

His filthy hand clasped around my mouth, and began to drag me backwards. My brain hardly began to process what was happening, but I flailed my limp arms and legs, clawing at his callused hand viciously. His grip tightened and I was hungry for air, trying to breath the little I can through my nose. I desperately scanned the back of the school for anyone to call for help, but everyone was still in their classes. My vision then began to go blurry. Hastily, I felt down in my pocket, patting around for my phone. The knot in my stomach was pulled tighter: it was in my locker. A startling stop flew me into a nearby car. I felt my body get thrown into the messy back seat. Cigarette boxes littered the floor, and beer bottles clanged around my ankles. My eyes widened with fear, my body was drenched in a layer of sweat, and my heart was pounding in and out of my body. I knew I had to face the reality- I was being kidnapped.

. . .

I shoved my way through the throngs of people, Liana's locker in my view. I pushed pass a group of gossiping girls, and slouched against the cold, blue, metal. "Where's Liana?" I thought, "She wasn't in World History..." I rapped my fingers on the metal, wondering where she could be.

A buzz from Liana's phone awoke me from my daze. I clicked her locker combo in: 25-11-09. Pulling up the handle, an avalanche of papers came tumbling down. Startled faces turned my way, but I waved them away, not caring if I embarrass myself. In the back, I saw her sparkling turquoise phone case, and snatched it with my hand.

The text was from her Mom telling her that she would pick her up in the back of the school. But, I saw another wandering text towards the bottom of her phone. It read, "Come to the back of the school at two. You have a dentist appointment. My contacts got deleted. Sorry! -Mom

"What?" I gasped softly. That text definitely was not from Mrs. Cander, but who was it from then? Boatloads of questions rushed into my head at once, but one was bolder than the rest; where's Liana?

I nearly slipped on the icy concrete, sprinting out to Mrs. Candor's white Audi. I ran up and banged my fist against the window. She cheerfully waved her manicured hand and rolled down the icy glass.

"Hi Peyton. Do you need a ride?"

"Mrs. Candor!" I blubbered breathlessly, "Liana's missing! I don't know where she is! I found this unknown number on her phone!"

Mrs. Candor darted her eyes at the text and back to me, glazed pupils staring straight into mine.

"Oh my..." Mrs. Candor cried, "Peyton call the police!"

...

The ride was silent except for the hum from the car and my heaving sobs. After what felt like hours, we halted in front of a dingy apartment building. We were far from town and graffiti and scum covered the street like a sheet. For the first time of the car ride, I glance up at the man's face. His square, rigid head was home to black, emotionless eyes, and a scruff chocolate brown beard, gray hairs poking through the chaotic mess. His face was a stranger in my eyes, but my mind recognized him. I saw this man before, but where?

The click of the car unlocking the doors rang through my head breaking up my thought. The man pushed himself out of his seat and hastily, came around to my door. He grabbed me vehemently and threw my body out. "Don't make a sound," I heard him grumble. He slid his muscular arm down and grasped my hand casually. We strolled through the graffiti door just like old friends.

The lobby consisted of a wobbly desk, a chair in the corner, moths eating its stuffing, and peeling wallpaper. He half dragged me along the gray carpet blotched with numerous different colored stains, my watery eyes mashing them together.

"Hey David, who's this you got with you?"

The bass voice from the corner, stopped David and I well in our tracks.

"This uh... is my niece...Liana." David sputtered.

My heart stopped and started for a split second. How the heck does he know my name? The man, who asked David, most likely the manager of the run down building, waved his hand in a 'you're good' gesture. His worn down plaid shirt was cuffed again and again, and a cigarette dangled from his cracked lips, lolling around his mouth. Heavy lids on his eyes slowly shut and David began to drag me once again.

We entered a dark lit stairway towering up five floors. I tried to slip my hand away from his grip but he only held on tighter. When David reached the third floor, he kicked open the door exposing a short hallway of rooms. Trash littered the ground and I hopped around it, not wanting to know what was lying below me. I could feel David glaring at me, but I stared at my Converse, not wanting to look into his beady eyes full of nothingness.

At the fourth door on the right, David fumbled with a rusty key, until the decaying door groaned, reluctantly inviting us in. David nudged me and I shuffled towards what looked like our basement after my sister had an outrageous party. David's commanding voice called from behind me "Sit." Obediently, I did. My eyes glance around the room, scouting for anything that can help me escape. My eyes fell upon a colorful picture under a mountain of last month's new papers. David was in the kitchen, and I was curious to know what was so joyous in this man's dismal life.

I tip toed over to where the picture laid, and plucked a bent corner of it. My mind instantly went fuzzy as I saw the three people in the photo. Two happy, young parents lay on a pink picnic blanket, laughing at their child rolling in the grass. The parents were my Mom and David... Spots started to cloud my vision as I peered at the baby in the picture. That little girl, dancing around in polka-dot overalls...was me.

"What do you think you're doing?" David's voice boomed from the kitchen.

"I-I..." darkness spilled into my view, and my mind slipped away like sand in open fingers.

...

I tapped my foot vigorously on the ceramic tiles of the police station. My eyes were glued to the ground, a small puddle of tears glistening off the linoleum.

"Maria Candor, the police are ready to see you."

Mrs. Candor's sobs slowly broke up and she rose up, wiped her nose, and walked into the roomy office, shutting the door behind her.

I cursed under my breath, wishing I went in and tried to catch some of the phrases being said.

"Kidnapped... By David!" I heard Mrs. Candor cry out.

"David? Who's David?" I thought out loud.

The click of the door handle arose my thoughts, and I hastily gathered up my belongings and greeted Mrs. Candor.

"Mrs. Candor! Who's David...?" I stammered.

She looked up at me with glassy eyes and exhaled a sigh full of sadness.

"David is Liana's father... When she was two, he began developing a drinking problem. He gambled most of our money and left me hopeless with baby Liana."

My lips circled into a big, round, *O*. Liana never talked about her father, but why would he kidnap her?

"I got threats from him for years, saying he wanted to take Liana, but I never thought he would actually do it!"

Her face said she was angry, but her eyes were brimming with sadness. Knowing that there was nothing I could do, I took her hand gently and hoped for the best.

...

I jolted a wake to the sound of a cackling ACDC CD. David's eyes glanced at me for a second, but went back to observing a shiny, black object.

When my eyes focus, my breathing stopped, for it was a revolver. From its glistening outside, I could tell it was brand new.

"I won't hurt you unless I have to." David proclaimed. But, would my own father really hurt me?

I coldly turned my head back into the pillow, wishing I could disappear into its darkness...

My head felt as if it was getting torn off. A jumble of voices and figures made my head spin. I recognized my Mom and Peyton in the back of the room, trying to break through the wall of men sporting gold badges on navy uniforms. Right on my temple, I felt a circular cold device. My eyes rounded as I quickly remembered David has a gun.

“You move, I shoot!” he bellowed out. I struggled to pry his fingers away from my red neck, but they held on tight. One of the officers took a baby step forward onto a ripped TIME magazine. David’s hands shifted on the gun, and I heard my Mom gasp.

“Please David! Don’t kill her. Kill me instead!” she squeaked between sobs.

“No!” I commanded. I wouldn’t let her be harmed because of me.

Then...one, two, three and my life changed forever.

One, an officer stepped forward and David shot him three times, a man being painted red in front of me.

Two, the other officers charged David, as he tried and failed to shoot as many as he can.

Three, David’s grip loosened and I felt his hand slowly slipping away. His shirt stained with burgundy, spreading out on his tan ripped tee shirt. Beneath the screams, I could hear David whisper, “I love you” and he fell to the floor.

I could hear my blood pulsing through my heart, my lungs heaving struggled gasps of air, and my knees knocking together loudly.

I looked around at the scene that laid before me; the officer who charged David, laying motionless forever, surrounded by his friends that won’t be able to cherish anymore memories with their lost companion. David crippled on the ground, his eyes still staring up at me with hollow pupils. And, my Mom and Peyton, their mouths struggling to voice words that couldn’t begin to describe their feelings.

I plowed passes the trash and the crowd that stood around David’s apartment and ran. Silence isolated me, even though screaming voices called my name desperately. The words ‘I love you’ echoed through my head as I ran down the flights of stairs, sprinted through the lobby, and collapsed on the sidewalk.

From that day on I knew I would never be that popular girl at school, I would never be the star athlete, or the girls all the boys love. No matter who judged me, they would

never know the burden I carry on my shoulders every day, and the memory I locked up inside me forever. But, I still live my life with hope, knowing the father I never knew loved me forever.