

# CANTON'S HELL

By: Cody Widmeyer



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In memory of my Mother, Daryl Widmeyer. The decade long journey to complete this novel encompasses a culmination of excitement, frustration, sadness, and finally happiness. After your sudden passing, I engulfed myself into this story, mentally arriving to a very dark punishing place, challenging myself to finish the story while also using it as a therapeutic tool. As you read it from up above, please don't worry. You didn't raise a psychopath.

Dedicated to my father, Douglas Widmeyer. Thank you for raising me on the ocean, around sandy beaches, salt water, cool breezes, blue skies, and beautiful sunsets. Being surrounded by that in my childhood made me curious of what the opposite would be like. Hence the subject matter of this story.

Finally, dedicated to my wife Christelle Widmeyer. Thank you for not leaving me after the first proof reading. Remember that moment you realized the darkest parts were written while you slept less than a foot away in our bed? And you asked if I would kill you? Those were fun times weren't they? I love you.

And further gratitude needs extending to the rest of my friends and family who proofread this story through each revision.

I promise you. I'm not crazy.

-Cody Widmeyer

## Edited by: Siri Svay

Born and raised in Houston, Texas, Siri graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a Bachelor's degree in Communications – Radio, Television and Film, specializing in Screenwriting. Shortly following graduation, she moved to Los Angeles, California where she worked in the music industry as one of the editors for a national monthly print music magazine.

After four years in the city of angels, Siri relocated back to Houston as a freelancer, establishing her name as an editor in authors' forums, working on transcription projects and writing press releases for music artists. In addition, she launched her website and embarked on her writer's journey with her first published book of poetry and prose, *Saudade*, which dives into the depths of anxiety and depression with a goal to tackle the negative stigma surrounding mental health. Currently, Siri works in the marketing department for a premier middle-market accounting and advisory firm in Houston where she continues to remain creative.

Since her early childhood, Siri has always been writing. She started with daily entries in her diary, documenting her life, before transitioning to spiral-bound poetry and prose sparked by random bursts of inspiration until ultimately developing stories in playwright scripts and film/TV screenplays. For further information or inquiries on her services, please visit her website at [www.sirisvay.com](http://www.sirisvay.com).

# Prologue | The Hell Begins

“I rule this land, that’s what you fail to understand, honey. I live out here on these roads, I know every turn, pothole, street light, stop sign, and most importantly, every back road. Your loving parents, your worried boyfriend, those sorority bitch friends of yours, and even your fucking dog won’t find you once I’m finished with you. God won’t find you either, and do you know why, my beautiful little whore? There is no God!”

He took a deep breath, held it in a second, then exhaled. Explaining the intricacies of his work was never easy. Patience was an important key in this process, and he was beginning to lose it with his latest victim.

“In other words that maybe you will understand, you’re fucked. Yes...” he took another deep breath. “Yes... fucked. You are the type of honey that fucks a lot, don’t you? I bet you take cock in every hole, don’t you? Hell, you take more than cock; actually, I bet you’ve taken an object such as this before, haven’t you?”

He walked to the front door of his truck, reached under the front seat, and found what he needed.

“You know what this is, honey?” his bearded face smirked. “By the look in your eyes, this seems familiar to you.”

He walked to the back of the truck and looked his victim straight in the eyes. He could see the fear in those lovely crying blue eyes.

“Oh, don’t cry. You know what this is, you love this; I know you do.” He held the object in front of her face and then rested it on her cheek. He began to slide the object down around her slender neck, down the middle of her chest, and then he paused.

“Hmmm... why, what do we have here?” He moved the object in a circular motion around each breast twice. Tears continued streaming uncontrollably from the shaking victim.

He rubbed the object up and down along her side, and stopped as he reached her hips. He curved the object around the back of her hips and temporarily rested it on the top of her butt.

“Now this is what we’ve been waiting for, especially you. You can’t wait for what I’m about to do, can you?”

She was violently shaking. Her thin dried lips began to quiver as tears ran down into her mouth.

“Now in all my years, I must say you have been the best fighter I’ve encountered. At this point, most of my honeys have this blank stare conveying no emotion and allow me to do as I please. Their lack of enjoyment does take some of the fun away, but you, now you my honey, with all your shaking and sobbing, you bring the excitement back!”

He moved the object around the crack of her butt and brought it between her legs, holding it steady underneath her crotch. Then he began to grind the object back and forth.

As he grinded the object against her crotch with his right hand, he moved her long sweaty brunette hair behind her ears to get a good look at her face. A normally tan face was now ghostly pale and broken. The skin was dried and dirty. Her upper lip wore the snot from her relentless sobbing. He ran his hand across her mouth, collecting it, then ran his hand through her hair again. He moved his gaze down her slender naked body. Tan lines were visible along her b-cup-sized breasts. The tan lines rose from her breasts in small parallel lines up to her shoulders imprinted by a bikini top. Her arms were tied above her head to the tow hook, revealing her ribs to show through her skin. As he continued to rub the object rhythmically back and forth along her crotch with his right hand, he slid his left hand



from her hair, down her right arm, along her side, and cupped her right breast. He squeezed... hard.

“You like that don’t you, honey?”

No answer. She continued to cry and shake.

“Answer me!” he screamed. She didn’t answer.

Quickly, he removed his left hand from her breast and took the object away from her crotch. He walked away from her, recomposing himself. He turned and asked again calmly.

“Did you like it when I squeezed your tit?”

Again, no answer. This time she stopped crying, stopped shaking, and looked at him with a blank stare.

“Oh, you fucking whore! I take back what I said earlier, you fucking bitch! You’re just as bad as the others; don’t you dare give me that blank stare. Speak, bitch!”

She stared directly into his eyes, but she wasn’t looking into his eyes. She was looking into another world, a happy world, somewhere she would go when she died. She needed to find the peace inside her to prepare, to prepare for a cruel death at the hands of a lunatic so revolting, so disgusting, so inadequate as a man, that he had to kidnap, beat, and force himself onto women to find enjoyment in life.

She opened her lips to speak her mind to this crazed psychopath, when he suddenly slapped a piece of duct tape over her mouth, muting her.

“Nevermind. It’s better if you don’t speak. The look of sheer terror and fear in your eyes will give me all the pleasure I need. Oh yes, honey, the things I am about to do will bring me more pleasure than a man rightfully deserves.”

She watched as he brought the object, an 18-inch steel crowbar, back between her legs and rested it on her crotch. She felt the tip of the crowbar circling and she lost all control. She trembled as urine began to trickle down her leg. She looked up

at his face and saw his mouth turn upward into a wide grin. She started to cry.

“Ahhh... there we go, honey. I knew you would come back to me.”

He continued to move the tip of the crowbar in a circular motion around the outside of her vagina.

“I have a treat for you.” He carefully removed the duct tape from her mouth.

“Honey, I’ve decided I may let you go, but first, we’re going to play a game. It’s quite a simple game with only one rule. You must answer all questions with your voice. Not a nod of the head signaling yes or no, but you must verbally answer yes or no. Your eyes show your fear, but your voice will let me hear the true terror you possess at this defining moment. Understand?”

“Yes,” she lowly mumbled.

“Do you want to live or not? Speak clearly or understand you will die!” he screamed at her.

“Yes,” she spoke again, this time much louder.

“Good, you are learning. Now for the first question, have you ever loved someone?” he asked.

“Yes,” she responded.

The second question followed, “Did you love them enough to let them fuck you?”

“Yes,” she replied again, her voice growing shakier.

“Did you let them fuck you here?” he asked as he moved the crowbar over her vagina.

Shivering, she said yes again.

“And what about here?” he asked as he moved the crowbar from her vagina to her mouth.

She began to nod, then remembered she needed to vocally answer and blurred, “Yes!”

“I thought you forgot the rules there for a second, honey. Don’t forget the rules.” He slid the crowbar from her mouth along her chest down the side of her hip and around to her butt. He placed the tip of the crowbar on the outside of her asshole.

“Did you let them fuck you here?” he asked in a quiet calm tone.

Tears streamed down her face as the crowbar tip began to inch closer. Snot poured from her nose as she began to vomit all over herself. The bile dripped down her chin onto her breasts and slid along her ribs.

Again in a calm tone, he asked her, “Did you let them fuck you here?”

Barely audible, she whispered no.

“I’m sorry. What was that? I couldn’t hear you. Here, maybe this will help.” He reached up with his left hand and wiped the vomit and snot away from her mouth. He wiped his hand up and down on her right side until the mess was clean from his hand.

“No, I never let...” she was shaking. “Never let anyone...”—tears flooded down her face—“...fuck me there.” She let out a small scream and sunk her head down.

“Are you sure, honey? Are you positive? You don’t want to lie to me now, do you?”

She shook her head.

“Good,” he said. “Which brings me to my next question; do you believe there is a first time for everything?”

“How do you mean... please... just let me go... I’ve played your game. Please let me go,” she pleaded.

“Answer my question and I’ll let—”

“Yes, yes, I believe there is a first time for everything.” She began to compose herself and regain confidence; he might actually let her go!

He took the crowbar away from her vulnerable naked body, untied her hands from the tow hook, and began to walk to the front of the truck.

“I too believe there is a first time for everything. Why hell, this is the first time I have ever let any of my honeys go before.”

He opened the driver’s side door and reached underneath the seat again.

“And as you said, you played my game according to the rules, so you’re free, go, run, get out of here.”

Vicky Canton bolted away from the tow truck as fast as she could. Where was she? It was the morning, or was it the afternoon? They had arrived in the middle of the night; how long had she been tied naked to the back of that lunatic’s tow truck? She ran and ran. Finally out of breath, she turned around and no longer saw the dreaded tow truck. Vicky Canton was free. But where was she? She looked around and took in her surroundings. The ground was covered in six-inch grass as far as she could see. There were dead patches of grass in many places, including two long trails of dead grass. She assumed this was the makeshift road the tow truck had used to get out here. The land was flat with not a hill in sight. The sky was sunny with a few clouds, and she realized she was beginning to sweat.

Up ahead she saw what looked like a large farmhouse. Were her eyes deceiving her? She took off toward the house. Her eyes weren’t deceiving her! There was a farmhouse, and it was close, only about 200 yards away!

That was when she heard the noise, the noise of the tow truck engine roaring behind her. Vicky’s heart skipped a beat, and she went pale again.

“Please!” she screamed. “You promised to let me go, please!” she continued to yell. The tow truck pulled to a stop about 20 yards away.

Vicky Canton ran toward the farmhouse. Her body ached; she was violated, abused, and tired, yet she ran as fast as she could.

“Honey, honey... don’t tire yourself out now; you’ve had a stressful night and morning. You just need to relax,” the man said as he pulled up to the right of Vicky. Vicky turned and ran to the left. The tow truck followed.

“Now look, honey, you’re still free to go. I just wanted to ask you one more question.”

Vicky stopped, exhausted. The farmhouse was still a good 150 yards away; she would never make it if she kept running.

The man stopped the tow truck and turned the engine off. He opened the door and stepped down from the cab. He was 20 feet away from Vicky. He did not approach her, though, but stood near his open door.

“Now, honey, you told me earlier that you believe there is a first time for everything, didn’t you?”

Vicky had dropped to her knees out of exhaustion and could barely stay upright, but she nodded her head yes.

“Well, I was thinking back to your answers from earlier, and I remembered you saying there was one thing you had never done before. You and I both agree there is a first time for everything, and I lived up to my end of the bargain letting you go earlier. I had never done that before, and to be honest, I didn’t like it, but that’s why you must always try something once. See but you, honey, you still have yet to do one thing in your life for the first time. Hell, you wouldn’t even let the one you love do it to you... so you say, but we’re different, honey. Me and you, we’ve been through a lot together, and I figure it’s only fair you show the same love I showed you when I let you go earlier.”

He smirked then turned and looked underneath his seat.

He found the crowbar and a quart of motor oil. This time, he shut the driver's side door and began walking toward Vicky.

Vicky began to crawl, clawing at the grass, gripping it, trying to drag her body. She had to get away. Her knees and forearms were scraped and cut, yet she still clawed and crawled. Then she felt him, felt him grab her hair, felt him spread her legs, and felt him place the tip of the crowbar against her bare skin.

"There's always a first time for everything, honey," he spoke softly as he moved the crowbar back and forth inside of Vicky. The grin on his face widened as he heard her first scream, then that grin turned into a laugh as the screams stopped.

"Oh no, I certainly did not like letting you go," he said as he laughed at his honey convulsing on the ground, "I certainly did not. And I must admit too, honey, you are not the best liar. I know you had been fucked here before."

He pumped the crowbar harder, "I've seen it."

# 1 | Jessica Winsen

Looking in the rearview mirror, Jessica touched up her lipstick, a ruby red color with a small hint of shine after application. Her smoky eye shadow accented her green eyes exuberantly well today. The curly long blonde hair had plenty of volume, and her pale white skin had a nice pink glow to it. I look damn good today, Jessica thought. At 32 years of age, a mother of an eight-year-old son, and loyal wife to her husband, Jessica did look damn good. Her son, Ryan, was on summer break but had been driving Jessica nuts. He only had two more weeks until 4<sup>th</sup> grade started, and to no surprise, he had been giving his mother hell.

“Definitely has his father’s personality,” Jessica murmured to herself in the mirror.

Ryan was stubborn like his father, Eric. Eric and Ryan hadn’t gotten along great the past few years, but she felt they were starting to bond. Jessica hoped their dinner tonight would bring the family closer and nurture that bond.

“I pray it’s a girl,” Jessica said aloud while sitting at the stoplight.

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She had been three weeks late on her period and had decided to purchase an at-home pregnancy test. Two days ago, Eric held her hand as they sat and waited for the results. To confirm the results, she took off work the day after and went to the doctor. She couldn’t wait to call Eric with the news, so she called him immediately at one in the afternoon and woke him up.

“Eric, babe, the results were real! I’m pregnant!”

Groggy with only four hours of rest, Eric rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. “I’m sorry, Jess, I couldn’t hear you. What did

you say?" asked Eric.

"Babe, I'm pregnant," Jessica said as she started to weep.

"Jess, are you serious? Oh my God, that's great... honey, why are you crying?" asked Eric.

"I'm sorry, babe. I'm just so happy. We've been trying for so long now; my emotions are getting the best of me. I love you, Eric," said Jessica.

"I love you too, Jess."

"I'll be home in about an hour. I have to pick up some milk and bread from the store. God I can't believe it; we finally did it, babe! See you soon!" Jessica hung up on the other line.

Eric slowly placed the telephone receiver on the mantle beside him. He sat at the edge of the bed, with his feet resting on the floor. I'm glad you're happy, Jess, Eric thought while gazing at the phone. Eric stood up and stretched his arms in the air, cracking his lower back. He needed more sleep. His shift at the docks started at 7 pm. He could get about three more hours of rest, but no way could he sleep now, not after Jessica's phone call.

Eric walked into the bathroom and looked up at the mirror. I don't look 35; I look about 50. Three days old stubble covered his face. His hair was unkempt and tussled, and his eyes looked like he had been in a bar room brawl. His back ached, and every bone in his body creaked and cracked. Eric felt about 50 years old, too. His right hand found the cold water handle on the sink and turned it. He cupped both of his hands under the faucet, collected the water, and then splashed it on his face. Again he looked up into the mirror, hoping the water would magically change his appearance. It didn't.

"What the hell are we going to do now?" Eric asked the mirror as he continued to stare.

"Babe, what are you doing? Are you ok? Did you just



wake up?” asked Jessica as she came up behind Eric and wrapped her arms around him. She looked at him in the mirror and kissed him on the back of the neck.

How long have I been staring into the mirror? Eric wondered. I couldn't have been standing here for an hour, could I?

“Hey, honey, yeah just rolled out of bed. I tried to get more sleep, but your news made me too excited,” he said as he turned and kissed her forehead.

“I'm sorry, babe, I know you hadn't slept that long, but I just couldn't wait to tell you; it finally happened, Eric... finally,” Jessica said.

She ran her hand through his short brown hair and turned him around to face her, his back to the mirror. She looked into his eyes, closed her own, and kissed him fully on the lips. He returned the kiss and grabbed her tight. After all these years, holding her close still aroused him, no matter how tired he was. They stood there, holding each other together, tightly, closely, lovingly. Jessica's pale white skin seemed to glow when caressed against Eric's dark tan; her green eyes brightened as she stared deep into his large brown eyes. She rubbed her hands up and down his back and kissed him again. He firmly grabbed her buttocks and turned her to the side where they both faced the mirror as they continued to kiss. Jessica glanced at the mirror and suddenly stopped. Eric opened his mouth to ask her what was wrong, but Jessica put her finger to his lips and turned his head toward the mirror.

After a long pause, Jessica said, “Eric, you and I are different in so many ways. You are night, and I am day, yet when together, we are the sunset, we are the moonlight. We are one.”

Eric looked at the mirror as Jessica closed her eyes, and

rested her head in the nook of his neck. Yes, we are different in many ways, Eric thought. Many ways. He picked her up and brought her back into the bedroom. She was beautiful, and he started to undress her. He would make love to her as he always had the past 10 years, tenderly and with affection. He never wanted to hurt Jessica, and it hurt him so much not to tell her, but he couldn't, not now, not after the news today, not now that she was pregnant.

## 2 | Baby Names

Jessica waited at the stoplight. She hated this intersection. Yesterday was one of the happiest days in her life. She was pregnant again! Eric's reaction had bothered her, though. He didn't seem as happy, and when they made love that afternoon, he was distant.

Well, Jess, he was tired; you woke the poor guy out of bed with news that isn't easy to take for any man.

Still, he had also seemed distant before... like the previous weekend. Is he hiding something from me? Jessica wondered. She decided to bring it up to him that night at dinner, before he went to work. She wished he would quit the job at the docks. The money was good, benefits were good, but the hours were long—12-15 hour shifts—with only Wednesday's and Thursday's off. And those weren't guaranteed, either. She figured he could find a forklift operator job at a warehouse or somewhere that had normal working hours. He grew up on the waterfront, though, and it was hard for him to leave it. At least that was his excuse for keeping the job.

For now, they had a solution for Ryan during summer. Eric could watch him from 2 pm until she got home from work around 6 pm. And she would watch him all night if he didn't stay at a friend's house. Ryan was on his own in the mornings, but so far, he was showing responsibility and causing no trouble. When the baby came, though, someone would need to be at the house 24/7. Jessica knew that would be her.

She pulled into the parking lot of the Dillard's department store at the Mainland Mall. Her job was to sell perfume and makeup to interested shoppers as they passed by her area. It wasn't the best job in the world, but she had worked

her way up to \$18 an hour over the past five years, and was in the running for floor manager. That is until she became pregnant.

“Good morning, Darby,” Jessica said as she entered the break room to put her lunch in the refrigerator.

Darby was 25 years old, recently married, and very rambunctious. She had fiery red hair and was covered in freckles; she was a southern girl from Georgia with the accent to match, yet as Darby had said, “I party like a blonde, sweetie.”

“Maybe for you, sweetie. Randall was feeling rather randy last night; guy wouldn’t let me sleep a bit. Plus, I’m sore as hell today. I hope I have checkout. I don’t want to make the rounds on the floor. I’ll freakin’ collapse!” Darby replied as she massaged her thighs. “Damn that man. I tell him not too rough, I have to work the next day, but does he ever listen? Nooooo...”

Jessica laughed, “Darby, you crack me up, girl.”

“Well, we’re newlyweds, sweetie. Isn’t that how you and Eric were when you two got hitched?” Darby asked as she made herself a cup of coffee.

“Yes, but not as... rough as you describe it, we always made love, passionate love...” Jessica seemed to lose her train of thought; she looked straight ahead dazed.

“Damn, sweetie. Well, that seems to work great for you. Hell, you look like you’re about to collapse just talking about it. Too old-fashioned for me, Jess girl, but that seems right up your alley. I’m glad you found the man who loves you right.” Darby finished stirring her coffee.

“Now, excuse me, sweetie, but I need to find a chair soon or my legs are going to explode. Damn you, Randall!”

As Darby left the break room, Jessica snapped out of her daze. Maybe she was old-fashioned as Darby put it, but she enjoyed compassionate sex, sex with meaning, sex that was

making love. Eric had never complained before, so he must be fine with it too.

With a smile, Jessica said to herself, “Well, Darby, that’s why there are girls like you in this world, to give us old-fashioned women stories to smile at.”

She went to the cooler, and poured herself a glass of water. As she walked out to her perfume booth, baby girl names kept running through her mind.

### 3 | Eric Winsen

Eric turned the key in the ignition to off. He stepped out of the 98 Green Ford Explorer and walked up to little David's house. David had been Ryan's best friend since 1<sup>st</sup> grade. They started T-ball and soccer together at the age of six and became friends instantly. Ryan wasn't the most athletically sound boy among his peers, which truthfully disappointed Eric, who had played sports throughout high school. Ryan, on the other hand, was more inclined to play video games and read comics than to play a sport. David, however, was the top scorer on their soccer team and had a talent for baseball that was evident even at his young age. At times, Eric almost wished David had been his son. Pushing his finger against the button, Eric rang the doorbell. David's mother answered.

"Well, hello, Eric. So nice to see you. How have you been?" asked David's mother.

She was a large woman with a heavy New York accent. Eric had always wondered how she came to live in Texas, especially the small town of Hammersfield. Her husband was from New Jersey and worked a standard 8-5 suit-and-tie job in Dickinson, a larger town about 20 miles north of Hammersfield. Eric didn't care much for David's dad; actually Eric didn't care much for any man who didn't get his hands dirty to make a living. Sitting in front of a computer and clicking a mouse all day was not a job to Eric. Computers had turned humans into unapproachable zombies as far as he was concerned.

"Doing fine as usual. I need to pick Ryan up; we're going to have a family dinner tonight, and I need to make sure he is cleaned up by the time his mom comes home."

In the background, Ryan yelled, "But, Dad! We've almost

passed this level. Can I stay longer please?"

"No, we have to go, Ryan. I don't want your mother waiting for you later; you can finish the game another day," replied Eric. Eric still heard the video game playing in the background.

"Ryan, I said we need to go now!" Eric yelled. David's mother backed up one step. "I swear that kid doesn't listen. I apologize for yelling."

Ryan and David walked in from the living room.

"You never let me have any fun, Dad; I just want to stay a little—" Ryan began.

Eric interrupted, "Ryan, we are leaving now. Get in the car." Ryan ran out to the car, opened the passenger side door, and slammed it shut behind him.

Eric reached over and patted David on the head.

"I hope you're still practicing swinging the bat every day, David. Practice makes perfect, remember that."

David nodded in agreement.

Unfortunately because of his job, Eric hadn't been able to see one of their baseball games in over a year. Jessica had to fill him in on the results of each game. Many of those games, Ryan sat on the bench or played in right field, which might as well be the bench when you're eight years old.

"Yes, David is practicing every day. It's too bad you can't make it to more of the games. I'm sure Ryan would love to have you watch him play," remarked David's mother.

Yeah right. Play what, water boy? If he went, he would go to see David.

"Wish I could make more of the games also. Well, as always, thanks for everything and have a good day," Eric said as he turned and walked back to the Explorer. He opened the driver's side door and sat down. He turned the ignition key,

started the engine, and began driving away from David's house.

Over the past two years, it had become increasingly harder for Eric to talk to his son. If he was honest with himself, he didn't see his son much, and when he did, Ryan was playing video games or spending time at David's house. He had tried to take his video games away before, but Jessica returned them, explaining to Eric that Ryan was never going to be a professional athlete. If he liked computers and video games, let him play with them. Eric had protested, but Jessica always gave him the look, the look he had fallen for years ago and the look he continued to fall for. He gave in as usual, but he still believed Jessica spoiled Rya. It was hard for Eric to be the boss of the house, though, especially with his work schedule. He was never home to enforce the rules, and when he was, he was trying to catch up on sleep.

Eric turned to Ryan, "Look, son, I'm not mad at you, but when I say it's time to go, it is time to go. You need to listen to me; I'm your father, and nothing will change that. Your mother wanted to have a family dinner tonight as did I. We have something important to tell you, and it's something you will be excited about."

Ryan looked at his Dad excitedly, "Is it a present, Dad?!"

"Yes, it is a present to your mother and me and to you," Eric replied. He turned the Explorer onto Oleander St., where their 2,500-square-foot, three-bedroom house was located.

He pulled into the driveway and turned the car off. "Now go inside, take a shower, get dressed, and help set the table. Your mother will be here soon."

Ryan raced into the house, up the stairs, and into the bathroom.

"At least one of us is excited."



## 4 | Waiting

There he was, parked on the shoulder of the long stretch of highway known as Interstate 82. He was parked on the straightaway, the 40-mile straightaway. Thick black asphalt covered four driving lanes, two lanes for eastbound traffic, and two lanes for westbound traffic. A three-foot high concrete barrier separated the east and westbound lanes with shoulder lanes on opposite sides of the barrier. Exits could be found off the interstate every mile, including the occasional gas station. He was not waiting by a gas station, though. He was waiting on the eastbound shoulder, mile marker 66, which was five miles from the nearest gas station.

The flatbed tow truck was a F350 diesel, jet-black color with four tires in the rear. Behind the cab were two hooks and chains, one on each side of the flatbed. They were connected to a motorized winch that lowered and raised both chains simultaneously. When an unfortunate driver found himself immobilized on the side of the road, the jet-black tow truck would pull up in front of the vehicle, lower the hooks and connect them to the front axle of the vehicle. The bed would then be hydraulically raised and slid down at an angle to the road. The hooks would then raise and in turn drag the car up onto the angled flatbed. Once the vehicle was securely on the flatbed, he would lower the flatbed to its original horizontal position and transport the vehicle and driver to the nearest mechanic or gas station. And that is exactly what the man in the jet-black tow truck did 99% of the time.

It had been two years since this man had enjoyed letting Vicky experience his kindness. For the first year, cops and search parties had littered the highway and neighboring farmlands and

fields. They diligently searched for Vicky, and he had even participated in a few of the searches. It never hurt to give the tow truck drivers of the world a little good publicity. As far as he was concerned, he was just doing his part for the community. They never found Vicky as he knew they wouldn't.

Two years later, the searches had stopped, and the family began to accept the truth. Vicky would never be found again. She was dead.

He hated himself at times for it. Not for what he did to the girl, but for who he did it to. Vicky had been the newly appointed Chief of Police's daughter. In turn, the new chief, Mr. Judd Canton, had every available hand and person within a 60-mile radius help conduct the searches and look for a potential suspect. And search they did, day after day, night after night, for a year and a half. Because of these searches, the man couldn't acquire any new potential victims locally; he had to lay low, stay an upstanding citizen and do his job. He could not take the risk or bring any suspicion upon himself. The public generally disliked tow truck drivers as is, calling them thieves and assholes who took advantage of the helpless. He always received dirty looks when in the market or at the gas station, even before Vicky went missing.

"Fuck them all," he said to no one in particular. "I'll give them a reason to give me dirty looks; when they're on my flatbed and at my mercy, fuck them all."

Here he was in 90-degree temperatures, at 4 pm, and so far only had one vehicle all day. It was a Tuesday, which was generally slow, but today was slower than usual. His only vehicle was a Chevrolet Cavalier, a little 16-year-old punk on his way to his friend's house. The little shit had overheated his engine and had smoke steaming out of his hood. He wished the little punk would have been a girl; it would have been the perfect

opportunity to begin his games again. He only played those games with girls, though, no matter how much the little shit had pissed him off. He loaded up his Cavalier, drove him to the Shell station five miles down the road, and dropped him off. He had contemplated throwing the truck in reverse and backing up over the little prick, but he saw the gas attendant as the thought crossed his mind, so he pushed the thought out of his head.

He took a deep breath, “Well the 9-to-5ers should be heading home soon. Maybe I’ll have some luck then, especially in this heat. I just need to wait a couple more hours.”

## 5 | Running Late

“Ryan, pick up the phone; my hands are full right now.” Eric was in the process of streaming spaghetti noodles for their dinner.

This was going to be a tight schedule. Eric had to be at work at 7 pm, allowing himself 20 minutes for the drive. He had to be walking out the door at 6:30 pm, and Jessica would get home at 5:30 pm at the earliest. Everything had to be ready to go when she walked in the door.

In the background, Eric could hear Ryan on the phone, “Ok, Mom. Do you want me to tell Dad or will you? Oh ok, hold on a second.” Ryan handed the phone to Eric, “It’s Mom.”

Eric put the phone to his left ear, “Hey, honey. Everything ok?”

“Babe, something has come up at work. I won’t be able to get home until maybe 6:30. I’m sorry. I can’t do anything about it; Darby went home sick at lunch, and my manager, Judith, just told me I needed to finish her rounds.” Jessica was on the verge of crying.

“Jess, it’s ok. Please don’t get upset. Look, I’ll call Tom at work, see if he will let me come in a few hours later. I’ll call you right back, ok?”

“Yes, I’m sorry, Eric. Please let me know. Love you.”

“Love you too,” said Eric as he hung up the phone.

Eric dialed the number for Tom, his supervisor at the docks. Tom picked up, accompanied by the sounds of loud machinery surrounding his voice, “Tom here, hold on a second.”

Eric heard Tom yell at someone in the background.

“Ok, sorry bout that. This is Tom.”

“Hey, Tom, it’s Eric. I need a favor... I’m going to be late tonight. I’m having some family trouble at home I need to take care of,” said Eric.

Tom sounded frustrated, “Damnit, Eric. You know we’re already short staffed here. I need you here earlier, not later.”

“Tom, what does it matter? We’re all out of a job in two weeks regardless. I can be in by 9. I have to take care of this now, Tom, please...”

“You’re right, Eric. We are all unemployed in two weeks, but that is two weeks from now. Until then, we have a job to do. Be here at 7 or don’t come in.” Tom was losing his patience.

“Fine, fuck it then, Tom. I’m not coming in. You don’t understand—”

“No, I understand perfectly. You’re not unemployed in two weeks; you’re unemployed starting now. Good luck finding another job, buddy!” Tom hung up the phone.

Eric looked at the phone receiver in his hand with disgust.

He then launched the phone receiver across the kitchen into the refrigerator. The phone shattered into pieces, making a small dent mark in the refrigerator.

“Dad... is everything ok?” asked Ryan as he slowly approached his Dad in the kitchen.

Startled, Eric managed, “Oh hey, Ryan. Yeah, everything is ok. Daddy’s boss is causing some trouble right now, but everything will be ok. Your Mom won’t be home until 6:30 or so, so we’re going to have dinner around 7. If you want to play games or anything, you have time.”

“Yeah, Dad. Earlier on the phone Mom told me she’d be home later. Do you want any help with anything?” asked Ryan.

“Thanks, son. I got it. Sorry you saw me throw the phone. I’ll clean it up. Just go play,” Eric sighed.

Ryan nodded and dropped his eyes. He turned and

walked off toward his room.

What are we going to do? Eric thought. He had known about his job for the past week but hadn't been able to work up the courage to tell Jessica. He was going to tell her that past weekend, but then she had taken the pregnancy test. How could he have told her then?

Eric had been working on the docks the past 10 years. He was a forklift operator, and more importantly, a member of the ILA, the maritime workers union. His pay had increased to \$32 an hour this past year. Everything had been looking great, but the rumors had been circulating that the union was disbanding. The vessel owners had been pushing the terminal to go private. Private terminal forklift operators made \$15 an hour maximum. Every job paid much less when the terminals privatized. The vessel owners finally convinced the terminal to privatize last month. The deadline to remove all union labor was in two weeks, but Eric had just sped that process up for himself with that phone call. He could find a forklift operator job tomorrow but not one that would ever pay the money he was making in the union, nor would he have the health benefits the union offered. He would have to work a year to be eligible for health coverage at a new job. Even then, Eric knew he wouldn't be eligible for benefits, not as a forklift operator. In today's world, they would work him 35 hours and call him part-time. That's how Dillard's had treated Jessica, 35 hours a week, always promising her she would move up to full-time status, giving her just enough hope so she wouldn't quit. Now she had a baby on the way, and they had no health insurance to speak of.

"Shit," Eric said aloud. He had forgotten to call Jessica back. They had another phone in the living room. Eric picked it up and dialed Jessica's cell phone. It was 5:45 pm, still another 45 minutes until Jessica should be home. Jessica picked up.

“Hey, Eric. So were you able to get off work?” asked Jessica.

“Yeah, yeah, everything is good. Tom just told me to take the night off, so I have a three-day weekend! I go back on Friday.”

“Aww... that’s great, baby. You need the rest. Well everything is on schedule right now. I should get off in another 10 minutes, so see you at 6:30! Byeeeeee,” said Jessica.

“See you soon, honey. Bye,” said Eric. He hung up the phone and looked up. Staring back at him was his reflection from the mirror over the couch, the reflection of a man who could not tell his wife the truth. Eric felt ashamed. Everything will be cleared up tonight, he thought. We’ll work this out. I’ll explain everything to her, and she’ll understand. Tomorrow I will look for a new job.

“Everything will be ok... Everything will be ok.”

## 6 | Mi Amigo

He exited the interstate at mile 71, heading eastbound down the side road. A quarter of a mile ahead was a gas station. It was 6:15 pm, and he was hungry. The gas station would have to do for dinner. Everyone's car was running great apparently. He pulled the tow truck into the parking spot next to the handicap space. There was a four-door black Toyota Camry at the gas pump and an old Dodge Ram parked two spots over from his tow truck.

"Slow night tonight?" he asked the cashier as he walked into the convenience store.

"Hola amigo. Sí, sí, very slow tonight. Hopefully better mañana, y tú?" asked the small middle-aged Mexican man named Julio.

The tow truck driver had always liked Julio. Julio was a hard-working man, seven days a week, 18 hours a day. The driver couldn't remember a day when he hadn't seen Julio in the station.

"Ah, Julio, very slow day today, only one car. I need you to start diluting your gas; give me more business, amigo," he laughed.

"Sí, señor. I'll get the hose from out back," Julio replied with a smile.

Remembering his growling stomach, he asked, "Julio, you have anything on the grill tonight?"

"Some hot dogs and one sausage leftover from lunch," Julio replied.

"Ah damnit. Alright, give me two of the hotdogs and add these." He placed a bag of Doritos and a 20 oz. Coke on the counter.



“\$4.28, amigo.” Julio held out his hand. The driver placed a \$5 bill in his hand.

“Keep the change, Julio. Have a good night.” He grabbed his food and walked out of the store. A kid was approaching from the outside. He was the owner of the black Camry that was pumping gas. The kid beat him to the door and opened it first.

“Excuse me, sir, is that your tow truck?” asked the kid.

“Yeah, why?” he was unscrewing the cap off of his Coke getting ready to take a drink.

“A few miles back, on the west side of the highway, a car was pulled over on the shoulder with its flashers on. No one seemed to be helping them,” said the kid.

Intrigued, he wanted to know more. “Was anyone in the car still or was it empty?”

“It looked like a lady, but I couldn’t be sure. There was definitely someone inside the car, though.”

“Thanks, little man. I’ll take care of them,” then turning to Julio, he said, “Hey, Julio! Looks like tonight won’t be a complete waste. Hope your business picks up also.”

“I hope so, too. Good luck! See you next time,” Julio said.

He walked out of the store as the kid went to pay Julio for the gas. Sitting in his truck, he quickly engulfed his hotdogs and chips. He started the engine, let it sit for a minute, and checked his watch. 6:25 pm.

After taking another sip of Coke, he switched the gear into reverse, backed up, switched the gear to drive, and headed out onto the side road. He had to drive another mile before the next turnaround, and then he would be heading westbound on Interstate 82, looking for those beautiful flashing red hazard lights.

## 7 | Coming Home

Jessica placed the key into driver's side door, unlocked the door, and sat into the driver's seat of the 1996 Red Toyota Celica. She placed the key into the ignition and started to turn it, but she paused. A smile started to creep up on her lips. She took her left hand and placed it underneath her blouse onto her stomach. As she began rubbing her hand in a circular motion, the smile ascended upon her lips in full force. She hoped it was a baby girl so bad.

Jessica took her hand from under her blouse, locked the door, and then turned the key in the ignition. The car began to turn over but stalled midway through. The car had never done that before. She reached into her purse for her cell phone and put it on the passenger seat, making sure to have it ready if the car didn't start again. The day had already been hard enough on Eric, but she didn't want to bother him with another issue, especially a broken down car.

The car started immediately on the second attempt. Good, I'll be home in 20-30 minutes, have a nice dinner, and actually go to bed with Eric tonight since he has the night off. I'll get to sleep with him the next three nights, she thought with a smile. Jessica placed the gearshift into drive and turned out of the Dillard's parking lot. The car entered the access road and merged onto Interstate 82, heading west.

"Damn that Darby," Jessica mumbled to herself. She knew Darby had faked being sick to Judith. Darby had floor duty all day, a simple job, but potentially grueling as you were on your feet all day. It was amusing to watch Darby in the morning, though; she had waddled around the store like a penguin, taking a deep breath with each step. Poor girl, Jessica

originally thought in the morning, but this afternoon, those thoughts had changed. Darby had rough sex all night, looked like hell when she got to work, and got to leave work early? I am pregnant for God's sake; I should be the one going home early.

The car had passed the mile 70 marker; there were only 14 more miles to go before she was home.

Jessica was concerned about Ryan, though. She knew Ryan and Eric had been having trouble, and now with the baby, Eric would have to divide his time between Ryan and the baby, which would only draw them further apart from each other. When Eric's mood became a little better, she would bring up the prospect of finding another job to him again, even though she felt it was hopeless. He had just received a healthy raise the past year, and he mentioned before that an 8-to-5 job wasn't for him.

The car was passing the mile 66 marker. Jessica felt the car shudder and then watched as the needle on the temperature gauge quickly moved to Hot. Within an instant, smoke began seeping out the sides of the hood. The smell of burning rubber entered Jessica's nose. Panicking, she slammed the brakes, locking them, and the car began to slide across the two lanes of the interstate. The car continued sliding across the left lane onto the shoulder and slammed into the barrier!

The car stopped.

"Oh my God! Shit, shit, shit... no, no, no, no!" Jessica was going hysterical.

The engine had overheated, and the driver side was pinned against the barricade. She took her shaking hands and tried to push the hazard light button, but kept missing it. Her hands were too unsteady.

"Deep breath, Jess, deep breath," she breathed in deep and held it for three seconds.

She tried again to push the hazard light button. The back

two flasher lights and the front passenger light began blinking. The front driver's side light had been busted on the impact with the barrier.

"I have to call Eric." Her cell phone was not in the passenger seat. She quickly glanced down on the floor, then around her seat, and underneath the passenger seat. The phone was nowhere to be found. She tried to open her door and realized it was pinned. Then she felt the pain in her left side; a bruise went from her hip to midway up her torso. She flinched when she saw it. Carefully, she began to inch herself from the driver's side seat into the passenger seat. She had to find the phone. Her right hand grabbed onto the seat buckle clip and slowly pulled herself up on top of the console. She placed her left hand on the steering wheel for support then began to scoot herself across the small console into the passenger seat. The pain in her side was not as severe as she initially thought; it was just a very large bruise, she needed to make sure she didn't hit it on anything. As she slid almost completely into the passenger seat, the seat belt clip scraped up her left side along the bruise.

"FUCK!" she screamed. Numbness overcame Jessica, and she was on the verge of passing out from the pain.

"No! Fight through it, Jessica. You have to find the phone!" she screamed again to herself.

Pushing through the initial shock of the pain, she began to look around for the phone again. Slowly turning her body to the left, she peered into the back seat. The phone was not to be found. Her left hand searched on the side of the seat and under the seat. Nothing. Her right hand frantically searched on the side of the seat in between the door. She had found it! She began to dial Eric at home when she noticed the display wasn't working. Her thumb held down the power button for a few seconds. Nothing. Frustrated, Jessica quickly pressed all the

buttons at once. There was nothing, not a sound, not a beep, and not a display. The cell phone had broken during the wreck. Tears welled in her eyes.

As she was crying, she caught a glimpse of flashing lights pass by the window. Startled, she rubbed her eyes and stared through the window. In front of her, a jet-black tow truck's brake lights were shining. She saw the reverse lights come on as the tow truck slowly reversed closer to her car. The truck stopped, and a rather average looking man stepped out of the truck. He was about six feet tall, had white skin that was roughed up with grease and cuts, presumably from his years in the towing business. His hair was a reddish blonde color and well groomed, matching a well-trimmed beard of the same color. The man had a dark green T-shirt on with a pair of blue overalls over the shirt.

He knocked on the passenger side window of the car. Jessica slowly rolled the window down with her right hand. "Ma'am, are you hurt?"

"My side is bruised, but other than that, I think I'm ok," Jessica strained to say.

"You don't sound it, ma'am. I called the ambulance when I pulled up here as a precautionary step anyway. They should be here within 10-15 minutes. Why don't you go sit in my cab and wait for them? I'll work on getting your car onto my truck while you're waiting."

The man opened the passenger door of the car and waved his arms in the direction of his truck.

"Thank you, sir. You're a lifesaver," she said as she tried to stand up. Expecting pain, she clenched her teeth, but to her surprise, only a dull ache greeted her. Jessica took the man's hand in hers as he slowly walked her to his cab. He opened the door and helped her up into the cab.

“Do you need anything else before I begin to work on your car, ma’am?” he asked Jessica.

Remembering she wasn’t able to call Eric earlier, “Yes, do you have a phone? I need to call my husband; my cell broke in the crash.”

“Yes, ma’am,” reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a phone and began to hand it to her. “Oh, wait, I’m sorry, ma’am. I forgot to charge the phone, and it’s almost dead. Let me plug it into the cigarette lighter and charge it up for you so you can use it.”

He walked around the front of the truck to the driver’s side, opened the door, pulled the charger from under the steering column, and plugged one end into the phone and the other end into the cigarette lighter. The phone beeped, showing the power bars charging up.

“Give it a minute, and it should be good to use. Just leave it plugged in.”

Relieved, Jessica said, “You have saved my life out here. Thank you so much.”

“Just my job, ma’am, but I need to get to work on your car. The ambulance should be here soon,” replied the man.

As he shut the door, Jessica picked up the phone and began to dial Eric.

Suddenly there was knock on her window. Startled, she rolled down the glass. “Did you forget something, sir?”

“Yeah, forgot my gloves; they’re in the glove box. Mind if I get them real quick?” he asked.

“Sure, do you want me to get them?” Jessica asked.

“Oh no, ma’am. You sit back; just relax. Thought I saw the ambulance heading for the turnaround a half mile down; they’ll be here in a minute.”

The man opened the passenger door and took his gloves

out of the glove box. He began to put them on.

"I wouldn't have any fingers left if it weren't for these things; they have saved my hands more times than I can remember."

"Thank God for that. Tough to do a job without any—," her words cut off as her head was slammed violently into the dashboard!

"Shut up, bitch. Sit back and relax, don't you listen?" asked the man as he pushed her down onto her side across the seat of his truck.

He waved his hands to the left and said in a voice mimicking Jessica's, "Thank God for this."

Then he waved his arms to the right, "and thank God for this."

Then he pushed both of his hands down in a quick motion as to show disgust. "Thank God for nothing, bitch. There is no God!" he yelled at Jessica. She was unconscious.

He ran his fingers through her blonde curly hair, "You need to be thanking me, Goldie Locks," he said as he continued to twirl her hair in his fingers. "You will experience more things with me than you have in your entire life, honey... if you want to thank God so much, you need to start thanking me for I will become your God."

## 8 | Where are You?

Eric glanced at the clock on the microwave. It read 6:45 pm. He walked back into the living room, grabbed the phone, and dialed Jessica's cell phone. For the third time, it went straight to voicemail.

Did she turn her phone off?

She always called him when she would be late. He tried her cell phone number again, straight to voicemail once more. Eric walked back into the kitchen, opened the drawer above the stove and took out the phone book. Thumbing through the yellow pages, he located D. He quickly scanned through the pages until he found department stores. Running his index finger quickly over the page, Eric found Dillard's. He took the phone book with him into the living room and dialed the number.

"Dillard's, Judith speaking," answered the other end of the phone.

"Judith, this is Eric, Jessica's husband. She had told me she was getting off of work around 6 pm or so. Can you tell me if she left on time?" asked Eric.

"Just give me one second here and I can tell you exactly when she left. Is everything alright?"

"Uh yeah, yeah, I think so. She just said she would be home around 6:30, and she's not here, and I can't reach—"

"Ok... I just found her timecard. According to this, she clocked out at 5:58 pm. Maybe she's stuck in traffic or something."

"You think so? At this time in the evening?" Eric checked the clock again.

"Late, the traffic has been much better, but you never



know, maybe a wreck happened, delayed her for a few minutes. Regardless, I'm sure everything is ok; don't worry. But I need to get back to work and close up the store."

"Ok thanks, Judith, I'm sure it's nothing, probably worrying for no reason. Thanks for your help," Eric said.

"No problem. Have a good night." Judith hung up the phone.

Eric dialed Jessica's cell phone, straight to voicemail once again.

"Have a good night, huh?" Eric said aloud. "I will as soon as Jessica gets home."

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He held down the button, which lowered the hydraulic tow ramp back into its original horizontal position. The ramp locked into place. He put his hand around the chains that connected to the front axle of the red Toyota Celica. He tugged on the chains, but the chains didn't budge. The Celica was securely fastened. Checking his watch, he saw it was 6:45 pm. He needed to move quicker; he had spent 15 minutes already dealing with the car.

Then he heard the sound and the flashing lights of a cop car pulling up behind his truck. Inside was the Chief of Police, Mr. Judd Canton.