



Lemon Dream



Luciano E. DeSanctis

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Book cover design by Luciano E. DeSanctis.

Book edited by the author himself.

In memory of my father, Nicola DeSanctis.
"Thanks, Pappa for your guidance and love."

And ...

To my mother, Leva Orticelli-DeSanctis,
who was always there encouraging me
to write, write — write!

No tongue can fully express my love for both of you.

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*Form transforms an idea into art and is the instrument
by which artistic truth is achieved; it is art itself.*

DeSanctis, Francesco (1817–1883)

THE PLAYGROUND



Faith Victoria Saylor rushed out of the main entrance of the Herberg Middle School, extremely angry at her teacher for being humiliated in front of her class and for being detained for ten minutes. And it wasn't even his fault. She was the prime suspect and had been falsely accused of stealing a 14k gold pen from her teacher all because she had repeated 5th grade last year, due to insufficient grades and behavioral problems.

She charged into the crowd, making a sudden swerve, and then crossed between two or more parked school buses that were in line along with cars waiting to pick up the students. As she ran, the cool November air whistled a clear, high-pitched sound inside Faith's ears, which was bothersome. Yet, she kept running home, trying to burn the fiery anger out of her. The sun looked very pale and had begun to dim, and it would not be long before the temperature in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, would drop below 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

After crossing the main road to the *Plunkett Elementary School* playground, Faith gave it all she had, as if running like a sprinter in a race. After a while, the release of so much energy in such a short time was exhausting. Her backpack had gotten to be like an anchor, dragging her down to a complete stop. The air in her nostrils felt cold. Her lungs felt like they were about to explode. She stopped and then began to pace back and forth, fighting to regain her breath.

It took a few seconds or so for Faith to breathe normally. She felt hot and unzipped her long, ragged jacket, and then quickly tucked back her long, fine, messy hair around her ears.

She stopped again. Then a sudden, intense pelvic pain caused her to double over. Faith was absolutely still until the pain flickered, dwindled, and vanished. She had just recently started her period and totally forgot about having such early signs. Her legs were weak. Regardless, she walked on, swishing through the dry, coppery leaves that had drifted on the ground. After taking a few steps, her foot caught on a broken branch and tripped. However, Faith swiftly regained her balance, rubbed the dull pain that had rushed in behind her knee joints, unaware that her ache was due to growing pains, which had steadily been expanding her scrawny body. Still, Faith carried onward. She needed to hurry; to get home on time to relieve her five-year-old brother's provider chaperone.

Her home was just behind the four-foot, rusty chain-link fence that surrounded the park. The apartment was one of the five-story urban condominiums that the city built in the 1960s, along with the schoolyard.

Out of the corner of her eye, Faith saw her schoolmate, Akira Hoshi, running. "Hey, girlfriend! Wait up!" yelled the out-of-breath Akira, while trying to catch up to Faith.

Faith looked back at Akira with a sulky face. She watched her run by a few elderly people who were walking their dogs, annoyed that she had to wait. Not far, Faith's eyes then turned to a group of giggly fifth-grade girls who had gathered on the track for their practice run. Faith loved running, and had been on their team last year. She had taken the second-place trophy in the 55-meter dash, also ran well in all four qualifying matches, making the semifinals in each match. That was last year; however, these days she was too busy looking after her brother, Barnaby.

Unexpectedly, Faith saw a runner accelerate into the distance, and she watched the student intensely, wondering if

she would beat her run time. "A lot of luck, kid," she whispered, and then smiled smugly at her old coach, who was busy staring at his stopwatch.

Akira was approaching. "What's up?" asked Faith. "I got to get going." She waited for her friend to catch her breath, wondering why she wanted to be with her. After all, Faith was somewhat homely, the middle school's outcast, the only freckly, acne-faced, red-haired girl who no one wanted to be associated with. So why was this girl running over to be with her? *I don't get it*, she thought.

"I can't get my Mamma on the phone. I left a message for her to call me," Akira said with heavy breaths. She then made a motion to hand over her mobile phone to Faith, "Here, I'll let you use mine to call your mother." Faith waved her hand no, although she did consider using the phone to call her Daddy who lived in New York City. Oh, how she would love to tell him everything about how for several months, her mother was punishing her by not allowing her to take classical ballet lessons, only to realize that she did not have her father's new phone number at hand. However, even if she did call him, it had been more than a year since they communicated. Thoughts then flashed through her mind. *Why did Daddy give up the fight for visitation? Why won't he call her at school? Could it be that he just stopped loving her altogether? It's because now with nasty acne all over her face, she looked increasingly hideous more than ever!* She often reflected on these questions. Ever since her dad had lost custody of her, they had seen very little of each other. *So, what could her father say or do?* She considered. Besides, she had a real fear of her manic-depressive mother and antagonizing her would surely get her in further trouble. It did not matter; Faith simply had to learn to be more patient with her mother, because the dog had indicated her willingness to allow her to

go back to her ballet lessons when she was good and ready. Therefore, the best thing for her to do was to stay motivated and show her mother that she is doing well in the new school. However, the complicated schedule, the difficult academics, the social pressures, and the heavy homework assignments that she detested were taking their toll. On top of that, looking after her rascally brother was a grueling job. Regardless, her dream was to go back to taking ballet lessons.

“You’re telling your mother about her, aren’t you?” Akira asked with a confused look upon her face.

Faith was stunned. “What? You’re going to tell yours?” she asked cockily.

“You bet, girlfriend, I’m telling everything about what really happened!” answered Akira.

Faith looked at her with disbelief and then began walking briskly. “All right, sure, go ahead and get yourself more punishment.”

“I don’t get punished, not with my mother. My mother is no way like Mrs. Scriber,” Akira answered proudly while she followed along.

Faith turned her head and looked at Akira with a smirk. “Girl, don’t be lying and don’t be telling me that you don’t get smacked from time to time.”

“Well, no, I’ve never gotten smacked,” insisted Akira, taken aback by Faith’s remark. “My mother is always there to help me with my troubles, and it’s the same with my dad; we are honest with each other, and we work things out.”

They walked under some leafless trees. The bare branches were saying signs that every day can be a snowy day. Faith kicked a pile of colored leaves that the children played with during recreation. Then she looked at Akira with a worn

expression, “Keep it real, girlfriend. Are you telling me that you’re bosom buddies with your parents?”

“Aren’t you with yours?” Akira asked.

Faith then thought about the pleasant weekend summers she had spent alone with her father at his home. In those days, her mother had kept her from seeing him as much as possible. At most, a weekend or several days was all her mother would let her spend with him. Despite that, Faith learned much about her playful, gentle father who pampered her like a princess. They had much in common: both were athletic and obsessed with the art of dancing. Like father, like daughter, it seemed. Then a couple of years ago, her mother put an end to their relationship by forbidding her from having any contact. Her mother thought she should stay put, taking care of her brother. *Gee whiz, why won’t he call or come to see me? That’s what she gets for growing up.* Abruptly, Faith drove that thought from her mind before the torment became worse. “Nope, it’s not my Mom’s way,” Faith answered Akira, while trying to project a calm, tough-as-nails image. In addition, with a conceited look on her face, she continued, “Sounds to me like you’re a spoiled brat ‘only’ child.

Akira was somewhat affronted, but then asked, “So, then you’re really not going to tell your mother about what Mrs. Scriber did to us?”

“That’s right, and if you’re smart, you’ll also keep your mouth shut. Unless you’re interested in getting your butt kicked by those five nasty doges,” Faith said with a hard look in her eyes. “Get this straight Akira, even after my Mom finds out about my detention, I’m not saying a thing about what those doges did today.”

“Why, you’re scared of those nasty huffing brain-damaged girls?” Akira asked with a curious stare.

Faith turned to Akira and scoffed at her. "Hey look, I'm not scared and don't be staring at me like I'm some kind of sissy! Don't you know anything?"

Akira stepped back from Faith as if she had something contagious; she was taken aback by the sharpness in her voice. "Well, no I don't," Akira said in a low voice.

"I can't believe that you don't know that our dorky skank teacher happens to also be my Mom's best friend. Girl, it's been going around!" Faith retorted sharply.

Akira looked surprised. "Gee no. No one told me."

"I guess you're new here, that's why. You never had a skank for a teacher before, right girl?"

"Gee no, that's so un-cool. Now I know why you hate middle school so much."

"That's one reason," answered Faith, more to herself.

They stopped by the old brick drinking fountain, by the side of the skateboard facility. Some nine and ten-year-old children were practicing their skateboard tricks: rolling down and up on the concrete surface, while swaying and waving with the cool soft wind. The jumping and rolling noises of the skateboards were annoying, but Faith deliberately paid no attention to them, or as well as the children on the other side of the skateboard facility; all of whom were enjoying playing on the playground equipment. Her snub was because she could not bring herself to admit she felt a twinge of envy for those children simply because she had grown up and was no longer like them. Instead, Faith turned toward her apartment building, looking to the second floor, and saw the flickering blue glow of the television reflecting on the white curtain through the master bedroom window. *Oh, man!, Mom's home!* Faith's jaw dropped and her stomach turned with anxiety. It was obvious to her that this was her mother, because his

egomaniac stepfather would not spend time watching television at that hour, most likely he would go out to a bar with his friends.

Faith was irritated by the futility of everything in her life.

At the futility of it all. Now, she would have to hear her mom's big mouth on why she was not home on time to watch over her precious boy. She brooded over why her mother was home from work three hours early. *Someone told me that she didn't lose her job*, she wondered. *Oh, what the heck, I'm going to be grounded again; that's what I get for being a bad seed.*

Faith wasn't in a hurry anymore. She had hoped that she would've been very close to making amends with her mother by showing how good she was at taking care of her brother, and as well as showing her good behavior in school, particularly in Mrs. Scriber's classroom, but that wasn't to be.

After a few moments of walking with Akira, Faith stopped and took a sip of ice water from the fountain, then wiped her mouth with her sleeve. Then she was about to continue her walk, when by chance she locked eyes with the old Indian artist, Lucinda Yonker-Malerba, who was sitting quietly on the bench sketching two little cheerful boys on their swing. Both boys raced for swinging high into the air, they guffawed at every huge rush of cold air. The genial artist was well known and well respected in the neighborhood. Often, Faith had walked past the artist in the park; however, she never made an effort to make a personal connection with her. Faith had an admiration for the artist, even though she had often professed her dislike of all grown-ups. Her liking of this woman may have been because of childlike qualities in her work that she had discovered during an artwork presentation, by artists, in the *Herberg's Auditorium*.

The artist gave Faith a warm smile, and then went back to work on her canvas. Faith quickly looked down and took another sip of water. *What was she doing out today in the cold*, she thought. Faith's bashful nature kept her from making her acquaintance, and she wanted to keep it that way. She wiped her mouth and continued to ignore the artist, as well as those nearby. Akira then resumed giving vent to her rage and despair. "We just talked for a stinking minute. I can't believe that we were the only ones that had to stay for detention."

Faith started walking, ignoring Akira's remark. At that, Akira spoke as if thinking out loud. "I can't believe that we were double-crossed like that."

Faith turned to Akira with displeasure, "Can't you get it that she made us the class fools — an example to everyone?"

"How could she not have seen Barak spitting spit-balls at Carmen?" Akira asked, wondering why no one else was busted. Faith was about to give her the answer but Akira interrupted. "And June making that pestering popping noise with her chewing gum. Why she didn't make them stay for detention is beyond me," Akira yelled at Faith, looking for an answer.

"Look, she's not a good teacher — get used to it!" Faith answered with a smirk.

Akira shook her head in irritation and came to a decision. "Well — I'm telling my parents. You know, I'm not some machine to make use of, she better stops singling me out!"

Faith grinned at Akira. It felt good to see someone else being angry for a change, "It is what it is, girlfriend."

"Gee, why do I have to have her twice a day!" declared Akira.

"You know, she's really boiling over that stupid pen," said Faith.

“Tell me about it, she kept picking my brain about that stupid pen. I can’t believe that she told the principal. She must have lost it somehow, don’t you think?”

“It’s been stolen.”

“Who would want her stupid pen?” asked Akira with an annoying voice.

With a smirk, Faith shrugged her shoulders. “I guess you don’t know that our skank teacher is separated from her ‘lovey-dovey hubby’ or that pen is supposed to be an expensive gift that he gave her for her first year of teaching,” Faith said in a sarcastic manner.

“Whatever,” said Akira. They began to walk again, and after a short silence, Akira asked another question, “Gee, she was really hard on you, did you take it?”

“No! But she thinks that I know who took it,” replied Faith with a concerned look in her eyes. “Oh, don’t you worry, she won’t quit interrogating me until she finds out who did it.”

“Gee whiz Faith, there’s no budging with that one, is there?”

“Look, just be glad she’s not your mom’s spy,” answered Faith ruefully.

“What a creepy school! I can’t wait until January; we will be outta this creepy place,” Akira said in a loud voice.

Faith was surprised. “You just got here?”

“We’re moving to Schenectady as soon as Father finishes his training here at Saint Luke’s Hospital,” replied Akira.

A pang of envy came over Faith. “Lucky you!” she snapped at Akira with cold eyes.

Meanwhile, five girls appeared from behind the slides and tunnels, and closed in on Faith and Akira like sharks on a feeding frenzy. One of the girls, named Joe, was Faith’s and

Akira's classmate; the others were old friends of Faith who were now seventh graders.

Akira looked helplessly, and she then dashed away in panic. The girls let Akira slip by so that they could focus on Faith.

A gruff-looking girl pulled out her stereo plugs from her ears and faced Faith. "Hey, ugly! You think you're someone special because you don't hang out with us anymore?" asked the leader of the pack. The girls with their funky hair-dos, heavy make-up, and body piercing were much bigger than Faith.

"Let me eighty-six the dog," Joe said.

Faith glared at Joe, "Why don't you go suck a lemon or something!" Faith said as she walked away.

The leader rushed in front of Faith, who then grabbed her jacket and stopped her. She then pulled a gold pen from her pocket and raised it in front of Faith's eyes. "You're going to tell on us, freckle face? Or should I call you 'one ugly freak-lee' face?" said the girl with a chuckle. Then the other four pushed Faith around until she fell to the ground, trying to force her into a fight.

Alarmed, Faith quickly stood up. "You know that I don't squeal on anyone, so leave me be!" she screamed, holding her head high while straightening her jacket on her thin body along with her backpack. "Why are you hassling me?"

Again, the four girls pushed her while the other slipped the pen in her backpack. Faith regained her balance. "Leave me alone!" she yelled.

"Don't worry, freckle face, we aren't going to whip your ass today," informed the leader.

"It's going to be your Momma that's going to whip your ass," snarled another girl, while clenching her fist. "And then

for sure she'll put you back in *Plunkett School*." The girls burst out laughing.

Faith stood firm with these once-old friends and took their insults with dignity. She was well aware that the girls were intoxicated, because their eyes were bloodshot, and they were sniffing as if they had a cold, and besides, she could smell the peculiar chemical odor from their breaths and clothing. She was not afraid. If she needed to, she could easily outrun them. Furthermore, she caught onto the reason behind the harassment: they were after her to rejoin the group. Faith brushed off the treat. Deep down she really liked them, still and all, rejoining the group was out of the question.

Just then, the artist walked over and interrupted the commotion. "Girls . . . break it up," Lucinda said while she approached them. "Go on!"

"Faith's a thief!" the girls yelled, followed up by boisterous laughter.

Faith screamed back to the girls, as they walked away, "I'm not! You're all a bunch of nasty stuck up fools!"

The five girls kept on walking, giggling to themselves.

Faith looked at the artist, "I am not a thief, ma'am."

Lucinda understood what had happened, caught her breath, holding her chest with a kind smile. "Are you all right, child?"

Faith looked at her sneakers, *what? I'm no child?* She then thought it over, out of respect, she excused the artist and flashed her a tight smile that looked sincere, but was artificial. "Yup," Faith answered with unconcerned voice.

Lucinda smiled. "I am pretty much acquainted with everyone around here, but you. I see you always walking by in a hurry."

“Well, I got things to do,” Faith said uneasily, but politely. Faith then turned her head down and changed the subject. “You know, I was there last Friday.”

Lucinda tried to recall. “Last Friday? Oh yes, my presentation at the school?”

Faith nodded her head with a modest smile.

“Well, child, how did you like my watercolors and my sketches?” asked Lucinda.

“They are awesome,” Faith said with a smile and a bashful look of approval. “One thing for sure, you really know these kids around here.”

It was then that the artist noticed the naked ambition buried deep down inside the girl’s eyes, which was hidden by fear.

“I see that my paintings have meaning for you — I’m glad,” Lucinda said, and then pointed her hand to the nearby bench.

Faith hesitated for a moment, as if she regretted her compliment. “Kind of . . . like I said, you really know kids,” replied Faith as they walked over to the bench. “By the way, I’m Faith and I live over there. She pointed to the sun faded grey apartment, nearby behind the fence.

Lucinda shook Faith’s hand. “Yes, child, I know where you live and now we are finally getting acquainted!” replied Lucinda with a jolly laugh. “Well, you know who I am. I live over there on East Street. Don’t you just love this park? My spirit rises here!”

Lucinda’s remark puzzled Faith. “I don’t get it; this place is an eyesore.”

Lucinda smiled. “Thank goodness for these children who love to play here; they make it a special place.” Lucinda saw that Faith did not comprehend what she was getting at. She

pointed at the children in the background who were playing joyfully on the playground equipment. "You know, you ought to stop and play here once in a while."

"Oh, come on, I'm getting too old for playing here," Faith replied in a careful measured tone.

"Too old?" Lucinda quipped.

"Plus, like I said, I got important things to do," responded Faith.

"Such as?" Lucinda asked. The artist then gave Faith a hand gesture asking if she could sketch a portrait of her. "May I?"

Faith was reluctant to accept the artist's offer. She thought it over. *No one gives a damn about me. Hmm, heck why not. I am going to be grounded for sure, no matter what I do.* She then slowly nodded yes with a pleasurable smile at the offer. Feeling a bit self-conscious, Faith then squirmed into a pose, unsure if she is doing the right thing.

"Well, go on tell me, what sort of important things you got to do?" Lucinda raised the matter in question with an inquisitive look on her face. Faith paused momentarily because she was quite aware that the artist was still a stranger and she felt unsure how to reply.

"Just things to do," Faith said resentfully.

Lucinda gave a faint smile of recognition, and then stopped pressing the issue. They sat on the bench. Lucinda then grabbed a medium pencil from her graphite pencil box on her easel stand, flipped over a fresh canvas and began to sketch in the oval shape of Faith's face.

Faith got a little edgy when she posed for the artist. *What the heck does she want with my face?* The thought boggled her mind. For a couple of months now Faith developed *spectrophobia*, or the fear of someone's reflection in the mirror.

She dreaded seeing her own reflection because she did not want to see her ugly acne-prone face. She avoided it like the plague. It was for this reason that a poster covered over her dresser mirror, and whenever necessary she used the small mirror above the bathroom pedestal sink. Faith felt that her looks were the reason that nobody likes her. She resented the fact that most of her schoolmates, especially the boys had ditched her. Of course, she tried medication including multi-vitamins, clay face packs, home remedies (aloe, cucumber, lemon and what not). Some of these things worked, but only to a limited extent, and only for a short time, but nothing stopped the recurrence.

"I'm supposed to be home to watch my brother Barnaby, that's all," Faith blurted out.

Lucinda stopped. "Oh, I see. I'm keeping you, child?"

"No! No, it's all right. Mom's home, so I don't need to get home early today," answered Faith, without giving her words careful thought. Then a thought popped into her head. *Maybe being stuck talking with the old artist is a good excuse for being late.*

"Barnaby, that name sounds familiar. How come I don't see you two around here playing?" Lucinda asked in a sober and gentle manner. "He'll have so much fun here, a good workout, and it will improve his social skills as well as mind development." Lucinda then noticed Faith's head backed away, when she looked her in the eyes, and saw the hesitation, unsure of how to reply. "I don't bite. Now, spell it out, child. Is Barnaby ill or are you both too busy playing video games?"

The answer was much too embarrassing. Faith looked down in an attempt to brush it off and shield her shame. "Nope, my brother just has bad allergies."

Lucinda resumed sketching with a puzzled expression, "Oh it's too bad. I would think that the fresh air would do both

of you some good,” she said as she outlined two almond shapes for the eyes.

A sickly, disheartening feeling came over Faith for being untruthful. At one time, there was no limit to Faith’s lies, however now that she has become known as a habitual liar, her quality of life and self-image had degraded. Spending her time and energy on fabricating new lies to cover the old ones, along with trying to remember just what lies she had told, and to whom and when, were exhausting. Now, Faith was starting to come to grips with the fact that being untruthful was no way to live, and that it was a route to failure.

With much admiration, she stood quiet and still, and studied the artist immersed in her work. Faith burst into a silly self-conscious smile after seeing the comical, wrinkled facial expressions of Lucinda’s that occurred as she busily worked with her assorted shades of pencils, moving swiftly and gently over the canvas. From time to time, the artist would spit a small amount of saliva on her long, bony index finger to be used as a smudging tool. She looked so humble; so sure, of herself; so unique with her Indian jewelry and the two feathers tied to her long braided white hair. In a way, Lucinda’s free-spirited outlook brought back memories of her dad, Winston Charlton Saylor.

Faith took a deep breath and then tossed Lucinda a bold look. “Mom wants us home; that’s the rule. It’s because my little brother has this nasty condition called Autism.”

“Oh dear, I’m sorry to hear that.”

“My brother is in kindergarten at *Plunkett* with Mr. Gurdeep,” Faith said with a half-suppressed smile of satisfaction on her lips.

Lucinda stopped sketching, trying to recall. “Was it Monday? That’s right, I visited Amar Gurdeep’s classroom a

couple of weeks ago,” she said in a jovial manner, and then resumed sketching. “It’s wonderful that your brother is able to be in Mr. Gurdeep’s classroom. He is a magnificent teacher.”

“Barnaby really likes it there,” Faith answered with an admiring glance. “Mr. Gurdeep had been her third-grade teacher, and it was rumored that he was reassigned to kindergarten because of his unusual teaching practices.”

Lucinda chuckled. “Well, I know Amar very well! Yes, he’s truly an original.”

“You know, I never got bored in his classroom; I just never!” Faith said, longing for those days.

Lucinda suffered from mild cognitive impairment, and she had trouble putting names with faces. Then, finally, the boy’s name rose to the surface of her mind. “There are two exceptional students in that classroom. Is he the energetic one with crazy painting fingers?” Lucinda asked with a smile.

“That’s Barnaby!” replied Faith. “Life with that boy can be like a roller coaster ride; the highest highs and the lowest lows and lots of thrill in between.”

“Oh yes, I can now see him clearly. That little fellow is out to paint the world over, isn’t he?” she asked, followed by a strong laugh.

Faith snickered, “Uh-huh, Mom gets mad at his teacher every time Barnaby comes home with stained clothes.”

“Oh well, clothes can be washed. What’s important is that your little brother is allowed to creatively express himself through his art,” Lucinda went on sketching.

Faith had a sneer on her face. “Not at home, that hyper kid is not allowed to do any painting at all. Mom makes sure of that!”

“Well, at least he has the chance to experience his art at school,” said Lucinda.

A short silence followed, as Lucinda continued to sketch. She surmised that something must be wrong at home; however, Lucinda was not about to bring the subject up. Instead, she decided to go a different way with her question. "Child, you seem to be so discouraged. What happened with those girls?"

Another short silence followed the question. Lucinda saw the tense, defensive look on Faith's face.

"Oh, them stupid cows have nothing else better to do," Faith answered while shrugging her shoulders. She became fidgety, "I guess the older you get, the more stuck up one gets."

Lucinda made a motion with her hand to stay still. "Go on, tell me more," Lucinda said softly while she kept on working, revealing to Faith her intrinsic talent for expressing movement, shape, and texture through the basic outline of her subject.

Faith gingerly reached her hand up, tucked some of her long, tangled hair behind her ear, and then became silent again. *Could she trust the old artist?* At that thought, she looked up at the sky, in low spirits, feeling that her whole world had fallen apart.

"Well, go on," repeated Lucinda as she made narrow lines between the eyes and two tiny circles below for the nostrils.

"If you don't breathe a word of this to anyone?" said Faith, warily, wondering if her instinct to trust Lucinda was real. The last grown-up she had trusted was her vindictive mother, who had promised her that she would let her talk to her dad on weekends, and thanks for nothing, it had been more than a year since she had spoken to him.

Lucinda smiled to herself and gave Faith a playful expression as she remarked, "PST! I promise! Now, child, give vent to your anger."

"I can't believe that I used to be friends with them snobby girls," uttered Faith as disgust filled her face. She looked down, fidgeting. "Anyway, I was just a little girl back then." Faith paused, reluctant to discuss the matter.

"And . . .?" Lucinda encouraged as she motioned again with her hand to be still.

"It all started back in *Plunkett* when I was hanging around with them fools. Now, they don't like me because I don't hang out with them anymore." Faith answered.

Lucinda moved gently on the canvas, alternating various shades of her pencils for the details, and Faith's image was beginning to become visible.

"I'm listening . . .," Lucinda encouraged.

Faith looked up at Lucinda. "Since they met those older boys, those girls' behaviors have gotten way out of hand, and it's getting worse day by day. Hanging around with them got me in deep trouble; I'm still paying for it by not being allowed to take Ballet lessons." Faith sighed with exasperation at the sour, broken friendship. "Besides, gambling bores me to death, smoking makes me sick to my stomach, so does huffing. It's just that I can't be seen with those girls messing around with those boys. Anyway, those boys laughed at me and gave me weird looks as if I had some kind of catching disease. You see, I just don't fit in with anyone around here, that's all," said Faith in a mouthful.

Lucinda snickered with concern. "Boys? Oh child, you're too young."

"I'll be thirteen soon, on December 28th," Faith said, determined to be treated like a grown-up. "I don't think you quite get me Lucinda; sixth graders are not so cool with people like me. I feel very out of place at *Herberg*."

“I’m telling you that you’re much too young.” *This child was on her own far too much these days*, Lucinda thought. “Child, mind the mirror and be yourself!” uttered Lucinda. “And don’t be looking for pity because of school bullies or anyone else, for that matter. Make a stand. Believe me, sooner or later you will triumph.”

Faith looked away, disheartened. “Sure Lucinda, we’re talking middle school here.” Faith then pointed two fingers at her mouth. “Lately them girls have been nothing but a bunch of snakes; they have poison on their tongues.”

Lucinda shook her head and then smiled at Faith seeing that the conversation brought back childhood memories. “Pay no attention. Before long, you’ll be moving on to new relationships with those whom will respect you as you are. Just give it some time,” encouraged Lucinda.

Faith’s mouth twisted with distaste. “I don’t know Lucinda, I’ve lost trust in relationships.” Faith said with a low voice. “Everything has changed.”

“I’m glad you’re sharing this with me. However, could you talk to your mother about these feelings of yours?” Lucinda asked as she drew in a small *M- shape* for the mouth.

The question caused Faith to titter. “You’re kidding?” She replied bitterly, while shrinking back on the bench. “My Mom is too busy with herself. I’ve always been nothing but one big hassle to her.”

Lucinda stopped sketching, giving Faith her full attention.

“According to my Mom, Barnaby is not the only mistake in her life,” uttered Faith.

“Could you make an effort, you know, in a tactful manner?” Lucinda asked, resuming her work, adding in the ears and long lines for hair.

Faith looked at Lucinda with a vexed expression. “Nope, like I said she’s too busy with herself — and of course with her thoughtless pain-in-the-ass hubby.” Then Faith paused to think before she spoke again. “I see them always fighting. That dude keeps going out drinking with his friends instead of coming home after work, and mom is all messed up over it. I think she’s afraid of losing him or something — I don’t get it. And with my brother Barnaby, neither of them has a clue on how to put up with his meltdowns. They won’t take any time to figure him out. And so, they rather leave him alone, with me, that is. It’s all pushed on me. I always got to be looking after him!”

“Oh child, you must feel like such a misfit,” Lucinda said as she continued sketching.

“A total loser!” burst out Faith, giving vent to her anger.

Lucinda pondered on Faith’s dilemma. “I hear you child, well then what about talking to someone else in your family?” Lucinda asked.

Faith's chest puffs out boastfully at the thought of answering the artist's question. “My Daddy, but he lives in Brooklyn.” She paused for a moment and then added comfortably. “My Daddy is a backup dancer on Broadway. The last time I got to see him was a couple of years ago, performing in, *‘La Cage Aux Folles’*,” Faith went on chatting with Lucinda, getting more comfortable in her company. “You know, the last time I visited him, he gave me this awesome ballerina doll with red hair that kind of looks like me. He told me to keep practicing. My Daddy and I, we’re somewhat alike — I’m also a very good dancer. You know, I was tops at my ballet school; no steps are too hard for me.”

“Really. Well then, have you talked to him recently about your troubles?” Lucinda asked.

Faith's expression just went from all smiles to a hopeless look in her face. "Nope Lucinda," Faith answered, trying not to make her feelings too obvious. "It's just a big hassle. You see, I don't have a phone, plus, I'm not allowed to have Daddy's new phone number, so I can't call him at school. Mom hates Daddy for what he is, and she doesn't want anything to do with him. Anyway, he doesn't seem to care anymore about me." Faith looked down for a second with a look of despair. "It's a bummer that I'm not allowed to live with him."

Lucinda did not respond, instead, remained silent. Lucinda was now more concerned than ever about Faith's family situation. *Should I get involved?* Lucinda pondered over that thought as she shaded Faith's skin tone with the lightest of her pencils. "Perhaps you should talk to your teacher about this?" Lucinda blurted out.

By now, Faith felt completely at ease with the artist, and she began to voice her despair with mockery. She pulled her head back. "What? Sure, that's what I need, more hassling from Mrs. Scriber," she snapped. "Nope, I don't think so Lucinda," she added scornfully. "I'm not talking to a skank who pretends to be a teacher."

"A skank?" shouted Lucinda, staring with a pucker of concern between her eyebrows. "That's not nice to say," she shook her head, amused. The artist then saw that she had interrupted Faith. "What else? Go on."

"Oh, Lucinda, you don't know how many times I've been judged wrong by that one. She happens to be my math, plus my homeroom teacher. It was that dog that told on me that I was hanging around with those girls. Got me in deep trouble. Do you know that today, those little backstabbing snots stole her stupid 'gold' pen?"

"Why in the world, a pen?" Lucinda asked.

"It beats me! The only thing I can think of is that those girls took it because our so called 'teacher' is always going around showing it off, pointing it at us like if it was a dagger or something like that. The reason I'm down in the dumps with that dog is that she thinks I might be the one who took it. It's those girls, Lucinda!"

"I understand," Lucinda said as she thought for a moment on how to go about advising this aggrieved child. "Child, you shouldn't go disrespecting women with name calling, the only 'doges' I've come to have known are dogs.

"But she gets on my nerve, Lucinda." Faith said still quite upset. "You got to know that woman believes anything those nasty girls tell her. Her dear pets! Everyone in class knows what those girls have been up to, acting as if they're good students following the rules, instead, they're always copying another student's work and disrupting the class." She uttered with a stabbing gesture. "Those fools wait upon the moment that stupid teacher turns her back from the class and faces the blackboard to do their tricks." Faith felt much better for having that off her chest and could relax a tiny bit. She continued gloomily. "You see Mrs. Scriber happens to be my mom's best friend. You believe that? What a pair . . . I can't win . . . I can't do anything between my teacher spying on me and my mom's stupid rules!"

"Yes, rules can be a frustrating experience for those who don't understand their purpose," Lucinda said with an agreeing smile. "Still an all, when life throws me a lemon — I whip up lemonade," she chuckled to herself while giving Faith a compassionate touch with her right hand. "You see, my child, life is full of rules, petty or not, they're here for a purpose. Without rules, why, there would be chaos! Now, look at our good old Mother Nature; it's full of rules."

Faith abruptly turned her face away from the artist and looked up at the sky that was now getting much dimmer. "Oh Lucinda, you don't get it. We are talking about my Mom and Mrs. Scriber's stupid rules that don't make sense. Those two have been on my case — they're killing my life with their rules."

Lucinda detected a faint note of weariness in Faith's voice. "Give it time, child. Open your eyes and look at the day when you'll see things in a different way," Lucinda said hopefully.

Faith's eyes narrowed in deep thought.

"So, go on, do tell me what you have in mind," Lucinda asked.

Faith pouted sullenly. "Nothing, for now," she snapped.

Lucinda had a worried look in her eyes, as she kept sketching the details of Faith's face. "Now, don't tell me that you're planning to run away?"

Faith looked at the artist, hesitating to answer, as she felt that she might talk. She then looked away.

Suddenly Faith heard loud tapping of a pencil on the easel, and then turned to look. "PST! I did promise. Child, don't look so concerned, I won't breathe a word of it," Lucinda maintained.

Could it be . . . she? No, her dad was supposed to be her mentor. The thought went flying around inside Faith's head. "I'm working on it," she uttered, "I have to get away from here Lucinda! This place is one big dark cloud for me. I'm sick of being looked at with sharp eyes, made a sport of."

"Oh child, can't you find a better way? I'm sure you can work out your problems with your mother."

"Nope. Everything has changed. I don't belong here," said Faith, sounding very pessimistically. She thought about her fantasy about being a famous ballerina. "It would really be

neat if I could find myself a place like an island or something like that. You know, with people like me who are able to do what they like, where no one gets on each other's nerves. Yup, an island would be cool; kind of like the one I used to . . .” Embarrassed by her childhood fantasy, Faith came to an abrupt halt. “Oh, forget that — now — I’m carrying on just like my little brother.” Faith then gave a despairing sigh. “I would really like to go and live with Daddy, but for sure Mom would come and find me and take me back.”

Lucinda finished her work and then scribbled in some words on Faith’s portrait. “Child, you do belong, everyone belongs, because we’re all a part of each other,” said Lucinda as she signed her name. At that moment, a thought came to the artist. “Have you studied living organisms — you know, like cells, in your science class?”

The question threw Faith off. “Kind of . . . very little. But I don’t get it — why?”

“Well, as you know from your biology lessons, your cells make up your body, but did you know that each individual cell is a kind of tiny creature in a sense; each one is single-minded, grows, reproduces, and dies by itself. Each type is designed for a different purpose in your body. A cell’s mind is a part of all cells’ minds and makes the whole body work in unison. You and I, as individuals, live the same as well. Our minds, like the one cell, are a tiny part of the universal mind.” Lucinda lectured while putting her pencils away.

Faith looked at her with skepticism. *Uh-huh . . . what is she talking about?*

“Child, you are one beautiful, bright girl, a part of the universe with a purpose. Don’t go losing heart on yourself! You’ll be cheating your life away, as well as everyone you’ll come to be connected with,” pleaded Lucinda.

“Everyone — really — you think that I may be connected with everyone?” Faith asked, mystified by the artist’s words.

Lucinda gave a big smile. “Of course, as well as the universe. So, don’t go hurting yourself and not give yourself a chance to be free.”

“How do I go about doing that, Lucinda?” asked Faith, baffled.

“By learning to love yourself, child,” answered Lucinda with a broad grin, while rubbing Faith’s shoulders.

“Love myself?” Faith turned her head slightly with a bemused expression, followed by half-suppressed laughter.

“That’s right. You cannot give what you do not have. So, if you are not able to love and accept yourself unconditionally, how are you to love life and everything about it?”

“That’s very easy to say when you like the way you look,” Faith answered, showing off her bony figure.

The artist slightly pursed her lips, realizing that she was not getting through to Faith. “You know, child, you remind me very much of me when I was your age. Back then, I was one irritated whippersnapper!”

Faith chuckled, “What’s a whippersnapper?” she asked, her emerald eyes staring at the artist with amusement.

“Darn heartburn,” Lucinda said to herself. Then she looked at Faith with a silly face. “That’s what grownups used to call us youngsters in mischief who didn’t follow rules.”

“That’s me for sure, a whippersnapper!” Faith said with pride. At that moment, Faith paused, thinking. And then asked, “Do you now like to follow rules?”

Lucinda burst into a soft laugh. “I am free, no matter what rules surround me. If I find them bearable, I tolerate them; if I find them very unpleasant, I break them. By now, at my age, one should come to an understanding of right and

wrong. However, at your age, you have a lot to learn about rules.”

Faith stamped her feet, tantrum-style, to emphasize her point. “Well, I can’t stand stupid grown-up rules; all I seem to get out of it is a nasty feeling . . .”

“Oh, come now,” Lucinda interrupted the rant. “A nasty feeling hurts only the person that is having a nasty feeling,” Lucinda explained.

“Is that some old Indian saying?” inquired Faith.

Lucinda laughed it off. “No, not really.”

“Anyway, what tribe did you come from?”

“My father was a Mohican descent from Stockbridge. I remember him only from early childhood. He was very sick and he died with kidney and liver failure. My mother was from Dutch descent and her people migrated here from Albany. So, that makes me half and half, eh?” she said with a silly smile. “My mother worked at the Museum here in town as an exhibit designer. There’s an honor plaque bearing her name in the front hall of the *Berkshire Museum*. I was her only child born here in Pittsfield and I must tell you that being the only Mohican-Dutch among all those English and Irish whippersnappers — well, I don’t wish it on anyone!” answered Lucinda.

“Going to school must have been a real bummer,” Faith said, sympathetically.

“That’s right, I was bullied, made fun of, pushed around, tripped, elbowed, and of course being excluded from social activities simply because I was different. I became ashamed that I had Indian blood.”

Faith cringed a little, “How did you handle the pressure?”

I spent most of my time in the museum with Mother. It was there that I found my talent, and there I was inspired to become an artist.

"I can relate," uttered Faith, sadly. "I'm totally inspired too — in dancing that is. But I'm going nowhere living with my mother.

"I understand, however, running away won't do. I remember when my mother's boyfriend, who lived with us for a short time, did not like me. He seriously overstepped his boundaries with me during one of his blind rages, and my mother chose to ignore my cries for help. I exploded and ran away to Albany. I found myself wandering the streets of the city alone and scared. My mother came after me, of course. The next day, I never saw my mother so scared out of her wits when she came to the Police Department. Right there, I knew I was loved."

A sigh escaped Faith's lips. The artist continued, as if she were having a conversation with someone else. "I was lucky. I wasn't raped or killed, and I didn't end up selling myself or becoming a drug addict. I was very lucky because I had a mother who truly cared."

"Well, I don't have a mother who truly cares," responded Faith.

"I think you do. Not all parents are complete, you know. Some, for whatever reasons, have forgotten the way of children. Then, there are those with fear in them; they are governed by blind, sinful prejudice that has swallowed up their minds. Most parents treat their children the way they do, just because they believe they are doing the right thing. You see, they have feelings too, and they don't want to lose out, becoming bad parents," explained Lucinda.

"Nope. I won't let her slide," Faith said with cold eyes.

“Like I said, you ought to talk to someone in your school. I’m sure your guidance counselor can direct you to proper counseling,” Lucinda advised.

“No way. I don’t trust any of those people,” Faith said, resentfully.

“Well, child, you need to trust someone, or else you’re going to get yourself in a heap of trouble.”

Disappointment was making Faith sulky. “I’m not going to get in trouble because, as soon as I get the chance, I’m going to go live with Daddy.” That was her plan all along, and until now, Faith had kept that secret hidden from everyone.

The artist gave a sly grin, and then she pointed her eyes at Faith. “You know, child, there’s a right way of doing things and a wrong way, and you running away is the wrong way.”

Faith looked down at her feet, quiet. *Yeah . . . sure, what the heck is the right way?* Faith showed deep unhappiness of thought.

Suddenly, a thought came to mind. “Would you help me find the right way?” Faith asked, pleading for some support. “I don’t trust anyone, but you.”

Lucinda’s eyes opened wide to Faith. “Oh — well — of course, child. I’m around here most of the time, that is, until the winter sets in.” She chuckled. “However, let me write my number for you. Call me using the school’s phone,” she said while scribbling the numbers on the back of the portrait. “Meantime, I’ll see what I can do for you. But now, child, don’t go doing anything drastic!” warned Lucinda.

The artist’s gentle nod and reassuring eye contact was all Faith needed to know there was support always.

“I won’t. Now that I got you to talk to,” Faith answered.

“Oh yes, child, I am happy to do whatever I can for you. Call me or stop and see me tomorrow. I am happy to listen

and give you advice. I have been there myself,” said Lucinda as she signed her name on Faith’s portrait.

Faith smiled with admiration, realizing that she had finally found her mentor. “You know, I think we’re kind of alike. From now on, I’m going to be just like you, Lucinda,” said Faith optimistically. After a moment, she rethought the remark, “That is, as a dancer.”

“Well, I’m flattered! However, my child, you need to nourish and build your own individuality. Not mine,” said Lucinda.

Faith was disappointed at Lucinda’s remark. “Me, really? But how can someone like me do that, Lucinda?”

“It’s all in your point of view. I have learned that we live in two worlds at the same time. One is the world within us, while the other is the world around us. The world within creates the world without. The world within is mental and spiritual; the world without is material and physical. The inner governs the outer, always. The outer is a reflection of the inner. These two worlds are not two separate worlds. They are two different levels of the same world. You see, child, the world is mental. All is mind. The universe is mental; as above, so below, as within, so without. This is secret knowledge. The problem with most of us humans is that we tend to be so wrapped up with the world outside that we tend to overlook the other. Child, you’re overlooking the great advantages of that world within!” said Lucinda.

“It sounds to me like you’re talking about kids’ stuff. I don’t get it, Lucinda, you mean my imagination?” asked Faith with a puzzled expression.

“Oh, it’s much more than that, child. You see, since the beginning of our childhood, we naturally begin to cultivate our artistry. We all start out the same way, searching for artistic

truth. Only very few of us achieve it successfully,” answered Lucinda while she pointed her pencil to Faith’s head, “It’s all inside, child! Someday, when you’re ready, when you do knock on its door, when you do find yourself, in some way — you’ll find your bliss.” It was then that Lucinda gave her the portrait.

Faith looked at her portrait, and gasped at the clear vividness of the picture. “That’s me?” she asked with wide eyes of disbelief then she erupted into giggles.

Lucinda chuckled as she put her things away. “That’s you.”

“She looks like me . . . but with a difference.”

“It’s what I see when I look at you,” smiled Lucinda.

Faith then read the writing: *I have great confidence in your strong range of vision, your friend Lucinda.* Faith sat silently with a puzzled look on her face.

Lucinda was aware of Faith’s confusion. “Guard your senses well, my child. Don’t let the world outside pollute you with poisonous thoughts. Someday, you’ll fully understand me. Then, you’ll learn to be loyal to yourself.”

Faith liked what she heard. However, she became discouraged. “It all sounds kind of neat, but I’m sure I’ll never be a dancer like my Daddy, unless I do what he did and leave this place,” Faith said. “Mom keeps telling me that it’s a waste of my time. Even if that were true, I love dancing; it’s the best thing in my life! Oh well, I’m longing for the day that Mom gives in and lets me go back to my ballet school.”

Lucinda smiled at her and said, “Well, I hope that it is very soon. Because dancing is not a waste of your time. Go with your instinct, child. Find a way to keep up with your training and don’t ever stop dreaming. It’s because of the little girl inside me that got me to love sketching and painting.”

“Sounds like you’ve been playing your life away, kind of like Mr. Gurdeep. You still play at your age?” asked Faith with a doubtful look and wonder.

“I play my part, child! Be convinced, become the dance you dance, the song you sing, the very thing you play,” said Lucinda with a chuckle.

Still, Faith again shows a doubtful face.

“I know, child. It’s not easy to face family problems,” said Lucinda with a rub on Faith’s back. “Perhaps one day, you’ll give it a whirl at playing your part. It’s all in your trusting nature.”

“Faith — hey girl!” a disturbing, aggressive voice called from far behind.

Lucinda and Faith were taken by surprise. Faith recognized her mother’s voice at once. She then looked over and saw her mother’s head stuck out of her bedroom window. “Yeah!” Faith shouted back.

“Girl, get your ass in here now!” shouted Faith’s mother in a roaring rage.

Faith grudgingly stood up. “Coming!” she gruffly barked back at her mother, completely impenitent. She then quickly slid her backpack off her shoulders and slid in all she could of the portrait inside the pocket of her three-ring binder notebook. In sympathy, Lucinda nodded with a compassionate smile.

“So long, Lucinda. I’ll catch up with you later — okay?” Faith blurted as she slipped her backpack on her shoulders and slowly walked away.

At that, Lucinda held her chest in discomfort. “Of course, my little whippersnapper,” she whispered to herself, aware that the girl was scared to go home.

IN RESIDENCE

Vikki Bode-Ross erased some of the foggy glass of her bedroom window to look for her daughter. The auburn-haired robust woman snarled a few choice remarks when she saw that her daughter was taking her own sweet time walking home. *That brat! If she thinks she's going to get away with it, she has got another thinking coming. She's in middle school now; she's getting too old for shenanigans.*

For several months now, her daughter had changed like night and day, and she had stopped being respectful to her. Her daughter was becoming more obsessed with her father to the point of showing many of his characteristics, which posed unresolved clashes with her own. Winston was her first love and her first heartbreak. To sum it all up, he was supposed to be her best friend, her husband-to-be, but instead, the jerk betrayed her, abandoning her with their child for another man. Even after all these years, she cannot seem to get over the heartache fueled with outrage and anger. Furthermore, her pain of losing her sister, Paige, in a fatal car crash was still as raw now as it was exactly thirteen years ago, when she learned that she had lost her forever. The *Mass-Pike* was so icy that day, which she should have been driving slowly with caution. But against her better judgment, she raced to Amherst so that she could spend more of her time with Winston, who was a student at *U-Mass*, enrolled in the dance major program.

Vikki can still remember her sister's sarcastic warning about the road, but continued driving with sheer impatience over the speed limit, until suddenly the car slipped on a patch of icy water and hit the guardrail, crashing into a rock wall and crushing her sister to death. Vikki has been devastated ever since. She cannot forgive herself for what she had done, or for that matter, let go of her heavy self-judgment and

criticism. She should not have pushed the gas pedal to the floor to hurry to be with a man who did not love her; to a selfish, pompous ass who pretends to know everything; to an ass that left her after he found out she was pregnant. She later denied that he was the father, until paternity tests proved otherwise, and he was ordered to pay child support. No, she won't forgive the gay bastard, for her wounds ran too deep for healing.

For now, what she really wanted was that her daughter comply with her demands, assuming her role and taking responsibility in helping raise Barnaby. She wanted her daughter to realize the crises she was facing in trying to raise both of them. She was determined to spare her daughter from having the same fate. However, she was tired of waiting. If truth were told, Vikki was afraid of losing control of her daughter. She believed that her daughter was spinning out of control and she felt as if she had reached the end of her rope. Nevertheless, Vikki was very determined not to let it happen.

Just about ten minutes ago, Erika Scriber had called to see if tonight would be all right for her to come over for a haircut. It was then that her old friend informed her that her daughter had misbehaved in her classroom. Of course, she would cut her hair, despite being very tired; Vikki needed to talk and could use the company. She turned her television off and then reached for her cigarette case and pulled one out, which she lit with a disposable lighter. She took a deep drag and exhaled a thin stream of smoke out of her mouth while standing still, contemplating the situation and how to go about disciplining her unmanageable daughter. *I'll remove all her stuff. If she's going to act like a spoiled brat, she can have NOTHING! Let her live at a 'home-boot-camp' for a while, see if I care.*

Vikki looked much paler than usual. It had been one of those ugly days; she was menstruating and her temperament had gotten the best of her, and it was made worse by her bipolar depressive episode. Her job as manager of one of a small chain of hair salons strained her tolerance to the limit. Two of her hairdressers had decided to quit because of slow business, and now she had to look for their replacements. She needed to hire stylists with a clientele, unsatisfied at their workplace—that would perk up her store business. However, the crippling affliction of the recession kept such stylists from relocating. Vikki took a puff on her cigarette as she heard the phone blasting from the kitchenette. Annoyed, she exhaled a long stream of smoke. *Damn debt collectors, she thought before going to see who was calling. I'm tired of these people; I can't wait to be done with those fucking credit cards!*

By the counter, Vikki quickly sat down on her swivel stool, placed her cigarette in the ashtray, and then moved aside her glass of blush wine along with the mail. Reluctantly, she grabbed the phone and looked to see who was calling. *Damn, it's that dude calling again! She thought.* “Hello?” Vikki answered. “I’m doing fine, Mr. Gurdeep; I guess.” Vikki had no interest in hearing his invitation to his ‘*Parenting Workshop/Seminar Program*’. She had always taken pride in her ability to deal with a crisis. She overtook the conversation by speaking over the teacher. “Look, Mr. Gurdeep, I’ve talked it over with my husband, and we don’t have time for that.” Vikki took a sip of her wine and then took a puff on her cigarette. She then flicked the ash from her cigarette on the ashtray, waiting patiently for Mr. Gurdeep to finish his boring, stiff sentence. The conversation was going nowhere, and Vikki grew exasperated with her inability to convince Mr. Gurdeep that he was not interested in his seminar.

A minute or so went by when Vikki heard keys rattling in the main door entrance. The voice from the phone faded when the door opened, and to her surprise, her husband entered the apartment. He gave her a very peculiar look; his annoyance that she was home did not escape her notice. Vikki was about to greet him, but she saw that he was obviously in an awful mood. She frowned while watching him deliberately pass by without a word, making his way to their bedroom. *What's he doing here?* She thought, acknowledging his presence with a condescending sneer. She then quickly resumed her conversation with Mr. Gurdeep. "What was that? Oh, all right — I know . . . I know, so it's free, but I don't need schooling on how to raise my kids," Vikki interrupted. "Whose idea is this, anyway?" inquired Vikki. She paused and took another puff, trying to control her deteriorating emotional state by sheer force of will. "Okay, thanks . . . but . . . we are not interested! How's Barnaby doing?" asked Vikki with a concerned but pessimistic tone. Vikki listened for a while, and then she interrupted again. "I know, I know, Mr. Gurdeep, Barnaby loves music, painting, and all that, but I'm more interested in him learning the alphabets and numbers and things. Do you know what I mean — is he picking up or what?"

Mr. Gurdeep's answer was not pleasant to Vikki. "I don't want to see my son get any further behind the kids of his age," Vikki insisted.

What a queer! He's hopeless, just hopeless. This dude doesn't get it! She thought as she reluctantly yielded in listening to Mr. Gurdeep's regurgitation of why her invitation was so important. "Okay, if I change my mind, we'll be there Monday — okay, Mr. Gurdeep, so long," Vikki said as she shook her head in annoyance.

"It's not here, damn it!" Rex said impatiently.

“Ten to one, it’s in that knucklehead’s room. He’s always playing there,” Vikki mentioned.

At that, Rex rushed out to Faith’s room.

When Vikki came into her daughter’s room, she saw her husband standing at ease, inspecting his wrist guard for damages. He turned and looked at her with an oppressive anger on his face. “You know nothing worse than unruly kids. I’ve told them time and time again not to touch my stuff — leave it alone. But they keep disrespecting me!” He took notice that his wife refused to acknowledge his complaint. “Do you hear me?” Rex shook his head in disbelief. “Last week, I found them both outside with my dart set. Do you believe that? They were both throwing it to a tree out there! Oh, I smacked them good!”

Vikki pulled her head back, staring at him, her face drawn. “Not Barnaby?” Her eyes narrowed painfully. “Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“No buts about it, I smacked him too. I don’t go for this ignorant kind of acting,” Rex answered. “Besides, we weren’t talking,” He continued, seeing that his wife’s posture stiffened and she was staring out the window with a look of strong displeasure. “Well, don’t be looking like that, you know that I can’t take unruly kids. They’re both disrespectful. They don’t follow rules around here.”

Aggravation was written all over Vikki’s face. “Are you ever going to have that damn lock replaced on our bedroom door?” she asked, and she rolled her eyes away. “Those door handles are about to fall apart.”

“I’ve told the landlord about this a number of times, I can’t help it if he takes his sweet time,” Rex said, snidely. He then pointed his index finger at her. “And don’t be defending

them, there should be no excuse for them kids going in our room.”

“I’m not defending anybody!” Vikki retorted. “It’s that brat not paying attention to her brother. That’s the cause of all this. She knows that she’s not supposed to be playing her damn video games when she’s looking after her brother. She knows that he’s prone to running away. I’ve told her over and over that he’ll get himself into a world of trouble if left alone!”

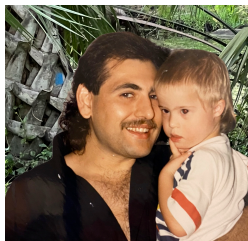
“I said it and I’m saying it again. You can’t trust that kid of yours for anything,” he remarked. He was about to say more, but then deflected the conversation after noticing that his wife was ignoring him. She wasn’t all that interested in his relentless criticism of her daughter. “Man, I don’t bowl well without this wrist guard.” He then looked at his watch. “Oh man — I got to get going!”

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ABOUT the AUTHOR



Hello Reader,

Luciano DeSanctis, an autodidact writer, resides in Jensen Beach, Florida. He is a widower living with two sons who have 'special needs'. He loves to improve

himself, keep learning, and engage in his art. Besides being a hairstylist/colorist for some thirty years, he has always been passionate about writing novels, poems, children's stories, and playwritings. Living in accordance with the teachings of Christ, he likes to focus his writing on his experiences with people with disabilities. As he sees it, his life has been dedicated to this purpose. Thus far, his discovery and enthusiasm for telling stories about his experience of life has been more fun than anything else. Lemon Dream is his first novella and playwright. He is also the author of several other stories and children's books.

Thank you for taking the time to read Luciano's books or eBook. Samples of his work are available at: <http://www.booksofmine.org> as well as most social media platform like Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/booksofminepage>
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