

I-Spy

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"Ok boys, screens down, eyes up", Dad says, turning around to look at me and Isaiah in the back of the car.

We both slowly look up from our tablets, yawning and stretching.

"Are we there yet?" Iz asks, looking around at the two rows of cars either side of us.

I snort and roll my eyes.

"Yeah, we're going camping in the middle of the motorway, doofus."

Iz ignores me and watches the cars out of his window.

"Why are we slowing down?" he asks, a whine creeping into his voice.

"Not sure pal, could be anything", Dad says. "Maybe there's been an accident, roadworks, people on the motorway. Or just your standard bank holiday traffic."

"Maybe someone died", I say as we pass under a bridge, and a shadow passes over us all. I look at Iz, his eyes now wide with fear. Dad taps on the headrest of the passenger seat to get my attention.

"Arlo, don't say things like that, you've frightened your brother." Dad sighs and shakes his head. "Just think before you speak."

I glance at Iz and mumble a quick, "Sorry."

We both sit in silence as the car creeps along. There's a woman asleep in the car next to us, her pale face pressed against the glass.

"Daaaaaad, Arlo won't stay on his side of the car!", Iz yells, making me jump. I turn to him and he grins mischievously.

"You liar!" I shout back.

"Boys!" Dad shouts and slams his hands on the steering wheel. We fall silent instantly.

After a few minutes, we start to speed up, the fields flying past us in a blur of greens and browns. Dad clears his throat.

"You know, we used to have to make our own fun on long car journeys. We're going to forget screens and engage our brains. I-Spy, who wants to go first?"

Me and Iz look at one another.

"Ok, fine", Dad says, after a moment of silence. "I'll start."

He looks around.

"Right. I spy, with my little eye, something beginning with B."

"Boys!", shouts Iz.

Dad shakes his head.

"Backpack", I say.

"Nope", Dad replies.

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"Bald!", shouts Iz.

"Cheeky!", Dad shouts back, glaring at Iz in his mirror. The car starts to shake as we burst out laughing.

After we calm down, Dad points out of the window.

"I'll give you both a clue, it's outside the car."

"Bush!" shouts Iz.

"Not so loud, Iz", Dad warns, putting a hand to his ear.

"Bridge", I say.

"Correctomundo!", Dad says. I pump my fist in celebration, whilst Iz makes a show of folding his arms and sticking his bottom lip out. He always does this when he loses. Which is all the time.

"Ok Ar, your go!" Dad says and begins to look around.

My eyes light up as we pass under another bridge, and I glimpse a thin lady in white stood staring out at the traffic.

"I spy, with my little eye, something beginning with W", I say, a smile on my face.

"Wheel!", shouts Iz, pointing at the front of the car.

I shake my head.

"Windows?", Dad tries.

"Nope!", I say.

"Warren!", yells Iz, holding up a well-loved toy rabbit that had been the fourth member of our family ever since he was a baby.

"Nuh-uh!", I reply.

Dad looks up as we pass under another bridge.

"Wagon?", he guesses.

"It is outside", I say.

Iz and Dad sit in silence.

Suddenly, Iz shouts, "Woman, like on my tab!" and Dad jumps, making the car bounce from left to right. The cars either side of us blast their horns in anger as Dad spins around to glare at us.

"Iz, stop shouting in the car, you're going to cause an accident", he booms, even louder than Iz shouted. He looks down at the floor as the satnav starts beeping.

I peer into the front of the car and see a big red triangle flash up on the screen. As the cars begin to slow once more, Dad sighs and taps on the steering wheel.

"You'll have to tell us what it is, Ar", Dad says, "I don't think we're going to guess it."

I make a face like I'd bitten into a lemon.

"Iz was right Dad, it was woman," I say.

Now it was Dad's turn to make a lemon face.

"I thought you said outside?", Dad asks, looking left and right.

"Yeah, she was up there", I say, nodding, "on one of those."



The cars had begun to slow down as we approached another bridge. As we creep under it, Dad also looks up, slowly scanning left to right.

"Dad!", Iz shouts, and we look back down to see that the traffic has stopped. Dad slams on the brakes and we all jolt forward in our seats.

The sun had now begun to set, making weird shadows on the cars in front of us. I follow the shape of the bridge across the 3 rows of cars before staring at the white van in front of us, its back doors splashed with mud.

The shape of a head rises from the shadow of the bridge, appearing on the back of the van. The head moves left and right, as though it's looking for someone, and sways from side to side. Suddenly it ducks out of view. I gasp and look away.

When I look back, the shadow of the bridge is breaking apart as the cars start to move, making it look as though it's collapsing.

As we move forwards, a sign outside the car flashes with the same red triangle that was on the satnav earlier. Dad puts the radio on, and happy music fills the car. Iz grins like a crazy person.

"Hey Arlo, it's your girlfriend Taylor Swift!"

"Shut up, doofus", I say, pretending to punch Iz, who flinches. He grabs his tablet off the seat and pretends to look innocent.

As Dad is turning around to face us, a traffic announcement interrupts the music, and we stop below another bridge.

"And for anyone travelling southbound between junctions 7 and 9 of the M62, there's been a serious incident, so please be aware if you're headed in that direction."

"Swiftie, swiftie!" Iz sings, holding up his tablet to reveal a video of a Taylor Swift concert.

"Stop it!" I snap, snatching his tablet and swiping at the screen. The concert video disappears to reveal a blurry video of the motorway, and the camera moves around so fast, it makes my eyes feel funny.

"I did that before!" Iz says proudly.

I ignore him and carry on watching. The camera stops moving around and focuses on a bridge in the distance. A slim white figure can be seen walking slowly onto the bridge, before stopping and facing out over the rows of cars. She then looks right and left. A few seconds pass before she quickly climbs over the railing and looks straight at the camera, her face a smudge. Then she jumps. I gasp and throw the tablet down onto the floor.

"Hey, that's miiiiine!" Iz whines and hits me. I barely even register it.

Dad spins around in his seat once again.

"Right, that's enough", he barks. "You've been warned about screens before."

I clear my throat.

"Dad, there's a video on Iz's tablet of a woman jumping off a bridge."

Dad frowns and glances down at the floor.

"Show me."

I grab the tablet and bring the video up again. Dad watches it and reacts like he's been punched when it gets to the end. He puts the tablet in the glovebox then looks us both in the eye.

"I don't want you looking at that stuff, boys. It'll give you nightmares."

There's a flash of white over Dad's shoulder, followed by a loud crash as something lands on the bonnet. Dad spins back around in his seat and we all watch something slide off the front of the car and land with a thump on the road.

Nobody breathes. A few seconds pass.

There's a soft rustling sound from just outside the car. We all turn to see the top of a head, black hair covered in blood, outside the passenger window. Dad puts a shaking hand over his mouth as the door handle begins rattling, and me and Isaiah start screaming. Dad stares out of the window, his face white. He slowly opens the glovebox and begins rummaging around inside. A long, pale arm appears and starts tapping on the window. Dad makes a sound like he's choking. As he pushes things aside, Iz's tablet falls out onto the seat. The arm lowers, then starts to use the handle as a lever to pull itself upright. The top of the head appears once again, hair shiny red, and now the eyes, wide open, as if someone is pulling them apart with their fingers. The black pupils dart around, looking at Dad, me and Iz, then down at the tablet on the passenger seat. They seem to grow even wider, if that were possible.

"Dad, give me the tablet", I say, my voice sounding strange and far away.

He moves like he's in a dream, slowly and unsure of what he's doing. Picking up the tablet, he passes it to me, and the wild, black eyes follow as it moves into the back of the car.

I swipe the screen to get to the video from before, then press the little trashcan to delete it. I look up to see the head duck down and the snake-like arm fall away.

Dad sits up straight, wiping tears from his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket before glancing out of the passenger window. Nothing there. He breathes out slowly with a shaky laugh. Iz is still gripping onto me for dear life, sobbing like crazy. Dad turns to face us and smiles, but it looks more like he's about to cry. He reaches out and strokes Iz's hair, and for once he doesn't pull away or moan. None of us speak.

A car horn from behind makes us all jump, Dad shouts, "Shit!", and me and Iz both start giggling. Behind us is a row of cars. Dad holds up his hand, clears his throat, and we slowly move away. We all glance up nervously at the next few motorway bridges we pass under, but we don't see anyone. The traffic clears up and we start going faster.

After a while, Iz falls asleep, and I ask Dad what happened before. He says something about crossing that bridge when we come to it, then laughs to himself.

I don't get it.