

Cigarette Run

Christopher Thomas Carter

Sheppard was having a terrible day as he pulled into the gas station nearest his house down near the end of highway 289. He went inside feeling the weight of the day on his shoulders. He walked up to the clerk and asked for his Marlboro light cigarettes. He knew smoking was a bad habit but he had yet to give it up. "We're out of Marlboro lights, sorry," said the clerk. "Dang, alright well never mind," said Sheppard. "Are you sure? We have other kinds of light cigarettes," said the clerk. "No thanks," replied Sheppard. He had resolved to go to the next nearest gas station it was just one mile farther into town. He got into his truck and cruised down the two-lane highway that cut through the pine tree forest like a great, green alley. As he arrived parking his truck in the parking lot of the second gas station he was talking aloud to himself, "That's kind of annoying, who doesn't have Marlboro lights." He got out went inside. "Somebody just bought the last pack" was the reply to his request. "You know the last gas station I went to was out too," said Sheppard getting noticeably irritated. "You want Camel lights?" Said the clerk in his old man's drawl, he had that kind of whistly speech that comes from missing a few teeth. "No I don't," said Sheppard and left without another word. He thought if the next gas station doesn't have them maybe he should just take the Camel lights but Marlboro lights were his favorite cigarette. Or maybe he should just quit he thought. What a time to quit though he thought, couldn't pick a worse time to quit. Now he was driving into the center of the small southern town that had raised him, almost ten miles from his house down highway 289 and about 7 miles from that first gas station. He passed over old railroad tracks all rusted, over ground and sprouting with dandelions. The roads too were old and pot-holed, covered in dust and leaves. He passed the houses on the main drag of town with the big trucks and the leaky, barely seaworthy boats right

out front. This was turning into quite a journey for a pack of cigarettes but he wasn't giving up. As Sheppard was traveling down the right lane of what had now turned into four-lane split highway someone from the left lane next to him abruptly veered in front of him nearly hitting the front bumper of the truck. He laid on the horn. It all began to bubble up now. He beat the steering wheel with his hand. He screamed and swore. Damn this and damn that, damn all of it, damn everything. Then he pulled into his destination, that gas station right at the intersection in the middle of town, still shook and angry. The parking lot was abandoned and covered in gloom from the shade of a huge oak tree. There was James the clerk, Sheppard knew him from high school. "Hey man you got Marlboro lights?" Said Sheppard. "No, we're all out," said James. "Dammit," said Sheppard. "But hey I got about half a pack of them here," said James reaching into his pocket and pulling out the pack. "Here you can have 'em," he said forcing them into Sheppard's hand. The gesture touched Sheppard so deeply he turned away to go to his truck without saying anything. "And hey," said James "I'm sorry to hear about your dad." Sheppard walked out the door. James turned and picked up the newspaper and turned back to the page to read it over again. John Sheppard Sr. passed away on June 15. He is survived by his wife Janice and his son John Jr. Sheppard went out to the desolate parking lot, got into his truck under the oak tree and cried for the first time.