

Our Last Car Ride

The clock reads 2:13 PM on a Friday afternoon and the road seems deserted; my friends, Emily, Victoria, and Walter, and I are the only car for as far as I can see. With this knowledge, my foot presses down on the gas and the car roars to life, jolting forward, hitting 60 miles per hour. The music is blaring, spitting out the words to Big Gangsta by Kevin Gates. My eyes stare directly at the road, so when a bottle comes flying up over the seat and falls at my feet, I barely notice it, but I manage to catch a glimpse of it. I think, "I need to move this before it gets stuck under my brake. We don't want to not have brakes."

I bend over, relaxing my grip on the wheel, and reach down to pick up the bottle that was rolling around by my feet. All I can think about is getting to that bottle before it gets stuck under the brakes. I stretch out my fingers towards the bottle, almost managing to grab it, but instead I watch as it rolls closer to the brakes. I can feel the car start to swerve to the left, so I try to tighten my grip on the wheel, turning it into what I thought was going straight. As I try to return my focus on the bottle, I can hear the tapping of Emily's fingers on my phone's keyboard; she is queuing up the next song. I hear my friends in the back gabbing away, still throwing stuff at each other. I shake my head, telling myself to focus on getting this bottle, so I stretch out my hand and wrap my fingers around the grooves in the bottle. As I start to sit back up, I hear a scream escape from Emily's mouth. I quickly look up to see blinding headlights coming right at us. I drop the bottle, forgetting that it might roll under the brake and I put both hands on the wheel, yanking it as hard as I can. The car starts to turn away from the oncoming car and I believe that we are safe, until I see trees rushing at us.

It all happens so fast. I try to hit the brakes, but there is little time; the car is moving too fast and the trees are too close. The car connects with a huge pine tree, throwing everyone around. I watch as Emily's flaming, red hair gets tossed into her face and as more bottles and food fly through the air. As I hear metal against bark, I realize that with the little time I had to think, I turned the wrong way. I feel this crushing weight on my chest and through half-closed

eyes, I see the airbag pressing on my chest. I can feel my eyelids getting heavy and I have a piercing headache. I feel numb; I can't move anything. Big Gangsta is ending and I hear the first few words to Knee Deep by Zac Brown Band featuring Jimmy Buffett: "Gonna put the world away for a minute," before the world went dark.

"I hear voices. Why do I hear voices?" I wake with a start, slightly opening my eyes. A bright, white light floods into my eyes and I snap them shut. I think to myself, "How am I still alive?"

I slowly open my eyes, letting the light in inch by inch. I gaze around and I see people checking a machine. It hits me. I'm in an ambulance, those are paramedics, and we crashed.

I hear the paramedics talking to one another. They seem surprised that I made it, so I wonder, how bad was the crash? I catch words here and there: "windshield caved in... crushed front end... car on it's side..." I moan as I try to push myself up, but my arms won't move. I try to speak, but my voice gets caught in my throat. I try again and again until eventually I utter, "Where are my friends?" The paramedics give me a woeful look; my heart speeds up as I watch them. "Where are they?" I demand. "Where are they?" I start to hyperventilate, making my headache worse. I watch as the paramedics jump to attention and grab the oxygen mask, but before I know it, the world is going dark again.

I later found out that only one other person made it out of the crash: Walter. Emily and Victoria didn't make it. I feel like I just got stabbed through the heart as I feel a shooting pain run through my body. "How did this happen?" "Why did this happen?" Those two questions run on repeat through my mind. My knees become weak and they buckle. I land on the ground hard, sobs racking my whole body. "No!" I scream. "No, no, no, no! Why?"

"Why," that one word forever echoes through my head. Why did I live and they didn't? Emily and Victoria are gone and I will carry this weight with me for the rest of my life. I will never again get to hear Emily's laugh echoing through the house or Victoria's wide grin when she dances. They'll never get to graduate and go to college. They will never have a family of their

own. They will never get to say goodbye to those they love. I may have been lucky, but not all of us are.