

If Only

Rowan's dead. Those two words would never be strung together if it were not for me.

"C'mon man, just this once don't be so stuck up." My first mistake was allowing Tyler to talk to Rowan in that way. My second mistake was joining in on the peer pressure.

"Rowan, it's a party. Just drink. You'll be totally fine!" I yelled over the blasting music.

Tyler and I met Rowan in the second grade, and have been inseparable ever since. However, Rowan has always been a goody-two-shoes. Always gets his homework in on time, has played almost every sport, and out of the three of us has the brightest future. Tyler and I, on the other hand, would much rather stay up late partying than studying. Despite Rowan's opposition to parties, we always seem to be able to drag him along with us and can always count on Row being our designated driver. However, this night proved to be different.

To our surprise after continuously pressuring Rowan to drink, he gave in. Tyler eagerly held out a beer to Row. I could tell by the way Rowan looked at the bright, red solo cup handed to him, he felt uneasy. Due to his good character, he has never once had the desire to drink. After studying the look in his eyes I should have spoken up, but Tyler was way too excited by Row's sudden switch in character.

One drink turned two, which eventually turned into too many to count. Rowan had completely lost himself. He had quickly started to get aggressive and careless.

"I think you should slow down on the drinks, Row." Tyler spoke for both of us.

"Are you kidding? The entire night you guys wouldn't stop telling me to drink, and I am. So you guys don't have to worry, I'm fine," Rowan replied hastily.

I knew that this was the moment I should finally speak up, to prevent the conversation from escalating. "Rowan, we're not trying to ruin the fun, but we're just a little worried."

Stumbling over his words Rowan replied, "SAM, YOU HAVE TO BE JOKING. You guys know I hate drinking and yet every time we're out you make me feel horrible for not. And

honestly, I can't stand you guys right now." The tension in the room grew thicker and now there was an overwhelming amount of attention directed towards the three of us.

The next words that came out of Tyler's mouth, I wish would have never been said. "No one is making you stay." Tyler replied without a care.

What happens next I still replay in slow motion. Rowan grabs the car's keys, stumbles out of the house, and starts the car. All the while I just stood there, watching. The car backed steadily out of the gravel driveway and then took off almost too fast for me to fully process that Rowan had driven away, drunk.

I woke up the next morning with a pounding headache, unaware of how I got home. Rowan driving off was the last thing I remembered from that night. My phone suddenly lit up and filled the darkness of my room. I must have had over a hundred missed calls and texts from Tyler. I tried to focus my eyes as I read the most recent texts.

Rowan is dead.

SAM ANSWER.

HE DIED.

I felt like my soul left my body. He died. Rowan had gotten into a horrible crash destroying the car and he died within seconds of impact. To this day, I can not get the image of a bloodied Rowan still strapped into a completely destroyed car that I allowed him to drive off in. If only I would have said something. If only I had found someone sober to drive him home safely. If only I had not pressured him to drink. I would still have my best friend with me here today.