

## Chapter 2

Ice covered the windows as Jack Frost spread his icy fingers across the glass. Freezing draughts whistled underneath the door. Karena shivered as she tried to pull the only blanket she owned over her cold body. The house, a squalid derelict building, was dark and smelly. No electricity or running water, but at least it provided a little shelter from the winter weather. Karena huddled tighter into the corner of the room trying to keep warm. She hoped her unborn baby would not be harmed by her unforeseen circumstances. She had never dreamt that her life would turn out like this.

Eight months ago Karena was a healthy, happy 16 year old, living at home with her parents. She was doing well at school and was hoping to go on to college and get her A levels. Maybe even go on to university and get an English degree. Then she met a boy and her life changed dramatically.

It was the first day of term 3 and a new lad was joining their class. As soon as Karena entered the classroom her pale-blue eyes made contact with his dark-blue eyes and immediately she felt an unexplained bond towards him. He had dark blond hair, was tall for his age and slim. She smiled at him and he winked at her. The class teacher asked Karena to sit next to the boy and after registration she was to give him a tour of the school. His name was Tony. He stood up when she approached him and she found she had to look up when she spoke to him. He was a lot taller than her.

Patently, he followed her around the school, listening intently to every word she said. Karena felt comfortable talking to him, as though she had known him for a long time. As the weeks went by they became inseparable. Then, one afternoon he asked her out on a date. He suggested a trip to the cinema and then a meal. Of course she accepted at once, without consulting her parents. He suggested they went on a Friday evening, so that it wouldn't interfere with school the next day.

However, that's when the problems with her parents began. They were very protective and controlling. She wasn't allowed to go out after school, not even with her girl friends from school. Karena felt very nervous that evening at the thought of asking her parents if she could go out next Friday evening. She debated whether she should tell a little white lie and say she had been invited

out by her best friend Amy. But she knew liars are always found out in the end, so the truth would be the best policy.

Karena's mother was a stickler for old fashioned values and always insisted that they had dinner sat at the dining table. It was always served at precisely 6pm. Nothing would prevent her mother from serving the meal. Karena thought that even the end of the world would not stop her. The family had to wash and change for dinner. Her father was almost as bad with his routines. It was just like the Victorian times, Karena thought to herself. They took their seats at the table, which had to be the same place every mealtime, then her father said grace. The meal was eaten in silence and it was only after the dessert that conversation could take place. With the feeling of dread in her stomach, she bravely brought up the subject of going out. Her hands were shaking and her voice trembled as she began to speak her first words.

"Father, can I possibly go out to the cinema next Friday?" A deathly silence followed. Karena was holding her breath, waiting for the shout of anger. Her mother seemed to pale into a ghost-like colour. To everybody's astonishment there was no shout, no reddening of the face, in fact he remained quite calm. "Would that be with the new young lad in the neighbourhood?" he asked.

"Yes father," she replied.

"Mmmm, he appeared to be quite a nice lad. He came around yesterday and asked for my permission to take you out. He also promised to take you to a respectable film and to have you back by 10:00pm. Any lad with manners and values like that in this day and age deserves a chance. So the answer is yes." There were astonished looks from the rest of the family that were sat around the table. They couldn't quite believe what they had just heard. "I will decide what you will be wearing, young lady, it has to be modest. None of this modern-day stuff that they call fashion these days," he told her firmly. That was one compromise she could make, she didn't care too much about fashion anyway. However, she could see in her mother's eyes that she did not approve at all. In fact Karena was sure that she would do her utmost to prevent her from going out.

Every evening, when Karena got home from school, her mother would make her do her homework and then find household chores for her to do. By the

time Friday arrived Karena was extremely tired, her hands were red and sore from all the chores and she looked pale and exhausted. Her mother even had her working until there was only ten minutes before she was due to go out.

Hastily, she washed and put on the clothes that her father had chosen for her: a long, black skirt; a high-necked white blouse and a plain, black cardigan. Her shoes were flat, black leather and laced up. Karena felt very dowdy.

Tony arrived exactly on time. Unfortunately, Karena's mother answered the door. She gave him a very frosty greeting; she didn't even ask him to wait in the hallway. Karena's mother turned her back, pushing the door so that it was almost closed, and left him on the doorstep. He waited patiently. He could hear her mother giving Karena a lecture on how a young lady should behave.

After another ten minutes they were finally able to leave. Tony waited until they were around the corner and then took hold of her hand. "I now understand why you were so reluctant to come out with me. Let's just concentrate on having a good time this evening," he gently said to her.

"Thank you for understanding," she replied.

Luckily the cinema was only a short walk from the house and despite leaving later than they had intended, the couple made it just in time. The usher showed them to their seats. The adverts had just finished as they sat in their seats. Tony slowly edged his hand towards Karena's, then tenderly began to stroke the back of her hand. His hand felt cool and she was shaking slightly. He leaned in towards her and whispered in her ear. "Don't be nervous: I won't do anything you don't want me to." He felt her begin to relax and then took hold of his hand. The pair remained like that until the interval.

"Refreshments will be on sale from the usherettes at the front of the auditorium," the announcer, with a deep voice, broadcasted from the speakers.

"Would you like an ice cream?" Tony asked.

"Yes please, a dark choc-ice would be lovely."

Luckily the queue wasn't very long and he soon returned with the ice creams. The lights dimmed and the second half of the film began. Once again Tony took

hold of her hand and they remained like this until the film had ended. Most of the people got up straight away whilst the film credits were still showing, but they decided to wait until the crowds had dispersed and then made their way out of the cinema.

There was now a chill in the air so they briskly walked the few yards to the restaurant. "Can I help you?" the maître d' asked.

"I have a table for two booked in the name of Price."

"This way please, sir, madam."

He led them to an alcove towards the back of the building. The decor was very romantic: the walls were a neutral colour; a crisp, white tablecloth covered the table; a silver specimen vase containing a red rose sat in the centre of the table and red napkins folded into a fan shape nestled inside one of the many glasses. The waiter then brought them the menu and took their drinks order. As they were under age and knowing what Karena's parents were like, Tony ordered them lemonade. For starters they opted for the tomato soup. They didn't have to wait long before the steaming bowls were placed before them. Fresh crusty rolls and butter were also served with the soup. Karena thought it was the best soup she had ever tasted. For the main course they both opted for the roast chicken with seasonal vegetables, which was equally as delicious. Not being used to so much food in one sitting, Karena was feeling very full, therefore for dessert she ordered the lemon sorbet. She had never had anything like it before and she savoured each mouthful. The sharp lemon ice freshened her mouth and was very refreshing. Unfortunately time was passing very quickly, consequently as soon as they had finished eating Tony had to pay the bill and they had to make their way back to her home.

Nearing her house Tony gently took Karen in his arms and shyly kissed her once. Karena smiled, she felt warm and fuzzy inside. "This has been the best night of my life," she informed him.

"Me too but, we must hurry now or we shall be late and I have a feeling that I would never be allowed to take you out again if we were."

They arrived at her front door with five minutes to spare and as expected her mother and father were on the doorstep waiting for her. How glad she was that Tony had kissed her before they had got near to her home.

“In you come, Karena,” her father said. “Well done lad for getting her home on time.” And with that he closed the door.

It was several weeks before Tony would dare to ask Karena’s parents if he could take her out again. It was the school holidays. Reluctantly they allowed her to go out again, but as before she had to be home by 10pm.

After several months Karena’s parents began to trust Tony. Even after all that time he had still not been invited into the house. Their relationship continued to develop and they became inseparable when they were together.

Despite her parents’ attitude towards Tony and that girls shouldn’t have careers, she continued to do well at school. She passed all her exams with flying colours and had enrolled at the local college.

Another year passed. Tony and Karena were still together and their relationship had become quite serious. They took every opportunity that they could to be together. At the end of the college year there was an end of year ball and Karena told her parents she would be staying at a friend’s house afterwards. That was the plan, but events soon changed those plans.

Many of the students arrived at the venue in limousines, even Tony, but she had to walk because she had changed into her gown and put make-up on in the college restrooms.

Tony was already there and was waiting eagerly for her arrival. When she walked through the door his jaw dropped. She looked absolutely stunning. Her satin gown was a beautiful shade of pale blue that matched her eyes. She had tied up her long hair and twisted it into a bun. Her nails were painted with a contrasting shade of blue and she wore dark-blue high heeled shoes. As he approached her, her heart missed a beat. He looked so handsome. He was dressed in a formal black dress suit, a white shirt and coincidentally a pale blue tie that complimented her dress. He took her hand, kissed the back of it and led her into the hall. She felt like a princess.

It was a typical student ball, alcohol and drugs had been smuggled into the building. Karena had never drank or taken drugs – for that matter never been out to a dance. Tony was buying her cola, but unknown to him, his supposed friends were spiking it with vodka. Inevitably, by the end of the evening they were so drunk that they didn't know what they were doing.

The following morning Karena woke up in her own bed. She had no idea how she had got there, how she even got home and certainly no recollection of the rest of the evening at the ball. She tried to get out of bed. Her head throbbed, her legs were like jelly and before she could get to the bathroom she threw up onto her bedroom floor. She thought she was going to pass out. At that moment her mother came into the room, with a stern expression on her face. She had no sympathy, and simply said "You have betrayed our trust in you. You are no longer allowed to see Tony. I have arranged for a tutor to come here so that you don't need to go to school and you must remain in the house at all times! Now clean up that revolting mess."

Crying to herself, Karen cleared up the vomit and managed to get to the bathroom to try to freshen up. She soon discovered that all she could do was go back to bed, take some pain killers and drink copious amounts of water.

By lunchtime she was beginning to feel human again and thought she would try to eat something. Gingerly, she crept downstairs trying to avoid meeting her parents. She needn't have worried: they were out shopping. A dry piece of toast and a cup of tea was all that she could manage to eat, so she retired back to her bedroom. For the next few days her parents avoided her when they could and didn't speak to her when they did see her. Most nights she cried herself to sleep.

This went on for several months until one evening her mother spoke to her: "Have you something you wish to say to me?"

Karena lowered her head thinking that her mother was expecting an apology. "Sorry mother," she mumbled.

"Look at your waistline young lady. Are you pregnant?" she growled.

"I, I don't know," Karena stammered. "I can't remember anything about that night. It wasn't my fault: I was drinking cola. Everything is just a blur."

“Enough!” shouted her mother.” I want you out of this house tonight: take what you can carry and leave. You are no daughter of mine,” and with that she stormed out of the room leaving a devastated Karena.

It hadn't crossed Karena's mind that she could be pregnant – where would she go? Who could possibly help her? She rushed upstairs and packed a few essentials into her haversack, emptied her money box – not that it contained very much – and grabbed her small toy teddy. Rushing out of the house her last thought was she was better off without her parents.

Pausing in the park, to gather her thoughts, she sat on a bench wondering what on earth to do. Firstly she must see if Tony would help her, and then go to the doctor to see if she is pregnant. Walking quickly to the street where Tony lived her spirits began to lift a little. Surely he would help her, even after all this time. Nearing the house her heart sank. A “for sale” notice was in the garden of his house, and as she got closer she could see that the property was empty. He had gone, her only hope of help. Tears flooded down her face; she sat on the garden wall and sobbed. A kindly woman stopped to ask if she was okay. Karena just nodded and waved the woman away. Karena got up and walked to the nearest cafe, ordered a tea, and sat staring out of the window in a daze. Her whole world had just come to an end.

She sat there until closing time – she had not realised the time of day – when the manageress had to ask her to leave. Karena stepped out onto the road, where people were rushing home from work. Walking aimlessly around the streets, she finally found herself outside the Salvation Army building.

She knocked on the door and it was opened by a friendly woman, who smiled kindly at her. “How can I help you my dear?” she asked.

“I need a bed for the night: my parents have thrown me out,” she replied. She then broke down in tears.

“Oh you poor thing, come in and let me help you. What is your name dear?”

“Karena,” She sobbed. “There is no one I can turn to. I have no friends and I have just discovered that my boyfriend has moved away.”

The woman led her into a homely-looking office and asked Karena to sit down in the comfortable, but slightly worn arm chair. Then the woman patiently listened while Karena poured her heart out to her. It was agreed that she could stay the night and they would even get the doctor to call and check her over.

The following morning, after she had eaten breakfast and freshened up a little, the doctor arrived. She confirmed that Karena was pregnant and arranged for her to have regular check-ups at the local health centre. The Salvation Army arranged for her to stay at a local emergency hostel, until something more permanent could be arranged.

Life at the hostel was good, although she did tend to keep herself to herself most of the time, until a woman moved in above her. She was a bully and the rest of the residents were terrified of her. Karena approached her one afternoon to try to make friends. That turned out to be a big mistake. The woman, whose name was Melanie, looked down her nose at her and with a snide look on her face asked Karena,

“Who do you think you are, you low life. How dare you even look at me, let alone try to speak to me! Off back to your room or it will be a thrashing for you.” Karena lowered her eyes and silently went back to her room. She was too afraid to venture out, except for mealtimes and to use the bathroom, so she spent the next few days in her room. All of the residents were so afraid of Melanie that the atmosphere in the building was very tense. Suddenly, outside her room there was a scream and then a loud thump, followed by sobbing. Karena slowly opened her door and she saw one of the residents curled up into a ball like a foetus and sobbing.

That night Karena packed the few belongings that she had and as silently as she could, crept down the hallway and left the hostel for good. The rest of the night she wandered the quiet streets trying to gather her thoughts. By the morning she was exhausted and sat on a park bench trying to rest a little. She must have dozed off because it was late afternoon when she could feel someone gently shaking her. She opened her eyes to see a homeless woman, with a kind face, looking at her. “You look like you need some help my luv. Come with me and I will show you a dry place to sleep tonight,” she told her. In a daze Karena followed the kind woman to an abandoned shop. The door had

been forced open and inside it smelt dank and musty. There were several people in there. They all looked like homeless people. The woman pointed to a corner and told her that she could sleep there. Kindly, they shared with her the little food they had.

Karena had a restless night, but at least she was able to get some sleep. The people seemed friendly enough and offered to show her how to survive on the streets. Between them they managed to find enough food to survive for a few weeks, then bad luck struck again. The landlord of the shop had sold the property and the new owners wanted to make it a going concern again. Therefore they were all back out on the streets and had to go their separate ways.

Karena wasn't so fortunate this time. She had found an empty house. She snuggled down in the draughty, cold corner, concerned for her baby. Unknown to her the other inhabitants were drug addicts. They persuaded her to try some for fun; they said it would cheer her up a bit and take away her sad feelings. The first time she tried the drugs she didn't like it, but they insisted she kept on trying it and before she knew it she was addicted to heroin. She was so addicted that she didn't even worry about the baby anymore. Most of her days and nights were spent in a foggy daze where reality became blurred with fantasy. Monsters roared at her one moment and the next she was on fluffy white clouds without a care in the world.

One morning her dreams were interrupted by a sharp pain in her stomach, which then became a fire breathing dragon trying to burst its way out of her stomach. In her drug induced state the pains of labour were becoming terrifying beasts trying to murder her. She cried out in agony; she was terrified. The other inhabitants had left her alone to suffer. Luckily a woman passing by heard her screams and called the police.

The police arrived and once they realised what was happening called for an ambulance. Karena was taken to the local hospital. She was in such a state and they were so concerned for the baby that they had to perform a caesarean. The poor little mite, a little girl, was very tiny; and because of her mother's addiction was already addicted to heroin. She was whisked off to intensive

care, where she was to spend months withdrawing from drugs and gaining weight.

Karena was sent to a rehabilitation centre; unfortunately she relapsed several times before she was finally clean. Eventually, Tony, who had finally heard of the situation, met her again and now they were a couple once more.

The baby was sent to foster homes and care homes, but was not a settled child and would often run away.