

Thirty Short Minutes

11:42 p.m.

Feeling like this is unsurpassable, I decide, tipping the glass back for another large swig. *Why be sober when I can be happily buzzed all the time?* Slamming the glass down on the wooden table in front of me, I forget all my troubles, instead focusing on the drinking game at hand.

The guy next to me, Tom, says, "Never have I ever been sky diving." Only one girl across from me picks up a half-filled glass and replies, "I went during the summer of my sophomore year of college." I tip my head in respect.

The girl next to Tom belts out, "Never have I ever cheated on my boyfriend or girlfriend." I happily take the glass in front of me and down it. The beer tastes bitter in my mouth, but I ignore it and focus on the buzz it gives me instead. "I had a boyfriend who was cheating on me with one of my friends, so I decided to return the favor." The others at the table nod as if in total understanding, when in truth, I hardly know any of them. One other person at the table, Jared, drinks then explains, "my girl wouldn't sleep with me so..."

All the girls at the table, myself included, glare at him. "That's horrendous!" I blurt out angrily, but my words slur making the others laugh. We continue the game for who knows how long, before a buzzing starts. At first, I believe it is just my own buzz from drinking, but then I feel a vibration from my pants pocket. Frowning, I pull out my cellphone. Squinting at the screen, I read the text from my brother: *I'm coming to pick u up, Dad found out u snuck out & is pissed. Wait 4 me out front. Sorry!*

I push away from the table, knocking over my chair. I stagger toward the living room in an attempt to find my best friend, all the while my hands clench together painfully, creating half crescent moon indentations on my palm. My anger basically killing my happy buzz. After stumbling a few times, I finally find her dancing with some guy I've never met. "Stacie!" I snap. She glances up at me, her eyes bright with a buzz, her movements sluggish.

"Shelly!" she squeals with delight, breaking away from her male partner. With one look at my livid face, her smile slips. "What's wrong with you?" she slurs.

"My brother told my dad about me sneaking out, he's coming to pick me up. So we need to leave."

"What?! I don't wanna go!" she whines.

My patience runs out. Grabbing her arm, we stagger out of the house. "Give me your keys," I demand.

"I thought your brother was picking you up?" she asks, pulling her arm away.

"No. I'm going to drive myself home."

It's my big FU to my brother. He can't just expect me to be okay with the fact that he ratted me out.

"You can't drive, you're drunk," she refuses.

"I'm more sober than you," I point out.

Huffing, she takes her keys out of her pocket, tipping slightly to the side. "Be careful, Shelly."

Seizing the keys, I walk down the driveway toward her vehicle. Over my shoulder, I respond with, "I always am."

Opening the door of a 2003 maroon Buick, I settle myself in and struggle to start the car, my hands shake uncontrollably. Finally, with the vehicle started, I pull out of the driveway not even bothering to buckle. The clock reads **12:07 a.m.** The headlights of Stacie's car slice through the darkness like illuminating blades. When I eventually restrain my anger, I slide my phone out of my pocket, and into my shaking fingers. Quickly staring at the screen, I open a message for my brother. A speedy check of the road reveals no oncoming traffic.

Glancing back at my phone I type *I*, look back up, *H*, look back up, *A*, look back up. I continue with this until I have spelt out: *I HATE YOU!*

12:11 a.m.

I hit the send button, just as a dark shadow races across the street heading straight toward my vehicle. Screaming, I swerve to avoid the deer, but the vehicle doesn't seem to go fast enough.

I lose control of the car. Spinning around and around, I feel like the world has tilted on its axis. A huge swell of pain crashes over me, as the world comes to a sudden, heart-stopping halt. I struggle to remain conscious, but the dark, daunting pull is too difficult to resist.

A bright light illuminates the darkness and for a minute I think it is the light at the end of the tunnel everyone believes in, but I'm wrong. Instead, the glow comes from the checkmark signifying a sent message. My cell phone.

It's the last thing I see before I slip into a dark oblivion, a vast void of night, never to wake again.

12:12 a.m.

A few days later...

"We are all gathered here to mourn the death of Shelby Anne Cross..."

I tune out the man, and instead stare down at the message my sister had sent me on the last day of her life: *I HATE YOU!*

A deep sadness envelopes my entire being, and my hands shake with uncontrollable sobs. The corners of my eyes become glistening pools, my cheeks flowing streams, as the tears cascade down my face. My mind travels back to that night when I first received the text. At first I brushed off her words, figuring we'd have a chance to talk later, but that was not the case. Soon, I realized that those would be the last words she would ever tell me. Her words still haunt me, as I know they will haunt me years from now. Her last words to me. Her. Last. Words.

What are your last words going to be?