

# The Rider

by Troy Larson

## Excerpt

On the other side of the freeway overpass, a motorcycle approached. The young rider leaned back on the seat of his Kawasaki and twisted the throttle. The bike, a modified green and black missile, responded with a loud buzz from the exhaust and the front wheel came off the ground. The rider leaned forward and balanced his body weight over the bike's center of gravity, and that's where he was, with his headlight pointed skyward, when he crossed the crest of the overpass.

Patrick hit his right turn signal as he approached the stop line at the end of the off-ramp, but he didn't stop, and he didn't look to his left, either. If he had, he would have seen the underside of the Kawasaki closing rapidly on one wheel. Like so many drivers had done so many times before, Patrick rolled through the red signal light and into the intersection.

The rider never saw it coming. Patrick heard a motorized whine in the distance, coming from his left, but too late. He turned to look as the sound of the bike, revving at high RPM, went from distant to deafening in a second.

The underside of the Kawasaki impacted Patrick's Explorer where the driver's door met the front quarter-panel. There was an explosion of plastic and glass as the front wheel rolled over the top of the Explorer's hood, bike and rider separated, and both went airborne. Patrick swayed left in the impact, then back to the right. For one instant, he caught a glimpse of the rider going over the hood amidst a thousand micro-satellites of debris.

Like a bank shot in a game of billiards, the motorcycle ricocheted off the Explorer, crossed two lanes in midair, crashed to the ground, then briefly stood itself back on its damaged wheels before it crashed into the median guardrail. The front forks broke off, and both pieces of the bike rebounded into the street with the back half spinning like a top until the rear wheel stopped turning.

Patrick was momentarily dazed. The ringing in his ears ended and it occurred to him how quiet it was. The broken bike smoked in the street, but there was no sound at all. He looked around for the rider but didn't see him anywhere. There was no moaning, no cries for help. It was deafeningly silent.

He attempted to open his door but struggled with it. The door rubbed against the damaged quarter panel and there was a sound of rending metal on metal. He put his shoulder against the door and there was a metallic pop as it swung open and he nearly fell out of the vehicle, stumbling in an attempt to keep his footing. Shattered plastic crunched under his feet as he walked into the street and looked for the rider.

Although the bike had gone left, the rider had not.

*"He went over the hood,"* Patrick thought. The sound of his heartbeat pounded in his head.

He looked toward the grassy ditch on the other side of the off-ramp. In a city that was struggling with budgetary issues, the grass in the ditches had grown long and untended, but there was one noticeable gap, where it looked to have been mowed down.