

Third Person Omniscient

The Pass Less Traveled

Samantha Wells shoved open the glass double doors and took a long breath of evening air.

“If I have to listen to one more old fart lecture me about when to limit order and when to stop-loss, I’m gonna lose it.”

To say it felt good to be free of the cold gray brokerage firm that she worked in would be an understatement. She made her way to her favorite parking spot where her prized possession was waiting for her; her brother’s old Nissan 350z. Sam opened the door and got in, and without another glance at her workplace, she set off for her only destination before home.

With a throaty purr, her car pulled up to the final stoplight. Beyond this point, the street gave way to the mountain pass Sam had driven nearly every day for the last half-decade. It was dusk now, and as she waited for the light to change, her gaze wandered leftwards towards the setting sun. The burning orange skies that haloed it faded gradually into swaths of indigo, and the first few glimmers of starlight were just revealing themselves to the east.

“Come on..” She grumbled to herself, glaring at the steady red glow of the stoplight that currently held her back. Sam tapped her fingers on the wheel impatiently.

A distant rumble broke the evening silence. A low black car grew larger and more distinct in her rear-view mirror. Though she’d inherited her brother’s performance machine, Sam had never taken time to learn about a car’s workings. This was somehow different. Even she could tell that the approaching vehicle wasn’t your everyday retirement ride. She squinted and adjusted her mirror, attempting to get a view of whomever was inside, but the diminishing light of day obscured the driver’s identity.

It approached her from the right and steadily decelerated, not quite stopping side by side, but

instead coming to a comfortable halt a foot behind the line she'd chosen to stop at.

"I know there's no one out here, but why would he do that? Why not just pull up completely?" She was slightly annoyed now. Now that it was closer, she took a look at its front fascia to try and spot a manufacturer badge.

At the tip of its nose she spotted an emblem that she recognized, but couldn't place. It was a pair of crossed flags, one with a black and white checkerboard, the other with a gold symbol that looked like a fusion of a plus sign and a bow tie. As she thought to herself that surely she knew what make this car was, a memory brought itself to the surface of her mind.

She remembered sitting in the same car she was in now, though in the passenger position. Her brother sat next to her in the driver's seat, and they were both at a standstill in the LA gridlock they'd grown up with. They heard a rumble approaching from the other side of the highway, which was ever so tauntingly traffic free. An imposing red sports car howled along the expressway, entering and leaving their view in what seemed to Sam like mere seconds. Her jaw dropped, and she looked at her brother wide-eyed.

"What kind of car was that?" She asked him.

"Looked like a C5 Corvette. Corvettes are made by Chevy, and they can compete with some of the expensive italian cars in terms of power and handling at a fraction of the price. There's kind of a stereotype that only old people buy them, and only drive them really slowly, but..." He chuckled to himself. "As you can see, that's not always the case."

"They may be fast, but with all the work I've put into this baby..." He patted the dashboard affectionately. "I've beaten my fair share of Corvette lap times at the track."

A honk snapped her back into reality. The light had turned green a few seconds before the end

of her reminiscence, and she hastily threw the shift knob into first and drove off at a steady clip.

“Sorry!” Sam said as she looked behind her and gave a friendly wave towards the other car.

The corvette was now following her about ten feet back onto the same mountain road.

“Even after years of taking this route, I think I can count the number of other cars I’ve seen on it with one hand. What’s this guy doing here..?” She shook her head and pressed a little harder on the gas to create some distance between them. A smile crept onto her face as she felt the sensation of torque thrusting her forward. She heard the engine truly come alive with a shout of exploding gas and thrusting pistons.

Before she had a chance to get comfortable, she heard the bellow of the car behind her as it suddenly accelerated and started coming up from the left.

The pace of the world seemed to crawl to a stop. Without thinking or processing the moment, her body was already reacting. As they both advanced towards the first right turn of the pass, she upshifted and heard her rival do the same. They both slowed their approach in preparation to take the corner and accelerate out of it onto the straightaway.

With her position on the right side secure, Sam knew that she would be able to come out of the corner first. Both cars reached the apex of their turns, and both gas pedals hit the floor. Just as she predicted, she exited a few meters ahead of her rival. Sam looked to the road ahead of her with a smirk. “I know this road better than anyone. Maybe I can actually beat this guy.”

The two drivers continued their duel through the mountain pass. Sam found herself able to maintain her slight lead over the corvette driver, but the continuous demand for her complete attention was wearing on her. Every time she thought she’d lost him at the last corner, it was only a second or two until she’d see two ominous yellow headlights getting closer and brighter in her mirror.

The two vehicles carved their paths through the road, glimmering in the moonlight. The only noise for miles were the two rasping metallic howls that echoed each other like a chorus of lions.

Sam knew that they were nearing the last corner before the pass merged onto the freeway.

“Just need to hold out a little longer...”

The last turn wasn't far now. Her ankle was almost aching from how hard she was stepping on the pedal. She could almost make out the words on the distant sign denoting their imminent arrival at the interstate... She was only a hundred feet away from her braking zone... Now seventy... Forty...

Without warning, her foe appeared on her left side. They were side by side, seconds away the same final corner. Sam's heart sank as she realized that the race had just been decided.

He was able to get right next to me, and he's going to be on the inside of the turn. I just got out-maneuvered.

She grit her teeth and maintained her acceleration for a couple more seconds before finally applying the brakes as she turned in. The black corvette was already nearing the apex of the corner, and Sam knew he was getting ready to accelerate out. Finally seeing the back of her opponent's car for the first time, she noticed a bold white sticker showing from the rear window.

WILLOW SPRINGS

INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY

I guess that makes sense, she thought to herself as she put her foot to the floor on her way out of the last corner. The corvette's pair of glowing tail-lights ominously distanced themselves further and further away from Sam. Though the highway she was entering was empty, she no longer felt like pushing her concentration. She leaned back in her chair and let out a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding for what felt like the entire sprint.

“I shouldn’t feel bad...” She said to herself. “I don’t think that was such a terrible performance compared to someone who takes their car to a racetrack all the time.” She felt strange, an unfamiliar emotion was mixing its way into her usual post-driving elation. She was *hungry*. Hungry to improve her driving, hungry to one day beat her new rival. She looked back in the direction her foe had disappeared in. *I wonder who that driver was*, she thought to herself.

“Willow Springs... I’m gonna have to look that up when I get home.”

First Person Protagonist

I shoved open the glass double doors and took a long breath of evening air.

““If I have to listen to one more old fart lecture me about when to limit order and when to stop-loss, I’m gonna lose it,” I said to nobody in particular. Talking to yourself becomes kind of a habit when you usually hate everyone around you.

To say it felt good to be free of the cold gray brokerage firm that I worked in would be an understatement. I made my way to my favorite parking spot where my prized possession was waiting for me; my brother’s old Nissan 350z. I opened the door and got in, looking around at the car’s sparse interior. Without another glance at the workplace, I set off for my only destination before home.

With a throaty purr, my car pulled up to the final stoplight. Beyond this point, the street gave way to the mountain pass I’d driven nearly every day for the last half-decade. It was dusk now, and as I waited for the light to change, my gaze wandered leftwards towards the setting sun. The burning orange skies that haloed it faded gradually into swaths of indigo, and the first few glimmers of starlight were just revealing themselves to the east.

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I guess that makes sense, I thought to herself as I put my foot to the floor on my way out of the last corner. The corvette's pair of glowing tail-lights ominously grew further and further away from me, a duo of red ghosts taunting me in the moonlight. I relaxed in my seat and let out a breath I didn't realize I'd been holding for what felt like the entire sprint.

"I shouldn't feel bad..." I said to myself. "I don't think that was such a terrible performance compared to someone who takes their car to a racetrack all the time." I felt strange, an unfamiliar emotion was mixing its way into my usual post-drive elation. I was *hungry*. Hungry to improve my driving, hungry to one day beat my new rival. I looked back in the direction my foe had disappeared in. *I wonder who the driver was*, I thought to myself.

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First Person Antagonist

I was running late getting home, and I knew that there was a mountain pass nearby that would let me bypass most of the traffic before town. As I pulled up to the last stoplight before the pass, that was when I noticed it. It was just idling there, waiting for the light to change. To the untrained eye, it didn't look much different from your usual production Nissan 350z.

"But this just screams 'boy racer', doesn't it?" I said to myself.

The hints were there. Roll bars had been installed and were clearly visible through the rear window. The brakes definitely weren't stock, nor were the exhaust tips. I suspected a decent amount of engine work as well, but there was really no way to tell. Unless...

The light had turned green. Perfect. I gave a sharp honk, and the 350z jolted to life.

"Right towards the mountain pass. This guy knows his fun roads."

It wasn't long before the other driver started to really put their foot to the floor. The roar coming from the car only continued to confirm my suspicions.

"That's more than just a new set of exhaust tips for sure. What are you all about, huh? I haven't seen a 350z at the track in years... Let's see what you're really made of, shall we?" I said as I put my foot down. I was pressed back into my seat as my car rocketed forward.

"No one's really ever out here... And I'm in an especially good mood now, so let's make this a little more interesting." I shifted over to the left side and made like I was going to pass. In that moment, I finally got an unobstructed view of the driver inside.

"A girl? Oh wow! Not bad at all!" I wasn't sure what exactly I was referring to there, between her attractive physical appearance, her tastefully tuned car, or her rather impressive skills.

"But where the hell did you learn to drive like this?" I wondered out loud as my body reflexively started braking and turning in to the first corner. With her position on the inside of the bend, she was going to be able to maintain the lead for now. Her car was truly impressive, and it had clearly taken a lot of care and patience to get it modified to the point where overall balance wasn't offset by unnecessary power. "She loves that car with all of her being. I can see it in how she drives." It was inspirational to watch. She was clearly fearless and either had exceptional instincts or simply knew this road like it was painted into her mind. "Hell, probably both," I grunted. She wasn't making it very easy to keep up.

I was enthralled, enchanted to just be able to follow her and watch her in action. It was as though an invisible thread was tying us together as we weaved in, out and around the pass. She never failed to impress me with her intimate knowledge of the road. In one particularly tricky hairpin turn, I'm

damn sure she wasn't more than three inches from the inside guardrail. The lines she chose to follow were perfectly efficient, but endowed with a definite grace. Her braking and turn-in weren't jerky or rushed, but flowed perfectly from one action to the next. The way she settled into each bend and clipped every apex perfectly and positively exploded out of each corner was intoxicating to watch. "She's a monster." I said through a massive grin. "I wonder what the guys' faces would be like if they could see this."

We were quickly approaching the final corner, and I knew that our private little duel was coming to an end. As much as I'd have liked to stop and have a chat about her amazing car and driving, I was already late enough to dinner with my wife.

"I wish you all the luck in the world."

We were only a few dozen feet from the corner, and I faked an early turn in, as though I was planning on passing her from the inside. Just as I thought, with reflexes as sensitive as hers, she responded by shifting over in turn and blocking the line I'd implied I was going to take. "Sorry to disrespect you by not giving it my all, but it wouldn't have been any fun if this had happened from the get-go." Having fallen for my feint, I took the other side of the road and punched the gas. In only a few seconds, we were side by side, and in only a few more, she was braking in preparation to take the turn. I maintained my acceleration, and hit the brakes at a much later point in the corner than she had. I turned in suddenly, and took the inside line, gassing hard on the way out, eventually outpacing her.

"It's been fun, though." Now ahead of her and on the last straightaway, I kept my foot pressed down, rowing through the rest of the gears, gradually increasing the distance between us. "I'll definitely be driving this pass again."

