**“HURRICANE!”**

**By**

**CJ Whitfield**

Thursday, August 25, 2005

“Mom, a hurricane is coming!” Brenee said as she bounced down the stairs of their townhome.

 A taller than average eighth grader, Brenee shoved her thick, wire-rimmed glasses up the bridge of her nose as she reached the bottom step. Her glasses were continually sliding down. They needed replacing. But new glasses for Brenee were not on the top of Shyanne’s priority list, now.

Shyanne waved Brenee away without even glancing in her direction. She was on the phone with her psychiatrist, Dr. Marvin Golden. She turned her back to Brenee who slowly approached with a dejected look on her face.

“I was only trying to help,” Brenee said softly.

She sat down quietly at the end of the sofa near her mom.

“Thank you so much for calling Dr. Golden,” Shyanne said. “I just didn’t have the strength to get up and dressed and drive to your office. I’ll try not to make a habit of this though, missing appointments, that is.”

Shyanne had been suffering from vacillating bouts of depression and anxiety ever since her ex-husband Michael had announced that he wanted a divorce the year before.

“I understand, Shyanne. That’s no problem at all. My staff and I are always here to help. And remember, we have a physician on call 24/7. So, if need be, please don’t hesitate to give my office a call or you can always go to your closest emergency room. But before I go, do you need refills on any of your medications?

“I don’t believe so, Dr. Golden. Honestly, I forgot our appointment this morning. So, I haven’t inventoried my meds in a while. But I think I’m okay. May I call your office if I find that I’m in need of any refills?”

Brenee began to tap Shyanne on her knee to get her attention. Shyanne turned sharply and looked at her, placing her hand over the mouthpiece of her phone.

“Just a minute Brenee,” Shyanne mouthed softly.

She turned back and continued her conversation with Dr. Golden.

“Of course. But I’m going ahead and refilling all your medications anyway. Your pharmacist will refill them as allowed by your health plan. Is Walgreens still okay?”

“Walgreens will do, Dr. Golden.”

Shyanne nodded her head in agreement as she spoke, as if he could see her. Then she rushed him off the phone so she could give her attention to Brenee who was still tapping her on her knee.

“And thanks again for giving me a call, Dr. Golden. Bye now.”

“Goodbye, Shyanne.”

That Thursday morning, Shyanne had been relaxing and listening to gospel CDs when Dr. Golden rang her phone. She had taken a Xanax an hour earlier and that had her feeling a little woozy. She leaned back on the sofa and dropped her cell phone in her lap. Then she turned toward Brenee.

“What were you saying, Brenee? All I heard you say was hurricane.”

Shyanne spoke slowly and with near disinterest.

“I could hardly hear Dr. Golden with your chattering in the background. What’s so urgent, baby?”

“You haven’t heard? You haven’t talked to Trey?”

Brenee’ stood up and walked around slowly and rolled her eyes up toward the ceiling as she neared Shyanne.

“Haven’t heard what, Brenee? Talked to Trey about what?”

“Oh, nothing much mom,” Brenee’ said.

“Nothing’ much about what, Brenee’?”

Shyanne exhaled with exasperation as she spoke.

“Why is everything like pulling teeth with you, child? What is it that I should be talking to Trey’ about?”

“Well actually, there’s a hurricane headed to New Orleans.”

  “A hurricane in New Orleans? Is that all? That’s not news. You know that happens every year about this time,” Shyanne said matter-of-factly.

She looked past Brenee’ as she unmuted the TV from across the room.

“I was watching CNN upstairs, Mom.”

Shyanne ignored her daughter and turned on The Weather Channel instead and heard….

“A hurricane of enormous proportion is headed toward the Mississippi Gulf Coast with landfall expected somewhere between Lake Charles, Louisiana, and the Florida Panhandle within the next 48-72 hours. At landfall, Hurricane Katrina is expected to reach category 5 status.”

Shyanne’s eyes opened wide, and her heart began to beat faster as she watched the projected path of the storm on her screen.

“Sweet Jesus. This thing really is gonna hit New Orleans this time! Get your brother on the phone, Brenee’...”

“Mom, you know Trey doesn’t answer his phone.”

“Brenee’,” Shyanne said hurriedly as she moved closer to the TV. “Dial him up anyway and hand me the phone as soon as he answers.”

Brenee’ did as she was told and dialed her phone. And, miracle of miracles, Trey answered.

“Hel-low,” Trey whispered half asleep and with his usual New Orleans drawl.

“Trey wake up! Mom wants to talk to you.  You do know there’s a hurricane headed to New Orleans, right?”

“Yea, I know. Just like last year and the year before that.  What’s the big deal?”

Trey yawned as he spoke.  Brenee’ could hear him stretching through the phone.

“Mom, Trey is sleeping.”

“Well, he’s about to wake up! Just hand me the phone please, Brenee’.

Shyanne reached and nearly dropped the phone as she grabbed it out of Brenee’s hand.

“Hey.  Whatcha up to over there?”

Shyanne tried not to sound as alarmed as she really was.

“Are you getting ready for this storm?”

“Hey, Ma.  You know I stay ready.  What’s going on with you?”

“I’m fine. Look, this is not another dress rehearsal, Trey. This is the real deal this time. This storm, Katrina, Hurricane Katrina,” she said as she rubbed her forehead, “is headed your way.  And, from the looks of it Trey, I suggest that you leave town, immediately if not sooner.  Have you spoken with your dad?”

“Spoken with my dad? Dad who? You mean Michael? No, I haven’t spoken to Michael. I’m sure he’s probably busy with the new life and all.”

“Trey, we’re not about to have that conversation right now.  I want you to wake up, get up and call your dad.  Find out what his plan is for this storm.  Knowing him, he’s planning a hurricane party with his…”

“Uh, Ma.  Didn’t you just say that we’re not about to have that conversation right now?”

Shyanne paused.

“And you’re right son.  Hold tight.  I’m gonna call your dad and have him call you.  Keep your phone on and for God’s sake answer it when it rings. This is no time for you to zone out on me.  You hear?”

“Yea, Ma.  I hear you.  But you know as soon as my dad sees your number in his phone, he’s not gonna answer.”

“I’ll text him first.  If I don’t reach him, we’ll make another plan, that’s all. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“But Trey, let me be clear. You cannot stay in your apartment.  Pack enough for a couple of days.  The storm should be over by then.  What are Jasper and his family doing?  Maybe they can be our plan B.  I’ll call you Aunt Beverly in Houston too.  We may be able to get you a flight…”

“Ma, Ma, Ma.  Hold on, wait a minute. You’re moving a hundred miles an hour.  Slow down.  Here’s what we’re gonna do.”

At 19, Trey enjoyed exerting his newfound independence from both of his parents. He loved being able to set boundaries with Shyanne as to what he would or would not do. He continued...

“You call my dad if you like and get back to me.  If he doesn’t respond within the next say…twenty minutes or so, you and I can make another plan like you said, okay?  And I’ll check with Jasper to see what they’re doing.  Last hurricane season they went to Dallas with his family.  If they haven't left already, I can always ride with them.  So, my dad’s help is not critical, at least not for me.”

“Okay son.  That sounds like a plan.  I’m hanging up now and calling your dad.  You keep your phone on, you got me?”

“I got chu’, Ma.  Calm down.  Talk to you in a minute.”

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Brenee’ had been eavesdropping on her mother’s conversation with Trey.

“Mom, do you want me to call my dad?  It might not go so well if you call him, you know?”

For just that reason, Shyanne had often put Brenee’ up to calling Michael.  And Brenee’ repeatedly asked not to be put in that position.  But Michael’s reluctance to talk with Shyanne ever since their divorce made it necessary.  But this time Shyanne decided to call Michael herself and to leave Brenee’ out of it.

“I married your father, Brenee’. Not you.  And I divorced your father. Not you. So, I’ll call him.  Whether he answers or not is up to him.”

Shyanne looked for Michael’s number in her contacts.

“Lord, Jesus.  I deleted your dad from my phone.  Dial his number with my phone please Brenee’, and I’ll lock him into my contacts.’

Brenee’ exhaled deeply and took her mother’s phone.

“Mom, this doesn’t make sense.  Why don’t I just call dad with my phone.  We can lock his number in your phone later.”

Shyanne didn’t answer and just looked at Brenee’. So, she dialed her dad’s number and put the phone close to her ear. She could hear it ringing.

“I’ll take that,” Shyanne said as she gently moved the phone from Brenee’s ear to her own.

“Mike Morrell, here.”

“Michael, this is Shyanne.”

“Shyanne, why are you calling me? I thought you said that you weren’t gonna ever call me again. I’m disappointed. I was looking forward to your keeping that promise.”

Shyanne tried her best not to respond to Michael’s smart commentary.

“Michael,” she said as nicely as she possibly could. “I’m calling because Trey is in his apartment and a hurricane is coming.”

“I know a hurricane is coming, Shyanne.  I’m from here, remember?  So why are you calling me?  What do you want?”

“What do I want?  I want you to get in touch with our son and get him out of his apartment to whatever safe haven you’ve created for yourself.  Are you planning a hurricane party or something?”

Shyanne immediately knew that she had said the wrong thing.  And so did Brenee’ who was listening nearby.

“Shyanne, number one, whatever I’m doing is none of your business.  Two, I don’t take directions from you. And three, Trey is a grown behind man who can damn well call me himself.  When are you gonna get that in your head and allow him to be a man and manage his own life?”

Shyanne shook her head at what she was hearing.

“Grown,” Shyanne shouted. “Ain’t nobody grown.  Trey is in college.  He can’t take care of himself yet.”

Shyanne spoke impeccable English.  But, when speaking with Michael, her conversation was much more relaxed.

“The hell he can’t.  He’s grown enough to…”

“Stop Michael. Just stop.  Here’s the deal.  I need you to...”

“You need.  You need?  Here we go...”

“Well, Trey needs, if that makes you feel better.  Trey needs you to take him with you to wherever you are going.  Can, I mean will you do that?” Shyanne spoke more civilly.

Michael paused before answering.

“Have him call me.  I have to work at the hospital.  I’m on the Hurricane Preparedness Team.  So, I’ll be there as long as need be. But, like I said, have him call me and I’ll see what I can do.”

Looking at the approaching storm on her TV screen as she spoke to Michael, fear rose up in her and Shyanne answered him angrily.

“You’ll see what you can do?  Look, that boy is sitting by his phone waiting for a call from you.  Now you call him, pick him up and take him wherever you’re going.  You hear me?  And, if you don’t and something happens to him, don’t you show up at his funeral.  You hear me?  Don’t you show up!”

She pressed the disconnect button without even saying “goodbye.”

“Makes me sick.  Ooowee!”

Shyanne paced the floor contemplating her next move to get Trey to safety.  Brenee just looked at her mother sheepishly and shook her head.

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Michael had wanted Trey to pick a *useful* profession. Something that meant he would always have work like barbering.

“You could make a lot of money with a chain of barber shops you know,” Michael had said to Trey back when Trey was finishing high school, Shyanne remembered.

Today Michael was focused on staying ahead of the storm. He reluctantly allowed Trey to join him and picked him up.

“Trey, why didn’t you call me yourself?  What’s up with your having your mom call me?  You’re a grown man now, you know, right?”

“I didn’t ask my mom to call you. I wasn’t even paying attention to this hurricane until mom called me. Brenee’ saw it on TV I think.”

“Well, okay.  How are your classes going? Is everything good?”

“Dad, I'm on the Dean's List again, just like last semester and the semester before that.  I mean, I’m not bragging, and it’s not by any means easy.  But I play hard and I study hard too. And, I only hang with those who do. You know what I’m sayin’?”

“Oh, I hear you.  And, I like that in you. So, what kind of playing are you doing? You’re keeping a helmet on that soldier, right?”

Trey squirmed in his seat at Michael’s attempt at a safe sex talk.

“Dad, I’m talkin’ about partying with my frat brothers. My crew. Hey, where are we going anyway?”

“To The Med. You know I’m on the hurricane preparedness team.  We’ll be riding the storm out there.”

“Every hurricane, Dad?  You were there for the last hurricane. And, mom told me about one hurricane when you had her sleeping on a gurney in a hospital hall during a hurricane scare while she was nine months pregnant with me.  Is that true?”

“Probably.  Well, if your mom says so, we’ll call that a yes. But, honestly, I don’t remember that. We’ve had so many hurricane drills that I can’t keep up.  Did I ever tell you about Hurricane Betsy when I was a boy? Man, that was terrible.  Our house flooded and we had to cut a hole in the roof to get out.  So glad your mother wasn’t here for that. She’d have lost her complete mind.”

Michael and Tre’ both laughed.

“Yea, she would have. And, she can swim!” Trey said.

“She can’t swim in hurricane flood waters. Nobody can.  But you know what, I sorta do remember a hurricane while we were expecting you. Your mom insisted that the hospital find a hotel room for her.  And, they did! You know your mom.”

“Yeah, she’s not the one.”

“You've got that right..  And, that’s great in the business world.  But when it comes to her personal relationship with me…”

“Dad, I’d rather not get into that. Now, what is that I smell?  You brought food with you?”

“You know I did.  Always have food, water, medicine, toilet paper…. that kind of stuff with you whenever a hurricane is approaching, son. Remember that.”

“Yea, I’ll remember as I’m packing to leave town. Had I been paying attention. Well, I knew this storm was coming. I just figured it was just another false alarm.  I get tired of packing for nothing. The storm usually heads east or west of us. You know?”

“Well, this is the real deal partner,” Michael said as he pulled into the hospital parking lot.

“Grab some bags and help me bring this stuff inside.  And, don’t forget your bag. What’s in it anyway?

“My Black and Milds for sure. This smells like Jambalaya.  Will they have a refrigerator in there?”

“Refrigerator, yes.  And, Coke machines, snack machines.  It’s a hospital.  And, hopefully we’ll be going home in the morning anyway.”

“Great, because I only brought one change of clothes,” Trey‘said.

The hospital was full of people going every which way.

“We’re going up to the pharmacy on the third floor,” Michael said as he pressed the elevator button.

The elevator was packed with uniformed hospital personnel and patients dressed in hospital gowns.

“This is us,” Michael said to Trey as the elevator opened on the third floor. “This place is a madhouse already,” he spoke to Trey’ over his shoulder.

“Hey Karen, who’s here?” Michael asked a young lady approaching him.

“So far, just you and me. Help is on the way though.  It’s all hands-on deck tonight.”

“Karen, this is my son, Trey.  He’s studying pharmacy at Xavier.  Wants to follow in our footsteps into the pharmacy world, I guess. Trey, this is Dr. Karen Bagneris. She is a Doctor of Pharmacy, which is what you’ll be... if you graduate.”

“Uh, when I graduate, Dad, Trey said.  And, Xavier only offers doctoral programs at our pharmacy school. So, every graduate earns a Pharm D. Trust.  I’m well aware of my degree options, Dad,” Trey said as he nodded his head up and down.  “Where have you been, Dad? We should talk more,” Trey said laughingly.

Michael looked at Karen for her reaction. He was caught off guard that Trey spoke so sharply to him in front of her. He tried to hide his embarrassment and just said, “Kids…”

Trey turned to place his bag on a counter and whispered to himself.

“If I graduate. I’m Dean’s List and this man says, ``if” I graduate. And, “follow in our footsteps? He’s a pharmacy tech, not a Doctor of Pharmacy. What is he really talking about?”

He turned back around facing Michael and Dr. Bagneris and said, “And, nice to meet you Dr. Bagneris.”

He looked her directly in the eye and extended his hand to her for a handshake. He made sure not to speak to Dr. Bagneris with his southern drawl which was a New Orleans language all of its own.  He used proper English as Shyanne had always stressed doing to him and Brenee’.

“The first thing people do when they meet you is look at your appearance,” Shyanne would say to him.

“Are you well groomed? Are your clothes neat and clean? Has your personal grooming been attended to? Then they listen to you speak. So, always speak proper English, Trey and not your New Orleans native tongue.  Nowhere else in this country do folks speak that way. And, I’m preparing you for the world stage.”

Trey was snapped out of remembering Shyanne’s instruction when Dr. Bagneris spoke to him.

“Trey, please call me Karen.  I bet we’re all gonna get to know each other really well before this thing is over. We’re all gonna be one happy family, she laughed”

Still smiling, Karen looked over at Michael and shared a long stare. Trey pretended not to notice as he looked at the two of them. He picked up the grocery bags that he had brought in from the car.

“So, Dad, where can we put our food? These bags are heavy, man”

“I guess they are heavy. I brought jambalaya, bar-b-q ribs, fried catfish and shrimp, French bread, bread pudding’ and a whole bunch of cold drinks and bottles of water.  Always bring water to a hurricane party, son.”

“Great,” Trey said shortly.  Which way to the refrigerator, Dad?  You planning on feeding the whole hospital or something?”

“Just follow me.  Bring your backpack too.  I’ll show you where you can leave your things.”

“Leave my things?”

“Yea. This is a hospital, not a hotel.  You’re gonna be working and helping me with these patients.  Think of it as... an unpaid internship.  It’ll be good, real world practice for you.”

“Man, you just said this is a hurricane party. Now I’ve gotta help with patients? I don’t work here, man.  Where am I gonna sleep anyway?”

“I suggest that you grab one of those gurneys before they’re all gone.  Oh, always bring your own blanket and pillow too.”

Trey whispered to himself, “I hope this is over soon.”

-CHAPTER TWO-

Trey opened his backpack and pulled out a pack of his Black and Mild cigars.  He opened the pack and counted them.

“Four cigars” he said softly to himself.

He exhaled deeply, put his head in his chest and shook his head.

“I knew I should have made this man stop at a store.”

Then Michael walked around the corner.

“Hey, you can’t smoke in here man.  This is a hospital.  You can’t smoke around the outside of the hospital either.”

“Well, where can I smoke?”

“I’d try the roof.”

“The roof? Seriously.”

“That’s it, Chief.  That’s your best option”

“Well, how do I get up there?”

“There are signs in the hallways that’ll lead you up there.  You’re smart, Michael said sarcastically.  Figure it out.”

“Okay. I’ll be back in a few.”

Trey remembered that there was a rooftop exit from the elevator. The crowd had slowed down, and it was a little quieter in the hallway, so he decided to skip the stairs.

As he was walking down the hall, his cell phone began to ring.

“Hel-low,” he answered slowly.

He was tired and didn’t feel like having a long conversation with anyone. It was bad enough being locked in a hospital with his dad and his friends for God knows how many days.

“Trey, it’s your Momma,” Shyanne said. How are you doing? How are things going down there?”

“We’re okay. I’m about to go up on the roof to smoke my Black and Mild.”

“Not good for your mouth, throat, nothing” Shyanne answered.

“Ma, I know. Anyway, how are you doing? Are y’all getting any part of this storm?”

“No. It’s not coming this far north or east just yet. Back to you,” Shyanne said hurriedly. “Do you remember my cousin Ervin in Memphis who got oral cancer from smoking? And before he died, doctors had to cut his entire tongue out! Horrible. Just horrible.”

“Ma, you’re grossing me out. Please stop.”

“I’m just saying.”

“Okay. Well, we got to the hospital safely. My dad offered me a gurney to sleep on. But I’m sleeping between two chairs for now instead. It’s not so bad. Reminds me of my boy scout days,” he laughed. “And, we have food and bottled water and everything. So, I think we’re okay for now. Hopefully we’ll be home in the morning.”

“Maybe not in the morning, Trey. I’ve been watching the weather channel. They’ve had non-stop coverage of this storm for hours. You might be there for a few days.”

“I hope not. I didn’t bring enough clothes for a few days.”

“Not to worry, I’m sure your dad will find you some clean scrubs around there. In fact, ask him after your “smoke break. Okay?

“Yea, okay Ma. I’m gonna go now. Love you. I’ll call you later.”

“Well, hold on a minute. Not so fast.”

“Ma, come on now. What? I’m tired.”

“Well, I know you say that everything is okay with your being there with your dad, but were you able to reach Jasper? Maybe it’s not too late for you to ride out with them.”

“Mom,

“Okay. Love you, son. I’m praying for you. In fact, I’m thanking God in advance because I know you’ll be just fine.”

Shyanne slowly put her phone on the coffee table in front of her and sat back in her chair.  With the television muted, she followed the path of the storm on her screen.  She thought about Michael's attitude when they spoke and his not really wanting Trey to be with him. She sat upright and shouted upstairs.

“Brenee’, she said. We’re going to New Orleans.”

“No Mom, no. We can’t drive into a hurricane! I mean, I don’t want to go. Can I stay with one of my friends?”

“Like who? You know we haven’t been here long enough to know anyone I would leave you with. And definitely not overnight. So, no. I’m not doing that. Besides, it’s best that we stay together. I need to know where you are at all times. Understood?

“Mom, I don’t want to be around Trey. He’s a supercilious, narcissistic, psychopath!

Shyanne stared blankly, rapidly blinking her eyes as she tried to make sense of what Brenee had said. Then she answered her.

“Brenee, all that, huh? What’s with all of the intensity, baby?”

Brenee grew quiet and softly answered, “Nothing, Mom. It’s okay.”

“Okay then.”

Shyanne followed Brenee with her eyes as she moved toward the stairs.

“Now pack your bag with a few outfits in it, Brenee. Remember your toiletries. And, I’ll be up in just a few minutes to check your bag. I’ll email your teacher that you’ll be out for a few days. So, pack your backpack too so you can get some work done while we’re on the road. Okay?”

“Okay Mom,” Brenee said as she headed upstairs to her room.

“Thank you, baby” Shyanne said. Brenee kept walking up the stairs as if she didn’t hear her.

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Shyanne busied herself between watching the weather and packing her bag. She walked into her bedroom closet to pack some shoes and glanced up at the box on the top shelf.  It was her gun box that she kept there for safe keeping. She did so at Trey’s insistence.

“Mom,” Trey said during one of his visits to Virginia for semester break, “I’m taking you to buy a handgun. We can buy it at the shooting range.”

“Handgun? The shooting range? For what, Trey? I’ve lived this long without a gun. So, I don’t need one now.”

“Mom, it’s a dangerous world out here. And, you’re here all alone with Brenee’. You never know when you’ll need to protect yourself. Besides, I’ve gotten more than one death threat since I moved back to New Orleans”

“Death threats,” Shyanne was shocked at the news. “Why would you be getting death threats? And, from who?”

“Mom, don’t worry about that. I’ve got it all under control.”

“You’ve got what under control, Trey? What in the world are you talking about, I don’t need to worry about it. You tell me someone’s threatening your life and I don’t need to worry about it? What goes on here. Who is threatening you, Trey. And, why?”

“Mom, it’s not important.  Just some fool thinks I owe them something, which I don’t. So…”

“They think you owe them something,” Shyanne repeated dryly. “What do they think you owe them Trey that they would threaten your life? What kind of folks are you associated yourself with down there anyway?”

“Mom, it’s over with.  Nobody’s threatening my life *today*. Forget about it. I’m sorry I mentioned it. I was just trying to give you a reason why you need to have and know how to use a gun to defend yourself. Get my point? Folks are crazy out here. Now, back to you…”

“Okay. But I have no idea how to buy a gun or what type to get.”

“I’ve got you covered, Mom.”

“Well, let’s get going. I have to pick Brenee up from school at two o’clock to take her to vocal rehearsal. You know she’s been accepted into the Hampton Roads Vocal Music Academy, right?”

“You mentioned that. And, good for her. I’m proud of her.”

“Can we go now, Trey?”

“I’m ready if you’re ready.”

Shyanne grabbed her keys and handed them to Trey.

“I feel like being chauffeured today. You mind driving, especially since you know where we’re going?”

“Sure thing. I’ve got a little spot in mind on VA Beach Boulevard.”

“You’ve been there before,” Shyanne asked.

“”Yea, I’ve been there a few times here and there.”

“Trey, I didn’t even know that you had a gun. Are you licensed to carry and all of that?”

“Of course I am,” Trey said as he pulled away from the curb. “I have all of my papers in order.”

“Mom, I live in New Orleans. Everybody has a gun there. So, I’d better have one. Two really. One for my house and one for my car. Besides, nobody is gonna protect me. I have to protect myself.”

“I didn’t know that you felt like that. “Well, let’s get going. I have to pick Brenee up from school at two o’clock to take her to vocal rehearsal. You know she’s been accepted into the Hampton Roads Vocal Music Academy, right?”

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“Of course I am,” Trey said as he pulled away from the curb. I’m a man now, Mom. And, I have to look out for myself. And, I’m looking out for you too. That’s why I’m taking you to buy a personal handgun and I'm taking you to the shooting range to be sure that you know how to shoot it too.”

“Okay, then. You know your Uncle Carlton in Chicago has been on the police force there for decades.”

“Yea, I know.”

“And, he told me to never show my gun unless I plan to use it. So, I guess this is a smart move after all, my being alone here and everything.”

Trey pulled the car over to park. He leaned over toward Shyanne and pointed to the building to their right.

“This is it, Mom.”

“Oh, we’re going to the shooting range first? I thought we were gonna get a gun for me first?”

“They sell guns here too. But, first let’s do some practice shooting so that you can get the feel of it. You know. I want you to get comfortable with holding a gun before we go shopping.”

Shyanne sat wondering why Trey was so insistent that she purchase a gun all of a sudden. He hadn’t shown such interest before. But, she went along with his plan just so that she could spend the day with him. They didn’t get to do that very often any more now that he was attending college in New Orleans and had his own apartment.

Trey interrupted her daydream.

“You getting out, Mom?”

“Uhm? Oh, yes” Shyanne answered as she got out and headed into the building.

Trey held the door as she walked inside, amazed at the rows and rows of guns in glass cases. There were rifles of all kinds mounted to the wall as well.

“May I help you,” a bearded man in blue jean overalls with a plaid shirt asked. He wore a gold cross around his neck like a choker.

Shyanne continued to look around the room and noticed a large Confederate Flag tacked to the back wall.

Trey nudged her as he began answering the person Shyanne assumed was the owner.

“Yes, we’d like to purchase an hour at the shooting range,” Trey answered.

“One lane or two,” the owner asked.

“We’ll need two. I’m teaching my Mom here to shoot,” Trey said proudly.

“Do I need a special ID or anything to use their facility, Trey?” I only brought my drivers license.”

“That will be just fine, Ma’am. That’s all that we require here. I will need to record your visit though. May I see your ID?”

Shyanne removed her license from her purse and handed it to him. Trey gave him his ID too.

“We have guns for rent, eye protectors and headphones upstairs. There’s an elevator behind you. Or, you can take the stairs.”

“We’ll walk up,” Trey volunteered as he looked down at Shyanne.

“Yes. We’ll walk up,” Shyanne said smiling at Trey. She gently pinched him in his back as the turned to head toward the staircase.

“You know I have bad knees, boy.”

“I know. But, we can walk up one flight of stairs, right,” Trey laughed.

“Okay,” Shyanne said. But, we’re taking the elevator down.

Trey spent nearly an hour showing Shyanne how to hold the gun and how to fire it. By the end of their session, she had hit the target more than a few times.

“Mom, you’re pretty good already! And, the more you come here and practice the better you’ll get. Accuracy matters you know.”

“Yea, well thanks. But, I’ll tell you the truth, the only ones that I missed was because the target was moving.”

They both laughed.

“Uh no, Mom. The target was not moving. It’s locked in place.”

“If you say so. And this gun was pretty heavy too.”

“Well, we can find you a lighter one when we go downstairs.”

“No. I think I’ve had enough for today. Let’s come back before you leave town. I need to get back in time for Brenee’s rehearsal. Remember.”

“Oh, right-right. Just leave everything here except your gun. We’ll need to turn that back in and sign out.”

Shyanne stood opening and closing her hand. So, Trey picked up her gun.

“I’ll carry it for you, Mom. You did good. I’m proud of you.”

“Why thank you again, Trey. My having a gun is a good idea, I guess. I’m just concerned about safekeeping.”

“You’ll just tell Brenee it’s there and not to touch it. And, you’ll keep it in a gun box, I suggest in your bedroom closet because it’s closest to you. But, you’ll figure it out.”

“Yes I will. I’m just trying to figure out how long you’ve had a gun and why. Are you gonna tell me?”

“You don’t need to worry about that, Mom. I just wanna make sure that you are safe. Okay?”

“Okay,” Shyanne said as they turned in their weapons and headed back to their car.

Shyanne felt uneasy about Trey having a gun and wanting her to have one too. But she decided that he was just “growing into his manhood,” and needed to be able to defend himself if necessary as he had said.

“Nothing unusual about that,” she thought. “Afterall, this *is* a dangerous world,” she remembered thinking to herself.

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Shyanne looked down at her empty travel bag on her closet floor when she was startled out of her daydream by the sound of her front door closing.

She stood and walked to the hallway outside of her bedroom door.

“Brenee’,” she said curiously but got no reply.

“Brenee,” she said louder as she walked toward the front door.

“Brenee’,” she said sternly as she was a bit irritated and frightened that Brenee was not answering her.

She walked upstairs to Brenee’s room and found her half packed overnight bag on the bed.

“Brenee’,” she called in a soft voice.

“This girl has left this house. Ooowee! What was she thinking leaving this house without talking to me when she knows I’m trying to get down to New Orleans!”

She walked down the hall to check the guest bedroom and bath. Brenee was nowhere to be found.

Shyanne ran down the stairs and grabbed her purse. She looked inside to be sure that she had her cell phone keys and wallet. She  slumped down onto her sofa and tried to calm herself down.

“Where is this child, she thought. Maybe she has her cell with her.”

She dialed Brenee’s phone and got the standard voicemail message that she had insisted that Brenee put on her phone for security purposes.

“Damn” she said as she hung up the call. Then she closed her eyes and said, “Forgive me Lord for cursing.” Shyanne always prayed for forgiveness when she cursed. And she always cursed when she was stressed.

“Okay,” she said to herself as she rose, bag in hand and headed toward the front door.

“Maybe I’ll find her walking around the neighborhood or something. She did seem a little unhappy about going down to New Orleans. Wonder what’s up with that? She always likes flying down there to visit with her dad and his people. This is so strange. And at a time like this. We need to be hitting the road!”

Shyanne drove around and around their subdivision looking for Brenee. Then she saw the public library on the corner.

“I bet she’s in there. She’s such a quiet child. And she loves the library. Maybe she’s in there,” Shyanne hoped.

She  parked the car and once inside walked directly to the check-out counter.

“Hi. My name is Shyanne Morrell. I’m looking for my daughter. She looks a lot like me. And she’s about 5’4 with gold wire rimmed glasses. Have you seen anyone like that in the last hour or so?”

“Why yes. I think I have. She might be in one of our study rooms along the wall. They all have glasses enclosures. So, she should be easy to find if she’s there.”

“Thank you,” Shyanne said as she walked away.

She checked several of the study rooms which were all empty. So she continued walking and scanned the entire library looking for Brenee. Then she saw her in the rear corner of the library, with her back turned and sitting in an oversized chair with her legs crossed Indian style.

“Brenee,” she said softly as she approached her.

Brenee looked up and a bit startled seeing Shyanne there. And before Shyanne could say anything more or ask any questions, Brenee blurted out,

“Mom, I just wanted to come and get a few books for our trip. I thought you might be taking a nap. It was so quiet in your room and everything.

“Taking a nap? Let’s go please, Brenee. I wanna be on the road in the next thirty minutes. Do you have everything that you need from here?”

“Yes, Mom” Brenee said as she grabbed her bookbag and fell in line behind Shyanne who was talking to her quietly over her shoulder.

“Please don’t ever leave the house again without telling me, Brenee. Okay? You really frightened me. And I won’t mention that you were supposed to be packing your overnight bag. Remember?”

“Yes, Mom.”

They were both quiet until they got into the car and Shyanne started the engine.

“Brenee, why does it seem like you don’t want to go to New Orleans with me? Is there something that I need to know? You always look forward to going and visiting your dad.”

“Yes. But things are different now.”

“Different how, Brenee? What’s different about your going down there? Look, I don’t wanna go down there either. I hate it there. It’s dirty and….”

“It’s not that, Mom. There are people down there that I don’t wanna see.”

“People? What people? Since when? Does your dad know about these people? Is it his new girlfriend?”

Brenee grew even more quiet as Shyanne fired question after question at her.  She seemed to unconsciously and slowly zip and unzip her bookbag.

Shyanne looked straight ahead at the road waiting for Brenee to tell her what or who it was in New Orleans that she just didn’t want to see. She grew exasperated in waiting.

“Look Brenee. Like I said, we *will* be leaving for New Orleans within the next thirty minutes. Understood?”

“Yes, Mom.”

“Now, if there’s something that you want or need to tell me, you can do so in the car.  You got me.? We’ll be in the car like… forever you know.”

Shyanne realized that her tone was uninviting. So, she tried again.

“I mean, “okay?”

Shyanne spoke softly as she reached over and rubbed Brenee’s hand.

Brenee slowly recoiled her hand as she parted her lips to whisper her answer softly and nodded her head, “yes.”

While Shyanne was rushing to get her things in the car, she couldn’t help but notice that Brenee’ was moving at a snail's pace.

“Oh well, Shyanne whispered. As long as she gets in this car, that’s all that matters…”

 -CHAPTER EIGHT-

A soft mist was falling on Shyanne’s car as she approached Atlanta. She and Brenee had been driving for hours, and the sun was barely peeking through the clouds that were beginning to roll in.

Brenee’ stretched on the passenger seat across from Shyanne.

“Where are we, Mom?”

“We’re in Georgia.  We have another six hours before we get to New Orleans. Are you hungry? I am.”

“Uh huh. Do we have any water?”

“Look in the cooler behind my seat. Get one for me too. Okay?”

“Okay, Mom,” Brenee’ answered as she reached to get the waters.

“We have fruit in her too Mom,” she said as she put a bottle of water in the drink holder and passed an apple to Shyanne.

“What time is it? Is the time in the car correct?”

“Yes. I’ll change it when we get to Mobile. It’s seven o’clock.”

“Do we know where we’re staying yet?”

“Yes. We’re staying at the VA with your dad and Trey.”

“Can’t we stay somewhere else. Where are we gonna sleep there? And all those sick people, Mom. Is that the best we can do?”

“Yes, it’s the best we can do. I spoke with Trey last night. He said that all of the hotels are sold out.  And as far as he knows, all of your family has left the city already.”

“Even Auntee Ethel and Uncle Thomas?”

“Even them.”

“They never leave for a hurricane Mom.” She looked out the window as the rain began to fall a little harder on the car windows.

Shyanne glanced over at her.

“Brenee’,” she said as she reached over and rubbed her arm.  “It’s gonna be fine. You’ll see.”

Brenee’ turned and looked at her.

“Mom. I need to talk to you about something. I need to talk to you about Trey.”

Shyanne tilted her head toward Brenee’ as if to listen more closely.

“Okay, baby. What about Trey?”

“Mom, you might not believe me,” she started. “But Trey… He hurt me when I was younger.”

“What do you mean he hurt you, Brenee’?”

Shyanne spoke softly as she turned the car radio down.

Brenee put her face in her chest and grew very quiet.

“Brenee’ baby. Tell me. What do you mean that Trey hurt you? You know I’ll get his butt, right?”

Shyanne smiled as she spoke.

But Brenee didn't smile back. She just looked out the front window of the car. Her silence was uneasy for Shyanne. So she jumped into the conversation.

“Oh, you mean that time you stabbed him with a thermometer when you were three, Shyanne laughed? I wondered what that was all about. And, you never did tell me. What really happened then, Brenee. You just said that Trey was bothering you. And, I was so busy trying to stop his bleeding...”

“Mom, no! This is not about a *thermometer*, Brenee’ interrupted.  Even then, you were so busy taking care of Trey, she said, looking down at the floorboard, while shaking her head from side-to-side and as tears welled up in her eyes. This is why that therapist you’ve been sending me to told me to get as far away from you as possible when I get eighteen.”

“What? Why would she say that, Brenee’? What’s really going on here?”

Shyanne turned her glance, first toward Brenee’ and then to the road ahead. And, again toward Brenee’.

“Sweet baby. Please tell me what you have to tell me. It’s okay, honey. Trust me.”

“Mom. Trey attacked me when I was little. He made me have oral sex on him. And he sodomized me too.”

Brenee’ spoke without stopping to breathe.

Shyanne let those words fill her head as she tried to keep her focus on the road. She didn’t want to alarm Brenee’ with emotion by her response. So she took her time in replying.

“You don’t have to believe me if you don’t want to, Mom.”

“Brenee’,” Shyanne said softly. Of course, I believe you. I believe you to the moon and back. I believe you into infinity. And, I’m beyond sorry that this happened to you. When did this happen? Where?”

Question after question flooded Shyanne’s head. She decided to pull over to talk to Brenee’.

“Brenee’, she began as she put the car in park. I am so sorry that this happened. And I do absolutely believe you.  This happens in way too many families.  And I’m sorry that this has happened in ours. But, “sodomized?” Where would you even learn such a word, huh baby,” she said as she rubbed Brenee’s hair that was pulled back in a tucked under ponytail.

Brenee looked up at her with eyes filled to overflowing with tears. They were glistening against the darkness in the car.

Shyanne began to cry.

“I don’t know what to say, baby, she said between sobs.  But I’ll tell you this. I promise you that I’m gonna drill down when I see that Trey and find out how this happened. I’m gonna get to the bottom of this. I need to know what has happened here. How could he do such a thing.”

Brenee’ looked over at Shyanne and began to cry deeply too.

“It’s okay, my baby.  I love you so much. You’re my baby girl. I love you Brenee’,” she said as she hugged Brenee’ and rocked her back and forth. “Oh my God. Oh my God,” she said over and over.

Brenee’ cried all the harder.

“We’re okay, baby. We’re okay. It’s gonna be okay. You’ll see. We’ll get past this. You and me. We’ll get past this, one step at a time. Yep. We’ll get past this.”

Shyanne hugged Brenee’ all the tighter and rubbed her wavy black hair. She grabbed a napkin from the stack laying atop of her coin holder.

“Here baby,” Shyanne whispered as she gently wiped Brenee’s eyes.

“Mom, I didn’t know how to tell you. I was so scared. Trey said that he would kill you and me if I told anybody. And…”

Shyanne listened intently as she continued to hug and rock Brenee.

“It’s okay, baby. What else happened?”

“Well, I was just scared that’s all.”

“Of course, you were scared. I’d be scared too! That’s scary. When did this start, Brenee’ Where were you when this happened?”

Shyanne was trying to determine if this had happened while she was away traveling for work. She was gone so often, she mused.

Brenee’ slowly pulled away from Shyanne and sat upright in her seat. She placed the cottony napkin against her eyes and then her cheeks, trying to slow her tears from flowing down her warm brown face.

Shyanne’s mind was racing from one thought to the other.  She tried to settle her mind and to focus on her baby girl Brenee’ who was sitting next to her crying and agonizing with visibly profound sadness. Shyanne was trying to fight back her own tears as she searched for the words to say to Brenee’.

“Brenee’, come here baby” she said as she again reached over and drew Brenee near her. She kissed her forehead and continued to rock her.

“Look, I have no words that can take this horror away.  Just know that I’m mad as hell about it. But we still have to go and get Trey out of New Orleans. And we still have to all stay together at the VA once we get there. This just sucks. Oh my, baby. This just sucks. This just sucks.”

Brenee’ whispered, “It’s okay, Mom. I understand. I don’t want to see Trey. He makes me sick.”

“And I don’t want you to see him either.  But I don’t know of anyone that you can stay with while we’re there. Most everyone has left town, you know? But I’ll try. Okay?  And if we can’t work out somewhere else for us to stay, we’ll stay together, and I’ll keep Trey away from you. That might be the best I can do until this storm is over and we get back home.”

“Okay, Mom. I understand.”

Brenee’ cried softly as she hugged Shyanne tightly.

“I hated to tell you about this, Mom….”

“No. I’m glad that you told me. I wish I had known about this earlier. Does your Dad know about this?”

“No, I never told him. I never told anyone except that therapist that you’ve been sending me to.”

“That therapist,” Shyanne thought. The nerve and audacity of that woman to know about all of this and not tell me about it. I’m the one paying her. And she actually knew that Brenee had been abused and said nothing to no one. I need to sue that woman and her clinic. She had a legal obligation to turn me into the law for abuse and neglect of a minor child at minimum. At least I would have known…

But she interrupted her thoughts because she didn’t want Brenee’ to know what she was actually thinking. So she turned back to Brenee’ and responded to her comment.

“Well, even though she doesn’t seem to think well of me, I’ll keep taking you to her office if you like.  It’s your decision. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Shyanne turned back toward the steering wheel and restarted the car. She leaned over and reached behind Brenee’s seat and grabbed a soft, blue throw.

“Here. Put this over yourself. Close your eyes and rest now.  It’s a long way to New Orleans yet.

Exhaling softly a long deep breath, Shyanne tried to figure out what her next steps would be. It was enough to be driving into a hurricane. She had to get Trey, out of New Orleans. She had to find safety in New Orleans for herself, Trey and Brenee’ until she could.  And, now this. Now she has to confront her son rather than embrace and protect him.

“How can I do this,” Shyanne thought. I’ve spent my life protecting Trey. How and I am going to speak to him about this. I know it’s true.”

Shyanne began to cry softly. Tears flooded her eyes and she blinked rapidly to be able to see the road. She quickly dried her eyes with her sleeve and looked over at Brenee’ who was sleeping soundly. Her CD case was beside her. Without looking, she grabbed a disc and slid it into the player on her dimly lit dashboard. She turned the volume down so that she wouldn’t wake Brenee’.

“Okay, she thought. Here’s what I’m gonna do.  As soon as the sun comes up, I’m gonna try and reach Dr. Arshad. He’ll have some ideas. No. I’ll call Dr. Goldin. He knows Brenee’ and I well. And, he’s Virginia, Shyanne said out loud. His office should be open.”

She opened the storage unit in the console between her and Brenee’ and grabbed her phone. She scrolled her contacts until she found Dr. Goldin’s number. She called him, but it rang several times before his office voicemail picked up.

“You’ve reached the office of Dr. Marcus Goldin. Our office hours are between 9am and 6pm, Monday through Friday. Saturday hours are by appointment only. Please leave your name, last four of your social, date of birth and a phone number where you can be reached. We will return your call before the end of clinic today. Beep.”

Shyanne left a voicemail for Dr. Goldin providing all the necessary information, and asking him to return her call. She was confident that he would. And, just knowing that she had reached out to Dr. Goldin helped her somewhat to  relax.

She was so anxious ever since Brenee found the courage to tell her what Trey had done to her that she had thought about taking a Klonopin just to try to relax.

“A half a tablet won’t hurt,” she thought. “I can still drive safely’

She looked away from the road to check on Brenee who had her eyes closed and her head against her window.  Then she quickly glanced back in front of her..

“It’s not worth the risk,” she whispered under her breath.

She found the smooth jazz station on her car radio, leaned back into her seat and let the soft music fill her head as she drove.

“How in the world did I miss all of this,” Shyanne asked herself?. “Was it my constant travel for work?

 “I knew I couldn’t trust Michael with the kids after he left Brenee’ at just three years old home alone with Trey who was only eight himself, for Christ’s sake.”

“What an idiot move, Shyanne” she thought to herself. You should have left him then. But noooo. You stayed. Kept giving him chances to keep our family together. Now don’t you feel stupid, Shyanne.  All of that stress, strain and self-sacrifice in the name of *family,* and you still have no family. And, your kids have been brutalized in the process!. Damn! Just damn!

She gripped the steering wheel tighty as she pondered how she had gotten to this place, bringing Trey and Brenee with her. A single, warm tear rolled down her face as she wondered...

“How could this have happened?  What world have I been in? How could I have missed this? And, where was Michael when this was happening?

She decided to check-in with Trey.

-CHAPTER FIVE-

“Wow, it’s still  sunny out here,” Trey said as he walked onto the hot hospital roof shielding his eyes with his hands. The tarry substance felt like glue against the bottom of his shoes. He found a couple of weather worn folding chairs that someone had left there.

“Probably another smoker,” he laughed to himself as he pulled one of the chairs closer and sat down. Then his phone rang again.

“I hope it’s not Mom again. I wish she could rest her nerves,” he said as he tapped his phone to accept the call.

“Hel-lo,” Trey said slowly.

“Trey,” Shyanne said. Just checking in on you. What’s the update?:

“What’s the update,” Trey answered. “Well, my dad picked me up and I’m here at the hospital with him. Where are you now, Mom?”

“We’re near Atlanta. It’s been a beautiful drive so far.”

“Yea well I sorta wish you hadn’t headed down here, Mom. It’s dangerous, you know. I mean a woman driving alone, and with a hurricane coming no less.”

“I’ve been driving alone for quite some time, son. I covered two states and five cities on the ground for many, many years. Remember? Plus, I have Brenee’ with me. So, I’m not really alone.”

“Yea, okay Mom. Brenee’ is no help. She can’t even drive yet.”

“But, she can dial her cell phone in an emergency. Why does it sound like you don’t wanna see me, Trey.”

“Oh, I always wanna see you Mom. I’m just thinking about your safety.”

“And, I’m thinking about yours,” Shyanne answered.

“Well, I’m gonna stop in a few to gas up and stretch my legs. I’ll call you again at my next stop after that. Okay?”

“Okay, Mom. But if I don’t answer, I’m not ignoring you. If the power goes out, my phone might be dead or I might not have service. Okay?”

“Okay. I gotchu. Talk later. Bye now.”

Shyanne dropped her phone in her lap as she looked for a place to stop for gas. Brenee’ sat up in her seat and turned down the air conditioning in the car.

“That was Trey, huh Mom?”

“Yes it was. How long have you been awake.”

“Long enough to hear that Trey doesn’t wanna see us.”

“Us? We were talking about me, not you or us. And, your brother said that he always wants to see me.”

“Okay, Mom. I was just repeating what I heard. I know you love your precious Trey.”

“Trey is precious. I’m precious. And so are you! Where is this coming from, Brenee’? Are you ready to talk to me about why you ran off to the library when it was time to leave and get your brother… out of harm's way I might add?”

Brenee’ didn’t say a word.

“Cat still got your tongue, huh? I’m not a mind reader, Brenee’.”

Shyanne exhaled deeply. She had made a point of trying to give Trey and Brenee’ equal time while they were growing up. But, it seems like Brenee was never satisfied. And her repeated suggestions of late that she had somehow slighted her got on Shyanne’s last nerve.

“I gave her the best that I had. And, I think I did a damn good job! So, why is she so jealous of Trey? Makes no sense,” Shyanne thought to herself.

Brenee interrupted her train of thought.

“Can we stop soon, Mom? We’ve been driving a long time.”

“Why of course we can. I’m stopping at the next exit.”

Brenee began riffleing through her bag without answering or making eye contact with Shyanne.

“Do you need money, Brenee?”

“No, I’m good, Mom. My dad put money on my card.”

“Great!  Can you get me a cold drink while I pump our gas?”

Shyanne felt awkward when Brenee didn’t answer.

“Well, that’s okay. I’ll come inside and get something. I might want a sandwich too.”

Brenee was embarrassed that she was slow in answering Shyanne.

“I can get it for you, Mom. I’m still half asleep is all.”

“No worries. I’ll get something. You go ahead and take care of your needs.  I’ll be there in just a few minutes.”

Brenee walked away slowly. Shyanne watched her and shook her head as she walked away.

“What gets into the child,” Shyanne wondered?

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Shyanne finished filling the car with and was leaning across the front seats to grab the trash beneath Brenee’s seat.

“I can get it, Mom” Brenee offered as she opened the passenger side door.”

“Thank, I’ve got it,” Shyanne answered. She looked up and saw that Brenee’ had purchased two drinks, a Snicker bar and some chips.

“Okay, big spender. Thanks for getting the snacks. I really appreciate that,” Shyanne said as she smiled broadly.

“It’s no big deal Mom,” Brenee’ said as she put their drinks in their drink holders.  I bought this extra large Snicker bar thinking we can split it.”

“Absolutely. Gotta save calories where we can, “ Shyanne laughed.

“Okay Mom.” Brenee, smiling slightly began to unwrap the Snicker.

“Hey, I still need to run into the gas station. Bio-break, you know? Can you hold off on opening the candy until I get back? I’ll leave the car running so you can have some air conditioning and music.”

“Okay Mom.”

Shyanne began to walk away from the car and she turned and looked back at Brenee who was drying her eyes with a tissue.

“My oh my,” Shyanne said as she continued to work toward the door of the gas station. “I sure hope this girl tells me what's going on with her. I really want to know what goes on with her.

A few minutes later, Shyanne returned to the car. Brenee was sitting back in her seat with her eyes closed and didn’t see Shyanne when she walked up.

“Brenee’”, Shyanne said as she tapped on the car window. “Unlock the door, please.”

Brenee’, startled by Shyanne’s tapping unlocked the doors as she sat up in her seat.

Shyanne was about to speak when Brenee’ spoke instead.

“Mom, I need to tell you something. You might not believe me. But, I’m gonna tell you anyway.”

“Okay. I’m listening.”

Shyanne turned the music down so that she could hear Brenee’ better.

“Mom, when I was a little girl Trey hurt me. A lot.”

Shyanne turned the music down still further.

“What kind of hurt, Brenee’? How did Trey hurt you?”

“Mom, he made me have sex with him. He made me have oral sex with him. And he sodomized me too.”

Brenee’ looked down at the floor of the car as she spoke and waited for Shyanne’s reply.

Shyanne’s mind was racing. She never would have guessed this in a million years! She thought that the tension between Brenee and Trey had to do with her divorce from Michael. She had unending questions racing through her mind as she looked at the dark highway ahead. When she had collected herself she replied to Brenee’s revelation.

“Brenee’ when did this happen? When did this begin?”

Shyanne was trying not to show all of the emotion that she felt inside. But she noticed that Brenee’ was slow to answer her. So, she asked again.

“Brenee’ she whispered, ``Can you tell me how this happened? Where were you? Where was I? How old were you when this started?”

Shyanne asked in rapid fire as she tried to make sense of it all.

“Mom, I was about five years old when this started.”

“And about how old were you when it stopped?”

Shyanne was calculating Trey’s age in comparison to Brenee’s age as she remembered.

“It stopped when Trey started dating Danielle. I figured he started having sex with her.”

“So you were five, then Trey was about ten”

“Where were you when this happened?”

“It happened everywhere, Mom. At Auntee Edith’s house. At our house. You know what happened. And, I have proof!”

Shyanne was shocked at Brenee’s words and fell back in her seat in silence. After a few minutes, Shyanne continued questioning Brenee.

“No baby,” she said softly. This is the first that I’ve known about this. What makes you think that I knew about this?”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Mom. I just don’t”

“Okay, when you’re ready, you’ll tell me about that,” she asked gently?

“Okay. Maybe later, Mom. But not now.”

Shyanne was perplexed as to how Brenee’ could even dream that she knew that her brother Trey was abusing her. But now she understood why Brenee was so distant from her. Why she rebuffed her attempts at closeness. Brenee hadn’t initiated a hug with her in what seemed like years.

“How could she think such a thing,” Shyanne thought to herself? How could she think that I would let someone hurt her after all that I’ve done for her. Her dad leaves her high and dry and I’m here taking care of her every need, and she thinks I would allow someone, anyone to hurt her? Makes no sense.”

“Hey Chief, Michael said as Trey was walking into the department. “That was one long smoke break. Can you help me move some of these patients? We need to move some of them up to the higher floors, just in case.”

“We,” Trey thought to himself. “This man really thinks I’m a volunteer or unpaid staff or something.”

But, Trey didn’t want to seem uncooperative. They were locked into that hospital for “*God only knows how long,”* he thought. So, he asked about moving the patients instead.

“In case what,” Trey asked?

“In case this building floods. That’s what happens in a hurricane, Trey. Now let’s go.”

Trey fell in line behind Michael when suddenly the lights went out. The entire building went black. Even the hum of medical equipment stopped.

“Here we go,” Michael said.

“Dad, it’s dark as midnight in here. I can’t see you.”

“Stay calm, Trey. Your eyes will adjust in a minute. Can you see me yet?”

“Yeah, a little. Hey, I’ve got my cell phone in my pocket. That will give us a little light. Hold on.”

Trey turned his phone on. He looked at his power bar. It was bright red.

“I need to charge my phone, Dad. I don’t have much power left.”

“Well, you won’t be charging it now. That’s enough light to get us back to the department anyway. Just turn around and follow me.”

Trey did as he was told.

-CHAPTER SIX-

When they entered the pharmacy waiting room, a few people were walking around in the dark, perhaps trying to find their belongings or family members.

Trey and Michael’s faces were illuminated slightly by the light from the phone. They could only see each other in the darkness when they heard a voice from across the room.

“Mike,” someone shouted across the room. “Mike,” they said louder.

Michael recognized the voice and stopped in his tracks looking around and waiting to be approached.

Trey recognized the voice too. It was his Uncle Tony.

Tony cautiously walked up to Michael trying not to trip and fall in the dark room.

Then the lights came back on.

“Tony, I thought you weren’t gonna make it in. Is Edith with you?”

“Yea, man. She’s sitting over there against the wall. This is gonna be something, man. I can just feel it. Lights going off already. This is Betsy all over again.”

Michael had told Trey about his boyhood when Hurricane Betsy had nearly destroyed the entire City of New Orleans. But, he didn’t know very much about it. He listened in the darkness.

“Yea, you’re right. And, we may be locked in here for a minute. Did you guys bring some food?”

“Yea, we did. We brought cold drinks and bottled water too.”

“Well, they may be cold now. But, I can’t promise that they will be an hour from now.”

Trey stood next to Michael not saying a word.

“Trey, you gonna say hello to your Uncle Tony or something?”

“Oh, hey,” Trey said.

“What’s going on man,” Tony asked?

Without answering Tony, Trey turned to Michael.

“Dad, I’m gonna get my bags and do some studying. Is anybody else coming,” he whispered quietly in Michael’s ear?

Michael pretended not to hear Trey’s question and replied only to Trey’s comment about going to study. He didn’t want to insult his brother-in-law.

“Okay. But don’t get lost. We still need to move some of these patients. Let me just check in and see what’s going on and I’ll find you. Okay? Don’t get lost, Trey.”

“I’m gonna sit in the breakroom so that I’ll have a table and outlets to charge my phone. I’m gonna grab some food too, okay?”

“Okay. Remember that food has to last. So, don’t make your home in it.”

“I won’t,” Trey responded as he began to walk away.

“Hey Trey, your Aunt Edith is over there. Why don’t you go and say hello to her. You know. Be polite?”

“Oh, I will in a minute,” Trey stopped and answered. He tried not to show his annoyance that Tony would try to direct him in any way.

“I’m out,” he continued as he again headed toward the breakroom.

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“Michael, what’s wrong with Trey,” Tony asked.

“I don’t know, man. He’s a little stuck up like his mama I guess. Hey, look. I’ve gotta go and check-in with my team. We still have patients to attend to, you know?”

“Yea, man. Go ahead and handle your business. Edith and I will be right here. No problem.”

“Alright. See you, chief. Stay close.”

“I got you. I’m gonna find some food. See you…”

Tony remembered that Trey was going to the breakroom to make himself a plate. He went there looking for him. Trey had his back to him when he walked in.

“Trey,” he said in a low voice.

Trey recognized his voice but ignored him.

“Trey!” Tony said louder.

“Man, what do you want? Get outta here. I don’t have nothing to say to you. Leave me alone,” Trey said emphatically. “I don’t want to talk to you no time never. You got that?”

“I got that you’d better keep your little mouth shut. You’d better not say a word about our *little arrangement.* Ain’t nothing changed.”

Trey turned and put his plate full of food down on the table. He slowly looked over at Tony and exhaled deeply before he answered. By this time, Trey had grown into young manhood and  was several inches taller than Tony. Still, he was afraid of this man who had sexually assaulted him in his youth. His voice trembled as he spoke in a low but steady tone.

“Look, man. First of all we never had an *“arrangement.”* And we certainly don’t have one now. Now get outta my face. You are the last person I’ll ever want to acknowledge even knowing. Stay away from me. You, hear?  I have nothing to say to you in public, private or anywhere else. So, there’s no need to make nice-nice because all of the family is here. Stay away from me.”

“Oh, you’re a tough guy now? What, you all grown up and gonna tell me what to do? I don’t think so son. I’m still..”

“You’re still nothing!” Trey interrupted. “You’re nothing and nobody, man. What a sad creature you are to attack a child. You know what? You stay. I’m leaving.”

Trey picked up his plate and headed for the door. Tony blocked his way and grabbed Trey’s arm.

“I’m not done talking to you, son.”

“I’m not your son,” Trey said as he snatched his arm back from Tony. “And, you might not be done, but I am! I’m not participating. It’s over. You’re all done intimidating me.”

“Oh no, bro. I’m not done at all. In fact, I’ve only just begun,” he shouted at Trey.

Trey gave Tony a steely look. Suddenly, Michael walked in.

“What’s going on here. I can hear you two way down the hall, and so can my team. Have you lost your last mind? I work here. What is all of this shouting about, Tony. You’ve only just begun to do what?”

Michael looked back and forth, first at Trey and then back at Tony.

“I don’t have nothing to say, dad. This dude is crazy. Tell him to stay away from me and to leave me alone. I ain’t got nothing for him. Ever. He’s not related to me anyway. He’s just Aunt Edith’s husband. He’s nobody to me!”

Trey started heading for the door, when Michael backed up to stop him.

“Woo, woo, woo, partner. What is this about Trey?”

“Like I said dad, I don’t have anything to say. Ask… him.”

Trey walked around Michael and continued down the hall to the pharmacy waiting room, leaving him to talk to Tony.

Michael turned around, rubbing his forehead and looking puzzled.

“Man, Tony. What was *that* all about? You got beef with Trey? What’s going on, man. Why were you shouting at him?”

“Awww, it was nothing man. He just smarted off at the mouth at me and I just had to put him in his place. I had to let him know that I’m still his Uncle Tony. Respect is in order, you know.”

“Yea, I understand. He’s been smarting off a lot now that he’s in college. I told you, he’s just like Shyanne, a little smart-ass. Sometimes I don’t think he’s even my son. He’s nothing like me. Not really. He’s all Shyanne.”

“I feel sorry for you, man. Shyanne is a piece of work. And, now you have a son just like her. Man, that’s tough…”

Michael and Tony laughed together.

“Hey, let’s get some food man. We don’t have no time for crazy people. The boy is crazy just like his maw,” Michael said.

Happy that he was able to avoid further questioning from Michael, Tony answered “Yea, you’re right man.”

An hour had passed before Michael showed up in the breakroom. He went directly to the cooler and pulled out a chilled drink. The ice was beginning to melt inside the cooler. So, the drinks were no longer cold.

“Was the food good?”

“Sure was, Trey said. I ate two plates.”

“Good. Time for work now. We need to follow the nurses to do rounds. They’ll tell us which patients to move and where.”

“I’m just following you, Dad.”

“Speaking of following me. Your Uncle Tony was offended that you didn’t greet him when he walked up, nor did you go over and greet my sister.”

“Man, I’m not thinking about those two. Why did you invite them here anyway? This place is already over crowded. They have other family. Why didn’t they go to Baton Rouge or Houston or something?”

“I invited them because your Aunt Edith is my sister. She and Tony wanted to stay in the city so they can get to their house quickly when the storm is over. What’s with the irritation? Don’t let this storm get to you, Trey. It’s way too early for you to get irritated.”

Trey stood up and began unplugging his phone and laptop from the electrical outlets.

“Let me put my things in your locker, Dad. It’s getting kind of intense around here. I wouldn’t want my stuff to come up missing.”

“Over there.” Michael pointed toward the last locker on the top row.

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-CHAPTER SEVEN-

“Trey, where are you,” Shyanne asked.

“I’m with Dad,” Trey answered.

“Okay good. But, where are you with your Dad?”

“We’re at the VA Hospital.  We’re on the third floor in the pharmacy department.”

“Got it. Well, I’m on my way.”

“On your way to New Orleans?”

“Yes. Brenee’ and I are in the car now. We left Virginia hours ago. We’re nearing Atlanta.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that you were coming, Mom? You don’t need to come down here. You’re driving in the middle of a hurricane?!”

“I’m doing fine.  It’s not raining here yet. How about there?”

“It’s not raining yet. But the storm should make landfall sometime Monday.”

“Well, I’m driving straight there. Brenee’ has her learner’s permit too. She’s been helping me to drive. Sorta like Thelma and Louise,” she laughed.

“Mom, that’s not funny.  Nothing about this is funny. Man… I wish you had talked to me about this before you left Virginia. You should stop in Atlanta and stay there.”

“Again, my plan is to drive straight through and arrive there by morning. But I’ll take your thoughts under advisement, son. Are you okay? Did you eat?”

“I’m fine, Mom. Look where are you going to stay? There are no hotel rooms available here. Tourists who couldn’t get outta here filled up the hotels. You should have seen it, Mom. Folks carjacking rich folk’s Mercedes on Canal Street, looting and robbing. It’s a madhouse down here. I wish I had left earlier too. If I had known you were gonna drive down here….”

Trey sounded totally different than he had that morning when he refused to leave New Orleans. Now Shyanne sensed sincere regret in his voice and wondered what prompted that change.

“Trey, where is your sister Kimmie? Who else is there with you?”

“Kimmie and her mom drove to Houston yesterday. Dad says that they didn’t even board up their house. They just jumped in their car and left.”

“Oh really,” Shyanne continued. “And who else is there from the family?”

Trey grew quiet before he answered.

“Well, Uncle Tony and Aunt Edith are here. And that’s about it for the family. Everybody else either works here or their family member does. A lot of folks brought their family here with them.

“Tony!” Shyanne screamed inside. “I hate that demon, Tony. Always showing up. Ooowee! I hate him.”

She tried to calm herself before she spoke.

“Mom, are you there?”

“Yes I’m here, baby. Look, I’m gonna hang up now and concentrate on this road.  I’ll call you back in a few.”

“Well lots of folks phones aren’t working now, Mom. The storm blew out a bunch of towers. So, don’t be surprised if you can’t reach me.”

“No problem. I know where you are on the third floor of the VA. One way or the other, expect to see me in a few hours. And, please don’t tell anyone that I’m coming, especially your dad. And for God’s sake don’t tell Tony.  I don’t want that demon ever knowing what I’m doing. He is not my friend.”

“Okay, Mom. I understand. Just please be careful. I’ll try to save you some food. My dad is feeding every woman and child in the building with our food. So…

“Don’t worry about food, Trey.  In fact, don’t worry about anything. Okay? You know I stay prepared. This car is stocked with food and drinks. That’s the least of our worries.”

“Okay.”

“You rest your nerves now.  Brenee’ and I are having a nice relaxing road trip, aren’t we Brenee’?”

Shyanne looked over at Brenee’ who had fallen asleep and was slumped against the front passenger window.

“Well, she’s taking a little nap now. You take one too, Trey. Love you. See you soon.”

 -CHAPTER EIGHT-

A soft mist was falling on Shyanne’s car as she approached I-10 in Mobile, Alabama. The sun was barely peeking through the clouds that were beginning to roll in.

Brenee’ stretched on the passenger seat across from Shyanne.

“Where are we, Mom?”

“We’re almost in Mobile.  We have another couple of hours before we get to New Orleans. Are you hungry? I am.”

“Uh huh. Do we have any water?”

“Look in the cooler behind my seat. Get one for me too. Okay?”

“Okay, Mom,” Brenee’ answered as she reached to get the waters.

“We have fruit in her too Mom,” she said as she put a bottle of water in the drink holder and passed an apple to Shyanne.

“What time is it? Is the time in the car correct?”

“Yes. I changed it when we left Atlanta. It’s seven o’clock.”

“Do we know where we’re staying yet?”

“Yes. We’re staying at the VA with your dad and Trey.”

“Can’t we stay somewhere else. Where are we gonna sleep there? And all those sick people, Mom. Is that the best we can do?”

“Yes, it’s the best we can do. I spoke with Tre’ last night. He said that all of the hotels are sold out.  And as far as he knows, all of your family has left the city already.”

“Even Auntee Ethel and Uncle Thomas?”

“Even them.”

“They never leave for a hurricane Mom.” She looked out the window as the rain began to fall a little harder on the car windows.

Shyanne glanced over at her.

“Brenee’,” she said as she reached over and rubbed her arm.  “It’s gonna be fine. You’ll see.”

Brenee’ turned and looked at her.

“Mom. I need to talk to you about something. About Tre’.”

Shyanne tilted her head toward Brenee’ as if to listen more closely.

“Okay, baby. What about Tre’?”

“Mom, you might not believe me,” she started. “But Tre’. He hurt me when I was younger.”

“What do you mean he hurt you, Brenee’?”

Shyanne spoke softly as she turned the car radio down.

Brenee put her head in her chest and grew very quiet.

“Brenee’ baby. Tell me. What do you mean that Tre’ hurt you? You know I’ll get his butt, right?”

Shyanne smiled as she spoke.

But Brenee didn't smile back. She looked out the front window of the car and answered.

“Mom. That therapist you’ve been sending me to. She told me to get as far away from you as possible when I get eighteen.”

“What? Why would she say that, Brenee’? What’s going on?”

Shyanne turned her glance, first toward Brenee’ and then to the road ahead. And, again toward Brenee’.

“Sweet baby. Please tell me what you have to tell me. It’s okay, honey. Trust me.”

“Mom. Tre’ made me have oral sex on him. And he sodomized me too.”

Brenee’ spoke without stopping to breathe.

Shyanne let those words fill her head as she tried to keep her focus on the road. She didn’t want to alarm Brenee’ with her response. So she took her time in replying.

“You don’t have to believe me if you don’t want to, Mom.”

“Brenee’,” Shyanne said softly. Of course, I believe you. I believe you to the moon and back. I believe you into infinity. And, I’m beyond sorry that this happened to you. When did this happen? Where?”

Question after question flooded Shyanne’s head. She decided to pull over to talk to Brenee’.

“Brenee’, she began as she put the car in park. I am so sorry that this happened. And I do absolutely believe you.  This happens in way too many families.  And I’m sorry that this has happened in ours. I don’t know what to say.  But I’ll tell you this. I promise you that I’m gonna drill down when I see Tre’ and find out how this happened.  I need to know.”

Brenee’ looked over at Shyanne and began to cry.

“It’s okay, my baby.  I love you so much. You’re my baby girl. I love you Brenee’,” she said as she hugged Brenee’ and rocked her back and forth. “Oh my God. Oh my God,” she said over and over.

Brenee’ cried all the harder.

“We’re okay, baby. We’re okay.”

Shyanne hugged Brenee’ all the tighter and rubbed her wavy black hair. She grabbed a napkin from the stack laying atop of her coin holder.

“Here baby,” Shyanne whispered as she gently wiped Brenee’s eyes.

“Mom, I didn’t know how to tell you. I was so scared. Tre’ said that he would kill you and me if I told anybody. And…”

Shyanne listened intently as she continued to hug and rock Brenee.

“It’s okay, baby. What else happened?”

“Well, I was just scared that’s all.”

“Of course, you were scared. I’d be scared too! That’s scary. When did this start, Brenee’ Where were you when this happened?”

Shyanne was trying to determine if this had happened while she was away.

Brenee’ pulled away from Shyanne and sat upright in her seat. She placed the cottony napkin against her eyes and then her cheeks, trying to slow her tears from flowing down her warm brown face.

Shyanne’s mind was racing from one thought to the other.  She tried to settle her mind and to focus on her baby girl Brenee’ who was sitting next to her crying and agonizing with profound sadness. Shyanne was fighting back her own tears as she searched for the words to say to Brenee’.

“Brenee’, come here baby” she said as she again reached over and drew Brenee near her. She kissed her forehead and continued to rock her.

“Look, I have no words that can take this horror away.  Just know that I’m mad as hell about it. But we still have to go and get Trey out of New Orleans. And we still have to all stay together at the VA once we get there. This just sucks. Oh my, baby. This just sucks. This just sucks.”

Brenee’ whispered, “It’s okay, Mom. I understand. I don’t want to see Trey. He makes me sick.”

“And I don’t want you to see him either.  But I don’t know of anyone that you can stay with while we’re there. Most everyone has left town, you know? But I’ll try. Okay?  And if we can’t work out somewhere else for us to stay, we’ll stay together, and I’ll keep Trey away from you. That might be the best I can do until this storm is over and we get back home.”

“Okay, Mom. I understand.”

Brenee’ cried softly as she hugged Shyanne tightly.

“I hated to tell you about this, Mom….”

“No. I’m glad that you told me. I wish I had known about this earlier. Does your Dad know about this?”

“No, I never told him. I never told anyone except that therapist that you’ve been sending me to.”

“Well, even though she doesn’t seem to think well of me, I’ll keep taking you to her office if you like.  It’s your decision. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Shyanne turned back toward the steering wheel and restarted the car. She leaned over and reached behind Brenee’s seat and grabbed a soft, blue throw.

“Her. Put this over yourself. Close your eyes and rest now.  We’ll be in New Orleans in about an hour and a half.”

Exhaling softly a long deep breath, Shyanne tried to figure out what her next steps would be. It was enough to be driving into a hurricane. She had to get Trey, out of New Orleans. She had to find safety in New Orleans for herself, Trey and Brenee’ until she could.  And, now this. Now she has to confront her son rather than embrace and protect him.

“How can I do this,” Shyanne thought. I’ve spent my life protecting Trey. How and I am going to speak to him about this. I know it’s true.”

Shyanne began to cry softly. Tears flooded her eyes and she blinked rapidly to be able to see the road. She quickly dried her eyes with her sleeve and looked over at Brenee’ who was sleeping soundly. Her CD case was beside her. Without looking, she grabbed a disc and slid it into the player on her dimly lit dashboard. She turned the volume down so that she wouldn’t wake Brenee’.

“Okay, she thought. Here’s what I’m gonna do.  When I get to the city, I’m gonna try and reach Dr. Arshad. He’ll have some ideas. No. I’ll call Dr. Goldin. He knows Brenee’ and I well. And, he’s in VA,” Shyanne said out loud. So, his office should be open now.”

She opened the storage unit in the console between her and Brenee’ and grabbed her phone. She scrolled her contacts until she found Dr. Goldin’s number. She called him, but it rang several times before his voicemail picked up.

“You’ve reached the office of Dr. Chadwick Goldin. Our office hours are between 9am and 6pm, Monday through Friday. Saturday hours are by appointment only. Please leave your name, last four of your social, date of birth and a phone number where you can be reached. We will return your call before the end of clinic today. Beep.”

Shyanne left a voicemail for Dr. Goldin providing all the necessary information, and asking him to return her call. She was confident that he would. And, just knowing that she had reached out to Dr. Goldin helped her somewhat to  relax.

She was so anxious ever since Brenee found the courage to tell her what Trey had done to her that she had thought about taking a Klonopin just to try to relax.

“A half a tablet won’t hurt,” she thought. “I can still drive safely’

She looked away from the road to check on Brenee who had her eyes closed and her head against her window.  Then she quickly glanced back in front of her..

“It’s not worth the risk,” she whispered under her breath.

She found the smooth jazz station on her car radio, leaned back into her seat and let the soft music fill her head as she drove.

“How in the world did I miss all of this,” Shyanne asked herself?. “Was it my constant travel for work?

 “I knew I couldn’t trust Michael with our kids after he left Brenee’ at just three years old home alone with Trey who was only eight years old for Christ’s sake.”

What an idiot move, Shyanne” she thought to herself. You should have left him then. But noooo. You stayed. Kept giving him chances to keep our family together. Now don’t you feel stupid, Shyanne.  All of that stress, strain and self-sacrifice in the name of *family,* and you still have no family. And, your kids have been brutalized in the process!. Damn! Just damn!

She gripped the steering wheel tighty as she pondered how she had gotten to this place, bringing Trey and Brenee with her. A single, warm tear rolled down her face as she wondered...

“How could this have happened?  What world have I been in? How could I have missed this? And, where was Michael when this was happening?

AUGUST 1995

“Ooowee,” Shyanne said. “I’m sweating like a Hebrew slave.”

She laughed as she took a napkin out of her purse and wiped her brow.

“Trey, grab a bottle of water out of the cooler and take it to the dugout with you.”

Trey was ten years old and had already played five seasons of Little League baseball. And, Shyanne loved it as much as he did.

“Mom, is my dad coming to my game today?

“He said that he’d be here. I’ll ask him to come and say hi to you when he gets here. Okay?

“Okay, Trey said with a smirk on his face.

“Well, are you gonna stay?”

“Am I gonna stay? Of course I’m gonna say, dude. I’m gonna stay until the last ball is pitched!”

Trey smiled broadly at Shyanne as he jumped out of the car throwing his bat bag over his shoulder.

“Do your best, Trey! I’m right behind you. Just need to park the car.”

She had dropped Brenee’ off at her sister Kimmie’s house since she had asked to skip Trey’s game.“

“Can I go by Kimmie’s house today,” Brenee had asked? “She said that I could come.”

“Okay,” Shyanne answered her. “I’ll pick you up after the game.”

Brenee  would be entering kindergarten that fall.

“Brenee’ is so smart,” Shyanne thought. She is just like Trey. Smart as a whip.”

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“Shyanne!” Michael said loudly from across the field

“Hey,” Shyanne said as she waved and beaconed him toward her.

She moved over on the bleachers to make room for him. She looked again over and Michael and saw Tony walking with him.

“Damn, damn, damn,” she thought. “Not this fool. Why did Michael have to bring him.”

She stood up and walked down to the edge of her row..

“Tony,” she said coolly.  “Michael, Trey wants you to come over and say hello before the game starts. Okay?”

“Uh, huh.” He nodded as he spoke and walked away, leaving her alone with Tony.

“Why are you here, Tony? I didn’t know you liked baseball.”

“I don’t. I’m just hanging out with Michael. Why? You got a problem with my being here?”

“Actually, yes. Yes I do. I would much prefer you be anywhere else than here. It would be nice if I could have a private family moment.”

“I’m family, Shane. I was family before you got here. Michael and I were hanging out before his first marriage and….”

“Uh, my name is Shy-anne, Tony. Shy-anne. Do you have early dementia or something? Why can’t you remember my name?”

“I said Shane. So, what’s the matter with that?”

Shyanne rolled her eyes up toward the sky and then looked around to see if Michael was heading back her way. She looked toward the dugout and saw Trey waving at her. He was smiling from ear to ear. Michael was by his side.

“Trey looks good in his uniform,” Tony said.

Shyanne wanted to say something smart. Something to let him know just how unwelcomed he was. Instead she answered dryly.

“Thank you very kindly.”

Michael came and stood at the bottom of the bleachers. Shyanne was seated on the second row. She noticed that he wasn’t taking a seat next to her. So she asked,

“Do you want to sit up higher, Michael?”

“No. Actually, I can’t stay. Tony and I have some work today. We’re working on a project uptown. We’re doing a room addition onto a really awesome property…”

“So, you’re not staying.”

Michael didn’t answer.

“Did you tell Trey that?”

“Well, yea. He knows. Shyanne, look. I came all the way out here just to say hi and to show my support.”

“Support? Sorta like a team sponsor, huh? Why don’t you buy a banner for your business and hang it on the fence. The park could use support… dollars.”

Tony smiled to see the discord between Michael and Shyanne. She noticed his enjoyment of the situation and continued lashing out at Michael.

“So this is why you brought Tony here? You had no intention of staying for the game. You said you’d be here for the game. And, this is not the first time that you’ve let this boy down.”

Michael reached up and touched Shyanne’s arm.

“Walk with me please,” he said quietly.  “Tony, wait for me by my truck. I’ll catch up with you.”

Shyanne didn’t move an inch. She followed Tony with her eyes and waited until he was far enough away not to hear her before she spoke.

“What did Trey say when you told him that you weren’t staying? I told him in the car that you’d promised you wouldn’t miss this game. Do you realize if they win today they’re going to Gulfport for the All-Star tournament? This is a really big deal for him.”

She was totally exasperated by Michael’s lack of interest in Trey. She looked away from him as he answered her.

“Shyanne, I’ve got to go. I promised my client that I be there before noon.”

“Well, you made a promise to Trey and I now didn’t you. Maybe you should stop with the promises.”

Michael looked around to see who was listening to their conversation. He walked to the end of the bench and began speaking to Shyanne more softly.

“Shyanne. Babe. Look, let’s do this. Halfway through the game just give me a call and if they’re winning I’ll leave Tony at the job site and come back over here.”

Shyanne squinted her eyes as she looked at him as if she couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

“This reminds me of your “call me when you’re dilated seven centimeters” when I was delivering this child. Remember that. I thought you would get better. But, you’re still a part-time parent, Michael. Fitting us in wherever you can.”

The silence was deafening as neither one of them spoke. They were at an impasse.  And, they both knew it.

“Look, just go Michael. I’m not gonna call you either. You’ve made the decision not to be here. So, that’s that.”

Michael reached in his pocket to search for his key to his truck.

“Well, if that’s what you want.”

Shyanne snapped to attention in her seat.

“Don’t you dare, Michael. Don’t you dare try to put your decision off on me.”

They heard a car horn beeping across the park. Shyanne looked and saw Tony with his window down, waving for Michael to come and join him.

“Your date is calling you,” Shyanne said.

“Date. Funny, Shyanne,” he said as he slowly began walking away.

“Michael. Let’s split the duties,” she said. “ I’ll stay here with Trey and you get Brenee’. She’s with Kimmie. Give them a call, okay?”

She hated having to ask  Michael to take care of Brenee’. It felt like she was co-signing on his neglectful attitude toward her,  Brenee’s and most of all Trey.

“Why should I have to ask him to take care of his own children,” she thought. “I feel like a single parent.”

Michael interrupted her thoughts as he shouted back at her, nodding “yes” as he began to speak.

“Will do, Shyanne. I’ll call Kimmie. No problem.”

Then he turned and jogged across the field toward his truck. Tony turned and smiled slyly at Shyanne as the truck pulled away.

-CHAPTER NINE-

The game was tied and the bases were loaded in the last inning of the game. There were already two runners out. Trey was the last at bat. If he didn’t get at least a base hit, the game was over.

Shyanne had spent a lot of money sending Trey to batting camps and clinics with the best coaches that New Orleans had to offer.

“Shyanne, I don’t know why you keep sending Trey to those expensive camps. That’s not gonna help him. Baseball is not important here. You know New Orleans is Saints country. You’d do better getting him into football,” Michael had once said to her.”

“Trey is not built for football,”  Shyanne had answered curtly. “Besides, there’s life outside of New Orleans.”

She put those thoughts out of her head to focus on the present moment.

“Take your time, Trey” she thought to herself. “Pick your ball, baby.”

She didn’t want to make him nervous by shouting out to him. She wanted him to focus on the ball.

“Crack!”

Shyanne knew when she heard that sound that the ball was well hit.  She jumped down from the bleachers and ran toward the first base line. She ran along the fence glancing first at Trey who was running the bases and then to the ball which was sailing upward and out of the park.

“Run boy, run“ she shouted!

The crowd behind her was on its feet shouting too.  She turned around and saw her sorority sister Rainey jumping up and down cheering.

“Go Trey,” she shouted.

Shyanne turned again and saw Trey rounding third base, his right hand clenched and in the air.

He was met at home plate with the three runners who had scored in front of him. Then his entire team and coaches ran out to greet him. The coaches hoisted Trey up on their shoulders and carried him out to the pitcher's mound for every spectator in the park to see.

Shyanne felt a tap on her shoulder. It was Rainey.

“Give me a hug girl,” Rainey said as she wrapped her arms around Shyanne.

“Trey hit that ball, girl. He is our MVP today!”

“Awwwh, thanks Rainey. I’m just so excited for him. He’s worked really hard for a really long time. And, I’m just glad to be her to share it with him.”

“Speaking of sharing, where’s Trey’s dad? Don’t tell me that he missed this.”

“Well, he sorta-kinda did. I mean he was here earlier. But, he needed to leave for work.

Shyanne tried not to show her embarrassment that Michael was not there. He missed so many of Trey’s games that other team parents didn’t even know his name.

“Hey look, thanks for saying that Rainey.. I’m gonna run over and give Trey a hug. Okay?”

“Oh, okay lady.  See you at All-Star practice.

-CHAPTER 10-

Trey was noticeably quiet as he and Shyanne rode home from the game. Shyanne leaned over and tried to start a conversation with him.

“How did you like the whole team coming out to meet you at home plate after your grand slam?”

“It was alright,” Trey answered.

“Just alright? I was screaming my lungs out.”

“Oh, it was lots of fun, Mom. Coach just doesn’t like it if we get the big head on the field.”

“The big head? A grand slam is a really big deal, Trey. And, I’m having a pizza party for the whole team.  How about this Saturday night.”

“That’s cool, Mom. Can we stop and get a snow cone?”

Shyanne’s phone was ringing on the dash. Michael’s name popped up. She wanted to ignore his call. But, she didn’t want Trey to know how irritated she was that Michael had missed his game.

“Hi Michael,” Shyanne said.

“Hey. How y’all doing? Where is Trey? Is the game over?

“I have you on speaker. And, Trey is here with me.”

“Hey, Dad. You missed my game, huh?”

“Well, yea. I told you that I had to work when we were in the dugout.”

“You said that you had to make a run. I didn’t know that you were gonna miss the whole game. I hit a grand slam, Dad. It was so cool. Even Coach gave me a high-five. And, he doesn’t do that for anybody.”

“Hey, man. I’m so proud of you. I wish I could’ve been there.”

“Well, we’re on our way to get snow cones. You’re still gonna get Brenee from Kimmie’s. Right?”

“Yep. I’ve got her. We’ll meet you at the house,” Michael said matter of factly

“Any idea about what time that might be?”

“Well, Tony and I have a couple of stops to make and then we’ll pick Brenee up.”

“Do you have me on speaker?”

“No.”

“Good. Now, I have an idea,” Shyanne said. “How about you drop Tony off at his car and you go and get our daughter by yourself and bring her home? Afterall , you have spent the whole day with Tony.”

“Ump. I hadn’t thought about that.”

“Well, think about it. Please.”

The phone went silent.

“We’ll see you at home, Michael. I’ll fix some dinner. And, please don’t bring Tony.”

“I won’t,” he laughed.

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“Mom, why does my dad never come to my games,” Trey said as he dropped his bat bag onto the living room floor.

“I wouldn’t say never, Trey. He comes when he can.  And, he’s the one who stays up at night washing your uniforms so you’re ready for the next game. So he does help, Trey.”

“Mom that’s not the same as coming to my games. The other dads come to see their sons play.”

“Jasper’s dad doesn’t come to your games. Have you ever even seen his dad? No. You haven’t. Trey, Jasper’s dad is not a part of his life. Why we don’t know. So, at least you know who your dad is and where he is, most of the time... when he’s not working somewhere.”

“I guess so, Mom.  It’s just that you’re always there.”

“Not always. You know I work too. And, I’m out of town a lot. So, I miss your games too. But, I do my best to be there as often as I can. So, maybe we should give him a little bit of a break.”

Trey changed the subject.

“I’m gonna take a shower, Mom. I just wanna eat and go to bed.”

“Good plan, son. I’ll get dinner together. And, I’ll let you know when your dad gets here. He and Brenee should be here soon.”

Shyanne made her way into the kitchen and opened the shutter blinds over her kitchen window. She looked outside onto the circle drive where only her van was parked. She wondered what was taking Michael so long to get home. She picked up her cordless phone on the kitchen wall and dialed his phone.

“Hey,” Michael said.

“Hey. Did you pick Brenee up yet?”

“Uh, no. I called her and she said that she wanted to spend some more time with Kimmie. So, she’s still over there.”

“Are you kidding me? Who put Brenee in charge? You told me that you were gonna drop Tony off, pick Brenee’ up and come home. I promised to get dinner together, which I am doing. Where are you anyway, Michael? Trey is thinking he’s gonna get to spend some time with you this evening.

“I stopped to drop Tony off as I said. But, my mom is here and she needed to talk to me. So, what could I do? You don’t want me to hurt my mom’s feelings do you?”

Shyanne was speechless.  She felt a tightness in her chest and a flush of heat rising up toward her face as Michael was breaking yet another promise to her.

“I’m on my way now, Shyanne,” Michael  into whispered into the phone.

“Goodnight Michael,” Shyanne said calmly. “I don’t have time for this. Please make sure that Brenee grooms herself before bed. I’m out. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye? You mean goodnight, right?”

Shyanne hung up the phone without answering.

-CHAPTER 11-

A week later, Shyanne had taken Trey and Brenee to sing in the Children’s Choir after school.

“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,” Trey and Brenee both sang from the front of the church.

It was the last night of the annual Vacation Bible School at Green Street Baptist Church. And, Shyanne was so pleased with their performance with the children’s choir. But, she was more pleased that it was the last night because she was just exhausted. Working all day and being at church each night for a solid week left her feeling drained.

“Guys, I am so proud of you,” Shyanne said as Trey and Brenee approached her. “Got all of your things? I’m ready to head out.”

“Mom, I’d like to stay for the closing prayer,” Trey said.

‘May I sit down, please?” Brenee asked as she slid past Shyanne to take a seat on the pew. Shyanne rubbed her shoulders as she passed by.

“Well, of course you can,” Shyanne answered Trey. “But aren’t you hungry?” Shyanne asked because she really wanted to go home.

“No, I’m not. They gave us snacks in the classroom.”

“Well, okay. I’ll call your dad and let him know that we’re staying a little late.”

“Mom, they asked us in the classroom if we wanted to become a part of GOD’s family. They asked us if we wanted to join church. And, I said yes.”

“You said, yes? Are you sure about that, Trey?”

“I’m sure, Mom”

“Well, I’ll call your dad and tell him that you’re joining church tonight! He might be able to make his way over here. He’s only a few blocks away at the Medical Center.”

She looked around as some of the other families were gathering up their children and belongings and heading out the door. She noticed the empty seats up front.

“Let’s move up guys,” Shyanne said as she grabbed her purse and her Bible.”

Without saying a word, Trey stepped away and found seats on the right side of the front row.

“Brenee?” Shyanne said questioningly.

“Mom, I’m so tired. I hope we won’t be here much longer. Can my dad come and get me? I wanna go home.”

“Brenee, your brother is joining church tonight….”

“What? Does that mean that we have to stay some more? I’m tired, Mom.”

“I know, baby. I’m calling your dad and asking him to come and meet us here. And, as soon as Pastor Nesby is done with Trey, you can leave with your dad. Okay? I’ll meet you all  at the house.”

Shyanne noticed Brenee looking straight ahead as she listened to what Shyanne had to say.

“Brenee, why don’t you call your dad? Yea, you go ahead and call him and tell him that we need him to come right away because Trey is joining church tonight. Okay?”

Brenee was so tired that the last thing she wanted to do was to get up and walk to another row. But, she mustered the physical strength to stand up and followed Trey up to the front of the church with her phone in her hand. She dialed her dad and he answered on the second ring.

“Brenee, where are you, baby?”

“We’re still at church. And, we’ve gotta stay late because Trey wants to join church. And, I’m so tired Daddy. All I want to do is to go to sleep. But, Mom says that you can come and get me if you want.”

“Trey is joining church? Alright,” Michael said excitedly. “I”ll be on my way, baby. And, we’ll ease out early and let you mom bring Trey home. Okay, babygirl?”

“Okay, Dad,” Brenee answered, smiling to herself. We’re sitting all the way in the front, Dad. We’re on the right side of the church.”

“I’m on my way now. See you in a minute.”

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Shyanne sat on the front row of the church with Trey on her right and Brenee on her left. Trey sat on the edge of his seat, looking around for his classmates and friends that he had grown up with in Green Street Baptist Church. Excited, he smiled from ear to ear.

“Mom, Uncle Tony is here! And, Aunt Edith is with him!”

Trey was excited to see them. Shyanne was not. She stood and turned around to greet them anyway.

“Hey, y’all. What are you doing here?” She smiled as she spoke.

“Michael called and said that Trey was joining church. So, the Deacon and I hurried up and got right over here,” Edith said.

“The Deacon? Oh, how nice is that!” Shyanne said sarcastically. “Tony, I had forgotten about your... deaconess,” she said, trying to hide her amusement.

Tony nervously shuffled his feet from side to side as he looked at Shyanne with disgust.

“Look at him,” Shyanne thought. Where can I go, what can I do that this man won’t be there,” she thought in disgust. “I can’t even worship with my family in peace.”

Confused, Edith looked first at Shyanne and then at her husband Tony.

“Well,” Edith continued, “Danielle is on her way too. And, she’s bringing all of her kids!”

Danielle was Michael and Edith’s younger sister and Auntee Dani to Trey and Brenee.

“Wow,” Shyanne said. “So, the whole family is coming?”

She looked at Tony who was making his way over to Trey and Brenee. Then she put her arms in front of both of them and pushed them behind her.

“I’m not gonna eat your kids, Shyanne,” Tony said. I just wanted to congratulate Trey is all.”

Tony turned to walk away when Pastor Nesby walked up next to him.

“Deacon Tony! So good to see you. What brings you here? Do you know these folks,” he asked as he pointed to Shyanne, Trey and Brenee.

“Do I know them?” Tony said laughingly.

“This is my Uncle Tony,” Trey said. And, that’s my Aunt Edith.

“Nice to meet you Edith. I know the Deacon very well. He’s helped with our children’s ministry on several occasions. He’s actually brought the youth from Mt. Moriah to meet jointly with our kids.  He’s a good man. And, the kids love him. Well Trey, I understand that you’re joining church tonight. Is that right?”

“Yes sir, Pastor Nesby.”

“And, what about you Brenee? Are you joining the family of GOD tonight too?”

Brenee was surprised by the question and stumbled over her words to answer.

“Uh, I don’t know Pastor. I mean, I hadn’t thought about that. My daddy will be here soon. I’ll ask him if it’s okay.”

Shyanne put her arm around Brenee and hugged her close to her.

“She’s not quite ready yet, Pastor. Anytime now I bet. Let’s give her a minute though.”

“No rush, Shyanne. So glad that Trey is making a decision for the Lord and at such a young age. Deacon, did you have anything to do with this? Have you been leading the boy in the ways of the Lord?”

“Doing my best, Pastor. Doing my best.”

Then Pastor looked beyond Tony and Edith when he saw Michael making his way to the front of the church.

“Hi Honey,” he said to Shyanne as he fell in line next to her.

Brenee smiled from ear to ear to at the mere sight of her dad. With Pastor Nesby standing across from her, Shyanne smiled too.

“Nice to see you, Michael.  We’re excited to have Trey become a formal part of the church. Normally we don’t baptize and accept children so young for membership. But, Trey has been here his entire little life. And, his teachers assured me that he’s ready.”

“That’s good news, Pastor. Thank you for all that you do.”

“You’re welcome. Folks, I’m gonna leave you now. We’ll be starting any minute,” he said as he walked away.

“So, as I was asking Edith, your entire family is coming tonight,” Shyanne turned and said to Michael.

“Pretty much they are,” Edith answered, watching Trey and Brenee moving from behind Shyanne.

“Well, let’s find some seats. The Vacation Bible School kids are all sitting on this right side. So, anywhere over there will do,” Shyanne said pointing to the left side of the church.

“Why we’ll sit right here,” Tony said as he sat himself down in the front row directly across from Shyanne, Trey and Brenee.

It irritated Shyanne that Michael was still standing in the middle of the aisle as if he didn’t know which side to sit on, hers or his sister and Tony’s. After a few seconds there, he slid to his right and sat on the end next to Brenee.

Shyanne was aghast that Tony would even bring himself into her church, much less seat himself across the aisle from her. She looked over at him and saw Edith smiling with excitement. Church was the highlight of Edith’s life, or her salvation from it. Shyanne could never figure out which.

Her head fell to her chest as she exhaled deeply. She hoped that Trey would be called soon to make his public profession. Like Brenee, she just wanted to go home.

-CHAPTER 12-

“Ooh, look at him sleeping,” Pastor Nesby said as the service was coming to a close. He was looking right at Michael.

Shyanne looked down the row and saw Michael's head bobbing. He was sound asleep.

“Brenee,” she whispered. “Nudge your dad and wake up.”

Brenee looked at Shyanne with a smirk on her face while she tapped her dad’s leg.

“What, what,” Michael said as he woke up. He appeared a bit disoriented as he sat straight up in his seat. Shyanne kept looking straight ahead as the pastor spoke.

When the pastor had finished speaking, Shyanne rose from her seat.

“Let’s go,” she said to Trey and Brenee.

Michael stood up to let them out of the row.

“Michael, can the kids ride home with you?”

Michael’s chest rose as if he was holding his breath.

“Uh, I have to go back to work, Shyanne. I just snuck away to be here for Trey.”

Brenee turned and looked at Shyanne in disappointment.

Tony came and stood next to them.

“I can take them home if you like, Michael.”

“No,” Shyanne said curtly. “I want their dad to take them home. Thank you,” she tried to say more politely as Edith walked up to join them.

“Michael, I’ll meet you and the kids at home. Our home,” Shyanne said as she smiled at her sister-in-law Edith and walked away.

“Mom, Brenee said as she ran up behind Shyanne. I’ll go home with you, okay?”

Shyanne turned around and looked at Michael still standing in the middle of the aisle with Tony, Edith and Trey who all had their eyes focused on Brenee’. She grabbed Brenee’ by the hand.

“Sure you can, baby” she said looking directly at Michael. “I’ve got Brenee. You’ll bring Trey home, right?”

“I’ll get Trey home,” Michael answered.

Shyanne nodded in agreement and waved goodbye as she and Brenee walked out of the side door of the church to the gravel parking lot.

“My feet hurt so bad and I’m tired,” Shyanne said as she wrapped her arm around Brenee, partly to hug her and party to keep her balance.

Shyanne tip-toed to the car, her feet aching and burning at the same time. She began taking her shoes off once she and Brenee were in the car. She looked over at Brenee who had her head leaned back against her headerst.

“Put your seatbelt on and lean your seat back, Brenee.”

“How do I do that, Mom” Brenee said as she began to reach on the side of her seat for a lever to let her seat back?

“Hold on. I’ll help you.”

Shyanne turned on the air conditioning and bent over to try to put her shoes back on her feet. But, her feet were too swollen. Her feet and ankles had begun to swell often along with her increase in weight.

“Forget about it,” she thought to herself.

She unbuckled her seat belt and reached across Brenee to release the seat back lever. But, because of her girth, she couldn’t reach it. So, she got out of her car and walked on the gravel to the other side of the car.

“See this lever, Brenee’,” she said as she opened the passenger door. “Put your hand on this lever, pull up and lean back. Got it?

Though she was tired to the point of exhaustion, she smiled as she spoke to Brenee’. And, once she got Brenee’s seat adjusted and she made sure that her seatbelt was properly in place, she paused before she started back to her side of the car.

“You alright, Mom” Brenee asked?

“I’m fine baby.” Shyanne said as she began to shut Brenee’s door. You close your eyes, baby. We’ll be home in just a few minutes.

Shyanne nearly  cried as she made her way back to her side of the car because her feet were so tender and painful. Walking all day in heels was killing her feet and her knees.  But, she decided to grin and bear it, just as she was doing with the pain in her heart that her failing marriage to Michael was causing her.

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Brenee was well asleep when Trey showed up at their front door. He was alone. And, Michael was nowhere in sight. He walked past her briskly and headed straight for the bathroom and closed the door.

Shyanne walked to the front door and opened it looking for Michael. His car wasn’t in the circle drive.

“Yes indeed,” she said to herself. Then she went back to the bathroom door and began to question Trey.

“Trey,” she said as she knocked on the door. “Where’s your dad? He brought you home, right?”

Shyanne was thinking that Michael had just dropped Trey off, left again and would be back in just a few minutes.

She could hear the shower running as she knocked a second time on the door.

“Trey, she said again. Where is your dad” she asked more sternly.

“Mom, I don’t know where my dad is. Uncle Tony brought me home. May I have my privacy please mom?

“Privacy? Well, okay she thought. My son is growing up. He wants privacy in the bathroom.”

Then her thoughts quickly turned to Tony? What the heck did Trey just say? Did he say that Tony brought him home? Did I not tell Michael that I wanted *him* to bring Trey home, himself? And, he didn’t even call me to let me know that he had passed my child off on the likes of Tony!”

Shyanne stood outside of the bathroom door as she listened to the shower water running.

“Mom. Did you hear me,” Trey asked?

“Yes, son. I heard you. Get your shower and get ready for bed. Okay?”

“Uh, huh” he answered.

Shyanne was livid that Michael had totally disregarded her request that he bring Trey home. She was even angrier that he had allowed Tony to bring Trey home. Too angry to go to bed, she walked upstairs to her office and opened her work emails.

Suddenly, her rage rose up in her and she grabbed for her phone. She was too angry and frustrated to speak to Michael right then. So, she rang Tony’s phone.

“Hello,” Tony answered.

“Why did you bring Trey home,” she asked without saying hello? You heard me tell Michael that I wanted him to bring Trey home to our house. Not you. How did you get in the middle of this?”

“Hey wait a minute, Shyanne. You need to talk with Michael about that. He asked me to bring Trey home. Said he had something to do. That’s all I know.”

Shyanne let the line go dead. And then she hung up without saying goodbye.

As she fell back in her seat, she could still hear the shower running downstairs.

“Why is that water still running,” she thought? Did Trey fall asleep in the shower?”

She walked downstairs and heard Trey turning the shower off.

“Trey, you okay? You’ve been in the shower for over a half hour. You know that?”

“I’m okay, Mom. I’ll be right out.”

Ever since Trey was a young boy, he was a stickler for being clean, well groomed and required a fresh haircut every week. And Shyanne had encouraged it. But, it seemed a bit strange to her that he had showered so long.

“Trey, I’m gonna give you a new name. Mr. Clean. That’s what I’m gonna call you,” she smiled as she spoke.

Trey didn’t answer.

“I’m hot and sweaty too, Trey,” she continued.. It’s been a long day. I’m gonna shower and go to bed too. Goodnight, son.”

Again she noticed that Trey didn’t answer her.

“That boy is exhausted, she thought.  Michael could have brought him straight home. So inconsiderate.”

“Rest well, Trey. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Okay Mom,” he answered her this time.

Shyanne turned and walked toward her bedroom, feet hurting and worn from the long day and thankful that at least Trey and Brenee had both gotten home safely. Exasperated, she exhaled deeply and  thought to herself.

“Where in the world is Michael?”

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As she approached the South Carolina- Georgia border, Shyanne sat upright and squirmed in the driver’s seat to help herself to stay awake, she remembered that night vividly.

She remembered that she had grown tired of repeatedly asking herself the “Where is Michael” question. But she wouldn’t ask Michael that question that night. Her momma had  always told her,

“Don’t waste time asking no man any questions because all he was gonna do was to lie.”

So, she wouldn’t. She just wouldn’t. Because she was already sure that she knew the answer. And the confirmation would be just too much for her.

Brenee’ turned and looked at her.

“Mom. I need to talk to you about something. About Trey.”

Shyanne tilted her head toward Brenee’ as if to listen more closely.

“Okay, baby. What about Trey’?”

“Mom, you might not believe me,” she started. “But Tre’. He hurt me when I was younger.”

“What do you mean he hurt you, Brenee’?”

Shyanne spoke softly as she turned the car radio down.

Brenee put her head in her chest and grew very quiet.

“Brenee’ baby. Tell me. What do you mean that Trey hurt you? You know I’ll get his butt, right?”

Shyanne smiled as she spoke.

But Brenee didn't smile back. She looked out the front window of the car and answered.

“Mom. That therapist you’ve been sending me to. She told me to get as far away from you as possible when I get eighteen.”

“What? Why would she say that, Brenee’? What’s going on?”

Shyanne turned her glance, first toward Brenee’ and then to the road ahead. And, again toward Brenee’.

“Sweet baby. Please tell me what you have to tell me. It’s okay, honey. Trust me.”

“Mom. Tre’ made me have oral sex on him. And he sodomized me too.”

Brenee’ spoke without stopping to breathe.

Shyanne let those words fill her head as she tried to keep her focus on the road. She didn’t want to alarm Brenee’ with her response. So she took her time in replying.

“You don’t have to believe me if you don’t want to, Mom.”

“Brenee’,” Shyanne said softly. Of course, I believe you. I believe you to the moon and back. I believe you into infinity. And, I’m beyond sorry that this happened to you. When did this happen? Where?”

Question after question flooded Shyanne’s head. She decided to pull over to talk to Brenee’.

“Brenee’, she began as she put the car in park. I am so sorry that this happened. And I do absolutely believe you.  This happens in way too many families.  And I’m sorry that this has happened in ours. I don’t know what to say.  But I’ll tell you this. I promise you that I’m gonna drill down when I see Tre’ and find out how this happened.  I need to know.”

Brenee’ looked over at Shyanne and began to cry.

“It’s okay, my baby.  I love you so much. You’re my baby girl. I love you Brenee’,” she said as she hugged Brenee’ and rocked her back and forth. “Oh my God. Oh my God,” she said over and over.

Brenee’ cried all the harder.

“We’re okay, baby. We’re okay.”

Shyanne hugged Brenee’ all the tighter and rubbed her wavy black hair. She grabbed a napkin from the stack laying atop of her coin holder.

“Here baby,” Shyanne whispered as she gently wiped Brenee’s eyes.

“Mom, I didn’t know how to tell you. I was so scared. Trey said that he would kill you and me if I told anybody. And…”

Shyanne listened intently as she continued to hug and rock Brenee.

“It’s okay, baby. What else happened?”

“Well, I was just scared that’s all.”

“Of course, you were scared. I’d be scared too! That’s scary. When did this start, Brenee’ Where were you when this happened?”

Shyanne was trying to determine if this had happened while she was away.

Brenee’ pulled away from Shyanne and sat upright in her seat. She placed the cottony napkin against her eyes and then her cheeks, trying to slow her tears from flowing down her warm brown face.

Shyanne’s mind was racing from one thought to the other.  She tried to settle her mind and to focus on her baby girl Brenee’ who was sitting next to her crying and agonizing with profound sadness. Shyanne was fighting back her own tears as she searched for the words to say to Brenee’.

“Brenee’, come here baby” she said as she again reached over and drew Brenee near her. She kissed her forehead and continued to rock her.

“Look, I have no words that can take this horror away.  Just know that I’m mad as hell about it. But we still have to go and get Trey out of New Orleans. And we still have to all stay together at the VA once we get there. This just sucks. Oh my, baby. This just sucks. This just sucks.”

Brenee’ whispered, “It’s okay, Mom. I understand. I don’t want to see Trey. He makes me sick.”

“And I don’t want you to see him either.  But I don’t know of anyone that you can stay with while we’re there. Most everyone has left town, you know? But I’ll try. Okay?  And if we can’t work out somewhere else for us to stay, we’ll stay together, and I’ll keep Trey away from you. That might be the best I can do until this storm is over and we get back home.”

“Okay, Mom. I understand.”

Brenee’ cried softly as she hugged Shyanne tightly.

“I hated to tell you about this, Mom….”

“No. I’m glad that you told me. I wish I had known about this earlier. Does your Dad know about this?”

“No, I never told him. I never told anyone except that therapist that you’ve been sending me to.”

“Well, even though she doesn’t seem to think well of me, I’ll keep taking you to her office if you like.  It’s your decision. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Shyanne turned back toward the steering wheel and restarted the car. She leaned over and reached behind Brenee’s seat and grabbed a soft, blue throw.

“Her. Put this over yourself. Close your eyes and rest now.  We’ll be in New Orleans in a few hours.”

Exhaling softly a long deep breath, Shyanne tried to figure out what her next steps would be. It was enough to be driving into a hurricane. She had to get Trey out of New Orleans. She had to find safety in New Orleans for herself, Trey and Brenee’ until she could.  And, now this. Now she has to confront her son rather than embrace and protect him.

“How can I do this,” Shyanne thought. I’ve spent my life protecting Trey. How and I am going to speak to him about this. I know it’s true.”

Shyanne began to cry softly. Tears flooded her eyes and she blinked rapidly to be able to see the road. She quickly dried her eyes with her sleeve and looked over at Brenee’ who was sleeping soundly. Her CD case was beside her. Without looking, she grabbed a disc and slid it into the player on her dimly lit dashboard. She turned the volume down so that she wouldn’t wake Brenee’.

“Okay, she thought. Here’s what I’m gonna do.  When I get to the city, I’m gonna try and reach Dr. Arshad. He’ll have some ideas. No. I’ll call Dr. Goldin. He knows Brenee’ and I well. And, he’s in VA,” Shyanne said out loud almost at a whisper. So, his office should be open.”

She opened the storage unit in the console between her and Brenee’ and grabbed her phone. She scrolled her contacts until she found Dr. Goldin’s number. She called him, but it rang several times before his voicemail picked up.

Shyanne fought back tears as she left a voicemail for Dr. Goldin, providing all the necessary information, and asking him to return her call. She was confident that he would. And, just knowing that she had reached out to Dr. Goldin helped her somewhat to  relax.

She was so anxious ever since Brenee found the courage to tell her what Trey had done to her that she had thought about taking a Klonopin just to try to relax.

“A half a tablet won’t hurt,” she thought. “I can still drive safely’

She looked away from the road to check on Brenee who had her eyes closed and her head against her window.  Then she quickly focused back to the road ahead of her.

“It’s not worth the risk,” she whispered under her breath.

She found the smooth jazz station on her car radio, leaned back into her seat and let the soft music fill her head as she drove.

“How in the world did I miss all of this,” Shyanne asked herself?. “Was it my constant travel for work?

 “I knew I couldn’t trust Michael with our kids after he left Brenee’ at just three years old home alone with Trey who was only eight years old for Christ’s sake.”

What an idiot move, Shyanne” she thought to herself. You should have left him then. But noooo. You stayed. Kept giving him chance after chance to keep our family together. Now don’t you feel stupid, Shyanne.  All of that stress, strain and self-sacrifice in the name of *family,* and you still have no family. And, your kids have been brutalized in the process!. Damn! Just damn!”

When she heard herself thinking of family, she briefly thought back to her own original family in Chicago. She remembered the night that that family had been forever destroyed.

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She had just gone to bed after a night of partying to celebrate finishing her winter finals when her phone started ringing. It rang several times before it woke her up entirely and she turned over to look at the clock on her nightstand. The flashing, multi-colored Christmas lights on the tree in her bedroom corner helped her to read the clock’s face.

“What? Four o’clock in the morning? Who the heck is this?”

She reached over to answer her phone.

“Hello.”

“Hello Shyanne. This is your mama. I need you to come home.”

“Come home? I’m not coming home, Mama. Remember? I’m staying on campus for the holidays.”

“Shyanne, listen to me. I need you to come home. Raymond is dead. Your brother Devon shot him. Raymond is dead. And Devon is in jail. And I need you to come home as soon as possible. Who can bring you home?”

“Wait a minute. Who told you that? Who? Have you seen a body? Why are you telling me this? Don’t tell me this until you’ve seen a body!”

Shyanne was frantic and in total shock at this news.  Although she remembered all of the unending disputes and arguments between her brothers and their father, she still couldn’t fathom in her wildest dreams what her mama was telling her that morning. She began to sob uncontrollably as she listened to her mama speak.

“Shyanne, calm yourself down. I have a lot to do now. Please come home as soon as you can. I need you here”

Shyanne hung up the phone without even answering.

She gripped the steering wheel tightly at the thought of that night and as she pondered  how she had gotten to this place, bringing Trey and Brenee with her. A single, warm tear rolled down her face as she wondered...

“How could this have happened?  What world have I been in? How could I have missed this? And, where was Michael when this was happening?

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As she refocused on the road, she thought,

“I bet that was the first time that Tony attacked my son. Trey hadn’t been taking any half-hour showers before that night that Tony brought him home from his game. Why didn’t I press Trey on that? Why didn’t I wait outside the bathroom door and talk with him about it?  Maybe if I had, II could have stopped this mess in its tracks.”

“Oh, but you were too busy fighting with Tony and trying to find Michael that you didn’t even notice the change in Trey’s behavior. You were so angry at the two of them that you completely missed that your own son had been hurt,” she thought.

Tears flooded her eyes so completely that they obscured her ability to see the road. She began to blink rapidly and to breathe deeply in and out through her mouth because she didn’t want to disturb Brenee with her tears.  She ached inside at the thought of Brenee being hurt and now Trey too.

And she was so tired from the long drive that another driver laid on his horn to alert her that she was drifting over into his lane. She jerked the steering wheel back to the right just in time to avoid a collision. The sudden movement  jarred Brenee from side to side.

Shyanne reached over to Brenee with her right arm to buffer her from hitting the dashboard of the car. Brenee opened her eyes slightly and then dozed back off to sleep.

A glimmer of sunlight began to peek through the mostly cloud filled sky, Shyanne lowered her window to check the temperature.  The warm mist fell on her arm that she extended out of the car. The sound of the wind made Brenee start to stir. She stretched as she sat up in her seat looking around.

“Where are we, Mom?”

“We’re still in Alabama. “

Brenee looked out her window and up at the sky.

“At least we’re getting some sunlight.. That’s a good sign huh, Mom?”

“It is. It’s a good sign that we’re gonna be able to get in and out and bring Trey with us. But the sun always shines until right before the storm nears dry land though.

It’s almost four. We should be there by nine, if the weather stays clear. Will you grab a bottle of water for me? There’s one for you too if you’d like.

Brenee’ reached back and got a bottle for each of them and passed one to Shyanne.

“Thanks, babe. Maybe, just maybe we can stop somewhere and find food,” Shyanne answered as she looked on either side of the interstate seeing no signs of life. We’ve still got fruit and chips back there. Right?

“I think so. I didn’t really look. I was hoping we could stop somewhere and eat some real food.”

“Well, I think we missed that opportunity when we left Atlanta. All of the rest stops I had planned look like a ghost town now.  And the storm hasn’t even hit yet. But don’t worry. We’ll find something to eat, even if we have to wait until we reach New Orleans. “

I don’t think there’s anything open there, Mom. They’ve all but closed the East, and the Plaza too. I talked to my Aunt Editn.”

“Your Aunt Edith? When was that,” Shyanne tried to ask calmly?

“I called her when you first said that we were going to New Orleans. She said that she and Uncle Tony were planning a hurricane party.”

“Sounds like some stupidness they would engage in, “ Shyanne thought to herself.

“Really? Well, we won’t be there long enough to attend,” Shyanne laughed. In fact, I doubt we’ll have time to even speak to them by phone. We’re gonna be in and out as soon as possible.”

She looked over at Brenee who was rummaging through her bag for her headphones.

“Well anyway, let’s just keep a look out for somewhere to eat. And if we don’t see anything out here on the road, we can always drive down Chef Highway into the city. We might find something on the way. But what made you call your Aunt Edith anyway, Shyanne asked nonchalantly?”

“Mom, I heard on the news before we left Virginia that the mayor had asked folks to evacuate. So, I called my Aunt Edith to see how they were doing is all.”

“I wish the mayor good luck with that.  Those folks aren’t leaving New Orleans. They are the original nonbelievers.” Shyanne laughed as she spoke.

Brenee squirmed in her seat as she looked out of her window, headphones in hand.

“Mom, I really need to go,” she said, changing the subject.

Shyanne looked over at Brenee’ shaking her head in agreement.

“Me too. We’ll get off here at the next exit.. We can stop at that Popeyes. A hot breakfast biscuit wouldn’t be bad, huh?”

The parking lot only had one car on it when Shyanne pulled in.

“Let’s go, baby. This is incredible, huh?. Usually the line is around the block at a Popeyes,” Shyanne said as she grabbed her purse and headed toward the door.

Inside was equally as empty. No patrons. Just two people behind the counter and one cook.

“Welcome to Popeyes. What can we get for you ladies,” the gentleman behind the counter asked?

“Brenee’, you go ahead and run to the restroom,” Shyanne said softly. “I’ll grab our food to go and wait for you out here. Okay?”

“Okay, Mom.” Brenee’ was rushing halfway down the hall speaking to Shyanne over her shoulder.

“Looks pretty desolate in here,” Shyanne commented. How long has it been this way?”

“The traffic slowed last night. Our mayor has issued an evacuation order. You’d better get off the interstate while you can. We’re closing at 12 noon today. I don’t know why we had to open at all. My family has already left for Baton Rouge. I’m gonna ride the storm out at my house. I live just around the corner.”

“Oh, I see,” Shyanne answered. “Well, we’re headed to New Orleans. Came to get my son and go. Can I get some food, please?”

“New Orleans?! You know the hurricane is gonna hit New Orleans too, right?

“Yes I know,” Shyanne answered. “That’s why I wanna get some food and go. I’ve gotta get my son outta there, now. Can you help with the food part?

“Well, we only have a few breakfast biscuits and coffee. Will that do?”

“Sold! You wouldn’t have any orange juice, would you?” Shyanne asked.

“Maybe. I’ll go look. But I’m not promising,” he said as he headed to the back of the kitchen.

Shyanne could hear the radio blurring from the cook’s area.

“From the Mayor’s Office comes the following emergency announcement. Hurricane Katrina is expected to make landfall along the Mississippi Gulf Coast to include the City of New Orleans by Monday night, August 28th. Beginning at seven o’clock Sunday night the City of New Orleans and its surrounding areas are under a mandatory evacuation. If you plan to leave the city, please do so as soon as is possible. The airport and all ground transportation will close on Sunday night  at six o’clock. All bridges and roadways in and out of the city will be shut down as well at six o’clock Sunday night as well.”

“If you don’t feel safe in your home and cannot leave the city, please make your way to the Louisiana Superdome or to the Convention Center. Both will be opened on a first come, first served basis beginning at twelve noon today. No cots, bedding, food or supplies will be provided.  No medical staff will be present. Please see to it that you bring all of your personal necessities to either one of these facilities with you.”

“Man, a mandatory evacuation” the counter worker asked as he walked back to the counter with four containers of boxed orange juice?

“You still going down there, '' he asked as he  placed them on the counter?”

“Yes I am. How much for the food,” Shyanne said hurriedly holding her debit card in her hand?”

The register read $16.85.

“Hey, please add a large coffee. And my daughter will pay you,” she said as Brenee’ joined her at the counter.

“Brenee’, take my card and pay the man, please. And wait for me in the dining area. Don’t go out to the car, okay?”

“Okay, Mom.”

“Well young lady, your total is $16.85.”

Brenee’ paid for their food and grabbed the bag.

“Thank you, sir,” she said as she found her seat in the lobby.

“Got everything,” Shyanne asked as she approached Brenee’?

Brenee’ nodded, “yes” as she turned toward Shyanne and handed her a coffee.

“Great. Let’s go, baby. I overheard an updated weather report on the radio while you were in the restroom. The roads are gonna close Sunday night at six o’clock, if not before. So, we’re gonna shake, rattle and roll and get your brother out of there. We’ll have to find another route home too.”

The sky grew darker as Shyanne and Brenee approached their car. Quickly they got in and Brenee’ began passing out the food.

“Can we eat right here, Mom? I’m hungry.”

“Go ahead, baby. It looks pretty safe around here. Looks pretty dead really. You eat and I’m gonna call… Trey.”

Her voice trailed away as it grew softer. She hadn’t mentioned Trey since Brenee’ told her about his abuse a few hours earlier.

Brenee’ took a huge bite out of her breakfast sandwich and began to chew slowly at the mention of his name.

“Brenee’, we’re gonna get through this. I promise. I’m gonna call Trey now and see where everybody is. I wanna make sure that he made it to the VA with your dad. You go ahead and eat now.

Shyanne rang Trey’s phone and surprisingly he answered on the first ring.

“Hel-low,” he answered. Where you at, Mom?”

“I’m on my way to you. Look, she said changing subjects. When I call you back in a few hours, I’m gonna need you to go downstairs to the first floor. I’m having food delivered to you. What color is your shirt? I’ll have the delivery man looking out for you.”

“What delivery man, Mom? Nobody is delivering food now. We’re about to be hit by a hurricane,” Trey answered hurriedly.

“Oh, you’d be surprised. I know a guy…”

“You know a guy. Is this a joke, Mom?”

“No joke. No again. What color is your shirt?”

“Light blue. I’m wearing a light blue shirt with navy jeans.”

“Okay. I’ll tell you when to come down, okay?  And, keep your phone on for God’s sake!”

“Okay, Mom. When do you think you’ll be here?. The mayor has ordered a mandatory shutdown.”

“For Sunday night at six o’clock. I heard about it already. So no worries there. I’ll be home… I mean there in a few more hours.”

She could believe that she slipped and called New Orleans *home*. I’ll be there way before then. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Bye now.”

Brenee’ had stopped eating and was looking at Shyanne in dismay.

“Mom, what delivery man? Why did you tell Trey that you were sending a delivery man.”

“I fibbed a little bit, baby. I just wanted to know where Trey is and to get him to come downstairs. I might need him to get us into the building. I understand it’s family of patients and staff only that are allowed in.”

“Well, I’m family.”

“But, I’m not. Not anymore. So, I might have to tell another little lie to get us in. That’s why I need Trey down there when we arrive. And I don’t want your dad to know anything about it. He might let you in and keep me out in the middle of an impending storm. I’m not giving him that chance. I just wanna get Trey and leave is all.”

Brenee’ spoke volumes in her continued silence. Then she spoke.

“Mom, about last night…”

“Yes, baby. About last night.”

“I’ve never talked to Trey about this since it stopped.”

“And when did it stop, Baby? How old were you when it stopped,” Shyanne said softly?”

Brenee’ looked up at the roof of the car as if to recollect what had happened to her.

“I must have been about ten. Trey was in high school. I guess it stopped because he started dating that girl Sherri.”

“Oh, I see. Well, where did all of this happen? Where were you, baby?”

“It happened in lots of places. It happened at Grandma’s house, at Auntee Mattie’s house. I don’t remember all the places, Mom. I just know that it happened!”

Shyanne could see that Brenee’ was growing upset with her questioning. So, she tried to change the subject as she thought about what Brenee had just told her.

“How could this happen at their grandma’s house or Mattie’s.  I trusted them with my kids and this is what happens? I hate these people,” she thought.

“Okay, Brenee’. We’ll talk about this later but only if you want to. I’m here to listen to anything that you want to tell me, good or bad, happy, sad or glad, I’m here for you. Okay, baby. Anytime. Anywhere.

“Okay, Mom.”

“I don’t know how this child is going to manage seeing Trey. I’ll just have to keep her close to me the whole time we’re here,” she thought. And then that demon Tony is still in New Orleans too! Help us both, Jesus.”

“Where are we going to sleep, Mom?”

“On a gurney probably. When I was pregnant with Trey, big pregnant I might add, Hurricane Juan was threatening the city. It was nothing like this though. Nobody was packing up or leaving town. Folks started frying catfish, shrimp and oysters and making Gumbo.  That was my first introduction to a “hurricane party.” These storms come every year at this time. So, folks down there are used to them. And, they pay them no mind.”

What? Pay them no mind?”

“That’s right. But I was married to your dad when Juan was approaching. So, I insisted that we evacuate.  He told me that he couldn’t because, just like now, he was on the Hurricane Preparedness Team at the medical center. So, he couldn’t leave town. He had to stay here.”

“That’s crazy.”

“I know right? But, here’s the crazy part. His boss wanted me to climb my nine-month pregnant self up on a gurney to sleep. I told her and your dad that was not gonna happen. Next thing I know, we were all moved into a high-rise hotel adjacent to the medical center full of food, drinks and with air conditioning and color TV!”

“Mom, you’re a mess.”

“No, I’m not. Sometimes you just have to stand your ground, baby. Remember that.”

Looking at Brenee’s downward stare, Shyanne was immediately saddened that she had said those last few words to Brenee’. She didn’t want to make Brenee’ feel that she was in any way responsible for the abuse she had suffered at the hands of Trey during her childhood. So, she quickly changed the conversation back to their sleeping arrangements.

“Anyway, we might be sleeping on a gurney if we can’t get out of there tonight. We’ll see. And, I brought sleeping bags for you and me. Guess my Girl Scout Leader training is kicking in.”

Brenee’ smiled at hearing that.

“What? I was a great Girl Scout Leader, and a great Cookie Mom too, don’t you think?”

After a few seconds, they both laughed. And, Shyanne leaned toward Brenee’ and hugged her gently.

“Just so you know,” she said holding Brenee’s face in her hands, “I plan to put the sleeping bags on top of the gurneys. We won’t by any means be sleeping on the floor.”

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“We’re here baby,” Shyanne said as she circled the parking structure looking for an empty spot.

She looked over at Brenee’ and winked. Then she looked at her watch and realized that she had just five minutes to get inside to meet Tre’.

“I’m going to park as close to the top as possible. The ground floor might flood. You okay?”

“I’m fine, Mom” Brenee’ answered as she unbuckled her seat belt and climbed over her seat and began gathering her belongings.

“I have my carry-all in the trunk,” Shyanne offered. “Just let me park and we’ll get everything together. I bet we can make it all in one trip.”

“Are we bringing the food and drinks up?”

“Yea, I guess so. I have my rolling cooler bag too. And we don’t have a lot of clothes. So, we should be in good shape.”

Shyanne pulled into a parking spot on her left, steps away from the elevator.

“Yay! This is a great spot,” she nearly sang as she spoke. “Favor isn’t fair,” she said smiling and moving her head from right and left as she turned off the car.

“Just take what you can, maybe the rolling cooler and the sleeping bags. But don’t hurt yourself. I’ll carry everything else.”

“Mom, does my dad know that we’re coming?”

“No, I don’t think I mentioned that to him,” Shyanne answered as she pulled her purse and an overnight bag out of the car. I know he’ll be so glad to see you though.

When they stepped onto the elevator, Shyanne pushed the doors back and stuck out her head.

“We’re on twelve, Brenee’. Remember that. We’re on floor twelve.”

“Hold on, Mom.”

Brenee’ pulled her phone out of her bag and stepped out of the elevator to take a picture of the column with the number twelve posted on it.

Shyanne laughed and patted Brenee’ on the back as she stepped back onto the elevator.

“I appreciate you baby,” Shyanne said.

She rubbed Brenee’s back slowly as they rode down to the third floor.

“Let’s get off here and find your dad,” Shyanne directed as the elevator doors opened. “He’ll know where we can put our things. Then I will run downstairs for a quick minute. Okay. That’ll give you some time to spend a private moment with your dad. How does that sound?”

“Okay, mom.”

“You brought some books to read. Right?”

“Yes, I brought books.”

“Well, let your dad help you to get settled in and then maybe try to relax with a good book. Okay? I’ll be right back.”

“Okay, Mom. Okay,” Brenee’ answered as they turned the corner into the pharmacy department.

Brenee’ saw Michael walking toward her.

“Dad!” Shyanne slowed her pace and allowed Brenee’ to reach Michael ahead of her.

“Brenee’,” Michael uttered. He reached out toward her and drew her unto himself.

“What are you doing here,” he asked staring  at Shyanne. “You guys know a storm is coming, right? What are you doing here?”

“Hi, Michael,” Shyanne said, purposefully not answering any of his questions. “Where is Trey? He’s here with you, right?”

“You know he’s here, Shyanne. He told me that he spoke to you last night.”

“Well, yes. I don’t see him. So, I was just making sure. So, where is he?”

“He said that he needed to run down to the first floor. Why I don’t know. But, that’s what he said.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll go down and greet him.  He can help me to bring my bags in.”

“Bags,” Michael asked, looking around at the bags and coolers on both Shyanne and Brenee’s shoulders.

With a shocked look on his face he rubbed his brow as if he had a headache and walked around in a circle.

“How many bags do you have? How long will you be here? Where do you plan to stay?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Shyanne answered. “I’ve got this. Can you hold Brenee’ down and help her to get settled? I’ll be right back.”

She walked away before he could reply.

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Shyanne made her way to a stairwell and walked down to meet Trey. She opened the door on the first floor to enter the main entrance of the hospital. Trey was standing in the doorway with his back to her. She walked up behind him and tapped him on his shoulder.

She smiled widely when Trey turned around, trying not to let on that anything was wrong.

“Mom, I knew it was you. I knew no “delivery man” was coming. I’m so glad to see you!”

He grabbed Shyanne and rocked her from side to side. Shyanne pulled back and looked him up and down.

“!Glad to see me? Yea, right. You didn’t even want me to come! Anyway....You’ve been eating well, big fella” she said as she lightly tapped his stomach.

Trey laughed and leaned forward to stop her from touching his stomach.

“Mom, come on now. Stop.”

He grabbed Shyanne again and pulled her close to him.

Shyanne stood on her tiptoes and kissed him on his cheek.

“Brenee’ and I just got here. She’s upstairs with your dad. How’s that going for you, being here with you dad, I mean?”

Shyanne noticed that Trey paused at the mention of Brenee’s name. Then he answered.

“It’s cool. He’s been giving our food away to the ladies around here. And Uncle Tony is here too. So…”

“Oh, joy” Shyanne replied. Well maybe we won’t be here too long. Maybe we can get outta here before nightfall with the interstates closing. All I need is a power nap.”

“You know I know, Mom.  I’ve been keeping up with the news too.”

“So besides the food situation, how are things going? How are you?”

“I’m fine. School and everything was going just great until this happened.”

“Yay. School will be okay. Let’s just get through this storm. Right?”

“Right. I could’ve stayed at my apartment though, Mom. I think you overreacted a bit. And your driving down here with Brenee’ is way over the top.”

“You think,” Shyanne asked? “Well, I don’t think so. The time will come when you’ll be glad that I came for you. I’m glad already. Look, I let a couple of things in my car. Can you go up with me to get them?”

“Sure, Mom. Let’s take the steps.”

Shyanne laughed.

“You’ve got jokes, son. Let’s do this. We’ll ride up and walk down. I’m parked on the twelfth floor.’

“Okay. Cool.”

Shyanne’s phone began to ring.  Dr. Goldin’s name and phone number displayed on her caller ID.

“Trey. One moment please. I need to take this call.”

“No problem, Mom. I’m going up to the roof to smoke a Black and Mild. I’ll meet you on the twelfth floor when I’m done. Okay.”

Shyanne held up one finger toward Trey and nodded yes as she turned and walked away from him. She began whispering in the phone.

“Shyanne Morrell,” she answered.

“Shyanne, this is Dr. Goldin. You left a message on my office voicemail that you wanted me to call you. How may I help?”

“Oh, Dr. Goldin. Thanks so much for calling me back.  I have a rather serious matter that’s come up with my kids. And, I was hoping that you could provide me with some idea as to how to manage this until I can get back to Virginia and into your office.”

“I see. Where are you, Shyanne?”

“I’m in New Orleans.”

“New Orleans. What’s going on? Why are you there? The weather is really bad there from what I can see on the news. A hurricane is forming in the Gulf. Right?”

“Yes, Dr. Goldin. That’s right. But, you see it’s about my kids. My son Trey and my daughter Brenee’. Well you see, Brenee’ and I drove down here last night. And while I was driving… well, she told me that her brother Trey had forced her to have sex with her for years while they were children.”

Shyanne was steely in her expression. It was the only way that she could get the words out.

“Brenee’ she continued, said that Trey sodomized her and made her perform oral sex on him as far back as when she was just five years old. Trey would have been about ten. And…”

“Shyanne, Dr. Goldin interrupted. I understand that this is highly distressing.  Are you in a safe place?”

“Yes. And, my kids are both with me.”

“Do you have all of your meds with you?”

“Yes, doctor. I don’t leave home without them.”

Shyanne gave a brief chuckle at her own words. Dr. Goldin listened quietly.

“Well, those are the first two most important things. Now, you know we can’t fix this over the phone in one single phone call. You know that, right?”

“Right,” Shyanne agreed.

“You’ll have to come into my office when you’re back in Virginia. But as for right now, I can tell you this. Most children who sexually assault other children have usually been sexually assaulted themselves.

Shyanne let those words reverberate in her head.

“Who would do such a thing to Trey.  Who would have access to him like that? Who would hurt my child,” she asked herself?

“Tony,” she screamed inside herself.

“That demon Tony raped my child! It was Tony. The cowardly demon.  I’m more woman than he is man. So, that simpleton demon attacked my child. Too weak to step to me. So, he attacked my little boy! Oh my God…”

Shyanne began to cry into the phone.

“Shyanne. Shyanne,” Dr. Goldin said. “I need you to collect yourself.  Again, I know this is distressing…”

Shyanne listened intently and she calmed herself down.

“Shyanne, are you hearing me?”

“Yes, Doctor Goldin. I hear you,” she said through her sniffles and tears.

“Are you going to be able to remain calm and get back here safely? You said that you have your meds with you. I would like you to take your medication as I prescribed it. This is no time to make any changes.  Can you do that?”

“Yes, doctor. I can and I will. Just when I thought that I was getting my life back together after my horrific divorce. Now this. This is terrible. Just terrible.”

“Shyanne, things happen in families. I know this might not bring you solace right now. But know that you’re not alone. Our goal now is to just keep you calm and to get you back here to Virginia safely.”

“Well Dr. Goldin, Trey and Brenee’ are both here with me. Maybe Trey could privately admit his wrongdoing to Brenee’ and beg her pardon. You know, say how sorry he is.”

“Shyanne. Trey cannot even face what has happened to him, much less admit what he did to Brenee’. Do you understand?”

“Yes, doctor I understand. This is complicated. And, a mere “I’m sorry” won’t do.”

“That’s correct. Not today anyway. This is going to take time to process and heal. But we’ll get there. It’s going to take time though. Maybe a lot of time. But we’ll get there. Okay? One step at a time.”

“And don’t try to fix anything between Brenee’ and Trey right now,” he continued. “You’re not a trained therapist. You’re their mother, both of their mothers.  That said, you are way too emotionally involved to even broach this subject with them. Leave that alone until you get back here, and you and I have had a chance to talk. Okay? And remember. This is old news that you’re just finding out about today. So, we’re not going to fix this today.  The goal today is to remain as calm as is possible and to get you and your kids back here safely. Agreed?”

“Agreed, Doctor Goldin.”

“Now, please call me if I can help you further at all. Or, if you feel like you need immediate care, Shyanne, don’t hesitate to go to your nearest emergency room. That’s what they’re there for.”

“Okay. Thanks for returning my call, Doctor Goldin.  I’ll reach out when I’m back in Virginia. Have a good day.”

“You too, Shyanne. Stay safe. Be well.”

Shyanne looked at the screen of her phone as she disconnected the call.

“So, I can’t even approach Trey about this now, she thought. He can’t handle it at all. I might cause more harm than good trying to force him to talk to me about this now. So, I’d best just keep it happy. Make nice-nice. Continue to keep the peace, like always. Okay. But, what will I tell Brenee’?”

“I can’t think about all of this right now,” she said out loud as she made her way to the elevator to meet Trey. When the elevator doors opened, it was completely full. She waited for a second elevator, but it was full too. So, she decided to take a back stairwell known only to staff and well-connected sales representatives, like herself.

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The rusty, old door to the stairwell was hard to open. Shyanne used all of her strength to force it open.

“Ooowee, it’s musty in here, she said to herself as she began to climb the cement stairs.

She could smell a mixture of urine and cigarette smoke.

“If those elevators hadn’t been full,” she thought. I wouldn’t mind walking down. But climbing to the top floor is gonna kill me.”

She struggled with every step, stopping to catch her breath at each landing. Finally, she made it to the twelfth floor and opened the door to a sea of parked cars. She saw Trey walking around with his black and cigarette between his lips.

“Trey, “Shyanne called out and waved. “Over here.”

Trey waved back and made his way to join her.

“I’m parked by the elevator.”

“Why didn’t you take the elevator up, Mom?”

“The elevators were all full, “Shyanne answered as she tried to catch her breath. “I’ve gotta do better, son. That climb up nearly killed me.”

They both laughed.

“You’re doing fine, Mom,” Trey said as they walked over to her car. “I’ll grab the big stuff, Mom. You just carry what you can. Okay,” he said as Shyanne opened the liftback on her car.

“I didn’t bring a lot, Trey. I brought more food than anything. And that’s practically gone already. I’m hoping that we can get outta here tonight.”

“Tonight? I don’t think so, Mom. The storm is gonna hit within hours. We might be on lockdown for a few days. Maybe even a week.”

“Oh no, son. What’s keeping you here?”

“Well school for one. And, I do have an apartment here and a girlfriend too.”

“All of which can be replaced,” Shyanne said with one bag over her shoulder and one in her hand. “Besides, the weather is fine in Virginia Beach right about now.”

“They have hurricanes in Virginia too, Mom.”

“Yea, but not today. And, there are schools there and lots of females there too.”

Trey closed the doors to the car and began walking toward the elevator.

“So, Trey how are you doing, son?”

“I was doing fine until this storm came along.”

“Well, you know that hurricane season comes every year. So, it’s not like this is a surprise or anything. But I do realize that this is hugely different, she laughed.  And at least we are all together.”

Shyanne noticed that Trey was expressionless. She leaned forward to look into Trey’s eyes.

“What? You’re not happy that we’re all here together?”

“Oh, yea. Yea. I’m glad you’re here, Mom. I really am.,” he said as they stepped onto the elevator.

Shyanne remembered what Dr. Goldin had said about Trey and Brenee’, so she decided not to press Trey on it. She changed the subject instead.

“Trey, when we start going downstairs, I want you to start packing up your things. I’m gonna take a power nap for about an hour or so. And then we’re gonna head due North to Memphis, then head east toward Virginia from there.”

“Mom, I’m not planning on going anywhere. This thing will be over in a day or two. Then I’m going back to my apartment and back to my life,” he said matter-of-factly.

“Okay. But, consider this. What if this “thing” doesn’t blow over in a day or two? What if you can’t go back to your apartment or school. If you’re in Virginia with me, at least I can provide your food and shelter and maybe another car.”

“I have a car, Mom.”

“Yea. Where is it?”

“It’s parked at Auntee Mattie and Uncle Irvin’s house in Gentilly.”

“In Gentilly,” Shyanne repeated sarcastically?

“Yea. My Dad said that it would be best to leave it there since it floods so much near this hospital.”

“It floods in Gentilly too. That’s just blocks from Bayou St. John. Remember?”

“You’re right. You’re right. I hadn’t thought about that.”

“Well, your conniving dad thought of it, I’m so sure.  Anyway, let’s just say hypothetically that your car flooded, totaled out even.  It’ll be of no use to you right?”

“Right,” Trey answered.

“So back to my original plan. Let’s get the heck out of here in an hour or so. And, we can assess from Virginia what your next steps will be. Deal?”

“Well okay, I guess.”

Trey held the elevator door for Shyanne as she stepped off and headed to the pharmacy department.

“You know where you’re going, huh Mom?”

“Of course I know where I’m going. This hospital was one of my accounts for years before I ever met your dad. In fact, I met him here when I was calling on the Director of Pharmacy.  It was Dr. Chen at that time. I wonder if he’s still here. Anyway, if you know the way, you can walk ahead of me. My bags are slowing me down a bit.”

“Hold on. Let me take these pillows.”

“Thanks, son” Shyanne said as she passed them to Trey. “They’re not heavy. Just awkward is all.”

Trey again held the door to the pharmacy waiting room open for Shyanne. She walked in and saw Tony and his wife Edith sitting together in the corner with bags on either side of them and on the floor.

“Look at these two idiots,” Shyanne said. “Country as I don’t know what. All of those plastic bags with them. I can smell the red beans from over here.”

“Leave Uncle Tony alone, Mom. Don’t bother him.”

“Stockholm Syndrome!” That thought blared in Shyanne’s head.  “Defending his attacker. My child has Stockholm Syndrome.”

“Don’t call that demon, Uncle Tony. Don’t call him uncle at all! His behavior toward you has not been uncle-like,” Shyanne said angrily.

“Okay. But what are you talkin’ about, mom? Why are you so angry,” Trey asked curiously?

“Let’s put my things right here by the door. No, let’s put them over in the corner actually,” Shyanne said, ignoring Trey’s question. She was sorry that she had shown her rage toward Tony to Trey.

Trey followed Shyanne and placed her overnight back and belongings in the chairs farthest from the door.

“This way I can easily get out to the restroom if I need to.”

She turned around and saw Tony and Edith staring at her and Trey.

“Guess I’ll wave at them,” she said as she smiled and nodded hello to them.

“Just a minute,” she mouthed at them and raised her index finger to indicate she’d be right with them.

“Trey, I’m gonna go and find Brenee’. I left her with your dad. Maybe you can start gathering your things and bring them over here. I’ll be right back. And, if I find some hot food on the way, I’ll bring you a plate back. Okay?”

“Okay,” Trey said as he looked over at Tony.

Shyanne saw Trey looking over at Tony and tried not to shake her head or show any sign of emotion.

“Do what you will, Trey. But you don’t have to deal with those folks if you don’t want to. We’re out of here in just a few. I’ll be back…,” she said as she walked across the waiting room and up to the pharmacy window.

Everyone behind the counter was wearing scrub suits. A woman in a pink scrub turned around to attend to her.

“Karen.”

“Shyanne! What are you doing here? I saw Brenee’. But I haven’t had a chance to speak with her yet.”

“Oh, I see,” Shyanne said with restraint.

She had suspected for years that she and Michael were sleeping together. At minimum, she simply didn’t like the woman. She put that aside and focused on finding Brenee’.

“Well, can you buzz me in? I’d like to find her myself.”

Shyanne smiled as she spoke to camouflage her disdain for the woman.

“Sure. I saw her and Michael in the breakroom buying cold drinks a few minutes ago.”

“Thanks,” Shyanne said as Karen buzzed her in and she headed down the hall.

She turned the corner and saw Michael and Brenee with their backs to her piling jambalaya and fried chicken on their plates.

“I’m hungry,” Shyanne shared as she approached the buffet.

“The plates are over there Shyanne.” Michael spoke with his usual tone of irritation toward Shyanne.

“Thank you. Brenee’, I’m gonna eat a bit and then take a quick nap. We’re going to leave in about an hour if we can. If not, I brought our things in from the car so we can hunker down here until we can.”

“Nice plan, Shyanne. You drove here in the face of a hurricane, why? Trey needed his Mommy, did he?”

Shyanne blinked her eyes rapidly as she decided how to reply. And when she did, she spoke slowly.

“I’ve come to take Trey out of here. My good planning tells me that this entire city is gonna be underwater in a few hours. And I want me and mine out of here.”

“Trey is mine too, Shyanne. Or, did you forget that?”

“Forget. I wish I could forget. I wish it wasn’t true the way…”

“Mom!” Brenee’ shouted as her plated titled toward the floor.

“Whoa, baby” Michael said as he put his empty hand under her plate to keep it from falling to the floor.

He looked at Brenee’ whose eyes were beginning to well up with tears.

“I’m so sorry baby. You stay here and eat with your dad. I’m going back to the waiting area if you’re looking for me. Okay?”

Michael took Brenee’ by the elbow and led her to an empty table. He ignored Shyanne as he spoke to Brenee’.

“You want a cup of ice for your drink, baby?” He placed napkins and plasticware on the table for the two of them.

Shyanne took her food and exited the breakroom from the exit door that led to the main hall. She walked around the outside of the pharmacy with her food because she didn’t want to have to pass Karen again on her way out. Knowing every hallway, entryway and exit from the building was working to her advantage.

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Trey had his head back against the wall behind his chair and his eyes closed when Shyanne walked up with her hands full.

“Trey,” she said as she nudged his knee. “Trey!” she repeated.

“Um,” he hummed as he saw the food and sat up in his seat.

“I brought you some food.”

“Great. What about you? Where's your food.”

“I ate in the car. I’m okay. Is there any update on the weather?”

“Yes. Katrina is supposed to make landfall sometime on Sunday night or on Monday morning. So you, I mean we can stay overnight and get some sleep if you want, Mom. I can help you drive back too. But you should at least stretch out across one of these double seats and get as much rest as you can.”

Shyanne began putting her pillows and blankets across two chairs.

“Let’s think strategically here. If Katrina is like most storms, she’ll drop a lot of rain before the storm actually hits. So, I’m gonna get some sleep. Did you bring your things over here like I asked?  I’ll keep my bags zipped. And at sunrise you, Brenee and I will load up and head out, hopefully before the rain. Sound like a plan,” Shyanne asked as she stretched out on her makeshift bed?”

“Okay, Mom. That’s what we’ll do.”

“And, if you see Brenee’ while I’m asleep, ask her to bring all of her bags over here too. Thanks.”

Shyanne could see Tony and Edith across the room as she shut her eyes slightly.

“I’m gonna find a way to confront that demon right here and right now,” she whispered to herself with her blanket partially covering her mouth.

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The streetlights were shining dimly through the window blinds. Trey was not next to her. Neither was Brenee’. She looked at her watch. It was 2am.

She looked across the room and saw Edith asleep in her chair. Just then, Tony stood up and patted his pockets and pulled out a cigarette pack and lighter. He headed toward the door to the outer hallway.

“This fool still smokes cigarettes in 2005. Idiot.”

Shyanne squinted as she followed him with her eyes across the room.

Tony glanced over at Shyanne as he walked past her. Shyanne was completely still so that he wouldn’t notice that she was awake.

“I bet he’s going up to the roof to smoke,” Shyanne thought.

She scanned the room to see if she knew anyone else in the room and if they were awake. Then she slowly lifted her blanket and slid her feet into her shoes. She grabbed her pink pepper spray case from her purse and took it with her.

Then she eased her way out of the waiting room and into the hall. She peeked around the corner toward the elevator to make sure Tony wasn’t standing there.

“He probably took the elevator up already. I’m taking the stairs,” she thought.

She walked softly down the hall and into the stairwell. She stopped and looked up at the stairs in front of her.

“Again,” she exhaled and inhaled deeply. “Well, I made it up there for Trey. And, I’ll make it up there again. I just hope that demon is up there when I get up there.”

She breathed deeply as she climbed the stairs, stopping to catch her breath on each landing. Finally, she made it to the top landing and the to the door leading to the roof.

A light rain had begun to fall. And, it was dark and misty on the roof as she slowly opened the rusty, squeaky door.

She didn’t see anyone there as she walked across the wet rooftop. She continued walking over toward the edge of the roof and looked quickly over the side at the muddy water in the street below.

“Shyanne,” Tony said as he stood a good distance from her.

“I know you raped Trey, Tony. I know you raped my son.”

“You don’t know nothin’,” Tony replied.

“Oh yes, I know you, you dimwitted demon! ! I know. Brenee’ knows, Trey knows. Your secret is out.”

“Oh yea. And how are you gonna prove that, Shyanne? Nobody is gonna believe that. That’s crazy.”

“Oh, it’s not so crazy you demented son ofSsatan. You see, everything you said and did to Trey he said and did to Brenee’, you stupid, little man.”

“So, Trey is a rapist. What has that to do with me? And, like I said, how are you gonna prove that?”

“Oh, Trey can provide us with dates, times, locations. He remembers the whole thing. His words will prove it.

‘And, guess what? There is no Statue of Limitations on sexual assault of minor children in Louisiana. I’ve researched it and talked with the New Orleans Police Department about you too.

‘Turns out, you’ve committed more than ten different felonies against my child my friend.  Sooo, after your buddy Michael, your wife and children disown you, you can look forward to spending the rest of your natural life in the Angola State Penitentiary. Ha, ha, ha. How funny is that? Everything you did to my child will be done to you…every day,” Shyanne said gleefully.

Tony stood speechless. He took a drag off of his cigarette, dropped it to the ground and crushed it underfoot. He began walking slowly toward Shyanne.

She uncapped the pink case in her sweaty right hand, ready to pepper spray him into submission.

“Shyanne, I think you’d best leave this alone. I’ll push you off this roof and kill Trey too if you push me to that.”

“Leave my mother alone!” Trey said as he walked through the stairwell door and onto the roof. He pointed a Glock pistol he had in his hand.

He had followed Shyanne up the stairs when he returned to the waiting room with coffee and saw her sliding out the door and noticed Tony was missing as well.

“What you gonna do with that gun, little boy? You know I’m not afraid of you. Take your weak ass right back down those stairs before I kill you and your mother.”

“He’s lying Trey. He’s a bully and a punk. He’s not gonna kill anybody. He’s been scaring you with those lies since you were a little boy. He’s not gonna do anything son. Don’t listen to him. He’s bluffing. ”

“You know I’ll beat your ass to death, Trey. You know me,” Tony said as he walked slowly toward Shyanne.

“Don’t move, Trey. Don’t be afraid. There’s two of us and one of him. You’re not alone anymore, Trey. I’m here. You’re not alone.”

“You’re gonna be alone Trey,” Tony said while continuing to walk toward Shyanne and locking eyes with Trey in order to intimidate him.

Trey’s elbows were straight as he held the gun with both hands that he had pointed directly at Tony. Now Shyanne understood why Trey had been taking her to the shooting range on his visits to Virginia.

She eased to her right getting away from the edge of the roof and moving closer to Trey. She saw Tony moving toward her out of the corner of her eye.

“Trey, don't shoot! Don’t shoot!”

As Tony lunged toward her, his cigarettes and lighter fell from his pocket. And Shyanne sprayed his face with pepper spray. Tony fell screaming on the slippery pavement onto his hands and his knees. He lifted his right hand to his face and began rubbing his eyes.

“You bitch. You crazy bitch. I’m gonna kill you!”

“Get up then, Tony. Get up and kill me,” Shyanne said confidently as she moved next to Trey.

“No, you’re not gonna kill us. You’ve done all of the damage to us that you’re gonna do.”

Trey kept his gun in his hands as he lowered his arms down to his side.

“Keep your finger on the trigger son. We might have to kill this heathen, in self-defense of course.”

“Now as I was saying,” Shyanne said as she walked over and picked up Tony’s damp cigarette pack and lighter. She put one of his cigarettes in her mouth and lit it.

“Stand up, fool,” she said to him as she handed him his cigarette.

“What’s gonna happen to you when we all go downstairs, and we tell the entire family about your un-uncle-like behavior toward my son, Michael’s son and your wife’s nephew. Huh? Who do you think they’ll believe?”

“And oh, how I can’t wait to see how you look in your new orange jumpsuit. Yep. You're going to Angola State Penitentiary, dude.”

“Angola was one of my sales accounts, don’t cha’ know.. You might like it there. Lots of pretty artwork on the walls that the other inmates painted. Of course, you won’t be upright long enough to enjoy it. You’ll spend most of your days in the *prone position*, if you know what I mean,” she laughed.

“Mom!” Trey shouted, gun still in hand and pointed toward Tony.

“Yea, you’d better check your mother, Trey. She’s about to get you hurt.”

Shyanne ignored Tony’s comment as she continued.

“As I was saying, everything that you did to my child is gonna be done to you, all day, everyday… if you survive.  As I understand it, most inmates don’t take kindly to child molesters. Guess even they know a lowlife when they smell one. Oh, you will be stinkin’, friend. You’ll be doing a lot of working out in there. It doesn’t matter really though. No one is coming to the prison to visit you demon. I mean Deacon. Deacon. Not even Michael. Most of all not Michael.”

Tony stood up tall and shoved his chest out in defiance. He stood quietly as Shyanne spoke and then Trey.

“Man, you are a terrible excuse for a human being. You should have left me alone, man. Why couldn’t you just leave me alone. Why did you have to pick on me? I was just a kid. I never did anything to you. Why did you have to pick on me?”

“Don’t ask him any questions, son. All he’s gonna do is lie. Don’t ask him any more questions. He’s not capable of telling the truth. It’s a waste of your time.”

“He didn’t tell you, Shyanne? He wanted it. Yea, he asked me for it. Begged me really.”

“You shut your filthy mouth, Tony. Children cannot consent to sex your dumb piece of…”

“Mom,” Trey said, pulling at her sleeve. “Let’s go. Let’s just leave him alone. We’re leaving anyway.”

“Oh, we’re going Trey. We’re all going. Let’s go, Tony. Time for you to go and face the family. Time for your death march.”

Tony stood steely eyed looking straight ahead as if envisioning himself in handcuffs and in orange clothes.

“Ready?” Shyanne spoke in a victorious voice.

“Ready for what, you dumb wench? Are you ready is the question.”

“What are you talking about, Tony?”

“You know what I’m talking about. I’m talking about you and your brothers. What? Trey doesn’t know? You didn’t tell him about your father being a womanizer and your brothers killing each other?”

“My brothers didn’t kill each other. That’s not even possible,” Shyanne said smugly.

“Minor technicality.”

“Mom let's go,” Trey said sternly. I don’t wanna hear anything he has to say.”

“Your mama’s family was no pillar of society, Trey. In fact, they were all jacked up. They fought like cats and dogs. And, one of her brothers shot and killed the other one. Didn’t know, huh” Tony said with a grin on his face.

“You low-life demon.” Shyanne said seething with anger. “I don’t traffic in lies and deceit like you. So, you lose again. Yes. Trey knows about that. Brenee’ too. You have no power here, there or anywhere, you simpleton. In fact, we win. I win. Trey wins and Brenee’ wins. Now let’s go, you loser.

Trying to appear unflinched by Shyanne’s response, Tony exhaled a puff of gray smoke and flicked his lit cigarette at Shyanne.

“I wouldn’t give you the pleasure,” he said forcefully.

“Hell, nobody ever gave me anything. You had everything. You gave Trey everything. The best clothes. New Jordans everytime a new pair came out. Baseball camp. Private school. Why should he be given everything when nobody gave me nothing!”

“So, that’s your problem? That’s why you attacked my child? Because he had a new pair of Jordans? You dumb twit,” Shyanne said while pacing from left to right.

Tony didn’t answer her question.

“Trey is no better than me,” he said. “I was raped! Yea, my stepfather raped me again and again when I was a child,” he said as his eyes began to turn red with tears. “And, nobody protected me. Why should Trey be protected when nobody protected me ? My life has been a living hell?”

Trey stood glaze eyed with his gun still in his hands listening to the man who had robbed him of his childhood.

“Am I supposed to feel sorry for you, Tony? My child didn’t do it. My child was a little boy just trying to enjoy being a kid. Your stepfather did it. He’s the villain, not my child. You had no right….”

“Stop. Just stop. You’re freaking me out! Both of you. I don’t want to hear any of this.  I don’t care why you did what you did, man. ! I hate you, man. I hate you!”

His hands were shaking as he spoke.

Shyanne walked over to him and placed her hands atop Trey’s gunned filled hands.

“Hold yourself steady, son. You hear me. Hold yourself steady.”

She turned back to Tony who was easing away from her.

“Don’t *keep* stalling, Tony. Stop being a coward. Time to go downstairs and face the family. You made an adult decision to attack and hurt my child because you were too weak to step to me! You wouldn’t confront me because you know that I’m more woman than you are man!

Tony stood in silence as if trying to figure out what to say or do next.

“Well, what’s the matter, Tony? Don’t have much to say now, huh?”

Tony’s eyes were glued to Trey’s who was trying to look away.

“Don’t look at my son, you demented fool. Look at me. Face me, you potato chip selling….”

“Mom, let’s go! This is not gonna turn out well,” he said looking at the stern look on Tony’s face.

 It was a look that he had seen repeatedly during his childhood.  And, it still frightened him.

Shyanne saw the fear in Trey’s face and said,

“Trust me, son. We’re okay. Don’t look at him. He can’t hurt you anymore. Let me handle this. We’re okay.”

Her voice softened as she spoke to Trey and got louder when she spoke to Tony.

“Back to you, Deacon,” she said sarcastically. “What you did? Well, that’s against the law. That’s against a whole lotta of laws in fact. I bet you didn’t even know that, huh? There’s a whole lot that you don’t know that you’re about to find out. Yes, you’re in trouble alright. You don’t believe me, huh? You’d better ask somebody. You can even use my phone,” she laughed. “Then again, no you can’t.”

“Hey and, just think about how Michael is gonna act when he learns that you stood next to him all day, every day, smiling, laughing, grinning in his face, and the two of you together plotting my destruction, all the while you were attacking his only son. Let’s see how that’s gonna play out. And, then there’s your lovely wife, Edith. Yea, she’s down there too, remember?. Wonder how she’ll feel when she has to tell your church members that her husband, Deacon Tony is a pedophile and is locked up in Angola Penitentiary! Yes indeed. This is gonna be rich.”

“Mom please,” Trey said, quickly turning to look behind him and backing up toward the stairwell door.

“You only got your high paying job because you’re damn near white! You’re no better than me either. I hate you, Shyanne  and your red ass. Prancing around like a Creole Queen or something. You’re nothing.  Your son is nothing. And, your son’s the coward,” Tony said as he eased backward toward the edge of the roof.

Shyanne and Trey watched as Tony  kept easing backward toward the roof’s edge. Then, suddenly, Tony spread his arms open wide and fell backward off the roof and into the flood waters below.

Shocked, Trey and Shyanne stood frozen in place. Trey moved first. He lowered his gun and walked slowly to the edge of the slippery roof and looked down. Shyanne followed close behind, grabbing Trey by  the back of his shirt so that he wouldn’t fall off the roof too.

In the darkness, rain and rising wind, they couldn’t see Tony’s body clearly. Through the dim light, Shyanne squinted at what she thought was Tony’s body bobbing up and down in the muddy water. Soon it was completely out of sight.

Shyanne looked at Trey who was still staring down at the murky water.  She pulled on the back of his shirt to get his attention and said almost emotionlessly,

“We win, son. It’s over. We win. Let’s go.”

Shaken, she wrapped her arm around Trey’s waist as they headed back toward the stairwell.

“Put your gun under your shirt, Trey. We’re going back downstairs, getting our things and leaving this place. Don’t say a word to anyone about this. Understood?”

“Mom, he jumped off the roof. He’s dead.”

“And, we don’t care. We know nothing. Say nothing. Understood.”

“Understood.”

Back in the pharmacy waiting room, they awakened Brenee’, grabbed their bags and left the building. They headed north toward Memphis as they had planned to avoid the ravages of the hurricane along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Shyanne and Trey said nothing about Tony’s suicide nor about his having sexually assaulted Brenee’.

Shyanne and Brenee’ said nothing about Trey’s attacking her either. That would be another conversation for another soon coming day.

-SIX MONTHS LATER-

Michael had paid for Brenee’ to complete her driver’s education courses at a Virginia Beach high school.

“Glad he’s paying for something,” Shyanne thought as she pulled over to let Brenee into her car.

“How’d it go sweetee,” Shyanne asked?

“It was fine, Mom. I didn’t run over any curbs or anything.”

“That’s good, baby. That’s good….”.

She paused to gather her thoughts before she spoke. She had rehearsed for months how she was going to broach the subject of Trey.

“I wanted to talk to you about...Trey.”

“What about him?”

Brenee’ answered in a curious tone.

“Well, he’ll be moving out of the dorm in a few weeks when spring semester ends. He won’t be staying with us or anything. I was just wondering how you’d feel about going to family therapy or even just you and me? Dr. Goldin could recommend someone, I’m sure.”

“Mom, I’m not ready for any of that. I’m busy with school. Besides I don’t want to talk to anybody about Trey. I want to forget I ever knew him.”

“And that’s totally fine, Brenee’. I’m with you. Anyway you feel is the right way. Really. You don’t have to go anywhere you don’t want to go or do anything you don’t want to do. Ever. Understood?”

“Okay, Mom.”

Shyanne’s phone began vibrating on the stand mounted on her dashboard. Brenee’ looked over to see who was calling.

“It’s my dad, Mom. Do you want me to answer?”

“No, I’ve got it. I’ll put him on speaker so you can talk if you want to.”

Brenee’ shook her head “no” and began searching through her book bag as if she had misplaced something there.

“No, I don’t want to talk. And, no to the speaker phone too. It’s okay if I’m not included in y’alls private conversations, Mom.”

“Hello, Shyanne Simmons here,” she said nodding okay to Brenee’ and giving her the thumbs up.

There was a long pause. Shyanne glanced at her phone to see if the call had dropped. Then Michael spoke.

“Oh, using our maiden name are we” Michael asked? “Shyanne Simmons? You’re not Shyanne Morrelll anymore?”

Shyanne ignored his question at first. But, she couldn’t resist the opportunity to push him back a bit.

“You decided that I wasn’t Shyanne Morrell a long time ago, Michael. Remember? So, how are you” she asked, changing the subject.

“I’m fine, Shyanne. Just checking on you and the kids.”

“The kids are fine, Michael, ” she said curtly. “Well, at least Brenee’ is fine. I haven’t heard much from Trey. He’s so busy. He’s in school full time at Howard finishing his pharmacy degree and working as a resident advisor. Didn’t he tell you all of this? Why didn’t you call them directly? You have their numbers, right?”

Shyanne couldn’t wait to hear his answers.   They hadn’t spoken for months.

“Well, it’s you I wanted to speak with Shyanne.”

“Me,” she asked? For what? Okay. I’m listening. What’s up?”

She began tapping on the steering wheel nervously.   She wondered if Michael was going to mention anything about Tony. None of his family had asked or said anything about him since she, Trey and Brenee had escaped from New Orleans, just ahead of Hurricane Katrina making landfall. She had directed Trey not to ask any questions about Tony either. And Brenee’ was clueless as to anything that had gone on between them up on that roof.

“If anybody mentions Tony to you, you know nothing. Understood? Don’t ask any questions about him. And don’t offer any commentary,” she had said to Trey.

“Shyanne, the medical center has been closed ever since the storm hit,” Michael said. They had literally been paying me to stay home, thank GOD.”.

“GOD? Now you wanna bring GOD into this” Shyanne thought to herself? But she listened quietly instead and didn’t say a word.

Michael noticed her silence but continued anyway.

“So, I was offered a transfer to one of their hospitals…. One is in Virginia. And I wondered what you  would think about my moving out there.”

Michael seemed so excited at the prospect. Shyanne on the other hand, couldn't believe that Michael was suggesting some kind of reunion after all he had sent her and their children through during their marriage and lengthy divorce.

She answered slowly yet deliberately.

“You move here” she said with a smile on her face. She wanted to give the impression that she found the idea pleasant.

“Uh huh.”

“To Virginia?”

“Yes,” Michael answered. “What do you think about that?”

“I think. Oh, no. I think you wouldn’t like it here. I mean Virginia is *soooo different* from New Orleans,”

She accentuated her words for emphasis.

“No, you wouldn’t like it here Michael. How about Arizona.  You like warm weather and all. Don’t they have any hospitals there. You work for a large medical corporation. They must have jobs in other places.”

She glanced over at Brenee’ who with a puzzled look on her face plugged her ears with her headphones and turned her face away from Shyanne.

“So, you don’t want me there” Michael asked?

“I didn’t say that, Michael. And it doesn’t matter what I want. I’m on my own now and so are you. You made an adult decision, Michael. Deal with it because what I want for you doesn’t factor in all  at all anymore.”

Shyanne knew that Michael wasn’t thinking of moving to Virginia. He just wanted to see if she would jump at the chance to have him back in her life. He wanted to know if Shyanne still needed him the way she always had.

“There are some other cities on the list. But when I saw Virginia, I thought…”

He sounded dejected as his voice trailed off.

“Well, nice of you to think of us. Really nice, Michael. Ooowee! Look at the time. Gotta go now, love. Good to hear from you. Really! Bye now.”

Shyanne exhaled deeply as she disconnected the call. She was happy that she answered Michael’s unexpected call because now she realized that she no longer needed him. And Michael knew it too.

She was overjoyed with herself that she didn’t welcome Michael back; That she didn’t yield to the temptation to let Michael take over the reins of her life again.

“Not today devil,” she whispered so that Brenee’ wouldn’t hear her.

She pressed her remote-control garage door opener as she approached her driveway.

“Why didn’t he mention Tony,” she thought?  He *was* dead, wasn’t he?

After all, she and Trey had seen him fall backward off the hospital’s roof and into Katrina’s flood waters,

“Surely he couldn’t have survived that fall,” she said softly. “Surely not…”