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Navigation by Instinct

RYAN G. VAN CLEAVE

You're in the middle of nowhere and your little two door's four-valve engine is protesting emphatically, the staticky legal-help talk show unjuicing the battery. It's a black, black road that appears more of a watermark on a giant shale eye than anything. Straight as a school wall, it seemed easy enough to follow but now you're sure it's a preposterous maze as cruel as a complex algebraic equation that ultimately equals nothing.

The man shuffling after the three-legged dog looked honest. Swing a left at the next intersection, drive east, then turn right twice and you're there. It sounded terribly simple at the time. But now you're confused and disoriented by the constant blur of mountain laurels and fields of fire-black grass. It's all strewn alongside the road like seeds on an asphalt lot, ordinary enough to lull you into a sense of security that vanished thirteen miles back, right before you met the guy with the lousy directions.

It could have happened to any of us. But you're the one there now and we're glad it's not us. It's disquieting to be just out of reach, so distant and worried that you're ready to confess anything, plea bargain your way onto a familiar highway. You roll down the windows to cool off. The scent of violets and rain heavies the air and you inhale deep, then you're heading south, past a bent telephone pole without wires, unattached to anything

Left? West? If you go fast enough, everything will blue as it bends towards you as you become light, a red beam like hydrogen lasers that beacon to a silver satellite among the dark space particles, then you can be launched back down into someone's microwave oven. A 35" tv, maybe. There's no way to say it with any magnitude of certainty, but you have the feeling you'd been there many times, with someone, somewhere, sometime long before this happened.

Tektite

n. a small roundish glassy body of unknown origin occurring in various parts of the earth.

In the purpling shadows
where the press of land
unfolds into perfect arcs,
a single measure of earth
obsessive on its tethered
wings, wanting always to
take flight, blame the sky
for its brooding; Here, below
ground, where fathers and uncles
lie in long rows, chains of bodies
that snake the dark soil,
a single mass of shiny rock,
quartz-like and heavy, secretive,
like a code no one ever learned
to break. Momentary ice, hard
as iron spikes, it bejewels
the darkness as trains clatter
past overhead, the passengers
sipping lattes and diet sodas,
so unaware of what lies below,
nestling deep with their childhood
demons, who like bitter jailers
rattle their keys along the bars,
wanting out, wanting to hear
again, their cries drowned out
by the steel wheels on tracks,
the laughter of a boy whose
father says no, that monsters
don't exist, that nothing but dark
lurks under his bed.