

Missed Curfew

Alice couldn't slow her breathing. Brian said he would be home by midnight, and here she was, sitting alone in their living room at 2:15, her husband having gone to bed ages ago. There was some old telenovela on the TV that she found no interest in— she just wanted her son to come home.

Attempting to ease her mind, she sipped her third cup of tea in the past hour; the warm beverage failed to yield any sedative effect for her active mind. She wasn't sure why she was so worried. After all, Brian had gone out with Allie and Jack— his friends since grade school. Alice had met them on countless occasions over the years, from end of school pool parties, to pre-homecoming dinners. She knew that Jack had gotten his license recently, the last of the three to pass the test, meaning the trio would no longer require an “embarrassing” dropoff, as Brian put it.

Call it a motherly instinct, but Alice still felt as if something in the night was amiss. She took out her cell phone, opening the tracking app she had convinced her whole family to download. Brian had agreed, as he usually would, to have it on his phone; he was a good kid, she always knew. He was set to finish his senior year at Magna Cum Laude, and was finishing up his final season of lacrosse with the school team, where he had been an easy choice to be captain. After all this, it seemed natural for him to want to blow off some steam with his friends on a Saturday night.

Alice could see the blip on the map where he was, his icon highlighted with Brian smiling in front of his silver '05 Ranger, a gift from his grandfather just in time for him to get his license. That truck had more power than she had hoped for his first car, but she'd never known

Brian to go any faster than five over in most cases— usually when he left a couple of minutes too late to get to work.

Ignoring the fact that they shouldn't be driving at this time in any case, she could see her son's speed on the app, but she could tell something was wrong. She knew the road he was on: perfectly smooth, and level, yet the speed was all over the place... thirty-five, forty-six, fifty-seven, twenty-nine, and so on as he cruised along. Alice tried to take a couple of breaths, deciding that the fluctuations were just a fault of the app; you can never really trust something that is free, can you?

Suddenly, it's gone. At the top of the hill, coming down towards Sleepy Brook, Brian's icon falls off the screen. Alice pauses for a second, then shuts off the app and reopens it.

Nothing. Again and again.

Nothing changes.

Now she was worried. She wasn't sure who was driving, but she could only hope that it was Allie, the most experienced driver of them all. She prayed and prayed they hadn't been drinking, too. She knew that Jack had a brother who was a college senior, who certainly would have been able to get them alcohol. For now, all she could do was wait, and try to pull her emotions together.

An hour later, a car pulled up. There was knocking on the door, and she saw two men in the window, their silver and gold badges glistening in the dim glow of the front bulb. As she opened the door, they asked if she had a son named Brian. She said yes, and the officers both took off their caps. Instantly, her knees buckled, and she fell to the floor; her strength was robbed entirely, and her ability to think gone. By then, she knew.

She knew he wasn't coming home.