

A Jeep Wrangler, a moped, a bank bag, Woody Guthrie and stained teeth

by Josh Spilker

When you bought Mike the Jeep Wrangler, he put a sticker on the front bumper. "Don't be fooled by the car," it read, "my treasure is in heaven."

"So people see it," Mike said, his tongue flitting over his stained teeth. You don't tell him the truth, don't dare break it to him though you should, that most people wouldn't read his bumper sticker, not because they didn't care about heaven or treasure of Jeep Wranglers, but because they could only read it backwards in their rearview mirrors, when they were leaving him behind. You don't tell him any of this.

A bank bag now hung from those teeth—yellow-gray rancid, decaying teeth, strands of tobacco chew laced in between. Those thin pen mark lips could not hide the teeth's keyhole spaces, shaped by open cavities—the bank bag hung from those teeth. The metal zipper of the bag, sour and dirtied by grimy hands and oiled by palm sweat. Mike's palm sweat. Mike had your bank bag.

You assume now that the moped was going 30 miles per hour. Pedals, a motor, an actual moped. You think it was driven by an actual drunk, had to be, no other explanation really, some stereotypes hold true and so does the one about loose seatbelts in Jeep Wranglers.

When the moped rider's helmet clanged against the side of Mike's Jeep Wrangler door, it produced a church bell dullness or a gong

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perhaps hollowing the anxieties of Mike's soul. On impact, Mike jumped to the proverbial high heavens, but detained in his ascent by the roll bar. Mike's head hooked the bar, dislodging the bank bag from his urine-colored teeth. The zipper of the bag hit the windshield and the windshield crumbled on impact, the window buckling under the power, the force, the velocity of the bank bag—an unusual occurrence to be sure, but one you don't mind.

Into the gravel the bag slid. In its wake, splintered glass globules fleeing like ants from an exploded hill on the 4th of July. When the bag slid into your feet, you had stopped shouting. But 30 seconds ago was Mike throwing the Jeep in reverse, 20 seconds ago was you feeling for the large hunting knife inside your waistband, 15 seconds ago was you noticing a moped speeding faster than you thought a moped could go, 10 seconds ago was the moped colliding into the Wrangler door, five seconds ago was your hands in front of your face, blocking bits of glass from your eyes.

The bag was at your feet. When you picked it up, gravel grit covered your thumb and forefinger, Mike's salty spit an adhesive. No time was given, no time was had to lock the bank bag, so your copy of Woody Guthrie's "Bound For Glory" slid out with ease.

You and Mike discussed the book many times—him surprised by Nora's bent for pyrotechnics and you surprised by Woody's Oklahoma-stewed dialect, words like "oozle magoozle." Those words formed paragraphs. And those paragraphs formed pages. And those pages formed resting spots for the \$1000 bills that you had taped inside. Mike's mouth had all of this, all of the oozle-magoozles and treasure his mouth hole could handle, the collected thoughts of Woody Guthrie veering so close to where they did not belong.

You speak. "Looks like God don't want you to have no money. He don't want you to have no money for your cancer and neither do I." You tell him all of this, as you stuff the battered copy of Woody

Guthrie into your back pants pocket.

The head of the moped rider is tucked underneath the Jeep, as if he is hiding from you. The front wheel of the moped is still spinning and spinning and spinning as if on a trail only it knows. You pat your side. You need he hunting knife.

Mike's eyes are closed, his breath coming only in short bursts, his back flush against the bottom seat cushion, his legs stashed haphazardly by the pedals. You decide against slitting Mike's wrists. You decide against slitting Mike's throat. Better for Mike to die, you decide, as a victim of cancer rather than in the glory of a tragic accident made murder. Because cancer victims never make the evening news, never make the newspaper, never make anything, because their treasure is in heaven.

