



THREATENED

C. I. HARDMAN

For my family, for believing in me.

The Start

“Hold up, what?” Avery Harper pauses in the middle of the deserted road, that's filled with street lights, and frowns at his best friend, who's standing a few feet in front of him.

“We're going to a party,” his best friend, Logan Dillon, smiles as he faces him.

“Logan, are you forgetting that *we*,” Avery moves his hands in front of him to signal he's speaking about himself and Logan, “never go to parties?”

Logan smirks at him. “I guess there really is a first time for everything.” He continues to walk down the road.

“Wait up,” Avery pants as he catches up to his best friend. “We can't just show up to a party, bro. We're not like the rest of the people.”

“The rest of the people?” Logan arches a dark brow, his dark blue eyes widening.

“You know what I mean,” Avery mumbles as they turn the corner. “We're not popular. We don't get invited to parties, especially parties that are thrown by the jocks at our school.”

“Who says it's a party thrown by them?”

“Isn't it?” Avery widens his dark eyes.

“Isn't it *always*,” Logan smirks.

The sound of thumping music appears closely and Avery twitches his lips. “Are you actually taking me to a party?”

Logan nods. He slaps Avery's shoulder. “It's Saturday night, come on, what can go wrong?”

“That right there,” Avery frowns. “By you just saying that makes me realize that anything can go wrong, Logan. *Anything*.”

“Lighten up,” he laughs. “It’ll be fun.”

Avery watches Logan head toward the house with the loud music and he lifts his head and lets out a pant. “Fine,” he dramatically says as he follows his best friend into the madness.

“Here, grab a beer.” Logan hands Avery a red plastic cup as they try to make their way through the raging crowd. The loud music is pumping and familiar faces from school surround them. People are dancing and drinking. This is so not Logan or Avery’s scene.

“What’s in this?” Avery asks as he brings the cup to his nose and sniffs.

“Alcohol.”

“We’re seventeen, we’re not legal to drink.”

“All the more reason to drink it then,” Logan laughs. They head into what looks like the living room and stand staring in shock at the half naked girls standing on the table.

“Well, at least they live up to their name ‘*the sluts*,’” Avery laughs.

“Yeah,” Logan says as he takes a drink of his alcohol.

Avery goes to lift his hand to take a drink of his drink when someone bumps into him, spilling the dark liquid onto his jeans. “Are you kidding me?” Avery doesn’t see who it is as the room is full of people. “This is just fantastic.” He scoots through the crowd and ends up back into the hallway. “Bathroom, where is the bathroom?” He looks in front of him to see the gold banister and teenagers standing on the stairs. “Great, just great.” He makes his way up the stairs and pauses on the landing. He sees a few different doors and frowns. He tries the first door and it’s locked. He heads over to the white door on the right and pushes it. The door opens to reveal an empty bathroom.

Avery lets out a sigh as he closes the door behind him. He places the cup onto the sink in front of him and then tugs at his pants. He notices the wet patch just between his thigh and he moans at himself. He gazes around for a robe but doesn’t see any. As he checks everywhere for one, he pauses as he hears a voice he knows so well. He steps closer to the other door on the other side of the bathroom. He rests his ear against it and listens.

“What do you mean you can't make it?”

There's silence until the voice begins to speak again.

“You know what? Forget it, Oakley, we're done. Don't call me again.”

Avery frowns and then as he's thinking, the door is pulled open and he falls onto the floor. He looks up to see a face he knows so well and he widens his eyes. He quickly gets to his feet and then adjusts his self. “I was just, uh—” he scratches at his dark hair.

“You were just what?”

“I was just, uh, in the bathroom, taking a leak.”

“Did you manage to get to the toilet in time?”

Avery follows the bright blue eyes that observe him and he steps back. “Oh, no, that isn't urine, I swear. Some idiot knocked my drink on me.” He looks back up at the girl in front of him. Her blue eyes are wide under her long dark lashes and her pale face is flawless. Her cheeks burn a natural red and she scrapes her auburn curls behind her ear.

“What are you looking at?”

Avery shrugs his shoulders and slumps his hands into his pockets. “I was looking at you.”

“Why?”

“Because you're beautiful.”

“Okay,” she mutters. “Why are you in my bedroom?”

Avery pouts his lips and stares around him. “This is your bedroom?”

She nods.

“Are you sure?”

She nods again.

“So this is your house?”

She rolls her eyes. “Obviously.”

“Sweet,” he replies.

“You never answered my question.”

“Which was?”

“Why are you in my bedroom?”

He shrugs his shoulders again. “Well, I was in the bathroom and you opened the door and I managed to somehow end up in here.”

“You were eavesdropping, weren't you?” Her lip glossed lips pout, her eyes narrow.

Avery moves his eyes away from her face and stares at the pink wall. "No, I was just wondering if I heard someone speak or if I was just imaging things."

"You were imaging things," she says as she leans against the bathroom door that Avery has just fallen through. "Now leave."

"Okay." He walks past her and stops as she tells him to wait there. He turns to see her standing in front of him, holding up a pair of jeans.

"They're my boyfriend's," she frowns at the word. "They're my *ex* boyfriend's, I don't want them here, you can have them."

Avery frowns at her as she holds the jeans out towards him. "Why would I want *Oakley's* jeans?"

"Because you look like you've wet yourself." She observes his wet patch.

"Okay." He takes the jeans from her. "Are you sure he won't mind?"

"He's rich, he can afford another pair of jeans."

Avery laughs a little at her comment. True thing; Oakley is rich. "Maybe these are his favorite jeans."

"He doesn't have a favorite pair of jeans, just like he doesn't have a favorite girl." She lets out a sigh. "I'm sorry, just ignore me."

"Are you okay?"

Her breathing becomes heavier. "I'm fine."

"You don't look fine."

"Just go change and go back to my party."

"This is your party?"

She nods. "Was, is, maybe still is." She begins to pant.

"You don't look so good."

"I look perfect, actually."

Avery smiles. "That's because you *are* perfect."

Her blue eyes widen. "You think I'm perfect?"

He nods in agreement. "I know you're perfect. Look at you, you're freaking beautiful. You're rich, you have tons of friends, and you're the most popular girl in school."

"That doesn't mean I'm perfect though."

"You're Darcia Perkins, it's obvious you're perfect."

Darcia rolls her eyes. "Just because of my popularity status and my

looks does *not* mean I'm perfect."

"Well, you're perfect to me."

"Am I?" she asks as she stares at him, intrigued to know why he finds her perfect.

Avery nods at her. Of course she's perfect to him. He's had a crush on her since he started high school. Darcia is the popular girl, always has attention wherever she goes. Boys want her and girls want to be her. Avery wants her too, not just because of her popularity or her good looks, because for some reason, he knows that she is an amazing person. He knows that underneath all the attention, she is just a typical girl. But the fault is that he can't have her. She's popular, he isn't. And that's just how life goes. "Yes."

Darcia steps back and takes a seat on her bed. Avery stands there looking lost, but eventually joins her, placing the jeans onto the Chester drawers by his side.

"I'm tired of it all," she says. "The popularity. Every morning I wake up and think of what outfit I should wear. It has to be expensive, because if it isn't, people judge me. It seems as if everyone expects me to be *perfect*. And perfect doesn't come easy. I have to make sure my hair is perfect and my make-up is too. It's like I'm living a life that I don't wanna live."

"Wait, you don't wanna be popular?" Avery asks, confused.

"No, I don't want to be under pressure. I wanna wake up with a real smile on my face and wear whatever the hell *I* want to wear to school," she replies.

"Then do that. Wear whatever you want to wear."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because like you said, I'm Darcia Perkins." She scrapes her hair behind her ear again.

"Well that's bull," Avery says. "I wear whatever I wanna wear to school and I don't care what anyone thinks."

"Because you're not popular, you don't have a reputation."

"I have a reputation alright. It just doesn't include being popular." Avery looks at the floor. "It's kinda the opposite, actually."

"Imagine what it'd be like if life was easy?"

Avery widens his dark eyes. "For me, it'd be the highlight of my life."

"Same here." Darcia pulls out her phone and frowns. "I hate him."

"Who?"

"Oakley Simmons."

"I thought you guys were like in love," Avery says.

"In love?" Darcia lets out a little chuckle. "I loved him, yeah. But he never loved me. We were only together because we're both popular." She throws her phone on the wooden floor, the pink case with all the gems glued to it stopping it from breaking. "It's stupid, really."

"Yes it is," Avery agrees.

"I can't believe I've just opened up to you." Darcia says as she looks at Avery. "I hardly know you."

"Sometimes talking is healthy."

"I guess, but still, I hardly know you." She stands up. "Oh, my God."

"What?" Avery asks as he stands up too in shock.

"You didn't judge me."

"Why the hell would *I* judge you?"

She shrugs her shoulders. "I don't know, maybe because of who I am."

"Seems legit, but I'm not one to judge."

"But you *are* one to be sarcastic."

He smirks at her words. "I guess you do know me then."

"Only because the answers you reply to the teachers with are sarcastic."

"Sarcasm is sarcastic."

"Obviously."

Avery pulls his phone from his jacket as it vibrates. He realizes Logan is calling him. "I gotta take this."

Darcia nods. "And I gotta get myself together and go back to my party."

They make it to the landing and Darcia walks down the stairs, leaving Avery alone.

"Bro, you're not gonna believe what just happened," he says as he answers his phone.

"I can't hear you, the music's too loud," Logan says as he steps out

of the back yard gate and heads towards the front of the house. “Where are you?”

“I’m coming out into the front garden so I can hear you, hold up.” Avery distances himself from the loud noise and steps out into the cold night. “You’re never gonna guess what just happened?”

Logan stares at the back of Avery’s body and holds the phone to his ear. “What happened?” He begins to walk over to him.

“Okay, let me get to the start, I was with you and some idiot knocked my drink onto my pants so I went to look for the bathroom to dry myself—” Avery turns to see Logan standing beside him, with his phone to his ear. “One sec, bro, I’m on the phone.” He turns away again and continues to talk on the phone. “As I was saying, I—”

“Avery.”

Avery turns and then watches Logan put his phone into his jeans pocket. “Oh, damn,”

“Exactly.”

He laughs as he slips his phone into his jacket. “As I was saying—”

“Shut up.”

“But Logan, I was talking to Darcia.”

“Wait, what? You were talking to Darcia?” He rolls his blue eyes. “I mean Darcia as talking to *you*.”

Avery nods his head and wears a grin on his face. “Yeah, man. We were talking in her bedroom.”

“Her bedroom?”

Avery keeps nodding. “It was like a dream. Nothing like that ever happens to me.”

“Did you guys just talk or?”

“Or what?”

“You know.”

“Do you mean did she take my virginity?”

Logan nods with a smirk.

“Oh, yeah, it was great. She threw me on the bed and rode me like a motorbike. Not.”

Logan laughs. “You had the perfect opportunity, and you let it go.”

“I didn’t let anything go, and trust me, it wouldn’t have happened even if she was drunk.” His phone starts beeping. He pulls it out and

frowns.

“Who is it?”

“My mom.” Avery reads the text again. “She's asking me where I am. She never asks me where I am.”

“That's probably because you're always in your bedroom.”

“True. So what do I tell her?”

“Say you're at my house.”

“Are you crazy? Are you forgetting what happened last time I told her that? She called your mom straight away and found out that I wasn't there, and that I had lied to her. She grounded me from my room for like a month, the only time I was allowed in there was when I had to go to bed.” Avery looks at his best friend. “Well, help me out.”

“Think of something. I don't know, anything.”

Avery puts his phone to his mouth and starts to pace around the front garden. “I'll tell her the truth, to save me getting into trouble.”

“So you're gonna tell your mom that you're at an under-age party where teenagers are drinking all sorts of alcohol and probably taking drugs?”

Avery's dark eyes widen and his mouth opens. “You're right. I'll lie, that way I'll be in less trouble by lying to her than telling her the truth.”

“I can't believe you told your mom we're camping out in the woods,” Logan laughs as he and Avery walk down the road. The silent wind around them begins to pick up, making the branches from trees that surround them sing. “You're in so much trouble.”

“Not as much as I would have been if I'd have told her the truth.” Avery zips up his jacket and looks around him. “It's creepy out here, don't you think?”

“It's only creepy because it's late at night and we're the only ones on this road.”

“It's cold.”

“Do you ever stop moaning?”

“I'm skinny, I get cold quickly,” Avery says.

“We weigh the same and have the same build, how are you colder

than me?" Logan asks.

Avery shrugs his shoulders. "Maybe the cold doesn't like me." He shudders. "Look, there's a gas station."

"Why do you want a gas station?"

"So I can fill up my lungs with petrol so I can get home quicker."

Logan rolls his eyes. "Stop being sarcastic."

"That's like asking the Queen to stop being the Queen." He picks up his pace. "I want the gas station because they sell sweets, and right now I'm craving something sweet. So can we go and get some food?"

"Okay." Logan follows Avery towards the gas station on the corner of the road.

Avery opens the door and steps inside. "This warmth is so good. I was afraid my body was gonna quiver up and rot away."

"If anything, you'd die of hypothermia," Logan says as he picks up a packet of Skittles from beside him.

"Whatever you say," Avery retorts as he heads over to the drink section. "Pepsi or Cola?"

"I thought you wanted sweets," Logan says as he stands beside him.

"All I really wanted was to get warm." He makes a weird face and picks up a bottle of Pepsi.

"So when we get to your house, what are you gonna say to your mom?"

"I'll just tell her it was too cold to camp out so we decided to come home, well *I* decided to come home, you don't live with me."

"I'm at your house more than your dad is, so basically I do live with you."

"True, but still."

"I think you should start calling me dad," Logan smirks as he steps in front of Avery and heads towards the counter.

"That's just weird."

"How is it?"

"Because it's like you and my mom are—" he pauses.

"What?"

"Logan," he swallows hard.

"Yeah?"

"Turn around."

Logan frowns but turns. His blue eyes widen and he steps back. They both stand there in fear as the masked figures enter the shop.

“Quick,” Logan says as he grabs Avery's arm and they sprint behind an aisle of food. They sit on the floor, their backs to the shelves. “Do you think they seen us?”

Avery swallows the dry saliva from his mouth again. “I have no idea, but my heart is beating so fast I think I'm gonna have an heart attack and die so therefore I will never know if they saw us or not.”

“Keep quiet,” Logan says. “I'll check what they're doing.”

“Isn't it obvious what they're doing,” Avery says as he stares at his best friend. “They're not here to buy Skittles, are they?” He grabs the packet of Skittles from Logan and opens them.

“What are you doing? You're making noise just by rattling the packet.”

“I'm gonna die, so I might as well die by tasting the rainbow.” He shoves an handful of sweets into his mouth and widens his eyes at his best friend.

Logan kneels and peeks around the shelf to see three masked figures standing at the counter, all pointing a gun at the guy behind it.

“Open the till and give us the money,” one of the masked figures shouts, their voice feminine. “And we won't hurt you.”

“They have guns,” Logan tells Avery as he sits back down. His heart begins to beat rapidly. “All three of them.”

“Well they're not gonna have bananas are they?” Avery sits straight. “Wait, did you say all three of them?”

Logan nods, his sandy blond hair tousling in the middle of his forehead.

“There were four guys outside, I swear I seen four,” Avery says.

“Are you sure, because I only seen three.”

Avery nods his head. “I'm positive.”

“So where's the forth person then?”

Avery swallows the taste of Skittles in his mouth and his dark eyes widen. “I think I've found him.”

Logan turns to see a tall masked figure standing over him. He holds a shotgun in his hands and he's aiming it at Logan and Avery.

“Get up,” the masked figure says, his voice deep.

Avery and Logan do as he says and stand. They try to stay calm.
“What are you doing?”

Avery and Logan turn to see another masked figure heading their way.

“I found these two hiding behind the aisle,” the masked figure says as he still aims the gun at them.

Avery stands closer to Logan, his heart beating rapidly.

“What did you see?” the second masked figure asks as he points his pistol at Avery's face.

Avery's dark eyes widen and he swallows dryness. “Truthfully?”

Logan rolls his eyes. Now isn't the time for Avery to be sarcastic. The masked figure nods.

“Well all I seen was you guys come into the shop, other than that I didn't see anything.”

“What about you?” He points his gun at Logan.

Logan swallows hard. “The same.”

The masked figures look at each other. “Take them,” the tall guy says.

“Take us where?” Avery asks.

“To your deaths,” the masked figure replies.

Avery's dark eyes widen in fear. “We haven't even seen your faces, we don't know you. Just let us go, and we'll never say another word, I promise you.”

“It's cute when they beg,” the third masked man says as he approaches them. The two other masked figures step back and stop aiming their guns at Avery and Logan when the man signals them to with his hands. He steps closer. “Now boys, let's make a deal.”

Avery and Logan swallow hard.

Act Normal

“Yo Avery, wait up.” Logan hurries towards Avery as they head into the school building. Monday morning couldn't have come any quicker. “You spoke to anyone since Saturday?”

“Yeah, I've spoken to tons of people, wanna list?” Avery replies as he walks into class, his back pack hanging from his shoulder.

“You know who I mean,” Logan says as he slides into the seat behind Avery.

“No, I haven't,” Avery says. “Have you?”

“No.” Logan takes out his pen and holds it in his hands. “What if they were just messing with us?”

“I don't care, I've got other things to worry about.”

“Doesn't it scare you?”

Avery turns and faces Logan. “A lot of things scare me, like my mom finding out about Saturday night for two reasons, like me being sent to the principle's office or—“

“I get it,” Logan interrupts. “Turn around, Stuart's here.”

Avery turns and faces the teacher of the year.

“I'd say good morning, but mornings are never good, so let's just get on with what you juvenile idiots need to do before you can graduate,” Mr Stuart says.

“I can't wait for that day,” a student shouts from the back of the class and everyone laughs, everyone except Mr Stuart.

“Oakley, if you're here for attention, you're in the wrong class, the drama class is on the other side of the school.”

Laughter fills the air.

"No Mr Stuart, I'm not here for attention, I'm here to learn," Oakley replies.

"Good, because I'm here to teach. Now everyone shut your asses up before I fill in detention slips."

Avery's dark eyes connect with Mr Stuart's dark eyes and he quickly looks away.

"Harper," Mr Stuart says, making the whole class look at Avery.

"You're quiet this morning, no sarcastic comments to throw at me."

"That'd be hard, throwing comments, as comments can't be thrown. They can be written though, or typed," Avery replies.

The class laughs again.

"Alright, I've got a question for you," Mr Stuart says as he steps closer to Avery's desk, the hairspray in his dark hair shines under the light. "Get the answer right, I'll let you miss second period, get the answer wrong, you stay for an hour after school."

"Do I have to?"

"Answer the question? Yes."

Avery rolls his eyes. "Bring it on."

"Imagine you are in a sinking row-boat surrounded by sharks. How would you survive?" Mr Stuart asks.

Avery feels all eyes on him and he smirks. "I'd stop imagining."

The class roars out in laughter and Avery wears a smirk. Logan pats him on the shoulder from behind.

"Alright, enough. Let's get this lesson back on track."

"It never was on track," Avery mutters.

Avery steps into the library second period and quickly sits in the seat at the far end corner. He places his bag down in front of him and pulls out his phone. No new messages. No missed calls. He's beginning to feel paranoid.

"You okay?"

Avery looks up to see Darcia standing over him, books in her hands. He looks around him and realizes she's talking to him. This never happens. "Yeah, I'm good."

She sits next to him and places the books on the table in front of them. "Can I ask you a question?"

"You just did," he smiles.

She laughs. "You're funny."

Avery tries not to blush. "What is it?"

"Actually I just wanna thank you for Saturday night."

Avery's dark eyes widen as he remembers Saturday night in his mind. Everything was going great until he entered the gas station. What a huge mistake that was.

"Thank you for letting me open up to over the most stupidest thing, and thank you for not judging me."

Avery smiles at Darcia. "Any time."

"How come you're not in class, it's not like you to bunk," Darcia says.

"I'm not bunking," he replies. "I'm simply embracing my free period that Mr Stuart gave me after I got the question to his answer right, or so it seemed."

"Stuart, he's always been an idiot, but quite a fun idiot."

"Yep."

"Are you waiting for someone?"

"No, are you?"

Darcia shakes her head, her auburn curls dangling at each side of her face. Her blue eyes are wide and her lashes long.

"Your eyes are so pretty," Avery says as he stares at Darcia, who is shocked. "They're so blue, when I look into them they remind me of the ocean. I feel as if I'm chilling on a beach somewhere, watching the waves rush to shore."

Darcia's eyes widen and she laughs a little. "I'm sorry, it's just no one has ever said that about my eyes before. Especially not in such fine detail."

"I thought I'd let you know."

"Avery."

Avery turns his head to see Logan pacing through the library. He stands as he sees him. Logan gives him a certain look as he holds out his phone. He takes it from him and swallows hard as he reads the message.

old avenue road, 4:35pm
both be there

“You thought they were just messing with us?”
Logan nods at his best friend. “What do we do?”
“We go.”

Logan pulls up on Old Avenue Road after school has finished. He checks the time. “We have ten minutes.”

Avery stares blankly out the car window at the busy cars passing by. “What do you think they want?”

“I have no idea,” Logan says as he rests his arms on the steering wheel in front of him. “But we made the deal with them.”

“Only because it saved our lives,” Avery says. “And my mom's life, because that idiot took my phone and went through my pictures. He knows what my mom looks like, and he threatened her. He told us if we didn't do what he said he'd kill her. Logan, we should have just let him kill us Saturday night, I'd be okay with that.”

“Shut up, okay,” Logan replies. “Just act normal. Act calm. He's only threatening us just so we do what he says. When he texts us, we meet him and then we leave, that's it. He's just doing this so we don't go to the police.”

“We should have gone to the police, bro. We should have gone straight away, told them about how they stole from the gas station and how we're only alive because we made a deal with them.” Avery runs his fingers through his dark hair. “This is messed up. He could ask us to do anything, I mean the guy could have killed us.”

“It's obvious why he wants us, he has us just where he wants us. He knows we won't say no to whatever he asks us to do because it's our families at stake here. He's manipulating us.”

“I swear, if it's anything too serious, I'm leaving. I don't care if he kills me.”

“Look,” Logan says as he points out the window. “You see that black range rover?”

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