

*Pink
Cigarette*

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W. KELLY WELCH

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(The early road.)

She was a piece of work with no chance of slowing down. I loved her from the first Red Light.

Martinis and Cigarettes, two Happy Hours a day on a quiet day. That was the way she ran.... High Test.

I've always needed something out of the normal path. Considering my lost youth and failed love lives, this ride was perfect. How long could it last? I got in at the light and never looked back.

She said she had been married once but never felt like it was her life. Just something that had to be done. Maybe for her Father, who knows? Seems as though we all try to please someone other than ourselves. As if there was some hidden power over us. It can take you away from your life and she wasn't going to let that happen again. I liked that thought.

That was all the time we spent on History.

When you are riding, it is one constant dream. Like floating with the world's perfect scenes. I felt if we stepped out of the moving car, the world would blast by at 2000 miles per hour. We would be standing with the wind, watching in awe.

Nothing was said about where we were going.

It was understood, we were just going.

There are areas in the Southeastern United States that will send your mind, heart and soul down paths of thoughtful sorrow and back again to some kind of peaceful gladness. It's easier to feel than to explain... Shadowed roads tunnel through moss laden water oaks. Prisms of sunlight hypnotize. Close your eyes and you may hear screams from the abused and impoverished still pleading for a release. You may smell cities burning or see the Strangest Fruit. If you're lucky, you will hear the Church Bells, which on that particular day brought us back to the present time. Brought us back to the land of the living and man was I glad we were together and living on this road to anywhere.

We found a Bar. An A framed open air Bar with acres of trucks and motorcycles parked in trees, ravines, and hanging off the hillside. I could hear a Les Paul crunching through a Marshall stack. We stayed awhile. I told the Bartender we had just gotten out of detox. He laughed and gave us Tequila and we danced and drank.

She looked like an 'Egyptian Princess' with moves so bizarre all eyes that could still see stared in disbelief. I stared in belief and hit the ground laughing.

She was one Beautiful Loon looking for a crash landing.

While the 'Princess' entertained herself and a few onlookers, I walked over and talked to the Soundman. He said the band was about burned out from traveling but they weren't going to slow down because, "Well Hell, What else are we gonna' do?" I said I knew the feeling. He said he thought he might have seen me before and I told him I'd played in a few bands through the years, but played mostly solo gigs these days. He asked if I wanted to play a couple of songs when the Band went on break. I said I would.

When I made my way back through the crowd, she was gone. I felt like I had let her down. It was foolish to walk away and leave her. I went searching. In my head, an old British rock song was playing. "I won't get what I'm after until the day I die." Well, I didn't die that day but I was the seeker and I did find her. She was pretty far out of the way behind the back side of the stage and load out area. There were five guys standing around

her. The young evening was growing dark. I guess the lure of some kind of smoke got her back there. Sometimes you get so comfortable, you forget about the 'Wolves.' The Wolves didn't win that night. When she saw me, the apprehension left her eyes. She took my arm and we walked back to the dance floor.

The Band went on break and I did play one song. It was a slow dreamy tune of my own and I swear, while she danced, there was a cloud that carried her bare feet and they never touched the ground. I strung that song out just to watch. When my song was over, I put the guitar down and got that girl. We cranked up the car and rode away.

We drove a while and found a camp area beside the inter-coastal waterway. There were hammocks tied between oak trees. She jumped out and ran to the hammock, immediately flipping herself one hundred and eighty degrees straight down into the soft ground. When I knew she was all right and could see her eyes shining through the mud covering her face, We laughed until we were crying. It was a beautiful night. We had the stars and a full moon in a clear black sky. I helped her into the hammock and she helped me climb in. We made Love. I hadn't been loved like that in a long time; maybe ever. Two smiles drifted away together.

I woke in the middle of the night thinking about a girl I made love to in a hammock close to twenty years ago. She's dead now. Funny how you still miss people. Funny how they keep coming back around.

I fell back into a restful sleep. When we woke, it was first light. There was mist and fog from the inter-coastal. Fish splashed and the first far away churn of a fishing boat brought us to life. We touched in the early light, loved each other, got up, got dressed, and got on the road again.

Every Second within every hour....
The Highway asks, Is this all?

Where to from here?