# Prologue

A faint sound–perhaps a whimper–echoes faintly in the background of my mind. Seconds, or maybe hours later, the sound returns, ringing annoyingly through my head. I’m desperate for it to go away. It takes a few more moments for me to realize the annoying sound is coming from my very own mouth. Something isn’t quite right, but I’m too unfocused to figure out what.

I wonder where I am as I mentally question what happened to me, but I’m groggy and confused. I feel dominated, trapped by the total darkness surrounding my mind. I can’t move, rendered motionless from my semi-conscious state on the hard, unfamiliar surface. It’s as if my brain can’t seem to process what I’m laying on, making me question my location, and how I even got here–wherever here is. Though I can’t seem to remember anything, deep down I know I’m not here by choice.

An urgent need to know my location is overpowering, as my brain finally registers the necessity of opening my eyes. If I could see my surroundings, then perhaps I’ll be able to recognize where I am. Taking a deep breath, I use what little strength I have to force them open. They barely budge. Defeat washes through me as I realize my eyelids are heavy, the simple task of opening them is impossible. *What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I move?*

Part of the problem is my head…my head is pounding, it hurts so bad. It feels as if someone’s taking a drumstick and beating on top rhythmically. Boom…Boom…Boom…If I bring my hands to my forehead, I could apply enough pressure that may disperse the pain. I try raising them, but my arms won’t cooperate. I can barely lift them off the ground. *Where did all my energy go?*

I’m not sure what to do next, because this pain isn’t leaving. I inhale a deep breath and hold it while reopening my eyes. A sharp pain darts straight across my head, landing right between them. It takes all my strength to not wince while closing them tight in hopes of helping, having little success.

Deflated, I lie perfectly still for a few more minutes, taking slow, even breaths. I begin to realize I have two options. Either continue to lay here without moving, or try to figure out what’s happened to me. After a few seconds of debate, I opt to go with the latter.

With yet another deep breath, I force my eyelids open as far as I can manage, trying my hardest to ignore the agony, but everything’s dark and blurry. Deep in my chest, a burning sensation emerges as if any minute the suppressed panic that has been simmering is going to burst out. I squeeze my eyes shut again, for the pain has become unbearable. Another soft whimper escapes.

Maybe I should just continue to lie still. Focus on something other than torment. Breathing…I need better control of my breathing, for it has accelerated to the dangerous level of hyperventilating. I keep telling myself to calm down and get a grip. Focus on taking slow, deep breaths. The more I breathe in, I realize, the more I’m nauseated. Ugh…That smell. It stinks of stagnant, damp air mixed with stale cigarette smoke. I force myself to pace my breaths anyway, cringing at the scent while the question of my location lingers in my mind.

My sense of hearing isn’t helping me figure anything out as I slowly begin to realize this quietness isn’t normal. It has an eerie presence about it. As I strain to recognize any noise that would hint at my location, I realize the audible sounds are coming from me. I need to remember what my last steps were. In an instant, my heart starts beating faster as pieces of last night flash through my mind. A guy. I remember a guy in a black coat, who appeared rather suddenly behind me.

It all comes flooding back, washing over me like a tidal wave, as I begin to remember…*I was leaving the mall last night, crossing the parking lot to get to my car. The sun had set, making the area seem more deserted and threatening than usual. The darkness made me regret my choice of parking in such a desolate area. Upon arriving, it didn’t seem bad, but as I was leaving, uneasiness stirred inside from being the sole person around. I decided to call my best friend, Kelsey, to keep me company as I walked across the blackened pavement. By the time we finalized our plans for the next evening, I had approached my car. With each closer step, my confidence had grown to the point of feeling secure enough to end our conversation.*

*While I stood there digging around my purse for my keys, I could hear Mom’s criticizing voice in the back of my head saying, “April, you should always be prepared.” Wanting to curse at her for constantly being right, I paused after hearing a shuffling sound coming quickly behind me.*

*Upon glancing up, I flinched as a reflection suddenly appeared in my car window. My heart rate spiked at the realization of being in trouble, for the image revealed a man wearing a long, black coat, standing directly behind me. Before I could do anything else, I found myself struggling with him as he quickly overpowered me. Although he was much stronger, I kept squirming to get out of his control. I defiantly opened my mouth to scream, but a cloth emerged from his hand, concealing my face. I tried not to breathe, knowing it would be too dangerous, but I couldn’t hold my breath any longer. As soon as I inhaled, a strong chemical odor engulfed my senses. An intoxicating heady scent enveloped me, making me unsteady as the ground started spinning below me. It didn’t take too long before I became weaker and weaker as I succumbed to the total blackness that overcame my body…*

A tingling sensation jolts through me causing me to shiver at the recall of that last memory. This snaps me back into the present, here and now…wherever here is. I want to cry, but that isn’t going to help me. I tell myself to be strong and find a way out of here. Try to escape. I keep repeating this to myself, like a *self-help* pep talk, but what I need to do first is move.

With my eyes fluttering, and body shaking, my brain registers that I’m cold. As I placed my hands against the floor, an understanding crosses my mind…I’m lying on a slab of cooled, damp concrete. *Why couldn’t I figure that out before?* Withmy cheek flat against the ground, I seem to be getting colder with each passing minute, now that I’m aware of it.

I need to get up; it’s the only way to get better, but lifting my head is impossible. It’s so heavy. All I can manage is to raise it a few inches off the ground. I swear an anvil is sitting on top of my shoulders, where my head should be. Giving up, I lower it back down and try reopening my eyes instead. The pain is persistent, refusing to go away, but I desperately try to ignore it. The only thing visual is blackness, but despite the pain they somehow manage to remain open.

As things slowly begin to come into focus, it’s a miracle I can finally see. After scoping my surroundings, my nose crinkles in disgust, doubting there are any miracles performed here. The eerie darkness of the room sends another shiver through my body as I lay here thinking that this definitely isn’t a place I would voluntarily come. This is a place I would instead run far away from.

My eyes close for a second to recollect my thoughts. Upon reopening them, they shift toward my left, noticing a faint light coming in from a small window. *Could it be morning already? God, how long have I been down here?* As I continue to stare at the window, a sensation of hope sweeps through me. Maybe, just maybe, it offers a way for escape. If I can figure out where I am, I might have a chance.

With all my strength, I endure the throbbing pain and somehow manage to sit. The dizziness hits as the room starts swirling around, forcing me to stay still. This spinning is making me queasy, as if I could throw-up. I make myself take slow, deep breaths in and out, in hope to ward off the nausea. Although the stale, foul air isn’t helping too much, the slow breaths calm my stomach. At least the pounding in my head has started to diminish.

As my body becomes adjusted to being upright, I glance back toward the window. I need to get over there. Inhaling deeply, I begin to stand. My legs shake badly, making every move more difficult. I keep my focus on the window, ignoring the tingling sensations shooting up my legs. I have to see out of that window.

I somehow manage to wobble over toward the filtered light. The lack of strength in my legs, along with the lack of visibility, is making me move slowly, but at least I’m moving. The faint light shining in, and my not-fully-adjusted eyes offer little help. I breathe a sigh of relief when I’m just about there. Only having a couple of more steps to go, I stumble over a crate hidden in shadows. At first wanting to curse it, I quickly realize it could be used to my advantage. Slowly scooting it underneath the sill, I step onto it. What little hope I have quickly vanishes, as the scenery offers no chance of escape. Big iron rods cover the outside of the window, crushing all hope of crawling out of it.

Defeated, I peered further out the window noticing a lake. *Is this Desti Lake?* I quickly scan the area for some type of distinguishing features trying for some type of verification of my whereabouts. Although I doubt I’ll recognize much from here, since the only section of the lake I’ve been to is the beach.

The beach…a lump develops in my throat as I find myself trying to hold back my tears at the warm memories of my friends at the beach. The very thought of never seeing them again is almost too much for me to comprehend. Blinking my eyes to stop the tears forming, I continue to peer out the window. Just as I suspected, nothing is recognizable. I happen to see a log cabin house across the way. The house is one story, not elaborate, and a little run down. Down the path in front of it, more toward the edge of the lake, sits a fake lighthouse. Disappointment sets in, as this information doesn’t help me.

If I could see beyond the side of the house, then maybe something may come into view that would help. As I stretch out and lean toward my left, I wobble slightly causing the crate to scoot out from underneath me. I land on the floor with a big thud, causing panic to rush through my body at the realization of making a tremendous amount of noise. My head whipped upwards toward the ceiling as fear overcomes me from the sound of running footsteps overhead.

Quickly scooting away from the window, I knew my chances of survival were slim. My head turns sharply toward the stairs as the squeak from the door pierces through the deafening silence. My breath caught, as my pulse quickens from the appearance of a dark figure on the top of the stairs. The clicking sound of the light switch causes me to flinch, as I struggle with my breath. Soft amber light creates shadows throughout the room from the single light bulb hanging from above. Although I wouldn’t think it possible, it makes the place seem dirtier, even more sinister.

Home quickly flashes through my mind, along with images of Mom and Dad. It’s a safe haven, a place where I’m secure and loved. Longing to be there, I know in the back of my mind it wasn’t going to happen. I’ll never know the safety from my loved ones again.

Unable to breathe, my heart continues to race, leaving me paralyzed. Trapped as I sit here, completely useless. Although knowing it’s solely from fear, I can’t move, regardless. Not sure how much more I can handle before my heart decides to explode like a ticking time bomb, I continue sitting as if frozen.

Move, April, I tried yelling at myself without success, you need to move.

As he draws closer, I know I need to do something or at least try to get away. Regardless, that doesn’t seem to be helping me move. Fight or Flight…words I’ve heard many times throughout my life, not ever giving them a second thought. Fight or Flight…I know I need to do something quickly. Instead, I keep sitting here useless, completely immobilized.

As the guy’s face comes into focus, my eyes grow wider from the shock of recognition. My school is where I know him. He’s the custodian’s assistant. Questions quickly begin swirling through my mind, like why would he do this to me? What is he going to do to me? Still breathless, I continue sitting here, paralyzed by the fear overpowering my body as he leans in closer toward me. His dark, blackened eyes penetrate through me as his arms stretch out to grab me. *Why can’t I move?* Just as he’s about to wrap his fingers around my arms, I find my voice, letting out a blood-curdling scream.