

The Sun is Gone/But I Have a Light

Our feet dangle over the side of the foot high ledge; the heels of our shoes hang slack and bounce with a nervous energy. Below us sit seven floors of empty parking spaces. There's no attendant; it's open to our intrusion as always. There are taller buildings atop which to begin our night, but we prefer this view. It's high enough for the ideal detached perspective, but we can still make out the details of our abandoned city. Crumbling buildings, deserted streets and alleys, the few haphazardly lit streetlights that create more shadow than light. Evidently during the day it is not as barren as at eleven PM: the office drones fill useable buildings, but at five o'clock they flee as though a plane just flew into the highest tower. Decades before, oil money pushed irresponsibly rapid growth, and now the remnants serve as an historic testament to reckless excess.

I glimpse the orange glow of a joint out of the corner of my eye and he passes it to me. I inhale slowly, and the building rises by a few floors while the ground seems to come closer. After several minutes we watch the glowing ember descend and then disappear before we get up. With an enviable brutish grace, he throws his board to the surface asphalt of the roof and is gliding across the concrete before I'm even fully standing.

I push off and ride slowly, leaning side to side, enjoying the crisp breeze in my face as he frantically races from ledge to ledge. He passes me in a rush from behind, his speed increasing as he nears the twelve inches of brick border at the edge of the roof. Just before his board hits the wall, he leaps off of it and lands on the ledge. Inertia pushes him forward, he peers into the street as if apologizing. Once he's back on his board, he speeds up again, heading toward the

first of the ramps that connect one level to another. I follow at a cautioned pace, unintentionally gaining speed as the decline steepens. I try to keep my balance, but I've never made it all the way down without stopping or slowing down. I don't expect to succeed, so the sudden revelation of the levelling ground distracts me from turning and I strike the wall. Laughter echoes toward me, but my eyes are too blurred to see how far he is. I pick up speed again, pushing off faster, harder than before, and reach the next ramp. I make it again and remember this time to lean to the right once I make it down. The sound of his wheels grows louder as six floors later I've nearly caught up. The last ramp comes and we're even, exiting into the street together.

We coast through the cracked streets carelessly, ignoring the suggestions of the stoplights, but the hills take as much out of me as they always do. I can barely feel my legs and my heart is drowning out the echoes of our wheels bouncing off of the tall buildings. I look up and see the monument, a towering and enigmatic beacon, silhouetted against the grey sky. I try to psyche myself up, but I know I can't make the last hill. I decide to give up, but notice he's cut through the train depot parking lot rather than skating up the incline to the bridge. He holds the fence up for me to crawl under, and we drop down to the gravel-lined railroad tracks. "I need a few more spikes for a project I'm working on," he says. I suspect this spontaneous exposition is masking a rare burst of benevolence upon observing my exhaustion, and I am silently appreciative. Normally the trains are a welcome rare sign of life, but tonight is quiet, calm. We gather a few of the straighter spikes scattered about, and pry a few loose ones from the tracks. We climb back up on the opposite side and use the rail of the rusted, rickety stairs to reach the surface.

The broken circle of curved benches are covered in a growing amount of graffiti which illustrates that this place isn't as secret as it feels, but we remain stubbornly oblivious. Ambling toward the center of the circle, neither of us wants to hurry, to concede our impatience, but this ritual is as implicitly significant as it is absurd. This is our communion.

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After the formalities, he's off first again, disappearing into the darkness of shadows provided by the trees lining the incline to the street. For several blocks we race between warehouses, abandoned storefronts, and chain link and razor wire fences protecting apparent vacancies. We stop below a flashing neon sign. We trade stories of shows we've seen and wonder if the Sex Pistols really played there the year we were born. The ballroom is snuggled up to a stretch of highway that provides a literal concrete border conveniently placed over an imaginary one. There are even fewer lights on the other side as we contemplate that great, dark north and wonder if it can possibly be as bad as we've been warned. We ride parallel to the border for a few blocks, watching vigilantly out of the corner of our eyes for shadows, but ours are the only ones that move.

Again, my exhaustion coincides with another necessary distraction and we stop. The gas station attendant doesn't like us, but that's part of the fun; it's the most comfortable relationship for all parties involved. Every night we try and we fail, but tonight he doesn't card us. Dumbfounded, we pay and fill our backpacks quickly before he can come to his senses. Instead he addresses my companion, "I always liked your tattoo man...I actually thought of you

when I heard the news.” We haven't heard any “news,” we've been asleep all day and typically have little use for the radio. He says hates to be the one to tell us.

In the parking lot, my companion smokes. I wait for him to give an indication of what to do next, and hope my silence is taken as comforting, not further abandonment. His heart is broken, and I don't have any glue. He finishes his cigarette and hops on his board, moving so fast I can only hope to keep sight of him. At the crest of a hill he has slowed. I almost catch up and can see our new destination at the bottom. As I near, he gently edges over the summit. I pass him, speeding down the long incline toward the river and then drag my foot to stop just before the bridge. I don't hear his wheels behind me.

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The chain-link has been repaired again, so I have to squeeze underneath and gouge my side on a stray piece. The crumbling concrete does its best to obscure the most treacherous flaws until it's almost too late; tiny pieces splash into the water below when I stumble. The cracks are getting bigger; they're holes now. I wonder how long until the same people fixing the fence realize that the imminent danger outweighs the historical significance.

Halfway across the bridge is a manhole leading to an iron ladder secured just below the surface. More graffiti here as well; my illusory solitude is crumbling along with the bridge. Tonight, however, I yell down. There's no answer and the façade remains. At the bottom of the ladder, I stretch my foot and feel nothing, only emptiness between my foot and the river bed below. One of the wood planks has fallen, visible in the muck far below. I reach toward the next one and stand, spread across the chasm, staring. The low water creeps by through the sludge,

muted and menacing. As I walk carefully toward the edge, I hear the distant whistle. Though I want to rest, I have another priority. The words are surrounded by fresh spray-paint, but still visible. I know she wrote it: those are her initials, the same as mine. She had to know I'd see it, but was it intentional? Endless scrutiny has done nothing to illuminate the ambiguity.

I cross more of the loosely secured beams and settle in to place on the arched concrete. Taking a drink, I gaze out at the sparse water as it struggles to flow, reflecting scattered lights along the bank, and I listen. The steady rhythm of the wheels is barely audible, but along with the intermittent horn, it's growing. Soon, it will be everything.