

2019-01-01

Ghosts of Madmen: A Generational Tale

Kristen Leigh Olin

University of Texas at El Paso, pilgrimsoul39@comcast.net

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open_etd



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Olin, Kristen Leigh, "Ghosts of Madmen: A Generational Tale" (2019). *Open Access Theses & Dissertations*. 134.
https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open_etd/134

This is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

GHOSTS OF MADMEN: A GENERATIONAL TALE
(FICTION)

KRISTEN OLIN

Department of Creative Writing

APPROVED:

Jose de Piérola, Ph.D., Chair

Tim Z. Hernandez, MFA

Liz Scheid, MFA

Charles Ambler, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

GHOSTS OF MADMEN: A GENERATIONAL TALE
(FICTION)

by

KRISTEN OLIN, B.S.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTERS OF FINE ARTS

Department of Creative Writing
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2019

Critical Preface

Ghosts of Madmen is the culmination of twenty plus years of writing. I started working on this story while I was a mental health worker in the psychiatric field and it started out as a crummy first draft as Anne Lamott would say in her book *Bird by Bird*: consisting of complete narration. And really only character development with no storyline. There was very little connective tissue between the generations it delineated. I had no idea what I was doing or what I was getting myself into. But it was also a story I picked up and put down numerous times, not knowing where to take it and how to get there or how to further my craft.

I became a member of a writing group started by one of my friends and through our time together gained greater control over my writing and slowly saw my craft improving. However, I wanted more of a critique group and found that was not possible in that setting. At the same time I was picking up copies of “Poets and Writers” and “Writer’s Digest” reading about craft and seeing all the information about MFA programs and the Iowa Summer Writing Festival. At the time I was not ready to pull up stakes and move, and the MFA I did not think I was anywhere near ready for, not to mention the program I could stay home and complete was at the University of Houston as it was like number three in the nation and I was intimidated, to say the least. I did check out the University of Iowa, in my home state, however, since they were number two in the country at the time, I kept to the summer program as their MFA was also so highly rated. I pulled the old story out and took a long look at the format and the storyline. It did have potential, but not in the format it was in. I rewrote it and altered the format using a more active voice, dialogue and suspense. What began in 1999 became a far better piece to bring to the 2006 Iowa Summer Writers Festival.

I envisioned this story as what Mario Vargas Llosa labeled a “Chinese Box” or matryoshka story and delving into the generations one at a time, one leading to the other, even in its beginning stages. The chapter on the hospitalizations was originally envisioned as a sort of vortex where all the stories connect. I think that is why I left it with all the generations of the tale and added in Aunt Angela’s story in Germany to the mix. What I wanted was a tornado style structure that showed how deeply one storm connected and lead to the next in this family. This current version, while somewhat simplified, I think still is able to make that case. It is probably the only chapter that has not seen a dramatic overhaul and remains mostly intact.

Vargas Llosa’s “Communicating Vessels” idea however seems more appropriate a structure as one generation speaks to and reacts to another about similar situations or scenic elements. That allows Danielle or Helena, the primary characters, to start a conversation and another generation chime in in response. In approaching the generations this way they seem to experience change and growth simultaneously, though realistically the one in the past is bringing the progress forward, allowing for the growth of the more contemporary character and ultimately Danielle.

I spent a week in Iowa working on this novel with Leslie Schwartz and on craft again. She and I discussed what I saw as the structure of the story and she introduced me to Anne Lamott. Afterwards, I put this project down again until I decided to go back. Two years later Mary Vermillion and Charles Holdefer became my guide posts. One to aid in building tension and suspense, the other to question why each generation was there and why each character was present and why the story had to be as complicated. Was there reason for the choices I was making? His questions disturbed me, but they made me think. What was the purpose for the characters and generations?

After attending the writing festival in Iowa twice and workshopping pieces of this project, I gained much more confidence in what I was creating and by 2015, after completing a different project from start to finish, I figured I was finally ready for the MFA. Ironically, I used the other project to apply to UTEP, and didn't think that I would pull this story out for my thesis at all.

When I approached my ISWF lecturer for a reference for this program, she was working for UCLA and stated she was no longer a believer in the MFA process. She, in fact, stated that writers write and the MFA was not needed, though she too holds an MFA. That did not work for me. In fact, the MFA allowed for a different experience in building a base of knowledge of how to better construct that connective tissue that my project needed, as well as, literary theory to back up the craft. But, after yet another revision, I again returned to Anne Lamott. She wrote about having to tear apart her novel and rearrange chapters and scenes to make it publish worthy. Likewise, I had to take apart my finished thesis and reconfigured it to allow for smoother transitions between the generations and greater connections between the generations in each chapter, which I limited to two generations per chapter except in one chapter focusing on similar experiences of hospitalization. Remembering Lamott's novel, I took a page from her experience and began this process.

My project is a "genealogical" fiction, entitled *Ghosts of Madmen*, plotting through the layers of matryoshka, creating the stories of each of five generations of women where each comes into the fore to share their part of the family history. Jobst Welge connects the conflicts in these types of tales to the outer conflicts in the time period or society, and at times to the very house that the family occupies, like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *The House of the Spirits*.

The families in my story do have connective tissue to their houses and their times and the effect of time on the family allows for the changes in how the women deal with these elements.

In utilizing a Modernist style broken timeline the communicating vessels of the major female character in each time period are allowed to pass on their stories to the next generation through the usage of letters or journal entries as catalyst for discovery. These storylines are as Borges' literary criticism suggests, "...stories that never intersect but somehow complement each other (qtd. in Vargas Llosa 125).

Though neither the matryoshka nor the communicating vessels operate entirely as Vargas Llosa described, they are playing upon these ideas and perhaps applying them, taking some liberties. The stories as matryoshka seem more purely box inside box in a story like *Frankenstein* where one is placed entirely inside one another. The stories of the female characters can stand alone and do not fit as neatly inside one another as generations do. They also do not communicate as vessels as neatly interwoven as the seduction scene at the fair in *Madame Bovary*, however the scenes played in succession are often in response to similar stimuli or situations that each character is dealing with allowing the reader see how each character deals independently to similar constructs.

In addition to Vargas Llosa describing these structures, he also writes about a narrative process that is played upon in *Ghosts of Madmen*: the hidden fact. In introducing this process, Vargas Llosa uses examples from Faulkner and Hemingway to show how the hidden fact comes into play. *Ghosts of Madmen* plays upon the idea of secrets and it is understood that there are hidden elements, so it is not as covert an investigation into this hidden fact, but more an overt discussion that there are things that are missing and the impact that those missing pieces have on the women in the story.

Missing pieces in the lives of the characters are used to push plot throughout the storyline and to aid in building suspense in the desire to reveal and heal from these secrets that have been hurting the relationships of the characters. And since this is a generational tale, the secrets not only harm the one generation, but also the ones that follow.

These scenes going back and forth, either as communicating vessels or as passing on secrets are frequently variable in length in *Ghosts*. This is partly to develop the exposition, which we will revisit, but also to build tension as Joyce Carol Oates suggests. She, too, uses Hemingway as example harkening back to “Hills Like White Elephants” to show how this one scene story is built to push suspense and tension. In creating my scenes, I too attempt to avoid “protracted,” “repetitive” scenes that allow the reader to jump ahead of the storyline, “slackening...attention,” but also trying not to make the scenes “too short and underdeveloped...thin, slight, sketchy, forgettable” (Oates 125).

My adjusting of the scene length had to do only with the pace with which the story was developing. This allows for the balance that Oates pushes, but also to allow for the altering of length of scene in order to slow or quicken the pace of the plot.

All of these structures and elements and processes are tied together in what Peter Childs delineates as Modernism. One of the primary elements of this is the subjectivity of the storyline breaking in to Free Indirect Discourse frequently. This use of FID has almost become second nature to fiction that we do not often realize what is happening until we examine it further. This happened to this writing and it relies upon FID in exploring the plot of *Ghosts*. Using an omniscient narrator and altering focalizations allows for FID to be used for any of the characters, as long as they are in their particular place of focalization.

Childs also gives modernist texts the characterization of fragmentation, as well as, “certain new understandings of time and space” (15). So while, as he says, modernism may be a contested term, this novel is clearly within the framework of what he sees as modernist. The timeline shifts from one generation to another breaking up the time and focusing on one or two years of significance for the primary characters of each section. This allows the parallel telling of the stories as they add to the overarching generational tale of violence and alcoholism and their impact on one family. We can see through the fabric of time and compare elements of the period with the responses of the family members and communicating vessels. Each of the major female characters deal with similarly disturbing male counterparts in the family and must choose their path in how to deal with the transgressions they encounter.

Time in this novel is in direct opposition to Aristotle’s “straight line connecting discrete moments” as the characters, like Orhan Pamuk suggests are living inside a more subjective time (80-81). The fragmentation flies in the face of objective time, though each of the segments and the connective tissue of each segment operate in objective time. But the blending of times and going from one time to the other places the reader in a more subjective frame of mind requiring them to reassemble the story and engage with the writing at a deeper level.

Although Childs also focuses on the duality of character and object, which has been seen in *Frankenstein* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, the characters of *Ghosts of Madmen* are perhaps experiencing a duality in the waking and dream states. They interact with dreamed up versions of very real characters who they are trying to ascertain if they are or are not, in fact, real. Plus with Helena and Dani both having similar dreams and similar experiences with eyes haunting them, they could be seen as two sides of one coin. The fact that they are in conflict with one another, Dani hates Helena and wants to exorcise her experiences of her a la *The Strange Case of Dr.*

Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, again shows that they are perhaps simply replaying an old tale of interior conflict perfected by Robert Louis Stevenson.

The utilization of therapy for Dani in the present day plot, also allows us to see the character as a dual persona, as therapy has been undertaken due to the baseline changes in character that one experiences forcing them to make that decision. Throughout the story, Dani softens toward her grandmother and becomes more at home in her skin, reverting back to the original character she must have been that we were not privy to at the start of the story playing upon this type of duality.

In using the dual nature of character and communicating vessels means the story contains a “multiplicity of viewpoints individual histories” similar to other generational tales (Welge 44). Utilizing this “plurivocality” as Welge calls it, gives the story a “unitary worldview, with all characters...appearing to speak in the same way and with the same language” in response to the abusive alcoholic violence in each generation (45).

Lastly, in talking of craft and plotline, the traditional view of Freytag’s Pyramid does not seem to work with this multiple time, multiple voice narrative. John Gardner’s argument for a Fichtean Curve seems more apropos to this style of narrative and allowing for the rise in action and emotional tension in each section make this seem the more appropriate form and allows for a building of tension overall, but all in pieces. This also taps into the idea Gardner gives in slipping in exposition in pieces according to the Fichtean Curve. This allows for the climax to have multiple pieces - from each generation - as it begins the final peak to the curve, wrapping up the storyline in denouement.

My intention with these techniques is to build the suspense of the story and the connections between the generations. I think adding in the mystery of each time period, in letting

it unfold piecemeal, allows us to see each generation develop along similar lines, a parallel journey for each of the female characters and a slow building to the climax and resolution for us as readers.

Influences:

There are many books that structurally, though perhaps not subject wise, have influenced this project. The fractured storyline I have become more and more accustomed to in reading many texts. In *A Tale of Two Cities* this was seamlessly done and allowed for two storylines to develop together. I wanted to emulate this structure in telling the tales of Dani and Helena and then bring these two stories to a head and connect them like Dickens connected the lives of Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton, where each story piece fits into a patchwork of text to great a greater story. That was how I envisioned the pieces from each generation fitting together.

What made *A Tale of Two Cities* work was the definition of place: London or Paris. *Ghosts of Madmen* stays put physically but moves back and forth through time into five generations, though starting slowly flipping between two of these at first and then slowly adding other times and generations. Though the image of “knitting” allowed a motif through which Dickens knitted his tale together, for me the motif was less material and had to be connected through the image of the eyes that seem to recur in many sections to illuminate a rather haunting element that is felt by many of the women.

Another book with a disjointed tale that I connected with was Barbara Kingsolver’s *Poisonwood Bible*, where it breaks the tale into the voices of the daughters in a similar fashion to William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. In these two books the main characters are given their voice and allowed to tell the tale of their history through their own eyes. This is the sort of

power I wanted to give my characters as we transitioned from Dani's story to Helena's and then to Kathy, Anna, Sarah and even Angela's voice. I wanted to grant them the sort of space that was allotted to the daughters and sons of Kingsolver and Faulkner, respectively. Allowing each of my generations time to tell their tale, I think was to allow for a deeper understanding of what each generation saw and how they viewed their situations, similar to aforementioned books.

I believe this idea of the disjointed timeline has become more and more popular and has become one of the characteristics of modernist text that we have gotten so used to that we do not even notice when it is happening. It has become second nature to what we are reading and how we are reading. I came across a more contemporary fiction series called *The Pink Carnation Series* by Lauren Willig. Before I understood what was happening in the text, we were being transported to another timeline. In each book of the series there is a contemporary character who is completing her Masters research on female spies of the *Scarlet Pimpernel* era and running parallel is the spy story of the time that is being depicted. Even in reading what I sometimes call fluff, as historical romance tends to be, this strategy is being utilized to effect.

More recently, I joined the Book of the Month Club online and discovered new and debut novels that are also utilizing this strategy. *Sweet Little Lies* by Caz Frear and *The Clockmaker's Daughter* by Kate Morton were surprises to me and still showed me elements of this structure that others had not. In *Sweet Little Lies*, Frear presents a crime novel told in two parts. The first is the contemporary murder of a young London woman and the search for the killer. However, the woman went missing some twenty years ago and was already presumed dead, in Ireland. The only person who knew this second detail was the detective Cat Kinsella who explores her past in Ireland and her father's possible connection to the dead girl for which he was cleared at the time. Like my book it travels between times to complete the story.

The Clockmaker's Daughter is far more complicated. It too travels back and forth through time, but also changes voice, from a ghost telling the tale to the perspective of each of the people who come in contact with her and the house that she haunts. The primary stories are that of the ghost, Lily Millington, and Elodie Winslow who is investigating the journal left by the artist Lily loved. Through reading the journal and looking into the house the stories of Lily, Elodie and many of her family members connect. Throughout the middle section of the book we hear from other characters who are connected and add something to the narrative. I thought that this was a more difficult read until I discovered the structure in which she builds the narrative of this story. Then it all started making sense, and alleviating my fears of delving too deep into the multiple generational viewpoints. I am not sure if I started using the journal as a connector before or after I read this, but it did make sense to me.

In addition, *The Clockmaker's Daughter* utilized Elodie's mother and her uncle connecting it to the other generational tales that I read and connected with writing *Ghosts of Madmen*. Lily and Elodie's tale connected to the house like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Gabriel Garcia Marquez and *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende. While I did not connect my tale to the house, it did connect to these through the use of multiple generations to emphasize the dysfunction of family.

Telling my tale through the guise of an alcoholic family sounds similar to the Buendia's trying to make the incestuous precursor not dismantle the entire family and its subsequent generations by holding onto the family and what it means to them by their fingernails. And just like the Buendia's my story's family find themselves facing the firing squad of violent alcoholic assaults and destruction. The Buendia's do not ever seem to find a balance or solace in contrast to what I have depicted. One thing that can happen in alcoholic families with help is a

progression of health that did not seem to happen with the Buendia's. In fact the vestigial tail that was hinted at finally devolved and showed up in the family.

Unlike the Buendia's, the Trueba's seemed to be doomed due to their own political actions. And as they deteriorate, so does the house. This was an amazing connection and it was interesting to see their actions' effects on the family and house at the same time. The generations also seemed to act in opposition to one another attempting to not do what the generation before them did. This was something I saw in my own family, but did not use it in my storyline as it did not fit the story that I was currently telling.

Wide sweeping tales of families, and unhappy families in particular, seem to be told often. I finally read *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, which has been on my shelf for a very long time, but also read *As I Lay Dying* again by Faulkner, and tapped my memory for John Phillip Santos' family saga *Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation*.

Anna's unhappy family is a direct thread to my story's family through Stepan's addiction to his proclivities. Today we would probably label Stepan a sex addict. But the infidelities of both he and Anna are their instigating factor in their fall from grace. At least their family's addictions didn't connect to violence until that fateful day at the train station.

I appreciated the focus on the death/murder in Faulkner and Santos. This is a factor that pushes their storyline like mine did. Peeling the layers and getting to the heart of the murder/suicide for me was more central in the family story and started the wake, destabilizing the generations. But once it was there, it seemed like it was one answer to why the family was how it was. This is the same for both Faulkner and Santos' narratives.

These elements seem harder to put into music and film. Maybe the likes of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen or *Scenes from an Italian Restaurant* by Billy Joel where there are seemingly disjointed sections playing parts and adding depth to the storyline of the music.

For film, however, there are two that stick out and both are Tarantino films: *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs*. Of these I think *Reservoir Dogs* is far better and more cleanly put together, though both tell the story through multiple characters and have a broken tale to tell which becomes pieced together as we continue. One movie that I absolutely love and it too is broken up in pieces is *Run, Lola, Run* a German film with Franke Potente where we relive her day until she gets it right...sort of a shorter version of *Groundhog Day* perhaps. However, they do not get any deeper than the one story, retold again and again.

Our own cultural ADHD seems to be an exacerbating factor in our altering of our reading styles. We want to keep our brain focused and to do so in the internet age, we have to keep the images coming. So I am left with the question: “Is my style and narrative structure adding to the mire of instant gratification jumping from one piece of the storyline to another? Or is it just another modernist text in line with others’ who have come before?”

Assessment:

One of the things that both Vargas Llosa and Robert Olen Butler hit on in their texts is the idea that “all stories are rooted in the lives of those who write them” (Vargas Llosa 15) and that “the only way to create a work of literary art is to stop that voice” that keeps screaming to get out (Butler 20). That is one of the aims that I worked for on this project. This story is one that is entrenched in family lore and has been begging to be out of my head for almost two decades.

So for this to be done and on paper is a huge accomplishment. I always thought that I just needed this one out of my head to continue. Though that has not proven true, it is a relief to have it done.

I wanted to do justice to the family story, and yet, since so much of the tale has not ever been told, this provided a hurdle for my process. One person I was working with asked why I needed all five of the siblings...well, that was for accuracy...but did they all need to be there for the story to be told? In hearing this feedback, I did reduce the largeness of the family and focused on the pieces that were pertinent. Actually that part, I think can be thinned out more allowing for more specific details perhaps.

The structure I originally wanted was to play all the generation cards at the beginning and allow them all to unfold at the same time. I now think that can be problematic and solved that by allowing for the two generations to build character, time and setting before bringing in more. That I think is perhaps due to my lack of outlining. One thing that I want to do more of in creating is using the pre-dreaming of scenes as Butler discusses, similar to the scene creation I also used in my Gathering Stories class. This class and Writing the Novel both used a similar plotting exercise that I think would help me make sure the scenes had connective tissue. That is something I am still working on in my craft, but means that as I revise this project, I will have to go back to what cards and notes I did take but also perhaps create them and line them up to make sure they work together. Sometimes seeing them in that fashion makes the errors stand out.

What I think could be improved is the metonymic connection between the people and their houses as Allende and Garcia Marquez have done. Tying the house to the family as part of who they are could also make the leaving of it or the cleaning of it more powerful for my characters. I also think the connection to the turmoil around the family in society could make their implosion more powerful. This is seen in Allende and Garcia Marquez, as well as, many of

the other genealogical fictions Welge cites. Often the crisis in the family mirrors the crisis in society of the time, which I don't feel is happening in my story.

The connections as vessels and matryoshka I also think could make stronger. The playful way that I tried to connect these may not always work. And the jumping from one time period to the another may also confuse the reader until they are use to the structure. I know that it took me awhile to pinpoint what Morton was doing with her very rich novel. Maybe the generations and flipping from one to the other will make for a more confused storyline. That is something I feel like I need input on and need to go reread now that I've had some space from it. Making those transitions smooth is something I think I'm still working on.

One thing I am still unsure of is did I, as Gardner suggest, "leave nothing unexplained" (194). I think I am still needing another read of the narrative to address this, making sure that necessary elements are not left unsaid. Using scene cards like Butler, I could ensure that all the pieces fit and are present, and omit pieces that strategically should be left unsaid. That is perhaps the one thing that I still am working on and need to one last time to ensure then likelihood of publishing, which was always the intention. I also look forward to feedback that comes from my committee, and also other readers I have engaged in this process, that will also allow for one last revision to happen.

Table of Contents

Critical Preface	iii
Ghosts of Madmen	1
References	222
Curriculum Vita.....	224

Ghosts of Madmen

Part I

Chapter 1

2018

Danielle played with her keys as she walked to her car. She hated working the evening shift. It threw off her sleep pattern. And that meant leaving work late. The parking garage was deserted at this time of night, except for the few hospital staff members getting into their cars. The shuffle of his feet echoed and drew her attention to the far corner. In the shadow he stood, the dim light only hinted at his dark clothes, hoodie exaggerating his slumped posture, hands in his pockets. He just stood there watching. The passing car lit his corner showing his disheveled sandy hair and blue eyes.

The eyes. Steely, cold, green. Who the hell? Standing in the darkened corner, she guessed, was what freaked her out most. You don't just hang around a parking structure's dark recesses.

What did they say at our safety meeting last week? This guy fits the bill. Everything they talked about and the strange behavior too. For a moment she hesitated. Better safe than sorry.

Danielle turned and ran back into the building trying to find anyone she knew. Most of the offices had closed down at 5:00 pm, but not the rest of the hospital. The units never closed and the drug rehab unit was always full, plenty of sorry suckers self medicating their depression, or drowning their sorrows, in need of treatment. They'd pulled on her ear with their sob stories all night, she'd narrow escaped hearing the whiny script abuser's story for the tenth time.

The doors to the unit were locked. Her keys were in the bowels of her purse and she figured pounding on the door was the best way to get someone's attention.

"Can I help you?" said the voice on the intercom by the door.

"Marina, let me in. There's some man out here. I don't know who he is. But we need to call security. Buzz me in."

The latch loudly gave way and she slipped in and forced the door shut again. After the lock sounded she let out a sigh and allowed her muscles to relax.

"Your fan club following you home these days, Dani?"

"Marina, I swear this one I've never seen."

Danielle had to shake her head and smile. It was only last week that she ran into a patient at the grocery store and was thoroughly hit on...and badly, too. "And I had nothing to do with the last one either."

While Danielle called security, Marina poured her a cup of coffee.

"This will put hair on your chest. Or so they say."

"You let Carlos make coffee?"

"Like I could stop him. The man is a coffee obsessed. He still comes in and makes this rocket fuel and then drinks it all night. I can't keep up. Cheers," Marina said drinking the last of her coffee.

"So what's this guy look like?"

"Blurry. All I see are his eyes. I remember those." She thought about it, shook her head, and came up with, "Nothing, I remember nothing, but the eyes. Strange."

"Why is that so strange? You were freaked out, It'll come back to you."

Danielle shook her head.

"I think he just reminded me of someone. You remember my crazy grandmother?"

Danielle watched Marina's face trying to pull the memory. Marina shook her head.

"You know, the drunk, I've told you about her before."

"Dani, I'm not making the connection here. Refresh my memory."

Danielle took a deep breath.

"Her journals were in her safe deposit box. I've been going through them. My therapist's idea."

Danielle rolled her eyes at the thought of going through so much history to get to a present day problem.

"Well, she had these nightmares of someone watching her. Some creepy looking guy and one time he was strangling her. She didn't really describe him except for his eyes."

That is when Danielle stopped in thought.

"So, what happened?"

"I don't know. That's all I could stomach. I need to go back and look, but this is freaking me out too much for that tonight. And when I tell Kevin what happened? Oh, Lord, he will tell me to quit reading them, quit my job and maybe even quit my crazy therapist."

Marina smiled, "Not a believer is he?"

"Not really. He thinks people just need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps." Dani mimicked his bootstrapping.

"That old crap. He does know it's 2018, right?"

"Oh, that's not all. He then tells me how black families haven't ever been able to rely on therapy. It wasn't available because they were poor."

"That man was never poor in his life. He grew up middle class or better. We were neighbor's, Dani, don't let him get away with that crap. And his mom is a therapist." Marina just laughed.

Danielle laughed and nodded, "I know. He's so full of shit. But he doesn't believe any of that. He's just trying to get a rise out of me. He likes me mad."

"Why would he like you mad? You can be a total bitch when you're mad."

"Marina, he likes the fight," Dani smiled, "but the make up sex he likes even better."

Shaking her head and smiling, Marina said, "I knew it had to be something like that. Why else pick a fight on purpose? Seriously."

"Ladies," Carlos popped his head into the room.

They turned and looked at him, waiting.

"Sorry, but security is here."

"Thanks, Carlos, he's here for me." Danielle got up from the table and followed him out, waving at Marina.

"Ma'am." Sgt. Martinez offered his hand and introduced himself.

"Danielle Smith. Friends call me Dani."

She had never felt the need to have someone walk her to her car, but knew that they would if she asked.

"So you hadn't ever seen this guy before?" said Sgt. Martinez.

"No, not that I recall. But it was just like one of those scenes from all the horror movies where the girl gets sliced and diced by the madman."

She looked at the skeptical face of Sgt. Martinez.

"Yeah, I know, I watch too many of those creepy movies."

"Better to be safe than sorry, ma'am, is what I always say when someone wants me to walk them out. It's really no bother and we'd rather keep busy than sitting down in the office watching monitors."

"This is me, here." Dani stopped at her RAV4.

"And where was he?"

"Over there." She pointed to the far corner with the strange lighting."

"That is a perfect hiding place. Enough shadow so you cannot see him clearly. No wonder you can't describe him. I'll keep a lookout for those corners for you. Make sure to call anytime for assistance."

Dani thanked him and got into her car, after checking that it was empty. The movies made her shake her head. Like someone would hide in her car. Why am I so freaked out? She got into her car and locked the doors. I have got to stop watching all those horror flicks. Kevin will just have to sit through some rom-coms.

*

Dani walked into the house and immediately faced her husband. That look on his face told her he already knew.

"She called you didn't she?"

"Can you blame her?"

"I was going to call. I was trying to get out of there. Security walked me to my car and I didn't want to..."

"To what? Waste time?" His look told her all she needed.

Dani took a deep breath and pressed her lips together, thinking a minute before responding. He has every right to be upset.

"I wanted to get home and away from there. And you know what a klutz I am. Getting out my phone while I'm driving just isn't a great idea. Especially when I am already upset. You know this, and tell me all the time."

His face softened a bit, knowing what she said was true. Shaking his head, he wrapped his arms around her.

"You still should have called," he whispered in her ear.

She closed her eyes and let the comfort wash over her. He felt secure, safe, like he would protect her against all the ills of the world.

"I know," she whispered back.

The morning came too soon and it almost felt as if she hadn't slept at all. Groggy, she headed into the kitchen. The smell of coffee was unmistakable. And if he made coffee?

"Dani, baby, you look like Hell," Kevin took a sip of his coffee and raised his eyebrows looking her over, "tossed and turned all night long?"

Dani checked her selfie. The messy bed head was one thing, but the dark circles under her eyes were going to require some serious make up.

"Bad dreams again."

"I know, I felt each one."

Dani nodded, not really awake enough to discuss it. Kevin poured her a cup of coffee placed it in front of her as she sat at the bar watching him cook breakfast, where he learned to make his fancy omelets was still a mystery he wouldn't reveal.

Stirring her coffee, she stared into the swirls of cream and sugar, wondering again about the face in the shadows.

"Who was he?" Kevin's voice interrupted her preoccupation.

"Huh?"

"Obviously there is something on your mind. Knowing you, you're still trying to figure out who the creep was."

“Kevin,” she shook her head, “I just keep seeing pieces of his face.”

She thought about it again and could see the light revealing a five o'clock shadow, but not much else. She continued to think about it.

“You going to drink your coffee or stare into it?”

This time the worry showed in his face, as he placed the omelet in front of her.

“Figured it out yet?”

“I can’t see enough to tell. There’s the feeling I know him, but I can’t access the memory. It’s bugging the hell out of me.”

“Doesn’t your therapist use a hypnotist or something? Maybe she could help out.”

He took a teabag from the canister and swung it pendulum like in front of her.

“You’re getting very sleepy...” He said this in his best Transylvanian accent.

“No, you are,” I said.

They both laughed about the Dracula meets the therapist scene with George Hamilton, both trying to hypnotize one another.

“Kevin, she’s just a counselor, not trained in hypnosis.”

“Did you ask?”

“No, but...mom went someplace else for that...plus...”

She could see her dad thinking some witchdoctor was working with his daughter. Going to therapy was a joke to him and he made those at her mother’s expense. But this? He’d hoot.

“Do you want me to call?” Continuing his best Dracula impression.

She smiled, “No...and I’m not sure this one bad dream warrants extensive psychotherapy...or any therapy.”

“Babe, if it bothers you doesn’t that warrant a look-see? And you’ve been having bad dreams, this isn’t the first. Just a new preoccupation.”

“Maybe.” Dani wasn’t totally convinced.

*

Dani sat in her therapist's office thinking of the lies and secrets. They were always there. Dani’s mother always changed the subject when asked about her father, or grandfather. And lied about not remembering. Dani could tell it was a lie, her mother had a tell.

Dani laughed at her mother holding her breath after a lie. Mom, never bluff at poker, she’d told her. Dani didn’t think it bothered her anymore. But always remembered things didn't quite fit. She spent her childhood glossing over what sounded silly. Going through the journals brought these back to her now. Now they sounded worse.

You could always count on lies and secrets. She knew that previous generations even switched into German to avoid letting the children in on the secret. These strange pieces of family history were never talked about. Grandma’s martinis were never talked about. Alcoholism was a taboo word...‘ssshhh, we must not judge.’ And the men vanished like ghosts, never to be talked about, never mentioned.

“Danielle?” Come on in.

Danielle followed her therapist into the office. This latest episode on her mind. She wasn’t sure she wanted hypnosis, but she’s at least mention it as she promised Kevin.

"How are the journals coming?"

"I don't know what I'm doing. Not sure any of this is helping. My hatred of my grandmother Helena isn't being alleviated by reading her words. I still am glad she is dead and I don't have to deal with her anymore. She was toxic and hateful."

"Danielle, the only thing I think we're working on is getting you more comfortable with your life. This issue with your grandmother has been bothering you. If that isn't what you want to work on, then lets move on. But I think that you're avoiding the subject again."

"Laura, I'm..."

Dani didn't quite know where to start. The journals were drawing her into her grandmother's world, but she didn't know how they would solve her anger with her. It just seemed that she and her grandmother were on a collision course. She thought about the madman her grandmother mentioned and the madman she had experienced.

1940

The demon had no name. He came to her each night, but didn't show enough of himself to recognize. Just lurked. Helena saw him in shadow, through the window pane or half hidden in the darkness of her room. She always awoke at the moment she was to discover his identity. Then he was gone. Lost in her dream, lost in the recesses of her mind.

Helena lay in bed, her eyes open, her sister Madeline in the next bed. Whose eyes were those? They seemed somehow familiar to Helena. She sat up and looked at the corner, hidden by the curtains and the dresser. No hint of anyone. It was just a dream, she told herself.

In the morning she saw him in the faces on the L, the strangers she passed on the walk to work. But no one had that menacing glare in their green eyes. Eyes she had only seen once and only by the light the street lamp outside the window. But they were burned into her brain; unlike any eyes she'd seen before or since.

There was a raggedness about him...disheveled, but also nondescript. The familiar feel made him seem real. Was he? Could she describe this man to the police? Would she have to she

kept asking herself. And would they brush her off as crazy, hallucinating, or merely dreaming him up? She didn't want to find out. And no one else in the family discussed anything scaring them. Maybe they were just not sharing. Demons would not be a topic openly discussed in the family. Not many things were openly discussed, why should this be any different?

In the family secrets were the norm. Her mother had them. She knew she had them. Father was never discussed; grandma and grandpa were also left out of the conversation.

"We don't talk about those things," would always be mother's response. Helena surmised the demon haunting her would also get this response. She'd never make it so far as the police station, knowing the family would ridicule her first. She kept her demon a secret, thinking, *hoping*, he would go away.

*

Quietly, she crept down the stairs. Another dream and those eyes were there again, watching from the corner of her room. The rest of the family lie sleeping in their beds. The hallway creaked a bit, so she had closed the door to the room she and Madeline shared. Maddie slept lightly, any noise would certainly wake her.

Helena made her way in the dark to the kitchen and padded to the icebox. She thought a little warm milk would do the trick. Carefully she placed the milk bottle on the counter and got a saucepan from the cabinet. As she turned around with a mug for the milk, she saw a red glow coming from the corner, and a plume of smoke rising from it.

"Can't sleep?"

She jumped back as the reality of his voice startled her.

"Damn it, Sonny."

"Be quiet, you'll wake the whole house."

“Why are you sitting in the dark?”

“Why are you so jumpy?”

He took a drag on his cigarette turning the end bright red. He eyed her suspiciously, from his dark corner.

“You’ve been creeping around for a couple of weeks, Helena.”

Sonny came out of the shadows, glared at her as he took one last drag from his cigarette. He crushed the butt in the small ashtray in his hand, knowing mother hated when he smoked in the house. So he smoked after everyone went to bed.

And he thinks I creep around.

“So. Why, what gives?”

She looked into his hazel green eyes and felt like she was shrinking. Being melted down to the smallest particles. He left her to squirm in her thoughts for a moment before taking a step closer and raising his eyebrow at her.

“Just trouble sleeping.”

“Bullshit – you think I don’t know better. Mom may buy that, but I know it’s crap. So what gives?”

“Nothing, just can’t sleep.”

“And....”

She sighed. Sonny had a look about him, like some detective piercing your brain if you didn’t answer, and he could lie like crazy, but try to pass one off on him, and he always knew. She told him he ought to be a police officer once. He just shrugged it off, saying they wouldn’t take him.

He took a step closer bringing his six foot frame to its full height and looked down at her. His towering figure threw a shadow over her.

Looking at him in shadow reminded her of her dream. A chill ran down her spine. She couldn't help but notice the feeling in her stomach was the same as when she had seen her demon. What if he knew? Was he messing with her?

"Helena."

She jumped, startled by his harsh tone.

"Bad dream is all."

He nodded and started to walk off, muttering under his breath.

"Just like her."

Just loud enough to be heard. Helena looked after him. Pain creased her forehead and her eyes welled up. Cruel. Sonny knew how to cut her, deep. But he also knew her deepest fears. And now he left her with them. Alone in the kitchen.

The tears fell silently down her face as she poured her milk.

*

She returned to bed. The even sounds of Maddie's breathing told her she had not awakened. Listening to the rhythm lulled Helena back into sleep where the demon awaited. Fog of sleep entered her head. There he was, in his corner, leaning against the window frame, his shape hidden by the curtains that breathed softly with him, the faint reflection of light in his eyes. Slowly he stepped out of the shadow and approached her bed, careful not to wake Maddie in the process. The dark of the room hid his face still, even the eyes she feared. But his tall stocky frame was now exposed and grew larger as he approached.

As he leaned over her, she felt his presence above her like the heaviness of the air just before a storm, pressing down on her. Smoke filled her nostrils - smoke and beer, like a stale tavern. The smell of beer was so strong she could almost taste it, though the bitterness wasn't familiar to her.

The demon wrapped his cold, clammy hands around her neck. They were the rough hands of carpenter, a man who used his hands for labor. Dry, calloused, and large, they were like sandpaper on the smooth skin of her neck. At first they simply rested on her; gently, they tightened. With the subtle movement of a boa constrictor, he cut off her air leaving her wide awake, gasping for breath.

Helena sat bolt upright, hair damp from sweat. Gasping for air. She clutched at her neck to get the feel of him off her. Kicking off the covers, she rushed to the mirror to see if he had left marks for anyone to see. This would be the evidence she needed to convince others that he was real.

"No.....NO."

Maddie moaned as she tried to figure out what was happening. Rubbing her eyes as she opened them, seeing her sister standing in front of the mirror frantically clawing at her neck.

"Jeez, Hel, you look like you haven't slept at all."

Helena sat on Maddie's bed.

"Do you see anything? On my neck."

"Am I supposed to?"

"Maddie."

Helena looked skyward, stretching her neck for Maddie's inspection.

“Alright. I see nothing. Nothing but your usual neck. Now, go back to sleep, it’s still early.”

Madeline turned over and plumped her pillow before trying to settle in for a couple of hours more pulling the covers over her head to block out the light her sister had turned on.

Nothing. Helena returned to the mirror, searching once more. He’d eluded her, again. She turned off the light and returned to bed. She lay down and studied the tiles of the ceiling. She could still smell the smoke. Faint like it had trailed off into another place.

“Maddie.”

“Mmm.”

“Do you smell the smoke?”

Madeline turned onto her back, pulled the covers down below her chin and drew in a deep noseful of the cool morning air from their open bedroom window.

“I smell line-dried sheets and detergent. And some faint flower from the trellis outside. No smoke.”

Helena laid there, her right hand caressing her neck, right where his hands had tightened around. The tears came again. They slid into hair as her lips and bottom jaw trembled. She muffled her tears. She had no way of convincing the others about him, no way to prove his existence, not even to herself. Maybe she was going mad. Now that Maddie knew, it wouldn’t be long before the others knew.

Maddie watched her sister out of the corner of her eye, with her eyelids almost shut. And turned away as she rolled her eyes and hid her guilty grin.

✱

Maddie shut the bedroom door quietly and came to stand over Helena's bed. She hesitated, knowing that her sister didn't sleep well. But the scene downstairs? She'd want to know to avoid that.

"Helena.....*Helena*, get up," Maddie said, shaking her.

"What?"

Helena whispered with her scratchy morning voice...still not totally conscious.

"What ever you do, don't go down to the first floor."

"Okay, Maddie. Then why are you waking me up?"

Helena started drifting back to sleep.

"Why, what's going on?"

"She's pitching a fit. Again. That makes two this morning. You'd know if you'd get your butt out of bed."

"Sorry, didn't sleep well."

"Yeah, how many times did you wake up? And where'd you go?"

"You woke up?"

"Always.....so...."

"Had some warm milk." Sonny's words came back to her, echoed in her mind, worried her.

"Do you think any of us are like her?"

Maddie crawled back into bed and pulled the covers over her head. Muffling her answers from there.

"Huh?"

“It’s hereditary, Helena....we’re all doomed. Bound to have some quality of hers. Just don’t want those *truly* special ones.”

Helena knew what she meant. There always seemed to be a crushing darkness around mother and her family. With her dreams worrying her, she felt this darkness in her soul, filling her head with worst case scenarios. Obviously Maddie felt this too.

Helena thought of those truly special qualities. Maybe that was what Sonny meant last night. She tried to shake the thought from her head.

To Helena, this family darkness had its own presence, its own life. It affected her mother Sarah most of all. And her mother fed this monster on a daily basis. Helena never understood why mother would go through so much trouble feeding the it. All Helena wanted was for this demon to go away, but she could not do it alone. But how was the demon and this monster mother fed connected? Were they?

What Sonny had muttered ran through her head again. “*You’re just like her.*” Did he really think that? Her eyes welled up again. She had sworn she’d never be like her mother...never. How to avoid it was harder to figure out.

Helena slowly descended into the foray, watching her steps, hoping to stay out of the fight. She knew there was still a commotion going on downstairs; she could hear the raised voice of her mother, who would try to pull her in to defend her.

“*No.* You cannot move out.”

“Mother, I wasn’t asking your permission.”

“You can’t leave me. I’ve worked so hard to keep this family together, I cannot believe you are trying to split us up. It’ll be the death of me. After all I’ve done for you. For this family.”

Sarah started to sob. She couldn't believe it was her son that would destroy her after all this time. The commotion in her head was throbbing, like the sound of the cicadas' electrical chirp in the evening. She brought her hand to her head to rub the pain from her eye.

"They are always trying to split us up. Always trying to hurt us. Not this time. I won't let them do it again."

She turned her head away from Sonny and stared at the floor, eyes wide enough to see the whites surrounding the deep blue irises.

Sonny was no longer paying attention. Two hours of this was more than he could handle. More and more she began rambling on to herself. It was time to escape. Escape from the crazy; escape from her. The house was large enough that that was easy enough. He lit his cigarette as he left the kitchen, rolling his eyes, as she continued to mumble.

"And Sonny. Stop smoking in this house. Every morning this kitchen smells like smoke. I come in here to make breakfast and cough...."

Her voice fell away as he walked to his room, closing the door and closing her out of his mind.

Helena saw her mother pacing in the kitchen, rubbing her head and talking to the air. Never. Please, do not let me be like her. Ever.

*

Helena had called Lillian. Softly Helena closed the front door as she made her way out. Talking with Lillian always made her forget the craziness at the house.

"So, what's going on?" Lillian said.

Helena walked into Woolworth's and sat down at the soda counter.

Lillian slid the chocolate shake over to Helena. Woolworth's was never very busy so early in the morning. But if Helena wanted chocolate sodas at 9:00 am, then there was bound to be something on her mind.

"Do I remind you of her?"

"Her? Her who?"

"You know who, my mother."

"Is that why you're all fired up? I thought there was some emergency when you called this morning. I had to lie to my boss to get over here this fast. Besides, you know how she is. Is that all you're really afraid of? Or is there something else on your mind? I have to get back to work or my boss will fire me."

"Lillian, I don't want my kids tiptoeing around me. Or people I love leaving me. I don't want them wishing a piano would fall on my head like the cartoons at the movie."

"So....you're pregnant? How trashy of you. And to think you were in high school just six month ago, who is he? " Lillian had graduated the year before.

"Lillian."

Helena's seriousness wasn't eased by Lillian's jokes. She had to tell someone about the demon, but talking about mother was safer. Lillian already knew how Helena felt about her mother. The demon was another thing.

"You know we are going to need something stronger than chocolate to make you act like your mother."

"Like what?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I don't think the sex will do the trick either. How'd she get like that anyway?"

"Wait...What sex?"

"You know, you and the mystery father of your children."

Helena smiled at the joke, pondering the bigger question.

"Wish I knew, but the only version I get is in German and only papa spoke it with her.

He's gone now, so no one understands her when she starts up."

"She's dropping into German, today?"

Helena nodded, "But only to herself."

She could still hear her parents changing from English to German when they fought.

They never taught her the language.

Helena's was the forth of five children, the second generation born in America. Her mother, Sarah, was an odd creature she thought. Dirt poor, living in a huge house with five children, trying to bury the remnants of their family history. Helena's father was dead, or that's what mother led them to believe. She didn't remember any funeral, but, then again, these are things we don't talk about.

Childhood memories were always a sad for Helena, always trying to find a way out of the family, into someone else's, usually Lillian's. This conflicted with her mother's wishes. Sara was bound and determined to keep the family together; together and poor.

"I have been having these dreams, Lil. And not about my mother."

"Ooooh, dish."

"You'll just think I'm crazy. I'm starting to believe that too, so it wouldn't exactly be a stretch."

"Helena, I would never think you're crazy."

Helena looked at Lillian. They had known each other for most of their lives. She was the one person Helena always trusted. There were no secrets between them, not even the ones the family would cringe at having others know. Lillian would find out.

“I’ve been having these dreams that someone is watching me from the corner of my room. I can see his eyes, but nothing else. Then last night, after weeks of the same dream, he comes closer and smells like a tavern, stale beer and cigarettes. And he tries to strangle me in my sleep. I woke up coughing and choking.”

“Mmmm, ok, I was wrong. You are going crazy.”

“Lillian, that’s not funny.”

“Not even a little funny?”

Helena looked hurt, like she’s lost her last friend.

“Ok, seriously, Hel...I think it’s disturbing. Have you told anyone else?”

“No, my family is not going to believe me.”

“What do you mean? Why not?”

“I don’t think it’s just a dream. I could feel him, smell him. And my sister constantly leaves that window open. You know the one...by the trellis with the honeysuckle growing on it. Says she likes the smell of it.”

“So, do you think that someone was actually trying to strangle you? Hel, I don’t think you’re making enemies that want to strangle you down at the office. Clerks and secretaries are not in a dangerous line of work. It was just a dream. They won’t start hating you until you start working there full time.”

Helena just smiled, then thought again of the dream, “It was a vivid one if it was just a dream. It was so real. I actually woke up sweating; I could feel his hands on my throat and that smell. Could that be just a dream?”

“Stranger things have happened, I’m sure, Helena. Not sure to whom, but I’m sure they have happened.”

“So, what do I do?”

“Maddie. Talk to Maddie. You share a room, anyway, maybe she could be on the lookout as well. At least she would be able to tell if you're having strange dreams, with all that sweating, you know?”

“I don’t really want to scare her.”

“You know what they say, misery loves company. She could share your misery with you then. And then you’d both be worrying about each others sanity, not just your own.”

“Maddie. Letting her in can’t hurt I guess. Maybe she’ll tell me if I’m just like my mother. At least then I’d know.”

*

Helena found Maddie in their room and took a deep breath. It’s now or never. Here goes nothing.

"Maddie," Helena started, remembering her dream, the madman, her fears. She hoped Maddie wouldn't think her completely crazy. She told her everything and breathed a deep sigh of relief. Then she waited, looking at the floor, waiting for the worst.

When Maddie said nothing, Helena looked up.

"Maybe we should tell the others. There is probably a reasonable explanation for your dreams. Someone you met, or know, that scared you? Maybe he'll remind them of someone."

"And that I dream of strangling me in my sleep?" Helena rubbed her neck absently.

"I don't think telling everyone is the best idea. Sonny already thinks I'm losing my mind."

"What about Ethel? She's the oldest and might even know who it is? And she can always talk some sense into Sonny, in the event that he says something ugly."

Maddie looked at Helena and shrugged.

"It can't hurt, Helena."

"Wanna bet?"

Helena wasn't convinced that this was the best route to take, but Maddie was right. If this demon was someone from their past, Ethel would know him. She following Maddie down the stairs.

They found Ethel in her room. She had just finished putting up the laundry and turned to find her sisters staring at her. She nodded.

"Something's up. You need to talk?"

Ethel was a good sounding board over the years. Both Maddie and Helena had grown accustomed to asking for her motherly advice.

"Spill it."

"It's Helena's story," Maddie gestured to her.

Helena hesitated, took a deep breath and told Ethel everything while Maddie sat with her for moral support.

Ethel shook her head, "I don't think we ever knew anyone who fit that description. Green eyes aren't that common. I only know two people with green eyes. Sonny. And our father had green eyes too. Those are the only ones I can think of offhand."

"You don't think she's dreaming about father, do you?"

Maddie had to ask the inevitable question. And she waited hoping for the best or worst, whichever outcome was what.

They all thought about the consequences of their father being the madman that Helena dreamt of. What would that mean? It would make sense, if he were alive and homeless and. No that couldn't be.

"All this craziness with my dreams and the tension this morning. Strange that these are going on at the same time, don't you think, Ethel?"

Helena wanted her opinion on all of this. She seemed to understand her mother better than Helena and Maddie did. Maybe the benefit of being older?

"What tension are you talking about?" Ethel said.

"Can you not feel it? Today it was Sonny and mother, fighting. The other day it was her, muttering to herself, in German. Doesn't it seem like something is going on?" Helena asked.

"Are you kidding? It's hard to miss. Today she was speaking German, again. Sonny must have hit on something. But it's never been this bad," Ethel said, "It's almost overwhelming.

"I talked to Sonny, after he and mother stopped arguing. He doesn't remember it ever being this bad either."

Ethel knew Sonny had a good memory and a keen eye for detail, his memories were always vivid ones. She also knew that his application to the police academy had been rejected. He had an arrest on his record for a bar fight when he was just out of high school. The way it was reported left him with a dark mark that meant no police academy. Ever.

"Can we confront her about this?"

Helena was hopeful. Hoping that maybe there was a solution to the problem that was haunting her and her mother. And maybe a discussion would be the solution to both.

“Helena, you’re pushing your luck. Mother will only deny this and push back,” said Ethel. “Just my two cents worth.”

“Push back....how?”

Helena looked dumbfounded by the idea of mother pushing back against her own children. If she loved them wouldn’t she listen?

“The last time she was confronted about her behavior she stopped working and sulked for a week. We were all younger then, though. This time we would at least be able to take care of ourselves. I had to take care of you then, it was awful.” Ethel shook her head as she said this, thinking about how bad it had been trying to take up mother’s duties. It had been over ten years but Ethel remembered like it was yesterday. Traumatic is what it had been for her as a young girl, Sonny was helpful, but it all fell on her shoulders.

“It’s driving me crazy, Ethel. How did you deal with her pushing back? And what do we do if she does it again?” Maddie was showing her exasperation.

Helena had been able to avoid it better with her new job starting.

Maddie was stuck closer to home, and dreaded coming home from school each day, unsure of what came next.

“Maddie, Helena, it’s going to be all right,” Ethel tried to reassure her, “but we need to talk to Bridget, and Sonny. We’re going to need a united front.”

*

Sitting with her siblings, Helena waited for the yelling to begin. None of them could ever agree on anything. The wheels in Sonny’s head seemed to be churning as he paced in front of them.

“So do we have a plan or not?” Sonny asked.

Bridget listened to her sister's story and Ethel and Sonny's warning about last time. Dreams of madmen, mother going crazy, all of them against her didn't seem fair. And to Bridget, it was always about fairness.

"Plan for what? When she totally loses her mind?" asked Bridget.

Helena saw her sister's look and knew she was blaming her for this meeting. Neither Helena nor Bridget paid much attention to mother, normally; Bridget was barely home, working at the tailors around the corner, Helena learning the ropes from Lillian. Helena had had second thoughts about openly discussing her dreams, but Ethel had backed her and told her they deserved to know.

"Well, I think the first thing we need to do is simply sit back and watch. She's lucid now. If we can figure out what all this is about, maybe we can help solve the problem, before her next episode." Sonny suggested.

He had just touched on Ethel's question, but was already strategizing, he had a plan all right. He first started directing his sisters to look for clues similar to the ones he and Ethel saw those many years ago.

"Now you're all pushing," Bridget warned as she walked out of the room. The shadow of their mother filled the doorway. Ominous for such a short woman.

"All right Sonny, what is going on with you and your sisters?"

Sarah had become suspicious with their looks and had followed Bridget. Helena looked up horrified. All this time she was spying on us? Did she hear it all?

Sarah had noticed the scrutinizing eyes of the four of them. What could they be up to, and together? she thought. They never got along well enough for something of this caliber. As

their mother she had a feeling that something wasn't right, but couldn't tell what they were thinking anymore.

"Scheisse. Shit, my own children are plotting against me." She started pacing and muttering.

"Mother. English, please. Maybe you should go sit on the couch, relax." Sonny met with resistance as he tried to help her to the couch.

"Mother, you'll feel better if you relax, come."

"Nein, you relax," she glared at Sonny.

He didn't need to speak German to understand her refusal. He looked over at Helena who instigated this whole thing.

"Go get Bridget. We need to do this now," he whispered.

The girls rejoined them with their mother in the living room. Sonny took charge of the interrogation, he was after all the only boy and was used to taking charge of his younger sisters, and Ethel let him.

Helena suspected the outcome and thought all of this was a waste of time. She'll never hear it, never pay any attention to this at all. This is a horrible waste of time.

"Mother, we all feel that something is bothering you," he started.

"It's like a dark cloud," Helena added.

Ethel shushed her.

"It has been going on here for a long time, but it seems to be getting worse," he added.

"We don't understand and we're worried about you, about our family." Sonny looked directly at their mother.

Sarah brushed off his concern, even as she stared in disbelief at her children.

"Sonny, I am sure I do not know what you are talking about. What cloud, Helena? There is no cloud hanging over the family. Where did this idea come from anyway?" denying her children's feelings.

"Such a foolish notion...what silliness to think such a thing. Nothing is bothering me at all."

They exchanged glances, not believing their mother's words. Helena was right about her denial, but would Ethel be right about pushing back? Each looked at their mother aghast, upset that she didn't admit feeling this or even listen to what her children were feeling.

The more they questioned the more closed off Sarah became. Their quest for knowledge had ended as abruptly as it had started.

Sonny was furious. He didn't like being brushed off and it was especially painful coming from his mother. He had tried to protect her as much as he could, but this time it wasn't going to work.

Chapter 2

2018

Dani closed her grandmother's journal. It sounded like the intervention they had for her mother, Katherine, before they took her into treatment. Though Dani didn't think they spend much time confronting her mother. Her meds had been out of balance and she was going to get fired if she didn't use their Employee Assistance Program and get stabilized. The EAP would work with her on allowing this time off to get her bipolar back in check.

Working for the same hospital meant that Dani got a ton of questions when her mother was out. They couldn't treat her at the hospital she worked at, but they all knew what had happened. Her mother had a huge, loud episode at work, screaming and carrying on like she was hallucinating. Talking to herself. It scared even some of the staff members, apparently hitting too close to home.

Kevin came up behind her and rubbed her shoulders.

"Babe, maybe you've had enough for one day?"

It wasn't until he mentioned it that she realized that she had tears running down her face. She started to see some of her mother in her grandmother's journal and missed her mother terribly. Dani often blamed her grandmother for rifts in the family, but the mental health issues ran deep. In a way it also worried her. She thought of her sister and the struggles she'd had with her mental health. *Apple doesn't fall far from the tree*, one of the psychiatrists she worked with would always say. What does that say about me?

"You need popcorn and a movie. That is my treatment for whatever ails you."

He leaned down and kissed the top of her head.

"What do you think?"

“Only if it’s a romantic comedy. Too many creepy dreams lately.”

“You got it. Why don’t you pick one and I’ll pop the corn.”

Dani nodded and went to look at the DVD selection. There was one she was wanting to watch again. Schmaltsy, but a favorite of hers. She listened as Kevin set up the popcorn popper. He’s a keeper, her mother had told her. She was right. Mother was always right about that one.

Dani remembered bringing him to meet her mother. She had already told her so much about him and her mother was impressed with how comfortable her daughter was with him. The lunch was a pleasant discussion of all the hard topics. Religion, politics, race. Her mother hinted that her father would probably have an issue with their relationship. Nothing Dani didn’t already know.

Something in the way Dani and Kevin looked at each other, and the happiness her mother saw swayed her immediately. Plus his views sounded like her daughter’s; they sounded and looked like a good fit. Her mother was convinced this was the one.

"He's going to ask you to marry him, you know." Katherine informed her daughter after that first lunch.

"Mom, you've just met him."

"I'm telling you this one is not one to mess around with, Dani. He's serious. You didn't recognize that look in his eyes. I did."

"Another of your hoaky predictions?"

"Tell me that when it happens. I'm serious. This one is a keeper. *You chose well, grasshopper.*"

Dani rolled her eyes. She was right, about it all. Watching him tackle the popcorn maker made Dani chuckle, her mom always used a pot on the stove. This was easy peasy compared.

Just add oil and popcorn to the contraption and turn it on. He was cute thinking that this was a difficult task. Anytime he wants to be domestic, Dani smiled, I'll certainly not argue.

*

The darkened parking lot seemed abandoned. No people, just cars. Dani remembered the words of the security guard, "better safe than sorry" but couldn't waste time waiting for them to arrive to walk her to the car. She had to leave, now. Emergency at home is what her sister Heather had said. I can't imagine what she is talking about. She doesn't even live in town.

Dani left work anyway and started home. But the parking garage. She had to go through the parking garage. She always parked on the same level. Maybe that was her mistake. A creature of habit. Using the same path to the car, same area, same time. Apparently that predictable pattern made her a target.

She thought about the eyes and the face that she couldn't piece together. What was it about him that bothered her so much? *Dani, you're not paying attention.* She shook her head and looked around the garage, he wasn't there. The relief washed over her, and she continued to the car.

She rounded the end of her RAV4. And came face-to-face with him.

"Dani, you're not paying attention."

"Dani, babe. Wake up."

She was trembling and covered in sweat.

"Babe, if you don't call her, I will."

Dani nodded. Laura would love doing some Freudian analysis on this one. What did he say? Not paying attention? To what?

"You're a mess." Kevin smiled, "Come here."

She rolled into him and he wrapped her in his arms and pulled the blankets tight around her to warm her up. *A keeper*. She closed her eyes and tried to get a bit more sleep before that phone call. Maybe it would all calm down with his heartbeat in her ear.

*

I can't believe I said yes to this. Hypnosis? Dani waited for her therapist to get set up and prepared. She remembered the festival she's been to where all the people got on the stage and followed the directions of the hypnotist. Never, she thought, would she ever do such a stupid thing in her life.

"Not going to make me cluck like a chicken?" Dani chuckled at her own joke.

"Is that what you want? I can't make you do anything that you wouldn't already do." The therapist smirked and raised her left eyebrow.

"I didn't know you could do this."

"What, hypnosis? It's not terribly difficult. Just takes some training. And not all people are susceptible to suggestion, so it tends to be useful for some and not for others."

"So, it may fail."

"Knowing you, it is likely to fail, but it's worth a shot. If you take it seriously and quit with your Dracula references."

"Uh..."

"Kevin told me."

"Laura, we..."

"I know. Make fun all you want, it does seem hoaky at times. But I have had some clients who've had some success."

Dani rolled her eyes and took a deep breath.

"Ok, tell me how this works."

After explaining that the whole point is to relax your mind and allow for your train of thought to be directed, it made more sense.

"That's why," Laura said, "you won't cluck like a chicken unless you already had a propensity to do so."

"So if I'm really wanting to cluck you can lead me to it?"

"Well, I can lead a horse to water, but I cannot make it drink."

"Got it. So still, I won't do anything I don't want to do. But what about those hypnosis shows?"

"Those people go up on stage and they know that the hypnotist is going to make them do strange things. They are already consenting to that. They already want to be silly."

"Ready?"

"Ok."

The session did reveal more of Dani's fears about this man, but not more much more of his substance. His hunched posture and hoodie came back to her. She could see that he had green eyes, but that was about all that was revealed to her. Under it all was this insecurity about men she had always felt, but couldn't place.

"Curious that this comes up at this time."

"Why is that?"

"Well, think about it Dani. It is the anniversary of your grandmother's death. And wasn't it at this time of year that Kevin first proposed?"

"And I flipped out on him. Yeah, it was. He gets it now, and the second proposal was exponentially better. I think he appreciated that too, in the end anyway."

"Your grandmother's demon was her father? Is that what you discovered?"

Dani nodded, "He had green eyes, too."

"Did they find the guy? Your guy?"

She closed her eyes and shook her head. "Apparently, he avoided all cameras. Sgt. Martinez thinks he may not even exist."

"Did he say that to you?"

"Not in so many words, but he kept asking if I was sure I saw him there."

"And?"

"I'm not sure at this point. Are her journals making me see things? Is that even possible?"

Laura shrugged, "Dani, the mind is a complex organ, it can make us see things, and hear things that aren't there. Anything is possible."

"What you're saying is that I may be channeling my grandmother's demon?"

"Stranger things have happened, I am sure."

*

Dani dropped her purse on the bar stool, took a seat, and sighed puffing her cheeks out watching Kevin's knife skills.

He looked up from the cutting board, "Bad session?"

"I need a drink."

He raised an eyebrow, "What's your poison?"

"Something strong. Apparently, my dear, I'll hallucinating." Dani rolled her eyes.

"Bummer," he didn't even flinch as he poured the wine in her glass.

"Not sure this is gonna do the job," Dani said.

He crinkled his nose, “It’ll do for starters. And what did your therapist say about said hallucinations?”

Dani took a sip of her wine and pondered how to phrase what she and Laura had discussed.

“Apparently, they may also not really be my hallucinations.”

The crease in his eyebrows deepened in confusion.

“If these are not your hallucinations, then who’s, pray tell, may they be?”

“Don’t laugh your ass off now.”

She paused for effect, took another drink.

“My grandmother’s.”

He started coughing at the idea, and had to change to water to swallow the news.

“You mean to tell me, that you are hallucinating her hallucinations? From her journals?”

Dani downed the rest of the wine in her glass, and nodded as he poured her another glass. The Chenin Blanc was smooth and easy to drink, and not terribly potent.

“The kicker?”

“Oh, I can hardly wait,” Kevin snarled.

“She wants me to continue reading her journals.”

“Can I tell you to quit therapy now? She sounds like a total quack.”

Dani smiled back at him, chuckling.

“I told her that you and my father would both say that. Oh, and guess what?” Again she paused, “looks like that madman that I saw, was actually her madman that she dreamed of attacking her. And he actually was her father.”

He stopped and looked around, obviously in thought.

“Let me get this straight. Both of you dreamt of some madman lurking in the dark, and it was the same guy.”

“Hence the ‘I’m having her hallucinations’ comment.”

“And the guy is really her father, your great grandfather?”

“Yep. Now you see why I can’t stop therapy. I’m so fucked up, somebody has to straighten out the damage.”

“I’ll drink to that.”

He held up his wine glass to share the toast with her, clinking their wine glasses together.

“Baby, that’s why I need you...and vino...and whatever the hell you’re cooking tonight.”

She breathed in deep, “That smells amazing.”

“Thai food. I thought a bit of curry would break your out of your junk food spell.”

Once again his knowledge of cooking went beyond the expectations she had and confounded her.

“Where did you learn to cook like that?”

“My mother, you met her once, remember? She was magic in the kitchen, babe.”

1940

Helena tossed and turned. She didn't get any answer to the questions she had about her dreams. And she worried that he would return. Lillian had told her she should write this down. At least she would remember what was happening in her dreams. Maybe she'd remember something else. Lillian had even presented her with a nice journal to start off.

Drifting off to sleep wasn't so easy when she was preoccupied with the nightmare to come. Maddie was sleeping. She didn't seem so concerned. But then again, she didn't believe it was anything other than a dream.

The windows were open as usual. Helena breathed in deeply smelling the honeysuckle and feeling the coolness of the fall air.

Once again he was there, waiting for her. She could smell the cigarettes and beer. He came out of the corner and sat on her bed looking down at her. He wasn't aggressive, but had a sad look in his eyes and the stubble told her it had been days since he'd shaved. With one hand he brushed the hair away from her eyes.

"Arthur?" The voice came from the stairwell.

"We need to go."

"In a minute," he responded.

It looked as if tears were welling up in his eyes. He then sat on Maddie's bed and looked closely at her as he had with Helena. Before he left, he checked that both of them were tucked in. Then he stood tall between their beds.

"Arthur." The voice was directly behind him this time.

"Sarah, they won't remember me. If I'm gone too long, they won't remember me."

"You're not going to be gone long. You just need some help. When you come home, they'll remember you. You're their father, Arthur."

Sarah lead him away and they disappeared.

Helena woke to the full dream and what it meant. She sat up and wrote furiously by the dim light of the night light that she started using, another Lillian suggestion.

"That way you won't have to turn on the lights and wake anyone up."

She finished scribbling away at the notebook when she heard Maddie moving and waking.

"Sorry," Helena whispered.

"You saw him again?"

Helena nodded. She didn't want to startle Maddie yet.

"Do you remember our father any?"

"Not really. Just a vague image in my head. Why do you ask?"

"I can't remember what he looks like, Maddie. But maybe this is him in my dreams. I saw mother with him this time. He was leaving. And crying."

"Why was he crying?"

"That's what I can't figure out. And if it is our father at all. There aren't any pictures of him anywhere. Neither of us really remember clearly enough."

"Ethel's bound to have something. Surely she wouldn't let mother throw them all away?"

Helena nodded, "I need to ask her in the morning. Then maybe we can at least have a name for the madman. Mother did call him Arthur though."

"It could still be just your dream, Helena."

Maddie turned over, away from the light.

In her heart, Helena knew that Maddie was right, it could be nothing. Although, it could be a memory. That idea hadn't occurred to Helena until tonight. Maybe she was remembering him. But why now? Why would her father be surfacing now? She couldn't come up with anything that didn't sound crazy.

*

Helena hated, no dreaded, her birthday and here it was again this next week. Eighteen, seemed like such an adult age when she was younger, now it was just an obligation to work. No, not the odd jobs she held all through school, but a real job to help support the family she so desperately wanted to leave.

But this year the dreams had begun, and it made her dread the date even more. Especially after Maddie suggested these nightmares were not only dreams. What if she was remembering things? Did he really try to strangle me? It didn't seem logical if he had tried to strangle her. The last time she had seen him was when she was three. Why would he try to strangle a three year old? What could a three year old do to deserve this?

Even if they were memories, she still couldn't remember his face. Ethel. Surely she would have a picture or at least be able to help.

Ethel's door was ajar when Helena went down to talk. She was talking to someone, and it seemed serious. Helena could not make out what was said, but the tension in their voices made her hesitate. She cleared her throat and tentatively knocked.

"Shh...she doesn't need to know that," was all that Helena heard before Ethel came to the door.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt."

"You didn't."

Ethel opened the door to reveal Sonny leaning on the dresser, arms crossed. He looked like she'd interrupted, even if Ethel said otherwise.

"What do you remember about our father?"

Helena said as she entered the room. I can't seem to recall his face, and there aren't any photographs I can find.

"Mother burned them all. One of her fits after..." Sonny left the idea hanging.

"After?"

"After he died," Ethel finished for him, "but she didn't seem convincing either.

"So, he did die?"

"Of course, Helena. He's dead," Sonny hedged.

"Why don't I believe you? You don't seem convinced yourself."

"Helena, it was..."

"Was what, Ethel? Death is death."

"It wasn't that simple. There was no funeral, he just disappeared from our lives. We assumed he was dead and mother never corrected us."

Ethel seemed more upset about this than Sonny, in fact, was almost moved to tears.

"He can go to hell."

"Sonny."

"What, Ethel? The bastard was a mean old drunk and wasn't really around anyway. What man abandons his kids to go drink? And then comes home and screams at them. I can hear him still."

Ethel took a deep breath.

"Don't speak ill of the dead," she said softly.

"We don't know he's dead, Ethel. Not one hundred percent. Do we? I do have a picture of him though."

Sonny took his wallet out and produced a picture of the family from at least a decade ago. It was yellowing and battered, but it was what she had asked for, a photo.

There, staring back at her, was her very own demon, the madman who invaded her dreams, her sleep, her nightmares.

*

Helena kept the photo and brought it out again in her room. She sat on the bed staring in disbelief. How can I possibly explain this one? If I don't believe it how will the others?

"Wait, that madman you keep dreaming of is our father?"

Maddie was incredulous, no shock there. She looked at the photo. The face looked familiar, but she didn't really remember him either. He looked enough like Sonny that it seemed obvious.

"All this time, you've been dreaming or remember our father. Hel, that is just crazy."

"And neither Sonny nor Ethel really know if he is truly dead."

Maddie looked at her and shook her head, "She isn't going to tell you one way or another."

"I know. But at least I'm not totally clueless anymore."

"Have you seen her today?"

"No. Any better?"

Helena hadn't seen her since the confrontation last week. She was looking forward to her birthday, and originally planned to do something with the family. But as nothing had been said, she made plans with Lillian instead.

Sarah had begun acting strangely, Helena noticed. Her mother had stopped working, not at home, not in the shop. The sudden silence of the sewing machine was almost nerve wracking; they had been so used to her constant bursts of energy, making curtains or clothing for family or anyone who'd pay her. It was unusual for her to not be working.

Ethel's words rang in the ears of her siblings. "Something's not right." They became leery of her.

When Sunday came, Sarah proceeded to clean all three floors of the house from floor to ceiling, baseboards, woodwork, everything. She hadn't done that in two years, when she'd taken weeks to completely clean. This looked more like a spot check. In the past, after finished the cleaning frenzy, she finally slept, and slept, and slept. Sarah then slept for three days one time and then laid on the sofa staring into space the remainder of a week.

"At least this time was just the one day."

Maddie shrugged, knowing how bad it could have been with all of them confronting her.

"Is she sleeping?" Helena asked.

"No, she's up, and getting dressed up like she's going somewhere," replied Maddie, "See you tonight."

Ethel overheard them, "She asked me to watch over things after work," she replied. "I get home early tonight so I'll take care of dinner."

"She isn't going to be home until dinner?" asked Helena.

"Apparently not. She said she had some errands to run," said Ethel.

Helena gave Ethel a curious look, but Ethel could only shrug.

Sarah finished getting dressed and left the house. This was after Maddie left for school, but before the others were off to work. She kept her word, and did not come home until after dinner, then stared at the wall all evening from her chair, still dressed from her excursion.

"Ethel, did she say anything about this errand?" asked Helena.

"No why?"

"Well she came home and is back to staring at the walls. Nothing has changed."

“Don’t worry, I baked a cake yesterday. We’ll still celebrate your birthday.”

“It’s not that Ethel, and I’m going to meet Lillian for my birthday. I’m just worried about her.”

“I know. I’ll keep an eye on her. It’ll be ok. Have a nice time. Say hi to Lil’.”

Helena nodded and headed out.

*

Helena caught up with Lillian at the L station. And linked arms with her. She knew her best friend would have some remedy for how she was feeling about her birthday.

“Dancing, Helena. That is what you need. Dancing.”

“Lillian, that is not exactly what I was thinking of tonight.”

“That is why I’m right. You have too much to worry about right now, it is a good time to relax, have some fun, stop worrying about everything.”

“Did I tell you it’s my...”

“Your father? In your dreams? Yep. You said that already.”

Lillian found the spot for dancing. A new club had opened up and they played the best Big Band music, according to the review Lillian received from her cousin. Tonight she had made a promise to her cousin to bring her girlfriend Helena. He’d been dying to meet her after all the talk of her from Lillian.

“Helena, this is my cousin Karl.”

He was dressed in his Army uniform and was immediately taken with Helena. Lillian had thought they’d hit it off and she’d been at least partly right.

He smiled at her and asked her to dance.

“I don’t really dance.”

“Go on Hel, all you have to do is follow. Karl’s a great dancer. Taught him myself.”

“What about you?”

“Pssst...I’ll grab my own soldier boy.”

She practically pushed Helena onto the dance floor and watched them go before turning to look at who was left to dance with tonight.

Helena tried to think of things to say and was always rather shy around boys, well, men. But one thing that played on her mind she thought she should address first.

“When do you ship out?”

He smiled, she was interested, he thought.

“A few weeks.”

“Where to? Do you know?”

“They are moving us to Spokane first. Fairchild Air Force Base. We ship out from there.”

He saw her confusion and smiled.

“Somewhere in the Pacific theater. We’re not exactly sure where yet. Maybe the Philippines?”

“Oh, and are you going to be on the front lines, as they say?”

He nodded, “I’m a radio operator. So, I’ll be with my company, wherever they are stationed.”

“That sounds dangerous.”

He thought of every possibility and yes, it had danger, but it was more protected than some other positions.

“Well, it sounds like you need to be careful.”

“I don’t know if that is exactly how I’d put it. But,” he nodded, “it does require some teamwork and watching our position.”

They kept dancing after the music stopped; she running all the scenarios in her head that he would have to use to protect himself; he thinking of all the men she’d be dancing with while he was gone.

“Uh, hello. The music stopped,” Lillian said, standing next to them.

They both came out of their daze and looked at her and Lillian couldn’t help but laugh. Karl was right, there was something here.

“Let’s get a drink.”

That night, in between dancing with Karl and talking with Lillian, Helena tried the punch.

“Mmm... What is this?”

She saw Lillian’s startled response.

“What? You always said the punch tasted good at the club.”

“How much of that have you had?”

“The guy serving it said I needed to drink the first one fast and then he gave me a second one. Why?”

“So this is your second?”

“Yep.”

“Karl,” Lillian motioned for him to grab her other arm.

“Help get her to the chair.”

“Lillian, I’m perfectly fine to get my own chair.”

Helena was confused at what she meant by all of this.

“Hel, just give it a minute and give me this one.”

It was half gone.

“Karl, can you get her some water?”

“Lillian, what is the problem?”

“The punch is good, Helena, I have had it before. But you don’t want to get drunk tonight.”

“What do you mean? It feels good. Wait is that why there’s two of you?”

Lillian smiled, “That’s the punch, honey. Remember me calling you a teetotaler? That means you can’t hold your liquor, Helena.”

Helena giggled at the thought, “Why not tonight?”

“Helena, didn’t you see the way Karl was looking at you? Like you’re the bees knees?”

“So you sent him away?”

“Just to get water, keep you from puking.”

Helena looked at her in confusion, Wait, you didn’t get sick.”

“Helena, I puked my eyeballs out the first time I drank that stuff.”

“You never told me that.”

“Well, it wasn’t a pretty sight.”

Karl returned with the water and sat next to Helena. He did look dapper in his army uniform. She smiled at him.

“Thank you.”

Helena felt more like herself that night, no more worrying, no more dreams. Lillian was right, dancing was just what she needed.

Karl was relieved to see the girl he was fond of smiling and having a good time again. His cousin had mentioned that she was going through some difficulty lately, but he hoped he could be part of the solution. And hoped for more.

*

The dance hall became their favorite haunt, and there was always punch. Helena felt so alive when she was with Karl and Lillian and was disappointed when the dance hall shut down for the night. All that awaited her was home and her bed and more nightmares.

The first time she and Karl went alone to the club, Lillian wasn't there to help moderate her punch, which she still did not understand. She didn't have the concept of how strong that stuff was, even as Karl warned her. But he drank right along side her.

When she got home that night, she did feel sick. Maybe it was all the alcohol, but maybe it was just being home again, but the combination was enough to make Helena vomit. Unfortunately she forgot to lock the bathroom door, and Ethel walked in on her.

"Too much fun tonight?" Ethel asked.

"Or are you coming down with something?"

"Ethel, please don't tell anyone," Helena pleaded.

"I don't want to have to explain this to mother."

"What? The fact that you got you all liquored up? Or that you were out till all hours of the morning? With Lillian? Or a man?"

"Ethel, he did not get me all liquored up. I drank the punch not knowing that it had alcohol in it," Helena lied.

That may have worked the first time with Lillian, but this time she knew better.

“So it was a he. How could you not know what you were drinking?” Ethel continued, “Have you never had a drink before? Or been to those dance halls? Someone usually spikes the punch. You have to be careful, though, you never know how much they put in or how strong the punch will be.”

Helena didn’t mention that that was where she and Lillian had been going, or that she had been almost every night in two weeks. She wasn’t sure she’d ever see Karl again. And she wanted to dance with him as much as she could before he left.

“It felt good, Ethel.”

“Um huh, you’re paying for it now, Helena,” Ethel said helping Helena get ready for bed and handing her two aspirins.

“And will later, too.”

That night Helena slept through the remainder of the night without any nightmares. She had forgotten what it was like to get a good night sleep. She did wake to an awful headache, but different from the one she woke to when the nightmares haunted her.

Then she thought of Karl, sweet Karl. How would he handle her nightmares if he were the one with the perfect family she longed to escape to? What if Helena talked during her sleep? How could she possibly keep this secret if she did talk in her sleep? After all, if Sonny could walk in his sleep, surely she could talk in hers.

Nervousness, that's what she always called it, but it was pure dread. Every night she and Karl went dancing. She drowned the dread in punch. She seemed to sleep better on those nights. She also didn't get quite as sick and the morning headaches were not nearly as bad. Ethel kept her word and didn't tell anyone. She also stopped confronting Helena with her behavior after

about a week of incidents. Mainly because they stopped. But Helena was not going to let her sister interfere with her plans to get out of the family.

*

Deep in thought for two days after her excursion, Sarah finally came around. She began sewing again. This calmed the household; it seemed that she was back to work on her tailored curtains.

Helena's journal was becoming full of her thoughts, and she hoped mother was better, like the rest of them. Unfortunately, Helena sensed it was the mere calm before the storm.

Sarah waited for dinner together with all her children to bring it up. It was sort of a birthday surprise, she said.

"I have an announcement and a surprise to give."

"A surprise for whom, mother?"

Ethel was happy to see her at the table and talking and seeming in good shape. A damn sight better than the last couple of weeks. But all were still suspicious of this surprise.

"I need to talk to all of you," Sarah paused.

"There is someone we need to go visit. We have to go into town to do this and it will probably take a great part of the day."

"And what about work? We all have work tomorrow," Sonny said, thinking of the plant that wouldn't let him just have a day off.

"Or school..." Maddie added.

"I need you to please call in sick, or get the day off. You also need to dress nicely, like church."

Mother didn't give any further details of the trip. She sat back down and ate the rest of her dinner, slowing chewing her food in the way she usually did, seemingly unaffected by this news.

“Someone to go visit? Who do we know that needed visiting?” Helena asked Maddie, but neither knew. They lay in bed perplexed by their mother’s comments.

“Do you think this has something to do with the trip she took last week?”

“What are you talking about, Maddie?”

“You remember, she up and left one day before anyone had left for work. Almost beat me out the door to school.”

“I honestly don’t know, Maddie. She never really discussed it when she came back.”

From one bus to another they rode until they reached downtown. Sarah walked to the large building on the corner, like she knew exactly what was going on, but did not let on as to what building this was.

“This looks like the hospital, mother.”

Ethel was perplexed, which meant that the others must have been, as well. She looked at Sonny who looked just as confused, and as the oldest they should understand what was going on. At least that is what their siblings thought.

Sarah nodded, “It is the state hospital.”

State hospital. What does that mean? Helena did not have a concept of what an asylum or a state hospital as her mother called it. What are we doing here?

The five of them piled into a small visitation room with their mother after walking the white institution halls, and listening to the heavy deadbolt locks banging along the way and in the distance, footfalls echoing. All of them were frightened by this trip that mother had orchestrated.

"Mother, what are we doing here?" asked Sonny,

"You'll see soon enough," she answered.

"You are scaring all of us, mother. Your zombie-like behavior, the mysterious outings, and now this trip into town...it's all a bit strange. And this place? Mother," Sonny pleaded with mother for some information, shaking his head in disbelief.

Chapter 3

2018

Dani stared in disbelief. Her mother had told her to get a hold of her great aunt, but her appearance at the front door was unexpected of the 98 year old.

“Aunt Bridget?”

She walked right into the house pushing past Dani, “Your Aunt Maddie is parking the car. Kevin, honey, there’s a box in the trunk she’s going to need help with.”

Kevin looked at Dani who just shrugged open mouthed and shook her head.

“Why are you two out driving? Didn’t she lose her license? Didn’t you both? Some time ago?”

“Oh honey that never stopped any of us. What are they going to do? Throw me in jail? I’m too old for them to punish. I’ll be dead before they can try me anyway, you know how backlogged the system is.”

“Aunt Bridget, it isn’t safe for you to be driving.”

“Honey, I’ve been driving for 80 plus years. I could teach you a thing or two. But that’s not why we’ve come. Do I need to put the coffee on myself or you have some brewing?”

“Kevin just made a fresh pot. Come on.”

“Mmmm, that’s why I always liked that boy.”

Dani chuckled as her aunt linked elbows and followed her to the kitchen.

Kevin and Aunt Maddie followed with a large document box that he set on the counter. Maddie patted him on the back and accepted the cup of coffee he handed to her. He winked at Dani, their signal that the aunts were in their usual brand of zaniness. Dani called them Lucy and Ethel when they were on a roll.

“What’s in the box?” Dani asked.

“All in due time, honey,” Aunt Bridget said. “We talked to your momma.”

“I’ve been meaning to call her. How is she doing?”

“She’s having trouble getting off that crazy train. I told her she needed to get her butt out of the looney bin so we could talk about all this crazy family stuff before I drop dead.”

Dani closed her eyes at the quip. Only Aunt Bridget would talk about death like this, it made others uncomfortable and she did it on purpose. She liked others off their game, said it gave an old lady an advantage.

“So why are you breaking the law driving all the way over here to give me a box? You know I could have come by. You didn’t hit anything did you?”

“Dani, sweetie, Aunt Bridget wouldn’t let me hit anything. She’s a great backseat driver.”

Kevin turned around to not show them his inability to keep a straight face with them. Aunt Bridget would give him what for if he openly laughed at them, as she had many times before.

“Honey, your mother said you were reading your grandmother’s journals.”

“God rest her soul,” Aunt Maddie added, “she just wrote everything down. I think she wrote every day of her adult life. Used to wake me up in the middle of the night.”

“She wasn’t the only one who wrote and hoarded all that crap for all those years. Your great grandmother did too. And her life was something else. No wonder your grandmother...”

“Rest her soul.”

“...drank herself into the grave. Especially after your grandfather died.”

Dani covered her mouth, smiling conspiratorially with Kevin.

“So if grandma drank herself into the grave, how did you not fall into that pattern too?”

Dani asked.

“Better genes,” said Aunt Bridget.

“You have the same genes,” Dani couldn’t help but laugh.

“Yes, but we got the better ones,” Aunt Maddie said.

“And in the box?” Kevin asked as he lifted the top to peer inside.

“Well, that is every letter and correspondence she kept and every notebook she had that had anything of interest in it. Your mom said you might like to take a peek. Plus it’ll be one less box for you go through later.”

“Stop talking like that,” Dani said.

“Honey, when you’re as old as we are it could happen at any time.”

Kevin looked concerned, “Can I at least drive you ladies home? It would be my pleasure.”

“Told you he would, Bridget. What a good boy. Thank you, Kevin,” said Maddie as she took his arm.

“Babe, if you want to dig in, I’ll just Über back or catch the L. Might want to call your dad, too.”

Dani nodded and reached for her cell phone. No telling what mess those two have created with mom. She dialed and waved to her aunts as the car pulled away.

“Dad?”

“What’s up kiddo?”

“The aunts just left a large box here that was grandma Helena’s mother’s stuff. Do you know anything about this?”

She could hear James displeased sigh, “Yep. And I told them not to bring it over there.”

“Why?”

“I didn’t want you reading any more of that crazy family stuff. You’ve apparently read Helena’s journals?”

“Some, yeah.”

“You know that’s what made your mom flip out and stop her meds, right?”

“What do you mean?”

“Those journals aren’t good for you. They just dig up all the bad stuff. Those and that quack you’ve been seeing.”

“Dad, she’s not a quack. She’s good.”

“Yeah, yeah, I just worry about you. Is it helping?”

Dani paused. Was it? Was he right about reading all this stuff? She knew that’s what he would say, but he really didn’t believe in mental health.

“Dad, it’s a process. It takes some time.”

“See. That’s a no.”

“Check back with me later on that one. Now what do you know about this box that the aunts brought over?”

“Just that it’s more stuff, from grandma Sarah this time. Please, I don’t want your momma having this info. Let her get back on track. And don’t tell her what you find.”

“Dad, I can soften the blow, but the secrets are part of the problem.”

“I just want her home and healthy. Promise me?”

“I’ll do what I can.”

1911

Sarah tossed and turned in her sleep. She hadn't been able to get the images of her parents' bodies in the doorway out of her head. And now they seemed to even haunt her sleep.

"Stop. STOP!" Sarah, woke herself as she said it.

Looking around she saw her room grow blurry as the tears continued to flow. Sarah remembered her mother had taken the time to make the curtains and put up the pink floral wallpaper, careful to show Sarah how.

"Move?"

Sarah hadn't believed her ears. How can I leave all I've ever known? Where will I go?

One thing was certain, she had to rid herself of the stained entryway, thinking she must have a clean house for...for her siblings and her new life. They can't see this.

She scrubbed until her hands were raw. Blood doesn't seem to come out of wood either. She laid large pieces of cloth on the stains and went to gather her siblings at the neighbors' houses. One last day together.

"Do you want eggs or waffles?"

She wanted to make a familiar breakfast for her siblings, something that reminded them of home.

"Waffles."

The gibberish form of the word came out of Hilde's mouth. She had to smile, Hilde was so cute when she tried so hard.

Life had changed and pappa made it happen. How had she been able to go on?

Red, everywhere. On her clothes, her hands, even in her hair. Sarah could smell it. Death had a particular smell, a rancid sweet stench that permeated everything. She could not get

the smell out of her nostrils as she again tossed and turned, struggling to sleep. The eyes open and lifeless as the bodies.

Hilde's screams faded into the background as Sarah shook her mother lying in the entry of the house.

"Mama," the tears streaming as she yelled, gathering her mother's body into her arms.

*

Sarah walked in the fresh morning air carrying a small bag with papa's wristwatch, mama's ring and a large bundle of papers. Papa must have had these in his pocket. The clothes she authorized to be burned. Blood just doesn't come out of clothes, at least not that much blood. How did all of this happen? Sarah kept running through the scenes in her mind, it was like one of those new picture shows flickering before her.

They were all in the kitchen, making dinner, mama and all the kids. Papa no longer lived there but they still made his favorite meal on Fridays. It had become a tradition. The babies were playing while the other three helped mama. Sarah worked alone at the stove. The baby, Hilde, began crying when there was a pounding at the front door, yelling coming from outside.

Mama picked up Hilde and went to answer the door. Sarah could hear their voices, loud, arguing again, but the shuffling around seemed out of place.

BOOM!...THUMP! Hilde began screaming and then the noise came again ...BOOM!...THUMP! Then silence. Then the muffled wailing of the baby started again.

Sarah eyed the door to the kitchen afraid of what lie on the other side. She slowly, cautiously, crossed the floor of the kitchen. Steadying herself on the door frame, Sarah closed her eyes and gulped hard pressing the swinging door open. That's when she found them, covered

with blood, lying on the floor near the door, papa on the porch, Hilde lying on top of mama face buried in the folds of her dress. Wailing.

*

The woman walked toward Sarah in a crisp clean white blouse and a long straight black skirt, her heels clicking on the tile floor. This is the kind of lady Sarah had seen in town and wanted to emulate, even tried walking like them in front of the mirrors and windows. It was her dream to be like this lady: neatly tailored, her hair upswept in a twist that accented the subtle curve of her neck. Nothing like the rough working women Sarah saw in the neighborhood.

Suddenly, the woman stopped and looked at Sarah.

“Hello. I am Mrs. Adams. I am a social worker.”

“Hello.” Sarah was hesitant, not sure what this woman could want with her.

“Would you join me for a walk?” She motioned Sarah forward. Sarah followed obediently.

“I am truly sorry that you have lost your parents. I do, however, have to talk to you about your siblings.”

“What about them?”

“Do you know what a social worker does, Sarah?”

She shook her head, fearful of the answer to come.

“We help people like you who have lost their families.”

“So you’ll help us find new parents?” The tears welled up in Sarah’s eyes. How could parents just be replaced? And by a stranger who never knew them?

Mrs. Adams looked at her and handed her a handkerchief. This job always had it's hard cases and this one was a doozy. She had looked at the case and didn't know what else she could tell the girl.

"It is almost impossible to find a place for all five of you to live together, except the County Orphanage. Do you have any family that could take you in?"

"My parents moved here from Norway before I was born. I have never even met any other family. Does that mean we are going to the county place?"

"The Cook County Orphanage," Mrs. Adams nodded, "they have a better chance to get adopted into new homes separately."

"Separately? We will be split up? All of us?"

Mrs. Adams steeled herself, she swore she wasn't going to cry in front of the girl. She took a deep breath and nodded.

"Yes, Sarah. You will all be split up."

*

The hospital noises couldn't keep the exhaustion from taking over. Sarah hadn't moved from her seat, but had slid down the couch to rest her head on the armrest. Then drifted to sleep still in the blood stained dress.

"Sarah...Sarah"...It was mama. "Rise and shine."

"Mama!"

Her eyes popped open.

Sarah saw the blurry figure open the curtains. She closed and reopened her eyes and rubbed them to clear her view. She was still at the hospital; the nurse had come into the waiting room to check on her. This wasn't a dream.

How could she take care of all of them now?

Mama, dead. Papa, dead. The image of their bodies twisted in her brain. Orphaned. All of them were orphans. The word was so final, damning. And that woman said they would all be split up. And that it was for the best. The best? What did she know?

Though Sarah was just twelve years old, but she had been up all night in the hospital waiting room, already worrying about what she would be able to do for her four younger siblings. She couldn't bear going home. She knew the others were safe and sound at the neighbors; Mrs. James and her sister, Mrs. Sorenson, had come to the hospital to gather them, as Sarah waited for any news, hoping there would be something the doctors could do for her parents. The neighbors had divided the young ones into two groups and taken them to watch. Division of labor, that's what mama always said worked best. Mama.

When they had all arrived yesterday it had been mid-morning. Sarah was distraught, staring into space, looking like a lost lamb amongst the hustle and bustle of the hospital, Sarah couldn't cry, this was not the time or place. The babies needed her.

They had nothing. She had nothing. Not to mention all the relatives they had were back in Norway. No one to help out in this foreign land. Who was there to help?

*

The story would surely make the morning paper. A mother gunned down by her husband. Five children, mother holding the baby in her arms as she fell into a clump on the floor, her blood pooling around her.

The eyes looked back at her, they gave Sarah chills. Dead. Cold. Blue. Her eyes. Haunting her nights was not enough. Everywhere she looked, there they were. Blood pooling around like a devilish halo, matting their hair in place.

It played over and over in her head. The knock on the door. Smells of mama's knockwurst brewing on the stove. Sarah cutting vegetables for the stew. Hilde began to scream and mama ran to pick her up, cooing and shushing her gently. Mama went to open the front door, and the mumble of their voices floated towards the kitchen.

Time seemed to slow for Sarah, she remembered every detail of the moment. The bubbling water in the pot, the crunch of the vegetables as the knife sliced through them, Hilde's pout and fussiness as Sarah tried to feed her. She was confused by soft voices. Why are they arguing? Is that papa's voice?

Mama had been brave to leave him. Everyone in town talked; a young woman with children, and no husband. It was scandalous. And it provoked papa.

Papa's anger drifted in, in waves of mumbled conversation. Sarah could not hear what was said, but mama's voice was also angry. The volume came up again. German, they were yelling in German. Why?

Peeking in the swinging door, Sarah began to understand. Her German was rusty but she heard it all. Papa was talking funny, words running together like they did at the end of a day of hard work and hard drink.

"No, no, stop...stop."

Then it was done. Hilde began to scream again.

Tears welled up in her eyes, she desperately wished to be ordinary. Maybe the neighbors wouldn't look at her like that as she walked home from the hospital. She had felt their eyes on her. But no one did anything. They all know. What if we'd never come here? She was alone.

Chapter 4

2018

Dani wrote furiously in her journal and seemed to be engrossed in the process and couldn't help but let the tears flow. These are the times she could call home and talk, get some well meaning advice, but that wasn't possible with her mother in the psych hospital.

"Kevin, I think I need to visit my mom."

"Is she ready for visitors?"

He looked at Dani's pained face, "You know what I mean. Will they let you visit and have some time alone? I assume this is about those journals?"

"And my grandmother."

"You really think she's in a place to discuss that. She's been in the psych ward only a week, right?"

"It's been two, Kevin."

But Dani replayed the two weeks in her head. They had had to talk her into this, but the threats from the hospital were real and the EAP intervention was too; there was some hyperbole involved. They weren't going to fire her. Well, not unless she refused help. Plus if her meds weren't stable she wouldn't be able to work anyway.

Taking her mom to the hospital was a long drawn out process. Intervention, argument, concession, agreement. The whole kit and caboodle. Once that was done, it took the usual time for admission. Again, long and drawn out: insurance check, paperwork, assessment, then finally back to the unit and nurses' questions. Thousands of questions it seemed. Dani and Kevin arrived home after 1 am.

The staff of the hospital (the competition) didn't want anyone visiting for two weeks. That way she could get acclimated and medicated and hopefully, stabilized.

It was Dani's turn to sit in the sterile drab room. Hospitals are all the same, she thought, waiting for her mother to enter. The room was stark white, institutional. At least it overlooked the parking lot and in the distance, Chicago. She felt like she could almost see the lake if only the skyline would disappear. Perhaps she could disappear. It was a jungle down there and there were plenty of places to hide. She just had to talk to mom first.

"Katherine, if you and your daughter need anything, I'll be just outside the door. You have fifteen minutes to visit."

An older woman, Dani's mirror image twenty-five years older turned to the nurse, "Thank you, Sandra."

Katherine's voice had the overtone of being heavily medicated, rather monotone and distant. It gave Dani a start. She knew the sound of patients who were possibly over medicated and definitely tranquilized. Dani struggled to hold back the tears. She needed to be calm to ask about her grandmother. And if she didn't phrase this right, her mother would just become defensive and shut down until the nurse could take her back to the psych ward and this would be a wasted trip.

*

The anger started to build as Dani watched her mother walk in the room. She knew when doctors had overmedicated their patients, but this time it was *her* mother, not just some patient.

"What have you given my mother?" Dani sneered.

"You need to get the doctor, or your supervisor down here now. Or I'll be talking to my attorney."

She turned and reentered the room with her mother.

The threat sent the nurse scrambling for the phone and not two minutes later an older woman in a lab coat showed up. She entered the room quietly so as not to startle Dani or her mother.

“I’m Dr. Wagner, your mother’s psychiatrist. I understand you have some concerns.”

“My mother and I work in a drug rehab psych unit. I’m not sure you understand that. But you have seriously overmedicated my mother. She is so gorked out she doesn’t recognize me. What have you done? Do I need to get power of attorney and act on her behalf? You’re supposed to be leveling out her bipolar meds not dropping her into oblivion.”

“So working on a psych unit means you understand that things happen that are unexpected.”

“Uh huh.”

“Ms. Cardiff, if you’ll have a seat.”

“Mrs. Smith, actually.”

“Sorry, Mrs. Smith, your mother had a serious panic attack yesterday evening. They did give her some strong medication.”

He could see she wasn’t satisfied and corrected, “Ativan. They gave her 5 mg of Ativan and she settled and slept last night.”

“That doesn’t explain why she still looks like that.”

“This am, her panic attacks began again. And we again medicated her with Ativan.”

“Have you figured out what is causing the panic attacks?”

The doctor hesitated and nodded, “She’s getting into some sensitive and tricky therapeutic issues. I don’t think she is ready to share those and she really hasn’t signed the consent forms for her therapist to discuss them. But she is the person I would refer you to.”

“The sexual abuse? Wow, she did bring it up. I wasn’t sure she was going to be able to.”

Dani thought about it for a minute, but it still didn’t make sense.

“But that doesn’t tell me why she went off her meds. Or did they just stop working?”

The doctor seemed relieved that Dani knew about the big issues, and addressed her concern.

“I believe the two are connected. But there is work to be done. Is there anything else I can clarify?”

“Can you just get a consent form filled out so that I can talk to the therapist? I’d like to ask some questions and I don’t think that she is going to be able to help me in the state she is in.”

“You’re probably right Mrs. Smith. But maybe you can visit for another fifteen minutes.”

“Thank you.”

She wasn’t satisfied, but it would have to do until her mother was better or the therapist could talk to her.

*

Dani walked up behind Kevin and thumped her forehead on his muscular back. She could feel his movements as he chuckled in response. He almost didn’t need to ask, but knew she’d need to talk.

“How’d it go with your mother?” He said without turning around.

Dani rolled her eyes and sneered, knowing he couldn’t see the response, but he’d know.

“You were right,” she said softly, her voice muffled by his shirt.

“I beg your pardon?”

Dani lifted her head, allowing him to turn rest his head on top of hers.

“You heard me, I should have called. See how she was before popping in to see her. She’s been having panic attacks.”

“So, about like you. Anxious, upset and needing some therapy.”

Kevin looked at her from the side and braced himself for her playful jab in the ribs.

“Yes.”

“Babe, you need to go back to the drawing board. Maybe back to your journals. Did you say you too had old journals that you used to keep?”

Dani thought about it for a minute, “Kevin, you’re a genius. There has to be something there about all this or at least some of it.”

It took Dani a couple of days to find the journal she was looking for but she’d finally found it in the attic with all her old journals. This journal told the tale of her grandmother’s childhood; her father attacking the family; his disappearance and reappearance; and a particular perilous fall in a laundry basket from a third floor window. Her mother had told her the whole tale, as Helena had told it to Katherine, but that wasn’t all there was to the story.

*

After Dani had looked for the incident her mother had told her about and then went to look for the same incident in Helena’s journal, now that she had a date. How different had the tale become over the years? Was this criminal her great grandfather? No wonder she was having nightmares about him. But Dani wondered why she was dreaming of him too. That part didn’t exactly make sense.

She looked through Helena's journal of the incident. It seemed scarier in the first person and in the back of the journal were two very old letters. They were addressed to Norway, to Christiane Hansen.

"Hansen." Her great great grandmother had been a Hansen. What do they have to do with this? She couldn't read it but knew it was Norwegian. Mom had taken some conversational classes, maybe she could translate? Hopefully her new medication has kicked in.

Dani called the hospital to check on her and spent an hour talking with the person who she actually knew as her mother. She hung up relieved that her mother seemed back to normal. Lets hope it sticks.

Dear Christiane,

Norway seems to drift farther and farther everyday. And not just in distance. Watching the fjords disappear made me homesick and I wasn't even gone more than a couple of days. I stood watching them, missing you already. This place is so different from home. Chi-cago. Dirty, foreign, and the smell is something awful. Gunther moved us near his work. It is awful. The only place that would hire right off the boat were the meat packing plants on the west edge of town. It always smells like the slaughterhouse papa used to take us to when we complained about the farm. The view of the big city is a ways off, but it draws my attention. Gunther's friend Aleksander was here for the World's Columbian Exposition and told us about it, and about the fire a

decade earlier. But mostly we stay in our area of town with the other Norwegians and Swedes. It almost feels like home sometimes. And then again not. I miss you, terribly.

Love you sister,

Anna Hanson

Aug 25, 1888

Katherine turned the letter over and back then handed it back to Dani.

“That’s the gist, anyway. My Norwegian is a bit sketchy these days.”

And she smiled at Dani, looking like the mom that Dani had known.

“Mom, you’re looking...”

“What? Like me?” She smiled again. Dani just nodded. “Why are you so interested in an old letter?”

“I’ve been having nightmares. Apparently of your grandfather and don’t know why. My therapist seems to think my depression has something to do with grandma’s nightmares. Well, and all my pent up rage. But we knew that. Just trying to figure it out.”

“My grandfather? He was a bastard. But you didn’t know him.”

“That’s why I can’t figure out any of this out. And I’m having her strange dreams of him stalking me.”

“Well...”

“What do you mean, well...? Mother what else do you know?”

“That may have been my fault.”

Dani didn't understand what her mother was saying. How could this possibly be her fault? And the confused look on her face was understood by Katherine immediately.

"Sweetheart, your great grandfather was scary. He was violent, he was abusive, he hurt your grandmother in so many ways. I think I told you about him and described him every time I told you about the boogyman. I wanted you to identify him every time, hoping that if he ever showed up in our lives, you'd be thoroughly afraid of him."

"Why? Wasn't he locked up? Didn't he die before I was born?"

Katherine pursed her lips, "He died in 1974. They had released him from the state hospital and we always thought he'd try to find us."

"When did they let him out?"

"In 1970. Needless to say, your grandmother was beside herself. She didn't even explain this to me until much later. All I knew is that she and I weren't getting along at that point. I didn't know that she was trying to hide from him."

"So that's why whenever someone scares me, he takes on this description. He looks like my childhood boogyman."

Dani sat and thought about this for a minute. It made sense. And this wasn't the first time it had happened. But no wonder her dreams took this shape.

"Thanks mom, now I definitely have something to tell my therapist."

Katherine looked at Dani and shrugged, and the both of them laughed about it.

"It's not exactly funny, kid, but it was my inexperienced way to try to protect you. And now it has backfired. I'm sorry."

Dani nodded, "At least it is starting to make some sense."

*

Her phone started to ring as she left the hospital. Someone's got great timing. She saw the number and smiled.

"Hello husband, you must be reading my mind."

"Hey, babe. How's that?"

"Well, I just walked out and so needed to talk to someone sane."

"So what did your lunatic mom say?"

Dani laughed. She knew how much Kevin loved her mom. The feeling was mutual. Kathy had always referred to him as her favorite son-in-law.

"She said she is the one who fucked me up, Kevin. You'd have loved it."

His laughter filled her ear as she walked to the car. It was true, but not the whole story and he knew it.

"Maybe you can fill in the details tonight. Dinner out somewhere? Or do you want to stay home?"

"It's probably a story for home. But definitely pick up some ice cream."

"Oooohhh, sounds painful. Can we have fajitas before we delve deep into ice cream territory?"

"If you're craving fajitas, I'm game. I'll even start the margaritas if I beat you home."

"Babe, now that's a deal."

Dani smiled, when he called her babe, she felt that he was really telling her how much he loved her. It made her feel warm and safe. And that would be needed for this conversation. Especially after what she found in her grandmother's journals that connected right to what her mother had said about her great grandfather being creepy.

1940

Helena sat staring at the walls listening to the dead silence. None of them spoke, they sat waiting, wondering what was happening; wondering why they were here; wondering why mother never mentioned this whole scenario.

The lock on the door turned with a heavy clang and the handle moved. In he came...tall, clean shaven, dressed in the white clothes of the institution. An older man stared at them, his green eyes emotionless. He slumped in his chair like a man beaten by the system he'd lived in for too long. His frown lines exaggerated the menacing look on his face. He was accompanied by a guard, who stated that he would stay with during the visit. A doctor came in behind them.

"Mrs. Dietrich, I'm Dr. Davidovich. I am Mr. Dietrich psychiatrist."

Helena looked up when the doctor called her mother Mrs. Dietrich. *And Mr. Dietrich?* Who was this man he was talking about? Did they know him? Was he a relative? Was mother married to this man? The questions kept coming as the doctor talked to mother. Their voices seemed to blend into the background as Helen's thoughts filled her head.

The doctor finished and walked out of the room. Leaving mother to explain. He had briefed mother, then she turned to face Helena and her siblings.

"Kids, meet your father."

Helena looked at him and her mother. She couldn't believe what she was hearing. This man? He's our father? This man we all had been lead to believe was dead, was alive and well in the Chicago State Hospital? She was so deep in thought when this man had entered the room that she did not see or hear the leg-irons around his ankles. Now that the doctor had left, and it was quiet, she could hear every movement of the irons. How could this man be the father we all had thought was dead for thirteen years?

"What do you mean our father?" Sonny was indignant. "You told us he was dead. Now you want us to believe that you were lying that whole time and this is him?"

"How could...?" asked Ethel. "You have lied to us for thirteen years. How could you?"

"This *is* your father," again mother stated.

Silence fell over the room. The wheels in Helen's head were turning. What do you say to a man you thought had been dead all this time? None of us knew what to say, including our alleged father. Helena wrote this in her journal and pondered what the hell it all meant for the family. She couldn't believe the lies that her mother had had to tell over the years; the secrets she had had to keep; the lengths she had had to go to to maintain a semblance of normalcy in the family was simply unfathomable to Helena. And why? Did she think we couldn't handle this?

After the visit, Helena sat dumbfounded on the bus ride home. This was the madman, and apparently someone else also thought he was mad. Mad enough to be in a state hospital...and chained. *What had happened? What did he do? Any why did mother keep this from us all these years?* They all had questions.

Helena tossed and turned that night. The spectacle of that man in that place with mother sitting quietly and not answering any of their questions frightened her. What hold did he have on her that kept her from speaking even? The look on her mother's face was undeniably blank, like she felt nothing. When everyone was up in arms, her mother was vacant, but when she'd lose it, all of them were expected to be calm and collected. It didn't make sense. But the madman returned.

The madman had come home drunk. That was why he always looked and smelled that way in her dreams. In a drunken state, he would enter the house. All was quiet, as usual. He looked for the family, finding them scattered throughout the house. Mother, in the kitchen

cooking, became his target again. He didn't like the dinner or something she said and their argument began. Soon the three oldest were listening to mother scream at the madman...about his work, his drinking, about the children. The screaming got so loud that the kids all ran to hide.

Mother is the one who found them, the madman not far behind carrying a huge knife...screaming at her. She shooed the oldest three of them into the streets to find help.

"Go to the neighbors...call the police."

They ran from the house only to glimpse mother racing to the smallest of the five, Helena and Maddie. They were on the second floor. Mother grabbed the babies and raced up to the third floor, locking herself in the bathroom.

Sonny, Ethel, and Bridget followed mother's instructions and banged on the neighbor's door. From there they called the police. Then they came back into the streets, waiting. They heard the mother's screams from the window in the third floor bathroom. Just as mother's screams died down, the big laundry basket made it's way to the ground below. The screaming took on a different sound...*Oh, my God...The babies!* Mother had dropped them from the window as the madman broke through the bathroom door. Mother was again screaming as they gathered the babies from the laundry basket, then hid in the lilac bushes, waiting for the police to come.

Their biggest fear was that mother was dead. Like her mother before her.

When the police showed up they brought out a crazed, chattering madman and mother...both on stretchers, placed into two ambulances. The madman was strapped down, tight. This is when the five children emerged from the bushes. The police took them to the hospital and asked a hundred questions as while being looked over by the doctors.

Mother was pretty seriously injured, but would be fine after the doctors kept her a few days and patched her up. She looked beaten and bruised, but they didn't trust that the doctor was right about her being back to normal in no time. The oldest had to be strong for the babies; after all, they dropped three floors to safety.

The madman never came back. And mother told them that he was dead.

*

Ethel couldn't believe her ears, couldn't believe her mother had the audacity to defend what she had done. She could see her siblings struggling with what to say, but she had had enough. Ethel sat in front of her mother and watched her as she avoided looking her daughter in the eyes.

"Mother, look at me. How could you keep this a secret?" asked Ethel.

"You didn't need to know," she answered, and continued to stare into space.

"Need to know...if he is who you say he is, I would say that we did, in fact, need to know," replied Ethel.

"How did he end up there?" asked Bridgett. "I don't even remember him. Did he always look like that?"

"No, Bridgett, he used to look like a madman," answered Helena.

"How would you know? You were too young to remember anything."

Ethel didn't understand or make the connection with her dreams. Helena had seen him well enough to recreate him.

"Helena, do not talk about your father like that," scorned mother. "He has gotten help."

"Help for what?" asked Sonny. "You never told us why he was there or how he got there."

Mother stopped answering questions. Leaving them to guess what father's problems were and what the asylum was *helping* him with during his stay there.

“We need to go back and visit. Maybe that would help with your memory.”

“Mother, are you serious? That man is obviously a criminal. Did you not see the leg irons they had him in. He is being restrained for a reason.”

Helena tried to reason with her, but it didn't seem to effect her.

“Sunday, we go back.” Mother changed out of her good clothes and went back to sewing. She brushed off every attempt to clear up the confusion that was now spinning around the house.

*

Helena and her family went on a bus into Dunning again on Sunday. This seemed very familiar this time, and not simply because they were repeating last week's journey. In fact, this was the same bus they had traveled to meet the madman years ago. The family was younger then, but it was the same trip into the city to the asylum.

The younger version of the family was shown into the same visitation room. The same madman entered...only not the same...no leg-irons, and not the calm expression of the older version of himself. The guard was there like their current visits. But this time mother started up a conversation, telling the madman about the family and how each of the children was doing in school.

Why was mother telling the madman all this stuff, wasn't he the one who attacked them? It didn't seem right, a calm cordial talk with a man who went after them with a knife? Mother's voice kept talking without seeing the look in his eyes. The eyes narrowed and he started to sneer. She didn't understand or see the agitation of his hearing this family news she wanted to impart, hearing anything she was saying appeared to agitate him.

A fire seemed to light in his eyes; he almost growled at mother. Then she spoke of his work and he started to scream at her. The madman jumped to his feet and lunged across the table reaching for mother, who grabbed at the babies and the rest of them, to move them away to safety.

The guard had to hold him back and yelled for help.

“Ma’am you and the children should move to the other side of the room.”

They were only too glad to follow directions.

*

Helena’s job finally came through. All the interning at Lillian’s job had been as fruitful as she had promised it could be. Now Helena could begin adding to the household funds. It was difficult since she wasn't getting much sleep these days. No one was. And Helena’s nightmares returned.

The madman would chase her. Up and down the halls of the institution. The staff of the hospital was no where to be seen. That didn’t seem normal, but she couldn’t stop to think about it. She would dream about the horrible place father was locked up in often. One night she woke up startled, hearing large doors slam shut and locks being clanging. When asked she would just say she was thinking about daddy. Daddy? They had never used the words 'mommy' or 'daddy,' so one was unsure what her state of mind was. But she had to tell Lillian everything. And she did.

“I can’t believe your mother stayed silent all these years about this. How could she keep this from all of you for so long?”

Helena looked into hands.

“I keep asking myself that question, Lillian. Apparently the people at the hospital had advised her of such a horrible idea.”

Lillian was speechless. And confused.

Helena nodded.

“I know, it doesn’t make sense. But after attacking us in the visiting room, they said to stay away.”

“I understand that, Hel, but why lie about him this whole time? I mean who was she protecting? Herself? I mean it didn’t help any of you in the end. She had to come clean how many years after this?”

Helena and Karl had begun dating regularly, thanks to Lillian’s introduction. He had been in the choir and she always thought he was a nice boy, but felt there was something familiar about him. They figured out that they’d gone to school together a long time ago. Now how would this nice boy accept her knowing that her father was some sort of criminal? She couldn’t tell him, not now, not ever.

“I don’t want to tell Karl about him? And what he’s done?”

“And what has he done, Helena? Suffered from drunkenness?”

“Attacking his family and getting locked away. For good.”

“I’m sure that Karl has crazy somewhere in his family too. Don’t we all?”

“Oh, yeah, Lillian, what crazy is in your family?”

“Uh, my dad plays the horses. Obsessively. And usually loses. My mom has to hide the money he brings home so he doesn’t use it on stupid horse races.”

Helena remembered the weekend she was over there. It was Kentucky Derby weekend and it was a total party. Lillian’s dad had bet a sizable sum on the number two horse. At least he

won some good money that day. It made the party fun. She couldn't even imagine what would have happened if the horse had lost.

"It's going to be all right, Helena. Just tell him."

Helena's smile disappeared and concern replaced it.

"I can't," She shook her head. "at least not yet. I will, eventually, but it's too soon."

"He's not going to want to find out after you're married."

"Lillian, we aren't getting married. We're just dancing."

"Uh huh, I've seen the way he looks at you. That isn't just dancing to him."

Helena wondered if she was right. She'd seen the look Lillian was referring to, but not sure of her interpretation. What would happen if she was right?

Progressively the nightmares got worse and worse. Helena saw father as some crazed madman, as Ethel had suggested. She saw him violent in her dreams...raging at the mailman and even at mother. This latest dream was, however, disturbed her like no other.

Helena awakened to a headache and sweaty hair and a sweat drenched shirt. What the Hell was that? All she could do was cry. How could she even talk about these dreams? This dream. Her mother, her siblings wouldn't believe this one. They'd say she was lying. Or imagining it. *It was a dream after all, Helena. Just a dream.* She couldn't get their voices out of her head. No one would believe. Lillian, maybe. And how to tell that to Karl, even though they seemed to be able to talk about almost everything else. What would he think? What would anyone think?

*

Helena's nightmares were now keeping her awake. She didn't want to close her eyes. She began drinking coffee, much to the jibes from Lillian about her intake. Smiling at Lillian was all

she could muster at this point. As Helena turned from the kitchen area to return to work, she knew it was a matter of time before Lillian drew it out of her. *Then what?*

She felt herself drift and tried to stay awake. The pull of sleep was too powerful and she found herself where she didn't want to be. In her room, again. Just a kid. With him. She could feel his breath on her neck and smell the whiskey. His hand was around her neck, again. His hand kept her from screaming. But she kept squirming.

"Stop moving or I will hurt you," he hissed in her ear.

She couldn't do anything, but cry. The weight of him on her eight year old body hurt, but she didn't know what to do. She didn't understand anything but the pain, and the fear.

Helena sat up in bed, again sweaty and with a headache. Lying back down in bed, Helena stared at the ceiling, watching the city lights make patterns around her. She tried to calm herself and thought about what was happening. Tears were flowing down her cheeks into her pillow. Was she losing her mind? She was too young to be going crazy, she thought. Then again, if the madman had really been the man in her dreams and the father she never knew, when did he start to lose his mind? Helena dreaded being just like him.

"Helena, you still dreaming about our father?"

The question threw her for a minute.

"Why do you ask?"

Maddie looked at her and Helena knew that she was not fooling her at all. She nodded. "It was horrible, this time. Abusive."

"How could you remember that? Didn't he go away when you were like three, and I was like what...one?"

"But in the dream I was eight."

“Then you have another problem. It can’t be him.”

Helena hadn’t thought that through. The grogginess of morning hadn’t worn off and she was typically not a morning person. Maddie always popped awake like sunshine. She’d always envied her for that. This time it proved to be beneficial. How could she have missed that. “Oh my God, Maddie. Who am I dreaming about?”

“And the bigger question. Did he abuse you? Was that real or just a fear?”

Helena thought about the pain and the fear. The tears started up again without her even thinking about them.

“Hey, I didn’t mean to say I don’t believe you.”

“Maddie, the pain was real. The fear was real. The smell of the whiskey, the hand around my neck, it all felt too real. I don’t think I’m dreaming this one. It had to be real.”

“I heard mom talking with Ethel and Sonny. Dad didn’t drink whiskey. Only beer from what mom was saying. Whiskey is Sonny’s drink.”

At this Helena looked up at her. The same green eyes. But would he really do this.

“Maddie, could it be Sonny?”

The look of horror mirrored on her sister’s face.

“But that would mean...”

“That someone in this house probably knows. And did nothing.”

Chapter 5

2018

James opened the door in his Chicago Bears t-shirt and cargo shorts, disheveled silver hair sticking up, coffee in one hand.

“Dani, what are you doing here so early? Did you just get off work?”

She nodded and came in, giving her father a kiss on the cheek, his three day old stubble tickling.

“Coffee?”

“You read my mind.”

“Apparently not or I’d have fixed this one for you. Come on.”

He lead her to the kitchen and poured a fresh one for her and pushed the cream and sugar over. Waiting for her to acclimate.

“Something’s on your mind.”

“Dad, I have another strange paper I found in grandma’s box.”

“Norwegian again?”

“No. German?”

Dani took it out and handed it to him and she drank her coffee and he perused this piece.

“Looks like hospital paperwork. I didn’t think anyone was from Germany?”

“Me either. Didn’t one of the aunts speak it? Or learn it at some point?”

“Your Aunt Maddie did some. Not sure how much she remembers. But I think she learned late. Took classes somewhere. Are you going over there?”

“I thought it was worth a shot. Thought I’d also talk to mom. How’s she doing?”

“She’s better, lucid again. We actually had a full conversation without the crazy. I think this new med is better. They’re scared of you though.”

Dani smiled, “I did sort of bite into them last time.”

“Well, you work in a place like that. They should have known to talk to you. I told them to call you, but they wouldn’t. Said it was my responsibility or something. I don’t know what they’re talking about; your mother would always explain that crap to me.”

Dani just smiled, her dad was definitely a coach.

“Want some eggs, kiddo? Or biscuits and sausage?”

“Grandma Caroline’s recipe?”

James looked shocked, “As if I’d make any other.”

*

Driving to the hospital made Dani realize how much she missed her mother. They talked almost everyday and these time away was a void for her. Now she didn’t know how much to tell her. Dad thinks this search set her back? Why would mom be triggered by all this?

Katherine paused, as she entered the room, then smiled.

“Dani,” Katherine hugged her daughter, “I’ve missed you. Is this a visit or more questions?”

“Both”

They talked for almost all of their allotted time when Dani brought up the document. Dad is right, she does sound better.

Katherine remembered all the times that her grandmother had dropped into German, but her mother hadn’t spoken the language.

“That is probably my grandmother’s. Sarah, your great grandmother.”

“So would they have spoken two languages?”

“Sarah’s parents were from Norway, but they died when she was maybe twelve. She spoke more German, because her husband did, I think, maybe her boss? I can’t remember. She used it all the time. I never heard her speak Norwegian.”

“Not ever?”

“Even though her parents were from Norway, they weren’t involved with the community in town, she didn’t know any of the family from back home.

“And from what my mother told me, they died violently. Her father, Gunther killed her mother, Anna. It was in the newspapers and she was in foster care or something like that. It was a horrible story. But if you’re digging into her letters and papers you might find more of it. I think maybe her foster family was German and they introduced her to a German boy? Um, Arthur, I believe. That would be my mother’s father, the one she never talked about. She has illuminated documents that are gorgeous, but that is about all I could ever get out of her. Until that one day when she dumped out all of her stories.”

“Why would she do that?”

Katherine chuckled a bit.

“Morphine drip. Better than sodium pentothal.”

“You are horrible.”

Dani laughed at her mother’s cunning tricks.

“You totally took advantage of your mother being wasted to ask all the tough questions she never wanted to talk about? You’re a horrible human being.”

“Your grandma Helena taught me to be a bit ruthless at times. And I knew she’d go to her grave with all the answers. So yeah, I suck. But I got the information I needed. It allowed me to have some closure. Hopefully you’re getting some of that too.”

“Mom, I’m not the one in the hospital.”

“Touché. But I am doing the work. And those things are ones I no longer have to deal with. Are you going to show me what you found now?”

“It looks like the papers from your hospital and a journal entry. Dad agreed.”

“Ah, can’t say I miss golf TV, but I do miss him.”

Katherine chuckled, knew exactly what he’d be watching at the house. And when to call and interrupt.

“Well, you’re going to have to find someone else to translate the German. I’m useless on that one. What about the hospital paperwork? Is that also in German?”

“Yeah, but the hospital on here can’t be in Chicago. Could it? Would they have done their paperwork in German?”

“Hmmm, maybe. If it was for the patient and the hospital was in the German section of town. It’s possible. I’m sure there is a German society of some sort in town that could answer all those questions.”

“What about Aunt Maddie? You know the aunts dumped a whole box of grandma Sarah’s stuff at my house to, don’t you?”

“Doesn’t surprise me after I mentioned Helena’s journals. But Aunt Maddie has probably forgotten most of her German.”

Katherine shrugged, “It’s worth a try, though. I think she took lessons at the German Cultural Center, but don’t quote me on that.”

“Got time for one more question?”

“Shoot.”

“Grandma sounds normal in the journals. I don’t understand.”

Katherine thought about it a moment. Kiddo, this one is painful.

1967

Pacing in the other room, James looked through the opening in the barrier wall at his wife and shrugged, his hands raised looking for an answer. Katherine shook her head ever so slightly. She had dropped the news, but hadn’t been able to gauge a response yet. But the red coloring of her mother’s face hinted at what was to come.

“Why should I be happy about being a grandmother?”

The tight-lipped sour expression told Katherine exactly what she needed to know: worst grandmother ever.

Helena’s tight coiffed updo would certainly get mussed up, not to mention the neatly pressed faux Jackie Kennedy ensemble and man-made pearls. She crossed her arms and waited to hear more, uncrossing and re-crossing her legs tightly, shaking her free foot.

“Mother, don’t look at me like that. James and I want a family and the doctor said I couldn’t conceive. This is the only way to ensure that we are able to have that family.”

Helena sighed, “I don’t see what the trouble is. I conceived just fine. So did your sister, even though she didn’t manage to stick with it.”

“Mother, she miscarried.”

The stale, cold room with its tile floors and harsh lines seemed to jump out at Katherine as she looked around, avoiding Helena’s eyes. Katherine always wondered what her mother

liked about this room with its straight lines and sharp corners. Even the artwork she chose for the dining room was stark and made Katherine wince.

“Fine. Then you don’t have to participate, *Helena*. Just go to your parties and drink and dance with your friends. Family apparently means that little to you.”

Katherine knew which button to push, *the family*. It was a bone of contention since Helena no longer talked to her brother Sonny. Neither did her sisters. It made Katherine crazy to think about all the family talk from her grandmother came down to this. A broken family. Then again, Helena and her siblings had locked her mother away, in the same state hospital as their father. They both died there.

Katherine remembered her grandmother fondly, had trouble believing that this woman was her daughter. How could they possibly be related? She always hated that her mother had taken her grandmother away from her.

1950

Sarah sat with Katherine in the back yard, listening to the train go by as they chatted and drew. She patiently answered all of Katherine’s questions. Sharp as a whip, she’s say about her granddaughter. This time alone was something she cherished. After all she and Helena had been through, she was unsure how much Helena would allow, and she loved Katherine and doted on her.

“Grandma, what was your childhood like?” Katherine asked.

Katherine was happy running around with her cousin, but knew that it was strange with all of them living in one house. But since the war it was this way. She didn’t understand the war

at the time, but the all the men were away, except for one of her uncles. That meant that she almost felt like she had a brother. At least for a while.

“Did you grow up in this big house?”

“No, honey. I was an orphan.”

“Like ‘Little Orphan Annie’?”

Sarah shook her head, “except no Daddy Warbucks. I had to work.”

“Until you met grandpa.”

Sarah was taken aback a bit, “What do you know about grandpa?”

Katherine shrugged, “Mommy said he was a soldier and died in battle.”

Sarah thought about that description and it fit. He was at war, with himself. And though he didn’t die in battle, he had lost and had to remain locked up. She was the only one who even bothered visiting anymore. But his absence lingered in a strange way. Helena never mentioned him, and lied to her child about him. What else should she say about him? To a six year old? She chose to let sleeping dogs lie. She didn’t have anything better in mind that Katherine would understand. Hopefully, when she was older, she’d understand the lie.

1972

Slipping out of the silver Pontiac, Dani ran to the front door mimicking an airplay swerving left and right and landed in front of Helena.

“Grandma!!!”

Dani’s mismatched clothes would certainly be commented on, but Dani greeted Helena with a big hug, oblivious. Helena stiffened and forced a smile. She tried to ignore her daughter rolling her eyes behind her dark sunglasses.

“Hello, honey,” Helena said.

Helena bent to hug her granddaughter, careful not to spill the martini she held in her right hand. The little girl paid no attention to the awkwardness of the hug and ran into the house.

“Hello, mother.”

“I thought I told you I didn’t want to be called grandma. You obviously haven’t taught her any other greeting.”

The anger behind her eyes pierced her daughter.

“Mother, you can be angry all you like. Her friends all call their grandmothers that. Do you really think she wouldn’t realize you were addressed differently?”

“I don’t really care.”

“She’ll catch on to that as well, don’t spill your drink.”

Katherine sneered as she brushed past her mother. Second guessing her decision to visit, she looked around the house and tried to shake off the negative images that ran through her head with each piece of artwork and sculpture her parents had accumulated over the years. Things. Things to make the family look better or classier or more important than the folks down the street.

Inside Katherine could hear Dani and her father talking in the kitchen but couldn’t make out the words. Karl was obviously cooking again. The smell of garlic filled the small house.

“Grandpa, don’t forget Link....he needs a cookie too.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry Link, how could I forget your cookie.

“Psst, Dani, where is he?” Karl whispered in her direction.

“He’s sitting right next to me, Grandpa.” She whispered back, laughing.

Katherine chuckled in the doorway.

“Dad, you don’t have to play, if you don’t want to.”

“Nonsense, you two didn’t have *imaginary* friends.”

He whispered the imaginary so as not to distress Dani, who sat talking to her friends.

“I am having just as much fun as she is.”

"How is my sister anyway?"

”She’s doing well. I’d like to stop being your go between. You should do something about that?”

"I know, dad. She and I just don't see eye to eye."

"Or back down. Both of you are stubborn. You get that from your mother, you know."

He looked over his glasses at her, then continued cutting vegetables for his stew as he turned to resume his conversation with Dani.

Katherine sat on the stool in the corner and watched the imaginary play of her daughter and father, smiling and smoking her menthol cigarette.

“So dad, what’s up with mom anyway?”

“Oh,” he hesitated, “she’s on her third. You know how that goes.”

Katherine closed her eyes and shook her head, resting her forehead on her thumb, keeping her cigarette away from the drapes. She remembered what her mother was like after three martinis, though married life allowed her the escape from all this these days.

“Are you two staying for dinner?”

“No, dad, we gotta get back.”

“But you just got here.”

“You may choose to deal with her like this, but I don’t want to put Dani through that. It’s bad enough that we have to. Haven’t you said something to her?”

Karl shrugged his shoulders at the idea. “I try sometimes, but you know how much nicer it is to keep the peace.”

“Until there’s no peace to be had. Come on dad, it’s bound to get worse. And you’re stuck in the middle with this. God knows my sister isn’t any help.”

“That’s not fair, Katherine. She doesn’t live anywhere close. And her job isn’t as stable as yours.”

“You think she lives there for comfort? They’re in the middle of the woods. In Arkansas. You don’t think that was on purpose? And jobs...really? A traveling salesman has a more stable gig.”

Karl looked at her over his glasses again, “An artist has to make sacrifices.”

“So does a full time stay at home mother. By the way, we just the signed papers.”

“You mother will flip.”

Katherine smiled, “Anything to make her more uncomfortable, dad.”

“Not nice.”

“No, but the baby is adorable and Dani will have a brother.”

Karl kissed his daughter on the forehead, “Well, you know I approve. And can’t wait to see the little slugger.”

“Thanks, dad.”

Katherine looked at Dani quietly playing with her imaginary friend and talking to him softly. Tea parties weren’t going to be the same with a baby brother to look after.

“Dani, kiss grandpa and say goodbye. We’re leaving!”

“**Good**,” she mumbled from the doorway, a look of distaste of her face.

“Dani, kiss *grandma*,” Katherine stressed the word grandma and watched her mother cringe as she leaned over for Dani to kiss her cheek.

“Bye grandma, bye grandpa.”

Dani danced her way to the door, cookies still in her hands. Oblivious to the adults. In her own imaginary world, talking with her friends. Helena sneered at Katherine.

“You need to get that girl some real friends. Why are you allowing this ridiculous behavior to continue?”

“Nice to see you too, mom. Bye, dad.”

Getting in the car was a relief for Katherine. Dani was still oblivious. *Thank God for imaginary friends.*

“Dani, what were you and grandpa talking about?”

“We were talking about cookies, momma. Why is grandpa always making cookies? Doesn’t grandma cook?”

“That is actually baking, honey. And yes, she does. He just really likes making you different cookies. What kind did he give you today?”

“Oatmeal scotties.”

“Close, baby, they’re oatmeal scotchies.”

“What are scotchies?”

Katherine smiled and thought, something my mother would pound if they packed a punch. She shook off the comment.

“They have butterscotch chips in them so they taste like butterscotch.”

“Where did he learn to bake, momma?”

Her we go with a million questions. Dani was always curious about something.

“He learned that in the Army, baby.”

“When was he in the Army?”

“During WWII. Just before he married grandma.”

“She’s so pretty, but she never cooks with us, momma. Why not?”

Oh hell, maybe she is picking up on the problem after all.

Katherine tried to be diplomatic, “She doesn’t like cooking nearly as much as grandpa.”

“Oh. Ok.”

Katherine watched her in the rear view mirror go back to playing with Link. She took a deep breath, hoping that she dodged that bullet for a while.

*

Karl looked at Helena over the top of his glasses, studying her responses, knowing what everyone of them meant after so many years.

“What were you and Katherine fighting about, now?”

“Karl, I’m sure I don’t know.”

Tension between she and her daughter had gotten worse lately. Vermouth and gin sloshing in a new mix, another martini would surly help. At least it would be numbing and warm going down. Helena took a sip, savoring the burn as it washed away the pain.

“What gourmet meal are you working on?”

Helena was only partially interested. Karl was always concocting something unusual in the kitchen. She tolerated his creativity, occasionally it worked, other times she sneered. Yelling no longer seemed worthy of her time or effective in controlling her husband.

“Just a new way of making pot roast.”

“There’s another way?” Helena said distantly, reading her spy novel in between sips of liquor. Sitting in her dining room with its harsh lines and hard surfaces suited her, comforted her.

He smiled, “Darlin’ one man’s Yankee Pot Roast is another man’s...Irish Stew. And I’ll make ‘em all for you.”

He came around the counter turning on old American Standards and pulled her up to dance. Karl proceeded to sing to her in her ear and she rolled her eyes and laughed. At least he could still make her laugh from time to time. That meant there was something still there. And not the foreboding prediction Katherine had given him about the drunkenness.

Deep down he knew he’d have to talk about it. At some point. But today they were still who they were on their wedding day, or so he believed. Still in love and still linked by their love for one another.

*

Katherine slammed the front door, and walked into her kitchen. She knew her husband would say, ‘I told you so.’ He was always pissed off his mother-in-law’s attitude.

“Ugh! I can’t even remember why I went over there. Why does that woman make me so crazy?”

“So, it went well, I take it?” He was seated at the table, reading the newspaper.

“What a waste of time that trip was.”

James smiled, “Kath, she’s a sour old woman. What did you expect?” He said absent-mindedly. His focus was entirely on the news story, probably sports.

“I don’t know why I keep expecting her to be happy about this. Aren’t you supposed to enjoy your grandchildren? I know, I know, you’re right, but she’s my mother. What am I supposed to do about it?”

“Quit taking her over there. Exposing Dani to her is not a good thing.”

“Yeah, but Dani and my dad are like peas in a pod. He actually plays with her. Talk about strange. This man, playing? All I remember is him yelling at us as kids.”

James just looked at her and shrugged. They had had this discussion more than once, and he knew there was no answer to the problem.

“Besides, she wasn’t always like this.”

“Katherine, you’re just forgetting. She used to be worse. At least she’s not acting out as much. Remember high school? And how she hit on all your boyfriends? The dancing and drinking? The screaming matches her and your father had all the time?”

“I know, I know. I just don’t want my kids to not know them at all. At least those things are done.”

“For now. And frankly, I’d rather you not take my daughter over there.”

“Your daughter? Mmmm. Your parents aren’t so fantastic either, James.”

“They aren’t the current subject. I just think you need a plan to keep her out of the mix with that woman.”

“That woman is my mother.”

“Ok, but you brought her up. What was the fight about?”

James never did like her parents, and her mother did hit on him as well. But the family connection meant more time spent with her parents. He knew her parents. Not terribly inviting, but he at least could enjoy talking with his father-in-law. He had done some crazy, stupid things

in his life that they could have a beer and laugh about. And Karl was a good storyteller, so why not. But that woman was trouble. James said it every time they visited.

“What are they ever about?”

James rolled his eyes, “well, why even get into it then?”

“I left, didn’t I? What else can I do?”

“Did you get the papers signed?”

“Damn it. Mother started in before I could think to ask. I totally forgot what I was doing there. I did mention the other papers to dad.”

“But the adoption agency also wants their papers. Kath, you need to not let her throw you off your game.”

“James,” she sighed, tired of going over the fight in her head, “easier said than done.”

She chuckled at the sports metaphor, he was such a quarterback, always trying to control the play. How did we end up together? The star quarterback and her? She was never a cheerleader and often wondered about their relationship.

James waved as he went out the door. The garage door opened and the sound of the lawnmower stopped her from following him into the driveway to finish the conversation.

“Damn it.”

The whole visit with her mother made her think. James said to keep Dani away, but she couldn’t separate her from her grandpa. It all just made her wonder about how her mother had become so hateful and self-centered. She didn’t remember being raised that way, but then again, it seemed her dad had been in charge of the kids. She struggled to remember what it had been like with her parents, but it had seemed like her father was the larger than life figure and her

mom was...where? And how had she become this angry alcoholic that was not nice to her granddaughter?

Part II

Chapter 6

1940

Helena ran to her room, tears flowing freely. She knew they wouldn't believe her. Why did I listen to Maddie? Maddie always trusted that the outcome would be what she wanted. But that is why doors have locks, isn't it? And the high back chair she loved to sit in, well, no more. Helena was bound and determined to use that to ensure that the lock on that door held.

She was a smart girl that Helena, and knew what she wanted. Out! And away from that horrible brother of hers. She knew the only way out of her family was to marry into another. In this day and age that was simply how it was done.

What Lillian had said about Karl rang in her ears. Did he really look like a love struck dope? Was it real or just him being a dope?

When she saw her the next day she decided she needed some time to talk. Girl talk mostly, but Lillian would understand. Even if her family didn't. Lillian didn't even need all the details to make a decision. Just knowing that Helena wanted to get married was enough to set Lillian on the planning mode.

"Lillian, when are we going dancing again?"

"When is Karl coming home?"

"He's gone for basic training. And then he ships out."

"And what? You want to be married before then? Wow, that was a fast turn around, Helena."

"I've been thinking about it, Lil. And he is the one."

She said it out loud, there. Maybe it was more to convince herself though. It didn't matter, as long as she kept up the premise long enough to convince Karl. She would accept it and be ok once it was underway she told herself.

"So, Helena, what's your first move?"

"That's what I need you for, Lillian. What do I tell him?"

"What did you tell him when he left? How did you leave it?"

"It was sort of up in the air. 'I'll see you when I see you' sort of thing."

Lillian rolled her eyes. "Helena, if you want him you gotta tell him as much. That much is sort of obvious, isn't it?"

"But now that he's gone? How is he going to get back here?"

"A man will figure it out if he wants to figure it out. Just tell him."

When Helena got home she wrote a letter to Karl, hoping not to sound desperate. She told him how much she already missed him, and dancing at the club just wasn't the same without him, and she didn't know what to do about a partner while he was gone. She tried not to lay it on too thick, but she did miss him. She wondered what he would do when he received this veiled come on. She hoped he'd hop the first train home, but wasn't sure he'd be able to.

She made sure did her hair in the mornings as fashionable as she could, hoping this would detract from her hand made or hand me down dresses. When he showed up, she wanted to look her best.

Throughout high school she only owned two dresses, and those were sewn by her mother, the seamstress. Her mother had to work, and sewing was the only thing she knew how to do well, well enough to support the family.

Helena splurged with her first paycheck. She bought a brand new dress with her own money. No one could stop her. And it was prettier than anything she'd ever owned. She made sure that it stayed clean and in the back of her closet so no one would know until she wore it with that man on her arm. She wanted to look good for him, but also to show up the rest of the family. All of them, she thought, needed to know she was worthy of him.

*

Helena was getting ready to go to the club with Lillian when Maddie came bursting into the room, breathless. She motioned to the door and spoke in coherently.

“Breathe.”

“There is a soldier at the front door looking for you, Helena.”

“Get the door.”

Maddie was confused, but she stood in front of the door holding it. Helena pulled her new dress out of the back of the closet and Maddie watched as she put the pretty new dress on and spun around for Maddie's approval.

“Wow, you look amazing.”

Helena smiled, “That is precisely the point. Let's go.”

She descended the stairs slowly and purposefully. She wanted him to wait just a bit and anticipate her arrival. As she came into view she could hear him suck in his breath. Now that was the response she was looking for. And she smiled at him as she approached.

“Karl.”

Helena held out her hand and he took it, kissed it and offered his arm. He knew it was a dance night. It would be best to dance first.

She wriggled her fingers in goodbye to Maddie, smiling. It seemed that she had baited the hook well, and he had bitten. Now to maintain her sense of calm, she listened to her breath and waited for him to talk. Nerves made her unsure of her voice, maybe it was love? No, it can't be.

Lillian was waiting for them when they arrived. Her eyes bugged out at the sight of Karl. She didn't think that Helena's letter had been strong enough. Apparently, she was totally in the wrong. And he was obviously a goner. Lillian smiled like the accomplice she was.

"Hello, Lillian."

Karl kissed her cheek and pulled Helena out to the dance floor, and pulled her close.

"I can't believe your letter. Last thing I remember, we were going to wait and see. Then I get your letter and that wasn't exactly a wait and see sort of message."

"Can you blame me? I'd be here dancing with some other guy and you'd be leaving the country. For how long?"

She could feel his muscles pulling into a wide grin, this was exactly what he wanted to hear and she knew it. But she also loved dancing with him. Was it so wrong to push this agenda? He would get her away from her brother, and disbelieving mother. It would be safe with Karl.

"But my absence wouldn't feel so bad if you were, say in, Spokane?"

Helena drew back a bit, "Spokane?"

"Yes, Spokane."

She looked at him with confusion.

"What's in Spokane?"

"Me. It's my home base and when I come back that is where I'll be."

"So you can take your girlfriend to war? I mean if that is what you meant."

“No, I can’t take my girlfriend.”

“Then I don’t understand.”

She said it to convince herself she wasn’t plotting and planning already.

“Well, I may not be able to take my girlfriend, but I certainly can take my wife. I can have a house on the base. And return there, to her.”

“What are you saying, Karl?”

“I think you know. You are the one I want to be there in that house waiting for me. I want you to marry me. Will you marry me?”

He sort of stammered a bit and spoke through the nervousness, and held onto her tightly.

“Yes, Karl. I will marry you.”

She almost breathed a sigh of relief. It was done, but her heart fluttered a bit. Helena was shocked to find herself nervous too. And to find herself excited about this, but she hesitated to call it love.

The barrage of questions began when Helena closed the door. She hadn’t told the family anything about Karl; this was the first that any of them had heard or seen of a love interest Helena had.

“Hmm...who is this Karl?” Sonny sneered.

Helena didn’t answer, she just smiled.

“Hello, Helena,” Sonny said.

“Hmmm?”

“Who the hell was that?”

Sonny's question won. Her sisters' questions echoed around her, but she heard nothing but Sonny.

Her eyes met his and she tried to show defiance, "Who, Karl?"

"Karl? That's all you have to say?"

Helena ignored him and floated her way up to her room.

Karl had been nothing but nice to the family. He tried to represent himself as a solid, hard working Army recruit. But, the family had not liked him, according to their expressions. She felt that upon her return; Karl wasn't like any of the boys she had dated. Ok, he was smart and klutzy, not to mention those glasses. The dark rimmed glasses did put him over top in the nerd category. Plus he really didn't have much of a sense of humor. Rather a stiff shirt.

Each time she went out dancing with Karl, it had been a secret. Now the secret was out. And she had said yes. They would have to see him again and that gave Helena a chuckle as she closed her door to the commotion downstairs.

*

Nights would come and the questions would burn in Helena's sleep. Dreams now had both the demon and Karl, after their discovery of each other. It always ended with one or the other dead. Much as she hated the feeling of being haunted by the madman, she didn't really want him dead. He was still her father after all, but night after night her dreams kept her from sleep. But tonight she couldn't manage to shake off the dream to return to sleep.

Helena sat up and shook her head. Karl had never met the her father; hopefully never would. She contemplated going down to the kitchen, but she couldn't figure out how real the other dream was. Helena was sure the dream about Sonny was different. Was that real? But she knew he'd be in the kitchen and stayed in bed with her thoughts.

Instead Helena turned on the little night light that glowed softly checked the chair shoved under the doorknob and went to open the window. She lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply, feeling the calm wash over her.

“Hel?”

“Sorry, did I wake you?”

Maddie came and joined her at the window. She took her cigarette and inhaled like a pro.

“When did you start smoking?”

“When did you, Hel? I thought I was the only one sneaking smokes.”

“It calms me down and keeps the dreams at bay.”

“I thought that was what the journal was for.”

“That too. I’m going to miss you.”

Another thing that helped was realizing knowing how soon she and Karl would be gone. He already applied for base housing, but had to prove that they were engaged. The idea he came up with was a photo of the two of them with her engagement ring visible for them to see. When she asked about the picture, he said that he didn’t think they’d believe him without it. But they did allow him to postpone his departure so that he could marry her and move her onto base. Two weeks was the allotted time. Two weeks.

Helena smiled at the idea of a Justice of the Peace marrying them. Just her mother’s reaction was worth it all. And Sonny’s anger felt different this time.

*

Two weeks. Helena remembered them in a blur. Planning with Lillian, and her sisters. At least for a small gathering. After all, getting married at City Hall should still be a special day. A wedding was still a wedding.

The packing and going through all of her belongings, deciding what she needed and what could be left was a struggle. What did she know about Washington, or marriage, or running her own home for that matter?

And now she could finally relax a bit, sitting with her new husband on their way to Spokane after an hours worth of goodbyes at the rail station. Helena leaned into Karl and dozed off as the Midwest sped past the windows of their compartment.

The two days on the train allowed Helena to snuggle up to Karl for lengthy periods of time. She had never felt so safe and comfortable. The little voice in the back of her head told her that he shipped out soon, so not to get too used to this.

“Where did you live on the base while you were up here?”

Helena wanted to have more information about what lay ahead.

“Most of us were in the barracks. The men with families were in the base housing. I’m sure it’ll all be fine though. What are you worried about?”

Helena shrugged, “Just want to fit in with the other Army wives.”

Karl kissed her forehead, “I’m sure you’ll fit right in.”

His voice was soft and reassuring. She struggled to try to sleep the last leg of the trip, but still held onto Karl hoping to calm the trembling nerves and keep warm against the wool of his uniform.

*

The town seemed deserted when they arrived. So this was Spokane. Only the car to take them to the house was there to meet them.

“Private Millar.”

“Yes?”

“Corporeal McIlhenny. I work in the Commandant’s office. I’m here to take you to your base housing.”

“How far is it?” Helena yawned as she talked.

“Ma’am?”

“How far?”

“Not too far, ma’am. About 12 miles. It’ll take us about 20 minutes. You can relax in the back seat. Some of the ladies were bringing over some food and one of our men brought over firewood and was going to start a fire in the fireplace. The heat in these buildings can be less than stellar.”

“The ladies?”

“Some of the other wives. They take their welcoming of new wives pretty seriously. They’ll try to help you get settled and figure out the runnings of the base. They support each other and the kids on base.”

Helena thought anything would be better than her home, especially now that Sonny and her father were *personas non grata* in her book. She was no longer sure what to think about either of them. And her mother was no help. At least these women wouldn’t know anything and she could keep the family history to herself. Perhaps that was the best plan for all.

The house was a cookie cutter of all the others on the base, but the Corp. had been right about the preparations the wives had made for them. There was even a note.

“Welcome, home. We will be by in the afternoon to say hi. We brought you some food to get you through the first couple of days of wedded bliss. We’ll show you around the base as soon as you’re ready. And show you the best places to grab some lunch.” The Girls

That would allow them time to get a bit settled, get some sleep and some breakfast before invaders.

“Ma’am, this is the key and the ladies will take care of you and get you settled. Private Millar, the Commander is expecting you tomorrow at noon. They ship out in 48 hours. If you don’t check in by noon tomorrow, you’ll be considered AWOL.”

“Understood. Thank you Corp.”

As Karl shut the door he breathed a sigh of relief.

“Finally, all alone.”

He looked at Helena and watched her look over the house.

“What do you think?”

She looked him in the eye, “It’ll do. The ladies will be by. I’m sure they will help spruce it up a bit. Ladies tend to do that.”

She smiled thinking of the invasion to come.

“I’m sure they will.”

He smiled and stepped closer.

“I’m sorry there won’t be any honeymoon.”

“I knew that going into this.”

She took out the picture her mother had given her of her grandparents, Anna and Gunther, in front of a huge castle. Her dreams of a honeymoon weren’t that grand.

1897

Gunther walked in from talking to Anna’s father. He knew she would be excited. Her father had suggested the path to the places she most longed to go. This would make her happy.

“Anna, I have it all planned out. We go to Germany for the honeymoon.”

Her eyes lit up as she smiled back at Gunther, she thought that he’d been listening to her girlhood dreams of castles. Perhaps he was playing into her Cinderella fantasies.

“How did you know that was my favorite Grimm tale?”

“Your mother told me, Anna.”

She had flagged it in her book and always loved the idea of being rescued like the folktale said. No more farm work, no more livestock. Just living in a castle like a princess. She knew it was unrealistic and just a little girl dream, but seeing actual castles was a suitable substitute. And perhaps he would be a good husband. Anna could only hope. They hadn’t been alone much and he was on his best behavior in front of Anna’s father.

When their parents met, they sat and talked over Vodka. Papa always had a bottle, usually out in the shed where he drank. He also drank at the tavern. Sometimes Anna would hear him come in late, stumbling through the house.

“Lars, you must stop this. It’ll be the death of you.”

“Greta, it’s just beer, not Vodka like your father.”

“You’ll drink yourself to death, just like he did. Ja?”

“I’m not your father. And I’ll drink if I goddamn feel like it,” he punctuated his sentence with a stomping of his foot.

Greta remembered finding her father out in the snow; he had collapsed in a snowbank on the way home. And froze to death in the Norwegian cold. She swore she wouldn’t let her husband follow those footsteps. She had come to love him.

She also remembered what life was like for her mother afterwards. The loss of her father made her fear all those things that he kept her safe from. All of her childhood fears came back to

her. She also saw her mother's struggle afterwards. Greta did not want to live like that, to struggle to keep her family taken care of. It became a hard life for her mother.

Greta's mother explained that was why she'd hurried to marry off her children, once Greta could understand.

Lars had to know about Greta's fears about the drinking; she pleaded with him. And it usually worked. She didn't want to repeat her mother's life.

Anna had never seen her father drunk, but talking with Gunther's father meant meeting him drink for drink and the both of them tried to outdo the other, a battle for Odin's respect, they joked. The result was too very drunk fathers and two very angry mothers.

To avoid the conflict, Anna sat by the fire hoping Gunther would come sit with her. She didn't want to be angry with him. She hoped that papa had chosen her husband well. All that was left was the ceremony. Then she would no longer be part of her family home. The rest of the night she looked around at what she would miss.

"Anna."

She looked up at him not able to gauge his thoughts or feelings.

"Yes?"

"I..." he hesitated.

"We set a date. Your father and mine settled on two weeks from now. I hope that pleases you."

Anna nodded, she wasn't quite sure what she thought. But one question lingered.

"I do want to know one thing. Are we returning here after the honeymoon? Or going straight to America?"

“Straight to America. My friend Sven says that he has set up a job for me and the sooner we get there, the better. He doesn’t want them to give my job away, but he cannot hold it indefinitely.”

Anna nodded, she had two weeks left with her family and then she’d be gone.

*

Anna sat with Gunther on the train into Copenhagen, trying to maintain her anxiety. She had spent the last two weeks talking with Gunther, but still didn’t understand what he wanted out of this marriage. His parents had arranged his part and hers, hers. But why did they choose her?

“Gunther, have you always wanted to see the castles?”

“No, but you have. Your father helped me with the route to take and which castles to see. Including a new one: Neuschwanstein Castle, it is supposed to be amazing and just opened last year.”

“Where from there?”

“Genoa, our ship will sail from Genoa, Italy to the Chicago in America.”

Talking helped some with the nervousness of being alone. Their first real night together in Copenhagen left questions in her head. Her mother had talked about her duty. It sounded like it would be painful and she had trouble relaxing knowing that they were getting closer and closer to their destination.

*

The castle at Copenhagen was beautiful, and so was the old hotel that they checked into. Anna allowed Gunther to take her hand and lead her to their room. They kept the curtains open to see the gaslights glow on the town as they undressed in their small room.

Anna needed Gunther to unzip her dress and felt his hands on her back sending a chill down her spine. He stepped in close and breathed in her scent.

“It’ll be all right, Anna. I won’t hurt you.”

She closed her eyes and nodded slowing her breathing and allowing his hands to undress her.

Her duty, she thought. All the advice her mother had given her started to run through her head as Gunther touched her and caressed and kissed places where she was sensitive, her neck, her ears, her breasts.

It seemed that her mother had left the enjoyable parts out of her talk. Had Gunther had a talk with his father? About these things?

Anna woke to the sound of Gunther’s soft snore. She listened to him breathing certain that he was sleeping soundly. This reassured her as she got up, wrapped her robe around her and walked to the bathroom. The pain wasn’t nearly what her mother had mentioned, but sitting in a warm bath would feel nice.

She thought about it for a minute, wondering if it would wake him. Then she tied her hair up and ran the water. Sliding in slowly she allowed the water to relax her muscles and she thought about her duty and how often this would happen. Her mother said she never enjoyed it, but there was some enjoyment. She hoped her experience wouldn’t be like her mother’s. The idea that her mother wouldn’t be there to talk to worried her more.

The knock on the door startled her out of her thoughts. He opened the door slowly.

“Avoiding me already?”

His eyebrow raised showed that he was curious, but less curt than he sounded.

Anna smiled, “No, just thought a soak would help.”

“Don’t take too long, we’ll want to get a move on to see what we can before the train to Berlin. I’ll ring for some breakfast.”

“Thank you.”

She sat for a couple of minutes more before feeling the impetus to finish, to get out, and to get dressed. He had sounded like he would be getting impatient and she wanted to see more of Copenhagen.

Roaming around Copenhagen wore out Anna and she leaned into Gunther as she fell asleep on the train. Berlin was next and it was a place he’d wanted to see. He had family that they were to stay with for a few days. Anna was looking forward to meeting his family, but it seemed odd to not have seen them at the wedding. Then again it was a longer trip than she had initially thought.

“Anna,” Gunther shook her awake.

“We’re here.”

“Berlin?”

“Yes. My family will be here to pick us up.”

He helped her onto the platform and to grab a porter to gather their bags. He lead her to the front of the rail station to find their carriage.

“Gunther!”

His aunt waved to him as his cousins came running in their direction.

“Jakob, Georg.”

Gunther hugged his cousins; it had been years since he’d seen them and now they were grown.

“How old are you? You look like men already.”

“Oh cousin,” Georg laughed. “I’m only twelve.”

Gunther smiled, “That makes you fifteen, right Jakob.”

“Right. We are supposed to help with your bags.”

“The porter has them. This is Anna, my wife.”

Both of them ooh’d like teenage boys. And then held out their hand to shake with Anna.

“Pleased to meet you, boys.”

She was happy to meet the family. The boys were like her brothers, and their mother Angela was very nice to Anna. But meeting Heinrich gave Anna a chill. There was something in his demeanor that made Anna uneasy, but she couldn’t name what it was that worried her.

Chapter 7

1940

Watching Helena go, reminded Sarah of watching her siblings being pulled away from her. And now Sonny was packing up, too. She didn't know what to say to any of them. All of her time it seemed had been spent on how to keep them all under one roof, all together as she had once believed was necessary.

The thoughts about her family kept creeping back into her head.

"Momma?"

"Maddie?" Sarah smiled weakly, "What are you going to do with your room now?"

The cleaning out of Helena's leftover belongings let Sarah walk down memory lane with Maddie, but cleaning out parts of the house made Sarah start to panic, too. She sat on Helena's bed, trying to breathe and focus so as not to freak out Maddie.

"Cry myself to sleep. I'm going to miss her."

"What?"

"That's what I'm going to do, momma. At least for awhile. Then I'll figure out what to do with her side of everything."

"Me too, baby. Me too."

Sarah held out her arms trying to be brave for her youngest, feeling the tears building. She thought she should have told them about their father. All those years she'd taken the advice of the hospital, and now her children were upset and leaving. All of her silence had hurt them. It was meant to protect.

"You aren't angry about your father?"

“I am, but Helena is more upset about it all. And Sonny was part of what she was upset about too.”

“What do you mean?”

Maddie told her about Helena’s other dream.

“But that doesn’t make any sense. It can’t be true.”

“Well, but both have now left. And is there any wonder why?”

She looked at her mother and tried to make her understand.

“It doesn’t matter what we believe. Helena believes it. And she was terrified before she left. She jammed that chair under the door knob the last week before she left with Karl.”

Tears silently trailed down Sarah’s face. She knew she’d lost Helena and now probably Sonny.

Sarah looked at Maddie, “When did you get so smart?”

She smiled through the tears.

“How do you go on when you lose people? I don’t know if I’ll be able to sleep in here without Helena.”

Sarah wrapped her arm around Maddie, “She isn’t gone forever.”

She had to try to convince herself, as well.

“Helena is just across a couple of states. And you can call or write to her. When I lost my family, I wasn’t allowed to stay in contact. They were truly gone. It was a horrible feeling and didn’t get over it until I met your father.”

“Was he?”

“Ill? No, he wasn’t at the time. It sort of developed over the years. But he saved me from the pain.”

Sarah remembered feeling returning slowly and smiled, the Arthur she remembered wasn't the one they had met.

"It just took time to adjust, but the loss is always there, Maddie. We need to keep in touch with Helena."

Sarah hoped she was right. Losing her daughter would be hard, but if she cut her off too? She didn't know how long she could keep up the hopeful outer appearance for the others. Talking with Maddie was helping.

For once Sarah talked about their father and how they met. She knew that she'd have to retell the story to the others, but telling Maddie would be a start.

After your grandmother and grandfather were buried, I went to live with a family called the Lembecks. They lived on the other side of Elmhurst from the house I lived in with my family. I had to learn this new area and spent many afternoons walking in the neighborhood after work. Mrs. Lembeck was a seamstress, and I became her apprentice.

"So she's the one who taught you how to sew? Like you showed Ethel and Bridget?"

Sarah nodded, "Mother had shown me a few things, but Mrs. Lembeck really taught me everything I know.

"I loved the lilac bushes in bloom and the lush green and the flowers lining the streets and in the parks. The North side of town was so much prettier and the gentle, brisk breezes of Spring made me want to walk in the park when I wasn't working.

"It was that following spring that I met Arthur walking in the neighborhood in his uniform. He was so handsome in his uniform. I had never seen military men in town. But lately there had been military men walking about, getting ready to go fight the Border Wars in Texas and New Mexico.

“These men also joined the women who frequented the dance hall in town, walking in their fine dresses, gloves, shoes, hats...I wanted to be like them, dancing and having a good time. In fact, I told Arthur I was 18 when I was only 13...and I tried to act as old, somehow I suspected Arthur did not believe me. He was only 17 at the time.”

She and Arthur were going to have a soda that Saturday. Sarah tried to dress 18; she put up her hair; wore her best dress; and painted her lips and cheeks. She looked like the girls coming from the dance hall and was impressed at how well she had transformed herself. Arthur started to think she truly was 18 and asked if she wanted to go dancing that night.

“I was scared to go to the dancehall, but I was happy he asked. I think he was just as scared to go dancing, but we were happy to find each other and talk. Imagine being able to sit and talk for hours without running out of things to say. That was what it was like for us then. It also got my mind off the loss of the family tragedy so recent in my memory.”

“So when did you tell him the truth?” Maddie said.

“Well,” Sarah smiled and rolled her eyes, “just before he left, we met for coffee. I had to admit that I didn’t have a taste for it. And told him I had a confession.”

“What did he say?”

“He said he knew that I was younger than I let on.”

“So he wasn’t shocked at all?”

“No Maddie, he wasn’t. But that meant that we really spent more time talking and writing than kissing or anything else. We took it slow, and became close very fast.”

Maddie looked at her funny.

Sarah nodded, “I know it sounds ridiculous, but it happened just like that. And I started to at least forget how horrible my family situation was. He gave me something, someone, else to focus on.”

“How long was he down there?”

“Two years.

“Before he had to leave for Texas, we spent every moment we could with one another. In fact, we spent almost every afternoon or evening together. We just talked and walked in the park, drank sodas and finally, we danced at the dancehall.

“Each night we ended the evening holding hands and he would kiss me on her cheek. Then he would watch me walk to my door. I didn’t let him come all the way up, not yet. He didn’t understand why I wouldn’t let him come any closer, but it was the Lembeck’s house.

“He wanted to know more about my family and meet them. I managed to avoid the subject of until he left. I’m sure he wondered why I was so guarded. He had no idea of what had happened. I wanted to keep that to myself for a while longer.

“We’d fallen for each other in a very short time.

“During our final night together we talked all night and discussed the future. I did not know what I wanted for the future and let Arthur do much of the talking. He knew what he wanted, the large family, the large house. He wanted a wife and mother for his children. I made no promises, and finally came clean.

“That night, I cried myself to sleep. I heard all that he talked about until...

“The tragedy?”

Sarah nodded, “He was asking a lot of someone so young.”

“He was.”

“But he was patient with me. And he knew that it was going to happen. He just had to wait. And keep writing letters.”

“He doesn’t sound like the man we met.”

“He wasn’t always like that, Maddie. You have to believe me. That was why it was so hard not bringing you back there; not going there myself; not talking about it with any of you. It was another loss for me.”

Maddie hugged her mother. “She’ll be back It’ll be ok. Helena still loves us.”

Sarah nodded, “I know. I just hope she can forgive me.”

1911

The words she heard, but they were not making sense. The hospital walls blurred and Sarah struggled to stay present in what was happening. All of the losses seemed to be coming at the same time. And now?

“I can’t lose them...they’re all I have,” cried Sarah. “First mama, then papa, now you want to take all my siblings?”

The flood of tears raged behind her eyes.

“Sarah, your siblings have a greater chance to get adopted outright rather than going through the Orphanage to find guardians. The biggest problem is you. A twelve year old is practically impossible.”

Sarah appreciated her frankness, but a sudden wave of fear washed over her.

“We are all going to be split up?”

“We have no choice,” stated Mrs. Adams.

“Since you are twelve, you can work and support yourself instead of going to the County Orphanage. But because you aren’t old enough to have a husband or a way to provide for your siblings. ”

Not yet, not yet.

I'm alone...all alone.

Mrs. Adams comforted Sarah and again she was encouraged to cry. Crying was not about to solve any of Sarah's problems. Crying? Not when there was so much to be done, to plan, to say good-bye to.

*

Sarah couldn’t remember how she had gotten out into the garden and looked around in awe. The trees seemed greener than normal and the birds’ chirping filled the air, flowers blooming larger than life and a crisp breeze wandered through her senses. Odd...how could everything be so lovely when the sky was falling on Sarah's world?

Sarah meandered her way back to mama’s hospital wing and the lounge she had come to know throughout this ordeal. She gathered her belongings and approached the nurse at the desk.

“Yes, Miss.”

“Is there anything else I need to do before leaving?”

The nurse checked her papers.

“All is taken care of, you need only sign the form to get your parents’ belongings, except for the gun, of course, the police kept that.”

Mrs. Adams started in again, “Do you currently have employment?”

“No, I help my mama with the babies.”

“Here in Elmhurst?”

“Yes,” answered Sarah.

“...and your address?”

Why all the questions all of a sudden? Sarah had not noticed Mrs. Adams pulling out her forms or pencil. She was writing all of this on her form. She then asked detailed questions about all five of the children. Birthdates, ages, given names, nicknames, medical history. Sarah didn’t understand the process but was too numb to question it. After all her questions were answered Mrs. Adams shook Sarah's hand, strange gesture for a woman, and then she was gone as mysteriously as she had appeared.

“Why do you need all of this?”

“We need the information for your siblings. So they can get a new home.”

“And what happens to me?” Sarah almost didn’t want the answer. She knew it would be horrible.

Abigail Adams now had the job of placing these children without letting on how much this was affecting her. She was a new mother herself and could not imagine leaving her child without any parents or family in a foreign country.

The orphanage might just be the only place that would take them all. She was told by her all she talked to that that would be the answer.

*

Sarah made her way through the streets Elmhurst lost in thought. Where did daddy get that rifle anyway? Sarah never remembered any gun in the house. Was it there all along? Did daddy really plan on shooting mama? Then himself? And did he buy this rifle recently? For this? Or did mama buy it to protect herself from daddy? Or did she put daddy's gun the closet to

protect them from him, or any stranger at the door? The questions flooded her head. All unanswered, never to be answered. Never. It sounded so final, now.

Sarah's head was pounding, mama always said that she thought too much. Sarah almost did not recognize the house she had lived in much of her life, yet she stood before it now. How had she made it here? She could not remember anything about her long walk home. She walked to the front door, the porch red with blood; she had trouble stepping over into the house. The entryway was also red with blood. Sarah could hold the tears no longer. She sat on the floor crying, looking at the two bloodstains that had been her parents only 24 hours ago.

The shadows shifted in the doorway, sunlight peering in at Sarah lying on the floor, watching the sky turn bright blue, no more tears. She had no more to give. She watched the sky turn amber then indigo as the night stars populated the Heavens. They spoke to her, giving her solace and peace in all this chaos her life had become. Why had all this happened? She could no longer ask any question but why? The two people she loved the most were gone. Why? Her life was to be turned upside down. Why? She was now going to lose her siblings. Why? Why did you come to this country, Mama?

Hours later, Sarah lay on the floor and watching the stars and night sky. Sleep washed over her, her body still facing the tragedy stained before her. She slept silently in the doorway, just beyond her mother's blood stain with the door still open allowing in the breeze and the night sky and the second stain to penetrate her view, should she awake.

The morning sounds of birds chirping awakened her and she stretched. Lifting herself off the hardwood floor she again wondered why such beautiful days plagued her dark world.

*

Mrs. Adams talked about where all the siblings were going, different homes, different people. She gave Sarah all the addresses and how to contact them. She could remain in contact with them all as long as they lived in these homes, however, once adopted, Sarah would no longer be allowed contact.

“Be allowed to contact? These are my siblings, my family, how can you possibly dictate how much or little contact I can have with them?”

Sarah balked at Mrs. Adams' words.

“They are all that I have left, Mrs. Adams. What do you expect me to do?”

“This is all we can do Sarah, it's best for all concerned.”

Mrs. Adams had left Sarah in the garden at the hospital and only made it to the corner in the hallway before tears streaked her face.

“Abigail, are you all right?”

“Mabel, You can't imagine.” Abigail looked around the corner towards the garden, “this case is the worst I've seen.”

“Need a cup of coffee and some company?”

Mabel locked arms and suggested a break. Abigail nodded, allowing her to be dragged away.

They sat at the cafe across from the hospital and ordered coffee and a piece of coffee cake. While they sat waiting, Mabel allowed Abigail to think over what she wanted to say.

Abigail dropped her head into her hand.

“These five kids just lost both parents. And it is my job to split them all up. Forever. I can't even imagine what Sarah, that's the oldest, is going through. She found them, apparently heard the whole thing. The father shot the mother, then himself.”

“Wow, you’re right, Abigail, that is the worst. You just have to do your best. And it will never be enough. But it’s the best you can do for any of them.”

Mabel had been working with Abigail for the last two years, and had been a friend and confidant. They often met for coffee and to support each other in their job. Today Mabel was the strong one, helping her friend through this case.

Abigail nodded, “five of them, all 12 and under, parents both gone, no family in Chicago or even in the United States. And the oldest is not able to take care of them; she’s too young. I don’t know where I can place them, families want babies, not the older children.”

“And with them split up and adopted out their family will feel it for generations,” Mabel said, “but there are families out there. If you need help, I’m here.”

“I know. Who is that seamstress who was looking for an apprentice? You remember the one who you tried to place that girl with a few weeks ago?”

“Marilyn Lembeck. Do you think the oldest would work for her?”

“Her only option of not going to the orphanage with her siblings, is to find a place where she can work and become an apprentice.”

“Hopefully, they will not be stuck in that orphanage. Surely we’ll find placements for them. Until then?”

Abigail shrugged. “It was the only place they could be together. At least awhile longer.”

Chapter 8

1920

Sarah waited for Arthur to come home. Lately he'd been spending more time with guys from work than with her and she wondered what they were up to. Prohibition was in full swing, but he still came home stinking of alcohol. Arthur waived her off each time, telling her it was all the guys and he hadn't touched a drop of it.

She paced the floors, waiting. Worrying. Not wanting to hear from the police that he'd been arrested. Or worse. Her imagination started playing with her head and she imagined the worst. She knew what he'd say. *Just your pregnancy playing tricks on you. Like the last time.*

Caring for two small children and pregnant with a third did mess with her sleep she had to admit. But this was something deeper that she couldn't place. Something too familiar.

It was after midnight when Arthur tried to sneak in. Sarah immediately stirred on the couch and he knew it was no use. She knew.

"Where have you been? It's late."

Arthur thought for a moment.

"Sven and I got a drink after work."

"So I smell. You smell like beer and cigarettes."

And as she stepped closer the odor changed. She set her jaw and addressed the fragrance.

"And strong, cheap perfume."

Her eyes were leveled at him and judging his every move and twitch.

"What do you know about cheap perfume? And why do you care what I do? I work hard and bring home bacon. You take care of kids. What else is there?"

"Arthur, who is she?"

“She? She who?”

“The one you smell like?”

He shook her question off, not planning on answering.

“Just a dancer. No one special.”

He knew she wouldn’t quit.

“No one special? So you stay out half the night with no one special while I sit at home alone with the babies?”

The conversation was hurting his head. Paranoid wife meant that he’d be doing a lot of explaining and it would do no good. But sleep would help.

“Sarah, I need sleep. I will talk about this in the morning. Now come. Lets go to bed.”

“No, we need to talk about this. You keep leaving me.”

She was starting to tear up and get angry at the same time. She approached him and grabbed his arm as he was starting his way up the stairs.

His unsteady gait didn’t help as he drew his arm back from his wife. And he raised his hand to steady himself. She shrieked and immediately drew back from him in terror. It was as if she thought he would truly strike her. The thought didn’t cross his mind until she withdrew in fear. But she did leave him alone and stop talking. For once he understood why some men scare their wives. He was unsure if could truly hit her, but the temptation was now there.

Sarah was more careful for a while, but the drinking and the dancing girls kept on being Arthur’s focus. Until Ernst, Arthur’s foreman, came over for dinner, Sarah was sure that Arthur was lying.

“It is all in fun, Sarah. I’d tell him to bring you if you weren’t about ready to have another. We’d all dance the night away like we used to. Remember when you just arrived. Man oh man that was good times. Drinking and dancing, even legal-like.”

Sarah remembered. She now had to take in projects for work, mostly from Mrs. Lembeck. The tailor around the corner was also giving her some business. At least that helped to bring in some money, even if Arthur didn’t approve.

“We have a growing family, we need the money, Arthur,” She’d said.

He didn’t like it at all; didn’t want his wife working like some poor immigrant.

“But we are poor immigrants.”

“Our parents were poor immigrants, he countered. We are not and I don’t like it all.”

So Sarah quietly accepted jobs that he never saw, and hid the money. Her rainy day money.

*

The clock ticked off the hours worrying Sarah. She chewed her nails and paced, thinking of all the awful things that could have happened to Arthur. He didn’t call to tell her anything, so her imagination took over.

Call his boss, the voice in the back of her head said over and over, till she gave in.

“Hello Ernst?”

“Ja, who is this?”

“Sorry to call so late. This is Sarah. Arthur hasn’t come home yet and I wanted to know if you’d seen him.”

“Oh,” he seemed to come to his senses and sounded more awake, “ja, he was with me at the club. I am certain he is on his way home. Unless he fell asleep on my couch downstairs.”

Sarah wanted to know, but in the back of her head she already did. Having Ernst check only made it real.

“Do you want me to check, Sarah?”

“No, I’m sure you’re right. And if he is there, he is at least safe and that is all I wanted to know. The baby is making me worry something crazy at times.”

“It’ll be all right. He’ll be there soon.”

“Thank you.”

She wasn’t really relieved, but at least she had a start to what he’d been up to that night. Maybe it would be all right like he said. The pain of another woman, though, made her cry herself to sleep.

Sarah woke to the smell of bacon cooking and coffee brewing. Now she really wondered what was going on. Arthur rarely cooked. When he did it was usually some sort of apology and he didn’t know how to cook many things. Breakfast was his specialty.

“Arthur?”

He looked like he’d been up most of the night, but he smiled through it all.

“Where have you been? I was worried and I even called Ernst last night.”

“Oh honey, I was working a second job. I didn’t want to tell you. But it gives me some extra money for us.”

He came over to her and hugged her long and hard.

Sarah inhaled him and noticed the lack of perfume. Maybe he was telling the truth. She told herself she needed to stop second guessing everything. It was all in her head. For the first time in a couple of months, she felt their relationship was back where it needed to be.

1911

Sarah sat at the beat up Singer in a daze, again. Apprentice sounded so much more interesting than it was.

How did I get into this mess? Trying to shake off the feeling of dread, she attempted to thread the machine. It was a task. One she struggled to remember, the wound of rage still raw.

“Sarah...Sarah...” Mrs. Lembeck placed her hand on Sarah’s shoulder. Her new apprentice was often distant. The news of Sarah’s parents was still fresh in the local talk.

“Sarah?”

“Yes, ma’am. Sorry, I keep forgetting the procedure for this threading.”

“I will show you again. Perhaps, if I knew what was troubling you, I could help.” She was a kind lady, but Sarah was unsure. The burden was hers to bear. Her family’s actually.

There is no family. Tears welled up and hovered before trickling down her cheeks. The big blue Norwegian eyes of her mother, a gift of heredity. Unfortunately, not the only one.

“Ma’am. Thank you for taking me in, I...”

“You’ve thanked me already, dear. Mrs. Adams told me about your situation; think nothing of it.”

“I had never seen dead people before.”

Tears were flowing freely now.

“It will ease with time, deary, it will ease with time.”

Mrs. Lembeck held her, her own children had grown, married, and moved into other parts of Chicago.

“Perhaps you would like to go lie down for a spell.”

Sarah nodded, wiping the streaks from her face.

Napping felt good; her body relaxed. Sleep had eluded her much of this first week. Had she been able to sleep deeply, she might feel better. It washed over her, fitfully as before. And only for an hour or two at most.

Sarah returned to the Singer in the workroom. Quietly she began to sew. The simple sewing fell to her, the newest of Mrs. Lembeck's apprentices. There were two other girls learning the trade, as well, but she was the youngest.

"Dear, you look horrible, no luck napping?"

Sarah shook her head. Looking down at her work, she felt Mrs. Lembeck's hand under her chin. Her face was drawn up and close as Mrs. Lembeck inspected her.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk...these dark circles will not do. They will think I am torturing you. You must get some good rest. I'll not have Mrs. Adams telling tales about me."

"Yes, ma'am."

Sarah tried to smile, shaking the images out of her head, the red fabric she worked on invading her senses and interfering with her work, she stopped often. Why did it have to be red? Simple curtains, but red? Who could stand to look at the color everyday, hanging there, reminding?

*

Sarah went to see Arthur off at the train station, as had every woman in town. All the men in uniform were leaving today on the early train. Off to war.

War. Sarah may never see Arthur again and she cared for him dearly. Just before he boarded the train Sarah gave him a kiss he would no soon forget. In Arthur's mind this meant far more than Sarah could have ever imagined.

Sarah eased back into her daily routine. Working for Mrs. Lembeck was tedious work. This helped Sarah immensely, she had to focus hard on work which meant she could forget Arthur. He could not possibly survive this war, and he would not believe she lied about her age.

That, she thought, will be the end of this relationship. Sarah was prepared for this. She even had prepared what she would say...'I'm sorry, I just thought you looked so nice in your uniform'...'I'm sorry, my family just got split up and I needed someone to talk to.'

NEVER!

She could *never* tell her family's story, her shame would remain hers alone. She missed them so much. They had all been adopted and she no longer had any idea where they were, or had any contact with them. When she thought about them she simply threw herself into her work and the pain, fear and shame vanished. She found herself doing this often, she had no other outlets anymore.

The letters started flooding in from Arthur. Mrs. Lembeck brought another to her room.

"I have another letter for you."

"Another? He must be writing everyday."

Then Mrs. Lembeck asked the fateful question, "Does he know how old you are?"

Sarah lied, "Yes, and he doesn't care. He said he'd wait for me, until I was old enough to marry."

Chapter 9

1940

Helena set down her cup after emptying the contents. The coffee warmed her and had a comforting feel in the pit of her stomach. She took a deep breath after putting this off for so long, just enjoying the quiet of the house with Karl.

He nodded, “Are you ready?”

She steeled herself for the news she was about to drop. Still not one hundred percent sure about the abuse she’d dreamed. But the smell of Sonny’s breath and the pain that went along with the act told her there was more than just a dream to this all. Dreaming of her father as the madman was one thing, but also dreaming of Sonny in that role. She thought it would sound ludicrous.

“Well, I’m glad you married me first.”

She smiled and thought it was time to unload all this to him. Looking him square in the eye, she knew that he would be pissed off, but that it wouldn’t be at her. The look in his eyes was of genuine concern. He must be crazy. She knew that it would be ok, he would protect her and it would all be ok.

“Spill.”

He looked intent, patiently waiting.

Helena told him all of it. All the dirty little secrets she’d been keeping and what was going on in the family. Enough that he should have run away, but he just sat there listening, saying nothing until she was done.

“So?”

“Truthfully?”

She nodded timidly, “Yes, of course.”

“If...I...” he paused, took a deep breath, “ever see that bastard anywhere near our house, I’ll kill him myself.”

“Karl.”

“No, I’m serious. I will kill him. You might want to warn your family about this. I won’t warn him, I’ll shoot first and ask questions later.”

He set his jaw and clenched his teeth hoping that he wouldn’t have to follow through on this threat.

“I’m not even sure where he moved to. He was moving out at the same time as I was leaving the house. My sisters would know though. They keep track, and there is some doubt to the story, so they have not really chosen sides.”

“They’ll back you eventually. He’ll show his true colors and that’ll be all they need.”

Helena chuckled a bit, and smiled.

“I know. Maddie believes me, that’s all I need right now. Well, and you too. That will get me through for now.”

“And how about with the Army wives? You’ll be stuck with them while I’m gone, y’know? It’ll be awhile.”

“I know. We’ll see in the morning.”

“Keep your chin up, chuck. It’ll be ok.”

He held out his hand and motioned to the room, “A good night sleep might also help.”

While waiting for the wives, Helena penned a letter to Maddie. She was wanting to hear about how the moves were effecting the family. And to tell Maddie that all was well. Then she turned to write Lillian who would definitely like to hear about the spillage of news. She was the

one who told Helena that she should do it. And she knew that Karl would be receptive. Of course, she'd been right. Helena smiled thinking how ridiculous her fears had been. Then again, Karl seemed deadly serious about killing Sonny. They probably shouldn't see each other again, she thought.

*

Maddie's letter made Helena think. Yes, she needed to tell Karl and finally she had broken the news to him. Told him everything. But now that he knew, he wanted answers Helena didn't have. She knew the phone call could be expensive, but the faster she could settle his nerves, and her own, the better.

"Helena," Maddie answered, "good to hear from you."

"I told Karl, but I need to know about Sonny."

"I don't know what to tell you. Sonny isn't around and no one knows where he is. He hasn't contacted any of us. At least that's what they all say."

"I'd stay away from him if I were you."

"You're still convinced?"

"I don't know, Maddie, but his disappearing shortly after all of this doesn't bode well for his excuses. He surely would have something to say if there was anything he could possibly. You know how much he likes to argue. This time it seems like he has no response to it."

"Maybe. But with you gone and Sonny disappeared, mother slipped into one of her states. Been staring off into the distance, out the front window, for days. Not sure what will bring her out of it. Ethel is keeping her nursing skills honed for the task."

Helena laughed, "Yeah, I remember her taking care of us when we were sick and mother had to work. She's probably tired of it all."

“So how is Washington?”

“So much more lonely now that Karl has shipped out. But I feel safer than being there. Sonny could show up at any time, and then where would I be? Locking myself in our room again? No thank you.”

“Yeah, but we may need you.”

“If you can figure out where he is, maybe. But only until she snaps out of it. Or I can’t stand it any longer.”

“I’ll call when I have news.”

“Maddie, you can call even if you don’t have any news. It’s good to hear your voice. I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too.

※

Peg looked at the ladies, holding her unlit cigarette in between her lips. It jumped up and down as she talked, announcing their break from the dancing.

“Ok ladies, smoke ’em if you got ’em. And then back out on the dance floor. This is for charity.”

Peggy was in charge of all the fundraising and all the USO charity on the base. She had been a business major at Mount Holyoke before marrying Tim and seemed to take charge, just like the Sarge, she’d always say. Making my man proud.

Helena took one last drag on her cigarette and downed the liquor that she’d been served. It took the pain of dancing all night off her feet. And it made her head feel lighter, like when she and Lillian had gone to the club.

“You look like you’re feeling good, Helena.”

Helena moved her head from shoulder to shoulder testing her fuzziness and then smiled at Peggy.

“Feeling no pain, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Yeah, well, I have a new drink for you to try. It’ll blow your mind and it works fast.”

“Peggy, I couldn’t have one more tonight. I’m already fuzzy and the smoking seems to only increase the potency of what I am drinking.”

“You’re right about that one, Hel. But let me tell you, you gotta build up your tolerance. When the boys get back it’ll be one party after another. And they can seriously hold their liquor.”

“As long as you don’t make me drive as well. I can barely walk.”

Helena laughed at the unsteadiness of her gait. It seemed to throw the world off kilter.

“Hey girls, Helena’s three sheets to the wind,” Peggy said and pointed.

“Then she needs to come dance with the handsy guy from Tupelo. If he grabs my rear one more time, I’m going to slap him, Peg.”

“Molly, just pass him off. We all have had to deal with Lt. Grabby. He misses his girl. And he ships out in about a week again. So, it’s temporary.”

“I’ll buy you another drink, Hel, if you take a round with Grabby.”

Molly looked pleadingly at her and mouthed the *please*.

Helena rolled her eyes.

“By the time I’m done dancing with Grabby, I’ll probably need one. And it’s all for charity, right?” Helena said.

“That’s the way to think about it,” Peggy said.

She charged for entrance for everyone and the Army wives were expected to be there for soldiers to dance with to help alleviate homesickness and loneliness. But she also allowed townies into the dance. Knowing it was for charity, the townies also showed up.

“My business degree in action,” Peggy said.

Helena danced until they shut down the dance and was there with the Army wives from her block: Peggy, Molly, as well as, Sarah, Rebecca and Amanda. They took her in and helped her get settled. Their friendship was important to Helena as she knew no one in Washington. But she struggled to keep up with the smoking and the drinking, at first anyway.

They danced and played Bridge and cooked dinners together. It was like having another family and Helena loved it even with the drama it sometimes entailed. It reminded her of time with her sisters.

Tonight they drove home together from the dance. The place would be cleaned up by the volunteers who said they’d handle that part. Peggy had jobs for all of them and had it all organized.

Molly dropped Helena off at her house before pulling into her drive two houses down.

“Thanks for driving Molly. And I don’t know if I like that drink.”

“The martini? You’ll get used to it. It’s a bit strange at first. But you’re driving next time.”

“You’re on.”

1897

Anna and Gunther fell into the pattern Heinrich and Angela lived by. Because Gunther was now married, he and Heinrich stayed in the back of the house in manly pursuits away from

women. And, of course, drinking beer. Angela knew enough to stay away. But Anna didn't understand, not at first.

It seemed like a situation of divide and conquer: the men do the work at the house that they knew how to do, and were always fixing and updating the old farmhouse. That left the women to do what Anna had been taught: needlework and sewing, cooking, cleaning and looking after the children. Though Jakob and Georg were almost men, Angela still watched over them. Heinrich was teaching them how to care for the place, but they still deferred to the mother.

Anna drifted into the back of the house where Gunther and Heinrich were talking and working.

“What are you working on, Heinrich?”

She was eyeing the piece of woodwork that he's been carving.

“That is beautiful, it would be a nice addition in the dining area.”

Heinrich just looked up at her for a moment. Then came around his workbench.

“Anna, I know you don't know the rules around here. But when the men are in the work room, the women stay in the kitchen or front of the house.”

“Oh, I didn't know.”

He looked at Gunther, “Teach her, Gunther. Teach her well.”

Gunther just nodded, not realizing what was being asked of him. He escorted his wife out of the room and talked with her about honoring Heinrich's rules in his house. Anna didn't quite understand, but nodded and left.

“Gunther, women are our responsibility.”

Heinrich wanted his nephew to understand his role as a married man. “You must set the rules of your house and make sure she follows them.”

“I’m not sure I understand, uncle.”

“Here, let me help you.”

He stuck his head out of the doorway and hollered, “Georg, Jakob.”

Soon his youngest showed his face, “Yes, papa.”

Heinrich put his hand on Georg’s shoulder and looked into his eyes. “I need you to go get your mother.”

“Yes, papa.”

“Watch and learn, Gunther.”

“Yes, Heinrich.”

Angela stood in the doorway looking at her husband expectantly.

“What have I said about coming in here when I am working?”

“Ich...” she looked at Gunther and knew something was wrong, “es ist verboten. Forbidden.”

Heinrich’s back was turned, but she could hear him clearly.

“Ja. It is forbidden.”

And then he turned and landed a backhanded slap hard across her face using the twisting motion of his body to land the blow hard against her cheek.

Angela just stood cringing, waiting for another blow while Heinrich gathered himself and stood tall in front of her. “Und?”

“I am sorry, I didn’t know she came in here. It won’t happen again.”

Angela’s head was down and she didn’t make any eye contact as she said the words that appeased her husband.

Gunther may not have understood the German, but he knew what was being said. Angela then nodded at both of them and turned to leave.

“And bring us a snack, too. We men are working up an appetite in here.”

“Ja,” said Angela.

When she was gone, Heinrich turned to Gunther. “And that is how it is done. You are the man of your house. Act like it.”

It was an imperative to follow and advice that he demanded of Gunther while under his roof. Gunther only nodded. His father had never hit his mother, but Heinrich was his mother’s brother and his mother had always cowered in the presence of his uncle.

Anna didn’t understand the reason Angela returned to the kitchen in silent tears. It seemed like there was a problem with family and Anna didn’t want to interfere.

Angela took a piece of ice out of the icebox and wrapped it in a cloth. When she turned to Anna the welt and bruise were beginning but the fresh redness was still there.

“This is what you get when you do not obey. Do you understand?”

Anna looked perplexed and shook her head.

“No, I’m afraid I don’t,” said Anna.

“Anna, husbands have rules and you must follow. My husband’s rules are simple. Leave men’s work and the workshop to the men. Do not go there uninvited. *Ever*.”

“Or he’ll hit you?”

“And he is training Gunther to do the same.”

“What do you mean training Gunther? He’s training him to hit *me*?”

“Ja. So you need to learn his rules and Heinrich’s too if you plan to stay here long.”

“I thought our ship sailed next week.”

“Gunther told Heinrich it was two weeks. And that is two weeks to learn the hard way if you choose.”

“So what do I do?”

Angela placed the ice on her red cheek, “Obey.”

*

Heinrich leaned over Anna, impressed with his nephews first hit. That’s how to handle a woman, he learned fast. He smiled at the raised mark.

“Gunther, how hard did you hit her?” asked Heinrich.

“I don’t know. I’ve never done it before. I took your stance and did it just like you showed me. Aunt Angela didn’t pass out. What do I do?”

“You need to take her to the hospital,” Angela said under her breath.

She whispered so that only Gunther could hear. She didn’t want this woman to bring her any more beatings. Once was more than enough. Though she knew that if Anna got a beating, she was sure to get one too, for not controlling her.

“Uncle Heinrich.”

His uncle rounded the corner and looked suspiciously at the passed out girl on his floor.

“What is it Gunther?”

“I need to take her to the hospital.”

“Hospital? What for? They’ll just wait till she wakes. Same as us.”

“But they’re doctors.”

Heinrich rolled his eyes.

“The weaker sex. Take her then. Take her.”

Gunther carried Anna to the wagon, still worried he'd done some permanent damage. Well, they'd see. He'd sworn he'd perfected his uncle's technique. Then why was Anna out cold and his aunt perfectly fine?

Half way to the hospital Anna woke. The sensation of the chilly breeze and the rocking of the wagon was what she awoke to.

"Where are we?"

"Anna. Oh my, you took a grand spill."

Gunther thought the lie may be easier to accept than the truth at this point. He didn't want to upset her any more than she would be already.

Anna wasn't mistaking his story for what she knew. She could still feel his hand stinging her cheek. There was no way that this was what he claimed was a spill. And she tried to muffle her tears like Angela had, knowing that this would now be a reality. How had this happened?

*

As they returned, Heinrich stood on the front porch and smiled again at the situation. The stupidity of it all amused him. These women, taking up for each other. He shook his head at them as they started to get out of the wagon.

"Wasted trip, I told not to take her," said Heinrich.

He gave Gunther a smug look of satisfaction.

"I said she'd be all right and look, she's all right."

Gunther looked at Anna and was unsure if she was really all right as his uncle suggested, but he really didn't know if he wanted Anna to hear this conversation. She would probably not take it well judging by his aunt's expression alone.

Anna allowed Angela to direct her back to her bedroom to lie down. She then went to get the ice she usually had on reserve for such occasions. A good heart to heart about how to avoid these hits seemed to now be in order for Anna, but as soon as she closed the bedroom door the tears welled up in Anna's eyes. Surely Gunther couldn't be like his uncle?

Anna allowed Angela to come in with the ice as her back was turned towards the door, though Angela knew. Angela remembered the first hit. She, too, had cried the first time Heinrich had done this.

Angela pulled a chair up to Anna's side of the bed and applied the ice in a towel to her cheek. She whispered words to comfort her, hoping that this would be the last, knowing it probably wasn't.

"Anna, it'll be all right. Gunther is a good man. He isn't like his uncle. He was a good, gentle boy and will be a gentle husband. But you need to get him away from here."

Anna said nothing and looked incredulously at Angela. Not believing, she just closed her eyes and let the tears fall.

"Seriously Anna, find a way to urge Gunther to take you to America. The more comfortable he gets here, the more he forgets he wanted to go. You are his wife and you can influence him."

"How can I influence a man who hits me?"

Angela smiled, "I'll show you. It will help you talk to him on bad days."

"Like today."

"Especially like today."

*

Angela had walked her through it. Talking through what Anna should say to manipulate Gunther. Angela was practiced at this and she wanted Anna to have the same success. They sat in the kitchen talking softly and practicing until Anna was ready.

“Gunther, are we not going to America?” asked Anna remembering Angela’s suggestions.

Anna looked expectantly and patiently waited for the answer.

He turned and looked her in the eye and she knew that he’d been out drinking with his uncle. His eyes were bloodshot and his breath stank. Just enough for her to question her timing. But Angela told her how to approach the men in her life and Anna wanted to try it. At least to try it before the long trip to America with no support at all.

“Gunther, do you love me?”

“That’s a stupid question. Why would you ask me such a thing? I married you didn’t I?”

“That is not what I asked. I want to know if you still love me.”

“Still?”

“Yes, still.”

“Why do you think I don’t?”

He sat down and looked at her and tried to breathe deeply to address whatever insecurity she was getting at.

“Because you haven’t taken me to America. You promised. I married you expecting this and you haven’t done it. What are we waiting for? And why?”

She realized too late that she started raising her voice. That made her cries loud enough to be heard outside their room. She could hear her pulse racing as the fear peaked and she waited for his response.

Gunther took a deep breath and stood up.

“What have I told you about raising your voice to me? And in *this* house? The rules aren’t even mine.”

That made her shudder. She knew Heinrich’s rules and they were for all and braced herself, knowing that there would be a slap at least. What she didn’t expect was the anger that came out of him. He didn’t slap her as she expected, she felt the blows of his anger hit against her stomach, her ribs, and felt the air being forced from her body each time. Over and over she turned and curled into a ball on the bed hoping to stop the blows but they kept coming until Angela yelled at Heinrich to pull him off of her.

“Stop him! He will kill her!”

He intervened, but her infraction did not go unanswered. Her bruise on her face glowed as she tried to take care of Anna. And Anna didn’t look well at all. Angela waited until the men went out to work in the fields.

“Georg, get the carriage. And tell no one.”

Angela prepared Anna for the trip. It must be done, she said. It must be done. She had Georg help her get Anna to the carriage.

“You sit up front Georg. You drive like we showed you. I’ll sit back here with Anna.”

“Where to mama?”

“I’ll tell you how to get there, baby. Just follow my directions.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Now, lets go.”

She knew the way. She had been way to many times. This time though she was scared. Heinrich had never hurt her like this and she was afraid for Anna.

The carriage pulled up to the hospital and Angela walked in to get some help carrying Anna. Her grim face told them all they needed to know.

“Mrs. Bauer, you look well, and yet you are here.”

“It is not me, my nephew’s wife.”

The doctor looked at her sternly, “Your husband teaching him a few of his tricks is he?”

Angela nodded, “Ja, unfortunately.”

He pursed his lips, “That is unfortunate. Your nephew? Is he staying long?”

The doctor walked with her to the carriage, not knowing what to expect.

She shook her head, “He was supposed to leave weeks ago for America.”

“Why hasn’t he?”

“My husband keeps working him around the farm. Asking for his help and making seem like we cannot do, like before.”

The doctor took one look at Anna and directed the orderlies to take her into their critical care unit and he would be there shortly.

“How did this happen?”

“She was trying to convince her husband that it was time to leave as he had promised. He had been drinking with his uncle and he...”

“Beat the hell out of her.”

The doctor’s agitation was apparent as he looked away from Angela and her Georg.

“I will need to speak to her husband. Tomorrow. Understand.”

“Yes Dr. Schneider. I’ll tell him that you expect him.”

“And your husband, too.”

He turned his back and went into the hospital, leaving them in the cold evening. Angela knew what he could say to Heinrich after all these years, but would he?

“Mama, what will he say?”

“Who, Georg?”

“Papa? Gunther? What will they say?”

“It was your papa that had to pull Gunther off of her. He hurt her badly this time. I hope it frightened him. They both get so mad sometimes. But he could have killed her if he kept on.”

“Why do they hit if it causes such pain?”

Angela wrapped her arms around him and kissed the top of his head.

“I don’t know, liebchen. I don’t know, I only hope that you and my other sweet boy will not do the same.”

The carriage ride home was somber, though Angela was trying to size up the situation at the house. And how to handle the men in question. One, hopefully, was still too drunk to be dealt with at all. And Heinrich? But this could not go on without someone ending up hospitalized or dead. She had a feeling what the doctor would say would have an impact, at least on Gunther.

Angela knew Dr. Schneider and he knew her. But he had kept it quiet. The family needed not to gain a reputation for violence. Each time, he warned her that it would get worse. And now she thought his prediction had come true. Even if she wasn’t the one on the receiving end.

*

Angela looked into the workroom watching Heinrich. She knew he wasn’t going to believe this, but she couldn’t let him slip out of it. The consequences for them could impact them all.

“What do you mean the doctor is expecting him?” asked Heinrich barely looking up.

Angela had said, turned and entered the kitchen. He followed her and sat down heavily at the table.

“Where is Anna? Didn’t you leave with her?”

“Dr. Schneider kept her in the hospital. He wants to talk to Gunther about her injuries.”

“What...did...you...tell...him?”

The color rose in his face as he contemplated her response.

“What could I say? I think her bruises speak for themselves.”

Angela faced him straight on and looked him in the eye.

“Well, don’t you think so?”

She gave him a stern glare, daring him to do his worst. Dr. Schneider would be able to vouch for her having no ailments or bruises and then having them if she should show up tomorrow implicating the additional abuse she suffered if he lifted his hand. This gave her an edge Heinrich had never seen.

I am warning you, Mrs. Bauer, if I can prove he is behind all your ailments, I will file a complaint.

Doctor Schneider’s words echoed in Angela’s ears. He had said it almost every time she came in now. Once he discovered who was at fault, he asked each time. Never did Angela say this, but the look in her eye confirmed all the doctor suspected. Thinking of tomorrow, Angela feel vindicated in her defiance of Heinrich.

“Georg?”

“Yes, Papa.”

Heinrich looked over Angela's shoulder to his son, "Did you hear what the doctor said, son?"

Georg nodded, "Yes, Papa, he said he was expecting Gunther tomorrow. And to tell him that. Just like Mama said."

He remembered his mother's hope and wanted to be that man she'd wished for. Now, he watched his father and his movements, wondering what he'd do now that he'd backed up his mother's statements.

"Fine, make sure you go tell Gunther. He may be up again. If not, I'll tell him in the morning."

Georg looked to his mother who nodded softly and slowly so that papa hadn't seen, then went to tell Gunther.

Heinrich watched his son go and turned on Angela, dropping his voice to just audible.

"Don't you dare try to turn my son against me."

Angela stood up tall and responded in kind, "That one already know you and what you do and what you're capable of, I had nothing to do with that. But the doctor, I'm sure, would like a word with you, as well."

The fire rose in Heinrich's face and he began to raise his hand. Angela stood her ground and continued to look him in the eye. She set her jaw and glared at him.

"The doctor saw me today too. He'll know what you did when he sees me tomorrow."

She took a step closer to him, and lowered her voice, daring him to do it.

"Now, what do you think he'll do when he sees that both Anna and I are black and blue? And who do you think he'll blame? He's been ministering to my wounds and bruises for over a year now. He knows."

A look of recognition flashed in Heinrich's eyes as he gritted his teeth, almost hissing at her.

"What did you say to him?"

Angela stepped closer, "I didn't have to say a thing."

Her voice was so quiet that Georg could no longer hear, but he could see the change come over his father's face. Something he had never seen before.

Fear.

Calmly, Angela continued, "You are both wanted at the hospital at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning. The doctor will discuss Anna's condition and what we will need to do for her. Understand?"

Angela walked away while Heinrich was still stunned. He still had his hand in the air and it was looking for a place to land. It never was just left hanging. Georg turned to leave too. No one left. Seemed the usual strategy had backfired on him. He was struggling to find a way to regain the upper hand with them, but he was at a loss. Soon he'd figure it out, and he went out to the shed to work on whatever project was there.

*

Heinrich and Gunther sat waiting for the doctor. He had wanted to talk to them alone in his office. Angela sat outside, waiting to see what happened. She knew that the doctor had some hard customers to deal with, knowing what he was about to discuss. Georg had come with her and sat fidgeting and asking questions that went unanswered, but he kept trying. He watched Angela closely checking her emotions as he waited anxiously to see his father's.

"Mama, it'll be all right. He will listen to the doctor."

Angela knew he was wrong but lied, "Of course he will."

She thought he meant Heinrich. But may be Gunther? He was still young enough to worry about threats from men he felt had authority. Heinrich held that sort of sway for him. The doctor probably would too. She waited, praying silently.

The raised voices could be heard in the hallway. What was said was garbled. She knew that that was how Heinrich would take their talk. Trying to decipher Gunther's voice was harder. He was always more soft spoken, and rarely yelled like Heinrich was known to. She didn't think that Gunther was in the argument. Again, she prayed.

She was unsure when she allowed her eyes to close, but was jolted awake by Georg.

"Mama, the yelling stopped."

Angela straightened up and listened for them to come out of the office. It had been almost an hour since they went in there and she was certain that was going to provoke a response. Though just what was yet to be seen.

The minute the door opened, she had her answer. Georg grabbed her hand. He'd never seen his father's face so purple before. And the bulging vein in his forehead was clearly visible. Angela patted his hand.

"Georg, go get the carriage. Quickly now."

When he turned the corner Heinrich raised his eyes to his wife. The steam coming out of his ears was practically visible. Angela stood tall where she was and waited for him to respond.

Heinrich took two steps to Angela. That was all he needed.

He muttered under his breath, "I'll deal with you when we get home."

"Why wait?" she responded.

His eyes held hers for what seemed like forever. Then he turned and walked out of the hospital to the carriage waiting for him. He took off in it before either Gunther or Angela had the time to reach the front doors. They stood facing each other in the hall as Heinrich raced away.

“Angela, I’m sorry for the inconvenience. The doctor is going to release Anna tomorrow. And we’ll be leaving that evening for America, as promised.”

“I hope you can also refrain from hurting her. There is no need for that; she is a good girl. And you have a chance to be happy. Be good to her.”

Gunther lowered his head, “Yes, ma’am.”

“Now go make your apologies and talk to your wife. Listen to what the doctor told you.”

Gunther nodded and made his way down the hall to Anna’s room. He told her of the plans to leave and apologized as directed. Anna cheered up and hoped that this was going to be the end of this phase he was going through.

Angela knew that by now Heinrich would have been gone, if not before. So she knocked on the doctor’s office door.

“Come in.”

“Dr. Schneider, could I bother you for the use of your phone? My husband has gone, and I need Georg to come fetch me.”

“I’m on my way home myself, Mrs. Bauer. I’d be glad to drop you by the house. There is no need to have Georg make another trip.”

She smile slightly and nodded, “That would be very kind of you. I would appreciate it greatly.”

This would also allow her to listen to anything he had to say about what had happened with her husband. And she waited for him to broach the subject.

“I think they took it well.”

“Took it well?”

“My threats? You know to report him to the police. To force Gunther’s hand in moving.”

“I hope you’re correct, doctor.”

She knew that that would not be the case, at least as far as Heinrich was concerned. His face told his intention.

The house was lit up like Christmas when Angela got home. It was eerie looking, but she knew if she didn’t go in to face him, he’d eventually come looking for her.

“Thank you, doctor.”

“Good luck.”

He said it and started off, watching her briefly.

“May fortune smile on us all,” he said softly.

Angela walked slowly to the front door. She wanted one more peaceful breath. Once she arrived, she knew that it would all be out of her hands and Heinrich would be in control. She stopped at the door and took a deep breath.

“Here goes nothing.”

The noise from the house could be heard from outside, but once the door opened, it became clear that there was some altercation that was happening. And it seemed to be all around, not just isolated to one room.

“What in the world?”

Angela looked at the state of her house that she always kept neat and tidy. It was in such disarray that she knew it would take weeks to put back together. She couldn’t believe her eyes.

“Mama, what took you so long?”

Georg looked at her bewildered by her absence and what was going on around him.

“I don’t know what is so bad that he had to break everything. Come, look at the kitchen.”

Of course, it had to be the kitchen. Her realm. The one she would have to clean first in order to feed the family. She sucked in her lips, trying not to say a word. Georg didn’t need to get his head filled with any more of this. He’d already seen enough, she thought.

“Where is he now, Georg?”

“In the shop with Jakob.”

“Did Jakob do this with him or was it just your father?”

She looked him in the eyes, hands on his shoulders.

“I need to know what I’m walking into, liebchen.”

“It was just father. Jakob stayed with me, but he is in their now.”

Angela nodded. She turned to face what was coming.

Heinrich was in the workshop relaxing.

“You see son, teaching a woman a lesson is a process. And at times it means you must destroy in order to build.”

He knew his wife was listening as the creaking floorboards had announced her presence.

“Jakob, please go to your room,” Angela said.

“No, Jakob needs to learn. And you need to let him see this too. He will be a man soon and need to know this.”

His fear of his father kept Jakob in his place. Angela could see the regret in his face. She hoped that he was not taking anything his father said to heart. He did have more time with his father than Georg, and she feared that that influence would come back to haunt them all.

“You do this to punish me? Tear up my hard work in this house? Why?”

“What did you tell Herr Doctor?”

He sneered, narrowing his eyes, expecting her to accept his destruction a just punishment.

“I told him nothing. I didn’t need to tell him anything. He made his own judgement of where my injuries came from each time. Over and over he asked me. And over and over I avoided his question. For the last ten years, he has treated me and asked the question. When you goaded Gunther into beating Anna, and then I showed up with matching bruises a day later, he needed no further questions. You are going to be watched.”

The audacity of her to question him. He was incensed about her questioning him about matters of the house. How dare she? He had taught her over the years and here she was no longer following his lessons. This could not stand.

“What have I told you about questioning me? What have you not learned? I will not have you question me.”

The more he talked, the more agitated he became and he walked closer to her with each sentence. She knew it was coming. He hated her challenging him and wouldn’t stand for it.

The blood rushed to his face as it did when he became enraged. This was what she wanted. She felt it was time that both of the boys knew and saw what their father had become. It was now with the doctor’s support that she thought she’d stand her ground.

Angela stood tall and waited for it. Heinrich didn’t just use his usual backhand, but gave her a full punch in the face and then to her torso and started to growl as an animal would. Angela fell to the ground and tried to protect herself from the blows.

The *thwack* was a surprise and the clang as it hit the spot rang out in the enclosed space. Afterwards the thud of his collapsing body shook the floor she lay on. She didn’t open her eyes immediately just inhaled deep breaths, hoping, but not sure for what.

Certainly it was Georg who had come to her rescue. They had been talking about how all of his papa's behaviors were hurting her. But when Angela opened her eyes, it was Jakob standing over his father with the cast iron skillet in his hand.

"Jakob?"

"Mama, he was going to hurt you."

"He did hurt me."

Jakob shook his head, "No, mama, there was more he wanted to do. He said this time it would be so bad you'd never disobey again."

"Oh, liebchen, I am so sorry you had to hear that. It must have been awful listening to it and not being able to say anything to him."

She held her hand out to them to help her sit up.

"Now you must listen to me. We must never speak of this again. You must give me the frying pan and you both need to go to Herr Rhinehart's. You remember the way, Jakob?"

"Yes, mama. But why?"

"Trust me you need to not be here now. Georg, help with the carriage and do as your brother says."

"Yes, mama."

When they had left, she rose above her husband and used her remaining strength to land the frying pan until she was sure. He needed to never wake up or her son would pay the price. Angela wanted to make certain that that never happened. She felt his neck for a pulse like Dr. Schneider had shown her. Heinrich gurgled and twitched a bit.

Angela back away from the body and backed up to the work bench. She felt the tools behind her until she found what she needed. The hatchet was the one that would seal the deal.

Heinrich hadn't moved since, but was still breathing and twitching. She drew closer wondering if she could do it. *It's either him or me, Jakob had said as much.*

The fear pulsed through her veins as she took one step, then another. Watching him lying there was almost enough for her to feel sorry for him.

Sorry for all the lost time, sorry they couldn't have had something different. The broken promises, the lies, the beatings all had replaced a peaceful marriage. She had loved him once, and she thought he had too. At least that is what he said. Now she had to remember the bad clearly to keep on.

Part III

Chapter 10

2018

The retirement village was close to her parent's house. They had all wanted the aunts to be within reach should the inevitable finally occur. Aunt Bridget always talked like it would happen any minute, but Aunt Maddie just rolled her eyes every time she did and smile and shrug.

"We've made it this long, Bridget, I'm trying for 100, or more," Maddie always shot back at her sister.

"No way you'll last that long."

They lived together and shared expenses, but had to move from the outer cottages to the interior apartments after an episode involving a stolen golf cart and a race around the property. Bridget had crashed adding fuel to the argument that the state had every right to take away her license.

"That's all bullshit, I drive just fine. Now your father is another thing, Dani. James is the worst. Did he tell you how many cars he totaled before graduating college? I should own stock in Ford, as many as he's walked away from," Aunt Bridget argued.

Dani walked the interior hallway of the complex, which was extra wide. The community had build in porches and grassy pathways from front door to front door. Hoping that the colorful decor and personal patios kept those homey attributes, as well as help the tenants find their door, even if they forget the number. It had happened too many times to count.

"Dani, honey," Aunt Bridget answered the door arms wide, "come give your crazy aunt some sugar."

Walking into their apartment was like walking in to her grandmother's house. Same pictures, same furniture style, same tastes it seemed. Dani had to drag herself into this world after all the animosity she and her grandmother shared.

"Maddie made some sun tea."

"Where is she?"

"Out on the back patio, where we get some real sun, not this fake 'I don't remember where I live' crap."

"I like the hall, Aunt Bridget. What's wrong with it? Better than stark boring white."

"Yes, well, I like ours, but I'd prefer an open air walkway. And no one really sits out there much, so why all the chairs? Ours is just all that fake greenery like my ficus trees. Cute, but no need to water, maybe dust once in a while."

Bridget locked elbows with Dani as she always did and directed her to the patio.

"Maddie, we've got company. Pour some more of that tea."

"Oh, Dani, love. What are you doing out this way?" said Maddie leaning in for a kiss.

"I wanted to talk to you actually. Dad doesn't think you remember your German, but I wanted to run this by you."

"Ah, you want me to sprechen sie? I do remember some. What do you want me to say?"

"To read actually."

"No promises."

The document in question again. Aunt Maddie looked it over, and read in German to them.

"This wasn't in the box we brought over was it?"

"No Aunt Maddie, it was actually in grandma's box."

“Hmm, Bridget, look at this.”

Aunt Maddie had a look in her eye that Dani understood.

“You recognize this?”

“No, but she recognizes the names. That is our grandmother Anna. But I don’t remember her ever being in Berlin. What does it say Maddie?”

“I can only make out part of it. She was injured and needed hospitalization. Something about bruises. But you know who might help? The young man at the German center. It’s been a number of years, but I’ve been back for their charity fundraisers from time to time. I’m sure he’d be more help. Want me to give him a call?”

“Please, I’d like to know more.”

Aunt Maddie got up to make the call.

“You know, Dani, if you’re looking into our grandparents, it’s not going to be pretty. Maddie doesn’t remember, and I don’t much either, but our grandfather was a violent drunk, much like our father.”

This wasn’t a shock to Dani, families had patterns, but this was one she was determined to break once and for all.

*

Dani walked into the German Cultural Center and looked around at the artifacts. The lost look on her face, as she looked at the things hanging on the wall drew the attention of one of the docents.

“Guten tag, Fräulein. Kann ich Ihnen helfen.”

She understood the greeting, but had to piece together the helfen with help. “I’m sorry, I don’t speak the language. Did you just ask how you could help me?”

“Ja, I did.” The accent remained heavy, but at least the English was understandable.

“I was going through my grandmother’s papers and letters and such. And I came upon a piece that I assume is German. Can you verify and translate for me?”

The docent smiled, “Mein Englisch ist nicht gut. Ja.”

Dani understood that and heard the docent calling on her phone to someone as she motioned to her one minute.

“My Aunt Maddie, uh Madeleine Winters, said a Mr. Schneider would be able to help me on this.”

“May I help you?”

An older gentleman approached Dani, “I am Friedrich Schneider. I am the curator of our small museum. Nadia tells me you need some translation? And something about an aunt?”

Nodding, Dani gestured her thanks to Nadia, “Danke.”

It was about the only thing she knew in German...except those words that are too obvious. Then she followed Herr Schneider into a side room where they could sit.

“Please, have a seat, Miss?”

“Danielle Smith. Dani. My Aunt Maddie took some lessons here a while back.”

“She comes by from time to time,” Herr Schneider smiled, nodding, “Ms. Smith, what can I do for you?”

“Mrs. actually.” She produced the two pages that were in question and he glanced over them.

“They are definitely in German. Are they yours?”

“My grandmother’s. They were in her effects after she died. No one in the family speaks the language anymore. And Aunt Maddie could only make out pieces.”

Herr Schneider looked over the top of his reading glasses, “We do offer classes, if anyone in your family is interesting in reestablishing that connection.”

“Thank you, I’ll think about it.”

“I had to try. Languages are a lost piece of heritage these days. So many want to teach their kids only the one and don’t see the value of both.”

He smiled and turned his attention to the hospital file.

“This one has vital signs and date and time. But also symptoms?”

“So it is a hospital document? It looked like it, but what hospital writes up their notes in German?”

“This is actually a hospital in Germany. Near Berlin. Closed down before WWII. Apparently your grandmother traveled there at one point?”

“I think that was her mother’s. The patient name wasn’t on the page I was looking at, but my grandmother didn’t speak German either.”

“The name is Anna Hanson.” He showed her the paper where it was written.

“That doesn’t make any sense. She was Norwegian. What was she doing in a Berlin hospital?”

He just shrugged and raised his eyebrows at this.

“What does it say besides the basic information?”

Herr Schneider read the notes that were on the page and it was a description of the assault and battery of Anna Hanson and her subsequent need for hospitalization. She had broken ribs and many bruises on her body. But nothing on her face because those wouldn’t be able to be hidden, according to the report.

“I says here that she was tearful, which makes sense, but primarily because this was her honeymoon.”

“That would make that before she came to America. Hmmm.” Dani thought for a moment, “And the other?”

Herr Schneider read it.

“That sounds like a journal entry. She recounts the whole story of what happened. From start to finish. It was her husband? Her brand new husband?”

“It says Gunther Hanson was the culprit.”

“Wow, her husband beat the hell out of her? On her honeymoon?” Dani shook her head, “And she still came to America with him.”

“In that day, she probably didn’t have much choice. Once they were married, she became his property. And unless her father was violent and went after him, it was most likely ignored.”

“Does it say anything about the doctor?”

At this he looked up from the document, “I wonder...”

Herr Schneider got up and took key from his pocket and opened a cabinet. The book he returned with was a thick leather bound book, like an old picture album.

“This is my family tree with all the pictures and such I have been able to find. This Doctor Schneider was in Berlin when my ancestor was. Both were doctors. The name on the paperwork is an Edvard M., and my ancestor was Edvard Michael.”

He talked as he turned the pages, looking back into his history.

“Ah, ja. Here he is. Edvard.”

He showed her the picture and Dani asked to take a picture with her phone, thinking that maybe there would be a picture in the boxes that may identify this as the same doctor.

“Sounds like my ancestor helped yours. You’ll have to tell me how it all ends.”

Dani sighed, “The more I know about my family heritage, the more I wish I didn’t. My Aunt Bridget said it didn’t end well at all for them. I hope there is more to tell at the end of this quest.”

“Then again Mrs. Smith, you can always think about how far your family has come since those awful times. And the new friends you meet along the way.”

“Unfortunately, I don’t think that we’ve come all that far some days. But you’re right. Thank you for your assistance, I’ll keep in touch.”

Herr Schneider pulled out a business card and handed it to her.

“For anything else you need, German classes, more translations, I’d be glad to be of service.”

They shook hands and Dani folded the papers and put them back in their envelope. She wondered how much of this heritage had been passed down to the rest of her mother’s lineage. It always seemed they were messed up and now it was hard to argue with. One thing was pretty clear, her mother would probably not want to know. An ignorance is bliss sort of thing.

*

Slipping into the booth at the Mexican restaurant, Dani sighed and looked at the set up already waiting, “Oh, Marina, I so needed a night out.”

“Well, all work and no play...” she shrugged but didn’t have to finish the sentence and instead handed Dani a shot of tequila.

“Shots. That is what is called for.”

“Mmmm. That is good. “

“Cuervo 1800 will smooth out the edges,” Marina raised her glass, “cheers.”

“Cheers.”

Slowly Dani licked the salt, spinning the shot for effect and downed it. Then popped the lime in her mouth.

“I’ve missed girls night out.”

“Well, all that therapy. Bound to put the kibosh on a few things.”

Dani laughed, “Yeah, like my own life. Fun, drinking, anything not exhausting or depressing. Or nightmares.”

“That’s rough.”

Marina placed another round in front of Dani and motioned to drink up.

“It’s exhausting. I keep looking for my grandfather’s eyes in the crowd. I keep reading the dysfunctional journals and now letters my aunts dropped off. I keep making Kevin crazy in the process.”

“So?”

“So my grandmother had not only her journals in her possession, but all these letters to her mother and her grandmother even. I have been pulling mom into all of this and having her translate...and this guy at the German Cultural Center in town for all the letters to Germany. Plus a second box of letters from my mom’s grandmother. It’s a mess.”

“Wait, I didn’t think your family was German.”

“They aren’t. Well, my grandfather was, and grandma’s grandfather had family that were German, it’s confusing. And apparently they kept in touch. At least Anna, Helena’s grandmother, kept in touch with her husband’s aunt? It’s all so messy and I’m not sure why that was who she wrote too. It’s not making much sense right now.”

“Stop trying to figure it all out. It’ll clear up. Just keep reading. Sometimes just backing away from a problem an answer pops into my head.”

“I don’t think the tequila is helping.”

Marina started to laugh, “makes me feel smart. Like I had this great epiphany or something.”

It felt good to laugh, something normal for a change.

*

Laura had asked for this check in. Dani had been dreading it in some ways. She really didn’t know if she wanted to talk about all the messiness in her family in therapy, yet. It would be necessary, she knew, but really just wanted to go home and pull the covers over her head.

“The letters are brutal,” said Dani.

“How are you handling reading them all?”

“Laura, I tell you, if I had this family, I think I’d drink too. I don’t know.”

“You do have this family, Dani.”

Dani tried to shake it off like it wasn’t her family but someone else’s.

“I didn’t know all of this so it is sort of a shock, but my grandmother apparently had read them all and knew the family history. Hell, I don’t even know if my mom knows all of this crap.”

“Did you tell her?”

“She knew that there was horrible times in there, but doesn’t want to know anything further. She thinks it’ll just keep her insanity going strong. Can’t say as I blame her. My dad said the same thing and asked me not to tell her.”

“So do you want to continue with it?”

“For me, it is now sort of a mystery unveiling itself. I’m not sure where it is heading and I think I understand Helena more. Even if I still don’t like her. My other grandmother was a mess too, but at least she liked being a grandmother.”

“You seem more at peace with this than before. Feeling better?”

“Meaning no more therapy better? Or just ready to tackle something else?”

Laura shrugged, “Whichever.”

“I think I’m more at peace in some ways, but I’m still having the dreams and not sure why. And I could have sworn I saw that man again. Not a hallucination like we figured, but a real man with those green creepy eyes.”

Dani thought about that day on the train. She wanted to avoid the parking lot a bit and walked with friends to the L.

“I don’t know if I’m reading too much into it or if there is something there. He is clearer, but I still don’t think I know him.”

“We could pursue it.”

“And I am not sure where the letters will lead. I think I just want to get through those, and make sure I’m not hallucinating or having these dreams before making a final decision.”

Laura smiled and nodded, “A sound decision. Seems like you are in a better place to make that decision than before.”

Dani nodded. “It’s been rough, but some of my answers have come.”

“So tell me about the letters.”

*

Dani sat at the breakfast bar reading one of the last letters, there were only two more from Angela to Anna in America. She had been following the tumultuous saga of Anna’s relationship

with Gunther and the advice given to her from his Aunt Angela in Germany. She seemed to have found a way to deal with her abusive husband, but she was not very direct in how to handle that.

“Sure, the one thing she could really use? Leave it for her to guess,” Dani rolled her eyes and shook her head.

“What’s that, babe?”

“Oh, I was just reading the letters.”

“And what is the guesswork about?”

“How Anna should handle her horrid husband. Angela doesn’t say how she does it, but something happened and it seemed to solve itself for her. I don’t get it. She doesn’t seem like the type to fight back. Apparently, she did.”

“Maybe something happened to him? Ask your buddy at the German Center. Maybe he can find some records for you on old Heiny, clear that up for you.”

“Great idea, I’ll call him in the morning and see what he can find out.”

“How did Anna’s hospitalization turn out?”

Dani puffed her cheeks as she released her breath, “It was pretty brutal. Apparently it even scared Gunther. And the doctor gave them hell about it and told him he would have him arrested if they didn’t leave for America, as promised.”

Kevin thought about it for a minute. “He got away with that one, didn’t he?”

He didn’t wait for an answer, it was in her face.

“Well, he wasn’t a citizen, so it was sort of a deportation. Still they could have done something.”

“Yep,” Dani nodded, “the mess could have stopped there. Then again if it had, we wouldn’t be here.”

“Wow, that’s a bit too sunny for your morbid disposition, isn’t it, babe?” He smiled at her and flinched as she swatted at him.

“Maybe the therapy is working finally.”

“Finally.”

He pulled her to him and held her tight and kissed the top of her head.

“Ok, ok. I’ve got to go to work. We’ll celebrate later tonight when I get home.”

“I like the sound of that. What time are you off tonight?”

“I’m covering for Carlos the coffee god, so...midnight.”

“Call when you leave.”

“Ok.”

“No. Seriously this time. Call.”

“Ok, ok, I will.”

*

In the dim light of the parking lot he came out of nowhere and before they knew what had happened, he was gone. And Dani lay on the ground. All Marina could do was scream as the blood pooled around he knees as she applied pressure to Dani’s injury.

The screams alerted the evening supervisor who was walking to her car just down the aisle. She assessed the situation and went into crisis mode. But first she needed her staff. She called the night supervisor for assistance and went to help Dani.

The police quickly took over the scene and were finishing talking to Marina as Margery approached.

“She’s a little out of it, ma’am.”

Margery nodded, “Marina, you call Kevin? Marina!?”

The panic was just setting in, and all Marina could think about was how had this happened? Didn't they say she wasn't being stalked? Hadn't they figured that whole thing out? What the hell? She wanted to scream at everyone in the garage.

"Marina!" Margery Bishop was standing in front of her trying to get her to focus.

"Listen to my voice. And focus your eyes on me. I need you now. This isn't going to work without you, Marina."

It felt like the voice was pulling Marina off a ledge and back to reality, "Margery. What do I need to do?"

"You need to call Kevin. Now. Tell him what is going on."

"But I have no idea of what is going on. I only saw...oh my God."

"Marina, focus. Take a deep breath."

Marina followed her direction.

"All this blood came from Dani? It's worse than I thought, isn't it?"

Marina looked around and Dani wasn't to be seen.

"She walked out with me."

Margery nodded, "That's what they said on the unit."

"It all happened so fast. I can't even remember what I saw."

"Right now, I need you to get a hold of Kevin and tell him they are taking her to the trauma ward and possibly to surgery."

"Trauma? Surgery? Was it that bad?"

Margery looked at her until Marina knew she wasn't joking. Marina pulled out her phone and dialed Kevin and hung up. Margery waited and stood by her in case she needed the support. *Breathe* Margery mouthed and gestured.

Marina followed the breathing Margery indicated and started to calm down enough to talk. She dialed Kevin, but there was no answer. She dialed again.

“Hey, babe.” He finally picked up.

His voice made Marina snap out of it, “Babe? Is that how you address people now?”

“Marina, I didn’t even look. I was expecting Dani’s call. Didn’t she work with you tonight?”

The tears started to well up again and it only stayed in control because Margery kept her breathing on task.

Kevin sat up, “What is it Marina?”

“I don’t know what happened, Kevin. We were walking to the cars and...

“And?”

“And its all sort of a blur. But, someone attacked Dani.”

“Where is she?”

“They took her into the trauma unit.”

“Trauma? What did they do to her?”

“I don’t know but the blood is everywhere...” Marina let loose with uncontrollable sobbing.

Margery took the phone, “Kevin, this is the Evening Supervisor. Margery, we met at the Christmas party.”

“Yes, ma’am. Can you tell me anything more?”

“It looks like a stab wound. Marina called for help and applied pressure until they took her to the floor. They are assessing her now. That really is all we know.”

“I’ll be there in ten minutes. Can I get to the unit at this hour?”

“I will have Sgt. Martinez waiting for you in the ER. If you come in that way, he’ll escort you up and I’ll meet you there. Is there anyone else we can call for you?”

“No, I’ll call her sister myself and then I’ll be there.”

“Ok. Marina will be here, we’re going to get cleaned up. If you need to, call her phone and I’ll text you from mine after we get off the line.”

“Thank you.”

Margery dialed the hospital Kathy was at and paced, waiting for her unit to pick up.

“Geoff, I need to get my nurse out of there.”

“What’s up Margery? I’m not sure she’s ready for discharge.”

“That isn’t important. A pass, something. It’s her daughter.”

Chapter 11

2018

The intake procedure:

“Name. Wait, doesn’t she work here?”

“Yes, up on the drug rehab unit,” Margery said.

“Dani or Danielle something?”

Margery nodded at the nurse, “Danielle Smith, she’s one of the nurses up there.”

“What happened?”

Silence. Margery didn’t know how exactly to put it. How do you just lay that one out there?

“Margery? Reason for admission,” the nurse repeated.

“She was attacked in the parking garage. We don’t know anything more than that. And shouldn’t speculate. I called her husband; he’s on his way.”

“So there’s a madman running around our parking garage attacking people?”

“Sandy, focus on the wound. The police and our security are up there. They are trying to piece this all together. We should know something soon, I would think.”

“Wound? I’m seeing four of them. Jerry make sure you keep pressure on those. The OR will call us in a minute to move her, but we need to clamp off the main bleeder.”

Margery waited by the phone for the OR call watching them at least get control of the bleeding before moving her onto surgery. She wanted to know what she needed to tell Kevin when he arrived.

1974

“Name.”

“Katherine, Katherine Cardiff.”

“Will your husband be joining you here?”

“No, he’s can’t be bothered.”

The intake clerk looked at her questioningly. Not understanding the sarcasm.

“He’s coaching,” Katherine huffed between breaths.

“And doesn’t want to see his daughter being born? Isn’t there someone who could take over for him for one day?”

“It’s football season. What do you expect?” Katherine sneered, huffing and puffing through her current contraction. She was sad about him not being there as well, but knew that the season was hard to interrupt for any reason... especially hard to get *him* to want to interrupt the season. He was like a racehorse with blinders during the season, nothing else was visible. Not even his very pregnant wife.

Katherine was also nervous. Her previous baby had been breach and there was a possibility that this one would get turned around as well. So far the baby’s head was down, but that’s how the first one started out. She wasn’t sure she could make it 36 hours with a breach this time, alone.

She shook her head, trying to get the thought of it out of her mind, sending the developing tear down her cheek. Football season sucked with small kids, at least when she didn’t have anyone to help. Katherine couldn’t tell if her depression was kicking in or if this was just hormones from the pregnancy. She knew from the previous two pregnancies that depression

was coming. And her meds would have to be re-regulated...the joys of being manic depression she would joke later.

1998

“Name.”

“Helena Millar.”

“Reason for admission.”

The nurse had to take only one look at her in the ER to notice that she was febrile, but took her temperature anyway. She looked miserable and flushed.

“The doctor will be in to see you soon.”

They waited for the doctor to come in. Karl trying to keep her mind occupied, read to her the spy novel she was reading at the house.

“Mrs. Millar, I’m Dr. Blake. I’ve looked at your complaints and her vitals, sounds like you may have pneumonia.”

He made sure to listen closely to her lungs and came up nodding.

“Yep, as I suspected. Because of your age, I am going to admit you so that we can evaluate you further and give you some IV antibiotics. It is important to keep an eye on your condition, as this often turns deadly for older patients.”

Once Helena was moved to her room, Karl called Katherine.

“They admitted her.”

“What did they say?”

“Pneumonia, but checking the X-rays now to verify.”

“And how long are they going to keep her, dad?”

“The doctor said about a week.”

“Dad, did you tell them how much she drinks every day?”

“Absolutely not. They do not need to know that.”

“Yes, they absolutely do. She will show signs of detox.”

“Well, if she does, I’ll tell them.”

“Dad, seriously, this is a small county hospital. They don’t know much about detox, I imagine, why didn’t you bring her up here?”

“Honey, it’ll be ok. I’ll call you if anything changes.”

“Dad...”

He was gone. She couldn’t believe he was still adamant about not talking about this.

1940

“Name.”

“Helena Millar.”

“Reason for admission.”

The nurse had to ask, even though she had a good idea what the answer would be.

“I din’t assht to come, the ossifer put me in the ambulansh.”

Helena swayed and had to brace herself with her hand to sit upright, her eyes partially closed. The nurse backed away from her, inundated with the smell of liquor, she hated dealing with the drunks.

“Ma’am, the doctor will be right in to see you.”

The nurse walked out and handed the paperwork to the clerk, incomplete. The clerk looked questioningly at her, and the nurse shrugged.

“She’s drunk. Slurring her words. She also has a big wound on her head, possibly a concussion. Did they say she was driving when they brought her in?”

“No, but they did say that they police would want to talk to her after she was checked out.”

“That would be a yes, Jimmy. Make sure the doctor checks her for a head injury. And look up her name in the computer, she’s been here a number of times before. Should be all the information you’ll need.”

Caroline shook her head as she turned away. She had dealt with Army wives before and they were always a pain in the neck to deal with, asking for special treatment, to not report injuries or episodes. And when told no, their Army representatives came into discuss not spreading rumors about Army wives. More trouble than they were worth.

1952

“Name.”

“I don’t think she’s going to sit still for your questions, nurse.”

“Mrs. Millar, I still have to ask them.

“Name, please.”

“Nurse, her name is Sarah Hanson.”

“Married, widowed...?”

“Widowed.”

Again her daughter answered for her.

“Husband’s name?”

“Arthur Hanson.”

“Arthur Hanson of Villa Park?”

“Yes, ma’am. One and the same. Why?”

“He is still here. But they won’t be able to see one another. At least not for some time.

They will be in different wards.”

Helena rolled her eyes, “She told us he was dead. Again.”

She looked at her mother who looked at her lucidly, like she was following the conversation.

“Mother...”

Sarah shrugged her shoulders, “He was lost and then found and lost again, I cannot help that he disappears on me.”

Helena turned to the nurse, “Probably shouldn’t believe what she says. Will I be able to see him?”

“Yes, Mrs. Millar. Family visitation is on the weekend, 11 am until 6 pm.”

“I just want him to stay away from my mother. Is that clear? She is not doing well enough for his craziness.”

As they walked Sarah to her room, the smell and the sanitized walls became familiar and even the clanging. Sarah began to think of him. Him that she had left here so many years before. Her heart yearned for the one man who gave her everything, then in one swift move, took it all away again. The yearning and the aching brought a flood of tears she just could not hold back.

“Orderly, get her to her room. I’ll get the doctor to order some medication.”

The orderly dragged Sarah down the hall. She was old for 50. The years had drained her and left her scarred and wrinkled, and mad as a hatter.

Helena watched the spectacle, tears welling up in her eyes. Her mother just couldn't stay here as long as her father had. He was dangerous to so many. She wasn't violent, but opening all the windows on the three story house during February wasn't such a good idea for the babies. Not to mention turning on gas without the pilot lit. She could have blown up the house and all of us with her. Dangerous in her own way. That nurse needed to keep the two of them separate, Helena didn't know how to stress that enough.

1926

"Name."

"Sarah Hanson."

"And you're here to visit?"

"Arthur Hanson."

"Yes ma'am. Follow me."

The nurse, dressed in white from head to toe topped with a stiff white cap striped blue, walked down the hall of sanitized, institution white. Her keys eerie, echoing off the walls as her shoes squeaked down the hall. In the distance Sarah heard the clang of the heavy iron doors opening and shutting.

"Wait in here," she said as she opened a thick metal door.

The window in the door was reinforced with a metal grid to prevent breaking. In the middle of the room was a table, bolted to the floor and two light weight chairs.

Sarah fidgeted nervously as she awaited the monster. He had terrorized the family long enough. Now he was here. At least it alcohol-free inside. She again heard the loud, ominous clanging of the heavy iron doors. This time footsteps and chain dragging the floor could also be

heard. She hadn't felt this way for over a decade, this dread. Not since she found her mother dead. She missed her mother, there was no one to lean on, especially with her husband here.

He walked into the room, guarded and chained. When the door was locked he was allowed to be unchained. The constant scowl remained on his face, but the look in his eyes was distant. Not nearly as violent, she thought. Maybe something could be worked out. Family visitation? He was still part of the family. How would the children react to seeing him like this?

He caught Sarah looking at him and growled like a beast. It didn't help that he apparently hadn't shaved in over a week.

Mama. I need you. She closed her eyes for a moment, took a deep breath and the thought finally hit her: *What in the world will they all think? Should I really tell them?*

"Mrs. Diedrich, he is still angry and violent. I don't suggest you bring the family here. We cannot protect all of you with him in this frame of mind."

"He doesn't want me to visit? Dr. Davidovich, I can't just abandon my husband."

"I think you fail to realize something. He has abandoned you and your family. And to add insult to injury he has also attacked the family from what the police report says. You had to save your children by dropping them from the third floor bath? Is that right?"

"Yes, but..."

"There are no buts about it. You must protect your children, and staying as far away from him as you possibly can is the only thing you can do right now. He needs to be here. You do not."

1911

“Name.”

“Jane Doe.”

“Time of arrival.”

“10:30 am, Dr. Sloan.”

“And she arrived in this condition?”

“Yes, doctor.”

“Nurse Anderson, do we know anything more than she was shot?”

“Intake is being done now. Apparently she arrived with her daughter.”

“Where’s the little girl?”

“She is up in the ER, being checked out now.”

“So the daughter is...”

“The only one who can fill in the blanks on what happened to her.”

“And the person responsible for this is?”

“Her husband. That was the only thing we could get out of her daughter at the time of arrival. Then she went into shock and stopped talking. She was then moved to the ER for evaluation.”

Dr. Sloan looked at the body of their Jane Doe, wondering how long it would take to fill in the blanks on this case.

“Nurse Anderson, follow up on the daughter. We’ll start her postmortem in the morning. That way maybe we can get some better background on what it is we are looking at with this one.”

1897

“Name.”

“Angela Bauer.”

“And the patient’s name?”

“Heinrich Bauer.”

“He had an accident in his workshop.”

Angela had prepared what she would say when they came to get her husband. She also made sure that the boys were not around for anyone to talk to about the accident, but she made it imperative that they tell everyone that pappa had an accident.

“This is important, Georg, Jakob. Or they will come and take you away and me too. We will be broken up for good.”

“But what happened to him?” Georg asked.

“He fell and hit his head and the ax fell off his workbench.”

“Georg, it was a horrible accident, don’t you remember?” Jakob asked.

This conversation took over an hour to explain to the boys, Georg especially. Ever since Angela had talked to him about the kind of man she wanted him to be, he thought things through. And this didn’t fit.

“This has to fit. He would have killed your brother. Then me. Would you have wanted that?”

Georg shook his head, he didn’t want to lose them all, “It was a horrible accident.”

“Keep saying that, liebschen. It will be all right.”

Angela sat and waited for the doctor to talk to. She had asked them to find

Dr. Schneider since he knew the patient. When he came into emergency room, he looked perplexed to see her standing at the desk.

“Mrs. Bauer, what are you doing here? Injured again?”

“No, doctor, it is Heinrich. He’s had an accident.”

Chapter 12

2018

Kevin came rushing into the waiting room on the trauma floor. Margery waiting with Marina sat exhausted from her shift and was trying to be the one holding it all together. But this attack happened on her shift and there would be paperwork for her to do on top of all of this.

“Kevin, thank God you’re here.”

The pained look on his face told her what everyone would ask and she avoided the stupid question.

“She’s still in surgery. One of our on call doctors came in. Dr. Matthison is one of our best surgeons, I called him in myself and told him the situation.”

“How could this happen?”

“I’m trying to remember, Kevin,” Marina shook her head, “It’s still all a bit fuzzy. And it happened so fast that I am not sure of what I saw.”

“Did you tell the police?”

She nodded, “Over and over. And our security and our administrator and the supervisor.”

He looked at Margery, confused.

“The night supervisor. He is trying to help with the paperwork and working with security to start the investigation.”

“So they are going to investigate.”

“Kevin,” Margery said, “of course, they are. They are still up there working on the area and talking to whoever was still in the building or there when it happened.”

“How soon until they know who did this?”

“They said they would be looking at the footage on the security cameras in the morning, when they can look with fresh eyes. This is taking its toll on them as well. Sgt. Martinez was the one who was trying to reassure Dani that there wasn’t anyone stalking her,” said Margery.

“Fat lot of good that did. She was attacked. So maybe he needs to revise his theory on this.”

“Breathe, Kevin. That is precisely what he is going to do. He is going to go over footage from a much larger window of time. He feels there has to be something he missed. Nothing had shown up initially, but he has been keeping his eyes peeled for anyone questionable.”

Kevin didn’t look convinced and pursed his lips.

“He feels horrible.”

“Horrible? My wife feels worse, I bet.”

Margery touched his arm and looked him in the eye, “Lets focus on what we can do. And right now we need to be here for Dani. If they find anything, they have my number and they said that they would get a hold of me. All we can do is wait.”

Kevin let out a frustrated sigh as he dropped to the couch next to Marina.

“Babe, she’s a fighter and you know it.”

Marina put her arm around his shoulders and he nodded, trying to smile. She rubbed his back trying calm his fears as he’d done for so many times.

“She has to be all right, I’ll never forgive myself if she’s not.”

“It wasn’t your fault, Marina.”

“No, it wasn’t, but I’ll still feel horribly guilty.”

“Try feeling impotent. I am not able to do anything. Anything, but wait. It’ll make me crazy before anything else.”

Margery sighed, “You two stay here. This is a job for the supervisor. I’ll see if there is anything I can find out.”

“Thanks, Margery.”

Kevin held out his hand, gave hers a squeeze and watched as she turned down the hall, a woman on a mission. Once she was gone Kevin let himself breakdown. Marina was family, but Margery was public. He didn’t want her seeing how vulnerable he felt. He knew that Marina already knew, he could feel it in her touch.

He sat back and leaned into her, “I can’t lose her, Marina.”

“Shhh, don’t talk like that. She’s tough and she fought back.”

“You know that? Remember it, or just assume that?”

“You should have seen her hands, if she didn’t get a DNA sample of that asshole, I’ll eat my hat.”

Kevin looked at her skeptically.

“Seriously, her hands were bruised up. She fought.”

Kevin smiled, “Been teaching her some Krav Maga.”

The smile disappeared, “I was planning on signing us up for a class to make her feel stronger and more confident with it. Especially since she started seeing that hallucination. I wanted her to feel safe.”

“Kevin, He may not have been a hallucination after all.”

“That’s what Margery mentioned earlier. Did she recognize him?”

“I get the feeling she did. She immediately was afraid of him,” Marina shrugged, “Maybe. I’m just not sure. I don’t want you to get your hopes up of some guy you can hunt down and attack.”

“I need the police and security to keep her from getting hurt. It doesn’t matter who catches this...”

His sentence was cut off by the high-heeled clip-clip-clip of his sister-in-law’s shoes rushing in to him, asking one question after the other that he couldn’t answer.

“Heather,” he placed his hands on either side of her face until she stopped and faced him quietly.

“Her supervisor, Margery, is trying to find out what she can. All we can do is wait.”

“I am really not good at sitting and waiting.”

Kevin smiled and pulled her in to him, “Tell me about it.”

Margery turned the corner and looked at them, “Excellent. Glad you are all here. I saw the doctors and the police.”

“And?” They all asked simultaneously.

“Please sit.”

Margery took seat across from them.

“She is still in surgery. I was watching them from the observation room. And no you cannot go in. That being said, there were some complications which is why it is taking so long.”

Tears welled up in Heather’s eyes, but Kevin had sobered up and was now being the strong one for them.

“And the police?”

“They are looking at the sketch that Dani did with Sgt. Martinez and looking at the security footage. Also, they sent someone into the OR to collect DNA from under her nails. They are also waiting for the completion of the surgery. Of course, they don’t want to interfere. But it

also means that they have to collect samples from all of us to illuminate anything we touched in the process of caring for her. It's all complicated and time consuming."

"Do you have a picture of the sketch she created? Maybe he is somebody we know," Heather suggested and leaned in closer as Margery nodded.

Margery handed her phone to Heather.

Heather's gasp set off a wave of emotion for her. She shuddered and started crying in earnest, trembling and covering her mouth to muffle the wails.

Kevin tried to console her, but it was practically impossible.

"You know him, don't you?"

She nodded.

Kevin rocked back and forth trying to get her to settle enough to talk about who this madman was and how she knew him when Dani didn't seem to. His breaths seem to slow and he whispered in her ear directions to slow hers, as well.

She finally took a deep breath and seemed ready. Sitting up, she still held onto Kevin for support.

Her lips trembled as she mouthed the words. Nothing came out. The second attempt connected with the sound.

"That is a picture of our uncle. Well, my mom's uncle, Uncle Sonny. He is my grandmother's brother. But he should be older if this is a current picture. I don't think it could be him then."

Heather forehead creased as she tried to hash out the logic of it all.

"How could that be him? He would surely be dead by now...or like 100 years old. That can't be. But he looks just like him."

"Did he have any sons?"

“Kevin, you know my family. They don’t talk about the past. Especially the painful and horrible parts. I don’t think my grandmother talked to her brother from the time she, what, got married? Mom said there was bad blood between them, but they never really said what it was, just something that broke up the family.”

“More secrets to fuck everyone up over. Awesome.”

Kevin had started showing a sign of hope and then had that pulled out from under him, all in a matter of sentences.

“Your family makes me crazy sometimes, Heather.”

“You? I had all these gaps in my life growing up. It was hard not having explanations. And now they come back to haunt us. I don’t know what to say.”

“Well, they are releasing your mother tomorrow to come up here. Maybe she has more of this explanation. Or at least a name to go with this picture. Hopefully, she has more pieces of this puzzle. Right now they’ve put out an APB on him. He was on the security video, but very blurry. That means they are still looking for all the people who were leaving at that time too. Maybe someone got a better look at him.”

1974

“Mrs. Cardiff, it’s a girl.”

She laid back and relaxed for the first time in 36 hours.

“I thought the last one was supposed to be faster. She took her sweet time.”

“They are all different. But I do have a surprise for you,” the nurse smiled suspiciously.

“What? I don’t think I’m up for any surprises. And I certainly don’t look ready for any.”

The nurse came in with her husband.

“Coach.”

“You still sound pissed off at me.”

“I’m too tired to be pissed off. Did you see your daughter?”

He sucked in his lips and almost teared up. Taking a deep breath he sucked in the emotions and shook his head, shaking the tears away.

Then nodded, “She’s beautiful. I’m so sorry.”

“What happened?”

“I was vetoed. Kicked out by all those bastards. See if I hire them again.” He chuckled and his sarcasm brought a smile to her face.

“What about? You know.”

“They’re increasing my meds now. In my IV, with some pain meds. Let’s just say, I ain’t feelin’ no pain or depression.”

He shrugged, “Sounds like a good start. Hopefully, they’ll load you up before it all hits. Last time it took a day or two, didn’t it?”

“Yeah, but let me enjoy this while it lasts.”

“Uh, nurse, I’ll have what she’s having.”

They laughed at the thought...a nice legal high. No beer needed.

“Who are the kids with?”

He grimaced, “Your parents. They asked to help, so, I let them. They can’t fuck ’em up in one night, honey. Besides, they’ll put them to bed and that will be that.”

He rolled his eyes knowing that that was a perfect scenario and probably not the case, but it was worth saying. Just for shits and giggles, they’d say.

The smile left her face, “Just don’t let them put me back in that...”

“Asylum?”

Her chin trembled a bit as she responded, “I can’t go back there.”

“My insurance doesn’t pay for that place.”

The joke fell on deaf ears.

“I know. I know. I won’t let that happen. We’ll figure it out. Just let the meds work, Kathy. They just need to rebalance you after the hormones readjust to normal, you said so yourself.”

“I need you. I need your help.”

“The Athletic Director said he’d help out with anything we needed. It’ll be ok. He’s a good man, he’ll keep his word.

2018

Katherine hadn’t thought about those days in a while, but hearing that one of her babies was now in trouble and in surgery brought the old hospitalizations back to her. Attacked, how, where, why? She couldn’t breathe and the anxiety started up.

“Control it, Kathy or they won’t let you go. Breathe, in and out, in and out, slow and deep.”

She continued to talk to herself as she tried to use all of her techniques to stay calm. Dani needed her, and Dani needed her not to lose it.

“Kathy?”

“Margery, what are you doing here?”

“I wanted to be with you when they transported you.”

“Weren’t you there all last night?”

Margery nodded, “Until quite late. But she is doing well, they say. Looks like all went well and they got all the bleeders tied off. She’s going to be just fine.”

“You don’t know that for sure.”

Margery grunted, “You’re right. But it does look good. How are you? Are you ready to go?”

Katherine nodded.

“There is one more thing that maybe you want to know before we head over there.”

She waited until Kathy beckoned, “The picture that we have of the man who did this, according to Heather, looks just like your Uncle Sonny.”

“That’s not possible.”

“Are you sure?”

“My mother said Sonny disappeared. It was in one of her letters. She wanted us to know what he looked like in the event that he show up. Ever.”

“Bad blood?”

“I always thought it was more than that. She would always get anxious and check the doors and windows, all the things we associate with victims. It had to be more than what my mother said. She just had another drink instead.”

“She never found out what happened to Sonny?”

“I think her sister did, but she never mentioned it to me.”

Kathy thought about Dani’s therapy and all the work she was putting into all of that.

“Oh my God, Dani.”

“We’ll go in a minute, they’re pulling up the van.”

“No, Margery, she has been reading all my mother’s letters and journals. I wonder if one of them is about Sonny and what happened to him. If she has information, maybe she knows who this is any why she was attacked in the first place.”

“You think all of this is connected?”

“Margery, all the secrets in my family have come back to bite us in the ass, why wouldn’t this one? And if it does, then there is a logical explanation for all of this.”

Margery raised her eyebrows.

“Ok, Margery, it’s at least an explanation, it doesn’t have to be all that logical, yet.”

“We were thinking that maybe Sonny had a son somewhere. Heather lost it when she saw the sketch. Don’t worry, she’s ok now.”

“Ladies, all the paperwork is done, I just need a signature, Margery.”

“Margery? Why?”

“She’s breaking you out, haven’t you heard?”

Katherine looked at Margery who just shrugged, “What? I called in a favor.”

“I’m really thankful you did.”

Margery jerked her head in the direction of the door.

“So, let’s blow this pop stand, ” She winked at Kathy, knowing they’d be in cahoots again soon back at work.

Chapter 13

1897

Anna woke to the sunlight streaming into the hospital room. Gunther was still sitting in the chair they found for him. He'd stayed and snored all night in that position. She smiled, something had gotten into him. Maybe it would all turn out, like Angela said.

"Good morning, Mrs. Hanson. How are you feeling?"

"Better."

"That is a good thing. You are scheduled to leave us today. The doctor said you could be discharged," the nurse said softly so as not to wake Gunther, "into your husband's care. And I think he mentioned you're leaving the country? Is that right?"

"We had planned on it. But I haven't heard anything further."

"Hmm...I thought the doctor suggested it would be good for you. Get some fresh sea air, enjoy the passage. I've heard it can be very entertaining. Even in steerage," she winked. "My sister was rather poor when they left for their voyage, and said that they even had dancing and music where they were."

"I don't know how much dancing I'll be doing. I'm feeling better, but not that well."

"It takes time to get there. So maybe once you've been onboard and healed a bit more, then you can join in."

Gunther groaned and stretched. He yawned as he came to life.

Anna smiled at his waking slowly and focusing on the situation, "You were snoring, Gunther."

"Naw, I don't snore."

Anna smiled and nodded at him.

The nurse patted Anna's hand and smiled, "I'll bring the papers when the doctor says he's ready to release you."

"The doctor's releasing you already? Did I hear that right?"

"Not yet, Gunther, but soon. Did he talk to you about America?"

"Yesterday, with Heinrich. He suggested we get on the next boat and leave Germany behind."

"And when is that?"

"This evening we will take the train. The ship leaves tomorrow at noon. Does that make you happy?"

"It does. I'll miss Angela, but I was looking forwards to America when we stopped here. Will we get to see them before we leave?"

"You haven't heard then?"

The nurse had entered with the papers.

"Heard? Heard what?" said Anna.

"She is here. Again."

"She came to say goodbye?"

"No, Mrs. Hanson. She is hurt."

Gunther looked up at the nurse and then at Anna who returned his concern.

"I have no idea what he was planning, but I'll find out what happened. We will still leave if she is ok. As long as it is ok with you, Anna."

Gunther worried about how staying would effect Anna. Now that he was perhaps back in her good graces, he wanted it to stay that way for a while. He though of what he had to do to be that good husband he promised the doctor.

As Gunther walked out of the room and into the hall, the nurse called to him.

“Mr. Hanson.”

“Yes?”

“If you’re looking for Mrs. Bauer, I think she is still downstairs being treated.”

“And Mr. Bauer?”

“I think that the doctor should talk to you about Mr. Bauer. I’ll call him and see if he is available to talk.”

The way the nurse said this made him suspicious. Why would the doctor need to talk to him? Again? What now? But he waited near the nurses station until she returned.

“Mr. Hanson, Dr. Schneider is in his office and will be able to talk to you in about five minutes if you want to wait down there for him. You do know where that is, correct?”

“Yes, thank you.”

He made his way down to the office, but his thoughts intruded. After their talk all he could think about is how Heinrich might have responded. None of what he pictured was good. He cringed at every image that flashed in his head.

The doctor answered the door himself when Gunther knocked and looked grimly at him, nodding, “Please have a seat.”

Gunther hesitated and looked around the office before sitting. It was just yesterday that he was here being yelled at for his actions and now? The doctor sat and looked at him a minute saying nothing, breathing deeply.

“Angela Bauer was admitted in the middle of the night.”

Gunther brought his hand to his forehead, he knew it would be something.

“I dropped her off at the house after all was said and done yesterday. And left. Apparently it wasn’t long before there was a confrontation. He tore up the house, then attacked her.”

“Is she all right?”

The doctor nodded. “She is going to be fine, but...”

“But?”

“She was found with the body.”

“What do you mean ‘found with the body’? What body?”

“Heinrich’s body. He evidently fell and cracked his head open on something in his workroom. He also had a hatchet...” the doctor paused to get his phrasing right, “embedded in his chest.”

“Oh my God.” It was worse than what he imagined, “Did she say what happened? What is going to happen to the family now? The kids?”

“I talked with her and she said it was a freak accident. When he fell he hit his toolbox and they went flying everywhere. But the hatchet came down hard on him as he lay unconscious.

“The magistrate says he needs to investigate, but if I was convinced it was an accident, the magistrate said he would probably be convinced too.”

Gunther wasn’t sure the doctor was as convinced as he sounded, he just didn’t know if Angela were capable of this without help.

“We were planning on leaving this evening. Not sure that can happen with this. My friend in America has been expecting us, but with her in the hospital where are the boys?”

“They are at the neighbors.”

“Do they know?”

“Yes. They know. She says they are fine. Better than fine because they are now safe from Heinrich. Not sure what she meant, but they are taken care of, no need for you to stay for them. In fact, when I talked to her, she wanted me to make sure you got on the train with Anna.”

Gunther couldn't believe that she wouldn't want help, but the doctor handed him a note from Angela.

Gunther,

You need to not let my misfortune keep you here. The new life you promised Anna in America still awaits you. I wish you all the love and luck in your new life. Please get on the train. We will all be fine here. I will keep you apprised of what happens and look forward to hearing about America.

Angela

“Thank you, doctor. I'll make sure we stop by her room on our way out.”

“Remember, you are lucky to be together. Have a safe trip.”

The doctor stood and shook his hand and watched as Gunther left, hoping his advice had left a lasting impression on him, knowing it was now out of his hands.

1911

The morning at the hospital had the chaotic nature one thinks of when you imagine busy city hospitals. Sarah had just said goodbye to the neighbor ladies. She was thankful that they

were watching the babies. And that they had taken over and made these decisions without much of her input. Both Mrs. Sorenson and Mrs. James had given her a list of things to do and helped to snap her out of her reverie.

“Sarah?”

She looked up at the nurse and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Your mother is in our morgue, I believe.”

“Is that where they put the dead people?”

Nurse Anderson nodded.

“Then that is where they took my mama, and papa, too.”

“I need to clarify what happened, so the doctor can examine her.”

“She’s dead. Why does he have to examine her?”

“We have to do an autopsy and make sure we understand how she died.”

Sarah couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She now had to tell the story and air the family business. But each detail was recorded for their records and made Sarah think of all the last couple of days as a stream of bad news, hoping she wouldn’t have to tell it to one more person. That was probably an impossibility, but she hoped.

As she told the story again, tears streamed down her cheeks.

“Thank you, Sarah. I’m so sorry for your loss. There will be someone who is coming to talk to you about what happens next. Mrs. Adams is someone who can assist you. That is specifically her job.”

Sarah nodded and turned to stare out the hospital window again.

※

“Dr. Sloan, I have the update for you on Jane Doe.”

“Name?”

“Yes, it is Anna Hanson.”

“Did the girl tell you what happened?”

“Father shot the mother while she was holding the baby. She opened the door and he killed her. Apparently they are estranged.”

“Apparently.” He looked at the woman’s body. He assessed the bruising and the scars that riddled her torso, face and legs, many were just healing. “Seems like they were still having some contact.”

He signed the paperwork and looked up at Nurse Anderson.

“Let’s call this one.”

“Without the autopsy?”

“I did the autopsy, she died of physical abuse and a gunshot wound inflicted by her estranged husband. Now let the girl have her mother’s body for burial.”

She nodded and watched the doctor leave, noting how hard this one had been for him. Not his usual.

Dr. Sloan walked to his office and sat behind his desk before it hit. Breathing deeply didn’t help, he grabbed his trashcan and vomited. Sometimes cases were just that horrible, but he rarely left an autopsy to the word of a child. This one would have to do.

Chapter 14

1940

Looking down at his tablet the officer jotted down the notes of what was being said. The accident details interested him. How had they wrapped their car around the tree was something he had to get answers to, but the hospital staff wasn't exactly forthcoming.

"Ma'am, was she the one driving?" the police officer asked the doctor who had been treating the Army wives.

"Well, I can say that her injuries are consistent with that. The bruising she has on her torso looks like she hit the steering wheel pretty hard and flew over it to hit her head."

"That would be an affirmative. Thank you. I'll make out her ticket. Thanks, doc."

"Wait a minute."

The Army representative from the base had finally made it.

"Maybe there won't be a need for that. They are all ok, right, doc?"

He hesitated, "Yes, they are, but she'll need to be here overnight at least for observation. I want to make sure she doesn't have a concussion."

"So, no harm, no foul? No one is going to file charges? No one else was involved?"

"What are you getting at?"

The police officer pursed his lips, he knew.

"This happened on the base, it is a base issue. We'll handle it. Seeing as no one was hurt, there should be no further action taken. And you'll have one less case to deal with regarding the Army, officer."

“Fine. But if these ladies leave the base and continue any of these shenanigans, we’re going to have a major incident on our hands. And you won’t be able to talk your way out of it then.”

“Understood, officer. Thank you.”

After the police had left, Corporeal McIlhenny turned his attention to the ladies. They had gathered around the bed of Helena. He cleared his throat to get their attention.

“You all could have been killed in this incident. You know that do you not? And you also have called attention to the Commander and to the base. Now we will be scrutinized even more by the local police. What do you have to say? No, wait. Say nothing.”

He looked at Peggy, and his eyes narrowed, “I mean nothing.” The sternness of his voice was nothing like they had experienced with him before.

“No one was hurt, as you’ve said.”

“Not one word. Or maybe I should have all of you removed from base.”

“You can’t do that,” Peggy said.

“The hell I can’t. Try me.”

Peggy said nothing more. She didn’t want to temp him.

“We’re sorry, Corporeal.”

They all apologized at the same time.

“Now, they have point on her care, I will drive the rest of you home.”

“I have my car here,” said Peggy.

The look on his face was enough for the rest of them to follow him to his car, Peggy leaving hers at the hospital.

Helena was moved to a bed on one of the floors upstairs, away from the confusion of the ER. The nurses proceeded to check on her throughout the night and woke her up each time. Something about sleeping and concussions. Helena was too groggy to understand what they were saying.

The night had left her dizzy and not just drunk. Her head hurt and threw her back to the old dreams of the madman in her room. She tossed and turned and was glad when the nurses came in and woke her from this torture, only to find herself back in the dream when she dozed back off to sleep.

“Maddie,” Helena said in her muffled groan.

“Sweetheart, Maddie isn’t here. You’re just dreaming. It’ll all be better in the morning and we can figure it out then.”

“No, I need Maddie. I need my sister. Where is she?”

“I’m sorry sweetheart, we’ll have to find her in the morning. Everyone is asleep now.”

The nurse patted her hand and made sure she noted the chart as that conversation may be something pertinent, or just a hallucination. Only the am would tell.

Helena continued to sleep fitfully through the night.

The door to the unit opened and the ER nurse walked in with two cans of Diet Coke and handed one to night nurse on duty.

“Hey Maria, how’s she doing?”

Carolina finally had gotten a break from the ER and wanted to check up on the Army wife she’d seen so many hours ago. Her brother was in the Army, too. She always took a special interest in the Army families. Figured that was the least she could do as a member of the Army family.

“She’s in and out. Keeps asking about her sister. I didn’t think she had any relatives out here. Just the Army wives.”

“Doesn’t mean she doesn’t miss the family she left behind to come out here. Her husband is deployed right now.”

Maria nudged Caroline, “So you’re standing in as Army family? Checking up on her and all?”

“Always. You know me, Maria.”

“Caroline, she’s going to be fine. In the morning, I’ll have them figure out how to contact her sister. That will help ease her mind, I think.”

“Who’s got the day shift?”

“Frances and Virginia will both be here. One of them will take care of it. You working tomorrow?” asked Maria.

“Nope. I have the day off. Tell them if they need some help, I can come in and work with her in the afternoon. I’ll only sleep a couple of hours today.”

“Ugh those turn arounds are painful. You have one day off or two, Caroline?”

“Two, thank God. I’d lose my mind otherwise. A couple of hours left. I gotta get back to the ER, talk to you later, Maria.”

“Night, Caroline.”

Maria could hear the moans from Helena before she reached the bed. Another dream? Caroline would probably need to come in and help with her after all. They’ll need another set of hands as she sobers up.

“Maddie.”

Maria took her vital signs and left her sleeping.

Frances was always the first day shift nurse on the floor. Today was no exception. She started the coffee and sat waiting for Maria to return, so she could hear the high points and start the assignment sheet.

“Morning,” Maria set down her clipboard and started her final clean up of the station.

“What’s going on today, Maria?”

“The one that is interesting is the Army wife. Drunk driving on base. Crashed her car with her friend in the passenger seat.”

“They both on the floor?”

“No, just the driver. Watching for a concussion. And needed to sober up.” Maria chuckled a bit. “Smells like the alcohol she drank all night.”

“They serve her a DUI?”

“Nope. She skated on that one. Army bucked up and sent the police packing.”

“Chalk one up for Uncle Sam. Still, that means she’ll probably be back this way soon. Wish I could skate on an offense like that. I’d be hauled in front of some hanging judge and lose my license,” said Frances clucking her tongue.

“Well, she also slept poorly. I did wake her up as the protocol states, but she had some horrible dreams all night and called out for her sister.”

“Hmm. We can probably handle that this morning.”

“Well, Caroline Mason from the ER, said she’d come in and work on that for you this afternoon if you needed her too.”

Frances looked curiously at her.

“She’s from an Army family too, remember,” said Maria.

Frances smiled, “They do stick together, don’t they? I’ll give her a call later. She probably wants to handle it. Thanks, Maria.”

1952

The admissions nurse walked in again. She knew the look of family in the psych hospital waiting room. There was always something that made them desperate for information. Unfortunately, she could not usually provide the details they were looking for.

“Mrs. Millar?” the nurse checked her paperwork.

“Please, call my Helena. Have you found my father?”

“Ma’am, he was here.”

“Was? He is still here is he not? My mother has been hiding that fact for years. She said he was dead twice, even sent a card the second time.”

She turned and sneered at her mother again. Once again the thought of her lies and manipulation made Helena’s temperature rise.

“The doctor will be in to see you in a couple minutes to discuss that.”

Helena shook her head and proceeded to pace the room. Her sisters were at work today and left Helena with the admission process for Sarah. It just made her angrier every time something new popped up.

“You know this would have been so much simpler if you’d just take the medicine and stop lying about all of this.”

Sarah did not even look up, just stared out the window. She didn’t move until the doctor opened up the door. He looked just he had the first time she’d seen him.

“Ah, Mrs. Diedrich, good to see you again.”

Dr. Davidovich was older than either of them remembered, but the same doctor who'd discussed father previously.

"You've been working here a long time, doctor."

He smiled and nodded, "Your father was one of my first cases here. I realize you are interested in information on him? Please sit.

"We've kept him here as a part of his sentence and as his sanity required it. But the laws changed and went into effect last month. We had to reevaluate him and his stay here."

"What does that mean?"

"That means that he was released about two weeks ago. I assumed that you knew. Someone was supposed to contact you."

Helena rolled her eyes and looked at her mother.

"You knew, didn't you? She stopped taking her medicine or it stopped working about two weeks ago. Either way that is about the time span of her latest episode."

"I'm not sure how long we will be able to keep her. Certainly not the many years like your father. Unless we just cannot stabilize her. The manic depression that she experiences is sometimes hard to control and sometimes just isn't controllable at all. We will do what we can. In the meantime, do you know what to do about your father?"

"He attacked the family the last times he saw us. I don't know what to do about him. What if he attacks again?"

"I'd just be prepared and make sure you call the police. He was lucid when he left here and seemed stable."

"But that is easily triggered. He is one drink from falling off the wagon and who knows what he'll do then."

Helena turned to her mother, “I cannot believe you didn’t warn us about this. It’s not like he is going to disappear into Chicago like Sonny did.”

“Sonny? He’s not in Chicago.”

Helena jerked to a rigid upright position. What did Sarah know about it?

“Where is Sonny?”

She almost hated to ask, but he, too, was a risk factor

“Said Wisconsin. He said he needed money. The family was broke. I sent him some.”

“What? You’ve been in contact with him? I cannot believe you. How much did you send him?”

Sarah was no longer talking, but starting singing one of her rhymes that had no meaning, just aggravating to listen to.

“Helena, you said you had power of attorney for her?”

Helena nodded.

“Take it to the bank. They’ll tell you what her balance is and give you a copy of all the transactions. It shouldn’t be difficult. But if you need to use my name, please feel free, I’ve had dealings like this with them before. I’ll walk you out. Say goodbye, Sarah.”

Helena kissed her mother and walked off the ward and to the car. Karl waited patiently. The man was a saint for putting up with all of this madness. He also could see that there was something else going on.

“That bad? I could have gone in with you.”

Helena shook her head and got into the car.

Karl looked over at her.

“Then what happened? You are obviously upset.”

“They let my father go. Let him out. Two weeks ago. She said nothing. And she knows where my brother is too. The woman makes me crazy, safety apparently no longer means anything to her.”

“Where are they?”

“My father, I’m sure, is still in town. And if he starts drinking, it’ll be bad. That...”

“Brother?”

“I wouldn’t call him that. He is apparently in Wisconsin. A short drive to Chicago.”

Helena trembled and held back the tears as she tried to think about how to tell the others. Maddie would need to know, and if the others know and she didn’t? Then what?

“It’ll be ok, chuck. It will. You’ll see.”

“I just can’t believe all this shit is still happening. Just when I thought it was all over and we were back to normal. Putting her in the same hospital was sort of strange, but I thought they’d both be here and that would be it. We could visit or not and all would be well. But no, apparently we are still keeping secrets that are dangerous.”

“Hel, I have a friend from the Army up in Green Bay. He could find your brother, I’m sure he still has access to people who can find him if he can’t himself. And we’ll look for your father. Breathe.”

The rest of the drive was silent. Karl was planning for this to come to a head. Good thing he still had his gun and ammo at the house. They had argued about the thing, but the Army made him think about those things like he didn’t before he was deployed. He saw Helena, tears streaking her face. He knew her fears. These were the two men who had haunted her and now they were both available to continue this terror. It would mean calling in a favor, but he knew what he needed to do.

When they got home, Helena went to her bedroom to lie down.

Karl went to the phone, and dialed his old Army buddy. It rang a couple of times and then sounded like someone dropped the receiver before saying, "Hello."

"Hey is TJ home?"

"Speaking."

"So you still fumble the ball, eh TJ?"

"Whoa, Static, is that you?"

"One and the same. I need an assist on something."

"Man, you got it. What can I do for you?"

"My wife's asshole brother is apparently up in Wisconsin and he is dangerous. We just found his wherabouts today. I need him found, so I can keep her from losing her mind. He also attacked her as a kid. So, I'd like nothing more than to knock him around a bit."

"Man, you just give me a name and I'll find the bastard."

"I knew you would. It is Sonny Dietrich. He may go by Hanson though, there was some conf..."

"Wait, from Chicago? About 40-ish? Gray brown hair, green eyes, maybe six feet tall?"

"I guess, what do you know."

"Don't have to look hard, man. He lost his mind, made the papers a couple of weeks ago."

"What happened?"

"Try this one. The idiot starts going crazy at his job. Finds out some bad news or something, I guess, and starts pacing and yelling. They get him to leave after about an hour, but

he is freaked out. He walks out and is still talking to himself and there are police there, spectators, media. It was a fucking circus.”

“Seriously?”

“No, man wait. It gets worse. He tried to attack the police officer talking to him, and pulls a gun out of the back of his pants. They filled him full of lead. The man is deader than Kelsey’s nuts. I’m telling ya, it was a spectacle.”

“Holy smokes. That is amazing. It’ll make my wife feel a bit better, at least one dangerous family member will not be back.”

“Well, his family is stating that it was all a misunderstanding and they want to sue the police. Someone insinuated that that is how they seem to get their money. Bottom dwellers, not a good situation.”

“TJ, thanks a million man. Now, how’s the family?”

*

Karl sat on the bed next to Helena and took her hand and kissed it. She stirred and turned over to face him.

“Helena,” Karl shook her shoulder to wake her, “I have news.”

She turned and looked at him, “Anything good? I could use something good about now.”

Karl shrugged. “Sonny’s dead. TJ knew. It was in the paper. But his son is not happy about the situation and wrote a letter to the editor about what happened.”

“Son?”

“Matthias. Said he was going to sue the police or exact some form of revenge. Sounds just as crazy as his father.”

“Is there anything that we can do?”

“I don’t think so.”

She sat up and shuddered, “Just what we need, more crazy, next generation. What about my father?”

“I’m having TJ look into Matthias, nothing about your father, but I haven’t looked yet. I did get out my gun and clean it.”

“You don’t think?”

“I’m taking nothing for granted.”

*

The eyes of the madman came to her again after all these years. In all her dreams he was by the window watching, or hovering over her. This time was different. The house was different. How had he found her? She hadn’t exactly kept in touch. Mother wouldn’t tell him how to find her, she knew that. But still, she’d done it before.

The sounds of the night filled the room as before. And the smell of honeysuckle. All the old pieces of the story filled her dream. She tossed and turned and made soft grunts and groans as the images returned. It was the sounds of the night that woke her.

She looked at the ceiling and tried to breathe and calm herself down.

“Karl,” she whispered as loud as she dared.

“What’s wrong, honey? The dreams back?”

She nodded, “This time he was here. In this house.”

“That’s impossible. How would he have found you?”

“I don’t know. I’m sure someone in the old neighborhood would still talk to him and help him look for the family. But most of them don’t even know.”

“Here, roll over. I’ll listen for a bit.”

She rolled into his arms and allowed the comfort to wash over her and fall back to sleep. But again he was there. This time Karl woke her, and placed his hand over her mouth.

“Sshhhh,” he mouthed and whispered, “I did hear something.

“Call the police.”

Karl sat up, and took the gun from the nightstand.

“You brought that up here?”

“What’s the point of having it if I can’t get to it?”

Helena was thankful she did not know. She hated that gun and almost wished they didn’t have it. Tonight though, it scared her.

Karl motioned to her. The phone was in the room next to theirs. They called it the office; it was just another bedroom, but it came in handy.

“I’m going downstairs, lock the door,” he said after checking the room himself.

She locked the door and dialed, listening to the night. It was too quiet and made her think the worst about what was going on downstairs.

“Villa Park Police.”

“Please come quick, I think there is someone breaking into our house.”

She gave all the details and sat waiting. Then she heard it. The noise he’s been talking about. It was something, something worth investigating at least. But she couldn’t tell just what it was either.

It rang out a moment later. The loud crack of the gunfire in the night. Sounds of the shots echoed in her ears. Helena put her hand over her mouth to muffle her cries. She wanted to stay silent in case it wasn’t Karl coming up the stairs.

The sirens filled the night as they got louder and louder. She waited, hoping. Her blood was rushing in her ears and her heart was pounding. The noise downstairs became loud and obvious.

The police had arrived. Their rushing upstairs sounded like her house as a kid with all her siblings running up and down the halls and stairs, pounding on each step.

Finally a hand tried the doorknob. Then they knocked.

“Mrs. Millar? This is the police, are you in there?”

Helena removed her hand and let out a cry, “Yes.”

“Please unlock the door.”

Helena tried to control her breathing and crying. She still didn’t know what had happened. The shots were all that she heard. Karl hadn’t returned. But *he* hadn’t shown up either.

As the police directed her to the steps, she trembled, and had to hold tight to the banister as she descended the steps, one by one.

“Mrs. Millar, I’m Capt. James. We got here as soon as we could. But I need you to identify the body.”

This made Helena’s knees rattle. The officer next to her had to help her regain her stance. Tears ran down her face; she thought for certain they knew who it was and just wanted her to confirm that her husband was dead.

“Are you ok to do that for us?”

She held tightly to the officer’s arm and nodded.

Capt. James led her to the dining room where the body was laid out on the floor and covered with a sheet. Just like the movies. She stopped, her heart pounded in her ears.

“Ma’am, if you could come closer.”

Helena did so hesitantly. Capt. James pulled the corner of the sheet back and revealed his face. She couldn't believe it and screamed, falling to her knees.

Her tears had become hysterical and uncontrolled as her breathing. As she looked at him, she touched his face. He was gone.

The Capt. looked up quizzically.

"He's her father."

Karl laid a hand on her shoulder. She jumped up and into his arms holding on tight.

He whispered into her ear, "It'll be all right."

With the police officer's assistance, Karl walked Helena away from the scene, sitting her down on the couch in the living room and sat beside her for support.

"Take your time, honey."

Then turned his attention on the officer.

"So, he broke into the house?"

Karl explained that Helena cried over the loss of the father she wasn't allowed to have in her life. He had always been gone and now was now gone for good. That madman had haunted her and now here he was in the flesh.

He was gone.

*

Helena stared at her face on the table. She wrapped her arm around Maddie and held her hand out for Bridget. The last surviving members of the family had gathered to see her one last time.

"Are we planning a memorial?" asked Bridget.

Bridget would be the one who'd want to memorialize this craziness.

“Can it just be us and some minister? For both of them?”

Helena didn’t want a big deal. She didn’t want to have to explain it all. It seemed like a Hitchcock film, in slow motion. She wanted it all to go away and shove the secrets back where they belong...the recesses of her mind, the pages of her journal, conversations with Lillian, not in public.

“I don’t know if a minister would do that for her. How she...” Maddie couldn’t continue.

“What? Cheeked all her meds and swallowed them all at once when she heard that father was dead?”

Helena didn’t want to sound angry, but she was.

“I’m sorry Maddie, but she left us a long time ago, it’s just geography now.”

“Hel, I think she always thought they’d get back together. Even in the state hospital. I think that’s why she was ok going there; she’d be with him again, even if not quite together.”

Helena nodded, “I just want this all forgotten. No more reminders of any of them. I can’t live like that.”

The three of them walked out of the morgue and promised to have lunch in a week or two, after a quick spreading of ashes in the lake or wherever they would let them. The national cemetery where their father was to be laid to rest? They’d decide in a day or two, but it was over.

Chapter 15

1998

The answers her father gave her only aggravated her. Katherine paced as she waited for the right unit and nurse to pick up and give her the answers she needed.

“Yeah, hi, I need to talk to Dr. Blake.”

“May I ask who’s calling.”

“This is Katherine Cardiff. He is treating my mother, Helena Millar.”

“Yes, ma’am. Let me put you on hold and I’ll page him.”

“Thank you.

“Finally...” she said after the nurse put her on hold.

The muzak was typical horrid selections of mutilated pop tunes that someone paid to have play on their phones while on hold. Can’t they get anything better?

“Mrs. Cardiff, this is Dr. Blake, how can I help you?”

“Who did the intake on my mother? You know family history all that stuff?”

“My nurse did. Is there a problem?”

“I’m sure all the information came from my father? My mother was having trouble breathing, I bet she wasn’t up for all the questions.”

“I’m sure your father did just fine, Mrs. Cardiff. Is there some specific concern you have?”

“She’s an alcoholic doctor. As you’re, I’m sure, aware, in a couple of days she’ll start detoxing and you’ll be treating her for DT’s, as well as, high blood pressure and she’ll be even *more* pleasant than she already is. Are you getting my concern?”

“Ma’am, I will note your concern, but as you are not listed as the next of kin or have a consent form signed with us, I can only treat my patient. I actually cannot take any information or give any information to you. But as soon as I do rounds and talk to her and your father, I’ll ask about a consent form. In the mean time, I’ll look after the medical condition of your mother. I’d refer you to your father for any further information.”

The click said it all.

“Did that asshole actually just hang up on me?”

Kathy looked at the phone in her hand in disbelief.

“James, he hung up on me.”

“Inconceivable.”

She slapped his thigh, and looked at him, “I’m serious,” but she couldn’t help but laugh.

“I stand by my answer.”

“Inconceivable?”

He nodded.

“I’m a psych nurse on a detox unit.”

He mouthed the words with her. She’d been hashing and rehashing what to say to get the doctor to listen to her. Again she slapped his thigh.

“Inconceivable.”

She laughed, “Shut up. They should listen to me. Should I go down there?”

“And do what? You don’t have privileges down there Dr. Cardiff. And no Missouri nursing license. What are you going to do?”

“My best *Terms of Endearment* crazy mom routine.”

“Because that has worked out so well for you in the past?”

She grimaced, “Ok, no, not really.”

She recalled the three or four times she’d pulled that one on people. They always just looked at her like she was crazy.

“Just let them take care of it. And you take care of you. You know being down there will just make you crazy, too.”

He crossed his eyes as he said it.

“Thanks for pulling me off the ledge, Coach.”

“That’s what I do. Now will you chose a damn movie and sit down.”

2018

Kevin placed his hands on Dani’s shoulders and read over her shoulder. The descriptions of Helena’s life made him shake his head.

“Babe, you don’t need to keep reading these. You’re still recovering yourself.” Kevin raised his eyebrow at her.

“Kevin, keep reading,” Kathy returned the eyebrow, “we just need to rip the band-aid off. No more family crap to wade through alone, right Dani?”

Dani smiled, “I think it’s time. And there are a couple of journal entries, too. Not much more than what I’ve already shared with you, mom. But it might connect to...”

“To what? Your stalker?” Kevin asked.

“Well, stranger things have happened. And I am here, attacked by some nameless, faceless man I have never met. He wasn’t a patient on the unit. We’ve already figured that one out. Marina and Margery went through all the records and looked at every face. He’s not there.”

“Maybe the police will have better luck.”

“Or...a crumb left in there?” She motioned to the letters.

“Ok, ok.” Kevin read.

*

The suited man walking into her hospital room confused Dani, but she allowed him to come close enough to talk. He showed her his badge as he spoke.

“Ma’am, I’m Detective Fitzpatrick. I have been working with Sgt. Martinez here at the hospital and I believe we have found the man who attacked you.”

He produced a number of pictures for her to look at, “Do you recognize any of these men?”

Dani looked them over, but the incident was still rather foggy. It seemed like it was the man from her hallucinations that had attacked, but if they were hallucinations, then he wasn’t real. But there he was.

“You mean he’s real?”

“Who, ma’am?”

She pointed to his picture.

“Him. I thought I’d dreamed him up. I thought I was hallucinating this whole time.”

Her voice caught on the last words and she started crying.

“Babe, it’s all right. That’s him. Right?”

Kevin wiped away her tears and held her head steady as he look directly at her.

“What could be wrong with that?”

“Nothing. It’s a relief. I thought I was losing my mind.”

“Ma’am, does that mean you see him in these pictures?”

Dani nodded and pointed, “That’s him. But my friend Marina probably saw him clearer than I did that night.”

“Mrs. Smith, she chose the same picture. Why did you think you dreamed him up?”

Here is when her credibility would be called into question. She’d seen it happen time and time again on the unit. Anyone with a psychiatric history was disbelieved by police. She took a deep breath and let him hear the story. The haunting eyes in her dreams, the stalker, the doubting if he was really there or not. The therapy.

“Now you can go back to the station and make crazy lady jokes. I know how that goes.”

“Ma’am, my mother is a therapist, I wouldn’t think of it. Besides, there are other corroborating witness statements, and Sgt. Martinez did some digging and found him stalking you in the parking structure. You’re not crazy. And stalking is an incredibly difficult crime to prosecute. But with the attack on you and your friend, it should seal his fate.”

“Have you picked him up?”

“Yes, ma’am, we have.”

“Do you know his name?”

“It says Matthias Hanson on his Wisconsin driver’s license, but his fingerprints came back as Matthias Dietrich. Do either of these names ring a bell for you?”

Dani looked at her mother and shuddered as she breathed in a long breath.

*

Her last session was about tying up the loose ends and ‘getting closure’ as Laura had called it. It felt good being at the end of their therapy.

“Did they figure out why he attacked you?”

Dani nodded.

“His father was basically left out of the will and the family and came on hard times. He blamed my grandmother for all of it. Poisoning the family against him. And he taught that storyline to his son.

“He was really pissed off when the police shot his father, so he came after those he felt maligned him all these years.”

Dani shook her head, “Does make some sort of crazy sense. I was the only one he could find. I had everything he didn’t, or so the logic goes.”

“We tell ourselves some strange stories to maintain sanity. How is your sanity these days?”

“I feel good. I feel ready.”

“You’ve been ready for a while. Just had to make that choice yourself. And your mom?”

“Back at work, on her meds,” Dani rolled her eyes and shrugged.

“Is she going with you?”

“Nope, just me.”

“Good luck.”

*

Dani couldn’t believe this place was still here. She’d heard about the state hospital, but experiencing it was new. And the locks seemed to echo, much louder than anything at the psych hospitals she’d been to.

She’d always known Illinois State Hospital was a horrible place, in theory. But the reality was just as stark, the journals had really not done this place justice. She imagined how her grandmother and great grandmother would have felt back then. They knew so little about any treatment for what ailed them. Dani smiled, it had been worth it.

Then she thought of her cousin again. How else do people like *him* get the care they needed? How did anyone in his position? Why was this place tucked into the neighborhoods? Shouldn't it be further out, protected? Knowing how many criminals it housed? That made Dani a bit anxious, but she'd worked with plenty of people with criminal records.

The state hospital visit was the topic of her conversation she'd had with her mother earlier in the week. How had she been able to do it? How had her grandmother? Leaving family here?

They had had no other alternatives in that time, but now there were so many others. Well, for most people. And the courts gave them no other choices. Dani wasn't sure she wanted to be here. It was so cold and stale.

The heavy deadbolt gave and the rattle of chains moved towards her. He looked just like the picture she'd been shown. Sonny's sandy hair, his green eyes, his square jaw, so much like his dad. His hands were in cuffs. When he sat down the rattling stopped. He was unsure of why he or she were even here and was hesitant to look her in the eye.

Dani took a deep breath. *No more secrets.*

"Matthias."

"Cousin."

"Dani. Call me Dani."

References

- Allende, Isabelle. *The House of the Spirits*. Atria Books: New York, 1985.
- Butler, Robert Olen. *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction*. Grove Press: New York, 2005.
- Childs, Peter. *Modernism: the New Critical Idiom*. Routledge: London, 2017.
- Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations: Two Novels*. Penguin Classics: London, 2010.
- Faulkner, William. *As I Lay Dying*. First Vintage International Edition: New York, 1990.
- . *Ibid. The Sound and the Fury*. First Vintage International Edition: New York, 1990.
- Frear, Caz. *Sweet Little Lies*. HarperCollins: New York, 2018.
- Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*. Vintage: New York, 1983.
- Joel, Billy. “Scenes From and Italian Restaurant.” *The Stranger*, Columbia.
- Kingsolver, Barbara. *Poisonwood Bible*. HarperCollins: New York, 1998.
- Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. First Anchor Books: New York, 1994.
- Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. First Harper Perennial Edition: New York, 1992.
- Morton, Kate. *The Clockmaker’s Daughter*. Atria Books: New York, 2018.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. *The Faith of a Writer: Life, Craft, Art*. HarperCollins: New York, 2003.
- Orczy, Baroness. *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. Signet Classics: New York, 2000.

- Pamuk, Orhan. *The Naïve and the Sentimental Novelist: Understanding What Happens When We Write and Read Novels*. Trans. Nazim Dikbas. Vintage International: New York, 2011.
- Queen. “*Bohemian Rhapsody*.” *Bohemian Rhapsody*, Queen Productions Ltd.
- Ramis, Harold, et.al. *Groundhog Day*.
- Santos, John Phillip. *Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation*. Penguin Putnam: New York, 1999.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Barnes and Noble: New York, 2012.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Tale of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Prestwick House: Delaware, 2005.
- Tarantino, Quentin. *Pulp Fiction*.
- . *Reservoir Dogs*.
- Tolstoy, Leo. *Anna Karenina*. Penguin: New York, 2004.
- Tykwera, Tom. *Run, Lola, Run*.
- Vargas Llosa, Mario. *Letters to a Young Novelist*. Trans. Natasha Wimmer. Picador: New York, 1997.
- Welge, Jobst. *Genealogical Fictions: Cultural Periphery and Historical Change*. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2015.
- Willig, Lauren. *The Secret History of the Pink Carnation*. Penguin Group: New York, 2005.

Curriculum Vita

Kristen Olin

The author is a native Iowan who came to Texas in the early 80's as a high school student. She studied Psychology and Criminal Justice at Sam Houston State University, graduating in May 1991 with a Bachelor of Science. During her tenure at SHSU and after graduating she worked in the psychiatric field in the years spanning 1988 - 2001.

During the years of 1993-2001, the author was a student at various times culminating in an English focus in preparation for the Alternative Certification Program in Houston ISD, including graduate education hours the University of St. Thomas. This was followed by 16 years of teaching English in the middle school and high schools in the Houston surrounding area.

In 2016, she was admitted the the MFA program at the University of Texas at El Paso. During the summer of 2017, the author taught Introduction to Creative Writing: CRW 3373, in an abroad class in London. She graduated May 2019, and can be contacted at **pilgrimsoul39@yahoo.com**.