

Chapter 29

I was still barely asleep. I was vaguely aware that I was in a car and that the car was quickly slowing down and making a turn. It was still dark outside but I could sense artificial lights seeping through the window.

The car came to a complete stop. I opened my eyes. “Wake up you two!” said Doreen. “Wake up, we’re here!”

Angela stirred from her sleep.

“Where are we?” asked Angela.

“Kerrville, TX. Middle of night. Middle of nowhere.” Doreen looked out her window and nodded.

“What time is it?” asked Angela.

“About three in the morning, Hon.” Said her mother. You two wake up good now. I’m going to go in and get directions to David’s house.”

We were parked at a gas pump of the Exxon service station. I knew it very well. We called it “Bishop’s” after the man who own and ran it. I could walk here in minutes from my school and my house was just a minute beyond that walk.

And I knew my summer had come full circle. My nightmare, my dream, my fantasy world. I hadn’t decided which one it was yet. But whatever it was, it was coming to an end right now. I didn’t feel happy nor did I feel sad. I just felt empty and alone. And tired. I had never felt so tired.

Doreen walked out of the convenient store, stopped a few minutes at the gas pump to fill up her car and got back in. “Goodness! Never seen so many stars in the night sky! The stars at night are big and bright out here in the heart of Texas!” She smiled and winked at us.

“Who said that about the stars?” asked Angela.

“Just an old song, you silly girl.”

“Did you get directions to David’s house?”

“Sure did, “said her mother nodding, “Though that clerk in the store wasn’t too keen on giving out any information. Wasn’t going to tell me anything until I told him I’d fill the car up full of gas.

Doreen started the car, pulled out onto main street, turned right at the second signal, passed my school, went several more blocks then turned left on North Pine, my road. She slowed her little car down to a walking pace, trying to read out the addresses on the mailboxes in the dark. “1510, 1508,1506,1502....1502! This must be it, “she said.

She pulled into the driveway, put the car in park, turned around and looked at me, “Well, David, Sweetie, is this there your house?”

I looked at the house in the silhouette of the streetlight. There was no doubt about it. There was the family station wagon and my dad’s beat up rusty pick-up truck. And there was my basketball goal and trampoline where I had spent so many hours alone while my parents yelled and screamed at one another. So, I suppose there was no way out of the truth and reality any longer.”

“Yes, Ma’am” I said to Doreen. “That’s the one.”

“Do you think your parents are at home?”

“Yes, the cars are all here.” I said nodding my head at her.

“Well, listen her, honey. This is the end of the line. You got to get off at this stop.” She took a long breathe and took a long look at my house. “Here’s what you do, sweetie. You get out of this car; you go up to your momma and daddy’s house there. Ring the doorbell or knock on the door loud. When they wake up and turn on the house lights. We’ll scoot on down the road easy and slow-like. And then we’ll make the block one more time, drive back around and make sure you are in and safe. Got that now?”

“Got it.” I said affirmatively.

“Now grab your bag there and go back to your own life. Your real life.” She motioned for me to exit with her hands in a “Shoo” manner.

I got out of the bac seat. Angela got out of the front seat and met me outside. “David....” She said, “It ain’t like you’re my brother because I’m sure you’d annoy me more if you were.

And it's not like you've been my boyfriend or anything like that because I don't want to marry you and all since, we're only eleven years old. But I've enjoyed being your friend, we sure had good times together, didn't we?"

"We sure have, I echoed."

She hugged me. I embraced her momentarily and then we parted. She took the necklace with the trumpet charm off her neck that her mother had just given her and said, "Here. Take this old thing. I'm going to make Doreen buy the right one for me some day."

"Thank you," I said as she put it over my head and around my neck.

"I don't know where I will be tomorrow. I don't know where I will be in a week, month or year," she said, making a hand gesture towards her mother in the car, "But I know your address. I will write to you. Will you write me back?"

I nodded and said, "Of course I will."

I took the borrowed pair of glasses off my face and gave them to her, "Here, you should have these back. Keep them. Give them to your mother. Give them back to your grandparents. They belonged to your father. They don't belong to me."

She hugged me once more quickly, walked back around to the front of the Pinto and back to the passenger's seat.

I started to walk away but Doreen called to me, "David...Sweetie???"

I stepped back to her window, "Yes, Ma'am?"

"You know...Old Walter..." she began. "He didn't mean anything hurtful to you, son. He just made a bad decision. He loved his son dearly. I loved him dearly. His Johnny...My John...he was one in a million. He was one in a billion. And then the Lord, or whatever is out there in these big bright Texas stars, took him away from us. You just filled a gap in his and Clarisse's soul that needed mending. So, it's your choice, but maybe you can find it in your heart to forget his name or where he lived when people start asking you a bunch of questions about where you been."

"Yes, Ma'am," I said. "I won't do anything to hurt him. He was nicer to me than anybody I had ever known."

“OK, Darling, “she said and then added, “What a long strange trip it’s been hasn’t it?”

I wasn’t completely sure what she meant by that, so I just nodded my head, “Where are you and Angela headed to?”

Doreen grinned from ear-to-ear, patted her daughter on the head and said, “We are going to Disney Land!”

“Oh, really, Momma? Is it true? Oh, please don’t be playing with me.” Said Angela.

“You bet we are, darling!” said Doreen. Then she turned back to me, “Now shuffle on up that driveway to that front door. We can’t put this off no more.”

I gave a silent wave, turned around and walked to the front door. The front door of the house I hadn’t seen in weeks. It was the only option I had. Couldn’t turn back now, there was nowhere to turn to.

Calmly and slowly, I moved up the front doorsteps. One, two,three,four. I rang the doorbell and then loudly knocked on the door with my knuckles. Knocked so hard that my knuckles hurt. I rang the doorbell again. And finally, I saw light start to pop on inside the house. First my parent’s bedroom, then the hallway, finally the living room. I peeked over my shoulder and noticed Doreen’s Ford Pinto slowly disappearing down the road into the early morning darkness.

Then I heard the latch of the front door turn. I jerked back around to meet my father opening the door. His eyes bulged out. “David!!!” he shrieked with excitement.

“Hi, Dad. I’m home.” Was the only thing I could think of to say at the moment?

He fell to his knees, his face blushed red and he began to cry. I had never seen him cry before. He reached out his arms ad grabbed me and squeezed me like a vice. He tried to talk but could hardly speak. It was as if he couldn’t get enough air to form a sentence.

He rose from his knees, still holding me. My feet were now dangling in the air and he finally said through tears and gasps for air, “Oh David, buddy! I never gave up on you, son. I knew you were out there. You’re a survivor. You’re a fighter. I knew it. I knew it! He kissed me on top of the head.

By this time, I was aware of my mother having joined the family clench. And she was crying even harder than my father. And then suddenly, I started sobbing too. I was so overcome with emotion I couldn't control myself. For every second of the past several weeks, I had convinced myself that since my parents didn't seem to love each other, that they must not have loved me either and there was no reason I should love them in return.

I was wrong though. I was so very wrong. I felt so horrible and guilty. But at the same time, I was so relieved that it was all over. And it took us awhile to calm down and control ourselves again. We calmed down. We all got in bed together and I told them the whole tale.

I told them the whole tale, but I bent the truth where it benefited me. I was overcome with guilt for not trying to come home. Overcome with guilt for not even wanting to come home. I felt horrible for losing myself in this new persona that had been thrust upon me. I couldn't bear to have told them the complete truth. I forced myself into spinning enough lies to hide my own selfishness. I made The Old man and his wife out to be a couple of hardened looney codgers who had taken me in but had forcibly kept me as their own until I was wrestled away by their wayward daughter-in-law. I felt like I was betraying Angela, the old Man and his wife, but it was all I could do-the only thing I could do was to sweep my own sins, my own compliance under the rug.

My parents listened to my story patiently and intensely. When it was over my mother started asking questions, "What was this man's name?", "Where did he live?", "What did he look like?" "We need to call the police first thing in the morning. I could tell she was working her temper up and getting overly excited.

My dad gently took my mother by the shoulders, "Rebecca, Rebecca. Calm down and look at me."

My mother looked at him.

"We need to let this go, dear. He's been through too much already. He doesn't need to be put through the wringer again. Let's just settle down and be thankful David has come home to us."

"But..." she interjected.

"Rebecca..." he beckoned her in a gentle soothing voice.

She closed her eyes, took in a heavy breath and let it out and then finally said, “Oh you’re right Mark...you’re right.”

My mother looked at me and said, “David, I’m sure you’re sleepy. Let’s all get some rest. You never ever have to talk about this again, do you understand?”

I nodded my head and I never did mention it again. Never mentioned the cover story that I told my parents. Never even let myself hardly think about what really happened. I’ve lived with that guilt. The guilt of wanting to wash away myself when I was twelve years old and assume a new identity, with a new family.

And I crawled under the covers with my parents and I slept deeply between them until the sun woke me up. My mother pulled the curtains in front of the windows. There was a little thirteen-inch television in their room that they turned on. I heard the TV lady saying, “Good Morning America, It’s Tuesday August 31,1981.”

My summer was over. I felt like my childhood was over. Sleep overcame me once again. Sleep overcame my heavy, stuffy mind.