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Exercise in Writing Tension

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Editor-in-Chief

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Michael Guidry is currently pursuing a Master's in Marketing at Winthrop University, where he works as a Business Consultant, tutor, and Editor-in-Chief of *The Anthology*. His work has held the title of "Top Rated" at *Every Day Fiction*, and has been made into audio productions through *Chilling Tales for Dark Nights*. Michael's passion for writing began in elementary school, where he wrote stories about giant mosquitoes and human/rocket hybrid heroes. He likes to think his writing has improved since then.



He was an hour from town when the needle teased over EMPTY. Lea slept quietly in her car seat, head bobbing with the gentle ridges of the interstate. He took exit 57, letting out an exhausted groan in response to the evening. The clock above the radio told him how late he already was, how stupid he'd been for attempting the drive tonight at all. His phone died an hour before. Amanda must be pacing the floors, dialing and dialing his dead cell.

The only gas station he found was a local chain with a sign faded past any chance of legibility. He pulled into the first open pump behind a rusty green truck. In his haste, he drove forward too far. The front bumper of his Focus made a soft crunch against the truck's scarred rear. He cursed under his breath and checked on Lea. Still asleep. In his rearview mirror he could see the station's convenience store, where the truck's driver presumably was. No one came. He reversed as gently as his foot allowed, then exited the car. The truck was already such a shit-show, he couldn't tell where he'd scraped it. He peeked at Lea again, filled up the tank, and opened his door.

"You think I'm stupid, mister?" a voice spoke, slowed by southern drawl.

He turned to the man, whose face hid behind a black beard. The man removed a cigarette from between cracked lips, sprinkled its ashes, and stared with bloodshot eyes.

"I saw you hit my car," the man said, pointing to the truck. "Were you just gonna leave? That's illegal, you know. That's a fuckin' crime."

"I don't think I hit you," he said, seeing that the man stood half a foot taller than himself.

The man pinched his cigarette again and waved it toward his truck. "I said I saw you. Didn't call the police, or write a note. You was just gonna up and leave." The man pressed a hand against the trunk of the Focus. "Don't appreciate that."

"I'm sorry," he said, lifting a leg into the driver's seat. Lea opened her eyes.

"Wouldn't do that. I'll follow you. Think I'll call the police now. You stay there."

"I'll just give you my info, how's that?"

"You already tried and run. Can't trust you, mister." The man pulled a phone from his pocket and dialed more than three numbers. "Yeah, we got a little incident up the road. At Billy Pumps. Mhm, you hurry now," the man laughed at something and hung up. "They'll be here soon. If I were you, I'd stop being so damn

fidgety.”

“Dada?” asked Lea from her car seat. He forced himself not to respond.

“Someone else in there?” asked the man, taking a step closer.

“Dada?” Lea repeated, louder.

The man let his cigarette fall and licked his teeth. “Well, well. Dada’s gotta good lesson to teach now, don’t he?” He took another step forward.

Without a word to the man, he threw himself into the driver’s seat and slammed the door.

“Hey, what the fuck?” the man screamed, pounding his fists against the window.

He applied full force to the pedal and veered right of the green truck, scraping its corner. Another truck pulled into the station. The man yelled at it and pointed to the Focus, which sped out onto the highway as Lea cried.