

Switchbacks

The motorcycle whined around the corners—I gave it a little extra juice in the tunnels so the sound of the engine growled as I shot into the night. Both tires barely gripped the slick asphalt. The lone headlight searched out for the next corner, finding it just as the front wheel dipped hard into the apex. My knee cocked out to the side like a sail of a boat rising above the dark ocean. I was just a body perched above an engine. It's all I wanted to be. The light illuminated some trees straight ahead, the metal railing rounding the corner, the blue dividers in the road, shining like cat eyes. Every few turns there was a sign reminding me that the switchbacks would continue for miles and miles. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the faint red glow from the back of bike and turned my wrist hard to make that light disappear. I hated myself for slowing.

I wished she was here right now. Clutching my waist, her tender, pale fingers digging through the leather jacket and feeling the muscles of my stomach flex and release as the road gave way. We felt all the dips and rises together. She touched me differently on the bike than she did anywhere else. In a mall it is just a caress on my side. At dinner, the hand just patted mine and her eyes searched for something on the wall behind me.

She grabs me on the bike with all her flaws. She grabs me with a pain that reminds me who I am and where we are. Her nose always buried in my shoulder blade. I can feel when she tilts her head to watch the cars or else signposts fall behind—the world flying by like it couldn't keep up.

A spattering of rain moves down the mountain with me. No more than a light shower, it lessens the further down I go. My breath, hot on my mask, fogged up my visor and I flicked it up to see the road. Lights in the distance. Some no-name, faceless driver making the way up mountain. Only those two lights in the distance.

I slowed and massaged a rib, I'd been leaning over far too long. Her face felt so unfamiliar now, as if she could retreat from him there too. I cocked my knee out to the right this time. Lifting off the accelerator and gliding through the corner. I started out wide and cut the corner hard so to get back on the accelerator as soon as I could. I felt the rumble and strain in between my legs.

The first time she saw it she nearly fell over. I told her eight o'clock and to wear closed toed shoes. I saw her face through the screen door before she opened it—mouth open wide. I

held out the extra helmet. It took some getting used to at first. She didn't know how to hold on. It was a first date, so I understood not wanted to hold on the whole way. I showed her the side grips, how to fasten the helmet, how to keep your core flexed to maximize your balance, all the basics. I showed her how to enjoy the heart pounding in the throat and love the fire that spread to the tips of your fingers and the end of your toes. She learned fast.

I could still see the lights in the distance. The car was so slow. It moved around the corners like a cruise ship. That's what she really liked, how fast we could turn on the bike compared to all else. She liked the way it could move through all the cars at a red light. After a long ride she'd curl into my back and rest, but when we'd pull up to a red light I'd jump it. She'd scream at first then laugh and slap my back a little. She loved the speed. Came to love it more than me.

I kept the bike whining down the switchbacks, trying to go faster each corner. The rain had all but gone and the air was crisp and clear and the night didn't look like it was going to give away anytime soon. Secretly, I hoped it would stay night forever and the only sense of clarity came from my lone headlight. I came around a corner and saw the headlights of car and all I could think of rose petals in the warm bathwater and that time you asked why we always wave at the other people on motorcycles. I didn't have an answer then and I still don't now. My wrist hurt but I didn't lift as I kept staring into the two lights.