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## Halt and Hover

By Corey Rhoades

In California there's a time of day when time stops. Maybe it could happen anywhere, but in the Santa Monica Mountains it's consistent, predictable, expected. It's the moment right after sunset, when the glowing reds and yellows have dissipated, and the hues of the shifting sky halt and hover in place before dissolving to black. The palm trees are silhouettes—black ink fireworks, exploding on a dark blue canvas. The mountains lose their texture and dimension, simplified to nothing more than a shape, a cardboard cutout that could be pushed over with the touch of a finger. The whole scene could be a painting, were it not for the irregular stream of cars darting along the Pacific Coast Highway to spoil the illusion. But for a second, even the cars appear suspended in time. Their headlights suggest movement with blurry glowing lines—white in one direction, red in the other.

He was living in a moment of dusk. Maybe it can happen anytime, but on this occasion he recognized the feeling of change, challenge, uncertainty. It was the summer right after college, when the pleasure and safety he once knew were fading away, and he stood in abeyance, in anticipation of the unknown. He surrendered his perceived identity and reduced himself to his simplest core. And in that moment he felt vulnerable, as if someone could place a finger on him and he would collapse. His friends raced along down career paths that sounded both impressive and mundane. He wondered if he would ever truly understand them or their ambitions.

So there on the edge of the highway, standing between dark mountains and the vast Pacific Ocean, he reveled in the lingering twilight. In California there's a time of day when time stops, and on this particular night, he stopped with it. He wondered if he could stay there, detached from the cars which raced past him in slow motion. But like clockwork, he sat down behind the wheel, buckled his seatbelt, turned the key, placed his foot on the accelerator and joined them.