

MYSTERY SHOPPERS

by

Arial Burnz

Based on the short story

Los Angeles, CA  
arial@arialburnz.com

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

A silver ribbon of highway dissects an arid desert, where a stalled compact gathers dust at the roadside. A TOW TRUCK pulls into frame and settles in front of the vehicle for the job ahead.

INSERT - LOGO ON TOW TRUCK DRIVER'S DOOR

"Sweet Bye-n-Bye Towing

Your Soul Solution from Point A to Point B"

BACK TO DESERT ROAD

SAM CROPPER (late 40s) climbs out of the truck and slams the door. Clipboard in hand, he marches toward the compact.

SAM

Last job, and I can call it a day.

SNORES rattle on the wind and Sam bends over to peer through the half-opened car window.

A SWEATY COUPLE

is fast asleep in the front seat.

CALVIN WHEELER (30s) -- driver, head back, mouth open -- looks like he's collapsed after running a marathon in his business suit.

JESSIE WHEELER (30s) -- in similar sweat-soaked business attire -- rests her head against Calvin's shoulder. She's sawing logs loud enough to wake the dead.

SAM

Hello?

Nothing happens.

Sam taps his ignition key against the window. The couple startles awake. Jessie fumbles with her glasses and squints at her watch.

SAM (CONT'D)

Need a tow?

CALVIN

Well, it's about time you got here!

Calvin shoves the driver's door open and Sam stumbles backward to safety.

Jessie scowls and pulls a small notebook from her purse. She scribbles while Sam struggles to maintain a customer service attitude.

SAM

Sorry `bout that. If you could put the car in neutral before you step out, that would be great.

Calvin, in mid-exit of the vehicle, plops back into the driver's seat and strangles the gear stick to prove it's in neutral.

SAM (CONT'D)

Aaand the emergency brake, please.

Calvin jerks the brake release, climbs out of the car and slams his door. Jessie exits vehicle, slams her door and scribbles in her pad.

Sam slaps the clipboard against Calvin's chest and heads toward the tow truck.

SAM (CONT'D)

Fill that out and I'll get the car hitched up. We'll be on our way in no time.

Calvin fumbles to catch the clipboard. Jessie scribbles in her pad.

MONTAGE - SAM HOOKS UP CAR TO TOW TRUCK

-- Sam yanks the chains from his truck. Calvin fills out form.

-- Sam, on his back, drags the chains under the vehicle. Jessie takes notes.

-- Sam tugs motor levers to position the wheel lift under the front tires. Calvin is impatient while Jessie gives Sam the evil eye.

-- Sam puts his tools away. Jessie continues to scribble.

END MONTAGE

Sam strolls toward Calvin and blots his face with a bandana. He then plucks the clipboard from Calvin's hand as he returns the dampened kerchief to his pocket.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Thank you very much...Calvin...and  
Jessie Wheeler.

Sam shoos the cranky pair to the passenger side of tow truck and opens the door.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Let's get to the nearest service  
station and move you two along,  
shall we?

Jessie scribbles in her pad while Calvin nods as he peers over her shoulder. Sam cocks an eyebrow. The couple clambers into the truck. Sam glowers, shuts the door and stomps to the driver's side.

INT. TOW TRUCK - DAY

Sam heaves himself behind the wheel, a saccharine smile plastered to his face, and starts the engine.

SAM  
Okay, folks. I'll try to make this  
nice and simple for you.

Sam revs the engine, grinds the gears -- smirks as the couple cringes -- and pulls forward down the highway.

SAM (CONT'D)  
I hate to break the news to you,  
but you're dead.

CALVIN  
WHAT?!

Jessie's jaw drops and she scribbles hard enough to rip the paper.

SAM  
Yep. I know it's hard to accept,  
but it's the truth. You and the  
missus died of dehydration back  
there. Running out of gas was the  
least of your worries. Haven't you  
ever heard, don't go into the  
desert without water?

Sam grinds the gears.

SAM (CONT'D)

Well, there's nothin' for it now.  
When we get to the service station,  
I'll show you where you can check  
in and move on to the Underworld  
Processing Center. We'll get you  
back in line for your next life.

CALVIN

You're a real piece of work, you  
know that?

Jessie continues to scribble and glare.

SAM

What is that you keep writing?

JESSIE

(smiles for the first  
time)  
Oh, you'll get to see it all in my  
report.

SAM

Report?

JESSIE

Yes, Sam.  
(grin widens)  
My report to the Underworld  
Processing Center.

SAM

Huh? Who are you two?

CALVIN

Ever heard of mystery shoppers?

Sam gawks.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Well, that's kinda what we are. You  
kept us waiting on the roadside for  
ten years, Sam. Ten years!

SAM

But, I mean--

JESSIE  
(reads from notepad)  
Your approach to ushering us into  
the afterlife was sloppy,  
insensitive and rushed.

Jessie crams the notepad into her purse.

JESSIE (CONT'D)  
We've received a slew of complaints  
about you and it's about time you  
were relieved of your duty!

SAM  
But, I was-

CALVIN  
There's nothin' for it now. Just  
pull into the service station and  
hand over your keys. Report to your  
supervisor for debriefing.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

INSERT - DRIVER'S SIDE WINDOW AND DOOR

WE SEE Sam's devastated profile through the open window. The  
company logo on the driver's door says:

"Sweet Bye-n-Bye Towing

Your Soul Solution from Point A to Point B".

BACK TO ROAD

The tow truck drives away, down the lone desert highway.

FADE OUT:

THE END