

Override

Paul C. Semenchuk

(This took place in Europe.) This is our umpteenth work trip from Monte Carlo to Germany (or Switzerland, or Holland, or all three). Betty and I started before sunrise. Drove the final ten miles of France to the Italian border. Played peek-a-boo with the rising Mediterranean sun through the 138 coastal tunnels all the way to Genoa.

Now we are turning north toward the flat and monotonous farmlands of North-Central Italy. Every two hours we stop to stretch our legs and take turns at the wheel. Even so, by early afternoon, our eyelids get heavy. Multiple cups of cappuccino don't seem to help. But, we have to keep clocking those continental kilometers.

Well into Switzerland, nearing Lucerne, I'm behind the wheel. The autobahn follows the snaking shoreline of a deep, dark-blue lake. We are in the left lane, next to the metal divider. Even this scenic stretch doesn't keep me alert. I do become alert when the steering wheel moves gently to the right, averting an unwanted encounter with the rigid rail. Did the wheel really move, overriding my lack of attention and action? Or was my tired mind playing tricks on me? I drive on. Betty is dozing, so I don't say anything to her.

But, fifteen or twenty minutes later, it happens again! It's not my imagination! Something or somebody moved the steering wheel to the right, on a concave curve, when I was beginning to doze.

That was enough for me. What's that expression? "Three strikes and you're out." I'm not about to tempt the Lord. So, I try to tell Betty what happened and I pull over. She drives and I close my eyes (but not my mind) in the passenger seat. On the outskirts of Basel we cross over into Germany. I'm still reliving how the steering wheel was maneuvered without my participation. Not once, but twice. Strange. But a nice kind of strange.