

### Lost highway

Another day had passed by, in the same meaningless manner. Tristan Miller couldn't keep track of the days anymore, but he didn't mind. Why bother if it was Monday or Friday, what difference did it make? His life had become too predictable the last twenty something years. He slowly lifted his cigarette to his mouth; enjoying every drag. This made life worth living, he thought. He turned his wrist in a discrete manner, almost seven. He took a new drag. In exactly fifteen minutes, his wife would bend her head in a bewildered way, informing about dinner. He took a new drag; God it felt good. He stretched his legs, and leaned his head back. It had been a calm day, not that many people passing by. It was the time of year. Indian summer, autumn was coming up. His own thoughts made him laugh; who was he kidding? No one ever passed by this deserted place. If he was lucky, he might have two or three people stopping, but they were mainly lost. He was no longer able to keep track of how many times he had explained how to get to the nearest town. Tristan stubbed out his cigarette, mumbling. Why wouldn't someone give him a map? He played with the cigarette with his feet, grinding it into the gravel. He turned his head slowly, and caught a glimpse of his wife inside, preparing dinner. Karen dried her hands on her apron, and tied her hair in a knot. She used to be a beautiful woman. It was her former appetite for life that had titillated his desire. How had they ended up in this gas station? He had the feeling of staring into a broken mirror, everything was falling to pieces. He used to be a promising football player. He was the captain, and was a hot candidate for his school's scholarship. The scouts had been full of interest in his future career. His thoughts guided his eyes back to the road. He lit a new cigarette. The words were ingrained into his brain, "*you will be big son*". These were the words of his former coach. He had been too young back then, and love had taken precedence over talent. He had let himself down. He took a new drag. He knew Karen didn't like the smoking, she kept telling him that the cigarettes would put him in an early grave. But they were vital, the only thing that kept him going. He took a good look around the place. He was literally in the middle of nowhere. He couldn't blame his wife for his sad excuse of a life. They were like two living ghosts. They didn't speak to each other anymore; nor did they laugh the way they used to. He couldn't remember the last time they had been happy. The fact that they couldn't have a baby; that was what had had such a huge impact on their marriage.

Tristan felt a cold wind touching his shoulders. He looked at this watch again. Still another ten minutes till dinner. He decided his thoughts could keep him company until then. He took a drag of a new cigarette. The silence was interrupted unexpectedly, by a car's engine. He lifted his hand to shade his face from the fading sunbeams, in order to get a clear view of the road. He stubbed his cigarette to the ground, amazed that an actual person was to arrive. He got out of his chair. A crowded Chrysler MPV was making a turn into his driveway. A tall middle aged man got out of the car. "Good evening! I'm Roger!" Roger's voice was vigorous. He seemed to be the one in charge of the talking. "What a lovely sunset! You must enjoy living out here; so calm and peaceful." Tristan didn't know if it was the southern accent that seemed to immediately irritate him, or the fact that a complete stranger could make such a statement about his non existing existence, in the middle of route 66. "Yes" He didn't know which question he was answering. "I need to fill her up, we still have a long way to go" Roger flashed a big smile, revealing a row of white teeth. Tristan grabbed the gas pump and started to fill up the tank. Roger with the southern accent had a good look around the station. "You got yourself a nice place here, living in harmony with nature and all." He smiled again.



“Where are you heading? You seem to be loaded with boys” Tristan indicated the car with a nod of his head. “We’re going to St. Louis for the week-end! That’s my boy Jeffery, the tall one in the middle” Roger made a sign at his son. Jeffery seemed to be as energetic as his father. “Football season is coming up. First tournament this season! I’m their pep coach, you see” .Tristan looked at Roger in a questioning manner. Roger cleared his throat, trying to be more precise. ““You know someone who cheers up the team before the match and supports them!” He looked at Tristan, to make sure he had understood this time. “I’m sure you’re the right man for the job.” Tristan answered with a shy smile. He hooked the gas pump back into place. “That will be 45 dollars, please.” “Make it 50” Roger said, still smiling. He made his way back to the car. “Wish your boy Jeffery good luck with the football match!” Tristan felt an aching pain in his chest. “I will! We’re pretty excited! You see, there will be scouts coming!” He looked at his son with a proud expression in his face “You’ll be big son!” The group of boys waved at Tristan enthusiastically as the car started to drive. Tristan followed the car with his eyes, as it made its way back onto the road.

He looked at his watch; it was almost time for dinner. It was starting to get colder. As he put away the canvas chair in the shed, he could see leaves blowing in the wind. The first sign of fall was already here. It’s time to go inside, he said to himself: And so he did.