

## Truck Stop

"I don't know, who or what, told you that it'd be a good idea to just be walking on the side of the road like that. But, I'll tell you one thing—it's the quickest way to get fucked up around here."

Ryan didn't have an answer for the trucker, as he nestled himself into the passenger seat. It was fairly ripped up on its back—spewing yellow foam from its former seams. The carriage smelled like packaged jerky and body odor.

The *actual* seat—the part meant for your ass and possibly a hooker's face—was shrouded in massage beads and McDonald's wrappers. Ryan kicked the layers of snow from the bottom of his shoes, and climbed in as the trucker rattled on.

"Yep, you're damn right you'll get killed out here. Friend of mine tried that. What you were doing there..." Ryan slammed the passenger door closed. The trucker pulled back onto the road. He continued to drawl on—despite the resistance of his chewing tobacco. "Had to be about...Three. Maybe, four years back, by now. He was walking on the side of the road in a storm just like you." A snort. "Got picked up. Next thing you know, he turned up—missing three fingers, talking about aliens!"

Ryan kept his eyes on the falling snow as the trucker's headlights pierced through the shade of the coming night storm. He didn't have the energy to entertain "trucker bullshit".

"And, I've just got to ask...Who the fuck sees aliens? Now, I ain't no scientist or nothing like that, but, come on! Fucking aliens?"

"What do you think it was?" Ryan asked. It was best to play nice.

"Well, look who found their fucking mouth!" The trucker exalted. "You know, you've got a hell of a voice. Old-timey, with a bit of Sinatra. Say something else."

"What do you think it was? What do you think happened?" Ryan kept his eyes on the road, as the sixteen-wheel carrier careened around the curve ahead. He'd noticed the warning sign. He hoped that the trucker did too.

"Yep. That's a hell of a voice son. But, anyway," The trucker's head dropped briefly before his sights returned to the road. He kept shaking it side to side—in disagreement with his own thoughts. His demeanor was less friendly now. It was more solemn and concerning, "I think that sum' bitch done went all queermo."

"Queermo?" Ryan said.

"It's a mix between a fag and queer. Basically, a fag that doesn't want to accept that he's a fag...But still just likes sucking dick." Ryan's face recoiled at the trucker's brashness. He threw his hands up to Ryan in his own defense, "Now, I ain't got no problem with the gays. Shit, my daddy was a gay. A good people. Clean people." The trucker returned his eyes to road as he tilted the wheel left—to follow the steepening curve, "Not everybody is as progressive as I am. Do you know what I mean? Especially in my racket. Bunch of hypocrites, if you ask me."

"Why's that?"

The trucker cut his eyes to Ryan. He noticed the mascara precisely traced along his eyelashes, the smeared lipstick on the sleeve of his shirt, and the frosted tips of the "boy-band" hairstyle that complimented his attitude. "You know better than I do what that life is like, son."

The trucker returned his focus to the road as they completed the curve and straightened out. Small flakes started collecting on the windshield. They'd begun to thicken and pile on. The wipers couldn't oscillate fast enough and the lights were altogether useless.

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"Why are we stopping?" Ryan darted his head through the windows of the big-rig's cabin, "There's nothing around here."

The trucker kept his eyes straight. He seemed to be eying a destination. To Ryan, there was nothing but a blanket of white ahead of them. "We've got to turn off the heater," the trucker said, "Ol' Betsy here is loyal, but only if you treat her right. You may want to zip up your sheep's wool boy."

Ryan buttoned his coat, and wrapped his arms around his belly. Once the heat had gone off, a cold breeze overcame them. It was as if it'd never been on in the first place. Fumes of air shot out of their mouths while they breathed. "There's a watering-hole about half a mile upward. I'm gonna' have to leave Ol' Betsy here, until the storm clears up. If you want, we can make the trek there and bunker down for the night. Good drinks. Decent people. Shit food. But, it's warm."

"You want me to walk? In this! Are you crazy?"

"Well, option B, is that you stay here—while I do the smart thing—and freeze your little ass off in those women's shoes you're wearing."

"They're Tom Ford!" Ryan's disgust was understandable, albeit, misplaced.

"Yea, yea. I bet he's a fag too. You're missing the point, princess. You stay here, you die. End of story. No more musicals. So..." The trucker donned his second coat, and pulled the keys out of the ignition. "What's it gonna' be?"

Ryan took a deep inhale. The cold burrowed into his lungs, causing them to splinter with a pain that he knew would only worsen as the storm pressed on. "Do they have vodka?" He asked.

"Well, hot damn, RuPaul! You got some fucking sense after all. Glad to have you aboard. Friends call me, Oedy." Oedy reached his hand out to shake Ryan's. He reciprocated the gesture, "Ryan."

"Pleasure to meet you, Ryan. Now." Oedy checked his coat pockets—presumably for drugs. It was obvious that Oedy must've been a bit of an addict by his frenetic charm. Ryan harbored no prejudice against *users*, so long as they forgave his own character defects.

"You about ready, boy?"

"Yea," Ryan answered pulling the last of his "necessities" from the backpack that he'd been walking with. "A half-mile. Right?"

"More or less." Oedy threw a shoulder against his door and jumped down from his seat. Ryan waited for Oedy's door to slam shut. Once alone in the vehicle, he reached his hand to his mouth and placed a pill on his tongue. *No need for him to know, not yet*, he thought. He took another deep breath in—hoping to catch any fleeting remainder of heat from driver's cabin.

He pushed his door open on the exhale and jumped out from the truck, into a pile of fresh snow that met him waist high.

"Fuck!" He cried to the wintry winds.

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"Careful. There's snow there!"

"I see the fucking snow, Oedy!"

Side by side, the two made their way forward, to what Ryan *hoped* was a welcoming sanctuary. He could pull off the "cisgender" facade well enough, but always preferred not to. He found that conversations with his straight counterparts often rounded around to "pussy" or "getting some" if given enough time. And, from the looks of it, they were going to be there for a while. *Even superheroes don't have to wear the mask that fucking long*, he thought.

"Just ahead princess!" Oedy said. Ryan could barely hear him, but made his judgement based on Oedy's arm swinging forward and his quickened pace. The "half-mile," wound up being closer to a full one. Though Ryan was prone to bitch, he'd forgive it all for a warm seat and a mixed drink.

"Just ahead, Ryan!" Oedy screamed again. His walk picked up to a jog. Ryan sped up as well. He feared that if he'd lost sight of Oedy, he would never see him again—and he refused to die alone in, "*Hicksville*." Soon after, he'd caught a glimpse of the neon sign—*TRISHES DISHES*—they'd arrived.

At first glance, the lot seemed barren—nothing to the naked eye, but a wall of white and fleeting snow. Oedy rushed his way to the front door. Ryan was disheartened, but confident enough that he could *bumper-bowl* his way to the restaurants snow-blasted glass doors.

The inside was oddly calm. Ryan had moved out to the city a few years prior. Though he knew what to expect from the "country-folk" he'd lost his sense of belonging in their environment. To him, he may well have been stepping out of a time machine and into the nineteen-fifties.

Booths ran throughout the place. Rows of them bisected the crowded floor. Each table between the spaces was filled with patrons—either dining, or sleeping. No one had paid him much mind when he walked in. *People must've been wandering in and out all night*, he thought.

Ryan eyed a jukebox, next to the bar, where Oedy had already made himself comfortable. It'd been playing one of those "oldie but goodie songs"—a straight white man in the country, with straight white man in the country problems. He didn't care much for it, but the world around him appeared to. He'd be a hypocrite, not to be accepting. He made his way to the bar—where Oedy had been chatting up a waitress half his age.

"I'm telling you, good looking. You and I could go places. With a face like yours, and a bank account like mine, we could run this *bunghole* of a town right." Oedy said.

"And what am I supposed to tell my daddy? That I just up and left town with a man old enough to be his uncle?" The waitress was oddly receptive. Ryan took off his coat and sat in the stool next to Oedy.

"You could tell your daddy what you want. His feelings ain't no concern of mine. You, however..." Oedy's eyes peered down to the young lady's cleavage as she leaned forward on the bar to hear him better. "You, I can give the world to."

Having had enough, Ryan interrupted, "I'll have a vodka. Neat, please."

The waitress scoffed at Ryan's request, and turned to the shelves to make his drink. Oedy took it better than he'd expected, "You know, you've got a lot of nerve coming between me and my honey dip."

Ryan pulled his wallet from his pocket, "What are you like sixty? Pot-bellied. Grey beard. You smell like your job. Why are you even bothering with that young woman? She's

beautiful. And she's got her whole life ahead of her. And you, you just want to ruin her with your old cock and questionable morals."

"Watch your step lady-boy. Remember, that I'm the man who's rig you're riding in."

"And I appreciate that. But, I can't stand by and watch, while you ruin two lives."

Oedy smiled, "Well, I'll be damned. I can't say that I've had someone give that many fucks about me. You're alright prissy pants."

Ryan laughed back, "I wasn't talking about your life. I was talking about mine. Imagine the nightmares that I'd have—picturing that bombshell rolling around with the likes of you. It'd be like watching someone dump mayonnaise on a soda bottle."

Oedy bounced his head back, "Well that was uncalled for."

"If you want lies, go to church."

The waitress slammed Ryan's drink on the counter—spilling about a quarter of it out. It was forceful enough that he didn't dare to comment on her rudeness, "Three bucks, asshole," she said. Ryan gave her a twenty, "Keep them coming please," and downed his glass.

Oedy leaned over to Ryan, as he tipped the last of the liquor into his gullet, "By the way—speaking of God—I know that we're all shits and giggles right now, but you may want to get that crap off of your face before someone notices. There's not much that you can do about the shoes, but..."

"God damn it Oedy! They're Tom fucking Ford!" Ryan yelled. The sound of patrons sitting at attention overwhelmed the sad song playing on the jukebox. Oedy placed a hand on Ryan's shoulder and gripped it tight, "Seriously kid. Get that shit off of your face. You send the wrong message in here, and that crap outside will be the least of your worries." Oedy released his

grip, and pulled back slow—never breaking eye-contact. Worry consumed Ryan, "Where's the bathroom?" He said with a sudden motivation.

Oedy pointed his finger to the back wall, "Past the pool tables. Through the hall with the deer head over it."

"Really?"

"Kid!" Oedy grit through his teeth.

"Alright." Ryan reached for the glass that he'd placed on the table. It was refilled, just like he asked. He polished it off, and stood to his feet, "If I'm not back in five, please come get me."

"Will do, boy scout."

Ryan made his way to the bathroom, with dozens of angry eyes staring at him. He passed the pool tables and gazed at the door frame behind them. Just above it—on the wall—a stuffed deer head erected from a plaque. Beneath it were the words, *I DIDN'T TIP*, in quotations. He gulped in his fear, and continued past the four men in leather vests, playing billiards.

He trusted that the restroom was close.

He could smell the trail leading to it.

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The handle was sticky. When the knob turned, it creaked and rattled—likely the result from years of truckers rushing in and out with varying levels of digestive urgency; courtesy of fast food, energy drinks, and amphetamines.



Ryan tried not to fixate on the thought as he opened the door. He was met with the wafting smell of urinal cake juices and watered-down soap—aromatic mainstays of the public restroom—seeping into his easily reviled nostrils.

He pressed the holes of his nose together, to avoid the smell, but found that breathing through his mouth was much worse. It was the sort of odor foul enough to taste. He gave up his feeble attempts, "The quicker the better," he said to himself. He listened to make sure the door had closed behind him.

To his non-surprise, the bathroom was just about as confusing as his reason for being in the establishment. That morning, he'd woken up in a stranger's bed, after a long night of playing "my pickle, or yours." He hated having to hide his true-self from the world. Weekends like the one he'd just had, became his sole reason for living.

"What if my kids knew," he mumbled to himself, as he wet the edge of his sleeves in warm water and wiped the remaining makeup from his eyes. He didn't trust the small stack of brown napkins that had been haphazardly placed on top of the hand-dryer with a *BROKEN* sign over its nozzle. At least, he didn't trust them near enough to touch his face. He flicked his hands into the sink, and wiped the rest of the moisture on his pants.

He took a second look in the mirror to ensure he hadn't missed a spot. After a few seconds, he'd no longer been "double-checking" for mascara. He was enamored with his own reflection, and pictured it knelt down in the "altar-boy" position, while the lucky young man he'd been fellating stood at attention—in both ways—fists pressed against his waist, "My Superman," he said to the mirror.

He knew that he'd never see him again, and all at once, he'd hoped not to. The life he lived was founded on fond memories that he could never speak of. It was a fair deal, in exchange for a seat at the big table at his tech company. Greed breeds most other sins. Ryan understood that, better than most.

After having had his fill of himself. He checked his phone to see the time, only to find that he'd had thirty-nine missed calls. He knew who'd been so obsessive. He didn't have time for any other issues. He thought to call his wife. It was an imploding marriage, but she still worried.

Before he could hit the call button, a glimmer of light flashed from the bathroom stalls. It flickered brightly, and in the same instant was gone, "What the..." He followed the path where the light had shone brightest.

There were three stalls, next to three urinals. The glare of light had flittered from the stall closest to the far corner of the room. "Hello," Ryan called, in a somewhat restrained whimper. He passed the urinals on his way to investigate the strange occurrence.

The strong concentrated steam of aged—and fresh—urine blanketed over his nose. His eyes watered a bit, but he didn't let that distract him. His curiosity had always been either his undoing or his salvation.

"Hello," he cried again—louder and more pointed, as he made his way past the two stalls. He pushed their doors in as he tip-toed to the third. They were empty, as expected, which meant that the last was definitely the peculiar one. His hand trembled while he rose it up to the stall door, and placed it—flat on the chipped paint of the steel barrier. He pushed it open and jumped back.

The stall was empty.

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"So, how's about this, good lookin'," Oedy leaned forward on the bar to continue his wooing of the young woman. Despite his age and size, he'd been making a fair amount of headway—keeping her attention as well as a stabilized erection.

Whether or not her interest was feigned, didn't matter. He only needed enough of her intrigue to get her alone. Once there, he'd get her pants off. That's how it "always" worked. Jobs like hers bred boredom. Even an old man like he, could get lucky. That is, if the moves were right. Nobody there sought love. Love, was for "suckers."

"I'll tell you my name, and you tell me your name. Easy, peasy." Oedy thought he'd proposed a figured enough bargain to keep her engaged. Though he couldn't help but ogle at the young lady's protruding nipples, through her work shirt, he'd managed to come off healthily cordial. The hardest thing for him was keeping a straight thought—despite his own wandering hand creeping between his legs.

"Okay, old man." She leaned over, just an inch or two away from him. Her breasts rested gently against the rim of the bar. Her breath smelled like liquor and candy canes. He'd been smitten, before he could smite.

"Well, since we're in agreement," Oedy took a gander down the young lady's shirt while he spoke. He couldn't help himself. He loved cleavage tattoos—they were a good indicator of a woman who liked it rough, "I'm Oedy. Oedy McAllen. And you?"

"Oedy? That doesn't sound like a real name." The waitress mocked.

"...It's a nickname. The full name is Oedipus. I'm not exactly a fan of it. Obvious reasons, you know."

"Oh," the waitress leaned back to fix her hair, then returned her breasts to Oedy's direct line of sight, "I'm Eunice. Why don't you like the name Oedipus?"

"Have you never read *The Odyssey*?"

"Can't say that I have."

"Well... it's the main characters name. Real brooding, hero-type."

"That sounds fine. Why don't you like it?"

"Let's just say, that he's kind of a motherfucker. So, Eunice. That's a nice name. I like the way you say it." Oedy pulled his hands onto the table to take a sip from his beer. Eunice leaned back as he did. She leered down the hall and then returned her eyes to Oedy while he drank. "It'd sound even better with your dick in my mouth," she said, biting her bottom lip, and giving him *the look*.

Oedy choked on his throat full of beer. He balled up his fist to cover his mouth while he coughed. "That's kind of straight-forward. Don't you think?" He said.

Eunice giggled at his broken demeanor, "What? Are you afraid of a little girl, old man?"

"Of course not! I've eaten things tougher than you."

"Then my pussy should be no problem," she said. Oedy choked again. This time on nothing. "Come on." Eunice grabbed Oedy by the collar, and walked him to the edge of the bar. "We're gonna' have fun," she said—licking his neck and proceeding down the hall. Oedy followed behind her like a witless puppy. Onlookers stared at the two with blank faces.

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Oedy and Eunice rushed to the men's room. Oedy lamented that he didn't have time to stop and admire the stuffed deer head that hung on the wall above the door frame. He'd figured that it'd be fun to inspect post-coitus. Few things compared to the beauty of a world that a recently-ejaculated man sees. He'd anticipated not having to *get there* alone for once.

The four men at the billiard table weren't playing. They just stood, and watched as Oedy followed Eunice to the back. "You know how it goes brothers," he smiled and waved to them as he shuffled by. They didn't respond. They just leered and eye-balled his pudgy silhouette when he passed. *Jealousy*, he thought.

Eunice had been standing in the doorway of the bathroom. She held it open as Oedy approached. She'd already unbuttoned her denim skirt. It hung loosely from her hips. He entered the bathroom, looked around, and fiddled with his strained belt buckle. The door slammed closed. He locked it.

When he turned to Eunice, she'd been bottomless. "You first," she said—walking past him and running her fingers across his chest. She made her way to the third stall. Oedy licked his lips and followed her in.

When he entered, her back was on the toilet seat, her legs wedged against the stall door frame, her "kitty" was open and ready for the taking. Oedy stared, slack-jawed, as his pants dropped down to his ankles. "Nuh-Uh," Eunice said, when Oedy attempted to position himself between her legs, "I want to see what that tongue of yours can do." Oedy complied. He dropped to his knees, and planted his bearded chin between her legs.

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Oedy wasn't sure how long his face had been pressed between Eunice's thighs, but his jaw had gone numb. His knees pained him as they pushed into the grimy tile. Her subtle moans and cries for "Jesus" had lost their effect on his libido. He'd just wanted to get it over with, but her legs had wrapped around the back of his neck. "Alright, darling. You about done?"

"One more minute, Pop-pop. I'm almost there."

He didn't find her response encouraging. "Nope. I think I'm through with. I may just have to rub this one out. You win Eunice." Oedy pushed her legs to the side, and fell back on the closed stall door. He rested there while Eunice dropped her legs to the floor, and searched for her panties, "Old piece of shit. I knew you wouldn't have what it took to please a woman like me."

Oedy laughed, "Maybe so." His panting interrupted his—already tough to grasp—speech. "...But if you were my age, You'd be good for a week or two, at least."

"Whatever." Eunice pulled up her jean skirt, stepped over Oedy, and stormed out of the stall. "Come on, baby! Don't be like that!" He said. The bathroom door opened and then retracted shut. Oedy stayed—sitting on the floor with his pants around his ankles. He couldn't seem to catch his breath. A glimmer of light flickered from the wall beside him.

"What in the?" There was hole in the wall that he hadn't noticed—primarily because of the sex-crazed twenty-something year-old, with daddy issues, whom he could still taste on his chapped lips. He licked the flavor from his mouth, and inspected the three-foot high, silver-dollar sized hole. The light continued to flicker as his eye drew nearer to the opening. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!"

"I think we need to have a talk, big guy." A man's voice boomed from the other side of the stall. Oedy couldn't force his focus away from what'd he'd seen. "I mean it old timer. Get up!"

Oedy was yanked to his feet by two of the four men that he'd seen by the billiard tables—the other two waited patiently by the bathroom door. They pulled Oedy into the hall by his arms. His pants had still been flailing around his ankles as his legs dragged. He wanted to scream, but couldn't muster the words.

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Their destination wasn't far. Once they'd left the bathroom, they took Oedy through a pair of swinging doors. As his knees glided across the mucky floor, he tried to reason with his captors. "Listen guys! I don't know what she told you, but she came on to me. Let's be reasonable about this."

The two men in leather vests and devilishly decorated skull caps said nothing in return. Their heads fixated on the doors ahead. The other two led them, and held the swinging doors open while they brought Oedy in. He'd still been muttering his case. After a minute or so, he'd realized that negotiations were out of the question. *I guess that I'll just be taking this ass-whoopin' then*, he thought.

The floor ahead was damp and sounded slushed. The room was dark—save for a single flickering light on the ceiling. It'd clearly been fighting for its own existence. There'd been a single bright burst, then nothing, then a bright flicker, then nothing. Sparks dropped from the single circling bulb each time it illuminated.

A chill ran through Oedy's chest and reached around to his spine. "Guys. Listen! You don't have to do this." They threw Oedy up against a wall, and cuffed his ankles to a thick metal chain. "Listen!" He screamed. There was still no answer. "Please for the love of God!" He said.

Three of the men stood back, as the strongest of the four yanked on the pulley and hoisted Oedy upward. He tightened the slack of the chain to a bolt on the wall.

Oedy's pants fell down to his thighs—the furthest that they would go without a fight. He dangled from the ceiling of the room, with the bottom of his shirt resting under his chin.

"Please!" He tried again. His body swung back and forth as he struggled—suspended two feet above the ground.

The men had left the room. Moments later, Oedy heard a creaking sound emanate from the walls. It began at the bottom and ran up to the ceiling. Before he knew it, a strong stream of water had been barreling against the front of his body. "What is this?" He screamed again. Still, no answer, as the cold stream dripped from the top of his bald head. "Help!"

"No one's coming, Oedy," he heard from across the room.

"Who said that?" The bulb flickered. Oedy took the opportunity to look around, but the water had been flowing too fast for him to blink his vision clear, "Who's there!"

"It's me, you idiot. Ryan."

"Ryan? What the fuck is going on?"

"I don't know. I figured that I'd ask you. Some guys just dragged me in here. I'd say about twenty minutes ago."

"The ones by the pool-table?"

"Yep... By the way, fuck you, for not coming to check on me!"

"Is this really the time, Ryan?" Oedy, screamed, "I didn't know what kind of in-the-closet shit you were up to. I figured that I'd let you have your fun."

"Well, a lot of good that fucking did!"



"Hey! Listen up you fucking fairy! I didn't do this." The water slowed. The pipes creaked. The water stopped all together. "Timers," Oedy said, as if Ryan had asked him. "We're in the fucking showers."

Oedy blinked as rapidly as he could—until the water had been cleared from his eyes. About five feet away, he'd made out Ryan's silhouette. He'd been strung up to the ceiling as well—circling over a drain of his own. A burst of light shone again. "Ryan, why hell are you naked?"

"I don't know. They took my clothes. Oedy, what the fuck is happening?"

A strong gust of wind blew against the building. Some of the air drifted through the room. Oedy let out a lamenting huff. "It's a cooler," he said.

"A what?"

"I'm sorry, Ryan."

"Oedy! What the fuck is..." Ryan's screams were interrupted by the sounds of the swinging doors pushing forward and gliding back. The light flickered. Then turned on.

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"Strip the old man. Prep the gay." Eunice's voice was unmistakable. Several footsteps marched into the room. With the lights on, Oedy could see everything. The floors beneath the drain were flooding in a pulsing inch high, thick, red liquid. The dry-spots elsewhere had been stained brown. Others, had clearly been reserved for the "unwanted pieces."

Eunice smiled to Oedy and waved *goodbye*. One of the bikers pulled out a knife, and began to cut the clothes free from his body. Eunice left the room as if nothing out of place had

been happening. Oedy, shut his eyes as tightly as he could. "Don't scream old-man," he heard, as the last of the fabric was cut off of him and his bare flesh met the freezing air.

"Oedy!" Ryan's terrified whimper called to him. He'd only heard the cry once. The room fell silent except for the leaking faucet sound five-feet away from him. The man threw the tattered remains of Oedy's clothing in a garbage bag that he'd pulled from his back-pocket, "Be good, and it'll be quick. Just like your friend," the man said, with a giggle and left the room.

Oedy opened his eyes. He looked across to Ryan. He'd known what he was likely to see. That knowledge couldn't calm his panic.

Ryan's throat had been slit wide open—his head was barely attached to his swinging shoulders as it dangled from the thick slab of skin that they hadn't bothered to cut through. A strong gust of wind blew into the room. Oedy's skin goose bumped and quivered.

The swinging doors opened and shut—three times, until they closed. Alone, Oedy finally let his tears fall as the room fell dark and he awaited his final end.

Johnny Cash's, *One*, serenaded his final moments.

The storm worsened.

Oedy swung.

***The End.***