

“Gimme your lighter,” I said, calmly. Jeff pulled it from his pocket and handed it to me. I lit up the cigarette, took a long puff and another, and exhaled a long air stream of smoke into the night. While the trooper returned and advised that a tow truck was on the way, I walked to the front of the muscle car to assess the damage. I noticed that the intersection of the right-turn lane and the main roadway was reinforced underneath by a three feet deep, solid block of concrete, curved for the intersection and extending a few inches above the ditch. The driver's side of the muscle car at the front had punched the dirt embankment and the driver's door had wrinkled a little, not too bad, but I stood scrutinizing the edge of that concrete block and the distance from that edge to the left edge of the muscle car. That distance wasn't even two inches. If the car had plunged into the ditch two more inches to the left, its front end would have crumpled like a Japanese geisha fan. The muscle car would have been completely undriveable and we would have been stuck in Nashville, Illinois looking at probable thousands of dollars of repair bills to the car. Well, *I* would have been looking at that, or, more appropriately, the old man would have been looking at that. I didn't know if Jeff had seen the concrete reinforcement. He didn't say anything to me to indicate that he had and I didn't bring it to his attention. I knew that once we got the car out of the ditch, I was driving the rest of the way to Carbondale.

The trooper asked to see Jeff's driver's license... He asked me for the car registration...I clambered up the ditch holding that piece of paper and handed it calmly to the trooper, who scanned it with his flashlight for a few seconds and handed it back to me. He advised me that he would have to write me a warning for my failed taillight and advised me to fix it as soon as possible.

“Sure,” I said.

The tow truck arrived about ten minutes later, the trooper already writing up the warning and I had stowed it in the back pocket of my jeans without even looking at it. The trooper backed his cruiser out of the way and directed whatever traffic came along while the tow truck backed up to the edge of the ditch and came to a stop.

I already had put the car in the neutral gear when the tow truck operator climbed down from his cab and walked back to the rear of the muscle car to survey the situation. When he asked me to put it in neutral I told him it was all ready to go. With a fairly bright light blaring from the rear of the truck, he looked down the driver's side of the muscle car and saw the concrete. “Geez! You just missed that concrete embankment,” he exclaimed to me. “You're pretty lucky.”

“No s***,” I replied.

He turned around to face me as I stood behind him. He seemed to size me up and asked, “You weren't drivin', were you?”

“Nooooo s***,” I replied, wearing a very thin smile.

He scrambled up the ditch, grabbed his chain and pulled it down to the rear of the car, wrapped it and hooked it around the rear axle, climbed back up to the rear of the truck, flipped a lever and the car slowly lurched backward and out of the ditch. A couple more minutes and it was back on the road and the dirt and gravel of the road's edge. The operator unhooked the chain, wound it back on his truck, talked to the trooper for a few minutes, climbed into the cab, drove forward into the opposite lane, turned left and drove back to Nashville. I had now witnessed the muscle car being stuck *twice* and being pulled out by a tow *twice* and didn't pay for the tow *twice*. That's a rarity for sure, but I would rather have witnessed neither event. - pages 256-258