

“My mother is rolling over in her grave!”

My jaw practically hit the kitchen island as I tried to swallow the words my mother spewed through the phone. I stopped breathing as my heart barely continued beating. I stared at my roommates sitting comfortably in our apartment numb as to what my birth mother was screaming at me.

“You are disowned from me and my entire family!” Her scream reached near deafening decibels. Her words stung louder than the volume in which they echoed.

Similar to the cultivated behavior of feeling nothing from years of experiencing daily wars with every person I was forced to endure living with since my inception until I was blessed to matriculate to the University of Virginia, I was left speechless.

I reverted back to being in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I was nine years old again and unable to speak. The years of daily beatings and not being allowed to speak over the violent screams took almost a year of speech therapy to overcome my stuttering then, but a lifetime of therapy would never be able to mend the vacant and empty void the bullet she shot through my left ear as it transferred across every synapse of my brain straight through my heart in the preceding three minute conversation.

“Is there anything else you would like to say?”

Oblivious and numb to the final venom, I hung up the phone and looked at my stunned roommates. The memory of sitting in the parking space during our final moments together when she finally admitted to liquidating my education fund to purchase her first vacation home flooded my memory bank. Less than a month before, after a two hour drive from DC back to Charlottesville, Cheryl finally admitted to stealing my education fund in order to provide for her enjoyment and retirement. Other than working short term part-time jobs to provide her an opportunity to have time to pay her bills, our parent’s separation provided her the means to continue living her lavish lifestyle comfortably nestled in her gated community. Seeing that it had been seven years since she was given a million dollar plus settlement, tapping into her children’s education funds provided her the means necessary to continue her lifestyle just as the baby boomers racked up our national deficit during their heyday in the eighties.

All I could think of was “Can I have a sip of tab?” In less than ten seconds I became age six standing in the doorway between her home office and the kitchen. Dripping in sweat having just walked in the door from playing kickball, I kept trying to ask if I could have a

sip of tab. Every attempt of speaking was thwarted with the flash of her left palm.  
“Mom,” I muttered.

“I’m on the phone!” Her histrionic nature provided her opportunities. Her histrionic nature stunted my ability to speak then as it did over fifteen years later. Instead of waiting for a break in her incessant chatter, I sat at the kitchen table and carefully constructed each letter so the top of the C and each letter reached the appropriate lines. Proud of my newly acquired ability to write, I tiptoed into her office where she quickly glanced at my accomplishment, shook her head yes, and quickly motioned for me to leave although her anger towards my intrusion in her life already precipitated my tiptoeing backwards.

The happy times of her cutting my grilled cheese sandwiches into shapes while I watched the bouncing ball sing along cartoon after preschool after promising she would buy the ingredients to make another bird’s nest I made in preschool when Kim ate it, dissipated by kindergarten in our little bubble world of Zionsville, Indiana. My parents moved to the quaint, Midwestern village a little over two years before I was born. My father’s dream of playing professional football was squandered when walking on as a free agent for the Washington Redskins didn’t work in his favor. He claims his Clemson coach benched him his fourth year to provide for the younger teammates to gain experience as well as blowing out his knee during training camp. Sonny and Cheryl started going out on a class field trip in sixth grade on a trip to Washington D.C. when Sonny gave Cheryl a big stuffed animal dog.

My older sister Kim and I still played with the big red and white dog in our converted attic playroom. Between building villages with weeble wobbles and playing house with fisher price, riding our rocking horse as if we were in a steeplechase to changing outfits with Strawberry Shortcake and Blueberry Muffin, I was led by my big sister in our adventures. Our relationship changed the night Kim began snooping through the storage closets. As the silverfish sped through the storage space, Kim tore through box after box until she discovered tucked away in the back corner the love letters our mom and dad sent to one another while Cheryl was studying abroad in England. Unable to read at Kim’s seven year old age level, I listened intently as she read them out loud. That was the night she learned she was a mistake.

Our relationship was never the same. Our Godmother’s words to our mom when Kim was a toddler before I was born, “That child is not right,” were never forgotten. Years later I was told the first time she ever slept through the night was when I was brought home from St. Vincent’s.

“Gwen! Don’t you get it? I was a mistake! Mom and dad got married because she got pregnant with me!” I continued building my weeble wobble village failing with balancing the weebles on their heads not paying as much attention to her discovery. Pressing my four year old thumb with all my force into a little indentation in the taupe carpet, I delicately placed the tip of the weeble’s head into the new carpet and was successful as Kim was too enthralled in learning she was a mistake to destroy my accomplishment. “Gwen! Look! Come here and look!” She screamed.

I darted over to our Steeplechase horse and sat between my afternoon workout machine and Kim. The box was strewn about with letters and miscellaneous papers forming a circle around her seven year old body. She threw the letter towards me, “See! Look! Read it!”

“Kim, I can’t read it,” I meekly responded followed the words trying my best to read.

“How stupid are you!” Kim pushed me throwing me into the springs connecting the horse’s left hind leg to its metal frame. “You are so stupid! Read it! Read it stupid!” Each scream increased in volume as she realized our parent’s mistake. “Look! It says right here that mom was pregnant, and she was in England so they had to get married. Don’t you get it?” Too focused on the pain of the springs catching and pinching the skin in my back, I looked at her afraid of how to answer the question. “You are so stupid! Look, I was a mistake!” She pointed to the words as she threw the letter to me. “Read it!”

I studied the letters intently and skipped over the big words with lots of letters. As I focused on each word, I began to understand. I understood more as Kim’s rage festered throughout the years. It was ingrained in my psyche by the time I was nine and in fourth grade that it was better to not say anything as the second a sound uttered from my mouth at home, Kim’s punches and wall slams coupled with believing everything I said was stupid. My attempts at dissipating the torturous sibling rivalry was met by my mother holding her two fingers together and playing a mock violin mocking my tears, “Ohhh, let me play my little violin.”

Standing at our kitchen island at 210 15<sup>th</sup> Street staring at my three roommates after being disowned at the start of my fourth year in Thomas Jefferson’s sacred land, again I could hear Cheryl’s little violin. This time, her mother was rolling over in her grave in a hopeful attempt to not hear her youngest child disinheriting her granddaughter from her entire offspring in one fell swoop with each stroke of the bow on her mock violin. My roommates watched in disbelief as I hung up the receiver. “Well,” I paused, numb by the shocking words from my egg donor, I calmly stated, “I was just disowned and my

grandmother is rolling over in her grave.” My roommates looked at one another speechless as I darted for the stairs up to my bedroom the tears pouring from my eyes as I took two steps at a time. “You are not my daughter!”

The cadence of my stride carried me swiftly up the stairs where I dove into my bed covered in the comforter she gave me my second year. It was the same comforter covering her bed at our house in Timber Ridge nestled on the fringe of Zionsville. The perfect bubble community comprised of a little over a thousand people when Sonny and Cheryl arrived in their green pinto station wagon from Bassett, Virginia with little more than the American dream and a young baby. The same pinto station wagon our dad would load with a grandfather clock to deliver to his new customers. I road in the passenger seat floorboard under the clock, while Kim would lie flat on top in the back as we delivered with Kim’s responsibility of carrying the weights, and my responsibility of carrying the pendulum.

The lavender hue projected a nice background color for the floral pattern shouting a multitude of pastels matching my forest green, metal canopy bed draped in a sheer, organza ivory fabric. Although the previous tenant’s stepmother commented a couple weeks prior at the beginning of classes, “It is so romantic,” all the love was diminished in one sentence spoken from my birth mother. “You are disowned from me and my entire family,” ran again through every synapse as I chased the only happy childhood memories to the only loving family member, my Granddaddy Gale. My heart bled knowing I was disowned from my Papa Fin.

I never met my grandmother. Before she rolled over in her grave, Cheryl reminded me through her screams, “When I was your age, I had to leave school and come home to take care of my dying mother! How could you! When I was 21, I was in Bassett missing out on the college experience because I had to tend to her! I can’t believe you would do this to me! I can’t believe you would do this! How could you! I don’t want to even think of what my mother would do if she knew I had a daughter like you!” Accustomed to her screaming how horrible of a child I was, I simply listened without saying a word with the knowledge that she also became pregnant with Kim during that period in her life, before she raised the decibel for the final blow, “My mother is rolling over in her grave! You are not my daughter!”

The scent from the recycled dryer sheets I tucked in my pillowcases after doing laundry wasn’t providing any comfort or solace as I gasped for air between each sob as I buried my face in my pillow to muzzle the sobs embarrassed my roommates would hear. I kept trying to breathe as the tears poured from the depths of my soul as my mind fixated on

being with my Papa Fin as he taught me to garden the summer I was eleven. After a traditional southern breakfast of grits, bacon or sausage, eggs, and toast, we would load into his old, beater pickup truck and head to his garden. Kneeling down, he delicately showed me how far each seed needed to be planted for proper cultivation. Our afternoons were spent back at the house where we played endless games of solitaire and rummy. His quiet, strong guidance and humble quality provided him the position as the plant manager for Bassett Furniture during the peak manufacturing period when furniture was actually made in America.

With an unparalleled memory coupled with walking miles upon miles a day over the sprawling furniture plant and yard, his refined manner and perfect Southern gentleman manners provided for countless hours of stories rife with photographic descriptions of our nation's history from his perspective throughout the various stages of his life. Born in 1913 and being raised on the eastern seaboard of Virginia, he spent his summers on his grandparent's 80 acre farm on the Severn River off the York. His mother shipped to boarding school at a young age in Eden, North Carolina as her father sailed and procured goods as far as China. As an only child, he spent much of his time alone. Wishing I was an only child, I treasured the summer I lived with him listening to his tales shared through the generations. My sole treasure, my only happy childhood memory, was now stripped from the bile spewed from his youngest child, my birth mother.

As the hurt transformed to despair, the despair slowly shifted to anger. I sat on the edge of my bed staring at the goal list I typed out on my baby blue piece of paper and taped to the mirror resting on the edge of my desk. Slipping on my running shoes, I slowly tied my laces, tiptoed down the steps broken and embarrassed for being disowned, and ran down the concrete steps. As I stood next to the sign I used as support, I looked over at the parking space remembering every word when she finally admitted to robbing my education fund so she could purchase her first vacation home. We fought the previous three years over her relinquishing my legal right to ownership. Staying the summer after my first year to take the dreaded accounting courses, I got my real estate license contemplating dropping out of school. Waiting tables and working in a planned developed community, I worked hard and saved every penny. My dream was to buy a home my second year like the predominant college slumlord did when he was my age to begin my livelihood of having a small real estate investment in Charlottesville.

After being told no too many times, I began focusing more of my efforts towards Wall Street. Having spent two days on the trading floor of Bear Stearns, a week at Merrill Lynch, and a week at Smith Barney, before they all eventually dissolved or merged profiting the top .1% before tipping the economies of our global scale, I skimmed the

Wall Street Journal and followed the more prominent business publications daily. Having spent the summer in Kuala Lumpur working in the banking industry, I looked over at the empty parking space and could only think of the knowledge I gained, how much respect was shown, and how I had been treated with the most dignity up to that point in my life. Devoid of sharing anything besides the abuse her four other children and various family members disbursed, Shari'ah was never a concept in Cheryl's paradigm. She took care of herself and used me as her scapegoat causing further rifts in her nest, that I was never a part of.

As the trust began eroding with each broken promise, the final stroke of her maternal sword swung straight through my neck with two sentences. Just as the chocolate bird's nest I spent the entire day at preschool preparing and delicately placing in a special place in our refrigerator, hidden from everyone, was eaten eighteen years before with a promise of it being replaced, all trust was now shattered, completely devoid and non-existent in one breath from her mouth. As I knelt down towards my right knee stretching towards the vacant parking space, I reached my head over my knee remembering the words jumping off the pages as I sat in the small office perched high above Kuala Lumpur in the Bank of Islam, the distant hum providing a steady rhythm heard throughout the city during lunch time prayers. Shari'ah, a universal concept in all religions, quickly dissipated from her being the day I boarded the plane for Seoul.

Her embedded, youngest child spoiled selfishness fueled each decision for her benefit regardless of the repercussions on anyone else, most importantly her second child. Her words left wounds deeper than her actions. As my feet pounded the pavement towards the Rotunda, I dreamt of being back in Sarawak, the largest Malaysian province on Borneo running through the jungles outside the confines of the Batang Ai' Longhouse.

2

“Daaaaaaaaddddddddddddyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!!!!! Don't let them do this to me!!!!!! Why are you letting them do this to me!!!!!!”

Daaaaddddyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!!!” My three year old body was wrapped tightly in a white sheet. Blood pouring from my chin. My babysitter ran to the clock shop as fast as she could cradling my body. My father sprinted to the closest doctor three small blocks away. My father's tears pouring down over my face as he gripped my head as hard as he could following the doctor's instructions. We were playing at Eagle Elementary School that day instead of Lion's Park. As usual, my older sister's daily beatings were in full force. As I explored the sticks and stones building my own little temple, Kim came flying up behind me stretching her six year old leg out as far as she could to launch me



face first into the rocks splitting my chin wide open pouring my blood into the pile of rocks.

We spent most of our days playing in our small, Midwestern town in the Heartland of America, a small, idyllic community northwest of Indianapolis, the Crossroads of America. Zionsville's homogenous community comprised primarily of farmland, a small village with a brick Main Street well known for Abraham Lincoln passing through during his campaign, and a small population of a little over a thousand people still had less than three stop lights. Our carefree childhood provided us ample opportunity to explore our microcosmic bubble in a safe, protected environment where traffic violations were the primary cause for concern. Still there today, Lions Park predominantly encompasses the Northwest corner of Elm Street and 334, Lincoln Park is nestled on the Northwest corner of Oak and First, and Eagle Elementary's newest swing set off the younger elementary students' wing appealed to Kim that day our babysitter and I picked her up from school.

Frantic, our babysitter ran as fast as she could back to my parent's small, quaint clock shop still in business solely because two farmers from Kentucky drove their Rolls Royce up on Christmas Eve to have it tuned. My mother kept the shop open that Christmas Eve out of sheer desperation. If they didn't sell one clock by the end of December, my mother and father would have to close shop. Now, I was lying on the doctor's table wrapped tightly in a bed sheet as blood gushed from my chin. My three year old cocoon surrounded by a group of men attempting to hold my writhing body still as my father held my head as the blood flowed towards Lincoln Park. The doctor stitched as quickly as he could.

The village of Zionsville, Indiana provided a picture perfect, idyllic community where the only crimes consisted of minor traffic violations and underage mischief. The small police station's parking lot and neighboring yards provided us long summer days of nonstop cops and robbers' games, kickball, red rover, and all sorts of hide and seek games. At the age of three, we moved from Beverly Drive near the town pool to a hundred year old home in town on Pine Street as our parents moved the clock shop from a one room building that became the Village Pizza Delivery, a primary source of nutrition for our expanding family, to a bigger space on Main Street a few buildings north of Metzger Lumber.

3

"THE WHOLE FAMILY WOULD BE BETTER OFF IF YOU WERE DEAD!"

"YOU NEED TO DIE! YOU NEED TO FUCKING DIE!!!!!!" Kim screamed loud enough for the fish swimming in the Colorado River to hear. I began searching the door

for the handle to be able to jump. “I’M GOING TO DRIVE US INTO THE RIVER SO YOU FUCKING DIE! YOU NEED TO DIE NOW!!! EVERYONE WOULD BE BETTER OFF IF YOU WERE DEAD!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” Her near deafening screams explained Archer’s inability to speak mimicking my inability to develop speech when I was nine and in fourth grade. She sped off the interstate towards the River crossing the shoulder as her right arm came flying back and the psycho look appeared in her eyes. The look brought back a million memories. Each day, dreading to leave the safe confines of wherever I was playing afterschool trying to dodge her flying missile, the second our paths crossed, the same look appeared in her face. Nothing but pure hatred and evil rose straight to the surface. The look appeared in less than a flash of a second.

“DIE! DIE! DIE!” Each punch with her flying fist nailed into my left arm. I cowered into the corner of my seat unable to dodge her flailing fist grabbing the handle of the door. I looked over at my nephew studying the book in his lap intently. Already accustomed to her abusive nature and high decibel screams, our coping mechanisms mimicked one another’s. His inability to speak mirrored mine. His mother’s insidious, histrionic nature filled their unaffordable home disabling his verbal ability just as our mother’s histrionic screams and behavior stunted my development. Each caustic yell between his parents could be more entertaining than a World Wide Wrestling Federation match. Always three years younger and at least fifty pounds less, I escaped the devil’s ring shortly after my fourteenth birthday.

Forced into her car again after my realtor allowed my estranged family into my home as I was camping in California, I came out to Colorado in an attempt to retrieve my treasured art. Natural hoarders, Kim inherited both Cheryl’s histrionic nature and the belief that my belongings were somehow owned by them. Not the first time they would strip my life from me, it would be the last. “Stop the fucking car you psycho! Stop the car!” I begged.

“YOU NEED TO DIE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” She kept wailing on my arm.

“I’m going to jump out of the fucking car!” I kept looking at my nephew afraid that my jumping would cause her to become more enraged. “Stop the fucking car!”

“DIE! DIE! DIE!” Each punch layered upon the other, never slowing, never easing in force. Our mother allowed the daily blows and encouraged her behavior never dissipating any of her brute force. I quickly developed my speed and agility to hide as a means of dodging her fifty extra pounds of evil hatred. Twenty years later and trapped in her car, still defenseless, I kept gauging my next move. “YOU NEED TO DIE NOW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” She continued wailing on my arm.



“Kim! I never once said it was in Glenwood! You knew I had to bike to Rifle!” Leading up the cannonballs in her fists pummeling my arm, her deductive reasoning already laid the groundwork as to how the morning’s events would manage to ruin Archer’s life. My immediate death sentence was precipitated by how Archer would miss his morning snack throwing him off schedule, ruining his entire day, which would ruin his entire week. Years later in therapy, Archer will be able to tell his countless therapists, if he ever learns how to form sentences caused by his stunted communicative ability and his insidious, abusive home environment, that Aunt Gwen who was first disowned by Grandma, caused him to be late that one day in daycare.

4

“Is your mother histrionic?” Heidi asked. Finally. Therapy.

“What do you mean?” I asked. Cheryl always presented herself as perfect. She made sure all of my flaws were significantly ingrained in my psyche. I strived for perfection before I was aware I was imperfect. My Dr. Seuss books were alphabetized the day I learned the alphabet from watching Sesame Street. My clothes were arranged in my tiny closet following the colors of the rainbow. Late at night when I couldn’t sleep, I hid my body under our second generation desk which was part of the bedroom suite my Papa Fin handmade for our mother while lying on my stomach reading Dr. Seuss by the light peeking through the crack in the bedroom door.

“Is your mom always over exaggerated in her emotions, does she over dress or is she always put together as though everything is okay when it isn’t?” Heidi asked.

I always defended Cheryl, and always being sixth fiddle to her needs and her false notion of her being the most perfect person on the planet, I disagreed without analyzing how imperfect, if not detrimental, her actions to me were ever since the first night Cheryl was able to sleep through the night as a mom. The night I was brought home from St. Vincent’s. I could hear her playing her fake violin with her fingers mocking my cries for defense from the daily incessant physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse brought on by her other children and our absent father. “No,” I paused, still not fully understanding the level of histrionic behavior she exuded, “well, yeah,” I thought about it, “in some ways I guess.” I was thinking of the New York women parading the streets in their perfectly coiffed hair, well manicured nails, and designer Couture.

“My mom doesn’t really care that much about her appearance.” I failed to remember my youth. As the car shook back and forth as Kim reenacted Mike Tyson’s swings, Cheryl was too busy staring at her face powdering her nose and applying lipstick as soon as she got in the car and as soon as we arrived at our destination as if she was a beauty queen for

all the other drivers on the road. Her appearance and semblance of a perfect family was devoid of any type of love or attention in dissipating any battle. Parents are supposed to choose their battles. They're not supposed to allow all battles. Cheryl treated her children like her dolls neglecting the rage her oldest disbursed on me on a daily basis. Unable to meet the athletic and academic ability I worked towards daily, the three youngest sisters were Kim's allies.

Once her children grew out of the ability to be dressed in little dresses, just like her dolls, she tossed them aside believing it was their responsibility to manage on their own. Each room in our home encased at least one curio full of dolls. The bathroom and kitchen being the only exception where only a few dolls and stuffed animals were scattered on tables, counters, or shelves. When I snuck down to the kitchen at night, I ran past the piano room where the majority of the dolls rested snuggled in the largest cabinet. Wall to wall dolls each peering eerily from the shelves. The picture I showed Heidi was the one family picture I had from my childhood. Heidi took one look at the picture and was able to gauge in less than a second Cheryl's histrionic nature coupled with my other siblings' innate nature. "Look at her fake smile," Heidi pointed out. "Look at her outfit," she paused, "See how she's holding Kelly?" Heidi asked.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"She is going through the motions," Heidi was the best therapist I had. My confidence in therapists was shattered when Vivienne Krepak, the Beverly Hills shrink I saw told me she never saw me as a patient and was only using me for information. I trusted Heidi. "Look at the expression on your mother's face."

I looked more intently. Her vacant expression was the same one I saw every day. Claiming to be superwoman, she made certain everyone knew she ran a million dollar business with multiple stores and employees while raising five daughters without any help at all. She claimed she did it all on her own, and she made certain to verbalize it almost every day. I remember, as I'm certain our caregivers and the many managers that actually ran the small business would remember, being raised by babysitters and spending more time at my friends' homes escaping the pain and abuse from the family God chose for me. "I see what you mean." I began looking at it again. Cheryl's shoulders were slightly rolled over as she held Kelly on her lap on one of the lower stairs. I sat at the top of the circular stairs, handcrafted without a railing. Amanda held the wooden pole holding the wooden planks leading up the stairs to their baby making factory. Ginger's tepid expression paralleled Kim's hatred towards the world. An extension of the environment given our baby making factory. When our father decided to

appear for his monthly visits, we used to jump up and down on the couch trying to peek at what was happening as we listened to our mother screaming ecstatically from the open loft as the old brass bed thrust against the wall. They would later come down the stairs after taking a shower, one of the few times there was any happiness in the home.

“It sounds like Ginger is borderline?” Heidi asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Based on everything you have said,” She paused, “it sounds like Ginger has borderline personality disorder.”

“What do you mean by borderline?” I delved into the family history of emotional and mental disorders after my mother disowned me my fourth year, courtesy of UVA’s exceptional health care system. I dove further when the Hollywood mother thought her child and I needed therapy to work on our relationship. My mom’s aunt disassociated herself from her family during her adult life. If my grandmother was anything like my mom, I understood why.

“Borderline is when there is a divergence in their personality. They can be either really hot or cold,” as Heidi continued I thought further about my mom sounded borderline as well. Never knowing how to approach her and never being allowed to approach out of fear of her reaction. Muted and stifled, never being allowed to cry unless I was hidden away from her and her four other children, my fragile ego didn’t know how to emote or properly develop. Cheryl acted as if everything was a life or death situation when it pertained to her or the clock shop, but she was incapable of caring or attempting to disassemble the raging, daily wars amongst her children within her own home. Memories of her throwing whatever she held in her hand down on her desk in the clock shop when I asked for help, her face enraged at the thought of being interrupted, flooded my memory. “Was your mother loving?”

I had to think trying to jog my memory for an extended moment. “She was when I was young,” I paused, “I think.” I searched my memory bank for the happier moments. Sitting in front of the television watching the bouncing dot when she placed the grilled cheese cut into surprise shapes, the only happy memory jogging through my grey matter, I searched for other happy events. “I was always told I was a very happy baby.”

“Look at your expression,” Heidi said, “what do you see?”

“That I was a total ham,” I laughed. “I had to be.”

“Why?” She probed further.

“It was the only way to survive,” I said. “I guess I always tried to make the best of life growing up in that house. It was my only way to cope.”

5

“Get the fuck out of my house!!!! Go back to fucking Wilmington!!!!” Cheryl screamed.

“I’ve been drinking! There is no way I’m driving! Are you trying to kill me?”

“I don’t care! Get the fuck out! Get the fuck out of here!” Cheryl continued screaming.

“Excuse me? Who the hell gave you the right to go to my home and steal everything? What the fuck am I supposed to do in Wilmington when all of my things are here?”

“I don’t give a shit! Just get the fuck out of my house and go back to Wilmington!”

“I can’t drive!” I continued screaming. I was standing in the exact spot before during my fourth year in college when I returned her lamp wrapped in the comforter I cried into seven months after she disowned me the first time. I walked out the front door telling her I hoped she had a nice life ignoring her violent screams. Her words kept repeating, “My mother is rolling over in her grave! You are disowned from me and my entire family!” What would her mother think now that she wants me to drive drunk at midnight back to Wilmington? What would Dan think?

“I am not driving! I’m wasted!” One would think that if they had a close friend paralyzed from a drinking and driving accident and saw another friend die in front of them from a drunk driver that they would attempt to not force their child into a similar predicament. Her second husband, Dan, and she became closer due to the fatal drunk driving accident as another close friend was left wheelchair bound for life. Cheryl’s resonance of complete apathy in her actions and words spoke volumes. I was already accustomed to it from the same behavior thread that ran throughout my life.

“Get the fuck out of my house!” Cheryl continued screaming piercing my eardrums just as they did my entire youth.

“Why? Is your mother rolling over in her grave again?”

“Get out of my house!” She screamed. A broken record. I was never allowed in her house. I often believed based on her behavior and actions towards me that I wasn’t her child. My only knowledge of my being a Gale was given to me by my Papa Fin. I was certain I was a test tube baby delivered on a petri dish on a late November day in 1974, the same date as John F. Kennedy’s assassination.

“I can’t drive!” I continued attempting to get her to realize my inability to get behind the wheel of a vehicle. “What’s the matter, you can’t admit what you did Cheryl?”

“Get the fuck out of my house!” She kept screaming.

“I don’t give a shit!” She never cared about me or my life before, why would she start caring now?

“I can’t drive! Admit it! Admit what you said!”

“Fine! I did it! There! Are you happy?” Her eyes bulged out of her eyes as she screamed in her mocking manner. She stood at the corner of the island in the exact same spot she did when I returned her lamp and blanket, Kelly stood on the carpet in the living room, where I knelt down on my knees an hour before my hands clasped in front of me praying for her forgiveness, screaming ‘Sorry I’m not Jesus Christ!’ As Cheryl screamed after closing the cabinet door, ‘the only perfect person who lived is Jesus Christ and he died over two thousand years before!’ I crawled around in front of Duke’s dog cage, lining the cage floor laid the comforter I wept into the night she disowned me.

“Get the fuck out!” Kelly kept wailing at the top of her lungs just as she did when she was two alarming the other shoppers causing Cheryl to give her whatever she wanted. Cheryl walked over towards the non-loveseat and stood next to her youngest screaming child and joined her screaming in unison to “Get the fuck out! I don’t care if you can’t drive! Get the fuck out of our house!” The same spot where the summer before Kelly screamed how she had to take out student loans for college because Cheryl told her and Amanda that I stole their college funds and they would either have to take out loans or not go to college. Cheryl’s purchase of two additional vacation homes after stealing her two youngest children’s college accounts was never questioned. The blame was placed on me as it always was. For years their anger and hatred festered without my understanding why.

Cheryl stood at the top of the steps that day in June as Kelly screamed that it was my fault for stealing her college money as Cheryl, lacking all accountability for her actions expecting me to live my life carrying the blame for her lies and illegal behavior, screamed for me to, “Get the fuck out of my house!” I drove that day without a destination in mind after grabbing my Granddaddy’s driver from the storage unit contained in her garage. After topping off the Honda Prelude at the gas station for over fifty bucks with fuel prices at an all-time high, I drove and drove along Interstate 64 East towards VA Beach as the broken record of her driving in my heart and soul, “Get the fuck out of my house!” to the remembrance of her visceral screams from years past, “my Mother is rolling over in her grave!!!!” I arrived at VA Beach at the end of a long, desolate road, opened the door before I realized my Granddaddy’s driver was for a leftie. I

grabbed the bag of golf balls and driver anyway and walked out over the sand dunes and found my special spot.

I practiced my swing utilizing what the pro golfer I went out with once on Sunset Beach with my right stance before lining up the ball with my club and began my swing by pulling back my left arm. I pulled back my right arm and drove the ball over the waves. I continued hitting the balls, missing some before I saw a few shadows walking nearby one of which resembled a former boyfriend that emptied out our joint safety deposit box and whose previous girlfriend had a retired CIA agent as a father. I often wondered if Jack Chord knew with whom his daughter was really sharing a dwelling.

I drove back to grounds of UVA the following day before visiting Zionsville. Now, I was being instructed to drive back to Wilmington at midnight, drunk, wearing nothing but a nightgown.

“You told me that you told the Metzings about the year at the beach!”

“I did!” Cheryl’s lies compounded.

“No you didn’t! Jeanine told me you never told them!”

“Who cares about the Metzings?” Cheryl failed to realize I spent more time in their home than I ever did in hers. Keri and her family provided more love than any member of my family ever did. I spent more vacations with them in Sanibel and at their lake house in Wawasee than I ever spent with Cheryl and her family. I learned what a loving family entailed through the actions and love her family displayed than anyone I was related to through blood. My Papa Fin the only exception.

“I care!” I did still care even if they didn’t. “They cared more about me than you ever did!”

“Get the fuck out!” Cheryl and Kelly screamed in unison.

“Get the fuck out of our house! Go back to Wilmington!” Kelly’s screams were at near decibel levels. It was harder to gauge who was louder in their attempted manslaughter technique.

“I’m wasted! I’m not driving!” I stood there in my nightgown with no undergarments and no shoes with the clock hands approaching midnight.

Kelly threw the keys as Cheryl opened the door pushing me out into the dark night. I pulled out of her gated community and stopped at the gas station to purchase the Reese’s peanut butter cups my high school governess, the title given by our father, told me to



always have in my glove box just in case I was inebriated and happened upon an unfortunate circumstance.

I rode up the ramp to route 199 and continued on my journey to Wilmington. Less than a half mile from entering interstate 64, the lights started swirling behind me. Frantic and drunk, I grabbed the bag of cashews instead of the Reese's cup and ripped it open. The cop was already 10 feet from my rear bumper. Without having enough time to rip into the necessary peanut butter cup to counteract the impending breathalyzer, I chomped on the handful of cashews hoping it might have some impact. I rolled my window down as I realized I was pushed out of the house without wearing a bra, panties, or any shoes.

"Are you Gwen Cassady?" The cop asked.

"Yeah. Why?" I wondered how he could know my name given I was in a rental car.

"Your sister called and told us you've been drinking and driving," he said.

"What? They forced me out of the house when I insisted I couldn't drive! They made me drive knowing I had been drinking!" I yelled, even more furious knowing I would never be able to work with children again, yet alone in any decent job with the impending DUI charge.

"Ma'am, I need you to step out of the car," he waited for me to open the car door.

I stepped out barefoot on the shards of broken glass and gravel, my feet unscathed followed the officer to the space between our cars lit by his headlights. "Ma'am, I need you to start by standing on your left foot and touching your nose."

I leaned my head back as my left knee shot up to my knee like I was in fifth grade again trying out for the All Stars dance troupe as I touched my nose. Shooting my leg too fast, I slightly lost my balance before I regained control. He instructed me to stand on my left foot and repeat the performance. Again, I slightly lost my balance but regained my stance. The officer then instructed me to say the portion of the alphabet starting with P and not go further than S. I continued to the U before I realized I went too far. He then instructed me to walk a straight line one foot in front of the other touching heel to toe without any space in between. Barefoot on the gravel nestled on the shoulder, feet from the side of the road, I followed his orders and stepped quickly across to his car. Again, pretending I was in Stars, I did an about face mimicking a soldier's about face at the patrol car, my right foot swung around too fast and I stepped out of balance as I made the turn. Hoping he wouldn't see, but knowing he did, I continued towards his final command.

“Ma’am,” he already had his breathalyzer kit ready, “I need you to stick this in your mouth and blow as hard as you can until it registers.”

I followed his instructions watching the numbers climb thinking the entire time how Cheryl and Kelly forced me to drive regardless of my life, and more importantly the other lives on the interstates I would be driving that night. I left knowing I would be back in Wilmington as the sun rose over Wrightsville Beach. I planned on taking a dip in the now warm waters. Warmer than they were during my previous swim. Officer Leo left a parking ticket on my windshield after the first swim. As I was placed in the back seat in handcuffs, I began to describe the events of the night. Remembering the first time I was in a similar predicament at the age of fourteen and Erin slipped out of the right side of the car as we pulled up to Boone County’s courthouse in Lebanon, I began to slip out of the handcuffs. As we pulled into the garage of the James City County Courthouse, I opened the door. Already in park with the car turned off, he was unable to roll the car back on top of my left foot as the officer did in Boone County twenty years prior.

6

“You’re on my foot asshole! Get off my foot!” Erin stood on the curb watching my fourteen year old body attempting to pull my trapped left foot loose from the ton of metal. “Dude! You’re on my foot!” He quickly got back in his car and threw it in drive. We began that evening with Mr. Metzger driving Keri and I to the delivery van parked in the overgrown brush at the land our parents purchased from Mrs. Sprong on Hunt Club Road. Sitting in the back seat one day in sixth grade on the way back from swimming in Brooke’s indoor jungle gym pool, I looked out over the land and told Cheryl that she really needed to buy it as we drove passed the miniature, rusted silo. Years later, in typical Cheryl fashion, she screamed, “That is ridiculous! No sixth grader would know that! Please! You didn’t have anything to do with me buying that land! I bought that land!” Already ingrained in my psyche, I didn’t speak allowing her to scream and remind me of how stupid and inferior I was to her mental acumen.

As we passed in front of the Cornelius’ house, Mr. Metzger looked through the rear view window as I sat behind him and asked, “Gale, why should I let you girls do this tonight?”

“Well,” I sat behind him as I quickly answered, “You see, now that we are graduating eighth grade, this will teach us about responsibility.”

“Oh really?” Our eyes met in the rearview mirror as we passed the Roethke’s. “And just how is it going to teach you responsibility?”

“Well,” I paused searching for my words, at least I was allowed to speak in their presence without being beaten or screamed at, their safe haven provided the knowledge that loving families existed, “by allowing us to camp alone,” the thought of sneaking over to Alex’s house later in the night to join the boys kept secret, “we will gain a new sense of responsibility that we need before we enter High School. We have a big year coming up before us, and by allowing us to camp alone, we will be able to gain more responsibility before we start the upcoming school year. Plus, we will be able to celebrate one of our last weekends of middle school.”

Mr. Metzger laughed, “Well Gale, alright. But I expect all of you girls to be responsible now.”

As he pulled away, Erin, Brooke, Keri, and I sat in the emptied out delivery truck, rifling through our plastic bags discovering the full contents of our debauchery. Erin and Brooke were able to squander a six pack, a small bottle of whiskey, and the miniature boot shaped shot glass. We all swore we would never smoke cigarettes at the beginning of middle school. Keri and I broke our promise during Spring Break that year in Sanibel at the same time Erin and Brooke broke their promise and tried theirs the same week. Erin brought the round black plastic canister with the green label of ‘Skol’ chewing tobacco.

After we spent the evening swimming in Alex’s pool, the four of us left before Alex’s parents returned. Back in the truck, Keri and I peeled back the top of the aluminum cans and sipped our beers as Brooke and Erin chewed on Skol tucked into their bottom lip. We sat in a circle talking about who had the bigger crush. They started in unison, “Chug it Gwen! Chug! Chug! Chug!” Just as I lowered the can, bright lights surrounded the truck. I looked at the girls and told them to throw the bag with all the alcohol as far as they could as I jumped off the four foot platform into the brush.

As I walked around the corner of the truck, two men under bright spot lights, had their shotguns pointed directly at me. The one on the right screamed over an intercom, “Stop! Put your hands up!” Frozen, my arms flew up with my lower half ensconced in weeds and brush, as I screamed, “I’m Sonny Cassady’s daughter! He owns this land! He owns the Village Clock Shop in town!” Their shotguns still aimed ready to fire, the one who initially yelled slowly walked towards me as he lowered his rifle so it was resting across his chest but still able to fire at a moment’s notice.

My arms were still raised as I continued trying to explain, “This is my father’s land, and we were camping for the night Officer.”

“You can lower your arms,” he realized I was a minor.

I reached down to scratch my barren legs agitated by the brush. My wet hair hanging over my eyes, I flipped my head to the side as we stood to the right of the truck.

“Who are you with?” He demanded.

“My three girlfriends and I were just camping,” I muttered hoping they threw the alcohol.

He began walking, his flashlight leading the way. When we reached the back of the truck, he flashed the light in our converted cargo van campsite, Brooke, Erin, and Keri sitting close to the edge sat there speechless.

“See, we were just camping,” I insisted noticing the plastic bag under the flatbed less than four feet from the edge.

“All clear,” he spoke into his hand receiver, “clear to approach.” The other officer arrived seconds later. “So, what have you girls been doing tonight?” It was obvious we went swimming.

“We just went swimming at our friend’s house and came back here to camp,” I continued talking trying to avoid the impending search.

“Do you have any alcohol?”

“No,” I quickly said.

“Then you won’t mind if we search the cargo truck,” he said firmly as he jumped into the truck. His partner stayed on the ground flashing his light under the platform. By the time the initial officer jumped in the truck, the other officer spotted what I did moments earlier under the truck.

“Hey Jerry, we got something here,” he reached under the cargo truck and grabbed our plastic bag of debauchery, the glass bottle and boot clinking against each other as he laid it on the wooden surface. Jerry squatted down flashing his light to inspect the contents.

“Well, well, well,” he said scowling at me, “What do we have here?” as he took each can, empty and full, the bottle, the dip, and the boot shot glass out of the bag placing them in a line formation displayed for us all to see. “Now, I know you girls aren’t old enough to be drinking. How old are you?”

He went around the circle as Brooke started with her mature fifteen, and Keri, Erin, and I followed suit with our fourteen year old status. “I’m going to have to bring you in now and your parents are going to have to come pick you up in Lebanon after we fingerprint you. Is there anything you need?”

Brooke, more mature and developed than the rest of us, quickly blurted out, “Yeah! Can we put our bras on?”

The officers looked at each other until Jerry spoke, “Yeah, uh, yeah, we’ll give you your privacy,” as he lowered the cargo door half way so we could put on our bras murmuring how much trouble our parents would bestow upon us. After raising the cargo door after we finished dressing, being instructed on which car to ride in, Erin and I slipped in the back seat. Pulling up to Boone County’s courthouse well after midnight, I thought Officer Jerry put the car in park. As Erin laughed on the sidewalk amazed that Jerry actually rolled back on my foot, I stood there numb to the pain until he finally realized he rolled his police car onto my fourteen year old foot and left it.

As he pulled gently forward, Brooke, Keri, and Erin stood on the sidewalk dumbfounded and still in shock as to what was going to happen. We followed the officers into the courthouse to the basement. Keri and I being the sole alcohol consumers went through the process of having our mug shots and fingerprints as Brooke and Erin called their parents. Keri called hers, and I tried calling mine. Erin’s mom was the first to arrive. Mom Danner, Brooke’s mom, my adopted mom who spent more time raising me than my own, arrived second. As Mr. Metzging walked through the basement door, his first words were directed at me, “So, this is your idea of responsibility, Gale?”

As I sat on the narrow wooden bench, his question shot straight through my gut. Speechless, my pursed lips were unable to open to be able to respond as Mr. Metzging shook his head in disgust as he looked down to sign Keri out of the basement holding room. After he walked out with the other officer, Officer Jerry came back into the room and said, “We’re having some problems locating your father. Do you know where he might be?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” I smiled knowing he was out at the bars as he was every night when he was actually in town. “I suspect he is either at Safari Bar, Ike and Jones’, probably the Broad Ripple one, but maybe the downtown one, or Friday’s,” I listed the bars I frequented with him. There were others, but I couldn’t remember their names. I was usually pawned off for one of his friends to babysit as he tended to mingling with the crowds and his other activities.

I sat on the bench believing I’d be spending the night wondering if they would give me a cot as Officer Jerry was in the other room trying to locate him. About twenty minutes later, Officer Jerry came back into the room. “Well, the good news is we found him,” he paused, “the bad news is he is still about 45 minutes away. I hope you don’t mind waiting.”

“Can I use the bathroom?” I asked.

“Sure,” he said, “you know where it is.”

As I sat on the porcelain bowl, I studied the black ink all over my fingers. I attempted to wash my hands again at the small sink to my right in the closet size space as I sat on the smaller than usual toilet. Washing them furiously, the ink stains were not relenting. I stood in front of the mirror, my hair now dry, I wondered what my father would do to me.

As I sat on the bench waiting, I listened to the officers talk about the excitement in Boone County that evening. About an hour later, after the bars closed, my father came walking in. “You ready to go?” He stood in the door frame as the officer that led him down the stairs stood in the area leading up the stairs. I jumped up and followed him up the stairs. Sitting in the front of his navy blue Mercedes, he sped out of Lebanon’s court square.

“Are you hungry?”

“Yeah,” I said, “I’m sorry this happened, dad.”

“Did you learn anything from it?”

“Yeah, I won’t be drinking anymore,” I answered.

“No, you need to learn to not get caught,” he paused, “Do you want to go to Steak and Shake?”

“Yeah,” I said with a sense of relief, “that sounds good.”

We jumped on Interstate 65 and headed towards 465, the beltline looping the Crossroads of America, Indianapolis. We sat in Steak and Shake near the corner of Michigan and 86<sup>th</sup> Street as I sipped on my Oreo milkshake eating each French fry individually when he said, “Yeah, the cop told me I needed to watch out for you. He said you had an unusually high tolerance to have registered the breathalyzer the way you did without displaying any symptoms of being drunk.”

“Yeah, that’s probably because he ran over my foot,” I said.

“He what?”

“Did he tell you that he ran over my foot?”

“No,” he paused, “he ran over your foot?” He asked, a surprised look on his face, “What did you do?”

“I screamed, get off my foot asshole!”

Sonny looked down at his hamburger, shaking his head while laughing, “That’s my girl!”



We rode back to the clock shop at 5 N. Main where the upstairs showroom was converted into a living area. Sonny's office was positioned in the southwest corner, the middle room was now a television room, the third office once used by Cheryl, was now converted into my bedroom with a couch placed up against the Northern wall. When school rolled around in the fall, I slept in the loft. Devoid of any windows, it was perfect for sleeping. Our parents bought the old restaurant after a fire. The building was the original train depot Abraham Lincoln used after giving a speech in the town park during his campaign trail. Our parents remodeled the existing shell after the Yorktown courthouse, following the Colonial Williamsburg style of architecture. It was our parent's third and final location before the dissolution of their marriage, years after the dissolution of their failed attempts of being a perfect couple raising their perfect children attempting to fool those looking in from the outside.

The brick main street provided Zionsville ample opportunity to attract tourists and Indianapolis residents. The Rolls Royce dealership, at the time the only one in the Midwest, attracted the upper echelon living in the Midwest. Rebricked when I was four, the community of Zionsville spent days investing time as multiple families, parents, and children worked side by side providing a new brick Main Street presenting a new array of small, personalized shops. The only two national chains represented were Burger Chef and Hallmark. Instilled with a strong work ethic, my eyes focused on the Rubik's cube I passed every day in Hallmark's window on my way from our house on Pine Street to the recently purchased old train depot, I begged my mom for the toy. On a tight budget, she told me I would have to earn the money to buy it. For several months, I drug each one of our weekly trash bags to the curb for a nickel a bag. Tiptoeing through the basement, on high alert waiting for the squirrels, possums, and raccoons to pounce on me at a moment's notice, I grabbed each gargantuan, black plastic trash bag and drug it over the concrete floor past the table we used to hide under during tornado warnings. I heaved each behemoth bag over my shoulder as I hauled each bag up the old stairs. Dragging the bag into the kitchen floor and heaving it over the other shoulder, I carried it through the house over the hundred year old wooden floors out to the front porch where I let it fall to the surface dragging it out to the curb. Each week's load earned anywhere from thirty five cents to fifty cents.

Counting my accumulated pile of money each week, I finally earned enough to buy the toy I walked past each day. I stayed in my room for hours on end mixing up the different square shapes, putting the pieces back together again so each face of the cube was a solid color. Putting together puzzles and building cities out of our colored blocks under the

stairwell until our playroom at the clock shop was moved to the smallest office were my favorite activities until Kim would come in and destroy each creation with one kick or throw of her fist. “Mom! Kim keeps ruining my cities!” Were always met with a cold, “work it out amongst yourselves! I don’t care!” Her apathetic attitude fueled the exact opposite quality in the fiber of my being, so I was told.

Learning early on that my inferior body mass and size couldn’t compete with Kim’s blowing forces and body slams, I found my outlets outside, exploring. Always playing with the older kids in the neighborhood, we played kickball until we heard the dinner bell. One hot summer day, across the street from the Ludlow’s, I jumped in line behind our babysitter Kris, one of the older boys in front of her told me I was too young to play. I sprinted home and walked into the piano room and looked in our great-grandmother’s mirror. Looking intently into my eyes for what seemed like hours, I kept telling myself on a broken record, “I will be great one day. I will be great one day. I will be great one day.”

8

I stood in one of the top floors of the Bank of Islam looking out over Kuala Lumpur. Listening to the hum of the prayer, a quiet peace and serenity enveloped the entire city. It was lunch time and the city seemed as if it was operating in slow motion. One of the largest mosques nestled less than a quarter mile from the government complex, filled to capacity during the noon prayer, filled my sense of wonder taking in all the sights and sounds. Each person, each spirit praying in unison creating an overwhelming power coming from within the giant dome. Each praying a different prayer. Each asking Allah for something different. Unique for their own needs, each prayer working collectively in a higher spiritual realm. Felt throughout the city, my first day I was taken to lunch with the Chairman’s assistant. His pregnant wife picked us up and we drove to a restaurant closer to the inner city. We began our meal with the standard tea concocted of a milky caramel taste. Before our meal arrived, she brought out a walk man and placed the headphones on her seven month belly. Mohammad explained in his soft demeanor, “We read in one of our baby books that if you play classical music while your baby is in the womb, it increases their intellect,” he paused, slightly embarrassed, “I hope you don’t find it an intrusion during your meal.”

“No,” I smiled, “not at all. I think it’s wonderful that you are doing that. What are you playing?”

“We try to play a variety of composers,” he continued, “This one is Mozart.”

“I have never heard of playing music for your womb,” I said, “I did read a Harvard study that says if you breast feed your child for a year, the baby is likely to have an IQ of ten points higher on average.”

“Yes, this is our first child so we are taking every precaution in developing our firstborn,” he smiled with pride as he glanced at his demure wife. Although her burqua was more fashionable than the ladies in the other building I walked to in order to use a western facility, her shy, peaceful demeanor mirrored all of the Malaysian women I met upon my arrival.

“You must be so happy,” my eyes followed his hand resting on the mound protruding from her silk dress. “So, tell me about the Bank of Islam,” I politely asked trying to be as demure as his wife. Having read enough to know appropriate customs, my three linen jackets and two pair of long pants covering my wrists and ankles were drastically different than the sea of silk dresses and burquas. I hoped my two skirts if worn with panty hose would suffice in terms of giving them the same respect they gave me. Arriving in Kuala Lumpur without any plan of where I would be staying other than the idea of trying to get a dorm room at the University, the first night I slept in a hostel. When I spoke with my college friend, Razman, the following day, he told me to get in a cab immediately and go straight to the Hilton.

As the small, white cab pulled up to the curb, the red carpet rolled over the sidewalk with what appeared to be the entire staff forming a line leading down to the car. It wasn’t until days later that I realized I was the only guest treated in this manner. Greeted by the manager, he bowed as he said, “Good Morning Ms. Cassady, you are Tunku Shahrman’s special guest. Please follow me as I show you to your room. Tunku Shahrman thought you would be more comfortable in an executive suite.” As he opened the door to my room, the first thing I noticed was the giant basket of fruit resting perfectly in the center of my coffee table.

Every day after my respective work assignment, the first thing I saw when I opened the door to my room was the huge basket of fresh fruit delivered daily. Treated with more respect than I had ever known in my entire life, with the exceptions of a few childhood and college friends, more dignity and generosity was bestowed upon me by Tunku Shahrman than any American ever displayed. It was inherent in their culture. Being treated with so much respect was completely foreign to me. Raised in the petri dish created by my parents and their extended families, it wasn’t until I escaped to Europe six months prior, that I started to respect myself. Respect, a concept completely foreign to the fiber of my existence based on the environment in which my parents provided, the

fresh pineapple, starfruit, kiwi, and other sweet accoutrements nestled in the green palm fronds proved that I was finally worthy of respect. It was just as unique a concept as Lariba finance.

Attending Razman's sister's wedding the second evening, my first Muslim wedding where all the women sat on the left and the men sat on the right, my striped ivory silk pants and brown, double breasted, top-notch collar linen jacket was completely foreign in the sea of brilliant hues of silk as we all sat on the floor focused on the union between their families. Early Monday morning I went to the Minister of Finance's office and he called the Chairman of the Bank of Islam to inform him I was on my way to their office. Upon my arrival, I met a handful of men on one of the top floors of one of the buildings within the government complex. Being shown to my small office looking out over the streets where the food vendors lined the backs of their minivans and carts with a wide assortment of buckets upon buckets of live fish, meat, spicy vegetables, huge vats of white rice, and fried critters of all varieties. I sat at the conference table and looked at the pile of books I requested to try to understand Islamic banking more effectively. A couple hours later after reading the first book, the Chairman knocked on the door and asked if he could take me out to lunch. Sitting in the restaurant sipping the milky, caramel tasting tea, I started listening intently.

"Well," he started, "we have been trying to expand into the United States market."

9

"Mom said I couldn't go to college because you stole all my money!" Amanda screamed as I drove through Virginia Beach with Talon in the orb car seat behind me.

Shocked by the newfound knowledge, yet immediately aware now why all of my siblings' bitter, caustic hatred and anger and behavior towards me could now be explained, I asked, "What are you talking about?"

Amanda kept her head still but still managed to shake it slightly as I quickly turned my head around to gauge the reaction on her face as she screamed, "Mom said you stole all of my money and that's why I couldn't go to college!"

I stopped breathing. I inherently knew that Cheryl liquidated her children's trust long before she actually stole their money to buy her vacation homes. I assumed she told her children the truth of her actions. I was astounded to learn the actual truth of her actions. It was mind blowing knowing that after stealing mine and lying about it, she would actually steal my younger siblings' education accounts as well while blaming me throughout all the years.

I still couldn't believe what Amanda was saying, "What are you talking about? What did she tell you?"

"Mom said that the reason I couldn't go to college was because you stole all my money and all of our money from the college accounts! She said that you stole everything and that's why I couldn't go to school!"

Slowly coming out of denial, her continued betrayal and compounded lies over the years festered and continued festering as Amanda ranted and raved in the back seat. I began to realize just how damaging Cheryl's lies were. Everything began making more sense as Amanda continued screaming.

Trying to remember one moment in her home when she actually defended me was impossible. Remembering every moment I was in their presence began to bring a clarity as to why I distanced myself as far away as possible. Their hatred, exposed in every movement, every response, was weighted and precipitated by a cold glance. Their eyes conveyed everything. Ignorant to the reasons why, now I knew the lies spread throughout her entire family. I began to remember the moments of evil hatred masked by a false semblance of fake happiness displayed in an array of little trinkets and mementos from alleged happier times. The expressions on everyone's faces spoke volumes.

The magazines purchased from the library for a quarter filled more vacant space than anything else in her house. She could have purchased a new car with what she spent on twenty-five cent magazines from the library. Magazines dated over twenty years old with broken promises of waiting to be read. My only memory is of Cheryl sitting at her kitchen island stuffing her face scanning her local newspaper histrionically highlighting headlines and activities, yet never attending or doing anything. Lying on her non-love seat watching the television claiming how she slaved for thirty years, yet retiring when she divorced our father to her gated, luxury community after playing house for fifteen years using a former train depot, converted restaurant as an extra large doll house. This time, she used her children, shifting and dressing her children throwing them in wherever they suited her needs while decorating each room with a different theme.

Her million dollar doll house provided a different theme each month. Stowed away in the attic cat walk, each month scattered about, Cheryl visited the markets to load up on bears, more dolls, and other assortments of decorations for her playhouse. Kim, Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly received her promise of a European vacation. Another broken promise, a day trip in third grade to Williamsburg and a shopping trip to Chicago's merchandise mart were my European vacation.

Our father kept the shop full of clocks. The Village Clock Shop grew as his Ridgeway clock bonus checks grew. As a manufacturer's representative, if he fell shy of his quarterly target sales, he padded the inventory in our backyard warehouse. I spent my afternoons playing for hours on end. Throwing my baseball up the south side of the roof, practicing catching my pop flies. Each catch met my open palm ready to hike it back again as I practiced throwing it to the very top without having it go over. The times I overthrew took a few minutes away as I sauntered over to the brick patio to find it hidden in one of the smaller bushes.

Every three months, as my three younger sisters were having bath time, unable to ever sleep, I followed my dad out to the warehouse where he hoisted me up to the top of the cardboard boxes. I started in the back northeastern corner and followed the row leading south zigzagging my way across the top of the clocks. The warehouse seemed empty when there weren't at least two or three solid rows against the eastern wall of the newly constructed garage and five or six rows lining the south and northern walls. An open space leading to the loading area. The oversized concrete sidewalk led to the gravel driveway modeling the fruits of our parents' success, if the American dream modeled a sleeker, more advanced car every couple of years. In our early years, the green, pinto station wagon was replaced by the T-top Trans am. When Sonny bought his first cream colored Mercedes, Cheryl received his hand me down of the silver, Buick Le Sabre. The \$5000 kit car of a converted Volkswagon engine into the shell of what resembled a plastic 1929 Mercedes convertible was stowed away in the smaller parking space attached to the addition where the baby making factory opened up over the family room, if one could call it that.

Our chaotic childhood consisted of babysitters picking us up from school, or the bus dropping us off at the clock shop if we didn't have afterschool activities. From a young age, I began taking care of myself walking to my own activities, making my own lunches, bathing myself, when I felt like bathing, and washing my clothes. Learning the insignificance of my own existence, I found safe houses outside of the war zone contained within 485 West Pine Street. After the sun set, forced to stay within the confines of the shelter our parents provided, I sought refuge in the triangular space hidden behind my bed where I spent most of my time reading. My own little Bermuda triangle provided me a safe sanctuary to be able to hide.

From a young age, I never slept. Laying in bed trying to figure out the world, my Dr. Seuss books were unable to provide all the answers. After I was born, our father began traveling regularly. His business trips took him out of town for weeks at a time. We usually saw him for two at most three days in a row. Starting off selling vacuum cleaners



door to door after he blew his knee during training camp while trying out for the Washington Redskins, he knocked on the son of the owner of Ridgeway Grandfather Clocks in Martinsville, Virginia one afternoon. Living back in Bassett, completely different than his weeks spent in DC living with two flight stewardesses, his lifestyle shifted from indulging in and learning how his roommates moved cocaine from city to city in their suitcases to selling vacuum cleaners door to door.

Spotting the hometown hero, Mr. Gravely was in need of a manufacturer's rep for the Midwestern territory. Cheryl and Sonny, with their infant baby, Kim, packed their pea green pinto station wagon and drove to Indianapolis and after spending time touring several communities, they settled in Zionsville. The village had approximately one thousand people and the appeal was the brick paved Main Street, Rolls Royce dealership, and most importantly, the people they met. Slowly adjusting to the Midwest, the young, All American Southern couple, blended well with the small community they selected to begin their family to begin living the American dream. They quickly became friends with many of the towns' families, seeking wisdom from those that were instrumental in the cultivation of the charm emanating from the small village. When the opportunity arose for the purchase of their home, our Godfather Al chose to give the down payment to our parents over his own son. Godfather Al also gave me the name G.G. following suit of Gwendolyn Gale. Sitting on their bench one day, he and his wife Helen, known by everyone in the community would tease and joke around with all passersby.

"Al!" I exclaimed jumping up and down in my blue grey hush puppies, "I've saved a whole dollar!"

"Really?" Our Godfather responded. "How much more do you need until you can buy it?"

I had been saving for weeks. Hauling huge, black plastic trash bags through the hundred year old home and dragging them out to the curb for a nickel a bag. Godfather Al's easy going and peaceful nature caused him to be friends with everyone. I felt safer with him than I did with my own parents. "It costs four dollars and ninety-nine cents. So I only have three dollars and ninety-nine cents left to save."

Godfather Al sat on the far right of the bench as he pointed up to the Rubik's cube in the Hallmark window and leaned down to me speaking in his deep, gravely voice, "G.G. you can do it. I want you to show it to me when you finish taking out all the trash and buy it." I smiled up at him and jumped up and down in excitement. He recently gave me the name G.G. after we were talking about our names. Russ was with me the day he gave me

the name G.G. as we always walked straight to one of the parks after he picked me up from preschool. Godfather Al asked, “Gwen what is your middle name?”

“Gale,” I smiled, “I was named after my Granddaddy Gale.” I smiled even bigger. The light blanket of snow brushed the brick Main Street as we stood on the sidewalk.

Godfather Al wore his snow hat as Russ, my favorite caregiver, and I stood next to him.

“Gwen,” Al was always very matter of fact but also jovial, “Gwen, I think you should be called G.G.”

Helen sat to his left smiling. “What do you think Helen?” Al asked.

“I think G.G. suits Gwen just fine,” she smiled.

Sitting on his park bench across from Hallmark, Al was a staple on Main Street, inviting everyone without a home to their bed and breakfast for Thanksgiving. Helen could usually be seen on the other side of the bench which always had people congregating around whenever we passed by on our way to the shop or Lion’s Park. My favorite sitter, Russ, would pick me up from the little nursery school across the police station. Once at Lion’s Park, hours were spent running from the slide to the swings around the merry go round over to the see saw where I would practice kicking to see how high I could launch myself.

10

Our big, white American butts mooning all oncoming traffic, Ginger and I were laughing hysterically as each car passed on our way back to London from Warwick Castle. Our mother sitting comfortably below in the warm bus with the other tourists, we ran up and down the aisle of the open double decker bus laughing at the hilarity of the situation. After studying in Copenhagen, when I was actually in Copenhagen, I met them in Paris to spend a weekend tagging along on their European vacation. We spent one night in Paris before traveling to London. Our first night in London included attending Phantom of the Opera. The next morning we chose to do a tour of Warwick Castle after which riding the double decker bus back to London provided just as much entertainment. That night included visiting the theatre once again, this time to see Tommy.

Blessed to be in college during one of our stronger economies, the beginning of the information superhighway, America’s thriving economic activity at the helm of President Clinton extended far beyond the North American Free Trade Agreement providing our dollar far greater purchasing power. After flying back to Copenhagen from London, the director of our overseas program commented one afternoon, “Gwen, I didn’t realize you were still in the program.”

My coy smile masking my lack of an excuse was quickly interrupted as Carsten said in a din low enough so the other students wouldn't hear, "It's okay. The other professors and I have already talked about you. We think you are the smartest American here," he smiled. "As long as you continue to show up for all your exams and turn in your papers on time, just keep on doing what you're doing. I predict you will have your own travel company some day."

"Thanks Carsten," I smiled. "I'm learning more about Europe this way."

11

"Sonny, your neighbors have called and said they've seen prowlers on the property," the police officer's urgency echoed through the receiver. "Do you mind if we come on out there and check the property?"

"Come on," the groggy, deep, threatened voice responded in a slight Southern twang.

"We'll be there shortly," Bob said.

"See you soon," Sonny responded.

"You bet."

.....  
The cool, late August night, lit only by the stars and bright moon contained a swift breeze that lightly blew the leaves on the trees surrounding the grand home situated at 8667 Hunt Club Road. It was 1:30 am and the dogs were sleeping soundly. The housemates were deep in slumber.

Ding. Ding.

The security system alerted the home that a vehicle pulled through the brick columns guarding the front of the driveway off the most exclusive street in this quaint, rural, Midwestern town.

Bring. Bring. Bring.

The phone rang differently this time. Alerting the house that someone was at the front door. As Sonny placed his left foot on the cold, taupe marble floor from the comfort of the white carpet, he saw them. All twelve of them. Dressed head to toe in black holding shotguns. The S.W.A.T. team surrounded Bob who was leading the pack. Bob's right hand contained a lone piece of yellow paper.

"There sure are a lot of you to be checking on us," Sonny smiled his typical charming way.

“Sonny,” Bob paused putting his left hand closer to his holster while handing him the paper, “we have a search warrant to search the premises.” You could see Bob’s hands trembling under the dark night sky as he handed him the paper.

“What in the hell is going on Bob?” Sonny’s deep voice demanded.

“It is all in the warrant. Is there anybody else currently on the premises?”

“What the fuck is going on?”

The men gripped their guns harder. They had already been informed of their suspect’s demeanor. His size scared them all, mostly Bob. “Sonny,” his voice was firm, “you need to remain calm,” he said as the largest S.W.A.T. member approached Sonny.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” Sonny yelled.

“Sir,” he reached for Sonny’s hands, “we’re placing you in handcuffs. Please remain calm.”

“I want to read the warrant!”

As Bob handed him the warrant, Doris, one of his housemates, appeared at the top of the landing.

12

My shop was a wreck. I was sitting in front of my laptop at the back table with receipts covering the plastic surface sipping my green tea. As always, my mind was racing as I multitasked. After deleting the spam from my junk mail, one email stood out from the rest: “As the former owner of the Village Clock Shop is rolling around on the floor in laughter, here’s a link to the latest of her ex:

P. 02  
FAX NO. 3178736259  
JUL-17-2008 THU 12:36 PM ZIONSVILLE TIMES SENTINEL

## Farms orward vote

a new Union Elementary school, Averill should not vote in the rezoning.  
The agreement to donate land or the school is contingent on the land being rezoned.  
Averill told the board he doesn't feel he has a conflict of interest since he would not gain financially from the approval of the rezoning.  
"It never crossed my mind that I would have a conflict until last month" when approached by Gregerson, Averill said.  
Averill is the ZCS representative on the APC. Each of Boone County's three public school districts rotate terms on the ZCS. ZCS currently has the schools' representative on the APC.  
To decide whether Averill should vote on the project, the APC decided to put it to a vote decided by a vote of 3 to 1 to allow Averill to vote. Board member Haza voted to allow him to vote, while Schiferl and Turk voted against. Akers was not at the meeting.  
debating the proposed rezoning, Turk suggested the rezoning be put to a vote.

# Former business owner arrested in cocaine bust

By Todd Harper  
Times Sentinel writer

The former owner of a downtown Zionsville Village business was arrested early Wednesday morning, Sept. 1, charged with dealing cocaine.  
Francis Neil "Sonny" Cassidy, 55, Zionsville, was arrested at around 3 a.m. at his Hunt Club Road house in Zionsville. A search warrant was issued out of Boone County Superior Court II, after a three-month investigation into the purchase of cocaine and assorted pills. The investigation was conducted by the Boone/Hamilton

A collection of photos taken by the Zionsville Police Department shows the cocaine, assorted pills and drug paraphernalia found during a recent drug bust in the 8600 block of Hunt Club Road.

County Drug Task Force.  
In a report filed by Zionsville Police Department detective Robert J. Anderson, during Wednesday's search, authorities found approximately 24 grams of cocaine, several assorted pills and drug paraphernalia. Cassidy faces charges of dealing more than 3 grams of cocaine, a Class A felony; and possession of cocaine with intent to deliver, a Class A felony.  
Anderson said the case is ongoing and

• Turn to BUST/A2



Photo by Todd Harper/Times Sentinel





OPENING  
SOON

Check out downtown Zionsville's newly renovated and expanded Brick Street Inn:

- 8 luxurious guest rooms
- beautiful meeting/event space
- Dahlias Linens and Luxuries
- Anson's Tea and Take-away

Stop by our courtyard today from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. for **free samples** and a sneak peek of the inn. Individual tours will be available on Sundays in October from 2-4 p.m.; for group tours please call 873-9177 to schedule.

The Inn is currently accepting reservations for October 2004 and beyond!

**BRICK STREET INN**

175 South Main Street  
Zionsville, IN 46077  
873-9177

www.brickstreetinn.com

### Voting location changes expected for November election

Zionsville is growing quickly and due to the additional residents now living in and around town, more people than ever are expected to cast votes in November's election. Poll location changes for this year's election were expected to be considered by the Boone County Commissioners Tuesday, Sept. 7. The meeting was held after the *Times Sentinel* press deadline.

County Clerk Lisa Garofolo said Wednesday, Sept. 1, the changes are intended to help voters get to the polls by providing better and closer voting locations. She said with Zionsville's rapid growth, her office constantly deals with new voter registrations. Eagle Township now has the most precincts of all of Boone County's townships, including Center Township in Lebanon.

For the 2000 November election, Garofolo said Zionsville had voter turnout in the mid-90 percent range at a number of precincts, which she said is almost unheard of. She said Zionsville has a strong voter base and it will be important voters understand any changes to polling locations.

### Township and town talk parks

Eagle Township Trustee Judith Essex plans to send a letter to Zionsville Parks and Recreation Board President George Tikjian, expressing the township's interest in exploring an agreement between the two governmental entities. Tikjian brought the idea to the attention of the Zionsville Town Council by Tikjian last month.

A parks inter-local agreement may be similar to what exists for fire protection between Eagle and Union townships and Zionsville.

Township board member Ralph Stacy said the idea should be explored, specifically the ability to tax and raise money through an inter-local agreement. The township has budgeted \$5,000 for parks for 2005, but is constrained by the state on how much it can levy.

### Bust

Continued from A1

Information acquired during the investigation resulted in the arrest of James Wampler, 35, of Zionsville, who was charged with possession of a controlled substance. Wampler was arrested on Tuesday, Sept. 7, and is currently being held in the Boone County Jail.

Police presented a search warrant to Cassidy, who later was transported to the Boone County Jail.

In recent months several drug-related arrests have been made in the Zionsville area, and authorities have attributed the arrests to an increased effort put into narcotics investigations.

**BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF ZIONSVILLE**

**& Fifth Third Bank**

presents

Zionsville's

BEARABLE GRINS



DR. NICHOLSON

Excellence,  
like a smile,  
lasts a lifetime.

James R. Nicholson, D.D.S., M.S.  
Specialist in Orthodontics

1911 N. Lebanon St. 95 E. Oak St.  
Lebanon, IN 46052 Zionsville, IN 46077

My consternation caused the palpitations of my heart to beat a little faster as I clicked on the link.

As I studied my father's dreadful mug shot, my grandmother's fragile tea cup fell onto the hard wooden seat of the chair to my right. The only memento I had of her, the thin porcelain shattered into what appeared to be a million pieces causing the green tea to swiftly spread all over the laminate floor rapidly filling the cracks. As I watched the water spill from the green, hand-painted, old fashioned school chair to the floor, I couldn't help but to think of having to drive to Myrtle Beach. If I left that minute, I would still be late.

Although redneck Riviera was only an hour away, the last time I was in Myrtle Beach was when I was 16 years old, over 15 years ago, when the FBI informed us our father had hired a hit man to kill our mother. I didn't know what I was in more shock of at that moment. That I had broken the only memento from my father's heritage, that I had to go back to that dreadful, haunting place immediately, or that my father was sitting in jail.



Wallowing in a consumed shocked silence, I continued watching the water flowing over the hard edge sealing the miniscule cracks on the fake surface.

13

The water rushed over Philpott Dam. The dam just opened to allow the river to flow through. Sonnyboy was scrubbing his tricycle less than a quarter mile from the behemoth of concrete.

“Momma’ll like me if you’s clean,” he said to his best friend, his little red tricycle, as his little four year old hands scrubbed furiously. The water was slowly rising above his ankles. Sonnyboy rode his tricycle everyday through the small southern town of Bassett, Virginia. His father Bernice came to visit him once in those first four years and gave him the tricycle as a parting gift. He promised he would visit again. Sonnyboy waited everyday for his father to return and honor his words.

“You look like Bernis!” Sonnyboy screamed to his tricycle. “Momma doesn’ want you to look like Bernis. You can’ look like him.” As the water crept to his shins, little Sonny kept scrubbing and scrubbing each spoke. “I’ll make you look bedder. You can’d look like Bernis. Momma said so. We needin make Momma happy,” he scrubbed the little, white seat harder.

“Sonnyboy!” Pat was screaming in horror. At the tender age of fourteen she escaped her mother and Bernice’s slimy hands to get married. She helped raise Sonny so her momma could work. Sonny had been missing all day.

“Sonnyboy!” Jimmy screamed even louder as he walked through the tall brush searching. Jimmy was a good ole’ Southern boy who fell in love with his little Pat when he was nineteen and Pat was fourteen. A hard worker with good Southern manners helped him keep his job at the textile plant. He was more of a father to Sonny than Bernice would ever be. “Sonnyboy! Come on Sonny! Where ya hidin’ at Sonnyboy! Sonny!” Jimmy screamed louder than before.

The river was rising quicker than they anticipated. Sonny told his pseudo mom, Pat that he was going to the river that morning. They knew he had to be there. They hoped they could find him before the current of the river did. Sonny continued scrubbing the little white seat. “Id’ll be okay. Momma will like you. You’re nod gonna look like Bernis.” Sonny vigorously washed the little seat as nature flowed through his legs slowly creeping up almost to his knees. “Come on! Don’ look like Bernis!” Sonny screamed at his little tricycle as he splashed it with more water.

“Sonnyboy!” Pat and Jimmy alternated screaming his name as they stormed through the weeds and over brush scouring the field for any sign of the red tricycle and its owner.

“Come on! Don’ look like Bernis!” Sonny screamed again. “No! You can’ nod look like Bernis!” The tears streamed down his face faster than the river was rising. Ignorant to the pool of water becoming deeper and deeper, his bleeding hands furiously tried to wipe away his own genetic pool. Sonny’s strained DNA was remembered everyday by his mother who constantly reminded her only son just how much she hated him because of her deep hatred towards his father.

“No!!! Don’ look like Bernis!” Sonny kept scrubbing his tricycle with his little four year old raw hands oblivious to the rising water.

“Sonnyboy! Sonnyboy! Where are you!?!?” Pat yelled as she and Jimmy were frantically scouring the trees for their unspoken responsibility. “SONNY! SONNY!!!” Pat yelled at the top of her lungs.

“SONNY!!! SONNY!!!” Jimmy screamed. “SONNY! SONNYBOY! WHERE ARE YOU?” The speed of his feet was faster than the speed of his racing mind trying to figure out where Sonny could be as he ran through the overgrown weeds.

“SONNY!!!” Pat was racing through the weeds on the other side of the impending river.

“Id’ll be okay momma. I’ll make Bernis go away,” Sonny kept scrubbing and scrubbing. The little white seat glistened in the sun. The remnants of the river’s natural elements caused brief flickers of brightness as the blistering sun echoed off the plastic seat.

14

“Wake the fuck up Gwen!” Kelly yelled peeling the worn down, 80’s comforter off my cramped body while throwing my legs off the armrest of Cheryl’s non-loveseat. “It’s Christmas morning! Wake the fuck up!” Kelly screamed loud enough for the neighbors a quarter mile away to hear. Emme quickly stood to attention guarding her master as I reached down with my right hand to stroke her soft, blonde hair.

“Merry Christmas, Kelly,” I shot her my ‘go to hell’ look while shaking my head back and forth. After losing my bed to one of her friends on Christmas Eve coupled with the typical holiday greeting, I decided I had enough of fruitless holiday attempts with my family. As Emme stretched her paws out in front of her looking at me for her morning walk, I threw my few scattered clothes in my worn down, green backpack and yelled to my mom in the neighboring kitchen, “I’m outta’ here.”

“Can’t we just have a peaceful Christmas?” Cheryl’s voice never intervened in the daily bantering and beatings between her offspring. She didn’t believe sibling rivalry was just as detrimental a form of child abuse as her own psychological slaughtering.

“Mom, I’m twenty-eight years old,” I stood there broken. “Things will never change. I am sick and tired of this family. I just want to have a good Christmas,” I said fighting back the tears. I never let my family break me when I was little. I never let them see me cry. I cultivated a solid wall of fake, hardened emotion from a young, tender age out of necessity. Any sign of emotion was met with a fist or body slam by Kim followed by Cheryl playing her little violin with her hand while mocking any signs of what I was feeling. “Oh,” she would mimic fake tears, “Let me play my little violin for you,” as her hand would form a tiny violin with her fingers, “boo, hoo.” Her mockery stunted any form of proper emotional development. Her knife struck the chord of my very fiber. She enjoyed watching the physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse her children heaved upon me when she wasn’t participating in the abuse herself. She refused to listen to the sexual abuse her eldest daughter, nieces, and nephews allowed to happen.

“Where are you going?” She held the same pot we had in our house on Pine Street steaming with boiling water.

“I don’t know,” I stood there numb. I lost the ability to feel at a very young age. Not knowing which beatings were easier to withstand, the physical, verbal, psychological, or sexual, I developed a hard shell to protect the current of bruising.

“Gwen,” she turned her back to face the sink while shaking her head, “it’s Christmas.” She turned to face me once again. Her voice raised as if it was a demand and based solely on my staying to continue to receive the psychological, verbal, and physical abuse that she encouraged and enjoyed watching, “Can’t we all just get along?”

“Mom,” the desperation of fighting the tears was losing, “I love you, but I can not handle this anymore. I am too old for this crap.”

My mother concentrated on pouring her steaming water over the tea bag resting in her mauve, ornate mug. Still focused on her morning brew oblivious as she always was to the daily wars raging in her home, she said, “Fine. I don’t care. Go then!” She never turned around as she focused on pouring the boiling water for her tea. Just as she never cared during my youth, she would never care in my adult life. Her words echoing throughout every membrane of my grey matter from over six years prior, “You are disowned from me and my entire family!”

“I’m sorry mom, I just can’t do this anymore,” I stood there saddened by yet another failed attempt for a happy holiday knowing there would never be one in her home. I tried every year to blend into the family of which I was born, and each year only brought more heartache. I turned my back, walked two steps to grab my backpack and gripped the round knob with Emme trailing behind me. As I opened the door, I turned to face my mother. “Have a good Christmas Mom.”

She sighed as she looked down at her tea, unable to even look at me, while feigning, “You too, Gwen.” Spoken more matter of fact without any form of sincerity, quickly pushing the words off her tongue displaying her true apathetic nature, her actions and behavior spoke volumes just as they did every year.

Emme led the way down the stairs and through the garage. She knew she wouldn’t be getting her morning walk and relieved herself quickly on the grass between the driveway and the neighbor’s property. She jumped into the passenger seat of my ’93 Camry and patiently waited for me to sit in my seat so she could lick the streaming tears off my cheeks.

As I turned the key to crank the engine, Avril Lavigne’s voice spewed out,

“Why you have to go and make things so complicated? I see the way you’re acting like you’re somebody else gets me frustrated; Life’s like this you know; And you fall and you crawl and you break;”

15

“Wake the fuck up Gwen!” Spoken in Kelly’s condescending voice kept creeping into my mind as I sped down highway 17, towards Myrtle Beach. I passed the sign for Holden Beach, the beach Emme and I drove to that Christmas morning in 2002. Two weeks before that Christmas, I had been living in a converted manager’s office of an old, dilapidated Wal-Mart in Florence, South Carolina selling furniture with a group of individuals that reminded me of the traveling carnival. I started off living in the boilermaker room and switched to the loading dock office when I got Emme for protection as the vacated Wal-Mart was unsecure. I saved all my money, took showers in the break room behind a yellow, plastic tarp while the carni’s smoked their cigarettes and drank stale coffee. I worked harder than the rest making more money and saving every dime, just as my parents instilled in me through their actions for fifteen hard working years, most of it during the heyday of the 80’s.

My first sale in Aiken, SC resulted in a two week blitz as the building we were renting had been leased by a Hobbly Wobbly. A nice stash of cash in hand, I was sent to

Middleton, Ohio where I only stayed a few weeks. Several months prior as I was leaving my position working in a group home for troubled adolescents, I received a phone call from my father's current girlfriend, "Gwen, I am leaving your father but you need to know some things," Lynn's panicked state caused her to speak somewhat erratically. "Gwen, you have three younger siblings. There are two girls, Cassady and Mercedes, and a little brother named Zach who lives in Carmel."

"What?" I wasn't necessarily surprised, but I was still shocked.

"Gwen," she paused, "I am going to tell you more, but you have to swear to not tell him I told you. You know how he is."

"I won't say a word," I said.

"Zach is black," she said.

I started laughing, "You have got to be kidding me." I was driving north of Leland and was slowing entering the Highway 76 interchange. Knowing that Sonny is the most bigoted, racist asshole would be too polite of a description. "Are you serious?"

"Yes," she became more rushed, "I don't remember if Cassady lives in Kentucky and if Mercedes lives in Tennessee, but they are being raised by men they believe are their fathers. The girl in Kentucky plays basketball and volleyball at the University of Kentucky. Zach lives in Carmel and his file is in the left top drawer of his file cabinet on the wall facing the cornfield. When are you coming back here?"

"I have no idea," answering in a state of disbelief, I was still dumbfounded by this newfound knowledge.

"When you come back here, you need to find Zach's file so you can see how truly sick your father is. He met Princess on one of those newspaper ads and she got pregnant that night. There was a woman highlighted on the front page of the Indianapolis Star that had AIDS and was having revenge sex with as many people as she could. Sonny met Princess in a parking lot near Keystone," Susan paused to take a mini-breath. "Luckily she was smart enough to have somebody with her during their meeting. He held up the newspaper with the article and told her that he had gotten AIDS from the woman. Luckily Princess had a witness and was able to sue him for \$50,000 and won because it was in Hamilton County and not Boone County. She is also getting a very high child support precluding Zach and nobody else knows who is father is."

"You have got to be kidding me!" I was speechless. I always assumed he had more children, but knowing how much of a racist he is coupled with the fact that he always wanted a boy, I found it hysterical that he now had a little African American boy.

In high school, I was sitting at the kitchen table watching Arsenio Hall and Eddie Murphy come on the program. I exclaimed, “Oh my God! Look at how hot he is!” As I watched in admiration of his perfectly chiseled face with his arm muscles bulging out of his shirt.

Sonny quickly screamed, “If you ever bring a nigger into my home he won’t walk out!” Of course during his hedonistic “Le Large Party’s” at his ‘Party Palace’ he encouraged as many African America athletes to attend in order to support his own distorted ego. The only African Americans that were allowed to attend were Colts football players. The party lists extended up to seven pages long and the preparations were tedious. Those that stayed in his home were expected to work. We would drive around and steal traffic cones for the parking lot, a converted field across the street. Those with special privileges had their cars valet parked by the numerous underage friends of my siblings. Those with chauffeurs or exotic cars had parking passes and parked in the parking area in front of the ‘Party Palace.’

16

It had been quite some time since I made this trek on Highway 17. I was no longer living in my store in Holden Beach. I had moved up to a mattress in the back corner of my 600 square foot little shop on the Cape Fear River in beautiful downtown Wilmington. I loved North Carolina. I moved here right after 9/11 after I burst into my therapist’s office in New York sobbing hysterically. I lied to everyone and told them my acting agent suggested it. My therapist suggested I get out of New York to visit my mother in Williamsburg.

After the seven hour train ride from Penn Station, my mom took me to her home where I cried and cried for bombing my Law and Order audition. If I wasn’t able to book a gig on Law and Order as an actor in New York City, how was I ever going to make it?

We woke early the next morning and drove to the Outer Banks to meet Amanda who drove her old Jeep Cherokee down Highway 17 to the quaint, Southern town of Wilmington. I put my change of address in the following day. When I called my agent to tell her the news, she also thought it was a wonderful idea. After all, Wilmington was one of the top film and television hubs in the nation and it provided a plethora of theatres for training. Blessed with the curse of the right of first refusal since my very first audition for a Hormel Hot Dog national commercial, like 95% of thespians, I wasn’t able to catch my big break in either Los Angeles or New York.

After a couple of auditions and random jobs while racking up my low balanced credit cards, I realized I had to do something quickly. Having to put my dream on hold once again, my father convinced me to sell furniture. I met with his former business partner,



his wife, and their daughter for lunch in their home town, and my new destination at a family style restaurant in front of the Bassett Furniture outlet store in Wilmington. I first became aware of his business partner during their failed Chinese import clock company, Shenandoah Clock Company, when I met Clock Wong, the Chinese business partner at their 100,000 square foot warehouse in New Jersey. His former partner told me I should either work in a high end retail store and take over a representative's position, or if I wanted to make fast cash, I should work for his friend Dean who sold cheap import furniture in different locations capitalizing on undercutting retail prices due to being the middleman.

I became the top salesperson at the end of the first week with the furniture carnival. My boss would set up shop in vacated Wal-Marts all over the Southeast, Midwest, and Northeast. Commission only coupled with knowing it was merely a means to an end for the time being provided enough incentive to work more diligently than everyone else present. Everyone else present provided more incentive. During the sale in Florence, I began making little mental notes of business plans that would be more conducive to a writer's lifestyle. Living in converted shipping offices and boiler rooms in vacant Wal-Marts was taxing my soul. Selling cheap, Chinese imported furniture reassembled in America to be able to stamp a "Made in the USA" sticker of approval for the ignorant consumer was stripping my soul.

I had driven this same stretch of highway, two and a half years prior in similar circumstances. Instead of driving towards Myrtle Beach, I would stop in Holden, just north of the South Carolina border. Kelly's screams of, "Wake the fuck up Gwen! It's Christmas! Wake the fuck up!" as she threw my legs off the non-love seat while Emme stood to attention ready to defend at a moment's notice, kept repeating and repeating as Cheryl's scream of, "I don't care!" vibrated in unison.

17

"Ahh, Pat now, it's okay," Bernice was thumbing through a small book of nudie pictures explaining what the pictures were. At the age of fourteen, his sister Louise was sent away to Tennessee when Momma Ruby found out she got pregnant. When he looked at little Pat, he saw his own younger sister Trish. When he forcefully jumped on his younger sister Trish on the couch one day, she luckily escaped his penetration. After telling her Momma Ruby, Ruby simply explained to Trish, "Boys will be boys."

Boys will be boys, just like Bernice will always be Bernice.

Bernice moved back to Martinsville about 2 months ago. Fondling and showing nudie pictures to his girlfriend's four year old daughter by day, he ran an illegal moonshine

gambling joint, The Hole in The Wall, at night in downtown Martinsville. ‘The Hole in the Wall,’ was hidden on a side street right off the town square.

Mary Gauldin came into Bernice’s gambling joint one night with one of her dates. Bernice’s thick, jet black hair framed his high, Cherokee Indian cheekbones and piercing eyes. His stature and confident manner captivated every room he entered. His Irish laugh captivated every woman in every room he entered.

Bernice gravitated towards Mary, also a looker, the second her date excused himself to use the men’s room. Their eyes left the sealed lock they had on one another only when Mary gave her date the consideration and decency she gave all her dates. She would occasionally glance their way during polite conversation. A ploy she utilized to maintain their full attention. In the amount of time it took the gentleman to reach the bathroom in the old, dilapidated abandoned upstairs of a former shoe store, Bernice had Mary’s right hand in his. With a slight kneel in his legs, he leaned over to grace the top of her hand with his drunk lips. “Evenin’ ma’am,” his eyes never left hers. “What’s a purdy lady like you doin’ with a guy like that?” He asked without sounding condescending.

“Hello,” she appeared to not be too interested, “And how are you this evenin’?” She smiled inviting his answer.

“Bedder now,” Bernice charmed, still holding her hand. “Can I get choo anothe’ drink?”

“Sure ya can,” she smiled that infectious grin, “but, ya don’ need to. I’m all ready feelin’ the first one.”

“Well,” he pulled her hand closer to his teenage body, “glad my moonshine is workin’.” He needed to let her know, as he did everybody, that this was his joint. Women normally weren’t allowed, but for the good customers they made exceptions.

18

The water pouring over Philpott Dam was in full force. It was flowing at its peak.

“Sonnyboy!!!” Jimmy yelled louder than he had in all previous attempts.

Sonny was still furiously scrubbing away the remnants his father left behind. His tears turned to anger as he was now yelling at his tricycle. “Why do you gotta be so dirty!!!” The blood from his fingers washed away with every stroke of each spoke as the river was beginning to drown his prized possession. “WHY WON’ YOU GET CLEAN!?!?!?” Sonny screamed with all his four year old might. Luckily, he screamed loud enough for Pat to hear.

“Sonny!” She finally saw the glare of the top bar of the gleaming red tricycle from the corner of her eye. She saw his jet black hair from a distance and began running. “Sonny! Sonnyboy!” She screamed.

“JIMMY!!!” She screamed even louder. “I FOUND ‘EM!!!” Her short legs were running faster than they ever had. “JIMMY!!! SONNY!!! SONNY!!!”

Sonny turned when he heard his big sisters voice echoing in the valley of the river bed. He looked down and noticed his jeans had almost disappeared under the rising water.

19

.....

As I looked down at my long, black floral skirt, I noticed how the red flowers matched my red sweater shirt perfectly. I didn’t wear my suit as the men in the south preferred a southern lady. I loved working in the South. The laid back jovial manner coupled with genteel manners made it much easier to conduct business. A Midwestern work ethic combined with having a particular Northern savvy when dealing with men, made it much easier to sell the consumer product in which my family was born, furniture. I followed each flower on my black skirt as I passed all the highway signs. Red, blue, yellow, green. The long span of highway on highway 17 connecting the small towns of Wilmington, North Carolina and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina was still in the very beginning of infancy growth and development of what would soon become a colonization of modern development constructed of planned developed community after community. Each one attempting to outdo the other. Each one inhabited primarily by Baby Boomer Northerners who could sell their million plus dollar homes in Massachusetts, New York, Jersey, and Connecticut and invest it for a small pittance in a much larger abode in the depressed, underdeveloped Southern economy. The shrimpers and fishermen were being pushed out of their inherited land and were slowly moving inward to the more depressed and underdeveloped central counties of the Southern states.

The Northerners enjoyed their golf, shopping, and sipping their sweet tea while tending to their gardens and reading about their former coworkers still slaving and toiling away at their miserable desk jobs. Taking their boats out for weekend fishing trips was the height of their activity. Spending their retirement savings on fuel for their guilty pleasure; playing the stock market as a day trader yet acting like a Wall Street Tycoon while hedging their bets; indulging in their material possessions which would inevitably lead to the fall of the Bush and Cheney regime carrying the American recession with it like a loose leash on a stray dog. The Southerners they invaded were left to sweep up after they left their restaurants, collect and dispose water stained napkins, and bag the grass and bush clippings from their perfectly manicured lawns.

Just as the Yankees pillaged their land, their women, and their children's futures during the Civil War, they were now invading the Southern territory in the modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It wasn't the 1860's, however the following century produced the generation of the 1960's allegedly developing the generations of the Millenium. Instead of arriving on horseback with files of soldiers in rank, this time they silently conducted their pilgrimage using golf carts while planning for their walkers and wheelchairs amidst stirring up the Southern economy. Enslaving the less educated as their maids, their dog walkers, their waitresses, their bartenders, their gardeners, while stripping them of their dignity as they haggled over wages and invoices.

I kept driving past the fields in North Carolina, currently run by another corrupt Republican governor learned during the three weeks I worked the graveyard shift for one of his friends who froze the meager, minimum wages when jet fuel prices rose and flying to his gated golf community became more expensive. Luckily his female predecessor would help clean up the mess he created.

20

"Do you have a lot of homework tonight?"

"No," I sat at the end of the bar above the raman noodles, "Why do you ask?"

"Do you want to go to the Rolling Stones concert?" Sonny asked.

"Are you serious?" I couldn't control my anxiety.

"Yeah," he said as he stood in the doorway to his office.

"I only have a little bit of biology to finish," my impending bio quiz was on standby as the thought of seeing Mick Jagger and his crew in full force came to fruition in my mind.

"Yeah," he paused for a nanosecond, "they are playing at the Hoosier Dome and some friends of mine are going to be there."

"No way!" I exclaimed.

"Yeah," he smiled his big cheshire grin as he stood in the doorway. "How much homework do you have?"

"Just a little bit more," I quickly scurried through the remainder of the chapter's problems knowing there was an impending quiz.

As we sped down I-65 listening to the Stones, each inner city tenement encroaching on one another as we approached the inner sanctity of the Hoosier Dome, Sonny continued talking about how it was supposed to be a sell-out show. After finding a parking spot

further than the nosebleed tickets we still had yet to purchase, we walked towards the Hoosier Dome in the crisp, autumn air. As we stood on the first platform haggling ticket prices, my short sleeve t-shirt and thin jeans worn to the barren fabric as they were my only pair of real Guess jeans although they were purchased at TJ Maxx, my father talked his way from a pair of nosebleed hundred dollar tickets to half the price.

After finding our seats, Sonny peered throughout the venue to find the easiest access to the suites.

“Follow me,” he said.

We walked up the stairs to the Southeast corner of the main level to a red velvet rope. He quickly stepped over it and instructed me to do the same.

“Where are we going?”

“We’re going to one of my friend’s suites,” he said. “Just be cool.”

I followed him through the long corridor past the small crowds of people huddling outside of their respective suites. “Hey Sonny!” One woman stopped him as the others standing with her looked up, a frightened look in the man’s eyes looked down at me and back at my father.

“Well, hey there!” He feigned. I could tell he didn’t know who she was. “How are you?”

“Good,” she teetered as she held her clear, plastic cup the ice hitting the sides as she swayed back and forth. “Who is this?”

“Oh,” he put his arm on my shoulder, “this is my daughter, Gwen.”

“Oh,” like all the other women who I met when I was with him, she became my best friend, “Look at you!” She quickly did a double take glancing me over, “She looks exactly like you!” She said to him.

“Yeah,” he kept his arm on my shoulder, “They call her Little Sonny.”

“I’m Melissa,” her hand extended from her petite frame. My size eight jeans were twice the size of her anorexic body.

“It’s nice to meet you,” I extended my hand.

“Did you just get here?”

“Yes,” Sonny answered. He already lowered his hand from my shoulder and started turning his body attempting to end the conversation, “we’re supposed to be meeting some friends.”

“Oh,” she paused, the other two people she was standing with never said a word, “it was great seeing you, and it was nice to meet you, Gwen.”

“It was nice meeting you too,” I said.

“See ya,” Sonny said as we walked away.

“Bye Sonny!” Melissa yelled.

As we continued walking down the corridor, the cement shined as if it was freshly cleaned, I asked, “Where are we going?”

“My buddy has a suite up here,” his voice echoed even though the hall was crowded.

After walking a couple hundred more feet, we arrived at the Eitlejohn suite. He knocked on the door. A short, balding man opened the door.

“Sonny!” He said. He looked at me, “Who is this?”

“Hey Woody!” He said, “This is my daughter, Gwen.”

“Oh,” the short, balding man stumbled, “well,” he stammered, “I don’t know if it’s okay for her to be here.”

“She’s okay,” Sonny said.

“Well,” he hesitated, “well, okay then.”

We walked into the suite and everyone turned to greet Sonny as he walked in the door. The usual suspects were hovering over the black, lacquer table. As Sonny walked towards the table as everyone shouted ecstatically in unison, “Sonny!” Several of the women and a couple of the men looked at me quizzically.

Suijia quickly walked over from the pile of cocaine sprawled out over the shiny surface to where I was standing in the entrance, “Hey Gwen,” his beady eyes had sweat dripping into them as he slurred his words as he offered me his drink, “here drink some of this.”

I grabbed the plastic cup and took a little sip to acquiesce his offering.

“Hey Suij,” Sonny yelled amongst the uncomfortable guests in Eitlejohn’s suite, “Why don’t you take Gwen down to the floor.” The men attempting to block the black table from my view seemed relieved. The pile of cocaine was too large to miss for my observant eyes.

“Sure,” he swayed as he leaned forward dancing to the Stones. “This is so fucking cool,” he said, “You’re going to love it.”



Badell, one of my father's attorneys said as he walked over, "Hello Miss Gwen!" He put up his hand for a high five. "I wanna go too!" He whined.

A couple of the ladies, none of them their wives, walked down with us. We sat on the right hand side close to the stage as Mick, Keith and crew jammed all over the stage. When "Honkey Tonk" woman started playing, the huge blow up balloons that one would normally see in a Macy's Day parade filled to the top of the Hoosier Dome. Rick handed me the joint they were passing around as I watched the giant Marilyn Monroe and Cowgirl on either side of the stage inflate.

Rick kept rocking up and down with the beat of the music. His head bopping up and down with the beat. He continued bumping into me encouraging me to bounce up and down with him as "Honkey Tonk" woman echoed throughout the Dome. As "I Can't Get No Satisfaction," blasted throughout the Hoosier Dome, Badell handed me the joint. Seeing that it was the third time I smoked marijuana, I only took a small, little puff remembering what I felt like after smoking it with my older sister. As "Satisfaction" blared throughout the entire Dome to the point of shaking the concrete floor, Rick kept jumping up and down as Badell attempted to move to the beat of the blasting music as I watched the Marilyn Monroe and Honkytonk women slowly deflate on either side of the stage. We continued dancing up and down to each beat of the Rolling Stones until the end of the concert. After the second encore, we slowly made our way back to the suite as they raised the lights. After climbing the stairs to the midsection of the Dome where all the suites lined the perimeter, we arrived at the Eitlejohn door. Badell opened the door as Rick and I walked in.

The darkness within the suite drastically contrasted the bright lights within the Hoosier Dome as the party continued within the suite. I stood off to the side with Rick as Sonny continued engaging in his debauchery with his cohorts. As people began dissipating the suite, Sonny walked over to Rick and me and said with a huge, tawdry grin on his face, "Let's go babydoll."

I quickly rose from the couch as Rick stayed seated comfortably on the right. As we walked on the concrete floor and white walls, Sonny asked, "Are you hungry?"

"Yeah," I paused knowing what time it was, "I guess."

"Do you have any tests or anything in the morning?"

"No," I paused again, "I did most of my homework," I paused again, "I do have a biology lab."

He snickered and smiled, "You can sleep in then if you want."

“Okay,” I continued walking double time in order to keep up with his pace.

We walked out of the Dome and towards the parking lot on the west side of the Dome. As he started driving towards I-65, he asked, “Do you want to go to Steak and Shake?”

“Yeah,” I said realizing the munchies were settling in, “That sounds good.”

“Well,” he smiled as he looked over, “Steak and Shake it is.”

As we drove over the ramp connecting I-65 and I-465, the beltway encompassing Indianapolis, I began probing, “Who were all those people?”

“Oh,” he snidely remarked, “Those are just some of my buddies.”

“How do you know them?”

“Oh,” he stammered for the appropriate answer, “I just know them,” he again tried to find the appropriate answer, “I know them from the bars and have done business with some of them.”

“Oh,” I knew when to stop asking questions. “Can you believe how awesome that concert was?”

“Yeah,” he sniffled, wiping his nose, “That was some concert. Aren’t you glad you went?”

“Absolutely!” I exclaimed. “It was amazing.”

“Yeah,” Sonny continued, “How was it from the floor?”

“It was the best concert I have ever been to!” I said. “You should have come down to the floor with us.”

“There weren’t enough tickets, and I wanted you to have the experience,” he said always knowing exactly what to say on the spur of a moment.

“Thanks Dad,” I paused, “It really was amazing. Did you see the big blow up dolls when Honky Tonk woman came on?”

“No,” he said, “I missed those.”

“You should have seen them! They rose to the top of the Dome. One was Marilyn Monroe and the other was a cowgirl.”

“I missed those,” he said.

We exited at College Park and drove South towards 86<sup>th</sup> Street. We pulled in and parked in the barren parking lot. He quickly got out of the car as I followed. I ordered an Oreo shake and hamburger with fries as he ordered the largest cheeseburger with a side of fries

as well. Sitting in the corner as he always did, we faced the rest of the restaurant as we chomped on our ketchup stained French fries. “So, what’s your biology lab tomorrow?”

“Oh,” I took another bite of my burger, “We’re just dissecting a frog.”

He continued chewing the enormous bite he took as he grabbed his chocolate milkshake, took a sip, and said, “Oh really?”

“Yeah,” I took a small sip of my Oreo shake, “We’ve been prepping since Monday for it.”

“Well,” Sonny said, “That should be interesting.”

“Yeah,” I swallowed my fry, “I’m looking forward to it. It should be pretty neat.”

“Yeah,” he said, “That sounds like fun.”

As we sat there in silence devouring our burgers and French fries, I cherished the moment. It was one of the few times I saw him. The summer before my freshman year in high school, I lived above the converted train depot alone. When school began in the fall, I rarely saw Sonny. Every morning after rising at 6:30 am, showering in the tiny closet in the converted attic sans windows or ventilation, after blow drying my hair and putting on my mascara, I climbed down the Pine ladder to the former showroom converted into our mini-apartment, and walked down the stairs to the side door of the Clock Shop. I rarely saw his car parked outside. I walked the quarter mile to my best friend’s Brooke’s house and her older brother Brice would drive us to school. In the early winter, I walked down the stairs one morning surprised to see his car only to find the entire right side of Sonny’s navy blue Mercedes completely sideswiped. The passenger door and the back door were bashed in as if he side swiped a car. I locked the door and walked to Brooke’s house wondering what happened.

When I came home that day at three, I walked in his room to put the pink, light blue, and cream colored sweater I wore that day. I began buying my clothes the year before when I worked as a perfume model at Lazarus spraying ‘Red’ by Giorgio Beverly Hills on innocent shoppers. As I planned my outfit the night before, I would often sneak into Sonny’s closet and pick out a sweater. As freshmen, my friends and I started going our separate ways. Finding my dad asleep at three in the afternoon wasn’t unusual, when he actually was at our converted abode above the Clock Shop. After quickly returning his pink, baby blue, and cream striped sweater that day, as I walked past his black pants on his black lacquer table with the mirror inlay, his pants fell to the ground exposing a small Ziploc bag containing white powder. As I bent over to pick up his pants, he awoke.

“What the hell is this?” I demanded.

Still in a half slumber he groggily answered, “What are you talking about?”

I held up the small bag of cocaine, asking again, “What the hell is this, Dad?”

“Oh,” he rolled from his right side, “Oh,” he stammered, “Uh,” he continued pausing searching for the right answer, “She must have slipped that into my pocket when she tucked her business card in.”

“Oh really?” I scowled.

“Yeah,” he lied, “I don’t know where that came from,” he continued lying, “I haven’t seen that before.”

21

Having moved in with him the year prior, I was already adept at being able to decipher his lies. My human lie detector ability began the previous year when I began lying to him. Keri was my best friend in eighth grade. Mr. and Mrs. Metzince invited me to go to Sanibel Island with them where most of Zionsville and other Indianapolis communities visited. As eighth graders, Keri and I met the older, senior boys and spent our last several nights with them. After Jeff and I kissed on the lounge chair under the cabana, we decided to continue our relationship back in Zionsville. Doug, the senior that worked in the shop after school helping with deliveries, told Sonny Jeff’s true age. My father caught me off guard one day when I got home from school, “Gwen,” he sternly said, “Come into my office.”

“What is it, Daddy?” I always used the endearing ‘daddy’ term whenever Mr. Hyde appeared from his Jekyll personality as I sat on his tan colored couch, the worn down piping separating the burnt orange diamond pattern running throughout.

He leaned back in his dark grey, leather Queen Anne style chair causing it to roll across his plastic floor cover. The stern look on his face conveyed that I was in trouble. I sat straight up, ingrained behavior caused by his open palm slapping us smack in the back whenever I slouched strictly saying, “Straighten up!”

He brought his hands up to his face forming a tent with his fingers under his chin, “Well,” he took a deep breath and brought his forefingers to his chin, the three digits of both hands still touching one another beneath, “I’ve heard that you are dating a senior.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked as I sat on the couch. “I’m not dating a senior, Daddy.”

He kept his forefingers pressed together at his chin as he continued, “Well,” he quickly brought his hands down laying his palms on his desk leaning forward as he spoke, “I heard that the guy you have been seeing is a senior that you met on Spring Break.”

“No he’s not,” I quickly responded. “He’s a junior.”

He continued leaning over his desk his elbows digging into the black leather inlay. As he clasped his hands together intertwining his fingers, he said harshly, “That’s not what I heard. You better be telling the truth.”

“I am daddy,” I paused as I sat stiffly in his chair, “I’m not lying. Jeff is a junior.”

“Well,” he continued leaning forward digging his elbows in the black leather inlay on his cherry wood desk, “I want to meet this Jeff guy.”

“Okay,” I paused, “We’re supposed to be playing basketball tomorrow. You can meet him then.”

“Good,” he maintained his stance over his desk his voice never wavering, “I look forward to it.”

Jeff picked me up from Middle School the next day, the top in his red, MG convertible pulled down, and we continued towards the Clock Shop. As we drove I told him that Sonny heard he was a senior and wanted to meet him. As we pulled up to the curb my heart began beating in anticipation of what was going to happen. I unlocked the side door and Jeff and I walked upstairs. Sonny heard us laughing as we walked up the stairs and came out of his office. Sonny always used his sheer size and presence as his primary source of intimidation whether it was in a sales office or his other endeavors. Most of my friends were already familiar with his physical presence, and although Jeff already heard through the grapevine about Sonny, Jeff’s eyes expressed volumes.

“Well,” Sonny glared, “I hear you’re dating my daughter.”

“Yes sir,” Jeff said. I proudly stood by Jeff as his confidence never wavered.

“Nice to meet you,” Sonny said as he extended his hand.

As he gripped Jeff’s hand, I noticed Jeff pulling back but not relenting. “Nice to meet you too sir.”

“Step into my office,” his office door was already wide open.

“Yes sir,” Jeff quickly responded.

“Gwen,” Sonny said, “Wait out here.”

“Okay,” I meekly responded as Jeff and I made eye contact before he followed Sonny into his office.

As I sat on one of the teal green leather Natali couches I waited for what seemed like an hour for Jeff to come out of Sonny’s office. Sonny finally opened the door and shook Jeff’s hand. He looked over at me and said, “All right, you guys go have some fun.”

As soon as Jeff and I got in his MG, I asked, “What did he say?”

“Oh,” he paused, “Nothing much. I told him I was a junior, and he asked me my intentions in the relationship and why he should let me date you.”

“What did you say?”

“I told him that I really cared for you and that I didn’t have any ulterior motives,” Jeff said.

“Why did it take so long?” I probed further.

“He kept grilling me about why I would date someone in middle school as a high school student.”

As we drove along Elm Street to Lion’s Park, my mind wandered back to the fall when I sat in the same place on the taupe colored couch with the burnt orange piping diamonds. In the beginning of October I came home from school and was doing my homework at the bar. The Casablanca sign hung on the wall behind the refrigerator on the right and the sink on the left. Sonny came out of his office and as he stood in his doorway, he told me, “Babydoll, I need to talk to you,” he looked at the beige carpet as he continued, “Come into my office.”

I quickly stepped off my barstool as I asked, “What is it?”

“Just come in here for a minute,” he paused, I could tell he had something important to say, “I need to talk to you about something important.”

“Okay,” I said as I continued walking towards his office.

By the time I got to the door, he was already sitting at his desk. When I walked through the door he said, “Close the door.”

As I shut the door, I noticed the serious demeanor on his face.

His coral colored sweater with the patchwork squares creating a checkerboard throughout his mammoth chest as his tan, ostrich boots peeked out from his blue jeans that encompassed a slight acid wash effect under his desk. I sat on the frayed, taupe couch with the burnt orange piping crisscrossing throughout forming a diamond pattern. My



ivory colored Limited Express skirt with the two piping threads that extended down to my mid thighs and Limited Express shirt with the miniature yellow flowers forming straight lines running from my arms to my skirt tucked neatly into the straight skirt belted tightly with a brown woven leather belt that matched my brown, braided leather shoes offset Sonny's tone.

He sat there solemnly before he spoke. "Babydoll, what I tell you," he paused as he looked towards his salesman of the year awards and said, "You can not tell anyone."

"What is it?" I had never seen him this serious or concerned before now.

He leaned over to his left and pulled up a pile of cash with both hands and laid it on top of the black leather embedded in his cherry desktop. He gripped the stack between his left thumb and his ring finger. It was almost six inches high. After he laid it out on his desk, it teetered as if it was going to topple over. As he sat in his Queen Anne chair staring at the pile of money, he looked at me and said, "Babydoll," he paused as he looked down at the cash, "If anything happens to me," he paused again looking at the pile of money, "You take this money and run."

"What are you talking about?" I furrowed my brow in consternation.

He continued looking at the pile of Benjamin's. He smiled to acquiesce my concern as he continued, "Oh," he paused again looking down, "nothing is going to happen," he hesitated again, "But, if anything should happen to me," he looked intently at me, "I want you to take this money and run as far away as possible."

"What is going on?" I continued.

He smiled his fake smile, "Nothing is going to happen, babydoll."

I didn't say anything as I straightened my posture listening intently. My fourteen year old ears silently sat in anticipation, Sonny stared at the pile of money before he continued, "Babydoll, this is \$25,000 cash. Nothing is going to happen to me," he paused again as he looked over at his pewter salesman of the year tray with miniature glasses and decanter sitting perfectly in the middle, "but if anything should happen, I'm going to show you where it's at and how to access it." Sonny stood up from his grey leather chair in front of the Clemson national championship poster and walked to his closet. "Come here."

I followed him into the closet inside his office. As he knelt down on his right knee, the ostrich boot balancing his left knee as he held the wad of cash tightly in his hands, he slowly laid the cash down between us. I was already kneeling on both knees as the pile of Benjamin's fell between us. He opened the bottom, taupe colored drawer and picked

up the money placing it in the back of all the files. He shut the cabinet drawer and locked it with the small, silver key. I sat up on the heels of my shoes resting my bottom on the brown, woven leather slip-ons.

“This is what you do,” he grabbed the silver letter opener laying on the taupe carpet above the \$25,000 cash with his right hand and pried open the lock by sticking the letter opener in the top of the file cabinet while jerking his hand back and forth. “It might take a while,” he said as he continued prying the lock with both hands, “But, just keep at it until you get the lock open.” Sonny continued moving his wrist back and forth as he leaned into the file cabinet, his left ostrich boot kicking up against the base of the metal frame providing leverage for his 230 pound mass. I sat on my heels as he continued bending the letter opener until the lock was busted open.

“Okay,” he paused, flustered, “Do you know what to do?”

I sat there stunned, having never seen that much money coupled with not understanding what was going to happen to him. I slowly answered, “Yeah,” I hesitated again, “I guess so.”

“Do you?” His left knee was still raised as the pointed ostrich boot he was wearing on his right foot dug into the ground as he looked over at me with a strained, yet concerned look on his face.

“Yeah,” I sat on my heels. “But, what is going to happen to you, Daddy?”

He changed his demeanor to a more relaxed look as he noticed my consternation.

“Nothing babydoll,” he paused for what seemed like a minute. “Just in case something happens,” he became more serious, “You need to take this money and run as far away as possible.”

“Okay,” I still didn’t understand.

“Come on,” he quickly stood up. “I’ve got work to do.”

I leaned back and allowed him to walk through the small closet door first as I rolled off my heels and stood up holding my ivory colored, Limited Express skirt close to my knees. I was wearing the same outfit I wore the day of my fourteenth birthday.

22

Every year as children, we had the option of going out to dinner with our father and could either bring a friend or one or more sisters. In seventh grade, Cheryl began planning her exit strategy from her marriage and bought a large house in Timber Ridge. Our antiquated house in town over a hundred years old with two bathrooms for five girls, two

of us teenagers, was too small to contain the daily battles. She purchased a home from a couple and redecorated the French theme other than the bathroom I spent an hour every morning primping and trying to put my new gas permeable lenses in each eye. Starting with my right eye, I would spend over a half hour alone fitting each lens on my eye and having to extract them with the miniature plunger. I woke earlier than everyone else in order to have a peaceful house and to avoid being thrown into the wall or punched by Kim's forceful, flying, raging fists.

Waiting until the last minute to finish my homework, I typically spent the morning bus ride finishing the rest of it. After Kim threw me through the wall one day as I was trying to walk up the stairs to the kitchen, Cheryl had the drywall replaced and decided to convert the attic over the garage into my bedroom to be able to provide for a larger distance between the raging bull and myself. It was already ingrained in my psyche that Cheryl didn't care about my well being. Any instance of attempting to ask her for assistance or protection was met with her eyes bulging out of her head as she screamed out of sheer exhaustion, "I don't care!" which was sometimes met with her melodious, "boo, hoo, hoo, let me play my little violin," as she mimicked playing a violin with her fingers.

Our father rarely made an appearance. In early Spring shortly after we moved into the Timber Ridge home, our mother told us that our father was coming home and was taking us out to dinner. Being older, I rode in the front seat as Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly rode in the back. As soon as we started driving out of the cul de sac, he began questioning us as to who left chewing gum on the back seat behind his seat. After everyone claimed innocence, he continued telling us how he had a very important dealer that sat on the seat and got out of the car with a wad of gum dangling from his pants that caused him to lose a commission. We pulled onto I-465 at the College Park entrance and continued North. "How about Dalt's?" He asked.

"Yeah," I said. "That sounds good."

Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly were bouncing up and down to the music as they all said in unison, "Yeah!"

As we approached the overpass with the Bob and Tom billboard, he asked, "Hey, babydoll, will you reach down in the pocket there," he pointed to the passenger door side pocket as he continued, "and grab the little black book behind the towel."

I reached behind the small, white, folded towel and grabbed the book. As I started to hand it to him he said, "Will you look for the number for Dalt's?"

I opened the little, black leather book and three note cards in the front of book immediately grabbed my attention. I noticed hundreds of women's names and their phone numbers written in miniscule handwriting in pencil. I looked at the first one for a second and as I picked up the second note card, I asked, "What are these, Dad?"

"Oh," his expression quickly changed from one of being jovial to a mock laughing, "Oh," he hesitated again, "Those are just some friends of mine."

I looked at him questioningly as Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly continued bouncing up and down on the grey, leather seat to the beat of the music. Sonny quickly changed the subject, "Look up the number for Dalt's so we can make sure they have a table ready for us."

"Okay," I continued flipping through the book to the D section until I found the number for Dalt's, as he reached down to the left side of my knee to where his car phone was and said, "What's the number?"

As I read off the numbers he began punching the buttons. He picked up the receiver and began speaking as he turned down the volume. "Hi Mark," he paused, "It's Sonny. I'm coming in shortly with four of my daughters. Do you think you can find a table for us?"

I could hear Mark through the giant receiver, "Sure Sonny, we'll certainly find a good table for you."

As he spoke, I continued looking through all the names of all the women on the three note cards. Each of the 4 inch by 6 inch unlined, white cards contained four columns of first names and phone numbers written in pencil less than an eighth of an inch tall perfectly spaced apart. The front and back side of each note card was full of names. I closed the book and placed it back behind the white towel when he hung up the receiver.

As his hand left the receiver, he placed his large right palm on my left knee. My light blue, grey, taupe, and ivory miniature plaid, long shorts fell inches from my knees. As he gripped my knee, he asked, "So, babydoll, have you started your period yet?"

I quickly jerked my knee away and scooted closer to the door. Horrified at his question, and only learning about what menses was that year in our first real sex ed class, where they separated the boys from the girls and told us about girls having a vagina and boys having a penis coupled with all of their anatomical actions. I looked over at him as I sternly said, "No!" and jerked my knee out of his grasp.

As we exited the ramp onto Keystone Boulevard heading South towards Keystone Avenue, he asked, "So, how is track going?"

“I really like it,” I was thinking of how Beth Sanford and Courtney Young were the fastest sprinters, “I’m doing the long jump, the discus, the shot put, and the four by four hundred.”

“Wow!” He exclaimed as we exited onto Keystone Avenue across the street from where he purchased the fur coats for our mother and Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly. He turned east onto Keystone Avenue and continued through the first light. Turning left into the mall parking lot, we drove past the TGIF’s on the right and continued under the enclosed walkway turning left into the parking lot. He held the door open as I walked in first and Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly followed. As we approached the podium, he extended his hand for the host at Dalt’s and said, “Hey Mark, it is good to see you again.”

“Hi Sonny!” Mark said. “Wow! These are all your daughters.”

“Yes,” he said, “I have one more, but she’s not with us tonight. She’s in high school.”

“Well,” Mark said, “I have a table waiting for you right here,” Mark held three children’s menus and crayons in his hands coupled with two adult menus.

We sat at the round table right next to the front door in between the host stand with a tall, dark cherry wood separating our table from the walkway of the entrance. My long sleeve, grey, Banana Republic shirt with the tiny, little buttons, the top three unbuttoned exposing my ivory colored sleeveless turtleneck matched the plaid shorts as I slid into the chair next to my father. Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly began coloring when a man approached our table after walking into the door.

“Hey Sonny!” Our father stood up. The top of the man’s head barely reached the shoulder of Sonny’s loud, coral sweater.

“Hi there Bruce!” Our father extended his hand.

“How are you?” Bruce asked.

“I’m doing great,” Sonny said. “How about yourself?”

“Good, good, things are going well.” Bruce looked over at our table seeing the four of us sitting there. “Who are you here with?”

“Oh,” Sonny motioned his hand over the table like he was in a showroom explaining the features of one of the thousands of grandfather clocks he sold, his extended arm full outstretched, “these are my daughters.”

Bruce tripped over his words as he exclaimed without pausing, “You have children!”

“Yes,” Sonny brought his hands down and clasped them in front of his acid wash jeans. “These are four of my five children.”

“Wow!” Bruce was taken aback. “I can’t believe you have children,” he said as he quickly looked at us before looking up at our father with a look of bewilderment raising his eyebrows in astonishment. Sonny was oblivious to Bruce’s shocked expression as he stood there smiling.

“Yeah,” he smiled, “These are my girls.”

“Hey,” Bruce moved in towards Sonny’s left ear and whispered something.

“Yeah,” Sonny said in a lower tone, yet loud enough to hear, “Let’s go to the bathroom.”

“Great,” Bruce said turning towards us again with a look of shame.

Our father turned towards us, “Hey girls, I’ll be right back.”

I watched them walk into the bathroom located in the Northwestern corner of the restaurant. I helped Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly decide what they wanted to eat as our father and Bruce took longer than usual in the bathroom. When our father returned, he asked, “Do you know whatcha want to eat?” His mannerisms were brisk and quick. He seemed agitated yet overzealous and easily excited.

23

“Sonny, do ya want some fatback?” Pat asked as Sonny rode in between his older sister sitting in the passenger seat as her husband Jimmy drove the old, beater, pick-up truck from Philpott dam back to Pat and Jimmy’s house. They found him in the nick of time as the water flowed over the opening dam. When Jimmy spotted Sonny standing in the rising waters scrubbing his tricycle, he ran as fast as he could in order to grab him before the current whisked him away.

Sonny, only four, completely focused on scrubbing his tricycle clean was oblivious to the rising waters when Jimmy swiftly picked him up with his right arm and grabbed the handlebar with his left hand and quickly rushed out of the knee deep water. Pat stood on the bank closest to where Jimmy’s truck was parked while screaming frantically for Jimmy to get him in time.

As they rode down the gravel road in Fieldale, Jimmy began explaining in his thick, deep Southern accent, “Now, Sonnyboy, you can never run away like tha’ again,” he paused looking down at him sandwiched between his sweetheart and himself, “You understand?”



“Yes Sir,” Sonnyboy meekly answered slurring his s’s together not understanding the severity of the situation.

Jimmy became more serious, “Sonnyboy, I’m serious. You had Pat an’ I very worried,” he looked down at Sonnyboy again, his deep, Southern twang accentuating each word, “Do ya realize what coulda’ happened?”

“No sir,” Sonnyboy looked down at the rusting, metal floor.

“Sonnyboy,” Sonny squirmed closer to his older sister, although only eighteen, she began raising him from the time he was born so their momma could work at the nearby diner.

“Didn’ cha see the water risin’?”

“No sir,” Sonnyboy slowly answered.

“Sonny,” Jimmy’s voice became stern, “Don’ ever leave again withou’ tellin’ Pat or me.” He looked down at Sonnyboy as he pulled onto the main thoroughfare towards Bassett.

“You understand me, Son?”

“Yessir,” Sonnyboy ashamed at disappointing the man who treated him as his own son, never looked up from staring at the cans rolling around, clanking all over the metal floor.

Pat squeezed her arm harder on Sonnyboy’s shoulder pulling him closer to her petite body as she looked over at her husband, “Jimmy, give Sonnyboy a break.” Her raspy voice echoed throughout the interior of the cab.

“Pat,” Jimmy looked back, “The boy needs to learn his lesson. This is serious. What he did could ha’ cost him his life.”

“Well Jimmy,” Pat continued, “You don’ have to be so hard on him.”

“Pat,” Jimmy looked back, “Don’ be so easy on the boy. He could o’ drown out there.”

Pat pulled Sonnyboy closer as she looked at Jimmy, “Jimmy, he’s only four years old, you don’ have to be so hard on him. He’s all right and didn’ know any bedder.”

“Pat,” Jimmy continued gripping the steering wheel as they drove through Bassett, “You don’ need to be so easy on the kid. He’s gotta’ learn his lesson.”

“I know,” Pat said as she continued assuaging Sonnyboy, “but, you don’ need to be so rough on him. All right?”

“Do ya have anything to say for yoself boy?” Jimmy asked Sonnyboy who was still watching the cans roll over the metal floor.

“I’m sorry Uncle Jimmy,” Sonnyboy timidly answered.

Mary, Pat and Sonny's mother, worked in the local diner as a cocktail waitress. Before the lunch shift arrived Sonny's responsibility was to fill all of the salt and pepper shakers. He went around to each table and would unscrew the tops. He took the big container of salt and would fill up each salt shaker screwing the lid on each on after filling it to the top careful as to not spill the salt onto the tabletops. Sonny carried the pepper container around in the opposite direction of the small café and finished filling the pepper shakers as the first customers entered the front door.

"Afternoon, Mary," the factory workers vied for her attention, the respectful ones removing their hats as they waved. "Hey Sonnyboy," many of them knew Sonny as he was a usual fixture in the diner. Governor Stanley lived in nearby Stanleytown and owned Stanley furniture company. John D. Bassett owned the neighboring furniture plant, Bassett furniture. Although they competed against one another, they shared the same railroad line and needed to work together in transporting all the goods produced in the humble, furniture manufacturing district in Southwestern Virginia. Ellen Plunkett, a refined Southern lady, one of few women who was actually educated in the South, attended secretary college in Lynchburg before she was selected by Governor Stanley to be his secretary. She seldom visited the diner but took a keen interest in the young, underfed boy.

One afternoon she arrived and pulled Mary aside asking her if she could give Sonny a present. Mary looked up to Ellen with admiration given she was the secretary to the President of Stanley furniture and married to Finley Gale, one of the most respected men in the community, given his position as plant manager of Bassett Furniture. As Ellen walked out to her car, Sonny perched on the vinyl seat of one of the booths and watched from the window. Ellen pulled out a red wagon from the back seat. She wheeled it to the front door and left it right outside. Walking inside, she saw Sonny sitting on his heels in the booth. She walked over to him and bent over meeting him at eye level. "I have a little present for you Sonny."

Destitute and living in the basement of a house on the other side of the tracks without any running water, Sonny jumped up ecstatically as Ellen held out her hand. She walked him to the door and opened it for him. As they walked outside, Sonny already saw the present but couldn't believe it was for him as he rarely received anything given Mary's income. Ellen knelt down to Sonny as she said, "Sweetie, this is all yours."

Sonny looked up at her astonished as he never received any present as grand as the brand new, shiny red wagon. The black wheels, gently dusted from the gravel when Ellen

pulled it from her car to the door were still resting on the small rocks to the right of the door under the 'Open' sign. Ellen put her hand on Sonny's shoulder as she bent over as she said, "Do you like it?"

Accustomed to talking to the customers, Sonny wasn't afraid to talk. "Is this really mine?"

"Yes," Ellen smiled gently, "This is all yours, Son."

"Wow!" He exclaimed. "Thank you," his five year old voice wavered. The only gifts he received were from Mary's many dates. He jumped up and down as Ellen stood in admiration. She knew Mary's struggles and was happy to help her bastard child by giving him a wagon.

"Do you like it?" Ellen repeated.

"Tis is the bes' gif' I eva' got," Sonny learned his grammar from overhearing the factory workers during the lunch time crowds.

Ellen smiled knowing how much the wagon meant to the young child. Several of the factory workers took a special interest in Sonny in order to win the attention of his mother. They would occasionally pass him a nickel if he retrieved them ketchup or mustard for their fries. He rarely received a dime, but when he did, he gave it to his mother in a vacant attempt to win her affection coupled with her never having enough money for food or clothes. Sonny and Mary ate all their meals at the café and most everyone in Bassett knew that they did.

"I'm glad you like it, Son," Ellen looked down at Sonny's scrawny body and smiled struggling to find the appropriate words. "Do you want to go inside and get your mother to show her?"

Sonny hesitated for a moment, "Yeah," he said. "I guess so."

Ellen opened the door for him to run back inside as she stood in the bright, shining Spring sun perspiring from the thick wool and cotton blend suit. Her short pumps dug into the gravel as she held her small clutch with both hands in front of her plump belly.

Mary pushed the door open as Sonny came running out shouting, "Mamma! Mamma! Look what I got!"

Mary, envious of the prim and proper secretary snickered trying to contain her jealousy of not being able to afford such an expensive gift for her son, said matter of fact, "That's nice."

Ellen maintained her composure as she sensed Mary's contempt and knew of her financial and social challenges as a cocktail waitress in the small furniture manufacturing town. "I hope you don't mind that I bought this for him," Ellen smiled, "I thought it would be a nice gift for him."

Mary glared at Ellen, "Yeah," she kept the door open by leaning against it. "That's an awfully nice gif'. Ya really shouldn' have."

"It was my pleasure," Ellen smiled as she watched Sonny pulling it over the gravel in between the cars and the diner. "I know how difficult it must be for you," Ellen struggled for the correct words to say without sounding aloof or demeaning, "I just wanted to do something to help out." Her smile was impenetrable.

"Well," Mary didn't know what to say. None of her dates ever provided a gift for her son that was as expensive as the one Ellen just gave. "It's very nice of ya to do that."

"Thank You," Ellen's refined manner spoke volumes.

25

"Sonny!" Mary screamed. "Getcha britches on! Carson's gonna be here any minute!" Carson Hemmerich passed through town at least once a month in order to check on the inventory of the nearby dime store he supplied. After spending his day in Martinsville, he would drive over to Mary's and take Mary and Sonny out to dinner. After dinner, they would drive up to Philpott Damn. Mr. Hemmerich would make Sonny sit in the back seat as he and Mary would 'park' in the front. As Sonny slowly matured from three to four and then from four to his present age of five, Mr. Hemmerich didn't think there was anything wrong with laying Mary down across the front seat of his Cadillac as he moved up and down, up and down in the front. Sonny grew accustomed to watching his mother squeal as Mr. Hemmerich shook the car back and forth. "Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream, make him the cutest that I've ever seen," was blasting from the radio as Sonny watched the seat moving up and down.

"Momma," Sonny cried from the back seat, "Momma." Sonny continued whimpering needing to relieve himself of the two Shirley Temples he drank that night.

Mr. Hemmerich looked up over the seat as he continued moving his body up and down, up and down, up and down, "What do you want?" He screamed angrily, selfishly and without any concern there was a young child in the back seat.

"I got to go pee," Sonny had his hand over his genitals his face bright red.

"Hold it!" Mr. Hemmerich yelled.

“I can’t,” the tears started streaming down his face.

“Hold it!” Mr. Hemmerich yelled over the seat as he continued moving up and down.

Unable to control himself, Sonny began peeing all over himself leaving a large puddle in the middle of the back seat of Mr. Hemmerich’s new Cadillac as he cried. Several minutes later, Mr. Hemmerich turned around and looked over the back seat. “What did you do?” He noticed the small pool Sonny was sitting in all over the leather seat of his new Cadillac.

Sonny never saw Mr. Hemmerich this angry before until now. Still crying, Sonny fidgeted around on the leather seat afraid of Mr. Hemmerich. He never saw him this angry until this moment. Sonny attempted to control his tears as Mr. Hemmerich’s expression conveyed pure hatred and evil. Afraid of what Mr. Hemmerich was going to do to him, Sonny quickly stopped crying as he covered his genitals.

“What did you do!?!” Mr. Hemmerich demanded.

“I’m sorry,” Sonny looked down at the floor.

Uncaring to anyone’s needs but his own, Mr. Hemmerich continued screaming at the five year old in the back seat of his new Cadillac. “This is a new car! Get out! Get out of my car before I kill you!”

Sonny quickly grabbed the handle of the car door on the left hand side and jumped onto the gravel road. He saw his mother putting her shirt on as he stood outside of the door as Mr. Hemmerich pulled his pants up. As soon as he zipped them he opened his door.

“What the hell do you think you are doing!?!”

Sonny ran behind the closest tree next to a few small bushes.

“Don’t run away from me!!!!” Mr. Hemmerich yelled.

Oblivious to anyone else besides himself, Mr. Hemmerich continued screaming. Sonny kept hiding behind the tree trying to protect himself from Mr. Hemmerich as he kept yelling, “Get over here! Get over here you little brat right now! Come here you son of a bitch!”

Sonny continued trying to hide from Mr. Hemmerich. “I’m going to kill you!!!! Get out of those bushes!” Mr. Hemmerich quickly ran over to the bushes. Although Sonny was only five, his speed, trained by sprinting past the funeral home after the picture shows at the local nickel theatre, far surpassed Mr. Hemmerichs.

Sonny ran from behind the tree to the nearby woods as Mary screamed, “Sonny! Sonny! It’s okay Sonny! Momma’s right here.”

As Sonny hid behind the overgrown brush, Mr. Hemmerich kept screaming. “Get out here! I’m going to kill you!!!!”

Mary finally intervened, “Carson, stop it! You’re scaring him!”

“I don’t care!” He ranted. “He peed all over the back seat of my new car!”

“Carson!” Mary continued screaming. “He’s just a child!”

Mr. Hemmerich kept screaming like a small child, “I don’t care!”

“Carson! You will not lay a hand on my child!” Mary continued yelling as Sonny hid behind the overgrown weeds and bushes. Sonny never saw his mother defend him before until now.

Carson finally calmed down when he realized he may never see Mary again.

“Sonnyboy,” Mary calmly yelled in a soft tone, “It’s okay. You can come out now. Mr. Hemmerich is going to take us home.”

Sonny slowly came out of the overgrown brush and quickly ran towards his mother. He grabbed her waist and held on as he stared at Mr. Hemmerich unsure of what he was going to do. Mr. Hemmerich opened his door and looked in the back seat, “Who’s going to clean this?”

“Carson,” Mary firmly stated, “He’s just a child. You can take it to town tomorrow and have it cleaned at the carwash.”

“I am never taking him out with us again Mary!” He continued yelling. “This is a brand new car!”

“Carson,” Mary said, “Then maybe we shouldn’t date anymore.”

“Mary,” Carson quickly changed his tone, “You can’t do that. I love you Mary. He shouldn’t be with us anyway. He’s getting too old.”

“Carson,” Mary fought back, “he is my child and you will not treat him this way!”

Mr. Hemmerich sat in his seat unconcerned with anyone else besides his sociopathic self as Mary opened her door and sat in the front seat pulling Sonny in his new Cadillac on top of her lap protecting him from the demon she never saw rise to the surface within Mr. Hemmerich until that point.

26

Sonny, Pat, and Mary lived in the basement of one of the smaller factory homes on the other side of the tracks from the factory managers, business owners, and more respected



members of the community. The only means of heating the basement single room apartment, without running water or a bathroom was by the coal Mary collected from the factory yards. When Ellen gave Sonny his wagon, at the tender age of five it became his responsibility to collect the coal by sneaking into the open factory grounds and stealing the small chunks of coal tossed aside. Most of the factory workers knew who he was from the café and didn't mind the small remnants given it saved them from having to clean up the unusable debris themselves. The bastard child didn't have many friends, and Mary couldn't stand looking at him given Bernice left her right after she got pregnant.

Sonny would haul the wagon full of coal from the factory yard to their little basement room and pile it up on the side of the furnace. The outhouse sat up on the hill. From his perspective it appeared like miles in the middle of night in the thick of winter. When school finally started, he experienced relief at school. Helping his mother at the diner, he taught himself to write using his left hand. After the night Mr. Hemmerich tried attacking Sonny he stopped going on Mary's dates. As she was getting ready she would give him a nickel to go to the local cinema. Able to escape his torturous existence briefly every night, the black and white picture shows allowed his escape into another world. At the end of the movie, after the credits rolled, Sonny would leave the theatre and sprint all the way home. The two sons of the funeral home told him that they buried the dead bodies under the bushes out front. When he approached the funeral home, he sprinted even faster.

His abandonment fueled by his mother always screaming, "You look like Bernis!" while leaving him to spend time with her steady stream of suitors, coupled with never knowing who his father was, left an empty void in his life. Pat, his older half-sister first met Bernice after Mary met him at his Hole in the Wall moonshine bar in downtown Martinsville, the hub of commercial activity near the furniture making plants. Bernice began showing Pat his nudie picture books within weeks of his relationship with her mother. At the age of eight, Bernice and Mary forced Pat to sit on an old trunk to watch them having sex telling her it was her sex education. She squirmed about just as she did when Bernice held her tightly on his lap a couple of years before as he flipped through the adult nudie pictures explaining what all the private parts were on the grown men and women.

27

"Mom!!!! Mom!!!! Mom!!!!" I kept screaming at the top of my lungs leaning my head back seeing her light on in her bedroom window, my fourteen year old body was slowly forming a sinkhole in the sand dune to the left of the walkway out to the beach.

Screaming at the top of my lungs, less than a hundred feet away, Cheryl did nothing. Given that she never cared or did anything to stop the abuse promulgated by her children or family members, I tried with all my might to fight off my almost sixty year old grandfather. I could smell the whiskey on his breath as he tried kissing me. After screaming and screaming for help, I focused on the handle of Jim Beam lying next to my head half buried in the sand. I continued screaming and fighting after waking up on the beach. My soaking clothes, wet from my older cousin, Kirk, and my older sister, Kim, throwing me in the pool after Kirk ripped off my shirt on the way home in the bank parking lot.

Earlier in the night, after having dinner at our Uncle Buck's condo, my cousins Kirk, Andrea, older sister Kim, and her friend Nate had me go with them to our other cousin, Charles, and his friend's condo in Atlantic Beach. As soon as I walked in the door, Charles handed me a shot glass and demanded, "Here! Drink this!"

The first time my cousins thought it would be fun to get a ten year old drunk was after my mother told me about the birds and the bees. I asked her earlier in the evening while she was getting ready, the only rare moments of privacy, if she would tell me about the birds and bees. Most of my friends were talking about the birds and bees that year at school, and I didn't know what they meant. She told me she would tell me after dinner. I waited in anticipation as we ate our buckets of fried chicken and mashed potatoes. After dinner, she said, "Okay gal, do you want to go out to the bridge?"

"Okay," my stunted verbal ability by not being allowed to speak caused by years of Kim punching me or telling me how stupid I was if I ever opened my mouth to ask a question or say something precipitated my incessant stuttering the previous year. I couldn't wait to have rare quality one on one time with my mom.

Cheryl leaned up against the railing facing north under the star lit sky. I leaned up against the splintering wood railing facing South. Cheryl began by saying, "Okay gal, why don't we start by you asking questions, and then I'll tell you the answers," she smiled. Other than the one day ATA trip to Williamsburg in third grade, we rarely had any private moments together. "What do you want to ask first?"

"Mom," I paused, "What's a dildo?"

She immediately laughed as I cowered back embarrassed by my question. I stood there waiting for the answer. Laura ran around the playground that year calling everyone a dildo. When I was six, I walked into Shirley Ludlow's house and there was a huge, green jello mold on the table. I had never seen anything like it before and asked Shirley what it

was. “It’s the Incredible Hulk’s dildo.” I was too afraid to ask what a dildo was and wondered ever since.

“Well,” Cheryl paused not knowing how to explain what a dildo was to her ten year old daughter. “Why do you ask?”

“Laura called me one on recess,” and I hesitated before saying what Shirley said years before, “And do you remember at Shirley’s house? She had the Incredible Hulk dildo in the middle of her dining room table.”

Cheryl continued laughing. “Well gal, I guess the easiest way to explain it is that it is something a girl uses.” She didn’t explain any further, quickly changing the subject, “What do you want to know next?”

I didn’t press the issue, still not fully understanding what a dildo was. “Mom, how do you make babies?”

“Well,” she leaned back against the wooden railing, “A boy has sperm inside of his privates and a girl has eggs inside of her body.” She paused trying to figure out how to explain every parent’s dreaded, initial procreation discussion. She continued, “In order for a girl to get pregnant, a boy sticks his privates inside of the girl’s privates and the sperm goes inside of the girl. When the sperm reaches the girl’s egg it creates what’s called a zygote and then the zygote becomes a fetus.”

“What’s a fetus?” I asked.

“A fetus is a baby developing inside of the mother’s stomach until it is big enough to be a baby,” She attempted to explain.

“I don’t understand,” I paused. “How does the baby grow from an egg to a baby?”

“Well,” she paused again, “A baby starts off,” she held her pointer finger out and pointed with her other finger to the center of the extended finger, “smaller than the tip of my finger.”

She leaned closer showing me the tip of her finger. “See,” she paused, “You came from something smaller than this.”

Confused, I allowed her to continue. “A boy’s sperm goes into the girl’s egg and then the baby starts to grow inside of the mommy’s belly.”

Having witnessed my mother’s stomach during my three younger sisters development grow bigger and bigger with each passing month, she explained that Kim and I were going to be big sisters again with each new sister. After visiting our mother in St. Vincent’s and watching from behind the glass partition our younger sisters in the baby

room, Sonny would take us to the nearby cafeteria. Cheryl continued, “A baby starts off as a zygote when the boy’s sperm goes into the girl’s egg and is as small as the tip of my finger.”

I stood there listening intently as Cheryl continued, “As the baby gets bigger, it is called a fetus,” she paused again, “When the baby is ready to come out of the mom’s belly, her water breaks, and she goes to the hospital.”

I looked at her quizzically. “What do you mean the water breaks?”

She laughed again, remembering her own water breaking. “Well, when the baby is ready to be born, a mother’s water breaks and the mother goes to the hospital to have the baby.”

“Why does the water break?” I asked.

“Well,” Cheryl continued, “When the baby is ready to come out of the mother, they put pressure on the cervix and the water breaks.” She hesitated. “Do you have any more questions?”

“No,” I thought I understood how babies were made. You could hear my older cousins sitting on the beach less than twenty feet away.

“Okay then,” Cheryl said, “I’m going to go back up to the house. Do you want to go over with your cousins?”

“Yeah!” The Cassady girls were the youngest of all the Gale offspring. As we walked off the bridge I turned to the right as Cheryl walked up to ‘The Quinta,’ the house we rented every week of the Fourth of July as the family expanded and we outgrew the ‘White Cap.’ As I ran over, all my cousins were sitting around laughing drinking beer. The drinking age was still eighteen in 1985, and Ann, Charles, Lee, Andrea, Kirk, and Kim were all sitting there with two cases of Coors Light sitting in front of them.

Andrea asked, “So what did your mom tell you?”

“She told me all about the birds and the bees,” I sat in the sand in their circle.

“What did she say?” Charles asked.

“She said that the boys have the spam and the girls have the egg,” I paused for a second trying to remember, “and that’s how you make a baby.”

They all started laughing hysterically. I sat there embarrassed as they laughed.

Kim laughed the loudest as she always did. “You’re so stupid!!!”

I stopped laughing and watched as they all continued laughing at me. Charles stood up and brought over a beer. “Here!” After being kicked out of an elite Virginia Military

prep school for drinking and smoking marijuana in his dorm room, his abusive behavior from lighting bottle rockets and blowing up beach critters to always picking on me, our Granddaddy Gale's favorite grandchild. He stood above me and put the beer in my hand as he said, "You have to drink this whole thing in less than twenty seconds!" His military school training conveyed his militant attitude as he screamed in my face, "Drink!"

I sipped a beer before and didn't really like the taste, but Ann, Andrea, Lee, Kirk, and Kim started joining Charles as they all chanted, "Chug! Chug! Chug!"

I started sipping and brought the aluminum can down from my mouth. Charles kneeled down and started screaming in my face, "Drink it!"

The others continued screaming, "Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!" As Charles stood to my right screaming in my face, "Drink it!!!!"

I tipped the beer back and drank the entire beer as quickly as I could. They started clapping after I finished it while hooting and hollering. Andrea asked again, "So, what's spam?" As Charles scurried like a beach rat over to the open, cardboard box half full of Coors Light. He reached in and grabbed another beer walking back over as I started answering Andrea.

"The boy makes the spam and puts it inside of the girl who has an egg," I hesitated for a second trying to make sure what I was saying was right as they all laughed. "Then the egg and the spam make a baby inside the girl's stomach." All my cousins and Kim continued laughing louder as I continued explaining the baby making process. "When the girl's water breaks, the baby is ready to come out."

Andrea, trying hardest not to laugh, looked over at me as she said, "Oh really?" Everyone continued laughing.

"Yeah," I said. Charles leaned down again and placed the open Coors Light in front of my face as he said, "Here! Drink this!"

I grabbed the open beer as everyone continued chanting, "Chug! Chug! Chug!" They were already drunk and laughed in unison as they rotated between chanting, "Chug! Chug! Chug!" I drank the beer as fast as I could.

After finishing the beer, I stood up and fell over into the sand. They all continued laughing. As soon as I sat back down, Charles walked over again, pushing open the lid on the can as I looked around at all of them through the fire. Their faces started blurring together, and I swayed back and forth as the Atlantic waves came crashing down rolling into the sand during low tide as the moon lit up the night sky. I tried focusing on each bright dot in the dark night sky, but my blurred vision incapacitated my ability. As I

looked around at all of my cousins and my older sister laughing in unison, it was as if they were morphing into monsters. Charles kept walking over with an open beer can as soon as I finished the one in my hand. As soon as I had my fourth beer, I had to go pee. I jumped up and ran up to 'The Quinta,' trying to dodge the sand spurs and hopping on one foot when I landed on one slowly stopping as I yanked it out of my foot.

Cheryl, my aunts and uncles were all sitting on the balcony rocking back and forth as I ran up the stairs. On the left hand side, my Aunt Billie and Aunt Francis Lee sat rocking back and forth in the old, worn down rockers. On the right, my Uncle Buck, Uncle Ross, and Cheryl sat rocking back and forth as well, as they all looked out over the Atlantic Ocean. I stumbled up the stairs, and Uncle Buck and Cheryl laughed as I stumbled. Uncle Buck was the first to speak, "Gal, what are you doing?"

"Charles made me drink beer!"

Uncle Buck and Cheryl started laughing as Aunt Billie said in her deep, Southern twang, "Charles did what?"

"They made me drink beer!" I said as I fell into the top railing turning too quickly to face Billie and Francis Lee who both stopped rocking their old rocking chairs. My small bottom bounced off the second railing causing me to fall forward. I barely caught myself with my right hand and quickly stood up. Uncle Buck and Cheryl continued laughing as Uncle John stopped laughing when he saw me fall.

"My Charles made you drink beer?" Billie asked again questioning her only son. Her semblance of being a perfect mother produced the complete opposite effect in her children.

"Yeah!" I started hic cupping as I crossed my legs jumping on one leg, "I have to go pee." I ran through Uncle Buck and Aunt Francis Lee's bedroom and into the bathroom pulling down my shorts and quickly relieving my ten year old self of the four beers.

28

Now, four years later, I was standing on the back of Charles porch at his condo in Atlantic Beach as two of his friends held the beer bong up. The plastic tube was being held in my fourteen year old mouth as Charles was screaming, "Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!" Charles stood over me at my right as he poured the beer into the red plastic funnel. He kept screaming as he poured the beer into the funnel. As I watched the pale yellow liquid swirl down the clear, plastic tube, Charles kept screaming as his two friends held my back as I leaned back, "Chug! Chug! Chug! You pussy! Chug!"



I continued inhaling the entire beer in less than what seemed like a minute. As soon as I stood up, I began feeling the effects from the first two beers and lost my balance. Charles opened another beer and screamed, “Lean back!” His two friends, one standing behind me held my back as the other one stood on the left holding the top of the clear tube. Charles held the red plastic funnel and started pouring the third beer screaming, “Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!” I continued drinking the beer as I fell back. Although my fourteen year old body drank for the first time at ten years old when he and my older cousins and sister forced me to drink the Coors Light, my tolerance was greater. The night I was ten began an annual ritual of all the older cousins and Kim forcing me to drink beer at least one night during our annual Myrtle Beach Fourth of July vacations. The aunts and uncles, never concerned with their behavior and actions allowed it to continue perpetuating the illicit behavior.

After arriving at Charles and his friends’ condo in Atlantic Beach, Charles immediately forced me to do a shot of a dark alcohol. As I held the shot glass up to my lips, the smell permeated my entire nasal cavity. Charles stood next to me as my other cousins stood around and watched as Charles began screaming, “Drink it!” I held the shot glass up to my lips and slowly opened my mouth not wanting to inhale the dark liquid. I tilted my head back as Charles screamed, “Drink it!” Accustomed to the abuse, I held my head back and swallowed the entire shot.

Charles quickly lifted the bottle off the counter in the small kitchen to the right of the door and poured another shot. “Drink it!” He screamed as he dangled the tiny glass in front of my face, “Drink it!” I took the miniature glass and placed the rim to my lips. I quickly tilted my head back and swallowed the dark, disgusting taste.

Charles opened the refrigerator and grabbed a beer from the open, cardboard box. He held it in front of my face and again said, “Here!” he stuck the beer in front of me speaking in a higher decibel over the blasting music, “Drink this!”

I took the beer from his hand as he walked out onto the back porch, his friends following. He grabbed his water balloon launcher and pulled back the rubber bands holding the small water balloon in his right hand. As he launched the water balloon towards the predominantly African American beach, he began screaming, “Hey nigger!” The African Americans walking on the beach turned towards his balcony. “Hey nigger!” He screamed again as he launched another water balloon towards an innocent man. He picked up his cigarette resting on the dark, wooden railing as he laughed hysterically. His two friends and Kirk joined in the laughter. I swaggered in the kitchen sipping on my

beer before he came into the kitchen and yanked on my white linen shirt exposing my belly button pulling me out onto the balcony to do the three beer bongs.

After I inhaled the beer bongs, I could barely stand. Charles picked up his water balloon slingshot and one of the water balloons and slowly pulled back the rubber bands after resting the water balloon in the small square as he spotted his next victim, an elderly African American man walking alone on the beach. He screamed, “Hey nigger!” as he aimed it straight at him. His two friends laughed in unison as it crashed to the sand near the elderly man’s feet. They held up the beer bong again as I laid on the back porch trying to get up. They quickly raised the plastic tube as Charles held the red funnel as if I was Rosemary’s baby and they were the devil completely careless in their actions

Sitting on the back porch falling in and out of consciousness, I could barely peel myself off the wooden planks. As I slowly stood up in an attempt to walk towards the back of his condo, I passed my sister, cousins, and all of their friends using the walls for balance. I opened each door trying to find a bed to lay down in as I could feel the effects of the alcohol quickly catching up with my 115 pound body. I walked straight to the back trying to find a room furthest from the blasting stereo and all the commotion primarily trying to get away from Charles so I wouldn’t be forced to drink anymore of the cheap, stale beer and burning alcohol. I opened the door on the right and found a bed pushed into the corner of the room. After turning off the light, I laid down in a desperate attempt to sleep. Unable to sleep after twenty minutes with the blaring music, I rolled out of the dingy bed and made my attempt to get some water.

As I stumbled down the hallway, I leaned my left shoulder against the wall using it for support. I continued walking, the walls vibrating from the blasting stereo. Several feet from the kitchen, I waited in the hall, leaning up against the wall as my left shoulder could feel the beat of the music from the blasting stereo. I could barely stand from all the alcohol poured down my throat. As Kim and my cousins laughed, they looked at me barely able to stand as one of them said, “Let’s take Gwen to the Pavilion.”

I stumbled around the kitchen trying to find a clean glass for water as they opened the door and drug me out the door my sister held one side of my body as I stumbled down the stairs after my cousins unable to drink my water. Kirk drove Charles’ car as Kim, Nate, and I got in his car. Andrea and everyone else got in the other car and we drove South towards the Pavilion. Kirk found a parking space on the northern side of the Pavilion. We got out of the car and walked in the hot summer night towards the old amusement park. The Pavilion was known in the 60’s as a bustling center of activity with an open dance floor east of the amusement park where all the teenagers congregated dancing the

shag. The primary ride was an old, rickety roller coaster. Although it was 1989, the roller coaster was still operating. The white paint was chipping off the largest ride in the dilapidated amusement park that encompassed an entire block. You could see the roller coaster from the parking lot. We went there first and waited in line after buying tickets.

I began feeling the effects of the copious amount of alcohol as the roller coaster jerked over the rickety, worn down rails. Gripping the handlebar in front of me as the old, open cars shook from side to side thrusting my newly developed hip bones into the side on each turn. As we went down the hill on the final stretch, it seemed as if the speeding coaster wasn't going to stop. We flew down the straight away and went over a little hill as I began to feel completely nauseous. We went around the final turn as I hung onto the railing in order to not bump into my cousin on the right.

When the coaster jerked to a stop I stayed in my seat unable to walk due to all the alcohol my cousins forced me to drink. They had to hold me up as they walked me over to the swings. I made it onto the swings located in the center of the park, and as the centrifugal force of the central unit began swinging the chains around and around, my cousins all laughed as my head bopped all over as if I was.

When the swings began slowing, Charles came up to me and started pushing me screaming, "What's the matter? Huh? Huh? Had enough yet?"

One cousin on each side of me, they walked me to the gravitron. As the gravitron fired up, the floor fell out from beneath me. The draping of my white, cotton, linen blend shirt was flying up onto the carpeted walls as the machine sped around counterclockwise. I could feel the alcohol curdling in my stomach as I could barely breathe as the machine sped faster and faster. The floor was at least four feet below me. As the gravitron began slowing, the floor slowly rose with it. When the gravitron finally stopped, I fell to the floor. My hundred and fifteen pound body was dead weight on the cheap carpet. Kirk and Andrea walked over and picked me up and walked me out of the gravitron. My arms extended over each of their shoulders as I slowly dragged my feet barely conscious from the alcohol forced down my throat earlier in the night.

Kirk raised the lever on Charles' seat before throwing my limp, long, skinny fourteen year old body in the back seat. Nate eagerly flipped the lever raising the passenger seat crawling into the tight back seat next to me. Kim threw the seat back and sat in the passenger seat next to Kirk. After Kirk started driving, completely passed out in the back seat, I woke up to Nate groping my breasts. My white, linen cotton blend shirt draped over my left breast as Nate leaned over my body enabling his right hand to fondle my right breast exposing my turquoise, lace Victoria Secret bra. I just purchased all my new

bras at the Keystone at the Crossing earlier in the spring. The late eighties promulgated pompous consumerism bringing with it flashy clothes and flashy cars. After the gas crisis of the 70's, the savings and loans crisis of the 80's, America's manipulation of emerging markets and cheap foreign labor provided for a new type of materialism. Nixon's toothbrush principle when he opened the trade barriers to China with the false belief that the Chinese would be importing all of their goods from the US, backfired as Wal-Marts began popping up throughout the US selling cheap, poor quality, material goods ensconced with the sweat of slave labor.

I bought my first bras at Victoria Secret selecting a red, turquoise, and black one with matching panties. My black rayon shorts covered in miniature colorful flowers of yellow, red, turquoise, and purple had a tight, elastic band about two and a half inches thick. The waist was extra tight that night after eating a big meal with our aunts and uncles and after Charles, his friends, my cousins, and sister forced me to drink all the alcohol and beer.

After getting out of the shower that evening, I opened the second drawer and decided on the black, rayon shorts decorated in the rainbow of flowers and the white cotton, linen blend shirt. I opened the top drawer and picked up the turquoise, lace Victoria Secret bra to match the turquoise flowers scattered throughout the pattern on the shorts. I picked out the matching panties with black lace covering the rear and a matching cacophony of colorful flowers on the velour front. Sliding my lean, muscular legs in one at a time before hooking the front of my vibrant bra in front of my stomach and moving it around to my lower back, as I slid the elastic band up my spine, I slid my arms through the straps and pulled them over my shoulders. After growing over three inches the year before, fueled by three chilidogs, large fries, and a Mister Misty from the drive-thru at Dairy Queen at least two or three nights a week and visits to the Hardee's, in addition to weekly Village Pizza deliveries, my hips grew to a ladies' size eight. As I moved my torso around in a circular motion as if I was hula hooping trying to squeeze my hips through the tight, elastic band, I noticed my tan lines and the stark contrast of white skin on my newly developing breasts as I watched myself in the mirror above the dresser. My memory quickly shifted to Bernice's words when we first arrived, "You're gonna' need a big stick to fight off all 'em boys!" He creepily told me as he fondled my right breast holding me close to his sixty year old body. A half empty gallon of Jim Beam in the other.

As I was quickly unpacking after putting on my brand new, hot pink first bikini, I glanced in the mirror scrutinizing every detail on my pubescent body. The five, black clasps in the front resembled those of my new bras, except these clasped in between my new

cleavage matched the black elastic bands on the skimpy bottom. Picking out and paying for all of my clothes using the money I earned bussing tables at the Old Windmill Café and perfume modeling, I bought this bikini specifically to wear for Mark, my first boyfriend. Last summer I let him go to second base and was planning on allowing him to go to third base this summer orchestrating losing my virginity to him the following summer after my freshman year in high school. My three best girlfriends already lost their virginities when we were still in eighth grade. Brooke was the first. Erin was dating a senior while we were in eighth grade and was the second.

One weekend Erin's older brother and his friends from college were supposed to be babysitting us. Instead, they fed us cheap beer and using their college tactics, they selected their prey early in the evening. Keri lost her virginity on a huge rock in Erin's back yard as one of the other guys watched. The rock where the rape occurred was covered in enough blood as if they performed the sacrificial of a small animal. In many ways they did. I fought off Erin's older brother as long as I could. Just as he reached over to the nightstand to the right of me and dipped his two fingers into the Petroleum Jelly jar as he held his 200 plus pound, muscular body on top of me as I attempted to escape, he swathed my vagina before he penetrated the tip of his penis into the base of my labia majora. I squirmed and squirmed my hips from left to right causing my body to narrowly escape his penis entering my vagina when Erin and Brett, her boyfriend, pounded on the door. As Mike turned his body around to the left to shout, "Wait!" I scurried under his huge body and ran towards the dressing area. Erin and Brett found me hiding behind her father's crisply ironed shirts in her parent's closet while screaming, "I just starched these!"

As I stood in front of the mirror that evening staring at my turquoise, lace, Victoria Secret bra holding my crisp, white, linen shirt loosely designed after a quarterback's shoulder pads, with one flap of the crisp linen covering my right breast first, and then the left panel covering the left breast with an overlay in the front so my belly button was exposed, I remembered when Erin's college brother, Mike, grinded down on me, I watched him through the mirror as I fought him off my body less than five minutes prior.

The blinds behind me covered the window that opened to the walkway overlooking the parking lot and swimming pool of the new condos. The vibrant, lace turquoise starkly contrasted the cheap ivory tinted plastic shielding the bright sunlight and the place where my grandfather groped me earlier in the week. After putting on my bikini within five minutes of arriving on Sunday, I quickly unpacked in order to take advantage of every minute of tanning. After placing my shirts, panties, Victoria Secret bras, and pajamas into the top drawer, my father's girlfriend, Cindy, yelled for me to come out to the

breezeway. I could already hear my drunk grandfather hitting on her through the thin glass as I quickly finished unpacking. Bernice progressively became worse over the years, both with his drinking and his flirting with all the female family members, including his own sisters. He waited until the girls developed breasts before hitting on them. His sister, Louise, was sent to Tennessee at the age of fourteen when she became pregnant by him.

As I opened the door onto the breezeway, Bernice's eyes bulged further out of his head with each step I took closer to him and Betty, his seventh wife, as he gripped the handle of Jim Beam nestled between the two of them. I never saw Betty drink during my entire childhood and was astonished at how quickly his alcoholism progressed.

I stood across from Betty after giving her a slight hug and quickly stepped back to avoid hugging Bernice, even stepping about a half foot behind Cindy's personal space placing me at the furthest available distance. Bernice, devoid of any boundaries as if his entire being was a spilled water glass filling all available space, quickly uttered, "Mmm, mmm, mmm," without even saying hello, "Well, well, well," he continued eyeing my newly developed hips and breasts tucked neatly into my new bikini, without ever looking at me in the eye or saying hello.

"Hi Papa Cassady and Betty," I strained, smiling at sweet Betty the entire time.

Betty's white rayon shorts and buttoned up silk shirt had small sweat spots under her arm pits and upper thigh area. They rented a condo nearby that year. My father took a special interest in flaunting my decision earlier that year, shortly after my fourteenth birthday, to live with him, and more importantly to his fragile ego, to show off his young, freshly silicone implanted girlfriend who was allegedly chaperoning us with a girlfriend. Cindy also happened to be the daughter of his divorce attorney. Maxine, or Grandma Max as she liked to be called, gave us all Easter baskets that year including a box of tampons for Kelly, who was only eight years old.

Sensing and knowing his ways, Betty reached over and put her arm around Bernice drawing him close to her as he lifted the gallon of bourbon in front of his thinning body in order to switch hands and lean on her for support. His body swayed slightly as the bottle of bourbon swung from his dangling arm as if it was a monkey dangling from a vine unaware of when the vine would heave the open vessel to pursed lips. The Cassadys were known to have great legs and high, Cherokee cheekbones, but their troubled midsections were difficult to curtail. Given the level of alcohol consumption, it was unapparent if the sun or the alcohol caused the reddish complexion of his face and thinning midsection. Betty, even her jet black hair, had not changed since my first



memory of her. Betty quickly responded attempting to shield me from the impending lewd comment from her husband.

“Hi Gwen!” She exemplified a Southern lady, minus the gloves in this heat, with her perfect Southern manners and charm. No matter what her husband did to her, she stood by him playing the part of dutiful wife, playing second fiddle to his needs. “Wow! You look great!” Her infectious enthusiasm masked the insecurities caused by her wandering husband. Aware of his actions and swarmy nature, she did her best to hold him back as he quickly knocked her arm down walking over to my side. He quickly put his hand under my armpit as his fingers groped my right breast hidden from Cindy as he held me tight, squeezing my body into his. Betty pursed her lips knowing what he was doing to his fourteen year old granddaughter.

“Well, well, well,” he repeated. “Look at you!” It sounded like he said hatchoo as he kept fondling my right breast, safely hiding his hand under my arm pit. He stood to my left, his sweaty body rubbing against my barely clad with a bikini, newly developed one. The stench of his bourbon breath, so wretched as he breathed down my neck gripping my rib cage combining our bodies into one, I turned towards Cindy and gave her a look of please rescue me, as I became drunk from his exhales. Cindy played me like a fiddle in order to get closer to my father. She continued playing, pretending as if she was unaware of his actions. As Betty squirmed uncomfortably watching what her husband was doing to me and my body, Bernice looked right at my cleavage, peering over the top of my head as he continued fiddling my right breast from under my arm pit as he said, “We’re gonna’ have to get a big stick fo’ ya’ to be able to fight off all ‘em boys!”

He smacked his lips three times as he hauled the gallon handle of Jim Beam towards his lips keeping the bottle there as the brownish liquid slowly drained from the clear bottle lowering the unlevel line from the top of the B on the label to half way down the B as he used his two fingers to lower it to his left side. His fingers never wavered from fondling my right breast. His eyes never left my cleavage and newly formed breasts. “Mmm, mmm, mmm,” he repeated as he continued smacking his lips. Each lip smack was near deafening as if he was preparing to stick his tongue in my ear, his lips that close. Bernice primarily smacked his lips as he ate. Kim and I began mocking him when he and Betty visited our home in Zionsville many years prior. As he ate, he would take the time to carefully smack his lips while trying to get the remaining food clean from his teeth. Toothpicks must not have been invented when he began this wretched habit. As Bernice ate and after he ate, he smacked his lips.

His body was swaying at this point as he continued groping and fondling my right breast concurrent with smacking his lips. I finally squirmed away from his grasp and quickly grabbed the door handle to go back into the condo. Completely scarred from the experience, I was astonished Cindy didn't intervene and watched as if she enjoyed seeing Bernice fondle his fourteen year old granddaughter, me, her nemesis and helper at the same time. Cindy wasn't the first of his girlfriends to use me in order to get closer to my dad. Everyone knew I was the apple of his eye. 'Little Sonny' as one of his friends coined, my face closely resembled his, further fueling my mother's hatred of me. We arrived to Myrtle Beach before everyone else, and I wanted to finish unpacking, more importantly, I wanted to escape being fondled by the disgusting pervert, formerly known as my Papa Cassady. My Papa Cassady couldn't hold a candle to my Papa Fin.

Herbert Finley Gale, the most dignified human I will ever know, and I were extremely close. Closer to him than any other granddaughter, I was the only one who got to spend a summer with him when I was eleven. I often questioned the essence of my being given the stark contrast in personalities and character between my two grandfathers. If Papa Fin had been in that breezeway, he would quickly put an end to Bernice's fondling. His scorned daughter, my mother, would have watched allowing small smiles to penetrate with a snide comment as I escaped stating how I deserved the unwarranted groping due to living with my father. Cheryl took it personally when I chose to live with Sonny. She was unable to accept that I had to choose the lesser of two evils. I chose an absent father as opposed to the daily beatings her eldest gladly bestowed upon me.

The week was going better than I expected given my fear of what my mother's family was going to say and do now that I wasn't living in her house. Most of the comments were directed towards Cindy, who was enjoying a free vacation with her best friend. My older sister, Kim, and her best friend, Nate stayed in the condo with us. Nate and Kim were both going into their senior year, and I just finished eighth grade. Nate's younger brother, Kevin, and I were friends in middle school. Both of us very different from our older siblings, Kevin was quarterback of the football team, and I was a cheerleader. Kim and Nate, questionable as to if they would graduate, were both druggies. Passed out in the back seat of Charles' little red sports car, I awoke to Nate groping the same breast Bernice groped the first day. Only Nate was groping the entire breast solely protected by my exposed, turquoise, Victoria Secret lace bra. I began trying to fight him off, but the back seat was so small, I couldn't move. My newly shaped hips, sandwiched between the black fabric interior and his narrow torso, made it impossible to maneuver around his swarmy hands. I kept moving his hands away from my breasts as I drifted in and out of consciousness. Every time I woke, he was squeezing my breasts trying to kiss me.

I kept fighting Nate and his hands off my breasts as Kirk and Kim argued about the quickest way home. Less than twenty minutes into the drive, I felt the inside of my bowels churning. The last ride at the Pavillion was the Gravitron. I felt like I needed to hurl while the floor dropped out from under me during the ride. After my cousins and sister scooped me off the padded floor when it finally came to a stop, the feeling never relinquished. It was coming to fruition as I thought about the Gravitron. As I projectile vomited through the opening in Charles' driver head rest and the driver seat, my vomit shot straight at the back of Kirk's neck and down the back of Kirk's shirt, all over the back of Charles' seat, the side of the driver's door, and into a pool at my feet with remnants hanging onto my clothes and shoes. Kirk quickly slammed on the brakes in the midst of traffic causing the cars behind us to swerve around and causing me to throw up a little more as he screamed, "Good God!"

I opened my knees as far as the small interior would allow and projectile vomited straight into the black, rubber floor mat as I watched the splatter splash up leaving strings of vomit covering my shins. As Kim and Kirk erupted in screams, Kirk noticed a bank parking lot with a running sprinkler.

He quickly veered into the right lane and sped up as he turned right into the bank parking lot. The butterfly style sprinkler rested on the green grass under the sprawling tree. I turned my cheek to the left away from Nate as my head flew into the back of the vomit covered seat when Kirk slammed on the brakes as he pulled up to the curb oblivious and unconcerned that the small sports car encroached three parking spaces. Not that it mattered.

Kirk and Kim already had his door open when he slammed on the brakes. Kim flung open her door using all her weight as she held the small handle as Kirk was jumping out of the car. He immediately ran over to the sprinkler. His right hand was holding his white, button down, cotton shirt by the time he got to the sprinkler. He stood under the sprinkler as Kim stood to the left of her open door inspecting herself for remnants of my spewed vomit. She quickly pulled the lever to have Nate get out of the car to inspect him before Kirk, soaked from the sprinkler, came back to the car. As they tended to cleaning themselves, I fell back into the black fabric. As my head grew heavy, I laid it back plunging into an unconscious state. I awoke to Kirk shaking me and pulling me out of the back seat. I could taste the freshly spewed vomit and found chunks of the up chuck scattered throughout my mouth as I rolled my tongue along the perimeter of my teeth.

Kirk had to kneel down as if he was at the start of a race and drape my body over the side of his. He knelt down next to the hinge of the door after he pulled my lanky legs out of

the door causing my bottom to begin falling into the pool of curdled, collected vomit at my feet. He quickly stopped and pushed me back into the seat. “Kim!” He screamed, “Get over here an’ help me with your sister!” Although our Uncle Buck, Kirk’s father had a football scholarship to William and Mary, he failed out his first semester. He began working in the Bassett furniture plant as did most of the town in Bassett, Virginia. The least scholarly of all the Gale children, Buck’s Southern, genteel quality and athletic work ethic promulgated him to the ranks of plant manager for Bassett in the Warner Robbins, Georgia plant.

“Kim!” Kirk yelled again. It sounded as if he was dividing up the one syllable word into two words. “Key Yam!” He screamed once more as she was helping to clean up Nate who now stood in the sprinkler under the big oak tree whose limbs protruded out providing shade to the cars that pulled up to the three of the five spaces Kirk parked in directly in front of it. “Key Yam!!!!” He screamed again as Kim pounded her feet across the fertile grass before taking a step down onto the pavement. She stormed towards Kirk as he attempted to haul my entire body mass across his back in a vacant attempt to carry me over to the sprinkler. As she ascended towards us, my eyes slowly opened feeling her presence. I tried to move my arms in front of my body, a natural defense mechanism given the environment I lived the previous fourteen years of my life. I was unable to move and only felt my dragging feet trailing across the parking lot behind Kirk. As I attempted to defend myself against Kim’s impending blows, Kirk gripped my right wrist tight as I quickly jerked my left arm up, accustomed to having to defend myself in less than a nanosecond, my left arm held a stance ready to fight Kim’s incessant brawling in case she flung her fist at my face, shoulders, or arms. Instead of punching, she gripped my left wrist and yanked it around her left shoulder as Kirk readjusted my weight carrying my right arm.

As my feet drug across the grass, my body draped between them, I could slowly feel the wet drops from the sprinkler running across my body slowly moving from my calves to my face only to start the cycle all over seconds after the wetness left my pubescent body.

29

We scurried like a mouse cleaning the house, Keri wiped down the counters as I swept the salmon colored tile kitchen floor. We were always allowed to have people over with the primary rule of the house being spotless upon Sonny and Rosalind’s return. They were attending some black tie ball that evening. As the driveway chime alerted us as to their arrival, I told Keri to go upstairs to bed as I quickly moved the three bar stools covered in purple swatches to match the valance in the great room from the hallway

between the dining room and the kitchen back to their proper places making certain they were evenly spaced. Just as I slid the third bar stool in place, Rosalind burst through the door first as Sonny trailed her. His 6'4" frame still towered over her 6'1" frame wearing three inch heels. They both looked at me before Rosalind walked into the kitchen with her wicked stepmother demeanor and began her inspection. "How many people did you have over tonight?" Her slight intoxication brought out her demonic manner.

"We only had about ten people," I lied as I looked back at her while Sonny walked through the kitchen inspecting every counter, the glass table, and the tiles before he noticed a mark as narrow as a pencil line less than six inches long to the right of the last bar stool I accidentally drug across the floor instead of lifting into its proper place.

"What the hell is this?" Sonny's temper yelled.

"Did you not mop the floor?" Rosalind raised her voice.

"I just finished mopping," I cowered.

"Mop it again!" Sonny yelled.

Standing under the glass portico as a precautionary measure, I went into the laundry room to get the mop. I quickly began mopping the one tile that had the small pencil mark caused by my dragging the final bar stool into place. I scrubbed furiously as I used all of my strength on the mark and surrounding tiles. I was quickly interrupted with Rosalind screaming, "You have to mop the entire floor again!"

"Why?" I gave her my evil, wicked stepdaughter look wanting to reach into one of the two bins containing pretzels and animal cookies with her voice echoing in my brain, 'You shouldn't be eating those.' I began turning to food as a source of comfort two years prior when I could eat half a seven pound bag of gummy bears hidden away in my room above the garage at our house in Timber Ridge. In Sonny and Rosalind's condo, I ate half a box of Fruit Loops and thought of her the entire time as I vomited in my bathroom downstairs. Now, all I could think of was vomiting the Fruit Loops all over her and my father in the kitchen.

"You need to learn how to clean properly!" She yelled.

"Clean the whole floor now!" Sonny yelled. I quickly began rolling the six, white iron chairs from the kitchen table into the great room.

Sonny and Rosalind began arguing, Rosalind stating, "Sonny! She can not have people over anymore! If she can't clean up after everyone properly, then she can't have any of

her friends in our home!” She emphasized the ‘her’ as she screamed and gave me her evil look.

“Oh,” he stammered, “She’s going to clean it until it is spotless!” He screamed as I got the mop out.

I began scrubbing the one tile again. As I stood about a foot away from the island wanting to run upstairs to the confines of my loft where Keri was sleeping, I moved the mop around the edges of where the four legs of the table met the salmon colored tiles. I kept moving my mop wishing I was Mickey Mouse in Fantasia instead of Cinderella bowing down to her wicked stepmother. As Sonny and Rosalind stepped into the hallway arguing I continued scrubbing the floor with the cheap mop following the water and miniature bubbles keeping my head down as I concentrated on watching the yellow, rectangular sponge.

“I’m done,” I meekly said.

Rosalind was the first to step into the kitchen on the wet floor. Sonny quickly followed. Rosalind walked all over the kitchen inspecting every crevice in the tile grout. I stepped backwards into the area between the steps and the backdoor as they inspected my second mopping. Just as Rosalind found a second area on another tile caused by her walking in her high heels, I noticed the blemish on the tile.

“Look! You missed another spot!” She vehemently yelled. “Didn’t your mother ever teach you how to properly clean!”

Without thinking, the words left my mouth quicker than I was able to think, I screamed, “Maybe, if my father wasn’t off fucking you she would have had time to teach us how to clean!” As soon as I screamed the word clean, the exasperated look on her face was met with a flying fist by my father. After the first punch launched me backwards onto the hard tiles, he grabbed my shirt in the front and threw me into the island before throwing me against the refrigerator. The two refrigerator handles running the entire length of the behemoth appliance, stuffed with Sam’s Club products, sandwiched my spine as he lifted me throwing me into metal handles. With each throw and punch, all I could think of was how I hoped Keri couldn’t hear the embarrassing brutality.

As he continued throwing my body into the refrigerator while screaming, “How dare you speak to her that way!” Rosalind snickered off to the side never once intervening as I never once shed a tear. After enduring five more cleanings with the Cinderella mop, I was excused and quickly ran upstairs. After I climbed the Pine ladder to my loft bed, Keri, wide awake, demurely asked, “Are you okay?”



I sat on the edge of my bed looking at my Dominick Dunne book and said, “I’m fine,” pausing for a moment out of embarrassment, and said, “Just go back to bed.” The digital, ivory white clock displayed that it was 3:37.

“Are you sure?” She asked again.

“Yes,” I paused again turning around to face her, unable to cry due to the years of forced stoicism after being beaten by Kim on a daily basis during my primary years. “Just go back to bed.”

Not knowing what to do or how to react, she rolled back over as I laid on my side wishing I could turn on my light to read, my only escape mechanism.

30

“Where the fuck is your sister?” Our father yelled.

“I don’t know,” I didn’t worry about Ginger’s whereabouts as much as I worried about her return and what Sonny was going to do to her. The memory bank flooded with his frequent and tumultuous outbursts. It was Saturday morning, and I spent the previous week cold calling the top one percent of real estate agents for one of his friends selling telephone seminars of leading motivational speakers. The previous month was dedicated to working for a catering company during the month of May at the world’s largest one day sporting event, the Indianapolis 500. Waking at 4:30 in the morning to be able to make it to the track on time, I greatly appreciated being able to sleep in three extra hours and driving less than three miles to my father’s friend’s house coupled with the 10% commission I received selling the overpriced telephone seminars. I worked for the free education. The commission was an added incentive.

My father’s voice rang through my cerebral cortex when he told me weeks prior, “I will pay you to work for John. He is the most dynamic entrepreneur I know. Call him and ask if you can work for free.” Now, my father’s voice was screaming a different tune. As each day lapsed, the Dr. Jekyll quickly diffused. Mr. Hyde grew larger and larger as each day passed. It was the eighth day of her being gone without calling.

I was sitting in the basement bedroom rereading Donald Trump’s ‘The Art of the Deal’ when I heard the car alert. I immediately jumped up as I saw the yellow Volkswagon minibus drive down the small decline before pulling into the parking space on the eastern side. Sonny quickly appeared from the drive through separating the two three car garages. Just as the door slid open on the minibus and the smoke billowed out in a Spicoli ‘Fast Times at Ridgemont High’ moment, Sonny yanked Ginger by the front of her shirt and threw her up the black top driveway towards the garage.

He screamed at the Grateful Dead followers as I watched through the window as I thought about calling 911 before he pushed her again towards the open space between the two garages. I ran to the bottom of the stairs contemplating calling 911 first or waiting to see what he would do. Knowing the police wouldn't do anything, as they never did anything during previous calls for help, I waited for them to enter the house. The second the door flew open, his raging screams were deafening even from the floor below. In the next second, I heard him throw her into the refrigerator. It sounded as if her skull cracked against the salmon colored door coverings.

I quickly sprinted up the stairs screaming, "Get the fuck off of her!" I stood in the doorway trying to dissipate his rage. "STOP IT!!! GET THE FUCK OFF HER!!!"

Sonny paused for a nanosecond and looked at me standing in the same area he and Rosalind stood in four years prior before I was thrown against the same refrigerator. I continued screaming as he gripped the front of her shirt banging her against the extra-large appliance. His violent thrusts of her entire body into the refrigerator was just as detrimental as shaking baby syndrome. Although her brain and skull were more developed at the age of seventeen than a baby's, she suffered as much as a small baby. I continued screaming as I helplessly watched my younger sister being thrashed against the behemoth cooler, "STOP IT!!! GET THE FUCK OFF!!!! STOP IT!!!! I'M CALLING THE COPS!!!"

He eventually stopped after I screamed, "GET THE FUCK OFF OF HER!!! I'M CALLING THE COPS NOW!!!! GO TO YOUR FUCKING ROOM!!!" Sonny retreated giving Ginger enough leeway to run towards the back steps. As Ginger ran up the stairs after freeing herself from Satan's grip, I could hear her flying down towards the west wing of the house where her bedroom was located. As Sonny stood there cooling down after his attack, I screamed, "GO TO YOUR FUCKING ROOM!"

As he stormed to his room, I ran downstairs to the closest telephone receiver. I picked up the ivory colored, multi-lined phone, similar to those you can only find in a swanky office and dialed 911. As the female voice on the other end responded, I studied the holes on the fake ivory colored, rectangular stone surface of the sofa table where the phone and other decorations rested.

"Nine one one, what's the status of your emergency?" She quickly asked.

"My father is beating my little sister and I don't know what to do," I hesitated. All previous attempts at justice in Boone County were halted and quickly brushed aside as minor family domestic issues. I persisted.

“Do we need to send someone to the residence?” She urgently responded.

“Yes!” I continued, “Someone needs to come immediately.”

“I have the address as 8667 Hunt Club Road,” her professional demeanor never wavered.

“Yes,” feeling relieved as I was certain my father was watching the red light on his multi-line phone as I spoke, “Please send someone immediately. I don’t know what he’s going to do.”

“Someone is on their way,” she paused for a few seconds as the receiver in my right hand shook from fear, “an officer should be there within ten minutes.”

“Thank you,” I meagerly responded still shaking.

“Are you okay,” she continued, “Or do you need me to stay on the line?”

“I think it will be okay until they get here,” I hesitated.

“Okay,” She too hesitated, “I will hang up the phone now as you wait for the officer.”

“Thank you very much,” I failed to remember the last time Satan Sonny threw someone into the massive refrigerator doors. Wanting to remember Dr. and Mrs. Lueros standing in the same area during my high school graduation party, I failed to remember the same location where I too was beaten a little over four years prior.

“Call if the situation escalates,” she said, “an officer should be there any moment.”

I hung up the receiver and retreated to the downstairs bedroom to wait for the officer. The shoddy construction in order to cut costs provided me the opportunity to be able to hear if Satan left his bedroom. I failed to realize I was the spawn of a career criminal. Within ten minutes the officer pulled into the front of the house alerting us that someone drove through the brick columns marking 8667 engraved in the concrete pillar. I ran up the stairs taking two steps at a time not knowing which aspect would be worse. The officer not believing what happened or Satan’s wrath after the officer left.

I met the officer at the door and could hear Sonny walking down the hall from Ginger’s bedroom. Wondering how he ended up in her bedroom while guessing what he did to her, I began speaking to the officer as Sonny walked down the stairs hurried with his fake troubled parent look. Before I was allowed to say anything further, Sonny gave me an evil glance and began speaking.

“My other daughter disappeared for eight days,” he quickly continued disabling my stunted vocal chords, “She just showed up and I found pot in her room.” His criminal mind always got away with murder. Literally and figuratively. “Here,” he paused for a

nanosecond already knowing how he would be able to get away with another beating, “come with me and let me show you.” He quickly walked up the stairs not giving the young, novice Boone County deputy time to speak to me.

“Gwen! Go back to your room!” He yelled as I retreated disobeying while waiting in the kitchen. “Ginger! There’s an officer here to see what happened!”

Moments later, the officer walked down the stairs following Satan with Ginger trailing behind. “I think the best thing to do is you take Ginger to a friend’s house as I have written a summons for her marijuana possession.”

“Yes sir,” I paused, “Can you wait for me to get my keys?”

“Yes,” the young officer’s crew cut made him look younger.

31

As Ginger and I pulled through the carriage style effect separating the six car garage, the tears burst from her eyes. “Ginger,” I paused not knowing what to say, “I am so sorry. I thought he stayed in his room when I called the cops. “What happened?”

She spoke between sobs, “He is such a fucking psycho!” She strained. “It was awful,” she tried to form sentences between sobs. “He came into my room,” she sobbed, “after you made him stop,” she sobbed, “and he threw me,” she continued sobbing gasping for air, “and he kept rubbing my face into the carpet,” she continued fighting for air as the tears streamed down her face. You couldn’t separate the tears from the mucus streaming from her nose.

“I am so sorry Ginger,” I continued. “I had no idea he went to your room or I would have stopped him,” I said as I turned right onto Cooper Road carrying my guilt with the turn.

“He hid a bag of pot in my closet,” she strained between sobbing as I increased my speed, “and told the officer it was mine.”

“I am so sorry Ginger,” I attempted to assuage her pain as I drove. “I had no idea,” I continued. Guilt struck by not being able to intervene during Satan’s rage, I helplessly tried to appease the Catholic saint running through my veins. Carrying the guilt, I continued as she sobbed, “Ginger, I had no idea. Let’s get you to Mom’s.” There was no alternative.

Ginger continued sobbing as she tried to explain what he did. “He picked me up,” she sobbed, “and launched me over the couch,” her sobbing escalated, “and kept rubbing my face in the carpet choking me.” Her heaves of emotion counteracted my calm. “I

couldn't breathe," she was barely breathing herself as she gasped for air. "He kept rubbing my face," she paused gasping for breath, "in the carpet."

As I rolled through the intersection of 334, I asked, "Are you going to be okay?"

"NO!" She gasped as she wiped the mucus from her upper lip.

As we headed towards Colony Woods where our various friends were scattered given Mr. and Mrs. Baker were out of town that weekend, "We'll call Mom as soon as we get there."

Ginger's sobs were dissipating as we turned left onto Sheetz Road in front of the only church I visited, St. Alphonsas. Remembering soccer practice and desperately wanting to be able to experience communion with my Catholic girlfriends, I continued trying to conjure the best escape plan for her. "Don't worry," I attempted, "you are going to be all right."

32

"You girls have everything you ever wanted! Come on! Get up!" John yelled. He didn't understand the Devil's advocate that truly enveloped the McMansion resting on top of the hill. I laid on my right side trying to sleep as I remembered every vivid detail of rescuing Ginger and putting her on the first available flight to our mother's home in Williamsburg. I wasn't able to sleep since the day she arrived home from touring with the Grateful Dead. It was late morning and after making a few phone calls attempting to sell the motivational and selling seminars I retreated to the bedroom closest to my office in another attempt to sleep. As I tossed and turned on top of the comfy down comforter, John stood at the foot of the bed ignorant to the true essence of one of his close friends. My father.

John only saw the parties and the lavish lifestyle. John saw the fake façade masking the evil core. John saw the perfectly clean house constructed shoddily in order to cut corners by Cassady Construction Company. John saw Sonny distribute fake manners and plastic pleasantries when a task needed to be done. John saw a cocksure confidence that he admired. John saw a bevy of beautiful women attached to Sonny's arm at every function. John saw a man taller than himself. John saw Sonny from John's perception which was how many people saw him and their own conflicted ego.

John did not see what I saw days before when Satan Sonny and Mr. Hyde unleashed from Dr. Jekyll and beat my younger sister with all of his force and strength. John did not see how life was really lived on a daily basis in the Party Palace.

“Get up,” his Canadian accent still lingered, “get back to work. You have no excuse,” he said. “You girls have everything anyone can imagine.”

“You have no idea,” I shook my head.

“Give me a break,” his Canadian accent suited his salesmanship, “Get up and get back to work.”

33

Avoiding opening the refrigerator where our father beat Ginger, I raided the cabinets instead. Three nights prior ended with all of our friends at the Bakers arranging Ginger’s departure to Williamsburg. I snuck back into the McMansion that evening as our father was out and gathered several bags of her clothes for her flight the following day. As I sat in front of the television that evening watching the news while eating a bowl of Healthy Choice chicken noodle soup, Sonny walked into the kitchen and sat in the chair Ginger sat in during dinner, when we actually ate as a family watching the news to drown out the bitter silence.

“Barry Brody, local Indianapolis businessman was killed in the parking lot of exotic nightclub PT’s,” the African American newscaster announced.

“Oh my God!” I exclaimed.

Satan Sonny sat on the purple vinyl cloth nestled in the white, wrought iron chair with gold embellishments squiggled all over to intensify the cheesy 80’s look he never left. He rolled the chair back about two feet from the glass table held by the matching white, wrought iron table and sat down less than two minutes before the newscaster announced his friend’s death. He held his hands clasped together interweaving his fingers neatly in his lap. As I exclaimed once again, “Oh my God!” Sonny never flinched maintaining his fake smile the entire time.

“The details are still sketchy,” the anchorwoman’s stern look conveyed the antithesis of Sonny’s façade, “but it appears two young African American men were seen on camera near the vicinity.”

“Oh my God!” I exclaimed once again as the camera panned over the back parking lot of PT’s strip club near Lafayette Square mall on the Southeast. Sonny’s face never wavered from his demonic grin.

“It appears that he was shot from behind with a sawed off shotgun after he got in his car after leaving the exotic gentleman’s club,” the serious African American newscaster



continued as the camera zoomed in on the open car door displaying the bucket seat where Barry breathed his final breath. “Again, the details are not cohesive at this time.”

“Oh my God!” I exclaimed once again as I looked over to my right to console my father. “Dad! I can not believe it!”

“I already know,” Sonny never flinched and never removed his hands from resting in his lap. His fingers woven together. “I need you to go to the funeral with me,” his stillness crept through my veins.

I hesitated. I promised John that day that I would drive to Lansing in order to help facilitate the first of the Life Success Institute’s motivational seminars. “I can’t go, Dad,” I paused as I gauged his reaction.

His hands still clasped in his lap, he asked, “Why not?” He slowly moved his head while raising his eyebrows.

“I have to go to Lansing, Michigan,” I paused glancing over at the refrigerator, still afraid after seeing him pummel Ginger while forgetting what he did to me four years earlier, I continued.

“Why do you have to go to Lansing?” His hands still clasped in front of him assured he wasn’t going to blow up. Mr. Hyde was tamed for now.

“I have to help with a seminar John is doing for Bob,” I paused. “The first one they are doing is in Lansing as a test.”

“What kind of a seminar is it?” He asked.

“It is a motivational seminar,” I responded.

“Are you getting paid for it?” Sonny failed to remember that he told me he would pay me if I worked for who he considered to be one of his best friends that summer.

“I receive a commission of ten percent for every seminar I sell after the informational meeting,” I was already planning in my head that I would wear Ginger’s hand me up brown pinstriped Gap pants as they did not wrinkle easily with the navy blue Gap shirt that I wore during the pretrials at the Indianapolis 500 while working in the suites.

“Well,” he stood up as I cowered back in the purple, vinyl cushion, “I guess I’ll have to attend alone.” He rolled the chair back into the proper place. As he walked back to his room, I sat there looking at the five vacant chairs and vividly remembered his last friend that died.

Although I had just finished my second year at UVA, every detail from one not so enchanting evening rose to the surface. I glanced over at the refrigerator again and the bar stool I sat in while doing Mrs. Goldsbury's trigonometry homework one night. As I sat in the northernmost stool directly in front of the refrigerator on the plastic purple vinyl, Satan Sonny walked into the kitchen and delicately pulled out the white, wrought iron chair. As he sat down, he said, "Babydoll, I need to talk to you."

Seeing the serious look on his face, I slightly turned my body not letting go of my pencil. Thinking I was in trouble, I sat back on my stool slightly rolling my shoulders forward as I waited for him to speak.

"Babydoll," he paused as he turned his body facing me towards the purple vinyl placemat searching for what to say. "Keith Richards died and I need you to go to the funeral with me."

"What happened?" Keith was one of the nicest of my father's friends. He attended the two big parties each year, but never came to the Saturday volleyball parties or the more intimate cocaine fests. I remembered Keith from the previous Christmas party wearing a grey suit and talking about law school. He was from Noblesville and practiced law.

"He was wasted and left Safari Bar," he paused, "He got on the wrong side of the interstate at the Allisonville Road exit and drove onto 465 backwards." Sonny paused again trying to find the correct words. "His car flipped several times."

"Are you serious?" I glanced down at my trigonometry homework as Sonny looked down at the purple, vinyl placemat.

Satan Sonny looked over, "Yes," he rolled his upper lip down while clenching his teeth as he turned towards the placemat. As he began moving his right hand back and forth as if he was sawing the purple, vinyl placemat with his pointer finger, he said, "Yeah," he paused again, "they found his head decapitated in the back seat behind the driver's seat." He continued sawing the purple, vinyl placemat with his finger.

"Oh my God!" I exclaimed. "I am so sorry," I was speechless as I watched him continue moving his finger back and forth.

"His torso was lodged between the driver seat and passenger seat," he stopped sawing with his finger and turned to face me clasping his hands in front weaving his fingers, including the one he used to mimic the saw over the purple vinyl placemat, "And, his feet were in front of the passenger seat."

"Oh my God!" I exclaimed again hearing the gruesome details. "How do you know?"

“Oh,” he paused for a nanosecond, “I read the police report.” His unwavering look spoke volumes as his unmoved, clasped hands in his lap remained unmoved.

“I am so sorry, Dad,” I was speechless after he demonstrated Keith’s decapitation on the purple vinyl placemat. “Keith was such a nice man. He was one of my favorite of your friends.”

“I need you to go to the funeral with me,” he never expressed remorse at the loss of his friend.

I gripped my pencil as I glanced down at Mrs. Goldsberry’s trigonometry homework.

“Okay,” I was still speechless after hearing the gory details of Keith’s death.

Sonny stood up, and as he rolled the chair back under the glass table, he said, “Good, it is this Saturday,” he said before strutting back to his bedroom.

Still speechless, I gripped my pencil harder as I focused on finishing my trigonometry homework. I looked over at the double oven and microwave to my left and realized it was 10:19. Luckily I didn’t have any tests the next day as I always procrastinated on studying for tests after I finished my math homework.

34

The morning of the funeral, I carefully selected my coral, silk Limited Express button down shirt and black draping skirt that tied on the upper left side of my hip. I had only been to one funeral before and didn’t have any black shirts to wear. We drove to Noblesville and Satan Sonny avoided speaking about his friend. When we arrived to the funeral home, the somber, sad mood set the tone which helped dissipate the antithesis of his prior mood. Sonny chose two seats on the aisle on the left side of the row. The closed casket somberly rested at the front of aisle. Keith’s family sat on the right hand side in the front row. After the sullen service, Sonny leaned over and said, “Just wait right here, I want to express my condolences to the family.”

Being the first to stand, his presence always drew attention. He walked to the front row as everyone in the entire room followed his six foot frame to the front of the room. After he bent down to Keith’s wife, he knelt down to the pretty, shoulder length blond hair girl sitting to the right of her mother, who I assumed was Keith’s daughter, and spent a longer minute talking to her. He was the first one to express his condolences as everyone, including myself, sat there speechless. Walking back down the aisle, everyone followed his move back to where I was sitting. He leaned over and said in a hushed voice, “Come on Babydoll, let’s go.” I quickly stood up and followed.

35

“You are nothing but a spoiled brat!” Mr. Caldwell screamed. “You drive a Mercedes!” He stammered. Mr. Caldwell didn’t realize I started saving my babysitting money from the time I was ten years old. Only to have my first \$385 stolen from my hiding spot tucked neatly into the corner brace under the glass encased dolls. Mike, Kim’s friend, the neighborhood scoundrel stole it while I was babysitting.

I saved every penny and was given opportunities to make money from our parent’s small business and at home. From taking out the trash bags every week for nickels and dimes, to dusting the grandfather clocks for a quarter before I was ten and asked to babysit by Mrs. Clark. In eighth grade, Rosalind had me become a perfume model for Red, Giorgio Beverly Hills, earning eight dollars an hour. That summer, the Old Windmill Café provided me tip money from the hard working waitresses. Janay would pick me up every morning to work in her parent’s café. Jerry Jones was the town plumber and in defiance painted the front of his truck like a big monster. BJ, his former stripper wife would wear low cut tank tops and was the engine behind the small café that attracted businessmen all the way from College Park to sample the daily specials. In the afternoons when my father was in town, he would stop in at closing and play Patsy Cline’s ‘Crazy’ over and over on the old jukebox. He said it was his mom’s favorite song and they used to play it in the café often.

I saved over five hundred dollars that summer from cleaning up after the businessmen and the blue collar workers that intermingled. During my freshman year, I continued babysitting as well as dusting the grandfather clocks in order to save over \$2600 by the time my fifteenth birthday rolled around. Although I began driving my father’s car while I was a freshman, once to bring him to the hospital when we thought he was having a heart attack, and many times to run down to the gas station for milk.

Mr. Caldwell had no idea that I earned every penny. Neither did my classmates. Shortly before I turned sixteen, I began scouring the ads for both housing and cars. That particular day I was arguing with Mr. Caldwell over a history test answer. Never wavering, I was trying to explain my perspective when Mr. Caldwell lost control of his temper, “YOU ARE NOTHING BUT A SPOILED BRAT WHO HAS NEVER HAD TO WORK FOR ANYTHING! JUST BECAUSE YOU DRIVE A MERCEDES AND LIVE IN A BIG HOUSE YOU THINK YOU CAN HAVE EVERYTHING YOUR WAY!”

I was silenced and sunk into the seat on my desk. The whole class was silenced as he continued, “D is not the right answer! C is, and that is final!”

I never said another word the remainder of the class as his words thwarted my ability to speak. I carried his words the entire day until Mrs. Treadway noticed my sullen

demeanor in her skills for living class during seventh period. After hearing what happened in the teacher's lounge during lunch, she asked, "Do you want to go call your dad?"

I hesitated for a moment after thinking that I would be more of a spoiled brat if I called him. Mrs. Treadway, also my track coach coaxed me again, "Mr. Caldwell had no right speaking to you like that. I think you should go call your father."

"Okay," I stood up and exited the classroom.

After the seventh period ended Mr. Schroeder, our guidance counselor came to walk me to Mr. Beigh's room. When we approached the door, my father was sitting in one of the small desks wearing his short, orange Clemson shorts and a white t-shirt. Mr. Caldwell was sitting three feet away from him in another chair. Mr. Schroeder instructed me to sit across from everyone.

Mr. Schroeder began our mini Spanish Inquisition. "Gwen, can you please describe what happened today in class?"

I looked at Mr. Caldwell, "I was just trying to argue a point when Mr. Caldwell started yelling at me calling me a spoiled brat and saying how I drove a Mercedes to school."

Mr. Schroeder continued, "Shane, can you describe your account of what happened?"

Mr. Caldwell, afraid to glance to his left at the sheer size of my father, looked at Mr. Schroeder as he spoke leaning to his right, "Gwen is very argumentative when she misses questions on her history tests and distracts from the class."

I maintained my composure as my father started speaking without being asked.

"Gwen has it really rough at home," he said as he looked at Mr. Schroeder. My father looked at me as he directed, "Gwen, go outside and get to your track practice."

Mr. Schroeder and Mr. Caldwell were too afraid to speak given his size and the rumors that floated throughout the village of Zionsville.

I quickly slid out of my chair following his command as Mr. Schroeder and Mr. Caldwell didn't say a word.

36

Michelle and I were sitting in the master bathroom. Instead of visiting one of the make up counters as I did for my previous proms at Rosalind's insistence after she treated me to a manicure, Michelle delicately laid the foundation before applying the blush and eyeliner. The car alert informed us of Brian's arrival. Michelle finished applying the eye

shadow and quickly jumped up to greet him. As I applied my lip liner I heard the back door opening. Michelle quickly ran back into the bathroom.

“Oh my God!” She exclaimed, “You are never going to believe what your father did!”

“What?” Having no clue what he could have possibly done to embarrass me and worse, my super sweet senior year boyfriend. Brian received his hair cut from my boss, Jayne, at Upscale hair salon. After visiting twice, I shamelessly flirted hoping he would ask me out. He finally did. His shy nature added to his appeal. We dated through the winter and planned an elaborate night with three of my best girlfriends and their respective boyfriends. I dreaded hearing what Michelle witnessed.

“Gwen,” she continued, “when Brian extended his hand to shake your father’s,” she continued, your father had a condom in his hand and gave it to Brian.”

“You have got to be kidding me!” I was speechless. Although Brian and I kissed and explored each other’s minds by talking, we never planned on exploring each other’s bodies thoroughly. “Oh my God! I can not believe he would do that!”

“I can’t believe he would do it either,” Michelle said.

“How embarrassing! What did Brian say?”

“Brian just looked at him and didn’t know what to say,” Michelle was just as embarrassed for Brian as I was.

“Oh my God,” I said. “I can’t believe he would do that!” I repeated.

“I know,” Michelle said.

“What am I supposed to say?” I said. “We never even talked about it.”

“I don’t know,” Michelle said in her soft nature shocked just as much as I was. “I still can not believe your father would do that.” She shook her head back and forth.

“Neither can I,” I said as I glanced at myself in the mirror covering the wall between the two sinks and vanity sandwiched in the middle.

“I have no idea what I’m going to say,” I reiterated.

“Just go out there so it doesn’t become more embarrassing for him,” Michelle said as the car alert dinged again as we looked over and saw the white stretch limo pulling into the driveway. I quickly followed her instructions and glanced at my face in the mirror. Michelle began walking out of the bathroom as I followed.

We walked through the hallway as Michelle led the way into the great room. Brian stood with a corsage in his hand looking regal with his blue tie and cummerbund. We smiled at



each other both carrying the secret of my father's actions. As Sonny invited the limo driver into the house to use the bathroom, he began rambling through the liquor cabinet for the handle of the cheapest liquor, Smirnoff Vodka. The limo driver exited the bathroom admiring the green walls of the dining room and rounded stucco design engraved in the ceiling. The limo driver admitted that he was hungover from the night before he was driving the eight of us to prom.

"Here," Sonny said, "let me give you some pepto bismal." He opened the cabinets trying to locate the pink bottle. "So, it looks like you had too much fun last night." Sonny laughed as he handed the driver the pepto bismal.

"Yeah," he demurred embarrassingly. Luckily it deflected from the embarrassment Brian endured. "I went out after work."

The tall handle of Smirnoff rested on the counter. "You won't mind keeping this in the car for them?"

"Sir," he hesitated as most people did when encountered by Sonny, "I can keep it in the trunk, but I don't know about it." The driver winked at Brian and me. Sonny picked up the cheap vodka and began walking towards the back door. He went into the laundry instead and grabbed a small, black bag big enough for the vodka and opened the glass door, "Shall we?"

As Brian followed me he said, "I rented the blue tie and cumberbund to match the corsage."

"I love it," I turned my head around to face him as I spoke, "Thank you."

"You're welcome," he smiled.

37

"Oh my God, Gwen," the look in Michelle's eyes spoke volumes. "It took four bouncers to pull your father off of the rodeo cowboy," she paused. "Your father would have killed him if Rick didn't have the bouncers pull him off."

"What happened?" I was the sounding board for all of my father's girlfriends, both the long term and the short term. I was only able to convince a few of them they would be better off with him out of their life. They had just returned as I finished cleaning and stuffing my face with the little square brownies. It was the night of the annual Holiday party. Other than the Christmas tree that stood in the foyer in front of the stairs and the decorations Sharon and Betty slaved hours over perfecting, the party never indicated anything celebrating Christ or Chanukah. Sonny had his well behaved friends and his

swarmy, cocaine infused ones all intermingling together. Although the annual holiday was more intimate in nature than the larger, ten host 'Le Large Parte,' the usual cast of characters present was being entertained by Sam Gibson singing his deep melodious tunes.

I had just finished exams having flown home for the annual event after my first semester at UVA, but was instructed to put away the food and clean. As soon as the car alert provided the chime alerting us of people coming and leaving, I shoved the last brownie into my mouth. As Sonny opened the door with Michelle trailing, I stood at guard hearing his demeanor.

"I can't believe that guy!" He screamed.

Sonny had a white towel wrapped around his left hand.

"What happened?" I asked not knowing if I should ask.

"Some asshole started a fight with me!" Mr. Hyde appeared. "We went to the Cork for cocktails after the party," he paused for a nanosecond, "and there is some kind of a rodeo in town." He paused searching for his words, "the biggest rodeo cowboy came up to me and said that he was looking for the biggest, meanest son of a bitch to fight."

Sonny continued, "He said that I looked like the biggest one in the room and he threw a punch that almost hit Michelle." He looked over at Michelle. I saw the fear in her face.

"He started fighting so I fought back," his mood calmed.

"What happened to your hand?" I asked as Michelle looked at the white towel afraid to speak.

"I hit him so hard his teeth were knocked out," Sonny paused for effect as he walked towards the kitchen sink. He unwrapped the blood stained towel as he placed his hand in the extra large wash basin. He ran the faucet as Michelle gave me a terrified look.

"Yeah," he continued believing his lies, "I was only defending myself and he said he wanted to fight the biggest, meanest son of a bitch." Sonny turned raising his eyebrows. The thought of Sonny beating the rodeo cowboy reminded me of walking on the beach late one night after Bill Moore let me go find my parents when as always, I was unable to sleep while listening to the waves crashing from the Atlantic onto Myrtle Beach in South Carolina. After running tip toe over the sand dunes trying to avoid the sand spurs, I sprinted half way to the pier when I noticed my parent's silhouette on the beach. After we reached the pier, we turned around and started walking back. A man stumbled up to us and began walking. I stood to the left of my mom as my dad held his hand up to his right as if he was shielding the stumbler.

“Man, can I just have some money?” The stumbler kept repeating.

“Sorry,” my dad said as my mom and I walked in silence. “We don’t have any money on us,” he paused. “I’m just enjoying a walk with my wife and daughter.”

The man finally gave up and stumbled away.

“Why were you holding your hand up, Dad?” I asked always seeking answers.

He took two strides before answering, trying to find the right words before speaking, “I didn’t know what he was going to do,” he paused, “so I held my hand up in case he punched or attacked me.”

“What do you mean?” I still wasn’t satisfied.

“If someone ever attacks you,” he paused again, “go straight for their eyes.”

“What do you mean?” I asked again.

My father held up his two fingers with his right hand just as he did moments earlier this time forming a peace sign and thrust them forward into the air. He spoke as he demonstrated, “You first go for their eyes and use your fingers to hit them straight in the eyes.” He hesitated, “by hitting their eyes first, you throw them off guard.”

I watched and listened trying to keep up with his 38 inch inseam stride. Two of my spaces walking as fast as I could still couldn’t match his long legs. “After you hit them in the eyes with your two fingers you kick them as hard as you can in their groin.”

“What’s a groin?” I was too young to understand.

“The groin is their privates,” he said. My mother listened as well never interrupting as my father kept speaking. “You kick them as hard as you can in their privates.”

“Why?” I still didn’t understand.

“When you kick them in their privates,” he paused, “you make them fall over then you run as fast as you can.”

“Okay,” I still didn’t understand.

“When I was trying out for the Redskins,” he said, “I was attacked by three niggers.”

“You were?” When we first moved to Pine Street, and when my dad showed up for his monthly visits I would run with him up the hill towards the Ludlows. We would run to the top of the hill to 9<sup>th</sup> Street, cut across Laurel to Hawthorne Street and run east towards 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. During one of these runs he told me why he didn’t make the Redskins. His childhood dream was thwarted when Coach Howard retired from Clemson after his junior

year. The new coach wanted to build the team by playing the freshmen and sophomores, and Sonny blamed the new coach for benching him his senior year causing him not to make the Redskins. He tried out as a free agent when he wasn't drafted and lived with two stewardesses. After being injured, he was released and tried out the following year. In order to keep food on the table, he had to work and wasn't able to train to make the team after trying out the second time. He carried the resentment in each stride on the beach late that night after the man stumbled away.

"Yes," he continued, "I was attacked by three niggers."

"Sonny," Cheryl intervened, "don't say that word."

"Well," he looked over, "they were."

38

"Put the cocaine in the weights," Sonny instructed the shaggy haired hippie. "I think that is going to be the easiest way to ship it," he was short and abrupt with his latest pawn. They were in a different warehouse than the one in our backyard on Pine Street. The boxes I was thrown on top of to help with inventory when Ginger and Amanda were having their baths and being put to sleep were replaced with a new, more expensive, and more lucrative inventory in a warehouse in the middle of nowhere.

We were in Myrtle Beach playing whiffle and paddle ball when we weren't building sand castles. I was the fortunate and favored grandchild of Papa Fin who got to spend time at Marion Earl learning to dive in the small pool after admiring the shag carpet in the room he shared with Mama Ginney. After teaching me how to dive by tucking my chin to my chest and forming a V over my head with my skinny arms, the Azionaqua tag dangling off the lower left corner of my shrinking bathing suit, I propelled my body off the side of the pool after hanging my toes over the edge. After learning to dive and being a proficient swimmer, Papa Fin took me out to the ocean and rode the waves on the rented navy blue rafts. Afterwards, he taught me how to bodysurf and dive back into the waves after riding each wave until they dissipated into the shore.

As Sonny and his cohorts took out the heavy, aluminum weights, they replaced each brass cylinder with almost half a kilo of cocaine. Each grandfather clock wholesaled for less than one thousand dollars. The new clocks wholesaled for over \$8000 with the extra special merchandise. As Sonny continued instructing his minions on how to properly unpack and repack the weights, we were sitting around a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken at the long, wooden table with benches on either side. Hours were spent at 'The Quinta' each week of the fourth of July when the Gales held their annual family reunion.

Between games of Uno and Gin Rummy at night, our older cousins tortured me as I wasn't young enough where they felt guilty for the abuse, yet I was old enough to be tormented coupled with being Granddaddy Gale's favorite.

39

"Gwen," the man on the white couch in the sunroom spoke with a serious demeanor, "I knew exactly who you were when I met you. There was never a night when I ventured into Broad Ripple when I wasn't asked, 'Are you Sonny Cassady's daughter?'" I knew what he was going to say.

"I really shouldn't tell you this, but I think you should know," he hesitated as he peered through his glasses. "Back in the late 80's, I was brought in for drug trafficking." I was wrong. I didn't know what he was going to say. "The DEA sat me down and handed me about a five page list full of names. I really shouldn't tell you," he hesitated once again. "But I really think you should know."

"What is it?" We sat there sipping our drinks. I was drinking water as he guzzled his gin and tonic. After the bars closed, we headed back to a house amongst the quaint neighborhood to continue our debauchery.

"Well," he hesitated again, "the DEA sat me down and told me that if I helped them bust any of the men on the list they would reduce the charges," he paused again before continuing as I leaned my back against the southernmost arm rest pressing my back into the arm rest. "They said that if I would help bust anyone they would reduce the charges," he reiterated still hesitant on telling me the truth, "but if I helped them bust the man at the top of the list," he took a sip, "They would drop all charges."

"Who was at the top of the list?" I already knew the answer.

"Your father," he stared directly into my eyes through his spectacles.

"What did you do?" I asked knowing more than I should.

"I went to prison," he didn't hesitate, "I looked at the DEA and said, 'that is an automatic death sentence,' and I went to prison for two years."

Somewhat speechless, I continued probing, "How long did you go to prison?"

"I served two years," he said matter of fact.

"Who else was on the list?" I inquired further.

"I'm not going to tell you that," he said.

“Oh,” I pressed, “Come on, you can’t tell me something like that and not tell me who else was on the list.”

“No,” he said, “I really can not tell you.”

I continued relentlessly, “If I guess will you tell me?”

“Okay,” he hesitated not realizing he already gave me the most vital piece of information, “but you have to swear you won’t tell anyone,” he said. “If you guess, I will say yes or no.”

“Was Barry Brody’s name on the list?” I asked already knowing the truth.

“Yes,” he continued.

“Was Keith Richards name on the list?” I asked not wanting to believe.

“Yes,” he shook his head as he spoke.

My suspicions confirmed, I continued, “Who else was on the list?”

“Really,” he paused, “I can’t say, and I’m not going to tell you.”

I sat back harder into the arm rest of the white couch as I followed his lips to his glass worried about April. April, her New York boyfriend Jim, was living with her mom in Anderson after he sent her here for rehab. She left over two hours earlier in search of more cocaine.

40

“Back in the late 80’s, we had it paid off up to Governor Bayh’s office,” Rick’s sinister grin as he gripped his cocktail glass permeated the back deck as the hamburgers continued grilling in celebration of my father’s fiftieth birthday.

“Are you serious?” I probed further.

“Yeah,” I watched him lift the glass to his pursed lips as he took another gulp, “we were known as the untouchables.”

I smiled as he continued, “Nobody could touch us. We had our people in Chicago, San Francisco, New York, and Miami, and Jimmy Eitlejorg knew someone in Evan Bayh’s office that allowed us to literally get away with murder.”

41

“Babydoll,” I picked up the phone not expecting Sonny’s call, “I need you to go to my desk and look up a phone number for me.”

“Okay,” I paused, “Whose number do you need me to find?”



“Ken Frandsen,” he was hurried.

“Where are you?” He asked.

“I’m in my room,” I answered.

“Okay,” he said, “Put me on hold and go to my desk. My address book is on the right hand side. You know what it looks like don’t you?” He inquired.

“Yeah,” I answered, “It’s the little black, leather one, right?”

“Yes,” he paused, “put me on hold, and I’ll wait.”

I jumped up and ran into his office. Originally supposed to be Ginger’s bedroom, I convinced the architect to expand the house over the six car garage to add value to the home due to the additional square footage coupled with opening up the great room providing a more spacious effect. I sat in his black, leather rolling desk chair and picked up the address book. Flipping the ‘F’ tab forward, my eyes were immediately drawn to the name, address, and phone number written in pencil at the bottom of the page. Ezra Friedlander’s name stood out like a sore thumb as I scoured the page finding Ken Frandsen’s phone number three quarters of the way closer to the bottom.

I picked up the phone resting to the right of Sonny’s desk on top of his file cabinets as I looked at the copper sculpture sitting in the center of his desk with the faceless person pulling the chain with the globe. As I pressed the lit up red light, I narrowed in on Ken Frandsen’s phone number. “Dad,” I paused as my eyes were naturally drawn to Ezra Friedlander’s unique name written in pencil, “I have it. Do you want me to read it to you?”

42

“Yeah,” Sonny said, “I heard Bob Anderson is a roofer now. That asshole never read me my Miranda rights. He is such an asshole. What a joke,” Sonny continued, “I would paralyze him for life.”

“What are you talking about?” We sat on his current girlfriend’s back porch. I had just returned from camping in Africa. My tumultuous affair with a much sleeker version of my sociopath father created the antithesis of my spirit. In an evasive effort at not destroying his picture perfect reputation curtailed by the bitter, brutal hostilities of our relationship, I escaped to Africa carrying my bleeding heart. After being told in Dar es Salaam that my father’s case was dropped, I went to Smith Mountain Lake to hear Sonny’s version of what happened.

“You would seriously have Bob Anderson paralyzed for life?” I was deeply disturbed as I listened intently.

“Well,” he sucked on his cigar looking out over the bay connected to Smith Mountain Lake, “I would have it arranged,” he paused looking over at me as the seriousness returned, “yes.” Just as afraid as I was the first time he gave me the belt coupled with years of the physical and more detrimental, the psychological and emotional abuse, I sat stunned by his words. In denial that I was actually spawned by the creature sitting next to me, I listened even more intently.

“Yeah,” Sonny paused as he took a gulp of his madras, “My people took care of it.”

“What do you mean?” I inquired further.

“My people took care of having the case dropped,” he puffed on his cigar once again.

“Bob Anderson is such a miserable fuck,” he paused searching for his words, “he never once read me the Miranda Rights, and when they were raiding the home, they handcuffed all the house mates and were going through all the pictures saying things about you.”

“Like what?” I was still in shock over the seriousness of how Satan and Mr. Hyde said he would paralyze Bob for life.

“Oh,” he continued looking out over the bay, “things like how they wanted to do you.”

Satan grabbed his drink again gulping the remainder.

43

“Hey! Can I do your daughter!?!” We were walking north towards Union Station on Illinois Street having parked in a lot off of Capitol Street and cutting across on Merrill Street when a loud Nova passed by with a man leaning out the window and screaming.

My father moved from the sidewalk to the street. Accustomed to being a Southern Gentleman, Sonny always opened the door to cars and buildings for every lady. After the man screamed, his demeanor changed.

“What does that mean Dad?” It was the night of my fourteenth birthday. Instead of taking my sisters out to dinner, I wanted to escape the hell residing in 925 Tilson Drive and enjoy a nice birthday alone with my father. Clueless to boys other than kissing Ryan in third grade and Brad in fifth grade, sex education that year consisted of the girls being separated from the boys. The fifth grade education, my mom telling me about the birds and the bees, didn’t include what would be asked later in my life, other than sperm not to be confused with spam.

My father looked down at his feet, his demeanor shifted when he stepped onto the street in anger. He stammered, “Nothing!”

Afraid of furthering his anger, I continued walking wearing my ivory colored mini skirt following the piping as I took each step watching my brown, woven shoes attempt to match his stride. My yellow pinstriped shirt with miniature flowers, tucked neatly into my ivory skirt by the brown woven belt, offset his colorful Coogi sweater. As we strolled North on Illinois towards Union Station remembering the car ride there, where a white Porsche pulled up to my father’s big, navy blue Mercedes, my father looked over and said, “Oh, that’s a buddy of mine.”

As they raced south on Interstate 65 towards downtown, his friend had a pretty blond in the passenger seat. “Who is that?”

“Oh,” my father laughed racing along, “His name is Mark Ritchie. His family owns a transportation company.”

“What kind of transportation company?” I inquired further.

“They have tractor trailers,” he continued speeding as Mr. Ritchie raced his turbo white Porsche to the right next to the velodrome as they sped along. Looking at the speedometer, the needle was hovering at 100mph. Although Sonny never sped as fast with Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly in the car, the previous year when Brooke and I rode with him so I could stay for cheerleading try outs, he sped over 100 miles per hour as Brooke and I sat in the back seat bouncing up and down. Wearing my navy blue Polo Sports Club sweatshirt and knee length red sweat pant shorts rolled just over my knees while peeking over my father’s seat to watch the needle on the speedometer pass over the 100 mph mark, Brooke and I waved to the man in the red BMW as he raced our chauffeur.

“So,” he asked, “Do you want to go to my friend’s restaurant?” My father asked.

“Okay,” I said.

“It’s called Rick’s Café,” he paused, “It is inside Union Station near the Hoosier Dome.”

“Yeah,” I said as Mark pulled back onto the interstate as we passed over White River. We continued on the interstate and exited on Martin Luther King Street. My father continued driving South on Martin Luther King until we reached Capitol Street.

I was reticent to ask, but given the War Zone that transferred from Pine Street to Timber Ridge, I had no choice. It was my fourteenth birthday, and I probably only spent a cumulative of fourteen months with my father. As a manufacturer’s representative for Ridgeway Clock Company, coupled with our father’s double life, he was rarely home.

Showing up unexpectedly for a couple of days, I was lucky if he made it to one of my baseball, soccer, or basketball games as a child. I don't remember him ever watching a Stars Dance recital other than the VCR tapes. By the time I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the one hundred year old home complete with two bathrooms, other than the shower in our parent's loft, coupled with Kim living in the basement dungeon was too small for five girls. The Village Clock Shop was doing well and our parents were trying to keep up with the wealth that the village of Zionsville attracted. Our mom decided to buy a bigger house to meet the needs of her growing offspring. Two teenagers, and her three favorite children moved from being townies to a neighborhood bordering the much larger suburb of Carmel.

I hoped home life would be better. I hoped Kim would leave me alone, but her daily punches and throws were worse as her fifty pounds of extra weight became heavier with each daily brawl. Our mother never intervened and rather enjoyed watching Kim's brutal force heaved upon my developing body. Devoid of any love, other than Christmas morning before everyone woke, I hid in my Bermuda Triangle I created behind my bed. Reuben and Jewel, my cabbage patch kids, and I would read for hours when I was home.

In the new house, my first bedroom was in the basement also. At our house on Pine Street, when Kim became a teenager, my parents made her sleep in the basement. A dungeon death trap, her makeshift room was wide open to the possum, raccoons, squirrels, mice, and possible rats shared the space with her. Right after she moved in a possum appeared. She quickly ran upstairs and found our father in the kitchen. The same kitchen he almost murdered her in several years later. She screamed in horror as she explained that there was a possum dangling from one of the pipes. My father stood from our great grandmother's table carrying his fork and grabbed a trash bag as he continued down the stairs.

"Kim!" He screamed. "Come on!" He grabbed her by the arm and yanked her down the stairs. He immediately went to where the possum was and hung the garbage bag under the pipe as he punched the possum catching it in the big, black plastic covering. "Here!" He yelled again as he handed her the fork holding onto her arm as she tried to escape. "Kill it!!!!" He held the fork in her hand as he punched the bag with the fork trying to kill the extra fat possum. "I said kill it!" Kim was in tears. She escaped free and began running towards the stairs. My father caught up with her in three strides lugging the flailing black plastic trash bag with a strained squeal coming from deep within its bowels. "Kill it Kim!" he began yelling as he grabbed her by the arm forcing the fork back in as he gripped his fist around hers. He motioned the fork while gripping Kim's fist up and down as if he had just opened the shower in 'Psycho.'

When Kim became too much to handle for my mom, as our father only spent about 5 days a month with us, as a last resort our mom brought Kim to a boarding school for delinquents that was part of a convent. The only school of its caliber in the state of Indiana, even the nuns were afraid of Kim and wouldn't accept her after spending the day with her. A couple of months later Bon Jovi came into town. The concert was on a Friday night, and I was in fifth grade. Kim was in eighth. She was supposed to come home right after the concert. When she didn't show up by late Saturday night, my mom summoned my father from whatever business trip he was on. Although he had already purchased the condo for Rosalind near Castleton where he spent most of his time, he was only thirty minutes away. His alleged 'business' trips were spent in their bedroom in the condo. He showed up at Pine Street in the early evening on Sunday. Kim still had yet to arrive. I was in the kitchen cleaning when my father walked in. "Where is your sister?" he demanded as if Kim would have ever told me.

"I don't know," I continued clearing the kitchen table as I heard the front door open. Our mom was upstairs with my younger sisters who were all getting ready for bed. My dad walked into our mom's office separating the downstairs bathroom from the kitchen and front room. Kim walked into the kitchen as I stood at the sink. Her long, black leather coat almost dusted the floor. Our father appeared in the doorway before she could speak.

"Where the fuck have you been?" he screamed loud enough for the Beanblossoms a block away to hear as he approached her before yanking her by the front of her shirt close to her throat. She quickly landed on the floor in front of the refrigerator before she could answer.

"Stop it!!!" She began writhing around trying to break free.

Our father was now hovered over her 14 year old flailing body shaking her by the front of her shirt causing her body to be thrust into the 100 year old, hard, wooden floors.

"Where the fuck have you been?!!!???" His rage peaked higher than Mt. Everest. "You were supposed to come home directly after the concert! Where the fuck have you been? You're grounded!"

"Fuck you!" Kim rebelled even when she knew it would be detrimental. She was always different than everyone else. Everyone else on the planet. It wasn't her fault given the seed that spawned her.

I saw my father's arm fly up and protrude like a nuclear missile into her arm. I quickly turned to wash the dishes as my mom appeared in the doorway leading to the dining room just as my father grabbed a chair from the table and threw it on top of Kim's body. I slightly turned my head and pretend to look out the window as I watched from the corner

of my eye our father beating my defiant older sister practically strangling and suffocating her with the chair. Pushing all of his weight into the chair while placing the headrest under her chin over her throat, her body still flailed in an unforgiving attempt to escape. Her hands gripped the top of the headrest as she bench pressed with all her might. Our father's 6'5" 230 pound frame proved to be too heavy to handle. My mom began screaming as she jumped on her childhood sweetheart's back in a failed attempt to defend her oldest as she screamed, "Sonny!!!! You're going to kill her!!!!"

Sobbing hysterically at this point, Kim continued to kick and scream as I continued washing the dishes making each one spotless my back stiff as a board with perfect posture as I stood there as frozen as the ice at the South Pole. Santa didn't exist in our house tonight.

Our mom continued pulling on Satan Sonny's shoulders in a futile attempt to relinquish his abuse from her offspring. Although the worst place to be on the planet is between a mother and her child, even our mother didn't have the strength to pull her husband off her child. Satan Sonny continued as Kim's coughing increased between each gasp for air. I couldn't cry. I couldn't move. I stood there frozen in time scrubbing each fork, spoon, and knife. I took my time as I was trapped and had no way of being able to walk around the ultimate World Wide Wrestling Federation match between a giant and his fourteen year old daughter.

Using the chair as his weapon, he gripped the spindles and kept moving it up and down as if he was hitting her with it while smothering her at the same time. As he was asphyxiating her, our mom kept screaming. I had never seen this afraid in her life. "SONNY!!!! STOP IT!!! YOU ARE KILLING HER!!!!!" She was sobbing hysterically unable to control her uncontrollable husband as she continued using all her might trying to pull him away. Although the police station was one block away, she too was too afraid to call.

The second my father pulled the chair away, Kim laid on the floor bawling as our father continued yelling, this time it was directed towards our mother, "She's never gonna learn Cheryl if she isn't taught a lesson!"

"SONNY! YOU ARE GOING TO KILL HER! STOP IT!"

He still hovered over her holding her arms down as he screamed in my older sister's face, "You are grounded for a month! You are only allowed to go to school and school functions! Do you understand me!!!!"

"Fuck you!" Kim protested.



“WHAT DID YOU SAY TO ME?” Nobody ever talked back to Sonny.

“FUCK YOU!” Kim stammered as my heart broke. Although I didn’t like Kim, I still loved her as my sister then. I didn’t want to think of what the action would be.

Our father grabbed the chair again, flipped it over and threw it on top of her body as our mother meekly attempted to grab it from his hands to thwart his anger. He began strangling her again. This time with all of his might. Keeping my back perfectly straight, I slowly turned my head so I could see what was happening. As each shade of red transferred though Kim’s skin tone, our mother continued screaming as Kim attempted breathing. Sonny finally relented as Kim was barely conscious. He finally stood up grabbed her by her shirt and picked her up by gripping the collar of her black, leather jacket. “Get the fuck downstairs! YOU ARE GROUNDED!”

Groundings weren’t effective with Kim just as nothing worked in curtailing her malevolent behavior. When we finally moved to the house on Tilson Drive two years later, my room was downstairs next to my younger sister’s. I would hide next to the wine closet before peeking to see and hear if Kim was in the general vicinity. Tiptoeing across the carpet, I would sprint on my toes as quick as possible whenever I was hungry. Finally deciding to build me a bedroom above the three car garage after Kim literally threw me through a wall, I was lucky enough to be completely separate from the rest of the house. Although Brandy kept me up all night with her yelping and whining, as she was kept in the closet below me so Cheryl’s new furnishings and decorations wouldn’t be destroyed, I was lucky enough to not be a constant target for Kim. Unable to compete with my grades or athleticism, Ginger, Amanda, and Kelly quickly became Kim’s allies probably out of fear of watching me be brutalized just as I tried to become the perfect child afraid of the abuse I watched our father espouse on Kim coupled with winning my mother’s approval and affection.

I thought about it all day at school. I had to leave and find a place to live in order to avoid Kim’s evil force and incessant abuse that Cheryl never once intervened to stop. I don’t know which was worse, Cheryl’s complete and total neglect or Kim’s abuse. My only option other than running away was to ask my father if I could live with him. Nervous that he would say no and I would be stuck living in the war environment Cheryl created by never dissipating any of the continuous brawls, I waited until our server laid the appetizers down. Approached by an older man, my father stood up and said, “Rick,” he extended his hand, “I want you to meet my daughter,” Sonny extended his hand as if he was showcasing a clock.

Rick looked at my father and then at me as he extended his right hand to shake my father's. We sat next to a railing about fifteen feet from the bar. Located in the extension above Illinois Street, Rick's Café was one of the nicest restaurants I had been to. "She looks exactly like you," as Rick stared at my father's face for a moment, he redirected his attention to me. "Nice to meet you," Rick extended the pleasantries, "Nice to meet you Gwen."

"Thank you," I smiled as I sat in my chair with my back towards the bar.

"She is a spitting image of you, Sonny," Rick said. "A lot prettier, but nevertheless, she looks just like you."

"Yeah," my father smiled. He turned towards Rick, "You aren't that busy tonight."

"There aren't any games tonight and this is a typical Tuesday," Rick said. "We usually aren't that busy on Tuesday."

"I can see that," Sonny said.

"I need to go check on the kitchen," Rick looked down at me again, "it was nice to meet you." He turned towards Sonny extending his right hand to shake again, "Great seeing you Sonny. Thanks for coming in."

"It is Gwen's birthday and she wanted to go someplace special," my father said.

"Happy Birthday, Gwen! You definitely came to the right place," Rick said. "I think it is pretty special."

"Thank you," I smiled.

"See ya Sonny," Rick said as he turned around and walked back past the bar.

"Rick named the café after the movie Casablanca," Sonny said.

"Isn't his name Rick?" I said not having seen the classic.

"Well, yes," Sonny has a slight tinge of being angry whenever anyone defied him, he quickly changed his demeanor, "in the movie, the name of Humphry Bogart's café is Rick's Café."

The neon sign in the window as we drove under didn't indicate any type of classicism.

After ordering our food my father asked, "So do you like eighth grade?"

"Yes," I said. "My English teacher hates my guts like my teacher last year because she hated Kim," I paused, "but other than that, I love it."

The long pause became strained until I finally developed enough courage. “Dad,” I paused as he looked up from the loaded potato skins for which he was reaching, watching the little slivers of bacon falling off onto the plate, I finally asked, “Can I come live with you?”

He swallowed the first bite as he laid the other part down on the small, white plate. “You want to come live with me?”

“Yes,” I said. “I can’t live in that house anymore.”

“Why?” He hesitated on answering.

“It is awful,” I said. “I can’t walk past Kim without her hitting me or throwing me into a wall.”

“Yes, babydoll,” he said. “I would love to have you come live with us.”

Relief overcame my body.

“I need to ask Rosalind,” he said. He paused an extra long pause, “Do you want to meet her?”

I stopped to think for a nanosecond. The year before when Sonny played chauffeur as Brooke and I rode in the back seat, we went to Smith Mountain Lake where our family had the first and last family meeting. We were all summoned to the pool of the condos we were staying in, and Brooke and our second cousin Tonya were instructed to stay in the condo. As the five of us stayed in the pool, our mother said, “Your father has something he needs to say to you.”

Our father sat next to our mother as we stayed in the pool. “I don’t know how to tell you girls this,” he paused, “but I have been having an affair with a woman, and your mother and I are getting separated.”

“I hate you!” I screamed. “I am never talking to you ever again!” I screamed louder.

“Gwen,” Sonny said, “I’m sorry.” I turned my back and walked towards the deep end. In total denial of my imperfect family, I knew they were going to get divorced making us even more imperfect.

“You ruined our perfect family!” I screamed not realizing how imperfect our family already was.

“I’m sorry,” our father said as the tears streamed from his eyes.

Our mother said, “We are only having a trial separation.”

“No you’re not! You’re going to get divorced!” I screamed again as I waded into the deep end separating myself from my sisters. “I’m never speaking to you again!” I yelled again at my father before turning my back.

Now I was sitting across from him at Rick’s Café on my fourteenth birthday asking to come live with him out of sheer necessity. I was unable to handle Kim’s evil hatred towards the world that she bestowed onto me on a daily basis.

“I would love to have you come live with us,” he said. “Do you want me to go call Rosalind so you can meet her tonight?”

“Yeah,” I said. I paused thinking about the woman that ruined our imperfect family coupled with what they were like together. I wanted to meet her out of sheer curiosity. I wanted to meet the woman that our father chose over spending time with us.

A huge smile rose to his face. “Okay,” he said, “let me go call her.” He stood up, and I followed his Coogi sweater in the opposite direction of the bar towards the restrooms where there was a pay phone resting in between the women’s and men’s room doors.

After several minutes, he returned. As he pulled the chair out and sat down placing the napkin on his lap, as he smiled, he said, “Well,” he clasped his hands under his chin and said, “Well, she is home,” he paused, “and she can’t wait to meet you.”

As the waitress laid the chocolate dessert in front of us with the vanilla ice cream on top, she said, “This is courtesy of Rick.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“Please tell Rick thank you,” my father said.

“You bet,” our nice waitress said.

After devouring the birthday dessert, my father always left a double tip after seeing his mother struggle as a waitress. Although he was no longer filling the salt and pepper shakers for her, he never forgot watching his mother working double shifts in order to support him.

44

It was late at night, only the scragglers were left in the ‘Hole in the Wall’ moonshine joint, as Bernice dealt the final hand. Bernice was out of money and agreed to rename his only son after his opponent if he lost. Carrying the birth certificate around in his wallet, Bernice pretended to be someone important. Anthony Neil Cassady was born days before during the hot summer month they were experiencing. June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1949 marked his arrival into the world.

Although he was only nineteen, Bernice impregnated the local waitress yet felt no responsibility for his actions. Other than carrying around the birth certificate of his son, his sole acknowledgement that he sired a child, Bernice bragged to everyone that night at the nip joint prior to running out of money.

The other three players folded leaving their last dollars on the table. The poker match was solely between Francis and Bernice. As the other players and onlookers looked on, Bernice was left no choice. He took out the birth certificate and laid it on top of the dollars, "I'm outta money." He gave away more moonshine that night celebrating the birth of his only son. "I wager Tony's name," he said before dealing the final card to his opponent.

"I call ya," he snickered knowing he didn't have a strong hand. His pair of eights was his only hope.

Francis threw his pair of Aces on top of the pile of cards resting on the old, wooden table as Bernice held his cards knowing he would have to name his only son with a girl's name. "So, what's it gonna' be Bernice?" The traveling salesman asked.

Not willing to accept the truth, Bernice hesitated.

"So," Francis knew his pair trumped anything Bernice had, "Is there going to be another Francis in the world?" He laughed.

Bernice hesitated. "I guess so," he threw his pair of eights onto the old, wooden table stained with rings of moonshine.

"Well," Francis said. "Let's have it." He held his hand up waving his four fingers motioning for Bernice to hand him the birth certificate he proudly waved around to everyone that night. "Let's have the birth certificate."

Bernice sat at the table shaking his head back and forth wondering what he was going to tell Mary as Francis grabbed the birth certificate and pulled the pen out of his pocket exclaiming, "Francis Neil Cassady!" He took out his gold pen and marked through the name Anthony writing Francis above it.

45

"Gwen! I have to leave your father, and there are some things you must know," I was pulling out of the neighborhood where the group home I was working in contained the failed children of our society and was driving to my child development class. Finding out the night before that the owner of Pride of North Carolina froze everyone's meager wages as the gas prices rose and his plane fuel became more expensive, I was disgusted that I

was forced to lie on the daily Medicaid forms in order for the owner to continue to buy more shoddy homes for the challenged adolescents we were supposed to be caring for in order to maintain his lavish lifestyle. As I pulled North on River Road, Highway 133, Susan continued, “He beat the hell out of me Gwen, and I have got to get out.”

“I am so sorry Susan what happened?”

“He pulled me into his closet after I kissed one of the girls and started pulling my ears off while hitting me,” she paused, “There are things you need to know.”

“What is it?” I was already burdened from also reading about the children I had just driven to school. Their lives rife with sexual abuse, they too had committed heinous crimes against other children and animals before being confined to live with one another while they were watched round the clock to prevent further abuse. They had no idea that their ringleader was providing the most abuse of all.

“You have a little brother and two younger sisters,” Susan said matter of fact.

“What?” I wasn’t that shocked, “Are you serious?”

“Yes,” Susan said. “You have a little sister that lives in Kentucky and another one that lives in Tennessee.” She hesitated before releasing the final bit of information, “And you have a little brother named Zach.” I immediately thought of the Zach I was a nanny for in Hollyweird.

“Are you serious?” I asked again.

“Yes,” Susan said, “Your little brother is black, Gwen.”

“Oh my God!” I laughed knowing my father was the biggest racist I knew coupled with him always wanting a boy. “You have got to be joking me,” I said in disbelief.

“I am not kidding Gwen,” Susan continued. “Your father told the mother he had AIDS so she would abort the child.”

Disgusted with this acknowledgement, even I couldn’t believe Sonny would do something that atrocious. “You’re serious aren’t you?” I asked.

“Yes,” Susan continued. “He has a folder in the top file cabinet on the far left, right next to his desk. In the back. It is the court case between the mother and your father.”

“You really aren’t joking,” I was stunned that my father had a boy with an African American.

“I am dead serious, Gwen,” Susan continued. “Princess is her name, and your father is paying her well over two thousand dollars a month to keep it quiet,” Susan continued,



“She was smart enough to bring a friend with her when she met your father and told him.” Susan paused, “Your father had a newspaper where the front page had an article about a woman who was sleeping with as many men as possible because she had AIDS,” Susan hesitated. “Your father told Princess that he slept with her and got AIDS.”

“Are you serious?” I couldn’t even believe that kernel of knowledge.

“Yes,” Susan continued. “He told her he had AIDS so she would abort the child.”

“You are serious, aren’t you?” I was shocked that Sonny would stoop that low.

“Yes,” Susan said. “I’m dead serious,” she paused again, “I thought you needed to know Gwen.”

“I’m glad you told me,” I was ecstatic to know that I had two younger sisters and most of all, a younger brother.

“Gwen,” Susan paused, “Your father is truly a sick man.”

“Tell me something I don’t know,” I reiterated.

“Zach has a file,” she said, “You need to read it for yourself.”

“Thank you Susan,” I paused, “I will.”

46

I was in Middleton, Ohio working for the traveling furniture peddler selling bulk furniture at discount prices. I started off in Aiken, South Carolina home to one of our nation’s nuclear power plants when the most brilliant football player from UVA, who studied nuclear engineering and who I spent one night with on the lawn of my beloved university, walked in. “What are you doing here?” Tom asked.

“I’m selling furniture,” I said after he introduced me to his wife.

“I can see that,” he said, “But why here?” He said as he looked around the former Wal-Mart converted into a massive furniture showroom. The other salespeople stood off to one side, “it looks like a traveling carnival that you are working for,” Tom furrowed his brow.

“I just started working,” I paused embarrassed by my current working conditions. “My dad is friends with the owner and it can be lucrative.” I said hoping the nuclear engineer would buy a house full of furniture for him and his lovely wife. “Let me know if I can help you with anything as memories of my night spent in the lawn room surfaced.

The following day, Dean called an urgent meeting. “The Hobbly Wobbly just rented the space, and we only have two weeks to sell everything that we can.” He paused looking at

me before turning to everyone else, “No more snaking customers,” he paused making sure they all knew how unfair it was to me the first few days when they failed to tell me I could negotiate. The night before at dinner, he dug into his steak after saying, “I know you can sell, so why aren’t you?”

“Well,” I paused looking at the other salespeople, “I’m working the customer, but others move in on my customers when I go talk to other customers.”

“Are you TAing?” Dean asked.

“What is that?” I was unfamiliar with the term.

“Are you negotiating?” He chewed as he spoke.

“You mean I can negotiate the price?” I asked.

“You mean nobody told you to negotiate?”

“No,” I looked across the table as all the salespeople were looking at their food realizing they were busted.

“Nobody told you to negotiate?” Dean looked across as everyone attempted to digest his words.

“Why didn’t you guys tell her she could negotiate?” You could hear a knife cutting the meat at another table.

“We thought she knew,” Sylvia lied.

Dean glanced over at her glaring.

As I quickly learned that I was able to negotiate, I quickly became the top salesperson. Never taking a break as the others smoked, my long skirts and matching sweater shirts blended in with the Bible belt customers. At the end of the second week, I sold almost \$200,000 worth of furniture.

After Aiken, Dean wanted me to travel to Ohio where his next sale was beginning. I drove to Zionsville first and stayed in my first room with the loft that I designed. As soon as I walked into my old loft bedroom, I noticed a stark white piece of paper on my desk. It was a memo from my father.

All Shoes must be removed. No dishes left in room including glasses. He named each bedroom where his housemates lived and luckily, living in the West Wing was a friend of his that I became better friends with over the years. I continued reading through the rules and regulations of his rented ‘Party Palace.’

After lying in bed reading, I looked over at the clock and realized that 2:30 am was late enough to begin my snooping following instructions from his former girlfriend. As I crept down the Pine ladder from the loft, I tiptoed across the teal green, brand new looking carpet towards his office. I turned on the overhead light after ensuring that his bedroom door was shut. My excuse was going to be that I was looking for a phone number in his phone book if he woke.

I quickly opened the top file cabinet drawer and glanced over all the tabs of his files. Not seeing anything about my little brother, I opened the bottom drawer. Again, I glanced over all the tabs and quickly noticed a tab that had 'Zach' written across the top.

Quickly grabbing the folder, I shut the drawer, stood up from his black leather, rolling desk chair and tiptoed over the plastic covering the ivory colored carpet. Safely shutting my door after turning off the light at the top of the stairs, I tiptoed back into my bedroom after locking the door. I continued tiptoeing on my green carpet but kept the light on knowing the light couldn't penetrate his bedroom due to the window of mine facing North and his back doors opening to the deck facing South. I laid down on my carpet as I always did when I read in the lower part of my bedroom and opened the manila file.

I read through the court document where Princess was smart enough to have a girlfriend with her to witness Sonny's appalling and evil behavior attempting to persuade her to abort Zach. I wasn't as stunned when Susan told me, but now I was in shock reading the truth. I didn't know what I was most shocked about, that I always wanted a little brother named Zach, or that my half-brother named Zach was born when I was a Hollywood nanny for a boy named Zach.

47

Pamela Whacker was as weird as they came. The red flags were there from the first day. It wasn't until I was seated next to a former co-worker of hers at a dinner party that I realized the extent of her evil wrongdoings in the workplace before her evil ways fully encapsulated their home environment. Being the lowest on the totem pole at the dinner table, after everyone discussed their respective companies they owned or their respective positions at various studios and agencies or being the offspring of some of the world's most famous celebrities if they weren't a celebrity themselves, the agent sitting next to me asked what I did. When I told her I was a nanny, she asked for whom?

When I answered Roger and Pamela Whacker, she spit out her food in astonishment. Her fork barely caught her vegetables as I smiled demurely. Without missing a beat, she exclaimed, "They have children!"

“Yes,” I paused, “he has one from a previous marriage and Zach is the one I care for.”

She caught herself, “I mean, I mean,” she stammered for the right words to correct her impulse, “I mean I can’t believe they have children. I worked with Pamela at International Artists. How old is her child?”

“He’s eleven,” I smiled still refreshed from my solo trip to Peru. Hiking to the top of Macchu Pichu was resonating in my mind and muscles.

“Is he adopted? I never saw her pregnant and was working with her the entire time,” she attempted to explain further.

“No,” I continued, “he is their natural child.”

“Well,” she tried to find something good to say given her earlier mishap of spitting out her food when she realized Pamela Whacker actually had offspring, “she really helped open the door for women in Hollywood.” The agent quickly took a sip of wine.

I followed in suit trying to find something to say, “they really are exceptional parents.” If coming home drunk every night, as Pamela stumbled in the door, after their child is asleep is good parenting. At least Roger showed up for his sporting matches and appeared sober. Having a drug dealer as a father, I was adept to the cocaine shortcomings. The one night Zach wanted to surprise his mom in the driveway when she did come home before putting him to bed, I had to pull him away from seeing her doing cocaine in her car.

I always thought molestation was actual penetration. When I first noticed the French kissing between Pamela and Zach, I was horrified. Pamela would encourage him to grope her breasts as she slid her tongue in and out of his eleven year old mouth. One of the three times they actually ate at home, when a Hollywood billionaire mogul cancelled last minute, Roger sat at the head of the long table, Pamela sat to his left, and Zach and I had just arrived from the park. I was instructed to keep Zach out of the house all night as a very important Hollywood billionaire was having dinner that night at the house. Louise spent over half an hour arranging the chairs.

“What’s the big deal?” I asked.

“He’s a billionaire! You know how Pamela is! She is driving me crazy!” Pamela drove everyone crazy.

“So what? He’s still a person,” I interjected having already spent time with a royal family.

“Are you crazy? He’s a billionaire! The chairs have to be perfect!”

“I don’t see what the big deal is Louise. He’s just a person, no different than you or me,” I reiterated.

“You and Zach need to stay away from the house until you are called. Take him to the park like you normally do and then take him out to dinner,” she instructed.

When I got the page and called from the car phone, Louise told me the Hollywood billionaire cancelled last minute. I rushed Zach home so he could spend some quality time with his parents. If you want to call quality time French kissing your mother and having her encourage your eleven year old hands groping her breasts. I stood behind the chair the Hollywood billionaire mogul was supposed to sit in during their multi-course meal. Roger and I were talking when I noticed Zach’s hand on his mother’s right breast massaging it as if he was giving her a breast exam as they French kissed. Disgusted, I watched intently in order to divert Roger’s attention from our conversation to his child molesting wife and innocent son.

“STOP IT!!!!” He spit out his food. “BOTH OF YOU!”

Zach pulled his hand away and ran into the other room. Pamela resumed eating her food. I tiptoed out of the room following Zach into the den. Roger resumed eating the meal prepared by the chef they flew in from New York specifically for the Hollywood billionaire mogul. He didn’t say another word to Pamela about her evil, incestuous behavior.

Over the course of the year that I was Zach’s nanny, the same year my little brother was born, every time Pamela and Zach were in each other’s presence, their French kissing rivaled that of new lovers. When Roger wasn’t home or when we were in Australia where she and Timothy Conrad were filming their Hollywood blockbuster, Roger’s absence intensified Pamela’s need for affection which was absent even when Roger was present.

I would walk into the master bedroom of their Ritz Carlton suite only to find Zach in the master bed. Lying on their sides, their noses touching, Zach usually had his hands on his mother’s face as they French kissed. Their tongues moving in and out, they viewed me as if I was a piece of furniture rather than a witness to their incestuous behavior.

Their favorite song, “Mommy and me, mommy and me, we’re two of a kind, just mommy and me,” while gripping each other’s pinky fingers, their noses touching, still resonates.

When Roger briefly visited Australia, the night he took the red eye back to Los Angeles, there was a knock on the suite door. I opened the door only to find him holding her

drunk body up with his right hand around her waist and clasping his left arm around her body. Her Armani jacket was disheveled and her ankles were teetering back and forth in her stiletto heels, Roger had to practically carry her into the room. I couldn't make out her slurred words and excused myself wishing Roger a safe journey.

The next morning I walked into the suite at my standard 7am. Not a minute early and not a minute late, although I wish I would have been. The Sydney sun rose on the eastern side of the Ritz closest to the living room. As the daybreak caused light in the suite, when I opened the door, my shadow caused a dark cloud over the master bedroom. I glanced in expecting to find Pamela and Zach making out on their sides as usual. This time Pamela was on top of Zach moving up and down, up and down. Her quick thrusts on top of his twelve year old body paralyzed me.

When she noticed Zach move his body up a little closer to the headboard as he looked over at me, she noticed the shadow that overtook the room and turned her head around only to find me standing in the doorway. In complete and total shock, I shut the door and went to the couch in the living area. I sat down on the same couch Roger and I watched part of a movie on two nights prior and stared at the black television for what seemed like an eternity thinking of how all I wanted to do was burst in their bedroom and steal my passport out of her safe and run as far away as possible.. Zach came running out over five minutes later and told me his mother wanted green tea as if nothing ever happened.

I stayed awake for nine days after that life altering, traumatic event and thought I was going to die after remembering a brief passage in a college psychology book that human beings die if sleep deprived on the tenth day. Months prior, on the first day of our arrival back to Sydney, Pamela took my passport and locked it in her safe in her bedroom holding me captive to her and her son's torture.

The first few days of staying awake were a blur as each moment blended into the next. I dreaded each morning after tossing and turning all night as to what I would find after turning the door handle to their suite in the land Down Under. After we flew back to Los Angeles, I began writing a letter demanding respect. On the ninth day of not sleeping, I demanded to be put on a plane back to the East Coast after ensuring Pamela knew that I knew exactly what she did. I think she was still in denial that her inherent nature of being a child molester was normal. Unfortunately, the Pamelas of the world can not be changed and the trickle down effect of their actions haunt more than just the innocent victims of their sexual abuse.



As I read my little brother Zach's file, I couldn't help but to think of the Hollywood Zach and what his mother did to him. I quickly turned each page in the manila folder until I came across my dad's will surreptitiously placed randomly in between Zach's information. Having worked in NYC the previous year assisting in the Trusts and Estates department, I read many wills. I began devouring the information.

'I bequeath my entire estate into five equally divided shares to be distributed to 1) Kimberly Ann Cassady; 2) Ginger Ellen Cassady; 3) Amanda Marie Cassady; 4) Kelly Claire Cassady; and 5) Tripper Finley Gore.'

After skimming the document, searching for my name, I laid on my freshly vacuumed carpet stunned but not shocked. Was he trying to teach me a lesson, and if so, what kind of a lesson?

The following night I called Hannah to see if she wanted to hang out with Neil, one of Sonny's current housemates and the friend with whom I was closer, and some of his friends. As we sat around the basement faux stone table drinking the double bottle of wine and listening to music. Neil's friend inched closer to me. After Neil and Hannah retreated to Neil's room, James and I continued listening to music while sipping our wine.

As we moved to a more comfortable horizontal position as Barry White played in the background, James began taking off my clothes. As I slowly kissed his chest moving south of his belly button, the music provided the perfect background noise for gyrating to the beat.

"I'm still a virgin," I whispered in his ear. My grandfather's gang rape was not included in my chaste belief given nobody else thought it was important to the development of my psyche and my womanhood. My mother covered her ears and shook her head as she said, "I don't want to hear about it." My sister's response of, "How do you think how I felt?" coupled with my cousins claiming that it wasn't true only caused the trauma to be further buried in the sea of daily trauma and abuse.

"I will only go as far as you want," James whispered as he continued kissing my neck slowly moving down to my bosom. He kept kissing my bosom as he slowly inched down kissing each inch of flesh before he reached the top of my pants. He slowly unbuttoned the top button of my jeans and slowly pulled them off my hips. As he slid my panties off, he threw them onto the ivory colored carpet. The basement carpet contained a pattern of squares three inches by three inches. My panties were tossed aside as I laid naked on the white leather couch.

James continued covering every inch of my body with his soft, delicate kisses. As I threw the pillow that laid under my head, I launched it towards my panties. Instead of throwing over the bottle of wine towards the direction of where my panties laid, I hit the magnum of wine. As I watched the extra large bottle come crashing down on the white carpet splattering everywhere, I screamed, “Fuck!”

James jumped up from pleasing me, equally concerned with the spilt red wine. He looked over at the emptying bottle as he leaped off the couch and picked it up. The damage was done. The remaining wine situated in the bottle resting on its side was less than what spilled all over the white carpet. I quickly scooted off the couch embarrassed by the size of my body, I hunched over like an egg and threw the pillows aside. I quickly threw on my jeans and shirt and ran over to the downstairs kitchen to retrieve towels. Before knowing the trick of cleaning red wine was to use white wine to be able to absorb the red wine, I turned the faucet on the small sink until the small, white towel was soaked.

“What do you want me to do?” James asked.

“Nothing! Don’t touch it,” frightened by what tomorrow morning’s aftermath would be when I had to tell my father what happened. “We have some carpet cleaner upstairs,” I said as I tossed him the wet towel. He caught the cold, damp towels as I ran upstairs to the laundry room to locate the heavy duty carpet cleaner. The cacophony of bottles and cleaners under and above the sink provided a PhD in chemistry to understand what was used for what purpose.

I grabbed the lemon fragrant one not knowing which chemical was supposed to be used on the carpet. As the sun slowly rose, James and I were still scrubbing the ivory squares covered in wine. The wood pile located in the red brick resting to the right of the actual fireplace was piled high behind me as I continued scrubbing as hard as I could spraying the lemon fragrant chemical all over the evidence of my haphazard pillow toss.

As daylight appeared, James and I furiously scrubbing for over an hour, without seeing any results, I said, “I think you should leave now.”

“What are you going to do?” He asked.

“I will deal with it,” I said.

Fully clothed by this time, as he pulled me closer, he said, “Anytime you are in town and want to dance, please call me.”

I smiled, “I definitely will.”

I led the way as we walked over the ivory squares towards the stairwell. “I had an absolute blast,” I turned facing him before we reached the mirror at the bottom of the stairs.

“Me too,” his smile pervaded the basement.

As we tiptoed up the stairs, I put my finger to my mouth signaling for him to be quiet.

When reaching the back door, he grabbed me with his arms while saying, “Thank You.”

I went back into the laundry and reexamined the contents of the cabinets attempting to find something that said ‘carpet cleaner.’

Out of the thirty plus bottles of cleaning products, nothing had carpet cleaner written on it. I slowly tiptoed towards my father’s room. As I heard him snoring, I gently tapped on the door. “Dad?”

“What is it?” He yelled.

“Where is the carpet cleaner?” I shied away from the door to avoid his anger.

“Why!?!” He yelled, “What did you spill?”

“I spilled some wine and wanted to clean the carpet before it soaks in too much,” I was more afraid of the ivory squares being permanently stained than I was of his immediate anger.

“You what?” He yelled, “It is the clear bottle with the blue lettering.”

“Have you used anything yet?” He yelled again.

“I used the lemon fragrant cleaner,” I said.

“No!” He yelled again, “That is the disinfectant.”

“Use the bottle with the blue writing on it,” He yelled again. “And use the towels under the sink.”

“Okay,” I quickly walked back to the laundry room and grabbed the clear bottle with the blue writing on it. Walking even quicker downstairs, I hurried to the scene of the accident. Spraying the area, I furiously scrubbed the spot where the wine spilt all over the carpet. Over an hour later, as I still scrubbed my sins out of the carpet, I could hear my father walking across the great room.

When he appeared from around the corner of where the stairs met the ivory square carpet, he said, “You need to get new tires before you drive today.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Your tires are practically bald,” he sternly said.

“Okay,” I continued scrubbing.

“You need to go check to see what kind of tires you have,” he said.

“Okay,” I continued scrubbing.

“What happened?” Sonny asked.

“I just spilt a little wine,” I said.

“I can see that,” Sonny snarled.

“Don’t use too much of the cleaner,” he said. “It doesn’t require a lot of it.”

“Okay,” I said scrubbing the ivory squares harder.

“You only need to use a little of it,” he said. “It is very powerful.”

“Okay,” I repeated my broken record.

“After you are done, go check your tires and see what size you need and get some new tires,” he demanded.

After scrubbing furiously for another hour, the red wine stain disappeared from the ivory squares in the carpet. I went upstairs to my bedroom and climbed the ladder to sleep. The same room where several nights prior I read about my little brother coupled with my dad’s will. Attempting to sleep having not gotten any the night before, I laid down. Within minutes of closing my eyes my door flew open, “What the fuck are you doing?” Sonny yelled, “I told you to go check your tires!”

The memo that was on the new desk when I first arrived still rested on the corner. Unlike most people that receive cards or a hug from their parent upon arrival, I received a memo that he sent to everyone that was currently living in the house. In order to help with his six thousand dollar mortgage payment, Sonny rented out at least two of his six bedrooms. Neil was staying in one and Curtis was in another. I quickly sat up hearing his scream.

“I will,” I said.

“No!” He yelled louder, “Go do it now!”

I slowly rolled out of bed and walked down the Pine ladder to my green carpet. Accustomed to not being allowed to wear shoes in the house, I walked down the back stairs carrying my shoes. As I sat on the second step putting my brown leather slip on mules on each foot, I couldn’t understand why he was so adamant on me getting new tires. Walking out the back door I noticed my pink thong underwear lying next to the

back rear tire on the passenger side. Hannah and I walked out to her car the night before, and it wasn't there when we walked back into the house.

I immediately felt every nerve in my body. Knowing he placed my pink thong panties next to my tire, I immediately began thinking of my escape. Having not spent any time with Chad during my brief two day visit, I was hoping I could stay with him that night. I picked up the panties next to the back tire and held them tightly in my hand as I proceeded inside.

Sonny was sitting in the kitchen preparing a bowl of Special K. As he poured the milk over the cereal, he said, "Did you check your tires?" His sinister smile spoke volumes.

"Yes," I looked at him disgusted.

He smiled. "Call Wal-Mart and make sure they have them before you get a new set," he said.

"Okay," I always followed orders.

"Do it now!" He yelled.

"Fine," I opened the drawer under the phone and looked up Wal-Mart's phone number. I continued going through the motions beyond disgusted that he would place my underwear next to my tire. Years later I was more disgusted that I was actually once a Wal-Mart consumer.

As I dialed the number, I hoped I could spend the night with Chad. After speaking to the tire department, I hung up the phone as Sonny said, "Do they have them?"

"Yes," I said.

"Good," he said as he scooped a mouthful of Special K into his mouth.

I slowly retreated upstairs to call Chad.

"Hi Chad," I demurred.

"Hey Geeg," Chad's pet name for me began in high school. His melodious voice was worthy of superstardom.

"Chad," I paused afraid he would say no, "Can I come stay with you tonight?"

"Yeah," he said, "What's wrong?"

"I'll tell you when I get there," my voice always conveyed my mood.

"Yeah," he said, "Come on over. Have you been here before?"

"No," I said.

“You know I am in the gay district downtown. It is south of Broad Ripple,” he said.

“Yeah,” I paused still disgusted at my father’s behavior, “I know.”

“When do you want to come over?” He asked.

“As soon as possible,” I started speaking as he asked the question. “I have to get new tires, then I will be right over.

As soon as I hung up the receiver next to the memo Sonny left me, I continued packing my small bag. Wondering how I was going to tell Sonny that I was leaving, I found him in the kitchen sitting at the table.

“Dad,” I said, “I’m going to stay with Chad tonight.”

“Why?” His negative connotation spoke volumes.

“I haven’t seen him yet, and I think we are going to go to the bars so by staying with him, we don’t have to drive,” I lied.

“Okay,” he said. “Well, let me give you some money to pay for your tires.”

“Thanks,” still disgusted by finding my pink thong underwear next to my tire, I always accepted his money.

I opened the fridge and grabbed an apple as he walked back to his bedroom, where he grabbed his money clip with his flash cash. As he walked through the great room I waited in front of the garage door and studied the circular, stucco pattern on the dining room ceiling. I opened the door as he approached the rounded, circular stairway in the center of the room. I noticed the dragon on the other side of the stairwell resting on the narrow, glass rectangular table. The last time I saw someone eating in the formal dining room was when I wasn’t supposed to be home. After returning from UVA’s graduation for two months before moving to Los Angeles, I was told one week by my father that he was having a dinner with two very important judges that his attorney Maxine arranged for him. They spent days preparing for it. Maureen, a gourmet chef by training, was preparing an amazing meal. At that point, Maureen and Michelle were my father’s favorite long-term girlfriends. Dynamic, beautiful, smart women, I never fully understood why they lasted as long as they did until I became much older.

The night of their dinner party, I was supposed to be out of the house. Running late as usual, I sauntered down the stairs and realized they were just being seated. “Gwen,” my father didn’t seem to mind, “Come here. I’d like for you to meet some new friends of mine.”



My chiseled body from running 10 miles a day strode over to the table. Both men stood up. As my dad said, “Gwen, I’d like for you to meet John Baker.”

“Nice to meet you Gwen,” his pale yellow shirt complemented his skin tone and grey slacks.

“Hello,” I continued shaking his hand, “It’s nice to meet you as well.”

“Your father tells us you just graduated from UVA,” John said. “Congratulations. That’s a pretty tough school. I was just there doing a program myself at the law school.”

“Oh, really?” I smiled knowing a fellow wahoo was in my presence. “It really is the quintessential academic environment. I didn’t do as well academically as I would have liked but what I gained from UVA was much greater than that. The values, principles, character, integrity, and honor that I gained are irrevocable.”

“Yes,” John had his hands in his pockets, “It really does emphasize honor, and I couldn’t agree with you more.”

John motioned to Ezra, “This is Ezra Friedlander.” I recognized the name. It was the same man whose name was written in pencil in my father’s address book. The only one like it.

“Hi Mr. Friedlander,” I extended my hand, “it’s nice to meet you.”

“It’s nice to meet you as well,” he paused, “your father has told us many wonderful things about you.”

“Thank you,” I paused looking over at Maureen’s smiling face. “Well, I am running late. It was a pleasure meeting both of you. I’m certain you’ll enjoy your meal.”

After they extended their pleasantries, I excused myself and began walking towards the doorway I was standing in now.

I opened the garage door when my father’s feet reached the runner in between the kitchen and dining room. As we reached the bottom steps in the garage, he held out his hand with two hundred dollar bills to pay for my tires and extended it towards me, “Drive safely. Good luck with the Middleton sale. I’ll miss you,” he paused, pulling me in towards his shoulder as he said in a hushed tone, “I liked your dance.”

I froze.

Leaving my panties next to my tire was bad enough, but the fact that he watched James and I get naked together was beyond anything I could imagine. I quickly pulled away

from his grip. I don't remember what I said as I walked out of the garage and quickly got in my car.

49

"Why did you leave me out of your will?" I yelled as I sat in the green suede chair in Carolyn's living room.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Sonny yelled. Earlier in the evening, we sat on the back porch overlooking a cove on Smith Mountain Lake drinking our madreses as Sonny sucked on his cigar as if it was a pacifier bragging how, "My people took care of it," and laughing about how he was able to walk away from facing over sixty years in prison on three felony charges. Although he was arrested for three Class A felonies of distribution of a controlled narcotic, cocaine; possession with the intent to sell; and utilizing his home as a distribution center; due to his connections in the highest judicial and legal arenas within Boone County and Indiana, he escaped all charges walking free and clear after sitting in jail for a week as he liquidated \$250,000 of his portfolio to pay the highest bail in Indiana's history.

"I saw your will and you left me out! Why did you leave me out!" I yelled. I just returned from Africa in a vacant attempt to mend my bleeding heart after being seduced by a sociopath much worse than my birth father. A much smoother, sleeker, financially wealthier man than the sociopath that spawned me, the sociopath I attracted used me as his toy and was more damaging to my psyche than any man, including my father, would ever be. Escaping to Africa was the only way to escape Mike's clenches he dug deep into my veins from the moment we met.

Believing every lie, I escaped to Africa after a friend was able to dig up the dirt on the truth behind the wanna be real estate tycoon and assistant dean at Duke's business school. His current real estate remained more vacant than the current market conditions. His soul was more hollow than his firm's vacancies. Yet I believed every single word that exited from his mouth. Foolishly. My bleeding heart barely beat when I boarded the plane to Capetown. My first visit to spend time with the Africans, Hot Sands Village, Malawi, provided a mending of the wounds. Spending time with the Africans placed a band aid over my bleeding heart, but I knew I would never be the same after experiencing Africa coupled with the ending of my tumultuous two year affair rife with having dinner with his wife and babysitting his adopted daughter to ensure our compatibility as a future stepmother. At least I was imprudent enough to believe all of his words.

Now, we sat in Carolyn's living room. Both Carolyn and Walt excused themselves for bed. My father and I both night owls continued the discussion indoors once the

mosquitoes became too frequent from sitting on the bay nestled off of Smith Mountain Lake. He raised his voice oblivious to Carolyn sleeping, “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“I read your will in Zach’s folder!”

He jumped up sitting on the edge of the couch, “What the fuck are you talking about?” He stammered trying to find the right words. “I left my entire life insurance policy to you!” He screamed. “Your sisters will inherit my debt!” He continued screaming. “The house is mortgaged to the hilt! Your sisters are going to be left with debt! You get the entire life insurance policy!”

“How could you do that to me?” I screamed back. After working for the number one pro bono law firm in New York in the Trusts and Estates department, I understood wills.

“That is totally unfair! How could you do that?”

“I did it so you would have something if something should happen to me!” He yelled back.

“Dad,” I hesitated knowing the rift my mother created between me and my sisters would further, “Do you even realize what that would do to me?”

“I left you all the money!”

“Do you not understand?” I screamed again.

“What?” He yelled. “Here, I’ll go get it and show you.”

“I don’t need to see it,” I sat in the faux suede, green chair that he moved into Carolyn’s when he sold the ‘Party Palace’ to a French investment company almost six months prior.

50

“Dad,” I paused, “I need to talk to you,” my serious demeanor caused him to sink back further into the patterned chairs.

“What is it babydoll?” The snow nestled in the corners of the skylights reflecting the bright sun as we sat under the glass windows at the kitchen table.

“We can’t find April,” I hadn’t slept in two days worried about my new friend’s whereabouts.

“What do you mean?” Sonny asked.

“We were at a house in Broad Ripple after the bars closed and April left to get more cocaine,” it was my third time trying the illicit, illegal substance the night I was told my father’s name was at the top of the DEA list. The man who served two years in prison to

avoid the automatic death sentence of helping to bust my father told me everything I needed to know in one sentence. After the bars closed in Broad Ripple that night, we headed over to one of the guy's homes that was courting Julianna. As my girlfriends slowly paired up with their respective men for the evening, I was left sitting on the couch on the sunporch with a guy wearing wire rimmed glasses.

"Gwen," he paused, "I knew exactly who you were when I saw your face."

I smiled, "I hear that often when I'm in Indianapolis." I was wearing my standard white Gap shirt and my Levi's that faded providing a slimming effect, not that I needed it. My running mileage was increasing to 7 miles a day.

"I really shouldn't tell you this," he paused, "but, back in the late 80's," he looked at the front door through the living room. His eyes peered back at me through his wire rim glasses. "I was a minor dealer and was brought in for drug trafficking." He paused again this time looking down at his drink as he swirled the cubes around the circumference causing the clear liquid to rise up over the cubes. He smiled as if he was remembering more than he was telling. "The DEA sat me down and showed me a 5 page list. They said that if I helped them bust any of them on the list they would reduce the charges, but if I helped them bust the person at the top of the list, they'll drop all charges. Gwen," he paused looking into the living room again, before looking back at me, "Your father's name was at the top of the list."

I wasn't surprised. "Are you serious?"

"Yes," his somber look and chiseled face caused a handsome quality.

"What did you do?" I inquired.

"I looked at the DEA and said, 'that is an automatic death sentence.'" He held his drink in his lap. "I went to prison for two years."

"You have got to be kidding me," I sat that stunned but not surprised.

'Your father's name was at the top of the list,' reiterated the nine years of awkward glances being thrust towards me. Nine years of rumors. Nine years of stories from random people. Nine years of his absence. Now my new friend April was missing, and I felt responsible for her disappearance, especially after meeting her New York boyfriend Jim and finding out the sole reason she was in Indianapolis was for rehab.

"Dad," I paused, "it has been four days, and she is still missing."

My father sat in the chair I sat in when he told me he needed me to go to Barry Brody's funeral. Now he was wearing his teal blue gym shorts with the 'Everlast' label

emblazoned across the band that had the tiger t-shirt my aunt Pat, his older half sister, made for him with puff paint. I sat in the chair facing west at the head of the table. Sonny clasped his hands in front, he began, “She’ll show up sooner or later,” he paused before continuing, “Back in the late eighties, we had girls that stayed awake for ten days straight.”

“Are you serious?” I asked.

“Yes,” he nodded his head up and down, “girls would stay at the condo doing cocaine for ten days.” He paused again, hesitating on what to say, “one day I looked out the condo blinds and there were over a dozen exotic cars sitting in the cul de sac.”

I sat at the head of the glass table. It was a perfect Midwestern, winter day. Home for over a month given I finished my exams before coming home for the annual Holiday party, I went out with Neil, JulieAnna, and April the first night. JulieAnna met April at a modeling audition and invited her to the legendary party. Both models, they quickly became the hit of the party surrounded by the nefarious judges and attorneys. We left as soon as the party became boring. In Indianapolis for rehab, April was now missing, and I felt responsible. As the light bounced off the snow illuminating the mane scrawled across the top of the tiger’s head, the orange puff paint shone as Sonny continued, “Rosalind was living in New York at the time, and I was living at the condo.”

“When was this?” I asked.

“It was back in the late 80’s right before your mother and I got separated,” he already admitted to having the ten year affair. Their marriage lasted a year after Rosalind waited for ten as his mistress.

He still had his hands clasped stiffly on his lap. “Sixty percent of America’s population lives within 800 miles of Indianapolis which has most major interstates and the nation’s railroads running through it. Back in the late 80’s, we were America’s largest drug distribution location,” father-daughter bonding time at its finest, he continued, “So, I was living at the condo and we used to party at the neighbors.”

“If you were to take one of those big salt bags,” he raised his hands up as if he was holding a big bag above his head and began moving his hands up and down as he spoke, “like the kind you use for a water heater and shook it out,” he paused as he continued mock shaking a giant 50 pound salt bag, “that is how much cocaine we had sprawled out on the coffee table.” He brought his hands down and clasped them again in front of the Everlast label on his turquoise shorts that cut off mid thigh.

“What am I supposed to do, Dad?” I was worried about April.

“She’ll show up sooner or later,” he said.

“One time,” he began storytelling again, “Badell, Suijia, and I lined the whole kitchen island with cocaine with a huge pile at the end there,” he pointed towards the double oven and the salmon colored kitchen island. “We would start at one end and see who could snort the longest line,” he laughed, “Suij did over three feet.” He laughed deflecting from his ability. His eyebrows raised as he spoke, “Suij would dip his entire head into the pile of cocaine like ‘Scarface’ to see how much he could do.”

“Are you serious?” I asked. I had only seen minimal amounts. My junior year summer when I was with Chad at Una Luna in Broad Ripple while sitting outside, Rick had just finished playing golf with his friends when they walked into the restaurant. As I finished using the bathroom, there was a knock on the door. I cracked it a bit as Rick asked, “Wanna do some blow?” Mistakenly thinking he meant would I give him a blow job, I exclaimed, “Rick!” He quickly lifted his hand with a small bag of white powder as he said, “No! Do you want to do some blow,” as he walked into the bathroom. Tainting the daughter of his supplier, I acquiesced to the adult pressure and tried a little bit even though I was only 16. Doing less than a pencil line each time, I was astonished to think of how large a salt bag full of cocaine actually was.

“Yes,” Sonny said. “The guy that lived across the cul de sac at Bayside ended up going to prison when his son turned him in to avoid jail time.”

I questioned the validity of my father’s account after knowing what the man said in Broad Ripple about my father being at the top of the DEA list.

“One time,” my father continued, “we were partying with a bunch of strippers here at the house.”

“Where were we?” I asked.

“You all were at your mother’s or somewhere,” Sonny waved his hand towards the laundry room,” he continued, “Anyway, the next morning I was checking the house and found a girl dead in your bed.”

“Are you serious?” I sat back in my chair as to the newfound knowledge.

“Yes,” he said.

“What did you do?” I asked.

“I called Badell and Suij,” he paused as he attempted to found the right words. “Badell said he couldn’t come back to the house as he was in the middle of a big case.”



Pat Badell was also one of my father's attorneys. I babysat for he and his wife when I was still in Middle School. "Suij came over and we tried to revive her," Sonny said. "When I found her she had green foam," he brought his hand up to his mouth as if he was stuffing his face with food as he spoke, "coming out of her mouth."

I sat there listening intently stunned at what he was telling me.

"And her body was completely limp. She wasn't moving," he said.

"What did you do?" I asked horrified by what he was telling me.

"She was this petite blond," he said, "I carried her to the shower and tried to revive her by throwing her in your shower."

I couldn't believe I was showering where a dead girl was showered in a vacant attempt to resuscitate her life.

"When Suij finally got here, we tried together to bring her back to life by keeping her in the shower," he smiled as if he was proud of his trying deflecting how they killed her from an overdose. He stopped speaking as he held his hands clasped in front of the Everlast insignia on his shorts.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I wanted to dump her body in a dumpster," he said matter of fact, "But Badell said to drive her body to her apartment complex."

"Who was she?" I asked.

"Some stripper Suij and Badell knew," he said.

"What did you do?" I asked again.

"We drove her car to her apartment complex and left her body in the driver's seat to make it look like she drove," his hands never wavered from the clasped position in front of the Everlast label as the light bounced from the snow resting in the windows in the kitchen nook to the flashes of color on the enormous tiger head on his shirt.

"You just left her there?" I asked.

Sonny began shaking his head up and down as he said, "Yes."

I don't think I heard him say the word.

51

"Cheryl," Sonny said as they sat on the edge of the bed side by side facing his barren closet, "I need to know how much cash is liquid in the Clock Shop."

“What are you talking about Sonny?”

“I’m being indicted by the DEA tomorrow and need to know how much is liquid in the business,” Sonny looked down at the carpet in the master bedroom, unable to look her in the eye until he finished speaking.

“What in the hell is the DEA?” Our mother asked.

“It’s the Drug Enforcement Agency,” he continued. “I’m being indicted tomorrow and need \$50,000 cash.”

“What?” Cheryl was clueless to his double life. She knew about Rosalind, but other than erratic, abusive behavior coupled with Sonny’s increased non-existence in our lives, she was even more clueless than she realized. “What are you talking about, Sonny?” She replaced her mother who replaced Sonny’s from the age of twelve when our parents first started going steady. The high school homecoming king and queen, prom king and queen, and what others referred to as a pillar of the Village of Zionsville lived a much different life behind closed doors.

“Cheryl,” Sonny paused, “I’ve been involved in cocaine and am being indicted tomorrow by the DEA. I need \$50,000 dollars now.”

“Cheryl,” he said, “the DEA is going to indict me.”

“I don’t care!” She jumped off the bed. “Get out of my house! Get out!”

“Cheryl,” Sonny stood to his feet standing facing her with his back towards the door blocking her in the Master Suite. We were all at school. “I need the money or they are going to send me to jail forever.”

“I don’t care! How could you?! Get out of the house! Now!” She was left speechless other than to scream for him to leave.

A few days later, Sonny reappeared.

“We need to talk,” he said.

“What is going on Sonny?” Cheryl asked never seeing Sonny as serious as he was.

“Cheryl, you can not say anything to anybody, okay?” Sonny’s seriousness scared her. “The Colombians are coming up to kill you and our entire family if you say anything.”

“What in the hell are you talking about, Sonny?” Cheryl pleaded.

“The Colombians are coming up here to kill us if you say anything to anybody,” Sonny warned again.

At its height, it was reported that the Medellin Cartel led by the late Pablo Escobar was earning \$25 billion a year. Oblivious as to what a Colombian necktie was as well as what was happening in Satan Sonny's other life, Cheryl filed for divorce that day.

52

"Here," Sherry said, "I think you should wear this." Sherry handed me a miniskirt and bright colored shirt. I sat on her bed as she stood in the closet rummaging through her clothes. Her blond, permed hair hung past her shoulders.

I babysat on several occasions for Sherry, but now she was planning on taking me out for the night to my father's fortieth surprise birthday party at Safari Bar. I was only fourteen and attempting to find the right clothes to make me look twenty-one.

"That looks perfect! What size shoe do you wear?" She asked as she scoured her rows of high heels.

"I wear a ten," I only owned flats.

"Shoot!" She exclaimed. "None of my shoes will work. I wear an eight."

"I can just wear these," I put my right foot forward wearing my black, woven braided shoes.

"That's going to have to work," she said. "Let me do your make-up, and then we need to boogie."

"Okay," I followed her into the bathroom.

"Here," she pointed towards the closed toilet, "Sit here."

As she applied my make-up, she asked through the mirror, "What do you think Rosalind is going to do when I walk in with you?"

"I have no idea," I answered honestly.

After Sherry applied the blue eye shadow, I looked in the mirror at my new self.

"You look amazing!" She exclaimed. "I borrowed my girlfriend's id so you shouldn't have a problem getting in. You need to memorize as much of it as you can," she instructed.

I grabbed the id she extended and began studying it. Although I was only 14 and a half, the id said I was 28.

"Here," she handed me a fur coat, "I think you should wear this as well."

Barely squeezing my shoulders into the fur coat, I thought I looked ridiculous given the hot, June night.

After arriving in the Safari Bar parking lot on the South side of Castleton, I stepped out and followed Sherri up to the doormen. After the doorman glanced at her friend's id, I held it out again guilty from breaking the law. The doorman smiled, nodded his head, and opened the door for Sherry and me. Already starting to sweat from the weight of the fur coat, we walked into the open space. The room off to the right contained about thirty people or so. Rosalind immediately saw us and as the look of disappointment came over her face, Sonny shouted from across the room, "Well, hello!" Although we missed the surprise, he was ecstatic. As he began walking over, Rosalind grabbed him as I saw her mouth the words while faintly hearing over the loud music and nonsensical chatter, "She should not be here," while shaking her head. As he walked over to us, Rosalind's frown overtook her glare of Sherry and me. Her jaw dropped open as if she was going to swallow the thick, gold rope stretched across her collarbone as her eyes followed her 40 year old boyfriend across the room.

"Well, hey babydoll!" My father leaned down as he gave me a kiss on the cheek and a soft hug. Signs of affection were rare, and I relished every one of them.

He quickly grabbed Sherry and held her close as he whispered something in her ear. Sherry quickly burst out laughing as she slapped him on the arm exclaiming in her raspy voice, "Sonny!"

My father stepped back as he glanced us over wearing a smile as loud as our outfits. It was June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1989 and my body ensconced in the heavy fur coat was now sweating profusely causing the coral colored silk shirt to layer my body as if it was a second skin. The black, rayon sarong skirt tied on the left side of my hip was soaked through my waist and lower back. It was as if my lower back was a steady stream of running water depositing its embellishments wherever it pleased.

'Welcome to the Jungle' was blaring in the next room of the Safari Bar as my dad slipped the heavy fur coat off my fourteen year old body. I quickly pulled the silk skin from my back to allow it to breathe as he slipped Sherri's coat of her lithe, toned, super skinny body. Her bleached blonde hair accented her tight, vibrant shirt. Rosalind's glare could burn a hole through the wall. I quickly grabbed Sherri as I told my dad, "we're going dancing!"

"Have fun!" He yelled over the music as he hid the fur coats under the pile.

We began making our way through the bar area where the party was and headed to the next room with the dance floor where we found a special spot and began throbbing our bodies to the music. With each gyration, my shirt stuck to me like a second skin. My entire back, soaked. My stomach, soaked. My underarms, soaked. “Welcome to the Jungle!” blared in the background.

53

Now, I was becoming soaked under the sprinkler on the grassy knoll next to the bank in Myrtle Beach. It was July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1989 and almost two weeks after I danced my heart out at the Safari Bar. Kirk and Kim had to carry my limp, lithe body to the water source. My fourteen year old body fell onto the ground the second they removed their arms to be able to clean themselves. After Kirk cleaned off my vomit from himself, he grabbed my shirt and pulled it over my head leaving me fully exposed in my turquoise lace Victoria Secret bra sitting two feet from the sprinkler. As the water passed over my head, and I became more and more soaked, I fell back on the wet grass.

The four of us resembled a comic routine as we attempted to sanitize our bodies of my vomit. Nate continued to move closer towards me before Kirk grabbed my arms and pulled me up exclaiming, “Okay! Let’s load ‘em up!” as Kim grabbed Nate.

Kirk and Kim assumed their positions of Kim carrying my limp body on the left and Kirk carrying the remaining weight on the right. They opened the small, red sports car driver door and threw me into the already open back seat. Nate already maneuvered the door open and climbed in and helped with pulling my legs into the backseat bucket, vomit and all. Kim threw my wet, white shirt over my head and strapped the seatbelt around me clicking me in.

We continued driving North on Highway 17 as I continued fighting off Nate’s swarmy hands. Every time my head found comfort in the headrest, I awoke to find Nate’s hand up my untuckable shirt. As we approached the condo, I felt the burning in my throat and couldn’t hold it in. “BWAHHHH!!” I upheaved once again projectile vomiting through the headrest and down the back of Kirk’s shirt that he just cleaned mimicking the first episode.

“GOOD GOD!” He screamed as he pulled into the Sea Villa Condominium Complex. Without bothering to take the time to find a parking space, Kirk pulled up next to the bushes bordering the other building with a pool and quickly came to a screeching halt slamming on the brakes. “I say we throw her in the pool!”

“Good fuckin’ call!” Kim yelled as she quickly got out of the car.

Kirk already had the seat pulled forward by the time Kim walked around the car. She grabbed the left arm as Kirk pulled on the right. As they carried me over to the pool, we noticed Bernice sitting next to it in a lounge chair with his handle of Jim Beam. In unison Kim and Kirk counted as they swayed my body to the beat, “One, two, three!” On three, they lifted and launched my 115 pound body into the pool fully clothed. Nate stood next to my grandfather on the side as they both stared at me flailing about in the water. After Kim and Kirk exclaimed they were leaving to get the car cleaned, I noticed my turquoise, lace Victoria Secret bra and all of its contents could be seen from Myrtle Beach.

“Nate,” Bernice said, “I’m going to take Gwen on a little walk.”

I stayed in the pool out of sheer embarrassment and fear of Nate trying to grope me when Bernice started cajoling me, “Come on Gwe-eeen, come on,” he stood at the side of the pool, “We’re gonna go for a little walk, to walk off all that alcohol.”

Using all my strength, I attempted to get out of the pool. As I continued flailing about, I used all my might in a vacant attempt to push myself out of the pool.

“Come ‘ere, Gwen,” Bernice was standing above the ladder, “Come on over here, Gwen!”

I started swimming towards the ladder fully aware that my bra and all its accoutrements were visible. When I arrived to the ladder, Bernice was standing above me smacking his lips, “Come on, Gwen,” he extended his arm over the railing, “You can do it.”

I could. But I didn’t want to.

“Come ‘ere,” he held his hand over the ladder rail, “Come ooon.” He drew out the on slurring his words.

I slowly grabbed the ladder with my hands and placed my feet in the built in steps. My grandfather fell back a step when my bust and all of its accoutrements appeared from the water. I took a moment to adjust my shirt by pulling it from my skin and placing the flaps in their proper places before I took the next step. I wasn’t worried about my loose shorts and the tight elastic band around my waist. They were black and at least my turquoise bra that was as loud as the neon lights at the Pavillion matched some of the miniature flowers.

I continued placing one foot above the other as I gripped the slick, sleek aluminum railings. As I slowly entered the warm air, Bernice took another swig of his Jim Beam after smacking his lips.



“Let’s go for a little walk,” he paused, “to walk off all that alcohol.” He smiled as I swayed back and forth like a skyscraper in gale force winds. I began stumbling towards the stairs to the condo.

“I’m tired,” I meekly responded before he clutched my side with his left arm while gripping the handle of his whiskey.

“Come ooon,” he drew out his on again, “it’s a beautiful night. Let’s go walk off that alcohol,” he repeated himself.

I relented and reticently allowed him to hold my side keeping me on my feet as we slowly walked towards the walkway to the beach. His left arm holding my body, his right carried his almost finished handle of Jim Beam. “Here,” he held the barren bottle to my mouth, “try this.”

I slowly took a swig as he smacked his lips while eerily saying, “Hmm, hmm, hmmm,” as he shook his head back and forth.

I awoke to him on top of me behind the sand dunes before the deck leading over the sand dune. My shirt was wide open exposing my turquoise, solid lace, Victoria Secret bra and everything it contained. Lying down and trapped, I looked around to gather my bearings. While I moved my head around, I caught glimpse of Cindy’s dark condo, the almost finished bottle of Jim Beam, and directly behind me, I finally noticed my mom’s light still on, I began screaming for my life as I tried pushing my father’s father off my fourteen year old body, “MOOOOMMMMM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
MOOOOMMMMM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! MOOOOMMMMM!!!!!!!!!!  
MOOOOMMMMMMMMM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! MOOOOMMMMM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

“Shhh!” He stopped moving up and down, “It’s okay. You don’t need to scream like that,” he whispered in a hushed tone. “It’s okay now,” he began gyrating over my shorts. Thank God I wore the shorts with the extra tight elastic band that only I could pull down over my budding hips. I used all my strength and tried pushing his sixty year old body mass off my fourteen year old body to no avail. I noticed him looking at his almost empty handle of Jim Beam. The second he reached for it, I scooted out from under him, stood up, and took off as fast as I could towards the Atlantic sea. During low tide it seemed as if the beach was three football fields long. I sprinted the entire way leaving the child molester behind in the dune. When I got to the water’s edge, I ran through it fully clothed.

When I got mid-thigh deep, I dove into the wave just like my Granddaddy Gale taught me. This time I was running from my other grandfather. The perverted one. Now I was swimming in the vast Atlantic Ocean far from him.

As the tide continued carrying me towards Atlantic Beach, I continued swimming with all my strength following the current of the waves. The pervert appeared where the waves came crashing in screaming, “GWEEENNNN!!! COME ON GWEEENNNNN!!!! I’M NOT GONNA HURT YOU!!!!!! COME ON GWEEENNNN!!!! COME ON!!! IT’S OKAY!!!! I’M NOT GONNA HURT YOU!!!!” He ran along the beach parallel to my swimming. I didn’t believe him and continued swimming with all my might fighting the current and my wanting to give up and go in to the shore back to the pervert.

A couple approached my grandfather and I could hear them ask, “Is she all right?”

“Oh,” he laughed, “She’s just had a little too much to drink tonight,” I was surprised he wasn’t still carrying his handle of Beam. They started laughing and continued on their way not realizing they were leaving a drunk fourteen year old with the sixty year old child molester.

“GWEEENNN!!!! COME ON GWEEENNN!!!! YOU HAVE THESE NICE PEOPLE UPSET NOW! COME ON GWEEENNN!!!! COME ON!!! YOU CAN DO IT!!!! COME ‘ERE!!!!”

My body was tired, and I could feel my dead weight drifting further out to sea. I felt as if I had been swimming for hours under the star lit sky. I could feel the salt water cleansing my body and my soul from all the seediness it encompassed the entire evening. I could taste the salt on my lips and remembered my grandfather’s pressed to mine moments earlier. I could almost still smell the bourbon on his breath. I continued swimming breast stroke towards Atlantic Beach. The fresh sea air cleared my lungs with every breath I struggled taking.

“GWEEENNN!!!! COME ON GWEEENNN!!!!” His voice ruined my concentration. “COME ON GWEEENNN!!!!” He was flailing his arms as he ran along the shore attempting to get me to come to the shore. “GWEEENNN!!!! COME ON!!!! YOU’RE GONNA DROWN OUT THERE!!!! COME ON!!!!!!”

I felt comfortable in the warm, buoyant water. The taste of salt on my lips counteracted the Jim Beam from the preceding moment. Although I didn’t know where I was going, I continued swimming as the pervert pranced down the shore yelling my name while telling me I was going to drown. Using a combination of strokes, I swam freestyle, breast, back stroke, back butterfly, and back breast. Just as an band loses its elasticity, I

could slowly feel my body losing its strength as I stood motionless and just treaded the salty water.

“GWEEENNNNN!!!! YOU’RE GONNA DROWN!!!!!!! GWEEENNNNN!!!! COME ON! COME TO THE SHORE!!!!” I looked over as I continued treading water and just stared. This is who I was a product of? I began swimming and thought of my Granddaddy Gale. He used to stay at the Marion Earl not far from where I was. Maybe I was swimming to him. My mind raced back to when he first taught me to body surf. He never taught me to run as far as I could from my other grandfather though. I couldn’t swim any longer and knew I needed to come in to shore. It was a matter of life and death.

“GWEEENNNNN!!!! COME ON GWEEENNNNN!!!!” He was motioning his hands to come towards him. He looked like a monkey flailing its arms while screeching its high pitched cries.

I began to make my way back towards shore. Luckily I was still fully clothed.

When I reached the pervert he quickly put his arm around my waist and said, “You could have drown out there? Why did you do that? I’m not gonna hurt you, ya know?”

He already did.

As we continued walking up the beach towards the condo he continued talking while carrying my weight with his left arm attached to my waist. “You know, this is our little secret. Tonight is a very special night, and you can not tell anyone what happened, okay?” He smacked his lips before continuing, “When something like this happens between two people it is very special and nobody else should know about it.”

We walked past the initial sand dune where I awoke to him on top of me gyrating up and down, up and down. “This is a very special place and you can not tell anyone, okay? It is our little secret.”

He continued holding me as I stumbled past my most painful secret.

I awoke naked in my bed to my grandfather’s naked body crawling into my bed pushed up against the wall in the back bedroom. His snake slithered up my inner thigh as my drunken body fought to push him off. Then the dark room became pitch black as I fought for my consciousness. I gave up on fighting him off my 14 year old body.

I awoke to Nate being on top of my naked body on the floor between the two beds. My grandfather’s silhouette was standing in the doorway between the dark room and the brightly lit hall. As I returned to consciousness, I began screaming and fighting Nate.

His small snake paled into comparison to my grandfather's. I could feel his small manhood between the lips of my tainted vagina. My hips kept turning to the best of my ability, but every time I attempted to move to one side or the other, I was trapped. My hips could barely move off the floor under the beds' box springs. Once I reached the box springs, they were too wide to go any further. Paralyzed, Nate continued gyrating up and down, up and down as my grandfather cheered him on.

"Have fun Nate!" He cajoled my sister's best friend as he watched me screaming for help.

54

"Who cares who diddled with Gwen!" is what Aunt Billie said to me when I told her what I saw," Kim told me through the receiver as I laid in bed almost twenty years later.

"What did you see, Kim?" I recently saw one of the girls I was a nanny for being tickled on her privates by another nanny when my own abuse rose to the surface. Almost a decade prior, I stayed awake for nine days straight after witnessing that child molester Hollywooding her twelve year old son. Instead of being asked any questions about my own abuse, I was smacked with the label of bipolar.

"How do you think how I felt Gwen? I'm the one who had to ride home the whole way from Myrtle Beach with Nate not knowing what happened!" Her typical rage victimizing role always came to the forefront.

"Yeah," I acquiesced playing the fiddle, "That must have been really difficult for you. Do you know what they did to me?"

"I don't know what happened to you," she was short and curt, "All I know is after Kirk and I got the car cleaned, we came back to the condo and I found you naked in your bed. I found your clothes soaking wet behind the door in the bathroom. I don't know what happened to you."

"I don't know everything either as you guys got me so drunk I couldn't even stand, let alone fight off Bernie and Nate."

Kim never said she was sorry.

55

"These pictures are shit!" Satan Sonny was in full force. He took the stack of black and whites and threw them across the room.

"I don't care what you say!" Kim yelled back. She was on her semester break from Colorado Mountain College. My mom took Kim there the year before to check out

colleges. Colorado Mountain College provided Kim with a new outlet. Other than waiting tables at the Smithy, her photography was her life. She was hoping it would be her livelihood.

“Yeah!” Sonny hovered over her as she scrambled to pick up her work. “You’re gonna care!” He reached back with his closed fist and with the force of a tumbling skyscraper struck her smack in the face.

She fell over and laid on her side holding her cheek as the streams of tears poured over her face like Victoria Falls falling into the Zambezi River. “Fuck you!” She attempted to scream through the pain.

“What did you say?” He mocked her by holding his fist over her face. “Get this crap and get out of my face!” He realized his employees could probably hear, yet he didn’t care.

She quickly gathered her pictures and raced down the stairs slamming the side door behind her. She went straight to the police station. She was an adult now and had the courage to press charges.

The next day, the police department called her and asked her to return for more questioning. On their way, she and Nate smoked a huge blunt. She had Nate wait in the car in the parking lot when she pulled up to the small building on Oak Street across from the Beanblossom’s and around the corner from our Pine Street house. She was shown to one of the smaller rooms.

After waiting a couple of minutes, the door abruptly opened and two men traipsed in and sat down opposite of the side she was sitting.

“Hi Miss Cassady,” the first one started, “I’m special agent Stopford and this is special agent O’Malley. We’re with the FBI, and we’re here to ask you a few questions about your father.”

“What are you talking about?” Kim asked.

“We understand he punched you in the face yesterday. Is this correct?” Agent Stopford asked.

“Yes,” she still had the bruising to prove it. “See?” Kim turned her head to give them a full frontal snapshot of the bruise. “This is where he punched me.”

“We can see that,” Agent Stopford responded. “We just wanted to ask you a few questions relating to your father and his activities.”

“What do you mean, ‘his activities’?” Kim asked.

“Well,” Agent Stopford hesitated, “For instance, the home he is building.” With that notion, Agent O’Malley pulled out a long tube and unrolled large pieces of paper that resembled a blueprint. “Does he have any removable walls or any hidden rooms?”

“Not that I’m aware of,” Kim’s bloodshot eyes were about to bleed onto the blueprints as she avoided eye contact.

“Do you know anything about his cohorts?” Agent Stopford continued probing.

“What do mean?”

“Do you know any of his friends or current girlfriend?” Agent Stopford asked.

“I know his girlfriend, Cindy Bennett,” Kim paused, “She’s his attorney’s daughter.”

The agents were already aware of the magazine ad saleswoman our father was dating.

“Would you be willing to wear a wiretap?” Both agents glared at Kim.

“Absolutely!” Kim was willing to do anything to nail our father.

“Would you be willing to wear one right now?”

“Yeah,” Kim was still sitting.

The agents looked at each other and smiled.

“Well, good,” Agent Stopford continued, “Thank you for helping us. While Agent O’Malley is going to get the wiring device, I’m going to explain it to you.” As Agent O’Malley stepped out of the small room, Agent Stopford continued.

“Essentially Ms. Cassady,” Agent Stopford paused to find the right words, “We’re trying to get your father or his girlfriend to allude to his cocaine dealings and other illegal activities. We’re simply trying to find as much information as possible. Anything you can help us ascertain what he is doing would be of tremendous help to us. So, do you think you can help us find this out?”

“I can try,” Kim was ecstatic to be wearing a wire on the man that tried to destroy her.

Just as Agent O’Malley walked back into the room, Agent Stopford stood and walked over to the side of the table Kim was sitting at.

“I need you to stand up please,” Agent Stopford instructed.

Just as Kim stood, a look of disappointment fell upon both agents faces.

“What is it?” Kim asked.



“Do you have any other clothes in the car?” Agent Stopford asked as he stared at Kim’s ripped jeans.

“No,” Kim paused, “Why? What’s wrong with these?”

“Well,” Agent Stopford answered, “we need to be able to run the wire through your jeans and with all the tears in them, we won’t be able to run the wire through yours.

“Sorry,” Kim smiled, “These are all I’ve got.”

“Well, we’ll have to try then,” the FBI wasn’t going to give up so easily. “Let’s try the side on the left and run it up the seam.

Agent O’Malley took the small microphone at the end of the wire and began threading it up Kim’s ripped jeans carrying the small microphone in and out of each tear keeping it concealed the whole time. When they got to her mid-thigh he asked her to sit down. Just as she sat down, the wire peeped out of several of the tears exposing itself and the FBI with it.

“Shoot,” Agent Stopford exclaimed. “It isn’t going to work.”

56

“Gwen,” my mother whispered while shaking me, “Gwen, Gwen, come on gal. We need to go to the police station.”

Her attempt at waking me was a far cry from the previous Saturday when I locked Ginger, her best friend Tara and my best friend Keri in our grandparent’s spare bedroom. We awoke to Papa Pervert trying to open the door while bemoaning, “Gweeeeen, Gweeennn! Open the door Gweeen!!!!” After a traditional Southern breakfast belabored by sweet Betty that morning, we raced out the door for the beach. Driving at some points close to 100mph, I couldn’t drive fast enough away from the child molester and closer to my Papa Fin and the beach.

“What’s going on?” It was Saturday morning and our last day at the beach. My best friend Keri was lying next to me and Ginger and Tara were in the other bed.

“Just get dressed quickly,” our mom painstakingly said. “The whole family needs to go to the police station.”

“What’s going on mom?”

“We’ll find out when we get there.”

The Gale clan surrounded the long table as if we were in a board meeting. All cousins, all aunts and uncles, and closest to the head of the table sat my Papa Fin and his wife,

Mama Ginney. As everyone whispered as to what was happening, the door opened. In walked two men clad in suits. They appeared out of place in comparison to our khaki cut offs and t-shirts. Some of my cousins were wearing swim suits preparing themselves for the last day of sun in comparison to their last day sitting in the police station.

As the two agents sat down, one of them exclaimed, “Hi, I’m Agent Lovin and this is Agent Case.” The other agent said, “hello,” before the other one continued, “We’re with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and you’ve been under surveillance all week.” My cousins all looked at one another in horror. This was the first year they got their own house away from all the parents. The levels of debauchery that took place in their dwelling could only be imagined.

“We’ve been protecting you from what appears to be a death threat placed upon Cheryl Gale.”

Everyone looked at my mom as they tried to digest what they heard.

“The information we have is still sketchy, but it has been brought to our attention that one, Francis Neal ‘Sonny’ Cassady has hired a hit man to kill Cheryl Gale. “

“This is bullshit!” I immediately stood up and walked towards the door carrying my Papa Fin’s concerned look with me.

I found the closest chair outside of the door and waited. And waited. And waited. Although I don’t remember, I was told my older cousins took Ginger and I, the only two living with our father, to the Pavillion to ride the rides.

57

The warm breeze blowing off the Atlantic caused my hair to blow as wild as the lions in the Serengeti. Although his friend already left, Eric and I continued making out. Ginger and I were with our dad and Rosalind in Fort Lauderdale. We went every year for Christmas and New Year’s. New Year’s was spent every year at Shooters. As the years progressed, the clothing became more subtle. Clothes from three years prior were louder, more extravagant. On New Year’s that year, I was simply wearing my coral silk shirt and black pants with an ornate, cloth, wide belt. Climbing from yacht to yacht, some of them belonging to my father’s friends, we danced the night away into the early morning hours. I had just turned seventeen and Ginger had just turned fourteen. We were sharing clothes, and I was wearing most of hers that night. Her sheer, organza, black floral print long sleeve shirt, complemented the rose tank top. I rolled up her white, Guess jean shorts making them even shorter.

Ginger and I met Eric and Chris on New Year's. They were celebrating on their Uncle's yacht as we jumped from boat to boat. We ended up staying on their boat as we slowly imbibed in the offered champagne. As the countdown to New Year's started, Eric and Chris vied for my attention in being their New Year's kiss. Ginger was too young. They were only nineteen and endeared us with their Canadian phrases. At the end of the night, they asked if I wanted to go out the following night.

After getting a midnight curfew, I met the Canadians at their red jeep parked in the condominium driveway at eight o'clock. After getting a bite to eat at a smaller restaurant, we decided the only thing we could do being under twenty-one was to go to the beach. It was obvious that Eric and I had flames firing between us and Chris agreed to leave and pick us back up at 11:30 so I wouldn't be late.

As soon as Chris left, Eric began kissing me. He slowly leaned me back in the sand and moved on top. As he unbuttoned each button on Ginger's shirt, I massaged his back. I had never kissed a boy over eighteen. Let alone a Canadian. As we lost track of time, Chris suddenly appeared. "Come on! Eh! We're late!"

I looked down at my watch and noticed that it was midnight. I was already late.

We pulled up to the condominium complex and Eric, a gentleman, got out of the jeep with me. He said he would explain to my father why we were late. The second we walked past the security guard who was staring at all of his video screens, he stood and said, "Your father is looking for you."

Less than a second after he informed us, the elevator door opened to Satan Sonny who was redder than the devil himself. "What the fuck are you doing!!!!?!!!! You're late!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Sir," Eric, already afraid by Sonny's sheer size, attempted, "I'm the reason she is late."

"Oh really?" Sonny approached Eric and picked him up by the front of his shirt before launching him across the marble floor towards the door. Eric landed on his rear and looked over at the stunned security guard for assistance. The helpless look on the security guard's face prompted Eric to make a quick entrance without saying good bye.

"Get the fuck out!" Sonny began approaching Eric as he quickly stammered and ran out the sliding doors before jumping in Chris's jeep and speeding off. I followed his hands motioning all these gestures to Chris as they pulled out of the parking lot longing to be with them forever to avoid what was about to come from this coked out beast.

"Where the fuck have you been?" He squeezed my arm so hard I felt it falling off.

“We went,” he interrupted before I could finish as the elevator doors opened.

“I don’t give a shit! Get in the elevator!” This time he picked me up by the front of my shirt and launched me so hard into the elevator that I hit the back mirror and fell to the floor cracking my skull as I fell. I looked back at the security guard who was just as stunned and shocked as everyone else as he stood there watching not knowing what to do.

As the elevator doors closed behind us, Satan Sonny knelt down and lifted me again by the front of my shirt. He began throwing me around from mirror to mirror while screaming, “You could have been killed! You don’t know who the fuck you were with! You could have been killed!!!!”

I took each strike to the various mirrors in stride. When we finally reached our floor, I had to peel myself off the floor and attempted to walk. He pushed me from behind this time, and I ended up knocking into our door as I attempted to hold back the tears. I wouldn’t let him break me.

He opened the door and threw me in the small room. Ginger was laying down in the bed pretending to be asleep. “Get to bed! We’ll talk about this in the morning!” He screamed as he threw me into the bed. The second his door shut, Ginger rolled over as the tears streamed down my face. I knew I had to leave, but I couldn’t leave Ginger behind to accept all of Satan’s wrath.

“Are you okay?” She whispered.

“No,” I was sobbing a muzzled cry.

“What happened?” She continued.

“Don’t worry about it Ginger,” I sobbed, “Just go back to bed.”

I could feel each blow all over my seventeen year old body. Completely sober of all beer that I drank earlier in the night with the Canadians had dissipated. As each tear crawled down my cheeks, I began devising my escape plan. As much as I couldn’t leave Ginger behind, I had to. I was no longer thirteen years old and escaping the World Wide Wrestling Federation matches that I bequeathed from Kim at our homes on Pine Street and in Timber Ridge. Now I had to escape the wrath of Satan Sonny. All two hundred and thirty pounds of him. I continued tossing and turning all night as I concocted the easiest way to leave. The only person I had left to turn to was our mother. I was going to have to leave Ginger and all my friends to go live in Virginia. That was the only alternative.

I walked in the front door of my mother's crowded condo in Kingsmill. After the FBI alerted her that she had a hit man after her, she quickly packed her glass encased home in Timber Ridge. Her move was precipitated one night at two am when her neighbors called to tell her there was a car with two men in it right outside her front door at the bottom of the hill of her cul de sac. Her home nestled high on a hill contained wall to wall glass on the back side facing out over a deep ravine. Her children's bedrooms rested on the lower level and all had the back wall enclosed in glass with a glass door leading out or in depending on perspective. After I moved out, Ginger took my bedroom above the garage. After she moved out, the room was left vacant.

The condo was as still as the James River in the early dawn when I walked in that afternoon after taking my first day of final exams. Then I heard it coming from the kitchen, a stifled, muffled cry. I knew my father was dead. Given that Henri Poincare modeled chaos theory on my family, normally the house was full of screaming usually combined with fighting while the television was blaring in the background as white noise. I walked to the sound emanating from the kitchen. Ginger was sobbing in my mother's shoulder as my mother held her close.

"What's wrong?" I carefully cultivated a concerned demeanor.

"Read this gal," my mom handed me the Zionsville Times Sentinel. Circled was the article emblazoned with the headline, "Prominent Local Businessman Attempts Suicide". I continued reading "prominent local businessman in the 8100 block of Hunt Club Road (our home was the only home in that block) attempts suicide via carbon monoxide asphyxiation. Among the items found were five letters for his daughters." The tears began pouring down my face. I couldn't breathe. I continued reading, "his ex-wife began resuscitation attempts when Officer Robinson arrived and assisted in reviving him before paramedics arrived."

I stood in the kitchen sobbing and shaking and otherwise frozen, unable to move. I just held the Zionsville Times Sentinel unable to move. My sister Ginger was still crying into my mother's shoulder. My cousin Kirk came into the small space in the center of the small, three bedroom condo my mom, my cousin, three sisters, and myself were sharing like smooshed sardines. He wrapped his long arms around me and held me tight as I sobbed into his shoulder. I could feel his shirt becoming soaked from my tears and snot. He held me tight as thoughts of who would walk me down the aisle crept to the forefront of my psyche.

I suddenly pulled away from Kirk and looked at my mom and Ginger exclaiming, "He would have never have done this if I wouldn't have moved away! The only reason he did

this is because I left!” I picked up the Zionsville Times Sentinel again and read the entire article. The tears poured onto the recycled paper.

My mom faintly said, “Gwen, that is not true. You can’t believe that. I’m so sorry Gal that he did this to you guys.”

“That’s not true! He wouldn’t have done this! The newspaper is dated Monday. Why didn’t you tell us until now!” I screamed.

“Gal,” my mother spoke in a hushed tone, “it is not your fault.”

“Yes it is!”

She had already let go of holding Ginger and walked over to me. She wrapped her arms around me and held me close as she rocked me back and forth. The sobs started pouring from the pit of my soul. She brought her forehead less than two inches from mine to stare me directly in the eyes. Soul to soul. Her blue eyes pierced mine as she said, “Gwen, look at me gal,” she looked more intently never allowing her gaze to leave, “Your father is a very sick man. Your leaving did not make him do this. Okay?”

I pulled away as I said between the dissipating sobs, “Yes he did! He would have never have done this if I haven’t left! Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Gal, I wanted you to get through your exams before I told you and your sisters,” she paused, “Brooke called and Ginger answered the phone. Brooke read the paper and told Ginger what happened.” She hesitated again for a second before continuing, “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you Gal. I just wanted you to get through exams.”

“I need to go home Mom. He did this because I left,” the tears were still streaming down my face, “I have to go back home Mom.” I still had Mr. Steffey’s Economics and Mr. Boyd’s and Miss Akers’ History exams to take tomorrow.

I walked in the dining room where Ginger was sitting at the head of the dining room table and sat down a couple of feet from her at the chair facing the 7<sup>th</sup> hole of the primary golf course in our mother’s gated community. “Can you believe this?”

She looked at me and started crying again. I don’t ever remember hugging any of my sisters when we were young and certainly not when we were older. I don’t remember hugging her then either.

“It’s going to be okay Ginger,” I said when the tears began streaming down my face again as well.

As we wept and wept our cries were interrupted by the doorbell.



My mom ordered a pizza as food was always used as a comforting, healing tactic or to just keep us complacent. The last thing I wanted to do was eat, especially pizza.

She walked into the dining room and holding the large, square Dominoes box in her right hand she looked at Ginger and I and divulged, “Girls, you should eat some of the pizza.” Food was simultaneously utilized as a tool and a weapon in our house. “I’ll lay it here on the table,” our mother laid the box down in front of us, opened the box, laid down some paper plates, and said again, “You really need to eat.”

Ginger and I had already ceased sobbing, and I picked up a slice as the tears continued to fall down my cheeks. Ginger followed suit. She was still living with our father and came to our mother’s for summer break after the Zionsville school system let out earlier than the Virginia schools. She had only been there about a week.

“What are you going to do?” Ginger asked me.

“I’m going to go back the day after my exams,” I paused not thinking she might want to go as well, “Do you want to go?”

“I don’t know,” she still whimpered as she should.

“Well, you can come back with me if you want,” I focused on breathing and was no longer crying. I took a bite of the hot pie and said while looking intently at Ginger, “I still can’t believe he did this.”

“I know,” she stared blankly at the wall at the far end of the table not touching her pizza.

As Ginger and I were in the dining room, Kirk and my mom were talking in the kitchen until Kirk went upstairs to get Amanda and Kelly for the pizza. I forgot about them being home.

As soon as I finished the first piece I reached for a second. I began devouring the piece when all the thoughts of what I would do without my father in my life raced through my mind. Who would walk me down the aisle? Who would teach my boys how to play football? Who would go to my college graduation?

I couldn’t imagine the implications on my day to day life. That was too difficult a concept to grasp, and I was incapable of thinking about it at that moment. I could only think of the future without him. I brought the slice to my mouth, and as I began chewing my food, I began thinking more about my life without my father and could taste the salt of my tears as I chewed each morsel.

I looked at Ginger, “Do you think you want to go back?”

“I don’t know,” she shook her head as she slowly took her first bite.

Amanda and Kelly sauntered downstairs after Kirk. Everyone congregated around the cluttered glass top table with brass base. It was the same table our mom had in her house on Timber Ridge. The several thousand square foot, six bedroom home managed to cram its way into the three bedroom condo. Obviously much of the furniture was sold, given away, or otherwise loaned to family members. Although the condo was crammed with furniture including our great grandmother's grand piano, there were a lot more people than belongings crammed into the small space. When our mother started dating a NASA scientist, the only place our mother could find for her 'private' time was under the grand piano.

Now our home was playing a different tune. A silence never heard before, the only sounds heard were muffled snuffles.

"Here girls," our mom handed them two paper plates, "Have some pizza."

Kirk already picked up a slice and as he chewed he said, "Committing suicide is something a coward would do."

I ignored him as best as I could and continued chewing myself. As I finished my third piece, I realized I had three finals the following day. I took my paper plate and folded it as I placed it in the trash. "I'm going upstairs to study," my voice cracked as I choked on more tears as I continued blaming myself for my father's attempt at death.

I walked upstairs as I started silently sobbing. Years of Kim punching me and beating me into oblivion and doubling the pain if I cried, taught me to sort through my emotions in private coupled with silently holding my tears. Once I turned right down the hallway, the streams of salty tears blended with streams of mucus clouded my vision. I tripped over one of Kelly's toys at the foot of my door, but caught myself on the door jam. I turned right into my room, shut the door, and face planted into my bed. I cried and cried for what felt like hours. The bed was so soaked under where I was crying like a baby that it was as if someone wet the bed.

I eventually fell asleep and awoke to my mother shaking me speaking in her soft voice. "Gal, wake up," she shook my shoulder harder as she sat on the edge of the bed near my developed hips which were bigger than most of the girls at my new school. "Gwen," she still maintained her soft voice as I slowly peeled open my crusted shut eyes, "you need to get up gal and get ready for school." I wanted to ask if I had a really bad dream, but I already knew the answer.

"Mom," I looked through her, "I didn't study for my exams today." I started tearing.

“Come here gal,” she opened her arms as I sat up and wrapped my arms around her. She began rocking back and forth as I continued crying into her shoulder. “It’s going to be okay, Gal,” she said over and over as if she was a broken record as she slowly rocked me as if I was still a baby.

“Mom,” I looked at her as the tears and mucus combination dripped into my mouth as I spoke, “I’m going home tomorrow. I have to.”

“Listen to me Gal,” she used both arms to grab my shoulders as if she was trying to shake sense into me, “Your father is a very sick man Gwen. Him doing what he did is not your fault. You need to believe that, okay?”

“Mom, I don’t think he would have done this if I wouldn’t have left.”

“Gal, listen to me, you know that he is not a normal person. Look what he did to you in Florida which caused you to move here. Look at what he’s done to all of us over the years, Gwen,” her eyes never left mine.

“I know Mom,” I hesitated, “but I still want to go home.” My crying transformed into sniffing.

“I know Gal,” she shook her head maintaining eye contact the entire time. “Let’s get through today first.” She pursed her defeated lips. “You do what you need to do, Gal.” She continued, “I spoke with your school today already, and they are aware of the situation. They said to go ahead and come in and take your exams and just do the best you can do. Your teachers will be understanding.”

“Okay,” I lay back down heaving my head onto the dryer sheet smelling pillowcase briefly looking away at the hounds tooth sport coat with the patches over the elbows I wore to school yesterday before engaging in eye contact once again. “Mom,” I paused, “I still can’t believe he would do this. Why would he do this?”

“I don’t know, Gal,” she shook her head back and forth, “Just remember that he is a very sick person and this is NOT your fault,” she said as she lowered her jaw, jutted her forehead forward, “Okay? Do you understand? You need to know that, Gwen.”

“I know, mom,” my bottom lip quivered as I shook my head yes.

“All right Gal,” she said, “Why don’t you get ready for school.”

“Okay,” I responded as I looked out the window praying to the exam God that I would pass. “Mom, I have no idea how I’m going to pass my exams.”

“Just do the best you can, Gal,” she paused, “I’m sure your teachers will be lenient.”

As I furiously washed my hair I tried to think about my impending finals but my focus kept shifting to my father trying to kill himself. I couldn't think of anything else.

I didn't pick up Sean that day and continued on to Lafayette by myself. I walked into Mr. Boyd and Ms. Aker's class and the look they gave me insinuated that they already knew. "Good morning, Gwen," my teachers said as they gave me a look of pity combined with a somber sadness. Ms. Akers walked over to me as I sat down at my desk. She waited for me to get situated before she leaned over and said as she put her right hand on my shoulder as she knelt down and said, "Honey, we know what happened. Just do your best, and you'll do fine."

Mr. Steffey was standing in the hall peeking through the door. He stood there patiently waiting for the other students to rush through the door. Ms. Akers walked up to him as he leaned into her and held up a light blue piece of paper. He put his hand on the edge of my chair and the other on the table in front of me as he leaned down and whispered in my ear, "I want you to step outside for a moment."

"Okay," I looked up and half smiled. He turned his back and headed towards the door as I stood and followed. He held the door open and smiled with his lips pursed while holding a piece of baby blue paper.

He slowly brought his forced half smile out of a fake half moon and looked solemn as he clasped his hands in front of him, "I'm really sorry for what happened."

"Thank You," I attempted the other half of his smile. I looked down at his shoes.

He placed his hand on my shoulder as he lowered his head as he slowly lured me to look up.

I matched his half smile as I looked up.

"Look," he paused, "I wanted to give you something." He had a baby blue piece of paper in his right hand that he slowly handed to me.

"What's this?"

"It's just a little something I wanted you to have," he said as I began to open it.

He motioned his hand back and forth as he said, "No, no, no."

I raised my eyebrow, "Why?"

"I want you to just wait and read it," he paused as he looked to his left, "after you take your exam."

"Okay," I looked at him as I gripped the piece of paper. "Thank you, I appreciate it."

He held his finger up as I started walking towards him. “You are not to read this until after you finish your exam.”

I slid the blue piece of paper that was folded into fourths into the right pocket of my blazer, told my Economics teacher thanks, and walked back to my desk thinking of my dad the whole time.

I sat back in the chair at my desk in the back of the room on the right hand side on the aisle. Ms. Akers and Mr. Boyd stood at the front of the room explaining how the final exam was a mixture of true and false questions, multiple choice, and essay. They began handing out the exams individually. Ms. Akers knelt down again at my desk when she handed me the exam and whispered in my left ear as my desk was furthest left on the aisle two rows from the back, “Just do your best, you’ll do just fine.”

59

Cruising west on I-64, I was about to pass exit 118A, the exit for the information center for UVA. The thought of applying had not even crossed my mind. My mind was currently consumed with the thought of my father dying. Who would walk me down the aisle? Who would attend my high school graduation next year? Who would attend my college graduation? My mind wandered to an empty church, me standing at the end of a long aisle adorned with a long, white silk sheath to walk on, only instead of my father’s arm being on one side, I am left alone to walk down the aisle to his casket.

As the tears streamed down my face, my mind raced back to the smell of donuts in our home on Pine Street. We knew our father was in town the second we awoke. Given I was always the first to awake, I would race downstairs and pick out my favorite chocolate covered ones where the icing drizzled to the bottom of the box and sprinkled with my favorite colors. He precipitated bringing the donuts home when he strode into town on a monthly basis to help with the end of the month financials. I would sit at the table alone slowly eating each of my two donuts delicately savoring each morsel in peace and quiet before taking a long bath before the morning chaos began.

The tears continued streaming down my face as I approached Waynesboro. I always thought of Batman as I drove through waiting for my Bruce Wayne to magically appear to save me from the pain and agony. I could taste the salt of my tears as they streamed down my face. I longed for the sweetness of the donuts and for life to return to how it was, no matter the unforgotten daily misery.

The thought of running up Pine Street with my dad when I was six years of age, my double stride could barely keep up with his long stride caused by his thirty-eight inch inseam, caused another influx of tears. Just as I would regain composure by gripping the wheel of my old beater 1976 Mercedes Benz as I hugged the turns on I-64, another influx of tears encapsulated each memory. I immediately thought of the summer I tried out for football. When I came home from school

.....  
Reading to the toddlers at Lubasi Children's home was heart wrenching. I arrived the day before. As I walked into their play room, all the toddlers jumped up and down shouting, "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!"

It reminded me of my first visit to Africa six years prior. That trip was precipitated by finding out the man I gave my heart and soul to was screwing teenage hookers. As my first real relationship, if one could call it that, Mike would parade me around his University's campus. We would jet set to New York, stay at the Ritz where he encouraged all employees to call me Mrs. instead of correcting them. Jetting off to London, Paris, California, Miami, dining at the best restaurants and staying at the nicest hotels would never suffice for either of us. He would have me go out to dinner with him and his wife, babysit his adopted daughter in order for us to cultivate a relationship for when I would be her stepmother. All of these compounded lies were told of course before our fateful lunch in Duke University's dining hall. As I told him how the person who introduced us was thinking of telling his wife how I was his mistress, Mike, without missing a beat exclaimed, "I will have him killed!"

He dove his fork, carried by his right hand covered by his lavender shirt cuffed by his Presidential cufflink he obtained when he was an intern for the first George Bush, into his

salad. I followed the swift motion over his shoulder to find Bill and Melinda Gates on the wall marking those that donated \$200,000. Mike's name was two places under it.

After a heart-wrenching, tumultuous two year relationship of him feigning multiple suicide attempts to win me back coupled with not letting me date, not letting me have any friends, reading all my emails, coupled with making me spend up to a week at his wife's house when she was tending to her dying mother, I finally had enough. When I found out that the money I was paying him for rent on my boutique in downtown Wilmington was being spent on teenage hookers, I allowed him to buy me out of the commercial real estate venture as the settlement. Booking the first available ticket to Africa was the first thing I did.

This trip to Africa was much different. My heart and soul belonged here and not to some cheap, small penis narcissistic, egotistical sociopath. Everyone tried to warn me. Those closest to me cared. Unfortunately, every time I attempted to leave or told him I was going to go out with someone, his animalistic tendencies would erupt. His animalistic nature coupled with his sociopathic tantrums would disable my leaving him. I gave up on my own happiness long before his first feigned suicide attempt. I gave up on leaving him when he told me, "I'll hire some Mexican to kill him," when referring to the man who introduced us. I escaped to Africa the first time to escape from him killing me. Now, I was returning on a different note.

"Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!" The children kept me alive. The children held my spirit. Their souls encapsulated mine. As little four year old Maya and little four old Isaac jumped up and down screaming "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!" they just wanted to be held. They just wanted to know that someone out there cared. They just wanted to be loved. They just wanted to love.

They are love.