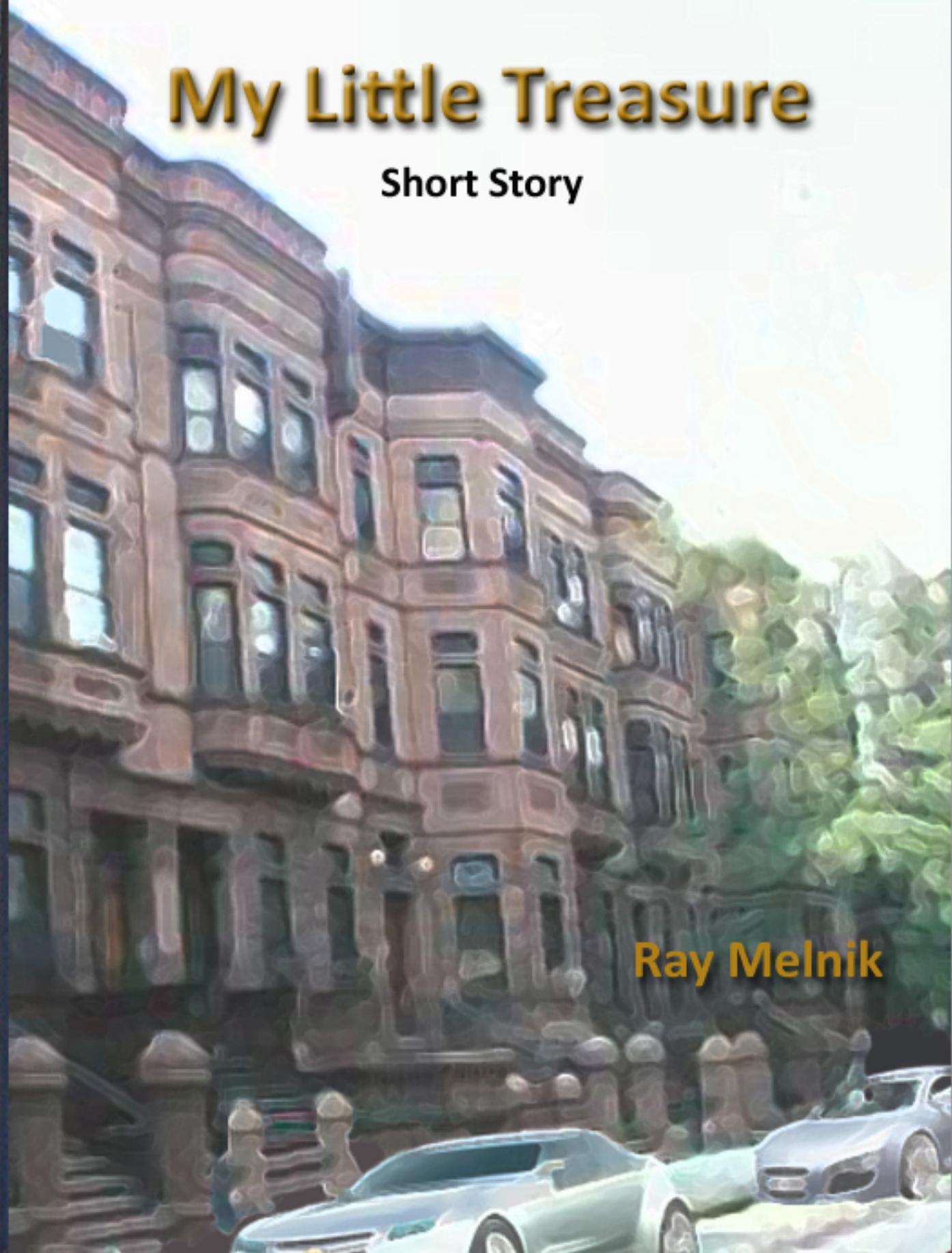


My Little Treasure

Short Story

Ray Melnik



My Little Treasure – by Ray Melnik

It was a sweltering August day and I was exhausted when I finally put down my bike and plopped onto our front stoop next to my little sister, Sheri. She was trying to escape from the heat inside our apartment. The fans inside were blowing nothing but hot air and the bricks of the building held the heat like an oven. At least the stoop was shaded at this time of the day. Sheri had a small scratched metal cooking pot filled with water and was splashing a little over her head. When she looked toward me, she noticed that my knapsack was full.

“Rael, what did you get?” she asked.

I reached inside and pulled out a plastic bag filled with pieces of fruit cut into chunks. Being a messenger for a financial firm in lower Manhattan, the service people let me take some of the leftovers from conference rooms after the meetings were over. The money was also acceptable for working there less than a year.

“They left so much today,” I said and handed her the bag and a plastic fork. I have some sandwiches, too.”

Sheri placed the bag between her legs and started stabbing at the fruit pieces.

“Mom won’t be coming home tonight,” she said between bites. She was able to get the overnight shift when they needed someone to fill in.”

“Is John inside?” I asked.

John, a docile man, has been married to our Mom for the last two years. His modest additional income contributed to us having a larger apartment.

“No. He left a few hours ago. Thank you for the fruit, Rael,” she said. I love the pineapple best.”

“I saved a little extra money,” I told her. Tomorrow after work, we can go to the Goodwill store and buy you some clothes before you go back to school next month. They have some really nice clothes there. Sixth grade is hard enough without them poking fun at what you wear.”

“I don’t care what they say, Rael. I never care what they say.”

“I know, Sheri, but I do.”

“You always taught me never to listen,” she said.

“That’s right, but it doesn’t mean that I can’t care for you.”

I reached into my knapsack and pulled out two tattered books.

“Look, Sheri. I found these in the trash behind the bookstore on Water Street. The corners are damaged, so they threw them away.”

One book was about the planets and the other was about the landmarks of New York City. She placed them on her lap and gazed at the covers.

“Wow, these are great. Thanks,” she said.

I ride past the store every work day and often find good books.

“I will keep my eye out for more,” I told her.

“Rael, I asked Mom again about who my father is. Why won’t she tell me? Mom just looked sad, but she didn’t say anything.”

“You are beautiful, like Mom, Sheri,” I told her. My father left Mom before I could even remember what he looked like. You shouldn’t worry about it.”

“But at least you know who he is,” she said. I just want to know who my father is.”

“I remember when Mom was pregnant with you and I was just around your age when you were born. I asked her then, but she never told me.”

I love my little sister and I could see how much it was hurting her not knowing. Later that evening after I tucked Sheri in, I heard John come home and go to bed. I slept on the couch, hoping to wake when Mom came home in the morning. The night brought lower temperatures, but the humidity still caused me to wake every few hours. I could hear the sound of the outside traffic distorting as it passed through the fan in the window.

Finally slept and in the morning I woke from the sound of keys fumbling in fingers outside the door. I saw the shadow of Mom coming in, as I leaned over to turn on the small lamp on the table next to the couch.

“Good morning, Mom. Hard night?”

“I needed the overtime. Was it too uncomfortable in your room last night?”

“I was waiting for you, Mom. Come and sit for a moment. I want to talk with you about something.”

She came over to sit in the chair next to the couch and I could see in her eyes that she could tell it was important.

“What’s the matter, sweetheart? Is everything alright?”

“There is something I want to know, Mom. I was only about Sheri’s age when she was born, but I’m older now. I want to know who her father is.”

Mom looked at me with an anxiety I hadn’t seen in her before. She remained silent until I couldn’t take it any more.

“Mom, you know you can’t keep it from me. You always made it clear to me growing up that I could come to you with any problem. You asked me to be truthful to you, and I was. Now, you be truthful to me.”

“Why do you want to know? I would rather leave it in the past. Let’s leave it at that.”

I waited. Mom went silent again until I saw a tear run down her cheek and she dropped her shoulders. Sitting back into the chair, she knew she had to tell me.

“I was raped, Rael. It was late one night where I was working. An upper manager was drinking in his office and I made the mistake of going in to clean instead of returning later. He told me to come in, that he would be leaving in a minute. I didn’t see how drunk he

was at first. He continued to drink and then I noticed a powerful look in his eye. He got up, locked his door and then raped me.”

Tears were streaming down Mom’s face now and she leaned over and buried her face and hands in my chest. She spoke in a soft voice.

“I couldn’t do anything about it. I had you to take care of and he was rich enough to destroy me. It would have been his word against mine that it was not consensual. I requested a transfer to the company’s other building across town and they gave it to me. I didn’t realize I was pregnant for a couple of months. You can see why I didn’t dream of getting an abortion.”

She raised her head, face full of tears and said, “Sheri is our little treasure.”

We were being quiet, but I thought I heard a sound through Sheri’s bedroom door, which was slightly cracked open. I waited for a moment to be sure we didn’t wake her, but heard nothing more.

“What is his name, Mom?”

“Rael, you can’t do any thing about this. Don’t dare even think about it.”

“I just want to know his name.”

It was one of the only times I felt justified in lying to her. She hesitated again.

“His name is Adler Beaumont. He’s a vice president there now. Please don’t tell Sheri. She doesn’t need to know, at least not until she’s older.”

“I won’t. I agree with you. But don’t you blame yourself for going in. Only that asshole is to blame. I’m going to get ready for work. You’re a good woman and I love you, Mom.”

When I was finished showering, Mom had long gone to bed and I called in to work and asked to take a personal day. As a reliable employee so far, they had no problem with it. I had one suit with jacket sleeves that were a little short, but it would do. I wanted to get out before Sheri woke, so I quickly put on the pants and carefully folded the shirt, tie and jacket, placing them in my knapsack. I put in jeans and several photos of Sheri, carefully strapping the bag to my delivery package rack.

It wasn’t sweltering yet, but nonetheless I took it slow biking down to the Madison Avenue office that Mom worked at then. If Beaumont was in, I was sure he would speak to me. The building had a bike rack in front and I could see that some of their messengers had already arrived.

I chained my bike to the rack and I felt sure it would be safe next to the others. There was a guard right in front.

I put the dress shirt on over my T-shirt and then put on the tie and jacket. Carefully I slid my photos of Sheri down into the jacket's inner pocket. I tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, but the guard noticed. I tried to blend in with the others walking right in, but her hand reached out in front of me.

“Have business in the building?” she asked.

“Yes, I'm here to see Mr. Beaumont, a vice president.”

“I see. What is your name?”

“Rael Anton.”

“Wait.”

She called on her radio, “Front desk. Come in.”

And from the radio, “Front desk.”

“Please confirm an appointment for Mr. Beaumont with a Mr. Rael Anton.”

In a few moments responded back.

“No appointment listed.”

“Sorry, Mr. Anton, but you won’t be seeing Mr. Beaumont until you have an appointment.”

“I understand,” I said.

I didn’t want to piss her off, but I was determined to find a way in. I sat on the wall of the fountain in front trying to look nonchalant, but still concentrating on finding a way in. There was a young woman sitting just a few feet away and she looked as frustrated as I felt.

“Feeling uneasy?” I asked.

“What?”

“Sorry, but you look frustrated about something,” I said.

“It’s that obvious?” she asked.

“My name is Rael Anton, pleased to meet you. So why the frustration?”

“Well, Mr. Anton, pleased to meet you as well. My name is Kaela Ladd, well, Dr. Ladd. The frustration is that being the youngest

woman scientist at SciLab and first in my county to complete a doctorate by the age of twenty, they decided to trot me out in front the board of directors here at IC&P. I'm trying to gather my thoughts before I go in.

“Innovation Capital and Promotion provides the lion’s share of the funding for the work in our lab up in Monroe, Orange County,” she said. Back in the 00s I heard that research money just flowed. Securing funds became more difficult, I was told, after a project by a Professor Kyle Trace didn’t live up to expectations. He is a brilliant man and we were just assigned a project together. We are conducting research into the development of a cheap, clean, renewable energy source. The division that actually develops new techniques in renewable energy production and conservation are what keep SciLab profitable. Mr. Greene, who is in charge of funding, believes that I will impress IP&G and gain additional funds for our research projects. Please call me, Kaela.”

“Well, Kaela, call me, Rael. I hope you can get the funding you are looking for. I was only eleven at the time, but I was glad to see that what was so obvious to many finally became clear to the masses in 2009. It must feel good to help reverse the damage we have done to our planet. But I know about how the effects will become more pronounced before our reversal efforts do any good. What about the study that concluded the elimination of the dirty pollution also eliminates the particles from the atmosphere that allow less radiation to hit the earth? It’s a bit of a catch 22, no?”

“It is, Rael. I have a friend working on a project to determine if the distribution of harmless particulate matter would help mitigate that, perhaps even accelerate the reversal. It would be a delicate balance and one that we would need to carefully control. You seem to know about this science. What do you do, Rael, where do you live?”

“I live in the lower Bronx and work as a messenger for a financial firm on Water Street. I have always loved science. I read books from the library and often find damaged science books and others in the trash behind a bookstore on Water Street. I am teaching what I can to my little sister.”

“You’re far from Water Street. What brings you here to Madison Avenue?”

“I’m trying to see Mr. Beaumont. I need to speak with him.”

“The Senior Vice President, Mr. Beaumont. Why? Do you know him?” she asked.

“It’s really personal, but I just need to speak with him. I have to. But the guard won’t let me go up.”

“I can tell you’re a nice person, Rael. I can help you get in, but you will need to find your own way past the reception desk on his

floor. I have to give my presentation soon. I want you to call me,” she said as she handed me her card. I can get you a position helping around the labs, if you like. That is, if you wouldn’t mind the commute.”

“No, I wouldn’t mind at all. I would love to work for a science lab no matter what the job.”

“Any of the jobs I could get you would pay you more than you earn now,” she said. I have friends in hiring. I will make sure it’s worth it for you. Who knows, maybe you will like it up there and move to Orange County. SciLab also covers education costs of any employee who pursues a degree in the sciences. You might want to take advantage of that.”

“I could never repay you for all this,” I said. I can’t thank you enough, Kaela.”

“You remind me a little of my Dad. He worked in technology, but always had a love for science. He studied it incessantly on his own. He always taught all sorts of science lessons to my sister and me, while we just thought we were having fun. He is the reason why I pursued my math and science. I guess I had a knack for it, huh?”

“He sounds like a good father,” I told her.

“He was,” she said. He was killed in a car crash a few months ago. He was driving on a back road, one that had not been scheduled yet for the automatic vehicle guidance system. He loved the view of Schunemunk Mountain on that road and one evening at dusk he was hit head-on by a nineteen year old kid who was wasted on synthetic heroin. My Dad’s wife, Lacie was inconsolable and still is. Like my sister, Lainey, and me, Lacie loved our Dad so much. They loved each other so much.”

“I’m so sorry to hear about your Dad, Kaela.”

“I felt ashamed a bit that I had wished the driver would have lived so at least he could feel the guilt for what he did,” she said. “But he died in the crash as well.”

“Well maybe he’ll still get his,” I offered.

“I don’t believe in punishment after death, an afterlife at all for that matter,” she said. “People who make unforgivable choices need to pay retribution in this world.”

“Trust me. I agree with you more than you know,” I told her. “It would nice if they were all held accountable, but we know that will never happen.”

“I need to get to the presentation now, Rael. Come on, let’s get you in.”

“The guard who stopped me is now standing inside by the building visitor check-in,” I pointed out.

Kaela walked with me right up to the guard and explained that I was with her and that she neglected to put plus one on her visitor pass request. The guard reached over the counter to retrieve a clipboard.

“Your appointment is listed, Dr. Ladd. You also have clearance to bring guests in at any time.”

“Thank you,” she said. This young man, Mr. Anton is here to see Mr. Beaumont.”

I was issued a pass to the top floor and walked in through the entrance scanners with Kaela. We stood for a moment between the elevator banks.

“I will never forget what you are doing for me, Kaela. If there is anything I can ever do for you, don’t hesitate to ask. I will absolutely call you about the job. Thank you again.”

“It was nice talking with you. We’ll talk soon, Rael. I hope you can accomplish what you came for.”

“You made me think earlier when you said you insisted on retribution in this world,” I told her.

She motioned that she needed to go and walked to the elevator bank to her floor.

Getting to the top floor would be easy, but I worried how I would get past reception once I got there. The elevator door opened to the floor and I noticed people walking left to reception and right to the door that led right into the office space. I followed the people going right. The first person to reach the door used her security card, while each held the door for the next and then for me.

I knew how these office buildings were all laid out. Housekeeping would be one of the inside rooms by the building core. It would be a good place to ask for the exact location of Beaumont’s office. Housekeeping would never question a guest in a suit, even in one that fit as badly as mine did. I knew I found it when I peeked into a door and saw hanging tools and three women in uniforms like Mom wore. The three were sitting in their chairs.

The woman closest to me asked, “Can I help you?”

“Yes. Can you direct me to Mr. Adler Beaumont’s office?” I asked.

“Sure,” she said pointing to a large floor plan on the wall. You make a left out the door, right at the hallway and walk straight down to the corner office.”

She stared at me for a moment.

“You look familiar. Have you been here before?”

“Yes, sure, a few times,” I lied. I’m sure I’ve seen you in the hall.”

I realized then how much I look like my mother and maybe that woman had worked with her for a time. I started to think that maybe this wasn’t the best place to ask after all, but then it appeared to leave her thoughts.

The floor was huge and it seemed so far off as I looked down toward his corner office. I had gotten so close to making it in, but got nervous when I saw some people down the hall. I was afraid I might be questioned, so I backed into the center hall again to wait until it was less occupied. Standing next to a cubby I saw a mail cart and no one around, so I borrowed it. No one would question a new mail person and if his secretary asked, I could say I have a hand delivery package that Mr. Beaumont is expecting.

A few people did pass me in the hall, but with the cart, not one of them even looked at my face. When I was close enough, I pushed the cart against the wall between two of the office doors and took

one of the stuffed envelopes from it. Outside his office, the secretary's desk was empty, but then I saw the arms of a woman from behind the corner column. She was struggling with a printer paper drawer. I could see inside the partially open door, a man was sitting with his back to the door and talking on the phone.

I slipped in quietly, carefully shutting the door behind me so it wouldn't make a sound. There was a large comfortable guest chair in front of his desk, so I sat down gently. The office was huge, decorated to a T and with only the best furniture and carpet. The man I believed to be Adler Beaumont was continuing on the phone, staring out on to Madison Avenue and I imagined he felt like a king looking over his subjects. I listened to him.

"I want that bastard to give me the time slot that I asked for," he said into the phone. What do you mean he won't play ball? You tell that asshole that if I don't get the time slot I asked for I'm going to pull the account. Tell him he can have another twenty, but I want that slot."

He didn't say goodbye, but I knew his conversation had ended when he just held the phone in his hand and stared out the window for a minute more. He finally turned back and saw me.

"Who are you?" he asked. What are you doing in my office?"

"Are you Adler Beaumont?"

“Yes. What do you want?” he asked, being obvious that he believed me to be too lowly to be speaking with him.

“My name is Rael Anton. You may remember my mother, Una. She was the one who would clean your office almost twelve years ago now.”

I could see he recognized the name, perhaps learning it at that time, believing she may cause trouble for what he had done. He didn't say a word, pushed a button on his phone and pressed two digits.

He spoke into the phone, “Denise. Cancel my next appointment and take my calls for now.”

I was looking deep to see if there was any look of shame being reminded of what he did to my mother, but instead saw only a look of defiance.

“So what is it you want from me,” he barked, not really asking.

“I want you to listen to what I have to say,” I told him.

“That was years ago and your mother came on to me,” he insisted.

“That's a lie,” I said. You know that's a lie.”

“Well, prove it,” he said. That was a decade ago and you think you can intimidate me. Good luck, kid.”

“Actually, I told you it was closer to twelve years ago,” I said as I reached into my jacket pocket and slapped the photos of Sheri on his desk.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“My mother got pregnant when you raped her. This beautiful little girl came from the vile act you committed. We may not be able to prove it was rape so long after the fact, but I’m sure your career and life would suffer once it’s proven that Sheri is from your sperm donation.”

I could see his defiance turn to anxiety, as he thought about the damage it would do to make this public. He sat silent and obviously now worried.

“So what is it you want from me?” he finally asked with no longer a cocky demeanor.

“I told you. I want you to listen to what I have to say,” I repeated.

He sank deep into his chair and said nothing.

“You were most likely born into money, you have always gotten anything you wanted and obviously feel you can take anything you want. You and your kind have your beautiful homes and things. You go through life as if it were a game of who can have more than the other. You maximize your wealth through greed and purposely cheat everyone around you. All the while you amass more and more wealth on the backs of the working class, ignoring how hard it is with falling wage values and rising living costs.

“My mother worries about how to put food on the table, while you contemplate where you will spend your lavish vacations. You and your type own the politicians and you are proud of it. You lobby to keep the wages of fine people like my mother at the poverty level, never letting them get ahead, while you speak about how great the economy is. And the economy is great, for you. But try living our life. So many of the people who work for you are struggling, while you spend more on flowers for your lobby than they make for their yearly salary.

“Your kind speaks about how you are entitled to what you earn because you work hard. Well so does my neighbor who works two jobs just to make enough to take care of his family, maybe put meat on the table once or twice a week. You pride yourself on how much you can squeeze from those without a voice and how it maximizes your personal profits. You spend substantial resources to coerce those in power to create more and more loopholes for you to shield your money, as you do to gain more tax breaks. Who

do you think makes up for the loss in revenue to the government? How much more do you think you can squeeze people before they break?”

I could have continued, but I needed to hear him say something. I leaned over the desk and stared into his eyes.

“Well?” I asked.

Given what was at stake for him, I could see that Beaumont couldn't help himself, when he shrugged his head and rolled his eyes.

“Well, I don't know what to tell you, kid,” he said. I may do all of those things, but I sure don't look at it the way that you do. Nothing that I do is illegal.”

I raised my voice. “Of course not, you idiot. The system is aligned so that you wouldn't need to. But you are still raping the vulnerable because you can, just like you raped my mother.”

“Listen kid. We can settle this without trouble. This would be messy for all of us.”

“For no one more than you, Beaumont, but I won't expose you. I would rather not have Sheri know that a rapist scumbag fathered

her. You, however, would deserve everything it would bring. But you need to do two things.”

“I’m listening. What?” he asked finally in familiar territory.

“You know my mother is beautiful outside, but what you don’t know is that she is as beautiful on the inside,” I said. She is smart and hard working and she deserves better. Your company provides the majority of the funding for a science facility called SciLab, in Monroe, in upstate New York. I know you can pull some strings. Arrange a job offer for a good paying housekeeping supervisor position there. I can get her to accept it. Her work for your company is exemplary so no one would question the offer.”

“That’s not a problem. You got it. What else, money right?” he asked. That’s still no problem. I just want this to go away.”

“Yes,” I began, but was interrupted.

“I knew you would want a piece. Thinking of the things you will be able to buy, huh. See, we are more alike than you let on,” he said.

“We are nothing alike,” I fumed. We could take you to the cleaners on Sheri’s behalf, but again, I don’t want to put her through the anguish. You are obviously extremely wealthy. Put seven hundred thousand dollars in a high yield trust fund payable only to Sheri, when she reaches the age of eighteen. I’m sure it’s

nothing for you. I want you to name me as custodian and send the paperwork and account information to me within a month.”

“Sure kid. Done.”

I scribbled my address for him to deliver the trust information, scooped up my photos of Sheri, and then turned to leave not saying a word.

“You know kid. You really don’t know me. I can be a nice guy at times,” he said.

I stopped dead and looked back.

“Really, Beaumont? During the whole time I was here, you not once asked me about Sheri. You never even picked up the photographs. I think I know you all too well.”

As I was opening the door to leave, he had already picked up the phone to get back to business. Our encounter seemed to be no more painful than a mosquito bite to him.

Outside I removed the jacket, dress shirt and tie, placing them folded back into my bag. I didn’t want Sheri to ask why I was home early, so I rode my bike to the west side to watch the new sea walls going in. The ocean levels were rising and all the coastal cities began attempts to hold off the inevitable. Everyone knew

that coastal cities would eventually fall like dominos since 2017, when they finally gave up trying to keep New Orleans above water.

Now almost noon and the temperature and humidity again made it sweltering, but I knew the oppressive heat would make it all that much easier to convince Mom and John to move when Mom's offer came. With better jobs for Mom and me, we could move to where there were fewer buildings that hold the heat, but more importantly, Sheri could attend better schools. John's job is nothing special. There would be plenty of opportunities for him. All in all, I know Mom will choose to do what is best for Sheri.

It was hard to stop myself from going over in my mind even more things I should have said to Beaumont, but what good would any of it have done. He's a man with a small black heart. What a contrast it was to compare Beaumont's forced efforts for Mom and Sheri, with Kaela's act of random kindness. Now that I had time to think about that offer for a job in the science labs, I was thrilled at the thought.

It was late enough now to ride slowly back home. I was happy to see the stoop empty, when I rode up, thinking I might be able to get the stuffed bag into my room without Sheri seeing it full and asking what I brought home today. It had become unbearably oppressive today, so she may have gone to the city cooling shelter. Once inside I still didn't see her, so I emptied the bag, carefully hanging the suit back up in my closet.

I took a shower, but shouldn't have showered so long. The water usage charge would be substantial, but I couldn't help feeling dirty after my visit with Beaumont. Nothing could wash it from my mind though. I pulled a new T-shirt from the drawer and slipped my jeans back on. Sheri for sure would still be dwelling on the subject of her father. I knew I could never lie to her, but I couldn't tell her the truth either.

I sat at the window to let the fan blow through my still wet hair. With the front of our place being shaded this time of day, the temperature was at least going down a few degrees. I heard the sound of rushing water and looked out to see James from next door cracking open the hydrant for the kids. He opened it just a bit, hoping it wouldn't be noticed, but with water in short supply, they installed sensors. Soon enough they would be coming to shut it down.

I saw Sheri walk up and stop to dip her head in the water, so I walked down to wait for her on the stoop.

“Hi, Rael. You too?” she asked noticing my hair still wet.

“Hi, Sheri. I just got out of the shower.”

She sat down across from me with her hair soaking wet, the water dripping onto her shirt.

“I met a really nice woman today,” I told her. She’s a scientist.”

“A real scientist?” Sheri asked.

“Her name is Kaela. She is a physicist in a lab upstate,” I said. “It’s beautiful up there.”

“When you took me camping upstate, it was so much cooler in the mornings and evenings,” she said. They have it so much better.

Kaela told me to call her and that she could get me a job as a lab helper. It would be a start and they would also pay for school. I could take classes in the evenings. So what do you think about that, little sis?”

“That’s great, Rael,” she said with an anxious look. But are you going to move away from me?”

Her look turned quickly to almost frightened.

“No. Absolutely not. I would never leave you behind,” I told her. I will always take care of you, just like I always have. I will be there for you and when the time comes you’ll go off to college.”

“Only rich people go to college,” she said.

“Whether it’s local or you go away, you will be able to go,” I said. You just keep getting those grades you do and I promise you will go.”

Sheri’s trust fund from Beaumont would insure that she could now.

“But what about Mom?” she asked.

“I will tell you something, but you can not tell Mom yet,” I told her. I was able to convince someone to take a look at Mom for a housekeeping supervisor job at the lab. You know she’ll take it and John will find a job up there. We can all move up.”

“Wow, Kaela is really helping us,” Sheri said.

I wasn’t going to mention Beaumont, so I didn’t respond. She can think it was Kaela who got Mom her job offer. Better if Mom thought that as well. There were too many lies, but it was for the good of my family.

“I have something really important to talk with you about,” I said.

“More important than all of that?” she asked casually.

“Sheri. You know that I always watch over you and try to do what’s best. I need you to do something for me, something that

will be very hard for you, but I need you to trust me. Will you do that?”

“If it’s something you care about that much, Rael, sure. What do you want me to do?”

“I told you it will be hard, but it’s about your father,” I said. I spoke with Mom and she will talk to you about him some day, but she doesn’t want to talk about it until you are at least a few years older. She is pained that you’re thinking so much about it lately. Can you put it out of your mind for now? Would you do that for me?”

“I will try, Rael. I’m glad that she said she will tell me some day. But I wish you all would stop treating me like a child,” Sheri said defiantly.

As much as she tries to act mature, there is still so much child in her.

I told Mom that night about Kaela and her offer to get me the job. I mentioned that she was talked about and would likely be offered a job there as well. Mom got the offer the following day and that same evening I was hand delivered a box with all the trust information and forms for me to fill out on Sheri’s behalf. It was obvious that Beaumont wanted to put this behind him just as soon

as he could. Good thing I was the only one on the stoop when the box arrived. I hid it in my room before anyone could see it.

The next day I called Kaela and she told me I could start any time. She was happy to hear that we would be moving up, when I explained about Beaumont getting Mom the offer there as well. I told her that I didn't want Mom to know it was him and I would explain it to her another time. We arranged for me to start in a few weeks and I planned to go up earlier to look for an apartment. With all of us doing better, we might soon be able to save enough to put down on a small house we could fix up.

Mom and John were happy we were moving and Sheri was smiling wider than I had ever seen. I know Mom and I were both thinking most about how much better things would be for Sheri. How she would go to much better schools. After all, she is our little treasure. And there would be no more bricks to hold the heat.