

The Drive

by **Peyton Vance**

“Now, you just have to be easy with it.” I say. Eli looks at the buttons and levers.

“OK.”

“What are you forgetting?” I ask.

“Oh.” There's a click and he disengages the emergency brake. “Reverse?” He asks.

“Yes.”

“Okay ... reverse.” He lets the ER drag out this mouth. “The ‘D’?” he asks.

“What? Oh, yeah, put it in drive.”

It takes him seven seconds to pull back the lever. He's timid. He thinks that if he presses or pulls the wrong thing the car will explode. Part of me doesn't blame him. My friend's brother slammed into a car so hard his body was scrambled like eggs. It took six months for him to learn to walk again. Eli pulls forward.

“Where do I go?” he asks.

“Where do you want to go?” That question wasn't good enough for him. He looks at me then back at the road then back at me again.

“Just tell me where to go.”

“Drive to the gas station by Food City. Do you know where that is?” He lets out an “uh” that lasts a lot longer than it should.

“I think so,” he says.

“Ok, drive and I'll tell you where to turn.” I'm thinking about Colton. His friend drove too fast over a pile of leaves and wrapped the car around a stump. It turned Colton and his friend into red pulp. Some of my friends who saw the pictures said “Goddamn, that stump was hungry. Gobbled them right up.” Eli speeds up.

“How fast?” He asks.

“What did the sign say?” He pauses, then answers like he was asked a math question.

“Forty five?”

“Yes, but go whatever speed you’re comfortable with.” Austin was rough. In the car with his buddy and drove over black ice. They went off road and whiplash caused them to headbutt each other. When the cops showed up Austin’s buddy was stumbling around in the road while Austin lay dead in the car. His brain was squished in his skull like a firefly in a kid’s hand. Eli jerks the wheel.

“Sorry,” he says, “Thought that was a bird on the road.” He’s hunched over. His shoulders almost touch his ears. It looks like if it wasn’t for the seatbelt he’d be twisted in a knot.

“You’re fine. Sometimes you’ll dodge ‘em. Sometimes you won’t.” He looks at me then back on the road. He goes a little faster.

“How do you stay so calm?” he asks. I’m thinking about the kid who drove into a lake and drowned himself. They didn’t find him until the next morning.

“There’s nothing to worry about.” I say.



Peyton Vance is a senior at the University of Tennessee majoring in English, so primarily he is focused on trying not to become homeless. Interested in writing across all genres, he’s had three previous works published within the last year.