

Headlights  
By Ethan Pranger

The gentle tapping of rain against the roof of the car attempts to lull me to sleep, and I struggle to keep my eyes open. *Focus on the road, Michelle. You can sleep when you get home.* A stirring in the back of the car draws my attention. I can see in the rear-view mirror Anthony beginning to wake from his sleep. "Mommy? Are we almost home?"

"Almost, dear. We'll be home soon." His eyes flutter a bit before closing, and the steady rising and falling in his chest resumes. It's funny, they always say to cherish every moment--that they grow up too quickly. My eyes begin to sting with tears as my mind begins to wander, wondering where the time went. It was just seven years ago when I found out that I was pregnant, and I remember the fear and anxiety I felt all throughout those nine months, how was I going to do it alone? There are single mothers everywhere, but can I truly give this child the best opportunity of having a good life? But all of that fear and doubt melted away as soon as I saw Anthony's face for the first time. The future was unknown, but I knew that everything would be alright.

The buzzing of my phone brings me back to reality. I look down at it in quick glances, not wanting to take my gaze off the road for too long, and I see that Eli, my husband of three years, is the one calling. I reach for my phone blindly, keeping my eyes on the road. My fingers stretch into the darkness, and I feel my phone buzzing at the tip of my finger, but, clumsily, I knock my phone from the passenger seat to the floor. I give a defeated sigh and bend over for just a moment to reach for my phone, picking it up off the car floor, but by the time I reach it, the phone has stopped ringing. I sit back up, redialing Eli when my eyes are able to scan the road once again. A small yelp escapes my lips when I realize we are speeding towards a colossal moose in the center of the road.

Time slows as my muscles react before my mind does. The car screeches as it swerves past the moose, flying off the side of the road. Seconds turn to minutes turn to hours as the car hurtles down into the ditch, wrapping itself around a tree as the world goes black.

My head throbs and my eyes flutter open to the sound of Anthony crying in the back. I quickly scan my body for any serious pains, and feeling none, I unbuckle and climb into the back to check on my son. He's crying, but his injuries seem minor. "Shh, it's ok, baby, everything's going to be ok." He nods his head, but continues to cry. I crawl back to the front seat to call 911, but my phone is completely shattered. "Damn it." I mutter under my breath. "Ok, baby, we're gonna have to go get some help. I'm gonna help you out. I climb back into the back seat and manage to open the door. I unbuckle Anthony and pick him up and carry him out of the car.

We stumble through the trees, back towards the road. I keep repeating that everything is ok, trying anything I can to soothe Anthony. As we stagger closer to the road, I can see headlights in the distance, and my heart begins to fill with hope. They have to have a phone, they'll be able to rescue us. Rain soaks us, chilling us to the bone as we break through the treeline, and we stumble out into the center of the road. "It's ok, Anthony, someone's coming to get us." I begin to wave at the oncoming truck, motioning for them to stop. Our savior draws

closer and closer, and I smile as I hear the truck's brakes begin to screech and the truck begins to stop, but the truck doesn't stop in time as the headlights bear down on us.