

# Hail Mary

A Memoir

By Mary Goggin

*with* Liza Lentini

Contact: Liza Lentini

917 572 6542

[lizalentini@gmail.com](mailto:lizalentini@gmail.com)

## PROPOSAL CONTENTS

Overview	2
Market Analysis	4
Author Bio	6
Writer Bio	8
Promotion	10
Chapter Summaries	12
Sample Chapters	
<i>Chapter One</i>	17
<i>Meet the strictly Catholic Goggin family and their oldest daughter Mary, an innocent honor-student who one day, at the age of 12, decides it will be easier to be in trouble than to try to live up to God's expectations.</i>	
<i>Chapter Two</i>	34
<i>Mary seems to finally find her "people" in a gang of local junkies, but just as her parents begin to suspect something's not right with their daughter, she hitchhikes to Florida, and finds misadventures with a pedophile trucker.</i>	

## OVERVIEW

Why is Mary standing naked in the middle of the street with her teeth smashed out?

Bronx-born Mary Goggin was raised in a strict Irish household to immigrant parents seeing a better life in the USA. Some might say her trouble began when she started dreaming about boys. At the age of 11, Mary stole a cheap anklet and fibbed to friends a boy had given it to her as a gift. When her mother spied the metal trinket, Mary's mother knew she had a sinner on her hands. Because back in Ireland when a cow was pregnant, they tied a rag to the front right ankle.

By the time she was 12, the head nun at school told her she was pregnant. Not understanding what pregnant was, and confused as to why she was always in trouble, Mary decided to turn to sex and drugs to find out exactly what all the fuss was about.

By 12 she was shooting heroin and turning tricks. After being sent away to County Cork, Ireland to live with nuns, she robbed them and was sent home. Among her many misadventures she got fired from the famous Mustang Ranch, tied sheets together to enable her escape from convent school, got venereal disease from Janis Joplin, robbed a blackjack dealer after they passed out drunk together, gets committed at Bellevue for trying to kill herself, and, in an even more tragic turn, had a boyfriend that was tied up with barbed wire, doused with gasoline and burned to death. She turned tricks across the country, from the grimmest of bathrooms, to being the highest paid call girl on NYC's Upper East Side. And that's just the beginning.

When Mary gives birth to her daughter it tugs at a new place in her heart, drive her home, and challenging her self-worth. It takes some time, but her love for her child eventually, at long last, is what forces her to choose life.

*Hail Mary* is the story of one young woman's path towards (and occasionally away from) salvation. It's a story of a girl ripped to shreds by religious repression, only to re-define her faith so it could save her life. It's an inspiring story of addiction and recovery described with unsurpassed wit and wisdom.

## MARKET ANALYSIS

Books with overlapping themes include:

- Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (Scribner, 1999. 368 pages): This international best-seller opened America's eyes to life in a devout Catholic Irish family. Not Irish-American, no hooker daughter, no comedy.
- Augusten Burroughs's *Dry* (Picador, 2004. 320 pages): Burroughs's does an excellent job at bringing wit and humor into the trials and tribulations of recovery. No prostitution, no religious undertones, no epic adventure.
- Mary Carr's *Lit* (Harper Perennial, 2010. 432 pages): Like *Hail Mary*, *Lit* ruminates on a life of early alcoholism which drove her to bad men and eventually the brink of madness. No religious repression, not Irish (Texan), not a hooker.
- James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* (Anchor, 2005. 448 pages): Frey's poetic and later debunked best-seller about trying to get sober. Made up mostly, he wasn't a hooker, not comedic, not religious.
- Jeanette Walls's *The Glass Castle* (Scribner, 2006. 288 pages): Eccentric family that wanders the country avoiding trouble and eventually settles (happily) on homelessness. No prostitution, no religion, no drugs.

*Hail Mary* is an inspirational book about addiction and survival, as well as an epic adventure of struggle for self-discovery that is as hilarious as it is heartbreaking.

While there are many books (as illustrated here) that allow their readers to experience their journey from addiction to recovery, none also embrace coming of age in the 1960s under a childhood of religious fanaticism. *Hail Mary* instructs its readers on the pitfalls of religious constraints, and the lure drugs and prostitution have on a very young girl. Without a speck of self-pity, *Hail Mary* strikes the ideal balance between instruction and grown-up fairy tale – with an eventual happy ending.

## **AUTHOR BIO**

Mary Goggin

[www.marygoggin.com](http://www.marygoggin.com)



Mary Goggin spent 15 years perfecting her skills at the “oldest profession.” This career got her hired (and fired) from the infamous Mustang Ranch, and led to many years as an addict of drugs, alcohol, and death-defying adventure.

Born in the Bronx in 1952, first-generation American Mary was raised in a strict Catholic household by her Irish immigrant parents. She spent her adolescent years shuttled from reform school to stricter reform school, and eventually left for a life in drugs and prostitution. Mary got sober in 1988.

In 1997 Mary received a scholarship to Marymount Manhattan College where she graduated cum laude with a degree in Theatre and Performance in 2001. A member of AEA, AFTRA, and

Goggin-Lentini/Hail Mary/ 7

SAG, Mary now works as an actress and print model. She has worked with such actors as Kate Winslet and Gary Busey.

She counts her 32-year-old daughter as her greatest achievement. Today, Mary resides in the Bronx, caring for her ailing mother.

## WRITER BIO

Liza Lentini

[www.lizalentini.com](http://www.lizalentini.com)

Liza Lentini spent a year interviewing real-life mistresses for a prospective “how to”, which she then fictionalized and turned into her novel, *How to Be a Mistress*. In years prior she worked in the self-help industry ghosting, structuring, and coaching authors on their books and articles, most notably best-selling authors Barbara Sher (*Barbara Sher’s Idea Book, Dare to Live Your Dream Audio Series*) and Dorothy Leeds (*PowerSpeak*).

She has written for such varied publications as the men’s magazine Gear, the literary journal Grit, and the science magazine Discover, which published her ground-breaking investigative feature on a rare brain disorder in children called Landau-Kleffner Syndrome (November 2007). In October 2007 Discover also published her feature *One Universe Under God: Creationism battles for the hearts and minds of America’s teachers*, which was honored by the National Center for Science Education (NCSE).

As a playwright, she has been produced world-wide since the age of 19, winning honors from The Pinter Review Prize for Drama, Trusts Playwrights’ Festival, Playwrights First, Great Platte River Playwrights’ Festival, the Lillian Hellman Prize for Drama, and the Siena College International Playwriting Contest, among others. In 2007 Liza was chosen as Manhattan Repertory Theatre's Playwright in Residence. Liza operated her own writing workshop in midtown Manhattan from 2001-2008 teaching her 8-week, story-based method.

From 2006-2010, Liza founded and managed Elephant Ensemble Theater, a charitable organization which toured New York City hospitals with educational, interactive plays Liza wrote herself.

Currently, Liza's researching and writing a book about famed children's book author/illustrator Robert Tallon as a commission from The American Illustrator's Gallery. She also writes lifestyle pieces for the Caribbean-based monthly Pure magazine.

Liza received her undergrad degree in English Dramatic Literature from Wheaton College in Massachusetts and her MFA in Playwriting from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

She is a member of the New York City Writers' Group, the Romance Writers of America, and the Dramatists Guild.

## **PROMOTION**

The author is a professional actor and avid member of the survivor and recovery community.

Mary's involvement in the following organizations will enable her to promote and sell the book:

- Mary is a frequent speaker at Alcoholics Anonymous, and will use her connections at AA to pre-sell and promote the book.
- She attends more than thirty events yearly through her ties in the entertainment industry, including SAG Life Raft, SAG Award Events, and SAG Conversations.
- Mary is a member of three entertainment unions which would promote her book to thousands of members: Screen Actors Guild (SAG), American Federation of Television & Radio (AFTRA), and Actors Equity Association (AEA).
- Mary has appeared at press conferences for "Off The Streets" (as an ex-prostitute) to promote the important issue of the health of street walkers.
- Mary is a frequent speaker and guest artist at her alma mater, Marymount Manhattan College, and would schedule a speaking engagement and promotion at the school. She would also have access to their database of over 240,000 alumnae to promote her book.
- Mary is also an alumnae of the Convent of Mercy, Rosscarbery, Co. Cork, Ireland. She would also have access to their alumnae list.
- Mary has more than 25 years as a teacher and counselor. In addition to AA, Mary also works with, Greymour Retreat Center (Garrison, NY).
- Mary was in New Orleans for two weeks after Katrina doing animal rescue and is in

constant communication with numerous animal rescue groups, including Second Chance Pet Society, (outreach 500), New York Cat Coalition (outreach 500).

- Mary is a member of the White Horse Theatre Company, and would promote the book through their database of 2,000.
- Mary is a member of The Aisling Irish Community Center of New York (for Irish Emigrants). She will promote the book through their website and book signing events.
- Mary is very active on Facebook (500 friends), Twitter and Linked In.
- Mary has 10 years' experience working in at-home sales for Corporate Rain [www.corporaterain.com](http://www.corporaterain.com). She is the company's top performer.
- Some of her past and present clients (approx.. 50) are Interbrand, Brand Trust, Harvard, Ann Klein PR, Gallop.org, and is willing to contact all for book promotion.
- Mary appeared in a in print ad for the Exelon Patch (for Alzheimer's) and speaks regularly at Voices of Inspiration events for Novartis pharmaceuticals.
- Member: Alzheimer's Association, attending frequent meetings and training seminars.
- Member of the Myosetsuji Temple, which has a New York membership of 1000.
- As an attractive actor of screen and stage, Mary is a dynamic, engaging, and eloquent speaker.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

### 1. Holy Mary

Twelve year old Mary Goggin's good Catholic girl image is shattered when some spreads a rumor that she's sleeping around. It's the catalyst for a polite breakdown, causing her to revolt against her Irish parents' strict religious upbringing which, until now, had been a powder keg of repression and anger. But all wasn't that bad in 1960's Bronx, before the Throgs Neck Bridge, when Mary played on the beaches and swamps with friends, dreaming of going steady with a boy. How quickly, though, innocence is lost.

### 2. White Rabbits

Mary is instantly traded as tender for drugs by her new "friends". Once her parents begin to suspect something's not right—Mary's nodding off, jewelry and money are always missing—she concocts a plan to escape to California.

After all, California is the home of Disney Land, American Bandstand, and Haight Ashbury. Fun and drugs is the new way of life. With the exception of a slight derailment, due to a pedophile trucker, Mary and her friend make it to Florida. And they would have gotten to California, too...if only they hadn't been arrested.

### 3. European Vacation

Most 14-year-old girls would be intimidated by the idea of reform school in Ireland, but not Mary, who's excited about her new adventure.

Her parents tried a total of three times to send her away—first to a boarding school in Dublin, then to the farm where her father was born—but each time she made it back to the Bronx, she became haunted by bad habits. Mary finds a strange comfort in the Sisters of Mercy (their third attempt), excited about the school play, not touching drugs of any kind. She makes friends through her music, carrying around a portable record player, winning them over with Herman's Hermits and her newest dance moves. But fearing she's been caught for stealing money, she flees to Cork City, where she manages to cop some hash. She's arrested once again and sent back to the Bronx.

#### 4. Shadows on the Wall

Mary heads for Greenwich Village, where she changes her name to “Princess.” She spent the first week of 1968 tripping on acid at the Electric Circus, and getting gonorrhea from a guy that claimed to have gotten it from Janis Joplin. She hangs (topless) with Jefferson Airplane, and is later gang banged by the Pagans, a local biker group.

After threatening suicide, Mary’s thrown into the Bellevue psych ward for observation. But after acting up, she’s put in a straightjacket and put in isolation, where all she can do is reflect on the recent adventures that brought her there.

#### 5. Street Meat

Once released from Bellevue, Mary heads back to the Village. Taking no chances with the pain of reality, she makes sure she’s so stoned she doesn’t know where she is or who she’s with. Hanging with a car thief named Paris, she’s arrested by association, and thrown in the woman’s house of detention on Greenwich Avenue. She spends a week kicking her meth addiction in her cell, hallucinations make her believe her skin’s falling off and infected with bugs.

While in lock up, she sees an article in the paper that her boyfriend Sunshine had been tied up with barbed wire, doused with gasoline and torched to death. Sunshine was the one guy she’d brought to the Bronx for dinner. Her Mom and Dad even approved of him.

Three court dates later, the court wanted to dismiss the charges and let this 16-year-old minor out of jail, but her parents begged to keep her there. Mary reacts with rages and fits in jail. A nun in jail tells Mary’s parents about the wonderful world of Synanon, a group of “religious” people looking to spend their days in worship and prayer.

Detoxed and released into general population in the House of Detention, she falls into the arms of New York City’s finest: The Black Panthers. It’s through their encouragement that Mary has her first lesbian experience.

#### 6. California Dreaming

In 1969, with her parents’ blessing, Mary joins the famous California cult, Synanon, but after two weeks she decides to run away. Had she run one block the other way, she would have made it to the beach, but in the opposite direction, looking for drugs, there was no escape. Deciding that cult life was better than street life, Mary heads back to the cult, where she is put on probation, and fully introduced into a labor ritual. Turns out, Synanon is less about God, and

more about heroin. Mary spends most of her spare time “kicking it” with a bunch of junkies with shaved heads (signifying you ran away). Synanon is even more sinister than that. Members like Mary endure ritual abuse and sleep deprivation, and are told that their cult leader Chuck is their new God.

#### 7. Brown Sugar

The cult receives a substantial donation of chocolate, which they all eat as “meals.” Mary comforts herself with eating and weighs in at 200 pounds, developing bulimia (before she knew the word). She follows the cult to an abandoned paint factory. The whole clan slept in dorms, but if you had a boyfriend you got a room to consummate your affection. Mary had a boyfriend named Dennis, and even though she caught him cheating, she married him Synanon-style, with 80 other cult couples at the same times, in their Tomales Bay facility.

#### 8. Just a Good Old Boy

After her wedding, Mary heads out across the country seeking donations for the cult’s “cause”. Landing in Mississippi, attempting to get a donation of a truckload of chickens, Mary meets some real good old boys, who proudly pull out their photo album of lynchings. Mary chooses not to mention that her new husband is black. Mary heads back to the cult convinced she needs a better gig, and plans her escape.

#### 9. I Loves You (Long Time) Porky

It’s 1975. While on a plane back to New York City, Mary meets Porky the Pimp, a “Gentleman of Leisure” who prides himself on some of Manhattans classiest girls. (Most of them, in actuality, are street girls.) After the meeting, Mary calls Porky from her waitressing job and he arranges her first trick at NYC’s Tudor Hotel. Maybe it’s easy money, but the john and the blow job she gives him are a disgusting experience. Afterwards, Porky comes in to “seal” their pimp-ho relationship: with sex. Her told her to shave her armpits.

Through it all, Mary makes a friend in fellow call girl Christine. Mary starts working with Christine at her Upper East Side high rise.

#### 10. Thank You, Come Again

Mary learns the ropes from Porky and another fellow-prostitute Christine. Unfortunately, after he goes to jail for tax evasion, Mary feels unprotected and “chooses” Carl as her new pimp. It’s through him she services famed fashion designer Oleg Cassini, and with a new swanky apartment, it seems like things are on the up and up. She’s actually building a reputation as someone...good at her craft.

But one night, after hours of cocaine with Carl, he was arrested for rape, and Mary steps forward to defend him.

### 11. Happy Endings?

Mary takes a job at a massage parlor, discretely hidden right on NYC’s 57<sup>th</sup> Street. Not your average massage parlor, of course, but one that promises “happy endings” for its clientele. It’s a fantasy land, with a giant swimming pool, full of naked girls. Tricks would come to the pool to watch the girls, and choose which ones and how many. Mary changes her name to Maura, and actually has some fun for herself. She’s making \$2,000 a week.

One night Mary and Priscilla are chosen to “perform” together. After a wild night, the john suffers cardiac arrest on top of Priscilla. Mary and Priscilla find themselves in a bit of a situation.

### 12. Be My Baby

Mary decides she going to leave the life, and a trick who owned the NY Racquet Club gave her a job selling memberships. At Studio 54 she meets a coke dealer named Alan who’s a dead ringer for Tony Orlando. Mary’s in love.

Alan moves in with Mary and they decorate their kitchen pantry with jars of Quaaludes. They had a fun time getting high and going out dancing. But Alan quickly finds himself on the run, and they speed off to Chicago. All of a sudden, there were no drugs around, so Mary turns to booze.

After months of mistaking morning sickness for hangovers, Mary realizes she’s pregnant. Though she doesn’t want to marry Alan, she goes through with it under her mother’s insistence. So, at nearly six months pregnant, Mary marries Alan with a priest and a rabbi present.

But by the time the baby arrived, Mary is too sick with alcoholism to be an attentive mother. Most nights, alcohol always won; she didn’t have a choice. Ashamed of herself, Mary abandons her daughter in search of a better life for both of them.

### 13. Low Rider

Mary is once again checked into a NYC mental ward, this time for alcoholism, and is told that her liver is failing her. She decides to go home to Alan. Once she find his new apartment, she begs to see her baby, but he refuses, throwing her down the stairs.

She tries to go back to hooking, but no one will have her. No one will talk to her. Once a glamorous call girl, alcohol has taken its toll on her looks and her relationships. Crashing on the couch of someone she met on the street, they advised her to get out of New York. She begged her mother for a plane ticket to Reno where she'd start a new life. Once there she got a cab to the Mustang Ranch, where she joined their "line up." Once the girls were picked, the remaining hustled drinks at the bar, which was perfect for alcoholic Mary. But after a few days off she went to work and no one answered the bell. They told her they didn't want a troublemaker like her back. And so, she left for Vegas.

### 14. The Chicken Dance

After being fired from the Mustang Ranch, Mary applies at the Chicken Ranch, but they won't have her. So she works the Vegas streets, crashing in a hotel with other drunks, getting wasted on tequila and Jack Daniels. She turned tricks for \$20, and spent many nights running from the police in five-inch heels.

Trying to go legit, with the help of a trick, she gets a job at the MGM Grand as a Keno runner. There she meets Don, her first taste of unconditional love. After she's fired from her job, the lovebirds take off to his hometown of Long Beach, California. She tried turning tricks, but lack of business made them homeless, living in the park, where things went from bad to worse when a gang rapes her in their van.

### 15. New York's Not My Home

Mary runs home to the Bronx. But things aren't the same. Mary's loving father now has Alzheimer's, and can't remember anyone – except Mary.

In effort to see her daughter, now four years old, she catches her playing at school recess. "Your daughter needs you," the teachers tell her. Her four-year-old daughter's face is covered with mysterious bruises. Mary understands the child needs proper care – someone who's responsible and dependable. And that's not Mary. Mary makes the painful choice to leave her child once

again, fleeing in the night to avoid a sad goodbye. But then, unexpectedly, Alan shows up with the child. Mary will find a way to be a great mother.

## CHAPTER ONE

That afternoon Sonny and I had spent hours picking crabs out of each other's public hair and torching them mercilessly with our lighter, only to find that their ghosts haunted us by the dozens. We would help tie the other up; make a fist, grind our teeth. Some might say that's the height of wooing, junkie style. That's when the other bugs would appear, the ones as big as my head that crawled on the walls and the ceiling and squeezed out of my pores by the hundreds. The ones that only appeared when we were high. Sex wasn't the main objective by any stretch, just a way to pass the time. No one ever came. The scene was as romantic as two young lovers who'd known each other for a matter of days could get. By day, I'd saunter down to the A&P and stuff bread and canned beans into the pockets of my navy pea coat, the one Daddy bought me for Christmas the year before. Since he was a dead ringer for Keith Richards, stealing money was really Sonny's job, but if I had to sashay through Washington Square Park and flirt a little in exchange for a quick fix, I was down for that. Depending on the day, hooking was faster and easier than stealing. Though, there was that poor girl who overdosed in the morning and, before Stanley dumped her at St. Vincent's emergency room, we cleaned her out and got a cool, easy forty bucks. Or did this all take place the afternoon before? Or the one before that?

I saw the figure descend the stairs before I heard a voice. It wasn't just Sonny and me, there were four, five, maybe six others, lying around on bare mattresses we'd rescued from dumpsters, sleeping and eating and fucking and nobody heard him come down. It's possible we thought he would join us; it's also possible none of us cared. What I do remember is a drugged out hippie in the corner singing an off-tune rendition of Elvis Presley's "Crying in the Chapel", soothingly

slow and soft. And then, out of the murky blanket of smoke and darkness a face emerges: my father's. "Come with me, Mary Pat," he said in his thick, Irish brogue, tugging firmly at my elbow.

"Daddy?"

I don't recall protest, I don't recall drama, nor shame, nor longing, nor punishment. What I do recall is my father, guiding me up the creaky steps from that stale, dark basement, up to the busy, noisy bright and shining Alphabet City Street. He brings me up to the light.

My father puts my hand in his and hoists me up the short steps onto the bus, the M181 that will take us back to the Bronx. His hand is warm and calloused, strong and safe. His nods to the driver, flashes his employee pass and we avoid the fare, because they are friends. In a gentlemanly gesture, my father gives me the window seat, allowing me to swish by him to lean and stare. Or, perhaps he was afraid I would escape. Again.

My eyes flutter closed, then open. Closed, open. The bus jerks then stops and jolts me awake again and again. I stare at the sun, high in the sky, and force my eyes to water just to feel something. I'd only been gone five days this time. But five days is a long while for a 13-year-old girl. Five days is a long time for someone like my father, who must have spent every waking hour knocking on doors of shooting galleries and houses of ill repute searching for me. I don't ask him how he thought to look on Avenue B and 10<sup>th</sup> Street. I don't ask because, in truth, I didn't want to know. I don't ask because that's not something we do in my house; we do not

inquire. Silence is the silent law. But what I think I know in that very moment, is how much my father must have loved me to bring me back home.

In my earliest memory, my father is showing me off. We've driven into the center of town in his green Ford Fairlane, the one with the fins on the back, the one he bought second hand from Uncle Bob. He slows down when he sees his guys, the one he calls Buddy leans into the car and pats my leg and kisses me on the cheek with whiskey breath. "Darlin'," he said, putting a silver dollar in my car seat, a St. Christopher medal he pins to the thick pink and white sweater it took my mother six months to knit.

"Ah, the hair will be here soon," my father assured both of us with a smile, lightly touching the top of my bald head. "You're still the prettiest little girl in the Bronx."

"Can't argue that, Eddie," Buddy said, taking a drag on his Lucky Strike. "You and Eileen make grand babies." And then they exchange a comment or two which result in a laugh, hearty like the audience on "The Honeymooners". That was Dad's gang, kind, hard-working, hard-drinking Irishmen who hung out in front of Woolworths or at Donovan's, the pub next door. They weren't all bus drivers like Dad, they were brick masons and steel workers, and janitors, and some were just drunks. But no one used the word drunk back then. Everyone, quite simply, just drank.

I was born on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1952 at Jewish Memorial Hospital in Brooklyn, where my mother was working at the time. It was a simpler life, with neighborhood guys singing doo wop on the corner, and ladies with perfect hair wearing pointy bras and hats with a touch of netting. I was named for my father's mother in Ireland, who died before I could meet her, as was his older

sister, a beautiful, kind, soft-spoken lady who wore clean white gloves and smelled like Evening in Paris perfume. My mother was from Mayo, County Mayo, “God help us.” Mayo is one big bog with no trees, just miles and miles of bog land, mostly sourced for the peat, bailed and sold for fireplaces. Back in Mayo, they called my grandfather Anthony “the Judge” because he always offered wise advice. He’d always told my mother to make sure she got out of Mayo. She ran and never looked back.

I never knew my grandparents. My mother was one of 10 children; two of them died. My father was one of 13 children; 3 of them died. My parents had had been in America little over two years by the time I was born, my father from County Cork, Ireland. No matter how far and away, he sang about hometown of Skibbereen as opportunity would allow. Like most Irish anthems, it’s a sad song, about lost love and death. Skibbereen, in this case, is the sight of an all our family massacre. And it ends with a warning:

*Oh, father dear, the day will come when in answer to the call*

*All Irish men of freedom stern will rally one and all*

*I’ll be the man to lead the band beneath the flag of green*

*And loud and clear we’ll raise the cheer, revenge for Skibbereen!*

Since Daddy and his friends usually sang the song three-sheets to the wind, there really wasn’t much of a chance for revolution. Lucky Uncle Bob was from Leitrim, or Lovely Leitrim, as it was dubbed. His song uses words like “hero” and “enchanted” and “grandeur.” His song makes people want to dance.

My mother moved to London to pursue a career in nursing, but was lured to America by her brother, my Uncle Bill, who promised her all things wild and wonderful in the U.S. of A. Six months in the States, she attended a dance at the Jaeger House on 86<sup>th</sup> and Lexington where she met my father. Six months later, they were married. Later, much later, my mother would confess off-the-cuff how my father had been a rebound for a true love she left behind in London.

And boy, if she, the good Catholic, had entered into marriage with a man she didn't fully love for the rest of her life, she was surely going to make him pay for it. She had been better off on her own, she used to say, a career woman, a nurse no less. She should have stayed in London. And if she'd known she was marrying an illiterate ahead of time, it likely wouldn't have happened at all. If things had gone just a little bit one way or the other, her life would have been very different. Her life could have been better. She could have been happy.

My father was devastatingly handsome, the spitting image of Gregory Peck, square-jawed, dark hair and eyes, and that gigantic bright smile. More than all that, he loved being a father. In the days of my youth the Bronx was filled with dirt and swamp, my backyard. It was my Bronx, a safe urban adventure, and I loved every inch of it. I was reared in the legend of Finn McCool, a towering giant who, even though he presided over Ireland's emerald knolls, his presence was well-felt at our apartment on 230<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. Daddy and I loved to play in the bramble bushes in the gloriously unkempt park near our home. We'd huddle in the leafy organic huts created by disfigured bushes, courtesy of Mother Nature.

“See that rock over there?”

“That one?”

“That one...the really big one. Guess how that got here? Finn McCool?”

“Finn McCool? He brought that rock here?”

“He picked it up just like this, right over his head...and tossed it all the way from Ireland.”

“And...it landed right here? In the Bronx?”

“He’s a very strong giant, indeed.”

Daddy’s shift on his bus route finished two hours after I got out of school. Once in my play clothes, I’d transfer my honor’s pin, fastening it to the strap on my overalls. I loved the way it looked on me in the mirror. To me, it looked just as good on the collar of my starch white uniform as it did on my mud stained play gear. I liked the way it shined in the sun. The year I was six years old, I would head out to the muddy pasture just two blocks away and dig for squiggly worms, the kind with a million little legs, perfect for fishing, and collect them carefully in a Chock Full of Nuts Coffee can. I’d delight in capturing the slimy critters, each one signifying more time on the clock alone with Daddy. This was about Daddy and me. Not Mommy, and certainly not Cathy Ann, my four-year-old sister, who I tried to choke to death by shoving a banana down her throat when she was born. They wouldn’t go fishing with Daddy and dig in the dirt and collect worms in a jar. This was all about Daddy and me.

Once he’d changed his work clothes, Daddy and I would trek to the fishing hole with our homemade rods, he’d bate my hook and we’d cast our lines. The anticipation of catching a fish was almost, near almost, as delicious as actually reeling one in. Mostly, we caught, celebrated

and assessed, and released. But in the beginning we dreamed of the feasts we'd bring home for Mommy to cook for us. "Do you think we'll catch lots of fish today, Daddy?"

"I think you can do anything, Mary Pat darlin'."

No one was more excited at the prospect of fileted swamp fish than me and my father.

"When are we going home, Daddy? I'm getting hungry."

His response, as always, was a limerick: "I am hungry, very hungry said the spider to the fly. And if you're caught within my web, you very soon will die."

We'd collect our meager catch in the old tin bucket from the basement, which, in multiples of five or six, proved a hefty trophy. Daddy let me haul the booty home by myself, which I carried carefully with two hands. We made sure to fill it with just enough water to keep the fish alive, and little enough to make the carrying an easy task for me.

"What's this?" Mommy said, when I presented the bucket.

"Look what me and Daddy caught today!" I exclaimed. "Can you cook it up for us for supper?"

She threw down her dishrag in a fit of fury. "What do you think I am? Your slave?" my mother asked. "I work all day as a nurse, bad enough I have to make dinner for the family, and here you are making more work for me? Throw those fish back in the water. And next time think about someone besides yourself."

Once inside the house, senses were eliminated. There were no smells, no tastes, no preferences, and, certainly, no passions. Upon entering you were met with holy water, the urinal-esque,

sconced religious water bowls, which we dipped our finger into to bless ourselves before we really knew what for. There was an Angelus painting, in the front hall depicting a poor, Irish man and woman who've stopped picking potatoes for a moment to bow their heads and pray. As a child I always imagined they were in my mother's homeland of Mayo, "God help us." We attended church every Sunday, and as far back as I can remember, I always had questions about it all. Firstly, all that standing up and sitting and kneeling seemly awfully excessive to me. It made no sense at all to be preaching to a bunch of Irish families in the Bronx in Latin, either. But most of all, regardless of what we were repeating, it all translated to a degrading chant of "I'm not worthy...I'm not worthy..." which could in no way be what an all mighty power had in store for us. Isn't the captain of the team supposed to pump up the moral of his players? It wouldn't make sense for him to remind them they're all second string at best. For as much as I questioned God, I knew he was the boss, and suspected he wasn't too happy with my performance here on Earth. If I was doing a better job, wouldn't Mommy be happier with me, too?

I also questioned the validity of the Blessed Virgin popping up all over the Globe with her messages for poor people. What the heck was that about? Not that it took away from the enchantment of "The Song of Bernadette" for me. Jennifer Jones was so pretty and soft spoken and of course I was lost in her quest to be heard. Yet, when we were brought water from Lourdes, it looked exactly like the New York City tap water to me. I even rubbed it on my scraped shin and didn't see any miraculous improvement. This was all cause for suspicion.

But there was no way I was voicing any of this to either of my parents, most especially my mother. When all was quiet in our house, I would walk by her room and see her praying, rosary in hand, her mouth moving in minute gestures like a ventriloquist. Her Hail Mary Pats. I was never actually taught the rosary, I always just knew how. My mother's rosary beads were as much a part of her as her deep green eyes. Always there. She believed in giving back to the church, and religiously donated a sample of her paycheck in cash every single week. Because it was right by God. By the time I was six Mommy was pregnant again with my sister Maggie.

###

Dawn was my best friend and she lived six blocks down in a tiny shack on the water with her grandmother. I liked her grandmother, even though she smelled funny and always offered me tea. Dawn and I spent every moment on the water, wandering out towards the biggest boulders, tempting the high tide to leave us stranded in the sea. By the time we were eight, we had our futures mapped out for us. Dawn would collect horseshoe crabs and other sea finds and work with the ocean somehow. I had much loftier ambitions. In spite of the fact that I had to be rescued after falling through the ice on the swamp the winter before, I was going to become a professional ice skater.

“How come?” Dawn would ask, as we climbed farther along the slippery rocks, braving the strong sea breeze.

“Because,” I told her, standing up straight on a rock, the wind whipping through my hair.

“Skating is the closest you can get to flying.” I stretched my arms up in skater pose, allowing them to fall ever-so-slowly down to my hips.

“But...” Dawn added. “You don't have ice skates.”

“That doesn’t matter,” I told her. “It’s the dream that’s important. I can get silly old skates anywhere.”

The other part of my plan was to marry Johnny Rubino who lived down the street. It wasn’t exactly a requited love, but, like the ice skates, the success would surely follow the conviction. Many nights I lay awake practicing our first romantic kiss. It was bound to be perfect. I’d lie in bed and close my eyes and pucker up, humming “Johnny Angel” simultaneously, only to pause to say, “Oh, Johnny...I love you, too.” Johnny really did love me, he just didn’t know it yet. Mostly he ignored me, but then there were the moments he singled me out. That summer he’d buried me in the dirt up to my neck and left me there until my father came looking for me. I was a silent movie damsel in distress. It was a glorious five hours. He’d also torched his tree house with me in it. I didn’t blame him in a way. I had, after all, unearthed his box of dirty magazines. If that’s not love, I’m not sure what is.

If it didn’t work out with Johnny, I’d already decided I’d just marry Paul McCartney. All Dawn and I had to do was mention The Beatles, and we’d open our mouths and scream at the top of our lungs, the way we’d seen the rabid fans do it on the Ed Sullivan Show. We’d scream standing right on the rocks, straight into that wily ocean wind. And just when it seemed we’d be worn out, we’d launch into a perfectly off-key rendition of “I Wanna Hold Your Hand” or “She Love You”. I’d close my eyes and think of Paul, who I knew was thinking about me too right there and then.

Some might say my trouble started when I began noticing boys. To clarify, I barely noticed boys. I noticed other girls noticing boys. Whenever I got a new friend, my mother would

always inquire: Is she a public school girl or a Catholic school girl?" The latter, was always the preference; the former, forbidden. By the time I was 12, the public school girls gong steady were all wearing shiny anklets on their right ankle. I wanted to belong. I'd found the perfect anklet at Woolworth's, a delicate gold-toned link chain. It was cheap enough, but I really didn't have the money, so I sampled it in the store, prancing here and there, informing my imaginary friends, "Oh, my anklet? Yes, I'm going steady." I decided to take the rouse outside, walking out with the anklet on, and never looking back.

Word at Sister Catherine's got around pretty quickly. I was the only girl in Catholic school to go steady. Even Johnny Rubino asked about it. ("Um...why are you wearing that thing?") My public school friends didn't make much of a fuss, and gratefully didn't ask too many questions. I was careful to take the anklet off before I got home, pocketing it right before entering the house. But one day, I forgot. My mother ran up to me, grasped my shoulder and turned me around to face her.

"What is that?"

"What?" I asked. I truly had forgotten about it.

"What's on your ankle? What is that? Tell me! What is it?!"

My feet, which hadn't touched the ground since I'd stolen it, fell right to the floor with a resounding thud. "Mommy—"

"Take that off..." she ordered. When I just stood there, she repeated with all her might and venom: "*Take that off!*"

I reached down to unlatch the anklet, which my mother snatched out of my hand. “Do you know what this means? Do you? Back on the farm when a cow gets pregnant, they tie a red rag to its ankle...” she was teary and panting now, rabid in her recollection. “Do you know how you make yourself look? Do you know what you look like to the neighbors?”

“I’m sure Joe O’Grady has better things to think about,” I told her. Truly, I was only trying to ease her mind, though the words had a flippant tone once they were airborne. Joe O’Grady’s favorite pastime was beating his family. We all knew it. In fact, we used to put a drinking glass to the wall so we wouldn’t miss any of the drama. So, I really did think he was one less neighbor Mommy would have to worry about.

She didn’t seem to see it that way. “You’re a little devil,” she spat. “Always were. What will the neighbors think of you? What is going to happen to you, Mary Pat?”

###

“The Principal wants to see you.” I left the classroom to walk quietly down the long, green tiled hallway to Sister Mary Bernard’s office. The hall was dim, and the color of the tiles made it look like a fish tank. The walls were lined with pictures of the saints, which I passed so often, I could predict their order: St. Christopher, St. Jude, St. Ignatious. I took my time. Maybe it was good news. I could sure use some this week. Last weekend Johnny had approached me all on his own at Jim & Ellie’s Candy Store. “Wanna go for a walk?”

Me? Could this really be happening? I tried to hide my smile as Johnny escorted me past the beach with the giant rocks and whipping wind, and out towards the park. This was it. This was the day I would kiss Johnny. He’d finally seen the light and discovered that I’m the one for him.

*Johnny Angel...how I love him...*

Once we'd reached a clearing in the overgrown grass, Johnny stopped walking. I smoothed the front of my skirt, and readied for his proposal.

"All right then..." he said. His tone was sharp and aloof, not at all the syrupy sentiment I'd rehearsed in my head. Unsure how this would lead to chocolate covered kisses, I decided to let him lead the way. He was the man after all. And I was the novice ingénue. Johnny suddenly dropped to both knees, and pulled me down, smashing my shin on a rock. "Ow!" I cried. But before I could recover, he'd pushed me back on the ground and had pinned my hands behind my head. "What...what are you doing?!" I yelled.

He'd managed to grasp both of my wrists with one hand, and was now maneuvering my underpants with the other. I wriggled my hips like a ship sailing rocky seas, and this seemed to frustrate him more than anything. "What the fuck are you doing?" he yelled.

"What are *you* doing?" I countered. "Get off of me!"

"You know you want it," he told me.

"Want what?!" I asked.

"You're a little whore and everyone knows it," he said, attempting to part my legs with his knees. With all his planning, Johnny had forgotten to factor my strength, agility, and relentless will. "Just stay still, you stupid whore!" he yelled.

"I'm not a whore," I said. My disappointment overrode the insult. How on earth would we ever walk off into the sunset now? Surely there were grass stains on the back of my white blouse; my

underpants were in shreds. My wrists throbbed in pain. “Johnny, please...” I begged. “You’re hurting me!”

“You give it up for strangers, but you won’t give it up for me?” He stood upward, letting go of my hands so abruptly, my head knocked hard on the ground.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about...” I said.

“What did you think you were coming out here for?” he yelled.

“I thought...I thought you wanted to kiss me...” I confessed. It seemed an embarrassing notion now. Without warning Johnny threw himself back onto me, rubbing his hard crotch against my stomach, smashing his mouth all over my face in a fit of passionate pre-rape.

I kicked him so hard he fell back three feet. Once he caught his breath he looked straight at me and said, “Bitch.” And walked away.

I sat in that field pondering how things could have gone so awry, watching the sun dip behind, and eventually below, the Throgs Neck Bridge. With the bridge they’d taken my beloved swamps. But something else had changed, too. It was now 1965. Our new president, Lyndon Johnson, told us that somewhere in Vietnam people were fighting. We’d seen the students protesting America’s involvement outside NYU. How could today be worlds away from last month, when all of us went to the World’s Fair and ate popcorn and cotton candy and listened to the man on the recorder tell us that someday a man might actually walk on the Moon. That night I’d gone how full of hope for our ever-expanding universe, including six-wheeled moon buggies. One short month ago, anything was possible. Everything was different now.

I tugged down the cuffs on my blouse to cover the light bruises leftover from Johnny's grip, and adjusted my honor's pin before knocking on Sister Mary Bernard's office door.

"Why didn't you tell us you were in trouble," she said, her arms crossed in front of her chest.

"I...I don't know what you mean," I said. I'd never been in trouble in my whole life. Could she not see my honor's pin with those Coke bottle glasses of hers?

"Your pregnant," she said impatiently.

I was as shocked as anyone. I'd only gotten my period that morning, and shifted uncomfortably in my seat from the bulk of the pad. "No, I'm not," I told her.

"Don't lie to me," she growled.

"I'm not lying, Sister. I promise." Had she forgotten I'd never once been hit with a ruler?

"Mary Pat, you know I won't tolerate insolence. Particularly from...a girl like yourself. Now, the sooner you tell me the truth, the sooner we can approach your parents."

My parents? My eyes welled with tears. "Please...please don't do that..." I begged.

"I will adhere to the necessary procedure," she insisted.

"But there's nothing to tell!"

"Mary Pat, if you won't allow me to help you, than I will have no choice but to expel you from school."

I stood up and turned on my heels.

"Where are you going?" she yelled.

“I don’t have to take this from you!” I yelled back.

“You...*what?*”

“You’re a liar,” I said. “You’ll be hearing *from my mother.*” With that, I passed through the door, slamming it behind me for dramatic effect. I walked and walked, across the grassy field, past the swamps and the beach and eventually home. “God damn Patricia Ryan,” I thought to myself. I knew it was her who’d started the rumor. About a week before I’d stumbled onto a boat party, to find everyone there naked. Boat parties in and of themselves were not the least bit uncommon. I lived quite close to the docks; many friends and friends of friends had boats. None of them, however, were naked parties. At least, not until that night. I knew nothing about sex. Only weeks before Dawn and I had ridden our bikes along the shore to find a used condom floating amidst the surf. “What’s that thing?” I asked.

“That’s a condom,” Dawn said.

“What does it do?” I wanted to know. It looked so strange and long and didn’t seem at all useful.

“A man puts it on his penis before he has sex with a woman.”

“Why would he do that?”

“So that he doesn’t make her pregnant,” Dawn explained. “You do know about sex...don’t you Mary Pat?”

“Of course I do!” I scoffed. “Do I look like an idiot?”

Regardless of what I looked like, I didn’t know the first thing about sex. But at that naked boat party that night, I was about to get a surprising crash course. I took a good view of the boat and

its guests, scanning in panorama, when I noticed a bunk in the back rocking and squeaking, flesh bouncing all about. No one seemed to mind if I took a few steps closer to investigate, and as I eased up to the site, which was not the least bit romantic, but rather quick and messy. It was Patricia Ryan in that bunk, all right. She must have told people it was me instead of her. Figuring I'd rat on her, she thought she'd rat on me first. I now had a bad reputation. Even if it was a big, fat lie.

"I'll show them," I growled under my breath, my fists pumping at my side. "I'll show them."

I never did quite fit in with the girls at Saint Frances, with their flawless beehive hairdos. I was tall and gawky, and when I looked in the mirror, I was disgusted by the sight of myself. I was ugly. "Fuck you..." I said to myself. "Fuck you!" I've had it. I give up. I'm not going to do it anymore. It was as though a switch had flipped inside of me, a cord cut that couldn't be undone. I'd become a public school girl, I fit in with them. The girls who wore anklets and went around with boys. The girls real rumors were created for. Those kinds of girls. I wouldn't be a good little girl. I pulled off my honor pin and threw it out of sight. What good was honor if no one recognized it? I would show them what trouble I could cause. I'd show them how bad I could be. Fuck you Sister Mary Bernard. Fuck you Johnny Angel. Fuck you Patricia Ryan. You want bad, you got it.

## CHAPTER TWO

One night, Daddy walked into the living room carrying a hot cup of tea placed it in front of me, just as Bonanza was running its opening credits. He sat down, under the presumption of watching the show, but I could tell by the way he shifted his eyes towards mine there was an agenda at bay.

“What are you up to tonight?” he asked at a quiet moment, when Lorne Greene and Michael Landon were having a friendly ale at the local saloon.

I took a sip from the cup, now less than piping hot. “Thanks, Daddy...” I said, hoping he’d remember I was too sick for serious discussion.

“What are you up to, Mary Pat?” he persisted.

“I’ve got the flu, remember?”

“Never heard of anyone with the summer flu,” Daddy said, standing up. “Let’s go. I’m taking you to the hospital.”

That wouldn’t do. “I’m feeling better today,” I told him, cheering up. “Look into my eyes...can you see? They’re a bit whiter today, I think.” I leaned forward and opened my eyes real wide. But Daddy didn’t even bother to look. He’d turned and trotted towards the kitchen where, within seconds, I could hear his car keys jingle. “Chills...fever...headache...!” he called. “You’re going.”

“What’s she done now?” Mommy called from upstairs.

“It’s Mary Pat!” Daddy called back. “I’m taking her to the hospital.”

“Mary Pat’s off to the hospital?” Maggie, now seven, ran into the kitchen to meet Daddy, her Barbie Doll dragged by its foot, its head missing from when Cathy Ann played with it as a girl.

“Can I come?” she asked.

“I’m not going!” I yelled.

“I wish you’d get some sense, Mary Pat,” Daddy said, standing over me. “Get your shoes on.”

I paused to sip the water and buy some time. “I gotta go to the bathroom,” I told him.

“Well hurry up then,” he said with a sigh, coming into the room. “I’ll wait right here.”

I’d never escaped through the kitchen window before, and the wood stuck a bit half way. I threw my feet out first and landed on the awning below. I sat for a second, hammock-style, and watched the cars zoom over the Throgs Neck Bridge in the distance, it looked small enough to tuck under my arm. I carefully latched my feet onto the attached drain pipe, where I slid the rest of the way down. My slippers smacked on the pavement with a triumphant thud. And I was off running.

“What the fuck am I supposed to do now?” I posed the question to the entire clan smoking outside the candy store, assuming in my naiveté, there really was strength in numbers. It was Marie the Wrestler who led the first round of laughter. Marie the Wrestler, nicknamed for her broad physique--shoulders, hips, and face--pretty much lead everything. Her personality was as big as her hips.

“Who the fuck gets the flu in June?” Freddy Goo Goo snorted, jabbing his forefinger between his eyes to push his five pound glasses back on his head. Half blind with buck teeth, Freddy Goo Goo probably weighed 80 pounds wet.

Everyone was laughing, but no one offered a solution to the problem. My father wanted to take me to the hospital. “What do I do?” I asked again.

“Silly, you’re kicking,” Marie said. “Calm down, I got your back,” she said, throwing her thick arm around my neck and knocking me off balance. “Let’s go hang at Stan’s place. Your dad is sure to find us if we keep standing here.” This is how it had been since I finished sixth grade. Unfortunately, public school wasn’t all anklets and gawking at boys. It was an underworld of daily torture. Sadly, I had only myself to blame for public school. After Mommy and Daddy had begged me to go back to St. Francis, assuring no one would ever again accuse me of being pregnant, I flat out refused.

“No way,” I told them.

“C’mon Mary Pat,” Daddy begged. “No one’s gonna bother you there anymore. I promise.”

“She’s being difficult again,” Mommy said, throwing her palm up to smack her own forehead.

“You’ll be the early death of me, Mary Pat. Just grow up and go to school. Stop being so sensitive.”

“I won’t go back,” I said again. Daddy studied my face and resigned, not in the mood for another fight. Just the morning before, I’d given them a taste of how things would be from now on. It was Mommy who’d tried to stop me from going out. “What’s that around your eyes?” she screamed before I slipped out the door. I was more hurt than anything. I’d sat in the mirror a

full three hours that morning painting the top of my lid in the perfect cat-like swoop, listening to Petula Clark's "Downtown" over and over on the portable record player I got the previous Christmas. "For the love of Mike, Mary Pat," Mommy had called. "Can you flip the record over just *once*?" In those three hours I had decided that when I walked down the street I'd be mistaken for a dancer on American Bandstand or, at the absolute least, a new girl in town. It was part of my reinvention. Lots of eye makeup, lipstick, ironing my hair. So when Mommy grabbed me in disgust and ordered me to "take that face paint off" I threw an all-out fit, writhing and screaming and spitting on the ground in front of the house like I was lit on fire. She would have preferred I peed in her holy water over this, because at least that deviant act we could conceal from the neighbors. I wouldn't calm down until she agreed to give me some money to go to the candy store and buy a Coke, which of course, I gave straight to Marie to buy us some dope. More than anything I threw the fit to prove a point. There was a new sheriff in town: Me.

"It's public school then," Daddy said. I could see Mommy doing a few extra rosaries over this, an image that made my mouth water; her precious Mary Pat running with the little devils at—gasp!—public school. But in the end, the joke was on me. I entered PS101 with an invisible "Kick Me" sign plastered to my back, one which Jeannie O'Leary and her gang of pubescent tyrants recognized and ran with, lifting my skirt when I walked down the hall, chasing me home after school, the highlight, for them, when someone would trip me and kick me on the ground, brushing dust in my face.

So, I was happy when Marie the Wrestler took me under her wing. Some might have said I was Marie's protégé. Others may have called me a mascot. Through Marie I gained entrée into a whole new group of neighborhood kids, all of them sixteen or so. I was the small cute one with

cash and cigarettes. I was light enough to be tossed from guy to guy, my short skirt (which had now gotten shorter) blowing up from the wind. I felt protected. I finally felt a part of something. Marie said she would always look after me. And today, she was good enough to bring me to Stan's house to get me away from Daddy's absurd hospital plan, which would surely expose the high levels of heroine swimming in my bloodstream like delicious poison.

Stan's apartment was just past the public pool, where I caught sight of Dawn, her hair squeezed into a baby blue bathing cap, chatting with Julie, the new girl at St. Francis and rumored future Valedictorian. The two were strolling into the Bronx Beach, politely paying their dollar with a smile. I hadn't talked to Dawn in quite some time, ever since her grandmother accused me of stealing her gold wedding band. Dawn defended me to the death, but in the end, it was a futile fight. Her grandmother had banished me from Dawn's presence. What did it matter, anyway? We were in such different places. Dawn got a full scholarship to Bronx Science, and I was learning how to cook heroin. "Hey Annette," Marie said, poking me playfully in the ribs. "You craving some beach blanket bingo, or what?"

"Huh?"

"If you want to go swimming with a bunch of Frankie Avalon assholes, just say so," she said.

"You couldn't pay me enough," I told her. "Buncha squares..." As we walked away I heard the familiar cry of kids calling "Marco!" Then, after some silence, "Polo!", sounds which unexpectedly tugged at my heartstrings.

This was the third time I'd been to Stan's place. The first two I didn't remember so well, though the stench of stale cigarettes oozing from under his chipped black and green apartment door sparked a memory. Marie knocked twice. Her code. Stan opened the door with his sly smile,

saw me and licked his lips. “I brought goodies,” Marie said, indicating my way with her fat thumb. Stan opened the door and let us in.

As he lay on top of me, heaving, pumping away, I opened my eyes slightly and could see Marie through the crack in the door jam, futzing with a needle and some small baggies. I closed my eyes again. The weight of Stan’s belly was burning my back on the frayed bedroom carpet, but I was too tired to care. That’s when I remembered, this was my third time I’d had sex with Stan, the third time Marie the Wrestler had put us in a room together. The first time I had sex with Stan was my first time ever having sex. Not that I remember much of it. It was also the first time Marie had helped me shoot up. She and Stan teamed up to guide me through it. I don’t remember much discussion. No real prep. Just Marie’s, “You want some?” and my casual nod, “yes”.

Next thing I remember, all thought was being drained out of me, like someone had finally opened the pressure valve. I was filled with a feeling of calm. There were no more mean girls at school. No more rumors about me swirling the neighborhood. No more mean nuns. Best yet, Mommy approved of me. And I loved everyone. My blood has been replaced by sweet honey, which triggered all the pleasure spots in my brain. I didn’t know those spots existed. It was the long-awaited relief I’d craved my entire life.

I threw up that first time Stan forced himself on me. Or maybe forced isn’t the right word, since Marie offered me up like the sacrificial lamb. But Stan didn’t seem to mind the vomit. He kept right on fucking. “You’ll like her,” Marie had told him. “She’ll be nice and tight.”

I suppose I was part of the deal. So now, the third time around, I was used to it. I left Stan snoring in the bedroom and shut the door behind me. “You two have fun?” Marie asked, waking a little when I walked into the room. I wiped some of Stan’s spittle off my cheek with the back of my hand. My mouth was as dry as dirt. “Anything to drink around here?” I asked.

Marie tossed me a bottle of Gypsy Rose wine, and I downed the last third of the bottle. I liked doing this best with the whole gang around because they were always so amazed at how fast I threw it back. Surprisingly, the Gypsy Rose didn’t take the paper taste out of my mouth, so I lit a cigarette.

“What am I going to do, Marie?” I asked, sitting Indian style on the stained yellow rug. I pulled at the crotch on my panties where Stan, it seemed, had given me a burning rash. “I can’t go home.”

“So don’t,” Marie said, her eyes half closed.

“Where am I going to go?” I flicked a flea from my shin.

“You got anyone you can hitch with?” she asked.

“Hitch?”

“Yeah, hitch. Anywhere you wanna go? You could hitch your way there.”

Marie was right. All I needed was my thumb and few tins of Spam and I was good to go. Maybe Fran, my favorite new friend from the neighborhood, would go with me. Her two brothers, Johnny Bones and Frankie Moon, were dope dealers and I’d gotten to know all of them pretty well. Fran was a tall, skinny Italian girl with goofy looks who was up for anything. We all called her Cooch. I’d ask Cooch.

“You go home you could be put in jail,” Marie warned.

“Jail?” I gasped. “What for?”

“You test positive for an illegal substance, what do you think they’ll do with you? They’ll lock you up.” Her voice had a ghost story, camp fire effect.

I felt a siege of panic. Until then I was only worried about Mommy’s wrath, now I had to worry about jail, too? Home was now a far off place.

“You’re gonna be okay, kid.” Marie said. “Think of it as an adventure,” Marie told me. “The world is your playground.”

###

I smacked the map on the grass in front of us, and pulled the cigarette from my lips. “All right,” I said, blowing smoke to my right, turning to Cooch on my left. “We’ll hitch down to Florida, and then head through Texas, and off to San Francisco.”

“San Francisco? That’ll be so boss!” Cooch shrieked. “But wait...why Florida?”

“Haven’t you ever heard of the Florida Keys?” I said. “We can go surfing!”

“Surfing!” Cooch echoed.

“Florida’s amazing. We can pick coconuts right off the trees and eat them for lunch. We won’t need money for food or anything. And then we’ll hitch across to Los Angeles,” I told her.

“How come?”

I looked at her dumbfounded. “Disney Land!”

“Oh, yeah!” Fran said.

I had to admit that was pretty super planning. What’s more, once we were in LA we could also squeeze in an audition for American Bandstand. I’d just learned how to “Do the Freddie”, thanks to Freddie and the Dreamers. It wasn’t hard at all, you just lift your left leg and arm, then your right leg and arm, to the beat of the music. I was teaching Cooch this very dance somewhere outside Baltimore when it started to rain on us. But we didn’t notice. In our flurry to begin our adventure we’d forgotten to plan. We hadn’t bothered to pack any underwear, or any clothes for that matter, no toothbrush, no pillow. What we had managed to do was steal some glue from the True Value in the Village, before lifting some perfectly good bags out of the trash near NYU. Our first trucker had picked us up only fifteen minutes after we’d hopped off the train in Hoboken, New Jersey. And that was it. Florida, here we come.

“Where are you girls headed?” This first trucker had been a Jesus freak, with crosses taped all over the front of his cab, and a bumper sticker that read “IN GOD WE TRUST” pasted to the dashboard.

“Florida!” Cooch screeched, just before I could jab her in the ribs to keep quiet.

“Florida, eh?” he’d said. “Have you two been saved?”

We couldn’t help it. Cooch and I looked at each other and just cracked up. In my head I made some smart assed remark about how the glue had saved us, and then another, even smarter assed, about how I was sure the trucker could “show us the light.” But we didn’t get that far. Once he figured out (a little late no less) that we were high as bottle rockets, he tossed us off somewhere in Baltimore, but not before issuing a warning. “When the time comes to meet your maker...it’ll be the devil.”

“Meet *my* maker,” Cooch said, and gave him the finger.

“Where are you girls headed?” This new guy seemed somewhat normal. He even had a picture of a girl about our age, hair in braids and ribbons, taped to his dash. A family man. I liked that.

“We’re going to San Francisco,” I told him.

“Aren’t you going the wrong way?” he asked. He looked to be about thirty, with Popeye muscles that bulged when he ran his fingers through his thick black hair, which was often.

“We’re going on vacation before we start our new life,” Cooch told him. “You can drop us in Florida.”

“Anywhere in particular?”

“Orlando,” Cooch said.

“I get ya,” he said, with a sly smile.

Cooch and I fell asleep in the front of the cab. I woke first. The truck had stopped. I waited for my eyes to adjust to the darkness, but there simply wasn’t any light in the sky. I lifted my hand, touched my nose, and pulled it an inch away. Couldn’t see a darn thing. I could feel Cooch, leaning against the window, her breathing slow and soft. But then, a slight rocking forced the seat forward and back in short jabs. Then, the breathing, a *ha-ha-ha* and some light snorting, too. I knew the trucker couldn’t see me, if I couldn’t see him. It was his business if he wanted to jerk off on the job, and I wanted to keep it that way. I put my head back on my seat, just as I felt something light and wet sprinkle my face.

“What the fuck!” I yelled. With this, Cooch woke with a start.

“What happened?!” Cooch yelled.

Instinctively I opened the door to the truck, and rolled out, dropping a good four feet onto my back. Cooch followed seconds later, her foot plunging right into my stomach. I let out a loud “Oof!” There we were, two penniless ragamuffins with a glue huffing hangover, stranded in an unknown city in an unknown state, me with a strange man’s spunk on my cheek.

“Mary Pat!” Cooch screamed in my ear.

“I’m right here,” I told her, reaching over to offer her my hand.

“Where the hell are we? I can’t see a damn thing.”

“Don’t think I’ve ever seen a night as dark as this,” said a familiar voice, hovering over us.

Instinctively, Cooch and I fell silent and still, our only defense.

“Why don’t you girls come back into the truck and we’ll get going. Should get you to Florida in no time flat.”

“What should we do?” Cooch whispered, her voice booming against the picture-less night.

“Get back into the truck,” another voice whispered back. And then, with a chuckle, “I’m sorry if I scared ya. Stop horsing around and wasting time. I seriously got to get a move on.”

Cooch grasped my hand, and together we hoisted one another to our feet. I felt around for the first step to the truck, Cooch on my tail. The trucker turned the ignition key, and the truck rumbled and groaned, scaring Cooch and sending her flying back onto her behind.

“Can we have some light, please?” I asked.

“Cab light’s out,” the trucker reported.

“Do you have a flashlight or something?” I asked. I stood at the bottom of the step, waiting.

Soon I heard the light tapping of a heavy metal object coming towards me. Then, a sudden flash in my face. I grabbed the light and turned it on the trucker, sitting back in a casual pose, pleased with himself.

“You got your flashlight,” he said. “Now if you want a ride, get in and shut the door before I count to five. One, two, three, four—“

Cooch slammed the door shut and we were on our way.

There was no napping after that. Poor Cooch had no idea what had startled me, but she knew I didn’t scare easy. Truth is, an ordinary guy spanking the monkey wouldn’t have scared me in the least. ‘Cooch and I had already decided we’d alternate who gave blow jobs for rides, even though we hadn’t needed to utilize any of those deals thus far. So, sex, let alone sperm, wasn’t the issue. We were ready and willing. Something about this guy wasn’t quite right to me. I resolved to keep my mouth shut, and that worked fine for a while, but as the hours dragged by the silence was simply too much to bear.

“How about a little music,” I said, finally.

“Radio’s broke,” he said, chewing on a toothpick. I turned the flashlight on, but no light came out. I banged it against my hand in panic. “Does that sometimes,” the guy informed me.

“Maybe shut it off and wait a while.” I turned the light on and off with determined fury. “You two girls on the run or something?” he asked.

“No,” I said. Cooch and I seemed to have made a silent pact that I would do the talking from now on.

“Oh, that’s right...you’re going on...*vacation*.”

“Yeah,” I told him. “Vacation. Disney Land. You ever been?”

“Damn straight I have,” he said. “One of the finest places on the face of the planet.”

“That’s great,” I said, relieved we were talking about something as safe and sterile as Mickey Mouse. “What did you do there?”

“What *didn’t* I do there?” he asked.

“Right,” I laughed, though not sure what for.

“You got that torch working?” he asked.

I flicked the flashlight five or six times before a dim, unreliable light flickered out of it.

“Turn that thing towards me a bit,” he instructed. That’s where I could see he was pointing to the picture of the young girl taped to the dash. The image was sepia toned from the sun, its edges dry and curled.

“Look close at that picture. What do you see...?”

I leaned my head in, weary of getting grabbed. There the girl was, turning towards the camera, her mouth slightly parted, caught unawares. Her braids caught wind, as did the tails of the

ribbons, which fluttered in the breeze. Her hair was a golden brown, her eyes, large and wide on her head, a bright blue. In the background was an unmistakable mouse and mousette, waving towards the camera. Their heads were cut off to frame the shot perfectly around the girl.

Clearly, she was the star.

“Disney?” I asked.

“You got it. That picture was taken last spring when me and my little cutie pie went away on vacation.”

“She’s a beautiful girl,” I said. She really was pretty, with her perfect teeth and skin.

“Prettiest girl of them all,” he said proudly.

“Where is she now?” I asked, delighted for the opportunity to relax and chat about a safe topic.

“She’s at home with her mom, now,” he said, woefully.

“You must miss her,” I offered.

“You have no idea,” he said. There was a bit of silence, and then he let out a low chuckle,

“Well, I guess you do...”

“What?” I asked. The word escaped before I had a chance to grab it and shove it back down my throat. It wasn’t a question I wanted an answer to, and my body tensed from my head to my toes.

“Well...” he licked his lips. “I just miss her and...please do forgive me...I didn’t mean to...well, *squirt* you if that’s what scared you...”

Before I could jab Cooch and tell her to shut up, she let him have it. “You were jerking off to a picture of your own daughter?”

“What are you talking about?” he asked, insulted.

“Ha, ha, ha...” I laughed, giving Cooch a look. “Don’t mind her. She was just kidding around.”

“She’s not my daughter,” the trucker growled. “She’s my girlfriend. What are you...a bunch of sickos?”

I panicked. “We’ll be getting off somewhere right around—“

“Like hell you will,” the trucker told me, picking up speed.

“She didn’t mean anything by it,” I told him.

“You think I’m a rapist?” he asked us in a sinister growl. “You think I’m going back to jail?”

“No,” I said flatly.

“No,” Cooch whimpered.

“Damn me...damn me for thinking maybe you two might understand my pain...might understand my love for Carrie Anne...but you don’t...you’re just like all the rest.”

“It was just a misunderstanding—“ I tried, but he cut me off.

“I have a good mind to go to the cops about you,” he yelled. “I have a good mind to turn you in, like Carrie Anne’s mother...turning me in...she doesn’t understand love...”

“No, she doesn’t,” Cooch said nervously. The trucker was weaving in and out of scattered cars, 14 of his 18 wheels skidding behind us.

“Tell me about Carrie Anne,” I said. “She seems like such a nice girl—“

“She is a nice girl,” he groaned. “No one understands...”

“I understand,” I told him. “Really, I do. How old is she? She looks to be about my age.”

“She’ll be 13 on Christmas day,” he said. “But she’s a much older soul.”

“Oh, I’m sure of it. Me and my friend are 13, too. I know how old 13 can be.” I didn’t ask him how old he was, figuring I already knew.

“I call her my little Priscilla,” he said with a smile. “She calls me her Elvis. It’s no different you know. But no one calls the cops on Elvis Presley and puts him away for statutory rape. Do they? Do they?!”

I couldn’t argue with the man. I’d never heard anyone call the King of Rock ‘n Roll a rapist. I slid my hand over Cooch’s lap and lightly touched the door handle. I looked at Cooch out of the corner of my eye and winked.

“You don’t know what it feels like to be separated from someone you love so much...the hurt...the pain...the anger...sometimes I punch things without knowing I’m doing it...broke my hand twice...but I don’t care...feels good to feel pain...”

Just as the truck slowed turning onto an interstate, I flung open the door and Cooch and I rolled out and onto the grassy hill like a couple of gumballs.

“Cooch? Cooch, you all right?”

Cooch emerged from a bramble patch, a ray of twigs popping out of her bee hive like a halo.

“Mary Pat,” she said, trying to stand like she was drunk, “I think I peed my pants...”

“Oh, never mind that,” I said, pulling her up. “You’ll dry...on the beach.”

“What beach,” Cooch asked, shaking a cloud of dust out of her hair.

“The Florida beach...” I said.

“I know, but...”

And there it was, just 20 yards off in the distance, a roadside sign that read, “Welcome to Florida.”

“Welcome to Florida!” I yelled, hugging Cooch.

“Sunshine State, here we come,” Cooch said.

###

“You get one phone call,” the officer told me, unlocking my cell with keys he’d unhitched from his hip. These were the words I’d been dreading ever since we got picked up on the Florida line. Apparently, someone had reported us falling out of the 18 wheeler, and that put us on red alert. I guess coppers were waiting for us on the Florida line, hoping we’d make it into their jurisdiction. I’d seen Cooch escorted past my cell to make her call a half hour before, she glanced my way, expressionless. But on the way back she turned her head. None of it was good for me.

That whole time I was thinking of what I was going to say to whoever picked up the phone at my house. “Please let it be Daddy,” I kept repeating to myself. And even though God and me weren’t always on the best terms, I decided to try and make a deal with him. “God,” I told him

in my head, as humbly as possible, “If you let Daddy pick up the phone, I promise I’ll go back to St. Francis. Well, maybe not St. Francis, specifically...but even if it’s not that school, then some other school where I promise to always say good things about you and never take your name in vein. Or, at least, if I do take your name in vein by accident I’ll take it back immediately.

Though, probably silently, because if I did that in front of Marie she would think I was a total wuss—“

“Are you coming or not?” the cop yelled. I stepped out of the cell more meek than intended.

“One call,” he repeated, handing me the phone. I held the receiver in hand as though I didn’t know what to do. “Dial!” the cop ordered. And I did.

Mommy answered.

I was surprised when they left me seated and Cooch seated in the same waiting section. Though the cop who’d escorted me had instructed, “No talking!” I couldn’t help myself. It felt like detention with handcuffs.

“What did your mother say?” I asked Cooch.

Cooch lifted her eyes towards mine with a warning. “Shhhhh!” she ordered.

“Don’t shush me!” I told her. “What did your mother say? Are they coming to get you? Are they sending you home?”

“She said this is all your fault,” Cooch told me. “She said you’re a bad influence on me.”

“Well...that’s bullshit and you know it,” I said. “You told her, right? Cooch? You told her, didn’t you? You’ll set her straight when you get home? Will you? Cooch?”

“Francine!” an officer called. Cooch sat up straight and laced her fingers together. “Your mother is sending you a plane ticket home. You’ll spend the night and be on your way tomorrow.”

Cooch bowed her head. Her voice was sweeter than I’d ever heard it before. “Thank you, Officer.”

“And you,” the same offer came over to me. “You’re the instigator, I take it.”

“Me?” I asked. I wanted to remind him that just two short months ago I didn’t know anything about drugs. That we’d actually bought them from precious Francine’s brothers, that she’d been shoplifting since she was nine.

“Don’t look all innocent at me, girlie,” he said. “I been around the block a few times.” He leaned in close and I could smell the garlic on his breath. “Your mother is sending you home, too,” he said. “But you’re going by train.” He laughed at this. With any luck you’ll be home by Christmas.”