~ Violet ~

For as long as I can remember it had always been my dream to get married and have children.

When I was a little girl, I would spend hours playing dress up or house in my bedroom with my,

collection of dolls. My entire childhood was happy, and everything was as it should be until I

turned thirteen in March of 1945 and got my first period. My mother seemed happy and kept

telling me that I was finally a woman while my father told me to stay away from boys and if he

caught me running around with any I would regret it. I didn’t think becoming a woman would be

so painful and I certainly wasn’t thinking about boys at the time. All I wanted to do was lie in

bed and wait for the pain to go away. Why me? Why did I have to be so miserable most of the

time? Why couldn’t I be like other girls who didn’t suffer? These were the things I asked myself,

almost every day for the next four years. I had many doctor’s appointments and not one of those,

doctors could tell me what was wrong with me until I met Dr. Phillips in the Spring of 1949.

I was 17 and had gotten used to dealing with the pain but nothing would prepare me for the

news, I was about to hear and how it would shape my life and the person I would become.

I was nervous as I waited in the waiting room of Dr. Phillips office and when my name was,

called I went from a confident teenager to a scared girl that wanted her mother, and I was glad,

that my mother had come with me. I told Dr. Phillips all the symptoms I had been experiencing,

over the years and after she examined me Dr. Phillips told me that I had endometriosis and since

I had never heard of this word before I didn’t think much of it but when I was told that I may,

not be able to have children I felt as if I had been robbed. All my life I wanted to get married,

and have children and when the news finally sank in, I realized that I would also probably,

never be married. Men want a woman that will bear their children as well as take care of the

house but I was never very good at keeping house but that didn’t matter anymore because I

knew no man would want me. I cried the entire ride home and my mother tried to cheer me,

up by reminding me that I was almost done school and soon I would be on my own and this,

did cheer me up a little because my grades were something I took seriously. While most of

the girls at Macon High School were daydreaming I was thinking ahead.

Thinking about my future is what kept me from being depressed. I knew if I focused on the

positive things more positive things would happen and when I found out I’d been accepted to

Harvard Medical School in the Fall of 1950 I was elated. Harvard was my ticket out of Alabama,

and where I could be among others who were just as serious as I was. My mother was happy for

me when I told her the news, but my father was adamant. He refused to let me go over a

thousand miles away to study when I could do the same thing in Alabama just like my brother,

Willie had. My father was a very controlling man, and he didn’t like it when he didn’t get his

way and my brother Willie was, an example of what happened when my father didn’t get his

way right after High School my brother Willie went off to college and did everything right in

my father’s eyes up until after he graduated when he met his girlfriend and future wife Catherine.

My father had wanted my brother to run the family business with him, but my brother had other,

plans and they didn’t include working for my father.

Willie and Catherine were married in June of 1948 and the only people in attendance were,

me, my mother and Catherine’s parents. My father was certain that Willie was ruining his life,

and wanted nothing to do with him after he got married and ruined the family name by working,

at the local Sunoco. Willie was content living in a trailer and working a regular job while,

Catherine stayed home and kept house which is something I never understood. My brother was,

smart and had majored in Psychology at Alabama State University but didn’t care to pursue a

career because he said he was tired of pleasing everyone except himself. Catherine came from

a wealthy family so her family disowning her when she married my brother and moved into a

trailer was almost instantaneous. I was only sixteen at the time and the opposite of Willie.

I wanted to please my parents and make them and my future husband happy someday and

it would be a while before something in me snapped and I would think of myself and what I

wanted. That something would take me down a dark road one that I could not come back from

and I would go from an innocent and pure Violet to a darker Violet always on the run from

her past and from herself.

I left Macon in August 1950 and went to study at Harvard Medical School in Boston,

Massachusetts. I was going to study to be an OB/GYN and I was going to make something of

myself. I didn’t want to wind up like my brother Willie. I wanted my parents to be proud of me,

and brag to all their friends about their daughter Violet the doctor. The night before I left my,

mother came to my room as I was packing up the rest of my things. She told me the house would

be empty without me in it and I told her that I would return in the summer even though I knew,

it wouldn’t be the same as having the ones you love around you. For the rest of the evening my

mother pretended to be happy that I was going off to study and start the next chapter in my life,

but I knew she was putting on a show. She wasn’t happy that I was leaving she was sad,

and when I finally got her to tell me why she was sad I wished I hadn’t asked to begin with.

My mother told me ever since I’d been told I couldn’t have children and ever since I decided,

to go away to college, she’d been having terrible nightmares about me that always involved,

death and me being on the run. I told her dreams were only dreams and her dreams meant,

nothing. She was just upset that I was leaving and once she got used to me being gone the

dreams would stop but what I didn’t know was that my mothers, dreams would later become,

a reality and I would become a stranger to her which was her worst nightmare.

When I arrived at my dorm room on August 25th, 1950, my roommate was saying her long,

drawn out goodbyes to her parents. I had asked my brother to drive me to school so I wouldn’t,

have to deal with my father being angry or my mother telling me about her strange dreams.

I never liked long goodbyes or saying goodbye period. I was and always have been a no

nonsense and serious person and having someone cry over me as if it was the end of the world,

just seemed silly. Willie didn’t do any of that he simply said goodbye to me and wished me,

luck which is all I needed and then he was gone, and I was left with a mopey roommate named,

Millicent Brown. Millicent was a native of Boston and a perfectionist. She agonized over every,

inch of her side of the dorm including her desk while I just unpacked and didn’t care what my

side looked like. I phone my mother after I got settled and after talking to her for what seemed,

like an eternity I hung up the phone and just when I thought I was going to have some peace

and quiet Millicent started to blab.

She went on and on about her parents and how she didn’t like being away from home but it,

was her dream to become a doctor so she had to tough it out and make her parents proud.

Millicent had an older brother named Paul and a cat named Puffy and after about thirty minutes,

of listening to her drone on and on I decided to go get my books for the first semester. The

bookstore was packed with lots of young and hopeful young women and men, but the truth is,

not all of them would succeed and go on to become doctors. Med school is difficult, and it takes,

a lot to graduate and as I looked around me, I could easily tell who was going to succeed and

who wasn’t just by the way they acted. There were times when I even doubted myself but I

quickly put those thoughts out of my mind and told myself that I was meant to be a doctor and

I had to become one since I couldn’t get married or have children. My mother had mentioned I

could adopt but it wouldn’t be the same as seeing yourself in someone else and as I thought,

about what my child might look like if I could have one Millicent snuck up behind me and

gave me the fright of my life.

I’d been too, busy dreaming in my own little world I hadn’t noticed her come up behind me

as I looked for my anatomy book. Millicent told me she hated being alone, so she decided to

buy her books and was happy when she found me. Lucky me is all I remember saying,

sarcastically but Millicent didn’t take it that way. She thought I liked her and was happy to see,

her but really all I wanted was for her to leave me alone. I never liked clingy people nor did I,

ever like a blabbermouth and Millicent was both of those things. I tried to get away from her,

while I picked out the books, I needed for my classes, but my clingy roommate was determined,

to keep up with me as well as annoy me. I found myself asking why me and what did I ever do,

to deserve such a roommate and I was about to snap on Millicent, but my prayers were answered,

when she spotted a friend of hers across the room and ran over to be with them. I had never

gotten angry so easily before and I wondered as I stood in line to pay for my books where my,

anger had come from. Willie used to tease me all the time when I was a little girl and even that,

didn’t make me angry the way Millicent had, and I hoped that my anger and short temper would,

pass with time but little did I know was that my anger would only grow worse as I got older and

whenever I looked at myself in the mirror, I would not recognize the person staring back at me.

The first few months of med school were as hard as I expected them to be and when winter,

break came I was relieved because for three weeks I would get to sleep in and not be around,

Millicent who spent every hour reading and studying. She stressed over everything and made,

me crazy and when this happened, I usually packed up my books and went to the library where,

everyone else seemed to be. I was always able to regain my sanity in the library where there was,

nothing but whispering students and the ticking clock on the wall. When it was time for

everyone to leave for winter break I didn’t wait around, but I did say a quick goodbye to

Millicent who was sitting on her bed waiting for her parents to arrive and I shook my head as I

left because I never understood how a person could stand to be so stuffy all the time and not,

want to have any fun. There were plenty of things to do on campus and lots of clubs to join but

Millicent refused to do anything for fear of interrupting her studies. I tried to get her out of our,

dorm but she wouldn’t budge. She told me all she wanted to do was study and do well so she

could become a doctor and that was that, so I gave up.

Willie was quiet most of the ride home. He would talk about work and about how he and

Catherine wanted to try and have a baby and then Willie stopped talking. He apologized,

several times after that and I told him that he didn’t need to apologize and that I was happy,

that he and Catherine were trying to have a baby. Focusing on my studies helped me forget,

that I was only half a woman or at least that’s what I thought of myself and as Willie pulled up,

in front of our house, I noticed our new neighbor. Willie saw me staring and he told me,

the man’s name was Wayne Elliot and that he was a lawyer and had just moved to Macon in,

October, two months after I started Harvard Medical School. Wayne was tall with dark hair and

when he smiled and said hello to me and Willie, I fell in love instantly. My only problem was

the age difference between Wayne and I was twelve years which was something my father would

have a heart attack over.

My mother didn’t leave me alone for one minute after I got home. She asked me about school

and how everything was going but I didn’t care about those things at that moment because I was

thinking about Wayne. I wanted to speak to him, but I didn’t know how or what I should say.

I found myself daydreaming about Wayne as I ate dinner with my parents that night which

annoyed my father. To him daydreaming was for people with no ambition. If you want

something don’t dream about it go out and make it happen which was something he said all

the time even though some things are easier said than done. Wayne was a grown man, and I was

just a kid to him at the time so we couldn’t really relate to one another, but he would be the one

who would make me feel alive again but later harden my heart Wayne would be my first and,

only true love and one I wouldn’t be able to forget no matter how hard I tried. Some things you

just never see coming and Wayne Elliot was one of those things.

The next morning as I lay in bed half asleep, I heard my mother’s muffled voice say

something about going into town to do some Christmas shopping. Christmas was my favorite

holiday so I got up out of bed, got dressed as quickly as I could and ran downstairs to the kitchen

where I asked my mother if I could go shopping with her. My mother preferred to shop alone but

I knew getting out of the house as much as I could, would mean I may run into Wayne and get a

chance to speak to him. When my mother said I could go with her I jumped for joy while my,

father sat back and ate his breakfast and tried to figure out why I was so happy. To him I was

acting crazy but to me I was perfectly normal. I was a girl in love and would do anything to get

Wayne to notice me even if it meant changing the way I looked and becoming someone, I wasn’t

which was something I would regret in the years to come as well as for the rest of my life.

My mother and I spent the rest of the day going from store to store buying gifts for my,

father, my brother and his wife. We had lunch at Bess’s Diner and then afterwards we went

searching for The Time Machine for my father. The Time Machine was his favorite book but

his reason and my reason for him liking it were two totally different ones. My father said he

liked The Time Machine because being able to travel especially back in time was his dream

and I knew it was his favorite book because escaping from the disappointment he heard

about everyday was something he wanted to do. Everywhere my father went someone would

mention my brother Willie and how my father must be upset that he didn’t join him to run

the family business. When my mother and I got to the bookstore I immediately went upstairs to

where I knew the book would be while my mother stayed downstairs to chat with Agnes

Cartwright who worked at the front desk. The library was my home away from home and

where the people in town usually came to gossip with Agnes who knew almost everything

about everyone in town.

As I walked to the W section, I saw Wayne sitting at one of the tables reading and my heart

Started pounding in my chest. I finally had my moment to speak to him and I was scared and

didn’t know what to say. I stood there in silence thinking of how I would start the conversation

and when I couldn’t think of anything I gave up and just walked over to him. I figured I had

nothing to lose and the worst thing that could happen was that Wayne would ignore me or tell

me he didn’t want to speak to me. I dreaded both of those outcomes and I was glad when he

said he’d been wanting to speak to me ever since my mother had told him I was studying at

Harvard. Wayne said my mother had been raving about me ever since he’d moved next door

to us and he’d wondered when he would get to meet me because there weren’t many people

in town he could have a good conversation with. Most people led simple lives and didn’t have

time for in depth conversations something he enjoyed and as Wayne spoke, I was captivated and

hung on his every word. He was very smart, and you couldn’t tell just by looking at him because

Wayne didn’t dress the part. He was a lawyer but I rarely saw him in a suit but that didn’t matter

to me I was happy that I’d gotten a chance to speak to him even though he did more talking than

I did.

After a while I heard my mother calling my name, so I said goodbye to Wayne and ran off to

find The Time Machine for my father. When I turned around to leave the aisle Wayne startled

me and said he’d wanted to ask me out to dinner, and I quickly said yes before rushing off to

meet my mother and pay for my father’s gift. I was smiling the entire ride back to the house and

when I told my mother that I was going to have dinner with Wayne she turned the car around and

drove back into town. She said if I was going to have dinner with Wayne, I was going to be

wearing a dress and she wasn’t taking no for an answer. We found a dress at Anna’s Dress Shop

and when I tried on the black lace dress that I would have to sneak out of the house in

so, my father wouldn’t see me in it I felt like a completely different person. When we got back to

the house I went straight up to my room, hung my dress up in my closet and sat down in front

of my vanity mirror. Looking at myself I saw every flaw that I disliked. Everything from my,

plain face full of freckles to my eyes that I thought were to far apart made me feel ugly and

I had no idea why Wayne wanted to have dinner with a girl like myself when he could probably

have any girl he wanted.

My mother bought me makeup when I became a teenager because she said that’s when she

started using it. I never bothered with any of the lipstick, blush or concealer but now that Wayne

was in the picture I figured I might as well put it all to some use. The red lipstick was too loud

and the blush and concealer didn’t blend well and by the time I was done with my face I actually

preferred it without any makeup at all. My mother knocked on my bedroom door as I was wiping

my face and sensing my frustration she asked me what was wrong. I told her that I never looked

good in anything and I don’t know why I ever bothered trying anything new and after saying

those things I started to cry. Like all mothers do my mother said I was beautiful, and I just

needed to find what worked for me which is when she left the room and came back with even

more makeup in softer shades and made me into a totally different person. I would change the

way I looked many times in the years to come and even more so when I was running from the

things I’d done and the people I’d hurt.

My dinner with Wayne didn’t happen until the following evening and right before he came to

pick me up I was having second thoughts about the dress I was wearing. I was rummaging

through my mother’s closet for a more modest dress to wear when she came into her room and

asked what I was doing. When I told my mother, I wasn’t comfortable in the dress I was wearing

she laughed and said I was being silly, but I didn’t think so. I have always been very self

conscious even when I was a child, I never liked how I looked but my mother would never

understand. My mother had always been tall and beautiful like a movie star, and I envied her.

She didn’t have to worry much about makeup or a bad hair day because she could just get up

out of bed in the morning and still look good. I hadn’t inherited anything from her except my,

height and the rest of my looks came from my father who was average height, used to have

brown hair and had a slender build with bright blue eyes that I had also inherited. My mother

told me it was time for me to grow up and stop hating myself because if I didn’t it would ruin

me and my chances of having any sort of future with Wayne. I knew she was right but what I

didn’t know was that my future with Wayne consisted of sadness and longing for something I

couldn’t have and something I wouldn’t have until after I left him.

Wayne picked me up at 8:00 p.m. and he drove us to Martucci’s the fancy new Italian

restaurant in town that not many people went to simply because it was almost always

reservations only. When we pulled up in front of the restaurant and I saw the solar lights

that lit the way to the door, the water fountain with lotus flowers floating and the lanterns

strung outside the building I was glad that I hadn’t changed dressed, or I definitely would have

been underdressed. After we were seated and were given menus Wayne started with the

compliments that made me blush and I tried to shy away from him, but I couldn’t. Wayne

never made anything easy and he always got what he wanted but I wasn’t ready to give into

his desires just yet. After dinner, Wayne and I went back to his house, and I was glad that it

was late and everyone was asleep in my home next door because if they hadn’t been asleep

they would have been outside trying to see what Wayne and I were up to.

Wayne’s home was very tidy, and I didn’t see anything that would interest me until I got

upstairs to the second floor where the library was. There were four giant bookshelves full of

books and a desk as well as a couch for reading that I sat down on after finding Gone With, The

Wind a book I didn’t expect Wayne to own. After a few minutes of silence Wayne sat down on

the couch beside me and then scooted closer. When he kissed my neck, I felt shivers all over but

I didn’t give in like Wayne hoped I would. Instead, I said it was time for me to get home and as

I put on my coat and reached for the doorknob Wayne pulled me close and once again tried to

get me to stay but I turned him down again and said we couldn’t rush things. He said I was

beautiful and I looked even more beautiful in the dress I was wearing. I was no longer the girl

next door nor did I resemble her in the body-hugging black lace dress I was wearing that made

me feel like someone else.

When I walked through the front door, I saw my mother sitting in the living room watching

T.V., I hung up my coat, went over to the couch and sat down next to her and that’s when the

questions started. How was dinner? Is the new restaurant nice? Did he kiss you? I answered

yes, to all of my mother’s questions and she went from a grown woman to a giggling school

girl who wanted to know all the details. I told her that all Wayne did was kiss my neck and

I left it at that. I didn’t tell my mother how it made me feel because Wayne was mine and my,

feelings were mine. I didn’t want to talk about anything for fear of jinxing myself and because

Wayne was my new beginning. When I was with him, I felt as if anything was possible and

maybe the impossible would happen but I was getting ahead of myself and my condition

which in the end would slowly tear us apart over the years and would be the beginning of,

the end of our, marriage as well as my life.

I spent the rest of my winter break getting to know Wayne and when it was time for me

to go back to Harvard, he didn’t want me to leave. I told Wayne that I would call and write

to him when I could and on the morning, I was due to go back Wayne came by to see me

just as Willie was pulling up on to our driveway. He brought me a dozen red roses and a

letter he’d written me but told me to read it when I was alone which left me wondering about

its contents. When it was time to say good-bye, I couldn’t bring myself to do so. Instead, I

hugged Wayne and he hugged me back even tighter before Willie said it was time to go so

I pulled away. As I turned from Wayne to open the door and get in the car, he pulled me back

close to him and kissed me. His kiss was the only thing I thought about the entire ride back to

Harvard and would be the only thing I would think about until I saw Wayne again in the

Spring when things between us would become more serious and I would begin to feel as if

anything was possible.

Studying and exams became the norm for me and Millicent and part of me was glad because

the dorm room was quiet, and I no longer had to hear her life story. From January to March of

1951 I didn’t have a social life. I woke up in the morning, went straight to class and then came

back to my room at the end of the day to study. The only thing that would distract me for hours

on end would be a phone call from Wayne who called me often. He would tell me how much

he missed me and asked me if I ever got his letters since he never got one back from me. I was

never very good at writing a letter but whenever Wayne wrote one to me, I felt as if I was

reading a love story or a poem because of all the emotion that was in the letters. Wayne was

in love with me and was the first to admit how he felt but I kept most of my feelings to myself.

I did have feelings for him, and I did care for Wayne, but I didn’t want to rush into anything

because becoming a doctor was my number one priority and I wasn’t going to let anyone or

anything stand, in my way not even Wayne.

I soon found myself going home for Spring break on March 20th, 1951, and I wasn’t sure

who was more excited, myself or Wayne who kept me on the phone for nearly three hours the,

night before I was due to come home. Wayne told me he had a gift for me from Valentine’s Day

as well as a birthday gift and I told him he didn’t have to get me anything which made Millicent

roll her eyes. Millicent had just broken up with her boyfriend Todd and had been sulking for

weeks. She cried most of the time and her crying would ruin my concentration and force me to

go to the library to study. When I returned to the dorm, she would ask me why I left and say she

didn’t like being alone which I thought was pathetic. I told Millicent to stop crying over Todd

and to remember why she came to Harvard but none of my advice helped so I gave up on trying

to tell her anything and focused on my studies.

When I got home, Wayne was not outside waiting for me like I’d expected him to be and

for the rest of the afternoon, I wondered what he was up to. My mother kept me busy with

questions about school and how I was doing but I was in my own world thinking about being

alone with Wayne later. I’d hung on his words for two months and I couldn’t wait to see

what Wayne had planned for us. I was in my room looking for something to wear when my,

mother came in and told me that dinner was almost ready and when I told her I was having

dinner with Wayne she was disappointed. My mother told me she’d been hoping to spend more

time with me since I wasn’t around much during Winter break and I felt bad, but I didn’t feel

like having dinner with my parents. I wanted excitement not boredom so after my mother left

my room I opened my suitcase and pulled out the red lace off the shoulder dress I’d bought

before I came home. I’d been out shopping with some friends when I spotted it in the window

of Beth’s Dress Shop and I had to have it. The dress looked so seductive on the mannequin so I

went inside the store, asked to try it on and as soon as I did, I knew Wayne would love it. If

my mother had seen me in it she would have said I looked like a harlot, but I didn’t care I’d

been listening to Wayne speak sweet nothings into my ear whenever he called for the passed

few months and I wanted him to want me.

After I put on my dress, shoes and makeup I grabbed my coat and hurried over to Wayne’s

house. My heart pounded in my chest as I waited for him to answer the door and when he did

I rushed inside his house happy that I was finally with him. Wayne didn’t take his eyes off me

all night. From the moment I took my coat off until we were sitting by the fireplace and he

was handing me my Valentine’s Day gift and birthday gift all he did was stare at me and I loved

every second of it. For my birthday Wayne got me a pen with my name engraved on it and for

Valentine’s Day he got me a gold locket that read V&W which I swore never to take off. After

Wayne put the locket on me he kissed me and after that we became entangled in one another.

Wayne wanted to do more than make out and I could tell by the way he touched me and pressed

against me. I told him that I wanted to wait until I was married before going any further and to

my surprise Wayne agreed with me. Most men would have been upset but not Wayne and after

he pulled himself together he went into the kitchen to check on our dinner. While he was gone

I found a mirror in Wayne’s hallway and fixed myself up. My hair was a mess and my lipstick

smeared but I didn’t care I was in love with Wayne and as we ate dinner together, he undressed

me with his eyes which was enough to make me hot and left me wanting him more.

After dinner with Wayne, I went home feeling happier about the future and I remember

thinking that maybe, just maybe what I had been cursed with would be broken and I would one

day be able to give Wayne children. Thoughts of a family kept me up most of the night and when

I finally did fall asleep I had a smile on my face. In the morning when I woke, I was once again

reminded of my condition and I spent the rest of the day in bed and in the worst pain I’d felt in

a long time. My mother told me later that evening that Wayne had come to ask about me and

when she told him, I wasn’t well he said he would come check on me the following day. I made

a promise to myself that I would never tell Wayne that I couldn’t have children because I didn’t

want to lose him. Even though he never told me he wanted children I knew he wanted them and

why wouldn’t he? Wayne had it all. He was tall, handsome and intelligent so why wouldn’t he

want to pass all of that down to his children? I however had nothing to pass down to a child

except my love of learning and I would possibly curse the child if it was a girl with my,

endometriosis.

I was sitting outside when Wayne came to see me the next day. He brought me flowers

once more and homemade chicken noodle soup he made himself after hearing that I wasn’t

feeling well. We spent the rest of the week together and when it was time for me to go back

to Harvard, Wayne waited with me until Willie came to pick me up. Before I got in the car

I hugged Wayne and he hugged me a little tighter this time then he told me that he loved me

which took my breath away I thought about Wayne the entire ride back to Harvard and for

the next three months all I did was study, take exams and talk to Wayne whenever I could

which was usually at night. I’d spend hours whispering on the phone and occasionally I would

raise my phone which would wake Millicent who would complain to me to keep the noise

down but I didn’t care about her. All I cared about was Wayne and our plans for the future…

our future that I couldn’t stop thinking about.

My first year ended as quickly as it had begun and while everyone was waiting on their final

grades I was thinking about spending my summer with Wayne in the seaside town of Martha’s

Vineyard where he grew up. When I told my mother that I wouldn’t be coming home for the

summer she didn’t seem upset even though I knew she was, and I was glad that she didn’t fuss

with me because I didn’t feel like fighting with her. I had no energy and I’d spent the last three

months of my first semester in pain and no matter what I did the pain wouldn’t go away.

When Wayne said he wanted to take me to his childhood home for the Summer I said yes

without even giving the idea any thought. I needed time to relax and time to grow and become

and adult without my mother harping and constantly worrying about me. I know she meant

well but at nineteen I was capable of being on my own and spending the summer away from

home for once and on the morning of June 15th, 1951, I was up early and waiting for Wayne

outside in front of the dorms. When Wayne pulled up in his shiny red Studebaker and smiled at

me I knew I wasn’t going to regret spending my summer with Wayne. My life was just

beginning and as I put my bags in the trunk and got in the car, I forgot all about the pain I’d

been feeling and thought only about the long summer ahead and how much fun Wayne and

I would have together.

We drove one hour and forty minutes to the ferry at Woods Hole then from there it was

another half an hour until we reached Wayne’s home in the town of Oak Bluffs. His home wasn’t

far from Oak Bluffs town beach and I couldn’t wait to go exploring around town, but Wayne told

me he wanted me to meet his parents and get settled in before we did any exploring. When

Wayne mentioned meeting his parents I thought they lived on another part of the island I didn’t

expect them to be in the living room having breakfast when I walked in the house. I was in shock

and didn’t know what to say so when Wayne’s mother greeted me with a hug and said she’d

heard all about me from Wayne I was completely silent. When Wayne and I were alone again

and unpacking our things I found my voice and asked him why he didn’t tell me we were coming

to see his parents. He told me he wanted seeing his parents to be a surprise and all I could do was

glare at him which made him laugh. I didn’t think anything was funny at all. If I had known, we

would be staying with his parents I would have brought a gift for them, but Wayne didn’t seem

to think that was necessary. I still wanted to give a gift since I was staying in his parent’s home

for the summer so after the four of us had breakfast together Wayne and I drove into town.

The town of Oak Bluffs was a friendly one and what I loved the most about it was that it was

not far from the beach. As we drove through town, I spotted an antique store called Cat’s

Antiques and I asked Wayne if we could check it for a gift for his parents. We looked around

the antique store for a good forty-five minutes until I spotted the perfect gift for Wayne’s

parents which was a wall clock with a bird for every hour that chirped. There were pictures

and figurines of all kinds of birds all over Wayne’s home so I figured the wall clock would be

a nice addition to his parent’s collection and Wayne agreed. We went in and out of shops for the

rest of the morning and then we had lunch at Bev’s Diner before spending the rest of the

afternoon at the town beach which was my favorite part of the day. As I lay on my towel soaking

up the warmth of the suns, rays and listening to the waves moving back and forth on the shore

I thought of my parents but mainly my mother and how she would be alone this summer.

My father was all business and rarely ever took a break even when he wasn’t working, he was

doing something and in the summer, he loved to be outside and would usually be gone most of

the day. My mother was never the outdoorsy type so I felt bad that I wouldn’t be there to keep

her company but I didn’t feel guilty for too long because Wayne who’d been laying, next to

me enjoying the sun as well suddenly got up and started running. When I shouted for him and

asked him what he was doing he said he was going to get us some ice cream and I laughed.

A few minutes later he came running back across the beach with two chocolate ice cream

and after we ate, we decided to go for a swim. The water felt cool against my hot skin and when

Wayne took me into his arms I felt hot again but I didn’t allow myself to get carried away no

matter how much I liked when Wayne kissed me or ran his fingers down my spine, I reminded

myself that school was my main priority and my relationship with Wayne was second. What

I didn’t know was that my way of thinking would make things difficult and cause my relation-

ship to fail and I would have no one to blame but myself. I would become a woman who lived

in constant fear of her past catching up to her and later a woman that was always on the run

with no place to call home and parents I could no longer see. I would be living the worst kind

of life. One that was a lie, and I would spend years wishing I could take everything that I had

done wrong back but by then it would be too late.

The summer days and nights after our day on the beach seemed to fly by and soon, I found

myself, heading back to Harvard. I hadn’t phoned home much while I was on vacation so when

I got to my dorm I called my mother to let her know was okay and as I expected she kept me on

The phone for most of the day talking about how she missed me and wanted to see me in

December and I promised her I would see her then just so she would get off the phone. After I

got settled I decided to lay down and take a nap, but that idea was interrupted by Millicent who

came in shortly after I closed my eyes. She went on and on about her summer and how she’d met

someone knew and felt that he was the one which made me roll my eyes. I told her that she

shouldn’t rush into anything and to take her time when it came to finding the one like I was

taking my time with Wayne. Wayne. Just the thought of him made me smile and took me back to

the summer we’d spent together that I never wanted to come to an end. Millicent begged me for

details but I had none to give. I wasn’t the type of girl to kiss and tell and I wasn’t about to

change because Millicent was curious.

I spent the rest of the day getting ready for classes the next day while Millicent spent hers on

the phone with Eddie the man whom she thought was “the one”. Eddie had a bit of a wild side

which excited Millicent but I knew this only meant trouble, yet I didn’t say a word as she

laughed and spoke loudly on the phone. When classes started up again, they were harder than the

first year of classes so I spent more time studying and less time on the phone which was the

opposite of my once quiet and intelligent roommate who’d been going out more and more with

Eddie instead of paying attention to her studies. There were times when Millicent wasn’t in class

and when the professor would ask where she was, I would cover for her but after so many missed

classes I stopped and let her get in trouble. I was getting tired of her not being in the dorm and

doing as she pleased when everyone else was studying like they should be so one day in

November of 1951 a few days before our Thanksgiving break Millicent left the dorm right before

class and told me she was going to spend time with Eddie and asked me to cover for her. I said I

would as I watched her run out the door, but I decided that I wouldn’t be lying for my roommate

any longer. When I got to Anatomy class I sat down in my usual spot and put my books down

beside me in the seat where Millicent would sit and when Professor Adams asked where she

was I told him that Millicent left the dorm and didn’t say where she was going.

I knew that my roommate would get in trouble, but I didn’t know how much until the

following day when she left the dorm mid- morning and came back in tears. Millicent told me

that her grades were not very good and if she didn’t bring them up, she wouldn’t be able to

continue her studies at Harvard and would be withdrawn. I told Millicent that I could help her

study so she could bring her grades up and if she needed to borrow my notes, she could but

nothing I said helped. She cried for most of the day and when she finally did stop crying

Millicent told me that she was pregnant but didn’t know how far a long she was. I wasn’t

surprised by the news but I was jealous because I would probably never be able to have children

but I wasn’t going to stop trying or let anything stop me from having the family I wanted.

Millicent asked me if I would go with her to the doctor’s office when she made the appointment

and I told her that I would, and this made her calm down more. For the rest of the day Millicent

picked apart her relationship with Eddie and what she liked and didn’t like about him. In my,

opinion it was too late to dislike Eddie or anything about him. A life had been created and

already had a beating heart and I couldn’t imagine Millicent not wanting her child.

I asked Millicent if she told Eddie yet and she told me she didn’t know how she was going to

tell him and the crying started all over again. Millicent was expected to graduate from Harvard

and become a doctor and Eddie who also went to college but not an ivy league one was expected

to take over the family business which was Whitmore’s a popular grocery store in

Massachusetts. Millicent and Eddie lived two totally different lives, one was a life of privilege

and one was a life of hard work where nothing would be handed to you. I knew what it was

like when certain things were expected of you so I understood why Millicent would have such a

hard time telling Eddie that she was pregnant. She was expected to be the perfect daughter which

was what was expected of me so Millicent getting herself pregnant was equal to letting her

parents down. The day before we were due to leave for Thanksgiving break was when

Millicent’s doctor’s appointment was and as much as I dreaded it, I forced myself to go and tried

not to think about the time when I went to my gynecologist and was told that I couldn’t have

children. Millicent was lucky and I wanted to tell her how lucky she was, but I knew it wasn’t

the right time and what seemed like the end of the world at the time would only turn into a

tragedy that no one saw coming.

When we arrived at Dr. Green’s office on Pine Street in downtown Boston, Millicent was

more nervous than I had ever seen her. She didn’t want to get out of the taxi, so I had to

practically pull her out of it and drag her inside the office where I made sure she sat next to me

in case she tried to run. When Millicent was called back, I went with her into the exam room and

said I was her cousin so I could stay with her when she was told how far a long, she was. There

was nothing but silence between us but I knew what Millicent was thinking and how scared she

was. I wanted to tell her that everything was going to be okay, but I wasn’t so sure that

everything would be okay since a young woman becoming pregnant before being married was

something that was frowned upon and in Millicent’s case nothing short of perfection was

expected. When Dr. Green entered the exam room I sat off to the side and let him examine

Millicent and when he told her that she was approximately 12 weeks along Millicent started

crying and I rushed over to her and tried to calm her.

Dr. Green did not say much more after his examination and once he left the room, I helped

Millicent who was sobbing uncontrollably get dressed. I didn’t know what to say to get her to

stop crying so I said nothing and waited for her to calm down on her own. A half an hour taxi

ride and two phone calls later Millicent said her first words to me which were thank you.

She thanked me for going with her to the doctor and she thanked me for letting her cry which the

latter I thought was funny to thank me for because there was nothing, I could do to get her to

stop crying. Millicent had told her brother and her aunt that she was pregnant and asked me

how I thought she should tell Eddie the news. Since she was going into her second trimester

I told Millicent the sooner Eddie knew the better and the hardest part would be out of the way

and both of them could focus on what they were going to do next. When I left Harvard for

Thanksgiving break the only thing on my mind was Millicent and I hoped that everything would

turn out okay for her. As much as she annoyed me, I didn’t want anything bad to happen to her

so, in a way I guess she’d grown on me and as much as I didn’t want to admit it, I liked having

her around.

When I got home my mother was the first one to come out to me saying that she’d invited

Wayne to dinner so she could see me for a few days before I went back to Harvard. I loved

my mother but I loved being alone with Wayne and how he made me feel but I knew I

couldn’t get away with not spending Thanksgiving with my family since I’d already spent the

summer away from them and I loved every second of it. The day before Thanksgiving was a

busy one and I spent most of it in the kitchen preparing dinner and desert or running to and from

the grocery store buying things my mother had forgotten to buy. Besides Wayne, my brother and

his wife had been invited to dinner and I was surprised by this. My mother said that she had to

beg my father so she could invite Willie and Catherine to dinner since my father had refused

to see my brother ever since he decided to go his own way. By the time everything was ready

for Thanksgiving dinner, I was too exhausted to do anything else but snuggle on the couch and

watch whatever my father was watching which was usually the news. Wayne came to visit me

later-on, in the evening and as much as I was tempted to leave my house and spend some time

with him I knew it wouldn’t be right of me to do so. I told Wayne that I had to stay in for the

night and that I would see him when he came to dinner the next day and after kissing him good

night I went upstairs to my room and got ready for bed.

As I was lying in bed I started to think about Millicent once more. Is she okay? Did she tell

Eddie about the baby? Do her parents know? Did she do something stupid? These were the

things I was wondering as I drifted off to sleep. The last thing I remembered thinking before I

fell asleep was that I should’ve gotten her number so I could call her and check on her to make

sure, she didn’t do anything stupid, but I’d forgotten to ask. In the morning when I woke, I had

breakfast with my mother and then at 10:00 a.m. we started cooking for dinner that evening with

only a few breaks in between to get changed and set the table before Wayne, my brother and his

wife arrived. I was relieved when the six of us sat down to eat because I didn’t think I could

stand much longer after being on my feet all morning but it was all worth it when Wayne smiled

at me and said that dinner looked wonderful. I remember thinking that there was more than one

way that I could please Wayne and I was about to speak my mind, but I was interrupted by

Willie who claimed to have good news to share with the family. I put all thoughts of love out of

my head and gave my full attention to my brother who was smiling and holding Catherine’s hand

and suddenly I knew the news he was about to share. I knew my mother was going to be

overjoyed while my father would be upset by the news and probably leave the table.

When Willie did finally share the news about Catherine being pregnant everything happened

as I expected. My mother was hugging Willie and Catherine and my father got up and left the

table puffing angrily on his cigar. My father had expected so much from Willie and Willie was

content living a simple life and if he was happy then nothing else should matter but that’s not

how it worked in the Epstein family, and I was determined not to be the next disappointment.

After Wayne and I had some pie, I asked my mother if I could spend the rest of the evening with

Wayne and her fast reply told me that she didn’t really mind at all. She was too busy thinking

about her grandchild to care where I was going so as soon as my mother said I could spend the

evening with Wayne I left my house as quickly as I could. Wayne and I spent the rest of the

evening making out in front of the fireplace. I could tell that Wayne wanted me and was growing

impatient but I wanted him more than he knew. I was on fire and with every kiss and stroke of

my thigh I found it harder to resist temptation, so I sat up and told Wayne that we needed to slow

down and as always, he agreed. We sat together in silence, and I guess Wayne could tell I wasn’t

myself so when he asked me what was on my mind, I was quick to tell him about Millicent and

her problem.

I hoped that Millicent was okay and when it was time to go back to Harvard, I was packed

and ready to go hours before Willie arrived. The baby was the only thing Willie and I talked

about the entire ride back to college and I hoped that when I saw Millicent again, she would have

good news to share. When I got back to college, I said goodbye to Willie and walked quickly to

my dorm where I found Millicent once more on the phone but in good spirits which was a good

sign. When she got off the phone, she told me that she and Eddie were going to get a place close

to Harvard so she could keep on going to school and they could be on their own. When Millicent

told me all of their plans I felt as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders and I could breathe

once more. I’d been so worried about her after seeing the way she’d acted when the doctor told

her she was three months pregnant I thought she would try something stupid but everything

had worked out or at least I thought it had. Millicent and Eddie talked every day, for the next

month about the baby and when they were going to look at apartments and then the phone calls

became less and Millicent grew sadder which each day that passed. I made sure she kept up

with her studies and did well in class even though all she could think about was Eddie and if he

still loved her. Everything was dependent upon Eddie and if he and Millicent got married

everything would turn out fine. If they didn’t get married Millicent would have to give up her

baby and act as if nothing had ever happened while trying to finish school which is something

I didn’t think anyone could do not even myself.

I didn’t know what to say to make her feel better but the one thing I did do before we left

for Winter break was get Millicent’s number so I could check on her. I’d been sick with worry

the last time we went on break I didn’t think I could bear to worry a second time. Millicent gave

me her number just as she was leaving the dorm and as I walked out to meet Willie a wave of

sadness come over me. I hoped that Eddie would be in touch with Millicent so they could find

a home and be together for their child’s sake but for some reason I didn’t think that was going

to happen. Just as my mother had, had nightmares about me being on the run and hurting

everyone I loved I had a strong feeling that nothing was going to turn out well for my roommate.

Winter break was the first break I’d wanted to be done and over with so I could get back to

my dorm and be by Millicent’s side since no one else seemed to be helping her and making sure

she was okay. Winter break did not fly by as I had hoped and while I enjoyed spending time with

my family and Wayne I couldn’t get rid of the feeling of dread and whenever I felt this way I

phoned Millicent. When I learned that everything was going well, and Eddie had been in touch

I relaxed a little but not completely because that feeling of dread was still with me.

On Christmas morning while I was exchanging gifts with family Millicent phoned me and

said that Eddie had proposed to her but even this news didn’t help because the feeling of dread

never went away. There was something about Eddie that I didn’t like, and I couldn’t put my,

finger on it and this bothered me. I’d seen him maybe once or twice and he never seemed happy

to see Millicent who never stopped talking about him and this just seemed wrong to me in every

way. Eddie meant the world to Millicent, and he just didn’t seem like he felt the same way about

her no matter how happy he acted. It all seemed like he was putting on a show and he had

something else planned that Millicent didn’t know about and if this was true this was the dread

I’d been feeling. When I went to spend time with Wayne after exchanging gifts with family I

stopped thinking about Millicent and focused on what I thought was going to be a proposal

since Wayne and I had been dating and serious for a while what else could his Christmas gift

to me be? When he sat down next to me on the sofa and pulled out a small crème colored box my

heart began to beat quickly but my happiness soon faded when I opened the box and saw a pair

of emerald earrings with a diamond accent.

I thanked Wayne even though earrings weren’t what I’d wanted and then after only two hours

I decided to go home. He asked me what was wrong, and I told Wayne that I needed to check on

Millicent when I was really going home to cry. I spent the rest of the evening in my bedroom

crying and mad that Millicent had gotten her wish when I hadn’t. I knew being mad at her was

wrong but I’d been the perfect daughter for so long why couldn’t something good happen to me?

Why didn’t Wayne ask me to marry him yet? These were the things that ran through my mind as

I sobbed and when my mother came in to check on me, I told her I wanted to be alone so she

left my room and did not return until morning to let me know breakfast was ready. I didn’t

bother trying to look presentable and when I sat down at the table my father asked me why I

had been crying. My mother told him that she figured it was about Wayne and her response

made me start crying again but I was able to have breakfast with my family and then return to

my bedroom where I remained for the next few days until Wayne came looking for me on New

Year’s Eve. My mother had let him in seeing how sad he looked and told him that I hadn’t come

out of my room since Christmas and she was worried about me because I’d been crying nonstop.

I told Wayne that I was mad at him because I was hoping that he would’ve asked me to marry

him on Christmas instead of buying me earrings and he laughed at me. He’d spent quite some

time trying to find the perfect gift for me and when he saw the earrings Wayne had a feeling that

I would love them but if I wasn’t planning on wearing them then he’d return them. I told Wayne

that I did love the earrings, but I wanted something more because I didn’t know how much

longer I could go on being the perfect daughter and girlfriend before my desires took over and

I’d eventually wind up like Millicent and this was something I knew I wasn’t strong enough to

get through. Wayne said that he had plans and he would things in his own time, but I didn’t have

to worry about him not loving me or us not being together because he loved me, and we would

be together one day. When I left home a week later and headed back to college, I wasn’t feeling

any better and when I got to my dorm, I didn’t even have any of the cake that Millicent had

brought back with her from the party her mother had thrown for her and Eddie after they’d

gotten engaged. Millicent didn’t have a ring yet, but Eddie promised to work hard and have her

one by Valentine’s Day.

I soon got over Wayne not proposing to me and realized I was being selfish, but I could never

get rid of the feeling of dread. Millicent got her daily phone calls but a week after we returned to

the dorm the phone calls stopped and that’s when worry set in. When I went to class and didn’t

find Millicent when I came back to the dorm room I worried. When she was gone all day I

worried. I worried so much January passed by, and I didn’t even notice that Valentine’s Day was

right around the corner which had me hoping that Wayne would propose to me on that day.

Valentine’s Day would be a day that I would never forget and one that I would also regret

because if I had stayed with Millicent things wouldn’t have happened the way they happened.

Millicent told me she was going to spend Valentine’s Day with Eddie, so I started to get ready

for my day with Wayne who’d called the night before and said he was already in the area and

wanted to take me out for dinner. Millicent left the dorm at 3:00 p.m. and I left around 5:00

for my dinner with Wayne at Eugene’s a new restaurant in Boston that he wanted to go to.

I had the feeling of dread during dinner, and I knew I had to do something because I wasn’t

going to let it ruin my day, so I excused myself and went right to the ladies, room and washed

my face with cold water. After I was feeling better, I returned to our table where there was now

a bottle of wine and candles in the center of the table as well as roses and the excitement that I’d

felt at Christmas time finally returned.

When I sat down at the table Wayne asked me if I was okay and I said I was fine and quickly

put all bad thoughts about Millicent out of my mind. When the moment I’d been waiting for

finally happened I couldn’t have been happier, but my happiness would soon be ruined the

moment I returned to my dorm room. I stared at the ring on my finger for most of the night

and when it came time for Wayne to take me back to my dorm, I didn’t want to go but I had an

early class the next morning so I knew I needed to get my rest. When Wayne dropped me off

at the dorm all I saw was an ambulance and students everywhere, so I asked what was going

on and someone said that they’d heard a gunshot, and another said a student had gotten shot

so, I walked quickly to my dorm room that was surrounded by police who were trying to keep

students back from the doorway. When I was able to see into my dorm room, I wished I’d never

even gone out to dinner with Wayne. There was blood everywhere and Millicent was in her

chair with half her face missing and her left eye was on her cheek, and I couldn’t believe what I

was seeing. It was obvious to me that I wouldn’t be able to stay in my dorm or get any of my,

things anytime soon so I had to go to the main office and see if they could place me in

another dorm room and I cried as I waited for someone to help me. The incident that took place

must have been the dread I’d been feeling during dinner with Wayne, and I figured I would

probably never know what made Millicent kill herself in such a way that it would probably

cause nightmares in the years to come.

As soon as I was assigned a new dorm I went straight there and called Wayne then I

called my mother and asked her to send me some of my things from home since it would be

a few days before I could go back to my old dorm and get the rest of my stuff. Both my,

mother and Wayne were shocked by the news but not as shocked as I was and when I got

off the phone Cynthia Hines my roommate said that Cheryl Billingsworth was the girl who

found Millicent. Cheryl had been on her way to class when she heard the gun shot so she

rushed to the room and after seeing the gruesome scene she called for help. I wondered how

Millicent got a hold of a gun and what made her take her life. In the days that followed

Millicent’s death I learned that she and Eddie had broken up because he’d been seeing someone

else while Millicent wasn’t around. I came home from classes late one afternoon in late

February and found a letter under my dorm room door with my name on it. I immediately

recognized Millicent’s handwriting and as I read the letter, I started to regret not staying in

the dorm on Valentine’s Day.

Dear Violet,

I just learned today that Eddie has been seeing someone else when I went to see him

for dinner tonight. Her name is Elena, and she goes to the same college he does, and they have

the same English class as well. They’ve been seeing each other for quite some time ad Eddie

thinks that it would be best if we no longer see one another. I don’t understand why he would

ask me to marry him and make all those plans if he was seeing some other girl. Why string me

along if we weren’t going anywhere? I came back an hour after I left and spend most of the

afternoon crying because I thought Eddie wanted me and our baby, but he lied to me. I’m

six months along and I can’t keep this baby unless I’m married but that’s not going to happen.

I took Eddie’s gun from the glove compartment in his car, and I don’t know what I’m going

to do with it yet as I’m still making a list of pros and cons about my life right now, but I must

say the cons are more than the pros. If you’re reading this letter, then I’m probably already

dead and you’ll no longer have to worry about me like I know you do. You’ve been a good

friend to me but it’s time for me to go since I don’t have a reason to stick around and no one

will miss me. Take care of yourself Violet and make sure you finish school and if you can,

please pack up my things and send them back to my family so nothing gets thrown away.

Your friend,

Millicent

I found myself unable to breathe after reading the letter and I needed to get some air but I

knew I had to pack up Millicent’s things and make sure they got back to her parents it was the

least I could do. When I arrived at my old dorm room it looked as if nothing bad had happened

there but I felt nothing but sadness as I packed up what I could of Millicent’s things so I

could send them back to her family. Millicent hadn’t left much behind except some clothing,

shoes, books and jewelry so I packed everything up neatly in a cardboard box and took them

back with me to my dorm room. Later, that evening I wondered if Millicent had written

a letter to her parents and how her letter addressed to me found its way to me and it was then

that I realized the letter had been read by the police before being slid under my dorm room door.

I was angry with Eddie for hurting Millicent and I wondered if he even cared that she was gone

but I had a feeling he probably didn’t care. The following day after class I mailed Millicent’s

things back to her family and I put the letter she’d addressed to me in the box with her things

hoping it would help her parents understand what she was feeling before she took her life.

On March 21st, 1952, I left Harvard to start my Spring break and after I put my things in the

trunk of my brother’s car and sat down in the passenger’s seat he told me that my father had a

surprise for me when I got home. I hoped it was a good surprise because I wasn’t in the mood for

anything but good things since Millicent had killed herself. Willie had heard the news from my,

mother who told him to not mention my roommate’s death since I’d been so upset which didn’t

make too much sense to me but my mother didn’t always make sense to me, so I left her

comment alone. When I got home my parents took me out to the garage and gave me my surprise

which was a teal blue 1952 Chevrolet Bel Air, and I was unable to contain my happiness. I was

jumping, shrieking and thanking my parents all at the same time and when my father handed me

the keys he told me I had to follow Willie back to Harvard one time before I could drive back

and forth on my own and I agreed. My car was a symbol of freedom. I could come and go as I

pleased but my coming and going had yet to begin but would start in the years to come. My

thirst for freedom would start with marriage troubles and end with me living as if I no longer

existed.

I went to visit Wayne later that evening and he asked me if I liked my car. He told me he went

with my parents when they bought it and they told him not to tell me about it because they

wanted it to be a surprise since I’d been through a lot already. Wayne and I spent the rest of the

evening planning our wedding and we decided on June 21st, 1954, as the date we would be

married. The years seemed to fly by as I was dress shopping and planning the guest list and

what the cake would look like and soon I found myself buying a dress and getting it hemmed

and taken in to fit me. Wayne and I decided to have our wedding in Massachusetts at St.

Stephens Catholic Church and everyone from both sides of our families were invited and almost

all of them showed up. My bridesmaids were my cousins Maria, Charlotte and Sylvia and

Wayne’s cousin Andrew was his best man. Right before I was supposed to walk down the aisle

My mother came in to see me and asked if I was okay and I told her that I was fine but that was

a lie. I was nervous about my wedding night, and I was nervous that Wayne would soon learn

that I was unable to have children even though I would do my best to make as many excuses as

possible. My mother told me not to worry about anything and just think about the present before

she left and as I was walking down the aisle with my father at my side, I hoped that I would not

disappoint Wayne and the curse that had been put on me when I was a teenager would be broken.

After we were married Wayne and I danced the night away at Brigitte’s a fancy restaurant in

town where our wedding reception was held. After the reception Wayne and I took the ferry to

Martha’s Vineyard for our honeymoon and when we got to our beach house that Wayne had

rented for the summer I became more nervous. Up until we were married all we’d ever done was

make out and stop when it got to be too much for the both of us. My oldest cousin Sylvia who

was also married with three children told me that on her wedding night she screamed because it

hurt so much and no one had told her what to expect so she figured she would let me know. I

hadn’t given my wedding night much thought until Sylvia decided to enlighten me and made

me wish she hadn’t because she made it seem like the worst thing in the world. Wayne and I

went right upstairs to the bedroom and unpacked our things and as I put my things in the dresser

drawers I came across a sheer nightie my cousin Charlotte had given me, and my hands began

to shake. I wasn’t ready for anything let alone a hot night in bed with Wayne and I guess he

could see that I was nervous because instead of going to sleep Wayne said he would make us

something to eat and went downstairs to the kitchen. After he left the bedroom, I let out a sigh of

relief because it seemed as if Wayne had wanted to get right down to it. As we danced the night

away Wayne held me close and kissed me every chance he got, and I know he was trying to help

me relax but nothing he did helped.

I put on a nightgown and fixed up my hair before I went downstairs to the kitchen to join

Wayne who was making scrambled eggs. Shortly after I sat down at the kitchen table Wayne

brought me a plate, served me, and put a plate down for himself and after her served himself

Wayne sat down and started eating. Our silence soon turned into a conversation that lasted well

into the early morning. We talked about anything and everything and at around 3:00 a.m. the

both of us went upstairs to bed and as soon as we were both under the covers the silence returned

and we both stared at one another. Wayne was the one to make the first move and when he did

he kissed me and soon he was on top of me trying to get my nightgown off. He was moving so

fast and I guess that was to be expected since he’d been waiting so long for me that he didn’t

want to wait any longer. When I took off my nightgown Wayne was all over me kissing and

touching every part, he could get his hands on and when I felt his hardness press against me I

became scared and nervous. I wanted to take things slow but clearly Wayne wasn’t going to

stop any time soon and by the time Wayne took his clothes off and slid my panties off I knew

there would be no going back. Wayne said that the best way to do things in the beginning was

fast since it was my first time and that’s exactly how things went that night. I was all hot and

worked up when Wayne pushed himself inside of me and when I let out a cry Wayne kissed

me and from that moment on I was a completely different person.

I was saying and doing things I’d never said or done before, and I never once stopped

moaning which seemed to excite Wayne. We spent the next two days in bed and the rest of

the week in the house making love in every part of it and Wayne’s favorite thing seemed

to be getting me in a corner and having his way even though at times he was a bit aggressive

I knew he meant no harm. Once I’d been cornered Wayne would kiss me while rubbing

Against me then he’d slowly put his hand up my skirt making sure to graze my inner thigh

so, I’d moan, and once Wayne was in me everything went from slow to fast. His thrusting was

hard and fast that the pictures often fell of the walls and my moaning was loud and sometimes

high pitched that I was sure that the neighbors or people passing by heard me because of the

looks I would sometimes get when I was outside. As much as I hoped that I would become

pregnant I told Wayne we had to do other things besides have sex our entire honeymoon and

I was glad when he agreed because I’d grown tired of being indoors all the time. I wanted to

go out and do things before I had to go back to Harvard and when I said this Wayne told me

he rented us an apartment near Harvard so we could be together while I finished school. I got

all caught up in how I would decorate our apartment and our child’s room if I had one that I

forgot about my parents. Living in Massachusetts meant that I wouldn’t be going home as often

as I’d used too, and this made me sad in a way. I was used to being home for the holidays but

now I’d be having holiday dinners in my own apartment and in a city where I didn’t know very

many people but in time I knew I would get used to it. Wayne said that I could always go home

but he wanted us to start our own lives first, but I knew no matter what I did I would always long

for home and this feeling over time would separate us but my love for Wayne would be

something I would never regret.

The summer flew by and in August of 1954 Wayne and I moved into our apartment on Spruce

Street in Boston, Massachusetts. The apartment was large and spacious with two bedrooms, a

large living room and dining room that I would decorate in the weeks to come often stopping to

call my mother and ask her opinion on what would look best or what would match with certain

patterns. I called my mother a lot in the first few months since moving away and I was surprised

since I hadn’t expected to miss her as much as I did. We were close but when I’d been living at

home I often wanted to get away from her but when I was on my own, I wanted to hear her voice

and really wished I could visit her for the holidays. My days consisted of school and afterwards I

would come home do classwork and then make dinner while I waited for Wayne to come home

from work. After we both had dinner, I would call my mother and spend an hour or two on the

phone talking about Willie’s son Jack who had just turned 2 that August and how my brother

wanted to have more kids but Catherine wanted to wait a little longer. My mother said that she

visited Willie often so she could see Jack because my father was still mad that Willie had

decided to go his own way after college.

I wanted more than anything to have good news to share with my mother and Wayne but my,

period either came and was spotty or didn’t come at all. I could tell that Wayne was getting

impatient with me even though he didn’t show it I knew he was waiting for the day that I would

tell him that I was pregnant and each night as we made love, I prayed that a miracle would

happen. By the end of my first year in med school in June of 1955 I was exhausted but glad

I’d made it through, and I knew Wayne was happy for me also, but he would be even happier if

I was pregnant. I’d never been a religious person but ever since Wayne and I were married I’d

often stop at St. Stephens Church where we’d been married and pray for the child that we both

longed for. I was lonely and I wanted to go home and see my family, but Wayne said my place

was with him and told me to get hobby so I wouldn’t feel so lonely while he was at work. He’d

started out as a loving husband and one who couldn’t keep his hands off me at first but as time

passed and I didn’t become pregnant he either stayed later at work or came home and brought

his work with him which would keep him up most of the night, so he didn’t come to bed right

away. We often had arguments over the stupidest things and one of us would wind up leaving

the house to blow off steam while the other cried and cleaned up the mess which was usually

me. Wayne never stayed away to long whenever we had an argument and when he came back

the same thing happened every time which was an apology and a quickie in bed. Wayne no

longer took his time with me in bed anymore he didn’t think there was a reason to anymore

and by December of 1955 I had made a decision to return home for Winter break so I could

clear my mind and get advice from my mother who I missed terribly.

The night before I left my apartment Wayne and I argued. He said I was giving up on us and

taking the easy way out but really, he was the one who had given up on us and on ever having a

child. I didn’t want to tell him the truth because I didn’t believe what had been told to me

when I was seventeen. I believed that things could change, and doctors could be wrong which is

why I never said a word to anyone and only my mother knew of my condition. On the morning

of December 23rd, 1955, I packed up my things as Wayne slept and after eating a quick breakfast

I got in in my car and headed home. I stopped to rest in Maryland and Virginia and spent the

night in South Carolina before arriving home on the morning of December 24th. I hadn’t told

anyone that I was coming home I just left so when my mother who was on her way into town

saw me pull up she canceled all her plans for the day just to spend time with me. I was so happy

to be home after a year of being away that my mother’s gossip didn’t bother me until she told me

that my brother and his wife were expecting again. I tried not to get upset but the mention of a

baby usually made me cry especially since that was the reason Wayne and I had grown apart and

when I told my mother this, she took me into her arms and tried to calm me. She told me that

Wayne and I would work things out in time, and I wanted to believe her but somehow, I felt that

our arguing and fighting were the beginning of the end for us, and nothing would ever be the

same again.

Wayne didn’t call me at all during the time I was away, and I didn’t expect him to but a part

of me hoped that he would call. I wanted everything to be the way it was when we first met and

when we got married but I knew that those times were gone. When the time came for me to

return home and go back to med school I didn’t want to leave but my mother told me I had to

go back to Wayne and work things out because we loved one another. I thought about what she

had said on the drive back home and I wondered if Wayne had missed me or just missed having

someone to lay next to. When I got home on New Year’s Day it was mid- morning and Wayne

was nowhere to be found. I was happy that he wasn’t home because for once I could think about

what I wanted to say so we could try and work things out instead of becoming distant and letting

things fall apart. After I unpacked my things, I cleaned up the apartment a little and decided to go

to the market and pick something up for dinner so I could have it ready before Wayne got home.

Dinners had become rushed since I started med school and Wayne worked longer hours so the

change I hoped would be a welcomed one and then afterwards maybe we could make love like

we used to and our prayers would be answered.

I spent most of New Year’s Day alone and after eating dinner by myself and watching

television by myself I decided to go to bed where I cried, until I heard the front door close and I

wiped away my tears and sat up in bed. I waited for Wayne to come to bed and when I realized

that he wasn’t coming to bed I got under the covers and drifted off to sleep and I remember

thinking before I fell asleep that maybe in the morning things would be better between Wayne

and I. When I woke up in the morning Wayne was already gone having left for work without

saying goodbye so I figured he needed more time and went about my day. When he came home

from work I had dinner ready, and we spoke a few words here and there, but I knew then that

things would never be the same between us. The days passed and Wayne and I went about our,

normal routines of him going to work and me going to Harvard and coming home later in the day

to make dinner and study. I became bitter as time passed and Wayne didn’t seem to care that we

were no longer intimate which made me angry because I wanted things to work out between us

more than anything. My mother was my comfort during the hard times, and I often called her

when I was home alone and feeling like it was the end of the world because Wayne and I were

slowly falling apart. My mother would tell me to give him time and to be patient, but I didn’t

believe her because Wayne was so distant even when we were together which upset me

because I didn’t think my marriage would end up the way it had.

One afternoon in September of 1956 when I started my second year of medical school my

mother called me and told me that my brother’s wife had just given birth to their second child

and named her Georgina. While my mother went on and on about how beautiful Georgina was

I died inside. Everyone was living life and having children while my marriage was falling apart

all because of my inability to have children and I couldn’t take it anymore. I hated the silence

and I hated being lonely and when Wayne came home that night, I told him what I was feeling

and how I wanted to try and have a baby. Wayne said nothing as I spoke and when I finished

speaking he apologized for leaving me alone and not speaking to me when I was lonely. In the

days that followed Wayne started coming home early and we had dinner together and he would

often help me study when he wasn’t working. At night we made love like we used too, and I

hoped that love would be enough to keep us together and for a while it was enough. We were

happy and all was well but as time passed and I had no news to share Wayne went back to his

old ways and I was alone once more wishing I was someone else living a different life than the

one I was living.

I got used to being alone and took up sewing and soon I was making my own clothes so I

didn’t have to buy anything. Sewing relaxed me and when I wasn’t sewing, I was studying or

talking to my mother about school and I never told her that Wayne and I were distant again.

I tried not to think about the negative things that were happening in my life and tried to focus

on the positive and one of the positive things was that I would soon be done medical school and

start my residency. Although I didn’t look forward to long hours away from home, I knew that

work would keep me from being lonely since the loneliness is what got to me the most. I was

used to Wayne taking an interest in what I was doing or what I was studying and when he

stopped caring I became lonely. I knew work and being around people would fill the void but

what I wanted most was to save my marriage and have a child, but I couldn’t do those things

on my own but Wayne was never around to hear me speak. I graduated from med school in

June of 1958 and that same year Wayne told me he was going to visit his parents for the

Summer because he needed time to himself so he could think. I didn’t try to stop him and as

Wayne drove away my hopes and dreams went with him. He was everything to me and I didn’t

know if I could ever be without him but in time I would learn to be on my own and come to

enjoy it.

With Wayne gone, I started my residency at Mass General Hospital and when I wasn’t

working I was reading nonstop. I figured whatever will be, will be so I should stop thinking

about what I didn’t have and focus on becoming a doctor which was something I had forgotten in

a way because I’d been to busy being a wife with her mind set on having a child thinking that

would be the only thing to bring happiness but I was wrong. Being a doctor would make me

happy because that had always been my dream and on my first day of work at Mass General I

felt as if I was dreaming. I would spend the next four years as a resident under Dr. Jean Morris

and OB/GYN at Mass General watching her work with women, perform surgeries’ and deliver

baby’s which would be the hardest part of my residency. Doctor Morris was a very serious

woman and didn’t like to waste time so as soon as we met, we went right to work and as we

worked she asked me about myself and why I wanted to be an OB/GYN. I told Dr. Morris that

it had always been my dream to become a doctor so I can help people, but it was obvious that

Dr. Morris had heard the same answer before because she did not say anything to me after that.

At 5:00 p.m. I met with Josephine Muller a second- year resident at Mass General who would

be supervising me. I would oversee OB Triage, Postpartum unit and any spontaneous vaginal

deliveries and I was glad that I would have someone with me most of the time because I wasn’t

ready to be on my own just yet. My weekday night call began at 5:30 and ended at 7 a.m. with

Saturday being my only day off and work was welcomed because I’d grown tired of sitting at

home feeling sorry for myself. My only concern was Wayne and how he would deal with the

change once he returned home from his parent’s home at the end of the summer since he’d

gotten used to having me home when he got home. I knew he wouldn’t like it so much but

he would have to deal with it since I’d done the same when he worked long nights and left me

by myself so in a way leaving him alone would be my revenge. When Wayne did return in

August of 1958 I was just coming home from my shift, and he looked surprised. He asked me

Where I’d been and I told him, I’d started my residency right after he’d left to spend the summer

with his parents instead of trying to make things work between us. I could tell he’d been hurt

by my words but I didn’t care since he hadn’t thought of me and how I felt before he left like

the coward that he was. My coming and going in the days to come seemed to bother Wayne

at first and I was glad because I wanted him to feel how I had felt when he left me but after a

while we were two people who were both coming and going not caring about one another

which would lead to our marriage falling apart in the end only I would be the one to blame.

As the years passed, I became more confident in myself and my ability to become a great

doctor and by the end of my third- year residency in June of 1961 I was positive that I wanted

to become an OB/GYN. Wayne hadn’t been home in a while so I had no one to celebrate my,

achievements with and at times I was sad, but I didn’t let my sadness bring me down because I

knew I was on my way to doing great things. One night in December of 1961 as I was getting

ready to go to work Wayne asked me if I could stay home for the night so we could talk and

spend some time together. I wanted to talk to him and for the longest time I’d wanted to spend

time with him but I also had to work and when I told him this Wayne became angry and started

throwing things. I tried to leave the house, but he grabbed my arm and pulled me to the bedroom

where I was thrown down on the bed and Wayne forced himself on me. Wayne was anything but

gentle and with every violent thrust he moaned, and I cried and after he was done, I got dressed

and went to work. I wanted to be as far away as possible from Wayne because I didn’t

understand how someone I loved and who had promised to love me could hurt me and for the

rest of that night I wondered why Wayne had done what he did. I wanted more than anything

to talk to my mother but I knew I couldn’t tell her what happened for fear of my father finding

out and then it would be the end of Wayne. When I got home in the morning Wayne was not

home and for this I was, thankful because I could talk to my mother without having to worry

about anything. I told her that we were still having problems and she told me to keep trying to

work things out and all I could remember thinking was if only she knew what was really going

on. “*Tell him the truth”* my mother said even though she and I both knew that the truth was not

an easy thing.

After weeks of debating on whether I should tell Wayne about my condition I decided

that the truth was the only thing that would make him understand but I changed my, mind

in late February of 1962 but not because I was afraid but because I found out that I was

pregnant. I’d gone to see my Gynecologist for my annual exam, and it was at this time that she

informed that I was pregnant, and I was surprised but then when I thought about how I’d

conceived I became sad. My gynecologist did a blood test to confirm my pregnancy and called

me at home a few days later to let me know my results were positive and I was approximately

seven weeks along. Wayne who was home for the day had overheard some of my conversation

and asked me what my gynecologist wanted and if everything was okay. I told him everything

was fine and I didn’t want to tell him that I was pregnant, but he had the right to know since he

was the father and had waited so long for a child. When I told Wayne the news there was nothing

but silence between us and this is when I thought of how I would tell my mother the news I knew

she’d been waiting to hear from me since Willie already had two children of his own possibly

another on the way for all I knew since I hadn’t spoken to my mother in a while.

Wayne asked me how far a long I was and once I told him he became happy, and we were

happy for a little while. On the days when I wasn’t working which was usually only Saturday

we decorated the baby’s room and Wayne would talk about how he wanted a boy but a girl

would be fine to as long as she looked like me. I’d been so busy working that I hadn’t paid

attention to the warning signs of a miscarriage which were loss of morning sickness, cramping,

painful contractions and bleeding. One evening in mid- March while I was at work, I started

experiencing even stronger and more painful contractions than I had before so I rushed to the

bathroom and when I sat down on the toilet and looked at my heavily blood - stained underwear

I knew I had miscarried and started to cry. I wanted to go home but I couldn’t face Wayne

because I knew he would no longer be happy and would go back to being miserable and never

around so I decided to wipe my tears and finish my shift. By the time my shift was over I

was exhausted and all I did when I got home was sleep until I had to get back up again and

return to work again. I kept my miscarriage a secret for a little while until I no longer could and

in April of 1962 I told Wayne that I was no longer pregnant, and we went back to our previous

life of the both of us coming and going and only one of us caring while the other had stopped

caring. By the end of my residency in June of 1962, I’d had it with Boston and wanted to move

back to Alabama and after I passed my specialty board examination Wayne agreed on moving

back to Alabama but on one condition which was that we wouldn’t live next door to my,

parents.

We bought a home not far from Macon General Hospital where I would be working and I

could visit my parents when I wanted to. I was happy about our new start, and I was positive that

it wouldn’t be long before good things started happening for us, but Wayne did not feel the same

way. He’d been waiting for 8 years for a child of his own and in the beginning, he was excited to

start a family but over the years he slowly lost hope and become more involved in his work than

he was at home while I just became bitter and sick of the negativity. For some reason though I

couldn’t stop thinking that something would come out of us moving back to Macon I just didn’t

know at the time that moving back home was the beginning of something terrible and would

take me across the country and send me into hiding or on the run for a very long time. Shortly

after moving into our new home, I started my job at Macon General and Wayne went back to

his old job at Smith & Associates who were pleased to have him back in their office. I worked

at Macon General whenever there was a surgery or women having children and at Macon

Women’s Health Group when I wasn’t performing surgeries or delivering children. My days

were long and Wayne was often home before I was and usually had dinner ready so we could

eat together when I got home. Everything seemed fine for a while but in December of 1962

Wayne became a completely different person who was no longer home when I got home and

dinner was never ready. Something felt off but I couldn’t figure out what it was, so I didn’t

say anything. I decided to wait and watch the way Wayne acted to see if I could pick up on

any clues so I could figure out what was going on and in February of 1963 I got my first clue.

I’d come home early so I could spend Valentine’s Day with Wayne and prepared dinner

for us as well as dessert and had just finished setting the table when I heard him pull up so

I quickly rushed to the door and opened it. There was a woman in the front seat with him who

turned away when she saw me looking at her and when Wayne saw that I was upset he told me

that Janice was a new associate, and they were meeting up with his other colleagues at Sonny’s

Italian Restaurant to celebrate. This all sounded fishy to me but there was nothing I could do

so, after Wayne left, I put the dinner I had made away and called my mother to see what she

thought of what was going on. I got the “*Wayne loves you”* speech and he wasn’t doing anything

wrong but I knew he was up to no good with Janice. Janice had fiery red hair which I’m sure

matched her personality and Wayne seemed happy sitting to her which was something I observed

as I watched them drive away. I tried to put it all out of my mind and when Wayne came home

later that evening I didn’t say anything to him and when he started talking about his evening I

listened knowing that something was going on and it was only a matter of time before I found

out.

By the time my brother’s wife had her third child in May of 1963 I’d given up on ever having

a child of my own. I wasn’t Catherine’s doctor, but I’d checked up on her once or twice after

she’d been admitted and it wasn’t long before her son was born, and I was feeling empty.

Catherine and Willie named their son Charles, and I could tell that they were both over the

moon but their two other children Jack and Georgina did not want to be in the hospital.

I congratulated my brother and Catherine before I went back to work and for the rest of that night

I was sad but not because my brother and his wife had another child but because I wanted to

keep trying to have a child and my husband didn’t take any interest in me. Since Janice started

working for Smith & Associates, Wayne worked later than usual and whenever he came home

he always had the same excuse which was he’d been helping Janice get things together and

he was sorry he wasn’t home sooner. I knew he wasn’t sorry and that he preferred to be with

Janice instead of me but I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to start another argument.

Our arguments were loud and angry and often ended with one of us crying which was usually

me and it never seemed to bother Wayne. The best thing for me to do was wait and so I did

just that. Day after day, week after week, month after month I waited to see when he would

make that mistake that would cost him dearly, but that day never came and soon the years

flew by along with our tenth wedding anniversary but Wayne never made one mistake. By the

time I turned thirty-two in the Spring of 1964 I knew it was time that Wayne and I went our

separate ways but I didn’t know how to bring up the subject because whenever I thought about

separation I started to cry.

I loved Wayne more than anything and I tried for so long to have a family and work things

out but I couldn’t do it anymore. I didn’t want to be alone anymore, and I didn’t want to live

with someone who lied to me night after night about what he was doing and where he had been.

As time went on, I thought about how I would pick up and leave and where I would go and my,

mind was set on California which put me far enough away from my miserable life and the

husband I had disappointed, one who was too much of a coward to face me and tell me that he

was seeing someone else. With each day that passed I thought of what I would pack and what

I would say in my goodbye letter if I left one the only thing, I hadn’t figured out is when I would

leave but little did I know was that day was just around the corner by June of 1967. Wayne and I

had done enough coming and going and his constant lies made me sick and by that time I was

positive he was lying because whenever I did the laundry his clothes smelled of Janice as if

whenever they saw one another, she threw herself on him. I kept what I felt to myself because I

knew I would be leaving soon and just the thought of starting a new life on my own excited me.

I wanted to be rid of Wayne and I didn’t plan on ever falling in love again even though I knew

I couldn’t control those feelings I would certainly try. I’d loved with all of my heart and what

good did that do me? I’d been loved back for a short time only to be tossed aside for the love

of ones, job then another woman years later after I failed to have a child. I didn’t want to be

angry anymore and I knew that I wouldn’t be once I left Macon and my old life behind.

On the morning of July 7th, 1967, I got up and got ready for work like I always did but this

morning was unlike any other morning for it would be the morning that my life would change

forever and I would leave Macon without notice never to return. After Wayne left for work I

did the same only I took the longer route so I could think more about which day I would leave

but my thoughts were interrupted when I spotted a young girl who was pregnant walking slowly

on the side of the road. I rolled down my window and asked if she needed a ride and she said,

yes, because she thought her baby was coming and asked me if I could take her to the hospital.

Something in me snapped then and I realized that the young girl sitting beside me was my only

chance at ever having a baby and I couldn’t let her get away. Within minutes of getting into my,

car Maggie’s water broke, and I told her that there was no time to get to the hospital because her

baby was coming fast, and she believed me. I told Maggie that I was an OB/GYN and had

brought many children into the world as I pulled over into a field where her life would soon end

and my new one would begin.

I helped Maggie lay down in the backseat and tried to keep her calm while I checked to see

how far along she was. The next four hours was full of screams for Paul who I assumed was

Maggie’s boyfriend and when the baby finally came, I quickly wrapped her in a blanket, made

sure, she was okay then set her down in the front seat. Maggie asked me if she could hold her

baby but I told her I had to make sure everything was okay with her first and then she could

hold her, which was another lie, but I didn’t care. Why should this stupid teenager have a baby

when she couldn’t, even provide for her and give her a good home? What made her so special?

I was the one with the career and a nice home clearly, I was the one who could provide more.

These were the questions I asked myself as I thought about how I would steal Maggie’s

child and raise her as my own and when the idea of killing her came to me I knew there was

no going back. When Maggie asked to hold her baby for the fourth time in about ten minutes

I became aggravated with her, so I got on top of her in the back seat, wrapped my hands around

her neck and strangled her. Maggie fought back but not much because she was to weak from

just giving birth and when she was finally dead, I pulled her body out of my car and laid her

down in the field where she would be found when I was long gone. I cleaned up the back seat

of my car as best as I could and then I drove home and grabbed whatever I could for my long

journey to California then I left Wayne and all I had ever known for good. I had started out

as a young girl full of promise one who wanted her marriage to work out and one who wanted

to have children but I hadn’t been able too, so I decided to take matters into my own hands. What

I did would forever haunt me and like my mother had predicted I would always be on the run

from my past and from what the future held for me.

~ Opal ~

My mother told me that she loved me before I even came into this world. I was her everything

and after I was born, I was the only one she ever loved. She named me Opal which meant

precious stone and I had always felt loved growing up and my mother always made sure I had

everything I needed but I always wondered about my father and why he wasn’t around. My

mother told me my father didn’t want me and had cheated on her while they were married and

it was then that she vowed never to love another man ever again. My mother cried when she told

me about my father and I didn’t like seeing her this way, so I never asked about my father ever

again, after that. I figured I had a great life and my mother had worked hard to give me that life

so, I shouldn’t ask her things that made her sad and I shouldn’t worry about a man that didn’t

want me to begin with. My mother was a great person and a wonderful doctor that helped women

every day, and brought children into the world and I wanted to be just like her, but it wasn’t until

June of 1982 when I was fourteen years old that I would start to learn that my mother wasn’t

who she said she was, and my real family was in Alabama and thought I’d been dead for the,

passed fourteen years.

We lived in Glen Park in a Queen Anne style two story home on Magnolia Street in San

Francisco and my mother was, the Chief OB/GYN at Saint Francis Hospital. I was a ninth

grader at St. Andrews Catholic School which was a short distance from my house so instead

of taking the bus to school every day I walked with my best friend Stella, and everything seemed

perfect until one rainy day in late June of 1982. I’d just come home from what was my last day

of school to an empty house and a note from my mother on the kitchen table which read

*Working late tonight. There’s pizza in the fridge see you later!* When I was little my mother

worked a lot and had hired a nanny to take care of me on the nights when she worked late.

She tried to come home before I was asleep so she could read me a story and tuck me in bed

but most of the time the nanny was the one reading me the story and putting me to bed. As I

got older I learned how important my mother’s job was and tried not to get so upset when I

was alone most of the time but it was still hard. I didn’t like eating alone and I missed being able

to tell her about my day at school but I soon forgot about being lonely when I went into my,

mother’s study for a book to read and came across some old newspaper articles and notes she’d

left out on her desk.

One of the articles read NO LEADS IN HAINES MURDER and another one read BABY

PRESUMED DEAD. My mother watched the news closely when I was growing up and it was

as if she’d done something wrong and wanted to make sure she’d never get caught. As the years

passed she stopped paying attention to the news and settled into her life and job as if she’d

breathed a sigh of relief but I always wondered why she’d paid such close attention to the news

and as I read the articles I wondered if she’d had anything to do with Maggie Haines’s murder.

Why did she cut the articles? Why did she pay such close attention to the news when I was a

child? Those were the questions I’d asked myself as I stood in my mother’s study but after a

about fifteen minutes my thoughts were interrupted by the phone ringing. When I answered my,

grandmother asked me if my mother was home and I told her she was working late to which my

grandmother sighed and asked me how I was doing. I hadn’t seen my grandmother since my,

grandfather’s funeral when I was ten in 1977 and our visit was a short one because my mother

said she needed to get back to California for surgery. I never saw my grandmother or anyone

else in my family much and this made me sad because my grandmother was old and not in

good health and my mother never seemed to care that she may not be around much longer.

I told my grandmother that I was okay, but I was bored and tired of being alone night after night

and she suggested that I come and visit her for the summer so we could spend some time

together. I thought my grandmother’s idea was great and after we finished speaking on the

phone I called my mother at work and asked her if I could visit my grandmother for the summer

hoping she’d say yes. My mother agreed without any argument and maybe she should have

argued just a little because the Summer of 1982 would be when I started to question if she was

my real mother and when my life would change forever.

A few days later I was on a plane to Alabama and although I was happy that I would be

seeing my grandmother, I was nervous too and I didn’t know why. Four hours later my plane

landed at Macon International Airport where my Uncle Willie was waiting to take me to my,

grandmothers house. My uncle loved to talk, and I was glad that I’d brought my Walkman so I

could listen to Madonna instead of him as he drove to my grandmother’s house. Twenty minutes

later we pulled up in front of my mother’s childhood home and my grandmother came out to

greet us and all I can remember thinking was that she moved fast for an older woman.

Within minutes I’d been hugged, had my cheeks pinched and taken inside to my room where I

was told to unpack and then come to the kitchen for something to eat. I was staying in my,

mother’s old room and after I’d unpacked, I started to look around for any sort of diary that

would help me find out who my father was. I never asked my mother about him after she told me

that he didn’t want me but a part of me didn’t believe she was telling the truth like she was trying

to hide something from me. After searching her room and finding nothing that would help me I

decided I would ask my grandmother since she would probably be the only one to tell me about

him. When I went downstairs to the kitchen my grandmother had already served me a plate of

pancakes and sausage with a glass of orange juice and once we were both seated, I asked her

who my father was.

She asked me why I was asking her, and I told her that my mother never mentioned my father

to me other than the fact that he didn’t want me. My grandmother told me my father’s name was

Wayne Elliot and he used to be their neighbor when he and my mother first met when she was

eighteen and in her first year at Harvard. *“Your mother was crazy about Wayne,”* When my,

grandmother told me this I thought it was strange because my mother had never dated anyone

and had always said men were trouble so she didn’t bother. When I learned that my mother used

to spend all her time with my father and that they’d been so in love I asked if he lived near by

and my grandmother told me after my mother left in 1967, he moved on and remarried. A phone

call was all that my grandmother had received from my mother telling her that she was pregnant

and my father didn’t want me, so she left Alabama and was heading to California. I wondered if

my father ever thought of me so I decided that I would try to find him over the summer and

hoped that my grandmother would help me. Later that day after dinner time my mother called to

check on me and after talking to her for a few minutes I asked her what my father used to do for

work. She told me he was a Lawyer and very good at lying which upset me, but I didn’t let her

hear that I was hurt and after I hung up the phone, I asked my grandmother if she knew where

my father had moved to.

Sure, enough my grandmother knew where he’d moved to but didn’t know his address or

phone number so she couldn’t help me with that information. She told me that he used to work

for a law firm called Smith & Associates and maybe they would be able to tell me where he

moved to. I was glad that my mother hadn’t gotten too, curious about all of the questions I’d

asked or she would tell me to come back home so I wouldn’t find my father or anything else

I wasn’t supposed to find out. As I lie awake in bed that night, I wondered more about the

articles I’d seen in my mothers, study and why she had them. Could I be the missing child?

Was I my mother’s daughter? These were the questions I asked myself as I drifted off to sleep

and when I woke up in the morning, I had breakfast with my grandmother and then asked her

for the phone book. I found the number for Smith & Associates after a few minutes of searching

then I picked up the phone and dialed the number. After a few rings, a woman named Viola

answered the phone and I introduced myself as Opal Elliot and told her that I was trying to get

ahold of my father who used to work for the company and was hoping she could help me.

Viola told me to hang on for a few minutes and when she came back on the line Viola told me

that my father was now working for Wexler, Brown and Jones and that was all she could tell

me. I thanked her and after I hung up the phone, I looked for the number of the company my

father was working for and when I found it, I froze. Once I started the search for my father

there would be no turning back, and I knew I wouldn’t be able to just hang up if my father

happened to answer the phone so I needed to think of what I would say. After a few minutes

of reciting what I was going to say I took a deep breath, picked up the phone and called

Wexler, Brown and Jones.

As the phone rang my heart was beating fast in my chest and when Nadia answered the phone

I was relieved because I would have a few more minutes to think of what else I wanted to say

before my father came to the phone. I asked if Wayne Elliot was available and when Nadia asked

me who was asking I told her his daughter even though I knew I shouldn’t have. As I waited for

my father to come to the phone I became more nervous and when Nadia came back on the line

she told me my father said he didn’t have a daughter. He really doesn’t want to see me is all I

remember thinking and when I hung up the phone, I knew there was only one way to make him

listen to me. I would have to go to Mobile and face him and make him listen to me even if he

didn’t want to I only hoped my grandmother would agree to take me or else I was on my own.

Later that day while my grandmother and I were having lunch I asked her if she would take me

to Mobile to meet my father and when she agreed I was surprised. I had expected her to tell me

no and that my mother wouldn’t approve but she didn’t say any of that instead my grandmother

said she thought I should find my father and have a relationship with him, and my mother should

have encouraged that. I told my grandmother I found the address for my father’s job and that I’d

called to speak to him and he’d told the secretary that he didn’t have a daughter which made me

wonder why and I wanted to face him more than anything after that phone call. For years, my,

mother worked hard to build a life for us, and it hadn’t always been easy, but she was determined

to do better and she did. We started out living in a tiny two- bedroom, apartment and when I was

a year old we moved to our house on Magnolia Street and from there things only got better

but it still would have been nice to have a father in my life to help me he was a lawyer after all

and perfectly capable of supporting me when needed. Little did I know that after I met him I

would question everything about my life and my house on Magnolia Street would soon no longer

be home.

A week after I’d asked my grandmother to take me to see my father we were on our way and I

was glad that my grandmother wasn’t a slow driver because she didn’t have an air conditioner in

her car and July in Alabama is always hot. The ride to Mobile was four hours and seventeen

minutes and my mind raced the entire time. I thought of what I would ask and what I would say

and my anger towards my father kept me going in a way because without it I probably wouldn’t

have thought of him. When my grandmother parked outside of Wexler, Brown and Jones I

started having doubts but my grandmother told me I had the right to know my father and he

should be ashamed of himself for denying me but what the both of us did not know was that my,

mother had never told him about me. *“Go on,”* my grandmother said as I sat in the passenger

seat frozen. *“We came all this way you need to see him. He needs to know about you,”* I knew

she was right but I was scared of what I might find out. I didn’t think I could handle any more

disappointment but I mustered up enough courage to leave the car and walk into my father’s

job and ask to speak to him.

Nadia asked me who I was and when I told her that I was Wayne Elliot’s daughter she once

again, insisted that Wayne Elliot did not have a daughter. I became frustrated and demanded to

see my father which got everyone’s attention in the office and soon enough my father who’d

been working with a client came to the front desk wondering what was going on. I didn’t look

anything like my father and when he asked me what I wanted I said I wanted to speak to him

and that was the least he could do since I’d come a long way. He gave me the name of a

restaurant and its address and told me to meet him there after he got done work which gave

my grandmother and I a few hours to kill so we spent those hours talking. She told me about my,

mother and I told her about the Violet I knew and our life in California which impressed her.

At 4:30 p.m. we drove to Josette’s Diner and ordered dinner while we waited for my father

to show up and when he did, I was relieved for I thought that he would not come after the scene

I’d made earlier. He said hello to my grandmother and asked what I wanted which once again

aggravated me. *“I’m your daughter!”* I exclaimed and my grandmother shushed me while my,

father looked confused. He said that it was impossible for me to be his daughter because my,

mother and him, hadn’t been intimate since she miscarried in 1962. My mother didn’t leave a

note for Wayne so he didn’t know where she’d gone off to and he later had his marriage annulled

so, he could remarry later if he wanted to. The only person who knew where my mother was

all those years was my grandmother and I felt that she knew more than she was willing to say.

Wayne said he loved my mother, but they became two different people over the years and her

Inability to have children made things harder. It was then that I learned of my mother’s condition

and I looked to my grandmother who knew about it but never spoke of my mother’s business

because she said it only upset my mother and made things worse. My grandmother said it is

possible for a person to have children with endometriosis but it is difficult so at the time I didn’t

completely question if my mother was who she said she was I only wondered about my father

and if I would ever find him. After dinner the three of us went our separate ways and I was left

feeling emptier than I had ever felt before in my entire life. I’d hoped to find my father and

spend time with him but nothing had gone as planned and this made me sad. When my grand

mother and I got back to Macon I went upstairs to my mothers, room which was now mine and

cried. My grandmother came up to the bedroom and sat beside me and tried to make me feel

better by telling me everything was going to be okay and all I had to do was ask my mother who

my father was and she would tell me. My grandmother didn’t understand my mother the way I

did. She didn’t know that my mother was difficult at times and never spoke of her past with me

so, I doubted she would ever tell me who my father was, and I realized then if I wanted to find

him I would have to do it on my own without my mother’s help. When I stopped crying, I asked

my grandmother about Maggie Haines’s murder and I told her about the articles I’d found in my,

mother’s study which made her fall silent.

Maggie Haines’s body had been found in a field in late July of 1967 and it was determined

that she had been strangled. Whoever strangled Maggie took the time to clean her up and

whoever found her did not think she had ever been pregnant and when word got around that she

was pregnant the baby was presumed dead. No one ever thought that someone would steal a

baby after strangling Maggie and then run off and raise the child as their own but that was

something I would learn as I unraveled the truth about my mother and who I was in the years to

come. My grandmother told me she thought it was strange that Maggie had been found after my,

mother had left Alabama and she claimed she was pregnant when it was hard for her to become

pregnant she didn’t question my mother at the time. She was happy to hear the news from my,

mother and even happier when photographs would come in the mail of me during the holidays or

my, birthday. My grandmother knew my mother and Wayne were having problems, but she

didn’t know they’d stopped being intimate, so she didn’t question my existence entirely and

didn’t want to because her daughter finally had what she’d always wanted.

It was only when she saw me for the first time in person at my grandfather’s funeral did, my,

grandmother question whether I was my, mothers, child because I did not look like either of my,

parents. I’d always been tall only and I had green eyes with auburn hair and a face full of

freckles that I hated as a child but grew to love because not many of my friends had them

which made me different. After my grandmother’s admission I knew I needed to learn as much

as I could about Maggie Haines’s murder and the first place, I would go to the next day would be

the library which wasn’t far from my grandmother’s house. When I got there, I asked the lady at

the front desk where I would find information about the murder of Maggie Haines and she

looked at me in a strange way. I told her I liked to read up on unsolved murders and she then

told me whatever I wanted to read I could read it on the microfiche which was kept in a room

in the back of the library for privacy. As I sat in the dark room reading about Maggie Haines’s

murder I wondered if my mother had been desperate enough to strangle a young girl and steal

her baby. My mother had always been very loving and did anything for me I didn’t believe

that she was capable of ending someone’s life, so I pushed that thought from my mind and

continued to read on. Maggie’s husband Paul was nineteen at the time of her death and had

been the only one to believe that his baby was still alive while everyone else presumed his

baby was dead. I wrote down Paul’s name and address of the deli he worked at when Maggie

had been murdered and then left the library and went back to my grandmother’s home. My

plan was to find out who I was and if I was the missing baby that everyone but Paul Haines

had presumed dead. I knew I needed to be positive that my mother had been the one to kill

Maggie Haines because I was playing with her life and if I was wrong, I would have nothing

but bad luck the rest of my life. If I was right my life and my mother’s life would change

completely. Mine would change for the better and hers would change for the worse little

did I know was that my mother would always been on the run and I would never be able

to let her go to jail.

When I got home, I told my grandmother that Maggie’s husband Paul worked at Haines Deli

and that I had found the address for when I wanted to go by. My grandmother told me that

maybe I should take things slow and that I couldn’t just go up to Paul and start asking all sorts

of questions since his baby had been presumed dead and the case was fifteen years old. *“People*

*have moved on. Think twice before you do anything because once you’ve done something you*

*can’t undo it,”* My grandmother was right, and I knew it, but I had to find out if I was the

missing baby and if my mother had done the unthinkable when she killed Maggie Haines and

raised me as her own. If my grandmother wasn’t going to go with me to Paul Haines’s Deli I

would go by myself and find out what I wanted to know with or without her help. My only

problem was I didn’t know what I would say and by the next morning I went from a fiercely

determined girl of fifteen who wanted to find her father to a girl who was angry and confused

as I watched the rain fall from the living room window. I’d come to Alabama without a care

in the world, had gotten my hopes up thinking I would finally find my father only to find out

that the man my mother had said was my father wasn’t really my father so now there I was a

girl without a father whose mother had possibly killed another woman and raised her baby

as her own. I didn’t know where I belonged or who I belonged to and by the time my

grandmother came and sat beside me on the sofa I was inconsolable. My face was hot and red

and when my grandmother hugged me, I still didn’t stop crying. If my mother had killed Maggie

and stolen me she ruined my life by doing so as well as the lives of others. I had a lot to think

about before I just walked in on Paul Haines’s life and brought back terrible memories with

my questions and I would spend the last two weeks of July thinking of what I would say

and how I would find out who I really was.

When August came, I knew it was time to go to Paul’s deli because I didn’t have much time

left in Alabama so I needed to find out all I could before it was time to go home. My

grandmother drove me to Haines’s Deli and when we got there, I sat in the car for a few minutes

thinking about how I would start the conversation and when I saw the NOW HIRING sign I

stopped thinking about what I was going to say because sign saved me. If I worked for Paul I

could slowly get to know him and find out all I needed to know before I did or said anything I

would regret. When I went inside the deli there was a woman named Mary at the register so I

introduced myself and asked for an application for employment. Mary asked me how old I was

then she shouted back to Paul and asked what the working age was and when he replied

fifteen I was all set, so I left the deli and went home to fill out the application. As I sat at the

kitchen table filling out the application I wondered what I would find out while I worked for

Paul. I wondered what he looked like and if I would notice any resemblance if I was his daughter

and after I finished filling out the application I decided to walk back to the deli and hand it in.

I hoped that Paul wouldn’t mind that I couldn’t stay and work long since I had to get back to

California for school before the end of August and when I go to the deli Mary came to the door

and greeted me. I handed her my application and told her I was visiting my grandmother and I

could only work for a few weeks before I had to go back home to California and Mary said

that was okay because she and Paul needed as much help as they could get.

As I walked back to my grandmother’s house, I wondered about Paul again and if he’d

remarried after Maggie’s death or lived alone. My grandmother was on the phone with my,

mother when I walked through the door and when I heard her ask if I was there and she wanted

to speak to me I rolled my eyes. She’d left me alone most of the summer why did she want to

talk to me now? I wondered as I said hello and when my mother told me she wanted me home

by August 23rd I became irritated. School didn’t start until September 7th and I hadn’t planned

on leaving until August 28th but arguing with my mother was pointless so I agreed and handed

the phone back to my grandmother. Right after my grandmother hung up the phone it rang

again, only this time it was Mary from Haines’s Deli asking to speak with me so my,

grandmother handed me the phone. Mary asked me if I could start work in the morning for a few

hours and I agreed saying that my grandmother could drop me off whenever I was needed and

I hoped that she wouldn’t mind that I could only work for three weeks. I had a hard time sleeping

that night and in the morning when I woke, I got dressed and then had breakfast with my,

grandmother before she drove me to my first day of work at the deli.

When I got to the deli Mary told me she would teach me how to run the register first and then

I could learn the rest of the store. I told her that I would only be able to stay for a few weeks and

she said it was okay because Paul had hired a few more people to help them out since they were

always very busy. After an hour of working on the register with Mary, I asked her where Paul

was just as a man with two boys came walking through the front door. The man introduced

himself to me as Paul Haines and it was then that I made the connection and saw somewhat of a

resemblance between us. Mary and Paul met in 1968 and shortly after the boys followed but

Paul always wondered who had killed his first wife and if his baby was dead or if she was

alive and had been raised by someone else. I wondered why he even bothered telling me a

stranger about himself but then I realized that he never really moved on after Maggie

was killed. Sure, he remarried and started a family and appeared happy, but he wasn’t happy at

all he was miserable, and I could tell as he cut the meat for the deli and handed it to me so I

could wrap and put a sticker on it. When I was done for the day, I took down my schedule for the

rest of the week and then left the deli. I was happy that my grandmother was on time because I

didn’t think I could hang around all that sadness much longer even though I knew I would have

to if I wanted to find out if Paul was my father. The only think I was unsure of was how I would

go about bringing up my mother and my childhood as well as my suspicions of who may be

Maggie’s killer. I didn’t want to hurt anyone I only wanted to find out who I was and my,

grandmother told me I needed to be careful and take my time figuring things out so I wouldn’t

do something I couldn’t undo but in the end that would be exactly what I did.

August went by as quickly as it had come and soon, I was flying back to my somewhat

fabulous life in San Francisco only I was no longer the same girl I’d been when I left. My

mother picked me up from the airport and from there we went shopping for school supplies

and had an early lunch before my mother dropped me off at home and rushed back to work.

I was glad that she was gone for once because that would give me time to write my letter to

Paul and tell him what I was, thinking.

Dear Paul,

I know you are going to think this letter is strange, but I had to write you since I couldn’t

really talk to you over the summer. I started looking for my father this summer since he was

never around when I was growing up and when I found the man, I thought was my father he

told me it was impossible because he and my mother hadn’t been together in a very long time

and on top of that she was not able to have children due to a condition called endometriosis.

After I found all of this out, I started to think that my mother wasn’t who she really said she

was and when I learned that she left Alabama right around the time your first and late wife

Maggie was killed I started to question everything I knew about the woman I called mother

since I learned to speak. I don’t know whose daughter I am, but I do know that I need to find

out and I will return to Alabama where my grandmother lives whenever I can until I find

out where I belong. I hope this letter reaches you and I hope that you respond but if you don’t

I will understand and I won’t bother you again.

Sincerely,

Opal Epstein

I read the letter a few more times before I put it in an envelope and sealed it hoping that I

would get a response. I rode my bike to the post office, mailed the letter and then went to Stella’s

house where the both of us spent the rest of the afternoon swimming in her pool. I envied Stella

because she had what I wanted most which was a father who took care of her, and she never had

to wonder who she was or where she belonged like I always did. Stella saw herself in her parents

while I didn’t know what it felt like to see myself in someone else, but I longed for that feeling

for most of my life. I’d been picking at my split for about twenty minutes when Stella finally

asked me what was bothering me, and I didn’t want to say anything, but I had no one else to

talk to besides my grandmother so I told Stella everything. I told her that the man that was

supposed to be my father wasn’t my father after all and my mother wasn’t who she really

said she was. Stella’s eyes were wide as I spoke to her and by the time, I finished speaking to her

she was on the edge of her seat hungry for more like I was reading out of a Nancy Drew novel.

*“Well, what are you going to do?”* Stella asked as she finished her banana split and waited for

my answer and when I told her I’d written a letter to the man I thought was my father Stella

gasped and asked me what I was going to do if the man I thought was my father didn’t respond.

Stella had so many questions and I told her that I planned on going to visit my grandmother

during Christmas, break and over the summer until I found my father and found out who I was.

*“What if your mom finds out. What will you do then?”* Stella asked me as she twirled her long

blonde hair. Stella was my best friend, but she always had to be doing something whenever

someone talked, to her or else she wouldn’t pay any attention. Stella had a very expressive face

and I always enjoyed telling her stories so I could see her expressions which at times made me

laugh. I didn’t know what I would do if my mother found out what I was up too, but I knew I had

to be careful so she never found out because I knew if she did, I would probably wind up

regretting it. When I got home around 6:00 p.m. my mother was already home and went I went

inside the house she was in the kitchen making dinner. I tried my best to sneak by the kitchen

and run upstairs to my room but my mother caught me and asked me to help her with dinner.

There was some tension between us as I made the salad and my mom put the chicken in the oven

and when she asked me why I wanted to know about my father after she told me he didn’t want

me I lied and told my mother that finding my father didn’t matter to me anymore. I didn’t want

to argue with my mother and I could sense a fight was about to start so I figured ending it

quickly was the best thing for both of us. My mother and I ate dinner with very little

conversation and afterwards I went upstairs to my room and called Stella who answered on the

first ring as if she’d been waiting by the phone.

I asked Stella if she could come over the next day while I my mother was at work and help

me look for my birth certificate and when she asked me why I told her because I’d never seen

it before. Stella told me I was strange but agreed to come over anyway, but the truth is I still

didn’t want to accept the fact that my mother may have killed Maggie Haines and my home was

in Alabama and not California. Stella knocked on my door about a half an hour after my mother

went to work the next morning and together we searched my mother’s bedroom and then the attic

for my birth certificate and when we couldn’t find one Stella said my mother may have lost it but

I had a feeling that I didn’t have one. I knew Stella thought I was being ridiculous when I said

my mother may not be my mother after all, and my father was in Alabama, but I was glad that

she agreed to help me out because if she hadn’t I’d have been scared and on my own and those

were two things I didn’t enjoy. I told Stella that the hospital I’d been born in would have my,

birth records and that I would have to go and get them, but I would have to as my mother to be

sure, of what hospital before I went running around all over town searching for my birth records.

My only problem was I’d have to wait until school started again so I could make up a story as to

why I wanted to know what hospital I’d been born in. A made- up school project would be my,

only way of getting my hands on my birth certificate and I wouldn’t look strange to my mother

which was fine by me because whenever my mother thought I was acting strange she had a

tendency to sneak around behind my back to see what I was up to. I didn’t want her getting in

my way of finding out what she’d done and who my real father was because if she did manage

to get in my way I knew something bad would happen.

Two weeks after school started in late September 1982, I decided it was time to ask my,

mother for my birth certificate. I told her it was for a project I was doing in my history class

when she looked at me funny and then my mother told me she would have to find it which

surprised me. I didn’t think she had one for me and I was curious as to what my mother would

give to me so I decided to wait and not bother her. I was doing my homework in my bedroom

and listening to the radio when my mother came to me and handed me my birth certificate and

then left my room. I was in shock. I didn’t know what to think of the document before me and

to be honest I didn’t even think it was real even though it looked real. My birth certificate,

read Opal Anne Epstein born July 7th, 1967, at 11:30 a.m. to Violet Epstein age 35. The

spot for father’s name was left empty and my place of birth was San Francisco Medical

Center which wasn’t to far from home. I decided that the following day after school I would

take the bus to San Francisco Medical Center and see if they had any record of my birth and

after I tucked my birth certificate in my book bag, I called Stella up and asked her if she would

come with me. Stella hesitated at first but then she agreed to come with me as long as we didn’t

take long and would be, home before dark so her parents didn’t worry.

The next day at school seemed to drag more than it usually did and when it finally ended

Stella and I met up at the schools exit and together we walked to the bus stop and hopped on

the first bus that would take us downtown. We got off not far from San Francisco Medical Center

and walked the rest of the way and when Stella and I reached the entrance she asked me if I was

sure, I wanted to move forward with my plan. I’d never been more determined to find out the

truth than I was the moment I walked into San Francisco Medical Center and when I asked the

woman at the front desk where I could get my birth record, she told me I would have to go to

the main office in order to get them. As I walked through the hospital to the main office I

thought about Paul and how happy he must have been when Maggie told him that she was

pregnant only to have that happiness taken from him the day she was murdered and their baby

presumed dead. When Stella and I got to the main office I asked Beth the woman in charge for

my birth record and she held her hand out to me and said I had to pay five dollars first before

she could give me anything. Her attitude and gum snapping irritated me, so I pulled out my,

wallet handed Beth five dollars and waited for her to get me a copy of my birth record. When

she came back a few minutes later and told me I must have the wrong hospital I pulled out the

birth certificate my mother had given me and that’s when Beth told me that my birth certificate

was fake and handed me back my money. I didn’t know what to think then and as Stella and me

rode the bus back home I knew for a fact that my mother was the one who killed Maggie Haines

and I was not her daughter.

As soon as I walked in the front door the phone rang and when I picked it up my grandmother

asked me what I’d done. I was confused and I asked her what she was talking about and my,

grandmother told me that there was talk around town about Paul Haines receiving a letter from a

girl who questioned who her mother was and mentioned his wife’s death. I knew then that Paul

had gotten my letter and knew I had to keep an eye out on the mailbox just in case he did write

back to me. I told my grandmother about my birth certificate being fake and she warned me not

to make a big scene and what I was getting into may be more than I could handle I only wish I’d

taken her advice but I was young and naïve and wasn’t one to think twice. With each day that

passed I made sure I checked the mailbox as soon as I came home from school so if a letter from

Paul came I’d be able to hide it from my mother. When the letter did finally come in early

October of 1982 my heart raced as I ripped open the envelope and walked into the house. I went

straight to the kitchen and grabbed a bag of chips before I sat down on the couch and read

Paul’s letter.

Dear Opal,

I was a little confused by your letter are you trying to say you think your mother had

something to do with my wife’s death. Opal, Maggie was murdered a long time ago, but I don’t

think your mother had anything to do with her death just because of her condition and I don’t

think it’s fair to her either. Maybe you’re adopted and your mother doesn’t want to say anything

to you because your birth parents may not have been that great and she’s trying to protect you.

Are you coming back to Alabama this summer? Maybe you can work for me again and we can

talk more about this then. I would love to talk more about this before then, but your letter

brought back terrible memories that I thought were behind me but obviously they’re not. Try

and talk to your mother I’m sure there’s a reasonable explanation for why she hasn’t told you

about your father that way you can put this matter behind you and move on. Hope to see you

this summer and I hope you find what you’re looking for.

Sincerely,

Paul Haines

I was a little upset after reading Paul’s letter and I knew I was right about my mother and the

fact that she may have been the one to murder Maggie, but I didn’t have any proof. Finding proof

other than me not having a birth certificate would be hard but I would search my entire house

until I found what I needed. I didn’t have much time before my mother came home so I went

upstairs to her bedroom and started going through her drawers and when I didn’t find anything

in her drawers I went upstairs to the attic. Lucky for me mother was a tidy person and didn’t

like clutter which made searching the attic a breeze. After about an hour of going through boxes

I found nothing that would prove that my mother had killed Maggie Haines and as I was leaving

the attic I tripped on a raised part of the floor. When I went to put it back into place, I noticed a

leatherbound diary underneath so I reached in and pulled it out hoping that the diary would hold

the proof I needed to tie my mother to Maggie’s murder. The first entry was written a few days

after I was born so I went to my room and started reading it and I made sure I listened for the

downstairs door to open so I could put the diary back before my mother even knew it was

missing.

July 10th, 1967

Opal is finally asleep after crying almost every night for the past, three days. I can’t

believe she’s mine and all I can do is stare at her and hope that I don’t fail at being a mother to

her. When I arrived in California, I called mother and told her that I’d left Wayne and that I’m

pregnant and she was both happy and sad for me at the same time. She told me I’ll find someone

new one day when the time is right, but I don’t care for relationships anymore all that matters to

me now is Opal. I don’t plan on living in this apartment long in fact I have an interview at Saint

Francis Hospital tomorrow for the OB/GYN position and I hope I get it. If I do, I’ll find a sitter

for Opal so I can work hard, and we can move to a house where we won’t be so cramped.

San Francisco is a nice area and far from my old life where I made nothing but mistakes and was

married to a man who loved me in the beginning but later I meant nothing to him. I can forget

everything out here and I intend to do just that. I’m no longer the Violet who was eager to

please everyone including her husband. I’m now a colder woman whose heart has been

hardened and I don’t plan on letting my guard down ever again. It’s all about me and Opal

this time around and I’m going to keep it that way.

I was about to move on to the second entry when I heard the door open and close downstairs

so, I leapt off the bed, ran as fast as I could upstairs to the attic, placed the diary back under the

floorboard and went downstairs to greet my mother who looked tired as always after a long day

at work. We had a quiet dinner and then my mother went to her study to do some work and I

quietly went back upstairs to get her diary so I could continue reading hoping to find something

that could prove she killed Maggie. I didn’t want to be right but ever since I met with Wayne

and he told me the two of them hadn’t been together in a very long time something didn’t seem

right to me. I loved my home and my school and friends, but I felt as if I belonged somewhere

else most of my life even though I never said what I felt growing up and as I opened my,

mother’s diary to read the next entry I had a feeling that my world was soon going to change

forever.

July 15th, 1967

I got the job at Saint Francis Hospital, and I start next week so I have a few days to find

a sitter for Opal. The hours are long but it’s a start, but it will be hard leaving Opal all day with

someone I don’t know very well. I was thinking about asking Mary from down the hall to watch

Opal since she has kids of her own and she already knows how to care for a baby, and I hope

she agrees because she’s my last hope.

July 16th, 1967

I asked Mary today if she could watch Opal while I worked, and she agreed to help me.

I told Mary I would pay her when I got my first paycheck and then I left her apartment before

she had any time to change her mind. I called mother and told her the exciting news and she

was happy for me then she asked me if I knew when I was due and I froze. I didn’t know

what to say so I quickly calculated nine months in my head which brought me to April

and that’s what I blurted out. I don’t know how I’m going to change Opal’s birthday to July

but I’m going to have to figure out a way because my mother never forgets anything

unfortunately.

That night as I lay in bed, I knew that the woman I’d called mother from the moment I

learned to speak was not my real mother after all. I still didn’t have evidence to tie her to

Maggie’s murder but it wouldn’t be long before I could prove everything, I knew to be true I

just needed to keep on reading her diary and make sure that Violet never found out. The next few

months came and went in the blink of an eye and soon it was winter break for my school and I

was halfway done the diary. I still couldn’t tie Violet to Maggie’s murder and I was starting

to think that maybe she didn’t have anything to do with the murder after all until late one night

in December of 1982 I came across an entry that would seal Violet’s fate and life as I knew it

would no longer be the same.

July 7th, 1968

Opal is one year old today and I can finally breathe because no one is coming after me

and Maggie’s case will never be solved. I have been watching the news ever since I came to

San Francisco and I’ve always been ready to run in case they do figure out who murdered

Maggie but I know they never will. I have a bag packed with makeup, and a wig and things

that I will need to start a new life in case I do have to run again, and I have some things for

Opal as well. I do not feel bad for what I did because Maggie was a teenager who couldn’t

possibly provide for a child and probably wouldn’t even know how to. I did what I had to do

because for years I’d been robbed of the only thing I ever wanted which was a child of my own

and because I couldn’t have one the only man, I ever really loved left me for someone else. Now

all I have is Opal and our new life to look forward to in our new house that I’ve bought for us

that we will move into next month.

After reading that entry which sealed Violet’s fate, I needed to think about what I would do

next. Should I go to Paul? Or should I go to my grandmother first and let her help me decide

what I should do. I decided to ask Violet if I could visit my grandmother again in the Summer

and when she said yes, I was surprised because I wasn’t expecting her to let me go but I figured

she felt guilty for not being around most of the time so that’s why she let me go. Violet thought

she had no worries, but she was wrong because I intended to make sure she paid for what she did

to Maggie and to me. Because of her I never knew my mother or my father and had spent most

of my childhood feeling as if something was missing. The only person I ever really enjoyed

being around was my grandmother and after Violet told me I could spend the summer with her I

called my grandmother to let her know the news. *“It’s me Opal. I found out who killed Maggie,”*

I whispered and when my grandmother asked me who the killer was, I paused because I still

couldn’t believe I was living with someone who’d brought children into the world but killed

someone for their child. “*Mom,”* I replied and vowed never to call her that again because a

mother would never steal someone’s child or kill a child’s mother. *“How did you find out?”*

My grandmother asked me, and I told her I would tell her when I saw her because I didn’t

want Violet to find out that I’d read her diary. My grandmother was crying for the rest of our,

conversation and before we ended the phone call, she told me to be careful and I promised her

that I would and we’d see each other over the summer.

I kept Violet’s secret to myself. I didn’t tell anyone not even Stella who usually loved to hear

any story except Mrs. Ambrose our fourth period English teacher who seemed to put the whole

class to sleep with tales from her youth. The months came and went, and I was glad when it

was almost summer because soon I’d be on my way back to Alabama and I could expose Violet

for the killer that she was. Before I left for Alabama, I planned on grabbing Violet’s diary so my,

grandmother could see what she’d written, and Paul could see that I really was his daughter and

we could try and get to know one another but when the day finally did come for me to leave and

I sneaked up to the attic to get the diary it wasn’t there. Violet must have found out that I’d been

reading it or she wanted to get rid of it either way my evidence was gone, and I knew I would

have a hard time convincing my grandmother and Paul that she killed Maggie, but I left my,

house anyway not knowing what the future held for me or if I would ever see Violet ever

again.

When I landed at Macon International Airport in late June of 1983 my Uncle Willie was there

as he had been before to take me to my grandmother’s home. When I got to her house my

grandmother greeted us and waited until after Willie left to ask me about Violet and the proof

I had which would tie her to Maggie’s murder. *“Violet hid the diary,”* I said, and I could tell that

my grandmother had her doubts since I didn’t have the proof then, but I told her that I would

think of something before the summer was up. After I unpacked, I called Paul at his deli and

told him that I was back in Alabama, and I wanted to see, him so we could talk because I had

something important to tell him. He told me to come by later on that day after he was done work

and we could talk and after I hung up the phone, I told my grandmother the only other way to

convince Paul that he was my father was to get him to take a paternity test. My grandmother

shook her head then and I knew what I was saying was too much for her to take in all at once but

a test was the only way. *“I knew Violet was responsible, but I just couldn’t bring myself to*

*believe it,”* My grandmother said as tears rolled down her cheeks which left me feeling sorry

that I ever went into my mother’s study and caused her such heartache. My grandmother would

always be my grandmother to me even if Violet wasn’t my mother, I would still visit my,

grandmother and spend summers with her. Our relationship would never change no matter

what happened and when I told her this, she thanked me for visiting her and not leaving her

alone because being alone was what she feared the most in this world.

My grandmother drove me to see Paul around 5:30 and when we got to the deli, I found Paul

outside waiting by his car so I went over to him and thanked him for meeting me. I told him

about Violet’s diary and what she’d written in it and that I wanted to bring it with me as proof

but when I went looking for it, I couldn’t find it. Somehow Violet found out that’d I’d been

reading it and hid it where I could never find it again and I had a feeling that I wouldn’t be

seeing her again for a very long time. A paternity test was the only way to prove that Paul

was my father and Violet was, not my mother and when I told Paul that he went silent as if

he was still unsure of what I was saying. *“Have you ever seen Maggie?”* Paul asked me and

I shook my head no, then he reached into his back pocket, pulled out his wallet and handed me

a picture of himself and a young girl about sixteen whom I assumed was Maggie. *“You look*

*just like her. When I first saw you, I couldn’t believe it and after you left Alabama, I tried to*

*forget about everything including you which is why I responded to your letter the way I did.*

*I didn’t want to remember anything but now that you tell me this woman named Violet*

*killed Maggie and took you from me it’s hard to not want to make her pay. If a paternity test*

*proves that you’re my daughter I want to find this Violet and make her pay because she took*

*away the two most important things in my life you and Maggie who I met when I was 14 and*

*she was two years younger. We got married when I was 19 and she was 17 in 1967 after she*

*found out she was pregnant with you and when she went missing my whole world fell apart.*

*Everyone searched for days and when Maggie’s body was found, and I was told that our,*

*baby was missing and probably dead I cried for months but over time I accepted the fact that*

*I would never see you again. I met Mary a year later and then the boys were born but I have*

*always felt empty because I was robbed of my time with Maggie and with you,”* Paul said while

he cried which got me crying to. I told him I wanted to do the paternity test and if I was his

daughter we would make Violet pay for what she did, but I wasn’t sure if I wanted her dead

and this was something I kept to myself. I had to think of my grandmother to who was older

and loved her daughter no matter what she’d done because a mother’s love is unconditional.

Paul and I agreed to meet at Macon General Hospital the next day to get a paternity test but I

didn’t mention any of this to my grandmother on the drive back to her house because I didn’t

want to upset her. Instead, she and I spent the rest of the night watching movies while I told her

about school and Stella who my grandmother said reminded her of herself when she was

younger. In the morning when I woke, I had breakfast with my grandmother and then she drove

me to Macon General Hospital and when we got there Paul was waiting for us in the parking lot.

I didn’t get out of the car right away and when my grandmother saw that I was hesitant she

encouraged me like always and told me that what I was doing was right, but I knew she was sad.

The test was quick and afterwards Paul went back to work and I went to Denny’s for breakfast

with my grandmother who I tried to cheer up but couldn’t. She told me she was afraid for Violet

and what was going to happen to her if I was Paul’s daughter, but I didn’t say anything I just let

her say what was on her mind. As we drove home, I thought about anything and everything that

could happen to Violet and the worst possible scenario was the death penalty and I knew that

would break my grandmother so I had to come up with a plan to spare Violet, and that plan

would involve her disappearing so nothing would happen to her, and life could go on as it

normally did.

A week later Paul called me at my grandmother’s house and told me that the results were

in and asked me to meet him after work again. I remember feeling relieved that I was about to

find out the truth but when my grandmother and I met Paul and he told me that I’m his daughter

I didn’t know what to say. My whole world changed so quickly and when Paul asked if Violet

could be found I wasn’t sure because I had a feeling, I wouldn’t be seeing her again any time

soon. The days turned into weeks and soon it was the end of August and Maggie was all over

the news again and her baby had been found and was now 16. It felt strange seeing my face on

T.V. but after a while I got used to it, but my grandmother never did and whenever the news

was on she left the room. I know she wanted me to be happy, but Violet was her daughter and

the fact that the police were looking for her did not make her happy. Every mother has hopes

and dreams for her children and my grandmother wanted nothing but the best for Violet but

things didn’t work out that way and now she was heartbroken, and Violet was on the run. I

didn’t know what was going to happen next all I did know was I was no longer Opal Epstein

from Glen Park in San Francisco, I was now the baby that had once been presumed dead and

was now back with my father who I knew nothing about and for the first time in a long time I

was scared. I knew I wouldn’t be going back to my home in Glen Park on Magnolia Street and

the letter that arrived for me a few days later from Violet only confirmed what I knew to be true.

Dear Opal,

I know you know what I did to Maggie, and I want you to know that I don’t regret what I

did because you brought joy to my life and gave it meaning. I know you probably hate me

right now, and there is nothing I can do about that but what I can do is make sure that I am

never found. I am good at disappearing I’ve done that my whole life, but I will be in touch

just not for a long time. I know you will probably have to turn this letter over as evidence

so, I made sure that there isn’t a return address because to me I feel that I’ve done nothing

wrong. Maggie was a teenager who probably wouldn’t have known what to do with a baby

nor would she have been able to give you what I gave you which was a good life and a good

education. Girls have no business having children and don’t go getting into any trouble because

your grandmother will be very upset with you as she was with me when I was running around

with Wayne. Take care of your grandmother and take care of yourself and I will be in touch

I just don’t know when but know that I will always love you and think of you as my daughter.

Love,

Violet

Violet’s letter disgusted me and made me very angry. How did she know that Maggie,

wouldn’t be able to give me a good life or education? Why did she think that killing Maggie

and taking her child was right? When I showed Paul the letter, he was furious and vowed that

he would make Violet pay for what she did to Maggie, but I knew that no one would ever find

Violet because she was right about one thing. Violet was good at making herself disappear

because in late August of 1983 when the police showed up at my old home on Magnolia

Street, Violet was nowhere to be found and all of her personal belongings were gone. When Paul

told me the news I wasn’t surprised in fact I expected her to leave because before I left home I

saw her getaway bag with her wig and makeup she’d written about in her diary, and I knew then

that she would assume another identity and run away from her past life and all the misery she

had caused.

Into the Darkness

I was on the run again in August of 1983 and after I mailed my goodbye letter to Opal I

packed up my personal belongings and left San Francisco. It wouldn’t be long before the police

came looking for me so I left as fast as I could and headed for Alaska where I would hopefully

find work under the name Alice Evans. I had a fake ID made up for me just in case I ever had

to be on the run again and I chose Alaska because it was far enough away where no one would

ever think to look for me or so I hoped no one would look for me there. I changed the name on

my degree from Harvard so I could get a job when I got to Alaska as well as an apartment and

this time around I would make sure I stayed to myself. The drive took two days and seven

hours and during that time I was always looking in my rearview mirror to see if the police were

following me. Whenever I stopped to rest for the night, I couldn’t get any sleep and whenever I

went into a restaurant to get something to eat I never ate inside I took my food out to my car

in case I had to run and by the time I arrived in Alaska I was ready for a new start. I found

a room for rent in Anchorage and as soon as I was settled, I went out to look for work hoping

to find something soon so I could move into an apartment and live comfortably.

My first stop was Alaska Regional Hospital not far from the room I was renting, and I was

happy to find out they were in fact in need of an OB/GYN because a few of theirs just retired.

I left my resume with human resources as well as the number where I could be reached and

then headed back to my room to unpack some more of my things. I hung up some pictures

of Opal when she was younger on my wall, and I thought of her and what she must be thinking

after receiving my letter. I knew Opal was safe with my mother and nothing would happen to

her but I still wished I could see her and talk to her but that would have to wait a while as I

didn’t want to risk getting caught. Later that day I went out to get some groceries for the tiny

fridge I had in my room and as I was leaving the market, I saw a man leaving a note for me on

my windshield so I called out to him, and he looked up at me. I walked over to my car and asked

him what he was doing and that’s when I noticed my drivers, side door had a dent in it and

that’s why he was leaving me a note. The gentleman’s name was Todd Baker and he said that

his son had opened his door fast and wasn’t paying attention when he hit my car door and he

wanted to make sure my car got repaired. Todd’s son Tommy was thirteen, shy and embarrassed

for hitting my car so I told him that it was okay, and I wasn’t mad even though I was because I

loved my, Mercedes and worked hard to get it after Opal and I had moved into our house in Glen

Park in 1968. Tommy said he was sorry again and Cynthia his older sister called him a moron

while Todd shrugged his shoulders and I laughed because his kids remined me of my brother and

I when we were younger.

I told Todd that I would call him later and watched from my car as he and his kids went into

the market. He seemed like a nice man, and I was new to the area so maybe he could show me

around and we could take things slow and possibly have a life together, but I stopped before I

got ahead of myself and put those thoughts out of my mind. I needed to focus on building a new

life for myself instead of thinking about being with a man but I couldn’t stop thinking about

Todd no matter what I did. A few days after I met Todd, I got a call from Alaska Regional

Hospital and they told me I got the job and could start in a week, so I decided to call Todd and

see if he wanted to go out to celebrate with me and surprisingly, he agreed. Todd asked me

where I was staying and after I gave him my address, he said he would pick me up at 6:00 that

evening after he was done work. When I hung up the phone, I went over to my closet to find

something nice to wear since it had been a while since I’d been on a date. I was a woman in

her early fifties who had a hard time with eighties fashion, but I did my best to try and keep my,

wardrobe current. Opal had always been a denim jacket, miniskirt and big hair sort of girl but

I could never get into that sort of fashion, and she always made fun of me for that. I’d always

liked dresses and I grew up wearing them a lot so that just stuck with me and when I couldn’t

find anything nice to wear I went shopping. After driving around town for about a half hour

I came across Bella’s a dress shop and decided to go inside and look around to see if I could

find something to wear for my dinner date that evening.

I found the perfect dress after about fifteen minutes of looking throughout the store and when

I tried it on I knew it was perfect for the occasion. The dress I purchased was black lace and

chiffon which hit mid- thigh level and showed off my legs which were my greatest asset. After I

paid for the dress I stopped at a shoe store and purchased a pair of black heels that matched my,

dress perfectly and then I headed back to my room and got ready for my date with Todd. It was

nice to be able to start over again where no one knew me, but I did miss Opal dearly even though

I knew she hated me for what I’d done. The doorbell rang at 5:45 and when I saw Todd in his

navy blue suit the word Lawyer came to mind and I knew I was in trouble because Wayne was

a lawyer and our relationship hadn’t gone well. Todd said we were going to Sophia’s his

favorite Italian restaurant and suddenly old memories started coming back to me of when Wayne

and I went out to dinner for the first time, but I put those memories out of my mind and tried

to enjoy the evening. When we got to the restaurant it was packed so Todd and I had to wait for

about a half an hour before we were seated and within that time, I learned that I was right about

him being a lawyer. Todd worked for Foster, Brown & Edwards a prominent law firm in

Anchorage and as he spoke of his profession Wayne came to mind once more and I was glad

when we were finally seated and given our menus so we could order our food and change the

subject.

As we ate Todd talked about growing up in Alaska, his college years where he met his now ex

wife Abigail and his job which he said he was very good at. I didn’t say much about myself but I

did go on and on about Opal and how she was staying with her father because we didn’t get a

long very well even though that was a lie it was all I had to keep the conversation going.

Tommy and Cynthia were Todd’s pride and joy as Opal was mine and just talking about her

me happy even though she would never look at me the same way again I would still always think

of her as my daughter. I was there when she took her first steps and said her first word and I

supported her for fifteen years and no matter what anyone said, Opal was a better person because

of me and no one could take that away from her. After dinner Todd wanted me to go back with

him to his place but I just wanted to go back to my room and try to forget about my sadness

and how much I missed Opal. When I got back to my room, I turned the T.V. on then went

into the bathroom and turned the shower on since a nice long shower seemed to help me

whenever I was down and when I came out of the bathroom, my face was on the news.

I was in shock and as I sat there and listened to the news, I decided that I would need more

than a wig and a new name to change my identity. I needed to do something with my hair and

face so after I showered, I got dressed, put my wig on and sunglasses and went back out to find

bleach, hair dye and some more makeup that would help me change how I looked so no one

would know who I was. My wig was red, so I bought red hair dye and a pair of scissors so I

could cut my hair after I dyed it and when I got back to my room, I locked the door and started

to work on my hair. After I cut my hair to a chin length bob, I dyed it then I got in the shower

and tried to forget about what I had just seen on the news. Things were going well, and I had

a new job and met someone who I could see myself growing old with and I wasn’t going to let

something from my past ruin my future. After I got out of the shower, I dried my hair and styled

it and when I was done, I was surprised at how different I looked, and I was sure that no one

would notice me and I could move on with my life, but little did I know was that I would never

be rid of my past or what I had done to those who loved me.

By December of 1983 I was all settled into my new life and my job at Alaska Regional

Hospital. I divided my time between the hospital and the Women’s Clinic which wasn’t far

from the hospital and when I wasn’t working, I spent as much time as I could with Todd. I

moved into my own apartment right before Christmas and since I didn’t feel like being alone

during the holiday I spent it with Todd and his children. I thought of Opal when she was a

little girl whenever I was with Todd and his children, and I hoped that she was okay and

moving on with her new life. I wanted to call my mother or write to Opal, but I knew that

wasn’t a good idea because the police were still looking for me and I didn’t want to risk

getting caught. In August of 1984, a year after Todd and I met he asked me to move in with

him and I didn’t know what to say at first because I enjoyed being on my own and not

having to worry about anyone but then I thought about how lonely I was at night and decided

maybe it wasn’t a bad idea to move in with Todd. Cynthia however did not like the idea at all

and did her best to avoid me while Tommy was the opposite and liked having me around

especially when I cooked or baked because his dad didn’t know how to cook. For a while things

were good between Todd and I and we both had our own routine, and nothing was expected

until one day in October of 1984 when Todd called me at work and asked me to meet him at

Sophia’s for dinner and I agreed not knowing that my life was about to change once more.

I met Todd for dinner at 6:00 and when I entered the restaurant, I wished I’d had time to

change because everyone looked so nice while I looked as if I didn’t belong. Shortly after I

was seated and handed a menu Todd asked me if I was happy living with him and his children

and I said yes as I wondered what had come over him. Todd told me that he loved me and he

never thought that he would ever feel that way again after his divorce but he’s glad he gave

love a second chance because he couldn’t imagine his life without me. I was so touched by

Todd’s words and almost in tears and that’s when he pulled a ring from his pocket and asked

me to marry him. There I was in my work clothes and exhausted from a long day and all I

could do was cry and nod yes as Todd put the ring on my finger and then handed me a tissue

so, I could dry my tears. I was finally happy, and I had no one to share my happiness with but

I knew I would be okay because I had Todd and together, we would be happy or so I thought.

What I didn’t know then was that Cynthia would later on discover my secret and I would have

to leave my happy life and go on the run once more only then, I would rely on Opal to set me

free.

I spent the next few months dress shopping and getting everything ready for our wedding

which was to happen in April of 1985 at St. Augustine’s the church Todd used to attend before

he got so busy with work. Some of my girlfriends from work helped me pick out a dress even

though I wanted Cynthia to help me so we could bond but she didn’t show to much interest

and told me I should stop trying to be her friend because she already had friends. I did most

of the planning on my own so Todd could focus on work and every now and then I thought about

Wayne when we first met and got married which made me sad, but I knew that I was getting a

second chance to get things right I only wished I could have a second chance with Opal whose

picture I put in a locket that I wore all the time and never took off. The months seemed to fly by

and soon I was a bride again nervous about her wedding night even though I shouldn’t have

been nervous because I’d been there before. I was glad that I wasn’t young anymore because

if I had been, Todd probably would have wanted another child and I would have to explain to

him that I couldn’t have any and I didn’t feel like going through that again. I enjoyed my,

wedding night more than I thought I would and when morning came Todd went back to work

and I did the same and Cynthia was happy to see me go.

Life went on as expected for a while and the four of us were happy for a while until my face

started appearing on the news which made me panic. If I was at work and I saw my picture on

the news I would walk away if I was around other coworkers so no one would make a connection

and if I was at home, I would change the channel before anyone would notice. I knew my new

hair style and color wouldn’t be enough to hide my identity for long, so I had to come up

with another plan but what I didn’t know at the time was that it wouldn’t be long before I was

on the run again living another life and another lie. I started writing in my diary again in June of

1985 which was something I would regret later because Cynthia had started to watch the news

more often and started asking me questions about where I was from and if I’d been married

before. What started out as me wanting to have a relationship with Cynthia soon turned into me

wanting to avoid her as much as possible and when I came home one afternoon in late June of

1985 to find Cynthia in my study looking through my things I was furious. I shouted at Cynthia

and told her to never go through my things again and when she went complaining to Todd, he

told Cynthia she needed to be more respectful towards me. I wasn’t taking any more chances

with Cynthia so I put a lock on the door to my study so I wouldn’t have to worry about anyone

going through my things anymore. I wanted to be with Todd as long as I could before I had to

leave and start a new life elsewhere and I wasn’t going to let Cynthia end my time with Todd

sooner than later.

The rest of the summer flew by without any trouble, and everything seemed to get back to

normal with our lives. I would go to work and so would Todd while the kids did their thing and

when September came around Tommy started tenth grade and Cynthia was in her last year of

high school which made her happy and I no longer had to worry about her being home all day

trying to figure out a way to get into my study to go through my things. I kept the key to my,

study in my purse thinking no one would be able to get in without it but I was wrong because

Cynthia was a lot smarter than I thought she was. She knew how to pick a lock and late one

afternoon in December of 1985 I came home from work and found her sitting on the floor of my,

study reading my diary. I immediately started yelling at Cynthia and snatched my diary from her

but it was too late she already knew my secret and there was no point in trying to hide anything

so, I decided to run again. I managed to push Cynthia and after she was on the ground, I ran for

the door and locked her in my study where there wasn’t a phone so she couldn’t call the police

on me. Tommy was at some afterschool activity and Todd wouldn’t be home for a while so I

had about 3 hours to pack what I could and figure out where I was going to go next. As I packed

my things memories of Todd and I ran through my mind as well as memories of Opal and my,

old life in California that I missed dearly but I couldn’t go back to California, and I couldn’t stay

in Alaska and as sad as I was at the time, I had to pick myself up and move forward. I left my,

ring behind for Todd before I left the house and drove to the airport where I bought a ticket

to Hawaii.

Five hours and forty-four minutes later I landed at Honolulu International Airport and shortly

after I took a cab to the nearest hotel where I would stay until I figured out what I was going to

do next. I spent the next week changing my hair and coming up with a new name for myself and

the rest of December looking for an apartment so I wouldn’t have to live in a hotel anymore.

My new name was Janice Jenkins, and my hair was no longer red I was blonde and decided to

cut my hair short so I would be unrecognizable to those who would eventually come looking

for me. I managed to get a fake driver’s license as well as social security card with the help of

my old connection which arrived in the mail a few weeks after I moved into my new apartment.

The landlord of Legacy Gardens Apartments let me fill out an application for an apartment and

move in so long as I brought her my ID as soon as I received them in the mail. I told her that I

had just gone through a terrible divorce and my husband had been abusive so I decided to leave

Alaska and start fresh and my landlord believed every word I said. Lying came to easy to me

and I figured why stop since everything was already a mess and everyone, I’d ever cared about

probably hated me by then. By April of 1986 I opened the Jenkins Women’s Clinic with the

money I’d managed to save from when I was married to Todd, and I enjoyed being my own

boss because I didn’t have to worry about any stares or whispers or the news showing my face

on tv because I didn’t have on in my clinic. I hired two more OB/GYN’s as well as assistants

and a few women to answer phones and make appointments and by June of 1986 my clinic

was constantly busy.

On my days off I would work on my house that I’d purchased in May of 1986, and I was

happy to be living right by the ocean because the ocean always brought me peace. I could

always think when I sat by the water and whenever I did I usually though of Opal whom I

hadn’t spoken to or seen in three years. Last time I’d seen her was June of 1983 when she’d

gone to be with her grandmother and a part of me knew that, that was the last time I would

ever see her. Opal would soon be twenty years old and probably forgot all about me and our,

home in San Francisco which seemed like a lifetime ago but the memories and the life we

made would stay with me forever. I wanted to send something to Opal for her birthday but

I didn’t know what to send so I decided to write to her instead ad enclose my favorite picture

of her and I in the letter.

Dear Opal,

It’s been three years since I last saw you and you are about to turn twenty this July.

I wish I could be there with you to celebrate your birthday in fact I wish I could have been

there for the birthdays I have missed as well as your high school graduation. Now that I think

about it I wish none of this had ever happened and that you and I did not have to be apart but

I can’t undo what is already done. What was high school like for you? Did you go to college?

How is your grandmother? I know you won’t reply to me since you have probably moved on

With your life and forgotten all about me but never forget that I love you and I always will.

Love,

Violet

I kept the letter short and mailed it the next day on my way to work. I didn’t include a

return address because I didn’t want anyone to come looking for me and ruin the life, I’d made

for myself. The next few months passed by without any interruptions and life went back to

normal for me until one day in October of 1986 when I thought I was done with men I met

Jason Sterling while I was grocery shopping. I’d bumped into him a few times as I went up

and down the grocery aisles and then when I went to check out Jason and I met once again

so we started talking. I remember thinking to myself please don’t be a lawyer as Jason and

I spoke but unfortunately, he was a lawyer, but he was single and didn’t have any kids so

I didn’t have to worry about some angry teenage girl or boy trying to ruin anything for me.

Before leaving the market Jason and I exchanged numbers and as I drove home, I wondered

If it was a good idea to get involved with anyone after all that I’d done and ran from for so

long but it was to late to turn back now Jason had my number and I was sure he would be

calling me. Later that evening like I expected the phone rang and sure enough it was Jason

who wanted to know what I was doing over the weekend and if I wasn’t busy would I

to come to his place for dinner and a movie. I couldn’t say no to all of the sweet talk so I

agreed to dinner and a movie just to get off the phone and get back to reading which was

the one thing that calmed me anymore. I’d changed my looks and my name a few times,

and told so many lies I felt as if I was starting to go crazy and the only thing that kept me

sane was reading.

When the weekend came, I decided to dress casual for my date with Jason. I didn’t see a

point in putting too, much effort into what I wore because to be honest I wasn’t too crazy about

seeing another lawyer and I didn’t really care how I looked anymore. I was fifty-four and when I

looked in the mirror I didn’t recognize myself anymore and I was tired of running and lying so

I decided that if anything happened this time around, I wouldn’t run again. I would turn myself

In and accept whatever my punishment and face all the people that I had hurt including Opal

who I missed more than anything and thought of everyday. When I got to Jason’s house, he

was grilling in his front yard and not far from him was a little girl who looked to be about six

years old sitting on a blanket playing with her dolls. Jason greeted me as I walked towards him

and when the little girl saw me, she said hello and went back to playing with her dolls. I didn’t

know what I was getting myself into and when Jason told me Maya is his niece and he adopted

her after her parents had been killed in a car accident, I felt sorry for her. Jason told me that

Maya was a year old when her parents were killed so she didn’t remember much about them

which in a way was good because she didn’t have a hard time after the accident like most,

children would have if they’d been older. Whenever he worked which was all the time, Jason

took Maya to school in the morning and then her babysitter would pick her up and watch her

until he came home from work. He didn’t see anyone for a long time because he wanted to focus

on Maya but as she got older Jason said he decided to start dating again because he wasn’t

getting any younger and didn’t like being alone all the time. *“I’m not very good with girls. I’ve*

*done my best with Maya but she needs a mother to teach her things that I can’t. I’m not saying*

*I want you to teach her because I didn’t ask you here to do that. I’d like it if you gave us a*

*chance and we could take things slow,”* I felt sorry for Jason and for Maya I knew how hard

it was to raise a child on your own, but I didn’t know if I could raise another. I didn’t have

it in me anymore but I also couldn’t just walk away so I decided to give “us” a chance and

see what happened.

What started out slow didn’t remain that way for long and soon Jason and I found ourselves,

living together like a family and I didn’t mind it one bit. I liked getting Maya ready for school,

in the morning and dropping her off on my way to work and since the two of us were home

before Jason, Maya and I made dinner while we waited. I thought of Opal often while the three,

of us had dinner together and I felt bad that she and I never had dinner together much because I

was usually working late at the hospital. I wondered if she was okay and if she’d received my,

letter but I knew I would never hear from her because she was living her life and had probably,

forgotten all about me in the years since we’d last seen each other. I knew my mother would,

take, good care of her and her real father would spend as much time as he could with Opal and

get to know her but she would always be my daughter no matter what anyone thought. Night

time was never a good time for me because it was when I was alone with my memories and all,

I had done, and what was to come. I thought of my life back in California with Opal then I

thought of Todd and his kids in Alaska then there was me and my new life in Hawaii with

Jason and Maya. I was finally at peace, and I didn’t want to lose the life I’d worked so hard to

build but I knew one day I would have to answer for all that I’d done I just didn’t expect it be,

difficult or to come as soon as it would. Jason would see me sitting alone in the front yard and

would sometimes join me and ask me what was on my mind. I wanted to tell him, but I couldn’t,

risk losing him so I kept my memories to myself and told him everything was fine and for once,

I wasn’t lying. Everything was fine in my life at that time and my face hadn’t been on the news,

in quite some time and the nightmares that plagued my sleep had stopped which I should have

seen as a warning but I didn’t. I saw light instead of darkness, a future filled with happiness,

instead of one filled with misery and I felt nothing but peace for once instead of feeling sad and

I enjoyed all of the positive energy. What I should have seen was the calm before the storm the

calm before my life was turned upside down but I had let my guard down and because of this,

I would pay dearly.

By April of 1987 I thought life couldn’t get any better. My clinic was thriving and so was my,

home life with Jason and Maya who had come to trust me more as time went on. I’d forgotten,

how much I missed having a child around and I cherished the times Maya and I spent together,

out in the garden or when I read her a bedtime story. I was so happy that she and her father were,

apart of my life and I was at my desk lost in thought one day in April 1987 when the phone rang,

and startled me. When I picked it up Jason was on the other end asking me to meet him at

Louie’s an Italian diner not far from our house and I agreed wondering what the occasion was,

as I hung up the phone. When 5:00 p.m. came I left work and drove to Louie’s and when I

got there I was taken to a table by the window where Jason was waiting for me looking both,

happy and nervous at the same time. After we were given our menus and were finally alone

Jason made some small talk, and I knew then what was on his mind since I’d seen it all before

with Wayne and Todd. I told Jason who couldn’t stop playing with the small ring box that I

would marry him and for the rest of the night he was all smiles, and I wouldn’t have had it

any other way. When we told Maya the news, she was happy and when she asked me if it was,

okay for her to call me, mom I hugged her and said I already thought of her as my daughter so

of course, she could call me mom.

I spent the next 6 months getting everything together for our wedding day and for once,

the atmosphere at work was a fun one. I invited almost everyone I worked with to my wedding,

and a few of the younger girls helped me look through magazines for a wedding dress whenever,

the clinic wasn’t busy. Jason and I decided to have the wedding at our home and invited his

friends from his law firm as well as his parents and when the big day finally came in October of

1987 I was up early getting myself and Maya ready. The girls from the clinic arrived around,

10:00 a.m. to help me with my dress then the caterer’s followed along with the guests and the

preacher from Jason’s church. For the first time in a long time, I agonized over my looks and

hated myself for chopping off my hair but it had to be done. The dress I’d chosen was a peach,

figure hugging one that stopped right above my knees, and my veil matched my dress which,

one of the girls at work made for me on her spare time. After I was ready, I helped Maya get,

ready and then afterwards she went downstairs to join the other flower girls who were waiting,

for the music to start so they could start throwing rose petals on the carpet. When the music

started I wished my father was with me to give me away, but I didn’t allow myself to be sad,

for to long and after I pulled myself together, I grabbed my bouquet and walked down the aisle,

towards my new life with Jason and Maya.

After the wedding Jason and I celebrated with our guests until early morning and then after

everyone left and Maya was fast asleep it was just the two of us. I was a woman of fifty-five

lying in bed naked next to her new husband only I wasn’t new to the situation because I’d

experienced a man’s hunger for my body before when I was married to Wayne and Tod but

nothing could have prepared me for the way Jason wanted me. At first, we did nothing but kiss.

which was enough to make my heart race and when he stopped kissing me Jason got on top of

me and began teasing me. I could tell he enjoyed the fact that he made me, moan and when he

pushed himself inside of me I closed my eyes and dug my nails into back. I tried to stay quiet,

for Maya’s sake but I hadn’t felt pleasure that way since my first night with Wayne after we

were married. In the morning when I woke, Jason was not in bed next to me and when I went,

downstairs I found him making breakfast with Maya and when we saw me Jason winked at me,

and said he decided to let me sleep in since I had a long night. The days and weeks that

followed our wedding, Jason, Maya and I were happy and settled back into our routines of me,

dropping Maya off at school on my way to work and Jason working long nights at his law firm.

Afterwards the three of us would have dinner together then Maya and I would do homework,

together until it was bedtime and Jason would do office work in his study. After I read Maya a

bedtime story I would join Jason in the living room for a late movie before the two of us went to

bed and got lost in each other’s touch. Everything was perfect and for the longest time it seemed,

as if nothing could ever go wrong, and I would live out my days with Jason and Maya without

ever having to worry about anyone coming after me but I was wrong about nothing ever going,

wrong. Something was about to happen that would end my perfect life to an end and I would,

pay for everything I’d done and for everyone I’d ever hurt including Opal who I would see for

the first time since she went to be with her grandmother in 1983.

One morning in December 1987 as I was getting ready for work, I noticed my right breast,

was more swollen than the left and the skin was irritated so I made a note to call my doctor as

soon as I got home from work. I tried not to think about the what-ifs all day at work and focus,

on my job but that didn’t help and by the time it was time for me to go home I was so worried

I made myself sick. The minute I got home I called Dr. Jacobs and made an appointment for

the following morning then after Alicia the babysitter left, Maya and I started making dinner,

while we waited for Jason. After dinner and after Maya and Jason were fast asleep, I found,

myself wide awake and worrying about what could be wrong with me. I wanted to talk to my,

mother then but I knew that was impossible, because she would let the police know where I

was the minute our conversation ended and that was a risk I couldn’t take. When morning came I

was still unable to calm myself but somehow, I managed to take Maya to school and get myself,

to my doctors, appointment. When arrived at Dr. Jacobs, office I didn’t wait long in the waiting,

room before I was taken, back, to one of the exam rooms where I waited nervously to be seen.

I was alone with my thoughts for about fifteen minutes before I heard a knock at the door and

Dr. Jacobs entered asking me how I was doing and what my concerns were. I told him about

my right breast being larger than the left and about the irritation and upon examining me he

discovered a lump and said he wanted me to have a biopsy done as soon as possible which,

scared me and I knew I couldn’t hide my visit from Jason anymore as much as I wanted to.

When I left Dr. Jacob’s office I went home and made my appointment for the biopsy and then

spent the rest of the day watching T.V. on the couch until it was time to pick Maya up from

school. Later as I waited for Maya to come out of school, I thought about how I would tell Jason,

about my biopsy appointment but I put those thoughts out of my head when Maya came running

out to the car happily talking about her day. Maya was a sweet little girl who had just started,

calling me mom and I didn’t know how much I’d missed being called mom and the thought of

leaving Maya and having my heart broken for the second time was unbearable. *“What’s wrong,*

*mommy?”* Maya asked me as we drove home and while I wanted to tell her the truth I just,

couldn’t bring myself to do that so I told her that everything was fine and prayed that it would,

be. When the three of us sat down to have dinner together I told Jason that I’d gone to see Dr.

Jacobs and he wanted me to have a biopsy done and that’s when all of the questions began.

Jason asked me when my appointment was and as I was answering him Maya asked me if I

was going to be gone long and I said no. *“Are you going to die?”* That question hit me the

hardest and I didn’t know what to say to Maya, so I said the only thing I knew that would,

bring comfort to her, which was I’ll try not to.

The next morning Jason drove me to Honolulu General Hospital and waited for me until the

biopsy was done. Afterwards Dr. Jacobs told me that he would have my results within the week,

and if I experienced any other symptoms, I should call the office right away, but other than that,

I should take it easy and return to work when I felt ready. Jason took some time off work and

hired a nanny to help with Maya so I could rest, but I wasn’t able to sit around and wait for the

phone to ring. I wanted to be at my clinic and decided to work part time to keep me busy until

Dr. Jacobs called me. Working helped keep me calm and by the middle of the week my positive

thinking had changed my mood and I felt as if I could handle anything that life threw at me but

when the phone rang one afternoon in late December all my fears came rushing back. It had

been exactly one week since my biopsy and when I answered the phone Dr. Jacobs didn’t sound,

like his usual happy self and that’s when I knew he was going to give me bad news. He asked,

me when I could come to his office and I told him I would meet him shortly, and I left my office,

as soon as I got off the phone. My stomach was in knots the entire drive to Dr. Jacob’s office and

when I arrived, I was taken back to see him immediately. I wished Jason was with me as I sat

and waited for Dr. Jacobs and when he entered his office looking very upset, I knew that I had,

cancer. Dr. Jacobs recommended a mastectomy and chemo as the treatment plan and I went,

numb. I didn’t think I could ever get any uglier, but I was wrong because I was about to have a

breast removed, lose all of my hair and in the end, I could still die but all that mattered to me at

that moment was, living for Maya and Jason and seeing Opal again.

The three of us spent Christmas and New Year’s Day together and the following day Jason,

drove me to Honolulu General Hospital for my mastectomy. When I woke up in the recovery

room I felt like my usual self and didn’t feel much pain until I started to move around which is,

when Dr. Jacobs came in to see me. He told me that everything went according to plan, and

before I was discharged, we would talk about when I would start chemo but all I could think,

about was, how worried Jason and Maya must be and asked if they were allowed to come in,

and see me. *“How are you mommy?”* Maya asked as she came running into my room and

hopped on to my bed while Jason tried to grab her saying I needed my rest, but I didn’t mind,

I was happy to see them both. *“I’m fine,”* I said as I hugged Maya even though I really wasn’t,

fine but I had to stay positive so I could get better and be there for my family. *“When do you,*

*get to come home?”* Maya was full of questions and Jason could see that I was tired and in

pain so he cut their visit short and that he would call me later. After they were gone, I spent,

the rest of my day in and out of sleep and when morning came, I was dressed and ready to get,

back to my life even though it would be different and harder this time around. Dr. Jacobs

told me that he wanted me to start chemo in mid- January so I would have some time to heal

from my surgery as well as have time to get things in line. The nanny Jason and I hired became

a live- in nanny and as the weeks passed, I found myself unable to do even the smallest of

chores.

On the days I couldn’t get out of bed Maya would come and sit with me and read one of

her stories to me and then she would eat her dinner in my room even though most of the time

I was asleep before dinner was served. Chemo, being sick and sleeping seemed to be my routine

as the year went by and in May of 1988, I completed my last round of chemo and after another

mammogram and checkup I was told I was in remission and I was, finally able to breathe again.

Our lives slowly returned to normal, and I went back to work even though Jason wanted me to

stay home a little longer I just couldn’t do it. I needed to work so I could keep my mind busy

and feel like I was making a difference even though I was not energetic or full of life as I had

once been but that would get better with time. The next year and half went by without any

problems and each time I went to the doctor for a checkup I was told I was fine, so I began

to worry less and relax more. *“The worst is behind us,”* Jason would say and those words

were enough to calm me until one day in April 1989 I started to feel unwell at work and had

to sit down. After a few hours I decided to go home and by the time I got there I had a terrible

headache and stayed in bed for the rest of the day which made Jason and Maya worry. I didn’t

think anything of my symptoms I just figured I had a cold but when my left breast changed in

size and the skin became red and irritated, and my headaches became worse causing me to miss

work I knew something was wrong.

I didn’t say anything to Jason or Maya because I didn’t want to worry them in case there

wasn’t anything to worry about. I made up excuses for why I missed work or why I wasn’t

feeling well but by early May 1989 I made an appointment with Dr. Jacobs so I could find

out what was wrong. I told Jason and Maya after I made the appointment but nothing Jason

said comforted me because deep down I knew my cancer had returned and I there would be

no happy ending the second time around. Dr. Jacobs sent me for a CT scan and a mammogram

at Honolulu General Hospital and I was scared the entire time but having Jason there helped

get me through it all. In mid- May of 1989 when I was at home working in the garden, I heard

the phone ring and my heart sank because I knew it was Dr. Jacobs calling and I didn’t want

to hear what he had to say. I didn’t want to be sick anymore. I wanted to live out the rest of

my days raising Maya and hope that I would see Opal again one day when she was much older

but some things can’t be. When Jason and I went to Dr. Jacob’s office the next day and he told

us that the cancer had returned to my breast and spread to my brain I knew things were not

going to end well and had to make sure everything was taken care of for when my time came.

In the evening after Maya and Jason were asleep, I wrote a letter to Opal. I wanted her to

know where I was, and I wanted to see her one last time before it was my time to go.

Dear Opal,

You are twenty-two years old about to be twenty-three and I haven’t seen you since you

were sixteen. I know your grandmother and your father have taken good care of you but I

sometimes wonder what you have become and how life has been for you all these years.

Did you go to college? What did you major in? As you probably know I have moved around

a lot and have finally made a life for myself, but these last few years have not been so good

for me which is why I am writing you. I just found out that I don’t have much time left and

I would like to see you before my time is up. I don’t want anyone to know where I am except

you and your grandmother for my family’s sake. I am married to a man named Jason and his

daughter Maya calls me mommy and she reminds me of you when you were her age. I hope

you come and see me because I do miss you and I miss the times when it was just us back

in California when we didn’t have a care in the world. I hope you will consider coming to

see me and I hope to hear from you soon.

Love,

Violet

I mailed my final letter to Opal the following morning and then I returned home and waited

for her response which I hoped would soon come. I wanted to see Opal more than anything and

at night when I couldn’t sleep, I thought about my old life in California before things got

complicated. I missed when times were simple when I didn’t have a care in the world like when

I was just a student and all that I needed to do was study and do well in order to become a doctor

but life took a turn for me, and I met Wayne and fell in love with him. In the beginning life was

fine and we were happy but then he started to expect things from me and that’s when I became

unhappy and made a choice that I couldn’t take back and now I was paying for it. My only

hope was that I would see Opal before my time was up so I could say goodbye and I would

make sure I hung on until I did so.

Letting Go

When I turned seventeen in July of 1984, I realized that life in Alabama wasn’t for me and

decided that when it was time for me to go to college, I would make sure I went as far away as

I could. I did well enough in school to get into Columbia University where I majored in law

something I know Violet would not approve of. I didn’t want what happened to Maggie to

happen to anyone else and whenever I thought about Violet getting away with murder I

became angrier. She took my mother away from me and I often wondered how my life would

have turned out had my mother not been killed and I grew up living a normal life with two

parents who loved me. Would I still be the same Opal? or would I be content with life in Macon,

and settle down with a nice guy and have a few kids? Those were the things I often wondered

about when I wasn’t studying for a test or going from class to class. My father worked hard to

pay for my education and Mary made sure I always had everything I needed even though I

didn’t live with them. I decided to live with my grandmother after I found out that Paul was

my father because it wasn’t right for her to be alone after just finding out that her daughter had

killed someone and stolen their child. My grandmother didn’t deserve to be alone and her health

was declining so when I told my father I wanted to stay with her and take care of her he didn’t

fight me and I was glad because I didn’t think I could deal with anymore anger than I already

had dealt with.

When the first letter came in 1983 a month after I turned sixteen, I was filled with anger

at the fact that Violet thought she was doing me a favor by killing my mother and raising me

and when the second letter came, I tossed it in the trash. The third letter came when I was in my,

last year at Columbia and my grandmother gave it to me when I came home after graduation and

it got my interest. When I read that Violet was living in Hawaii with her husband and a girl that

called her mommy and reminded her of me I was angry but when I read that she was dying I

didn’t know how to tell my grandmother who had already been through so much. I knew

turning Violet in for Maggie’s murder was pointless because she was already going to pay

for what she did with her life and that punishment seemed to fit the crime. I thought about

what I was going to say to my grandmother for a few days and then one afternoon in late

June as we were having lunch, I told her about Violet’s letter. My grandmother stopped eating

and her eyes got wide as I told her about Violet’s new life married to a lawyer who has a

little girl that calls her mommy and apparently reminds her of me. *“How is she?”* Answering

my, grandmother’s question was probably the hardest thing I would ever do but I knew it had

to be done. *“She’s dying.”* The room went silent after I told my grandmother that Violet’s cancer

had returned and she didn’t want to go through chemo again and then my grandmother asked me

something I never thought I’d hear her ask. “*I want to see Violet,”* I didn’t know how to respond

to my grandmother because I wasn’t even sure that I was going to see Violet, but I knew the

both of them didn’t have much time left so I said we could visit her together.

The next day I bought two tickets to Honolulu, Hawaii and on July 2nd, 1989, my grandmother

and I were on our way to see Violet. I’d written her a letter as soon as my grandmother and I

decided that we were going to see her, but I didn’t think Violet would get it until after we visited

her so our visit would be a surprise. We arrived in Hawaii at midnight on July 3rd and checked

into the nearest hotel where we spent most of the day resting before talking about going to see

Violet. My only problem was I hadn’t told my grandmother that Violet no longer used her real

name in order to avoid jail and I didn’t think my grandmother would have an easy time

understanding everything I had to say. *“She doesn’t go by the name Violet anymore,”* I said

as my grandmother and I sat outside on the balcony of our hotel and had lunch together. *“I know*

*that,”* My grandmother sounded sad when she responded to me, but I didn’t want to keep

anything from her because it wasn’t fair. *“I have her number. Would you like to call her and let*

*her know that we are here?”* When I asked this question there was a long silence and when my,

grandmother said no I didn’t have to ask why. *“I don’t want her to know I came with you. I want*

*her to stay put and not run again,”* I knew my grandmother was angry and she wanted answers

that she may never get I just hoped that Violet would talk to her and be honest before she never

saw either one of us again. We waited until night- time the following day before we called Violet

to let her know we had arrived in Hawaii and wanted to come and see her. The phone rang a few

times before a man answered and I asked to speak to Janice after lying and telling him that I was

a friend from work.

*“Hello,”* I hadn’t heard Violet’s voice since I was a teenager and hearing it for the first time

in six years took me back to the house on Magnolia Street where I used to feel safe until my,

whole world changed. *“It’s me Opal. I’m here in Hawaii and I wanted to call and ask you when*

*was a good time to come see you,”* There was a long pause and I figured Violet was thinking

about our old life in California as well and when she told me to come have breakfast with her

in the morning. There was so much I wanted to say to her then, but I knew I wouldn’t be able

to because me being angry and telling Violet how angry I was wouldn’t change the fact that

she was dying and my anger didn’t matter anymore. I told Violet I would meet her for breakfast

and after I hung up the phone, I told my grandmother our plans and the only thing she said was

that she couldn’t wait. My grandmother was angry with Violet and had been for quite sometime

since I’d come to live with her when I was 16 and she hadn’t been able to tell anyone, so I knew

now that she had her chance, she would take it. We watched the fireworks for the rest of the

night before going to bed and in the morning when we woke up my grandmother and I took

quick, showers, got dressed and took a cab to Violet’s house. There was nothing but silence

during the entire ride to Violet’s house and when we finally arrived my grandmother stood out

front for a little bit and took in the scenery. *“She’s done well for herself. I hope she doesn’t think*

*that everyone has forgotten what she’s done in the past because the past will always haunt her,”*

I knew my grandmother wanted answers and I knew she wasn’t going to leave until she got them

and she had every right to demand answers I just hoped that Violet was prepared to answer those

questions and answer them honestly.

After I rang the doorbell, we waited for a few minutes before Jason opened the door and

invited us in and took us to the kitchen where Violet was sitting at the table with Maya acting

like she’d never done anything wrong and as if everything was fine and it made me sick.

As the five of us ate my grandmother and Violet kept on looking at one another and I knew my,

grandmother wasn’t going to let Violet get away with all she had done. For years my

grandmother had been lied to and hadn’t heard from her own daughter and she didn’t like either

of those things especially being lied to. Neither of us said very much during breakfast and

afterwards we took a cab back to our hotel and as soon as we got there my grandmother told

me she had a feeling that Violet was going to try and run again because she had come with me

to see her. *“How do you know?”* I asked even though I knew my grandmother was right because

I’d seen the fear in Violet’s eyes at breakfast even though she hid it well. *“A mother knows,”*

My grandmother was angry, and I knew she wasn’t happy with Violet and all the pain she had

caused everyone who loved her and the only thing I could think of was calling her and arranging

a meeting between the two of us so I could get the answers to my questions. While my,

grandmother napped I called Violet who answered the phone this time and somehow, she knew I

was the one who was calling. *“Hello Opal,”* I didn’t know what to say at first but when I did

finally find my voice I asked Violet if we could meet somewhere and talk since, I hadn’t seen

her in so long. I wanted to let Violet know how angry I was with her, and I thought I would be

able to get her to talk if it was just the two of us but I was wrong because my grandmother had

her own agenda and was smart enough to keep it to herself.

Violet and I agreed to meet for lunch the following day and after we made plans, I called Paul

to let him know I was okay and enjoying my vacation. I never told him about the letters I

received because I know if I had Violet would have been in jail years ago for my mothers

murder and anyone else she’d hurt while she was on the run. After I was done talking to Paul

I hung up the phone and started thinking about what I wanted to ask Violet when we met for

lunch and as I did this, I looked through an old photo album that had pictures of me and Violet

when I was a baby up until I turned 13. Paul had missed out on so many firsts in my life and I

only had Violet to blame for that because it should have been him and Maggie in those pictures

with me. My mother should have been there when I started to walk and talk and then both of

my parents should have been there on my first day of school, but life took a different turn

for me and I would never be the same because of what happened after I was born. That night

before bed I went over the questions, I was going to ask Violet and I put the only photo I had of

Maggie in my purse so I wouldn’t forget to bring it with me. In the photo that Paul had taken

Maggie was wearing a blue dress and she was 7 months pregnant with me according to the

date on the back of the photo which was May 1967. In the phot Maggie was smiling and looked

very happy little did she know she would be gone in two months, and I would be presumed

dead.

When I woke up the next morning my grandmother and I had breakfast together and at 11:30

I grabbed my purse and then called a cab so I could meet Violet for lunch. I told my grandmother

I wanted to buy a few souvenirs before we went back to Alabama on my way out the door but

she wasn’t stupid and I shouldn’t have underestimated her. During the entire cab ride to Pete’s

Seafood Shanty the restaurant Violent and I agreed to meet at I felt as if everything was about to

come to an end and I didn’t know why. When I got to the restaurant Violet was already there

waiting for me and after I was seated, she said she hoped I was hungry because we were eating

in the best seafood restaurant in all of Hawaii. *“How can you act as if everything is okay and*

*you’ve done nothing wrong?”* There was a silence between us after I asked my first question

and as I watched Violet look through her menu, I knew I wasn’t going to get any answers

unless I made a scene. *“You’ve hurt so many people including me and all you can think about*

*is food? Don’t you feel bad about anything you’ve done?!* I’d raised my voice for the first

time in my life and it got more than just Violet’s attention and I was glad because she would

finally take me seriously. *“Please keep your voice down?”* I couldn’t believe the woman that

had killed my mother and stolen me from my family was asking me to keep my voice down

and her request did nothing but anger me. *“Why did you do it?”* I needed to know why Violet

really killed my mother because I didn’t believe for one minute that she was more able to

give me a better life than Maggie. After Violet ordered her lunch, I waited for an answer

and by the time lunch was served I was still waiting for an answer to my question. The

feeling that everything was coming to an end had gotten stronger by the minute and when I heard

the sirens I knew Violet’s time was up. There was a look of fear in Violet’s eyes when she

looked over her shoulder as the officer’s walked into Pete’s Seafood Shanty and when they

arrested her Violet didn’t even put up a fight.

When I went back to the hotel, I found my grandmother sitting outside on the balcony

with tears in her eyes and I knew she was the one who’d called the police. *“Is it done?”* I knew

what my grandmother had just done was the hardest thing she would ever have to do but it had to

be done because Violet had hurt those who loved her the most and she shouldn’t get to live her

life as if she’d never done anything wrong. When my grandmother and I got back to Alabama I

told Paul the truth about my trip to Hawaii and afterwards he didn’t speak to me for a while and

I knew it was because he wanted his chance with Violet to make her pay for what she did to

Maggie. When the police asked me about Violet, I told them everything I knew especially about

the diary she kept and wrote about killing Maggie and raising me as her own child and I still

regret not taking it the day I found it. Violet’s trial began in late October of 1989 and lasted until

April of 1990 and during those six long months I heard and saw some people I knew such as

Wayne and his family and some I did not know such as my mother’s second husband Todd a

lawyer from Alaska who she met in August 1983 and married two years later in April 1985.

My grandmother and I would get up in the morning so we could get ready and go to court

where we would spend most of our day listening to testimony’s, from people who worked

with Violet and those who lived with her then one day it was my turn to testify. I told the

courtroom all about Violet’s diary and the article’s I found in her study then I told them

about the DNA test I took which proved that I was not her daughter which caused quite a few

people to gasp.

In April of 1990 when the trial ended Violet was sentenced to life in jail, but I knew she

wouldn’t last much longer because of her illness. After my grandmother and I left the court

house the two of us went home and when we got there, we found Paul outside waiting for us

and he asked me if I would like to go with him for a ride around town. I said yes not knowing

he would be taking me on a ride back in time to where he first met my mother and where they

used to live up until she was found dead in a field. Our first stop was Macon Central High

School where Paul met Maggie when he was a junior in high school and she was a freshman.

Shortly after they first met Paul told me he and Maggie started dating and her father tried to

keep her from seeing Paul because she was so young. They went to see A Fistful of Dollars at

the drive in and when Paul pulled up to the drive in and told me about their first date in detail

I felt as if I was back in time reliving that day. When Paul took me to the house, he and Maggie

moved into after they got married, he became very emotional, and I didn’t know what to do

except let him speak. *“She was my first love. I promised her father that I would take care of her*

*after we found out that Maggie was pregnant. She wasn’t supposed to go anywhere that day*

*because she was told she could go into labor at any minute. Your mother loved nature and*

*never liked to sit home so she went for a walk that day and when she wasn’t home when I*

*got home I knew something had happened, but I never expected her to be dead,”* Paul was

inconsolable then and I found myself crying as well for the mother I never got to meet but

our tears did not last long and after we pulled ourselves together Paul told me he wanted to

take me to one last place.

Margaret Elizabeth Haines May 2nd, 1950 – July 7th, 1967, beloved daughter and wife this is

what my mother’s head stone read. She’d become an angel to soon and after her body had been

found my mother’s parents left Alabama and never told anyone where they were going not even

Paul. I said my goodbye to my mother that day and a month later in May of 1990 Violet passed

away and it was my grandmothers turn to say goodbye. I however was still angry at everything

that had happened and everything that Violet had done without even thinking about how it would

hurt others including the people who loved her. I spent weeks at home in my room feeling angry

because all I had of my mother was a few photos while others had albums full of memories and

a mother they could always talk to. Then one day in mid - June of 1990 as I was looking through

the paper for a job, I heard a knock at the door and when I opened it Paul said he’d found a few

things that belonged to my mother that he thought I might want including a letter she’d

written to me before I was born. *“I don’t understand why would, she write, me a letter she*

*had no idea what was going to happen to her,”* I was confused and when Paul told me that

my mother had been afraid to have a child because she heard a person could die in labor

I then understood why she’d written the letter.

I waited until night- time to look through the box of my mother’s things that Paul had given

me and laid everything out on my bed. There was a gold locket with her initials on it, a promise

ring my father had given her, a photograph of my mother and father dated December 1965 and

the letter my mother had written to me dated December 15th, 1967, two months after finding out

she was pregnant with me. I pictured a sixteen- year- old Maggie writing the letter and in a way I

felt closer to her as I read her letter and all her hopes for me and my future which is one, she

would never live to see.

Dear Daughter,

Don’t ask me how I know that I’m going to have a girl, but I just have a feeling that, that’s

what’s going to happen. Apparently, you’ve been growing inside me for the past two months

and no one but me and your father know about you. I will have to tell my parents soon but I

haven’t quite figured out how to do so just yet but I’m more afraid of having a baby than I am

of telling my parents that I’m pregnant because some women die while giving birth and I don’t

want to die. I know you will probably think I’m being silly, but I can’t help feeling scared like

something bad could happen to me even though I will probably be just fine. Your dad and I will

watch you grow up and do great things with your life and you will never feel like you’re not

loved so don’t worry about that. I know a lot of people are going to say what does a teenager

know about caring for a child? Or what kind of life will it be for the child? I may not know

much about raising a child but your father and I will care for you the best way we know how and

you will have a great life. In case the worst happens, and I don’t make it I want you to live your

life and not be angry or have any regrets. Don’t worry about what others think of you and know

that I will always love you and watch over you wherever you are and wherever you go.

Love,

Mom

After reading my mother’s letter to me I decided to take her advice and let go of all my,

anger and move on and after my grandmother passed away in August of 1990, I sold the house,

said goodbye to Paul and headed back to New York to see what the busy streets of The Big

Apple and the future held for me now that I knew who I was, and I could handle anything that

came my way.