

**Chapter 1**

“Alana! Alana! Get your butt over here! The dishes aren’t done, where the hell do you think you’re going?”

“But mom, I’m going to be late for school. I have a Math exam today.” Alana replied.

“Who cares about your stupid Math exam? Get those dishes done now!”

And so her day began with the usual shouting & unreasonable expectations. But today, she wasn’t about to allow her despair to cloud her thinking. Today, she was going to remain calm. She was going to do those dishes and run all the way to school if she had to in order to get there on time. Today, she was going to stay focused because it marked the beginning of the rest of her life. Today she would write her final exam. This one was her last exam and she’d be a high school graduate. Being a high school graduate meant that she could get a job and get out of this hell-hole for good. Yes, today was going to be a good day and she’d see to that!

Her younger sister Alyssa sauntered down the stairs and Alana stared at her outfit. Her mini skirt was so tiny it probably wouldn’t fit Barbie and the red sequined tube top barely covered her boobs. Alyssa walked into the kitchen.

“What are you staring at?” And with that she flopped a dirty cup into the sink, splashing dirty dish water all over Alana’s shirt.

“Hey! Why’d you do that! Now I need to change my shirt and I’m already late!”

“Whatever! Who cares? You’re always early anyway, for what reason, I have no idea, but it won’t hurt if you’re late today! It’s the last day of school!”

“I have an exam!”

“So what, you’ll pass anyway, Miss Brilliant!”

And with that, Alyssa walked out of the kitchen & out the door. It almost felt like she was walking out of Alana’s life. Or maybe she was; Alana had a plan. The manager at the local ice-cream shop had offered her a job yesterday. He needed a clerk at his office to handle the orders, the inventory, the accounts, just odds and ends whilst he ran the store. The salary was reasonable and he needed her right away. So as soon as her exam was done today, Alana was going down there to get started. Her first job and her ticket out were waiting. No way was she going to allow Alyssa and a wet shirt to stand in her way.

“Finish the dishes Alana”, she chided herself. “Finish the dishes and get out.”

 Alyssa was her mother’s favorite. She had always done what their mother wanted and that included sexual favors with drug dealers to pay for their mom’s supply of weed and crack. Alyssa saw it as a way to earn quick cash as if she did well, the drug dealers often tipped her. She’d always considered Alana stupid for not using her “assets” to her advantage. After all, Alana had in Alyssa’s opinion, a sexier figure. Maybe she was right, because the men always seemed to choose her. So far Alana had avoided any sexual favors for her mother, but things were getting dangerous. The last man had cornered her in their room. She put up a big fight and he had decided it wasn’t worth it. Luckily he didn’t get off on rape, because he could have overpowered her very easily.

Finally, the dishes were done and she could get out of here! She didn’t even bother telling her mother that she was leaving. That might result in another house chore and Alana couldn’t spare another second. She had ten blocks to run in order to get to her exam, and at this point, no matter how quickly she moved, she’d never get there on time. She grabbed her book bag and dashed out the front door, letting it slam behind her.

“Oh great, I forgot that I need to change my shirt!” She exclaimed aloud. Just then she heard her mother’s voice calling for her.

“Alana! Alana! Get back here and close that door properly!”

Alana couldn’t risk it. She couldn’t go back in that house; she may be stuck there forever. With that she started running, all the way to Edward Long High School. She figured her blouse would dry on her way there. Even if it didn’t, she didn’t care. She needed to get that exam done in order to get her Diploma. Yes, her Diploma and her ticket out.

“Run Alana”, she spurred herself on. “Run!”

She ran at full speed for six blocks. People must have thought that she was some crazed teen on drugs, but she didn’t care, she ran because her life depended on it. Her heart pounded in her chest but she kept going. In two minutes that bell would ring and she’d be late for her exam. Mr. Danforth was a stickler for time and he may just reduce her grade simply because she was late. She couldn’t risk it. She needed her perfect 4.0 GPA to land that MIT scholarship. Yes, she had a plan and right now her plan was in jeopardy.

“Run Alana! Run!”

So she ran. She burst round the final corner and there it stood before her, the school. All the students seemed to be running into the building. The bell must have just rung.

Go Alana. The door to her destiny was still open. Run Alana, one hundred yards to go, you’re almost there. Run!

All of a sudden, her world started to spin. The pounding in her chest grew so loud that she could hear it above her footsteps. She started to stumble. The world grew dark. She was falling. She didn’t understand how but she was falling. Then it was quiet, too quiet.

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She opened her eyes and saw white ceiling tiles. Her head was reeling and her chest hurt. White ceiling tiles? Where on earth was she?

She turned her head to the left, and regretted it instantly because it began to throb.

“What on earth happened to me?” She whispered to no one in particular.

“You collapsed.” answered a strange voice.

She turned around to see who owned the voice and there stood a man in a white robe with glasses and a clipboard in his hand. He pulled a chair from a corner and came and sat next to her.

“You’re in the hospital, you collapsed at your school and you were brought here. Try not to move too much, your head will be throbbing. You hit it on the concrete when you fell. You’ll probably have a nasty bump there for a little while.”

“I collapsed!” she exclaimed, realization setting in. “My exam! What about my exam!” She tried to get out of the bed.

“Whoa, hold on young lady. You’re not going anywhere just yet. When you came in your heart rate was way above normal. It may be the reason you collapsed. We need to run some tests before we can release you. And besides, you won’t be able to go far with that headache. You also need a parent or guardian to sign you out and we’ve tried contacting your mother but she couldn’t be reached. You’re just going to have to wait this one out.”

She collapsed? She collapsed before she could write her exam, and now she’s in the hospital. All of a sudden she remembered her scholarship. Oh no! Now what was she going to do. Maybe she could call the scholarship committee. The school had to let her write her exam at a later date. They just had to. This was her way out, her open door and she could see it closing. She could see it closing slowly. No, this couldn’t be happening. It just couldn’t be.

“No!” she cried out. “No! My exam, my scholarship! No!”

“Relax”, the doctor chided. “Relax, you’re going to get yourself all worked up again and I’m not sure your heart can take it. I’m going to have a nurse bring you something to help you sleep. Get some rest; we’ll sort the rest out in the morning.

And with that, he left. The nurse he promised walked in and without a word, stuck a needle into her IV line. She emptied the contents of the syringe into the line, adjusted Alana’s pillow and left. The room grew silent, slower this time, much slower as she drifted off to sleep but she still didn’t like it.

**Chapter 2**

The next day, the hospital was finally able to reach her mother. She came off her high long enough to come to the hospital to get Alana. The doctor had brought her in to Alana’s room to explain the prognosis and it hadn’t been a good one. She had a minor heart defect that she was probably born with. It caused problems for her heart any time she did strenuous exercise. Of course she had never found out before because she was never much of an active person. Even as a child she preferred sitting in the house with a library book to running around outside with the other kids. Her mother and sister had called her fresh, but she didn’t mind. She didn’t like dirt. Books were better.

Yesterday was supposed to mark the beginning of her new life. Instead it looked like the end. She missed her exam. She knew that she’d be allowed to take the course again in the summer, however the MIT committee would be deciding on her scholarship next week and her high school education was incomplete. Maybe with a note from the doctor she would be excused, but with so many people vying for that scholarship she’d probably have to wait a year.

 Mom had managed to arrange a ride home for her from the hospital, probably the best thing she’d ever done for Alana in her whole life. No, the second best thing. The first was when she didn’t abort her, because no matter how crappy her life had been Alana was happy to be here. She had goals and a dream. And one day, she’d write a book telling her story; her rise from the ashes of 106 Hilltop Avenue.

At first glance, Alana’s mom seemed like an ordinary single mother. She was a clerk at a local lawyer’s office. The pay wasn’t great but it was just enough to support her two girls on. Well, it would be if she could get home with her whole salary after payday. Usually, that wasn’t the case. She’d stop at her favorite crack house and come home with a few rocks and maybe one hundred dollars left from her salary. The only reason she managed to keep a roof over their heads over the years, is that their landlord has requested that all rent payments be made directly through her employer. The salary check given to her mother was always less the month’s rent. As a child she used to think that their landlord was mean, but now she thinks of him as her hero. He kept a roof over her and her sister’s head.

Her mother wasn’t always bad. When she was clean, Alana had called her the world’s greatest mom. They once had a happy family. Their parents were happily married, she and Alyssa got on great. They were only eleven months apart in age and shared everything. They lived in this same house. It was small but cozy. The girls shared a room which had obviously been decorated with love. The pink and white wall paper with hundreds of dancing ponies, the two identical white dressing tables, the twin beds, the pink rug in the middle of the room all sang out love back then. Now they were barely pink, or white. The beds barely carried the weight of the almost grown women, and the wallpaper no longer had dancing ponies, they had long faded in the sunlight that managed to come in through the window.

Their whole world came crashing down in one day. The girls were already at school when the policeman came to get them. There had been an accident. Daddy had been driving to work and his car was hit by an eighteen wheeler. The impact caused his car to be crushed between the truck and a guardrail. When they finally moved the truck, her father’s body was so badly mangled that he could not be recognized. They’d identified him using his dental records.

Alana’s mother had never been the same. She’d lain in bed for days crying. She was so depressed that she couldn’t even attend the funeral. Back then, grandma had been around to help. She’d taken the girls and allowed mom time to grieve. But tragedy struck again. One month after dad’s accident, grandma had a major heart attack and she never made it to the hospital. The girls were alone again.

 Mom had tried to make it work the first few months after that. She even got out of bed and got a job. She got the girls to school on time every day. They’d gotten dad’s insurance money and mom promised to buy a house and open trust accounts for the girls. Things had started looking up until one day Alana and Alyssa got home from school to find mom lying on the floor of the living room. They didn’t know it at the time, but mom was drunk and high. The stress of losing dad was too much for her. They didn’t realize it then, but that day, they lost their mom too. Drugs and alcohol had stolen her from them. Now here they were, ten years later. Mom was a shell of herself. Alyssa was literally a prostitute. She no longer had sex with just the men mom brought home, but she now had her very own clientele. Alana was disgusted with her younger sister, but the truth is that Alyssa’s money put food on the table. Maybe she should be grateful because that meant she had been free to study and pull off all A’s her entire high school career. Dad’s insurance money was long gone; drugs had taken care of that. Grandma was their last living relative. Both mom and dad were their parents’ only kids, so there were no aunts or uncles to turn to. Alana and Alyssa were alone with a drunk, depressed, high mother. Their safety net was gone.

Her brain fast forwarded to present day as she heard her mother’s voice.

“Who’s going to pay those hospital bills huh?” her mother was saying. “Gone and get yourself sick! I’m not paying for this. You better forget about this school nonsense and get yourself a job. Look at your sister, she helps put food on the table, what do you do? Sit in that room all day with your nose in a book. Books aint gonna help you with nothing. They aint help your father and they certainly aint help me. Get a job!”

Mom didn’t know it, but Alana was way ahead of her. As soon as she got home she was leaving again, first to meet with Mr. Woodridge at the ice cream shop and then with Mr. Danforth about her math exam. Then she’d put in a call to the scholarship committee. Books were her way out and nothing would stop her.

**Chapter 3**

Alana left the house pretty much as soon as she walked in. There was nothing there for her anyway and mom just kept ranting about the hospital bill. Apparently those tests were expensive and no way was her mother going to decrease her crack budget in order to pay it. They used to have health insurance, but that was one of the things that took a back seat to mom’s crack habit. It was a cool day and the neighborhood seemed alive. Children were riding around on bikes and running around in the street playing ball. It was a relatively nice neighborhood, a quiet place for families on small incomes, not rough like the projects, just quaint. She walked as fast as she could without aggravating her headache. There was still a slight throbbing in spite of the painkillers they’d given her as she was leaving the hospital. The doctor had been right; there was a large bump on her forehead. She figured that’s what happens when skull connects with concrete.

The ice cream shop was only about three blocks from home. It was frequented by the neighborhood’s families and kids from the high school and from the looks of things Mr. Woodridge did well enough. He usually hired students to serve his tasty treats part time and this helped many pay for college classes. Alana was the only high school grad he’d hired full time. She had actually gone into the shop to request a part time job, he took one look at her, asked about her grades and hired her right off the bat to do his office work. Turns out he’d just botched a very big order because he’d been too busy to double check it and she’d walked in at just the right moment.

Alana hurried into the parlor, hoping that she didn’t lose her job for not showing up yesterday afternoon. Mr. Woodridge was busy with a customer, so she waited. When he was done, he looked up at her over his wire rimmed glasses.

“Where have you been? Weren’t you supposed to be here yesterday? What happened to your head?”

“I’m sorry Mr. Woodridge. I collapsed at school yesterday and I was taken to the hospital. They released me this morning. Is it ok if I start now?

“They released you this morning? So what are you doing here, you should be home resting. You could have called me on the phone to explain. Gone on home, you can start tomorrow if you feel better.”

“Oh no Mr. Woodridge, I really don’t mind. I feel much better.” The truth was, she didn’t want to go back home.

“Alright then, but take it easy. I don’t want you collapsing again. It’s bad for business. There are some orders I’d like you to get started on. We’re running out of Rocky Road and Rum and Raisin. They’re our most popular flavors so we can’t afford to run out of them. The numbers for our suppliers are in the rolodex on the desk.

“Ok Mr. Woodridge.”

She set to work placing orders and in about half an hour she was done. She noticed that Mr. Woodridge kept stock of his inventory in a small wire rimmed notebook. It was an effective system. He’d taken great care planning this out apparently and everything was recorded, but Alana knew it would be a lot more efficient if he’d had it in a database instead. Then he’d just be able to call up a report of his current inventory levels and never run out of his most popular flavors again. He did have a computer system on his desk and it looked like it had never been turned on. Alana flipped the switch and it buzzed into life. She got to work building a simple database. She’d always been a whiz at computer stuff. She’d topped her information technology class and couldn’t wait to get into MIT. She’d planned on becoming a Software Designer. She found solace in programming. Hundreds of lines of code gave her a place to get lost in and she loved it.

The hours flew past and she continued working, banging away at the keyboard. By the time she was done it was late afternoon. She’d show Mr. Woodridge the new system in the morning. But for now she needed to get to the school to get her exam and her Diploma sorted out. She went to Mr. Woodridge and he gladly allowed her to leave early in light of her situation the day before.

She walked briskly to the school campus, reminding herself not to run. Running was what had put her in this position in the first place. She arrived at the school and walked quickly to the math department. Mr. Danforth was still at his desk, marking papers. He lifted his head as she opened the door and he appeared pleased to see her.

“Alana! How are you?”

“I’ve been better sir, she replied.”

“You missed your exam yesterday, I heard about your accident. When would you like to write your exam?

Alana couldn’t believe her ears. “That’s precisely what I came to speak to you about. Can I write it now? The MIT scholarship committee meets next week and don’t want my transcript to say incomplete.”

Mr. Danforth’s expression soured. “I’m sorry Alana, I had to send them the transcripts yesterday. Their representative said it was the final deadline. Your transcript already says incomplete. You can still write your exam today and I’ll put in a call to the committee explaining your situation, just hope for the best.”

Alana didn’t hear anything else he had to say. Her heart started racing, she sat in the nearest chair and hung her head. She agreed to write the exam and started working. But she couldn’t get that scholarship out of her head. With her grades there had been other offers, but she’d turned them down. She knew she could make it into MIT so she had all her cards on that. Now she felt foolish. She may lose her scholarship. She wrote her exam without even having to think much. It was pretty easy and she was sure she had aced it. But it didn’t matter, her transcript said incomplete, that meant the MIT committee may just push it to the side and never consider her again.

Alana turned in her paper and walked home a bit despondent. It was early evening by now and the streets had quieted. The kids had gone home to eat their dinner and she was going home to a bare table. Her tummy had long stopped grumbling at dinnertime. It had grown accustomed to being empty whenever she wasn’t at school.

She walked into the house and it was strangely quiet. Her sister was probably out “working”. But where was mom? Maybe she could get to her room without having to find out.

“Alana!” No such luck. Mom was calling from the living room.

“Coming mom,” she replied. She walked into the room to find her mom sitting there with a strange man. She’d never seen this one before and he didn’t look like a drug dealer. His appearance was neat and expensive, not cheesy. There was no excess jewelry, and no questionable package on the coffee table like with the others. No this one appeared classy but questionable.

“Sit down honey” her mom said. Honey? Oh oh, this couldn’t be good.

“Mr. Montgomery here has agreed to help us pay for your hospital bill. He just needs you to help him out at his house twice a week.

Mr. Montgomery stood and walked across the room towards her. He eyed her from hair follicle to toe nail and back the other way. Something about the way he stared made her rather uneasy. She could feel him undressing her with his eyes. Something about this situation was fishy and Alana was not about to fall into that trap.

“Help him do what?” she asked.

“Oh, your mom says you’re a bright one, so I’m sure you’ll figure it out.”

She heard his voice for the first time and it was loud, husky and rough. She didn’t like it.

 “Honey, you need to cooperate because we don’t have any money. The hospital gave us only fifteen days to pay your bill and Mr. Montgomery is willing to help.”

Alana’s blood began to boil.

“We’d have money if you hadn’t spent all of daddy’s insurance on your drugs!” she exclaimed. “I refuse to be anybody’s whore. That may be good enough for you and Alyssa but it’s not good enough for me.”

Her neighbors must have heard that slap because to Alana, it was deafening. “Are you calling me a whore!” her mother screamed. “You ungrateful wench, you better pack your clothes and go with Mr. Montgomery now!”

Mr. Montgomery seemed to like that order, because he smiled and started walking towards Alana. She started backing up, but forgot about the sofa behind her. She tumbled backwards and before she knew it, he was on top of her. He started to kiss her and his hands were traveling into places no one had ever touched her. She tried to scream but when she opened her mouth he plunged his tongue deep into it. She gagged but she was powerless. He was bigger than her and he had her hands pinned behind her. He had her body in full control. She struggled under him, but before she knew it, her skirt had been raised and her panty was coming off. This couldn’t be happening. No way could this be happening. Where was her mother, how could she allow this to happen to her. His fingers were groping her, touching her, thrusting into her. The pain was excruciating. She’d never even had a boyfriend before. She’d never been kissed before, but he was touching her, he was violating her. Tears slid down her cheek and she screamed, but the screams were muffled by his mouth that had never left hers. He lifted her body and repositioned it on the couch. She struggled. He slapped her across the face. She hadn’t noticed a ring, but there must have been one on his fingers because something had torn into her flesh. She cried out but again his mouth covered hers. Again he was on top of her. She hadn’t heard his pants unzip, but she could feel him trying to position himself inside of her. Alana felt like she was about to die. She felt all the fight leave her body. With one final thrust he tore into her flesh and his was inside her body. He had completed his violation of her entire being. His repeated thrusting tore into her again and again for what seemed like an eternity, yet the clock behind his head said the entire ordeal lasted only five minutes. With one final grunt, he was done. He lifted himself off of her and zipped up his pants.

 He turned and looked at her mother who was still standing there, said a very polite gentlemanly thank you and left.

He mother just looked at her lying there on the couch and left the living room. She could hear her footfalls on the steps, then the landing upstairs, finally she heard the bedroom door close. Alana couldn’t believe what had just happened to her. She couldn’t even cover up herself. Shock had taken over her body and she began to shake and shiver.

She laid there with her body exposed for a very long time and cried. She looked at the clock again. Two hours had passed. She finally got up, found her underwear, put it back on, fixed her skirt and walked out of the house. She had nowhere to go but she knew that she’d never go back there. She just walked out into the night. She walked to the park opposite the school and sat on the nearest bench. She had no money, no food and no clothes, but she’d never go back to that house. She lay on that bench and cried.

**Chapter 4**

She had no idea when or how she had fallen asleep. But apparently she had because now it was day time and she was waking up. She ran her fingers through her hair and it was a mess. She tried to comb through it with her fingers to make it decent. In the struggle on the couch, she’d lost her pony tail holder, so her hair had to stay the way it was for now. Now she just needed a public tap to wash her tear stained face and try to make it to work. She was still alive and her door hadn’t closed fully. She still had a job. She didn’t have a home but Mr. Woodridge paid weekly so maybe on Friday she could find herself a room to rent. It was Wednesday, only two more days. She’d make it.

“Alana! Alana! Where are you?!” A sobbing voice was calling her name. “Alana! Please be here.”

“Alyssa?”

“Alana!” Alyssa came running from behind a large tree. “Oh thank God I found you! Mom told me what she did to you. I’m so sorry I wasn’t there to help you. “

Alyssa broke into to tears.

“It’s not your fault Alyssa. Its moms fault. Don’t blame yourself.”

“I brought you some clothes.” Alyssa produced a bag. “I know you got that job at Woodridge’s place, he told me when I went in there the other day. I have a friend who lives on Autumn Avenue. She helps me when I’m in trouble sometimes. She has a room that you can stay in. I don’t think you should come back home. I can live with mom’s vices but you were never cut out for that. You have a brain and you could actually get into college.”

“So could you Alyssa. You didn’t have to drop out of school.”

“We both know school wasn’t for me and besides somebody needed to put food on the table.”

The sisters sat in silence at the reality of that comment. It was sad, but it was the truth. Alyssa had sold herself so her sister could be something better.

“Here’s some money so you can get something to eat.” Alyssa finally said, breaking the silence. Let’s get going, you’re going to be late for work”

Alyssa took Alana to her friend’s house. The friend was an older lady who opened the door with a sweet smile. She welcomed them both in and hugged Alyssa like she was hugging her own daughter. The lady gladly offered Alana her room for free until she got on her feet and agreed to accept a small rental fee after that.

Alana finally had a chance to shower off the odor of Mr. Montgomery. As she thought of last night, chills ran up her spine and she cried again. Her tears mixed with the cold water from the shower and she wept even more. No amount of water could wash off the violation. And she was sure no amount of therapy would get rid of the memory.

**Chapter 5**

Alana had finally managed to tear herself out of the shower and into some comfortable clothes for work. Now she sat at her desk and with all her might, tried to forget what had happened to her the night before. Not much had worked, but after she poured herself into finishing the inventory database that she had started the day before, nothing else in the world mattered. When she came in this morning she’d shown Mr. Woodridge her progress on the database and he was very impressed. Yes, her future seemed promising again.

She’d considered going to the police about the events of the night before, but somehow she didn’t think that any one would believe her. Her mother would just call her a liar, and Mr. Montgomery appeared rich enough to be able to pay a judge to let him off. No, going to the police was not an option. She’d always dealt with her problems on her own, and she could definitely make it through this one. Her world hadn’t ended. She could do this.

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Three weeks had passed and Alana’s life was getting better. She worked hard at the Ice Cream Place and Mr. Woodridge liked her ideas. Mrs. Allen, her landlady was kind to her and often spoke encouraging words to her. She was a Christian and had invited Alana to church twice and both times she had politely turned down the invitation. Alana did not believe in a God who had let her suffer the way she did. However, Mrs. Allen wasn’t pushy, she genuinely cared and Alana liked that, so she listened when the old lady spoke of God’s love. She didn’t even mind the little notes that the old lady pushed under her door occasionally. Strangely enough, they made her feel like someone actually cared about her. Maybe not God, but Mrs. Allen certainly did. Maybe one day she’d go to church with the old lady just so she didn’t feel bad.

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About a week later Alana was at work updating the inventory database. They’d just received a large order of supplies and it all needed to be entered into the system so that they’d stay on track. She was lost in her work for quite a while until a loud commotion outside in the service area demanded her attention. Alana looked up from her desk through the glass barrier that separated the office from the store and was mortified to see her mother causing a scene at the cash register.

“Oh no! What’s she doing?” Alana leapt from her desk and ran to the cashier’s side. “Mom, what’s wrong?” she demanded in a hushed tone.

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong is that you owe me $5000 for that hospital visit. We had an arrangement with Mr. Montgomery and you blew it, now he wants his money back and you better pay it!”

Alana felt all the blood in her body flow into her head in one big rush and for a minute she thought she’d lose her mind. All of the pent up anger of the last four weeks suddenly rose to the surface and in a fit of rage she let it all out.

“An arrangement, you call that an arrangement? You let that man rape me just so that you could get money for drugs and you say we had an arrangement! I hate you! You’re the worst thing that has ever happened to me. I wish you had died instead of daddy. You’re nothing but a disgusting whore. I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!”

Immediately Alana regretted her outburst. It was a busy day at the store and several families had been sitting enjoying ice cream, now they were all staring at her in disbelief. Mr. Woodridge had been cleaning out the store room when he heard the commotion. Now he came running over to her.

“Alana! What’s going on? Have you lost your mind? We have customers to serve and an image to uphold.”

Alana was mortified by what she had just done. Mr. Woodridge was a kind and understanding man, but when it came to business he was all about professionalism. Just last week one of the waiters, Paul, had a girlfriend who came by and created a scene. Mr. Woodridge had warned all the staff that another case like that would not be tolerated. Alana, felt her throat getting dry. She didn’t know what she would say to Mr. Woodridge and she was sure that it wouldn’t matter, because she was going home for good.

**Chapter 6**

Three days had passed and Alana couldn’t get that day out of her mind. Now she had two recurring nightmares; one about her rape and the other was of the moment Mr. Woodridge handed her a severance check. She’d lost her job and her mother had been happy about it. Her world was starting to crumble once again.

She lay on her bed starring up at the ceiling. Mrs. Allen had told her she could stay as long as she needed to and she didn’t need to worry about rent. At least she had a comfortable place to lay her head, without having to worry about rapists and drug dealers.

She had planned to go job hunting today, but she felt ill. She’d vomited twice this morning and couldn’t stand the smell of food. She figured she’d picked up some sort of stomach flu and hoped it would be gone by the next day.

The phone in the living room began ringing and Alana struggled out of bed to get to it before it stopped. Mrs. Allen had gone to the grocery store, so she was alone. Finally she made it to the receiver.

“Hello”

“Hello, I’m trying to contact Ms. Alana Goodman”

“This is she.” She said to the official sounding voice.

“Good day Ms. Goodman, I’m calling from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Scholarship Committee.”

Alana’s heart sunk and for a moment she lost her breath. She was grateful that the voice continued and she didn’t have to speak.

“Ms. Goodman, I’m pleased to inform you that we have reviewed your scholarship application and we are very impressed with your academic career. We have decided to offer you a provisional place at the Institute with a full scholarship including tuition and accommodation. We’re pleased that you have chosen the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and look forward to having you as a student.

“Thank you, thank you so much.” She managed, though her throat was dry.

“Your scholarship offer includes a paid position at the Institute’s Information Management Department and we trust that this will make your study period a bit easier.”

“Oh thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Ms. Goodman, we will be sending you a package in the mail with further details and instructions for registration. Have a good day”

“Thank you.”

The voice was gone.

She’d gotten her scholarship, and it included a job! Yes, things were looking up! In less than a month, her troubles could be put behind her.

Alana felt like dancing but her head was throbbing so she decided to go back to bed.

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The next day, Alana woke up feeling exactly as she did the day before. Mrs. Allen was worried and insisted on taking her to a doctor. So now she sat in the waiting room of the free clinic downtown reading a two year old edition of Vogue magazine.

“Alana Goodman,” called the reception at the desk, “the doctor will see you now.”

Alana got up and followed the nurse waiting for her through the door into the examination room. A man in a white robe stood near a bed and asked her to sit on it and explain her symptoms to him.

When she was done, he looked her straight in the eye.

“When was your last period Ms. Goodman?”

Alana didn’t have an answer. With all the drama in her life lately, she hadn’t paid attention to her menstrual cycle. Now that she thought about it, her last period had been at least two months ago, long before her rape. Alana’s heart started pounding as the realization set in. The doctor thought that she was pregnant, and he may be right.

“I think it might be a good idea to do a pregnancy test, Ms. Goodman,” the doctor was saying. “We’ll have the results back in about 24 hours and we’ll contact you when we have it. In the meantime drink plenty of liquids and get some rest. You should be fine.”

Chapter 7

Two days had passed and Alana had gotten the call from the doctor. She was indeed pregnant. She was able to determine exactly how far along she was because she’d never forget the day that she’d been raped. She had spent the hours since that phone call in bed crying. She was 17 years old, with no family support and pregnant at the hands of a rapist. She had no job and no prospect for taking care of a child. Alana had never believed in abortion and no matter who the father was she couldn’t bring herself to killing a child that was part of her.

MIT was now out of the question; no way she could attend school and take care of a baby on her own. Besides, her grades needed to be of a certain level in order for her to maintain her scholarship and a baby would be a major distraction. Alana had no idea what she was going to do. She just lay in bed, crying and ignoring food. Mrs. Allen had done her best to cheer her up. She’d even promised to help with the baby, offering to take care of it whilst Alana went off to school but she couldn’t think of burdening the old lady that way. She just didn’t have the heart. She’d have to find another way. She’d considered adoption, but she wasn’t sure she could live knowing that she had a child out there in the world somewhere, not knowing how he/she turned out. She could consider adoption if she could somehow stay in contact with the family. She’d heard of those kinds of adoptions before. Maybe she could do that.

Alana drifted off to sleep with all these thoughts clouding her mind. It wasn’t very restful sleep but it was the first she’d had in two days.

“Alana. Alana.” Somebody was calling her name. She opened her eyes to see Mrs. Allen’s gentle face staring down at her. You have a phone call. It’s the doctor from the clinic.

Alana dragged herself out of bed and into the living room to get the phone.

“Hello.” She said into the receiver.

“Hello, Ms. Goodman, This is Dr. Daniel. I need you to come into my office as soon as possible. There’s something I need to discuss with you, and it’s rather important.”

Twenty minutes later Alana was on her way out the door with Mrs. Allen in tow. She was hoping that the doctor was calling to let her know that they’d made a mistake and she wasn’t pregnant. That would be the best news she’d ever gotten.

The drive to the clinic in Mrs. Allen’s car couldn’t go past fast enough and Alana found herself pressing an imaginary accelerator under her foot on the passenger side willing the car to go faster. Now they sat in the waiting room again and her patience grew even thinner.

Finally she was called in the examination room. She took her place on the bed and waited whilst Dr. Daniel sat in the chair next to the bed.

“Alana, I’m sorry but I have some bad news” he said.

Bad news? What could be worse than being pregnant at the hands of a rapist?

“Alana, as part of our routine pre-natal care procedures, we performed an HIV test on your blood. I’m sorry to have to inform you that you have tested HIV positive.”

Alana didn’t hear anything after that. She collapsed onto the floor of the examination room. This latest development was just too much for her to handle.

Chapter 8

**One week later**

Alana hadn’t gotten out of bed since she’d come home with Mrs. Allen from the Clinic. Her life was officially over. Whether she could get her baby adopted or not wouldn’t matter. Whether she’d do well at MIT or not wouldn’t matter. She’d have only a few years left to live. She’d never be able to love. She was a walking lethal weapon to any man who would dare to love her. She was HIV positive and life was no longer worth living.

Mrs. Allen popped her head into her room. “Alana, I’m going out for some groceries. I’ll be back soon ok.”

“Ok, Mrs. Allen”, she replied weakly.

She heard her bedroom door close and the front door open a few seconds later. She heard the car start and move out of the driveway.

Alana decided to put her plan into action now. She got out of bed, weak from not having eaten for days. She struggled to the closet in the hallway where she’d seen exactly what she needed. She’d done nothing to deserve this. The God Mrs. Allen kept yapping about hadn’t protected her and she was tired of living. This was it, she was done.

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Mrs. Allen returned home after her shopping trip and walked into the house. She was determined to get Alana to eat something today. Lying around wasn’t doing the girl any good and she may just be doing more damage to her health by not eating properly.

“Alana,” she called.

She didn’t get an answer and she didn’t expect one. She walked down the hallway and knocked lightly on the door.

“Alana,” she called again as she opened the door slowly.

She popped her head around the door and was mortified at what she saw. She jumped back in sheer fright, her heart pounding. She couldn’t believe her eyes, she wasn’t seeing right. There was just no way.

She waited a few seconds, steeled herself and eased the door open again. This time there was no doubt in her mind what she had seen. There was Alana, hanging from the ceiling fan, by a rope around her neck. There was blood coming from the corner of her mouth and she appeared dead. Mrs. Allen ran back to the living room and called for an ambulance.

Ten minutes later the paramedics came, and Alana was declared dead on the scene. Mrs. Allen wept like a mother who had lost a child. Alana was dead. A young life so full of promise was cut short; a victim of her circumstances.

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Look Out for the second book in this Series

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Alyssa’s Secret

