

My Sister's Car

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Please note, this work includes content related to death and a traumatic car incident.

I died 6 years ago. The car had very little damage, I took all the force when I went through the front windshield. Charley, my friend—do you remember him?—fixed up the bumper for me. Or rather you really. It's all for you now. It was really only cosmetic damage mostly. That is why the seatbelt chirps so loud, and the car won't move till you plug it in.

I mean it's not horrible that it ended up like this. Everyone knows I wasn't going to add up to much. Was never going to go to college. That dead-end job at the auto parts store was never going to promote me to manager. Just because I could rebuild an engine with my bare hands didn't make me not a girl. Doesn't matter now.

You had the potential, mom and dad always saw that in the traces of promise in your eyes and the penmanship of your teacher's hands when they arced perfect A's into your report card.

You are older than me now. It's weird... that you keep getting older and I never will. When you smile at your friends, it's with a wisdom I never had. College looks good on you. I'm glad you are doing well there; I wish I had gone. It looks like fun when you take little trips to Target and fill up the car with everyone's groceries, so the trunk is filled past brimming and when you slam down the door it shoves frozen fried rice coldly into the carpet along the bottom of the bass system in the trunk that you have never used.

I'm sort of surprised you drive the car at all.

The first few years I sat all alone on the side of the driveway. Mom still let you use her little Impreza from time to time. That was more your style anyway. I've been wanting to ask you what finally drove you to plop down behind the steering wheel that first time and cry. Sobbing and sobbing into my perfect purple seat covers. Normally I would lament someone ruffling the thick faux fur lining my steering column and wheel, but I missed you. That grip you had was white-knuckled, punching the seat with one hand and twisting and choking the wheel with the other like you could kill it.

Finally, you grabbed the gearshift. I drove this car so much the eight ball I attached to the end of the gear lever was warped to my hand. The way you rub it is different now. Contemplative. Reminiscent, like you think running your fingers over the organic shapes of the ridges will answer a question, but it's not a magic eight ball; it's just a gear shift lever.

I always liked Halloween when I was alive. I liked bats and teeth and vampires but now it's all the more important to me. It's true what they say about the veil between worlds getting thin on this October day. I feel myself getting stronger. I mean sure I can always change the radio channels in the car but now I can feel more of the asphalt beneath the tires, and I can see almost to the door of any house you park in front of.

It's nice, seeing a bit more of the world I left behind. You aren't the only thing I miss you know.

The slipping past of the wind on the quarter panels is nice. It's not quite like through hair, but it still satisfies an itch.

The friends you made in college are fun; they scheme. It reminds me of me and Charley in the shop playing pranks. Your short little friends all decided to get children's costumes and affect lisps so they could try stumbling up to doors and begging for candy. Tricker treaters in their twenties. For the last several blocks they have been doing surprisingly well.

You are taller than your friends, so you got chosen to stay behind in the car as they go up to each door, you still get your percent of the racket of course. Picking out the chocolate cherry candies with the caramel filling you like so much from the backseat when your friends dump out their conquest in a pile. I like watching your eyes watching them. Irises flicking in anticipation of trouble on the rearview mirror.

I flip the radio on, so we don't have to sit in silence. I set it to the same preset I always do, a channel you would call "Horrible EDM." Which it isn't. It's actually new wave deep house but you don't know that. You whip your attention back to the dash with a start. The furrowed knit of your eyebrows tells me you think you accidentally hit a button. I've been relearning your face the past couple months so I can read you again like when we were alive. Mostly the looks you gave me back then were glares but that's just how siblings are, huh? To my surprise your head starts bouncing along with the music after a moment when the lyrics start you sing along to the horrible disjointed and clipped words.

I want to cry but cars don't have that feature so instead, I just let the throat I don't have close and choke on the words I can't say anyway. This song is the first one alphabetically on my iPod Touch. You must have gotten ahold of it somehow. I imagine you late at night under the covers with earbuds in quietly playing deep house trance and crying gently

to yourself. I wish now more than ever I could hold you.

When your friends get back in from their latest door trek, their breath collects on the front windshield like verglas, and I press myself up through the fog like a wraith. You gasp and slam the brakes.

"What is wrong?" asks some girl dressed in Disney princess attire.

"Nothing, sorry," you gasp. "I just thought I saw someone." The energy in the car is uneasy as you get going again. I wonder if you saw me or something outside the car that I couldn't sense to protect you from. I turn on the defrost either way, and while the cold air melts off the grey tint, I pump up the seat heaters for a little extra warmth. If you notice that you've stopped shivering, I can't tell from the way you drive.

The acclimation to me helping you with the car was very smooth. One of your many passions when you started driving the car was grinding the hell out of the clutch, but now, I keep it sliding between gears with the same smooth skill I had in life. Now, I just match the speed of the gear ratio from inside the engine, and it is so much easier. The lurching, rocking style of your driving was no fault of your own anyway. Manual is hard. I always told you I would teach you, but you had Mom's car and why would you have to learn anyway.

This neighborhood must be fully looted because you pull back out towards the main road. At the light, a car of boys pulls up next to you. Their windows are all down, and by the way they whoop and holler, they've been having a busy night of more than candy. The radiant purple under-glow of the chassis catches their attention, and they begin waving at you. The girls in the backseat whisper and roll the windows down to match. A giggling match ensues.

He revs his engine and gestures for you to do the same. You try, but you don't know you aren't

supposed to hold the brake and the gas, so I quickly shift you to neutral before you can do a burnout in a residential. The car roars like a beast awoken after a thousand-year slumber. This engine hasn't gotten real use out of its turbochargers since it launched me into the afterlife, so it spits frothy desire at the chance to get real use out of its upgraded fuel injectors. When the light flips to green, you slam the gas and four hundred and eighty horsepower rear to life at your command.

The monster is tired of sucking up gasoline and sets its heart-shaped headlights on domination. When you shoot straight out like a bat from the fiery depths of the sulfur charred land they call hell, the boys next to you launch forward too from the right-hand turn lane. For a brief moment you are in tandem, but my car was my pride and joy. I fed it blood, sweat, tears, vomit, hours of my life, every cliché, and my eternal soul. This car is not about to be bested. The purple grill launches past theirs with unseen hunger.

If they had turned, it would have been fine, but they wanted a straight-line drag race, I guess. If you had been slower, they could have gotten in front of you before they reached the barrier delineating the two-lane road on the other side of the light which is probably what they thought would happen. Realizing at the last second that they are gunning it hard and fast for a relentless wall, they make the worst possible decision and knife back over into your lane where, rather unfortunately, you are. Unfortunate for them I mean. I haven't been

watching out for you these past months just to watch your life get ended by some jackasses in a Tesla.

A truck is in the oncoming lane, he hasn't started slowing for the residential yet. You have nowhere to go. Other cars have always been outside of my ghastly influence but it's Halloween. The veil is still thin. I reach into the Tesla's lithium-ion battery and shove all the volts up through the manifold.

The LED headlights blow out instantly like mini supernovas. The car stops and seizes, humming to a halt as the hood catches fire. Tesla's steering locks with a full motor failure. They can no longer steer into you to avoid their fate. The wall comes at them like the taillights of the semi had come at me. Fate is a cruel bitch. Teeth taste better in the mouth.

You clear the intersection with ease and grace like a fine stallion draped in neon streetlights and purple glow. If the girls in your backseat know what they avoided they are too busy rushing to help the boys to express gratitude. Quickly, you and I are alone again. I'm not sure if you know what a spontaneous electrical failure is or what kinds of things would need to happen to make one, namely miracles, but you sit collapsed and gasping against the dash all the same. I pull your seat belt tight like a hug. It's a whisper so gentle I almost don't catch it when you say,

"Thank you," and I'm not sure you are saying it to me or the universe, but I'm also not sure it matters.