

PART OF ALL BOOK PROCEEDS WILL BE DONATED
TO THE AMANDA TODD LEGACY SOCIETY

When best friends Kaitlyn and Rebecca begin their first year of high school together, excitement quickly turns to danger. Rebecca finds herself the victim of a physical and cyber bully. Concerned for her safety, Kaitlyn is determined to report the incidents...until she speaks to Rebecca. Much to her surprise, Kaitlyn finds herself on the receiving end of stern and convincing requests to remain silent. Although at first reluctant, Kaitlyn becomes a bystander.

Months pass and without reason to assume otherwise, Kaitlyn is confident their troubles are over. But when tragedy strikes, Rebecca's darkest secrets are revealed and Kaitlyn is consumed by the pain of her silence and her hesitancy to take action. Amidst serious emotional and mental repercussions, Kaitlyn must extract herself from the depths of her negative state to somehow make good fortune out of misfortune.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Katie Kuperman is a passionate writer, entrepreneur and mother. Situated in Toronto, Canada, she lives with her family and is the owner and principal copywriter of Striking Content, a content writing and strategizing business. Her life is rich with a breadth of experiences ranging from competitive sport and travel, to academics and entrepreneurship, to motherhood and the pursuit of dreams. Katie writes with intent and purpose to make her readers feel, learn and do. It is her hope and her vision that, through her writing, she may be the ink that dots the lives of others in a positive and meaningful way.

An anti-bullying advocate and never one to shy away from voicing her opinion, this is a story written to open the eyes of our youth today, not only to see what bullying can amount to, but also what each of us is capable of when presented with an opportunity to talk.

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THE ONLY WAY OUT

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*A bully, a victim and a bystander
whose lives will never be the same.*

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

My two incredible children.

*May you never feel the wrath of a bully,
and if you do, may you know the way out.*

Amanda Todd.

*A life too short. Without your story, I never
would have put pen to paper. Rest in peace.*

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Though I always knew I wanted to write a book, I was never certain about the subject matter...until I became aware of Amanda Todd's story. A young teen who described her experience as one of struggle, bullying and self-harm, Amanda's life ended tragically in suicide at the age of 15. It is her story that inspired me to write *The Only Way Out*.

When it came time to publish, I was consumed by a strong desire to acknowledge Amanda's name. I sought out Carol Todd, Amanda's mother and a prominent voice in the bullying prevention space. She granted me permission and now I am truly honored to have this book dedicated to Amanda.

Since then, Carol Todd and I have connected in a few ways, one of which is a donation partnership. A portion of the proceeds from every book sale of *The Only Way Out* will be donated to the Amanda Todd Legacy Society, which makes a direct impact through education, awareness and support for those who struggle with bullying and mental health issues.

THE ONLY WAY OUT



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MOTIONLESS



I stood there and watched. It was horrible. They beat her right there in the schoolyard. Utterly ashamed yet too much of a coward to make a move, I hid behind the trunk of our school's oldest tree.

Fear paralyzed me.

As I watched this ghastly incident take place right before my eyes, I desperately wondered how we got here. How had our lives come to this? There I was, hiding, weak and petrified. And there was my dearest Rebecca, lying, still and lifeless.

Why wasn't I stronger? Why couldn't I be the brave one to save her? One of us had to be—and yet none of us were. An evil had taken over our school and if you were on the unlucky side of it, you didn't stand a chance. The longer I stood there, the more frightened I became.

I saw the crowd around her disperse, but Rebecca didn't move. There was blood. My breath quickened as I realized the severity of the situation. In my mind, I begged for a physical gesture—for a sign that she was okay.

Nothing.

What had they done?!

Three teachers rushed the field. As they flooded the space around her, I felt myself begin to walk forward. Every so often, I'd catch a glimpse of Rebecca between the movement as people scrambled on their cell phones and frantically shouted over and over again, "Call 911! Call 911!"

Slow and robotic, I forced myself to walk. In that moment, I experienced the crippling sensation of my most haunting, recurrent dream. The one in which I needed desperately to run fast but it was as though a force much greater held me back. I could feel my face wincing in pain and frustration as I tried to be quick. But the fear was too great. It overtook me and my entire body began to shake. In one moment, I heard the screams—the panic—among the students and teachers who stood above her, and in the next, nothing but my own deep, panting breath.

The fire truck arrived. Already? I wondered how long I'd been frozen in my own slow-motion reality. Now I stopped dead in my tracks as I watched the firefighters blast the scene. I couldn't see Rebecca at all anymore.

An ambulance pulled in.

Then another fire truck.

Then two police cars.

After what felt like only seconds, I saw two men in uniforms emerge from the crowd, holding Rebecca on a stretcher. A large lump formed in my throat. I tried to swallow it away but it wouldn't budge, making my breath quicken to a pace that began to terrify me. I was losing control.

Step. I tried to instruct my legs to move.

Step. I tried again.

Gasping for breath, body shaking, knees buckling, somehow I made it. I reached that tainted spot on the field. Stopping dead in my tracks,

Motionless

I stared at the ground beneath my feet. The patch of grass where she had lain was tousled and matted and now had a different consistency than the rest of the field. You could tell something happened there. Everything grew blurry as my eyes welled with tears.

2

ON OUR WAY



“Don’t forget your lunch!” Mom screeched. My goodness was she ever nervous. Her voice always echoed the same high-pitched tone whenever she was anxious about something.

“I won’t,” I replied, trying to keep my voice calm so she wouldn’t sense my own strong sentiment of anticipation. That would only make matters worse. I smiled at her as she continued to bustle about all around me. It was a big day! Her “little girl” (although I despised the thought of that expression since I was a whopping fourteen now) was growing up—much too fast if you asked her. But Mom’s emotions didn’t hinder my mood in the slightest—I was so excited I could barely contain myself! A new school, new people, new classes, new teachers... Slightly nerve racking I suppose and I’m sure every ninth grader’s mind was buzzing uncontrollably with similar questions: Will I fit in? Will people like me? Will I get good grades? Will I have nice teachers?

As I took one last look at myself in the large hall mirror, Dad piped up from the living room behind me, “All ready, Kiddo?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be,” I said. To be honest, I just wanted to get the first day over with! The summer buildup was too much to bear a moment longer.

I imagine I was a great deal more nervous than other students because the only other person I knew was my best friend and next-door neighbor, Rebecca. You see, Leacrest High was an arts school with specialty programs for drama, visual arts, music and dance. Students who lived within the specified surrounding area could attend Leacrest without a focus in the arts, whereas those who were accepted into the arts program were permitted to attend the high school even though they resided outside the mainstream boundaries. Rebecca and I were out-of-area arts students (she in music and I in dance), which meant that unlike other grade nines we wouldn’t have the vast majority of our elementary school friends with us. Although I was slightly apprehensive about the fact that literally every last one of my previous schoolmates was attending a different school, I was thrilled to be with Rebecca at last. We’d always attended different elementary schools but had become the best of friends over the last twelve years as next-door neighbors.

I gave Dad a big hug, kissed Mom on the cheek and made my way out the front door. I took a deep breath. The air outside was fresh and I felt it flow through my nostrils, past my throat and into my chest. I walked across the porch towards Rebecca’s house. Our families had arranged that her father would drive us to school, since it was on the way to his office. I couldn’t have been happier about the plan because it meant one less city bus ride for us.

As I jumped off the porch, walked across the grass and onto Rebecca’s driveway, I could feel my parents staring at me through the living room

window. I chuckled a little to myself and turned around to verify my suspicion. Yes, there they were, now smiling and waving frantically. I laughed even harder as I waved back.

Continuing across the driveway to the Blaines' doorstep, I felt my nerves begin to subside. Before I even had a chance to knock, Rebecca swung the door open and greeted me with an excited scream.

"Can you believe it?" she squealed.

"I know. This is crazy!" I yelled as we linked arms down the walkway.

Mr. Blaine was only a mere second behind us and he almost startled me as he grabbed my shoulders, gave them a little shake and asked excitedly, "Ready for your first day, Kaitlyn?"

"You bet, Mr. Blaine," I replied. "Especially since I have Rebecca here with me."

"Yeah, it's fantastic you gals get to do this together," he said as he opened the car door and plunked inside. I nestled into the back seat while Rebecca took the front. I felt the car jolt as Mr. Blaine shifted into reverse.



Rebecca was a talented saxophone player. We'd lived next door to one another nearly our entire lives. When each of us was just a year old, the Blaines and my parents moved into numbers 12 and 14 Buckingham Way, respectively.

The dearest of friends we were—sharing similar interests, enjoying highly entertaining play dates and always spending as much time together as possible. During our elementary years, Rebecca attended a French immersion school in our local town and I a public school. And now finally the time had come. We'd be together.

As young children we took turns at each of our homes, flipping from one house to another, playing in each other's basements, swimming in the Blaines' pool, conducting intense baking sessions in my parents' kitchen and building secret hideaways in each other's backyards.

"Taste Tests" were my favorite. Actually, I could never quite decide whether I hated the game or loved it. The designated setting was the kitchen, and back and forth, we'd take turns.

"You're up!" Rebecca would say, her hands wrapped tightly 'round her back.

"Ugh! I don't want to," I'd whine, a huge grin on my face. We'd burst into hysterical laughter, each of us sharing the same undecided, love-hate sentiment for the game.

"C'mon now, it's only fair," Rebecca would insist.

I'd close my eyes and purse my lips shut.

"Open up," she'd demand.

Frowning and pursing my lips shut at first, I'd finally decide to slowly open my mouth. Again, my laughter would get the better of me and I'd fall over in my chair as Rebecca frantically stepped backwards to hide her arms yet again behind her back so as not to spoil the surprise of whatever tasty—or maybe not so tasty—treat awaited me. Sometimes our bouts of hysterical laughter would continue on for quite some time until finally we'd gain our composure long enough for me to taste whatever it was she held so secretively behind her back.

I'd open my mouth as wide as I could and the spoon would enter. "Now close," Rebecca would order. I'd close my mouth and slowly begin swishing my tongue around, usually with a disgusted look on my face. What was most unnerving was this very part of the game—feeling a foreign texture and taste in my mouth, and then trying desperately to

figure out what it was. After a few seconds, I'd have it! My expression would turn from disgust to utter pleasure.

"Peanut butter and chocolate sauce!" I'd exclaim. "Phew!"

Again, we'd laugh. Always respectful of one another, the object of the game was not to make one another ill, but rather to enjoy a tasty treat and guess what it was. You'd be surprised how many times neither one of us could decipher what strange substance was floating around in our mouths! I'm sure if we were boys, the game would have taken on a much different form. Maybe Tabasco sauce mixed with strawberry jam?

When Rebecca and I came to the conclusion that we would both audition for the arts programs at Leacrest High School, we knew there'd be several nerve-racking months ahead of us. Although at first I presumed the auditions would be the worst of it all, I couldn't have been more wrong. The most terrifying part of the process was the waiting—the long, tedious, cannot-stand-another-moment period of anticipation before the response letters were mailed.

We spoke about it often and Rebecca was just as apprehensive as I—not only for her own admittance into the school, but for mine too. How awful it would have been if only one of us had made it! Thank goodness we were both selected.

Or so I thought.

Today, I wish with all my heart that Rebecca hadn't been accepted to Leacrest High.