt coffee slides down the back of his throat. He moves the head of his tongue to the back corners of his mouth like a eel and clears away his left overs. He slides his working gloves off the metallic table and exits the diner. The door chimes as he pushes it open ringing the sound of thin glass. It's cold outside, a silver sort of cold. In front of the diner he sucks in wet air. He exhales engine breath through a pinhole crack between his lips.

He walks over to his blank truck, takes the two steps up and lands onto his worn out seat. He looks into his rearview mirrors and readjusts his hat haphazardly. His left hand pushes at the back of his head, his right hand shifts the hat's rim into a comfortable position. His greasy hair peaks out in no order. His dark eyebrows hang heavily over his green cat eyes. He wipes his nose with his rough, dry palm. He smells the leftovers of the girl from earlier hours on his index finger. He smirks over the fading memory. He turns his radio on to listen to the reports and bullshit rants of the other truckies. He flicks through the FM radio to find a station that sings. He catches a song between the waves.

"Mister Engineer take that throttle in hand  
This rattler's the fastest in the southern land  
To keep movin' me on, keep rollin' on."

He rolls down route 78 away from Athens, Georgia. The sky is somber. Hints of the sun slowly begin to fade the darkness. He pinches his lips and whistles along to the song. He licks his lips to press out a smoother, stronger sound as he pulls at the steering wheel

to merge onto the highway. He tries not to think about Grand Rapids, a day behind him, but she creeps into his mind in that way women do.

The cold wet winds from the great lakes burned his fingers that night. His middle finger on his left hand had been numb since childhood. In Grand Rapids his whole left hand went numb, every finger besides his little finger.

Angela tried to bring the feeling back for him. She started with his ring finger. She put its tip to her lips and lightly bit down at the base of his nail. She slowly pulled at the finger with her lips to push it further into her mouth. Half the finger was encased in her warm, wet mouth. She licked at the peacock finger's belly from knuckle forward to tip. Slowly. She moved progressively from one finger to the next.

"Hey cat eyes," she whispered. "You feeling anything yet?"

"Mhmm." He moaned. He didn't want her to stop. Apparently he gave the wrong answer because she did, stop.

"Glad to hear it." Angela said. "I always got the solution to men's problems. Oh' ways."

She lifted herself off of her knees and went to find her plastic purse. It was hanging off the T.V. Hanging wide opened, keys with a red dragon keychain, crumpled tissues with pen markings, a small round mirror, lipstick and some loose coins. She took out her tube of pink lipstick and went to the bathroom. She turned on the yellow light and leaned into the mirror. Her hair was a flaming frizzy red. She pushed her hair up to her icy cheekbones kissing her red image.

"I just love this here pink shiny lip stick." She said still watching herself. "It minds me of ma' Louisiana childhood. Like the first lipstick I ever owned."

"Mmm." The sound reverberated from his throat.

The only sound he could give not to leave her words hanging. He knew she would go on talking anyway. He wet his fingers, shoving all four of them into his mouth at once. His eyes closed. He was amazed that she brought them back to life, to warmth. She watched him from the bathroom doorframe. She tried to look sexy but he didn't notice her. She shut the light, walked over to the bed and slid in next to him. He could smell her presence, sweet pink grapefruit. He licked his lips wanting to taste more of her. His eyes closed.

He looked. Looked ahead. There it was, the sun, raising itself ahead of him. It moved upward through the sky. He drove directly towards its voluptuous head, pressing his foot onto the gas pinching his sciatic nerve. He wanted to meet the sun, hold it in its place, press himself deeply into its pelvis and hold it and him there in one moment. He will discover its core and sink its pretentious vitality.

"You bitch, you're mine." He licked his dry lips and pressed harder on the gas pedal.

He went long for the days he worked on railroad tracks, picking up jobs every few months, leaving the park to work with some other veterans, Southerners, Midwesterners. He scored the best drugs then, working those jobs. In Sweetwater, Texas he worked a two-month job with Richie and some other guys. Richie always spoke too much but had the money and bought the coke. Well, he did when the right girls were around and enough drinks went down. Yeah, that sure was a good time. That New Years that group of New York chicks got stuck in the storm and joined us at the Karaoke pub. They drank and danced and drank some more. Dancing their skinny asses through the new year. They started with us that night. Came right over to our table and asked us questions as they

danced as they drank. The streets were covered thick with ice, they had no way of getting out. Getting out of Sweetwater.

Richie begged them along into the truck and went for a quick spin to the closest ATM and drug dealer. They were coming to our hotel room. All was right. All was all right. We got high, four or five or six of us. Then those New York bitches got up and left. No explanation, no blow jobs, nothing, nothing like that night in Grand Rapids, sweet pink grapefruit gal, who licked my fingers right to feeling. Angela, sweet, sweet angel Angela.

“Show me your hands.” Angela said.

The driver held up his hands to the room. He stayed flat back on bed. She jumped onto the bed and stood over him. She waved a lighter in front of his left hand, then his right hand.

“Your hands always this cold?” She asked.

“Sure. In the winter, why not?” He said.

“They’re so dry.” She said. “You have no feelings for others.”

The driver grabbed her thigh with his right hand and squeezed.

“I sure as hell feel this and I’m pretty damn sure it aint my thigh but some others.” He said and pulled her down onto his waist. She shrieked as she fell on top of him. Her purple lighter flew across the room behind her, her red hair lifted like a flame ignited.

“Want me to tell you about your childhood?” She asked.

“Sure.” He said as his hand slipped up her skirt.

“Great!” She said. “But I need to see both hands.”

“Both?” He asked.

“Well, I can start with the left.” She said and ran her long fingernails over the lines of his hands. “Interesting,” she said.

He was just about ready for more coffee. He turned up the radio to focus on the road and reached for a plastic bottle. He flicked off the bottle cap with his thumb, unzipped his pants and pissed. *One more hour till the next coffee break*, he thought. The landscape flew past him like a poorly focused photograph. White to green to yellow and blue, always blue. Motion. Landscape. Crash! His truck spun over, sliding off the highway slapping the pavement on its right side. The roof of the truck crashed into a barbed wire fence. In defense the fence instinctively dug its prickly fingernails deep into the truck’s white skin. The head of the truck snapped backward and then bent forward in dejected defeat. Black tire marks stained the road a trail, as a map from beginning to end.

The driver imagined his body sucked up against the passenger's window. Blood pooling the outline of his body, soaking his face, his shoulder, his clothing, the window, he would be everywhere all at once, living and dying all at once. The police, roadside assistance, could try to set him free, they would, but he would already be gone.

He imagined he had the greatest orgasm of his entire life in that last accident. The last sensation before death, his semen surging and purging forcefully, all around his room. His eyes would twitch and soak from pleasure. His mouth would pop open like a Japanese Koi, releasing his last sounds of the purest pleasure, beats dying unconsciously any day. His lips twitched in excitement at the thought as he drove past his lost funeral. He dropped a deep exhale from his irritated nostrils that sank his shoulders, *Oh well*, defeated by life.

*Angela, where are you?*

"Hey Cateyes, stay wake with me, okay?" She asked.

"Oh, c'mon baby, I got miles to drive t'morrow. I need some sleep."

"Oh no, please, please, stay here with me. I won't sleep tonight. I mixed too many colored pills. They never let me sleep."

"Just try baby. Come here, close to me, I'll give you some sleep."

She pressed herself into his left side. Her body met and matched his body as they affectionately rested together.

"I once read somewhere, you only need 20 minutes sleep and then it feels like you got your hours. Let's try it, alright? I'll time you 20 minutes sleep and then you wake up for me, alright?"

"Oh no, baby, please. I need my sleep. I've gotta work. I've got 19 hours of road up ahead of me. Please baby, let me sleep. Just stay here and lay with me. You like to lay here with me, don't you baby?"

"Well, sure I do. But I can't sleep and then, well, it's plain boring for me after a while, to listen to you breathe and dream. C'mon, let's just try this here experiment, can we? I'll give ya more than 20 minutes, deal?"

"Baby."

"Okay, sleep now, make it real deep, and I'll wake you when it's time."

"Alright. Hope you making coffee, strong coffee, when I get up."

"Oh baby, you know I will. I'll do a lot more for you than just coffee, don't you worry.

Just sleep now. Don't forget to make it deep, and I'll wake you when it's time. I promise

you won't regret it." Her leg slid up his leg and she lightly rubbed him with her knee and pink painted toes.

"Mmm, well how am I suppose-to get to sleep with you teasing me like that baby?"

"Just relax. Just showing you what's to come when you wake baby."

"Mm... well alright baby."

2:47 PM, right about coffee time. He checked his gas, the pick about to stick through the head of the E, tapping its head teasingly.

"Your mine. I'm coming for you. Gunna ride right through you, you're not going anywhere Mr. E. I'm gunna cut you right down to your third line and rest my tip on your base, you watch me go, and you won't do nothing about it, just stationary as ever. No life, no motion, just E, always E."

He slid the truck into the right lane, easing off his highway. He took the exit, passed the parking lot for travelers and automobiles neatly lined up and orderly, and parked his truck off a ways away, out of the way, by the trucker's sanctuary. He pulled the keys from the lips of the ignition. Sunlight came through striking the passenger's seat for contact. He waited until the truck settled down and pressed the keys' teeth into his palm. He moved his fingers over the keys like a piano and, pressed their grail further into his palm. His morbid hands were cold enough to feel nothing but the sound of the keys scratching each other and his lifeline. He pressed his palms together over the keys and twisted his hands back and forth, grinding the keys into his lines. He's got too many lines on his palms, too many. He dropped down from the truck.

The air was getting warmer. He traveled southwest, cutting through Alabama. There weren't any clouds in the sky, just an overwhelming ice blue, an endless pale blue. He

tilted his nose up and slid his hands into his front pockets. He never looked to the other resting trucks. He had to walk through an empty lot to get to the main rest stop, to the Pop Eyes, Dairy Queens, snickers bars, and Coca cola machines. On his way past the empty lot he curled, a sound wired through his ear. He moved towards the sound, unconsciously. The sun was white blinding his vision. Then the shadows and colors came into his blotchy perspective.

He met a crow knifing its beak into the neck of a ginger cat. The crow stopped as soon as it sensed the presence of an observer. The crow was not ashamed of its action. The pause from the pleasure attack was merely an instinctive pause. It cared little for its audience and continued to stab its sharp black beak into the dead cat. The blood, no longer warm, dried to a thick dark red on the ginger fur. Not an overwhelming amount of blood, for it was only a cat and not a human, but nonetheless it bleeds at death all the same.

A thrill overtook the crow as it began striking wildly, rapidly stretching its mouth inside the flesh of the cat's neck, stretching its wound wide. It had no shame in taking what it wanted. These are the rules of his game. The crow has no false notions of Karma. It does not think about these things, they do not exist for him. The crow clipped at the cat's lungs with his beak, breaking the space wider, hunger.

The driver did not care for the departure and walked away.

Inside the rest stop was color chaos. Children were flying from parents to get on line for ice cream, chocolate bars, stuffed animals and milk shakes. Women rushed in and out of the 'Lady's Room' to get back to their families, lovers, cars. So many colors, blonds, browns, blacks, reds, greens, blues, hues spreading over the white floor. There was no

order, no rules, simply stationary tables, lines for waiting, ordering, choosing, and receiving. The driver steered himself through the madness. He scanned the disorder with his eyes, twisted his hands, one over the next, in a round circular motion as he decided from a distance where he would land.

Finally, he went for Burger King where the line was shortest and the service was speediest. He ordered a cheeseburger and a coffee to go. He crunched his paper bag, palmed his paper cup, stopped at a Cinnabon stand and ate his cinnamon pleasure on his way out the door. He sucked at his lips from sweet pleasure as the shepherded sun blinded his eyes a second or third time.

Silence.

"You see them crazy motha-fuckers in there too? They always there. Man I tell you, they don't know what to think, how to think, they just do, do, do."

The voice, a man, ageless, puffed to the drowsy earth, his tight skin golden and muddy from the elements. He covered himself in shredded layers stiffly blended, creating the illusion of symbiosis.

"Mm... yeah, I see them."

"This truck yours? It's a fine truck. A fine lifestyle. Wheels and speed and direction mapped out by someone else's orders. The plan- your destination. Lucky man if you ask me. You rid yourself these illusions of con-trol. You got it made brother with a real beauty to ride through. She a real white angel." The man sat on the truck's steps.

"Mm..." He replied. He slid half the hamburger out of the bag's yawn and took a shortened bite.

"You have a look at them police standing round doing nothing but feeling 'portant. Looking at you, sizing you up 'gainst them as if their bulletproof vests count for inches a strength. These people got nothing to do but consume what their told to de-sire. Foolish fools. Got nothing to live for anymore but the next purchase. S'if their material ob-jects confirm their 'xistence. Hey people!" He bawled. "I gotta big surprise fo you. You all gunna die and there ain't nothin' you can do to avoid the hook. Try put up a fight, protest, you lose, I swear it. I've seen men die. I've heard the sound of last breath, sucking in last presence in time. Minds gone before the body lost. Just cause you want life more don't mean you get it, you get me? What you live for? What you want?"

He takes another uncivilized bite from his hamburger. "Hmm. To keep my belly full and my bed warm," the driver answers.

"Clever man! Wise-dom! Jesus stands resurrected before me. Holy man. You've got nothing to live for but you'll do it anyway. Hey Jesus, tell me something. What's your purpose? What's your drive son?"

"My foot on the gas pedal. I'ma havta' ask you to find a new seat now, sir." He brought the cup to his lips and filled his mouth with hot filtered coffee. "Gotta keep moving."

"Ha! You in it too! You think you have the changes, the motion, the action! Well, son, you ain't got none of that. I can see you now. The sun ain't as blinding as 'fore. You're still as a stalk in the Nevada desert. You move when the wind blows your ass and you think you're doing something." He lifted his heavy body upward. He put his weight onto his right foot and brought his body vertical. "Son, I see you now. You ain't got no life in you. You just all shell busy protecting nothing but air. Well, boy let me tell you

something, you can keep you ass moving, but inside, on the inside, nothing moves.” He brought his fingers around his thumbs and threw his fists forward while pressing a breath of ‘ha!ha!’ in front of him as he walked off.

The driver crumpled the paper bag and moved the paper cup of coffee from his right hand to his left hand. He stepped upward as he pulled open the door to his truck, throwing himself inside. He was damn tired. His mind spoke to him at half speed.

She woke him up with a hot cup of coffee she borrowed from the diner downstairs.

"Hey baby, show me those sweet cat eyes."

He turned to his left side. "Mmm... not yet, just a few more minutes."

"Baby, I gave you more time than I should have. Now, I've been a good girl for far too long. I want to be a bad girl now, baby."

She sat the coffee on top of the TV and slid her body over his warm body. She put her lips to his neck, to his ears, to his nape and purred.

"Prrrrr," she vibrated into his neck.

She rubbed her face over the side of his cheek and began to move her hips slowly. His eyes were closed but his body was waking up. His heart pumped blood harder through his body as she continued to move her hips over him. His senses were waking. He smelled her sweet grapefruit from her hair sweeping his face.

"Mmm."

"Prrrr."

He ignited the engine, adjusted his mirrors, shifted his truck in reverse, and drove, and drove, and sipped his coffee, and smoked a cigarette and drove. He pulled to the left to get onto the highway, away from the people, the cars, the crows, and sped through the

lane for trucks, ready to take leave from Eutaw, Alabama. A space on the map, marked and conquered by his wheels, his truck, barely leaving track marks in his fading memory.

"What time you have to start your next job?"

"In bout half hour."

"Do you have to?"

"Course I have to."

"But do you really have to?"

"What else I gunna do?"

"Stay here with me."

"How'mi gunna earn a living? You know it ain't easy coming by jobs these days. I got a good job. Nothing but road and frozen meat. What else a man need?"

"A woman."

"Ha. I got nuf women in my life, believe me."

She hit him in the stomach playfully. Well, half playfully.

"Ow, what's that for?"

"Oh, don't be no smart ass. You know 'xactly what for."

"Alright, alright. Fair 'nough, but you know I can't stay. I got a job. Got deliveries to make."

"You can. But you won't." She folded her legs beneath her on the floor and rested her head in his lap. She looked up at him and watched him sip coffee. She reached her hand upward to scratch the hair on his face that grew in after two days without shaving.

"But I do wish you would."

"Why did you come over to me by the bar last night?"

"Cause I saw you watchin' me and I know you the kind of guy who would never come to me first, so I came to you."

"Yeah. But there were lots of guys talkin' to you, watchin' you. Why'd you come to me then?"

"Cause I wanted to, so I did. I do as I want. I know what I want and I take what I want. Like this hear shiny pink lipstick. I saw it in the pharmacy, knew I liked it, and took it. Sure, guys could talk to me, watch me and I like it, but in the end I choose, and I take what I want."

"Hmm."

"I'm gunna be sad when you're gone. I just know you're different from the rest of them." She slid her fingers to his lips, brushed them back and forth over his mouth and moved her hand up to his left eye. He shut his eyes as her hands flirted with his features.

"Cateyes? My cat eyes is leavin me behind."

He followed the signs to Odessa, Texas. He followed the forking highway to the left as it took him further West. He'd finish in Roswell, New Mexico. Take a break, take a woman, take a meal, take what came his way. Unexpectedly! A bird took a fat drop shit crashing whites and brown right over his window. He swerved a bit from the shock of the invasion. He could barely see past the splash of shit, tried to look through it, look around it, pulled at the lever to trigger a heavy spray of washer fluid, and wiped away the dump he was hit with. The water splashed and spread the shit thinly over his window. The wipers moved back and forth to clear the mess away quickly and efficiently until no evidence of the mess was left behind.