

Ross Clapsaddle

Percival the Trucker

The semi swerved onto the rumble strips as Percy fiddled his fingers through the papers in the glovebox. Correcting the path of the big rig with his left hand, his right continued the search for his Darth Vader Pez Dispenser. “Where the fuck is it,” he muttered to himself, slamming his glove box closed and moving his hand along the passenger side of the truck and down into the ass-crack of the seat. Feeling a rounded-off bit of plastic that he thought could only be the Sith Lord’s helmet, Percy retrieved his dispenser and popped two caffeine pills out of Vader’s throat and down his own. It was nighttime, but his forearms were unaware – they were doing their best impression of the Arizona sun they had been blasted by all day. His hula girl, whom he had dubbed Dulcinea Del Dashboardo, seemed indifferent as well, as she was dancing to the rhythm of the road at her own nighttime luau.

Percy checked the clock and the speedometer, which read 11:37 pm and 76 mph, respectively, and then checked his gas gauge. Seeing that he only had about a quarter of a tank left, he decided to fill up at the next station. He knew better than to get too low on diesel in Arizona, where civilization was about as rare as the civility within it.

Percy hated Arizona and the Arizonans it harbored. He saw it as a land in which the hard-working immigrant and the hard-complaining about the hard-working-immigrant came to clash. It wasn’t dissimilar to his hometown of San Bernardino, CA, in that it was extremely hot, and everyone was perpetually unhappy (maybe on account of the heat). Percy often thought that living as a struggling writer by day and a fry cook by night might have jumpstarted his pessimistic outlook; well, that combined with the ever-widening income-to-bills ratio. The words of his sister and ex-fiancé (who had both found their lucrative calling as a doctor and financial advisor, respectively) also constantly echoed in his head, and the thought that he was “stagnant” and “never did anything with his life” kept him up at night. That’s

why, when his brother-in-law offered him a union job driving semi-trucks, he welcomed the opportunity to get out of his rut, so-to-speak, and experience something new.

It had been two years of driving and Percy was still a struggling writer, a tag he thought he might carry for the rest of his life (yet still welcomed). He was prone to recording his thoughts during his long drives and was strangely critical of himself – writing and recording everything as if the whole world were reading or listening to it right then and there. On this particular night, Percy was in the process of rewinding his trusty device to record over what he deemed a ‘useless sentiment’ – an entry comparing the open road to the running water of a stream and something about fossil fuel emissions being as much of a necessity to the earth as a grizzly bear who can’t catch salmon – when he glanced at his speedometer again.

“Oh shit, these pills are kicking in!” he exclaimed, laughing as he yanked his foot off the gas pedal. He watched as the ticker began its slow countdown from 90. Just as he stopped laughing at what an idiot he was, Percy saw the fast approaching and ever-familiar red and blue lights growing in his side mirrors.

“Well, fuck. You gonna take the blame for this one, D?” he said, looking at his hula girl as she bobbed and danced. The truck began its ascension out of the stream and onto the side of the road.

Percy watched through his mirror as the shadow of a motorcycle cop, or the literal chip on the shoulder, kicked out his kickstand, hiked his pants, and approached the front of his truck.

“How we doin’ there, chief? My name is Officer Bill Sage. Do you know why I pulled ya over tonight?” the cop said, about as naturally as anything Percy had ever heard.

“Uh, yeah... I lost track of my speed for a second. Sorry, officer...” Percy responded, trying to match the tranquility set forth by the officer.

“Well I mainly got ya’ for skipping the mandatory Semi Weigh Station a couple-a miles back. But how fast were ya’ goin’?” said Officer Sage, with an almost Wisconsin-like emphasis on every syllable in the word ‘mandatory’.

“Oh, I was going the speed limit, I think,” Percy responded, evading the officer’s bait, “but I must’ve missed the station. Want me to circle back and hit it?”

“No, no, that’s alright. Just go ahead and gimme’ your license and registration” said the officer, hiking his pants up even further. Percy thought to himself that if Officer Sage had aviator sunglasses on, he would have pushed them up the bridge of his nose at least six times by now, all while excessively chewing gum.

As Officer William B. Sage inspected Percy’s CDL license and insurance, as well as his manifest, he chuckled.

“Everything alright, officer?” Percy inquired, starting to see why a person could dislike the stereotypical cop.

“Yeah, yeah... all good. It’s just... Percival. With a name like that, shouldn’t you be one of them science guys or some shit?” he said, laughing through a condescending grin.

“You’re talking, Bill... like, Nye? That’s literally THE Science Guy’s name...” responded Percy abruptly, wiping the smile off the officer’s face (he didn’t bring enough elbow grease for the condescension).

“Shit, I’m sorry. It’s been a long day,” Percy followed, with a tone full of forced remorse. “What would you like me to do?”

“You can step out of the vehicle for me, sir... that’s whatchya can do.”

Accepting defeat, Percy unclicked his seatbelt, blew a kiss to Dulcinea, and began to dismount his trusty ‘Rocicante’ (the Cervantes-based nicknames didn’t stop at his hula girl). As he started to lean against his door to force it open, he noticed a new and even faster approaching set of headlights in his mirror.

Sage, noticing the same thing, slammed his shoulder against the truck’s door as it was about to open, just in time for a black sports car to recklessly swerve by.

“NEXT WEIGH STATION” the motorcycle cop yelled as he jumped off the truck’s running board and threw Percy’s license and papers through the window. Percy gathered himself and his documents and watched as Officer Bill ‘doesn’t respond well to Bill Nye references’ Sage hopped on his bike and took off in pursuit of the careless driver.

“A streetcar named scapegoat, am I right?” Percy said, half expecting Vader or Dulcinea to at least chuckle. Neither did.

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The rig pushed on, resuming its swim through the moonlit desert. Whether it was heading upstream or downstream, Percy was both unaware and indifferent. Clicking first his seatbelt and then the ‘record’ button on his device, he began to retell the events of his night with a zeal he hadn’t felt since his younger days – the days filled with full pages and fryer burns.

Amid the (somewhat exaggerated) recount of his encounter with Officer Sage and the black sports car, Percy noticed that his tank was now almost entirely empty. Tossing his recorder onto the passenger seat, he saw a sign (mostly physical but somewhat divine) indicating that the next station was only a mile and a half away.

“Thank god,” he muttered.

Percy arrived at the signaled watering hole, a seemingly deserted ‘Lake Exxon’ lit with faint yellow bulbs, this time fully intent on dismounting his thirsty steed. As he began the process of filling up his rig, Percy heard what he later described as a “major kerfuffle,” (before erasing the entry, of course).

“I SAID, LET ME SEE YOUR HANDS,” Percy heard the voice that he was just describing – for the listening world – scream from behind the run-down gas station. With his eyes following fresh tire marks that led into the darkness around the building’s corner, his heart began racing again. He decided to do what almost all white people do (his name was Percival, after all) and walk towards the sounds of the police altercation, as opposed to running away from it.

With his phone set on record-mode (a setting that took him much longer to find than that of the one on his trusty device), Percy crept towards the building in hopes of catching some sort of excitement. “HANDS! NOW!” Sage yelled, as Percy walked past the fly infested bathrooms and rounded the corner of the seedy station. His eyes adjusted to the back end of a an early 2000-something Corvette with its engine still running. Just as he began to capture the car’s Nevada license plate, Percy received his wish of excitement and heard the weight of at least two full-grown men slam onto the hood of the car.

There were only a few short seconds of grunting and slashing about before Percy, his phone, and the wide-eyed and falling-backwards Officer Sage watched as the speed-demon yanked the officer's gun from him.

The hectic situation was abruptly followed by an eerie moment of calmness, which was even more abruptly followed by a three-way slap of realization. Looking down at his hand as if the gun had been placed there by someone else, the large sports car driver poked his chest out above his potbelly and began to take control of the situation.

“Let me see YOUR hands, motherfucker,” he said, backed by his new-found confidence.

Sage, with no real chance of hiking up his pants, uttered a meager “Calm down, man. You don’t wanna do this.” His once-commanding voice seemed to be unarmed and on its back next to him.

Percy quickly realized that he was unseen by both the officer, and the man holding the officer's firearm and decided to spring into action. With one quick motion, Percy took off sprinting, with the help of adrenaline and Vader pills, and blindly threw his phone in the speedster's general direction. He later documented that, at this exact point, he began screaming (reminiscent of an 80's movie shootout scene), which forced the gun-wielding speed-demon to turn his face directly into Percy's somersaulting iPhone 4s (he also later claimed, falsely, that the phone's screen was uncracked before the throw).

Percy heard the gun go off just as he tackled the man holding it (with the intensity Quixote would tackle a man-sized windmill), and immediately felt his left foot go numb. The gun, knocked loose from the tackle after firing its round, was picked up by Officer Bill Sage, who pointed it at the man on the ground.

“STAY THE FUCK DOWN, ASSHOLE,” he screamed, after ultimately winning the back-and-forth trade of confidence. “Percival... You alright?”

Percy still heard a dash of condescension in the way the officer said his name, but that was the last thing on his mind at this point.

“Yeah, I’ll be alright,” Percy responded, with his adrenaline still coursing through him. Wincing in pain, he looked through the bloody hole in his left shoe where he thought his pinky toe should be.

Percy thought, through the pain, that this epitomized the opposite of “stagnant” and hoped that his recorder wasn’t going to be locked up in the evidence room for long.

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