

My Drive With Dad

He only had it for a week. His new car I mean, a black 2008 Ford Excursion. It cost him a lot and he got everything that you could get extra: a sound system, GPS, little TVs in the backs of the driver's seats, *everything*. He picked me up from soccer practice in our old car, a Cougar, and we went straight to the dealership. I was bored for the whole hour it took him to sell the old car and buy the new one. He argued with the guy helping us and got red in the face, like he always did when he argued. I just sat there and watched until they both smiled and shook hands. Then we drove it out of the lot. My dad drove me around the entire neighborhood with the radio turned up high. It made my ears hurt. Finally I saw the familiar green sign that said "Harman ST." in familiar white stencil letters and we were home.

At dinner, all dad did was talk about the car. Our old car, I mean. He said it was a piece of shit and how happy he was to be rid of it. My mom didn't say much. She never said much when he went on rants like that. He squirmed in his chair while he talked, his voice getting louder and louder as dinner went on, occasionally breaking to swallow a big forkful of chicken or take a gulp of Bud Light. Once or twice he asked me to get him another beer out of the fridge, which I did. Then he went back to talking like our kitchen was full of people who came to hear him talk about his car.

The next day, Saturday, he took mom and I for a drive. We stopped at Mr. Prion's house – he's a friend of our family – and my dad got out and opened the hood and showed him the engine. He got in the car and revved it. With the hood open it made a loud, high growl, but with it closed I couldn't even tell if the car was on or off. We drove past South Street School, where I go and play soccer. There was a girl's field hockey game going on. Other parents were crowded around the field cheering for their girls, and a fleet of other trucks was parked on the grass. My dad grinned as we passed the field. My mom didn't say anything the whole ride. After that we got home and I went to bed early. All this driving around was wearing me out.

A few days later my mom and dad had a fight about the car. My mom was saying (I don't remember the exact words) that it was too expensive, and that we couldn't afford a hundred dollars for gas. My dad said something about how the car was safe, and how he was just protecting her and me. Then I heard my mom mutter something and my dad blew up. They always fought like this and I didn't know who was right so I just stayed out of it. I just knew I wanted a car that would keep me safe, so I went to bed siding with my dad on this one.

Friday I had a soccer game. We lost to Clearview. We *always* lost to Clearview. My dad picked me up and took the long route through town to get home. He put in a Led Zeppelin CD he bought at the mall and played it loud.

"Come from the land of the ice and snow..." he belted out as we drove. He didn't sound anything like the singer on the album. After passing some houses where he played the music loud with the window rolled down, he shut off the album and asked me how we did.

"We lost," I said, hanging my head. The seats were so big I had a hard time getting my legs up to take off my sweaty shin guards. "But I made a goal."

"Well, you should've made two," my dad said, not looking at me. "Can't get by losing, boy. And I ain't gonna raise no loser."

"I'm *not* a loser!" I yelled. This speech made me so mad. I heard it every time I lost a game or got a bad grade. He snapped his head around and looked at me, getting red-faced.

"Well, your losing you games, so you're a loser, right?" he asked, not looking at the road.

Before I could answer he slammed on the breaks. The car in front of us was stopped at a stop sign. We jerked to a stop inches from them.

“Dumb fuck!” dad yelled, beeping the horn. Some kid in a weird jacket with patches on it leaned out of the driver’s side window and gave my dad the finger, then went through the stop sign.

As soon as the other car was through the stop my dad floored it. I felt myself being thrown around as the big truck swerved into the other lane, going around the smaller car. I didn’t see, and neither did my dad, the car coming at us.

I don’t remember hitting them. I just remember the truck lurching around. I was too short to see all the way out the windows without stretching, so I only got glimpses of the world spinning around us. Horrible crunching noises came from everywhere before something threw me forward and the airbags blew up. They weren’t soft like I’d imagined airbags to be. The white pillow slapped me in the face and threw some kind of powder into my eyes. I tried to yell but was smashed so hard into it I couldn’t open my mouth. Then I fell back into the seat, my face hurting, and a big red burn mark on my shoulder from the seat belt.

“Are you alright,” my dad asked, grabbing me hard.

“Yeah,” I said. I moved up in the seat to get a look around.

“Stay here,” he told me. I didn’t even take my seatbelt off. My dad took out his cell phone and got out of the car.

“Aw, man!” he yelled when he saw the front. From my view I could tell it was smashed up. The front windshield was cracked. My dad dialed a number and put the phone to his ear, pacing around yelling curses. I looked for the car we hit. I saw the car that was at the stop sign pulled over up ahead. Three boys were inside: the one that gave my dad the finger and two others with mohawks. One of them was taking on a cell phone. I kept looking around until I saw the other car – the one we hit head on. The front was gone and the passenger side door was missing. I could see a person inside.

“Yo, my man, you alright?” one of the boys with mowhawks asked my dad.

“You little shit!” my dad yelled, then ran after the boy. His two friends ran over and I heard them yelling over each other. I was terrified. I thought there was going to be a fight.

Then the cops came.

My dad backed off as soon as he saw the flashing lights. Two of the boys were holding the third one back, who yelled, “Fuck you, redneck asshole!” at my dad. Two cops in blue uniforms stood between them and told everyone to calm down. I saw the square outline of ambulance barreling down the road with its lights on.

“These kids caused this accident!” my dad told the cop. As soon as he said it the three boys started hollering and cursing again. One of them told the other two to calm down and began explaining what happened to the cop. He nodded and listened while my dad got redder and redder. His lips started shaking and he beat his fist against his thigh. Then a cop came over to me.

“Hey there, son,” he said. “Can you tell me what happened here?”

“No!” my dad yelled, walking up to the cop. “You do *not* involve my son in this, you hear?”

“Sir, *calm down!*” the cop ordered, and then went back to talking to me. “Can you tell me what happened?”

I told him the truth. Before the cop could turn around my dad kicked the front of the car so hard I thought he’d launch it into the air. He kicked it again and again screaming, “No, you little fuck! You

little fuck!” One of the cops took him by the wrist, did something with his leg and slammed my dad down on the front of the car, then handcuffed him. It took both cops to get him into the police car. I saw him in there rocking back and forth yelling, kicking the car door, kicking the seats. One of the cops started filling out paperwork. All I could think was that I just sent my dad to jail.

I couldn't believe this could be his fault. The boy in the car gave him the finger, and my dad passed him. I didn't see where any of this was his fault.

A new *crash* noise got my attention, so I looked at the car we hit. A man and a woman from the ambulance were pulling the driver out. It was a girl with blond hair, but some of it was red. Even at that distance I could see blood everywhere, and as they pulled her head rolled so she was facing me. Except she didn't have a face; there was just a red mask and something light gray where some of her hair should have been. Then the woman pulled a black sheet over her and I never saw her again.