

Misplaced Emotions

by Foster Trecost

I spent most of those days in my car. Stashed in the trunk was a cache of precious stones, neatly sorted and separated, bound in smooth black velvet inside a smooth black briefcase. I sold diamonds, and usually made it home for the weekends, except those occasions when a Friday found me edging the far reaches of my territory.

A late April morning had me driving between two small towns that sat between two larger ones. A light rain dotted the windshield, but the sky held a torrential promise. I noticed a skip in the engine, and then caught sight of an undue amount of black smoke exhausting from the rear. I purposely drove something outdated, full with dents and rust, and it looked as if my choice, though well-reasoned, had caught up to me. The next town was five miles further, but they passed like fifty, the smoke having been joined by a faint tick turned all-out knock. At last, I eased into a settlement situated just off the main highway.

The garage had a café connected on one side, giving an impression of leisure. I entered the garage and found the usual smells fanning around. Half-hidden behind a newspaper, a man asked, "What can I do for you?" He wore a straw hat and chewed a twig that spewed indifference with each grind. His coveralls were clean.

"Slow morning?" I asked.

"Till now."

I explained the symptoms, and offered subtle confirmation when he repeated them back to me. "Yes sir, black smoke. Yes sir, loud knocking."

"I'll give her a look," he said, and returned to the newspaper.

Unwilling to gender my car, I asked, "When do you think *it'll* be ready?"

His faced re-emerged from behind a down-folded corner. He studied the car from squinted eyes, as if the exterior might offer

insight to internal ailments, and said, "I'd say after lunch sometime. There's a coffee shop next door."

I walked to the trunk to get my briefcase, grabbed my umbrella, and left.

In the café I stood, much like my car, as the sole patron. I sounded the counter bell, wondering who might be summoned, not expecting the mechanic. He smiled as if seeing me for the first time and asked, "What can I do for you?"

"A coffee, please. To go."

We made the exchange and he said, "Now, if you don't mind, I've got a car to fix."

It all made perfect sense.

I left the coffee shop, and wound my way to the main street. The rain arrived, but I strode dryly from beneath my umbrella. When I came upon a jewelry store, I clanged my way inside. An elderly gentleman peered from behind workman's glasses, first looking at me, then at my briefcase. "We've already got suppliers," he said.

"It's that obvious?"


He smiled. "I've been at this a long time."

"Really?" I asked, wondering how long. "How long?"

"Forty-two years, right here."

"That's a long time. You're not interested in my diamonds, are you?"

"Like I said, we've got suppliers."

The rain stopped. I backtracked toward the garage and thought of my wife; she had to endure my absence, even when I was home. She looked forward to my return , and I sickened when I imagined her disappointment--hope is such a depressing expectation.

"She's all ready," said the mechanic.

I paid what I owed, and walked to my car. "Why do you think my car's a female?"

"If you've got a wife," he said, "then you know the answer." He disappeared behind his newspaper, the same way I found him.

I drove away. There was no black smoke, no loud knock, and I felt a pang of sadness, as if I missed them, and I wondered how my

emotions could be so misplaced. I pulled back onto the highway. It was Friday afternoon. If I drove fast, I could be home for dinner. I took my time.

