

CUTTING
EDGE

Breaking Dawn

DONNA SHELTON

CHAPTER 1

I open my eyes to the sun shining brightly through my bedroom window. For a minute I am confused. Where am I? What day is it? One of those over-tired confusions that seem to come often lately. The warm sun on my face reminds me of summer; a sweet, warm day to walk barefoot in the grass. Then the heater starts up with a rattle, reminding me of the snow still sitting on the ground and the cold that refuses to break for spring.

The way my pillow billows up softly around my head and my oversized quilt rests heavily over my body should have brought me some comfort, like those times when I would get a cold and have to stay

Breaking Dawn

in bed, missing school and sleeping the day away. Nothing seems to comfort me any more. I don't seem to feel much of anything any more. I am numb.

The numbers on my clock radio roll over to 6:00 a.m.—the radio blares some new rock song through half-blown speakers. I close my eyes—I'm just not ready.

Footsteps shuffle down the hall, stopping abruptly at my door. A quick rap of knuckles against the wood then Mom pops her head in, and like every school day since preschool she chimes, "Rise and shine, time for school!" And like every time before, I lie in bed and wait for her to repeat this ritual at least three more times before I finally drag myself out of bed.

A familiar song grabs my attention. The strum of an electric guitar followed by an angelic orchestra and the soft voice of Paul Humphrey singing "If You Leave." There's a gentle tingling sensation in my head—a memory, *Pretty In Pink* with Molly Ringwald and Annie Potts, a 1986 classic teen movie. Perry and I must have watched that movie

a hundred times. Although we were born in the 90s, we loved the 80s and everything about it.

Perry. Oh God, Perry...

“That’s us in a few years,” Perry says during the scene of Molly Ringwald and Annie Potts working in the record store, listening to music and gabbing on the phone.

Perry hops into bed with me and puts his arm around my shoulders for a quick squeeze. “Working with my girl, listening to music, doing what we want and getting paid for it. That’s how I see us.”

Perry thinks that it would be cool to work at a music store. Sometimes I think that is his only ambition. Sure, it’s nice to fantasize about working together and having fun, and perhaps that would be a great job to have during the summer; but I have always wanted to go to college and make something of myself. I know

Breaking Dawn

Perry doesn't have the options I have and I definitely know that with his grades he has no chance of winning a scholarship, so if working at a record store is his dream job, I just let that be.

Most parents would have a problem with their daughter having a boy stay the night. Especially when that boy spends the night in the same bed as their daughter. But my parents know that Perry is special. Since first grade, Perry and I bonded almost instantly. Perry isn't like the other boys. He doesn't like boy stuff. Perry comes from a broken home and at my house Perry is accepted for who he is. I think my parents mostly take pity on him because he really has nowhere else to go.

Perry's mom is nice in those rare times when she's sober, but his dad took off when he was barely out of diapers. His mom often brings men home, some are one-night stands, some stay for a week or so. But none are substitute parent material. Perry is always telling me that his mom would be better off without him. Since she never calls

to check up on him or have him check in with her, I think maybe she thinks she'd be better off without him too.

When we met, Perry and me, I was this shy, skinny little twig of a rich girl with no friends and Perry was a feminine poor boy who would distance himself from others because he was afraid of what they would think of him. Most of the nice clothes in his wardrobe were given to him by me and my parents on birthdays and at Christmas. Our gifts are the only ones he ever receives. Perry is like my brother.

The song fades out and Mom pops her head in the door again. "Come on, Dawn. You can't lie in bed all day."

Can't I?

I stretch my arm over to hit the button on the clock radio. I hate the song coming on next and the DJ is just too damn chipper. Why can't they play Expose's "End

Breaking Dawn

of the World” or Tiffany’s “All This Time?”
Something to fit my mood.

I pull my covers away from my weary body and force my legs over the side of the bed. The cold wood floor barely tingles my bare feet. But like a robot, set on autopilot, I have a morning routine to suffer. My therapist says that with each passing day it will all get better. It’s been two weeks and the only thing that has changed is me running out of tears. I just can’t cry any more.

I randomly grab some clothes from my closet, not even caring if they match, and get dressed. Now comes the tricky part—brushing my teeth and my hair without looking into the mirror. I still can’t face myself. With a brush, I stroke my hair back to the nape of my neck where I tie it back with a rubber band. Simple enough. I run the water for my toothbrush with a small dab of paste and stare down into the sink, watching the water swirl down the drain as I brush the morning breath out of my mouth.

Afterwards, I go to the kitchen, where Mom has breakfast on the table; a few eggs, pancakes and some toast. My stomach grumbles as I sit down in front of my plate. Normally I would clean my plate in a matter of minutes while gabbing away about my latest escapade with Perry. Normally.

“Eat something, Dawn,” Mom says. “You can’t afford to lose any more weight. You’ll disappear.”

I can’t remember the last time I ate. My therapist tells me that if I eat, I’ll have more energy to recover. I pick up a slice of buttered toast to take a small bite. The texture is foreign in my mouth and when I swallow, it hits the bottom of my empty stomach like a rock. I want to vomit. I take a glass of water and sip on it. I should at least keep my body hydrated. Mom sits down across from me with her own breakfast, and every now and then I catch her glancing across the table at me. I nibble on the toast a little more, more for her sake than my own.

Breaking Dawn

A horn sounds outside the house. The bus is early today. I am in a hurry to get away from the food and Mom's sad eyes. I grab my parka off the chair and my bag from the floor and head for the door, juggling my bag as I slip on my parka. Before Mom can catch up with me, I step out the door into the cold and make my way down the freshly shoveled pavement to the curb.

The bus opens its doors. The driver looks at me indifferently as I clamber up the stairs, freezing in the aisle as the other kids stare and quiet down. Dozens of eyes are on me, watching me, judging me. I want to turn and run back down the stairs. I want off this bus. And as if the driver could read my mind, the door slams shut. I am trapped. The bus jumps to a start. Nearly every seat is taken as I work my way down the narrow aisle, feet clearing the way, bags being moved into open spots next to the passengers to maintain a single occupancy of a seat. I walk past Brian Kane, averting my eyes as he moves his bag aside to make room for me. I walk on past him. Brian is on the bus early this morning. Normally he is one of the last stops made

before school, unless he has spent the night with his friend Gary.

Behind me the whispers rise. I hear my name, but I don't react. I hear Perry's name and I keep walking to the back of the bus, as far as I can get from the occupied seats. I just want to sit alone.

I slump down onto the cold, vinyl seat. I can still feel eyes on me. I don't want to be here. Oh God, I just don't want to be here. I'm not ready to go back to school and just continue with my life.

I want to disappear. Stop looking at me. Everyone just stop looking at me!

I stare out of the windows, concentrating on the world passing by one block at a time, watching the short lines on the road become one long continuous yellow line. I don't want to think about Perry—I just want a distraction from the prying eyes.

But Perry is rarely out of my thoughts. Perry was always among the first group

Breaking Dawn

of kids to be picked up in the morning and he would always save me a seat. We would talk, laugh and joke; we had our own language for our own little world. No one else mattered but us. Perry made me feel alive, special and pretty. I felt like a somebody when we were together. How did things get so awful?

It's the week we returned back to school after the Thanksgiving break; there is Perry waiting for me on the bus, all excited and all smiles.

“Guess what I heard?” Perry grabs my arm to pull me close and whisper in my ear. “Brian and Gary were talking about you in the locker room yesterday.”

I can feel myself blushing. I'd had a crush on Brian Kane since fifth grade, but I never thought he knew I existed.

“Is this good or bad?”

Perry smiles and whispers again, “Brian was talking about asking you to the Christmas dance.”

“And you knew this yesterday and didn’t tell me?”

I playfully punch him in the arm. Perry laughs and points out the window as the bus is coming to a stop. Brian is on the curb waiting to board the bus. Brian Kane is beautiful. Tall, blond and handsomely built, and a football player. The best player on the team as far as I am concerned; and the best looking. I can count a dozen girls who would kill to date him. Popular and pretty girls. I never thought *I* had a chance. Let’s face it; I am a twig with barely any breasts and long stringy hair. Not exactly a great catch. But Perry always tells me I am the most beautiful girl he’s ever seen.

I watch Brian as he boards the bus and walks down the narrow aisle, smiling and nodding. He seems to know everyone. Perry deliberately busies himself with his bag as Brian approaches, then the bus jumps