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One Too Many

12:27 am

Glass dust falls around me, gently, as if it's snowing. My forehead is pressed against the steering wheel, the rough fabric of my seat belt cutting into my neck as the force of my body falling forward stretches it to its limit. I can't feel my legs; it's as if they vanished. I groggily wonder where they went. Warm, sticky liquid drips down my temple, narrowly missing my eye. I only half-register that it's blood. I can't open my eyes. Too tired. I can't move. Steam rises from the crumpled hood at the front of the car, sparks jumping in the humid summer air.

Another ghost of a thought floats through my empty mind: Jenny. I don't hear her. She must have left, I think. She's never this quiet.

12:20 am

A sound like an atomic bomb rips through my head. I'm thrown forward in my seat, met by the exploding airbag and jerked back by my seat belt as it locks. The radio goes dead, the scream beside me ends abruptly. My forehead connects with the top of the steering wheel, and the world goes black, darker, even, than the starless night outside.

12:19 am

"Watch out!" Jenny yells, pointing at the yellow eyes barreling toward us through the darkness. I realize half a second later that they aren't eyes, but headlights of a car traveling in the other lane. The lane that I drifted into. I rip the wheel to the right to avoid them, and we skid onto the shoulder, spinning toward the woods at the side of the road. Jenny starts to scream as I wrestle for control of the car. I lose the battle and we crash head first into a tall oak tree.

12:08 am

"So I put my hands up, they're playin' my song, the butterflies fly away..." Jenny cranks the volume as we fly down the empty road. Wind whips through the open windows as we scream along. For a moment it feels like we're the only people alive. I feel light-headed and warm, attributing it to the summer evening and adrenaline rush that comes with being out late - not the couple drinks I had at the party. I lean my head back against my seat, and stick my arm out the window, feeling like a bird soaring on the breeze.

11:57 pm

The sounds of music and shrieking laughter fade behind us as Jenny and I leave the party, breathless and smiling. "That...was...the best...night ever!" Jenny says in between breaths, wobbling on her feet as we make our way to the car.

"Seriously," I reply, yawning as I dig my keys out of my purse. It takes me a minute to realize they're already in my hand. Jenny dances ahead of me, twirling around and around, humming the melody of an old 2000s song and almost losing her balance as she takes an awkward step off the pavement. "Please be careful!" She answers my yell with a grin. When we reach the car, Jenny collapses in the passenger seat with a sigh. I settle into the driver's seat and put the keys in the ignition.

"Are you sure you're okay to drive?" Jenny slurs, her heels already off and her eyes closed.

"Yeah. And I don't really have a choice, do I? You're clearly in no shape to get behind the wheel!" She chuckles slightly in response. I take a deep breath, closing my eyes for a second as a wave of nausea comes over me. It's gone in a second. I'm fine - far from drunk. Steeling myself, I pull out of the driveway, flicking on the high beams as Jenny looks for a song to play and we start the drive home.

10:12 pm

"Oh my gosh, I can't believe we just graduated!" I shout across the blasting music, the bass vibrating through the whole house.

“Seriously! It doesn’t even feel real yet,” my friend Olivia responds, mixing drinks behind a makeshift bar in the kitchen. “Cheers to adulthood!” She reaches across the counter, handing me a half-full Solo cup.

“I don’t know Liv, I should probably just go find Jenny. I’m driving us home,” I push up from the bar stool where I was perched, but my exit is blocked by the arrival of a new group of people.

“Come on! It’s just one drink. And it’s not too strong, I promise,” Olivia waves the cup in front of me, a goofy grin on her face and something like a dare in her eyes. “We only graduate high school once, you know! Have some fun!”

“Fine,” I sigh, giving in and taking the cup. “But only one! I really do need to drive tonight.”

“That’s my girl!” she says with a laugh, downing her own cup in one gulp. I roll my eyes and leave her to her alcohol. Taking a quick sip from the cup in my hand, I start to push my way through the crowd to find Jenny.