

⚠ WARNING:
MATURE CONTENT

2
Days

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CHAPTER 1

New Year's Day

Get out!” Mom yelled at me as I grabbed my warmest fleece jacket from the closet. “How dare you accuse De Monte.” I couldn’t believe Mom was choosing her boyfriend over me. I was sixteen, not some little kid telling stories. I knew it was wrong for De Monte to touch my breasts. I knew it wasn’t an accident. It wasn’t the first time. I knew he was a creep when he was drunk. But that didn’t mean he could do what he wanted. How could Mom not see this? How could she believe him and not her own daughter?

“Mom, please!” I begged as I pulled the jacket over my shaking arms. “He’s lying. Don’t do this!”

When she didn’t answer me, I ran into my room. But Mom followed me. She was not letting up. “Neema, I said get out!”

“Mom!” I yelled back. “I’m going.” I could feel tears flowing down my cheeks. I looked her right in the eyes.

“You have to let me take some of my stuff. I can’t go without anything.” Mom turned and stomped out the door. I tried to calm myself and take a deep breath. I had to pull myself together.

The room I had called mine for three years had a window that looked out over Pine Street. It was usually a busy street. But everything was dead that day. It was January first. I could see a few flurries and knew my jacket wouldn’t be enough. I was already shaking, and I hadn’t even stepped outside yet. I walked over to my bed and touched the red and blue quilt that Mom had given me. She said she got it from her mother. It would be perfect to keep out the cold.

I grabbed the quilt off my bed and shoved it under one arm while I grabbed my overstuffed, yellow handbag in the other. I glanced inside the bag. I had my phone and my wallet, along with lip gloss and other random things like eyeliner, a bottle of Tylenol, a couple of CDs I burned myself, and some tampons. I thought they were emergency items at the time. I was suddenly scrambling for real emergency items.

I could hear Mom and De Monte cussing in the other room. I told myself I needed to clear my head. Think, Neema! Think! I had to make sure I had enough for a few days. I shoved underwear and a pair of blue jeans in the bag. I looked at the closet full of clothes. There were new ones and those I had kept for memory’s sake. I had to leave them.

I looked at the pile of stuffed animals and old dolls that sat neatly on my dressers. I had to leave them too. I looked at the pictures neatly stuck to my wall. One of my mother and me smiling. A few of me pretending to be a top model. Then there was a single picture of my father in uniform. He looked about twenty. I never knew him. I believed he was saving the world. I ripped all the photos from the wall and stuffed them into my bag.

I took a glance in the mirror. I looked awful. My hair was all crazy. I hadn't even washed my face. I hadn't had time to get ready to go out. I never would have left my home like this. I was always the best-looking girl at school. Always hair with the newest style. Always makeup to show off my beautiful brown eyes. The girls always said I looked like Beyoncé, with beautiful caramel skin and a body others would kill for. But at that moment I looked like a mess.

I suddenly felt De Monte towering over me. I turned to face him. "You heard your mother. Get out!" His angry face was looking down at me. I could still smell the stink of his partying from the night before. The night he tried to touch my Beyoncé body.

"Get away from me, creep!" I moved away from him and headed toward the door. He followed. Mom was standing in the kitchen crying. Black eyeliner was smeared across her smooth, brown cheeks. She wouldn't even look at me. I wasn't sure if she was crying for herself or me.

“Mom?” I begged one more time. She didn’t even look at me. My own mother let me walk down the steps to the outside door and stand on the cold street. I knew she was crying for herself.

I stood for a few minutes in front of De Monte’s Pawn Shop. He’d moved us to his upstairs apartment when Mom needed a place for us to live. He’d been good when I was younger. But booze and time had changed him.

The snow started to come down a little harder. I awkwardly carried my belongings toward the subway station. There was no way I would be out in the cold for long. I had money to get on the next ride to Park Central Station. Only two stops away. I took out my phone. My hands were shaking. I texted Nate that I was on my way. He’d been my boyfriend for six months. I knew he would help me.

As I sat in the warmth of the subway car, I finally let myself breathe. I wish I hadn’t. I wish I’d stayed on running mode. But I didn’t. Suddenly I was crying again. There were only four other people sitting nearby. They didn’t even turn their heads. They didn’t care. So I didn’t care. I just cried.

CHAPTER 2

Shelter

The snow had stopped when I got off at Park Central. There were tall trees surrounding a park where some kids were playing. The snowfall had not given much to play with, but the kids were excited anyway. I walked to one of the four apartment buildings that surrounded the park like a large fortress. I found the right door and pushed the doorbell that read Boyd. My heart raced. I hoped they would be home. It was noon. Nate hadn't answered my text. I pulled out my phone and texted again. This time I got a response. "I'm not home. Wait for me at the park. I'll come get you. Got a car?" Car? I found that strange. Exciting too! Thinking about the car took my mind off of Mom. I pushed away her words. I pushed her away.

I walked over to the kids again and sat down on a wet bench. I covered myself with my quilt. It brought some warmth. I waited half an hour before Nate pulled up in an old, blue Chevy station wagon. His window was rolled

down, and I could see the smooth, brown skin of his arm facing the cold. Nate looked like he was on a summer afternoon drive with just a T-shirt on. His hair was in tight cornrows, and he smiled a smile that would make any girl melt. He parked and got out of the car.

“Dang, you look like an old bag lady.” Nate laughed as he walked up to me. I looked at him and started to cry again. He sat down next to me and crawled under the quilt. “Come on, baby. It can’t be that bad. Tell me what’s going on.”

So I told him.

Nate was quiet at first. Then he asked me, “Do you want me to beat up De Monte?”

I smiled and told him, “That won’t help Mom any. But it’s a sweet thought.” I sighed and added, “I just need a place to crash until I can figure out what to do next.”

Nate stood up and grabbed my purse for me. “Come on. Let me take you for a ride.”

“In that?” I said with disgust as I pointed at the station wagon.

He laughed. “You should be talking! Have you seen yourself?”

I stuck out my tongue and followed him. Once I was sitting next him in the wide front seat I asked, “Where’d you get this piece of junk?”

Nate laughed. “Guy down the street sold it to me for two hundred cash. Said he needed the money bad.” I

frowned. He glanced at me a minute. “Don’t worry I’m going to use it down at the shop. The guys and I are going to use its parts or I may turn it into something amazing myself.” I rolled my eyes. I couldn’t quite see a pimped-up Chevy station wagon. “You’ll see.” He smiled and reached over and touched my leg.

His warmth made me relax. I leaned my head against his shoulder as we spent the day riding around in his car. By evening Nate parked in a dark spot near his apartment. I spread my quilt out in the back. The seats went down and made a huge space. We giggled and snuggled. One thing led to another. It wasn’t my first time with Nate. In fact, it was part of who we were as a couple. In fact, it was all we were as a couple.

Nate invited me to stay with his family until I could work things out with Mom. Mr. and Mrs. Boyd weren’t too happy with Nate bringing me home. He had two younger brothers that shared a room with him. This meant I got the couch. But Mrs. Boyd smiled the best she could. I could stay. But only a few days.

It was Wednesday. School started Monday. I told myself that not much could happen in a few days.

CHAPTER 3

Emergency Item

“Crap!” I shuffled through my bag. I had a towel wrapped around me. The morning shower had felt good. But my relaxed feeling was leaving me. I was in a panic. The bathroom was small, so the pile of objects I was pulling out of my bag started to look like a small mountain on the tiled floor. I stood still looking at my emergency items. Why I didn’t think of my birth control pills is beyond me.

I slowly picked up my clean underwear, jeans, and T-shirt and got dressed. I would give Mom a couple of days to calm down, and I would swing by to pick up a few items. Like my pills. A couple of days couldn’t hurt. At least that’s what I told myself. I was so wrong!

CHAPTER 4

Quick Fix

I've got to run by and see if I can get in the house." I was snuggled up against Nate. I was getting used to the old-car smell. I had spent the last two days listening to his ideas of how he would fix up the car. It was clear he wasn't going to break it down for parts. Talking about the car meant I didn't have to talk about Mom or De Monte. At first I wished Nate had asked me more, but he didn't. I told myself this was good. Now I dreaded bringing it up again.

"What for?" he asked as he turned a corner. We were a block away from Pine Street.

"Got to get a couple of things I forgot," I said, trying to make it sound like no big deal. Even though it had been two days, I figured if I grabbed the pills and took one I'd be okay. I didn't need to worry Nate.

"You think it's a good idea?" He sounded worried.

"If I'm right, De Monte will have his pawn shop open today, and Mom will be working at the beauty shop." I

smiled for a moment remembering Mom trying out new hairstyles on me before she showed them to her customers. I was the envy of all the girls. She may not have made much money, but she made her baby girl look good. I pushed away the lump in my throat. I would not cry.

“Okay, but be careful.” Nate pulled up slowly. The pawn shop sign was flickering on and off. He was too cheap to get it fixed. I looked out my window and saw De Monte behind the counter. He was shaking his head at an old man who was holding a vacuum.

“Good! He’s busy.” I smiled at Nate. He pulled around to the side of the building. It was a small alleyway with enough room for me to hop out. I grabbed my empty bag and ran up the stairs. I opened the door using my own key. I stopped for just a minute. The apartment was quiet, and the smell of home made me want to give in to my tears. I pushed them away again. I had to focus.

I ran into the small bathroom next to my room. I found the pills still neatly packaged. Small arrows pointed from one pill to the next. I stared at the two I’d missed. I pushed the first one through the wrapping and swallowed it. I shoved the rest of the pills in my bag.

I went into my room and grabbed a couple of my best jeans, some pretty tops, and my newest shoes. My favorite earrings were in a small box next to my bed, so I grabbed

them too. I had to go to school the next day and wanted to look good.

I suddenly heard the door slam. My heart raced. I ran out of my room to find De Monte standing between me and the door. He was breathing hard. “What are you doing here?”

I held up my bag. “Had to get a few things.” I tried to sound calm. But I could tell he saw my fear.

He walked up to me. “So you think you can break into my home and get away with it.”

“I didn’t break in.” I held up my key. “This is my stuff.” I was starting to shake.

He moved in close and looked me in the eye. I could feel his breath on my face. He’d been drinking again. I tried to stare back. But I looked away. I started to move around him when he reached for me. I hit his hand away before he could touch me. I dropped the key on the floor.

He cursed and was about to hit me when the door opened. “Are you ready to go?” Nate’s eyes were big. He didn’t look at De Monte right away. He didn’t want to challenge him. He knew De Monte would win. He finally looked up at the towering man. Nate smiled, “Hey, De Monte. What’s up?”

De Monte nodded and didn’t know quite what to say. So he grunted.

“Hear the shop’s doing well.” Nate was looking at De

Monte. But his arms were reaching for me. He was waving for me to head out the door.

I didn't wait. I ran. All I could hear was Nate yelling, "Good talking to you."

We jumped in the car. Nate drove away fast. We didn't speak until we reached an old parking lot that had belonged to a store. The store was gone, but the concrete was still there. Small tufts of grass were trying to push through and reclaim the space.

"Thanks," I whispered. I looked at Nate. I finally gave in to the tears. He pulled me close. I felt so safe. He kissed me. I kissed back. Soon we both didn't care if it was in the middle of the afternoon or not.

I thought for only a moment about the missed pills. Only for a moment. I had no idea that two missed days could make such a huge difference in my life.

2 Days

Sixteen-year-old Neema Powell was always the best-looking girl in school. But right now she was a wreck. Her mother's sleazy boyfriend was towering over her screaming, "Get out!" Her own mother wouldn't even look at her as she walked out of the apartment into the cold January day. Neema knew that Nate, her boyfriend, would take care of her. *I'll give Mom a couple of days to calm down.* But those two days made all the difference, and Neema must draw from somewhere deep for the inner strength she will need.



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LEXILE HL390L

ISBN: 978-1-61651-793-9

