



Pilot Annie

Annie learned long ago that being a woman in a predominantly male profession is no easy feat. Annie is called in to do a flight for a private jet owner, this is where things go sour. With the help of her brother and some very good friends, Annie navigates around any problem she finds and she uses her strength to find answers.



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Annie walks confidently over to the airplane hangar, where the private plane is waiting for her as well as its owner. She sees a man, in an expensive looking suit, pacing the area. “Hello, I’m Pilot Annie. I understand you want to take off by 2:00 this afternoon,” she says to him.

He turns to see her, he looks at her from head to toe assessing how she looks, he walks over to a table behind him and picks up a package. He tosses it to her, which she easily catches, and he says, “You’ll do, put this on and get into the plane we don’t have much time till take off,” he grumbles.

Annie looks down at the package, “No, I’ve already dressed for this flight and this flight doesn’t take off until I say it does. I stopped by to introduce myself, I’m headed over to check the engine of the plane now,” she turns to leave.

“I have people that do that, you just get yourself changed and get into that cockpit,” he grumbles again.

Annie turns back to face him, “As I see this, I’m the third pilot you called today and the only one who was willing to take this flight. Not the only one available but the only one who took this particular job.” Before Annie can say any more her phone rings, she looks at the screen and says to the man, “I

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have to take this.” Then she walks out to the plane to check the engine.

“Hey Lance, perfect timing,” she says.

“Annie, why did you take this job?” he asks.

Lance knows where Annie is going because she reports to him about all her flights. She always wants at least one person she knows to know where she is and likewise, he tells her when he is doing anything dangerous in his job as a police officer. Assuming, that is, he even knows ahead of time. They’ve been like this their whole lives.

“No one else would take this run. Everyone said the man is too annoying to work for and wouldn’t do the run even though the pay is great. But the boss pleaded with me, said I’m the only one he trusts with this kind of cargo anyway. What the hell Lance? Is this a drug deal you guys are watching, because if it is, I’m walking away right now,” she says nervously. “Hold on, let me talk to the mechanic for a moment.” Annie stands at the plane and talks to the mechanic about checking the engine of the plane.

“No pilots check planes, that’s my job,” he says angrily. “Checked her myself last night.”

“Listen sir, I realize that you feel I’m stepping in on your job but I assure you, that I’m not

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interested. I don’t want your job, in fact, before I took my classes for my pilot’s license, I had myself trained to do your job at Wilshire Academy. I can take that engine apart and put it back together in perfect working order. Before I fly any plane whether it is commercial or private, this is what I do. Please sir,” she asks with a steady voice.

“Ok, I’ll go up with you if you don’t mind,” he says as he pulls over a second ladder to get to the engine.

“Annie you still there?” Lance asks.

“Yeah, sorry I had to gain his confidence. He seems convinced,” she says softly.

“He should, anyone with half a mind would, you’ve been taking things apart and putting them back together since we were kids. From what I heard, no, not a drug thing Annie. As annoying as this rich man is, he is rumored to do wonderful things. Like today, he is flying a young man to another state so that he can get a specialized surgery that he can’t have done even here at our local hospitals,” Lance answers.

“Oh, now I understand why the boss thought I should do this one. Ok. I’ll try and deal with the man. But he wants me to put on a costume and that I won’t do. It would make me feel like I’m wearing

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that sexy French maid costume. You know what I mean?” she asks.

“Yeah, I get that,” Lance answers. “I’m sure he is just trying make the kid feel comfortable, you know, how they portray pilots in picture books, that kind of stuff,” Lance says.

“Mr. Wales asks all of his pilots to wear what he thinks is a pilot outfit. Don’t feel like that Maám. He is harmless, I’ve been working with him for many years, known him for many more,” the mechanic says.

“See Annie, harmless. Weird, yes, but harmless,” Lance says.

Annie looks at the mechanic and says, “Thank you for that information, can you do me a favor? Can you please go get me a pair of gloves, I realize that if everything is good the owner will want to leave right away and it’s really hard to get this oil off of the interior of the plane if it’s on my hands.”

“Sure, I’m sorry I didn’t offer them to begin with. I see you really do know your stuff. You tightened that knob like a real pro. You have to know what you’re doing to do it that way. I’ll be right back,” he steps down and walks to the inside of his office.

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“Annie, what did you see? You never use gloves and that was your way of pushing him away, speak fast. I’ll text Red as you talk, he is at the airport today.” Lance tries to keep himself calm. His sister is in trouble, he can tell.

“Lance, there is a tube that has a slice. You can’t see where at first glance but it is there, after about two hours in the air, this plane would explode. Lance, my flight is scheduled for three hours. Then there is this weird smell. I smell lavender, the red cap here had something on it and I don’t know why, but I smelled my finger after touching the top. It is definitely lavender,” Annie takes a pause. “Lance, I would have died, so would the little child we are transporting. Who is the target? All the rest of us would have been collateral damage? Oh Lance,” her voice is choked.

“Ok Annie, all is going to be fine. Red says he sees you already, he is almost there. Do you hear his car coming?” he asks.

“I only hear my own heartbeat right now Lance, I can’t move,” her voice is still shaky.

“Freeze!! Police!!” Red screams to the man standing near the plane.

Annie looks around her and sees a man now standing with his hands up. It is not the mechanic

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from before. The mechanic from before comes running out and stops when he sees what is going on. “Pilot Annie, are you ok? Tell me you’re ok,” he calls to her with genuine concern.

“Yeah, I’m good. Red that man is the head mechanic. You can send him over,” she says.

“Ok, you walk over there slowly. Who is this man under the plane?” Red asks the mechanic.

“He is a temp. Came here last night, sent over by the agency. I’ll give you all the information but first I have to check on my pilot,” he runs over to the plane.

“Annie, I’m on my way. The flight is going to be delayed anyway, tell Red I’m coming,” he tells his sister.

“Ok. Thanks Lance,” she finally hangs up and slides the phone into her pocket.

“Pilot Annie, you ok?” the mechanic asks as he gets close.

“Yeah, I’m good. Unnerved a bit, but I’m good,” she says.

“How did the police get here so fast? If you don’t mind me asking.” he looks at her with concern.

“I was on the phone with my brother when you were out here before. He knows I never wear gloves so asked what is wrong. Lance is an officer

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himself, he texted his fellow officer who was on duty here today, someone I happen to know by name,” she answers him as calmly as she could.

“What did you see?” he asks with caution as well as irritation that he didn’t find this himself.

Feeling she is safe now that Red is here and has someone in custody. “Look over here, this tube. And smell this,” she shows him the cap.

“Lavender? Oh hell. That can only be one person,” he says.

“You know who would have sabotaged this flight?” she asks shocked.

“Did you touch a lot of things? I mean are your fingerprints going to be on everything? I hope they don’t cover up other prints,” he tells her.

“I use my eyes and only touched what I thought was of concern. Don’t worry, they already have my prints on file and they can tell whose is whose to prove this slice wasn’t from me,” she says to assure him.

“You touched the cap and the tube though,” he states.

“No, I saw something I didn’t like on the tube and pushed on the back of the tube to produce what I thought I was seeing. I used my fingernail and

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pushed up. Like this, see?” she demonstrates how her fingerprint wouldn’t be on it.

“Ok. I see. I think we should go down and talk to your police friend. You need help getting down?” he asks.

“Why?” she asks almost annoyed.

“The shock of finding what you did, knowing what the outcome would have been had it not been caught. That would unnerve anyone I know. Please, let me get down first and help you down,” he smiles at her.

“Thank you for understanding that,” she says.

The mechanic gets down and walks around to where Annie is, he holds up his hand for her to take and she does as she steps down slowly. “Your friend Red is waiting for us I see.”

Red runs over to Annie, someone else is watching the man that was near the plane before. “Annie?”

“I’m good Red, this mechanic, oh dear, I don’t even know your name,” she looks at him.

He laughs, “Whitey,” he looks from the officer to Annie.

Everyone smiles for a moment. “Whitey here kept me calm. A good man.”

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“Who had access to this plane?” Red asks.

“No need to call out the whole crew here Red. The lavender smell can only come from one place. Mr. Wales’ ex-wife still thinks she has control over here, over him. When he divorced her, he told us she was not allowed anywhere near his plane or anything else he owns for that matter.

Dumb broad never read her pre-nup. She still thinks she owns half of what is his, or still wants half, I’m not sure which. If you show that temp over there her picture, my guess is she convinced him to let her look at the plane last night. She isn’t smart enough to get someone else to do the work for her, so she probably hired him to tell her when everyone is gone. She is doing this to prove a point. That she is still in control. She could have gotten all the passengers killed. I stake my reputation on the fact that this is her work. Let me see, its Wednesday? That means she will be spending her day at the Wolf Club that she thinks she is still a member of. Mr. Wales says her membership ran out, but she still shows up as a guest to her friends. For now, they allow her in. I believe she goes in with her friend Bernice who also thinks the world of herself, quite the pair,” he tells Red.

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“I’ve called in our team, they are going to inspect the plane again Annie, not that we don’t take your word and Whitey’s here, but an official investigation has to be made now. You understand,” Red says.

“Yeah, I hear you. But I was told that I was carrying precious cargo. I’m assuming there is a time limit on getting it there,” she looks to Whitey.

“I’ll go get Mr. Wales,” Whitey says as he walks away. He always uses his friend’s formal name when others are around. He isn’t going to like this, not one bit, he thinks to himself.

“No, please stay here. Call him to come out here please. We need to make things official at all times now,” Red asks.

“Oh, sure. I’m sorry, I didn’t realize.” Whitey takes out his phone, “Mr. Wales, we have a situation you need to come out to your plane for.” He pauses, “No sir, this is unavoidable. You need to come to me. The police are already here. Yes, I said police,” he nods to Red.

The man from before comes running out towards them, he does not look happy at all. In fact, his eyes are bugging out so far Annie takes a step back only to be caught by Whitey. “He is harmless, I promise,” he whispers to her.

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“Whitey!! What the hell is going on? Who are all these people and why are they touching my plane?” he yells at Whitey.

“One-word sir,” he pauses, “lavender.” Now he looks into his friend’s eyes to make sure he understands the severity of what he is saying without using more words.

Mr. Wales looks at Whitey, he looks to Annie and then to Red. His face becomes pale, he puts his hand to his heart and slowly gets down on his knees shaking his head. After a couple of moments, he looks back at Whitey and asks, “How bad is the plane?”

“Pilot Annie caught the slice when I went to get her some gloves. A tube, Annie here smelled the lavender and told me about it as soon as I came back. No one would have survived the flight sir,” he says solemnly. “No one.”

Mr. Wales pulls himself up from the floor. “She sent me a text this morning, telling me she was going to our club for the day. I responded that it isn’t ours and I don’t need to know her whereabouts. I told her I didn’t care when we were married, and care less now. But now at least I understand her response. Hold on, let me find her response

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exactly,” he looks through his phone for the text.
“Here it is,” he shows it to Red.

You need to be careful how you talk to me from now on, it could come back to bite you.

“She never made any kind of threat before. Maám, are you ok?” Mr. Wales asks Annie.

“Yeah, I’m good. Thank you for asking. Is there another plane we can use? I understand you were bringing precious cargo somewhere and it needs to be done in a timely fashion,” she says.

“I have to call a friend, maybe I can borrow his plane. Do you need me for anything else?” he asks Red.

“Don’t leave the area right now. Not until we have your ex in custody and have checked the engine ourselves,” he answers.

“We need to get him there today, surgery is tomorrow morning,” he pleads.

“We should know in a couple of hours,” Red says.

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“Lance, this is the weirdest thing ever,” Red says to his old friend.

“I’m on my way Red, what’s up?” he asks.

Red explains how everyone thinks it is the owner’s ex-wife. “Apparently she hasn’t gotten the

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hint that all of this was her own fault. First line of the pre-nup says that if she is ever found to be unfaithful, she loses everything. Immediate divorce, no alimony, nothing. Whatever she earned or saved on her own is all she will be leaving with.”

“So, how does she still get around? I mean how can she maintain her fancy lifestyle?” Lance asks.

“I wish all of my cases were this easy, but it seems everyone is willing to talk about her. We asked about the lavender scent? Well, everyone seems to say the same thing. Every time she touches something there is a lingering smell of lavender. I already have her home being gone through by our crime scene investigators, her car and her locker at the club that she actually no longer has a membership to, or so I’m told. I’m assuming they already have taken her. The embarrassment alone is enough to kill her, her ex-husband told me,” Red says all this then he takes a deep breath. If anything happened to Annie because of this woman, he would have made her suffer a lot more than embarrassment.

“Red? We can’t let this get personal,” Lance instructs his friend. The three of them have been together for many years. Red and Annie are almost

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as close as Lance and Annie are. “I’m almost there. How’s Annie taking this?”

“You know Annie, she is being a trouper, not showing how shaken up she must be. I mean, she is the one who found the sliced tube, she knows exactly what would have happened. It has to affect her,” Red says. “Hey, Lance, did you clear this with the boss, that you’re coming out here.”

“Yeah, I told him as soon as I got off with Annie what is going on. He told me to leave, I didn’t have to ask. But I’m sure that once I left, he has been busy setting everything in motion that you asked about. Wow, so hard to believe. Either she hired someone or that she did it herself. None of this makes sense. How can someone not realize that this is not a simple prank, this is attempted murder,” Lance comments.

“I know. I can’t put my finger on motive. I know when I got divorced, we at least parted knowing that we have to stay friends because of our kids. In the aftermath, we realized we are much better friends than we are a couple. She is still a person I call a good friend,” Red tells Lance.

“We all do. You guys separated into being friends and we all accepted the divorce as simply a new norm. But this doesn’t seem to be accepted by

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her. When did they get divorced? How did he prove that she was unfaithful? I mean, that’s pretty hard to do with a hundred percent proof,” Lance says.

“That’s where things get even funnier. As I spoke with the plane owner, he told me that he received photos of his wife with another man. Some of the pictures were of the presenter and his wife being intimate, some were of them simply having fun together. He took the less intimate pictures and put them on the kitchen counter so she would see them one day. He quietly asked who the guy is and his ex told him the man was a friend she works with on one of her charities.

Then he said he pulled out three pictures of them completely naked together and they definitely weren’t doing charity work. She had stared at him being stunned that he had such a thing. He told me that he stood up and said that she would have the divorce papers by the end of the day, and that she should start packing and make it her business to be out of his house before he comes back from his work day. He hired seven of his most trusted people to show up at his house minutes after he left and watch to make sure she was doing as he said she should and not destroying things on purpose.

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He received messages all day from these guys and he gave them instructions as to what to say and when. When she tried to convince the men that this was all a misunderstanding, one of them produced even more pictures and told her she should go get her pre-nup and call her own lawyer, and not anyone associated with her husband because they won’t talk to her.

Apparently, she didn’t take kindly to this and started throwing things at everyone. This whole thing is a bigger mess than I want to know about. I just want to prove she was the one who sabotaged the plane, and the owner wants her charged with attempted murder. There was an innocent child and his mother to be on this plane. Who does this?” Red sits down and waits for Lance.

“I’ll be there in five minutes. We’ll talk shop then. Hang in there,” Lance says.

Lance calls Annie, “Hey girl, how are you doing?”

“I’m not sure why everyone keeps asking that. I’m not falling apart. I’m waiting for the next plane so we can take this child where he needs to be,” she answers with annoyance in her voice.

“It’s hard to stare death in the face. That’s why. Red spoke to the owner of the plane, seems his

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wife, well ex-wife, doesn’t know what it means to be divorced. She doesn’t get that she isn’t part of his life or his money anymore and wants to prove to him she can still throw her weight around,” Lance tells her.

“I overheard him say, the day of the divorce he changed his Will to not include her anymore, she may not understand that this was done. She seems to not understand that this is all because of her own actions,” Annie says.

“I’m pulling in now. I’ll see you in a minute.” Lance hangs up still wondering how his sister is staying so strong because he is a mess at the notion of what could have been.

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Annie has been sitting here watching all of the commotion around the plane. The plane she was supposed to fly, the plane she was supposed to die in. The thought of that has her stomach in knots but she doesn’t want to show that to anyone here. She wants them to see her as an expert mechanic and pilot, if she breaks down when there is a crisis, she will never be hired again. Often times things can happen during a flight and she needs to keep a cool head. She is still being asked to fly today, there is no

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time for a breakdown, she can let that happen in her hotel room tonight.

A hand on her shoulder has her jump, she turns to see Lance standing next to her. “Deep in thought, I didn’t even hear you walk up,” she says.

“I was walking in stealthily, not your fault. Occupational hazard,” he smiles at her.

“It must be tough being you,” she jokes.

Lance sits down next to his sister and puts his arm around her shoulders. “Did Red talk to you? This whole thing is messed up. How do you not know you’re divorced?” Lance asks.

“Denial is a powerful thing. I’m more worried about the boy who was supposed to be brought somewhere,” she says.

“Yeah, Red is almost done. He has people all over town already. Her home, her car, picking her up at the club and others who will be cleaning out her locker at the club and any other place that she touches. Then they are going to look into how she is connected to the temp mechanic here,” he says.

“Oh, that’s an easy call. She probably knows someone who is her car mechanic and asked him if he has ever worked on a plane. Then she probably told him she doesn’t trust Whitey and wants him to get himself over there so he can check out the

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plane’s safety. She made it seem that they were still married or promised him some extra benefits that only a promiscuous woman can promise. I’m going with the later. Oh wait, there can be one more possibility. She is bribing him about something. Women like her know how to use the people around them. My guess is that the people at the club don’t even know she is divorced because people at those places don’t take kindly to that kind of behavior. It looks bad on all of them. Especially if one of those men were part of her party,” Annie shakes her head. “When can we get another plane?” she asks.

Lance looks at his sister, he knows what she is doing and why. “You have a good point about the woman and the temp mechanic. I’ll let Red know. They’re at the club now, so whatever she has said in the past will come out. They will know. Either way, she won’t be going back there. Kind of amazing she landed Mr. Wales to begin with.”

“No, it’s not, she saw his potential and went along with him until he made his money, then she became herself and let loose after holding it in for so long. Very calculated,” Annie says simply.

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“You sure you’re in the right profession? You always seem to help me more than I do you,” Lance jokes.

“Lance, the next flight?” she asks.

“Ok, I’ll go check,” he kisses her on the cheek and walks into the building behind him to see how he can get things moving for her.

Annie pulls her knees up and holds them as she sits and watches the plane still being checked, inside and out. “May I sit here?” Mr. Wales asks.

“Sure sir,” she moves over a bit and drops her legs.

“I believe I owe you a thank you. I’m sorry. I always get antsy when I’m transporting a child. The costume is for them, not me, I assure you. I should have been more open about that, sometimes I forget when to be a business head and when to simply be a person. Forgive me?” he asks with his hand out to shake Annie’s hand.

Annie looks at his hand and then up at his face, his eyes are telling the truth. This is a crushed man. “Nothing to think about. Sometimes I get pushy because people don’t trust me to have the knowledge that I do,” she shakes his hand. A soft hand, not someone who has done hard work ever.

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Pampered hands. Soft hands and why does she feel warmth and strength?

“Don’t ever apologize for your training. It took so long for someone to get here; my schedule had already been pushed off for two hours and by the time you showed up, I was at my wits end. I don’t know why it is so hard to get a pilot. I pay well. I stay in the back, I don’t bother the pilots during flights, I swear I don’t.” his voice sounds pleading to Annie.

“Sir, if you don’t mind me asking. Does your wife, excuse me, ex-wife, have any connection to the pilot service you call? Has she ever been over there? Know any of the owners or other pilots? Could she have been the one to badmouth you so that other pilots say no?” she asks softly.

“Name’s Beau by the way,” he runs his hand through his hair thinking over what Annie has asked. “Truth is, I don’t know how many men there have been. I feel as if I’ve become a laughing stock among people in our community. I mean, I knew she wasn’t faithful. I even approached her about it more than once. She would apologize and say she has a sickness but that it was me she really loved,” he takes a deep breath.

“Then one day, a man shows up with an envelope of pictures of the two of them. I looked at

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him and asked what he plans on doing with these pictures. He told me he wants money for the negatives or he will go public with them. I remember telling him that I’ll do him one better. He was confused. I said, I’ll give you my wife. Then I stood up and opened my door. He left not sure what was going on. By the end of the day, I had everything in motion for the next day. She was shown our pre-nup, showing where it specifically stated infidelity would lead to an immediate divorce with no alimony. Then, the man who approached me was given a copy of that page with that line highlighted and a note that says, ‘she’s all yours.’

That being said, she didn’t believe me and started with her apologies again, that is the only time in my life that I got physically angry. I stood up, threw the pictures at her and told her that her lover came to brag. That he, himself, was the one to give me the pictures. It was one thing to go out to dinner with someone, other than me, but those pictures were not a quite dinner in a public restaurant, if you get my drift,” he pauses again.

“Yeah, I understand what you mean. I’m sorry you went through that. How long ago was that?” she asks.

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“The divorce? Four years already. She still goes to the same club, drives the same car and lives in our home. In the end, I was the one who left. Even though it said she would come out with nothing. I knew she had no idea how to find a new place to live. Initially I kicked her out and she went to the most expensive hotel she could find, then I left, moved my stuff into the top floor of my office building, after a short while, I decided that since I own the building anyway why not stay, so I had a builder and architect come in and made me a great home on the top floor of my building. I have three very large bedrooms and two bathrooms. Plus a guest suite. I have enough space that I hosted my niece’s morning after the wedding breakfast. A tradition in our family, we had sixty-two people there and no one crashed into each other. It was a fun time,” he smiles.

“So, that could be why she doesn’t believe or understand divorce? Or do you think she played you all those years you were married to make you think she is stupid and therefore knew exactly what would happen. That she bragged about eventually taking the house from you,” she says.

“Oh, you misunderstand. The house is not in her name. Yes, she lives there, but it is in my name

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and is mine only. She was given a letter from the lawyer that says she is allowed to live there until our son is out of school so he doesn’t have to move around too often. But it also says that at any given time I can ask her to leave, I can also sell the place without her knowledge. All in the papers she obviously never bothered to read,” Beau stares at Annie’s face, wow she is beautiful.

His hands begin to shake. “I’ve been a fool. All these years I thought I was the only one who had a head on his shoulders. In the meantime, she has been laughing at me for the past twelve years behind my back,” he shakes his head in shame.

“If not you, it would have been someone else. You want my unbiased opinion?” Annie asks.

“Sure,” he says softly.

“If I were you, and you can afford it that is, I’d hire a private detective to look into her conduct for the past four years and a few years beforehand. She was publicly arrested so people already know something is wrong and I have a feeling they aren’t going to be coming to her rescue. Even her lawyer won’t want to be associated with the publicity, whoever that is.

My guess is, the right investigator will find out statements she has made in the past either with

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interviews or on her phone about how she feels she runs your life, how she is in control of all of you, you are her puppet. Old text messages to friends can be found with the right warrant, believe me on that. All of this will make today look premeditated and her attempted murder charge will gain her a longer sentence,” she says.

“Why would she do this?” he asks.

“Greed is a wild thing,” is all she says. Annie remembers her own parents and how their greed ended them both in jail. Lance and Annie are the only two siblings who still talk to each other. The other two won’t talk to anyone out of embarrassment, or so they claim. Annie believes one or both of them were involved with their parents’ schemes and are simply glad that they weren’t caught too, she knows one of them definitely has a skeleton or two in his closet. She shakes her head to bring herself back to the present.

She sees Beau laughing, “Did I say a joke?” she asks.

“Annie, may I call you Annie?” she nods to him. “I am a man who has a private airplane and access to another quickly and you’re worried about me affording a private investigator? Thanks for making me smile. Been a hard day. I got word we

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can leave in another hour and a half by the way. As long as we are there before morning, the boy will be fine,” he says still smiling.

Annie smirks and thinks to herself, boy you are stupid Annie. Of course, he can afford an investigator. Once stupid, always stupid. “No, you’re not. I know that look, now stop going there,” Lance says as he stands in front of them.

Annie looks up at her brother. “Lance, police officer and brother to the best pilot around,” he puts out his hand to shake Beau’s.

“Beau, entrepreneur, business owner and apparent fool,” he shakes Lance’s hand and the two men laugh a bit.

Annie stands and walks away from them. She can’t listen to this. Memories are coming back to her that she doesn’t like and she needs to get rid of them before she gets into the next plane. Lance watches her with caution, he understands her body language more than she knows.

“Will she be ok?” Beau asks.

“Yeah, and you?” Lance asks looking at the man still sitting on the floor.

“Your Annie has a couple of good ideas I think I should follow up on, know any private detectives?” he asks.

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“Yeah, best one is standing right out there running this investigation,” he says pointing over at Red.

“But he is a police officer, I thought,” Beau replies.

“He is only an officer during the day. He is allowed to do whatever he wants in his off time, as long as he doesn’t do any of his work with his badge or log in to the database after hours. He will never abuse his badge, don’t ask him to. But he will get to the bottom of anything faster than anyone else I’ve ever met doing the same thing. When and if he feels the police need to be involved, he will tell you how and what to do. Want me to ask him?” Lance asks.

“No, I can ask. Feeling like a fool seems to be becoming my new normal,” he stands to walk away and Lance grabs Beau’s arm.

“People who do this, can do it to a genius same as an ignorant man. You have nothing to be ashamed of. Don’t let her win. Hold your head high through all of this, as high as you can too,” he tells him in a friendly voice, not his professional voice.

“Thanks Lance. Thank Annie too, I don’t know if I will ever be able to say thank you enough times to her though. My life, hers, as well as the

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child’s and his mother. What did they ever do to her?” he asks.

“Collateral damage, or in this case she could think that it would cause problems like a slow oil leak in a car. Ignorance in mechanics of a plane could be her defense in this case,” he says.

“No, that won’t work at all. Before we even bought the plane, I sat with her and we talked about all the things that hold a plane together. I wanted her to understand that planes are safe, she hadn’t been on a private one before, or so she said. Something else to check into I suppose. So, in order to prove their safety, we sat down and compared a car engine to a plane engine. She is very educated. In fact, she used to have her written test hanging in the den to show everyone how smart she is about planes. No ignorance there, which makes the attempted murder that much stronger, not the opposite way. No, if she did this, she did this knowing full well what would happen to me and anyone on the plane. I need to call my lawyer, I need to check and make sure all the papers I think are in place, actually are. Damn,” he walks quickly over to where Red is standing. Maybe I need a new lawyer too, is he on her payroll so to speak? He begins to question a lot of what has happened these past couple of years.

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~ ~ ~

Annie watches as the world goes by in front of her, happy to be in the cockpit and flying this young boy to the person who can save his life. The drama is behind them for now and all she has to do is be the best pilot she knows how to be. They are landing shortly and then spending the night at a hotel, they will return tomorrow. Mr. Wales is putting her up in a hotel for the night as part of her payment. Not even the same hotel as him, he told her he didn’t want her to feel uncomfortable at any time.

Beau watches the front of the plane, the door to the cockpit has been closed the whole flight, once they passed the two-and-a-half-hour mark, he finally exhales feeling as if he would be here for another day and the boy next to him will make another day as well. How can someone be so cold as to not care if three other people die at the same time? Red promised Beau that he will take on the case as an investigator but that he has to step away from the investigation during the daytime as an officer. Beau said it is more important to him that he does the investigation that Annie suggested, he added in to check his own lawyer and make sure he is as loyal as

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he claims to be and her supposed nerves about being on a private plane. Now some other thoughts of what she said about planes are starting to bother him. Red agreed and promised him information, at least most of the answers, in two days.

“Please prepare for landing,” Annie announces over the intercom.

Beau prepares everyone for landing, he has done this enough times, he no longer employs any in-flight help anymore. Once secured, he presses a button that shows the pilot he and everyone on board is ready. Annie sees the light come on and proceeds to land the plane.

With a flawless landing Annie announces, “We will be at the gate in a couple of moments, please wait until we are there and you see me open the door. That is when everyone can prepare to depart. Thank you, I hope you enjoyed your flight.”

Annie gets the go ahead to pull up to a special gate for private planes. When she sees the ambulance pull up next to the plane, she knows it is time to get off. She stands and opens the door to the cockpit. “Welcome. Your ride is here already and they are going to take you directly to the hospital,” she says to the young man in front of her.

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“Thank you Pilot Annie. Beau said you are his friend. Can I be your friend too? It’s really cool to fly,” the boy asks.

Annie squats down to be eye to eye to her young passenger. “I would be happy and honored to be your friend. Will you write to me when you get back home?” Annie asks, holding back a tear.

The boy looks at his mom and she nods, “I’m going to be here a long while. But if I know I have friends back home, I will work hard on getting back sooner,” he smiles to her.

“There is nothing that would make me happier,” Annie says as she unlocks the door and pushes it open.

“Welcome, how was your flight?” A paramedic says to the boy.

“My flight was great. How was your day?” he asks cheerfully.

Annie watches as the boy who has been sleeping for the past couple of hours becomes animated at the sight of someone here to help him. Annie watches as his mother tries to keep herself from falling apart. She stands in front of Annie and then pulls her in for a hug. “He has a seventy-five percent chance of *not* making this surgery. Thank you for being his friend, we will try our best to make

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it home. Thank you,” she whispers and then runs off after her son.

Annie stands there stunned. All this on a twenty-five percent chance at life? She looks to Beau to see if he knows the truth. He is standing there quiet, she isn’t sure he knows. Annie repeats what the woman just told her and watches him react.

Beau steps back and sits down, he puts his head into his hands and stays there for a moment or two. When he picks his head back up, he looks at Annie, waiting patiently for him to respond. “I didn’t know. All I knew is that they called my charity and said he needs a life-saving surgery. My guess is the boy doesn’t know or he is simply wonderful,” he says as he stands back up with some hesitation. “Come, let’s get to our hotels. It’s been a long day. We both need some time to process our day, and sleep. Sleep sound good right now.”

Annie follows him out to see two different cars waiting to take them to where they need to be. Beau walks her to her car and tells Annie he will be in touch tomorrow as to when they will leave. She nods and he closes the door. Beau stands there watching her leave, he was going to be in the same hotel, but how could he? After he saw her walk away from him and Lance, he could tell the words she said

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had about an investigation, about people behaving badly, had somehow resonated with her deeply. She knows the feeling of betrayal from greed. Who did this to you Annie? I’m going to find out. He thinks to himself. I’m going to make sure they never do anything to you again. That no one will, he promises himself.

Beau steps over to his car. “Let’s go,” he instructs the driver.

Annie turns around in the car to see that Beau is watching her leave. She doesn’t know where she is going, Beau didn’t give an address, he said to go ahead and take her and to drive carefully. The ride isn’t very long, however, it is very late and she would prefer to get straight to bed so she is grateful that the hotel is near the airport. When the driver pulls up Annie can’t really see much of the hotel, but what she does see is that it has a circular driveway up to the front door and a doorman is opening her door before she even gathers her purse. He holds out a hand to help her out and then leans in to grab her overnight bag before she even takes two steps away. “Follow me Ms., we’ve been waiting for you. I heard you had a flight delay and I’m sure you’re very tired.”

Annie follows him into the hotel, when she picks up her head to look around, she realizes she is

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in a luxury hotel. Oh, damn, she thinks to herself, not again. It is too late at night, she can’t find another place plus she doesn’t know the area enough to call in a favor from a friend. Damn, she thinks again.

She follows the porter to the elevator and then to her room. When he opens the door, she reaches into her purse for a tip and he says, “Already taken care of, have a good night,” he closes the door and Annie walks over to the couch to sit down. This is no simple hotel room, this is a luxury suite. She calls Lance, “I can’t do this again Lance. I can’t, I won’t and you can’t make me,” she screams through tears.

Lance has no idea what she is talking about. Did the flight not go well? “Annie explain please.”

Annie can’t talk, she takes a few pictures of her room and sends them to him. Now he knows what she is thinking. “Annie. Take a deep breath. He isn’t even in the same hotel.”

“And you know this how?” she asks.

“Because he sent me a note a few minutes ago to tell me that your driver told him you were dropped off and that he waited as instructed for you to get into the hotel before leaving. He is staying at a different hotel because he said he didn’t think you’d want to stay in the same place as him. Now take a

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deep breath again and tell me, finally tell me, what the hell did our parents have you do,” he says trying to hold in his anger.

Nothing they can do now, they are already in prison she assures herself. Annie takes the deep breath as instructed and says, “I can’t Lance. Believe me when I say that they put me up in a hotel when I landed somewhere and they had asked me to pick up a bag from a friend of theirs before coming home. I told them no. But you know saying no never worked for them.

Someone showed up at the hotel drunk and lecherous. All I can say is thank you for teaching me self-defense moves. They work. I left the hotel at 2:00 in the morning and drove out to the airport and spent the night in the hangar waiting for the plane to be ready to go home, without the bag. It was a luxury suite, the attempt happened more than once before that night, but I was too tired to realize who had put these men up to the challenge of Annie.

When I came home, I screamed at them like never before. You know what they said? They said if I was a real daughter, I would have done anything for them, but that they will let this one go and see how I do next time. Next time? Well, you and I know that never happened, it was from that moment on that I

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never told them when or where I was flying. That is as much as you will know. So, stop asking,” she says breathless.

“Annie, I love you. I will always love you but you’ve told me that story three times already. I want to know why that one was the last straw. How many times did they make you their mule?” he asks in more of his professional voice than a brother.

“Lance, my dear brother, I love you too. But please don’t push the issue. Dad had friends in business who spent the night at the house, suffice it to say, I took to locking my door and putting furniture under the doorknob to prevent anyone from getting in. No need to press charges now, no way to prove a thing. They are in for thirty-five and forty years respectively. By the time they come out, no one will care. I already don’t. ok? It’s been a long haul to overcome that reputation they created for me, I’m in a good place now. So please, let the past go,” she pleads.

“Annie, was this while I was away in school?” he has to ask.

“Does it matter?” she asks.

“Yeah, because now certain things our wonderful older brother used to tell me, now make sense. He was involved too, wasn’t he? That wasn’t a

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car accident that caused your bruises when I was home on vacation, was it? Annie, I’m so sorry I wasn’t there for you. I’m so sorry,” he begins to cry with her now.

But his mind also begins to think of other things. Like the miscarriage Annie had before she started college, that was also a result of a fall she said, fall my ass, he thinks to himself. They never found the father because Annie wouldn’t let them do DNA testing, but the box is still downstairs in the cold case room. If that doesn’t work, he will exhume the body and have the baby tested. Annie insisted on a real burial because the child was real, not only a piece of flesh but a real human. He is going to get to the bottom of this now. He has to, for Annie. If his own brother raped her, that boy will not live until next week. By his hands or someone else’s, it doesn’t much matter right now.

“Lance, don’t get involved. Take off your cop hat. I’m ok. I am a survivor, I picked myself up and became a great plane mechanic and then a pilot. How many can say that?” she asks.

Lance takes a cleansing breath and says, “Only you Annie. Only you. But Beau seems to be the real thing. He hired Red to investigate like you suggested. He said what you told him makes sense

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and he feels so much like a fool he can hardly look in the mirror now. Go to sleep, you need at least seven hours to make yourself fresh. Lock the door if you want, push furniture if you want to make yourself comfortable, but I think we can trust this one. Ok? I think we actually made a real friend today,” he finishes.

“Ok. I’m sorry, I guess the whole of the day is getting to me. I’ll see you tomorrow night, you’d best have some good burgers for me to grill when I get home,” she says.

“I’ll have them marinating all day, only for you. Love you sis,” Lance says.

“Back at ya,” she smiles and hangs up.
~ ~ ~

“Morning, I hope you slept well. Am I calling too early?” Beau asks.

“I’ve been up for a while. I slept fine, thank you for asking. And yourself?” she asks.

“I slept like hell, worried sick about the boy. Less than thirty percent? Not great odds but I suppose you’d take even five percent for your child,” he says softly.

“Most would,” she says quietly, not hers, she thinks to herself.

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“Annie? Are you sure you’re ok? I mean yesterday was pretty traumatic, it was for me. Knowing that my own ex-wife wanted to kill me. Knowing you would have been caught in the cross-fires of her hate and for no reason. You don’t deserve that,” he says, again keeping his voice soft for her.

“It may take me a day or two to let everything sink in, but I’m good to fly today if you’re wondering,” she says authoritatively.

“I have no question of that at all. Would it be alright if we left earlier today instead of later? I’d like to be back before dinner, Red has some information for me already that can’t wait.” Yeah like the fact that they found poison in my garage at the house and are now checking all of the vegetables to make sure she didn’t already try and poison their son. Thankfully, his gardener does things with only natural weed killers so he probably never touched the stuff that his ex bought, but he also may not have known it was there. His whole house where she lives was gone through while he has been gone, and she is in custody. They even went to his business and checked his own place from top to bottom, just in case. The entire building, every computer, every desk. New locks were put on every office, a hundred and fifty

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people are now being scrutinized for any involvement with her, anything at all. Somehow, he has to apologize to everyone personally. He will have to think of how, he can’t afford any ill will in his own business.

His son called him last night to tell him that he heard what was going on from Beau’s sister, that his mom was at the club and that his aunt is coming to pick him up today because she was afraid people would make fun of him at school tomorrow. Beau had to call the school and leave a message that there is a family emergency and that his son will be staying with his sister for a few days. Who knows which parent from the club contacted the school already or at least their own children. Stupid uppity school. He should send him to public school like he always wanted. His ex wanted their son in this school specifically, maybe she has something on the principal, well no more. He will find something better. As soon as he knows why she insisted on this one.

“Beau? Are you still there?” Annie asks to silence.

“Sorry, mind is occupied, I’ll send a car for you in half an hour, will that work?” he asks.

“I’ll be ready,” she says.

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Beau hangs up and calls Lance, “I don’t know why but I hear it in her voice, your sister is hurting. I swear to you I wasn’t in her hotel, let alone her room. You have to believe me on that,” he pleads.

“Whoa Beau, I believe you. What has you so riled up? What did she say?” he asks.

“It’s what she didn’t say. In my business, as with yours, you listen to what is not said and when I mentioned that any parent would try and do a surgery even it was only a five percent chance, she was dead silent before she answered. Answer me one question, where are your parents?” he asks.

“Federal prison,” Lance answers.

“Ok. Just know, I will never harm her. She seems like a special person and she means a lot to both you and Red, she even has Whitey on her team and that’s saying a lot in my book. Whitey and I went to high school together, been through everything there is to go through together. All of it. I’d take his word over my own sometimes,” he chuckles.

“I get that, same as me and Red. We’re a tight group, sometimes we’ve needed to be. But Beau, if you’re looking for more than a friendship, you’d better tread lightly and go as slow as a pregnant turtle,” Lance says as a brother would, protectively.

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“I hear you loud and clear. Do turtles even get pregnant?” he tries to joke.

Lance laughs, he likes Beau already, and with everything they have found out about his ex, nothing, not one person that works with or for him will say a bad word about Beau. They aren’t scared to say anything, they simply have nothing bad to say. In the span of twenty-four hours they have received fifty-seven voluntary calls from people around the neighborhood to sing his praises, that whatever she did to him was not self-defense and that the police should not believe anything she says against Beau. People from the club, from work, from business. Word spread fast about what she had done and how she was publicly arrested.

“You speak to Red yet about what is going on here at the precinct?” Lance asks.

“No, he said he will only report to me what is going on while he is on my dime. Something I should know?” he asks.

Lance explains how people have been eager to call and vouch for him, unsolicited. “It’s good to know she hasn’t completely smeared my name. I sent Red the list of men I’ve already known her to be with, in case she tries to blackmail them, I told Red to tell them I don’t care about her, she is their

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problem now not mine. I’m a cold bastard sometimes too Lance.”

“No, I’d say that is being an honest bastard. I’d have accidentally spilled hot coffee on them the next time I saw any of these men.” Lance laughs to himself remembering how he did that to his own father. But it wasn’t an accident. When his father jumped up, Lance had dared him to say a word, slapped some proof on the table and walked away. “We all have our skeletons Beau. Have a nice flight home.”

“Thanks,” Beau hangs up and walks out to his car, he realizes that Lance gave him permission to look at what could be with Annie and himself being together as more than friends, “How had I earned that so quickly?” he says out loud to no one. Must be something in the investigation, maybe those calls he was referring to, Beau thinks to himself.

Annie is waiting at the plane when he walks towards her, he can tell something is on her mind. How can he know her so well already? Maybe they met before. How can he see this? Did he know her in a past life? He will have to look up her family and figure things out. Maybe he knew an older sibling. Red seemed to indicate that there are more siblings, but not in touch with these two.

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“Ready?” he asks.

“All checked and ready to go, did you hit traffic?” she asks wondering why he is so much later than her.

“I was stuck on the phone, when I got off, I didn’t realize how much later I was. My apologies. I should have called you,” he says looking into her eye.

“No need to apologize. Did you call the hospital?” she asks.

“The mother will contact us. Our job is done Annie, no matter how much it hurts to not know,” he says as he thinks about how many times they have called with good news and sometimes bad, this one has not called yet. But the surgery could still be going on. He needs to get home, he can’t focus on this part. Not today anyway, he will find out from his charity what transpired. One way or the other, he always finds out.

Annie watches as she sees him thinking past the time he responded. Maybe he knows something she isn’t supposed to know. She reminds herself she is only the pilot, she is not in the world of traveling around in private planes, she is no different than a cab driver.

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“You are much different than a cab driver,”
Beau says.

“What?” she asks, did I say that out loud she
thinks to herself.

“The look on your face, it was as if you think
I’m hiding something from you, that I think of you as
only a driver. But you’re not. You’re, well, you’re
Pilot Annie and I think that describes you well
enough. Shall we?” he asks as he steps towards the
plane.

Annie follows him in and does her initial
check of the plane. She radios that she is ready to
leave and gets her go ahead from air traffic control.
Once in the air there is a knock on the cockpit door
and then it slides open. “Mind if I sit next to you?”
he asks.

“You know how to fly?” she asks.

“No, not in the least, but when flying alone, it
is boring and the view from the front is nicer.
Sometimes scarier too. I’ll go back if I’m bothering
you,” he looks at her to judge what she is thinking.
Her jaw tightens slightly before she answers.

“I can talk and fly but I may not look at you,”
she says.

“I’m fine with that.”

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For the next couple of hours Beau and Annie find themselves talking about nothing important and the time seems to pass quickly. “We’re getting close to landing. Can you please go to the back?” she asks.

“Sure, see you soon.” he walks back to put himself into his seat and his seatbelt and presses the button he is ready.

Lance is there to greet her when she gets off the plane, she runs into his arms. He holds on tightly, she must need this, he thinks to himself. He looks over her shoulder at Beau and he shrugs his shoulders to tell Lance he knows no reason for her to do that.

“Red is coming to my place in an hour. We usually get together after Annie flies overnight and grill some burgers and chicken, care to join us? You won’t be able to talk to him until he eats anyway,” Lance smiles, now having his arm around his sister’s shoulders, she is safe and he can exhale.

“Yeah Beau, come. Lance has probably been marinating the chicken and my burgers all day. Besides, you don’t want to eat alone again, do you?” she asks.

“I should see my son first,” he says, but he is not sure his son wants to see him.

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“Does he know what time you’re landing?”
Annie asks.

“No,” he looks at her.

“So, another hour or two won’t matter. You need to unwind first, then see him with a calm demeanor. Follow us in your car,” Annie smiles at him.

“If you’re sure I’m not invading,” he says.

“Red would be happier to see you in a calm environment. Where is your son?” Lance asks.

“By my sister, about an hour north from here,” he says.

“Tell her to bring him over, after you see where it is, then you’ll have at least an hour to unwind before he comes. Plenty of food,” Lance assures him.

Beau smiles and picks up his phone, they walk to their respective cars in silence. In the car Annie looks over at Lance, “Some people like their children Annie, remember?”

“Yeah, I know. Sometimes I need a reminder,” she begins to think of the survival percentage again.

“Are you out of what is left of your mind?”
Annie is going to kill you!! My God Lance, you’ve

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pulled some pretty crappy things before but she will never forgive you for this. **NEVER!!**” Red screams at him as he walks closer to the grave.

“We are in a cemetery, maybe you want to scream a little softer. I went to the judge saying I had an anonymous tip about a cold case and I needed to exhume the body to prove paternity and rape and I want to get it done within the statute of limitations. He agreed. But we aren’t taking the body out of the grave, only getting samples for DNA proof. I brought a whole team of crime scene investigators with me so they get the exact things they need, no more. Move back, they have to lift it out now,” Lance pushes Red back.

Red steps back with Lance. Annie miscarried the baby nearly eight years ago, she was almost exactly half way through when she had taken a fall and it caused the miscarriage, she told them. But she was insistent on having a full burial. Red and Lance were the only ones there, no other family showed up. Annie was bruised and battered and broken, however, it was after this event that she became even more determined to finish school, the school of her choice, she worked hard during the day to pay for her own schooling at night, she refused to take any money from anyone. She had made that perfectly

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clear to both Red and Lance, she had to do this on her own.

Red remembers the coffin being large for a small child but Annie insisted she wanted the best for her child, he remembers her telling them she is burying more than a baby, she is burying a past that she never wants to revisit.

“Red, my gut is telling me things I don’t want to go to, but with recent information she told me, I’m almost positive I know who raped her, it was no car accident she was in, you don’t get wrist bruising from a car accident, that was ligature marks, the police even marked it down as such, I checked the cold case file. The pictures almost made me vomit all over again. Then out of the blue she was pregnant, and six months later my brother Stan decides to come home from wherever he had been hiding and boom, she had a miscarriage from a fall. Have you ever known her to fall? I mean ever, in all of our lives? I checked with a friend of mine yesterday, who is an obstetrician, about the likelihood of a miscarriage from a fall, he says it can happen but usually they recommend bedrest and they monitor them in the hospital overnight, it rarely happens spontaneously unless the child was targeted or it was going to end on its own anyway. It takes a

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lot for a woman to lose a baby from an outside source. I researched online after that call and found similar results. He raped her, he impregnated her and then when he returned home, he didn’t want the baby for fear it would come out who the father was, he got rid of it the only way he knew how, through force, same way it got in there, he made sure it came out.

My bigger question is where did he return home from? We were away in school at this time remember? I have Martin looking this up now. I think he did six months on the inside, but for what? We need all the facts. Holy crap what is that?!” Lance exclaims.

Lance and Red watch as the CSI team pull out bags with material inside, there are four of them laying on top of the child. One, Lance recognizes immediately as the dress Annie was wearing when he carried her into the hospital from her fall, the day of the miscarriage. Red and he came home to surprise her and there she was, lying on the floor bloodied and sore.

He grabs Red’s arm as they approach. “The sheets from our home, the dress from the day of the miscarriage. It’s all here Red. She buried all of her

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ghosts. Open that one first please,” Lance tells the head of the CSI team, pointing to the dress.

He opens the bag and takes out the dress, Lance falls to his knees and begins to cry, full out sobs are coming from him. Red doesn’t know which way to go first. He looks to his friend, then he looks to the dress being held up.

“Oh no, this can’t be true, I was hoping you were going on a hunch that was far-fetched from your overactive imagination,” he says softly. He walks over to the CSI agent and tells him, “Turn the dress around and look at the back, at what we see.”

He does this, “See this shoe print on the back of the dress, she was kicked down the stairs, and if it left such a definite mark, it was a strong kick at that. With a muddy shoe. But you see this here, in the middle? The man’s initials who did this. He takes pride in the fact that he has his shoes made like this on purpose so that people know where he has walked, as if he is some kind of prophet or something, well, his own ego just put him in jail,” Red looks back at Lance, he didn’t want to believe him any more than Lance wanted to believe himself. That their own brother could cause this kind of harm to Annie.

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Annie, the most tenderhearted of a woman Red has ever known. Lance and she were always close as kids and even more so in their adult lives, the three of them are all they have. And Red, they’ve always had him too, he has always been the third of the trio. But to think that all of what Annie went through came from family? Red is going to be very sick. He knows as soon as the CSI team makes the same discovery, they are going to have a hard time with this one as well. Half the precinct knows Annie, he hopes this won’t change their opinion of her. Red takes a look back at Lance, he hasn’t moved from his spot on the ground, nor has he stopped crying. Red knows that Lance needs to get this all out before they approach Annie. He will need to be strong for her. They both will.

Red continues talking to the lead CSI agent, “You see, their brother, Stan, was in this fraternity, the kind where they let all kinds of stuff take place that was probably illegal and attributed it to the old adage of ‘boys will be boys’ before women understood that date rape was real. This happened after Stan finished college but he never got passed the idea he was no longer in a fraternity. At least I think he finished college, now I’m not even sure. Either way, he never grew up, we need to see if he

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has ever been locked up before, there is a five-month gap in the time-line that we know of.” Red continues his conversation with the CSI lead investigator to tell him Lance’s theory, that his brother was away for those four and a half months and didn’t know that she was pregnant until he came home.

“You need to inform the victim. I will take all of what you have said back with me. We actually don’t need her permission to prosecute him but she shouldn’t be blindsided in case this makes the news or something. You should tell her today. No later Red, I mean that,” he says sternly.

“We’ll need a minute to get over the shock. Did you look at the papers inside the bags yet?” Red asks.

“I was reading them when you came over. She wrote it all down and buried her burdens. A smart way of closure and moving on. But Red, don’t ask me to show you or Lance, you’re officially off of this case, you hear me? I mean off, don’t make me push my weight on this one. You’re not to know. And I really mean *not*,” his voice equally as stern as before.

“I don’t want to know. Don’t worry, just put the sorry bastard behind bars and let everyone know in the jailhouse why he is there. How he treated his

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own sister. That is all I ask. Professional courtesy,” he smirks.

“I get that. Now leave. Take Lance and leave. We’ve got this, you have to trust me to keep her name out of this as much as we can,” he says putting his hand on Red’s shoulder.

Red pats his friend’s hand with his own. “Thank you.” He walks back to Lance and squats down next to him. “We’ve got to go to Annie, Lance. We’ve got to go now,” he says.

Lance finally picks up his head and looks at Red with swollen eyes, “I wanted to be wrong, I wanted to be so wrong, don’t you get that?”

“Did she tell you to do this?” Red asks.

“No, she said let it go, but then she told me more this time than ever before. I couldn’t let this go. I can’t stop this steamroller from going now. He has to pay, he has to, and if the law doesn’t do something, I will. I promise you that,” even in his despair, Lance is angry.

“It won’t come to that, but we are officially off the case. We are too close to be unbiased. Now pull yourself together and let’s go find Annie. She is working for Beau again tomorrow which means today she is home,” Red puts out his hand to help Lance up.

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Lance stands on shaky legs and lets Red help him back to his car, Lance had come with the team so he is free to go.

~ ~ ~

Beau is pounding his punching bag harder than usual, he won't let up. Whitey is on the other side of it trying to hold it in place, he has never seen Beau this worked up. He is pounding the bag and screaming with each punch, jab and right hook.

“Beau, you’ve been at this for almost fifteen minutes, you’re going to burn out or hurt yourself. Please stop. Please talk to me, I haven’t seen you like this ever. Talk to me,” Whitey says between punches.

One last punch and Beau finds himself falling to the ground. He begins to speak and it is as if a floodgate has opened and all the words come out as one long sentence. Whitey stands there and watches as his friend spills his inner most feelings to him. Something only the two of them have ever done a couple times in their lives.

Yesterday, Red told Beau that they have enough evidence against his ex-wife that Beau won't be needed to prosecute her, there is no need. The police have all they need to take over the case. He

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will be informed when the date of the trial is and he can make a choice to show up or not. But this is worse. Beau’s worst nightmare has actually been a reality. “I’m done,” Beau says defeated.

“I’m making the call. Go shower,” Whitey tells him.

Whitey walks out of the room with his phone, “Hello Annie? Hi, Whitey here. Um, I know Beau has you flying for him again tomorrow, but right now, he needs to speak with you about something personal. I can’t explain what it is on the phone, but he has to do this today.”

“Whitey, you’re scaring me. I know we’ve only known each other for a few of weeks now, but for some reason I believe you and that’s not easy for me to say. Do you want me to come over to you?” she asks.

“No, if you don’t mind, we’d rather come to you. Beau says he knows where you live. Are you ok with that? Do you want to call Lance to meet us there or Red?” he feels she shouldn’t be alone when they have this conversation, well, more like a revelation.

“I’m ok with that. Maybe I’ll call Lance. I think he is off this afternoon anyway. I’ll see you within the hour then,” Annie tells him.

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“Ok, we’ll be there soon. Maybe open a bottle of wine or something stronger,” he hangs up and goes to check on Beau. Whitey walks over to the bathroom and hears the water still running, he also hears something he hasn’t heard in years, Beau is crying, full out sobbing. He sits and waits, he will give him a few minutes before he walks in on him and gets him ready to go to speak to Annie.

“Lance, hi honey, its Annie. I had a weird phone call from Whitey, remember him? The mechanic? Yeah, well, he tells me that Beau has to speak to me before we fly out tomorrow. Then the tells me I should open up a bottle of wine or something stronger. He also asked me to invite you. Are you available to come now? If not, I’ll understand,” she says.

“Annie, kind of funny you called, Red and I were thinking of picking up lunch and surprising you. What kind of sandwich would you like? I’m thinking deli but they have great cheese there too. What would you like?” Lance answers with an exhale. He will let Beau speak first and see what happens after that.

“Red, I don’t like this. What could be so important?” he whispers while listening to Annie’s order.

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“Lance? Did you even hear me?” she asks.

“I’m sorry, kind of distracted today. Work. What do you want honey?” he asks again.

“I’ll take a grilled cheese sandwich but then I said maybe you should get a couple of platters and bread on the side because Beau and Whitey will be here too,” she says.

“Great idea, as usual. You have drinks or should I buy?” he asks.

“I made a pitcher of iced tea today and some lemonade, I think we will be good. See you soon,” Annie says and sits back down on the floor where she was before Whitey called.

Annie has been sitting on the floor all day going through old pictures. For some reason today seems like the day to take these out. She pulls out one more envelope and empties the contents on the floor and freezes. She forgot she had these photos, why didn’t she get rid of them with all the rest of the stuff? Why today? There are so many other envelopes here, are there more than she remembered?

Annie sits frozen and looks down in front of her. The last picture ever taken of her whole family together, before Lance went off to school. Stan’s hand was on her shoulder, his other hand was

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somewhere the camera can’t see but she can feel his hand as if it was yesterday. She should have known it was not going to be a one-time event. But why would she assume that?

The next picture is the picture her friend took of her after her so-called car accident. She had gone to the hospital and claimed she was in a hit and run. Gave them a made-up story, but she remembers putting all the pictures in the ground. She buried all of this, both physically and emotionally.

Annie has been walking around all day with a feeling of gloom. Maybe this is why. The banging on the door startles her and she jumps up to answer before she thinks to put things away. She opens the door to see Whitey looking serene and Beau looks as if he hasn’t slept in three weeks. What could be going on? “Lance and Red are on their way. Please come in. sit down.”

As they walk to the couch Annie sees the pictures on the floor, she pushes past them in a rush and picks them up quickly. “Sorry, private pictures,” she says.

Beau nods and Whitey smiles at her, “Bikini pictures huh?” he tries to laugh.

Annie looks at him and smiles. “Something like that,” she says as she puts them back into the

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envelope and into her purse. She will bring them to be buried tomorrow with the rest of the stuff. She has moved on. She will continue to do so.

“Knock, knock,” Lance calls as he opens the door with Red right behind him with more food.

“Ooo, that looks delicious,” she walks quickly over to Red, “come put this on the table,” she tells them. The men follow her and she whispers, “I’m really nervous. Look at Beau,” she says to them. Lance and Red look over at Beau sitting on the couch with his hands hanging down between his knees and his chin touching his chest because his head is so low.

“It’s ok Annie, we’ll help him through this. He seems like a nice guy. Come on, united front as we always are, ok?” Lance looks at his sister.

“Ok, let’s get through this,” Annie says but her heart is hurting watching this man in such a state of despair. They have talked almost every day since they met. He is so open and easy to talk to, Annie was thinking she may have found a normal person for once, someone who wants to know the real her and not what they heard about her.

The three of them finish putting the food out and head over to sit by Whitey and Beau. Annie sits next to Lance on the floor in front of Beau who is on

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the couch. For reasons unbeknown to herself she puts her hand on Beau’s knee. “Whatever it is Beau, I think we are friend enough to be honest with each other. Since that first flight for you, you and I have talked a lot. Today is no difference. Let’s talk as friends,” she leaves her hand on his knee and Lance puts his arm around her shoulders.

Red speaks next, “Well, if anyone wants some good news first, Beau your ex is behind bars and since she was arrested a few other items of interest to the feds have come up. She won’t be bothering you any time soon. She had an accomplice too, not the temp we saw at the airport, he was only a messenger to tell her when the plane was free to look at. He is clear, well mostly. She had someone from the club she holds so dear. A woman no less,” he tells everyone.

“Bernice the bitch,” Beau says under his breath.

“How did you guess that?” Red asks.

“She has always hated me because I turned down her advances towards me. I have about a dozen or so letters from her telling me how much better she would be for me than my ex, before we were even separated. The two of them deserve each other. But that’s not why we are here. Whitey? I

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can’t,” he says exasperated and embarrassed. Beau buries his face in his hands again.

“I’ll get this one, my friend. You sit,” Whitey looks around the room at the friends around the room. These are good people, who knew they would all come to needing each other so soon.

“Life happens in times and places you never expected. I’m not good with making things seem better than they are, so I’m going to tell you a story that happened about eight and a half years ago. Please hold on to something or someone strong.

Annie eight and a half years ago Beau belonged to a fraternity, I used to tell him he was crazy but he said he was pressured into being part of this particular one because of his father being an alum. He never really hung around the frat house much.

But that is not the important part. Annie. You’d better take a deep breath, your brother Stan was part of that fraternity too. One night, as I said around eight and a half years ago, Stan came back from a weekend at home. He came back bragging about being with a young girl. Said he had conquered himself a virgin and was proud to flaunt his conquest. Beau here doesn’t take kindly to that kind of bragging so he told him to shut up. I was there

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visiting at the time, I’m telling you this as first-hand knowledge. A witness actually.

But Stan continued. In fact, Stan even said that it was fun to have built in virgins in his home, he didn’t have to go far to get what he wanted, that he would always have what he wanted, when he wanted, and as often as he wanted. At that moment Beau had lost his mind a bit, he jumped on Stan, knocked him to the ground and used his face as a punching bag. No one stopped him. When Stan stopped fighting back, I finally went over to Beau and tapped on his shoulder. He stood up and then kicked him in the groin with his steel toed boots.

One of the other fraternity brothers told Beau it was time for him to leave. He said, no one blamed him, he told us that this kind of behavior is unwelcomed in the fraternity’s home and that Stan will be banned from coming back. A few guys said even in thirty years they would still say they saw nothing and under oath they would swear Beau was provoked and that Stan deserved the beating.

The guys at the house called paramedics after we left and said they came home and found him like this. There is a police report and everything. Sworn statements from everyone. I have a copy here with me if you want to see. Anyway, we found out Stan

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had a broken jaw and a couple of busted ribs, he had to go to a rehab place from the hospital to be able to be fed and such. I think he had other personal injuries too but no one told us about those. We believe he was there for almost five months. After that, no one cared. Until last night.

You had mentioned your full name to Beau a few days ago in a casual conversation and he couldn’t figure out why the name sounded familiar. Then the memory hit him and he looked up on the alum board. Stan’s picture came up, and also your parents – I guess every tree has a few bad apples but Lance and you seemed to turn out fine,” Whitey sits back into his chair with a sigh, he has nothing left.

Annie looks at Whitey a moment longer than at Beau, “You did that for me?”

“I would do better now that I know you, he should not be able to walk this earth Annie, not even a little bit. I did what I did because what kind of scum thinks it’s a good idea is to have sex with a sister, or maybe a cousin, I couldn’t be sure but he said his house which meant family I had assumed sister and I was sickened by his bragging. I would do the same again Annie, this time for you, directly.” His voice is hoarse, “and I’d do even more. I’d finish the job.”

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Annie looks into Beau’s eyes, she looks over at Lance who seems lost. “Of all of the days, I found some pictures today. My friend took them. I thought I buried them with the other stuff,” she admits.

Lance interrupts her thoughts, “We found that other stuff today too Annie. You had let slip something and my gut was churning and my mind thinking, and then, after all these years I remembered what my gut was feeling when we saw you that day. I got a warrant to exhume. We only were allowed to take something small enough for a DNA test. Red and I were headed over here to tell you when you called. I’ll leave now if you want me to,” Lance says, feeling as defeated as Beau looks.

Annie stands and everyone watches her walk around the room, once, then twice and she stops and looks at the men in her life. “I am so blessed. I have someone who did justice for me years ago without me knowing, and I have family who are willing to stick their necks out and do the same again for me now. You found the dress then?” she asks Lance.

“His footprint is on the back – along with his initials he is so proud of,” Lance says.

“I never looked at the back. Oh, I wish I had, he would have been put away back then wouldn’t he Lance? I’m not as smart as I look, am I?” she pauses

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and walks around a minute again. “Red, who is handling the investigation because I’m sure you guys can’t.”

“Head of CSI is taking this one personally. He is the one who told us to come to you today and make sure you’re not blindsided in case his lawyer wants to go public. But he also assured us that you won’t be needed in the courtroom, at least he is hoping not. The information, he will say, came from an anonymous tip. The judge had no problem allowing for the exhumation on that alone anyway,” Red says. “You may need to identify him, but that can be done behind a one way window.”

“Why didn’t I give you guys this back then? I’m a fool,” she says.

“No, don’t ever say that Annie. You did the only thing that would give you closure. It is kind of genius if I understand what you did. You buried your child along with all of the reasons that you were having the child to begin with. An amazing feat. You’re more amazing each day I know you Annie. I’m sorry I didn’t do more for you. I would have crippled him for sure if Whitey hadn’t stopped me,” Beau says.

“What you did was brave and heroic, you stood up for a person you didn’t even know. For no

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other reason than you saw what happened was wrong. Beau that is a beautiful thing and knowing it was you who did this to him, well, honestly, that pushes it over the top for me,” Annie says.

“I should be angry at Lance and Red but I’m not. I suppose I haven’t been fair to them all these years of holding back. We never held anything back before.” Annie takes a deep breath and sighs. She pulls out her phone to check the date and freezes. “Gentlemen, today is going to be my new turn around date. Eight years ago, Stan came home and saw me pregnant, he had accused me of planning the pregnancy on purpose so that he couldn’t have me anymore. When I told him it was his and he is the only one who ever touched me that way he became enraged. He started screaming all kind of things about how I’ve ruined everything for him. How I was going to ruin him for sure. I remember, that after I turned around, he attacked me from the back, I had no recourse, I mean I was laying on my pregnant stomach with a madman beating at me from behind. My back, my sides, he even knocked me out because I don’t remember falling down the stairs but there I was, bloody and in pain when Lance and Red happen to come home. I knew I was going to lose him. I knew the baby was a boy too, I could feel

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somehow that he was a boy. **But I never hated him, how can you hate a child, an innocent child who didn’t ask to be in such a situation.?”** Annie walks over to Lance and hugs him, he holds on tight and she kisses his cheek. The same to Red and Whitey.

Beau sits and watches this, this woman, who has been through so much terror in her life, considers herself blessed. Like so many of the patients he flies to have life saving surgery. They always tell him how blessed they are because they have this opportunity, forgetting completely that they are in a precarious situation to begin with. Only seeing the upside. **But what he did is a criminal offense and he admitted it in front of two officers of the law.**

Annie walks over to sit next to Beau on the couch, she puts her hand on his knee. **“I used to cringe at thinking about those days. I would cry and cry and cry and lose my mind. Then Lance taught me self-defense and then I began school for being an airplane mechanic. I poured my life into being the best. I hope I’ve made you proud Whitey. But I know now why all of this happened today. Today, is the first time in eight years that I haven’t spent the day at the cemetery and cried. Today is the day my baby died. Not the day I was beaten, that was two**

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days ago and that went on without a hitch. Instead of being surrounded by sorrow, which you all feel you’ve brought me, I am surrounded by love, the deepest most pure kind of love. Oh boys, don’t be afraid for me, with you all on my side, and a job I love with a good man besides me. I’ve got everything I need.

I don’t know if you read the letters but it won’t only be Stan that is arrested in our family today. Are you going to be able to deal with that Lance?” she looks to her brother.

“Annie, I am here for you always. It’s been you and I since we were young,” Lance looks at her with pride.

“Lance do you know why our father never paid attention to us?” Annie asks.

“Probably because even as young kids we never gave him any credit for his plans he was always coming up with. No interest in his next scheme, unlike the others. When I was becoming an officer of the law, he told me that no one in that profession can live in his house, so I willingly left. But that was after all this, wasn’t it?” he asks.

“True and now we have a new mess. But I believe we will leave this one to the right people in CSI and move on with our lives as we always have.”

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She leans into Beau and kisses his cheek, “Will you please join us at the table for lunch? Red brought enough food for a dozen people and despite all that has happened right now, I’m kind of hungry.”

“You don’t hate me?” Beau asks.

“No, I don’t hate you, in fact I like you a bit more than I had planned. But I need to eat well today so that I have enough energy for the flight tomorrow. Are we making a delivery or picking someone up?” she asks.

“Neither, I was actually going to try and convince you to take a small vacation with me. Separate everything, except the plane of course,” he smiles at her. “I realize it is a lot to ask and if you didn’t want to stay with me, I’d put you up farther away so you can take two days to yourself, I felt you needed some time away. Presumptuous of me I’m sorry.” He bows his head again but then stands to leave, “Come on Whitey, I’ll call for a different pilot.”

“Now that’s presumptuous if I ever heard it. Assuming my answer would be a no before you even hear me say an answer. But I can’t answer on an empty stomach. Whitey bring your friend to the table, would you? I’m going to the back room to get something to cheer everyone up.” Annie walks back

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to her room and digs through a few boxes of pictures still hidden in her closet. She comes out holding some pictures and smiling

This day has sure been weird, but her heart feels good today, not empty. She is full, full of love. Love for her brother, for Red and a special kind of emotion for Beau. The kind that she didn’t think she would ever have for a man but now she sees that she is completely over her past.

She sees the four men sitting at the table with plates full of cheeses, breads, pickles and vegetables. Red is pouring wine for everyone, he stands and sees her coming. He smiles at her a loving smile. “Let’s remember these from now on. Shall we?” she asks as she hands out a stack of pictures.

Lance looks down and his cheeks begin to burn red. “Really Annie?” Red grabs the picture from Lance’s hand and begins to laugh, a hearty, well needed laugh.

Whitey takes the picture and looks down, he sees Lance as a young boy wearing an outfit of blue plaid pants and a green shirt with bright white shoes. “Oh my,” Whitey begins to laugh as well and hands the picture to Beau who hasn’t really even looked up all day.

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Beau looks at the picture Annie hands him first, he looks up at her. “I see you’ve always been beautiful,” he says softly.

Annie smiles, “Even in that outfit?” she asks.

“Especially this outfit,” he smiles and looks at her again, he sees Lance and Red standing tall and proud next to Annie at her pilot’s graduation ceremony.

The picture Whitey hands him, he finally looks up to see. “Oh Lance, really?” Beau actually lets out a chuckle.

“I was only twelve, I thought I was so cool. What were you wearing then? You’re older than me, fashions were probably worse for you,” Lance yells at Beau.

“I’d have looked better standing in my father’s pajamas than you are in this,” he laughs some more and looks over at Annie who is looking at him and smiling. That is all he needs.

~ ~ ~

As it turned out, Beau invited Lance and Red to join him on a two-day excursion to a place he likes to visit. Mostly because Annie was called into work for a couple of special flights. Whitey needs to stay home because his son became ill. It was a good

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escape from everything that had happened and a great way for Beau to become a little closer to all of them.

Tonight, Annie and Red are sitting in their favorite café and having dessert, waiting for Lance to get off work. Lance finally joins them carrying a very large ice cream sundae to their table. “That’s enough for four people, you monster,” Annie says.

“They said kitchen was closed for food so I could only get desserts and I’m starved. While Red has been off solving everyone’s personal problems, I was stuck at a multi-car accident today trying to keep everyone calm. Four were dead on the scene, a horrible sight, but now I want to sit back and think of nothing other than this mountain of ice cream.

Anyone hear from Beau today? Whitey called me last night to say that Beau was told there is one more complication from his ex that needs to be resolved today. But I haven’t heard from either of them regarding what that is,” he looks to Red.

Red bows his head. “Oh hell, I’ll tell you, but I hope he doesn’t kill me. I found this out yesterday afternoon, so I wasn’t on Beau’s dime, because I’m too close to the case now, Captain took over. I didn’t want to ruin tonight’s calm dinner with this, but you’ve brought up the subject, so I will.” He takes a

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deep breath and says, “The boy isn’t his. One of her many liaisons. The judge wanted a DNA test done before he released the boy from the aunt. Even though it was Beau’s sister, something told the judge the features didn’t match, or the woman’s behavior suggested something to him, no one knows his real reasoning but the test had to be done because the judge asked. I think he knows Beau’s ex some other way, but I’ll never say that out loud again and you can’t either. The real father has been notified this afternoon. Beau was supposed to be notified too. So, no one has heard from him? Annie?” Red asks.

“No, not me either. But I bet I know where he is. Good thing you got that ice cream in a to-go bowl. Come on. I’ll drive,” Annie says. They follow Annie outside and to her car and she drives in silence. It is not until she is almost there, do they figure out where she is going. Annie pulls into a small area of the airport, by now she knows the side roads to drive on where the private planes are. She pulls to a stop right in front of where Beau stores his plane. “This is the only thing, the only place that is solely his. Sure, she got to the plane, but not this part of the airport, she isn’t allowed here. Never was.”

“How do you know this?” Red asks.

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“This part of the airport is under surveillance all the time. My car has been approved and your faces are on the approved list so upon seeing you in my car we were allowed to go through. He needs to start over. He loved his son, very much. But the father must want the son as well, leaving him with nothing. I know that feeling. I would have raised my son as my own. Telling no one, but instead I have nothing too. Let’s go get him. Lance, send a notice to Whitey, he should know what is going on,” Annie begins to walk inside and the men follow her.

As she gets close, Annie hears the familiar groan of despair. She pushes the door open and sees what she knew she would see. Beau is on the floor, on his knees and pouring out his soul to any higher power that will listen. Annie walks slowly over to him and gets on her knees next to him. Beau looks to the side and sees Annie. His eyes look over her and he sees Red and Lance coming in behind her. “We don’t let family suffer alone,” Lance says putting down his ice cream and walking in to sit down on the other side of Beau, Red follows him.

“She knew that if she was ever caught, she still had one more way to get at me. Why did she hate me so much? She could have simply asked for a divorce, I might not have understood why, but I

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think I would have given it to her, then she would have been receiving a monthly check from me in alimony. I was never good enough, even after all I’ve accomplished,” Beau gasps for breath in between sobs.

No one says a word. They sit and let him get through all of his feelings. But at least he is not doing this alone. Each one has a hand on him somewhere. A shoulder, a knee, his back. He is not alone, this is the best feeling of all. This will get him through.

“You are *not* going to believe this!” a voice calls from the door. Everyone turns around to see Whitey standing there smiling. “I knew I’d find you all here. You’re so predictable Beau but I have some icing to put on this fallen cake. Oh good, ice cream,” he takes the ice cream sundae Lance had set down and begins to eat. Knowing full well it belongs to someone there. They are smiling at him, that’s good, he thinks to himself.

Beau is still on the floor and so is Annie, “Get up my man, I’m here to make your day.” He pulls Beau up and brings him over to a couple of folding chairs against the wall. “You, my friend, are going to laugh now. You’ve shed enough tears. Now hear me out. I hear that your boy is no longer yours, but did anyone tell you who the father is?” he asks.

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“I didn’t think it was necessary. Ten years Whitey, I gave him ten years of unwavering attention, didn’t I?” he asks.

“We aren’t going to talk about that part. But what we are going to do is laugh for a long time because I’m going to tell you that Bernice the bitch’s husband is the father. My guys at the club told me all hell broke loose. Bernice, the one who walks around talking about how she nabbed her husband and has him on a short leash? Yeah that Bernice. Bernice, who was supposed to be best friends with your wife and tried to seduce you multiple times, only to be backstabbed on the same account? The same Bernice who is now in prison for conspiracy to commit murder by sabotaging your plane. Oh my, I can’t say any more, my sides are killing me,” Whitey continues to laugh, tears running down his eyes.

Beau looks at his friend, the only one who could probably get him to laugh right now and for some reason, with Annie’s hand in his, he begins to laugh. After a moment or two the rest of them join in. Not knowing Bernice makes it hard to laugh but hearing who she is does make things kind of ironic.

Whitey calms down a moment and puts his hand on Beau’s shoulder. “Hey man, I know this is hard, but the news was killing me and I had to share.

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When they called from the club, they said everyone couldn’t stop laughing. Her husband apparently is happy about this. He thinks it proves his prowess, that having another boy makes him more of a man, he has four of his own with the bitch. The boy knew him all this time as an uncle from his mother’s side. So, they knew all this time. I’m sorry man. Beau, you look like hell, but you know what? Something good will come of this, my wife said so and I always believe her and so do you.”

“Whitey, look around this room. These people came for me. This woman, this fine woman who has been through so much of her own drama came to comfort me. And these men, without knowing me fully, came to make sure I was good. Whitey we did good my friend we did good. But I needed this time alone and I think Annie knew where to find me and when to come. Like you. You probably knew this information for a while,” Beau says.

“Actually, I can’t fake this kind of laugh. I received the call on my way home from work and came straight here. I was working on an emergency fix for someone, I haven’t even told the wife yet.” He looks at Beau in the eye to understand the magnitude of that. Whitey always goes home straight

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from work. Always, never lets anything go unsaid between him and his wife.

“Call her Whitey, tell her the truth. I’m ok if she knows. Tell her she has to meet Annie, Lance and Red here too. I want her to know everyone in my life now. I want everyone to know her.” Beau nods to Whitey who walks away to apologize to his wife for not coming home and not calling her yet. He sits outside to make the call. Red follows him out and sits down without talking, he lets Whitey finish his call.

Whitey finishes his call and looks to Red, “She is my whole world. Beau never had that. Never. Having you guys being around him today, means more than you know.”

“Divorced, myself, two small kids. Annie was my first love but we’re too close to be intimate. I kissed her once and we both laughed. That’s when we knew our place with each other, but this guy? Beau? I’ve never seen her so gentle with a man. Obviously now I know why, but we’re ok right?” Red asks Whitey.

“We are, seems Beau sees you guys as more than friends. He and I? He is all I have. Parents gone already and only one sister who hates me. So, Beau, my wife and kids are my world,” Whitey says.

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“Kind of like the three of us. I suppose now we can say the six of us.” Red smiles and the two of them walk back into the room with Lance, Annie and Beau. The three of them are in a group hug. “Really? We leave you alone for two minutes and you’ve formed a new group?” Red jokes.

Lance releases everyone first. “Red, we were saying a prayer for the baby. Beau’s idea. We said one for Beau’s son too that we hope he doesn’t get caught in the crossfires of everything. Now it’s your turn.”

Red looks to Whitey. “Lance here is joking of course. He thinks my job has tainted me from introspection.”

“Guys, can I pull your attention for a moment,” Annie says softly.

All eyes are on Annie. She takes a deep breath. “Eight years ago, my baby died. My baby, the one growing inside of me, for whatever reason it was placed there doesn’t matter, but a piece of me died long ago. I thought I had closed that door by burying all that remained, all that brought back the memories. Today I realized I had not closed the door fully until this afternoon. The way you truly close the door to one tragedy is by opening the door

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to more positive aspects of your life and that is what happened today.

I’m opening my door to Beau and I hope he is willing to let me in. Red, you need to call Margret right now and get off your ass, we all know you have the hots for her, and Lance, we’re going to meet Whitey’s wife and see who she knows for you. Any objections?” she looks around the room to everyone and ends her eyes on Beau.

“Pilot Annie, I’ll take you anywhere as long as you drive,” he smiles.

Annie’s heart melts a little more, but she realizes it is not her heart that is melting but the walls she has put around herself for so long. Beau makes her heart grow so much she is bursting through the walls she has worked so hard to build, walls that kept her from feeling. From that first flight home, Annie has been taken in by Beau.

“My wife is going to be thrilled to have permission to set up Lance. My house for dinner tomorrow? Any one not coming?” Whitey asks.

Annie is looking at all these men in her life. She is so blessed. She turns to stare at Beau straight in the eye. “Beau?”

“I don’t know why I am so lucky to have you around now, all of you actually, I know I will make it

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through everything life has to give me though, I know that for sure now,” he turns to Whitey. “Call your wife first, ask her if she is ready for the onslaught of all of us, if not. We’ll do dinner when she can,” he turns back to Annie, “In the meantime will you be my permanent pilot?” he asks.

“I’d be honored to and more; can I still fly sometimes for the company I work for now?” she asks.

“You can soar anywhere Annie, you *will* soar.” Beau leans down and kisses Annie on her cheek, he leaves his forehead there touching hers and again he whispers, “Soar.”

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