

A Taxi

By Trent Roberson

I sure as hell won't take any criticism from my father. Of course, I don't blame him for any of this either. I've always been my own man. Ever since the eighth grade when I became a man, or at least grown up enough to have a beer with my dad in the garage and talk about sex. Sex I wasn't even having yet. But I pretended like I was to impress him. He liked that his son wasn't some pussy—waiting around until marriage or some bullshit—and I liked my father paying attention to me. And it's not like I didn't want to have sex or drink beer—I did. For the record, I drink because I want to drink. I'm not one of those pathetic, pretentious alcoholics going to meetings and seeing a shrink; blaming my dear old dad for my problems. Drinking is just something to do. It makes the sex I am having now easier to get.

This thing smells familiar, but I can't quite place it. Not a foul odor, just the smell of use. It's a dusty smell—like the years of accumulated human grime of an old couch, or a bus seat. Not wholly unpleasant, but it draws a vague scent memory that I struggle to recall. It's better than the paper mill smell of my dad's work clothes, better than waking up in vomit, better than pine-tree shaped air-fresheners, better than burning rubber, smoke, gasoline, bile, blood.

The flashbacks come about so easily.

I used to get lost in daydreams of riding my bike down the old dirt road by my grandparent's house, high school football games, driving other boys into the dirt, making-out in the backseat of my first car. Those were careless times; when dread wasn't a constantly churning acid eating away at my insides. Now the daydreams are continuations of nightmares—twisted and contorted into that one singular moment. Reoccurring doesn't quite fit. Life is a dream now.

Consciousness is wispy and elusive—ever plunging into the unending night of my own personal hell. The smell of grinding brakes and motor oil is far more real than brimstone. Sounds of metal twisting and glass breaking drown out my existence. Her pale thin face, illuminated for an instant in my headlights, is my only reprieve.

Of course I'd been drinking. Not much, just some cheap vodka I'd swiped from my roommate's freezer. It's not like I was drinking alone. I was going out to get cigarettes for me and the girl I'd left on the couch. Just a few shots with her, and a few gulps for me to actually feel it. But the girl in the headlights was nothing like the random drunk girl. She was an angel—engulfed in serene fluorescent light that signified impending doom—her hair floated in strands around her closed eyes. An angel completely undeserving of the death I provided for her. The flashing red and blue lights finally came, and the vodka smelled stronger on my breath than I'd remembered. I saw the body bag in the grass, and my eyes blurred from tears and blood. The smells I have come to hate more than anything made bile rise in my throat, and then there was only blackness.

But this smell is something else—something so goddamn familiar, and yet, out of reach. The memories are a flood of good and bad—nostalgia and loathing rise and swirl uncontrollably.

My head is spinning, floating as I fall. My breathing has become a hollow choke—a simulated rising of the chest—inadequately feeding starving lungs. The human grime and dusty smell of use, has formed itself into a memory. At last I realize what the smell is from—I think about my father and I laugh. I want to tell my dad his body bag will smell just like a taxi from the bar. Truth is; he wouldn't give a shit. Besides, he'll know it for himself one day.