# Part Two:\_\_ Hickeys from Rickey\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

So about a year and a half later, I stepped out of my car and made my way towards Taylor’s house.

And not a *lot* had changed; at least, at this point in my life. I had gotten a new job after I left UltraTan, and that’s where I met my friend Hadley, but that’s still before we became roommates. I was still living with my parents, I hadn’t been doing a lot of dating, and I was still working my ass off in college. And any other day of the week, I would have gone all-out on bitching about each and every one of these topics at length if anyone had given me even the slightest lead-in.

But coming over to Taylor and Justin’s house for the first time in way too long was always a good way to remind me that I should have been more thankful for my chance to stay in the nest my momma and daddy had made for me.

In the time that it had taken me to go from an aspiring Sophomore to a soon-to-be Senior, Taylor and Justin’s cute little prebuilt out in the country had dilapidated noticeably. Not in the sense that the paint was chipping or that there were holes in the roof or anything like that, but just that things seemed… trashier.

The eggshell siding had started to brown around the corners a little. The wooden steps that led up to their front door looked more worn. The lawn was a little patchier, and where the grass hadn’t faded to dirt it was just a little long and unkempt. Justin, who sat outside and nodded at me from the porch, was much the same—his dark brown hair had grown longer from underneath his backwards baseball cap and his facial hair had come in similarly patchy. There were multiple cars parked in the driveway, and of the two that I recognized, I noticed that Taylor’s wasn’t drivable. The rest of them, a series of lifted trucks with one having a particularly obnoxious Carolina Squat, belonged to people that I didn’t know.

Yeah, no, nobody else was coming out to this party—at least not anybody that I knew. The rest of the girls had either moved out of town or were kinda done with Taylor. Like, Kelsey would sometimes come over if I came over, but that was pretty much the extent of our high school friend group by that point.

Everyone else had either moved away, or I barely recognized.

“There she issssss~!!” Taylor drawled at me as soon as I walked through the screen door, her arms wide open. “Everyone, this is Hanna, say *hi Hanna~!*”

And Jesus y’all, I barely recognized Taylor at this point.

She was sitting on the armchair that Justin’s brother used to game in before he had moved out. The one that spun around so that he didn’t have to get his lazy ass up to turn and face the couch when we were all partying. Like the chair, Taylor had seen better days. Her belly was tucked into the roomy crotch of some high-waisted cutoffs that sunk real deep around her thighs and hips. I knew for a fact that she wasn’t fitting into anything that she used to wear back in high school, but she’d clearly bought the same top in a bigger size some time ago. And I say some time ago, because it rode up on her stomach when she raised her arms to greet me.

As I walked closer to Taylor, she slowly got up from the armchair and waddled towards me with open arms. Despite the changes in her appearance, her smile was just as big and warm as it had been back in high school.

"It's *so* good to see you, honey!" She exclaimed while embracing me tightly. I could feel her massive belly pressing against me, making it hard for us to get too close, “You wanna drink?”

It took a moment for me to regain my composure after being engulfed by Taylor's embrace. I could tell that she wasn’t *gone* yet, but she was already pretty white-girl wasted by the time I pulled up. When we finally pulled away from each other, it honest-to-God felt like I was coming up for air. She waddled in front of me, leading me further into the bustling party where she and Justin were the only people that I recognized. As her shirt rode up along the back, her sausage fingers picking idly at the hem in a failed attempt to keep her whale tail from showing, I could see that that poor butterfly tattoo along her crack was faring just as well as the birds on her arm.

“Hanna’s my best friend from high school, so *be nice.*”

For a long time, I wondered what she meant when she told them to *be nice* to me, but in hindsight I’m pretty sure it was because she had talked shit about me to all of them at least once.

Which, yeah, fuck her for that, but there’s still *so* much more to cover so I’ll shut up about it for now.

“Can someone grab the Birthday Girl and her bestie a beer, *pleeeeeease*?”

I am not exaggerating when I tell you that she had put on at least another eighty pounds since I last saw her, like, in person. Shoot, maybe even a hundred. I don’t know.

I mean obviously that’s small potatoes to how she wound up, but you gotta remember that it’d been a year and a half since I had last seen her with my own two eyes. Taylor was a *master* at deceptive selfies. With enough contouring, the right angle, and careful cropping, Taylor was still small enough that she could still take a really convincing thirst trap—and that’s *mostly* what her Facebook and Instagram were becoming by this point. In all of the photos she used to post on social media, I could never really get a good idea of just how big she was getting. Like, yeah, it was obvious that she was putting on weight, but only in shots where someone else tagged her in the photo.

Seeing it first-hand told a different story; Taylor was getting to be a *pre*-tty big girl by now and…

Oh *gawd*, this is when she started seeing that guy Justin used to hang out with—I almost fuckin’ forgot about that!

Okay.

*So.*

I told you about how Taylor and Justin’s marriage was going downhill, right? Mostly it was because of the stuff that I told you earlier—Taylor blew up like a tick, Justin started to drink more, all that stuff—but what *really* set it off was that she had been seeing one of Justin’s friends behind his back. Like, one of his *best* friends. He went to Alternative School when we were kids, so I never met him, but apparently he and Justin started working at the same plant and…

*Ugh.* Okay. This is just, like, one of the best parts. So deal with me.

So; Taylor literally *only* spent time around Justin’s friends and family. *Sometimes* her momma and daddy, but usually that was just around the holidays. All of us were busy and Taylor lived out in Bumfuck, Nowhere. So it’s not really surprising. But Justin would have this Rickey guy over all the time since they were best buddies at work. And Taylor had stopped going to work at Lucy’s because she wrecked her car and Justin couldn’t drive her to work all the time. So there were just, like… *days* when Taylor was just laying around at home while her husband was at work, and *days* where Rickey would be sleeping off a hangover on their couch, and sometimes there were *days* where these two things would be happening at the same time, and…

Well, there was literally a whole junk room with a functioning mattress in it that Justin literally never checked.

If you catch my drift.

I met a lot of people at that birthday party, but Rickey’s the only one that’s super important because he’s gonna be a *major* player in the game a little further down the line. And while I didn’t exactly have the best time on the day that my alcoholic friend could finally drink legally (and did so to embarrassingly large levels), it did kind of get me back in the door a little to Taylor’s life. Enough at least that Taylor and I were messaging more often and we started to meet up now and then again, but catching up with Barbie’s Little Redneck Dreamhouse was always a wild ride.

“So Rickey and me were at the Waffle House up here one time, and I ain’t been back since.” Taylor told me one time when we met up for lunch near campus, “We *thought* we saw Justin up here and that would *not* have been good.”

“I’m not really into all that anime stuff, but Rickey and Justin watch it all the time.” I remember being able to *hear* Taylor’s eyeroll on the other end of the line, “But y’know, sometimes I’ll watch it with Rickey on days he doesn’t have to work, and we’ll toke up and watch a little while we… y’know…”

“He might as well just move in with us.” Taylor had said it for about the fortieth time one night, thigh-deep in denial that this wasn’t a horrible, awful idea as she scarfed down her tray from Cook Out, “I don’t have a car or a job, Rickey does, he and Justin get along, it’s literally perfect for everyone and it just *makes sense*.”

I swear to God that this was easily one of the most entertaining and stressful things I had ever heard in my *life.*

And I know it *sounds* kind of mean, but it wasn’t like I was pushing her to do anything. Because by this point, I was just messaging Kelsey about all of the shit that Taylor would unload on me whenever we hung out. But at the same time, I couldn’t help it. It was scandalous, it was interesting, and we knew most of the key players involved, so it was hard *not* to be invested. I’m pretty sure that if I hadn’t been messaging Kelsey like, every other two weeks while all of this was going on with Taylor, we wouldn’t still be friends to this day. And in my defense, I tried *multiple times* to try and talk her out of some of her bullshit decisions.

But at the same time, *Taylor was cheating on her husband with the guy who moved in with them.*

So to reiterate; my good friend Taylor is now in a situation where she doesn’t have to pay bills, where the most exercise she gets is cleaning up a two-bedroom prebuilt out in the country, doesn’t have a car so someone else has to drive her anywhere that she wanted to go, is now getting dicked down by a guy who thought she was hot *after* she started getting fat.

Is it *really* any wonder why *this* is when she started to get *big* big?

Like, her whole world had shrunk down into that dinky little trailer. Not only could she not leave when she needed to, but most of the time she just didn’t *want* to. Getting up and getting dressed, putting on nicer clothes than whatever she waddled around in all day was just too much effort. She never had a lot of money, because she didn’t have a job, so it wasn’t like she could afford to go out and eat with her new redneck friends all that often. And then there’s her wanting to squeeze in as much time with her new boyfriend on days that her husband was at work, so that provided *lots* of incentive to stay home three days out of the week…

And this is gonna sound really mean, and I don’t know what kind of validation comes from getting dicked down by a guy like Rickey on the regular, but it couldn’t have been enough for Taylor to feel like she was as hot as she acted like she was.

I really think that it was just more that she finally realized that she’d never be able to lose weight without getting up off her ass and doing something about it. But then again, I guess having someone who didn’t bitch at her for being fat *and* the thrill of her affair was just enough to make her feel like it was Real Housewives of the Trailer Park, because the longer that all this went on, she started getting *insufferable.*

Whenever she’d repost a photo from when we were younger, there was a fifty-fifty shot that she’d caption it something like “throwback to when I thought I was fat” so she could fish for compliments.

Every time I tried to vent to her about how I hadn’t dated in a while, Taylor *always* told the same stupid joke about being “enough woman for two husbands.”

And then she got another bird tattooed on her middle finger so that she could use it to “tell skinny bitches to fuck off.”

Fuck, who was I talking to…

Oh shit, it was *Laura.* Right, Laura was the first person outside of Redneck Land to notice that something was up with her and Rickey and Justin. After we had both graduated, we had gotten together for the first time in *years* and we wound up talking about itbecause Laura was gonna go on some big Mission Trip and wanted to say bye to some old friends, and we started talking about old times. Which inevitably lead us to our good friend Taylor…

“So are Taylor and her and Justin’s roommate…” there was a long pause, some vague hand gestures, and some choice facial expressions that filled in that intentional blank, “*Y’know…*”

I *unloaded* on that girl. I *gladly* filled her in on everything that had been going on until that point. The house, her drama, Rickey, the fact that the three of them were *living together* and Taylor’s dumbass husband didn’t realize that his wife and his best friend were screwing around behind his back. Poor Good Little Christian Girl Laura had to go to Guatemala with the last thing she knew about Taylor being that she’d gained two hundred pounds, started cheating on the boyfriend that we’d all known since middle school, and was on a one-way ticket to turning into a barge of white trash.

“Lord hammersy…” Laura sounded like she’d just run a marathon after I caught her up with the current Taylor drama, “Like, Becca got married out of high school but like… she didn’t turn out *like that*—”

“That’s because it’s not a ‘getting married’ thing.” I told her plain and simple, “It’s a *Taylor* thing.”

And then she went on some spiel about how she was glad that she gave herself to God and was still saving herself for her future husband, and I stopped really paying attention. Laura’s drama is a whole ‘nother story.

So, okay, fast forward a little bit more. I *really* feel like it’s starting to sound like all I did back then was wonder what Taylor was doing, but I *was* doing other shit. I was still trying to find a better job, me and Hadley moved out of that crappy little apartment and cosigned on that crappy little rental house, I’d started seeing Chris, and my life just got busy again. Y’know, it happens.

But that means that I wasn’t really *around* for a lot of *this* part of the story. So if I’m wrong or if you hear something different, just remember that I’m working backwards from the *rest* of the stories that I’ve heard.

Over the next few months, nothing *really* changed. Taylor, Justin, and Rickey still tried to host parties, but as more and more drama accumulated in the weird little social circle that they all belonged to, no one wanted to come over because it was just this *powder keg* of stupid bullshit that was gonna explode at any point. Taylor still didn’t have a job because she had her husband and roommate to mooch off of, and she could usually finagle some spending money out of her parents if she needed to.

Like, Taylor’s *weight* changed, obviously. I don’t know if Rickey was some kind of chubby chaser or if it was just the thrill of doing all of this behind Justin’s back, but the two of them had a pretty active sex life as I understand it even as Taylor started to get kind of up there. She and a few of her friends that she’d met through Justin’s friends would hang out and day drink on days when they didn’t have to work or when they didn’t have their kids. Justin had reached a point where he’d rather just bring home whatever his wife wanted from the drive-thru than fight her on cooking anything, so he (and unbeknownst to him, Rickey) were blowing through money just keeping Taylor’s lazy ass fed. It all accumulated in this environment where Taylor literally just didn’t have to *try* to do anything.

All she did was lay around, eat junk food, and get humped all day, so she was living her best life.

Until (again, as I understand it) Justin started to get suspicious.

Yeah, right?

Like *now* he’s getting suspicious.

I don’t know what set it off, but I think it’s because someone told Justin about it? By this point, Rickey had lost his job at the plant and had started working at Marco’s pizza, so there was no reason for anyone to cover his ass anymore. He left on a pretty sour note, and I think he just pissed off the wrong guy.

Either way, whatever happened, Justin started to get suspicious of his best friend and his wife spending so much time together. All of the sudden, Rickey chipping in to buy something nice for Taylor seemed a little strange. All of the sudden, maybe it *was* weird that they spent so much time in Rickey’s room once they’d gotten it all cleaned out. And maybe the reason why they seemed so uncomfortable around him had a lot less to do with him, and more about what he might have *caught them doing*.

So after a little while of Justin’s gears starting to turn underneath those baseball caps of his, the dynamic of their weird little living arrangement had changed, and I don't think anyone really knew how to proceed. Justin was starting to spend more time at home with her and Rickey, she and Rickey were starting to turn on each other because they both thought that they could pin the blame on the other person, and Taylor must have been panicking because her gravy train looked like it was about to derail, but she couldn't do anything without making it obvious that something weird was going on.

And I remember getting little bits from her Facebook around this time, but there was no way that I could have known the *extent* of what was happening.

So because Justin was getting more suspicious he would alternate between like being a passive-aggressive little manbaby about it and trying to slap a band-aid on his and Taylor’s relationship. He had started trying to be intimate with her again (I’m imagining *specifically* whenever Rickey was around) and that started putting ideas in Taylor’s head about making it work with her husband. *Meanwhile* Rickey is talking about the two of them moving out (I don’t know where, but considering where he wound up after all this, he must have been talking about his parents’ place) and trying to convince Taylor to leave Justin.

All the while, Taylor is stress-eating up a storm. She’d always done that—ever since we were kids—so it wasn’t all that shocking to anyone who was paying attention that her weight was still on the rise.

But then she started having morning sickness.

*Yeah.*

I think, because everyone in her life (including Taylor) were just used to how big she was by this point, no one really tried to put two and two together. The weird cravings for junk food, her belly getting bigger, and how tired she was feeling all the time just lined up with what had become her baseline personality. She was always claiming that she didn’t feel well to get out of housework, she routinely ate enough to feed the three of them comfortably, and she didn’t *do* anything around the house. How was anyone supposed to pivot from “Taylor’s a lazy fatass” to “Taylor’s a pregnant lazy fatass” just because she’d packed on even more weight?

But you have to remember, she was actively having sex with both Rickey *and* Justin at this point.

See? I *told* you that Rickey would go on to become an important player down the line.

Now, once Taylor got pregnant, she decided that it *had* to be Justin’s. Even if she wasn’t really *sure* of whose it was, she just *decided*. Because Justin was her husband and Justin was the one who owned the house, and Justin was just the easier person to barnacle herself to. And while none of us are really sure *which* one of them Maverick’s dad is…

C’mon. It’s *obviously* not Justin.

Nevertheless, Taylor and Justin were all each other all over again. It was like the affair had never happened—everything was going to be okay because God had blessed them with a baby and it was a sign that they needed to focus on each other and whatever other band-aids they could slap on their marriage as it momentarily stopped falling apart.

Rickey either moved or got kicked out, Taylor quit drinking and smoking weed, and everyone just buzzed around her like she was the queen of some country-ass beehive. Taylor’s cultivated inner circle of Justin’s coworker’s current and former plus-ones were happy as could be once she made the announcement, and I’m willing to bet that all of them were having the exact same thoughts that I was, but never brought it up to her.

As for me, I still stay out of *that* conversation. Taylor and I aren’t that close anymore, but even if we were, what was I going to say? "Hey, are you sure that baby is Justin's?"

No thanks. That's not my place.

But here's the thing: Taylor and Justin’s marriage might not have been on the rocks anymore, and Taylor might not have been drinking anymore, and she really *had* been excited about turning what used to be Tyler’s room, then the Junk Room, then Rickey’s room into her kid’s room. But she didn't really make any lasting changes to any of the behaviors because she *wanted* to. She made them because she was *pregnant*. And all that pregnancy would give her (y’know, besides stretchmarks and Maverick) was a new reason to be lazy.

The pregnancy was just another excuse for Taylor to not do anything. She'd already been lazy and complacent, but now she had a "valid" reason for it. With her parents getting back in the picture, wanting to support their grandchild in the best way that they knew how, Taylor *still* didn’t have to get a job. She had surrounded herself with people that would continue to reinforce her self-centered attitudes by showering her in praise about how beautiful she was or how she was “glowing”, and as much as Justin tried to lay off on stressing out his wife throughout the pregnancy, all Taylor did was everything that she did or didn’t do before.

Laying around, eating her way through Justin’s paycheck, not cleaning, and stick her nose behind a screen.

I can’t imagine that her not being able to drink helped her attitude much. She started to get a little princess-y for someone who waddled around, crammed into sweatpants all day. Looking back at the photos, you could have told me that she was pregnant and I wouldn’t have known it—y’know, she kind of already carried a lot of weight in her stomach to begin with, so Maverick was kind of lost underneath all that belly—but it was obvious that she wasn’t denying herself much of anything at this point.

Don’t get me wrong, Taylor got huge while she was pregnant with her first kid, but just like her moving out with her boyfriend straight out of high school was a bad idea because she didn’t have her parents around to keep her on the right track, getting pregnant set some habits deeper into stone. Now that she had a reason to lay around and eat to her heart’s content, I don’t think that there was anything that could have convinced her to do otherwise.

Because of her size, everyone around her was telling her to take it easy during the pregnancy—her weight was a complication enough, but any undue stress could have been really bad.

And so for nine months, Taylor sat on her ass, continued to eat like shit, and got everything that she wanted from everyone around her while everyone doted on her for the baby’s sake…

That… kind of explains a lot about where you know I’m going next, right?