

Twilight's Last Gleam

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. OASIS FILLING STATION - NIGHT

Storm clouds blot the stars from the night sky.

Weak florescent lights cast a green tint over the dilapidated old gas station. The building doesn't appear to have been upgraded since it was built in the late forties. It certainly hasn't been repainted.

A black luxury sedan speeds past the station. A faded sign in the foreground proclaims, "Last gas for 55 miles".

INT. LUXURY SEDAN, DRIVING - NIGHT

STAN SCHWARTZ, mid-thirties, wears an expensive dress shirt and power tie. Remnants of a fast food meal rest in the seat beside him.

RADIO WEATHERMAN (O.S.)
Sporadic power outages are likely
to continue across upper Inyo
County into Eastern Kern and San
Bernardino counties...

A large cardboard box inhabits the back seat. The Necrologist Publishing logo on the side is a menacing gargoyle perched atop a stack of ancient books.

Several neat stacks of hardback books fill the open carton. The black, white and red dust jackets feature a full moon looming over a sea of weathered crypts. The bold title 'Dark Prophecy' appears above "Stanford Schwartz, author of the best sellers, 'Scalpels' and 'Absence of Charity'".

The radio signal begins to fade in and out, garbling the announcer's voice.

RADIO WEATHERMAN (O.S.)
...A P.G. & E. spokesman said twelve
thousand homes are currently
without power...

Stan attempts to adjust the radio's tuner with one hand while holding a cup of coffee and the steering wheel with the other.

RADIO WEATHERMAN (O.S.)
...The weather forecast for the
evening of December 21st.

RADIO WEATHERMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

-- The weather bureau calls for a low tonight of 42 across the desert regions with highs tomorrow in the mid to lower sixties...

A burst of lighting momentarily fills the car with blinding white light. The driver flinches. A second flash and he jerks the wheel. The car swerves.

STAN

Shit.

A small stack of posters, featuring the 'Dark Prophecy' book jacket, slide across the back seat.

Coffee splashes his leg; he struggles to get both hands on the wheel and all four tires in his lane.

Wipes the coffee from his leg.

STAN

At least it was already cold.

The road ahead is once again calm, peaceful and very dark.

The radio announcer is almost inaudible.

RADIO WEATHERMAN (O.S.)

...Intermittent thunderstorms are expected to continue across the high desert throughout the night with relief expected by early morning...

The in-dash, state of the art satellite navigation system shows his location as a lone blip on a lone road in the middle of nowhere.

STAN

Scenic route my ass.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The black luxury car is still the only vehicle on the highway. The endless black ribbon of asphalt stretches into an endless black void in both directions.

INT. LUXURY SEDAN, DRIVING - NIGHT

Stan loosens his necktie and peers into the night sky.

STAN

Bullshit, there's no freakin' full moon up there. There's nothing up there.

The sky is as black as tar.

STAN

How did I get talked into this?
What the hell crazy-ass shrink school did that guy go to?

A series of three quick lightning strikes dance across the distant mountains.

STAN

Breathe deep, that's what the man said. Just breathe deep and think pleasant thoughts... What a freakin' whackjob!

The three thunder cracks arrive.

STAN

Music... Doc Whackjob said to sing along with 'happy' music... And I paid \$200 an hour for that lame ass advice.

Stan searches for some happy music on the radio but all he finds is static.

He slowly reaches into the console between the front seats and retrieves a CD with a red and green label.

He slips the disc into the slot below the SatNav system, which still shows the car's location as the middle of nowhere.

An upbeat rendition of "Jingle-Bells" begins to play. Stan turns the volume down low.

STAN

(Timidly signing along)
Dashing through the snow. In a one-horse open sleigh. Over the hills we go...

Flipping on the inside light, he cautiously lifts a briefcase up onto the passenger seat, pops it open and removes a bottle of pharmaceutical pills. The label clearly identifies the prescription as Prozac.

A small stack of flyers announcing a 'Book signing with renowned horror author, Stanford Schwartz' fills the bottom of the case. The book cover's graphic dominates the top half with local information bannered across the bottom. -- 'Time: 10:00 am, Saturday, December 22nd, Location: Bell's Books and Candles - Twin Palms Mall'.

STAN

...Laughing all the way. Bells on
bobtails ring...

Keeping his eyes on the road, Stan removes two tablets from the bottle and swallows them without water, then turns off the overhead light.

A lightning bolt strikes a transformer atop a power line tower, it erupted in a brilliant flash. Sparks rain down and bounce off the highway.

STAN

...SHIT!

Stan yanks the steering wheel sending the car careening across the highway. Brakes screech. Tires slide. The car slams into an earthen embankment. Glass and metal, twist and shout.

INT. LUXURY SEDAN, ON SIDE OF THE ROAD - NIGHT

Unhurt but quite shaken, Stan struggles to catch his breath.

With both headlights out, the only working light source in the entire valley is in the dashboard of Stan's now less than luxurious sedan. The small light illuminates Stan's face but falls short of filling the inside of the spacious interior.

A flaccid airbag sags from the steering wheel. The CD player continues caroling. Stan, on the other hand, is practically hyperventilating.

STAN

Okay... Ten fingers and ten toes.
So, I'm okay... Don't freak out.
(To the CD player)
Shut the hell up.

He slams off the CD player.

Lightning strikes in the distance. He jumps, spins around and discovers only darkness.

STAN

Okay... Okay.

Stan flicks the switch for the inside lights. - Nothing.

STAN

Shit!

Tries the ignition key. The starter grinds but fails.

STAN

Shit.

Tries again.

STAN

Damn it... Now think...

Excitedly, Stan pulls a small cell phone from his shirt pocket, opens its clamshell and checks the signal.

He opens the car door, steps up on the edge of the floorboard, lifts the small phone in the air and slowly sweeps the sky.

STAN

Shit.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LUXURY SEDAN, ON SIDE OF THE ROAD - NIGHT

Stan cowers down in the seat until he can no longer be seen from the outside.

He begins to rock back and forth, building momentum until he breaks into a full-blown panic attack. Covered in sweat and hyperventilating profusely, he grabs at his throat and fights to escape from his necktie, almost strangling himself in the process.

Rid of the necktie, he claws open the collar of his designer shirt.

A lightning strike reveals a calm desert outside of the car, and a freaked out driver within.

Stan jerks his legs off the floor and up on to the seat.

STAN

It's all in your head. It's all in your head.

He shines the phone's light on the floor. Nothing is lurking in the shadows.

As he tries to shine the phone on to the hood of the car, he catches a reflection in the rear view mirror.

STAN

Shit!

He spins around and stabs the phone into the dark. The shadows retreat leaving only his suit jacket draped across the backseat.

The hyperventilating returns.

He throws open the car door and leaps outside.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - NIGHT

A chorus of crickets punctuates the otherwise silent night.

The trunk's gaping maw looms over Stan as he tentatively sweeps the glowing cell phone into the belly of the beast.

Cartons bearing the Necrologist Publishing logo fill most of the cavernous trunk. The phone's light seems to give motion to the crouching gargoyle design.

Barely able to make out the shapes beyond the boxes, Stan ventures closer. The dim light struggles to reveal a set of jumper cables, a canvas tool bag... and an old flashlight.

STAN

YES!

Stan reaches for the flashlight but quickly retracts his arm, violently shaking off something only he can see.

STAN

Shit.

Slowly returning to the trunk, he takes three deep breaths, closes his eyes, then reaches in the darkness and snatches out the flashlight.

Breathing heavily, he flips on the flashlight and gets nothing for his trouble; it's as dead as a coffin nail.

He shakes it and pounds it but it resists his will.

STAN

Come on...

He twists open the base of the flashlight and pours the batteries into his hand. Even under the weak light of his cell phone, the corrosion is obvious.

STAN

Shit.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - NIGHT

Stan surveys the damage beneath the crumpled hood.

The engine compartment is crunched in, the last wisps of steam rise from the radiator, a dark liquid has formed an ominous puddle on the ground below.

The headlight that's not embedded into the embankment is hanging from the grill like a trauma victim whose eye has popped out of its socket.

By the weak light of his cell phone, Stan takes a wrench from the canvas bag and begins to remove the car's large battery. Hands tremble from the exertion.

STAN

Come on...

The wrench slips free and knocks the phone into the recesses of the engine compartment. It comes to rest deep within a tangle of wires and hoses.

Shadows from the dim light bring life to the snakelike coils. Holding his breath, he plunges his arm into the nest of vipers. The rescue's only casualty is some skin off his knuckles.

The car's battery surrenders to the wrench. Once freed, the red and black wires are pried loose revealing a small gash in the top of the battery.

STAN

That can't be good.

The remaining tools are hastily dumped from the bag, the heavy battery placed within and positioned so that the bag's handles are easy to grab from above. Stan hefts the unit to test its weight.

STAN

(With satisfaction)

Yes.

Stan severs the two wires that hold the dangling headlight and secures the lamp to the end of the canvas bag with duck tape; essentially making an overweight flashlight.

He strips the coating from the headlight's red wire and wraps it around the positive post of the battery.

A very bright lightning burst burns unearthly shadows into the ground around him.

His hands shake uncontrollably as he strips the second wire with the sharp knife. Blood drips from a finger tip.

The cell phone's screen goes blank as its battery finally breathes its last breath. Darkness fills the valley.

STAN

One last...

A bright orange spark arcs across the wire.

The car battery explodes in a brilliant flash turning the black of night into a searing white abyss.

FADE TO BLACK.

BLACK

The beep, beep, beep of hospital equipment fills the void.

DOC (O.S.)

Don't panic, the straps are for your own protection. You were trying to rip off the bandages in your sleep.

Sounds of struggling and labored breathing.

DOC (O.S.)

Don't try and speak. We've had to put a tube in your throat to help you breath... I'm Doctor Fields... Nod if you can understand me.

The struggling sounds die down; two short squeaks come from the bedsprings.

DOC (O.S.)

Good... Mr. Schwartz, there was an explosion...

DOC (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm afraid acid from the battery
reached both of your eyes...

Bedsprings cry out. The rhythm of the beeps rapidly
accelerates until one beep holds a continuous tone.

After a long pause, credits roll.