

Lydia Fox

Arrive Alive Contest

Silence. It stings the air and forces us apart, the arcs of our circle repelling like the South ends of two magnets. Rewind thirty seconds. Running out of ideas in our late-night sleepover game, some voice murmurs "Never have I ever driven drunk", without expecting a response. But from a few guilty hands around the circle, fingers go down, meaning that they *have* done it. Driven drunk.

We thought we had heard everything; nothing could offend us. Crazy parties, drugs, nights drunk to oblivion, elaborate lies, and almost every other teenage experience that can shock. These were their choices; our choices. Deplorable choices, perhaps, but harmful mostly to the person who made them.

Our reaction was different this time. The possibilities of their actions enraged us. This kind of choice was about more than the life, health, and well-being of a single person. Images flashed before our eyes rapidly like a movie on fast-forward. Crunched cars and broken glass. Limbs twisted beyond recognition. Bodies and blood. Beeping hospital monitors. Wheelchairs and crutches. Empty seats at a table. Gravestones. Tears.

Whatever our morals or beliefs, this is one choice we can agree is a horrible one. A selfish choice. That's what it is, really. Selfish. That single choice has the power to cause so much damage, and hurt so many people. It isn't just about you.

Chances are, you don't have a death wish for the random people driving near you. But desire and action can show two different things. No one wants to end their teenage lives a murderer or dead. But sometimes it ends up that way, whether you want it to or not.

Taking shot after shot, while the music and lights pulsate, you feel invincible. The present moment is all that matters. You don't care about getting into college, passing that biology test, how hungover you might be tomorrow, how you're getting home tonight. Whatever. Take a selfie. Dance and laugh with your friends.

Keys jangle. Where's the car? Stumble to it, laughing and lurching. One thought is clear: you won't let your parents see you like this. Drive somewhere, sneak home, escape whatever shame or punishment they have to give you. But you don't need a taxi. You're fine, right?

Stop.

Wait.

In your drunken jumble of a mind swirl thoughts of parents, the party, and how easy it seems to just to drive home.

Choices. They're yours to make, but sometimes the results are fuzzy. It's not just about you anymore. In a car, you are responsible for those around you. Whether you want to be or not.

Everyone has heard the tales of horror and death, of screeching brakes and cracked windshields. It happens. You know it's real.

What's the worse that can happen to you if you don't get behind the wheel? Shame? Punishment?

What's the worst that can happen if you decide to drive? You know the answer...

Does it really matter what your odds are?

Have you ever done something that you regretted, like gotten a friend in trouble? Or hurt someone very close to you? Think of how horrible that feels. Think of the guilt, remorse, and that sickening twist in your stomach. Yet it could be worse. And you might have to live with it for the rest of your days.

In our once light-hearted game of never-have-I-ever, it was hard to look certain people in the eye for a while. These were all smart people, good people, and people who were going to good colleges. But in the face of a single decision, none of that matters. Even though nothing had come of their drunken travels, we only imagined what could have happened. We could only see the future they were willing to throw away, or the lives they were willing to take from other people.

Life is not a party, even if it seems that way in the moment. Choices are made, and the results may be horrifying. You are not invincible. No one is. And even if life was a party, this is one where you don't get another shot.