

DARK CARNIVAL

A STORY OF HORROR AND RETRIBUTION

FICTION BY
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CHAPTER 5

Ben “Junior” Stokes

For the hundredth time I punched the steering wheel. I was so filled with rage and panic and fear that I was having a hard time keeping the car on the road. I knew it would happen one day, but why did it have to be TODAY? Why did it have to happen while I was with HER? It was all I could do to sit there and act calm when I really wanted to run.

There was nothing I could do now...I kept repeating this over and over in my head. It was done, and I couldn't take it back. I tried to assure myself that they wouldn't find anything to link Holly's body back to me. She'd been in the water for weeks...anything incriminating would've been washed away by now.

The best couple of days of my life were now marred by that bitch...it's as if she was still trying to fuck my life up. And I definitely didn't expect Kelsey's reaction. I figured she would be indifferent, considering how mean Holly had been to her. She took it a lot harder than I thought she would...but I hoped it was just because of the nature of the crime and not the actual fact that Holly was dead. I doubted anyone really missed her.

I was going to have to lay low for a while and hope that everything turned out alright. I hoped that I'd still be able to come back and be there for Kelsey when she needed me the most, but if I couldn't, at least I knew she wouldn't be alone. Her friend would be there for her and would see to it that she was taken care of.

The drive back was a long one, and I was almost relieved when I pulled up outside of my dad's old RV. I'd sold my old RV for scraps and watched happily as it was torn to bits and pieces. At least they couldn't find any evidence in there. And as for dad's old car...well, I'd reported it stolen in the previous town and the thug that lifted it must have crashed it, causing it to burst into flames and turn to ashes. I didn't act

too upset when I was told about the car being discovered completely totaled. I assured the police that it was an old junker car anyway, and that it was probably just a bunch of kids being stupid. So, no evidence to be found here...

It was the middle of the night when I got back and it was too late to call Kelsey, though I wasn't sure if I should have contact with her now or not.

As I lay in bed that night and stared up at the ceiling, I let the fury overtake me. That which I had to keep hidden while I was with her now freely ran rampant in my body. I wanted to find that Kevin character and rip him apart for hurting her. When she first told me about what happened the day I found her on the side of the road, she had had told me that he'd done something similar to her previously, though she neglected to mention where that had taken place.

However, when she retold the story for her parents, I found out that Kevin had been the asshole there with her at the lake that night. I had to sit there on the couch and listen to her tell her parents about what he'd done.

The worst part was that I remembered feeling a bit of jealousy towards him when I saw him with Kelsey. If I had known then what I knew now, I would have dragged him off by his balls right then and there and taught him a lesson.

After I had come back from first running into Kelsey the day after Kevin attacked her, I had spent so much time trying to imagine what he looked like when I would fantasize about wrapping my hands around his neck and squeezing the life from him. I hadn't known that I'd actually seen the fucker before.

I would deal with him later...and he would pay severely for hurting Kelsey. I just couldn't deal with him right now. I wanted to make sure the Holly issue blew over first, and then make sure that Kelsey was taken care of.

I allowed myself to dream that she hadn't been knocked up by that fucking loser and instead had gotten pregnant by me while we were staying in the motel. I bet if that had happened, she wouldn't be trying so hard to get rid of it. I bet she would have wanted to keep MY baby.

I replayed events over and over in my head and found

myself being happy again. I didn't even have to be with her to be happy...just thinking about spending time with her was enough.

I would have never dreamed that she was even remotely interested in me, but she proved me wrong. I would have to find a way to be with her...even when she moved away. I didn't think I could live without her now.

A week had gone by now, and I still hadn't gotten up the nerve to call Kelsey back, though she'd left me plenty of messages. I was torn between wanting to walk away and leave this shitty life behind to be with her and never speaking to her again. If I chose the latter, it would be best for her. I knew I would have to choose soon, because she would be expecting me to be there for her when she went to the clinic to take care of her situation.

I would decide tonight, one way or the other. I just had to get through work first, and I wasn't looking forward to it. Every day I spent doing this job was pure hell. I could no longer fool myself into believing that I would be able to keep it going. I just wasn't sure how to let it go yet. That and I wanted to keep a low profile for now until the whole Holly situation was forgotten.

However, there was still one loose end to tie up. Kevin. He was going to pay dearly for what he did, but I wasn't sure what to do about it. I didn't want to draw attention to myself, so killing the bastard probably wasn't an option. I was sure I could figure out something to teach that prick a lesson.

I struggled to keep my mind on work that night, when really all I could do was think about Kevin. Little did I know that an opportunity would present itself in the very near future. It was as if the universe wanted me to teach that fucker a lesson...

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Kelsey O'Neil

A week...it had been a week since I'd heard from Ben. I'd left him tons of messages but he never called me back. I was depressed when I climbed into bed that night. Somehow, I knew he was going to do this. I knew it the night he left. He'd been acting weird most of the day and I'd had a feeling when he drove off that he wouldn't be back.

I promised myself not to call him again. He'd apparently gotten what he wanted from me and now he was never going to speak to me again. Why was I so stupid? Was the whole world full of assholes? Weren't there any decent guys out there at all?

As I tossed and turned in bed, I also promised myself that I wouldn't hesitate in a few days when I had to go in and have my "procedure" done. I felt myself getting more anxious with each passing day, and I was already trying to come up with excuses to keep myself from going through with it. But, I had to be strong and do this...for myself. I was going to get out of here before it was too late. I would be going to college very soon and I would start all over again. I just had to make sure I didn't chicken out at the last minute.

I had been counting on having Ben there for support, but apparently he wasn't going to come. I'd just have to rely on June. Ever since I told her, she has been a complete wreck. I knew she blamed herself for my situation, but I didn't. She had kept her word and hadn't told Jared. I knew that had to be hard for her, especially since Jared hung out with Kevin often. I noticed June was spending a lot less time with her boyfriend and more time with me. I just hoped that this whole mess wouldn't ruin June's relationship in the process.

I finally managed to fall into a fitful sleep, waking often and searching my empty bed for someone who wasn't there. In the early hours of the morning, though, my eyes flew open as a terrible pain lanced through me. I felt strange, and when I flung the covers back to get out of bed, I realized what was happening. My bed was drenched in blood. I screamed out loud before I could stop myself.

My mom appeared in my room moments later, looking worried and half-asleep. She perked up immediately as she took in the scene before her. Her eyes widened momentarily

before she raced to my side to help me out of the bed. She screamed for my dad, and before I knew it, he was also at my side. I was in too much pain to feel embarrassed. Mom shooed dad out of my bathroom and helped me get cleaned up and dressed. She was insisting on taking me to the hospital to get checked out.

Less than an hour later, I was lying in an uncomfortable hospital bed in the ER. A doctor and two nurses had already given me a quick examination that completely mortified me, but they had also given me a nice IV with some pleasant pain meds mixed in, so I couldn't object too much.

I was on the edge of unconsciousness often, but I tried my best to stay awake and answer questions when they were asked. My parents' faces were always nearby, and they looked extremely worried. I was too out of it to wonder why. Eventually, I passed out.

When I woke up again, I realized I wasn't as groggy as before. My mom let me know that the doctor had reduced my pain meds so that I would come around, and that he wanted to do another examination. I was surprised to see June standing at the foot of my bed. Her eyes were puffy and red from crying.

"Hey...when did you get here?" I asked hoarsely.

"Not long ago. Your mom called me and let me know what happened." June walked to the head of the bed and leaned over to give me a brief hug. I saw my mom from the corner of my eye as she quietly walked out of the room. I noticed for the first time that dad wasn't here.

"You didn't have to come, June."

"Of course I did, Kelsey. You're my best friend!" she argued.

I tried to smile, but that seemed like too much effort. Why was I so tired? Maybe they needed to ease up on my pain meds some more.

"So how much do you remember about this morning?" June asked.

"Not much, I guess. I woke up and it hurt so bad...and there was so much blood. Mom and dad brought me here and I got examined and then they gave me pain meds. Then

I guess I must have passed out for an hour or two. I wish mom hadn't called you so early." I frowned at June, wondering why my mom had bothered her for no good reason.

"K, your mom didn't call me until noon. It's almost six p.m. now. You've been out all day."

All day? That was weird. I felt like I hadn't slept much at all. I frowned at June and then my eyes swept around the room. For the first time since waking up, I realized that this was not the ER room. This room was bigger and had more equipment.

"They had to admit you to the hospital," June advised me after seeing the confusion on my face.

"Why?" I asked, appalled.

"Kelsey, you were hemorrhaging and they couldn't stop the bleeding. The ER doctor finally called the on-call OB/GYN and they had to do a D & C and give you medication to stop your bleeding. Your mom called me before they were taking you in for surgery. You're probably going to be in here for a day or two so they can monitor you. You gave us a scare, K." June was trying hard not to cry but I could tell she was on the verge of a breakdown.

I was trying to process everything that she'd just told me. I was still trying to understand how I could have lost a whole day and not known it. I tried to sit up a little and realized that there was quite a bit of pain associated with moving, so I gave up on that.

June took my hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze before flashing me a big smile. "I wanted to talk to you first, but there's someone here to see you. I figured I should at least warn you before I let him in."

My eyes widened in fright for a moment because at first I thought she was talking about Kevin. My brain wasn't working properly since it was still under the influence of some heavy duty pain meds.

I watched as June sprinted over to the door and opened it. On the other side was a very tired and worried-looking Ben. He hesitated for a minute before he stepped into the room. June came back to my bed and leaned down to whisper in

my ear.

"I wasn't sure if I should have called him since he hadn't been returning your calls all week. Don't be mad, okay? I left a message and he called me back within minutes. He sounded really worried and he drove like a bat out of hell to get here to be with you. Don't be too hard on him, Kelsey."

June gave me another hug and left without another word. She carefully shut the door behind her.

Ben stood perfectly still and made no move to approach me. It took me a minute or two to get up the nerve to look at him. When I finally did, I couldn't find the rage that I'd felt towards him earlier this week. I looked at his handsome face and saw that his eyes were clouded with concern. I didn't know why he'd been avoiding my calls, but it was clear that he did care for me in some capacity. He was here, wasn't he?

I stared into his eyes for a while and when I didn't start yelling or screaming at him to get out, he seemed to have been assured that I wasn't going to freak out on him. He slowly moved to my side and took my hand. I could see the regret on his face.

"I'm so sorry," he said quietly.

The next hour or so seemed wonderful to me, despite where I was. No one came in to bother us, so I had Ben all to myself. We didn't talk about why he hadn't called, because it honestly didn't matter to me now. However, I couldn't keep him from apologizing over and over again. My mom had told Ben what had happened this morning...the miscarriage, the bleeding that wouldn't stop, the surgery...he seemed to be more informed than I was.

I was just content to have him with me. And, though I'd never admit it out loud, I was relieved. I'm sure a miscarriage wasn't something that was a relief to most women, but it was to me. It also meant that I wouldn't have to willingly have an abortion, and that made me feel tremendously better.

Our time together was up, though, when a doctor and a nurse came bustling into my room and advised me that I was in need of another examination. Ben tried to leave, but I made him stay with me and hold my hand. I was told that the

surgery had gone well and that my bleeding was significantly better, but I would still have to stay overnight for observation. My exam produced nothing alarming, and I was glad when the doctor and the nurse left my room.

My mom, dad, and June all filed in once my exam was over, and Ben moved across the room to sit in a chair so that he wasn't in the way.

I did my best to reassure my mother that I was fine, but nothing I said kept her from being hysterical. My dad, on the other hand, was livid. He was more determined than ever to call the cops, but I still wouldn't let him. All of that was behind me now. I would leave this hospital without a care in the world and I was looking forward to it. My reassurances seemed to appease my parents, but June and Ben weren't convinced.

While my mom fretted over me needlessly, June excused herself so she could call her parents and let them know that I was okay. I watched with curiosity as Ben silently followed June out of the room.

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Ben "Junior" Stokes

Anger...that wasn't the word to describe what I was feeling right now. Fury didn't do it...or rage. I couldn't come up with a word that captured what I felt towards that monster Kevin.

When I heard my phone beep earlier that day, I'd thought it was another message from Kelsey, so I eagerly called my voicemail to retrieve it. Little did I know that it was June instead, and that she was calling to give me the worst kind of news.

Kelsey was in the hospital. Kelsey was having a miscarriage. Kelsey started hemorrhaging and the doctors couldn't stop it. Kelsey was weak from blood loss. Kelsey was about to have surgery.

I had listened to that message in a daze, and had it not

been for the sheer panic that was evident in June's voice, I would have thought it was a joke or a ploy to get me to call. June had been in tears when I'd called her immediately back. She sounded more than worried for her best friend. I'd assured her that I was on the way and I'd driven faster than I'd ever driven before.

I wasn't sure what kind of reception would be waiting for me at the hospital once I'd gotten here, but apparently Kelsey hadn't said anything to her parents about me all week. They were still polite enough to me. June, however, was a little standoffish. I took her to the side and apologized, making up some lame excuse about work and whatever else I could come up with.

The fact that I'd dropped everything and come running seemed to be enough to placate June, though. I'd been allowed in Kelsey's room for a few minutes, but she still hadn't woken up from her surgery yet. The rage almost strangled me as I stared down at her in the hospital bed. She looked so pale and so sick...nothing like the last time I'd seen her.

I kept my emotions in check though. I was more concerned about her, and I wanted to make sure she was okay. Finally, she woke up and seemed to be okay. And she didn't cuss me out or throw anything at me when I appeared in her room. She was entirely too good for me.

Now that she was awake and I was sure that she was okay, I could freely allow the hatred bubble up inside of me once more. I followed June out into the hallway because I wasn't sure how much longer I could sit there without punching my hand through the wall and wishing it was Kevin's face.

I paced around while June was on the phone with her parents, and then while she was on the phone with someone else. I couldn't tell who it was at first, but then it became evident.

"No, I'm not leaving yet. You can get by without me for one night...no...I already told you no! Why aren't you listening to me? I'm not having this discussion with you again...I mean it...no, especially not now...you know how I

feel about him...it's not a biased opinion, you asshole! Well, I don't care what you think...I've got to go...what? Yes, fine! I'll stop by for a MINUTE, okay? You're lucky you're even getting that...bye." June shoved her cell into her pocket and glared at the wall for a moment before realizing that I was there.

She stared at me for a moment and then sighed. "You know, it's really hard keeping my promise to Kelsey over this whole Kevin thing...especially now. My boyfriend still hangs out with him and I can't stand being in the same county as he is. Jared seems to think that I'm picking sides or something because it didn't work out between Kevin and Kelsey. Apparently that was Kevin's excuse. If Jared only knew...he would probably murder that asshole!" June exclaimed, shaking her head in disgust.

"And I didn't tell Jared that Kelsey was in the hospital...I just told him she was sick. I didn't want Kevin to know what was going on with her. Now I'm getting flak because I'm supposedly blowing him off for no good reason. I swear, I'm about to explode! And to top it all off, he's with that asshole tonight and he wants me to stop by on my way home! It will take everything I've got not to choke Kevin to death."

June went on ranting about her boyfriend and I tried to pretend like I was listening, but all I heard was that I knew how to find Kevin now. The plan formed in my mind without effort. I felt much calmer when I went back into Kelsey's room. I only had a few minutes left with her because a nurse had already come around and advised us that we would have to be going soon so that Kelsey could rest.

Kelsey's mom was staying with her overnight, and her dad was going back home to get some rest. Since I was being watched by her family, I merely gave her hand a squeeze before leaving for the night with June. I offered to walk her to her car since it was so late, and she seemed happy to have someone walk with her.

"Thank you for coming, Ben. Kelsey seemed much better once she saw you. She's been really upset these last few days," June said.

"I know, and that's my fault. Don't worry...it won't happen

again," I promised her.

"Good," she responded with a smile.

I said goodbye once we'd reached her car and was happy to see that she hadn't parked too far from my own car. Once she started her car and started to back out of the parking lot, I sprinted towards my vehicle and threw myself inside. I had to be quick if I was going to follow her.

Part one of my plan was underway as I pulled out onto the mostly deserted street behind June's car. I kept a safe distance so as not to alert her to the fact that I was following her. It was a very short drive to Jared's house, and I eagerly parked and turned off my car as I watched her pull up beside the curb and go inside.

I waited impatiently for the asshole to show himself, but it was June that came out first. Her boyfriend was right behind her as she stormed off to her car. I couldn't make out exactly what they were saying but they were arguing pretty badly from what I could tell. June shoved her finger in Jared's face and he threw up his hands in disgust before turning around and walking back in his house.

I watched as June pulled away and took off down the road. She disappeared out of sight and I went back to staring at Jared's front door. Less than half an hour later, my patience was rewarded. The asshole emerged and it took every ounce of willpower to stay in the car.

I watched as he laughed and joked with Jared for a few minutes before climbing into his vehicle and driving away. That asshole was laughing and having a good time while Kelsey was stuck in the hospital...because of him. Well, that issue would be taken care of soon. I would see to that.

Kevin drove straight home, and I followed closely behind so that I could be sure I knew where he lived. I watched as he fumbled around with his keys and let himself in the house. A few minutes later, a light came on in one of the upstairs bedrooms. The curtains were open and I watched as the asshole flopped down on his bed and yanked his shoes off. He stood up and pulled his shirt over his head, flinging it to the floor before he crossed the room and yanked the curtains closed.

Now I knew where to find him, and that was all I needed. I smiled to myself as I made my way back to the hotel where Kelsey and I had stayed just a week ago. I took a quick shower and jumped in bed, wanting to get to sleep. Tomorrow was going to be a long day and I would need as much rest as I could get.

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Kelsey O'Neil

I was sore...well, sore was an understatement, but that was close enough to describe what I felt. It was as if my body had been flung off of a cliff and hit every available surface on the way down. My abdomen was especially sensitive, and I had no choice but to lie in bed and eat pain pills. I hadn't slept much last night despite the constant barrage of narcotics being forced into me.

My mom hovered over me all night, and though I was relieved to have someone with me, it wasn't her that I wanted by my side. I knew better than to try to get her to go so that Ben could stay.

The morning came eventually, along with another round of doctors and nurses that poked, prodded, and examined me to death. I was grumpy when chicken broth and tea was all I was allowed for breakfast, and was even more agitated when Ben didn't show up first thing. June and my dad were there by my side, though, so I felt a little better.

Around ten, Ben finally came through the door and I was flooded with relief. I was already worrying that he'd gone back home and had only come to see me out of guilt. My parents were kind enough to leave the room, though June lingered for a few minutes to make sure that I was okay with Ben being there. Finally, she left us alone.

"I didn't think you were going to come," I admitted.

"Sorry I'm late...I had to run some errands this morning." He leaned over and kissed my head before putting a plastic shopping bag on my lap. I looked inside and found food...not

the hospital garbage that passed for food...but real food. I was suddenly ravenous. Ben had been to the diner beside the hotel we'd stayed at...he'd probably slept there again last night. I pulled out a small plastic covered dish and found eggs, bacon, and toast waiting for me. I scarfed it all down without shame as Ben watched with amusement.

"I figured that they were probably starving you...and that you might want something good to eat," he said with a wink. He reached into the bag and pulled a bottle of orange juice out, handing it to me. I drank the whole thing in a few gulps.

"Thank you," I said fervently, feeling much better already. Ben leaned over to kiss me for real this time, and I let him. I was glad to have him here with me.

He eventually sat back on the edge of the bed, taking my hand in his again. "When are you going home?" he asked.

"Don't know...this afternoon possibly, though they might keep me for another night. It all depends on my exam later today. I'm apparently doing better, but not as good as they had hoped. I'm still bleeding some," I said as my face flushed red. I didn't really want to talk about this with him...or anyone for that matter.

He ran his hand down my face and I looked up at him, surprised at the expression that I found there. He looked so worried for a moment that I thought he might cry.

"What's wrong?" I choked out eventually.

"I wasn't sure if you were going to be okay. None of us were. I mean, logically, you were bound to be fine, but it was still a very trying experience. I'd prefer if you didn't do anything like that again, please," he said with a faint smile.

"I'll do my best," I promised. I was surprised that he felt so strongly about me. Especially after a week of assuming that he'd only wanted me for sex. I felt like an idiot now.

We talked for a little while about nothing in particular, but I could tell where I was steering the conversation. It had been something that had been on my mind for a long time now, and I finally just blurted it out.

"You know this can't work, right? And not because I don't want it to, but because I am about to leave for school and you travel all over the country for your job. I don't know why

we're doing this, Ben...it's only going to be harder for both of us in a couple of weeks when I'm gone."

Ben watched me wearily for a few moments before saying anything. I could tell that this had been on his mind too.

"We will find a way, Kelsey. If you want to, that is. I've been thinking a lot about this, too. I haven't come up with anything brilliant yet, but I will. Just don't worry about that now. You have more important things to deal with at the moment...like getting better, okay?"

I nodded and smiled at him, but I wasn't feeling any better about our situation. I was alarmed at how strongly I felt about him, especially in such a short time. I was worried about continuing this between us...whatever it was. I also didn't want to be a wreck when I went off to school because I was worrying about him all the time. Maybe it would be best if we just parted ways before things went too far.

I put that thought out of my head immediately and tried to focus on the present. Ben was right...I had to worry about getting better and then school. That was what was important right now. I couldn't worry about Kevin or the issues I had because of him. They were over now, and though I would have liked to have made him suffer, I knew one day karma would pay him back for what he did to me.

* * * * *

Ben "Junior" Stokes

I was happy when Kelsey was finally released from the hospital that afternoon. She seemed utterly exhausted, so I promised her that I would come see her in the morning once she was up. I wanted to let her get some rest. Plus, I needed the evening to track the asshole and see what he was up to.

I was going to wait a while before I did anything to Kevin. I wanted to make sure nothing looked suspicious and that no one had a reason to suspect me. I would bide my time until the right moment.

That evening, I called to check on Kelsey before I left the

hotel. I told her I was about to go to bed, and she said the same. She sounded really tired, so I didn't keep her long. However, she still seemed really glad to hear from me. I couldn't understand why she wanted anything to do with me. It was a mystery to me. I tried to make myself focus on the task at hand as I drove to Kevin's house. I wasn't surprised to find that his vehicle wasn't there, so I quickly headed over to Jared's house. They weren't there either. I waited outside of Jared's house, figuring they would show up at some point.

Earlier that morning I'd headed to Kevin's house to see what he was up to. Unfortunately, he only left his house once to go get something to eat and then he went straight back home. After half an hour of waiting, I drove the short distance back to Kevin's house, but he still wasn't there. I found myself parked outside of Jared's house again fifteen minutes later.

Finally, Jared came home. June was with him, and she didn't look pleased. I watched as Jared and June walked up to the front door. A few seconds later, Kevin's vehicle pulled up to the curb, along with another car I didn't recognize. The asshole climbed out of his car and a taller, skinnier guy climbed out of the backseat. A girl jumped out of the passenger side and staggered up the walkway to the front door with Kevin close behind her. The other car parked behind Kevin's had three more guys and one girl inside. They all piled out and went inside.

I sat and waited. I was going to follow him everywhere I possibly could for the next couple of days and see everywhere that he went. Then, in a few days once I was supposed to be gone, I would come back and take care of him. No one would suspect a thing.

After about an hour of waiting, the front door opened. It was June who stormed out. Jared was staring after her but made no attempt to follow. She stalked off towards the car I didn't recognize and climbed into the front seat. A few seconds later, the driver emerged from Jared's house along with the other people that had come with him. They all piled into the car with June and left.

Jared shook his head and slowly turned to go back inside.

They had apparently been fighting again. Maybe I should have a talk with Kelsey about this. It's obvious that her friend is loyal, but this is ridiculous. She's having to associate with that monster because Kelsey wants her to keep a secret.

After another half hour, the tall, skinny guy came outside with Jared and got into Jared's car. Kevin and the girl who'd been riding with him got into Kevin's vehicle, and they all left at the same time. I assumed they were going somewhere together, but I was wrong. Jared turned and headed down a residential street, but Kevin headed for the highway.

I followed him for a good twenty miles, wondering where he was going. He pulled off on a concrete road that led into what appeared to be a subdivision that was still under construction. Most of the lots on either side of the road were just patches of dirt. There were sporadic houses in various stages of construction along the way, but it seemed deserted. I already turned my lights off and was creeping slowly behind Kevin to keep from being seen.

I could make out his taillights up ahead, so I slowed down even more. He finally pulled over in front of a house that looked mostly complete except for the siding and the driveway. I parked my car behind a huge bulldozer a few hundred feet away and cut the engine quickly. I reached over to my glove box and pulled out my huge flashlight, figuring I might need it.

I climbed out and carefully made my way towards the house. I could hear Kevin's voice...he sounded like he was drunk. The girl with him sounded even worse. They were yelling and laughing out loud, and I knew they had to have gotten out of the car. As I got closer to where Kevin had parked, I saw them. They were standing below a window in front of the house, and Kevin was breaking in.

He finally managed to get the window open after a few minutes and he slipped inside. A minute later, he was opening the front door. I heard the girl giggling as she ran inside. The front door closed behind them. I was torn – I knew exactly what that bastard was here to do, and I wasn't sure if I should stay or go.

For some reason, I found myself walking towards the

house. I cautiously tried the front door, but the asshole had locked it behind him. From what I could tell, they had gone upstairs. I could hear their loud voices echoing through the house. I snuck over to the window that Kevin had climbed through and peeked in. The room was empty. Kevin hadn't bothered to close the window behind him, so I quickly climbed through it. Once I was inside, I tried to find them. It wasn't hard.

As I had thought, they were upstairs. The house was completely dark except for a little bit of light that was shining in the bare windows from the moon. I didn't dare turn on my flashlight, though, because it would probably alert them that someone was in the house. I made my way upstairs and found the room they were in – it appeared to be the master bedroom. I looked around and found that there were two other rooms upstairs, as well as a bathroom and a huge closet.

I wanted to make sure I could hide quickly in case I needed to. I watched with disgust through the tiny crack in the door as Kevin and his date fooled around. She was obviously toasted and that annoyed me greatly. I was sure that this was the only way he could get a girl to do anything with him.

After a few minutes, I had decided to leave. I wasn't doing anything here but making myself angrier. Kelsey was at home recovering from a painful surgery while this dipshit was trying to get laid. I wanted to lop his dick off with a very dull knife. I was already headed back down the hall when I heard the girl say something that made me stop in my tracks. I almost started laughing.

"Come on, already! Is your damn dick broke, or what? A hot dog is harder than you are!"

I turned around and headed back to the door, fully intending to see his reaction. Apparently Kevin had some performance issues, and that was too good to pass up.

I could tell that he was pissed just by the way that he was hovering over her. She was completely naked under him now, and his pants were on the floor beside them.

"I'm sorry, baby. You know I get stupid when I drink. I

didn't mean it, I swear!" she said in a rush, apparently aware of his agitation.

"Get me a damn beer and shut the fuck up," he sneered at her, climbing off of her and plopping down on the bare floor.

The girl crawled on her knees over to a small cooler under the window and popped it open. She pulled out a can of beer and brought it to Kevin. He popped it open and took a huge glug before putting it on the floor beside him.

"Why don't you come and suck my dick? Maybe that will help," he said menacingly as he stood up and leaned against the wall.

The girl hesitated for a second but then shuffled over in front of Kevin. She immediately grasped his limp dick with both of her hands and shoved him inside of her mouth. He gasped for a second and then roughly grabbed her hair with both of his hands. She tried to pull her head away but he just held her even harder.

"That's right, bitch...suck my dick like a good little whore." Kevin was practically ramming her head up and down with his hands, forcing her to take him completely in her mouth. I could hear the strangled gagging noises she was making, but Kevin didn't seem to notice...or care.

Kevin started flexing his hips with each thrust, making her take him even deeper. I watched with disgust as she sucked his cock and his balls repeatedly slammed into her face. Kevin picked up the pace and was making her go even faster. He was moving his hips in rhythm now and was basically fucking her mouth.

Her hands were braced on his thighs as she tried to put a little distance between the two of them, but he wouldn't allow it. After a long while, he finally seemed to have had enough. He slowed the thrust of his hips and made slowly bob her head up and down on his dick. Finally, he released her, and she leaned away from him, wiping her mouth off on the back of her hand.

"Well, it looks like my dick is just fine, now. Maybe you just weren't doing it right before," he jeered. She didn't respond, and this seemed to please him.

He leaned down and grabbed his pants, pulling out a pack

of cigarettes and a lighter. He bent down and picked up his opened beer and took a swig. He placed the beer can on the windowsill beside him and lit up a cigarette. He was standing there with a shirt on and an erection while the girl stared at him. She was probably in shock.

He was fiddling with something in the cigarette pack and wasn't paying any attention to her at all.

"Go get me a cold beer...this one's too warm to drink now," he commanded. She slowly got to her feet and turned around.

As soon as her back was turned, I saw him pull something out of his cigarette pack and swivel towards the opened beer. I couldn't be certain, but it looked like he had put something in the beer. He closed the cigarette pack and put it and the lighter back in his pants.

The girl was back with his cold beer now, and he picked the opened one up and started swirling it around.

"Here...why don't you drink it?" he asked. "I don't like to waste beer, but I don't drink them unless they are cold."

She hesitantly took the beer from him as he cracked open the new one and drank deeply. He paused for a second to glare at her and finally she tipped the beer can to her mouth and drank the contents in one giant swig. Kevin was smiling down at her now.

"Good girl...now we can have some real fun, just like I promised."

He finished his beer, crushed the can in his hand, and threw it into the corner. He swiftly yanked his shirt off and threw it down with his pants before pulling the girl towards him and kissing her viciously.

I was amazed at how well I could see, now that my eyes had adjusted to the darkness. I wanted to leave now before things got gross, but for some reason I had the urge to stay. I didn't trust this asshole and I had a bad feeling about what was about to happen.

Kevin kissed the girl obscenely for a few minutes and then pushed her up against the wall so that his back was to me. He groped her tits tightly with one hand, making her squeal. This seemed to excite him, so he squeezed even harder. I

had to bite back a growl.

Then, with such speed that I wasn't sure how it happened, he was inside of her. He'd pushed her legs apart with his own and positioned his dick so that he could ram it in her.

The girl cried out as he penetrated her, but he didn't stop. He pounded her over and over again as he pinned her against the wall.

"Kevin! Stop! You're hurting me!" she yelled, but he just clamped his hand over her mouth.

"Shut up, Ava, if you know what's good for you. You wanted this, so don't try to back out now!" he shouted at her as she tried futilely to get away from him.

He just turned his head as she screamed, though his hand was still over her mouth, muffling her. He pounded her over and over again, not caring that he was hurting her. He seemed to like it this way.

I was about to step in and do something but I kept chickening out. Would I be able to subdue him without hurting her? Should I really get involved in this?

Before I could do anything, I noticed a change. Ava's screams got quieter and quieter until she was completely silent. Then, she slumped over against Kevin.

When Kevin realized this, he pulled out of her and flung her to the ground.

"It's about fucking time! Damn cock-teasing bitch! Telling me she wants it all night and is gonna fuck me till the sun comes up and then she tries to back out? I don't fucking think so! Who's in charge now, cunt? It's not you! Because you are passed out now, and my little pill will keep you that way for quite a while. You are going to be sore tomorrow, bitch," he grumbled at her as he pushed her legs apart and roughly slammed into her again.

I was shocked. So I wasn't making it up in my head...he really had drugged the poor girl and now he was raping her. I watched numbly as he fucked her limp body. He groped and grabbed her flailing tits, sucking on them as if he were doing her a favor. He grunted and groaned as he pounded on and on. Finally, he pulled out of her and started beating his dick off while he straddled her. He positioned himself over her

face, reaching down with his free hand to pry her mouth open. I watched in disgust as he came loudly, shooting his load into her slack mouth. Then, he rubbed the head of his dick round and round on her lips, seemingly enjoying himself. When he was done, he wiped his dick off on her shirt that was discarded on the floor and began to get dressed. He pulled his phone out of his pants and leaned down close over Ava's nude body, and I was horrified to watch as he started snapping pictures of her. Once he'd taken a dozen or so, he laughed cruelly and stuffed the phone back in his pants. He picked up the empty beer cans and placed them in his cooler.

I panicked as he turned and headed for the door. I had only a moment to run into one of the adjacent bedrooms before he came out. I hid behind the door and waited for a moment until I heard Kevin heading toward the stairs. I wasn't sure what I should do. I didn't want to be involved with this, but I couldn't just let him get away with it...again. At that moment, images of Kelsey flooded my mind. I pictured her lying there, lifeless and helpless as he raped her.

I envisioned him inside of her, tearing her open and soiling her...making her pregnant and putting her at risk. The rage that I'd manage to keep beat down for the past week or so boiled inside of me and there was no way I could contain it now. I quickly dashed outside of the bedroom I was hiding in and ran for the stairs. The asshole had paused at the bathroom at the top of the stairs to take a leak...he was peeing in the sink.

I flattened myself against the wall next to the bathroom door and waited. I heard his fly being zipped up, the scrape of the cooler being picked up off of the counter, and the squeak of the bathroom door hinges as he sauntered out. He turned right and headed for the stairs. Luckily, he hadn't seen me standing right there on the other side of the doorway.

I lunged at him, allowing the fury to sweep through me. It didn't take much effort at all. He was already slightly drunk, plus he was at the top of the stairs and believed he was alone, so he was unprepared for my attack. I shoved

viciously and watched with great satisfaction as he tumbled down the stairs in a most ungracious manner. He hid the hard tile floor below at the base of the stairs with a sickening thud.

I slowly eased down the stairs, in case he was about to jump up and try to attack me, but my caution was unnecessary. He was knocked out. I saw the huge lump already forming on the side of his head. I checked his breathing just to be sure, but unfortunately the asshole was still alive. I nudged him with my foot, causing him to roll onto his back. Then, I gave him a taste of his own medicine. I pulled my foot back and then made contact with his balls. He groaned a little but didn't wake up.

I laughed out loud and then kicked him in the groin again...and again...and again. Then, I kicked him in the ribs...the stomach...the face...everywhere I could get to. I wanted him to hurt worse than he'd ever hurt before. I wanted him to wake up and wish for death just to get away from this pain. I gave him one last kick in the balls – for Kelsey – and then I had to make myself stop.

I went back upstairs to check on Ava. She was still breathing deeply. I didn't dare touch her, but I couldn't just leave her like that. I grabbed her shirt and covered as much of her as I could. As I leaned over her body, I winced. I saw the result of what Kevin had done to her. She was torn and bleeding from where he'd pummeled her relentlessly. I knew I was going to have to do something to get her some help. I turned her on her side and watched with revulsion as Kevin's spoooge oozed out of her mouth, then dug around carefully in her pants but didn't find what I was looking for.

When I was done there, I headed back downstairs. I kicked Kevin in the face once more for good measure before heading back to the room with the open window. I used my shirt to wipe the window frame down anywhere I might have touched it and then left through the front door, taking care not to touch anything except with my shirt.

Once outside, I strolled over to Kevin's car. I used my shirt to pop open the passenger side and found what I was looking for. Ava's purse was on the floorboard of the car. I

used my shirt to dig around for a second until I found her cell phone. I unceremoniously dumped the contents onto the passenger seat, then back away from the car. I knew I would only have a minute or two to get out of here, so I made sure that I was ready to bolt. I walked halfway up to the house and then dialed 9-1-1. I waited for the operator to answer before I hung up, then I flung Ava's phone into the grass in front of the opened window.

Once I was inside my car, I returned my flashlight to the glove box and cranked my car up. I carefully backed up and headed out of the subdivision as fast as I dared. I drove cautiously but swiftly back to town, taking the back roads instead of the highway so I could avoid any cop cars I might encounter along the way.

I got back to the hotel finally, and wasted no time going inside. I took a shower and made sure to inspect my clothes and shoes for any sign of where I'd been tonight. I didn't see anything that looked suspicious, but I washed my clothes in the bathtub anyway and scrubbed my shoes clean with a washcloth. After hanging my clothes to dry, I went to bed feeling satisfied.

I would have loved to have done more to that fucker, but it would have to be enough. I hoped that the cops would find Ava before she woke up so that they could get her some help. Not to mention that they could test her at the hospital and find out what that asshole had given her to knock her out. I didn't so much care about Kevin...he could lay there and die for all I gave a shit, but it would be nice if they would arrest his sorry ass.

I fell asleep almost immediately, thinking about Kelsey and trying not to picture him on top of her. I would see her again in the morning. That thought had me smiling as I drifted.

* * * * *

Kelsey O'Neil

"I am perfectly capable of walking, mom!" I grumbled as she helped me stagger down the stairs. Honestly, she was making it worse. It was as if I were an old lady with a broken hip!

"Don't argue with me or I'll make you stay in the bed," she retorted. I knew she meant it, too. If it hadn't been for the fit I'd thrown over getting to see Ben, she would have kept me locked up in my room all day.

Ben was waiting for me in the living room, and he jumped up as soon as I came in. He helped me to the couch and I slowly and carefully sat down, trying not to wince too much.

"I'll go get your meds," my mom said before leaving the room.

"How are you today?" Ben asked.

"I'm fine," I said for the hundredth time today. I was tired of people asking me how I was...but I hated to admit that I liked Ben asking about me.

"Good," he said, smiling. He seemed to be in a better mood today. Maybe it was because I wasn't in the hospital anymore.

My mom was back with my medication, a plate of crackers, and a glass of apple juice. I took them without complaint, because I knew it would do no good to object. She left as soon as I'd swallowed my pill, heading upstairs under the pretense of taking a bath. Ben assured her that he would look after me while she was gone.

As soon as she was upstairs, Ben attacked me...gently. I was unprepared for his assault, but it was welcome. He kissed me with a passion I hadn't felt before and grabbed my hair firmly with both of his hands. I kissed him back as desire ripped through me. I winced as I tried to lean into him, and he pulled away from me, making me sit back.

"Sorry...I shouldn't have done that," he said quickly, looking ashamed.

"I didn't mind," I assured him, wishing that I was healed up already so I could jump on him.

"I noticed that," he said with a laugh. He moved closer and let me lean into his side. I was content with that. We talked for a while about his business and how things were going,

and then we talked about school. I was getting nervous the closer time came to leave.

I felt a little bit better about having to leave because Ben promised me that we would still be together. It wasn't any different than being here...he moved all over the place so that's how it would be even if I didn't move out of the state.

I knew my parents were worried about my relationship with him – mostly because of the age difference – but I didn't care about that. He was everything I ever wanted...smart, handsome, kind and gentle, sweet, loving, accepting...the list went on and on. Maybe that was my problem with boys my own age...they were just too immature for me. Besides, it wasn't THAT much of an age gap.

And, not to mention the fact that I was a legal adult now and I could date anyone I pleased. In a couple of weeks I would be out of their house for good and they would have no clue what I was doing.

I started getting sleepy and felt my meds kicking in. Ben helped me back up to my room since my mom hadn't come back down yet. Once I was in my bed, he gave me a kiss on the forehead and left after I promised him that I would call as soon as I was awake. I drifted off into a peaceful, drug-induced sleep.

* * * * *

Ben “Junior” Stokes

I hadn't heard anything about the asshole all day...nothing on the news at all. I was beginning to wonder if anyone had even found them, but by now they both would have come around. Surely Ava would have said or done something once she woke up and figured out what Kevin had done. Then again, Kelsey didn't do anything when he'd done that to her.

I didn't want to risk going back to the scene of the crime, though, so I would just have to be patient. Maybe later I could drive by the asshole's place to see if he was around. Surely he would have had to go to the hospital for his injuries though.

I sat in the bed at the hotel, thinking of Kelsey again and wishing that she were here with me. Just thinking about her made me rock hard and before I knew it, I had my hands down my pants and was beating off. It wasn't nearly as good as having her here with me and sinking my cock into her soft, wet hole, but it would do for now.

I slid my pants down to my knees, freeing my raging boner, and worked the shaft with my hand. Up, down, up, down...grazing the head with each pass. I fantasized that Kelsey was here and she was going down on me...that image was almost enough to tip me over the edge.

I moaned out loud as I felt myself tensing up. I could feel the heat coursing through my body...feel the buildup that was about to explode out of me...I was only a second away from coming...but then my phone rang right by my head and scared the shit out of me. My climax faded away and my dick was already losing its rigidity. I cursed out loud and fumbled for the phone.

"Hello?" I growled at whoever was calling and bothering me.

"Um...hi," Kelsey said, sounding shocked at my less than polite greeting.

I calmed myself down immediately. I should have checked the caller ID first. I felt like a total ass. Besides, I was the one who'd made her promise to call me when she woke up.

"Hey. Sorry...the phone just startled me. I'm glad you called," I said in a rush, trying to apologize for my bad behavior.

"Oh...it's okay," she replied, sounding relieved. "I didn't mean to bother you."

"You didn't...honestly. I was actually just sitting here thinking of you," I replied as I looked down at my dick. I smiled to myself. Just being honest...

"I was thinking of you, too...but probably not in a good way," she said quietly with a tone that I understood well.

"Stop it. You need to heal up and it's going to be a WHILE before we can do any of that again." I was still smiling...at least she was thinking of me in the same way.

"I know, but I can't help what my brain does. I wish you

were here. I'm so bored! June is coming over to "babysit" me while my parents go out tonight. Apparently dad's got a big function he's required to attend for his work and he's dragging mom along."

"I can come over...if you want me to. I wasn't doing anything of importance."

"Would you? Oh, you're the best! They'll be leaving in an hour, so come over whenever you want. June's going to cook...so maybe you should eat before you come," she suggested with a laugh.

"I'll take my chances. See you soon," I said.

"See you," she replied before hanging up.

I turned my attention back to my once again raging boner as I flung my phone down on the bed beside me. Thoughts of Kelsey sitting in her room thinking of me in dirty ways starting invading my mind, and I didn't try to stop them. I put my hand back on my dick and resumed my pumping rhythm. It wasn't long before I was on the brink again, feeling that warmth gathering inside of me as my muscles bunched up. I gave one last jerk and I came...hard and loud. The goo was shooting out of my dick all over my hand, my legs, the bed, the floor...and I didn't care. I kept pumping my dick, milking every last drop out that I could and wishing that I could do this inside of Kelsey instead.

Once I was done, I cleaned up quickly, got dressed, and headed out to my car. I made it to Kelsey's in no time, and her parents didn't seem too disturbed to see me there. June was already banging around in the kitchen and from the smell of things, I thought I probably should have taken Kelsey's advice and eaten first.

I joined Kelsey on the couch, keeping my distance from her, at least until her parents left for the evening. They advised no one in particular that June was staying the night and could go home in the morning since they would probably be out late. I supposed that was for my benefit...slyly letting me know that I was not to linger here any longer than necessary.

They needn't worry about me though. Kelsey had just been through a traumatic event and was still in pain. There

was no way I would try anything with her now...and most definitely not here. I had more respect for her than that.

Once we were virtually alone in the living room, I leaned in to give her another kiss, which she returned with just as much enthusiasm as she had earlier. I broke away before things could get too serious, but it was a good thing that I had. At that moment, June's phone started ringing on the other side of Kelsey, and June came dashing out of the kitchen to grab it. She fished her phone out of her purse and answered it on the fourth ring.

"Hello? Oh, hey Kayla, what's up? What? You're kidding me! When? What happened? Yeah...yeah...no, I remember. She was there last night, too. I left before then. Yeah, I figured that would happen. She did? Then what? No way! NO WAY! Are you sure? Well, yeah! Fuck...I can't believe this! No, I don't care! What did she say? Good! I'm glad! Does Jared know? No, no...I want to tell him! Please! Yes...okay. I will. I'm staying with Kelsey for the night, but I'll go over there tomorrow. Yeah, I'll check first. Sure...no problem. Thanks for calling. Later!" June's called was confusing since we could only hear one side of the conversation. Something interesting must have happened though, because she was on the call for several minutes. I thought her eyes were going to pop out of her head.

June turned to stare at Kelsey with a look of both shock and amusement. Kelsey just stared back at her, waiting for her to say something.

"You...will...NOT...believe...what...Kayla...just...said!" she said haltingly.

Kelsey arched an eyebrow but continued to stare at June. June seemed a bit displeased with her best friend's less than ecstatic response, but powered through anyway.

"This morning, Ava Downing was admitted to the hospital," June said.

I tried to maintain my composure and not react to the news at all. Neither of the girls, however, were paying any attention to me whatsoever, so I didn't have to worry about it.

"Holy shit, is she okay?" Kelsey asked, sitting up on the couch, but then wincing. I leaned over and forced her to sit

back.

"Yes, yes...she's fine. Apparently she called the cops last night. You will NEVER guess who she was out with last night!" June was practically bouncing up and down.

"Who?" Kelsey asked, clearly interested now.

"KEVIN! They were with us last night. I met up with Jared, and of course he was hanging with that loser. Kevin was drinking with some of those idiots he hangs out with, and Ava was with him. She was pretty plastered. They all went back to Jared's house, but I couldn't stand being in the same room with him. He was being a total douche to Ava. I made Mark give me a ride home. Jared wasn't pleased about that at all. Actually, I haven't talked to him since...but he can wait. I've been TELLING him that Kevin was a total douchebag asshole loser, but he wouldn't listen to me!"

"June, what happened to her?" Kelsey said impatiently.

"Oh yeah...so Kayla calls and tells me Ava's in the hospital and I immediately know why...cause she was with Kevin, right? And Kayla told me that Kevin had taken her to some empty house somewhere to...well, you know...and he apparently got really rough with her and gave her something that knocked her out. Somehow, she'd managed to call the cops...they apparently still haven't figured it out yet because she was pretty bad off when the cops got there.

"And get this...you'll really LOVE this news.

Kevin...fell...down...the...stairs! At the house! He was leaving I guess and cops think he tripped and fell because he was drunk. He was carrying a damn cooler full of beers. What a fucking dumbass! Kayla says he's in the hospital now, but he's under police custody. After the doctors ran Ava's blood and found out what he'd doped her with, they told the cops and he's been under surveillance since. Though, from what Kayla says, he won't be going anywhere for a while! She went to visit Ava this morning and she saw Kevin's mom there too.

"You know Kayla's like Kevin's third cousin or something...so she stopped to talk to his mom and she told her that Kevin had a severe concussion, some broken ribs, a dislocated shoulder, a fractured nose, and something wrong

with his “privates.” Kayla wasn’t sure what she meant by that but apparently he sustained some damage to his jewels when he fell down the stairs. Of course, Kayla hates Kevin’s guts ever since he showed off those pics of her boobs in eighth grade that time...so she wasn’t too worried about him. Apparently Ava’s mom called Christine’s mom this morning cause Christine hadn’t heard back from Ava last night after she left Jared’s house...she was there with us, too and left with me and Mark and a couple of other guys, but Ava wanted to stay behind with Kevin. She’d tried texting Ava, but never got a response so she got worried and called Ava’s house early this morning.

“They had already been looking for her when the hospital called to notify them that Ava had been brought in. Ava’s mom was pretty upset. Once she realized what had happened, she went ape-shit! Ava’s still pretty groggy, but she remembers enough to get Kevin in some serious trouble! Oh, Kelsey! That asshole is finally going to get what he deserves!” June was almost beside herself as she finished relaying her information.

I was mostly relieved because no one seemed to think that another person had been involved...they just thought the asshole was drunk and had fallen down the stairs. That was perfect.

I was surprised to look over at Kelsey and see that she looked absolutely horrified. Surely she didn’t feel bad for that asshole?

“What’s wrong?” I asked, since June seemed incapable of speech at the moment.

Kelsey turned to face me and she was on the verge of tears.

“It’s my fault! Don’t you see that? All of this is my fault! If I’d let my parents do something about Kevin when I first told them, then none of this would have happened to Ava. What did Kayla say about her?” Kelsey demanded, turning back to June.

June hesitated for a moment, and Kelsey snapped at her. “Tell me!”

“Okay...um, well...apparently Kevin had been...rough. He

drugged her and she was out for a while. She was...ripped open...and they had to stitch her up. She was also pretty bruised up from what Kayla saw." June didn't seem excited anymore. The fact that someone had gotten hurt had been lost on her previously when she'd been so excited that Kevin was in deep shit.

I watched as Kelsey buried her head in her hands. She was sobbing now, and I didn't know what to do to comfort her. I had actually watched it happen, and I felt like shit, too, but it wasn't my fault. At least that fucker wasn't going to get away with it this time...and there was no telling how many others were out there that had been done the same way.

I reached over and pulled Kelsey into my side, trying my best not to jostle her. June sunk to her knees in front of us and put her hands on Kelsey's knees. She had a look of determination on her face that I'd never seen before. She actually looked a little scary.

"Now you listen to me, Kelsey O'Neil. Stop it, right now! You know damn well that NONE of this is your fault. It's Kevin's fault...not yours, not mine, not Ben's, not Ava's...no one but KEVIN. Telling on him might have stopped him from doing this to Ava, or maybe it wouldn't have. There's no way to know, and you can't change what's already happened. You had to do what was best for YOU to cope with this and not worry about future ramifications. Look at me!" June said with fierceness.

Kelsey picked her head up and stared at her friend.

"I want you to promise me, right now, that you will let this go. I don't want you dwelling on this and thinking that it's all your fault, because it isn't. Kevin is a monster, plain and simple. You can't change who he is or what he does, and there is no way you could have known that he would do that again. YOU ARE A VICTIM, KELSEY! And I won't have you blaming yourself for his actions. Anyone who thinks otherwise can suck a big fat dick, because they weren't in your shoes and having to make the tough choices.

"Besides, as loony as Kevin is, I seriously doubt you were the first one that he'd done this to," June said, echoing my thoughts. "And if that's true, that means there are others out

there like you that have had to deal with what he's done and are probably feeling guilty too. You can't save the whole world, K...you just need to look after yourself." June finished her speech with a gigantic hug and a stern, no-nonsense look directed at Kelsey.

Kelsey sniffled and shook her head, appeasing June. After a moment, June stood back up and turned to go back to the kitchen.

Kelsey turned towards me with a look of shame on her face, but I merely shook my head in disapproval.

"Don't even say it...I know what you're thinking, and I agree with June on this one," I said.

"THANK YOU!" June shouted from the kitchen. I laughed, and this embarrassed Kelsey tremendously.

"Stop eavesdropping, bitch!" Kelsey yelled back, smiling just a little. She sounded a bit more like her old self, and I was glad. The last thing I wanted was for her to blame herself. She'd been through enough the past few weeks and didn't need anything else stressing her out.

She leaned against me, seeming content, and for that moment I was happy too. I was still worried about Holly...and now about Kevin, too, but there wasn't anything I could do about either of those situations. Though, I had to admit that the whole Kevin issue resolved itself quite nicely...as long as the cops didn't realize that there was someone else there. I doubted they would be too suspicious, considering what Ava had probably told them and the fact that he was drunk. Yes, for now...things were good, though I knew it wouldn't last. A big problem was looming on the horizon and I still hadn't figured out a way to deal with it.

I knew Kelsey would be leaving soon, and I wanted desperately to go with her. I was afraid that she would adapt to college life and realize that she wasn't interested in me at all...especially because of our age difference.

I made the most of our time together that night, but too soon she was worn out and ready for bed. I said goodbye and let her know that I would be going back to work first thing in the morning, now that I knew she was okay. She seemed just as unhappy about that as I was.

June was kind enough to leave us alone downstairs so we could say our goodbyes. I doubted I would be able to come back before she moved. We were about to move to a new town, and I would be over eight hours away, so driving probably wouldn't be a good option at that point.

Kelsey kissed me intensely and didn't want to let me go, but she was about to pass out from her meds that June had to practically force down her throat.

I helped her up to her room, where June was waiting, and got her into the bed. June thanked me for all that I'd done as she walked me out of the room, intending to see me to the front door.

"Seriously, thanks. You don't know how much you've done for her. She won't stop talking about you," June said earnestly. "I don't know what's going on between you two, but I think it's great. Kelsey needs someone that is serious and not some immature punk...like all of the guys around here. They don't realize how great she is, but apparently you do." June took me by surprise by hugging me at the front door, and I tentatively hugged her back.

"She means a lot to me. I don't know how, but I'll make it work...we'll find a way."

June shook her head in approval and gave me a warm smile as I waved and headed toward my car. I was just about to climb in when I heard my name being called. I turned, expecting June to be at the door telling me I'd left my wallet or something, but it was Kelsey. June looked worriedly as Kelsey staggered down the walkway to meet me as I rushed back to her side.

She looked as if she were about to fall over, and I knew she was probably loopy from the pain meds.

"What are you doing? You're supposed to be in bed!" I scolded her.

"Wait...I needed to tell you something before you left. Something important...because I don't know when – or if – I'll see you again," she said, leaning over and grasping me around the shoulders. I pulled her to me and embraced her, bemused by the tone of her voice.

"What is it?" I asked when she didn't continue.

Kelsey leaned away from me so that she could stare into my face as she said the next few words that nearly made me collapse.

"I think...Ben, I think I love you, and I wanted you to know that before you drove away. And I know this is way too soon, and I know you're much older than me and that people won't approve, and I know that I'm about to move far away and go to school and I'll hardly ever see you...but you have to know, okay? You have to know that I love you, because this might be the only chance I have to tell you that. And it's okay if you don't feel the same...or feel as strongly. It's enough that you're here." By the time she finished speaking, she couldn't look me in the eye. Was it because she thought I would be upset about the words she'd just said to me? Because that was exactly the opposite of what I was feeling right now.

I didn't think that I'd ever been so happy in my entire life. What started out as gratitude turned into a strange obsession and now turned into something more. Though I hardly deserved Kelsey's love, I was happy for it...for the moment.

I forced her to look me in the eyes so that she would believe what I was about to say.

"I love you too...I have for a while, but I didn't want to scare you away. I never thought it would be possible for me to trust another woman...after what happened to me before, but you've proven me wrong, Kelsey. You've made my life worth living again," I said fervently, then leaned down to kiss her.

I didn't want to let her go, especially now, but she was swaying on her feet. June – who was now crying like a baby, having heard every single word we'd said – helped me walk Kelsey back to her bed and get her settled. She was out the moment her head hit the pillow.

June saw me out – again – and had a hard time saying anything. I hugged her and thanked her for being a good friend to Kelsey and told her goodbye. When I got back to the hotel, I was flying. Life was grand...until I starting thinking about what really happened tonight.

Just as quickly as my excitement came, it was gone

again. Never in a million years would I have expected Kelsey to fall in love with me. I had only intended to watch her from afar...the object of my strange obsession. But fate hadn't allowed that to happen. Somehow, she'd let me in and trusted me when all others had failed. Somehow, she'd managed to get inside all of my barriers, too.

Now, I had to live with the fact that nothing I did would be right. I was a monster...a monster worse than Kevin. Despite what I'd convinced myself of when it happened, there was no justification for what I'd done to Holly. Kevin probably justified his actions too. Sure, Holly had been a mean, cold, heartless bitch, but did she deserve what I'd done to her?

I'd only done that to pay her back for what she'd done to Kelsey, though I never intended to take it so far. What would Kelsey think if she knew just how horrific I was? Would she still love me? I doubted it...she would run screaming in the other direction, and rightfully so.

I had to figure out a way to let her go. She was too good for me, and I should have never, ever let it get this far. I should have stayed away this week, but I couldn't think straight when June called and I thought Kelsey was really hurt. If I'd just stayed away, she probably wouldn't have ever tried to call me again, and I wouldn't be feeling so guilty now.

And all this time, I'd been trying to find a way to be with her, when I should have been trying to figure out a way to stay away from her. I couldn't be so selfish again. I needed to find a way to let her go and hope that she could forget about me. Maybe once she was in school, she would find someone better for her...someone younger and less broken...less damaged.

I let the rage wash over me again that night, though it was directed mostly at myself this time. I still hated Holly and Kevin for what they'd made me do to them, but I hated myself for not being able to control myself any better than that. I don't think I slept more than an hour that night, and at dawn I checked out and started the long ride back to the carnival.

I needed some distance from Kelsey, because when I was around her, I didn't want to think about anything but being

with her, and that was no good. I knew that being back at work would clear my head and give me some time to think about what I'd done and how to put it right. I couldn't slip up again...no matter what.

I called Kelsey's phone, knowing that it was way too early and that she would still be asleep. I wanted to leave her a message, hoping that it would take the sting out of what I was about to do. Hurting her wasn't something that I wanted to do, but it was necessary. It was the only way I could protect her now...and it was of the utmost importance that I protect her from the greatest threat in her life now...me.

TO BE CONTINUED

**THIS NOVEL IS PRESENTED IN SERIAL FORM. NEW AND
SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE AT
REGULAR INTERVALS.**