**The Drive**

He wasn’t much of a driver; he relied on taxicabs to get him around the city. His apartment was only a few blocks away from his office, so he walked when the weather permitted.

She had learned to drive at fourteen and inherited her father’s buggy. It was parked at her mother’s home in Connecticut, where it had remained unmoved since she came to New York. She missed driving; she liked the feeling of control. His driving made her uncomfortable: he was slow. Slow, steady, and unsure: hardly appropriate for an escape.

Perhaps it was ironic: so many leave for the city, and they were running from it.

She stared out the window, focusing on the scenery. It wasn’t especially attractive: it was filled with hollow forests, abandoned farms, and road kill. She opened the window expecting the breeze to feel refreshing, but instead it was as if forty thousand nails were thrown at her face.

“Jesus Christ Ellie, would you close the god damn window!” It was unlike Phillip to take a harsh tone with her. He usually approached her with a certain softness so his utter adoration of her would shine through. Ellie glanced at him: he looked tired.

*They had met election night at some nightclub both of them would be hard pressed to remember the name of. She was a young liberal idealist, so she tried all night to convince him that Kennedy was the right choice. It made him think she might indeed be too young for him. They danced to Johnny Mathis until the night turned to morning. Then, she returned to Lester.*

Her fingers trembled through her gloves, which made her think it was a good idea that he had decided to drive. She did love the car. It was a lovely ’58 Cadillac, but Lester never let her drive it; he didn’t trust a woman behind the wheel. She wanted Phillip to start a conversation; he was good at that. He was afraid of silence really; he always filled the void with discussions about the Manson family, or race riots, or what really happened to Marilyn Monroe. This time she filled the void by turning on the radio. She didn’t know the song, but she sensed he did as he tapped his fingers on the steering wheel to the rhythm; it must have been a hit when he was young.

“I think we should stop- soon.” Phillip was taken aback because it was the first word she had mustered up all day. He responded with a simple nod, not even turning his head towards her. He stared straight ahead; there was no traffic in sight, just road and trees.

*A month into the relationship she told him about Lester. He didn’t seem to mind that she was married. A part of her hoped Lester’s existence would make him jealous, but she knew a part of him was relieved. She wasn’t the kind of gal he could marry. She was twelve years his junior, and was far too mouthy to display at dinner parties.*

The car came to a sudden and abrupt stop. He had pulled over by the side of the rode almost hitting a tree stump. He waited for the song to end. Ellie listened to the final lyrics: *Why did I decide to roam? Gotta take my sentimental journey, sentimental journey home?*

He pulled out the keys and stepped out of the car; as she followed him she lit a cigarette and let the smoke warm her. She offered him the cigarette and he accepted the gesture; this was the first time they communicated on the journey. For a minute they just stood there leaning against Lester’s Cadillac.

*She never loved Lester. She didn’t know if Phillip was her true love, but at least he didn’t bore her. Lester grew up two houses down from her in Canterbury Connecticut. Their fathers were in the same navy unit during the Great War. Ellie knew she would marry Lester when she was fifteen. They would spend three years in the city giving him a chance to jumpstart his career, and then they would move back to Canterbury. Lester would commute, and Ellie would raise the children. It was a plan that made her want to rip the hair from her skull.*

Suddenly the sensation of the cold air stopped, she couldn’t feel anything. She stood beside Phillip motionless, numb. He glanced over at her; it was a side of her he hadn’t seen. She was sad, and perhaps a little scared.

*It had been a while since she and Lester had a conversation that went beyond a quick greeting. Which is why he caught her off guard the week prior when he announced: “I found this house in Canterbury. Oh Ellie you’ll love it, three stories, four bedrooms, a block from the train station so the commute ‘ll be great,” He went onto explain the monetary operations of the proceedings, but Ellie ignored this part. She wanted to say something, to state her objections; it was so easy for her argue with Phillip but Lester-*

*“Darling,” she used her sweetest voice, careful not to offend him. “I am just wondering if we’re ready for this transition. What with you promotion and everything. You’re working so hard, do you really think you need the extra stress?”*

*“I will say what I can and can’t handle,” Lester was a boring man, but not a calm one. He refused to lose an argument at any cost, and when Ellie voiced her opinion, his rage took over.*

*“I know dear, but it’s been so stressful-“*

*“And what the hell have you done to help with that, HUH?” Ellie sat there, speechless. He was shaking with anger, while she was shaking with fear. “You’re not even around. My own wife out all night doing God knows what with God knows who.” It was the first time he ever alluded to Phillip. She stared blankly at him wanting desperately to defend herself.*

*“I- I really didn’t mean-“*

*“SHUT UP!” And with one swift move of the hand he struck her.*

*It was the sound that scared her more than anything. It didn’t hurt so much- stung more than anything. She continued with her blank stare, hoping for an apology, or even a look of sorrow. Instead he marched into the next room slamming the door behind him. In a way she was pleased; now she wouldn’t feel the least bit guilty about leaving the bastard.*

Phillip was the first to move, but at a very slow pace. Ellie followed him reluctantly knowing she was unprepared. They stood behind the car knowing that they couldn’t stop and smoke a cigarette, or just stand there and stare at the license plate. They could no longer delay the inevitable.

*She had called Phillip the next day and told him about Lester’s violent outbreak. He listened as she rambled on before finally coming out and saying, “I’m leaving him.”*

*The two of them gathered all of Ellie’s stuff and packed it into her old suitcases and any other boxes they could find. Ellie didn’t have much; a few outfits, several records, and a couple of books. They were quick, hoping to finish before Lester got home.*

*Ellie grabbed a piece of scrap paper and a fading pen and scribbled frantically:* ***So Long- Ellie.*** *There was no use making it sentimental. She grabbed a magnet and stuck it on the fridge.*

*At Phillip’s apartment they brainstormed their runaway. She wanted to go somewhere warm and isolated, while he had dreamt of Europe for years. They both knew they had no chance in New York; she couldn’t get a divorce and the affair itself would cause a scandal. After hours of debating Philip and Ellie decided on the perfect location to live out the rest of their days. They had everything worked out to a tee. Phillip was going to stop by his office to get his final paycheck waiting for him on his desk, and then they were off.*

Phillip opened the trunk; he started slowly, but then figured he should just get it over with. Ellie looked away at the sight of it. She knew that she would have to help Phillip carry the body. After all, it was her husband.

*Ellie waited alone in Phillip’s apartment pondering her new life. She wasn’t sure if this was her key to happiness, but she was sure that it was better than here. She married Lester at the age of eighteen. She wondered if that mistake could really be fixed. She heard a loud knocking on the door, which was odd because she thought she left it open.*

*“Phil it’s open,” she stood up, put her shoes on, and grabbed her purse.*

*Her purse fell from her hand and her cosmetics scattered across the wood floor.*

*She had dinner with Lester just last night, but looking at him now was like seeing a ghost. She said nothing, knew her frightened, confused, and bewildered expression was giving him great joy. She was expecting him to yell; he didn’t. He just stared at her with terrifying joy in his eyes.*

*The next part was a blur, it happened so fast; she couldn’t remember how he made it across the room to the point where he was pushing her against the wall. She couldn’t remember when exactly he put his hands around her neck. A million questions entered her mind: ‘How did he find me? Will he ever let go? Where is Phillip…’ She tried to block out all senses. The sight of his terrifying face. The pain of his tight grip. The sound of her own cries. That’s when it all started. His hands fell from her neck, and he gradually cowered to the ground. Her vision was hazy but she could make out the bloodstain that was expanding on his shirt. She in front of her and saw Phillip holding a kitchen knife. It took everything in her not to collapse.*

*“Grab the keys from his pocket,” she told him.*

Phillip looked at Ellie and gave her a reassuring nod; each of them took an end of Lester’s body and carried it up the hills of the abandoned forest on the roadside. He was starting to decay, which meant they had to suffer through a horrifying smell. Ellie distracted herself by listening to the sounds of the leaves crackling beneath her. She appreciated the crackling otherwise there would have been dreary silence as the two made their journey.

“This is the place,” Phillip said.

“On the count of three.” They whispered the numbers in unison and then let the body go. Phillip stood and stared for a minute, while Ellie headed straight back to the car.

When Phillip caught up with her he asked: “So what now?” When he was answered with silence he continued: “We could still go to Greece.”

Ellie pounded her feet so that the crackles of the leaves would overpower her thoughts, “Let’s just keep driving.”

Word Count: 1847