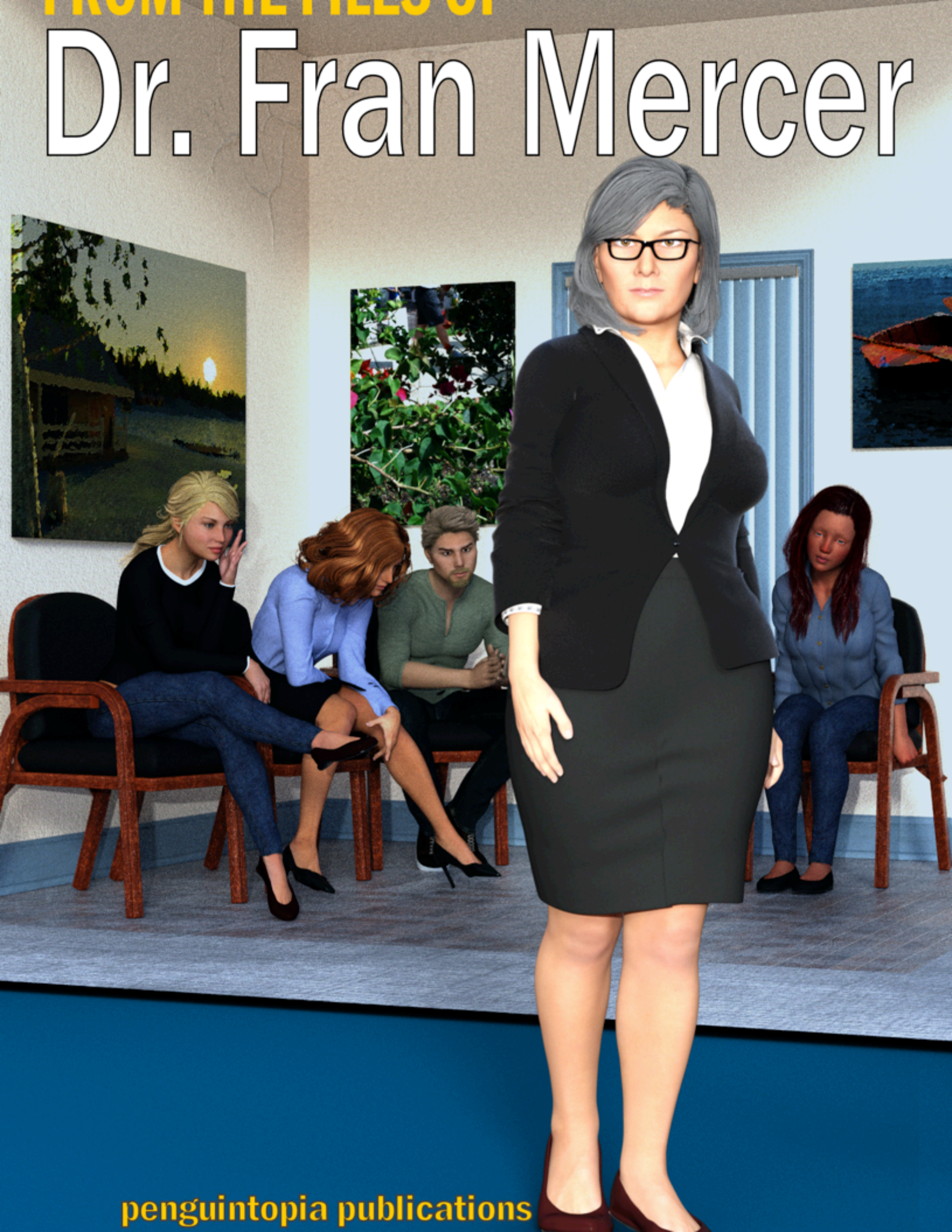
FROM THE FILES OF

Dr. Fran Mercer



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From the Files of Doctor Fran Mercer

by Michael Loucks

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For Angie

Part 1 - Fran's Story 1
Entry 19611109 - Backstory 1 3
Entry 19611109 - Backstory 2 15
Entry 19611110 - Backstory 3 25
Entry 19611111 - Backstory 3 - Bev's Story 39
Entry 19611118 - Backstory 4 - Dinner and a Movie, Part I 51
Entry 19611118 - Backstory 4 - Dinner and a Movie, Part II 63
Entry 19611118 - Backstory 4 - Dinner and a Movie, Part III 75
Entry 19611120 - Backstory 5 - Discoveries 85
Entry 19611125 - Backstory 6 - Discovered 101
Part 2 - Fran's Practice 113
Entry 19770108 - Bethany Michelle Krajick 115
Entry 19780525 - Bethany Michelle Krajick 139
Entry 19811124–1 - Elizabeth Petra Loucks 153
Entry 19811124–2 - Elizabeth Petra Loucks 169
Entry 19811124–3 - Elizabeth Petra Loucks 187
Entry 19830406 - Kara Anne Blanchard 197
Entry 19830413 - Kara Anne Blanchard 211
Entry 19830504 - Kara Anne Blanchard 231
Entry 19830504 - Doctor Fran Mercer 241
Entry 19840331 - Clarissa Saunders 251
Entry 19841020 - Elizaveta Viktorovna Kozlova 263
Entry 19891218 - Bethany Michelle Krajick 275
Entry 19891228 - Bethany Michelle Krajick 283
Entry 19900102 - Bethany Michelle Krajick 293
Entry 19911011 - Bethany Michelle Krajick 307
Entry 19911023 A - Stephanie Ann Adams 319
Entry 19911023 B - Bethany Michelle Krajick 335
Entry 19911023 C - Bethany Michelle Krajick 349
Entry 19911109 A - Stephanie Ann Adams 357
Entry 19911109–B - Stephanie Ann Adams 373
Entry 19911109–C - Stephanie Ann Adams 385

Part 1 - Fran's Story

The story of Fran's formative years, starting in 1961, when she was a sixteen-year-old Junior at Milord Main School.

Entry 19611109 - Backstory 1

November 9, 1961, Milford, Ohio

"Fran! You're going to be late for school!" Esther Sorkin called down the hallway.

"I'm almost ready, Mom!" Fran called back.

Her mom was wrong, because the school building was less than three blocks from their three-bedroom ranch on Brandon Avenue in downtown Milford, Ohio. Next year, though, she'd have to ride the bus, because they were opening a brand new High School about four miles away, on the very far east side of town. But school wasn't her priority; her priority was Benjamin Goldfeder, the dreamy, drop-dead gorgeous son of the Rabbi at Adath Israel, the synagogue in Avondale which they attended.

Fran was extremely happy that the dance was on a Thursday, as a Friday evening dance would have been difficult for Ben to attend. The fact that Friday was a day off from school due to Veterans Day meant they could stay out until Fran's weekend curfew of 11:00pm. Had it been a school night, she'd have had to be home by 9:00pm, which would have been before the dance ended.

Ben didn't go to Milford, but she'd invited him to take her to the Sadie Hawkins Day dance, and he'd agreed. The best part, beside him being a total dreamboat, was his 1959 Cadillac Sixty Special. Well, his dad's, but he'd be driving later that evening. Fran finished putting on her makeup, tied back her long black hair with a pink ribbon, then left her bedroom.

"Morning, sleepyhead!" Joshua Sorkin, Fran's dad, called out.

"She wasn't sleeping!" her younger sister, Elizabeth said. "She was primping even though Ben won't see her until after school and she'll have a chance to put on more makeup!"

"Hush!" Esther Sorkin said to her thirteen-year-old daughter. "I can't think of a nicer boy to take her to the dance."

"Fran and Ben, sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g! First comes..."

"Shut up!" Fran ordered.

"Francheska!" her mom exclaimed. "That's not ladylike!"

Fran glowered at her mom. Once again, her little sister got away with teasing her about boys.

"Yes, Mom," Fran said, not wanting to do or say anything that might interfere with her date with Ben, which meant Elizabeth could get away with it.

Elizabeth smirked and made loud kissing noises.

"That's enough, Liza," Joshua Sorkin said. "Fran will behave like a young lady should, and Ben will behave as a young gentleman should."

Fran kept silent and focused on eating her Corn Flakes, because she really liked Ben, and if he asked her to kiss, she would, but that was something she did NOT want her parents, or in many ways worse, her sister, to know. That would be the biggest benefit of going to the High School - not being in the same building as her bratty little sister! And then Fran was going to college, and definitely not living at home.

She wasn't quite sure what she wanted to study, but she'd found psychology and philosophy very interesting. She didn't want to teach, so most likely she'd study psychology, but she still had a year to think about it before she had to apply to colleges. Fran pushed that out of her mind, finished breakfast, and after rinsing her bowl, she grabbed her books, kissed her parents, and left for school, not wanting to walk with Liza.

"Hi, Frannie!" her friend Allison, who was a Senior with flowing strawberry blonde hair, called out as Fran stepped onto the sidewalk.

Allison, who had Beverly with her, hurried to catch up so they could walk together. Beverly was one of the wildest and craziest girls in school, and was a lot of fun, but Fran's parents didn't like Beverly because she had a 'reputation', one which Fran knew from Beverly's stories was well-earned, and Beverly wore it like a badge of honor. Every boy in Milford hoped to get a date with Beverly, but most of them never had a chance.

"Hi, Allison! Hi, Beverly!" Fran called out.

"Cute dress!" Beverly observed. "Is that what you're wearing tonight?"

"No, I'm wearing my pink blouse and gray skirt," Fran replied. "The skirt with the rose on it."

"Careful you don't get pricked!" Beverly teased.

"I'll 'prick' you if you want, Beverly!" Bobby, a boy who lived on the same street as Allison, and who was wearing his usual blue jeans, white t-shirt, and leather jacket called out.

"Fat chance, Bobby Block!" Beverly said. "Stick to Allison, she's more your speed!"

Allison rolled her eyes, "As if I'd go out with him after that comment!"

"You asked him to the dance tonight!" Beverly said, laughing. "So, if he's playing 'backseat bingo' it's with you, not me!"

"Your bingo card is full!" Fran teased.

"You can play more than one card!" Beverly laughed. "They do that at the Catholic church next to Milford Main on Bingo Night."

"Hi!" Jennie Peters said, coming out of her house.

Jennie was in second grade, so they had to stop their 'unladylike' conversation.

"Hi, Jennie!" the three girls said.

"Are you all going to the dance tonight?" Jennie asked.

"Yes," Fran replied.

"I wish I was fourteen!" Jennie replied wistfully. "Then I could ask a boy to the dance!"

"You're seven!" Allison protested

"So! I didn't say I'd kiss him. Yuck! But I'd dance with him!"

"Who?" Beverly asked.

"Kent McGrath!" Jennie giggled. "He's cute!"

"What grade is he in?"

"Third!"

"Ooh, an older man!"

Other kids joined them as they got closer to school, and by the time they went in the front doors on Lila Avenue, the group had swelled to fifteen. Fran and Beverly said 'goodbye' to everyone else and went to their homeroom with Mrs. Oligee, who Fran thought had been teaching since dinosaurs roamed Milford. She was an English teacher, and was really strict, but if you did your work and learned what she taught, you had an easy time writing papers for your other classes and not losing points for grammar or spelling.

"Beverly Thompson!" Mrs. Oligee reprimanded when Beverly gave Al Franks a kiss as she went by.

"Sorry, Mrs. Oligee," Beverly said. "Won't happen again!"

"That's what you said yesterday, young lady. And the day before!"

Beverly laughed softly, "Slow learner, I guess."

"And your grades in my class show it!"

Everyone in the class laughed, but Beverly simply didn't care. The most important part of school for her was her social life, which involved boys, and everything else took a backseat to that. Well, unless she was IN the backseat, a place she very much enjoyed being. And Al had a fast car with a big back seat, not to mention his other important attributes.

The school day dragged for Fran and her friends because they were all looking forward to the dance. Fran and Allison were good students, and liked school, but the day simply couldn't go fast enough for them.

"Do you think I should go parking with Bobby?" Allison asked Fran as they at their lunch in the cafeteria. "Beverly thinks I should."

"I think you should pay less attention to Beverly and do what you think is right! Beverly is lucky she hasn't gotten herself knocked up or had a dose of the clap!"

"Do you think she really does all that stuff she says she does?"

"I don't have first-hand knowledge, but given how happy her boyfriends are, I'd say she does. I mean, how does she know some of the stuff she knows? They sure didn't teach that in health class and my mom sure didn't tell me about it!"

"Health class?" Allison laughed mockingly, "two minutes about that time of the month, then the rest of the hour about not doing anything 'inappropriate' without actually saying what it was we aren't supposed to do!"

"Well, at least both our moms thought having the 'birds and bees' talk was OK. You know most of our friends learned from us or Beverly who decided to take matters into her own hands!"

"I don't think it was her hand!" Allison giggled and blushed. "Though maybe at first."

"Just be sure," Fran said. "It's not like you can undo it! And you don't want a reputation like Beverly's."

"But she's popular and has a lot of fun!" Allison replied.

"What would you do if you got pregnant?" Fran asked.

"Curl up and die! The old man would totally lose his mind!"

"Then don't be dumb!" Fran warned.

She totally understood Allison's feelings, as thinking about Ben made her squirm when she sat in the bench at the synagogue. And it made her squirm in her seat in the cafeteria, as those strange feelings in the pit of her stomach made her want to do exactly what she's just warned Allison about.

"Do you think Beverly really was with Mr. Carlton?" Allison asked.

Mr. Carlton was the gym teacher and Fran thought he was handsome.

"I think Beverly talks WAY too much," Fran said. "They could get in real trouble if it's true, even though Mr. Carlton isn't married."

"But do you think?"

"I think she probably did," Fran said. "She said she was going to get an older guy to be her first when she was a Sophomore and we were Freshmen."

They finished their lunch, and then went out to the playground to hang out with Bobby and his friends who were smoking. Allison accepted a cigarette but Fran declined. Most of her friends smoked, but she'd never had even one cigarette because she thought it was a nasty habit. Nobody in her house smoked, for which she was grateful, but her grandmother, who'd grown up in Russia, was a chain smoker.

It was her Russian grandmother who'd insisted on her middle name - Vladimirovna. Vladimir was her grandfather's name, and her grandmother had

decided that had Fran been a boy, her name would have been Vladimir. Fran's dad had put his foot down against naming Fran 'Vladimira' or some such thing, and her mom had chosen 'Francheska', though she always went by 'Fran', or, occasionally, 'Frannie'.

The warning bell rang about five minutes later, and everyone trooped back into the building for afternoon classes. They didn't have gym class, though, because the gym was being decorated for the dance, which was going to be a 'sock hop'. Instead they had a study period, which Fran appreciated, because she could do her homework and not worry about it during the long weekend.

On Saturday morning, they'd line Main Street for the Veterans Day parade, but other than that, and their usual visit to the synagogue, Fran planned to read *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, a book Mrs. Oligee had recommended. It was the story of Juana Maria, the 'Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island', who had been left behind alone on an island off the California coast, and Fran was really looking forward to reading it.

The day finally ended, and Fran and her friends walked home. Fran was skipping dinner with her family because Ben was going to take her to Frisch's Big Boy before the dance. It was her first real date, even though she'd gone to dances before, it had always been just the dance. But now that she was sixteen, her dad would let her go on dates with approved boys, and Ben, being the rabbi's son, had no trouble receiving her father's approval.

"What time is Ben picking you up?" Esther asked Fran, later in the day, as Fran dressed for her date.

"6:00pm. That gives us plenty of time to eat before the dance. We might go for ice cream after the dance, if Allison and Bobby want to."

"Don't miss your curfew, Fran, or your dad will take away your dating privileges."

"I know, Mom!" Fran replied, annoyed that her mom felt the need to remind her.

"Don't take that tone with me, young lady, or the only thing you'll be doing tonight is sitting in your room!"

"Sorry, Mom," Fran said as sweetly as she thought she could without getting in trouble.

Fran finished putting on her blouse, then tied her hair with a gray ribbon which matched her skirt, then went to the bathroom to fix her makeup. She didn't use a lot, just lipstick, eye shadow, and a bit of mascara. She went back to her bedroom and checked herself in the full-length mirror her dad had installed on the back of the door to her closet, and was happy. She put on her saddle shoes, grabbed her clutch purse, and a white sweater, and went to the living room to wait for Ben to arrive.

At five minutes before 6:00pm, Fran heard a car in the driveway, but knew her dad would expect her to sit, ladylike, until Ben came to the door. Her dad would answer, and then bring Ben to her. Doing anything else would make her dad nervous, and that was the last thing she wanted to do. So while she was excited that Ben had arrived, she couldn't show it.

A minute later the doorbell rang and Fran fought the urge to get up. Her dad went to the door and greeted Ben, and reminding him of Fran's curfew, and asked what they planned to do for dinner, even though Fran had already told him. It felt like he didn't trust her and was looking for any difference in what she'd said from what Ben was telling him. After two minutes, her dad was satisfied and brought Ben into the living room. Fran stood up.

"Hi, Ben," she said demurely, trying to impress on her dad that she was acting 'ladylike'.

"Hi, Fran. Ready?"

"Yes. Dad, is it OK if we go?"

"Yes, Fran. Remember, 11:00pm. Not one second later. And dinner, dancing, and ice cream."

"Yes, Dad," Fran said, trying to sound sincere.

"Then you kids have a nice evening. I'll see you when you get home."

Which made it clear to Fran that he would wait up for her, which wasn't a surprise. She and Ben left the house, and he helped her into the passenger side of his dad's Cadillac, and then got into the driver's seat. Neither of them bothered with the newfangled lap belts as they were uncomfortable and Fran was worried they might snag her skirt. Fran's dad's Ford didn't even have them, and nobody she knew wore them. And it was silly, really, as they were only going about five blocks to Frisch's.

When they arrived, Allison, Bobby, Beverly, and Al were waiting for them, and they got a corner booth. They sat alternating, with Ben to Fran's left, and Bobby to her right, then Allison. Beverly sat next to Ben, and Al was next to her. They all ordered Cokes while the perused the menus and decided what to have. For Ben and Fran, it was a 'Big Boy Platter', though she didn't order it as a cheeseburger because it wasn't 'kosher'.

She'd sometimes order one when it was just her and Allison, but otherwise she tried to at least look the part of a faithful Jewish girl, even if she wasn't sold on the whole idea of religion. The traditions and rituals were nice, but otherwise,

she wasn't sure any supreme being actually existed, let alone cared about what anyone did.

They ate, and after the boys split the check and paid, they left for the school which was close enough to walk to, though Ben and Fran drove so that Ben's car would be in the school parking lot. The other four walked, though Fran was sure Al's car was parked somewhere close, as she expected Beverly and him to disappear partway through the dance.

At the school, Fran handed over the two tickets for which she'd paid 25¢ each, which helped cover the costs of decorating the gym. The PTA was providing punch and cookies, so there would be no charge for those, though if you wanted a Coke, you had to pay for it.

They had a great time at the dance, and just before 9:00pm, the DJ put on slow songs and Fran and Ben danced close. She loved how strong he felt, how his arms felt around her. The feeling in the pit of her stomach grew strong, and when Ben tried to kiss her during the last song, she didn't resist. He kissed her a second time, and she felt woozy, and sighed deeply, resting her head on his chest.

She decided then and there if he wanted to go parking, she was going to say 'yes'.

Entry 19611109 - Backstory 2

November 9, 1961, Milford, Ohio

"What kind of ice cream do you like?" Ben asked, as they drove the short distance to the local soda shop, which was actually in the Ben Franklin five-and-dime store.

"Chocolate, and the more the better!" Fran said with a soft laugh. "But sundaes are good, so long as they're hot fudge!"

"I feel like there's a pattern there," Ben chuckled.

"Do you think so?" Fran asked, laughing softly. "My dad says I'd put hot fudge on steak if he let me!"

"That might be a bit much!" Ben said, shaking his head, as he pulled into the parking lot.

He parked, got out of the Cadillac Sixty Special, and walked around to Fran's side to let her out. Ben held out his arm and Fran slipped hers around it, and they walked to the door of the five-and-dime. Ben held the door and Fran went in. He followed her to the rear of the store to the soda bar and they sat on stools.

"Hi, Fran!" Sam, the soda jerk, who was dressed in white, with a red and white striped apron, said when she sat down.

"Hi, Sam! This is my date, Ben. Ben, this is Sam Mercer. He's a Senior at Milford, and his dad manages the store."

"Nice to meet you," Ben said to Sam.

"What can I get for you?"

"Two hot fudge sundaes, please."

"Coming right up!" Sam replied.

He retrieved two sundae glasses and then opened the small freezer and scooped two scoops of vanilla ice cream into each glass, then ladled hot fudge onto each one, added whipped cream, and topped them with cherries. He set one before Fran and the other before Ben.

"That will be $1.05," he said.

Ben pulled out a his wallet, took out a dollar bill, then got a quarter from his pocket. He set them both on the counter.

"Keep the change," he said.

"Thanks," Sam replied, pocketing the quarter and then placing the dollar bill and a nickel from his pocket into the cash register. "How was the dance?"

"Fun. You had to work, I see."

"My dad owns the store and all the other jerks asked for the night off to go to the dance, so I got stuck with it."

"Do you plan to take over the store from your dad?" Ben asked.

"No. I plan to go to UC and study aircraft and spacecraft engineering, what they're calling 'aerospace'.

"You want to work for NASA?"

"Or one of the contractors."

"Think we'll ever get to the moon?"

"Yes. We have to, before it's 'Red'! You know the Russians will build a military base if they get there first. And they're ahead. Gagarin orbited the earth before we even launched Shephard on that fifteen-minute flight! But we can beat them to the moon if we make up our minds to do it like Kennedy said in his speech back in May. What do you plan to do?"

"Law school. I'm going to Harvard next Fall."

Sam nodded then moved down the counter to serve another couple who had come from the dance.

"I didn't know you were going away next Fall," Fran said, then began eating her sundae.

"It was only just confirmed last week. My father has friends who are alumni, and they arranged for me to gain admittance."

"So you'll be away for four years?"

"Seven, including law school. I'll be home for summers and for breaks. With the new jets, I can fly home in no time."

"The 707 and DC-8 are really nice aircraft," Sam interjected. "And last December, I went to the airport over in Kentucky and watched the first jet to land there - a

Delta Convair 880 from Miami. I go out to the observation deck at the airport at least once a month to watch for new planes."

"Planes are keen," Ben replied, "but I prefer a hopped-up Ford."

"You drag?" Sam asked.

"Not officially. The old man is a square and would have a hissy fit."

"Fast cars razz my berries, too," Sam replied. "But not like jet aircraft or rockets."

"You have a hot-rod, Ben?" Fran asked.

"A buddy of mine and I have a Deuce we've rebuilt. But do NOT tell my old man! I'd be on a trip for biscuits if he ever found out!"

"How do you hide that from him?" Fran asked.

"The car is at my buddy's house. But my name is on the pink slip with his."

Sam moved down the counter to serve two teenage girls, both of whom flirted with him while he made their milkshakes. Ben and Fran finished their sundaes and waved 'goodbye' to Sam, who was flirting with the girls. Fran looped her arm in Ben's and they walked out of the Ben Franklin and got into the Cadillac.

"Want to go for a drive?" Ben asked.

"Where?"

"Just around. I'll have you home before your curfew, I promise."

"Sure."

Ben started the car and pulled out of the lot on the Route 50 side. He turned east, heading out of town. He drove a couple of mile, then turned left onto a steep, winding road.

"Where does this go?" Fran asked.

"At the top of the hill is a horse farm, and during the war, there was an airfield used by the Civil Air Patrol."

"What road is this?" Fran asked. "I've never been up this way."

"Klondyke Road," Ben replied. "At the top of the hill is Overlook Drive, which was the access road for the CAP airfield."

"What happened to it?"

"When the war ended, they consolidated at Blue Ash and Lunken. There wasn't really a need to patrol the way there was during the war. And it was a grass field, so modern planes really couldn't use it."

"So there's nothing left?"

"No. They tore down the Quonsets and sold the land to the horse farm."

"Does anyone live up here?"

"There are some old cinderblock houses at the end of Overlook that were used during the war for guys on night patrol and an office. I think people live there."

"You're not from Milford; how do you know about it?"

"Jack, the guy who I own the hot-rod with is a military history buff. He brought me out here last Spring. We've been to battlefields, abandoned airfields, and other places. Abandoned airfields often have runways which are in good enough shape to drag. Mostly the concrete holds up pretty well."

"Which is the real reason," Fran giggled. "But you have cover with your dad."

Ben turned right on Overlook Drive, and Fran knew what was coming next, and after that second kiss with Ben at the dance, had no problem with parking with Ben, so long as it was just necking. Ben pulled onto a short gravel road and shut off the engine, then slid across the bench seat. He put his arm around Fran's shoulders and she snuggled close. Ben turned up the radio, Ray Charles' voice filled the car with *Hit the Road Jack*.

Fran turned her face up and presented her lips to Ben for a kiss, and he obliged. After two quick kisses, their tongues touched, and Fran's entire body tingled. Ray Charles gave way to Neil Sedaka singing *Calendar Girl* and Fran felt Ben's hand slowly slide up her side. Fran knew she should tell Ben to stop, but she didn't *want* him to. His hand found her full, firm beast and he squeezed gently, causing Fran to shiver and moan into his mouth.

Ben ran his thumb over Fran's nipple, causing it to harden. Fran squirmed as the intense pleasure caused a wetness between her legs and very unladylike desire threatened to overwhelm her conscious caution about going 'too far'. Pleasure overwhelmed her and her last, fleeting coherent thought was that her mother had never told her that kissing and touching were intensely pleasurable; so pleasurable in fact that any thoughts of being a 'good girl' were completely overwhelmed.

Fran had no idea how it happened, but her hand had found a way to Ben's lap and was resting on a bulge in his slacks. The very idea that she might touch a man that way was both thrilling and frightening. What she was touching was

supposed to go inside her, though only after she married. But she *wanted* it! She wanted the pleasure that she was sure was to come from something forbidden.

An ephemeral thought floated into her mind; a single word, but a word which snapped her out of the pleasure overload - 'baby'! Her hand recoiled from Ben's hardness as if she'd touched a snake. She broke the kiss and pulled slightly away from Ben, gasping for breath.

"Fran?"

"Sorry," she said through heavy breathing. "It's just overwhelming."

She cracked the window open and allowed the chilly November air to hit her face, bringing her further back from the edge. She knew in her heart that she'd barely escaped with her virtue intact. A few more second of kissing and touching, and she'd have been past the point of no return, her clothes on the floor of the car, and their bodies mashed together.

Those thoughts threatened to reignite the passion and Fran knew she'd quickly lose control if they started kissing again.

"Can we just drive?" she asked, still somewhat breathless.

Ben reluctantly slid back to the driver's side, started the car, and backed out of the gravel road. He'd been SO close, but Fran had freaked out after she'd tentatively touched his member, most likely because of its size. Two other girls had gone just a bit further, but had been frightened by the length and girth of his manhood. Only Ellie Green, a gorgeous sixteen-year-old in his father's congregation, hadn't stopped. She'd marveled at his size as they'd taken each other's virginity in the back seat of the Cadillac. She'd gone out with him three more times before her father put a stop to it, though Ben still didn't know why.

"Are you OK, Fran?" Ben asked as he turned north onto Wolfpen-Pleasent Hill from Klondyke.

"Yes," she replied. "I'm not upset with you. I wanted to kiss, it was just...too intense."

"Would you go out with me next weekend? Saturday evening?"

"I'll ask my dad," Fran replied. "I think he'll say that it's OK."

Ben smiled, because he was positive it was only a matter of time before Fran let him sample her obvious charms. He knew if he played his cards right, she'd be squirming underneath him and he plunged into her, burying himself inside her. He just needed to be patient, and let her desire do all the work. He turned left onto Route 128 to head back towards Milford, and a few minutes later, he pulled into the driveway of Fran's house. He walked her to the door and she gave him a quick kiss, thanked him for the evening, then slipped into the house.

"Did you have a good time, Fran?" her dad asked, looking up from his *Life* magazine.

"Yes!" she exclaimed excitedly. "The dance was fun and he bought me a hot fudge sundae afterwards."

Joshua Sorkin laughed, "You and your chocolate! I thought it was a man's stomach was the way to his heart!"

"It worked on you!" Esther said, putting down her copy of *Redbook*. "Fran, would you like to have Ben over for dinner?"

"He wants to take me out next Saturday. Is that OK, Dad?"

"I can't imagine a better boy than the Rabbi's son, so yes, of course. What will you do?"

"He didn't say; he just asked if I would go out with him and I said I needed to get permission."

"You have it."

"Thank you, Daddy!" she gushed. "I'm going to get ready for bed and read for a bit before I go to sleep."

"Good night, Princess."

"Good night, Fran," her mom added.

"Good night!" she exclaimed.

She went over and kissed them each on the cheek, then went to her room. She put her purse on her desk, took off her sweater, then went to the bathroom she shared with her sister to brush her teeth and relieve herself. That accomplished, she went back to her room, closed the door, and undressed. When she removed her panties, she saw a slight discoloration, but it wasn't from her monthly visitor. She wondered if she should rinse them in the sink, but she was afraid that her mom would be suspicious, so she simply put them in the hamper with her blouse, bra, and her socks, hanging her skirt on a hanger, as it was still clean.

Fran examined herself naked in the large mirror on her dresser, and nodded approvingly at her own body - nice, firm breasts, properly flared hips, and a tangle of hair that hid her most private place from view. She wondered what Ben would think if he saw her this way, and that caused a tingle between her legs, and she felt dampness again. She frowned, because the only way to protect her undergarments was to put on the belt which held the sanitary pads she used

during her time of the month. They were totally uncomfortable and often slipped, but they were better than nothing.

Fran assembled the belt with a pad, put it on, then slipped a pair of comfortable panties over it, and finally pulled a long nightgown over her head. She picked up *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, turned on her reading lamp, turned off the overhead light, then climbed into bed. She read a chapter, put the book down, turned off the reading lamp, pulled up the covers, and closed her eyes.

As she began drifting off to sleep, her mind replayed what had happened in Ben's car, and the tingling feeling returned. She squeezed her legs together tightly and shuddered from the intense feeling. Something in her subconscious directed her hand to the spot where the tingling was the strongest and she gasped had just how sensitive she'd become. She pressed harder and the pleasurable feelings grew stronger. Fran began moving her fingers in a slow circle, and her breathing rapidly increased as she felt as if she were about to burst. Two minutes later, she felt as if there was an explosion deep in her body, and she fought not to scream, lest she give away what she was doing.

Not wanting to get caught, she did her best to control her breathing and moved her hand away from her most intimate spot. Sleep was difficult, but it eventually overtook her, and she dreamed of Ben touching her the way she'd touched herself.

Entry 19611110 - Backstory 3

November 10, 1961, Milford, Ohio

"Fran! You're going to be late for the parade!" Esther Sorkin called down the hallway.

"I'm almost ready, Mom!" Fran called back.

She was late because when she'd woken up, it had been in the middle of a dream about Ben, a very GOOD dream, and she'd rubbed herself to satisfy an urge that she couldn't control. She finished putting on her makeup and hurried to the foyer so that she, her parents, and her sister could walk to the library, which would take about fifteen minutes. They left the house and were immediately joined by Allison and Beverly and their parents, and then Bobby, Jennie, and their families.

"So?" Beverly asked expectantly.

Fran shot Beverly a dirty look because there was no way she was going to say anything about parking with Ben, and absolutely not in front of her parents! When they got to the library, they found clear spots along the sidewalk, but they couldn't all stand together. Fran and Allison managed to find a spot where it was just the two of them, though there were others around them, just nobody they knew.

"So?" Allison asked, repeating Beverly's question.

"Just necking," Fran said quietly. "But it made me feel all squishy inside!"

Allison's eyes darted around, then she said quietly but giddily, "My insides were squished!"

"You and Bobby?" Fran gasped.

Allison nodded, "You know my parents were out last night, and there was no way I was going to let Bev add Bobby to her list!"

"But..."

"But what? It was AWESOME!"

"Did it hurt?"

"For maybe a second, but then it was like I was in heaven! So, you and Ben?"

"We have a date for next Saturday after services at the synagogue."

"And?" Allison giggled.

"He's supposed to call me to let me know what we're going to do. Are you going to do it again?"

"Bobby's parents both work!" Allison giggled.

"Be careful, Ally!"

"I'm not dumb!" Allison protested. "My brother bought rubbers from the machine in the men's at the Sohio station for me. I would never have let Bobby have me without one!"

"When did you decide?"

"When I figured out Bobby thought he had a chance to get Bev."

"EVERYONE has a chance to get Bev!" Fran said, shaking her head.

The parade began, as it usually did, with the Milford marching band playing the National Anthem, and then the volunteer fire department lead the way in their new engine. They were followed by the mayor and city councilmen, and then the VFW. The marching band came next, and then the school flag and rifle corps. As was the norm, people came from the sidewalks to follow the parade to where it ended at Five Corners, and then everyone went to Greenlawn Cemetery to pay their respects. From there, everyone gathered on the huge playground and combination football and baseball field for lunch, with hot dogs, hamburgers, and other food available from vendors in tents.

"Hi there," a young man in a suit said to Fran, Beverly, Allison, and their friends Elaine and Nancy. "I'm Kent and I want to invite you to a new church here in Milford."

"I'm Jewish," Fran replied.

"I'm Catholic," Allison declared.

"And I don't believe in God," Beverly stated. "So blow!"

The young man frowned, "Well, if you ever want to hear the truth about the Good News, we're meeting at the VFW hall on Sunday mornings!"

"I said, blow!" Beverly growled.

The young man turned and moved on to speak to another group.

"I heard you like to worship on your knees!" Allison teased.

"Not some 'holy roller' type! That's just NOT happening!"

"What's not happening?" Alan Blanchard asked, coming up to the girls. "Hi, Nancy."

Alan had been interested in Nancy for ages, but she'd never agreed to go out with him.

"Hi, Alan," Nancy replied. "Just some guy who asked us to come to his new church."

"Which one?" he asked.

"He said they meet at the VFW."

"Grace Church," Alan replied. "That's the church my family goes to."

"Count me out!" Beverly declared. "Let's talk about something else!"

"Did you guys hear about the plane crash in Virginia the day before yesterday?" Sam Mercer asked coming up to the group with a hot dog in hand.

"No," several of them replied.

"Seventy-seven fatalities, but two crew members survived. It was mostly new Army recruits, according to the *Enquirer*. That's the second most in any single plane crash ever in the US!"

"What happened?" Alan asked.

"Nobody knows but the report in the newspaper said they had engine trouble during the flight. The Civil Aeronautics Board will investigate, but that usually takes a few weeks or even months."

"Not working today, Sam?" Fran asked.

"Everything is closed except the Rexall," Sam replied. "And they're only open for a few hours now that the parade is over."

"Who's your friend, Jennie?" Allison asked.

"This is Linda Kane, from Goshen. She's fourteen and our dads work together at P&G."

Everyone said 'hi' to Linda, and then she and Jennie went to get something to eat.

"Fran, can I talk to you a minute?" Sam asked.

She nodded and they moved a bit away.

"Are you doing anything tomorrow night?"

"No."

"Would you like to see *West Side Story* at the theater in Mariemont?"

Fran liked Sam, but she had a date with Ben in a week, and she didn't want to be known as a two-timer, even if she didn't have Ben's class ring.

"I would, but I'm seeing someone," Fran said gently. "You met him last night."

"I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were steady with him."

She wanted to let Sam down easy, and truth be told, she liked him.

"I'm not," she replied, "but I wouldn't feel right going out with a boy when I already have a date planned with another boy. Ask me again?"

Sam smiled, "Sure!"

Fran smiled and they went back to the group, though people were coming and going as they got food or a drink. Eventually, after about an hour, Fran and Allison got permission to go home, deciding to hang out together at Allison's house.

"So you and Bobby really did it?" Fran asked.

"Yes! Why would I say I did if I didn't?"

"I think sometimes Bev makes things up to sound cool."

"I don't," Allison declared. "In fact, I think she's done it with more guys than she lets on. Including at least TWO teachers!"

"She's going to wind up pregnant or catch a social disease!" Fran replied. "Can I ask what would happen if you and Bobby break up?"

"You mean would I do it with another guy? Sure, if he was a hunk and treated me nice! You and Ben?"

"Maybe," Fran allowed. "Sam Mercer asked me out today."

"What did you say?"

"I have a date with Ben a week from tomorrow and it feels wrong to accept a date with Sam when I already have something planned with Ben. I told Sam to ask again."

"That makes sense, I guess. The last thing you want is a reputation as a 'two-timer'."

"Or being 'easy'," Fran added.

"Ben doesn't go to our school so it's not like he could brag to anyone who mattered. Bobby won't say anything because if he does, he'll never get it again! And he knows it!"

"Was it like you imagined?"

"You have no idea, Fran! Oh my God! Have you, uhm, ever rubbed yourself?"

"A couple of times," Fran replied quietly.

"Like that, only times a hundred!" Allison declared.

"So he knew what he was doing?"

Allison laughed, "It's kind of obvious how it works once you think about it!"

"I know THAT," Fran exclaimed. "I mean how to make you feel really good."

"Not the first time, but the second."

"Twice! In one night?"

"Yes!" Allison giggled.

"I can't believe your brother got you condoms!"

"He'll do anything for me! I saved his butt when his girlfriend snuck into his room through the window last year."

"What!?" Fran gasped.

"My parents almost caught them, but I distracted my dad long enough for her to sneak out."

"How did you know?" Fran asked.

Allison giggled, "His room is next to mine and they weren't quiet enough! 'Oh, Ken!' 'Yes!' My parents would have killed him, not to mention what Mary's parents would have done!"

"And if you and Bobby get caught?"

"We'll be careful! So, you and Ben?"

"I don't know," Fran replied. "It's a big step. But Ben is SO dreamy! Did you bleed?"

"Just a little. I made sure I got the stain out of the sheet so the old lady wouldn't see it."

"Are you guys going steady now?"

"If Bobby knows what's good for him!" Allison declared.

"Shouldn't you have asked first? That was your first real date with him!"

"Oops!" Allison laughed. "I screwed on a first date! I'm such a slut!"

"I didn't mean it that way!" Fran responded.

"And you know Bobby and I have known each other forever, and we've hung out. Besides, there was no way I was going to let Beverly add him to her list! She would have thought it was fun to get him before I did. So I decided to get him! And now, he's mine!"

"Does he know that?"

"Of course!"

Fran wasn't so sure. And that's what made her stop and think about Ben. Her body was making demands, but if she was going to do it, Ben had to make some promises, the most important one was that they would be steady. Fran didn't feel the need to wait until she was married, but she sure wasn't going to give it up casually. But if Ben asked her to go steady, that was different. She could imagine being married to him, because he didn't plan to be a rabbi. That would have put a stop to things before they even started.

Then she remembered what she'd said to Sam - to ask her again. She knew if she turned him down twice, he might never ask again and she liked him. Sam was a really good guy, but he seemed a bit boring and unexciting compared to Ben. Fran knew she was lucky to have two really nice guys to choose from, and she was sure she might meet others when she went to college. She hadn't decided what to study just yet, but thought about being a teacher, or perhaps a social worker. She wanted a job which would make it easy to have kids and keep working, as the last thing she wanted to be was a homemaker like her mom.

"As long as you're sure."

"You and Ben aren't steady."

"Well, if he wants to do that with me, he's going to have to promise to only be with me *before* he has me!"

They heard noises at the front door, which meant Allison's parents and brother were home, so Fran decided to go home to spend the afternoon reading, as she'd planned. She and Allison said 'goodbye' and then Fran walked the two blocks to her house. Her parents and little sister were home, and after greeting them, she went to the kitchen to make some hot chocolate. Once it was read, she too the mug and went to her room where she got her book. She set the mug of hot chocolate on the night stand, then curled up on her bed under a quilt and began reading.

The problem was, she couldn't focus. All she could think about was Ben and what it would be like to do it with him. She'd felt this way occasionally in the past, but now it seemed constant, and she had trouble thinking about anything else. Fran put her book down, got up and shut the door to her room, then got back under her quilt. She lay back and carefully slipped her hand inside her pants, not caring that she'd have to change her underthings. She ran her fingers through the downy hair, and found *the* spot and began to gently rub, imagining it was Ben who was making her feel so good. The pleasure was so exquisite that Fran went slowly, building to what she knew was something earth shattering, something she'd experienced the previous night when she'd lain in her bed and rubbed herself before falling asleep.

"*Oh, Ben*!" she moaned in a whisper as she drew closer and closer to the pinnacle.

A loud knock at the door startled her.

"Fran, are you OK?" her mom called out.

"Uhm, just feeling a bit sick," Fran replied. "I think I drank a Coke too quickly at Allison's house.

"Do you need anything?"

"No, just to rest."

"OK. Dinner is at the normal time."

"Thanks, Mom. I think I'll nap."

"OK, honey."

Fran sighed and picked up her book, the mood broken. This time when she read, she was able to concentrate, as the fear of getting caught pleasuring herself overrode her desire to do it. About an hour later she heard the phone ring, and then heard a soft knock at the door.

"Yes?" she called out.

"Ben is on the phone, Frannie," her dad said. "Do you want to talk to him?"

"Yes," she replied carefully, not wanting to sound too excited, lest her dad become suspicious.

She got out of bed, and went to the kitchen where the phone was, and picked up the receiver from the counter where her dad had left it.

"Hi, it's Fran," she said into the phone.

"Hi, Fran!" Ben exclaimed. "Did you get permission for next Saturday?"

"I did! What did you want to do?"

"How about dinner and then we see *The Parent Trap*; it's playing at the new drive-in on Route 28 in Loveland."

"I better ask about the drive-in," Fran replied.

"OK. Can you ask now?"

"Yes. Hang on!"

Fran put the phone down and went to the living room where her dad was reading *The Sporting News*.

"Daddy?" Fran said.

Joshua Sorkin lowered his newspaper, "Yes?"

"You said I could go on a date with Ben next Saturday, and he wants to have dinner and then see *The Parent Trap* at the Hi-Way 28 Drive-In. I said I'd have to ask about it."

"I'd really prefer you didn't go to a drive-in on a date, but if I can't trust Ben to behave like a gentleman, I'm not sure who I could trust."

"Is that a 'yes'?"

"It is. But I'll speak with Ben when he picks you up."

"Thanks, Daddy! You're the best!"

She went over, kissed him on the cheek, and went back to the kitchen.

"He said I can go, but he's going to speak to you when you pick me up."

"I can handle your old man!" Ben said. "I'm looking forward to it!"

"Me, too! See you at synagogue tomorrow?"

"Yes. Sorry I can't take you out tomorrow because I'm busy."

"It's OK! See you!"

"Bye!"

"Bye!"

She hung up and turned to see her mom standing there.

"Well, that call picked you right up! Ben is a very nice boy."

"I think so, too," Fran replied, again being careful not to sound too enthusiastic.

"Will you help me with dinner?"

"Yes, of course!"

Fran and her mom put on aprons and got to work.

Entry 19611111 - Backstory 3 - Bev's Story

November 11, 1961, Milford, Ohio

On Saturday morning, after breakfast, Fran went to Allison's house where they were joined by Beverly and Nancy.

"What are we doing today?" Beverly asked.

"I wanted to do some shopping," Fran said. "I want something new for my date with Ben."

"Silk panties and a lacy bra?" Bev teased.

"I meant a blouse and scarf!" Fran protested.

"So they can end up on the floor in the backseat of that rad Sixty Special?"

"Bev!" Fran protested. "Stop!"

Bev rolled her eyes, "What's the big deal?"

"Not everyone is you, Bev," Nancy declared. "Some of us are waiting for marriage!"

"YOU are," Allison giggled, deciding it was OK to share. "Too late for me!"

"No!" Nancy gasped. "You?"

Allison nodded, smiling like the proverbial cat that ate the canary, "And I'm seeing Bobby after dinner! His parents are out of town!"

"How was it?" Bev asked.

"Oh! My! God!" Allison exclaimed. "Now I wonder why I waited!"

"Because good girls don't do that!" Nancy protested. "You'll get a reputation! And what if you get pregnant? Or get a social disease?"

"First of all, Bobby had never done it before, so there's no way I could get a social disease. We used rubbers because there is no way we want a baby. And Bobby isn't going to say anything to anyone because he wants it again!"

"You just told three friends!" Nancy protested. "What if he tells HIS friends?"

"He won't, if he knows what's good for him!"

"So," Bev smirked, "did you suck him?"

"Ewww!" Nancy, Fran, and Allison all squealed.

"It's fun!" Bev declared. "And you can ask him to do the same thing!"

"Gross!" Nancy exclaimed. "Who would put their mouth there?"

"You have NO idea what you're missing! My first time, he did that before, and I thought I was going to lose my mind! It was SO awesome! And I did the same thing for him, and it was so cool when..."

"Stop!" Nancy demanded, then stood up. "I'm leaving!"

"Don't be a baby!" Bev ordered.

"I'm not a baby, but I don't want to listen to this!"

She hurried from the room and out the front door before Allison could stop her.

"Did you HAVE to do that?" Fran asked.

"Do what?" Bev asked. "Talk about sex? You're going to do with Ben. Don't you want to know what to do?"

"I think that's been obvious since I started babysitting!" Fran replied. "I mean, seriously, the boy has something that sticks out and we have a place where babies come out. Most seven-year-old girls have it figured out because of changing diapers. Boys are a bit more clueless, but even they know what goes where! After all, Allison and Bobby figured it out!"

Allison giggled, "I babysit, too, and I've changed enough diapers, so yeah. But it was WAY bigger than a baby's!"

"They come in various sizes," Bev declared authoritatively. "From 'nice' to 'wow!' and plenty in between!"

"Bev, truth now," Allison said. "Did you really do it with Mr. Carlton?"

Bev smiled, "Oh, yeah! He was the first when I was a Sophomore. He's huge and really knew what to do!"

"And he put his mouth on you?"

"Yes! Including putting his tongue in me! I almost jumped out of his bed at that point!"

"And you really did the other thing?"

"Suck him? Yes! He taught me what he liked and it was totally cool."

"And..."

"Yeah," Bev smirked. "I swallowed!"

"Ewww!" Fran and Allison both squealed.

"Boys *really* like it when you do that. And if you don't want to give it up, you can do that and keep them VERY happy."

"How would YOU know?" Allison asked.

Bev laughed, "OK, I might not need to do that for that reason, but I know girls who do that so they can stay virgins."

"You do that a lot?"

"Sure. Sex is fun!"

"But what about your future husband?" Fran asked.

"If he can't deal with it, then he can't be my husband. But I don't want to just have sex with one person for the rest of my life."

"And you think you'll find a guy who will be OK with his wife being a loose woman?"

Bev smirked, "He'd be allowed to have sex with anyone he wanted, too! I think I know a few guys who would sign up for THAT!"

"That just seems so wrong," Allison protested. "Don't you think so, Fran?"

"I guess it's not really my business if that's what she wants to do, but I could never do that. But Bev, you could have real trouble if anyone found out. I mean, can you imagine if you were a teacher or something like that and people found out? They'd run you out of town!"

"I'm probably going to get a job as a secretary when I graduate, not some job where I have to behave in a certain way. Nobody will care what I do."

"I'm not so sure about that," Fran said. "I think you need to be really careful."

Bev shrugged, "It's my life and I want to live it the way I want to."

"You know that's not how it works," Fran objected. "People who don't follow social norms are outcasts. They could probably arrest you, because adultery is against the law."

"Who's going to complain? My husband? Not if he gets to screw anyone he wants!"

"And social diseases?"

"Rubbers are good for that."

"Bev," Allison inquired, "are you telling the truth about using your mouth on guys? And them on you?"

"Most guys won't do that, but some will. And yes, of course! If you have a banana or a carrot, I can show you how!"

"No way!" Allison gasped. "Seriously?"

"We're friends, so why not? I'm sure Bobby would be happy! In fact, if you want, I'll show you how on him!"

"If you touch him, they won't find your body, Beverly Thompson!" Allison declared fiercely.

Fran squirmed a bit because the conversation was making her think about Ben and what she thought they might do. She didn't want her friends to notice, so she excused herself and went to the bathroom. She sat on the toilet and took several deep breaths while she emptied her bladder, trying to push the images out of her mind, but not having any success. Her body was demanding that she let Ben have her, and she felt powerless to resist. It was the strangest feeling, and she had no idea how it had developed in such a short time, when just a few months previous, she would have said she'd never do it until she married. She finished using the toilet, washed her hands, then checked her makeup in the mirror before returning to her two friends.

"Bev!" Fran exclaimed as she saw Beverly pushing a whole carrot deep into her mouth.

Beverly slowly pulled the carrot out, ran her tongue around it, and smirked.

"What?"

"It's too much," Fran said.

"Is someone feeling a tickle in their cunny?" Bev asked with a smirk.

"I just don't think you're respecting yourself," Fran said. "Not because you had sex, but because you're too free. I mean, how many guys have you had?"

"An even dozen," Bev declared, running her tongue around the top of the carrot.

"Don't you think that's too many? I mean, you're only seventeen."

"So? I like sex. Maybe I'll be with a hundred guys."

"That's just disgusting to think about!" Fran said, shaking her head. "I mean, OK, not waiting until you get married, I totally understand. But a *hundred* guys? That's just gross. Don't you agree, Allison?"

"I guess, but if I don't marry Bobby, I'll be with at least two guys. The same is true of you and Ben. How many is too many? Nancy would say two is too many, but I don't know."

"It's only too many if YOU think it is," Bev declared. "I mean, Allison, people would call you a 'slut' or a 'loose woman' because you did it with Bobby, even if you eventually marry him. And worse, it's OK for a guy to have all the conquests he wants, but let a girl 'give up her virtue' before her wedding night and she's a 'wanton slut' or whatever you want, even if she's only with one guy! It's wrong!"

"I don't see that changing anytime soon," Allison declared. "And the risks are all on the girl, really, with being pregnant."

"Did you hear the government approved a pill you can take that can stop you from getting pregnant?" Bev asked. "I don't think they're available yet, but can you imagine not worrying about getting pregnant?"

"A pill?" Allison asked. "But what would that do to your body?"

Bev shrugged, "I only know because Al's dad is the pharmacist and his dad was debating whether he should carry the drug or not, even though it's mostly meant to help regulate your monthlies. Some girls have real problems and they miss school every four weeks because they have such bad cramps. You know, Ellen Perkins, right?"

Fran nodded, "Yes, she's had bad cramps since she was thirteen. But can she get those pills?"

"No idea," Bev replied. "Mr. Franks carries it, but he might have to stop because it might be illegal to prescribe it for birth control."

"You're confusing me," Allison said.

"Sorry. So this drug has been available for three years for problems with your period, but now it can be used to prevent you from getting in the family way. Supposedly, politicians are having hissy fits about it."

"Because it would allow women to have sex without getting pregnant, right?" Fran asked.

"Yes, but also think about this - a woman could take it without her husband knowing about it, and not get pregnant and he'd never know why."

"That does seem deceitful," Allison observed. "But shouldn't it be up to us to decide when we get pregnant and how many kids we have?"

"I think we all agree on that," Bev said. "But politicians and a lot of men sure don't! But for a single guy, it's like a dream come true - no rubbers!"

"This pill stops social diseases?" Fran asked.

"No, but if they guy and girl are clean, that's not so important," Bev replied.

Fran wasn't so sure, because she'd heard that you could have a social disease and not know it.

"I think the Catholics are fighting it, too," Bev added. "The Pope says they can't even use rubbers!"

"And I'm sure every Catholic boy follows THAT rule," Allison giggled.

"None I know!" Bev smirked. "And I've been with Catholic boys!"

"Have you ever done it without a rubber?" Allison asked.

"Once," Bev said. "I got all hot and bothered and he didn't have a rubber, but I'd just had my monthly, so it was safe. It was like the day after it ended. Now I make sure I have them."

"Where do you get them?"

"There's a clinic in Cincinnati where I can get them. It's called Planned Parenthood, and they give advice on 'family planning', and they'll give you rubbers even if you're not sixteen. But I didn't need that before I turned sixteen because Mr. Carlton had them, and so did Mr. Wilson."

"He's married!" Fran protested.

"And his wife hates sex! She won't use her mouth or let him use his mouth or even do it with the lights on! He was the best ever, even better than Mr. Carlton! But we almost got caught, so he decided we had to stop. I'd do it with him again anytime!"

"Is Al the only guy you're with now?" Allison asked.

"For now," Bev smirked. "So, are we going shopping?"

"Yes. Let's go. Do you have your dad's car?"

"Yes. So we can go into the city and shop at Pogue's, Mabley & Carew, McAlpin's, and Shillito's. I'm sure you can find something sexy to wear under the blouse you want to buy!"

"What about lunch?"

"How about Skyline Chili on Glenway in Price Hill?" Allison asked. "My dad took us there a few weeks ago and it was awesome."

"Sure," Bev agreed. "Fran?"

"I've never had chili, but I'll try it. We should call Nancy, though we have to promise to behave."

"She's such a stick in the mud!" Bev protested. "She should just hang out with Alan Blanchard! He's got the same opinions!"

"You wanted him?" Allison asked.

"He's a hunk and is nice, but he's totally hung up on religion. And he said he couldn't go out with a girl with a 'reputation'. Do we HAVE to invite her?"

"She's our friend," Fran replied. "So yes. And we should see if Jennie wants to go along. I do need to tell my mom where we're going."

"Me, too," Allison said. "Meet back here in twenty minutes? I'll call Nancy, and Fran, you can stop at Jennie's house on the way home to talk to your mom."

That's what they did, and the plans worked out, and twenty-five minutes later they were on their way in Bev's dad's Chevy convertible. Their only regret was that it was too chilly outside to put the top down. Their shopping trip was successful, and Bev talked Fran into buying red silk panties and a red lace bra, which caused Fran to blush when she paid the female clerk who had also helped her fit her bra.

"That was embarrassing!" Fran exclaimed when they walked back to the car from McAlpin's, where Bev had found exactly what she thought Fran should wear.

"Why? It's not like there was a male clerk!"

"Even so," Fran said. "I think she knew!"

Beverly laughed, "Of COURSE she did! You don't buy those unless you're going to screw!"

"Bev, you promised!" Allison reprimanded.

"Sorry, Nancy," Bev said, sounding as if she actually meant it.

"You should be careful what you say around Jennie," Nancy said firmly. "She's only seven."

"I know how that works!" Jennie declared, confirming what the girls had said earlier about babysitting and changing diapers. "I think it's gross, but I know adults do that! It's where babies come from! I asked Mom about it when I changed my cousin's diaper when I was six. I mean, I guessed, but she said I was right."

"Your mom talked to you about it when you were six?" Nancy asked.

"What was she going to do?" Jennie inquired. "I asked her if the boy put that thing inside the girl to make a baby!"

"My mom barely talked to me about it when I got my monthlies," Nancy said. "And I was fourteen!"

"Hands-on experience is the only way to find out!" Bev declared, then quickly added, "Sorry. Let's change the subject!"

On the way home, they chatted about school and boys, but without Bev making any inappropriate comments. When Fran walked into her house, she was very careful to quickly go to her room so she could stash the sexy underthings in a place where her mom wouldn't see them.

"What did you find?" Esther Sorkin asked from the door a few seconds after Fran had hidden her secret purchases.

"A blouse and scarf," Fran said, taking them out of the Pogue's bag.

"Those are very pretty!" her mom declared. "I'm sure Ben will like them! Will you help me with dinner?"

"Of course!" Fran replied.

Entry 19611118 - Backstory 4 - Dinner and a Movie, Part I

November 18, 1961, Milford, Ohio

On Saturday afternoon, Fran bathed, then went to her room to dress. She put on her new red silk panties, new red lace bra, and stopped to admire herself in her dressing mirror. Just as she struck a pose, smiling at how sexy she looked, she was startled by a knock at the door.

"Fran?" her mom called out.

Shaking, Fran quickly put on her robe and went to the door and opened it slightly.

"I'm dressing," Fran said, hoping her mom would go away.

"I want to talk to you, please."

Fran had no choice but to let her mom in, and decided she could put on her makeup and paint her nails, in the hope her mom would leave before she had to put on her skirt and blouse. She sat down at the dressing table and began working on her nails.

"Take this," Esther Sorkin said, holding out her hand.

"A dime?" Fran asked.

"I want to make sure you had a coin for the pay phone. I know your father trusts Ben, but if he gets fresh, I want you to call me and I'll come pick you up."

"Ben's a nice guy and would never do that!"

"Ben's a teenage boy, Fran."

And I'm a teenage girl, Fran thought, but didn't say. She had the same urges, but she doubted that her mom would understand. Except, unknown to Fran, her mother understood all too well. Esther, when she was sixteen, had been involved with a boy who'd joined the Marines on December 8th, 1941, and before he'd shipped out, she'd given in to the urges she'd had, and gone to bed with the young man. She'd never seen him again, as he'd died on an island called Guadalcanal less than a year later.

Esther had met Joshua Sorkin in early 1944 when he'd been sent to the hospital where she worked, so he could recover from injuries he'd suffered on Tarawa. They'd married, and then moved to Cincinnati from San Diego, where Esther's father, who was in Naval intelligence, worked. Fran had been born just ten months after the wedding. Fran knew those details, but she didn't know that her mom had said 'goodbye' to Joseph in the most intimate way.

"I trust Ben to treat me right," Fran said carefully.

"I know, honey, but sometimes boys stop thinking, especially when pretty girls are concerned."

Fran laughed, "All us girls know THAT! And it's not just being fresh!"

Esther smiled, "Teenage boys have been known to do a dumb thing or two, even when girls aren't involved. Men, too!"

"Daddy?"

Esther smiled, "Your dad was a Marine. They're pretty 'squared away'. He still is."

"He doesn't talk much about that," Fran observed.

"Most of the men who fought in the war don't talk about it. They volunteered or were drafted, did their jobs, and then came home and resumed their lives. Well, the ones who came home, anyway."

Fran detected a note of sadness that she'd never heard in her mom's voice before.

"Did you know someone who didn't come home?"

Esther nodded, "I knew a lot of sailors and Marines because my dad was based in San Diego."

"But there was one special boy, wasn't there?"

Esther nodded, "Joseph Friedman. He was eighteen and joined the Marines the day after the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, just like your dad did. Of course, I didn't know your dad then, but Joseph died on Guadalcanal. Your dad was badly hurt on Tarawa, but he made it home."

"You were sixteen when the war started, right?"

"Yes. It was a frightening time, and we thought the Japs might actually invade California. That's why Roosevelt ordered them rounded up."

"But they were Americans, Mom!" Fran protested. "Some German-Americans actually helped the Nazis!"

"Honey, you don't understand how afraid we all were after Pearl Harbor."

"How long did you date the boy who died?"

"We didn't really date one-on-one. We had a group of friends we hung out with, but there wasn't a lot of money to spend. We were fortunate because your grandfather was in the Navy, so he had a job all through the worst years of the Depression. Honey, just take the dime and use it if you need to."

Fran knew the best way to get rid of her mom was to agree, then say she needed to brush her teeth.

"OK," Fran replied, putting the dime next to her purse, and getting up. "I need to brush my teeth, which I should have done before the makeup!"

Esther laughed softly, "You'll get the sequence down after a few dates!"

"Did you and Dad date?"

"Not really, unless you count me sitting by his hospital bed every evening. We were married by a chaplain the day he was released from the hospital. The only people there were my parents and a few of our friends, plus a bunch of Marines."

"Did you have a honeymoon?"

"Basically our drive from San Diego to Cincinnati where your uncle had arranged for a job for your dad. There weren't a lot of resources available. Our friends shared ration cards with us so we could be sure to get gasoline and food on the way. Rationing ended when you were about six months old, except for sugar. You were about a year old when that ended. Our drive took two weeks because even with a 'C' sticker and sufficient ration cards, we had to be careful with how much gas we used each day."

"So you and Dad were criminals?" Fran teased. "Who know I was the daughter of the Jewish Bonnie and Clyde! That was what? An eight-state crime spree?"

Esther smiled, "Cute. But there was a lot of trading going on, and that was kind of winked at, especially for returning soldiers and sailors. If you bought on the black market, then the authorities would come after you. Anyway, go brush your teeth."

Her mom left the room, and Fran went to the bathroom. She brushed her teeth, then returned to her room where she immediately put on her skirt and blouse before finishing her makeup. Once she was happy, she put her shawl around her shoulders, checked herself in the mirror one last time, then went to the living room to wait for the rest of the family. When they were ready, everyone piled into the family car, and they headed to the synagogue.

Fran saw Ben sitting in his usual place, and smiled at him. She wanted to sit with him, but her dad always insisted they sit together for services. Fran fidgeted the entire time, and hoped her dad didn't notice. Fortunately, he didn't, and when the service concluded, she asked permission from her dad to go with Ben.

"Have an enjoyable evening, Frannie," Joshua Sorkin said, "and be home on time."

"I will, Daddy. Ben knows he has to bring me straight home from the movie."

She got a kiss from her dad and started to walk away, but she felt her mom's hand on her arm.

"I went to the Tuesday matinée in Mariemont with my friends," Esther said quietly. "We can talk about the movie tomorrow."

Fran managed to stifle a groan and avoid frowning, but only just.

"OK, Mom," she replied evenly, instantly angry that her mom didn't trust her.

Fran had been unsure about letting Ben have her, but in the blink of an eye, she was determined to do it. How DARE her mom interfere with her date in that way! Even necking would be difficult because if she missed some minor point in the movie, she'd never be allowed to go to the drive-in again, and probably never allowed to see Ben. The 'Old Lady' had some nerve! The only problem was, she had to be home immediately after the movie, and being late would bring down her dad's wrath.

Frustrated, she walked over to Ben, but put on a happy face as best she could. He took her hand, and they walked out of the synagogue together. In the parking lot, he helped her into the passenger side of his dad's Cadillac Sixty Special, then got into the driver's seat.

"How will your parents get home?" Fran asked.

"I drove Mom's car here, and they'll take that one. I had to do a bit of fancy footwork to get the nice car. Mom's car is a bit cramped and uncomfortable for a drive-in movie."

Fran was sure he meant 'for sex', but she was still fuming inside, or otherwise she might have laughed. She wondered if she should say something to Ben, but given that it was still light out, and there really wasn't any place they could go to be alone, she decided to keep the 'problem' to herself while she tried to work out a way to accomplish what was now her primary goal. Just the thought gave her a strange feeling in her stomach and a tingle between her legs.

The drive to Milford took nearly thirty minutes along Route 50, and Fran and Ben chatted about school and listened to the radio. Fran was a bit distracted by her thoughts and by her annoyance with her mom, and she hoped it didn't show.

Ben didn't seem to notice, which pleased Fran, as she didn't want to do anything to put a damper on his mood, and didn't want to disclose what her mom had said.

Ben, too, was thinking about what he hoped would happen later in the evening. The way Fran had responded when they were parked made it obvious that if he got her worked up, he'd have his long, thick rod buried in her before the movie ended. His only regret was having to use a rubber, but he couldn't take the chance of Fran getting pregnant. His first time with Ellie Green had been without protection, and it had felt SO much better than when they used rubbers. It really was too bad that her father had forbidden her from seeing him, and he still didn't know why.

When Ben and Fran arrived at Big Boy, Ben helped Fran from the car, and they went inside. They were immediately shown to a cozy booth, and the hostess handed them menus. A bus boy brought them ice water, and a waitress came to take their drink orders. Both of them ordered Cokes, then perused the menus. Fran opted for a 'Big Boy' platter, and Ben did the same, though he chose a double-cheeseburger, rather than the single-cheeseburger, which Fran selected. The waitress brought their Cokes, took their orders, and left to put them in with the kitchen.

"We're going to have about an hour from when we finish eating until the show starts," Ben said after the waitress left.

"We could go for a drive," Fran suggested.

"Sure," Ben replied, thinking that even though it wouldn't be dark enough for the movie to start, it had been a cloudy day, and they could go parking without being too obvious, because the gravel road was shielded by trees. He didn't know if Fran would be OK with that, but he certainly could try.

It didn't take long for their food to be served, and they ate without much conversation, electing to pass on dessert. Ben paid, left a tip on the table, and then he and Fran walked out to his car. He helped her into the passenger seat, then went around to the driver's side, got in, started the car, and backed out of the parking spot.

When he left Big Boy, he turned right on Route 50 and drove less than a mile before turning left onto Klondyke, and Fran was nearly positive about what Ben had planned.

When he reached the top of the hill and turned right onto Overlook, Fran's heart began racing and a combination of nervous excitement and fear overwhelmed her, for she knew exactly where they were headed and what was going to happen once they arrived. She had to fight not to shake, and she was positive Ben could tell just how apprehensive she was. But apprehensive or not, she was sure this was what she wanted.

Ben turned into the gravel road and drove far enough that the car couldn't be seen from the street, and was also shielded from the barn and farmhouse. Only someone who came to the fence on the far side of the field from the barn would be able to see the car. Ben stopped, put the car in park, and shut off the engine. He slid a bit closer to Fran and put his arm on the top of the seat back and was very happy when Fran scooted close. He put his arm around her shoulder and waited, as he didn't want to spook her like the previous time they'd been in this exact place.

Fran was nervous, but she was determined, so she snuggled close, then raised her lips for a kiss. Ben, again not wanting to move too fast, gave her a gentle kiss, waited a few seconds, then kissed her again. Fran sighed softly when he broke the second kiss, an obvious signal to Ben that it was OK to engage in serious kissing. He lowered his mouth to hers, probed gently with his tongue, and when her lips parted, he pressed it forward and they engaged in a soft French kiss.

After a few minutes of kissing, Ben slowly moved his arm so that he could slide his hand under Fran's arm and gently cup her breast. Fran moaned into his mouth and didn't pull back, so Ben ran his fingertip lightly over Fran's hard nipple, eliciting a second moan. Ben moved his other hand to Fran's knee, which was covered by her skirt, and left it there while they continued to kiss.

Fran felt herself get wet between her legs, just as she had when she rubbed herself in bed at night, and suddenly she positively ached for Ben to touch her there, to make her feel good. When she rubbed herself, she could cause her whole body to shake, and she wondered just how much better it would be with him...inside her! The thought caused her to shiver in anticipation. She moved her hand to Ben's thigh, then tentatively moved it upwards until she encountered his hardness. It seemed ridiculously huge, but she knew it would fit because babies were WAY bigger and they were born through where he was going to put it; where she wanted him to put it.

Fran ran her fingers lightly along Ben's rock-hard shaft, and he groaned softly as they continued to French kiss. The first time he'd been with Ellie, he hadn't been able to hold back and had made a complete mess in his pants, though he hadn't let that deter him from achieving his goal - the same goal he had now. He might even get Fran twice, because they'd have the entire length of the movie to spend in the back seat, which was where he wanted to move, but he didn't want to push TOO hard, lest Fran object the way she had the last time they'd necked.

As they continued to kiss, Fran didn't stop running her fingers along Ben's shaft, and he very much wanted to touch her, but between the shawl and calf-length skirt, he didn't have easy access to either her breasts or to that wonderful place hidden between a girl's thighs. He patiently kissed Fran while gently squeezing her breast and running his finger over her nipple, and after about five minutes, she broke the kiss and took some deep breaths.

"Do you want to move to the back seat?" he asked quietly.

Fran knew it was the decision point. If she said 'no', they would just keep kissing until it was time for the movie, and she could put off the decision for another hour. If she said 'yes', she knew that it wouldn't be long before she was naked with Ben's equally naked body on top of hers, joined together in the most intimate of places. Fran took a deep breath and nodded just enough to make it clear she wanted to.

Ben got out of the car, walked around to the passenger side and helped Fran out, then helped her into the roomy back seat. There was plenty of time, so Ben simply got in and slid close to Fran, putting his arm around her and pulling her gently to him. They began kissing again, their hands returning to the places they'd been before, his on her breast, hers on the bulge in his slacks.

They kissed for a few minutes, and this time, Ben broke the kiss. He shifted slightly and moved his hands to unbutton the single button which held the shawl tight around Fran's shoulders. She didn't object, so he unbuttoned the shawl and pushed it from her shoulders. Fran shivered in anticipation as his hands moved to the button of her blouse which was just under her chin. Nervously she nodded and Ben began unbuttoning her blouse, slowly revealing the red lace bra which covered her breasts.

Ben continued to take things slow, and moved to kiss Fran, and this time all that separated his hand from her breast was the lacy red bra she was wearing. He allowed one finger to slide along just above the top of the bra, and after a minute, slipped it under the material. Fran broke the kiss and took a deep breath, let it out, then kissed him again, so he moved his finger slowly down to touch her spongey nipple. He very much wanted to get her bra off so he could see Fran's large, firm breasts, but more importantly so that he could get his mouth on them.

A rap on the rear window startled them, and they looked out to see a Clermont County Sheriff's Deputy tapping his baton on the window.

Entry 19611118 - Backstory 4 - Dinner and a Movie, Part II

November 18, 1961, Milford, Ohio

Fran quickly pulled her blouse over her chest and began buttoning the buttons while Ben opened the door and got out.

"Can I help you, Deputy?" Ben asked.

"Your driver's license, please. And the young lady's as well."

Ben fished his wallet from his pocket, then extracted his license and handed it to the deputy. Fran finished buttoning her blouse, pulled her shawl around her shoulders, then got out of the car.

"Pretty far from home, Benjamin," the Deputy said.

"My girl is from Milford," Ben replied.

"Your license?" he asked Fran.

"I don't have one."

"How old are you?" the Deputy asked.

"Sixteen," she replied nervously.

"What's your name?"

"Fran. Fran Sorkin."

"You live in Milford?"

"On Brandon Avenue."

"You kids are on private property without permission. Didn't you see the 'No Trespassing' sign?"

"No, Sir," Ben replied, honestly, as he hadn't seen the sign.

"I'd ask what you were doing here, but it was pretty obvious from the young lady's blouse. Where were you two supposed to be tonight, Fran"

"Dinner and a movie," she replied.

The deputy made a point of scanning the area.

"Doesn't look like a drive-in theater to me, Benjamin. Does it look like one to you?"

"No, Sir."

"Then I suggest you two be where you're supposed to be. Don't let me catch you here again, or I'll have to run the young lady home and you can explain it to her father. Do we understand each other?"

"Yes, Sir!" Ben exclaimed.

"Then have a good evening."

As the deputy turned to walk away, Ben thought that it had been about to be a VERY good evening, until the deputy had interrupted things. Now, most likely, they'd end up watching the cartoons and the short, and then the entire feature, which was not how he'd planned the evening to go. He waited until the deputy got into his cruiser and backed out of the gravel road before he wordlessly helped Fran into the passenger's seat. He went around and got into the driver's seat, started the car, and backed it down the gravel road.

Fran thought about asking Ben to take her home, but that would only lead to all kinds of questions - questions she didn't want to answer. It would also ensure her dad never let her see Ben again, or likely even allow her to talk to him.

"Do you think someone saw us and called it in?" Fran asked as Ben drove back along Overlook Drive.

"I think he might just have been patrolling. There was never a 'No Trespassing' sign before. Whoever owns the farm probably spotted some other kids there and then put up the signs."

"We can't ever go there again! If he took me home, I'd be in big trouble with my dad."

"It wouldn't be too keen for me, either," Ben replied. "I mean from my dad. I don't even want to think about what YOUR dad would do. Do you still want to see the movie?"

"Yes. The Old Lady is going to quiz me like they did Joyce Brothers on *The $64,000 Question*!"

"It's amazing a woman could know so much about boxing. I would have guessed she was one of the ones who cheated, but it doesn't look like they fed her answers like they did that Charles van Doren guy on the other show."

"*Twenty-One*," Fran replied. "My dad said that was completely rigged almost from the start. That man lost his job because of the scandal."

"What do you watch?" Ben asked as he turned left onto Klondyke and carefully navigated the sharp turns on the steep incline.

"A couple of new shows - *Ben Casey* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. They just started last month. Have you seen them?"

"No. What are they about?"

"*Ben Casey* is about a doctor and is shown on Monday nights, and I'm allowed to stay up and watch, even though it starts at 10:00pm; *The Dick Van Dyke Show* is about a writer for a TV comedy series and is shown on Tuesday night. What do you watch?"

"*Wide World of Sports* and *My Three Sons*. Have you seen that one?"

"Yes, though Thursday night we usually have our family game night when we play cards or *Monopoly*, so we don't usually have the television on. What about *Andy Griffith*?"

"We watch that," Ben said. "I don't think the sheriffs around here are like that. Nor the deputies."

"This one seemed pretty nice. He could have insisted on taking me home because I didn't have a license. I think he might have been worried that I wasn't sixteen."

"He didn't see us doing anything that could get either of us in trouble with the law, just our dads."

"If you turn on Route 131 you can turn left on Wolfpen, which is where the new High School is being built. That will take you to Route 28. Turn right, and the drive-in is a couple of miles east on the right."

"I checked the map, but I had planned to take 28 from downtown Milford before we decided to go for a drive."

Fran almost laughed because the LAST thing boys wanted was a girl giving them directions. She remembered a trip to Pittsburgh when she was little, and her dad specifically asking a waitress at a diner if there was a guy who could give him directions. She'd been eight, and decided then and there she'd learn how to read a map.

"I can read maps," Fran said. "I can be your navigator, like on airplanes."

"How did you learn to read a map?"

"I taught myself! It's not difficult! I'm good at geography, too."

And other things, too, but most girls pretended not to know stuff like that, or about cars or motorcycles or planes to keep the boys from being shown up. It was like Doctor Joyce brothers and boxing - everyone had thought she'd cheated because she was a girl. And it turned out, she was WAY smarter than the guys who ran the show who tried to trip her up.

"What do you want to do when you graduate?"

"Go to college. I'm going to study philosophy and psychology, and maybe become a psychologist."

"Does your mom work?"

"No, but so what? Women can do anything a man can do!"

Ben almost asked if she could piss standing up, but decided against it as all that would do was make her angry, and if he was going to achieve his goal, that was the wrong thing to do. In fact, agreeing with her was probably the best course of action.

"Of course they can," he replied.

"Don't patronize me, Benjamin Goldfeder!" Fran exclaimed. "You'd have sounded more convincing if you told that Deputy we were having a Garden Society meeting!"

"I didn't mean it to sound that way!" Ben protested.

"But you don't believe it! Could our congregation have a female rabbi?"

"Well, no," he admitted.

"What about a female President?"

"Uh, sure."

"Would YOU vote for a woman for President?"

Not in a million years, Ben thought. He'd managed to get in trouble by *agreeing* with Fran, which made no sense, but then again, he found that what girls thought often made no sense at all.

"I'm only seventeen," he replied defensively, hoping that would save him.

"And in 1964, would you vote for a woman who ran against President Kennedy?"

"It would depend on who it was."

"Right," Fran said, shaking her head.

Ben decided is best course of action was to just be quiet for a bit, then change the subject and hope Fran dropped it. If she didn't, he knew there was no chance he'd even get a make-out session, let alone anything else. He followed Fran's directions which were impeccable, and they listened to the radio.

When they arrived at the drive-in, he paid the 'car' fee, and they found a spot towards in one of the back rows, where other teenagers were parked. That meant a long walk to the concession stand, which was by the screen, but also afforded a bit of privacy in that it would be darker because the screen was further away.

"I wish we could stay for the second feature," Ben said. "I really want to see *The Guns of Navarone*."

"My dad was already nervous about us coming to the drive-in, so there was no way I was asking to be home well after midnight! He'd lose his mind!"

"Are you doing anything tomorrow?"

"I don't have any specific plans. Why?"

"Maybe we could have lunch and then ice cream at Graeter's."

And maybe she'd agree to go back to his house which would be empty because his parents would be out for the day and his younger brother would take $2 to disappear for an hour and not rat him out to his parents."

"You can ask my dad when we get home. He'll be waiting up for us."

Ben agreed and at the concession stand they got a bucket of popcorn and two Cokes, then walked back to the car. They settled in, Ben put the speaker in his window, and pulled a blanket from the back seat. It was just cold enough to need it, even if nothing was going to happen underneath it.

And that was the case, as Fran allowed Ben to put his arm around her, but otherwise insisted on watching the cartoons, the short, and *The Parent Trap*. Ben was frustrated, but he didn't realize that Fran was just as frustrated, but she was also worried about her mom quizzing her AND about being caught by the Sheriff's deputy. Bed did get a 'good night' kiss from her before they went into the house so he could speak with her dad.

"Mr. Sorkin, would it be OK for me to take Fran to lunch and for ice cream tomorrow? I'd pick her up around 11:00am and have her back by 3:00pm at the latest."

Joshua Sorkin looked Ben directly in the eyes and didn't see anything which concerned him.

"That would be OK," he said. "I'll walk you to the door."

Ben was glad he'd asked for the 'good night' kiss BEFORE they'd come inside, as it was obvious that Mr. Sorkin was ensuring there wouldn't be one after.

"Good night, Fran," Ben said.

"Good night, Ben," Fran replied.

When her dad and Ben went to the front door, Fran went to her room to drop her purse and take off her shawl so she could begin getting ready for bed. She wasn't surprised when her mom showed up at the door.

"How was the movie?" Esther Sorkin inquired.

"Fine, Mom," Fran replied. "Can we talk about it at breakfast? I'm tired and want to go to bed."

"Ben behaved like a gentleman?"

"Yes, Mom," she replied, hoping she didn't sound as exasperated as she felt.

"Frannie, we love you and that's why we look out for you."

And interfered in her life, too! But Fran wasn't going to say that.

"I know, Mom. We had dinner, saw the movie, and I'm home on time. And yes, we watched the entire movie, which you'll find out at breakfast."

Esther smiled, "I'm sure you watched."

Fran suppressed a groan because she realized her mom had no intention of quizzing her, but had said that solely to ensure that Fran DID watch the movie. Now she knew for next time. Well, unless her mom was being sneaky and wouldn't ask THIS time, but would next time to try to catch her out. The fact that her mom was so suspicious made Fran suspicious, but she had no way to find out if her mom had acted in an 'unladylike' manner when she was sixteen.

"Good night, Mom."

"Good night, Fran."

Esther left and Fran removed her shawl, shut the door to her room, and removed her blouse and skirt. She put on her housecoat and went to the bathroom to wash

the makeup from her face and perform her usual bedtime routine. When she finished, she went back to her room, closed and locked the door, then took off her housecoat, bra, and panties. She examined herself in the mirror, then put on a fresh pair of panties and her nightgown, took some tissues from the box on her desk, turned off the light, then climbed into bed.

She closed her eyes and began gently rubbing that spot between her legs, thinking of Ben, and what it would have felt like to have him inside her.

November 19, 1961, Milford, Ohio

"How was the movie?" Fran's little sister Elizabeth asked, with a smirk, and then made kissing sounds.

"Elizabeth!" Esther reprimanded. "Your sister behaves like a proper young lady, just as we expect you to!"

'Hah!' Elizabeth thought. If her mom only knew about the game they'd played at her friend Patricia's birthday party! But there was no way she was going to say anything or do anything to give her mom a clue that she'd let Kenny Burnside put his hand inside her panties and she'd put her hand in HIS boxers. Unfortunately, the party had ended before it got REALLY interesting. Next time she was going to suggest they play 'Seven Minutes in Heaven' again, though she didn't want to spin a Coke bottle for who she got to go to heaven with! That's how she ended up making out with Kenny, but there were boys who were toads she had no intention of kissing!

"The movie was fine," Fran replied. "It was a very funny story about two twins who didn't know they were twins meeting at summer camp. Their parents had split up and the twins, after teasing each other and playing tricks on one another,

find out who they are. They then set about getting their parents back together. In the end, they succeed."

Esther smiled as she knew why Fran had given the details.

"What are you doing today, Fran?" Elizabeth asked.

"Ben is taking me to lunch and then to Graeter's."

"No fair!" Elizabeth protested. "I want to go to Graeter's!"

"You are NOT tagging along on my date!" Fran declared. "Go on your own date!"

"When she's sixteen," Esther said.

Elizabeth knew better than to protest, because if she did, that would lead to a question about which boy she liked, and that was a question Elizabeth didn't want to answer. She knew any boy she named would instantly be a suspect in her dad's mind, and that was the last thing she wanted. Not to mention the fact that there were three or four boys she thought were totally cool and would be fun to go on a date with.

"You could always ask Mom or Dad to take you," Fran suggested.

"Could we, Mom?" Elizabeth begged. "Please?"

"Let me talk to your father," Esther said. "Now, eat your breakfast."

The girls finished their breakfast, and after helping clean up the kitchen, Fran went to her room to read, while her mom and Elizabeth went to the sewing room. Fran read until 10:30am, when she got ready for her date with Ben, putting on a white, pleated skirt and a red blouse, and wrapping her shoulders in a while

shawl. When she went to the living room, her dad had the television on, waiting for the football game to start.

"Who's playing, Daddy?" Fran asked, even though she didn't really care.

"The New York Giants and Pittsburgh Steelers," he replied. "I'd like to see the Cleveland game, but CBS doesn't have the rights to their games."

The doorbell rang, and Joshua got up to answer it, as Fran knew he would. She waited until her dad brought Ben into the living room, and after Ben confirmed their plans, he and Fran were allowed to leave the house. Ben helped her into the passenger seat, then walked around to get into the driver's seat. He started the car and backed out of the Sorkin's driveway. As he pulled away from the house, he decided to just say what he'd planned.

"My parents are out for the afternoon," he said, hoping Fran understood the implied invitation.

"What about lunch and ice cream?" she asked.

"We could eat at my house and then get ice cream after..."

Fran felt the now-familiar tingle between her legs and heat in the pit of her stomach, and her desire overwhelmed her such that there was only one thing to say.

"Yes."

Entry 19611118 - Backstory 4 - Dinner and a Movie, Part III

November 19, 1961, Milford, Ohio

As Ben pulled into the driveway of his house, Fran's nerves kicked into high gear, but even there, they were unable to overcome the burning desire which was overwhelming any contrary thought. Ben, so close to gaining what he'd lusted after for over a year, willed himself to remain calm and not do anything that would spook Fran or cause her to change her mind. The one remaining hurdle was his fifteen-year-old brother, but they'd already agreed on the deal, and Isaac would leave as soon as they were inside.

Ben stopped the car, turned off the ignition, then got out, taking the keys with him. He walked around to the passenger side, opened the door, and helped Fran from the car. He shut the door, then took Fran's hand and led her up the walk to the front door. He unlocked the door, opened it, and they went inside. He took Fran's coat and hat and hung them in the closet, then removed his own hat and coat and hung them next to hers. They both took off their shoes, then Ben asked Fran to wait in the sitting room while he went upstairs to Isaac's room.

"Time for you to make like a tree and leave!" Ben declared.

"Five bucks," Isaac demanded.

"We agreed on two and I paid you!" Ben protested.

"Five bucks. Ten if you want your rubbers."

"You little prick!" Ben growled.

"Your prick isn't going anywhere unless you pay me," Isaac declared smugly. "And I'm sure Dad would be very interested to know you brought Fran here. So you'll be busted without busting a cherry!"

"We had a deal!"

"I changed the deal. It's up to you, Ben. Ten bucks if you want your pussy."

"And what do YOU know about pussy?"

Isaac laughed, "You may be two years older than me, but you don't know a THING about getting chicks to put out!"

"And you do?"

"Since I was thirteen. Now, ten bucks. Or, do you want to let ME take care of Fran Sorkin for you?"

Ben knew he was trapped, and if he wanted to get Fran into his bed, he'd have to pay. The problem was, his brother could blackmail him in the future, and there was no way Ben could prevent it. He pulled out his wallet, extracted two fives, and handed them to Isaac.

"Nice doing business with you!" Isaac declared gleefully.

"The rubbers!" Ben demanded.

Isaac opened the desk drawer, pulled out the box, and held it out. Ben took them and put them in his pocket.

"Here's some free advice," Isaac smirked. "Chicks really dig it when you put your tongue in their pussy!"

"You're so full of shit your eyes are turning brown!" Ben retorted.

"My eyes *are* brown!"

"Blow!"

"Put your tongue in her, and she might actually do that for you!" Isaac smirked, getting up from his desk.

Ben followed Isaac downstairs and watched him put on his hat and coat and go out the front door, then went to the sitting room where Fran was waiting. He'd wondered if his brother was telling the truth about being able to get girls to put out at thirteen, but it seemed far-fetched. It seemed even MORE far-fetched that Isaac had actually eaten a girl, something that neither Ben or any of his friends had done, or wanted to do, because it seemed gross. Of course, the girls felt the same way about using their mouths, so it was mutual. The idea that his little brother had talked a girl into giving a blowjob was just beyond anything Ben could fathom.

They had at most an hour before Isaac came back, and Ben fully expected Isaac to cause trouble, which meant it would be better to eat lunch after, but he wasn't sure how Fran would respond. There was, he decided, only one way to find out. He held out his hand to Fran who took it and stood up. She was still nervous, but she WANTED Ben.

"He's gone for an hour," Ben said quietly.

Fran nodded and when Ben lowered his head for a kiss, she raised her head so their lips met in what immediately became a frantic kiss, their tongues swirling,

twirling, and dancing around each other. Ben put his arms around Fran and pulled her to him and Fran responded by immediately wrapping hers around him, bringing their fully-clothed bodies into delicious contact. Fran moaned softly and pressed her body tightly against Ben, unsurprised to find a hardness pressing against her lower stomach, a hardness she desperately desired. When Ben broke the kiss and led her towards the stairs, she didn't resist; in fact, it was all she could do to restrain herself from dragging HIM up the stairs.

Ben and Fran quickly climbed the stairs and he directed them to his room, closing the door behind him before they began furiously kissing. Ben, with no concern about Fran objecting, slid his hand up to cup her full breast, causing Fran to moan and press her body against his, his erection trying to burst from his slacks, and pressing against her hip. Fran, her body on fire, tugged at Ben's shirttail, pulling it from his slacks.

Ben took the hint, broke the kiss, and quickly moved his hands to the top button of Fran's blouse. He fumbled a bit, but soon enough pushed it off her shoulders. Fran lowered her arms so her blouse could fall to the floor, then quickly, without any fumbling, unbuttoned Ben's dress shirt. The cuffs were buttoned, so she had to unbutton those before she could help Ben remove his shirt. With no hesitation, Fran pulled up on Ben's sleeveless t-shirt and soon he was bare-chested.

Ben put his arms around Fran and moved his hands to the clasp of her bra. He'd struggled when he'd tried to remove Ellie Green's bra, but by the third time with her, he'd figured it out, and now deftly undid the clasp on Fran's bra. She stepped back slightly, crossed her arms in front of her and pushed the straps from her shoulders. Burning with desire, she had no second thoughts about simply lowering her arms to allow the bra to fall away, exposing her lovely breasts to a boy for the first time.

Ben tentatively reached out, placing his hands gently on Fran's breasts, enjoying their soft but firm feel, before he and Fran crashed together again, her nipples

trying to bore holes in his chest while they locked lips and their tongues danced. The tingle between Fran's legs was growing stronger by the second, and she did her best to try to rub her most sensitive part against Ben's hardness.

Ben's hands searched for and found the zipper on Fran's skirt and when he drew it down, the skirt floated down around her ankles. Reluctantly Fran broke the clench and the kiss, and carefully removed Ben's belt, then found the button of his slacks, unbuttoned it, then drew down the zipper. She pushed the slacks over Ben's hips, and they slid to the floor. Fran stepped out of her skirt and Ben out of his slacks and they kissed again, clad only in their socks, his briefs, and her panties, which had a growing wet spot.

A minute later, those joined the other clothes on the floor and Fran gasped at the size of Ben's manhood, momentarily worried, but then remembering babies were going to come out where he was going to put it, and they were much bigger. Ben pulled her tightly to him, crushing her breasts and his manhood between them. Fran's hands roamed over Ben's back and butt, and Ben cupped Fran's butt, pulling her hard against him.

Fran's body was on fire as it never had been before, and the feeling in the pit of her stomach was demanding she couple with Ben. When he moved them towards his bed, she put up no resistance, for she wanted it at least as badly as Ben, and maybe even more. He let go of her, pulled down the bedspread and top sheet, and they scrambled into bed, Ben moving immediately on top of Fran. Fran knew what she wanted and spread her legs wide so Ben could get between them.

The weight of Ben's body on hers, pushing her into the mattress caused Fran to shudder, and when Ben kissed her, she hungrily accepted his tongue into her mouth, wrapped her arms and legs around him and pushed her hips upward, seeking the pleasure she knew from the times she'd rubbed herself. This pleasure, though, was so much more intense, and made her almost delirious.

Ben, driven by his desire grasped his shaft, and ran it along the entrance to Fran's womanhood, coating it with her juices. Encouraged aby Fran pushing her hips up, he positioned himself and pushed slowly forward. Fran gasped at the contact, and sucked in her breath as she felt Ben's hardness slowly spread her apart. Raging and demanding hormones drove her to push her hips up hard, resulting in a brief twinge of pain as her maidenhood gave way.

Ben pushed his hips forward, sinking deeper and deeper into Fran as she began frantically raising and lowering her hips, the desire to have him fill her erasing any rational thought. It wasn't long before he filled her completely, in a way she never could have imagined when she'd rubbed herself, and creating exquisite pressure on the little nub of flesh that gave her extreme pleasure. Unable to control herself, driven by desire Fran began humping against Ben, who took the hint and pulled back before pushing deeply into her once again.

Fran moaned in pleasure as they kiss end built a rhythm, her body seeking his, desiring release. She could no longer maintain the kisses, as her breath was growing ragged. She gasped for air, and called out his name.

"Oh, Ben!" she moaned.

Fran felt her release was close, and tightened her arms and legs around Ben as they moved together, each seeking that ultimate pleasure. Fran's arrived first, an explosion of pleasure in her body which made her see stars, and which was far beyond anything she'd ever experienced. The waves of pleasure caused her muscles to spasm around Ben's manhood, which was enough for him to begin firing what felt like molten lava into Fran's womanhood.

Fran suddenly snapped out of her delirium, and her eyes went wide - she could get pregnant! In their rush to bed, neither of them had given a thought to rubbers. It felt so good that she didn't want Ben to pull out, so there was nothing

to do except pray that she didn't catch. When the last molten jet left Ben's shaft, he collapsed on Fran, breathing hard. Fran caught her breath enough to speak a moment later.

"You didn't use a rubber," she whispered.

"Oh!" Ben gasped, pulled out of her, and rolled off of her.

Fran whimpered, feeling completely empty and regretting saying something so soon.

"I'm so sorry, Fran," Ben said, realizing how big a mistake he'd just made, despite the intense pleasure of being inside Fran without a rubber.

"My monthly is supposed to be in a few days," she said. "So we'll know by the middle of the week."

"My parents will kill me," Ben said worriedly.

"Yours?! Think about mine!"

"We're dead," Ben sighed.

"Just wait to see what happens," Fran said. "A few days and it won't be a worry."

"I'm such an idiot!"

"I had a part in it, too," Fran said. "I could have said something but I wasn't thinking clearly! I don't think you were, either!"

"Uhm, no."

"Ben?"

"What?"

"Do we have time to do it again?"

"You'd want to? Even though I messed up?"

"WE messed up," Fran said. "And I think at this point it doesn't matter, so if you want to do it again without a rubber, now's the time! It probably won't happen again."

There was no way Ben was going to pass up the opportunity, and the second time was better than the first, lasting even longer, and with Fran reaching the pinnacle of pleasure twice before Ben had his release. Fran LOVED the feel of his emissions, ruing the fact that she might never feel them again before she married at some point in the future. She wondered what it might take to get those new pills they were talking about that prevented pregnancy.

This time, Ben stayed in her and on top of her until he was soft and slipped out. They got out of bed, and Fran noticed a small pink spot on the sheet which was soaked with her juices.

"Ben," she said, nodding.

"Uhm, I don't know how to do laundry. Mom does it."

Fran rolled her eyes and shook her head, "Let's get cleaned up and I'll show you. Does your mom line dry?"

"No, we have a machine dryer."

"Good, because otherwise it wouldn't be dry before they get home."

They went across the hall to the bathroom and Fran used a washcloth to clean up, while Ben did the same. They went back, got dressed, and stripped off the bottom sheet. Fran was happy to see that there was no bloodstain on the mattress, but it was a bit damp and she was sure it smelled like her. They'd have to leave it air out and hope his mom didn't notice and that it didn't stain.

They took the sheet to the basement where Fran showed Ben how to work the washing machine, then they went up to the kitchen where he got out a can of tomato soup which Fran prepared while Ben got out potato chips and put bowls on the table. They ate, then did the dishes together. The washer wasn't quite done, so they waited for it, then put the sheet into the dryer.

"You can put it back on yourself, right?" she asked.

"I think I can manage! Ice cream?"

"Yes!" Fran quickly agreed.

They put on their shoes, then their hats and coats, and left the house, just as Isaac was returning. Ben was happy Isaac didn't say anything to Fran, and hoped against hope that there would be no further blackmail. Ben helped Fran into the car, and they headed for Graeter's. They had their ice cream, and then Ben took Fran home. He walked her to the door, she gave him a nice kiss, then let herself in with her key.

Nobody was home so she went to the kitchen and found a note her mom had left saying that they had gone to A&W for root beer floats, and would be back by 3:30pm, which according to the clock, gave Fran about twenty minutes before they arrived home. She went to her room, shut and locked the door, and took off all her clothes.

She moved to stand in front of the full-length mirror to see if she looked different now that she was no longer a virgin. Of more concern, was any sign that she was pregnant, but she knew from older women that they didn't show any signs for months and months. Fran was worried, but it was also the case that there was literally nothing she could do. Hopefully her monthly would start on time, and that would be the end of it. If not, well, as Ben had said they were dead.

Satisfied that there was no sign that she was now officially a woman, Fran dressed, fixed her makeup, then went to the living room to wait for her parents and sister to arrive, which they did about ten minutes later.

"Did you have a good time with Ben?" Esther Sorkin asked.

"Yes, mom. We had a nice lunch and then went to Graeter's. How was A&W?"

"We had to sit inside, of course, but otherwise the floats are always awesome! Help me with dinner?"

"Love to!"

Entry 19611120 - Backstory 5 - Discoveries

November 20, 1961, Milford, Ohio

When Fran woke on Monday morning, the afterglow of Sunday afternoon had worn off, and the cold, stark reality that she might be in a family way nearly overwhelmed her. She managed to get control of her emotions while she went through her usual morning routine for a school day. If her monthly didn't come by Thursday, she would be in serious trouble. Having a baby would mean no college, and probably a 'shotgun' marriage to Ben, though thankfully Fran's father did not own any guns.

Fran did her best to conceal her nervousness at breakfast, and got out of the house before her sister as she usually tried to do. She saw Beverly and Allison and hurried to catch up with them.

"How was your date?" Allison asked. "See any of the movie?"

"Yes!" Fran exclaimed.

"Who goes to the drive-in and watches the movie?" Beverly asked. "That's for old married people with kids!"

"Did you even give him a 'good night' kiss?" Allison asked.

"I didn't say I acted like a nun!" Fran protested.

"So what DID you do?" Beverly asked. "Relieve the pressure with your hand or maybe your mouth?"

"Don't be disgusting!" Fran insisted.

"You have no idea what you're missing!" Beverly exclaimed, licking her ruby lips suggestively.

"You've done that?" Jennie Peters asked, having quietly come up behind them.

"Sure!" Beverly exclaimed. "Guys like it and it's fun! If you do it, they'll go down on you and THAT is worth swallowing!"

"Ewww!" Fran and Allison exclaimed.

"How does it work?" Jennie asked, intrigued.

"You're seven!" Fran protested.

"So what! I didn't say I was going to do it, I just want to know how it works!"

"You know those Popsicles you like so much?" Beverly asked. "Like that. Just don't bite!"

"What did you mean about swallowing?" Jennie asked.

"When a guy gets really excited, he shoots out sperm which is how he makes a baby in you. But it can't do that in your mouth, obviously. So you just swallow it!"

"Ewww!" Fran and Allison exclaimed again.

"Any guy who you do that for will absolutely use his mouth between your legs, and THAT is heavenly!" Beverly declared. "And a guy who will kiss you after you suck him is a keeper!"

"You've done all that?"

"Sure! Like I said, it's fun!"

Bobby Block came out of his house, so the girls knew they had to change the subject. They walked the rest of the way to Milford Main talking about what they planned to do over Christmas break, though Fran's family didn't celebrate Christmas. Chanukah started on December 3rd, and lasted a week, so it would be over before school let out on December 20th.

Fran was preoccupied during the entire morning, thinking both of how it had felt to be with Ben, but much more about what might have happened because of that. She needed to talk to someone, but wasn't sure who. Beverly knew way more about sex than anyone else Fran knew, but she wasn't sure she wanted Beverly to know that she'd been with Ben. Allison was probably a better choice; she didn't know as much about sex as Bev, but she had done it with Bobby Block. At lunch, she managed to get Allison away from the rest of their friends.

"What's up?" Allison asked.

"I saw Ben yesterday, too," Fran said. "And we went to his house..."

"You're no longer a virgin?!"

"No."

"How was it?"

"To die for!" Fran said dreamily, but then remembered the reality of her situation. "But we didn't use a rubber."

"Oh, no!" Allison gasped. "When is your monthly?"

"Tomorrow or Wednesday, according to my diary."

"I don't know for sure, but I think you're too late in the month to be in a family way. Bev would know, I think."

"I don't want Bev to know!" Fran exclaimed. "You have to keep my secret!"

"What's the big deal? All of us have done it now!"

"I don't want it spread around and you know Bev can't keep her mouth shut any more than she can keep her thighs shut!"

"Don't be catty, Fran," Allison advised.

"I don't want a reputation!"

Allison rolled her eyes, "Nobody besides Bev, Jennie, you, and me know about Bobby and me. And he sure isn't talking because he'll never get it again if he talks, and he knows it!"

"Do you believe all that stuff Bev says?" Fran asked.

"I think Bev has done stuff we don't even know about!" Allison declared.

"I'm worried about Jennie, too," Fran replied. "She's only in second grade."

"We were just as curious," Allison said. "But we didn't hang out with anyone old enough to tell us about it. What will you do if Ben knocked you up?"

"Die!" Fran exclaimed. "I don't want to get married now and a baby would make it impossible to go to college. I hope you're right about it being too late."

"I thought you were insistent on using a rubber."

"We kind of got carried away."

Allison nodded knowingly, "If I hadn't stopped Bobby and made him put on a rubber, that would have happened to us, too. And I was right in the middle of my monthly cycle, which is the best time to get pregnant according to Bev. Her dating the pharmacist's son is to our advantage."

"How many times have you and Bobby done it?"

"We do homework at his house every day after school!" Allison giggled. "It helps that my mom and his mom both work! Are you and Ben going to do it again?"

"I want to," Fran said hesitantly.

"You don't sound convinced."

"I've been thinking about Sam. He asked me out and I told him to ask again."

"Bev would date them both!"

"Obviously, but that just seems wrong to two-time a guy. Would you be happy if Bobby was two-timing you?"

"I'd cut it off with my mom's carving knife! So what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I'm sure Ben will ask me out again, and I want to see him again, but if I turn Sam down too many times, he won't ask again."

"Fran Sorkin! Did you screw Ben simply because he's a dreamboat?"

"He is to die for!" Fran gushed.

"But you'd rather date Sam?"

"I don't know," Fran sighed. "I have bigger things to worry about right now."

They ate their lunches and then went to find their friends.

"Alan invited me to dinner at his house," Nancy said just as Allison and Fran walked up.

"And you're going?!" Bev asked.

"He's really nice," Nancy protested.

"He's boring because he's so hung up on church."

"Well, I like him!"

"He's a Senior and you're in eighth grade," Allison said. "What will your parents say?"

"I'm just going to his house for dinner. I'm not allowed to go on a regular date until I'm a Sophomore."

"Is anyone doing anything this Friday?" Jennie asked. "We don't have school, so I thought we could go bowling then get burgers and after that, ice cream. Mom said it would be OK."

"Boys, too?" Allison asked. "I'd want to bring Bobby."

"Sure! Then I can invite Kent. Fran?"

"I don't know," Fran replied.

"You could ask Sam," Allison prompted.

"Let me think about it," Fran replied.

"How about you, Bev?" Jennie asked.

"There are other balls I plan to finger!" Bev declared.

"Don't be gross, Bev!" Nancy declared.

"I'll invite my friend Linda," Jennie said. "It'll be fun."

The warning bell rang so they all quickly headed to their classrooms so that when the tardy bell rang, they would all be in their seats.

November 22, 1961, Milford, Ohio

Wednesday was even more unnerving than the previous two days, as Fran still hadn't started her monthly. If it didn't start before bed, then she was very likely pregnant. She was never more than a day off, and she'd been due on Tuesday. Fran wondered if she could tell by looking in the mirror. She slipped off her nightgown and panties, then moved to stand naked in front of the full-length mirror.

She put her hands on her stomach and tried to decide it anything had changed. Sometimes when she had her monthly she felt bloated, but she'd never looked in the mirror to see if it was visible. Her stomach was mostly flat, though there had always been a slight bulge where she knew her womb was. She tried to decide if it was larger than usual, but it didn't seem so. She turned to look sideways and didn't see anything different about her breasts either.

Fran turned back to face the mirror and looked her body up and down, remembering how thrilling it had been to be naked in front of Ben and to see him naked. Her left hand, seemingly on its own, moved downwards, her fingers sliding over her soft pubic hair, while her right hand moved to cup her own breast...

"FRANNIE!" Esther Sorkin called out. "Breakfast!"

Snapped out of the spell, Fran quickly dressed, taking the time to put on her belt and a sanitary napkin, just in case, brushed her hair, then went to the kitchen to join the family for their morning meal.

"Mom, can I go to a party at Julie's house on Friday afternoon?" Elizabeth Sorkin asked.

"Who's going to be there?"

"Just a bunch of kids from school. Her mom will be there. I'll eat dinner there, too. Julie's mom is going to make spaghetti and meatballs for everyone."

"You may go, but you need to be home by 10:00pm."

"Thanks!" Elizabeth exclaimed.

She was careful not to seem too happy, because she didn't want her mom to be suspicious. They were going to play 'Spin the Bottle' and 'Seven Minutes in Heaven' and Elizabeth planned to arrange things so she could end up with Kenny! The thing between his legs was SO cool, and she wanted to SEE what she'd touched, and she'd let him see her, too.

"Fran are you going bowling on Friday?" he dad asked.

"Ben hasn't called, so I think so," she replied.

"Is Sam going to be there?" Elizabeth asked.

"No troublemaking from you, young lady," Joshua Sorkin said sternly. "Unless you'd prefer not to go the party on Friday."

"Sorry, Daddy!" Elizabeth said quickly.

"You could call Ben," Esther suggested.

"We did NOT raise our daughters to be that forward!" Joshua declared. "They're proper young women, and if Ben doesn't call, then Fran can speak to him at the synagogue on Saturday. Ben's a fine young man and I'm sure he has a good reason for not calling."

Fran thought Ben was probably just as nervous as she was, and that he was waiting to hear from her what had happened. She'd told him Wednesday, and she was pretty sure he'd call later in the day, or, possibly Thursday evening. She ate her breakfast quickly in hopes of getting out of the house before Elizabeth as she usually did. She accomplished her goal, and walked quickly to where Allison was waiting.

"Well?" Allison asked.

"No," Fran replied. "It HAS to come today..."

"Don't lose your composure, Fran. It's not uncommon to be a day or two early or late. I asked my aunt about it last night. Of course, she thought I was asking for myself, but I had just had my monthly, so I could say I was safe."

"So you actually did homework?" Fran asked.

"It would be WAY to messy and if my mom saw sheets like that, she'd skin me alive!"

"Does your aunt know you and Bobby are doing it?"

"Yes. She's the one I got the best information from. She got pregnant before her boyfriend went to England for the war, so they got married the night before he had to ship out."

"No honeymoon?"

"They already had it, obviously, if she was pregnant!"

"I just can't be pregnant!" Fran fretted.

Bev came to join them so that ended the conversation and they headed for school. Fran had difficulty concentrating all morning, but when she went to use the facilities at lunch, she saw the first telltale signs of her monthly and was greatly relieved. She'd dodged a bullet and resolved to never make that mistake again! She skipped out of the ladies' and quietly shared her good news with Allison.

Her happiness was dashed later, when it was bedtime, and Ben hadn't called. Fran hid her disappointment from her parents, but wondered what was wrong with her that had caused Ben not to call. He'd said he liked what they did, but Fran wondered if maybe he expected her to do something else; perhaps use her mouth the way Bev talked about. It seemed gross to Fran, but Bev said it was fun and that she liked doing it. Fran just couldn't imagine herself doing it.

Fran undressed, put on panties and her nightgown, and got into bed. She hadn't touched herself since she'd been with Ben, but thinking about being with him made her want to. She closed her eyes and thought about what they'd done together, but didn't want to rub herself because she was afraid of making a complete mess due to her monthly. She had an itch, but couldn't scratch it, so she did her best to relax, and eventually fell asleep.

November 24, 1961, Milford, Ohio

Thanksgiving had been typical for the Sorkins, and it was their turn in the rotation to host the extended family. Fran and Elizabeth were both glad that turkey was considered kosher, because they really liked it. Fran was disappointed that Ben hadn't called, but she was looking forward to seeing Sam. Elizabeth was antsy all morning, because she was anticipating the party.

They left the house at the same time, with Fran walking to Bev's because Bev could borrow her dad's car to drive to the bowling alley, and Elizabeth walking to Julie's house for the party. Fran just took her purse, but Elizabeth had prepared for what she wanted by secreting her dad's penlight in the pocket of her winter coat, because without it, it would be too dark in the closet to see. She was sure he wouldn't miss it, and it would be back in his desk before morning.

"Did Ben call?" Allison asked when she came out of her house and joined Fran for the walk to Beverly's house.

"No," Fran groused. "I don't know what his problem is, either."

"Did you call him?"

"My dad doesn't think a 'proper young lady' should call a boy, so I have to wait to see him at the synagogue tomorrow."

"He's a complete idiot if he doesn't want to see you again, Fran; you're a catch!"

"I'd rather have strawberry blonde hair like yours!"

Allison giggled, "Bobby really likes my hair...and not what you can see right now!"

"You're SO bad Allison!"

They arrived at Bev's house, and when Bev opened the door, the three of them went straight to the car so they could drive to the bowling alley to meet the rest of their friends. Fran decided that if Ben was going to be such a dork, then, if Sam asked her on a date, she was going to say 'yes'. It served Ben right, and he could forget it, if he thought Fran was going to be with him again if he treated her this way.

While Fran and her friends were on the way to the bowling alley, Elizabeth talked to her friend Julie about how they'd play their games with Julie's mom at home.

"Don't worry," Julie said. "The old bat will be in the kitchen all afternoon. She's baking bread and making the sauce and meatballs for the spaghetti. She almost never goes down to the basement because she doesn't like the stairs. Dad had a plumber install the washing machine in that small room next to the kitchen so

she didn't have to go up and down the stairs. That's why they bought this ranch-style house."

"What rules are we using?"

"Spin a bottle and whoever it points to gets to pick their partner. They go into the pantry closet for seven minutes and do whatever they want. But the guy has to ask the girl, and if she says 'no' that's it. Any guys who get fresh and do stuff without permission have to leave and never come back."

"That should keep the toads in line," Elizabeth said.

"True, but if they never get kissed or anything, they'll get upset. So somebody has to kiss them, at least once or twice."

"Let Kelly or Brenda do that! They'll kiss ANYONE."

"I'll talk to them when they get here."

An hour later, all the guests had arrived - a total of sixteen, evenly divided between boys and girls, and all of them in ninth or tenth grade. Julie checked to make sure her mom was busy, and then they sat in a big circle. Julie moved to the center and spun the bottle, and to Elizabeth's delight, it pointed directly to her.

"Kenny Griswold!" Elizabeth declared.

Kenny quickly jumped up, and he and Elizabeth went into the large walk-in pantry and closed the door. It was pitch black, except for a tiny amount of light that came in at the bottom of the door. Elizabeth wasted no time, and put her arms around Kenny. He did the same and they kissed for a minute. He knew he had permission from the previous time, so he moved his hand to Elizabeth's

breast. Elizabeth responded by running her fingers along Kenny's manhood, the broke the kiss.

"I want to see it," she whispered.

"It's too dark to see," Kenny said.

"I have a small flashlight!" Elizabeth giggled. "And I'll show you mine!"

"Yes!" Kenny quickly agreed.

"Pull down your jeans and boxers," she instructed.

Kenny, who had a rubber in his pocket that he'd bought in the men's room at the gas station, hoped he'd get to use it, but he wasn't sure Elizabeth was ready to go all the way. He quickly undid his belt, unbuttoned his jeans, pulled down the zipper, pushed the jeans down, then lowered he boxers, allowing his erection to spring free. Elizabeth clicked the end of the penlight and knelt down, shining it at Kenny's groin.

"Whoa!" she gasped. "It's so big! Can I touch it?"

"Oh, yeah," Kenny replied, hoping he didn't lose it as soon as she touched him.

Elizabeth reached out her hand and grasped Kenny gently, and his dick twitched, hard. He nearly lost it right there, but managed not to.

"He likes me!" Elizabeth giggled.

She carefully ran her fingers along his firm shaft, then gently ran her fingers over the sack that hung below his manhood. Kenny was in heaven, but he was struggling very hard not to make a total mess. He was afraid that if he did lose it,

Elizabeth would be very upset. Elizabeth was totally engrossed in his manhood, moving the light and her head so she could thoroughly examine it.

Remembering something one of the older girls had said in the locker room, she considered what to do next, then went for it, kissing the tip of Kenny's throbbing manhood. Kenny groaned and knew he was on a hair trigger.

"If you keep doing stuff, I'll make a huge mess!" he whispered urgently.

There was nothing to clean up with, so Elizabeth considered what to do next. She didn't want to stop, but if he shot sperm, everyone would know what they had done. There was only one thing to do, she decided. She parted her lips, leaned forward, and took about an inch of him into her mouth. Instantly, he groaned and his manhood pulsed, then warm, sticky fluid shot out of it and into Elizabeth's mouth. She flinched, but didn't release him, taking the six or seven shots. It didn't taste bad, and with no real options, she swallowed, then released him and stood up.

"That was fun!" she giggled.

"Urk, er, ah, yeah," Kenny replied, his brain spinning from the surprise pleasure.

Elizabeth giggled again, then handed Kenny the penlight. She pulled her fuzzy sweater up over her head, then reached around and unhooked her bra. She pushed the straps off her arms and let it fall away, then unbuttoned and unzipped her jeans, and pushed them and her panties down past her knees.

"Your turn to look!" she declared, handing the penlight to Kenny.

He wasted no time, shining the light first on her breasts, which he touched, causing Elizabeth to shiver, even though she was hot, not cold. Kenny directed the light down, seeing Elizabeth's very sparse pubic hair, and then puffy lower

lips which glistened in the light. He tentatively moved his hand down and ran in through her lower hair, then touched Elizabeth in a way that made her squeak.

"That's my pleasure button," she whispered. "Just rub gently."

Kenny nodded and used his fingers to rub Elizabeth who was so excited that it only took a minute before she shuddered and groaned. She was totally surprised when Kenny brought his fingers up to his face, smelled them, then licked them.

"Do I taste good?" she asked.

"It's strange. I guess it was strange for you, too."

"It was, but I'll do it again if you lick me!"

"TIME!" Kelly called.

"Ugh!" Elizabeth groaned as they both quickly pulled up their pants.

Thirty seconds later, all their clothes in place, the opened the door to the pantry. Kelly stepped in took a deep breath through her nose and laughed softly. It smelled like 'girl' and Kelly was jealous. She'd have to get her turn, hopefully with the hunky Mike. Elizabeth, on the other hand, was thinking about how she could be alone with Kenny so they could continue playing the game!

Entry 19611125 - Backstory 6 - Discovered

November 25, 1961, Milford, Ohio

Fran was both happy and annoyed when she woke on Saturday morning - happy that Sam had asked her out but annoyed with Ben that he hadn't called. She thought about going against her Dad's wishes and calling Ben, but if he found out, that might cause problems with dating, as he would think she was 'too forward'. It was too late for that, but he didn't know, and didn't need to know. She took a bath, dressed, then ate breakfast with her parents and Elizabeth.

"Mom, I want to go to Julie's house," Elizabeth said. "I'll be home in time to go to services."

"Is Mrs. Owens going to be home?"

"Yes," Elizabeth replied.

What her mom didn't know was that Mrs. Owens wouldn't come to the basement, and Elizabeth planned to use the cellar door to go to Kenny's house next door. HIS parents weren't home and they'd have a couple of hours to fool around.

"Bev, Allison, Jennie, Nancy, and I are going shopping this morning," Fran said. "They need to do some Christmas shopping. We'll have lunch at Mabley & Carew, and Bev will drop me at the synagogue, if that's OK with you, Daddy."

"It is," he replied. "All of those girls are very well-mannered and well-behaved. Do you have enough pocket money?"

"Yes."

"Are you going out with Ben after services?"

"He didn't call," Fran replied. "Sam Mercer asked me out last night and I said yes. He'll come to the house this evening to see you before we go out."

"Where are you going?"

"To see *A Christmas Carol* at Playhouse in the Park."

"That's the new theater in Eden Park, right?"

"Yes. The play begins at 8:00pm, and I'll be home by 11:00pm."

"What about dinner, Fran?" her mom asked.

"We'll have a burger at the diner on Wooster Pike in Newtown."

After they finished their breakfast, Fran and Elizabeth washed dishes and cleaned up the kitchen, then both of them left the house together, though they headed opposite directions, and with very different intent. Fran's morning was going to be filled with shopping, but Elizabeth hoped to be filled with something else!

"What is everyone doing tonight?" Bev asked after the girls got into her car.

"Dinner at Alan's house," Nancy said.

"A date with Sam, which you all know," Fran replied."

"I'm babysitting," Allison replied. "And Bobby might stop by!"

"Might?" Jennie giggled. "We're visiting my grandparents. What are you doing Bev?"

"I'm doing Mr. Carlton!" Bev smirked as she turned onto Route 50.

"You're so bad, Bev!" Allison exclaimed.

"And what exactly are you and Bobby going to do tonight? Hmm?"

Allison laughed, "The same thing you are! But Bobby isn't a teacher and isn't twice my age!"

"Older guys are awesome," Bev replied. "They know *exactly* how to make you feel really good!"

"Bobby does fine!" Allison declared.

"I can't believe you two talk openly about that!" Nancy said disapprovingly. "Good girls don't do those things! And Jennie is in second grade!"

"I know what's what!" Jennie declared. "It's not like I'm going to do anything! And I bet you kiss!"

Nancy shook her head, "Just a 'good night' kiss on the cheek when I went out with Dan."

"You have NO idea what you're missing!" Bev exclaimed as they crossed the Little Miami River.

"I'll find out on my wedding night," Nancy said.

She'd be the only one, Fran thought, sure that Jennie would do the same thing she and Allison had done, though Fran hoped none of them would be like Bev, who was far too loose. It was one thing to do it with one, or maybe two guys; it was a whole other thing to be with over a dozen!

"What happened with Ben?" Jennie asked. "I thought you liked him."

"I do," Fran replied. "But he didn't call me this week, so Sam gets my company tonight!"

"Sounds like fun!" Bev teased.

"We're going to dinner and a show," Fran replied. "I'm not like you!"

"Sure you are," Bev smirked. "You just don't know it yet!"

While the five girls headed into Cincinnati, Elizabeth and Julie were in the basement of Julie's house drinking hot cocoa.

"Mrs. Samuelson should be here in about five minutes. Once she and mom sit down with coffee, the Russians could send missiles into Cincinnati and they wouldn't notice!"

The doorbell rang two minutes later, and once the girls heard the women start to chat, Elizabeth quietly went out the cellar door, up the steps, and then through the gate in the fence that separated the backyards. She saw Kenny sitting on the steps to the side door of his house, wearing blue jeans and a white t-shirt, with a pack of Lucky's rolled in his right sleeve. She hurried over and looked around to make sure the coast was clear. It was, so Kenny stood up and they went into the house and both removed their shoes.

"How long do we have?" Elizabeth asked.

"The old lady is gone until after lunch," Kenny replied.

"Keen! Wanna show me your bedroom?"

Kenny grinned and grabbed Elizabeth's hand, then led her through the house, up the stairs, and into his room. Elizabeth took a quick look around and saw baseball and football posters, but she didn't follow baseball or football, so she didn't know who they were. Kenny closed the door and turned to look at her.

"Same as at yesterday?" he asked.

"I want to see without a flashlight!" Elizabeth exclaimed excitedly.

"Me, too!"

"Same time?" she asked.

"Yes!"

Elizabeth watched as Kenny stripped off his t-shirt. She admired his muscular chest for a few seconds, then pulled her sweater over her head. She dropped it on the floor, then reached around and unfastened her bra and let it fall away, revealing her pert breasts. They weren't too big, but they were perfectly round and all the guys seemed to have liked them when she had worn her bathing suit at the pool over the summer. She saw Kenny's eyes grow wide and knew he liked them.

Kenny began taking off his jeans and Elizabeth quickly unzipped her skirt and let it fall to her feet. When Kenny pushed down his boxers, Elizabeth hooked her fingers in her panties and drew them down, never taking her eyes off Kenny's manhood which was standing straight up. She got the same tingly feeling

between her legs and in the pit in her stomach she'd had the two previous times, and knew she had to have that thing inside her. She quickly removed her socks, and stood up again.

They stared at each other for a moment, then moved towards each other, ending in an embrace, savoring the skin-to-skin contact. They kissed, and when their tongues touched, Kenny groaned and his manhood twitched hard. One of Elizabeth's friends had warned her that guys often shot too quickly and that if she sucked him, he'd last longer when they actually did it. Elizabeth broke the kiss, took Kenny's hand, led him to the bed, and encouraged him to sit. He sat on the edge of the bed and Elizabeth knelt in front of him.

"Peggy said you'll last longer if I do this," Elizabeth said.

"You like doing it?" Kenny asked.

"Yes! And I want you to lick me before we do it! Peggy says that will make it better the first time."

"Peggy Schultz?"

"Yes, but you can't say anything!"

"Her dad is a preacher!"

Elizabeth giggled, "And she's been on her knees worshiping since she was thirteen!"

She was so worked up, she thought about just getting into bed and doing it, but Peggy had promised it would be so much better if they were to 'go down' on each other first. Elizabeth leaned forward, opened her mouth, and took about two inches of his erection into her mouth. Kenny groaned, his manhood

twitched, and sperm shot into Elizabeth's mouth. She had been ready for it, so she just sucked and swallowed until Kenny stopped shooting. She released him, then kissed the tip of his erection.

"Your turn!" Elizabeth exclaimed.

She stood up and climbed into the bed and laid on her back.

"I, uh, have never done that," Kenny said nervously, "so I don't know what to do."

"I haven't either!" Elizabeth giggled. "But start with my boobs then kiss me between my legs and we'll figure it out! You liked how it tasted, right?"

"Yes!" Kenny exclaimed, then turned and lowered his lips to Elizabeth's breast, and kissed Elizaveta's nipple, causing her to shudder.

"Suck my nipple," Elizabeth whispered.

Elizabeth moaned loudly when Kenny started sucking on her nipple, and one hand went to the back of his head, while the other moved towards her pleasure button, which she had almost rubbed raw the previous night thinking about what was going to happen very soon. After a minute, Elizabeth encouraged Kenny to suck on her other nipple.

"Kiss between my legs," she whispered

Kenny released her nipples and slid down, planting a tentative kiss on Elizabeth's sparse pubic hair. He could smell her womanly scent and wanted to taste it again. He kissed Elizabeth on her glistening lower lips, getting just the barest taste. Elizabeth sucked in her breath, and begged Kenny to kiss her again. He pressed his lips against her...

"Kenneth Neil Burnside!" his mother screeched from the now open door.

Kenny scrambled off the bed and hid his lower body on the side opposite the door by crouching down. Elizabeth looked for something to cover herself. She grabbed Kenny's pillow and pulled it over herself, hugging it tightly.

"Put your clothes on, Kenneth! Your father is going to hear about this! And you, you little tramp! Your mother is going to hear about this! Get dressed and I will march you home!"

Elizabeth was shaking as she got out of the bed and started dressing. It wasn't her mom she was afraid of, it was her dad. He was going to flip his lid, but what really concerned her was that her dad had been a Marine in the war and he might go after Kenny. She quickly pulled on her panties, the grabbed her bra. Kenny came around the bed, covering his privates with his hands, bent down to grab his boxers, then turned his back on his mom to pull them on, allowing Elizabeth to catch a glimpse of his shriveled manhood.

A minute later she was dressed and Mrs. Burnside grasped her arm and marched her downstairs.

"Where are your shoes and jacket?" Mrs. Burnside demanded.

Elizabeth didn't want to get Julie in trouble, and wondered if she could manage not to reveal anything.

"My shoes are by the back door. I didn't wear my jacket, just my sweater."

They went to the back door where Mrs. Burnside released Elizabeth's arm long enough for her to put on her shoes, then marched her out the door and towards

her house. When they arrived, rather than allow Elizabeth to go in, Mrs. Burnside rang the bell. Esther Sorkin opened the door a few seconds later.

"Your tramp of a daughter was in bed with my son!" Mrs. Burnside exclaimed without any preliminaries. "And he had his head between her legs!"

"WHAT?!" Esther gasped. "Is that true, Elizabeth?!"

"Yes," she replied meekly.

"You go right to your room, young lady! I'll be there shortly."

Mrs. Burnside released Elizabeth's arm, allowing her to go into the house. As she went to her room, she heard her mom speaking in an urgent, but hushed tone. But then worse, just as she went into her room, she heard her dad ask 'What is going on?'. Instead of the best day of her life, it was going to be the worst. Resigned, she sat on the edge of the bed to await what was very likely to be the end of the world.

The next ten minutes were the longest of Elizabeth's life, and she felt a tiny bit of relief when it was only her mom who came into her room, closing the door behind her.

"Did he force himself on you?" Esther Sorkin asked her youngest daughter.

Despite her fears, Elizabeth almost laughed, but managed not to. She could put all the blame on Kenny, but if she did that, she was sure her father would take one of his guns and kill Kenny.

"No," Elizabeth answered meekly.

"You were supposed to be a Julie's. Does she know?"

Elizabeth knew she was sunk. No matter what answers she gave, a quick call to Mrs. Owens would reveal the truth. As much as she didn't want to get Julie in trouble, if she told another lie and was found out, it would be worse.

"Yes," Elizabeth admitted.

"I will speak to her mom later. How long has this been going on?"

"About two months," Elizabeth said quietly.

"You're fourteen, Elizabeth! Fourteen! Whatever possessed you to surrender your virtue to that boy?"

The thing was, she hadn't. She had *wanted* to, and if she was honest with herself, still wanted to, but she hadn't.

"I didn't," Elizabeth protested weakly, on the verge of tears.

"That boy had his face between your legs and you claim not to have lost your virtue?"

"We didn't...you know..."

"I'm having a hard time believing that."

"It's true, Mom!" Elizabeth exclaimed.

"I can't believe that's all you did."

"Well," Elizabeth replied, shaking, "I, uhm, did the same thing. Well, you know..."

Esther recoiled at the idea that her fourteen-year-old daughter had engaged in oral sex.

"And how does a fourteen-year-old girl know about those things?"

"I just do," Elizabeth said, not wanting to get Bev or Peggy in any trouble.

"It's that Thompson girl, isn't it? She has a reputation!"

"She's Fran's friend," Elizabeth protested, tears running down her face, knowing everyone would hate her for ratting them out.

"I'll speak with your sister later. And with Mrs. Thompson. And with Mrs. Owens and Mrs. Burnside. You are to stay in your room until I say you may come out. And I need to speak with your father."

"Does he know?" Elizabeth asked.

"He came to the door and Mrs. Burnside repeated what she said. I calmed him down enough that he won't do anything foolish, but you know there will be consequences, both for you and for Kenny."

Esther left the room, closing the door behind her, and went to find her husband who was brooding and smoking his pipe.

"What did she have to say for herself?" he asked, fuming.

"That her virtue is intact."

"And you believe her? After what Clara Burnside said they were doing?"

"I think we have to," Esther said.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked.

"She said two months."

"I'm going to have a word with John Burnside. And I might just call the police."

"I wouldn't do that, Joshua," Esther counseled. "Elizabeth insisted that he didn't force himself on her."

"That does NOT excuse his behavior!"

"No, it doesn't, but you know they would never make the charges stick, and Kenny isn't eighteen, so they probably wouldn't even charge him."

"Clearly his father did not teach him how to be a gentleman!" Joshua declared. "What did you say to Elizabeth?"

"Nothing yet, except to stay in her room until we decide what to do."

"I'm going to the Burnside's."

"And I'm going to talk to Linda Owens."

Part 2 - Fran's Practice

Stories from Fran's practice after she began practicing on her own.

Entry 19770108 - Bethany Michelle Krajick

January 8, 1977, Milford, Ohio

Doctor Francheska Vladimirovna 'Fran' Mercer sat in her office on a cold January Saturday, reviewing the notes she'd made as she'd spoken with Mrs. Nora Krajick. Bethany Michelle Krajick, her thirteen-year-old daughter, had been raped and impregnated, and then had an abortion. No formal police report had been filed because the young woman hadn't told anyone about the rape until she'd realized she was pregnant. By that time, there was no evidence that a rape had occurred, and the Krajicks had decided against a 'he said, she said' trial to spare Bethany the additional trauma.

Doctor Mercer leaned back, removed her wire-frame glasses, pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. Her practice in Milford, Ohio, a village on the eastern side of the Cincinnati area, hadn't developed along the lines she'd expected when she'd received her license to practice Psychology from the State of Ohio. She'd expected to do divorce and family counseling, and while she still did some of that, most of her time was now spent with teens, and most of those were girls who had been subjected to some abuse - physical, sexual, or mental. She'd developed something of a reputation as an expert in the area, and other psychologists referred patients to her regularly.

Straightening up in the leather chair, she put her glasses back on, and retrieved an intake form from her desk's lower-left-hand drawer. She filled in the basic information she knew - name, birth date, address, parents' names and wrote 'rape recovery/gross stress reaction' on the treatment line. The 'experts' didn't feel that rape was a cause for 'gross stress reaction', but Doctor Mercer felt that the kind of trauma rape victims suffered was, in many ways, comparable to 'battle fatigue' of soldiers returning from Vietnam.

Her patient, thirteen-year-old Bethany Krajick, arrived with her mother about five minutes before their scheduled 8:00am appointment. Doctor Mercer knew, from talking with Nora Krajick, that Bethany was a good student and a cheerleader, and that the perpetrator of the rape had been a member of the school football team. Bethany's best friend was another cheerleader, named Kathy, with whom Doctor Mercer hoped to be able to speak.

Bethany was a pretty brunette, with her wavy hair styled such that it framed her face. She wore just the tiniest bit of makeup - just eyeshadow - and looked to be fit and trim. What was missing was the typical bubbly, energetic nature of a cheerleader; instead, Bethany seemed depressed and reserved, at least at first glance.

"Come in," Doctor Mercer said, standing up.

"Hi, Doctor Mercer," Nora said. "This is Bethany."

"Hi, Bethany," Doctor Mercer said warmly.

"Hi," came the very timid reply.

"If it's OK with you, we'll have your mom wait just outside the office on those couches. That way you and I can talk and get to know each other."

"I guess."

Doctor Mercer nodded to Nora, who left the office, closing the door behind her.

"Have a seat on the couch, please."

Bethany moved to the couch and sat down, and Doctor Mercer sat in a wingback chair just to the side.

"Do you know why you're here?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Because I was raped and Mom is worried about me."

"OK. Why don't you tell me a bit about yourself? You can say anything you like, but I would like to know about where you were born, where you went to school, and about your friends and family."

It was an open-ended question, but Doctor Mercer preferred those, at least at first, to try to get a new patient talking.

"I was born April 12, 1963 at The Christ Hospital. Mom and Dad lived in Price Hill then, but we moved to Milford when my brother Ed was born three years later. I've gone to Milford schools my whole life - first Pleasant Hill Elementary, then Milford Main, and now Milford Junior High."

"What do your mom and dad do?"

"Dad is a CPA and Mom is a real estate attorney."

"And your brother? What grade is he in?"

"Fifth."

"What do you like to do in your free time?"

"Read, listen to music, and hang out with my friend Kathy."

"Is she also a cheerleader?"

"Yes. We both joined in seventh grade."

"Do you like being a cheerleader?"

"A lot. It's fun, we get to go to all the football and basketball games, and visit lot of different schools."

"Do you like school?"

"I do, especially math."

"Have you thought about college?"

"Only a little. I might want to be a CPA, like my dad. He gets to travel and do math all the time. But I'm not sure."

"Well, you're only in eighth grade, so you have lots of time to think about it. Do you have any pets?"

"No, but some day I want a parakeet!"

"A parakeet?"

"My friend Kathy and I talked in seventh grade about the perfect future - a house with a white picket fence, a husband, kids, and pets. I want a parakeet."

"Why?"

"I don't know, I just do."

"That's OK. Do you go to church?"

"No. We did when I was little, but we stopped going. I'm not sure why."

"Which church, if you know?"

"First Methodist in Milford."

"How old were you when you stopped going?"

"Around six, I guess. You'd have to ask my mom."

"That's close enough. Before you became a cheerleader, did you play any sports?"

"Softball, in sixth grade. I also bowl, if that counts."

"Do you like bowling?"

"Sure. I do OK, but I'm not great."

"Do you keep a diary?"

"Yes, but not regularly."

"Did you write about what happened to you?"

"No."

"Can we talk about that night?"

"Mom said I have to."

"Well, I think you should, but you don't have to. We can talk about other things if you aren't ready."

"No, it's OK," Bethany said with a hitch in her voice.

"Let's just talk about that day, from when you got up in the morning. Just tell me everything you can remember."

"My alarm went off at 8:00am, which is normal for a Saturday. I got out of bed, straightened the sheets and pulled the bedspread up."

"What day was that?"

"September 4th. It was Labor Day weekend."

"OK. What do you wear to bed?"

"A nightgown. It was my summer one, it's really light and soft and comes down to my knees."

"Do you wear anything else?"

"Panties, but no bra. I wear panties because my period is kind of irregular and I put pads in them."

"That's normal at thirteen. When did you have your first period."

"On my thirteenth birthday, exactly."

"By irregular, what do you mean?"

"It could be three weeks or five weeks. Sometimes light, sometimes heavy."

"OK. Go on."

"I went to the bathroom, took a shower, then got dressed."

"What did you put on?"

"Jeans and a t-shirt. Well, my underwear, too, plus socks."

"Then what?"

"I had breakfast with my family."

"Do you remember what you had to eat?"

"Waffles and bacon."

"Do you drink coffee?"

"Gross! No!"

Doctor Mercer laughed softly, "I prefer tea myself. Do you drink soft drinks?"

"Sure."

"What's your favorite?"

"Dr Pepper."

"What did you do after breakfast?"

"It was my turn to do the dishes, so I helped Mom, then I rode my bike to Kathy's house."

"Your cheerleader friend?"

"Yes."

"And what did you do with her?"

"Just hung out, talked, and listened to music."

"Records or the radio?"

"Records."

"Do you remember which ones?"

"Only one for sure - a new album she had by REO Speedwagon."

"What did you talk about?"

"School, cheerleading, football, boys, and the party we were going to that night."

"What about boys?"

"Just which ones we liked and which ones were total speds."

"Were you allowed to date?"

"Not really. I could go to school dances, football or basketball games, or to school parties, but not on a real date. Dad says I have to be fifteen."

"Do you want to date?"

"I did; I'm not sure now."

"How long were you at your friend's house?"

"Until about 3:00pm. I rode home, so I could have dinner and get ready for the party."

"Did you eat lunch?"

"Yes, at Kathy's house."

"Do you remember what you had to eat?"

"PB&J sandwiches, chips, and lemonade."

"Did you bike straight home?"

"Yes."

"And when you got home?"

"I took a shower and put on clean clothes - a knee-length skirt and a nice blouse, and clean underwear, too."

"May I ask what kind of underwear?"

"Just plain white cotton. Mom doesn't think I should wear anything else, not even colors."

"What color was your blouse?"

"Blue, the same as my skirt. It's my favorite color."

"Do you remember what you had for dinner?"

"Spaghetti with meat sauce. Our usual Saturday dinner."

"Usual?"

"Ed and I both love it, so Mom makes it every Saturday."

"OK. Then what did you do?"

"Brushed my teeth, fixed my hair, and put on makeup."

"What makeup?"

"Eye-shadow and nail polish."

"Blue?"

"Yes!"

"What about lipstick?"

Bethany shook her head, "I'm not allowed; I use cherry lip gloss."

"What time was that?"

"About 6:30pm. Kathy's mom picked me up about ten minutes before 7:00pm and drove us to the party."

"Where was that?"

"At a football player's house on Vera Cruz Pike."

"What as his name? The football player?"

"Gary Hardoffer. He's JV."

"How many kids were there?"

"About thirty, I think."

"Was everyone in eighth or ninth grade?"

"No, there were some Sophomores there, too. It was mostly football players, cheerleaders, and a few girlfriends of football players."

"What was going on when you arrived?"

"Music was playing and some kids were dancing."

"Was there alcohol there?"

"And pot, but I didn't smoke and I only had a half a cup of beer."

"Do you like beer?"

"Not really, but I didn't want people to think I was a baby. I just sipped a bit so people saw me with a cup."

"Was that normal for parties?"

"Not in seventh grade, but in eighth grade. I think the Sophomores brought the pot and somebody got their big brother to buy beer."

"Were there any parents home?"

"Yes, but they never came to the basement where the party was."

"Who did you dance with?"

"Pretty much all the guys. That was normal, really."

"So you danced. What else?"

"Well, some of the kids had to leave at 9:30pm, but I was allowed to stay later, until 11:00pm because it was a Saturday and I was with the cheerleaders. There were about twelve people left and one of the guys suggested we play 'Spin the Bottle'."

"Had you played it before?"

"Twice."

"Was your first kiss playing 'Spin the Bottle'?"

"Yes. Those were the only kisses I had."

"Did you like playing?"

"Yes."

"Did anything happen except kissing during the game?"

"No. Some of the guys wanted more, but the girls always said 'no'."

"What happened during the game?"

"The usual stuff - I kissed most of the guys, and so did the other girls."

"Kathy?"

"Yes. She really liked playing."

"And you?"

"I did."

"Was there anyone you didn't want to kiss there?"

"Not really."

"Did you like any of the guys?"

"Yes," Bethany said quietly.

"The boy who later attacked you?"

"Yes," Bethany whispered with a tear dripping down her face.

Doctor Mercer took a box of tissues from the table next to her and handed it to Bethany who dabbed her eyes and blew her nose.

"Can you tell me his name?"

"Josh Benton."

"A football player?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what position he plays?"

"Safety."

"What happened then?"

"Well, after we played for maybe twenty minutes, he offered to drive me home. I knew he lived in my direction, and Kathy lived in the opposite. I told her I wouldn't need a ride and went with Josh."

Bethany blew her nose again, and then wiped her tears away with a fresh tissue.

"Are you OK to keep going?"

"I think so."

"What happened next?"

"When we came to my subdivision, he turned right onto Klondyke instead of left. I knew he was heading for a parking spot."

"Did you say anything?"

"No, because I liked kissing him and wanted to kiss him more. But I didn't want..."

Bethany started sobbing and took several minutes to compose herself. Doctor Mercer made notes in her notebook and waited.

"Can you tell me what happened next?"

"We parked and started kissing. He put his hand on my boob."

"Over your blouse?"

"Yes."

"Did you tell him to stop or try to move his hand?"

"No, because I liked it."

"Was the radio on?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember what was playing?"

"*Don't Go Breaking My Heart*."

"Go on."

Bethany took a deep breath and let it out, then dabbed her tears.

"He started pulling up my blouse. I told him to stop, but he pushed his hand up inside it."

"What did you say to him?"

"I said 'Stop!' and 'No!'," but he didn't listen. Then I felt the seat recline and he moved on top of me."

"What did you do?"

"I screamed 'No!' and 'Stop!' but he didn't listen. I felt his hands under my skirt and I tried to push him off but he was too heavy. He started pulling down my panties and I started crying and screaming 'No!' over and over, but he didn't listen."

She stopped talking, her body heaving, wracked by tears. Doctor Mercer patiently waited until Bethany calmed down enough to continue.

"I felt him against me and then suddenly it hurt bad and he started...doing it. I cried and screamed but he didn't stop. I kept trying to push him away, but he was too heavy. When he, uhm, finished, he got off me, zipped up his pants and started the car. I pulled up my underwear and just stared out the window while he drove me home."

"How did you feel?"

"Like I wasn't in my own body. I kept thinking that if he'd just been nice and asked, I probably would have done it with him. But he forced me."

"You were ready to have sex?"

"I liked him, and liked kissing him, until..."

Bethany sobbed more and once again Doctor Mercer waited for her to be able to continue.

"What happened when you got home?"

"I got out of the car and ran to the door, used my key, and went inside. I called 'hello' to my parents, then went upstairs and took a shower."

"How long did you stay in the shower?"

"Probably twenty-five minutes. But I liked long showers so nobody thought it was strange. I washed myself three times, but I still felt dirty. When I got out of the shower, I saw blood on the pad in my panties, but I knew it wasn't time for my period so I knew he'd, uhm, broken my cherry. I wrapped the pad in one of those little envelopes and put it in the trash."

"And your clothes?"

"I put them in the clothes hamper. I washed them the next morning."

"You didn't say anything to anyone?"

"No. I was so embarrassed!"

"You just pretended nothing had happened?"

"That's right. Well, until I missed my period. I thought it was just late, but then it was six weeks and I was really worried. When it didn't come the next week, I told my mom what happened."

"And she called the police?"

"No, I had the abortion before she called them. She didn't want to tell my dad at first, but then she decided she had to. So they called the police and I gave a statement. I'd destroyed all the evidence, so both the police and an attorney my dad talked to advised not to press charges because it would hurt me even more."

"How did you feel about the abortion?"

"I don't know, really. But there was no way I could have a baby."

"How are your grades?"

"Mostly B's and C's. I got mostly A's last year."

"Because you have trouble concentrating and studying?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"That's normal. I can help you with those things, if you'll let me."

"Mom said I have to come here."

"I know, but this will only work if you want my help. Do you?"

"I don't know; I guess."

"Are you still friends with Kathy?"

"Yes."

"And how do you feel about boys?"

"Scared. I never was before."

"That's normal, too. Are you scared of being around them? Or just what might happen if you're alone?"

"Both. I don't talk to any of them at all. Mostly I just talk to Kathy."

"OK. Will you let me help you?"

"I guess so, yes."

"Good. I'll arrange with your mom to see you once or twice a week. Mostly you and I will just talk, and we'll figure out how to improve your concentration and study habits. Are you sleeping OK?"

"Mostly. I sometimes wake up from a nightmare."

"About him?"

"I can never see his face in the dream, but I'm sure it's him."

"Let me give you my card. It has my office phone number on it. If I'm not here, and my receptionist isn't here, it will go to my answering service. They can reach me no matter what time it is. If you need to talk to me, or feel depressed, or think about doing anything bad, I want you to call me right away. Promise?"

"You mean wanting to kill myself?"

"Have you thought about that?"

"When I first realized I was pregnant, but not now."

"You're sure? Not at all?"

"I'm sure."

"Promise you'll call me?"

"I promise."

"Good. Let's go see your mom."

Doctor Mercer and Bethany walked out to the reception area and Doctor Mercer asked Nora to call her on Monday morning. Once Bethany and her mother had left, Doctor Mercer went back to her desk and wrote out her basic analysis, completed the intake form, and labeled a new file folder with Bethany's name. She put the form into the folder, then locked the notebook in the credenza behind her desk and picked up the phone to call her mentor, Doctor Laura Paulus, in Dayton.

"Hi, Fran. How did it go?"

"Hi, Laura. Better than I hoped. She really opened up to me and was able to walk me through the events."

"She's thirteen, right?"

"Yes. She'll be fourteen in April."

"She must be made of pretty strong stuff. What's your initial analysis?"

"She has the symptoms of 'gross stress reaction' as we discussed - trouble concentrating and studying, occasional trouble sleeping, poor grades compared to before, and fear of the opposite sex."

"What's your proposed treatment?"

"Counseling. I don't think I need to refer her for medication. We'll work on helping her focus on school work and take it from there."

"Are her parents supportive?"

"They are. They're pretty strong as well. I suggested they come in for a couples session and they agreed. Eventually we'll do a family session. The only question is her little brother."

"Does he know?"

"Not that I'm aware of. I'm thinking of not including him."

"That's probably a good choice, at least for now. You have to leave it to the parents to decide, though."

"Of course. There was one strange thing she said, and once she's in a better frame of mind, I want to explore it."

"What's that?"

"That she would have agreed to have sex with the boy if he'd just asked."

"A hyper-sexualized thirteen-year-old? Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"I am, but she told me she bled from having her hymen ruptured during the rape."

"Not all abuse is penetrative, Fran. It's not normal for a thirteen-year-old to contemplate having sex and admit she was willing and ready. It happens, but it's rare. If she were fifteen, I wouldn't even blink."

"I know."

"The brother is younger?"

"By three years; he's only ten."

"That's not a likely source, but again, anything is possible. Have you talked to the dad?"

"Briefly."

"Just keep your eyes out. And remember - uncle, teacher, neighbor, and while even more rare, it could be a female."

"You had a case like that, didn't you?"

"About four years ago - a pre-teen girl being abused by a female college-age neighbor. It took me forever to get Family Services involved because they just flat-out didn't believe it."

"Are you free for lunch next week?"

"Thursday is good. Shall we meet in Kings Mills at the usual place?"

"See you at noon."

They said 'goodbye' and hung up. Doctor Mercer checked her schedule and pulled out her notes to review for her next patient. After she finished with that patient, a victim of incest at the hands of an uncle, she locked up the office and got into her Chevy to drive home. She lived just five minutes from the office, about a mile from Route 28 on McClelland Road.

"Hi, Mom!" her eldest daughter, who was ten, called out when she walked into the house.

"Hi, Sarah! What are you doing today?"

"Not much, really; my dealer was out of coke, so it's been boring."

"I never should have let you read that paper. I'm curious, do you actually know who to buy drugs from at Country Day School?"

Doctor Mercer sent her kids to private school in Indian Hill because she didn't want them mixing with her patients who were mostly from the Milford area. That would have caused all sorts of potential conflicts and potential 'dual relationships' that it wasn't worth the risk to have them in the local public school. Her husband, an aerospace engineer who worked for General Electric, made more than enough money to cover the tuition.

"No, but I know kids who would know."

"Wonderful. So much for your tuition."

"We're supposed to learn about new stuff, right? You always say that!"

"Not THAT kind of new stuff, young lady! Where's your dad?"

"In the garage tinkering with his Firebird, what else?"

"And Abigail?"

"Doing whatever it is six-year-olds do when there's a foot of snow and they're too much of a Jewish Princess to go outside!"

"We don't even go to synagogue!"

"Yeah, but you know Grandma!"

"Why are you immune?"

"Grandma's funny, but I can't take her too seriously with that Russian accent and ranting about the Communists."

"She has good reason, you know."

"I suppose. Abby is in her room."

"Thanks."

Doctor Mercer went to the garage and kissed her husband Sam, then went to change into comfortable clothes for an afternoon at home. Entry 19780525 - Bethany Michelle Krajick

Entry 19780525 - Bethany Michelle Krajick

May 25, 1978, Milford, Ohio

Doctor Mercer was concerned about Bethany's growing relationship with the young man who had escorted Bethany to a 'turn-about' dance at the Junior High. It wasn't that Bethany shouldn't be dating, or even that Bethany shouldn't be contemplating limited physical intimacy, but that the young man was not prepared for what might happen. Rape victims often had problems with sexual activity, even something as simple as holding hands. A bad reaction on Bethany's part might lead to an even worse reaction on the young man's part, and cause a setback for Bethany's recovery.

Doctor Mercer hadn't met the young man, Stephen Adams, a Freshman at Milford Junior High, but Bethany had described him in detail - smart, nice-looking, a bit on the nerdy side, a member of the chess club and with interest in computers. Bethany had been a bit cagey about Steve's sexual experience, but Doctor Mercer wasn't sure if that was because Bethany didn't know, was reticent to say, or was purposefully demurring.

Bethany and Steve arrived a few minutes early for their appointment, and Bethany was shown in alone at 4:00pm. Doctor Mercer asked her receptionist, Cecilia, to make sure that Steve had the permission form signed by a parent with him.

"How are you, Bethany?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Good. I thought Steve was supposed to come in."

"He will, but I wanted to talk to you first. How have you been this past week?

"Fine. I saw Steve a couple of times, and I had my last final exam this morning, so I'm done for the year."

"How did those go?"

"Fine. I should have all A's."

"Very good. Tell me what you want from Steve."

"I thought we talked about this," Bethany protested.

"We did," Doctor Mercer replied with a smile. "But I'm asking again."

"I think he'd make a wonderful boyfriend," Bethany said quietly. "But I don't think I can be his girlfriend..."

"Because of what we talked about? What you call 'freaking out' when you try to hold his hand or hug?"

"Yes."

"How does he react?"

"He's understanding and loving, but I'm afraid I'll lose him to some other girl before I can..."

"We talked about that," Doctor Mercer said gently. "Even though you thought you were ready to have sex, and even wanted to, in the right circumstances, fourteen is awfully young. And that's not taking into account the trauma you suffered. Don't think about that kind of thing yet; in fact, not for quite some time. Has Steve pressured you?"

"NO!" Bethany exclaimed. "He'd never, ever do that! He's been nothing but understanding."

"Then why are you concerned?"

"Because I'm not sure how long he'll wait."

"Because of what he said?"

Bethany shook her head, "No, it's just how I feel."

"I know you've avoided answering this, but has he been sexually active? I mean to your knowledge?"

"I think so, yes."

"Please don't push yourself. There's no rush. Let me have Steve brought in, and after a few questions, I'll have you step out. When I finish talking to him, I'll talk to you again. OK?"

"Sure," Bethany said, sounding a bit tentative.

Doctor Mercer pressed a button on the intercom on her desk and asked Cecilia to bring in Steve. She had him sit in a chair next to Bethany and introduced herself.

"Bethany tells me she told you about what happened to her," Doctor Mercer said. "Do you have any questions for me before we start?"

"Only to know how I can help her," Steve replied.

"That is the question, isn't it? It's really the only question, but a lot of boyfriends ask questions."

"Boyfriend?" he asked, shifting slightly in his chair, discomforted by the question.

"Sorry," Doctor Mercer said quickly. "I didn't mean it that way. I understand that you and Bethany are just friends. In the usual case, the partners girls bring in already have an established relationship. Honestly, it's not often I see a fifteen-year-old young man in this kind of situation."

"I guess I'm just clueless about how what happened affected her and I want to know what I can do to help her."

"I'd like to ask you some questions, if I may."

"I'll answer any question you ask if it will help Bethany."

"Good. Bethany, would you step outside, please. I think it'll be easier for Steve to give clear, honest answers, because I suspect he'll do his utmost to avoid saying anything that might hurt you. Steve, it's the case that something totally innocent might hurt her, even if you try your best not to. Are we agreed?"

"Yes," Bethany replied.

She got up and left the office, closing the door behind her.

"Steve, why are you here today?" Doctor Mercer asked, once Bethany had closed the door behind her.

"Bethany asked me to come."

Doctor Mercers smiled, "Yes, of course. But why did you agree?"

"Because I want to learn how to help her. A friend of mine warned me that if I wasn't careful, things could get, well, volatile, given what happened to Bethany."

"This friend is an adult woman?"

"Yes."

"Did she have some kind of trauma in her life?"

"Her husband was killed in Vietnam shortly after they married."

Doctor Mercer nodded, "OK. She's right, of course. Being the friend, or more, of a rape victim is difficult. Your answer before to my question about why you were here was only part of the answer. Is there anything else you can think of?"

"Because I've taken Bethany on a couple of dates? And I'm pretty sure she likes me, and she's afraid of liking a guy and getting close to him."

"Very good. She and I talked about you. She does like you, very much. She told me a few things, but I want to ask you myself, if that's OK?"

"It is," Steve replied.

"You don't have to answer," Doctor Mercer said, "but the more you tell me the more I can help her. And the more I can help you help her."

"OK."

"Bethany has told me some things, but I'd like to ask you for more information. If anything makes you uncomfortable, you don't have to answer. OK?"

"Yes."

"Are you sexually active? By that I mean oral sex or intercourse?"

"Yes to both of those."

"For how long?"

"About a year now."

"Was it just one or two instances? Or something more regular?"

"More regular."

"And you've been with more than one girl?"

"Yes."

"OK. I don't need more details than that. I'm sure you know, or can at least infer, that any kind of intimacy is going to be difficult for Bethany. Even a kiss."

"That's what my friend told me, but I haven't done anything like that with Bethany. We've danced, and we held hands. But I don't even think about things beyond that."

"Relax, Steve! I didn't mean to sound like I was accusing you."

"I guess I'm just nervous," Steve replied.

"It's OK. She did slow dance with you? And kiss your cheek?"

"Sorry, I forgot the kiss on the cheek."

"It's OK. And she held your hand, as you said."

"Yes. That's it, though. Honest! She was nervous about doing all of that, too. She was shaking pretty much the whole time, and when we went for that walk where we held hands, she dropped my hand when we got in sight of her house."

"She was nervous, or more accurately, frightened. Just like she was at the dance. You danced at arm's length the whole night, except for the last dance, right?"

"Yes."

"I want to change topics a bit. Will you tell me why you asked her brother to go on your date?"

"To make her parents comfortable. I could tell they were evaluating me. Her dad looked very concerned, though her mom was more, I don't know, calm, I guess, about it."

"That's very perceptive. Now, going back to the dance - tell me what you thought when you first saw her. Just whatever popped into your mind."

"I thought she was beautiful. One of the most beautiful girls I've ever seen."

"Have you noticed how she dresses?"

"Yes. Other than her hands and face, she shows no skin at all. Well, except when she wears her cheerleading uniform."

"Dressing ultra-conservatively is one way people respond to sexual trauma. As for cheerleading, that is something of an enigma with her."

"I guess inviting her to swim at my house isn't a good idea. I had thought about doing that."

"It's OK to invite her. In fact, I believe you should. I would expect her to say 'no', at least at first. Please don't take it as rejection of you, just let it go and ask again in the future. It'll be a big step for her, when she's ready to take it. Now, the last question before we bring Bethany back in - what do you want from her? Honestly?"

"A friend."

"Not more? Not a girlfriend or something even more intimate?"

"I think she can be a friend, but more than that? I don't think it's a possibility at this point. Nor any time soon."

Doctor Mercer nodded, "That's a fair answer. Let me ask you this - could you see her as your girlfriend? Do you think about her that way? It's important to tell me."

Steve smiled, "She's a pretty, desirable teenage girl. So yeah, I do think about her that way."

"Does the fact that she was raped bother you? I mean, in terms of how you see her?"

"Well, I didn't do it, and it's not like she asked for it to happen or encouraged it or anything. It's not like it somehow, I don't know, makes her dirty or damaged or anything."

"You seem to have a good understanding for someone who's only fifteen. You know, I do have one more question, well two, actually."

Steve laughed, "This sounds like *Columbo*! But sure, OK."

"I guess it does," Doctor Mercer replied with a smile. "Bethany told me she told you about her abortion. What do you think about that?"

"I'm Roman Catholic so I know what the Church teaches. But I can't even begin to put myself in her position. She and her parents did what they thought was right. That's all I ever try to do."

"That's a good answer. If she wants to be your girlfriend, could you do it, knowing everything you know?"

"I think so, yes. But I'm not dating anyone exclusively. I go out with three or four different girls, but none of them is my girlfriend."

"Which means I need to ask another question! Are you sexually active with all of these girls?"

"No. Just one. Well, I kiss all of them, but only with one of them do I do what you asked about before."

"OK. Let's bring Bethany back."

Bethany came back in and sat down.

"I had a good talk with Steve," Doctor Mercer said. "Is it OK if we talk together about what he said? If not, Steve can wait outside."

"It's OK if he stays," Bethany said.

"Well, first of all," Doctor Mercer said, "Steve says he wants to be your friend and help you. And you've said you want to be his friend. And that you like him."

"Yes."

"And you know that he's not dating anyone exclusively and doesn't want to, at least for now."

"Yes."

"My advice for you, for now, is keep things very simple. Go on short dates; double-dates with your younger siblings is a great idea. Steve should get credit for thinking of that. Spend time talking and make sure you tell each other what you think and what you feel and what you need.

"Steve," Doctor Mercer continued, "please be patient with Bethany. There will be times when she is very emotional, times when she is quiet. Don't think she's mad at you, well, unless she tells you she is. And absolutely, under no circumstances, put any pressure of any kind on her for anything."

"I've never in my life pressured anyone in that way," Steve replied firmly. "If anything, the pressure for, uh, intimate relations, has come from the girls. I know that 'no' means 'no' with no exceptions and 'stop' means 'stop right now' not stop in ten seconds to see if she 'meant it'."

"Very good," Doctor Mercer replied. "Bethany, you have to work on building trust like we've talked about. This young man has said he wants to help you. He can only help you if you let him. You took a big step by asking him to the dance, a big risk in telling him about the assault and another big step asking him here today."

"I'll try."

"Good. Steve, would you step out? She'll come out when we're finished."

"OK."

Steve got up and left the office, closing the door behind him.

"How are you feeling?" Doctor Mercer asked Bethany once the door was closed.

"OK."

"Do you want to change what you've told me about your feelings?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I asked. Did our talk, or anything Steve said, change how you feel about him? About your goals?"

"I think he can help me," Bethany said quietly. "He's patient and gentle and I think he loves me."

Doctor Mercer carefully took a deep breath and let it out. Bethany was on a trajectory which was of significant concern. She wasn't ready for what she was contemplating, even if it was months away. More importantly, evidence suggested that Steve wasn't going to make a commitment to Bethany. Anyone engaging in sex with a girl and dating others, even if he wasn't having sex with them, was not the type she'd recommend to Bethany for a boyfriend.

"Do you love him?" Doctor Mercer asked carefully.

"I think so, yes."

"Take things slowly, please. We'll talk more next week at our regular appointment. Are you going to see Steve before then?"

"I was going to ask him to have dinner at Frisch's. Just eat, and then have mom pick us up."

"I think that's fine. Just make sure you talk to him, Bethany. And listen to what he says, too."

"I will."

"Then I'll see you next week. If anything comes up before then, you know you can call."

"Thank you."

Doctor Mercer showed Bethany out, said goodbye to Steve and to Nora Krajick, Bethany's mom, and then went back into her office to complete her session notes. Once those were done, she headed home where her husband Sam was making dinner.

"How was work today?" she asked after they exchanged a quick kiss.

"I need someone like Farrah Fawcett-Majors for my new marketing campaign for Head & Shoulders!"

"For the campaign?" she teased.

"Nobody could ever replace you, Fran! Not even a smoking-hot blonde starlet!"

"I may go to the garage and set fire to that poster!"

"What do you think of 'You Never Get a Second Chance to Make a First Impression'?"

"Meaning not having dandruff on your suit or dress?"

"Yes."

"Not bad at all. Is that the new slogan?"

"Yes. How was work today?"

"Same as always, but you know I can't really talk about it. Where are the girls?"

"They better be studying for exams!" Sam declared. "Dinner is in fifteen minutes."

"Then I'm going to go change into something comfortable and say 'hi' to the girls. I'll be back to set the table."

"Thanks."

Doctor Mercer left the kitchen, went upstairs, found the girls studying in their rooms, then went to change. Entry 19830406 - Kara Anne Blanchard

Entry 19811124–1 - Elizabeth Petra Loucks

November 24, 1981, Rutherford, Ohio

Doctor Mercer walked into the room where Elizabeth Loucks was sitting slouched in a chair. It was obvious that Elizabeth, under normal circumstances, we a very pretty girl, but at the moment she was disheveled and it was obvious she'd been crying. That was, Fran thought, not surprising given how Laura Paulus would have conducted her interview. Fran believe in a different approach, which in this situation, was a major plus.

"Hi, Elizabeth, I'm Fran."

"Hi," Liz replied dully.

"How are you?"

"How do you think? Everyone is lying about me! Nobody will listen and nobody cares about the truth!"

"I care about the truth, Elizabeth, or should I call you Liz?"

"Liz. You're just another psychiatrist who wants to drug me and put my brother in prison!"

"Do you know the difference between a psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist?"

"No."

"Clinical psychologists like me aren't allowed to prescribe drugs. We're not medical doctors, we're counselors, and I'm specially trained to help teenagers like you."

"And the other lady?"

"Doctor Paulus? She's also a clinical psychologist."

"But she tried to trick me into accusing Mike just like that bitch from Columbus!"

"You mean because she asked you the same questions in different ways?"

"Yes! Just like that bitch who said Mikey abused me! She tricked my mom, too!"

Elizabeth was clearly agitated, and that concerned Fran, because no matter what the truth happened to be, the agitation would be used by the State of Ohio and their doctors to 'prove' that both Liz and Mike were lying. Fran had seen it happen, and had seen it destroy a family, when no actual abuse had occurred, except in the mind of the prosecutors and their doctors. Fran decided that the direct approach was a bad idea. She mostly hadn't used it with Mike, and she certainly couldn't use it with Elizabeth - Liz - if she wanted to get the truth.

"Why don't you use the powder room and wash your face and blow your nose and we can have a chat. Just a talk. I promise no tricks and no traps. The powder room is just outside this door. Come back and we'll figure out how to help you."

Liz nodded and got up from her chair and walked to the door. Doctor Mercer watched carefully and saw that Liz walked steadily, appeared to be healthy and reasonably fit. Her build reminded Fran of her own daughter, Sarah, who was fourteen as well. While Liz was in the powder room, she pondered everything Mike had said, and her experience and insight told her Mike was telling the truth. That said, he might just be a very good liar and an adept manipulator.

Doctor Mercer had run into a few of those in the past, but Mike didn't seem to fit the type.

"How are you feeling?" Doctor Mercer asked in as friendly a voice as she could muster without sounding patronizing or cloying.

"How do you think?" Liz replied testily. "Nobody will believe anything I say! They locked me up in a cell in Columbus. Now they forced me to live with a family I don't like. They want to put my brother in jail for life! He didn't DO anything!"

"I understand those are the things that are upsetting you, but would you tell me how you feel?"

"Helpless," Liz sighed.

"Then let's see if I can help you. You said you don't like the foster family. Why?"

"Kim, who's in my grade, is a stuck-up cheerleader who didn't even acknowledge I was alive! She pretends to care when she's home, but some of my friends told me she's saying nasty things about me at school."

"Did you tell Family Services?"

"The stupid cow who made me move doesn't listen to anything I say! She said I was making it up because I was covering for Mike and that Kim was a 'wonderful, sweet girl'. That's bullshit, and *everyone* at school knows it!"

Fran contemplated gently reproving Liz for swearing and for name-calling, but decided it would be counterproductive.

"I know you've only been there a few days, but what do you do?"

"Stay in my room except for meals and the bathroom unless they make me come out. I don't want to be there, but I'm not allowed to leave. I'm not allowed to see any of my friends without Family Services interviewing them and I can't go to school until after the hearing! I'm being punished because that bitch in Columbus lied about me!"

The interview was going to be even more difficult than Fran had first imagined because Liz was clearly very, very upset. That didn't help because girls trying to cover for abuses became very upset, as did girls who were telling the truth. The psychiatrists appeared, as was common, to have simply assumed that Liz was covering for Mike, instead of trying to find the truth.

"Liz, I can help you if you let me. I can't promise anything except to try, but if you don't let me try, the court will confirm the order. Will you let me try to help you?"

"I guess."

"Tell me how you met Paul, if you would."

"Last Summer, when my friend Emmy was on vacation with her family, I was at the pool alone. My mom had dropped me off because Mike couldn't give me a ride for some reason. Paul sat down in a deck chair next to me."

"What were you wearing?"

"A bikini."

"And what was he wearing?"

"A bathing suit."

"Which kind?"

"Trunks."

"So what happened after he sat down?"

"He said 'hello' and I said 'hello' back. It was pretty obvious he was interested from the way he looked at me."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Tingly, and I had this kind of queasy feeling, like I had when I'd made out with a guy. But he had just said 'hello'; he hadn't even tried to touch me."

"What happened next?"

"Nothing. We both lay in the sun for a time, then he said 'goodbye' and left, but I know he checked me out."

"Checked you out?" Fran asked.

"You know, looked at me from head to toe and liked what he saw."

"Go on."

"Two weeks later, I was at the pool with Emmy..."

"Emmy is?" Fran asked, interrupting.

"My best friend, Emily Nelson."

"OK, go on."

"Anyway, we were in the pool and he touched my arm, then my hip, then my stomach. It was all casual, but I really liked it and I was sure I wanted to be with him. I'm sure he wanted me, too."

"Did he know how old you were?"

"Not until right before he left. I asked him how old he was and then he asked me."

"And you told the truth?"

"Yes. I said I was fourteen. He seemed a bit surprised, but didn't say anything. Later he told me he'd thought I was sixteen."

"Go on."

"Well, before that, I'd asked him what he did for a living and where he worked. He told me that, and I told him I was in High School. That's when I asked how old he was."

"What did you think before that?"

"That he was a college Senior, so like twenty-two."

"OK. So what happened?"

"After I told him how old he was, we talked for another minute and then he said he had to go. I kissed his cheek before he left."

"Did he do anything?"

"No. He just smiled and left. I didn't see him at the pool the next few weeks, and then the summer ended and the pool closed."

"When was that?"

"About a month later at the end of September."

"When did you see him next?"

"Right before Halloween I managed to get to the place he worked in Rutherford so I could talk to him."

"He didn't call you? Or get in touch with you?"

"How could he? He didn't know my phone number, address, or even my last name."

"Why did you go to see him?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Liz asked with a smirk.

"Yes, but I'd like to hear what you were thinking."

"That I wanted to be with him. I'd had really intense dreams about, well, doing it, with him."

"Did you masturbate?"

"Uhm, yeah," Liz said quietly.

"OK. So, you went to the place he worked?"

"Yes. He was totally surprised and said he hadn't expected to see me until the next summer."

"Which was this year, when you turned fifteen, right?"

"Yes."

"So what happened after you saw him at Halloween?"

"I managed to sneak to see him a few more times, and Emmy covered for me."

"How many times?"

"Three or four; I don't remember for sure."

"Did you kiss?"

"No. I kissed his cheek, but that's all. He never kissed me or even hugged me."

"When was your first kiss with him?"

"Around Christmas. I bought him a gift and took it to him. He thanked me and then we kissed for the first time."

"What did you buy him?"

"A thin gold chain."

"How did he kiss you?"

"Just, uhm, normal at first, but then I Frenched."

"And how did that make you feel?"

"Like I wanted to do it; I mean, really, really wanted to do it."

"Then what happened?"

"I guess he felt the same way, and he told me he wanted me."

"How tightly did you hug?"

"I felt him, if that's what you mean."

"Yes. Go on."

"We agreed on a date for the Friday after New Year's."

"Of this year?"

"Yes, in January."

"What happened?"

"Well, I told my parents I was going ice skating with Emmy and she covered for me so I could meet Paul. When I showed up, he asked what I wanted to do and I told him I wanted to be alone with him. He said that's what he wanted, too, so we got in his car and drove to his house. As soon as we got inside, we started making out."

"And then you had sex?"

"Yes. I wanted him SO badly I couldn't stand it. I begged him to do it, so he picked me up and carried me to his bed."

"Who took your clothes off?"

"Both of us, together."

"You don't need to give details, but what did you do?"

"He kissed me all over, especially my boobs and between my legs, and then he got on top of me. I begged him to do it, and he did."

"How did you feel?"

"A bit uncomfortable at first, but then it felt so good I never, ever wanted to stop."

"Did you do it more than once that night?"

"Three times."

"And did you 'kiss him all over'?"

Liz laughed and smirked, "You mean blow him? Yes."

"Did you use birth control?"

Liz shook her head, "No."

"So what happened after?"

"We took showers, dressed, and he took me back to Grant Park to meet Emmy so I could go home with her."

"And after that?"

"At least once a week, sometimes twice, but mostly at the motel in Rutherford."

"Why not his house?"

"Because after we did it that first time, I saw a crib in another room. And pictures of his wife and son."

"So that's when you found out that he was married? You didn't know before?"

"I didn't know until I saw the crib and the picture, but that was after. I guess I wasn't paying attention at first."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Upset, but he'd treated me so nice and made me feel SO good that I decided I just wanted to do it with him."

"What about his wife?"

"He said there were having serious problems ever since his son was born, and that she was ignoring him and when she wasn't ignoring him, she was a bitch."

"Ignoring him? As in not having sex?"

"Well, that, too. But she spent all her time with the baby and her mom, and basically wanted nothing to do with Paul. He said she got all moody and acted crazy, and then just stopped paying attention to him. Before the baby she'd

cooked dinner every night, but she stopped doing that. And she stopped doing the laundry."

"You know this, or he told you?"

"He told me. But I think he was telling the truth."

"And this went on until your brother found out and called the Sheriff?"

"Yeah," Liz replied sullenly. "And everything went straight to hell."

"I saw in your medical records that you had an abortion. Was that Paul's?"

Liz shook her head, "No. I had two periods after he was arrested."

"Do you know who the father was?"

"No. I was kind of a slut at that point."

"Please don't use that word."

"What would you call a girl who traded sex for drugs? And who didn't care who she fuc...slept with?"

"Troubled," Doctor Mercer said gently. "So, when you told Mike, what happened?"

"First he insisted I have a pregnancy test and a VD test. He took me to the clinic here in Rutherford for the test."

"Negative, right?"

"Yes. Then he called the Sheriff and Paul was arrested."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Betrayed. Like my life was over."

"What did you do?"

"I started drinking, doing drugs, and having sex with anyone who could get me booze or coke. That's when Mikey noticed and talked to my parents and I got sent to that evil place in Columbus."

"Why tell your brother?"

"I didn't mean for him to find out," Liz sighed.

"Oh?"

"I was giving Mike a difficult time about Emmy, because I didn't want him to date her. He told me to 'grow up' and I replied that that was funny given I'd had sex before he did. Mom overheard, and she and I had a fight. I told her to mind her own f-ing business. She forced me to go to confession and grounded me. Mike didn't know anything except that I had a secret boyfriend. Emmy accidentally spilled the beans that Paul was married and that he was twenty-four. Mike freaked out and came to talk to me, and things spiraled out of control after that."

"Why would Emmy do that?"

"Because she assumed Mike knew, and asked if my mom knew everything, including how old Paul was and that he was married. According to Emmy, Mike nearly drove off the road."

"So your friend knew?"

"I said she covered for me when I was meeting Paul."

"Did she ever flirt with older guys at the pool?"

"Some, but she really wanted to fu...have sex with my brother."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Grossed out! I mean, seriously! Yuck!"

Fran laughed softly, "A common reaction from little sisters when their friends flirt with their older brothers. Did you and Emmy talk about that?"

"Only in the sense that I told her to stay away from him and told him to stay away from her. It didn't work."

"They dated?"

"Yeah. 'Dated'."

"As in they had sex?"

"Duh!"

"What else do you know about your brother's girlfriends?"

"April wouldn't do it with him, then decided she would, but they broke up because Mikey is fixated and obsessed with church. Then April offered and he turned her down. He went to Cincinnati with Jocelyn for a couple of days, which

is when he lost his virginity, and then he was with Emmy. Maybe other girls, too, but I'm not sure."

"How do you know so much?"

"Part of it is stuff Mikey said, part is stuff Emmy said, part is stuff my parents said. I'm pretty sure I'm right."

"So, you believe Mike was a virgin when he went to Cincinnati?"

"Positive, from something Jocelyn said to Mike."

"When was that?"

"Back in August."

"And you weren't a virgin when you were with Paul in January?"

"No. Didn't they tell you?"

"Yes, but I'd prefer to hear it from you. That's the best way for me to help you. Are you OK with discussing that?"

"If it will help Mikey, sure."

"Then let's start with when you first used drugs."

Entry 19811124–2 - Elizabeth Petra Loucks

November 24, 1981, Rutherford, Ohio

"The first time I tried pot was when I was thirteen," Liz said. "It was at a birthday party for a girl from school."

"A close friend?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Not then, but later."

"Did you do it voluntarily? Or would you say you were pressured?"

Liz shrugged, "Everyone was doing it, so I did. There was Southern Comfort, too, which we all put in our Coke or 7-Up."

"Would you say you were 'high' or 'wasted'?"

"Wasted, I guess."

"What was going on at the time?"

"A game of 'Spin the Bottle'."

"You were playing?"

"Yes."

"So you kissed guys?"

"And let them feel me up, outside my shirt."

"Because you wanted to or because you felt you had to?"

"The first time because the rules said I had to, but I liked it."

"Had you kissed before that time?"

"No."

"Do you feel as if you were abused or taken advantage of?"

"Not really. It was just a game and nobody tried to go further than the rules."

"How far was that?"

"Just touching outside clothes."

"Below the waist?"

"Some people did."

"Including you?"

"I rubbed some of the guys but they only touched me above the waist."

"And you were OK with that?"

"Yes. It made me curious about what they looked like, you know, guys."

"But you didn't see one then."

"No."

"When did you first see one?"

"Maybe two months before my fourteenth birthday."

"Who? And no names, if you don't want to."

"Freddy Kramer. We were making out and he was, uhm, complaining about being uncomfortable, so I let him take it out."

"Were you using any drugs?"

"We'd smoked some pot he got from his older brother."

"Did you feel 'high' or 'wasted'?"

"Yeah," Liz nodded.

"So, what happened then?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"I used my hand on him while we kissed."

"You made him ejaculate?"

"Yeah, a hand job."

"How did you feel about that?"

"OK, I guess. I mean I wasn't grossed out or afraid or anything."

"And what did he do?"

"Had his hand inside my blouse, and under my bra."

"That was the first time someone touched you that way?"

"Yes."

"Did you take off your shirt or bra?"

"No."

"So at that point, nobody had seen you?"

"No. Well, my doctor, I guess."

"But not your brother?"

"Mike has never seen me naked!"

"And have you seen him?"

"No! Never! Both of us kept the door locked to the bathroom when we used it, and I always locked my door to my room when I was changing."

"Why?"

"I didn't want anyone to barge in."

"Were you worried about Mike?"

"You mean that he'd try to come in? No way! He'd never do that."

"Not even by accident?"

"He always knocked, and never opened the door if I didn't say it was OK."

"So why lock it?"

"I don't know; I just did."

"What about your dad?"

"Gross!" Liz spat.

"Did he ever bathe you?"

"Not that I remember. It was always my mom until I could do it myself."

"What about Mike?"

"No way!" Liz exclaimed.

Doctor Mercer laughed softly, "I didn't mean him bathing you! I meant who bathed him."

"My mom. She pretty much did everything around the house until Mike and I were old enough."

"When did you start doing your own laundry?"

"When I was eight or nine. I don't remember for sure. That's when I started helping with dishes and other stuff."

"Did you ever do anyone else's laundry?"

"No. Mike did his and Mom did hers and Dad's. I think she might have done mine or Mike's if we were sick, but I honestly don't remember."

"Do you know what kind of underwear Mike wears?"

"No clue."

"Do you know what he wears to bed?"

"I thought it was PJs, but then I found out totally by accident he slept naked."

"You didn't know he was naked that day?"

"No! I'd have never gone into his room if I knew that!"

"Going back to your boyfriend, well, would you consider Freddy your boyfriend at that point?"

"I guess. It wasn't like we could go on dates, but I went to the Valentine's Day dance at school with him."

"Did you do anything physical besides dancing?"

"After the dance we went back to his house, which was close to the school, to wait for my ride. We made out and I, uhm, sucked him."

"And he ejaculated?"

"Yeah," Liz replied, her eyes downcast.

"That's all?"

"He put his hand under my skirt and rubbed me over my panties. It felt good and I liked it."

"And that's where it ended?"

"Mike showed up to take me home, so we had to stop."

"Would you have gone further?"

"I don't know; maybe."

"Had you talked to anyone about it?"

"Just my friend Emmy. I pretty much told her everything except what happened a week later."

"Are you OK to talk about it?"

"I have to," Liz said resignedly. "Otherwise Mike will go to prison for something we didn't do!"

"Tell me about that day, starting with when you got up."

Liz took a deep breath and let it out. Then took a second one and let it out slowly.

"It was a Saturday and I slept late. I don't think I ate breakfast, but I ate lunch, and then Freddy came to pick me up."

"What did you put on?"

"Uhm, jeans and a blouse."

"Underwear?"

"Always. Just normal panties and a bra."

"OK. Freddy was a couple of years older, right? But not sixteen?"

"Yeah, fifteen; it was his brother who drove him to our house and I left with them to go to their house."

"Did your parents or Mike know you were going?"

"No. My parents were out, but I don't remember where. Mike was probably with Jocelyn and Dale, and then I'm sure he went to church because he never missed, but I don't remember for sure."

"He had his driving license then, right?"

"He was seventeen, so yeah. He'd had his Mustang for close to a year by then."

"Which month was this?"

"April."

Doctor Mercer noted that Liz's responses were flat and almost robotic, but that was normal, so she let it go.

"And that was the Spring before you met Paul, right?"

"Yeah."

"OK. So, you went to Freddy's house. What happened there?"

"His brother and some of his brother's college friends were there, but Freddy and I didn't hang out with them at first."

"What did you do?"

"Listened to music and made out."

"Clothed?"

"Yeah. He asked for, uhm, oral sex, but with his brother and his friends there, I didn't want to. But then they went out, so we went to Freddy's room and I sucked him."

"Did he touch you?"

"Yeah."

"What happened then?"

"We went to the basement to play ping-pong. His brother and his friends came back and started doing lines of coke. They offered some to Freddy and he did it, then offered me some."

"And you did it?"

"Yeah, because everyone was doing it."

"Just once?"

"No, twice."

What happened then?"

"I was sitting in his lap and he was rubbing me and got me super excited. That was the first time he put his hands inside my panties. It felt really, really good. I felt him, you know, hard, and he asked if I'd have sex with him."

"What did you say?"

"That I wanted to, but I wasn't ready to do it, but I offered to suck him again."

"Did you?"

"Yeah. He asked his brother and his brother's friends to leave and I sucked Freddy."

"Then what?"

"When he, uhm, ejaculated, I heard his brother and his brother's friends cheer and applaud."

"How did that make you feel?"

"I was so spaced out that it didn't really register."

"And then?"

"How much do I have to tell you?" Liz asked.

"Only as much as you want to," Doctor Mercer said.

Liz sighed deeply, "Freddy had been rubbing me while I sucked him. I was kind of lying across his lap. He pushed his finger into me a little bit, but not far enough to, uhm, break my cherry. I was spaced out, but super excited, and I let him take off my shirt and bra, and them my pants."

"With his brother and the others watching?"

"Yeah," Liz said, a tear running down her cheek.

"Do you want to stop?"

Liz shook her head, "No. Freddy took off my panties, pulled down his pants and had sex with me. When he finished, he gave me some more coke, and then his brother and all his brother's friends took turns having sex with me. When they finished, I got dressed and they took me home."

"Did you tell them to stop?"

"I told Freddy but he didn't listen. I screamed when his brother started, but then I just gave up and let it happen."

"Did you fight?"

"I was too wasted."

"What did you do when you got home?"

"Took a shower and washed all my clothes, then went to bed."

"Did you tell Emmy about it?"

"Just about Freddy fuc...having sex with me."

"How did you describe it?"

"Just that I was spaced out on coke and we did it."

"What did she say?"

"Not much, but she was curious about it."

"About sex?"

"Yeah. She had a thing for Mike and even then she wanted to do it with him."

"Do you know if she did?"

"Yeah, but that was after Jocelyn's accident."

"So you knew when Mike was having sex?"

Liz laughed for the first time, albeit wryly.

"Everyone did!" she exclaimed. "He and Jocelyn went to Cincinnati to lose their virginities together."

"You're sure?"

Liz nodded, "Mikey was such a goody-two-shoes that even the easy girls weren't interested in him. Even April, his girlfriend, wouldn't."

"How do you know that?"

"We talked later, after he broke up with her."

"Are you OK with me asking more questions about the assault?"

"Sure," Liz sighed.

"Were you injured in any way?"

Liz shook her head, "No, there was a bit of blood in my panties, but I'm sure that was because I was a virgin. I think it hurt a bit when Freddy did it, but honestly, the coke makes it all fuzzy."

"And after you showered and washed your clothes and went to bed, then what?"

"I just went to church the next day, and school."

"Did Freddy talk to you?"

Liz shook her head, "He never talked to me again. He tried to avoid being around me."

"So who did you tell about it, eventually."

"Mike. I thought you knew that."

"It's better if I just ask questions than assume something I've read or heard is correct. When was that?"

"Back in September, after I came home from that evil place in Columbus."

"So about fifteen months after it happened?"

"Yeah."

"And that was after you were with Paul?"

"Obviously, if it was in September and I was with Paul before that!"

"Sorry, I'm just making sure I have the timeline correct. It's important."

"OK," Liz replied warily.

"Why did you tell your brother?"

"It was right after...the thing that that bitch thinks means Mikey abused me."

"Can you tell me about that?"

Liz sighed deeply, "It started when I called Mikey a coward and said he always ran away."

"Why did you call him a coward?"

"Because I wanted him to help me because he always avoided saying anything harsh."

"So why ask him to have sex with you?"

"I didn't! I was trying to get his attention! Nothing else worked."

"What was it you wanted?"

Liz sighed, "A way out."

"Of?"

"Alcohol and drugs. I was trading sex for drugs and I needed help. I wanted Mikey to help me."

"So why not just ask him?"

"I was afraid he'd run away and that he'd hate me. And then I'd have nobody."

"Why not go to somebody else?"

"Because nobody loves me the way Mikey does. Nobody."

"More than your parents?"

"Absolutely!"

"Why do you feel that way?"

"He never judged me or criticized me, well, beyond us teasing each other. He was always there for me and always supported me."

"What's your first memory of him loving you?"

"When my friend Lisa moved away and I was really upset, he cuddled me on the floor of my room until I cried myself to sleep. I guess he stayed the whole night because he was there when I woke up."

"How old were you?"

"Three."

"So Mike was six?"

"Yeah."

"And he didn't touch you?"

"He had his arm around me, but I didn't have boobs or anything for him to touch! And it wasn't like that bitch in Columbus said, either! Nothing happened."

Liz was clearly agitated again, but this time, Doctor Mercer was convinced that Mike hadn't abused Liz, and that the conversation between them had been what would be best characterized as a 'cry for help'. But there was one more topic Doctor Mercer had to discuss.

"Relax, Liz. I'm not accusing either of you of anything."

"No, but that's what they're saying and they're going to take me away from my parents and put Mikey in prison! Nothing happened!"

"Liz, the only way to prevent that is to relax and let me finish this interview so I can write up a report."

"What are you going to say?"

"I'm not allowed to tell you that, but please know that I want to help you in any way I can."

"And I'm just supposed to trust you?"

"I hope you believe I've listened carefully to everything you've said and that I'll do my best to help you."

"What did Mikey say?"

"I can't share that, either. The rules are really clear. I'll be at the hearing tomorrow. There is one more thing I want to discuss with you."

"What's that?"

"The time you spent in Columbus. Are you OK to talk about that?"

"I wish we didn't have to, but if it will help."

"I think it will."

"OK."

Entry 19811124–3 - Elizabeth Petra Loucks

November 24, 1981, Rutherford, Ohio

"Who convinced you to agree to go to the clinic?"

"Mikey did," Liz sighed. "And he made me promise not to fight our parents, but I did."

"How did he do that?"

A tear ran down Liz's face and she shook her head, "That's what made them accuse him of doing terrible things to me."

"You said before that you said it because you wanted Mike's help."

"I did," Liz replied, sobbing softly. "And he made me promise to tell them."

"Why would he do that?"

"Because he loves me! He told me I had to tell them everything!"

"Did you ever, at any time, tell Doctor Orosco that Mike had touched you inappropriately, or that you two engaged in any kind of physical relationship?"

"NO!" Liz screeched. "Never! She tried to force me to say it! She tried to trick me into saying it! But I never did! I told over and over that it never happened!"

"Liz," Doctor Mercer said gently, "if you want to help Mike and you want to go home, you need to be careful about overreacting."

"But that bitch is trying to destroy our family and ruin my brother's life even though he's the one who helped me!" Liz wailed.

"And if you want to prevent that, you need to calm down, please. If you respond like that in the courtroom, they're going to disregard what you say."

"They're already doing that!" Liz protested, though a bit more calmly. "The judge let them take me away from my parents!"

"That's part of her job, Liz. When Family Services has sufficient evidence, and Doctor Orosco's evaluation is sufficient, the judge has to act. But you get a hearing, which is what we're preparing for. Let's take a short break, you can use the ladies', and then we can discuss what you talked about with Doctor Orosco."

"OK," Liz sighed, deeply.

She got up and went to the washroom to blow her nose and wash her face. While she was gone, Fran wrote several lines in her notebook. She was reticent to say that Doctor Orosco had fabricated the report she'd given to Family Services, but Fran's gut and everything she'd heard from Mike and Liz pointed her in that direction. ` Fran had seen a situation like this once before, where a teenager was pressured to say she was abused when there was no physical evidence, and nothing from any of the interviews which Fran had done indicated any kind of abuse, sexual or otherwise. In that case, she'd managed, with no margin for error, to clear the allegations. This one might be more difficult, as Liz's mother had apparently been tricked by word games into agreeing with the accusation.

That was what bothered Fran the most. She'd never use the 'what if I told you...' construct to try to elicit a pre-determined answer, and it was fairly clear from everything that Doctor Mercer had reviewed that that was what had happened. And based on THAT deceptive practice, the judge had issued the temporary

order and scheduled the hearing. Fran was convinced that the kids were telling the truth; now the task was to get the judge to see that.

That wouldn't end the ordeal, but it would likely get Liz home, and that was the best possible short-term outcome. Fran was certain that forcing Liz to live with a foster family would worsen her situation, and very likely lead to her running away or even attempting suicide. The report from Columbus Health Services had showed that Liz had been sedated, restrained, and kept in what amounted to solitary confinement because they felt she was a suicide risk, as well as that she'd violently react. To Doctor Orosco, that had confirmed her suspicion of abuse, but to Fran it was a normal reaction to be expected of a teenage girl under extreme stress.

"Feeling better?" Doctor Mercer asked when Liz came back into the room.

"No, but I can finish our talk."

"Let's pick up with Mike convincing you to go to the clinic. What did he say?"

"That he loved me, that he thought I needed help, and that they could help me."

"So what happened?"

"I talked to my mom and told her I'd go to the clinic."

"Did you know you were pregnant at that point?"

"I thought I might be, but I wasn't sure."

"You had a pregnancy and VD test, right?"

"Yes, but they were before I started having sex with guys to get drugs, and they were negative."

"What did you write on the forms about having sex?"

Liz sighed, "I lied. I just wrote about Paul. And I said we used rubbers every time, but we didn't that first time."

"When did you find out for sure you were pregnant?"

"When I went to Columbus. The first thing they did was a complete physical, plus VD and pregnancy tests."

"And when they told you were pregnant, what happened?"

"I cried, and then Doctor Orosco said she was going to do an abortion. I wasn't sure, but she said my parents had signed full medical power of attorney, and that I didn't have a choice."

Doctor Mercer frowned, but quickly tried to have a more neutral look. She didn't agree with that policy, though she was certain that it had been in Liz's best interest. But the thing to do was talk it through, not perform an abortion against the will of a confused and distraught young woman. That was especially true if Liz had been less than a month along - there would be plenty of time to deal with the situation.

"How did that make you feel?"

"I didn't like being told I had to, and I was worried about what Mikey would think, but I couldn't have a baby at fifteen. I cried a lot, before, during, and after."

"And now?"

Liz shrugged, "It's done, and like I said, I couldn't have a baby."

"How did Mike react?"

"The way he always does - he told me he loved me and that he understood."

"He's against abortion?"

"The church considers it a sin, so Mikey won't even think about it."

Doctor Mercer suppressed a laugh, because like many religious kids, Mike certainly thought sex was a sin, but still engaged in it. Hormones were a very powerful force, and resisting them was quite often a fruitless struggle. Fran didn't agree on the sin aspect, but understood Mike's behavior as typical of a religious, introverted, nerdy teenager who was presented with the opportunity to have sex.

"But he accepted it?"

"Because he loves me and he'd never, ever do anything to hurt me."

"So you had your medical evaluation, then they performed the procedure, then what?"

"I was locked in a room and they put me in restraints."

"Why?"

"Because I said I wanted to leave and I refused to take the drugs they wanted me to take."

"What were those?"

"I don't even know what they gave me, but it made me feel completely spaced out."

"For how long?"

"I don't know, maybe a week. Then I decided I'd cooperate because I was sure it was the only way I could go home."

"What do you mean by 'cooperate'?"

"Answer their questions. But every time I told Doctor Orosco that Mikey and I had never done anything, she told me it was OK to tell the truth. I was telling the truth, but she never, ever believed me. She tried to trick me, trap me, and even promised that if I admitted it, I could go home. I know THAT was a lie because she helped that lady from Family Services take me away from my parents! And she's going to try to put my brother in jail!"

"Tell me what she said, if you can remember."

"First she asked me about stuff my mom told her, and then about why I agreed to them checking me in. That's when I told her about what I said to Mikey and what he said to me. That's when she decided Mikey and I had actually had sex."

"But you didn't?"

"No! Never! I never even kissed him except on the cheek, and that was mostly when we were little."

"Did your family kiss on the lips?"

"No. I always kissed my mom and dad on the cheek, and they wither kissed my cheek or forehead."

"What did Doctor Orosco say, specifically, if you can remember."

"That I was safe, that nobody would be able to hurt me, and that if I told the truth she'd help me go home."

"And you believed her?"

"I guess it didn't matter because I *was* telling the truth. But she didn't believe me."

Doctor Mercer smiled, then spoke gently to Liz, "I understand that point."

"Sorry," Liz replied, chagrined. "Anyway, for that first week, every time I said it didn't happen, she kept saying I was safe, and protected, and that if I told what happened, she'd help me go home. After the first week, though, she started asking why I was trying to protect Mikey. That's when I got even more upset and they gave me even stronger drugs which made me totally out of it and all I wanted to do was sleep. After a few days, I just decided to not fight anymore."

"And then what happened?"

"Because I cooperated on everything else, they stopped giving me drugs, and then, one day, Doctor Orosco told me she knew about what happened, that my mom had confirmed it. I told her she was lying because it never happened. That's when she started accusing me of trying to protect Mikey again and asking why I would do that."

"Did you ever say anything that indicated that something might have happened between you two?"

"No way! She asked me every possible question you could imagine about Mikey."

"Such as?"

"If I had seen him naked, or he had seen me naked, or if he knew my bra size, or if I knew how big he was, you know. And it was always the same - I told her it didn't happen and had never happened. But I was calm and answered her questions and didn't yell, and followed the rules, so she had to let me go home. One of the orderlies told me that was the case, so I just cooperated, but never, ever said that anything happened."

"And you never told anyone, not a friend, or anyone else, that anything like that happened?"

"No. Nobody knew I was raped, and only Emmy knew I was with Paul."

"I think we're finished."

"Do you believe me, Doctor Mercer?"

Doctor Mercer nodded, "I absolutely do. And I'll say that tomorrow at the hearing."

"Thank you!" Liz gushed and started crying again.

"May I give you some advice, please?"

"Yes," Liz replied, dabbing her tears with a tissue.

"If you are called to testify tomorrow, be calm and respectful. If you call Doctor Orosco names or raise your voice, you'll only hurt your chances of going home."

"Do you think they'll let me?"

"I think if you and your brother are calm and respectful, there's a very good chance. I'll take you back to Mrs. Laramy now. Just hang in there, and don't discuss anything we talked about, please. For your own sake. I'll see you tomorrow at the hearing."

"Thanks."

Fran led Liz out of the room to leave her with Mrs. Laramy, then went to find Laura Paulus, who had completed her interview with Mike. The two of them got coffee and went back into the room where Fran had done her interviews.

"What do you think?" Doctor Paulus asked.

"I think those kids are caught in a system designed to find abuse. I don't know Janet Orosco, but this tracks almost exactly with that case you helped me with right after I began working on my own."

"My thoughts exactly," Laura replied. "There are no indicators and no warning signs."

"Some girls do engage in sexual activity at that age, and when it's with close-in-age friends or acquaintances, it's risky and ill-advised, but not necessarily a sign of abuse. Add in experimentation with drugs, and then introduce college-age men, and everything lines up. You remember our discussions about Bethany - she was thirteen and was ready to engage in intercourse. She had the unfortunate situation of running into a serial rapist, rather than just a normal jock."

"OK. We've reached the same conclusion separately. We should each write up our findings and we'll present them tomorrow. I spoke to Doctor Hart, Mike's

advisor and counselor at school, as well as the family physician, and they both agree there is no evidence to suggest anything happened beyond what the kids admitted. It was an extreme cry for help and an extreme response, but it did crack open the details of everything that had happened."

"It does present a significant problem, but I believe Mr. Winston has a strategy to deal with it. Our problem is that Family Services often defers to the State and the bar of 'proof' is fairly low."

"But in this case, there is none, except for the kids' statements, which in context, make perfect sense. Hopefully, the judge will see that."

"Hopefully. Dinner at Lou's Diner?"

"Sounds good to me."

Entry 19830406 - Kara Anne Blanchard

April 6, 1983, Milford, Ohio

"Doctor Mercer will see you now, Miss Blanchard," the receptionist, Cecilia, said.

"What about my mom?" Kara asked, tightly clutching her stuffed bear.

"Doctor Mercer would like to talk to you alone, but if you need your mom, it's OK for her to go in."

"You can do it, Kara," Mrs. Blanchard said, encouraging her daughter.

"OK," Kara answered.

She got up and the receptionist showed her into Doctor Mercer's office. Doctor Mercer stood and smiled warmly. Cecilia closed the door to give them privacy.

"Hi, Kara, I'm Doctor Mercer. Who's your friend?"

"Steve Bear," Kara said timidly. "Can I keep him with me?"

"Yes, of course. Have a seat on the couch, please. We're just going to talk."

Kara sat down on the couch, still clutching her bear tightly. Doctor Mercer sat down in a chair near the couch. She didn't have her notepad, as she had spoken with Kara's mother and knew Kara was reticent to talk. The only reason she was here was because Steve Adams, another one of Doctor Mercer's patients, had insisted she come for help.

"Can you tell me about your bear, Kara?" Doctor Mercer asked "Who gave him to you?"

"Steve."

"Was it a gift for something special?"

"For my birthday."

"And your bear's name is Steve?"

"Yes, because I called Steve 'Snuggle Bear'."

"Does your bear go everywhere with you?"

"Yes."

"What do you do, Kara? Do you go to school or work?"

"I work."

"What do you do at work?"

"I'm a receptionist. It's temporary for a girl who is having a baby."

"When did you graduate from High School?"

"May of last year."

"What about college?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"I was going to go, but my dad died."

"When did that happen?"

"The Sunday after graduation."

"Is that why you're sad?"

"No," Kara said, almost inaudibly, and clutched her bear even more tightly.

Doctor Mercer thought about the best way to move forward, and decided it might be best to start at the beginning, and, at least for the first session, stay away from whatever it was that was that appeared to have shattered Kara's psyche.

"Let's talk about something else, then. What did you want to study in college?"

"Chemistry."

"For research or teaching?"

"Both. I want to be a college professor."

"Were you a good student?"

"Yes."

"And what else did you do in High School? Any sports or the band or choir?"

"No. I sang at church."

"What church?"

"Grace Church in Milford, be we don't go there anymore."

"Where do you go now?"

"The Evangelical Free Church in Loveland."

"Why did you change churches?"

"Because the pastor of the old church is evil! He blamed Steve and his dad for what happened to my dad. He said they were sinners and that caused my dad to die!"

Doctor Mercer's hands gripped the arms of her chair. She'd had a few other patients who had suffered similar kinds of abuse at the hands of overzealous religious leaders. She wasn't a regular attendee at any synagogue, but was notionally Jewish, at least with regard to the traditions being a touchstone than as a something which controlled her life. She had plenty of Christian patients, most of whom came from mainline denominations, but Kara was the third young person from Grace Church she'd seen in the previous five years, and she knew of at least one suicide that was attributed to that pastor, though not in a way where criminal charges could be brought. On the plus side, at least from her perspective, she'd heard that pastor had been fired after his own teenage daughter was found to be pregnant.

"Do you like your new church?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about your friends."

"Susie, Josh, Ruth, and Sandy from my old church. Sandy is pregnant."

"Did you have friends besides the ones at church?"

"Some of Steve's friends."

"Were you close to any of them?"

Kara clutched her bear tightly again, and a tear dripped from her eye and rolled down her cheek. It was obvious to Doctor Mercer that she'd once again come close to the source of Kara's current mental state. Doctor Mercer thought about taking a shortcut and calling Steve in Chicago to ask him, but given she wasn't sure about their relationship at this point, that wasn't wise, and might cause other issues. Steve was usually pretty forthright and honest, but he might not even know what the issue actually was.

"Let's talk about something else, then," Doctor Mercer continued. "How did you meet Steve?"

"He sat down in chemistry class next to me."

"And what happened?"

"I told Mrs. Brewer, the teacher, I didn't want him to be my lab partner, but she wouldn't let me change."

"Why did you say that?"

"Because I knew about him and didn't want my friends to think I liked him."

"But you did?"

"Yes," Kara replied, continuing to clutch her bear tightly and seeming uncomfortable.

Doctor Mercer knew Steve's history, and she made a few assumptions, which in her mind provided more clues - Kara had been sexually active with Steve, there was an issue with one of Steve's friends to whom Kara was close, and something had happened with that friend, or with Steve, or both, which had triggered overwhelming emotions. And that pointed a direction for the questions.

"Are you feeling very sad?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Yes," Kare replied quietly.

"How else do you feel?"

"Sick," Kara whispered.

"As in you feel like you want to throw up?"

"Yes."

"When you eat? Or when you cry?"

"All the time."

"Because of something that happened?"

Kara nodded and once again clutched her bear tightly and a pair of tears dripped from her eyes.

"Do you have a boyfriend?" Doctor Mercer asked, having a general idea of the situation from her talks with Steve.

Kara shook her head.

"Did he break up with you?"

Kara shook her head again, but didn't say anything. Doctor Mercer decided to let it be for the moment, and hoped Kara would open up more in the future.

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"No."

"Any cousins?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"My dad has a brother, but they haven't seen each other since before I was born."

"Do you know why?"

"They had a big fight right after my dad's brother graduated from High School. My dad was in college then."

"What about your grandparents?"

"We don't see them too often."

"Would you come back and talk with me again next week?"

"Steve said I have to."

"I think he wants you to, but you don't have to. I would like you to. Maybe we can talk about Steve."

"Maybe," Kara said sounding very unsure.

"Would you mind if I spoke to your mom now? You could wait in the outer office, and your bear can keep you company."

"OK."

Doctor Mercer and Kara both got up and went to the door, and once Kara had sat down on the couch in the reception area, Doctor Mercer invited Nancy Blanchard, Kara's mom, into the office. They both went to sit on the couch so they could talk.

"Has Kara been depressed the entire time since your husband died?"

"Oh heavens no!" Nancy replied. "She was very happy by the end of the summer, and she and Steve were on their way to getting engaged. He was about to ask her when she walked out on him."

"Do you know why?"

"I wish I did. She told Steve some story about fornication being a sin and going to hell, but I think there has to be something more."

Doctor Mercer knew part of this story, at least from Steve's perspective, though she wasn't sure he was giving her the full details.

"Did he actually propose?"

"No. He had the ring and was going to propose on Christmas Eve. She walked out before he could ask her, and went back to Chicago. From that point on, she refused to talk to me about anything, and started dressing even more conservatively than she had before. You saw her today - nothing showing except her hands and head."

"When we talked, you said you had no idea what caused her to enter into this emotional state?"

"No. She had finally started talking to Steve again after he sent her that bear for her birthday. Ever since she received it, she's taken it with her everywhere, including to church and to work every day, though I think she leaves him in the car at work. It's never more than a few feet away, and almost always in her arms or lap. I'm pretty sure at work she puts him in the dashboard of the car and parks so she can see him from the reception desk."

"The bear is a stand-in for Steve?"

"I think that's pretty obvious, don't you? "

"I do. Has anything change in your life? I mean you, personally?"

"Not really. I'm working, but I got the job last summer, with some help from Steve calling in a favor. I'm not dating, if that's what you mean."

"Does Kara visit her dad's grave?"

"No. But I don't visit regularly. I decided to go on his birthday and our anniversary, at least for now."

"And she's been in this state since she received the bear?"

"Yes. Before that she was basically going through the motions - totally emotionless and refusing to talk. Then she got the bear and clung to him for dear life. But she doesn't appear to have any issues at work."

"Is she seeing her friends?"

"No. She was hanging out with a girl named Joyce until late last fall, but they had some kind of falling out. Kara still saw her other friends, at least until she broke things off with Steve."

"OK. I'd like to see her again on Monday, if that works for you, and then every Monday until we get to the bottom of this and figure out how to help her."

"I'm not sure if she told you, but she and Steve were sexually active."

Doctor Mercer did know that, but not from Kara. And she knew Steve was OK with her sharing that he had seen her on occasion, as he was very open about it.

"She didn't, but I was aware of that because I've been seeing Steve off and on for a few years, and he made me aware."

"I just don't get it, Doctor," Nancy sighed despairingly. "She wanted to marry him, and he was ready to propose! Why would she walk out on him? It makes no sense!"

"That's what we're going to try to find out. Now, I'll let you go so you can both get to work."

The two women got up and left Doctor Mercer's private office. Nancy and Kara left, and Doctor Mercer went back to her desk. She took out a notebook and wrote out her perceptions and thoughts about the session, then filled out a

diagnostic form, listing severe depression as the probable diagnosis, leaving the blank for 'cause' empty.

She checked the clock and her appointment book, and with only ten minutes between sessions, she really only had time to use the ladies room and refill her cup with coffee from the pot on a table in the corner. She considered calling Steve in Chicago, but decided against it, wanting to talk further with Kara before she asked Steve if he had any insight. The last thing she wanted to do was color her own perceptions based on what Steve thought the problem might be.

"Doctor?" Cecilia, said. "Kelly is here."

"Show her in, please."

Kelly was fifteen, pretty, and in her own words, a 'sex fiend'. Her parents had brought her in after discovering that she'd had sex with fifteen Goshen High School football players to celebrate her fifteenth birthday. She'd lost her virginity at thirteen, had her first threesome at fourteen, and, if she was to believed, had more than two dozen sex partners before she turned fifteen. Amazingly, she hadn't become pregnant, nor contracted an STD. And she certainly didn't feel she had done anything wrong. The session was difficult, just as the three previous ones had been, because Kelly refused to see anything wrong with what she was doing.

When that session finished, Doctor Mercer's next appointment was with Robert, who at age twenty-seven had finally told someone about sexual abuse he'd suffered at the hands of a Catholic priest. His marriage had been falling apart, and he'd finally told the marriage counselor what had happened, and the marriage counselor had referred Robert to Doctor Mercer. They had discussed reporting it to the police, but as it had been fourteen years in the past, and Robert didn't want to have to testify, he'd elected just to receive counseling.

After Robert, she placed a phone call to Bethany Krajick in Madison for their monthly conversation. Bethany was doing well in Madison, and working towards a degree in Psychology. She had mostly recovered from her rape, though the recovery method was not something of which Doctor Mercer approved. Bethany was dating, but she still carried a torch for Steve, something which concerned Doctor Mercer because of Steve's apparent feelings for Kara.

After lunch, Doctor Mercer's first patient was Angie Stephens, a young woman who was struggling with relationships because of some deep-seated anxiety about sex, for which Doctor Mercer hadn't found a cause. They'd talked about Angie's friend, Debbie, who had overdosed after becoming pregnant from her only sexual encounter. Debbie was the girl she'd thought of during her talk with Kara, who was, in Doctor Mercer's opinion, the victim of the same preacher who seemed to have done a real number on Kara as well.

After seeing Angie, Doctor Mercer headed home, and after changing from her skirt and blouse into sweats, she made herself some tea and curled up on the couch with *Psychology Today* to await the arrival of her daughters from school. Sarah and Abigail were dropped off by their friend Rachel's mom, and burst into the house fully engaged in some kind of dispute.

"Ladies, what's the problem today?" Fran Mercer asked her kids.

"Sarah is in LUUUUVVV!" Abigail sang out.

"I am not!" Sarah protested. "I was just talking to Joshua!"

"By putting your lips on his?" Abigail teased.

Doctor Mercer reminded herself to remain calm and dispassionate, lest her feelings push her daughter towards behavior she preferred not to happen for a few more years.

"Abigail, go change; Sarah, please come sit with me."

"Busted!" Abigail exclaimed, then hurried up the stairs to her room.

Sarah walked over to the couch dropped her book bag and plopped onto the couch, a sullen look on her face.

"Want to tell me what happened?" Doctor Mercer asked gently.

"Not really," Abigail replied.

"Who is Joshua?"

"He's a Sophomore."

Doctor Mercer breathed an internal sigh of relief that the boy wasn't a Senior.

"Was that your first kiss?"

"That's my private business!" Sarah protested. "You said so!"

"You're right, I did say that. I thought maybe you'd want to talk to your mom about it."

"Why?"

"Because you're sixteen? Because you might have questions?"

"Oh puh-lease!" Sarah replied, rolling her eyes.

"Go change and do your homework. If you want to talk, I'm here."

Sarah got up from the couch and left the room and went upstairs. When Abigail came down, Doctor Mercer called her over.

"And you, young lady, do NOT tease your sister about boys."

"Fine," Abigail sighed. "But like, gross! Boys are SO dumb and blech! Who knows what they've had in their hands or mouths!"

Doctor Mercer laughed softly, "I think twelve-year-old boys might think the same things about you!"

"Fine with me! Just gross! It's bad enough seeing you and Dad kiss! Yuck!"

"Go do your homework!" Doctor Mercer said, shaking her head slightly in amusement.

Abigail left and Doctor Mercer picked up her magazine. Sarah's first kiss wasn't all that surprising, and it was something of a miracle that it hadn't happened until she was sixteen, well assuming that was the case. She hoped it would be three or four years before Abigail had her first kiss, but she'd become interested in boys very soon, and at age twelve, she was going to have her first period soon, and THAT would usher in a new era in the Mercer household with TWO hormone-overloaded teenagers, something Doctor Mercer did not look forward. She shook her head, laughed softly, and began reading again. Entry 19830413 - Kara Anne Blanchard

Entry 19830413 - Kara Anne Blanchard

April 13, 1983, Milford, Ohio

Kara, who was clutching her bear tightly, was shown into Doctor Mercer's office and sat down on the couch. Doctor Mercer greeted her and moved to the chair next to the couch.

"How are you today, Kara?"

"OK."

"Is there anything you want to talk about?"

"No."

"How are things at work?"

"Good."

"Can you tell me about your usual day? What do you do?"

"You mean at work?"

"Start when you get out of bed."

"Well, I take a shower, and get dressed..."

"Does your bear go into the bathroom with you?"

"Oh yes, he goes everywhere, but he stays in the car when I work. But he watches me and I can see him."

"Go on."

"I have breakfast with my mom, then drive to work which is close to the house where Steve's parents live by the Klondyke hill."

"And what do you do at work?"

"Greet people, answer the phones, type, file things, you know, basic office work."

"What about lunch?"

"I eat with the engineers. They're really, really nice."

"But you do OK without your bear?"

"He's in the car, but he's there."

"Do you think you could put him down now?"

"No," Kara replied, almost frantically. "I need Steve Bear!"

"It's OK, Kara. You can keep holding him. Can we talk about Steve?"

"I guess so," Kara said quietly, clutching her bear tightly.

"You told me how you two met in chemistry class. How did you become close?"

Kara smiled just a little bit, "I accused him of being sinful with Bible verses and he quoted X-rated ones back to me."

"Which ones?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Ezekiel 23 and Song of Songs 7."

"And how are those X-rated?" Doctor Mercer asked, though she knew the gist of what Steve had likely said.

"Well, Ezekiel talks about the size of their genitals and their uhm, ejaculation. Song of Songs talks about female anatomy, mixing navel with genitals."

"And why did he quote those?"

"To try to offend me because I was the leader of the 'Holy Rollers'."

"And what was that?"

"A group of kids who went to church and hung together at school. Kind of like Steve's group, but very religious."

"What did your group do?"

"Read the Bible and talk about church stuff, mostly."

"So what happened after the Bible verses?"

"Steve and his friend ran a computer dating service for the school."

"Did you participate?"

"No, because I thought it was sinful."

"Why did you think that?"

"I don't really know now, but then I was sure. I just don't know why."

"Then what happened?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"I told Steve I thought it was sinful and he challenged me to fill out the form and make a bet."

"What kind of bet?"

"That if we matched on more than half the items, he would win; if we didn't, I would win."

"And the bet?"

"If he won, then I would go on a date with him to have ice cream; if I won, he couldn't talk to me for the rest of the year unless I spoke to him first."

"And you agreed?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"We matched on 19 of 25. But later, I found out that most people matched on half, so it really wasn't a fair bet."

"Did you go out for ice cream with him?"

"Yes. I remember Steve telling my dad that he and I discussed the Bible so I'd be allowed to go."

Doctor Mercer laughed softly, "I suspect he had a different impression of your discussions from what they really were."

"Yes," Kara replied, giggling softly.

"How was your date?"

"Steve was his usual self and asked if he could have my cherry. I thought he meant from my ice cream, but he meant my virginity."

"What happened then?"

"I told him he was gross and we had a debate about religion. We made a bet about the Bible and he won, which meant I had to go on a real date with him, not just for ice cream."

"What was the bet about?"

"That the only place in the Bible where the words 'by faith alone' appeared, the word 'not' was in front of them. I didn't believe it, so I made the bet. I lost, so I had to go on a real date with him."

"You wanted to go on those dates, didn't you?"

"Yes," Kara replied, her voice just barely above a whisper.

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to be with him and do things with him."

"Things?"

"You know, sex."

"But it went against your religion, right?"

"Yes, but I wanted to so badly."

"Why is that?"

"Because of my dad?"

"Your dad?"

"I needed to prove that I was in control of my life and my body, not my dad."

"And losing your virginity was a way to do that?"

"Yes, because it was the one thing I could do to prove to myself I was in charge."

"When did you decide that?"

"When Steve sat down next to me that first day in chemistry class."

"Then why did you resist?"

"Because I knew he wanted me. He wanted to prove he could seduce the 'Holy Roller'. I made him work for it!"

"When did you go on that date?"

"October of my Junior year."

"1980?"

"Yes."

"And that's when it happened?"

"No way! He had to work harder for it! But he did say a real date meant a real kiss. He got one."

"And how did you feel?"

"Excited. It made me want to even more."

"What did you do on your date? Besides the kiss?"

"We went to dinner at Cork 'N Cleaver in Madeira. He wanted to go to a movie, but I wasn't allowed to go to movies."

"Why not?"

"Because my dad didn't approve and I would had been in a lot of trouble."

"More than having sex?"

"No!"

"So why not go to the movie?"

"I guess it seems silly now."

"So when did it happen?"

"January 9, 1981. We went to dinner and I invited him to my house. My parents were gone, and we went to my room."

"How was it?"

"Beautiful. It was just supposed to be sex, but he told me he loved me."

"And did you believe him?"

"Yes, but that's not why I did it. But we made love instead of just having sex."

"So you became lovers. Were you boyfriend and girlfriend?"

"Until he cheated on me," Kara sighed.

"When did that happen?"

"A few weeks after we first made love."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Betrayed, but I loved him, and didn't want to stop making love with him, even though it was sinful."

"Sinful?" Doctor Mercer inquired. "You've never used that word before when talking about it."

"That's what I told Steve when we broke up - that we were fornicating," Kara said, haltingly, "and...and...and that would send me to hell."

There was something else, something deeper; Doctor Mercer was sure of it. But she didn't think Kara was ready to tell her just yet.

"So you broke up because he cheated? And because you began to believe what you were doing was sinful?"

Kara shook her head, "No. He confessed and I forgave him. We broke up at Christmas."

"So you continued sleeping with him? Even though he was with another girl?"

"He was with lots of other girls. It's who he is."

"Why were you OK with that?"

"I wanted to be with him."

"But you broke up with him, right?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me why?"

Kara dropped her voice to almost a whisper, "It was fornication. I want to go to heaven and fornicators don't go to heaven."

Doctor Mercer gripped her pen and pad tightly, but didn't show any facial reaction. She'd dealt with this kind of demonization of sex before - the threats of eternal damnation for so much as thinking about engaging in sexual activity. Ethically, she couldn't try to dissuade Kara from her religious views, but she could try to help Kara deal with the mental and emotional anguish she was suffering.

"Did you believe that when you first made love with Steve?"

"Yes."

"And you continued making love with him?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"I was at a Bible Study at my new church," Kara said, clutching her bear tightly, "and we read Corinthians where it said that fornicators and homosexuals won't go to heaven! And I want to go to heaven, not hell!"

Kara's inclusion of homosexuals with fornicators got Doctor Mercer's attention. She wondered if some kind of same-sex encounter was the real cause of Kara's meltdown. She knew Steve had engaged in what was, for a teenager, fairly extreme activities, with multiple female partners who at times engaged with each other as well as Steve. Could THAT be the source?

"Kara, was there some specific thing that happened between you and Steve that caused this?"

"No! He was always very protective of me! But that doesn't mean we weren't fornicating!"

"Do you regret having sex with him?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"I told him when I broke up with him that he should never have taken my virginity."

"Do you still feel that way?"

"I don't know," Kara sighed.

"Have you been with another man, Kara?"

"No!" Kara exclaimed. "I can only ever be with one man!"

Another piece of the puzzle fell into place. By breaking up with Steve, Kara had broken off with the only man who, in her mind, she could marry. Her attachment to 'Steve Bear' made much more sense now, but Doctor Mercer felt there was still something Kara was keeping hidden. That comment about 'homosexuals' seemed to be the key, but it could also be a false lead. That happened so often in counseling. It might well be that the only issue was Kara's view of sexual sin and her belief that she was only supposed to be with one man for her entire life.

"Then why break up with Steve?" Doctor Mercer asked gently. "If you believe you can only be with one man, why not stay with him?"

"Because I was sinning! And I had to stop!"

"Your mom told me that Steve was going to propose to you. Did you know that?"

Kara shook her head, "No. Not that day. Mom told me later."

"How long was it after you broke up that Steve sent you the bear?"

"We broke up at Christmas and I got the bear in March, for my birthday."

"Your mom said that before you got the bear, you wouldn't even talk to her, unless you had to."

"I didn't want to."

"But then you got the bear and you talked to her, but became really sad?"

"Yes. Because I knew I had ruined everything."

There was something nagging Doctor Mercer about the sequence of events and Kara's statements, which didn't seem to line up.

"Do you feel the same way about what happened today as you felt before you got your bear and as the night you broke up?"

"What do you mean?" Kara asked.

"You told me before that you regretted Steve taking your virginity, but then you told me you didn't know how you felt now. Do you still think it was sinful?"

"Maybe, but...but...," Kara stammered.

"Is there something else you want to tell me?"

"No," she said, shaking her head firmly and clutching her bear.

It was going to take some work for Doctor Mercer to get through the wall Kara had erected around something. She was tempted to ask Steve about it, but Steve and Kara weren't in a relationship and it would be difficult to have that discussion without revealing things Steve might not know. Whatever it was Kara was hiding, might actually have been hidden from Steve as well.

"Then we'll just pick up next week, OK?"

Kara nodded tentatively, "OK."

"You don't want to talk to me?"

"Steve said I had to."

"Because he's very concerned about you and cares deeply for you."

"He loves me," Kara sighed. "And I ruined everything."

"But he sent you the bear, right?"

"Yes, but when I broke up with him, he went with Stephie. She took him back."

"Took him back?"

Kara sighed deeply, "He broke up with her to ask me to marry him."

Another piece fell into place - Steve was unobtainable in Kara's mind. The bear was the substitute for what she was sure she couldn't have.

"Our time is almost up, so I think we'll leave it there," Doctor Mercer said. "See you next week?"

"Yes."

She escorted Kara out, then made her notes about the session. She checked her watch and saw that she had fifteen minutes before her next patient, so she decided to go outside and get a breath of fresh air. She was back in her office twelve minutes later and two minutes after that, her receptionist showed in her next patient.

"Hi, Larry," Doctor Mercer said. "Come in and sit down."

April 14, 1983, Milford, Ohio

"Doctor, while you were with your patient, Steve Adams called. He'd like you to call him back."

"Did he leave a number?"

"Yes, a Chicago number."

She read it to Doctor Mercer who thanked her and dialed the number.

"Hi, Steve," Doctor Mercer said when he answered.

"Hi, Doctor Mercer. I wanted to talk to you about Kara."

"You know I have to be very careful about that, right?"

"Yes, of course. I talked to Kara last night and told her I was going to call you and that you would need a release. I talked to Nancy about it as well."

"How much do you know?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"All of it," Steve sighed. "But I won't tell you - Kara has to. That's why I want to talk to you to find out what she's told you."

"You won't tell me?"

"I think that would do more harm than good. Nancy has given me real grief about it, but honestly, I'm absolutely convinced it has to be up to Kara to decide who to tell."

"That's true, though there are instances when you need to violate privacy."

"I don't think she's suicidal, Doctor," Steve said. "But if you and I can talk about her, then I think I can convince her to tell you."

"I think she wants to tell me, but she's afraid."

"I agree. She's seeing you because I insisted. If I insist she tell you, I think she will. But I need to know what she's told you and what you've talked about."

"I'll see her next Thursday and ask her to sign a release. I'll have Nancy sign as well, just to cover my bases."

"Good."

"How are things with you?"

"They're pretty good, all things considered. I bought a house together with my dad and my friends and I will be moving in next month."

"A house?" Doctor Mercer asked in surprise. "You're just finishing your Sophomore year, right?"

"Yes, but I plan to stay in Chicago when I graduate, and I'm renting rooms to my friends to help cover my part of the mortgage."

"May I ask about your girlfriend?"

"Stephie? I take it Kara mentioned her."

"Yes."

"We should probably wait for the release so neither of us have to tiptoe around things."

"Then I'll plan to call you next week to talk. Thanks, Steve."

"You're welcome."

Doctor Mercer took Kara's file from her credenza, made a few notes, then put it away. She locked the credenza, then left her office to head home. When she arrived, Sarah was putting on her jacket.

"Hi, Mom! Joshua will be here to pick me up in five minutes."

"Remember what we talked about."

Sara rolled her eyes, "If he does anything I don't like, or drinks, or has drugs, to find a phone and call you or dad."

"Honey," Sam said coming up to kiss his wife, "your mom and I are just trying to keep you safe."

"Josh is really nice, goes to our school, and his dad is on the village council in Indian Hill!"

"Which are all good things," Sam Mercer replied. "But we still want you to know we're available if something bad happens. It might not be Josh - it could be a friend of his, or a friend's girlfriend. Just be safe, Honey."

"Yes, Dad," Sarah said, rolling her eyes.

A horn beeped, sounding as if it was in the driveway.

"Over my dead body!" Sam declared.

He went to the front door and waved to the driver of the car. The driver shut off the engine and got out of the car. He was 6'2" tall, and built like a linebacker. Sam was about four inches shorter, and other than jogging in the morning, not athletic. Sam didn't care about that; he was going to lay down the law.

"We don't honk horns to summon our dates at this house," Sam said. "If you want to take my daughter out, you'll come to the door, ring the bell, and say 'hello' to us."

"Yes, Sir," the young man, presumably Joshua, said.

"Then come inside for a moment, please. I'm Sam Mercer, Sarah's dad. You must be Joshua."

Sam extended his hand and Joshua shook it firmly. They went into the foyer, and Sam shut the door.

"Fran, this is Joshua," Sam said. "Joshua, this is my wife and Sarah's mother, Fran."

"Nice to meet you, Ma'am," Joshua said.

"Nice to meet you, too, Joshua," Doctor Mercer replied. "Please have Sarah home by 11:00pm."

"I will."

"Good. Then you two have a good evening."

The kids left and Sam closed the door behind them.

"Nice recovery," Sam said with a laugh. "From honking the horn to 'Sir' in five seconds flat!"

Doctor Mercer laughed, "Just like you the first time you met my dad. The sarcastic rebel became the perfect gentleman!"

"Until he was out of sight!"

"Something we will NOT tell Sarah about!" Doctor Mercer replied firmly.

"Don't want her following in her mom's footsteps?"

"I was eighteen! She just turned sixteen!"

"Uh-huh," Sam smirked.

"Right, because YOU would be OK with her doing with Josh what I did for you the night you're referring to?"

"No, of course not! She's my daughter!"

"Double standard?" Doctor Merce asked.

"Dad's privilege! Shall we make dinner?"

"Yes. And if you're good, maybe I can remember what it was I did that night and we can do it again!"

"Oh, gross!" Abigail said, making retching noises.

"How long have you been listening?" Doctor Mercer asked.

Abigail smirked, "Long enough to know I can get extra privileges for not telling Sarah what you said!"

"Or lose them all if you do, young lady!" Sam threatened.

"Parents!" Abigail groused.

"Go set the table," Doctor Mercer said with a smile.

Abigail turned and headed towards the dining room.

"That one is going to be a terror when she discovers boys," Sam said ruefully.

"Like mother like daughter!" Doctor Mercer replied mirthfully.

"That's exactly what scares me!" Sam replied.

"Me, too," Doctor Mercer agreed.

They hugged, kissed, and headed into the kitchen to make dinner. Entry 19830504 - Kara Anne Blanchard

Entry 19830504 - Kara Anne Blanchard

May 4, 1983, Milford, Ohio

"Hi, Kara, how are you today?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"OK, I guess," Kara replied.

"Why do you say that?"

"I don't really want to be here, but Steve told me I had to tell you what happened."

"That's because he really cares for you."

"But I ruined everything!" Kara protested, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Steve doesn't believe that. Can you tell me why?"

"Because I walked out on him when he was going to ask me to marry him!" Kara wailed.

"And your mom tells me that he tried, from the first moment, to talk to you about what had happened. And he's done everything he can to help you get better."

"But I ruined things!" Kara sobbed.

"Will you tell me why you walked out on Steve? The real reason?"

Kara clutched her bear tightly and sobbed harder. Doctor Mercer got up from her chair and did something she usually didn't do - she sat down on the couch next to Kara and put her arm around her. Kara leaned on Doctor Mercer's shoulder and cried hard for a good ten minutes. When Kara finally composed herself, Doctor Mercer handed her tissues to wipe her face and blow her nose.

"I did something terrible," Kara whispered.

"Will you tell me?" Doctor Mercer asked gently.

"I," Kara began, then had a hitch in her breath, "had sex with someone."

Which, in Doctor Mercer's mind, certainly had the potential for causing the meltdown Kara had experienced, though given Steve's sexual ethics, most likely wouldn't have meant the end of the relationship. That was especially true given that Steve had cheated on Kara, and she'd forgiven him, and whatever else Steve might be, he was no hypocrite.

"That sounds like something you could talk to Steve about," Doctor Mercer said gently.

Kara shook her head, "It's not Steve, it's me. I sinned and I don't want to go to hell!"

Doctor Mercer took a deep breath, being careful not to let it out in a way that sounded like a sigh. There was very little she could do about the theological issues, but perhaps she could get Kara to a place where she was at least at peace with herself. It would take some very careful guidance, so as not to interfere with Kara's religious beliefs, but Doctor Mercer had some experience in that area.

"Well, let's talk about what happened. Just start at the beginning."

"I don't really want to," Kara sighed.

"But it's the only way I can help you."

Kara took a deep breath, nodded, and bit her lip. It was a few minutes before she spoke.

"Last year, after my dad died," Kara said, her voice a droning monotone, "I was really lonely, and Steve was in Chicago. I really should have gone to college, like I planned, but my mom needed me, so I stayed in Milford. I stopped going to that horrible church, and that meant not seeing most of my friends. I spent lots of time with Steve's friend Joyce..."

Kara's voice trailed off, and she dabbed her eyes with a tissue.

"...I needed someone to talk to, and she ended up staying overnight quite a few times. Sometimes we'd cuddle, especially when I was sad. One night, last November, when we were cuddling, she kissed me."

It took every ounce of willpower Doctor Mercer had for her not to react visibly to the revelation she was sure was coming, and which was, all things being equal, the very LAST thing she might have imagined Kara confessing.

"I was lonely," Kara continued, the words coming in a rushed jumble and tears rolling down her cheeks, "and I didn't stop her. We were just lying in bed cuddling and she put her hand on my breast and kissed my neck. It felt good and I didn't complain when she kept kissing me like that. When I turned to look at her, she kissed my lips and pulled me close. I kissed her back and we kept kissing and eventually she moved to my breasts and then between my legs. It just felt so good I couldn't tell her to stop. She made me cum and then because she did it to me I did it to her. She fell asleep first and I cried myself to sleep

because I was so disgusted with myself! And because it happened in my bed, I couldn't make love with Steve there ever again!"

Doctor Mercer waited to see if Kara would say anything more before speaking.

"Did you tell Steve about that before or after you broke up with him?"

"Before," Kara said, sounding forlorn.

"And what did he say?"

"That everything was OK, but it wasn't! I had sex with a girl! I felt dirty and sinful and disgusted!"

"Had you ever done anything like that before?" Doctor Mercer asked.

Kara sniffed and nodded, "Some kissing and a bit more. But only with Steve there! He kept me safe!"

"Safe?"

"To not do things I didn't want to do!"

"Do you think Joyce forced you?" Doctor Mercer asked carefully.

"No," Kara said, sounding small. "She didn't make me."

"Did Steve encourage you to do 'a bit more'?"

"No. Joyce wanted to, but she and Steve had a fight about it because Joyce was dating someone and broke up with him because she wanted to have sex with Steve and me."

"And you didn't want that?"

"I was confused," Kara sighed. "But I told Joyce I couldn't ever have sex with her!"

"But it was OK if it was you and Steve?"

"I don't know," Kara sighed again. "It was strange but Steve was there, so I felt safe."

"It happened more than once?"

Kara nodded, "Yes. But it was kissing and touching, not...you know, oral."

"You said Steve was understanding; why break things off with him?"

"Because sex outside of marriage is a sin! Homosexuality is a sin!"

"You've always believed that?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Yes!" Kara affirmed.

"But you chose to have sex with Steve in spite of that?"

"Yes," Kara sighed.

"Can you tell me why?"

"To prove my dad and pastor didn't control me."

"Not because you loved Steve?"

Kara took a deep breath and let it out, "I did, but I decided to have sex with him first, then fell in love with him."

"Would you do something for me?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Maybe. What?"

"Write your story, starting from the first time you met Steve. That was chemistry class, right?"

Kara shook her head, "No, I met him before that, when he was interviewing Birgit for the Junior High newspaper."

"Then start with that. Just write what happened and what you thought."

"Do I have to write about Joyce?" Kara asked quietly.

"It would help," Doctor Mercer said.

"I guess."

"Our time is almost up, but I want to make sure you're going to be OK."

"I am."

"Remember you can call me anytime."

"Thank you."

They both got up from the couch and walked to the door. Kara's mom was waiting to take her home, and she and Doctor Mercer exchanged a look. It was

clear that Nancy wanted to know what had happened, but Doctor Mercer couldn't tell her because Kara had only given permission for Steve, not for her mom.

"See you next week, Kara," Doctor Mercer said.

"Bye," Kara said.

Doctor Mercer went back into her office and made notes about her session with Kara, then saw two more patients before she headed home.

"You look upset," Sam said when she walked into the house.

"I had a tough afternoon," Fran replied. "But you know I can't talk about it."

"From what I see in your eyes, you need to call Laura," he said gently. "Go do that. Dinner won't be ready for another hour."

Fran nodded and went to the small study she had at home, picked up the cordless phone, and dialed Doctor Laura Paulus, then sat down on the loveseat and curled her legs up.

"Laura, it's Fran. Got some time?"

"For you? Always. What's up?"

"You know the patient we've discussed? The young woman with the fundamentalist background who had a meltdown?"

"I remember. I take it you've discovered something."

"A same-sex encounter."

"That would do it," Doctor Paulus affirmed. "Consensual?"

"She was emotionally vulnerable, so I'd say not really. But she'd done some experimenting with her boyfriend and this girl, so I also wouldn't say it was completely non-consensual. It's one of those gray areas. The problem is that she's convinced she's going to hell for that encounter, and it's made her reconsider her sexual relationship with her boyfriend in that light as well."

"Tread carefully, Fran."

"I know," Fran sighed, "ethically I can't tell her that her externally imposed moral code is the problem, not her."

"She's been sexually active for some time, right?"

"A couple of years."

"How did she view that?"

"Before the same-sex encounter? I'd say she was a typical teenager with a healthy sex drive and relatively healthy view of sex, despite who her lover was."

"The very promiscuous young man we've talked about?"

"Yes. She tried to rein him in, but failed, and decided to continue the relationship, until the same-sex encounter caused her to break things off."

"I take it he didn't object?"

"I'm reading between the lines, but I'd say from what I know about him, he was more than OK with it, if you get my drift."

Laura laughed, "That kid has the makings of a legend."

"Don't start," Fran warned. "You know my opinion."

"Has he lied to anyone, Fran?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Is he functioning?"

"Straight A student with a successful business."

"Then you know the answer."

"That doesn't mean I have to like it!"

"Are we back on Bethany Krajick again?"

"You know me too well."

"And you know what she told you. Fran, she's doing well and just because she felt she had to have sex with him to be able to get on with her life does not mean you failed!"

"It doesn't feel that way."

"You know what? Come see me on Saturday. I think we need a formal session."

"Lunch afterwards?"

"Yes. See you at 11:00am."

They said 'goodbye' and Fran went to the kitchen to help Sam with dinner.

"I'm going to see Laura on Saturday."

"Good. Some of your patients just seem to drain you of energy."

"I know. Thanks for looking out for me."

"That's what a husband is for!"

"Really?" she asked. "That's all?"

"After dinner, I can show you the OTHER thing husbands are for if you want."

She kissed his cheek, "And I promise I'll make it worth your while..." Entry 19830504 - Doctor Fran Mercer

Entry 19830504 - Doctor Fran Mercer

May 7, 1983, Dayton, Ohio

"Come in, Fran," Doctor Laura Paulus said. "There's tea and coffee on the sideboard, and bagels. The cream cheese is in the mini-fridge."

"Thanks."

Doctor Mercer helped herself to a cup of English Breakfast tea and a bagel with cream cheese, then sat down in a comfortable leather chair set at an angle to the one where Doctor Paulus was sitting.

"How are you feeling today, Fran?" Doctor Paulus asked.

"About the same as when I spoke to you on Wednesday."

"Remember what we talked about? About getting too close to a patient? I'm pretty sure that's the problem here. You and Bethany Krajick were too close; you are too close. And I think that's also linked to the other issue that's bothering you - your patient with an enhanced sex drive."

"Bethany's choices do not make sense, and just because he's functioning doesn't mean what he's doing is healthy!"

"And yet, the only real measure we have to use is whether a patient is functioning well - has a job or is doing well in school, has friends, is taking good care of themselves, and so on. Would you say that their behavior is putting either of them, or others, at risk of serious harm? Or that they are unable to care for themselves, complete school, or hold jobs?"

"No. And I know the next thing you're going to say - just because we don't like the outcome doesn't mean we've failed."

"Because it doesn't."

"Laura, you can't believe sex is a cure for the trauma of rape!" Doctor Mercer protested. "It isn't, and it never will be!"

"Of course it's not, but that's not the end of the discussion, either. One of our most important tasks is helping a patient overcome the trauma and return to normal intimacy. That's what a successful recovery from rape looks like - a survivor who can be truly intimate with a mate. There really is no other criterion for success. Anything short of that is coping, and sometimes that's all that's possible. But when a return to true intimacy is possible, we should seize the opportunity.

"You worked with Bethany to help her understand that rape is about violence, not about sex. Her solution to getting past the mental block was to make love with the safest person she knew, someone she could trust implicitly, and someone who fully understood that Bethany wasn't 'damaged goods'. That person, if I understand you correctly, convinced her that she was still a virgin! In other words, your treatment worked exactly the way it's supposed to work, and Bethany had a loving partner who helped her through it, which is ideal.

"Your difficulty is with the young man she chose as a partner. But if I recall correctly, they dated for quite some time before she asked him to make love with her. He's also a straight-A student who runs a successful business in his field of study. Yes, he's promiscuous, perhaps in the extreme, but he hasn't had any sexually transmitted diseases, and as far as you've said, other than his trouble with his mom, he has a positive relationship with his family as well as his

friends. I seem to recall something similar about a young woman who did her clinical internship with me."

"Laura," Doctor Mercer sighed.

"No, it's time to bring this back into the open. How many partners did you have before Sam?"

"That was different!"

"Really? You were a teenager in the late 50's and you were on the leading edge of the 'free love' movement on campus in the early 60's, long before the 'Summer of Love'! So, how many?"

"We've discussed this."

"Yes, we have. How many?"

"Five," Doctor Mercer replied with annoyance.

"And how many FEMALE partners?"

"You're a pain in the butt, Laura!"

"Yes, I am. How many?"

"One," Doctor Mercer said grudgingly.

"My point is, that regret for your OWN behavior isn't sufficient cause to object to that same behavior in one of your patients, so long as it isn't interfering with their functioning in their family, job, and society in general. And from what you've said, Sam was no monk, either. Was your first lover experienced?"

"Yes."

"So you're objecting to Bethany taking an experienced lover?"

"Philip didn't have THAT much experience!"

"This guy has really gotten under your skin! We need a name to make the conversation easier."

"Steve."

"How many partners has he had?"

"A dozen before Bethany, four times that number after."

"That's pretty impressive, when you think about it," Doctor Paulus said with a smirk.

"Oh, stop! Not you, too!"

"You were really high on Steve when you first met him and he offered to help Bethany. You said he was doing wonders for her. And you believed that right up until she said she was going to sleep with him to get past her mental block. Then he became, in effect, public enemy number one in your book! But let me ask you this - how is their relationship now?'

"That's difficult to say. They're the best of friends, and she's in love with him. But his lifestyle doesn't really allow for the kind of relationship she's dreamed about - husband, two or three kids, a house with a white picket fence, a dog, a cat, and a parakeet. The chances of him settling down are pretty much zero. She's carried a torch for him even while he played around and continues to play around."

"You don't think he'll marry?"

"Where is he going to find a woman who will put up with his kind of shenanigans? I honestly don't see him changing."

"Maybe Bethany just waits him out. She's just finishing her Sophomore year, so she's at least five years away from her practice. Guys like Steve tend to calm down after college when life gets real. I've seen it many times, especially with kids who were in college in the late 60's. Kids aren't marrying as young now as they did in the 50's and 60's."

"Maybe," Doctor Mercer allowed.

"I'll spare you the lecture and change the subject. How did things go with Michael?"

"I called him a 'Grade-A idiot'," Doctor Mercer said with a sly smile.

"Fran, you know that's not appropriate!"

"Oh, it certainly is for Mike! In a way, he's like Steve in that he wants to hear things straight. In fact, I'd say for both of them, only blunt and direct will ever be effective. The proverbial two-by-four to the temple. And, honestly, I think that's a very good thing for a kid who wants to work in the ER; it might even be mandatory for success."

"So, what happened?"

"Basically, he messed up his relationship with a girl he feels is his soul mate and is trying to figure out a way to set it right. They've known each other since

kindergarten, but didn't get together until after graduation. Then she was in a bad accident and things went downhill from there."

"Do you think she is his soulmate?"

"I think he thinks so, which is really all that matters, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. How is he doing otherwise?"

"He's doing well in school; he's a straight-A student in the honors program. He's having difficulty creating stable relationships, and I think that's a direct result of trouble with his soul mate. There are probably some residual issues from what happened with the false accusations about his sister as well. I think he has some work to do, but I believe he's going to turn out OK."

"And his sister?"

"Given the trauma she suffered, she's doing about as well as can be expected. According to Mike, she expects to graduate on time next year. She's also planning on going to junior college. He's positive she's not engaging in any risky behavior."

"I'd call that a win, I think. Shall we go back to what brought you here?"

"I'm not sure I'm ever going to get used to the idea."

"This has been bugging you for some time - why not refer Steve to someone in Chicago? He doesn't have a diagnosable illness, so you don't have an ethical obligation to keep seeing him. I think that the fact that he gets under your skin IS why you still see him. He's a challenge and you can't give up on the challenge, no matter how much his behavior annoys you. I think it intrigues you enough to want to find out what actually makes him tick."

"Have I told you recently that you're a pain in the butt, Laura?"

"About fifteen minutes ago, I think it was! So, what do you think?"

Fran sat back and considered a moment before she answered.

"Abusive mother; mainly uninvolved father who despite that served as mother's enforcer until Steve's late teens; doting sister; brother, who is mom's little angel, but who has been arrested for exposing himself to pre-pubescent children; his first lover was ten years older; the girl he claims was the love of his life died at age fifteen; an unintended pregnancy at age sixteen, but the girl's mother forced her to have an abortion against their will; there was no physical abuse, but a lot of mental and emotional abuse, and a lot of emotional trauma."

"Looking for love in all the wrong places?" Doctor Paulus asked with a silly smile.

"It doesn't feel like that. He's not lacking for good friends nor for girls who love him. I think there's something else going on."

"Any medical issues?"

"He's prone to fainting under stress, but I've always chalked that up to the fairly common syncope we see in adolescent males; that said, he's twenty and should have outgrown that by now. He was an avid swimmer at home, now he's practicing karate and advancing through the ranks. He also runs. His diet is good, though he drinks a lot of Coke."

"Regular physical exams?"

"I believe so, but I don't ask those questions. The information I just gave you is what he's volunteered during our sessions."

"And given his obvious intelligence and business success, I'll assume no mental impairment."

"No, I'm reasonably sure this is purely emotional, and a result of the abusive home situation while he was growing up. His dad did come around, as I said, and they have a decent relationship now, though they both have to be careful because of his mom."

"What's your goal?"

Doctor Mercer laughed, "Until I figure him out, I can't really say!"

"He's functioning, Fran."

"I know. You don't have to keep reminding me."

"Apparently I do. Is anything else bothering you?"

"Just that ethics prevent me from telling my current patient that her head is full of complete garbage put there by an ignorant misogynistic charlatan masquerading as a man of G-d."

"She was seeing Steve, too, right?"

"Don't start..." Fran said, with obvious exasperation in her voice.

"It seems a good portion of your practice revolves around him," Doctor Paulus said with a smirk. "But let me ask you - what better antidote to an evangelical preacher could you find?"

"Too far, too fast. At her core, she's a normal, red-blooded teenager. The problem is, her head was filled with ideas which ran counter to who she really is."

"Lesbian?"

"Probably not, but, and I can't believe I'm saying this, willing to experiment in a safe environment with a safe male partner."

"Steve?"

"As I said, I can't believe I said it. For some reason, girls feel safe with him."

"Maybe you should investigate that angle. Find out what it is that attracts the girls to him."

"I'm not sure I want to know," Doctor Mercer said, shaking her head. "But it would be an interesting avenue to pursue."

"How are things at home?"

"Things with Sam are fine and the girls are teenagers!"

"Which means what?" Laura asked with an arched eyebrow.

"They're growing up too fast."

"Sarah?" Doctor Paulus asked.

"I'm concerned she's getting too serious too fast with her young man."

"You're concerned she's doing the same things you did at her age?"

"Here's your free shot at me, Laura; this is different."

"I'll pass on the pot shot and just ask you to think about whether it really IS different or not. Is sixteen now all that different from sixteen in the 50's?"

"The world is a much more dangerous place."

"Is it, really, Fran? Or has your perspective changed? The world looks different to a parent than it does to a teenager. You know that."

"How did you handle Melissa?"

Doctor Paulus laughed, "About the same way you're handling Sarah! It took some time, but eventually I realized that Melissa was mature enough to make good decisions. I believe Sarah is as well."

"It's so easy to counsel parents and teens," Fran said. "It's much more difficult to raise your own kids."

"She'll be fine, Fran."

"That's what Sam said!"

"Just be there for her. You've prepared her well, and she'll make good decisions."

"I hope so." Entry 19840331 - Clarissa Saunders

Entry 19840331 - Clarissa Saunders

March 31, 1984, Milford, Ohio

"Come in, Clarissa," Doctor Mercer said to the pretty brunette who was waiting in the reception area.

Clarissa rose from the couch and walked into Doctor Mercer's office. Doctor Mercer closed the door behind them and indicated a pair of comfortable arm chairs angled so that two people could talk intimately. Doctor Mercer picked up a pad of paper and a pencil from her desk and sat in the empty chair.

"How are things in McKinley?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"School is good and I'm pretty happy."

"Only 'pretty happy'?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Mike and I made love," Clarissa said matter-of-factly.

Doctor Mercer was careful not to show any reactions, but suppressed a sigh. She'd been afraid that Clarissa would decide to experiment with Mike, and had been concerned about her because of the counseling she'd done with other patients who had encounters which went against their self-perceived orientation.

"How do you feel?" Doctor Mercer asked, careful to show no emotion.

"Confused."

"That's fairly normal after a first sexual encounter, and this is your first, right?"

"With a guy? Yes. I think you know I had a girlfriend."

"Yes. Let's start there. How did you feel the first time you and your girlfriend made love? It's OK to use names; I won't reveal anything."

Clarissa laughed softly. "It was a public relationship. I'm sure everyone knew what was going on, though only Mike knew the details."

"You told him about your encounter?"

"I asked him for advice on eat...performing cunnilingus."

"And?"

"He gave very good advice which I put to use!" Clarissa said, laughing softly.

"Were you nervous?"

"No. I was before the first time we kissed, but after Glenda and I kissed, all I could think of was being in bed with her."

"When was that?"

"About a year ago."

"Are you still together?"

"No, we broke up in January," Clarissa sighed.

"Was that because of Mike?" Doctor Mercer asked.

Clarissa shook her head, "No. Glenda was accepted to the Art Institution in Chicago and didn't even tell me she'd applied, and made her plans to go there without telling me."

"How did you feel?"

"Betrayed."

"How long was it between then and when you and Mike made love?"

"A couple of months. I asked him that night and he refused."

"How did you feel about that?"

"I was upset, but I realized he was looking out for me."

"Who initiated your sexual encounter?"

"Me. Mike was very, very cognizant about me being on a rebound and also about my orientation."

"Which is?"

"I think I'm most likely a true lesbian."

"Will you tell me about your encounter with Mike?"

Clarissa smiled, "It was the most loving, gentle, and strange thing I've ever experienced."

"What was strange about it?"

Clarissa laughed, "There was an erect penis involved and it went into my vagina! And sort of into my mouth."

"Sort of?"

"It just seemed strange to put it in my mouth so I just kind of held it against my lips and used my hand and tongue."

"How did that make you feel?"

"It was strange at first, but when he ejaculated it was REALLY strange. It was almost like I was drinking his life force."

"Was that before or after you had intercourse?"

"Before. There was actually cunnilingus before the fellatio."

"And when he penetrated you?"

"I told him I was about to completely freak out. He offered to stop, but I told him not to."

"Did you orgasm?"

Clarissa shook her head, "Not from intercourse, but after he ejaculated he used his mouth to give me two orgasms that I'd describe as gentle. It was more like a feeling of love than a huge release like I had with Glenda."

"What happened next?"

"We went to sleep. I didn't talk to him about it for a few days because I was trying to figure out how I felt and if I could do it again."

"And?"

"I'm not sure. I feel like we need to have sex again for me to be sure. I've been sleeping with him off and on, but just sleeping, not having sex."

"What do you wear?"

"It started out with sweats or a nightgown or one of his shirts, but now we sleep naked."

"You said before you thought you were 'most likely a true lesbian'. Did you decide that before or after?"

"After."

"Then why think about having sex with Mike again?"

"Because I love him more than life itself! He completes me! He's my soul mate! He'd die for me!"

"I sense a 'but'," Doctor Mercer said.

"But he was born with a 'Y' chromosome. As he and I have teased each other, we both like pussy."

"But you still think you need to be with him again?"

"I have to be sure, Doctor Mercer. If I can do it, then I can marry my soul mate!"

"Do you think you might be deceiving yourself?"

"Yes, which is exactly why we aren't doing anything more right now, but will before Mike makes any decisions about his future. I can't take the risk of missing out on being with Mike."

"Have you ever been attracted to males before?"

Clarissa smiled, "No. Just Mike. And I'm not attracted to him sexually, but I am in every other way you could name."

"Sex is usually a critical part of marriage; not always, but usually."

"Mike prefers gentle lovemaking and then cuddling. It's almost as if he was a girl, if you know what I mean."

"He has some qualities which would traditionally have been called 'feminine' but I'd simply say he's a very sensitive man who is in touch with his own emotions. But Mike is also a very sexual being."

Clarissa laughed, "There are serious rumors to that effect!"

"I thought you two shared everything," Doctor Mercer challenged.

Clarissa laughed again, "OK, Mike is the dorm stud! Basically, he can have any girl he wants, and there are a lot of girls who want him. And rumor has it he's VERY good."

"Are you jealous?"

"Not like I think you mean. I don't care who Mike has sex with; I care who Mike has in his heart. And that's Angie and me. Two girls who probably can never be his wife."

"What about his Russian friend?"

Clarissa smirked, "Pure, unbridled, unquenchable lust! Those two have wanted to fu...uhm, have sex since she was fourteen and he was seventeen!"

"I have heard that word before, once or twice!" Doctor Mercer replied. "Mike's not in love with her?"

"Mike loves her deeply, but he's not in love with her. He's in love with Angie. Period. End of discussion."

"What about you?"

"It's beyond that," Clarissa sighed. "We share a heart. We always will, even if we can't marry."

"I want to ask you a question, and I don't mean to upset you, but are you a surrogate for Angie?"

"Every girl is a surrogate for Angie!"

"But you say that you're his soul mate."

"I am, and if magically, I was straight, with nothing else changing, then we'd already be married. But we both know that a 'straight Clarissa' would be a VERY different girl. Mike and I will be together forever, but it's unlikely I can be his wife, despite wanting to be in the worst possible way."

"You've talked about that?"

"Constantly. It's why I made love with him and why I'll do it again. I have to be sure I *can't* be Mrs. Loucks, and that is the only real impediment."

"You do realize that you could convince yourself that you could, only to find later that you couldn't."

"Yes, and that's why we're being so careful."

"Would you tell me more about what you said about Angie?"

"That he's deeply, madly in love with her? What's more to say? She was the one girl to whom he could make a long-term vow of celibacy. He would have kept it, too. I think the fact she refused to be his girlfriend kind of flipped a switch and sent him down the path of debauchery!"

"You don't approve? I thought you said you didn't care."

"If Mike is happy, and it's not affecting his grades or anything else, it's none of my business who he has sex with. I know all the names, and more detail than I probably should."

"Would you call him promiscuous?"

"Strangely, no. He's had a lot of partners, but he's fairly selective. He did discover at one point that all of his little sister's friends were interested and he took advantage of their very clear, very blunt offers."

"You approve?"

"What's to disapprove of? He has lovers. I've had two lovers - one female and one male. He doesn't judge me, I don't judge him."

"If you understand the severity of the risk, why are you pushing forward?"

"Because the risk of not pushing forward is I miss the chance to be with the person I love more than any other person on the earth."

"But you said he's in love with Angie."

"He is, but I'm the person he loves more than anyone on the earth. I suppose I'd put it this way - he's in lust with Tasha and in love with Angie, but he loves me. Does that make sense?"

"Different kinds of love?"

"Mike talks about three kinds, with «agape» being the most important - the one that gives completely to the other person. I know Mike would do literally anything for me; well, OK, he ruled out a sex change operation, but otherwise? Anything."

"Was that a serious discussion?"

Clarissa laughed, "No. He's as straight as they come. That said, he does engage in what our friend Sophia calls 'homoerotic play' with our friends Robby and Lee."

"Mike's experimented?!" Doctor Mercer asked, unable to contain her surprise.

"Oh, HELL no!" Clarissa exclaimed, laughing. "But he's comfortable enough in his sexuality that teasing with two gay guys doesn't bother him. He was hit on by a gay guy and told the guy he was flattered, but not interested. Mike's about as secure in his sexuality as anyone I know!"

"And you?"

"I don't have a problem with being a lesbian; it's who I am. It's who I've always been. As soon as I hit puberty I wanted to have sex with girls."

"And Mike?"

"He's different. I can't even begin to explain it."

"May I give you some advice?"

"Of course."

"Let it end here. I think, based on everything you've said, that if you move forward, you might let your heart make a decision with which you ultimately can't live."

"I'm aware of the pitfalls," Clarissa said.

"But you intend to experiment again?"

"I told Mike last night that at some point, before he makes a commitment to anyone, we put everything to a final test where he shows me every possible way we could love each other physically. Either the first time for the rest of our lives, or the last."

"You don't think you'll 'freak out' as you put it?"

Clarissa smiled, "I know what to expect now."

"What do you expect to happen?"

"That Mike and I are soulmates, but that we can't marry because I'm pretty sure I need a female sex partner to be completely fulfilled, physically and emotionally."

"If you know that..."

"But I don't. I suspect that's the case, but I need to prove it to myself. If I don't, I may regret it for the rest of my life."

"You don't think you might regret engaging in sex in 'every way possible'?"

"Even if I do, I'll still love Mike and he'll still be my soulmate."

"Aren't you worried you'll hurt him?"

"He told me he didn't think that was possible, and I'm pretty sure he's right."

"What does he expect to happen?"

Clarissa smirked, "That he'll have me in every way possible!"

"I meant after that," Doctor Mercer said tersely.

"The same thing I expect - that we'll simply be the closest of friends, go to school together, study together, do our Residency together, and practice together."

"And his wife?"

Clarissa smirked, "Well, unless she's bi, and Mike decides to leave the Church, just close friends."

"That is NOT what I meant," Doctor Mercer said, slightly annoyed at Clarissa's flip answer.

"I'm the lesbian friend, who is no threat."

"But you are."

"Mike and I won't ever cross that line."

"Given the stress of medical school and Residency, I'm not sure you can make that statement the way you are."

"The one thing I'm sure about Mike is that he's not a cheater."

"He's not the type to use drugs, and he doesn't drink except on occasion. The stress will make the temptation far worse, and if there's ever any trouble with his future spouse, whoever that is, he'll look to you for comfort and support."

"And it will be chaste."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that if I were you," Doctor Mercer said with resignation.
Entry 19891218 - Bethany Krajick

Entry 19841020 - Elizaveta Viktorovna Kozlova

October 20, 1984, Milford, Ohio

"Good morning!" Doctor Mercer said when Mike Loucks and Elizaveta Kozlov walked into her office.

"Good morning, Doctor Mercer," Mike replied, shutting the door. "This is Elizaveta Kozlova, my fiancée."

"Nice to meet you, Elizaveta," Doctor Mercer said. "Please, both of you, sit down."

They sat in the comfortable leather chairs which faced Doctor Mercer's desk.

"Actually," Doctor Mercer said, "now that I think about it, Mike, would you mind if I spoke with Elizaveta alone?"

"No," Mike replied, "I don't mind so long as Elizaveta is OK with it."

"It's OK, Doctor Mercer," Elizaveta said. "Mike told me you might want to talk to me alone."

Mike got up and left the office, closing the door behind him.

"What has Mike told you about me?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"That you were the counselor who helped him and Liz when there was a problem right after he graduated from High School and that you're helping Angie. I guess you're helping him deal with the situation with Angie, too."

"Yes, that's all true. We obviously talked about his intention to ask you to marry him, and he asked if I would do some pre-marital counseling."

Elizaveta smiled, "I actually asked HIM to marry ME!"

Doctor Mercer smiled in return, "He did say that. Would you tell me about it?"

"I **had** to ask him because he was such an idiot!" Elizaveta declared. "He kept bringing non-Orthodox girls to church instead of asking one of us to go out!"

"You would have been, what, twelve, when he first started attending your church?"

"Yes, but girls like Yuliana were the right age, or Oksana who's a year older than I am. He ignored us and brought girls like Kimiko, who wasn't even a Christian, to church instead!"

"That seems to have offended you," Doctor Mercer observed.

"Duh!" Elizaveta exclaimed. "There were five or six perfectly good Orthodox girls right there, all of whom thought he was handsome and interesting, but he didn't pay any attention to any of us! Finally, I had to basically tell him off and demand he marry me!"

"When did you decide?"

"I think it was when he first brought Kimiko to church that I realized someone was going to have to take matters into their own hands. Well, it kind of started

when he brought Angie to church, but everyone thought he and Tasha were a couple, so I wasn't sure what was going on."

"You were twelve, right?"

"Yes, as I said before. But I knew what I wanted from the time I was five or six."

"Which was?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"To marry a good Orthodox man and to raise an Orthodox family."

"OK. We'll come back to that. Go on."

"Anyway, after Angie was Clarissa, but she's lesbian, so that kind of explains why they never got together. Then he brought Kimiko, Maggie, and Lara. Of all of them, setting Tanya aside, only Lara is Orthodox. All of us girls tried to let him know we were interested, but he wasn't paying attention. I got fed up and finally had to do something about it."

"Which was ask him to marry you?"

Elizaveta laughed softly, "More like 'demand' or 'order'! And like all Russian men, he does what he's told to do by a Russian woman!"

Doctor Mercer laughed softly, "I'm not sure that's the case."

"We let them drink their vodka, smoke their cigarettes, and pretend to be in charge!"

Doctor Mercer realized that this young woman was quite determined, and all things considered, seemed to know what she wanted. That didn't make the

decision wise, but it certainly didn't seem as if she had been pushed or coerced or directed to marry Mike.

"And it was your idea?" Doctor Mercer asked. "Nobody encouraged you or pushed you to do it?"

"No! In fact, the other girls were all jealous once they realized I'd claimed him! I know for sure Juliana, Oksana, and Johanna wanted him, along with Suzana from his old church!"

"And your parents?"

"My grandmothers were very happy that I took the bull by the horns to get the man I wanted. My dad likes Mike, and in fact, it was what my dad did that made what I wanted possible. After our Deacon reposed, Dad asked the bishop to ordain Mike, and the bishop agreed, which meant Mike had to marry. And I knew if I didn't do something, he was going to choose one of the other girls."

"So what did you say to him?"

"Well, I asked him if there was anything wrong with the girls at church, and he wondered why I asked that, so I said he was always bringing different girls to church, and pointed out he never asked any of us out, even though we obviously were interested. He said we were too young."

"How old are the other girls?"

"Sixteen and seventeen. Well, Suzana at his old church is fifteen."

"And you don't think he had a valid point?"

Elizaveta screwed up her face and narrowed her eyes, "Do you think I'm a little girl?"

Doctor Mercer smiled to try to calm Elizaveta, "I think you're fifteen which is awfully young to get married."

"I'll tell you the same thing I told Mike that day - that we aren't little girls, that we are all faithfully Orthodox, that we understand what it means to be the wife of a deacon and that we liked the idea of being a doctor's wife."

"And what did he say?"

Elizaveta's faced softened and she laughed, "He asked if it was a proposal! Then I pointed out that he should have at least asked Yuliana on a date."

"Didn't he briefly date a girl from your church?"

"Katy, but she went to college in California. He mentioned her, and then I asked him if he thought I was pretty, sweet, and nice. He said I was, and I told him I thought he was handsome and very nice, and that I could make him very happy if he gave me a chance."

"He objected, saying I was only fifteen and a Sophomore, so I pointed out that it wouldn't be a big deal when we were older and that I know how to cook, bake, clean, do laundry, sew, and care for babies. I also told him I'm sure I can figure out how to make them!"

"You do know the physical process, right?"

Elizaveta laughed and nodded, "I had health class and girls talk!"

"What did Mike say in response?"

"That the true qualities of a good wife are faithfulness and supporting her husband, just as the true qualities of a good husband are faithfulness and supporting his wife. I asked him if he'd have time to do all of those things or if he needed a wife to help him. He agreed he needed a wife, so I told him my parents liked him and that we had a cottage on our property where we could live, and which was big enough even if we had a baby."

"So you made your argument. How did he respond?"

"He asked how much time I spent planning it, but I hadn't! I just told the truth. I asked him to consider my offer, then asked him to take off his cassock so I could kiss his cheek, because otherwise it would have been inappropriate."

"And he accepted your offer and here you are."

"Yes!"

"Can we go back to you deciding you wanted to marry when you were five or six. Did anyone tell you that was what you were supposed to do?"

"No! My mom and grandmas started teaching me to cook and sew and clean and I liked doing those things, and I loved babies. Everything I've done since then has been about making sure I could be a good wife and good mother. That's what I want, Doctor Mercer. I'm positive."

"Why not wait until you graduate High School and finish college?"

"But why go to college? I don't plan to have a career other than being a wife and a mom. And Mike will certainly make enough money to support a family being a doctor! And he has the finances to take care of us until he finishes medical school."

"And children?"

"Not right away. Probably after I graduate, but Mike and I need to talk more about it."

"Are you aware of how your body works?"

"You mean periods? Yes. My mom explained it when I was twelve and first had my period. She didn't go into too much detail, just that it was part of my body being ready to have babies when it was time."

"What did you know about sex at that point?"

"Not much, really. I knew boys and girls were different and I had a pretty good idea how it worked. Then I had health class when I was thirteen and it was close enough to my guess."

"What do you know about birth control?"

"There are pills and condoms, but the Pill is more reliable. That's what I'll do, I think."

"And you understand how babies are made?" Doctor Mercer asked, using Elizaveta's term.

Elizaveta smirked, "The basics from health class; more from one of my friends."

"Be careful about the things you learn from your friends. Teenagers often don't have all the information and a lot of the rumors aren't true. You know you can get pregnant the first time you have intercourse, right?"

"My health teacher was very clear about that."

"And do you have questions?"

"Plenty, but I think Mike can answer them for me, and that's probably best."

"Are you two sexually active?"

"No!" Elizaveta exclaimed forcefully. "That would be very wrong! Mike could get into a lot of trouble with the police and with the bishop."

"What have you done, if I may ask."

"Just kiss. Mike is very, very careful about that."

"Do you have any concerns?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"About what?"

"Marriage. Sex. Children?"

"Not really. We're doing marriage counseling with our priest and his wife, too."

"And how is that?"

"Fine. I mostly know everything they're saying."

"Going back to the cottage - that's where you're going to live?"

"Yes."

"OK. I'll want to meet with you again, if that's OK."

"Sure."

"Then we can bring Mike in."

Elizaveta got up and opened the door. She asked Mike to come into the office and the two of them sat back down. Doctor Mercer took them through some basic strategies for dealing with the inevitable conflicts that would arise due to Mike's medical training, and once that was done, she asked Elizaveta to step out so she could speak with Mike about Angie and about his relationship with his parents. When they finished, Mike thanked Doctor Mercer, he and Elizaveta said goodbye, and they left the office.

Doctor Mercer completed her notes, then dialed Doctor Laura Paulus' number in Dayton.

"I have a question," Fran said after she and Laura greeted each other.

"Sure. What's the concern."

"What would you say to a fifteen-year-old girl who is determined to marry just after she turns sixteen?"

"It would all depend on the girl and the guy involved. How old is he?"

"It's complicated. This one goes into the 'counseling' files."

"Of course."

"It's Mike Loucks."

"Now there's a surprise, given what happened with his sister and his reaction to it."

"I was thinking the same thing, but his revised thinking on the matter is that the problem wasn't that his sister was fourteen and her lover was in his twenties, but that the man was married and had a kid."

"Did he come to that conclusion before or after he met this young girl?"

"Before."

"Is anyone pressuring the young woman?"

"Only the young woman."

"Well, Ohio says she can get married at sixteen with parental consent. Does she have that?"

"Yes, and her pastor and bishop are supportive. But you know that just because something is legal, that doesn't make it wise."

"Of course, but in this case, Fran, can you in good conscience say she's being abused or coerced?"

"No."

"And she's not mentally ill?"

Fran laughed, "You mean besides believing she's ready to marry at fifteen? Well, sixteen when they actually marry."

"That's not in the DSM, last I checked. Fran, our job is to ensure people are functioning and adjusted to their circumstances. It sounds as if she is. You shouldn't interfere, beyond normal marriage counseling."

"I knew you were going to say that."

"But you had to hear it, right?"

"Yes."

"She had a proper health class and knows the basic mechanics, and knows about birth control?"

"Yes."

"Then don't interfere, Fran. That's not our job. Fundamentally, unless you're prepared to report them to Family Services, your role is supportive."

"I know. I just don't like it."

"You could drop them as clients on ethical grounds by telling them you are unable to provide them with help."

Fran grimaced, "That might do more harm than good because of Angela Stephens."

"Then your choice is made, isn't it?"

"I'm SO tempted to tell you the same thing Steve Adams wrote in his journal that he told girls who boxed him into admitting he was wrong."

"What's that?"

"He'd tell them 'I hate you', but in a tone that conveyed love."

"He might have a point!" Laura replied mirthfully.

"You're a BIG help!"

"You're welcome! Go home, spend time with your girls, then take a nice warm bath with Sam and a bottle of wine. Relax, and come back to work on Monday."

"You're right, of course."

"Of course! See you next week?"

"Thursday morning."

"Great!"

They said goodbye, hung up, and Fran left her office. She locked up, then headed home to do exactly as Laura had recommended.

Entry 19891218 - Bethany Michelle Krajick

December 18, 1989, Milford, Ohio

"Fran, it's Bethany."

There was a hitch in Bethany's voice that made Doctor Fran Mercer immediately aware something terrible had happened.

"Hi, Bethany. Aren't you in Guam?"

"Yes," came the soft reply. "Fran, Nick's been shot."

"Shot?!" Fran gasped. "How is he?"

"On life support," Bethany replied, sounding very, very tired. "The doctors suggesting we remove him from it."

"Is someone with you, Bethany?" Doctor Mercer asked, her voice expressing her concern.

"Two military wives and the base chaplain."

"What do you want to do?"

"I don't know," Bethany replied with a deep sigh.

"Can you tell me about his injuries?" Doctor Mercer asked gently.

"He was shot twice; once in the stomach and once in the head."

Doctor Mercer reeled from the revelation, trying to fathom how something like that could happen, but those questions were for later.

"What did the doctors tell you?"

Bethany took a deep breath and let it out, "That the damage to his brain is so severe that it's unlikely he'll regain consciousness, and even if he does, he'll likely never recover from the traumatic brain injury."

"Do you believe them?"

"Yes," Bethany said quietly.

"Is Nicholas with you?"

"He's sleeping on a sofa here in the base hospital chaplain's office. I said that 'daddy was hurt', but at six months, I'm not sure that registers in any real way."

"You know I can't tell you what to do, Bethany, but I will support whatever decision you make. If you decide to disconnect the machines, make sure you say 'goodbye'. I'd advise against taking Nicholas into the room."

"It all seems so easy when it's an academic exercise," Bethany sighed. "Reality is so very different."

"I remember the conversations we've had on the topic. Have you talked to anyone else?"

"No. I know someone called Chicago, so I'm sure they know. But I haven't spoken to anyone. I have to make this decision on my own."

"Yes, you do. Did Nick leave any instructions?"

"No," Bethany said with a wan smile Doctor Mercer couldn't see. "Like most military men, he was averse to wills of any kind. He felt they were tempting Fate. He did fill out the pro-forma will the military has, but only reluctantly."

"Did you two ever discuss what to do?"

"No. Steve and I had quite a few discussions about it, but Nick and I never did."

"And what did you conclude?"

Bethany sighed deeply, "That if there was no realistic chance of recovery and some quality of life, we wouldn't want to be kept alive by machines."

"Thank I think you know what to do," Fran said gently. "Take some time, think about it, make your decision, and then call me, please."

"I will."

"May I speak to the chaplain, please?"

"Yes, of course."

"This is Lieutenant Commander Paul Francis," a strong male voice announced. "I'm a Roman Catholic Priest."

"Hello, Father. I'm Fran Mercer, a clinical psychologist in Milford, Ohio. How is Bethany holding up?"

"About as well as could be expected, I think."

"I take it that thing are as bad as she said?"

"She gave the most positive assessment," Father Francis said.

"I assumed that was the case. She's not religious."

"I know. She and I have had several very good talks. I'm here to support her in any way possible."

"Thanks, Father."

"You're welcome. Did you want to speak to her again?"

"After. I asked her to think it through, make a decision, and then call me once she had."

"I'll take care of her," Father Francis said.

"Thank you. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Fran hung up the phone and simply stared at the receiver, unsure what to do. After a couple of minutes, she picked up the phone and dialed Laura Paulus' number.

"Hi, Laura. It's Fran. Bethany Krajick's husband was shot and is going to die."

December 19, 1989, Milford, Ohio

"I don't really have any choice," Bethany said, sounding weak and exhausted.

It was just after midnight, but Fran had not been sleeping. She'd been sitting in her living room with her husband, Sam, with a pot of chamomile tea when the phone had rung.

"Did you say 'goodbye'?"

"Yes, but I decided to take Nicholas in with me. I just couldn't bring myself to keep him away. I won't take him in when they remove Nick from the ventilator."

"That's wise."

"I called Kathy and talked with her. She wanted to fly out, but that really made no sense. She said Steve had a fainting spell when he heard the news. I'm worried about him."

"Let his doctors worry about him, Bethany. You know he's had syncope, and you know that Doctor Barton will make sure he has the best care possible."

"I know, but I'm still worried."

"And he'd be the first one to tell you not to worry, wouldn't he?"

"Yes," Bethany sighed.

The bigger concern Doctor Mercer had was that Bethany would seek comfort in Steve's arms, or rather, his bed, and that was something which might lead to a complete disaster.

"What are your plans, if you know them?"

"I think, because of all his friends, it's best to have his memorial service at Great Lakes. Then, I'm going to bring Nick home to Milford. In the end, I think that's the best option best for me. The Navy takes care of literally everything, so I just need to tell them when and where."

"Come see me when you get home, Bethany. You're going to need help."

"I know. I just need to get through the next few days."

"If I remember correctly, one of the men he was close to on base in Chicago will come escort you and bring him home."

"Maybe. It depends on the logistics."

"Bethany, make sure you talk to someone there."

"I've been talking to Father Francis and a staff psychologist. I know the drill."

"Yes, of course, but you also know that we're often the worst patients. Please call me when you know the details."

"I will. Thanks, Fran. For everything."

They said 'goodbye' and Fran hung up the phone, then went back to sit with her husband.

"She's going to take him off life support?" Sam asked.

"Yes."

"What do you need?"

"Just hold me, please," Fran sighed, collapsing into her husband's arms.

About fifteen minutes later, she straightened up.

"I need to make a call."

"It's almost 1:00am," Sam replied.

"I know," Fran said, getting up.

She walked over to the phone and dialed a number.

"ER, Bala speaking."

"Bala, my name is Doctor Fran Mercer. I believe one of my patients, Steve Adams, might have been admitted."

"Yes, Doctor Mercer. Doctor Adams' husband was admitted for observation. I can let you speak to the Attending on duty if you'd like more information."

"Yes, please."

"One moment."

Fran listened to the canned 'music on hold' for about thirty seconds before the doctor came on the line.

"This is Doctor Miller," a male voice said.

"Doctor Miller, I'm Doctor Fran Mercer a licensed clinical psychologist in Milford, Ohio. I understand you admitted one of my patients, Steve Adams, for observation?"

"Yes, Doctor. He had a syncopal episode and was brought to the ER by ambulance. We conducted a full battery of tests with no abnormal results. He was admitted to cardiology by Doctor Washington, and he's being kept overnight on the orders of Doctor Al Barton. He'll be released in the morning if there are no medical indications for keeping him in cardiology."

"Thank you, Doctor Miller."

Fran hung up the phone and went back to sit with her husband.

"I know you can't tell me any details, but those two names seem to be linked together."

"No, I can't," Fran agreed. "But yes they are."

Entry 19891228 - Bethany Michelle Krajick

December 28, 1989, Milford, Ohio

"Hi, Fran," Bethany Krajick said when she walked into Doctor Mercer's office on Thursday afternoon.

"Hi, Bethany. Can I get you some coffee or tea?"

"Tea, please."

Doctor Mercer got up and opened a packet of Earl Grey, put the bag into a mug, then poured hot water from an electric kettle into the mug. She handed the full mug to Bethany.

"Who brought you?"

"My dad. He'll come back when I call him."

"And your son?"

"With my mom."

"I know how this sounds, but how are you?"

"I honestly don't know," Bethany replied, emotionlessly. "Numb, I guess."

"Have you decided to stay in Milford?"

"I honestly think that's best. I have to move off base, obviously, and I really don't think I'm up to trying to find a place for Nicholas and me, and doing all the things I'd need to do. I thought about asking Steve to move into his house, because it's perfectly located, he has a nanny, and he'd provide all the support I need, but I decided that wasn't a good idea. That kind of left my parents' house, which I think is best; they'll help and you're here."

Doctor Mercer was relieved, as she felt that Bethany would fall right back into the pattern of her life before Nick, including restarting her sexual relationship with Steve, which Doctor Mercer believed would do far more harm than good.

"I think you made the right decision."

Bethany smiled wanly, "You've never really understood my relationship with Steve. Nobody has ever helped me the way he has."

'Or hurt you,' Doctor Mercer thought, but didn't say, then quickly pushed that thought out of her mind because it was Josh Benton, the serial rapist, who had hurt Bethany and set in motion the entire chain of events. But Steve was married, had what amounted to mistresses, and had kids, and Doctor Mercer was worried how interacting with Steve would affect not just Bethany, but his entire family. She decided to change the subject, as Bethany had already made a good decision, and there was no point in have a discussion which might cause Bethany to change her mind.

"Have you thought about practicing here?"

"Yes. I'd need to get an Ohio license, and until then, I'd have to work under supervision. I'd hoped you would do that for me."

"Bethany, you need time to grieve," Doctor Mercer said gently. "Have you even started?"

"After the funeral tomorrow," Bethany replied. "But I can't sit around in black mourning clothes."

Doctor Mercer frowned slightly. Bethany's comment about being 'numb' indicated she was suffering from psychological shock, and at some point, the suppressed emotions would come crashing through the stoic exterior. That said, allowing Bethany to see a very limited number of clients would likely help her, IF she showed she was emotionally ready.

"I agree, though I want you to take some time to mourn, and want you to spend some time with Nicholas and your family and friends. We can talk after the first of the year about the timing, but if you want to do that, I'll want to see you a few times a week for the next month. How have you been sleeping?"

"My sleep schedule has been a mess since Nick was shot. Traveling from Guam and not really having a chance to get settled hasn't helped. Last night was probably the best sleep I've had."

"And your diet?"

"I'm eating some, even though I'm not really hungry."

"Your first task is taking care of yourself, Bethany. Eating properly and getting sufficient sleep are both vital. You won't be able to care for Nicholas if you don't care for yourself."

"I know," Bethany sighed. "I just need to get through tomorrow."

"Who's escorting you?"

"Howard Pointe. One of Nick's closest friends. He's been with Nick from the time the plane arrived from Guam. Everyone from Chicago will be here."

"That's good. Do you want to talk about anything in particular?"

Bethany sighed and shook her head, "No. Let me get through tomorrow first."

"OK, but then I want to see you on Saturday. You know why."

Bethany smiled, "You do know that I didn't sleep through my classes, right?"

December 29, 1989, Milford, Ohio

"Thanks again for taking the day off to come with me, Sam," Doctor Mercer said to her husband early on Friday afternoon.

"You're welcome. Are you ready?"

"I suppose. I feel like...I don't know how I feel. What more can happen to that poor girl?"

"You've never shared the original reason she came to see you, but I can surmise. Add to that the accident and now losing her husband? I can't even begin to imagine how she's able to function. Well, I can, and that's because you've helped her."

"She has a good support network, too, though..."

She stopped because she had to maintain Bethany's privacy; and Steve's.

"What's bothering you, Fran?"

Fran smiled wanly, "You know I can't tell you."

"I wish I could help."

"You do! You're here when I need you, even if I can't talk about my patients. And you seem to know exactly what I need!"

Sam laughed, "I do enjoy it when you need to work off your stress!"

"All men are inherently pigs!" Doctor Mercer laughed. "But I love you anyway!"

"It's the testosterone! And you have never ONCE objected! And now that you're not quite so morose, shall we go?"

"Yes."

They left the house, got into Sam's car, and drove to Greenlawn Cemetery. Sam parked the car and as they got out, the hearse arrived, along with the Naval contingent. Sam and Fran walked over to join the other mourners as the coffin was carried by Navy pall bearers to the gravesite and placed on the stand with pulleys that would eventually lower Nick into the ground. A short distance away, the Navy men who would provide the gun salute had assembled, and some distance from them, a lone sailor with a bugle stood, awaiting a command to play *Taps*.

A few minutes later, Doctor Mercer saw Steve Adams and his extended family arrive. Steve was, in Doctor Mercer's mind, a double-edged sword. He could help Bethany, but if they fell back into their old pattern, he could hurt her quite badly. It was something to watch out for, and potentially discuss with Steve, though privately and without telling Bethany, who arrived, escorted by a Naval officer. She was dressed in black and carrying Nicholas, and was led to a set of

chairs where Nick's parents were already seated. The officer took his place behind Bethany, and next to her parents.

At 1:00pm, a Navy chaplain gave a short benediction, and then asked Howard to say a few words. Howard gave a short eulogy, and when he finished, the chaplain led everyone in the Lord's Prayer, though Fran and Sam refrained from voicing the Christian prayer, and instead silently prayed 'Blessed are You, Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, the Judge of Truth', the same as Doctor Mercer had prayed when she'd first heard of Nick's death. She and Sam weren't observant, but the touchstone of the rituals was comforting at time.

The officer in charge of the ceremony signaled another officer, who gave the commands to the riflemen and three volleys of rifle shots rang out, punctuating the quiet of the dull, overcast, December day. Immediately following the final volley, the bugler began playing *Taps*. Fran took Sam's hand and squeezed it, and leaned on his shoulder as a team of sailors removed the flag from Nick's coffin, and quickly and expertly folded it, and one of them handed it to an officer who brought the flag to Bethany and said the usual words to her.

With the ceremony concluded, Fran started to move towards Bethany but stopped when she saw Bethany hand Nicholas to someone, then walk over to Steve. When Steve held out his arm and Bethany lopped hers around it, Doctor Mercer frowned and shook her head. It was no surprise that she'd seek comfort and support from Steve, but as she'd thought earlier, that relationship was fraught with danger, and both of them might well be oblivious to the pitfalls. It was something to discuss with Bethany in the morning.

"We can go," Doctor Mercer said to her husband.

"You don't want to talk to her?" Sam asked.

"Oh, I do, but I'll wait until I see her tomorrow morning."

"You're worried about that young man she's with?"

"You know I can't say."

"No, but I can surmise. You're a good counselor, Fran. You'll get her through this."

"Some days I wonder," Fran sighed.

"But I never do!" her husband declared.

December 30, 1989, Milford, Ohio

"I knew you'd react this way," Bethany said after Doctor Mercer expressed her concerns about Steve. "But it's not what you thought!"

"What do you mean?"

"I was supporting Steve, not the other way around! I'm not sure if you saw it, but the gun salute and *Taps* really hit him hard. When I talked to him, I discovered that he's stopped writing in his journals. He used them as a combination of catharsis and as a way to try to make sense of the world. He can't make any sense of what's happened."

"Nobody can make sense of a senseless act," Doctor Mercer replied gently.

"No, they can't," Bethany replied. "But Steve being Steve, he thinks he has to carry the burden of the world and he's struggling to find meaning after Nick's death."

"And you?"

"Nicolas has to be my meaning. For him and for me. That said, I do need Steve's help; and Kathy's, too."

"I'm concerned, Bethany."

"Don't be. We're in exactly the right place. He called me 'Sweetheart'..."

Doctor Mercer interrupted her, "Bethany, we've talked about this."

"You didn't let me finish! He called me that, but I pointed out that our relationship has to be different. I need him. He's been my best friend for a long, long time. I want him to be."

"I'm just afraid where that kind of intimacy will lead."

"I know. But you know how much he's helped me since ninth grade - with recovering from the rape, with recovering from the accident, and with recovering from our failed romantic relationship."

"I know, and that's what has me worried. Your 'solution' to each of those was physical intimacy."

"It was, and one of the reasons I decided to come back to Milford was that I needed some separation, but not so much that he and Kathy can't help. I briefly considered asking to move in with him, as I said, but decided that was a bad idea. I need him, and he needs me. But as friends."

Doctor Mercer took a deep breath and let it out.

"Your friendship with Steve is more intimate than most marriages, Bethany."

"I know. And that's why we couldn't marry, as crazy as it sounds."

"Have you cried?"

"No."

"You should."

Bethany nodded, "I will, when it's time."

Entry 19900102 - Bethany Michelle Krajick

January 2, 1990, Milford, Ohio

Doctor Mercer was in her office early on Tuesday morning, the day after New Year's. Her first appointment of the day, with Bethany Krajick, was scheduled for 7:30am, which gave Doctor Mercer about twenty minutes to drink her tea and prepare. The phone rang, and as her receptionist hadn't arrived, Fran answered the call.

"Fran Mercer," she said.

"Doctor Mercer, it's Steve Adams."

"Steve! How are you?"

"I'm a lot better than Bethany, that's for damned sure," he said, his voice a combination of anger and sadness.

"I saw you at the funeral, but you and Bethany walked away together before I could say 'hello'."

"I'm sorry about that, but as I'm sure you can imagine, I was more worried about her than pleasantries."

"Yes, of course. How are you doing?"

"I had a syncopal incident when I first heard the news. Al Barton insisted I stay in the hospital overnight for test."

"And?"

"Nothing new. They're still looking."

"Hopefully they'll uncover the root cause and treat it."

"Hopefully. Anyway, one of my confidantes suggested I see you because I'm struggling."

"With Nick's death?"

"Yes. You know I try to make sense of the world and it no longer makes sense, and I'm not sure it ever will."

"Are you in Chicago?"

"Yes. But I'm planning to drive down today to see Bethany. Kathy and I agreed that we need to help her in any way we're able to. And before you say it, that means appropriately, Doctor Mercer."

"Your definition of 'appropriate' and mine differs."

"I'm not going to have sex with Bethany," I replied. "I'm not a *complete* idiot."

"No, not *complete*," Doctor Mercer said with a soft laugh, knowing she could get away with saying something like that to Steve.

"Are you free tomorrow morning?"

"I have a patient scheduled for 9:00am. Could you be here at 7:00am?"

"I could. See you then."

They said their goodbyes and Doctor Mercer replaced the handset in the cradle of the phone. She made a note in her appointment book, then went to the large filing cabinet where she kept 'inactive' records, retrieved Steve's file, and moved it to the drawer of her credenza where she kept her active files. She'd need to review his file at home so she would be ready for his appointment in the morning.

"Good morning, Fran," Bethany said, coming into the office and closing the door.

"Good morning, Bethany. There's tea in the pot. I haven't made coffee, but you could turn on the machine if you want."

"Tea is fine, thanks. Steve got all of us hooked on tea back in Junior High."

"I just spoke to him. He's coming to see you?"

"Yes. He and Kathy have worked out some sort of platoon system, I guess. And before you say it, no, I am not planning to have sex with him, now, or anytime soon."

"Emotions combined with biology have a long history of overcoming plans in that regard."

"I trust him."

"You'll forgive me for bluntly saying I fear that trust is misplaced, given your history."

"We'll have to agree to disagree," Bethany replied. "And my request to start seeing patients?"

Doctor Mercer removed her eyeglasses and pinched her nose, the put her glasses back in place.

"You're not ready, Bethany," Doctor Mercer said.

"I can't sit around doing nothing!" Bethany protested. "I need something to take my mind off what happened in Guam. And honestly, if I can't do that here, then I think I'm going to have to go back to Illinois where I can practice."

"Have you cried?"

Bethany shook her head, "No. It's not time."

"When you are ready to cry, THEN we can talk about you seeing patients. And I really don't think going back to Chicago is a good idea."

"You never did understand my relationship with Steve," Bethany sighed.

In a sense, Fran thought, Bethany was right, but in another sense, and more importantly, Bethany was wrong. Fran understood that the relationship was a strange mix of supportive and destructive. To use a Greek myth as metaphor, they could soar through the skies together, but eventually one of them flew so high that the wax melted and their wings fell off.

Both had a history of seriously failed relationships, including their own, though to borrow another myth, somehow their relationship managed to rise from the ashes like a phoenix every time it had crashed and burned. And every time that phoenix rose, they ended up in a physical relationship, drawn to each other like strong magnets. Fran had tried for over ten years to help them come to some semblance of stability, but something always intervened - a girl, a guy, an accident, and ultimately, Nick's death.

"I think your relationship with Steve is so complex that none of us truly understands it."

"I'm not sure I can live without him," Bethany sighed. "And I don't want to try."

"What did you do this past week?"

"Spent time with Nicholas, went to the cemetery, spent time with my dad, slept, and watched TV."

"Not your mom?"

"My mom and I don't communicate. We haven't since Steve and I broke up the summer after graduation. She's still angry over that, and I'm sure she thinks it was all my fault."

"Because of Andrew? We talked about that."

"I know. I didn't say I thought it was all my fault, just that my mom still does. Dad understands. Strangely, he always has. He trusted Steve to take care of me, no matter what, from the first time they met. And Steve has never let him down."

"You need to find something to occupy your time," Doctor Mercer said.

"Seeing patients will do that, you know."

"Yes, I know. But not yet, Bethany."

Bethany sighed deeply, "Can we make a deal?"

"I offered one before."

"Then can I offer a modification?"

"What?"

"Steve's session tomorrow; make it a joint session."

"I'm not sure that's a good idea."

"If you leave us alone in your office, I'll cry while he holds me."

As Fran considered Bethany's request, her crying in Steve's arms was probably going to happen no matter what, and having it happen here, in her office, was probably the safest place it could happen. Anywhere else ran the risk of them falling back into their old pattern, and THAT, Fran thought, would be a complete disaster.

"I think I can work with that," Fran said. "He's supposed to be here at 7:00am."

"I'll show up a bit after that, say, ten minutes. And please let me talk to him without interrupting."

"I have to keep my own counsel on that, Bethany, but I'll let you lead."

"Thanks."

Fran realized that they wouldn't make any further progress, and despite her misgivings, felt that Bethany's idea might help, though it was fraught with all kinds of danger.

"Then I'll see you tomorrow about 7:10am," Fran said.

Bethany got up, they said 'goodbye', and Bethany left the office. Fran made notes in Bethany's file, and as she had some time before her next appointment, took out Steve's thick file an began to review. She was interrupted when her phone buzzed and her receptionist announced her next patient.

"Good morning, Marcie," Doctor Mercer said when the sixteen-year-old girl came into the office and shut the door.

"Hi, Doctor Mercer. Mom went to have coffee. She said she'll be back ten minutes before we're done in case you want to talk to her."

"Have a seat."

Marcie sat on the couch and Doctor Mercer moved from her desk to the chair near the couch.

"How are you doing?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"I don't want to kill myself today."

"Good."

January 3, 1990, Milford, Ohio

Steve was punctual as usual, arriving at 7:00am. Doctor Mercer invited him in, offered him tea which he accepted, and then he sat down in the chair near her desk.

"I was surprised to hear from you after all these years, but I suppose it made sense for you to call me, given what happened. How have you been?"

"Since the last time we talked?" I said with a smile. "I could write a novel, except I don't feel like it at this point. I saw you at the interment, but I didn't have a chance to say 'hello' because Bethany took me aside."

"I saw that. I have a question for you - have you been keeping your journal?"

"I'm not sure I can at this point. I used it to try to make sense of the world, but now, after everything that's happened, I don't think that's possible."

"Which is why you're here. But why me? Why now?"

"Because I came this close," I said, holding my thumb and forefinger a millimeter apart, "to shutting down. I'd have destroyed everything. And I knew you would understand. And that you could help."

"Write, Steve. It's important. It's cathartic. All those things you can't let out to anyone else for whatever reason, write them down. If you don't, you'll drive yourself crazy."

"Isn't that why I'm here?" I asked with a wry smile.

"You aren't crazy. You're human. Nobody can go through something like this without being affected."

"It makes even less sense than what happened with Birgit. Or Stephie."

They spoke for about ten minutes before Bethany knocked on the door and came into the office.

"What are YOU doing here?" Steve asked, totally surprised.

"We need to do this together," Bethany said, moving to sit by Doctor Mercer.

"But..." he protested.

"How can I do this after what happened? This is part of me getting through it. You and I can help each other the way we always have, but we have to keep our feelings for each other in check."

"Doctor Mercer, could you leave us alone?" Steve asked.

"Bethany?" Doctor Mercer queried.

"Yes, please."

Doctor Mercer nodded and left her office. She closed the door behind her, and sat down at her receptionist's desk. She had made a gamble and hoped it would pay off. What happened in the next fifteen or twenty minutes might well make the difference between success and disaster for a number of people. It could turn out very badly, but it might also get Bethany to a point where she could properly recover from the shock of Nick's death. And Bethany was still in shock. Once she cried, which she'd promised to do, THEN Doctor Mercer felt they could make some progress.

Steve and Bethany didn't open the door, and Doctor Mercer was concerned, so she got up and softly knocked on the door, then opened it and went in. She needed to talk to Bethany alone, and decided to use a bit of subterfuge.

"Sorry," Fran said, "but my next client will be here in about five minutes. Steve, are you coming in tomorrow morning as we discussed?"

"Yes, I am," he replied. "Thanks for today, it was helpful. Both before and after you left us. I'll see you in the morning."

"Good."

"I'll see you in a couple of hours, Sweetheart," he said.

Steve using his pet name for Bethany concerned Fran greatly, as in her mind, it was a warning sign that they might well fall back into their old pattern.

"Thanks," Bethany replied to Steve. "You can't even begin to imagine how much I appreciate it."

"I'm just paying forward what Jennifer and others did for me when something like this happened to me."

Steve and Bethany exchanged a quick hug, she kissed him on the cheek, and he left the office. Doctor Mercer closed the door and went to sit with Bethany.

"Sorry about the subterfuge, though technically you are my patient."

"It's OK. Steve provided exactly what I needed. He knew, too. As soon as we sat down, he told me to cry."

"Good. Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not today, please. I need to spend more time with Steve before I talk with you about it."

"I'm almost afraid to ask, but where is he staying?"

"He's at a friend's house, but I asked him to come stay at our house, and he called Kara and Jessica to discuss it."

"Bethany..." Doctor Mercer warned with a sigh.

"Just as my friend."

"I think you're taking a huge risk, and I really wish you wouldn't do that."

"Fran," Bethany said in a soft but firm voice, "I know what I need and I know what I'm doing."

Fran shook her head, "I don't think that's true at all."

January 5, 1990, Milford, Ohio

"He held me and let my cry myself to sleep. I asked him to make love to me and he refused."

Doctor Mercer sighed, "I was afraid of that, and to be frank, I'm not convinced you two are being honest with me, Bethany."

Bethany smiled wanly, "I can see you doubting me, but Steve? He'd never lie to you about that. He's never lied to you about us, even when I tried to keep things from you. How can you doubt him?"

"Steve would kill to protect you; telling a lie to protect you doesn't even come close!"

Bethany shook her head, "You STILL don't understand him! He'd kill Seaman Jefferson if he had the opportunity, though I suspect he'd have to get in line. He'd have killed Josh Benton or had him killed, if I hadn't demanded he not do so. But lie? No."

"Hang on! You're saying he'd commit cold-blooded murder before he'd lie?"

"I'm telling you, Fran, you do NOT understand him. Steve may not be in the military, but it's all about honor, duty, and, for want of a better term, unit cohesiveness. When his honor is at stake, he's very predictable. When he feels he has a duty, he's unstoppable. The people he loves are worth more to him than his own life."

"But he's opposed to the death penalty - we've talked about that."

"Yes, he is, but you saying that simply shows you STILL don't get him! He doesn't think the government should have the power to judicially kill. On the other hand, duty and honor require him to kill Seaman Jefferson if he has the opportunity, unless I tell him not to, which I have. And he'll keep his word. And, just so you know, there were quite a few officers in Guam who would have gone into the brig and killed him with their bare hands if I'd asked."

"But Steve is a pacifist...that makes no sense."

"Yes, but not the way you mean. He won't initiate violence. But if someone else does, he'll end it, violently and with finality. He and Nick saw eye to eye on that - the goal of having a strong military is deterrence, and if someone is foolish enough not to be deterred, the you destroy them as quickly and violently as possible, go home, have a beer, fuck your wife, and play with your kids. So, no, Steve isn't lying and won't lie."

"I still think it's unwise, Bethany. Your history..."

"Is exactly why I knew I could trust him to hold me, let me cry, and gently refuse to make love to me. We both agree that's the right way forward. You wanted me to cry, and I found the way I could do it, and have it MEAN something."

"You have to admit that your relationship with him is very strange."

Bethany laughed softly, "Steve is very strange. And I think you should try to understand him for who he REALLY is."

"Well, I'm seeing him this afternoon, and I think I have plenty to discuss with him."

"And me seeing patients?" Bethany asked.

"We're making progress."

"Good."

Entry 19911011 - Bethany Michelle Krajick

October 11, 1991, Milford, Ohio

"Fran, can I ask you something in complete confidence?"

"Of course, Bethany."

It's about Abel and Delilah. They asked me to find out if you'd be willing to counsel them."

"Them? Together?"

"Don't you think that would be necessary? Honestly, you have to agree that they want to keep the details of their story to as few people as necessary."

"I can see that, but it's not a thing we typically do except for family or relationship counseling."

"Which I think this would be. I also think that given the way the law works in Ohio, counseling is possible."

"It occurred in Ohio if I understand it correctly."

"Yes," Bethany confirmed.

Bethany knew that wasn't entirely true, but it had started in Ohio, and mostly occurred there. And that fiction could be maintained, and didn't really change the character of what she was asking.

"And you're positive that the incestuous relationship has ended and that the statute of limitations has expired?"

"Yes, and that it would be covered by the counseling exception under Ohio law as neither of them are willing to make a complaint of any kind."

"Do you know why?" Fran asked. "After all these years?"

"Because both of them are seriously affected by it, and it's affecting their quality of life and their relationships with their significant others."

"I'm not sure how wise it would be to see both of them. Who approached you?"

"Abel. I believe he's struggling with remorse, despite being positive it was the right thing to do when he was younger."

"You wrote that in your research. Are you reconsidering your findings?"

"Aren't we always supposed to do that as new information comes to light?" Bethany asked.

"Yes, of course."

"So, what I wrote was true when I wrote it; now, I'm not so sure. I'll need to speak to both of them, preferably after a bit of counseling. If I were ever to publish something that discussed their case, I'd need to know if I had to revise my finding."

"And Abel is willing to reveal himself to me? With his real name? And the timeframe?"

"Yes, I'm positive that he is."

"And you feel he'll openly speak with me?" Fran asked.

"I'm positive."

"Let me think about it. I'll probably run it by Laura as well."

"I figured that would be the case. Thanks, Fran."

"You're welcome."

Late that afternoon, Doctor Mercer called her mentor, Doctor Laura Paulus, for advice.

"Honestly," Doctor Paulus replied, "I think you should, for two reasons. One, to verify Bethany's research; and two, because it would be a very interesting case."

"You think Bethany was mistaken?"

"I think there's something she's not telling you."

"There's a lot about this she's not telling anyone, for what I'm sure you can imagine are good reasons."

"Yes, of course, but from everything you've said, and from reading her dissertation, I have a suspicion that there is something more to this."

"And your curiosity insists that you find out?"

"You know me very well, Fran!" Laura laughed. "I just hope that it's something you can tell me, within the bounds of patient privacy."

"Depending on what I find out, I'll ask for permission to discuss it with you. What about seeing both of them?"

"I think you have to talk to the brother alone first, then the sister alone, and decide if it's wise. We can debate the ethics once you do that."

"OK. I'm going to think about it a bit more, then let Bethany know that I want to speak to Abel."

"Good luck, Fran. Let me know what happens and call if you need advice."

"Thanks, Laura. I appreciate it as always.

They said 'goodbye' and Fran hung up the phone, got up from her desk, and left the office, locking the doors behind her. Once again, she was in a stressful situation which she couldn't talk to Sam about. He'd always understood, and had provided the support she'd needed, but things would have been so much easier if she could talk to him openly. She got into her car and headed home.

"Hi, Fran!" Sam called out, hurrying to the foyer to greet her with a kiss.

"Hi, Sam. Sorry about being late, but I needed to talk to Laura and she was only available after 5:00pm."

"One of those days?"

"Yes and no. It's a bit of a dilemma, and it has the potential to be stressful."

"The girls aren't home..." Sam offered suggestively.

Fran laughed softly, "You're still as horny as that day we met at Ohio State!"

"You've never complained!" Sam protested, but with a huge smile.

"So the Jewish Princess stereotype doesn't apply?" Fran asked, taking off her jacket and hanging it in the closet.

"Well, if you've been trying to decide what color to paint the ceiling for the last twenty-six years, I'm going to be mightily offended!"

"I think I could go for a nice hot bath with a glass of Chardonnay, a massage, and your special stress reduction techniques!"

"And now you see the main advantage of having the girls out of the house!"

"I'll run the water, you get the wine!" Fran said, unbuttoning her blouse.

Sam needed no additional incentive to move. She might be close to fifty, but his wife was just as sexy as the day they'd met.

October 16, 1991, Milford, Ohio

"I believe I can see Abel," Doctor Mercer said. "Sorry it took so long. I had to think about it."

"I totally understand," Bethany replied. "I'll get in touch with him and have him call. It might be a week or two before you hear from him, depending on his schedule and how soon I speak with him again."

Bethany needed to continue the subterfuge, as Steve hadn't made a final decision as to how to handle things.

"OK. Shall we talk about your most recent new patient?"

"She's struggling with having given up her daughter for adoption. I think the major factor there is that it was a direct adoption, and she knows the adoptive parents quite well from their former church, and sees her daughter every few weeks. But that's not the biggest problem. The biggest problem is that she and her husband are unable to conceive and none of the medical treatments are working."

"That's a tough situation. Did she have trouble with her successful pregnancy?"

"Other than conceiving at fifteen and delivering at sixteen, no trouble. More likely it had to do with her very promiscuous behavior."

"An STD?"

"Not that she acknowledged. I suppose it could be HPV and she didn't know, as that often clears on its own, and we don't know how that affects fertility. And you know there's a potentially long latency period. But the why is less important, obviously."

"Are you recommending marriage counseling?" Fran asked.

"Yes," Bethany replied. "I think I've addressed everything I can with regard to her teenage promiscuity and her guilt over the situation with her daughter. I don't hold out a lot of hope, though. Her husband, if she's to be believed and I do believe her, is adamant about having biological children."

"I've seen that before," Fran said. "About ten years ago."

"Mike actually told me about that when we made his last referral."

"How is she doing?"

"About what you would expect from a twelve-year-old victim of violent rape whose dad is facing murder charges."

"They're charging him with murder?"

"Under Ohio law, 'laying in wait' is sufficient for pre-meditation. The fact that the dad used a private investigator to find the guy, then staked out his house pretty much doomed him. Both of those things make any defense such as temporary insanity or 'crime of passion' nearly impossible. And given how he killed him and what he did afterwards, I can't imagine Governor Voinovich issuing clemency or commutation the way Dick Celeste did right before he left office in January."

"Wait! They're charging him with *capital* murder?"

"That's the last I heard from the public defender. Think about it, Fran. He methodically planned it, tortured the guy, emasculated him, forced the severed genitals into the man's mouth, and then drove an ice pick into his brain through his eye."

"I'd go for straight insanity. Even with all of that, the death penalty just seems wrong. Well, you know my opinion that it shouldn't exist at all, but even setting that aside, it's not right. I mean, not to defend him, but given how badly his daughter was brutalized, you'd think they'd show SOME compassion and only seek life in prison."

"He confessed to the police when they arrived after he called them."

Doctor Mercer shook her head, "Which is going to hurt his daughter even more."

"Yes, it is," Bethany agreed. "You know Steve wanted to kill Josh Benton, right?"

"He's told me. I'm very glad you were able to keep that from happening."

"You and me both," Bethany replied.

"How are things between you two?"

Bethany smiled, "He hasn't broken his promise to you, despite my repeated entreaties."

"You know my feelings on the matter."

"You've made them quite clear. Repeatedly."

"And yet you still think it's a good idea."

"Believe it or not, for many of the same reasons it was a good idea when I was fifteen. You objected to that, despite it being exactly what I needed."

"Your relationships after that weren't exactly healthy."

"No, but without that, I'd never have even tried. But we're off topic."

"What's your treatment plan?"

"Well, now that she's no longer on serious sedatives, to see if I can rebuild a life for a little girl who was violated in every way you can imagine by a monster. And to make things worse, being subjected to medical procedures to repair the damage. The one plus is that she'll never, ever have to testify, or even talk to the police. I refused to allow that even after they took her off the sedatives. And then her dad did what he did. I'm not even sure how to address that with her, because at some point, she'll find out."

"How's her mother?"

"Under psychiatric care. I'm not sure she'll recover from finding her daughter and seeing what had been done. I don't think I could."

"Something I hope neither of us ever have to find out."

October 23, 1991, Milford, Ohio

On Wednesday morning, a week later, Doctor Mercer made Earl Grey tea. It wasn't her favorite, but Steve was her first appointment and she knew he preferred that particular blend. It had just finished steeping when her receptionist announced that Steve had arrived. The door to the office opened and Steve walked in, followed by his little sister. Doctor Mercer found that strange.

"Good morning!" Fran said. "I thought this was a counseling session."

"It is," Steve said. "Doctor Mercer, I'm Abel."

"And I'm Delilah," Stephanie said.

Doctor Mercer was stunned, and the shocked look on her face surely gave that away. She suddenly felt queasy and weak in her knees, because she'd been seeing Steve for nearly fifteen years, in one context or another, and had completely missed what had just been revealed. Not even an inkling. A million things crossed her mind as she basically fell back into her chair, fortunate that it didn't flip over backwards. If Steve had kept something like this from her, what ELSE might he have kept from her? Her mind boggled.

She tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come, and she realized that she'd only be babbling. She had to gather her wits and regain her composure. She took several deep breaths, letting them out slowly, then sipped water from the class on her desk.

"I, uhm, guess you better sit down," she said. "Both of you."

Steve and Stephanie sat down on the couch close to each other - too close - and Doctor Mercer got up from her desk, picked up a notebook and a pen, then moved to the comfortable chair she usually sat in for counseling. She opened her notebook, wrote the date, as well as the code names, not wanting to record them as that point, and then simply looked over at the brother and sister who were sitting on her counseling couch. Steve spoke first.

"I'm sorry to have dropped the bomb on you that way," he said, "but I'm sure you can imagine why Bethany couldn't reveal who we were, nor could I very well call you from home about this."

"I, uhm, well, yes, I see," Fran replied, still trying to regain her composure. "Did you read Bethany's dissertation?"

Steve nodded, "I attended the faculty review in Madison when she used it as her Senior project in Madison. And I read advance copies before she turned in her thesis and dissertation. I don't know if Stephanie read it."

"I read the dissertation," his sister acknowledged.

"You attended the faculty review session, Steve?" Fran asked, surprised. "And sat there and listened to them grill her about her research? On you?"

"Yes. It was fascinating, to say the least."

"And her conclusions?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Right at the time," Steve replied. "Wrong now. I suspect she told you that."

The revelations had come to quickly for Doctor Mercer to process them, so she made some notes. The next few minutes were going to be difficult, but nowhere near as difficult as the discussion she'd have to have with Bethany at their planned lunchtime meeting. Fran wondered exactly when Bethany had known and why she hadn't put a stop to it. But that was for later.

Entry 19911023 A - Stephanie Ann Adams

October 23, 1991, Milford, Ohio

I'd actually like to speak to Stephanie alone for the rest of this time," Doctor Mercer said. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all," Steve replied. "I'll go to the waiting room."

"Thanks."

He got up and left the office, closing the door behind him. Doctor Mercer took a few sips of water from her glass, got up from her chair, retrieved a new, unused notebook from her credenza, wrote the date and Stephanie's name on the cover, and then, having collected her senses enough to begin, sat back down.

"Stephanie, I want you to be completely honest with me, and tell me the truth. I promise nothing you say will ever be revealed, with the exception of talking to your brother. If I need advice, I'll never reveal your names or anything else that might give away your identity. Can you promise to tell me the truth?"

"Yes," Stephanie said firmly.

"Good. When did you have your first thoughts about your brother in a way that might be considered sexual?"

"Just as I said before - when I was seven."

"And that's when you discovered the mechanics of sex, right?"

"Well, I kind of knew before, because I'd seen babies and something in my brain said 'boys go out, girls go in', but nothing more than that. And I knew you needed a man and a woman to make a baby because that's what people said and because everyone I knew had a mom and a dad. The book just confirmed how things went together. Well, and explained about the physiology of intercourse and conception."

"Prior to reading the book, did you have any thoughts about it? I mean beyond what I would call typical for a pre-pubescent?"

"Not really."

"What was your relationship with your parents like at that point?"

"Mom was already showing a lot of her bitchy personality, mostly to Steve. I felt bad for him. Dad was always cold and distant. He'd let me hug him, but I don't recall him even hugging or kissing my mom all that much, at least in front of the kids. I think, from everything I've read, he was very much the 1940s and 1950s dad in that regard. And it makes sense, given his age."

"Yes, it does," Fran agreed. "What about your relationship with your older brothers?"

"Well, the Pervert and I never really did much together and I more or less ignored him."

"It would be better if you called him by his name, please. It's Jeff, right?"

"The Perv is named Jeff, yes," Stephanie replied.

"And Steve?"

"We always got along really well. I remember being around him a lot. There's a picture, and I don't remember this, but there's a picture of me swaddled in a blanket in the back of his metal Tonka dump truck. It was his prized possession, and seeing that picture told me how much he loved me."

"Did you two hug or kiss?"

"No. Our family wasn't huggy at all. It wasn't just Mom and Dad."

"Do you remember the first time you hugged your brother or that he hugged you?"

"Probably around the time I was eight, I hugged him."

"And how did you feel?"

"Loved."

"Was that before or after you read the book?"

"After."

"Who gave you the book?"

"Nobody, really. Mom bought a set of books for Steve and they were kept in the common book closet in the hallway. I saw them and took them down."

"There was more than one?"

"It was a four volume set in a cardboard box, with the first two volumes covering puberty; one for boys and one for girls. I read both. The third volume was about

the basic mechanics of sex, birth control, and VD. The fourth was about pregnancy and childbirth. I read both of those, too."

"Did you talk with anyone about those books?"

"My friends Trish and Shelly. I showed them the books, and we talked about it. There was a lot of giggling."

"Not uncommon at that age. You didn't talk with your parents?"

"No. I'm pretty sure my parents never talked to any of us about sex. Mom just bought the books for Steve."

"He put them on the shelf?"

"I suppose, but any books that Mom bought were required to be with the shared books. The only books Steve had in his room were ones he bought with his allowance. It was like the computer that Mom insisted Steve couldn't keep in his room even though nobody else used it. Well, the Per...Jeff tried to, but couldn't make it work and only used it to try to annoy Steve."

"Did you talk with Steve about the books?"

Stephanie shook her head, "No."

"Even with you said how they made you feel?"

"I wasn't sure what he would say and I was afraid he'd reject me. I was so sure that we were supposed to be together and I didn't want to mess it up by being a little girl."

"What did you think would happen?"

"I wasn't sure."

"What did you want to happen?"

"What I said - that Steve was the person I wanted to make love to. I was positive our bodies were made for each other."

"At seven?"

"I knew the mechanics, and how they fit together. I knew I loved him. I knew he loved me."

"Did you tell anyone how you felt?"

Stephanie shook her head, "Not then. Not for a long time, really."

"So Steve didn't know then?"

"He didn't know until Jennifer and Melanie told him when we was fourteen."

"Did you tell them?"

"No. But I guess they saw what was happening, even if Steve didn't. He was pretty clueless then. I pursued him like a lioness after a zebra, but he never saw it until the girls told him about it."

"You said you wanted to be his first."

"I did, and if I'd been even two years older, I might have succeeded. But at twelve, he wasn't interested in me that way."

"And what do you think would have happened?"

"We'd have eventually run away and pretended to be married. After all, we'd have the same last name, so our IDs would have been good. Nobody would need to know we were brother and sister."

"Kids?"

"Of course. And we'd have lived happily ever after. But it didn't work out that way."

"You said he wasn't interested you at twelve. How do you know?"

"He told me. When I pushed him to be with me, he said we had to wait at least until I got my period. And then, later, when I pushed after getting my period, he said we had to wait until I developed and looked like a woman."

"So, when the girls told him, he was OK with it?"

"No. He actually totally freaked out, at least according to Jennifer and Melanie. But I guess, in the end, the combination of Birgit dying, our mom being a total bitch, and my relentless pursuit, he decided it was possible. At that point, he was more or less putty in my hands. When he came home from Sweden and I was developed, I knew I had him. Then it was just a matter of when."

"So, after that first hug, who initiated the hugs?"

"Me, almost always, until he came back from Sweden."

"What did you two do together?"

"We swam every morning and he often made me breakfast. And sometimes I hung out with him and his friends."

"Did he ask you to swim with him?"

"No, that was my idea."

"And breakfast?"

"His. Dad ate with us pretty often; Mom almost never did. She and my other brother were inseparable."

"How did you feel when you discovered your brother wasn't a virgin?"

"Horrible. But I knew how much he cared for Birgit, and how gorgeous she was, and how much she looked like a woman when I was still ten or eleven."

"You knew he was sexually active from that point?"

Stephanie laughed, "Once Melanie got her hooks into him, he became the school sex god!"

"I'm not sure that's a positive thing," Doctor Mercer replied dryly.

"Oh, right," Stephanie smirked. "Teenage boy has an unlimited supply of pussy. And all from gorgeous girls. Tell me how that's bad for HIM!"

"It was, but that's not the point of our chat. How did that make you feel?"

"I suppose it was a mixture of jealousy and desire. I was sure he was going to blow my mind when I finally got him into my bed."

"Why wait so long after he came home from Sweden?"

Stephanie took a deep breath and let it out, "Becky the Bitch."

Doctor Mercer was aware of everything that had happened with Steve, Becky, and Kara, but she couldn't reveal that without permission from Steve.

"What happened?"

"My idiot brother went full 'dumb boy' and cheated on Kara with Becky. I'm guessing you at least know who she is because of the pregnancy and abortion, and how my idiot brother couldn't break his attraction to her."

"And that caused a rift between you and Steve?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Jennifer. I was positive at that point he and I couldn't run away together, but I was sure he'd marry Jennifer, even though she'd moved away. And if he married Jennifer..."

"You wanted that to happen. Why?"

"You know how he's married to Jessica and Kara, right?"

"Yes."

"That."

Doctor Mercer took off her glasses and pinched her nose. She could feel a tension headache coming on and decided to proactively take some aspirin. She got up and retrieved the bottle of Anacin she kept in her upper-left desk drawer, got two tablets from the bottle, and swallowed them with a drink of water. She sat back down and put her glasses back on her face.

"Did either of them know you wanted that?"

Stephanie nodded, "Yes. We had a threesome."

"You what?!" Doctor Mercer gasped.

"Had a threesome. Jennifer and I made love with Steve, and to each other."

"When was this?"

"The summer after Steve graduated, but before he moved to Chicago. Jennifer came to visit after I invited Karin to visit because I was afraid my idiot brother was going to marry Kara."

"You keep calling him an idiot. Why?"

Stephanie laughed, "Because he is! Well, when he doesn't do what I think he should do. But I'm not the only one who calls him a 'dumb boy' - all the girls do, in one fashion or another."

"This threesome..."

"My idea. I wanted it. I felt it was a way to ensure Steve and Jennifer married, which would mean I could have both her and him."

"You wanted Jennifer?"

"Yes. And she wanted me. She hadn't figured out she was a lesbian at that point, but I knew. It was obvious that she loved my brother, but I knew that she was always going to need a girl. I realized I could be that girl. Well, I thought I could. You know how it worked out."

"So, what happened with Becky?"

Doctor Mercer actually knew part of the answer, but suspected she was going to find out that the situation was FAR more complex than she'd thought when she'd talked to Steve about it.

"Steve confessed to Kara, who forgave him. He confessed to me and I slapped him hard across the face and told him I'd never let him touch me. That's when the Triumvirate formed. That's been a pattern through Steve's life. There have always been three girls who were close to him, loved him, made love with him, and helped him navigate life. That was Kara, Bethany, and me. We were all royally pissed at him, and Jennifer was beside herself, but she was in Seattle at that point."

"So what happened next?"

"Steve worked on restoring his relationships with all the girls. He did a good job, and I was pleased, though I never let on. He was like a brother then, but we did discuss what I wanted. And he simply let me take my time to decide. He treated me like a princess, but he didn't make any moves. I made the moves."

"Your threat, I guess we'll call it. Was it real?"

Stephanie shook her head, "No. I just wanted him to understand how badly he'd screwed up with Becky."

"You decided the day and time?"

"And what we'd do. Like I said, he was putty in my hands. I'd done my best to tease him to make sure he'd do what I wanted."

"How?"

"Just little things - words I'd say, things I'd do. But he was adamant about never seeing me naked until that day we first made love. I wanted him to see me naked, but he refused."

"Had you seen him?"

"Yes, a few times, including when I spied on him and a girl making love."

"You watched him?"

"Yes. And I saw everything."

"Does he know?"

"Now? Yes. But not when it happened."

"Where were they?"

"In my parents' bed. Steve had closed and locked the door, and drawn the blinds on the window that overlooked the indoor pool, but you could see through a gap between the blind and the sill. He didn't realize until I told him. After that, he was careful to make sure the blind was actually below the sill."

"You tried to spy on him again?"

"Yes, and tried to see him naked whenever I could."

"But he didn't see you until that day?"

"Correct."

"Did anyone try to talk you out of it?"

"Steve, at first, but he never was able to refuse me anything. Bethany, but I convinced her that I was the one pursuing the relationship and that Steve hadn't lifted a finger or said a thing to encourage me."

"Are you covering for him in any way?"

"No!" Stephanie said firmly. "I was the one who wanted it and manipulated him into doing it."

"And now? Are you manipulating him?"

"No."

"But you said, earlier, that deep inside you still wanted him to be your lover. In fact, your husband and to father children with you."

Stephanie let out a deep sigh, "Which is why I'm here. I know it can't happen, and well, Ed is insisting I get treatment."

"You want to be with him?"

"If we exclude my brother, Ed was my first boyfriend."

"Have there been others?"

"Nobody who lasted."

"How many lovers have you had?"

"Sixteen."

"Including Ed and your brother?"

"Yes. And Jennifer. And there are some who I kind of messed around with but wouldn't call them lovers. Making out, I guess."

"But your very first intimate experiences were all with your brother?"

"Yes. We did literally everything. And nobody else could compare."

"Would you say that's why you've had so many lovers?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Probably."

"What's different about Ed?"

"I suppose it's that he won't give up. I mean, I really like him, but he's never, ever let me push him away without fighting back."

"And he knows the details?"

"Yes."

"Has Steve ever forced you to do anything?"

"More like the other way around," Stephanie replied. "He tried to end it several times and I did whatever it took to get him back."

"And now?"

"As I said, I know it's impossible for Steve and me to be together the way I wanted."

"But you're still attracted to him?"

"Yes. But I don't think he's attracted to me."

"How does that make you feel?"

"Sad. Rejected."

"One last question, how did you feel the next day?"

"Sore!" Stephanie smirked. "I made him do it again and again even though I knew I'd pay for it the next day."

"I meant emotionally," Doctor Mercer replied, suppressing a sigh.

"Like I was on top of the world," Stephanie sighed longingly. "Everything was perfect."

Doctor Mercer made some notes in her notebook.

"I'm going to call your brother back in now."

"OK."

Doctor Mercer got up, went to the door, and invited Steve back into the office. Steve sat down on the couch, but not as close to Stephanie as he'd sat before. Doctor Mercer sat down, made a note in her notebook and then looked up.

"I need to think about this," she said, "mostly because of the distance. May I have a week?"

"Yes, of course," Steve replied.

"And do you have an issue with me talking about the ethical issues involved with someone I trust?"

"So long as you don't reveal who we are in any way, shape or form, I have no problem with that."

"Me either," Stephanie said.

"OK," Doctor Mercer replied. "I'll give you a call early next week. What number should I use?"

"My cellular phone," Steve said. "Let me give you the number."

He asked for a piece of paper and wrote down the cellular number and then handed the paper to Doctor Mercer.

"Thanks," Steve said. "I appreciate you listening and I'm sorry we dropped this bomb on you today."

"I suppose I'm the only person to whom the two of you could have confessed. As I said, let me think about it."

"Of course," Steve replied. "Thanks."

"Thanks, Doctor Mercer," Stephanie added.

"You're welcome. I'll be in touch."

Steve and Stephanie left the office, closing the door behind them. Doctor Mercer went back to her desk and gathered her thoughts, jotting down notes in her notebook. There was so much to unpack and the distance made counseling difficult, but the thing she'd said to Steve was absolutely true - she was probably the only one they could come to, and the only one who could help them. More thought was necessary, as well as a conversation with Laura, but most likely, she'd accept them as patients. Well, accept Stephanie, as Steve was already a patient and had been for nearly fifteen years.

There was one thing, though, that was truly nagging her, and that was Bethany's involvement. It had been one thing when Bethany had written about this relationship as a researcher, it was a VERY different thing now that Bethany was clearly involved and had known about it while it was ongoing. That warranted a conversation, one which Fran did not relish. She'd broach the topic when she met Bethany for lunch, but it was unlikely to be a short conversation. The phone on her desk buzzed, interrupting her thoughts.

"Yes?" she said.

"Your next appointment is here."

"Thanks."

Entry 19911023 B - Bethany Michelle Krajick

October 23, 1991, Milford, Ohio

"Doctor Mercer, Doctor Krajick is here," Cecilia said over the intercom.

"Send her in, please," Fran replied.

The door opened and Bethany stepped in.

"Ready for lunch, Fran?" Bethany asked.

"We need to talk. Cecilia is going to Andreas' Deli for sandwiches for us."

"Steve and Stephanie?"

"Steve and Stephanie," Fran replied.

"What can I get for you, Doctor Krajick?" Cecilia asked.

"Ham on rye, light mayo; regular chips; small Sprite."

"Doctor Mercer?"

"My usual, please."

"Back in fifteen minutes!" Cecilia said brightly, closing the door.

"Sit," Fran directed.

Bethany nodded and moved to a chair across from Fran. She set her purse on the floor and looked up.

"You knew before it happened," Fran said.

"Yes. They told you?"

"I spent the last fifteen minutes reviewing your dissertation. I know how close you and Steve were. Nobody had to tell me once Steve and Stephanie introduced themselves as 'Abel and Delilah'."

"No, I suppose not," Bethany replied. "I messed up."

"That's an understatement if there ever was one! In fact, I don't call condoning incest 'messing up'! I don't call hiding it from me 'messing up'! I don't call exploiting them for your research 'messing up'!"

"Exploiting?" Bethany asked, reeling from the accusation.

"What would you call it?"

Bethany was quiet for a moment.

"It was legitimate research," Bethany replied defensively.

"Really? If this isn't the epitome of a 'dual relationship' I don't know what is! You were intimate with him while you were doing your research by your own admission! You call him your best friend! You know better! Do you realize what could happen if your PhD advisor or committee found out? Or the licensing board? YOU KNOW BETTER! You broke the rules. You violated protocols. It was unethical. Do you understand that?"

"What are you going to do?"

"That's not an answer, Doctor Krajick," Fran said sternly.

"Yes," Bethany replied. "I understand."

"Do you realize the position you've put me in?"

"I'm sorry," Bethany replied.

"You're sorry," Fran sighed, shaking her head. "Sorry enough to repudiate your research? Sorry enough to give back your PhD? Sorry enough to surrender your license?"

"But it happened before I completed my undergrad degree!"

"The incest? Yes. Your research? When did that finish?"

"When I turned it over to the PhD committee," Bethany admitted.

"You knew the rules, the protocols, and the ethical guidelines."

"Yes."

"And yet you violated them. Why? To make a point that NEVER should have been made? And which, obviously, is incorrect?"

"It happened, Fran. I can't undo it."

"No, you can't. You've put me in a very difficult position. If I do what I'm supposed to do according to the code of professional ethics, you'll never practice again."

"Fran..." Bethany pleaded, interrupting with tears forming in her eyes.

Fran held up her hand, "Let me finish. That is what I am supposed to do. But if I do it, I can't begin to imagine the adverse effects on Steve, and you know where Stephanie not getting help will lead - prison for her brother and suicide for her. I told them I have to think about it, but I don't see an alternative way to prevent that outcome except counseling them myself. Fundamentally, if I don't, I end up destroying three lives; three lives of people I care for. And probably even more, as it would affect Steve's family, his business, your brother, your son, and who knows who else. The State of Ohio, and I'm certain Illinois as well, believe that kind of destruction is warranted; I don't, at least in this case. Well, assuming you answer my next question the way I expect you to."

"What?" Bethany asked with trepidation.

"Your research, as suspect as it is, reports things accurately?"

"Facts," Bethany sighed, "but clearly not conclusions."

"Clearly," Doctor Mercer replied flatly. "But it matches what Stephanie insists to be true. And knowing the mental and emotional abuse Steve suffered, he was putty in her hands. But you know what? That's on you, too! You, Melanie, and Jennifer helped not only make him who he is, but literally groomed him for his little sister! Think about that 'fact', Doctor Krajick!"

"Shit," Bethany sighed. "Maybe I **should** give up my practice and my license."

"Then I suppose I would have to as well, because I completely missed it. I'm being harsh on you because I have to, but I'm also being harsh on myself. Ask yourself this question - is that girl of fifteen or sixteen the woman who is twenty-eight?"

"I want to say 'no', but you know how I feel about him. That's never changed."

"And is the source of never-ending drama in your life, and the reason you come to me for counseling! Your relationship with him was nothing but destructive."

"Not after I married Nick."

"And yet, you've fallen right back into the same pattern, haven't you?"

"He's my best friend in the world," Bethany protested, tears dripping from her eyes and rolling down her cheeks.

But it wasn't any normal friendship, at least not in Fran's mind. Bethany's connection to Steve, whatever it was, was so deeply embedded in her psyche that there was no way to separate them. It wasn't conjoined twins, it was as if their souls had merged. Counterintuitively, that merger had been an impediment to being a couple, though Steve's penchant for having multiple girls loomed large as well. Fran knew, though, that Bethany had played a key role in Steve's development with regard to sex and relationships, and in that way, Bethany was, after a fashion, partly responsible for who he was.

That said, as Fran looked back, she wondered if Bethany could have survived her rape without Steve. Not just someone like Steve, but the unique 'soul' that could directly interact with Bethany's, support her, and give her energy. The problem was, that energy seemed to destroy all boundaries and lay waste to all social standards. And it provided for what amounted to magnetic attraction between them, something that nothing could seem to attenuate.

Breaking that hold was dangerous, as Fran had seen in the past. It had led to self-destructive behavior by Bethany, including her long-term affair at college, the disastrous relationship with Andrew, and her clinging to Steve after Nick's murder. It was only Steve's sheer willpower which had kept him from fulfilling Bethany's request to make love after Nick's death, though Fran knew it wouldn't last, and they might have already consummated. Again.

"I warned you about your relationship with him twelve years ago. If you had listened, things might have gone differently."

Bethany was fighting hard not to begin sobbing, but she was slowly losing the battle.

"I can't change what happened," she said, her dripping tears spotting her light blue blouse.

"No, and I'm not one to say 'I told you so', but actions have consequences. You have to figure out a way forward."

The sobs won out.

"I can't live without him," Bethany wailed.

Fran felt badly that she was making Bethany cry, but she also felt it was necessary. And she had one more harsh thing to say.

"Then you have to stop enabling his behavior. Period. That has to end today. If you want to keep your license, it ends today. It would be better to distance yourself from him completely, and to not be intimate, either his way or in the usual sense of that word. And, if you want to keep your license, you will work closely, under my supervision."

"I don't enable him," Bethany protested weakly.

"Do you call him out? Do you identify the areas where he crosses the line of accepted behavior?"

"But that's his entire life! He doesn't care about norms, social or otherwise."

"Obviously. But do you do ANYTHING to rein in his most egregious behavior? Or do you simply go back to his bed?"

The sobs gave way to what could only be called bawling. Bethany put her face in her hands, and cried hard, her body shaking as tears ran freely. Fran hated herself for how she was making Bethany feel, but it was her own fault for not having been tougher on Bethany over the years. Bethany had, much like Steve, chosen self-medication over treatment, and now the chickens were coming home to roost.

There was a soft knock at the door and Fran got up, rather than call out. She opened the door just far enough to take the food and drinks from Cecilia, then closed the door. She went back to her desk, set the food down, then moved next to Bethany and put her hand on her shoulder.

"Bethany, you know I care for you, right?"

"Yes," Bethany replied, her body heaving.

"And you know I only want what's best for you?"

"What you think is," Bethany replied, finally getting control of her crying.

"We can talk this out, and I promise I won't be as tough, but you had to hear it from me. I've held my tongue long enough. This situation with Steve and Stephanie basically forced my hand. Blow your nose, use the powder room, and we'll have lunch."

Bethany took some tissues from the box on the shelf, blew her nose, then went to the small powder room off Doctor Mercer's office. She washed her face, blew her nose a few times, washed her face again, then went back to sit down. She wasn't particularly hungry, but she knew she had to eat, so she unwrapped her ham sandwich and began eating. Doctor Mercer had her usual pastrami on rye.

"I can't lose my license," Bethany said after she'd eaten about half her sandwich. "It's who I am!"

"I know that," Fran replied. "But the ethical breach is unconscionable. Frankly, as I said, the only reason I'm refraining from doing what I ought to do is that the destruction it would cause would be so great! I can't imagine another set of facts that would lead me to that conclusion, but these do."

"You really think Jennifer, Melanie, and I groomed Steve?"

"What do YOU think?" Fran asked.

Bethany sighed, "I suppose we did."

"And, in the process, you taught HIM how to do it."

"He does NOT groom! The girls all come to him! All he does is treat them as equals and adults."

"And you don't think someone with his experience and, I hesitate to say this, training, doesn't understand how to subtly encourage the girls? Don't you think

your behavior, along with that of your friends, taught him exactly how to go about seducing anyone he chose, without them even realizing it was happening? And if he's still interested in teenage girls, he has the advantage of at least ten years of life and probably close to fifteen of experience. You can't ignore that, even if the teens are mature."

"No, I suppose not. But Steve isn't a normal case."

"No, he's not, and I bear some responsibility for who he is as well. I inadvertently helped make him who he is. I'm sorry I made the 'grooming' accusation, but you have to agree it looks that way. Well, in hindsight, obviously."

"True."

"There isn't much we can do about the past, but in the present we're not talking a normal twenty-eight-year-old going after a normal eighteen-year-old!"

"Are you saying Steve is a predator?"

"I wouldn't, because he's so careful about consent, which is perhaps the ONLY thing you got right in your relationship with him. Perhaps he's not stalking his prey, but he's certainly lying in wait."

"They pounce him, Fran. You know that."

Fran nodded, knowing she was being overly harsh, but she felt she had to be, at least to make a point.

"How about this - he has the ability to create the perfect conditions for girls to walk into his lair, willingly, mind you. But there's still the significant disparity in experience which has to make you question the consent."

"This doesn't sound like you, Fran," Bethany protested.

"No, I suppose it doesn't. I don't think it's true in the general case; I think it's true with Steve. And that's what we're talking about here."

"But not with his sister."

"No, but I believe it was that entire experience with you and your friends and his sister that taught him exactly how to be successful in his pursuit, without seeming to pursue."

"I suppose," Bethany reluctantly agreed.

"As a mental health professional, I have to say he's not good for you, Bethany, but I know you disagree."

"Nobody has been by my side, and accepted me for who I was, and done more to support me, care for me, and love me than Steve."

"And Nick?"

"Is special, and had he lived, things would have been different. Steve and I had a very healthy relationship after I married Nick."

"So you admit before it wasn't?"

"Using your standards, Fran, not mine. But Steve knew what I needed, which is why he introduced me to Nick. And he knew what I needed when Nick died, which is why I was so frustrated. I know you disagree with me, but the only reason I'm alive and am building a practice here in Milford is because Steve was there to pick up the pieces every time. Every single time."

"But don't you see how he's at least partly responsible for causing the problems from which he helped you recover?"

"You mean like assigning my husband TDY to Guam? You mean like shooting my husband in the head?"

"Bethany..." Doctor Mercer said, her voice indicating a light reprimand.

"I'm not lashing out, Fran. I would NOT have survived that without Steve and Kathy. And my accident? It was Steve who got me through it; he sure didn't cause it or do anything that led to it! I was driving home to see my parents. Yes, I stopped to visit him on the way home from Madison, but I'd have made that drive no matter what. And while I know you disagree, vehemently, I was only able to be properly intimate with Nick because Steve helped me survive my rape. And Steve is NOT responsible for my affair in Madison in any way shape or form!"

"I'd ask why you defend him, but you just explained why you feel that way. But, Bethany, you have to see that so much of your life has revolved around him."

"You mean like you and Sam?" Bethany asked.

"I don't think that's even remotely comparable to what we're talking about! To be blunt, I'm certainly not sleeping with a married man. And before you say what that smirk indicates, to one whom I'm not married."

"You could marry your best friend; I couldn't. Fran, I need him."

"I understand why you believe that, and there may well be some truth to that, but you have to stop enabling his behavior. You need to take a step back, even if it's a small one, and use all your training and experience. You need to be the woman who has nearly finished writing her book on recovery from sexual abuse.

And speaking of that, I want to read the proofs of the chapters on incest before you send them to your publisher."

"I gave you copies when I wrote them."

"Yes, but I need to see the edited copies, and any changes you've made. You have to understand why."

"There's nothing in my book about 'Abel and Delilah', not even a hint."

"Just get them to me, please. We also need to talk about supervision, especially in cases of incest counseling."

"I've never, once, even hinted at any positive outcomes or given any support to anyone in that situation!"

"And I'm going to make sure, Bethany. I want your notes from the two incest cases you treated since you came here, as well as those from any new patients. No arguments."

"I don't have a choice, do I?"

"No, Bethany, you don't. You made your choice when you broke the rules. Now, you have to suffer the consequences."

"But you're going to help Steve and Stephanie?"

"Probably, though I want to think about it some more before I give a final answer. You are NOT to discuss this with them in any way. Period. Understood?"

"Understood. He'll be easy; she'll need to be completely rebuilt from the ground up."

"I know what to do, Doctor Krajick. And you are to keep your nose out of this. Completely. They are not your patients and you are far too close to them."

Bethany nodded, took a deep breath, and let it out.

"There is something I suppose I should tell you."

"What?" Fran asked warily.

"Steve and Stephanie had sex in my presence, and Steve and I had sex while she was in the room."

Fran dropped the remnants of her sandwich on her desk, took off her glasses and tossed them onto the credenza, put her hands over her face and leaned back in her chair. Just when she thought it couldn't get worse, it had.

Entry 19911023 C - Bethany Michelle Krajick

October 23, 1991, Milford, Ohio

Once Fran recovered from the shock, she pulled a notebook from her credenza, flipped to the first empty page, and wrote down the date and time. She took a deep breath and let it out.

"When did that happen?"

"December of 1982, right after Kara's meltdown. When Steve went missing, I drove up to Chicago and Stephanie insisted she come with me. I asked Steve to make love to me, though he was reluctant. When he agreed, Stephanie said she wasn't going to let him out of her sight, period. She sat in a bay window and watched us make love. Despite her being in the room, I felt it was the most perfect lovemaking Steve and I ever had accomplished. Stephanie said it was like watching a work of art being created. Steve called it a 'virtuoso performance', which in hindsight, means something different from what I first understood."

"He was showing off for her?"

"Subconsciously, I suspect, but yes, now, almost nine years later, I think that was the case. Anyway, when we finished, Stephanie got into bed with us and we slept together. In the morning, I woke to her orally pleasuring him and watched her do it. She moved to kiss me, after, but that was a line I simply couldn't cross."

Fran took a deep breath and let it out.

"THAT was the line? Not her watching you two have sex? Not sleeping in the same bed? Not watching her fellate him?"

Bethany took her own deep breath and let it out, "It was a close thing. I was kissing him when he had his orgasm. After we got out of bed, Stephanie and I showered together."

"Did you and she..."

Bethany shook her head, "No. It was intimate, but not sexual. It was right after that shower that she told me how she really felt about Steve - that they were made for each other; that they fit perfectly together, loved each other perfectly, and completed each other perfectly. And to the point of her not letting him out of her sight for a second, she threw an absolute fit when he left the apartment to put the sheets in the washer in the laundry room. She and I had been doing dishes, so she didn't notice. When he came back, she went off on him.

"There's something else you need to know; something I learned from reading Steve's journals. Stephanie's offer to kiss me after she'd given Steve and orgasm with her mouth was generated by lust. She admitted to him that she was so excited she didn't think about what was happening. He wrote that in his journal, and I read it at some later point, though I can't remember exactly when it was.

"But things changed later that day when Jennifer arrived. Her parents felt she needed to come to Chicago to see Steve. She and Steve refrained from being physically intimate, but Stephanie and Jennifer were together, though Steve declined to be in the room with them. Stephanie chose making love with Jennifer over Steve not leaving her sight. I'm pretty sure THAT was about ensuring Jennifer would be the girl Steve chose. It wasn't the first thing Stephanie did to try to improve Jennifer's chances."

"And that's why Stephanie did it?" Fran asked.

"Yes, but also because she loved Jennifer almost as much as she loved Steve. It was, if you'll pardon the expression, a strange relationship. In some ways, it presaged Steve, Jessica, and Kara."

"I'm almost afraid to ask, but what were the sleeping arrangements?"

Bethany smiled, "Stephanie claimed Steve, so they slept together. I was going to sleep on the couch, but Jennifer said we could share Elyse's bed, and promised she wouldn't bite...unless I wanted her to."

"You and Jennifer?"

Bethany shook her head, "No. I have done that, but not with Jennifer."

Fran took off her glasses again, rubbed the bridge of her nose, and put the glasses back on her face.

"You may as well just tell me."

"Kathy, Steve, and I on several occasions; Pam, who was my roommate at UW, Steve, and I. And, like Kara, I could do that with Steve, but never one-on-one or with anyone else. He's safe."

"I'm not sure that's a word I'd use for Steve."

"Fran, think about it. Forget social norms and Abrahamic views on virginity. If you want to have amazing, push-the-limits sex, Steve is the safest guy on the planet. If, on the other hand, you're a typical dad, lock up your daughters! And not because Steve will try to steal them, but because they'll go to him."

"And you think that's healthy?"

"To be honest, if I had my choice between complete repression of sexuality and Steve's lifestyle, I'd not only follow his lifestyle, but recommend it. And can I tell you a secret I've discovered, and one I'll discuss in my next book?"

"Next book?"

"About teenage sexuality."

"What's this 'secret'?"

"If society wasn't so repressive, Steve's list would have been WAY shorter."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because he was the one to go to for the thing which your parents, pastor, and most of society told you NOT to do, but which a few of your friends had done and said was amazing. You could have an outrageously good time with a guarantee that nobody would know unless you told them. I've known Steve since eighth grade and I can't think of a single instance where HE said anything to any guy. Sure, some guys know, because their girlfriend or wife told them. But Steve kept his mouth shut. The girls all told each other to seek him out. Even Kara heard about him from another girl and sought him out!"

"Are you arguing that Steve is a product of society?"

"Aren't we all?" Bethany asked. "Granted, in his case, mix in his mother, his sister, Jennifer, Melanie, and me, and well, yes. And leaving the incest aside, he's a successful businessman, a fantastic dad, a great friend, an expert lover, and, within the defines of his marriage, a good husband."

"You do realize that you didn't use a superlative there."

"Given the complexities of the relationships, I'd say 'good' is the right word. Actually, as an outside observer, I'd say he's a great husband for Jessica, and an OK husband for Kara. But you know what? He is what Kara needs, and she's happier than any woman I know, present company included. Jessica, well, you know what medical training does from your counseling with your doctor friend from Rutherford."

Fran nodded, "I'm still not sure how he survived. One of his friends didn't."

"Which led you to even more sessions with Laura than usual. You never told me the details, and I know you can't, but it obviously affected you."

"By that point, I considered him a colleague, even though he'd just finished medical school. And it wasn't just that, Bethany. He had his own personal tragedy as well. But we need to get back on topic. Are you sleeping with Steve?"

"We've shared a bed, as you know, but we have not been intimate in the way you mean. And, as I've said before, that's because of HIM, not because of me. Whatever faults Steve may have, he knows how to take care of me better than anyone ever has, and that includes my dad and Nick."

"How are you and your mom getting along?"

"It's not like Steve and HIS mother, but, we're not. She blamed me for breaking up with Steve, and our relationship never improved. My dad, on the other hand, has never once objected to my relationship with Steve. Dad has known I needed Steve from my very first date with him. The only thing he ever said to me was to remember that if I made vows to Nick, I had to keep them. And it was said in a loving way."

"You know I have to ask."

"And I should give you Steve's response to patently offensive questions that call my integrity into question! No. From the time I started seeing Nick, until his death, I have not violated my vows to Nick. Steve won't violate those vows, even though Nick was murdered."

"How hard are you pressing him?" Fran asked, with an arched eyebrow and a knowing smile.

"I suppose it depends on what you mean. I've asked him to make love and tried to tempt him, but never in a way that would lead to him doing anything which he felt was wrong. Does that make sense?"

"When we're talking about you and Steve, I don't expect anything to make sense except to the two of you. And you know that's part of my concern. He and Stephanie need a lot of help, and your relationship with him is very likely to interfere. That's why I asked you to take a step back."

"I know Steve, Fran. The thing you're going to have to do is keep him from becoming depressed over what happened."

"Please don't discuss his treatment with me, or with him, or with anyone else. You simply can't be involved."

"But you are going to treat them? Both?"

Fran nodded, "I think I have to. Anyway, it's almost time for my next appointment. You and I have quite a bit to talk about."

"We do."

Bethany drank the last of her Sprite, said 'goodbye' to Doctor Mercer, and left the office. Doctor Mercer made a few notes in the notebook she used when counseling Bethany, and then made additional notes in Steve's notebook. The entire situation was a mess and fraught with all kinds of danger. She finished making her notes, used her private bathroom, and was back at her desk when Cecilia announced that Angie had arrived for her session. Doctor Mercer got the correct notebook from her credenza, got up and went to the door. She opened it, and stepped out.

"Hi, Angie, go in and have a seat, please."

"OK," Angie said, moving through the door into Fran's office.

"Hi, Mrs. Stephens," Fran said, walking over to her. "How has she been?"

"She's keeping her regular schedule with church, martial arts, and work. She took her medication without arguing with me every day since her last appointment."

"Good. How are you and your husband doing?"

"About the same. Doctor Mike and his daughter stayed with Angie last Friday evening so my husband and I could go on a date. That helped a lot."

"Good. You should do that more often."

"That's what Mike said. He mentioned it to the priest at Angie's parish and there's a woman there who seems to be able to deal with Angie's situation. We're hoping they can become friends."

"OK. I'll talk with Angie. Are you going for coffee?"

"Yes. I'll be back in forty-five minutes."

"I'll see you then."

Mrs. Stephens left and Fran went back into her office, closing the door behind her.

"So, Angie, how are you doing today?"

Entry 19911109 A - Stephanie Ann Adams

November 9, 1991, Milford, Ohio

Doctor Fran Mercer was sitting at her desk on Saturday afternoon, waiting for Ed and Stephanie to arrive. She'd spoken to Stephanie by telephone after the revelation from Steve about the conversation through the car window, and was very concerned. Distance made things difficult, as more intensive counseling was indicated, but given the circumstances, there wasn't much Fran could do other than work with what she had. And what she had was, to put it in non-clinical terms, a complete and utter mess, at least with regard to Stephanie. Her talks with Steve had been fruitful, as they always had been, even if at times Fran didn't agree with the solutions or outcome.

"Doctor Mercer, Mr. and Mrs. Krajick are here," Cecilia said over the intercom.

"Show them in, please."

Cecilia brought Ed and Stephanie into the office, then closed the door behind her as she left.

"Have a seat, please," Fran said.

Stephanie and Ed sat on the couch and Doctor Mercer sat in her counseling chair which faced the couch at an angle.

"Ed, I just have a few things to say, and a few questions, then I'll ask you to go get a cup of coffee."

"OK," he said.

"First, are you both eating right, getting enough sleep, and working?"

"Yes," Ed said.

"Yes," Stephanie agreed.

"Where are you employed?"

"I work for the City of Chicago in the Planning Division," Ed said.

"I work for Arthur Andersen as an auditor," Stephanie added.

"Do you travel?"

"When necessary for the client, yes."

"How often is that?"

"So far I've had two out-of-town assignments. When that happens, I'm away during the week, usually traveling Sunday evening and Friday evening."

"What do you do when you're traveling? I mean in your free time?"

"Read, watch TV, exercise, and sometimes hang out with my co-workers."

"And Ed, what do you do when she's away?"

"Hang out with Steve, Pete, Terry, or one of the other guys, or watch TV."

"Are you sexually active?"

"Yes," Ed replied. "Nothing has changed in that regard, really. As I told you on the phone, I knew about Steve and Stephanie when we were teenagers."

"I'll want to talk to you about that at some point, but for now, if you don't mind, I'd like to spend the rest of the session with Stephanie."

"I'll go get some coffee at Frisch's," Ed replied.

He kissed Stephanie on the cheek and left the office, closing the door behind him.

"Let's start with some questions I'm going to ask you every single time. Please don't be upset, because they're important."

"OK," Stephanie answered warily.

"Have you been alone with your brother in any context since we spoke on the phone a week ago?"

"No."

"Are you feeling depressed or angry?"

"Both, I guess."

"Have you had any thoughts of hurting yourself or others?"

"No."

"Have you fantasized about being intimate with your brother?"

Stephanie nodded, "Yes, in the way you mean."

"Let's assume, for our purposes, that 'being intimate' means having any kind of sexual contact. Last question, do you commit to not acting on those fantasies and to not having any intimate contact with your brother before I see you again in two weeks?"

Stephanie cracked a slight smile, "Interesting way of putting it."

"It's like with recovery programs - commit to not doing whatever it is you're recovering from for one day. Then make the same promise the next day, and so on. I get the sense that your mind works like your brother's, so I can tell you the point - it's fairly easy to stay sober for one day; it's fairly difficult to stay sober for the rest of your life. BUT, one day, day after day, IS the rest of your life. It's about setting a simple, achievable goal. And I can share this, because Steve gave permission - I'm asking him every time we speak about any kind of incestuous thoughts about his daughters."

"Oh, come on!" Stephanie protested. "That's NOT him, and it never will be!"

"Clinical evidence says that a teen or young adult who engages in an incestuous relationship is significantly more likely to abuse his children. I *have* to ask those questions. And he responded as I expected - with outrage. You'll likely be outraged by questions I ask you as well. It's the nature of this kind of counseling."

"I was the predator, Doctor Mercer," Stephanie said firmly. "He never had a chance. My mom made sure of that."

"Let's begin there - with your mother."

"The Queen Bitch," Stephanie growled angrily. "She made his life a living hell!"

"What's your first memory of your mother?"

"I guess I was four or five and she was screaming at Steve for something. I don't know what it was, but she was in a full-on rage about something he said or did, but I'm not sure what it was."

"Where were you living at the time?"

"We had just moved to Ohio from Arizona and had a house in Glendale. We didn't live there very long before we moved to Anderson Township, and then finally, Milford."

"Steve told me that you moved a lot."

"Which is why I think he'll never, ever move from the house in Kenwood."

"What else do you remember from when you were four or five?"

"That my mom obviously loved Jeff more than Steve. At that point, she was OK with me, I guess. I mean, I don't remember her treating me badly until Steve and I became close."

"Which was when?"

"Around the time he met Birgit Andersson."

"How old were you then?"

"It was the Fall of 1976, so I would have been nine."

"What happened between ages seven and nine?"

"You mean from deciding I wanted him?"

"Yes."

"He was involved in Cub Scouts and baseball, and we didn't spend a lot of time together."

"Who took him to his den meetings and his baseball games, if you know."

"Mom was the Den Mother. I know now it was so she could control everything. Dad took him to baseball practice and games, and I went to his games."

"Did your mom go?"

"Mostly she didn't. She would stay home with Jeff."

Doctor Mercer made some notes, and not for the first time, wondered what it was that had caused Judy Adams to fixate on her middle child, abuse her eldest child, and neglect her youngest child. Unfortunately, without lengthy interviews with Ray and Judy Adams, she was unlikely to uncover the source, though she had a strong suspicion that Judy was suffering from some form of mental illness.

"So Steve and your dad got along?"

"I suppose. They would go to hockey games when they still had them before the team folded. But Mom basically wouldn't support him being in Boy Scouts and he wasn't good enough to keep playing baseball."

"Did he not make the team?"

"He didn't try. Later on he told me he knew he was only so-so, and once he discovered computers and chess, he didn't care about playing baseball."

"What position, if you know?"

"Pitcher and sometimes other positions if they needed a sub."

"OK. Let's talk about how you felt when you read the books."

"Curious more than anything. I mean, I had an idea of what had to happen because I knew boys and girls were different, but I hadn't quite figured it out."

"Did your mom give you the books?"

"No. She got them for Steve, but they went onto shelves in the hallway closet that served as the library. If Mom bought something, it HAD to be someplace public. She tried that BS with the computer, too. Did my brother tell you about that?"

"Yes, but let's not skip ahead, please. Why did you read them?"

"Like I said, I was curious. I read the 'girl' book first, and it made a whole lot of stuff clear that I had only guessed about. Them I read the 'boy' book and more stuff made sense. Then I read the 'sex' book. And finally the last book about pregnancy and childbirth."

"Tell me about how you felt when you read the 'sex' book."

"It was an 'Aha!' moment, when suddenly everything made sense - you know, anatomy, sex, and babies. Of course, Jesse, Matthew, and Birgit already know all of that, at least at a level they can understand."

"Birgit is three, right?"

"Yes. But she knows how babies are made. I mean, once you see a boy, even a baby, it kind of dawns on you that things go together."

"Back to you and the 'Aha!' moment - is that when you decided you wanted to be with your brother?"

"It was a long time ago, but I'm pretty sure the idea just popped into my head fully formed - if I was going to do that, then I was going to do it with Steve. And it would be to most perfect thing that ever happened."

"What did you do?"

"Well, I'd discovered from riding my bike that rubbing myself felt good, though I don't think I managed to give myself an orgasm until I was around nine or ten. Once I'd read the book, I thought about Steve when I did that."

"How often?"

"Not very, really. I was always afraid my mom would find out and I'd be in huge trouble."

"Your family is Roman Catholic, right?"

"Well, Mom and Jeff are. Dad is an atheist. Steve and I are agnostic, though I lean more towards atheism than Steve does."

"Did you go to parochial school?"

"No. Only Steve did. I never quite understood that, and neither of us asked."

"So what happened when you were nine?"

"My mom became even bitchier than she had been, and I felt bad for Steve, so I started doing things to help him stay out of trouble with my mom. I loved him

and I just couldn't stand how badly she was treating him. Of course, once she noticed we were getting close, she started in on me, too. It wasn't too bad at first, but it made me even more determined to protect Steve and love him, and to show him how much I loved him. But I knew he wasn't ready."

"But you were?"

"Yes, though I knew I needed to be at least twelve or thirteen so I had developed and looked like a woman. The problem was, there was a four-year difference, and that kind of ruined my plan."

"Which was?"

"That Steve and I would be each other's firsts, and that as soon as I was eighteen, we'd run away from my mom, pretend to be married, have kids, and live happily ever after. If we moved away from Milford, nobody would ever know, and my ID would always say 'Stephanie Adams'."

"You don't think your parents would have tried to find you?"

"Probably, but it would have been pretty easy to disappear, perhaps even overseas. Steve was really good with computers even before he went to IIT and could have landed a job easily."

"And if you were found out?"

"I didn't think that far ahead; I was nine!"

Doctor Mercer nodded in acknowledgement. "When you became close, what did you do?"

"Just stuff together, really. Talked, watched TV, and played with our friends."

"Did you hug? Cuddle? Kiss?"

Stephanie shook her head, "No. I mean, there were occasional hugs, but we weren't really a huggy family. Dad pretty much never hugged any of us, and Mom, well, only Jeff once the teams formed."

Another clue that there might be something seriously amiss with the relationship between Judy Adams and Jeff; Doctor Mercer made some additional notes in her notebook.

"What was the first thing you remember doing to flirt or let Steve know how you felt?"

"The funny thing is, he did it by complete mistake."

"You made it fairly clear you started it."

"I did, by snooping on him. This was after Birgit went home and he was fooling around with a bunch of girls. I discovered rubbers missing from the box in his drawer and said something to him."

"When did you start snooping on him?"

"About the time he was with Je...uhm, his first; the older woman."

"What happened?"

"I confronted him about kissing Jennifer. He said she was a friend and that's when I asked him why three rubbers were missing."

"How much did you know about what was going on?"

"I figured out about Birgit Andersson when I found a blonde hair on a towel in the bathroom. And I knew about his 'appointments' with Melanie. There were other girls, but I don't remember exactly when I knew who, though later I knew them all."

"So, you confronted him, and then what?"

"He told me I shouldn't snoop, I told him he shouldn't leave his rubbers in the closet where I could find them, implying Mom could find them, and then I stuck my tongue out at him. I'd seen other girls do it, and he reflexively said what he said to them - 'Don't stick it out unless you plan to use it!'. I knew he was trying to be gross, so I went 'Eww' but that wasn't how I really felt about it. Later on I found out he'd used them with, uhm, MH, but by then he'd been with Jennifer, Melanie, Birgit, his first, and I guess two of Melanie's cousins."

"When did you find out? I mean, for sure?"

"When I read his journals. I made sure Mom couldn't find the box he locked them in when she went snooping, which is how I knew about them."

"I've read some of the entries, but not by any means all, or even most. Were they explicit?"

"VERY," Stephanie said. "Written like erotica."

"And you were reading this at age nine?"

"No, it was later. But I'd already decided what I wanted to do long before then. It just gave me some ideas that weren't in the books my mom had bought."

"So then what?"

"I put my plan into action. I decided I'd ask him stuff about puberty and sex and get his advice. We were talking about all the problems he was having with girls between the time Birgit left to go home and she died, and I tried to bring up masturbation and he freaked out and told me he didn't want to hear it. I told him he was the only one I could safely go to for advice about sex and boys. He objected, saying I was only eleven, but relented when I pointed out I didn't have anyone else to talk to, and that I could ask a boy who I knew, but said that boy would likely want to show me. He actually got a girl pregnant, so I'm totally glad I avoided him,"

"What did you think about your brother being with other girls?"

"I actually encouraged him to have sex with lots of girls at that point."

"Why?"

"Because I didn't want him to have a steady girlfriend so that after we were together, he wouldn't have to break up with anyone. Well, if he'd been with Jennifer, it would have been OK, but she moved right after he got back from Sweden."

"When did you realize you were attracted to Jennifer?"

"About the time she and Steve first had sex."

"And by then your original plan, if you will, wasn't possible."

"That's right."

"So you continued talking about sex. Did you flirt or hint?"

"Massively, but Steve didn't see it, or couldn't, I guess, because I was his little sister. It was Melanie and Jennifer who clued him in. He freaked out at first, but basically I wore him down and he agreed he would, but only after I had my period. That happened right before he left for Sweden and I tried to get him to have sex with me, but he said he would only do it after I looked like a woman. He was delaying, hoping I'd change my mind, but I didn't."

"When did he first see you naked?"

"Right before we made love. I'd seen him before that, though."

"Where?"

"I snuck into his bathroom when he was showering, and I watched him have sex with, uhm, VP."

"Did he know about it?"

"Not until afterwards when I told him. I had actually tried to spy on him with MH, but I couldn't really see anything."

"Tell me about VP."

Stephanie laughed softly, "It wasn't like I had to do anything, really. I think you know the house had an indoor swimming pool, and there were windows facing out to it, as if it had been an outdoor pool - from the den, the hallways, and my parents' room. Well, my brother didn't remember and didn't close those blinds, so I just stood carefully and watched the entire thing."

"What did you think?"

"That it was totally hot and I was totally jealous and I REALLY wanted to do it."

"That was when you were eleven?"

"Yes."

"When you say you watched the entire thing, you mean everything they did?"

"Yes. Because of the location of the window, I had a full view of both their bodies and watched while they had sex."

"Without too many details..."

"Oral, both ways, and vaginal."

"And you weren't upset or bothered?"

"No. Steve was, when I told him that he'd left the blinds open, but it made me excited."

"Did you masturbate?"

"Yes. I think that was the very first time I gave myself an orgasm."

"And you said you saw him naked other times?"

"Yes. He tried to get me to stop, but I was persistent and eventually he just gave up. But when I tried to show him myself naked, he was insistent and stopped me. Like I said, he didn't see me until two days after my fourteenth birthday, when we made love."

"Did you start hugging?"

"Yes, but basically that was all. It was when he came home from Sweden and told me that I was a 'stone cold fox' that the hugs became sexy, and we had a few kisses. But he wouldn't do anything more."

"Why your fourteenth birthday?"

"Because my parents were going to be out of town starting the day after my birthday and the Perv was going with them, so Steve and I had the house to ourselves."

"Remember, please use his name. Was there any hesitation or reluctance on either of your parts?"

"There was a big blow-up over Becky when Steve cheated on Kara with her, but we eventually got past it."

"Big blowup?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"I slapped Steve across the face. He didn't tell you?"

"He probably did. I didn't read any of my notes about that period because I wanted to have a relatively clear mind for this session."

"Refresh my memory, please, did this blowup happen before or after you were intimate?"

"Before," Stephanie answered. "As I said, we got past it."

"Your parents never had a clue how you felt about Steve? And what you intended to do?"

"No. I was careful not to do anything around them that might give it away, and Steve basically let me set the tone and flow. We had plenty of time together when our parents weren't around to talk and stuff. They didn't even think twice of leaving us home when they went to Myrtle Beach. I'm pretty sure my mom was happy not to have us along, and Dad was always pretty aloof."

"So what happened once they left?"

"We went shopping to buy food so we could cook together. That evening we had a romantic dinner and both went to our own beds. The next day," Stephanie said dreamily, "was the best day of my life."

Entry 19911109–B - Stephanie Ann Adams

November 9, 1991, Milford, Ohio

"Who actually initiated things that morning?" Fran Mercer asked Stephanie.

"I suppose it depends on how you mean. We were both nervous and at least a bit scared. Steve recognized that and I admitted being afraid, but I looked him in the eyes and said that I had been looking forward to that day from the time I was seven, ever since I knew what sex was in a little kid kind of way. I told him I'd imagined what it would be like every single day, but I was worried that he would reject me and that I was afraid I wouldn't be able to convince him. I pointed out that his reaction to Melanie and Jennifer telling him what I wanted had been negative, but that eventually he decided he would fulfill my desire. But, strangely, it was at that point that I began to be scared about actually doing it. As I told him, I liked the idea of doing it, but the reality frightened me."

"You told him all of that?"

"Yes, and he said that if I'd changed my mind, or that if I was too nervous, or was afraid, then we wouldn't do it and we'd just spend time together as brother and sister, and that no matter what, he'd love me more than he could possibly say."

"What were you thinking when he gave you the opportunity to back out?"

"I was afraid to do it, but I was even more afraid to not do it! I loved him so much that I couldn't imagine not making love with him, no matter how scary it might seem."

"Because it was incest?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"No, because I was a virgin. But I knew that Steve would never hurt me, which made me less afraid. I loved him so much, that I just had to do it. I almost started crying because I was afraid it wasn't going to happen."

"Then what?"

"I told him I loved him and I asked for a hug. He just took me in his arms and held me until I asked him to make love to me."

"Do you remember what you said? Exactly?"

"I said 'I want you to make love to me, big brother. Please.' and then he scooped me in his arms, kissed me, and carried me down the hall. I asked him to take me to my bed, because that's where I wanted it to happen."

"Did you talk about birth control?"

"He knew I was on the Pill. I'd told him that months and months before."

"Was your bed turned down? Or had you done anything special to prepare your room?"

"No."

"So what happened next?"

"I took off my t-shirt and sweatpants, but left on my bra and panties, and a waist chain Steve had given me."

"When did he give you that?"

"For my twelfth birthday. He obviously appreciated what he saw, and I asked him to undress."

"How did you feel?"

"Once I saw him? I wanted him so badly my body ached. I asked him if he wanted to see me, and when he said 'yes', I took off my bra and panties, then asked him to help me turn down the bed."

"I don't need specific details, but what happened next?"

"First I got a white towel from my closest and put it on the bed under where my butt would go, then we got into bed, with him on top of me. We kissed, and I asked him to do just what I said, which was to take me, but be gentle. He was worried about hurting me, but I told him that I wanted him to take my virginity, and that a long time before that day I'd told him I wanted his penis in my vagina, shredding my hymen. I urged him to do it, and raised my hips. He did, and it hurt a bit, but only for a second. I asked him to show me my blood, and when he did, I ran my finger through it, then spread it on his lips and mine, then asked him to make love to me, and he did."

Fran was making notes in her notebook, but was having difficulty fathoming a fourteen-year-old formulating those thoughts, let alone acting on them. Under normal circumstances, Doctor Mercer would assume that Stephanie had been groomed, but all the evidence suggested the opposite – that Stephanie had been the one grooming her brother, though that term didn't really describe what had happened between the two siblings. And Doctor Mercer knew, from her conversations with Bethany, that there was much more that had happened.

"How would you describe how you felt?"

"During? It was exhilarating. After? Loved and very happy."

"Did you have an orgasm?"

"Yes."

"What happened after?"

"I asked him to taste us, you know, our combined taste. He put his finger in me and then put it in my mouth, and then he put his tongue in me. And then we French kissed."

"Was that the end of the encounter?"

Stephanie laughed softly, "Not even close. I asked him to have anal sex next, and then, after he washed, I gave him a blowjob. After that, we showered and we decided not to wear clothes. We had lunch, and after lunch we cuddled in bed for an hour and then I asked him to make love to me for as long as he could, which he did. It was amazing and I had multiple orgasms. Afterwards, we showered, and then stayed naked. We had dinner, and when we went to bed, he gave me a bunch of orgasms with his tongue, and then we made love once last time before falling asleep together in my bed.

"When we woke up the next morning, I asked him to, and I'm quoting, 'fuck me really hard', which he did, and then we had our morning swim together, our first time naked in the pool. Later that day, we had lunch with Bethany, and she asked me how I was. I told her I was a bit sore, but that I was very happy. She hung out with us for the afternoon, and then after she went home, Steve and I made dinner then had another night of wild sex, this time in his bed. I guess you could say I was insatiable."

"And you initiated everything?"

"Yes. I basically had a plan for what I wanted, and Steve complied with every single request."

"So the rest of the week?"

"It was basically non-stop sex, but lots of cuddling, too. And we had a dinner party for our friends which Steve and I hosted. It was almost as if we were husband and wife. Then sadly, too soon, my parents and brother returned from their trip and our honeymoon was over."

"Honeymoon?"

"I told you my dream," Stephanie sighed. "That Steve and I could move somewhere and nobody would know we were brother and sister, and we could live as if we were married and have kids."

"How did you handle the change?"

"I hated it, but I understood the risks, so we went back to our old routine of swimming together and hanging out. Eventually, though, after maybe a week or so, I couldn't take it anymore and snuck into his room for sex after everyone else had gone to bed."

"Your parents obviously had no idea."

"Obviously, and they still don't. It was right around this time that Dad finally began to put his foot down about how Mom was treating Steve, and that actually gave me a bit more freedom as well."

"Do you know why your dad changed?"

"I think he was unhappy that Steve was going to go to college in Chicago, and was afraid that he'd never see Steve again."

"Because of your mom," Doctor Mercer stated.

"Yes, but I knew Steve would come back to see me, despite my mom. Part of it would be poking his finger in her eye by being successful, but mostly it was because he loved me too much to stay away."

"Did you continue to sneak into his bedroom?"

"Yes, but we also used an apartment he had access to, which was a lot safer, obviously."

"How long did that continue?"

"Off and on until Steve proposed, and then it was over."

"You had other encounters, right?"

"You mean with Steve and other people? Yes. Jennifer, Steve, and I made love together, and there was the time with my friends Trish and Shelly, but we didn't do anything with each other."

"Any others?"

"I, uhm, am not sure I should say."

"Bethany?" Doctor Mercer prompted.

"Yes, but she and I didn't do anything with each other, just with Steve."

"Is Jennifer the only same-sex encounter you've had?"

Stephanie frowned and shook her head, "No."

"Why the frown?"

"Because it was a mistake."

"When did it happen?"

"When I was seventeen. It was one of the two girls I mentioned before."

"So you were with Jennifer, and then those two other girls?"

"The other way around. Steve called it 'Cherries Jubilee' in his journal."

Steve letting Stephanie read his very detailed journals was a significant factor in Doctor Mercer's mind, even if there had been no apparent attempt to use the journals to encourage Stephanie's behavior. It was something to investigate later.

"In broad terms, would you describe what happened?"

"I invited...uhm...T and S over to the house. They both really liked Steve and thought he was hot. When they arrived, I suggested we all go swimming, naked, and we did. Afterwards, we all showered together to rinse off the chlorine, and then I had Steve make and eat a 'Stephanie Sundae'."

"Which is?" Doctor Mercer interrupted.

Stephanie smirked, "Fudge sauce, whipped cream, and cherries, put on my breasts and mons, and then eaten."

"OK. Go on."

"Anyway, he did that, then did the same for my friends, then we had sex in front of my friends who were totally in awe. After that, he took their virginities in my bed, including having anal with S. We also took a bubble bath together."

"They were both virgins and came to the house with the intention of losing their virginities?"

"Yes."

"With the others watching?" Doctor Mercer asked.

"Yes."

"How did you feel?"

"It was wild watching my brother have sex with my friends and it turned me on!"

"And your friends?"

"S was fine, and really got into sex; T fell in love with Steve and it took some time for her to get over it, but she never regretted having sex with him. She ended up staying that night, though S went home. T watched Steve and I make love and he made love to her again."

Doctor Mercer made more notes, and was still uncertain about how to proceed, beyond getting the basic timeline correct, and who Stephanie's partners had been. The real hard work would be, in effect, rebuilding Stephanie from the ground up, because her love for her brother was clearly the very core of her being, and unless something was done to redirect that to an appropriate kind of love, Stephanie would continue to seek out a physical relationship with her

brother. And redirecting it might shatter Stephanie's personality to the point where she might never recover. It was an agonizing dilemma and Fran needed time to think about how to proceed and to discuss her plan with Laura Paulus.

"What happened next?"

"I invited Karin Andersson to come visit from Sweden, telling her that if she didn't come, Steve was going to propose to Kara, which I desperately wanted to prevent."

"Why?"

"Because I was sure Steve belonged with Jennifer, and I wanted him to be with Jennifer, because then I could still live out at least part of my fantasy."

"When did you become interested in Jennifer?"

"Right around the time I turned twelve."

"Are you attracted to other women?"

Stephanie shook her head, "No. Just Jennifer. I guess it's like the way she's attracted to Steve, or Steve's wives to each other."

"But you had another same-sex encounter?"

"Three years later, with S."

"OK. We'll come back to that. What happened next?"

"Well, Steve and I went to Chicago to see his skater friend Katt, and to find an apartment for him. Steve was with Katt and her friend, who he'd been with

before, but we also had a chance to make love the last night. After we came home, he and Kara got back together."

"Back together?"

"Oh, right, I left out the part where her dad discovered they were screwing and tried to keep them apart. But Kara's mom intervened and her dad relented. Anyway, because of Kara, Steve and I kind of cooled things off and I had sex with Ed."

"Your then future husband?"

"Yes. But something was off. I mean, it felt good, but it just wasn't the same as with Steve. Not long after that, Karin came to visit, and then Jennifer, and that's when she, Steve, and I made love to each other, and Jennifer and I made love. And I basically achieved my goal of keeping Steve from getting engaged."

"Had you stopped?"

"For a time, but once we'd been with Jennifer, it started again."

"Then he went to Chicago?"

"Yes, and I could only see him on breaks, but it worked out for us to see each other once a month or so, and we always found time to make love."

"Did you have other partners?"

"Just Ed at first, but we broke up and I went out with different guys."

"Were you intimate with them?"

"Some."

"How many is some?"

"Seven during my Sophomore year."

"And more after that?"

"Yes. Pretty much never more than twice with the same guy, and it kind of depended on how often I could see Steve."

"Does he know about any of this?"

Stephanie shook her head, "No. Well, Ed, but not about the others."

"Do you know how many?"

Stephanie smirked, "I have a list. Thirty-three including Ed, Steve, Jennifer, and S."

"All in High School?"

"No. Some were in college."

"They were just, well, affairs?"

"Except for one," Stephanie sighed. "A college student named Jorge who was Steve's best friend."

Doctor Mercer nodded, "I know a lot about him, though not that you two were seeing each other seriously."

"He was going to ask me to marry him, so I beat him up and broke up with him."

"Beat him up?"

"I had a violent streak. I actually was arrested and plead guilty to disorderly conduct after the cops saw me trying to beat up my brother. And there was another incident when I was attacked and ruptured a guy's testicle."

Doctor Mercer frowned, "The criminal charge; what happened?"

"Supervision and expungement. I don't have a record."

"OK. We'll come back to those incidents and your relationship with Jorge," Doctor Mercer said, realizing that things were even more problematic than she'd envisioned. "Just to round things out, when was your same-sex encounter with the girl you called 'S'?"

"October of Senior Year, which would have been 1984."

"Have you been faithful to Ed since you got back together?"

"Yes. I never thought about being with anyone else once he came back into my life. Well, except Steve. And Ed knows everything."

What amazed Doctor Mercer was the number of people who knew about Steve and Stephanie, yet not only kept quiet then, but had kept quiet over the years. That was strange, but everything about this situation was strange, even for cases of 'consensual' incest.

"OK. That gives me the broad outlines, and now I'd like to delve more into your relationship with your mom and dad."

Entry 19911109–C - Stephanie Ann Adams

November 9, 1991, Milford, Ohio

"The Queen Bitch and her enabler," Stephanie growled.

"I'd prefer you referred to them as 'Mom' and 'Dad', please."

"Oh, I'm sure you would. So would they."

Doctor Mercer nodded and let it go for the time being.

"When did your hostility for your parents begin?"

"You mean my age or what happened?" Stephanie asked.

"Both, actually."

"Around age seven when I realized my mom heavily favored Jeff and was basically doing everything she could to torture Steve."

"Torture?"

"What would you call it? The Queen Bitch was like a terrorist who had taken a hostage and my dad suffered from Stockholm Syndrome."

"Steve seems to have a very good relationship with your dad."

"Steve makes excuses which I simply don't buy. My dad enabled my mom's behavior and he's never apologized nor done anything to fix it. She's mentally ill and needs help and he refuses to see it."

"Let's refrain from trying to make diagnoses of others and focus on you."

"It's all her fault! She did everything she could to destroy my brother's life! I wouldn't be here if that hadn't happened!"

"Because you and your brother would have run off together?"

Stephanie shook her head, "Because he would never have made love with me, no matter what I wanted."

"I thought you felt that was a result of your mom's behavior."

"Maybe Steve said that, but I sure didn't! I knew, before I realized what a bitch my mom was, that I wanted to make love with Steve, to be his first, for him to be my first, and for us to be together forever."

"At seven?"

"As soon as I knew how sex worked, I was positive," Stephanie declared. "And when we made love, it was perfect, as if our bodies were made for no other purpose than to fit together."

"So the two things are separate in your mind - your mom's behavior and your desire to have sex with your brother?"

"Yes, but as I said, it couldn't have happened without her being the way she was. Without her abusing Steve, I could never have convinced him to come to my bed."

"Can you identify the first thing your mom did that made you begin feeling the way you did?"

"I honestly don't remember, but I do remember she was always critical of anything he did. No matter what it was, she had something negative to say about it. That never stopped; well, not until the four moms told my mom to shut the fuck up or she'd never see her grandkids again. They also forbid The Perv from coming near their kids. Steve never stood up to her that way; he just tried to avoid her."

"Do you have a theory about why?"

"A combination of survival and wanting a decent relationship with my dad. He ran away to Sweden for a year then escaped to Chicago. But even then, he was who she made him. He took a long time to get past her bullshit."

"And you?"

"It didn't affect me the same way."

"Why do you think that is?"

"Because the only thing she really did was try to wreck our relationship. She wasn't insanely critical of me the way she was with Steve. I'm sure he told you some of the insane stuff she did, like with the computer."

"Yes, he told me about that. Let's go back to the books about sex. After you read them, what was your first experience with regard to sex?"

Stephanie frowned, "Hearing my parents."

"Were you listening?"

"It was hard to miss," Stephanie groused. "Their room was next to mine and after they fought, my mom was LOUD."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Sick to my stomach."

"Did you ever have the idea of marrying your dad?"

Stephanie shook her head, "No Elektra Complex. That was about as likely as Steve having an Oedipus Complex!"

"Do you have any good feelings about your dad?"

"I suppose in the sense that he finally came to his senses enough to support Steve, but I don't forgive him for the fact he let my mom abuse Steve for sixteen years. And to continue to try to abuse him after that."

"You really should let go of some of that anger."

Stephanie narrowed her eyes and declared firmly, "Never!"

Doctor Mercer made a few notes and decided to leave that be for the time being, as she could tell it agitated Stephanie.

"Did that change your thinking about sex at all?"

"You mean, like encourage me or discourage me? No. I just couldn't understand why my dad would want to do it with my mom when she was such a bitch!"

"Was she like that to him?"

"I suppose not."

"What did they fight about?"

"Steve, mostly."

"Mostly?"

"I'm pretty sure at some point my dad cheated on my mom. They basically didn't talk for a couple of weeks."

"Steve never mentioned it."

"I don't think he had a clue, and I didn't ever share it with him because I wasn't sure."

"How did you find out?"

"One of my friends told me that her mom said my dad was 'hung like a horse'."

"How old were you?"

"Eight. I knew my dad had been to my friend's house, but I thought he was friends with her dad."

"And she told her daughter?"

"No, my friend was eavesdropping and her mom told another mom that she'd done it with my dad."

"And you didn't tell Steve because you weren't sure?"

"I thought my friend might be lying, or that her mom might be lying. Maybe they were, but I don't know. And the LAST thing I wanted to talk with anyone about was my parents' sex life!"

"Going back to your thinking about sex, did you have thoughts about anyone besides your brother? Movie stars or rock stars or teachers?"

"No. Only Steve."

"Did you formulate a plan?"

"Yes, but because I was four years younger, it didn't work out the way I had hoped. I was only ten when he was with the older woman and then Birgit."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Sad, really. I wanted to be with him, and only him, and have him be with me, and only me."

"And once you found out, you said you encouraged him to be with other girls to try to keep him from having a permanent relationship?"

"I hoped he and I could be together forever, either just the two of us, or if he had to have a wife, that it would be Jennifer."

"And you were prepared for a lifelong relationship that involved you and Jennifer having sex?"

"The same as Kara with Jessica, I suspect."

"You mentioned a mistake in that regard. A same-sex encounter with," Fran consulted her notes, "a girl you called 'S'. You said it was a mistake. Can we discuss that?"

"Sure."

"You said it was during your Senior year, in October of 1984. Will you tell me what happened?"

"Well, S and T were my best friends and we hung out together a lot. One day it was just S and me; I'm not sure where T was that day. Anyway, we were hanging out at my house and nobody else was home. We got to talking about the 'Cherries Jubilee' and things just kind of got out of control."

"How so?"

Stephanie sighed, "There's something thing I didn't tell you about what I called 'Cherries Jubilee'."

"What's that?"

"T and S licked the fudge, whipped cream, and cherries from my breasts while Steve was licking off what was on my mons."

Doctor Mercer was peeling an onion, and it didn't help that Stephanie was withholding information. That was a common thing in cases like this, especially when the victim didn't think they were a victim, though this case wasn't nearly so cut and dried.

"OK, so what happened?"

"Well, S and I were talking about it, and started teasing about it. She dared me to do the same thing to her that she'd done to me, and when I did, we both got so worked up we spent three hours fooling around."

"By which you mean?"

"Sex, which included joint cunnilingus."

"Did you orgasm?"

"Repeatedly! But it wrecked our relationship because it went further than either of us had intended. We still hung out, but it wasn't ever the same again."

"And that's why you regret it?"

Stephanie sighed, "It wasn't really the sex, it was how we both reacted to it afterwards. We both really got off, but then we both kind of realized we'd made a foolish mistake. We never really could get past it."

"Do you have an idea why?"

"I think she was afraid of becoming a lesbian. It was right after that she found a steady boyfriend, and she married him."

"And you?"

"I'd say I'm straight, but I've had sex with two girls and I enjoyed it. I guess it's not all that different from Kara, really. She had one failed relationship, and now one very successful relationship."

"How much do you know?"

"Everything. Steve wrote about it in detail in his journal. He was basically distraught and part of his recovery was writing about it. I think you told him to do that."

Doctor Mercer nodded, "When he was fifteen, or so. How far did you read?"

"Basically until the year he got married, though there were times he didn't let me read for various reasons."

"How did that make you feel?"

"Like he was cutting me out of his life. I realized then I'd lost him to Kara."

"But you continued your physical intimacy after that."

"It wasn't the same. I could tell he wasn't as into it as he had been. It was like the spell was broken when he decided to marry Kara."

"How did you feel about that?"

"Resigned, I guess. But then she walked out on him and I thought maybe there was hope. But he had Stephie Grant, and he was determined to somehow repair things with Kara, which he obviously did."

"And your last encounter was the summer before he asked Jessica and Kara to marry him?"

"Yes. And I knew he was doing it only because he loved me. He obviously didn't have the desire, and he didn't feel the spark, but he loved me so much he agreed to do it one last time."

"You had stopped at times before."

"He had. I didn't really want to, but I knew if I pushed too hard, he'd end it. So I bided my time."

"And took advantage of his emotions to manipulate him?"

Stephanie sighed deeply, "Yes."

"And if you had the chance to run away with him now?"

"I still want him," Stephanie said quietly.

"Which is why you asked if he could role play and have sex with you?"

"Yes."

"You understand what that would cost?"

"If it could be permanent? I wouldn't care."

"But you know it couldn't, don't you?"

"Yes," Stephanie admitted.

"And not just the cost of all of his relationships and his business, and not just the destruction of his family, but a lengthy prison term for him when you were eventually found out. And nothing you could say would prevent the government from doing that."

"I know," Stephanie said quietly.

"I think I have enough of the outline. I'm sure we'll cover things in more detail as we continue your sessions. I need you to promise me three things, and I need to ask a pair of questions."

"Sure."

"First, do you promise to tell me the complete, honest truth going forward?"

"As best I can remember, yes."

Doctor Mercer smiled, "Your brother couches his responses in the same way."

"Of course! We all know that 'truth' is about perception."

"How about you commit to not intentionally lying to me or to try to deceive me."

"I can do that."

"The second question is whether you intend to try to entice your brother into having sex?"

"I don't know," Stephanie sighed.

"An honest answer is better than a dishonest one," Doctor Mercer said.

"Two promises, then. The first is that you will, each day, resolve not to act on your desires about your brother. And the second is that if you feel those desires are overwhelming, that you'll immediately call me. The third one is that you'll keep an appropriate separation from your brother."

"Sure."

"Promise."

"I promise."

"OK. Then I think we're finished for today. I'll speak to you on the phone a week from Monday, and then see you here two weeks from today."

"OK."

"Just focus on your husband and work," Doctor Mercer said. "Let's see if Ed is back."

Doctor Mercer got up and went to the door and saw that Ed was, indeed, in the waiting room. She invited him in.,

"We had a good session," Doctor Mercer said. "And Stephanie has made commitments to me about her treatment and her behavior. The most important one, and one you need to help with, is that she needs to keep an appropriate distance from Steve. You need to help with that."

"Of course. Steve and I have spoken about this. He'll cooperate and I'll make sure it happens."

"Good. If anything happens that concerns you, call me, day or night. My service will have instructions to get in touch with me immediately so I can return your call."

"Thanks, Doctor Mercer," Ed said.

"Thanks," Stephanie said halfheartedly.

"Then I'll speak to you a week from Monday," Doctor Mercer said.

Ed and Stephanie left, and Fran completed her notes from the session. She had several things to talk to Steve about, as well as some things she wanted to discuss with Bethany. But those would wait for the regular work week, because she needed to get home to Sam and the girls.

"You look wiped out," Sam said when Fran walked into the house.

"Gee, thanks," Fran replied with a sigh.

"Worse than you thought?"

"I'm not sure that's possible, but it's going to be very, very difficult, and very stressful, both for me and the young woman."

"Need some stress relief?" Sam asked. "The girls won't be here for about an hour.

"Fran smiled, "If that includes a shoulder rub before and a shower after, SOLD!"

Sam smiled, "It does!"

"Then what are we waiting for?"

"I have no idea!"