205 Horsepower

There is magic in a new car, one that you’re completely unacquainted with. Not just in getting the seat positioned right, but in adapting to it, learning all of the quirks and features that it presents to you. There’s a symbolism in the replacement of an old vehicle, full of memories both good and bad, with a fresh slate, a chance to begin again.

He was scared when he first realized his old car was dying, even though he’d wanted to replace it for the better half of six years. When the alternator -- or maybe it was the battery, or some other electrical gremlin, he never properly diagnosed it -- started to go, and it became a dice roll as to if the car would even turn over, he sold it for five hundred dollars on the spot right after Thanksgiving break. He was a freshman, his confidence mostly unfettered. It was surprisingly inexpensive to get behind the wheel of a new car, he’d found out, and he’d decided the monthly cost was worth it -- cars were always a big hobby of his, after all.

He was excited to show her off all around his hometown before he had to head back up to his school. A six speed manual made him nervous, at first, and the amount of times he stalled embarrassed him, but he loved it all the same. He named her after a character in the story he’d been writing at the time: Elly. He’d spent six months researching this car, ever since its announcement, and now he was finally behind her wheel.

In the timespan of a semester, things started to change. His confidence began to waver, starting when his best friend left their school and he was now left alone. A death in his family, just a month later, provided no assistance, and only continued to shake the boy. Elly remained by his side, an avenue to feel ever-so-slightly in control once more. With the buzz of college, it wasn’t often he was able to get on the road, but the roadtrips like that of his first spring break to go visit his friend made all but up for it -- even if it left him on the road until 1am and with a speeding ticket to pay for.

As summer rolled in, the roads became more frequently travelled. Uncertainty was a big factor in it, perhaps a bit of loneliness -- they chose to stay up in their college’s town year round, a choice they’re still unsure of if they regret or not. They lost more people.

But at least Elly was still by their side, through all of the confusion and the misfortune. Doing stupid things like driving for eight hours that resulted in them getting home four hours past midnight just because a friend needed a ride from the airport after coming home from abroad, for example.

Elly was there through it all. She made them feel safe and comfortable, belting out lyrics to songs and ignoring the reality. They felt their control sapping away from so many aspects of their life, but still, that six speed manual remained.

Staring in the mirror one day, she realized she needed to go to the hospital. It wasn’t something too serious, in that it wasn’t critical. Urgent, maybe, and needed for sure, but not medically serious -- but beyond serious for her. Elly was glad to help her. The semester around her felt out of her control, but she was doing her best to feel in control.

Elly was, perhaps, the only true control she had. But that was okay, she hoped. She wasn’t too certain about much anymore, and just wanted to keep her head down. She was afraid almost everywhere, except for when she was behind the wheel of that car. There, and only there, she felt safe -- not because of all of the safety features, no, but because only there was she truly in control.

Sure, she knew, an automatic might be faster and more economical. Sure, she knew that it was outdated.

But it was the control, as little as it may’ve been, that she needed.

Slowly, things began to change. The school year as a blur, and she didn’t remember much of it. The fear behind it all was too much. The car crash definitely didn’t help, either.

It was a simple moment of inattentiveness, of course. Rubbernecking at another car crash lead to, well, another car crash. The snow definitely didn’t help, locking up the brakes. The illusion of control was shattered once more. She was only in the shop for less than a week, but it was a week too long, and in the rental car, she felt even less safe -- if you even thought about taking a corner at more than five miles per hour with even the lightest snow still on the ground, the damned rental would just spin out. Her one safety net of comfort was dragged outside and shot twice in the back of the head, at least for a while.

But she knew this time, at least, to not make the same mistakes again.

The summer that followed was tame and, thus, lame. She spent most of her time stagnant; her stagnance meant that Elly, too, was stationary far too much, brought out only at night when she’d gone stir crazy and she just needed to move. The grasp of control was coming back, bit by bit. It was better than nothing. Her confidence, too, was growing once more. Perhaps the loss of it all had forced her to try and regain it, but it was a slow process.

As the school year returned, she started to spend less time travelling to familiar places -- she sought out a new one, instead. It meant six hours on the road instead of four, it meant staying in a hotel room instead of a familiar bread, but it meant a breath of fresh air -- and it meant safety in the comfort of her best friends.

One with two legs, and the other with 205 brake horsepower, a six-speed manual transmission, and an unwavering loyalty despite all of the crashes, mistakes, and slipped clutches.