

Whiteout On Route 89

by

L. Chambers

libbych@hotmail.com

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FADE IN:

EXT. ROUTE 89 - DUSK

A interminably long and winding stretch of road, flanked on both sides by a dense forest of snow capped-pine trees.

Mountain ranges in the distance.

Flurries of sleet coast along a gentle breeze.

In the dying light a taxi barrels down the road gaining speed, its fog-lights and head-lamps on high beam. The taxi's seen better days, faded insignia, rusted door panels.

INT. TAXI

Leather gloves grip the steering wheel.

The red glow of an LCD metre rolls the fare steadily over, as a portable CD player on low volume plays songs of holiday-cheer.

Tinsel, a Santa Claus, and rosary beads pendulum back and forth from the car's rear vision mirror.

EXT. ROUTE 89

The car continues its pace along the long and lonely road.

INT. TAXI

REG shifts in his seat to get comfortable, clears his throat. In his late 60s, he wears a five o'clock stubble and a beanie, his name hand-embroidered on the cuff.

REG

So, what you doin' all the way out
here, pretty lady?

He inclines his head slightly toward his passenger.

REG

Yeah, I know... That ain't a
politically correct thing to say -

In the back seat, a fragile beauty in her mid 20s, EDIE, sits tight up against the window looking out, eyes cast down, as the road speeds by. She attempts a smile -

EDIE
No offence taken.

REG
Me, I'm old school. I says what I
sees, fuck that other shit -
Whoops, see I done it again.
(laughs.)
Mean no offence with the swearing.

Eddie gives a short sharp little laugh in response. She stares out at the snow drifts coming in off the mountains.

REG
Some view, eh? Make you believe
there really is a God, after all.

EDIE
Yeah.

REG
Lovely young lady like yourself,
all the way out here, I hope you
got a proper place to hole up in
cause -

EDIE
We have a cabin down near Jacob's
lake. My fiance and me.

REG
Right. Right. Okeydoke.

EDIE
We're to be married Christmas Eve,
so... He's staying in town, and me
and some of the girls are...

Eddie smooths the hair down over her forehead.

Reg sneaks another look in the rear vision mirror, at Eddie's hands. No engagement ring, finger-nails bitten to the quick.

REG
Say no more. Bit of a last hurrah,
then is it? Forty years since me
and the missus tied the knot.

EDIE
Wow.

Eddie stretches the cuffs off her jumper tight over her hands to cover angry looking cuts and bruises.

REG
Yep, was Paul Newman said, 'I have
steak at home. Why go out for
hamburger?'

Eddie continues to stare blankly out at the view.

REG
Ha, you probably don't even know
who Paul Newman is.

A tear rolls down Eddie's cheek. She brushes it away roughly.

REG
You sure you're alright back there?
None of my business I know, but for
someone set to tie the knot you
sure as hell don't look happy.

EDIE
(head still turned to
window)
I'm fine, really.

REG
Sure, sure... You know they say
taxi drivers are like barkeeps and
psychologists. Just as much help
only you don't have pay through the
nose. Course like I said it's none
of my beeswax.

Eddie snuffles.

EDIE
Just a cold.

The visibility is worsening. The sleet has turned to snow.
Reg turns the heater up. Adjusts the de-mister, wipes
condensation from the windscreen.

REG
Offer's there you want it. I'm told
I'm a real good listener.

Eddie begins crying in earnest, uncontrollable sobs.

REG
Hey, hey, there, there. Can't be as
bad as all that -

Reg momentarily takes his eyes off the road.

EXT. ROUTE 89

Up ahead in the near distance a deer ambles out onto the middle of the highway, stands stock still.

INT. TAXI

Reg's attention on Edie -

REG
Probably just a case a' cold feet.
Lot of it going around this time of
year.

He grins into the back seat again.

Then back to the road.

A look of horror on his face.

He slams on the brakes.

Yanks the wheel hard to the left.

The taxi fishtails wildly, slipping and sliding over the icy terrain, but it's too late.

The violent impact propels the animal onto the bonnet. Reg pulls the taxi hard the other way, but it's too late.

The taxi smacks into a guard rail, becomes airborne, careens over a bank, slides down into a

EXT. RAVINE

The sickening crunch of metal and glass as it slams sideways into a felled log, then comes to a stop.

The deer slides off the front of the taxi onto the ground.

Steam billows from the bonnet. It spurts, hisses, then extinguishes.

EXT. ROUTE 89 - LATER

Snow falls cover the trail of tire marks left by the taxi.

Not another vehicle in sight. Silence.

INT. TAXI - RAVINE - SAME TIME

Equally quiet in the cabin of the taxi.

Except for the CD player which continues to spin over to the next song: Santa Claus Is Coming Town.

Reg is slumped in the driver's seat, his hands still grip the steering wheel tightly. He wears the vacant stare of a dead man, eyes glazed, looking straight ahead.

A whimper from the back seat.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Edie comes to, tentatively raises a hand to her head.

The car door has caved in, her left leg wedged between the floor and the door panel, foot skewed at a sickening angle. Colour drains from her face. She gulps.

She searches frantically for the seat-belt release.

EDIE

Reg...? Reg?!

Edie tugs at the woollen scarf around her neck. A seemingly interminable silence, then...

REG

It's alright. I'm here.

Relief floods her face.

REG

How're you doing back there?

EDIE

Sorry, when you didn't answer I...

Reg is pinned to his seat, steering wheel and steering column pressing into his abdomen.

REG

Nope, still with us.

He attempts a chuckle, gasps in pain.

REG
 Can't breathe so well I'm afraid,
 but once this thing is out of my
 way -

Eddie looks out the window at the snow, heavier now. The wind has picked up.

EDIE
 (faltering voice)
 Reg...? What are we...?

REG
 We're not going to panic is what
 we're going to do. Route's been
 logged...

Eddie glances at the deer outside, quickly averts her eyes.

REG
 ... I don't check in shift-end,
 they'll be sure and send the
 cavalry.

EXT. RAVINE

The deer sits upright in the snow, a pool of blood blossoming around it. It lifts its head now and again, appears to stare accusingly in through the taxi's windscreen.

INT. TAXI

Eddie scans the cabin, smashed dashboard and two-way radio a mangled mess. Contents of her handbag strewn everywhere.

Her cell phone lies on the cabin floor just out of reach.

She extends her good foot, tries to snag it, but the seat-belt tightens around her neck, puts her in a stranglehold.

EDIE
 Ugh! If I could just -

REG
 Someone'll come. They always do.
 Best thing is to just sit tight.

Reg takes a deep breath, buckles over with the pain, tries to cover it.

EDIE

What is it?

REG

Bit of a squeeze is all. Nothing a warm blanket and a hot toddy wouldn't cure. What we need to do is relax, pass the time...

He coughs.

REG

Hmm, I think the last thing we was talkin' about before your dam busted and Bambi got in the way, was your cold feet, right? How 'bout you continue on from there.

Reg gazes out the window at the deer.

EXT. RAVINE

The deer attempts to stand, its legs buckle like an ungainly foal. It falls back down into the snow.

INT. TAXI

Reg and the deer appear to lock eyes with one another.

INT. TAXI - LATER

Sweat's broken out on Reg's brow. He struggles for breath.

Eddie blows her nose.

EDIE

So... that's about it really.

She wipes a tear from her cheek.

REG

Oh dear, you poor poor thing. If you don't mind me asking, how were you gonna -

EDIE

Do it? I dunno, I hadn't decided exactly. I thought about doing a Sylvia Plath -

A shrill little laugh. Edie looks at Reg in the rear vision mirror, raises her eyebrows.

REG

S'alright. We're not all dumb hicks out here you know.

EDIE

Sorry. I didn't mean -

REG

No matter.

EDIE

Pills and vodka were my second choice.

REG

Ooh, that's not a good idea. End up alive but with a bung liver.

EDIE

Yeah.

A pause. Both of them look out the window at the snow falling around them.

REG

This kind of puts things in perspective now, dunnit?

A whining sound emits from Reg's lungs. He coughs again. A fit of coughing ensues.

EDIE

(quietly)

Yeah, we're both going to freeze to death.

Edie bangs hard on the mangled door with her elbow -

Desperately tries again to snag the cell phone with her foot.

The seat-belt once again tightens around her neck. She groans in despair.

EDIE

If I could just get -

REG

Let it go, Edie. Talk to me... Tell me more about how you got yourself into such a state that you -

Eddie gets her toe to the tip of cell phone, ends up pushing it further away. She yells with frustration.

EDIE

Aargh!

Stomps her foot.

A surreal calm suddenly falls over Eddie's face.

EDIE

(calmly)

He cheated on me. Is that what you want to hear?

Reg looks sorry he asked.

EDIE

With my best friend.

Eddie looks down at the floor, lost in another world.

REG

I'm very sorry to hear that doll.

EDIE

He was my everything, you know...

REG

Ah. Well, you're not the first, and you won't be the last there.

(beat)

Bit more to it than that though, am I right?

EDIE

What? Why...? Why would you even say that?

REG

Do this job long enough you get a sense for people, you know. Like -

EDIE

Like what?

REG

- My guess is he hit you.

MEMORY FLASH

A BED. Underneath white sheets, EDIE'S FIANCE, and a WOMAN make love. Edie's fiance tenderly traces his finger along the curve of his lover's jawline, caresses and kisses her.

Edie watches from a doorway, concealed in the shadows.

END MEMORY FLASH

BACK TO SCENE

EDIE

What? No. You're wrong. He would
never -

Edie shuts her eyes tightly.

MEMORY FLASH

Edie's fiance strikes her hard across the face, she reels back across the room collides with A VASE on a mantle piece.

The vase falls in slow motion onto the floor, shatters into a thousand pieces.

END MEMORY FLASH

BACK TO SCENE

Edie eyes snap open, she looks out the window at the blinding white snow.

In the rear-vision mirror Reg clocks fear on Edie's face, and something else... a haunted look, dazed, defeated.

EDIE

Where do you think we go when we
die?

REG

Ain't nothing going to happen to
you, hear?

EDIE

Yeah, I know, but...

REG
No such thing as heaven or hell if
that's what you're asking.

EDIE
No?

REG
No. Just something people made up
to make themselves feel better.

Eddie stares off into space.

EDIE
Maybe it's life that is the hell.

REG
Hey, I'm a wise up to you, young
lady -

EDIE
What?

Eddie startled out of her reverie, brushes the bangs forward
over her forehead.

REG
- You, changing the subject and
all. That's all's I meant.

EDIE
Oh.

REG
Seen you doing that thing with your
hair the whole way. Seen that nasty
gash on your forehead too -

Eddie tucks her hands inside her jumper.

REG
Cheating is one thing. But the
other stuff. Can't ignore that.
Better off without him, ask me.

EDIE
You don't know what you're talking
about.

REG
No matter. Tell me, don't tell me.
Thing is you gotta get on don'tcha?
Plenty more fish, all that.
(MORE)

REG (CONT'D)
 Beautiful young woman like
 yourself, whole life ahead of you -

Reg spasms, coughs.

EXT. RAVINE

It's now blowing a gale, snow driving in diagonally, piling fast up around the wheels of the car.

LATER

The last of the dying light. A cold sweat's broken out on Reg's face. He looks down at the steering column.

Eddie dozes in the back seat.

REG
 Listen love... ?

Eddie rouses, half asleep.

REG
 I know what I said before but... I think I know the way this is going and -

EDIE
 You said you were fine. You -

REG
 Shush now. Listen. I was fine, but I ain't now.

A look of pure terror on Eddie's face.

REG
 Come on now love, you're gonna' have to be brave. Someone's gonna' come for you, I promise. But me... I seen enough to know they lift this thing off me, I'm a goner. At the moment it's holding everything in place but -

Eddie whimpers.

REG
 At some point I'm gonna hafta'... give it a helping hand so to speak.

EDIE

Oh, Jesus.

Reg pauses for breath.

REG

Otherwise...

He looks out the window at the deer. It's given up flailing, but its eyes still appear to stare straight ahead accusingly.

REG

I'll be no different to him out there.

EDIE

Stupid deer.

REG

Not its fault. Got more right than us.

Reg coughs again.

REG

Need you to do something for me.

EDIE

(losing it)

I can't... I can't do this, I -

REG

Well you gotta. You're all I've got. See, I've spent the best damn years of my life with my Rosie and I need you to tell her so. Clear?

EDIE

Clear.

REG

Make sure she gets my hat. The one on my noggin. Okay?

EDIE

O-kay, but...

REG

That's all I'm askin'. Not much.

EDIE

Fine. Sure. Okay.

REG
(chuckles)
Tell her... I always hated it.

EDIE
What? No -

REG
(chuckles)
Don't fret. She'll know.

The rest of this exchange is delivered MOS. Edie nods, listens intently, solemn. Tears in Reg's eyes.

EXT. RAVINE - NIGHT

Blizzard conditions. A complete white-out.

The car is slowly but surely being buried in snow.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

Both Reg and Edie appear to have dozed off.

EXT. RAVINE - CONTINUOUS

A Snowy Owl swoops down, perches on the felled log. It slowly pivots its head.

From the car the faint sound of the CD as it plays yet another song of holiday cheer.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN

EXT. RAVINE - DAWN

The snow and wind has eased.

The car is now completely submerged.

EXT. RAVINE CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

A lone head-lamp appears through the early morning mist.

A MAN hops off his snow-mobile, pulls a rifle from his backpack.

He strides purposefully towards the still breathing deer, shoots it in the head.

Walks back towards his snow-mobile, stops, hesitates, listens.

The faint sound of music -

The man turns around again, spots the taxi's wing-mirror poking up through the snow.

MAN

Well, I'll be...

He nears the taxi, scrapes ice from a window, peers in. Pulls a walkie-talkie from his backpack.

MAN (ON RADIO)

Need some help down here!

EXT. RAVINE - LATER

Snow-boots trudge through three to four foot of snow.

Two PARAMEDICS pull Reg's body from the taxi, lay him on a stretcher, zip a body bag over his head.

EXT. ROUTE 89

Police vehicles line the side of the road, their red and blues flashing alongside an Ambulance and a Medical Examiner's van, its back doors flung wide open.

Reg's body is lifted into the ME's van.

Eddie follows, alive, on another stretcher, a thermo-blanket draped over her shoulders.

Her hands are cuffed.

Reg's beanie tucked into her lap.

Two serious looking PLAIN CLOTHES DETECTIVES escort her, along with the Paramedics, to a waiting ambulance.

DOWNWIND

Two POLICE OFFICERS rub their hands together against the cold. They watch as Eddie is loaded into the ambulance.

CONSTABLE

Damn shame about the driver.

SENIOR CONSTABLE

Yip. Always the good'uns.

CONSTABLE

Got to her just in time I reckon.

SENIOR CONSTABLE

Oh, she'll be doing some time
alright.

CONSTABLE

What'd she do?

SENIOR CONSTABLE

Took a knife to her husband-to-be,
allegedly. Carved him up so bad
when she was finished with him he
looked like a smashed pumpkin.
Couldn't make out his nose from his
elbow. One of the officers puked
before he could make it outside.

CONSTABLE

Jeeesus!

SENIOR CONSTABLE

Yip. Never'd tell by looking at
her, now would ya? Looks like
butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.

The policemen walk slowly back towards their patrol car.

SENIOR CONSTABLE

See some people just ain't what
they seem to be. Do this job long
enough, you'll get a sense. Soon
enough...

Senior Constable slaps Constable hard on the back, chuckles.

SENIOR CONSTABLE

And, if you don't, you'd better.

Constable laughs nervously along with him.

FINAL FADE OUT.

