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PRESENTS
a Short Story

Carpool

SAMPLE CHAPTER ONE

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Chapter One

It was the umpteenth time that Mike and Steve had taken the turnpike seventy miles Northeast to their trailer out in Mount Juliet.

The highway was always the same. Grey slate, stretching out in the high beams. White lines dashing beneath the fenders of the old El Camino.

I-40 was always pretty lonely out on the eastbound side of Music City. The two boys were settled down into the impressions of old Chamille's bench. Mike, his arm stretched out along the leather seat back and one hand on the wheel. Steve snuggled into the crook between the passenger door and the seat belt hangar, his work jacket balled up so he could lay his head on it and just stare out the window.

He'd watch the lines in the road slide by, sometimes skating to and fro, for no better reason than Mike getting bored with

one lane or another. Dodging invisible traffic.

They both listened to the deceitful silence of the road. Full of repetitive noises that had become background sound. The rumble of the v-8. The whine of rubber on the asphalt like a faraway airplane propeller. And Dave Matthews, barely playing in the speakers.

Seventy miles wasn't a terrible work commute. An hour and a half maybe, though they had been known to make it in fifty minutes, racing in separate cars. Those times, they were lucky to have made it alive, between the weather and the deer.

Eventually, they had decided it was safer to carpool.

You could motor out another ten hours down I-40 and eventually it'd dump you out in the Atlantic Ocean near Wilmington, North Carolina. Not too far from the Bermuda triangle.

On the night of the last full moon before Halloween, the Ley Line that runs along the I-40 highway is especially active.

On this night, half an hour into their monotonous drive home, both boys were feeling a little like they were driving straight through the Bermuda Triangle, now.

A school bus passed, headed westbound.

“Holy shit,” Mike said, “did ya see that?”

It had been painted white and the windows were tinted dark like Chamille’s, except the bus’s tint was torn all along the windows facing this side.

“That was creepy man,” Mike said.

Steve craned his neck up like a cat shocked from a nap.
“What? That bus?”

“Yeah, man,” said Mike, “looked like there were a bunch of people pressed up against the windows in there.”

He had been looking back over his left shoulder and then into the side view watching the red lights disappear over the horizon.

“What’s a school bus doing out this late anyhow?” asked Steve, smiling. He was entertained at Mike’s obvious unease.

Regardless, he nuzzled back down into his jacket against the window

Mike glanced his way twice while adjusting his position in the driver's seat. The deceitful silence filled back in the space and Mike relaxed back, peering out into the yellowed grey night.

He toggled the brights back on with his left foot and washed the trees along the roadside with that same eerie glow.

Here the median widened out to separate the east and westbound lanes.

"See ya tomorrow sunshine," Mike said as he made a grip in the air toward the yellow sign indicating a divided highway.

Steve lazily threw up the peace sign. It had been a tradition to acknowledge the split since day one.

It was Mike's way of saying, "We're nearly halfway home."

Those kind of traditions were common among friends. Scratch the ceiling if you pass under a yellow light. If it turned red while beneath it, Chamille suffered a punch to the headliner.

There were no street lights out here though. The woods along I-40 east swallowed them up. The two traveled for the next fifteen minutes, like white noise, covered by that deceitful silence.