



THE  
HIGHWAY  
LISA JADE

'The Highway' by Lisa Jade © [www.lisajade.net](http://www.lisajade.net)

This was my second round entry into the NYC Midnight Short Story Challenge, 2016.

I was tasked with writing a maximum 2000 word short story with the following details:

Genre: Drama

Character: Delivery Driver

Theme: Decadence

Synopsis: Driving back from a delivery, you find yourself wondering.  
Which direction is home?

“Honey.”

You don't reply. Jane's voice crackles across the radio again, harder this time.

“Honey!”

You heave a sigh and manage to tear your gaze from the road. Empty highway stretches out in front of you, all dirt and rocks and road.

Boring. Your hand finds the radio receiver.

“Hi, Jane. Sorry. Some asshole just cut me up.”

For a moment there's no reply, and you wonder if she's seen through the lie. But then comes a soft chuckle, light and breezy.

“You have the worst luck, Jason. I was just checking in. I wanted to know when you'll be back.”

You pause, your eyes gliding over the screen of your GPS. You're about three hours from Ottawa.

“A week.”

“A week?! I could swear it gets longer every time. Is there nothing you can do?”

For a brief moment, guilt wells in your chest. You don't like lying to your wife; you never thought you'd be that kind of guy. When you close your eyes you can see her, all mousy and mild, sitting in the basement where you set up the radio. But when you open them again, you see road – and that's all you want to think about right now.

“No. Sorry. It'll go fast, though – I'll be back before you know it.”

“I hope so. I miss you. I hate sleeping alone every night.”

You roll your eyes. *Typical.*

“Yeah,” you say, “me too. Just wait for me, okay?”

She makes a small noise, and you can't quite tell if she's laughing or choking back tears. No point in asking. You don't want to step on that landmine.

“Okay. I will. I'll check back tomorrow – I'm sure you're bored and lonely in that truck.”

You frown. No, not really. The oversized cab is the lap of luxury - heated leather seats, microwave, TV – hell, if you could install a bathroom you'd never leave.

“Sure. Speak to you later. And be sure to click off this time. Yesterday you left the button on and I had to hear you playing your terrible disco music on a loop.”

As the line falls silent, you reach into your pocket. The phone you pull out is a little rich for your tastes – if Jane knew how much you'd spent on it, she'd be furious. She works two jobs as it is. But it's necessary to keep up appearances.

You punch in the number and press the phone to your ear.

“Hello?”

“Morning, love. It's just me.”

Your voice is suddenly deep and rich, almost snobbish. It's a habit you picked up early on with Carmen – but once you started, you found it impossible to stop.

“Hi, darling,” she replies, “how's the flight?”

You scour the cab with a smug grin.

“Oh, you know how it is. You pay a fortune for first class and end up in coach. Ridiculous.”

“That's awful. John, you know I can complain to the airline if you like – what's your flight number?”

Your fingers tighten around the phone. It took a while to get used to having two names; even longer to click into the personas you've built around them.

“Ah, don’t worry about it. It’s not that bad. At least I have wine. How are things?”

“Everything’s okay, I guess. I miss you.”

Your heart aches at the sound of that voice – that deep drawl, the elegance. You picture those lips, always rouge, framed by glossy curls and complemented by vicious curves. You wipe the drool from your mouth before speaking.

“I miss you too, love. What can I do to help?”

“Well...” she says, “I’m going out with the girls later. We’re getting our nails done. Would you mind wiring over some money?”

“Consider it done.”

“We’re also going shopping. Would you mind...”

“I’ll send extra.”

“Thank you, darling. You’re the best.”

At the word ‘best’, her voice cracks a little. It’s a tiny thing, insignificant, but so sexy that you have to correct your steering a little.

*Damn.*

It takes a lot to keep a woman like Carmen happy. Even when you use your wife’s meagre wage, you can barely afford to keep her in the expensive jewellery and designer dresses she loves so much. But that face – and that voice – you feel hot under the collar just thinking about it.

She speaks again, this time suddenly serious.

“Babe. I have a question.”

“Hmm?”

“Well,” she says, “I was wondering if we could go down to the wedding show when you get home. There’s one at the Hilton on Friday.”

“Sure, love. We can go anywhere you want.”

“Good. Maybe while we’re there, we can scout the venue. I know it’s pricey, but this is our wedding day. It’s worth every penny, right?”

Your grip tightens on the steering wheel, and you fight to prevent a growl escaping your throat. Somehow, you just knew she'd bring this up again.

"We can look anywhere you want," you tell her, your voice hard, "but I don't think we should book anything. Not yet. It's not the right time." She emits a sound that lies somewhere between a huffy teenager and a toddler who's been told 'no' one too many times.

"John, come on. You proposed eighteen months ago. How have we not set a date yet?"

"It's just not been the best time. What with my travelling for work..."

"That's never going to change," she insists, "you're committed to your job and that's great. I love that. But I want more."

You push down a little harder on the gas pedal. Of course she wants more. She always wants more. Will nothing please this woman?!

"I know," you tell her, fighting to keep your voice calm, "you want the whole nine yards and that's great. But this isn't a conversation we can have over the phone."

"Maybe I can wait until you get home. How long?"

Your eyes scan the GPS. You're directly between Ottawa and Montreal.

"I'll be home in a few hours."

She huffs again, and you find yourself laughing.

"Don't worry, love. I'll be with you soon."

You hang up before she has time to respond, and toss the phone onto the passenger seat with a sigh. You'd never imagined that keeping two women would be this hard. When you started in the haulage business it seemed all the drivers had a woman at every port. It all seemed so effortless, travelling between them and getting all the love, all the sex – with none of the commitment.

You turn your attention back to the road and shake your head. Maybe you're just bad at this. Somehow, the woman at every port has turned

into a wife and a fiancée in the same damn Province. The stress is unbearable.

It'd be easier to just ditch one of them. Ditch Jane and marry Carmen, ditch Carmen and go home to Jane. If only it were that simple. Without Jane's income you can't hope to keep a woman like Carmen. And Carmen's just too damn sexy to give up cold turkey. When you think back, there was probably a time when you loved Jane with a similar passion; but now that love is different. It's worn and comfortable and tastes of home. What you have with Carmen is fire and fury. It's like choosing between meatloaf and caviar.

It's another few hours driving in the cold before the phone starts to ring. You instantly recognise the melodic ringtone you picked especially for Carmen. As you reach for the phone, you sigh again, feeling more tired than ever.

"Hello, love."

"John. I've come to a decision."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Do you want to marry me?"

You bite your lip, unsure where she's going with this.

"Of course I do."

"Good. Because I'm going down to Town Hall to apply for a marriage licence."

You slam on the brakes and then look back, suddenly grateful there's no one behind you.

"Wait, what?"

Her voice is suddenly stern, demanding.

"This is ridiculous, John. I know that you're busy travelling for work, but this is important. I'm not getting any younger and I want to have a big fancy wedding before I'm too old and wrinkled to be in front of a camera!"

You wince. Her notion of ‘big and fancy’ isn’t just booking the Hilton. It’s truffles and Jacuzzis and exotic getaways. Out of your reach. Out of your league – like her.

“I thought we were going to talk about this when I got home.”

“Well, I’m sick of waiting. You say you want to marry me? Then I’m going to apply.”

She hangs up, and you find yourself glaring at the phone. The call only lasted thirty seconds, but in that time your whole world has come crashing down around you. You don’t want to imagine Carmen’s reaction when she finds out that John doesn’t exist. The woman’s no pushover; you’ll lose her forever.

You need to stop her.

You nudge the gas pedal down a little harder. You’ve become an expert at talking her round – if you can just stop her, reason with her, then you might be able to keep her. Offer to take her away for a week or something. It’s worked before.

The radio crackles just as you reach the highway. You snatch it up, suddenly not caring who’s on the other line.

Someone sniffs, and you instantly recognise the sound. Jane is crying.

You remember the noise – you hear it every night you’re in Ottawa.

You’ve woken to the sound before, in the dead of night. You’ve closed your eyes and faked sleep just to avoid asking her what’s wrong.

Suddenly, your chest aches. She must not have realised she’d pressed the button. Must not realise you can hear. Your stomach twists, and you ease off the gas.

How many nights has she cried because of you? How often has she sat alone in the basement, barely scraping by because you’re fighting to keep up appearances for Carmen? The guilt is near painful, settling into an agonising ball in the pit of your stomach.

You picture Jane, kind and loyal and troubled. Then Carmen, all sex and legs and fun. Your head hits the steering wheel and you release an

anguished sigh. You know what's right. It's obvious. But giving that up...

Your mouth is dry as you reach out, taking the device in your hand. The truck slows to a stop and you look down, stunned at what you're about to do. *Damn. This isn't fair.* The wind batters the curtain side, and you grit your teeth as you lift the device to your lips.