

A Drive

By

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RONNIE (50) drives in the front seat while SAM (17) sits in the back engrossed in his smartphone, his schoolbag to his side. On the front windscreen Ronnie has his phone on a mount with the Grab app open. Occasionally, Ronnie taps and swipes on his phone.

RONNIE

Are you hearing what I'm saying?

Sam continues to look at his phone while talking.

SAM

I ***** heard you lah, you won't pick me up because you're driving late tonight.

RONNIE

What did you say?

SAM

Nothing. You really can't come home? Is ma cooking?

RONNIE

I don't know...We're not just food and shelter you know.

SAM

I didn't say that.

RONNIE

Then what are you saying?

Sam puts down his phone

SAM

It was just a question. I want to know if we're all having dinner tonight.

RONNIE

Why, you have supper again?

SAM

No? I just asked whether ma is cooking? If I'm not joining why would I ask?

RONNIE

I don't know I can't read your mind. Can you ask nicer next time?

(CONTINUED)

SAM

mmm.

Sam sulks.

RONNIE

mmm what mmm? Mmm means what?

SAM

Pa not everything I say is some basis for you to attack me.

RONNIE

I'm not attacking you.

SAM

I'm putting my guards up and I'm just saying I don't get defensive for no reason.

The car comes to a stop.

RONNIE

Get out.

SAM

What?

No response.

SAM

Why? Just because you're upset? I'm gonna be late.

RONNIE

You don't care about me, I don't care about you. Get out.

SAM

(exasperated)

I didn't say I don't care about you.

RONNIE

I have a passenger waiting. Get out.

2 EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

2

Sam looks at Ronnie's phone and pauses in shock before getting out of the car onto the sidewalk, bag in tow. As he walks away, Ronnie rolls down his window.

RONNIE

Sam!

Sam turns around and walks back over to Ronnie. As soon as he is within arms reach, Ronnie smacks him on the head.

RONNIE

Don't swear.

Sam doesn't react.

SAM

You don't just accidentally book passengers.

RONNIE

Meaning?

SAM

You couldn't spare a few minutes to actually be a decent parent?

Sam walks away. Ronnie looks for awhile before rolling up his window and driving away, bitter.

3 INT. CAR - DAY

3

Ronnie drives with a grimace on his face. He eventually stops the car and waits.

The backdoor opens and CLAIRE (18) rushes into the backseat. She struggles to put an overstuffed bag to his side. Her shoddy clothes are accompanied by bruises all over her body and face. Ronnie looks at Claire through the rear-view mirror for awhile, worried at the state of her, before deciding to drive off.

RONNIE

Claire? Is that your name?

She sobs quietly, seeming not to hear Ronnie's words.

RONNIE

Ma'am, you okay?

The words illicit no reaction. He picks up a box of tissues and passes it back to her. She takes it and picks a few tissues to wipe off her tears and blow her nose.

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE
Thank you. It was my dad.

RONNIE
(pensive)
...Your dad this to you?

Ronnie hesitates on what to do next.

RONNIE
Can I ask what happened?

Claire wipes her face with the tissue. She sighs.

CLAIRE
****. I got home late last night
and my dad was angry.

RONNIE
He hit you?

CLAIRE
Not at first. He kept asking where
I was so I said I was studying but
he didn't believe me. Then I didn't
know what else to say and then he
pushed me into my room and took the
belt.

RONNIE
And you weren't studying.

CLAIRE
...Lying is no reason to get hit.

RONNIE
Of course, of course. Do you want
me to drive you to the hospital? Or
the police?

CLAIRE
It's fine. Just stick to the
destination.

RONNIE
...Boyfriend's place?

CLAIRE
How'd you know?

RONNIE
An instinct.

(pause)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (cont'd)
You trust your boyfriend can take care of you?

CLAIRE
Not him. His mom, Susan.

RONNIE
And she can take care of you?

CLAIRE
...It's not the first time.

Claire's eyes are directed at a faded photo of Ronnie, his wife and his son wedged in the corner of the rear-view mirror.

CLAIRE
Is that your son?

RONNIE
And my wife and me. But that's an old photo, I mean I guess that's obvious, look at me now. He's actually about your age.

A pause. Claire is in contemplation.

CLAIRE
Do you think there's ever a reason to hit your kids?

Ronnie is surprised by the sudden heavy question.

RONNIE
Excuse me?

CLAIRE
Like, are there times where hitting kids isn't plain abuse.

A tense pause.

RONNIE
I don't know that much, I only know what I've experienced. But at your extent, no. That's not right. And not for the reason your dad did.

CLAIRE
But there are reasons?

RONNIE

I don't know.

CLAIRE

Have you ever hit him?

Ronnie sighs, hesitant to answer truthfully.

RONNIE

When he was young, sure. The Ang Mohs may hate it flat out but when you're a parent and your 3 y.o. can't understand you but you wanna tell him that what he did was wrong, then maybe the Ang Mohs won't speak so fast. But it was never that hard and never for the wrong reasons.

CLAIRE

At what age do you stop then?

Ronnie appears uncomfortable with the conversation and ignores the question.

CLAIRE

And what wrong reasons? Or like, what are the right reasons?

RONNIE

...Why are you asking all this? I don't have answers.

CLAIRE

You do. Your answers are yours. And even if you don't it's fine. I just, I won't ever see you again you know? So what do I have to lose?

RONNIE

You ever thought that I might have something to lose?

CLAIRE

You're scared of talking about how you treat your kids?

RONNIE

I guess not, it's just not something people ask me. I'm not asking you about your life.

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE

Why not?

RONNIE

So if I asked you why your dad hits you, you'll answer?

Claire doesn't answer immediately, instead moving to the window and staring out of it, watching the world go by. A long pause, as if Claire eventually decided not to answer the question.

CLAIRE

Because he doesn't love me. Because he's a control freak. He doesn't see me as his daughter. He sees me as this person he can exert power over.

Ronnie is taken by surprise by the raw answer.

RONNIE

You don't think he's just scared you'll get hurt? or scared that he's losing you?

CLAIRE

He doesn't seem scared. I'm the one that's scared most of the time. What does he have to be afraid of? He's not the one who comes home and gets beaten for tiny mistakes.

A beat.

RONNIE

I get scared that I'll lose my son. But I can't tell him. I lose him a little bit everyday. But he needs to feel free, even from me. That's something I never thought I'd feel. Maybe some people don't know how to deal with that. They can't let go.

CLAIRE

I guess so. I think, in some way he believes he can beat me back into being a small girl again.

RONNIE

A small girl he loves?

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE

Loved. You can't love something that doesn't exist anymore.

RONNIE

He still loves you he just doesn't know how to show it. Or maybe he's still learning how to love you.

CLAIRE

No offense, but you don't know my father. He really doesn't show it. Everything I say triggers something. It's like everything I say is used to attack me.

The last phrase, echoing the same ones Ronnie's son said, hits a nerve and Ronnie distances himself away from the conversation, focusing back on his driving. Claire, riled up, concentrates out the window.

RONNIE

So this Susan. She doesn't mind you coming over?

CLAIRE

Actually she's happy when I'm there. I think she's lonely when her son's gone all day.

RONNIE

Sounds like she considers you family.

CLAIRE

I wouldn't know. What does it even mean to be family?

RONNIE

It means a lot of things.

CLAIRE

Like what?

A beat.

RONNIE

Everyday I go to work. Everyday I get the terrible passengers like you can't imagine. I drive them around and I get ***** pay. I don't have much time to spend with friends and when I do they don't

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (cont'd)
respect what I do for a living.
Hell, not like I have that many
friends anyway. I look at myself in
this mirror and I don't see pride.
I feel that, everyday, the whole
day or like at least most if it.
But every night I go back home and
I get dinner with 2 people who make
me forget about all that and who
make me wanna do it again tomorrow.
And I feel alright, and I can get
on with the next day. That's
family. That's my family.

CLAIRE
Sounds like you have your own
problems. But your family solves
them.

RONNIE
Well not tonight, I'm driving late.

CLAIRE
But they don't mind?

RONNIE
To be honest, I think they do. I
think my son tries to show me he
misses me some days. But I never
act like I know it.

CLAIRE
Why?

RONNIE
I don't know.

A lull in the conversation passes.

RONNIE
I don't know if there are any
actually.

CLAIRE
Hmm?

RONNIE
Your question, about the right
reasons to hit a child. Look,
society can judge me for hitting my
kid. But our relationship isn't
broken, and they grew up fine and
healthy.

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE

So that's your reason for hitting them? That they still turned out okay? Am I messed up cause my dad abused me?

RONNIE

Sounds terrible when you put it that way.

CLAIRE

What way?

RONNIE

Are you doing this in purpose?

CLAIRE

What?

RONNIE

(annoyed)

You sound like you know the answer already and are just forcing me to say it. I don't appreciate the interrogation. For someone who's so afraid of their father you're really bold talking to me.

CLAIRE

Don't you think there's something wrong about being so scared to talk about how you treat your son?

RONNIE

(angry)

I'm not scared or ashamed of how I treat my son, it's just that you'll get the wrong idea if I condense it into a short reply. Same thing as my perception of your situation.

CLAIRE

But I'm not scared, I have answers.

RONNIE

(vindictive)

Well I don't! Not everybody does. Okay? You're just a teen the world is so black and white for you. It gets a lot more gray at my age. You don't have as many answers as you thought you did. Who are you anyway? I don't have to win your

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE (cont'd)
approval of how I treat my son. I
don't have to answer to you.

CLAIRE
Who do you answer to then?

RONNIE
My son, it's his life I'm
affecting.

CLAIRE
And what does he say?

RONNIE
Stop asking questions like you're
allowed to know these things! This
isn't normal! No wonder your father
gets angry.

CLAIRE
What did you just say?

RONNIE
I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I'm
sorry.

CLAIRE
I'm sorry I asked.

The atmosphere is thick with tension as they both try to
ignore each other and ruminate by themselves.

RONNIE
There may be reasons to hit a
child. I don't know whether they're
the ones I have. They turned out
fine. But I don't know whether that
makes it okay. I just really don't
know. And I guess that's the worst
right? I love my son but I hit him
and I don't really have a good
reason why.

CLAIRE
You really do love your son?

RONNIE
Of course I do. No question.

CLAIRE
Do you show it?

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Do you to your dad?

CLAIRE

That really isn't comparable.

RONNIE

You're right. Sorry. Well, I really don't know. To be very honest, I'm not a great father...Just before you came in I was dropping Sam off. I got angry and I hit him.

CLAIRE

Was he okay?

RONNIE

I think it hurt more than I could see.

CLAIRE

Maybe you should apologise.

RONNIE

Yeah...

A beat.

RONNIE

Do you love your dad?

CLAIRE

Not right now. Sometimes, yes.

RONNIE

You should tell him that. All parents love their kids, I believe that. It's whether kids love them back that scares us parents the most. Scares me to death.

CLAIRE

He won't listen. But I'll try.

RONNIE

Trying is enough.

The car stops. A MIDDLE AGED LADY (50) stands in the distance worried.

CLAIRE

That's Susan.

Claire opens the door.

(CONTINUED)

RONNIE

Good luck. Stay safe alright?

CLAIRE

Thanks uncle. For everything.

Ronnie gives an earnest smile. Claire grabs her bag and begins to climb out of the car.

CLAIRE

And uncle?

RONNIE

My name is Ronnie.

CLAIRE

You seem like a great father
Ronnie. I'm sure your kids love you
back.

RONNIE

I don't doubt that.

Claire smiles and closes the door. Ronnie pauses for awhile, processing his emotions before driving off.

THE END