

Wasted

“You said your name is Jillian Bennett, right?” The officer’s caterpillar mustache twitched as he looked up from his paperwork.

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“What happened to cause Angel to fall? Were there any others with you and Angel?”

I looked down at my lap. My hands were still shaking from the ride in the police car. The officer waited for a couple of moments, expectantly. I couldn’t speak. My voice was suddenly gone.

He must’ve realized I wasn’t going to answer him, because he let out a small, frustrated sigh.

“Do you need a couple minutes?”

I nodded at my lap. His metal chair made a slight screeching sound as he got up. The door clicked behind him.

I didn’t want to rat them out. But I also didn’t want to take the blame for what happened to Angel, either.

They’d called it “Wasted Wednesday.” Every Wednesday night at eleven, my friends Ross, Tony, and Angel went out to the wooden castle playground by the middle school and drank. They’d have everything from whiskey to champagne, beer to wine -- but their one rule was that it had to taste expensive. Yellowtail and Blackstone would go untouched; six packs of Corona and Budweiser were promptly poured down the slide. They’d been doing this for years, they told me, and nothing had ever happened. They told me it would be fine.

I couldn't say no. I had just transferred from Saint Virgil's to this rich white kid high school, and they were the only ones willing to hang out with the new girl. I was afraid they'd abandon me.

Angel had picked me up at my house right at eleven. My mom lined my purse with candy and stuck several movie theater gift cards into my hands on the way out, wishing me a good time at the midnight premiere of Ironman 3. She didn't notice my missing wallet or the bottle of mead she'd bought at last summer's Renaissance Fair lying at the bottom of my bag.

"Did you grab anything?" She'd asked as I slid into the passenger seat of her luxury BMW.

"It's underneath all the Crunch bars." I was too concerned why my seat was so warm to look at her. She laughed.

"Heated seats. I'll turn it off if it weirs you out that much. Anyway, what'd you bring?"

"Surprise."

"Aw come on, Jill. Don't leave a girl in suspense." She gave me big, puppy dog eyes. I could feel the answer working its way up my throat, but I shook my head.

"Nope. You'll find out when we get there.

"Fiiiiine. As long as it's the good stuff," she huffed. "We'll throw it in the cooler when we get there. Tony's got it in his car."

I shifted in my seat nervously.

"So... we really won't get caught, right? I know you've said you do this every Wednesday, but is it really every or only just--?"

“Jill, relax,” she said gently. “You’re with veteran park drinkers. You’re totally safe with us.”

I wasn’t sure I believed her. But I wanted to.

We’d all gotten there around the same time. Ross was carrying large bottles of champagne and rum in his skinny, pale arms towards the park. Tony was getting the blue and white cooler out of the trunk.

“Jillian, Angel! How are two of my favorite ladies doing?” His words blended together at the edges. I watched him approach us, instinctively pulling my purse closer to me. Drunk people from my old neighborhood were usually violent or klepto.

“We’re ready to go, but it seems someone didn’t wait.” Angel gave him a soft hit upside the head. “You impatient goof.”

Tony stuck out his tongue at him and began waddling away with the cooler. “I was here at eleven. It is now eleven-ten. I’m allowed a couple shots for having to wait for you slow-pokes.”

“Whatever, man.”

We’d followed Tony and Ross to the playground. We climbed up to the tallest tower, where the big blue slide was. The space we sat in was cramped. The slide smelled of feet and woodchips. But the wood walls surrounding the tower were tall, even for a bunch of teenagers, so I was satisfied. No one would see us while we were sitting down like this.

“See, Jill? Totally secure. So are you gonna drink tonight or not?” asked Angel. She set up colored shot and martini glasses on top of the cooler, which was being used as a table.

“I wouldn’t say totally, but it’s better than I thought,” I admitted from the corner I’d picked to sit in.

“Jill. Honey. Lighten up a little. You’re perfectly safe here,” Tony chided. “Have a drink. It’ll take the edge off that anxiety you’ve got going on.”

“She doesn’t have to this time if she doesn’t want to. Let her get comfortable,” Ross said quietly from my right. He gave my shoulder a reassuring nudge with his own.

“Aw come on, one drink can’t hurt you. You don’t have to get plastered. Just indulge us, okay? For shits and giggles,” Angel replied.

I stared at her and Tony from across the little tower. Either it was too dark in there or they were too pre-occupied in pouring themselves a glasses of Krug Rose Champagne to notice my look.

“I-I really don’t drink. Besides, someone’s gotta stay sober to make sure nothing happens, right?”

Angel chugged half the champagne in her glass before responding.

“None of us ever stay sober, Jill, and nothing’s bad has ever happened. Chill out.”

“Yeah... we usually are all pretty drunk, and nothing bad ever happens. But it’s up to you, y’know,” Ross added, taking a swig of rum straight from the bottle.

Were they always this stupidly reckless, I’d thought? Did they have any sense of the risks they took each Wednesday at all? Or were they numb to it?

Ross may have given me a get-out-of-drinking-free card for tonight, but I didn’t want to disappoint Tony and Angel. Especially not Angel. She was the one that invited me into the friend group in the first place.

“Alright, one drink. The stuff I brought is supposed to taste pretty good anyway.”

I took out my bottle of mead from my purse, which got a delighted squeal out Angel, and poured a bit into the colored martini glasses on the cooler. Angel held up hers once it was full.

“To Jillian, for not being a straight edge,” she said proudly.

“To Jillian!” Ross and Tony echoed.

I simply knocked my drink back.

It was sweet. It tasted a lot like honey, to the point where I really didn’t notice the taste of alcohol. Maybe that’s why I went for the mead several times; it didn’t taste like anything that could hurt someone.

We’d raided the candy bars I brought with me at some point by my second glass, took turns in games of truth or dare by the third, and played music that was far too loud for midnight hours on my fourth. I didn’t even realize I was drunk. I simply felt that this was the first time I was having fun since I moved here. So I kept drinking as if it were simply tea, or any other sweet drink.

Angel got bold, having already consumed most of the champagne we brought by herself plus my mead. She stood up and began to dance in the tower, and then onto the chain and wood, railing-less bridge.

“C’mon, guyss... Conga Line!” She slurred. Tony followed her onto the bridge, with me right behind him, dancing all the way.

The shaking was too much. Angel had nothing to hold onto, and she was too drunk to keep her footing. She’d landed right on the back of her neck.

I was the only one there when the ambulance showed up. Tony and Ross ran and took the drinks with them. They asked me to cover for them. I hadn't known she was dead when I said yes.

I wasn't sure how much time had passed when the officer, whose name I couldn't remember, walked back into the office and sat down. He offered me a glass of water.

"It'll lessen your hangover later on," he said. I took it from him and sipped.

"I know you and Ms. Angel weren't the only ones there, and I can smell the alcohol from here."

I just stared at him. My eyelids were swollen from crying.

He stared back, but not coldly. Just grim.

"You did the right thing. You stayed and got her medical attention. Whoever else was there had to have left and took the alcohol with them. There would've been bottles left it was just you too." He leaned forward, hands laced together and forearms resting on the table. "If you can tell me what happened and who else was there, Jillian, I can see if they can go easy on you. Might be able to get you out of misdemeanor charges entirely."

I didn't want to be alone. But I didn't want the blame to be mine alone, either.

"We were wasted," I began.