

Arrive Alive

In retrospect, it's clear to me that what we once thought meant everything now means nothing. That last party before graduation? Meaningless. That boy that invited you? Insignificant. The "squad" of girls that you did everything with? Inconsequential. The latest fashion trend that you just *have* to follow? Temporary. It's all temporary until, in one fleeting moment, it becomes *permanent*.

It was Friday, the night the entire senior class had been anxiously waiting for. The quarterback's parents were on vacation and he had managed to score half a dozen kegs for what was supposed to be the "night of our lives." Admittedly, I hadn't originally planned to attend, but then *he* asked me, and all self-preservation I had mustered up to say no a hundred times before flew out the window. But, it wasn't puppy love that had me flying through the guard rails on Fifth Street around two in the morning.

I had spent hours primping, second guessing every single outfit. Once I was ready, my parents offered to drop me off, but I insisted on driving myself for the sake of not looking like a complete loser.

The party was close to reaching full capacity when I arrived, narrowly avoiding the precariously parked second-hand Toyotas and beat up Chevy's. I made my way to the door, the music spilling out getting louder as I approached, and weaved my way through the crowd. It wasn't long before I bumped into Alana and her boyfriend Chad, and upon my approach she immediately handed me a cup filled to the brim with foam balancing dangerously over the top.

I never managed to finish one beer before another replaced it. Bouncing back and forth between the dance floor and the kitchen, I had easily had seven or eight by the time the liquor was introduced. Already on cloud nine, I had no inhibition towards switching to the clear, burning liquid. It was after the third round that I lost count— and track of time.

Alana and I had stumbled out to my car, my dead cell in one hand and my keys in the other. I struggled with the car door, ripping it open and falling into the leather clad seat as Alana collapsed into the passenger side. I hooked my phone to the charger and waited. It didn't take long for the screen to light up with missed call after missed call. I sighed and started the car. I knew I was utterly obliterated and really shouldn't be behind the wheel of a car, but my parents were already livid and I had no intention of making the situation worse. My house was only 10 to 15 minutes away anyways; *what could possibly happen?*

My hands were shaking as they clutched the wheel, but I managed to maneuver my way onto the street. I tried to focus on the lines painted on the roads, but they blurred in and out of focus. The speedometer rose steadily once I turned onto a backroad, the engine roaring loudly on the otherwise quiet stretch as that daunting red needle reached 90. My phone began to sing—

The first thing I remember is the steady dripping sound. I was told it was fluid leaking from the car, but as I was trapped between leather and metal I had come to believe it was blood.

Whether mine or Alana's, I didn't know. Her shallow, obstructed breathing was faint but present beside me. I couldn't move to look at her, and all I could feel was the pain. It felt as if someone had covered me in gasoline and lit me on fire, the flames burning as they licked at my skin. I wanted to scream so badly, but I couldn't seem to make even the slightest sound. In front of me, my hand had shattered through the glass just below the dashboard, the shards protruding from a hundred different places.

Peering past the airbag, I saw only darkness as the sirens got closer. I didn't know how long we were trapped in the contorted piece of metal, but by the time the ambulance had reached us, I was floating in and out of consciousness and felt only panic as first responders tore off the doors.

I looked up from the journal, scanning the hospital room around me. The walls were very bland, the light color giving me a sense of imprisonment rather than the comfort that was intended. I felt suffocated, as if some great pressure was fixed against my chest. I hit the call button for the nurse, wincing as I tried to adjust myself.

"Everything okay in here?" She asked as she came in, glancing at my left hand. The casting was a stark white, making the twenty or so black pins jutting out at every broken bone that much more noticeable.

"My legs.. They hurt." I admitted, embarrassment overcoming me. She patted my shoulder comfortingly and removed my blanket to reveal the empty space where my legs used to be.

"Phantom limb is very common in amputee patients. The doctor suggests massaging the residual limbs and has prescribed a few different medications to help with the discomfort." As she spoke, she checked my IV drip and the various machinery behind me.

My mom walked in shortly after the nurse left, the same look of worry carved on her face ever since this nightmare started. But there was something more today—an underlying sadness—that caught my attention.

"She didn't make it, did she?" I asked softly. She shook her head and approached the bed, grabbing onto the rails. I leaned my head back and closed eyes, trying not to cry. However, just like the memories that played a constant loop in my mind, I was incapable of holding back the tears.

"We just wanted to arrive alive," I whispered painfully, my heart constricting inside of my chest. The sound of my voice reverberated through the room like a crash in the night.