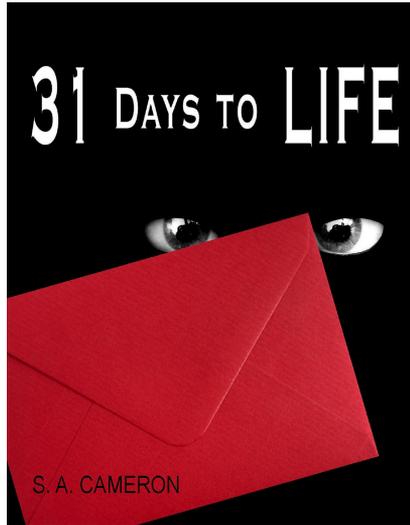


31 DAYS TO LIFE

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BY

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STEPHENS FAMILY MEDIA GROUP

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To those who have suffered abuse, yet endure to make a
better life, this book is for you.

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THE LAST DAY

Today is the day. He said he would let me go today. He told me that if I did what he wanted for thirty days, he would release me. Each day I refused, he would keep me one day more. That first day I fought a lot, and he still got his way. I have been here thirty-one days now, and have done everything he's asked since.

At first I thought he would kill me when he was done with his little game. After all, I wasn't just his toy to play with, I was a witness. Why would he let me go?

As his game has played on, I've come to realize his confidence, arrogance really, is enough that he may actually let me go. I'm not even sure how to feel. After a month of his torture, I have little emotion left. I just feel...numb, really.

Being left alone for the better part of each day has given me too much time to my thoughts. The physical torture has been nearly unbearable, but it only lasts a few hours each night. The rest of the time I have spent torturing myself. Psychological punishment for each twisted thing I've allowed him to do. I can't escape my thoughts, and there seems to be no end to the questions my mind creates.

For those few moments I've allowed myself to think about being released, I've tried to envision what a life might be like for me after this. As the month has gone on, it's become more difficult to see a life outside of this. Right now, I just feel broken.

I've run it through my mind over a thousand times, and I still don't know what I want. I've prayed to be let go. I've prayed to be killed. I've prayed, and I've prayed. For

something, *anything*, to end the pain. But, what would I do if he let me go? I don't think I could ever be the same again. How could I be?

And my family...I cry every time I think of them. My mom, my dad and my brother, Kenny. Do they think I'm dead? By now they'd have to be preparing themselves for that possibility. Who disappears for a month and returns? They know me well enough to know I wouldn't run away, so they must think I'm dead. If I do return, how will they see me after this?

A month ago I had a normal life, at least for what I considered normal. For me, normal was hanging out with friends at the mall. It was silly crushes and deciding what outfit would get some cute guy to notice me. It all seems so insignificant now.

It used to be so easy for me to see my future. I dreamt about meeting the perfect guy, getting married and starting a family. It's so hard to picture any of that for me now. Would I ever be able to trust a guy? Would a *normal* guy ever want to be with me? What could I offer someone now that I'm so...damaged? Though I've had seemingly endless hours to ask these questions, the answers never do come.

It's agonizing, the amount of time I have to my thoughts. John, at least that's what he tells me to call him, leaves me alone in this room most of the day.

I spent the first couple of days trying to find a way to escape, and finally gave up. Every day has had the same routine, and that routine is all I've had to help me know what day it is, because the walls have no windows and he never mentions the days.

In the morning John brings me breakfast and then leaves. Breakfast is usually cereal and orange juice. He leaves me a cooler with my lunch inside, usually a sandwich and a drink. In the evening he brings dinner, which can be any of a number of things, and always seems home cooked. I hate to think someone could be helping him, so I just hope John is cooking our meals. I refused to eat at first, which only made me weak, and John angry. I hate that the food is good.

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John insists on eating dinner with me. It's part of the game, to fulfill his little fantasy. Getting through dinner takes all of my strength. It's this time that John expects me to be his little doll, his image of perfection. Anything less than proper and cordial is unacceptable, and punishable. Putting on my fake smile has been hard enough. Knowing what comes next makes it all the more difficult.

The room I am in, my prison cell, is the only place I have seen in a month. I have free access during the day to walk around, but only in this room.

When I first arrived, I searched the room high and low looking for something to help me escape, or something to use against him. There's nothing sharp, and nothing I could use to catch him by surprise. I realized quickly that the best I could expect would be to do what he said, and hope he kept his promise.

The room is fairly large, and seems like a basement. There is a bed in it that I can't sleep in because, every time I'm on it, all I can see are the horrible things he's done to me there. It makes me want to throw up.

In one corner of the room there is a table where we have our eating ritual. In another corner there is all of the clean laundry necessary to complete his fantasies. Everything is neatly folded or laid out. No hangers. Dresses, bras, underwear, lingerie and socks are laid out, and all my size. No jeans or shirts...they wouldn't fit his fantasies.

The room has an attached bathroom, which is stripped down. It has a shower so I can bathe and the basic essentials for me to get ready. For him. There is no medicine cabinet, but there is a metallic, reflective mirror on the wall to help me get ready. The image reflected back at me is distorted. Fitting.

As I look in the mirror, I see a shell of the person I once was. I was never a supermodel, but I wasn't insecure about how I looked. Before I arrived, I loved my hair. The brown locks had a natural wave to them. My friends would joke that they were jealous of my hair. Now, all I see is flat, lifeless hair. It's thinner and there's more of it in my brush than I'm used to.

There are large bags under my green eyes and I see no emotion in them. I was always pretty thin, but I probably weigh less than a hundred pounds now, which was never a goal of mine. My cheekbones are more pronounced than ever.

At first, John expected me to have perfectly painted, red fingernails...something he gave up on after a while. I didn't even realize when I was doing it, but I had taken to chewing on my nails. He made me repaint them every day until he must have realized it was a lost cause. Eventually, he made me take the polish off altogether.

Seeing what I had now become, I found myself staring at this stranger in the mirror, sobbing uncontrollably. I didn't even realize how lost in thought I was when John called to me through the small viewing screen of the metal door that has kept me isolated to this room.

"Now, now my Dove. You know the rules. You don't want to get yourself another day when you are this close, do you?"

"No, no!" I said, startled. Tears were not allowed. I wiped my eyes and hurried out of the bathroom. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize..."

"Not to worry, Kyra. You've played your part well. I'm willing to overlook this one little indiscretion. Now, you know the drill. Move to the corner where I can see you better. Hands out in front, please."

His words were spoken in a low, methodical tone, so as to announce each word deliberately. It is very different from the voice he used the first day. The disguised voice is just one reason I believe he might actually let me go.

I moved over to the corner, held my hands out as instructed and put on my fake smile. To be the girl he requires me to be. It is so difficult sometimes, but a month of training has made it easier.

"Very lovely," he said as he opened the door, entered and locked us both in. He had with him a cart with our dinner on it and, as usual, a gun. Once he was inside, he motioned me to take my usual seat at the table.

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“I’ve prepared you a lovely feast for this evening. I do hope you like it.” He rolled the cart to the dining table, placed my plate in front of me and a wine glass to my left.

“I’m sure it will be great,” I said, trying to sound pleasant, and looking at the glass.

“I know you don’t fancy wine, my Dear, but I was hoping you might make an exception tonight. Given this is a special occasion.” This was his polite way of telling me what I must do to obey him.

“Wine would be great. Thank you,” I replied, tucking my hair behind my ear.

I had never had wine before arriving at this place. My mom and dad wouldn’t let me drink it, so I wasn’t really used to the taste. The first few nights, he brought me wine. He must have decided that it wasn’t worth watching me try to choke it down, because John has brought me milk or water with my meals since.

He poured wine into both of our glasses, and sat down in his chair.

“Does this mean you are letting me go tonight?” I asked, trying not to sound too eager.

“Not tonight. I have a wonderful evening planned for us. In the morning, I will drop you off back near your school. Unless, that is, you would like to stay?”

“Thank you,” I said as graciously as possible, “but I do think I should get back to my family. I’m sure they’re worried.”

“I would expect so,” he said. I couldn’t read John’s expression, but he did seem to expect my answer. My mind began racing with questions, and it must have been evident to John.

“Something is on your mind, Dove. What is troubling you?”

“It’s nothing,” I lied. It didn’t seem wise to ask him about his plan. If I changed his mind now, there’s no telling what he might do to me.

“Now, now. Are we holding back? You know how it displeases me when we aren’t forthcoming.”

Another cue to warn me I'll be punished for my disobedience. I tried to come up with a reasonable response but my mind went blank. Panic was setting in and I had no choice but to say what was on my mind.

"I was just wondering how you are going to drop me off near my school without being noticed? Aren't you afraid someone will recognize you?"

His smile indicated he was pleased with my question.

"Surely, by now, you must know I'm not worried about being noticed."

"I do, but...I don't really understand why."

"What do you know about me, Love?"

I was afraid to answer this question. I didn't want it to occur to him that I knew more than he expected and have him change his mind. Truth was, I had given this a lot of thought. I knew every detail about John's appearance. If he was really going to let me go, then he was really stupid, really arrogant or he looked nothing like the man I saw in front of me.

"I know you ask me to call you John, but I'm guessing your name is something different than that."

He smiled. "Good observation. What else?"

I hesitated.

"Come Dear. Don't be afraid to state the obvious. I planned this too well. This will be a fun game. Tell me what you know."

I looked in his eyes, but there was no soul looking back at me. Just dark eyes fixed on mine. I looked down, breaking his gaze, and tucked some stray hairs behind my ear. Answering him was the best option. It was the only option.

"You have a very low voice, which is very different from your voice the day you took me. I'm guessing neither of those voices is your normal voice."

He smiled wider. "Excellent! Please continue."

"Well, the hair on your head is blonde and wavy, but there is not a single hair on the rest of your body, which means there's a good chance that is not your natural hair color. Or maybe not even your real hair."

"You have been quite observant. I'm impressed!" He really did seem to be impressed. "What else?" John seemed

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almost giddy when he said it. A side of him I hadn't seen since I've been here.

"Your eyes...they're dark blue," I said, leaving out the part about them having no soul. "And...your face seems darker than the rest of your body. Like you have make-up, or something to disguise you."

"Very good, Love. You have picked up on the most subtle of my changes. So, have you come to any conclusions?"

"Well, if you've have changed your voice and your hair, and I guess your face in some way...I don't really know anything about what you really look like."

"Which is why you should realize searching for me would be a waste of time. My preparations have been flawless. It is, in fact, the perfect crime. The best part is, nobody had to get hurt."

I was doing my best to fight back the tears. Just because he hasn't killed me, doesn't mean I haven't suffered. A lot. How does he define hurt? I was trying with all my strength to keep it under control, but silent tears fell down my face. Noticing the tears, John's expression quickly turned.

"What is it troubling you?" He tried to disguise his irritation with concern.

"I just...what if I get pregnant, or get a disease? You only started using condoms a week ago."

For the first time John looked offended, like I had just kicked his dog. "Dear girl, do you really think I would plan everything with such detail and forget something as simple as birth control? That I would be so careless as to leave traces of me in you when we are all done? I can assure you that will not be the case."

"If you don't mind my asking, how can you be so sure?" Courtesy was so difficult. I wanted to rip his eyeballs out right now, but I knew I wouldn't have a chance. I've had plenty of time to learn my place over the last month.

"I have been tested over the years, and am disease free. I'm very selective about the girls I've been with, and you are the only girl I've been with under these...special circumstances."

I didn't know how that made me feel. I was glad that no other girls have had to go through this, but I couldn't help wonder why me? And, I still had more questions.

"But, how do you know you didn't get me pregnant?" I hadn't had my period since the second week after I'd arrived. I wasn't due for another week or two but...it's possible he could have gotten me pregnant.

"Not to worry, Love. I had a vasectomy just to be sure I wouldn't get you pregnant. The procedure was done during my preparations for this occasion. So, you could say that I did this just for you." He smiled as he said it, as though it would make me feel special or something. Instead, it made me want to throw up.

I was relieved, though, to hear that he can't get me pregnant. The thought of carrying a child from this man, and at sixteen, was unbearable. I have cried almost every night over just that one thought.

My little bit of relief turned to nausea as he added, "Although, I do think we'd make some beautiful children. Don't you?"

It felt like my body was thrashing under my skin and I was doing my best not to visibly shake. It was all I could do to keep my food down. John was pushing the limits of the control I've learned over the last month. The best I could do was to pretend I didn't hear the comment and change the subject.

"So then, why did you bother wearing a condom at all, and for just the last week?"

"All part of the plan. Pregnancy and disease prevention are not the only uses for a condom. Though I can't get you pregnant, and you won't be receiving any diseases from me, I am giving you my DNA every time we are together." He said it like we were a couple having a casual, yet scientific, conversation about our love life. "The condoms will prevent introducing any traceable DNA into your system while your body discards everything from prior."

I didn't know what to say after that. I was staring at my food, unable to eat. I've been through the worst part of this. By now, he's done everything he was going to do to me.

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What I've heard tonight should probably be comforting, but it wasn't. I felt like a hollowed out tree log...once alive, but now just empty.

"Come Dear. This game has been fun, but it's time for you to eat up. You'll need your energy for tonight. I want my girl to be perky."

"I don't think I can eat anymore. It was delicious, but I'm full."

"Well, if that is all you will eat, then so be it," he said, visibly displeased. "Did you put on the outfit I asked you to wear?"

"Yes, I have it on underneath this."

"Good. Then, it is time. Please begin."

I stood up from the table, walked over to the bed, climbed on and propped myself onto my knees. Usually, before anything happens, John has me do a little dance. A striptease.

I swiveled my hips to the sound of imaginary music playing in my head.

"You're not smiling, Dove. You don't look like you're enjoying yourself."

As if I could enjoy it. "Sorry," I said, pasting a smile on my face.

I began removing my clothes. Socks first, then the dress. He only ever gives me dresses and lingerie, so there's not much to strip off. He doesn't really seem to care. It's more about controlling me than the striptease, I think. I don't do it very well, but it doesn't seem to matter to him.

"Very nice, my Pet. Now, please secure your arms."

"Am I leaving this on?" I asked, surprised. Usually, he makes me take everything off. Tonight, I was wearing a black, lace top with matching underwear.

"Yes. I will remove them when the time is right."

The bed has a wiry, metal headboard. I have tried to move it, but it's just too heavy. There are handcuffs fastened to each side of the headboard. One cuff secured around each metal post and the other dangling, waiting for my wrists. Tonight, like every night, I secured one of my wrists with the first pair of cuffs. Once my left wrist was secure, John put the

gun down on the table and came over to secure my right wrist.

Now cuffed to the bed, John took off all of his clothes and joined me on the bed. Usually, I am completely naked and he begins kissing me all over. Tonight, he was rubbing me. My feet, my calves, my thighs and then my arms.

Once he finished with my arms, John jumped off of the bed, put on a condom and pulled a sharp, thick pocket knife out of his pants. He climbed back on the bed, opened the knife and began cutting away my clothes.

First he cut the straps on the top. Next, he cut straight up the middle of my top, between my breasts. Silent tears began running down my face as he took the knife to my underwear, cutting the narrow part of each side.

He could easily have pulled my underwear down. Was he making a point with the knife? Did he change his mind, or was he lying all along about letting me go?

Maybe this was his big plan. Let me feel like I would be set free, only to kill me here on the night I thought was my last. Maybe it was my last.

He threw the knife off of the bed, and he pulled the cut material away from my body so that I was lying there naked. He again began to massage me, all over my body. Normally, this act would be quick. He usually made me do things to him, he did things to me and then forced himself in me to finish. Tonight, he was taking it slow. He kissed me like I was his lover. He caressed my skin as he worked his way down my body. Tonight he wanted me to enjoy it. Not that I ever could, but tonight, unlike most other nights, he was trying.

I didn't understand. Did he really think that, given the circumstances, I would be able to enjoy this? I could tell he was trying really hard to make me feel good, if for no other reason, because he was doing things completely different than he ever had before. He was slower, and it hurt less.

The problem was, the harder he tried the harder I started to cry. I had managed my tears well for weeks. I had been a master of my emotions, but tonight I couldn't help myself. I

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knew I was in danger of spending more time here if I didn't stop, but I couldn't.

I didn't want it to feel good in any way, because I didn't want him to feel any justification for what he did. Deep down, I felt that not enjoying it would give me the chance to enjoy it with someone special some day. I didn't want him to take that away too, when he had already taken so much.

I closed my eyes and tried to block everything out as he finished. I could tell he was irritated and I felt him return to his normal ways, as though he had given up on me. Then, it was over.

"Very disappointing, my Dear. Inconsiderate of you to be so cold toward me for our last time together."

"I'm sorry," I cried. "Please don't keep me another day."

"No, you won't be staying another day. Something must be done for your lack of consideration, though."

John stared at me, sprawled out, naked, helpless. He considered for a moment, and then he licked me straight up the middle of my body. Long and wet. Totally gross. I wanted to gag or scream, but I didn't want to make things worse. My whole body gave an involuntary shudder as I felt his wet saliva drying on my body.

John jumped off of me and headed for his clothes. He picked up his pants, looked at me and dropped them back to the ground. I hadn't even noticed he had the knife again until it was too late. Without a second thought he jumped back on me and sliced my left breast along the outer crease. I screamed from the pain. I was really scared. Just as I was starting to wonder if he was going to kill me right there, he jumped back off and turned his head toward me as he walked back to his clothes.

"Just a little something to remember me by, my Love."

He put his clothes on, gathered the dishes and lunch cooler on the cart and headed toward the door. Normally, after he would force himself on me, John made me take a shower. He would uncuff me and direct me toward the bathroom where he would watch me clean myself to his liking. Tonight, he left me cuffed to the bed, sprawled out and bleeding.

“Are you going to leave me like this?” I said with a slight whimper.

“For now, my Dear, I shall let you stay like that. Perhaps later I will change my mind.”

Being handcuffed to a bed, spread out naked, it is hard to keep some dignity. My legs were not cuffed, so I closed my legs in tight to my body. Still, this was just the latest in a long list of humiliating experiences I’ve been subjected to this month.

I didn’t know what to do or think about what just happened. I felt like I was in trouble and being punished, but I didn’t know if there was more punishment to come, or if this was it. I felt numb and raw. I was a piece of meat laid out after the kill. All that was left was to mount my head on the wall like a prized animal.

Since I’ve been here, I have gone through every emotion possible. Fear, loss, anger, sadness, hopelessness...I wasn’t sure if there was anything new to feel. I was physically exhausted from the lack of sleep, but I was mentally exhausted from trying to be this little doll for him. I had learned early on how to let him do his thing and let my mind go someplace else. John’s only real requirement of me had been not to put up a fight, to smile and follow his directions. Tonight was different. Tonight he made it more personal, and it scared me all over again.

It was probably an hour or two later when John came back to finish what he had started. I was out of tears and out of emotion when he walked in. I wasn’t going to instigate anything, but I was to the point that I didn’t care what happened to me. Maybe it would be better if he just killed me. I wouldn’t have to suffer anymore. One thing was for sure...I had no more tears left for him or what he had done.

He came back over to the bed and looked at me. I stared back as he seemed to consider what to do. There was a minute of silence before he spoke.

“Let’s try this again, shall we?”

He removed his clothes and climbed back onto me. He put a new condom on and quickly went back to work. He was not trying as hard to please me, but it did seem as though he

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was making some effort. The faster he got it over with, the better it would be for me.

I didn't really know what he expected from me. Before I came here, I had never had sex. It was something I was saving for the right person. Instead, for the rest of my life, the memories of my first time will be with John. I despise him for that!

Now that I was here, expected to act like a lover, I had no idea how to act. I knew how the whole thing worked, but I didn't know what I should or shouldn't do. He was kissing me and he began going faster. I tried to pretend to enjoy it. I groaned a little, because I thought that's what I was supposed to do. It felt awkward, though, so I stopped. After another minute, he was done and he rolled off of me.

"That was much better my Dear. I'm glad to see you pulled yourself together."

John got himself dressed, walked toward me, pulled the handcuff key out of his pocket and unlocked the handcuff to my left wrist. He threw the key on my chest and walked to the table to get his gun. I uncuffed my right wrist and rubbed both wrists with my hands. That was the longest John had left me handcuffed since the first day. Over the last month, my wrists have become chafed and bruised, but they were especially sore now.

He motioned me over to the bathroom. I walked over, handed him the key and took my place in the shower. John took his usual place sitting on the toilet seat to watch me.

The bathroom was not very large and John was only a few feet away. Many times I have thought about attacking him here. This would be the best opportunity to catch him by surprise. If I failed, the punishment would be severe, if not fatal, and since he has said all along that he would let me go after a month, I have been hesitant to try. When someone has no hope, they have nothing to lose by trying. Maybe he realized that and it was the reason for telling me he would let me go. If he doesn't let me go tomorrow, this is where I will try to free myself.

I went through the normal cleaning rituals, taking extra care to gently clean my cut breast. It stung, and I winced a

little. The corners of his mouth turned up a bit, like he was pleased with himself. The cut was not real deep, but I was afraid it would leave a scar. As soon as I had the thought I felt stupid. What does it matter if I have a scar? I may not be alive tomorrow. Even if I am, I'm sure to leave with a lot more scars than the physical one on my breast.

When I was finished cleaning to John's satisfaction, I turned off the water and he handed me a towel. He allowed me to dress myself as I wanted for bedtime, not that I slept much. It has gotten better as the month has gone on. Better, not well.

Now that I knew his routine, it was easier to know I could sleep. He always left me alone at night, so I never had to fear him coming in. I could only guess he was getting his sleep at this time. Still, I wake up screaming a lot, and I usually only sleep well after exhaustion has set in.

Normally, in the safety of my own room, I would only wear underwear and a nightshirt to bed. I don't do that here. Here, I make sure that I am fully dressed for bed with underwear, socks and a dress. Obviously, John hasn't been prevented from getting what he wants, but it is more of a statement for me. He may get what he wants, but I'm not giving it to him.

"Good night, my Dear. I have enjoyed your stay, but tomorrow I will return you to your family, as promised. Get good rest. We will begin early."

He walked out of the room and secured the door. The lights went out and I was left in the dark. I don't go anywhere near that bed on my own time, so I crawled into my usual corner and tried to fall asleep.

As much as I wanted the rest, I found myself thinking about my family and being free. As close as I was to supposedly being free, I knew it wouldn't feel real until it actually happened. I wasn't going to let myself have that emotion until John actually did set me free.

I must have fallen asleep at some point because, suddenly the lights came on, the door opened and John walked into the room.

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“Good morning, Child. It doesn’t look like you took my advice.” I must have looked exhausted.

“I tried, but I had a hard time sleeping.”

“No matter,” he said. “You’ll catch up some on the trip back. Please cuff yourself to the bed.”

I wasn’t prepared for that. “But...I thought we were done with that,” I said meekly.

“We are, Dove, but I can’t have you just walking out of here. I’m going to give you something to sleep.”

“Please, no!” I pleaded. “Can’t you just cover my face or something? I don’t want to be unconscious again.”

The thought of being unconscious with this guy scared me. What if I never woke up? This could just be the way he decided to kill me.

“Child, I can’t have you conscious on the trip back. I can’t take a chance of you knowing how long, or in what direction, our journey takes.”

“But...”

“You do want to go home, don’t you?” he said flatly. I could tell this was the end of the conversation. If I was going home, it was going to be his way. Just as everything else had been. I stood up, walked over to the bed and cuffed my wrist.

“That’s my Girl.” I hated it when he said that.

He walked over and cuffed my other wrist. Then he walked out of the room and came back with some supplies. He pulled a needle and syringe out, loaded it with something and walked over to me.

“What is that?” I asked reluctantly.

“What it *is*, is not really important. What it *does*, is. Just like your trip here, this will paralyze you within moments and knock you out within minutes. Don’t worry, there is no lasting effect. I’ll be sure to let you wake before we part ways. Well, it has been a pleasure.”

With that, he stuck my arm with the needle. Just as when he abducted me, it took a few seconds for me to lose the use of my limbs. I was just lying there, staring at him. I was conscious while he uncuffed me and then started taking my clothes off. Why was he taking my clothes off? I wanted to

ask him, but I couldn't. I started to worry about what he was going to do to me, and then everything went black.

I opened my eyes to find myself stuffed in front of the passenger side front seat, sitting on the floor of a truck, completely naked. It looked like the same truck he took me in a month ago. My hands and feet were bound and my mouth was covered with duct tape. I wanted to ask him why I was naked, but I couldn't speak with the tape in the way. I couldn't really move, either. I was groggy and the function of my arms and legs had not really returned yet.

"Ah, I see you have rejoined the living. Welcome back. It won't be long now."

I tried to speak through the tape, but my words didn't make sense.

"Shhh," he quieted. "No more words, Love. There's nothing more to say."

I looked out the window. From where I was sitting, I couldn't see anything but the sky. It was pretty dark outside. It looked like the sun was just starting to come up.

He drove for about ten minutes more and stopped, but he left the engine running. John got out of the truck and shut his door. After a moment, he opened my door and pulled me out of the truck. He was wearing some kind of rubber or latex gloves as he held me up and helped me over to a patch of grass. Then, he sat me down.

Oh no! This was my school. He was dropping me off, naked, right in front of my school! How could he do this to me? My eyes got wide with panic, and he noticed.

"I thought the ensemble would help the doubters to know you didn't run away for the last month. Have a nice life, my Love."

John shut the passenger side door, walked over to the driver's side, got in and drove off. Just like that, he was gone.

31 DAYS AGO

“Kyra, I know this isn’t easy, but I need you to start at the beginning. I need you to tell me everything you remember about how he abducted you, and then take me through your time there, and how you made it back. Any detail could be important.”

Detective Shanahan had been a part of my life for the last several hours, since John dropped me off at my school. I had made my way to the office doors, where horrified administrators let me in. Chaos was quick to follow.

Everything is still such a blur. But, I know the police were called because several showed up at the site. One officer took a description of John and the truck he drove me to the school in. I heard him request another officer to put out an APB, whatever that was, and the police stayed with me until the detective arrived. I’ve been in her custody since then.

My parents must have been called too because my mom, dad and brother met Detective Shanahan and me at the hospital. After being put through a series of horrible evaluations, I finally got to see them.

For a few minutes, my mom and dad just hugged me. I thought they were going to squeeze the life out of me. When the questions started coming, Detective Shanahan stepped in.

“Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster, I’m Detective Shanahan,” she said, shaking each of my parents’ hand. She was tall and skinny and used a firm handshake, just as when she introduced herself to me. Her long, blonde hair was put up tightly in back, and I could tell instantly she was all business.

She had a softness in her eyes, though, that made me think her work was personal to her.

Detective Shanahan explained what had happened since I showed back up at the school, and told them she still needed to take a statement from me. She requested that my mom be present for the interview, but suggested my dad and brother might like to find the cafeteria down the hall. She had asked me ahead of time who I wanted present, and when I told her I wanted my mom there, she said she would arrange it. Just like that, it was done.

“Kyra?” Detective Shanahan said, bringing me back to the present.

I felt small, like the whole room had grown in size around me. The room itself was impersonal, with four white walls. If not for the brown couch I was sitting on, the room would have felt more like a police interrogation room.

I looked at my mom, who was sitting on the couch next to me, and then Detective Shanahan. She was sitting in a chair across from us. My heart was beating fast and hard against my chest. I was sure they could hear it from where they were sitting. My mother took my hand and smiled sympathetically.

“Sorry.” I took a deep breath and looked down.

“Ummm...okay...let’s see...the first day,” I said, and took another deep breath. “Allie and I usually meet at her car after sixth period. I went through my regular routine. When the bell rang, I went to my locker, gathered the books I needed for the night, and headed out to Allie’s car. I was just getting to the parking lot, when I heard a guy call my name.”

“Did he actually say your name?” Detective Shanahan asked.

I looked up at her when she asked the question, and quickly looked back down. “Mmmhmmm. He knew my name, and he knew Allie’s name.”

“Did you recognize him, his voice, anything?” she asked.

“No. I didn’t recognize him, but he did call me by my name.”

I looked up, expecting her to ask another question. She didn’t so I continued on. “So, I heard my name, and then I

looked around to find who called me. There was a man sitting in a truck. It was the truck that I described before to the officer at school. Faded red, high off the ground. It was pretty old. I don't know much about trucks, so I can't really tell you more."

I looked up again, and Detective Shanahan was making notes. I made a sideways glance at my mom as I tucked my hair behind my ear, then looked back down and continued.

"He waved and so I walked over toward the truck. I was cautious, but he knew my name, so I thought maybe I met him somewhere and couldn't remember. At first he was talking to me through the passenger side window.

"He said his name was John," I continued, "and he said he was a friend of Allie's." I looked up, and my mom looked awestruck. "Now, I don't really think he knew either of us."

"Why not?" the detective asked.

"Well, he sort of mentioned as much later on when he told me he had been watching us for a while to learn my routines."

"Okay," she said, getting back on track, "you were talking to him outside his truck."

"Yes. He said that Allie had told him about me, and thought we should meet. I told him I was waiting for Allie, and he suggested that we wait together. He opened the passenger side door from inside, and waved me in. I hesitated at first, but like I said, he knew Allie's name and my name, and he even turned the truck off. There were people all around. It didn't seem very dangerous."

I looked up at that point. My mom smiled understandingly.

"He told me I could wait outside if I was nervous, but at that point I...wasn't really. Allie is usually only a few minutes behind me, so I didn't think there was much harm to get in and wait. Obviously I was wrong."

"What did he look like?" Detective Shanahan asked. My mom wasn't making a sound. She was just listening and trying not to get in the way.

"Well, he looked different the first day than he did after that."

“Just start with what he looked like the first day.”

“Let’s see,” I said, closing my eyes to help me remember. “He didn’t seem that old at first. Maybe twenty or so. He had kind of medium, choppy hair. And blonde.”

“How do you mean, choppy?” she asked.

“Well, it had kind of a messy part down the middle, I think, but it was wavy and it laid down unevenly. It was longer in the back than the front, but none of the hair was really the same length. I think it was a wig. He didn’t have any hair on any of the rest of his body.”

Right after I said it my face felt hot. I looked at Detective Shanahan and my mom, but neither was making eye contact.

Detective Shanahan continued writing. “What color were his eyes?”

“They were blue. They were a strange, dark blue. I’m pretty sure he was wearing contact lenses. He insinuated as much, anyway.”

“Did he have any distinguishable marks or features?”

“Not really. I mean, he may have. The thing is, I think he was so done up that any marks he may have had were covered. I think that’s why he looked so much younger the first day.”

“So, you think he was wearing make-up that first day?”

“Yes, but I think he was always wearing make-up, or some kind of...something. I don’t know. What he did the first day was different than the rest of the time. I don’t know if he had to do more to look younger. I would guess yes, because he didn’t look all that young after that. He seemed pretty old after that?”

“How old?” she asked.

“Pretty old. At least thirty.”

Detective Shanahan smiled at that, but I didn’t get the joke.

“So, his hair was blonde. Were his eyebrows blonde?”

“I don’t know. I think he had blonde eyebrows the first day, but after that, he didn’t have any. They seemed to be covered.”

“Is there anything else you can remember about his appearance that first day? Crooked nose, earring, tattoos, freckles...”

“No. I don’t think he had anything like that. I only saw him for maybe three minutes that first day.”

“Was there anything, then, that you remember about his appearance after the first day?”

“Just that he looked older after the first day. No eyebrows. I think he was trying to look as plain as possible. Not ugly. It seemed like he tried to look nice. Just in a plain sort of way...if that makes any sense.”

“Sure,” she said, writing more. “What about smells. Did he have any distinguishing smells? Did he smell good, bad? Anything that comes to mind?”

“No. He didn’t smell bad. There wasn’t really anything that he smelled like. John was very particular about the way he presented himself to me. He wanted it to be impossible for anyone to catch him.”

“Okay. So...once you got into the truck, what happened?”

“It happened so fast. I asked him where he went to school. He pointed out my window and said that Allie was coming. I looked over where he pointed and I felt a prick in my neck. Almost instantly I couldn’t move my arms or legs. I remember feeling numb, and everything seemed to be happening in slow motion. It was all sort of fuzzy after that, but I sort of remember the truck engine starting, and seeing us start to drive away as I slowly blacked out.”

“What is the first thing you remembered once you woke up?”

My face got hot again and I was having trouble coming up with the words. I was looking back and forth between the detective and my mom. Detective Shanahan looked up from her notepad when I didn’t immediately respond.

“Kyra, are you okay?” she asked.

“Yeah, it’s just,” I started, closing my eyes and tucking my hair behind my ear. I took another deep breath, looked down and continued, “I didn’t wake up completely at first. I was kind of dazed. My eyes were closed and I remember

feeling cold all over. Well, almost all over. I heard a kind of ripping sound and was jolted awake from a burning sensation. When I opened my eyes, I found myself handcuffed to a large metal headboard attached to the bed I was lying on. I had one wrist cuffed to each side of the headboard and I was..." I closed my eyes tight, and covered my face.

"It's okay, Kyra," my mother finally said.

"Well, I was naked."

"You felt burning," Detective Shanahan chimed in. "Was he hurting you?"

I could feel my face was on fire. "He was...waxing me. Down there," I said, sort of pointing to my lap. I looked at my mom and her brown eyes changed from soft and comforting to something of disgust or shock. Just for a flash, and then the comforting smile was back on her face.

"Anyway, I still couldn't move for a short time. He hadn't noticed my opened eyes, so he continued on. I got my motion back around the time he pulled the next patch of hair. I screamed from the pain, and from everything else I was feeling, then I kicked him in the head, knocking him off the bed."

"Your legs weren't secured?" Detective Shanahan asked.

"Not at first, and not usually. After I kicked him in the head, he strapped my ankles down for the rest of the day. After that day, he went back to leaving them unsecured."

"So, what happened after you kicked him in the head?" Detective Shanahan asked.

"He kind of swore to himself, got up and put a smile on."

"What happened next?"

"I can't really remember exactly how things happened at that point. I was yelling and screaming at him. He kept trying to talk to me, but I kept kicking and yelling for him to let me go.

"After a while," I continued, "he grabbed the container of wax and left the room. He came back after a few minutes. He was still holding the wax, but he had restraints, too."

Detective Shanahan turned the page of her notepad and continued writing. She looked up when I paused, then she smiled and nodded for me to continue.

“So...John put the wax down and brought the restraints over to the bed. He reached for one of my legs, but I kicked his hand out of the way. I succeeded at that a few times before he jumped on the bed and sat on my legs. I fought as hard as I could, but he was too strong. Eventually, he had strapped each of my legs to a separate bed post.

“He jumped off of me,” I continued, “and grabbed the wax and the rest of the kit. He got back on the bed and picked up where he had left off.”

I kind of flinched and my mom noticed. “I was just remembering,” I explained, “the wax burned. He had heated it up more, and I think he made it too hot on purpose.

“Once he was done, he...” I looked down again, and realized I was picking at my fingernails. I felt another hot wave run across my face, “he smiled and...and told me it looked very nice. Then he told me it was time for the rules.”

“The rules?” Detective Shanahan repeated.

“Yes. He told me that if I followed the rules, he would let me go. I told him I wasn’t going to follow any rules he had and I yelled at him to let me go. I could tell he was losing his patience. He just stared at me until I stopped yelling. Then he started with the rules.

“His voice was deep and creepy, it was almost unreal. And he spoke really slowly.” I thought back to that first day, and the memory raced back like it had just happened.

“You would do well to listen carefully right now, my Pet, as breaking the rules will cost you dearly. I have decided to make you my guest for the next thirty days. After thirty days, if you have followed the rules, I will take you home.

“Now,” he continued, “for every day you *don’t* follow the rules, you will be penalized one day. That means, you can stay here thirty days or you can stay here forever, or any amount of time in between. The choice is strictly yours to make. Although I must say, at some point I would probably get bored with you, and then things would get more complicated. Staying thirty days would be ideal for both of us, I would think. But again, the length of your stay is completely up to you. Fair enough, right?”

I didn't answer, and so he continued with the rules. "Now, the rules are simple. As my guest, you are provided with this room. It is yours to enjoy each day you are here. You will have clean clothes. You will be given breakfast and lunch to have on your own, but we will enjoy each other's company for dinner. In return for my hospitality, you will do anything I ask. Each day you fail to do so, you will spend another day in my company. Do you understand these rules?"

I was shaking my head and saying no, asking him to just let me go, but he left the room after that. He left me alone for a while. I didn't really know how long, but it felt like at least an hour.

Eventually he came back in with a mobile cart of food and wine. He rolled it next to the table and came over to talk to me. He sat on the bed and put his hand on my leg. I tried knocking it off but I could barely move from the restraints, and I was tired and sore from fighting. He slid his hand off of my leg and scowled at me.

"You couldn't have forgotten our rules already, my Dove. I have prepared a lovely dinner for us this evening, but I'm afraid you won't be able to enjoy it if you can't behave." I wanted to yell and scream some more, but I realized if I played along, I might have an opportunity to catch him off guard.

"Sorry," I said, insincerely. John seemed to disregard my tone. Instead he just smiled and undid the restraints on my legs.

"That's my Girl," he said, undoing the restraints from my ankles. Then he walked over and picked up a gun from the cart he had brought in with him. John came back over with the gun and a handcuff key. He unlocked one handcuff and he handed me the key.

Thinking this might be my chance to catch him off guard, I swung myself around and kicked him in the head, again. I wasn't able to kick him very hard, though, and I think John must have been expecting me to try something, because he didn't seem to be surprised by the move.

It was a foolish move. I hadn't even gotten my other wrist uncuffed before he had snatched the key away. He put the

gun back down on the table and came back to secure my other wrist. Then he secured my legs again, tighter than the first time. He didn't say a word while he strapped me down. I kicked and screamed the whole time, but it did no good.

Once he was done securing the restraints, he jumped back onto the bed, maneuvered me a little to my side and...he began spanking me. Hard. I tried not to cry or scream. I didn't want him to have the satisfaction of seeing me cry, but eventually I broke down.

When he was done, he finally spoke. "Disappointing, my Dear. If you behave like a child, I will have to treat you like a child. You'll soon learn, you can do this the easy way or the hard way. Either way, you're still going to do what I want."

I yelled and screamed for him to let me go. Screaming for somebody, anybody, to come help me. Nobody came.

He walked over to the table, placed the food in front of our respective seats and sat down. He ate his entire dinner without speaking to or even looking at me. I screamed more, but it did no good.

Everything John did was proper. He laid his napkin in his lap before he started. Then, he would take three bites of his food, chewing meticulously, drink some wine, wipe his face and return the napkin to his lap.

When he was finished, John stood up and began taking off his clothes. I started kicking, though all I was doing was hurting my wrists and ankles. When he was naked, he jumped on the bed and sat on my lap. He was trying to rub me but I kept fighting. After a few minutes he gave up trying to be gentle. He...pushed himself inside me.

When John was finished with me, he jumped off and got dressed. He told me that I should consider myself lucky because he was giving me a grace period today. My disrespect for the rules would only cost me dinner tonight. If I didn't get in line after that, it would start costing me an extra day's stay. Then, he brought my food over and placed it on my stomach, close enough for me to smell it, but impossible to eat.

John collected his things, turned out the lights and left me there, strapped and cuffed to the bed in the complete dark.

Tears were running down my face as I recalled the memory of the first day.

“Kyra?” said Detective Shanahan. I looked up and realized I had been lost in thought. My mom squeezed my hand, trying to comfort me.

“Do you need a minute?” the detective asked softly.

“No, sorry. It’s just...it’s so horrible.” I hid my face in my hands and my mom began rubbing my back.

“Just take it as slowly as you need,” my mom offered.

I picked my head up and wiped my tears. I was sniffing and Detective Shanahan handed me a tissue.

Once I had myself somewhat together, I explained to them everything that I had recalled to that point. I felt like I was on fire telling my mom and this stranger everything that had happened to me. It was so personal. I could tell my mom was trying to keep her composure, but she couldn’t hide the tears from finding her drawn-on smile.

“When he left me alone that first night, I spent what felt like hours just trying to figure out how I ended up there. Asking myself why this was happening to me, and wondering how I could have been so stupid. I was hungry and exhausted. My body ached...everywhere. Especially my wrists and ankles. I don’t know how, but at some point I fell asleep.”

I had been looking down at my hands for much of the story. It was a little easier to tell the story to my hands. Until I noticed I was picking at my fingernails again and looked up. Detective Shanahan had her emotions perfectly in check while she took notes. She wrapped up her writing and looked to me, so I continued on.

“It didn’t feel like I had slept very long. Before I knew it, John was back in the room with a cooler.”

“Do you know what was in the cooler?” she asked.

“Food. Every morning he brought in a cooler with lunch in it for me. He would also bring me breakfast. Usually, he would drop it off, tell me what outfit I was to wear that night and leave me alone for the day. I wouldn’t see him until the evening, when he brought dinner.

“That day, though, I was still strapped to the bed. He sat down next to me to talk. He told me there were two ways my

stay could go. If I fought, I would stay strapped to the bed every day, and I would prolong my stay. If I cooperated, he would leave me free to walk about my room during the day. John told me he had brought me food. Then he said he'd release me, but if I attempted to fight in the least little bit, I would stay strapped to the bed all day. He asked if I understood and I nodded."

Detective Shanahan stopped writing and looked up for me to continue.

"He walked over to one of the walls in the room. There were clothes stacked on the floor. He grabbed an outfit, brought it over to the bed and told me I'd be wearing it when he returned in the evening. It wasn't a question. It was part of the rules. The first thing I had to obey."

I sat up and tucked my hair behind my ears. "John unstrapped my legs and one of the handcuffs. I was so sore and tired, I couldn't have hurt him if I tried. He handed me the key to uncuff my other wrist. John smiled and told me that he was glad to see I could follow directions. He told me not to lose the key, took the plate of food off my stomach, winked and left. He didn't come back until that night."

"So, at that point you were free to walk around the room?" Detective Shanahan asked.

"Yes."

"And did you search the room?"

"Yes, but when I found the shower, I cleaned up immediately. I showered for a long time."

Realizing that was probably an unnecessary detail, I quickly put my head down.

"Anyway," I continued, "after I showered, I put the clothes on that he gave me. I spent most of the day looking for a way out, but there was nothing."

"What did the room look like?" Detective Shanahan asked.

"It was pretty big, but there's not much to describe. The walls were concrete, and there were no windows. The door locked from the other side and there was no breaking it. The door was metal and it had a little viewing screen."

"How was the room decorated?"

“It wasn’t, really. There was a really heavy bed with a metal headboard and posts and there was a table for us to eat dinner. There were no pictures or drapes or rugs or any other furniture.”

“Was there carpet?”

“No. The only other things in the room were the clothes he had for me, all stacked along one wall.”

Detective Shanahan continued writing, and then finally looked up. “Is there anything else you remember about the room?”

“I don’t think so.”

“What about the bathroom?”

“It was plain too. There was a shower.”

“Was it a tub and shower, or just a shower?” she interrupted.

“Just a shower. A toilet and a sink. There was a mirror, but it was like a reflective metal. I couldn’t break it or remove it at all.”

“I’m assuming if we found this room, you could identify it?”

“For the rest of my life,” I said matter-of-factly. “But I doubt you’ll find it.”

“Why do you say that?” she asked.

“John was very sure you would never catch him. He told me the only reason he was letting me go was because there would be no way to trace anything back to him.”

She paused for a second before she spoke. “Kyra, just because he thinks we can’t find him doesn’t make it true. People make mistakes. We just have to find his. Did you know that basements are not common out here?”

“Not really,” I said quietly.

“Don’t get me wrong, they exist, but it’s not like every house has one. Unfortunately, because you were unconscious, we have no way of knowing how far you traveled to get there and back. The thing is, there are never any guarantees, but we will do everything we can to see this man is brought to justice.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean...”

“Not at all,” she said waving her hand. “I understand.” She smiled and continued on. “What about when he arrived that evening?”

“He opened the viewing screen on the door and called for me to stand with my back to the wall where he could see me, and to put my hands out in front of me. This was the routine we had any time he entered the room.

“So, when he came in,” I continued, “he asked me to have a seat at the table.”

“What were the table and chairs like?” she asked.

“They were heavy. Metal. Big. I had a hard time moving the chairs. I mean, I could move the chairs, but...well, they were too heavy to throw at the door. I didn’t even try to budge the table. It was apparent pretty quickly that it was a futile effort.”

After a brief silence, I continued on.

“So, I sat down at the table. He made a comment about how nice I looked and how he was glad to see I was coming along. He laid the food out for both of us, and poured wine into our glasses. I asked him if I could have water or something else to drink and he said I should appreciate the nice dinner he had provided. I tried to drink the wine, but it kind of burned. He could tell I didn’t like the wine and he seemed irritated by that.”

“What was the food like? Was it fast food?”

“No, all of the food seemed home cooked to me.”

Again there was silence while she wrote. Eventually, I continued on.

“So, he tried making small talk. He would ask me questions about myself. I would answer, with as little information as possible, which also seemed to bother him.

“Once dinner was over...he told me it was time for us to head over to the bed. I tried pleading with him. I asked him why he was doing this and I begged him just to let me go. He reminded me of the rules, and said that was the last time he was going to remind me.”

I closed my eyes and felt my bottom lip tremble. “I started crying. I couldn’t help it. I knew it was going to get me in trouble, and I was trying to control myself, but I

couldn't stop. John told me to go over to the bed, which I slowly did. He had me get on the bed and..."

My face was burning hot again. I was starting to feel sick from all of the times my face had gotten hot and cooled down. I felt like I was on a rollercoaster in a heat wave. "He...told me to do a striptease for him, which I didn't really know how to do. I tried, but I just started crying more.

"When I was undressed, he told me to lie down and cuff my wrist to the bed. I was crying more and asking him to please stop. Not to do this. He was getting angrier. He told me to do it now and he moved his hand over the gun. I finally cuffed my wrist as he asked. He asked where I had put the key he had given me. I told him where it was, he got it and put it in his pocket."

I could feel the anxiety building in my chest as I recalled the events of that day. "He came over to the bed and cuffed my other wrist. Then he started undressing. When he was done, he climbed up on top of me. I kept saying no and trying to move him off of me, but...I didn't succeed."

I realized there were new tears running down my face. I looked up for the first time in a while and noticed my mom had a steady stream of tears.

"When he was done, he got off of me and got dressed. Before he uncuffed me, he told me that my behavior had cost me another day there. I begged him not to keep me another day and I told him I was sorry, but John said I'd worn out my second chances. He told me to think about it so it didn't happen again. Which I did." I made sure I did my best not to give him another excuse to keep me any longer.

"After that," I continued, "he uncuffed one of my wrists, handed me the key and told me it was time to shower. He had me take a shower while he watched. John always watched. And he would instruct me on exactly how he wanted me to shower. After I was done showering, he loaded the dishes, cooler and dirty laundry onto the cart, said goodnight and left."

"Did he keep this same routine the entire time you were there? Was there anything he did differently?"

“He would have me wear different outfits, and some of the things he did...you know...to me were different, but the schedule and general routine were pretty much the same.”

“Did he use protection with you?”

I looked at my mom, and my face got hot again. “Not at first, but he did toward the end. He said he’d had a vasectomy...so he wasn’t worried about getting me pregnant. He said he started using condoms so he...wouldn’t leave any DNA.”

Detective Shanahan had me walk her through the events of my last day there and I told her the little I was awake for, up to the point where John drove away.

“Is there anything else you can tell me about your time there?” she asked. “Anything that stands out? Any little detail could be important.”

“Not that I can think of. I think I’ve told you everything.”

Detective Shanahan closed her notepad and turned off the recorder she was using for our interview. After packing up her things, she stood up. “Kyra, I know this has been difficult for you, but you did very well. This is helpful. I will contact you as soon as we have test results, or any other information for you. In the meantime, if you think of anything else, or just have questions for me, please call,” she said, handing me a card.

Detective Shanahan took us to a waiting room, and excused herself to check that the hospital staff had everything they needed before I was released.

There were others in the room, but I was alone with my mom in the corner where we were sitting. It was the first time my mom and I had been alone today. My mom looked into my eyes and smiled with a trembling mouth.

“Oh, Kyra, we’ve prayed and prayed for this day,” my mother said, choking on the words. “We were so afraid we would never get to see your beautiful face again.” For a few minutes, she just held me in her arms.

As we waited, I noticed a nearby television was on. Wow, I hadn’t watched a television in over a month. Such a little freedom that I had always taken for granted. The TV wasn’t showing anything of interest to me, but I couldn’t stop

from watching anyway. I found myself sitting there, staring, thankful that I was alive and able to watch a television. For a moment I felt almost...normal.

Detective Shanahan returned to tell us we were free to leave. My mom thanked her and we made our way to the cafeteria to find my dad and brother. Finally, we were on our way home.

Everyone in the car was silent on the drive, which is why I didn't really notice my brother staring at me. When I did, it caught me off guard.

"What?" I asked, a little harsher than I meant to.

"I'm sorry," Kenny whispered, as he kept his glassy eyes locked with mine. We both get our green eyes from my mom. I softened my tone. "What for?"

"For people who could do something so evil..." He didn't finish his sentence. I smiled, awkwardly, and he put his head on my shoulder.

Kenny is two years younger than I am. I guess he's a good kid, but we've never been real close. We get along alright, but we don't really have a lot in common. We've kind of always been into our own things.

This was more emotion than he has probably ever shown me. It was nice to know he cared, and he must have missed me. He kept his head on my shoulder the rest of the way home. As strange as it was, I was thankful to have this moment.

As we pulled into the driveway, I could feel a small wave of relief come over me. Yesterday, I didn't know if I'd ever see my house again. It was a sight for sore eyes.

My mom asked me if I was hungry as we made our way inside the house. I told her that I just wanted to go rest. My parents and brother each gave me a hug and I headed up the stairs to my room.

After everything that I'd been through, all I really wanted to do was wash it all away. The school had lent me some gym clothes from the lost and found so I had something to wear. I wanted to throw them away, but they didn't belong to me. Instead, I threw them in my dirty laundry, hoping my mom would make them disappear.

I got in the shower and sat on the floor, letting the water wash over me. Though I was finally home, and in my own shower, I couldn't escape the visions of everything that's happened to me in the last month.

Pulling my knees in close to my body, I buried my head in my arms. Every time I closed my eyes, visions of the horror that has been my recent life flashed through my mind.

Once I had thoroughly exhausted myself of my time in capture, my mind began retracing today, trying to make sense of how I actually made my way to be here now. Parts of the day were still a blur.

When John dropped me off at the school this morning, I found myself standing in the grass, not knowing what I should do.

Judging by the little light that was in the sky, I knew school wouldn't be starting for an hour or so. I wasn't sure if anyone would be in the office that early, but I decided to try hopping toward the school office, to see if any of the administrators were there. I knew it would be completely mortifying, but there seemed to be no other choice. At least I would be safe.

I hopped over to the front door, and found that most of the front office staff and administrators were there. It was going to be worse than I had hoped for, but what hadn't been completely awful in the past month? I was close to the end, and I wasn't going to let this stop me.

I started screaming through the tape over my mouth and began banging my head on the door. Several people turned my way and a look of horror quickly came over their faces. A few rushed over to let me in.

They hadn't even gotten me inside before I had collapsed in someone's arms. I awoke in the principal's office, opening my eyes to bright fluorescent lights. Someone had removed the tape and my bindings, and I was lying on the couch, covered in a blanket.

The principal was in the office when I woke up and when she noticed I had opened my eyes, she walked toward me. My mind was so disoriented, and all I registered was a figure

coming toward me. I screamed, jumping back and nearly falling over the arm of the couch.

“I am so sorry,” she said, backing up. “I was just going to offer you some clothes. Kyra, do you know where you are?”

I didn’t say a word at first, trying to take in the scenery. I had never been in the principal’s office before. There were abstract paintings on one of the walls, and degrees and certificates on another. After a minute, I was able to get my bearings.

“I’m...at school.”

“Right. Do you know how you got here?”

A flood of emotion came over me. “The man who kidnapped me...he dropped me off outside,” I said, as my eyes began to tear up.

“Well, you are safe now, and you’re in my office. The police are on their way, and my secretary is trying to get in touch with your parents right now. Would you like to change into these?” she said, holding out some gym clothes. “It’s the best we could find for you,” she added apologetically.

“Yes. Thank you.”

“Sure,” she said handing me the clothes. She turned down the blinds in her office. “I’ll give you some privacy. I’m not sure if you want company until the police come or if you’d prefer to be alone, so if you need me, I’ll be just outside.”

“Thank you,” I said again. She smiled and left the room.

I put on the gym clothes and sat on the couch, trying to take everything in. I didn’t really know the principal. Before today, I had never met her. She seemed nice, but I really didn’t want any company right now. My family. I wanted to see my family, but they weren’t here yet. I thought I remembered her saying they were trying to contact them.

The walls in the principal’s office were very thin, which was not helped by the large windows. I could hear everything outside the room. There was lots of commotion outside, and it was all about me. I wasn’t fully cognizant of it until I heard what sounded like a walkie-talkie getting close. That’s when I heard the police talking to the principal.

After the principal explained to them what she knew, she then knocked on the door. I said they could come in, and she entered with two police officers.

The officers introduced themselves to me and took the initial description of John and the truck, so they could begin searching. It wasn't long afterward that Detective Shanahan walked in and took control.

The drive to the hospital existed as a brief recollection...more a floating moment in my mind that made me aware I was present for the drive, yet not knowing more than that.

Before long, I found myself at the hospital. That part I remember quite clearly, because it was an extension of the horrible nightmare I had been accustomed to living over the last month.

Detective Shanahan must have called ahead and arranged everything, because they were ready for me when I arrived. I was taken to a waiting room where Detective Shanahan and I waited for the nurse to arrive. She was not long.

"Hello Kyra," the nurse said, entering the room. "I'm Nurse McAfee. I will be taking some blood and urine samples and I will be doing your exam today. Here is a container for the urine sample. There is a bathroom across the hall. Fill the container at least halfway, cap it, put it in this bag with your name on it and seal it shut. There is a compartment in the bathroom wall. Put the sealed container in the compartment, close it and come back to this room. Then, go ahead and get changed into this gown, with nothing else on, and lie down on the exam table. I will be back in a bit."

With that, she left the room. Detective Shanahan escorted me across the hall to the bathroom, which felt quite unnecessary, and waited outside the door for me to finish. I closed and locked the door, and filled and sealed the container as the nurse had instructed. Then, I put it into the compartment and closed the lid. On the other side of the wall, I heard a clank that was probably from someone opening the other end of the compartment and taking the sample out.

I opened the door to find Detective Shanahan where I had left her, ready to escort me the entire fifty feet back to the exam room.

Though she had explained it was protocol for her to be present the entire time in situations like this, I was initially uncomfortable to have the detective in the room with me while I changed. My concerns seemed a bit silly after everything I had and was about to endure. John had made me feel like a piece of meat. What was one more person?

I turned away from the detective to save the very little modesty I had left, took my borrowed gym clothes off and put the gown on. Then, I lay down on the table and waited for the nurse to return. Not soon after, she arrived with a tray of supplies.

“We’ll start by taking some preliminary photos, and then we’ll take blood samples,” she offered.

The nurse had me remove my gown. That didn’t take long.

“Did he give you that cut?” she asked, pointing to my breast?

“Yes,” I said. Who else would have done that? “He did that yesterday, with a knife.”

She took photos of the cut, and went about taking photos of the rest of my body. She noted severe bruising and chafing on my wrists and ankles as she photographed. I wasn’t sure what else there was to photograph, but she still took plenty of photos for the file.

After what seemed like forever, Nurse McAfee told me I could put my gown back on. I wanted to laugh at the seeming irrelevance of the gown at this point, but I was still glad to be able to put it back on.

Next, she walked over to my left arm and began cleaning the area she was going to stick. She put an elastic band around my arm and tied it off. Then she straightened my arm and poked the needle into the sterilized area, the doorway to my vein. It pinched a bit, but it wasn’t too uncomfortable. She attached a vial to the needle casing, untied the elastic band, and let the blood fill the vial. She detached and inserted three more vials until they were all full.

Once she was done, Nurse McAfee removed the needle, placed a gauze pad over the hole and told me to raise my arm and put pressure on it. She continued packaging and labeling the blood and then she returned to bandage my arm.

“Okay Kyra, I’m going to need you to lie back and put your feet in the stirrups.”

I did as she said and she pushed my gown back so she could perform the exam. At some point she made a note, whether to the detective or to herself, that there was no pubic hair. That didn’t keep her from taking some close-up photos.

“He waxed it all off when I first arrived,” I said defensively. “After that, he made me shave anything else. He said it would make it harder for the police to find evidence. He didn’t have any hair either.”

“Well,” she consoled, “we’ll let the labs decide that. Just because I can’t see it, doesn’t mean something isn’t there. This won’t hurt, but you’ll feel some pressure. Try to relax your muscles and I’ll go as quickly as possible.”

She was very matter-of-fact in her tone, and she carried about her business in the same manner. Sadly, it seemed that she had plenty of experience with this procedure. I could feel her wiping swabs over my legs and genitals. After the last month, this was hardly a big deal. The worst of it was just reliving the memories of it all as she did her thing. The last swab she took was in my mouth.

“Okay, well...the last thing we need to do is scrape under your fingernails. They look pretty clean, but we want to be sure we get everything.”

I held out my hands, and she used a little pick to scrape under my nails into a container. That was the most painful part of the whole process. But, like everything else, that too came to an end.

“The cut on your breast is not very deep. We’ll disinfect it and I’ll give you an ointment to put on twice a day. The doctor just got some samples in, so you won’t need a prescription.”

She left and quickly came back with the stuff for my cut. She applied something to it and handed me some samples.

“We’re all done! I’m going to leave so you can put your clothes back on.” She looked at me as though she was going to say something, but must have thought better of it. In the end, she just smiled thoughtfully and left.

As I stood up in the shower, it was impossible to tell the difference between my tears and the water swirling around the drain. It had been a long month and I had little energy left for this day.

I turned off the shower, and my skin felt sensitive to the touch. Looking at my fingers, they seemed to have aged ninety years in a very little time.

After I was dried off, I put the towel around me and walked back into my room to get dressed. But something stopped me as I walked in. I looked around this room that had been home to so many of my personal hopes and dreams...and my sanctuary in difficult times...but it felt different. The sunshine and happiness that filled the room, the yellow and pink flowered wallpaper, now made me feel corrupt in contrast. No longer did I feel like the innocent girl who belonged to this room.

I closed my eyes and opened them again, but found no change. Things were different now. I dressed for bed, turned out the lights and slid under the covers. It was not even close to bedtime, but I didn’t care. Straining my eyes in the darkness of my room, I could make out shadows on the walls. Visions I’ve seen thousands of times, and they only now seemed foreign. I had no idea who this girl was sleeping in my bed. I could only pray that someday soon, I might find myself anew.