The music droned on, a dull, repetitive beat with what sounded like a distorted human voice spouting words that James wasn’t sure he understood. Someone in front of him was singing along, and James half-heartedly hummed through closed lips. The clock on the dashboard read 2:03 AM and the sights on both sides blended into lines of streetlamp-orange and highway-grey as James heard his voice trickle away and the silence, calm and dark, close in.

A burst of volume jolted him awake. The song had been changed; the car had picked up speed. But the lines, instead of becoming lengthier and indistinguishable, materialized into objects and figures, and James could make out streetlamp from pavement, car from pedestrian, buildings from… trees. Trees. Trees everywhere, lining the windows on either side, their crooked branches extending like dark webs into the night air. And as he narrowed his eyes, as he examined the patterns which linked trunk to branch and branch to trunk in a systematic jigsaw that led to the tip of each top, he felt a familiar feeling return. The blood rushing to his fingertips. A restlessness in his belly and a surge of power through his arms. The sense of purpose sweeping away all the doubt and uncertainty in his mind. The uneasiness of the night and the company whose friendship he was unsure of were forgotten. He rubbed his fingers with his thumbs, clenched his toes, and a smile of a rare kind spread across his lips.

He barely remembered saying goodbye and slamming the car door. He searched for a place to drop his loot – plastic bags that once had such thrill and excitement to them but seemed so insignificant now. He turned to face the window, and satisfied that the car was well out of sight, left his house in a blinding sprint across concrete.

The frost bit at his ears and tore at his lungs and seeped into his skin. But the cold only succeeded in prompting a defiant grin as the warmth of anticipation and frenzied desire spread through his blood.