

Running Sand

Tyler "Lou" Fish

Thursday morning Jake pulled up into my driveway in his rusty old pickup. "We're going to make it big this weekend Matt, I can tell." He said that every week before we go to pick up the goods in Newshore. I stepped into his car, moved the week's newspapers to the back seat, and sat down. Zeppelin was playing on the radio; the DJ always played zep on Thursday mornings.

"Check these out," Jake said, and opened the glove compartment. Crumpled notes and receipts moved out of the way as he pulled out a pair of fuzzy dice and hung them on the rear view mirror.

"Got them with last week's earnings. Five fifty-nine on sale."

"Did you get this one last week too?" I asked, pointing to his hula-dancing figure on the dashboard.

"No, I found her in the back on Tuesday. Not sure where she came from, but she looks nice doesn't she?"

"Yea, it's kind of...Ah! Get off!" Something jumped in my hair. I knocked the furry rodent off my head. It landed by my feet and just stared up at me. Its tail was still wrapped up with a brace and gauze. It quickly crawled under the seat.

"Next time warn me when you bring Jess along! I don't like her surprising me like that."

"Sorry, she's a bit more active now. If I leave her alone she gets bored and chews on her brace. She's sure lucky I found her when I did."

I don't know how serious a broken tail is to a squirrel. I put my feet down, careful not to let Jess run underneath them. They came to rest on top of the numerous acorns that littered the floor. Between the acorns, left over sand gathered in small clumps.

Every week, Jake and I run what some might call a "gilded scam" or a tourist trap. We fill up old mason jars with sand, maybe a sea shell or two, and sell the tourists "authentic beach sand" for five dollars a jar. Misleading tourists was what our town is all about. The city earns at least half of its annual profit from tourism. We have a festival nearly every weekend, and Jake and I don't miss a single one. We're always selling our mason jars of sand to anyone stupid enough to buy them. I have no idea why people keep buying them. It's just sand, after all, and a twenty-five cent mason jar. Everyone wants to cash in with the gullible tourists. But Jake and I are the only ones mad enough to drive to the nearest beach, in Newshore.

The thing about "running sand", as Jake calls it, is the fact that Newshore is exactly one hundred and twenty two miles away, across the longest stretch of nowhere land you'll ever see. There are two problems with that. The first problem is the heat. If it weren't for the air conditioning, the blistering sun would literally melt your back into the seat. Jake still has some pieces of his AC-DC T-shirt molded into the driver's seat. The second problem with the trip is the gas.

I'm not stupid. I know a hundred twenty two miles at eighteen miles to the gallon and three forty six per gallon both ways won't be paid by selling mason jars filled with sand at five dollars a pop. But gas is never a problem. Each time Jake picks me up, he has a full can of gas in the back. We have an unspoken agreement: he never tells me how he keeps filling up, and I never ask.

We made it about sixty miles into the wasteland this time when the engine shut off. The A/C went with it too. I guess the radio was running off the battery because the zeppelin didn't stop playing.

"Must be out of gas," Jake said. It took me a few seconds to take in what he just said. Jess peaked out from behind the chair to see what happened. Out of gas?? He's supposed to make sure

the tank is filled up from wherever he gets his gas! He opened the door to check the can in the trunk.

"Yep, out of gas," he said as he came back to the door.

"What do you mean, out of gas? I thought it's your job to take care of that."

"I have to make due with what I can."

"What made you think we were going to make it to Newshore with anything less than a full tank?"

"I couldn't get a hold of any this time." I didn't ask him where he gets the gas. I tried to get a signal with my phone, but no luck. Jake doesn't have a phone. He's got a belt holster for one, but no phone to go with it. Form over function he'd answer whenever I would bring it up.

Jess kept to the shadows under the seats to keep cool, while leaving us to bake in our own sweat. It was noon, and must have been at least one-oh-five out. The hula-dancer's base was already melted to the dashboard. It felt like we were dying, and we probably were. We checked the back for anything we could use, but all Jake kept back there was the empty gas can, some cut up pieces of a plastic bottles, a mesh net, and a all-in-one toolkit, which we didn't dare open for fear of the sun's rays reflecting off the chrome tools and blinding us. We set up the net to keep as much of the sun off us as we could. It wasn't much, but it was all we could think of. I lasted till a little past one when I couldn't take it anymore.

"Where do you get your gas?" I asked.

"Hey, you know we aren't supposed to talk about that man!"

"I know! But I need to know why we're stuck out here in the middle of fucking nowhere!" The heat made us angry. It felt like my blood was boiling my veins, cooking me from the inside. After a long silence, Jake replied.

"I siphon the gas out of unattended cars." There it was. That was the only time we spoke of it, ever. A police cruiser came down the road. It stopped behind us, lights flashing. They don't flash those lights in the middle of a deserted highway if they're there to help you.

"Are you the owner of this vehicle?" The officer asked. He wore his badge on his chest; it was reflecting the heat off the sun onto my face.

"...yes sir." Jake said. He knew what was coming next. His voice sounded distant, like he could see everything that was about to happen play out in his head.

"Please step out of the car, sirs." We weren't going to make it back in time, but we'd damn well try.