

Missing Links

The day is finally here. You have been anticipating it for a long time. The first round of playoffs in your senior year is about to be underway, and in the back of your mind you know that every game from this point on can be your last if you don't play it right. The game begins as each one does, with the playing of the national anthem and your teammates lined up across the goal line, waiting to skate out to center ice when their names are announced. Only this time when the public announcer lists off the names of the other four regular starters from your team nobody skates out to center ice. The crowd is completely silent, honoring your teammates. Former teammates.

The last game of the regular season had been a thrilling one. An overtime game winning goal had earned your team a win and locked you into the one seed and home ice advantage heading into the playoffs. Naturally there was plenty of celebrating both on the ice and in the locker room after the game, but a few of the older members of the team had decided to continue the celebration by meeting up with some other friends to hang out and go drinking.

They originally had a plan with one of them agreeing to be the designated driver, but they all got caught up in the moment. The designated driver had a few drinks and thinking nothing of it, he did not even mention it to the friends who he still planned to drive home.

You didn't even hear about it until the next day. Your parents were watching the news as they always do and you couldn't help but overhear a story about a fatal car accident where the driver had taken a corner too fast, sending him and his passengers careening off the road, where their car had rolled over and smashed into a tree. Though your mom was disturbed that something like that could happen so close to home you simply chalked it up to another sad, but avoidable accident and went on with your day, completely ignorant to who had been involved in the crash. You didn't learn this news until you got to school and it was the only thing that anyone was talking about. The news came as a total shock, leaving you paralyzed in place, and a sense of emptiness replacing every other feeling you had inside of you. It

had never even occurred to you that an accident like this could happen to anyone you know, much less some of your best friends. Nevertheless, time continued as if nothing had happened at all.

You return to the locker room, the playoff game now finished. The final score was 6-0. The worst seeded team in the tournament, who you should have handled with no problems, had dominated you because some of the key players to your team were now missing. You throw your helmet and gloves in the direction of your bag, not caring whether they find their way into it or not, sit down, bring your hands to your head, and stare down at the ground. Though you want to, you can't shake a feeling of anger towards your teammates who had been in the car that night. You wonder how they could abandon you and the rest of the team when you needed them the most, especially when the entire accident could have been easily avoided. You think back to the moment of silence that occurred before the game and remember the sight you saw as your eyes scanned the crowd. The parents and siblings of the teammates who had been killed, holding each other as tears streamed down their faces. The thought of the possibility of your parents doing the same convinces you to make a promise to yourself that you will never allow your actions to cause the pain or grief that the families of your teammates felt.