

# Electric



# Broadsheet

**publishers of semi-literate doodlings, scraps, & snippets**

**presents**

## **Profile**

**short fiction by Matthew W. Schmeer**

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## Profile

*Matthew W. Schmeer*

“You know, when the light hits you just so, you have a damned good profile,” she said without looking up from the page she was reading.

He glanced down at her, her legs lightly buried beneath the sand and a diet soda clutched in her left hand while with her right hand she flipped through the book sitting on her lap. “How long has it been?” he asked.

“Not long enough.”

“I think we should head back now. Look,” he pointed out over the horizon, past the blue rolling waves and the terns flocking on the water’s edge, “you can see the storm brewing from here. I think we should go.”

She put down the book and stood, absently brushing the sand from her legs as she stared out to sea. “Okay, let’s go then,” she said. “How far is it from here?”

He glanced at his watch. “About an hour. If we push it and don’t stop. We’ll need to fill up the tank first,” he said.

She picked up the blanket she had been sitting on and flapped it in the wind, knocking away the sand. The sand clouded in the air for a moment before the wind caught the grains and threw them away. He felt the grains grind into his bare arms, and made no effort to brush them off. He picked up her book and carried it to the car parked a short distance away from the beach.

“Do you think they will have a place to change at the gas station?” she asked.

“Maybe just a restroom. You can change in there if you want.”

“We are doing the right thing, aren’t we?” she asked, her eyes suddenly serious and her voice unfirm. He was used to seeing this from her when things were going to happen like this. He knew how to deal with it.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I guess so. It feels right. All I know is, it must be done.”

“Yes,” she said, getting into her side of the car, “it must be done.”

He slid behind the wheel of the car and started the engine, its muffled growl growing as he steered the car back onto the highway and followed the curving road along the base of the rising bluffs. The air was full of the sea, and with the car windows rolled down, it smelled good to drive.

She flipped on the radio and searched for a station. A few moments later, after turning the dial up and down and back again, she turned the radio off. There wasn’t a station strong enough to carry beyond the bluffs. They drove in silence, the wind whistling over the car.

He pulled into the first filling station they saw. An attendant sat in a chair in the shade of the opened garage. He was reading a magazine that he folded and put aside as the car pulled to a stop beside the gasoline pump. She hopped out of the car with her bag in hand and walked to the restroom to change. He told the attendant to fill the tank and check the tires and oil. He popped the hood for the attendant and waited.

She came out a few moments later, her hair tied back in a quick braid, and wearing a pair of walking shorts with a white shirt in place of her swimsuit. She put her bag in the back seat of the car and then rummaged around in the small cooler for a soda. She got back in the car as the attendant slammed down the hood.

“You were a little low on water, so I filled it up. The oil is a little low, but I don’t think putting in another quart will help anything. You’re tires are fine, and the gas comes to six dollars,” the attendant said.

He pressed a ten into the attendant's hand. "Keep the change," he said, starting the engine.

"Much obliged, mister," the attendant said, walking back to his chair.

He steered the car back onto the road. "Look at the sky," he said. "It's getting darker. It'll storm soon. I can smell it in the air, can't you?"

She glanced at the clouds gathering overhead. "Yes, I can smell it. It smells wet. Dark. Like night." She sipped at her soda.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, I guess it does smell like that."

"Do you think it will start before we get there?"

"Maybe. I don't know. I don't like driving when it storms. The rain is too much. I hope it holds out."

"Me too," she said. "Do you want a soda or something?"

"Yes, a soda would be good. Did you pack any white soda? Any 7-UP?"

She turned in her seat and opened the cooler in the back seat. She pulled out a cold 7-UP, opened it, and handed it to him.

"Thanks," he said. He dug in his shirt pocket for his pack of Camels and his Zippo lighter. "Do you want a cigarette?" he asked her.

She shook her head. "No. I don't," she said.

He pulled out a cigarette, and balancing the steering wheel with his knees, cupped the Zippo as he lit the cigarette. It was an act he had perfected over thousands of miles.

He inhaled and let the cool grey smoke roil out of his lungs when he exhaled. "I'm tired of it, you know? I don't like doing this. I feel like a whore. Yes, a whore. That is what I feel like."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's like this," he said, sipping his 7-UP. "I write because I have to, not because I want to. When I have to sell something just to get the money, it doesn't feel right."

"Well, it's only money. Everyone needs money."

"Yes, but it's what you do to get the money that makes you a whore. I didn't want to write those stories. I had to. I needed the money for this. For us. Now, I'm not so sure. I mean, you're right, it's only money, but it's dirty money and I want to spend it quickly so it is no longer in my pocket. I want it gone. I need to cleanse myself."

"You can write something good when we get there, can't you? Is that the reason you wanted to go in the first place? To get it out of your system?" She was an honest girl, and that was the reason he liked her. She knew him well enough to keep him honest.

"Yes, it's that and more."

"Like what?"

"It's difficult to explain. Let me phrase it another way; I need to move on. And this is the first step." He tapped the ash from his cigarette into the car's ashtray, and rubbed the cigarette butt in the tray until it was extinguished. "I just want to get there and get it out of my system."

She studied his profile, the way the sweep of his hair jelled with the strong curved line of his jaw and his dark-hallowed eyes. His nose was not too prominent, and his chin did not extend too far. She watched him chew the inside of his cheek. He does that when he is upset, or anxious, or worried, she thought. There are things I must do to calm him. He has a damn good profile, she thought. Damned good.

He watched the hood of the car eat up the road, the black strip disappearing beneath the metal beast as the rain began. It was slow at first, the small splattering of drops on the windshield, not even enough to turn on the wipers because it would

disappear as the wind pushed over and around the car as it barrelled down the road. This did not continue for long. Soon it began in earnest, the full-on unleashing of rain obscuring the road. He rolled up his window and turned on his headlamps, and while they had not passed a single car on their drive, he wanted to side with caution. He did not like to drive in rain.

She rolled up her window when the rain started. "Maybe we can stop somewhere," she said.

"No, there's no place to stop from here to Newport. It's one hell of a lonesome stretch of road." He lit another cigarette. "This storm will pass. If not, I'll just pull over to the side of the road under an overpass and we will just wait it out. You know how it goes."

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