

I Had to Leave

Donna

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to:

My husband Rick, for always believing in me and supporting me in pursuing my dreams. In addition, most importantly, for never letting me give up!

My two incredible children, Alyssa and Ricky. You are my greatest accomplishments. I am so proud of you both and honored to be your mother.

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Preface

Sixteen-year-old April Morgan has a good life. Despite her family not having much money, she is happy. All that changes after her father dies. When her boyfriend comes into the store with another girl on his arm, April snaps and attacks her. She is sent to a juvenile psychiatric hospital, where she develops a friendship with a felon named Cobra.

Cobra will do anything to protect the people he loves. Whenever April gets herself into a difficult situation, Cobra is always there to help. He acts with good intentions, but does he take things too far? Can he ever win April's heart?

I HAD TO LEAVE is a story of love and heartbreak which will leave you asking yourself. How far would you go for love?

Chapter 1

A loud round of applause and cheers rang out as the cheerleaders swiftly landed and bowed to each other. April, a popular cheerleader at her high school, straightened up after a courteous bow and smiled at her friends as she made her way to the locker rooms.

Pom-poms dangling on each side, she strode briskly towards the school with her best friend Megan when Jason, the high school varsity quarterback, came up behind her. He placed his hands over her eyes and asked, "Guess who?"

"Oh, I don't know. Is it you, Tom?" April replied to him, grinning.

Jason spun her around to face him. "Tom? Who is this, Tom?" He wrapped his arms around her.

April giggled and kissed him on the lips. "Hi, baby. How was practice?" She loved to watch her boyfriend worry someone else had walked into her life.

"It was good. Can I give you a ride home?"

"Yes, wait for me after your shower." She pinched her nose. "You stink!"

"I thought you loved my scent?" He chuckled and raised his armpit to her face.

April pushed him away. "I do, but not that scent."

She went into the locker room to shower and change. Twenty minutes later, Jason was leaning against the lockers, waiting for her when she came out. He was freshly showered and looked oh so handsome. He took April's breath away as he smiled at her, "Ready to go?" He swung his arm around her and placed it over her shoulders.

"Yeah," she said, placing her nose against his shirt and breathing in the scent that she loved so much.

"Do you want to double-date tonight with Megan and Michael?" She asked him on the drive to her house. "I thought maybe we could go see that new movie I've wanted to see."

"Sure. What time do you want me to pick you up?" He asked as he pulled the car into the mobile home park where April lived.

"I don't know. Let me check the movie times, and I'll text you."

"Okay, baby. I'll see you tonight." He leaned in and kissed her goodbye.

When April entered her house, she immediately knew something was wrong. Her parents huddled on the couch as she placed her things on the floor by the door. Her

mother seemed to be crying. After a moment, her mother called to her.

"April, can you come here, please? Your father and I need to talk to you."

She cautiously stepped into the living room and took a seat in the recliner across from them. "What's the matter?" She asked, feeling quite worried now.

"Your father went to the doctor today."

April knew that her father had not been feeling well lately. Her mother had been pushing him for the past several weeks to see a doctor.

"What did the doctor say?" She asked, quite concerned now.

"I have lung cancer," her father said.

April could feel the tears swelling up in her eyes. "No!" she cried as she held her father's hands. They both couldn't keep their tears in any longer. Her father hugged her and let her weep in his arms for as long as she needed.

Finally, she stepped back, and he said, "It's stage four. There's nothing they can do."

"No, there must be something. Chemo? Radiation?"

He shook his head. "It's too far along."

"We'll get a second opinion. He's only one doctor," she cried, her voice quivering.

He reached for her hand, "Okay, April. We'll get a second opinion."

April hugged her father again and didn't let him go for a long time. She forgot she had made plans for the night. Later, after her parents went to sleep, April stepped out of their trailer to call Jason. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she called Jason with a shaky voice.

"Baby, what's wrong?" Jason asked as soon as he heard her voice.

After clearing her throat and gathering enough courage, April broke the devastating news to him.

"Oh shit. I'm so sorry to hear that, love. Is there anything I can do for you? Do you want me to come over?" Jason asked April, his voice evident enough to show his worry.

"No... I want to be alone for the night. I'll talk later. Sorry." And just like that, April hung up the phone, as she buried her face in her hands and went back inside to bury herself in her pillow and cry herself to sleep.

April was an ordinary middle-class girl. Her parents had tried to give her and her little sister the best life they could. However, they were under massive financial constraints since her father became ill. April had always felt

lucky to have a loving, supportive family, and now, everything seemed to be falling apart for her.

With her dad feeling sick like this, she had no hopes of survival at all. She prayed with all her might that their second opinion would give them better news. She was a sixteen-year-old girl, who should have been out on a date night with her boyfriend, and yet here she was, a scared little girl hiding in her trailer.

April's father never made it to the next appointment; he died the day before it. It all happened so fast that April didn't have time to process it. Before she could have come to terms with her father being sick, he was gone.

On the night of the funeral, April was sitting with Jason by the lake, still dressed in her funeral clothes. He held her in his arms while she cried.

"I didn't get to tell him how much I loved him."

"He knew, baby. I'm sure he knew." Jason said.

"I feel so alone," April said as tears ran down her cheeks.

"You're not alone, baby. You have me." He pulled her head against his shoulder. "I'll never leave you."

"Do you mean it?"

He placed his hand under her chin, lifted her head, and looked into her eyes, "I mean it."

"I love you," she said. "I know that I'll be okay as long as I have you."

He held her in his arms with moonlight shimmering off the lake. April looked at Jason with utter admiration in her eyes. She had never loved him more. "I'm ready," she said.

"Ready to go?" He asked.

"No, I'm ready to make love."

"No, April. Not now. You're upset. You're not thinking clearly."

"I'm thinking very clearly. I realize now that life is short, and I don't ever want to have any regrets. If I never made love to you, I would regret it for the rest of my life."

They both sat side by side, looking into each other's eyes. April leaned in and kissed him. Jason returned her kiss as she slid closer to him. He let his knees down and crossed his legs as she drew ever closer to him.

Jason moaned as he felt April's hands, caressing his shoulders as she kissed him solemnly. Her nails trailed down his shoulders and reached the top of the buttons on his shirt.

She was about to pull them open when he grabbed her hand. She pulled away from him. He looked into her eyes. "Are you sure?" He asked once again, and all April

could do was smile at how sensitive Jason was and how proud she was to have him in her life.

"Yes." She answered, then kissed him on the neck as she pulled open his shirt. Suddenly he pulled her away as if he had come back to his senses.

"You know I want nothing more than to make love to you right now, but I can't, baby. Not tonight, you just buried your father. I'm not going to take advantage of you when you are so vulnerable. Please, let's wait a couple of days, and if you still want to, I will."

"Okay..." April backed away and replied slowly, looking away from him, apparently quite embarrassed now. Jason stood up, buttoned up his shirt, and stretched out his hand for April to take, "Come on, it's getting late. I better get you home."

April nodded, taking his hand as she got up. Jason didn't mention anything about what had happened moments ago, and they left for home.

Chapter 2

It was Saturday morning, and April, along with her younger sister, Jordan, was eating cereal at the kitchen table. Their mom returned from her shift at the factory. She threw her things in a corner and made her way straight to April.

“April, there’s something I need to talk to you about.”

“What’s up?” April asked without looking up from her bowl.

“I’m going to need you to increase your hours at the grocery store. We need the extra money now that we don’t have your father’s income anymore.”

April looked up from her bowl and gave her mother a confused look. “Mom, how am I supposed to do that? I already work twenty-five hours a week. I have school.”

“I was thinking about it, and the only way you will be able to work enough hours is if you quit school.”

“You can’t be serious? What about college? I can’t go to college if I don’t have a high school diploma.”

“Look, I’m sorry, but as the eldest child, I need your help supporting this family. I’m already working two jobs, but it’s not enough. I don’t make as much as your father did,

and we have so many medical bills. I wouldn't ask if there was any other way, sweetie."

"Can we talk about this later? I'm going to be late for work." April put her bowl into the sink and stormed out of the trailer slamming the door behind her.

Unable to talk her mother out of quitting school, April dropped out one month later and started working sixty hours a week at the grocery store. At first, things between her and Jason were going smoothly. Every night when she got done with work, Jason would wait outside of the store, waiting to drive her home. One night, they were sitting on the porch kissing when Jason pulled away and said, "Oh my gosh, I almost forgot to tell you. I have good news! I got a full football scholarship to Ohio State University."

"That's great," April said, although it was clear that she did not mean it.

"What's wrong? Aren't you excited for me? I worked hard for this."

"What does this mean for us?" April asked, her eyes already welling up. Jason had been her one strong support through this time.

In only a couple of months, she had lost complete sense of herself. She had been a happy cheerleader, looking forward to her future and going to go to college just like

Jason. Now, she had lost her father, and she had lost any opportunity to go to school. Jason had been the only thing keeping her connected to her past. And now he was planning on leaving too!

“We’ll figure it out. I’ll come home and see you on breaks, and you can come to visit me too.”

“Yeah, maybe I’ll run away and stay with you in Ohio.”

“It’s late. I gotta go. I have to get some sleep for school tomorrow.” He gave her a quick kiss and left.

The next night, when April got done at work, Jason wasn’t waiting for her outside the store. She looked around at the parking lot but to no avail. She pulled out her phone from her pocket and texted him, “Where are you?”

After a minute’s wait, she received a reply from Jason, “Sorry, something came up. Can’t pick you up tonight.”

Little did April know that Jason would no longer come to pick her up. Every night when April finished work, she prayed that Jason would be waiting for her outside, and each time she went out, he shattered her hopes. The first couple of nights, April walked two miles back home crying the whole way. She cried herself to sleep the first night and every night after that for weeks.

Now she had absolutely nothing to bring her joy. Her boyfriend had walked out on her precisely when she needed him most. She had no idea how she would get through this, and for the first time, she didn't want to.

April gave Jason a few days, hoping he would come to his senses. But he didn't. And whenever she called him, he never picked up. What *had* happened? Why had he suddenly abandoned her when he had promised he would be there for her.

After a couple of months, April stopped calling him. She busied herself with work and helping her mother meet her household expenses. Things at home were getting worse. After her father's passing, April's mom had become an entirely different person. She was always asking April for more money, and she suspected her mother had developed a drinking problem. April had started spending a lot of time at work. It had become a sanctuary for her.

Until one day, fate snatched her only sanctuary away from her. April was stocking shelves at the grocery store. The bell on the door jingled as it swung inward, signaling that someone had entered the store. She stopped stocking and headed to the checkout counter to ring the customer up. She froze, not knowing what to do, as she saw Jason with a pretty

blond girl walking towards her. The girl hung on Jason's arm.

"Hi," Jason said, his face turning red. "How are you?"

"I'm okay," April replied, suppressing her emotions as she rang up the items. "Will that be all?" She asked, staying as professional as she could.

The girl leaned over to Jason's ear and whispered something. Jason laughed.

April snapped! She jumped over the counter and grabbed the girl around the neck. "You bitch!"

The girl lost her balance and fell to the floor. April refused to let her go. She fell on top of the girl as she continued choking her. Unable to breathe, the girl's face turned red as she gasped for air.

"April! What are you doing?!" yelled Jason, pulling April off the girl.

"How could you do this to me?! I thought you loved me!" She yelled at him, her voice breaking.

While this fiasco was going on, there were two police officers on duty nearby. It seemed someone had called the police to handle the situation.

"Let me go! How could you do this to me?! I trusted you!" April shouted at Jason as one of the police officers held April by the arms tightly, while the other cuffed her.

Jason had frozen at that moment; he could only watch in horror as the officer put April in the police car and drove away. While April was behind bars, the young girl's parents had pressed charges against her, leading to April's arrest. It turned out that the father of the girl April had attacked was a lawyer who influenced the judge. He claimed April was dangerous to society and needed psychiatric help. The judge agreed and sentenced April to a psychiatric facility for young adults.

Chapter 3

It was on April's first day at the Wilson Psychiatric Facility that she met Cobra. He was sitting in a circle with eight others and one counselor when Mr. Bush opened the door and said, "Excuse me, everyone. Sorry for interrupting your therapy session. I would like to introduce you all to April Morgan. She is new here, so please make her feel welcomed."

"Welcome, April, please have a seat. My name is David Townes. I am the group's therapy counselor. You can call me David."

They went around the circle, making introductions, and then David asked, "Who would like to give April a tour of the facility and answer any questions she might have?"

Several of the patients looked away, avoiding eye contact with the therapist. When no one replied, he said. "Okay, no volunteers. How about you, Joseph?"

"Alright."

"Good, you can give April the tour when we are done here."

When therapy was over, Joseph approached April. "Are you ready for the tour?"

"I guess so," she said, as he led her into the hallway, she looked him over. He appeared to be a few years older than her and handsome in a rugged, mysterious kind of way.

"So, Joseph, how long have you been here?"

"My friends call me Cobra. I've been here a couple of months now."

"Why do they call you Cobra?"

"Because I don't like being called Joseph, and I have a pet cobra. What did you do to end up here?"

"I attacked a girl," April said in barely a whisper.

Cobra stopped and turned to look at her. "Wow, you don't look the type."

"What about you? Why are you here?"

"My mom's boyfriend was beating on her. I gave him a taste of his own medicine."

Cobra finished giving her the facility's tour and then walked her back to the girl's wing of the facility. "Thanks for showing me around. I appreciate it," April said.

"You're welcome. It was my pleasure." He started walking back to the boys' wing, but then he stopped, turned around, smiled, and waved at her.

April smiled for the first time since her father had died. Something told her they were going to be good friends.

That night, April was eating her dinner alone in the dining hall when Cobra walked up and asked, "Mind if I join you?"

She pointed to the empty seat across from her.

"No, please have a seat."

After that day, April and Cobra were inseparable. They were together every second of their free time, and everyone assumed they were a couple.

One night, April's roommate, Lisa, plopped on her bed and asked, "How long have you and Cobra been dating?"

"Oh, we're not dating. Cobra and I are just friends."

Lisa looked confused. "Really? You guys seem so good together. Have you ever thought about dating him?"

"No, he's my best friend. I would never want to ruin that."

"Would you mind if I dated him?"

"Not at all. Why don't you join us at lunch tomorrow? I'll introduce you."

"I would love that. You sure you're okay with it?"

"Absolutely. Now let's get some sleep." April reached over, turned off the light on her nightstand, and lay down on her bed.

"Okay. Goodnight April."

"Goodnight, Lisa."

The next day at lunchtime, April spotted Lisa carrying her tray and looking for a place to sit. "Lisa, over here. Come join us."

Lisa walked over and took a seat across from Cobra. April introduced them. "Cobra, this is my roommate, Lisa."

"Hi, Lisa," Cobra said.

"Hi." Lisa smiled at Cobra. "It's nice to meet you."

The three of them made small talk for a couple of minutes before April said, "Will you two excuse me? I have to drop something off to my counselor." She grabbed her tray and got up from the table.

"I'll come with you," Cobra said.

"No, that's okay. Stay and talk to Lisa. I'll catch up with you later." She winked at Lisa as she walked away.

Later that night, April and Cobra played pool in the recreation room when she asked, "So, what do you think of Lisa?"

Cobra smiled. "I knew it! You didn't have anything to drop off at the counselor. Admit it. You were trying to set us up."

April giggled. "Was it that obvious?"

"No, but I know you too well. You usually would have let me come with you. Why would you try to set me up with Lisa? She's not my type."

"Why not? She's pretty, and she's nice, too."

"There's nothing wrong with her. I just don't see myself dating her." Cobra's mood suddenly became serious. "Please don't do that again."

"Okay, I'm sorry. It's just Lisa was asking about you. She thought we were dating."

"What did you tell her?" he asked while making his shot.

"I told her we were just friends."

"Why is that?"

"What do you mean, why is that? Because it's true."

Cobra placed his pool stick on the table, walked up to April, and looked her in the face. "No, I mean, why are we just friends?"

"Because you are my best friend, and you would probably break my heart, and I would be devastated. Now, please move out of my way so that I can win this game."

"I play the winner," Lisa said, walking into the recreation room.

April made her shot and won the game. Lisa frowned, clearly disappointed not to be able to play Cobra.

"I'll see you guys later. I'm going to bed," Cobra said, and he left.

"I don't think he likes me," Lisa said.

"Come on, let's play," April said, changing the subject.

April and Cobra never talked about dating again, and things went back to normal between the two of them until, one night, several months later, when April was sleeping, she felt a presence over her.

"April, wake up," Cobra whispered inches from her face.

Startled to see him standing there, she asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Shh! Come with me," he whispered, taking her hand.

Together they tiptoed out into the hallway. Cobra stole the keys from the sleeping guard, and then they snuck out of the facility and went down to the lake at the edge of the property. When they got there, he reached behind a tree and pulled out a whiskey bottle and a blanket. He laid the blanket on the grass, and they sat down on it.

"How in the world did you manage this?" she asked. "What if the guard wakes up?"

Cobra smirked. "He won't. I slipped him something in his drink. Cheers!" He took a swig from the bottle and handed it to April.

"Tell me about your childhood. Do you have any siblings?" April asked.

"I'm an only child. My childhood wasn't so good."

"It's okay if you don't want to talk about it. I understand."

"I don't like to talk about it, but I feel like I can open up with you." He took another swig from the bottle. "I'm an only child. My dad left my mother and me when I was six years old... said he didn't love her anymore; they fought all the time. I guess it was for the best, but after that, my mom started bringing home all kinds of men. Most of them weren't very nice to me. When I was eleven, I started hanging with some older guys in a gang, got myself into some trouble. I went to juvie for a while, and when I got out, my mom had a new guy beating on her, and then I ended up here."

April took his hand into hers. "I'm sorry."

Cobra felt vulnerable; he shook it off. "Hey, life isn't fair, right?"

Before they knew it, they had downed half of the bottle of whiskey. Cobra could tell April was feeling good.

"You never told me why you attacked that girl."

"It was because of a boy, of course." She took a swig of the whiskey. "It was so stupid. I thought he loved me. I'm just thankful I didn't give him my virginity."

Cobra raised his eyebrows. "What? You're still a virgin?"

"Yeah, something wrong with that?"

Cobra smiled. "Not at all. The first time should be special. I'm glad you didn't waste it on him. He didn't deserve it."

"What about you? Was your first time special?"

"I wouldn't say it was special. The first time is always meaningful for a guy. It represents becoming a man. If you are asking if I loved her, the answer is no. I've never been in love before."

"Really? How is that possible?"

"I don't know. I guess I just never met the right girl."

"Maybe I can help you out. What type of girl do you like?"

"I don't know if I have a type, really. It's just something I feel. I have to have a connection with her before it can turn into something more."

April fell back onto the blanket. "Well, I hope it happens to you soon, because it feels wonderful!"

Cobra lay back, too, so that their heads were touching, "I hope it happens, too. Are you still in love with him?"

"No, I wouldn't say I'm in love with him like I wish we would get back together. I will never forgive him for breaking my heart. But a part of me will always love him. He was my first love, and that makes what we had special."

"Yes, first loves are special."

When the bottle of whiskey was empty, they lay in silence, looking up at the stars and listening to music playing on Cobra's cell phone.

"I love this song," April said when "*I Can't Help Falling in Love with You*" started playing.

Cobra got to his feet and held his hand out to her.

"May I have this dance?"

April smiled and took his hand, and he pulled her up on her feet. Cobra was sleek and tall. He had the grace to hold her well if they danced, and this was April's chance to find out how good he was at it. He took her in his arms, and they danced under the stars for a minute. She looked up at him slyly. She had never seen him this way before. His French goatee and short spiked up hair were quite attractive. April had noticed all of this for the first time.

"April, there's something I need to tell you." Cobra began talking.

"Shhh, don't ruin this moment." She placed her head on his chest and could feel his heart racing. She didn't see the tears running down his cheeks, though, as he spun her around in his arms. When the song was over, they lay back down on the blanket, enjoying each other's company in silence for several minutes while Cobra got up his nerve.

"April, there's something I need to tell you. April?"

She was asleep.

Cobra picked her up, carried her back to her room, put her to bed, and kissed her on the lips. "Goodnight, April. Don't worry. I'll tell you another time."

The next day, April overslept, and she looked like hell as she walked into her group therapy session. She searched the circle, looking for Cobra, but he wasn't there. *I bet he's hungover, too*, she thought. When Cobra didn't join her at lunchtime, she started to worry.

"Have you seen Cobra today?" She asked Lisa.

"No, I thought you heard. He was transferred to another facility."

"What? That can't be. Why?"

"He got in trouble for sneaking out last night. They said he drugged the guard and stole his keys. Do you know anything about that?"

"No!" she yelled and raced out of the lunchroom.

She flung open the door open to the administrator's office, panting after running the whole way there, "You can't do this. Please bring Cobra back."

"Ms. Morgan, please have a seat," Mr. Bush said.

"I think we have some things to talk about." He got up from his chair and closed his office door.

"Don't blame Cobra. It's all my fault. I was the one who did everything."

"Don't cover for him. I saw it all on tape. I know it was Cobra. I did see that you went along with him. I'm very disappointed in you, April. What do you think your punishment should be?"

"I don't care what you do to me. You're already punishing me by sending Cobra away."

"For the next two months, you are on kitchen duty. After you eat your lunch and dinner, you will need to help the kitchen staff clean the kitchen and lunchroom."

"Okay. Am I through here?" she asked, getting up from the chair and folding her arms in disgust.

"Yes, you're excused. Try to stay out of trouble."

April went back to her room, plopped on her bed, and cried. The next two months went by slowly for her. She missed Cobra desperately and fell into a deep depression. She no longer participated in social activities; instead, she stayed in her room and kept to herself.

The day before her eighteenth birthday, April got a letter from Cobra.

Dear April,

Happy Birthday, beautiful. I miss you so much. I wish I were there with you to celebrate your birthday. Hopefully,

we will be together soon. They moved me to the Longwood Psychiatric Facility. They tell me if I stay out of trouble, they will release me in six months. When I get out, I will come and see you. If you get out before me, please come to see me.

I wish I could tell you I'm sorry about that night, because of my behavior we are separated now, but honestly, I'm not sorry. That night was perfect, well, almost perfect. It would have been perfect if I had told you what I needed to say to you.

Love,

Cobra

Lisa came into the room, and April smiled as she folded the letter and placed it back into the envelope and slipped it under her pillow.

"It's nice to see you smiling for a change. Mr. Bush asked me to tell you he needs to see you."

April knocked on his door this time. "Come in!" Mr. Bush yelled.

"You wanted to see me?" She entered his office and closed the door behind her.

"Yes, I just got the word you are going to be released tomorrow. I understand it's your birthday. Nice birthday present, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's the best present I could ask for."

Mr. Bush stopped smiling and became serious.

"April, I hope that you learned something while you were here. You are a young woman; you have your whole life ahead of you. Don't waste it. Make wise choices."

"I will. I need to let my mom know I'm getting out."

"She already knows. She will be picking you up after work tomorrow. She said to tell you she will be here around 5:30."

April hadn't talked to her mother in months. Her mother hadn't even visited her on visitation days. She was relieved to hear that her mother would be picking her up. She planned to visit Cobra as soon as she could get there.

The next day, April packed her bags, said goodbye to Lisa, and went outside precisely at 5:30 to wait for her mother. She was sitting on a bench in front of the psychiatric facility for twenty minutes before her mother, Leslie, pulled the car into the circular driveway. April let out a sigh of relief.

"Hi, Mom," she said, getting into the car and leaning over to kiss her mother. She could smell alcohol on her mother's breath.

They drove in silence for a couple of minutes before pulling onto the highway, which was not the right way to their home.

"Where are we going?" April asked, just now noticing the bags and boxes in the backseat.

"The bus station."

"Why?" April already knew the answer.

"You didn't think you were coming back home, did you?"

"Mom, please don't do this. I don't have anywhere to go. I'm only eighteen years old!"

"You are a disgrace to this family. You are no longer welcome at home."

April had never seen her mother so cold. She began to cry. "Please, Mom, I'll be better. I promise. I can work and help you pay the bills."

"They don't want you back at the store after the way you behaved."

"I'll get another job. I don't have to work there."

Her mother pulled up to the bus station. "I've made up my mind. Don't make this harder than it has to be. Here. It's not much, but it's all I have." She handed April sixty dollars.

Tears running down her face, April took the money with shaky hands and then got out of the car. Her mother got out and placed the items from the backseat on the curb.

After her mother drove away, April stood at the corner of the bus station crying for several minutes, not knowing what to do.

Finally, an eighteen-wheeler pulled up next to her. An older man in his sixties rolled down the window and asked, "Are you okay, honey?"

April nodded, unable to speak.

"You need a lift?"

"Do you know where the Longwood Psychiatric Facility is?"

"Yeah, hop in. I'll take you there." April climbed into the truck, and the driver got out and loaded her stuff into his trailer.

When she stopped crying, he said, "My name is Jim. What's yours?"

"April."

"It's nice to meet you, April. You know, it's not safe for you to be hitchhiking. There are some bad people in this world."

"I know."

"What's your story? You run away from home?"

"Not exactly. My mother kicked me out. I'm not welcome there anymore. She gave me sixty dollars and dropped me off at the bus station."

Jim shook his head in disbelief. "Why are you going to a psychiatric facility?"

"I'm meeting a friend."

When they reached the Longwood Psychiatric Facility, it was after 8:00 pm, and visiting hours were over.

"I don't think you are going to be able to visit tonight. It's pretty late. Are you hungry? I was going to get something to eat. You want to join me?"

"Yeah."

They went to a burger joint and had dinner. After dinner, Jim said, "I have to get back on the road. I don't feel right just leaving you, not knowing where you are going to sleep tonight. Come on; I think I saw a motel down the road."

They drove a few miles down the road and parked in front of the motel office.

"Wait here," he said and went into the office.

When he came out, he was carrying a room key. He opened the truck door and said, "Come on."

April jumped out of the truck. "Why are you doing this?"

"You remind me of my granddaughter. I don't want to see anything bad happen to you."

Jim unloaded her stuff out of the truck, carried it into the motel room, and then handed her one hundred dollars. "Here, take this."

"I can't. You've done so much for me already."

"Please just take it. I would feel better if you did."

April gave Jim a big hug. "Thank you. I'll never forget you."

"You're welcome. Good luck, April. I hope you figure everything out."