Silent Night

The radio sputtered to life, filling the damp insides of a 1994 silver sedan with a steady flow of static noise. Evelyn Nollins settled into a grey leather seat behind the wheel. She carefully adjusted the rear-view mirror, while gingerly tuning the radio. She skipped past the high pitched Carollers, pursing her thin lips as they cheerily wished everyone a “Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!” She skipped past the various channels of men and women straining to articulate each word, each of them with a vow to bring breaking news before the breaking dawn.

“Lawyers push for answers on drug te—“

“Deficit plan on track, finance minister insis—”

“Chinese immigrant drowns landlord’s daughter, found schizophren—”

“Methane gas ca—”

One of the men, whom she assumed must be dressed to the nines in a fancy blue suit and cardinal red tie, managed to warn Ms. Nollins of severe weather conditions that he claimed were bound to occur in what could be less than a few hours, before she huffed a sigh and turned off the radio.

The streets were long and quiet. The stampede of footprints tattooed furiously onto the ground by waves of last minute shoppers were coated with a fresh blanket of snow. Snow so soft and white; so *pure*. No child could resist diving into; rolling snowballs, without mittens, while they belted out queen Elsa’s famous *Let It Go* through the gaps in their teeth. Playing until their poor little frostbitten fingers sent them screaming to their mothers.

“Needles, Ma! There’re needles in my hands!”

Ms. Nollins drank up every drop of serenity the night had to offer and allowed herself a smile that was lost in the dark of her second-hand car. It was Christmas Eve and she was alone on the barren road, fifty years and counting with no loving embrace to return to at the end of each day. She took her time, cruising down the deserted streets of Mississauga. The display on her dash blinked 11:45 PM with green eyes, like hers, only bright and neon. She didn’t mean to, but she found herself boring her eyes into the naked flesh of her left hand where her fourth finger met knuckle. A golf ball sized lump formed in her throat.

Something itched in her chest as memories resurfaced from the depths of denial. Unwanted emotions flooded her chest, drowning her in years of buried sorrow and a pain so searing it leaves a permanent scar inside of her each time it comes knocking. She gasped, her lungs stuffed with wool. The light had turned green, snapping her out of her trance; she couldn’t even remember driving up to a crossroad. With a quick shake of her head, she stepped on the gas; it was time to go home.

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Tyler Buckle cursed under his breath. The pocket of warm air escaping his chapped lips was greedily sucked away into the icy black oblivion of night. He continued to inch towards the highway, bringing one laced boot in front of the other, a stream of snow gliding smoothly forward then shooting outward from the tips of his toes each time. The cold bit through his clothes, to his bones, frost wrapped around strands of black hair falling out of his mustard yellow beanie. His legs have lost almost all feeling; even the hairs inhabiting his nostrils were cracking with winter as he wrinkled his nose. Snow fell around him in a flurry of soft flakes, their crystal formations lit up by eerie streetlights standing rigid along the sidewalk, contrasting the endless deep blue of the darkened sky. Normally he would be awestruck by such a sight; disappointed to not have his paint set on him. But the sharp nails of anxiety that clawed its way up from his heart to his throat, stole away all pretty imaginings, leaving him with nothing but a nervous ball of energy trying to escape his skin. He had been walking on empty sidewalks, abandoned even by the homeless, for half an hour, an hour, two hours? What did it matter? He could walk forever and find that the silhouetted figures belonged to inanimate objects. Blow up Santa Clauses staked to the ground by corporation spiders awaiting more flies.

His bare hands, stuffed gratefully in the pockets of a beige paint splattered coat, curled into fists as he recalled his roommates leering as they pushed him out, shouting at him to “Just go home to your mommy!” His nails embroidered a row of crescents as they dug into flesh. *Those bastards*, he thought, blue lips curling back furiously. *I hope they flunk finals, screw that, they can all go to hell*.

The steady sound of tires grinding snow broke through the immutable silence, Tyler froze, a deer caught in blinding headlights. He whipped out his hand, sticking up his thumb, hope surging up to his chest so fast it knocked the air out of his lungs. He was seconds too late. The car zipped past, engulfing him once again in the dead of night.

“Dammit!” he cried, his hesitation cost him his rescue. Fury sparked a fire in the pit of his stomach, the icy flames scorching his insides. “I hate you Tyler! Goddammit! I hate you so much! Look at you, freezing your ass off while the rest of the world is snuggling at home by the fireplace. What a loner!”

The more holiday activities he added onto his mental *What I Could Be Doing Right Now* list, the more he loathed himself, and the more profanity he flung onto the street. As time slowly ticked away, he began filling his head with a new thought, a darker thought: he could die out here, cold and alone on Christmas Eve.

The snow fell faster, each flake now a malicious shard of glass. Pulling his shoulders back, Jack Frost filled his stomach with icicles, shooting them out of his mouth in gusts of vicious wind.

Tyler’s grunts were ripped from his lips and into the void. Even breathing required bitter concentration; he was so focused he almost didn’t see the old vehicle roll by. Luckily, the woman was going slowly enough for him to squeak out in surprise and fling both palms up with his fingers splayed like a dancer giving his audience the old razzle dazzle.

The car didn’t stop.

Tyler Buckle’s heart lost its grip and fell down into a bottomless pit.

Then the car came back. Stopping first, and then backing up.

As he ran up to the passenger side, Tyler believed with all his heart that the age of miracles had not past.

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“God bless you” were the first words to gush out of the young man’s mouth as he entered the warmth of her car. Evelyn did not believe in a God.

“Where to?” she questioned, uncomfortable with her own spontaneous decision.

The kid was so mesmerized in rubbing his hands together and shaking out his unkempt locks that her question fell on deaf ears—deaf and frostbitten, she noted.

“I’m headed to Scarborough. Where should I drop you off?” she asked again, voice pinched with annoyance.

He paused; she could see the gears grinding in his head. “Sure. Scarborough is good.”

She had never done anything like this before and regretted it instantly. But it was Christmas Eve, and she wasn’t heartless.

“I’m Tyler Buckle, thanks again for saving my ass from winter’s wrath,” seeing that she was expressionless, the pale young man with flushed cheeks continued in a serious tone, “it really does mean a lot to me, uh… Mrs.—?”

“It’s Ms.” Her cheeks reddened, feeling betrayed again, “Ms. Nollins. If I may ask, Tyler, what are you doing out so late?”

The pause was longer this time, she caught the waver in his voice when he finally answered, “I’m not expected back at my parent’s house until tomorrow, but my pal’s party ended early today so I decided I could go home earlier and…well… I decided to hitchhike.”

Evelyn had a keen nose for the bullshit of men, when the kid spoke, the car reeked of it. She knew better than to trust his words, momentarily taking her eyes off the road to glance at her left hand—at the fourth finger—the finger that a diamond ring had once proudly perched atop.

Someone stole *that* ring.

She used to accuse the mistress, but after three years of being blinded by foolishness she had finally come to her senses. No one stole that ring. It was the “Causer of All Pain” who had gotten tired of seeing that ring on chicken-thin fingers, decided it would look much better on a younger, perfectly blossomed woman.

Half her attention was paid to the boy; the other half to the road.

There were now two elements of danger present.

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Tyler knew he should have just told the old woman the truth flat out, it wasn’t a big deal, and yet he lied. Why? He was embarrassed—*embarrassed!*

*Well who cares! It’s not like I’ll see her again. White lies don’t hurt anyone,* he thought. *It’s not like she explained why she’s driving around so late.*

Coming up with an explanation for this woman, *Evelyn* *was it?* That was the easy part. Explaining an unwelcome midnight arrival to his mother, after having cut ties with her for over a year now—all for feverishly insulting her replacement husband, stirring up a fight so stormy the lightening can still be seen from a distance—now that was the real challenge.

He turned to take a good look at Evelyn, it dawned on him suddenly that she was a complete stranger. He was so happy to be out of the cold to realize that he willingly put his life in the hands of this frail, brown haired woman, although it wouldn’t be fair to all the wiry grey strands on her head to call her hair “brown”.

He noticed that she wore no ring; felt bad about his earlier assumption. He wondered how after all these years, she ended up alone; hoping he would not share her fate.

The more he studied her, the more he itched with unease. There was something about her that just wasn’t right. Was it her lack of expression? Or was it her abnormally thin body?

Or maybe it was his frostbitten flesh tingling in pain.

Yes, it was merely the needles bothering him.

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The snow was coming down in sheets of white. Evelyn turned onto the highway, slowly picking up speed; she had always been a cautious driver, she bought snow tires before most families even ripped October out of their calendars. *Better safe than sorry!* That was the motto.

Yet despite such dangerous driving conditions, she still could not bring herself to focus entirely on the road. It was simple: she didn’t trust Tyler Buckle.

*Is that even his real name?*

She could see him staring at her from her peripheral vision.

Wariness slowly transcended into fear. The infamous itch returned to haunt her, burying itself deep in her heart. Her thoughts ran frantically towards a dead end:

*What the hell was I thinking?* *What did I get myself into?*

*Wasn’t there something about a schizophrenic Asian man who drowned a little girl? Tyler isn’t Asian, but he’s probably half… He could be related to that schizophrenic!*

*No, that’s insane. Insane! And racist!*

*But what if he is? I’m dead if he is! Schizophrenia is genetic. There is a strong hereditary component! And even if he isn’t… he’s still a danger to me… stronger, healthier—*

*What are those dark splatters on his coat?*

*Oh shit!*

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Tyler felt the car waver from left to right. Evelyn was in a trance, staring bug-eyed at the steering wheel, muttering under her breath about schizophrenia and danger.

*Crap! Is she schizophrenic?* *Is she trying to warn me?*

The thought of being in a car driven by a schizophrenic sent adrenaline coursing through his veins, snapping awake all his senses.

*She could be as mental as the stragglers preaching nonsense on Young St. You’re familiar with those, man. You do not want to be in the car with one!*

*God I hope she’s not* crazy!

Not wanting to bother her yet fearing for his own safety, Tyler placed a cautious hand on Evelyn’s shoulder, trying to break her trance, “Hey—”

It all happened so fast.

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Evelyn was a cat being jumped by a dog from behind.

Her body jerked in shock, sending the car spinning out of control. The snow swirling down wrapped them in their own personal tornado.

“What the hell!” Tyler shouted, eyes bulging out of their sockets. He leaned over and forcefully grabbed for the steering wheel.

Not fully understanding the situation, her mind scrambling for the loss of logic and normality, Evelyn pinned the blame on the strange young man whose face was stricken with fear. She lashed out with all her might, causing him to shout out in pain, yet he wouldn’t let go of the steering wheel.

Unlike most unfortunate souls who see their lives flash before their eyes, Evelyn did not recall a happy memory. She did not see the face of a lover. She did not remember the warmth of an embrace. She did not even register how the highway no longer flew out in a straight line, but tilted at an odd angle.

She saw nothing.



The screeching sound of rubber tires burning and the whining engine of an old coughing car were slaughtered by the tremendous snow storm Mr. Blue-Suit-Red-Tie had previously predicted.

The chaotic screams thundering in the ears of both Evelyn Nollins and Tyler Buckle were gone unheard by parents tucking children into bed.

The short lived moments following Tyler Buckle’s hand on Evelyn Nollins’ shoulder befell in a series of silent frames.

The shots failed to capture the rotting stench of fear hanging in the cramped space of the car.



The heap of twisted metal found shattered at the base of a streetlight was a gift presented by the devil himself. Unhinged scraps curled up towards the sky like the arms of a grotesque creature, greedily grasping the air in attempts to pull itself out from the depths of hell.

The glass was black and jagged, the tires melted, the paint stripped off. Oily smoke willowed up into the clear blue sky from punctured fuel tanks.

Snowflakes ballet danced down from cotton candy clouds and lay innocently on the gruesome gash, forming a scab of white.

Officer Narciso stood solemnly on the empty highway road blocked off by police tape. His partner, Johnny, was away spending time with family, leaving him alone again on Christmas. “Severe weather conditions,” he coughed into a handkerchief, “no one ever listens to the weather reports.”

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