Chicken Shit

By: Christina Cintron

You call me chicken shit for not driving, so I grab the wheel. You think because I am careful, I am not brave, but I am. You are impulsive. I am thoughtful. But at this moment, I am impulsive. You try to take back control of the car. You are stronger than me, but I am faster. I turn the steering wheel all the way right. You slam on the brakes, but it is too late. We crash into a tree by the water. The airbags burst out at us. Your driving glasses crunch and fall off your face. My forehead is wet. I touch my cheeks, and my hands pull away red. Your mouth moves like you are barking. I do not catch the words. I cannot hear anything over the ringing in my ears. Your seatbelt is on, but you lunge at me. You grab for my neck. Spittle escapes your mouth as you speak.

You look like a rabid dog. I notice your arm bends at a weird angle. Part of your bone peeks out at your elbow. Windshield glass peppers your Pink Floyd t-shirt. It is your favorite shirt. You love Pink Floyd almost as much as your car. I giggle. My giggle rolls into a chuckle. Your complexion changes from tomato to beet. You look enraged. I laugh harder. I see flashing lights. I am in hysterics. The jaws of life pull me out of your green Saturn that now looks like a crushed can of peas. This image tickles me even more. Something wet slides down the sides of my face. I am not sure if it is tears or blood, but everything is so funny, I do not care anyway. I am on a stretcher. The paramedic leans over my face and talks to me. I do not see you anymore. He is too close. I am scared. I try to speak, but spit dribbles down my face. I look for you but cannot twist my head in your direction. There is a strange gurgling noise in my throat. The paramedic injects me with something that makes me happy again, even though everything is not as funny as it was before. I hope they do not give you the same happy needle.

I met you on a humid night in July. I saw you when I took my dog Cuddles outside to piss. I brought her to the bar. She sat by my feet while I drank a pitcher of Czech beer. I rescued her from a foster home that summer, and I did not want to leave her home alone. You were smoking outside of the bar. You wore your driving glasses and your hair long, slicked back, and parted to the side. You looked like Clark Kent. You asked to pet my dog. I said she is not good with strangers. Cuddles only had one eye, half-covered with a tuft of white fur. You let her sniff your hand. She dropped and rolled on the ground, and you patted her belly. You rubbed her the wrong way, and she snapped at you, baring her tiny teeth. You asked if I wanted to go for a ride. I pointed to my bicycle chained to a parking meter outside of the bar. We laughed. We walked to the park. I grew up near that park. I had been going to that park my whole life. That night, I got lost there with you.

Your name was Ben. I hated that name. I knew a boy named Ben in junior high. Everyone said he liked me. When he saw me in the hallway, he smacked my books onto the floor. When I bent down to pick them up, Ben tipped me over like a sleeping cow. I thought, it’s just a name.

You drove me home. We sat outside of my apartment complex and talked for hours. I told you all of my fears and dreams. You listened and smiled compassionately. I got out of the car and thought, what a nice guy.

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You are an hour late. I am heated. You say I always complain about something. I eye the door handle and wonder how much it would hurt to jump out of a car doing 50MPH. You tell me what a nice guy you are; otherwise, you would have punched me in the face already. I say nice guys do not say things like that. You tell me to shut up. You say that I am a baby, and I act like a victim. You yell. There is a ball of something forming in my stomach. I do not know what it is, but I know it is not good. You scream something else, and the ball gets bigger. It cannot fit in my stomach anymore and starts spreading to my ribcage, passes my heart, and jumps into my throat. I try to swallow it down. I say okay, I am a shitty person; I am a baby; I am a victim. You say I cannot do anything on my own; I do not do anything. You say I cannot even drive, and I am chicken shit. That is when I take the wheel.

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