

Watch Your Back

We stumble out of the crowded bar, the door slamming behind us cutting off the shouts and rowdy calls of the crazed football fans. Olivia, Abigail, Lillian and I stumble out behind a sober, 'designated driver' Claire. The moonlit wet pavement below my feet blurred in and out of focus. My hands reaching out in front of me trying to regain the sense of balance that I seemingly left on the bar. The girls' laughter rang out around me, a faint tinker resounding somewhere in the back of my alcohol-filled brain. I try to remember how many drinks I've had at this point. One? Three? Five? I look up and Claire's face comes into focus. Her blond eyebrows are scrunched up above her vivid green eyes that search my face; for what exactly? I wouldn't know.

Claire sighs "What am I going to do with you guys?"

Olivia suddenly appears next to Claire and sluggishly throws her arm over her. She sloppily kisses the side of Claire's face, who grimaces and wipes her face with the back of her hand. "You loov- us" Olivia hiccups.

Claire, Olivia, and I proceed to stumble across the dimly lit parking lot, the trees casting swaying shadows that seemed to cover the parking lot with a foreboding darkness. None of us seems to pay attention to the ominous, heavy feeling the night suddenly takes on. The noise and light of the bar get further away, becoming nothing but a distant buzz. A suddenly way too talkative Abigail waits next to Claire's car along with Lillian. The two most likely are having another heated argument about John, Lillian's step brother who Abigail has taken a sudden liking towards lately. Claire pulls out her key fob and hits a button, the dash lights and tail lights blink

twice and she gestures for all of us to get into the car. As the girls attempt to squeeze in, the car I look up at the night sky, the moon glittering high above us, the surrounding stars further adorning it.

"Now is not the time to appreciate the weather Vera," Claire's quips out dryly behind me.

I turn around and sluggishly get into the car. I squeeze my way between Abigail and Lillian in the backseat, which sadly does not bring an end to their annoying argument. Claire turns the car on and the radio comes to life. Adam Lambert's 'Ghost Town' faintly fills the car, and Olivia softly begins to sing along and nod her head to the music in the passenger seat in front of me. Claire reverses out of the parking space and drives out of the lot, onto the deserted road.

I doze off looking through the windshield, thinking about how soon we would be moving onto college, one step closer to fulfilling our hopes and dreams and going off our separate ways. I yawn and pay attention to my surroundings instead of letting the alcohol make me look for a more metaphorical meaning to life.

"Girls," Claire suddenly says seriously, reaching over and turning off the radio, effectively catching all of our attentions. Her wide eyes flitter from her rear view mirror to the road stretching out ahead of us. "I thought it was just me being paranoid but I swear there's a car that has been following us since we got onto the interstate," Claire nervously declares. Lillian and everyone seems to suddenly sober up.

"Don't get off the interstate. If we take an exit it'll be deserted at this time. Keep driving past a couple of exits and if the car is still following us, call for help and whatever you do don't stop driving." I say. We continue driving, passing exit 29, exit 42, then exit 47. The lonesome

black truck still followed, keeping the same pace and staying the same distance away from the car the whole time. It seemed as if we were the only ones on the road.

"Call 911." Lillian shakily orders. Abigail clumsily pulls out her phone, her screen lighting the otherwise tense, dark car. She fumbles with the keypad and presses the phone up against her ear. "Dammit. Signal is poor. You gonna have to pull off the highway to get help," Abigail says as she redials 911. A cold chill washes over me and a feeling of trepidation almost makes me protest, but for some reason, the words die in my throat.

"Okay maybe we are just being paranoid and if we pull over on the road, the car will just drive past us." Olivia said, the only seemingly calm one in the car. "...I don't think we should..." Lillian whispered, clutching the seat below her tightly, her knuckles turning a ghostly white. "Do it. Pull. Over." Olivia demanded. Claire kept driving, but slower now as if fighting an internal battle as to whether or not she should stop.

"CLAIRE! NOW!" Claire abruptly pulled over to the side of the road, bringing the car to an screeching halt.

Time itself seemed to slow down and all of us held our breaths as the truck slowed a little. My heartbeat seemed to drown out all other sounds, and my stomach felt as if it dropped down to my feet as the truck approached. We all followed with our eyes, as the truck drove toward us and eventually kept going and drove past, its taillights and tinted windows disappearing around the next bend of the road. The tension in the car seemed to lift a little, and we all seemed to release the breath we'd been holding.

"You see, nothing to be worried about" Olivia said under her breath, but the fear still hadn't been fully shaken off. We looked around, taking time to assess where exactly we were, seeing as we skipped our exit.

Claire looked around, " I have no idea as to where we are. Abigail, is your phone still down?" Abigail flashed her screen as us, showing us the empty 5 bars.

Olivia looked down as her phone "Shit. I don't have a signal either. Just keep driving and pull off the next exit to see if we can get a hold of some sort of signal." Claire turns on the car again and starts driving, this time with no sign of anyone but us on the road.

Claire merged onto the farthest right lane and pulls out on exit 49. She continues driving and we all look around. Wherever this was, it looked deserted. No one seemed to be out at this time and as we drove for 10 minutes, I only saw 5 homes. As we reach a lonely four way intersection, Abigail cries out "Signal!" and we all let out a small cheer. We come to a stop at a red light and the inside of the car is suddenly bathed in a red glow.

"Try obtaining our location and pull up the GPS to see where do we need to go," Claire says and glances back at Abigail and me, who hums and clicks onto the google maps icon. The car is bathed in a green hue as the light changes. Claire goes to turn back around when Olivia places her hand on her shoulder.

"Wait, don't you hear that?" I look around outside the car, but I don't see or hear anything besides the soft hum of Claire's car engine. "Listen harder." Olivia urges. I strain my ears and suddenly, I hear the faint roar of a car engine.

Claire turns around and places her hands on the steering wheel and softly presses the gas pedal." Well, I don't hear anythi-" "CLAIRE WATCH OU-" Olivia's petrified voice yells as we

all looked to the left but it was already too late. The black truck, the same one from the interstate, came barreling toward us, its headlights off. The light was red but the car only seemed to pick up speed; its intention clearly wasn't stopping. I didn't even have time to scream before the impact came.

It must have taken places in the span of a couple seconds, but the seconds seemed to defy physics itself and stretched into an eternity. The car was hit and everything seemed to play out in slow motion in front of me.

Abigail's scream was cut off as we were impacted on her side. The air in my lungs evaporated and my head violently whipped to the right as bright dots exploded in my vision. All of the glass shattered from my left, cutting into my arms, face, and legs, and the car suddenly began to roll over. As it did, the impact of the ceiling touching the ground made the car cave in on itself and further crushed me into the car seat. The car rapidly rolled on its side and over and over again. My head and hair whipped to and fro, my body strapped to the car, tossed this way and that like a rag doll that's been thrown in a laundry machine.

It seemed like another eternity passed before the car stopped rolling. It rolled over a final time and landed on its roof. Some metal part of the car had contorted and was painfully pinning my right leg down, making me hang upside down in the upside down car. I shook my head, trying hard to focus. The blood rushing to my head was causing everything to blur and was making me dizzy. As my eyes focused, I slowly turned my head to the right and my body and mind went numb. Half of Abigail's head was flattened like a disc, and on the untouched side of her head, one glassy eyeball stared straight into my soul, her mouth contorted into a silent scream. Her hands hung limply, blood trailing down her arms, dripping onto the car roof beneath

us. Abigail had died with a death grip on her phone, the google maps location service still loading. I craned my head back as far as I could to look at the ground, and I began to dry heave as Lillian's arm lay below me, her shiny Cartier ring glittering on her detached hand. I felt the urge to cry, but the shock did not allow me to process everything that had just happened. The smoke starting to emerge from the engine began to fill the space, obstructing my view from Claire and Olivia. My eyesight went out of focus once again, but I distinctly heard the crunch of boots outside the car.

"H-h-hel-lp" I croaked, the smoke starting to make it difficult to even breathe. With great difficulty, I crane my head to the right, looking past what remained of Lillian's mangled body.

The light from outside casts a glow on a pair of boots that stood outside the window door. My heart sank as the sound of a match being lit resonated through the night. I saw the match drop next to me on the floor and all the sudden, flames erupted all around me. An all consuming heat began to surround me, scorching my skin. I grasped Abigail's hand and I pulled harshly, trying to release the phone from her hardened fingers. I tugged hard, and it finally came off of her fingers and a cry of relief tore from my throat.

I dialed 911 but dial pad seemed to blur. I shakily pressed the phone to my ear. "911 what is your emergency?" the call operator said. "H-help" I half coughed out, but the smoke and the fire were beginning to suffocate me. The phone slipped from my hands and my eyesight blurred. The voice of the operator grew faint and the fire blazed on as the world went black.