

Echoes of Disappointment
Nicole Anstedt
Portland

“Please tell me we are not going over that bridge. Seriously. I won’t make it. I am literally going to die of a panic attack right in the middle of that thing.” Only the sound of the GPS narration broke through the tension, “Continue over bridge.” He smiled, “I guess that’s the final answer. The mighty GPS never lies. Besides, if we are going to make the car show, we have to cross the river.” She looked down as they began to make their way across. The sides of the bridge were barely visible and the water below had been covered in a thick, soupy fog. “How far in the air are we? Do you have any idea? I can’t even see the water from here. I mean, this car is pure steel, right? If something happened and we drove over the side or something—we would just end up as a huge hunk of black metal forgotten at the bottom of the sea.” He interrupted, “River.” “What?” she asked. His eyes did not leave the road. “It is a river below us that flows into the ocean. And we would be like a speck of dirt if we sank to that riverbed. I can’t even imagine how many shipwrecks there have probably been in this area. Besides we would just rot away and the car would rust over time into nothing.” Traffic slowed in front of them at the top of the bridge. “Oh that is comforting. Do you have one of those tools to break the window if we go under water? Can you even hear a car fall in this fog? You need to turn around. There has to be an overland route.” He shook his head. “ We have exactly one hour to get there and register for the show. Just breathe. Try closing your eyes or something.” She took out her cellphone. “I am going to see if this bridge was ever mentioned on Trek Tips. Scratch that. I’m looking up Oregon’s most terrifying bridges. “ He sighed, “You are just going to freak yourself out but whatever works, right? Actually you seeing other bridges way worse than this one, might calm you down. So where are the most terrifying bridges?” She turned her phone over. “Okay, one, I am not telling you any of them. Two, these people writing articles have clearly never been here. And three, I am totally researching any scary things we might encounter on future road trips. This water is so dangerous. There have been like 2000 shipwrecks and probably great whites or killer octopi. I’m checking.” Traffic began to slowly inch its way forward. He smiled. “Well, you know they say the sea lures its chosen dead. How do you think it is getting them now that the big ships aren’t coming through?” She slapped his arm. “Shut up. I checked. There hasn’t been anyone who has driven off this bridge or had a river wave come and take them. This backup makes no sense though. There are no lights or sirens. If it is an accident, we are going to be stuck here forever.” She sighed and went back to looking at her phone while he pounded the steering wheel to a song playing in his head. She looked over. “Do you want music? I could play something on my phone?” He didn’t respond. Instead he continued to look forward at the driver’s rearview mirror ahead of them. She sighed again and looked out the passenger window as the fog quietly enveloped their car making it almost impossible to see.

As the fog suddenly and briefly lifted, they could see that the cars had pressed far ahead. He hit the gas pedal, “I guess we became the jerks holding up traffic, huh?”

She didn't answer. They made their way to the small town of Ilwaco. He glanced down at the navigation system. "Like ten minutes. We will be there soon so how about we get something to eat after we register the car? I heard they have a giant frying pan outside. We can take some pictures to post. Okay?" She solemnly nodded. "You aren't still mad about that bridge are you? We made it. See? And in one piece—just like everybody else who crossed it." She sank lower in her seat. "They rolled to a stop at the red light. "Turn left," the navigation system interrupted before he could offer to take a land route home and bypass the bridge all together. "I wonder if they have any good Thai places?" she pondered aloud. He had been thinking of looking for a good burger and fries and dreaded the idea of having to eat another curry. His girlfriend had pretty much been living on Thai food since she moved to Portland two months ago from Wisconsin. "Don't they have Thai food in Wisconsin?" he asked. She glanced over at him. "Are you suggesting I go back?" she sneered. He bit his lower lip and didn't reply. She folded her arms. "Well, I am sorry I am stuck on repeat Mr. Foodie." They went back to silence until he glanced down at the GPS. "How long has it been since...?", he paused. "How long has it been since I said it was going to be ten minutes until we reached town?" She looked down at the time on her phone. "I am not sure. I mean I wasn't paying attention or anything. I just figured we would get there when we get there." She looked over to see that the GPS was no longer showing them on the map. "What happened? Where are we?" she asked as the idea of being lost began to set in. He shook his head, "I have no frickin idea. We aren't even on the map. I think we lost the signal. Is the fog getting even worse? What the hell?" He slapped the steering wheel with the palm of his hand. "This is just great. I have no clue where we are and no idea how to get out of here. Did we pass Cape Disappointment?" Smirking she said, "No, just the Cove of Mild Frustration. Remember that time we tried to find a Taco Master before they closed and the GPS kept having us drive near that old ladies house? It insisted the restaurant was like in her driveway. I think we probably would have circled that block the whole night if the neighbor hadn't called the cops." She could tell he was starting to become angry. "We should have hit town by now. I don't remember taking any other turns. It said left, right? Are we even on a road anymore? It looks like we are driving closer to the trees and every time I try to drive toward clear sky, the fog just gets thicker around us." Realizing that it was actually fear in his voice, she became insistent, "Look we need to stop right now. I am really scared. Seriously." She heard the crumbling of loose rock under the tires. "Please. I am begging you. I don't want us to drive off a..."