

The Undead Heart

For my niece, Bev, for whom I wrote this book series for.

For my Dad, Sandy Rogers, who turned me into a book worm.

For my brother, Shane, “He who dies with the most money wins!”

My thanks to my Mom for a lifetime of encouragement.

My eternal love to Rita Jackson for giving me *my* Richard (I know, “No refunds, No returns!”).

All my thanks and love to Becky Goppert, my best friend and editor, I couldn't have done this without you!

And for all my kids: Charley, Tommy, Harley, Potter, Bruce, Wes and Darian. I love you all!

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They had put her out of the house. She was so mad that she decided to go for a walk before putting her things in the car. If she didn't walk off some of this anger, she was going to end up throwing her own stuff! She was three blocks away from the house when she heard growling. She looked out into the street and saw a huge German Sheppard stalking towards her. Her first thought was to run, but she knew if she ran that the dog would chase her down.

She backed slowly away from the approaching dog until she bumped into the fence behind her. She looked back and saw that the fence was eight

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feet tall. She wouldn't have a chance of getting over it before the dog jumped on her.

"Damn it!" she screamed when the dog lunged at her.

She threw up her arms to guard her face and caught a blur of movement from the corner of her eye. She looked through her arms and saw a pair of hands catch the dog's head in midair and crush it. No, that couldn't be possible. Could it? When she lowered her arms, she found '*The Man*' standing in front of her.

"Good evening," he said.

It was too much, and for the first time in her life, she passed out.

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CHAPTER ONE

1

Rebecca Stockdale was seventeen years old and today was her High School graduation. She was only at the graduation because her sister Bev had insisted on it. She took a deep steadying breath as she grudgingly filed out onto the stage and took her seat among the rest of her graduating class. When she looked out into the audience she was shocked to see what she had come to think of as 'The Man' sitting in the second row. She had not seen 'The Man' since she was twelve years old!

2

Beck (as Bev called her) had always been an unusual child. She had always been pretty, with long red hair and bright green eyes. Unfortunately, she had also always been an abnormal child. She had been born with the ability to see ghosts and had occasional dreams of the future. She had also been born with a slight electrical problem. If her emotions were running high she was prone to blow out light bulbs and appliances in her home. Her parents had removed all of the carpet from the home when she was three years old to cut down on the level of static electricity.

She had gotten her first real beating from her father when she was only five years old.

They had gone to a family reunion, and she had told her aunt that she'd had a dream that she was going to die soon. When her aunt had died a week later, her father had beaten her, screaming it was all her fault. For years afterwards, she had believed that she had actually killed her aunt.

When she was seven, she'd told her second grade teacher during class that her house was going to burn down. When it had burned to the ground a few days later, all the kids either became afraid of her or made fun of her. The few friends that she had had wouldn't speak to her anymore. Over the years it had only gotten worse. All the kids called her a witch or a freak, among other things. Even her own parents hated her!

In public they pretended to love her, but she knew the truth. She had also been born with the ability to sense or 'read' peoples emotions. Bev called her a human lie detector. Bev had grown to hate their parents for the way they treated Beck. Charles and Lisa Stockdale were cruel parents who only cared about how things looked to other people. Outside the home, they acted like normal parents.

Inside the home, they were quick with a punch or an insult. They never hit Bev, but Bev hated them anyway.

Beck knew that her abnormalities embarrassed her parents. She also knew that they wished she had never been born...or that she was dead.

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They had never come right out and said it, but she knew that it was how they felt.

Several times she very nearly obliged them. When she was seven years old, they had gone to see the 4th of July fireworks at the river in her home town of Clarksville, TN. No one had been paying attention to her, and she had wandered to close to the edge of the dock they were standing on. Her feet had left the dock, and she was going over the edge when an arm grabbed her around the waist.

She hadn't known how to swim at the time and probably would have drowned if she had fallen in. She had already started to cry when he set her back on her feet. He'd squatted and turned her towards him.

"Shh. It's alright. You're safe now," *'The Man'* had said. She could feel love, affection, and relief coming from him, but didn't know why.

"Beck, come on, the fireworks are about to start," Bev called to her.

She only turned her head for a second to look at Bev, but when she looked back *'The Man'* was gone. She looked around but didn't see him anywhere.

"Where'd the man go?"

"What man? You know you're not supposed to talk to strangers," Bev said sternly.

Even though Bev was only ten at the time, she was far more maternal than their mother was. She would have told her about almost falling in the water, but the fireworks had started. She was only seven years old and by the time the fireworks had ended the incident had slipped her mind.

She was nine years old when she saw *'The Man'* again. Bev had started Junior High that year and wasn't able to walk her to school anymore. She had been crossing the street that day, by herself, two blocks down from the crosswalk on Crossland Ave. She knew if she crossed the street at the crosswalk with the rest of the kids that they would call her names and make fun of her the rest of the way to school.

She had been thinking about a test she was supposed to have that day and hadn't looked up before she stepped out into the road. She heard a horn blare and looked up in time to see a car skidding down the street at her. She wanted to jump back onto the sidewalk, but she couldn't make her body move. Right as the car was about to hit her, someone grabbed her arm and slung her out of the road. She looked up and saw *'The Man'* standing beside her, holding on to her arm.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

She tried to answer him but could only nod her head.

"You must be more careful, Little One." he said. "Calm down, close your eyes and take a deep breathe," he instructed her.

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When she had done what he said, she opened her eyes and he was gone. She stood there on the sidewalk for several minutes in shock. She knew it had been the same man that had saved her from falling in the river, she just didn't know who he was. She knew that she wasn't going to tell anyone about him though, not even Bev. She felt like he was her secret.

She knew that whoever he was, he cared about her and didn't mean her any harm. She'd had to run the rest of the way to school so she wouldn't be late.

On her twelfth birthday, her Grandma Cora had given her a bicycle. She had never ridden a bicycle before and didn't know how. Her parents had said that they were too busy to teach her and that she was going to have to figure out how to ride it on her own. She knew that 'busy' was what they said when they didn't want to be around her. When it came to her, they were always 'busy'.

She knew Bev would have taught her how to ride, but she wasn't home. Bev had started playing the flute in the school marching band and had been at a football game that night. So after dinner she had taken the new bike out to give it a try, thinking '*How hard could it be?*' She got on the bike and started peddling. She made it a sum total of one block down the street before she found out '*how hard it could be*'.

She was going too fast and squeezed the hand brake too hard causing the bike to flip over and slam her hard on her back onto the concrete sidewalk. The impact had knocked the wind out of her and she had not yet gotten her breath back when '*The Man*' had lifted the bicycle off of her.

"Little one!" he said in a panicked voice.

She still couldn't take a breath and felt as if she was going to die. He ran his hands up her legs, over her ribs, and up her neck. When he lifted her slightly off the ground to run his hands down her back, her breath came back in a giant whoosh.

"Can't breathe", she gasped, waving her hands above her chest.

"Look at me." he said. She forced her eyes up to his. "Do what I do."

Taking her hand and placing it on his chest, he started taking slow deep breaths. She copied him, taking deep breaths and holding them for a few seconds before releasing them. She could feel his cool skin through his shirt, which she later thought was strange since it was the middle of July and had been at least 100 degrees outside.

"Better?" he asked when she was breathing more normally.

"Yes," she said, looking at his face, "You missed me this time," she added, feeling his fear recede.

"I noticed that," he said with a deep laugh. "I was unaware that this was going to happen. How do you feel?" he asked, helping her to her feet.

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“Fine, I guess. My bike isn’t so good, though,” she said pointing at her bent front wheel. “I’m going to get whipped for that, for sure.”

“Your parents shouldn’t hit you,” he stated angrily.

She had felt too comfortable with him and had said more than she had meant to say.

“It’s okay. It’s not a big deal,” she said quickly.

“It is to me,” he said quietly. He turned her bike right side up and handed it back to her.

“Take your bike home and don’t tell your parents about it until tomorrow. You have suffered enough pain for one day.”

“Okay. Thank you for helping me,” she said.

“You are most welcome,” he said, smiling at her.

He’d had an accent like ones she had heard before on television and she had really liked it. She had only walked a couple of steps towards her house before turning back to ask him his name, but he was already gone. She took her bike home and hid it in the shed.

When she’d gotten up the next morning, she had found her bike in the backyard. It had a brand new wheel on the front. She would not see ‘*The Man*’ again until her high school graduation.

3

Looking at him in the audience now, she knew that something was wrong. Looking back to when ‘*The Man*’ had saved her from falling into the river, she would have guessed him to be about 27 years old, and she had been seven. When he had saved her from being ran over, she’d been ten and still too young to notice his age. It wasn’t until she was twelve years old and had crashed her bike, that she had noticed how nice looking he was.

He had been roughly 6’5” with muscles perfectly proportioned for his body frame. He had light red hair that he wore in a ponytail down the back of his neck and green eyes so light that they were almost yellow. She had noticed how old he looked then but hadn’t really thought much about it. Now it was ten years since the first time she had seen him, and he hadn’t aged a single day. No, that couldn’t be possible. She looked at him again now.

He had almond shaped eyes, perfect cheek bones, and very pale skin. He was a beautiful man. And he was a man who had obviously *not* yet reached thirty years of age. If she was right about his age, then he should be around thirty-seven years old, and he *definitely* was not.

She looked away from him and tried to think of something else. She thought about graduating today. She was graduating at the top of her class and had had no problem getting accepted to the college of her choice. Her

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parents were to ‘busy’ to come to her graduation, but Bev was there, and she was more stoked about Beck graduating than Beck was herself.

In four short months, she would be heading to Duke University to study Parapsychology. She had always been curious to find out why she was like she was. She was hoping that at Duke, she would finally find some answers. She wasn’t expecting to have all of her questions answered, but at least some.

Like why she was seeing a ghost right now.

She had seen him her whole life. Every few months he would appear, hang around for a bit, and then vanish again. He was of medium height with short dark hair, blue eyes, a muscled body, and a mischievous smile. He nearly always had a smile.

He was standing in the back of the audience now, waving at her. She wiggled her fingers at him, acknowledging that she saw him, and he smiled again. He was not the only ghost she had ever seen, but he was the only one she had seen on a regular basis. She had never minded seeing ghosts. They had never scared her like they did most people.

She had never seen a ghost covered in blood or burned. Her theory for that was that she saw ghosts the way that they remembered themselves. If they *did* remember themselves bloody, burned, or sick, they didn’t project themselves that way to her. To her, they looked like anyone else.

She had also never had a ghost speak to her, and she had never tried to speak to them. She liked it that way. She had been made fun of enough without walking around talking to invisible people.

She looked through the audience until she found Bev. It had been Bev that had forced her to come to graduation. She definitely wouldn’t have come if Bev hadn’t made her. Bev is three years older than her and a pre-law student at Austin Peay State University. Since Austin Peay was in Clarksville where they lived, it wasn’t hard for Bev to be at the graduation today.

She’d always thought Bev was beautiful. She was only 5’5” compared to Beck’s 5’8”. She had a perfect body and gorgeous hair. She had the same shade of red hair as Beck, but she could do so much more with it. She had pleaded with Bev not to make her go to graduation, but Bev would hear none of it.

“It’s the only high school graduation you’re going to get, and you are going. Now get dressed,” Bev said.

Once she was dressed, she could no longer put off leaving. She trudged out of the house behind Bev feeling as if she was heading to the gallows. Bev had held her hand for the whole drive to the school trying to reassure her that there was nothing to worry about.

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“It’s going to be easy. One quick walk, take the diploma, throw the cap, and you’re out of there,” Bev had said.

That was easy for her to say. Bev had always been popular in high school, while Beck still didn’t have a single friend. That was partially her own fault. As she had gotten older, she had never gone out of her way to make friends. Being around people made her nervous, and she didn’t like to be touched.

She didn’t mind being able to read peoples moods and emotions, but when someone touched her there was a transfer, and for a few seconds she actually felt the way they felt, and she didn’t care for that at all. She didn’t mind Bev touching her but that was about it. Except for ‘*The Man*’, of course, she had never minded him touching her, either.

She looked at him again and found him staring at her. The look he was giving her made her skin tingle; in some places more than others.

Who was this man to make her feel this way? What was he doing there anyway? Did he know someone here that was graduating? She looked around at the other students to see if she could guess which one he knew.

She jumped a little when she saw Alex Whitman sitting six seats down from her. She had only had sex once in her life. It had been with Alex Whitman, and it had been against her will.

4

She had been sixteen years old, and Alex was supposed to have been her first date. She hadn’t really known him and was shocked when he had walked up to her in the hallway at school.

“Hey, you’re Rebecca Stockdale, right?” he had asked.

“Um, yeah, that’s me,” she said.

“Hi, I’m Alex.”

“Yeah, I know who you are,” she had said shyly.

Everyone knew who Alex Whitman was. He had been the star of the school wrestling team and one of the most popular boys in school.

“I was just wondering if you wanted to go out with me Friday night? Maybe see a movie or something?” he had asked.

“Really?” she asked in shock. She had never been asked out on a date before.

“Yeah, really,” he had said, smiling at her.

“Um, yeah sure. I’d love to go.”

“Great!” he said. “Don’t you live in the big white house on Cumber St.?” he had asked.

“Yes,” she had said, surprised that he had known where she lived.

“Good. So I’ll pick you up at eight o’clock on Friday then?” he had asked.

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“Okay,” she’d said, and, still in shock, watched him as he had walked away down the hall.

After school, she had driven straight to Bev’s dorm and banged on her door.

“I have a date with Alex Whitman!” she’d shouted when Bev had opened the door. Bev screamed and started jumping up and down.

“With who?” Bev had asked excitedly.

“Alex Whitman,” she had repeated.

“Isn’t that the wrestler? The cute one with the blonde hair?” Bev had asked.

“Yeah, that’s him. We have a date Friday night,” she told her.

“I didn’t even know you knew him.”

“I don’t. He just came up to me today and asked me out.”

“Where is he taking you?”

“To a movie, I think.”

“Your first date!” Bev had squealed. “We have to celebrate! Let’s go shopping!” Bev had said, grabbing her purse.

In Bev’s opinion, everything should be celebrated by shopping and she had bought her a new skirt outfit for her date.

She almost hadn’t expected Alex to show up. She had never been on a date before and didn’t know how she was supposed to act. Was she supposed to hold his hand? Let him kiss her goodnight if he wanted to? She was waiting nervously on the porch when he pulled up.

He took her to see *The Mummy* and had tried to hold her hand during the movie, but she kept pulling away from him. She could feel that he was attracted to her. She could also feel that he was tense and jumpy, but there was another emotion that she couldn’t identify. She hadn’t liked it, and when the movie was over, she’d just wanted to go home.

“That was a good movie,” he said when they were back in his car.

“Yeah, it was. Thank you for taking me,” she had said politely.

“There is somewhere else I want to take you,” he said pulling out of the parking lot.

“I really rather you just take me home. I’m not feeling very well.”

It wasn’t a lie. The emotions that she was feeling from him were making her nauseous.

“Later”, he had said, not taking his eyes off the road as he turned onto a two lane road that led into the country.

“Take me home.”

“Not yet.”

She could feel the fear starting to crawl in her stomach. He had driven for ten minutes before pulling into the dark parking lot of an old abandoned

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building. She had known something was horribly wrong and reached for the door handle to get out of the car.

“Don’t,” he had said grabbing her arm.

“Please, just let me out!” she begged.

“Come on. You knew we were going to do this,” he said pulling her towards him.

“No. I don’t want to do this. Let me go!” she’d yelled and slapped him. She felt rage and hatred fill him, and he punched her in the face.

“What did you think I took you out for, you stupid bitch?!” he snarled and punched her in the face again.

“No, please! Don’t!” she had cried, trying to push him away from her.

“Stop fighting!”

When she kept pushing him, he had punched her three times in the ribs. She couldn’t breathe well enough to fight him much after that. He had reached over her and pulled the lever that laid the seat back. When he climbed on top of her, she had tried weakly to push him away again.

“I said stop it!” he had snapped at her and brought his fist down on her collar bone.

It had felt like she had been hit by a hammer, and she stopped moving. He had ripped her shirt open and undid the clasp on the front of her bra. She had lain as still as she could as he groped her breast.

“Nice, let’s see the rest,” he had said pulling her skirt up.

He tore her panties from her body and stuck his fingers inside her. She could feel a sick excitement running through him. He had slid his pants down and was rubbing himself on her leg as his fingers dug deeper insides.

“Ready?” he had grunted.

“No, please,” she’d begged him again with what little breath she could pull into her lungs.

He had ignored her pleas and, as he thrust roughly into her body, she had felt her flesh rip. He thrust harder and harder, and an agonizing pain stabbed through her as something inside her cracked. She wanted to scream but couldn’t draw enough breath. She had lain under him gagging on the blood that was running down her throat. He had reached up and wrapped his hand around her throat.

“Tell me how much you like it,” he had groaned.

She couldn’t talk through the pain and was terrified that he was going to kill her. She could hear him panting and feel his hot breath on her face. Some unknown time later, she felt him shudder. He rolled back over into the driver’s seat and pulled up his pants.

“That was as good as I thought it would be,” he had said.

All she could do was lay there and cry, completely helpless and ashamed.

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“If you tell anyone what happened tonight, I’ll kill you. I don’t want anyone to know that I fucked a freak like you, now get the hell out of my car.”

When she hadn’t moved, he had reached across her and opened the door.

“Remember what I said, bitch,” he had said and pushed her out of the car. He had thrown her panties out after her and drove away.

She didn’t know how long she had lain there in the dark before she was able to make herself get up. She had had to stumble three miles to get to the closest pay phone to call Bev’s dorm room. When Bev had answered, she had barely been able to tell her where she was. Fifteen minutes later, Bev had slid her car to a stop in the parking lot of the gas station that Beck had called her from.

“Oh my, God! What happened to you, Beck?!” Bev had screamed when she had seen her.

“Alex. He, he...” she had tried to say but couldn’t finish. She could feel blood running down her face and her thighs, and she couldn’t stop shaking.

“Let’s get you to the hospital. You can tell me what happened on the way,” Bev had said as she helped her gently into the car. On the way to the hospital, she had gasped out in little breaths what Alex had done.

“**SON OF A BITCH!**” Bev had yelled, speeding into the emergency room parking lot. “We’ll call the police when we get inside!” Bev had said while helping her out of the car.

“No! I don’t want to call the police,” she’d panted in pain.

“My ass we’re not calling the police! Look at what he did to you!” Bev yelled, pointing at Beck’s reflection in a hospital window. She had seen that she was covered in blood, bruises, and dirt. “You have a choice. We can call the police on *him* for what he has done to you, or you can let his family call the police on *me* when I kill him!” Bev had said, walking her through the emergency room doors. “We need help over here!” Bev screamed and a nurse had come running to them.

“What happened?” the nurse asked.

Bev had looked at her, and Beck had nodded her head.

“Call the police,” Bev had said. “We need to report a rape.”

The doctors had taken swabs of the fluids in her and x-rayed her whole body. She had had a broken nose, a fractured cheek bone, two cracked ribs, a broken collar bone, several tears in her vaginal wall, a bruised cervix, and a fractured pelvic bone. They had given her I.V. pain killers, and she had been talking to Det. Eaton when her parents came in.

“What is going on,” her mother had snapped when they came in the room.

“Alex Whitman raped Beck,” Bev had said and explained what had happened.

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“Thank you for coming Detective, but we won’t be pressing any charges,” her father had said.

Det. Eaton had looked up from the notebook he had been writing in. “Excuse me?” he asked in surprise.

“There has been a misunderstanding,” her mother had said.

“A misunderstanding?” Beck had asked.

“If you didn’t want to have sex with him, then you shouldn’t have gone out with him. You’re not going to put that poor boy in jail because you changed your mind later,” her father had said. Det. Eaton had looked at her parents like they were bugs.

“Changed her mind?! What is wrong with you?! That ‘poor boy’ broke six of her bones!” Bev had screamed.

“It’s her own fault, and we won’t have her humiliating us by taking this to court!” her mother had yelled at Bev.

“It is not up you, Ma’am. Your daughter is the one who was *clearly* attacked. It is up to her whether or not she wants to file charges,” Det. Eaton had said coldly.

“Do you want to press charges?” he turned back to her and asked her kindly.

“I do,” she had said, and he had nodded at her. She could feel that he was proud of her.

“You’re telling me that because she lies about being raped that we have to go to court?” her mother had yelled.

It was more than Bev could take and she reached out and slapped the hell out of their mother.

“I want her arrested,” her mother had screamed.

“For what?” Det. Eaton had asked calmly.

“For assault,” her mother had yelled.

“I didn’t see an assault,” Det. Eaton had said. Her mother’s mouth had fallen open in shock.

“What I do see,” Det. Eaton continued, “is you harassing a victim of a violent crime. If you don’t leave now, then I’m going to have to arrest you for interfering with an investigation. If I hear that you in any way badger this young woman after she leaves this hospital, then I will personally arrest you for obstruction of justice and tampering with a witness. Do you understand me?” Det. Eaton had asked.

“But she is our daughter,” her father had said.

“Not tonight. Now get the hell out of here,” Det. Eaton had said, and her parents had stormed out of the room.

“Thank you,” Bev had said.

“My pleasure,” he said. “I’m going to go file the charges and get a warrant for Whitman’s arrest. I’ll have him picked up within the hour.

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You are doing the right thing and don't let those people tell you any differently. Try to get some rest," he said and left the room.

5

"One year of probation?! You have got to be *shitting* me?!" Bev had screamed into the phone two months later. "Yes, I understand. I understand that I should have killed him myself instead of relying on you for any kind of justice!" Bev had screamed and slammed the phone down.

"Bad news?" she had asked. She had just walked in the house and only caught the end of the conversation. They had been waiting for the judge to

hand down a decision on the case, and it hadn't sounded as if things had gone well.

"We should have went with a jury trial," Bev had said.

They had foregone a jury trial and opted instead to have the case heard by a judge in a closed court. She had still had to take the stand and recount the events of the night of the rape just not in front of a whole courtroom full of strangers.

Only the people that had been involved in the case had been allowed in the courtroom. The D.A. had allowed Bev to stay in the courtroom as morale support for Beck.

"Why? What happened?" she'd asked.

"The D.A. accepted a plea agreement from the defense. Alex has pleaded guilty to Assault in the First Degree in return for the rape charge being dropped. He was given a two year suspended sentence and one year of probation. They dropped the restraining order. He can go back to school now, Beck!" Bev had told her.

She had sank slowly into a kitchen chair. "He won't spend any time in jail at all?" she had asked.

"None. Not one God damned day!" Bev had said utterly pissed.

"So, we did it all for nothing. Calling the police, going to court, it was all for nothing," she had said in a daze.

"I could tell you a bunch of bullshit about how you standing up for yourself will help some unknown girl in some unknown future stand up for herself, too. But that's all it would be; bullshit. Yes, we did it for nothing. I'll be back in a few minutes," Bev had said and snagged her keys off of the wall before heading for the door.

"Where are you going?" she had asked.

"Alex should be leaving the courthouse in a minute. I'm going to run over him," Bev had said, and Beck knew that if she didn't stop her, Bev would have done it.

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“Bev, no, don’t do it!” she yelled.

“Why not? He deserves to be punished, and the court is obviously incapable of doing it! He’s getting away with it, damn it!” Bev had bellowed.

“I know he is, but you being in prison isn’t going to help me.”

“I would be out in no time. He got a year of probation for beating, raping, and throwing you out of a car. That means I should get about three years for murder. I’d be out on parole in fifteen months,” Bev had said.

She had to smile at how Bev’s pre-law brain had worked.

“We don’t have that kind of luck. If you killed Alex, they would probably give you a lethal injection, electrocute you, and then hang you just to make sure you’re dead. Please, just let it go. For me,” she had begged.

“Fine,” Bev had said after a few seconds and tossed her keys onto the table. “What are we going to do about your school? He could be back at school as early as tomorrow. We could get you transferred to another school,” Bev had said.

“No, I’m not going to do that just because he’s there. I didn’t do anything wrong, and I’m not going to let him chase me away. I don’t have any classes with him anyway, so I won’t have to see him that much. I’ll just have to deal with it,” she had said.

“Okay, but I’m taking you to school every morning and picking you up every afternoon. If I see him say so much as a single word to you, I’m running him down,” Bev had said.

But she had had nothing to worry about. Alex Whitman never spoke to her again. She had walked past him a few times in the halls, and when she had been unlucky enough to catch his eye, he would flash an evil smile at her, but no more than that. When that happened, she had just looked in the other direction and kept walking.

6

She hadn’t realized that she had been staring at Alex until he looked over at her and gave her that evil smirk. She knew what that smirk meant. It was his way of telling her that he had gotten away with it. God, she fucking hated him! She snapped her head back around to the front and found herself looking directly at ‘*The Man*’ again, and he looked...*angry*? He looked slowly from her to Alex and back to her again. She had no idea what he looked so mad about, but she knew it was somehow about her.

She tore her gaze from his and found Bev’s face in the crowd. Bev was glaring at Alex with murder in her eyes. Bev had never gotten over what

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Alex had done and how the law had failed them. Bev had wanted to drop out of law school after Alex's plea agreement, but she wouldn't let her do it. She knew that Bev had always wanted to be a lawyer and Beck hadn't wanted what had happened to take that away from her. Alex had taken enough away from them.

Bev had stayed at Austin Peay in pre-law but had lost all of the zeal she had once had for it. She glanced back at *'The Man'* and saw that he too, was glaring at Alex with hatred in his eyes. When her name was called, she took her diploma, threw her cap when it was time, and looked back out into the crowd. *'The Man'* was gone.