

## **END OF THE ROAD**

**By Liane Fazio**

“In 100 feet, turn right,” the female navigation voice announced through the car’s speakers. Heather checked her side mirror, flipped on her right turn signal, and eased into the right lane, although there were no other cars on the road. The driving app still said she was only twelve minutes away. It felt like she was driving forever. She was getting drowsy and needed to stretch. She turned right.

Heather didn’t like driving at night. The oncoming headlights messed with her depth perception. But she didn’t have a choice after getting the phone call from her mom earlier that day. She rushed out of the house, hoping to make it in time. Not having been to the rest home before, Heather typed the address her mom had given her into the driving app on her phone and set off on the seven-hour journey.

The sun was setting as she took the exit ramp off the expressway. That was what? An hour ago? No. It was full dark now. Two hours? She swears she should’ve been there by now. Before she exited the expressway, she tried to call her mom, but there was no signal. Since then, the only connection she had was with the driving app. Not familiar with the area, Heather didn’t even want to turn on the radio for fear of getting distracted.

Her stomach rumbled. When was the last time she ate? Actually, when was the last time she passed a restaurant? Or a gas station? She glanced at her phone mounted on the dashboard, and the driving app showed her car still driving forward, and she was going to have to turn left soon.

"I have to be lost," she said out loud. "I should have been there by now." Heather peered through the windshield at the darkness. No cars were driving towards her from the other direction. "What town am I in?" She saw nothing outside.

"At the next street, turn left," came the GPS voice again. Heather jumped. She looked in the mirrors again, and just in case a cop was hiding, she turned on her left turn signal and turned left.

The road was dark, lit only by her headlights. No streetlights, moon, or stars illuminated the roadway. Her headlights barely pierced ten feet into the dark. She slowed the car's speed.

Heather's finger clicked the button on the door, and the driver's side window rolled down. The breeze that came in smelled bland and not the least refreshing. She checked the map again. It showed a straight arrow for 2.1 miles. At least it was progress, but where was she? Her phone showed no bars, so how was the map app still able to function? She tried to call her mom again using Bluetooth, just in case she could get through. Nothing.

Her stomach growled again, louder this time. Keeping her eyes on the road, she dug in her bag that was lying on the passenger seat and rooted around for something to eat. She felt the familiar shape of a protein bar and pulled it out, ripped the end off with her teeth, and took a big bite. It was smooshed and stale, but tasted so good. She washed it down with the last of her water and immediately regretted it.

"Dammit," she whispered. Looking out every window and checking each mirror, she slowly pulled to the side of the road. Turning the headlights and car off, Heather sat for a full minute listening to the night outside. She heard nothing. Sliding over to the passenger seat, she quietly

opened the door. Unhooking her phone from the dash, she tentatively stepped outside. The night was quiet and still.

She dropped her jeans and panties, and holding onto the open passenger door, squatted on the side of the road and peed. Looking up, the sky was completely black, starless, empty. She glanced up and down the road. No lights. Peering behind her, all she could see was dead grass and darkness. She finished, pulled up her clothes, crawled into the car, slammed the door, and punched the lock button. Turning the flashlight on her phone, she peered into the back seat. She was alone. Heather slid back into the driver's seat, mounted her phone, pulled up the map app, started the car, turned the headlights on, and continued her route.

"At the next intersection, turn right," the navigation voice said. Heather shook her head, realizing that since she'd exited the expressway, not even a scrap of roadkill had appeared. Weird. There was an intersection up ahead.

"OK, I'll turn right," Heather sighed. She turned on her right turn signal and turned right. The road looked exactly the same as the one she had just turned off. "This is just stupid. Where in the hell am I?" She looked at the map app. Only .25 miles from her destination. "A quarter of a mile left? There's nothing here! What could possibly be up ahead in a quarter of a mile?" she asked aloud.

"You have arrived at your destination, Heather," the navigation voice declared. Heather stopped the car. Peering out the windshield, she saw where the road ended. Literally. Turning to look out the passenger window, all she could see was a field of dead grass. Same on the driver's side. Checking the rearview mirror, she saw only her red taillights. She opened the door and got out. The night air was still and quiet. She looked around once more. Nothing. She slowly walked

to the front of her car, and with the tip of her finger, she touched the fabric of existence. It shimmered, cool to the touch, and inviting. Her destination.