



ROAD TRIPPIN’

BY EMELIE NYMAN

Honey does know better than to hitchhike, so when she has to go home during the summer, she asks around until one of her friends lets her borrow his car. She can’t afford a plane ticket unless she wants to spend the entirety of the next term trying to survive on nothing but noodles, and she’s never been able to stand being cramped up in a seat during those long Greyhound trips, so Mo’s car was the perfect solution. It’s far from new, but still in good shape, and Mo didn’t really seem to mind being without it for a few weeks. Honey just has to pick up some things for him later, on the way back to campus again, and if it turns out any of those packages contains anything illegal, or something weird like live snakes, she’ll simply have to kick Mo’s ass.

She gets halfway home without any incidents beyond the occasional traffic jam and forced reroutes, though bad weather seems to be a constant part of the trip. It’s dark outside, wind picking up, and at times the sheets of rain make her feel as if she’s driving through a waterfall. She hears thunder rumbling somewhere to her left. Perfect setting for another trite urban legend or standard slasher flick, sure, but also the kind of weather where she can’t help but sympathize with people caught out in it. She knows better than to pick up hitchhikers, too, but then there’s that lone figure by the side of the road, thumb up and out.

It’s been hours since Honey last saw another car, and especially in weather like this she suspects it’ll be more than a few hours until another car would pass by here. She knows it’s a bad idea to pick up hitchhikers, but she has her pepper spray and her old jujutsu skills, and feels bad for whoever has the guts or stupidity to brave a storm like this. She suspects not even serial killers would be out working in this weather.

“Hell of a time for my empathy to make an appearance,” Honey mutters to herself as she pulls the car to a stop. She lowers the passenger side window halfway down as the figure approaches, and tries not to pay attention to the rain sneaking in. It will dry long before Mo gets the car back in any case.



“Where to?” she asks, as the figure peeks in through the open window. His shaggy brown hair is slicked against his forehead and his sweater looks droopy, totally drenched. He’s tall, and his smile is wide. He reminds her of an excited labrador puppy after a swim.

“Oh, just the next town over would be awesome,” he says, smiling and smiling, and Honey guesses maybe he doesn’t really mind the rain. She unlocks the door anyway and gestures for him to step in. He does, fastening his seatbelt and shaking some water out of his hair as she closes the window and starts driving again

“So, what’re you doing out here on a night like this?” she asks, glancing over at him and trying to get a better sense of what kind of guy he might be.

“Oh, um,” he frowns a bit, “it’s, well, work stuff. And I kinda got separated from my, um, friends, so I’m hoping to catch them once we hit civilization. To continue with, yeah, stuff.” He grins and shrugs, and the way he skips around the topic makes her genuinely curious.

“What kind of job’s that, out here in the middle of nowhere?”

“Well, you know,” he gestures a bit with his hand then sticks it out towards her. “My name’s Jeriko. Hi.”

“Honey.” She removes her hand from the steering wheel long enough to give his a shake. The angle is awkward.

“You mind if I take off my shoes?” he asks. She shakes her head, so he leans over and unties his sneakers, kicks them off and wriggles his toes. He’s not wearing any socks.

“So your job means heading out without even being dressed for the weather?”

“Well, I’m on a mission,” Jeriko says, and Honey raises an eyebrow.

“Oh yeah?”

“I’m trying to save the world,” Jeriko continues, and laughs a little. Honey glances over at him, wondering if this means he’ll soon bring out the pamphlets while asking if she’s been saved yet. He doesn’t have a bag though, so she figures she’s probably safe. Crazy zealot is at least better than axe murderer. She hopes.

“I suppose the world might need some saving,” Honey says after a while, keeping her eyes on the road and the rain. Jeriko nods enthusiastically, water droplets flying from his hair.

“Yeah,” he says, “there’s a lot of bad stuff out there.”



“Uh-huh,” Honey says, trying for noncommittal

“Demons and stuff,” Jeriko continues, frowning again, “and now there’s the zombies.”

“Wait, what?” Honey can’t help but ask, glancing over at him. So maybe not a zealot, but definitely crazy.

“You know, the living dead?” Jeriko chews on his lip. “Don’t you know what zombies are?”

“Of course I know what zombies are,” Honey almost snaps. Bad enough to get caught up in a crazy conversation, she didn’t need her crazy conversation partner thinking she was stupid on top of it. “And I know zombies aren’t real. They’re in movies. Not out walking the streets.”

“Well, no, they’re not,” Jeriko agrees, then beams. “We’ve managed to stop all major outbreaks so far. Even though there’ve almost been more of them lately than ghosts.”

“Ghosts aren’t . . .” Honey trails off.

“Well,” Jeriko scratches at his chin. “You know, to most of the ghosts, living people aren’t real. I think it has to do with the different planes of existence. The overlapping is only visible and believable to a few.”

“Right.” Honey decides not to argue it further. If he really wants to believe in such things, it’s not up to her to try to convince him otherwise.

“Oh!” Jeriko sits up straighter, staring out into the darkness ahead of them. Honey is once again reminded of an excited puppy, this time one that just caught the scent of bacon. “You can drop me off right here, that’d be great.”

At first she thinks he’s completely lost it, wanting to get back out on the empty road in the middle of nowhere again. Then she sees the lights up ahead, small like fireflies at first, but as they get closer she can make out the shape of a horse-drawn carriage. There are candles flickering on top of it, still burning bright despite the rain and lack of shelter. Honey parks the car at a distance and gives the shapes in the mostly-dark a dubious look which she then turns on Jeriko.

“You sure?” she asks, nodding towards the carriage, the coachman with the big collar of his coat turned up against the rain. She can’t see his face. In fact, Honey realizes, she can’t see his head. Jeriko just laughs lightly, already undoing his seatbelt and putting his sneakers back on.



“Of course,” he smiles, “I know ‘em. These are the ones I was trying to catch up to. So, hey, thanks for helping me.”

“Yeah, sure thing,” Honey says, looking past him at the shapes. A dog gets up from the ground, skulks a bit closer to the car. It’s big, shaggy; she wonders if it might be part wolf. Its eyes seem to almost glow.

“Hey, um,” Jeriko starts, pauses, and when she looks back at him he’s rummaging through his pockets.

“Here, take this,” he says, and she briefly thinks he’ll pull out some pamphlets after all. Something like instructions on what to do in case the zombie apocalypse occurs. Instead, he hands her a stone. It’s grey, with smooth edges, and small enough to easily fit into the palm of her hand. It looks like how she figures every other stone by the road looks, except that when she holds it up to the car’s interior light, it glimmers.

“Keep it, for, you know, protection.”

Honey raises an eyebrow yet again, not sure how a stone might stand a chance against zombies or ghosts or whatever else Jeriko believes she’d need protection from. She puts it on the dashboard anyway, to keep it from getting lost. She nods, and Jeriko smiles, and then he gets out of the car. She locks the doors again as soon as he’s outside, and then watches him approach the carriage. The large dog follows him as he moves to talk with a pale figure inside. Honey feels as if the figure is looking right at her; she starts the car again.

Jeriko waves and smiles as Honey pulls away, and she waves back. When she looks in the rear view mirror, all she can see is the rain.

EMELIE NYMAN was born in Lund, Sweden and has managed to move as far as to Malmö (about ten kilometers). She is currently in the English Studies Program at Malmö University and has been published previously in Shipwrights.