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## A Little Piece of Noir

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## A Little Slice of Noir

I'm flying down the road so fast you'd think I was a goddamn comet. Somehow I've lost my way and ended up going south on Denman, a frigid ball of ice moving so fast I vaporize the water droplets that're falling around me. You can call me Rick, but you should keep that ice in mind: it'll give you a good idea of what to expect out of me.

A lot of people will tell you that I'm a hard man to get along with and I guess they're right. I've never really felt comfortable getting close to other people (my ex-wife can attest to that), but I figure that I'm just doing what needs to be done. The way I see it, it's not good for someone in my line of work to get too close to anyone; it just ends in a lot of trouble for everyone else and one of those headaches that floor me for about two days. I spend my days and nights working behind a shield so that everyone else can pretend that the city they live in is a safe place for their kids to grow up. But I've seen the ugly truth: any place grotesque enough to spawn the kinds of things that I've witnessed is officially in need of saving from itself.

If that last line sounds more poetic than the rest of what I have to tell you, you shouldn't get the wrong impression. I came up with that one during a long and boring shift and I've been practicing it ever since. I made the mistake of telling it to my partner once. He just shook his head and told me that that attitude would get me killed eventually. I laughed it off and told him that I didn't really mean it, but sometimes I wonder if he's right.

This sobering thought snaps me back into the present, and I have to swerve at the last minute to avoid some kid on a bike. Normally I'm pretty fair behind the wheel, but the slick pavement refuses me purchase. I spin across the road in a figure eight pattern, just like a figure skater, one that weighs two thousand pounds, has four feet, and who's still trying to master the basics of staying upright. My right wheels slam into the opposite curb with a thump, and the car and I both sigh in relief when we realize that the carousel has stopped. My exhalation ceases after a few seconds, but the car's continues: a busted tire.

I check the glove compartment in the futile hope that there's a forgotten patch in there, buried under old napkins and outdated maps. I mutter my displeasure once I realize that I'll have to brave the downpour to actually change the tire.

Just as I pop my trunk and get ready to make a dash for the jack and the spare, my senses are assaulted by the heavens. Accompanying a peal of thunder like an artillery barrage is a single bolt of

lightning which, like a razor to an artery, looses a new torrent upon the earth. All I can do is sigh and secure my hat and jacket as I dash for the replacement tire.

Forced to kneel in the roadside mud as I am, my mind begins to wander. As I see a piece of trash carried off into a storm drain by at least three inches of water I'm reminded of the biblical story of Noah. At the end of the story, that son of a bitch priest I'm forced to listen to every Sunday always emphasizes the rainbow and God's promise not to drown every last one of us again. There aren't any rainbows to be seen right now.

I finish the swap and jump back into the car just as the frigid water is starting to seep through my coat. If my ex were here she'd yell at me for getting the upholstery wet. It's a good thing she's not here. I've got enough to worry about right now without having to endure shrill lectures and jabs to the ribs to ensure my rapt attention. I'm in the biggest hurry of my entire life and I have the misfortune of a flat. Remembering the lesson of earlier, I try not to dive too deep into my own thoughts and stay focused on the road ahead of me. The intensity of the rain has only increased since that initial incision, with several others after it adding to the outpouring of the sky.

Reminding myself that I do not have the time to take another shot at the gold medal just now, I slow down and focus on what is ahead of me. I've been trying to avoid thinking about it for a while now, but I'm forced to confront it as I turn onto Beech Street: I need to find my daughter.

I got the call nearly half an hour ago, telling me that my daughter was in some van somewhere in the park. I'm not sure who called, and he didn't identify himself, but I have a pretty good idea of where he can be found. I've heard that a guy like him hangs out near the soccer fields, so that's where I'm headed first. I'm trying my damndest to focus on the road, but I can't help but picture Annie sitting in a puddle, huddled in the back of some filthy van. Just that is enough to set me off. When I get angry I don't run hot like most other people; I become a ball of ice. Remember the comet? I'm there again.

If this bastard had called Annie's mother, he might have gotten away with it. She would have tried to meet his demands, regardless of how outrageous they might have been. But he made the mistake of calling me instead of her. As I near ground zero I imagine the impact I'm going to have on him. I plan on making the comet that killed the dinosaurs look miniscule in comparison. I estimate a crater roughly the size of Rhode Island will form where his face used to be.

As I near the fields I spot a van that matches my mental image. Caring more for my daughter's immediate safety than if I've spooked him or not, I pull into the adjoining parking space with a screech

and vault out of the car door before the engine even has a chance to shut off completely. Filled with righteous purpose, I stride to the driver's window and pound. It rolls down to reveal a man behind its tint. He looks to be middle aged and energetic, not what I had envisioned at all. He smiles in a way that I can only describe as predatory and addresses me:

"Afternoon. Are you Annie's father?"

"Yes, I'm here to pick her up. I'm assuming my ex-wife already told you that Annie would be coming home with me after the game today?"

"Yes, yes, everything's okay. She explained that you had gotten someone else to watch the desk for you tonight. I don't know how you do it; I couldn't handle sitting behind the desk in some lobby all night." I just stare at him and grunt some vague answer as he turns back into the van and addresses what I can only make out as two shadowy figures through the tint. "C'mon, Annie. Your dad's here to get you." It's then that I see the sliding door move on its own, revealing the wonders that lay beyond it as if I were its Ali Baba. There, damp but warm, sits Annie. She looks to be enjoying herself as she watches a DVD with the coach's daughter. I decide that now is not the best time to assault the creep, so I get a handle on my rage and push it aside for the time being.

As she bounds out of the sliding door I realize that I've never been this happy or relieved to see anyone in my life before. All of my worst fears of fatherhood are put to rest like the apparitions that they are. Here is my daughter returned to me, safe and sound. I do my best to shield her from the rain with my own coat as we run back towards the car.

Once we're under way, she turns to me and asks, "What took you so long, daddy? The game was called as soon as the rain started."

"I'm sorry, sweetie, but I came as fast as I could. There was a little trouble with the tires, but I fixed it. So, tell me about the game. Who won?"

"We were down by two when they called it, so I guess that makes them the winners. Coach Brenner said that he felt bad about us getting cheated out of a game, so he said that he's taking us out for ice cream after the next game, no matter what."

I'm only vaguely aware that she keeps talking after admitting the loss. My brain collects all that she says and orders it for easy processing later, but my heart stops at 'winners.' The rotten scum that had the gall to call themselves my little Annie's opponents will regret what they did today. I'll hit them so hard that they'll bruise up every time that it rains outside. They should start feeling the fear now,

because I am a goddamn force of nature. I am a ball of ice screaming towards them at millions of miles an hour...

*Zach Walters, '06*

