

—GOD'S WORK

by Matthew Lee Bain

The roadkill was staring at her. The eyeballs bulged from its squashed face. It smiled with a wide mouth full of sharp teeth, tongue hanging, exhaling a greasy stench.

The hitcher swallowed, gripped her pack a little tighter, and edged farther down the roadstead. The blacktop smoldered like a grill, filling the air with dizzy waves of heat. She struggled for a full breath, unpent breasts panting beneath a thin, yellow shirt. Aside from the strip of highway, she could make out nothing but sand and scrub brush. Somewhere, far off, behind the waves of heat, there might have been hills or mountains, maybe a city, but. . .

The hitcher stripped her pack from her shoulder and, crouching, began to dig through it. She withdrew a brown thermos, unscrewed the lid, and brought the lip to hers. Not much more than a kiss of liquid. Her tongue was quick to savor the drops from between the dried cracks of skin. Wiping her head, she returned the thermos to her pack and stood. She took a long look down the highway—one way, then the other—which blurred on, out of sight.

“Off the edge of the world—fuck.” Her eyes slowly slid around the empty, empty landscape. Slinging the pack over her shoulder, she continued west, away from the roadkill. After a few steps, she heard the growl, far-off, but deep. She squinted over her left shoulder. The growl was growing into a roar. Holding her palm up to shade her face, she widened her eyes. A bright shining spot, like a small silver sun, was coming down the highway in her direction.

“God,” she prayed. The small silver sun formed into a tall pickup truck. The hitcher jumped and waved her arms, screaming as loud as her dry throat would allow. The roar grew until the truck slowed to a stop in front of her. She heaved a sigh, on the edge of tears. The driver’s door cracked open, and a set of heavy boots hit the ground. She looked up—took a few steps forward—but could not see around the cab. A gloved hand reached over the truck-bed and removed a stain-painted shovel. Her heart jumped. A tool that size might as well be a weapon. She backed up a few paces, feeling the instinct to run. But run where? She’d be as good as dead. A moment later, there was a long grating sound, as the shovel was scraped over the blacktop. The pancaked mammal arced into the air, landing in the truck-bed; the shovel followed

after with a dead clatter.

"Hello—" she said, but the driver side door slammed shut. "No, wait!" She ran, jumping onto the side of the truck.

The putrid waves of stench emanating from the truck-bed overtook her. "O, *Ghgod*," she gagged, losing her purchase. She fell, ass-first, into the gravel. Struggling to her feet, she screamed, "Wait!"

The passenger door cracked open like an icebox, and a face, five-days unshaven, peered out.

"Hop up," he said with a droll smile.

"Oh, thank God you came along," she uttered, hopping in and slamming the door.

"You're welcome," he answered.

The silver truck roared down the highway, westward bound.

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"Where were you headed?" he said, looking her up and down from the corner of his right eye.

"What's that?" She squinted.

"Where were you headed 'fore I stopped?" he said over the *whirr* of the truck.

"Oh," she laughed, "just out of Bum-Fuck Egypt or wherever you call this."

"Bum what?"

"Bum-Fuck Egypt."

"Bum-Fuck E-Gypt?" His face split open with laughter.

"Well—I haven't seen a pyramid, but I wouldn't be surprised." She smiled.

He puckered his lips and squinted. With a snort, he reached across her to the glove compartment, his grubby fingers popping the door to rifle inside. Withdrawing a half-crushed cigarette pack, he held it up to show a camel-headed mascot in front of a pyramid.

"Found one," he sputtered with laughter. The hitcher smiled, shifting in her seat. Taking the brown, tree-shaped air freshener down from the rear-view, the driver replaced it with the camel and pyramid. She stared at the air freshener with a crooked smile. Wheezing, the man composed himself.

His mouth sidled over to the right side of his face, where it cracked open.

"Hey," he said, his voice deep and serious.

"Huh?"

"Hey," he whispered, poking her arm with his dirty index finger.

"What?"

"Know what?" he continued, leaning in, tilting his head like he had a secret.

"What?"

"My *mummy's* buried here." His mouth became a seizing mess, spewing laughter.

The hitcher smiled and bit down on her lower lip, tucking her chin up. The driver faced forward, still sniggering—"My *mummy*. . ." She noticed him looking at her breasts from the side of his face. She looked down, herself, to see her nipples pointing down the road—the cab was pleasantly chilled. She crossed her arms over her chest.