

Bryce McLaughlin

My Leap of No Return

A Tale by Hex

Chapter 1

“This Stretch of Desert Highway”

The smell of the hot, greasy, gas fumes that bake in the oil as it basks upon the tar-paved raceway drifts through the seams of my sleek – yet stifling – helmet, tempting my nostrils with their infectious smell. I look to Dru who is standing on the far side of his hollow speed demon. His beast rests silently by. A gap of no less than three feet lies between our competing death traps of adrenalin. Dru’s eyes shine with an intense fire that has never once ceased, nor failed, to produce a wild thrill of an adventure. I am sure his flame will not flicker in the current gust of excitement, the current whirl of adventure produced by our present.

With a nod of our heads, we acknowledge the competition that awaits us upon this sickening deserted stretch of desert, paved in the creation of an endless Nevada highway. Slowly – ever so cautiously – I place my hand, palm down, upon the blistering sun-scorched door of my ride, and with my left, reverently, I lift the sparkling silver handle that burns with life. The clasp clicks in a release of agreement. From the corner of my eye, I see Dru do the same.

The leather seat – for vinyl is too false a truth – is sticky as I settle upon it. My dark gloves fit perfectly upon my wavering hands. With a great sense of unity with my beast, the fingers of my tentative hand settle upon the gearshift. My left foot gently depresses the accelerator. My lion murmurs in acknowledgment as we accept the challenge that lies ahead. Left hand upon the 12 O’clock, my other fused to the gearshift knob – causing my entire being to tilt ever so slightly and produce the precarious image of a juvenile delinquent – I ready my stallion. I ready my steed.

Never have I felt such a sense of excitement. Never have I felt such a sense of control. Utter freedom lies within my grasp. Utter freedom is at my command. The road will never end. It is an endless expanse of possibilities. The open road is my Land of Opportunity. This stretch of desert highway is my Route 66. I will follow it to its end and the realization of my dreams. I will compete with my brother, my friend, until the sun sets over the City of Stars. The sickening smell of carbon monoxide turns to French perfume.

I shift my attention to the searing red light suspended by the tension of the moment. It would dance if there were a breeze. It would laugh if there were a touch of wind. It does not laugh. It does not dance. The wind does not breathe. Even restless she is caught in the timeless moments before an end.

With a confident sense of ability, I allow myself one last look at my sworn friend, my eternal competitor, my brotherly beloved foe. His eyes of fire never leave the road. He lights his path with passion. He burns his mark with charisma. Dru never falters before a daunting task. The light is still red.

A sigh escapes my rattling frame. The thought of Mary Day crosses my mind. If only she could see me now! as I saw her that day in Ms. Weckles' hall. If only she could see me now as I saw her that day deep within the damp of the dark of the fortress of black stone that is Founder's High. I imagine her to be waiting at the checkered finish, her eyes filled with tears of relief as I and my noble steed cross the black and white line. The blossom of my mind, I win this race for her. I win this race for Mary Day.

Dru and I are servants of the Inner Government and – though I cannot reliably, that is I must alter, relate my descriptions, for I *must* maintain the integrity of our nation's best kept secrets, I will do my best – are currently engaged in a test of two machines of a transportation-like design. Dru and I, each and every time, without fail receive the most dangerous, the most daring, the most adventurous assignments that cross our superiors' desks. So far as those not troubled by our perilous encounters are concerned, our current adventure, that is the race between Dru and me, is simply an unapproved – and seemingly inappropriate – distraction from the paroles of our everyday teenage lives. And so far as those directly involved are concerned, the distraction is simply a test of the friendship Dru and I share.

A true friend will never let me win; a true friend will always push me to my limits, exasperating my being until no will to go on is left within. Then – and only then – mercilessly throw me from the cliff that is the known and expect me to fly – and fly I will! – through the darkness of what is to be. A true friend will see no obstacles upon my horizon, no obstructions in the path that will be my meaning. A true friend will always be there to push me further than I have ever been pushed before. Dru and I race to fly. Dru will not let me fly.

Dru and I have always been evenly matched. As I recall this morning when, wind in my hair, I made my leap of no return – or perhaps I have yet to say! In the course of my day it will return – Dru landed but five seconds before the soles of my big, black, jumpsuit boots touched the soiled grounds of reality. Yet I managed to stand while he seemingly fell. A perfect balance within itself.

Our Fathers died when he and I both were young. Two wide-eyed boys, innocent, lost without a guide to lead and to be followed by them in the world that is truth between lies, honesty in deceit. Both men served the Land of Opportunity. Both men served in the flight of planes, the flight of freedom – a legacy I must not fulfill for I must not lose the glory in, the status to, which I hold my Father. Dru and I both sustain a certain amount of resentment for the fault life has graciously bestowed unto us. While we may not speak of it, it is a bond we share. It is an unbreakable link, though we wish it would not persevere. My Father would have liked Dru. My Mother too, that is, if she knew, if she could know of the tales I could tell, of the adventures I could share.

I once heard a wise young man – no older than I – describe death as the “unknown.” In his scientific and quite self-assured opinion, death is but an absolute, the final end, a complete disconnect from all that be life. He preached to those touched by the potency that is reason of the death that occurs when a carbon-based life form ceases to draw a breath. I remember now that as this once wise and haughty man related unto me his faulted philosophy by which he lived, he asked the rhetorical question, “Can this be it?” I must admit, it struck me a humbling thought, a thought long since seared upon my mind. What *if* we are simply here. What *if* we do not serve a greater purpose. What *is* the larger picture? *Where* are we headed? For this poor man, the answer was thus: “There are no answers.” I wanted to ask, “Then how, pray tell and with all due respect, did you, my dear man, just answer your very question?” Perhaps we can only conjure our best hypotheses. I believe death to be the beginning of a

higher form, a spiritual form, a form my Father possesses now as he looks down upon me. A form from which he watches as I grow and mature, eventually and inevitably accepting the position of the man I know he always knew I will be. Death is only a physical barrier. I share a bond with my Father as does Dru with his. There has been no disconnect. There is no absolute end.

The light has since turned yellow. Though I did not see so directly, I perceived its shift. The human being, though flawed in intellect – and furthermore, reason – is a perfect predator long since well adapted to detecting the movement of the pray, the shift of light as the hunted stalks, the change in color as the beast, soon to be felled, accepts its fate. My eyes snap to the horizon. Quietly, carefully, I ease off the brake that tames the beast. Gently, graciously – humbly! – I excite the accelerator. My lion roars! I have not the chance to turn back. Green.

My rattled frame – pulled by the explosive power of the flawed ingenuity of the endlessly pursuing human spirit – is thrown back against the delicate of the cushion of my seat as the color of freedom filters through the gold of the tint of my visor. My eyes are blinded by its release. My eyes are blinded by its glory. Ah, freedom, let it rein upon my unworthy head! Ah, freedom, let its bells still ring in the damp of the dark of the days of servitude yet to be served. Ah freedom. Freedom!

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I race with no heed to the speed with which I glide upon these boiling seas of oceans of oil in sands of desert. I feel no loss of the power of my steed. My beast will not be tamed! Run and let no chain restrain the power of sheer will that lies within! Flee from what can only be the cruel end of the race

for which a life is lived. A sixth sense tells me Dru is hot upon my left flank. I throw my steed into its final gear. In this split second, Dru has garnered the lead.

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Dru and I jockey – evenly matched, for always have we been so – for the perfect position of the other’s demise. Outright defiance to the bonds betwixt Dru and me, reverent denial to the respect owed to our Fathers, compels me to excite my beast to cast off its chains and reveal the unbeatable speed I knew lay within. Mile by mile, inch by inch, I creep to the side of my competitor’s steed. The roar of my Lion excites the scream of the panting Panther, second only to the King! in the court of nobility, in the castle of lies.

Intuition compels Dru and I to simultaneously address each other with the indifferent stare of the cool of the reflection of the visors of our brightly colored racing helmets donned upon our heads. With a nod each we acknowledge that now is the time to fly. Spread thy wings and soar to heights of pastel skies! My beast roars with agreement as Dru falls away. The checkered line approaches. I have not failed in my never ending duty as friend of indifference, the competitor of his demise – for I must seize the known upon which he stands and pull it from beneath his trembling legs. I display my victory, my vindication – for I have flown! I have soared to heights I knew not – before the piercing emerald green of fire that burns within my sworn foe. A flaunt uncalled for, I should not permit.

Dru is often silent. His words ring clean and clear when on occasion given. I have since dismounted my exhausted brute. She rests silently by. The heat that shimmers upon her melted frame is the last viable testimony to the life she eagerly lived. Her meaning she has met. Dru speaks. Dru rings clean and clear in the heat of a deserted, sun baked afternoon. His words cool the hot of the moment.

“You have won, Hex.” His eyes sparkle as he removes his dark, leather gloves. His steady left hand is free. “You have won, thank you.” No more do I expect. I turn to go. I turn to leave. “You will fall,

Hex. Soon, you too, will fall. Your wings cannot soar to such heights and last too until the end of time.”

I stop and turn and I say, “They need only last so long for the sun to set over the City of Stars.” Dru winks. That is all. We have justified our game. We have justified our present end. The victorious Lion and the beaten Panther shimmer silently beneath the rays of Midas beating down upon this afternoon. The ocean of tar, the sea of oil which swells below, smells of home as my boots stick to the soiled ground of a would-be reality.

“Dru, are you hungry?” I ask because I long for the taste of the grease and oil of the Barbarian’s food. Dru does not response. A female’s voice splits the stifling hot of an endless stretch of Nevada highway. The desert is always beautiful in the light of the afternoon.

Dru slowly fades as he walks, a distant silhouette against the central orb – raised high each morn in the hopes of the waking and lowered silently each eve in the realization of reality – of life, towards the horizon. A solitary figure bent against the whims of the world. The oil covered tar paved raceway slowly fades to the wet road upon which we travel. That central orb of life slowly fades behind the drizzle and haze just beyond my window. The stifling hot of the silent afternoon turns to the cold of a raining day. I sit upon the lie that is vinyl.

“We’re almost there, Stewart. Stewart?”

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End sample of Chapter 1