



Ashleigh & Megan Book I: Friendship

*Friday April 7th,
Decisions*

*Day 12 of Book I
(Sixty Days after Bob Meets Susan King)*

Part One of Six

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format I call, "A 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." 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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April 7th, Decisions

Day 12 of Book I

(46 days after Nicole Meets Bette)

Megan: reached over and turned off her alarm, flipped over the covers, glanced at the blinds, stepped into the galley, and pored herself a cup of coffee. She set the coffee cup onto the table, stepped back into her cabin, opened the French doors of her closet, opened a drawer, selected boyshort panties, slipped them on, selected a sports bra, and put this on.

She had: long dark blond hair, an inverted triangle shaped face, and dark blue eyes; the were so dark they often appeared plum. She disliked her long celestial nose. She hated it's bend to the left and it's natural bump just above her nostrils. This bend was created when she broke her nose playing collegiate volleyball. 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, long jaw line, and 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 thin lips. She took care of her straight teeth.

She was: six feet tall, had an athletic body, long legs, and small breasts. Her toned body and small girl muscles were created by participating in athletics and hard work. It was obvious she took aerobic exercise and eating correctly seriously. She felt: her breasts were to small, her quarter sized areolas were to big, her nipples were to long, and felt her uneven breasts made them look horrendous. Because of the round shape of her breasts this size difference was difficult to notice.

A top fantasy of hers was imagining what it would feel like to have a guy kiss and suck on her breasts. With how responsive her breasts were when she touched them she imagined a guy kissing them would be arousing. At one time; she imagined Christopher being the first guy to kiss them on their wedding. She was no longer convinced Christopher was the guy for her.

She: slipped on a well worn pair of pine colored athletic pants, added a white and pine colored matching athletic tank, grabbed a pair of athletic socks, and a pair of Adidas running shoes. This tank allowed everyone to see her girl muscles. These pants highlighted her buttock and her long athletic legs. She felt her buttock and her legs were her best physical traits. These two features caught the attention of both men and lesbians.

She considered herself a heterosexual woman. She was handling compliments from both men and women better. What she still believed, was no matter if a male or female paid her a compliment; a person should act appropriate. Her Sister-in-law Nicole and her best friend Ashleigh were teaching her what was appropriate and inappropriate when someone approached her. The women Megan credited with helping her through her sexual struggles included: her sister-in-law Diana, her lesbian neighbor Gina, her neighbor Florence, her favorite Sister-in-law Nicole, a friend from college named Krissy, and her best friend Ashleigh.

Being a virgin at twenty-eight was sometimes awkward. There was a time, where she felt tempted to have sex with a guy so people would stop accusing her of being a lesbian. It was Ashleigh and Florence who helped her understand, even if she slept with a guy, there were people who would believe she was a lesbian. There were people within her Christian community who wanted to exalt her for being a virgin. She never wanted attention for being one because she felt this was what God preferred. She dealt with this attention gracefully. Many of her secular friends felt she was being naive and was keeping herself from being happy. Based upon all of the people who regretted having sex before they were married; it was easy for her to believe she was wise in waiting to have sex. This never stopped her desire to have good sex once she was married.

She was forever grateful for Nicole, Diana, and Ashleigh answering her sexual questions. Without these three ladies she believed she would still be struggling with the basic understanding of sex. She was thankful Ashleigh encouraged her to purchase educational books about sex. She was forever grateful for her friend Krissy. Krissy encouraged Megan when she experienced her first orgasm while riding a horse.

The previous week Megan called Krissy. She wanted advice related to: watching porn, fetishes, graphic sex dreams, and Christopher. It was nice to talk to someone who lived a couple hours away. Krissy gave her some of the same perspectives as others but she gave different advice. Megan appreciated this advice and took a great deal of what she said to heart.

She: slipped on her socks and shoes, tied her shoes, zipped down the side zippers of her running pants, stood up, went to the head of her houseboat, did her business, once done she washed her hands, brushed her teeth, put her long dark blond hair into a pony tail, spotted one long hair in her eyebrows, grabbed it, yanked it out; her face cringed. She stepped into her galley and looked up at the clock.

Julie asked Megan if she wanted to go with her when she walked Nikita.

Her plans after were: taking a shower, dressing casual, going out for breakfast with Ashleigh, and taking an hour road trip to a "boutique." The only human being Megan felt comfortable going with was Ashleigh; she was to uncomfortable going by herself. She set aside personal time after this shopping trip and before her first mate would arrived. Once he arrived

the two of them would prepare for an evening charter. Based upon previous notes this group liked fishing into the early morning.

She took a drink of her coffee.

Her dimples flashed.

She: went back to her cabin, took out a Miami Dolphin baseball cap, made sure her pony tail went through the back of the hat, grabbed her fanny pack, clipped it on, opened a drawer, grabbed a pair of sunglasses she often exercised in, shut the drawer, closed the closet doors, went back to the head, applied sunblock, stepped into her galley, grabbed a water bottle, filled it with ice cubes, then with water, slipped it into the sleeve designed for the water bottle, and headed out of her houseboat.

Her plan was to wait for Julie by the wooden pier. The least thing she wanted was to deal with Ashleigh's brother Bob. Since dating Susan he no longer complimented her or asked her out. This both impressed her and bothered her. She questioned the reason for these compliments. Were these compliments of good faith or was he hitting on her to date her; Megan believed these were two different motives. She respected him more with the idea, he was avoiding complimenting her, because he was dating Susan.

She was impressed he would fly to Wisconsin to visit his son. She knew of many dads and moms who skipped out of visitations and they lived near their child. What bothered Megan was having the mother of his son living in Wisconsin and Bob owning a house there. She knew of many wealthy people who owned multiple houses across the nation and even across the Atlantic. She felt it was too easy to cover up an affair. Megan felt it was highly likely the mother would seduce him; she reminded herself this was Susan's problem.

She reminded herself she was still dating Christopher.

She reached the wooden pier. While standing there she looked at Julie's bike. Biking was the one exercise she stopped after graduating college. She often used the exercise bike at the YMCA but it had been a long time since she rode a regular bike. She believed Bob was generous to give Julie this bike as a Christmas gift. Megan inspected it. She believed Julie was taking very good care of the bike. She looked up the steps when she heard the second deck door open; Bob and Ashleigh used this as the main entrance into the yacht.

Julie's: left hand was up against the shower wall, water was spraying everywhere, she was verbal, she tensed up, her body convulsed, and the release made her shudder. She managed to hang the water picket. She placed both hands against the wall, the water was running off her, she craved this afterglow, and hated it when it ended. This is when: she stood up, soaped her hands, did one last wash, did a quick rinse, turned the water off, and stepped out of the shower.

She now felt ready to face the day.

Saturday was her favorite day to walk Nikita. With there being very little pressure to get home she normally took photographs. Because she was walking the dog with Megan, she would leave her camera hidden in her bedroom.

She: dried her growing six foot athletic body, slipped on her panties, a brand new white pair of athletic crop pants, she liked them because she could tie the bottom, felt these were perfect for biking to the yacht and running Nikita, slipped on a pink colored sports bra, over this she added a pink colored athletic tee with more support, adjusted both; with how large

her breasts were this was a necessity. She: opened a drawer, grabbed a hair dryer, quickly dried her dark wavy hair, once dry she put the hair dryer away, brushed and flossed her teeth.

She looked older than fifteen. What caused her to look older was her: height, rectangular shaped face, wider jawline, beautiful greenish blue eyes, naturally winged shaped dark eyebrows, roman style nose, developed female form, and overall maturity. Julie had small dimples. When she smiled her upper lip moved upward to show the top row of her naturally straight teeth.

The advertising firm Mr. Bob owned, was looking for an athletic female teenager for an athletic catalog. Mr. Bob and Ms. Ashleigh knew how models were treated so they never referred her. Mr. Bob's firm would have certainly treated her well, not just because Mr. Bob knew Julie, but because it was policy to treat models correctly. Both Ashleigh and Bob believed after appearing in this catalog she would be hounded by other agencies; Ashleigh and Bob mistrusted these agencies. They wanted people to notice Julie for her intelligence and her athletic ability.

When she was finished she rushed out of the bathroom and into her room. On the way she noticed her Sister's bedroom door was ajar. She shut her Sister's bedroom door before her shower. She worried her little sister Ester or Ester's friend Danielle might sneak into her room. There were many reasons she wanted everyone to stay out of her bedroom.

She: opened the door to her bedroom, stepped in, shut the door behind her, went over to her closet, slid open the door, selected the white jacket that matched her cropped pants; she liked it because of the pink trim and the pink string hanging off of the zipper. She reached down and grabbed her backpack. When she stood up she banged her head on the top of the closet. She: immediately put her hands on her head, dropped the backpack, the jacket landed on the floor, cringed, teared a little, and believed she would have a bump. This was the first time she ever bumped her head on the top of the closet. When the pain was over she: picked up the jacket and backpack off the floor, set these items on her queen sized bed, untied and slipped off her pants, set these cropped pants onto the bed, stepped over to her dresser, opened her pants drawer, dug through, found a pair jeans she wore a few weeks prior, slipped them on, zippered them, buttoned them; they fit wrong. She stepped in front of the full length mirror attached to the wall next to her closet. She looked at the bottom of her pants and sighed. From this eye test she believed she was growing again.

This worried her. She was concerned her breasts would grow again. Anytime she grew taller her breast became larger. She pulled her t-shirt tight and stood sideways. She would have given anything if they were again a smaller C cup. What made her breasts look larger was how in shape she was. She was truly resenting her own breasts. She hoped her breasts never became as large as her Momma or her Friend Bobbi-Sue. She liked her breasts when they were a more rounded shape and her aerosols were smaller. She disliked how they transformed from a round shape to a banana shape; more disturbing was the growth of her aerosols. She disliked their reaction when she became aroused. She reminded herself: there was nothing she could do about their size or shape, many of the girls in her school were envious of them, guys became hard looking at them, and she was aware some guys specifically looked for women with her breast shape. She felt fortunate to have an understanding Momma who purchased expensive sports bra's so she could continue playing sports. She dressed modest to avoid any unwanted attention.

She: let go of her shirt, took off her jeans, tossed them into her hamper, stepped over to her bed, slipped her athletic pants back on, again tied them, with it being sixty degrees she slipped on her jacket, swung the backpack over her shoulder, went over to her dresser, grabbed her sports watch, put it on, opened the top drawer, took out a small box, selected a pair of sunglasses, opened a pocket of her backpack, placed the glasses in a case she kept in this pocket, slipped it back into the bag, zipped up the bag, stepped out of her room, ran down the stairs, turned on the light of the hallway, rushed into the kitchen, turned on the light to the kitchen, turned off the light to the hallway, stepped over to the refrigerator, opened it, grabbed the two water bottles she used for her bike, opened a drawer, took out an apple, and a yogurt.

She spotted a small shadow enter into the kitchen.

She: shut the refrigerator door, looked at her sister, and approached her.

Jeff: stepped out of his room, walked across the kitchen, and opened the refrigerator.

Julie asked, "What's the matter?"

Ester gave her a concerned look, "Y'all are sick?"

Julie thought her little sister lost her mind, "Why do Y'all feel I'm sick?"

"Every morning Y'all are sick."

This caught Jeff's attention.

Julie gave a face, "I ain't understanding."

"When you take showers you moan and make noises. You must have a tummy ache."

Jeff started to laugh.

Julie blushed.

Ester upset at her brother asked, "Why are Y'all laughing?!"

Of course this made Jeff laugh more.

Julie turned and pointed, "Don't Y'all say a word."

"Everyone knows Y'all do it all the time."

Julie snipped back, "I'm sure Y'all do it."

Jeff answered, "At least I ain't enjoying it the girls bathroom."

Ester asked, "Enjoying what?"

Julie scolded, "Not with Ester here."

Ester feeling belittled stated, "I'm telling Momma."

Jeff seriously said, "Y'all should tell Momma."

Julie grabbed Ester and said, "Wait a second."

"Ouch."

"I'm sorry."

Ester gave Julie a face, "Momma says I should tell her anytime Y'all are sick or hurting."

This concerned Jeff.

He asked, "Why?"

He was still standing with the refrigerator door open.

"I'm to tell her if Y'all are hurt."

Jeff scolded, "You better not."

Ester felt trapped.

Julie gave Jeff a look.

Jeff took the milk out and went to the counter but was listening and watching. The door to the refrigerator shut. He turned on a light and prepared himself a bowl of cereal.

Julie bent down and asked real nice, "Why does Momma want Y'all to tell her when we're sick?"

"She told me. Y'all pretend to be okay when Y'all are hurt. She ain't wanting Y'all to play sports when Y'all are hurt."

Jeff answered, "It's up to us if we should play or not."

In a defiant tone Ester answered, "I listen to Momma and Daddy."

She looked at Julie and said, "I'm telling Momma about your tummy ache."

Jeff snickered, "It ain't her stomach."

Julie glared at her brother.

Ester concerned asked, "Y'all have cancer?"

Julie was going to lie. She thought about how her Momma talked to her. All at once she believed she felt what her Momma must have felt when she talked to her.

"Let's go into the den."

"Why?"

"This is a woman to woman question."

This interested Ester but she crinkled her forehead.

"You and Momma told me where babies come from."

Jeff laughed.

Ester in a frustrated voice said, "Momma says it's serious."

Julie took her hand and glared at her older brother.

Julie snipped, "It's serious. Big brothers shouldn't laugh when they do it too."

Jeff was about to respond.

She stopped him by saying, "Don't say it. It ain't any different."

He let it go.

She led Ester into the den and shut the door.

She knelt down. Kneeling she was still taller than her eleven year old sister.

"I don't have a lot of time. So listen."

Ester answered, "Okay."

"Remember when Momma and I talked to you about growing up and having babies."

Ester's eyes went big, "Yes."

"Remember when we talked about masturbation."

Ester made a face.

Julie pointed to herself, "I sometimes masturbate in the shower."

Ester tried to sound mature.

"Why would Y'all masturbate?"

Julie needed to restrain herself from giggling; Julie being an understanding big sister held it in.

"As your body changes it feels good to touch it. Momma and I told you it was okay if you touched yourself."

She made a face, "I don't."

"You don't have too. But it's okay for others to touch themselves."

Ester would think about this.

"I shouldn't be so loud."

Ester answered, "Okay."

"Let's say you started to touch yourself."

Ester again made a face, "Okay."

"When you get bigger you might want to."

"Why?"

"Like I said before. As your body changes it feels good. Plus..."

She stopped herself. She felt if she went any further it would be inappropriate.

"What?"

"Let's pretend Y'all are my age and you touched yourself."

Ester made a face.

"You think Y'all would want other people to know you did? Worse! Kids would tell others Y'all are touching yourself?"

Julie hoped Ester would get this.

"I wouldn't like it."

"I promise to be more quiet. It's wrong of me to wake Y'all up. I ask you'd promise to never tell anyone I'm masturbating."

"How are Y'all touching yourself?"

Julie thought of her promise.

"When your older and you've figured it out then we'll talk."

"Okay."

"With Y'all being more grown up. I know you'll keep our conversation private. Then I'll tell you how I do it."

"Okay."

Julie said from the heart, "When you start too."

"I ain't wanting to."

Julie smiled, "It's okay if you don't. But if you do. Only do it in private."

"It's what Momma says."

"Yes she does."

"I have to go."

"Julie."

Julie answered, "What?"

"I promise I won't tell anyone."

Julie hugged her.

Ester was unsure of why her big sister hugged her, but she gladly hugged back.

Julie let go, stood up, and stepped out of the den.

Ester followed.

Julie suggested, "Why not go back to bed."

"I'm hungry."

"Okay."

Julie and Ester stepped into the kitchen. They observed Jeff sit back down at the table with a second bowl of cereal. She made a mental note to ask Jeff what he heard. At the current moment she wondered why he was up.

She asked, "Why are Y'all up?"

"I'm riding with Bette's family to Fort Lauderdale."

Ester asked, "Why?"

Jeff was about to ignore the question but Julie asked, "Why?"

“Auntie Diana wants Ms. Sherry to meet a director of a museum. While Ms. Sherry is visiting with her the rest of us are seeing other things.”

Ester asked, “Like what?”

“A car museum and a crime museum. Other things.”

“Oh.”

Julie headed toward the door that led out to the garage.

She heard Ester ask, “Is Bette your girlfriend?”

This caused Julie to stop at the door and look at Jeff.

She expected Jeff to be childish.

Instead Jeff showed some maturity, “Yes she is.”

Ester smiled, “I like her.”

Jeff was surprised, “Y’all like her?”

“She played Uno with me and she helped me make a bracelet.”

She became excited, “Y’all want to see it?”

“Later.”

“Oh.”

With this Julie: opened the door, stepped into the garage, shut the door, hit the garage door opener, the light turned on, she went around the mini-van and the truck, and stepped to where her bike was. Even with the sun starting to rise she felt she would need to use her bike light. She: took out a hair tie, tied her hair in a pony tail, grabbed the helmet off of the bike, checked it for bugs and spiders, put it on, she opened a pocket of her backpack, took out a rag she kept in her backpack, wiped the seat of, put it back into the bag, zipped it up, slipped it on her shoulders, mounted her bike, rode it to the outside garage door panel, hit a button, the garage door started to fall, while it was dropping she biked out of the garage, and was headed to the yacht.

On Saturday, unless she had a softball game or a morning practice, she had more time to walk Nikita. Because of her talk with her brother and Ester she had less time than she wanted; she pushed herself. To accomplish what she wanted she went through: the old part of Eastbank, through downtown, and back to the yacht. She collected mail at three abandoned houses; one of them had realtor sign up. She would research this in a couple days.

On the east side of town she visited a newer corporate gas station. She: quickly locked her bike in the bike racks, went into the gas station, went directly to the ATM, opened her back pack, looked through an envelope filled with bank cards, took out the one she wanted, took out a large sum of money, hid the money in her bag, left the gas station, went to three credit unions, and a bank. One of these credit unions was owned by Mr. Bob’s company. The second credit union was where her childhood savings account was. She stopped at a new credit union. Then biked up to a brand new bank that was built across the street from where *County Road One* started and across from the old broken down municipal sign. She used each financial institutions ATM’s. She fulfilled the plan she prepared the night before.

When she was finished at the last bank she briefly checked the horizon, took note of a slightly choppy ocean. There were a couple people walking along the beach. She spotted a runner and a group of bikers headed south. She spotted Earnest running north. This confirmed an idea. She focused and biked to the yacht. She: turned into the marina, biked to the yacht, stopped at the front of the wooden pier, slipped off her back pack, took out her expensive bike lock, locked up her bike, put her helmet into the bag, zipped the backpack up,

opened a small pocket, took out her keys, closed this pocket, went up the stairs to the main entrance, heard Nikita behind the door, using the yacht key she quickly opened the door; Nikita was there to greet her.

Julie: briefly greeted Nikita, she stepped into the galley, and Nikita followed close behind.

Bob was standing over the kitchen table looking down at sheets of paper. It was obvious they were filled with double spaced printing. She restrained herself from asking what he was reading. On the side was an organic cereal box and an empty bowl with a spoon in it. She was happy he was no longer eating unhealthy cereal. She assumed Ashleigh was buying the groceries.

Bob without looking up asked, "How's your morning?"

She answered, "It's good. Where's Ashleigh?"

"She's taking a shower and getting ready."

Julie stepping through the galley heading toward Nikita's closet.

Bob: looked up from his sheets, stood up, turned, and stopped her.

"Ms Julie."

"Yes sir."

"I've heard your softball team is doing well."

"We'll should have a better season. We're eight and seven. We've lost a lot of close games. Games I wish I'd have played better."

"Are you playing your best?"

"Yes sir."

"I've heard your a team captain."

"Yes sir."

"I've heard this doesn't happen very often with a sophomore."

"No sir."

Bob asked, "I understand you have five games left."

"We need to win all five just for the chance to get into the regional tournament."

"When is your next game?"

"It's at seven tonight."

Bob was checking his information, "At the high school baseball stadium?"

"Yes. We're playing Boca Rotan."

"I've heard they have an excellent team."

She sighed.

"They're winning the division by two games."

"I have another question."

"Yes Sir."

"I was unaware Florida has flag football for girls."

"Yes Sir."

"Why don't you play?"

"There ain't any scholarship for flag football. I have a chance at a softball scholarship."

"Makes sense."

"If colleges had girls flag football I'd love to play."

She made a face and her body language was filled with frustration.

"Why the frustration?"

"Momma doesn't want me to play both. I'd have to pick one or the other. The coach of the flag football team said he'd work with my softball schedule."

"You should listen to your mother."

Disappointed she said, "Yes sir."

"I wouldn't be to disappointed."

"Why?"

"I would hate to see a young lady get hurt playing flag football and miss a chance at that softball scholarship."

"What are Y'all meaning?"

"There will be a couple college scouts there tonight."

Julie immediately became a giddy teenager.

"Really? They don't watch Eastbank games."

"There is interest in a young lady who is very smart who happens to excel at sports."

She was tingly inside and was determined to play at a higher level. Her notch below was above most girls playing at their top level; not just softball but every sport.

"Here's my suggestion."

"Yes sir."

"Just play like you always have. I don't believe I need to tell you. But I'm going to tell you anyway. Remember the team comes first."

"Yes sir."

"One of the reasons this young lady has been noticed is because of how hard this young lady plays on some poor teams. There is a rumor she is patient with her teammates. She's always helping others improve."

He pushed up his glasses.

"Blames herself instead of blaming others."

She said from the heart, "If I played better we'd win."

"Did you ever consider how poor the team would be without you?"

"Mr. Bob. Others have told me the same thing."

"You don't believe it?"

Very serious, "No sir. If I was playing well we'd win."

Bob pushed up his glasses.

"That doesn't always happen."

"Yes sir."

"No matter if you believe me or not. You play well tonight."

Very serious Julie answered, "I promise."

She headed to what was called Nikita's closet.

Bob smiled and turned back to the current book he was writing.

This is when a barely awake Ashleigh stepped into the galley carrying a laptop. This interested Julie.

Ashleigh: glanced up, paused, and looked again. She believed the difference between Julie's height and the door top were changing. Ashleigh turned away before Julie noticed she was staring at her.

Ashleigh was in a conservative looking plaid tunic. Julie liked the overall cream color, she liked how the stripes were wide, were in a diagonal pattern, and there were a small amount of them. Most were: gray, blue, white, and one or two were red. Along the neck line

and under the breasts was a wide dark blue continuous stripe; this of course is what made it a tunic. Her breasts were noticeable but nothing obnoxious. Ashleigh was trying to monochrome her outfit by wearing a brand new blue pair of bootcut jeans. These jeans matched many of the blue curved downward stripes of the tunic. She was wearing some makeup and her hair was set nice. She was wearing homemade dangling red earrings. These matched the red stripes of the tunic. She was also wearing bracelets with red beads on them. On the other wrist she was wearing a watch with a red band.

Julie wished she could wear the cute tops Ashleigh wore. Because of the size and shape of her breasts a tunic would have been uncomfortable and inappropriate.

Julie watched Bob: glance at Ashleigh, he read a few more sentences, stopped reading, and started to organize the sheets on the table.

Julie grabbed the pooper scooper and ignored the leash.

When she shut the door Nikita ran to Julie's backpack. A few days prior Julie purchased a leash designed for running with a dog. Nikita knew there was a leash in Strong Scent's bag. She sat down and waited, her tail was a weapon. She loved "walks" and "lets fly."

Julie reached her bag. She always placed it on the floor in front of the short side of the China cabinet.

Julie asked, "Y'all buy a new laptop?"

"I bought it yesterday."

"What operating system are Y'all using?"

"Windows XP. Why?"

"I'm happy Y'all didn't choose Vista."

Ashleigh answered serious, "Terri said I should avoid it."

"Who's Terri?"

Bob pushed up his glasses and spoke with a tone, "Our IT director."

Julie stated, "She's right."

Bob looked up from his paperwork and asked, "What's your opinion of Apple?"

Julie answered, "It'd be great for Y'all art departments but not for day to day business."

Ashleigh smiled, "That's how we have our computers set up."

Julie smiled, "I noticed Y'all accepted my friend request."

"Felicia made me sign up for Facebook."

Julie's eyes became wide, "Everybody's getting on it. What's cool. Is all you need is an email."

Julie gave a concerned look, "Y'all have email?"

Ashleigh with a face answered, "I signed up for it didn't I?"

Julie felt stupid, "I guess you did."

Ashleigh clarified, "I have a work email and a *Yahoo* account."

Julie added, "Many people like their start up page."

"It's how I check the weather in Wisconsin."

Bob mentioned, "You should see a movie called *Roller Ball*. It discusses a world where all of the worlds information is stored on a computer. In the movie the computer losses the seventieth century."

Ashleigh commented, "You own the DVD."

He looked at Julie, "You promise to return it?"

Julie smiled, "Of course."

Ashleigh rolled her eyes and asked.

“This isn’t going to turn into another one of your debates?”

Bob answered, “That’s the point.”

Julie smiled and showed a very confident body posture.

“These discussions have helped me in school.”

Ashleigh in a sarcastic tone answered, “I’m sure they have.”

Bob asked, “Have you thought about joining the debate team?”

“Sports gets in the way. Besides. It wouldn’t be fair for the other team if I joined.”

Ashleigh rolled her eyes and shook her head. She wondered if her brother was a good influence.

She interrupted the conversation on purpose, “What’s Excel?”

“I believe it’s Microsoft’s new spreadsheet.”

Bob added, “Terri was saying it’s a good program.”

Julie asked, “How did Y’all get the new office suit?”

“One of the guys at work put it on for me.”

Bob spotted Megan walking on the first pier. He took note of how she was dressed. He turned away because he was dating Susan.

Nikita headed for the door.

Bob announced, “Megan is walking up the pier.”

Julie stated, “I have to go. Auntie is walking Nikita too.”

She paused and turned toward Ashleigh.

“Momma wanted to remind Y’all. Your Foster Momma and your sister are invited to the women’s Bible Study on Monday. Momma is inviting the whole family over for dinner. Her plan was to make them something before the game.”

Ashleigh smiled, “My Foster Dad likes baseball. Would you mind if we watched you play?”

Julie smiled, “I’ve been wanting to meet Felicia. I’m hoping we’ll all would hang out together.”

Ashleigh asked, “How do you know her?”

“We’re friends on Facebook.”

Ashleigh asked, “How did that happen?”

“Because we’re friends on Facebook I could friend Felicia.”

Ashleigh stated, “Let’s not assume we’re all invited over to your house.”

“If Y’all arrive before four they’d be welcomed to dinner.”

Ashleigh asked with a curious look, “Are you inviting them?”

Julie smiled, “Last night Momma and Daddy talked about having them over today. But she was worried they might be tired from the flight. But if Y’all eat before the game I don’t feel there would be a problem.”

Bob stated, “They’re taking the same charter I fly to and from Wisconsin. They’ll be on time.”

“Yes sir.”

She focused on her backpack, looked up at Ashleigh, “Y’all could go with us?”

Ashleigh answered in a very serious tone, “I attended her aerobics class the other day. I could barely walk yesterday.”

Julie mentioned, “With Y’all exercising Y’all are a lot more toned.”

Ashleigh winked, "I better with how you two work me out."

Julie was absolutely serious, "Y'all should try Auntie's advanced step aerobic class."

Ashleigh crinkled her forehead.

Nikita made noises at the door.

Bob stated, "I'll get the DVD."

"Okay Mr. Bob."

"I'll set it on the China Cabinet."

"Yes Sir."

Julie: quickly took out the leash from her bag, grabbed the pooper scooper, and ran to the main entrance of the yacht.

Julie commanded Nikita, "Sit."

She did.

Julie clipped the leash on her, she held onto the leash, commanded, "Come."

The two went running down the stairs.

The door slammed behind her.

Ashleigh asked Bob, "Why do you make her do those reports?"

Bob stated very serious, "She's a genius no one wants to listen too. I believe these reports make her feel important. Plus. I believe they are fun for her."

Ashleigh looked up from her laptop.

"You ever consider these debates are creating a monster?"

Bob smiled, "I'm keeping her interested in school."

Ashleigh glared.

Ashleigh mentioned, "You've heard her. She's told us she'd like to drop out and just get her GED. I feel she means it."

Bob answered, "Of course she does."

"You think she'd pass it without studying?"

"Without a doubt."

This surprised Ashleigh.

Bob answered her look, "What keeps that girl in school is walking the dog, sports, and her Mother."

Ashleigh asked again, "You think she could just walk into the GED office and pass it?"

"She'd ace it."

They looked at one another in silence.

She acknowledged, "You're probably right."

Bob stated, "When you are done with your vacation lets talk about where we'd like Julie to work this summer."

"Okay."

"Is Jeff working with us this summer?"

"Jeff is working construction."

"It'd prepare him for football."

Ashleigh looked at him, "Nicole said they received a call from the University of Wisconsin."

Bob smiled, "That's interesting."

"You wouldn't have anything to do with that?"

"What's a phone call?"

Before Ashleigh would answer.

"Isn't his girlfriend thinking about going there?"

"This is a concern for both Nicole and Sherrie."

Bob asked, "What's the concern?"

"Do I have to mention Felicia being pregnant? Or you having a son with Shelly?"

"There is the possibility they're having sex already."

"Everyone's hoping they'd wait. I don't accuse you of having sex with Susan."

Bob smiled, "It's crossed my mind."

Ashleigh made a face.

Bob laughed.

"It isn't funny."

Bob pushed up his glasses and became serious.

"I'm honoring her."

Ashleigh turned from the laptop screen and looked at him, "This means you're being the brother I grew up with."

"Mom raised me well."

Ashleigh felt it was a good time to ask, "What was Dad like?"

Bob: stood up, walked over to the double sink, stood there, placed a cereal bowl into the sink, turned around, and looked at her.

With an angry tone bluntly stated, "He's a selfish prick. Along with being a lying asshole."

His tone shocked Ashleigh.

She asked with some hurt in her voice, "Do you feel this way because of the affair?"

Bob looked at her step sister.

"It's a part but not the whole."

"Oh."

"He had many affairs. I'm amazed we don't have other siblings."

Ashleigh asked sincerely, "Maybe we should find out?"

"It's just us."

Ashleigh asked, "You checked?"

"Twice."

"You know where he lives?"

He was honest with her, "Not anymore."

"You did?"

"Yes."

Ashleigh managed to ask calmly, "Why didn't you tell me?"

Bob walked over to the table and sat at the end of the table.

"He left you with your mother. He knew what was happening and did nothing."

Ashleigh started to tear.

"He knew?"

Bob answered with some emotion in his voice, "Of course."

Tears streamed down her face.

They looked at one another, "How did he know?"

"I told him."

She brushed tears from her eyes, she was trying to stop her makeup from running, "When?"

"When I was trying for custody. And again when the Anderson's were seeking to be your foster parents."

Ashleigh thought about something, "Didn't the State of Wisconsin know where he was?"

"He disappeared the next day."

"Have you talked to him since?"

"No. He abandoned you. He abandoned me. He abandoned your mother. And he abandoned my Mom. It's one of several reasons I'm honoring Susan. And I never had sex with Patty."

"Why did you sleep with Shelly?"

"Two reasons."

He pushed up his glasses.

"I was struggling as a person and I assumed one day we'd get married."

Ashleigh looked at him, "Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I did."

"Not everything."

"I don't want to know everything related to our father."

He pushed up his glasses.

Bob in a very serious tone answered, "I don't believe he deserves to know anything about you."

Bob stood up and started to collect the papers on the table. Ashleigh very rarely witnessed her brother this upset.

In treatment she came to terms with the idea her real father was a jerk. Instead of dwelling on the fact her real father abandoned her, she embraced the idea her Brother and her Foster Dad were better than her real father. In treatment is where she acknowledged they had been there for her the whole time.

She stood up and hugged her brother.

For one of the few times he hugged back. She was unsure of who was supporting whom and who was comforting whom.

Bob stepped away pushed up his glasses.

"I could have someone find him if you'd like."

She asked, "You sure we don't have any other brothers and sisters?"

"I checked again when you were in high school. There was no trace of where he went or any known siblings."

"Maybe we should check again?"

"Do you want too?"

"What happens if we have a brother or sister that went through what I did?"

"It's why I checked when you were little and when you were in high school."

"If you've checked and don't believe there are others we wouldn't need to check."

Bob pushed up his glasses.

Ashleigh checked one more time, "You don't know where he is?"

"No I don't."

"You don't care to find him?"

"No I don't. It's my belief he knows where I am. But if you'd like to. We can find him."

Ashleigh answered, "Let me think about it."

Bob was honest, "If you approach me I'll do so. Until then I don't feel it's necessary."

"Maybe it'd be good for both of us."

Bob pushed up his glasses, "That is a difficult thing for me to consider."

Ashleigh could understand this. She sat back down in her usual spot Bob put all of his papers into a file folder.

Bob asked, "Would it be better if I stayed in a hotel the next few weeks and have the Anderson's stay here."

"Let's just stick to our plans. I believe they'd feel more uncomfortable if you weren't here. For the first week they're staying in the big resort in town. Why not invite Susan on the trip to Key West."

Bob answered, "She isn't interested."

"Are things going well?"

"I believe so. She just wants to take everything slow."

Ashleigh suggested, "Why not invite Al and Shaye? He's been your best friend for years. I realize it would be short notice."

"It's still not a bad idea."

Ashleigh asked, "You and Shaye get along?"

"As long as Shelly isn't around."

"Why didn't they like one another?"

"Shaye felt we were horrible for one another."

"You can't blame her for that."

Bob answered himself, "I guess it can't hurt to call them and ask."

"I always liked them."

"They liked you too."

"I'm starting to believe the best thing is for me not to go."

"Why?"

"Unless it's an emergency one of us should always be at work."

"Leah and Jimmy are more than capable of running things."

"That isn't my concern."

"What is?"

"What happens if something happens to both of us at the same time? Who's going to run the company?"

Ashleigh and Bob looked at one another.

"We've never discussed that."

Bob answered, "I never considered something happening to us at the same time."

"Are you assuming I'll take over if something happens to you?"

Bob pushed up his glasses, "Who else would?"

"I couldn't run everything."

"You are the only one who believes this."

This hit her.

Bob smiled, "When I'm no longer needed to be involved in the business world. You should run the company."

She glared at him.

With a tone she asked, "Are you making plans for me?"

"Would you be happy with someone else running the company?"

The truth of this was obvious.

Bob in a very serious tone said, "So far. You're the only one I trust running the company."

"I don't believe anything would happen if you took the trip with me. But it's probably a good idea for one of us to always be running the company."

They nodded their heads in agreement.

Bob pushed up his glasses.

Ashleigh pointed out, "We're not exactly busy until after the Fourth."

"You enjoy the yacht and the time with your family."

Ashleigh asked, "Why did you originally want to be here?"

He tried to avoid the question by focusing on his papers.

She was forceful, "Be honest with me. Why did you want to go with us on vacation?"

Bob pushed up his glasses, "I was of the persuasion the Anderson's and myself should patch things up. At one time we worked together. It's a shame we have this tension between us."

"I don't believe you'd need to go on the trip to remove the tension."

"Maybe you're right."

Ashleigh suggested, "Maybe meet us in Key West."

Bob smiled, "I'd rather boat there."

"Why?"

"Have you ever looked at the bridge that runs from Florida to Key West?"

All at once Ashleigh thought about this.

Bob smiled, "You think the bridges along Hwy One are intense. Check out that bridge."

This is when they heard Julie run up the stairs and the door swung open.

Ashleigh focused. She was interested in knowing everything about this bridge.

Bob pushed up his glasses and smiled.

Megan: watched Julie step out of the yacht, Nikita was by her side, she was carrying a pooper scooper with one hand, in the other Julie was holding onto the leash, Nikita was excited on the other end, they ran down the stairs, stepped off the yacht, and met Megan standing by the bike.

Julie stated, "I take her to go potty first."

Megan said, "Let's get it done."

Megan followed Julie. With it being morning she led Nikita near the large fence. Both Megan and Julie glanced at the preserve.

On this morning Nikita was unable to sense them.

Julie picked up the droppings and went over to where the dumpster was. Julie tossed out the droppings and headed to the back of the dumpster.

Megan asked, "What are Y'all doing?"

"Hiding the scooper."

Megan's dimples flashed as she watched Julie hide it between the fence and the dumpster.

Nikita wondered why humans always put her droppings in the thing with all the smells. She was looking forward to hear the command, "walk."

Megan asked, "Where are Y'all talking her today?"

Julie said, "On Saturday I walk her along the beach."

"Isn't there more people on the beach?"

"Nikita is a good girl. She listens."

"What about little ones?"

Julie answered, "She likes em'. She'll listen to me. I bought this leash on account it makes it easier to run with her."

Megan's dimples flashed.

She observed Julie wrap the leash around her waist.

"You ready?"

This upset Nikita. This is where she would get the command to "Walk."

"Where are we headed?"

"I run her to the lighthouse. I play fetch with her. Then we run up to the pier over to the road and back."

Nikita was confused. She heard the word "fetch" this was the wrong place for "fetch" this happened further down the beach near the territory called "lighthouse" or in the yacht territory where there was her "ball." Nikita could smell a "ball" Strong Scent had it with her.

"Okay."

Julie looked down and commanded, "Walk."

This excited Nikita.

The three of them followed the parking lot, stopped at the street, walked across the street, stopped at the bike path, two groups of bikers went racing by, they crossed the bike path, and headed toward the beach.

Julie mentioned, "It's so much better with the city mowing this area."

"I agree."

"Y'all believe Mr. Bob was the reason they mowed it."

"Y'all know it."

Julie stopped just before the grass ended and the beach started.

"Wait a second."

"Alright."

Julie took out her hair tie and put her hair into a pony tail.

This excited Nikita. When Strong Scent played with her fur she knew she'd hear her favorite command.

Julie commanded, "Let's fly."

This surprised Megan, but when Julie and Nikita went running southward she started to run as well. She stayed a few paces behind to observe how the two of them ran together. Megan quickly realized Nikita stayed on the one side; Megan went to the other and kept pace.

Megan asked, "How's softball?"

"We need to win today."

They caught their breaths and focused on running.

Julie spoke, "To have any chance at the regional tournament."

“What’s your record?”

“Eight and seven.”

“Who do Y’all play.”

“Boca Raton.”

They again focused on their breathing.

Megan stated, “I’ve heard they have a good team.”

“When don’t they have a good team?”

They caught their breaths and concentrated on running.

Julie asked, “You ever have a losing season?”

“The first few years of college volleyball were tough. We were always five hundred in high school softball.”

Julie added, “I feel like I’m failing the team.”

“A team is more than one player.”

“I hate losing.”

“I’d worry about Y’all if you liked it.”

Julie understood this.

They focused on their breathing as they continued running.

Megan broke the silence, “But Y’all have to remember part of learning is losing. Y’all never win them all.”

“I should be able to raise the level of play.”

“Y’all do.”

“If I did we’d be winning.”

Megan understood this mentality.

They focused. This is when Megan noticed Julie’s stride seemed to be slightly longer. She glanced over and believed Julie was growing taller.

Nikita liked how Woman Friend was running with them. She was listening for a noise she understood.

Nikita became excited as they neared the lighthouse.

Julie asked, “Did Y’all hear?”

“What?”

“There is a rumor the lighthouse might be restored.”

“Captain was saying something about it.”

“Y’all think Mr. Bob and Ms. Ashleigh are behind it?”

“I’m sure they have an influence.”

They spotted the lighthouse. With both of them knowing they were headed toward the lighthouse they started to speed up; the race was on.

This energized Nikita. Nikita ran as far as her leash would allow.

Megan and Julie were now sprinting. Julie: was caught by surprise when Nikita stopped just before the lighthouse, Julie tucked, hit the beach, rolled, and found herself laying on her backpack.

Nikita: walked up to her, sniffed her face, and then licked it.

It looked awful funny. The concern for her Niece curtailed any laughter.

Megan quickly approached and asked, “Y’all alright?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

Megan reached out her hand, Julie grabbed it, Megan pulled her up, Julie brushed off all the sand, and they looked at one another. For the first time in their lives Julie was looking above Megan's eyes.

"I'm taller."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"Let's check."

Julie dropped her backpack.

The two ladies went back to back.

Julie measured with her hand, "I'm taller."

People on the beach glanced over and snickered.

Megan responded, "Let me check."

Megan recognized her niece was taller. Megan caught a glimpse of her prime being over. In her family she was the primary female athlete. She still was, but it was clear the torch was being passed to her Niece. Megan both respected it and disliked it.

Julie turned, "See."

Megan changed the subject, "Where is she going?"

Julie turned and observed Nikita walking toward the row of trees.

Julie smiled, "She's finding a stick."

Julie commanded, "Sit!"

Nikita listened.

Julie: picked up the backpack, walked up to her, and unhooked the leash.

"Ain't you afraid she'll run away?"

"No."

Julie: unzipped the backpack, quickly wound up the leash, stuck it into her backpack, zipped this pocket up, zippered open another pocket, and took out a bright orange ball made for dogs; it squeaked.

Nikita forgot about the stick. She liked this ball.

"Ready for fetch?"

Julie threw it.

Nikita: ran after the ball, picked it up, ran it back to Julie, and dropped it in front of her.

Julie picked it up and threw it.

Megan asked, "Is your game here?"

"It's at seven o'clock. I have to be there by five."

Nikita brought the ball back.

Julie commanded, "Drop it."

She did.

"Good girl."

Nikita stood up, Julie picked the ball up, and threw it again.

Nikita went running toward the ball.

"How's Amanda?"

Julie looked at her Auntie, "She's struggling."

"What's she saying?"

Julie held in tears, "She ain't talking to me."

"Why?"

"I don't want to hang around the girls she's hanging around with."

Julie picked up the ball and threw it. Nikita went running after it.

Megan commented, "It ain't easy when friends split into different groups."

"It happened to you?"

"Many a time."

Julie gave her Auntie an inquisitive look.

Megan's dimples flashed.

"It ain't easy being a Christian. I didn't want to drink or party. Many times I ended up staying in hotels by myself. There were times when a gal would go with me to see something or just take a walk near the hotel we were staying at."

"What about high school?"

"Youth group helped me get through things."

Nikita brought back the ball.

Julie again picked up the ball and threw it.

Megan decided to tell Julie, "High school was tough."

"Why?"

"With everyone believing I was a lesbian it made it tough."

"With you being straight why was it so tough?"

"Part of it was my fault."

"How?"

"Back then I wasn't able to talk about sex. When kids talked about it I completely avoided the subject. I was both afraid to talk about it and embarrassed."

Nikita brought back the ball.

Julie again picked up the ball and threw it.

"Because of the rumors I questioned if I was gay."

Julie could tell this was difficult for Megan to talk about.

"The rumors increased when I wouldn't sleep with a guy."

"Everyone assumed you liked gals?"

"Yes."

Julie asked, "Did you ever sleep with a gal?"

"I'm still a virgin."

"Some gals feel if you've messed around with a gal Y'all are still a virgin."

Megan answered, "I'd disagree."

Julie assumed Megan would feel this way.

She turned to Nikita, "Y'all are a good girl."

She picked up the ball and threw it again.

Nikita went running after it.

"In college a friend of mine tried seducing me."

Julie was surprised to hear this.

She asked with an excited tone, "What happened?"

"She invited me over for a candlelight dinner."

"Did Y'all know she was a lesbian?"

"Not at all. I thought we were just hanging out."

Julie looked at her Auntie, "Did Y'all leave?"

"I was uncomfortable but I stayed for the dinner."

"If you were uncomfortable why did Y'all stay?"

"I felt if I was a lesbian she'd be the type of gal I'd like to be with."

Nikita dropped the ball.

Julie picked it up and threw it.

"What happened."

"We danced."

Julie imagined her Auntie dancing with another woman; all at once it seemed odd. The idea her Auntie was with Ashleigh was interesting but to imagine her with a different woman seemed odd.

"She led me to her couch and took off my shirt and kissed me."

Julie's eyes became big, "What did Y'all do?"

"I basically ran out of the apartment."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"I wish I would have handled it better."

Nikita dropped the ball.

Julie picked it up and threw it again.

Julie asked, "Have Y'all fantasied about being with a girl?"

Megan blushed.

This surprised Julie, she never witnessed her Auntie lack confidence or blush before.

"Until recently I never even masturbated."

"Y'all didn't even masturbate? Everyone does it."

"I tried it in college because my friends talked about it. I once walked in on a friend doing it."

Julie could easily understand all this, but had to ask, "Was she embarrassed?"

"I was."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"She didn't even cover up."

"Really?"

"I ain't lying."

Julie answered honestly, "I believe you."

Megan stated matter of fact, "She glanced over. Shrugged her shoulders and kept right on going."

"What did Y'all do?"

"I left."

Nikita again dropped the ball. She wondered when Strong Scent would chase the ball too.

Julie picked up the ball and threw it.

Megan decided to say, "I tried it on account my friends were saying how wonderful it was. I didn't find it to be a big deal. The reason being I thought I reached an orgasm but I didn't. I now realize just before I'd go over the edge I'd stop and think this was the orgasm."

"Oh."

They looked at one another.

Again Julie picked up the ball and threw it; like all the other times Nikita went running after it.

Julie asked, "Have Y'all had one?"

“My first time was riding a horse.”

Megan expected Julie to laugh or acted shocked.

Instead; she answered matter of fact, “I’ve heard of other gals having their first orgasm this way.”

“Girls at school?”

Julie answered, “A couple.”

Nikita stopped and looked at seagulls.

Julie whistled.

Nikita looked over at Strong Scent, “No! Don’t chase the birds.”

Nikita turned to look at the seagulls.

Julie said, “We need to get her.”

“Okay.”

Julie shouted, “Stay! Sit!”

Julie quickly picked up her bag and walked toward Nikita.

Nikita knew this meant fetch was over but also knew the walk would continue.

Julie decided to ask, “Do Y’all wonder what sex is like?”

“Of course.”

Megan’s dimples flashed.

She decided to be honest, “It’s why I masturbate.”

Megan stopped Julie.

“There was a time when I was tempted to find a guy and just sleep with em’. I believed if I did people would stop spreading the rumor I was a lesbian. I’m happy I didn’t. It ain’t like I don’t have the desire. But after hearing all the ladies who’ve come up to me and said they wished they would have waited. I’m happy I’m a virgin. This ain’t meaning sex hasn’t been a struggle for me. In many ways it’s more of a struggle since I started masturbating and in other ways sex is less of a struggle for me.”

Megan’s dimples flashed.

“The reason sex ain’t such a struggle is because I was able to talk to people about my struggles.”

Julie smiled. She caught the layers.

“I’m able to talk to Momma.”

“Be grateful for it.”

“You never talked to Ma about sex?”

“Just the basics. Just recently we had a brief conversation. She doesn’t feel it’s right for gals to be talking about it. Especially if they’re Christians.”

Julie made the comment, “The Bible talks about sex all the time.”

Megan became passionate, “The Bible talks about both how splendid it can be and the consequences of it. I hope Y’all decide to wait.”

Julie answered honestly, “I’m still a virgin.”

She left out the part she was feeling the desire to loose her virginity. She was feeling if everyone believed she was a slut why not have sex.

They reached Nikita.

Julie said, “I need to get her leash.”

Megan felt a sudden urge to warn her about pornography. This felt very odd to her. But this was the same feeling she received anytime she felt close to danger or needed to warn someone of their behavior.

Megan's dimples flashed.

"A help was researching sex. There was a flip side I wasn't ready for."

"What was it?"

"What surprised me was finding pornographic websites designed for us ladies."

Julie lied and was somewhat sarcastic, "Wow. Who'd have guessed it."

"I started to read the erotic stories and looking at the nude pictures of men on those sites."

Julie again lied, "I had no idea these things were on the internet."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"I believe if I hadn't stopped looking at porn. I'd have become addicted to it."

"Y'all believe it's possible for a gal to get addicted to porn?"

"Yes. There are times when I still have to fight the desire to go onto the internet and read an erotic story. I hate to admit I do like looking at men's cocks."

"Doesn't it mean Y'all are straight?"

"I'm sure it does. But I can't be a hypocrite."

"How are Y'all being a hypocrite by looking at nude pictures of men? Men are always looking at porn?"

"It's exactly why I'm a hypocrite. I can't be criticizing men for looking at pornographic pictures of women. When I'm logging in and searching for nude pictures of men."

Julie made a face.

Megan blushed.

Again Julie found this odd but was curious what she was going to say next.

"One of the reasons I believe guys ain't finding me attractive is because of the way everyone's paying attention to gals with big boobs or have a trait they like based upon the pictures they're looking at."

Julie sighed, "They like em' bigger."

"I'm sure you've received negative reactions of having larger breasts. Just as I believe guys discount me because I have small boobs."

"What are Y'all meaning?"

Megan blushed again.

Julie was shocked. She had never observed her Auntie being so timid before.

Megan forced herself to continue.

"I started focusing on guys with big cocks. After research I found out most guys ain't as big as in the pictures. When I get married I don't want to be disappointed in my husband. Just as I don't want him to be disappointed looking at my breasts."

Julie respected this and answered truthfully, "Makes sense."

"I'll be honest and say I'm hoping the guy I marry is bigger. But what I've been learning is just because a guy has a big cock ain't meaning he's good at sex. If he ain't willing to give Y'all attention. Sex ain't much fun."

Julie pretended to be ignorant of this, "I've heard the same thing."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"The reason I'm telling Y'all this. Is so Y'all don't go looking on the internet for porn. I'm hoping Y'all stay a virgin. I can't stop Y'all if you starting logging onto the internet. Or start having sex. But I'm hoping Y'all wait."

Brief moment of silence.

Megan made a point to say, "I'm sure if Y'all were struggling with sex Y'all could talk to your Momma. If you don't want to talk to her I'm here for Y'all. I'm telling Y'all this because I know what it's like to struggle with sex."

Julie told a half truth, "I will."

Megan said, "Lets get on with running."

Julie whistled Nikita over.

She ran back with the ball in her mouth.

Julie commanded, "Drop it."

Nikita did so.

Julie: grabbed the ball, placed it into the pocket of her backpack, zipped opened the main part of her backpack, took out the leash, hooked it onto Nikita's collar, tied the leash around her waist, and commanded, "Lets Fly."

The three of them ran to the pier, made a right, made it to the road, and together ran back to the marina.

Once at the pier, Megan offered to take her home, Julie kindly refused because she wanted to bike home.

Megan headed to her houseboat.

Julie: ran up the stairs, briefly talked to Ashleigh, said her good bye to Nikita, said bye to Mr. Bob, and biked home.

Megan headed to her houseboat to shower and meet Ashleigh at the yacht.

April 7th, Decisions

Part One of Six

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Ashleigh & Megan Book I: Friendship

*Friday April 7th,
Decisions*

*Day 12 of Book I
(Sixty Days after Bob Meets Susan King)*

Part Two of Six

Authored By: R. P. Voght

*Posted on ashleighandmegan.com on:
March 20, 2024*

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format I call, "A 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." 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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April 7th, Decisions Day 12 of Book I

Ashleigh pulled into the parking lot.

Megan commented, "It doesn't look open."

"Didn't Nicole say it was open twenty-four hours?"

"Drive up and see when it opens."

Ashleigh nodded her head and drove the Jeep around so Megan could see the door, "There's a sign taped to the door."

Ashleigh crunched her face, "What's it say?"

Megan stepped out of the Jeep, walked up to the glass door, read the sign, and stepped back into the Jeep.

"They'all changed their hours."

Ashleigh asked, "When did they do that?"

Megan's dimples flashed, "Last week."

They looked at one another and made faces.

Ashleigh asked, "When does it open?"

"An hour and a half."

"What do you want to do?"

"Let's wait."

Ashleigh asked, "Should we go back to the restaurant?"

"Not after the meal we just ate."

Ashleigh nodded her head, "It was a great breakfast."

"Y'all ate grits."

"They're growing on me."

Megan pointed, "Let's park over there."

Ashleigh drove the Jeep to the back of the parking lot, she backed the vehicle into a space, it was a few spots from the mall sign. This sign was sitting upon two tall pillars. At the bottom was a large square box with flowers.

Ashleigh mentioned, "I'm glad we stopped at the gas station before coming here."

Megan drank a sip of her coffee.

Ashleigh took a sip of canned iced tea.

She crunched her face, looked at the can, then at Megan, and said, "This doesn't taste like the ice tea you make."

"I use Nicole's receipt."

"I use it too. But it just doesn't taste the same as Nicole's."

"She ain't given us the receipt she uses."

"Next time I'm going to watch how she makes it."

Megan answered, "I've been trying for years. She makes it ahead of time or blocks people from seeing how she makes it."

Megan's dimples flashed.

Ashleigh asked, "How's your coffee?"

Megan's dimples flashed, "The sign on the machine said it was French Vanilla Cappuccino."

"Not exactly it?"

"It wants to be."

They giggled.

They were studying the store and the strip mall. In silence they were processing their doubts.

Ashleigh mentioned, "You look really nice today."

This surprised Megan. After her shower she agonized over what to wear. She felt she was being very provocative and was embarrassed stepping into the restaurant. She chose: a pair of dark blue crop jeans with the bottom's rolled up, she matched this with a cranberry colored bra top t-shirt with a front keyhole just above her breast, over this she was wearing a cream colored sateen halter vest. Her gladiator sandals matched her vest and cropped jeans. She accessorized with: a couple bracelets, cranberry colored dangling earrings, and a light amount of makeup. The only place she ever wore the vest and the crop jeans were in the privacy of her houseboat. These were the tightest jeans she ever wore in public. The vest was the lowest cut top she owned. When she wore this vest in the privacy of her home she never wore a bra; this vest easily teased her nipples. This was why she added the bra top t-shirt; this top was the tightest top she owned.

Megan responded, "I like your top."

Ashleigh made a face, "Does it look good?"

Megan answered, "The stripes match your jeans and they make Y'all look taller."

This pleased Ashleigh.

Megan took a sip of her not so good tasting gas station coffee.

They were staring at the store.

"You wouldn't know what they sold by the outside."

Ashleigh added, "It's the best adult book store I've ever seen."

Ashleigh corrected herself with a sarcastic tone, "It's called a Boutique."

They laughed.

Megan asked seriously, "What's the difference?"

"At a guess?"

Megan answered, "I'd like to hear what Y'all think."

"It emphasis lingerie and toys. Without the porn. I don't believe Nicole would recommend a place with porn."

"She's against it."

Ashleigh asked, "Are you still struggling with it?"

Megan knew she meant well, "I'm no longer fighting the urge to look at nude men. What I'm struggling with is reading erotic stories. I've had to stop researching sexual topics."

"Why?"

"It's becoming an aid in my private times. I've answered all the questions in the fantasy book. I'm working out my struggles with prayer and writing in my journal."

Ashleigh answered, "I get excited watching romantic movies. There are way more hot guys here."

Megan answered, "A lot of guys run on the beach."

"That's what I'm talking about."

They looked at one another.

They sat in silence for a few moments.

Megan asked, "Talking about guys. Has Marcus asked Y'all out?"

"It's torture going to the early church service."

"Even after showing him your tags?"

Ashleigh asked, "It was just a coincidence he was at the police station when I needed to show my license plates."

They looked at one another and giggled.

When they stopped Ashleigh said seriously, "I can tell his fiance really hurt him."

"Makes sense why he'd be reluctant to ask Y'all out."

"What about Christopher?"

Megan's dimples flashed.

"I ain't sure it's working out."

"He still isn't talking?"

"When we're in a group he talks but he seems to have his tongue locked when we're together."

"He was outgoing at the costume party?"

"It's what I'm meaning. He was outgoing there but when we took a walk along the pier his tongue was locked."

"Uh huh."

"He has all the other qualities I like but he never opens up. I want to be able to talk to my partner."

"It makes it tough."

"We have a date planned next week and after the trip."

Ashleigh asked, "Have you felt comfortable talking to him about sex?"

Megan's dimples flashed.

"I struggle talking to him about everyday things much less sex. I'll try in the next couple dates. If I can't I feel I should brake up with him."

"That sucks."

Megan smiled at her Ashleigh's Midwestern accent.

Ashleigh pointed, "Looks like your truck."

Megan replied, "It's a F-150."

"Oh."

"I'd love an extended cab."

"What's that?"

"Instead of the one door like the one we're all looking at. It'll have two doors on each side."

"The real long ones."

"Yup."

The truck was blue. It appeared as though someone was moving. The items in the bed of the truck were covered with plastic tarps and bungee cords. The truck parked. They watched a woman in her mid-twenties step out of the truck and walk up to the glass door. She was wearing: a white colored cowgirl hat with a large feather on the side, a red top, dark blue cropped denim jeans, with a woman's styled belt buckle, and cowgirl boots. Just like Megan she looked at the sign written on the door. She turned, she stepped back into her truck, shut the door, parked a few spaces away from Ashleigh's Jeep; like Ashleigh she backed into the space.

Ashleigh commented, "At least we won't be the only ones in the store."

Megan asked, "I ain't sure it makes it easier. Y'all think it does?"

Ashleigh's answered, "It'd be more embarrassing if it was someone we knew."

Megan blushed.

They both thought about this.

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan broke the silence, "What could they say? They'd be looking at the same things we'd be looking at?"

"Still makes it awkward."

Megan said, "Like your third grade teacher?"

They giggled.

Ashleigh became serious, "Or one of my employees?"

Megan in a disappointed voice answered, "It'd increase the rumors we're lovers."

Ashleigh looked at her, "Why do people think we're lovers?"

"I've been thinking."

Ashleigh made a face, "Yeah."

"It's because people are expecting me to have a same sex partner."

"Makes sense."

"With everyone talking about who's gay and isn't. People are having a difficult time separating a love between friends and two people of the same sex being lovers."

Ashleigh nodded her head, "Agreed."

She took a sip of her iced tea.

Megan's dimples flashed, "I'd hate to run into one of my relatives?"

Ashleigh made a face, "Is that possible?"

“Jackie and George don’t live too far. Nelson and Erica and all of their girls live a town over. With this being one of the few stores advertising to women I bet Rebecca and Meredith shop here.”

“I’m sure there are boutiques in Miami.”

Megan stated, “The website had many positive reviews from gals and couples who were from Miami.”

Ashleigh smiled, “Fortunately or unfortunately they’d probably understand more than anyone else.”

Megan’s dimples flashed.

“I believe the reason she came out of the closet is they believed I was coming out.”

Ashleigh gave Megan a look, “You think?”

“Yeah. Auntie Ruth knew for a long time.”

“Makes sense.”

Ashleigh pointed, “I see someone pulling up.”

They watched a car pull up and take a spot not too far from the store. Out of this car a dark haired woman stepped out, she pulled keys out of her purse, walked up to the glass doors, unlocked it, stepped in, and locked the door behind her.

Megan asked, “Are Y’all nervous?”

Ashleigh mentioned, “Yes. But I’m glad you’re with me.”

“I’m happy Y’all are with me too.”

Ashleigh continued, “I’ve been to these stores with boyfriends. Remember that bachelorette party Haley and I went too?”

“Yeah.”

“We went to an adult store.”

She blushed thinking about it.

“I felt uncomfortable buying a toy with any of them but I feel comfortable buying one with you.”

“Why?”

“Most important I trust you. Second; I don’t believe you’d make fun of me.”

“Why would I make fun?”

Ashleigh blushed, “Because of what I want to buy.”

They looked at one another and looked away.

Megan broke the silence by asking, “Have you ever used a toy?”

Ashleigh sheepishly answered, “I’ve only used cucumbers or bananas.”

Megan suggested, “I’d believe a toy would feel the same as a cucumber.”

“It seems different.”

Megan’s dimples flashed.

“I’d feel a toy is safer.”

Again Ashleigh blushed, “You promise you won’t tell anyone?”

Megan was very serious, “Of course.”

Ashleigh blushed.

“I was thinking of buying a butt plug.”

Megan was shocked.

Ashleigh continued, “I tried a cucumber but it was too big.”

Ashleigh expected some comment or some criticism.

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan answered very honestly, "No matter what Y'all are buying I'm grateful Y'all are with me. There is another part of me that feels awkward I'm buying anything. Whatever I buy Y'all know what I'm into."

A brief silence.

Ashleigh caught the layers.

Megan added, "Based on some surveys I took I'm considered kinky. I'm wanting to look at what people call fetish gear."

It felt good to say this out loud.

Ashleigh felt this was the first time, regarding the subject of sex, Megan was brave.

Ashleigh stated, "At the adult store we went to at the bachelorette party I saw what was called a machine."

Ashleigh blushed.

Megan touched Ashleigh, "I'm sure they will have one here."

Megan was unsure of what it was but wanted Ashleigh to feel comfortable.

Ashleigh commented with a smile, "No offense."

"None taken."

Ashleigh asked, "Do you even know what I'm talking about?"

Megan flashed her dimples.

They looked at one another and giggled out of nervousness.

Megan flashed her dimples.

"None taken. I ain't sure Y'all are knowing what I'm meaning by kinky."

Ashleigh smiled. With Megan being her best friend she understood and felt what Megan meant.

Megan took a sip of her coffee. She scanned her surroundings. She did a double take when she looked into the cab of the truck.

Brittany pulled into the parking lot.

She was five foot five. Her naturally straight long brunette hair was set into a wave at the ends, she had light green eyes, a long rectangular shaped face, her forehead had a heart shaped peak, she had a square chin, medium sized boobs, and a nice padded rear end. A large feather was attached to her white cowgirl hat. She was wearing a red and white polka dot top with a tie in front. A pair of dark blue cropped denim jeans: the dark blue was faded on the calves, they had zipper back pockets, two large front pockets, and a two button hem with stitching. She matched the jeans with well worn but comfortable cowgirl boots.

She spotted the store at the end of the strip mall. She: stopped her car, stepped out leaving the door open, walked up to the glass door, and read the sign. There was about forty minutes before it would open. She spotted a Jeep with two women in it; she felt more comfortable parking a few spots away from them.

After parking she studied her twenty-two day old baby boy. He was sound asleep.

She glanced at her wedding ring, yanked it off her finger, used the window button, and tossed the ring out of the passenger window. If the ring had any value what so ever she would have tried to pawn it off.

In a strong southern accent she said to her son Jesse, “Your Daddy ain’t worth a lick. I wish I’d have listen to Daddy. He was always warning me he’d up and leave.”

She cried.

She looked over at her baby, “I ain’t ever done anything like this before. It ain’t right of Roy to be up and leaving for a gal he met in some chat room. Imagine him leaving me for a gal who lives in Tennessee? Just like Momma said he was a snake in the grass. We’re good to be rid of him. But it ain’t meaning it ain’t hurting.”

She stopped sobbing when her baby started to move around.

She said in a gentle way, “Stop your fussing.”

She picked up her baby, looked around, the only other car was the Jeep with two gals in it. As she observed the lot a car parked close to the store. Out of this car a dark haired woman stepped out, she pulled keys out of her purse, walked up to the glass doors, unlocked it, stepped in, and locked the door behind her. Brittany glanced at her watch, there was still a while to go. She: lifted up her top and bra, grabbed a blanket, covered him, and breast fed her baby.

She prayed for some other way to make money.

Jesse fell asleep and stopped suckling.

She: gently removed the blanket, removed him, set him into the car carrier, she gently folded the blanket, set it on the car seat, and made herself presentable. She grabbed her purse, set it on her lap, pulled out a woman’s wallet, set it in front of her purse on her lap, dug through her purse, pulled out the gift card the manager at the strip club gave her, slipped it into her wallet, placed the purse on the floor, and set the wallet off to the side. She accepted a job in Ocala Florida to work on a horse ranch but she needed money: to get there, for food, baby supplies, paying her bill off at the motel, and first months rent. What was irritating was her major in communications with a minor in English was far from lucrative. The only job she could get was working on a horse ranch. She started to work with horses when she was thirteen and this skill helped her pay her way through college. She would again work for a ranch if it was the only way she could provide for herself and her baby. This was the very reason she was ready to use the gift card. Based upon what her neighbor at the motel told her she’d have all the money she needed within three days.

She felt awkward calling her Momma. They had a major falling out over eloping with Roy. It didn’t feel right to arrive at her Momma’s front door holding a baby. She felt this was her doing. With it being her doing she felt it was her responsibility to get herself out of this mess. She just wished with all her heart God would set forth a different path.

She felt she was living out the song, “Jesus Take the Wheel” by *Carrie Underwood*. She: had sex before marriage, she married a non-believer, she forsook fellowship, she no longer prayed like she did, having a baby, and having her good for nothing husband leaving summed up the Carrie Underwood song.

Currently Carrie Underwood and Tim McGraw were her two favorite singers.

She looked at her watch.

This would be the first time she was ever in a store like this. She was terribly embarrassed wearing the type of outfits the manager of the strip clue suggested she was to wear. She was surprised her neighbor at the motel would wear what she showed her. The sexiest thing she ever wore was a light blue chemise with matching satin shorts. She never wore garters, corsets, bright colored nylons, or the skimpy items her friend from the motel

showed her. She felt cheap and desperate. She knew she would have to wear these type of outfits in front of strangers. Worse would be taking the outfits off to make money.

This made her cry.

She took a deep breath and sucked in her tears.

She convinced herself stepping into the store was what she needed to do.

She looked over at the two ladies in the Jeep. She disliked the idea of handing her baby over to strangers. She felt it was better to have her baby handed off to them instead of bringing him into the store or leaving him in the truck. What made this decision difficult was the idea these two women were lesbians. At the moment she felt this was what she needed to do and felt this was her only option.

She: opened the door, hit the lock button, grabbed her purse, swung it over her shoulder, stood on the edge of the door, gently grabbed her baby, wrapped him in a blanket, stepped down, she used her body to shut the door, and headed toward the Jeep.

Megan stared for a second and turned toward Ashleigh, “Is she nursing?”

Ashleigh turned and focused, “I believe so.”

“I don’t want to criticize anyone for being here but why bring a baby here?”

Ashleigh asked, “Do you see a guy with her?”

Megan looked over

Her dimples flashed.

She turned toward Ashleigh, “I ain’t seeing a guy. But I believe she’s crying.”

Ashleigh believed she knew what was happening.

Megan’s dimples flashed.

She asked again, “Why would a gal bring a baby to a store like this?”

If the top was off the Jeep she would have stood up and looked. She understood sixty some degrees was cool for Megan. She turned herself in a way to see through the passenger side window.

She asked Megan, “What do you feel is in that truck bed?”

Megan looked over, “It looks like she’s moving.”

Ashleigh turned around and sat back into her seat.

Megan’s dimples flashed.

Megan asked, “What are Y’all feeling?”

Ashleigh pointed to a sign attached to the window of the boutique.

“Is that say they give discounts to performers?”

Megan focused, “Yes.”

“I believe I know why she’s here.”

Megan’s dimples flashed, “Is she part of a play?”

Ashleigh restrained herself for laughing.

She focused, “Not that type of performer.”

“Is she an escort?”

“I suspect she’s a stripper. Instead of calling them strippers they call themselves dancers or performers. She’s either tired of being one or is thinking about starting.”

They observed her moving around in her truck.

Megan comment, “I’m believing she ain’t the type to be one.”

"I was tempted with it."

This surprised Megan, "Y'all were?"

Ashleigh answered, "I had a friend who worked at Bob's club as a burlesque dancer. After Bob shut down the club she started dancing at a club. She wanted me to work where she did."

"What stopped Y'all?"

"God. What my family would think. And Bob. The closest I got was being a waitress."

Megan asked, "The one where they wear orange shorts?"

"Yup. They opened a new one in the place where..."

Ashleigh stopped and pointed.

Approaching the Jeep was a Mother holding her baby.

Megan and Ashleigh stepped out of the Jeep and shut the doors behind them.

Brittany stopped and said, "Hi Y'all."

Ashleigh felt she had the strongest southern accent she ever heard. Ashleigh had to focus to hear what she was saying; she stepped around the Jeep.

Brittany was surprised at the size difference. She felt guilty for wondering on how they had sex.

"Howdy. My name is Megan this here is Ashleigh."

Ashleigh gently waved, "Hi."

"My name is Brittany. I hate bothering Y'all. I'm needing to buy me a couple outfits."

She paused.

It was taking great effort to hold back tears.

"Would Y'all watch him? He's a very good baby and I promise I won't be long."

She brushed a tear away, "I'm hoping Y'all will treat my baby right. I ain't wanting anything happening to em. He's the reason I'm headed into the place. So please take good care of him."

Tears from both Ashleigh and Brittany.

Ashleigh asked, "Why would you bring a baby here?"

"Huh."

Megan repeated, "Why are Y'all bringing a baby here?"

Brittany was able to hold in her emotion.

"I lost my place. I'm staying at a motel up the street. I'm surprised my things ain't been stolen."

She paused and brushed away tears.

"I have a job lined up in Ocala. But I'm needing to pay for the trip. The only way I'm able to make the money is by dancing."

She cried.

Ashleigh and Megan looked at one another.

Brittany managed to hold back her tears.

"I ain't wanting to dance. But I ain't having my baby starving. I ain't taking any drugs and I ain't a drunkard. From what the manager of the club told me I'd have enough money to move in a few days. I have to be in Ocala by Tuesday."

Ashleigh was tearing.

Megan felt this was a divine appointment.

"I ain't wanting to be flashing my body in front of people. But..."

She stopped.

Ashleigh interrupted, "Don't you have family here?"

Brittany gave a face.

Megan said, "Y'all have folks here?"

"My Momma lives in Georgia. My Daddy died a few years back."

Ashleigh calmed herself down and asked in a slower cadence, "Why did you move from Georgia to here?"

"On account my husband is from here. We met when I was a Sophomore in college. I made the mistake of believing he loved me."

Megan asked, "What college did Y'all go to?"

"I graduated two years ago from the University of Georgia."

Ashleigh slowed down her speech, "You don't have a job?"

"When we moved here I found me a job at a store. When we became pregnant Roy wanted me to stay at home. I wasn't objecting because I've been working on a novel."

Megan and Ashleigh looked at one another.

Ashleigh asked, "You write?"

"Huh."

Megan asked, "What is your degree? Do Y'all write?"

"I have a degree in communications with a minor in English. Y'all know what they did?"

Megan asked, "No."

"I'm just as smart as all the other folks who graduated with me. Some of them have jobs in communication. One of my friends is written for a magazine. I've been passed up on account of my grades. Y'all know why they kept down grading me?"

Ashleigh asked, "Why?"

"I wouldn't agree with their liberal thinking."

She became as animated as her Daddy would get, "They ain't having the right to tell folks when they should be praying or how they should be living. They kept telling us folks who believe in carrying guns how evil we are. I kept thinking these people have never been in the country. I hope I didn't offend Y'all. I ain't believing it's okay to be killing babies. It ain't American to be telling folks how we should be living. Bunch of hypocrites. They're telling us what we should be doing but we ain't allowed to tell them what to do. It ain't right."

She lowered her voice in shame, "As a Christian I'm knowing it's wrong to be showing my body. But I'm needing to feed my baby and get to Ocala."

She removed her tears with one of her hands. She quickly held onto her baby.

Ashleigh and Megan looked at one another.

Speaking slow Ashleigh asked, "Are you able to prove you have a degree?"

This surprised Brittany, "Yes Ma'am. It's in the back of the truck."

Ashleigh waived to Megan.

Megan said, "Y'all wait right here."

"Yes Ma'am."

Megan followed Ashleigh until they felt they were out of ear distance.

Ashleigh whispered, "You feel she's telling the truth?"

"If she's lying it's one whopper of a story. Y'all notice the white ring around her finger."

"You think it's from a wedding ring?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Her dimples flashed.

"I was reading on how marriages are breaking up cause of them chat lines."

"Me too."

Megan asked, "What's this world coming too? To be leaving a wife and baby for some other gal on the internet. I'm believing he's a snake in the grass."

Ashleigh asked, "Does your parents have an apartment available?"

"I ain't sure. They've rented a lot of units and houseboats to your employees."

Brittany yelled, "I ain't asking for nothing other than for Y'all to watch Jessie. My Daddy taught me I should be standing on my own two feet."

Megan turned and yelled, "Y'all have food for the little one?"

She answered honestly, "A days worth. After dancing I was planning on shopping."

Ashleigh tapped Megan.

She turned toward Ashleigh.

Ashleigh, in a loud whisper, became demanding, "Call Ma and ask if she has an apartment or a houseboat."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"What happens if she ain't have one?"

"If it's necessary she'll have to live on the yacht for a few days."

Megan mentioned, "Why not have her stay at the resort?"

"They do owe me."

Megan stated, "Lets skip the boutique and take her shopping."

"Good Idea."

Ashleigh started to walk over to Brittany. Megan followed. Ashleigh suddenly stopped. Megan did as well.

Ashleigh stated, "If you feel she's telling a whopper. Let me know."

"Yes Ma'am."

Megan was curious on what Ashleigh was planning. This is why she allowed Ashleigh to take the lead. Megan assumed this was how Ashleigh behaved at work. Jimmy told Megan; how assertive Ashleigh could get a work. Megan wanted to see if this was true.

Ashleigh yelled, "Brittany."

"Yes Ma'am."

The two ladies approached Brittany.

Ashleigh stated bluntly, "I know I have a strong Midwestern accent."

"Yes Ma'am."

"Don't be afraid to tell me if you don't understand what I'm saying. I know I talk fast. Okay?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Brittany asked, "Would Y'all mind if I set Jessie down? He's getting heavy."

Megan opened the passenger side door of the Jeep.

"Much obliged."

She set her sleeping baby on the front seat. She turned and looked at the two ladies; but stood in a way to keep an eye on her baby.

"You said your moving to Ocala?"

Both looked at Ashleigh. Ashleigh pronounced it horribly wrong.

"Yes Ma'am."

She talked slow and with confidence, "I'm assuming this is for a job?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Megan asked, "What type of job?"

"I'll be working on a ranch."

Megan wondered if she was hired by her friend Krissy.

Megan asked, "Have Y'all worked with horses long?"

"I started when I turned thirteen."

Ashleigh asked, "Is this what you'd like to do?"

This question surprised Brittany.

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan felt this was a confirmation on how *Renewed Mastery* interviewed people.

"No Ma'am. I love horses but I don't want to make a living working with horses. My passion is writing. I like writing about horses and living in the country."

Ashleigh asked, "Do you have an example of your writing?"

"In the truck."

"Go get it."

Brittany looked at Megan, Megan nodded her head.

Ashleigh reassured her, "We'll make sure nothing happens to the little guy."

Brittany only caught a few words but felt some reassurance from Ashleigh's tone.

Megan said, "We'll all watch the baby."

Brittany: ran to the cab, took her keys out of her purse, unlocked the door, opened it, reached into the side pocket of her door, took out a three subject notebook, she locked the door, and shut it.

Ashleigh was bent over making faces at the Baby.

Megan asked, "What are Y'all planning?"

"I'm thinking about hiring her."

Megan asked, "Working with Bob?"

"Yup."

"Why?"

Ashleigh stood up and looked at Megan, "She'd stand up to him."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"Is this why you've had trouble finding someone?"

"You know Bob?"

Megan's dimples flashed.

"I hate to admit but he's better since dating Susan."

Ashleigh was blunt, "It's the reason he's stopped asking you out."

Megan caught the layers. She would think about this later.

Brittany approached her and handed the notebook to Ashleigh.

"I apologize it's hand written. I ain't having the money to buy a computer or a laptop. My computer broke after marrying Roy. We all didn't have the money for one."

Ashleigh flipped through the notebook.

Megan was astounded at how every page was filled, both sides, and she wrote on every line.

"I have two other notebooks."

Megan asked, "Same story."

"Yes Ma'am."

Megan asked, "What's it about?"

Brittany somewhat excited answered, "It's about a gal who dreams of racing horses."

Megan asked, "Not many gals race horses?"

"No Ma'am."

Ashleigh stopped and started to read a page.

Megan asked, "Y'all know a gal named Krissy. Her father owns a horse ranch?"

"No Ma'am."

Ashleigh stopped and handed her the notebook, "Are you a good at proof reader?"

"Yes Ma'am. It was one of the ways I was making extra money in college. I did a lot of typing in my spare time."

Ashleigh asked, "What was the other way?"

"I told Y'all. By working at the ranch."

Megan watched.

"If you thought something stunk would you say so?"

"What?"

Megan answered, "If Y'all thought something rolled with the pigs would Y'all say something?"

Brittany felt the need to be honest, "It's the reason I didn't have the best grades."

"Would you like to work in an office?"

"It'd be much better than cleaning up after horses."

Ashleigh looked over at Megan.

The look of guilt on Ashleigh's face shocked Megan.

"Would you be willing to keep a secret?"

"Depends on what it is?"

Megan asked, "What secret?"

Ashleigh caught Megan's question but focused on Brittany, "One that'd allow you to work in your profession and keep an author hidden."

"Are you meaning a pen name?"

"Yup."

"Would I be a ghost writer?"

"No. You'd have to be a great proof reader with opinions."

Ashleigh again looked at Megan.

Megan wondered why she was giving her a look of guilt.

"My name is Ashleigh Waller. My brother is Robert Waller."

"Yes Ma'am."

"You familiar with that name?"

"No Ma'am."

Megan liked the fact this gal never heard of Bob.

Ashleigh asked, "You familiar with the author Robert Heart?"

Brittany lite up like a Christmas Tree, "Y'all work for Robert Heart?"

"He's my brother Robert Waller."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"Bob is Robert Heart?"

Ashleigh cringed, "Yea."

“Why didn’t Y’all tell me?”

“Officially I haven’t told you.”

Brittany asked, “Who’s Robert Waller?”

It was impossible for Megan to be angry at Ashleigh. She believed the reason she kept this hidden was because Bob forced her too.

This irritation came out in her tone, “An arrogant Billionaire who happens to own the company *Renewed Mastery*.”

Brittany again became excited, “I applied there.”

“What did You apply for?”

“A Communications Consultant.”

The Communications Consultant was to handle all media related to the company and help with the publishers media; a lot of this was focused on Robert Hearts books.

“Your primary job duty would be to proof read and to help me publishing Robert Hearts books. The secondary role is helping Haley and I with regular office work. Haley is Robert Heart’s Executive Secretary. He’s not known as Robert Heart. He’s known as Robert Waller. Everyone in the company calls him Mr. Bob.”

Brittany was all ears, she missed some of what she said, but pieced it together, “Yes Ma’am.”

“Would you like the job?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

Megan was surprised at how excited Brittany was.

“He’s one of my favorite authors.”

Megan suggested, “He ain’t always easy to get along with.”

Ashleigh sighed.

Brittany answered the sigh, “I’ve heard he’s eccentric.”

Ashleigh acknowledged, “He isn’t always easy to work with. But we’ll be working on his books together.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

Brittany hoped she would grow accustomed to her strong Midwestern accent.

Megan mentioned, “Y’all won’t have to be dancing. We’ll find Y’all a place to stay.”

“Where?”

Megan answered, “We all live in Eastbank. It’s an hour drive.”

She made a face.

“Y’all need gas money?”

She teared, “I’m down to a quarter tank. I love my truck but she ain’t getting me to Eastbank.”

Ashleigh turned and reached into her Jeep.

Brittany asked in a whisper, “Is she a good gal?”

Megan’s dimples flashed.

She whispered back, “She ain’t like other Yankees. I never would have believed we’d be best friends.”

Brittany caught the layers and no longer believed they were lesbians.

Megan asked, “Why ain’t you calling your Momma?”

Brittany became serious, “On account she never liked Roy. We’all had a fight over me eloping.”

Ashleigh heard this as she turned to look at Megan and Brittany.

Megan said, "I ain't always getting along with my Momma but I bet she's all tied up with worry."

Brittany made a face and started to tear.

"When we find Y'all a place you should call her."

"She ain't wanting to talk to me."

Ashleigh asked, "Does she know she has a grandson?"

"No Ma'am."

The next question surprised Megan but knew where she was coming from.

Ashleigh asked, "Was she a good Mom? Did she drink or use drugs?"

A tear, "Shes a good Christian woman. She'd be against those things."

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan asked, "Is she a praying woman?"

This touched Brittany, "Yes Ma'am. Before I met Roy and went to college I was a praying gal too."

Megan stated, "Maybe the reason we'all are meeting today is on account of her prayers. To be honest we're both feeling doubts shopping at the store."

Ashleigh said, "That's true."

There was a brief silence.

Ashleigh broke the silence, as she pulled money out of her wallet, "It's up to you. But here is the money to get yourself to Ocala or you can follow us to Eastbank."

Brittany's heart jumped at the money she was just handed.

She cried, "I can't take..."

"Call it an advance."

Megan said, "My folks own proprieties and houseboats. We'll find Y'all a place to stay."

Ashleigh said, "I liked what I read."

"Y'all did?"

"She ain't the type to be pissing down your leg."

Ashleigh asked, "Why haven't you tried publishing it?"

"I ain't had the money to replace my computer."

Ashleigh smiled, "We'll fix that."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"Why not take the little guy and follow us."

Megan asked, "Y'all have a cell phone."

"No Ma'am."

Megan looked at Ashleigh, "You'll have to drive the speed limit."

Ashleigh looked at her, "I only go five over."

Brittany in a worried tone, "I can't afford a ticket."

Megan said, "Ashleigh will drive the speed limit."

Brittany asked, "Are Y'all sure your parents will have a place?"

Ashleigh stepped in, "If they don't. There is a resort you can stay at."

Megan asked, "Y'all have anything heavy in the bed of the truck?"

"The heaviest thing in the truck is a table and chairs. Oh. There is a crib and one recliner."

Ashleigh asked, "What did you have planned on sleeping on?"

"I was figuring on buying an air mattress."

Megan stated, "We'll help move your things."

Ashleigh mentioned, "When we get to Eastbank Y'all can go shopping."

"That ain't necessary."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"It ain't right. We'll take Y'all to a thrift store."

Ashleigh changed this, "Or a nice furniture store."

Megan understood what Ashleigh meant.

Brittany stated, "Shopping at both would be helpful."

Ashleigh asked to make sure, "I'm assuming you're taking the job?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Megan asked, "Y'all need to check out of the motel?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Ashleigh: took out of her wallet her business card, took out a pen, wrote down Haley's name and extension, and handed her the card.

"You show up for work in two Monday's."

"Yes Ma'am."

"I'll be on vacation. But I want you to work with Haley the first week anyway. With me being on vacation she'll need help and it gives you a chance to learn how we work. This gives you a week to get settled."

"Yes Ma'am."

"I'll make sure Mr. Bob, Haley, and Ms. Gracie. She's our HR manager. Knows you'll be starting. Be there at Nine."

"Yes Ma'am."

She felt odd but asked, "Y'all have health insurance and what will my pay be?"

Ashleigh and Megan smiled at one another.

Ashleigh turned and started to dig into her purse. She made faces and made noises at the baby. The baby smiled.

Ashleigh stood up and turned toward Brittany, in her hands was a note pad and a pen, while writing down somethings she said, "You'll have to sign a legal document saying you will never tell anyone Mr. Bob is the author Robert Heart."

"Yes Ma'am. I promise."

"You'll have the choice of three health care plans."

This surprised Brittany.

"We offer three different types of life insurance."

This surprised Brittany.

She tore off a sheet of paper and handed it to Brittany.

"We also offer legal services."

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

Megan stepped in, "It ain't your fault your husband cheated on Y'all. Even Jesus said it's alright to get a divorce in the case of adultery."

Brittany again felt the tears well up, "It hurts."

Ashleigh stepped up and hugged her.

This surprised Brittany but she took the hug. Tears fell. Ashleigh allowed Brittany to cry.

Megan teared up. This confirmed her belief being cheated on was one of the worst possible feelings anyone went through.

Ashleigh stepped back and wiped away a tear, "You think it's a good wage?"

Brittany opened the paper. Her eyes became wide and asked, "You ain't yanking my chain?"

"No."

Megan answered, "If Y'all are working for Mr. Bob. Y'all earn every penny."

Ashleigh was tired of her shoes and she felt comfortable around Brittany. She put her hand on Megan, and removed her shoes.

Brittany was surprised on how tiny she was and was surprised Megan let someone just grab her and use her as a pole.

"Oh."

"Outside of work call me Ashleigh. At work call me Ms. Ashleigh."

"Yes Ms. Ashleigh."

Ashleigh said, "Lets get to the motel."

Megan smiled her big dimple smile.

She asked Brittany, "Y'all have breakfast."

"No Ma'am."

Ashleigh and Megan looked at one another.

Megan said, "We know of a good restaurant up the street after you settle with the motel."

She looked at the both of them.

"Okay."

Brittany went to the Jeep and picked up her baby.

Ashleigh asked, "What's his name?"

Brittany looked at Ashleigh, "Jesse."

The baby smiled at Ashleigh.

Megan said, "We'll follow you to the Motel."

"Yes Ma'am."

Walking back to her truck the tears really started to fall.

Ashleigh and Megan glanced at the store. Both having their own thoughts about missing out on going in.

"Y'all driving without shoes?"

"You want to drive?"

Megan's dimples flashed, "I've always wanted to drive her."

Ashleigh smiled, "I figured."

They headed to the Jeep.

The first thing Megan did was remove the cushion on the seat and pull back the seat as far as it would go, then she sat in it, she adjusted it.

Ashleigh asked, "You know how to drive stick?"

Megan's dimples flashed, "Daddy taught me."

This gave Ashleigh confidence.

Ashleigh waved Brittany forward.

Brittany led them to her motel; this was a four block drive.

Nicole hung up the phone.

Immediately; Ester and Danielle slipped off the tall chairs in front of the kitchen counter. Ester knew her Momma would be taking them somewhere. Danielle witnessed Ms. Nicole be this determined just after her Daddy had died.

Nicole walked to the bottom of the stairs and yelled, "Julie!"

Julie stepped out of her room and stood in front of the railing.

Nicole said, "We're leaving. If Y'all like you could come along?"

"Where are Y'all going?"

"Ashleigh just hired a young lady. She needs a place to stay. Captain and Ma have an apartment for her. I'm headed to their house to get the key. Then I'm meeting them at the new place."

"Do I have to go?"

"No."

"Where's Daddy?"

"He went to help at the farm. He'll be back before dinner. After we're planning on seeing Y'all play."

Ester yelled, "Me too."

They smiled when Danielle said, "I'm watching too."

Nicole turned to her oldest daughter, "You don't have to go."

"I'd prefer to stay home. If I get back I'll drive you to the game."

"I have to be there two hours early."

Nicole said, "Bike safe."

"Yes Ma'am."

Julie knew it was okay to go back to her bedroom. Nicole turned and looked over at Ester and Danielle.

Nicole commanded, "I have to get dressed."

"Yes Ma'am."

"You two quickly change, put on shoes, and a jacket."

"Yes Ma'am."

"I ain't putting up with anyone poking around."

Both answered at the same time, "Yes Ma'am."

The two eleven year old's knew they would be able to ask questions in the minivan.

Nicole made sure the girls were headed toward the stairs Nicole turned and headed to her bedroom. Once there she changed out of her casual athletic wear. She slipped on a blue stripped patterned french cuffed blouse, a very nice dark blue skirt with a flower pattern, a nice but comfortable pair of shoes, a light amount of makeup, and she quickly set her hair. If she wasn't on a time constraint she would have selected a better outfit and put more time fixing her hair.

The apartment key was for Ma and Captain's newest acquired property. At one time this nine building complex was a Motel. The people who built the motel were bad owners and word got out never to rent from there. The city of Eastbank revoked their license and took ownership of the complex when it became a haven for prostitution and drugs. The buildings sat empty for a few years until Eastbank sold the property to a local developer. The developer repaired and redesigned the complex. It went from having eighty some small units into fifty-

two apartments; all of them were two bedrooms except for two. The developer was now semi-retired, he offered a good deal to Ma and Captain more than once. The reason Ma and Captain reason accepted his last offer was on account of all the people moving into Eastbank. Even with the influx of people it was a difficult place to rent. It was on the edge of town and was not looked upon as the best area. Even with this, there were two apartments left, one was a one bedroom and the other was a two bedroom. Ma and Captain had shown multiple people these last two apartments but because of its odd shape no one really wanted to rent them. There would be other apartments and a houseboat at the end of the month. The only two complexes with immediate occupancy was this one and a more luxurious complex near a popular mall. These were more expensive and Ma had never met Brittany. The only reason Ma and Captain were allowing a person to receive an apartment without meeting the person was because of Ashleigh and Megan's word.

Ma and Captain would have gone out to the apartment but they were directing an event at the VFW. Nicole was aware Ashleigh needed to be at the airport and Megan had a charter. Nicole wondered where they met an abandoned woman with a baby.

Nicole felt Ashleigh was leaving out details. Ashleigh's story was they met a young woman with a baby while shopping. Somehow; Ashleigh found out this woman had applied to work at *Renewed Mastery*. Ashleigh decided to hire her on the spot. Nicole never once doubted Ashleigh would hire someone on the spot or hire someone to help them; especially a young woman with a baby. She disbelieved the vague story of meeting this woman shopping. Based upon the time it was taking them to reach the apartment complex they were at least an hour away.

She stopped and looked at herself before she slipped in a nice pair of earrings.

She asked herself out loud, "Did they go to the Boutique?"

There was a pause as she stared at herself.

"Are they lesbians?"

She closed her eyes, she took a deep breath, opened her eyes, and out of sheer trust said, "Megan would have told me if she was. They must have went as friends."

She felt this made sense but it caused Nicole to have more questions. Was this Brittany a secret lover of Ashleigh? Nicole rolled her own eyes at this. It was obvious she wanted Marcus to ask her out. Hearing Ashleigh was arriving at the early service at Marcus' church spoke volumes. Everyone who knew Ashleigh knew she struggled with getting up early.

Nicole remembered the advertising at this boutique. Nicole believed Ashleigh would have spotted a woman who was contemplating being a dancer. If the person touched Ashleigh's heart and Megan liked the gal; it would explain why the two of them would help her. Nicole promised herself to bring wisdom to the situation if she felt Ashleigh and Megan were being played. This idea somewhat bothered Nicole because of Ashleigh's street smarts. Nicole knew Ashleigh had a soft spot for people who were at a disadvantage.

Billy came to mind. Nicole was still surprised Ashleigh hired Billy. Nicole hoped it would work out for Billy. Not only for Billy but for Bobbi-Sue. It was obvious they loved one another. Nicole reminded herself to never bring this up with Ashleigh until she did.

Nicole believed her Son was in love with Bette. The only way her son would take a trip to Fort Lauderdale and visit a couple museums was if he was in love with her.

She stood up and left the bathroom of her bedroom.

She heard Danielle and Ester discuss what movie they wanted to watch.

She went through the living room, "Y'all ready."

Ester and Danielle were in front of the DVD rack, they stood up, and at the same time said, "Yes Ma'am."

Nicole stated, "Lets go through the garage."

They ran to the door between the house and the garage, they opened it, they opened the side door to the minivan, the girls crawled in, Nicole grabbed her purse and cell phone, stepped out into the garage, shut the side door, stepped into the minivan, and asked, "Y'all have your seat belts on?"

She heard the clicks and then, "Yes Ma'am."

Nicole hit the button to the garage door opener.

Immediately Ester asked, "Where are we going?"

"We're helping a young lady who has a baby."

Danielle asked, "Where's the Baby's Daddy?"

Once Nicole was out of the garage she hit the button and the garage door started to shut.

She answered Danielle, "I don't know."

With a sad tone Danielle asked, "Y'all think the Daddy died?"

Both Nicole and Ester felt Danielle's grief.

As she pulled out of the driveway she answered honestly, "I don't believe so."

Ester asked, "What happened?"

"I believe the Babies Daddy left the Momma and the Baby for someone else."

Danielle said, "Daddy would have never left us for someone else."

Nicole answered, "No he wouldn't."

"Momma says he loved us."

"Yes he did."

Ester added, "I liked your Daddy."

Danielle said, "I like your Daddy too."

Nicole looked in the rear view mirror, "Mr. Jimmy likes you."

"He does?"

Ester said, "When you ain't around Daddy asks how you and Ms. Jennifer are doing."

"He does?"

Nicole smiled, "Yes he does."

"Mr. Jimmy is like my Daddy."

Nicole was curious, "Honey; in what way."

"He would never leave Y'all like the gal with the baby."

Nicole answered, "It's one of the reasons I love Mr. Jimmy."

Ester chimed in, "Momma and Daddy love each other."

Nicole's heart was touched.

"Why do Daddy's get sick?"

This hit Nicole hard.

"What does your Momma say?"

The two girls looked at one another.

Nicole spotted this.

Ester stated, "Ms. Jennifer doesn't like talking about it."

Danielle said, "She cries when I ask her."

Nicole held in her tears.

"Everyone mourns differently. She's crying because she misses your Daddy."

Ester asked, "What does mourn mean?"

"It's the way someone behaves after someone has passed away."

Ester answered, "Oh."

"I wish Momma wasn't so sad."

Nicole glanced at Danielle, "The reason she's so sad is because they loved one another. The sadness will go away."

"I feel sad."

"It's okay to feel sad and it's okay to feel happy too."

Danielle asked, "Why does God want Daddies in heaven?"

Ester was less of a help when she asked, "Why does God want good Daddies in heaven but lets bad Daddies leave mommies with babies?"

Danielle said, "Yeah."

Nicole decided to be honest. "I don't believe God wants anyone to die."

Danielle asked, "Then why do we die?"

"Sometimes we die because we make bad choices. Sometimes there are accidents. Sometimes we die of old age. If Adam and Eve didn't sin and if sin wasn't in this world no one would die."

Ester asked, "Like a car crash?"

Nicole clarified, "Many people die in car crashes."

Danielle added, "The people who die in a hurricane?"

"A hurricane can be an example of where people make bad choices."

Ester asked, "How?"

"Sometimes when people have a choice to leave an area they stay. Sometimes a storm happens to quickly or because of their situation can't move. The best example of people dying because of bad choices is when someone takes drugs or drinks."

The two girls looked at one another.

Ester asked, "Why doesn't God stop people from drinking?"

"Because he gives us choices."

"Oh."

Nicole glanced in the mirror, "God warns us about getting drunk? Doesn't he warn us about leaving mommies?"

The two girls glanced at one another.

Nicole pointed out, "There are wives who leave husbands and Momma's leave their children."

Ester said, "Stacie's Momma left."

Danielle added, "For some guy she met on the internet."

Nicole believed this was the reason Brittany's husband left.

Nicole stated, "It's not just Daddies who leave."

The idea a Momma would leave was a foreign idea to the two of them because they were raised by Nicole and Ms. Jennifer. They heard of a lot of Daddies leaving so this was not as traumatic, but neither one believed Jimmy would leave Nicole.

Danielle said, "Stacie's Momma told Stacy the sex was better."

Nicole glanced into the rear view mirror.

She knew they were looking for an answer.

Nicole asked, "Did your Momma explain sex to you?"

"Yes Ms. Nicole."

"I don't believe a husband and a wife should leave one another when sex is bad. They should talk it out. Try to make it better."

Ester and Danielle looked at one another and made faces.

Nicole quickly changed the subject, "Danielle have you been to Captain and Ma's house?"

Nicole knew the answer.

"Yea."

Ester said, "Remember she came over and swam with us. Ma yells at us."

"If Y'all would listen Ma wouldn't be needing to yell? Right?"

Both made faces and answered at the same time, "Yes Ma'am."

Danielle said, "I like swimming."

Nicole turned off the main road and onto the dirt road, "Ester you know where to go?"

Danielle yelled, "I do too."

"Show me the way to go."

This focused the two eleven year old girls.

Nicole loved Ester because she was her youngest. Nicole loved Danielle because she was over at the house all the time. She was certain Jennifer felt the same way about Ester. At this time in their lives they were inseparable. Nicole knew all too well they were growing fast.

April 7th, Decisions

Part Two of Six

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Ashleigh & Megan Book I: Friendship

*Friday April 7th,
Decisions*

*Day 13 of Book I
(Sixty Days after Bob Meets Susan King)*

Part Three of Six

Authored By: R. P. Voght

*Posted on ashleighandmegan.com on:
June 2, 2024*

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format I call, "A 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." 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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April 7th, Decisions Day 13 of Book I

Megan turned onto an old highway and was headed west.

Ashleigh asked, "Where are we?"

"On the western edge of Eastbank."

"This looks like an old highway?"

"It was."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"At one time people would stop here on their way to Miami or the Keys."

Ashleigh commented, "Many of the buildings look like old motels."

"They were."

Megan's dimples flashed.

"The apartment building we're showing Brittany was once a motel. The people who build this motel were to late. The locals who were in the knowing were selling their motels. The people who built this motel were wretch-it owners."

"Did your parents buy it from them?"

Megan answered, "No. The city shut it down because of escorts and drug dealers."

"Oh."

"One of Captains friends bought it from the city."

"When did your parents buy it?"

"A few months after Y'all moved to town."

Ashleigh smiled.

Megan's dimples flashed.

“He was trying to sell the property to Captain for years.”

Megan: shifted gears, slowed down, and pulled into the property. This was a nine building complex. Six were on the left side and three were on the other. It went from having eighty small units to fifty-two apartments; all of them were two bedrooms except for two. These were difficult apartments to rent out because: they were oddly shaped, they were on the far edge of town, and this wasn't looked upon as the best area. There were two apartments left, one was a one bedroom and the other was a two bedroom. Ma and Captain had shown multiple people these last two apartments but because of their odd shape no one really wanted them.

All of the buildings were one floor. Each building had: a grayish-tan peaked roof, all were painted a light gray, around each window was a dark gray window panel, each door was painted the same dark gray, there was a small sidewalk going from each door to a boulevard, and each apartment had two front windows. With the apartments designed oddly, the back of each of the buildings were different. About seventy five percent of the apartments had a back door and the amount of windows depended on the apartment and the building. There was Freshly cut green grass surrounded all of the building and evenly placed palm trees were in front of these buildings.

The road inside of the complex was set up like a city boulevard. It was a long skinny U. The sides of the U were wide enough to have parking slots. Inside of the U was a long skinny garden with flowers and decorative shrubs.

Megan made a right onto this first boulevard.

“How many buildings do they own?”

“All nine.”

“Which one's Brittany's?”

“This one.”

Megan turned into one of the first parking slots. She picked one of five spaces that were marked visitor.

It was obvious to Ashleigh the lot was recently redone. All of the parking space lines were recently painted. Every spot had a number painted in front of it; the exception were the ones marked visitor.

Brittany parked next to Megan.

The three ladies quickly stepped out of their vehicles. Ashleigh watched as both Megan and Brittany went back to their vehicles. Megan slipped on an blue stripped athletic style hoodie. Brittany slipped on an old light blue western style denim jacket with fringe; the fringe went from one sleeve to the other. Both noticed a few of the fringes were missing.

Ashleigh complemented Megan, “You drive stick well.”

Megan's dimples flashed.

“I should've drove better.”

Ashleigh answered, “You did great. Every stick shift feels different. ”

Megan acknowledged this by saying, “It was fun driving it.”

Brittany carrying Jesse stepped up to Megan and Ashleigh.

Jesse was awake.

Right away Ashleigh waved at him.

He responded with a smile of his own.

Megan smiled her big dimple smile.

Brittany said, "He likes Y'all."

Ashleigh said, "He's such a cutie."

The baby's eyes became wide and he smiled.

Megan shook her head. Even a baby boy responded to Ashleigh's flirting.

Brittany looked at the buildings, "These are so nice."

Ashleigh and Megan looked at one another.

"I can't wait to see what the inside is like."

Megan answered, "My Sister-in-law will be here in a moment with the key. She'll be showing Y'all a two bedroom."

Brittany held in tears, "I'm so blessed. To meet Y'all."

Ashleigh started to tear.

"I was praying. And God listened. I didn't want to be showing my body to strangers. Now I have a good job and a place. A gal can't be asking for more."

Ashleigh said, "You haven't seen it yet?"

Brittany heard enough of the words Ashleigh spoke to answer, "I'm telling Y'all. This is better than the apartments Roy and I were living in."

Ashleigh and Megan looked at one another.

Megan mentioned, "My parents just finished some renovations. But this property was kept up by the last owner."

"A gal can't be complaining when things are improving."

Again Ashleigh and Megan looked at one another. They both wondered what squalor she lived in before.

This is when Nicole pulled in with the minivan. Before the two girls stepped out, Nicole gave them instructions; it was obvious these instructions annoyed the two girls.

Megan said, "It's my Sister-in-law Nicole. The one on the right is my Niece Ester. The one on the left is her Best Friend Danielle."

Ashleigh added, "They're inseparable."

Brittany was unsure of what Ashleigh said.

Nicole stepped out.

The girls unbuckled their seats and moved themselves up front. Where they immediately turned on the radio. They turned the volume up.

Ashleigh recognized the song, "Sweet Escape," by *Gwen Stefani*.

The three adult women smiled when Nicole turned around, opened the door, and commanded, "I ain't wanting to hear it while standing outside."

Both at the same time answered, "Yes Ma'am."

The volume dropped and no longer could anyone outside of the mini-van hear the song.

This reminded Ashleigh of Victoria. Ashleigh hoped the plane would arrive on schedule so Victoria could meet Nicole.

Nicole focused on the baby, "Well ain't he a darling."

Brittany made it a point to show her baby.

She said, "He's a good baby. Sometimes he fusses at night."

Nicole warned, "When the time is right never have em' sleep with Y'all."

"Yes Ma'am."

Megan said, "Brittany this here is Nicole. Nicole this is Brittany."

Nicole had the key in her hand, "We should be getting inside."

Nicole noticed Ashleigh was without a jacket.

Ashleigh felt sixty eight degrees with a slight breeze was warm.

Brittany agreed, "Yes Ma'am."

Then added, "I'm much obliged."

Nicole's heart went out to this woman. She felt this young lady was authentically in trouble. Nicole spotted the white circle around her finger; where once a wedding ring had been.

This is when they heard a male voice yell, "Ms. Ashleigh."

The ladies turned. Two apartments down, two of Ashleigh's employees had stopped, and one shouted at Ashleigh. Both were carrying fishing gear and coolers. One was in shorts and a t-shirt the other was in jeans and wearing a long sleeved shirt. Both worked in production.

Ashleigh answered, "Hi."

The local waved at Megan, "Howdy Megan."

"Howdy."

"How's Jimmy?"

Megan answered, "He's doing well."

The local with the long sleeved shirt asked, "What brings Y'all out here?"

Ashleigh answered, "I'm helping a new employee get settled. Where are Y'all headed?"

The guy with the shorts answered, "Bubba is showing me a good fishing spot."

Megan was unable to resist giving the two of them tips and handed out cards to her charter. Brittany was impressed with Megan owning her own business and being a charter captain.

When the conversation was finished Megan stepped next to the ladies.

Ashleigh yelled in a joking matter, "Stay out of trouble."

They looked at one another, the local said, "I ain't about to get into trouble."

Ashleigh realized they missed the joke.

When they stepped into the car the ladies followed Nicole to the apartment. Nicole used the key and stepped in.

Nicole, Megan, and Ashleigh felt it was an odd place. Directly to the left was a closet and a half bath. Right of the front door was the kitchen. Two windows were between the door and the right wall of the kitchen. About five feet in front of the door was a support wall that went parallel of the front of the apartment. On this center wall was a shelf with cabinets above and below; with room and the plugs to place appliances on this shelf. In the center of the right wall was a small cabinet, on top was a double sink, to the left of this sink was a refrigerator, and to the right was the stove. There was a hanging light in the middle of this room.

The left wall slanted into the living room. About five feet from this slant was a supporting wall; this went parallel of the slanted wall. This living room was an odd shaped V. In the middle of this supporting wall was a bedroom door. There was a five foot hallway behind the wall of the kitchen and in front of this bedroom. Just passed the large bedroom and to the left was a small skinny bedroom. In the large bedroom was a full bathroom and a walk in closet. The small skinny bedroom was without a closet.

Megan believed the slanted wall was most likely a bedroom or living room of the left side apartment and she believed the kitchen was against the kitchen of the apartment to the right of her. She correctly guessed the apartment to the right was a one bedroom. She made

this assumption because this apartment was the second apartment in; from the right side of the building.

The most excited person was Brittany. The three ladies could tell her excitement was legitimate. She started talking about where she would place her things. Based upon the wage Ashleigh promised to pay Brittany; Brittany felt confident she could sign the lease. Nicole wanted to pay half of the security deposit. Ashleigh insisted on paying it in full. Nicole dug into her purse and handed Brittany: a grocery gift card, a gas station gift card, and a gift card to a fast food restaurant. Nicole always kept gift cards in her purse for charity situations.

Ashleigh, Megan, Nicole, Danielle, and Ester helped Brittany unload the truck. During this time Nicole officially invited Ashleigh's family over for dinner. Before the three ladies left Brittany thanked them and promised Ashleigh she would be a great employee. Ashleigh wanted to believe her.

Nicole and Brittany exchanged numbers. Nicole told Brittany if she needed anything she should call. After Megan and Ashleigh left. Nicole, Ester, and Danielle went to a large box store. They bought Brittany: baby formula, diapers, baby food, feminine products, soaps, light bulbs, batteries, a toilet brush, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, a flashlight, and a microwave. While they were moving Brittany into the apartment Nicole noticed she was using many off brands and dollar store items. Brittany wept when Nicole came back with all name brand top of the line items.

Driving back to the marina Megan was again the passenger.

Ashleigh asked, "How bad was her last place?"

Megan answered honestly, "I ain't wanting to find out."

She pointed, "Make a left at the next road."

"Okay."

"Nicole is hosting your family?"

"If the charter cancels you can come over."

"It'd take a hurricane for these guys to cancel."

"You expecting a late one?"

"This group always runs late."

Megan's dimples flashed.

She asked again, "Why did Y'all hire her?"

"She has talent."

Megan gave her a look.

"Like I mentioned before I believe he'll listen to her."

"What makes Y'all believe he'd listen to her?"

"She's tough."

Megan agreed, "She's defiantly a country gal. It's surprising to me she'd like writing."

"You could tell from the story she's a southern country girl. No offense."

"None taken."

Megan smiled her big dimple smile.

They were waiting at a stop sign.

Megan said, "Make a right up at the next stop sign."

Ashleigh gave a look.

Megan answered the look, "It'll cut across and you'll end up in front of the *Warrior River*. Make a left and we'll end up at *Five Corners*."

Ashleigh stated, "I always wondered where this road went."

Megan smiled.

Ashleigh again mentioned, "She looks sweet. But I'm counting on her to be able to stand up for herself."

Megan asked, "Were the others wimps?"

"Not exactly."

"What makes Brittany different?"

With confidence Ashleigh stated, "She's a tough nice. Where the other girls were just nice. I bet she gave professors a run for their money."

"It's difficult playing the games they want Y'all to play. I was downgraded because I wouldn't believe their non-sense."

Ashleigh said, "Uh-huh."

"They were always telling us on how bad America was. They were always ridiculing the military. It was difficult for me to keep my tongue locked. Those liberal professors were as useful as a screen door on a submarine. What always bothered me is they talked about being diverse."

"They weren't?"

"They were diverse in race but they'all thought the same."

"Imagine going to a northern school."

Megan never considered this.

They stopped at a stop sign.

Megan stated, "In front of us is the *Warrior River*. If Y'all make a left We'll end up at *Bluff Beach Parkway*."

"Oh. This is the street with all the stores."

"Yes Ma'am."

"I don't like this road."

"We'all feel it's to busy. Y'all be careful. There are a lot of accidents on this here road."

Ashleigh gunned it to get across and make the left hand turn.

Megan braced herself but Ashleigh made nothing of it.

Ashleigh continued, "Up north it's how bad business is and how corporations are out to get you. What's even worse."

Megan recovered from crossing the street.

"What?"

Ashleigh made a face, "The professors lack common sense. That drove me crazy."

Megan stated, "In my general studies courses they were always talking about how bad business was. With me getting a business degree I was happy I didn't have to hear it all the time. The thing that irritated me was how they believed the entertainment business ran."

Megan found Ashleigh's comment interesting.

Megan mentioned, "There's a lot of accidents at this intersection."

Ashleigh mentioned, "It's the reason I take *Swamp Road* to work."

"Y'all are as smart as a whip."

"That road is creepy at night."

"It's next to the preserve."

Ashleigh went with the light, went straight, and crossed the bridge over the *Eastbank River*.

Megan asked, "I'm assuming you learned more about the entertainment business working at your brother's club."

"Oh yeah."

This was easy for Megan to believe because she felt she learned more about business from her Daddy than anything she learned in college.

Ashleigh stated matter of fact, "Most professors are clueless."

Megan's dimples flashed.

They made the left hand turn onto *Bluff Beach Parkway*.

Megan stated, "Am I wrong for wishing the bank was never built."

"No. I liked the open lot."

Megan continued, "Y'all ain't wrong about liberal professors. Like I said before most professors are like screen doors on a submarine."

"Bob points this out all the time."

"What?"

"He isn't a fan of professors."

Megan would think about this.

Ashleigh pulled into the marina and parked the Jeep into the garage.

Megan asked, "You taking Bob's car?"

"Yeah."

Ashleigh pulled the emergency brake, lifted up the clutch, and pulled out the key. They stepped out of the Jeep, shut the doors, Ashleigh hit the garage door opener, and they headed toward the first pier. On their way they both noticed a large red SUV parked in one of the visitors parking spaces. Neither one mentioned anything but both knew this was an expensive vehicle. They walked in silence until they reached the pier.

Ashleigh broke the silence by saying, "Bob is always talking about how professors and most teachers have lived in a world of philosophy without having to deal with reality."

"I ain't disagreeing."

"He points out they start in kindergarten. Go to primary school. Then high school. They go onto college. And then start teaching. He believes unless a professor has spent time in the private sector they haven't a clue as to how the real world works. He claims it's all philosophy. It's why they believe in Marxist non-sense."

"Then why does he want Y'all to go back?"

Ashleigh made a face, "I'm feeling he believes it'll stop some of the criticism I'm receiving."

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan stated, "He's just being a big brother."

Ashleigh asked sincerely, "Do they ever stop being big brothers?"

Megan answered honestly, "I ain't sure. But I'm feeling it's different between Y'all and my brothers."

Ashleigh glanced at Megan.

Megan smiled a big dimple smile.

"There ain't many brothers who would have treated Y'all like he does."

This caught Ashleigh's ear.

They took a few steps in silence.

Megan stated, "I hate to admit."

“What?”

“I’m impressed with him.”

This surprised Ashleigh, “You are?”

They reached the front of Megan’s houseboat and stopped.

Megan stated, “He’s a good Daddy.”

Ashleigh caught the layers.

“With him flying to Wisconsin every other weekend shows what type of Daddy he is.”

“I agree.”

Megan found herself asking, “Why ain’t he with the boys Momma?”

“They’ve always struggled.”

Megan brushed her hair behind her right ear.

“I wonder if they’d be good together.”

Ashleigh gazed out into the horizon. Her mind flashed to the times when Shelly and Bob were together.

Megan broke Ashleigh out of her memories by saying, “I’m looking forward to meeting your family.”

Ashleigh smiled.

“I’m glad Captain and you are sailing the yacht.”

Megan said, “Y’all. He’s so excited.”

“He hasn’t shown it.”

Megan’s dimples flashed.

“He ain’t showing anyone how excited he is about anything.”

Ashleigh giggled.

Megan did the same.

Ashleigh stated, “I got to get going.”

Megan smiled a big dimple smile.

Megan said, “See you later alligator.”

Ashleigh answered, “After while crocodile.”

With this Ashleigh headed toward the yacht and Megan stepped into her houseboat.

Julie listened for the garage door to close. Normally, with the house to herself she would have indulged in some private time; private time where she was without worry of being heard or caught. Today; she put on some older clothes and a pair of older shoes. She ran down the stairs and into the garage. She looked up at the rafters and focused on the five coolers stored there. She grabbed a ladder and quickly went up and selected the one she believed would work. She checked for bugs or spiders; she felt lucky neither were there. She pulled it off to the side. She rearranged the other ones trying to make it look as though nothing was taken. Carrying the cooler she: crawled down the ladder, set the cooler on the ground, put the ladder back, took the cooler into the back yard, using a garden hose she cleaned it off, dried it with a towel, she ran it up to her room, and set it on her bed.

She stepped over to a large rectangular shaped framed print of a mermaid. She purchased this print at a yard sale; she was overjoyed her Momma let her purchase it and hang it. Julie rearranged her desk and bed so she could hang it on the front inside wall of her room. This was the supporting wall to the left of the stairs and was the front wall of her room;

this wall faced the front door. Without alerting her Daddy she paid close attention to how he hung it. A few nights later: using her Daddy's stud finder she found the studs, using a pencil and a ruler she drew a rectangle on the wall, using a drywall knife and following the line she cut a giant rectangular shaped hole between these studs, and hung the picture back up. A few days after creating this hole she build a wooden box from the wood left over from the fence (there was so much of it left over no one would notice she took some). It had: six shelves, she added numerous slots of different widths on the bottom two shelves, there was a door, and a wooden lever. She hid this box under her bed until the next day. On this day, again home alone for a few hours, she secured this box to the studs in the wall; with the extra supports she believed this box would never be pulled out.

She: lifted the picture up and off the hangers, she undid the latch of the box, opened the door, she removed her laptop, she was able to lay the laptop into the cooler, she quickly lifted it out, she set the laptop onto her desk, she carried the cooler into her closet, she simply put it in the corner like it was always there, she went back to the hidden box, took out an accounting book, and a large plastic envelope with a front tie. She undid the tie and removed a series of fake social security cards and matching bank cards. Each social security card and bank card had a receipt card rubber banded to them. The information on this card was coded. Without the key to this code it was impossible to match what was written on the cards. Just in case she'd forget one she wrote down these codes. The true codes were written down on a sheet of paper, the paper was in a protective plastic sleeve, and was hidden between the bathroom vanity and the floor. She had a sheet of fake codes hidden in her computer desk and taped behind her computer desk.

She opened the laptop and visited her favorite financial sites. Reading some information caused her to go back to the framed box and take out an expandable file folder with a different set of fake id's and bank cards. Based upon this information she went onto a series of bank websites, did some banking, she made sure to write this information down in her accounting book, she saved it onto a flash drive attached to her laptop, she separated two sets of fake ID's, she wrote some information on a receipt card, attached these cards to the sets with a rubber band, she set these into her backpack, and then carefully put the ID's back into the box.

She estimated how much time she had left. She put everything back into the box, she locked it, and hung the picture back up. She: went to her closet, took down a locked metal box, she took it over to her desk, she opened a desk drawer, she dug into the drawer, she took out a key, she used it to open the metal box, she took out a pink colored starter vibrator, she grabbed one of the binders from off of her bookshelf with the words Algebra written on a sticker, she set both of these items onto her bed, and she glanced at the clock.

She was looking forward to relieving some stress. She convinced herself she had control over her masturbation habits.

Megan: stepped into her houseboat, locked the door behind her, made sure all of the blinds were shut, set her keys onto the coffee table, stepped into her galley, took off her jacket, hung it over a chair, took out a large plastic cup, filled it with ice, took out two bottles of water, was about to open the bottles, and fill the cup. She stopped herself from doing so.

Her dimples flashed.

She considered indulging in pee desperation. What gave her pause was the clean up and the guilty feelings she always experienced when she indulged in this fetish. Out of all her fetishes this one carried the most guilt. She loved the prep and anticipation but disliked the clean up. She often question why she had an emotional attachment to this fetish. She felt guilty for liking the naughty feeling. This naughty feeling was a major reason peeing in her pants was so exciting. She felt she was strange to enjoy the warm feeling. This fetish was the one she wanted to share the most with a future husband but felt was the least likely a husband would want to share with her. She often felt guilty for the fantasy's surrounding this activity.

She set this time aside to enjoy whatever she purchased from the boutique. Even though she never went into the store; she planned on enjoying herself. She placed one of the water bottles back into the refrigerator. The other one she took a drink from and set it on the counter. She stepped into her cabin and opened the french doors of her closet. She went through what she termed her special clothes.

Her dimples flashed.

She: turned, bent down, undid the lock to her trunk, opened it, set the top layer on the floor, and went through another selection of special clothes. She grabbed a pair of white jeans and stood up. They suddenly didn't seem appealing. Whenever she set time aside to indulge in her fetishes picking out clothes she wanted to wear was exciting. This was the first time she felt indifferent to anything she would wear.

Her dimples flashed.

She: neatly put back the pair of jeans, put the top layer of the trunk back, took out her journal, shut the trunk, set the journal on top of the trunk; she would lock it when she put away her journal.

She went back to her closet and glared at her body pillow.

She made a face.

Using her body pillow was her favorite technique. At this moment it seemed like work.

Her dimples flashed.

She took her journal into the galley, went to the refrigerator, she took out some grapes, she placed the cup back into the cupboard, grabbed the bottled water, set them onto the table, she opened all of the blinds in the galley and in her lounge, checked her plants, she felt they were okay, sat down at the table, and turned to an unused page. She looked at it. She focused on the need to purchase a new journal. This was somewhat upsetting because this was the one Ashleigh gave her after Nikita tore the previous one; Megan fixed the old journal by photocopying all the pages and putting the pages into a three ring binder. Megan wondered why Nikita tore into the journal, knowing Nikita, this incident was out of character for her. Megan would keep the pen Ashleigh gave her. She took a drink and looked out the galley window. She turned and looked at the unused page.

She was aroused and unable to concentrate. This was frustrating. Most of her masturbation sessions were planned. Without her recognizing it; planning her sessions added to her pleasure. This time, because of what happened at the store, there seemed to be very little excitement to masturbate. She would have given up on the idea but she needed the release.

She stood up, took a sip of her water, and went into her cabin. She decided to undress. Many times when she undressed it added to her arousal and even inspired her to wear a sexy outfit. Today it was like changing her clothes. She again thought about her body pillow; it still

felt like work. Instead she simply laid down on her bed. She often times fingered herself when: she had a short amount of time, she was being spontaneous, or when she pleased herself without any fetishes; she could easily bring herself to an orgasm without the need of her fetishes.

She was putting in a lot of effort. She considered stopping but pressed on because she needed the release. She glanced at her digital alarm clock. This was taking much longer than she anticipated. This was a very frustrating sexual experience.

Her dimples flashed.

She changed her technique and focused on a fantasy. Normally she focus on one or maybe two and it added to her enjoyment. This time she went through ten different ones; for whatever reason none of them seemed to exciting.

Her dimples flashed.

She focused on a favorite fantasy of hers. She imagined a future husband watching her pee in her pants. In her fantasy he would stand behind her, reach under her jeans, and touch her through her wet panties. This took her over the edge but it was the most unfulfilling orgasm she ever experienced. The fantasy was more exciting than the actual orgasm.

She made it into a positive. Even though it was a lot of work she still experienced an orgasm and she was never tempted to view pornography. She grabbed the clothes she would wear on her charter: this was a pair of green colored cargo pants, a brown colored boyshort swim trunk, a floral print brown and white padded swimsuit top, and a white polo shirt with her charters emblem embroidered on her right chest. She decided she would order more shirts for both herself and Jake. She took a shower and changed into these clothes. After the shower she went back to her journal. She liked the cool breeze passing through her houseboat.

She decided to write about her trip to the boutique. She started by writing on how she envisioned herself being bold and confident as she: looked at adult toys for the first time, would try on a few kinky outfits, try on a pair of boots, and even make a purchase. She admitted in her journal; while waiting for the store to open she was nervous and would have likely ended up to be shy and timid. The longer they waited the less she wanted to step into the store. If she was ever to enter a boutique she would go back to this one but she would make sure the store was opened.

She questioned if she would ever invite Christopher to this boutique.

She made a face and her dimples flashed.

Her conclusion was, he would have been against the idea. Worse; he would likely look down upon her. What made dating Christopher so difficult was he had all of the traits she liked except for two big ones. A lack of communication and the feeling he would be boring in the bedroom. She hated to draw this conclusion; it was easy for her to do so because she never felt comfortable bringing up anything sexual. The other reason she was drawing this conclusion was how he acted and behaved with day to day activities. It seemed to Megan he liked the same routine and felt comfort in the tried and true. She thought about how he liked being an assistant coach but never had the desire to be the head coach. She felt this was a confirmation he disliked risk and liked his life to be comfortable. She made the correct assumption he would like sex the same way every time.

Her dimples flashed.

She: drank the last of the water, gently shut the journal, clipped the pen to the cover, she stepped back into her cabin, opened all the blinds and windows in her cabin, put the journal in the trunk, locked the trunk, prayed for a while, set her alarm clock, and took a nap.

Ashleigh stepped from the first pier onto the yachts pier. When she stepped from the yacht's pier onto the yacht. She looked up at the stairs going from the first deck to the main entrance on the second deck. Because Bob took Nikita with him she decided to use the door on the first deck.

She: shut the door behind her, turned around, and gazed at this room. This was what they called the rec area of the yacht. There were three rows of Roman styled white pillars. Often times she would sit and look out of the U-shaped windows at the bow end of the room. She felt the side windows were an awesome touch. She enjoyed gazing at the river, observing the walking bridge, and studying the preserve. She hated those times when if felt as though something from the preserve was staring at her. When she felt this way she always left the room. Looking at the row of eighties arcade games she was reminded of the costume party. These machines were a short distance from the U shaped windows and were back to back. In the center of all the pillars was a large antique table.

She smiled.

She spend many hours at this table playing board games or working on art projects. In between the next set of pillars, lined up in a row: was a blackjack table, roulette wheel, and Craps table; the top of the blackjack table could be flipped over to be a poker table. These tables were a focal point of the costume party. For a few hours these table were run by professionals and the money raised went to the *Eastbank Community Center*. A few feet from the last set of pillars was a custom built oblong cherry wood bar. Along the starboard side in between the pillars near the exterior wall were two electronic dart boards. These dart boards were her favorite. She spent many hours playing darts with Megan and Julie. Scattered throughout this deck were small enclaves of brand new chairs, six love seats, two couches, large tables, and small round end tables (that were secured to the floor). A favorite item of hers was a very large antique roman numeral clock attached the wall above the engine room door. She was still trying to find out where Bob purchased this from. She glanced at the storage room door and the entrance to the port side cabin. This corner cabin started just beyond the door of the storage unit and ended near the port side entrance.

Ashleigh felt the painted collage on the port side of the Yacht was outlandish. Painted on the wall were: chess pieces, checker pieces, Monopoly pieces, dice of varying sides, Clue pieces, Risk pieces, a Backgammon Board, a Checker board, marbles, and other recognized game pieces. A local artist painted this and the outside of the yacht. She appreciated the talent it took to paint this collage and the outside of the yacht, but she wished her brother would have commissioned something more conventional. What surprised her was during the costume party people stood in front of the collage marveling at it.

She smiled.

She turned and headed toward her suit.

As she headed up the ladder to her suite she glanced at a large aerial picture of *Renewed Mastery*. This picture was taken a few months after the company first opened. The picture was taken in early spring: there were buds on the trees, a pick-up truck was in the

parking lot with a plow still attached to it, and there were melting piles of snow around the edges of the parking lot. Ashleigh recalled her brother's confidence the day he opened this factory. It seemed like an eternity since this picture of *Renewed Mastery* was taken.

She turned away and headed up the stairs. Once at the first deck she glanced toward the pool. The pool was behind a top of the line glass sliding door and was at the stern of the boat. She thought about going swimming but decided against it. She was grateful the pool service would arrive tomorrow. She turned and was in a hallway; she was now facing the bow of the vessel. She focused on her suite door her suite was on the starboard side of the vessel. Directly across from her suite were two cabins. Between these cabins was a full sized head. She stepped into her suit and shut the door behind her.

She set her purse on a chair next to her bed. She stepped over to her brand new computer. This was on the port side of the suite just passed the door. This desk top computer and the state of the art monitor were on a brand new computer desk. She chose this desk because: of the lower shelf underneath where she could place the computer, the lower cabinet across from this shelf, the shelf designed for the monitor, the column designed for disks, and the cabinet on top with two doors. She had the movers secure this desk to the wall. She was grateful Megan helped her put together the computer chair.

Without the IT director, Ms. Terri Green, installing the state of the art wifi on the yacht; there was no way Ashleigh would have been able to log onto the internet from her suite. Terri Green was a difficult manager to deal with. The reason Ashleigh and Bob put with with this difficulty was how good she was at her job. Most important; she was very loyal to Bob. This loyalty shocked Ashleigh because they were complete opposites. She often questioned why they were so loyal to one another. The easy answer would have been sex, this was far from the answer in this case; because Bob never messed around with anyone he worked with. More important; it was obvious to Ashleigh, Terri Green had no interest in having sex with Bob. Ashleigh wondered if she was interested in sex at all.

Ashleigh: pulled out her chair, turned on the computer, sat down in her chair, rolled it to the desk, pulled out the rolling tray with the keyboard, took a deep breath, and waited for the computer to boot.

She was disappointed they never entered the boutique. Based upon what she observed she would have purchased a toy from this store. She was taken to adult toy stores with each of her boyfriends. These stores were creepy to her and she never liked the pornographic material. She especially disliked the adult store Haley and Ashleigh visited with the bachelorette party.

There were many reasons she ended up regretting attending this bachelorette party bus tour. One of them was the cost of a cab when Haley, a friend of the bride, and herself refused to enter a male strip club. Ashleigh was reminded on how irritating drunk people were. She despised the politics of being a Vice President out on a bachelorette party. The worst was the experience at the adult book store. The adult book store they went to had booths where they showed porn and booths with live girls. She disliked the racks of pornography. This was the reason she disliked adult bookstores in the first place. She was annoyed at many of the ladies behavior. She especially disliked; when a few of them acted like they had never entered an adult store before. Ashleigh felt the only woman who had never been to an adult store before was the friend of the bride who clung to Haley and herself.

Ashleigh was grateful Haley was there. Ashleigh suspected they would never find themselves in an adult bookstore with one another ever again; which was fine by both of them.

There were many reasons she felt awkward at buying a toy during the bachelorette party. She was certain if she purchased what she wanted it would have turned into gossip. Ashleigh never believed Haley would spread any gossip but Ashleigh felt odd buying a toy with Haley there. Another reason she felt odd buying an adult toy with this group was the belief; the toys she wanted to purchase were different from the toys most women liked. It seemed to her, all of her girlfriends who talked about owning a toy, owned a vibrator or a large dildo. She disliked the idea of vibrators because they reminded her of electric tools. All of the dildos she spotted were way to large for her. Large dildos reminded her of the first guy she had sex with.

Sex with her first boyfriend hurt. While dating him she lacked the confidence to tell him to stop. After her sexual experiences she believed she had a smaller than average vagina. During a recent physical, it was confirmed by her gynecologist, her vaginal depth was shorter than average. Knowing this about her own anatomy, finding out how wonderful foreplay could be, and having more confidence; she would never again put up with painful intercourse. Foreplay was her focus. However; she loved the feeling of a penis inside of her. She knew this because of using cucumbers and her experience with her third boyfriend. Based upon the size of her third boyfriend she realized a smaller penis was far more comfortable for her. She liked using cucumbers as sex toys because she could shape them into the size she liked. She considered buying a small vibrator but they still reminded her of electrical tools.

An incident she witnessed at the adult store confirmed her belief. Haley was encouraging the friend of the bride, who clung to Haley and Ashleigh in the store, to start with a small vibrator. This friend was clearly sexually inexperienced and wisely choose Haley for advice. One of the bridesmaids interrupted. This woman vehemently disagreed with Haley and grabbed a huge vibrator. Ashleigh felt this woman and the toy were intimidating. This turned Ashleigh off from buying any.

The computer was booted up. She clicked on the search engine icon.

She glanced at the clock on the bottom of her screen.

She believed: it would take forty-five minutes to an hour to drive to the boutique, if she limited her shopping to a half hour, she would have the time to drive back to the marina, hide what she bought, and get to the airport just in time. The problem was everything had to be perfect; she would have to limit her shopping to a half hour. She knew she'd shop longer than a half hour. This time constraint and what she wanted to purchase were the reason she typed into the search engine: *Anal Sex Toys*.

A list of online adult toy stores appeared. She clicked on one with a name she recognized. A friend of hers had left a catalog from this company on top of some mail she received. Ashleigh would never forget the name of this catalog.

She clicked onto the link stating: *About Us*.

The website promised discreet shipping.

She clicked back to the home screen.

She blushed when she clicked onto the link directing her to a list of female toys.

She found the bravery to click onto the link; *Sex Machine*. She never knew there were sex machines until the bachelorette party. Many of the women made comments about the machine. This was one of many reasons Ashleigh only felt comfortable purchasing a toy with

Megan. The stores sex machine had a selection of attachments. There were two attachments she found fascinating.

Three of these machines appeared.

She gasped and stared at the pictures.

She was intrigued by the one she could mount. She felt this was better than the one in the store and the other two the website was presenting. She clicked the link of the one she would mount. She found herself clicking onto the link: *attachments*. She focused on two of the six attachments. One of them was just about five inches. She convinced herself the price was just to high and clicked back to the home page.

She felt herself becoming aroused.

She clicked onto the link: *Anal Toys*.

Until this morning she never told anyone she was curious about anal sex. When she was dating her first boyfriend, she read an article in a magazine at a doctors office, discussing the best positions for the size of a guys penis. A woman who preferred small cocks was interviewed for the article. This woman was quoted as saying, "*Because anal sex is a favorite of mine. I look for guys who are smaller.*" Ashleigh would never forget this. It was unhelpful to her at the time because of how large her first boyfriend was.

There were other reasons she was interested in trying anal sex. Anytime she received a massage or a guy touched her backside it was arousing. A pleasurable surprise was the time her last boyfriend touched her anus. After this, there were times when she would casually touch herself there, but backed off because she felt awkward. She tried inserting a cucumber but it was to uncomfortable. In the same doctors office, a few years earlier, there was a magazine with an article on how a woman could enjoy anal sex. This article recommend starting off with an anal toy before trying it with a real person. Her last boyfriend had the perfect size for a anal sex. She never brought up the subject because they broke up before having sex again. The idea to experiment with anal sex was revived when she spotted anal toys at the store the bachelorette party visited.

Whenever she clicked onto a toy she quickly read the description and the reviews. She marked a half dozen as favorites. She read all the favorites again. She made her decision and these items were put into the cart of the website.

After; feeling she had time, she started to casually surf the rest of the site. There were things she wondered why anyone would buy and there were things if she was married she would possibility consider. While doing this she started to debate about the machine.

She clicked back to the machine again. She was afraid she would like it to much. She had gone through a stage in her life where she masturbated at least once every day. During this time she began to feel she was about to loose control of her sexual impulses. Through prayer and some of the principles she learned in alcohol treatment; she felt her masturbation habits were healthy. There were reservations about the butt plug but she felt this item would never cause her to loose control. There were major reservations about the machine. Just studying it was causing her to feel aroused; she felt this was a warning sign.

She added a bottle of lube and a bottle of toy cleaner to the website's cart.

This is when she heard the main door open and the jangling of Nikita's chain as she ran through the yacht to her suite door.

She heard Nikita howl and whimper.

Ashleigh yelled, "No howl."

She quickly finished her purchase and clicked out of the website.

Bob knocked on the door.

Ashleigh yelled, "I thought you were spending the day with Susan and her son?"

"Plans changed. She's taking William to his Dad's today. She's coming back later tonight."

"Oh."

Bob asked, "I was thinking of taking Nikita down to the pier."

Nikita knew "pier" and became excited.

"No problem."

Bob suggested, "I'm more than willing to watch Nikita while you pick up your family."

Ashleigh, clicked out of the search engine, stood up, walked to the door, and opened it. It was impossible to ignore the bright multi-colored leaf patterned Hawaiian shirt he was wearing. She wondered if he shopped at the same store as Stan. Barbara complained about Hawaiian shirts. Ashleigh thought about the many times Megan complained about Hawaiian shirts. Ashleigh assumed Susan disliked them too.

Ashleigh was forced to pet an excited Nikita.

Ashleigh asked, "You feel that's a good shirt?"

He looked down, "What's wrong with it? I just bought it the other day."

She gave a look.

"Nicole has invited my family over for dinner tonight. Would you watch her through out the day?"

"No problem. Susan likes Nikita."

"Susan is a good woman."

Bob asked, "You like Susan?"

"Of course."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Ashleigh was very serious, "Sooner or later you'll have to take her to Wisconsin."

He pushed up his glasses.

"I've offered. She says she isn't ready to go."

She smiled, "It shows she trusts you."

"I do sense some jealousy."

"You should understand that?"

"Sex with Shelly is out of the question. Especially while I'm seeing Susan."

Ashleigh sighed.

Nikita howled.

Ashleigh yelled, "No howl."

Ashleigh looked at her brother, "She might trust you. But she might not trust Shelly."

Bob gave Ashleigh a look, "How does that make any sense?"

She made a face and said, "We'll talk about it later."

"Alright."

He pushed up his glasses.

"The vehicle I rented for your family arrived."

She sighed, "I wish you'd talk to me about these changes you make. I assumed I'd be using your car today. Plus. Haley and I picked out a car for my family. It's arriving here tomorrow. Now what do I do?"

“Nothing.”

Ashleigh gave him a face.

“I talked to Haley after you rented the vehicle you chose. I paid for a better one. Your family deserves better.”

Ashleigh asked, “Is it that expensive SUV out in the parking lot?”

“Only the best.”

She sighed.

“I really appreciate you helping me. I just wished you’d talk to me first.”

“How am I able to surprise my Little Sister and her family if I talk to you first?”

She stared at him.

Bob smiled, “Tell your family I say hello.”

“I will.”

He pushed up his glasses.

In a very serious tone he asked, “Is Felicia’s boyfriend taking responsibility for her pregnancy?”

“We’re not sure.”

Bob pushed up his glasses, “Oh.”

“We’re all discussing the options.”

“I hope she isn’t considering an abortion.”

“If Victoria and Blake have anything to say about it there won’t be an abortion.”

He pushed up his glasses.

Nikita howled again.

Again Ashleigh yelled, “No howl.”

Nikita stopped.

“Adoption is being considered as well as the possibility of her keeping it.”

“If they need any legal advice let me know.”

Ashleigh smiled, “Okay.”

As frustrating as her brother could be; these were the times when she loved her brother the most.

“You enjoy the day.”

She smiled, “I will.”

She watched her brother turn and head toward the door.

Nikita stayed sitting next to Ashleigh. Nikita would follow Best Friend wherever she went next.

Bob noticed and turned around, “Let’s go for a walk.”

Nikita knew “walk” and Bob’s hand gestures. She went running toward him.

Ashleigh shook her head at the Hawaiian shirt. She wished she could explain to these fashion experts why girlfriends and wives disliked Hawaiian shirts. She reminded herself she had no control over the fashion industry; unless of course Bob was to buy a fashion company. She watched Bob lead Nikita to what they called Nikita’s closet, she watched him clip on the leash, and lead her out of the yacht. Ashleigh turned and looked at the clock. She left the door open, stepped into the galley, opened the refrigerator, opened the drawer labeled Vegetables, took out the three cucumbers in a vegetable bag from the grocery store, selected one, placed the other two back, shut the drawer, shut the refrigerator, set the cucumber on the counter, opened a drawer, took out a slicer, shaped it, glanced at the kitchen clock, headed back to her

suite, she reminded herself this was to be a short session, she went to the night stand on the side of the bed she slept on, open the drawer, grabbed one of the last remaining condoms she purchased at the convenience store, slipped it on, and removed her clothes. She reminded herself it had to be a short session.

While laying there in the afterglow she glanced at her digital clock. Immediately; her afterglow was replaced by panic. She stood up and took a deep breath. Then focused on getting ready and picking up her family at the airport. She was grateful it was between twenty-five to forty minutes away depending on traffic.

Ashleigh turned onto I-95 and hit the gas pedal. She was watchful for any police officer along the way. What bothered her about I-95 were the many lanes and the tolls; she was grateful there were no tolls between Eastbank and the airport. Growing up in a suburb of Milwaukee the freeways were three lanes and in the rural areas were two.

Her family was arriving in the same airport Bob flew in and out off to visit his son. This was the same airport important clients of *Renewed Mastery* were flown in and out off. Ashleigh suspected her brother invested in the charter company he always used. She Believed this was the reason for the discounted price and the newest plane her family was on. The airport itself was a half hour southwest of Eastbank. She was surprised a city of this size would have an international airport. She reminded herself she was living in southeast Florida where tourism was a very important industry. She never visited the city this airport was in but she often times drove through it when she headed to and from Boca Rotan or Fort Lauderdale. Many of her employees made the commute to work from this city.

She wondered why her brother picked out such a large SUV, with her being five one she would have preferred the small SUV Haley and herself chose. Finding the positive as Megan said, she appreciated the amenities of this large SUV; with the exception of the GPS device. She turned off the GPS device before reaching the freeway because it kept repeating “*recalculating*”. It was doing so because of road construction and a detour she needed to follow. Before turning onto the freeway she glanced at the Google Map she printed out to remind herself of what exit ramp to look for. Once off the freeway she would use the hand drawn map Jake made her; this map was less confusing to her than the Google Map.

She spotted the exit she needed.

She pulled off the freeway.

She was looking forward to seeing her family. The question; was how well the family was dealing with Felicia’s pregnancy. Ashleigh was disappointed in her Little Sister. Not just because she ignored everyone’s warning about him. Felicia ignored Ashleigh’s advice, this advice included Ashleigh telling her how: she regretted losing her virginity, having sex with her boyfriend was not a cure all, and the first boyfriend she slept with told everyone she was easy. It was difficult for Ashleigh to believe Felicia’s story. She told people she trusted the condom fell off and she was on the pill. Ashleigh believed the condom fell off but she had difficulty believing Felicia was on the pill. Ashleigh comparing herself to Felicia, when Ashleigh was Felicia’s age. Ashleigh felt she was difficult and in many ways rebellious. She knew enough to go on birth control. Even with this preparation Ashleigh would have given anything to have her virginity back. The positive was Ashleigh’s belief her pregnancy was causing Felicia to stop being so naive.

She glanced at the directions Jake wrote out for her. She followed one road, made a left, and followed the signs into the airport. She observed this was far from a large airport but commercial airliners were flying in and out of it. There were three runways. She spotted a brand new large charter plane parked at a terminal. She recognized the name printed on the side. She focused straight ahead when she entered a tunnel. Once out of the tunnel she drove maybe two hundred feet and was at the pickup area of the airport. She was surprised at how busy this airport was for its size.

Ashleigh started to tear when she spotted her family. She spotted Annette waving excitedly. It was obvious Blake said something to her. This caused Annette to stand straight and be calm. Ashleigh was willing to pay for Iris. Iris's family objected because the family was visiting Yellowstone national park.

Ashleigh cringed when she spotted a very pale Felicia run to the nearest garbage can and throw up.

She spotted Victoria cringe.

To Ashleigh's surprise Victoria went up to Felicia and comforted her. Equally surprising was Felicia accepted it. This was the type of positive Megan talked about.

An excited Annette ran to an open spot and stood in the center. What caused Annette to move was Victoria yelling at her. Annette quickly moved out of the spot and onto the large sidewalk. Ashleigh now understood what Victoria and Felicia were talking about. Annette never acted this way before. Just before Ashleigh left for Florida Annette, at the age of fifteen, experienced her first period. This was a relief to everyone who cared about Annette. She was scheduled to go through a battery of tests if her periods never started. She still endured some; everyone was relieved when they came back normal. Since this first period her emotions were erratic and she was easily excitable. This made sense to every woman who knew Annette's situation. Ashleigh felt nature played a cruel joke on her. Nature prevented Annette from maturing but now it was trying to catch up for lost time; she was now filled with raging hormones. Everyone who loved Annette was trying to be patient with her. Just as Annette was trying her best to be calm.

Annette was still an awkward looking teenager but nature was finally applying itself. Her face was finally starting to mature and transform into an oblong shape. For years she wore a bra but everyone knew this was cosmetic. Ashleigh was certain Annette was overjoyed to finally developing female hips and breasts. Ashleigh believed once her braces came off she would have an awesome smile. Ashleigh hoped Annette believed Victoria when she would tell an exasperated Annette late bloomers ended up to be gorgeous looking women.

Ashleigh spotted Annette turn toward Felicia and cringe.

It was obvious Felicia was throwing up again.

Ashleigh hoped this would encourage Annette to remain a virgin. Annette was like an adoptive member of the family. She called Blake Dad almost from the beginning of meeting him. Even after her mother remarried she still called Blake Dad but called her Step-Dad by his first name. From all accounts her Step-Dad was a good guy but Annette had made the emotional connection to Blake and Blake never did anything to ruin this affection. Only Ashleigh, Felicia, and Annette knew; Annette and Felicia almost had a falling out because of how Felicia was treating Victoria and Blake. The reason Annette stayed friends with Felicia was because Annette would have lost a whole family if she stopped being friends with Felicia.

Felicia and Annette were overjoyed they remained friends. In many ways their friendship was stronger because of their struggles.

Annette helped Felicia see how good her parents were and how terrible she had been acting since dating the Father of her Child. This tough love was a huge reason for Felicia's change in attitude.

Only Annette was aware, Iris told Felicia a lie, her parents would have allowed Iris to go on the trip. Iris was tired of Felicia's behavior and was temporarily avoiding Felicia. Iris would be there for Felicia once Felicia would listen to people's advice. Iris felt Felicia was on her way. On the previous night Annette and Felicia went to Iris' house. Felicia, with sincere tears, apologized. It was obvious to all three girls, Felicia's boyfriend was ready to dump Felicia and do everything possible to avoid being a father. It was equally obvious Felicia was growing up in a hurry. This changed impressed Iris. She knew of many girls in Felicia's situation who chose to remain childish and irresponsible.

Ashleigh stepped out of the vehicle. Ashleigh recognized the stewardess and the two guys pushing the two carts with the families luggage was on. Ashleigh correctly assumed the one large leather bag was Blake's and the rest were the ladies bags.

This is when Ashleigh's phone rang. She looked at the number and knew it was Nicole. She took the call.

Victoria cringed when her youngest daughter threw up again.

She was unable to contain herself and turned toward Annette and stated "See why you wait?"

Annette cringed, "Yeah."

All of them looked at Ashleigh when her phone rang.

Victoria with compassion asked, "You okay."

Felicia answered, "I hate planes."

Victoria handed Felicia wipes and breath mints. She made sure her purse was secured. One of her biggest worries about visiting Florida was being mugged.

Blake and Annette felt compassion for Felicia. As soon as the plane lifted off Felicia's pigment turned into the pale miserable pigment she was currently displaying.

Annette with an excited tone said, "Ashleigh's lost weight."

Felicia added, "She's gaining muscle."

Victoria commented, "See what happens when you eat right and exercise."

She turned to Felicia, "Take that with a grain of salt. Your eating for two."

Felicia tossed out the wipes in the same garbage she threw up in.

Felicia hated it when her Mother reminded her she was pregnant. Felicia understood the reason her Mom was treating her the way she was. Felicia hated to admit, she needed her Mom, and for the first time in her life was happy her Mom was older than all the other mom's she knew. Being pregnant was frightening, embarrassing, and it felt like the world was upon her shoulders. Adding to her misery was the realization everything everyone said about her boyfriend was true.

The family observed a confident Ashleigh walk to the back of the vehicle open the hatch. She did this while holding onto what they believed was an expensive phone.

She momentarily stopped talking on the phone.

In a commanding but nice voice, “Anna would you make sure all of the bags end up in back.”

The stewardess answered, “Yes Ms. Ashleigh.”

They spotted her wink at the stewardess. The stewardess smiled in return.

Anna made sure the handlers loaded the SUV. While talking to Nicole on the phone she: dug into her purse, opened a female wallet, pulled out bills, counted it out, and handed cash out to both the handlers and the stewardess.

They heard Ashleigh say, “Okay.”

She clicked off the phone and looked at everyone. Even before she could say anything Annette waved her arms, ran up to Ashleigh, and embraced her. Lucky for Ashleigh, Annette was only few inches taller than Ashleigh and was light weight. Annette started to cry. Ashleigh looked over at Victoria. Victoria made a hand gesture indicating Ashleigh should have patience. After letting go of Annette and reassuring her everyone was going well; Ashleigh proceeded to give her family hugs.

Felicia stepped up to a teary eyed Annette, “Why are you crying?”

“I don’t know. I just missed her.”

“She visited us last month.”

Annette answered through tears, “I know.”

At times it was difficult being friends with Annette but there was no way Felicia would stop being friends with her. Both were struggling and both were leaning on one another.

Victoria gladly took the hug and they both teared.

Annette and Felicia smiled at Blake. It was rare to see Blake get emotional. What they found fascinating was when Ashleigh briefly hugged him he was fine; but when Ashleigh and Victoria hugged is when he became emotional.

Annette went up to Blake, “It’s okay to cry.”

Blake looked at her, “I’m okay.”

Annette made a face and walked back to Felicia.

Felicia thought this whole thing was hilarious.

They watched when Ashleigh pulled away, looked at Anna and the handler, “Thank-you. See you in a few weeks.”

Anna stated, “We’ll like it when you fly with Mr. Bob.”

Ashleigh smiled.

“I’ll be the ones bringing my family back.”

“It’d be proper.”

“Yes it would.”

The two smiled.

Anna said, “See Y’all then.”

“I’ll look forward to it.”

Ashleigh’s family were surprised at how different Ashleigh was acting. The Florida Ashleigh acted different than the Ashleigh they met the previous month. Ashleigh came up with Bob to meet her nephew for the first time. Before heading back to Florida she had lunch with her family.

Victoria was impressed with Ashleigh’s mature confidence.

Ashleigh said, "After I check you into the resort we're going to Nicole's house. She's a very dear friend of mine. She just told me she's making us Jambalaya. Dad you'll love it."

Blake said, "I hope so."

Victoria looked over at Felicia, "Be careful it's spicy."

Ashleigh answered in a delightful tone, "Nicole made two versions. There is her normal spicy version and a mild version."

Victoria was impressed.

Felicia sort of cringed at the idea of eating Jambalaya.

"Megan's parents are also coming over. Who are Nicole's in-Laws. They've been a huge help to me."

Victoria and Blake looked at one another.

"After dinner. We're invited to watch Julie play softball. She's the young woman who walks Nikita. If they win today they have a chance at getting into the regional playoffs."

Felicia was interested in watching the game because Felicia and Julie had friended one another on Facebook

Blake smiled, "I'm up for a good softball game."

Ashleigh smiled, "I figured that."

Annette whispered to Felicia, "Is she picking up a southern accent?"

Felicia whispered back, "Sort of?"

They gave one another looks.

The family expected Blake to encourage everyone to move on.

Ashleigh beat him to it, "Let's get going."

Immediately the chatter started.

What surprised the family was when Blake sat in the front passenger seat and allowed Ashleigh drive. Victoria was aware, the reason her Husband took the passenger seat was because of Ashleigh's confidence, without this confidence he would have insisted on driving.

Victoria asked as Ashleigh was turning on the vehicle, "Are these good people?"

Ashleigh stated, "You'll like them a lot. Nicole reminds me of a younger version of you."

This was interesting to the two girls.

"Captain and Ma. Who are Jimmy's parents and who are Nicole's in-laws. I'd like to think they are the grandparents I never had. No offense."

Blake asked, "Why would we be offended?"

Ashleigh stated, "They're the same age as you."

Felicia poked, "See. You are old."

Annette and Felicia laughed.

Annette being her excited self believed she was funny when she said, "Are they close to being in an nursing home?"

The dead silence alerted Annette she took it too far. This frustrated herself.

The sudden silence caused Felicia to laugh. Felicia and Annette looked at one another and giggled.

Ashleigh looked at her Mom with the rear view mirror. Victoria just shook her head. Ashleigh smiled.

Ashleigh was looking for a space to pull into traffic.

This was the first time Felicia laughed in weeks. The past few weeks were emotional for everyone. This laughter was fulfilling Blake's plan. It was his hope they could find some

respite from the families struggles. More important, he wanted to see how Ashleigh was doing. As a Dad he would be paying close attention to how Ashleigh was living and who her friends were.

This was Victoria's mission. Ashleigh was unaware this was the angle he used to convince Victoria to vacation in Florida.

Everyone gasped when Ashleigh gunned it and was in traffic.

April 7th, Decisions

Part Three of Six

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Ashleigh & Megan Book I: Friendship

*Friday April 7th,
Decisions*

*Day 13 of Book I
(Sixty Days after Bob Meets Susan King)*

Part Four of Six

Authored By: R. P. Voght

*Posted on ashleighandmegan.com on:
August 11, 2024*

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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format I call, "A 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." 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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April 7th, Decisions Day 13 of Book I

Ashleigh was in her walk in closet deciding on what she was going to wear.

Annette and Felicia were sitting on Ashleigh's bed.

Annette was petting Nikita.

Nikita liked both of these female women. She remembered their scent. She sensed Felicia's baby.

Ashleigh stepped out of the closet carrying two items. The first was a blue and white stripped scoopneck top with a tie on the front.

She said, "I like the sleeves."

Annette said, "It'd look cute on you."

Ashleigh made a face.

"Or should I go with this one?"

Ashleigh presented an ocean blue polka dot dress.

Ashleigh asked, "Which one?"

Annette mentioned, "I like the outfit you have on."

Felicia warned, "Mom doesn't like being late."

Annette added, "Victoria thought it was a bad idea of you coming back here to change."

Ashleigh answered, "I won't be late."

The two girls gave one another a look of doubt.

Ashleigh made a face and asked, "Which one?"

Felicia mentioned, "Why not wear one of your little black dresses?"

Annette agreed, "You look good in them."

Ashleigh answered, "No one wears black here. Unless your going to a funeral or a wedding. I'm not sure they would even wear black at a wedding."

Felicia mentioned, "Everyone's wearing jackets."

Annette added, "It's like sixty degrees."

"That's cold here."

Ashleigh stepped back into the closet. The girls heard her sliding clothes. Ashleigh's dilemma was the softball game. Ashleigh was aware of her actions because: her brother owned the largest private held company in the State of Florida, she was the vice president of her brother's company, Eastbank was a small community, and she was an outsider. She often times felt uncomfortable being a local celebrity. Whenever she felt uncomfortable she relied on Nicole, Diana, or Megan. Diana and Nicole were teaching her how to present herself. They never told her exactly what to wear nor did they curb her personality; but they lovely reminded her she was being watched. She was trying to find something comfortable while appearing classy.

Ashleigh pulled out a red three-tiered top with small white polka dots. She smiled. She liked patterns. She stepped over to her jackets. While looking for a specific jacket she was hearing whispering. Ashleigh was certain the two young ladies in her suite were talking about her.

Annette yelled, "So. When are we meeting Megan?"

Ashleigh removed from the rack what the catalog called a shrunken dotted jacket. Ashleigh liked how it appeared longer on her, it was in the same type of white polka dots as the blouse, she tried to remember where she put a certain pair of shoes.

This time Felicia yelled, "Are we meeting Megan?"

She hung the jacket and blouse on one of the many hooks she secured to the wall of the closet.

Ashleigh asked loudly, "Why?"

Felicia commented, "I saw you posted pictures of her on Facebook."

Ashleigh listened. She could hear the sounds of loud whispers but was unable to catch what they were saying.

Ashleigh felt the need to ask, "She's my best friend."

Felicia answered, "You've said that."

Ashleigh again heard loud whispers.

Ashleigh made a face.

Ashleigh was surprised they would believe Megan and her were lovers.

She turned and opened one of a series of drawers Megan and Nicole helped her install. Ashleigh believed Nicole was one of the best closet organizers she ever met. Since; Ashleigh was having trouble finding everything. She found a very nice pair of red summerweight chino trousers. She felt these were classier than jeans, would still be casual, and would keep her outfit monochromatic. She looked at her large shoe caddie and made a face. No longer being a pile of shoes she was trying to remember where in the shoe caddie she put her shoes. She hated shoes. The only reason she somewhat liked shoes was to look taller. This never stopped her from removing shoes with a heel. She often wore athletic shoes, flats, or would go barefoot. Which put her back to her five foot one self. She set her slacks onto a chair she kept in the closet.

She heard Annette ask, "Ashleigh what do you mean?"

Ashleigh more concentrating on her shoes answered, "Mean by what?"

Felicia stepped up to the plate, "What type of friend?"

This is when she heard Nikita's chain jangle and felt the presence of two teenagers staring at her. Felicia sat on a small stool.

Nikita liked Female with Pup because she was petting her.

Felicia said, "I like the blouse."

Annette mentioned, "I've noticed a lot of people here wear bright colors."

Ashleigh mentioned, "Bright colors and polka dots are supposed to be the trend."

Annette said, "You'll like that. You've always liked patterns and bright colors."

Ashleigh bent down and started to open drawers in the section she believed the shoes she was looking for were.

Felicia mentioned, "You usually have a pile of shoes on the floor."

"Megan and Nicole helped me. Because of bugs and spiders it was suggested I put my shoes into caddies."

Felicia somewhat animated, "I suppose you like it when she helps you?"

Ashleigh found where Megan put all of her pumps. She pulled out a pair of polka-dot peep-toe pumps with a four inch heel. She was not a fan of pumps. She ordered this pair because it matched the jacket. She opened a different drawer and grabbed a pair of white criss-cross sandals with a four inch platform heel.

"Which one?"

Felicia asked, "Why go with white?"

"I'm going to wear a white purse with a white belt."

An excited Annette pulled down from a hook a very skinny white belt, "This belt?"

"Yeah."

Felicia glanced at her many hanging purses, "Which white one?"

Annette animated, "Don't bugs get into them?"

"I keep them closed and shake them."

"Oh."

Excited Annette asked, "Should we be worried about bugs and spiders? I don't like spiders."

Felicia answered, "Me either."

"Be watchful."

Annette again excited, "Okay. I'll watch out for spiders. I heard there are black widow spiders down here. Is that true?"

Ashleigh answered, "Yes."

Felicia said, "Oh."

"Watch for webs and be careful."

Annette recognized she was getting excited and said, "Okay."

Ashleigh purposely talked with a calm voice, "I was feeling I should go with the small purse with the small strap."

Felicia mentioned, "You always look better when you carry a small purse."

Annette already getting excited state, "I like the polka dot shoes."

"Are you sure?"

Felicia mentioned, "They match your outfit."

Annette was again excited, "But the white shoes with the belt are cool. The white belt will match everything. But then again. It's up to you. No matter what you wear you look cute. Especially with all the weight you lost."

Ashleigh and Felicia glanced at her.

Nervous Annette said, "What?"

Felicia calmly said, "With the pants reaching the floor. I don't believe it will matter to much."

Annette managed to remain calm, "Just wear white colored jewelry."

Ashleigh smiled, "I planned on that."

Annette stated, "I just can't get over how in shape you are. You'll look so awesome in that outfit."

"You really think I'm in shape?"

Felicia answered, "Your in great shape."

"I'm not really loosing a lot of weight."

Annette touched her, "You must be working out a lot."

"Attend Megan's step aerobics class."

Annette asked in a worried tone, "Is she intense?"

Again Ashleigh and Felicia looked at her.

Felicia asked calmly, "Is she nice?"

Ashleigh was about to answer.

Annette was unable to hold it in, "Mom hasn't seen a picture of your friend yet. You don't mind if we call her a friend? We don't care. We just want you to be happy."

Felicia rolled her eyes.

Ashleigh made a face.

Annette said, "We're worried."

Ashleigh let them believe she had no idea what they were hinting at, "About what?"

Felicia and Annette looked at one another.

Felicia gave Annette a look.

Somehow Annette was able to control herself.

Felicia mentioned, "You haven't always picked out the best partners."

Annette started with controlled emotions but then became excitable, "We're worried you might be rushing into a relationship to fast. You fall in love so quickly sometimes. I feel it's wonderful you'd find someone to be in love with. But we're worried she'll brake up with you."

Felicia mentioned, "We won't tell Mom."

Annette excited, "Ever since we seen her picture we've wondered. How tall is she?"

Ashleigh decided to play along, "She's six foot. I like taller partners."

Felicia made a face, "Really?"

Ashleigh holding in the laughter said, "It's more fun."

Annette eyes bulged out and asked, "Is the sex good?"

Ashleigh lied, "It was magic. I never realized how good it could be."

Felicia calmly asked, "But you've always liked guys? I heard you are wanting to date one?"

"I like him too."

Felicia and Annette gave one another shocked looks.

Ashleigh managed a straight face, "I get the best of both worlds."

They again looked at one another.

Annette asked in a worried excited, "Won't they get jealous? What happens when they find out about each other?"

Ashleigh held in her laughter.

Completely serious she stated, "They know about one other."

Felicia asked, "They do?"

Ashleigh started to feel guilty.

Felicia started to say, "If your bi we..."

Ashleigh interrupted, "I'm joking. I'm straight. Megan's straight. She's dating a guy."

Annette was suddenly angry, "That's not funny."

Felicia said, "Nikita. Your master is mean."

Nikita stood on all fours and wagged her tail.

Ashleigh started to laugh.

Annette angry stated, "It isn't funny."

"It's just a joke."

Felicia stood up and went on a rant, "This isn't something to joke about. It's awkward thinking you are a lesbian. Worse. To act like you like both. I mean. Like one or the other. To find out you're joking. That's not nice. Not that you've made jokes like this before. I should have known. It isn't funny."

Annette said, "We'll wait in the living room."

"Wait."

Annette animated and angry asked, "Why?"

Both Felicia and Ashleigh gave her a look.

Annette started to tear a little and repeated herself, "A joke like that isn't funny."

They gave her a face and stood there.

Felicia said, "I thought you were done with your pranks?"

Ashleigh sighed and said, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that."

Annette wiping away tears asked, "Why do you do that?"

"I just wanted to have some fun. I feel like I have to be serious all the time. I do like living here and I love everybody. It's just. I have to be more serious. I thought it'd be fun to joke around a little. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have. Especially with this issue."

Felicia answered, "It's okay."

Annette embraced Ashleigh, "It's okay. We love you."

Ashleigh looked over at Felicia.

Felicia rolled her eyes and shook her head.

Annette stepped back, tears were over, and asked, "Is Megan a lesbian?"

"No she's not."

Both at the same time, "Oh."

Ashleigh mentioned, "She's tired of people accusing her of being one. I'm tired of people thinking we're a couple. We're best friends. She's the best friend I ever had. Without her I don't feel I'd like it here."

Annette trying to remain calm asked, "You like living here?"

Ashleigh smiled, "Yes. Without my friends. I don't feel I'd be happy. I've never had a set of better friends in all my life."

Felicia and Annette looked at one another. They felt they understood this. They smiled at Ashleigh.

Felicia asked, "What's it like being a Vice President?"

"Let me change. I'll tell you on the way to the resort."

They nodded their heads.

Ashleigh asked, "Felicia you doing okay?"

"I'm worried about the jambalaya."

"Don't eat the spicy version."

Annette asked again, "I'm just making sure. You aren't a lesbian or bisexual?"

Very serious, "No. Why did you think I was?"

Annette answered excited, "We saw the pictures of Megan. You keep talking about her."

Ashleigh said very serious, "Like I mentioned before. She's been accused of being gay her whole life. This is a very touchy subject for her."

Felicia mentioned, "There is a guy like that at school. Everyone believes he's gay but he's not. It really bothers him."

"I have to get ready. We'll talk about this on the way."

Felicia mentioned, "I do like the yacht and your suite."

Annette blurted it out, "May we stay here?"

"You will in a week."

Felicia said, "I'm worried I'd get sea sick."

"We'll buy some sea sickness pills."

Very concerned, "Will the pills hurt the baby?"

"Nicole was a nurse. We'll ask her."

Felicia answered, "Oh."

With this Ashleigh collected her clothes and stepped into her suite.

She stopped, "Play fetch with Nikita downstairs."

Nikita ran to the suite door.

The girls opened the door and followed Nikita.

When they made it to first deck they became fascinated with the: video games, casino games, and the mural on the wall.

This disappointed Nikita who held the ball in her mouth most of the time. She dropped it a few times at their feet. They threw it a couple times. This was not what Nikita wanted.

Nicole was just about done setting the dinning room table.

She smiled at her two helpers.

Danielle and Ester carefully set some small serving items onto the table.

Nicole stated in a serious tone, "I want Y'all to be on your best behavior."

They both said at the same time, "Yes Ma'am."

Ester asked, "Who's coming over?"

"Ms. Ashleigh's parents, her sister, and her sister's friend. Plus Captain and Ma."

"Oh."

Danielle asked, "How come Ms. Megan ain't coming over?"

"She has a charter."

Danielle asked, "Ms. Nicole."

“Yes.”

“Y’all think Ms. Megan would teach me how to be a charter captain?”

Nicole smiled, “Why do Y’all want to be a charter captain?”

Ester answered, “We’ll be running our own charter.”

Danielle added, “We want to show folks dolphins just like Megan.”

Nicole made herself sound real serious, “Well. It’s a lot of work.”

Ester made a face, “It is?”

“Dangerous too.”

The two girls looked at one another.

Danielle said, “I still want to be a charter captain.”

Nicole said, “When you get older ask Megan if she’ll let you be her assistant.”

“Will she pay me?”

“Y’all have to talk to her.”

Nicole made sure to add, “Megan would have to agree to it.”

Both at the same time said, “Oh.”

Nicole smiled, “We’ll need to get ready.”

Ester asked, “Do we have to wear a dress?”

Nicole said, “No. But you better look nice. If not Y’all have to change again.”

They glanced at one another and ran upstairs. Nicole checked the table and moved a couple items. She glanced at the clock in the dining room and headed toward her bedroom. She passed a clean and presentable Jimmy.

They: stopped, hugged one another, and kissed.

She smiled and being truthful said, “You look handsome.”

He was wearing: a new multi-stripped burgundy polo shirt with a banded bottom, a new pair of khaki colored cargo slacks, and new pair of brown shoes. One of the main reasons she liked how he looked was because she purchased the outfit he was wearing.

Nicole smiled.

He smiled, “I’m glad Y’all approve.”

She tapped his chest and looked up at him. Again they kissed, this time a little bit more passionately.

She stated, “We don’t have time.”

He smiled, “Preparing for later.”

“Who says there’s a later?”

She dodged his playful grab at her backside.

They both smiled and she pointed at him, “Don’t touch.”

“Later?”

Nicole winked, “Maybe.”

He glanced into the living room, he gently entered her space, embraced her, and asked; “Who’s coming over?”

She said again, “Ms. Ashleigh’s parents, her sister, and her sister’s friend. Plus Captain and Ma.”

“I’ve been wanting to meet her parents.”

Nicole became serious, “It’s obvious Ashleigh loves them.”

“From what I’ve gathered she ain’t always had it easy.”

Nicole confirmed, “They turned her path.”

“Don’t underestimate the influence Bob had.”

“Megan says they are more like father and daughter.”

Jimmy in a serious tone, “Very close but they are still brother and sister.”

She caught the layers.

He added, “No one. Has as much influence over Bob as Ashleigh. She has his ear.”

Nicole out of concern said, “I’m sure you have influence?”

He smiled, “They’ve gone with a lot of my ideas.”

She smiled, “See.”

They again glanced into the living room and briefly kissed.

She pulled away, “I have to get ready.”

They parted.

She mentioned, “Don’t touch the desserts. Have some fruit salad or carrots.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

She glared at him.

He laughed and headed into the kitchen.

Nicole: shook her head, stepped into the bedroom, shut the door behind her, went over to her closet, opened it, and stood there. Ashleigh and Nicole agreed this would be nice casual. Ashleigh assured Nicole there wasn’t any need for her to get really dressed up; especially with them watching Julie play softball after dinner. Nicole considered what nice casual would mean to a woman from the Midwest who was Ma’s age. She reminded herself: she was the host, she was meeting people for the first time, and they would be sitting at the baseball park. Most important, she imagined what Ashleigh would wear, and what Ashleigh meant by nice casual.

She paged through her clothes. She pulled out a blue and white stripped scoopneck top, she liked the bow, she felt her new white denim full length skirt would go nice with the top; she decided against this because she felt it would get dirty at the park. She bypassed many items she felt were to casual, to dressy, or were wrong for the occasion.

She was down to two outfits. With both outfits she considered wearing nice slacks. She was unsure if Ashleigh’s Foster Mom believed a Christian women should only wear dresses or skirts. Nicole knew Ashleigh’s belief on this subject but was unsure of what her Foster Mom believed. With her Foster Mother being from the Midwest there was a great chance she would be wearing slacks. If she went with a skirt or a dress she wanted to make sure she avoided making Ashleigh’s foster mother feel under dressed. She again reminded herself her Mother-in-law was coming over for dinner; a woman who believed a woman should wear a skirt or a dress. Ma, at an occasion like this would never criticize a woman for wearing slacks; but Nicole was always mindful of what Ma felt. There were times when Nicole would go against what Ma felt. Nicole was considering all this as she stared at the outfits laid out on her bed.

One of the outfits put an emphasis on being a host and was inspired by her sister-in-law Diana. This outfit: emphasized a brand new khaki colored full length silk crinkle skirt, she matched it with a cream colored lace trim cami, to look modest she would layer over her large breasts a light blue silky smooth button front blouse. She would accessorize with: a wide bracelet macreme’ belt, a brown and white colored short healed pump, simple brown loop earrings, and a handmade brown wooden disk necklace; she purchased it at the art store at her husband’s company. For the game she had a white hat and a white jacket.

The other outfit was slightly more casual, was more artsy, and put an emphasis on the baseball game over hosting; while taking into consideration she was still a host. This outfit started with a multi-colored printed surplice dress. She liked how each color had a different pattern, the colors were dulled which she liked, the colors consisted of reds, yellows, and greens. She purchased this dress to wear when she visited her husband at work. Nicole felt this was artsy, still represented herself, and it was casual. Underneath she would wear the proper undergarments to look modest. She would accessorize with a green cropped leather jacket and a hand made chain link belt with a five inch tassel.

She glanced at her digital alarm clock. She needed to choose. She wished there was more time. She wanted to scrap both outfits. Her impulse was to go with a white denim skirt, a striped blouse, and a flowered embroidered jacket. Two things bothered her about this. One it would get dirty and there was a possibility Ashleigh would wear similar. This was the same reason she avoided an orange polka dot dress.

She was about to choose the more artsy dress but ultimately it felt wrong for the occasion. She felt the first outfit, even though it was slightly inspired by how Diana dressed; was more herself. Plus, if she met other ladies from town it would be more in line on how they knew her. She changed and got ready.

When she stepped out of her bedroom she heard her husband say, “UNO.”

This pleased Nicole greatly.

Ester asked, “You don’t have a red one?”

Jimmy answered, “I know the rules. You need to draw four and it’s blue.”

Ester reluctantly drew four cards.

Danielle smiled.

She put down a blue draw two.

Jimmy made a noise and picked two cards.

The girls were surprised at Jimmy’s outburst and giggled.

Nicole stepped into the kitchen, “Girls would you stand up.”

They looked at Jimmy.

Serious, “Y’all listen to your Momma.”

They set down their cards and stood up.

Both were wearing brand new blue jeans. Ester had a tree print on the right leg and a flower print on the left. She was wearing a light green polo shirt with the same tree print on the right shoulder. Danielle’s jeans had printed flowers on the right leg and was wearing a pink polo shirt with a flower print on the right shoulder. They accessorized with the bracelets they made from their jewelry kits. They were wearing the same styled simple department store tennis shoes; the only difference was Ester’s were green and Danielle’s were pink.

Nicole said to her daughter and her best friend, “You look nice.”

This excited them because they could get back to playing UNO with Jimmy. It was rare he would play with them.

Ester declared, “It’s my turn.”

This is when Julie stepped into the kitchen. She was in her softball uniform, she was carrying a large bag with her softball gear in it, and her backpack was full.

Ester played a card.

Julie glanced at Danielle’s cards and pointed.

Danielle looked up at Julie.

Julie nodded her head.
She turned and laid down the card Julie pointed at.
Julie excited, but trying to hide her nervousness, asked; "Did Mr. Bob tell Y'all?"
This caught their attention.
Jimmy said, "No."
He played a card.
Ester did as well.
Again Julie pointed.
Danielle played the reverse Julie pointed at.
"College scouts are evaluating me today."
Nicole asked, "For softball?"
"Yes Ma'am."

Ester played a card.
Jimmy played his reverse card, and stated; "UNO".
Ester played a card.
Nicole commented, "You've received attention for volleyball but never softball."
Jimmy stated, "Don't be nervous play like Y'all always play."
Julie answered, "Yes Sir."

Again Julie pointed to one of the two cards Danielle held.
Danielle laid it down and immediately said, "UNO."

This changed the color.
Ester asked, "Why did Y'all change the color?"
Julie answered, "The numbers matched."

Jimmy had to pick a card.
Danielle looked at her card and looked up at Julie.
Julie smiled.

Ester had to pick a card, she played it, like Danielle, Ester changed the color because the numbers matched.

Jimmy answered, "It's one of the reasons scouts are wanting to see Y'all play."

Danielle was excited because the numbers stayed the same, she played her card, and declared, "I won."

Julie said, "Planning is so important."

Jimmy smiled because he heard both Bob and Ashleigh say this all the time.

Ester stated, "Lets play again."

Nicole suggested, "Daddy should take Julie to the stadium."

"I was planning on biking."

Nicole mentioned, "It'll be easier with company coming if we drive Y'all back."

Julie understood what this meant. She was banned from doing something with the team; this very rarely happened.

Nicole reassured Julie, "Ashleigh's sister and her friend are visting. Maybe they'll want some company."

Julie asked, "Is it all right if I invite Hannah and Zoe?"

"Sure."

Julie smiled, "I've been wanting to meet Felicia."

This surprised everyone.

Ester and Danielle were waiting patiently because they were allowed to listen to an adult conversation.

Jimmy asked, "You talked to her?"

"On Facebook."

Jimmy made a face, "What's Facebook?"

Nicole stated, "Have her explain it to Y'all on the way to the stadium."

Julie's tone was serious, "I don't want to be late for practice."

Jimmy winked at Nicole, Nicole winked back.

Jimmy asked, "What's a Facebook?"

Julie led the way by stepping into the garage, "It's so cool."

Nicole smiled at the two of them.

Nicole: checked the two slow cookers, stirred them, and put the lids back on. She set the O'dours on the counter in front of the four tall chairs (they were in front of the counter). Nicole felt everything was ready until guests arrived. She believed the doorbell would ring at any minute.

"Mamma?"

"Yes."

"Y'all believe Julie will win tonight?"

"We should pray it happens."

Danielle said, "I bet they win."

Ester fed off this, "Yeah. Julie's the best player in all the world."

Nicole smiled at the way they shuffled the cards. They plopped the cards on the table and mixed them and then put them back in a pile.

Nicole mentioned, "Didn't Julie teach Y'all how to shuffle?"

Ester looked at Nicole, "It's hard."

Danielle responded, "Yeah."

Nicole smiled, "Later I'll give you an old deck of cards Y'all can practice on."

Ester and Danielle looked at one another.

"It's how Julie learned."

Danielle asked, "Y'all know the bridge?"

Ester glared, "Do you?"

The doorbell rang.

Nicole winked, "I'll teach you."

The girls looked at Nicole.

They stacked the cards and watched Nicole head to the door.

Julie opened the passenger door of the pickup truck and said, "Bye Daddy."

"Play well."

She smiled and answered, "I will."

She grabbed her backpack, her duffel bag, and shut the door. She waved to her Daddy when he drove away. She was dropped off at a community park with three stadiums. The main stadium was never officially the high schools stadium, but the high school was always given top priority; baseball was always given priority over softball. The main stadium was concrete. It went from the middle of the first base line, around home plate, to the middle of the third

base line. There were twenty rows of wooden seats and a press box on top. On the inside border of the concrete fence were banners advertising local businesses. There was a metal fence that connected the concrete stadium from end to end. Along this fence were a half dozen five tiered wooden benches that were eight foot long. In between these benches people often sat on chairs they brought themselves. In the concrete area of this stadium it had working bathrooms; they were not large but they could seat five women and five guys standing and two guys sitting.

This stadium was old but was maintained. There were a variety of colored seats and types of seats; they all fit and they all worked. Three other ways you could tell this was an older park was: the different shades of weathering of the wooden benches, different sections of fence line, and every so often the bathrooms would not work. When this happened it was fixed as quickly as possible. When they didn't work they used the outdoor toilets.

Besides this main stadium there were two other fields, they were surrounded by fencing with long tiered benches around home plate and half way up the first and third base line. Many times people sat along the fence line in their own chairs. In the middle of all three was a concession stand. If it was open it was run by a charity or a club. About twenty yards from right field of the one stadium and maybe forty yards away from center field of the other field were a line of outdoor toilets. No one ever really wanted to use them, but many times there was no choice; sometimes if the breeze was right someone playing in the outfield could catch a scent. Effort was put in so this scent was rare. When there were a lot of people, and the crew was unable to keep them clean; the stench was awful. This being stated, they set these up so the scent very rarely crossed the field of the main stadium.

Julie loved it when the team could play inside the main stadium; today was one of those days. Along the fence line there was a gate opened for the players and coaches. She headed toward this opening. Usually she was the first player to arrive; today she was the third player. She ran inside and went to their dug out.

She was happy to see two of her teammates. The coaches were on the field huddled together talking. These two girls liked Julie. Not everyone on the team liked her but everyone on the team knew they needed her to win. These teammates, like everyone else, were hearing the rumors she was a slut and a tease. Many of the girls in school discounted the rumor she was sleeping around but almost everyone felt she needed to stop getting herself off at school.

Terri-Sue acknowledged Julie, "Howdy."

She was a starting senior on third or first base, she was a little curvy, but was an excellent softball player.

Julie answered, "Howdy."

Julie's duffel bag clanked when she set it on the warning track near their dugout. She: set her backpack near the duffel bag, opened the duffel bag on the ground, removed her softball shoes, pulled out her glove, sat down, took off her shoes, set them into her duffel bag, and slipped on her softball shoes; when she slipped them on they felt a little tight. She really hoped her breasts would stay the same size.

Mindy-Lynn acknowledged Julie, "Howdy."

Mindy-Lynn was a Junior, was a brunette, was average height, was the starting shortstop when Julie was not playing the position, if Julie was playing the position Mindy-Lynn was the starter on second base. She was a very good batter, very quick, and was a ball hog. Very seldom did anything get passed her. The exception was the last game. The ball

ricochet off of second base plate and she missed the ball. She quickly secured it but throw it over the girls head at first place. All the runners advanced and one scored. The difficult part for Mindy-Lynn was it cost the team the game.

Julie looked at Mindy-Lynn, "I'm glad Y'all are here."

She answered, "I hope I play better."

Julie finished tying her shoes and looked at her, "If you dwell on the last game how are Y'all able to play good in this game?"

"We need to win this one or we're out of regional."

"We ain't about to win it if Y'all are concentrating on the last one."

Downtrodden Mindy-Lynn stated, "Because I missed it we lost."

Terri-Sue added, "Anyone could have missed it. It ain't like you miss very many."

Julie said, "You can't fix yesterday. But Y'all can make today better."

Belinda arrived. She was blond, had bright green eyes, was average height, and was a girl who loved playing sports. Both on the field and off the court was feminine but both on the court and off she was a no nonsense girl. Her family moved to Eastbank because her dad worked for *Renewed Mastery*. Her family was from New Jersey, she was a Junior, and was the starting center fielder. She was surprised she beat out a local; she assumed because she was new she would be a backup or a Junior Varsity player. The reason she was given center field was her strong arm. The reason she made the team was her speed and her batting average.

Belinda felt she stepped through some vortex and was on a foreign planet. What she hated about high school in Jersey was the same reason she disliked high school in Eastbank Florida; rumors and drama. Like the other two girls she heard the rumors about Julie. She hated all rumors no matter if they were true or not. She always wondered who's business it was on whom was sleeping with whom. She felt if a girl wanted to find relief in a girls stall it was her choice. What made Eastbank difficult was being friendless except for the girls on the softball team. This was her own doing. Before she settled on a friend she wanted to watch these people first. There were two things she liked about Florida; the house they lived in and the open space. In New Jersey it was impossible for her parents to own a house.

Julie looked up at Belinda, "Howdy."

"Hi."

Julie smiled, "I've been meaning to ask."

"What?"

Belinda gave Julie a face as she tied her shoes.

"When did Y'all start throwing the ball so far?"

This was the sort of question Belinda liked, "My brother made me. He'd take me to a park down the street. He'd stand back as far as he could and make me throw it to him."

Julie smiled, "Sometimes brothers are a good thing."

Belinda smiled, "He has good qualities. Most of the time he's annoying."

Terri-Beth added, "Mine is too."

Mindy-Lynn mentioned, "Y'all have a good brother."

Julie was surprised on how many of the girls who criticized him were now infatuated with him. Julie hoped her brother had the sense to ignore any new found attention and stay with Bette. Julie felt Bette's best quality was how authentic she was.

Julie acknowledged, "He's a good one."

Julie decided to stand up and asked, "Y'all want to play catch?"

More players were arriving.

One of the coaches yelled, "A meeting in fifteen minutes."

All the southern gals said, "Yes Ma'am."

The northern counterparts paid attention to it.

Julie panned the stands to see if a stranger was sitting in the stands, so far it was recognizable family of the girls who played.

She grabbed her mitt and ball and ran into the outfield. Belinda and the other two girls followed Julie.

Victoria was nervous.

Since having her breasts removed she disliked meeting new people and often times struggled with being out in public. Whenever she felt less of a woman she reminded herself on how much her husband loved her and was reassured by the love her daughters showed her. She knew each of her daughters loved her and needed her. This was evident by: Ashleigh who called her every few days just to talk about life, her oldest daughter seeking her advice on how to be a pastors wife, and how Felicia was relying on her since her pregnancy.

She was disappointed Felicia was pregnant. What was encouraging and difficult was Felicia was leaning on her. She liked the feeling their relationship was again close and Felicia was seeking her help. Victoria keep reminding Felicia if she wanted to keep the baby she needed to grow up. Victoria was emphasizing the importance of better decisions and how those decisions would impact her baby. Victoria understood why her daughter had sex but this would never exclude the consequences of it.

The reason she decided to take this vacation to Florida was to observe whom her middle daughter was fraternizing with. She was struggling with the idea Ashleigh was exploring a same sex relationship. The way Ashleigh talked about Megan was the same way she talked about past boyfriends. Victoria reasoned; Ashleigh might be inclined to fulfill the longing of a mother through a lesbian relationship. This hurt Victoria because she had loved Ashleigh as her own and wanted to believe Ashleigh loved her as a Mom. Victoria also believed, based upon Ashleigh's personality, it would be easy for her to be bisexual. As a conservative Christian woman she hoped she was jumping to conclusions. Victoria felt if Ashleigh was either a lesbian or bisexual she would hide this from her. There was no way Victoria would ever reject her foster daughter. Through thick or thin Victoria would love her.

Ashleigh parked the rental in the driveway.

Victoria glanced at her watch and said, "We're lucky we're on time."

Felicia stated, "If they know Ashleigh they aren't expecting her on time."

Ashleigh gave Felicia a glare.

Blake smiled.

Annette giggled.

Victoria spoke, "Annette."

"Yeah."

The rest knew to step out of the car and wait.

"Please. I know it's not easy. Please try to keep your emotions in check."

Excited, "I'm trying."

“When you get excited take a deep breath and focus.”

“Okay.”

Victoria had more to say but Annette was already out the door and had the side door shut. Victoria heard Annette talking about how she was liking Florida and was thrilled to meet Ashleigh’s friends.

Victoria stepped out of the rental and shut the door behind her.

Victoria stepped over to Ashleigh and whispered, “You think I look alright?”

Victoria was wearing a white sheer peyton shirt with an embroidered flower print. There was one embroidered flower on the front right, the stem went from the bottom to the chest, the stem broke into three other stems; on two of them were embroidered pastel colored red flowers the other one was a pastel pink flower. This was repeated on the three flowers on the back of the shirt and on the sleeves; on the back and sleeve the pastel colors were randomized. Underneath this shirt she was wearing a white tank. She matched this with a brand new pair of pink crop pants with cargo pockets and back flap pockets. She added a decorative belt with red and pink stones and a side chain. She accessorized with a handmade pink flowered necklace and matching earrings. Ashleigh gave her this set just after arriving at the resort. This set of jewelry was the reason Victoria selected the outfit she was wearing.

Ashleigh answered, “Yes. You look very nice.”

“I’m afraid I’m to casual.”

Felicia mentioned, “We’re going to a softball game. You wouldn’t want to be more dressed up.”

Annette excited, “Plus it’s hot and humid.”

Victoria gave Annette a look, “Take a deep breath.”

Annette asked, “I need too?”

Ashleigh added, “Yes.”

Annette closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Everyone around her doubted this worked.

Felicia added, “Your outfit matches the necklace and earrings.”

Felicia liked the green beaded homemade necklace and matching earrings Ashleigh gave her. She matched it with a very nice green belted v-neck top. What bothered her was it was feeling a little tight in the boobs; she hated how sensitive they were. She was aware in a couple months it would be impossible to wear this top. She chose a dark denim rinse stretch trouser Capri. She chose it because her mother banned both girls from wearing shorts to this get together. She added green colored thong sandals. She was grateful her mom purchased these items for her trip. In the back of her mind she wondered how she would be able to afford her own clothes and those of a baby too. Felicia was pricing: baby clothes, formula, baby food, diapers, car seats, and strollers. She wanted to believe the babies daddy would be involved. Based upon how he was treating her, she was forced to face the reality everyone was right about him. Whenever she thought of her situation she forced back tears. She temporarily buried these thoughts and feelings.

Annette: thought about Ashleigh’s comments, considered how hot it felt, and how bright the sun was; this convinced her the locals were onto something. She decided to avoid wearing black. She selected Earl Grey cargo pants; the store called it a three in one cargo pant. Currently they were rolled up to a Capri level, if she felt hot she could roll them up to above the knee, and if she felt cool she could drop them to the floor. She was excited to be wearing a

fuchsia colored squareneck mesh top with very tiny white polka dots; she liked the three-quarter inch puffed sleeves. She believed she appeared very ladylike. This top showed the world she was finally developing into a woman. She matched this with the purple handmade necklace and matching earrings Ashleigh gave her. She added matching purple wedges.

Ashleigh gave Blake a new leather wallet. It was handmade with an imprint of an American Eagle on top. Blake being an experienced husband and a father of three girls knew if he remained silent it would take a few minutes to reach the door.

He gently said, "Ladies."

They looked at him.

He motioned toward the door, "Ladies first."

The four of them knew he was correct and stepped in front of the man they all admired and loved.

Ashleigh said, "Nicole is a dear friend. Without her help I'm not sure I'd like living here."

This was a two edged sword for Victoria. She was grateful her daughter found good people to be with and was grateful moving to Florida was working out. Yet; she wanted her daughter to move back to Wisconsin.

Ashleigh rang the doorbell.

This is when they heard a vehicle pull into the driveway.

They all turned around. Victoria noticed the couple in the truck were around their age. She watched them get out of the truck. She was amazed at how tall the man was. They were nicely dressed. Based upon how the woman was dressed Victoria believed they were of a Pentecostal background. The woman was in a very nice but conservative flowered blouse, her graying hair was pinned up, she was wearing a brand new denim skirt, and was wearing new comfortable shoes. He was wearing nice jeans, a red western style long sleeved shirt, had on a western tie, and was wearing a very nice cowboy hat; she believed the cowboy boots were very expensive. Victoria believed these were the people Ashleigh referred to as her Grandparents.

Immediately Ashleigh said, "Ma."

"Howdy."

Ashleigh said, "Let me introduce you."

Victoria noticed Blake and the tall man were staring at one another.

"This is my Foster Mom Victoria, my foster Dad Blake, my sister Felicia, and a close friend of the family Annette. She's like my little sister."

This is when Felicia rang the doorbell.

Victoria mentioned, "Felicia and Annette are best friends. Annette stays over so much she might as well be family."

This impressed both Captain and Ma.

Ashleigh continued, "This is Mary Steward and David Steward."

He reached out his hand to Blake, "Glad to meet Y'all. Ashleigh has told us great things."

Blake took it, "Nice to meet you. She's told us the same."

This is when Nicole opened the door.

They stopped and paid attention to Nicole.

Nicole said, "I see you all have been introduced?"

Ashleigh jumped in, "Yes. This is my Dad Blake, my Mom Victoria, my younger sister Felicia, and her best friend Annette. She's like a sister to me."

This interested Danielle and Ester. They were peering through the door.

Ashleigh continued, "This is my dear friend Nicole."

This surprised Nicole but she held it in, "Well thank you."

Ashleigh was always amazed at how Nicole could conceal her accent.

Victoria smiled, "We've heard so much about all of you."

She felt comfortable to reveal her accent and said, "I'm glad to meet Y'all."

Victoria answered, "We're glad to meet you too."

Nicole being the good host said, "Come on in."

She stepped to the side and motioned them in.

Felicia and Annette stepped in first, then Victoria, Ashleigh, Ma, Blake, and Captain.

Nicole announced, "There are O'dorves on the counter."

Victoria said from her heart, "I love your house."

"Thank-you."

Victoria commented, "You have such beautiful plants."

Felicia, Annette, Danielle, and Ester made faces. They all believed their mother's would stand there talking about plants for hours.

Nicole was overjoyed someone noticed her plants, "Its my relaxation."

Ester stated, "We have a garden too."

Victoria smiled, "Who might you be?"

Captain was about to shut the door but he spotted his son drive the truck into the driveway. It was impossible to park the truck into the garage.

"I'm Ester and this is Danielle."

Danielle said, "We'll be best friends forever."

Annette and Felicia looked at one another and smiled; they felt the same way.

Nicole stated, "She is my youngest of three. My oldest Jeff is spending the day with his girlfriend and her family. Julie is currently at softball practice, and this is my youngest Ester. This is Danielle who is like our adopted daughter."

This is when Jimmy stepped into the house.

Victoria immediately recognized he served in the military. It was obvious to Victoria this was a military family.

"This is my husband Jimmy."

Ma smiled, "He's our second oldest son."

Victoria asked, "How many children do you have?"

"I have three boys including Jimmy and my youngest is Megan. I'm sure Ashleigh has told Y'all about her."

Ashleigh said right away, "She's my best friend."

Danielle, Ester, Annette, and Felicia glanced at one another.

Nicole repeated, "There are O'dovers in the kitchen. Soon we'll be ready for dinner."

They followed Nicole into the kitchen.

Victoria was concerned about Blake. She could tell something was bothering her husband and felt it was related to Dave. There was an odd feeling.

Ma, Nicole, and Jimmy could tell Captain was thinking.

When they reached the kitchen Victoria said, "You didn't have to go to all this trouble?"

Nicole smiled, "It ain't a bother."

Ester and Danielle glanced at one another.

Victoria said, "I love the kitchen."

Blake asked, "Who did the carpentry?"

Jimmy mentioned, "Myself and my construction crew."

Blake asked, "Are you in the construction business?"

"I was until the dip in the economy."

The ladies started to talk. Nicole and Ashleigh were pointing out what the food items were.

Felicia wanted to try everything and at the same time was reluctant to try anything.

Ma suspected Felicia was pregnant. Nicole knew because Ashleigh had told her. Ashleigh never mentioned this to Ma.

Ashleigh hearing the men's conversation mentioned, "Dad is an engineer."

Jimmy said, "Y'all should take him on a tour of the Company."

Ashleigh winked, "It's in the plans."

While these conversations were happening Victoria felt something was deeply troubling her Husband. While she was paying attention to this she was paying attention to how selective Felicia was. Victoria wanted to believe she was finally using the wisdom she seemed to ignore her whole life, or she was sicker than she was letting on, or both were happening at the same time.

Ma felt Captain was acting reserved. She believed he figured out something and was holding it back.

Ashleigh mentioned, "Jimmy is a very good carpenter."

"Daddy taught me."

Captain mentioned, "Y'all have turned out to be a much better carpenter than me. It's just a hobby for me."

Ashleigh jumped on this, "Captain has a similar hobby as you."

Blake asked, "He does."

"He's working on a Model Railroad."

Blake gave her a look then at Captain.

Ashleigh apologized, "People call Dave Captain."

Blake in an odd tone asked, "Were you in the Navy?"

Immediately Captain said, "Yes sir. Served in the Navy then retired from the Coast Guard."

Blake's body language changed and asked, "Were you in Vietnam?"

Suddenly the kitchen was dead silent.

This surprised all the ladies in Blake's family. Blake never talked about Vietnam.

Ma, Victoria, Blake, Jimmy, and Nicole felt the Holy Spirit.

Captain answered, "Yes sir. While in Nam I spent my time on a PBR. I started in the Mekong Delta. Later was part of the Brown Water Navy. While serving there I spent my time on the Saigon River."

Blake all at once became silent and held in tears.

This worried Victoria, Ashleigh, Felicia, and Annette. They never spotted Blake tear in front of strangers before. The only time Ashleigh ever witnessed Blake cry was when it appeared as though Victoria was about to pass away. All at once he stopped his tears.

He stood straight, in a military stance, something his family never spotted before. He said, "Corporal Blake Anderson reporting."

Captain stood straight and answered, "When we'll met I was a Gunners Mate David Steward."

Silence when they embraced.

They all heard the loud whisper, "You saved my life."

Captain pulled away and stated, "I ain't deserving Y'all's thanks. It was my duty."

Everyone was looking at one another.

Victoria was unsure of what to do.

Ma stepped up, prayed, gave thanks, and just started to sing, "*Amazing Grace*."

It was impossible not to join in.

When it was over. The three people who were not tearing were: Jimmy, Blake, and Captain. Based upon their facial expressions they held it in.

When it was over, Nicole turned and asked, "Captain would you give thanks before we eat dinner?"

Holding his hat over his chest he led the prayer.

Nicole announced, "If Y'all sit at the table I'll bring it out to you."

Victoria felt this was unnecessary, she felt cafeteria style would have been fine, but Nicole led everyone to the dinning room.

Victoria heard Ester tell Ashleigh, "Danielle and I helped set the table."

Ashleigh answered, "It looks great."

Captain sat at one end, Nicole assumed Blake would sit at the other, instead he sat next to Captain.

Victoria spotted this and sat next to her husband. Ma immediately sat across from Blake, Nicole motioned with her head for Jimmy to sit at the other end, Jimmy did so.

Ester asked Ashleigh in a whisper, "We'd like Y'all to sit by us?"

Annette was using all of her self control she had, "Yeah."

Annette and Felicia smiled, they sat across from one another.

Victoria smiled when Ashleigh suggested, "How about I sit next to my sister and you sit on the other side of me?"

Ester smiled, "Yes Ma'am."

Danielle looked rejected but Annette mentioned, "If you sit next to me you'll be across your best friend."

Victoria spotted the young woman Annette would be.

Danielle quickly sat next to Annette.

Nicole said, "You may start. I'll bring in the jambalaya."

Ma said, "Dear I'll help."

Victoria looked up and asked, "You need help?"

Nicole said immediately, "Y'all are our guest."

Victoria nodded and remained seated.

Ma and Nicole stepped into the kitchen to place the jambalaya in serving bowls and to bring out a few hot dishes.

Victoria looked over the food and was astonished at the variety of seafood dishes and fruits. It was obvious she never tried some of the dishes on the table. Her biggest concern was her husband. She knew how emotional the topic of Vietnam was; she touched his leg.

He looked at her.

Her touch and her look helped him.

This is when Captain asked, "I understand Y'all have been working on the Model Railroad for a long time."

This made Blake smile, "Yeah. Yes."

Victoria smiled. She was listening to all of the conversations at the table. As a mother she was paying attention to what Felicia was selecting. What was helping Victoria select her meal was both Ester and Danielle's zealousness to tell Annette and Felicia what everything was; Ashleigh and Jimmy put in their two cents when it was necessary.

Ashleigh was concerned about her Dad. It was obvious he was upset but as Captain and Blake talked it became obvious her Dad was becoming more at ease. She was impressed with how Captain was handling the situation.

Ashleigh was surprised when Felicia leaned over and asked, "Is Dad okay?"

Jimmy caught this.

"I think so."

"Shouldn't we ask about what happened?"

Ashleigh answered, "I don't feel it's a good idea."

Annette whispered, "He never talks about his time in the war. I'd like to know what happened."

Jimmy whispered, "Young ladies."

Immediately Ester and Danielle sat up and paid attention to Jimmy.

Ashleigh, Annette, and Felicia looked over at Jimmy.

"Ladies it ain't easy talking about war. I'm sure they'll talk about it away from Y'all."

Ester asked, "Why?"

"It's because we love Y'all."

Ester said, "You tell Momma?"

Jimmy smiled, "There are things I'll never tell her. It ain't because we don't love Y'all it's because we don't want Y'all to think different of us. In war things happen we ain't always proud of. Many of us are afraid if we tell Y'all what happened Y'all won't look at us the same."

This is when Nicole set down a yellow bowl filled with Jambalaya and Ma set a red bowl of Jambalaya near Captain.

Nicole announced, "The red bowl is the spicy version. The Yellow bowl is the mild version."

Felicia looked at it.

Nicole in a whisper said, "If Y'all don't eat any I won't be offended. The pasta and fruit should be alright."

Ashleigh leaned over, "She's the one I've been getting advice from."

Nicole nodded her head and went back into the kitchen to get some cooked vegetables.

Ma wondered why good girls fell for bad boys.

Ashleigh suggested, "Try a little."

They heard Captain ask, "Ashleigh, Y'all want some of the hot version?"

Ashleigh stood up and said, "Oh yeah."

Captain stood up and handed the bowl over to Ashleigh.

Ashleigh mentioned, "You have to try Nicole's Sweet Iced Tea. It's the best."

As Nicole was setting down the vegetables she said, "Thank-you."

Ester said, "Momma makes the best Key Lime Pie."

Nicole answered, "It's our desert."

Ashleigh reassured her family, "It's excellent."

Nicole in a serious tone said, "If Y'all don't like Iced Tea I have Coke or coffee."

"You have Coke?"

Nicole glared at Ester, "I hid it."

Victoria smiled at this.

Danielle asked, "What flavors?"

This confused the people from Wisconsin.

Nicole answered, "Coke, Root Beer, and Sprite."

Ashleigh spotted Annette's odd look, "All soda is coke here."

Nicole mentioned with a wink, "With so many transplants moving here over the years I'm able to understand what Soda and Pop is."

Annette mentioned somewhat excited, "I have family from Minnesota. They call it Pop."

Ashleigh thought of Gracie.

Nicole shook her head at the clump of Jambalaya Ashleigh put on her plate.

Annette excited, "This is the best Jambalaya I've ever had."

Victoria rolled her eyes.

Nicole smiled, "Thank-you."

When Ashleigh sat down Ma and Victoria shook their heads.

Victoria looked at Ma and in a tone loud enough for Ma to hear but not loud enough for Ashleigh to hear, "She's just like her Brother."

Ma added at the same sound level, "It ain't every brother who'd take care of a little sister. Not only does he take care of her. He's treating her like his own."

This struck Victoria.

Blake mentioned at the same sound level, "Without him and his mother we'd never would have been her foster parents."

Ma asked, "If Y'all don't mind me asking."

Victoria said, "Go ahead."

Ma said very serious, "Why didn't Y'all try and adopt her."

Captain watched both parents closely.

Ma spotted hurt from Victoria, "We tried."

Blake added, "Her Mother kept fighting it."

Victoria added, "She tried to take her away from us."

Captain asked, "She must've been something for the courts to keep her from her own daughter."

Blake mentioned, "She almost won her back. But her brother hired a private investigator and took pictures of her drinking."

Victoria clarified, "She was telling everyone she went to treatment and wasn't drinking any more."

Ma shook her head, "Alcohol is the devils poison."

Victoria with a passionate whisper stated, "She shouldn't have had a chance at custody. Her Mother tried kidnapping her."

Captain said, "God must've intervened."

Blake smiled, "Our temperamental dog helped."

Victoria rolled her eyes, "We planned on putting it to sleep. But it died saving Ashleigh."

Captain mentioned, "She's good with dawgs."

Victoria answered, "She's always had a way with them. The dog that saved Ashleigh didn't like anyone but her. We were putting it to sleep because it would snip at anyone who came near her."

Captain mentioned, "The bond between Nikita and Ashleigh is the same as K-9 units."

Blake thought about this, "Your right."

This impressed Captain.

Blake asked, "Were you a police officer?"

Captain smiled, "For a short time. I ain't one for being a police officer. I decided to run a charter instead."

"I understand you will be sailing the yacht next week?"

Captain answered, "With my daughter Megan. She's a charter captain herself."

Victoria smiled, "I've heard."

Ma felt some relief in sensing Victoria had the same concerns as she did.

Victoria said, "This is the best tasting Jambalaya I've ever had."

Ma mentioned, "My daughter-in-law is a good christian woman. It's good she's friends with Ashleigh. I believe she's helping her get settled."

Victoria glanced over at Ashleigh, Ashleigh was talking, so Victoria leaned in, "How's she handling being a Vice President?"

Captain smiled, "She's a pistol."

Blake mentioned, "You should stop worrying. She's a great Vice President."

Victoria with some defiance said, "I'm her mother."

Ma was unable to hold it in, "Well Amen."

Victoria smiled, "I agree."

Ma mentioned, "It ain't easy being a mother with how the world is today."

Victoria looked at Ma and on purpose spoke just as loud as she did, "No it isn't."

Nicole from the other end of the table stated, "I agree."

All the children no matter their age were looking at the mothers.

Victoria smiled when she heard Nicole say, "Ashleigh one day you'll understand."

Felicia was unsure of what to say or feel.

Victoria went on, "No matter how old our children get. For those mothers who love their children we'll never be able to stop being a parent. Truth be told you don't want us to stop being our parents. Things change and our relationships change but we're still your Mom."

Ma smiled, "Amen."

Nicole nodded her head, "May I grab hold of that statement and keep it as my own?"

Victoria with a smile answered, "Most certainty."

Ashleigh felt a bond between the three mothers, she also felt how awkward this was for Felicia; Ashleigh reached under the table and touched her.

Felicia looked at her.

Ashleigh winked.

Annette believed Felicia needed her older sister.

Ashleigh thought about the Dad's at the table, "Let's not forget we need Dad's too."

Blake and Captain would take this.

Ester stated, "I have a great Daddy."

Jimmy smiled.

Jimmy nodded to Captain.

Felicia felt compelled to say, and she said it from the heart, "We have a great dad too."

Annette said, "Dad is great."

This caught every one who was not part of the family by surprise.

Annette being completely emotional added, "My Dad left my Mom. Blake has been my Dad since I started to hang out with Felicia."

Ashleigh held in her own tears, "He taught me there were good men in the world."

This hit Captain. He kept recalling the night he won the Navy Cross; it was impossible for him to stop this memory. This medal caused him many internal struggles. In many ways he resented the medal because he believed anyone would have done what he did. Being called a hero bothered him. When Ashleigh said this, it occurred to Captain, without his actions and those other PBR men; Ashleigh would be a completely different person. He glanced at Felicia and knew if Blake had died that night she would not be sitting at the table. Would her friend be the same? The lives Blake and Victoria lived would have never happened. It was so bluntly obvious to Captain his actions had an imprint on so many lives. Being a man of faith he recognized what God was showing him.

Blake kept thinking about how Captain and two other PBR men were able to stop the enemy long enough for Blake and two of his men, and all of the wounded, to escape. What Captain was unaware of, it was Blake's letter to the Navy, which told of Captain's actions on this night. What was bothering Blake was if Captain died that night how would it have changed the people who loved him? It was obvious his family loved Captain and he had been a major influence in their lives. Blake correctly assumed he was likely part of many Coast Guard teams that saved many lives. Only Blake knew, without Captain he would have never accepted Christ as his Savior. It was Captain's bravery and a discussion on the boat which never left Blake. This conversation is what made him seek after God during and after Vietnam.

Neither one would have ever believed they would have reconnected this way. Their bond was ever cemented together.

Blake was unable to stop himself, "Without Captain I would not have been a Dad or a husband."

Captain held in his emotion and said, "I was just doing my duty."

No one knew what happened on the night in question but everyone knew that night had an impact on all of their lives.

"It was more than that. This man risked his life to save me and others."

"I had help."

"Yes you did. But it was Captain's leadership during the whole battle that saved many men's lives."

Now one knew what to say or do.

It was Ma who said very humbly, “It’s obvious God’s plans are bigger than ours. For whatever reason he has intertwined our families way before any of us ever met one another. Lets enjoy this time together. Nicole isn’t it time for dessert?”

Nicole smiled, “Yes it is.”

Jimmy suggested, “Dad and I help the guys at the VA suffering from PSD. Y’all are welcomed to be our guest?”

Blake holding in tears answered, “Certainly.”

This surprised Victoria, Ashleigh, Felicia, and Annette.

Captain then said, “I’d like to invite Y’all to church on Sunday.”

Victoria answered, “We’d love to.”

This pleased Ma.

Nicole commanded, “Girls help me clear the table.”

They made faces, but said, “Yes Ma’am.”

Victoria looked at both Ashleigh and Felicia, “See how nice that sounds.”

The southern adults appreciated this.

April 7th, Decisions

Part Four of Six

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Ashleigh & Megan Book I: Friendship

*Friday April 7th,
Decisions*

*Day 13 of Book I
(Sixty Days after Bob Meets Susan King)*

Part Five of Six

Authored By: R. P. Voght

*Posted on ashleighandmegan.com on:
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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format I call, "A 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." 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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April 7th, Decisions Day 12 of Book I

Nicole glanced at the kitchen clock. They needed to leave. If it was a football game they would have needed to leave an hour earlier. Most of the other sports had a quarter of the attendance as football. Because of the influx of talent both the boys and girls basketball teams received more attention. What was disappointing was both teams missed the playoffs because of the first half of the season. Nicole hoped, because her son played football; the team would make it to the state championship. After the horrible season the girls volleyball team had and how difficult this was for her daughter; she hoped they would make it to the state tournament.

Nicole believed the softball team was improved and was happy they had a chance. People, including her daughter, felt they were falling short of expectations. The girls from the Upper East Coast were helping the team a great deal. Many of the Upper East Coast parents were surprised at how talented the local girls were. Many of these parents expressed to both Nicole and Jimmy on how good of a softball player Julie was. Everyone who cared about girls softball were hopeful they could get into the regional tournament. If not, like the other sports, the hope was next year would be the game changer.

Nicole was rinsing the dishes and trying to fit as many of them into the dishwasher. She set the ones that did not fit into the sink for after the softball game.

She was surprised when Victoria stepped into the kitchen carrying dishes.

Ma was behind Victoria carrying dishes herself.

In the background was the sounds of everyone talking.

Victoria commented, "I really liked the key lime pie."

Nicole smiled, "Thank-you. Let me have those."

Victoria gave her the plates, Nicole set them on the counter, then Nicole took the dishes from Ma, and set these on the same counter.

Nicole asked, "Was this the first time you tried key lime pie?"

Victoria smiled, "Yes. But I can tell you're a great cook."

Nicole winked, "You'll have to make us a pie we haven't tried."

"Have you ever had rhubarb custard pie?"

Ma stated matter of fact, "In these parts rhubarb is hard to come by."

Nicole mentioned, "I've witnessed a few transplants try to grow it and it wouldn't grow."

Victoria smiled, "We'd never be able to grow citrus trees in Wisconsin. A friend of Blake's parents grew a pear tree. It was difficult to get started."

Ma asked, "I'm assuming Y'all grow Apple trees?"

"We have plenty of those. I can make a good apple pie."

Nicole smiled, "I'd be nice to get a taste of northern apple pie."

"I'd love to make it."

Victoria added, "That was the best tasting Jambalaya I ever had. The seafood salad was delicious."

"I'm glad Y'all liked it."

There was a slight pause.

Victoria asked, "May I ask you something?"

Nicole answered, "Go on."

Victoria became very serious and lowered her voice, "This isn't easy for me."

Ma mentioned, "Y'all are talking to sisters in Christ. Honey, feel free to ask."

Victoria became her bold self, but in a more hushed tone asked, "Is Ashleigh and Megan in a same sex relationship?"

Nicole and Ma looked at one another.

"I'm sorry if I'm out of line but..."

Nicole interrupted with a tone of compassion, she spoke in a more hushed tone as well, "We were questioning the same thing. It ain't easy believing a loved one is a lesbian."

Victoria asked, "Did they come out to you? I'm afraid Ashleigh is keeping it from me. I'm not sure I should ask."

Again Ma and Nicole glanced at one another.

Ma answered, "Megan says she ain't."

Nicole added, "We were feeling the same way. Megan has made it clear they ain't lovers."

She paused and glanced into the dining room.

With a hushed tone continued, "It makes me feel better I ain't the only one believing Megan and Ashleigh were a couple."

Victoria asked a difficult follow up question, "Is Ashleigh a lesbian?"

Ma answered, "From what I observed I don't believe so. She's interested in a very nice young man. He's a local Sergeant in the Eastbank police department."

Victoria smiled and said, "She's always liked men in uniform."

Nicole again glanced at the clock, she quickly finished rinsing the plates, she set them into the sink and said; "We'll need to get a move on."

Nicole promised, "We'll talk about it later."

Ma stated, "Your daughter has been a real blessing."

Victoria touched her chest, "I'm happy to hear it. I've been worried about her."

Ma smiled, "With Y'll being close to the God almighty he's answering Y'all."

"I'd like to believe so."

Nicole: cleaned her hands with a towel, she hung the towel, gently touched Victoria's arm, winked, stepped into the dinning room, and announced, "Girls. "Y'all need to get ready. We'll be late for the game if we don't get a move on."

This hurried the girls.

Ashleigh, Felicia, and Annette jumped in to help; but Nicole politely excused them from helping.

The girls attempting to help surprised Victoria.

While everyone headed to the vehicles everything was: cleaned, the last items rinsed, the dishes were set into the sink, Nicole was the one to lock the front door, and was the last one to enter the mini-van. There was a lot of chatter about a wide range of topics.

Nicole was grateful Jimmy loaded all of the lawn chairs and camping chairs into the mini-van before the guests arrived.

Ashleigh convinced them to sit in the upper left corner of the stands; she believed she would receive less attention. Sitting to her left was Felicia and Annette. To her right was Victoria. Behind them was Nicole and Ma. To the right of Victoria was Blake, Captain, and Jimmy.

Felicia nudged Ashleigh, leaned in and whispered; "Look at Dad."

The three ladies glanced over and snickered.

This is when Nicole and Ma took note on how Blake was cheering just as much as Captain and Jimmy.

They turned away before Blake noticed.

Victoria was paying attention to all of the conversations going on at once.

Ashleigh whispered back, "Dad would've been worse if we played."

The three ladies again turned to look at him.

He booed with the rest of the home crowd when a player was allowed to walk to first base. This was the first player on either team to reach a base in over four and a half innings.

The three ladies turned back toward the game.

Annette commented, "Julie didn't like that."

Ashleigh answered, "I don't believe she likes to loose."

When Julie pitched again the batter had no chance.

Felicia mentioned, "She's so athletic."

Ashleigh leaned over, "Her biggest strength is how smart she is."

Nicole caught this and was impressed.

Annette said, "She's smart too?"

"Very."

There was a pause.

Ashleigh became serious, "Don't tell her I told you."

Felicia asked, "Was she teased for being smart?"

Annette somewhat excitable asked, "Who'd pick on her? Look at her? She'd kick the shit out of half the guys in our school."

Victoria scolded, "No swearing."
Excited she answered, "Sorry."
Victoria commanded, "Take a deep breath."
They did together.

Nicole and Ma wondered about this girl. She was so excitable and so animated. They wanted to believe this was a passing thing.

Felicia with some hurt in her voice, "I bet they wouldn't say it to her face."

Nicole, Ma, and Victoria caught this comment.

They heard the Umpire yell, "Your out!"

There were cheers and claps from the decent sized crowd. The teams started to switch sides. It was noticeable how disappointed the girl on first base was.

Ashleigh having compassion for her sister said, "Want to get a hot dog and soda?"

Annette and Felicia smiled, "Yeah."

When they stood up Blake asked, "You getting something to eat?"

Ashleigh asked, "Did you want something?"

He started to reach for his wallet, "I'll take a hot dog with relish. If they have sauerkraut I'd like that."

The southerns all around him made faces.

Ashleigh answered matter of fact, "They won't have sauerkraut. Anyone else want anything?"

Victoria answered, "I'll take a root beer."

This surprised the three ladies.

Blake tried handing Ashleigh a bill.

Ashleigh stated, "You keep it."

Nicole and Ma smiled when they spotted Victoria gently touch Blake on the leg.

Blake and Victoria looked at one another; this is when Blake put the bill back.

Felicia asked, "Dad you want something to drink?"

Captain mentioned, "They make a good iced tea."

"If the ice tea tastes as good as it did during dinner. I'll have another."

"Okay."

Ashleigh smiled and they headed down the concrete stands.

Everyone smiled at the three making their way down the stands. Nicole observed Ashleigh handle being stopped. It was obvious she introduced her sister and her friend multiple times.

Nicole gently tapped Victoria.

Victoria looked at Blake, Blake nodded his head; she stood up and went up a row and sat next to Nicole.

Everyone stood up when a ball was hit and it rolled into the field. The young lady playing for Eastbank high made it to second base.

The ladies heard Jimmy comment, "She's always getting on base."

This caused the guys to focus on the game. Jimmy and Captain were telling Blake their opinions of the girls on the Eastbank softball team.

Nicole said gently, "If Y'all don't mind me asking..."

Victoria interrupted, "She's at most three months."

Ma shook her head.

Victoria made a face, "We're talking about adoption."

Ma leaned in, "I'm assuming many parents are looking to adopt."

"After this vacation we'll be talking to a couple Christian organizations that will help with the process of adoption."

Nicole mentioned, "Our church works with a couple good ones. One is national. I could give you their information."

Victoria smiled, "I'd love to have it."

Nicole smiled in return, "I'll get it to you."

Victoria gave a face of worry.

Ma answered the look, "Honey, Y'all can tell us what's eating you."

Victoria voiced her concern, "I'm afraid she'll keep the baby."

Ma mentioned, "Be thankful she ain't feeling the affects of an abortion."

Victoria gave Ma a caring look and answered, "I've ministered to a many ladies who've made that mistake."

Ma sternly said, "We have too."

They heard the umpire yell, "Your out."

Boos came from the crowd.

Victoria said, "I'm disappointed."

Nicole touched Victoria's leg, "I'd feel the same if Julie ended up pregnant."

Ma added, "I'd be madder than a dog with rabies."

Captain turned, "At what?"

Ma gave him a look.

Captain lifted his hat and put it back on his head and turned back to the game.

Nicole said more softly, "I'd be angry too"

Ma added, "Julie has the talent and the smarts to be accomplish whatever God has planned for her. It'd be a shame if she ruined it by having one in the basket."

Jimmy and Captain turned with concern and Jimmy asked, "Is Julie pregnant?"

Nicole scolded him, "Y'all think I'd have kept it a secret?"

"It's hard telling what Y'all have cooking."

Blake was honest, "Felicia is."

Captain and Jimmy made faces.

They stood up when the ball was hit, the girl on third picked up the ball and threw the ball to first, they heard, "Your out."

Sighs from the crowd. It was clear she was out.

Nicole talking softer asked, "Is the Daddy involved?"

Victoria rolled her eyes, "He says he'll be."

Blake answered, "He's a putz."

Ma trying to clarify what a "putz" was by asking, "Is he a snake in the grass?"

Blake looked at her, "May I borrow that saying?"

Ma answered with a serious facial expression, "Yes you may."

Captain and Jimmy smiled at this.

Victoria added, "We haven't heard about him lately. Which isn't to much of a surprise."

Nicole made a face, "Maybe it's better."

Nicole asked, "Is he a Christian?"

Blake answered, "We warned her about him."

Victoria stated, "We were told we were being judgmental and didn't understand."

The ball was hit, everyone stood up and cheered when the ball headed out to center field; the young lady in the field made a spectacular catch. The visiting crowd cheered the home crowd sighed and sat back down.

The teams started to switch sides.

Captain mentioned, "It was a good catch."

Jimmy answered, "Unfortunately."

Blake stated, "Your daughter is a hell of a pitcher."

Captain added, "When she ain't pitching she plays a mean short stop."

Blake added, "With her being so tall and I'm sure she's fast."

Nicole stated, "Y'all should have watched her in gymnastics."

Ma added, "She's as fast as a jack rabbit being chased by a fox."

Blake smiled, "I could see that."

Jimmy commented, "Hopefully she'll get to bat next inning."

The ladies again focused on their conversation.

Nicole asked, "Why is it good girls fall for bad guys?"

Victoria sighed and rolled her eyes, "All three of my daughters fell for some real winners."

Blake reminded Victoria, "Without Patty falling for Bob we wouldn't have been Ashleigh's parents. He's a good guy but he wasn't a match for her."

Victoria clarified, "Patty is our oldest. She's married a delightful young man who's leading a church in Canada."

Victoria followed with a stern statement, "We aren't talking about Bob."

Nicole felt Victoria's disgusted face and body language spoke volumes. This added to Nicole's curiosity of Ashleigh's life history.

Blake answered, "I suppose that's a good idea because he's just entered the stadium."

All of them looked up.

Captain stated, "He's stepping in over there on the left side."

Captain turned to Nicole and asked, "He's dating Susan?"

Nicole answered, "It's what I've heard."

It was obvious to Ma and Nicole Victoria was keeping comments about Bob to herself.

Nicole watched them try to find a place to sit. Both were greeted by towns people; nothing obnoxious but they were greeted just the same. They found a secluded area on the opposite side of the stands. She observed a woman and a gentleman step over to Bob and Susan. He stood up and shook their hands and he introduced Susan to them.

Nicole correctly assumed these were the scouts Bob knew.

Felicia and Annette followed Ashleigh as she led the way down the stadium.

It was surprising to them on how often she was stopped. They were amazed at how polite and engaging she was. The girls could tell being stopped so often was irritating to Ashleigh. They acknowledged within themselves, if this suddenly stopped, Ashleigh would have been concerned. Both believed it was Ashleigh's natural ability to be an actress, without

ever being fake; which encouraged people to engage her. They appreciated Ashleigh for introducing them.

Felicia believed many of the women they met recognized she was pregnant. This created mix of emotions ranging from embarrassment to wondering if she was getting fat. She wanted to tell them: she made love with her steady boyfriend, she was the one percent who became pregnant while on the pill, and twice the condom he used fell off while inside of her. She believed this second time was when she became pregnant. Before her boyfriend she was looking forward to falling in love with someone for the rest of her life. What she never told anyone was she wanted to know what sex felt like and was tired of being a virgin; she now regretted this impatience. It was becoming a regrettable acknowledgment on how naive she was. She now understood why God and others were encouraging young people to wait until they were married. She felt foolish for falling for his words and for believing he loved her. Since becoming pregnant she felt his actions were the exact opposite of someone who loved their baby. This hurt a great deal. She kept his actions hidden from her parents but wanted to believe he'd come around. She hated to admit how correct her: parents were, Ashleigh was, and her best friend Iris was. She regretted her actions and the words she spoke to the people she loved.

She credited Ashleigh for giving her the courage to tell her parents. This was the first difficult hurdle of many difficult obstacles she was facing since becoming pregnant. Disappointing her father was the worst feeling she ever endured. Relying on her mother was: a surprise to her, irritated her, how her mother was treating her was a shock, and she hated to admit they were developing a different bond. She was unable to articulate what it was but it felt different. She already knew giving up her baby for adoption was going to be very hard, but she believed this was the correct decision. She knew her parents could support herself and her baby but she felt raising a baby should be her responsibility. It was clear on how he felt about the situation. She hoped he would change his mind and would support her, she had great doubts this would happen; but the hope was there.

Ashleigh and Annette were a comfort to her.

Ashleigh gently touched her and asked, "You feeling okay?"

Felicia answered honestly, "I'm glad we're here."

Annette animated, "We were looking forward to it for months. We can't wait to go to the beach and see the ocean."

Ashleigh smiled, "I'm sure you two were excited."

Annette with excitement added, "Wait until you see the outfits we bought."

Felicia was less excited about these outfits.

Ashleigh asked with a concerned tone, "What's the matter?"

She whispered, "I must already look fat."

Ashleigh answered, "You don't look fat."

"I feel like everyone knows I'm pregnant."

Annette tried, "The guys don't."

Ashleigh and Felicia looked at her.

Ashleigh said, "If you hadn't told me I wouldn't have guessed you were."

Ashleigh spotted him in the crowd.

Ashleigh suddenly adjusted her clothing, prepped herself, and asked, "How do I look?"

Felicia and Annette looked at one another and smiled. The only time they ever spotted Ashleigh act this way was when she liked a guy.

Felicia said, "You look nice."

"Don't lie. I look like a mess."

"Howdy Ms. Ashleigh."

Felicia and Annette turned and in front of them were two male police officers. Felicia and Annette glanced at one another; it was obvious Ashleigh liked one of them. Felicia suspected it was the guy who had Sergeant M. Tyler on his badge.

Annette found the younger police officer with M. Clark written on his badge very cute. She liked: his muscles, his clean shaven face, his bright green eyes, and felt his defined chin made him look masculine. She tried to hide her braces. Being attracted to him was disappointing. She knew nothing would ever happen, if he had hit on her, she would have felt he was disgusting. There was the disappointing feeling if she was over eighteen he would have ignored her. She felt she was only beginning to look like a woman. She was correct in assuming she was the last girl in her grade and one of the last in her whole high school to start developing. This was embarrassing because she was a Junior in High School.

Marcus said, "Howdy Ms. Ashleigh."

Annette and Felicia rolled their eyes when Ashleigh gave an odd look and said, "Hi."

Very professional Marcus stated, "Ms. Ashleigh I'd like you to meet our newest officer Melvin Clark."

Ashleigh jarred herself out of her fascination with Marcus and turned to this new officer, "I'm glad to meet you."

"Howdy."

Annette liked how he tipped his hat and adored his southern accent.

Ashleigh stated, "I'm assuming Sergeant Tyler is showing you the ropes?"

"Yes Ma'am."

The Sergeant asked, "Who might these Youngins' be?"

Ashleigh gladly stated, "This is my sister Felicia and her best friend Annette."

"Glad to meet Y'all."

Felicia and Annette both knew Ashleigh was focused on Marcus. Both believed he was better than the other three guys Ashleigh fell in love with. Felicia suspected her Mother might actually like this one.

Felicia said, "We are too."

Felicia glancing at Annette could tell she liked the other police officer.

The sergeant said, "If Y'all have any trouble just find us."

Ashleigh winked, "I'm sure you'll be there in a hurry."

It was obvious to Felicia and Annette how flirtatious Ashleigh was being.

Ashleigh then focused, "It's nice meeting Y'all."

Again Annette felt an attraction to the other officer. She felt if it would have been appropriate for them to date he would have ignored her.

"Well we must be getting on."

Ashleigh stated, "We wouldn't want to keep you from performing your duty."

M. Clark said, "We appreciate it Ma'am."

Marcus tipped his hat, "Bye Y'all."

All three said bye.

It was obvious to Felicia and Annette she was disappointed Marcus never asked her out.

Ashleigh became inspired and stopped them, "You know. Any police officer is allowed to eat at the company cafeteria?"

This stopped both officers.

Marcus smiled, "We heard. We're much obliged."

Ashleigh answered, "How come I haven't seen you there?"

Annette and Felicia glanced at one another then at Marcus.

"I get awful busy."

This was disappointing to Ashleigh. She quickly winked and replied, "I'd love for you to stop by."

"Yes Ma'am."

The other officer smiled and looked at Sergeant Marcus.

Officer Clark tipped his hat, "Ma'am I'm sure Y'all see us there."

They all heard the cheers then the sighs.

Marcus made a point to say, "We need to get a move on."

This is when they turned and headed toward the stands.

Felicia and Annette smiled when they noticed Ashleigh checking out Marcus' behind.

A disappointed Ashleigh commanded, "Let's get back into line."

Annette and Felicia smiled at one another.

Felicia and Annette followed. They were about to ask Ashleigh about this sergeant, but as soon as Ashleigh stepped into the line, people started to talk to her.

Felicia felt every woman they met knew she was pregnant.

The lights of the stadium turned on.

Ashleigh was carrying her food and Blake's. Felicia was carrying: a large tray of drinks, the small bags of condiments, and napkins. Annette was carrying: Felicia's food, her food, and bags of popcorn. They stepped up into the stands, stopped, and looked up.

Felicia asked, "Where did we..."

Annette interrupted, "Dad's waving."

Ashleigh spotted him, "Don't drop anything."

Felicia being sarcastic, "Yes Mom."

"Not funny."

Annette asked, "Why is it funny when you are sarcastic?"

Felicia answered for Ashleigh, "That's different."

Ashleigh turned and said very serious, her tone surprised both, "I never say that. I don't live my life that way."

Felicia gave her a hurt look, "Okay."

Annette made a face, "We weren't trying to offend you."

Ashleigh answered, "I just hate that saying. And I hate it when people live that way."

Felicia replied, "You've always hated double standards."

"That's correct."

Ashleigh smiled, "Let's go."

They followed Ashleigh up the stadium.

A small group of locals overhead this conversation; this reaffirmed for them how authentic Ashleigh was.

While walking up the stands they heard a ball being hit and then gasps from the crowd.

The three ladies turned to see the girl on first base catch the ball and the umpire shout, "Your out!"

Boos came from the away fans and cheers from the home crowd.

Felicia said, "Must have been a good play."

Ashleigh turned and made their way to their group.

Blake asked excited, "Did you see that?"

Annette answered, "Some of it."

Blake looked at the hot dog, "No sauerkraut?"

Again southerners made faces.

Felicia knowing her Dad handed him a bunch of ketchup packets.

Ashleigh made a face, "No."

Captain said, "The shortstop made a great play and the gal was thrown out at first base."

Ashleigh answered Captain, "I saw the out."

Victoria gladly took the root beer. She shook her head at the amount of ketchup Blake heaped onto the hot dog.

Ma and Nicole now understood where Ashleigh caught the habit of putting a large amount of condiments on her food.

Before the three ladies sat down, Annette and Felicia handed Jimmy, Captain, Nicole, and Ma iced tea's, and small bags of popcorn.

Captain said, "Shorty thanks."

Blake was about to say something but Ashleigh quickly touched Blake and shook her head.

Ma and Nicole spotted this. They correctly assumed, at one time this sort of pet name hurt Ashleigh's feelings. They believed she allowed Captain to use this pet name because of their mutual respect.

Victoria was surprised Ashleigh allowed someone to call her shorty.

Ma did say, "Y'all didn't have too."

Ashleigh winked, "Don't worry about it."

Ma answered, "Thank-you."

Victoria answered, "Thank-you."

Victoria nudged Felicia, "Thanks."

Nicole and Ma felt the way these three ladies were talking to one another was evidence of deep sister love. Nicole and Ma suspected, if anyone else talked to any of them the way they were speaking to one another, this would have angered the other two.

Their discussion ended when Victoria stated, "That's enough."

Nicole, Ma, Captain, and Jimmy found it interesting on how quickly the three became squared away.

Nicole smiled. She found it interesting on how Blake took no mind to it all.

Ashleigh asked, "I see the score is still zero to zero?"

Captain answered, "The gal for Boca Raton is just as good as Julie."

Jimmy felt the need to say, "Julie's better."
Nicole gently tapped Ashleigh.
Ashleigh turned and winked.
Ma shook her head.
Like Blake, the ladies watched Ashleigh gob on the ketchup; unlike Blake she added a small amount of mustard.
The home crowd cheered when Julie pitched another out.
Blake turned to Jimmy, "She's a very good pitcher."
"I believe so."
He then turned to Ashleigh, "Your brother is here."
"Where?"
Nicole mentioned, "With Susan?"
Ma stated, "Should we'all be assuming they're dating?"
Ashleigh answered, "I don't believe it's serious."
Nicole added, "I'm surprised she's dating already."
This was interesting to both Felicia and Annette. They were trying to see where he was.
Ma said, "She went through and awful divorce."
Nicole added, "It ain't her fault."
Victoria felt compelled to ask, "What happened?"
Nicole with a face said, "He was a cheating fool."
Captain surprised everyone by saying, "She's a good gal from a good family."
Nicole clarified, "They're a very influential family in these parts. They've always been involved with the community."
Ma added, "They've given to a lot to charities."
Captain mentioned, "It ain't wise getting her Daddy angry."
Jimmy spotted salt packets on the serving tray, "Youngin."
"Yeah."
Ashleigh instructed in a whisper, "Answer yes sir."
Victoria was surprised at this but liked it.
Ma and Nicole smiled.
Annette answered, "Yes sir."
"Would Y'all mind handing me the salt?"
Annette asked, "How many do you want?"
Nicole tapped Jimmy on the shoulder.
He wanted four or five but said, "A couple."
Captain then stated, "Young Lady I'll take a few."
Annette smiled, "Yes sir."
The packets made their way to Blake and Captain.
Blake mentioned, "This is some good iced tea."
Ashleigh mentioned, "It's a staple here."
Jimmy answered, "We love our iced tea."
Annette annoyed, "Where is he?"
Felicia said, "I'm not seeing him."
Everyone heard Victoria sigh.
Ma was compelled to ask, "You gals looking for Mr. Bob?"

They were surprised she said Mr. Bob, but answered, "Oh yeah."

Ashleigh nudged her.

Felicia answered, "Yes Ma'am."

Annette as her excited self showed had no restraint, "When he used to pick up Ashleigh he'd give us money or bring us gifts."

Ashleigh added, "This is when I had visitations with him."

Nicole asked, "Was his gifts the only reason you looked forward to seeing him?"

They glanced at Ashleigh; she gave her okay by nodding her head.

Felicia responded, "As we got older we realized he really helped out our sister."

Annette excited added, "He saved our school."

Ma asked, "How did he save the school?"

There were cheers and everyone stood up, the girls looked out at the field, everyone sighed when the center fielder made a great catch. The girl on first tagged up and made it to second, she was headed to third, but the third base coach wisely waved her back.

They heard Jimmy say, "In two batters Julie is up."

Annette turned to Ma.

Victoria stated, "Be calm."

Annette managed to say calmly, "Without Bob we'd be going to different schools."

Victoria mentioned, "We aren't certain he did anything."

Felicia gave her a look, "After we told him what was going on it was all over the news."

Captain asked, "What happened?"

Felicia looked over at Captain, "The State of Wisconsin was about to introduce new legislation regulating school classroom size and new building codes."

Victoria added, "This would have hurt all of the private schools and charters in the state."

Ma with a tone, "Was it sponsored by the teachers union?"

Victoria added, "Along with the Democrat Governor."

Ma asked Captain, "Well ain't it something. Captain didn't they try it here?"

Captain looked at her, "Of course. A gal is up to bat."

Ma made a face and turned back to the ladies.

Felicia said, "We waited for Bob to pick up Ashleigh."

Victoria added, "At the time Ashleigh was just starting high school and no longer stayed over for the weekends."

Annette reminded herself to remain calm, "Even though we were upset we waited for him. When we saw him pull in we yelled to Ashleigh to come down the stairs. We ran out to the car."

Felicia said, "When we reached his car Shelly asked us what was wrong."

Ashleigh added, "She's the mother of Bob's son."

Everyone, for now, avoided this topic.

Annette mentioned, "I told him if the legislation went through my Mom wouldn't be able to handle the tuition to our school. I'd have to go to a public school. Which meant I'd have to go to a different district. The three of us would be split up for the first time."

Felicia clarified, "Our best friend Iris would have went to a different school too. She's named after her Grandmother."

It took great effort for Annette to remain calm, “The next day the story was all over the news and our school ended up with a very famous lawyer.”

Everyone cheered when the ball was hit and somehow made it between right and center field.

Captain said with excitement, “She’s always been a good hitter. I wish she’d be a faster runner.”

Jimmy replied, “I bet Julie gets her home.”

They all turned to watch.

Julie was standing in the batters box. She glanced over at her family, then over at Susan and Bob; the scouts were sitting near them. This was the second time Mr. Bob watched her play a sport. The other time was when Ashleigh and Bob watched her play volleyball. She wanted to win this time. She was concerned the scouts were more impressed with the Boca Rotan pitcher. She felt it was horrible luck to play against her when the scouts were here. In their lifetime, Julie won two more games than the girl pitching, but they had played against one another over a dozen times. Julie was determined to keep the winning count in her favor.

This pitcher’s name was Isabel Chavana. She was: a natural athletic beauty with mulatto skin, dark eyes, long dark eyebrows, an oblong shaped face, large luscious lips, her long dark hair was in a single tight pony tail with a ribbon on the end, her breasts were barely noticeable, her wider hips and padded butt were obvious. A large group of her family were along the fence line cheering her on. This was the first time many of them watched her play. This girl was a year older than Julie, they played against one another the previous year, and many times in a girl softball league.

Julie watched as Becky, a Senior swing and miss, this was strike two.

Becky was average height, had black hair, intense brown eyes, was average height, was average weight, was smaller chested, had a flat rear end, was considered unappealing in appearance, when annoyed had a sharp tongue, she lived on a ranch near Julie’s grandparents, and was the middle child of seven siblings. Julie was one of the few girls on the team who disbelieved the rumor Becky was a lesbian. Julie could understand why this was an easy rumor to believe but because of her Auntie she was less likely to jump to this conclusion. Julie believed if a good Christian guy asked Becky out she would have gone out with him. Julie felt most guys avoided asking her out because of her looks and her confidence. There was no way Becky would sleep with a guy to get a boyfriend. Julie felt guys were stupid to discount her because of her looks; Julie admitted her sharp tongue often times got in the way.

Becky was one of the teams best hitters and on occasion would hit home runs. She was fast enough to play left field. She hit the ball. There were cheers. Julie smiled when many of her family members cheered just a little louder than the rest; it was impossible to avoid seeing Becky’s family. The ball went far enough and in between a couple players for Becky to reach first base.

As Julie stepped up to the plate she heard Ester and Danielle cheer.

She glanced over.

They were sitting with a group of other girls and a set of parents. These parents went to their families church. The mom was a Sunday school teacher and often helped out the youth group. The dad went to her Daddy’s Bible study and their daughter was on the team.

Julie casually waved to Ester and Danielle.

This excited them; they shouted and aggressively waved in return.

When she reached the base she did a very quick glance at Susan and Bob; the scouts had moved. She purposely avoided looking for them. She made a practice swing and glared at the pitcher.

Isabel glared back and no longer heard the crowd.

Julie no longer heard the crowd.

Isabel pitched it.

Julie stepped back and it was called a strike.

Julie believed this was a bad call but shook it off.

With the ball in Isabel's hand Julie focused.

The two of them glared at one another.

Isabel pitched the ball, Julie swung, when the bat hit the ball she could feel it was a bad hit. She immediately ran toward first base.

The catcher ran up to the ball and threw it to second base, Julie never heard the umpire call this girl out, she was sprinting to first base, her helmet fell off, the second baseman threw to first base, Julie reached the base just before the girl caught the ball, the umpire yelled, "Safe!"

The crowd gasped.

She slowed herself down and walked back to base. She was disappointed in the hit, but was happy to make it to base.

Belinda stood in the middle of the on deck circle surprised Julie made it to base. She knew Julie was fast because she witnessed her speed in practice. She heard from the local girls Julie could turn it up a notch. At the time Belinda felt these local girls were exaggerating; Belinda felt she just witnessed a speed only an Olympic athlete could reach. She made a mental note to observe her at a track meet. After witnessing the sprint to first base she felt an obligation to get the girl home.

Isabel believed they had a double play, but when she looked toward first base, she herself witnessed Julie's foot hit the bag before the ball reached the girl on first base; the umpire had the call right. This angered Isabel. She cursed under her breath in the language she used at home.

She heard her mother yell, "Isabel. Don't swear."

Then heard her mother speak to her Papa in the language they used at home. Isabel smiled when her Papa said something and her mother became quiet. Her Papa encouraged her in both English and in her parents native language. This caused the rest of her family to clap and cheer.

Isabel focused.

Isabel remembered every girl she ever pitched to. What was difficult about playing Eastbank this year were all the transplants. Like the Eastbank Softball team Boca Raton had transplants playing on their team. The parents of these girls worked at *Renewed Mastery* as well. Isabel respected this company because they hired her Papa and her Uncle. This helped both families.

She was determined to strike out Brenda a second time during this game.

Isabel was mindful of Julie on first base. She witnessed Julie steal bases in past games and all the pitchers were warned about her before the game.

Julie knew this pitcher and catcher were good at getting players called out for stealing bases; her coach reminded her of this before going up to bat. She decided to move out from base. Isabel threw the ball, Julie casually stepped back to base, the umpire called safe.

The girl on first base threw the ball back to Isabel.

Julie immediately stepped off base.

Belinda witnessed Julie tease pitchers and the girls covering the bases before. She glanced over at Julie. Isabel threw the ball back to first base. Based upon Julie's body language Belinda believed Julie had no intention of stealing a base but was trying to throw her off her game.

Belinda was again determined to get Julie home.

Isabel glared at Julie when she received the ball back.

When she looked at her catcher she made a face.

Isabel focused on the batter. She would have to trust her catcher would throw Julie out on second base. Isabel threw two strikes and three balls; the last one was a swing and a miss. She quickly threw to first base. Julie again made it back to first base.

Julie was surprised Belinda had a strike. Julie believed Belinda was the teams best hitter. Julie was ready to sprint to second base.

Belinda focused.

Isabel threw it hard.

Julie took off.

Belinda hit it.

Cheers from the crowd.

Julie: rounded second, the third base coach knowing Julie's speed waved her on, Julie glancing at the girl on third knew the ball was coming their way, she glanced at home, Julie charging third surprised the girl on third, it was the reason she bobbled the ball, Julie tagged the base, she again turned it up a notch, she heard the ball go by her, she slid, and was ruled, "safe."

Cheers from the crowd.

Belinda made it to third because of what Julie just pulled.

The Eastbank High School Softball team was winning one to zero with a girl on third.

The girls were cheering and congratulating Julie as she made her way back to the bench. Julie warned every girl on the team they needed to finish this inning and there were two more to go.

They quickly calmed down.

Julie and the team observed the coach for the other team go to the pitchers mound and talk to Isabel.

Julie was disappointed the coach left Isabel on the mound. Julie believed as long as Isabel was pitching her team would have to play their hearts out.

Isabel struck out the next player.

*A*shleigh and everyone else in the stadium was focused.

The score was still one to zero, it was the bottom of the seventh, there was a runner on first and third, two outs, and the girl on base had one ball and two strikes; if Julie could throw

one more strike the game was over. If the batter drove in those batters Eastbank would have a fight on their hands.

The debate across the stands was if it was wise to leave Julie in. She was asked by her coach if she could make it. Julie being her overconfident self demanded she stay in.

Annette whispered to Ashleigh, "Isn't she tired?"

Ashleigh without hesitation said, "You should see her do aerobics."

Felicia and Annette glanced at one another.

Jimmy hearing this mentioned, "Julie looks forward to these moments."

Ashleigh looked at Jimmy, "Are you sure?"

Nicole and Ma glanced at one another.

Jimmy said with confidence, "Of course she does. She's a winner. She'll win this game for the team."

Ashleigh replied honestly by saying, "I'm sure she will."

Nicole smiled when Ashleigh nudged Felicia, they winked at one another, Annette smiled, and Ashleigh whispered, "Dads."

The three of them glanced over at Blake, glanced at one another, and then back at the game.

Julie: watched her coach go back to the dug out, she took a long deep breath, and felt the world was on her shoulders. As an athlete these were the moments Julie imagined and lived for; at the same time she felt the stress of it. She was tired. Her arm felt like rubber. She was conscious of the fact: her parents were in the stands, Mr. Bob and Ashleigh were in the stands, Ashleigh's family was in the stands, the scouts were in two different locations in the stands, she believed they were observing Isabel as well as herself, and most important her teams playoff changes were hanging in the balance.

She thought about all of the stories of her Auntie Megan.

She took a long deep breath and planned her pitch. She made it look like she was throwing it as fast as she could, but it was slow and low, the girl at the plate adjusted and hit the ball, everyone stood up, the ball went up in the air, Belinda waved all the girls away caught the ball.

Cheers from the crowd.

Julie was happy they won but was disappointed in how she played. She was surprised when girls came running up to her, hugged her, and congratulated her. She responded respectfully but made her way to Belinda and congratulated her. This act surprised Belinda. This was the moment she decided Julie was a person she wanted to be friends with.

Nicole turned when she heard Bob's voice, "Julie."

Nicole quickly tapped Jimmy.

Julie turned and looked over at Bob.

Standing next to him were: Susan, the two scouts, Isabel, and her two parents.

Bob shouted and waved, "Julie bring your parents over here."

"Yes sir."

Julie turned.

Nicole stated, "Be professional."

Julie was about to make a comment but she caught the glare from her Daddy; she replied, "Yes Ma'am."

The whole group heard Victoria say, "You could learn something from her."

Felicia gave her Mother a look.

Ashleigh found this funny.

Nicole ignored her daughters look because she understood what an opportunity this was and how excited her daughter was.

Nicole heard and observed Jimmy lean over and say, "No matter if they offer you a scholarship or not. I'm proud of you."

Julie smiled and replied with, "Yes Daddy."

If they were in the privacy of their home Julie would have given her Daddy a hug; these were rare even in the privacy of their home.

Nicole noticed Isabel and Julie give one another glaring looks.

Susan nodded at Nicole. Nicole responded with a smile.

Bob stated and stretched his hand, "This is Isabel who pitched a terrific game."

Isabel right away stated, "Thank-you sir."

Bob nodded his head, "Behind her is her parents Montez and Benita."

Both nodded and in their Cuban accent, "Howdy."

"This here is Julie and her parents Jimmy and Nicole."

Both families greeted one another.

Nicole spotted Susan gently nudge Bob.

Bob stated, "Obviously you all know who I am. This is my girlfriend Susan."

Again everyone acknowledged one another.

Susan nudged Bob again.

Bob pushed up his glasses and stated, "I want all of you to meet Ms. Smith and Mr. Jones from Florida State."

Mr. Jones then stated, "I'm an assistant to the athletic director and Ms. Smith is an assistant to the Manager of the Woman's softball team. She wants to speak to both of you together and on a later date individually."

Both sets of parents agreed.

The assistant coach stated, "Normally; we'd talk to both of you individually before discussing anything with the two of you at the same time. I felt it might be wise to talk with at this moment because it is obvious the two of you have a history playing against one another. Is this okay with you two ladies."

Immediately Nicole nudged Julie; Benita did the same with Isabel.

Both girls looked at one another.

Julie said first, "Yes Ma'am."

Isabel was still upset at the loss and needed a second nudge from her Momma, "Yes Ma'am."

The assistant in a serious tone stated, "Good."

Nicole was curious as to what was coming next. Her feeling was, no matter if her daughter liked it or not, if a scholarship was involved; yes should be the appropriate answer.

The assistant continued, "If Florida State offered both of you scholarships to play for the Seminoles would Y'all be able to play on the same team."

Nicole spotted the two girls stare at one another.

Both Nicole and Benita nudged their daughters.

Julie answered, "Yes Ma'am."

Isabel answered as well, "Yes Ma'am."

The assistant: smiled, pulled paperwork out of her suitcase, took down all of the information she needed, handed out business cards, encouraged both families to call her, and the two scouts excused themselves.

Before everyone separated Julie stated, "Imagine if we're on the same team?"

Isabel was surprised and smiled, "It might just work out."

Montez spoke up, "Y'all would win a lot of games. No?"

The girls looked at him and Julie answered, "Yes sir."

Nicole suggested, "We could watch the games together."

Benita smiled, "Yes."

Jimmy smiled, "I'll see Y'all on Monday. We have a family get together."

Montez answered, "Yes. We visit family too."

This is when Isabel's family stepped away.

Nicole looked over at Susan and Bob, "Y'all are welcomed to come over."

They smiled.

Susan replied, "Thank-you. But we've made plans. We should get together sometime."

What surprised Nicole was her sincerity, "I'd love too."

Susan took out her phone and asked, "Y'all wouldn't mind if we exchanged numbers."

Bob and Jimmy looked at one another as they did this. When this was accomplished Susan and Bob stepped away. Nicole and Jimmy headed back to the group. Nicole was happy to see: Hannah, Zoe, and Monique waiting for Julie to join the group. Both Nicole and Julie wished Amanda was there.

What surprised everyone was when Belinda ran up to Julie.

Nicole watched as they exchanged numbers. Nicole watched Belinda head back to her parents.

Jimmy mentioned, "Her mother works in the art division."

Nicole asked honestly, "Who doesn't work at Renewed Mastery?"

Jimmy replied back, "Everyone is being touched by the company."

Nicole knew this was true.

She focused on her new friends and was looking forward to being a host.

It took some time to figure out who was riding in which vehicle.

April 7th, Decisions

Part Five of Six

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Ashleigh & Megan Book I: Friendship

*Friday April 7th,
Decisions*

*Day 12 of Book I
(Sixty Days after Bob Meets Susan King)*

Part Six of Six

Authored By: R. P. Voght

*Posted on ashleighandmegan.com on:
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I hope you enjoy this pioneering format I call, "A 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." 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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April 7th, Decisions Day 12 of Book I

*J*ulie braced herself against the shower wall as the water was landing at her feet. Her quest was to flee the stresses and hurts of life. These included: the implications of winning a scholarship, the stress from winning the game, the fear of letting everyone down, the ever increasing fear Ester and Danielle were entering her room, the worry her parents would hear the rumors, the hurt of the many rumors, the idea her own friends were talking about her, the hurt of knowing her nickname was the Fingerpainter, the hurt of being considered a slut by her friends, the hurt of her own brother believing she was a whore, and the growing desire to give up her virginity. For the second time she: bit her lip, shook, and enjoyed the waves. During these moments of euphoria all of her concerns seemed to disappear. She was disappointed when the feeling was over.

She was tempted to go at a third time.

Instead: she stood up, stepped into the water, washed her hair, she rinsed herself, stepped out of the shower, changed clothes, and set her long dark hair. With company over she selected a new pair of dark blue bootcut jeans with two buttons above the zipper. To be modest she wore a very supportive bra. She was wearing a blue and pink stripped polo shirt with white trim around the sleeves, the collar, and along the buttons. She applied very little makeup and added matching stripped socks.

When she opened the door of the bathroom she heard the adults talking loudly in the dinning room. She felt remorse for leaving her friends in the side room. She justified it by telling herself it was alright because all of her friends were together and she needed to get rid of her body odor.

There was some truth in this self denial. Anyone who ever caught a scent of Julie after any athletic event would give Julie grace if she took a long shower.

Hannah was in the corner chair of the side room. Zoe and Monique were sitting on the floor. They were dressed casual and modest. Felicia and Annette: politely excused themselves, they got up from the coach, and headed into the kitchen.

When Hannah believed Felicia and Annette were out of listening distance she leaned in.

Monique and Zoe followed Hannah's lead.

Hanna asked out of concern, "You think she's getting herself off?"

Zoe without batting an eye stated, "Of course. She's a chronic masturbator."

Monique asked, "You believe she's sleeping around?"

Hannah answered honestly, "No."

Monique questioned, "She went to those parties."

Zoe added, "She gets herself off and films what's happening."

Monique stated, "I've heard she was directing people."

Hannah asked, "Is it true she's jacking guys off?"

Monique made a face, "I've heard she lets guys finish on her breasts."

Hannah pushed up her glasses and asked, "Why?"

Zoe with wisdom said, "Because she likes it."

There was a brief moment of silence.

Hannah broke the silence by answering her own question, "Before she started giving handjobs I heard they were planning on forcing to have sex."

Zoe reasoned, "Maybe jacking guys off is enough to keep her safe."

Monique mentioned with concern, "She wouldn't be the only girl being forced. Bad things are happening at those parties."

Hannah pushed up her glasses, "Isn't everything at those parties bad?"

There was a moment of silence.

Zoe pointed out, "The Snob Club is angry."

The other two girls gave her a look.

Hannah answered, "Because she's refuses to sleep with anyone."

Zoe quickly agreed, "I've never heard anyone saying she's had sex with anyone at those parties."

Monique made a face, "Guys are claiming to have had sex with her."

Hannah with a defensive tone, "Never at the parties. I don't feel she's had sex with any of the guys claiming to have sex with her."

Monique mentioned, "It ain't helping she's getting herself off in the girls bathroom."

Hannah reluctantly acknowledged, "I've heard she's done it in the shower at school."

Monique made a face, "If U's listen to the rumors she's done it just about every place in the school building."

Zoe with a tone, "Lets be careful. I ain't saying she hasn't done it in places she shouldn't but we shouldn't be believing everything. I feeling the Snob Club is spreading rumors."

Hannah pushed up her glasses, blushed, and sheepishly mentioned, "It ain't like everyone doesn't do it."

Zoe clarified, "Sleep around?"

Hannah blushed again, "No. Fingerprint."

Monique with some confidence said, "I'm not doing it in school."

Zoe wisely said, "Look. Some of the gals laughing at Julie for getting herself off in the bathroom have likely enjoyed themselves in places they'd never admit they did it. I ain't saying if I've done it or not but I'm agreeing with Hannah. No one should ever laugh at someone for getting themselves off when they're liking enjoying themselves."

Silence filled the room. All three thought about their private moments.

Hannah mentioned, "Instead of spreading rumors and poking fun. We should try to get her to stop."

Zoe asked, "How are Y'all stopping her?"

They all leaned back and silence filled the room.

Hannah waved the others toward her and asked out of concern, "Y'all feel she's a sex addict?"

Zoe and Monique made faces.

Zoe commented, "I've never heard of anyone being sex addict."

Monique added, "Seems odd."

Hannah answered, "I read a magazine article about it."

Zoe spoke her opinion on this, "If Y'all are a sex addict. Wouldn't Y'all be having sex? I feel if she's addicted to sex she would have done it at the parties."

Monique asked, "Wouldn't a gal be doing it with every guy she meets?"

Zoe pointed out, "But we've agreed she ain't sleeping around."

Hanna admitted with a tone of worry, "Once she has it she'll want it all the time."

Zoe agreed, "She ain't known for doing anything half way."

Monique believed this.

Hannah reasoned, "In the article it mentioned people often start by being addicted to masturbating."

Monique added, "I'm sure guys are."

Zoe made a face, "Why couldn't a gal get addicted to rubbing themselves out?"

Hannah mentioned, "Where do Y'all think the term chronic masturbator comes from?"

They sat up when they heard the doorbell ring; they heard Julie yell, "I'll get it. It's probably Belinda."

The girls looked at one another with surprise.

Belinda was known to be a loner.

Nicole spotted Felicia and Annette in the kitchen. She excused herself from the conversation she was having, left the dinning room table, and stepped into the kitchen. Nicole glanced into the side room and smiled. Nicole was delighted her Daughter was hanging out with a better group of girls. Nicole was concerned about Amanda and hoped she would go back to hanging around Julie and these group of girls.

The ladies glanced into the kitchen.

Victoria was about to help but Ashleigh touched her underneath the table and shook her head. Victoria listened by remaining seated.

Nicole covered her true intent by unloading the last load of dishes from the dishwasher. These were the dishes left over after dinner. When they arrived home from the game the ladies helped Nicole unload the dishwasher and refill it with the dishes left in the sink.

She observed Felicia filling up her plate with deserts. As a mother and a nurse Nicole wished she would have picked the fruit salad or the chiefs salad.

She heard Annette say, "Are you sure you want to eat all that?"

Felicia answered, "I'm so hungry."

Annette made a face, "Aren't you going to get sick again?"

"I hope not. But I'm so hungry."

This reminded Nicole of her three pregnancies.

Felicia asked, "Nicole. What type of cookies are these. I really love them."

Nicole reminded herself this young lady was from the Midwest and was in no way being disrespectful.

Nicole smiled and gladly answered, "It's an iced orange cookie. On your plate is lemon cream cheese bars, a couple coconut bars, and citrus mini cakes."

Annette stated, "It's all so good."

"Thank-you."

Nicole was unable to help herself, "Honey."

Felicia answered, "Yeah."

"Y'all don't mind receiving some advice."

Felicia responded quickly, "Of course not."

"Y'all will feel better in the morning if you'd eat the salad and some fruit over them sweets."

Felicia made a face and was unsure of what to feel.

Nicole in a whisper, "This is coming from a nurse and mother of three. I'll never forget my appetite and what I went through in the mornings."

Nicole was actually surprised when Felicia humbly said, "I'll have some of the salad after this."

Nicole winked, "Honey. Don't go heavy on the dressing."

Felicia smiled, "Okay."

Annette was remarkable subdued, "Ashleigh is right. The fruit and seafood does taste better here."

This is when the doorbell rang.

They heard Julie shout and get the door.

Nicole tapped Felicia on the arm, "Those are some good girls in there. Y'all relax and enjoy their company."

Annette answered, "They've been nice to us."

Nicole smiled, "I'm sure they have. Help yourselves. I'll be in the dinning room if Y'all need anything."

Felicia answered, "Okay."

Felicia felt comfort from this woman. She believed Julie was lucky to have her as a mother. This would never super seed the immense love, respect, and connection she was feeling toward her own mother. Felicia correctly believed she was unable to reach the standards of motherhood she observed from her Mother and mothers like Nicole. She was

hoping to find an adoptive mother like Nicole. Felicia always wanted a mother around Nicole's age. What she felt was unique about Nicole was she seemed just as wise as her own mother.

Julie stopped at the entrance of the kitchen.

Julie stated, "I'd like Y'all to join us?"

Nicole was happy to hear Julie check on their guests.

Annette and Felicia smiled at one another.

Felicia responded with, "After I make myself a salad."

Julie changed her mind, "I'm hungry myself. We'll join you."

She then waved the girls from the side room into the kitchen. The girls in the side room were happy to join the four girls in the kitchen.

Julie formally introduced all of them to Belinda.

Nicole was pleased Julie was being a good host. When Nicole sat back at the dinning room table Victoria nodded at Nicole; she winked in return. Nicole quickly joined one of the many conversations happening in the dinning room.

Julie was sitting in the corner chair of the side room. Zoe was to the left of her sitting on the floor directly across from the coach, Hanna was to the left of Zoe in a kitchen chair in the corner of the room, Monique was to the left of her in a kitchen chair. Felicia and Annette were sitting on the couch. Belinda was in a kitchen chair in front of the entrance to the side room with her back to the kitchen. On three tray tables were bowls of salsa and chips. Everyone was observing Felicia take one chip after another.

The adults were playing a marble game called *Aggravation*. This was one of the many games *Renewed Mastery* made out of wood. There were many different options. Jimmy chose the moon landing option. Jimmy chose this option because he always had a fascination with the moon landings. This board was: in a circle, it was stained in a light colored black, in the center was a carving of a moon with an astronaut holding an American flag, along the outside were carvings of the Apollo patches, and all six sets of marbles were the moon style; the colors were red, blue, green, white, purple, and yellow. Carved on the back of the game was the date the game was finished. They were playing men versus women. Ma was enjoying the company and would serve anyone if needed.

They became loud when Ashleigh sent Captain's marble back to start. Captain teased saying something about payback.

Zoe commented, "Imagine if we'd be that loud?"

All the girls agreed with her.

Julie suggested, "Y'all want to watch a movie?"

Zoe imagined a horrible romance movie, a cartoon, or worse the movie about penguins. She asked with some tribulation, "What movie?"

Julie stated, "It's called Roller Ball."

The girls made faces.

Annette asked in her emotional self, "What's that?"

Belinda stated, "I saw it."

Julie along with everyone else was surprised.

Julie asked, "Was it good?"

"It's a seventies science fiction movie."

This caused immediate facial expressions.
The only two girls interested in it was Zoe and Julie.
Zoe asked with an excited tone, "What's it about?"
Belinda stated, "My Dad is into odd movies and fishing shows."
Belinda slightly paused waved her hand and rolled her eyes,
She went on; "In the future they play this game called Rollerball. The people controlling the world want this guy named Jonathan to retire. But he doesn't. So the people running the world get angry and try to kill him."
Zoe made a face, "I bet my parents have seen it."
Hannah mentioned, "I'm sure they did."
Zoe asked, "Why are Y'all picking this movie?"
Julie answered, "Mr. Bob wants a report on it."
Felicia and Annette glanced at one another.
Belinda asked, "Does he pay you for it?"
"No."
Monique asked, "Then why review it?"
Julie answered, "He listens to me."
Belinda made a face and asked, "U's have a crush on him?"
Julie became angry, "It ain't what Y'all are thinking."
Very seldom did the girls ever see Julie this angry.
Julie responded quickly, "We review books and movies. We discuss the reports. Ashleigh is always in the room. He's never acted weird."
Hannah pushed up her glasses, "Really?"
With a tone, "Never."
Felicia jumped in, "We've known him our whole lives. He'd never act inappropriate."
Annette added, "He never treated either of us wrongly. He was a good brother to Ashleigh."
Felicia in a very serious tone, "He never missed any visitations with my sister."
Zoe asked, "I've never heard of a brother getting visitations?"
Monique made a face, "Seems odd?"
Annette and Felicia glanced at one another.
Hannah was observing them closely.
Felicia asked, "You know my parents were Ashleigh's foster parents?"
Most of the girls acknowledged this.
Belinda found this interesting.
Annette and Felicia glanced at one another.
Felicia turned toward everyone, "Don't tell anyone."
They all agreed.
Felicia continued, "Her mom was an alcoholic and beat her. Bob tried for custody and they didn't give it to him."
Hannah pushed up her glasses, "Why?"
Felicia answered, "Milwaukee county didn't like the idea of a brother raising a sister. They're known for favoring mother's even when they shouldn't."
The girls held in their opinions.
Belinda mentioned, "With Mr. Bob being so rich U's think he'd be given custody."

Annette in her excited self stated, "He wasn't as rich as he is now."

Felicia did clarify, "His mom was."

Zoe asked with a puzzled tone, "He wasn't always rich?"

Annette and Felicia looked at one another.

Felicia answered, "He was what my Dad calls well off. But he wasn't as rich as he is now."

Annette somehow held in her emotions and explained, "He almost went broke starting up up Renewed Mastery. The only reason he had money was because he won a couple bowling tournaments."

Felicia clarified, "He won them before he owned his restaurant and club."

Annette a little animated, "I thought he won them after?"

Felicia made a face, "Maybe one? But it didn't matter as much."

Monique asked, "He owned a club?"

Annette excited "It was really popular."

Felicia said a lot calmer, "Big acts would come to the club."

Julie thought about all of the music memorabilia on the walls.

Monique asked, "Was there dancing?"

Annette answered, "All types."

Felicia excited, "His mom taught Bob and Ashleigh how to ball room dance."

Julie smiled.

Annette added, "Their great dancers."

This impressed all the girls.

Monique brought the conversation back, "Was it because of the club he didn't get custody?"

Felicia stated, "Like we mentioned before. It wasn't because of the club but on account the court didn't want to give custody to a brother."

Julie always felt this was ignorant.

"My parents and their lawyer worked with Bob and his Lawyer. This is how my parents ended up to be foster parents to Ashleigh. They tried to get full custody but Ashleigh's mother kept fighting it."

Belinda asked, "What stopped her?"

Annette answered with a smile, "Bob hired a private investigator and caught her in a bar getting drunk."

Right away Belinda commented, "Well good for him."

This caught everyone by surprise.

Julie wanted to tell everyone why she was taken away from her real mother. She suspected Annette and Felicia knew the story but was keeping this to themselves. Julie correctly reasoned they also knew Ashleigh was molested by her Step-dad and a boyfriend. Julie remained silent because of the respect she had for Ashleigh. An even more important reason was her promise to Ashleigh.

Monique commented, "You must have good parents."

Annette hoped Felicia would take this to heart.

Felicia paused.

Julie felt Felicia took this comment to heart.

Felicia in a somber tone answered, "I didn't realize how good of parents they were until I became pregnant."

This caught the girls by surprise.

Hannah asked right away in a very concerned voice, "Y'all keeping it?"

"I'm planning on giving it up for adoption."

Zoe asked, "Is this your choice?"

Tears fell, "It is."

Belinda being her east coast blunt self, "Is the father a jack ass?"

They all gave her a look.

Belinda asked, "What?"

Annette was nodding and making faces.

The rest of the girls liked Annette but felt she was too excitable.

Felicia answered honestly, "He's mad I'm keeping it."

Monique angry, "He wants you to get an abortion doesn't he?"

Felicia glanced toward the dining room and restrained her tears, "Promise you won't tell my family?"

Julie answered, "Yes."

"He said we should talk. Instead he drove me to an abortion clinic. I thought he was going to..."

She paused.

Hannah handed her a tissue.

Annette whispered, "Tell them. You'll feel better telling someone."

All of the other girls wondered where this sudden mature Annette appeared from. They wished she acted like this all the time.

Felicia managed, "He said we'd go shopping for clothes and supplies. Instead he takes me to an abortion clinic. He tried to tell me it would be the best thing. He'd even pay for it."

She teared up.

She was handed a tissue.

"I can't kill my baby. He said he was going to support me in whatever I decided. He said he would stay with me."

What irritated Zoe was how this guy was disrespectful to Felicia. She felt a guy should agree with whatever the mother wanted.

Belinda asked with a compassionate tone, "Has he broke up with you?"

This compassion surprised many of the girls.

Felicia shrugged her shoulders and answered meekly, "Not yet."

Monique answered in her East Coast accent, "What an ass."

Annette was overjoyed someone said this.

All of the girls felt sorry for Felicia and all of them knew a girl who went through or was going through the same thing.

Felicia felt safe to confess, "The worst part. I was on the pill."

Gasps.

Zoe asked in shock, "Y'all were on the pill?"

Annette with a disgusted face announced, "I can attest she was taking it. The worst part is his condom fell off."

Hannah in horror asked, "Inside?"

Felicia's tears stopped, "He dug for it."

All gasped at what this must have felt like. And how horrified they would feel if a full condom fell off inside of them.

Julie mentioned matter of fact, "There is a one to two percent chance of getting pregnant on the pill. Inexperienced guys ain't having the sense to hold onto it when they pull out."

Felicia now knew what happened. "That's it!!"

The girls looked at her.

Felicia stated, "I never thought about that."

In disgust Felicia added, "He didn't last long."

Julie believed this whole heartily. This was something she observed from many guys her age.

Monique said bluntly, "I've heard that before."

Belinda thought about the two guys she had sex with. She felt free to say, "You'd think with all the jacking off they do. They'd be practiced enough to last longer than a few minutes."

Felicia made a face, "Even a few seconds."

The girls gazed upon her.

"I've had two boyfriends."

Julie stated, "A hand is a lot different than our vagina's."

They looked at her.

Julie felt the need to say, "I haven't slept with anyone."

Felicia exclaimed, "Wait!"

Everyone was silent as she wiped tears away and calmed herself down. "I wish I would've waited. This isn't worth it. I wanted to know what it was like. It isn't as good as everyone says. I thought he loved me. I was stupid to believe him."

This caused all the girls to feel compassion for Felicia.

Hannah handed her another tissue. Felicia took it. As a friend Annette wrapped her arms around her.

Felicia forced herself to sit up and stated, "It wasn't what I thought it'd be like. Sex isn't like the movies at all."

Belinda decided to be honest, "Guys think they're great but I've never been able to get off with a guy inside of me. I wish I would've had sex with my first boyfriend. At least the second guy would get me off other ways. But he didn't last long either."

Hannah pushed up her glasses and asked with a slight blush, "What were the other ways?"

Belinda smiled, "He went down on me."

They stared at her.

Zoe asked, "Was it good?"

Belinda made sure to say, "My first guy tried. He was terrible at it. The second knew what to do. It still wasn't worth it."

Belinda could still feel the sting of the second guy sleeping with a friend of hers.

Felicia commented, "Sex isn't so great."

Belinda made a face, "You'd think it'd be better."

Annette found herself saying, "I'm waiting until I'm married."

This encouraged Hannah, "Me too."

Zoe rolled her eyes, "I ain't saying I'm waiting till then. But I ain't just given it away."
Monique stated, "I ain't given it away either."
Julie remained silent.
This is when the doorbell rang.
Monique asked, "What time is it?"
Julie flashed her sports watch.
Monique stated, "It's probably my Dad."
They heard Nicole say, "I'll get it."
The game stopped and the girls stopped talking.

Nicole correctly assumed this was a parent picking up one of the girls. While Julie stepped to the door the girls went into the kitchen.

Nicole opened the door and a medium height muscular blond haired, blue eyed, mid-thirties man was standing at the door. Nicole assumed this was Belinda's dad.

She was surprised to hear, "Is Monique here?"

Nicole was suspicious and asked, "Who might be calling on her?"

Monique understood what was happening and called out to him, "Dad I'll be right there."

This caught everyone by surprise. Based upon Monique's darker skin tone, no one would have guessed she was of a mixed race.

Taking a second glance Nicole realized Monique had similar traits as her Dad. She felt horrible. She stated with a welcoming voice, "My name is Nicole. I'm Julie's mother."

He smiled, "Names Nick. Glad to meet you."

"Your welcomed to come in."

He said with a smile, "I'll take a rain check. She needs to get home before her curfew."

Nicole respected this.

Nicole smiled as Monique stopped and hugged all the girls; then headed toward the door.

Nicole stated with all sincerity, "Y'all are welcomed here any time."

Monique answered simply, "Cool."

Julie smiled.

Then Nicole being a great hostess, "Do Y'all have a second?"

"It's nearing curfew."

Monique made a face.

Nicole answered, "Julie could you get me a pen and paper."

"Yes Ma'am."

"I want to give Monique's Momma my number. We'll have to get together. I'd love to invite the two of you at our next party."

Julie gave her mom a pen and paper.

She quickly wrote her information down and gave it to Monique, "Now you give this to your Momma."

Monique thought this was great.

"Okay."

Nick stated, "Her Mom will be angry if I don't get her home."

Nicole smiled, "Okay. Monique I mean it. Y'all are welcomed here anytime."

This meant a lot to her. There were times when parents of different races were displeased her father was white.

"Okay."

She turned to Julie, "I'll talk to you soon."

"Okay."

Monique was the first to leave Nicole and Jimmy's house.

This surprised Belinda the most. She grew up being taught the south was filled with ignorant prejudice people. She had run into some but it was far from the amount she was led to believe. She equated this to how people in Florida assumed all people from the Upper East Coast were uncaring and rude. She recognized people from the Upper East Coast could be rude and uncaring; but it was far from everyone. She reasoned many of the judgments were based upon how different the cultures were. Belinda felt she found a good group of friends.

Within four-five minutes all of the girls were picked up and the marble game ended.

Megan, under the lights, was swabbing the deck of her charter. Jake was below deck doing maintenance on the engine.

What pleased both Jake and Megan was running into a school of blackfin tuna fairly quickly. They caught a large amount of tuna in a short time; an added bonus was catching a white marlin. Megan often times preferred the groups that were more interested in catching a larger amount of fish, compared to the groups that solely wanted a big score. Depending on the season both could be a difficult tasks to complete. Both Megan and Jake were delighted they gave Megan four blackfin tuna; as always she split the tip and gave two to Jake. Megan knew of more than one way to cook tuna.

The only crinkle to the trip was one of the guys almost fell over board. She embarrassed him by quickly grabbing his life jacket and keeping him from falling into the ocean. Away from his friends he thanked her. The worst part of any trip was fishing someone out of the ocean; especially at night. She appreciated it when he thanked her.

She was making mental lists of what she needed to accomplish on her two charters on Saturday and the two day charter scheduled on Sunday and Monday. This two day charter was a group from Quebec. They were looking to catch yellowfin tuna and shark. She was contemplating where to catch these fish.

Her thoughts were interrupted by hearing the voices of Bob and Susan. She stopped swabbing the deck. A few minutes earlier she observed them passing her charter. Due to a slight breeze she was able to hear what they were saying. Based upon the conversation they were facing the stern of the yacht.

Susan wanted to talk about the pinup painted on the stern of the yacht. This was of a small breasted young woman in a Green Bay Packer cheerleader outfit. Like many of the women who observed this painting, Susan believed the pinup was of a person Bob knew. Nicole and Susan believed this because of the pinups small breasts and average appearance.

She heard Susan say, "Y'all did a nice thing today."

"Julie is a good girl with immense potential. Montez and his brother are excellent employees. Isabel is a very good student as well as an excellent athlete. She often works at a family owned restaurant."

This confirmed Megan's belief his contacts went beyond Eastbank.

Bob continued, "After living in a socialist pit. Montez appreciates America more than most Americans. He's been warning anyone who'd listen about the Democrat party."

Megan felt guilty for stopping her work and snooping but felt compelled to do so.

"Let's not talk politics."

Megan imagined Bob pushing up his glasses when he asked, "What shall we talk about?"

Susan was stern, "Who is she?"

"Who?"

"The pinup. Who is she?"

Megan could picture both of them staring at the image.

"It's just a work of art."

Megan rolled her eyes.

There was silence.

Susan broke into the silence, "No. Y'all should tell me who she is?"

Megan believed Susan was hurt by his answer. Megan felt this was a very good second question.

"Why is this important? I'm dating you."

"You ain't telling me?"

"I honestly don't see why it's important. It's just a work of art."

Megan imagined Susan's look, "How am I to trust you?"

"I'd never cheat on you."

"It's not just about cheating. It's about trust."

Megan really focused.

"Do you believe I'd cheat on you?"

"I want to believe you'd be faithful. Imagine how I feel."

"About what?"

Megan rolled her eyes.

"Every other weekend you fly up to Wisconsin to visit your son. Something I admire Y'all for. But Y'all could be having a relationship with his mother. Is this Shelly?"

Megan felt this was a very good question.

Bob answered quickly, "No."

"Maybe it's some other girlfriend you have in Wisconsin?"

Megan felt this was another good question.

"I've asked you to come along with me."

"I ain't ready."

Bob answered, "I just hung on our wall a picture of Shelly and Bobby. I could show you."

Megan's dimples flashed.

Megan whispered under her breath, "Guys."

"I'd appreciate it."

There was a pause. Megan believed Bob was about to lead her to the wooden pier of the yacht but she heard Susan say, "You've been a gentleman to me. I'm assuming Y'all will continue to be. I ain't making love until we're married."

Bob in a very serious tone answered, "One of the reasons I'm dating you is because you feel this way. I would never pressure a woman to make love before she's ready. I'm more than willing to wait until I'm married."

Susan used a different more pleasant tone when she answered, "Let's see those pictures. I bet he looks a lot like you."

Megan smiled at Bob's answer, "In some ways. In others he looks like Shelly."

Susan asked, "After let's walk along the beach."

"I'd like that."

Megan's dimples flashed and brushed her hair behind her right ear.

Megan felt it was rare to find a guy willing to wait until being married. Megan was surprised Bob felt this way. Before she went back to swabbing the deck Megan recognized Bob never told Susan who the pinup was based upon.

This is when Jake stepped out onto the stern of the charter.

"Megan."

"Yes."

Jake stated, "She's ready for tomorrow's charter."

Megan flashed her dimples.

"Alright. Before Y'all don't forget the tuna?"

Jake made a gesture, "Thanks for reminding me."

Megan watched him head to the attached outside freezer.

She asked, "How'd Y'all make it without Linda and I."

He was a smart ass, "Maybe I'd do better."

Megan's dimples flashed.

He: lifted up the cover to the freezer, he let it close, he turned, he grabbed a cooler from storage, he wheeled it to the freezer, opened both covers, transferred the fish into the cooler, closed both lids, walked the cooler off the vessel, set it down on the concrete pier, and was about to wheel the cooler to the car.

Megan waited.

Jake asked, "We arriving early?"

"I'm feeling maybe an hour. With us getting things done we ain't needed to be too early."

"Alright."

He started to walk away.

Megan waited.

He stopped and turned toward Megan, "Y'all know I wouldn't want to find out what it'd be like without Linda."

She smiled a big dimple smile.

"I'd miss Y'all but it wouldn't be like missing Linda."

Megan answered, "I understand. It's why I allow you to work on my charter."

She watched him look up and yell, "Howdy Mr. Bob and Ms. Susan."

She heard Nikita whine.

Bob yelled in return, "Hi Jake."

"Howdy."

Bob and Susan walked up to Jake.

Normally Nikita would have been interested in Jake but she smelled the fish in the cooler. At the moment this was more interesting than Jake.

Bob's first question was, "What's in the cooler."

"Tuna. They make for some delicious eating'."

Bob answered, "There isn't anything better than fresh fish."

Jake stated, "You ain't whistling Dixie."

"I have a question."

"Yes Sir."

"Do you bowl?"

"What are Y'all meaning?"

When Nikita realized she was unable to get to the food inside of the cooler she stepped over to Jake. Jake bent down and started to pet her. Her collar was jangling.

Megan shouted, "Bowling. The sport of bowling."

Then Jake understood, "Why are Y'all asking?"

"I noticed there was a bowling alley in town and I was curious if you'd want to join me on a league."

"I ain't a great bowler."

Jake stopped petting Nikita and stood up.

Nikita again focused on the cooler until Bob yanked on the leash. She sat down.

What Bob said next surprised Megan, "It's not all about winning. I'm sure you'd always try."

"Yes sir."

"Then I'd want you on my team."

Jake answered, "I'm much obliged but I'd have to talk to Linda first and I'd have to work around our schedule."

"No problem. Just let me know."

"I will."

Jake glanced at his watch, "I need to be getting home."

"Alright."

Jake smiled, "Mr. Bob I'm always happy talking to you. Ma'am it was nice seeing Y'all again."

Susan answered, "It was."

Susan and Bob watched him walk away. Nikita stood up and sniffed the cooler as it passed by.

Susan acknowledged Megan, "Howdy Megan."

"Howdy."

Nikita became excited, she wanted Female Friend to pet her.

Bob commanded her to sit.

She reluctantly did so.

They turned toward Megan.

The two ladies gave one another looks.

Bob asked, "Charter go well?"

"Yes it did."

Susan asked, "Y'all have any openings next week?"

Megan put the mop inside of the bucket and walked up to the edge of her charter, "After Tuesday I'll have a couple spots. Is it business?"

“My Daddy would like to schedule a charter. I’m assuming it’s business but it could be politics.”

Megan answered, “Would it be alright if I called him?”

“I’m sure it’d be fine. Just tell him we talked.”

“Okay.”

“See Y’all.”

“Bye.”

Bob said, “I’m glad the charter went well.”

“Me too.”

Megan brushed her hair behind her ear.

She watched them walk to the end of the concrete pier and make a right. She observed Susan grab hold of his hand. Bob took it in kind. She observed Nikita turn and look toward the preserve, She watched them walk along the parking lot and cross the street.

Megan felt envy. Bob was willing to hold onto Susan’s hand, while her current boyfriend never once reached for hers.

Her dimples flashed.

This is when she heard arguing coming from Gina’s houseboat. She looked up. With the type of curtains and the light in Gina’s houseboat Megan could tell Gina was standing on the port side and Miranda was on the starboard. Megan could tell Miranda was angry at Gina for talking to someone on the phone.

Out of the corner of her eye she spotted Ashleigh and two teenagers. One of the girls was pushing a cart from the marina; on the cart were suitcases and bags.

Megan shouted, “Howdy.”

Ashleigh answered, “Hi.”

Ashleigh stepped up to the stern of the charter. Felicia and Annette followed closely.

Ashleigh asked, “How long have they been arguing?”

“About ten minutes.”

Ashleigh mentioned, “I don’t like Miranda.”

Megan remarked, “I ain’t a fan.”

Annette asked, “Who’s Miranda?”

Ashleigh pointed to the houseboat across from Megan’s, “In the houseboat over there is a friend of ours named Gina. Miranda is her girlfriend.”

Annette and Felicia glanced at one another.

Ashleigh stated, “Yes they’re lesbians. Megan and I are both straight.”

All at once they heard a door open and then slam. They watched as an angry blond woman quickly headed toward the parking lot.

Ashleigh shook her head and felt a concern for Gina. She witnessed this behavior before. She shook this feeling off.

She turned toward her sister and friend, “This is my best friend Megan.”

She pointed to each respectively and stated, “My sister Felicia and her best friend Annette.”

All three greeted one another.

Ashleigh asked, “Did I see Bob and Susan take Nikita for a walk?”

"They were headed toward the beach."

She looked over at Megan, "Talk tomorrow?"

Her dimples flashed, "All for it."

Felicia and Annette were watching closely.

Megan flashed her dimples.

"I'm looking forward to spending time with both of you next week."

Annette answered, "Me too."

Megan reminded both, "Don't forget to have sunblock. If Y'all haven't sailed before bring sea sickness medicine."

Felicia asked, "What if your pregnant?"

Megan felt compassion for her, "I believe so. But a mother trying to be responsible should call her doctor."

Annette and Felicia glanced at one another.

Ashleigh stated, "You should be able to call a doctor on your own."

Felicia sheepishly answered, "I don't know how."

Ashleigh answered, "I'll help you through it."

Megan's produced her big dimple smile.

"I'll give you the number to my doctor."

The three women looked at one another.

Megan assured them, "She's a good doctor."

Ashleigh mentioned, "I'd like the number. I need one here."

Megan pulled out her cell phone, opened it, and gave them the number and name.

Felicia decided she would have Ashleigh help her with the phone call.

Ashleigh smiled.

"We need to get going."

Megan stated, "Okay."

Ashleigh stated, "See you later Alligator."

Megan answered, "After while Crocodile."

Annette and Felicia smiled.

Felicia said, "Thanks. See you."

Megan answered, "Looking forward to it."

When they turned around they spotted Nikita running up to the three ladies.

Megan on purpose turned away.

She smiled when she heard Nikita being greeted by the three ladies. She picked up the bucket and mop and took these items into the galley of her charter.

Julie: was sitting at her desk, her desk light was on, and her laptop was open. On her desk there was: a water bottle, a receipt card, a fake id, fake Social Security card, a bank card, a loose rubber band, there were four filled out tax returns, there were four empty envelopes, there were six other envelopes closed, and there was a small bottle with a sponge on her desk, and an accounting book. On her bed were: her accounting books, a spiral notebook, and at least a dozen rubber banded piles of paperwork. Each rubber banded pile had: a receipt card on top, a fake drivers license, a fake Social Security card, at least one bank card, and over half had credit cards. Each receipt card had: a name, address, codes, and a round colored sticker

on it. Leaning against the wall was her mermaid print and the secret compartment door was open.

Julie: folded the finished tax return, she picked up the empty envelopes, she paged through, found the proper envelope, she slide the tax return into the envelope, sealed it with the little bottle with the sponge, set the envelope onto the finished pile, she stood up collected the fake ID's off the desk, she carefully put the rubber band around the ID's, she glanced at the next finished tax return, she turned, went over to her bed, she put the current stack of ID's onto her bed in a specific order, by reading the receipt cards she found the pile that matched the next tax return, by reading the receipt card she knew she should use the accounting book on her desk, she turned, sat back down at her desk, she pulled off the rubber band, carefully, set the contents of this pile on her desk, and picked up the next filled out tax return. She carefully checked all the information on the tax return with the receipt card, the ID's, the information she stored on her laptop, and the information in the accounting book. When she was satisfied she again sealed the envelope and put it with the others that were finished. She continued this routine until she was done with all the returns. When this was finished she carefully put all of these items back into her secret compartment; excluding the laptop.

She looked at her small digital clock on her desk. It was now early Saturday morning and in a few hours she would need to walk Nikita. She was about to take a drink of water but her water bottle was empty. She quietly made her way downstairs to the kitchen.

By using the nightlight in the kitchen she: opened the freezer, took out the ice cube tray, she shut the freezer door, she walked the tray and bottle to the sink, as quietly as possible bent the tray, she turned off the lid, set it on the counter, she placed the loose ice cubes into the water bottle, she stepped back to the refrigerator, she opened the freezer door, she placed the tray into it, she opened the refrigerator door, the light brightened up the room, she placed her water bottle under the water jug, and filled the bottle with water. Julie felt this system was better than buying all the individual water bottles.

She heard her brothers bedroom door open.

She watched her Brother step to the edge of the kitchen.

She felt water hit her hand.

She: swore at herself, she sipped water out of the bottle, she shut the door to the refrigerator, she stepped over to the sink, she grabbed a towel, dried her hand, she twisted the cover back onto the bottle, she stepped around the counter, leaned up against one of the tall chairs in front of the counter, and starred at her Brother.

She prepared herself to be called terrible names.

It appeared as though Jeff was going to say something.

He stopped.

Julie demanded, "Say it."

"You shouldn't attend those parties anymore."

She reluctantly asked, "Why?"

There was silence in the dark kitchen; except for the small nightlight.

She could tell her brother was bundling up his emotions.

She again expected hurtful ridicule.

"With Melissa graduating this year it ain't safe for Y'all to go anymore."

She was surprised her brother would warn her.

The only thing Julie managed to say was, "I ain't planning on attending."

Jeff then stated, "After I graduate there's kids who feel they'd have permission to mess with Y'all."

"Jeff I can take care of myself."

She stood there.

He stood there.

All he could manage to say was, "Your my sister and I ain't liking what everyone's saying."

Julie held in her tears.

"What are they saying?"

He stood there with bundled up emotion.

Julie saved him by asking, "Did Y'all have a good day with Bette?"

Jeff smiled, "Yes."

"Y'all like the museums?"

"They were alright."

Julie assumed he hated the museums but enjoyed hanging out with Bette.

They again stood there gazing upon one another.

Now both had bundled up emotions; neither knew how to get it out.

Jeff stated, "Y'all are my sister."

He turned and went into his room.

She never interrupted him.

She grabbed her water bottle, went up to her room, shut the door, went into her closet, reached up and grabbed a small metal box, took it to her desk, went into her desk, found the key, opened the box, grabbed a toy, stripped naked, grabbed her laptop, did an internet search, found a pornographic clip, and made herself comfortable on her bed.

After two sessions she passed out exhausted.

Ashleigh woke up to Nikita howling and making noise.

She looked at the clock.

She stepped out of bed, stepped out of her suite, stepped across the hallway, opened the door to where her sister and friend were, and stared at them.

It was obvious they were trying to calm Nikita down.

Nikita was obviously very happy. There was a ball in her mouth and her tail was a weapon.

Ashleigh commanded, "Nikita to your bed."

Nikita's tail dropped, her head dropped, and she made her way back to her spot.

Ashleigh stated, "In your condition you shouldn't be up this late."

Felicia gave her a look, "I suppose."

Annette's eyes became wide. She never imagined Ashleigh acting this way.

Ashleigh answered, "You suppose?"

Felicia was all at once angry, "Since when are you my mother?"

"Ashleigh no longer could hold it in, "I'm not your mother but I'm your sister. I love you and the baby you are carrying."

Felicia snipped, "Okay."

The tone Felicia used irritated Ashleigh, "Don't use that tone with me."

Felicia rolled her eyes, "Okay."

Annette knew enough to remain silent.

Ashleigh snipped back, "Okay?"

Felicia being emotional stated, "It's not like I planned this."

"It's obvious you didn't plan."

"What are you saying?"

Ashleigh answered, "For God's sake. You could have at least went on birth control. How could you be so irresponsible?"

Ashleigh realized she was sounding like their Mother.

This outburst surprised all three.

Felicia started to cry, "I was on the pill and his condom fell off."

"Bullshit."

Annette jumped in, "It's true. I went with her to get the pills."

"Why didn't you stop her?"

Annette stated meekly, "I tried."

Felicia was one octave below screaming, "I was stupid."

Ashleigh calmed herself down enough to say, "You are not stupid."

Felicia broke down, "I wish I would have listened to everybody. I wish I could have it back. It fell off and I felt him digging for it. I didn't know what to do. I wish I wasn't pregnant. I know I should give it up and I'm going too. But it's my baby. This is so hard."

Ashleigh ran up to her sister.

The two hugged. They cried and mumbled many things together for almost forty minutes.

Ashleigh stepped back and stated, "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"Yelling at you."

Annette was tearing.

Felicia responded with, "It's okay."

Ashleigh said, "I'm disappointed. But I shouldn't have implied you were lying to me."

"I'm not."

"I know."

They hugged again.

When they pulled apart; an emotional Annette hugged Ashleigh just because.

Ashleigh returned the hug.

When they pulled themselves apart Ashleigh informed them, "Julie will be here in about four hours to walk Nikita."

Felicia made a face, "That early?"

Ashleigh made a face, "On the dot."

"If you wanted to go with them you two need sleep."

Annette answered with a shocked tone, "Alright."

With this Ashleigh smiled, "See you tomorrow."

Felicia answered, "Okay."

Ashleigh turned shut the door went back to her suit. She let Nikita know she loved her still. Then she slipped into her bed.

This was the moment Ashleigh recognized she was a full fledged adult. She was unsure of when this happened. She felt she never made the conscience decision to be a full fledged adult. She reasoned, becoming an adult started after leaving treatment when she was in high school, in one way or another each decision big or small led to her becoming one.

She fell asleep contemplating the meaning, consequences, and importance of decisions.

April 7th, Decisions

Part Six of Six

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