

*"Thanks to you, my heart is black.
You've pushed too far, I'm pushing back!
Fiery rage burns in my head, when I get done, you'll wish you're dead.
No more peace, now it's time for war!"
~ "When the Hammer Falls" Wicked Angel*

"Are you ready?" Hunter asked.
"As ready as I'll ever be." I said.
"OK, April? Are you coming?" Michelle asked.
"Yeah. I'm coming." April said.
"Then let's go." Harley said.
"Good luck Derek." Tiffany said hugging me.
"Thanks Tiff." I said hugging her back.
"Go get 'em man, you'll be fine." Chris said.
"You'll do great." Destiny said.
"Yeah, hang in there." Jesse said.
"Thanks guys." I said.
"You guys behave for Josh." Harley said.
"We always do." Chris said.
"Sure..." Josh said, "Don't worry, we'll be fine. Just focus on Derek. Good luck."
"Thanks Josh." I said as I followed the Bradleys and April. We loaded into Hunter's Durango and headed for the courthouse.
"Felicity is with Tommy right?" Hunter asked as we drove.
"Yeah, Kim picked her up this morning." Michelle said.
"OK. Derek, remember what we talked about, just stay cool and don't doubt yourself." Hunter said.
"I know." I said as April reached over and held my hand.
"You'll be fine." She said.
I smiled and squeezed her hand. I was so glad she was with me.

When we got to the courtroom I saw my parents. My father glared at me and my mother looked at me with a pained look. I took a deep breath.
"You'll do fine, just be strong." April whispered as she kissed my cheek. I hugged her and then went with Hunter to sit with the DA at the counsel table. Michelle, April, and Harley sat in the first row of seats in the public seating area.
"Good morning Derek, are you ready?" Mr. Adams asked.
"Yes sir, as ready as I'm gonna get." I said.
"OK, we present our case first. I'm going to call your mother to the stand then Hunter then the social worker that worked on this case then you. Is that ok?" Mr. Adams asked.
"I guess so..."
"Ok. The judge will be in here any minute."

April

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I watched Derek preparing for the trial. It reminded me of what I went through with Ed. Of course he never went to trial. The case was dismissed in the investigation stages.

*"Your honor, this case is erroneous, how can we take the word of a teenager who is nothing more than a prostitute over a man who has no past criminal record?" the defense lawyer asked.  
"What? Why do you think I ran away and had to sell myself? I was trying to escape him, that's why!" I cried.  
"April, that's enough. Your honor, my husband is a wonderful man and would never do anything like my daughter is suggesting. She's a drama queen that is trying to get attention." Mom said.*

*"How can you defend the man who raped your own daughter?!" I cried.*

*"That's enough April." Mom said.*

*"Your honor, there is no evidence that warrants taking this case to trial, this is obviously a case of a dramatic teenager. I feel it is this teenager that needs help. May I recommend sending her to alternative education school rather than juvenile hall." The lawyer said.*

*"What? What did I do to go to juvie?!" I asked.*

*"Prostitution is against the law in California." The lawyer said.*

*"I agree with you councilor. I recommend April Snyder spend the next 12 months at Starlight Academy, it's a new alternative education school that I believe will help her. The case against Ed Smith is dismissed." The judge said.*

*"NO!" I screamed.*

"April? Wake up, the trial is starting, are you with us?" Harley asked.

"What? Oh...yeah...sorry." I said snapping from my flashback. I watched as Derek's mom took the stand.

Derek

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I took a deep breath as my mother was sworn in. Somehow I didn't think she had any intention of telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I watched as the DA stood up and began to question her.

"Mrs. Hall, you are aware of the charges against you?" Mr. Adams asked.

"Yes sir." Mom said.

"Have you ever touched your son, Derek Hall, in any way that can be construed as sexual in nature?"

"No sir."

"Have you ever gone into Derek's room and forced him to undress?"

"No sir."

"You have never forced your son to engage in sexual intercourse with you?"

"No sir, I have not. He is my son, why would I do something so horrible?"

"Why would your son make up such accusations?"

"My son was brought up on drug charges and was sent to Starlight Academy instead of juvenile hall. It is my belief that in his therapy sessions that Derek was led to believe that I abused him and he now believes it to be the truth."

"Derek is 17 years old, it is uncommon for a young adult of his age to be led to any belief."

"Then he made this up to justify his drug use, I do not have all the answers Mr. Adams, I just know I would never touch my son in any sexual way."

"No further questions at this time."

I sighed, she lied through her teeth. The defense didn't cross examine so Hunter was called to the stand next and sworn in.

"Mr. Bradley, please explain a little bit about your school."

"I am one of the two head masters and owners of Starlight Academy. My wife, Michelle Bradley, and I set up this school to help troubled youth."

"Please define 'troubled youth'"

"There is no clear definition but generally speaking it is teenagers that have fallen off into a path of trouble, be it drug use, gang activity, or some other destructive behavior. Starlight Academy has various types of student from those who have been abused to those who have eating disorders. It varies student to student."

"And it is your job to council these students?"

"Yes. We try to dig into the source of the problem and help the student realize there is a better, non destructive way to handle their problems."

"And these counseling sessions are confidential?"

"Yes, unless there is some sort of criminal activity that we are required by law to report, such as child abuse, be it sexual or physical."

"Please explain how you came to discover Derek's accusations against Mrs. Hall."

"I could see Derek was not being open. He would try to dodge questions about his family life by either joking, using

sarcasm, or just not speaking at all. Finally, he opened up to one of his fellow students and told her that his mother had sexually abused him. With the encouragement and support of his classmate he came to me to specifically tell me his story.”

“And what did Derek say?”

“That his mother had forced him into sexual intercourse many times in the past several years.”

“No further questions.”

The defense attorney decided to cross examine this time.

“Mr. Bradley, is it possible that when you get a large number of so-called ‘troubled youths’ together that they start to concoct stories to ‘one up’ each other?”

“It has been known to happen on rare occasions.”

“Is it possible Derek made up this story to justify his drug use as Mrs. Hall suggested?”

“I suppose anything is possible but I highly doubt that is the case here.”

“And how did you come to this conclusion? Did you talk to Mrs. Hall or are you taking Derek’s word on it?”

“It is not my job to get both sides, I am not a social worker, my job is to listen to Derek and help him through this.”

“So there is no way you can possibly have an objective view on the situation.”

“Like I said, it isn’t my job.”

“No further questions.”

I sighed, I had a feeling this wasn’t going well. There was no hard evidence. I asked Mr. Adams if I could go take a walk during the social worker’s testimony. I needed air. He agreed. I went and sat outside the courthouse. April sat next to me a minute later.

“She’s gonna get off.” I said.

“No she won’t, you don’t know that.” April said.

“It’s my word against her’s and she’s a respected member of the community, they are making me look like nothing more than a druggie that belongs in juvie.” I said.

“We both know that isn’t true.”

“It doesn’t matter what we think. The jury is the one convicting her.”

“It’ll be ok Derek, it’s not over yet. You still have to testify...just be honest and I’m sure justice will be served. Now come on, I’m sure they’ll need you soon.”

“Ok...thanks for coming here April, I know this can’t be easy for you.”

“Hey, we’re friends. I’d do anything for you Derek.” She said hugging me.

I held her for the longest time. It felt so good to have her in my arms.

We finally went back into the courtroom, and not a moment too soon either, the social worker was stepping off the stand and I was called. I walked up and was sworn in. Unlike my mother I would tell the whole truth.

“Derek, can you please tell us your version of what you claim your mother did to you?”

“Yes sir, how much detail you want?” I asked.

“As much as you’re comfortable with sharing.”

“You asked for it.” I said as I took a deep breath. It was time for the jury to hear the whole horrid tale in graphic detail, detail that I couldn’t make up if I tried. It was time to tell the stuff I hadn’t even told Hunter. I closed my eyes and took another breath before opening my eyes and starting. “Well, each time was slightly different, but basically she would wait until late at night after my father was sleeping, usually between midnight and 2:30 in the morning. She would come in my room and wake me up, but she wouldn’t turn a light on. I had a small nightlight in my room, each room had one, and that’s how she would navigate. After the first few times I knew why she was there when she’d wake me up at that time. She would close my door and lock it then pull the top sheet and comforter off my bed so nothing covered me. She’d sit on the bed and reach her hand under my shirt, if I happened to be sleeping in one, other wise her hands would roam around my upper body. She would start kissing my neck then tell me to stand up. If I would refuse she’d slap me across the face. Once I was standing up next to the bed she would command me to take all of my clothes off so that I was naked then she would pull me back into the bed and pin me down. If I was being particularly obstinate that night she would tie me to my bed posts with a rope and undress me herself. Either way, once I was naked she would undress herself and climb on top of me. If I wasn’t tied up she would give me orders about what to do. Sometimes she would tell me to touch her breasts, other times she would want me to finger her or sometimes just French kiss her, I remember a couple of times she wanted me to perform oral sex on her. As I got older and fought her more I would end up tied up

more frequently and she seemed to enjoy performing oral sex on me. This is all what she considered foreplay. After that part was over she would lower herself onto me so that my penis penetrated her and we would have sexual intercourse. This would go on until she reached a climax, and she would always make sure I ejaculated, then she would get off me, get dressed, and clean me up and tell me to get dressed and then make my bed up and tuck me in before going back to her own room. During the day it was as if none of it ever happened, until the next time she decided she wanted me.” I finished. I was focusing on my breathing so I didn’t break down on the witness stand.

“Did this occur every night?”

“No, normally once every couple of month, unless my dad would go out of town, then she’d take advantage of it. She would make me sleep in her bed with her and it would go on all night, every night he was gone.”

“How old were you when this started?”

“The first time she did this I was only 9.”

“And it never stopped?”

“No.”

“Is this why you turned to drugs?”

“Yes. It was a way for me to cover up the pain.”

“Do you feel your time at Starlight Academy has helped you?”

“Yes I do. It’s made me stronger and more able to deal with life.”

“No further questions.”

I took a deep breath and braced myself for the defense attorney.

“Derek, your story is very graphic indeed, if it is true, as you say, why didn’t you every fight back? Especially once you were a teenager. You’re an athlete, surely you are stronger than your mother.”

“She scared me when I was a kid. She told me that if I ever told or tried to stop her then she’d...” I took another deep breath, “...that she’d make me pay.”

“What does that mean?”

“That she’s kill me, she showed me a gun one time. I was afraid she would shoot me if I ever fought too hard or told anyone.”

“Do you really believe that a mother would kill her own son?”

“She raped her own son didn’t she?”

“Derek, you were on a variety of drugs, including hallucinogens, is it possible this whole scenario occurred in your head while you were in a hallucinatory state?”

“No.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes! I’m sure! I know what happened!”

“Isn’t that the point of hallucinogens? It skews reality?”

I couldn’t speak because I felt myself losing control of my tears.

“No further questions.”

I stepped off the witness stand and a recess was called. Hunter hugged me.

“You did well. I’m proud of you.” He said.

“I don’t know if I can take it if she gets off.” I said crying.

“I know...you’ve done well though...you really got graphic in your account of things.”

“The jury needed to hear it.”

“You’re right, they did.”

“Where’s April?”

“She said she was going to get some air.” Michelle said.

April

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After seeing the way the defense was trying to discredit Derek I knew I had to do something. Ed might have gotten away but I wouldn’t let Mrs. Hall get away with what she did to Derek. I had to act fast. I talked to every cop in the building but they said there was nothing they could do. I had one last chance. I went to a pay phone and called Detective Scott. He was like Michelle’s brother and his partner, Detective Oliver was Michelle’s brother. After talking to

Detective Scott for a little while he agreed to help me. I caught a cab and went to go meet him a couple of towns away at Derek's house.

When I got there Detective Scott was already there with a search warrant. He had called in some favors to get it fast. "OK, let's see what we can find." He said as we entered the house. We did a lot of searching but hadn't found anything when I heard someone come in the house.

"Who are you?" A man asked me.

"April Snyder, I'm with Detective Scott, we're searching this house."

"For clues against Tara Hall? I think I can help. Let's chat." The man said.

We talked for awhile and the man agreed to come testify in court. Just as I was ready to give up hope of finding clues Detective Scott came out with a box that was locked in a safe. It was a locked box full of naked pictures of Derek. In some he was tied up just as he described in his story. A picture was worth a thousand words and we just found a locked box full of pictures. Between the new witness I had and this box there was no way Tara Hall would ever see the light of day again.

Detective Scott took me back to the courthouse and I found the DA. I explained my new findings to him and he thanked me for my help.

"Good work Ms. Snyder, I think we have this case all wrapped up."

"That's what I was hoping." I said as I went and sat back down.

Derek

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After the recess Mr. Adams said he had a way to wrap this case up but he didn't have time to fill me in before the judge came back in. I only had enough time to tell him 'do whatever it takes'. He nodded and stood up.

"Your honor, new evidence and a new witness has come up that I feel is vital to this case if you will allow it." Mr. Adam said.

"Very well Mr. Adams, I will allow it but it must prove to be vital." The judge said.

"Yes your honor. First I would like to call an additional witness to the stand."

"You may."

"OK, I call Mr. Derrick..."

'Oh great, me again, what else can I say?' I thought to myself.

"...Holmes to the stand"

'Derrick Holmes? Uncle Derrick?' I watched as he entered the courtroom and took the stand. He was sworn in. I was totally confused now.

"Mr. Holmes please tell us your relation to the defendant." Mr. Adams asked.

"She is my older sister."

"OK, now please tell the court why you have come here today and insisted on testifying."

"Because I feel that it would be unjust for a jury to make a ruling without hearing my story."

"Please tell the story you came here to tell us."

Uncle Derrick took a deep breath, "When I was 11 my sister was 16. From that time until the time she moved out when she was 18 she would periodically come in my room and force me to have sexual intercourse with her."