

DRIVING LESSONS

By Carolyn West

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CAST: one female

AT RISE: GERI, a teenage girl, sits in a chair. Perhaps there is another chair immediately next to her on her right. Bouncing back and forth from one chair to the other, SHE can act out the story as SHE tells it.

GERI

When I got my learner's permit, my mom decided she would teach me how to drive. I didn't see the problem with that at first. I mean, I'd have to spend time with her, and that's never good, but I'd be able to drive the car by myself when it was all over. That actually meant less time with her in the long run since she wouldn't have to drive me places.

So she started to teach me how to drive. But it wasn't like "Step on the gas when you want to go and the brake when you want to stop." No, she said stuff like, "There's a stop sign at the corner. Put your brake on now." Or "Children are playing on the sidewalk. You never know when one might dash out into the street. You'd better slow down." And she said it in her "Mom" voice which was like a drill digging into my skull.

She'd say things like, "See the minivan?" And I'd say, "The one two blocks ahead?" "Yes, it has its brake lights on. Put your brakes on too." And all the time her voice was boring into my brain. "Oh, there's an airplane overhead. Be careful, it might crash." Well, maybe not that bad, but you get the point.

And my goodness, if I made one little mistake, she'd yell at me like I'd sold government secrets to Chinese spies. Her voice would get higher and louder. "You have to pay attention at all times! You can't wave to friends when you're going around sharp curves!" Like our lives were at stake or something. The yelling was bad, but at least it was a break from the "Mom" voice. Opera singing is better than the "Mom" voice.

We'd drive along and she'd jabber on, "Oh, there's a school zone somewhere around here. Slow down to 15 miles per hour." And I'd think, SHUT UP. SHUT UP. And she'd say, "Look out for the squirrel." And I'd think, "WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO SHUT YOUR FAT FACE UP? DRIVE INTO A BRICK WALL?" Of course, I don't say it out loud. I know my mother, she'd take it the wrong way.

Whenever we got home from one of these lessons, I'd beg my dad, "Please, please, for the love of God, teach me how to drive." But my dad taught my brother how to drive so he was just like, "No thank you. I don't need that aggravation."

The lessons with my mother continued. Saturday at 8:00 in the morning. That's another thing. She'd wake me up at 8:00 every Saturday morning to go driving. Who drives at 8:00 on a Saturday morning? The woman is just not sane.

And she kept talking to me. That voice started following me around in my dreams. "Step on the brake. Watch out. Slow down." I wasn't getting any rest. I began chewing my fingernails and I developed a facial tic. I had to do something before I lost my mind. So I figured it out. Instead of letting her use the "Mom" voice I'd make her use the "Screaming" voice.

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