

Home

Jamaican oils were brewing and making love with my nose as I walked into the door. I was greeted by scriptures and commands from the bible that she had written on index cards. The cards were planted on the wooden door with Scotch tape.

BLOOD OF JESUS.

THOU SHALL NOT STEAL.

NO WEAPON FORMED AGAINST ME SHALL PROSPER.

The scriptures were aligned on the door in an effect to resemble stairs, as if walking up this staircase of scriptures would help you get to heaven. The light was dim, but there were four lamps and three windows in the room. The couch was still as white as it was when we bought it because she never took the plastic off of it. I took off my shoes, because to my right lay a mountain of them. My grandma had this thing about wearing your shoes inside of her home. She felt like the shoes held spirits from the outside world. She didn't want anyone dragging in the evils of the world. Of course the rules hadn't changed in my one year of absence; I left to go to the Air Force in search of a better life and myself. Or maybe I left because I already knew myself and the military was just like me: cold, distant, and fearless. I excelled at my rank for those very reasons.

Lisa was an overemotional psyche major. She said I hurt her feelings a lot. She always had feelings about every damn thing. She always wanted to talk about those feelings. She was an overflowing tub of feelings and like the linoleum floor I just couldn't soak them all up. She told me I wasn't making myself vulnerable for her because I had trust issues. She told me I was suffering from abandonment issues. She told me I didn't open up to her enough. She told me I

was heartless.

One morning before I was set to go on vacation with my best friend, we decided to go for a jog along the shore. The entire thirty minutes was filled with conversations between the waves and the sand, seagulls, and thumping of our running shoes with the ground. We stopped to catch our breath. The air was crisp and smelled of salt. The wind ran through her hair wrapping it around her head. When the wind stopped, most of her curly strands fell and some stuck to her brow. She wiped the hair and the sweat from her face. I flashed her a smile and she waved it away by rolling her eyes.

“What is it Lisa?” I asked.

“You know what Judy, you should really start talking to your mother again,” she almost begged with the suggestion.

My mother and I hadn't spoken since I was five years old. She left me with my grandmother, got married and had more kids. I was an accident that happened when she was fourteen.

“I'd prefer if we didn't talk about that,” I said as I began stretching.

“That's the fucking thing, you never want to talk about anything. You're a pinned up bottle of tension and you're driving me away.”

I shook my head and replied, “Look you knew all this from the beginning. So do what you need to.”

“Wow. Fuck you,” was all she said and started crying.

My grandmother's fascination with decorations and collecting shit she didn't need hadn't changed either. My grandma was stern. She had it her way in her house. The house that I helped

keep intact with money I would give to her, so that she could make ends meet, but I still had no say on what could come in or go out of the house.

“Well look at this, it’s my baby. Come on in here Judy” my grandma wailed from across the living room.

“I see things haven't changed. Including you” I replied. She was wearing her all too familiar floral print mu mu that was thinning and almost see through. She had her hair pinned up with lime green rollers and white house shoes covered her feet. She had lost some weight. I wondered if she had been stressing. Or lonely.

“Sho' haven't. Come give me a hug,” she said as she opened up her arms. Loose skin dangled as her arms rose up above her head exposing my height. She seemed to be shrinking. She smiled so hard you could see her dimples. I walked over to hug her. The embrace was warm. She had missed me. I guess I missed her too because I got butterflies when we touched. I didn't miss the suffocation of the house though. She had so many things everywhere. On the eggshell white walls there were ancient artifacts from both the 99 cent and thrift store. They sat on the walls or in groups along the wall and in corners. While I was gone, I’m sure they listened to her complaints and worries, never said anything back. They just collected dust. I guess her collection was her companion. It seemed that the things she brought in, nailed, taped, or glued somewhere that wasn't too cluttered, made her feel good about herself. They kept her company while I was gone. The brass cinema faces and butterfly wings that were popular in the 90s were her favorite decorations, or I had thought they were. When I was younger and before we moved to this house, they were the first things she would dust and shine. Now they were a part of the collection. A collection she did not care about. On the floor she created space for baskets. There were big baskets. There were small baskets inside of the big baskets. And there were even smaller baskets

inside the small baskets. She watched my eyes as I scanned the room.

“I'm not letting any of my stuff go. So don't start. This is my stuff. I bought it,” she bolted out. I looked up from my panning of the room and smiled. A fake smile that I knew would fill the void of disappointment I had in this fire hazard she had created.

“Looks like you'll be making all the Easter baskets this year,” I joked.

“You're so mean to me,” she replied.

I laughed at her sensitivity. She was never too keen of my jokes. She lacked a sense of humor which usually caused our arguments. I went back to retrieve my bags and took them to what use to be my room. It now served as storage. Towers of books: health books, children books, cook books, manuals, novels, bibles (why someone needs more than one bible never made sense to me), and coloring books, just to name a few, stood behind the door and all along the wall to the right. My grandma never graduated middle school, so her library always made me laugh. She could read, but it was as bad as a third grader reading Catch-22.

One time she was reading her bible and there were so many pauses in between words that I offered to read for her. She looked at me like I had just stolen something from her. I probably did, her pride.

“Girl I don't need nobody reading to me. I ain't dumb. You might think I'm dumb, but I'm not.”

I rolled my eyes, “No one said you were dumb, it's just the way you're reading won't help you comprehend the message.”

“What you know about the message? What you know about comprehendin'? I've been taking you to church since you was three years old. You sho' didn't comprehend that being gay is a sin! Shoot! You like girls; you know nothing about what the lord is giving me through my

reading.”

I rolled my eyes and met up with some friends to play some basketball.

Natasha was in love with me, for reasons I do not know. I even asked her once.

“Why are you in love with me?” She stared out the window of the car.

“To be honest Judy, I don't know. But I need you.” I wasn't surprised. Three weeks before I had asked her why she was in love with me, she had come straight to my house from being out of town. She came to see me before anyone else. I didn't even acknowledge her presence. She left the house crying. I missed her when I realized she was gone.

As soon as I opened the door completely the books all came crashing down like dominoes lined up one in front of the other

“What the hell are you doing in there?” my grandma yelled from the living room.

“I forgot to turn on my x-ray vision before opening the door.” I bolted back.

“Don't get smart.”

I blew a big sigh and threw my bags onto the bed that was held captive in the room full of bullshit. Before turning to go back to the living room I looked around the room. There were mountain bikes, about 30 boxes with God knows what in them, towels, papers, shoes, clothes, and just crap that should either be given away or thrown away. I closed the door. I didn't bother looking in her room.

“Where's grandpa?” I asked.

“Back at it,” She replied.

I shook my head. My grandfather was a binge crack head. He would go long periods without

touching the shit, then my grandma or this house or maybe both would set the man off. He would choose the streets over the suffocation. Sometimes I understood his reasoning. My grandma could be that plastic bag over your head. Although he was on drugs he was a great man. The complete opposite of my grandma, even though they were the same astrological sign. One day he showed me how much he love me. He said, "I know you like women Jude. And who the hell am I to judge you, ya know? You ain't ever gave me a hard time for being in and out of your life. I'm sorry. I love you though."

I always wondered how my grandparents lasted for so long. My grandma hated to admit it, but she needed people. She tried substituting her need for people with the over consumption of tangible items.

"So when are you going to get rid of this stuff?" I asked.

"When are you going to stop coming back and forth?" She replied.

"Maybe when you figure out that you don't need all this stuff. I hate all of this stuff."

"Girl be quiet. My stuff ain't bothering you no how. How's work?"

"Work is fine. NOT TOO MUCH STUFF is going on there."

"You think you're so funny Judy."

Nina use to want to talk all the time. She wanted to talk about spring, and whether religion was some man made bullshit to keep people even more divided. She brought me soup when I had the flu, and talked to me until I fell asleep. One day she wasn't so nice.

"Do you ever wonder what the point of living is?" She asked.

"It doesn't matter," I replied.

Nina rolled her eyes. "Nothing ever matters to you."

“You're right. So just shut up for once.”

Nina spat in my face.

A week had gone by and I had missed being away from the house already. The air was always stale and stiff. Only Christian music could be played loudly. Only her soap operas could be on the TV at 2 pm. Only she cooked in the kitchen. Only she sat on the couch without the plastic. This was why I joined the Air Force. I had to get away from her. She hated me when I told her I was leaving for the Air Force for the first time.

“Why didn't you discuss this with me? Aren't you supposed to talk with your family first?”

“I'm grown.” I replied.

I think I made her cry. She knew she couldn't rely on my grandfather's presence. She needed me, but instead of her admitting it. She cursed me out. STUPID BITCH. She told me I was taking the mark of the beast. YOU'RE TAKING THE MARK AND GOING TO HELL FOR THIS. She didn't wish me well. I left her with her baskets and dust and stale air.

Since I was on winter leave I had to stay another two weeks with my grandmother. I was going to try to make the best of it. Try to enjoy her.

I tried.

We went to the movies. I ordered popcorn and overpriced candy. The seats weren't clean enough. The movie was too loud. The movie was stupid and evil. Here I was trying to get her away from the house, but anywhere we went was never good enough. She needed that house and all the shit in it. I was starting to believe that they really did keep her feeling protected and at

ease.

Eden loved me too, but she was so sexual and free that it scared me. I never understood showing love in a physical way.

“Park over there Judy.”

“No, I'm leaving.”

“I don't want you to.”

“Why not?”

“I want to spend time with you Judy.”

“No you don't. You just want to have sex.”

Eden looked hurt. She got out of the car and went inside her house. I sat in my car in the middle of the street. My engine was quiet and so was my heartbeat, All I could hear were the blinkers. The two arrows were pointing in opposite directions. The one pointing to the left seemed to be telling me to leave and the other was pointing to the right in the direction that Eden had gone. I put the car in reverse and parked. I walked up to her door and knocked several times. She opened up the door and smiled.

It was time to go back to Colorado.

All of my things were packed. I was pulling my duffel bag down the hallway. I bumped into a stand that had a crystal set on it. The crystal broke.

“All you do is fuck up my house.”

I looked up and bit my tongue.

“I'm so glad you're leaving. You don't need to come back for a while.”

I picked my duffel bag up and walked to the front door. I put my shoes on and turned to look at my grandma once more before I left.

“I love you,” I said.