

Prologue

“Run.”

Every time Sara closed her eyes, she saw Drake’s mother. Donna Hardgrave had a face that read like braille. The stories written there would be ones full of fear. Fear of her husband, who thought nothing of hitting her and fear of a son who was growing up to be exactly like his father. Donna’s eyes seemed to have fine lace curtains hung in them, they always seemed unfocused, myopic, as if enabling her to cope with the horror of her own life. Sara shook with the strength it must have taken that solemn woman to look across the table and say that word to Sara, *“Run”*.

For Sara, it felt as if Donna Hardgrave had just woken up. Donna’s eyes were finally bright and clear, pleading with Sara to act on that whispered word. The night had started off like any other Friday night family dinner. They served supper in the early afternoon, since Drake and his father were usually drunk by dinner. Sara was exhausted. She had been busy all day preparing the roast and could hardly move her poor throbbing leg.

Six weeks earlier, a glare at Drake had started a fight that ended with Sarah being pushed down the stairs. Drake let her stay there a while before finally driving her to the doctor’s with a feeble story about a slip on a broken porch step. Now, with the cast gone, Sara was careful not to show how sore she was and had tried hard to smile through Drake’s jokes with his father about how whiny she’d been since slipping on the step. In reality she’d been quiet since the attack, fearing another broken bone, or something worse.

Mrs. Hardgrave cast her eyes down to the uneaten dinner in front of her and Sara could not help but notice the bruise on Donna’s left temple. Sara let her attention drift around the once friendly farmhouse she’d lived in since birth. How had she gotten to this lonely place? Her sweet family home transformed into a house she dreaded. From the moment of the first slap it had become his home, Drake’s home. Now she could see herself, head drooped like Drake’s mother’s hoping for invisibility. What did she even want from him? Kids who lived in fear? More casts? He wasn’t going to change, nor was the situation. *“Run”* That word got her mind racing right along with her heart. In an instant of pure awareness, Sara decided that was exactly what she would do. The moment they left for the bar, Sara began her escape.

She knew that Drake and his father would probably drink at Captain’s for hours before Donna drove Drake home to Sarah’s place, but Sara needed to be far away before he stumbled through the door. Once downstairs, she grabbed the keys and, in the same motion, dropped them. Sweat poured from her brow as she struggled to bend low and retrieve them from under the couch. Out of pure habit Sara bit down on her lower lip rather than cry out at the sharp pains her knee was sending her.

Excerpt from “Hiding From Shadows”