

# WATER IN MY EYES

**A Novel**

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## CHAPTER 1

The courtroom is abuzz with conversation as everyone waits patiently for the verdict. I'm nervous because my husband, Doug, is on trial for embezzlement. I think the whole thing is a farce because my husband would never steal anything from anybody. He has worked for Horizon's Mutual Insurance Company for twenty-five years. He started out there on an internship during his freshman year of college and has worked there ever since. Why would he invest so many years of his life to a company the way he has to turn around and steal from them? That's why I think it's a farce. The CEO and President of Horizon's Mutual told Doug they had been investigating him for over two years and they'd finally found enough evidence to press charges. The way I see it, things all of sudden started happening when Doug made a fuss about being denied a promotion two years ago. No matter how hard he worked for them, they only promoted him twice during his twenty-five years of service. What makes it more unusual, another guy started with the company the same time as my husband and has been promoted six times during his career. And they told my husband they didn't discriminate. Well, anyway, I'll just keep sitting here on this hard, wooden seat and continue to say a prayer for my husband as we wait for the jury to return. Doug tells me not to worry, and that everything will be OK, but I still can't help but think the love of my life may be going to prison. Watching him in the front of the courtroom with his lawyers, I notice Doug has the look of worry in his eyes. He tries to give me a smile when we make eye contact, but it's a weak one. It even appears that his coal, black, wavy hair has picked up a few new strands of gray since this whole thing started. The courtroom gets quiet when the jurors enter. My heart is beating so fast, I'm sure the woman sitting to my left can hear it. My son, Nathan, is sitting to my right, and he's squeezing my hand. I can tell he's feeling just as anxious as I am. We hug each other tightly as one of the jurors stands to render the verdict.

“We the jury, find the defendant, Doug Newcomb, guilty of two counts of embezzlement.”

I gasp for air and, for a moment, believe I stop breathing. My son screams out,

“No!! That's bullshit! That's bullshit!”

I try to compose myself. The judge says something, I don't know, maybe about coming back for formal sentencing and Doug remaining in custody, but I can't breath, I can't move, I'm numb. The only thing I can do is watch and listen to what's going on around me. The officers are trying to put handcuffs on Doug. He's trying to make his way towards me but he can't because they're restraining him. I can't get up from this spot to try and meet him half way. He mouths the words 'I love you' and they take him away. Nathan is hysterical. I think he's calling the jurors' names, names I'd rather not repeat, and I want him to stop before they take him away, too. Finally, Nathan sits down beside me and hug me tight. I don't remember what happens after that, but he tells me that I fainted.

Now I'm laying here in bed, the same bed I've shared with the same man for twenty-two years. At forty-three, Doug still satisfied me the same way he did when he was twenty-one. I can still remember the day he walked into the bank. I was a teller trainee, first day on the job, when Doug walked in. His eyes and his hair are the exact color, coal black. His skin is the color of

milk chocolate, smooth and creamy in definition. His frame is well defined: Six-foot four inches tall with the build of a professional basketball player. As a matter of fact, that's exactly what I thought he was when he walked in, and immediately I got nervous. I could feel his eyes staring at me as I avoided eye contact with him. The more he stared at me, the more I perspired. Finally, he was next in line and walked slowly to my window.

"Hi, Gorgeous."

I smiled, weakly, hoping not to get fired my first day on the job for flirting.

"Um, hi. Can I help you?"

"Sure you can. You must be new because I'm known by all of the tellers here. I'm Doug Newcomb. And you are?"

"Joan, Joan Murray."

He handed me his deposit slip and a check.

"Joan, Joan Murray, I need to deposit all but fifty dollars of my check."

I processed his deposit and gave him a deposit slip. He stands there for several seconds without moving with a smirk on his face.

"Has anyone ever told you how much you look like the girl from the movie Sparkle? You know, the sister that can really sing? Not the new Sparkle but the old one."

"Actually, I get that all the time."

I refused to make eye contact with him. He was so absolutely, positively gorgeous, I thought I was going to faint. On top of that, he just kept staring at me.

"Is there something wrong?" I asked him, and he leaned on the counter and got close to my face. I could smell his breath, it smelled like mint, and immediately, I got consumed by his cologne.

"You forgot to give me my cash."

Just then, my best friend Peggy walked up. She'd been a teller at the bank for several months and actually helped me get the job.

"What's the matter, Joan?" she asked.

"I forgot to give Mr. Newcomb his cash back from the deposit he just made." Peggy smiled at Doug, a seductive smile, and leaned over so she was eye to eye with Doug.

"Doug, are you giving Joan here a hard way to go?"

"I'm trying to but she won't let me."

Peggy rubbed his hand.

"Well, I told you anytime you needed anything to come and see me and I would take care of you."

"OK. How about giving me and Joan a minute alone. Can you do that for me?"

Peggy stomped off from the rejection and I loosened up a bit. I did the accounting for my drawer and gave Doug his money.

"So Joan, do you have a boyfriend?"

"No."

"Do you want one?"

"I don't think it's a good idea, I mean, I think Peggy likes you. She's my friend so..."

"Joan?"

"Yes?"

“I want you, I don’t want Peggy.”

He kissed my hand, the same hand that had just given him his money and my heart stopped. He wrote his address and phone number on the back of his deposit slip and handed it to me.

“Call me, please?” he said.

I did, and here we are, twenty-two years and one son later and he still drives my heart wild.

I can’t believe, after all of this time, we’re going to be apart. I just keep getting these terrible images in my head of prison life and what those brutal men do to each other. I’m sure Doug will intimidate a lot of them with his height, but it still makes me nervous that someone may try to physically hurt him or something. I sit up and look around the room. To the right sits a cherry wood vanity that matches the cherry wood sleigh bed Doug and I picked out several months ago. There’s a cherry wood dresser, a tall, cherry wood chest, and a chaise lounge. You would think with all of the furniture we have in here, the room would probably be crowded, but I still have enough room in the middle of the floor for a professional size treadmill which hadn’t seen action in months. The walls are painted with Ralph Lauren suede paint, light burgundy in color. It matches the comforter and curtains. The shades are drawn halfway on the floor length windows, and I notice the sun setting outside. I turn on the lamp and sit down at my vanity. Nathan enters.

“Oh, Mom, I didn’t know you were up. Was I making a lot of noise?”

“No, sweetie, I didn’t hear you at all. How long have I been out of it?”

“I don’t know. About three hours or so.”

“Three hours?”

“Well, actually, after you fainted, one of the officers used smelling salt and you woke up. I got you to the car, and I don’t think you were in the car five minutes before you fell asleep. I think you were just tired.”

Nathan pulls down all of the shades in my room and takes a seat on the bed. He is the spitting image of Doug. I don’t think I did anything but give birth, Doug did everything else.

“You need anything, mom?”

“No, I’m OK.”

“The phone has been ringing off the hook. Aunt Peggy has called three or four times to check on you.”

“I thought she was still in Chicago?”

“She said her conference ended early so she got back this evening. She was going to come over but I told her you were out of it so she didn’t want to disturb you.”

“So, what do you think?”

“About dad?”

“Yes. How much time do you think he’s going to get?”

“I don’t know. Between two to five years I would think.”

“I can’t let him stay in jail that long when he didn’t do anything. This is not right! It’s not fair!”

“I know mom, I know. His lawyers have already said they’ll be appealing the decision as soon as they can.”

“But there must be something I can do. Doug needs a special mattress for his back and he can’t eat certain foods. Who’s going to make sure he’s taken care of?”

“Mom, there’s nothing you can do for dad right now but support him. He needs you to be strong while he counts his days in that hell hole.”

I bury my head into his chest. I have to stay strong for Nathan. He hugs me, rubs my back and rocks me back and forth. I look around the huge bedroom, looking at all of the reminders of Doug. His cologne on the dresser, his favorite throw at the foot of the bed with Baltimore Ravens splattered all over it, his hairbrush. These things never seemed to catch my attention until now. I don’t know how I’m going to be able to deal with this. It hurts so much. My son is hurting just as much as I am but we’re a lot alike when it comes to expressing our pain-neither one of us likes to show it.

## CHAPTER 2

I look through the stacks of bills that have accumulated since the trial and I can't help but to think of how I'm supposed to pay them on one income. Sure, I'm one of the office managers at the bank so I make a decent salary, but my husband was definitely the breadwinner. Nathan still lives at home, but I wouldn't dare ask him for money. He only works part-time at the radio station while attending college full-time. His money is scarce so I don't want to bother him with my money problems. On top of the household bills, the telephone bill is constantly growing because of the collect calls Doug makes to us at least twice a day. Today he called and asked if I could send him some sneakers. He told me he had a brand new pair, still in the box, in his closet. When he worked for Horizon's Mutual, he wore business suits everyday so very seldom did he wear sneakers. I'll check his closet later for the sneakers, right now I need to concentrate on the bills. Maybe I can qualify for a home equity loan or a consolidation loan. I'll call Peggy because she's in charge of the loan department.

It's amazing to me how far both of us have come at the bank. Neither of us had any education higher than a high school diploma, but we both managed to work our way up to a couple of rewarding positions. Growing up poor, black and female threw three strikes beside my name in the minority department. But I came out on top of the odds, living in upper class and living out the American dream. Oh well, I can't let what's happened to my husband ruin what we've built together. The publicity from the trial has put a heavy burden on me, but I won't let it dampen my spirit or damage my soul. As I continue to shuffle through the mounds of envelopes with 'Past Due' on the slips inside of them, I make the decision to call Peggy.

"Hello?"

"Peggy? Are you busy?"

"Oh no Joan, I'm not busy. What's going on?"

"Look, I think I need to consider a consolidation loan or a home equity loan or something to help me pay some of these bills. I'm over my head in debt and with Doug being convicted, I need to figure out a way to pay everything without losing it all."

"Joan, if you need money, I have money saved up. I'd be happy to give you what you need."

"No Peggy, I want to do this myself. I appreciate the offer but I can't go into anymore debt right now. If I borrow from you, that just puts me further behind."

"Did I say anything about a loan? I said I'd be happy to give you what you need."

"Thanks, but no thanks. I appreciate it though. So, do you think I have a shot at some type of loan?"

"Hmm, let's see. What is your annual salary, about \$62,000 right?"

"Yeah."

"Have you calculated how much your bills total?"

"No, not really."

"OK, how about the equity? Do you know how much equity you have in your house now?"

"No, I don't know. We should have a whole lot of equity since we've been in this house for at least twenty years. The house should almost be paid off."

“Oh yeah, you should have a substantial amount of equity. Let’s do this: calculate your total monthly bills as well as the total amounts you owe on everything. Bring everything in tomorrow and I’ll work everything up for you. How does that sound?”

“Sounds great. Enough about me, how was your trip to Chicago? Did you meet any nice men?”

“The women’s conference was great. There were a lot of really good speakers. As far as the men department, I met one guy who turned out to be a recovering drug addict with six kids. Thanks, but no thanks.”

“Ugh, he sounds disgusting.”

“Actually, he was fine as all out doors, but once he started telling me about himself, everything went down hill. I almost took it to the one night stand level, but then he said he was a recovering addict so I said hell no.”

“I’m sorry Peggy.”

“That’s OK, it’s not your fault I can’t find or keep a man. Being forty-three, single and childless is not all that bad.”

“Peggy, you can say what you want to say, but I know you. I’ve known you for twenty-three years and I’ve seen your heartbreak over unsuccessful relationships. I just wish you could find someone you’re compatible with, emotionally and financially. Besides, there’s nothing wrong with you for refusing to settle for just any man.”

“Joan, that’s easy for you to say because you have a wonderful family. Look at me. I have a sister who lives in California who barely speaks to me, and both of my parents are deceased. I don’t have anybody. Sometimes I get so lonely, it’s depressing. You’re so lucky.” I feel what Peggy is saying, but doesn’t she realize my life has been turned upside down? Sure I have a wonderful husband and son, but when will I be able to have my normal life back?

“Peggy, what happened with the guy you met at the grocery store? The one who has his own business?”

“Not only does he have his own business and his own home, but his own wife to go along with the package.”

“A wife! You’re joking, right?”

“I wish. It just so happens loverboy has a mortgage with our bank and I know I shouldn’t look up account information for personal reasons, but I had to know.”

“Peggy, you better stop before you get in trouble.”

“I know, I know. I was doing a name search and found his name in the database. When I found his name and account, his wife was listed as co-owner on the mortgage. I questioned him and he confessed to everything.”

“I’m sorry, Peggy.”

“Nothing for you to be sorry about. Where’s that son of yours?”

“He’s in the den watching TV. I’m so proud of him and how strong he’s being. If he wasn’t here, I don’t know what I’d do.”

“Yeah, girl, you might be going through a rough time, but all in all, you’re so lucky. Everything will work out, I just know it will. It always does with you Newcombs’. Look, I’m going to turn in now. I think I have a bit of jet lag or something. I’ll see you at work tomorrow.”

“OK Peggy. Thanks.”



“No problem. Good night.”

Peggy is just like a sister to me. No matter how bad things may appear to be in her life, she always reminds me of how good things are in mine. I just wish she could find a decent man to treat her nice. I know it’s not about looks because she has the most beautiful, bronze colored skin and the most beautiful eyes I’ve ever seen. She’s been a size four since we met over twenty years ago. So I definitely know her looks have never been an issue. She almost made it down the aisle to the altar twice, with the same man, but each time he’s gotten cold feet, then disappears. No matter how much Peggy denies it, I know Kyle broke her heart. They dated each other on and off for four years, and they were so in love. We used to double date all of the time and things between them were perfect. But for some reason, Kyle was afraid to commit to marriage. He just couldn’t walk down the aisle. Peggy has forbidden me to talk to her about Kyle unless she initiates the conversation. So unless she brings his name up, I don’t even mention him. Oh well, if it’s meant to be between them, it will be.

The house is quiet except for the sound of the TV coming from the den. When I go to the den, Nathan is gone. I guess he decided to go and have him some fun to keep his mind off of me. He’s a good kid, so loving and caring. I can’t wait until he graduates from college, settles down and marries a nice girl. Right now he enjoys having friends to hang out with, no serious relationship for him, so he says. He is so different from Doug in that department. When Doug and I met, he never played any mind games with me—he was totally committed. Nathan, on the other hand, is not serious about any of the women he sees, even though he tells me they all understand he’s not looking for a commitment right now. I still try to make him understand that women view relationships a little bit different than men. Being just friends to a man means something different than being just friends to a woman. Anyway, I guess he’s not hurting anyone as long as he’s being up front with all of them. I don’t know how he keeps up, but he does. Oh well, he’s happy so I’m happy.

It’s almost ten’o clock and I can’t sleep. I hate being in this big house by myself. I haven’t gotten used to being here alone when Nathan is out. When Doug and I bought this house, five thousand square feet didn’t seem like that much, but now it does. Why did we ever buy such a big house anyway? Nathan is our only child, we never planned on having any more children, so I don’t understand nor remember the logic behind it. Now the telephone is ringing about to scare me to death.

“Hello?”

*“This is Global Tel with a collect call. This call originates from a correctional facility. You have a collect call from Doug Newcomb. To continue press one. To deny the call, press two or simply hang up.”*

I press one before the automated operated repeated the entire message again.

“Doug?”

“Hey, babe. How are you doing?”

My heart races at the sound of his voice.

“I’m doing a lot better now that you’ve called. I was just thinking about you.”

“Aw, just what I need to hear to keep me going. Where’s Nathan?”

“I don’t know where he’s run off to. He was in the den watching TV and when I went to check on him, he was gone. I’m sure he got a call from one of his lil’ girlfriends. So how are you doing?”

“I’m doing my best under the circumstances. I’m in the infirmary.”

“What? Why?”

“Me and another guy had a little altercation in the cafeteria. Since I wouldn’t do what he told me to do, he decided to stab me with his fork.”

“Oh my God, Doug. Are you OK?”

“Well, he stabbed me in the stomach. Luckily he didn’t puncture anything and I just needed a few stitches. I asked the nurse if I could call you to let you know I was in here, so she let me use the telephone. She wasn’t supposed to let me use the telephone in the infirmary, but she’s looking out for me.”

“But are you OK, Doug? Are you getting the medical attention you really need?”

“Babe, I’m fine. The doctors in here are just like doctors outside. They just have to put up with more shit for less pay. Believe me, they’re real doctors, so don’t worry.”

“Do I need to contact your lawyer about this?”

“For what? Babe, my lawyer can’t do anything to a person who’s already serving a life sentence.”

“But what if he tries to retaliate? I don’t want anything else to happen to you.”

“Babe, don’t worry about me. The warden is going to move me to another area of the facility so I don’t have to interact with him anymore. I’m fine.”

I don’t understand how he can be so calm when someone just stabbed him and tried to kill him. I feel like my chest is going to explode.

“Well, what is your lawyer doing about your appeal? Has he started the process yet?”

“Babe, I told you before, he has a waiting period before he can start the appeal process. Look, I can’t stay on long. I need to get off of this phone before the nurse gets in trouble. I just called to hear your voice and to tell you how much I love you.”

“I love you too, Doug. I miss you so much.”

“Hold my pillow and think about me. Two years will fly by before you know it. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“Bye.”

I can’t believe it! My husband’s only been in jail for one month and he’s been stabbed! There’s nothing I can do about it. It’s bad enough they had to ship him off to the middle of no where, which happens to be about three hours away. I have to drive six hours both ways to see my husband on the weekends. His lawyers are dragging their butts on the appeal, and I think they’ve basically given up on my husband. I wish there was something else I could do.

### CHAPTER 3

I'm sitting here, listening to this woman complain, over and over again about an unauthorized, automatic draft coming out of her checking account. I've told her three times we will start an investigation for fraudulent activity, but she won't stop talking about it. Thank goodness my boss Keith Dole just walked up.

"Joan, I need to see you when you're done."

The lady finally stands up and walks away.

"Well, apparently, I'm free now."

"Let's go to my office."

Keith appears to be acting cold towards me, like I've done something wrong. Even though his personality is that of a Q-Tip, he would at least offer a bit of small talk before whisking me off to his office to give me his list of demands. When we enter his office, I notice three gentlemen are already inside. I begin to feel nervous, not only because I'm the only female in the room, but also the only African-American.

"Joan, this is Greg Staples, Lewis Fuller, and Bobby Taylor. They're from the Human Resources office out of Raleigh."

I shake all of their hands and try not to appear nervous. I sit down beside Keith and all three of the Human Resource reps are seated across the table from us. Greg Staples, a twenty-something, good ol' boy starts talking first.

"Mrs. Newcomb, we came here today to discuss restructuring and downsizing that's going to affect All City Bank. As you know, the company hasn't been doing very well in their revenue objectives for the past year, so we need to make some adjustments in head count to make up for some of the lost revenue."

I stare at Keith and he's avoiding eye contact with me. Why is this the first time restructuring and downsizing has ever been mentioned to me? I didn't know anything about it. Plus, the last time I checked, the company as a hold was ahead of its' revenue objectives by thirty-five percent.

"I'm sorry Mr. Staples, I don't mean to interrupt you, but this is the first I've heard about restructuring. Also, I was not aware of a loss in revenue. Last quarter, our branch was ahead of all other branches in the region by fifteen percent. I don't understand."

Greg clears his throat and talks again. If I didn't know any better, I'd say the bastard is lying to me.

"Well um, Mrs. Newcomb, this is a region wide effort that's going to affect all of our branches. I apologize if you haven't been made aware of the changes."

"Sure, that's not a problem. So tell me, how is this going to affect our branch?"

"I'm sorry to have to break this to you Mrs. Newcomb, but we have to let you go."

"This is a joke, right? Keith, what's happening here?"

"Joan, I'm sorry but it's out of my hands. This decision was made by the folks in corporate. If there was something I could do, I would."

"So you mean to tell me, as big as this bank is, they're going to get rid of one of its office managers? How is it possible for this bank to run with only one office manager?"

"Actually, umm, we're bringing an office manager in from a branch in Upper Marlboro,

Maryland. That branch is closing next month,” said Greg.

“How long has this person been with the company?”

“Joan, that’s not relevant.”

“Keith, it’s relevant to me. How long?”

“I’m sorry, but we can’t share that information with you, Mrs. Newcomb.”

“Fine. I’ll call all of the branches in Upper Marlboro until I find out which one is closing and then I’ll ask who the office manager is. I’ll get it straight from the horse’s mouth.”

Look at them, all liars, turning beet red because they don’t have the balls to tell me the truth.

“Look Joan, this is not necessary. We don’t want to do this but we have no choice,” says Greg.

“Keith, does this have anything to do with my husband?”

“Your husband? Gosh, no. This doesn’t have anything to do with Doug. We’re sorry about what happened though. I never would’ve taken Doug as the type.”

I’m fuming. How dare he insult my husband to my face! I jump up and have lost all composure.

“How dare you insinuate that my husband is guilty! He didn’t do anything, he was set up!”

“I’m sure he was Mrs. Newcomb. Look, we’re prepared to offer you a nice package for being with our company for twenty years. Here, take a look,” says Greg.

He pushes a folder in my direction. I can’t believe what’s happening to me. Keith doesn’t even have the heart to fire me himself so he calls in the goon squad. The more I think about it, the more I understand what’s happening. Keith is getting rid of me because of Doug. He thinks I’m going to try to steal from this company.

“As a matter of fact, Greg, I have been with this goddamn company for twenty-two years. You all think I don’t know what’s going on, but I do. I know this has something to do with my husband. I know it does. But I’m going to tell you one thing-if I find out I’m being fired for the wrong reason, I’m going to have the NAACP in here so fast, it will make your head spin. You will have the biggest lawsuit on your hands since the Jackson and Jackson case back in ‘87. Don’t worry Keith, I won’t cause a scene on the floor, I’ll just get my things and leave.”

I grab the folder and storm the hell out of the room. I can’t believe they just fired me after twenty-two years of service. I wonder if Peggy knew this was coming. They fired me for nothing. Twenty-two years of kissing ass, working my butt off for nothing, trying to prove myself at this company. I made this office number one in the region three years straight. We were even named the top revenue producers for five years in a row when I became office manager. This is bullshit and everybody will know about this.

I walk back to my desk and I can see everyone staring at me. I’m slamming drawers, pulling my personal items together to box up. I want to cry, but I won’t dare give those bastards the satisfaction. All I need is a box and I can get out of here. For some reason, there is not one customer in the branch so everyone has their attention focused on me. Finally, this red-haired girl who works part-time as a teller comes up to me.

“Ms. Joan, what’s wrong?”

“Samantha, I don’t want to talk about it right now. Just go back to your window and tell your friends Joan Newcomb no longer works here.”

I walk away from her and go to the copy room to see if I can find an empty Xerox paper box. I

spot one, scoop it up and rush back to my desk to pack my things. Samantha is still standing there.

“Samantha, why are you still standing here? Go back to your window.”

“But Ms. Joan, why are you leaving?”

“I told you, I don’t want to talk about it so get back to work!”

I must have scared her when I yelled because she jumps and then turns as red as the hair on her head. She huffs and walks away. I finish packing and I see Keith and his crew walking towards the door. It’s funny how the office is going through restructuring and reorganization but the only person affected by it all was me. Plus, why are they leaving so soon? It just makes it clearer for me to understand. I was fired because of something they think my husband did. Since he was found guilty, they’re assuming he *is* guilty. I want to go upstairs and talk to Peggy, but I can’t stand to be in this building a moment longer. I grab my box, my purse and my sweater and head out the door. I don’t say good bye to anyone, I’m too upset. The cold Baltimore wind almost pushes me back into the building as I adjust to fight against it. I walk past the several skyscrapers I’ve been accustomed to passing each day to get to and from work and they seem to be sad. It’s as if they know I won’t be passing them on this journey again. I walk to the parking garage, find my car and put my box in the trunk. It’s only ten thirty-five, which means it’s too early for lunch. I get in the car and try to decide what to do. I don’t know whether to go home or walk down to the Harbor to gather my thoughts. If I go to the Harbor, I could risk running into some of my co I mean former co-workers. I definitely don’t want to do that. I’ll just go home and sulk, all alone. While driving, I think about how my life has changed over the past several months. My husband, gone to jail for at least two years for a crime he didn’t commit. Now I’ve lost my job, the only income we have to pay the bills. With no job, I don’t have the means to pay the \$2,500 mortgage let alone pay Doug’s \$600 car payment and my \$450 car payment. Doug’s car I could possibly sell and get a cheaper one when he comes home, but I can’t lose my house, I just can’t. I need to read over the package those bastards gave to me so I can see how long they will provide me a salary. Then I can determine how long I can go without a job. I still have overdue bills piling up to be paid. My head is pounding and I can’t think anymore. I need to calm down.

As I pull into the subdivision, I look around. Even though this subdivision was developed twenty years ago, it’s still really beautiful. Every home in the subdivision is at least two levels, some of them (like ours) is three levels. They’re all brick, colonial style homes, with an array of driveway designs, some have the half moon design, and some of them have a double driveway on each side of the yard. Everyone’s yard is professionally maintained, and they’re all as green as a golf course. I pull up to my house, open the garage door, and wonder what Nathan’s car is doing here. He is supposed to be in class. Maybe he got one of his friends to pick him up. I get out of the car and enter the house through the garage which brings me directly into the kitchen. The lights are on in the kitchen and I hear music playing. I walk up the first level of stairs as I hear the music get closer and closer. The closer I get, I notice a moaning sound.

“Nathan?” I call out, but I just hear music and moaning.

The music is getting louder just as the moaning is getting louder by the time I reach his bedroom door. I knock and open the door slowly.

“Nathan?”

Oh my God! The same child I gave birth to twenty-one years ago is showing me his backside. All I can see is him pushing deeper and deeper inside of some poor young woman, doggy style, while she squeals in pure delight. I stand there for several seconds, frozen, as the two of them try to reach their climax. Neither one of them notice me as they continue to satisfy each other.

“Nathan!!!” I scream, and this time they both turn around to the door and scatter for cover.

“Mom, what are you doing here?”

“Nathan, why aren’t you in school?”

I try to avoid eye contact with the girl because I know she’s embarrassed enough for us all.

“Mom, can you give me some privacy?”

“WHY, AREN’T YOU IN SCHOOL?”

“Mom, can I get dressed first? I’ll come to your room in a minute.”

I slam the door. Now my head is really pounding. Seeing my son get his freak on is not my idea of entertainment. Sure I know he’s sexually active, but he and his father normally talk over all of the details surrounding his sex life. I never wanted any part of it and I definitely don’t want to see it. What I want to know is why in the hell isn’t he in school? Doug and I give Nathan a check every semester to take to the finance office at Morgan State. Sure, it could be a lot worse, like Nathan could be attending a school out of town, but he decided to stay at home and go to college which was easier on our pockets. We’ve been saving for his college education since he was born so the money for his tuition has always been there, in a separate fund. No matter what happens, I won’t touch his college money. Which brings me back to my original question, why isn’t he in school? I enter my bedroom and plop down on the bed. I know I should change my clothes, but my head is throbbing too bad. I hear Nathan walking to my room. He knocks and enters slowly. His face looks worried and scared, a lot like his father did in court on the day he was convicted. Nathan sits down on the bed beside me and sulks.

“Mom, I have something to tell you.”

“What?”

“I dropped out of school.”

“What?!”

Did he just say what I thought he said?

“I dropped out of school.”

Yes, he did.

“Nathan, please tell me you’re joking. Please tell me you’re trying to make me laugh.”

He doesn’t look at me, just sits there, looking at the floor.

“It’s not a joke, mom. I dropped out of school two semesters ago.”

“What do you mean, two semesters ago? You’ve been out of school for a year and didn’t tell me or your father? What the hell is wrong with you?”

“I’m sorry mom, but I just couldn’t handle school with everything that was going on with Dad. It was too much.”

“Nathan, if you couldn’t handle school, then why didn’t you just say so? Why have you been lying to me?”

“I don’t know. It just seemed like the right thing to do at the time. I was planning on

going back after one semester but some how the time got by me and with the trial and work and everything...”

I smack him upside his head.

“Do you think I’m a fool? Where’s the money?”

“Huh?”

“You heard what I said. WHERE IS THE MONEY?”

“I spent it.”

He says it so low, I can’t understand him.

“What?”

“I spent it.”

I stand up so I can get away from him. If I stay near him I will probably strangle him to death and I don’t want to do that.

“OK, you stop going to school on your father’s behalf, so you say, but you spent the money. What the hell is wrong with you, Nathan? Your father and I saved that money for your college education not for you to rendezvous with your little freaks.”

“Mom, don’t call my friends freaks. Tracey might hear you.”

“I don’t give a damn about Tracey or any of those other freaks you deal with. If she had any sense she would get her shit and leave before she runs into one of your other freaks. Do you realize what I’m dealing with, Nathan? Do you have any idea of what I’m dealing with?”

“Mom, I’m sorry. I know you’re disappointed.”

“Disappointed? Disappointed? Do you realize I lost my job today? Do you realize how much debt your father and I have accumulated? Do you realize I don’t have any idea how I’m going to get us out of debt with no job and no money coming in from him? Huh? You have no idea what’s going on here. I’m upset because not only have you been lying to me, but you’ve been spending the money I’ve been giving you to pay for your education.”

“You lost your job today? Oh my God mom, I had no idea. I’m so sorry.”

“Stop saying how sorry you are. I don’t want to hear it!”

“I don’t know what else to say.”

“Nathan, you’ve been staying here, free of charge mind you, working fifteen hours a week. If you’re not attending college full-time, what in the hell have you been doing with your time?”

“I’m working on other things. I have a business opportunity I’m working on.”

“What kind of business opportunity?”

“See, this guy at the radio station, he belongs to a small music group. They sing R & B music. Anyway, I’ve been helping them get their demo together to start sending to record companies.”

“Helping them like what?”

“Giving them money for studio time, stuff like that.”

“You’re giving my hard earned money to a group of knuckleheads trying to make it in the music business? Boy, have you lost your mind? I don’t want to hear anymore. Just get out of here.”

“But mom,”

“Nathan, get out of here, right now! I don’t want to look at your face!”

Well as if my day couldn't get any worse, my son has dropped out of college and I've been so lost inside of my husbands' problems, I didn't take the time to see what was going on around me. I realize now I haven't seen Nathan doing homework over the past year. Lately, whenever I ask to see his grades, he always made up an excuse. After a while, I stopped asking. My husband was getting all of my attention while my son was running wild. What am I going to do? I can't discuss this with Doug right now since he's in jail. I can't call Peggy since she's still at work. With my luck, those fools at All City are probably tapping her phone lines, trying to make sure she isn't in cahoots with me. I'm probably the angriest right now than I've ever been in my entire life. Why is my life literally falling apart piece by piece?

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