

3. Carissa N.

I sat in the corner of the cold jail cell, head pounding. My eyes closed, I rested my head against the brick walls, not wanting to think about the night's events. 4 hours ago, Andrew had been alive, and now he was gone, and it was my fault.

His last words rang in my head, "Alex, run!" as he foolishly tried to pull something out of his jacket pocket. A clear *bang* rang through the air, and Andrew crumpled to the ground, blood seeping into the tiles of the stupid store we'd been dared to rob.

A memory fluttered into my head, delicate as a butterfly, and as painful as a bee's sting. Their smirks as they dared me to be courageous for once in my life. I *was* going to shake my head like I had a thousand times before, but Andrew slung his arm around my shoulder. Taking my side like he had a thousand times before.

"Sure." He'd said it with so much confidence, he'd always been confident, up until his very last breath.

My shoulder shook, a sob breaking through the facade of bravery that I'd held since I'd been marched into the jail. It seemed like days had passed in that cold, lonely cell.

The cell door slowly opened with a *creak*. I looked up, quickly wiping my tears, it was the officer who'd arrested me.

"Get up," he said in a gruff voice. I got up slowly, not trusting my body to hold any sudden movement. My legs shook as I stood, weak from the grief. He walked me to a table and sat me down, giving me a cup of hot chocolate. I took a sip, the drink warming my whole body.

"So," he started, "What's your name kid?"

"Alex Parker," I whispered, as if him not hearing it would let me leave this rotten hellhole.

"Ok, Alex Parker," he said while typing, "How old are you?"

"17," I answered.

"Great, another teen ruining his life." the officer grumbled, "And what about the idiot who was with you?"

"HIS NAME'S ANDREW!" I shouted, then I slumped back down in my chair. "Sorry sir," I said, "I just, just-"

The officer interrupted me, "Listen here son, in all my years here, do you think you're the only one who's yelled at me?"

I shook my head.

The officer sighed, then spoke again. “My name’s Roger, and I hate it when people call me sir, makes me feel old.” He took a long look at his papers, then shoved them to the opposite side of his desk.

“What’s your story kid? Why’d you do it?” he asked.

I told him everything from the very beginning. How me and Andrew were orphans that grew up together, how we’d done everything together, and how all Andrew wanted was for me to be accepted just like everyone else. I told him that Andrew meant everything to me, and now he was gone. I’d expected him to say something, but he just listened. And as he listened, the look in his eyes changed, he looked sad, as if he was reminiscing, remembering something better left buried.

I finished, and Officer Roger looked at me for a long time with those sad, reminiscing eyes of his. Then he got up and handed me a new cup of hot chocolate. I hadn’t even noticed mine was drained.

“What was your dream?” he asked, voice trembling a little.

“My dream was to be a police officer, someone who helps others, and...” I swallowed, “It still is.” He stared into my eyes, gauging my sincerity, and then he smiled. A smile that a father would give a child who just took their first steps, who’d spoken their first words.

It was the first time I’d ever received such a smile, and so, I smiled back. Nothing big, I couldn’t do big yet. It was a small smile, and yet it meant the most.

He handed me a piece of paper. I looked at Officer Rogers, a question in my eyes.

“We’ve started a new program,” he said, “Each officer gets one chance, we can enroll one person into the police academy, free of charge...”

He kept talking, but all I heard were the words *one chance*. I’d had one chance, and I already blew it. Officer Rogers waved his hands in front of my face.

“Alex? You still with me?” I snapped out of my thoughts, and looked at my hands in my lap, wondering what more he had to say, there was no way he was going to let me have it.

“I want to give you that chance.” He stated simply. I looked up quickly, not believing what I’d just heard.

“Are- are you serious?” I asked, voice shaking. “You’re not kidding?”

Office Roger chuckled softly, “If I was kidding, I’d be a pretty bad person, wouldn’t I?” I quickly scanned the piece of paper and looked up again, not fully believing the opportunity in front of me.

He held out a pencil and said, “Go for it.”

In that moment, I could’ve sworn I heard Andrew’s voice overlaying with his, “**Go for it.**”

I choked down my tears, “Thank you.” I said with a broken smile. This chance had cost a life, did I really deserve it? I wrestled away my insecurities and took the pencil.

Name: Alex Parker

Date of Birth: November 28, 2001

Why Do YOU deserve this:

I stopped for a moment, staring down at the question, wondering what they would want to hear, and then it hit me. It’s not what they wanted to hear, it’s what was true.

I took a deep breath and started writing. I wrote down my story, and what I intended to do with this chance. I wanted to help people, that’s all I’d ever wanted.

It’s what I still want, and it’s what I’ll want for the rest of my career as a police officer.