“There is a way which to a man seems straight, but the end of which are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12)

“You’re too nice for this job,” David told Eli while training him. They were sitting together around a small metal table, at the entrance to the gas station convenience store at the junction of Route 90 and Route 1. The gas station was spitting distance from the desert and the mountains of Sodom, and steam rose from the asphalt and the ground indiscriminately. The only shadows in the area were those cast by the huge shipping trucks parked next to the station. David mainly saw in his apprentice a sympathetic ear to give vent to his musings. “Here there are only two rules. As long as you abide by them, no one cares if you have a C license or not. You don’t pick up female hitchhikers—the insurance doesn’t cover lawsuits for rape. The second is that you don’t leave the road.”

“What? Why?”

“No one really knows,” admitted the older driver, and despite the heat his hand appeared suddenly like a fish out of water, searching feverishly for a lighter. “There’s something outside there. The Bedouin call it *rolla*, a demon. It doesn’t hit family vehicles—they’re random. Nor busses. But everyone knows that if a truck driver leaves the road, he never returns.”

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Eli enjoyed the fact that his cargo that night was from the textile chain ‘Kitan.’ A week earlier he had transported cans of preserves. He could imagine the huge container filled with soft, goose-feather pillows. He drove along the road rising from the Arava, and slowed as it twisted near Ein Gedi. A human figure stood next to the road, and the wind played about her skirts. He tried to evade her gaze. That way it was easier for him to pretend that he was not a bad man since he left a girl alone in the middle of the desert. “Dammit,” he hissed, and stopped next to the bus stop. David was right about him; he was too nice for this line of work.

“I was sure that I would sleep here.” She introduced herself as Idit. “I stood here for so long and **you** were the only one who helped me.” His hitchhiker put her hand next to the air-conditioning vents, “I froze out there!”

“No problem,” he smiled. “Everyone would do the same thing.”

“Not true,” she said, shaking her head, her long hair moving like a curtain. “I’ve been standing here from 3am until five and no one stopped for me. Thank you.” Eli knew that he had simply allowed her to hitchhike, but the way that she stared at him with her black eyes and eyelashes, he felt almost like a knight. He didn’t dare ask what she was searching for in the desert in the middle of the night.

“I want to return the favor.”

He was sure that the air conditioner had jammed for a moment, and was happy that the darkness hid his face. Eli took a deep breath. *Girls don’t really do things like that.* “You can buy me a coke at the next gas station.”

“Don’t be stupid.”

He turned his head towards her, trying to understand what he’d done wrong this time. Before he understood what was happening, her soft lips rested on his mouth. Her tongue separated his lips. His hands tightened around the steering wheel. The driver in him forced him to separate from her powerfully. “Are you trying to kill us?! We’re driving!”

“So stop on the side.”

The wheels squealed lightly from the sharp turn, and the truck creaked as it rose onto the gravel, leaving the road behind.

He raised the handbrake, grounding the vehicle. He looked at her, and then grabbed the back of her head and brought her towards him for another kiss. This time he wasn’t obliged to look at the road, and was free to indulge in her touch. Eli separated from her when he ran out of air. “My cargo tonight is for Kitan. If you know what I mean.”

She giggled and put her hand on the gearshift.

“Wait, I’ll open the door for you.” His cargo container wasn’t connected to the driver’s cabin, so he kicked the door and jumped onto the gravel. Far from the road. The moment he looked around, he knew that something was amiss. The desert looked different, old and forbidding. Across the road, he could see the black, bitter waters of the sea. He tried to encourage himself with thoughts about his hitchhiker and went around the vehicle. When he reached her side, he discovered that the door was open, but she wasn’t inside.

“Idit?” His voice sounded tiny and lonely amongst the mountains of Sodom.

“Don’t look back.” Her voice sent shivers down his skin.

“Why?”

“I’m getting undressed.”

I locked his gaze at the mountain next to the sea, and tried to convince himself to obey. “Idit, I—”

“Don’t look, I’ll be there in a minute.” She whispered, and he could almost sense how the cloth slipped off her onto the ground.

Eli heard the gravel as she walked towards him and couldn’t control himself any longer. He turned towards her, sure that in the end she’d just call him a rascal and laugh, but he froze in place. His hitchhiker stepped on the bare ground, and every step caused her face to crack, deep lines creasing her face. Like a failing river and sinkholes in the desert. Her eyes reflected the moon’s light like those of a sand jackal. The cracks fell along her naked body, and suddenly the wind brought with her the sharp smell of sulfur. “What the hell…?”

“I told you not to look back!” She fell upon him, and dropped him to the ground. His head smacked the gravel, causing the stars to be bright, blurred streaks across his iris. He tried to overcome the pain from the hit, and then Idit thrust long and sharp teeth into his shoulder.

Eli felt as if he was sinking into a dream. David’s voice filled his head. *Don’t ever leave the road.* He forced himself to open his eyes and push away the hitchhiker. Her teeth carried with them a piece of his flesh.

Eli started to run into the night, the sounds of her feet on the ground filling his ears. He saw the black asphalt with the bright yellow lines, one of the most beautiful sights he’d ever seen.

Something sharp stabbed into his body, causing him to fall to the gravel. His knees burned, his heart beat painfully, and he could feel her claws stabbing his skin like pieces of broken glass. The road was only a few steps from him. But it appeared so far.

He dragged himself slowly in the direction of the road, feeling as if he was being eaten from inside. His fingers fumbled amongst the gravel, trying to find the way since he couldn’t see anything because of the pain. Suddenly the gravel simply ended. He dragged himself to a half-jump, half-fall onto the asphalt. Eli felt abruptly that the night was less deep. There was something in the road that belonged to the world as he knew it, something nightmares had no hold over. Suddenly he understood that he didn’t see Idit stepping on the road.

He ripped the hitchhiker from his body and pushed her onto the road under him. She started to scream the moment she touched the asphalt. Her white, cracked skin started to crumble. Her voice echoed in the surrounding desert, until her whole face was erased into a white powder. Elie tried to regulate his breathing, still digesting what had happened. He ran his fingers through the crystals, and the burn caused him to withdraw his hand. *Salt*, Eli understood.

His shoulder still hurt as he moved away from the broken pillar of salt on the road. When he opened the door of the driver’s cabin, the sun started to rise above the sea like fire and brimstone.