

If you've ever driven drunk, you probably assume you'll be safe because you are a good driver; you are driving extra carefully; you are following traffic rules. You might make excuse after excuse to convince yourself that what you are doing is okay. You are perhaps too drunk to realize how much danger you are in.

If you have ever ridden in a car with a drunk person behind the wheel, you know what a serious misconception this can be. You know the nauseating smell of alcohol, filling every space of a car that is under the control of an out of control, intoxicated person.

The first time I drove outside of drivers ed, I was acting as the last minute designated driver for a friend who had "only had a few drinks," and was "perfectly good to drive." The irony of the situation was that I was not designated to be anyone's driver that day, but rather, was expecting to get a ride from an unexpectedly intoxicated friend.

Sarah had been a friend of mine for as long as I could remember, and had always been dependable, like a member of my own family. She rolled into my driveway that day unscratched, ready to drive me to an important doctor's appointment which I had been dreading for weeks. I was not ready for the dreadful journey on which we were about to depart.

When I got in that car, I legitimately believed I was safer with my drunk friend behind the wheel. That sounds stupid when I say it aloud. Frankly it was quite stupid, but it is what I believed to be true at the time, and it wasn't fabricated out of nowhere: she had a license, she passed their driving test of the first try, she had never been in an accident, and besides, she had only had a couple drinks, right?

Our car backed out of the driveway. It proceeded to swerve down the road at what would otherwise be an inappropriately slow speed. We were moving somehow sluggishly and recklessly at once, and drivers behind us struggled to pass our vehicle. I began to worry. Sarah wasn't talking to me, but was only staring intensely at the road ahead. I shuttered to realize she was too focused on trying not to crash to pay me any attention. Finally, she broke the silence. "Where are we going again?" asked Sarah, genuinely confused. "We're going to the doctor's office." I said, suddenly aware we had been driving in the completely wrong direction. At this point, we were approaching an intersection. She slowed the car, made an unreasonably wide turn into the wrong lane, and stayed there for a solid ten seconds before adjusting. "Where exactly are we going?" she asked again, already forgetting the answer.

I knew I had to take the wheel.

As we pulled over, Sarah rolled forward with the kind of slowness and steadiness one would use to remove a jenga block. She inched closer and closer to the curb, until finally, she collided with it in slow motion. Together, we exited the car. "Look!" she pointed, just now noticing her terrible parking, "I hit the curb!" I sat in the driver's seat, trying to remember how to start the vehicle. "Have you ever driven?" Sarah asked. "Not outside of drivers ed." I replied.

"Wow." She looked impressed.

The car purred, and we pulled out into the road.

"You need to go faster." she said, glancing at the cars behind us through the rearview mirror.

"I'm going at the speed limit." I said. I couldn't believe I was actually driving.

"Have you ever driven before?" asked Sarah, for the second time.

I couldn't believe I had let her drive in the first place. Cars whizzed by, passing us on the road. I was shaking and crying and struggling to breathe.

"You should go faster." she repeated. For someone so forgetful, or rather, in such a forgetful state, Sarah sure had a lot, (of the same things), to say. "I'm not going over the speed limit." I replied, growing more and more furious with my friend that I had to drive at all.

"You're allowed to drive five miles above the speed limit. God, it's like you've never driven before."

"I haven't driven before outside of driver's ed." I said, struggling to keep my cool. I couldn't afford to be distracted from the road.

"Really? This is your first time really driving on your own?" She turned to face me, surprised, as if this was the first time she had heard it.

"Wow."

I didn't respond. I was trying to remember how to use the blinker.

"That's special. What a special time."

How could I have let her drive? How could she have encouraged it? I was furious, terrified, let down: When I got in that car, I wasn't just hitching a ride; I was trusting Sarah with my life. She showed up plastered, completely unfit to drive. How could she put me at that sort of risk? How could she put herself at risk like that? I turned to face her, angry, disgusted. She looked at me with big glazed eyes.

"I'm so glad we can share your special first time driving together," she said, "I'm glad you trust me."