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One Snap, Five Lives

It was a good day. The April sun had finally come out, bringing warmth to Maine. Five cars sat side by side at the Saco Park & Ride. The lot was tucked between pine trees, quiet and ordinary, like nothing bad could ever happen there. But that's how tragedy always starts, on days that feel normal.

I rolled down the window and called out, "Whose turn is it to drive today?"

Carly groaned, "I think it's my turn," and we all piled in the red 2019 Subaru Outback.

Today was an early practice day, which meant rushing out of school to meet up on time. As usual, we were running a bit behind. Carly's English teacher had started threatening detentions for her early dismissals. Thornton Academy tends to be a little too strict. I pulled up our ETA from the passenger seat: arriving at 4:05 for a 4:00 practice. I looked back at the three girls in the backseat and their faces made it clear; the five minutes felt like a crisis.

Picking up on the tension, Carly promised, "I'll shave off the five minutes, guys. Don't worry."

Merging onto Route 95, Carly swerved into the left lane and pressed the gas to 85 miles per hour. No one in the car questioned the speed. We all tried to cut time when it was our turn behind the wheel. We eased into our routines: Avery and I took out our homework, Abigail started curating the playlist, and Evelyn dove into boy talk with Carly.

We had just passed the Kennebunk rest stop when Carly finished debriefing her latest break up. Like any teenage girl these days, she had a few new boys she was Snapchatting. Evelyn begged to see them. Carly reached for her phone—always within arm's reach—and began scrolling for the perfect picture. Each time Carly's eyes dropped to the screen, the car

gave a slight jerk. I sat up, tense, and watched the road ahead. However, I stayed silent; I didn't want to seem dramatic or offend Carly.

Eventually, the conversation died down. Carly set her phone aside and returned to safe driving: both hands on the wheel, eyes on the road. I relaxed and even felt silly for overreacting.

As we passed Wells, my stomach growled. I opened a family-size box of Cheez-Its and turned to share with everyone in the backseat. Just then, a Snapchat notification went off.

"OMG! Kyle snapped me back!" Carly squealed.

I turned around just in time to see her posing for a Snap reply.

A Snap that never got sent.

The glowing red brake lights of the car in front of us filled my vision. Carly tried to swerve, but with only one hand on the wheel, she lost control. We spun into the guard rail. Then came the impact of the cars behind us too late to stop. The Subaru was destroyed.

The five girls did not make it to practice on time.

The five girls did not make it at all.

The five girls died.

You can blame the early practice time, the threat of detention, the five minutes we were trying to save, the breakup, Kyle's Snap, the sudden traffic, or even me for not speaking up. But the truth is: it was Carly's fault. Carly's choice to Snap a guy she barely knew cost her life, and the lives of four friends who trusted her to get them to practice safe and alive.

Carly valued a Snap over the lives of her friends.

The April sun that once made it a beautiful day was now sinking. Darkness crept in as police officers knocked on five different doors to deliver the same unbearable news. Sirens and sobs filled the night.

And at the Saco Park & Ride, four cars sat silently, waiting for their owners to return.

We never thought it would be us in the freak accident that everyone warns you of. We were wrong.

One Second. One Snap. That is all it took.

None of us got a second chance.

But you do. This is your second chance. You could be next. You are not invincible.

Put down your phone.

It is not just your life, it is the lives of everyone on the road with you.