

Man In Hiding

by Foster Trecost

I suppose they'll tumble the events till every detail has been recalled. I got an hour for lunch, and I'd already extended it by half, that much is clear...but the rest?

The path to my desk took me past my boss's office, and he looked up as I glided by. I knew I'd been caught because he shouted, "One-fifty!" Then he asked if I'd seen the accident.

Accident? Had there been one?

I answered with my usual economy of words. If someone wants more, they must ask, and he did. "Tragic," is all I could add. It would've been too risky to say more. What happened was this: she'd been thrown clear out the car, and lay crumpled in the street, but no one looked at her. The car, that's where they looked. On fire, yes, whelmed with flames, but was it screaming? Was the *car* screaming? They wished it had been, but it wasn't the car. Trapped inside a small boy let loose the wails of someone being burned alive. And then they stopped. And there I stood on the corner, scoffing at my attackers. I could see them lurking, closing in, and I knew they'd try something, I expected it. With a few blinks, they were gone.

After work I walked toward the movies, but didn't make it. Fatigue forced me to rest, and I found a park bench; I was under attack, second time that day. This time they hid behind trees, crouched in bushes, an ambush. I sat still, and hid in a memory, the safest I could find: I was eleven and built a ramp, pedaled towards it and pressed my eyes into slits, hoped my aim would hold. I heard a thud, felt it, too, and then silence, beautiful silence, not just from sound, but from everything. Time stood still--in the air, I was a clean canvas, but when I hit ground, all the bad feelings flooded back in.

Beautiful silence. For years now I've searched it, and along the way, figured something out: since I couldn't control my emotions, I had to expel them. So that's what I did, but they haven't gone far. They lurk and wait, they're patient, and when the time's right, they pounce.

Back home my grandmother called, she raised me. She'd heard about the wreck, and it stoked her memory, upset her, and she called to upset me: "It wasn't your fault, you know that?"

She was talking about a different wreck. For my ninth birthday, I wanted a bike, a red one, but when my father wheeled in a *green* bike, I ran to my room, slammed the door. Moments later, I heard the trunk close, followed by two car doors; my parents had left to make the exchange.

I never saw them again. It wasn't their fault, and it wasn't the other driver who killed them. It was me. They found a red bike in the trunk.

"No one blames you..."

She wasn't my grandmother anymore, just some old lady who wanted to fight, but I didn't feel like fighting, so I asked: "What you doing this weekend?"

She became my grandmother again. "There's the football game on Sunday."

That's all she said, but it was enough: an ambush disguised as a lonely old lady using a football game to resurrect her husband. My emotions, they're getting really clever. It was too late to hide, this time they got the best of me. Sometimes I win, sometimes they win. It was so much easier on my bike. Time stood still. Now, it just slows down.

