

I'm Sorry

1-412-1

The most important thing was to apologize to Shiloh. It was raining fat drops by now, but he had to apologize to Shiloh. Romeo studied the road ahead of his car. What was that? A person? Hitchhiking on the lonely I-500 on such a day? Romeo's gut told him to pull over and let that poor soul get out of the rain. That was the right thing to do. But then, it would be too late to apologize. But then again, she would never forgive him if he didn't pull over. Romeo pulled over.

"Hey! You want a ride?" Romeo peered through the forest of raindrops. The figure turned and yelled something inaudible back. Romeo drove closer. "You! Want! A! Ride!?" he yelled. The figure hurried towards the car as lightning broke out. A hand poked out of the hooded jacket and grabbed at the truck's door. Once inside, the hitchhiker turned to him. Romeo looked at suspicious eyes in a dirty face. It was a she. "Don't worry about me," said Romeo cheerfully. "I'm trainin' to be a pastor."

The girl wanted to go to Palos Verdes... 523 Pirate Street to be exact. As the white pickup veered west, Romeo extended his free hand. "My name's-" But he didn't want to say Romeo. He would get the same old joke- "Where's Juliet?"

So he said, carefully, "Jack."

The hitchhiker nodded brusquely.

"Got a name?" he asked genially.

“Abraham Lincoln.”

“Just wanted to make conversation- it’s a heck of a trip we got ahead of us.”

Pause.

Abraham Lincoln growled, “Whatcha doing in the middle of nowhere...*Jack?*”

She stretched out the last word, as if to make a point. Romeo wanted to ask, “Well, I got you out of the rain, didn’t I? What’s wrong with being called Jack? And just what are *you* doing in the middle of nowhere?” But he got an idea. “Hey, I’ll tell you a story. What about that?” No answer. Well, go ahead and be that way.

“There was once a guy who loved money. When he was five, he made an ingenious safe for his nickels by using paper clips and chopsticks. When he was nine, he set up a project that systematically robbed the principal every other Friday. Well, you can understand how he became a good engineer. And a better miser. He was rich. He got married, got a red Corvette, and had a good life.”

Abraham Lincoln interrupted at this point. “But something happened.” Romeo smiled grimly. “Yeah, of course- and how did you know that?” Abraham Lincoln shrugged. “Things always happen.”

“Well, ‘things’ didn’t happen to this guy. He made them happen, by his own darn blindness! He was too greedy for his own good. The kids never got nice clothes, and the wife was never fed properly. And this guy- he drank and drank, and ate his share

without caring that his family was starving!” Here Romeo smacked the wheel with a vengeance. “The wife left... I suppose that it was the only thing to do... and the kids left with her. Then, the man realized what he’d become. Monster. Anyways, he straightened up his life and wanted his family to come back. It had been over ten years. The wife was all right with that- the beautiful, forgiving lady that she was- but on a few conditions. She wanted him to come on a certain day, at a certain time, and to help anyone he saw along to roadside. Just to test his generosity. To show that he was all right. Well, this guy was in! He was more than in, man.”

Romeo trailed off, and his eyes wandered to the road ahead of him. The grey rain curtained the cliffs and ocean of Palos Verdes in front of him. “*The day is cold, and dark, and dreary...*” The girl said, “Well... that wasn’t that surprising of a story. I’ve heard stories like that tons of times.” Then, with a slyer look, “Why are you interested in some story like that?” Romeo laughed.

“All right, so you know it’s true. Would you like some names now?”

“That would be nice.”

“All right. The lady was Shiloh. She was the one that I was driving to meet when I met you. She wanted me to come on February fifth, six o’clock sharp. I would have been there, but the second part of the deal was that I had to help anyone I met. And I met you.”

Abraham was pitying. “Oh, so I stopped you from seeing her. Are you sad?”

“Sad?! Sad? What are you talking about- I love Shiloh! I would get forgiven! I would get my life back! Sad? *Yes...*”

Another pause. Then Romeo sighed. “Just wish that I could have ‘pologized to her. Before it was too late, you know. And it is too late. Even if she didn’t forgive me, I would have felt all right. And now I’ll never see her again...”

Abraham Lincoln was shining, for some reason. She said, “Romeo, I want you to know something.”

Romeo started in his chair. Gasp! Romeo! But how...

Abraham was bouncing up and down. “You’ve been forgiven a long time ago. Don’t you remember me? Your entire purpose has changed- it’s not about the money anymore- and I can see that! And you *do* care! I’ve been wriggling in my seat the entire time you were talking- why, Romeo!”

For our hero was slumped against the wheel, his truck stopped in the middle of the Palos Verdes highway. He was crying.