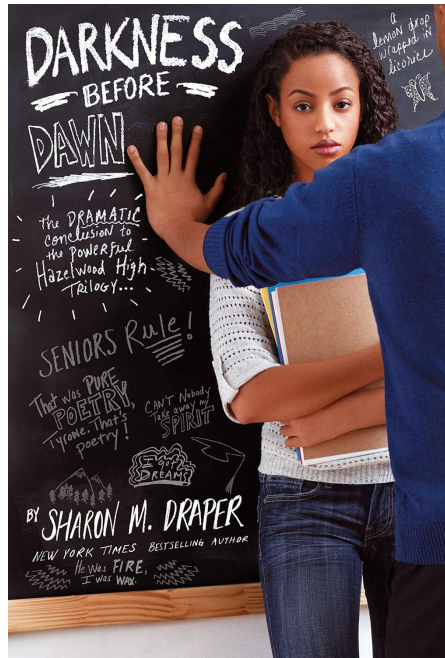


Darkness Before Dawn



Book Summary

This is the 3rd book in the trilogy, it follows a female high school senior, coping with her ex's suicide and develops a relationship with a high school coach who is the principal's son.

Summary of Concerns

This book contains; anorexia, anxiety, bullying, controversial cultural and social commentary, death/grief, depression, drugs, dubious consent, manipulation, profanity (very minor), racism, rape (attempted), suicide, sexual assault and violence.

Young Adult

By Sharon M. Draper

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CONTENT WARNING

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14	When Rhonda had called me later that night, however, she was crying hysterically about Andy and blood and a gun. She wasn't making any sense at all. "Oh, Keisha! It's Andy!" "What about him?" "Blood everywhere!" "Where? What are you talking about?" "Monty. Poor little Monty. He found him." "Found who?" "He found Andy." "Is Andy OK?" "He had a gun! His father's hunting rifle!" "Who did?"
15	"Andy!" "Calm down and tell me what's goin' on! You're not making any sense!" "Andy's dead, Keisha. He shot himself. Monty found him when he got home from school. I got there about the same time Andy's mom got home. It was awful! Oh, Keisha!" Rhonda dropped the phone and all I could hear was heavy, choked sobs coming from her. I didn't cry right then. But it felt like a huge rock landed inside my chest and just sat there. I didn't want to believe her, but soon it was clear that it was all too true. Andy had taken his own life.
48	"Well, I took a deep breath and I told him, 'Tyrone, I don't want to be like some of the girls at school—like most of them, actually. I don't want to have sex just to see what it's like, or to get pregnant because the dude makes pretty babies, or to keep a count of how many dudes I can sleep with before graduation.' I said it real fast so I wouldn't lose my nerve."
91	"What did he say?" This was pretty amazing. "He just frowned and said, 'It just ain't cool for a coach to be hitting on a student, even if he is the principal's son. Big phony—"
98	"We are holding hands. Kissing. Touching. We are inhaling the scent of the lavender and of ourselves." I was terrified of how direct he was, but I was excited at the same time. It was so easy to play these delicious games with Jonathan as I lay snuggled safely in my own bedroom. "Perhaps one day," I whispered into the darkness, "you can really paint that picture." I was amazed at my boldness and glad he couldn't see the embarrassed blush on my face. "Oh, I will," he promised, "and you'll learn the difference between a high school boy and a man who knows how to please a woman." I turned on my bedroom light. This was getting too heavy for me. "Don't talk like that," I said. "You make me nervous." "There's nothing to be afraid of," his smooth voice soothed. "Remember, you're not like the rest of the girls. They're still crawling around like caterpillars. You are already a butterfly—ready to try her wings."
116	Jonathan leaned over and kissed me as the music from the CD throbbed and rolled in the background. At some point Jonathan had turned down most of the lights in the room—the only light came from the lavender scented candles. I sighed with contentment and let him kiss me again. This time his kiss was more demanding and he squeezed my arm so hard it hurt. I had to push him back so I could sit up on the couch. "Hey!" I cried out. "You're hurting me!" I rubbed my arm and frowned. It was Jonathan's turn to apologize. He inched closer to me. I could feel the warmth of his leg next to mine. "I'm sorry, Keisha," he murmured into my ear. "But you look so good in that dress, I can't help myself. Please forgive me."
117	I felt myself fading again, but one level of my mind felt real fear—fear that I was in a situation way over my head. He kissed my ear, then the silver necklace on my neck, the fierce intensity returning as he held me much too tightly. His hands began to roam. Suddenly I didn't feel like much of a grown-up. I was getting scared and I had no idea how to make him stop, except to say so. "No! Stop!" I said forcefully. "You're moving too fast, Jonathan. I think you better take me home now." I pushed him away once more and jumped up from the sofa, trying to smooth my hair with my hands and smooth the wrinkles from my dress. I didn't want him to think I was being impolite—after all, he had gone out of his way to make that great surprise dinner for me. Maybe I was overreacting. Jonathan simply smiled. He held out his hand. "Come and sit down, Keisha. You're trembling." It was true. I was shaking with fear. "I promise I'll behave myself," he said apologetically. He extended his hand again. But instead of reaching out toward him, I backed slowly away from him. I glanced nervously around his apartment, trying to peer through the smoky light, looking for something, anything that might help me. I could see my dim reflection in the huge wall mirror. My eyes were full of fear. Jonathan got up from the sofa. He never took his eyes from me. He walked toward me.

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117	Slowly I continued to back up toward the door. When I reached the door, I could go no further. I reached for the doorknob behind me and turned. Nothing happened. The door was locked. “Why do you want to leave so soon?” he murmured in that buttery smooth voice. “You were just beginning to relax and feel comfortable.” “I want to go home, Jonathan,” I said firmly. “I’m not ready for this. And I don’t feel comfortable at all right now. You’ve never acted like this before!” “And you’ve never acted like a stupid high school kid before!” he snapped back at me. “I thought you were different—more mature. Why’d you wear that skimpy little silver dress if you didn’t want to be treated like a woman?” I reeled as if I’d been slapped. I wasn’t sure how to respond. “I’m ... I’m sorry,” I stammered, although I didn’t know what I was apologizing for. “Can you just unlock the door? We can talk about this tomorrow.” I was about to cry.
118	“Don’t cry, Keisha,” Jonathan murmured gently. He reached out for me and wrapped his arms around me, pushing me against the locked door. His embrace wasn’t gentle, however. When I tried to pull away, I found he had me pinned to the door with his body. I couldn’t move. He tried to kiss me again, harshly this time, but I twisted my face away. I could feel the stubble of his beard as it scratched my face and I fought to free myself. I tried frantically to remember what I’d read about self-defense in these situations. I had slept through this chapter in health class, thinking it boring and unnecessary. What was it? Kick him? Scratch him? Spray mace? All of that seemed foolish and futile now. “Stop!” I screamed as I gathered all my strength and pushed him away from me. I took the moment to duck away from him, trying to find a place to run in the dimly lit room. He lunged after me, grabbing the back of my dress, which ripped as I pulled away from him. I jumped on the sofa, then on the table, knocking over the wine glasses. “Don’t touch me! Let me out of here!” “I told you to just relax!” he repeated. “Quit acting like such a baby!” I was terrified. I no longer felt like an adult. I felt like a child who had jumped into the deep end of the pool and I needed help, quickly. I wanted my mom, my dad, daylight—anything to get me away from this golden eyed creature who held me against my will. “No!” I screamed. “No! Leave me alone!” I ran behind the sofa, grabbing a wine bottle from the table. “Grow up, Keisha,” Jonathan snarled. Gone was his smooth, mellow voice and his gentle attitude. “No!” I yelled again. I threw the empty bottle at him. He ducked it easily, laughing. I tried to reason with him as I ran from corner to corner of the small apartment. “If you do this, I swear I will tell!” she warned. “You’ll lose your job, your dad will lose his job, you’ll go to jail, and ...” “I couldn’t care less about my father,” Jonathan said harshly, interrupting me. I couldn’t think of anything else to threaten him with. I was breathing hard and trying not to give in to the hysteria I felt. He had calmed down a bit, and he looked at me coolly. He was once again in control. “And you’ll tell what?” he jeered. “That you came over here alone in that sexy little silver dress? That you sneaked out of the house and lied to your parents to be with me? That you kissed me like a woman
119	kisses a man, not like a high school girl kisses a boy? Is that what you want to tell?” I wept real tears then for I knew he was right. He would walk away unpunished. “You’ll look like a fool if this ever gets out,” he told me. His voice was slow and manipulating. “All your friends, all your teachers will know what you have done. Your parents will look at you in disgust.” He smiled as he watched me cry. “It will be all your fault, you know.” Jonathan glanced at himself in the mirror above the sofa. He smoothed his hair a bit, smiled, and watch himself walk toward me. I stood trembling behind the chair. Terrified, I ran once more to the door, screaming for help and fruitlessly rattling the locked doorknob. “Help!” I screamed. “Somebody, please help me!” I screamed as loud as I could and pounded on the door praying that someone, anyone would hear me. No one did. He grabbed my shoulder, spun me around to face him, then reached into his pants pocket and took out the key to the inside door lock. He laughed and tossed it on the floor. “You won’t be needing this,” he said softly. Still crying, I spit in his face. “Unlock the door, you pervert!” Jonathan never took his eyes from me. He calmly wiped off his face, then reached into his pocket once more. This time he brought out a small, silver-handled knife. It gleamed with sharp intention in the darkness. I felt its sharp pointed tip at my neck. “Silence!” he said quietly. “Do as I say and you won’t get hurt. Relax.

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119	That’s what I’ve been telling you all evening. Just relax.” The soothing voice was back, but his tone was harsh and cruel. Crying and trembling, I tried once more to kick him and lunge away, but I felt the knife point pierce my neck. I cried out as a small drop of blood joined the point of the knife and rolled down the length of the silver necklace. “Just relax,” he said again. “If you fight me again,” he warned me viciously, “I will have to hurt you.” “Well, you’re just going to have to hurt me!” I screamed as I twisted my body and pushed him off balance. “But you are not man enough to handle me!” I spoke with a confidence that I really didn’t feel. He hesitated for just a second before he tried to grab my arm. I used that second to lunge for the knife and grab it from him. He laughed, grabbed my wrist, and tried to twist the knife away from me. But that wasn’t so easy. I screamed and gripped it firmly, moving with								
120	him in a horrible sort of dance as he tried to make the knife his once more. He pulled my arm over my head, right at the level of his face, and squeezed my wrist to make me release it. But I held on, closing my eyes and pulling my arm back down with all my strength, down to my waist, and around in back of me. I opened my eyes when I heard him scream, and suddenly he let me go. In trying to get away from him, I had pulled the knife down right across his face. A huge bright red diagonal slice from the top of his hairline, across his left eye, past his nose, and across his lips to his chin marred his once perfect face. My eyes widened in horror as I saw what I had done. He held his face in his hands, groaning. I dropped the knife as if it were made of fire, looked quickly to the floor, located the key, and had the door open in a second. I had no time to find my coat or shoes or purse. I ran barefoot down the stairs out of the building and into the fifteen-degree night wearing only my torn silver dress.								
158	Mr. Hathaway began as he cleared his throat, “Jonathan did come to our home that night . . . the night of the Valentine’s Dance,” he began. “His face was badly cut and he was almost hysterical. He refused to go to a hospital. I forced him to tell me what had happened.” He sighed. “Did he tell you everything?” I asked harshly. “Did he tell you that he tried to rape me? Did he tell you that I cut his face trying to get away from him? Did he?” I was almost yelling, hating that I had to remember once again. Mr. Hathaway bowed his head. “Yes, he told us everything, dear. I’m just so very sorry ...” “Quit apologizing!” I yelled. Then I said, more quietly, “It’s not really your fault.” “This was not the first time he had done this,” he said sadly. “I know,” I said coldly. “Why didn’t you get him some help—do something to stop him?” I demanded. “I tried. The last therapists we had him with said that his inclinations were under control. That was six years ago.” “Tell that to Rita Bronson!” I said harshly. “Rita Bronson? Another attack? I didn’t know about her.” Mr. Hathaway sighed with great sorrow. “Where is he now?” my father demanded. “He needs to be in jail!” “That’s where he is,” Mr. Hathaway said sadly. “Let me explain. That night, his stepmother, who is a doctor, was able to put the necessary stitches								
159	in his face. I drove him to Lexington, Kentucky, where I have cousins. I know it was wrong, but he is my son,” he added simply. “So how did he end up in jail?” I asked. Mr. Hathaway continued. “Jonathan was devastated about his face. He is very vain, and he worried about having a scar.” I smiled with grim satisfaction. “His face had barely healed,” Mr. Hathaway continued slowly, “before he was out every day, hanging around the local high school, trying to charm the young ladies.” “Why didn’t you have him locked up?” my mother demanded. “You can’t get arrested for talking to girls,” Mr. Hathaway explained gently. “According to my cousin, who found out about all this later, Jonathan tried to use his usual smooth style with the high school girls there, but most of them ignored him—maybe because of the cut on his face. A fifteen-year-old named Candy, however, must have fallen under his spell in spite of the scar.” Mr. Hathaway breathed deeply and looked at the floor. “He took her to a motel room ...” I bet it smelled like lavender, I thought. “... and he assaulted her.” The silence in my living room was thick as mud. “Did he use a knife?” I asked. “Yes, the silver knife his mother gave him when he was eight years old,” Mr. Hathaway said sadly. “He loved that knife—carried it with him always. It was the only gift she ever gave him.” “Jonathan is very sick, Mr. Hathaway,” my father said. “I know. He will be in prison for quite a while. His sentence for the attack on the girl in Kentucky was thirty years, with no chance of parole before that.”								
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