

GOOD DRIVER

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“I *am* a good driver.” There was no room for arguments.

Pointedly, I glare down at my phone to display the time to the bickering group. Ten minutes had already ticked by and soon the doors to the concert would be officially closed. Usually, I was organised. My outfit had been laid out for weeks and all hair and makeup was set in place an hour prior to leaving the house. We shouldn't have left it to the last minute to organise a driver, instead we should have just agreed I would be driving. Typically, it took little to no convincing to get my friends to pile into my car, however, today was not one of those days. It shouldn't matter that I was only on my restricted licence, my city was small and it wasn't like I was going to take them on a road trip or anything. The stadium was about an eight-minute drive away and at the end of the day, I am a good driver, so I will get us there.

I shifted my focus to the party of girls now packed into my car. Hannah's knuckles had turned white as bone as she clung to her seatbelt looking prepared to bolt for the door. Crammed next to her, Sarah's elbows were tucked in tightly, her hands tinkering and pulling at the hem of her shirt that had begun to unravel. Clearly, I needed to reassure them. “Guys, you don't need to worry, I know these roads, I drive them every day.” I've got a bit of a talent for predicting what other drivers will do, it's all about reading their body language. Even my mum told me she's so proud with how quickly I have progressed, especially considering some of the dangerous encounters I've already had with *idiots* on the road. Without hesitation, I launched into my first recount.

Rope barely clung to the loose pile of tools that jingled around on the trailer, locked away only by a rattling gate that was visibly rusting with age. The bronzed metal was chipped away near the lock, making a clunking sound that resonated at the high speed of the car. The driver was oblivious, of course. I watched impatiently as the truck ambled down the road. Surely, somebody will signal to them soon or they'll notice in their mirrors the distress they are causing to the other drivers. I suppose in the event everything tumbled out, the driver would feel awfully foolish for not being more mindful and pulling over. I kept up pace with the truck despite the current situation, my hands tingling with the urge to yell at the driver for their recklessness. My eyes were fixed on the latch hanging onto the back of the trailer desperate to succeed at its job. The latch chimed louder as a gust of wind hurried through, itching to give in and release itself. Inching closer to the truck now my eyes

darted down to check on my speed. Prickles were forming deep under my skin itching to shove the driver aside, to move quicker to my destination. My foot was twitching, followed by a pounding in my toes that throbbed as it moved upwards to my thighs, it spread like a fire through my chest.

“Some drivers will never understand the importance of being ‘self-aware’.” Huffing, I felt my agitation resurface in a wave. Fixing my eyes ahead, I squinted in an effort to concentrate and continued to relay the event to my friends.

I blinked once, one small bump in the road was all it took. It was the trigger and it was released. Everything unfolded like clockwork. I scanned the trailer as the latch flung off and the rope slackened at the release, pinged off into the air like a loose snake. It tumbled. Hammers, wood, paint, pipes, rope, I heard before I saw it, a can hurtling towards me. Without a moment to hesitate, I flung the wheel and slammed on my breaks. The car shuddered to a halt and I was thrown into my seatbelt forcefully. It was a close call. What an idiot that driver was to not have noticed such an obvious issue.

“They were lucky I saw it coming. They were lucky I knew what to do.” I scoffed at the memory from barely a month ago. With no time to spare for questions from my friends, I began the next tale.

So many rules. My head spun as I recounted the basics. I glanced around to check my learner’s licence was still firmly placed in the centre console. Mirrors were adjusted to the perfect angle as I glanced at regular intervals back and forth. I never understood exactly what I was searching for, but I knew I had to practise the reflex to pass my test and that was all that mattered. I had been on my learners for a full three months now and soon I would have all the freedom I desired. We travelled further down the motorway before the instructor spoke again, “I would like you to change into the left lane.” Simple. These tasks felt so tedious at times, so easy I could do it with my eyes closed. My muscles flinched in torment as I focused once again on the mirror and lifted my hand to flick on the indicator. I would achieve my task with the utmost precision so he would never make me do it again.

Three motorbikes streaked past my vision. One swooped inward, overtaking my vehicle from the inside, no visible warning. Not another moment passed before I heard the hum of a second engine overtaking me. Everything was happening in a flash before me, the car throwing itself forwards at alarming speeds, no possibility of halting. Sweat clung to my palms as I tried to ease my mind. “You have your indicator on, you need to change lanes”, reiterated the instructor, more forcefully than before as if he too sensed I was about to make

a grave mistake. Averting my eyes to the side mirror, I tried to look for more and sure enough a lone motorbike hung back preparing itself to zip in front of me. The indicator ticked like a clock counting the moments that passed. Three seconds was the rule. Indicate for three seconds and change lanes. I was now up to fifteen. "He is waiting for you to switch lanes. You need to go." But I couldn't, I couldn't see the driver anymore, I couldn't see anything. I went rigid as I attempted to compose my thoughts. Turning my head and leaning forwards, I tried to gauge where the last bike was by contorting my body to the side. My eyes locked on the median barrier and with a yank the instructor guided us to safety. Inches away from catastrophe. Gently, I grabbed control again and switched lanes easily, now free of any bikers. I dared a glance sidelong at the instructor.

"You need to be listening more carefully, that could've been a horrific accident. Do you understand me?" His voice was steady, but an iciness had settled in his tone. He was angry with me? He was cross with me over another moron's mistake.

"It wasn't my fault, I saved us both. I changed lanes and did as I was told. The bikers were nothing but a load of irresponsible and reckless drivers who endangered me!" I didn't realise I was yelling until I heard the squeal of girls around me.

"Okay okay you have us convinced!" they chimed in the backseat. A smug smile crept up onto my face. I knew I was right. I adjusted the music to accommodate the lightened mood and flicked my eyes to the time.

"Grab my phone and let them know we will arrive any moment now." I knew the boys would be waiting outside all impatient and rowdy, as usual.

"I don't know your password!" giggled Elle from the passenger seat. I fought back the urge to roll my eyes.

"It's my birthday."

"And that is...?" My jaw locked and I grinded my teeth down agitated by my friend's thoughtless behaviour.

"Just give it here!" I snatched the phone, throwing my body to the side to get a proper grip. My vision swooped out of focus, everything imploding within seconds. No time to prepare, no time for fast thinking. I never even saw what speed I was going, couldn't see the trajectory of the car as the post rushed towards us. Screams rang out in a confused ensemble, fragments of glass and ruin spotting my vision. Ringing reverberated through my skull mimicking the sirens starting up around me. The earth collapsed from under me as everything tumbled inwards, the blue and red lights smothered to black in an instant. All I could fathom was one sentence I couldn't stop from tumbling out.

"I swear I was a good driver..."