

Ashleigh & Megan *Book I: Friendship*



Thursday, June
1st

Megan

Day 3 of Book I

(1 month and 22 Days Since Bob Bought
Ashleigh a Jeep)

Part One of Four

Authored By:
R. P. Voght

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format. I have termed this as an "Story Cast" What the term "Story Cast" means; is this story is designed to be read in small to medium intervals. This particular story is broken up into "days." In this particular story these portions are broken up into part of a particular fictitious "day". Each day surrounds the characters lives, relationships, adventures, struggles, mishaps and triumphs. This story is very different from a Novel or conventional story in many ways. Again, THIS IS NOT A NOVEL AND IS NOT WRITTEN IN A CONVENTIONAL NOVEL FORMAT. Instead; as the reader you are following the characters thoughts and actions during the course of fictitious "day." This fiction story is set up like a TV series and or a third person journal. It always starts with one or more character getting up and ends with one or more characters going to bed; while during the day you experience the Characters actions, feelings, and their thoughts. On a large overview; there is a beginning, a middle, and an end to this "Story Cast."

*Authored and designed by
R. P. Voght*

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Thursday June 1st

(1 Month and 22 Days Since Bob bought Ashleigh a Jeep)

Megan's small digital alarm clock started to beep. Megan reached over and turned off the alarm. She: blinked open her dark blue eyes, she slipped out from underneath her sheets, she stood up, she stretched, yawned, pushed her long dark blond hair from her face, and again blinked her eyes.

At the age of twenty-seven she had the physical persona as an aerobics and self defense instructor. Her small girl muscles were visible on her shoulders and arms. These muscles were developed by hard work and participating in athletic events through out her life. It was obvious by her legs and rear end she was dedicated to aerobic type of exercise.

She was pleased with herself for keeping in shape after playing collegiate sports. Her desire was to exercise more but she was active as much as possible; she was delighted to make a living by being active.

She believed she was the complete opposite of the tantalizing women men found attractive. She assumed if a guy or lesbian complemented her on her physical attributes this person was just trying to have sex with her. She was aware both guys and lesbians liked her buttock and legs. There was one male who was brave enough or foolish enough, depending on the point of view, to bluntly tell Megan how much he enjoyed her rear end. This neighbor found himself swimming in the Eastbank River. She felt a true gentleman would have focused on who she was as a person.

Her dimples flashed.

She expected a man to find her breasts hideous. She assumed most guys would have felt her round 34b sized breasts were way to small. She wondered why any guy would want to touch her pointy nipples and big areolas. What was embarrassing to her was her round

breasts were uneven in size. She wished her smaller left one was the same size as her right one. She believed this size difference was very noticeable. In reality, because of the shape of her breasts and the short space between them, this size difference was difficult to notice. She felt an anxiety any time she imagined her wedding night.

Being a woman of traditional values she was of the persuasion the only time she would give a man permission to see or touch her private parts was on her wedding night. She believed if a boyfriend ever tried to touch her before she was married she would easily tell him no. As a gentleman he would respect these wishes. What seemed to be a contradiction to anyone who knew her was her desire to find a man who responded to touch. Megan believed there was a big difference between casual touch and anything sexual. She always admired those couples who showed public displays of affection.

Her dimples flashed.

She proceeded to her galley. She stepped passed her walk in closet, opened the door to her cabin, and stepped into a small hallway. On the starboard side of this hallway was the head. On the port side was a linen closet and her combination washer and dryer; the dryer was on top. She opened the door to her linen closet, grabbed a long bath towel, wrapped it around her six foot body, tied it securely over her small breasts, and shut the door. When either the linen door or the closet door were open this blocked the passageway from the cabin to the galley. Megan visually inspected the already tight blinds of the galley. She turned on the galley light.

She stepped over to her coffeemaker. This coffeemaker was on the port side of the galley on the short side of the L-shaped counter. She focused on the coffeemaker. She made an attempt at turning on her coffeemaker.

It sat there.

She made a face.

Her dimples flashed.

The surest method of getting this coffeemaker started was by smacking the side of it.

Her dream coffeemaker was a twenty-four hour programmable she spotted at a mall department store. Without her Sister-in-laws dragging her to the mall she would have never known this type of coffeemaker existed. Megan loved the idea of having a cup of coffee as soon as she woke up. The coffeemaker started. She yawned one last time and stepped away from the coffeemaker.

Megan felt she was on her way to purchasing luxury items. Her small business named *Dolphin Tours* made enough profit during her busy season to pay off her truck loan three months ahead of schedule. She felt a deep sense of accomplishment when she was able to pay six months of her business loan in advance. There were many years of this loan to go, but she believed with the work she was putting in, she'd have the loan paid off sooner than expected. This business loan covered many things, but the most important item on this loan was her charter. The name of the vessel was the: *Dolphin Queen*.

She stopped in front of her linen closet: she opened the door, pulled out a wash cloth, shut the door, turned on the head light, undid her towel, set the towel and washcloth on a black three tiered stand she purchased at the thrift store, she did her business on the toilet across from the stand, she washed her hands, she grabbed her washcloth, and stepped into her rectangular shaped corner shower. She appreciated the outstanding job: her Daddy, her brother Jimmy, and her nephew did on installing this shower. She especially liked the sliding

door.

It was rare for her to have the time to enjoy a long shower. She loved the feel of the water on her six foot body. Megan was a simple gal who enjoyed her store brand: bar of soap, body wash, shampoo, and conditioner. Having extra time she decided to try the expensive: soap, body wash, shampoo, and conditioner her Sister-in-law Nicole bought her. She: peeled open the seal, set the shampoo on her shower caddy, she opened the bottle of body wash, she sniffed the body wash, she liked the smell, she applied the body wash; and was pleased with how it felt. She used the same process for the matching soap bar, shampoo, and conditioner. She decided she would use these items for special occasions. She spent some extra time rinsing. She: turned the shower off, slide open the shower, stepped out onto a shower mat, grabbed her towel, stepped back into the shower, dried herself in the shower, tightly wrapped the long towel around her athletic nude body, and stepped out of the shower.

She stepped in front of the bathroom sink. She was ready to prepare herself for the day. This process normally took a few minutes. With her busy season being over and free from a part-time job today; she took her time.

In the mirror above the sink she gazed upon her reflection.

Her dimples flashed.

She never liked the shape of her face. Until her Sister-in-laws took her to a spa, she was unaware her face shape was named an inverted triangle. This name sounded horrible to Megan. Her facial expression was everything anyone ever needed to know about her only experience at a spa. She quickly stopped thinking about the spa.

The first item she took care of was her natural straight teeth; she brushed them with fluoride free toothpaste and took extra time to floss them. The next item she inspected was her skinny dark blond eyebrows. She took note of one eyebrow hair just a little longer than the rest and plucked it out. On purpose, she ignored her long celestial nose. She hated it's bend to the left and it's natural bump just above her nostrils. She felt the way her nostrils curved up and almost out were unappealing. In reality; a reality outside of Megan's over critical judgment of her looks, her nose fit her facial shape. Her nose blended well with her high cheekbones, her long jaw line, and her long chin with its rounded point. At this moment her dimples, which brightened her face and helped her look attractive; were just lines outside her long but thin lips. She took one more quick glance at her face and decided everything was fine.

Megan: turned off the light, she stepped out of the head, she turned to her right, she turned on the cabin light, stepped into her cabin, and was now standing in front of two French closet doors. Her brother Jimmy and herself installed these very appealing doors after removing bunk beds. The changes Megan made to this houseboat were necessary. The couple who rented the houseboat before she moved in just about destroyed the interior of the boat. She was grateful her parents gave her the houseboat and helped fund the remodel. Without her families help she would have never afforded the remodel of her houseboat and would be living on her charter. One day, when her business was successful, she would pay her family back.

Hanging on the wall was a framed family photo. This was taken after the annual Memorial Day picnic. Her three older brothers, their wives, and all of their children were standing behind Ma and Captain. All were showing their smiles. As she opened the French sliding doors she glanced at herself standing among her family. As a twenty-five year old woman she was showing her big dimple smile and was legitimately happy. The present day

Megan was disappointed in the twenty-five year old woman pictured in the photo.

With the closet doors pulled completely apart she focused on the task at hand. She was standing in front of an elaborate closet system. She enjoyed the day Nicole and herself installed this system. This system used: wire shelves, wooden shelves, shelf boxes, drawers, plastic bins, and hanging racks. The only item somewhat out of place was the brown hamper on the left side of her closet.

She opened her drawer dedicated to swimwear. Her swimsuits were neatly piled. On one side were suits she wore on her charter or when she was training. She kept her more fashionable suits on the other side of the drawer. She selected a tankini swim top from her training suits. This white top was covered in a dark red and green Hawaiian flower print. The only reason she purchased this top was because the pattern concealed the size and shape of her nipples. She quickly pulled out the matching boyshort swim bottom. This suit separate was perfect for working on the deck of her charter and for climbing in and out of the water. She pushed the drawer back in and set this suit on her bed. She went back to her closet and pulled open a large drawer. In this drawer her shorts were neatly folded and organized by type. She dug through them and found a red pair of cargo shorts. She felt they were perfect for her charter. Pulling open another drawer she grabbed a woman's white polo shirt with her Dolphin Tour symbol on her right shoulder. She set these items on the bed.

She visually checked her blinds, once she felt confident they were shut, she dropped her towel.

This cabin was on the bow side. A long window faced the bow of the boat; the tight blinds prevented Megan from viewing the Eastbank River and the town of Eastbank. On the port side of this window was a door, it opened to the porch like bow. Just outside of the door was a three foot wide ladder leading up to the top deck of her houseboat. On this top deck was another wheel. Underneath this long window was the inside wheel of her houseboat. Above this wheel and just below the window was a shelf. On this shelf was a small cactus and a flowering plant. Her bed ran along the starboard side of the houseboat underneath the window. On her bookcase head board was: a small digital alarm clock, a nice small lamp, a ship in a bottle, and a giant ring of keys; except for the keys all these items were secured to the shelf. The blinds in front of the window above the single bed matched the bow window blinds. Hanging on the wall above her headboard was a framed poster of Dan Marino. Dan Marino was Megan's all time favorite NFL football player; she felt he was the greatest quarterback to ever play. What excited Megan about this poster was Dan Marino signed it himself. To the right of this poster was a wooden plaque of the 1972 undefeated Miami Dolphins. This plaque highlighted the teams record and above this record was a picture of the team. Underneath this plaque were two framed pictures of the 1973 and 1974 Superbowl stadiums. Attached to these prints were small pictures of the Superbowl MVP's, along with the final scores of the games. As a life long Miami Dolphin fan, Megan hoped the Dolphins would win another Superbowl. Directly across from her bed on the port side was another long window; these blinds and curtains matched the other two windows. Above this window was a framed print of a beach line and a series of small framed light house prints. In between the entrance of her cabin and her walk in closet was a framed painting of a ship.

The custom painting depicted what historians believed the ship looked like before the Spanish sent the pirate ship to the bottom of the ocean. This painting was an exact replica of the ship her Daddy discovered. It took her Daddy countless hours of research and many failed

attempts to find the wreck. Captain found the ship near an island every local knew. In all the years Europeans lived in the area no one, except for a fanatical Spanish Captain, ever bothered to include this island on a map. Without the Spanish Captain's preoccupation with mapping, and her Daddy's personnel determination in finding this shipwrecked pirate ship; this pirate ship would still be undiscovered.

Megan was now dressed.

She went back into her closet and panned her shoe shelf. She longed for a shoe caddy where every pair of shoes had a specific place. Currently her shoes were neatly lined up like soldiers; the toe of the shoe was pointing toward her and the heel was facing the closet wall. Every type of shoe was grouped and organized in her preferred order; an order she always maintained. Below these shoes was a boot rack just as organized. A third set of shoes were in a long skinny bin underneath her bed. She despised getting rid of her clothes, but more than anything, she dreaded ridding herself of her shoes.

Megan had an odd relationship with clothes. Megan was content buying her clothing at department stores, out of catalogs, or at a thrift store; she reluctantly went mall shopping with her Sister-in-laws. Megan loved her Sister-in-laws but she disliked going to the mall. Even when Megan stated she was busy, her Sister-in-laws would rearrange their schedule so she could go. Megan was gratefully aware they often times went to the mall without inviting her. Megan wished her Sister-in-laws would pick a different social activity. No matter where Megan purchased her clothes she felt the clothes she wore were an extension of herself. As long as she could remember she felt certain feelings and emotions based upon the clothes she wore. An additional feeling made its presence known when she entered puberty. She internally termed this specific feeling as her "weird" feeling. She never verbalized this feeling to anyone. When feeling this feeling around others she'd say a piece of clothing felt "uncomfortable" or she "didn't like" the item. To the people who knew Megan what clothes she liked or disliked made very little sense. To Megan her choices made perfect sense.

This feeling affected her wardrobe in many ways. She was very selective on what denim she purchased. She never bought anything too tight; the exception was work out clothes or swimsuits. She very rarely bought clothes with silky feeling fabrics. She felt more confident in wearing uniforms; this was why she spent the extra money on the polo shirts with her business symbol on them. Before she slept nude or semi-nude, she wore pajamas that gave her a feeling of comfort; the same type of comfort someone might feel sleeping with a stuffed animal. She often wanted to wear different type of styles, but anytime she felt this internal "weird" feeling, she put the item back onto the shelf or returned the clothes to the catalog company. This feeling caused her wardrobe to be very conservative.

She felt a similar feeling toward shoes and makeup. She always felt "odd" wearing makeup. Besides this odd feeling, she felt makeup was expensive and it seemed to take forever to apply. Her college friends taught her how to apply makeup simply and modestly. On those rare occasions she applied makeup it went on the same way with the same exact colors. When it came to her shoes, anytime she experienced a certain memory in a pair of shoes, she found it difficult to get rid of them. Megan easily remembered every special memory associated with a specific shoe. She reluctantly went through her shoes when the bin underneath her bed was full.

Megan: grabbed a new pair of gray and white swim shoes with a zipper on top, she quickly slipped them on, zipped them up, she opened a small drawer, she pulled out a simple

hair tie, she placed her long dark blond hair into a pony tail, she reached up into her closet and grabbed what the sport catalog called a brown *Pacific Siesta Hat*. She liked how she could turn up the sides and liked the snug feel. Once her hat was on the way she liked: she shut all of the open drawers, she opened another small drawer, she picked out one of her favorite pairs of sunglasses, she secured these glasses on top of her hat, shut the small drawer, she stepped back, stood there, and when she felt everything was squared away she shut the french doors.

She: stepped over to her single bed, took the time to make her bed, grabbed the wad of keys off of the headboard, clipped them onto her red cargo shorts, opened all her blinds, looked out into the slowly fading night sky, turned off the light, stepped out of her cabin, turned on the light to the head, glanced at herself in the full length mirror that hung on the back of the head door, she turned to her mirrored cabinet, opened the cabinet, grabbed an open bottle of sunblock, shut this cabinet, turned off the light, stepped into the galley, turned on a light, opened a wooden cabinet above her coffeemaker, and took out a University of Florida Seminole Travel Mug; the Seminole insignia stamped on the outside of the cup was nearly faded away. She owned other mugs but this was her favorite since she purchased it as a Freshman in college. She relaxed by: turning around, leaning her back against the short end of the L shaped counter, and took a few delightful sips of her morning coffee.

The cabinets of this L-shaped counter were redone. She liked the two tubed sink she installed. This was in the middle of the long part of the L. This section was alongside the port side wall of her houseboat. Above this sink was a small window with a curtain. In front of the window was a hanging plant hung up by a beaded hanger; a hanger she bought at the thrift store. At the end of this counter, where the galley ended and the lounge started, was a brand new electric stove. She purchased this stove at a scratch and dent sale. She purchased this stove because of it's price, but more important the dent was against the side of the cabinet. On the bow side of where she was standing was: the short side of the L-shaped cabinet, the short hallway, and on the opposite side of the passageway was her refrigerator. A foot beyond the refrigerator was where a window ran the length of the galley. Below this window was a very nice small kitchen table she purchased at a yard sale. In front of this window were five evenly spaced hanging plants. Tied neatly alongside of this window were brand new curtains Nicole purchased for her. Megan imagined what two of these plants would look like when they blossomed in a few weeks.

She wished she had the money to replace the lounge rug. This rug marked the edge of the galley and the beginning of the lounge.

After she took another sip of her coffee she became motivated. She: set the coffee mug down, stepped over to her refrigerator and opened the door. She removed: a small Ziplog bag of grapes, an unopened bag of baby carrots, and a container of non-fat raspberry yogurt she mixed herself. She: shut the refrigerator door with her hip, set the food on the L-shaped counter, opened a cabinet, grabbed a plastic grocery bag, placed her food into the bag, grabbed her coffee mug, and turned off the galley light. She stepped into her lounge and set these items on to her coffee table. She opened the curtains. Every woman in her family hated these thrift store curtains. These curtains would have been replaced but everyone in the family knew Ma was sewing her new ones as a Christmas present. Megan open the blinds wide enough so her plants would stay healthy. She checked the temperature of the air conditioner. Others would have thought the houseboat was hot; with Megan spending a large portion of her time outside she felt the temperature was perfect.

She took a couple steps backward and studied her large Ficus Allie tree. She again reminded herself she needed to trim it; it was growing over the sides of both her futons. Looking up she noticed the top of the tree was making her ceiling green. Her dimples showed her concern and guilt for not watering this plant. She panning her houseboat, based upon this quick assessment, she began to check the moisture of her plants.

At the age of nine her Sister-in-law Nicole gave Megan one plant to take care off and this started a life long fascination with plants. Megan admired Nicole's skill as a gardener but Megan felt she was just as skilled handling household plants. She questioned her green thumb when she realized she needed to water all her plants. Megan: stepped into her galley, she went to her long cabinet, underneath the two tubed sink she pulled out her watering can, she filled it, and proceeded to water her precious plants. She started with the hanging plants in the lounge. There were twelve evenly spaced hooks in her lounge, nine of these twelve hooks currently had plants on them. Six of the nine were all different. The three other plants were duplicates. These duplicate plants were started from buds of the other six plants. Megan made sure at least two of the nine plants bloomed during each season of the year. She maintained this principal with her potted plants. After checking the hanging plants she checked her three plant stands. There were two plant stands on either side of her small TV stand. This TV stand was on the starboard side of the lounge facing the wooden futon on the port side of her houseboat. Her favorite plant stand was a simple circular towering stand on the edge of the galley and the lounge. On the very top of this stand was a large Ala Vera plant. She was proud of her skills when she took seedlings from this plant and gave them to every female member of her family. She went back to the galley and refilled her watering can. When the watering can was filled she watered three of the six plants in front of the galley window. After watering these plants she went to her three foot tall Jade. This plant was to the right of a small end table and a couple feet from the electric stove. This end table was next to the wooden futon. The plant was in a brand new pot she purchased at the thrift store. She cringed at how much she paid for this fancy planter. After the Jade plant was watered she went back to the galley and refilled the watering can and went to her Ficus Allie tree. She again felt guilty when it took the whole watering can to water the plant.

Her dimples flashed.

She was clearly disappointed in herself.

Megan: went back into the galley, again filled the watering can, stepped out onto the stern of her boat, she set the watering can on a bolted down wooden bench, unhooked a couple bungee cords, and grabbed a small step ladder she hung against her houseboat. The bottom deck of the boat was attached to the top deck by a series of poles. There was a three rung pole fence around the boat. This fence gave the boat a walk way around the living quarters and gave a protective edge around the houseboat. Megan panted this network of poles white. Megan attached this small ladder to her houseboat to maintain three of the four hanging plants hung around the stern. There was a large potted palm tree attached to the network of poles on the starboard corner of the houseboat. Attached to the living quarters, on the port side, next to the wooden bench were two flags; the top one was a brand new American flag and below was a black POW MIA Flag. After checking three of the four hanging plants, Megan decided to bring these plants in for the summer.

Megan glanced up at the last hanging plant. She was considering replacing this sun bleached fake plant. This fake plant was hanging by itself on the port side above the bench and

next to the flags. This plant concealed two extra houseboat keys. Megan purposely rigged this plant so a stranger would struggle getting the key. The first obstacle to retrieving the keys was the height of the plant. The second obstacle was the odd hook she used to hang the plant, if a person was unfamiliar with this hook, it would be very difficult to remove the plant. The last obstacle to getting at these emergency keys, was the knowledge of where the key was buried. It was underneath the fake ground inside the pot. In all the time living on the houseboat Megan only needed to get these keys once.

From the stern of her boat she observed the marina waking up. On the starboard side of her houseboat Frank and Florence's houseboat lights were on. She looked across the pier at Gina's house boat and wondered what woman stayed over this time. Megan felt if Gina would settle down and pick one gal she would be happier.

She: carefully hung the three hanging plants inside, she watered them, she again filled her watering can, she stepped outside onto her bow, she watered a couple palm trees, she went back in, ignoring her cactus she watered the one plant in her cabin, she went back to the galley, she rinsed out the watering can, she put the watering can away, washed her hands, grabbed a bottled water from her refrigerator, she drank it all, and placed this bottle in a recycle bin underneath the sink.

She went back into her lounge and stepped in front of a small end table. On top of the table was: a small lamp, a land line portable phone for her personal use, a charging cell phone she used for business purposes, and a leather pouch. She: unplugged her cell phone, grabbed the leather pouch, put the phone into the pouch, hooked it onto a belt loop, she went over to her coffee table, picked up the items she left on the table, she went up the two steps of her lounge, and with a bit of sadness glanced at the floor lamp next to the steps. Her Nana gave her this floor lamp. What made this lamp sentimental was her Nana gave her this lamp a month before she passed away. This was heartbreaking for Megan because this was her last surviving grandparent. Thinking about her Nana still stung, but time was healing this wound.

She stepped out onto the stern of her houseboat.

Nicole was standing in front of her closet contemplating what she would wear for the day. She was wearing a shell and starfish patterned two piece pajama set. The top was short sleeved but the full length bottoms came with a drawstring. With Megan having a full day off they were having lunch at *Lucy's*. Nicole felt this was the perfect time to fulfill her promise to: Ma, her Sister-in-laws, and herself.

Two weeks earlier Diana provided a catered lunch at her ocean side condo for: Nicole, Timmy's wife Sam, Megan's mother and Nicole's Mother-in-Law Mary, Mary's sister Alice, and Megan's Aunt Ruth; who was Megan's father's sister. After catching up and enjoying the niceties of lunch; they spent the next few hours discussing Megan's sexual orientation. After much debate they were unsure if Megan was straight or gay. However; they agreed with Nicole's assessment. Nicole felt if they confronted Megan and she was indeed straight this would hurt her. The widest difference on why Megan was hurting was between Sam and Mary. Sam felt Megan was afraid the family would reject her because she was gay and liked being a lesbian. Mary felt her Daughter was struggling with unwanted same sex attraction and was afraid the family would reject her instead of helping her. No matter what anyone believed, none of them wanted to add to Megan's hurt, and all felt horrible Megan was afraid to tell

them.

Mary was having trouble believing Megan was having sexual difficulties if she was indeed a virgin. Mary and Alice jumped to the conclusion if Megan was indeed a lesbian she was already sleeping with women. The three Sister-in-laws and Auntie Ruth tried to help Mary and Alice understand Megan could be struggling with sex and relationships no matter what Megan's sexual orientation was. A bigger obstacle was convincing these two women Megan was struggling with sex while still being a virgin. All of them reassured Mary their belief Megan was indeed a virgin; as Megan herself often gladly proclaimed. There was a point in the conversation where Mary felt their talk was inappropriate and asked to be excused. Mary's Daughter-in-laws, and Ruth extended their grace to Ma and promised to tell her what they planned. Mary and Alice left at the same time; because Mary drove Alice to this get together.

The plan they agreed upon would go forward in steps. The first step was for Nicole to talk to Megan in a nonconfrontational manner. Based upon this conversation Nicole would decide on how the family would proceed. If Nicole felt Megan was indeed a homosexual, and felt it was appropriate, she would gently ask Megan if she was a lesbian. If Nicole felt Megan was a lesbian, but felt it was inappropriate for her to address Megan's sexuality by herself; the three sister-in-laws and Ruth would talk with Megan. If Nicole felt Megan was indeed gay and felt asking Megan or bringing it out in the open would hurt Megan, they would wait until Megan came out on her own. If Megan was to afraid to come out, they would make a concerted effort in making Megan feel comfortable enough to express her sexual orientation. Everyone of these ladies had different feelings and hopes for what would happen; but they all loved Megan. The one worry all of the ladies shared was how the men in the family would react. The women were sure the men would have very little to no tact. Nicole felt if the men in the family felt Megan was a lesbian they had to address this issue before Christmas.

Sam proposed; Megan might never fully confess she was a lesbian, but would start bringing a "friend" over. This led to every lady in the family discussing on how they should handle Megan having a "friend." Nicole was grateful they discussed this angle. What irritated Nicole was the feeling Sam brought this up to illustrate a point instead of any real concern for Megan.

Nicole was deciding on how to bring up the topic of homosexuality without accusing Megan of being gay. The inner debate on how to approach Megan was effecting her decision on what outfit she should wear. A consideration was the fact they were having lunch at *Lucy's*. *Lucy's* was the place all of the locals went. Nicole knew: the leaders of Eastbank met there, friends had meals together, many couples had their first date at *Lucy's*, many of the same men showed up before work to have breakfast, many first jobs were at this restaurant, and gossip flowed in and out of this establishment. So much gossip flowed in and out of the place, Nicole questioned if people went there for the food or for the flowing gossip; Nicole suspected both were reasons to go.

Nicole considered her brand new button fly embellished jeans; she liked the two rhinestone studded belt loops. She felt this pair of jeans were hip; without making it look like she was trying to appear hip. The best top to go with these jeans was a large V shaped pink striped polo shirt. The pink V went across the center, above and below the V, the rest of the shirt was white. The other option was wearing the same jeans but with a yellow embellished sheer Georgette blouse with a back zipper. If she wore this top, she would wear a simple

yellow cami underneath.

She made a face.

With it being a June day in Florida she considered a linen shirt dress. She liked the orange, black, and white pattern. This dress was trendy the prior summer. Nicole felt she could still wear it this summer. If she wore the dress she would add a brown ringed belt. Her apprehension with these outfits was the feeling it was too casual; she was fighting the impulse to dress very formal. She considered a green jersey dress. This dress was casual but feminine.

She made a face of doubt.

She recalled the white cropped pants she purchased a couple weeks earlier. The print on these pants seemed to feel less confrontational. She decided she would add a red seamed neck tee and a light blue denim vest; this was just in case it was chilly inside of *Lucy's*. She loved the idea of looking youthful without appearing as though she was trying to look as young as Megan. She was aware this outfit would be similar to what Megan wore but would be far from the same.

She smiled when she heard Jimmy crawl out of bed.

Nicole waited.

She acted serious when her thirty-six year old husband, a husband she loved for seventeen years, wrapped his arms around her.

She asked teasing, pretending to be serious, "What do you want?"

"I was admiring the lady standing in front of me."

He gently kissed her neck.

She loved the fact he found her attractive. What astounded her was he found her attractive wearing pajamas.

"The kids will be up."

She moved her hands on top of his.

"Remember when we didn't have children?"

Still looking at her wardrobe, "We've always had children."

He stated matter of fact, "Not before the Marines."

He again kissed the back of her neck.

She loved this. She was in the mood to make love to him. The problem was her three children would be up in a few minutes.

Answering playfully, "Those few months is what gave us Jeff."

"Ain't you remembering what we did before?"

Answering in a serious tone, "I was a lady and wouldn't let you go all the way."

"We'd have fun," he answered. "I was a gentleman. I always stopped when Y'all said too."

Nicole wondered why she was the one who needed to put on the brakes. One of the reasons she fell in love with Jimmy was he always stopped. What Nicole never told Jimmy was stopping was sometimes very stressful; especially after the first time she experienced an orgasm from his touch. What Jimmy never told Nicole, even though there were many dates of frustration, he was pleased they were virgins on their wedding night.

She enjoyed his arms around her.

He added, "I was remembering how much fun we'd have when we were going out. I was thinking we should again play like we used too. Maybe this will get us out of our rut."

Her face crinkled, "Are you suggesting we should go parking?"

“Why not?”

Joking, she turned around, and poked his chest; “To make it authentic you'd need the same pickup truck.”

“Okay,” he said with a smile, “I'll drive us to the junk yard.”

She shook her head, “I'm a lady I ain't playing at a junk yard. Because I'm a lady I ain't parking.”

“Why not?”

She made a face and tapped his chest, “If we went to one of them parking spots we'd scare the teenagers away.”

They laughed.

When they were done chuckling they looked at one another seriously.

She reached up and gently touched his rectangular shaped face. She appreciated how he kept his face shaved. She liked his dark blue eyes, his long smile, and she always admired his chin. She was grateful he was still in shape, he was far from the husband who left the Marines, but to her he was still physically attractive. What Nicole loved most: he was a very good husband, was a good Daddy, he listened to her, he did what he said, and she was certain he loved her. She spotted this love in his eyes.

Being serious he repeated, “I was thinking we could enjoy the playing around we did when we parked. I've been thinking we're rushing into intercourse.”

He knew his wife hated slang sexual terms.

She smiled.

She gave him a look she only gave him, she reached down into his boxers and commented, “How we used to play?”

He smiled.

She felt his member get ready.

Ever since she touched his cock for the first time she loved the feel of it. She enjoyed those opportunities when she was the one who caused his cock to go from limp to erect; it still amazed her how it could go from five inches to seven.

She mentioned, “It's difficult to be spontaneous with our kids.”

He said with a smile. “But I love it when you touch me.”

He started to slip off his shorts.

There was a knock on the door.

Nicole quietly pulled her hand out and he pulled his shorts up.

She was as disappointed as he was.

Ester's voice came through the door, “Momma I'm hungry.”

This was their ten year old, the youngest of three.

Nicole commanded, “Y'all get yourself a bowl of cereal.”

Brief silence.

Ester answered, “But I was hungry for eggs and grits.

“I don't have the time for a choose your own breakfast.”

“Oh.”

Jimmy stated with authority, “Young lady you heard Momma. You get going. Y'all are able to get your own breakfast.”

The quick reply was, “Yes Sir.”

They heard her feet head toward the kitchen.

Nicole nodded at Jimmy. He leaned down and they kissed.

"I'm needing a shower," he stated. "I have to see a client before he goes to work."

Nicole was grateful he was seeing a new client. Her husband was trying to be an expert insurance salesman. Nicole suspected he was better at building things than selling insurance for things already built.

"Why not wear your burgundy suit coat?"

He gave her a look.

She opened the closet next to hers.

Soon after he left the marines she started to buy his dress clothes. She grew tired of his black dress pants, his white shirts, and his simple colored ties. She felt the burgundy coat would jazz him up. She was keenly aware he never wore this suit coat before.

"Here."

She handed him the burgundy coat.

She asked, "Who are Y'all seeing?"

"Bill."

She knew who this was.

"Here."

She handed him a gray pleated pair of slacks.

"But..."

She handed him a burgundy and white striped shirt; another item she knew he never wore before.

"I ain't a fan of wearing stripes."

"Stripes make you look handsome."

Before he could protest she handed him a burgundy and gray patterned tie.

"There."

He smiled and leaned in and gently kissed her; this quickly escalated to more passionate kissing.

They heard a knock on the door.

They reluctantly pulled away.

Jimmy grabbed a: belt, a pair of black socks, briefs, and stepped into the bathroom; Nicole wished he would have taken his gray pair of socks instead.

Nicole heard Ester through the door, "Where's the fruit cereal?"

This question irritated Nicole.

She quickly opened the door.

Standing in front of her was Ester. It was obvious to Nicole her ten year old was just starting to transition from a young round baby face into the triangular shaped face of a Steward. Her chin was starting to point downward and her mouth was longer than most girls her age. Where Ester differed from the Steward family was her light brown eyes and the reddish tint in her brunette hair. This natural red tint was inherited from Nicole's grandmother. What was odd to Nicole was the red in her hair was slowly starting to dominate her brunette hair; creating a whole new color.

Nicole answered Ester's question bluntly, "I dumped it in the garbage disposal."

With a look and sound of disappointment Ester asked, "Why?"

"Your brother knows better."

Ester protested, "I liked it."

Nicole answered, "It's not good for you."

"Why?"

"I've told you."

"Jeff says once in a while ain't hurting anyone."

"Once is to much in this house."

"Ms. Jennifer lets Danielle eat good cereal."

"If Danielle's Momma lets her eat sugared cereal that is up to her. But as your Momma I ain't allowing junk food in my house."

"Oh."

Ester felt it was time to spend more time at her Best Friends house instead of Danielle staying over at her house.

"Rose's Momma lets her eat good cereals."

"I don't care what our next door neighbor eats. We're all eating healthy."

Ester made a face.

"You like the cinnamon wheat cereal I buy."

Ester shook her head.

Nicole was irritated, "You told me you liked it."

"Our cereals are boring."

Nicole suddenly realized Ester was still in her pajamas. Nicole wondered why their school district always ended on June first. It seemed odd to end the year on a Thursday.

"Why ain't Y'all ready for school?"

"Julie is taking a shower," Ester became upset. "She yelled at me. I don't like it when she yells at me."

They heard Jimmy start his shower. He was in the bathroom attached to the bedroom.

"I have to change."

Nicole decided she would wear something casual until she was ready to leave.

Ester stepped into the bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed.

Ester complained, "She doesn't play games with me no more."

"With her being older her interests have changed."

"She don't like me no more."

Nicole could hear the hurt in her youngest voice.

"Yes she does," Nicole answered as she folded her pajama top onto the chair. Nicole was facing Ester, "She loves you. She's just getting older."

Ester complained, "I don't like Jennie."

Nicole disliked Jennie and Julies new friends as well; but Nicole kept this to herself.

"Why did Julie get new friends?"

Nicole answered while facing the closet and putting on her bra and her simple red V-neck tee.

"As we get older sometimes we change friends."

"Danielle and Rosie will be my friends forever."

"I'm sure they will be."

Nicole adjusted her shirt.

"Why isn't she playing UNO with me?"

Nicole was certain this was Ester's favorite game.

Nicole: took off her pajama bottoms, folded them, set them on the pajama top, opened

a drawer from inside the closet, took out a pair of light blue Capri jeans, shut the drawer, quickly slipped these jeans on, opened another drawer, slipped on a pair of socks, stood up, and slipped on a plain blue buttoned blouse.

Reassuring her daughter, "She still loves you."

"But she ain't playing with me no more. Why won't she play with me?"

At one time Julie allowed Ester to take along, this ended when Julie turned fifteen and her friends changed.

Nicole repeated herself, "She's bigger."

"I ain't liking sisters getting bigger. Why do sisters get bigger?"

Nicole walked over to her youngest, and started to lead Ester out of her room, "You'll get bigger too."

Ester made a face.

Based upon Ester's facial expression it was easy for Nicole to spot the idea of growing up was a bit frightening for Ester; this was in contrast to other moments when she was in a hurry to grow up.

"Let's get ready for school and I'll fix something for breakfast."

Ester asked very eager, "Are Y'all making eggs?"

"How about oat meal?"

Disappointed Ester answered, "Okay."

The two ladies: stepped out of the bedroom, walked down the hallway, went right, walked through the living room, and up the stairs. The whole time Ester continued to ask endless questions. Nicole assumed it was difficult for Ester being five years younger than her older sister and almost six years older than her brother. Ester's interests were completely different from her siblings. Ester was far more interested in art and books than sports; with the one exception being soccer.

They reached the top of the stairs.

"She's still taking a shower," Ester added. "I need to take my shower."

The only reason Ester wanted to take a shower was because her sister was taking one.

Nicole commanded gently, "Y'all are fine. Start getting ready for school. When your sister is done with her shower you get in there and wash up. After breakfast brush your teeth."

"I want..."

"I'll check."

"Yes Ma'am."

"Get going."

"She's been taking a shower for a long time."

"Stop worrying about your Sister and change."

Ester knew this tone and simply answered, "Yes Ma'am."

Nicole smiled and shut the bedroom door behind her.

Ester liked the door open, but if her Momma shut the door, she knew enough to keep the door closed.

Nicole knocked on the bathroom door.

No answer.

Nicole was concerned with Julie's extended showers. With her daughter's strong body odor she understood why Julie took long showers. What concerned Nicole was Julie's trend of extra long showers. Nicole was worried her Daughter was using these extra long showers to

cover up a drug addiction. Nicole was far from being a paranoid parent; she was a concerned one. Nicole put her ear on the door. This sort of snooping was difficult for Nicole. She wanted her children to feel free to be themselves and to have their own personal space. She wanted to believe if her children were addicted to drugs they would tell her. She was realistic as well; she was aware children were capable of hiding their addiction until it was too late. What worried Nicole was the fact Julie was: a genius, loved collecting things, she pushed things as far as she could, and it was in Julie's nature to hide details.

Nicole stepped back and looked at the door.

What she heard was a reminder her daughter was growing up. She recalled the time her mother rushed into her bedroom and belittled her for masturbating. Nicole strongly believed this was the wrong approach. The problem was the long showers had to stop; Nicole would pick the right time to talk to her.

She knocked on the door and called out, "Julie."

Nicole heard: the shower head clank onto the tub bottom, more noises, the water slowed up, the curtain moved, and Julie shouting through the door; "Momma?"

It was impossible to avoid noticing Julie's odd voice.

Nicole yelled, "Y'all need to finish."

"Okay."

"I ain't wanting my daughter to late for her exams."

"They're boring."

"Not everything will be as exciting as a sporting event."

"Why not?"

"Are Y'all sassing me?"

Julie quickly answered, "No Ma'am."

"I'll give you work duty instead of letting Y'all over to Jennie's house."

Julie was keenly aware on how Jennie and her Momma were struggling.

"Yes Ma'am."

Nicole heard Ester's door open.

Nicole yelled at Julie, "Julie you have five minutes."

"Yes Ma'am."

Ester pleaded, "I'm hungry."

Nicole smiled.

"I'll fix you some oat meal."

Nicole grabbed her daughters hand.

The two ladies heard the garage door open. Nicole assumed this was her son and his friends leaving for school. She was certain he left his lunch in the refrigerator. She was convinced he was leaving his healthy lunch in the refrigerator to have an excuse to eat out or eat the junk food the school sold.

Ester asked, "Is Jeff leaving?"

"I'm sure it was."

Ester being eager, "I bet he left his lunch again. Is he getting work duty?"

She wanted her older brother in trouble because he was always teasing her. What she hated and liked was when he picked her up and spun her over his head; until she screamed or her Momma yelled at him. Ester did enjoy it when her older siblings were in trouble.

"Y'all should worry about what Y'all are doing."

By her Momma's tone Ester knew if she continued to push she'd be in trouble. Ester climbed up onto one of three tall stools in front of the kitchen counter and turned on the TV, she turned the stations, "Why is there only news on?"

"It's how it is."

Nicole pulled the container of oatmeal out of the cupboard.

"Y'all want toast?"

Ester smiled, "Yes Ma'am."

"Grape jelly?"

Ester answered excited, "Yea."

Nicole gladly answered Ester's list of random questions related to what she was seeing on the news.

Ashleigh reached over and turned off the beeping alarm. Ashleigh preferred her alarm clock radio over the alarm the resort provided. She despised the one hour difference between Wisconsin and Florida.

She felt the last ten days were emotionally and physically draining. She was used to meetings in corporate settings but the meetings in the last ten days were in the presence of: politicians, executives, bankers, lawyers, and the media. Adding to the stress of the last ten days, she took on the responsibility of making sure every meeting went smoothly. She often times felt these elite members of society looked down upon her; worse was when they tried to manipulate her. Often times Bob or Haley needed to address the situation so a member of this elite class would take her seriously.

Besides attending meetings Haley and Ashleigh were visiting a list of possible sites for her Brother's company *Renewed Mastery*. This involved driving hundreds of miles all over southeastern Florida. Everyplace they went they took pictures of: the community, the proposed location of the company, did minor research of the community, and in many of these communities had meetings with the leaders. A week earlier she spent half the day with her brother looking for yachts. This was a frustrating shopping trip.

She stopped herself from dwelling on this day.

What was on the top of her mind were the trips to a town named *Eastbank*. This large town was a forty-five minute to an hour drive north of *Fort Lauderdale*. She was flattered her brother agreed with their assessment of the industrial park and the town. She felt this was the best place to relocate his company too. A concern for Ashleigh was how her brother found out about this small coastal town. Ashleigh worried her brother had a local lady "friend."

The alarm beeped again.

She scolded the alarm, "Shut up."

She lifted her head up off the pillow and turned off the alarm.

She: turned over and was now laying on her stomach, she watched the little red numbers of the alarm clock turn, her arm was over the side of the bed, she imagined Nikita waking her up by putting her nose next to face; these thoughts caused Ashleigh to wonder how Nikita was getting along with Ariel and Guinevere.

She reminded herself she needed to call Victoria.

Laying there she started to think about all the sexy Floridian guys she met. She never imagined there would be so many attractive and in shape men in one place. She was starting

to enjoy hearing; “howdy Ma'am,” “howdy”, and “Y'all”. She admired their southern hospitality and was flattered when a man opened a door for her. She was undecided if she liked people calling her Ma'am. She was turned on by all the guys who were dressed like her favorite country singers and she enjoyed watching the men of the Fort Lauderdale police department bike up and down the beach.

She contemplated a one night stand. With all the different men in this upscale resort it would be easy to fulfill.

Sometime during these thoughts she slipped her hand underneath her panties. She was barely conscience of her actions. It had been years since she enjoyed herself while laying on her stomach.

She was keenly aware of how many of these men were responding to her flirtatiousness. She thought about a few of the employees of the hotel who were going out of their way to talk to her. She was aware this was partly due to the tips but she could sense when it was something else. She liked the idea of deflowering the young bellman who worked part-time at night. She stopped this thought. Instead; she concentrated on all of the manly men who paid her attention. They were a lot more appealing than the wimpy guys who tended to like her back home.

She was experiencing the difficulty of abstaining from sex after having it.

She continued to fantasize about a hot one night stand. She forced herself to glance up at the clock. She knew she needed to stop or she would be late. In her attempt to stop, she put some realism into her fantasy. What she imagined was the guilt she would feel for having a one night stand. She loved the three men she slept with, but when she broke up with them there was regret; she allowed herself to feel this regret. She imagined the guilt and regret she would feel after a one night stand.

She was temporarily fighting her fingers; they were not moving but they were there.

She imagined kicking out a one night stand out of bed and being happy to never see him again. Being honest with herself she recognized the chances of falling in love with him were immense; especially if he took his time. The chances of loving him doubled if this stranger liked to cuddle. Her mind went to Neil and their long foreplay sessions.

She lost the fight to stop.

Her mind flashed to Neil's penis. She remembered how shocked and disappointed she was when she first spotted it.

This caused her to slow up.

She started up again when she imagined a guy who enjoyed foreplay but was maybe an inch or so larger. This caused her to flashback to Clyde's member. She loved its girth, how impressive it looked, and what it felt like in her hand. Then came the recall. Clyde continually pressured her to perform oral, she reluctantly caved into his pressure; this was one of the worst sexual experiences of her life. In addition to this; she would never forget how much it hurt whenever he jammed it in.

Recalling these experiences just about killed any desire to continue.

It was Neil who taught her how important foreplay was. She liked the fact she never encountered any discomfort while having sex with him. Being honest; having him inside was far from spectacular.

These thoughts started her up again.

Reading an article in a magazine, she came to recognize her privates were smaller than

average. This caused her to research the link between positions and the size of a guys penis. Since this research she had two mental lists. One was a list of positions with a large cock and a list with a small cock. She would never let a guy, no matter what his size was, just jam it in without being ready.

She wished she could shape a cucumber.

Her first two boyfriends were jerks when it involved performing oral sex. She would never again perform oral on a large cock; this was like having a doctor force her to gag. Both times were horrible experiences.

These memories almost caused her to sit up and get ready.

Neil was the only guy she performed oral on without being asked. The reason she did so was because he never asked and because he was such a giving partner. The way she made this enjoyable was using flavored lube or dumping chocolate syrup over it; Ashleigh felt this made it taste like a Popsicle. With how much Neil appreciated it and the flavor she created; these experiences were enjoyable. She reasoned she was one of the few women who desired a small cock over a large one.

What was about to send her over the edge was imagining a stranger who was an inch or two larger than Neil and loved foreplay as much as he did. In her fantasy it was big enough to feel but small enough where it never hurt.

The phone rang.

This startled her and she fumbled answering the phone.

It was the resort giving her a wake up call.

Even though Ashleigh never asked for the wake up call she was thankful she received one. This stopped her self exploration. She never felt guilty about exploring herself; this was keeping her from having sex with another person. What concerned her was the fantasy of being with a stranger: she was away from anyone she knew, she was stressed, was very aroused, and the temptation of having a one night stand was very real. She wanted to finish but it would have been irresponsible to start up again.

She reminded herself of the promise to wait until she was married to have sex again.

She: hung up the phone, took a deep breath, crawled out of bed, stood up, stretched her five foot one self, let out a groan of frustration, and frizzed up her long blond hair. She was dressed in a brand new pair of multi striped pajama shorts and a matching top.

Once she was focused she: went to the bathroom, started the water in the bathtub, left the bathroom, grabbed the clothes she laid out on a chair the night before, reminded herself there was not enough time to change her mind, carried the dress into the large bathroom, hung the dress on a hanger on the wall, set her underclothes on the counter, slipped of her clothes, checked the water, stepped into the bathtub, pulled the curtain closed, and started her shower. While taking her shower she prayed and asked for the strength to resist the temptation of fulfilling the fantasy of a one night stand. She reminded herself the reality of an encounter would be a lot different from the fantasy.

Megan: stepped onto the stern of her houseboat, she set her things onto a wooden bench, she unclipped her wad of keys from the loop of her red cargo shorts, spread them out in her left hand, and flipped through them with patience. She tried the one she believed was for her houseboat, to her delight it was the correct key, and locked the door.

She was feeling the need to change her key system. Having these type of feelings began the day she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. The intensity increased the day she allowed the Pentecostal women in her Mamma's Bible study lay hands on her.

Her face showed concern and her dimples were visible.

The last few times she went to the hardware store she ran out of time to have her keys redone or she needed to purchase something more important. When it came to any purchase she used a very balanced and responsible approach. She felt with her keys working, even if they were cumbersome, she should wait.

She clipped the wad of keys onto her red pair of shorts.

Megan grabbed the plastic grocery bag and her coffee from off the bench.

She stepped off her houseboat onto her pier; this pier was on the port side of her houseboat. She stepped onto the first of three piers of the marina. She turned to her left to check on the ocean and the sky. In front of her was the pier she was standing on, vessels on either side of her, the marina parking lot, the road, a space of tall grass, directly across from the marina was a worn out path through this tall grass, the bike path, the beach, and then the ocean. The marina itself was on the Eastbank river. If she looked left there was a tall metal fence bordering the property and the preserve. Alongside of this fence was a dumpster and five wheeled carts locked to this fence; every vessel was given one key to unlock these carts. There was a small space between the front of this fence and the river. To the left of this fence was the shoreline of the Eastbank River. This shoreline was maintained by the Town of Eastbank. For two miles this shoreline was mowed, there were picnic tables placed along this shoreline, and one very large walking bridge near the opposite end of the two miles. There was debate about building another one closer to the marina. The people fighting this idea were: Mike the owner of the marina, Megan herself, other charter owners, and boat owners. To the right of the parking lot were sixteen buildings in even rows of four. These were garages and storage units for the general public and for those who lived or docked a vessel at the marina. Mike, the owner of the marina, reserved a certain amount of these units for the people using the marina. The rest were first come first serve but he tended to favor those who lived in the marina.

Megan recalled when Mike purchased the land to expand the marina. She remembered watching the mansions on this land being torn down to create this space.

Her dimples flashed.

She remembered a time when each one of these sixteen buildings were painted different and it was obvious different materials were used. Recently Mike paid to replace the siding and roofs of all these buildings. Now, the only way to tell different materials were used to construct these buildings was if a person had a keen eye or worked in the building industry.

One of the reasons she loved living next to the ocean was the sunrise she was gazing at. Reading the ocean and the sky she felt it would be a clear morning. This was a pleasant change after the last three mornings.

Her dimples flashed.

She: focused, turned around, and headed to her charter. She often thought about living on her charter and renting out the houseboat. She discounted this idea. She believed she needed to have a place where she could get away from her charter. She honestly liked her current living arrangements.

As she walked down the pier she passed her charter, the name of her charter was;

Dolphin Queen. On the port side of her charter was a professionally installed pier. Attached to this pier was a five rung metal fence with a metal gate at the front of the pier and next to the charter. On either side of the charter's pier, attached to the first pier of the marina, on both sides was a short but decorative wooden fence. Attached to the right side of this fence was: a wooden pole with a sign attached to it, at the bottom of the pole was a button with a small sign above saying *ring*, a wooden bench was secured to the front of the wooden fence, and above and slightly behind the bench was a flower bed the length of the wooden bench. On the left side of the wooden pier, attached to the decorative fence was a large wooden sign designed by her Nephew Jeff. The top quarter of the sign, in the fancy font Megan used on her business cards, was the name of her small business; *Dolphin Tours*. Just below this title was the symbol of Megan's small business; this was three dolphins swimming swiftly on top of the ocean. Underneath Megan's symbol Jeff carved in fancy but readable letters: *Ms. Megan Steward Owner Operator*, beneath this was Megan's business cell phone number, and her website address. Underneath this sign was a well maintained flower bed; Nicole often times helped Megan maintain it.

Megan remembered when Nicole called her in a panic telling her to forgo ordering a professionally made sign. Nicole informed Megan, Jeff was in the process of making her a wooden sign. Nicole reassured Megan the sign was turning out spectacular. When Jeff and Jimmy, Jimmy using his pick-up-truck to bring it over, presented the sign to Megan; she acted surprised. Megan honestly felt the sign was spectacular. Megan recalled the memory of Jeff and Jimmy attaching the sign on the fence and over the flower bed.

Megan's dimples flashed.

The worst part, was after Jimmy and Jeff stomped on most of the plant life in the flower bed, Nicole and herself needed to replace the flowers and plants.

Megan bent down very lady like when she set her things on the bench. She was making sure Gina or any other person would have difficulty gazing upon her rear end. Megan caught Gina looking at her buttock and legs, when Gina noticed Megan was looking at her, Gina was embarrassed and acted like she was pulling the drapes closed. Since this incident Megan never caught Gina gazing at her again, just in case Gina was gazing, Megan was now bending down very lady like. Megan felt Gina's behavior was different from Mr. Allen who was downright disrespectful and avoided Megan's warnings.

She: stepped in front of the gate, unclipped her wad of keys, fumbled through them, found a key, put the key into the gate, turned it, and to her disappointment realized it was the wrong key.

Her dimples flashed.

She again focused on her keys and tried the one next to the last key and this key turned the lock. The gate swung to the left where she easily clipped this gate to the fence of the pier. This was a five rung fence went all the way around her pier; except where someone would step onto her charter or onto the pier itself. Once the gate was secured: she selected a short key, she stepped over to a metal box, this box was attached to the back side of the wooden fence, opened it with a short key, took out a metal sign that read; *If need assistance please ring bell*. She took this sign back to the first pier. She stepped up onto the wooden bench, she removed a sign that read; *At the current time I'm unavailable to provide a charter. If you'd like to schedule one visit her web address was mentioned, or call her business cell phone was listed*. She slid this sign out of the sleeve and replaced it with the one she removed from the metal

box. She quickly stepped back to the metal box; placed the sign into it and shut the lid. She would lock it with the last use of the day.

She: stepped onto the first pier, very ladylike bent down, grabbed her things from off the bench, stepped through the open gate, onto the pier of the charter, and easily stepped from the pier onto her fifty-six foot vessel. This vessel was originally built in 1967. Megan was able to purchase this vessel because of a friend of Timmy's, who knew a friend, who's friend knew her Daddy, who then gave her a good price. Her Daddy tried to persuade her to buy a different vessel; but she could envision it's potential. There were two reason her Daddy gave her a portion of the money from the pirate ship discovery to purchase this vessel. The first was the love and trust he had for his daughter. The second was the remodel plans Jimmy and Megan presented to him. These plans showed Captain how they could turn this neglected vessel into an excellent touring and tournament fishing boat. With the help of Timmy's shop and Jimmy's company, and turning in favors from their friends; they turned this vessel into something special at less coast than buying a newer used vessel of the same type.

It took nine months for her to use up her portion of the pirate ship money, plus the business loan from the credit union (the reason she was able to get this loan was the loan officer was Captain's friend and knew Megan personally). She was internally grateful for the family and friends who helped her. She was keenly aware her Daddy's effort was his way of showing her how much he loved her. Plus, it was his way of making amends for selling his charters before asking her if she wanted to take on the family business.

The stern of this vessel was fairly large and it was currently set up for fishing. There were three removable chairs slotted into the deck of her charter; with the center chair designed to keep someone strapped in. Attached to her charter were elegant looking wood storage units; she stepped beyond them. On the port side she passed a ladder, it went up to the enclosed bridge. This ladder bent up and over the original bridge enclosure. They redesigned the bridge by putting in the newest navigation equipment and adding a lookout on top of the bridge. On the starboard side was the original wheel and a small cabinet, because she loved the nostalgic look to her vessel she never removed these items.

The nostalgic look was the main reason she fell in love with the vessel. She felt she took this old and forgotten vessel and turned it into something elegant and beneficial. The wood of this deck and the hull were replaced.

She was now standing in the center of her vessel in front of two side by side doors. It was easy to look into the lounge; each door had large square windows. She again was fumbling with her keys and this time needed to try two keys before being able to unlock the doors. She clipped her keys onto her belt loop and opened the doors. She stepped into her completely redone lounge. She was grateful for her Sister-in-laws. Without: Ma, Diana, Sam, and Nicole's expertise in decorating Megan felt the vessel would look less than grand.

The lounge was surrounded by elegant looking windows; windows Jeff and Jimmy replaced. These window's were covered by blinds and curtains. Blinds and curtains all four ladies of the family argued over but Megan went with Nicole's choices. On the port side was a built in L shaped settee, this settee started at the double doors and ended at the galley. The cushions and matching pillows on this settee were sown by Ma. These cushions added to the nostalgic look and feel of this lounge. Originally there was just an empty space on the starboard side; but Captain with the help of Jimmy put in an entertainment bar, and a two person settee. With their expertise in wood working it blended in perfect with the rest of the

decorations.

The entertainment bar ended at the totally redone galley. At one time this was a simple U shaped island galley without a lot of amenities. On Megan's direction they moved the front part of the U shaped counter and the two stools toward the stern. The part of the U facing the bow of the ship was torn out. In this empty space they built a new kitchenette. They started with a custom built refrigerator. Next to this refrigerator they built a new counter, on this counter they installed a double sink and a very nice six burner cook top. Above the counter top and the refrigerator they added new cabinets and installed a built in microwave. Megan was delighted with these new cabinets not only because it was far more practical but Jimmy designed them to match the nostalgic look of her charter. On the port side of the galley they tore out the old refrigerator and cabinets, they shortened the lounge settee and installed a very nice breakfast table. This breakfast table was her Daddy's favorite project. This breakfast table sat: one person on each end, and four across the back. It was somewhat cramped but six people could eat at this table.

Megan: stepped into this redone galley, placed her coffee cup onto the island, she set the yogurt next to the cup, opened the refrigerator, placed the rest of the food into the refrigerator, she made a mental assessment of what she needed for the next day's charter, she closed the refrigerator, slide opened a drawer, grabbed a plastic spoon, she took the yogurt, sat down on one of the bar stools, she quickly ate the yogurt, and contemplated the upcoming charter with all of her Daddy's police buddies.

Her dimples flashed.

She was looking forward to this charter.

When she was finished she: pulled out the garbage from underneath the counter, tossed out the spoon, and pushed the compartment back into the cabinet; due to Jimmy's wood working skills it blended into the cabinet next to the refrigerator. She washed out the empty coffee cup, the Tupperware bin the yogurt was in, and immediately put these items away.

She stepped out of the galley and went down four redone carpeted steps and was now in the widest part of the hallway. Directly in front of her was a brand new guest suit. To install this small suit they removed two sets of bunk beds. Her Daddy and brother Duke custom built two single beds with pull out beds underneath. One of the beds was against the aft on the starboard side. The other bed was against the middle wall with the front of the bed against the port side, with an open doorway just past the head of the bed. This doorway was covered by a well made dark curtain; a curtain Megan sewed herself. Against the port side, in front of the foot of this bed, Jimmy and Jeff built a very nice, but small entertainment center with a small flat screen tube TV and a DVD player. Next to this was a built in cabinet with six drawers. They installed a long overhang cabinet above the beds. This was a cramped suit. Megan very rarely received any complaints after the remodel was finished.

She went around the stairs.

In front of her was a skinny hallway. At the end of the hallway was the door to the redesigned engine room. Her Brother Timmy owned his own boat and car repair shop. His specialty was restoring or redesigning boat engines; to cut costs Duke and Jake helped. Timmy joined the Navy after high school. Due to his life long experience on boats and his mechanical ability he was assigned to work in an engine room on an aircraft carrier. It became apparent to his officers he was excellent with mechanics. They transferred him to Hawaii to

work on docked ships. Timmy opened his boat repair and car shop after leaving the Navy. After her brothers were done rebuilding the engine the vessel could reach up to eighteen knots on less fuel; one of Megan's guests won a fishing tournament the year before.

With the engine room smaller they were able to extend the master suit on the starboard side. This room was able to fit a queen sized bed and had it's own head; with a corner shower. The first item they replaced were the two small windows on either corner of the cabin. They built a cabinet underneath the bed, they added a long hanging cabinet on the inside wall, and on the headboard was an alarm clock radio. Jimmy and Jeff added a very nice built in master entertainment center at the foot of the bed; this center showcased a brand new HDTV and DVD player. The HDTV was expensive. Megan spent the money knowing she needed to keep up with other charters. The DVD's inside of this cabinet were given to her by various relatives. Megan was adding movies based upon a list of movies Jeff and Julie gave her; she kept this list in the glove box of her truck. A pet project of her brother Jimmy and her Daddy was the attached head. They did an excellent job of keeping the nostalgic look while installing a new: shower, sink, and toilet.

She was now passed the steps.

On the port side she passed two companionway bunk bunks. They were covered by installed French doors, when open the doors were secured. In one corner above the top bunk was a brand new window. Just passed these bunk beds was a brand new head; a head her Daddy and Jimmy struggled installing. Passed this head was a small combination washer and dryer.

She passed this washer and dryer. She stopped in front of a locked custom built door. She: unhooked her keys, she fanned them across her hand, she found the key, unlocked this door, and opened it. This small cabin was her office. It was wide enough to have a computer desk with a computer on it, a chair, and against the starboard side wall was a small table. This table squeezed tight against the wall of the engine room and the wall of the cabin. She set her keys on the counter of the desk, and sat down on the small chair. The morning sunlight was perfect to see what she was doing. She: stuck a small key into the bottom drawer, unlocked it, opened it, pulled it open, removed an accounting record book, and her journal, set these items on her desk, locked the drawer, turned on a small fan attached to the top of her desk; if there was a scheduled charter she would have turned on the air. She took out a pen from a tacked down pencil box. This box sat next to the computer monitor.

Megan: turned on her computer, clipped her keys onto her belt loop, removed her hat and sunglasses, and neatly set them on the table.

Once the computer was booted, she opened to her website. She checked to see if anyone scheduled a charter. She noticed a few emails. Today was a perfect day to go over: her pile of mail she, go over her bookkeeping, make phone calls, clean, go over her business plan, and she was looking forward to taking some personal time to write in her journal.

She looked up at the simple clock she secured on the wall. She had six hours before she would meet Nicole for lunch. She was looking forward to spending time with her favorite Sister-in-law.

She smiled her big dimple smile.

Officially they were sister-in-law's, but in both of their hearts they felt like sisters. Megan was Nicole's little sister she never had, and Nicole was Megan's big sister she always wanted.

Megan opened her website; a website designed by a friend of her brother Duke. What Megan never knew was through this website Duke knew everything Megan was planning and how well she was doing.

End of Part One of Four

Thursday June 1st, Megan

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Ashleigh & Megan *Book I: Friendship*



Thursday, June
1st

Megan

Day 3 of Book I

*(1 month and 22 Days Since Bob Bought
Ashleigh a Jeep)*

Part Two of Four

Authored By:
R. P. Voght

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format. I have termed this as an "Story Cast" What the term "Story Cast" means; is this story is designed to be read in small to medium intervals. This particular story is broken up into "days." In this particular story these portions are broken up into part or all of a particular fictitious "day" of the story. Each day surrounds the characters lives, relationships, adventures, struggles, mishaps and triumphs. This story is very different from a Novel or conventional story in many ways. Again, THIS IS NOT A NOVEL AND IS NOT WRITTEN IN A CONVENTIONAL NOVEL FORMAT. Instead; as the reader you are following the characters thoughts and actions during the course of this "day." This fiction story is set up like a TV series and or a third person journal. It always starts with one or more character getting up and ends with one or more characters going to bed; while during the day you experience the Characters actions, feelings, and their thoughts.

On a large overview; there is a beginning, a middle, and an end to this "Story Cast"
R. P. Voght

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Thursday June 1st

(1 Month and 22 Days Since Bob Bought Ashleigh a Jeep)

Julie looked up at the school clock. Julie was sitting in the back row in the third to last desk on the left side of the room. She panned the room and everyone else in class was still working on their ninth grade English exam.

As a young woman she was a blend of an athlete and a model. This combination of looks started with her rectangular shaped face. It was easy to notice her bright and beautiful looking greenish blue eyes. The reason they were so noticeable was her complexion, her winged shaped dark eyebrows, her long thick wavy hair, and her roman style nose. Her roman style nose led to her long skinny lips. Like her Auntie she had dimples; Julie's were smaller and less noticeable. When she smiled the top row of her straight teeth were visible. How Julie differed from others in her family was her wider jawline and her high forehead. She tried to hide her forehead with her naturally thick brunette hair, hair she was pleased with unless she was participating in an athletic activity; this was why she always carried pony tail bands.

Being five foot eleven it was easy for her to observe everything in the room. She was certain she inherited her height from her Daddy's side of the family. When she first started to grow taller than her peers she felt self conscience. This changed when she recognized being taller helped in her athletic conquests and she no longer appeared to be the youngest in her class. After skipping fourth grade being the youngest and brightest in class often times caused her trouble.

This growth spurt was helping her: stomach remain tight, she now had long muscular legs, she developed hips, and her rear end was now noticeable. As a young woman and an athlete she liked these changes. As a young woman and an athlete she currently despised her breasts. Before this growth spurt her breasts: fit into a 32A bra size, they were somewhat

pointed, and she had small areolas. As an athlete she would have been happy if they stayed an A cup; even though she wished they were a rounder shape. Because she was an athlete, she was concerned her breasts were outgrowing her 34B sized bra. As a young woman she disliked their pointy shape and the growth of her areolas. What bothered Julie was none of the women on either side of the family had breasts like hers; most of them had small round breasts. She wondered if she was the only one in her family to have large areolas. She was way to embarrassed to ask anyone about this; even her Momma. As an athlete and a young woman, she feared her breasts would end up to be the size of her Momma. Discussing her concerns with her Momma, her Momma shared with Julie, she was the same age as Julie when she started to develop. Julie knew girls who quit playing sports because of their larger breasts. She would have breast reduction surgery before quitting any athletic activity. The reason Julie never considered quitting sports was: her love of athletics, her love of competition, and an overall healthy view of her body.

Her natural athletic ability and her determination to push the limits of herself allowed her to excel at athletics. As a freshman she was: a Varsity softball pitcher, she was on the Junior Varsity volleyball team, held the schools record for girls cross country, and participated in track. She would have participated in flag football and gymnastics but they conflicted with volleyball and softball. She planned on signing up for the tackle football team. She believed she could play: wide receiver, a secondary player, or a quarterback. One of the reasons she decided to skip playing tackle football was because of her older brother's request to avoid playing. The greatest hurdle to playing football was receiving written permission from her parents; she was sure her Daddy would disapprove of young men tackling his Daughter.

A sport she wished she could have played was hockey. She became interested in hockey after her Momma took her ice skating in a mall in Fort Lauderdale. Julie begged for lessons. She used the skills she acquired from ballet and gymnastics and applied them to figure skating. These lessons were short lived because of the distance of the mall. Since these lessons Julie wondered what ice skating would feel like on a real outdoor ice rink. She was delighted when her Uncle Duke took her to a Florida Panthers game. She felt important when she explained the rules to: her Daddy, her Uncle, her Brother, and her Cousins.

Analyzing the classroom clock the exam took her forty minutes to complete. The reason it took this long was due to the essay questions. Based upon past experience she would have to wait another twenty minutes before another classmate would finish this type of exam. It appeared to her the rest of the class was sweating out this exam. She was of the belief if this test would have been handed out in a non-accelerated class a few of the students would have given up and turned it in. English was far from her favorite subject, and yet she was easily receiving an A in the class, and was confident after this exam she would continue to receive an A.

Julie: shifted in her desk, lifted up the exam pretending to concentrate on it, she started to speed read the test, she stopped herself from speed reading, and set the test down. She usually waited for the third student to turn in an exam. This was one of the ways she tried to blend in with the rest of her classmates. Julie was sure she was the most intelligent kid in school. One of the ways she tried to avoid the social stigma of being the smartest in school was by dressing casual or sporty. Blending in became difficult when students: always came to her for answers, they tried to copy from her, she was on the honor roll, and everyone knew Julie was in all accelerated classes; except for a few general electives. One of the electives she took

was Introduction to Art. This elective was the only class she ever received a C in, and only the third time she ever received less than an A. She took Introduction to Art after her Momma suggested Julie take a fun class. Her Momma felt this class would “expand her horizons”. Julie felt the only reason she received a C was because: she completed every project, behaved in class, her honest effort, and as a popular student tried to get along with the art students; she treated the less popular students respectfully.

Julie understood why she was included with the popular students; at the same time she often times felt school would be less stressful if she stopped hanging out with the elite crowd. With her two best friends Jennie and Amanda being in the popular crowd she felt obligated to stay in this elite group. She missed hanging out with her old friends, and unlike the other “popular” girls in her group, Julie was known to talk and treat other kids in school with dignity. When Julie was around this elite group of girls they were less inclined to tease or bully others; even guys avoided messing with Julie. She was feeling a tension within her group as she tried to stop the popular group from bullying and was willing to talk to others outside of her group. The stressful part for Julie was trying to keep Jennie and Amanda as her best friends.

She again glanced around the room.

How Eastbank High School handled exams: the last three days of the semester were exams, and each class was given two and a half hours to complete the exam. In between the exams a student was to report to: the cafeteria, the gym, or the library. Of course many students never reported to any of these places. Officially this was a problem. Unofficially; as long as a student returned on time and in a capacity to take the exam most teachers could have cared less. Still there was the policy. Every hall was monitored by a teacher. How stringent the halls were monitored depended on the teacher doing the monitoring and the student trying to escape. Being caught was suppose to bring about a stiff punishment, this very rarely happened, what normally happened was a student was sent to the library. For most students this was the worst place to end up.

She: shifted in her chair, made a face, and decided to go over the exam. After looking over the exam she made a face.

Julie's desire was to relieve the pressure she was feeling and go down to the beach. She pictured: biking the half mile down to the beach, locking her bike at a specific look out, walk on a nearby trail, hide in a spot she knew off, and would loose herself. She purposely dressed for biking and walking on the beach. She was wearing a crop yoga pant with stripe detail; the main color was berry and the strips were pink, black, and white. She was wearing a pink tank top with adjustable straps and a sports bra underneath. She would have preferred to wear the matching yoga tank; but one of her Momma's rules was no exposing her mid-drift at school.

Another option was to practice volleyball or softball in the gym with some of her teammates.

She thought about the library.

She imagined herself on the preserve and fulfilling the strong urge within herself. Being bored and wanting to escape school she: grabbed her answer sheets, the test booklet, her backpack, and stood up. Immediately her classmates made noises and started to tease her; she took this in stride and teased them back. The newest and youngest teacher in school scolded the class. All of the students knew Ms. Conner was serious. The students again concentrated on their exam. Many believed this was the hardest exam they ever took.

When Julie reached the teachers desk, Ms. Conner pointed at the baskets on her desk. Julie gently placed the test booklet in one basket marked; *Test*. She placed her answer sheets into the basket marked; *Answers*.

Despite the fact Ms. Conner suspected Julie never applied herself, Julie was one of her favorite students. Ms. Conner felt compelled to ask; "Are you sure you want to turn it in?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Ms. Conner appreciated the fact Julie was always respectful and wished more kids were like her. At the same time Ms. Conner was feeling something was starting to change her favorite student.

Ms. Conner was a very attractive woman. She had a round face, pretty dark green eyes; they could become intense in a hurry. She had: a wide nose, round cheekbones, cute blond eyelashes, naturally long blond hair, and her cupid lips caused many of her students to desire her. She was very consciences of the fact just about every male student had a crush on her. She purposefully dressed like a nerd by wearing: long dresses, she avoided anything that highlighted her medium sized breasts, she tried to hide her curvy hips, she wore glasses instead of contacts, and to her own annoyance put her beautiful hair into a bun. Her fiancée gently teased her by pointing out she was two different people.

"May I suggest you look it over. This isn't an easy exam."

Julie answering honestly, "Ma'am I did."

Ms. Conner looked at her and whispered, "Give me your answers and the test booklet."

Julie rolled her eyes and picked up the test and the booklet and handed it to Ms. Conner.

Ms. Conner sat back in her seat, she looked at the letter written on the test booklet; she opened her brown leather bag and found the answer key to this particular test. She had five different tests she handed out randomly.

Julie was paying attention to how the kids were reacting. Julie noticed kids were whispering and a few were pointing at her. At this moment she was thankful she was in an accelerated class, if she was in a regular class she would have been picked on or someone would have been ignorant enough to ask her for an answer.

"Julie."

"Yes Ma'am."

She motioned for her tall student to lean in; Julie was obedient and followed the instruction.

"You realize cheating only cheats yourself?"

Julie answered honestly and just as sternly, "I don't need to cheat on tests or on the field."

Ms. Conner smiled and winked, "I'm sure you haven't."

This conversation was a boost to Julie's ego.

Ms. Conner asked in a whisper, "What are your long term plans?"

Julie smiled and answered in a whisper, "To be a kindergarten teacher."

This surprised and impressed Ms. Conner, she knew without a shadow of a doubt Julie Steward could pursue anything she wanted.

Julie asked, "Would I make a good teacher?"

"I'm sure you'll make an excellent teacher," Ms. Conner spoke with an approving smile, "Alright your dismissed."

Julie smiled and answered, “Yes Ma'am.”

She flung her backpack over her shoulders and headed out of the classroom. Julie stepped into the hallway and shut the door behind her. Julie knew the floor plan of the school by heart. She swiftly and quietly moved in and out of doorways. She slipped passed more than one teacher by allowing other students to be clumsy and loud. It was only a short time before she made her way out of the building.

Julie left the school building on a relatively isolated corner next to a concrete fire exit. She assessed the situation. There was an empty practice field in front of her and across this field was a thick wooded swamp. She glanced up at the windows above her and knew she was out of sight. She: set her backpack down, unzipped the large pocket open, quickly slipped off her top, folded her top, placed it in front of a folded beach towel and her bike helmet, unzipped a smaller pocket of her backpack, pulled out male antiperspirant, quickly applied the antiperspirant onto her underarms; Julie hated her body chemistry especially when it was her time of the month. If it was her time she would have went to the library. She: put the antiperspirant back into the small pocket, zipped the pocket closed, took out her bike helmet, quickly put it on, closed all the zippers, quickly wen around the corner, headed toward the bike rack, she stepped up to her bike; she purposefully locked her bike where it would be easy to get too.

Her parents bought this bike at a large boxed department store. Many of her friends teased her about this bike because it was far from a “popular” named bike. The way her brother and daddy maintained this bike it was faster than many other bikes. What hurt the most was when some of her peers picked on the design of the bike. This hurt because the purple and yellow spider web design was hers, and her daddy even took the bike to her Uncle Timmy's car shop to make the bike the way she wanted. Julie honestly felt the bike looked better than a more expensive bike. She: quickly undid the combination lock, wrapped the chain underneath the seat, locked the lock onto the chain, again unzipped her backpack, pulled out a water bottle, placed this bottle into the bikes holder, zipped up the pockets of her backpack, swung the backpack onto her back, and sat up onto her bike.

Looking at her digital sport watch she calculated how much time it would take to get to the lookout, how much time she would have to get to her spot, on what time would be the best to leave the beach, and how much time it would take for a quick shower in the girls locker room. She headed to the beach with the express goal to relieve the stress she felt.

Megan lifted herself out of the Eastbank River and stepped onto the stern of her vessel. She: stepped to the center chair, grabbed a towel, dried herself, wrung out her hair, tied it in a pony tail, slipped on her red cargo shorts (they became wet because of her boyshort swim separate), clipped her keys onto a belt loop, and slipped her white polo shirt over her body; she was keenly aware her red and green Hawaiian flower print swimsuit was visible through the white polo shirt. She slipped on her siesta hat and secured her sunglasses to the top of the hat.

She: stepped up to the ladder on the port side of her charter, easily climbed up the six rungs of the ladder, this ladder curved up and over a storage unit, and stepped onto the deck of her bridge. There was a five foot separation from the bridge door to the ledge, there was a small railing along the ledge; there was an eight foot drop from this ledge to the deck. She: stepped up to the sliding glass doors, slipped her keys off of her shorts, found the key to these

doors, unlocked the doors, slid open both sides of these doors, and stepped into her bridge.

Inside: was the main wheel of the vessel, a tall chair was in front of this wheel, on the starboard side of this chair was an updated panel. On the port side was an AM/FM radio, a CB, and on top of this CB was a walkie-talkie. She selected the key she needed, stuck it into the panel, she turned the key far enough so she could check all of the instruments. Even though her weather instruments were showing clear sky's she turned on the radio to hear the weather report. She took her time checking every instrument in on the bridge. By the time she was about to check the pistol she hid on the bridge her clothes were dry.

She heard, "Megan."

She glanced at her watch.

Her dimples flashed.

She wondered why her brother would take the time to drive north from Miami to reach Eastbank in the middle of the week. She was well aware he hated it when he had to drive twice a day from Fort Lauderdale to Miami.

She turned everything off, pulled out the key, and again clipped the keys onto her belt loop.

This time she heard, "Little Sis?"

She rolled her eyes and stepped to the ledge.

She tensed up.

She immediately took note of the two intense looking guys standing on the pier. They were dressed in business casual, they were wearing sunglasses, and they went out of their way to acknowledge her by nodded their heads. She nodded her head in return.

Megan's impulse was to go back into her enclosed bridge and grab the six shooter she hid on her bridge. She decided this would look odd and with her brother there she hoped everything would be okay.

She answered in a loud voice, "I'm up here."

She heard the lounge door close and then heard Duke yell; "Little sis where are you?"

She was keeping an eye on the two gentleman on the pier.

She replied, "I ain't little."

Duke backed up and looked up at the bridge, "Hi Y'all"

In a tone she answered, "Howdy."

She made a face and with her head motioned to the two guys.

"There with me."

Duke was: four inches taller than Megan, he was very muscular, it was obvious he worked out, his hair was receding, his blue eyes were hidden behind his sunglasses, and based upon the suit he was wearing he was on a business matter. She wanted to trust her brother so she headed down to where Duke was. It was unlike him to leave his accounting practice in the middle of the day and this was the first time he ever brought his "friends" to her charter.

Duke's friends frightened her.

Duke was waiting for her as she stepped off the ladder.

"How's everything?"

With a tone she answered, "I'm fine."

"I'm hearing Y'all are having a good year."

She took her sunglasses from off her hat and put them on.

"That's true."

She whispered in an angry tone, "Why are you bringing your friends here?"

"Don't pay'em any mind. They're just hitching a ride with me."

Her dimples flashed.

She gave her big brother a look of frustration.

"Why are you visiting me?"

"I'd like an ice tea?"

Her dimples flashed.

She asked, "Are your friends wanting some?"

"They're fine."

She noticed they sat down on the bench in front of the wooden fence,

In a huff she: stepped over to the two doors leading into the lounge, opened the doors , and asked, "Y'all coming?"

He smiled, "It's been a long time since I've drank your ice tea."

Duke glanced over at the two guys. Duke felt it was fine for them to sit on the benches.

Megan glared at her brother.

Her dimples flashed.

Duke saw this look when he turned back around.

She commanded, "Come in."

She made another face and let the door slam shut behind them as they stepped into the lounge and walked into the galley. Once she heard the door shut she: ripped off her glasses, hat, and practically threw them onto the galley counter. She stated in a very angry tone, "I don't like em' here. Especially when I ain't prepared."

"It's fine."

Megan spun around when she was behind her counter, "No it ain't."

"Now listen..."

Interrupting, "You keep promising Y'all will quit."

"It ain't like I can just give a two week notice."

"You should've listen to Daddy."

Her voice was filled with fear and worry.

She: turned back around, opened the refrigerator, and pulled out a can of iced tea and set it on the counter.

"This?"

"You ain't deserving my homemade iced tea."

She: gave him a look, turned around, bent down, took a bottled water out of the refrigerator, she turned, and leaned against her kitchenette.

"I'll be okay. I'd wish you'd stop worrying."

"Don't tell me I shouldn't be worrying."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"I'm expecting to get a call saying Y'all are dead or in jail. Y'all should turn yourself in and go into..."

He interrupted, "Don't finish what Y'all are saying."

She crunched her jaws together and was angry at her brother.

"If I could do it over I wouldn't be in this mess."

She relaxed her jaws, and spoke in a whisper; "Go and turn yourself in. Daddy has friends."

He whispered back, "It ain't that simple. Diana and the boys ain't moving. She can't go into witness protection. You know this."

"She ain't wanting you dead. She loves you."

Still whispering, "I love her too."

"Then turn yourself in."

"I can't."

Her brother took a sip of his canned iced tea.

"Y'all have honest clients. Diana is wealthy."

"It ain't the money."

"Then why stay?"

"I ain't having this argument with you again."

Megan's dimples flashed.

She was visibly angry. She set the water down and placed her hands on the counter.

"What about the rest of us? What about your faith?"

"I'm reaping what I'm sowing. I ain't liking what I'm involved in but there ain't anything I can do now."

Megan knew there was not much else she could say. She took a sip from her bottled water and was about to ask him why he was here.

He beat her to it, "Where's the Yankee?"

Now it made sense. She answered without any emotion, "He moved two days ago."

"Oh."

She became angry, "What were Y'all planning?"

"I was planning on having a talk with him."

"A talk?" Megan asked, "You can't be ruffing up my neighbors.."

"We ain't planning on ruffing up anybody. We're just making a suggestion."

"Did Daddy tell you to talk to em'?"

"I heard about a neighbor of yours filing a report against Y'all. It is rumored Y'all tossed him into the river."

"He needed to be taught some manners. But I wasn't asking you to come over."

Duke repeated himself, "We're just interested in having a talk with him."

Megan's dimples flashed.

She knew better.

"When are Y'all expecting him back?"

"He was angry chargers were never filed."

"You know where he went?"

She lied, "I ain't sure."

Duke smiled, "Y'all shouldn't be telling fibs. Y'all are terrible at it."

She wanted to refute what he said but instead just blushed.

"Now I know Y'all are fibbing."

"I ain't liking the guy but I don't want you hurting him. Throwing him into the water was enough. Instead of me getting into any trouble he was about to be charged with harassment. What irritated the annoying Yankee was Mike wouldn't kick me out."

Duke took a sip of ice tea and looked at his sister, "Y'all alright?"

"Yes," and added, "I don't want anything to happen to him."

Duke made a face of disapproval. He had the connections to find Mr. Allen wherever he

was. He would reluctantly respect his sister's wishes.

In a serious tone stated, "If Mr. Allen comes back I'll be expecting a call."

She felt this was fair, "If he comes back I'll give Y'all a call."

He smiled and became serious, "Can my guys have an ice tea?"

Megan gave him a face but opened the refrigerator and handed two canned ice tea's to her brother.

"Thanks."

He picked them up and stated, "I'm needing to get back."

Megan was already making her way out of the galley, she was in the lounge, and opened the door for him. The two of them stepped out.

"I heard Diana and Nicole talking about shopping."

Megan made a face and asked, "When?"

"I ain't sure."

Megan followed her brother to the stern of her charter.

Duke stepped onto the wooden pier and looked over at his Sister.

She could tell he wanted to ask her something.

There was silence instead.

She noticed the two guys stand up, turn around, and gaze upon them.

She broke the silence and in a worried tone asked, "Is everything all right?"

He looked toward the ocean and stated, "This place sure looks better than when we were kids."

Megan answered, "Mike is always working. He's trying to fill the empty spot."

Duke was sarcastic, "Y'all would tell us you'd fill this whole pier with your boats."

"I'm working on it. I haven't told anyone but I'm working on a business plan to buy the yacht at Benny's."

Duke gave her a puzzled look and asked, "Are Y'all talking about buying the one he's always parading people through?"

"Yup."

"How are Y'all affording it?"

"With Benny's divorce he was offering to sell me the demo at a good price. It's once in a lifetime deal. He's been showing it to people for the last couple years but it's in great shape. I'm feeling I'll get the loan. I'm hearing no one wants it."

Duke took off his sunglasses, "If Y'all are feeling it I'm sure Y'all will get it."

He stopped talking as Megan stepped off her charter, they stepped through the gate, onto the first pier, he waved his friends to back off; they listened.

Megan spoke quietly and with compassion, "It's sweet Y'all are looking out for me. I haven't forgotten how Y'all helped even if you didn't like the idea of running my own charter."

"It ain't our charter," Duke started. "Y'all are the one who named her *Dolphin Queen*."

She smiled and was about to hug him, he stopped her by putting on his sunglasses and saying, "I'm needing to get back."

She wished her family was comfortable showing affection, but she mentioned, "Y'all stay safe."

He answered in a whisper, "Keep praying I find a way out."

"I'm already praying."

She wanted to tell him more.

Instead he said, "Lets go."

The two guys said their goodbyes and thanked her for the ice tea. She responded respectfully.

She watched her brother and his two friends: walk down the pier, step onto the parking lot, walk toward the visitors parking spaces, they stepped into her brothers Cadillac Escalade, and watched them drive out of the Marina.

She hoped she would see her brother again.

Her dimples flashed.

She wanted to believe he wanted out.

Megan imagined the space from Frank and Florence's houseboat to the shore having two more of her boats docked on the pier. She hoped the credit union would go with her plan and would loan her the money for the houseboat yacht at *Benny's Yachts and Boat Extravaganza*. She would dock it on the port side of her charter. Her plan was to use the yacht for executive meetings, fancy tours, and weddings. She envisioned a day when a third vessel would be docked across from the yacht. Her ultimate dream was to own another vessel specializing in research, underwater film making, and for scuba diving. She envisioned documentaries being filmed on this vessel and science expeditions. She knew this was a ways off in the future but she believed: with the profit she showed this year, all the hard work she put into her business, the pinching of pennies, her smart choices, working part time, plain old sacrifice, and her faith; she knew she would succeed.

She was prepared for the long haul.

The hardest part of fulfilling her dream was the feeling she would never find the time to be a wife and mother. She was certain men were threatened by the fact she owned a business dominated by men. What irritated her was the feeling if she owned some sort of store or ran a cleaning service men would have felt more comfortable. With Megan trying to see the balance in things, she understand why a guy would get jealous of all the time she spent working; she still longed for a relationship. She hoped she'd have more time to pursue a relationship with her no longer teaching self defense.

Gazing upon this empty space, if she was unable to secure the loan for the yacht, she hoped Mike would fill the space with locals instead of a transplant. The last three transplants were nightmares. The worst were the sugar babies. The second worst was the wife who came with the second yacht, the husband was a good guy, but Megan felt the wife was the worst person she ever met. Instead of concentrating on these negative memories she focused on the view.

Since her Daddy moved his charter business to this marina she loved gazing upon the river. Megan recalled the many times she would walk along the shore enjoying the preserve and the river. She remember the day her Daddy banned her from ever exploring the shore alone. As an adult she enjoyed: the view of the preserve, observing the wildlife, taking walks, fishing along the shore, and boating alongside the preserve.

Megan focused.

She glanced at her sports watch. She turned and looked up at her bridge. She stepped back into the living quarters to retrieve her hat and sunglasses. Her plan was to step back onto her bridge and finish what she started.

Ashleigh was thankful the morning meetings were done.

She was currently listening to the song; “Sitting by the Dock of the Bay,” by *Ottis Redding*. One of her favorite purchases was her new Ipod.

Haley and herself were enjoying a break before their next assignment. Ashleigh was waiting for her ham and cheese sandwich; a sandwich she stuck in the microwave for thirty seconds. She made sandwiches like this when she lived with Ashley Vindavaine. The microwave beeped. She: took it out of the microwave, blew on it, and then took a bite.

She was wearing a green and white floral dress with buckled straps and a ruffled fishtail hem. Being five foot one she liked how the dress made her look taller. She was currently barefoot. She purchased two pairs of shoes to match this dress, one was a pair of ballet shoes and the other was a pair of green high healed sandals. She honestly hated both pair of shoes but she promised Haley and her brother she would leave her shoes on during meetings.

Standing in this very luxurious kitchenette, of the luxurious suite, of the luxurious resort, overlooking the ocean; she felt unqualified. She questioned the wisdom of her brother. She felt the only reason he hired her was because they were siblings. There were times when she felt she should take the money her brother offered her for school, move back in with her foster parents, and forget about working for her brother.

She tried to block out how inadequate she felt by enjoying the sandwich and the song. When she was finished eating the sandwich: she tossed out the paper towel, she washed her hands and face, she wiped them off with a towel the resort provided; she put the towel in a slot where the resort staff could pick it up. She looked up at the clock and was thankful there was time left. She walked away from the kitchenette and was now in a very large room. In this room was: a couch, two chairs, a coffee table, an elegant entertainment center, and sitting on top was a large screen HDTV. What she liked best was the large windows and the balcony.

She sighed. She thought about all of the: executives, lawyers, and politicians she met over the last ten days. She took a deep breath and let out another sigh. There were still two more days to go.

She paused her Ipod and pulled out the earphones and wanted to talk to Haley. Ashleigh stepped into her bedroom. Haley was laying on her side, on top of the covers, and her brand new shoes were on the floor. Ashleigh wondered if Haley's rayon suit pants were getting wrinkled. The matching jacket was hung on a chair. This caused Ashleigh to notice Haley was wearing a scoopneck cami. Ashleigh envied Haley's shape and the fact Haley could wear just about anything. Ashleigh felt guilty for being jealous. Ashleigh was leaning on Haley for support and Haley was showing her great patience. This was part of the reasons Ashleigh purchased the outfit Haley was currently wearing. Ashleigh was unable to bring herself to wake up her Friend.

Ashleigh left the bedroom and decided to step onto the balcony. Once she stepped onto the balcony she felt the wave of heat and humidity hit her. She almost stepped back into her suite.

“I thought the humidity was bad in Wisconsin.”

In spite of the heat and humidity, she liked the balcony. The Atlantic Ocean made Lake Michigan feel like a puddle. She liked the chairs with the feet rest. She never thought about growing a large snake plant outside before. She walked up to the railing of the balcony, she stood up on her toes, and directly below her she could see all the floors of the resort going out

like steps. She walked to the left side of the balcony, she was again on her toes, and glanced at the pool. Looking directly to her left; the resort was built exactly like the side she was on.

She: took a deep breath, stood back down on her feet, and enjoyed the aroma of the ocean.

She again stood on her toes and became fascinated with all the activity on the beach. She loved the umbrella's stuck in the sand. She enjoyed the roller bladders and walkers on the boardwalk, she liked how the boardwalk was on the edge of the beach and along side of the road. She noticed an attractive bicycle cop talking to a group of women wearing swimsuits. On purpose she turned her attention to the ocean. At this moment she wished she had her camera so she could take a picture of a cruise ship sailing by. She was transfixed on all the sail boats; she was awed by the many different colors and patterns printed on the sails. She focused on a sport fishing boat moving south. This was when she caught a glimpse of a yacht. This yacht was built by the same company as her brother's yacht; but this was much longer and three full decks.

She made a face, spoke out loud to know one, "Bob's yacht is better."

Right after this thought, she became aware her Brother's yacht was bigger than the two story house she grew up in. She felt being with her Brother during the purchase of the yacht was a valuable financial lesson.

Without Victoria's chastisement Ashleigh would have never recognized the lesson of the yacht. Victoria became angry with Ashleigh after she took Felicia shopping. Victoria: refused to accept any of the gifts Ashleigh bought her, verbalized her disapproval, and voiced her concerns. This caused Ashleigh to take a second look on how she was spending her money. A few days after Victoria's chastisement, Ashleigh organized a meeting with: Victoria, Blake, Blake's personal financial adviser, Bob, and Larry; Larry was the only CPA Bob trusted. She was honestly surprised Bob and Victoria agreed to be in the same place together. The financial adviser and Larry showed Ashleigh how quickly she'd end up in debt if she continued to spend her money without restraint and without any regards to her future. Their presentation was eye opening to Ashleigh. With her large salary and the lump sum she received from Bob; she felt the money would never run out. They helped her set up a financial portfolio she knew she could handle. She was grateful her Foster Parents reminded her how much responsibility came with wealth.

She put the earphones back into her ears. Paging through her Ipod; she felt the song, "Kokomo" by *The Beach Boys* was perfect for standing on the resort balcony. She found herself focused on the group of police officers and the women wearing swimsuits. The officers were trying to get three of these handcuffed girls into a paddy wagon. One of these girls was being uncooperative. This was a reminder on why she took her faith and sobriety seriously.

Her mind wondered to the previous Thursday. After a morning of meetings her Brother asked her to go with him to look at a series of yachts he was interested in. She felt this was more than a request and went along. What surprised Ashleigh was he made it known to every broker he was of a higher social class but used a different identity; normally when he went shopping for big ticket items he concealed both his identity and his wealth. At every broker he made it seem as though he would purchase a yacht, but at the last minute he would refrain himself from purchasing one. This was the first time she ever witnessed her brother be so indecisive. This trip became hurtful because he never once asked her what she felt about any of the yachts they looked at. This was the first time he was so disinterested in what she felt

about anything. At the end of the night she wished she would have stayed behind.

Standing on the balcony she contemplated her brother's motives. She decided he was trying to gain information about yachts without revealing who he was. She felt this because of what happened during the last two days. On Tuesday he changed Ashleigh and Haley's schedule and sent them to Eastbank; a town forty-five minutes to an hour north of Fort Lauderdale. There they investigated and took pictures of: an industrial park, a marina, and the town. Ashleigh and Haley felt it was smaller than a city but was larger than a town. The following day Bob surprised both Ashleigh and Haley; by giving Haley a day off and then demanded Ashleigh go with him back to Eastbank. She was informed he would again look at yachts but this time they rented a Ford Fusion and he instructed Ashleigh to dress casual. She knew he was hiding his wealth and identity.

Throughout the drive from Fort Lauderdale to Eastbank they stopped off at: small boat dealers, brokerage dealers, and at some private residences. She enjoyed this trip because it reminded her of the times he took her on camping trips. She liked the fact he asked her what she felt about the yachts or the people they met. For the most part she was indifferent to the yachts she toured and was confused by all the boat terms. She already knew the Floridians she met were different from what was represented on TV. She just about liked every person she met, especially an older southern gentleman who was trying to sell a yacht on his own.

When they reached Eastbank her brother wanted to see the Eastbank Industrial Park. Ashleigh showed him the lot Ashleigh liked. From there they went to a place called, *Benny's Yachts and Boat Extravaganza*. The first thing Ashleigh noticed about this place was the sign was recently changed from *Benny's Boat Extravaganza* to *Benny's Yachts and Boat Extravaganza*. This small brokerage had a small variety of vessels, both used and new; but the center piece was a houseboat yacht. It was impossible to miss the signs and the many string of flags encouraging every patron to take a tour of this demo.

It only took a few moments after getting out of the car for Benny to come out of the main building and introduce himself. Benny was: muscular, he was wearing a nice summer style suit, he was around the same age as her brother, was jolly, and talked with a heavy southern accent. It only took him a few minutes to convince Bob to take a tour of the houseboat yacht. Ashleigh knew Bob liked Benny because he encouraged small talk with Benny. She figured the wisest approach was to allow these men to be men while she listened to every word they spoke. The only thing she disliked was when Benny kept referring to her as the "Little Gal." She never told him she disliked this nickname because she never felt he was being malicious.

Even at the start of the tour Ashleigh could tell Benny was an expert. During the tour Ashleigh struggled understanding all the technical boat terms he was using. She felt Benny: was trustworthy, was a man's man, was friendly, she liked how he was a complete gentleman to her (except for calling him the Little Gal), she liked his sense of humor, and he was clearly very smart. What impressed her was his knowledge of all the options available to her Brother if he ordered a yacht from this company. This impressed her because they never gave Benny any reason to believe they could afford a yacht. Based upon some of her Brother's misleading statements and how they were dressed; Benny would have been justified to shorten the tour. Ashleigh could tell Bob was impressed Benny never stopped the tour.

As soon as the tour was done Bob politely told Benny to wait while he talked with Ashleigh. When they were far enough away from Benny he asked her what she felt about the

yacht. She expressed: how she trusted Benny, how she liked the pillars between what she called a kitchen and what she called the dinning room, how she liked the bedroom just after some stairs on what she called the second floor, how she liked the pool, how she felt Bob would like the large open first floor, she felt the yacht had a Mississippi boat feel; the yacht reminded her of those old musicals she used to watch with Bob when she was little. After a few questions she told him how she felt drawn to the demo and how she felt this yacht was built for them. Right after, she reminded her brother she only planned on staying for a few months, and suggested he was better off ordering a customized yacht. Ashleigh was sure Bob would ignore everything she said and buy one of the bigger vessels they looked at the week before. Ashleigh was certain the price Benny would offer a customized yacht would be much higher than a larger broker. She was shocked when after some small talk, Bob surprised Benny by asking him how much the demo was.

Standing on the balcony of the resort she wondered about the feeling she received concerning the yacht. This was the first and only time she ever felt drawn to an object. It was a gentle nudge. She never felt this feeling was oppressive or pushy, just a feeling her brother should purchase the demo.

Ashleigh temporarily stopped thinking about the demo when she noticed the obnoxious girl in the swimsuit, while handcuffed, tried to slam her head against the bicycle cops face. This was a wrong move. Four cops descended upon her. Ashleigh witnessed her friends yell at the police. A woman police officer was verbally stern right back at them. This quieted all of the girls. Ashleigh watched as they tied the girls ankles and hands with zip ties and placed her into a police vehicle. Ashleigh noticed many of these spectators were carrying camcorders filming the event. She felt this was a horrible thing to film, but acknowledged within herself it would be a good show to the families back home. She wondered if anyone would upload this film onto a website called Youtube; a website Felicia showed Ashleigh. After the girl was placed into the patty wagon: the police waved the spectators on, the patty wagon drove away, the girls who were free talked among themselves, the officers talked among themselves, two girls in swimsuits politely approached the police, an officer talked with them, all but two officers left, the girls hurried to their belongings, the two bicycle cops climbed back on their bikes, and headed north on the sidewalk.

Ashleigh loved watching these attractive police officers bike away. She purposefully turned toward the ocean.

Her mind drifted to the inside showroom of *Benny's Yachts and Boat Extravaganza*. Once inside the showroom they discussed the price of the yacht. Bob informed Benny he wanted to pay for the demo in cash. Immediately Benny informed them he would have to: contact a couple government agencies and check their personal and financial information. This was when Bob informed Benny who he was, Benny made Bob show him his drivers license, this impressed Ashleigh. Once Benny figured out Bob and Ashleigh were who they said they were, they spent the next few hours discussing the remodel of the demo. Benny recommended a local company who would handle the remodel. This lead to the biggest bombshell to Benny, Bob's willingness to leave the yacht open to the public until the remodel started. Benny suggested the remodel be done on his property. Bob promised he would pay Benny and the remodel company a cash bonus if everything went well. Benny promised he'd watch the progress and give Bob updates. After all this was worked out Bob made it clear no one was to know who purchased the yacht. Bob was so serious about keeping his identity

secret Bob had a Floridian lawyer fax over a document saying Benny would never reveal Bob's identity. Based upon Benny's reaction to the name of Bob's lawyer, Ashleigh assumed this Floridian lawyer was a powerful attorney.

After the verbal agreements were settled Benny locked himself in his office to work out all the details. While Bob patiently sat in a waiting area watching TV and making phone calls, Ashleigh explored the showroom. She studied a wall devoted to local men and women who were or had served in the US military. She was saddened anytime it was noted a service man or woman lost their life because of their service. She spotted Benny wearing a desert camouflaged Marine uniform. After studying this wall she enjoyed viewing the museum quality model ships displayed in glass cases. These models were strategically placed around the showroom. She especially liked a model of a Spanish pirate ship. Below the display she read about the ship. She learned: this model is what experts believed the ship looked like before it was sunk by the British Royal Navy, experts believed it was sunk in the mid 1700's, it was found near a popular island some distance away from the shores of Eastbank, Ashleigh enjoyed how it was found miles from where the experts believed the ship was sunk, Ashleigh's favorite piece of information was how a local named; Dave "Captain" Steward discovered the ship.

When she was finished reading this information a southern lady in her late fifties approached her. Ashleigh knew this was Benny's secretary because she asked her brother and herself if they wanted a beverage while they waited. This southern lady handed Ashleigh a water. They exchanged some niceties. Just before the secretary was about to step away Ashleigh asked her about the man who discovered the pirate ship. This southern woman was pleased Ashleigh would ask about "Captain." The Secretary told Ashleigh: he once owned a charter, he was a long standing member of the Coast Guard, he was married with four children, she talked about how the family was deeply involved in veterans affairs, and how he had insisted for years the ship was sunk near the shores of Eastbank. Ashleigh felt the most important thing to this secretary, as the secretary put it, "after striking it rich they're still good Christian folks." The conversation ended when the two ladies caught a glimpse of Benny stepping out of his office.

Ashleigh spotted Benny physically shaking the paperwork he held in his hand. She was surprised to see this man had been crying. This caused Ashleigh to tear. Benny was a man's man; a US Marine, to see a man like him cry was emotional. She could tell he tried to hide these tears by pulling out a hankie, turning around, and pretending to blow and wipe his nose; Ashleigh knew better. She watched him gain his composure and head over to where Bob was sitting.

At this moment the secretary in a motherly sort of way grabbed Ashleigh's hand and whispered, "Don't tell him I'm telling Y'all this. I'm feeling Y'all ain't like other Yankees. Y'all purchasing the yacht means a lot to all of us. I'm sure Y'all could have purchased a lot better yacht at them more fancy brokerage places. But Y'all decided to purchase one from Benny." It took all of Ashleigh's effort to reframe from tearing, this was because this southern lady was unable to keep herself from tearing. Once the tears started she simply said, "Thank Y'all." She let go of Ashleigh's hands and went back to her desk before Ashleigh could respond. It was obvious the money her brother was spending on this yacht meant a great deal to Benny and his employees.

This was the moment of the financial lesson. This is when she recognized the: power,

responsibility, and influence they had over people's lives. What frightened Ashleigh was the idea one purchase or one decision could change the course of someone's destiny. It was obvious to Ashleigh, Benny was about to lose his business, but with Bob purchasing the yacht in cash it kept this business open. Ashleigh took this lesson very seriously.

She let herself step away from this knowledge and concentrated on the *Beach Boys* song, "Good Vibrations." In so doing she noticed a cute guy down by the pool rubbing suntan lotion on a woman's back. At this moment she wanted to be this woman. She started to focus on this open display of affection and let her mind wonder. She was grateful when she witnessed Haley walk toward her.

In a hurried voice, "Bob needs us."

Ashleigh pulled the earphones out of her ears.

"Oh," said Haley, "Bob has scheduled a couple meetings for us in Eastbank."

"I thought..."

Haley interrupted, "One is with the mayor and a few of the community leaders. He's wanting us to meet with some local banker as well. This is what we're getting paid to do."

Ashleigh commented, "I'm getting tired of all the running around."

"You went with him when he was looking for a yacht. This was his way of doing something with you outside of work."

Ashleigh remarked, "They were long trips."

Ashleigh and Haley headed back into the suite, Ashleigh was the one who shut the sliding door to the balcony; they went directly into Ashleigh's bedroom.

This seemed like the right time to ask, "Haley."

Haley looked over at Ashleigh.

Ashleigh slipped on her green ballet shoes, but grabbed the green sandals.

Haley was already dressed in her tan dress sandals, she slipped on her business styled jacket: this jacket matched her rayon pants, the nice cami top, and she buttoned the one button of the jacket. Ashleigh wished she was Haley's height and shape to wear whatever she wanted.

Ashleigh asked very sincerely, "Will Bob be back to normal?"

Haley, with wisdom looked at Ashleigh, and asked a question in return, "The guy who wanted to do everything? The guy who was involved in everything? Wanting attention for maybe all the wrong reasons?"

Ashleigh questioned this within her heart.

"Bob has always been the best person I've ever worked for. He's an excellent owner. I know we're running around and he is being difficult. It's especially irritating he's not going with us. This stuff over the computer is maddening." Haley used an intense tone, "But it's better than before."

Before Ashleigh could ask.

Haley answered, "As a brother he loves you a lot."

Ashleigh was stunned at her bluntness. "I know but..."

As a stern mentor, "Let me tell you something. He wouldn't have you doing any of this if he didn't trust you."

Ashleigh pleaded, "But I'm his sister."

Haley was tired of this implication.

"Stop it," Haley scolded. "If he just thought of you as his sister you would be going to

school full time. Do you really think he'd hire you just because he's your sister? You know your brother isn't like that. Think about it? There has to be a reason he's having you observe everything."

Haley hoped this would help this young woman's confidence.

Ashleigh wanted to believe Haley. She wanted to believe he hired her for her: talents, hard work, abilities, and character.

Ashleigh was reminiscing back to when she was little, and stated, "I feel like he cared more."

Being snipping Haley replied, "Didn't you ever consider he might care more now?"

Ashleigh was having difficulty feeling this.

Ashleigh: picked up her purse, swung it over her shoulder and across her chest, stuffed her green sandals inside of her large purse, picked up a backpack, slipped the backpack over her right shoulder, and picked up a very expensive leather case with a top of the line lap top in it. Haley: picked up another backpack, slipped the backpack onto her shoulders, picked up a locked leather brief case, and quickly grabbed her small purse. The two looked at one another and headed out of the suite. Just before Ashleigh shut the door she slipped off her ballet shoes. This annoyed Haley. Ashleigh: set down the laptop, picked up her shoes, placed them into her purse, and shut the suite door.

In the hallway Ashleigh nodded her head.

Haley returned Ashleigh's nod.

They headed out to accomplish their next task.

End of Part Two of Four

Thursday June 1st, Megan

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Ashleigh & Megan *Book I: Friendship*



Thursday, June
1st

Megan

Day 3 of Book I

*(1 month and 22 Days Since Bob Bought
Ashleigh a Jeep)*

Part Three of Four

Authored By:
R. P. Voght

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format. I have termed this as an "Story Cast" What the term "Story Cast" means; is this story is designed to be read in small to medium intervals. This particular story is broken up into "days." In this particular story these portions are broken up into part or all of a particular fictitious "day" of the story. Each day surrounds the characters lives, relationships, adventures, struggles, mishaps and triumphs. This story is very different from a Novel or conventional story in many ways. Again, THIS IS NOT A NOVEL AND IS NOT WRITTEN IN A CONVENTIONAL NOVEL FORMAT. Instead; as the reader you are following the characters thoughts and actions during the course of this "day." This fiction story is set up like a TV series and or a third person journal. It always starts with one or more character getting up and ends with one or more characters going to bed; while during the day you experience the Characters actions, feelings, and their thoughts.

On a large overview; there is a beginning, a middle, and an end to this "Story Cast"
R. P. Voght

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Thursday June 1st

(1 Month and 22 Days Since Bob Bought Ashleigh a Jeep)

Julie finished.

She: removed her hand, lifted up her pelvis, pulled up her berry colored cropped yoga pants with stripe detail, and laid back down on her beach towel. She laid there in the afterglow enjoying the peace she felt while listening to the ocean. She: sat on her knees, pulled her pink sports bra over her breasts, secured it, glanced at her sports watch, and scrutinized the area. In front of her was a half an acre of tall grass, in front of this grass was a section of beach, and the Atlantic Ocean. Within Julie's vision the ocean was temporarily devoid of vessels. On her right were small shrubs, a few yards off to her left was a large rock cropping, and behind her was the natural rock wall that cut through the preserve; both paralleled the ocean. Julie was grateful for all the times her Auntie Megan took her exploring.

She: grabbed her backpack, unzipped the small compartment, took out a bottle of hand lotion, set the bottle in front of her, made sure her hands smelled like the lotion, placed the lotion back into the small pocket of her backpack, removed mans antiperspirant, took off the cap, applied it onto her underarms, put the cap back on, placed the antiperspirant back, grabbed a small bottle of perfume, when she applied enough to cover her scent. She decided if anyone made a comment she would apologize and say the perfume bottle broke. To help with her perspiring problem she planned on taking a route back to school where kids normally drove; she assumed one of the guys from school would stop and give her a ride. She again studied the secluded area and felt safe. Before she stood up she: unzipped the large compartment of her backpack, pulled out her pink adjustable tank top, slipped it over her sports bra, secured it, stood up, stepped off the beach towel, pulled the backpack off the beach towel, picked up her beach towel, and with a couple snaps sand went flying into the air.

Standing; she again felt compelled to study the area and made sure she was truly alone.

Feeling secure she: quickly folded the towel and put this back into the large section of her backpack, zipped up all the compartments of her backpack, and swung it over her back. Her Adidas tennis shoes and her keys made noise as they dangled off the back of her backpack. Being mindful of snakes she followed a worn out trail to a nearby lookout.

Julie was aware many of the guys at school were interested in her. She felt most of the boys in her school were childish and stupid. The only boy she considered boyfriend material was her Brother's best friend Sal. She was physically attracted to him, but she was unsure he was the type of guy for her. As much as it was humanly possible Julie tried to avoid the drama of school; if it was up to her she would take the GED and be done with school. She was confident within the first couple weeks of college she would pick out a mature Christian who treated people with respect.

As she approached this overlook she spotted Billy's truck and Billy sitting on a bench.

Billy was a boy who: respected his momma, other students, he listened to his teachers, and her Brother allowed Billy to follow him around. These traits were the reason Julie liked him as a friend. Billy tried protecting girls, even those girls who teased and made Billy look like a fool. Billy was in her brother's grade but was in all basic classes. Julie admired how he kept going back to school. Julie was one of the few who understood Billy was filled with common sense but struggled a great deal with school and abstract concepts. She was grateful he kept growing bigger and stronger. His girth was the main reason the teasing he suffered through out school was ending. Julie was afraid if he ever was in a fight he would never stop.

As soon as Billy saw Julie walking toward him he stood up as a gentleman.

She smiled when he stood up.

Julie suspected his momma picked out his clothes. He was in a nice pair of jeans, a nice short sleeved button shirt, he always tucked in his button shirts, and wore plain red non brand tennis shoes. These items were fine, but he never fit in with current fashion and sometimes Julie cringed at the combination of colors he wore.

Any time Julie talked to Billy in school her "snob club" friends would become upset. Julie was the only one of the "snob club" who knew the nickname of this popular group. She wanted to leave the "snob club" but was certain she would lose her friendships with Jennie and Amanda; at this moment in her life she was emotionally unprepared to lose these friendships.

"Hi Y'all."

Julie replied back, "Howdy Big Guy."

He liked this and made sure he had a straight posture.

She: untied her shoes from her bag, slipped on her shoes, tied them, and stepped over to her locked bike.

"I was driving cause I was on a brake. While driving I spotted your bike. It's easy spotting your bike cause nobody has a bike like yours."

Julie asked very sincerely, "Do you like my bike?"

"Yes I do. I'm liking how it looks like the clothes them skiers on TV wore."

Julie was impressed he was the one who knew where she received the idea from.

He asked, "When are Y'all be on TV?"

She raised an eyebrow, "Why would you think I'd be on TV?"

"When Y'all were playing volleyball. I was thinking Y'all are better than the gals I seen

on TV. I's like watching them gals who play on the beach. I was thinking your better than those gals."

She could have teased him for watching girls play volleyball, but chose not to, "I was hoping one day to play on a college team."

"I's didn't know they have college teams playing on the beach?"

She smiled, "I'd play in the gym."

"Oh."

"If I'm good enough maybe I'd be invited to try out for the Olympic team."

She could tell this excited him.

"I've been watching you play in the gym." A concerned look came on his face. "You don't mind me watching you play?"

She could have took this as weird but she knew him.

"I don't mind you watching me play."

He smiled and was eager to tell her what he thought, "Even when the volleyball team is loosing Y'all play well. I ain't liking the fact the teams loosing. They ain't suppose to be be loosing with you playing."

Losing was very traumatic for Julie. In all the years she played sports when she rose the level of her play the whole team played better and won. She never played so hard in all in life. To be in last place in her conference was very stressful for her. This caused her so much stress she changed the subject.

Julie knowing his school schedule asked, "Shouldn't you be studying for your English exam?"

He gave her a look, "I ain't going."

She could feel her friend felt dumb. Julie suspected every school across America had a Billy. A good guy who struggled with book smarts, had a good heart, was picked on, but worked hard at just completing a school day.

She: bent down, quickly did the combination, unlocked her bike, looked up at him, and commented in a very serious tone, "Your Momma will be angry at you if you don't try."

She could tell by his facial expressions he took this seriously.

He said in desperation, "Ms. Moore was telling us there'd be a lot reading."

Julie assumed Ms. Moore, who was a very nice teacher, was just trying to be nice and prepare her basic English class.

"She was being nice."

"It ain't nice."

Julie sighed, "She's nice to you."

"I don't like reading."

"She has to have you read. It's an English class."

He shrunk his shoulders, "Okay."

"I know you don't like reading that's why I read to you."

She gave him a moment to think: she wrapped the chain below her seat, locked the two ends with her bike lock, she pushed her bike to his pick up truck, and stood next to the tailgate.

He followed her.

He pleaded, "Y'all should come to my class and read to me. I ain't cheating by having Y'all answer the questions. If Y'all are reading to me I'd know the answers."

She gently explained to him, “They ain’t allowing me to read to Y’all. Plus I have my Biology exam.”

“Oh.” He made a face, “Ain’t Biology for Sophomores? Y’all are so smart.”

She pointed at him, “I don’t want you to tell anybody how smart I am. You promise!?”

“Everyone knows how smart Y’all are.”

“I just don’t want you telling anybody.”

“I’m always wishing I’d be smart. If I’d be smart I’d want everybody knowing.”

“Being smart isn’t always easy.”

He looked at her and said, “It ain’t occurred to me a smart person would have trouble in school. But I guess they’d be having trouble too.”

“As long as you keep your promise of never telling anybody how smart I really am. It’ll be easier for me.”

“I’s keep my promises.”

She was sure he would never forget his promise.

This was when he noticed she was standing by his tailgate and asked, “Are you needing a ride?”

“Let me put this...”

Before she could finish the sentence he grabbed the bike and gently put in the bed of his pick-up-truck.

“I ain’t wanting to scratch your bike.”

When the bike was set into the truck bed he turned and gave her a weird look.

“Whats eating you big guy? We’re needing to get to school.”

He asked, “Will Jeff be mad at me?”

This seemed odd.

“Why would he get mad at you?”

Billy became real serious, “None of us are to mess with Y’all.”

“Who says?”

“Jeff.”

“When did he tell you this?”

She hid her irritation from Billy. She noticed Billy’s body language.

“He’s been telling everyone they better not be touching you. Or he’ll make them regret it. I ain’t about to hurt Y’all.” Real serious he said, “I’s seen guys hit gals. It ain’t nice.”

Everyone in town knew what happened.

Serious he asked Julie, “I ain’t wanting to tangle with my friend.”

“I think you’d put him in the hospital.”

She commented as only an irritated sister could.

He looked frightened, “I’ve been watching him play football and I’ve seen him fight.”

She glanced at her sports watch. She walked to the passenger door and asked, “Billy are Y’all letting me in?”

This caused him to focus.

He practically ran over to her, “Momma taught me I should be opening doors for gals.”

Her heart went out to him and commented, “A good gal appreciates it when a big guy like yourself opens doors.”

He quickly opened the door. Julie swung her backpack in such a way she could step into the cab; her keys jangled. Billy waited until she was sitting nicely.

He stopped before he shut the door and commented, "Y'all are smelling really pretty."

As she swung the seat belt around herself she smiled at him, "Thank-you. But we need to be getting to school."

"Okay."

He gently shut the door.

Julie was both irritated and happy with her brother. She believed she could take care of herself; at the same time she was grateful her big brother cared enough about her to have her back.

She watched Billy walk around to the drivers side door. She was certain teachers passed him onto the next grade because he tried really hard. She watched him step into the truck and shut the drivers door. He put on his seat belt.

He looked at her.

Julie could tell he was going to ask her again, to avoid this conversation, she said, "We can't be late."

"All right."

He turned the key and the truck started right up.

"Are you noticing something?"

"What?"

"How good the trucks sounding?"

"It's sounds great."

She was unable to tell the difference from what it used to sound like.

"I was working on the truck..."

She interrupted, he could ramble on for hours on how he fixed his truck. She diverted the conversation, "We'll all be late."

"Okay."

He put the truck into drive and headed toward school. It always amazed Julie on how well he could drive.

"Julie."

Julie noticed his nervous tone, she stopped him from asking again, "Does my brother ever fight you?"

"Guys ain't wanting to fight with me no more."

She smiled, "I was meaning Jeff."

"He's my friend. He's never picking on me. He ain't as nice to me as you are. I reckon' it's because Y'all are a good gal."

Julie understood Billy considered Jeff his friend. She would never tell Billy her Brother avoided Billy as much as he could but never stopped him from tagging along; Julie was relieved to know Jeff never picked on Billy.

"Jeff told me the coach wants Y'all to play football."

"I can't play."

"Why? Y'all are always talking to me about football."

With a face he said, "I just like watching football. I can't play."

"Why not play?"

"They don't like me."

She decided to be positive like her Auntie taught her, "They'd like you better if you played."

Julie heard his concerned tone.

"I see em' carrying around a book."

This was the play book.

"You can chase guys right?"

"Yup. I ain't as fast as a deer running. But I be running fast to the store for Momma."

They pulled into the school parking lot and Billy parked in the same spot every day; with how big Billy was everyone left him the spot.

Julie was about to get out.

"Momma says I should be opening the door."

"Its okay. You've been good to me."

They smiled at one another.

She saw them across the parking lot: she sighed, rolled her eyes, and her smile disappeared. A few guys were circulating her friends like sharks surrounding a dying whale. Julie ignored the "snob club" and she stepped out of Billy's pick-up-truck. Julie took note of their disgusted faces and their annoyed body language, Julie was thankful this was the last day of school.

He pulled down the tail gate. She appreciated how careful he was with her bike. He gently set it down with its wheels on the ground and looked at her.

She commanded, "I want you to play football next year."

"I can't."

She pushed her bike forward.

Billy slammed the tailgate.

Julie headed toward the bike rack, she knew he'd follow.

She asked him, "Ain't I helping Y'all with your homework?"

"Momma says your a good gal for helping me. I's ain't sure I'd be getting C's."

"Are you telling anyone I'm helping you?"

She heard his concern tone, "You've been telling me I shouldn't be telling anyone since you started helping me. I's keeping my promise." He paused, "I'm thinking you'd be good at helping other dumb kids..."

She interrupted, "You ain't dumb."

"I ain't smart."

She answered, "Everybody is good at something and are bad at something. It doesn't make you dumb if you struggle with school. I feel it's cool you keep trying."

He stood up with confidence.

He did say with passion, "Momma says Y'all would make a good teacher."

When they reached the bike rack she smiled, "I'm glad Y'all keep our secret."

He was overjoyed she was happy with him.

She: unlocked her bike lock, she unwrapped the chain, and instructed him, "What the guys are carrying around is the play book."

"The plays."

"Yes. They have to write down the plays."

"I ain't good at writing."

She smiled, "All you'd be writing is diagrams." She noticed his face and before he would ask, "Pictures. Like pictures in shop class or in woods."

He smiled, "I like building things."

Being encouraging, "The playbook is like written down plans. After writing down the plays you use the plays on the field. It's like when Y'all are fixing the truck."

"I's get it."

"During the game Y'all are using the plays like signs when your driving."

"So I's knows where I'd be going."

"Exactly."

He smiled.

She let him think about this as she locked the bike to the rack.

Before he would come up with a question, she stood up and demanded in a nice tone, "After your English exam you go find the coach and tell him you want to play on the defensive line."

He smiled, "I'd have fun tackling."

"Exactly," she replied with a smile, "Y'all would be great on the defensive line."

"What happens if I forget the plays.?"

"You know what a stunt is?"

"Yup."

"I'd teach ya' the plays," she said with absolute confidence, "Just tell the coach you'd like to tackle the quarterback. Always remember when your on the field to follow the ball."

With a sad tone he asked, "What happens if they don't like me?"

She looked at him, "I bet if you play football they'll stop picking on you."

"Y'all are smart."

Julie smiled. She noticed her "snob club" friends were headed toward her. She lead Billy into the building. Julie to her disappointment was certain her "snob club" friends would follow.

"I've been hearing Jeff will be playing for the U. Everybody is knowing how good he is."

"He's thinking about it," Julie answered honestly. There were a lot of university's all across the south scouting her brother; wisely Jeff and Julie were keeping the names of these various universities to themselves.

She encouraged Billy, "Besides Jeff I bet Y'all will be the best player on defense."

He believed this because Julie told him.

They stepped into the building and were near some stairs.

Due to exams the hallway was empty. A teacher was headed toward them. Julie knew this teacher and nodded her head. This female teacher who was two years from retiring nodded in return and left them alone.

Julie looked up at her friend and poked him gently, "Now you be quiet in the hall and you get to the exam."

"Okay."

"You promise me you'll talk to the coach after the exam?"

"Yup."

"You tell him you want to sign up. Don't be afraid of asking him where you should sign." In a demanding tone, "I want you playing next year."

"Okay."

The bell rang.

Kids immediately piled into the hallway. During exams they had a half hour to get to exams not the usual ten.

Kids were about to pick on him but when they saw Julie standing next to him they restrained themselves.

“You'll do fine on the exam.”.

She could tell by his body language this gave him confidence.

“You get to your exam.”

“Okay.”

She made sure Billy headed upstairs to his locker. She was sure he would go to the English exam. She noticed them out of the corner of her eye and wished she could escape.

Julie heard in a contemptuous female tone.

“Why are Y'all talking to HIM again?” Chelsey snickered, “We've told you not to talk to him.”

Chelsey was the freshman leader of the popular kids in school. Her whole existence was about becoming the most popular popular in school. Julie considered Chelsey one of the many stresses she occurred in school.

Julie reluctantly turned. She was facing two of the three least favorite people in school. Julie wished with all her heart Jennie and Amanda would hang out with someone else. Based upon the stories Julie heard from missionaries, she believed if they were dropped off into one of these third world countries; it would help their attitudes. Julie was sure they would have a nervous breakdown if they had to live life without the “mall.”

Chelsey snickered and demanded, “We've told you not to talk to him.”

Chelsey was slightly shorter than Julie. She was obsessed with maintaining her long black wavy hair. Chelsey was given a perfect oval face, her forehead was perfect, her high cheekbones perfectly matched her longer celestial nose. She made sure her cupid lips and her dark piercing eyes were focal points. Julie noticed Chelsey was in a brand new outfit. An outfit Julie was sure Chelsey received while modeling for local department store. If Chelsey acted different Julie would have encouraged Chelsey's modeling dream; but Chelsey used the fact she was a model to bully, boss, and one up everyone.

Chelsey was wearing a white lace and eyelet cami; this top highlighted her cleavage and was intended to make her cleavage the focal point. Chelsey pushed and pinched them together to make her medium sized breast look as large as possible. Matching this expensive but revealing blouse, Chelsey was wearing a white stretch canvas crop pant with studded ankle wrapped sandals. With all the jewelry Chelsey wore Julie felt Chelsey was a walking billboard for any jeweler. She flaunted every piece of jewelry she ever received and she always wore multiple: bracelets, necklaces, rings, and earrings.

Julie and Chelsey were rivals in every way but because of mutual friends they put up with one another. This was how they survived being in the same group during their Freshman year; both hoped they could avoid one another during the summer. What irritated Chelsey was Julie openly challenged Chelsey and even ignored Chelsey's commands. A prime example of Julie's disobedience was when Julie talked to Billy or others Chelsey deemed as beneath the group. What was even more infuriating was how Julie defended kids below their status. Chelsey despised the fact Julie was popular without her permission. What compounded this irritation was Chelsey felt she was trying her best to teach Julie how to be an elite. Chelsey felt Julie was unappreciative of the grace she was giving Julie in allowing Julie to be in her presence.

Julie felt Chelsey was a spoiled brat and many times wanted to call her a bitch. Julie

hated the way Chelsey: treated her momma, how she complained about everything, how she treated teachers, and how Chelsey treated her older sister as a stepping stone. Julie liked Chelsey's older sister who was a very popular upper classmate who played on the varsity volleyball team. When junior varsity and varsity played against one another, Chelsey's sister encouraged Julie. Julie would never forget this. The only reason Julie put up with Chelsey was because of Amanda and Jennie.

Chelsey gazed upon Julie.

Kendall, followed Chelsey where ever Chelsey went. Kendall was average height, her heart shaped face made her perfect to be a cheerleader, her long wavy blond hair was set exactly the same as Chelsey, her skinny nose fit well with her very flat cheeks and her simple rounded jawline. Kendall had large cupid shaped lips with a small prim looking mouth. Kendall's eyes were large, bright green, and were beautiful.

It was obvious to Julie, Kendall was trying to attract attention. Kendall accomplished this by wearing a blue lace up top; this top revealed her midriff, was tight, and highlighted her small breasts. Kendall bragged about her future graduation presents. These were implants and a car. Julie believed bragging about these things showed how vain Kendall was. Kendall added to her attention getting outfit by wearing a tight denim embroidered mini skirt; white flowered embroidery was conveniently sown on her rear end. Underneath the skirt she was wearing black crop leggings. Both ladies were carrying the same type of purse. The one talent Julie admired Kendall for was her ability to apply makeup.

Julie was frustrated with Kendall's flip-flop personality. Julie noticed if Kendall and her were alone Kendall acted one way, but as soon as she was in a group Kendall became a snob. Julie despised how Kendall would only talk to kids at school who were of a certain status.

Kendall agreeing with Chelsey commented with an irritating tone, "Y'all are not understanding how things work around here."

Julie rolled her eyes.

One of Jeff's friends yelled, "You get em' Julie."

Julie nodded her head. He smiled and ran up the stairs.

"Whats he meaning?"

Chelsey snipped at both the comment and Julie's flirtatiousness.

Kendall repeated what Chelsey just spoke, "Why talk to Billy? He's the town fool."

The two girls giggled.

Julie was about to walk away but an angry Chelsey stepped in front of Julie.

Chelsey stated with a tone, "I've been trying to teach Y'all how things work around here. You ain't appreciating what I'm doing for you."

Julie answered with dripping sarcasm, "What are you doing for me?"

The two girls looked at one another and sighed.

"With you being so smart," started Kendall, "Why are you so stupid?"

Julie glared with some intent, "I ain't stupid. Nobody is stupid."

Kendall caught Julie's look and decided to let Chelsey sink or swim on her own.

Chelsey was now annoyed at both Julie and Kendall.

"Look," Chelsey spoke, "We'll ban Y'all from hanging out with us."

Julie was about to jump on this chance but...

Chelsey whispered, "I'll make sure Amanda and Jennie will never talk to you." She

paused her speech, in a whisper added, "I might know of something you'd like."

Julie was curious, but more important was afraid her friends would just follow Chelsey's word, "What?"

Kendall leaned in and whispered into Chelsey's ear.

Nothing irritated Julie more than this immaturity.

"Yup."

Kendall knowing smirked at Julie.

Julie was suspicious and commented, "I'm needing to get to class."

"Wait."

Chelsey again stepped in front of Julie.

A couple kids near a locker watched closely. They all hoped Julie would bust Chelsey's nose wide open. This happened to a senior who thought he could force Julie to date her. Not only did Julie brake his nose, a few days later he felt the wrath of Jeff. Jeff as a Sophomore was a starting linebacker on the varsity football team and was already considered one of the best in the state. This fight sent a clear message to the rest of the school.

"What?"

Chelsey in a sarcastic tone, "For some reason my sister likes you." Chelsey took credit for something Chelsey's sister was about to do anyway. "I suggested you'd like to go to one of my sisters private parties."

This was one party Julie was curious about.

"I'm sure Y'all will like it." Chelsey said with a smirk. "I'm being a friend and getting Y'all in. With the way you are I'm sure you'll like the party."

Kendall snipped, "Even if Y'all are a virgin."

For different reasons both Julie and Chelsey gave Kendall a look to shut up.

Julie found it difficult to say, "I ain't interested."

Chelsey replied, "Y'all would love to go. You'll be popular with all the guys. Just remember I'm the one who invited Y'all." Chelsey added with temptation in her voice, "I'm sure you'd love it."

Chelsey missed Julie's motives for wanting to go to the party. She liked guys but being popular was far from the reason she would go.

The two girls looked at one another and giggled.

Julie wondered what the giggling was about.

"Why not have some fun."

"I said no."

Kendall smiled, "You'll miss out."

Chelsey stated, "Ya; Ms. Goody to Shoes. I invited Y'all thinking you'd actually have fun."

"I ain't into immature boys."

Kendall glared at Julie and spoke, "What are Y'all saying?"

Julie spoke honestly. She was surprised at what she said, "I'm needing to get to class. I'll tell you if I want to go to the party."

Julie with authority forced her way between the two girls and headed up the stairs.

She heard the girls giggle, and Chelsey say, "Lets go."

Julie ignored them and headed to her next exam.

Julie was surprised on how tempting this party was. An appealing aspect to this party

was only certain kids were invited, this being the case, she still was unimpressed with the guest list. She could have cared less at who was at the party, but what she would be able to see at the party. She knew it would be completely unacceptable to go to the party and just watch.

Julie was aware some of Chelsey's comments were due to Julie's insistence on never drinking or using drugs. The few times Julie went to a party Chelsey was frustrated with Julie because she never even drank; and became infuriated when Julie convinced Amanda to stop smoking pot. There were three reasons Julie never drank or took drugs: she felt drugs or alcohol would ruin her goals of playing sports on a collegiate level, her faith, and her Momma's threats.

Julie stepped onto the second floor. A couple kids from her Biology class followed her to her locker. The three accelerated students discussed what they felt would be on the exam. Julie removed the Biology text book from her locker. They looked at one of the hallway clocks and rushed to class.

The teacher made them turn in their books before he would give out the exam.

Julie sat in front of a long science table. As soon as she sat down she started to imagine what the party would be like. She was so into her thoughts the teacher became concerned and asked Julie, "Are you alright?"

The class laughed.

Blushing; she took the exam and the answer sheet from the teacher

She focused on what she felt would be a boring exam.

Megan was sitting at the breakfast table. She glanced over at the clock hanging in the galley. There was plenty of time before she would meet her sister-in-law for lunch. Megan was grateful she was finished with everything on her task sheets and all her laundry was in the back of her pick-up-truck.

She: took a quick shower, set her long dark blond hair, and changed clothes. Megan was wearing a pair of lightweight wide leg denim jeans she purchased at the thrift store. She was delighted with her boa constrictor cowgirl boots, a boa constrictor Captain killed crawling across his property. She coordinated her outfit by wearing a simple short sleeved blue and white plaid shirt. Her sunglasses were sitting next to her journal.

She looked down at her journal with a disappointed face. It was difficult for her to find the words she so desperately wanted to express. She admired those people who could just start writing and pour out everything onto a page. She felt she was getting better at free writing, but at this moment writing in her journal was terribly difficult. Her head and her feelings were uncooperative.

She picked up her empty water bottle and studied it.

Her dimples flashed.

In frustration she: grabbed the water bottle, stepped into her galley, tossed it into the recycling bin, and grabbed another water bottle from the refrigerator. She leaned up against the counter and contemplated on why she was having such a difficult time writing down: she wanted to write down how her high school experience led her to question her sexual identity. She wanted to be brave and write down her one and only sexual encounter. This encounter was when her best friend and volleyball teammate tried to seduce her. Megan quickly realized

she was unable to respond to Michelle's seduction. Megan felt if she was indeed a lesbian Michelle would have been the type of woman she would have wanted as a life long partner. What Megan felt embarrassed about was how she reacted to Michelle's gentle seduction and how she never picked up on the fact Michelle was a lesbian.

Megan often felt being a lesbian would have been easier. She felt she was the only woman alive who questioned her sexuality and when the opportunity to have a same sex experience happened; she was unable to go through it. This was when she recognized she was indeed straight. It hurt when people assumed she was a lesbian. She reasoned people jumped to the conclusion she was a lesbian because she: liked guy activities, owned a business normally men owned, never dated, was till a virgin, and completely avoided the topic of sex. With this being her life experience she never made assumptions about gender roles. Megan never assumed based upon a persons interests this was a sign a person was a homosexual. She knew many women who were into sports and liked guy activities who were straight, just as she personally knew women who were completely feminine and a person would have never guessed they were a lesbian.

She drank from her water bottle.

She recalled stepping into Michelle's apartment and spotting a dressed up Michelle and a romantic dinner for two prepared for the two of them.

This memory brought on a sentence. She sat down to write this sentence down.

This is when she heard a northern accent yelling; "Megan?!"

It was Gina; the woman who lived directly across from her charter.

Megan: stepped out of the galley, through the lounge, opened the doors, and again she heard, "Megan!?"

"Howdy!"

Megan exclaimed so Gina could hear her. She stepped out of the living quarters and approached Gina.

Gina was standing on the pier next to Megan's charter, on purpose Gina was waiting for Megan to approach her, Gina hated stepping from the pier onto Megan's charter.

Megan took note of Gina's appearance. Gina was wearing a multi colored babydoll dress, Megan thought the dress with its three layers and its light vertical strips made her voluptuous figure stand out in a positive way. She was wearing a wide brim circular hat, round sunglasses, and she was in a pair of tan wedges with red straps. Megan felt Gina's purse matched her outfit perfectly.

Gina at five ten was taller than most women but was shorter than Megan. Gina was used to being the tall person in a relationship. The idea of being with a taller partner appealed to Gina. Her wavy bright blond hair always looked nice. Her round shaped face made her large dominating nose very noticeable. Her nose was off set by: her lower blended in cheekbones, her cute chin, her long smile with her thin lips, and her bright green eyes. Her face was perfect for Gina's voluptuous figure. Megan being an expert in physical fitness, bone structure, and body fat; knew Gina was far from overweight. Megan knew many women who were similar in shape who became obsessed with their weight. Megan was pleased: Gina never once seemed to lack confidence, she put in the effort to maintain a healthy weight, and avoided the up and down style of dieting.

Megan understood why men asked Gina out.

Gina took it in stride when a guy was surprised she was a lesbian.

Megan smiled, "Howdy."

"Hi there."

Gina answered in her Minnesota accent.

Megan knowing how feminine Gina was; asked, "You need help getting onto the charter?"

"Would you please?"

Megan gently reached out her hand; Gina took Megan's hand and allowed Megan to help her onto the charter.

Gina liked Megan's touch. She hoped Megan was a closeted lesbian. Gina assumed the reason Megan was still in the closet was because of her family. With how often family members visited Megan and how she talked about her family; Gina assumed Megan was very close to her family. Gina knew her family was very religious, especially her mother who talked to her about Jesus. Gina never felt Mary was pushy or rude to her. Gina surmised with Megan's family being religious this was the reason Megan kept her sexual preference a secret. Gina disliked dating someone in the closet, but decided to set this preference aside if it was the only way to date Megan. Gina kept in mind Megan might be straight or bisexual. In either case Gina hoped they could remain friends. Many times Gina became hurt when she tried to have a straight woman as her friend. She knew part of this was her fault for falling for straight women, but what hurt the most was when a misunderstanding ruined a friendship.

Megan carefully led Gina onto her charter and without thinking anything of it let go of Gina's hand.

Gina stated as soon as she felt she was securely footed, "I noticed you didn't have a charter."

She normally worn tennis shoes on Megan's charter but she wanted to look attractive.

Megan caught Gina gently checking her out. Megan made this into a positive by telling herself this was a sign a guy would find her attractive one day; she doubted her own reasoning.

Megan answered Gina's question, "My busy season is just about over. I'll get a charter here or there. It's just too hot for the tourists."

"Oh."

Megan being encouraging stated, "Y'all are a good Yankee."

They both laughed and Gina on purpose gently touched Megan's arm.

Megan without thinking about it moved her arm.

Gina's was disappointed by Megan's reaction and body language, but Gina understood if Megan was in the closet public affection would be uncomfortable. Gina reminded herself of the possibility Megan was straight.

"It gets so humid down here."

Megan smiled and tried to be positive by saying, "If I moved to a northern state I'd be hibernating during the winter. I'm not sure how Y'all do it."

Gina asked, "Have you ever seen snow?"

"When I went traveling with my volleyball team. We didn't get a chance to play in it due to the tournament and all."

"It's pretty. I'd bet you'd love to skiing or snow shoeing."

Megan mentioned, "I saw snow shoeing on a National Geographic special. I've been known to watch some of the winter Olympics. But I'm more interested in the summer

Olympics.”

Gina was enjoying the conversation, “That's understandable.”

“Maybe some day I'll ski or do something in the snow. If I don't that'd be okay too.”

Gina replied, “It's a lot of fun skiing at night under the lights. It's kind of romantic.”

Megan avoided this part of the conversation by asking, “Did you want to step inside and have an iced tea?”

To Gina this was encouraging, Megan never invited her inside either one of her boats before.

“I'd like that.”

Megan smiled.

Her dimples flashed.

Megan led Gina into the living quarters.

Gina felt Megan's dimples were cute. Walking behind Megan; Gina admired Megan's rear end and legs. Gina especially liked the fact Megan was wearing jeans.

Gina wanting the conversation to continue asked, “You still doing the Y thing?”

“With school ending I'll be there a lot more. It helps pay the bills with how slow it'll be during the summer. I'll teach swimming, coach volleyball, lead a couple aerobics classes. I lead them all year round.”

Megan held the door for Gina as she stepped into the lounge. Gina took off her sunglasses and put them in her purse.

Gina over exaggerating, “I like what what you've done to the place.”

“Without my family helping I couldn't have remodeled her.”

Megan passed Gina as she gazed upon the living quarters, Gina focused and followed Megan to the galley.

“Feel free to sit down.”

Gina: gently set her purse on the counter, sat upon the end stool very lady like, and yet; she purposefully sat in a way so her breasts and an outstretched leg were noticeable.

Gina felt somewhat guilty for watching Megan bend over and open the refrigerator. Gina stated, “You look really nice in jeans. Why don't you wear them more often?”

Megan immediately changed her position. She was angry at herself for forgetting Gina liked looking at her rear end. “I'm not always comfortable wearing' jeans.” Her dimples flashed, “I found this pair at the thrift store. It was obvious to me they were only wore once.”

“You betcha. The thrift store is a good place to find deals.”

Megan standing up holding the plastic quart container of iced tea, looked at Gina and stated, “I'm surprise Y'all go shopping at the thrift store?”

“My last girlfriend liked going. It's like rummaging.”

“Are you meaning a yard sale?”

Gina smiled and crinkled her nose, “That's what's I'm meaning.”

“I enjoy finding deals.”

“I've found some wonderful things going rummaging. We should go sometime. Florence was telling me at the end of winter people are selling lots of good stuff.”

“She ain't whistling Dixie. Rich folks just sell off furniture they only used for a season.”

Trying again, “You should show me where these are.”

Megan answered innocently, “I'm not a fan of shopping but I go with my sister-in-laws.” Megan turned and faced her cabinets and reached up. “If it wasn't for them I'd never go

to the mall. I love em' even when they're dragging me to the mall.”

Gina admired Megan's rear end and legs; she turned away from her rear end just before Megan turned to face Gina. Megan was finished preparing two glasses of iced tea.

Gina focused on Megan's dark blue eyes, Gina liked how sometimes they appeared plum, and spoke, “Families are both a blessing and a curse.”

Megan set down the two glasses of iced tea on the counter and asked, “How are you meaning?”

“I don't know if I told you this or not. But I moved down here to take care of my retired parents. I love them but they have trouble accepting me.”

Megan leaned back against the counter and listened.

Gina continued, “They know I'm a lesbian but we never talk about it. Even when I've brought girlfriends over they'll refer to her as a friend.”

Megan asked, “Was it difficult coming out?”

This encouraged Gina. “Not really. I was pretty excited after having sex with a girl for the first time.” Gina waved her arm, “I was telling anyone who'd listen.”

Megan felt uncomfortable with this talk. Megan barely knew how sex worked with a man and a woman; so the idea of two women having sex seemed really foreign to her.

Gina never witnessed Megan look so uncomfortable.

Gina took a drink of her iced tea. She wondered if Megan was ever with a woman. Being with a first timer sometimes was difficult. With how fascinated Gina was with Megan she was willing to go down this emotional mind field.

Gina purposefully relaxed a little but still sat in a way so Megan would find her physical attributes appealing, “I was with a couple of guys but it never felt right. Being with a woman was absolutely mind blowing. I just love the feel of a woman.”

Megan blushed.

In the past she would have found a way to escape this conversation. Megan felt if she wanted to confront her sexual fear she needed to start discussing sex in a mature manner. Still, she was unsure if she should be talking to Gina about sex.

Gina was surprised at Megan's response and decided she would try a different angle. Gina set her glass of iced tea onto the counter.

“On Saturday I'm going to go and watch a friend of mine play softball. After the game we're all having a party. I'd love to introduce you to my friends. Do you like playing softball?”

Megan knew what Gina was meaning and felt uncomfortable, “I played softball in college.”

Gina excited by this, “You should come with me then. At the party they'll play softball and volleyball. I'm not that into sports but I like hanging around.”

Megan was so uncomfortable, “What'd your girlfriend say?”

Gina could see this was a problem.

“Well,” a pause. “I was going out with Cora. She's a fun girl but I'm not sure it's working out.”

“Which gal is Cora?”

Gina knew this was a problem. Megan made comments about her serial dating. Gina was tired of the constant dating herself. What drew Gina to Megan was Megan's suggestion she should find one woman to be with.

“You know.” Gina waved her hand, “She was the younger one with the short blond

hair.”

To Megan this described just about everyone of her girlfriends.

“She was small chested who wore...”

Megan interrupted, “Was she the one who was talking to me about the Dolphins?”

“No. That was Carol. Carol was the one with the blond hair that came down to the collar and she likes to where baseball shirts. She kept taking me to all these sporting events. I didn't mind watching her play. But sitting in a stadium watching all those guys play. It wasn't for me.”

“What gal is Cora?”

“Things aren't going well with Cora and I.”

“Sorry to hear it.”

“It's alright.”

Gina decided to answer, “Cora was the one who kept joking with you.”

“Her?” Megan was irritated, “I ain't believing she's a good gal for you. I was feeling she was hitting on me.”

This statement encouraged Gina.

All Megan could think about was how Cora was hitting on her anytime Gina would talk to their neighbor Florence. Megan felt it was rude and bossy of Cora to be hitting on her, Megan wanted Gina to be with someone more positive.

Megan being angry at Cora stated, “Maybe you should find a better gal. One who's focused on a long time relationship.”

Gina's insides jumped. Gina hoped Megan was hinting she wanted a long term relationship.

Gina stated with all her heart, “If I found a hard working woman who was family oriented I'd love to settle down. I'd so appreciate a loyal partner. I'd understand if she was afraid to come out of the closet because of her religious family.”

There was an awkward silence.

Megan felt bad for accidentally leading Gina on. Megan understood how hurt a person could feel when one wanted a long term relationship with someone who was uninterested in having a relationship in return.

Gina was waiting in deep anticipation for Megan's next comment. She hoped Megan would want a first date.

Very gently Megan answered, “I'm sure if Y'all are patient and start picking better gals. You'd find one who wants a relationship.”

“Oh.”

Gina was clearly disappointed.

Megan observing Gina's facial expression and body language added, “Just like I keep hoping I'd find a nice guy to be with. I'm sure there's a woman out there who'd love to be with Y'all.”

Gina felt embarrassed.

Megan clearly understood why Gina would feel hurt.

“Well I should be going.”

“I'm a straight gal. If I was into gals I'd pick a woman like you.”

Megan was unsure if this was encouraging but it was the only thing she could think of to say.

Gina found Megan's reply genuine. In return Gina smiled and acted like her confident self by saying; "If you ever decide to switch sides you let me know. I'd love to teach you a few things."

This shocked Megan.

Gina giggled at Megan's shocked face..

Megan giggled.

It was clear she giggled out of nervousness.

Both ladies ended up laughing.

Gina waved her hand, "I'll just have to help you find a good guy."

Megan asked, "Does one of your friends have a brother?"

"I'll have to check," Gina smiled, "You know I'm good at setting people up."

"I ain't sure you'd be good at it?"

"Oh Yes!" Gina proclaimed, "I even set up straight people. I have that knack you know," She thought of a particular guy she knew, "Would you hit a guy?"

"I tossed our neighbor in the water didn't I?"

As a friend Gina touched Megan's arm.

"I was so happy when you dunked him into the river. You know he hit on me?"

All Megan could do was take a sip of iced tea and study Gina's facial expression.

"You know I'm open about my preferences. The jerk said he knew girls who liked girls and boys and we should all get together." Gina barely took a breath, "It's been a long time since I did a guy. It would have to be special circumstance for me to want to ever do a guy again. You know I never liked all the mess. I hate it when guys are so rude."

Megan blushed and felt uncomfortable.

Gina asked, "What's the matter?"

Megan answered honestly, "I ain't used to such talk."

This statement felt like a huge load off Megan's shoulders.

"Hmm."

Megan decided to be brave, her voice quivered, but managed to say; "In college a gal made me dinner."

This was very interesting, "What happened?"

Megan stopped talking and just stood there blushing.

Gina very gently stated, "I'm not trying to pressure you in any way. If you don't want to tell me you don't have too."

This meant a lot to Megan. For the first time in her life Megan was ready to tell someone about the time Michelle tried to seduce her. This took courage.

"I understand things like this can be difficult to talk about. We don't..."

Still blushing Megan interrupted, "She invited me for dinner."

Megan took a sip of ice tea.

Gina pulled her dress over her leg and sat in a more comfortable position and was ready to listen to a friend as a friend.

Megan's opening statement was, "I thought nothing of going over to her apartment."

Nicole: parked the minivan in one of the visitor parking spaces, she took off her sunglasses, she put them into her purse, she flipped down the visor, she looked at herself in the attached

mirror, she felt her long brunette hair was set, her makeup was fine, she pushed the visor back to its spot, and then said a silent prayer.

She pushed her nervousness aside. Nicole ended up choosing a pair of white denim cropped pants with Caribbean style print. She matched these pants with a red salsa styled V-neck top, and just in case *Lucy's* was cold she brought a blue denim jacket. She tossed the jacket onto the second row of seats of the minivan. Before she stepped out of the van she grabbed her purse and swung it over her shoulder.

She took one last deep breath, stepped out of the van, shut the drivers side door, looked both ways, a Jersey couple from the marina stopped their car, they waved her across the parking lot, Nicole quickly headed toward the first pier; Nicole waved in thanks.

The car drove passed her.

As Nicole walked toward her sister-in-laws charter she felt the sister type of love she had for Megan. The sister bond started on the first day Jimmy introduced Nicole to his family as his girlfriend. Nicole had been over to Jimmy's house as Amy-Lynn's best friend. Nicole was aware Jimmy's family adored Amy-Lynn and because of the situation had reservations about Nicole. The first person in Jimmy's family to accept Nicole was Megan. This was an enduring memory for Nicole. She replayed this meeting in her mind as stepped onto the pier.

Nicole felt homosexuality was sinful, even though she felt this way, she felt it was equally wrong to reject her Sister-in-law. She disagreed with many of her peers who thought if a person was gay they were unsaved. She felt a gay person could be saved but there was deep consequence for this choice. She knew the secular world held to the view a person was born gay and homosexuality should be embraced. This philosophy felt wrong to Nicole. Nicole believed with all her heart God could heal a person of their homosexuality. Nicole at the same time felt a person who was gay needed to feel the need to be healed. She avoided judging the situation and would leave this whole thing up to God.

Nicole was determined to be the best person she could be. Nicole would continue to love her Sister-in-law no matter what Megan was feeling. If this meant Megan was hurting and no longer wanted to be a lesbian or if Megan was comfortable being a lesbian. Loving her Sister-in-law was both an easy thing and an uneasy thing. She hoped her Sister-in-law was straight.

Nicole stepped onto the stern of Megan's charter.

The personal belief Megan was straight was challenged. Looking into the living quarters of Megan's charter she could see Gina sitting on one of the stools. It was obvious they were having a very serious conversation. Nicole felt she was interrupting a relationship type of conversation. Nicole took a deep breath and for the first time knocked on the door; instead of just stepping into the living quarters.

Megan was having great difficulty telling the story and was grateful someone showed up, but when she noticed it was Nicole she exclaimed, "Darn it."

A frustrated Gina asked, "What?"

To Gina the story was just getting to the good part.

"Nicole and I were meeting for lunch."

Megan quickly looked up at the clock. She realized Nicole was a little early; but Megan doubted what time they agreed upon.

Megan wondered why Nicole was waited outside the door.

Nicole heard, "Come in."

Nicole took a deep breath and opened the door.

Megan and Gina gazed at Nicole as she stepped into the lounge.

Gina being polite stood up and presented herself to Nicole.

Megan asked, "I ain't late?"

"No. I'm on time," answered a confused Nicole, "We agreed I'd come here and pick you up?"

Megan's dimples flashed, "I apologize. I forgot we changed plans. I was thinking we all were meeting in town."

"It's okay. We'll just enjoy lunch together."

Nicole felt it would be impolite to leave Gina behind.

Gina caught Nicole's invite but Megan missed the implication.

Megan spoke, "My truck is filled with laundry. I'll just follow you."

"Okay."

Nicole who was always a great host politely asked, "If I'm correct your name is Gina?"

Gina smiled as Nicole approached her and stuck out her hand.

"I'm sorry," Megan was frustrated with herself for not introducing the two of them. "This is my neighbor Gina. She lives in the houseboat across the way."

Gina stated, "We've met in passing."

"Yes we have," Nicole answered. "You like living here?"

Megan gave Nicole an odd look because of the question and she was trying to conceal her southern accent.

Gina smiled, "My parents moved here many years ago. With every visit I liked this place more. With my parents living here and with me liking it I decided to move here."

Nicole made some assumptions on why. She decided she would give this potential, "sister-in-law" a chance. This was difficult for Nicole but she felt this was the correct thing to do.

Gina spoke with a smile, "Megan talks highly of you,"

Nicole smiled, "We're like sisters."

Gina answered, "I wish I had siblings."

"I was an only child. Megan has been the little sister I always wanted."

Megan appreciated the compliment but was finding Nicole's body language odd.

Gina felt a connection with Nicole and mentioned, "I really like your outfit. Where did you get those pants?"

"I bought these at Chico's. They were on sale.."

"I love a good sale."

While Megan casually listened to their conversation she questioned why Gina assumed she was a lesbian. Megan felt it was because she enjoyed masculine activities. Megan wished people would notice she liked feminine things too. Megan made a mental list of all the things she believed made it obvious she was straight: the dolphin paint job on the side of her charter, her love of plants, she loved playing hostess when people came over, she wanted to get married, the love and interest she showed her nieces and nephews, she felt her love of children was feminine, admittedly she disliked putting on makeup and shopping but she still participated in these activities; what she wished was people would stop assuming she was gay because of her interests.

She then considered the conversation Nicole and Gina were having. Megan felt this was

an example of why people should avoid judging a person's sexuality based upon their interests. At the current moment Gina and Nicole were pulling makeup out of their purses comparing the different brands and colors. Gina was as feminine as you could get and all she ever wanted was to be with a woman. Megan was unsure if being gay was due to nature or nurture but to assume someone was a homosexual based upon their interests seemed ignorant. Megan felt homosexuality had everything to do with whom a person felt attracted to and whom you associated your sexuality identity too.

She felt one reason people felt she was gay was how long it had been since she dated. She heard the rumor the reason she was a virgin was because she really liked women. She assumed others thought she was in the closet because of her reluctance to talk about sex. Her curiosity toward sex was growing but this was causing her to feel awkward and uncomfortable. She correctly surmised this was due to how she was raised and the teasing she suffered in high school.

"Megan?"

This was the third time Gina called out her name.

"Sorry."

Megan focused on Gina and Nicole.

Gina stated, "I have things to do. I hope you two have a good time."

Nicole mentioned, "Y'all are invited along?"

Gina was grateful but she answered, "I really have to get going."

Nicole mentioned, "Hope to talk to you soon."

Gina replied, "I'm sure I'll see you around."

Gina smiled and thought Megan had a nice family. This only added to Gina's disappointment. Megan and Gina talked as Megan led Gina off the charter.

Nicole worried about the loyalty of Gina. Nicole suspected once Megan was in a relationship Megan would be the jealous type. Nicole felt if Megan began a relationship, either with a male or a female, if the other cheated this would devastate Megan.

Nicole put these thoughts to the side when Megan opened the door and asked, "Are you ready?"

"Let me grab my purse."

Megan realized she left hers in the office, "I'll get mine."

"Okay."

Megan passed Nicole, Nicole asked, "Are you following me or am I following you?"

Megan answered, "It doesn't matter."

Nicole went to the top of the stairs and shouted, "Did you want me to help you with the laundry?"

"I wouldn't mind the help."

Nicole heard Megan opening and closing drawers in her small office. She liked the new additions to the charter; she liked the galley clock and the beach picture on the wall.

Megan was headed back up the stairs.

Nicole answered Megan, "I'll help Y'all with the laundry."

"I ain't about to refuse it."

Nicole asked, "Do we still want to take separate vehicles?"

Megan answered, "Lets."

Nicole smiled when Megan swung the small purse over her shoulder.

Megan asked, "Ready."

"I was waiting for you."

Megan was looking forward to spending time with her beloved Sister-in-law.

*A*shleigh looked up at the hostess.

When Haley and Ashleigh first stepped into this restaurant, Heather introduced herself by saying, "Howdy Ladies. Welcome to Lucy's, my name is Heather."

Ashleigh's first impression was Heather was pretty intimidating. She was in her early forties, her wavy long reddish brunette hair was neatly pinned, her long rectangle face showed she could handle herself, she had a long skinny nose, a small mole just above the right corner of her lips, and her jawline was long and intense. Her luscious lips were covered by red lipstick; she wore just enough makeup to make herself look younger. Ashleigh felt her light brown eyes could analysis a person in seconds. Heather was wearing a garden patterned silk shirt; underneath the pattern the shirt was vertically striped in wide dark blue and brown stripes. Matching the blouse she was wearing a dark blue bootcut pant and navy cuffed booties. Ashleigh liked Heather's homemade glass and beaded necklace with a large green loop; the earrings matched the necklace wonderfully. It was obvious to Ashleigh part of this woman's work out regiment involved weights. Her medium sized boobs were falling and rear end was not as tight; but she was in excellent shape.

When Heather led Haley and Ashleigh to their seats Heather was: professional, patient, and friendly. Both Haley and Ashleigh were impressed with the food and their college aged waitress. They felt the pace was slower than what they were accustomed too. Haley and Ashleigh felt if Bob was about to move the company to the town of Eastbank they were the ones who needed to adapt to the culture, just as important they were conscientious of any future politics between themselves and the locals. After the meal Ashleigh was impressed with the restaurant and requested to talk to the hostess.

Heather prepared herself for a complaint. It seemed when any northerner came into their restaurant something was always wrong: service too slow, something not cooked right, and there could be a list of other things. Heather took note of how the short one with blond hair liked her food spicy. Heather never witnessed a northern gal put so much hot sauce on ribs before. Heather also wondered where the short one put all the food. She ate: Mozzarella sticks, all her sides, the main dish, and she was just about done eating the restaurant's home made apple pie.

As Heather approached the table she heard the tall blond ask the short blond gal; "If I ate all that I'd blow up like a balloon. Where are you putting it all? Do you have a hollow leg?"

"Huh," Ashleigh looked up from the apple pie she was finishing, "I didn't eat that much."

Heather interrupted in a very polite manner; "Ladies, I'm understanding Y'all wanted to talk to me?"

Ashleigh and Haley looked at one another.

Heather prepared for the complaints.

Ashleigh trying to talk slower sounded a little rough, "Yes I did."

Heather made a face, "Yes Ma'am."

"It's all good," Ashleigh being concerned about Heather's tone spoke in her natural

tone, "I just wanted to tell you this is one of the best meals I've ever eaten. This is a very nice restaurant. It's hard to find a locally owned restaurant these days."

Haley added, "We're glad we stopped here."

"Honey, I'm glad Y'all enjoyed dinning with us. We're always trying to make our guests feel at home."

Ashleigh asked, "I was wondering if your chicken wings tasted as good as the ribs?"

Heather could tell they were Midwestern, but she couldn't place exactly where, the way the two of them pronounced their T's and C's was odd. Heather recognized these two women were pretty well off. Their outfits were too expensive for most of the middle class folks who lived in the area. With this knowledge it was shocking to Heather these two ladies were so polite; Heather's past experience with northern rich folks was at best strained.

Heather clarifying asked, "Honey, are you wanting the wings to go?"

Ashleigh smiled, "Yes. If I could have an order of wings super spicy and some of this apple pie."

"We can oblige." Heather was curious on why Ashleigh wanted to order with her instead off the waitress, "Were you ladies having trouble with Betty-Sue?"

Haley answered, "Not at all. We just wanted management to know how much we enjoyed the restaurant."

"This is awful good homemade pie."

After Ashleigh stated this she ate the last piece.

Heather became animated and announced, "Oh my! Well honey, all are desserts are made right here at Lucy's."

Ashleigh took notice of Heather's genuine smile.

"This place has been here in Eastbank since just after World War Two. My husbands Grand Daddy opened it and now my husband and I are running Lucy's. His daddy is willing to help out." She briefly glanced at the cooks, turned, and whispered to the ladies, "I let em' think he's helping out a great deal. After all, he's my Husbands Daddy and my children's Granddaddy. I ain't stopping him from working here."

Ashleigh stated with a wink, "I'm surprised they didn't name the restaurant after you?"

"Honey," she waved her hand and winked, "I can't imagine the talk if we'd change the name. It would be a hurricane of gossip if they named it after me. I ain't saying I wouldn't like it. Don't tell anyone I said this."

Ashleigh smiled, "We promise."

Heather spoke, "Lucy was Austin's Grand Momma. Austin is the cook over there and is my husband. His Grand Daddy was in the 101st and was a prisoner of war in the Battle of the Bulge. What kept his Grand Daddy going was the love he had for his wife. She was a faithful woman. When others told her he'd passed into the by and by she'd tell them God wasn't ready to take him yet. From what I've been told when they met up again no one saw them for days."

Heather winked and smiled.

Ashleigh found this funny and smiled in return.

Haley asked, "This place doesn't look that old?"

Heather smiled, "Austin and I caused' a commotion when we closed the place down for a couple months and remodeled. The section Y'all are sitting in is the old section. See where those fine folks are walking into?"

Haley answered, "Yes."

"That's all new. I decorated it myself. I spent many months collecting the history of this place. And it took me just as long to put all the history into them frames."

"Heather," Austin shouted. Customers could see into the cooking area through a big square opening in the wall. In front of this grill was a space, in front of the space was a long counter with stools, men were starting to fill the stools; it was obvious to Ashleigh they were here for lunch.

Austin yelled, "Is there a problem?"

She scolded in a loud voice, "You mind yourself. I's talking to some nice ladies. I was telling them how this place got started and how we all remodeled."

He made a face and went back to cooking.

Ashleigh noticed how attractive he was. She liked: his blond hair, blue eyes, his muscles, he was in his early thirties, and seemed to work hard. With her lack off sex and her vow to abstain from sex until she was married; her mind wondered. Ashleigh and Haley looked at one another. Heather was at least nine to ten years older than her husband. Ashleigh and Haley wondered how Heather kept him.

Heather saw the look on their faces. "Oh ladies he's all mine. I don't think anyone else would want him."

Ashleigh in her mind pictured how wonderful sex would be. She felt guilty for this thought and pushed it away.

"A lady can have fun."

If Heather disliked either of them she would have politely left and went to the business of the restaurant.

Ashleigh answered, "It's been a while."

Haley rolled her eyes.

"Y'all are a nice gal. I'm sure you'll find a good man."

"Are there any left?"

"I found mine at a Bible Study," she leaned over and talked quietly. "I don't know if Y'all read God's word, but we'all were studying the Song of Solomon. I felt this was a sign. And I'm telling Y'all, I ain't one of them sign chasers. I'll be listening to the guy upstairs so I don't need to be looking for signs."

Haley and Ashleigh smiled at one another.

Austin yelled, "Heather!"

Heather: looked over, made a face, turned back toward Haley and Ashleigh, politely said, "Ladies would you excuse me. Honey, I'll put in the order for them wings."

"Thank-you."

Heather smiled and turned around. Ashleigh noticed Heather's body language change to one of annoyance as she headed toward her Husband. As Haley and Ashleigh planned out the rest of the week, Ashleigh watched the two owners of *Lucy's* having an intense discussion. No one could hear what they were saying; but Ashleigh felt their facial expressions were priceless. He did get the last word in, Heather rolled her eyes, she turned and met a couple guys coming into the restaurant. It was obvious to Ashleigh she knew their names and set them at a table.

After this Ashleigh gave all her attention to Haley. In the mean time the waitress came by and cleared the table and filled Haley's coffee. Ashleigh was surprised she needed to ask for a glass of water. The waitress was nice and fulfilled her request. Ashleigh witnessed Heather

approach a couple employees talking by the soda machine. Ashleigh could tell just by a few words these ladies went back to work.

Ashleigh answered Haley's question, "I do like this town."

"It's a mix of old and new. It does have amenities. I did see a Target and a small movie theater. I spotted a live local theater in town. It's a real tourist town." Haley jabbed, "I even saw a bowling alley."

"Don't you dare tell my brother."

"Why?"

Very serious Ashleigh commented, "I hate it when he bowls."

"You know he..."

"Don't finish. I was there remember."

Ashleigh was reminded of all the times she went bowling with her brother and witnessing more than one bowling tournament.

They were quiet for a second.

"This town is kind of buried. How did Bob know about this place?"

Ashleigh answered, "I have no idea."

"Come on? Does he have another Shelly stuck someplace?"

Ashleigh made a face of worry and answered, "I don't know."

They sat quiet for a bit.

Haley observed how this comment upset Ashleigh.

"I liked Shelly and Patty."

"Who's Patty?"

Ashleigh answered Haley with heart, "A very good sister."

Haley knew by Ashleigh's tone there was a heart felt story.

"What should we tell him?"

Haley answered, "This town is safer than others we have visited. We are about forty-five minutes to an hour from Fort Lauderdale. I like being close to a city but not living in it. Everyone would love the work. We can't forget what the mayor told us."

Haley stopped talking when their blond waitress set the wings and the bill onto the table.

Ashleigh picked up the bill right away.

"When Y'all are ready you'll need to pay at the register."

"Thank you," answered Ashleigh. "Could you help us find something?"

The girl strained to understand what this fast talking northerner said.

"Ma'am I'll try."

"How do we get to *Benny's Yachts and Boat Extravaganza*? I was there once but I'm unsure of how to get there from here."

"What?"

Ashleigh was about to say it again, but this time Haley spoke, "A place that sells boats. It's called Benny's Yachts."

"Are Y'all meaning *Benny's*?"

Ashleigh answered, "Yeah."

Haley and Ashleigh looked at one another and smiled.

The waitress gave Ashleigh a concerned look, "It'd be a hard place for a tourist to find. I ain't one for directions. I'll get Austin."

The waitress went over to Austin and asked him.

Austin was annoyed, but waved his spatula and spoke out loud, "Little Lady, come on over here and I'll tell ya'."

Ashleigh walked over.

Heather was watching close, she could tell this northern gal was flirtatiousness, plus Heather just heard these were the two women asking about property in the industrial park. Heather was making sure this flirtatiousness Yankee kept her distance. Heather knew she found herself a good man and she meant to keep him.

Ashleigh imagined many sexual things as he gave her directions. She felt guilty for these thoughts; especially because he was married.

"Thanks."

Austin answered, "Y'all are welcome."

He decided to ask, "Are you the gal who likes a little spice on her food?"

Ashleigh answered with a smile and wink; "My brother was the one who introduced me to spicy foods."

He understood her by catching a couple words and putting the sentence together himself.

"Little Lady may I ask Y'all something?"

Ashleigh with a smile and wink, "Yea."

"With Y'all being such a tiny gal where are Y'all putting it all?"

She felt he was just being playful, she winked, "I'm able to eat more when the food is prepared by a good chief."

Austin proclaimed, "I'm the best darn cook in all of Florida."

The staff who heard him snickered and a customer yelled, "It ain't what my stomach is telling me lately."

Customers laughed. This laughter stopped with just a glare from Austin.

This was enough for Heather. She walked over and picked up the next order. Austin caught the piercing glare.

Ashleigh observed the glare too and said, "Thank-you."

"By Y'all"

He waved as he tossed some meat and onions on the grill.

Ashleigh: was carrying the meal for her brother, she was worried it would be cold by the time they made it back to Fort Lauderdale, Haley met Ashleigh at the register, Heather made sure she rung out the two ladies, Haley and Ashleigh said they'd visit the restaurant again, Heather and the waitress hoped so based upon the tip the short blond gave them, and Ashleigh and Haley headed toward the glass front door.

Megan opened the door for the both of them. She assumed they were tourists.

"I hope Y'all enjoyed the dinner and are enjoying Eastbank."

Megan was obviously trying to promote the town she grew up in.

Ashleigh answered, "It's nice."

Haley added, "We're liking the area."

"I'm happy Y'all are enjoying yourselves."

Megan watched them step by.

When Haley and Ashleigh were passed the door Nicole stepped in and Megan followed.

Megan assumed based upon their accents these two ladies were from the Midwest; she

felt they were from Chicago. Due to the fact Megan dealt with tourists and transplants everyday she brushed this memory from her brain.

Nicole looked up at Heather and thanked her. The two ladies sat in their usual booth in the long rectangular section of the restaurant. Megan from her vantage point could see the register, Nicole was viewing the long room. On the wall were a series of framed photographs showing the history of Eastbank from the time of the restaurant until three years earlier.

Heather handed them menu's and asked, "Nicole I'm assuming Y'all want an Ice Tea, and Megan your wanting an orange juice?"

Megan answered, "Yes Ma'am."

Nicole nodded, "An ice tea would be delightful."

Heather smiled and asked, "How are Y'all today?"

Megan answered, "Enjoying the day."

"Hows the charter business?"

"I'm starting my slow season but I'm doing well."

Heather leaned down and whispered, "I'm hoping Y'all are given the men a run for their money."

"I'm doing better every season. I ain't trying to take out anyone else's business."

Heather winked, "I'm understanding what Y'all are saying. I ain't trying to cause Y'all any trouble."

Megan and Nicole looked at one another and smiled.

"I'll get Y'all your drinks."

Heather stepped away.

Megan and Nicole both started to look at the five page laminated menu.

"Nothing beats your eggs Benedict."

Nicole answered, "I'm sure its good here too."

Megan made a face and bluntly asked, "When are Y'all having one of your chose you own breakfasts."

Nicole looked at Megan and smiled, "How about next Sunday before church. Talking about church. I haven't spotted you there lately?"

Heather put the drinks on the table, the ladies nodded. Heather in a serious tone mentioned, "The server will be right with Y'all."

Nicole answered, "Thank-you."

Once Heather left Megan answered Nicole's question, "I've been attending on Saturday night. If Y'all have a choose your own breakfast I'll go in the morning."

"All right you be there." Slight pause, with a serious look Nicole asked "How's everything?"

"My refrigerator is full I'm making headway on some bills. I'm doing so well I've stopped teaching self defense."

Nicole nodded at Megan, "I'm glad. I hate fighting."

Nicole mentioned in a concerned tone, "Julie will be disappointed."

"She's a great student and is good at teaching others. I'll continue to work with her even when I quit teaching the class."

Nicole asked in a serious tone, "What are Y'all teaching her? I witnessed her teaching

Ester how to punch. I'm not wanting my girls punching anyone.”

“Nothing extreme,” Megan stated gently. “It's always in self defense.”

Nicole hated fighting, but she married into a family where self defense was encouraged. As long as Nicole could remember Megan was always part of self defense training. This self defense training was a two edged sword for Nicole. On the one edge she felt better her daughters where able to protect themselves and on the other she was worried one of her children would seriously hurt somebody.

Megan was thankful the waitress named Becky showed up. Talking about self defense with Nicole was sometimes difficult. Becky was: a college aged woman, average height, blond hair, long diamond shaped face, and had a nice figure. She set the drinks down for both Megan and Nicole.

“Howdy, Ms. Nicole and Ms. Megan.”

Both ladies replied, “Howdy.”

Right away Becky asked, “I was hearing you ain't teaching self defense at the Y?”

Megan's dimples flashed, “With my business doing well and I just don't have time for it. Janet from the Eastbank Police Department is taking over.”

“Ms. Janet is intense. She's good and all, but I'm missing you and Julie teaching the class.”

This was difficult for Megan to hear, “Ms. Janet is a nice gal.”

Becky repeated herself, “She's a fine teacher. I'm just missing how the two of you would go at it.”

Nicole sent a glare toward Megan.

Purposely changing the subject Megan asked, “Hows your studies?”

She smiled, “I did better this semester and I'm taking a class this summer.”

“I'm sure you'll do well.”

“Ms. Nicole I'm studying awful hard.”

The two ladies smiled.

Nicole answered, “I'm sure you are.”

Becky asked, “Are you two ladies ready to order?”

Nicole answered first, “I'll have my usual chiefs salad with a the dressing on the side.”

“French or thousand island?”

“I'll have thousand island.”

Megan spoke, “I'll have spaghetti with sausage and peppers.”

“Are you wanting a soup or salad?”

“Salad with a small amount of French dressing.”

“Yes Ms. Megan.”

Becky was polite, took the menu's, and left the table.

Megan and Nicole glanced at one another.

After taking a sip of her sweet iced tea Nicole asked, “Why are Y'all stopping? I know teaching self defense is a passion of yours?”

“I'm sick of teaching it and I'm needing some time for myself. I'm still helping at Sam's shelters if she asks. I'm hoping with her having Janet's number she won't call. But I'm sure Sam will call me.”

“Who's Janet?”

“She's one of two new female officers they hired.”

Nicole felt the need to speak her mind in a tactful way, "I know the boys were teaching Y'all self defense your whole life and it saved you and your roommates life. I know it's a passion of yours but I'm glad Y'all are done teaching it."

"I never set out to teach it for money."

"Why did you?"

Immediately Nicole regretting asking the question. Based upon Megan's facial expression, Nicole could tell Megan was reliving the awful night the intruder entered her dorm room.

Megan's dimples flashed and in a very somber tone stated, "After the investigation was over. Coach asked me to teach the volleyball team self defense."

Megan became quiet and took a drink of her orange juice.

Nicole knowing what happened gave her sister-in-law grace.

Megan's dimples flashed.

She set the orange juice down on the table.

It was obvious to Nicole that awful night still affected Megan.

Megan broke the silence, "Coach told me he was tired of hearing on how his girls were being assaulted at parties and in dorm rooms. He wanted me to teach them how to protect themselves. This lead me to teaching others. A friend suggested I charge for it. I've sometimes felt guilty for charging others to protect themselves."

"You put a lot of work into those classes."

Megan's dimples flashed, "But I needed the money."

"You shouldn't feel guilty for charging people."

"I sometimes still feel guilty for charging."

"You never wanted to hurt anybody. If you hadn't shown up your roommate would have been raped and possibility killed. You warned him."

Nicole recognized the facial expression of her sister-in-law. Nicole witnessed this facial expression in: her husband, her brother-in-law, her father-in-law, and veterans she knew.

"If he wouldn't have come at me."

"You stopped him once?"

Megan blushed.

She blushed because she kicked him in the groin. What embarrassed Megan was his thing was hanging out when he came at her.

Megan sheepishly whispered, "I kicked him."

"Why are you so embarrassed?"

"I..uhm...ah..."

Nicole leaned over and whispered very gently, "You don't have to be embarrassed. I heard how he was exposed. You can use the word penis around me."

They were surprised how odd this sounded.

Nicole felt the same mix of emotions talking about sex with Megan as she did when she talked to Julie about sex. She pressed on hoping this would help Megan, "If you have any questions related to sex I'm willing to listen."

Nicole did a great job at concealing how awkward this felt.

Megan felt very uncomfortable. Megan wanted to be brave and open up and ask Nicole a ton of questions. Except; talking to Nicole about sex made her feel self-conscious. If Nicole had asked her when she was a teenager, this would have helped Megan a great deal, but Nicole

was in Virginia at the time.

Megan changed the subject, "Are Y'all going back to work?"

Megan quickly took a drink of her orange juice.

Nicole debated about pressing forward but she understood how difficult the whole topic of sex was with Megan. Nicole hoped Megan would some day take her up on her offer to talk her.

Nicole answered Megan's question, "We're hoping Jimmy will get more clients so I won't have to go back to work. I was feeling the best time to start working is when Ester is older. Plus we're getting concerned about Julie."

"Why?"

Nicole crinkled her forehead, "It's nothing' I can place. I've been looking for any sign of drug abuse."

"I haven't seen any signs she's using. Is she eating properly?"

"I haven't heard her throwing up and she ain't starving herself."

Megan asked, "Why are Y'all worried?"

"She's changing but with her grades up." Nicole shrugged her shoulders and proceeded, "I've never smelled or heard anything to make me think she's taking drugs."

"She ain't the type to use drugs."

Becky arrived at the table and dropped off the salad and asked, "Are Y'all needing anything?"

Nicole answered, "No Ma'am."

Megan added, "Everything is fine."

Becky smiled, "Holler if Y'all need anything."

The ladies nodded their heads.

Becky left the table.

Megan answered, "She won't on account of playing sports."

Nicole in a serious tone stated, "I've seen many athletes in treatment."

"I've seen it too. Julie's different," Megan was mixing her salad and looked up at Nicole, "With the way Julie is you'd notice."

"What should I be looking for?"

Megan answered, "If she ever starts drinking or taking drugs she'll feel she'll be able to handle it but we'll notice something because she'll be pushing her limits. She'll be feeling she's handling everything. She might even be hiding it from us but everything will come crashing down on her."

"This is why I'm so concerned."

Megan smiled, "I'm feeling she ain't ever starting. She's complained to me about kids drinking."

"I've heard this too."

This seemed to settle the discussion.

Megan thought about Nicole working, "If Y'all went back to work Momma would miss you at the Community Center and at church."

"You need to call her more."

"I've been calling her regular."

"She's your momma," Nicole glared at Megan. "You'll understand when Y'all are a momma."

Megan's dimples flashed.

She made a face before putting a fork full of salad into her mouth.

Nicole jumped at what she felt was an opening, "Are Y'all planning on having children of your own someday?"

Megan in a defensive tone commented, "I ain't haven't a child now. Why are Y'all asking?"

This was a relief for Nicole, she worried Megan might be considering being a single mom.

"Y'all are really good with children. I just assumed you wanted one of your own. I wasn't implying you wanted one now." Nicole in an understanding tone added, "It'd be alright if you were feeling like you wanted one."

Megan frowned and her dimples were clearly visible. Megan was so frightened of sex it would have been impossible for her to just sleep with a guy to become pregnant. She often times felt an anxiety anytime she thought about her wedding night.

"I'm sorry if I was prying."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"It's alright."

This was when Becky brought their orders.

Megan slid the empty salad plate off to the side, they thanked Becky, Becky asked Nicole; "Did Y'all want another iced tea?"

"Yes please."

Megan asked, "May I have a water?"

"I'll bring your drinks out."

She grabbed the empty salad plate and stepped away from the table.

There was a brief moment of silence as they prepared to eat their meals.

Nicole was feeling doubt. She was questioning if she should ask Megan or not; especially after Megan's reaction with the basic questions she was asking. Nicole questioned the possibility Megan always wanted to tell the family she was a lesbian; but was afraid to say anything. Nicole wondered if Megan was hoping one of her family members would simply ask her. A hurt thought came across Nicole's mind, with Megan knowing the families beliefs about homosexuality, maybe Megan was to afraid to come out of the closet. Nicole being honest with herself could understand why Megan would feel this way. This was especially hurtful to Nicole if Megan was struggling with being a lesbian and wanted out of the lifestyle. The other extreme was if Megan was completely comfortable being a lesbian and was lying and being secretive. To Nicole this was possible because of what she witnessed between Gina and Megan. Compounding all of this was Megan's general struggles with sex. With Nicole's sister-in-law hurting she felt hurt too.

Megan for many reasons changed the subject, "Are the kids looking forward to school ending?"

"Immensely. Julie is looking forward to playing Volleyball at the Y this summer. Ester is looking forward to playing with her friends. Jeff is already starting to work out for football, plus he's playing on some baseball league this summer."

Megan in excitement asked, "Is this the year Y'all are putting in the pool?"

After asking this question she felt horrible, after all they were living off of Jimmy's investments.

Immediately Megan said, "I do apologize for asking about a pool."

"Y'all are used to us having money and we've talked about putting in a pool for years."

Truth be told Nicole was afraid a pool would ruin her garden and was sure a pool would cause more work for her.

Nicole stated, "We're okay. The house is paid for. We've always saved for a time such as this. We just can't purchase any big ticket items. If it was up to me I'd be getting a new car. I'm tired of the minivan."

"Its tradition."

Megan smiled.

Nicole rolled her eyes.

Nicole answered, "I wouldn't mind a different type of soccer mom car."

They laughed. They sat quietly for a bit just enjoying their meals.

Megan asked, "You like being a stay at home momma?"

Nicole was overjoyed to answer this question, "I enjoyed being a nurse and a physical therapist but I've loved being a full time momma. It's my favorite job. I'm sure when Ester is in high school I'll go back to work. With the investments and with our chunk of the pirate ship money we're doing fine."

Based upon Nicole's current tone Megan hoped her Brother would start selling more insurance.

Megan expressed, "I would like to be a momma but I'm not sure I'd be happy being a stay at home momma. I'm planning on working on my charter and leading a life outside of the home."

Her dimples flashed.

In a disappointed tone, "I ain't sure any guy would be interested in me."

"Y'all are a good gal. I'm sure there is a guy out their for you."

Nicole closely watched Megan's facial expressions and her body language.

Megan stated sadly, "Guys only think of me as a buddy. I ain't the marrying type of gal."

Nicole questioned if Megan was mentioning a guy to cover up the fact she was gay or if she really felt this way. The reason Nicole felt this was a cover was based upon true life coming out stories she read on the internet.

Megan flashed her big dimple smile, "I like being the cool auntie."

"Y'all are their favorite."

They smiled at one another as they ate their meal.

Nicole broke the silence by asking, "Ester wants to stay over night?"

Megan smiled, "She can this weekend."

"How about if I drop her off on Saturday?"

Megan wondered about Julie, but she understood Julie was now a teenager, "Make it after nine in the morning."

Becky came back to the table and set down their drinks.

While Megan drank her water, and Nicole finished the last of the salad, Nicole was trying to figure out a way to get Megan to talk about her sexual preferences. Before Nicole could ask a questions Megan made a comment.

"Daddy called while I was following Y'all here."

"Is he still checking up on his Daughter without saying he's checking up on her?"

Megan smiled her big dimple smile, "He sure does."

Then there was an awkward silence.

“Are Y’all doing okay?”

Megan's dimples flashed.

“I was doing okay until he started asking me all those odd questions.”

It was obvious Megan was upset by her Daddy's questions.

“First he was telling me how Barry sold the yacht.”

“The one you've been hoping to buy?”

Becky showed up, “Hi Y’all. Are you ladies done with your plates?”

“Megan answered, “Yes.”

Nicole answered, “I'd like to take this home.”

Becky stated, “I’ll bring Y’all a box.”

She grabbed Megan's empty plate and left the table.

Megan finished, “Yup.”

“I’m shocked he sold it.”

“Daddy was telling me Barry sold it to some rich guy.”

Her dimples flashed.

With frustration in her voice, “I was hearing the rich guy had some young gal with him.”

“I hadn't heard anything.”

“I'm sure Barry's selling to a drug dealer.”

“I've been hearing how he's struggling but I'm sure he wouldn't sell to dealers. If he was I'm sure Captain would have told Y’all.”

Megan said, “Here's the odd part. It's still docked. Barry is allowed to walk people through the yacht.”

Nicole made a face.

Megan with a tone stated, “I'm thinking Barry's been peeing down Daddy's leg.”

Nicole shook her head, “I ain't never heard of Barry lying before.” Before Megan could reply she decided to be positive, “I'm sure Y’all get another deal.”

In a disgusted and disappointed tone Megan answered, “It's just like” She paused, “I'm feeling like I've been chewed up and spit out.”

“With all the contacts Captain and your brothers have I’m sure Y’all will get a good deal on another yacht.”

This was when Megan leaned forward, “What was upsetting was he started asking me about Janet and Karen.”

“The new police officers?”

“Yes Ma'am.”

Megan used a confident gesture.

“Why was he asking you about them instead of Chief?”

“I'm feeling they were trying to find out if they were homosexual without asking them.”

Nicole could see how upset Megan was; but this was an excellent lead in. She was about to ask the perfect question when Megan started rambling.

“Why do people start assuming a woman is a lesbian if she's a police officer? Or a security guard?”

“What?”

Megan quickly answered, “People ain't gay because of the job they have or the interests

they have.”

“What do you feel makes a person gay?”

Megan was taken back by this question so she repeated herself, “It’s just wrong to assume a guy hairdresser is gay or to assume a woman athlete is. This sort of assuming is irritating.”

Nicole immediately expressed to Megan, “I strongly believe it’s wrong for us to purposefully hurt a gay person.”

“You don’t agree with it,” retorted Megan. “I’ve heard you complain about gay people.”

This comment cut to Nicole’s heart. She wanted Megan to be straight but she never wanted to hurt Megan. With these last few comments Nicole was leaning toward the possibility her Sister-in-law was a lesbian, but would hold off this assessment until she knew for sure.

Nicole stating from her heart, “I’m sorry if I said anything horrible. I shouldn’t be rude or offensive.”

Megan could see Nicole was speaking from the heart.

“You never did anything to me. It’s hurtful when people assume someone is a homosexual and isn’t. I know it hurts other gay people when they’re bullied. But if someone is being picked on for being gay when their not. Well. It’s hurtful too.”

This gave Nicole an opening.

“Do Y’all feel a gay person wants to be asked if they are gay? Or does a lesbian want to tell the family? Especially if she feels her family would reject her?”

Megan never thought of this before and contemplated an answer.

The silence was so loud it hurt Nicole’s ears.

“If I was a lesbian and I was feeling my family would reject me I’d want to wait to tell them. Or I might just bring a lover over and tell em’ this was my friend.”

Megan’s dimples flashed.

She blushed just because it was a sexual conversation.

Based upon Megan’s comment and reaction Nicole felt she found an answer to her dilemma. Nicole would take Sam’s advice and let Megan come out of the closet on her own; unless the men in the family would hurt her feelings. Nicole knew it would be difficult for many of the family members to accept she was gay. To keep the subject quiet until Megan was ready would be even more difficult; Nicole assumed the family would abide by her instruction.

In all the years Megan was questioning her sexuality she never once felt any of her family would reject her. She knew it would have been difficult on everybody, including herself, but never once did she feel her family would reject her. This was why Megan missed Nicole’s implication.

At this moment Becky walked up to the table, “Did you ladies want our dessert of the day? It’s a really good tasting apple pie?”

They both answered at the same time, “No thank-you.”

“I’ll have another ice tea.”

Megan requested politely, “I’ll take another water.”

Becky wanted to tell them about the two ladies who visited the restaurant. It was rumored they were working for the new company moving into town. She showed restraint because she could tell the two were talking serious.

Instead Becky said, “I’ll be here if Y’all need anything. Your drinks will be right up.”

Becky stepped away from the table.

Megan felt she knew why Nicole was asking such odd questions. The expression on Megan's face looked like she was about to be run over by a semi-truck.

Megan leaned forward and asked in a whisper, "Is Jeff or Julie gay?"

"Of course not!" Nicole answered in a panic. Nicole never considered her children could be gay. Nicole felt horrible. She was sure she looked and sounded like a monster. What made Nicole feel even worse was she just apologized for treating gay people horribly. With the thought planted, Nicole questioned herself; *If Jeff or Julie were struggling with homosexuality would they tell me?*

"I do apologize."

Megan trying to be reassuring said, "Believe me I'd understand."

Nicole being a southern lady calmly answered, "I don't believe they are. I was just asking because of the questions Captain was asking."

"Alright."

Megan observed Nicole's body language.

Nicole felt compelled to say, and hoped Megan would hear what she was saying, "I wouldn't want Jeff or Julie to be homosexual. If they were I'd hope they'd feel they could tell me. I wouldn't agree and I wouldn't like it, but I'd never reject them."

Megan answered from the heart, "Y'all are a good momma."

This blessed Nicole on many levels.

"Let me get to finishing what Captain did."

"Okay."

"Like I was saying earlier he was asking if Janet and Karen were lesbians." Megan rolled her eyes and her dimples flashed, "Like I'd automatically know."

"Maybe he thought they would've have said something to you."

Megan wondered why Nicole would assume this, but she ignored the comment, "He asked me if I was still his baby girl."

"What did Y'all say?"

"I told em' I was and when I told him I was looking for a guy like him he became is old self."

This confused and angered Nicole. It was one thing to be in the closet but it was another to bluntly lead one astray. She calmed herself by putting herself in Megan's shoes. The idea of being rejected was a powerful emotion. Nicole considered the possibility Megan was saying a certain type of guy, but really was meaning the type of gal she was looking for. Nicole questioned every conversations they ever had about men.

Nicole asked, "Are you looking for a long term relationship?"

"I'm not really looking for a guy right now."

Megan took a drink of her water.

Nicole was having difficulty reading Megan's body language. Nicole again questioned her decision. Nicole wanted to bluntly ask Megan if she was gay or straight, what stopped her was the idea Megan might be bisexual. This was a whole different set of concerns. Nicole ultimately was worried about Megan's feelings, and wanted to avoid jeopardizing their relationship.

"Captain would have liked your compliment."

Megan gave Nicole her full dimple smile and answered, "He did."

Megan's smile disappeared.

"I wasn't liking the questions he was asking. I ain't heading over to the police station to be their spy."

Nicole needed to focus and asked, "Who are Janet and Karen again?"

"They're the new female officers Chief hired. They'll mostly be on the beat unless there is a woman in the prisons overflow."

Nicole was honestly glad they were now talking about something else.

"I was hearing it'd be a large facility."

"It's mostly for our tourist season. I've been told they're hoping this overflow becomes a small permanent county jail. Chief wanted two women on the beat and to watch any female inmates."

"Jimmy told me they were planning on only holding men?"

"They decided with women arrests on the rise they needed at least a small wing."

"It's a shame."

Megan commented, "It's all the drugs these ladies are taking."

"I was seeing this when I was working as a nurse in the treatment center."

The two looked at one another and nodded sadly.

Becky brought the box and the slip, "I hope Y'all will have a good day."

Megan answered, "We will."

Becky being hopeful asked, "Are Y'all teaching volleyball this summer?"

As Megan and Becky talked volleyball Nicole put the rest of the salad into the Styrofoam container, she took out of her purse a sharpie and wrote on top, *Nicole*. She placed a good tip on the table.

Becky said to Megan, "I'll be look for Y'all at the Y."

Megan with her big dimple smile answered, "I'll enjoy coaching you this year."

The thought of Megan and Becky secretly being together crossed Nicole's mind. Nicole felt guilty for this thought. Especially since Becky was dating a local boy.

Becky reminded them, "Y'all need to pay at the register."

Nicole answered, "We ain't forgetting."

Becky gently took the tip and stated, "Thank-you Ma'am."

"I was a waitress here back in the day."

Nicole winked.

"Was it this hard back then?"

Nicole answered, "I'm sure it ain't any easier."

The ladies all smiled.

"Hope to see Y'all later."

Megan answered, "Bye Y'all."

Becky stepped over to another table and immediately told the four gentlemen at the table about the two northern women who ate at their restaurant.

Megan asked, "Ready?"

The two of them slipped out of the booth. Nicole grabbed the bill. Since Nicole invited Megan, Nicole would pay for the whole bill. If Megan would have invited Nicole, Megan would have paid for her portion of the bill. This was how it worked since Megan moved out on her own. This was one of the ways Nicole made sure Megan was eating properly. While standing in line, Nicole pulled out of her purse a credit card, and placed the pen into it's proper slot in

her purse.

Megan asked, "I'm assuming Y'all are helping me with my laundry?"

"Jimmy is knowing we were going to eating a late lunch and was willing to watch the kids."

"Is it nice having a spouse?"

"It's wonderful being with a person you love and you know they're loyal to you."

At this moment Nicole wanted Megan to end up with a good loyal woman. At the same time she would pray Megan would get healed. To Nicole this seemed a little contradictory; but this was what she felt.

Nicole: paid for the meal, Heather and the two ladies talked for a while, when the small talk was over Megan and Nicole left the restaurant, and they headed to their vehicles.

Due to their talk about homosexuality Megan decided to ask Nicole a very hypothetical question, "Lets say Julie was a lesbian and decided to bring a partner over how'd Y'all handle it?"

Nicole was unable to hold in her immediate look of distress.

Megan's dimples flashed.

Again Nicole felt guilty for her reaction. Nicole hoped this question meant Megan was in a monogamous relationship. Nicole would have wanted Megan in a monogamous relationship if Megan was straight.

"Well I think this would be difficult but..."

She paused and gave her answer a second thought.

Megan could feel how upset Nicole was.

Nicole calmed herself and decided this was of great importance, "We as a family should treat this partner with respect. I'm not sure everyone would like this person but I can say I'd be a lady and invite her to any holiday function. I'd treat her like a family member."

Megan knew if Nicole invited anyone to a family function this meant the person was accepted.

Megan answered, "That'd be nice."

Nicole felt conflicted in her heart but managed to say, "Lets start the laundry. I was feeling we should play some cards."

Megan stated with her big dimple smile, "Are you sure? I always win when we play Gin."

Nicole hoped if Megan had a partner, this partner would help her Sister-in-law be less competitive.

Megan asked, "What laundromat?"

"Y'all washing bed clothes?"

"Yup."

"The newer one has bigger machines and the air works better."

"I'll follow you."

Megan walked over to her pick-up-truck.

Nicole pulled out her keys and stepped inside of the minivan.

End of Part Three of Four

Thursday June 1st, Megan

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Ashleigh & Megan *Book I: Friendship*



Thursday, June
1st

Megan

Day 3 of Book I

*(1 month and 22 Days Since Bob Bought
Ashleigh a Jeep)*

Part Four of Four

Authored By:
R. P. Voght

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format. I have termed this as an "Story Cast" What the term "Story Cast" means; is this story is designed to be read in small to medium intervals. This particular story is broken up into "days." In this particular story these portions are broken up into part of a particular fictitious "day". Each day surrounds the characters lives, relationships, adventures, struggles, mishaps and triumphs. This story is very different from a Novel or conventional story in many ways. Again, THIS IS NOT A NOVEL AND IS NOT WRITTEN IN A CONVENTIONAL NOVEL FORMAT. Instead; as the reader you are following the characters thoughts and actions during the course of fictitious "day." This fiction story is set up like a TV series and or a third person journal. It always starts with one or more character getting up and ends with one or more characters going to bed; while during the day you experience the Characters actions, feelings, and their thoughts. On a large overview; there is a beginning, a middle, and an end to this "Story Cast."

*Authored and designed by
R. P. Voght*

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Thursday June 1st

(1 Month and 22 Days Since Bob bought Ashleigh a Jeep)

Megan was standing next to one of the four wheeled carts. She was about to pick up two baskets full of clothes.

She heard Frank ask her; "Y'all need some help?"

She left the basket on the cart and looked up.

Frank was one half of a couple Megan knew since she was a little girl. Frank and Florence lived in this marina for as long as Megan could remember. Megan was delighted when Mike allowed her to dock her houseboat next to this couple.

Megan was about to ask where Florence was but he spoke first.

He pushed up his dirty round glasses, "I ain't interrupting something? I was assuming you didn't have a charter today."

"People ain't interesting in a charter with it getting hot outside. This morning we cleaned her up and some maintenance. Next week Jake and I will tune her up."

Frank pushed up his glasses. His dirty glasses matched: his unbuttoned Hawaiian shirt, the wrinkled white t-shirt underneath the Hawaiian shirt, his plain blue shorts, brown slip on shoes, and his white socks that were pulled up to his knees. His gentle blue eyes could be seen behind his dirty glasses, his thin straight hair looked like a white bowl on his head, he had an attractive square face for someone seventy; what Megan liked about Franks appearance was his cute wily smile. She felt this smile fit his personality.

"Jake's a good guy. He's been helping your family for years."

"Yes he has," was Megan's reply. "He's been very good to me."

Frank asked, "I'm happy he's with Y'all while your out to sea."

Megan's dimples flashed, "I'm capable of taking care of myself."

“On the news they were talking about pirates.”

Megan stated with confidence, “Pirates would have a bad day if they tried boarding this here charter.”

“The coast guard just nabbed a boat filled with cocaine and heroin. Your Daddy was saying heroin was making it's way to the suburbs.”

Megan listened.

“People have been talking about something called meth?”

Megan shook her head and her dimples flashed.

“It's bad news. People go crazy on the stuff. They're telling me someone addicted to the stuff will loose their teeth. They start picking at their skin thinking there's bugs crawling on them.”

“Back in the day we thought grass was bad.”

“I'm glad I never started using drugs.”

Frank asked, “What's the world coming too?”

Megan being positive stated, “There's good people out there. We're friends right?”

“I've known you since you were knee high to a grass hopper.”

She smiled and was about to say something sentimental.

He asked, “Are you sure you ain't needing help?”

She believed if he picked up the basket of sheets his back would go out.

“I'm getting it just fine but I'm wishing there were more men willing to to help out without thinking I couldn't take care of myself.”

Megan observed Florence step out of her houseboat and stroll up to them.

“Many of my Yankee friends are heading back home.”

Megan's dimples flashed.

“What's happening with card night? I reckon' Y'all will miss Nelson.”

“We took one of them computer classes they've been offering at the senior center. We've decided to talk over the computer.”

Megan was impressed and said, “It's good to keep learning new things.”

“He'll be back in spring.” He winked, “I'm glad you stay all year.”

Megan rolled her eyes.

Florence made a face.

Megan acknowledged Florence, “Howdy.”

“Howdy,” Florence looked at Frank and asked, “Y'all are flirting?”

Megan smiled and winked at Florence, “He's being a gentleman and offering to take my laundry basket in.”

Florence became upset, “You ain't touching that basket! Your back will get twisted up like a snake. I ain't waiting on you hand and foot again.”

Megan read between the lines and smiled.

“Ma. I'm capable of understanding my limits.”

Florence gave him a look.

Florence turned her attention to Megan and asked, “Y'all coaching at the Y?”

Megan suspected she was only a couple years older than Frank, but Florence would never confess her age. Florence: had a round face, she wore round glasses when she read, her gray hair was always in a pony tail, she was wearing a flowered dress, and Megan thought it was to tight for Florence's round body and thick legs. Florence was the self elected momma of

the marina. Megan appreciated every meal Florence brought over after “misjudging” the quantity of food she needed to prepare for the two of them.

“With school ending today I’ll start coaching next week.

Frank winked, “You could coach me.”

Florence gently hit his shoulder.

Megan knew for a fact Frank loved Florence. The only time Frank joked this way was when Florence was around. Right or wrong, Megan knew this was some personal game they teased one another with.

Frank in a flirty way told Florence, “Y’all are my one and only.”

Florence placed her hands on her hips, “Too late.

Frank winked at Megan.

Megan flashed her dimples.

Florence turned her attention to Megan and asked, “Honey, I was thinking. Sometime this week Y’all should come over for some catfish.”

Florence again put her pointing hand against her hip.

“Did you catch em’ yourself?”

“At the grocery store.”

Megan kept herself from laughing.

“If someone wouldn’t be talking the whole time we’d catch something.”

Frank made a face and nodded his head toward Florence.

Florence interrupted, “It’s because of your big mouth we’re always sitting in the boat not catching anything.”

“I’m as quiet as a mouse.”

Florence protested, “It ain’t how Y’all are talking it’s your snoring.”

Megan loved talking to these two.

Frank stated, “It was just an unlucky day.”

“We’re always having bad days when there’s a saw cutting timber in our boat. It seems to happen every time we’re trying to fish.”

Frank made a face.

Florence became serious, “You should relax a little and go fishing with us. While you’re at it bring a nice guy along.”

Frank said with a chuckle, and winked at Megan. “I’d be your date.”

Florence hit him again.

“I’m sorry to tell Y’all but I ain’t into old guys.”

Florence agreed full heartily with Megan’s assessment, “He’s an old guy.”

Frank gave his wife a face.

Florence winked at him.

They smiled at one another.

Florence looked up at Megan and asked, “Why haven’t you brought a guy around?”

“I ain’t dating now.”

The disappointment in her voice was obvious.

Florence put her plan in place, “It’s a shame a nice healthy gal like yourself is single. I have a cousin who’s son is looking for a nice gal like yourself.”

Megan tried to hide her disappointment.

“Kyle?”

Frank's face contorted with a look of disbelief.

"Whats wrong with Kyle?" Florence asked with an angry tone, she continued, "He's making a good living by being a lawyer."

Frank clarified, "He's a clerical lawyer for an insurance company. He's never even stepped inside of a courtroom. Plus he's still living with his momma."

This last statement was disappointing.

"He's been taking' care of his Momma. Whats wrong with being dedicated to family? Megan is a gal who'd want a guy who treats his momma right."

"He's thirty nine." Frank added, "She's making his lunch."

"Frank is over blowing things," Florence made a face, "He's a nice guy."

The kiss of death.

Megan answered, "I'm not really looking. But I'm grateful Y'all are thinking about me."

"It's a shame you ain't with somebody. I'll give my cousin a call."

Frank's eyes rolled, "You knows this ain't going to work."

"What ain't working?"

"You playing match maker."

Megan flashed her big dimple smile.

"Y'all be quiet."

Frank shook his head.

Megan again rolled her eyes.

Florence looked at Megan and promised, "I'll give my cousin a call."

"Thank-you."

Megan hoped Florence would forget to call.

"I'm sure if I talk to him and tell him what a nice gal Y'all are he'll want to talk with Y'all."

Behind Florence; Frank shook his head and made a face.

Megan hated blind dates. They were so terrible Megan convinced herself they were meetings.

Frank rescued Megan by stating, "I'm hungry?"

"Do you have a hollow leg?"

He winked and gave a smile, "Maybe I'm hungry for my sweetie."

Megan found this very cheesy. What fascinated Megan was how statements like this worked. To be married for fifty years and still have sparks was an inspiration to Megan.

Florence looked over at Megan, "We're headed back to our place."

"Bye Megan."

It was obvious he was eager to get home.

"I'll make sure I call my cousin."

"Okay."

Megan still hoped she would forget.

Florence said, "Bye Y'all."

"See you later alligator."

Frank responded, "After while Crocodile."

Megan watched in envy as Frank and Florence reached out to one another and held hands. Megan wondered what it would be like to feel a guys arms around her, or for a guy to hold her hand, and to have a guy brave enough to gently kiss her in a public place. She deeply

desired a love interest to acknowledge her by reaching out and holding her hand; a delightful bonus would be a guy who would willingly cuddle with her. She hoped with all her heart when she held onto a guys hand he would understand this was her way of showing how much she loved him; without believing it was a sign she wanted to have sex. She assumed this was wishful thinking.

Megan observed: Frank open the door for Florence, he very playfully tapped her rear end, Florence responded with a wink, she ran into the houseboat, and Frank rushed in. The door slammed shut.

At this moment Megan felt very lonely.

She focused on the laundry baskets. Most were for the charter. She: lifted up two baskets of clothes, stepped onto the stern of her houseboat, set the baskets on the bench, unhooked her keys, tried the door a few times, found the correct key, and then brought her clothes in.

She again felt she should change her key system.

Nicole was sitting in her minivan at her favorite overlook. Gazing at the ocean helped her to think. She observed a group of bikers move quickly passed her on the bike path in front of the overlook. She felt guilty for wondering if any of the women in this group were lesbians.

She believed Megan was a lesbian. Nicole decided Sam's approach was the best way to handle Megan's sexuality. Nicole's plan was to encourage Megan to feel comfortable enough to come out of the closet before someone asked her at an inappropriate time. Nicole was unclear on how she would accomplish her plan but she would give it an honest and loving try.

While sitting there she pulled out her flip phone and made three phone calls. The first one was to her Sister-in-law Diana. She described every detail she felt Diana needed to consider. Diana agreed with Nicole's plan. After this call Nicole called her Sister-in-law Sam. Sam was pleased with Nicole's decision and felt Megan would eventually tell them. The hardest call was to Ma. This was a very long and difficult conversation.

After making these calls Nicole prayed silently as she looked over the immense ocean. Once she was done praying she: drove back home, parked the minivan into the garage, hit the button to the garage door opener, the overhead door started to close, she opened the drivers side door, she collected all her things from the minivan, she shut the drivers side door, she opened the door inside of the garage, stepped into her kitchen, and was happy to be home.

Nicole: set her purse on the kitchen table, hung her jean jacket over one of the chairs, went to check the garbage; she was disappointed seeing fast food bags in the garage. What she wanted was for Jimmy to cook a meal.

Nicole was certain Julie picked out the restaurant.

She heard Ester run into the kitchen and declare, "Momma we went out for tacos. And."

Ester stopped knowing they were in trouble.

Nicole politely yelled, "Jimmy!"

Megan was grateful all her work was done and her charter was locked.

Megan: stepped onto the bow of her houseboat, she shut the door to the living quarters,

walked up to the black outdoor glass table, she set her journal onto the table, she pulled out a chair with red and white striped cushions, sat down, pulled herself next to the table, enjoyed the slight breeze and the smell of the ocean. She felt tiny compared to the vast ocean before her. Reading the sky she decided she would watch the sunset; most important she was in one of her favorite spots to write.

This bow was longer than most. This was offset by the long window of Megan's cabin and the wheel on the top deck.

Looking at the ocean she recalled what she was about to write before Gina came over.

She opened her journal and began to write.

The scariest moment of my life was when my best friend Michelle asked me to slow dance with her. After making me a candlelight dinner she told me she loved me. I so wanted to be loved by someone other than my family I was ready to accept the idea I was a lesbian. Since I was ten people kept asking me if I was a lesbian. High school was the worst. If everyone believed I was a lesbian I must be one. Michelle reached out her hand and I eagerly took it. What surprised me was how uncomfortable I felt. I was hoping I was a lesbian but as I danced with Michelle the more awkward I felt. The honest truth was I wanted to be a lesbian so my struggles would end. I kept wishing Michelle was a guy. Guys never want to have a relationship with me. They must feel I'm ugly. I wish I looked more appealing. Maybe if I was more feminine they would like me. They obviously have very little interest in marrying me.

I will never forget when she asked me..

The doorbell of her houseboat rang.

She: quickly closed her journal, she clipped the pen on the cover, she pulled the chair out of from underneath the table, she slipped the journal under the cushion, and pushed the chair under the table.

The doorbell rang again.

She stepped over to the starboard side just past the large palm tree and shouted, "Who's there?"

"It's Mike."

The owner of the marina stepped in front of the pathway in between the metal railing and the walls of the living quarters. They were gazing at one another.

She yelled, "Y'all all right?"

"I just need to tell Y'all something."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"Okay."

She felt something was wrong.

When he reached her: they shook hands, Megan led him to the round table, Megan was thankful Mike was unable to see her journal, Mike pulled out the chair to Megan's right, sat down, and pulled the chair close to the table.

"This is a nice table set. Did you get it at one of them yard sales?"

She was suspicious, "Y'all should go to yard sales when all the Yankees return or when they're leaving. They change their furniture like they change their clothes."

Mike was different from the person she knew as a child: he was balding, tan, put on more weight, he was a grandfather, and it was obvious he aged.

Mike put his arms on the glass table.

She scowled.

Her dimples flashed.

"Whats the matter?"

"I wanted to tell ya'. Someone has rented the spot next to yours."

"It's a rich Yankee ain't it?"

He hoped for a different response but expected the one he was currently receiving.

"Don't you start giving me a hard time," he commented, "Don't start jumping to conclusions without knowing the facts. "

Her dimples flashed.

"It's always causing me problems when you rent to one of them Yankees. Why not rent to someone local. Or a friend of someone who lives here."

"We have many Yankees who are docked here and Y'all are friends with them."

"They ain't owning big yachts and throwing huge parties," she examined his every move and added, "With a landlord who's normally a great guy until he's unwilling to stop a billionaire throwing the party. Ain't this correct?"

Her stare could have killed him.

"I'll admit I stepped in a gopher hole with the last Yankee. This time it'll be different."

"Can I have it in writing?"

"Why ain't we getting along?"

"I've heard this song and dance before."

"I'm trying to tell Y'all the situation is different this time."

"How?"

He made a face and looked down at the glass table top.

Megan pleaded, "What are Y'all doing to me?"

"I'm believing everything should be okay." Mike said trying to be reassuring. "The Guy who's renting the spot doesn't want anyone noticing him."

With a glaring look she asked, "Why?"

She despised the silence and asked, "Are you renting to someone who's running drugs?"

"I'm running a legit business here. I ain't ever. On purpose. Renting to drug runners. I'm a stand up guy."

Megan gave him a look. In the silence both recalled a couple instances when either the Coast Guard, DEA, FBI, or the Eastbank Police Department; raided vessels of different sizes.

She repeated herself, "You should rent to locals."

"You keep this quiet now but they paid in cash. Cash. Three years of rent up front. With the size of the yacht they've paid a great deal of money."

She was shocked by this information.

Mike again tried to be encouraging, "They're good folks. I ain't lying to Y'all. They're Yankees but they're down to earth people. The short gal is hard to understand she always talking way to fast."

Megan's look made him stop.

He broke the silence, by repeating himself, "I'm trying to tell Y'all the guy wants to keep it low. He's trying to stay hidden' like a rattlesnake under a wood pile."

Megan made the connection between what Mike was telling her and what her Daddy told her earlier in the day.

"Is this the Yacht from Barry's?"

His look told her yes.

Her dark blue eyes looked plum as they pierced his soul.

"Let me get what Y'all are saying?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Her dimples flashed.

"I'm having a rich recluse moving next door."

"He ain't exactly a recluse."

"Living with a recluse is a young gal who's getting' all her bills paid?"

"It ain't like Y'all are thinking."

"What is it?"

Megan was angry at the prospect of another sugar daddy situation. What compounded this frustration was the yacht she wanted to purchase would be docked next door to her charter.

He tried, "She's a really nice gal."

What Megan pictured in her mind was: a whinny, complaining, rich snob, who would spread rumors, and look down upon her. She would never forget the woman who was married to the nice older gentleman from Connecticut, he was great, but he was married to a real nightmare. She: was tall, had fake breasts, and she hit on just about every guy in the marina. The women associated with the marina hated her while the men were fascinated with her. Megan hoped she was wrong about this girl but she was certain her assessment was correct.

Mike was in a tough spot: Megan's parents were dear friends of his, her parents did a lot to get him going, his wife and Mary worked at the pantry together, they went to church together, and both were passionate about woman's prison ministry.

Mike felt this short Yankee could get along with anybody.

"Megan," speaking with his hands, "I'm knowing they're rich but they're down to earth folks."

"How did HE get his money?"

"Y'all are a great gal. Everyone loves you around here. Promise me you'll try getting along with the two of them?"

"If you tell me how he's made his money."

Ashleigh made him sign an agreement of disclosure. The penalty was very severe if he or anyone from his staff starting telling anyone Bob Waller was living in the marina. What scared Mike was the famous Florida lawyer who drew up the document.

"I'll get in lots of trouble if I tell ya'."

For the first time in the whole conversation she felt he was being completely honest with her.

"If they tell me or I find out?"

"I ain't in trouble."

Being completely sincere Mike addressed the situation, "What they're paying me will help me improve the marina."

Megan fathomed these people were celebrities or he was hiding a mistress; both of these situations were historically common around Eastbank.

Very reluctantly she promised, "I promise to get along. I ain't happy living next door to another rich Yankee. With Y'all being a friend of the family and with me being a Christian. I'll try my best to get along with em'."

He smiled. "I promise they're good folks."

Her dimples flashed.

She asked sincerely, "Why all the secrets?"

"They've got their reasons." He repeated himself, "They've got good reasons. He's trying to live a quiet life doing what he wants. I'm telling Y'all the gal is very sweet. I think Y'all will like her."

He hoped they would like one another.

Megan felt he was being honest but she disliked his pleading; Megan being a smart women suspected there was a whopper of a story behind all of this.

Megan wanting to get a feel of this woman, "Is she a complainer?"

"No. I ain't every heard her complain once. Even when she was looking tired."

Megan snipped back, "Being a man. When they're cute or gorgeous they're always nice. After a few weeks they start becoming characters. These type of gals are always belittling me. Why should I believe Y'all? I'll do what I promised but I ain't happy Y'all are trying this again. Tell me when this worked out."

She studied his body language.

Very calmly he repeated, "She's not your typical spoiled northern gal. She's very bubbly and friendly."

She imagined what bubbly and friendly meant.

"I promise I'll try getting along with them. I ain't saying I'll be their friends but I ain't going out of my to mess with them."

"Good," and before she would change her mind he stood up, "Thank-you. You'll see it'll work out."

Before she could respond he headed off her houseboat.

Megan felt this was a life changing event; she was unsure if it would be a positive or negative. She would pray about this later. She stood up and watched him walk off her houseboat. As he stepped onto the first pier, Megan imagined what her new neighbors would be like. She always struggled with rich spoiled women.

At this moment she felt what she called a check in her spirit. She felt like a hypocrite. She recognized she was jumping to conclusions before she even met this gal. Megan hoped at

the very least she was nice like Mike said; but she was suspicious of what Mike's version of friendly was.

She: stepped to the edge of her boat, she looked over the three piers of the marina, and sighed.

She: stepped back to her outdoor table, opened her journal, and for the first time in her life wrote about something sexual.

There was now a crack in her Pandora's box.

Ashleigh's stepped underneath the cold shower: her body tensed up, she let out a small scream, she stood there with the ice cold water spraying all over her body; she hoped the cold water would help suppress her sexual desires. She was feeling the sexual impulse to pick up the hot cowboy she witnessed sitting at a lounge table. She wanted to fulfill her long time fantasy of having a one night stand.

She again reminded herself the fantasy and the reality were most likely different. The first time with Neil was better than the other two guys she was with, but it took the third time to be earth shattering. As she thought about this sexual learning curve; she wished movies would show what the first time was really like. She had a list: the guy ejaculates too fast, it's uncomfortable, worrisome, he's expecting the woman to do something she will not do, or he refuses to do something she likes, sex hurts, the sex might be cumbersome, and most likely she would never have an orgasm. She wanted a movie where the girl has sex because the guy threatens to leave her. She wanted a movie to show how horrible a woman felt when after she gives in he leaves. She felt the pain of this experience when her first love Clyde just got up and left and refused to answer her calls for three days. These thoughts helped curb her sexual impulses.

She heard the suit's telephone ringing.

She: stepped out of the shower, grabbed a towel, loosely wrapped it around herself, the long shower towel looked like a dress, she kept the towel up with one hand, stepped out of the bathroom, stepped into the bedroom, walked over to the phone, tightened the towel around herself, sat down on her bed, and put the phone to her ear.

"Hi."

Haley asked, "Are you ready to go outside and get something to eat? After we'll watch the movie, *50 First Dates*?"

"Sure."

She felt being with Haley was a good idea.

"Give me a few minutes okay?"

Haley agreed, "I'll meet you in the dinning area next to the pool? I'm assuming you want to eat outside?"

She hoped with it being dusk it would feel cooler outside, "Sounds good."

"I'll meet you down there."

Haley hung up the phone.

Ashleigh turned and looked at the selection of clothes laying on the bed. She made a face and considered the new clothes she purchased. With Haley waiting for her she decided to go with what she picked out earlier. She: quickly dried herself, she set the towel onto a chair, she put on her undergarments, she slipped on a pair of pink chino shorts with a five inch

inseam, she added a brand new thin belt, she slipped on a darker pink pique polo, she applied a light amount of makeup, put in a pair of simple earrings, and slipped on a few simple white bracelets. She matched this outfit with canvas pink and white ribbon shoes with rubber soles. She grabbed her small purse and swung it on her shoulder. She grabbed a frayed, chino, crusher hat. The hat was all white with: green, light blue, black, and green stripes around the brim. She set the hat and after checking her purse put on a pair of new sunglasses.

She left the suite and went downstairs to enjoy the time with Haley.

She: talked to an Ohio couple while riding the elevator, waved at the doormen and the bellman, they eagerly waved back, briefly talked to the woman behind the front desk, when she reached the pool she checked on the bar tender, Haley stood up, she waved, whistled, Ashleigh noticed Haley, Ashleigh politely excused herself, and went over to where Haley was sitting.

The sun was just starting to set, the outside lights turned on; Ashleigh especially liked the lights around the pool.

Ashleigh: sat down, immediately set her sunglasses on the glass table, moved the chair in, and said, "Hi."

In a tone of a caring friend Haley asked, "How are you holding up?"

"I'm..."

Interrupting, "I don't want to hear any shit about you quitting."

"I'm terrible at this."

Being honest Haley answered, "Your excellent at this."

The waiter set the appetizer platter on the table.

He made sure to greet Ashleigh, "Hello Ms. Waller. I hope Y'all are enjoying your stay. May I start you off with something to drink."

"I'll take a Sprite."

Ashleigh found this Latino waiter awful attractive. She loved: his long gorgeous face, the muscles underneath his waiter uniform, his dark hair, his dark eyes, his rear end, and took note of his legs; she believed the white shorts he was forced to wear were divine.

"Yes Ma'am."

He answered with a wink.

He turned to Haley, "Ma'am are you needing a refreshment?"

"I'm fine."

"I'll be right back with your Sprite Ms. Waller."

The waiter turned and headed toward the bar underneath the canopy.

Based upon the suite she was staying in; the staff assumed she was a wealthy woman. What they appreciated was: Ashleigh never complained, they loved how friendly she was, the male staff loved how flirtatious she was, but most of all they were impressed with how down to earth she was.

Ashleigh: grabbed a plate already on the table, placed a couple mozzarella sticks, jalapeno poppers onto her plate, looked over at Haley, and wished she could wear the clothes Haley was wearing.

Haley was wearing: a multi colored, viz-zag patterned, faux crop wrap, and nice looking white foldover cargo pants. Ashleigh was trying desperately to find a pair of cargo pants that looked good on her; the pockets always looked huge on her.

Haley placed on her plate: mozzarella sticks and breaded mushrooms.

Ashleigh asked, "Why would you feel I'm good at this?"

Haley made a face, "If you'd trust yourself you'd see you're doing well."

"Didn't you hear what I told the mayor of Eastbank?"

"Yes," Haley answered, "We all have those moments. What's important is you rebounded."

The waiter came by with the Sprite, "Did you ladies need anything else?"

"No. We're doing okay."

Ashleigh was very polite.

"Yes Ma'am," he answered, "I'll be back in a minute to check on how Y'all are getting along."

"Okay."

Haley watched closely.

Ashleigh was trying everything possible to avoid staring at the waiter's body.

When he stepped away from the table Ashleigh leaned forward and asked, "Why do they keep calling me Ma'am?"

"It's the culture. They feel you are in authority."

"I'm not any older than they are."

"This is part of the reason others are giving you such a hard time."

Ashleigh leaned back in the chair and said, "I know."

After finishing a mozzarella stick, Haley felt the need to reassure her friend, "I feel you've picked a perfect place for the company. The marina you picked is great. I feel Bob will like it."

Ashleigh crinkled her forehead and answered, "I don't know."

"What's there not to know?"

"What happens if Bob hates everything. Huh? He'll blame me for everything. We'll get started..."

Interrupting, "Bob doesn't do anything he doesn't want."

Ashleigh crunched her face and pondered this concept.

The: sun was setting, they heard the sound of the ocean, chirping birds, the sound of people talking, heard someone dive into the pool, and they were grateful the lights of the resort were on.

Ashleigh turning to her left mentioned, "I do love the ocean."

"It's certainly larger than Lake Michigan. One of the reasons your brother had you pick the spots is because he values your in site. He wouldn't trust anyone else with these things. This is rare with your brother."

"He doesn't listen to anybody."

"He just pretends not too," Haley smiled, "What does he say?"

Ashleigh knew the saying Haley was referencing, her brother said it a thousand times; "Just because I didn't do what you said doesn't mean I didn't listen."

"Exactly."

Ashleigh rolled her eyes and sighed.

Ashleigh asked, "Did you trust the landlord at the marina?"

"Pretty much. Why?"

"He seemed to be trying to hard to sell me the one spot. He was carefree to tell us about everybody around the spot except the person who owned the boat with the dolphin painted on

it.”

“The one that read *Dolphin Tours*?”

“Yeah.”

“I was talking to a couple of the people who live there.”

“Which ones?”

“The New Jersey couple?”

Ashleigh smiled, “I liked them.”

Haley being serious, “I think he liked you but I'm not sure Barbara liked you.”

“Why?”

“Just watch it around couples.”

“Watch what?”

Haley rolled her eyes.

“Never mind.”

Ashleigh let this go and bit into another jalapeno popper.

“These are good.”

“I don't know how you can eat all that spicy food?”

“I've always liked spicy food.”

“I'd get heartburn.”

Ashleigh shrugged, “I've always been like that.”

The waiter came back and put down another Sprite for Ashleigh and asked Haley, “You want another drink?”

“No thank-you.”

“Ladies Y'all want to order a main dish this evening'?”

Ashleigh shook her head, “No. But could you send an order of these jalapeno poppers up to Mr. Waller? He's in the penthouse suite.”

“Yes Ma'am.”

“Put this meal, my brothers poppers, and any drinks of my associate on my tab. I want the receipt.”

In a serious tone he answered, “Yes Ms. Waller.”

He quickly stepped away from the table. He wanted to make sure he received the tip before his shift was over.

Ashleigh was feeling uncomfortable in the way everyone was treating her.

“I'm just not sure about Mike.”

Haley smiled and asked, “I liked eating at Lucy's.”

“Bob liked it.”

“Did you like it?”

“Of course,” was Ashleigh's answer.

Haley observed her friend and fellow work companion contemplating something.

The waiter brought back the slip, she commanded, “Just hold it.”

Politely he answered, “Yes Ma'am.”

Ashleigh scrutinized the bill and noticed the poppers were being delivered to her brother, she reached into her purse, took money from her woman's wallet, and tipped the waiter.

He smiled but remained professional, “Thank-You Ma'am. It's much appreciated.”

“Your welcome.”

Haley smiled, "Thank-you."

Ashleigh said as soon as the waiter left, "I feel drawn to everything?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm feeling like." Ashleigh made a face, "It's almost like everything is picking me. You know what I mean?"

Haley answered honestly, "No."

"It's like the yacht. I never felt so sure about anything. It felt like it was made for us."

"Then why are you so worried about everything?"

Ashleigh: became quiet, she loved the stars in the sky, she noticed a yacht larger than her brothers float by; even now she felt drawn to the yacht her brother purchased.

"Look," Haley began with a stern tone, "You told him Eastbank was the best place to put the factory and he agreed with your assessment of the yacht."

"What happens if I'm wrong and I ruin everything? What will happen to all the families who move down here."

"They'll be fine."

"Why would you say that?"

"Because Bob has someone who cares about his employees as much as he does."

Ashleigh answered, "There my brothers employees."

"Exactly," was Haley's reply. "Lets watch the movie. I've been wanting to see this since it came out on DVD a couple weeks ago."

Ashleigh knew this meant Haley was sick of talking work, Ashleigh replied, "I've been wanting to see it myself."

"Well lets get going."

"I'll follow you."

Ashleigh: stood up, set her sunglasses into her purse, swung her purse over her shoulder, adjusted her clothing, and pushed in her chair.

Ashleigh asked, "Do I look alright?"

"You look nice."

"Thank-you."

Ashleigh again adjusted her clothing.

Haley shook her head and pushed in her chair.

As soon as Ashleigh was done they headed up to Haley's suite.

Nicole walked up the stairs to talk to Julie about the strong possibility Megan was a lesbian.

Nicole decided she would discuss Megan's sexuality with Ester when: Megan officially came out of the closet, Megan brought a friend over, or if Ester asked. Nicole stepped onto the second floor. To her right Julie's bedroom door was shut; light was coming from underneath the door. To Nicole's left Esters bedroom door was wide open.

Nicole quietly stepped into the bedroom and walked up to Ester. Nicole assumed by how still Ester was and by her light breathing she was asleep. Nicole moved the sheet up to Esters shoulder and leaned down and kissed her. Nicole tiptoed out of the room.

Nicole heard, "Momma."

Nicole turned around and stated softly, "I thought Y'all were sleeping."

Ester lied, "I was pretending."

"You should go back to sleep. With Danielle coming over you'll have a busy day."

"Momma can I ask Y'all something?"

Based upon Esters tone Nicole sat down on the edge of Ester's bed, "Yes."

"Is Megan marrying a girl?"

Nicole was shocked.

Ester sat up and waited for an answer.

"Did someone tell you she'd marry a girl?"

"No," was Esters honest answer. "I was just wondering."

Nicole asked, "Did Julie and Daddy talk about Megan marrying a girl?"

Nicole learned to be patient with Ester. Ester was forever seeking information and expected a reply, but in reverse, she could be a trapped door and not give anyone else the information they wanted. Nicole felt Ester would grow up to be a reporter or a detective.

Ester gave Nicole her crinkled face and asked again, "Is Megan marrying a girl?"

Nicole who always was honest with her daughters said, "I don't know."

Ester made a face of concentration, "Is she a lezz-a..."

"You mean a lesbian?"

Ester answered, "Yup."

"Where did you hear this word?"

Ester liked the fact she was being talked to and answered freely, "One of my friends at school has two mommies. She was saying when two mommies get married there called a lezz-a-bin."

"You mean lesbian."

"That's what I said."

Nicole put one arm over Esters leg and asked, "Why would you think Megan's a lesbian?"

"I don't know."

Nicole lifted up her arm and sat more squarely on her bed, "Did Daddy or anyone in the family say something?"

Ester made a face and answered honestly, "No."

Nicole yelled, "Julie!"

"Yes Ma'am."

Nicole shouted back, "I want Y'all out here."

Julie answered by opening her bedroom door and yelling, "Why?"

Nicole in a tone, "We're talking like ladies and I'd like Y'all to step over here."

Julie stepped out of her room, she shut the door behind her, and while stepping into Esters bedroom turned on the light.

"Ooooh."

Ester covered her eyes and rubbed them until they adjusted to the light.

Julie replied, "Honey, I'm sorry."

"Don't you ever wear those downstairs? Why on earth would you were those clothes?"

Julie answered, "Y'all gave me permission to buy the outfit."

Nicole answered honestly, "I did?"

Julie wondered what the big deal was.

Julie was wearing a black tank with spaghetti straps and matching boyshort bottoms.

What bothered Nicole was the fact her daughters breasts could flop out in any second

and Nicole felt the boyshorts were painted on. Plus on the left side of the boyshorts written in pink was the name of the retailer and right above on the tank was a pink heart.

“Promise me you'll hide the outfit in a drawer and take it out on your wedding night.”

Julie gave her momma an odd look.

Ester's eyes were finally adjusted and looked over at Julie. This was the first time Ester recognized her Big Sister looked like a woman. This made Ester feel uncomfortable.

Nicole interrupted, “Please. Never wear that outfit outside of your room.”

“Why?”

“There are men in this house.”

“They never come up here.”

“They stay downstairs out of respect for both of you,” Nicole answered, “They do this because they're men of integrity. Lets help them by wearing appropriate clothes. We don't want to show our bodies to them.”

Ester asked honestly, “You show daddy?”

Julie liked the question from Ester. Julie also liked what her Momma said. Julie met creepy brothers and Dads; Julie was grateful she never felt her Brother or Daddy were creepy.

“A wife is allowed to show a Daddy. I show Daddy because I love him.”

Nicole was honest.

“Promise me you'll never wear it downstairs.”

“I promise.”

Nicole knew Julie took promises seriously. She would go to great lengths to fulfill any promise she made, even if keeping the promise was worse than letting the promise go. Any time Julie broke a promise she was riddled with guilt. This guilt was the reason Nicole very rarely made Julie promise anything. When Julie made a promise, Nicole felt Julie would have trouble fulfilling, Nicole would give Julie a way out of the promise.

Nicole took Julie's promise as is, “Okay.”

“Why am I sitting here?”

Julie asked as an annoyed teenager.

Ester answered, “Megan is a lezzza-bin.”

Julie asked with excitement, “You mean a lesbian?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Did she tell you?”

Julie found this fascinating.

Nicole answered, “No.”

“Momma told me she was.”

“But I thought...”

Nicole took control. “We need to discuss this like ladies.”

Julie made a face.

This caused Ester to giggle.

Julie purposely made another face.

Ester giggled again.

“That's enough.”

Silence temporarily filled the room.

Nicole stated firmly, “This is something we should discuss as ladies.”

“Yes Ma'am.”

“What about you?”

Julie made a face, “Sure.”

Julie caught her Momma's glare.

“Did you talk about this today?”

Julie answered, “No.”

Nicole could see this was an honest answer.

Nicole being proper, “To answer your question. Auntie Megan didn't tell me she was a lesbian. But I believe she is.”

Her daughters had a list of questions but knew their Momma had the floor.

“As ladies. And as Auntie Megan's family we'll continue to love her and treat her like we always have. We ain't teasing her. We ain't about to ask her if she's a lesbian because there's a chance she's straight.” Looking directly at Ester, “This means she likes men and not women. If she's straight or gay and if we say something this will hurt her feelings.”

Julie asked with concern, “Are we still allowed to hang out with her?”

This questioned concerned Ester, “I wanted to stay over night?”

“Yes. She's your Auntie. I'm sure she wouldn't do anything inappropriate with Y'all.”

Ester gave her momma an odd look.

Julie answered the look, “With Auntie being a lesbian people would feel she'd want to start giving you bad touches.”

This upset Ester a great deal, “Auntie Megan wouldn't.”

Nicole in a comforting voice, “No matter if your Auntie is straight or gay I don't believe she'd ever touch Y'all wrongly. Like always. If a male or female touched Y'all wrongly you tell me. No matter what the person tells Y'all.”

Both at the same time said confidently, “Yes Ma'am.”

This was comforting to Nicole.

Julie asked, “What happens if she moves in with a gal? Or has a girlfriend?”

Nicole was prepared for this answer, “Just as if she was living with a husband I'd want to meet her partner. I'd need to trust the partner. Male or female. If I don't trust the partner we'd think of some other way for you to see your Auntie. This goes for a gal or a guy.”

Ester looked at Julie, Julie nodded her head.

Nicole was used to Ester seeking confirmation from her sister.

Julie asked, “Do you feel she's born this way? Will Megan go to hell?”

Ester was upset and answered, “I don't want Auntie Megan going to hell.”

“Lets answer one at a time.”

The two sisters waited for their momma.

Nicole took a deep breath and answered the way she felt, “I believe if Megan is saved she won't go to hell.”

Ester was about to ask a question.

“Let me finish,” Nicole said holding up a finger. “I believe practicing homosexuality is a sin and just like any other sin it has consequences. I ain't sure if a person is born this way or not. What I believe is Jesus can heal a person of their homosexuality.”

Julie asked sincerely, “What happens if they don't want to be healed?”

“I don't know?”

Ester asked with concern, “Would Megan go to hell?”

Nicole answered her with an analogy, she was unsure if it was a good one or not, but

this was what she felt; "If someone has cancer and they die do they go to hell?"

Julie answered, "No."

"If a person is saved I don't believe they'd go to hell. This is why we shouldn't be telling others they're going or not going to hell. Only God and the person knows for certain if they're saved. Even after we're saved we all sin. Homosexuality can't be any different than any other sin. Sex has consequences. This is one I believe has many consequences just as if you'd start sleeping around or having sex before your married."

Julie wanted to ask a more detailed question but Ester was there. Julie was aware of what her sister knew of sex, this knowledge was at a completely different level. Nicole always tried to give Julie and Ester honest and accurate information.

Ester asked confused, "I thought only a momma and a daddy can have sex?"

"I believe this is how it should work," Nicole smiled, "I promise when Y'all are older I'll explain it more detail."

Ester's face showed her disappointment.

"What's important. Is we'll always love your Auntie and we'll never purposefully do or say something to hurt her feelings. I can't stop others from saying things but we ain't." Nicole added with a strong tone, "We're not. You understand me?"

"Why?"

Julie pointed out, "We're always talking about everything? Auntie can handle it."

Nicole gave her a look, but answered the question, "If she's straight and we start asking her it'll hurt Auntie's feelings. We don't want to hurt her feelings?"

Ester quickly replied, "no."

"If she tells us then it's okay for you to ask her questions."

"Okay."

Ester yawned and was looking very tired.

Nicole said, "I love you."

"I love you too."

Nicole hugged Ester and whispered, "When you're around Megan don't ask her questions about being a lesbian."

Falling asleep, "Okay."

Nicole hoped Ester would have some self restraint.

Julie left the room and waited in the hallway.

Nicole tucked Ester in, she turned off the light, and was about to shut the door but heard, "Don't shut it."

"I'll leave it slightly open."

Nicole stopped short of shutting the door.

"Okay," was Ester's answer.

Nicole heard Ester yawn.

Julie's arms were crossed and it was obvious she was impatient.

When Nicole stepped into the hallway Julie was about to speak. Nicole put a finger over her mouth and pointed to Julie's bedroom. Julie surmised if she protested stepping into her room this would cause her Momma to have suspicion; suspicion was the least thing Julie wanted her momma to have.

Julie opened the door and let Nicole in first, Julie closed the door behind her, making sure the door shut quietly.

They walked over to Julie's queen sized bed and sat on the edge. Julie's legs were crossed. Nicole sat with her left leg underneath the right; her right leg was hanging over the edge.

Nicole used this opportunity to eyeball her daughter's room for any sign of large scale changes or any sign of drugs. The room was in its typical order: her bed, her dresser, her bookshelves were nice and neat. Nicole spotted brand new three ring binders standing in an order on a bookshelf. Each binder was color coded and marked with a school subject on them. Nicole thought nothing of Julie collecting her school work. In the past Julie collected: dog anything (Julie hoped this would get her a puppy), stuffed animals, beanie babies, horse statues, little glass animals, anything to do with ice skating, and she kept all her athletic trophies. She openly displayed her athletic trophies but hid all her academic achievements. To see binders with subjects labeled on them pleased Nicole.

Julie asked, "Why can't I talk to Auntie? We talk about everything."

Nicole gently asked, "Have Y'all ever engaged in a sexual conversation with Megan?"

Julie stopped and answered, "We've talked about boys."

"But was it sexual?"

Julie thought for a second, gave her Momma a look, and answered, "No."

"You have to understand Ma. She's a wonderful lady. But she has a difficult time talking about sex."

Julie gave her momma a confused look.

Nicole changed direction of her thought, "As a Christian, Ma doesn't believe Christians should talk about sex."

"That's dumb."

"You feel this way because I've talked to you about sex. I make sure it's always appropriate and we are never using slang."

Julie knew how much her Momma hated slang.

"Many Christians have disagreed with me and their daughters ended up pregnant. I'm hoping as a momma you choose to wait."

Julie knew she needed to answer the question, "I ain't sleeping with the boys at school."

Nicole responded, "You shouldn't be sleeping with anybody until Y'all are married."

"I ain't planning on sleeping with someone before I'm married."

This was a half hearted answer.

"If you ever end up pregnant you know who will be taking care of it?"

"Me."

"You'll have to quit sports and you'll have to get a part time job. Your life will be about babies and school work. Y'all understanding me?"

"Yes Ma'am."

"I'll allow the two of you to live here, but it ain't a free ride."

Julie asked with an angry tone, "What happens if Jeff gets a girl pregnant?"

"Same thing," Nicole said without missing a beat, "He'll have to work part time and make sure he's taking care of his baby. He ain't abandoning his own child. I ain't letting him shrug his responsibility."

Julie smiled and thought this was fair.

Nicole asked very concerned, "Is he sleeping around?"

Julie made a face and rolled her eyes.

"He's embarrassing. I wish he'd stop acting goofy around my friends."

Nicole was displeased in her current friends, so Nicole mentioned, "I haven't seen Zoe or Hannah lately?"

This stung Julie, "I talk to em' at school."

Nicole with wisdom commented, "You might want to consider why they're avoiding Y'all."

Julie wanted to argue but was reflecting on who her true friends were. The whole situation was very difficult on Julie. Julie wished all her friends could hang out together but Jennie and Zoe really hated one another. Hannah was keeping to herself and was now a library aid to avoid the lunchroom.

"I don't understand why I can't talk to Auntie."

"Megan's struggling with sex."

"Is it 'cause she's gay?"

"Could be. If she likes being gay or not she's most likely feeling she can't talk to us."

Julie protested and said, "She could talk to us."

"I'm feeling she wants to but it's too difficult for her."

"Why?"

"It's how's she was raised. I ain't saying the way she was raised was right or wrong but I'm sure it's part of the reason she's struggling. I realize Y'all want to help her. I want to help her too. But I'm feeling we need to wait until Megan brings it up."

There was a brief moment of silence as they both thought about this statement.

Nicole felt compelled to ask, "If Y'all felt you were a lesbian would you tell me?"

Julie gave her momma a face and answered, "I'm straight."

"Let's say Y'all were struggling with same sex attraction would you tell me?"

"Of Course."

Julie's answered with an eye roll.

"I just want you to feel comfortable enough to talk to me about anything."

Julie squinted and answered, "If I ever feel I'm into gals I'll tell you."

They stared at one another.

Julie all at once became concerned, "Are you thinking I'm a lesbian?"

"I asked because you said it'd be cool if Megan was a lesbian."

Julie made a face, "Momma I'm into guys. It'd be exciting if Megan was a lezbo."

"Let's be ladies. The term is lesbian. We should respect Megan and use proper terms."

Feeling bad Julie answered, "Yes Momma. The lesbians at school get upset when people pick on them."

Nicole was shocked at the idea there were more than one. She put this aside for later, she wanted to address something more concerning. "We have enough excitement around here."

Julie gave her Momma a look of disbelief.

"Sports are exciting to you?"

"Playing sports is exciting. School's boring." Julie looked at Nicole. "I get bored here sometimes."

Nicole looked at her daughter, "Start using the brain God gave Y'all. Start positive projects to keep occupied. Isn't working out and all your sports enough?"

Julie shrugged her shoulders.

“Where I get concerned is things that kids would consider more exciting. I don't want those things to be drugs, alcohol, and sex.”

Julie made a face and looked down at the bed.

Nicole gently touched her leg, “I've said this before but I want you to feel comfortable talking to me. When Y'all are getting pressured to take drugs, to have sex, or any thing you feel is wrong I want you to come to me. I'll address whatever you tell me as your Momma.” She raised a finger when she saw Julie was about to speak, “Let me say there's nobody, nobody; who'll help you more than me. You might not like the help I'm giving. But I'll never stop loving you.”

Julie believed this.

Julie felt her parents were sometimes irritating, especially at moments like this, but she knew without a shadow of a doubt they loved her. She knew this by comparing her parents with other parents. Due to the strong feeling of love she felt toward her parents she disliked how other teenagers treated their parents. Julie would never treat her Momma or Daddy the way her friends treated theirs. Julie as: smart as she was, as cocky as she was, as confident she was, as self sufficient she thought she was, and how she believed she could outsmart anybody; was wired to really love and need her family. Especially her Momma.

Julie found herself saying, “I've been asked to take drugs. I tell them no because of sports,” She first looked at the top of her bed and then at Nicole. “I tell them you'd kill me.”

“You can use me as an excuse any time you'd like. But I wouldn't kill you.”

Julie interrupted, “Y'all would be mad.”

“I'd be sad. I'd know how hard your life would be after starting to use drugs. I'd be deathly afraid.”

This statement shocked Julie, “What'd you be afraid off?”

Nicole almost started to cry, “The day the phone rings and it's the police telling me they found Y'all dead.”

Julie looked at her and saw how much this would hurt her.

“Or I'd be waiting for the phone to ring and we'd only get a fifteen minute phone call.”

“Fifteen minutes?”

“This is how long an inmate gets to talk to their family.”

Silence.

Nicole changed the direction of the conversation to get Julie thinking, “How are drugs affecting the kids at school?”

Julie wanted to talk to her but felt she would betray her friends.

“It'll stay between us.”

Julie trusted this, “One of the gals on the volleyball team quit playing. She's hardly at school anymore.”

Julie stopped talking when she recalled on how sickly her friend was.

Nicole knew who this was. Three days earlier the girls mother called Nicole and asked her what to do. Nicole gave this woman: sound advice, encouraged her to take action, suggested a treatment center, and how to hold an intervention. This mom became upset with Nicole and felt her daughter was in a “phase”. Nicole knew of many teenagers who died because the parents believed their children were in a “phase.”

Julie shrugged her shoulders and frowned, “There's others.”

Julie broke the silence in a desperate plea, “Momma I try to tell them but they won't

listen. I wish I could stop them.”

“They're needing God in their lives. A lot of the times an addict needs to hit rock bottom before they start seeking help. It's admirable Y'all are trying to discourage your peers from using. But Y'all can't fix the world.”

Julie liked and disliked this answer.

Julie felt free to talk about her best friend, “I'm worried about Amanda.”

“Is she taking drugs?” Nicole was just as alarmed if someone just told her Julie was taking drugs. Amanda was like an adopted daughter and Nicole was sure Amanda's mom felt this way about Julie.

“No she isn't,” Julie thought about what she witnessed Amanda doing, “Kids keep saying she's fat.”

“She isn't fat.”

Julie pleading, “I've been telling her this. She doesn't believe me.”

Nicole now wanted to invite Amanda over for dinner and talk to her, but she asked, “Want me to talk to her?”

“NO,” protested Julie, “She'll be okay.”

Nicole asked, “Is she still playing the violin?”

Julie smiled, “She's first chair in orchestra. She's better than ever.”

“I'd love to hear her.”

“She's wanting to play at some fancy college.”

Nicole smiled, “She has the talent.”

Nicole feeling the need to encourage her daughter honestly told her, “Y'all are a beautiful young lady.”

Julie made a face and commented, “All Momma's feel they have beautiful children.”

“Y'all are a very healthy girl. To starve yourself or throw up isn't attractive. It'll make Y'all look horrible. I want my oldest daughter to be healthy and be comfortable in her skin.”

“Guys don't like fat girls.”

“The other extreme is looking like a skeleton. Continue to eat healthy and there will be a lot of guys who will find Y'all attractive.”

Julie made the assumption her momma was clueless.

Nicole answered her daughters facial expression, “A guy should like you for you.”

Julie announced, “The guys at school are stupid.”

“What's the matter?”

“Except for Billy. They only like me because of my boobs.”

“There will be guys who'll like you because they are bigger. How Y'all handle it is up to you.” Nicole encouraged, “Y'all should note the guys who pay attention to your heart and brain.”

Julie frustrated, “I don't want them to grow any more.”

“We can't stop them from growing. Small chested girls complain about their breasts. Your Auntie Megan hates em'.”

“She's never said anything.”

“Listen to her when we're shopping. She'd never mention anything like this out in the open. It's not who she is.”

Julie thought about this.

“They are what they are,” was Nicole's answer. “I'm proud of Y'all for continuing to play

sports.”

Julie gave her momma a look, “Why?”

“I stopped playing because of the looks I’d be getting and how uncomfortable it was.”

This meant a lot to Julie, but she asked, “Didn’t they have sports bras?”

“Not as good as today. I regret not playing,” Nicole winked, “But your Daddy likes em.”

Julie gave her mom a disgusted looking face.

Nicole smiled, “If we didn’t like sex Y’all wouldn’t be here.”

“It’s just weird thinking about you and...”

Nicole saved her, “I feel the same way about Nanna and Poppa. They’re still doing it.”

“Really?”

Nicole laughed.

Julie felt this was an awful idea.

Nicole broke the silence, “It’s an odd feeling isn’t it? Your children will most likely feel the same way.”

Julie smiled and understood her Momma’s point.

Nicole felt this was a good time to bring up something she needed to address but was waiting for the right moment, “I need to talk to Y’all about something.”

“What?”

“I understand why Y’all need to take regular showers.”

Nicole stopped.

Julie gave her Momma an odd look.

Nicole gently waved her hand and took a deep breath.

Julie knew to wait.

Nicole stated, “With your body chemistry I know you need to take more showers than other girls.”

Julie was surprised by Nicole’s body language and tone.

Nicole was surprised on how difficult this was to talk about, she just went for it or she would chicken out, “The extra time your spending in the shower has to stop.”

“I’m needing to take long showers.”

“The showering is fine,” Nicole took a deep breath, “But Y’all are holding the hole house up with Y’all enjoying yourself.”

Julie blushed.

Her eyes were as big as an owls.

Julie was surprised her momma knew what she was doing in the shower.

“I’m all for it it’s keeping you from having sex.”

A long awkward pause.

Both ladies blushed.

Nicole’s voice quivered but was able to say, “What concerns me is what your fantasizing about. I wouldn’t want you to start experimenting because of what Y’all are thinking.” Nicole paused, was deep red, but she recovered, “I ain’t wanting Y’all to fulfill the fantasy with a guy. Once Y’all are married I feel it’s okay.”

Julie as red as a tomato shook her head no.

With great effort Nicole said, “The water bill is getting higher. Daddy is starting to ask about your showers. I’ve been telling him you need to take showers because Y’all are a young woman. I don’t want to explain Y’all are masturbating in the shower.”

Julie blushed again.

Nicole with great bravery, stated, "There's other ways of masturbating." A pause, "Do you have any questions?"

Nicole prepared herself for any question.

At school Julie could talk about sex all day long. She even corrected a lot of miss information; because of her Momma's correct information. At this moment Julie felt so self conscience she was speechless.

Nicole commented, "Don't feel embarrassed I was a young lady too."

Julie: was surprised, felt her Momma was cool, and felt better about herself for having her Momma just admit she masturbated too. All at once it dawned on Julie her Momma was a woman too. She always knew this, but somehow, this knowledge was now at the forefront of how she felt about her mother.

As a southern lady Nicole stood up, "I'm proud of you for avoiding drugs or sleeping around. Auntie Megan will be needing a friend and we should be there for her. I never want to hear Y'all were teasing her."

"I wouldn't ever tease Auntie."

Nicole took a tone her daughter would recognize, "I don't want you saying anything unless she comes out of the closet."

"What happens if she brings a girlfriend over?"

"We'll treat the girlfriend with respect. I believe it's what Jesus would want us to do."

"What happens if Auntie likes being one?"

"We'll have to pray for her. Either way we'll always love her and hope she gets healed."

Julie asked, "What happens if she doesn't believe she needs to be healed?"

"We'll still love and respect her. I'm hoping if she is one she'll find someone who loves her and never cheats on her."

Julie made a face.

"No matter if Auntie is straight or gay if she falls for somebody and they cheat on her it'll crush her."

"Yes Momma."

Giving Julie a tone, "You tell Jennie I want her to be wearing better clothes when she comes over here."

"She ain't listening to me."

"I don't care. With Ester and Danielle being here I don't want them thinking dressing like your friends is okay."

"I'll try."

Nicole walked to the door and stopped and asked one last thing, "How's Jennie treating her Grandma?"

Julie shrugged her shoulders. Julie disliked how Jennie treated her Grandparents.

"Okay, You have a good night."

"Yes momma."

Before Nicole shut the door she said, "I love you."

Julie answered honestly, "I love you too."

They met one another and hugged.

They pulled away.

Nicole: shut the bedroom door, Nicole felt both talks went well, she felt a close

connection to her daughters, she took a deep breath, she headed downstairs to talk and spend time with her husband.

Julie: put her hair into a pony tail, she slipped on her Adidas running shoes, removed her top, she replaced it with an expensive sports bra top (her Momma help her pick out), she felt better about her body after talking to her momma; her goal was to stretch and relax before bed.

On her toes she ran in place for exactly ten minutes.

When she was done she turned on a local radio station that specialized in classical music. Jennie made fun of her old pink radio with it's CD player. Julie could have cared less if it had an adapter for an electric device. She liked it and it still worked. The day it no longer worked was the day she'd get a new one.

These sets of stretches were relaxing to her; to an average person it would have been a full workout. She started this set with her legs slightly bent, she bent herself over, she was laying flat on her legs, and was trying to grab her feet. This was a time when her boobs were annoying to her. Before she had them she could hold onto the stretch a lot longer; her sports bra helped. Anytime she stretched she would count the seconds off in her mind.

The second stretch in this set, was putting her leg up on her desk; she desired something higher but this was just a way to relax before bed. She leaned forward to where her head was on her leg. She performed this stretch three times on each leg. She thought about how interesting it would be if her Auntie was a lesbian. She knew of a couple girls in school who were and knew of a girl in her youth group who was in the closet. She could have cared less if someone was or not. She felt it would be exciting to observe her family if her Auntie was a lesbian.

She moved from this stretch to what her ballet teacher called a Jazz split: her one leg was straight forward, the other was straight back, she placed her head on her leg, her arms were stretched out, and her toes pointed forward. She liked this stretch.

She stood up, shook her limbs, and then focused on her next stretch. She stood as straight as she could on one leg, she stood on her toes, she brought up her other leg, she placed her foot against the knee of the leg standing straight, she closed her eyes, and made a circle with her arms. She could have stayed in this position without effort for multiple minutes, with this being a light workout she only held it for a few minutes, during these minutes she took in the sound of *Beethoven's* Fifth Symphony. She repeated this with the other leg.

She again shook her limbs.

She considering skipping the next stretch because she never danced ballet anymore; but the stretch was part of the routine. She: grabbed the back of her desk chair, she pointed her toes, she rested her body on her toes, her knees were together, and from the side she looked like her a hook. She only held this for fifteen seconds. This part of the routine was intense, all she concentrated on was the count. This stretch was the reason she could move her feet into the shape of a banana.

The next stretch was her favorite. She placed her legs in a straight line on the floor, her left toe was pointing to the bedroom door, and her right toe pointed to the window directly across from the bedroom door. She leaned forward as far as she could with her arms rested on

the floor. She remembered her ballet teacher encouraging her to pursue dancing. She liked dancing but her passion was sports. She was certain the reason her Momma signed her up for ballet was to widen her horizons. Julie appreciated how ballet helped her in all her sports; especially gymnastics and ice skating. She loved the fact she was one of only a few people she knew who could ice skate. There were times she missed the rink in the mall.

She stood up, shook her body, and shook one limb at a time.

The DJ was talking in a soft voice telling everyone about local symphonies.

She stepped over to the wall next to her bedroom door. She: focused on the wall, she lifted her right leg up, pressed it against the wall, she placed her face against her leg, her leg was pointing to the ceiling, her foot was flat on the floor. She loved holding this stretch as a challenge to herself. While she held it she thought about her friend Jennie. She was contemplating a way to convince Jennie to dress in a way her Momma liked. She reasoned the only way her friend would dress better, was on the day Jennie decided to dress better. She loved how much time she could push both legs.

The DJ in a soft tone announced he'd play; Rhapsody in Blue from the *Fantasia 2000 soundtrack*. Julie loved the begging sounds of this classical piece.

She again shook her limbs. She stepped into the center of her room.

She went onto the next step of the routine. She recalled on how all of these stretches were easier before puberty. She felt the stretch she was about to attempt was a perfect example on how her body changes effected her performance. She bent over and tried to get her fingers to touch the floor. When she was younger it was easy for her to lay her hands flat on the floor. She held the stretch as long as she could, most young women her age would have collapsed in exhaustion with how long she held this stretch; Julie was disappointed in her performance.

She was eager to perform her next stretch. She bent one leg backward, she set the other leg forward, she leaned down upon her front leg and grabbed her foot. She would count and switch her legs. She felt if Jennie would just listen things would go better for her. She understood why her Momma disliked Jennie, at the same time Julie understood why Jennie felt Nicole was to strict. Julie was wondering how long it would take for there to be a full blown argument between the two of them. As Julie was maturing she found Jennie and all of the Snob Club's behavior annoying.

She: rolled onto her back, she crossed her arms over her chest, her legs were straight in the air, her feet were pointing at the ceiling, she first crossed her ankles, then lowered her legs into a split. If she was trying to push herself she would have held her legs and did multiple reps; instead she only performed ten sets.

What added to this experience was listening to the music.

She was grateful the only exercise left in this routine was her leg lunges. How she did them in a confined space was by stretching one leg behind her, she kept her back straight, and folded her other leg in front of her; while planting the foot on the floor. She became acquainted with many core exercises by attending Megan's aerobic class. Julie in her arrogance believed she could outlast her Auntie in a full blown workout session. If Julie ever voiced this to Megan, Megan would have kicked up her workout and Julie would have found out first hand how intense and in shape her Auntie really was. Julie being herself believed she was in better shape than her Auntie.

When she was done with this last stretch she shook her limbs, took a couple deep

breaths, she casually sat down in her chair, she opened a drawer from her desk, she took out a water bottle, an apple, and a granola bar. Sitting in the chair she thought about her conversation with her Mother. She could tell by the conversation her Friend's Momma called her Momma. Julie recalled the last time her Friend was actually at school and recalled how Julie tried to convince her to get help. What frustrated Julie was the only person willing to talk with her friend was Zoe. It was painfully obvious why she was wearing long sleeved shirts and barely showed up at school. She heard her Friend was making money by giving oral sex and having sex. Julie knew it was only a matter of time.

She closed her eyes and listened to the end of the classical piece. The DJ stated the call letters of the station. In the background *Mahler's* Fourth Symphony started to play. She liked this one as well. She was pleased when the DJ stopped talking and the music filled the room.

She thought about her friend Amanda. Unlike Julie who exercised and ate all day long, Julie knew her friend needed to eat more, and was concerned when she heard Amanda throwing up in the girls bathroom. Julie decided she would start encouraging her friend to eat more. Amanda was her best friend; Julie assumed this was enough to get her friend to eat more.

Julie finished her little meal.

She: turned off her radio, grabbed new underclothes and the shirt she wore earlier, opened her bedroom door, stepped into the in the hallway, she could hear her Momma and Daddy talking downstairs, she ignored them, she stepped into the bathroom at the end of the hallway, she brushed her teeth, she took a short shower, did her business, washed her hands, and dressed into the clothes she'd sleep in. She wanted to snoop and listen to the conversation her Momma and Daddy were having but the light in the living room was off and the house was quiet. She went into her room and put her clothes into the hamper. She changed into some sleep clothes. She prepared for a long run as soon as she woke up by putting: a pair of orange microfiber running shorts, a clean sports bra, and a matching top which was called a "antimicrobial treatment"; onto a chair next to her bed. This workout top was to help stop body odor when a woman ran for a long distance. She received this outfit in the mail as a gift from her Momma. Her Momma put this outfit in her room without letting anyone else know, she left an encouraging personal note only a momma could give a daughter. These sorts of things were why Julie loved her Momma.

She yawned turned off her light and crawled into bed. Julie was grateful her Momma tried her best not to embarrass her. Julie knew parents who were more conservative and knew of very liberal parents. An example of liberal parents, were Zoe's parents who: were open about sex, lived a nudist lifestyle, and even took the whole family to nudist events. On the flip side was Amanda's mom who was very conservative who barely talked about sex and sheltered Amanda from any movie with nudity. Julie wondered if Ma was even more strict.

Julie put herself in her Auntie's shoes. She could understand why her Auntie Megan would stay in the closet. If her Auntie was gay or straight she would love her. She smiled with the thought of Megan bringing a "girlfriend" over. She loved the idea of the whole family being uncomfortable. She decided she would go to the Y on Saturday morning and participate in the aerobics class her Auntie lead during the summer.

Shortly after this she fell asleep

Ashleigh: took off her shoes, grabbed them, stepped into the elevator, and was headed to her suite. The elevator stopped. When the door opened three men stepped into the elevator. Ashleigh was watchful. Two of these men were very intense looking. All three were wearing western type of clothes. The guy in the middle was: attractive, average height, in shape, and had what Ashleigh felt were dreamy green eyes. He was wearing: a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, nice jeans, a button shirt, and a western tie.

Ashleigh was unable to control herself and said, "Hi."

One of the intense looking gentleman gave Ashleigh a look and answered, "Howdy."

She answered back, "Are you guys having a good day?"

One of the body guards, answered in a deep southern accent she never heard before, "Yes Ma'am."

The handsome one stepped to the corner of the elevator. The two big guys stood in front. Ashleigh felt she recognized the cute guy from somewhere and felt she personally met one of these big intense looking guys before. She felt this was silly.

"What do you guys do?"

The one who looked cute, "Boys let me answer."

Ashleigh liked this.

"We're working for a company out of Nashville."

Ashleigh became excited, "I love country music."

"Well. Where did a fine northern gal such as yourself learn about country music?"

She was totally turned on by his voice and his accent.

"Wisconsin." She was trying to focus, "I'm here on business. My brother is moving his company down here and I'm helping him set it up."

She adjusted her clothes.

She wished she could have said something better. She hoped she would get an opportunity to talk about her brother's club; where she met many famous country acts.

They needed to listen closely.

The cute one stated with a smile, "You talk awful fast for a short gal?"

"This doesn't mean I'm a snob or anything. I just have lots to say."

"I'm sure Y'all have a lot to talk about."

He blinked.

She blurted out, "Have I met you before?"

"Maybe around this here resort."

The two body guards glanced at one another.

"We're travel around looking for new acts. We work for a record company out of Nashville."

This was a half truth. They made a special trip from Nashville to watch an upcoming country act. This cute guy wanted the best opening act for his first headlining national tour. As soon as the elevator door opened they stopped discussing this particular country band and his national tour.

"Oh," Ashleigh said. "My brother owned a club in Wisconsin. We often had country acts."

The cute guy asked, "What club?"

"*The Event.*"

The body guard now knew exactly where he knew her from.

The elevator opened and the three men motioned for her to step out.

“Ma'am. Y'all staying on this floor?”

“Yup,” she smiled. She adjusted her clothes and now wished she would have dressed better. She was embarrassed she was carrying her shoes. They were now in the hallway. The elevator door shut.

The older gentleman was about to ask Ashleigh a question, but the cute guy beat him to it, “My name's William.”

“Nice to meet you. I'm Ashleigh Waller.”

The older big guy remembered this gal from when he was a body guard for a very famous country star. It was his first assignment and it was the country acts first tour. The body guard remembered this little girl standing back stage with earmuffs in her ears getting to watch the show. The country singer spotted this young girl sitting at a table stuffing envelopes after she helped a waitress wrap silver wear. During this whole time he observed her watching everything his crew was doing and watched her sing along to his songs. What the body guard would never forget the singer's wife and the singer talking to her during lunch. This was why she could sit back stage and watch.

William and Ashleigh stopped walking and faced one another. She wanted to touch his muscles and run her hands all over his body. She imagined him touching her body in a way she liked. Trying to calm herself down she told herself it was unlikely he'd know how to touch her.

“I'm happy I'm meeting a fine lady.”

“Thank-you.”

She winked at him.

He smiled and raised an eyebrow and winked back.

She LOVED a flirtatious guy.

“Y'all are a fine northern gal. You mentioned you liked country music?”

This man oozed confidence without being cocky. She was feeling tingly all over.

Acting lady like she answered honestly, “The way I was brought up I was taught to like all types of music. But I especially like Country music.”

The body guards standing were watching the aisle and paying attention to the conversation. The older body guard remembered how the club her brother owned was decorated with memorabilia from many different acts.

He winked, “Y'all interested in heading downstairs and talking a little. Or how about at the end of the hallway in the vending area.”

She answered, “Over at the vending area.”

He motioned for her to lead. At the end of the hallway was a small room with: a couple fancy chairs, a table, a couple vending machines, and an ice making machine. They sat down across from one another. She felt naughty as she found herself studying his hands. She wondered if he ever played an instrument. She wanted to assume if he was good at playing an instrument he would be good at playing with her button. She glanced at his private area in a way he never noticed. She was certain other women would have been disappointed; but she believed it was the perfect size for her. She imagined it sliding in, where she could feel it; but it never hurt.

It took great effort on her part to shut down these thoughts.

The body guards stood in the hallway. If at any time Ashleigh felt threatened she would have ran to her suite; overall she felt safe.

“What part of Wisconsin are Y’all from?”

“I grew up near Brookside.”

“I’ve been to Wisconsin but never there. Y’all like it?”

“It’s okay,” she diverted and asked, “Where are you from?”

“I grew up in Carolina. From here I’ll be visiting family for a few days then heading back to Nashville.”

The idea of sleeping with this guy and not facing any consequences was awful appealing.

“I’m sure it’s bothering Y’all I’m just passing by?”

His voice was like a poetry reading.

“Y’all are a nice gal. I’m sure you have a boyfriend back home. If ones waiting I’d completely understand.”

It took an actress skill to hide her nervousness, “I don’t have a boyfriend.”

She was turned on and the temptation to sleep with him was growing. She imagined what it would be like to: kiss his lips, to touch his smooth skin, to touch his chest, and she again imagined what his hands could do.

He again was smooth, “If you’d live close to me I’d certainly take you out for a nice dinner. It’d be easy for me to get back stage passes to any show.”

She smiled, trying to get a grip, “But we don’t live close.”

“This is true.” He was honest when he said, “It’d be easy for me to pick up gals while on the road. My Momma raised me better. The reason I’m taking a shine on Y’all is because I can tell You ain’t like other gals. It ain’t easy finding nice gals like Y’all on the road.”

She liked the fact he called her nice, he was family orientated, and he was so attractive. She put on brakes with the thought; *I bet he’s he said this to hundreds of women across the country?* A second question came screaming into her mind; *How would she know?*

He winked, “I love gals with energy.”

She was well aware of what he meant. She should be offended, should brush him off but: she liked how he looked, liked his charm, he made her feel special, she was lonely, she was worried about moving, and maybe the stress of all this was getting to her. She asked herself a dangerous question; *What would be the harm in a little fun?*

“When I spotted Y’all step into the elevator I was telling myself there is a good gal to spend some time with. If we hit it off who knows?” He smiled, “I’m sure Y’all are the type of gal who’d appreciate pampering.”

This increased her arousal. She loved foreplay more than sex itself. She wondered if this guy would be better at foreplay than Neil. She thought back to the three men she slept with. Each time there was a consequence; some how, some way, there was a consequence. She asked herself; *Would there be one now?*

She found herself saying in a voice, “I love pampering.”

“I’m believing we’d have many wonderful nights together.” He added, “This could lead to something wonderful and permanent down the road.”

She was imagining what pampering meant. She felt he was a guy who made sex special, she assumed he went beyond just touching her breasts, and then just trying to jam it in. She imagined: the two of them kissing, what it would be like for him to start kissing her neck, to

kiss her body, to spend some time on her breasts, and to make his way to her special spot.

“We could?”

With a twinkle in his eye, “Y’all like dancing?”

“I love to dance.”

“I’d put on a nice slow song and we’d enjoy a little romantic two step around the room.”

This was a fantasy come true. She forced herself to ask, *or was it?*

She looked at him and he stood up from the chair, he took off his hat, he bowed, and asked “I’d be obliged if you’d dance with me?”

He put his hat back on and stood straight up. This was all so cheesy, but the way he did everything, how attractive he was, and the way he sounded; increased her arousal. She stood up and put her hand into his.

When he grabbed her hand she thought about the next step.

Her mind raced with question after question. *If it’s as good as I’m imagining then what? What if he doesn’t love me after? What happens if I regret this? What would happen if I fell in love with him? I’m most likely going to fall in love with him. No I won’t. Yes you will. You know you will. Especially if he’s good. Imagine if he’s good with those wonderful fingers. I will stop myself from loving him. Could I? What would happen if he’s a lousy partner? Guys are never as good as you hope they are. Remember Neil? you thought he was going to be a horrible lover. He turned out great though. Don’t forget about your first two lovers. So how accurate are your instincts? What happens if he falls in love with you and you end up despising him? What happens if he wants to marry you? What are you going to feel like tomorrow? It will be over. Then what? You’ll have to look at him when the alarm goes off? How many other women have fallen for his charm? How could he actually respect you. You haven’t even been on a date with him.*

She knew this was old fashioned, but she had to know.

They reached his door and she stopped him. She felt like she was in one of those nineteen fifties movies.

The older security guard standing at the end of the hallway was debating if he should interrupt. He assumed she’d be good for him. There was a high possibility, even if he wanted to have a long term relationship; it’d fail.

She found herself asking him an old fashion question, “What happens tomorrow?”

He gave her a shocked look, he paused, and gave her an honest answer. “We’d have spent a wonderful night together. It’d be filled with dancing, romance, and passion. It’ll tell us if we belong together.”

He smiled.

He took the plastic card out from his pocket.

She imagined laying next to him right after it was all over. She again questioned herself. *What will you feel like? What happens if he just rolls over? What happens if he stinks in bed? What if it was a night of great passion? What happens if you end up pregnant? She stopped taking birth control months ago. She recalled there were condoms sold in the resorts store. What happened if it fell off? Or it broke?*

A year earlier she would have slept with him hoping he’d fall in love with her. At the present time this felt very odd to her. She wanted to have sex with a guy only after he loved her and knew for a fact he’d be there for her.

She said a line she saw in an old black and white movie when she lived with Ashley

Vindavaine; "I'm not that kind of girl."

He was shocked. He now wanted a long term relationship with this woman. She was different than so many of the women he met on the road. He suspected she'd even go on tour with him. Something he actually wanted.

He waved the two guys over, she was ready to run to her suit.

But he again took off his hat and bowed in appreciation, "It was nice meeting a fine lady like Y'all. I ain't supposing you'd be interested in moving to Nashville?"

In a blunt honest answer, "No. My brother needs me."

William instructed, "Bubba give me one of my cards."

Bubba, the older security guard was proud of Ashleigh. He was interested in finding out how successful her brother was. It was well known in music circles, if Mr. Waller liked an act, he made calls to help the act. Mr. Waller had a reputation of treating any performer he respected well. Many acts who came to the Milwaukee area hid in his private hotel under his club. Bubba gladly handed a business card and a pen to William.

Ashleigh watched as William wrote something on the back of a card. He handed it to Ashleigh. Ashleigh stated politely, "I'm glad to meet you."

He took her hand and answered, "I'm much obliged. Y'all are a good gal."

He smiled.

Then stepped into his suit.

Before the older body guard stepped into the suite he nodded and gave her a smile.

She smiled in return and waved at him.

The two body guards shut the door behind them.

She shrugged off the feeling she meet the older security guard before.

She looked at the card, it had his hand written name on it and a cell phone number. She turned the card over and his country artist name was printed on it. She just about fainted. This was one of her favorite country artists and it was obvious his stage name was different from his real name. Her immediate impulse was to turn around and pound on the door.

She stopped herself.

She needed to stop herself again.

It was very difficult to stop herself the third time but she did.

She adjusted her clothes and as calmly as she could put the card into her purse. She slipped on her shoes, and to her door. She admitted to herself all her thoughts were lustful. She heard Victoria's voice, "*Women are just as lustful as men. They just use fancy wording to make themselves feel better. Don't kid yourself it's bound to happen, remember there is a consequence. Sex is awesome and it should be, but there is the moment after.*"

Instead of walking to her room she stepped to the elevator. She: hit the button, tried to shut down all her lustful thoughts, was grateful the elevator dinged, quickly stepped into the elevator, ignored every guy who stepped onto the elevator, rushed out of the elevator, and headed to the front desk; this was the first time she avoided any conversation with any employee of the resort.

Ashleigh greeted the girl behind the counter with a simple, "Hi."

Ashleigh recognized the girl behind the counter, her name was Natalie, and she was consistently at the desk at night. Her dark blond hair was in a bun. She: had a diamond shaped face, very dark green eyes, a very noticeable chin, and a long jawline. She believed her brother would have found her small breasts and her athletic body appealing. Ashleigh felt she

was very good at her job and was always friendly.

“Howdy Ma'am. Ms. Waller how may I help you?”

Ashleigh wished people around her age would stop calling her Ma'am. She was trying to adjust to the southern customs. She assumed they were calling her Ma'am because she was associated with her brother.

“Call me Ashleigh.”

“Yes Ms. Ashleigh.”

“Is there a convenience store or a grocery store close by?”

Natalie had to focus anytime Ashleigh spoke to her: Ashleigh spoke really fast, Natalie was having difficulty with the way she pronounced her c's and her t's; Natalie was good at accents.

Natalie asked very politely, “Ms. Ashleigh Y'all are wanting a store?”

In desperation, “One in walking distance.”

“May I recommend using the store in the resort. A gal shouldn't be walking alone at night. We're in a safe neighborhood but Y'all shouldn't be walking alone. I hope Y'all ain't forgetting our wonderful room service?”

Ashleigh forced herself from blushing.

“I. Uh. I really need to get to the store.”

Natalie reluctantly answered Ashleigh's question, “Up the street is a gas station named *Mamma's Market*. They might or might not have what Y'all are looking for.” Natalie again tried, “Everyone likes you. We wouldn't want something happening to Y'all.”

Ashleigh was looking for something very specific, something private, and was reluctant to tell anybody.

“Wheres a regular grocery store?”

“Honey. It's a ways away. Y'all shouldn't walk there.”

Ashleigh decided she'd take the chance on the gas station, “How do I get to the station?”

“Y'all step out of the resort. I hope Y'all stay on the lighted sidewalk. A gal shouldn't be walking on the boardwalk alone. Are Y'all hearing me.”

This annoyed Ashleigh. She felt she was a grown woman who could take care of herself.

With a tone she answered Natalie, “I appreciate your concern but I'll be alright.”

A worried Natalie replied, “Yes Ma'am.”

Ashleigh was determined to accomplish what she needed: she secured her purse in a way where it would be difficult to grab, secured her shoes, adjusted her clothes, set her hair into a loose bun; she felt the way she set her hair it would be difficult to grab. She was desperate. She was fighting the temptation to sleep with one of her favorite country singers. She stepped away from the desk and headed out of the resort.

Natalie picked up the phone.

Ashleigh greeted the doorman, “Hi Pete.”

The doorman opened the door for Ashleigh, “Howdy. How are Y'all tonight?”

“I'm needing a walk.”

“It's not wise walking by yourself. It's a safe neighborhood but this is a city and things have happened to many fine people.”

This reinforced her determination. With a flirt she answered him, “I'll be fine.”

“If Y'all are looking for fun there's a lot of nice dance clubs down the strip. There not all

country bars. I'm assuming Y'all ain't a country fan."

She smiled, "Pete I might be from up north but I'm a country fan."

"Do tell."

"Give me some: Alabama, Alan Jackson, Brad Paisley, Josh Turner, Tim McGraw, Garth Brooks, Shania Twain, and Gretchen Wilson."

"You hadn't mentioned any classic..."

Interrupting, "How about: Tennessee Ernie Ford, Oak Ridge Boys, Jerry Reed, Johnny Cash, Charles Daniels, Patsy Kline, Roger Miller, and Hank Williams?"

She smiled and raised her right eyebrow.

Pete stated with a smile, "Well you talk like a Yankee, but it sounds like Y'all are a country gal to me."

She said with a smile, "I'll take that as a compliment."

The doorman said, "I'd like to tell Y'all something?"

"Of course."

"You ain't like other Yankees."

"How?"

He smiled, "Well. You ain't rude. We appreciate how Y'all are always greeting us. We're all talking on how you ain't said one bad thing. We're not used to rich folks. How Y'all say it? From up north."

They laughed.

"That's it."

"Y'all have been nice."

"I'm glad. I was a waitress and..."

He interrupted, "Well ain't that something? We'all reckoned' Y'all were a rich gal."

"My brother is the rich one I'm just helping him move his company down here."

Pete answered honestly, "I'm thinking he's helping Y'all because he knows what a good Sister he has."

She kept herself from tearing. She smiled, winked and gently touched his arm, "Thank-you for being sweet. I need to get to the store and back."

"Maybe Y'all should grab a cab?"

She answered with a smile, "I need to take a walk."

He reluctantly opened the door, "Y'all be safe."

She was about to open her purse and give him a tip, "Ms. Ashleigh are you seeing those people on the beach?"

"Yes."

He looked serious, "Y'all might want to wait and give me the tip later. We'd be more than happy calling you a cab?"

"I'll be okay. I'll stick to the sidewalk."

"it'd be better if Y'all didn't walk at all."

"I'll be fine."

Before he could stop her she headed down the concrete stairs. She stopped once she was on the sidewalk. Looking across the street was the boardwalk and the beach. She saw the flickering light of campfires, the lights of the streets, the lights reflecting on the ocean, the lights of the moon; in between it was dark. She listened to Natalie and took a right and stayed on the sidewalk. The: skyline was awesome with the tall buildings, boats were traveling the

water ways, she loved the ocean to the left of her, she enjoyed the palm trees, she loved the sound of the ocean, she loved the campfires, and loved the lighted ships on the ocean. She also noticed: two women in bikini's next to a garbage can; one was holding onto her friend as the other woman was throwing up, she spotted a homeless guy sleeping on a bench, she heard the sounds of a beach party, two police officers were handcuffing two drug addicts; Ashleigh could tell the man and woman were lovers. Her heart jumped when she noticed a cowboy holding hands with a young cowgirl.

She thought about a slow song William sang. She was tempted to call his cell phone.

She was grateful to reach the gas station and convenience store. In front of the parking lot was a large lighted sign of the gas they sold, underneath in white lettering was a sign reading *Momma's Place*. She found it interesting on the other side of the parking lot was a dock so boats could get fuel. The parking lot had two long rows of gas pumps. She was thankful the lot was well lit. The store was large. On the windows in neon lettering was a list of what the store sold. The signs were announcing: cigarettes, water, milk, and fresh fruit were on special. She noticed just as she was about to step into the station a sign declaring boat and bait supplies. She opened the door and heard the ringing of a bell.

Right away a young black girl said, "Howdy Ma'am."

She smiled and answered, "Hi."

Behind the counter was a black women and a white woman. The black woman was big who wore a plain blue dress, she was wearing a cross, and attached to a gold plated necklace a pair of glasses hung around her neck. Ashleigh noticed she sort of shuffled when she walked. The white woman was standing on a stool, holding onto a clipboard, and was obviously counting cigarettes hanging above the counter.

Ashleigh panned the store. She spotted a hanging basket next to the counter with fresh fruit in it. To her right was a small deli section with more fresh fruit, sandwiches, and other small grocery items. Before she stepped over to this area she noticed the station was somewhat busy. She took note of a guy who looked like he'd pass out at any moment, but was still carrying a twelve pack up to the counter. She observed two teenage boys and a teenage girl, Ashleigh suspected they spent as much time on the beach as they could. She noticed a couple business men. In a corner she noticed a tall man: he was in his late forties, he wore a cowboy hat, plaid shirt, nice jeans, a light jacket, and cowboy boots. Next to him was a very pretty woman in her early forties: she had long brunette hair, was wearing jeans, had on a nice pair of gray cowboy boots, a nice plain blue button shirt, and she was carrying a small red basket. Ashleigh noticed they were wearing wedding rings; Ashleigh felt how much they loved one another.

Ashleigh could hear the ringing of the door as people were coming in and out of the store.

She focused on the grocery case. There was a slot for the item she wanted. Instead of the item there was a sign saying, *Temporary out of Stock*. She decided the prepackaged tuna sandwich looked appetizing and grabbed it. She headed down and around the aisle. She took note of a sign saying announcing a buy one get one free special; she picked out two lemonades. She looked at the root beers and again her favorite root beer was absent. As she made her way around the store she spotted the small selection of drug items were. To her dismay the one hanger that displayed the box of three condoms was empty, but hanging next to it was one large box of thirty-six. This was clearly embarrassing. She was tempted to shop

left them. This only added to feeling guilty.

The place was far from quiet. Different accents were being exchanged across the counter. Ashleigh glanced up and spotted two bike police officers step into the store. She was immediately attracted to the male officer.

Ashleigh jumped when the young black woman asked, “Y’all needing help.”

“I’m doing okay.”

“Sorry for scaring Y’all.”

Ashleigh smiled, “It’s okay. I’m just looking.”

The young woman whispered, “It’s annoying when guys make us buy em’.”

Ashleigh became an actress, “I think I should just get a headache and let him sweat it out.”

This black woman laughed and touched Ashleigh, and whispered, “I’m sometimes feeling we should just get headaches once in a while. It’ll teach’ em’ to mind a little.”

They chuckled.

“Shhh,” said the black woman. The black woman whispered, “When Y’all are ready tell me. I’ll ring Y’all up. The other two are religious folks they wouldn’t understand.”

“Okay.”

This comment, which was meant to make her feel better, only added to how guilty she was suddenly feeling.

The young black woman winked and walked past Ashleigh.

Ashleigh: quickly pulled the box off the hanger, at the end of the isle she grabbed a *Glamour* magazine, in an attempt to conceal her purchase she placed the magazine on top of the box of condoms, as she passed a shelf with banana’s, she grabbed two of the greenest banana’s she could find, and she walked sheepishly to the counter. Ashleigh stepped up to where the young black woman was ringing up one of the business guys. Just as she was finished a guy in back came up to the counter and announced in an East Coast accent, “U’s are out of milk.”

The larger black woman commanded, “Tamika go and get em’ one from in back.”

“I was...”

“I’ll ring up the young lady.”

The young black woman shrugged her shoulders.

Ashleigh cringed but smiled. The young black woman quickly headed toward the cooler.

The big woman gave her a look, “Howdy.”

This woman took the banana’s and slowly rang them up.

“Hi,” Ashleigh mentioned. “Are you having a good day? I sure like the ocean. It’s a wonderful night outside isn’t it?”

The whole store looked at Ashleigh. Her attempt at avoiding attention failed.

What Ashleigh missed was the forty year old woman nudged her cowboy husband and whispered to him.

This was when the black lady put on the glasses she had hanging around her neck, and asked, “Whereabouts are you from? You sure talk fast for being a short thing.”

Ashleigh barely picked up this woman’s very strong southern accent.

“I’m from Wisconsin.”

This big woman just made a face and said, “Hmm.”

Ashleigh sighed at how long it was taking to check out every item. This was when Ashleigh saw the small pin attached to this woman's lapel, and it read; *John 3:3*.

"Y'all visiting."

"I'm on a business trip."

This was when the big woman pulled off the Glamour magazine and had troubles scanning in the UPC code.

"I'm hating how these new fancy devises ain't every working."

A guy spotted condoms inside of the basket and winked at her, being an actress Ashleigh pretended to miss the look.

It was painful to watch this big woman type in the code and the price. Ashleigh finally was grateful when this was done. Ashleigh braced herself when this big woman grabbed the condoms, "Hmmm."

Ashleigh blushed and shrugged her shoulders.

"You be here on business?"

"Yea," Ashleigh considered what this woman meant, "Not that type of business. I'm helping my bro..."

She trailed off.

Ashleigh was as red as a tomato.

It was obvious everyone was staring at her.

Ashleigh missed the attractive forty year old woman paying close attention to the whole store. Her husband shook his head and made a face. This bothered his wife she whispered something to him. She whispered because to many men were watching this purchase. The tall cowboy agreed with his wife and on purpose stepped behind Ashleigh.

"I'm supposing you'd like these items in a bag."

With desperation answered, "Yes please."

Ashleigh caught an older guy give her a creepy smile, she knew what he was implying, she pretended to miss his gesture.

This man was about to step over to Ashleigh but the tall cowboy behind Ashleigh said, "Howdy little lady."

"Hi."

The wife asked, "How are Y'all tonight? Names Debbie-Sue and this is my husband Wayne."

"Nice to meet the two of you."

Wayne gave the old guy a glance. This changed his mind and stepped out of the store.

"I was hearing Y'all are from Wisconsin? Where a bouts?"

Ashleigh smiled, "Near Milwaukee."

"Y'all talk like a Yankee."

He could sense this young gal would appreciate a little teasing.

Ashleigh answered back, "I ain't a Yankee fan I'm a Milwaukee Brewer fan."

He chuckled, "Well little lady you've got some spunk."

The woman behind the counter said, "Ma'am."

"Oh sorry," Ashleigh looked at the price displayed on the screen of the register. Without thinking, she opened her purse, and pulled out a couple bills from her cash filled ladies wallet.

Wayne took note of the characters in the store.

Debbie-Sue out of concern nudged her husband.

The big black woman gave her the plastic bag and the change.

Ashleigh was about to leave when Wayne asked, "Why are Y'all visiting Florida?"

Ashleigh trying to inform the store she was in a legitimate business declared, "I'm helping my brother move his company here."

This announcement made Wayne cringe; she just let every character in the store know she was wealthy.

Debbie-Sue asked in a soft tone, "What type of company?"

"He's consolidating his manufacturing business. He's moving the headquarters from Wisconsin to here. He's moving the whole operation to Florida."

What was important to Wayne and Debbie-Sue was they were keeping Ashleigh with them. Wayne as a vacationing county Sheriff listened to his gut and believed she was a good gal and needed protecting.

Very casually shoved the bag into her purse.

Wayne asked very serious, "Where are Y'all staying?"

"At the resort down the street?"

Debbie-Sue replied, "Honey. we're staying right next to it. Why not walk with us?"

Ashleigh was grateful and asked, "Are you guys on vacation?"

Debbie-Sue looked at Wayne and he smiled, Debbie-Sue answered, "We're on our anniversary."

"How many years have you been married?"

Debbie-Sue answered as Wayne paid for their items, "Twenty years."

"Congratulations."

Ashleigh was her bubbly self.

This excited Debbie-Sue. The two of them started a conversation. This conversation lasted from this convenience store, down the street, to the front of the resort; where Debbie-Sue and Ashleigh talked another half hour. They exchanged emails and phone numbers. The conversation ended with the two ladies hugging.

Wayne watched these two ladies and listened, he only spoke when Debbie-Sue asked him a question. He noticed the local police department drive passed him and park a ways from the resort. His gut told him they were watching over Ashleigh. When Wayne felt Ashleigh was safe: he nudged his wife, they two ladies hugged one another again, they said good bye again, and the couple headed back to the hotel.

Over the years Pete witnessed many bad things as a doorman. He was grateful when Ashleigh was talking to the country couple and was even happier when she stepped into the resort. He enjoyed their conversation and the tip she gave him. He liked Ashleigh but felt Ashleigh would never go out with him. The second person grateful Ashleigh made it back into the resort was Natalie. She immediately waved to Ashleigh. Up until this moment Ashleigh felt proud of herself for "taking a walk at night". When Ashleigh witnessed the relief on her face and body language; this caused Ashleigh to reconsider her attitude. When she reached the elevator she realized the cool couple were watching over her. This made her think about all the times God protected her.

The elevator was busy with men and women getting on and off until she reached her floor. Her heart fluttered with the thought one of her favorite country singers was staying across her suite. She imagined what her life would be like if she took out the card and called him. She wondered if he wanted a relationship or if he wanted a one night stand. Her own

words echoed in her brain; *I'm not that type of girl*. If she called him and spent the night with him, she would again be; *That type of girl*. She hoped one day they would meet again or maybe she would call him a few months from now.

She: pulled out the plastic key to the suite, stuck it into the slot, spotted the light turn on, stepped in, locked the door, threw off her shoes, turned on and off the lights on her way to her bedroom, turned up the dimmer as far as she could, set her purse onto a long dresser, she walked over to the blinds, pulled them shut, she stepped back to where her purse was, pulled out the plastic bag, set it on the dresser, she stepped into the bathroom, she removed her clothes, did her business, washed her hands, glanced at herself, let her hair down, grabbed her clothes from off the floor, stepped out of the bathroom, stepped up to the dresser, spread out the items of the bag, turned, she grabbed the smaller of the two green banana's, and opened the box of condoms.

Some time during this process the card fell onto the dresser.

This was one last temptation.

One of her fears of having a one night stand was taken care off. She could avoid a pregnancy or a venereal disease. She battled with herself for five minutes. Before she would succumb to the battle, she grabbed a condom, tore at the package, and prepared the banana. She needed relief so badly she dropped the condom twice.

Without masturbating she would have broken her commitment to wait until she was married. She was pleased her masturbation sessions were growing farther apart. She concentrated on the physical aspect of her activity and purposely avoided any deep fantasy involving the country star. She was grateful when she received the physical relief she needed. She laid there for a while. She imagined what it would be like to have a guy cuddle with her. She: brushed this thought aside, she temporarily placed the banana on the night stand, stepped to the dresser, opened a drawer, grabbed her pajamas, stepped into the bathroom, took a shower, when she stepped out she was dry, and ready for bed. She: picked up the banana, removed the condom, wrapped both in a paper towel, went into the kitchen, shoved it down into the bottom of the kitchen garbage, went back into her room, hid the condoms in a suitcase, turned on the TV, grabbed her sandwich, her lemonade, and watched a late night episode of *Seinfeld*.

Megan stood on the stern of her houseboat, she was leaning up against the pole with the stool attached to it. The oranges and yellows looked awesome over: the ocean, the beach, the bike path, she watched a group of bikers race by, Mikes house, the parking lot, the marina, and she watched the people of the marina. She took a drink of water

Her dimples flashed.

People from the marina waved to her. A number of people who lived or owned vessels on the marina talked with her. The conversation was surrounding their new neighbor. A couple from New Jersey stood next to one another gazing at the sunset. She envied Barbara for being married to a guy who truly loved her. Soon the evening was replaced by stars and a quarter moon. The Jersey couple and Megan talked briefly. After their conversation the couple went back to their houseboat. This was on what everyone considered the third pier; it was the one closest to the mansions. Megan felt a slight breeze and the temperature drop. To her it made the night cool, to all the northern tourists they felt the night was just right. Megan was

far from complaining because in the next four months cool nights were rare.

Megan stood with her arms crossed.

Megan: loved the ocean, loved living near her family, loved the way she made a living, loved her friends, enjoyed her good neighbors, and could never imagine moving away from Eastbank.

She was smart enough to know Eastbank was changing and growing. This was evident by the growth of the police station, box stores were added two years earlier on the west side of town, two national sit down restaurant chains opened, and a multiplex theater was opened near the box stores. Megan liked the fact her town still had it's mom and pop stores. This was due to the tourist type stores selling: antiques, ice cream, trinkets, and other things tourists liked. The mom and pop stores locals used included: the hardware store, a jewelry store owned by the same family for five generations, the thrift store Megan adored, an old style theater, a twelve lane bowling alley, local bars, bait shops, a sporting goods store, local mechanics, just south of town her brother Timmy's boat repair and mechanics shop, there was the bookstore designed for both locals and tourists, and one of Megan's favorites was the flower shop still being run by Simon's Momma.

What Megan liked about Simon's Momma was no matter what happened between Simon and herself; Megan was always a welcomed visitor. It took a while but even the oldest sister enjoyed Megan coming in. Simon and his middle sister long ago moved. Simon ended up being a professional baseball player; he ended up with the Kansas City Royals. After working so hard the minor leagues, he was disappointed to only be a bit player for a year. He was now married, had two boys and a girl, and owned a large local jewelry store chain in Kansas City. Megan sometimes wished she was the wife and the kids were theirs. Megan felt this was unfair and unwise to hold onto such thoughts and feelings. Megan honestly hoped he was happy.

Megan wondered if she would have a family of her own. This caused her to feel a tinge of loneliness and some sadness. Looking at the night sky she wished the stars would line up and she would end up with an honorable man. It seemed to her the Christian men she knew were always interested in someone else. To have a man who loved her for who she was a personal dream of hers.

She started to tear.

The pain of being lonely caught her. In this moment she recalled the Junior prom when she thought Simon was going to ask her out and instead asked out Gracie. She relived the pain of the martial arts instructor in college. Megan liked him and felt they were starting to have a relationship, but caught him having sex with a fellow student in his office. There were the other guys she would start to like and they would end up asking out other women. She felt the disappointment of the only person who wanted a relationship with her were two women. A friend from college and Gina. Megan understood why Gina was hurt when she turned her down; especially since Megan had lived the experience of liking someone and finding out they were uninterested in a relationship. Still, being accused of being a lesbian when she was a straight female was sometimes hurtful and difficult.

She reminded herself: she was the cool aunt, she enjoyed owning her own business, and rested on the fact she was loved by her family. She was honest enough to recognize her family was imperfect but without a doubt they loved one another.

She: stepped into the living quarters of her boat, and locked the door behind her. She

went through: the lounge, the galley, turned on the light, sat down at her kitchen table, she picked up her journal, and she reread what she wrote earlier. She wrote: about the time Michelle tried to seduce her, how this incident convinced Megan she was straight, what frightened her about sex, wrote in great detail about the type of man she was looking for, and a paragraph on what it felt like for people to believe she was a lesbian.

She wanted to get over her fear of sex. She decided she would conquer her fear just like she prepared for a sporting event. The question was how to do so without losing her virginity. She believed she needed to start studying the subject; she was unsure of how. She considered trying masturbating again. She wondered why any woman would waste their time doing it and why women liked it; to Megan it was nothing special. Many of her college friends talked about how wonderful it was and many of her friends suggested she buy a sex toy; there was no way she would ever use one. She knew she needed to address her feelings toward sex but was unsure of how.

She knew if she wanted to fall in love and get married she would have to take the risk of being hurt again. Being hurt again was a difficult thing to face. What she hoped for was to meet a very loyal guy who would never cheat. She mentally pictured herself loving a guy and the guy falling in love with someone else. She knew of men she could show interest in, and they would go out with her; but these men were either just after sex or had issues she was unwilling to deal with.

She looked at her galley clock.

She: stopped writing, stepped into her cabin, and prayed about everything she wrote about. Once she was done with her prayer she pulled all the blinds tight and opened one window a hair to allow the breeze in. Earlier in the evening she turned the air off. Once she was sure no one from the outside could see in she removed her clothes, placed them into the hamper, and crawled into bed.

She tried to recall the first time she slept in the nude, she was unable to remember the circumstances, but for her it was the most comfortable way to sleep. She reached up and turned off the light. Laying there she made her tentative plans for the next day. She imagined how the charter with the police officers would go. She made a mental list of all the items she would purchase at the grocery store after her charter; unless the guys from the police force invited her into town. She reviewed which guys on the police force she would want to date. The one guy she would consider dating was out of the question due to family history.

Her dimples flashed.

She imagined the sugar daddy and the young woman moving next door. She rolled her eyes and spoke a quick prayer.

In the process of thinking about each family member she fell asleep.

End of Part Four of Four

Thursday June 1st, Megan

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