

PROLOGUE:

Jessica was listening intently to the first two stories being told by the strangers. She was mesmerized but was also dreading when the time would come for her to tell her story. She was ashamed of herself and knew everyone would be disgusted with her. She started to get upset and panicked, but only on the inside, so no one would know. As story number two ended with a big finish and was being elaborated on, Jessica realized it was her turn.

“Ok, you’re third.” said a pretty girl with dark hair.

“Yeah, let’s hear another good one!” piped in an older man.

Jessica gulped and smiled, silently coaxing herself. She knew it was her moment to bear her soul and her secrets, to a group of complete strangers.

HERE BEGINS THE TALE:

“Well,” Jessica said as the twenty-nine strangers looked at her intently.

“My story is pretty much about myself. It sounds dumb but it’s actually kind of interesting...and depressing.” She paused, looking up at the variety of faces.

“Keep going, we’re listening,” said one of the men.

“Ok, here goes... I had it all, but I wasn’t satisfied. I was smart, real smart. I could have gotten into any college. And my boyfriend, Jack, he was great, the sweetest guy ever. My parents loved me but they pushed me really hard to be successful, maybe a little too hard. We had money though, and I was frequently

rewarded with it. I had it all but I took it for granted. I didn't appreciate all that I had. I had friends but they were jealous and two-faced. The only things I had that I really loved were my dog, Pepper, and running. I'd been on Varsity Track for all four years of high school. Any kind of running, sprinting or cross country, I loved it. I went to the gym everyday to keep my passion alive. The gym was my life, I was always there. That's where it happened. That's where it all changed for me. That's why I'm here right now.

One night, I was leaving the gym; it was already dark and I was walking out to my car. The street light in the parking lot was out and I had an eerie feeling, almost like someone was watching me. I started out walking at a fast pace but I soon broke into a run. I was about ten feet from my car when a man dressed in all black came at me from my left. I screamed and tried to run away but he grabbed me around my middle and covered my mouth with a white towel. He picked me up and forced me into a dark blue pickup truck. Then he pulled out a nine millimeter pistol, put it up to my temple and said

“Stay where you are. If you scream or try to get away, I'll shoot ya.” He had a deep, raspy voice. He laughed in a way that made my blood cold. He was scruffy, with a matted brown beard. His dark, beady eyes stared me down as his dirt-covered hands grasped the pistol. I obviously shut up and stayed put in order to save my life. The crazy man smiled and said

“That’s more like it.” Then he put his key in the ignition, started the truck, and took off. We drove out of the city for about forty minutes into a wooded area. Both of us were silent the whole ride. No talking, no radio, no nothing. All I could think about was what was going to happen to me. Was I going to die? Was he going to rape me? Would I ever see my family again?

He stopped and turned off his lights. I was terrified; I can’t even explain the feeling in my body and my emotions at that time. I shook with fear and tears ran down my cheeks. I knew what he was going to do. By his body language and the hungry look in his eyes, it was obvious. He was going to rape me, but was he going to kill me? The man turned towards me and grinned in a way that made me want to puke. The man said

“It’s time.” and I closed my eyes just waiting for it to be done with. It was long and I cried hysterically the whole time, begging him to stop. He was disgusting, with a smell of putrid body odor and whisky. He was a big man and he easily held me down with his body weight. He was so heavy that it hurt my bones and made me feel weak. I felt awful, nothing could be worse. I was becoming more and more traumatized until finally it was over. I sat there, shaking uncontrollably. I didn’t know what to do with myself so I waited until he made his next move. Finally, after about ten minutes of silence, the man started the truck again. He reversed through the wooded area back to the road. He started driving back towards the city. My heart was pounding. Maybe he

wasn't going to kill me. We entered the city and returned to the gym parking lot. I felt sick and I was so stunned. He stopped abruptly next to my car but didn't unlock the door. He looked at me with those cold, beady eyes.

“Get out and don't tell,” growled the man as he flashed me a threatening glance of his pistol. He pushed me out of the truck and rode away. I didn't know what to do with myself. I collapsed onto my car and sobbed for what seemed like almost a half hour. I knew that I had to pull myself together so I cleaned off my face and drove home. I tried to act as normal as possible towards my parents. It didn't seem like they noticed anything so I just went upstairs, showered and went to sleep. For the next couple of weeks, I just went on with my life like normal. I didn't tell anyone but it was constantly on my mind. I had nightmares about being raped every night. I barely slept through the night the first couple of weeks after the incident and I was becoming sickly. I thought it was just from sleep deprivation and stress, but it soon became clear to me that something else was wrong. My body was filled with sleepiness and exhaustion. I was even starting to vomit frequently, but only in the mornings. There was one thing that really freaked me out though. I was late in my menstrual cycle. I started to worry that I was pregnant. I had always been having sex with Jack, but we always used protection; my rapist hadn't though. I decided to go downtown to the clinic to take a pregnancy test. I was so nervous but I knew I had to do it.

While I waited for my results, I wondered how my life might change. I shuddered and went back to reality. The nurse called me into a private room.

“Miss Johnson,” she said. “Your results have come in and you are pregnant.” I was in shock. I sat there and stared at her in disbelief.

“Good luck with everything and you can always come back here for help.” I got up, my body numb. I drove to my house and when I got there no one was home. I sat up in my room and looked at my old photos from when I was younger and remembered how little things like ice cream and dolls used to make me happy. I thought about what I would do with the baby. I couldn’t get an abortion; that was wrong. My beliefs strongly disagreed with abortion. What about adoption? I think I would get too attached to let the baby go. But keeping the baby? How could I do that? How could I tell anyone? I mean I couldn’t keep it a secret forever. The most horrific thought I had though was the fact that the baby might be my rapist’s. I mean I knew that the man didn’t use protection but how could it be? I couldn’t bare the thought but I knew, I knew it was his. Jack and I were just too careful to let something like that happen. So now I was in a terrible situation. My only option was to tell my parents and Jack. They were all so conservative, but I had no other choice. If they really loved me then it wouldn’t matter because they would support me no matter what. Well it didn’t exactly go as I had hoped.

The next day when I went to school, I took Jack out to lunch and when we were on the way back to school I told him. He flipped out like I never would have imagined. Jack was so disgusted with me that he even accused me of lying, saying that I had cheated on him. He immediately ended our relationship. I was devastated. Jack was the love of my life and now he was gone. I skipped the rest of school and cried for hours knowing that my parents were my last hope. Later that night I went home after spending the day at the park, taking in the beauty of nature and wildlife. I confronted my parents right away. The whole conversation was terrible. They accused me of lying, just like Jack. They told me they knew it was Jack's baby and I had just made up that story for sympathy and attention. I couldn't believe what they had said but it got worse. They told me to leave, that they didn't want a daughter who was filthy and pregnant at the age of seventeen. They told me to pack my bags and leave. My body was in total shock. I couldn't move. I didn't know what to do, I felt so lost. I did the only thing I could do; I left. I didn't have any relatives in the city and I only had one friend who might understand my situation. Her name was Heather. She said I could stay with her but I didn't tell her why, just that it was really important. I didn't want anyone else to judge me and call me a liar.

During the night when I was at Heather's I got violently sick. I was throwing up and was really shaky and unstable. I went to the clinic the next morning to see what was going on. The same nurse ran some tests on me to

check on the baby but once again delivered me some terrible news. She thought I might have HIV because my blood test came back irregular. She said she'd run an HIV test and let me know within a week what the results were. I went back to Heather's for the next four days until the nurse called me. She told me my results came in and that I was positive for advanced HIV. I couldn't believe my luck. My life was completely deteriorating. I told Heather and she became so freaked out that she made me leave. After I left Heathers I tried calling my parents but they wouldn't return my calls. Shortly after that, they disconnected my cell phone. I had no where to go. This time, I really was lost. I just rode the subway from shelter to shelter; that's how I ended up here now."

Everyone looked at Jessica. Their expressions were a mix of disbelief and sympathy as Jessica started crying softly.

This just goes to show that in situations like rape, you always need to report it and go to the police and the hospital. In Jessica's situation, if she had taken action earlier, her parents would have known the truth and she could have prevented her unwanted pregnancy and potentially slowed down her HIV. Don't take life for granted like Jessica, because it can be changed forever in a split-second.