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Joe Lewis

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Spin Control

The fog hugged in close, enveloping, fitting tightly like a glove. Voices had a peculiar dead sound, as if the words themselves were afraid to be heard. It was a land of no echoes, of present, past, and future all rolled into one. The city fell into coma, preserved by the permeating fog.

His footsteps scraped softly down the sidewalk, leaving no marks and telling no lies. Normally he would be jackknife alert, especially at this late hour, but tonight it was useless; he was too tired, the streets too quiet for anything to happen.

Jack turned the corner and put the night club behind him, leaving smoke and bad vibes tangled together in a snarling mass. The smell of her perfume was close as the fog, and the taste of her skin was fresh on his lips. He could close his eyes and imagine her walking next to him, lazily leaning into the crook of his arm, her blood racing through, giving purpose to her heart. He damned himself again for letting go.

Another corner twisted upon itself; his car crouched there, waiting for him. Predator black with silver detailing, it sang a song of unrestrained glee when set loose upon the open road. Beads of condensation mottled its hind quarters and back, quivering and tensing with anticipation. He gave reality to those machinated dreams as he closed the door behind him, settling into the deep abscess of a bucket seat. Inside his own private time capsule, shut out from the stagnation and clinging dampness, he breathed.

A shiver through him set the engine to sputtering, growling, then humming; mad amber light filled the capsule as he pulled away from the scene. Warm life flowed; time slipped on to its next victim. The engine knew no direction, only hunger. Symbiosis complete: driver became guide, machine became impulse. Sealed within, he could divide and mumble; he could argue and hurt and bleed at high speed, where no one could find out.

Chicago dissolved into the mist in his rear-view mirror; clouds shut down around the towers like medieval city gates. The highway muttered through his tires and into his ears, chanting "last call" over and over. Feeding and rolling, the tires ate pavement, putting distance between him and this night.

His friends were still back there, abandoned to themselves in the slippery light of the bar, talking trash and dancing worse. It was so easy to get lost in there, so easy to lose track of his name and memories, even easier to hook up with an eager Jane Doe. But though the body might be warm and willing, the face was an icy mask of indifference.

He slammed an angry hand against the steering wheel, choked back the rage, hit the gas hard instead. The speedometer jumped as if kicked; his perception faded into a blur as lights strung out into phosphorescent streamers lining the tollway. Open road calmed the madness; hands clenched hard into the wheel relaxed and melted; he bled into memory.

Her hands had been warm and sweaty, fresh off the dance floor complete with high-cheek flush. Her mask of make-up was overdone, but

didn't crack when she smiled. The drink rolled down his throat, cooling and burning, joining the others in his stomach as proof of cowardice. No names were exchanged. He took her arm and led her out onto the floor, just as a grinding beat seeped into the stale rhythm. A new song appeared like liquid steel, burning bright and slow and guttural. Their legs locked as bodies rolled together, simulated horizontal while still vertical. Sweat poured down the short hairs on his neck as silence crashed in upon his ringing ears. The lights went down; music began to play soft and slow. The marionettes around them hung slack on their strings and swayed gently in time.

His hands reached around and found purchase in the small of her back. She encircled his sweaty neck with her arms, and he felt himself being drawn into her. Her dreamy eyes closed; he bent close and kissed her. His head was filled with a comfortable white noise, numbing the hunger and dulling the screams. Her lips opened to his; her arms tightened around him. He slid down her jaw to her neck, the smell of her perfume strong in his nostrils, her pulse strong and heavy against his lips. He stayed there for a while, listening to her sighs, swimming in the raw current of her heartbeat.

A sympathetic rhythm blended with the song, scratchbeat and samples in double-time. He pulled back and felt the static fade from his head; she wasn't who he needed her to be. The walls tilted, pulled back, returning the world to its normal size. He looked around for a moment, as if lost, and found no familiar faces. Not even hers. She was a smiling stranger to him, a nagging facsimile of a woman he didn't know anymore. The dance floor fragmented, spun away like smoke.

In his solitary comet he laughed blindly, bitterly. He remembered promising the moon to that other girl, and now every time he saw that viscous orb, he was reminded. That worn memory was closer to him than the flesh he had held in his arms on the spinning dance floor. But that flesh, curved and warm, was breathing and moving; his memories were only pictures and frozen sounds. And that moon was as far from him as God, distant through vacuum.

There was a time when the afterimage of her face was burned into his retinas, a photographic negative that blackmailed him as he tried to sleep, an indelible tattoo of fluorescence on the back of his eyes. He used to look up into cloudless skies and spell her name in the pinhole patterns of the stars. Her voice was once a mad obsession of music to his ears, a drug that drilled holes in his world. But all those romantic images had faded, given way to a parade of nameless voices in bars, washed colorless by neon vapor.

The wheel spun under his hands as the road writhed and slithered. He loosened his grip, so that his fingers barely brushed the knobby wheel. The car, with a life of its own, bulled and muscled through the turn; he felt like a spectator, detached from the rage and design of the engine. He sunk lower into the seat., hiding his eyes from the bright beams behind him. The mirror betrayed him, and he stared into the blinding glare, hypnotized.

She was his addiction. For three years he'd seen her only in dreams and half-believed double-takes. She was an elusive grail, and he'd given up the chase, trying to convince himself that love was a fallacy of attraction; need

and euphoria cycled around the lie that she could mean more than another. But she was light and religion, and all things blurred and diminished next to her. She was perfect, if only because he had lost her and declared that no one was her equal. Not even the shining face tonight had persuaded him, even though he had let go and drifted for that short dance. He desperately rebelled at the illogic, cutting deep and asking questions he knew would find no answers.

He snapped back, shook free. Squinting at the painful intrusion of the hi-beams, he reached up and flicked the mirror to the darker tint; the light reflected deeper into the glass, but wasn't as harsh. The chirping of the unit on his dash forced him to slow down; the engine moaned audibly at the tug on its leash. Candy-colored lights erupted off to his left as Racer X was caught and pulled over. He kept his attention forward, not watching the show, instead staring into the twin jets of blue fire the headlights had left in his vision.

Tired metaphors drifted through his mind, dissolving and re-forming. His head was spinning, a twisted rope-braid of circumstance and raw-throated screams. He gave up why and how, shut down his mind and let impulse guide him. The past forsaken, he let his thoughts wander to the near future. Tomorrow morning, reeking of old sunshine, he would close his sleepy eyes and backslide: dreaming of her sidelong glances and the way soft smiles wept across her lips. Sleep and dreams were all he craved, somewhere in there he would find respite.

His vision bored through the fabric of reality and was blinded by the light that lay behind. He saw only flashbulb etchings, edged in dark highway periphery. His eyes closed upon nothing, leaving only the flow and hum of the engine. His mind drifted away, and backsliding into yesterdays, he dreamed the miles home.