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MADELINE
July 14, 1987

The sign reads Glorytown. Glorytown? Where the hell is Glorytown and how the hell did I get here? My name? Virginia. Think, think! Virginia Stower. Middle name? Does that even matter? Where did I leave my purse or didn't I have it? How the hell did I get here? A train, a bus, walk? God, I hope I didn't hitchhike? Shit, holy shit! I'm starving and my throat feels like a dust-covered road. I must've walked forever from God knows where. My shoes are caked with mud and russet-colored goo peppers my scratched-up legs, as if I went through a cow pasture and tried to jump a barbed wire fence.

An elderly couple, on a bench, watched my every move. I ran my fingers through my matted hair and straightened my clothes. Although I must've looked a fright, they were my only hope.

“Excuse me.”

The woman raised a newspaper in front of her face. The man didn't take his eyes off of me. I heard her murmur his name, Henry. Standing squarely in front of her, he became a shield.

“I'm sorry to ask you but I need help.” I pleaded.

“Miss, I must ask you to go.”

It was a wonder that he didn't stamp his foot, as though shooing away a stray dog that nobody wanted. He pointed down the street.

“If you need help, the police station is around that corner. Understand?”

“Yes.”

He moved further sideways to protect his companion, which I presumed was his wife. I followed or should I say obeyed his instruction.

It was a quiet town without the chain stores and fanfare. Passing the facades suddenly triggered something deep inside me that was blazingly familiar. My hometown. Yes. Arbor Heights! Another piece of the puzzle. Good. Very good. I hurried to the precinct. A silver-haired lady with deep lines on her face, stood behind a counter, doodling on a pad of paper. She acknowledged me without a glance, but when she looked up, her face froze.

“Miss. May, may I help you?”

I thought to myself, obviously, didn't my appearance give that away?

“Yes, I need help.”

“Please, wait right here. Would you like some water?”

“Yes.”

She rushed over to a cooler, snatching a paper cup, overflowing the cup, as water sloshed over the edge. She handed it to me.

“Thank you so much.”

She went into an office. Before long, a man, practically as wide as he was tall, approached me, offering his hand.

“Miss, I'm Officer Daly. The Chief of Police. Won't you please come back with me to my office?”

He motioned towards an oak chair.

“Have a seat, please.” He returned to his chair and leaned forward and in a soothing manner asked, “Did someone hurt you?”

“I don’t think so. I’m just lost.”

“Do you have a license or know of someone we might contact?”

“I must’ve misplaced my purse. My identification would have been in it.”

“Do you know who you are?”

“Virginia Stower from Arbor Heights. I think.”

“Miss Stower, pardon my French, but you’re a helluva’ way from Arbor Heights.”

He spun his chair around to a map behind him and placed his finger inches away from a star, which I assumed indicated Glorytown. I gathered by the name, it was once knee deep in the coal industry.

“I see by the ring on your finger that you’re married.” he continued, “do you happen to know his name? Your phone number?”

“LE4 something.”

My head spun.

“Miss, are you okay?”

He rose and grabbed a ceramic cup, filling it with steaming coffee and placed it on the corner of the desk. He grabbed cream out of a small refrigerator next to him.

“Cream and sugar?”

As words escaped me, I could only nod my head. He dumped tons of sugar and cream in my cup and handed it to me. Out of his desk drawer, he grabbed a package of chocolate chip cookies.

“Always keep a few packages handy, he said as his eyes twinkled. “Would you like some?”

“Yes. Thank you so very much.”

I drank my coffee, pausing enough to devour the cookies, even licking the crumbs from my fingers.

He slid a paper and pen across the desk.

“When you’re ready, could you do me a favor and write down everything you recall about yourself? Okay?”

I nodded and sipped the hot coffee, savoring the warmth of it and my surroundings. I was lucky to be in a safe place.

As the shadows of the night fell, memories of who I was surfaced like the first signs of spring.

My name is NOT Virginia Stower, but Madeline Storm Thompson. Yes, and I have a son, a practically full-grown man, named Jason. Jason, my sweet Jason. I went full circle and everything returned, including the man I married, Frank.

Officer Daly began to enter the room when he stopped in the doorway and waited until I finished writing. I handed him the paper with a scatter of sentences.

It was midnight when they arrived, my Jason and his father Frank. Jason was sheet white and embraced me while Frank chatted it up with the officers, like he was my knight in shining armor. Then, Frank handed me a sweater and said, “Madeline, sweetheart, are you okay?”

“Yes.” I ran my fingers through my tangled hair as Jason stood aside watching the circus. The ringmaster leading the show.

“We were so worried, sweetheart, but everything is fine now. Isn’t it Jason? We found your mother.”

“Yeah.” Jason weakly smiled.

Frank wrapped the sweater around my shoulders and drew me against him in a hug, a bit too tight. I knew what was coming.

We piled into the car. Jason insisted that I sit in the back seat with him. Frank looked at us in the rear view mirror. “What’s that smell? Ha.”

Jason glared at him, keeping his middle finger low so his father couldn’t see it. I was ashamed that I stunk like a skunk, but more embarrassed that Jason had such a cruel father.

“Dad, come on. She’s been through a lot. Give her a break, won’t you?” Jason said.

“Lighten up. Can’t you two take a joke?” snickered Frank.

We drove in silence. It was several hours before we pulled in our driveway. Jason had fallen asleep, his head resting against the back of the seat. Frank opened my door quietly and tugged on my arm, urging me to get out. He latched the car door silently behind him and escorted me into the house. No sooner were we in the kitchen, when he jacked me against the counter, straddling me with each hand by my sides, smashing them on the counter. I was powerless.

“You cunt. I’ve had it with you!” Spittle flew from his mouth.

“Next time I won’t admit I know you and rescue your ass. Do you hear me?” He screamed and shoved his pelvis against me, pinning me to the counter, my spine crushed, my breath in painful gasps. He raised his fist.

“I should. I should.”

His eyes became snakelike slits, his breath billowed like a bull's. Our voices mute, our eyes remained unflinching. It felt like an eternity. Then, just like that, he pushed back, and stormed into the other room. My body shook in spasms as I slid to the floor. The solitude of the cold floor was a relief. After a while, the kitchen door opened and Jason flew over.

“Mom what happened?” He gritted his teeth. “Dad? Bastard.”

“Oh no, no, it wasn't him. He went up to our bedroom a while ago. I told him I was getting a drink of milk before I joined him. I must have fainted or something.”

“Mom. Are you lying to me? So help me if he did anything to you.”

He raised his fist, his face beet red, the veins popping out in his neck. I patted him gently on the arm.

“No sweetie. It's been a long, arduous day. I'm exhausted, that's all.”

He finally calmed himself and filled a glass with milk and handed it to me. We sat at the kitchen table and talked for a while. His eyes grew sleepy.

“Jason, please go to bed. I'm okay.”

“No, not until I know you're in bed. We'll go upstairs and you sleep in the guest room. It's too late to shower and I'd rather you stay in there tonight.”

“Sure my darling.”