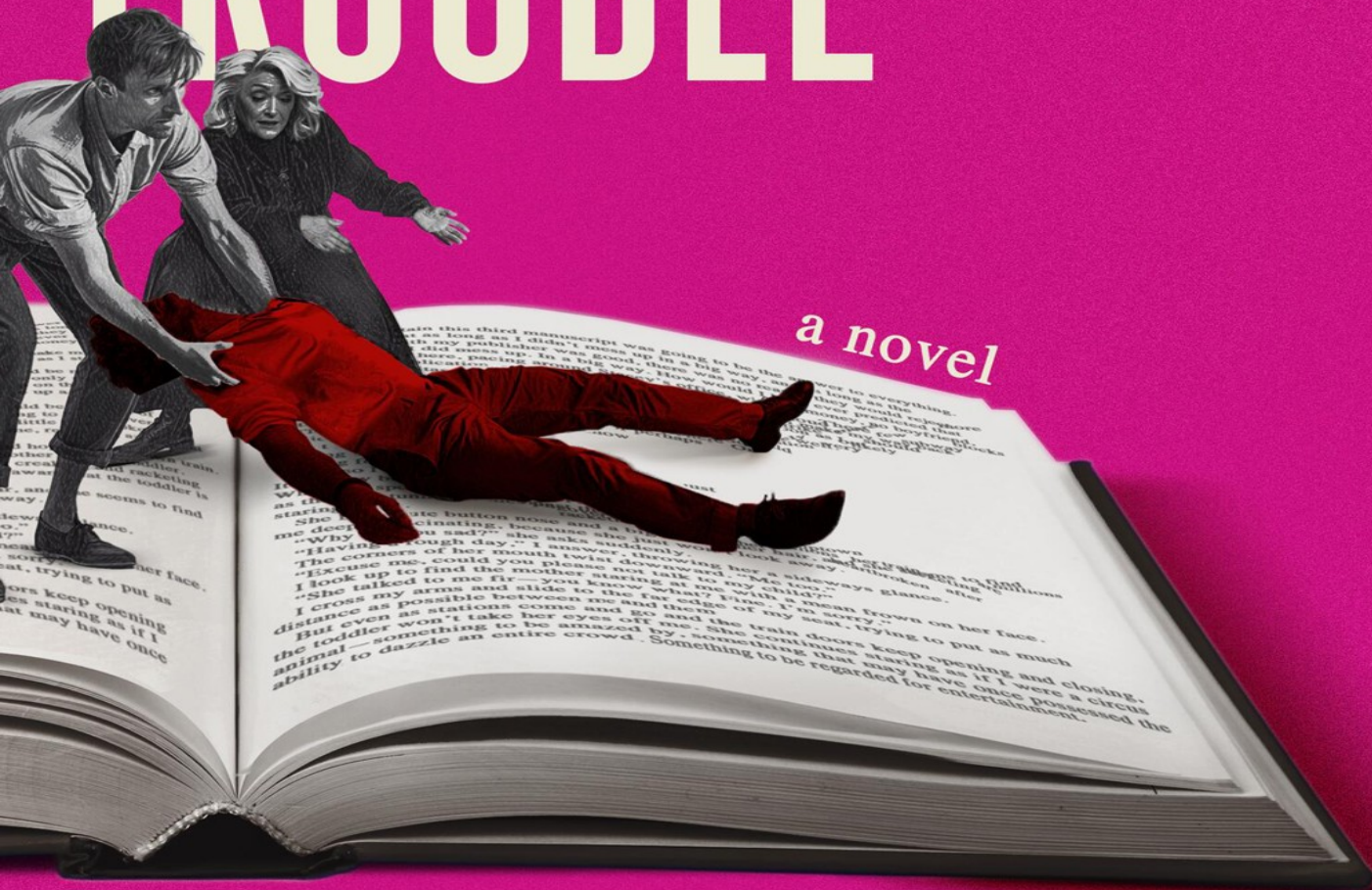


# I MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE



a novel

DANIEL ALEMAN



# I MIGHT BE IN TROUBLE

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**DANIEL ALEMAN**



GRAND  
CENTRAL

NEW YORK BOSTON



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# Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[A Slight Complication](#)

## **[Part I](#)**

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

## **Part II**

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)



[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Discover More](#)

[Reading Group Guide](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Author Q&A](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Daniel Aleman](#)

*This book is dedicated to you,  
if you are familiar with one  
or more of these experiences:*

*1. Feeling alone in a crowded  
room*

*2. Getting something you  
really wanted, and then  
losing it*

*3. Waking up to find that the  
person you went out with the  
night before is lying dead  
next to you*

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## A SLIGHT COMPLICATION

It's 6:47 a.m.

Staring at the numbers flashing on the clock brings an odd sense of comfort to my chest. The time is one of the few things I can be certain of—an undeniable fact, something to hold on to even in this moment, when I'm not sure I can trust myself or my own memory.

I'm foggy with exhaustion. Every inch of my body is protesting all the alcohol I drank last night. Nothing feels real, except for those tiny numbers shining in green. But then, unexpectedly, a million questions flood my mind: *What exactly happened? What have I done? How did I end up here?* It's this last question that grabs hold of me, that makes everything else take a back seat.

*How did I end up here?*

I never thought of myself as capable of killing someone, not even accidentally. I find it hard to believe I'm actually responsible for doing this, but I wonder how surprised other people would be if they could catch a glimpse of me right now. They might say they were able to see something in me all along—some sort of sign that told them David Alvarez was deranged. Some indication that he might just have the gall to end a man's life so unexpectedly, so callously.

Although, I realize with a small glimmer of hope, there's also the possibility that it's not callousness I've shown, but stupidity.

Yes, that seems a lot more likely. I've been stupid. Going out to meet this handsome stranger, agreeing to keep the drinks coming even when we were both wasted, bringing him back to my apartment—it was all just a matter of making one bad choice after another, wasn't it?

I wish I could take it all back. I wish I could return to twelve hours ago and stop myself from going through with any of it—but perhaps the string of poor decision-making that led to this moment began much earlier than yesterday. It may have begun in Stacey’s office, during the last meeting I had with her. Or maybe even before that, when I started making all the mistakes that led to my career imploding.

*How did I end up here?*

I try to push the question away, all too aware that I’ll drive myself mad if I keep attempting to answer it. For now, there are more important things to consider, much more urgent matters to occupy myself with, two critical facts I need to focus on.

It’s 6:47 a.m., and there’s a dead body on my bed.

# **PART I**



## CHAPTER ONE

An author much younger and wiser than I am now once wrote, *My legs are my favorite part of my body, because they take me anywhere I want to go.*

That's how it all began—with that one sentence scribbled across the back of a receipt for a BLT and a Diet Coke. Those eighteen words turned into eighty thousand, which turned into a book deal, which turned into the start of what should've been an incredible career. The writer in question was... well, me, except I no longer feel like him. I'm no longer the kid who had big dreams of becoming a published author, being on bestseller lists, and seeing the cover of his book staring back at him through bookstore windows all over the city.

Every single one of those things *did* become a reality, but I've learned the hard way that sometimes dreams aren't everything you'd made them out to be. Now, all I have is the memory of the words that got me further than I ever thought I would go, and these same old legs, which cramp up a lot more than they used to.

As I stare down at my thighs, I don't feel the strength I once did. I don't feel the urge to get out there, and chase after my dreams, and make things happen. I see nothing but a faded stain on my khakis that survived the wash—ketchup, most likely—and a slight trembling motion that only gets worse when I sneak a glance at the time on the dashboard and realize it's almost seven.

"Uh... isn't there a faster route we could take?" I ask the Uber driver.

"Sorry, buddy," he replies. "Map says we're already on the fastest one."

I lean my head back, letting out a long breath as I stare out the window at the red lights of cars braking all around us. I hate first dates. *Hate* them. I

hate the back-and-forth on the apps; hate the first encounter when you don't know if you should go for a hug, or a handshake, or a polite nod; hate the boring questions of where you're from, and what you do for a living, and what you enjoy doing in your free time. Tonight, though, I mostly hate the anxiety of being late.

"Don't worry," the driver says to me. "We just gotta get through the next couple intersections. I'll get you there in no time."

Trying to keep busy, I open the camera app on my phone so I can take one more look at my hair. I swear, it always refuses to behave right before important events. If only anyone had seen me yesterday—I spent the entire day inside my apartment and my hair looked glorious, but tonight it's awfully poofy, as if I'd blow-dried it to add volume in all the wrong places.

I'm doing my best to flatten it, not shying away from using a bit of spit where needed, when the driver clears his throat.

"We're here."

"Damn," I say, my eyes still glued to my phone screen. I'm pretty sure I've only made my hair worse, and now I desperately need to look at myself in an actual mirror.

"Are you... getting out? I have another ride waiting."

"Sorry." I lower my phone. "Could you just... move the rearview mirror a tiny bit?"

"What?"

"The mirror. I need it real quick."

Staring at the driver from behind, I can tell he's frowning, but there's hardly any point in explaining what I mean—this will only take a second. I lean forward, sneaking into the gap between the front seats so I can get closer.

"Whoa, buddy, what are you doing?" he says, cowering back against the side of the car.

"I just gotta—"

*"Get out!"*

Flinching, I move back. I open the car door, and I've barely had a chance



to step onto the sidewalk before he starts pulling away, the tires screeching as he drives off.

“I’ll give you five stars!” I shout after him, but it’s probably too late. I don’t think he heard me.

With no time to waste, I turn around and walk straight toward a cloud of smoke that’s coming from a group of women wearing high heels and expensive coats. I hold my breath briefly to inhale as little of the smoke as possible, and then I make my way through a set of glass doors.

I didn’t know what to expect, but it certainly wasn’t this. For a place called *the glory hole* (all lowercase), this is a lot classier than I thought. Golden candlelight everywhere, sleek high-top tables, and a fancy bar covered in crystal, behind which two obscenely good-looking servers are standing.

I spot my date sitting right in the middle of the room. Making one final attempt to flatten my hair, I approach him with as much confidence as I can muster.

“Shane?”

He looks up, and my first thought is *yes*. He’s hot. Too hot for my own good, really. Caramel brown eyes, strong jaw, shiny blond hair—the kind you could run a brush through *once* and would end up looking absolutely perfect. As if I wasn’t feeling self-conscious enough already.

“Hey,” he says, smiling at me from the corner of his mouth. “Dave, right?”

“David,” I correct him. “I’ve never thought of myself as cool enough to be able to pull off ‘Dave.’”

I let out a small laugh, but he frowns in response. Noted—no more jokes. At least not until I’ve figured out his sense of humor.

“Sorry I’m late,” I say as I take a seat across the table from him. “Traffic was horrible.”

“Nah, don’t worry about it. I barely just walked in the door myself.”

“I gotta say, you *actually* look like your photos—which is honestly a relief these days.” Damn it. There goes another joke—a half joke, though. Maybe

this one will work better.

“Yeah, thanks, man.”

He looks over my shoulder, probably trying to see where our server’s gone, but the brief silence that falls between us is too much for me to bear.

“Well... do *I* look like my photos?” I blurt out, smiling at him in what I hope will come across as a playful way.

He narrows his eyes, searching my face. “Yeah,” he says, nodding slightly. “For the most part.”

*For the most part.* Fuck, I need a drink.

I reach for the menu. “What are we having?”

When the server comes, we order overpriced cocktails, which makes me hope that Shane is planning to get the bill at the end of the night. It was he who picked this place, and twenty-dollar cocktails are exactly the type of thing I promised myself I would cut back on. Still, when we look down to find that we’ve gone through our first round a little too fast, I’m quick to flag down our waiter and order another. Sometimes I just need a little alcohol to get me feeling more chatty.

“So,” I say once we’re halfway through our second drink. Or maybe it’s the third—they’re strong enough that I’m starting to lose count. “You’re in tech, right?”

“Tech sales.”

“What’s the difference?”

Shane leans forward, setting his elbows on the table. “Well... tech people *create* the technology. I just sell it.”

“Yeah. That makes sense.”

“How about you?” he asks me. “What do you do?”

I take a sip of my cocktail. “I’m a writer.”

“But, like... what’s your actual job?”

“I... write books.”

Shane frowns. “Oh.”

“Yeah.”

“So, what, you wake up in the morning and... write?”

“That’s... kinda what full-time writers are meant to do, yeah. But I’m between projects at the moment.”

“Interesting,” Shane says in a way that tells me he doesn’t think it’s interesting at all. “Have you written anything I might’ve heard of?”

*Only one of the top-selling debut novels of 2021*, I almost reply. Instead, I shrug a little and say, “Maybe. You might recognize my first book if you saw it. We got pretty good coverage for it—big displays in bookstores and everything.”

“Oh, I don’t spend much time in bookstores,” he replies. “I’m more of a gym type of guy.”

“Hmm. I figured you would be.”

“Well, thank you.”

When I meet his eyes, he’s smiling. He has taken my comment as a compliment, which is probably a good thing. And, I mean, he *does* have a great body. While he tells me about how he wakes up at five every morning to hit the gym before work, I notice that the top buttons of his shirt are undone, revealing a smooth, golden chest.

I should be trying harder. I should be focusing on being nice, and listening to him, and making a solid attempt at finding some common ground. God knows I’ve been on more than one bad first date lately, so I could really use a meaningful connection for once. But while Shane continues his monologue, and I keep drinking sips of my cocktail, feeling the alcohol rush to my head, I simply can’t help it: my mind starts to wander.

*Not now*, I say to myself. *Leave me alone*.

The thought of Jeremy always has a way of sneaking into my head—especially when I least want it to. It lingers somewhere in the background during every single date I go on. It rushes through my veins when I walk past some corners in the city or get off at certain subway stops. It’s with me in the shower, while I’m sitting on the couch by myself watching television, and when I wake up every morning.

With Jeremy, there were no awkward silences, no misunderstood jokes, no need for defensiveness. I guess it’s only natural I would compare every

guy to him (but, actually, Jeremy can go fuck himself). He was the best sex I've ever had (seriously—he can go straight to hell). But with him, it wasn't only about the physical connection. It was about the way he looked at me on our first date, the way he held my hand over the table while we were sitting inside that hole-in-the-wall restaurant in the East Village he loved so much, and the way he said, "You're exactly who I hoped you would be."

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

"You're the kind of person I've been looking for."

It was the way he kept ordering one round of vodka sodas with a slice of orange after the other, even as the hours went by and the restaurant emptied around us. It was the way a deep sadness flooded my chest when I realized the date was coming to an end, and the fact that he made it vanish altogether when he asked if I wanted to go to a different bar so we could keep talking. It was the way I leaned over in my stool and undid the top button of his shirt just because I could, and the way he touched me as if he'd known me for years and not hours—a squeeze of my thigh, a graze of my arm, a gentle brush of my face.

And then, at the end of the night, the way he kissed me softly and asked the most heart-stopping question I have ever heard. *Can I see you again tomorrow?*

Maybe no one else stands a chance. Maybe, no matter how many first dates I go on, it's all pointless, because no one will ever come close to Jeremy. But I still sit here, drinking cocktails I can't afford and listening to details about a weight-lifting routine I couldn't possibly care less about, hoping to sense a spark between me and Shane. Hoping to feel something—anything.

"Anyway," he says after a while, readjusting the collar of his shirt. He must've become aware that he went on a bit longer than he should have, because he sets his elbows back down over the table and asks, "Why don't you tell me more about your books?"

I give him a small smile. "Well, I guess... the first one did really well." Saying that *The Millers* did "really well" might be an understatement, but