

Here's another punk you want to bust in the snotbox. But, hey, you asked to get in the game, so play by the rules. You hand him the sawbuck the old man slipped you. And you get a little surprise. He hands it back and walks away. Slow. Now you want to rip his arm off and slap him across the face with it. But that ain't in Murphy's Law: You can't quit, you can't win, you can't break even. So you peel off a double saw. He takes it like he grabbed an ass. Like it never happened. Says like an old beer buddy:

"Back it in, Amigo. Have you truckin in a snap."

You swear this is your last run. Breeze through the want ads. You're not ACCOUNTANT. DISHWASHER AND GRAVEDIGGER don't appeal. Only thing you're really qualified for is PLASMA DONOR URGENTLY NEEDED. Next thing you know, you're upshifting through an amber light. And not to hear a personal question you're about to ask, you turn up the radio. But they don't play the good songs no more. They just play them new songs. "O baby o baby o baby o baby I want you o baby I need you o baby drop your laundry." They got shoemakers makin songs. Fidgit on the CB. Talk ice patches. Radar traps. See a phone booth. Choke it with quarters, dimes, nickles. She's not there. Do a hundred miles. Blinking neon. Diner. Pull over. Coffee, danish, small talk. Do your little routine. Make a waitress laugh. Find out Johnny Blade fell asleep at the wheel out Nevada. Through a guardrail. 200 feet. Now he's truckin in a wheelchair. Do a hundred miles. You think of that waitress in the last diner and sleep. And if you had a choice, you'd take sleep. But you don't. Drink black coffee till you can't taste nothin' but the hotness. You get used to your own stink. No bath, three days. Phone booth. Let it ring thirty times. She's not there. Four in the goddamn morning. Not home. You start

talkin to yourself. You argue with yourself. Whether she this, me that. Whether you should pull over and sleep or do another hundred miles. You argue, you lose, you win, you doze. Rig edges into the other lane. Guy in a Volkswagon beeps like crazy. You see his mouth movin behind the windshield. He's in the right, but you curse him, his family, his car, dog, kids that ain't born yet. Pull over. Lay on the front seat. Tell yourself you're just resting your eyes because the load's got to be in San Jose in 6 hours or they don't want it, and by rough calculations you can't make it in less than seven and a half. Lay your arm over your face to block out the sun. You see the veins in your wrist, red and blue, like roads on the map. And that question you been giving the slips for the last thousand miles catches up, and you whisper to nobody in particular, "What am I doing? What am I doing?" And you fade. Wonderful. It scares you. You spring up. You think you slept 10 hours. It's only 2 minutes. The Volkswagon passing you. Other trucks passing you. Leap to the wheel. Pop a benny. Peel off. Insect hits the windshield. Leaves its soft green smear ontop a thousand others. Count the white lines shooting past. Lose count. Lose touch. Lose yourself in the road. And you're caught. You move with the pack. Keep it between the lines. That's what it comes down to. Keep it movin even though the road funnels into some gigantic meatgrinder and every robot's over the limit to be the first one inside where it's all mangled and mixed and you hollar, SLOW DOWN! but they only see your mouth movin behind the windshield. Bulldog tailgating, poundin foghorn to make you go faster into the grinder. Sign reads NO STOPPING OR STANDING. Radio's goin "O baby o baby." Three lanes merge into two. The broken white line becomes a solid yellow line, and the solid fades and two lanes merge into one. You floor it. Into the tunnel. Engine echoes off the walls, drowns out your brain.

