



Turning Upside Down, Right side Up

Savannah and Alec have always thought their house was odd, their childhood a bit different from their friends, but they never knew how different until Savannah's fourteenth birthday. A day that will live in everyone's memory as the day the life they knew would forever change, and in more ways than they thought possible. Savannah and Alec learn all about the love they never knew they were missing and begin to thrive both inside and out instantly.



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Today is the day we visit Mom at the penitentiary. Since her incarceration, six years ago, my father has taken us to see her on certain days; birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and if something special happened at school for us to share with her. Other times, my aunt has taken me to see her. On the days that my aunt took me, Mom and I sit in silence and draw. Since being put away my mom has not said a word, not one, to anyone around her or us; she made a pact with our father the night before she went in to never speak a word again. We are given a room that is used for conjugal visits and we sit together and draw on drawing pads that I bring, there is always a guard there too to make sure I don’t bring in any sharp objects and to make sure my mom doesn’t keep any of the pencils to be used later for god knows what, but those are the rules.

We sit next to each other and we draw freely, not thinking about what is on the paper, simply letting our fingers say what we want. Often times I stare at her drawings long after we leave to see if she sent me some kind of secret message. Once I found the words ‘I love you’ hidden in a tree she drew. Since then, I always look.

Mom and I would always draw together, since I was very little. She is really good. I once heard my aunt say that my father made her stop to become a mom. He told her that her chosen profession wasn’t real to begin with and only a hobby, but my aunt and I know better. She is brilliant with a pencil and can make a whole world on paper in very little time. I cherish the drawings I have from her, especially the ones we do when I visit her alone, without my father and brother.

I was a child of only eight years old when my mom was put away, today I turn fourteen. I have always visited her on my birthday. Today is a birthday, so we are allowed to bring in cupcakes. They are x-rayed before we go into the room for the visit. The whole day has been an eerie one however. I can’t put my finger on what is going on, or why, but it’s there. Looming in the house all day. I’m hoping that Mom is all right and she won’t have bad news for us. I can’t put my finger on any other reason.

Back when I had turned seven, a girl from my neighborhood was kidnapped and was hurt a lot by someone. It was all over the news and everyone at school talked about how awful things were for that family. Teachers talked to kids about “stranger danger” and even the dangers one can have with people they already know. My aunt insisted that I start self-defense classes right away. To my father’s chagrin, my mother signed me up. He told her that girls can’t defend themselves and that classes are a waste of money but somehow my aunt won that argument and I’ve been in those classes ever since. I am now a brown belt in karate and I am the star in my class. I help teach a lot of younger students, including my brother, who is now eleven. He loves being in my class. We have a great time together.

Alec and I always have fun together, we’ve always made the best of our lives. When our parents are too busy for us we seem to find time for each other. I help him with math and he helps me read boring stories because we take turns and he is very good with his voice. Sometimes he sings the story and we laugh and laugh. Even history class is fun with him around.

Thinking back about the time my mom was put away, I remember more than my parents think I do. I remember the arguments, I remember the screaming cries from the basement, though I didn’t know who or what was screaming. I remember my mom coming to my room those nights

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and singing to us and playing music loudly, it was supposed to be a happy time, but they never were. They were always surrounded by an aura that was heavy with sadness. My brother and I can always feel sadness in the house. We danced with my mom as she sang and we always tried to have a good time for her but when she left our room, my brother and I would cry. Neither of us knew why, the tears would come and we comforted each other before I would take him to his room to go to sleep or he would bring his sleeping bag into my room and sleep on the floor next to me.

In the morning Mom and I would draw together, sometimes her own tears smeared her drawings like a watercolor. I would take those out of the garbage and save them. I put dates on them always. My aunt found my stash of drawings from my mom after she was taken away and she asked me about them. She told me never to show them to my father, that I should always keep this part of her to myself. I used to keep them in the house, now I keep them at my aunt’s apartment and some of them are in my locker at school. I am very protective of them. There are a few here in the house, the oldest ones from when I was really little. And he knew she would draw with me.

“You excited to see Mom today?” Hank asks his daughter as he drives.

Shaking her head from her memories, Savannah looks over to her father, “Always,” she answers quietly.

“What about you buddy?” Hank calls to his son in the back of the car. Alec gleefully answers, “Of course, I brought her favorite kind of cupcake this time and something else special I can’t say now,” he smiles to his dad.

Alec loves to see his mom. They have a great time, she is the only one who listens to him, mainly because she doesn’t talk. She smiles at him all the time and she loves pulling him onto her lap and giving him hugs. It’s not a regular mom and son relationship he knows that, but he likes that she still loves him. He has never had a close relationship with either parent, they are parents, he listens to them because he doesn’t like when they yell. He will argue with Savannah sometimes but he listens to her the most, she is the smartest person he knows, for a girl.

“I’ll bet I can guess what the surprise is,” Hank calls back to him.

“Don’t try I want her to be surprised. Please,” he asks pleadingly.

“Ok kiddo, no problem. I’m sure she will be happy with anything from you. What about you pumpkin? Did you bring anything special?” Hank asks his daughter with his hand on her knee. She pushes his hand off and says, “No, only me. It’s all she ever wants anyway,” she answers quickly.

Hank puts his hand on her shoulder and gives a squeeze, “Yes, you’re right, she loves to see you guys,” he leaves his hand there for a moment too long for Savannah’s comfort, she pushes him off again but doesn’t even know why.

The rest of the car ride is in silence except for her brother’s singing. Alec loves to sing and on days they go see Mom, he usually serenades them with a menagerie of Savannah’s favorite songs. Savannah doesn’t mind, he happens to be very good and it is taking her mind off of her worries.

Savannah’s aunt spoke with her about six months ago about the changes in a girl’s body to a becoming a woman. She had seen some changes in Savannah and knew what was coming. She then took her to see her mom so her mom could explain things to her in a visual way. Her mom cried and before she left she handed her a small piece of paper and on it she wrote, “don’t let him



touch you at all costs.” Savannah doesn’t know who she is referring to or why but she keeps her guard on at all times like she has been taught to in her self-defense classes. She never showed anyone the note, not even her aunt whom she tells everything to.

Today she feels as if she is on an especially high alert, which is why even the touch of her own father has her on edge. She has to remember it’s her birthday and that her mom will probably sense her unease, she has to bring herself back to the here and now. She begins to sing with her brother.

“You have a very sensual voice, be careful with that,” Hank says to her in a voice tone she has never heard before.

Savannah stops singing and sends her aunt a message about what he has said. Her aunt writes back, “I love you and I’m here any time of day.”

Savannah thinks this is a weird answer but she is also comforted by her aunt’s words as well. Before she can get lost in more thoughts of the past, they arrive at the penitentiary.
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Inside her bedroom Savannah’s aunt is pacing. “Damn it!!! Damn it!!! What the hell can I do!!! I can’t be at the house when they get back he will suspect something. Oh god, oh god, oh god, I’m going to vomit. Chelsea what can I do to help?” she calls out to her sister.

“Ok, bring yourself to a calm place, pacing is not helping anyone. Think Reese. Think!” she says out loud again to the walls of her apartment.

Reese paces a few more times around her living room and then sits down on her easy chair. The only thing she can think to do is call the cops but that won’t help. Nothing has happened yet and what if it doesn’t? What if she is wrong and that her sister did do what she said she did? Her gut tells her otherwise though. She knows that Hank is the one who did this, that he kidnaped that girl years ago and that he destroyed her for ever wanting to be near another man, no, another human actually for the rest of her life.

She also feels that he may have done this more than once before that event and even since her sister has been in jail. She doesn’t have the material to prove anything though. Who can she call? Barryl. She will call her old college buddy, the one that got away, he is sure to have the right connections and know whom to call or what to do. She finds her phone and dials with shaking hands.

“Barryl? It’s Reese, I need you big time. Any chance you can meet for lunch or now perhaps?” she asks trying to keep her voice level but she doesn’t think she is successful.

“Reese? Been about five years since you’ve talked to me and now you need a favor. Sounds suspicious. I can’t get you out of a parking ticket, you know,” he says smugly and a little annoyed at her nerve but lord knows it’s good to hear her voice.

“Barryl? You’re all I have,” she begins to cry and then she spills her guts right there on the phone, her sister’s so-called confession and her suspicions about what will happen to her niece all in one long ramble and probably all in one breath. Her crying has her shaking and her voice is quivering so much she is not sure he understood anything she has to say.

“Don’t move, I’m coming over. Same apartment?” he asks.

“Yes,” she manages to whisper.



"I'm calling you back on my cellular phone so we stay in touch until I get there. Reese do you hear me? Push a button on the phone, you don't have to speak." Barryl's voice is much softer now, he has never heard Reese so broken, he knows about her sister but not about the rest of what she is saying. If any of this is true, he will personally see to it that Hank is beaten to a pulp before he reaches trial, even if he does it himself.

Barryl had a crush on Reese years ago and she brushed him off like a fly on a picnic sandwich. He has since kept his distance from the family but never has met anyone as special as Reese. His torch may have died down but it has never been put out. Hearing her voice plea for him has put him right back where he was, infatuation. "Reese?" he says as she answers her phone.

"Yes, I'm here," she manages to say through her choking voice.

"You need to get back to your calm place, it's the only way we can talk. I'm going to help you do that so we can talk when I get there. Your favorite ice cream still pistachio?" he asks.

"Yes," she says with a smirk on her face.

"You still like to go to the park and swing at midnight when no one else is around?" he asks remembering how he has seen her there many times while out after his shift when he was a security guard.

"Um, yes Barryl. I do," her voice a bit stronger at his memory of what she likes to do to relax.

Barryl pulls over to make a quick stop at the store, still talking to her, "Do you still eat grapes with whipped cream and try and make different hair dos on them?" he asks smiling at the memory of throwing whipped cream at her face with a spoon flick.

"I love grapes what can I say?" Reese responds with a little more lift in her voice, "and who can say no to whipped cream?"

Barryl picks up both items and heads to the freezer section for the ice cream. He only has one more item to verify. "And if memory serves me right, you only eat chocolate that has nuts on the inside not out," he says in a questioning voice.

"Wow, Barryl, if I didn't know better I'd say you've been keeping tabs on me," she answers firmly. Reese finds the familiarity of his voice and his choice of conversation helping to bring her back to a calm place. She finally sits down from all of her pacing. She can feel her pulse slowing down but her heart seems to be racing at the thought of seeing Barryl again. The boy who loved her so much when they were too young to know love and she was too foolish to let him in.

Biggest mistake of her life, he would have been a hell of a lot better than the jack she hooked up with in college. What a waste of her time, Barryl promised her a lifetime of love and admiration on his part. She gave him a cold shoulder, actually it was pretty darn freezing if her memory serves her right. She has no right to call him today but she has no one else who will listen to her suspicions as being real. He knows she can't lie, she doesn't know how.

"Reese? You still with me? I hear your breathing getting faster again. I'm on Market street, I'll be there in three minutes," he calls to her. He can hear that she stopped talking and started pacing again.



“Walk over to the window Reese, look out at your back courtyard. Look at how big that cherry tree has gotten. Wow I haven’t seen it in years. Must be almost as high as your window. Can you see the cherries Reese?” he hopes for an answer.

“Barryl, why are you coming? Why are you being so nice to me, I don’t deserve you in my life,” Reese says hesitantly but honestly. It’s really the only way she knows how to talk to people. She continues and answers his question, “Yes, I can see that there are three nests there all ready for the Fall. One has eggs already. Oh Barryl, I’m going to be a momma,” she says softly and puts her hand over her mouth.

“I’m turning on your street now. Stay at the window. I’ll let myself in. I still have my old key,” he says without saying why. Chelsea had given him a copy years ago when Reese was dating a jerk because she was sure that her sister would need saving one day and that Barryl was the one who would do it. In the end, Chelsea is the one who needs saving now but Barryl still has Reese’s key, he couldn’t give it back or let it go.

Barryl takes the steps three at a time and gets to her door on the third floor rather quickly, even carrying the packages. He lets himself in and takes a deep breath. Seeing her, lights that torch hotter than it has ever been. He sets the bags down on the kitchen table and calls to her. “Come before the ice cream melts, it’s still too warm outside to leave it in the car too long.”

Reese turns as she hears his voice. She didn’t even hear him come in. She takes a quick breath upon seeing him. This is the man who promised her forever and right now he is looking better than she has ever seen him. With her eyes fully open but her heart under guard, she walks over to the table and sees that has purchased all of what he talked about.

“Let’s start with the grapes on the balcony, the ice cream will wait for later,” she says opening the whipped cream tub and wiping her finger right through the middle of it.

“Nice to see you too,” Barryl says.

Reese walks with the tub out onto her balcony. After putting away the ice cream. Barryl carries the grapes out and joins her.

“Momma!!! Guess what I brought you!?” Alec calls to her the minute the guard brings her in. She smiles at him and opens her arms for him to get a big hug. She holds on tight and over his shoulder she watches her daughter. Something is wrong, she knows it; her gut tells her something is very wrong.

She lets Alec go and he hands her a piece of paper. The guard steps forward and takes the paper first to check the contents, he is the second one to check the same paper and it upsets Alec that he can’t have a secret with his own mom. She takes the paper from the guard without showing how angry she is that he upset her son. She opens it and reads. A progress report card, with all good marks, he brought up all of his grades from last year. So far, he is doing well in all of his classes. She grabs him and swings him around in joy.

Alec looks at her in the eye, he knows she is happy. “I’m going to be a doctor one day Momma. I’m going to cure people who can’t talk and who can’t hear. Ok Momma? I’m going to do that for you,” he says with a big smile.



His momma tries to smile and hugs him again, she looks this time at her husband and sees him looking at Savannah. Her stomach is churning, she knows the problem now. This is a big thing, she will have to break her silence. But how can she do so without him finding out? If Savannah hasn’t figured anything out yet, no one will ever know.

She finishes hugging Alec and runs to Savannah with a big happy birthday hug. Her husband grabs the cupcakes. He even gives one to the guard. Who, at first, would not take the food until he said. “My son here insists that everyone at the party gets a cupcake and since there is always a guard we had to get five cupcakes. Please, take the first one,” Hank smiles at the guard.

Savannah speaks up for the first time today, “For my birthday wish this year Mom I only want you to be happy. I’m doing well in school like Alec is and Dad is always busy so I’m guessing work is fine. This year it’s about you being happy. Ok?” she asks her mom.

Her mom gives her a big hug again. They sit and eat cupcakes and everyone sings happy birthday to Savannah, except for Mom. They talk a little while about what is going on in school. Hank gives her a cursory account of his job at the bank, never leaving his arm off the back of Savannah’s chair.

Chelsea is very uncomfortable today and the guard notices. She is usually very calm during these visits but something is upsetting her and the guard actually likes Chelsea, this guard feels sorry for her that she has taken this vow of silence. Inside the guard can see Chelsea is bursting with something to say but she can’t. The idiot husband keeps smirking at her as if he knows what is eating her up and the guard wants to accidentally swing a foot and let the chair under the husband go flying. Some say this woman has received what she deserves, some say the punishment is not enough. This particular guard has a hard time figuring this out since the inmate won’t confide in anyone.

Savanna talks about taking art classes with their Aunt Reese and Hank’s face goes cold. He has no use for this aunt and he wants her out of their lives but the only way he can do that is to move and he can’t do that either. He will have to come up with something now that his baby girl is older, she won’t need so much babysitting, she can watch her own brother and maybe he will get what he wants. Specifically control, most importantly away from the menacing aunt.

Chelsea feels the pain in the room, she doesn’t know where it’s coming from but she feels pain all the same. She knows their time is almost over but she wants to get to the bottom of things before they leave, she needs to confirm her stomach ache.

Alec pics up the garbage and throws it out, the guard smiles at him for his good manners. Savannah hugs her mom goodbye and Hank stands in front of his wife with his arm around his daughter’s shoulders, he smiles at his wife. “Isn’t our little girl growing up to be so beautiful?” he asks in a very low and slow voice. The guard doesn’t like what she hears, doesn’t like him.

Savannah wiggles out of his arm, his voice doesn’t sound like his normal voice. It’s the same one she heard in the car before. Not his normal voice, a voice that is coming from somewhere deep inside of him, a dark place maybe. Savannah’s mind is racing, she needs to leave here. The guard sees the irritation in Chelsea’s eyes. She is shaking her head back and forth to say no, to scream actually and the husband laughs. He looks at her and laughs. “I think we are done



here.” The guard announces. Chelsea looks to the guard for help but she knows she can’t do anything.

Hank pats his wife on the top of her head, “Staying silent was your idea, and you made a promise, didn’t you? Be a good little girl,” he laughs again and leads his children out of the room.

Chelsea sits down on the chair and begins to cry. This is the first time she has let tears out since coming here, the guard leaves her be until she is done. Then, quietly, brings her back to her cell without mentioning the outburst to her at all, figuring everyone is due to have one now and again. Although watching someone cry in silence was a little creepy to her. Who is she protecting with this silence?
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The car ride home is quiet. Savannah lets her mind wonder again. This time she insists that her brother sit up front with their dad, claiming she wants to lay down in the back and maybe sleep a bit before they get home.

“Won’t be going home though dear. First, we will have the rest of your birthday celebration. I insist. Come on, we will go to The Grill for lunch then I have to go to work. I won’t see you the rest of your birthday,” Hank makes a fake frown.

“Still, I’d rather close my eyes a few minutes, sometimes this place gives me a headache,” Savannah responds.

“Ok, we’ll wake you when we get there,” Hank says, this time his voice back to normal she recognizes.

Sitting in the back, Savannah brings her mind back to the night before Mom left. She remembers hearing her mom swearing a lot which was unusual for her. Her father was throwing things around in the living room.

Then they were yelling out in the backyard. Savannah saw her mother pointing to the shed in the backyard and her father punched her in the stomach really hard then. She landed on the floor. He picked her up and brought her in the house.

Savannah was going to go downstairs to her mom when she heard her father say, “I don’t want to do that again. What got into me? I’m a sick man to hit my wife. Look what you brought out in me?”

Her mom answered but she couldn’t hear because it was no more than a whisper. Then her father said, “You have to save me, you’re the only one.”

Savannah remembers this as if the events happened yesterday. But who would believe her now? She remembers hearing them clean up the living room and her mother finding her voice to say, “I’ll do what I can, I’ll say what needs to be said but you will never hear another word from me as long as I live.”

Her father had laughed. “Like that’s possible, you never shut up,” he had said.

“Or I can go and say whatever I want and see where the chips will fall,” she said.

“And what will happen to your precious children without parents?” he asked. “You think your selfish sister would take them? No way, she only wants what is best for her. One day, I’ll teach her what is best for women like her. We’ll have that one on one she keeps yapping at me about.” he said.

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“Don’t touch my sister or Savannah for that matter, or anyone else,” she said in an angry voice.

“You will say what needs to be said, you will throw them off, you will be quiet, or guess what will happen to that precious piece of garbage you love so much?” he said.

“yes,” she answered.

Savannah sits up. So many things are falling into place now in her mind. She wants to go look at her pictures now even more. Maybe her mom said something, maybe the truth is there. Her suppressed memories are sure resurfacing now and she doesn’t know why. They are as clear as they’ve ever been.

All she knows is that her mom is in jail because of something her father did. This she is sure of now. She will have to keep thinking, thinking of things from back before Mom went away. What else can she remember? And even if she does, will anyone listen to her or will his lawyers convince people that someone else is feeding her this information, someone who doesn’t like him like her aunt. Savannah laughs at herself now, she has created a whole television drama in her head about her own life. Savannah sits up to try and get back into her birthday mode.

Her friends are coming over for dinner tonight because her father already told her that he won’t be home for dinner, he has some kind of meeting after work. She can make herself happy enough for lunch at The Grill. “So, Alec do you know what you want already? We don’t want to waste time deciding, better to know and eat right away, right Dad?” she asks trying to sound chipper

“You bet,” he answers.

“Because it’s my birthday can we get an appetizer and then a main course?” she asks

“Why not, it’s early yet and I have the time. Fourteen is a big birthday, let’s go all out and even get dessert. They have that apple pie there you like,” Hank answers with a smirk.

“Whoa dad!! If we’re going to have dessert too than I only want a burger for lunch. Whoo hoo! Happy birthday sis!!” Alec calls to her.

“Thanks Alec, I guess when you turn fourteen, we’ll have to order from the bar b que place across town, huh?” Savannah asks knowing it’s his favorite.

“You bet!” he answers.

The ride to the restaurant is peaceful in the car. The three of them happily take their seats and order a three-course meal in honor of Savannah birthday. The waitress brings her over a special birthday hat they have for patrons willing to admit their birthday. If she keeps it on the whole time, dessert is on the house.

Savannah is a good sport and she agrees to put it on. Anyone who passes her wishes her happy birthday and every time a waiter or busboy catches someone saying so they come over and makes a mark on her hat. “The most we had for one person is fifty-eight,” he says with a smile.

Their table is close to the entrance so pretty much anyone walking in says happy birthday to her. The waiter didn’t realize how many people would be coming in for lunch when he put them at the front table.

By the time dessert comes, Savannah has broken the record, she is now the proud owner of a happy birthday hat with sixty-four checks on it. In some ways, this makes her very happy. She



wants to tell her mom all about her lunch, she wants to tell everyone, even though it seems silly. But their dessert is free and she received so many compliments from people, it has been a real ego boost lunch. They even asked if they can take her picture as the new birthday girl of the month.

On the way back to the car, Savannah thanks her dad with a peck on the cheek, “That was fun thanks,” she says innocently to her father.

“Anything for my big girl,” Hanks says in the voice that is unfamiliar to her again. She quickly pushes her brother in the front seat and hops to the back to stretch her legs. “Ah, the birthday girl gets to stretch her legs after that big lunch. I think I’ll only have water for dinner though.” Savannah says trying to justify her being in the back again.

“You need more than that to keep your strength up,” Hank says in this unusual voice once more.

Savannah’s gut is jumpy, kind of like how she saw her mom today. Her mom knows something is wrong, now Savannah knows too and she is pretty sure that her aunt knows something as well. But what could be so bad that I need to protect myself and Alec? Savannah watches the road pass her by as they drive home, nobody is talking which is good; she needs to think.

She wants to send a message to her aunt but part of her feels she has to wait. Her mom always tells her to go with her gut; that it will always teach you the right thing to do. So, for now, she will hold off in talking to or texting her aunt.

No sooner has she made up her mind and she gets a text from her aunt ‘*Happy Birthday to my best girl ☺ Can’t believe you’re fourteen.*’

Savannah has to respond, but she wants to say something without saying something, hmmm, how can she do this, ‘*driving home quietly after a big lunch, stretching my legs in the back seat.*’ She hopes her aunt hears what she is not saying.  
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“Barryl, she knows something bad is going to happen.” Reese looks over to Barryl on the other end of the couch. She has spent the past hour or so telling him everything she knows from her sister’s innuendos years ago to what her gut is telling her now. She swings her feet over the edge of the couch to stand up.

“Reese, pacing won’t help you. Really, it won’t. Tell me, how do you know,” he asks calmly.

“I told you her text, right?” she asks.

“yes,” he says blandly trying not to put the puzzle together because he is about to be sick to his stomach at the thought of a father doing anything like this to his own daughter.

“She told me now she is in the back of the car. Barryl, Savannah gets car sick too quickly which is why she is always in the front. Ok, it’s not a far drive right now so she will be ok, but she never, and when I say never, I mean never sits in the back seat. She is trying to tell me she is worried. Oh god, if that bastard touches her, I’ll personally string him up by his balls if I don’t kill him first,” she says.

“As a former officer of the law, I’m going to pretend I didn’t hear that, ok? Either way, there is nothing for you to do Reese. Your gut is not a convincing argument for the cops. They won’t care. I promise you. We need something concrete. But if your gut is telling you something is



up, I believe you, and I believe you hear what she is not saying too. And I will also tell you this sucks big time that you can’t do a damn thing right now, so the best I can do is stay here on this couch with you and be ready to run if necessary. I promise not to jump your bones, at least not tonight,” he tries to end with a smile.

“You’d do that for me? After how I treated you years ago. You’re still the best friend I’ve ever had Barryl, I mean that,” Reese says with pleading eyes.

“Reese, I never stopped being your friend, you stopped being in touch is all. I’ve still been around, and if you didn’t think I was, you wouldn’t have called me today, would you?” he asks.

“I hate when you’re right. I don’t know what to do Barryl, this does suck. Oh god Chelsea I promised her I’d keep a tight watch on those kids. Are you sure we can’t pop over with a surprise dessert around the time he gets home?” she asks. “Being her birthday and all?”

“Didn’t you say he is working late tonight? That will be highly suspicious and if he wants he can put a restraining order on you for becoming too clingy to his children. I’ve seen it done. It’s not pretty. Listen, I’ve worked as a security guard for some high-profile places and I’ve practically written the book on how to spy on someone if need be, as a private detective I’ve helped a lot of people find justice but it means a lot of things to people and the law isn’t always involved. Do you understand me?” Barryl asks.

“Yes, but doesn’t the lying hurt you? I mean I couldn’t lie about my age if you asked me to or even my weight,” she says shyly.

“I know, you’re a detective’s dream. I spent eight years as a private security guard, they liked me working the night shift because of my size, then I worked for the police for a while but their rules restricted me from getting things done the way I wanted to. Yes, I do things within the law, but sometimes the line I’m inside of is pretty thin. They know me down at the 5th precinct and respect the work I do. I’ve never crossed that line nor do I have any intention of doing so, ever. I am here tonight for your personal safety and your emotional support. I am here for Chelsea’s kids as well. Whatever you need, I’m yours, it’s always been that way,” he says dryly.

“Please don’t tell me this is why you never married. I’ll hate myself if you say that,” Reese says.

“Ok,” he says.

“Ok what?” she asks.

“I won’t tell you no other woman has measured up to you,” he says with a smile.

Reese walks over to Barryl and leans down to give him a peck on the top of his head, “I don’t deserve a friend like you Barryl.” She says quietly and walks back to her back door to watch the world go by. She needs something to do, something mindless to do. What can she do that will take her mind off of her imagination right now?

“Pictures,” she says out loud, “hold on, I’ll be right back.” Reese says as she darts to the back of her apartment and retrieves three shoe boxes filled with pictures, many of them taken from her sister’s house right before she went in. Chelsea said it’s something she never got around to doing.

“Good idea, mindless yet time consuming. I’m in,” Barryl says walking towards where Reese has dumped the first box onto the floor. “Are there dates on the back?” he asks.



“On some, yes.” Reese begins to sort by which ones have writing and which ones don’t, they can fill in the don’ts after seeing the ones that do or so she assumes. She takes a deep breath and can smell Barryl’s aftershave from her side of the pile. This is going to be hard working so close to him. She owes him so much, but it is he who is giving more, again. She has to stop this thinking of her personal life right now, the kids are priority one but Barryl is definitely priority two.
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Savannah’s friends come by for a great dinner, a few of their older siblings hang around too because they were told to watch the younger ones knowing no parents were around. Savannah doesn’t mind as much as some of the others do, she is happy for the distraction. Happy to have some fun in her house. That is until one of the guys yells, “Hey, why don’t we go in the basement and play some games.”

Savannah freezes at the word basement. “No!” She screams. Then she calms down as she sees everyone watching her. “I mean, my dad has private things down there, we aren’t even allowed down there, let alone all of you, how about we go out back? The weather is nice and we have enough balls to play dodgeball, boys against girls I think,” her voice quickly recovering from a horror she doesn’t even know about, she knows that touching that doorknob once got her smacked in the head so hard she hit her head into the wall and fell down. Then the lock was installed higher than she could reach at the time.

“You’re on sister!” the same boy calls out. Everyone piles into the backyard and grabs a ball from the side of the shed. The game is a huge success, the girls won and the boys were really good sports.

“Best party you’ve ever had Savannah,” one of her friends says on the way out.

“Thanks.” She answers.

“Yeah, nice job kiddo. Feeling good at fourteen, huh? Wait until you hit seventeen, that’s when the fun starts. Driving, sneaking into R rated movies, hanging out in all the best places. You’ll see. It will be great fun,” he says as he ruffles her hair like a small child. “See you around kiddo.”

Savanna waves to all her friends and their siblings. In the end, no one minded really having the older teens there, they made the party a lot of fun. It was fun having an all kid party with no real adults. Made her feel very responsible. Alec and Savannah spend an hour or so cleaning up the house and sit down to watch a movie. With the movie over, they both head upstairs to bed. “Savannah?” Alec asks.

“Yes?” she says.

“Can I sleep on your floor tonight?” he asks

“You feel something too?” she asks.

“Yes, Mom wasn’t right today, the car ride felt off, everything. I know I’m a big boy now and it’s not like it was when we were little, but can I please stay with you? I’ll get my sleeping bag.” He pleads with her.

“Somehow, I feel life is you and me against the world, especially today. Of course, you can stay. I’ll play our favorite music on low so you can fall asleep easily. I’m going to stay up and read a while ok?” she answers him

“Thanks Savannah, for a girl, you’re the best,” he smiles.



Savannah and Alec settle into her room. He lays down in his sleeping bag and falls to sleep pretty quickly at the foot of her bed, she puts her side light on and reads for a while before laying down herself. She has no reason to stay up late. School tomorrow, she sets her alarm and lays down.

Hank finds his way home tonight by sheer luck. After work he had gone to the bar with a couple of friends and they drank to their good health and anything else they could find to toast. He knows what’s been on his mind all day and he is looking forward to this evening’s entertainment.

Who wants to be with that redhead from the bar anyway when you can have a fresh dark brunette? Brunettes have always been his favorite. He remembers them all fondly. While some may say blondes are stupid, Hank has always found that brunettes are the most gullible and that has always been good for him.

He opens the door and stumbles in. He sets his car keys down on the side table in the foyer and goes about checking the house as if this is an ordinary day. He splashes water on his face in the kitchen and looks around to make sure the kids cleaned up from dinner tonight. It looks good to him, Savannah is a great housekeeper, now he will see what else she is great at.

Hank heads upstairs to get ready for bed, he goes through his usual routine, and puts on fresh clean pajamas. He turns off the lights.

Someone is moving in her room, Savannah can tell but it’s a shuffling sound, not like her brother’s quick steps. She opens half an eye and sees her father coming towards her with a smile on his face, but it’s not a real smile, it’s something so much more. She readies her body for self-defense. Savannah knew something bad was going to happen, she didn’t know it was going to happen to her, and by him of all people. How do you prepare for that?

He sits down on her bed and strokes her head, then his hand goes under her cover and down her back, when it doesn’t stop she attacks. He is drunk, she can smell alcohol on his breath.

“You can’t be this seductive and not expect me to react. You brought this upon yourself.” He says to her in a growl only heard by animals. “Don’t even try your self-defense crap on me. I know all of them, I’ll beat you at your game you little tramp. I’ve waited long enough,” he continues to grab at her in places he shouldn’t.

Then the final blow comes, he rips her shirt open and his eyes pop open. Savannah realizes that he never knew she has grown as much as she has because she wears loose fitting clothes, especially tops, and she takes this moment of shock to convince him, she is not a pushover. But before she can she hears a crash and her father falls to the floor.

Alec is standing on her bed with his hands trembling. He had climbed up on the bed with no one noticing and slammed her heavy light on his father’s head. He is not moving. Savannah and Alec jump away from the bed. She grabs her phone and her brother. They run down the hall and then down the stairs, she runs into the laundry room to grab some clothes to put over her pajamas and then she grabs her brother and they run out to the shed to grab their bikes. They walk them to the street behind their house and start riding as fast as they can towards her aunt’s place. After the first ten minutes of riding on sheer adrenaline, she pulls over behind a house to wait to make sure they aren’t being followed. She takes a moment to call her aunt.

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“Aunt Reese, he... I mean, we are...” her voice is trembling too much to finish a sentence. “Where are you, we’re coming,” she says.

Alec sneaks around the house to see the address, she tells her aunt where they are hiding.

“Don’t move, in the dark he won’t find you. He is probably ok, I’ll send the cops over saying I’m a neighbor and I heard a loud crash,” she hangs up.

“Damn it!!! Damn it!!!! Damn it!!!” she screams her voice getting louder and louder each time she says it. “He went for her that damn bastard went for his own daughter! You better drive we have to go get them,” she says to Barryl.

“Ok, try and breathe, is she hurt?” he asks.

“Doesn’t sound like it, but she is shaken that is for sure,” she says, her heart racing, she can feel her pulse pounding in her neck. “Oh god Chelsea, I’m so sorry, I failed her, didn’t I Barryl. Give me one job to do and I blow it out of the water. How on earth could I ever be a mother? I’ll kill my own kids,” Reese continues her rant in the car.

Barryl listens to every word, he is never sure when something could be significant that he will need to use later for some reason, occupational hazard. He puts his hand on Reese’s shoulder to calm her down, “Reese, the kids need you to be the adult, they need calm and firm do you hear me? They need you to open your arms and hug them and cry with them if necessary but they don’t need to see this nervous side of you. Can you pull yourself together, we’re almost there,” he says in his professional voice.

“You’re right. Ok, deep cleansing breathes. The house number is 725, should be the next one. I said I would get out of the car so they can see me, they don’t know you’re with me although I did say we but it could mean anyone to them,” Reese says in a calming voice, “Ok, I can get out now.”

She opens the door and two kids come running out of the blue from the other direction, they told her the wrong number. Probably on purpose, she thinks to herself.

Barryl puts the bikes in his trunk, happy to be driving his pick-up truck tonight, and introduces himself, “Hi kids, name’s Barryl. I’m an old friend of your mom and your aunt. Right now, I work as a private detective. This is my car and I’m going to take you back to your aunt’s place. Ok?”

They shake their heads. “Did you call the police yet? Is Dad alive? Did I kill him?” Alec’s voice says shaking. Barryl looks at Reese, he knows she can’t make the call.

“I’ll make sure they know,” Barryl says and makes the call to a friend at the precinct.

“Can you speak candidly?” the officer asks.

“Not at this time,” he answers.

“Call me back in five, no later,” the officer orders.

The instructions are ok with Barryl, it only takes a few minutes to get to Reese’s place anyway. “You guys go in. I’ll be up in a few minutes, the police asked me to call back when you were safe,” he shakes his head to the door and Reese takes her shaking niece and nephew to her apartment. He watches as the doorman lets them in and then he calls back.

“Give the truth, what are we dealing with Barryl,” the officer says.



Barryl tells him all that Reese told him today. “I say this in confidence, word gets out you’re investigating him and I’ll personally have your ass on a sling in ten minutes or less,” he kind of barks that last part for emphases.

“Got it, right now we call in a disturbance. We’ll see if he is alive and or needs medical attention. Highly possible he needs some medical attention is my guess,” the officer says.

“Intruders do weird things to people you know,” Barryl answers. Then he hangs up and goes up to Reese and the kids.

He knocks before entering. “Hey, how is everyone doing?” he asks.

“Alec thinks he killed our dad, do you know if he is ok?” Savannah asks in the most grown up voice she could muster right now.

“The police are on their way, they will contact me as soon as they know what is going on. Savannah, did he get a chance to hurt you in any way? Besides the slap on the face, that I see.” Barryl observes.

Savannah puts her hand to her face, she had forgotten about that, he was so smug about being able to get to her to prove her self-defense moves wouldn’t work. Reese takes her niece’s hand down and says quietly, “This is going to be red for a couple of days, best you stay out of school, you don’t want anyone asking questions about whose hand print that is. Right Barryl?” she asks for confirmation.

“Exactly. I’m suggesting a visit to your mother tomorrow, Savannah, it’s time you get her to communicate with you. In some way, she knows more than she is telling of why she is there. I’m sure she does,” he says, again using his professional voice.

“Aunt Reese, where are her pictures? Sometimes she hides messages in them. Last time I was there we drew in silence, real silence, it’s as if she was intent on making her picture,” Savannah says, her voice still shaking. She sits down next to Alec and pulls him over.

“I killed my own father,” he says under his breath.

Barryl pulls up a chair and sits in front of Alec, “Whatever happened, needed to happen. Instead of saying how much your hurt your father, maybe you can think about how brave you were to save your sister. You are a fast thinking young man who knew there was a bad situation and you did something to stop things from getting worse. To me, you deserve a medal of honor. I should know, I was on the police force for a while, I know who gets them,” Barryl says showing off his private detective badge to the young man.

“Besides, if he is ok, he will know you guys are here, where else will you go? He will come and show you he is ok. You will see. Right Barryl?” Reese is second guessing her every word right now and Barryl knows why, she no longer trusts herself and he has to step in before she shows her nerves to the kids.

“Did you find those drawings yet?” he asks her to give her a reason to leave the room.

“Oh, one moment,” she says as she walks out.

“The police may ask you questions Savannah, are you prepared to answer them?” he asks.

“He was drunk, he didn’t mean what he did, right?” she asks him pleadingly.

“I can’t answer that, you can’t blame things on alcohol if you were going to do them Anyway,” he says straightforward to her.



“Oh, well, that explains his voice then,” Savannah says. Barryl looks at her inquisitively and she explains the day and how his voice changed a couple of times and what he said in that voice. Something falls on the floor and before Alec can pick it up, Barryl does. “What’s on the recorder my friend?” he says in a serious yet firm voice, wanting the truth.

Alec’s eyes are frozen on the recorder. With all his fidgeting it must have fallen off his belt. Savannah puts her arm around her brother’s shoulders and pulls him closer to her, she speaks for him. “When Alec was little he said he used to hear voices down in the basement when he slept. He said he heard them in his room too, so I bought him a recorder and I said any time he is scared he should record the night and we will listen together in the morning, the tape is digital so it runs eight hours or so. I didn’t realize he turned it on tonight. Alec were you that scared? Is that why you wanted to sleep in my room?” she asks her brother softly.

He can only shake his head and starts to cry. Savannah holds on to him like a mother would. Barryl thinks this is not the first time this has happened in their lives. “I’m going to hold on to this for future reference if you don’t mind. We may need to hear this later. Ok?” he asks the kids.

“Found only these two Savannah, they are dated last month and a year ago. Did you hide others here I don’t know about?” Reese asks her niece.

Savannah shakes her head and proceeds to go and find them in their hiding places. They are all around the apartment. Savannah produces eight more drawings. “See this is the one she wrote *I love you* in the trees for me. See it?” Savannah points to the picture. Barryl sees it right away, he also sees a cellar door on the ground with a hand coming out of it and it’s freaking him out.

“Savannah, do you see anything else in this picture?” he asks her.

Somehow, in Savannah’s current shaken state she finds the courage to look more deeply into the picture. She points to the hand coming out of the cellar door. She points to a small jar in the window of the shed in the yard and Alec points to a pair of his father’s pants in the bark of the tree.

“How do you know they are meant to be your father’s?” Reese asks.

“The patch on the knee,” he points to it again and this time Barryl sees the image as well. A puzzle is being put together here. She took a vow of silence; that she would never speak again, but she is screaming in these pictures.

“Where are your drawing pads Savannah? Now, where are they this minute?” he asks.

“Some are in my school locker, one is under my mattress and one is under a fake bottom of my desk drawer in the living room. Are these important?” she asks.

“Very. Did you date all of them?” he asks.

“Yes, Momma always taught me to date my work and sign them,” she says proudly.

“Reese, I need to make a couple of calls. Do like we did with the pictures. Put these in date order. We will see the whole picture through them. I’m sure everything not said is here. Six years’ worth of pictures must convey an awful lot of information. Savannah, I say this again, you and your brother are two of the bravest kids I know. I’m proud to call you my friends,” after saying this he gets up and calls his friend again.



“What’s the hold up?” Barryl asks.

“Definitely unconscious when we got there. We are at the hospital now but based on what you said, I asked a few weird questions while he was in a groggy state and not quite with us. He said something about keeping her for himself and a basement. We aren’t sure what to do with this yet or even if it means anything. You have more?” the officer asks.

Barryl plays the recorder over the phone for him to hear. “Is that enough to hold him at least until we figure out the more. The boy recorded it all, I’ll explain why later. We have drawings from the mother that have hidden hints, remember those pictures of hidden pictures we used to do as kids and you circles the hidden objects when you found them? Well, we have six years of pictures from the mother to look through. It’s not going to be pretty and I don’t want the kids looking at them. Who can you send over in the morning? Or now. Definitely now.” Barryl asks.

“Oh crap, you’re kidding right?” the officer throws out a few curse words and then continues, “This is not going to be good for those kids to know about. I’ll get a temporary custody given to Reese. Right now, I’m going to cuff him to the bed, when he wakes I’ll let him know why he is here. Let him sweat it out a while. Maybe I’ll tell him his house is being looked at from top to bottom to see if I can get a rise out of him. I’d like to raise my fist through that damn smirk he had on before. Damn it Barryl, just damn,” he ends the conversation and calls his best detective to tell him where to go early in the morning or now if he can.
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Barryl and Reese are up at the crack of dawn, “No sleeping for you?” he asks as she comes out from the back.

“Tell me again why I deserve your friendship?” she asks.

“Well, for right now, things have changed. I’m a detective on a mission. I’ve been looking at these drawings all night. There is a detective coming over soon to double check what I see. I don’t want you or the kids to look at them, ever. She has a lot to say, we have enough information to get a warrant to search the house today. I’m sending you up to see their mother with a lieutenant from the force. He is a close friend of mine, I trust him with my life. Better if he goes. He will play the recording from last night to her and try and get the last piece of information we are missing.

She has to say things outright or use words, no more drawings. As of now, the officer I’m dealing with says we have enough to hold him for a few days on the events of last night alone. But we want him there much longer. I’m afraid your gut has been right all along. All this time, he has been laughing at the law, laughing that he has his wife behind bars and he is free as a bird to do as he pleases, and I don’t think he has stopped pleasing himself either. I’m also not sure how innocent your sister is.

It’s pretty gross what is in that bottle in the window. I won’t tell you what I think and I don’t want the kids to know. Ever. Do you hear me? Ever. The less you know, the less those kids will ever have to deal with,” he says firmly but friendly.

“Barryl, it will be on the news, the kid’s lives will be ruined. You and I both know that. If my sister knew this all this time, she won’t be coming out, she will be an accomplice,” her voice shaking now thinking her sister will never come home.



“Or, she discovered it and put two and two together after the incident became public of that little girl from their neighborhood. On the other hand, she could not have mistaken the screams she heard, she knew they were in her house. I’ve met Chelsea and she is far from dumb. My guess is he threatened to kill the kids if she talked. Nothing else would hold her so long now would it?” he asks.

Reese walks into the kitchen to make some breakfast for the kids. She wants it to be special so she looks up her mom’s biscuit recipe and begins banging around in the kitchen. Barryl is still hunched over the pictures and does not hear Savannah come up behind him.

“Excuse me sir.” She says quietly.

Barryl looks behind him and smiles. “Good morning sunshine, did you sleep at all?” he asks.

“I know you want my mom’s drawings but do you want my diary too? The last time I wrote in it was the night before Mom went away. I heard them arguing, I heard a lot more than they thought I did. I wrote everything down. It may not be spelled well because I was only eight years old. I opened it yesterday after some of my memories came back to me, it’s shaky but the words are all there, I promise. I did not add anything yesterday. After mom went away I believed I would never have anything to write in a diary again. My final page, the night she left. You can find the diary under my big bear, inside the book he sits on.” Savannah says as she comes around to sit in front of him.

“How did you get my school books already?” she asks looking down.

“A friend of mine went to get them last night. Brought them over right away. He also brought your school books so you can keep up in school. But for now, we are going to call school to say you won’t be able to attend for a while due to illness and they should call me with all your assignments. Mad?” he asks her.

“I suppose not. I have good friends, they may want to come over to cheer me up.” She says. “They are good people, I promise,” she says, “I think. I don’t know any more who to trust.”

“I’m sure they are, but you have to consider yourself too sick to see anyone. Until we clear the air about a few things. A friend of mine is going to drive you and your brother and your aunt up to see your mom again today. He is going to play the recording for her. The one from last night, so you know what is on the recording, it won’t be a surprise to you or your brother. This has to be done, if you don’t want to be in the room when he hits play, you tell Reese, she will take you out. By the way, he is not dead, he is in the hospital and the police are watching him carefully,” he says.

“Vanna!” Alec calls, Savannah runs to the back bedroom to her brother, so does Reese. Barryl has to be professional now, he has to separate his desire to make it right for Reese; he is hoping he will have time later. After this bastard is put out of everyone’s misery.

With the warrant in hand, Barryl, his friend and four other officers quietly walk into the house. Barryl finds the books he needs first from Savannah’s instructions and the officers say nothing about him going out immediately to put them in his car to the picture expert waiting. When he comes back in, he says, “Ok boys, the basement, now.”



They walk to the basement door and bust it open with one quick kick. The light goes on but it’s very dim. Barryl was assuming it would be so he brought a new bulb with him, he exchanged the bulb at the bottom of the stairs and puts in his brighter one.

The five of them stand at the bottom of the steps and take in the room they believe has been used multiple times as a room where children have been hurt in the worst way. They take pictures of how the room is set up. There is a bed on one end of the room, with clean white sheets on. Around the room, hanging in framed pictures are pieces of other bedsheets with what looks like an ink blot tests only upon looking closer at them, they see that they are blood stains. Most likely from virgin children.

One of the officers finds himself losing his lunch in the nearby bathroom. Barryl counts them and says, “Fifteen, there are fifteen frames up. Are they the ones he enjoyed? I’m going to be sick. I know his wife, there is no way she didn’t know what was going on, damn. What could he have had over her that she was so afraid about? Her life? No, she would give her life to save others. Her kids?” Barryl lets that hang in the air.

“I’m guessing it’s this,” his friend says.

Barryl walks over to his friend. They exchange a look and agree that this is the priceless gem that the monster holds over her head each time she made threats. Barryl bows his head, he remembers a very bad time in Chelsea’s life; he remembers mostly because how upset Reese had been at the time as well. This can’t be real; his head is spinning right now. It wasn’t a still borne Chelsea had, it was a deformity. Her eyes are undeniably her mother’s, what facial features they can make out are similar, the coloring is the same as well. No DNA test necessary, it’s their daughter.

“What do we do? I don’t think she knows any better than being here, among all of this horror.” The officer looks around the room and Barryl does too. “Call in the experts. This is way past us. Oh god, I hope this man gets the crap beaten out of him on a daily basis,” Barryl says.

The two officers who are with them have been dutifully bagging all that they found in the basement. Up and down the stairs a dozen or so times each. Barryl’s friend stays downstairs waiting for the child experts or social workers to come, he doesn’t know which they will send, hoping for both. In the meantime, Barryl walks out to the shed with a bolt cutter from his car. The beginning of the shed is open, that’s how the kids got their bikes, but it’s the door that is halfway in it that needs to be opened, the wall that has been placed midway in the shed to cut it in half.

Barryl opens the lock and opens the door. There is a switch here and he turns the light on.

“Holy crap, right under everyone’s noses. He has been playing his little game of hide and seek this whole time. Catch me if you can, I’ll put the evidence right in front of you and you won’t even see. You sick piece of scum. How much worse can you get?” Barryl yells out loud.

“Much,” a man answers from behind him. Barryl turns to see the expert that has been looking at the pictures.

“I finished going over the pictures from the apartment and have been sitting in your car going over the ones you found here as well. I think we need to get a heat sensing machine. There may be buried bodies back here too. What they hell!!!? Are those vials of blood?” he asks as he looks over Barryl’s shoulder.



“As far as I can tell, yes. Each marked with a date and even a name. He is so proud of his shrine. He planned on adding his own daughter to this last night. Thank god she knows self-defense and her brother is strong enough to slam a lamp down on scumbag’s head.” Barryl says all while looking around the small space of the shed.

“Your buddy is in the house waiting for you. I’ll get this area. The woman spoke volumes through her pictures, thankfully the daughter never shared them with her father and even more thankful that she never turned them upside down.” He says wincing.

“She wouldn’t. She was told they are for only her that it is something special between mother and daughter. She hid them. Reese told her that her father thought her mom’s work was crap anyway. So, she knew not to show him. All of this would have been burned evidence.” Barryl says

“Not really, he still would have pulled his stunt last night and we would have gotten him either way around now. On one hand, I’d like him to die, on the other hand, I think it’s best that he live in jail and learn what it means to be someone’s slave or pet as it were. Or better still, we pour honey on his balls and sit him near an ant hill naked,” the officer says.

Barryl smirks at the thought. “The children cannot know about this horror, not ever in their lives. Those pictures can be evidence, then destroyed. And NO press,” he says to the man in front of him.

“We’ll keep a tight rap on this one; too many lives involved here, but the kids have to be told something. I’m afraid Mom may not be getting out though even with turning this evidence. She knew all this time, especially about the other girl, she knew. She allowed him to go on.” He says.

“I know, too little too late, and there is the issue of what was found downstairs, you’re right on that point.” Barryl says. “What a damn shame. Something could have been done right away if they wanted to. But I think he had already started this and knew this was his ticket to survival. Excuse me.” Barryl walks back into the house as the other men take care of what is inside the shed. “What did the experts say?” Barryl asks his friend.

“Taking her is the only option. Not sure what they will do yet but taking is a necessity. I asked if they will be informing the mother and they said yes because it will probably add to her charges. They are guessing the child is about eight or nine years old. He has been doing this for that long, makes sense if he has fifteen frames already. At least one a year, maybe two. Can Reese handle this Barryl? She is going to have full on custody of two very broken kids,” his friend says honestly.

“I’ll be there, and believe it or not, they are not as broken as you think. They are the strongest duo you’ll ever meet. They knew something was wrong but never knew what, I intend on keeping it that way.” Barryl says

“I sure hope so, they are going to need you. Come on, let’s let them finish bagging up the house. We need to grab some clothes and toys from their room to take over to them, no?” He asks.

“No, no memories of this house at all. None. I’ll take them shopping for a whole new wardrobe this afternoon when they get back with Reese. This morning Reese lent her niece some



clothes and she even had an old pair of sweats for her nephew and a college t-shirt for him to wear.” Barryl says.

“Let me help, please,” the officer hands him some cash and Barryl accepts, he knows it’s going to be expensive to refurbish a fourteen year old girl’s wardrobe and a growing eleven year old boy.

“Can we leave?” Barryl asks.

“Yeah, they have her, she is in good hands now. I know Shakira, she will do her best to make things right for this girl I promise. As right as they can be at this point. Most likely institutionalized for the rest of her life.” He puts out his hand to encourage Barryl to go first out the door.
~ ~ ~

Chelsea did not want the kids in the room to hear the recording again and Reese is all too happy to pull them out for that part of the visit and never hear what happened herself.

“I’m not going to lie to you Chelsea, this will be hard to hear,” the lieutenant plays Alec’s recording. During this time, he is receiving text after text after text. He knows it must be urgent so he reads them. “Crap,” he says softly. This is going to get messy and get messy fast. But maybe, just maybe there will be some families that get closure. He looks up from his phone to try and get a read on Chelsea’s emotions, she is showing nothing. He looks to the guard who has her mouth open in shock. At least one of them is surprised, he thinks to himself.

“This is about to get really ugly Chelsea. Your house has been searched, they found everything and I mean everything and it’s all been taken out of the house. Has it been worth it? The lives of others so you can keep one like a caged animal? You may think you were helping with all your pictures but after last night a warrant was issued and your house has been searched. Your pictures only add to what was found. Seriously? Even after all that you won’t speak, not even shed a tear for your daughter? Maybe you are as sick as your twisted husband. You went down there, you saw the picture frames, you saw, you heard and you stayed mute all this time even before incarceration which is even worse than your reasoning for doing it now.

You sicken me. You should know you lost all visitation rights to your children now. You’re done here. You may say whatever it is you want to say about being afraid for that *one* child, but remember this, you willingly allowed all of this to happen all so you could keep one yourself. One who could have gotten help and been functional. Did you ever think of that? Modern medicine is pretty good you know.

How many Chelsea?” His voice is raising now and the guard is letting him, “how many had to die or be tormented to make it right so you could keep yours? How much help she could have had but you neglected to get her, all the therapies you denied her, the normal living conditions. You are no different in the eyes of the law. I’ll call your kids back in, you had best say goodbye, you won’t be seeing them any time soon.” He says in disgust and spits into the trashcan because he can’t spit on her, as much as he wants to.

Savannah, Reese and Alec are led back into the visiting room. They see their driver none too pleased and they see Chelsea sitting in her silent world looking stunned to the core. Reese goes over to her sister, she has put one piece of the puzzle together, and that is, her sister is not coming



home, ever, and that she may know a lot more than she ever is willing to say, like Barryl said this morning. “A part of me will always love you Chelsea,” Reese says as she hugs her sister goodbye. She knows it’s the last time. She won’t come visit, she won’t subject the kids to any more visits either.

Alec is next. He walks cautiously towards his mother, right now a woman he does not recognize. “Goodbye Momma.” He says as he always does, she barely lifts her hands to hug him, her life’s energy being drained from her.

Savannah is next. She stands over her mom sitting in the chair and she refuses to bend down to her. “If you want to say goodbye to me, than say it in words damn you,” Savannah senses what is taking place and she will have none of it. “I deserve two words from you after last night, don’t you think? You knew what was going to happen, you knew when too. Two damn words is all I ask for! Can you handle that? Didn’t think so.” She spits at her mother’s feet, literally. She turns to her aunt and the lieutenant, “I’m ready to go home.”

The lieutenant stands and leads them out the door. The guard stands there stunned. She cannot believe what she witnessed here. First the allegations, then the truths and then the lack of good bye. She is not likely to forget this inmate’s reaction for a long time. She may even have to speak to the therapist on staff to get over this one.

Reese takes Alec’s hand and walks down the corridor for the last time. Savannah walks in her own thoughts waiting for the day to be over. It all has become clear to her now. All of it, her memories, her worries; now things make sense. But now her worries start anew, is she like them? Is Alec?

But she will say nothing to her brother or her aunt. He must stay innocent. The ride back is quiet. She pulls her legs up in the back of the car and falls asleep. She can’t sit in the front ever again, all she can see is his hand on her knee that day. Alec taps her knees, “We’re back at Aunt Reese’s place Savannah,” he says quietly afraid to disturb her.

Savannah walks into the apartment with no expression on her face at all. Reese keeps looking at her niece, she wants to hug her but she is afraid to get too close right now. Barryl will know what to do, he always seems to know.

Before she has a chance to ask him what to do Barryl pushes through them and has the lieutenant against the wall. “I told you not to tell her anything,” he growls into his ear.

“Barryl, I swear on my life I didn’t,” he releases him and looks him in the eye.

“What happened then?” Barryl growls.

“First, Savannah told her what happened last night, then their mom had tears in her eyes, I thought they were for her but now I know otherwise, they were for the lost one. As I sent the kids and Reese out during the recording she barely flinched. It was then that my blood was boiling, she knew he was going to do this last night but I thought maybe she was in shock hearing about it. During this time, I got all your texts about everything. This is when she went catatonic. I laid into her about her being the same kind of monster he is and she didn’t move. Not once muscle. Reese said goodbye, Alec said goodbye, both bent to hug her. Savannah came back in and demanded those two words be said to her face. She said she deserved them. When her mom wouldn’t say



goodbye, she spit at her feet and we left. She has had that face on ever since. Swear to you Barryl I would never break your trust,” he finishes with a deep breath.

“Barryl, he is telling the truth, please you’re scaring Alec,” Reese says with her hand on his back.

Barryl turns to his friend and kindly hits him on the shoulder, “Made you flinch, I win,” he says laughing and the lieutenant does too.

They walk into the living room where Alec is sitting on the sofa and Savannah is glaring out the back window. Barryl walks towards her, he lightly lays a hand on her shoulder, before he can say a word, she begins to speak. “We heard cries from the basement, we did, sometimes really loud ones too, this is when she played dance party with us and the music was loud. He hurt those girls, didn’t he? Like he was going to hurt me? Was I going to be the last one? A substitute wife? Or a plaything? Barryl, you love my aunt, I can see that, but can you show me how a real man is supposed to behave? Can you teach Alec how a real man is supposed to be? Can you promise me there is not a mutant gene we will both inherit? Can you promise me that our lives are not permanently screwed up and that we can live normally? Can you at least promise me that?” she finally allows her tears to flow down her cheeks, she doesn’t even bother wiping them off.

“I will teach your brother how to be a gentleman, teach him how to dance with a woman the right way, how to throw a ball so it almost gets to the plate and makes the batter swing for a strike, I will show him how to be romantic by remembering all that interests his best girl as if it’s the most important thing to remember. I will teach him how to cook and how to sew on his own buttons. He will make one hell of a catch by the time I’m done with him.

There will be no trial where you have to be in court. Enough evidence has been found, you don’t need to say word. I won’t let you. He will get his rightful payback on the inside, I can assure you of that. I can also assure you that one day you will bring home a boy and I’m going to have to approve of or you won’t be able to see him again. We will argue over that and many other things as well, we will fight over how unfair I am and how mature you think you are and how with your self-defense, you should be able to do all sorts of things. Are you willing to put up with me? That is the bigger question. As far as mutant genes are concerned, I think you inherited all your strength from your Aunt Reese,” Barryl says all this in whispered tones for only Savannah to hear.

But Reese is sitting close enough to hear each and every word. He still means forever, he has always said that and is still saying that he will be here forever. Reese has no tears about this topic, only bright smiles. Things will be ok as long as Barryl is around.

“Barryl, the precinct is calling for you,” the lieutenant hands him his phone.

Without leaving Savannah, “Hello, I’m sitting with precious gems here,” he insinuates that he is with the kids.

“Done. He has been taken directly to the state penitentiary infirmary. There is a whole task force working on contacting all of the families affected by these crimes. Cold cases are being opened. Thanks for opening pandora’s box at least this time all these demons will be put to rest. I’ll be in touch next week,” he hangs up on his friend because he knows Barryl has a lot to do now with his new family that he had taken under his wings.



"I'm going to head out now. It's been a pleasure meeting you Savannah, you too Alec. Maybe you'll come down and see how we work down at the station one day. Reese, a pleasure driving with you," the Lieutenant makes his way to the door.

"Nice work," Barryl calls to him. The two friends smile and he leaves.

"I don't know about you but I'm starved. Us boys want some real meat, the kind that we can sink our teeth in and get really sloppy with. Right Alec?" Barryl asks

"It's not my birthday but can we go to the bar b que place Savannah? Or wherever you think is best," he asks his sister, the only real parent he has ever had. Barryl notes that his tone is still a bit shaken from their day and yesterday. He needs Savannah to be on his side.

"Don't you think we need to get some clothes first so we can be properly seen in public?" she asks everyone.

"Spoken like a true teenager. Fine, I'll forgo eating for one hour at the mall, but then we must feed the belly," Barryl says rubbing his stomach.

"Ok, one other problem. There are four of us now sleeping, eating and living in this two-bedroom apartment?" Reese says.

"Not a problem my new found family will be moving in with me, I have a fully stocked fridge at all times, four bedrooms, a television with all the video games a growing boy needs to learn to play, a back patio with enough seats to relax in for all of us. And most importantly, it's a ranch, no basement, built on a slab. I even have two full bathrooms so I don't have to share with stinky teenagers." Barryl says with a laugh in his voice. "Oh, wait and one more thing, I have a huge family that loves to converge on my house every once in a while for the heck of it. Whose game?" he asks the group standing in front of him.

"Any game I want?" Alec asks cautiously.

"Yep."

"Does the bedroom have a fully stocked closet?" Savannah asks her newly found 'father'

"It will as soon as we rummage through the mall. Any questions from you Reese?" Barryl asks her directly.

"Forever?" is all she can think to ask.

"As promised," he says.

~ ~ ~

Barryl never expected the group to actually meld so quickly together, but they did. The kids, despite their weird childhood up until now, adapted pretty quickly to a new school district and a different group of friends.

Savannah still talks to Barryl about what happened and wants to know details that he won't share, she asks Reese and has figured out that Reese knows less than she does. After the first couple of months though, she gives up.

The past is not worth reliving. Her current home is so much better and even at age fourteen, when she should be a rebellious, wanting her independence, she wants nothing more than to stay home on Saturday night and watch movies together and play dumb video games with her brother. She is no longer afraid of what is downstairs, no longer afraid of what is around the corner, for the first time in her life, she can actually live and nothing else. Her old friends called for



a while but teenagers tend to stay local for socializing. Savannah is understanding, she is not sure she wants anything that ties her back to the where she was.

Reese’s feelings for Barryl have grown exponentially since they have all moved in together. He has never made a move on her, or even kissed her, he is the perfect gentleman, waiting for Reese to show she cares as much as he does. The children, her children are wonderful, she loves them to pieces but now she wants one of her own and that will only happen one way in her mind.
~ ~ ~

On the morning of their eighteenth month anniversary of living together, Reese pulls out all the stops, she makes a huge breakfast for everyone and even makes each of the kids their favorite lunch to take to school.

“Dinner will be amazing by the way. Come home hungry and come home straight away,” she says to the kids as they walk out the door smiling.

Savannah is thrilled to walk to school now, it’s fun meeting everyone on the street as they all converge on the street corner to walk together. Alec has met some good friends so she is not nervous about dropping him off at school and leaving now. That took a while for both of them but after finishing last year and beginning this year with the same people, friendships have formed stronger than she has ever had.

Barryl looks over at Reese, “You are planning something; it would be nice to be in on this if it’s for the kids,” he says.

“That might be true, but I think this surprise will be best kept quiet,” she smiles at him. Barryl is over the moon right now, he doesn’t know what she is planning but he is hoping it will be fun. He leaves for his office with a smile on his face.

Reese spends the rest of the day getting his house ready for the evening’s events. Thanks to all of Barryl’s siblings, this will work. They start showing up around 2:00 in the afternoon, right before the kids begin to come home.

They have all met numerous times already, Reese was surprised to see that it is absolutely true that they stop by at random times. Barryl’s new family has readily been accepted by all of his biological family. Especially the doting grandmother who thought he would never have children. She brings gifts all the time. ALL the time.

As Savannah and Alec are walking home he says to her, “Do you think Reese and Barryl love each other?”

Savannah looks at him and says, “I think that is what Reese is planning tonight, to finally tell him. I know he loves her from deep down inside. You think I’m crazy, don’t you?”

“I’m ok with that. I like your crazy. I like Barryl’s too. We are pretty lucky huh, we never knew we were missing a family until we got so much of one. Barryl’s mom is great and his brothers and nieces and nephews too,” Alec says.

Savannah rubs his head and ruffles his hair, “Beat you home.” They race the rest of the way home. Reaching the house, they hear the laughter. “Family is here!” Savannah calls out, they charge into the house.

“OOOO you’re home, quick come with me,” their new grandmother says. She whisks them off to a back room where she shows them each an outfit they have to wear for tonight.



"You win again Savannah, she will tell him she loves him tonight," Alec says.

"Good girl, you figured this out. Now come, Barryl's brother told him he was coming over by 5:00 tonight and you know how Barryl hates to be here after company arrives. Reese and I picked this dress out I hope you like the style and color," She tells Savannah.

Savannah picks it up. "Love the color, thank you."

Alec comes into Savannah's room, "Look at me!" he says all dressed up in an actual suit and a tie.

Savannah smiles, this would never have happened had they still been in another place. It's hard to know what you are missing until you have that something in front of you. Love; that has always been missing except from Savannah to Alec and back, and always from their aunt. "This is going to be fun," she says to him.

Barryl rushes home, his brother is coming at 5:00 which means he needs to be home by 4:45 the latest to make sure he has a drink in the cooler for him ready.

The whole day he has had the jitters, which makes no sense because nothing much that is urgent is going on at work, the kids have been great in their new schools, Reese is working from home now so she can be there for them at any given moment. Life couldn't get better.

Barryl pulls into his driveway and gets out of his car quickly. He rushes through the door because he is a couple minutes late, due to an accident on the highway which slowed traffic down.

Before he gets a chance to look twice at what is going on around him, his two older brothers ambush him and push him into his bedroom. "Change," they say as they cross their arms across their chest and stand guard at the door.

Barryl looks around the room, he sees a suit and tie on his bed. His brothers are tight lipped so he changes in front of them and puts on the new suit and tie waiting for him.

"Ok let's go," his oldest brother says. As they come out of the bedroom, the house is quiet. Not a sound. They bring him to the backyard where he is stunned to see a canopy and seats set up. Soft music begins to play and they walk their brother down the aisle. A photographer grabs the moment. By the time he gets to the canopy and turns around, the chairs are filled in with family and a few friends. He has no idea where they were hiding moments ago.

Without missing a beat, the kids begin to walk down. Barryl stands a little taller seeing them walk down, the whole concept of what is taking place has not fully hit him yet. Savannah walks up to him and plants a kiss on his cheek, he gives her one back and she steps aside. Alec does the same and moves out of the way to the other side of the canopy.

The music starts again and the crowd rises, it is then that Barryl sees the full scope of what is about to happen. Reese is walking down in front of him in the most beautiful wedding dress he has ever seen, or maybe it's the bride herself. He sees his own mother walking behind her holding Reese's train and tears begin to fall down his face.

She steps next to him and the Justice of the Peace begins the ceremony. An old friend of Barryl's. When he gets to the part where he says, "You may kiss the bride," Barryl freezes, this is a moment he has been waiting for but he always assumed it would be in private, he slowly takes his hands and puts them on Reese's shoulder's, he takes another step closer and pulls her in. His



hands slowly slide up her shoulders to be around her neck and he finally places a kiss on his beloved, the kiss he has been thinking about for many years.

The crowd is screaming in excitement and throwing flower petals in the air as the music begins to play again. The new couple head back to his bedroom where they close the door and Barryl finally gets to speak. “I can’t wait to see what you do for an encore,” he pulls his wife in for another kiss, this one with a lot more passion.

“The reception is here in the backyard. Simple, family and friends. Mad?” Reese asks.

“Not even a little. My dear wife. Not even a little. Come let’s go enjoy them together,” hand in hand they return to the backyard where more screams of joy are heard. The food is served. Everyone is having a great time. Reese could not have asked for more. This is all she has ever wanted. A forever guy, a family full of love and a house full of children. This is the part she will work on starting tonight. She laughs to herself. Reese softly taps her spoon onto her glass, “May I have everyone’s attention. Please.”

All eyes are on Reese. “It took a long time to plan this, but thanks to my many new brothers and sisters in law and new mother, it seemed like a breeze. There is one more ceremony that will take place today. It had to wait until we were properly married in order for the papers to work, but here it is. Judge, would you do the honors. Again,” Reese says.

“It will be my pleasure. Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like to introduce to you, for the first time ever, Savannah and Alec Remins.”

Savannah and Alec look to Reese and Barryl. Barryl is stunned but not surprised by what Reese had done, she has always wanted a family and family means children of her own, now she has them. They are legally a family.

The judge continues, “If there is any one here who feels this would be a mistake, please speak now.”

“Remember I know karate,” Savannah says as she runs over to her new parents with open arms. Alec is right behind her.

The party lasts a long time. Everyone stays until they could no longer laugh without being in pain. All the brothers, sisters, brothers in law and sisters in law stay to clean up.

“Now my dear children,” Barryl’s mother says to the new couple, “here is your key to your hotel room for tonight. I’m staying here to spoil my grandchildren even more and so is Warren and Zee. The kids will see you after school tomorrow. Go,” she pushes them away.

Reese already had their bags packed and Barryl grabs them happily. Savannah and Alec kiss their new parents, and hold on to each other as they leave. “Why do we get a second chance Vanna?” he says quietly.

“It wasn’t all bad Alec, our early years were good, remember we even have pictures of the four of us on picnics and at parks. But something inside them snapped, Barryl says it’s not in us, he says we will be ok and I’m inclined to believe him. Hard to believe that such a short time ago our lives were upside down and we didn’t even know how much. I’m always here for you Alec, always, through everything,” she whispers back to him.



Their grandmother approaches them feeling sorry in her heart from listening to what Savannah said, one hand on each of their shoulders, she whispers in between their heads, "and now it's all right side up," they turn to her and each smile.
~ ~ ~

Savannah's graduation is today, her house has been so busy lately. So many people in and out, setting up the backyard again for a big party. Many of her friends are coming; her Barryl approved boyfriend is coming too.

Alec has been walking around telling everyone how his sister is going to be going into the police academy after graduation. He always says how he feels sorry for anyone she has to arrest. Savannah's decision came easily to her and both her parents have been very supportive. Barryl tells her that when she has put in her time in the force, she can join him in his private investigator business. Her future is looking great but one thing has been on her mind for a long time.

Barryl walks up behind her, "Ok, time to spill what you've been worried about," he says in his professional voice.

Savannah turns around, "I'm graduating today," he nods.

"I might not have made it here without Alec, and without you. I still think about them from time to time. Is he dead yet?" she asks pointedly.

"Why do you want to go there today Savannah?" he asks.

"Because, one, I'm eighteen and deserve to know, and two, once I'm on the force I'm going to hear anyway because I'm going to be local. I'd rather hear it from you. Truth this time Barryl. I know Reese doesn't know, you kept her in the dark and that's probably better that way, and Alec too. But no more secrets between us," she says.

"Would it really matter one way or the other?" he asks.

"I woke up about a month ago," she pauses, "with a sense of peace around me and that makes no sense. I should be in therapy or something, we went through a lot. I think I'm going to explode one day. How do you hold it together?" she asks.

"I don't always." Barryl says. "I cried many tears when you first came, I did it on my own time so that I wouldn't disturb you two. I cried with Reese a time or two as well. Some of my cases get to me and I rely on old friends to pull me out of dark places. You said a month ago?" he asks. Savannah watches him, his eyes always say the truth. "yes," she answers softly.

Barryl bows his head, he knows she will look it up once she has access. "A month ago, my friend the lieutenant, the one who drove you that day," he pauses, she nods, "he called me and said he happened to be there on a different mission. He inquired about him and found out he has been beaten numerous times, the last time, left him paralyzed. He sits in jail in a wheelchair now, any other questions?" he asks.

"Mom?" she asks.

With that Barryl bows his head, "Not today." He bends down and kisses her head. "You shine today, we are so proud of you. Alec can't stop singing your praises to all of his friends. Reese and I and your two little siblings love their big sister. You've done well and will continue to do so because you and Alec are made from the same stock that Reese is, and my parents will tolerate



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nothing less than wonderful. Come, let’s hold our heads high in pride and go enjoy your party.”
He puts out his elbow for her to take, she does so willingly.

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