

I Loathe Maps

By Jay Rehak

"Maps! I loathe maps." Tom said, as Georgette fumbled for a cigarette from the glove compartment.

"You may loathe maps, but I loathe being lost." she said, lighting her Marlboro.

"Please don't smoke, Georgette. Not in the car! You know how much I hate it. It stinks and it's too cold to roll down the windows," Tom begged.

"I tell you what. I'll put out this cigarette as soon as we know where we are and how far we've got left to the Grand Canyon."

"I'm not stopping. I know where we are, approximately." Tom insisted.

"We're approximately in the middle of friggin nowhere Arizona." Georgette said, as she blew smoke in his general direction.

"You're fogging up the windows."

"We need to stop at the next gas station and get a map."

"Okay. Okay. Agreed. Now can you put out the cig?"

"Not until we actually get to the station and I have a map in my hands."

"Fine." Tom said, pressing the gas pedal hard to the floor.

"Watch it or you'll get us killed!" Georgette shrieked.

"I'm just trying to get us to a gas station as soon as possible. Preferably before I get lung cancer."

"You know, you can get a portable GPS system for about a hundred dollars."

"Yeah. Let me pull over at the next cactus and buy one."

"I'm just saying, we could have gotten one, before we left Santa Fe."

"Would have been a good idea, then, had you mentioned it." Tom agreed, as he coughed into the windshield. "Come on, Georgie, you're killing me with that thing."

"Find me a map and it's all good. "

The two drove for another hour in their bright red Volkswagon Beetle, Georgette smoking cigarette after cigarette, and Tom driving with one hand on the wheel, the other waving histrionically at the smoke that continued to find its way between him and the windshield.

"You've got to be running out of those things." Tom said, exasperated.

"Last one." She said ruefully.

"Thank God."

Just to make a point, Georgette smoked her last cigarette as slowly as possible. Just as it was about to burn her fingers, as she was putting it out, they saw the sign both had been looking for "Food, Gas, Lodging, This Exit."

It wasn't a typical highway sign, with international symbols to represent the various travelers' needs. Instead, it was a handwritten sign, decrepit and not particularly encouraging. But it was late, and as the saying goes, "Any oasis in a desert will do."

When Tom pulled onto the Exit, they saw, a quarter mile up, an old Sinclair station, one that had a tattered green dinosaur as its logo. It was late, almost midnight, and both Tom and Georgette held their breaths as they approached the station. "Please be open, please be open." They chanted in unison as the Bug pulled next to the solitary pump in front of the worn out station.

Tom jumped out and grabbed the hose nestled next to the gas pump, only to find it locked in place. "Dammit!" he yelled, as Georgette looked on in frustration and disbelief. Folding her arms, she crawled back into the car.

Tom ran over to the station and began frantically pounding on the locked door.

Georgette rolled down her window and said pedantically, "They're closed, Sherlock. Let's get going."

"No. Someone's got to be in there."

"Really." Georgette asked as she puffed, "and why's that?"

"Because...they..." Before he could finish, an old man, very possibly the oldest looking man either of them had ever seen, shuffled to the door. Georgette jumped out of the car and ran up to the door, scaring the old man.

"Can I help you?" he said nervously.

"Can we get some gas?" Tom asked.

"I suppose so. Seeing as there's no other station for another hundred miles in any direction. I'll sell you whatever you want. We've got just about everything."

"Are you friggin' kidding me?"

"No sir. I wouldn't do that. This is the middle of the friggin' desert you know. Strange you'd come out all this way. Where you headed?"

"The Grand Canyon." Georgette and Tom said in unison.

"The Grand Canyon? Why'd you come this way? Just about easier for you to go around the world than get to the Grand Canyon from here."

"Really? Are you joking?"

"No, sir. Like I said, I'm not much of a jokester."

"All right. Look. Could you just tell me how to get to the Grand Canyon from here?"

"I really couldn't say. I suppose you could take a plane if you could find your way back to Santa Fe."

"Fine, sell us a map, would you? Georgette asked, seething.

"Well, now that's one thing I ain't got. Salesmen always trying to sell me some. But I don't like 'em. No need. Maps. I loathe maps."

"Cigarettes then?" Georgette said flatly.

"Sure, I've got cartons of them." How many do you need?"