***Chapter One***

Driving to an unfamiliar house outside the city limits to meet people I didn’t know and then riding with them for 424 miles to a remote location was a little daunting already. When the envelope with my scribbled directions to Kathy's house fell out of reach between the seats of my car, I began to wonder if it was divine intervention. Why was I doing this again? The opportunity to go white water rafting had sort of fallen into my lap, and the fact that it was a church activity made it seem safer. I smiled as I teased myself with mental images of people praying over my body after the river won this battle. No, I was going to be fine, I thought as I crossed my fingers just in case.

After three wrong turns, each too long followed, I finally got to Kathy’s house. The fact that she lived in a very rural area surprised me somewhat. Judging only from her appearance at church, I expected a large, ornate mini-mansion on a well-manicured lawn in a very structured neighborhood, but what I found was nothing like that. The house was nice and well-kept but not fancy. There were many tall trees that hovered protectively around it, giving it a cozy feel. The flowers leading up to the door were tasteful but not overwhelming. Seeing Kathy’s always tanned skin and great sense of style at church had made me feel somewhat inferior to her at times. Now, I saw by her house and her demeanor that this was not intentional; perhaps it was all in my head. Kathy wasn’t ostentatious, just well-polished. While finishing off the glass of raspberry tea that she’d offered, I was treated to her disarming laugh. I found it strangely appealing that she laughed so often. Her home was comfortable, and I was comfortable in it. We chatted like old friends as we waited for the other rider, Kathy’s daughter, Lindsay, to arrive. Some 40 minutes later than expected, we heard her car pull in the driveway.

Meeting her at the door, Kathy said:

“Anna, this is my daughter, Lindsay. Lindsay, this is my friend, Anna. She will be travelling with us to West Virginia. Can we go now?”

“Nice to meet you,” Lindsay answered ignoring her mother’s insistance.

It was evident from the moment we got into the car that Lindsay’s life was not what her mother wanted for her. Although too polite to be openly critical, Kathy's disappointment was only thinly veiled. She asked me several times whether or not Lindsay had asked for permission to open the window or to smoke. Still, I found Lindsay to be quite well behaved for a twenty-something; she spoke politely and without even a trace of disrespect, although it was obvious that she had a wild side. We chatted and laughed as we drove on. Rain pounded the windshield, at times completely obscuring the unfamiliar road. I was glad that I’d decided to ride with someone else, allowing me to focus on the sandwich I’d gotten a few minutes earlier at the Wendy’s drive through window instead of the dangerous driving conditions and the limited visibility and a sky lit only by a sliver of a moon and accented by an occasional lightning strike.

After we left Indiana, the drive got hillier. There were times when the sandwich I’d eaten threatened to escape my stomach, but I managed to keep it down. As it got darker, the oncoming headlights prevented my eyes from adjusting, and, between that and the glare off the water on the windshield, I wondered how Kathy was able to see the road. Again I was grateful that she preferred driving to riding.

Driving through Indiana was adventure-less since I had lived there all my life, and Ohio was not much different. I even caught myself wondering why the two states, which had so much in common, were separated. West Virginia had an almost eerie feel however. There was military tension in the air, as if the Civil War were still being fought. I tried to shake off the feeling but didn't close my eyes just in case the eeriness proved a precursor to something that required my attention.

Lindsay said, “How about a pit stop? I need to pee.”

Kathy sighed in derision. “Yes, Lindsay, we can certainly stop for a restroom break. The sign says there is a BP station in 4 miles. You will have to wait until then.”

Four miles later, we pulled into the station, and Lindsay slammed the door in her hurry to get to the restroom. Kathy grunted again.

“Kathy, Lindsay seems very sweet. It is really great that you and she can travel as friends. I would love that if I had a daughter.”

Kathy responded, “Well she is more her father’s daughter than mine, unfortunately. Sometimes I think she goes out of her way to make me uncomfortable.”

“Well, not many twenty-two year old women would take a trip with their mothers, so she must really like being with you.”

“The trip was kind of her father’s idea. He thought it would help us bond. I just hope Lindsay doesn’t drown me when no one is looking.”

Lindsay tapped on the window and said, I am buying some smokes. Do you want anything?”

“Peach Tea Snapple please. Do you need me to give you the money?”

“No, mom, this one is on me. How about you, Anna?”

“I am fine, thanks. Well, actually I need to stretch my legs, so maybe I will come in with you.”

As we walked into the BP station together, I said to Lindsay, “I remember seeing you at Church last Christmas. It is nice that you come to the Christmas service with your mom and dad.”

“Well dad wanted me to, and I guess it means a lot to my mom. My grandpa was a pastor in that church, you know.”

She grabbed the Snapple, a monster energy drink, Bubble Yum bubble gum, and asked the clerk for a pack of Salem Light 100s. I picked up a package of sunflower seeds and dropped them on the counter behind Lindsay’s bubble gum. I fished a dollar bill from my pocket and tossed it on the counter.

Back in the car, Kathy seemed even more uncomfortable, putting the car in reverse before Lindsay’s door was even closed. Lindsay handed her the Snapple. I thought I saw Kathy exhale irritably when Lindsay popped the tab on her monster drink and took a big slurp. Kathy backed the car out of the space, and we were on our way again. For several miles, the darkness covered the discomfort between mother and daughter, but then Lindsay with a mouth full of gum, lit a cigarette.

“It really is disgusting to have to watch you smoke and chew gum at the same time.”

“You really don’t have to watch you know.”

I closed my eyes to hide as I had done as a child when my parents fought.

At 2:12 AM, we pulled up to the house where we were to stay the night. Blumehaven Inn was a Victorian house perched atop a hill, overlooking the historic town of Fayetteville (Blumehaven). It had once been the home of one of the town’s first doctors. Its historic beauty was still evident although the building needed serious repair work. Kathy had seen a picture of the house on the web site, and seemed fairly sure that this was it. I seemed fairly sure that it would do; I’d have slept anywhere at this point. We tried the door and found it locked. We made our way up the stairs to a second door, which to our delight was unlocked. Road fatigue and the thought of getting up just a few hours later to take on an adventure that I felt barely ready for made me want to bed down where we stood. Giddy from the late hour and the length of the trip, we walked through the house, laughing at our clumsiness as we looked for some indication of where we were supposed to sleep. In the darkness, Kathy kicked a table awakening someone who showed us to our room, handing us clean sheets and wishing us pleasant dreams. I climbed onto the top bunk. As I closed my eyes, I looked up at a stained ceiling which reminded me of the ceiling at the Girl Scout camp I had gone to for every summer as a young girl.

**Chapter Two**

Although I had gone to bed to the sounds of fatigued giggling, I awoke to the renewed heaviness of war. Before I opened my eyes, I felt that something had changed. I looked up at the ceiling above my top bunk where I had noticed the stains the previous night, and now found it remarkably clean. Perhaps it had been a shadow. Shaking myself awake, I noticed that the sound of swing music and the smell of stale cigarette smoke. But more than this, the atmosphere was weighed down with that special mixture of sadness encapsulated in forced amusement; each laugh I heard was a pain revealed. The atmosphere was not happy, but it wanted everyone to think it was.

I opened my eyes to see a décor completely different than the one I'd seen the night before. The taupe painted walls were now adorned with a turquoise flowered wallpaper pattern, and the wood trim that had been painted a cream color was now its original wood tone. There was a faint odor of Pine Sol in the room where I slept, which didn’t mix well with the cigarette smell coming from the hall. The house was clean, but the air burst with secret smells and sounds that poured out too rapidly to be recognized.

A gentle rap at the door made me jump. Although the knock was polite, I felt dread, fearful of the unknown that lurked on the other side. I tried to ask who it was, but only a squeaky grunt emerged. Opening the door a crack, I peeked into the hall. A woman stood there, dressed in a white maid's uniform that reached just below her knees. Her hair was pulled back in a modest bun. She greeted me with a serving smile and a perky “Good morning, Miss.” My new acquaintance proceeded to ask me what I'd like to eat this morning. My jaw dropped with wonder. I wasn’t so much scared as curious with a reservation to be scared later.

Looking past her into the hall, I saw that her clothing and hairstyle, which seemed retro to me, were appropriate for the décor. I was more out of place than she. I gathered myself, told her that I was not hungry, only to see her nod and say “Yes Ma'am” and scurry away busily. She reminded me of the clock-wielding rabbit in "Allison in Wonderland."

I stepped into the hallway, cautious yet quite curious at what I'd find. The campy furniture I’d seen in the shadows the night before had been completely replaced. The new decor wasn't quite luxurious, but it was nicely coordinated and moderately expensive for its era. The floor of the living room was a dark wood that smelled of lemon cleaner. There was a round braided rug in the sitting area of the room and a jukebox in the corner, which I remembered seeing the night before.

I felt sure that I was dreaming, although it all looked and smelled real enough. The heaviness in the air had a dreamlike quality though. As I pondered, a movie star handsome soldier dressed in a lightweight khaki Army uniform danced into view. His partner had peroxide bleached hair that dangled in large curls that bounced with each step. Her dress was made of a very curve-hugging stretch royal blue satin with lots of sheen, and it was obvious that her dance partner appreciated the view. They danced away, soon replaced by another couple in similar attire.

I had to be dreaming, I told myself. I was on a white water rafting trip, staying in an old house that had been remodeled in a simple, rental property style to house more people. This trip was like camp, and it was the year 2006. The people around me were out of place, or I was. This could not be real. The music changed to a song I recognized. It was Glenn Miller’s Pennsylvania 65000. I must have smiled when I heard it, because one of the soldiers walked up to me. He spoke to me, “Ah, this is a nice song; would you like to dance?” I felt very much out of place and unsure of what to say or do and unsure whether or not to play along. I glanced downward and saw that I was dressed appropriately for this time too though not as fancily as some of the women around me. I wore a pink and white cotton dress with puffed sleeves and white buttons down the front.

It still felt like a dream. The change in my surroundings made me afraid, but my fear was different than waking fear. I was completely alert, but the feeling of being distant from my fear reminded me of the time when I’d been given morphine to combat pain after sinus surgery. I knew that there was fear, but it existed in a glass box where I could see it but where it could not be felt or touched in a more tangible way. I took the hand that was extended to me, and we began dancing. The skirt of my dress, which was pleated below my hips, whirled around in response to my movements as my handsome dance partner skillfully led me around the dance floor. I had always shied away from swing dancing, but in this dream state I was easily led. My partner and I didn't speak; we were both busy with the dance. When the song ended, my soldier boy dance partner escorted me back off of the dance floor and with a modest half bow whispered, “It was a pleasure.”

I stood, still a bit stunned at my changed surroundings. The sounds and smells seemed right somehow, almost familiar. The people looked and felt real and were friendly enough. For a second, my thoughts went back to an episode of “The Twilight Zone” where the protagonist suddenly found himself alone in a strange town. My experience was the opposite; I had fallen asleep alone in a strange town, but awakened – if I were awake – in a crowd that felt oddly familiar. A song I was unfamiliar with came on next, and several people rose to dance. I was quite puzzled as to how I could dream a song that I had never heard and stood pondering that for a minute or so before another soldier with a ruddy complexion and a good deal less grace stepped toward me.

“Ma'am, are you all right?” he asked tentatively, turning his head away as if embarrassed to be asking at all.

“Uh, yes. I suppose I am all right. I was just wondering if someone might have a paper.” I asked in the hope of finding out what day it was.

“Excuse me, but what type of paper would you like? I have some stationery in my room.” He answered and then blushed when it occurred to him that I might take that as an attempt to seduce me.

“Actually I was more hoping for a newspaper.” I replied.

He smiled wryly and said, “There is usually a newspaper on the table in the parlor down the hall.” He pointed down the hall. “Do you need me to escort you there?”

“Thank you, but that’s not necessary,” I told him to relieve the awkwardness between us. I then walked down the hall in the direction he had indicated.

I walked down the hallway, peering into the rooms as I passed them.