

Don't Be The Reason  
By Gretchen Muehle

A girl named Rachel, twenty-two years old, rushes to her new Toyota Camry she and her husband just purchased as newly-weds. Lugging her makeup bag, products shuffle around the unzipped pouch as she rushes to start the engine. It's cold out, nearly below freezing, her hair is still wet from the shower. She's late to meet up with her friends at their favorite restaurant. They're throwing her a post-wedding congratulations party, since some of them were unable to attend the wedding. She struggles to put the key and the ignition and blasts the heat as quickly as she can.

Not having enough time to get ready at her house, Rachel grabs her makeup bag off the passenger seat to finish applying her favorite products. Her phone buzzes, it's her friends telling her they got a table. She quickly looks down to reply at a stop light. "Be there in ten!" She types out. Moments later, honks from cars behind startle her as she looks up and realizes she has a green light. Only minutes away from the restaurant, Rachel finishes applying her mascara in the rear-view mirror. Realizing she needs to switch lanes to turn left, she puts her blinker on, all while still looking at herself, instead of the road. It only took four seconds.

Four seconds to cross over lanes, four seconds to finish her mascara for the last time, to blow through a red light with a half-ton pound truck coming directly perpendicular to her. It only took four seconds to end not only the life of a beautiful young twenty-two year old newly wed girl, but a father of two precious children, who watched as he was propelled out of the windshield.

The girls husband brought home flowers that night, unaware of the events that happened only minutes prior, unaware of the mere four seconds that it took to turn his life from a daydream to a nightmare. His cell phone rings, it's from an unknown caller, but his gut tells him to answer it. An unfamiliar voice speaks the words that would crush his heart and his world, saying, "Hi Sir, I'm the detective of the car accident that happened near the sushi restaurant on 5th ave. Your wife was in the crash, I'm so sorry, sir, she didn't make it."

Three towns over, a man named Brent the age of twenty-nine drives home from his parents house. He's a veteran, having fought multiple years for this country, giving up his freedom and his life so others could enjoy theirs. His parents made him a home cooked meal that night, shepards-pie, his favorite. He's been struggling lately, from PTSD to financial problems, he's doing his best to get back on his feet.

After a long night of sharing laughter and memories, he says his goodbyes and heads out the door, the same instant, it begins to rain. Brent stops in his tracks and runs back into his parents home and asks for an umbrella, knowing his parking space is a far walk from his apartment. He stays inside again for five-minutes waiting for the rain to slow down, but it doesn't. Five minutes, later, He takes his chances and runs through the muddy puddles to his vehicle. Five minutes was all it took.

His drive home was quiet, he kept the radio off as he listened to the patter of the rain on his windshield. He stops at a four way intersection, looks all three directions, and proceeds forward.

Meanwhile, a group of teenage boys are leaving a party. They've had a few to drink, but convince themselves they are fine to drive. "We'll be fine" they think, "it's not like we're gonna crash." They drive towards the same intersection as the veteran, but little do they know they also have a stop sign. Swerving around, crossing over into the other lane, they don't realize there is a car merely 10 feet in front of them.

The sound of brakes screeching, glass breaking, airbags colliding with lifeless bodies fill the quiet town. Not a word is spoken by the teenage boys, only deep breaths and whimpers escape their lips, as they look at the car across from them, and see a man, a stranger, a life they just took.

It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter if you're an adult that's had your license for thirty years, or a child behind the wheel for the very first time. It doesn't matter if the roads aren't busy, or the rain has stopped, or those three beers you drank "weren't enough to get you drunk." It simply doesn't matter if the text you received was your spouse asking you to pick up milk on your way home, or your best friend telling you exciting news about the cute boy that asked her to prom. Don't be the reason a father will never walk his baby girl down the aisle. Don't be the reason a little boy receives the news that his sister isn't coming home, left confused about what the word heaven means and why she won't make it to his 6th birthday party. Do not be the reason your best friend will never walk across the stage at graduation, because you just *had* to answer that text from your boyfriend. No text, call, curfew or hair-do is worth risking the lives of not only yourself, but the thousands of other people on the road. Stepping foot behind the wheel of a vehicle is the same amount of power as wrapping your fingers around a trigger, one wrong move and someone's life could be at stake. Everyone is responsible for what they do inside their own vehicle, so don't take advantage of that privilege and be the reason somebody else, no longer can.