

Excerpt from Chapter 1:

*Late September 1984*

**Overdose Warning.** My index finger landed on these two words. I tilted the box to reduce the fluorescent lights' glare as it flickered across the small typeface.

Once the words came into focus, I scanned them quickly:

**TYLENOL® PM** relieves your pain fast so you can sleep and feel refreshed after a good night's rest.

I didn't want an overdose warning; I wanted overdose advice. I wanted to know what to take so I would a sleep for an eternity.

I would need to take more than just the Tylenol to be sure it worked, so I decided I should combine the pills with Nyquil. Yes, together, these would create my own little annihilation cocktail.

But would buying these two products together look suspect at the checkout counter? The cashier could ask, "*Hey, girl, are you planning to kill yourself?*"

And then I could say: "*Yes, you asshole, I am. I'm pregnant and I'm desperate and this is the solution that causes the least pain for everyone in the long run.*"

"*And it's none of your fucking business,*" I'd add.

One by one, I took the packages off the shelf—two of each—and placed them gently in the red plastic shopping basket draped across my left arm.

"Excuse me," a middle-aged lady said suddenly, startling me. She smiled and nodded at me. I stepped aside so she could reach out and take her own box of sleep aids from the shelf. I was sure she was really going to use hers to sleep and not to kill herself, but I guess you never know.

As I moved over for her, I reached deep down inside my soul and pulled out a smile in return. I hadn't smiled for days, but this woman made me think of my mom, whose gentle face entered my mind like an uninvited but welcome guest.

I meandered through the drugstore aisles. Before now I'd never thought much about the number of products that were available to solve your problems. There

were products to take away body odor, products to make your skin soft, products to get rid of zits and stop bleeding. There were tablets to freshen your breath and capsules to make your headache go away. There were pills to make you sleep, and even kill yourself if you wanted.

But there was nothing to make a pregnancy disappear.

As I passed the plethora of feminine hygiene supplies, I thought of the pretty pink box of Playtex tampons that sat unopened in my dorm-room closet. It had taunted me over the past few weeks, especially this morning. I'd thought of the many times over the years that I'd hated having to open those boxes, having to deal with the inconvenience and hassle of a period. Now opening that box would seem like opening a very special gift.

I moved on from tampons to chips. I stood in a daze in front of the Doritos, Fritos, Old Dutch potato chips, and other unhealthy snacks. The bags lounged in their steel racks, just waiting to be picked up. The Fritos looked good—they always looked good—so I grabbed a bag, placing it strategically into my basket to cover the boxes of Tylenol and Nyquil. I also grabbed some Doritos. *What the hell? I may as well eat all I want.* I'd been dieting for years—most of my life, really. Another curse of being a girl, and a childhood gymnast at that.

As I approached the checkout counter, the collage of women's magazines reinforced the ideal body image that had bombarded me most of my life. Headlines blared: "Lose 10 pounds in 2 weeks!" "Get a flat tummy fast!" "Thinner thighs in 30 days!" None of that mattered anymore.

The guy at the counter was about my age, and I was relieved that he didn't seem fazed by my strange combination of items—I threw in a Toblerone chocolate bar at the last minute to add to the mix as he rang up the sale.

"Thanks," I said, avoiding his eyes. I didn't want this guy to feel bad later on when the authorities figured out he was the one who sold me the ingredients for my permanent nightcap.

Plastic bag clutched tightly in my hand, I headed back out to the outdoor mall area of downtown Mankato, Minnesota. I took a seat on one of the wooden benches that dotted the sidewalk and dug my Marlboro Lights out of my backpack. It was about my tenth cigarette for the day, and it wasn't even noon. I lit up and took a deep, long drag.

God, I hoped this was the right way to do this. *This is not something I can screw up; I don't want to screw up again.* But I was damned either way. “Thou shalt not kill,” the commandment said. Nowhere did it specify, “Thou shalt not kill yourself,” but the nuns had made it clear: you do that and you’ll burn in hell. But what made them know everything? Hell, the church didn’t even respect them, so why should I?

*Maybe a gun would be a better choice than pills.* There were plenty at home, as I came from a family of hunters. I pictured myself back at home, unlocking the gun cabinet and taking a shotgun from the rack. I’d sneak back to my bedroom, position myself on the bed with the yellow-and-green daisy-print bedspread. Then I’d pull the trigger. It would be fast. And it was more of a sure thing.

But it would be so awful for whoever would find me—and unfortunately, that person would most likely be my mom. She was always home. *Always there for us.*

I put my head in my hands and rubbed my temples, careful not to burn my hair with my cigarette. No, I couldn’t do that. My mom was just too nice and too sweet for me to do that to her. To find her baby like that would be awful—red blood and grey matter with bits of blonde hair splattered against the beautiful daisy bedspread.

I took another deep drag and looked up. The sign “Someplace Else” hung there, laughing at me.

Just last week, my new friends and I had been in Someplace Else, one of the more happening bars downtown. Laughing, dancing, talking, flirting—we’d been on top of the world that night, the same as every night since school had began. It was a dream come true, being at college and on my own.

Now here I was at the same spot, this time at bottom. In just a few weeks I had tumbled from straddling the high board of life to lying at the bottom of the pool. Just last week I was a freshman in love with my friends and my new life. Now, I sat here wondering how many sleeping pills I should take to end my life.

I’d already sorted through my options:

Option 1: Give up college. Get married. Live in Mitchell. Be a mom.

**Option 2: Have the baby. Be a single parent. Live with my parents in the town I had so desperately wanted to leave.**

**Option 3: Have an abortion. Don't tell anyone. Ever. Go on with life.**

**Option 4: Grow the baby. Have the baby. Give it to some strangers to raise.**

**But none of these seemed right. It also didn't even seem right that I was having to make this decision at all. I had used birth control. I had only slept with Jim, my boyfriend from back home, about five times—that wasn't much! Especially not compared to all my friends. But here I was. Which is how I ended up at Option 5.**