**Road Trip**

Leaving for my trip in the morning, but I haven’t even packed a single item of clothing. I’m tired from working my sixty hours work week, so I put off packing. Will need to get on the ball, so I can get to bed early. By the time I get packed, the stars will be shining bright in the sky, indicating night. When I get on the road tomorrow, I might just drive for half a day, then pull over for a break.

Having been on the road for just a few hours, I suddenly realize I don't even know where I'm headed. That may seem strange to you, but that's the way I roll. Sometimes I do plan out my trip.

After being on the road for a few hours, five to be exact, I pull into a roadside diner. Mel's Diner is the sign hanging above the entrance.

Inside, the decor, is Fifties style. Aren't they all? Clean and brightly lit, didn't seem normal for this type of diner. The inside doesn't match the town I just drove through to get here.

Lunch lasted an hour, and I'm back on the road. I'm heading south on the interstate. Just passed a road sign for the Tampa exit, which is off Interstate 4.  
One of my best friends told me to visit Ybor city in Tampa if I ever made it down South. He's a cigar smoker and often comes here from Georgia to stock up on Cubans. Cigars that is, not the people. That would be illegal.

I continue to drive until I reach Ybor where I plan to stay over a few nights. My buddy also gave me a brief overview of the history here. I find the nearest hotel, check in and after getting settled in my room, I walk back down to the front desk to inquire about a good place for dinner. First thing out of the desk clerks mouth was, you have to go to the famous Columbia restaurant on E. 7th Ave. Just a few blocks from here.

The clerk tells me about one of her favorite items on the menu. "1905" salad is the best in my opinion. There is also a "1905" Martini that you should try if you drink. She goes on to explain other items that are a have to try.

Hearing the information the desk clerk gave me, I decide to head down the street, and try out this restaurant for dinner. Walking down 7th avenue, I take notice of other place that peak my interest to try tomorrow. I make a mental note of a few, and will look them up on line, when back at my hotel room.

In the restaurant, I'm greeted by a very pretty young woman asking me for the last name the reservation is in. I didn't make one was my candid response. I just walked here from my hotel, having just checked in an hour before.

She informs me that reservations are required for dinner service. Going on to tell her that I didn't make one, and telling her I got my recommendation to dine here, from the hotel clerk, she asks me which hotel. Hilton Garden Inn, I replied.

Well, The young lady said, follow me sir, and I'll seat you right away. Her tone of voice changed to a tone that made me feel like a very special guest. Reaching the table, I turn in her direction, and ask what changed the reservation policy when I gave her my response about the desk clerk. She says, sir, the desk clerk is the Daughter of the owner. My lucky day I thought to myself, as she was handing me the menu to glance over.

I ordered the "1905" salad, and ask to try the "1905" Martini. For my Tapas, I'll try the

Pinchos Morunos. My waiter suggested that instead of the Martini, I might want to consider a glass of Sherry. He explains that it pairs very well with the Pinchos Morunos. Also I am told that even though it's an appetizer, It serves very well as a full meal. Bring it on, I tell him.

Dinner is complete, and my waiter ask if I have room for dessert. I tell him I will try your world-famous Flan. I'll have an espresso to go with that, I shout, as he's walking away.

Walking slowly to the door, after finishing my fantastic dining experience, a gentleman greets me by the door and thanks me for dinning with them tonight. As I was putting on my jacket, I turn to him and say, "my pleasure". Saluda a mi hija cuando vuelvas al hotel. I hear him say, as my back is turned away from him, and I've reached the outer door of the restaurant.

Good thing I know Spanish, the owner just told me to say hi to his Daughter when I get back to the hotel. How about that, the owner was actually in the house. How rare is that, now days.  
I take my time walking back to the hotel. The night air is brisk, and a bit chilly. Fall has arrived in

Florida.

Passing by the front desk on the way to my room, I turn to the young lady and say, "Tu padre dijo que dijeras hola!" She gave me a look I can't even explain, but knew right away that I sure made her day!

Breakfast in the morning starts at 7am, after, I’ll head out for some sightseeing. Finally, I make my way back to the hotel, after a long day of taking in most all the places I had planned to see.

I plan on staying in Ybor city just a few more days. I want to go back up north and visit a few smaller towns, before going back home.

My visit in Ybor city has come to an end, much to my disappointment. I really enjoyed the city, and the rich history that came alive as I visited most of the places I planned. The best part of the visit was the food, and the friendly people everywhere I visited. My car is packed, and I’m on my way to the next adventure. I have a few places in mind, and will just drive until I feel like stopping for dinner.

After driving a few hours, I search for a place to stay for the night. Not looking for any fancy, just comfortable. Driving about half and hour more, I pull into my home for the night. A clean motel, with a very comfortable bed. Next door to the motel, I find a diner and go in for a quick meal.

I had a restful night, and find myself up before the sun. I figure I might as well get back on the road.

After loading up my car, I start to back out of the parking lot, when I'm waved down by a tall slender man.

I’m reluctant to roll down my window and asks what he wants. He steps directly behind my car, and blocks me from preceding out of my space. I roll down the window and ask what the fellow wanted. He didn’t say anything at first. I tried to back out of the space, but he wouldn't move.

Finally the man came out from behind my car, and walked up to my window. He apologised for holding me up. Then he asks if I could give him a ride to the next town. He looked honest enough, and I was in a good mood, so I told him to hop in. In the car, I ask him why he needed a ride, and where he lives. He just sat there in silence. I wasn’t going to move the car, until he at least told me where he lives.

A few minutes go by, and the man still has not spoken. I turn around to him and say, “if you won’t cooperate, you need to get out, I won’t give you a ride”. I’m Joe, he suddenly speaks out. I live only a few blocks from here, and I need a ride to the next town to visit my father in the hospital. My car stopped working last week, and still parked up at the hospital. I have no one to take me to see my father.

Believing him, I continue to back out of the parking space, and head north on the highway. We remain silent for several miles. All of a sudden, he asks me what my name is. I blurt out, “why do you want to know?” He gives no answer, and just continues to stare out the car window. By this time I'm getting nervous and decide to pull into the nearest service station. This guys is bugging me, and I think I need to be where there are other people around.

Pulling into the station, the guy in my back seat asks what I'm doing, then says he really needs to hurry and get to the hospital. I motion for him to exit the car. Suddenly I feel something cold pressed into the back of my neck. I can feel my heart start to race, and blood pressure rising. He’s tells me to be still and not to turn around. Next, he says he has a gun, and demands to be taken to the hospital to pickup his father.

Only thing I can do now is abide with his demands. I turn the car back on, and head to the highway. The hospital is half an hours drive. During this drive, he remains silent. I continue to ask him what his motives are. He no longer has the gun against my neck.