

## Acceptance

The back door swung open violently slamming against the wall. It rattled the cabinets whose doors opened, their contents teetered on the edge of falling out. The blinds crashed as the door slammed shut. I heard heavy breathing and fingers frantically fumbling with the lock. The sliding wooden door flung closed behind her, so hard it bounced off the door frame. As she scrambled into the kitchen I looked up from the newspaper and calmly sipped my tea. I knew what this was about. She pressed her back against the wooden door and looked up at me sitting at the kitchen table. Mustering any breath she could, she shrieked out, "You've got to hide me, it's not safe here they will find me! Then they'll come for you!"

I sat and stared at her for about a minute, waiting for her next move. Tears streamed down her cheek, but she wasn't crying, her hair was wild, what was left of her makeup was smeared all over her face. She was wearing a beige crochet blouse with a white silk camisole underneath. I loved that blouse it reminded me of antique doilies and happier times. Her white slacks were wet from the knee down and her denim cork wedge shoes were stained green along the bottom. I placed the paper down and folded it neatly, gently stirred my tea and took another sip. In a frenzy she pulled out all the drawers in the kitchen digging through each of them, spatulas, strainers, pot holders and silverware were crashing to the floor. There in the drawer next to stove she found what she was searching for, the sharpest knife in the house.

The knife was gripped firmly in her right hand and she ran with it behind her back through the kitchen into the living room. She turned off all the lights and shut the drapes. She yelled as loud as she could up the stairs, "Eric! ERIC!".

"He's not home", I said calmly.

"You have to get me out of here, please. They already got Eric, and it's my fault. We have to run. Please!", she pleaded coming towards me.

I stood and faced her to ask where she had been. Her unruly hair brushed my face, she snarled and pressed the knife to my chest, lunging forward, her eyes full of fire. I sighed and asked her again where she had been.

She snarled, "You work for them don't you?".

"You know I've been waiting for you." I replied

She took a step back and looked me over as if it was the first time she had ever laid eyes on me. I stepped forward and reached out my hand. "Come on now, I want the knife."

She jerked her hand back from my reach and turned to run for the front door. Panicking she cried out, "How could you do this to me?" As she moved for the front door her shoe caught the runner and she tumbled forward, the knife glided across the floor and hit the wall.

I made a move for the knife but she was closer, she dove on top of it and held it out pointed at me. Her speed and agility still astonished me. I begged, "Please stop this, no one has to get hurt."

Exhausted she relaxed her arm letting the hand wielding the knife lay on the floor. I knew my words were finally beginning to make sense to her. It became clear she could resist me no longer. I knelt down and whispered it would be okay.

I gently touched her wrist and pried her fingers from the knife, it slid out of her clammy palm and I placed it back where it belonged. "No one is coming, and don't worry, Eric is away at school."

She stood up, pressed her face in mine and furiously grabbed my arm, "The FBI is looking for me, they wear black suits and they watch everything I do, why won't you help me?"

I hugged her and she submitted. Gently I helped her to a seat, where she finally relaxed. I went to the bathroom and got a white oblong pill, I carried it back to the kitchen and placed it on the table in front her. She glanced up at me sharply, "Now you are going to drug me, your own mother!?" she cried.

Spinning to face the opposite direction she mumbled something I chose not to understand. I knew where she had been, I just wanted to hear it from her. Her palms were pressed together in prayer, she mumbled "Amen" and quietly motioned the sign of the cross.

She had been with Esmeralda, I was sure of that. I could envision her long thick rust colored hair draped down over the green chiffon scarf always wrapped three times around her neck. Her cold black eyes had a way of looking through you but never at you. She spoke softly with strong persuasion. From her rose colored lips came elaborate visions of the future. I never believed her but mother couldn't live without her. It was like an addiction, and I didn't know who was more dependent upon who. I begged her not to see Esmeralda but she would never comply, even when she swore to me she would.

"What did she tell you Mother?" I asked. She silently jerked her body around to face me again. Her French manicured nails drummed against the table. I placed my hand on hers and quietly said, "No one is coming, I promise. I'll make you some tea." She nodded in acceptance.

She insisted I taste the tea before she would drink to prove it wasn't deadly. I honored her request then placed it down in front of her. I sat and watched her cautiously sip from the mug. The truth was I couldn't blame Esmeralda for my mothers' paranoia. Honestly I wasn't sure who was sicker, my Mother or Esmeralda. I suppose the difference was Esmeralda made a living off of her illness, duping people like my other Mother out of their money, fueling their suspicions. She was a con artist and didn't know it, she wasn't at fault.

I nudged the pill I had placed on the table earlier toward my Mother, "Why don't you take this? It will help you relax."

She gently moved my hand away from the pill and stared at it. "Trust me, it'll help." I said.

In one quick swoop she put the pill in her mouth took a gulp of the tea then abruptly stood up and said "I'm going to go lay down."

I nodded and watched her slowly walk away, I listened to the stairs creek and finally her bedroom door slammed shut. I knew she felt defeated and couldn't quiet her thoughts, but the medication would help. I estimated she hadn't taken it in at least four days. I knew she wanted to believe the men who came to the house on occasion were FBI or CIA agents, tracking her down to help solve a big investigation. It was certainly a lot more glamorous than their true purpose. In reality they were just case managers and social workers coming to check her progress. Her fear, I suppose, is they would see something that was cause for concern and make that fateful call in to take her back to the hospital. I tried to monitor her and take care of her but I was no match for her mental illness. I let out a long breathy sigh and closed my eyes, briefly imagining a different life, but I knew this was the one I was meant for.