

# Not My 21st Birthday

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“Hi. My name is Jared and I’m a closet alcoholic.” That’s what I should say to my old 6th grade teacher and classmates who gather around a Steak N’ Shake table on the eve of my 19th birthday. But I don’t say quite that. This isn’t AA. I tell them I have enjoyed the move to my new school and that I’m making good decisions. Mostly. People don’t believe I still meet with these people. To be fair, I’m friends with three of them – Abby, Nicole, and Melissa. Abby and I have remained particularly close friends since the 3rd grade. Granted, most of our time together consists of drinking and food runs to Jack N The Box because I’m dating another girl. Abby keeps me in the friend-zone for her own reasons. Nicole is always up for a chat every now and then. Melissa is too good for me.

After all the half-truths and considerate chatter, I walk with Abby to her car. It’s a typical Midwest July night. The only difference is my impending birthday.

Before we part ways I say, “I’m having some people over at Blake’s house for my birthday. Wanna join?”

“Oh! Your birthday is tomorrow. Hell yeah! Someone should drive me though. You know me and directions...”

Blake’s parents are gone tonight which equals instant house party. Well, an illegal house party technically, but who really cares other than the police, absent parents, and the vacation-ing Melissa? Bring on the drinks! Being under twenty-one doesn’t mean you can’t get alcohol. Know where to go and not to go. You’ll also need an expensive fake id that says you’re from Illinois, religiously memorize the address on your fake, and walk through the liquor department with confidence.

Blake welcomes Abby and me into his nondescript suburban home. Lauren soon saunters in to the house, winks at me, and kisses my cheek, followed by Nicole and Mikey – Mikey and all the glory of forty Jello shots. Add Jose Cuervo and Bud Light and you have all the appropriate drinks for a small house party; we have what we need for a good time. Blake is such a gracious host. He sips an O’Douls, leaving the real stuff for the rest of us. He doesn’t say too much, letting the party unfold. He’s an omnipresent, non-interfering host. The good kind.

Lauren approaches me as I grab a Bud Light. “Don’t drink too much, okay? We both have work tomorrow,” comments Lauren as she eyes my first beer suspiciously. I have downed a few of those Jello shots already. I’m not the only one drinking though.

Everyone but Blake has followed suit.



My favorite defense goes like this, “I can control myself while drinking.” I empty the first beer bottle with a smirk, and she rolls her eyes. I’ll convince her.

With my second beer in hand, I lead her outside to join those playing Twister. This game was so much more innocent and easy as kids. We were smaller, flexible, and didn’t think to consider how close we were to other people. The game doesn’t last long as things get awkward fast between Lauren and I while Nicole crashes on to the mat.

Maybe she’s feeling the shots. They are disappearing at a steady rate long with the beer.

Everything is completely fine up until 11:59pm. We all know the song. “Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday Jared. Happy Birthday to you...”

All hell breaks loose at 12am. Happy 19th Birthday to me!

“Shots,” immediately yells Mikey as he and I give a clink of cheers and bottoms up that tequila.

Abby shuffles over. “Hey! I’ll match you guys shots.” It will be fine. She can handle it.

And with that, tequila and vodka disappear. I lose count, but I feel the drink’s effect. That floating feeling that makes life not so serious; the stress of life is suppressed. The alcohol brings me clarity, and I’m more of myself under its influence. Drunk words equal sober thoughts.

The three of us stumble over to the couch, bellowing about God-knows what. Abby fits herself in between us, leaning a little close to me while her legs are pushed against Mikey. There are several types of drunks, and Abby falls under the clumsy, flirty drunk. She grows bored of me, so she turns to Mikey. She’s taking his hand and trying to make him get up and go with her somewhere. The next few minutes are me trying to break the two up from serious PDA and watching Lauren give me the death glare.

I leave the couch to brave the storm of an angry girlfriend. “What’s wrong,” I ask. Lauren gives me the most menacing look. “Abby was trying to kiss you. I also told you not to drink so much.”

“She’s interested in Mikey. I’ve had more drinks before. This is nothing,” is all I can say before she stalks away. I feel the fury brewing in me, this anger at myself for upsetting Lauren. It stays there, waiting for something else to provoke it. I can control myself though.

We continue pouring and downing the drinks, the night blurring in to strange, mixed up pieces. I think there’s more pulls of vodka. Maybe there are more games of Twister. At one point I fling my phone because Lauren is still upset with me, but it somehow lands in Nicole’s purse. I obviously know what is happening.



Where is Abby? I look around, getting angry with every second that passes. There she is, curled up in the fetal position, looking a little too sick. She throws up suddenly and Nicole and Lauren rush to her side, holding her long hair back and pulling her to the deck. Shit. This is all my fault. I know better than to let her have all that alcohol. It is my fault for even inviting her. I'm so stupid and I should know better and... Blake is showing me a hole in the wall, a fist-sized hole in his parents' home's wall. He keeps telling me I punched it. Shit. Actual Shit.

Mikey lays in the middle of the floor, drunkenly staring at the ceiling. Conscious thankfully. This is all my fault.

Nicole appears at my side saying, "We should probably call Abby's mom. She might have alcohol poisoning."

We scroll through Abby's phone and cannot find her mom's number. Nicole calls Melissa but of course it's late for her. She's asleep like a good little girl. Maybe we should take her to the hospital. Seems the most logical thing to do. She's also underage. We are all underage. I'm not really sure how they will take that fact.

"Let's just get her home," decides Nicole.

Abby is still so sick, puking and very unaware of what is happening to her. Shit. I am pretty sure she is gonna die or something. It's my responsibility too. Nicole leads Abby to her car. I hope she doesn't puke again because Nicole is fond of her car, Dean. We probably should take her to the hospital. This is all my fault...

I fall asleep sometime that morning at Blake's house. An ear-splitting alarm jolts me awake around 8am. Shit. I have work today. Despite a dull headache, the hangover symptoms are not present. I can control myself, even the hangovers. You have to know what you are doing, and you can escape the dreaded after-party sickness.

Damage control- I first text Abby to make sure she's even alive. Next is Lauren, and I apologize for the hundredth time. I also promise Blake to fix that hole in the wall. Hopefully he's not too mad about my brief lapse of self-control. Last is Melissa, so she can hear about this story from me before anyone else tells her.

Now I tell this epic story to anyone that will listen. Of course, I embellish it a bit but no one needs to know that. This party makes me feel like I'm truly living out my college years well. Even though it sucked while it happened, it makes for a great story. I had this crazy 19th birthday party. My 21st probably won't measure up.

