

Short Story

The Drive
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With tears streaming down her cheeks, Tamara wrenched open the driver's door of her station wagon and slid down into the seat. She jabbed the key at the ignition; when it finally slid into position she turned it forcefully until the engine choked into life. With the radio blaring, she pulled sharply out of the driveway and sped off down the street.

She had known for a while that her relationship with Lauren was not serious. They lived together, but Lauren was not interested in settling down, and she had made that fact clear. Yet in a fluster of infatuation Tamara had been blinded by her lack of commitment, and had continued to believe that someday Lauren would change her mind.

The sharp pang of doubt had come again a few months later, but still Tamara had ignored it. She wanted to be with Lauren, no matter the personal sacrifice.

Approaching their two-year anniversary, Lauren had admitted to Tamara that she wanted to break up. Tamara was too needy, she had said, and that she felt more like a parent to Tamara than a girlfriend. Tamara had pleaded with Lauren, promising that she would become more emotionally independent. Eventually Lauren had been reluctantly convinced to stay.

They had moved house, and for a while the relocation had proved to be a positive new start for them. However after only two months at the new place, Lauren had once again brought up her desire to break up. This time she could not be swayed, and Tamara had been left with no choice but to make plans to move out. Lauren had started dating someone else within three weeks of the split.

Adelaide fell away behind her; she didn't know where she was going, she just kept driving. Before she knew it, five and a half hours had passed. She was alone on the long stretch of flat and dusty road. The surrounding plains were brown and empty, with the rugged Flinders Ranges rising out of the earth in the distance. The sun's heat was relentless against the pale blue sky. The radio

announcer's voice began to crackle, dissipating behind the static interference. Tamara reached down and switched the stereo off.

She glanced at her rear-vision mirror; a cloud of dust trailed from the foothills to the road. From the cloud emerged a rusty old ute, the first car she had seen since civilisation had fallen away behind her. It caught up to her quickly.

The driver blasted the horn, making Tamara jump with fright. From the reflection in the mirror she made out the shape of the driver, a scruffy old man with a beard. She tightened her grip around the steering wheel, carefully veering toward the side of the road.

The man did not overtake as expected, but instead remained close behind Tamara, persistently blasting the horn.

"What do you want?" Tamara shrieked, tossing her hand in the air.

The ute's left indicator began to blink red.

"Overtake me, dammit! Just do it!"

Tamara continued to cautiously navigate the edge of the road. The horn blasted again and again.

"Are you crazy?" Tamara shouted. "Psycho!"

Finally, the man pulled out from behind Tamara, lining his ute up with her car. Her stomach sank. The man was waving and shouting.

"Pull over! There's something wrong with your car!"

Tamara did not succumb to his demands, so the man sped up ahead of her and pulled in front of her, forcing Tamara to slow down. He continued to drive for a short distance before stopping at an angle, blocking the road.

Tamara remained in her car, her heart thumping firmly in her chest. The scruffy old man stepped out of his ute and approached her station wagon. Tamara swiftly moved to wind up her window, and the man launched into a sprint. In his hand he held a wheel wrench, thrusting it at the window and smashing the glass. He threw open the door and grabbed Tamara by the hair, pulling her out

and shoving her to the ground. Kicking and screaming she reared up, but with one hit of the wrench to her head she was immobilised.

The man left Tamara in the dirt and made his way around to the back of the wagon. He lifted the door up, scanning the clutter. A grey bundle was pushed up against the edge of the rear door. Tensing his brows, he pulled at the sheet, releasing its tight wrap.

He stopped suddenly, pulling back. The cold, pale face of a woman stared up at him through the folds of bloodied linen. He looked at Tamara, who lifted her head, casting a bleary gaze.

The man moved, and Tamara cowered in the gravel. He passed her, walking back towards his ute. Before he lifted himself back into the driver's seat, he gave her one last look. And with that, the ute lurched forward and continued on down the road.

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