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A teenager flees the scene of a brutal car accident that he caused, but soon realizes that the only thing that will bring him peace is to seek forgiveness.

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EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A stretch of a two lane highway weaves through a moonlit forest. Picturesque. Peaceful. Serene. The woodland CHORUS--crickets, frogs, birds--plays its nocturnal serenade.

INT. SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

PAUL, a young father, guides the sedan along the highway through the thick layers of trees. SUSIE, a young mother, peers out the passenger window. Behind them, in a car seat, sleeps KATIE, 3. Paul and Susie exchange a tired smile.

SILENT STRETCH OF HIGHWAY

Same empty piece of road. Still quiet and tranquil.

A caption appears. Against this backdrop, it's jarring. The text message cuts through the serenity:

10/23/2012 - 9:41PM
MATT: you leave yet bro?

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

BEN HARRISON--nice-looking, 17, kind of kid that helps out with Sunday school--behind the wheel.

A mobile phone resting inside a cup holder atop the SUV's console BUZZES and glows. New text. He picks it up. Begins typing with one hand while he drives.

SILENT STRETCH OF HIGHWAY

Same shot. Eerily silent. Ben replies:

10/23/2012 - 9:42PM
BEN: On me way

EXT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

The SUV drifts. The tires THUMP over the center line. The vehicle jerks back into the appropriate lane.

BEN IN SUV

Another BUZZ. Ben lifts his phone. Glances at the road, then the cell, and back again. Caption:

10/23/12 - 9:42PM
MATT: Talk like a pirate day, eh?
Arrrg, matey! Hurry up!

Ben SNICKERS. Types a reply with one hand.

SILENT STRETCH OF HIGHWAY

Same shot. Now foreboding. The SOUNDS of the forest are gone. Replaced by the SOUND of two vehicles approaching. Ben's reply, as he types it out one letter at a time:

10/23/12 - 9:43PM
BEN: Jus left

PAUL AND SUSIE'S SEDAN

Paul yawns. Shakes his head vigorously. Susie runs a hand down his arm. Gives it a squeeze. Paul smiles at her. Opens his eyes wide playfully, a silent promise not to fall asleep.

Simultaneously, Ben's text keeps coming. The caption has never left the screen:

10/23/12 - 9:43PM
BEN: Jus left be ther in 5 mi

The cabin of the sedan is suddenly awash in bright light. Oncoming headlights. They blind Paul. He squints. Pounds the HORN. Hits the brakes. Yanks the wheel.

BLACK SCREEN

The HORN and the SOUND of SCREECHING TIRES fade out...

INT. SUV - MOMENTS LATER

Ben. In shock. White-knuckled death grip on the steering wheel. Color drained out of this face. He looks in the rearview mirror.

EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Off the road, beside the asphalt, a deep gash cuts through the mud and grass--a tire track.

ON THE ROAD

A long, black skid mark crosses over the highway's dashed yellow line.

THE FRONT GRILL OF THE SEDAN

Smoke bends, twists, and writhes in the spotlight of a single headlight. The mutilated front bumper hangs from the body of the car.

IN THE MUD AND GRASS

Broken glass everywhere.

THE TREE TRUNK

Scarred. The front-right side of the sedan wrapped around it.

INSIDE THE SEDAN

Airbags deployed.

Paul's hand, unmoving, limp.

The car keys, still in the ignition, sway gently.

The rear, right-side window is gone. Shattered.

IN THE MUD AND GRASS

Amidst the broken glass, a tattered, stuffed animal--a pink bunny--sits, staring into the sedan's headlight as if dazed.

THE SUV

Idling on the road. Unscathed.

BEN IN SUV

His hand drops to the door handle. Hesitates. He looks back over his shoulder. Then down at his phone. Picks it up. Fumbles. Drops it.

ON THE HORIZON

A pair of headlights appear. Miles away, but headed toward the accident. Headed toward Ben.

BEN IN SUV

Staring at the oncoming headlights. The sedan's door CLICKS open. Ben spins around. Hand jumps back to the door handle, but his eyes dart back to the oncoming headlights. They're getting closer. His phone BUZZES. He grabs it.

10/23/12 - 9:52PM
MATT: WHERE R U?!?!

Hesitates again. Bites his lower lip. Swallows. The headlights grow closer. He starts to panic. Face contorts. Chest heaves. The sedan's door THUMPS closed.

Ben's foot slams down on the gas. The SUV's tires SQUEAL. White as a sheet, panicked, he hauls down the road. His eyes remain focused on the horizon as he passes the oncoming car.

EXT. MATT'S HOME - LATER

The SUV pulls into the driveway. Parks.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

Ben, texting. Caption:

10/23/12 - 10:02PM
BEN: Im here. Come out here

He shuts his eyes. Takes deep breaths.

BEN
(whispering)
Dear God, please, please help those
people!

His phone BUZZES.

10/23/12 - 10:02PM

MATT: what? Why? Just come in

Ben, frustrated, is about to reply when the front door opens. MATT, 17, appears. Throws up his hands as if to say: "What's wrong with you?" He approaches. Opens the SUV's door. Sits.

MATT

What's the big- Whoa. Dude, are you all right?

BEN

(quiet)

There was...an accident.

(angry)

Why were you texting me?

MATT

What?

BEN

I was trying to- You kept texting!

And-

MATT

What are you talking about?

Ben stops. Stares ahead. Looks back at Matt. He's scared.

EXT. HARRISON RESIDENCE - MORNING

OFFICER PARKER closes his squad car's door. Walks up the driveway. Looks around. Moves to the porch. Rings the DOORBELL. Glances around. DEBORAH HARRISON opens the door. Her slight smile melts into concern.

DEBORAH

Oh! Officer Parker. Is-is everything okay?

PARKER

Morning, Ms. Harrison. Sorry to disturb you. I'm just here to follow up on a lead.

DEBORAH

Is Ben all right?

PARKER

As far as I know, ma'am, he's fine. Are you home alone?

DEBORAH

Yes. Ben spent the night at a friend's house. I'm sorry--what exactly can I help you with?

PARKER

Ms. Harrison, there was an accident last night on I40. Not far here--

DEBORAH

I don't understand. You said Ben--

PARKER

As far as we can tell Ben was not hurt, but a vehicle matching the description of the SUV registered under your name was seen fleeing the scene of the accident.

Deborah lets that sink in.

DEBORAH

(quiet)

Is everyone okay?

PARKER

A three-year-old girl was seriously injured. She's in intensive care. Her parents are a little banged up, but nothing serious. Was Ben driving the SUV last night?

Deborah stares. Her mouth drops open. She shuts it. Nods.

DEBORAH

(quiet)

Is he in trouble?

PARKER

I don't know, ma'am, but I do need to speak with him. Can you tell me where he is now?

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ben paces. Still freaked out, but calmer than last night. Matt thinks. Neither of them have slept.

MATT

Remember when I hit the ball through Mrs. Taft's front window?

BEN

What? What does that have to do with anything?

MATT

You wanted to tell her. I wanted to run away.

BEN

That was a window, Matt. This was a car full of people. Don't you get it? One of them could be dead! They could all be dead!

Matt looks away. Ben takes a deep breath.

BEN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I just-

Ben's phone RINGS. He checks it. Frowns. Answers.

BEN (CONT'D)

Mom?

Ben freezes. The color drains out of his face again.

BEN (CONT'D)

Looking for... me?

(pause)

Wait, Mom...he's coming here? To Matt's house? Mom, I've gotta go.

(pause)

Yes, I'm fine, Mom. I just have to go, okay?

He hangs up. Turns to Matt.

BEN (CONT'D)

A cop- a cop is coming here.

MATT

(freaking out)

Here?

BEN

What am I gonna do?

MATT

Maybe just explain it to him. You know? Tell him what happened. It was an accident.

BEN

I caused that car to veer off the road! What if somebody died? I could go to jail!

Ben moves toward the door.

BEN (CONT'D)

I can't. I-I'm not ready. I need... I need to think.

Ben opens the door and hurries out.

MATT

Ben! Ben, wait!

EXT. MATT'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Ben makes a beeline for the SUV. Matt chases after him.

MATT

What am I supposed to do?

Ben slides behind the wheel. Shuts the door.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

Matt stops on the other side of the window. Stands, hands on his hips. Ben starts the SUV.

MATT

(through the glass)
I've gotta tell the truth, Ben. I can't lie. You can't ask me to lie.

Ben puts it in reverse. Leaves Matt standing there, watching.

EXT. FOOD MART - AFTERNOON

The SUV pulls up. Ben gets out. Pulls a backpack out of the back seat. Looks around. Heads inside.

INT. FOOD MART - MOMENTS LATER

Ben stares at a bag of chips. Puts them in his basket.

A MALE CUSTOMER walks up to the checkout counter. The OWNER begins swiping his items.

OWNER

This it?

CUSTOMER

Just the essentials. You hear what happened last night? Down on I40?

Ben freezes. Peers over at the counter. The owner nods, and then shakes his head as he bags the customer's items.

OWNER

Terrible shame. Any news on the little girl?

CUSTOMER

I don't know the latest. She's down at Presbyterian Memorial. Last I heard, it was serious.

OWNER

What about the other driver?

Ben braces himself.

CUSTOMER

Dunno. Haven't heard.

The customer takes his bags off the counter.

OWNER

We'll keep praying, then. Thanks for dropping in.

The customer nods. Heads out the door. Ben takes his basket to the checkout counter. The owner looks across at him.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Howdy.

Ben doesn't respond. The owner sizes him up. Realizes Ben's not going to say much. Turns up the volume on his radio. Ben sticks his hands in his pockets. Fidgets. On the radio, a BAPTIST PREACHER in mid sermon. Ben's eyes find the radio.

BAPTIST PREACHER (O.S.)

...amen? You see, brothers and sisters, forgiveness is not something we seek only from God. God invites us into Christian community.

OWNER

That'll be \$19.47.

Ben digs through his pockets while trying to listen. The owner notices Ben listening.

BAPTIST PREACHER (O.S.)
 Jesus Christ forgives. That's what
 he promised. But our sin does not
 only offend our Savior! Often
 times, we offend one another!

Ben places his money on the counter. Starts counting out exact change.

BAPTIST PREACHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 And when we do, we must seek
 forgiveness. Brothers and sisters
 we must be reconciled one to
 another! We must seek forgiveness
 even when we don't deserve it!
 Amen?

The owner stares across at Ben. Smiles.

OWNER
 Amen?

Ben stuffs his groceries into his backpack. Slings it over his shoulder. Heads for the door. The owner just watches.

INT. SUV - EVENING

Ben pulls off the road. Turns the car off. Gets out.

EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Right back where we started--the once-serene stretch of two lane highway. The accident has been cleared, but the evidence remains. Black streaks of rubber on the asphalt. Shards of broken glass that didn't get swept away.

Ben's gaze falls on the scarred tree where that the sedan hit. He walks to it. Runs his hand down the bark. Bows his head. Starts to cry.

BEN
 (whispering)
 I'm sorry, Lord! I'm so sorry!

Puts his back against the tree. Slides down it until his butt hits the ground. His head falls between his knees.

His eyes catch something. Just off the road, missed in the clean-up efforts. A stuffed animal--the pink bunny.

He stares at it. Wipes his tears away. A look of determination crosses his features.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Ben pulls up to the hospital. Parks. Notices the squad car parked off to the side. There's a split second of panic, but he takes a deep breath and reaches over to the passenger seat to pick up his backpack. Opens his door.

INT. HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER

Ben enters the hospital. Backpack over his shoulder. Keeps his head down. Hurries past the front desk.

HALLWAY

He pauses. Opposite him, a door: "INTENSIVE CARE UNIT."

ICU

He steps into a wide corridor. Rooms on either side. Across the hallway, Officer Parker stands next to Paul and Susie. Ben stops. Swallows. Puts his head down. Walks toward them.

ON PARKER, PAUL, AND SUSIE

Officer Parker sees Ben. Stops talking. His face becomes stern. Paul and Susie follow his gaze. All eyes on Ben.

He stops. Beyond them, out of focus: the big glass window to Katie's room. Ben looks at the adults, then the ground. Slowly turns his head. Peers into the hospital room. It comes into focus. There's Katie, on the bed, bruised and battered.

PARKER

I've been looking for you, Ben.

Anger floods Paul's face.

PAUL

You? You're the one?

Ben looks up at him, then down at the floor.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What- Were you drunk?

Ben shakes his head.

BEN

No! No, I-I was texting, and-

Paul's fingers wrap into fists. Susie gently touches his forearm. He pulls away. Walks a few paces away. Officer Parker follows him. Ben watches. Tears pool up in his eyes.

Susie looks at her husband, then turns to Ben. Her eyes brim with tears as well. She hugs herself. Rubs her upper arms.

BEN (CONT'D)

(almost to himself)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. It was an accident.

Susie tilts her head. Then walks to Ben. Gently touches his upper arm. Offers him a sad, but sympathetic smile.

Ben's attention shifts to Katie.

BEN (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Is she...going to be okay?

Susie takes a deep breath, lets it out slowly. Nods.

Ben walks to the window. Stares at Katie. He turns back to Susie, asking silently for permission to go in and see her. Susie hesitates. Nods her approval.

HOSPITAL ROOM

Ben enters Katie's room. Pauses. Katie's eyes swing over to him. He gives her a tentative wave. Walks around the bed to her side. Places his backpack on the ground. Unzips it and reaches inside. She watches.

He pulls out her stuffed pink bunny, cleaned and washed. The dirt and grime from the road is gone. He holds it up for her. Her eyes light up. She smiles broadly, thrilled. She manages to lift an arm. He gently tucks the pink bunny under it. She hugs it tightly.

ICU

Ben exits Katie's room. Officer Parker is waiting for him. Hands on his hips. Stern. Ben looks up at him. Nods.

Ben seems at peace as Officer Parker escorts him offscreen.

FADE OUT.

