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Mirrors

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“Where are we going?”

“Anywhere.”

The words ring softly in my ears, echoing faintly before being drowned out by the distant whistle of a midnight train. The pallid moonlight casts a reflection upon the glass of a face I have yet to know. In the feeble light I cannot discern whether the tears within the image are merely rain upon the window or something more. I choke back the bitter thoughts, in some absurd fear that memories are lost through the tears that we shed.

Freedom is suffocating. Like an asylum of my own making, sterile and untarnished by the grit of life’s kiss. It buries me in excess, and leaves nothing but questions in its wake. Questions about who to be….what to do. I see a child who cannot decide, and so he goes to bed hungry for the night. I am so hungry.

In a moment of decision, I seize my only salvation. A small piece of metal, no more than a few inches long, sits cold and lifeless in my hand. With it I take control, and kindle within myself a passion I have scarcely felt before.

A stab,
A twist,
And fire ignites within my veins.

It is neither the first, nor the last time that I would speed through the still night with no destination in sight. The midnight roads are liberating, and I am only mildly disappointed that the torrential rain prevents me from wrapping myself in the cool night air. I pass streetlamps that shine with a stale yellow glow, and seem to radiate brighter with each passing pole. They are as good a measurement of distance as any, truthfully. I seek to put as much of it between myself and home. If only for the moment. And so the dim afterglow of the lights fades from my mirror, as I escape the city and drive into the night in a desperate search for anywhere, one last time.
The slick roads wind deep within the forest, and seem as though they may never end. Tonight I cannot stomach music. The world around me remains silent, and I am left with only the guttural murmurs of the engine to accompany me. Wiping blades keep a vigorous rhythm, like a heartbeat. I stare up at the towering pines as they carve the skyline into a celestial pathway, as much a reflection of my route as the misty road beneath.

Eventually I emerge from the trees and meet the night sky stretched out across the burnt forest remains. The land, once thick with life, lays black with ash. A small road that at one time served as a trailhead is where I come to rest. I twist the key and the car quickly winds down, as if drifting suddenly off to sleep. My lights extinguished, the night creeps in.

But I am restless, and my body longs to feel again. I rub the encroaching sleep from my eyes and pull my body from the car into the icy mountain rain. It is cold, and runs in droplets down the back of my neck. I shiver. The hood of my car is where I come to rest. I can feel the engine purr gently beneath the still-warm metal. I sigh as the numbness begins to melt away.

I look upwards at the night sky, realizing that such a sky has been seen many times before, and will be until each and every star fades in its time. But for now, it is my sky. The world around me lays empty, and I am undisturbed. The burden of my future is balanced by the power of my past, and for a moment I can see clearly enough to know that the dawn is not far below the horizon. Everything, all of this, sinks deep within my soul and helps me to feel once more. Neither happy, nor sad, but something indescribably close to both. The feeling of old memories, being packed and stored away in an increasingly crowded attic. Relieved of my fear of forgetting, by the knowledge that I never could.

I do not think of tomorrow. The tomorrow after tonight when I will return to my house and leave my soaking clothes upon the floor before retreating to bed and falling into a catatonic sleep. In the morning, I will awake and attempt to fit everything I need into a container that can be transported, until the day it can return to its
proper location. I wish, for a moment, that “I love you” was small enough to fit in the navy blue, mid-sized sedan sitting alone in the driveway. Until I realize that such a small amount would never do. But until then, I am here. Gazing into serenity atop the rain slick vessel of my deliverance.

The next day I begin my journey westward to the coast. I cling to feelings of livelihood, and weave them into the sights and sounds of summer, to be retrieved years later. Driving across the desert I look out my window and I can see the violet mountains roll by like waves upon the sea. They flow into valleys that shimmer and crack with dry, summer heat, and stretch between horizons like long-forgotten pages. I snake my way along rivers of words, but these pages are hollow and empty, filled only with the transient etchings of a story not yet written.

I continue my race against the sunset, turning pages of the American landscape and mulling Steinbeck between the radio pop songs. My destination creeps ever closer, and with it the boundless future. I could, perhaps, imagine what life will be like, but such fantasies are never close to the truth. Instead, I turn my mind one last time to what I leave behind. Only now realizing that the people we used to be inevitably fade into the people we become. Leaving us with nothing but memories, shining like rearview mirrors into our past. As if to serve as an eternal reminder that the roads behind us are the first to rise and meet the morning sun.