

Stick Shift

I don't know how to drive a car, but the girl in the passenger seat doesn't have to know that. It's embarrassing—to be nineteen years old and not know how to operate a vehicle. While my friends were getting their licenses on their sixteenth birthday, I was taking care of my little sister. Walking her to school. Making her dinner. Helping her with homework.

That's the kind of shit you have to do when your mom's dead and your dad's a junkie.

It's okay, I don't mind—I love my sister. It's not an excuse, just an explanation. But it certainly doesn't justify why I'm about to put a girl's life at risk to get laid.

“This is a cool car,” she says, running her fingertips along the black leather seat. Her nails are painted cherry red, and I wonder how they'd feel against the skin of my back.

“Thanks,” I say coolly. “My dad gave it to me.” It's not a complete lie. It *is* my dad's car, but he didn't give it to me. In fact, he'd sooner die before handing me the keys to his 1974 Benz. He spent months restoring it and loves it more than he loves me and my sister. Which, I mean, isn't saying much.

He took too much Xanax and fell asleep on the couch today; left his keys sitting on the kitchen table. I give him another 6 hours before he wakes up.

I hold my left foot down on the clutch and put the keys in the ignition—exactly what the Youtube tutorial told me to do. First gear, release emergency brake, ease left foot off clutch, accelerate. It isn't until I'm on the road that I realize I've been holding my breath. I let it out slowly. “What movie do you want to see?” I ask her, trying to keep my eyes on the road.

“I forgot what it was called, but there's this new horror movie out. I'd be down to check it out,” she says. I glance over at her. She's wearing a cropped tank top without a bra underneath it, and I can see the outline of what I hope is a nipple piercing.

“Sounds good,” I say. I steal another glance. It's quick but not quick enough, and I don't even notice that I ran the stop sign until I see the flashing red and blue lights in my rearview mirror. “Shit,” I say under my breath. The officer steps out of his car. He's short and fat and balding, and lumbers toward the Benz on stubby legs. I wonder if he's getting laid tonight. I'm definitely not.

I roll down my window. “License and registration please,” he says, peering toward the passenger seat. He probably notices the nipple piercing too.

“Sure thing officer, one second,” I say confidently, although I know damn well I don't have either of those things on hand. “I think it's in the glove box.” I reach over and pull open the compartment, hoping that by some miracle, a driver's license with my name and photo on it will fall out of it. Instead, a small baggy full of white falls onto the only part of the passenger seat not covered by long, half-bare legs.

“What the hell?” My passenger shrieks, picking up the bag with her delicate fingers.

“Boy, what's in the baggy?” The officer asks.

At this point, I don't know what's worse. Admitting to this girl that I don't have a license, and that my dad's a junkie who leaves bags of God-knows-what in the glove compartment of the car that belongs to him and not me—or going to jail for possession. I look at the cop, whose red beard has grown patchy across his neck. I look at the girl. I look at her nipples again.

“That's just my bag of cocaine officer.”