

## Lexi's Lamentation

Undeniably young, and unapologetically fun forty-two year old Travis Bance threw his three year old daughter Lexi above his head. Naturally, as we're aware of gravity, Lexi Bance fell right back into her dad's constricting arms. Travis' hold on his daughter was all but comforting, although she'd never disclose that to him. As he let her down on the kitchen floor, she curiously asked him, "Daddy, why when you throw me up don't I stay up? How do I stay up Dada?" Oh, perfect, as if his night didn't have enough meaningless metaphors to explain to his daughter the meaning of life during her existential crisis. Was it time for the birds and the bees talk, too?

"Because anything that goes up must come down," Travis said in a tone he'd hope would end the conversation.

"But, Daddy, why? Does that mean if I goes on the ferris wheel and I get to the tops I'm gonna fall down and hurt me?"

"Ah," Travis sighed. Kids will always have a follow up question. How could he explain this in a way an imbecile child would understand? He felt his forehead grow beads of sweat and reminded himself that at home, he must hold it together. For, he couldn't simply state, "Just like when I held a knife above your mother's chest, anything not held up by force will fall down." That was an appealing way to frame it... like the knife had just fallen from his hands because he couldn't hold it up. He simply couldn't hold the heavy weighted knife above her any longer. When his grip on the knife loosened, he could say gravity was the reason Jennifer was no longer here. The knife

simply fell into her model B-cup breasts... and then fell over and over again 47 times. Gravity kills, aye? Oh, God, another metaphor? It was time for bed.

Travis gathered himself, put on his mask that he had almost let slide, and said, "God made the world this way. He said there is good and bad, black and white, up and down... What he forgot to mention was the spectrum between each of those two opposite values. So when something is going up, it will also go down. And while someone is good, they are also bad. And when something is white, it is also black; everything is gray. So don't think of yourself going up or down, think about the middle moment where you are both and neither. Thi-

"Daddy you don't make no sense! Can I have applesauce with sugar?"

Finally, he bored her to sleep with his metaphors, only, this one, he had wished he got to finish explaining. He was onto something bewildering: Morality is a spectrum. No one is only good or only bad, after all we were all born of the Original Sin and gain forgiveness through confession. No one is Mother Teresa and no one is Hitler; Mother Teresa had a little bit of Hitler himself buried somewhere deep inside her. Travis once again managed to deflect guilt and blame from himself. He was no Dexter; he didn't believe himself to be a moral savior claiming the lives of the evil people in the world. No, Dexter had too much pride you see- full of himself, arrogant, and WAY less attractive than Travis (not that it matters). But Travis, unlike Dexter, knew his actions were condemnable. He also knew anything that is condemnable can also be celebratory. See, Travis made no reason or rationale for killing. He couldn't tell you why he picked who he picked. He couldn't tell you when or how he decided to claim a life. But if you

were to ask him, he'd probably say "Only God can say," with a smirk on his face and a sip of his whiskey.

### **Thirteen Years Later**

Retired from his "old ways," serial killer Travis Bance entered the St. Bernardo Church for the confession of a lifetime. His days writing policy for political campaigns was going to come in handy; his verbiage would be subtle, manipulative, and half-true. It wasn't an easy thing to do, after all, as claiming the lives of thirteen victims didn't roll off the tongue as well as, "I hurt thirteen people over the years and feel regret for the harsh words I sent their way, oh God, forgive me?" Half-true, manipulative, and subtle... Ah, it's probably not as bad as the secrets the priest keeps. Plus, if God was real, then none of this was inherently Travis' fault. After thirteen years, Travis still had the first place award for "Best at Framing a Bad Situation in a Good Light."

"Forgive me Father, for I have sinned," the priest and Travis whispered in unison.

After a momentary pause, the priest asks, "What do you need to confess to our Holy Father?"

Travis gathered himself the same way he did thirteen years ago when he wanted to blurt out the murder of his own wife to his daughter. He'd rehearsed this moment for six and a half years, but this moment felt like one that no one could truly prepare for fully. He gulped in a breath of stale air and mumbled, "I'm here to confess, yes."

"Well then Son, confess to our Father, as he is here to forgive your sins shall you own up to them and speak your forgiveness into an earthly realm."

“Uh, okay... Well, you see, I’m here today because I am not the man I once was, and I want to put that man to rest and free myself of these burdensome chains. It is a breakage of the Ten Commandments to kill. Thou shall not kill. And I suppose I’ve killed the spirits of some kind and undeserving people. I had a temper back in the day; I said things I didn’t mean. You know how you can say things that you can never take back? Things that you wish could stop affecting people the moment you said sorry? Like, you crumble up a piece of paper, and you know it can never be perfectly without creasing ever again? I did that thirteen times. Thirteen spirits I have shattered, oh God, can you forgive me and remove the guilty conscience I carry?”

In typical confession fashion, the priest recited a few prayers for Travis to repeat, and he was on his way. Whether or not he was forgiven, he knew he had to keep going for his sweet daughter Lexi. Now eighteen, she was free to go into the real world as her own person. Even if she wouldn’t physically be living at home anymore, the only debt he had left to pay in this world, and the only reason he hadn’t taken his own life yet, was making sure that Lexi lived a life he wished he had given her from the start. No one would hurt Lexi like Travis’ dad hurt him. And he’d make sure Lexi never hurt anyone like he hurt those thirteen spirits.

### **Thirty-seven Years Prior**

Travis camouflaged his body into the dark night, making sure to wear all black clothing, without zippers or fabric that could make any noise. He listened outside of his Section 8 home; his ears were tormented by familiar sounds that left his chest burning. Oh, that acidic burn that swam up Travis’ throat since he was three years old had

returned. Acid reflux, as the doctors called it, was a functional disorder where the lower esophageal sphincter does not fully close after a meal like it should. This left Travis with stomach acid inflaming his throat and creeping into his mouth, giving him bad breath and tooth decay. What a fitting outcome; the bitter taste in his mouth was as much physical as it was mental, for the screams coming from the house made his skin tingle.

*Bitter.* Travis was bitter and broken. But, he was more-so bitter and bewildered at this moment. Bitter because he had just heard the screams, but bewildered because they suddenly stopped.

Inside the home, there was more to see than there was to hear. At the top of the stairs stood Glenda, a mom to three malnourished children, one of whom was Travis. Without time to think, Glenda threw her body down the stairs. She rolled and thudded down them as she made sure to tuck her head between her arms. Once she reached the bottom of the staircase, the bathtub was already coming for her. Within only a second, maybe two, Glenda secured her short-term safety by kicking against the wall, shifting her body to the right of the staircase. As soon as she could get her eyes back to the stairs, where she knew he'd be running down simultaneously, she mentally thanked God for giving her more time. The bathtub went halfway through the wall, and the dark red water inside slowly sloshed back and forth. Glenda was left with half a bathtub, a "man" with a drinking problem, and not one piece of herself remaining.

“Boys, Travis, Jessie! Matt! Run, RUN and HIDE,” Glenda screamed out in scratchy sounds.

Travis heard his mom’s plea after what felt like an eternity of silence. He swallowed down the acid, tapped into his bravery, and ran a hell of a lot faster than he recalled ever running before.

### **Today**

Lexi prepares for her twentieth birthday by heading straight to the bathroom and puking last night’s cake into the toilet. There were many things over the years she could ignore, or things she could write off as being insignificant. At seven, she could pretend the incriminating pornography on her father’s laptop was simply gross adult play. At thirteen, she could convince herself the screams from her dad’s basement were those of consensual adult pleasure. And at seventeen, she believed the blood on (and above) the toilet was the result of her poorly managing her menstrual cycle. But, now? Today was the icing on the cake! She finally cracked the code to her dad’s basement lock. Of course it was “12345678.” And today, she finally was granted a clarity of the day her mother died that the police did not yet have.

*He killed my MOM? MY DAD? KILLED MY MOM?! No, no, he- no way.* But there it was, the proof of a truth Lexi could not yet digest. A written confession in his will didn’t spell it out crystal clear; her dad never gave more than half a truth. But Lexi was gaslit long enough by her father to know how to read in between the lines. “No we can’t afford

groceries this week” meant that her father had gambled away all his paycheck, got high, and ate the rest of the food in the fridge. “Yea I hear you” meant that yes, he heard the annoying cadence of her rocky voice, but hearing didn’t mean he was listening. And “I regret not being there for mom in her last moments. Jeffrey Mcloire is innocent in her death, I was with him at the bar when it happened. We met up because I suspected she was cheating, and as a result I lost the beautiful mother of my children” really meant that it was him. He would never meet up with Jeffrey... He killed Mom.

Lexi didn’t jump to this conclusion just from the words in his will. Although none of her dad’s twelve trophy pictures contained her mother, her dad’s bullshit alibi for Jeffrey and the decapitation shown in picture five were more than enough for her to connect the dots. It wasn’t until picture eleven that Lexi had to head to the bathroom. In the picture laid a woman probably no older than Lexi herself. The photo was dated January 1, 2023. It wasn’t the dark red globs of clotted blood on the girl’s head that sent Lexi over the edge. No, it was far worse. It was Mom’s holiday dress being on that dead girl that made Lexi see more red than she had searching through the entire photo album. She wondered if she pulled a Gypsy Rose whether or not she’d be granted mercy by the court. For the first time in her life, Lexi empathized with Gypsy. Gypsy was no monster for killing her mom; she was a saint. All that shit Dad goes on and on about with “the world is gray; nothing is black or white” was simply that- bullshit. The world seemed blacker than ever, and Lexi knew the only way to see white again was to add a little more red to the world. Deserving red, that is.

And, so, Lexi killed her dad. It doesn’t matter how she did, why she did, or when she did. The real question for you, here, remains:

(Of Travis' dad, Travis, and Lexi): Who is going to Hell, if only one?