

Distracted
by Alexis McCauley

Shannon had been on her phone ALL night, and Melissa found it quite annoying. Ever since she had started talking with that guy last week, she spent all her time sending him messages and videos. Melissa just wanted to have a night out, it was Friday, and she had no schoolwork left to worry about; she was ready to unwind with a girl's night. Yet, there was Shannon, recording their trip to the club, as if this guy cared about the boring 15-minute drive.

Melissa let out a huff, as she pulled up to the red light. Staring at Shannon she finally broke, "if you're going to chat with that guy all night, I'll just take you home." Laughing Shannon points the camera at Melissa and begins recording her pouting. Shannon forces the camera in Melissa's face to get a close-up of a "major whine in progress," teasing her. The two tussles briefly over the phone, Melissa trying to push it out of her face, and Shannon "wanting proof of her bad mood." That's when the car behind them leans on his horn, loudly. Startled and without thinking, Melissa stomps on the gas not even glancing up at the light. As the car moves forward, Shannon drops her phone, and Melissa finally sees the rider, but there just isn't enough time to do anything. Letting out a scream and holding her hands up to protect her face, Melissa's car slams into the bicycle. Both girls feel the impact, and whimper when the rider's body hits the hood with a hollow 'thunk' sound. This awful sound is followed by the tinkle of the windshield breaking, Melissa can feel little pinpricks of glass as it hits her hands. With a heartbeat pounding in her ears but the organ itself feeling as if it has dropped to her toes, Melissa uncovers her face and looks to Shannon. Reflected in her friend's eyes is the terror Melissa feels, the color is gone from her face and her mouth just hangs open. With a rush of heat, the truth of what has happened flushes through Melissa's body. She begins to shake; it feels as if she has stepped into her worst dream imaginable. *This can't be real; please tell me this is all just a bad dream!* Facing forward again, Melissa can see the imprint of the person she hit on her trunk and in the glass left in the windshield; *no, this was not a dream.*

"OH...MY...GOD, Melissa! What did you do? I think you KILLED him!" Turning to face her front seat passenger, driver Melissa shot a look of disbelief at her friend Shannon.

Her voice raised in anger, “What did *I do*? You want to know what *I did*? I think you mean what did WE do?”

Scoffing, Shannon began to shake her head back and forth like a maniac, “Ooooh no, I wasn’t driving, you were. *You* killed him.”

Rolling her eyes, Melissa looked back at Shannon, her voice rose again to hide the shakiness to it. “I-I-It was your fucking p-p-phone in my face, you were blocking my view.” For a moment, distracted by an insistent knocking, Melissa turned back toward Shannon, and she screeched... “My phone, but you were the one who hit the gas during a RED light. You cannot pin this on me. I had nothing to do with this!” Again, the knocking came. Both girls looked to the driver’s side window, where an older man was violently knocking.

“Hey, what were you thinking? You hit a bicyclist! What are you stupid?”

It was with trembling hands that Melissa opened her car door, *what should she say? This guy looked angry, and she didn’t know what to do?* He came around the door as she opened it and got very close to Melissa’s face, “what are you drunk? Did you not see that guy in front of your car?”

Nervous Melissa flinched away from the man, “No, I didn’t see him. My friend had her phone out...”

“Oh of course,” he said, throwing his hands in the air. “you were looking at your phone and not the road. Right, how did I not know that? Stupid kid. Well, now you’re in BIG trouble.”

“Ok, ok, is he hurt? Has anyone checked on him?” looking back toward Shannon, Melissa realized she was not going to get any help from her friend.

“I called 911, they will be here soon. Meantime, I will grab a blanket. You check his injuries.”

“Check his injuries... I don't know what to do.”

“Look, it's in your best interest to make sure he lives, so I would do what you can until the ambulance comes.”

With an unsteady step, Melissa heads to the front of the car where the man had bounced off her car's hood. *I can't believe this happened, what am I going to do? God, if only Shannon had put her phone down.* Her head feels light, dizzy even and her vision begins to go black around the edges. *I can't pass out now; I have to see if I can help at all. I have to see how bad it is... Oh God, what do I do?*

In front of her car, highlighted by her headlights is the curled-up body of an older man. He is faced away from Melissa and there is no movement that she can see. *I killed him...Please, no, did I really kill him? Please, please move. Please be ok!* Melissa kneels on the street next to the biker but doesn't know what to do. Her mind is running through all the horrible things that will happen to her, handcuffs, jail, police cars, and angry family members. *What if he has children, his wife? They will all lose him because of me!*

Wildly, Melissa looks around for someone to help her, someone who knows what to do, how to help this man. Her head swivels around, her eyes large and panicked. Another younger motorist comes up, his mouth is moving, but she can't tell what he is saying. There is nothing but a roaring in her ears and she glances down again at the crumpled form on the street. She notices the blood coming from underneath his helmet, and the odd form of his shoulder. *I didn't see him, and someone was honking, oh God, what do I do? I didn't see him, my stupid friend's phone....* She knows she is babbling, but she can't seem to stop, can't focus on what the motorist is telling her. The cyclist begins to stir, groaning and moving his legs. “Sir, Sir, you need to stay still, ok? You've been in an accident, but help is

coming. I'm so sorry, I'm just so sorry." Melissa's voice cracks and she barely lays her hands on the man's chest to keep him from moving much.

The biker again lets out a groan and seems to get restless; with still shaking hands, Melissa presses down on his shoulders, which she notices feels lumpy and 'wrong.' "Sir? Sir, stay still, ok?" *Where is the other guy? I don't know if I can keep him from getting up, I'm so scared. I don't know what I'm doing, this is all my fault.* As these scattered thoughts race through her mind, Melissa notices the biker has opened his eyes, but they seem so blank. He doesn't seem to focus on anything. *Can he even see us? Oh God, I can't do this...*

Coming around her car, the young motorist is unfolding a rough-looking blanket. "It's clean and will keep him warm until EMS shows up." Nodding, Melissa stands up to grab a corner of the blanket, glad she can feel useful. Melissa helps cover the biker, "where are they? It has been forever since you called, hasn't it?"

The young man gives her a grim smile, "Don't worry, they should be here soon, the station is just down the road."

As he says this a low wail can be heard coming their direction, and for the first time, Melissa feels some relief. "Thank you, God, they are finally coming."

First to turn the corner is the fire truck. It parks diagonally to block traffic, and several people scramble out of the vehicle. A man toting a heavy bag walks up to Melissa and asks her what happened. Once again, the motorist takes control and begins to explain exactly what happened. Melissa stands back, as more of the rescue team close in around the injured man. She watches as the medic at the head of the biker wraps his neck in a hard, plastic collar, while another tries to get the biker to answer questions. She tries to explain that the injured never said anything, but she realizes quickly they are not listening to her. Stepping back further to get out the way, a bed on wheels is brought from the ambulance she did not notice arriving.

As several men in uniforms lift the biker onto the bed, a police officer appears on Melissa's right.

“Are you the driver of this car?” He points to Melissa’s blue Civic. Nodding, Melissa hugs herself, the time has come to face the consequences. The officer asks Melissa to follow him back to his car, where he can ask her questions. She barely had time to note the ambulance pulling away before she and Shannon are sitting in the police car and Shannon is still worked up; yelling that Melissa “killed that man. I can't believe you killed that man!”

Stunned, Melissa stares at Shannon. “I didn’t kill him, and I didn’t see him, your phone was in my face.”

Shannon looks to the officer, “I was on the phone with my boyfriend, but I wasn’t driving. I had nothing to do with this.”

Melissa takes a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves. “She’s right, I was driving, but she was trying to take a video and it was in my face. I didn’t know there was a cyclist in front of my car.” She shakes her head, wishing she could clear her memory of these horrible moments. “Do you know if he’s ok?”

“We don’t know anything yet, except that he was taken to St. Francis. They will keep us updated. Now tell me how this happened.”

Melissa begins the story, explaining the drive, the video Shannon took, and the car honking. Then she starts to cry, “I didn’t mean to hurt anybody. I just wasn’t thinking, the car honked, and I thought I had missed the light....and I just went. I know I should have taken my time, and looked at what was going on, but I was distracted and...” She shakes her head again and looks down at her hands, nervously clutching and unclutching them in her lap. “I know there’s no excuse, but I just, I was distracted and didn’t see him.” Now the tears start rolling down her cheeks. She cried for the biker, she cried for his family, and she cried for herself. *What would happen now?*

“You realize how serious this is right? Depending on how serious his injuries are, you could be looking at some heavy charges. How old are you?”

“18, I just turned 18.”

