

## Asleep at the Wheel

8:19.

Almost home now.

Drops of rain start to fall effortlessly on the glass as I drive. There was no point to go home...ha! There was no point being anywhere else. No one understood me and there was no place I could be that could warm me on the inside. My fingers gripped the wheel; tighter, making my knuckles whiten – contrasting the freezing purple of fingers. My mind wandered as dusk gave way to night and the drops became more constant.

Cars speed by.

I often daydreamt about where they were all going, what in their life persisted them to get where ever they drive so passionately.

Where was my passion? The only logical explanation I could ever come up with – it was stolen. When, where and by whom I could never pinpoint, but I had definitely not misplaced it. My memory was too good for that.

Up ahead a car looms out of nowhere, possibly from my imagination, right in the middle of the road. It has stopped at the intersection with hazard lights cutting into the ever-pressing darkness and the backs of my eyes.

*Sigh.*

A few metres behind the car I stop and sit idling, waiting. Waiting for the world to hurry up and move another obstacle. Waiting for someone else to stop and help those people, but others didn't do what I wanted. They moved up from other directions, put on their indicators, gave way, and turned.

After a few moments I became more and more aware of my environment.

The hardening rain.

Wipers moving back and forth, back and forth, over the glass, scraping slightly.

Two people from the car argued on the corner in the rain. Soaked. Yelling. Gesturing to me.

I shift nervously in the woollen seat covers and avert my gaze out the driver's side window to see nothing but a reflection of green on my ghostly features and rivers of drops.

A car has just stopped a few metres behind ours. Only one person, a girl maybe, it's hard to tell from here. It's startin', 'bout time.

"Not another one!" me wife pleaded to me waving her arms at the car.

"I can't bear to do this anymore! I don't know why I agreed to do this in the first place."

Clothes cling to her tiny body. Always whinin'. Was she cryin' or did it just look like it because of the rain? Who cares. In the flashing of orange I remembered her as a partner in crime.

Once, she would laugh when we pulled our pranks on unsuspectin' victims, gatherin' up all she wanted from their lives, looking so damn sexy. The last of our attempts resulted in her "accidentally" killin' a young mother like herself who looked right into her eyes and whispered, *Why me?* It was about time. What did she expect happened to these people after we kidnapped 'em? Now she was a nervous, shakin', and pitiful excuse for a human.

I give her a look of disgust and turned towards the car. A blur rushes past me to the back door. "Leave them out of this! They are only children! They'll learn the wrong things!"

I push her to the left. She insists on gettin' in my way again so I take her by the shoulders and throw her to the gutter. No doubt this display would be makin' the game in the car behind us uncomfortable but they sat there, still, engine runnin'. If they're stupid enough to stay there then they deserve what's comin' to 'em. I walk to the back of the car and shove my key in to open the boot. I grab a large knife and hide it under my shirt, slammin' the metal shut, I make my way to the back door – to the kids.

I turn from the window to see the woman standing on the corner alone. She now stood, arms crossed, clutching her elbows into her body. Violently; she shook. Cold? Or was it something more.

Her eyes darted from him, to the back seat of their car, to me. It looked as though she wanted to move but her body wouldn't let her and the result were spasms and jerking here and there.

What the hell is going on?

The man was now opening the boot of his car. Good. He'll fix his own problem. While he is at it, maybe he can fix all mine!

Unlikely. Could this man fix my disease? No. Could this man fill me with love? From the looks of him, and if that woman over there was his wife, I doubt it. Could he change my anti-social tendencies? Could he bring back my passion? Maybe he's the one who stole it. With all these thoughts spinning around and around in my mind I look down at the gear stick and slowly study all the lights and knobs.

8:22.

Thoughts of friends enter suddenly. Happiness overcomes me for a brief moment – it is always so brief.

*Why am I sitting here?*

I could easily drive around them and be on my way home, only a few blocks away. People don't usually describe me as an impatient person and, after moving to a different town, starved for

human connection of any kind, I stay. Well, that, and I have no motivation to move. I sit and watch the movie framed by my car window, like one who has something important to do, I procrastinate, putting off putting my foot on the accelerator and turning the wheel for just that second longer.

I'd have washed the dishes if any were around.

Looking up ahead of my lights I see the man open the back door. He crouches down with one knee on the ground and leans into the light. His face appears calm but I sense he is feeling desperate. Finally, something I can relate to.

"Right, who's up for a game" I ask me two boys, obviously bored shitless, they won't quit punchin' each other.

"But it's rainin'. I ain't gettin' out."

"You'll damn well do as you're told!"

"No!"

Has this whole family plotted to make tonight so damn difficult for me? Maybe it was time to ditch 'em. I would, if that bitch wouldn't run off to the cops the minute I left town.

"If you get out I'll buy ya both somethin' cool..."

"Like what!"

"Yeah, like what." The youngest one chips in, hittin' the older one in the shoulder.

"We'll talk about that later."

I grind my teeth together and get off me knee. Over the roof of the car I see her. There is a pleadin' look in her eyes but she ain't protestin' again. The night is here and everything is perfect.

I walk to her and reach out to hug her, for show. All I feel is a soaked bag of bones, make that a shiverin', soaked bag of bones. Her mouth is so close to me ear I can hear her sobbin'. I feel better, more in control. A car races past and bathes us in light for a few moments.

A set of small legs swings themselves out the door. They dangle for a moment and then the boy attached to them jumps out of the car, awkwardly landing on all fours. A smaller boy doesn't wait for a clear exit and tries to use the other as a landing pad. The two fall over each other and wrestle out to the right-hand side of the road.

Then, they stand up straight, like dogs hearing a whistle too high pitched for our own ears.

Maybe I should do something.

I had a soft spot for children; I trust them more than adults. They aren't afraid to tell you what they really think and that's a healthy, refreshing slap in the face. A family is something different. Surely these people had some sense of responsibility if children were involved.

I slide my hand across the steering wheel, slowly, ever so slowly, to my keys and move them to the left. The car shudders a little and there's no longer life in him. The wipers stop half way down the window.

I sit very still, watching anything I could make out through the rain.

After a while my eyes become sore. What was once the friendly light of my clock and dash now pierced into my mind.

8:27.

I sit and zone out on the numbers.

How does eight twenty-seven tell me anything? Doesn't *mean* any thing.

I turn and see the boys muckin' around too far away from the car. A yelp. It scares her as I stride off to the centre of the road. Damn knife jabs into me and I take it out from under me shirt.

"What the hell are ya doin'?"

Almost past the car now, I point the knife out ahead of me, wavin' it about as I speak. Shit. I shove it back under me clothes. It spooks 'em and they run off to the other side of the road.

"Come back here! I'm not angry, ya just need to...just come back!"

I can barely see them now. It's dark and the rain's gettin' harder. Constant orange flashes off every. This ain't workin' out the way I wanted it to. At any second that car would take off and all this would have been for nothin'.

Then everyone would be punished.

*As soon as we get home...*

I turn and am blinded by the car lights. Liftin' my arm, I try to see inside. Nothin'. It's too frustratin', everythin's becomin' uncontrollable.

8:30.

I look back up, almost forgetting where I am or what I am doing. The wavy outline of a man is now in the middle of the road frantically gesturing to something I couldn't see.

I focus again on the numbers.

They seemed burned into my retinas. I closed my eyes and see them there, inverted so that the darkness becomes light and the numbers are black.

A change of light from behind my eyelids, they snap back open.

The man is making his way past the front of my car over to the passenger door. It's very hard to see anything. With the car off the water takes over the glass, but something in that hand glinted in the light.

Heart pounding.

I fumble with my keys and in the process wack my knuckles against something.

Fuck.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

The door opens, and he moves in. The door swings back forcefully, whacking the man in the back.

“Fuck!” he screams.

*Exactly.*

Finally my brain co-operates with my fingers and the key is turned to springing my cocoon back into life. I turn my head while putting the car into drive.

The man has regained his bearings and gives the door one last go, but he barely learns from his first attempt. He manages to get one knee onto the seat and looks me dead in the eyes, knife pointed.

This moment seemed to go on forever allowing me to study him. The outline of his muscles shine from the dull light inside the car bouncing off the water he was soaked in. It makes him appear physically strong but the expression on his face gave a sense of being too angry to be able to pull anything off. Becoming calmer inside I quickly shift the gear into reverse and push down slightly on the pedal. Expectantly he is taken off guard. His hand hits the dash sending the knife to the floor. Putting the car in drive again, hitting the pedal hard this time, and I hear a heavy clunk as his head connects with the doorframe

Blood drifts down me face and stings me eyes.

The pain.

Rain keeps beatin’ down on me as I’m strugglin’ to move. Harder and harder, like I’m being battered from behind. I lift me head but I can’t see straight.

A kick to my ribs. It ain’t a very hard one, but enough to keep me breathless for a few seconds.

Footsteps run off, I hear mumbled voices but only see dark water.

A car is started. She’s drivin’ off on me!

“Come back! Ya...”

Pain hits me again cause I’m tryin’ to lift me-self off the ground.

“You motherfu...you bitc...Don’t *leave* me here! I...ya Bitch!”

The last word ring in me head, it gets louder with the throbbin’. I grab at me messy hair, feelin’ thick liquid between me fingers. The rain starts to sting. Lifting me jacket over me head I use it as some sort of poor cover. Feelin’ the effects of either blood loss or whackin’ my head, I collapse on me side and wait.

A few blocks away I sit in my car.

8:47

The rain has stopped, it was only a short storm. Positioned under a streetlight I watch the knife lying still on the floor. Did I expect it was going to jump up and get me? No. I laugh out loud nervously. *Don't be stupid.*

As a car passes I sink lower so the light won't touch me.

What am I supposed to do now?

There was no way I was going to touch that thing.

With the passenger door ajar I move a little and see dark stains on the frame. I sit back. My throat closes, my stomach contracts. I gag.

What if he is dead?

There's no way I could deal with that.

What if he wasn't dead?

Then, he would be waiting somewhere for me. I would constantly watch over my shoulder, forever, and ever. If I went back he would surely be there, dead or alive. If I rang the police I'd have to deal with all the questions, the bright lights, hours and hours of follow up, and if he really was dead then I might be charged with manslaughter. I've seen that in movies. The one in trouble always ends up in court.

No one believes them.

I sit wide-eyed, not so much scared but amazed. I had gotten through this, I had survived. I suddenly think about everything in my life in a new light...and my parents! I had been the unkindest to them.

"Arrhh."

"Shh. Don't move."

What? Where am I?

I try to move me arms and legs. They're tied down.

I try to sit up. Nothin'. Pressure over my chest and hips and knees.

"You're badly injured."

Openin' me eyes I squint. Everythin' is white.

"Heaven?" I mumble out.

She laughs.

"Far from it. You're recovering in gaol."

Shit.

I struggle against rubber clasps. No control, no control! My eyes try to adjust to the room. Blurs of a woman sittin' in the corner, readin'. A large black screen, most likely a window for another room, covers the wall in front of me.

I can't control me body, I can't control me eyes, I can't control this situation. I yell louder.

"Be quiet now."

"Don..n't, don't ya tell me wha.." *t to do, whore.*

Who dobbed me in? *Her* and the boys. Was it that girl in the car? Or maybe it was all 4 of 'em, starin', laughin' and pointin'.

I'm laughin' now, at least I think I am. A deep laugh that makes the woman look uncomfortable and shift; she pretends not to hear it but it's so loud like the white walls.

11:27

I open the front door to my house to find my parents looking directly at me. It's warm in the house, and everything is lit up brightly.

Decorations from my 19th birthday still hung from the lights.

My dad is sitting in his favourite armchair and my mum standing a few feet away from him.

They had obviously been deep in conversation before I interrupted.

No one says anything, and my mother jerks in such a way as I remember the woman on the corner in the rain doing.

I move quickly towards her and embrace her. She takes me up in her arms as my father gets up from his seat to put his big arms around the both of us. My mother starts to sob, and both of them have their eyes closed tight.

As for me I feel the warmth inside, and for the first time, in a long time...I smile.