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The Driver's Seat

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According to dictionary.com, the driver's seat is the place where "the vehicle is operated"; however, when applied metaphorically to the conditions of life, the driver's seat represents control: the idea that one has authority and agency to not only make simple decisions but dictate their entity as a whole. One would describe this as the beauty of existence, yet I would object to the theory as it is not a universal experience. As a testament to that, I have always felt like a passenger in my own car, stringing along for the ride. Perhaps, when properly given the chance to sit in the driver's seat, all my worries and fears will dissipate, but the theory of the driver's seat is a selective one, choosing to apply itself on the basis of different conditions.

Sunday 7:05 pm

I expected the driver's seat to be more well-fitted. Instead, it was every bit of wrong: too long for my thighs, too wide in the rear, too thin on the side, too slouched from the back, and too big for my height. Yet, my pride fooled me into thinking that the seat was hand-carved for me. Grabbing the wheel, I told myself it was my calling; my path to freedom.

My dad lectured me on every aspect of driving as if I were a mechanic specializing in engines or considering a career as a sports car driver. We would go over the same thing: brake, drive, signal, park. Covering everything from reversing to the emergency brake button, my dad poured every ounce of his twenty-five years as a commute driver down my throat.

"Can I drive now ...on the street," I muttered, *purposely* showing my distaste in his lectures?

Dad sighed, giving one last lesson to my face: "What makes the driver's seat so special, so distinct, is C-O-N-T-R-O-O-L." He made sure to phonetically emphasize the word to ensure that my brain had grasped the special power pressed against the steering wheel. "Dear, you simply cannot be the driver without it."

Control. Control. Control. Yes, the only thing I crave to have in my life is to make choices, go to places, and live a life I envisioned all by myself. Gleefully, I press the gas pedal, zooming off the white pavement to the dark roads. I smile at myself in the rear mirror in awe of what I see: a woman who is finally making her own choices in the driver's seat.

"Do I make a right turn here," I inquired my dad?

He chuckled to himself, "Dear, I'm in the passenger's seat. Didn't I tell you that the driver has control over everything?"

My jaw dropped partly from shock but mostly from joy. I make the choices? I get to pick? Destination? Right?

Left? I make the rash decision to turn right and exit out of my dimly lit neighborhood. To the city, my heart shouts.

To the city! To the place of fun, new beginnings. I push the gas pedal a bit harder, desperate to leave the small town of mine. To the city! To the place where I dream of being!

The city was only ten minutes away, stocked with shopping malls, cinemas, and museums. The place where we could dress how we desire and dance unbothered until death does us part. The place where social constraints no longer existed, where man, woman, or thing lived harmoniously as equal beings.

My heart sank again: To the city, to the town, to the town!

"Dear," my dad said, "Do you like sitting in the driver's seat."

"Oh, dad," I squealed, "I love it so much. I've never felt happier, freer, than sitting here in the driver's seat."

The driver's seat was no more too wide, long, reclined, or thin. It fit her frame perfectly, protecting her body and fueling it with newfound energy: control. To the city! To the city! To the city! Her heart shouts again. This time

the driver's seat joins in. To the city! To the city! To the city!

I arrived in the city. I didn't know if I should scream from the beauty eluded from the lights or the pure shock that I drove here on my OWN accord. "Dad, can we look around. Maybe, walk and shop on Ginsburg Road?"

My father's forehead wrinkled once more. He hummed through his mouth and quietly said, "Darling, It's quite late for a woman to be walking."

Silence. We were silent. Not a word from us both; just the small hums from my father's throat. The tune of his old favorite song from the 80s about women making sandwiches and cleaning. I drove a few more loops around the city, quietly wishing that my father would let me explore this lovely city. Once I have my license, I will come here at night and party away without any man's consent, but I can't help but think: Shouldn't I make all the decisions as I sit in the driver's seat?

I head back home in silence once more. Hmmm Hmm Hmmm, my father hums. His hums get louder the closer we reach home, yet my heart still roots for the city. Two different tunes in my brain, wanting two other destinations.

We are almost home, just a few more minutes. No people outside expect- wait, who is that walking? My car headlights focus on the stranger walking five meters ahead. How are they able to step out? I thought that was dangerous...

"Dad, look," I whisper, pointing my finger at the figure walking above. "It's kind of late. Should we ask them if they are okay?"

Dad gets a bit worried, furrows his brows once more. He peers outside through his window. I expected him to tell me to brake, so we could ask them if they were okay, but instead, he just laughed and pointed ahead. "Darling, let's go home. No worries here."

"But dad, it is dangerous outside-" I protest, but my dad interrupts me. "Sweetie, he's a man. He does not have to worry about such things. Don't worry; he has control."

Control. Control. Control.

Wasn't she in the driver's seat? The person with control. The person who made all the choices: chose the destination, decided to signal right, decided to loop around the city a hundred times. C-O-N-T-R-O-L?

She's never been allowed to walk alone unless the sun shined very bright. She's never been allowed to enter stores alone at night. God, forbid she gets the mail when the sun starts to fade. How can he- the stranger who walks with only the company of his shadow- have more control than she who drives a well-oiled machine, designed by engineers and crafted by the most advanced technology. Control? Control? Control? No, she has power. She HAS to have it. She drove to those places. She made those decisions. The driver's seat- it's hers. But-How can he have more control than her? How can he roam the streets alone? Just because he's a man? A man. A man. A man. Is that the condition she must withhold? No, it can't be- She does have control. Does she? Does she? Does she?

-----*Screech! CRASH*-----

Her red Santa Fe crashed into the blue car parallel parked outside of Lorde Street. Her hands start to tremble. Sweat trickles down my forehead, but her face is stone cold, emotionless.

"Darling!" her dad explodes. "What happened?"

She sniffled once more, quietly mumbling: "I thought I had control, but I never did."