

**The motorcycle...** by turbohawk, May 28<sup>th</sup>, '01

A metallic shriek came on cool winds, evil in its intensity and unrelenting as it climbed into the upper registers. It was a war cry filling the night, and it made neighborhood dogs reply on brassy lungs as they challenged the unseen thing that frightened them. It started as a low, throaty buzz and climbed amid the torturous sounds of a four cylinder sequence repeating more than twelve thousand times a minute. In the comfort of nighttime dwellings, people stirred at the noise, wondering what could be so fierce, so lethal sounding. The song rose and fell, and then died to a whisper of what it had just been. Gravity threatened to reclaim lost territory and a boot came down solid against the still-warm asphalt below. A motorcycle, threading through the ether of the night, going places for no other reason but to go, now sitting motionless under the glower of a single, red light. There was no one else around.

The traffic lights facing other directions fell away from reds to greens and the rider, a speed-hungry reprobate, grew impatient. He stung the throttle, taunting the engine and edging up hard against the white line. The light held its ground, and the driver retaliated by crossing the intersection on one wheel and then taking three gears to redline. There was no prey out tonight.

The driver came to another red light, this one fronting a fork in the road. Which way? Two ways of nothing, perhaps. But maybe...

The driver ran this light as well, and he chose the path to the left. This one led behind the pastures, back into places where light became scarce and nature's green growth leaned into the roadway. There had been many victories here before, many wins over lesser foes. As he plied the roadway he checked his watch and frowned. It was late now, well past the time when most opponents would have left. But he continued onward as if driven by an inexorable force, an urging of fate that told him he must still go to this place. He rounded a slow bend in the narrow road and came to a straightaway, the place where his victories had made him an icon.

Nothing.

He slowed the **bike** without clutching, allowed the motor to complain before shifting down. Again the boot came down to steady. The driver sat motionless for a moment and marveled at the intensity of the darkness. It seemed to attack the illumination coming from his headlights, combating their illumination for dominance on an atomic level. He flicked his high beams on and watched as the shadows fell back across the edges of the road. Someone observing the rider would have seen his shoulders rise and then fall in a sigh. He blipped his motor in

disappointment and slipped the transmission into gear, preparing to leave.

Lights. Coming from out of the darkness, not there only moments ago.

He paused. At the far-off end of the straightaway, he could see what appeared to be parking lights. Nothing more, just two dim orbs of yellow reaching out to him from across the distance. The rider hesitated. A challenger? Someone boldly exposing themselves as an extension of invitation? He chewed on indecision before deciding to go to them. He would just drive by, pass whatever was there in order to gauge its potential. He dimmed his lights and slowly released the clutch. A little over a minute later he came close enough to the car to make out its details.

It was consuming in its blackness, darker even than the night around it; only the reflections off of its sides allowed him to discern its dimensions. It was not familiar to him, but he could tell it was from another time. Squares and angles dominated its surface, and the whole of it was blocky, both in profile and from end to end. He allowed his **bike** to continue on by it, and noted that he could not see the driver though the darkened windows.

It was only when he turned around that he came to a realization: the car was sitting squarely in the right hand lane. His pulse quickened and his breathing became shallow.

Was this car aligned to race? His bully nature told him that beating a car would be easy, but something deep within him sounded an alarm, told him that he should fear this silent black car. The car's headlights came on as he neared, and he was surprised when it heated its tires in a short, curt burnout. Tire smoke curled up from underneath it and became incandescent in the headlights of his motorcycle. His heart was racing now. For such a quiet car it had spin its tires effortlessly.

He engaged his clutch and eased the **bike** in next to the car. He turned his head, seeking some sort of contact with the driver, wanting to know how they would initiate, but the deep black of the windows revealed nothing to him. He was still pondering how the race would be initiated when the car's engine began straining against its brakes and an otherworldly whistling sound began

coming out from under its hood. He gave it a mute look as oddly sweet-smelling exhaust fumes fed into his nose, not knowing what the sound was but realizing that the car was allowing HIM to start the race. It was madness, insanity, that a car would allow a motorcycle to start a race. The motorcycle could humble cars with ease, even when he gave them a head start; but this car was suggesting something else. It was suggesting it could seed him the advantage and still win.

With a nod of his head the cyclist prepared himself. There would be no mercy for this impetuous car, no letting off at the three quarter mark. He goosed his throttle several times, signaling to the car that he was ready. In response, the black car's engine strained even harder, and the sound coming from under the hood rose in intensity until it sounded like a hundred hissing tigers.

The cyclist brought the motorcycle's engine up to speed, lifted it a little more and then steeled himself. Point of no return. A flick of the wrist released the clutch and allowed the full might of the engine to lunge through the driveline. The back tire protested under strain while the front tire threatened to lift off into the heavens. The black car fell away.

The first-second shift came quickly, and the **bike** wagged its tail as the driveline sorted out. The cyclist glanced into his side mirror, looking for the car's headlights. There was nothing. As the engine pushed to the top of second gear, the cyclist thought he could hear something, a high-pitched whistling from somewhere over his right shoulder. Third gear came only a little slower than second had, and the **bike** was now fully locked in. The cyclist leaned down low over the handlebars as he sought to push the throttle past its stop. No mercy. The driver turned his head to check the mirror again and was stunned to see the fender of the car coming into view around his arm. He swung his head fully over, and his heart sank as the fender gained another four feet. It was impossible; no car could gain on a motorcycle like that.

The car pulled ahead by three quarters of its length before the motorcycle was halfway through third gear, and had expanded the lead by the time the motorcycle found fourth. The road ahead narrowed into a pencil-width of asphalt, trees and shrubs racing by in a blur. The car added another three feet before the motorcycle let off in disbelief. The car had come from behind to defeat him, had given him the advantage and had still won.

He slowed to saner speeds and watched as the car made a U-turn further up the road. As they passed, the cyclist gawked at the car as if it was from another planet. How could something so unassuming be so fast? How could a car beat a motorcycle? He contemplated going back for another run, but understood on another level that the results would likely be the same and continued onward. As he reached the bend in the road, the motorcyclist saw the car turn around again. It was slipping back into the place it had been when he had first arrived, back into the ready position. Its headlights extinguished, leaving only the parking lights illuminated. The motorcyclist rounded the bend, watching the golden lights in his mirrors fade away into the rustling shadows of vegetation back-lighted by the half-moon sky. He would not go back. He felt something in his heart that he refused to call fear.

Down the road and around the bend, the black car waited to see if the motorcycle would return. Two minutes later the parking lights phased into darkness and the engine cut off. The faint sounds of a radio carried through closed windows, accompanied by the subtle ticking sounds of cooling metal. There the car sat.

Motionless.

Waiting.