

Prologue

The thing about that day, it was beautiful. Sunny, clear. The leaves were changing and Hannah was mesmerized by the vibrant colors around her as she drove. It was the first day in six months she'd felt the inkling of joy come back into her soul. A glance in the rearview mirror revealed a blush to her cheeks she hadn't seen since... since losing the baby. It'd been unplanned, the pregnancy. She and Parker weren't expecting to be expecting. Sure, they'd been a couple for a few years and did almost everything together, but they didn't even live together. They certainly hadn't talked about anything more than the next concert or vacation they were going to take. They were having a good time. While the word love came easy, it was never followed by anything else.

So, when the second line appeared on the pregnancy test, all hell broke loose. They fought about it for weeks. They broke up. Hannah didn't want to be a mother but also didn't want to get an abortion. Adoption seemed the best choice, however, Parker refused to sign off on it. No child of his was going to be raised by strangers. Knowing how he liked to get fucked up in his free time, Hannah couldn't sign off on him raising the kid alone, either. But she knew she didn't want to be a mother.

A late night of cramping a few months into the pregnancy, followed by passing blood and tissue into the toilet the next morning, ended all that. A trip to the emergency room confirmed a miscarriage, and an invasive procedure to remove any remnants completed the chapter on the child that never was. Parker wanted to get back together, Hannah wanted to be left alone. She grieved for a child she'd never even wanted. In truth, maybe she was grieving for the part of her who'd come and gone. Either way, she hated Parker for it.

But that was six months ago and she'd moved on. Parker had a new girlfriend but still called Hannah drunk about once a week. She was the love of his life, he'd claim. She didn't care. Now, though, she was ready to seize the future. Not let anything, or anyone, determine who she was or what she'd do. It was October and for the first time in a long time, she didn't mind thinking about the days to come. She could put it all behind her and discover a new journey in her life. Nothing could take that away from her.

A song she loved came on the radio and she cranked it up as the cool breeze blew through her rolled-down window, causing strands of her golden-brown hair to fly around her. She tried to tuck her hair behind her ears but it whipped across her face. As she neared her street, she let her

hand drift just outside the car, catching the wind between her fingers as she brought the car to a stop. Oncoming traffic was thick and she glanced into her rearview mirror to make sure no one would rear-end her as she waited. The car behind her slowed and the woman inside sighed impatiently.

Hannah waited for a break in the traffic coming toward her in the other lane, so as soon as she saw even a sliver to slip through, she could hit the gas, feeling proud of herself for being so aware and brave. She saw her chance and bobbed her head to the beat of the music. She yanked the wheel to the left, pressing the gas to the floor to glide between a pickup truck and a blue SUV. However, she didn't glide.

See, about ten cars back behind Hannah, a couple of guys on motorcycles were waiting. They'd been out riding all day, raising a hand at other motorcyclists who passed. They felt invincible, part of a special club. After waiting for Hannah to turn, they decided they could cut around instead, seeing as their bikes were small enough to fit through. Nothing could stop them. As they neared Hannah's waiting car, one cut around the right of her, the other cut to the left.

To the left. Just as Hannah saw her opening and gunned her engine, turning her wheel hard to the left. To the left, as her car and the motorcycle collided. No, not just collided. As the motorcyclist saw what was happening, he tried to turn to avoid the collision, instead causing his bike to careen sideways and slide. Right under Hannah's wheels. The force of the wheels and the bike hitting each other created a slingshot, and the motorcyclist was catapulted across the asphalt into oncoming traffic.

The sound was horrific. Like a bomb of nails exploding. Cars, not able to avoid the accident, slammed into each other, strewing bits of rubber and metal everywhere. When it was all said and done, there were multiple injuries. Hannah was without a scratch. What remained of the motorcyclist was hard to say. Scraps of his colorful leather suit and parts of his body were scattered all over the highway.

Hannah climbed out of her car and stared blankly at the scene. People were getting out of their vehicles, stunned. The music was still blaring from her car as she walked toward the middle of the highway. With the sun glinting off of the crumpled metal and the strips of bright leather fabric, it almost seemed festive. Like a street carnival.

Her mind went back to the morning she saw the bloody pulp of tissue in the toilet. Now, seeing the bits of bloody pulp on the road caused a break in her mind.

She began to scream.