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My Life as A White Trash Zombie



Par Diana Rowland

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThis title has been removed from sale by Penguin Group, USA.ExtraitChapter 1You should be dead, the ER nurse stated as she adjusted something on my IV. She was more husky than fat, with too much eye makeup, and hair that had been dyed a nasty shade of reddish orange. When I didnt immediately respond she glanced my way, as if to assure herself that I really was awake and aware. You realize that, right? she demanded. Youre pretty damn lucky to be alive.Umokay, I muttered. Beneath the sheet I ran a hand over my stomach, frowned. Have I been in a coma or something? I asked.Her thin lips pinched together. A coma? No. You were brought in a few hours ago. She paused, set her hands on her hips.

You overdosed. I scrubbed a hand over my face, shook my head. No, I was in a car accident, I insisted. I remember being injured. Didn't I? I was bleeding, I added, less certain as I ran my hand over the unbroken skin of my stomach again. She gave a dismissive snort. There's not a scratch on you. You must have hallucinated it. Her eyes narrowed with contempt and disapproval. I didn't care. I was used to seeing that when people looked at me. Glass and blood and metal. A broken body beside me. Teeth and hunger. Gobbets of flesh ripped away. Cold sweat broke out on the back of my neck. How could that have been a hallucination? Hallucinations were strange and hazy and jumbled. I knew. I'd had a few. Making an annoyed noise in the back of her throat, she snagged the chart from the end of the bed. Unknown white female.

Hmmm. Do you remember your name, sweetheart? She flicked her eyes back up to me and gave me a sugary-bitchy smile that didn't have an ounce of true concern in it. Yeah, I know my damn name, I snarled. It's Angel Crawford. I wanted to add, And you can write it down with the pencil that's stuck up your ass, but I managed to hold it back. I knew that nurses had the power to make your life suck worse than it already did, and it was clear that this bitch considered me to be one step away from starring in my own loser reality show. Screw her. I was at least two steps away. The nurse gave a sniff as if she didn't truly believe I was smart or sober enough to know who I was. Let's see what all was in your system: THC, hydrocodone, alprazolam, oxycodone. She rattled off a couple of other drug names that sounded long and scary while I scowled blackly at her. After she finished she gave me a look full of smug satisfaction, hung the chart back up and left the room in a pompous waddle before I could respond. Good thing too, because what I wanted to say to her would have been too much even for a Jerry Springer special. My anger withered as soon as she was gone, overwhelmed by my confusion and sick fear. I lifted the sheet up to see for myself again that I was uninjured. I struggled to make sense of it. I remembered the blood. Lots of it. There'd been some sort of long gash across my stomach, and I had a nauseating memory of seeing the jagged end of white bone poking from my thigh, blood pumping out and all over. But now there was nothing out of place. No scrapes, no bruises. Just perfectly normal flesh all over. A coma could explain that, right? A couple of months or so, enough time for me to heal up. Except that I didn't have any scars, either. Sighing, I dropped my head back to the pillow. I hadn't been in a coma. The nurse wasn't lying or messing with my head. No, I was simply a loser. Overdose.

Great. Well, this was a new low for me, and it didn't help that it was totally believable. The only possibly shocking aspect was that it hadn't happened sooner. I didn't remember taking as many drugs as the bitch nurse had said, but the fact that I was in the ER was proof enough that I obviously had. The nurse hadn't gone and altered my lab results either. I did that all by myself, the old-fashioned way. Weary depression rolled over me as I stared at the speckled tile of the ceiling. Beyond the door I could hear the frenzy of a stretcher being wheeled by and voices raised in brief concern. I knew what would happen next. Some social worker or psychologist would come in and tell me I needed rehab or counseling or some crap like that, which was a stupid suggestion since I didn't have money or insurance. Or worse, I'd get a seventy-two-hour commitment for psychiatric evaluation, since I was clearly a danger to myself, and I'd probably end up in some nasty charity ward. There was no way I was gonna put up with that. I felt perfectly fine now and more than ready to get the hell out of here. I kicked the sheet away and slid off the bed. The tile was smooth and cold against my bare feet. I needed shoes and clothes. I was wearing the stupid hospital gown, and my own clothes were so covered with blood that I'd draw all sorts of attention if I tried to walk out in them. I shook my head. No, the blood had been a hallucination. There was no sign of my clothes in the room. No closet, only one cabinet and an intimidating variety of medical equipment. I started to move toward the cabinet, remembering the IV a step before I accidentally yanked it out of my arm, then spent a couple of seconds trying to decide if I could carry the bag out with me instead of pulling the needle out. Needles freaked me out, but leaving it in would probably be worse than removing it myself. Hell, that was the only reason I'd never gone for the harder drugs like heroin or meth. Too chickenshit to stick a needle into me to get that kind of high. Pills were easy. Plus I could tell myself that I wasn't a real druggie. Except that now I'd almost killed myself just as dead as if I'd ODed on heroin. Pushing that unpleasant thought out of my mind, I peeled off the tape on my arm then clenched my teeth and pulled the needle out. I braced myself against the wave of nausea that always hit me whenever I saw blood, especially my own, but to my relief it didn't hurt at all, and I didn't feel sick. A tiny bead of blood welled up from the puncture site, and I wiped it away with the hem of my gown before I even remembered that I was supposed to be nauseated by it. Maybe that's why I'd hallucinated about being covered in blood? There wasn't much that would freak me out more than that. The door to the room opened again, startling me, and I dropped the IV line with a guilty flush as a different nurse walked in. She was a lot younger than the other one, maybe in her early twenties or so, with sleek blonde hair pulled back in

a ponytail and the sort of fresh no-makeup look I wished I could pull off. I looked like death without makeup, and while my hair was blonde as well, it was that way because I dyed it myself, which meant it was a frizzy, damaged mess. Her eyes flicked to the discarded IV, but she didn't seem to be upset that I'd removed it. I wanted to make sure you were awake and decent, she said with a smile that was kinder than I expected. There are a couple of detectives here who want to talk to you. A frisson of terror shot through me. Wh-why? I asked, though I was pretty sure I knew. They were here to take me to jail. My probation officer had found out about the drug use and my probation was being revoked. Or they wanted me to squeal about where I got my drugs. I must have gone pale because she closed the door and gave me a reassuring smile. They only want to talk to you. You're going to be fine. Here, she said, gently but firmly pushing me back to sit on the bed.

She didn't make me lie back down simply pulled the bed sheet around so that my lower body and bare feet were covered. That's better. I know I can't talk to anyone with any sort of authority if I'm half-naked, she said with a wink. Her unexpected niceness had me a little off-balance, especially after the open hostility of the previous nurse. Where are my other clothes? You, uh, weren't wearing any when you were brought in. Oh, shit. I swallowed hard. Did they take them off in the ambulance? Surely it wouldn't be as bad as if I'd The cops found you on the side of the road naked. Her face twisted in embarrassed sympathy. My throat tightened. Was I mean, had I been? I couldn't say the word. Her eyes widened. No! She shook her head emphatically.

No, the doctor, um, checked. You weren't assaulted. I scrubbed at my face and fought the urge to cry. Overdose and naked on the side of the road. This kept getting better and better. And not even the victim of a crime, just a stupid drugged-out skank. The nurse made a concerned noise in her throat, reached out and gave my upper arms a firm rub. Relax now. Everything's going to be fine. These detectives want to have a word with you, then you'll be ready to get out of here. She turned and left before I could form any sort of coherent response. Right. Everything's going to be fine, I thought with a sour laugh. She didn't know. She couldn't possibly understand why I was freaking. I didn't have to stew in my panic for long. No sooner had the door swung shut behind the blonde nurse than it opened again and two detectives walked in. But they weren't probation officers or narcotics detectives. That threw me. At least I was pretty sure they weren't narcs. Those guys usually went around in jeans and T-shirts, but these two were in dress shirts and ties. The first one in was a burly guy at least six feet tall and stocky with a bit of a pudge working around his middle, blondish brown hair, and a scruffy-looking mustache. The second detective wasn't as tall, but he was big in a muscled way. No pudge on him. I could tell he worked out, and hard. He had dark hair, dark eyes, and an equally dark expression on his face. Both had guns, badges, and handcuffs on their belts. In other words, they intimidated the ever-living shit out of me simply by walking into the room. Ms. Crawford, the burly one began, I'm Detective Ben Roth and this is Detective Mike Abadie. He cocked his head toward the dark-haired detective. We're with the Saint Edwards Parish Sheriff's Office, and we'd appreciate it if you could take a couple of minutes to answer some questions for us. Do I need a lawyer? I blurted. The two men exchanged a quick glance. Oh, great. Nice way to start. Now I sounded guilty as all hell. That's completely up to you, Ms. Crawford, Detective Roth said. But we're only here to see if you might have witnessed anything that could help us solve a crime. You're not under any sort of suspicion at this time. His expression remained serious but his eyes were kind. At least, I wanted to believe that. The other detective looked like he had a permanent scowl on his face. Maybe they were about to play good cop bad cop on me. It would probably work, too. I

always fell for that psychological shit. Especially when I was confused and stressed. Like right now. I gripped the sheet in my hands. Uh, sure. What, what crime? Detective Abadie cleared his throat. You were found on Sweet Bayou Road right off Highway 180. His lips pressed together and I could see the same derision in his eyes that I'd seen in the red-haired nurses. Maybe he didn't know why I was in here, cause of privacy laws or whatever, but he sure as hell had his suspicions. Okay, I said, doing my damndest to not hunch under his gaze. If you say so. At about the same time, he continued, eyes hard and flat, a body was found a few miles further down Sweet Bayou Road. It had been decapitated. Wh-what? I said, staring at him in horror. Decapitated. It means that his head was chopped off, he explained, tone thoroughly patronizing. A sudden burst of anger managed to burn away a good portion of the panic and fear that had been controlling me up until then. I know what decapitated means, I replied with a scowl. But I don't know anything about this. I sure as hell didn't do it! The two men exchanged another quick glance and a sliver of the fear came back. You don't think I did it, do you? Detective Roth shook his head firmly. You're not a suspect at this time, Ms. Crawford. However, right now you're the only possible witness we have. Anything you can remember might be useful. I swallowed. At this time. He kept saying that. In other words I sure as shit hadn't been ruled out, even though I knew there was no way I would have chopped some guy's head off no matter how high I

might have been. So why did I remember blood? I took a shaking breath. No. There was no way. I wasn't a killer. Sweet Bayou Road? I asked, stalling for time to get my thoughts into something other than a jumbled mess. That's where you were found, Detective Roth said patiently. What do you remember? I don't know.

Sweet Bayou Road was only about five minutes down the highway from where I lived, but there wasn't a whole lot on it. A few fishing camps near the end, and the rest of it was several miles of desolate and twisty road through the marsh. I mean, I was at Pillars Bar with my boyfriend. We had a fight and I rubbed my eyes, odd flashes of the hallucination swimming through my head. Blood and pain. I thought I was dying. No, I died. But then I was hungry. Starving-to-death hungry. I took an unsteady breath. Then I was out on the road, and there was an ambulance. I was arguing with the paramedics after they got me into the ambulance, begging for something to eat because I was so damn hungry. Maybe that's why I didn't walk into the stupid white light. Maybe I knew they wouldn't have anything to eat down that way. I must have passed out. I looked up at the two men. Then I woke up here. Sorry. No pain. No hunger. No clue. Detective Abadie let out an exasperated snort. Why were you out there? I don't know, I said. I guess I was trying to walk home. Walking home from the bar would definitely rank as one of the more boneheaded things I'd done in my life. In other words, totally believable. And somewhere along the way I'd decided to strip naked. That must have been one helluva high. Detective Roth tugged a hand through his hair, clearly frustrated. I need you to think real hard, Angel. Did you see anyone? Any cars? Someone walking along the road? I'm sorry, I mumbled, hunching my shoulders. I didn't see anyone. Fatigue and disappointment etched itself across Detective Roth's face. All right, Miss Crawford. If you think of anything else anything at all please give me a call. He pulled out a business card and handed it to me. Yeah, sure thing, I said, obediently taking the card. A sour expression twisted Detective Abadie's mouth. Cmon, Ben, he muttered. We're wasting our time. He turned and stalked out. I couldn't even get annoyed at his reaction. I had been a waste of their time. Detective Roth let out a low sigh but gave me a tired smile. I appreciate your talking to us, Miss Crawford, he said. I hope you get to feeling better. Then he too was out the door, and I was alone in the room once again. Wrung out and depressed, I dropped the card into the wastebasket. This day couldn't get much worse. The blonde nurse entered again, this time carrying a cooler and a large paper grocery bag which she set on the bed beside me. This was left at the nurses station for you, she said, smiling brightly. Looks like you won't have to go home in a hospital gown after all! I'll go get your paperwork ready, and as soon as you're dressed you should be able to get out of here. She was out of the room with the door closing behind her before I had a chance to respond. I stared at the closed door in confusion then looked over at the stuff on the bed. The cooler was one of those mini plastic things, big enough to hold a six-pack of beer. I opened it to find six bottles of Frappuccino. At least that's what I thought it was at first. It was the same type of bottle as those kind of coffee drinks, and the contents were brown and opaque, but there were no labels on the bottles, and there was also some sort of pinkish lumpy sediment at the bottom. What the hell? I checked the bag with the clothes next. A pair of exercise-type pants, a sports bra, underwear, a plain blue T-shirt and some flip-flops all stuff that could be bought if you weren't sure of someone's size. I was skinny with no tits and no muscle tone. As long as the pants had a drawstring at the waist, I was probably good to go. At the bottom of the bag was an envelope and a twenty dollar bill with a little sticky note that had cab fare neatly printed on it. Again, what the hell? My first reaction was to get pissed. I didn't need anyone else's help. I took care of myself because, frankly, depending on someone else meant standing outside an empty, locked elementary school at six p.m. and telling Mrs. Robichaux that no, really, my mom would be here any minute and I didn't need a ride while a) Kerrie Robichaux, who gets 100s on her spelling tests is looking out the car window at me in a way that I'm pretty sure says, Don't you even think about getting your trashy ass in the back seat of this nice car, and b) Mom is again conveniently forgetting I exist because her life was so much fucking better before she got saddled with a kid and had to do boring things like pick me up from school and make sure I had clean clothes and socks that matched. I took care of myself because I figured out that it was better when she didn't remember I was around. And even after she was gone I took care of myself, because Dad couldn't handle being a dad, and instead sat on a bar stool at Kaster's remembering when his life was simple and his wife was fun and he had his job on the oil rig. Except right now I was naked well, not counting the hospital gown. And I couldn't take care of that without help, though I was damned if I could figure out who'd bother getting clothes and cab fare for me. The only person who came to mind was my sort of boyfriend, Randy, but I couldn't see him giving me money for a cab when he could come and get me. Plus, he knew my size. I ripped open the envelope and read the letter. Then I read it again, because it didn't make any sense the first time through. Angel Take good care of the contents of the cooler because it should get you through the

next couple of weeks. Its very important that you drink one bottle every other day, starting tomorrow, or youll start to feel very sick. Be sure to shake it up well before you drink it. Theres a job waiting for you at the Coroners Office. They have an opening for a van driver, and the arrangements have already been made. Go to the office at 9 a.m. tomorrow to fill out the paperwork and start work. Now, heres the deal: You will take this job, and you will hold it for at least one month. If you quit, or are fired before one month is out, your probation officer will be informed that there were drugs in your system when you were brought to the ER, and youll go to jail for violating your probation. And if you go to jail, youll probably die there within a few weeks. This isnt a threat. Its a warning. Id explain, but theres no way youd believe me. Youll understand eventually. Good luck. Hey, look, I thought with a miserable laugh, this day just got worse. I stared down at the letter in confusion and disbelief. My mom had gone to prison when I was twelve and died while still incarcerated, on the day I turned sixteen. That was a little over five years ago. Then last year Id been more of a moron than usual and had bought a nearly new Toyota Prius for five hundred dollars from some guy Randy knew. A week later I was pulled over and arrested for possession of stolen property. Yeah, my bargain of a car had been jacked a couple of weeks earlier in New Orleans. But the seriously sucky part was that Id kinda suspected that it hadnt been legit but went ahead and gave the guy the money for it anyway, too excited about what a great deal I was getting, and convinced that I wouldnt get caught. Moron. Id spent two days scared shitless in a holding cell before I could find someone to bail me out, and had been lucky as hell to get a three-year suspended sentence and probation. I read the letter again, hand shaking. I thought Id dodged a bullet with that visit from the two detectives, but here was another one right behind it, ready to flatten me. I didnt want to go back to jail, and I didnt want to end up like my mom and die there. But why would I die within weeks? What was that all about? Maybe someone who had a grudge against me was in jail already? Id pissed off plenty of people in my life, but as far as I knew there wasnt anyone who hated me enough to want to kill me. I turned the letter over, searching for any clue as to who had sent it. It was printed on plain white paper and the envelope was an ordinary white envelope. No signature. No postmark. None of this made any sense. I couldnt think of a single person whod bother finding me a job, much less threaten me with jail to make sure I kept it. Why jail? Why not rehab? Because jails a bigger threat, I realized. Rehab would suck, but jail. Whoever sent this stuff had to know that jail scared the shit out of me. I read the letter one more time, then took a deep breath and started getting dressed while my thoughts continued to tumble. It wasnt as if Id set out to be a loser. I didnt wake up every morning and say, Hey, how can I screw my life up today? But the universe sure seemed to be rigged against me, and most of the time it didnt seem to matter how hard I tried since I was obviously never going to catch a break. Except. Except this letter wasnt a couple of hardass cops questioning me about something I didnt know shit about. This was someone holding a big whopping threat over my head, who also seemed to be crazy enough to give the slightest crap about me and give me that break I kept saying I wanted. Me. Loser girl. If this job was for real and I didnt at least give it a shot Id be right back at being a Grade A Screwup. But who the hell would do this for me? I had a feeling the only way I was going to find out would be to take the stupid job. Drive a van for a month. How hard could that be? *Revue de presse* An incredibly fun series, and a breath of fresh air in an increasingly crowded field. While there's no denying that the basic premise is fascinating and entertaining, the real draw here is Angel's personal journey of growth and self-discovery. --(Tor.com)