

A Forgotten Tomorrow

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CHAPTER 1

It's funny how life can change at any moment. Two days ago I was doing my usual routine on the corner of Benz Street for my nightly work. The weather was below freezing but I still had on my old skirt, sleeveless top and hand-me-down pumps. My hair was tied up with a rubber band; my face caked with cheap make-up – days old really, since I rarely have a moment to take a shower.

Today is completely different, almost overwhelmingly different. I find myself feeling a tad uneasy while sitting here looking at the cold, white walls of Jonah's office at the City Community Center. I feel

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like I am in an institution being observed for some unknown mental disorder. Actually, I'm not even sure why I am here. It's stupid. He thinks that he can help me. Help me with what? I have no idea. I think I'm doing okay on my own.

Jonah found me on the corner of Benz Street a few nights ago. Benz Street is where all the girls like me hang out during the witching hour. It's the best time to get business, and without business I would never be able to survive out here.

What's my job? Well, it's obvious if anyone takes a look at my clothing. I have worn this same outfit for an entire year, except for the times I am able to get it washed. My skirt is full of holes and my top is practically falling apart – but with what I do, clothes don't really matter. It's more my attitude and sex appeal that grabs the attention of approaching men.

I am not proud of what I do, but I have to make money somewhere. I was once at the point of starvation out here, trying to live

the right way. But the right way didn't turn out so well for me. Where else could I work at sixteen years old and make the money I do now? Not many places, I'd imagine. I mean, it's not great... but it is enough to get by.

I also have a slight problem with meth. It's not a bad problem really. I don't think I'm addicted completely either, I just use it every day to calm me down. Who wouldn't want to calm their nerves after nights like I have had? I don't care either. I mean, I know I can stop whenever I want to.

Anyway, back to Jonah. He thinks he can help me. What's he going to do, rent me an apartment or send me back to school? Probably not. I will let him talk, but I doubt I will have much to say.

Once he comes back into the room and sits himself at the desk, all I can do is stare. He seems to be a happy person; his eyes are smiling even when he isn't. I can't understand that either, considering he works at this place. I would picture him as

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being a law enforcement agent of some sort, with his thick body build and muscular arms – not a counsellor.

He sits there for a few moments before making eye contact with me again. I have no idea what this guy wants me to say or do, and it only makes me feel even more awkward when he takes out his ballpoint pen and holds it over his notebook. Again, I feel like I am being studied, but I should not be so negative. I can't help it, though.

Minutes pass as he rambles on about his program for kids like me. His goal is to take kids off the street and give them a new beginning. That's all well and good, but I'm not comfortable telling him what he wants to know – about the real me and where I came from. I'm not promising to let him help me, but I will tell him, I know I will. Even though it's not any of his business. I mean, sometimes it's good to get things out, right?

Where do I start? I don't know what I'd count as the beginning. I guess it started with my mama – if that's what you want

to call her. I can't remember everything perfectly, but I will try my best.

My mama gave birth to me when she was in her early forties. I haven't seen her since I was close to nine years old. At times, I struggle to remember what she looks like, although I do remember her long, uncombed hair and how she always reeked of booze. She was rarely dressed either, unless she was working. She would lie around in her nightgown all day long.

Looking back I realise that she probably never really wanted kids – well, a kid like me at any rate. Even when I was very young, she never wanted anything to do with me. She would never play with me, help me with homework or even talk to me. The only time she spoke to me was when she wanted me to do something for her. Back then I thought it was normal for her to act like that, but now I realise that it was far from normal.

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All in all I guess my early years as a child weren't too bad though. I didn't have much, but I didn't know any different, so wealth or things didn't matter. I was used to my mama being broke all the time.

Things could have been a little different if my crazy step-father Johnny had worked – he was more than capable. Now and again he did odd jobs, but never enough to help take care of a family. That was the problem I guess; he didn't see me as family. My mama didn't make him work or do anything either, probably hoping to keep him around. So he did very little around the house. He mostly obsessed about his baby – his motorcycle – or anything to do with guns and hunting.

Johnny lived with us for about a year before I was taken from my home. From when he first moved in I didn't get a chance to grow attached to him. I did the exact opposite – I tried my best to stay away.

He was a scary-looking man, about fifty years old with long, greasy hair. His intense

brown eyes were likely to scare anyone who came across him in a dark alleyway. Johnny didn't talk much either – unless it was to one of his buddies who were constantly hanging around the house.

His friends were just like him, jobless and scary. I hated it when they came over because they would take over the entire house, drinking beer and smoking up the place with their disgusting cigarettes.

Well, my mama did work. In retail. But only a few days a week. She never cooked; she would stock up on all the frozen dinners she could, and that is what we ate every night. Everything else I had to do by myself. Like I said, she always smelled like booze and boozing was all she seemed to be capable of – especially after Johnny came on the scene. So, most days she remained on the couch with a cold beer in hand, drunkenly laughing at ridiculous soap operas that had no real meaning.

Again, this is how I see it now, this is what I remember. Who knows, I could be

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wrong – but that is all I remember about my mama.

When it came to me going to school, I did have a few problems, no matter how friendly I tried to be. I was the yucky girl who no one wanted to be friends with. My white sneakers were brown from wearing them every day, and most of my outfits were too small. Half the time I went to school wearing dirty clothes because I forgot to wash them. Eight years old and remembering to do laundry? Give me a break.

I liked going to school, though. It was my escape from everything else in my life. I still really like reading and literature, and reading was certainly a big part of my life back then. I read stories that made me happy, that took me far away from nasty Johnny or my drunken mother. I often imagined myself as the main character, reaching excellence and having a life full of love and adventure.

Johnny teased me often, as if he were a little child. Dealing with that wasn't so

horrible. I just sucked it up and avoided him as much as I could. For some reason he loved to scare me in front of his friends, taunting me and telling me that ghosts were going to get me in middle of the night. The first few times I didn't take too much notice, but eventually I hated it. It didn't do any good to tell my mama. She never yelled at him about anything at all, it was always me who was scolded. And I rarely did anything wrong back then.

Anyway, eight years old was such a long time ago for me. I have blocked it out of my mind for so many years, pushing it deep down inside myself, hoping it would never surface again. I will try to explain that day as it really was, but I can't promise it will be exact.

It was in the spring, a few months before my ninth birthday. My neighbourhood was pretty small and reasonably safe. I would ride around on my bike for hours, trying to do tricks or play some sort of imaginary game. Most of the time I ended up on the ground with a scraped knee or elbow, but I

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didn't care. I didn't realise that day would be my last on a bike.

Johnny and his friends were in the wooded back yard of my house messing around with a pellet gun. He really shouldn't have had that thing, because he would shoot squirrels or rabbits for fun. It didn't ever kill them, but it hurt them enough that they would never be the same again. They would laugh hysterically as a squirrel struggled to crawl away after it was shot. I don't know why, but I guess it amused them.

I always played alone, so when Johnny asked me to come out back to see what he was making, I couldn't help being curious. I don't know why I allowed myself to get excited, because deep down I should have known something weird was going on. Anyway, he wouldn't tell me what it was at first, but he did give me a hint – saying it was some kind of fort for me to play in.

I don't think I ever rode my bike as fast as I did that day. I'd wanted a tree house for

the longest time, but never got one. It didn't occur to me to wonder why Johnny was suddenly making one. If only I'd thought more carefully, maybe things would have turned out differently.

Big lie. When I reached them, my excitement turned to fear. Johnny and his buddies were leaning against the broken down wooden fence with odd expressions on their faces. He was holding something behind his back, but I couldn't see what it was until I got closer.

“Come here, Savannah. I got somethin' for ya,” he said, in a creepy voice.

I didn't move from where I was standing. I was only a few feet away from them, but I couldn't move. It was like my legs were nailed to the ground – no matter how hard I tried, my feet wouldn't budge.

Johnny slowly walked towards me with his hands behind his back, smiling and giggling when he made eye contact with

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his friends. When he got close enough he showed me a half-dead squirrel that he was holding.

“See this?” he asked. “This will be you if you don’t do what I tell you to.”

The expression in his eyes sent chills down my spine. Suddenly I was too scared to do anything. All I could do was look at him and the poor squirrel.

“You understand me?”

I didn’t say a word, just nodded my head. My hands were shaking, I felt sick to my stomach and I wanted to cry.

He took me. He took me into the shaded part of the backyard where no one would see what he was going to do. Nobody except his friends, who laughed softly as tears fell from my eyes.

That day he touched me in a place that no one had ever touched me before. I knew it wasn’t right; I was terrified. All I could

think about was the squirrel. If he could harm animals like he did, so swiftly and easily without a thought, what would he do to me if I told anyone? I do believe he would've killed me.

Months went by before I said anything. I would sit alone in my room all day. The visions of his evil smile that day haunted my every thought. I could still see it and I could still smell his rotten breath.

A vision came to me one day at school, making my teacher panic. We were in the middle of a maths lesson when I spaced out. Before I could stop it, my hands were clutched to my desk and tears began to fall, too quickly for me to push them back where they belonged. With that, I had the attention of the entire class, including my horrified teacher.

I didn't realise what was happening until a couple of minutes passed, and when I snapped out of it everyone was staring at me. My teacher was tapping on the desk in front of me repeatedly, asking if I was okay.

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It was then that I had to... I had to tell her.

I didn't want that to happen for fear that I'd end up dead, but it took only two days before a county social worker came to my house for a visit. Johnny wasn't around when the nice lady came, only my mama and I. And boy, did Mama get angry. She yelled at me up and down, calling me a liar.

The nice lady listened to my mama rant on about how much trouble I caused and how much I lied, before taking me aside and talking with me alone. I was glad she did that too, because I wasn't lying and it wasn't fair of my mama to talk about her own daughter that way. Even at that age I knew it was wrong.

To make a long story short, I was taken from my mama that day, and haven't seen her since. It only took ten minutes of me talking to the social worker for her to realise how my life was. Of course I told her the details of what happened that day too, but by then she'd already made her decision. I don't know what I'd expected to happen. I

hadn't really thought that far, and I guess further meetings with my mama must have gone on after that day. But I never knew anything about it.