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No Perfect Family

CHAPTER 15

The wide-body Airbus A310 banked west and then started climbing to thirty-five thousand feet. Beth took a deep breath and then opened the plain white envelope. The protestant's seventh commandment was different than the one she learned all thru Catholic school. It really didn't matter, the Chanel N°5 perfume that had been on Tom's pillow was still lingering in her head. She didn't want to read the letter.

Beth I'm so sorry for the adulteress act that I committed. Up until last week you were the only person that I've been intimate with. I was the elder and I should have been stronger. It just happened. Maybe if Tina were my biological niece my desires and thoughts toward her would have been different? I'm not making excuses for my actions. I let you down. I let myself down and most of all I let God down. Don't bother coming back to Africa. I'm contacting the home office to hopefully get transferred to a staff position at Glory and Praise University in Kansas.

Tom

Tears dropped from Beth's chin onto her blouse, she closed her eyes and pushed her head back into the seat. All of Tom's rude actions for the last three days now made sense. *I hate Tina! She's always flirted with Tom. Why her? It's probably part my fault. I wasn't chaste when we got married, like Tom. I lived with someone for a few months in college. I was never up to Tom's standards...*

In a weird way Beth felt relieved. Now, Tom wasn't that all pure perfect half of their marriage. For at least twenty years she carried

34 remorse for a promiscuous start at college. St Mary's all girls' high
35 school left her a bit naïve. The first month away at state college to
36 have the star linebacker take an interest in a shy Christian girl made
37 her feel loved and wanted. It felt like all the romance novels with
38 alpha-male characters that she read passionately over so many lonely
39 weekends and summer breaks.

40 Before football season was over Rex had moved into her tiny studio
41 apartment. It wasn't a good relationship from the start. The alpha
42 dominated relationship turned violent after Rex tested positive for
43 steroids. The last game of the season the coach pulled his scholarship
44 and cut him from the team. Thankfully a college resource officer
45 helped Beth with a restraining order and posted that Rex wasn't
46 allowed on campus. Rex moved to California.

47 Over winter Beth poured her heart and soul into distance running
48 and then tried out for the track team. By her third collegiate track year
49 she had earned the anchor spot on the 1500 meter relay team and
50 was competitive at the 3000 meter steeplechase. She loved the
51 solitude of ultra long distance running but those events were
52 dominated by Kenya and Ethiopian athletes.

53 "Madam, when you finish, if you could extinguish your reading
54 light it makes it easier for other passengers to sleep."

55 Beth wiped at the tears running down her face. "Sorry, I just
56 wanted to read this letter."

57 "You look upset. Can I get you anything?"

58 "Yes, a glass of wine to help me sleep." Beth turned off the reading
59 light and then folded up Tom's letter. She pushed her head back into
60 the headrest and closed her eyes. *Hail Holy Queen Mother of Mercy in
61 my weeping and vale of tears I'm asking for your prayers and
62 intercession. Please...*

63 "Cabernet Sauvignon has more melatonin than white wine. It
64 should help you sleep." The attendant spoke just above a whisper and
65 handed Beth a plastic glass.

66 "Thank you," Beth replied. As she consumed the red wine the
67 blame game started up again. For a moment it was Tom's fault. For
68 sure it was Tina's fault. But then, Beth blamed herself — not being

69 able to conceive a child was on her. Tom loved children, he coached
70 boy's little league back in Texas and always talked about a large
71 family.

72 Way back before Tom was in to her life the college nurse
73 suggested backing off endurance running and maybe even giving up
74 track to see if her menstrual cycles got regular again. That was a big
75 ask, plus it was just a suggestion. By her senior year with Beth
76 running at anchor position, the women set a record for the 1500 meter
77 relay. Her alma mater still holds that track record.

78 Graduate school was where Tom came into Beth's life. He was a
79 womanizer; but in a different way than any football star or basketball
80 player. He was suave, confident and always had connections. Like
81 Beth, he too thought a master's in education would be a good degree
82 and could lead to at best a middle school coaching position.

83 On their first official date Tom picked Beth up in an official Army
84 Hummer; he was wearing a dark blue Army dress uniform. He had
85 made reservations at a famous all American steak house. The owner
86 seated them at his best table and gave them complimentary drinks in
87 appreciation of Tom's service to country. After dinner Tom ditched the
88 blue Army dress jacket and white shirt for a sports shirt and
89 windbreaker. He had front row tickets at an outdoor Hank Williams
90 concert.

91 It was twenty-three hundred military time when Tom dropped Beth
92 off at her tiny apartment. He took her hand, walked her to the door
93 and after a gentle kiss on the cheek said, "Ms. Elizabeth Ann if you are
94 not busy tomorrow maybe we could have a picnic lunch." Tom barely
95 got the Hummer back to the National Guard motor pool before
96 midnight.

97 Beth hand washed a pair of running shorts and steamed the best
98 blouse she owned. Going to bed way late was useless; she didn't get
99 but thirty minutes of sleep. From day break until eleven o'clock Beth
100 peeked out the curtains a minimum of fifty times.

101 Finally, a red convertible pulled in to the parking spot right in front
102 of her apartment door. Tom still had on golf attire from an earlier tee
103 off. He grabbed a bouquet of flowers from the passenger seat. Dinner

104 a concert and now a Sunday picnic with a soldier was something to
105 covet over. Yet, in a weird way it felt too mushy even phony, but deep
106 down her heart swooned.

107 At first Tom seemed like a showoff and big flirt. But, it was their
108 eighth date before he even stepped foot inside her tiny apartment.
109 Their entire time dating period Tom never stayed overnight. Tom did
110 embellish and liked being around affluence and money. It hurt when
111 her Dad called out Tom's as a big bull shitter. When it came to living a
112 chaste life Tom was overly committed — that bothered Beth.

113 When Tom was in sixth grade his older sister got pregnant her
114 freshman year at high school. Their parents made the decision that the
115 baby should be put up for adoption. Shortly after the newborn was out
116 of site but not out of mind his sister started sniffing glue and other
117 inhalants. Two and a half years later Tom found her dead in the
118 basement of the night of her senior prom. That night the father of her
119 baby was crowned king and her once best friend was queen of the
120 prom. Alcohol and Prozac were what his parents coped with a family
121 decision gone awry.

122 Two year later the Seton had sunk further into despair. Tom
123 skipped his eight grade promotions. That night all alone in the
124 basement he played video games. It was a way to strike out so to
125 make the life-like avatar's feel his pain. That was the night Tom
126 decided to join the military to become just like a video game
127 combatant.

128 Beth's family had their own drama; coming from a large catholic
129 family of eight everyone learned to deal with their own problems. It
130 wasn't honoring thy father and mother — it was obey Mom or deal
131 with Dad when he got home from work. If you wanted something you
132 would have to earn it for yourself. When Beth wanted a bicycle she
133 picked berries an entire summer to pay for it. Beth also paid for her
134 college education. Her Dad didn't speak much to her after Rex moved
135 in and didn't care much for Tom's better than thou manner.

136 "Madam, may I take the empty wine glass?" The flight attendant
137 gently asked.

138 Beth refocused her eyes. "Sure, go right ahead."

139 “Could I offer you a pillow?” The attendant put her hand on an
140 overhead compartment latch.

141 “Yeah that would be nice.” Beth reclined her seat and barely moved
142 her lips. “God please help me, show me a sign or...”

143 “Here’s a pillow. The flight attendant handed a pillow to Beth over
144 the back of the seat. “You can rest peacefully, this pilot always flies
145 south of the Devil’s Triangle.”

146 “What?” Beth brain snapped from good to evil.

147 “I heard you praying. A lot of travelers get nervous if we fly over
148 the Devil’s Triangle.”

149 “Oh...” It took a moment for Beth’s brain to settle. “People still
150 believe in that Bermuda Triangle stuff?”

151 “I sure do. You don’t believe in Satan?” The attendant picked up
152 the wineglass and empty bag of pretzels and then worked herself
153 toward the back of the plane.

154 That wasn’t the sign Beth had prayed for. It took awhile for the
155 Cabernet Sauvignon rich in melatonin to start working. Beth’s heart
156 rate slowed as she drifted into a REM level sleep state. She dreamed
157 about verse 30 in the first book in the bible when Rachel said to Jacob,
158 *“Here is Bilhah, my servant, have intercourse with her, and let her*
159 *give birth on my knees, so that I too may have children through her.*
160 This was more than a dream! Beth twisted her head side to side but
161 couldn’t wake herself.

162 Another Old Testament narrative invaded Beth’s gray space. It was
163 when Abraham had been living in Canaan. Sarah his wife took her
164 Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his
165 wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. Beth was now moaning,
166 these were not dreams they were vivid messages from afar.

167 A cold freezing sensation smothered over Beth’s right hand. She
168 moaned even louder. The coldness moved to her forehead, it felt like
169 an unknown entity was trying to freeze her thoughts. It would take an
170 outside effort to pull Beth from this deep visionary slumber. “Sweetie
171 it’s okay. You can wake up now. It’s okay. Jesus loves you.”

172 Beth water soaked eyes slowly opened. All she could see was
173 blurry bluish white. Her chest was pounding. Her hand felt knotted.

174 “You’re okay the flight attendant pulled the blue ice pack back from
175 Beth’s forehead. “There you go sweetie. Those nasty night tremors are
176 hard to wake up from.” The attendant lifted a second ice pack off of
177 Beth’s hand.

178 “Those were the most vivid dreams I’ve ever had,” Beth panted
179 out.

180 “You’ve been sleeping hard for at least five hours. You were
181 clenching your hands so tight that you broke a fingernail.”

182 Beth put her hand over her heart. It was still racing. “It must have
183 been the wine.”

184 “Or maybe a divination from above”

185 “A divination, what do you mean?”

186 “You know a calling. A supernatural message from above.” The
187 attendant paused. “Or a trick message from the dark side. Did you
188 buy any Juju souvenirs while in Africa?”

189 “No not at all.” Beth shook her head side to side. “You are starting
190 to scare me.”

191 “That a big issue for you tourist from the United States, so few of
192 you believe that evil exists.” The African flight attendant continued
193 with the warning.

194 A cold chill ran down Beth’s spine when she remembered about the
195 small handmade straw doll that she bought from a dock vendor when
196 Tom showed her the floating Makoko slums. Beth was instructed to
197 hang the fertility icon on the door lintel of the master bedroom. She
198 packed that doll in her carryon bag that was in the overhead
199 compartment right above her!

200 For the rest of the flight Beth didn’t dare sleep; she felt weighted
201 and pressed into her seat. When she felt the tires bump down on the
202 Dallas Fort Worth runway it felt like something leaped in her stomach.
203 She hurried up the jet bridge and stopped at a group of waste
204 containers. She put her carryon bag on top of the green recycle bin
205 and quickly dug out the straw and burlap doll and dumped it into blue
206 garbage bin. She then rushed toward a restroom to wash off what felt
207 like powder on her hands. She exited the rest room and looked for a

208 spot in the terminal to entreat. She searched for a spiritual warfare
209 prayer on her phone and then read:

210 **Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in**
211 **battle. Be our protection against the wickedness**
212 **and snares of the devil; May God rebuke him, we**
213 **humbly pray; And do thou, O Prince of the**
214 **Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust into**
215 **hell Satan and all evil spirits who wander through**
216 **the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.**

217
218 Almost immediately Beth felt as though an enormous burden had
219 been lifted. She then checked the world clock on her phone; it was
220 almost 4:35 pm in Nigeria. *Tom should be at the cargo holding area at*
221 *the Abuja International airport getting Cain and Able out of*
222 *quarantine.* Beth hit **#1** speed dial on her phone

223 Tom was rushing across the parking lot and stopped to take the
224 call. "Beth, I'm so sorry about what happened. However you want to
225 handle our property and assets will have to wait until I get back home.
226 I hope to wrap up things over here in three weeks or so. I'm pressed
227 for time right now"

228 "Tom, wait and listen to me! I had a vision on the plane. It was so
229 vivid and all biblical. Now, I know for sure that God has a plan for us.
230 He wants Tina to be our surrogate! Just like Hagar was for Abraham
231 and Sarah..." Beth was almost out of breath with enthusiasm.

232 "Beth, you are misunderstanding that story in Genesis. Sarah and
233 Abraham did have their own son. Abraham should have trusted God to
234 bring about His promise of a son with Sarah. Isaac was born when
235 Abraham was eighty-six years old."

236 "Tom I know the story. Hagar bore Abrahams' first son Ishmael,"
237 Beth replied with determination.

238 "So you know that Abraham banished Hagar and Ishmael to Mecca
239 and never had contact with them after Isaac was born."

240 Beth wasn't listening, she quipped back. "What are you going to
241 say if Tina is pregnant right now?"

242 "I'm going to say that is impossible!"

243 “Why are you saying this stuff Tom? Maybe it’s my calling to raise
244 Tina’s unwanted baby. We could pay her to be our surrogate.”

245 “Beth, I’m telling you this because I didn’t have intercourse with
246 Tina. It didn’t go that far.”

247 “What? Your letter said you committed adultery.”

248 “I did...” Tom looked across the parking lot at the cargo pickup area
249 for the quarantine entrance. “When Tina came out of the shower her
250 towel fell off. I got aroused. Tina rubbed up against me but there was
251 no intercourse.”

252 “What! That’s not adultery.” Beth felt played like click-bait.

253 “I let Tina give me a massage. I touched her breasts and I had an
254 orgasm. I’m sorry Beth. I should have had more self control.”

255 “You’re telling me you didn’t screw that bitch? That’s not how I
256 understood your letter!”

257 “Beth, adultery, infidelity and just looking at women lustfully are all
258 sins against the flesh. Thou shalt not commit adultery is one of the
259 commandments.”

260 Beth hated it when Tom used the Ten Commandments or his in
261 depth knowledge of scripture. “So now what? Where do we go from
262 here? We need to talk face to face.”

263 Tom looked at his Rolex. He only had twenty minutes before the
264 quarantine pickup department closed for the day. “Beth after I get
265 Cain and Able loaded up I’m meeting up with your friend Dan. I’ll call
266 you afterwards.”

267 “I’ll be waiting for your call. We have a lot to discuss.”

268 “We do Beth. I’m sorry for everything. If you want you can start
269 the paperwork.”

270 “Paperwork for what?”

271 “A divorce! At least we didn’t get married in your church so you
272 won’t have to go thru the annulment process.”

273 Elizabeth couldn’t get her head wrapped around Tom’s insistence to
274 start divorce proceedings. For twenty years they had dealt with the
275 reality that most likely no baby would ever stir in her womb. Not to
276 grow old with Tom was something that had never crossed her mind.
277 Now, he was pushing her away!

278 Somehow, Tina still had to be in the picture. The desire of the flesh
279 often overcomes rational thinking and trashes traditional wedding
280 vows. Catholics have two commandments on not to covet. Beth didn't
281 care — Tina needed to be totally out of their lives.