



Inside Out

Nancy Callahan



November 15
1946

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2

Black. Black two-piece suits.

And starched white shirts.

That's what I remember. Row

upon row of men in black

tailored suits with silk ties at

their throats. And gold. Gold

cuff links. Gold wrist watches.

Gold rings on their fingers.

Rings studded with diamonds.

That's what I remember. And

their manicured nails and

perfect haircuts. I'd never seen

men who looked like this.

And I remember the clattering

of their polished wing-tipped

shoes on the parquet floor as

they filed into the State Legisla-

ture's Chamber and took their

designated seats. There were

just men in that room. Only

men. Important men. Men with

money. Men with power. That's

what I remember.

I remember the musky aroma

of their aftershaves and hair

tonics. And how those scents

followed them back to their

seats after recess and mingled

with the tobacco smell that

clung to their clothing and

hung on their breath. And I
remember a whiff of liquor.

But maybe it was just my own
nervous perspiration finding
its way into my nostrils.

I remember peering up at the
massive chandeliers, traveling
across the ornate ceiling and
following the heavy crimson
curtains back down to the floor.

I followed a repetitive pattern
of inlaid wood over to my worn
brown Oxfords, up my khaki
pant-legs to my large calloused
hands resting there in my lap.

Hands that appeared so small
and distant.

The room suddenly seemed
too warm, too stuffy, too dark.

First I felt queasy, then light-
headed. A gavel slammed the
podium and the room fell silent.

I grabbed the water glass in
front of me and took a gulp
just as I heard my name being
called to the floor and "Docket
#4897: Salary Increase for
Public School Teachers." That's
what I remember.

I remember wiping my handkerchief across my sweaty forehead and running my moist palms over the front of my cheap tweed jacket and straightening my borrowed ill-matched tie as I stepped up to the microphone.

And I remember my voice reverberating in the cavernous space. Too timid at first, but gaining strength and authority as I delivered my brief argument. That's what I remember.

And then the thunderous applause after my summary, and cheers echoing off the walls of the tiered chamber after the vote. And hearty slaps on my back by the men in the tailored black suits. And this ever so fleeting sense of belonging. And a lingering wish that I might be one of them. That's what I remember.

CALENDAR 1946

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FEBRUARY

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Father's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 1

Be Careful What
You Wish For

November 15
1946

when he was twenty-six

to my mother and her warm darkness. Hands. Turning me over and over. Wiping mucous and blood away with damp wads of white gauze. Straightening my limbs. Examining each crease. Inspecting every crevice. One after another. That's what I remember.

And the heaviness of the cold stethoscope pressed to my stiffened back. My sunken stomach. My heaving chest. That's what I remember.

And my mother next to me drenched in the raking white light. Her face pale, drained, exhausted. Her black sweaty hair matted to the white pillow they carelessly stuffed under her limp head. And all those sharp black knotted sutures poking out of her into the whiteness. And that first nauseating sensation of being alone. That's what I remember.

And that relentless piercing scream. Why won't it stop? Why won't it stop coming up from deep inside my small convulsing body?

It filled up that white, white room
on the day that I was born. That's
what I remember.

CALENDAR 1950

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Father's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 3

Don't Give Up

November 15
1950

when he was thirty

Pauline is here to see me. She looks so beautiful and vibrant. I understand she can't stay long. She had to bring the little girls again today. They're outside on the sidewalk playing. She couldn't find anyone to take all three kids and the baby too. I can understand that, they're a handful. Pauline says all the children are being good. Jimmy had a check-up and a smallpox vaccination today. He weighs thirty pounds. A little butterball. We hope he will begin to walk soon. She

tells me Nancy has sniffed almost all the scent out of my old T-shirt, which she drags around with her everywhere she goes. Diane and Daryl are doing well at school. Daryl has started reading the bedtime story to the other children. I wish I could see them. It's been a long time. I hope they don't forget who I am. But they won't let them in the polio ward. I wouldn't want the children to see me like this anyway. They might be frightened. Or worse yet, they might not recognize

me at all.

Today I hardly recognize myself. I can't move my back or either of my legs. I can no longer feed myself and I have become quite thin and bony.

This concerns the staff but is of little consequence to me. I've lost all interest in food.

My stomach muscles have atrophied so bowel movements are now impossible. This catheter was inserted weeks ago so there is no need to get me out of bed. I'm beginning to

understand the bitter irony of placing the polio ward in the Children's Hospital. Like a child, I'm dependent on someone else for all my needs. The doctors try to hide their discouragement, but they're at a loss after trying everything they know how to do – regimens of hot packs, drugs, even physical therapy. I understand they've done their best. The truth is, not much is known about this disease.

Last week I finally came to

terms with the fact that I may never walk again. This week I realize I'll be lucky to leave here alive. Many of the other polio victims have died. Three just this week. I may be dying too. I'm exhausted from the pain and I'm losing my will to fight this.

Pauline sits by my bed and I see she has brought more cards from our friends and neighbors. Hundreds have arrived in the past eight weeks. She opens each one and holds

it up in front of my face so I can see it. Each envelope contains wishes for my speedy recovery and small amounts of cash, whatever people can spare. I am thankful for their generosity, though I hardly register whom they are from.

Pauline's soft voice lulls me in and out of a shallow dreamlike sleep. I float under the peaks of the open cards, which transform into the pointed roofs of luminous white tents suspended in air. I feel peaceful.

Each time I open my eyes
Pauline wipes tears from hers.
She puts the cards aside and
holds my hand. We don't speak.

Pauline must leave. I understand. She must get the children home to bed. I'm saddened but too weak to protest. She promises to return tomorrow. I hope I will still be here then.

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FEBRUARY

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JULY

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AUGUST

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OCTOBER

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Nancy's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 4

You Don't Always Get What You Want

November 15
1950

when she was four

Maybe you aren't supposed to understand when you've just turned four. And what does turned four mean anyway? One day I am three. The next day I am four. Mom said I turned four sometime in the night. But I don't remember turning over even once. And I'm still the same size as I was last week when I was three. How will people know if I'm three or four? I know I don't look five because I'm not as big as my older sister. I don't understand any of this. But it doesn't matter because we had candles on my cake. And I got to

make a wish and I did blow out all four candles. Everyone clapped.

What I don't understand, and it does matter, is that I got a new doll instead of what I wished for. I like the new doll. It's nicer than my old ones. They all have torn dresses and missing shoes and cut-off toes. But the doll wasn't what I wanted. It wasn't what I wished for.

All I wanted was for my Dad to come home. I don't understand. Aren't you supposed to get your

wish? And why was he crying when Mom took him to the Children's Hospital? And why do sick Dads have to go to a hospital for children? If it's really a children's hospital, why can't we go inside and see him instead of playing outside on the concrete? Do some children get to go in? Don't the people in the hospital know it's cold outside? Don't they know we left our mittens in the car? Don't they know we can't go across the parking lot to get our mittens? Don't they even know our Mom is still inside the hospital

and we need to go to the bathroom? What is polio anyway? I don't understand. The older kids don't know either. But they said maybe we could get it. I wonder if I got it if I'd be able to go inside the hospital and see my Dad. The older kids go to school so I have to wait at home for Dad. But it's been a long, long time now. Polio takes a long time I guess.

I heard Mom on the phone. She was talking to my Grandma. I heard her say, "He's very bad. He might not make it." I don't know

who was bad or why he wouldn't
make it or even what she wanted
them to make. But it made her
sad and she was crying out loud
just like my baby brother. Then
she said I was very bad too.

She said I wouldn't eat my food
anymore. Not even the cake she
made me for my birthday. She
said I slept most of the time and
I'd left my new doll in the box and
wouldn't play with her. And for
weeks I'd only sucked my thumb
and smelled my Dad's old t-shirt.

I am sorry for being so bad and
making her cry. But that's all I

know how to do until my Dad
comes home.

CALENDAR 1951

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Father's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 5

Stand On Your
Own Two Feet

July 21
1951

when he was thirty-one

Sitting out on the front porch this evening enjoying the warm summer breeze, I'm thinking what a lucky man I am. Finally I can stand on my own two feet ... I mean literally ... I can stand for a few minutes all on my own without my crutches. Pauline and I have each other and our four healthy children. What more could a man ask for? Many of the other polio victims weren't so lucky. Couples lost one spouse or another. Other families lost their children. People

we know are paralyzed and will be in wheelchairs for the rest of their lives. It's been a hard year.

I took my wheelchair back to the hospital. Couldn't wait to get it out of here. Pauline thought maybe we should keep it around ... just in case. But it's uncommon enough to have polio twice. I don't think I'll ever get it again in my lifetime. How good it is to be home. Out in the countryside again. Our garden is bountiful this year.

It's a big undertaking, but everyone pitched in. The neighbors helped plow and plant.

All of the children have done an amazing job of weeding even though our oldest is only eight. Pauline and the children picked our first green beans today. Two bushels in fact.

Jimmy, who is two, helped pick. Or at least he made a show of it... actually ate more than he put in his pail. We'll be harvesting cucumbers and tomatoes in a few more weeks.

It's important to us that the

children have good fresh food. At least I can help put the vegetables up for the winter.

Pauline and I sat together at the kitchen table all afternoon cutting up beans for freezing. It feels good to be able to help out.

I still tire easily, but I'm gaining every day. I'm enjoying the children and their funny antics. I've offered to keep an eye on them while Pauline blanches the last batch of beans and cleans up the kitchen.

The kids got a kick out of me trying to play my trumpet today. I took out the mouth-piece and blew into it but didn't have the lung capacity to make a sound. The kids all tried their hand at it. They had better luck than I did. They thought I was just fooling around with them when I couldn't make a sound. Little do they know. I'll put it away for a while and try not to get too discouraged.

My primary focus is getting my strength back. I still go

back to the hospital for physical therapy every weekday.

At home I practice getting up out of a straight-backed chair on my own and standing for as long as I can without losing my balance. Haven't attempted to walk without my crutches yet ... maybe next week. My secret goal for this month is to get so I can stand without my crutches long enough to take a piss. You have to set your sights high or low as the case may be.

The girls have bowls of green

beans and are pretending to feed them to their dolls. The boys are using piles of beans to feed their horses, which are really their bicycles. They are all smart kids with good imaginations. Doesn't take much to amuse them.

These past eleven months have certainly been a strain on the family. Now that I am back home maybe things will start to turn around. I sure hope so.

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 6

Try to Be Brave

July 21
1951

when she was five

We spot heat lightning in the distance and take off running every-which-way squealing with delight. We try to find rubber objects to hold on to before the storm comes in close enough to hear the thunder.

It's the first electrical storm we've had since Dad came home. Sitting up stiffly in a wooden chair he holds our baby brother in his lap, grins and calmly says we're probably safe enough on the porch without having any rubber in our hands.

"Sure Dad, you're safe," says my older brother, "you've got crutches with rubber ends leaning up against your chair."

My dad laughs.

"Rose next door was just lucky Dad that she had a rubber fly swatter in her hand last summer when she got struck by lightning. That's what the doctor said. You know Dad, rubber acts like an insulator," my brother continues. "And if we're so safe out here on the porch, why did you say we

should turn off the radio and back away from the railing?"

Dad laughs again.

As for me, I don't know what is or isn't true about the rubber thing, but I want to be insulated just in case. So I'm getting my rubber doll unless it's upstairs. If it is, someone's going to have to go with me to get it.

"Let's get our sneakers," says my sister.

"Good idea." I say 'cause I know they're under the bed and she'll be tricked into going upstairs with me. I'll search for my doll while we're up there.

We're back out on the porch in no time clutching our sneakers, a hot water bottle, and my doll. My sister, my older brother and I jump on our tricycles with their rubber wheels, and circle around my dad. I jump off long enough to give baby Jimmy a red rubber ball to hold on to. He waves it around in the air and then throws it.

Before I can grab it, the ball rolls across the cement floor and out onto the lawn. My brother double dares me to go get it. Lucky for me Dad says, "Let it be."

We spot the first jagged bolt of lightning high over the top of the barn. We start the count ... One-one-thousand. Two-one-thousand. Three-one-thousand. Four-one-thousand. Five-one-thousand. Six ... We all shriek when we hear the first loud clap of thunder. All of us, that is, except for my Dad.

"Six miles away Dad. Where would that be?" my brother asks. "Could be Augusta, maybe Knoxville," Dad says.

We pull up close to my dad and watch for the next bolt. He says, "This one could be closer or farther away depending on which way the storm is moving."

I'm a little nervous. Lightning struck the telephone pole right next to the house last summer and the pole caught on fire. But our dad's out here with us. So we

can be brave.

I still wonder why Mom said the
baby had to go inside with her.
It might be too dangerous for a
baby. But not for me! Just in case,
I'm going to sit on my dad's lap. I
know I'll be safe there.

CALENDAR 1958

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 7

Think
Creatively

July 16
1958

when he was thirty-eight

Went out to Walter and Virginia's farm in Cato to work with the 4-H girls today. They're all healthy good-looking girls. Friendly too. They got my blood pumping. I think with a little more practice we'll be able to pull this scheme off.

Most of them are driving the tractors pretty well now. We just have to teach them to plow. That's next week. My boss is really excited about my idea and if we can keep it under wraps until the field days, we should cause quite a stir. The

John Deere Tractor representatives will be surprised to see ten pretty young women plowing alongside their men on our Ford tractors. If it boosts sales, I'll probably get a raise, maybe even a promotion. Who knows?

Virginia is the girls 4-H leader. She's been helpful. Really helpful in fact. She's quite a looker herself. Wonder where she's been all of my life? She's pretty flirtatious for a married woman with five kids. I like that. She has a sexy manner about

her that's hard to resist. When no one is looking she'll look at me, smile and sensuously run her tongue over her lips. Every time she does it I start getting aroused, and I think she knows it. She does things that make me wild. At first I thought it was unintentional. We'd sit down in the grass under an old maple tree and watch the girls practice their driving. She'd laugh and playfully kick off her shoes, pull up her shirt just a little higher than might be considered proper, spread her

legs apart and run her hands slowly up and down her smooth bare legs or lean into me with her firm breasts. There's been weeks of this teasing. And I have to say I've enjoyed it all.

Now I know there's more to it. She was much more brazen with me today and there's no mistake about what she wanted and what I wanted. And I gave it to her hard and deep. It started after the girls went home. Her husband and her kids were all off somewhere

for the day, who knows where.
She'd gone in the house and
changed into a full skirt and a
sheer sleeveless blouse, which
she'd neglected to button all
the way. As she walked closer
towards me carrying two glass-
es of scotch I could see her full
rounded breasts bobbing up
and down inside her blouse and
her hard pink nipples pushing
out in my direction. That was it
for me. We both downed a drink
and I pulled her blouse open
and slid my hand up under her
skirt and soon discovered she'd

already taken off her panties.
And now, I can't wait to go back
for more. What a day!

CALENDAR 1958

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 8

Life Isn't Always Fair

July 16
1958

when she was eleven

My dad has a great idea. And I'm sure it will work. But it makes me mad for two reasons. One reason is that I always wanted to learn how to drive the tractor and he'd never let me. Only the boys are allowed. Which is so unfair because I know I can do it. Grandpa lets me steer the tractor all the way up the hill to his farm and that's got to be over two miles. I've watched him put in the clutch and shift and I'm pretty sure I can do it on my own if someone would only let me. But no. Dad just laughs at me when I

ask him to show me how to drive our tractor.

This reminds me so much of bringing home our report cards. If my older brother gets a "B" my parents think that's really bad and tell him he had better study harder. But if my sister or I get a "B" they pat us on the head and say that's good. What's with that? Do they think girls are stupid and can't get "A's?" Are boys supposed to be better? That makes me mad.

So now what does my dad decide to do? Teach ten 4-H girls from Cato not only to drive tractors, but brand new tractors. On top of that he's teaching them to plow. During the field days he's going to have the girls plow up a field to show the dealers and farmers how easy it is to operate a Ford tractor. What's so special about the 4-H girls in Cato? Just because they're older doesn't mean they can drive the tractors better. I heard my dad say some of them have never even been on a tractor before. But he's going to

teach them anyway.

But that's not all. The other thing makes me feel creepy and uncomfortable. I know why he wants the 4-H girls to drive the tractors, the other reason I mean. It's because they're older and they have boobs and he thinks all the men will be watching the girls all day and wanting to talk to them. And then they won't be looking at the other tractors. He's really just using those girls to sell his tractors you know. And that makes me mad too.

CALENDAR 1959

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 9

Be Careful Who You Trust

September 13
1959

when he was thirty-nine

Well this has been a heck of a day! I drive around to see Virginia before heading home and she's in a sorry state. Tells me she's been to the doctor. And he said she's about three months pregnant. To top that off she says she doesn't know exactly who the father is. Might be Walter's, might be mine. What the hell! Before she told me she hadn't slept with her husband in over a year. Said I was the only one she's been with in a long, long time. Now she says she doesn't know

who the father is! That's crazy. "It's something you'd better darn well know," I told her.

And what if it is mine? Does that make everything better? Hell no! If she has a baby that looks like me, then what? Doesn't she think Walter might notice if it's not his kid. Shit! What a mess. She's a mess. She lied to me. I don't know what to think anymore. She's probably been sleeping with Walter right along. No loyalty there, just whoever happens to be

around at the time I guess. And
I thought I was special. Hah!
What a joke.

How'd she get herself into this
situation anyway? She was
supposed to have been taking
precautions. Said she had that
all covered. Now look what
she's done. She knows damn
well Pauline's five months
pregnant. Damn her if she got
herself pregnant on purpose.
She'd do that too. I just know
it. She's so jealous. She'll go to
any lengths to get me all for

herself. What a screwed-up
mess this is.

And what in hell is she going to
tell Walter when he gets home?
Especially if he hasn't been
sleeping with her. She'd better
be coming up with a really good
story before tomorrow. Other-
wise the shit is going to hit the
fan. What if he suspects it was
me? What if her kids tell him
I've been there a lot when he's
away?

And God, what about her kids?

What if they overheard us?
They probably did. How could
they not have? We were pretty
loud. I'm sure they heard her
crying. She's never that care-
ful about what she says or does
in front of them. Now I have to
drive home and face my own
family and pretend everything
is just fine. This is just shit!

CALENDAR 1959

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 10

Don't Ever Lie

September 13
1959

when she was thirteen

My dad rules with an iron hand. And he has the largest hands I have ever seen. His grip is like a vise. I swear he can pick up a watermelon with one hand. My mother often tells the story of how my father marched me out of church and straight to the car one Sunday morning when I was five and spanked me for being disruptive during the sermon. I don't have any recollection of that. But it must have made a deep impression on me because I consciously try to be ever so good and to never cross him.

We are all good kids, all seven of us. Little soldiers really. We do what we're told, when we're told and how we're told to do it. All of us, that is, except for Diane. She is the defiant one. She talks back to my mother when she asks her to do chores. Wants to know "why" and "how come." Nothing is ever fair in her mind and she wants to set things straight. She is my older sister so I watch her closely and learn a lot from her behavior. Not so much what to do, more what not to.

One winter evening as we cleared the supper dishes my mother determined it was definitely Diane's turn to wash the dishes. Diane had a fit. She couldn't understand why all my brother had to do that evening was to shovel the walk to the barn. Why couldn't he do the dishes for once? She'd be willing to trade chores. Before I had time to consider temperature, wind velocity, and snow accumulation she had cut herself a deal. My brother and I finished the dishes and were sitting in the living room

watching TV when she came inside crying at 8:30 pm with her mittens and boots frozen to her snowsuit. I have to admit I didn't have much sympathy for her. She never stops to think things through. Unlike me, maybe she wasn't spanked often enough or hard enough to appreciate the consequences of her actions.

It seems like my dad is never home much any more. And when he does come home we tiptoe around him. Maybe that is because when we get out of

hand during the week my mother threatens us with his retaliation. Even though the punishment is usually just a severe "talking to" or extra chores, that is enough to keep me on the strait and narrow. But not Diane.

On this particular day Diane told my mother a bold-faced lie. I'm not certain of the details but the bottom line was the lie had been told and one of the younger kids had innocently set the record straight. My dad was confronted with the story just as he came in

the door from work. My mother and I stood in silence as my dad grilled Diane for the details. When she was finished telling her side of the story he unexpectedly hauled-off and forcefully hit her across the face with his mighty hand. That red stinging pain burned my tender heart as well as her soft cheek.

CALENDAR 1960

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 11

Pretend Nothing
Is Wrong

March 24
1960

when he was thirty-nine

I have to go lie down. *You can't right now. You have to eat dinner with your family.* I can't. I'm upset. I'm tired. Hung over. *Take some aspirin.* I already did. I'm sick to my stomach. *Say the blessing, everyone's head is bowed. They're waiting for you.* I'm sick. Emotionally sick. Don't you know how sick I feel inside? I can't function. *Stop it! Just act as if everything's all right.* But it isn't, is it? Nothing will ever be the same again. Not now. Not after what I've done. I'm going to lose my job and everything

I've ever worked for. I know it. *Pretend there's nothing wrong. Can you at least do that?* I don't think I can pull this off. *Yes you can. You just took a Valium for Christ's sake. Try to relax.* It's not working. It's not going to work this time. I can't sit here. I have to get out of this chair, away from this table, out of this room. *Stop it. Put some squash on your plate and pass it on ... that's better ... now the mashed potatoes.* Look at their innocent faces. They're my children. What will happen when they find out? They'll

never speak to me again.
They'll all hate me. I'm going to
lose my family. That's what's
going to happen. I know it.
*They aren't going to find out unless
you tell them. Now take the platter
of roast beef. Your son is passing it
to you. My son, my oldest son,
he's only seventeen. He won't
be able to take care of all of
them when I'm gone. Where are
you going? Away. Away where?
Somewhere. Anywhere. I'll be
ruined when they find out. Try
to take your mind off it. Stare at the
wall if it helps. Oh, no. No! What?*

*What's the matter? My parents.
What are you talking about? My
parents sitting there up on top
of the china cabinet in those
picture frames. They're star-
ing at me. They're going to find
out too aren't they? They'll
never forgive me. No one will.
I've disgraced my whole family.
I've ruined my entire life. Will
you pull yourself together? I can't!
Eat your dinner. Don't you get
it? I'm about to puke. Do you
want me to puke on the dinner
table in front of my children?
Is that what you want? Make*

believe you're eating. Cut your meat and push it into your potatoes. Pauline's holding our new baby. He's only two months old. Just two months. I'll never see him grow up. I'll never know what he's like. Will you stop it? I can't. Look at Pauline, she's exhausted. She won't be able to take this. What was I thinking? If she ever finds out ... and she will you know. People talk. Oh yeah, they love their gossip. It's a little late to be worrying about that now. Don't you think? It will be our eighteenth wedding anni-

versary next week. We've been together since she was sixteen. Sixteen. My oldest daughter's age. Can you imagine? Pauline will be devastated. I know it. She's not going to understand. She'll never forgive me. No matter what I do she won't be able to hold her head up in this community ever again. God, I hope they show her some kindness. *When? What are you talking about? When they all find out. So you're going to tell them? No. No. Are you crazy? I can't tell them I have a mistress and*

she's just had a baby. *So what
are you going to do? I'm going to
end it. It? What do you mean? You
know. End it once and for all.
Yes, that's what I'm going to
do. Right after dinner. Maybe
you should take another Valium.
Didn't you see me? I just did.
Then excuse yourself from the table.
There are no excuses for this.*

CALENDAR 1960

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 12

Keep Your Mouth Shut

March 24
1960

when she was thirteen

I just let go of the plate and it crashed to the floor. I was in the kitchen drying the dishes. Diane was with me. She was looking out the window. Her arms were immersed in a dishpan of hot water and there was a mound of soap bubbles climbing up towards her elbows. She was going on and on about who was doing what across the road in front of Clark's house. I really wasn't paying much attention. I was just thinking, let's hurry this up. Let's get these dishes done so I can walk down to Marge's

house for the afternoon. I knew I could get permission to go if the food was put away and the dishes were done. I'd already finished my homework. I'm not really sure where everyone else was. My brothers might have been in the living room watching TV. The three little kids must have gone for their naps.

My mom appeared in the doorway and leaned her back up against the door jam. As she slowly slid down the side of the doorway towards the floor, words

fell out of her mouth, "Your father
has gone to the woods to kill
himself."

The sentence seemed to hang
in the silent space between us. I
understood each individual word,
but not when arranged in this
peculiar order. I had to strain to
absorb their meaning. Finally I
asked how she knew. She said
he'd left a note on his desk. And
he'd taken his pistol.

That's when I dropped the china
plate, stumbled out of the house

and ran towards the woods to
stop him.

It was awful. It was cold and
windy. I mean really windy and
I didn't have a coat on, just a
lightweight shirt and jeans ... and
sneakers with no socks. Burdocks
were sticking to my clothes.
Thorns tore my shirt and ripped
at my ankles. I was bleeding and
out of breath. My hair was blow-
ing in my eyes and sticking in
my open mouth. A stream of thin
clear snot was running out of my
nose and tears were dripping

from my face. And the mud. It was like quicksand sucking at my legs and pulling my shoes half off. I was so upset. I couldn't make any headway. Everything seemed to be conspiring against me. I screamed up to God, "Why don't you help me?" All the while, I was trying to prepare myself for what I might find if I was too late. I was sure I would be too late.

Then I found him. He was sitting on the wet ground staring straight ahead. I stood still watching him. I wanted to hug him but I was

unsure. No one ever showed any signs of affection in our family. So I didn't know what to do. I looked up and saw Mom coming towards us across the field.

Suddenly I was so angry with him I could spit. I turned and ran. When I came back to the house it was as if nothing had ever happened. All the evidence had been removed. The shards of china from the kitchen floor ... the note from the desk ... all gone. I went straight to my room and stayed there until the next day. Then I

got up, got dressed and went to
school like I did every Monday
morning. No one ever spoke of it
again.

CALENDAR 1962

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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Father's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 13

Be Prepared to Take Risks

April 23
1962

when he was forty-one

Perhaps this is rather a foolhardy idea, inviting them here. Maybe I shouldn't have let her talk me into it. She's so persistent and persuasive. And she has a point. Just because my family isn't accustomed to having dinner guests doesn't mean I don't have every right to start entertaining business associates at my home. Let's face it, she and her husband have done me a great favor by convincing the other board members I was the right man for this job. At the very least I

owe them dinner. It's a professional courtesy.

This job is going to require more socializing. It's all new to me but I'm rather enjoying it. I'm not so sure Pauline is cut out for it. She doesn't drink. Never has. Never will. And maybe I'm drinking a little too much. But I've learned that a lot of this kind of business is done over drinks, at parties and banquets. Pauline's family oriented. Never has been one to mingle with strangers. Prefers

to keep to herself. This will be good practice for her. It'll give her a taste of what's to come.

I agree with Pauline, everything is happening pretty fast. But it's what I've always wanted, a white-collar job with responsibility and prestige. And the money. Let's not forget that. This is more money than I ever dreamed of making.

Twenty-five years ago I was living down on the farm with my folks. We didn't have a pot to piss in. Ten years ago I couldn't

even walk, let alone take care of my family. And now here we are in this big house. I'm driving a new car, wearing new clothes. Next week I'm going to be lobbying senators and congressmen in Washington, D.C., for crying out loud. I guess I can take a few risks. I've earned it.

She's not pulling anything over on me either. I know women well enough. She wants to see where I live. How I live. And of course she's dying to meet

Pauline. Women like her just have to see and know all the details. She says she can pull it off. I sure hope so. What's the harm? I want to see her. Can't get enough of her. She's gorgeous. I love to be around her. I like the way she smells and moves and laughs. She's smart, lively and articulate. It will all appear on the up and up. I haven't misled anyone. She really is associated with my business. That's not a lie. Beside who will even suspect? She's bringing her husband along. And he

does work for me. It'll be fine.

Pauline tells me dinner is almost ready and she's worried. Worried our guests might be late and the meal will be ruined. I'm getting worried too but not for the same reason. I'm seriously having second thoughts. This was a ludicrous idea. What was I thinking, inviting her here? I don't know how I let her talk me into it. She may be able to pull it off, but what about me? I'm not sure I'm that good of an actor.

We're getting sloppy and if we aren't more careful we'll be found out. Maybe I've been able to fool her husband, but Pauline is another story. Women have an uncanny intuition about these things. I'm going to get the bottle of scotch out of my office cabinet. In fact, when they arrive I'm going to invite them in here first to see my office; we'll all have a scotch before dinner. Before she meets Pauline. Maybe it will steady my nerves.

CALENDAR 1962

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FEBRUARY

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JULY

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OCTOBER

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Nancy's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 14

Trust Your Intuition

April 23
1962

when she was fifteen

Up until now, entertaining guests for dinner was unheard of in our house. That is aside from the three married couples in my parents' card club who rotated to our house every four weeks for an evening of bridge. Seriously, I don't remember anyone other than relatives ever coming to our house, let alone strangers for a sit-down dinner. But two guests were coming on Saturday and all I knew was they had somehow helped my dad land his new job in Syracuse.

My mom asked me to help her prepare and serve the meal for our guests. As Saturday approached, everyone seemed wound up with nervous excitement, even my dad. After all, he was counting on us to impress his business associates with our hospitality and home cooking. Everything had to be perfect. In fact so perfect, Diane was responsible for feeding the three little kids and entertaining them upstairs in their bedrooms. The two older boys would be allowed to fill their plates and eat in the living room

in front of the TV with a solemn promise of no rough housing. Our plan was set in place.

After school on Friday I vacuumed and polished the teak wood floor in the dining room, dusted the furniture, added another leaf to the table, and put all the chairs in place. Early Saturday morning I prepared the table. First down was the linen tablecloth, which I'd starched the night before and ironed earlier that morning. Then came our good china plates and the freshly polished silverware

and fragile drinking glasses from the china cabinet. To adorn the table I settled on two yellow candles and Grandma's gold-plated candlesticks placed on either side of a vase full of daffodils from our own flower bed. As an afterthought, I placed small paper doilies in the center of each dinner plate to catch the drippings from the fruit cup that would be served before our meal. Mom was thrilled when she peeked in to see what I had done. Our timing was impeccable. Only twenty minutes before the

roast chicken would come out of the oven. Thirty minutes before the potatoes would be ready for mashing. Glazed carrots simmered in their juices on the back burner. Cloverleaf rolls made to perfection were waiting for their turn in the oven. Cabbage salad and freshly whipped cream cooled in the refrigerator. Apple, cherry, and lemon meringue pies laid in wait in the pantry.

I kept an eye on the oven and the stove, finished folding the napkins in that clever manner I'd seen

in a *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine, and arranged an assortment of olives and pickles on a relish tray while my mother ran into the bathroom to comb her hair, touch-up her make-up, change her dress and tie on her frilly organdy apron. Just as the oven's timer buzzed, she reappeared fresh and tidy. I pulled the chicken from the oven and slid the rolls in. Reset the timer for twelve minutes. Transferred the chicken to a platter and covered it with aluminum foil. Poured the chicken drippings and water into

a saucepan. Added flour for thickening, then handed a wooden spoon to my mom so she could make the gravy. I drained the potatoes, added butter, milk, salt and pepper and started mashing them into a smooth creamy consistency.

Golden brown rolls fresh from the oven were being transferred to a cooling rack just about the time we heard some commotion at the front door. Our guests' voices interspersed with my dad's high-spirited laugh drifted down the

hallway to the kitchen. On cue, Mom sent me off to the dining room with a tray of delicate crystal cups filled with bite-sized segments of fresh fruit, each topped with a dollop of stiff whipped cream and a large maraschino cherry on a stem. I put them carefully in place and ducked back into the kitchen. As the two guests were ushered into the dining room from the office entrance we heard the woman "ooh" and "aah" over the charming room and table setting.

My mother went in to meet them while I sliced the chicken and transferred hot vegetables into our best serving dishes. After a few minutes of light chatter, Mom came to the kitchen doorway and asked that I bring in the food. I took a deep breath, entered the room, and placed the platter of roast chicken on the table.

A large burly man, who turned out to be one of the directors on the board of my dad's company, stood awkwardly next to the chair at the end of the table talking to

my dad and sipping amber liquid from a glass that hadn't come from the kitchen. He barely noticed me but his strikingly pretty, effervescent wife stepped forward, extended her hand and said, "You must be Nancy, I've heard so much about you. I'm Virginia." At the precise moment our hands touched she coyly turned and caught my father's eye. They exchanged a knowing glance and before she released my hand, I knew she was his lover.

CALENDAR 1963

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 15

Ask Permission

February 3
1963

when he was forty-two

It's frigid outside but warm and inviting in here at the bar at the Hotel Syracuse. Walter's gone to Watertown to cover the Annual Meeting for me and his gorgeous wife is sitting next to me looking like a million bucks with her black low-cut dress, black nylons and high heels. Not to mention the thin gold necklace that is dangling in her cleavage and driving me wild. She's very sexy and desirable when she's been drinking, and I've noticed other men at the bar are having trouble keep-

ing their eyes off her. Probably all thinking what a lucky bum I am. Don't I know it. Guess we make quite a couple. Me in my tailored black suit and starched white shirt and her looking like she does, showing off in the clothes she bought with the money I gave her.

She asks what I've been doing all day and tells me what smart decisions I've made for the agency and how delighted the shareholders are with my performance over the past five

years. Profits are up and everyone has more money in their pockets.

After the third round of highballs is set in front of us, she gets up to go to the ladies room, leans into me seductively and whispers that she doesn't have to go home tonight. It seems her kids are spending the night at her mother's and Walter won't be back until tomorrow.

I wonder how she manages to get away so often. No com-

plaints on my end, mind you, but it's not so easy for me. Pauline is getting pretty hot under the collar about all these late nights. She likes to have me there to eat supper with her and the children. And she's acting more suspicious lately. I need to watch my step.

After I order another drink for Virginia and myself, the bartender asks if we will be staying for supper. While I pause to think how I'm going to explain this to Pauline, Virginia flashes

him a cunning smile and says that would be lovely. She picks up our drinks and heads for the table in the corner of the elegant dining room. It's the table the agency reserves on a permanent basis, as they do the bedroom suite on the fifth floor. They make it all so convenient.

I head for the lobby and get Pauline on the phone. In the background I can hear one of the younger children crying, Walter Cronkite's voice on the

evening news, two of the older children arguing, and the water running in the kitchen sink. I tell Pauline I've had a few too many drinks with the company's lawyer and I don't know if I should try to drive home. I tell her, "I've heard the roads are pretty icy and they're reporting poor visibility on the Thruway. It might take a long time to get home and it could be dangerous. Do you want me to take a chance? Or would you rather I just stay up for tonight? I do have a 7AM

breakfast meeting with the board of directors tomorrow, so if I do come home I won't get much sleep." I hope it sounds convincing.

She asks how many drinks I've had. And while I don't really have any idea, two maybe, I have to make it sound good so I say four or five. "Well, if that's the case," she says, "you'd better stay up. You know your drinking is getting out of hand. Just because the lawyer's an alcoholic doesn't mean you

have to become one too. The children and I have been waiting to eat with you. And I could use a little help here, you know? But I don't want you driving home drunk. You could have an accident and wind up killing someone or killing yourself. Then what would I do, alone with seven children?"

Permission granted, I hang up the phone and smile to myself as I head back to the table where Virginia is waiting for supper and a sweet dessert.

CALENDAR 1963

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FEBRUARY						
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APRIL						
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MAY						
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JUNE						
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JULY						
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SEPTEMBER						
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OCTOBER						
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NOVEMBER						
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DECEMBER						
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Nancy's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 16

Be Patient
and Wait

February 3
1963

when she was sixteen

We have supper ready exactly at six o'clock every night. That's when my dad likes to eat. Diane and I take turns helping Mom make supper and wash up the dishes afterwards. I'd rather cook but I've gotten so I can wash dishes pretty fast. So I don't mind either job. The first time I ever made supper I followed a recipe in a *Little Golden Book*. Scrambled eggs on toast. I couldn't have been more than six. Now I make four loaves of bread every Saturday morning and make a lot of meals by myself. It's fun.

I never realized all the things Mom taught us until I took *Home Economics* last year. The first project was to sew a laundry bag. That took me about fifteen minutes because I've been designing and making all my own clothes since eighth grade. I spent the week helping other people sew their projects up. The next unit was "Caring for Children." That was a breeze because I've taken care of the little kids in our family since they were born and I babysit for other people's children too.

I stayed out of school three years ago when Brian was born and took care of my younger sisters when they were two and four until Dad could find someone to come in and help out. Diane and I wash all the clothes, do the ironing, clean our bedrooms and our assigned rooms every Saturday morning. I have the living room, dining room and the hallways up and down. They teach you all about that sort of thing in *Home Economics*. So that course was an easy "A". The only part about that class that I wasn't sure about

was when the teacher said, "As a wife you should look fresh, neat, and happy when your husband comes home from work." I got the answer right on the final but I'm not sure that works with seven kids. Maybe the teacher should come to our house for supper some night.

Mom says it's important that all the family sit down to supper together because it's the only time of day when we're all together. It's a big production with nine people around the table. The

baby is in the highchair, the little girls are sitting in regular chairs with old city phone books tucked under them so they can reach the table. The rest of us crowd around the kitchen table banging our chairs together. Inevitably someone tips their chair over or spills their milk before we settle down to eat but we're all there at six o'clock. Well, that is except for Dad. It seems to me he's home less and less these days. So many night meetings. I guess that's the price you pay for an important job.

It's twenty past six, the vegetables are mushy and the meat is dry from being warmed over on the stove. We're all hungry and the little kids are cranky. "Let's just eat!" my brother pleads, "He's not coming." Mom doesn't want to start without Dad. She says she's going to give him five more minutes. Then the phone rings.

After she hangs up she comes back into the kitchen and tells us to go ahead. Dad won't be home again tonight. He has another late meeting and he'll be staying in

Syracuse at the Hotel. We serve up the food and everyone dives in except for Mom. She has something in her eye and goes into the bathroom and shuts the door.

CALENDAR 1966

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 17

Fend for
Yourself

March 26
1966

when he was forty-five

There are Ford and Chevy weddings and then there are Lincoln and Cadillac weddings.

This is definitely a Ford and Chevy wedding. Not a Cadillac in the lot. I guess Nancy will have poor relatives all the way around. A small ceremony and reception are planned. Adequate, but nothing too fancy.

Pauline tells me Nancy made her own dress and her maid of honor's dress too. The two simple wedding bands cost less than thirty dollars. And there is no engagement ring. So all

in all there hasn't been much expense involved.

Pauline says everything is in order. I don't know that I would call it in order. If everything was in order we wouldn't be having a wedding today for a pregnant daughter, now would we? I guess Pauline isn't doing such a good job raising the girls if this kind of thing can happen. I shouldn't have paid for Nancy to go to college. What a waste of money that was. Hope this fellow can take care

of business. He had to drop out of college too. So they'll have their problems I would expect. But they won't be my problems. They're both old enough to fend for themselves.

Other than that it has been a pretty good week. Picked up my new Lincoln Continental yesterday. Drove out to see Virginia and took her for a ride. She was duly impressed. Loved those power windows and leather seats. I was pretty surprised when she gave me

the gold ring with the diamond set in the center. I'm not sure where she came up with the money for that. Probably her husband's money. She said it was for the eighth anniversary of our first meeting. Women are so sentimental about these things. I didn't tell her but it will be Pauline and my twenty-fourth anniversary on Sunday. I'll have to pick up a card and give her some money.

I told Virginia that I'd keep the ring in the glove compartment

but she insists that I wear it.
So I'll say it was a gift from the
agency for all my hard work
this year lobbying for them
in Washington. And the truth
is I deserve a gift from them.
So it will all seem plausible
enough. And I've wanted a ring
like this for a long time. It's a
bit of a status symbol I admit,
but what's wrong with status?
With this and my new suit I
should look pretty sharp today
at the wedding.

of business. He had to drop out of college too. So they'll have their problems I would expect. But they won't be my problems. They're both old enough to fend for themselves.

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CALENDAR 1966

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JULY

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SEPTEMBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 18

You've Made
Your Bed
So Lie In It

March 26
1966

when she was nineteen

No! No! Don't stop! Just drive around the park one more time. Shit, I'm not so sure this is the best idea I've ever had. I never thought about getting married ... wasn't boy crazy like a lot of my friends. But this is it! Everyone's at the church waiting. Waiting for me. All I have to do is walk down the aisle, say 'I do' and live happily ever after. Easy! But it doesn't feel right. Marge, my best friend and my maid of honor looks in the back seat at me and says, "What do you want us to do?"

"Keep driving," I say. And her boyfriend drives past the church for the second time.

What a disgrace I am to my family. Pregnant at nineteen. Had to get married, that's what they say. I'm sure every tongue in town has been wagging since they found out. How could such a thing happen to such a nice family? My dad hasn't spoken to me since the day I told my parents. And damn it if it doesn't confirm everything he ever said about girls that always made me so darn bloody

freakin' mad. "No use wasting your money sending them to college. They'll just get married and spend the rest of their lives raising kids."

So what do I go and do? I've turned out just the way he said I would. I hate the fact he was right. I hate it and I hate myself. I only finished three semesters of college. He already prepaid my tuition for the year and I wanted to finish out my second year. And I could have. I would have. But no, he wasn't going to have that.

Even though it was too late to get his money refunded, he wasn't going to let me go back to school in my condition for everyone to see. You have to keep up appearances you know. It wasn't even about the money for crying out loud. He came driving in the driveway last night with a new car and this morning he's dressed in a new suit and there's a diamond ring on his finger that I never saw before.

And I'm meant to feel cheap and dirty and ashamed and worthless.

And it worked. I do. I do. I do feel like that. I've basically been dis-owned and the only choice I have is to walk straight down that aisle, which I will. So just pull over. I'm ready as I'm ever going to be.

CALENDAR 1968

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 19

If You Make
a Mess
Clean It Up

July 26
1968

when he was forty-eight

What a sorry mess Nancy has gotten herself into. Pauline paid her an unexpected visit today. Their house was spotless. But when she opened the refrigerator, the only thing she found was a partial gallon of milk and a few half-used jars of baby food. Nancy told her she hadn't gone to the grocery store yet. But when Pauline offered to drive her she begged off saying she'd do it later on. Pauline says Nancy is just skin and bones but the baby is round, rosy, and happy. And

Nancy loves him to pieces.

Nancy has been beating the pavement trying to find a part-time job. Says she's been to every business in town. No luck. Said she'd been back to Burger King twice. Begged the manager to give her a job. Everywhere she goes she gets the same old story, she's either under qualified or over qualified for the job. They can't afford a babysitter so when her husband is home she goes out and cleans people's houses,

hangs wallpaper, and anything else she can find to make extra money. She takes care of her friend's baby during the day and works the night shift at the dress factory. Walks out there alone, over two miles in the dark. Says she's scared to death walking back home after she gets out at eleven. She can't take their car. Her husband bought some foreign job that looks good but won't run. He carools to work, so he's in no hurry to fix it. Pauline thinks the real story is they don't

have the money for the repairs. All I can say is she made her choices. She'll just have to work it out.

Pauline said Nancy has some nonsense in her head about going back to college and finishing her degree. Her husband just graduated and has a teaching job lined up for September. Now she's got this crazy idea that she should have the opportunity to finish. How can she even entertain an idea like that in her situation? I thought

she was smarter than that. I paid for the boys to go to college. They're the bread-winners in the family. But I'm not wasting any more money on educating girls. I can tell you that. Sounds like her husband has no patience with her idea either. At least he has some sense.

Pauline was planning on staying the night but Nancy had wet diapers hanging on clothes lines strung upstairs in the spare bedroom. It seems she

bought an old wringer washing machine for ten dollars so she can keep up with the laundry. She said the laundromat was bleeding her dry and she couldn't get the clothes there without the car. She and her friend, who also has a baby, wash clothes every other day in that old machine. They hang the clothes out on nice days and in the spare bedroom on rainy days. So not having a place to sleep, Pauline came on home.

Pauline was all upset when she came in. Thought we should try to help them out. Maybe send them a few dollars. I asked her if Nancy had asked for help and she said, "No."

I told Pauline if Nancy needed our help she'd ask for it. Otherwise we were staying out of it. I'm not going to set a precedent of handing out money to our children. I have enough expenses of my own. She got herself into this mess, she'll have to get herself out of it

and I don't want to hear any more about it.

CALENDAR 1968

JANUARY

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APRIL

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MAY

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 20

What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger

July 26
1968

when she was twenty-one

My slender body cuts through the surface of the scalding hot water like the blade of a knife and comes to rest on the smooth porcelain lining of the claw-footed bathtub.

The heat from the water coaxes the weariness from my muscles. Leaning back, I trace the fine system of spidery cracks in the plaster ceiling above my head. My body appears distant and small illuminated by the pool of harsh light emanating from the bare bulb dangling above the

surface of the still water.

Slowly, sliding up to a sitting position, I reach towards the shelf for my husband's old Gillette double-edged razor. Twisting the handle opens the razor's head into a gaping mouth. I remove the old rusty blade then slip a fresh sliver of steel from its paper wrapper. Mesmerized by the glint of electric blue dancing off the cool metal, I turn the shimmering blade over and over in the palm of my hand.

Despair stealthily enters the room
and settles itself beside me. I
pause, set the blade into posi-
tion, and screw the handle tight.
Watching the sleek swatch of
smooth skin that trails behind the
sharp blade helps satisfy my
desire for order as the night tucks
itself tightly around the long day.

The razor works its way from my
ankle, up my shin, over the top
of my knee and begins a steady
climb along the length of my
thigh. Swerving inward between
my legs it presses hard across

one light blue vein ... then
another ... then another.

My thoughts work their way back
... back down to the bottom of the
stairs where I ask my husband
once more where he is going. He
turns his head and responds by
depositing a large pool of green-
ish-yellow phlegm on the polished
wood floor between my feet.

Riveted in place with dread, I
watch the putrid glob slowly spread
out, into a pool of hot darkness.
Behind the closed door he fades

into the intoxicating night.

Time stretches out backward then
forward as my mind travels over
the day ...

Diapers changed. Breakfast made.

Sheets washed. Furniture polished.

Slowly I rise from the tub,

Vacuum run. Bills paid. Tears wiped.

step on to the pale-pink bath mat,

Errands run. Mouths fed. Nap given.

Clothes pressed.

dry my flesh with a worn terry-
cloth towel,

Buttons sewn. Apples peeled. Sauce

cooked.

pull my cotton nightgown over my
head,

*Supper on. Dishes washed. Pans
scoured. Garbage out.*

drag a brush methodically
through my hair,

*Rugs shaken. Kitchen swept. Floor
mopped.*

find my way to the side of my
son's crib,

Toys picked up. Stories read.

struggle to memorize each
feature of his face, his honey
brown curls,

Prayers said. Songs hummed.

make my way along the seem-
ingly endless corridor to my room,

Curtains drawn.

and slide between the fresh clean
sheets.

Lights out.

By the time my husband stumbles
into the room through the first
slice of dawn I have drifted so far
away he can't reach me.

Cross my heart and hope to die.

CALENDAR 1971

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 21

Everyone Has Problems

August 7
1971

when he was fifty-one

One ... two ... three ... four.
Pull yourself through the
water. Eight ... nine ... ten ...
eleven strokes. If only life was
this effortless. Everywhere I
go these days I face a problem.
Problems at work. Problems at
home. How do other men man-
age these kinds of pressures?
Same way I do, I guess. Drink
booze, pop pills, and have
affairs.

Nineteen ... twenty ... twenty-
one ... I haven't seen my family
in a week and what happens?

My wife is in bed sound asleep.
What's left of supper, which
isn't much, is cold. The chil-
dren are all swimming and
barely register I'm here. Nancy
backs away from me as soon as
I get out of the car. My grand-
son acts like he's afraid of me.
I pay for the family to have a
nice vacation at the lake and
they barely even acknowledge
I exist.

What's here for me anymore?
I told Pauline I wasn't going to
abandon her. Everything would

appear normal. I'd always look out for her, take care of the kids, she didn't need to worry. Can't she be satisfied with that? But I guess that's not good enough for her. She barely speaks to me any longer.

Worse yet. Now that Walter's left Virginia, she's miserable. Completely unreasonable. She wants me with her all the time. All we do is fight. She can't understand why I can't just leave Pauline and my children and come live with her and

her six kids. They're Walter's children, not mine. Thank goodness. At least we think none of them are mine. God! What a mess I've gotten myself into. I've just got to count the strokes and try to take my mind off it ... forty-nine ... fifty ... fifty-one years old and my life is a shambles.

What's the sense of it all? I'm not appreciated. I can't seem to do enough to satisfy anyone. I'm torn between what I want to do and what I should

do. There are so many people involved, so many to try to please. How did it get so complicated?

Seventy-six ... seventy-seven ... seventy-eight ... Why can't I just please myself? And what would please me? I'm not even sure I know anymore. I can't stand the constant demands, the unrealistic expectations. I'm tired of it. All of it. Tired and exhausted.

Ninety-one ... ninety-two ...

I haven't been paying attention ... maybe I've gone too far this time. If I ever went under out here they'd never find me. That's for sure. Who would even know? Who would even care? Maybe that's the answer. Just keep on swimming until you can't swim anymore. Isn't that what life is all about anyway?

CALENDAR 1971

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 22

Look Out for Others

August 7
1971

when she was twenty-four

Finally I coax my son out of the water after his "one more final last, please, please, pretty please, I promise" dip of the day. Teeth chattering, he shakes all the way up the bank. As he gets closer I can see the goose bumps on his tanned body and those telltale deep-purple lips. I wrap him up in a towel, and rub my hands briskly over the surface of the towel warming his small body. Scooping him up in my arms, I pull him close to me and rock him from side to side. He looks longingly back towards the lake where

my brother and sisters are still screaming with delight as they jump fearlessly off the end of the dock into the water. I count them ... one ... two ... three ... all present and accounted for.

But that's odd. Where's my dad? I quiz my son, "Where did Grandpa go?" He points out toward the water. "By the dock?" I ask. "No, out there." Far out on the lake I spot one lone swimmer getting rhythmically smaller and smaller with each stroke.

My body stiffens as I lock my father in my gaze. I've never known him to swim this far from shore. Whatever is he doing? He can't be trying to swim across the lake. It's way too far. But why doesn't he turn back? The light is beginning to fade and I'm having difficulty keeping my eyes on him.

My thoughts ricochet inside my head. What's going on here? What should I do? What can I do? Mom asked, no, begged me to come to the lake for the week. She simply said she wanted me

to be with her and my younger brother and sisters. I thought she sensed I was having a rough time of it. Perhaps she thought it might do me some good to get away for a few days. Maybe she somehow knew how the bruises got on my son's cheek, about the fist fight my husband was involved in at the department store, or my worry that now he might lose his job. But that wasn't it at all. How silly of me. She has no way of knowing any of this. Like everyone else, she probably thinks I have the perfect marriage.

When I arrived at the lake my mother's reason for asking me to come made perfect sense.

She's barely capable of caring for herself, let alone the children.

Dragging herself out of bed at noon, she hardly manages to stay up long enough to eat the lunch I have prepared. We have to persuade her to sit in the lawn chair for a half-hour and watch

us swim. If it's a good day, a really good day, she'll agree to go with us for a short walk, but she always begs off at the end of the driveway and returns to the

cabin to lie down until supper. By seven o'clock she's in bed for the night. She coughs a lot but is always vague about what the doctor has to say. I'm not convinced she is telling me the truth when she says there is nothing physically wrong. Maybe she doesn't want me to know how serious it really is?

And my dad. What about him? Out there swimming away from us across the surface of the darkening water. Even if he turns back now, right now, this very second,

I'm not sure he'll be able to make it back to shore.

Think! Think! I need to think what to do! I've got to stay calm. I don't want to scare the children. Mom is asleep and she wouldn't be of any help if I woke her. There's no boat. No one else around. It's all up to me.

Dad arrived this evening for the first time this week. As soon as he got out of the car I could smell liquor on his breath and I felt myself fill up with anger. Where

has he been every night this week? Doesn't he know how sick Mom is? Doesn't he care about her? Doesn't he care about any of us?

I continue to stare out across the water and I'm afraid. I'm afraid he's going to die. I'm afraid I'm going to stand here and watch him go under. I scream inside my head. "Turn back. Turn back! Please don't do this to me! Don't do this to us! Turn back! Please! Please! Please!"

"Mom, Mom, you're squeezing
me too tight," my son says. I
loosen my grip and set him gently
down on the ground beside me. I
take a hold of his small hand and
look back out at the water. And I
wait.

CALENDAR 1980

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 23

Keep Your Promises

May 18
1980

when he was sixty

“**Y**ou promised me,” that’s what Virginia said. “You promised me that when your children were all grown and married you’d leave Pauline and come live with me.”

I guess I probably did tell her that once or twice. Maybe even more often than that. But just to keep her happy. Keep her from nagging me. But I can’t leave now. Hope she’s not going to cause a big stink over this. I’m sixty years old for crying out loud. I don’t need this.

People and situations change over time. Does she really expect that I can walk away from this life? People respect me, count on me. Sure, when we were young and foolish we said and did a lot of things we never followed through on. When we first got involved we did plan to run off together. Leave Pauline, Walter, and all the children. Go off and start a new life together. Then we came to our senses after awhile and realized we couldn’t leave thirteen children behind.

That was twenty years ago.
Now there are other considerations. This is my home, it's familiar. It's where the children come and bring their children. It's where I park my car, keep the tractor, raise my tomatoes. It's the only semblance of a normal life I have. I can't give this up and go live in a shabby apartment somewhere out in the middle of nowhere.

I've been faithful to Virginia all these years. Haven't I? She's had a pretty good time with

me. Gone to fancy dinners and banquets, traveled around the country, stayed at the best hotels. And I've given her money and gifts. Even bought her jewelry and fancy clothes. What more can I do?

If I left now, look at all the people I'd let down. People at church, in the community, friends I've had all my life. I'm a justice of the peace. What would all those people think of me if I left my wife after nearly forty years? It would shatter

their confidence. If you're going to do something like that, you have to do it when you're young, so you have time to build up your good name again. Have time to get people to trust you again. I don't have time for that now. I have a comfortable life here with Pauline and I get to see Virginia every week. If this whole affair were to come out in the open, it should have happened years ago, not now. It's way too late.

CALENDAR 1980

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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JULY

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 24

You're No
Different Than
Anyone Else

May 18
1980

when she was thirty-three

They picked up my son after school and drove him over to the SPCA to see the puppies. With the clarity of vision that a six-pack of beer can provide in less than thirty minutes, my husband and his drinking buddy Dave decided it would be a good idea "to get the kid a pet." The only good sense they shared between them that particular afternoon was deciding it would be best if Dave left before I came home from work. The minute I came in the door I was greeted by "Guthrie" the new puppy my twelve-year-old son

immediately promised to take care of "forever and ever."

Refusing to take responsibility for the reprehensible behavior of two drunks, I told my husband he would have to be the one to break my son's heart by telling him the dog had to be returned. Of course he didn't do it. Quite predictably, the eviction notice came two weeks later. We were politely reminded, in case we had forgotten, we had broken the terms of our lease and had thirty days to find a place to live with our

new dog.

I still fell for him. How sleazy is that?

I'm still trying to forget the details of the ensuing nightmare of purchasing a "fixer-upper" in the country using the two thousand dollars, I had somehow managed to save, as our down payment. All I can say is that it had a lot in common with a shot-gun wedding. But what I really want to confess is that I fell in love with Dave. It was never my intention. I suppose it never is. After all, he was my husband's friend. Undoubtedly his best friend.

The truth is, Dave spent more time with my husband over the next few years than I ever did. They were always together. When they got out of school, after teaching all day, they drove in tandem, first to the corner store for beer and then out to our place. My husband would come in the house, brush by me without a word, and stay only long enough to take off his jacket and tie and change into his blue jeans. Then

he was out the door. Cruisin'. That's what they called it. Cruising around the countryside drinking and driving and listening to the radio. Dave was young and single. Killing time until something better came along. My husband seemed to want to forget the bad time he thought he was having. So I guess he was looking for something better to come along too.

Before long Dave started coming inside the house instead of waiting out in his car while my hus-

band changed his clothes. Unlike my husband, he actually spoke to me, was polite and friendly. Even acted like he cared what I was doing and thinking and saying. That's pretty charming when you're not used to it.

After awhile Dave began to convince my husband to stay around the house a little longer, play catch with my son a few minutes, take time to fix the broken light in the garage, or play one game of monopoly with me. I began to smile and laugh and look forward

to something other than chores and a cold shoulder. I understood why my husband and my son liked Dave so much. He was a fun guy to be around.

One afternoon when my son was off visiting friends, Dave asked me to go cruisin' with him and my husband. I slid into the front seat between them. Before we had backed out of the driveway I felt Dave's leg brush up against mine. I looked over at him and he smiled back at me and I knew I was in love. I felt simultaneously

exhilarated and ashamed.

Dave was a wise and good man. He stopped coming to the house as often and slowly drifted away from our lives. He never kissed me, never held me, never laid beside me. What he did was reach some hidden place inside me and let me know it was possible to love a thoughtful, caring man, and maybe he would love me too.

CALENDAR 1988

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NOVEMBER

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Father's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 25

Sometimes the Best Thing to Do Is Nothing

January 23
1988

when he was sixty-seven

I've had to issue five more domestic violence arrest warrants this month. All to residents of the trailer park down the road. Too many people living too close together, that's the only way I can explain it.

That, and the fact that many of them are unemployed and they spend their days drinking.

I know some of their parents and I wouldn't be surprised if many of the people I see weren't abused as children themselves. The abused often become the abuser. I suppose

there's domestic violence across the board in all economic brackets, but you don't hear too much about it in middle and upper income families. Probably because it's swept under the rug.

I'm at a complete loss as to what to do in this case. It's hit too close to home. We've always stayed out of our children's affairs. And that's probably what we should be doing now. But Pauline wants me to do something. Call in a favor.

Have him arrested. But on what grounds? There hasn't been a complaint. Our grandson is twenty-one, so I suppose he could have his father arrested. But I'm not sure he would do that. And what would the ramifications be if he did? Do you want something like that out in the open? It could do more harm than good. What a mixed-up mess.

I told Pauline to wait and see what happens. Give it a few days. Maybe it will all blow

over. But she insisted on calling Nancy at the University tonight. Told her she needed to get her son out of that house. Said he wasn't safe living with his father any longer. Now I guess it's up to Nancy to decide what to do. We'll wait and see.

I can't imagine what her options are. She's at graduate school under a scholarship that pays her tuition. But her sister told us she's living in a shoebox of an apartment, with no furniture, in a bad section of

the city. Doesn't have a penny
to her name. She says Nancy's
lost a lot of weight and looks
like hell. She's been moonlight-
ing at another college because
of some difficulty with her
student loan. So who knows
what she'll do. The truth is you
never know what she's going to
do next.

CALENDAR 1988

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JULY

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 26

Forgive But Don't Forget

January 23
1988

when she was forty-one

My son was the first one to tell me. I was getting ready to go back to the art building to work on a project for my graduate print-making class when I heard the knock on my door. My twenty-one year old son stood before me bruised and cut beyond belief. I brought him in and sat him down in the kitchen of my small apartment. And he told me ...

... told me about Saturday night when his dad got drunk and came after him. Started beating him. How he tried to get away from

him. How his dad wouldn't let up. How he had fought back. How they'd punched at each other over and over and over again. Told me how they'd broken the lamp and busted the leg off the coffee table and smashed all the ceramic pots my houseplants lived in. Then he paused and I looked him over. Made him take off his shirt so I could see it all. Asked him where it hurt the most. Asked him what his father looked like. He laughed a little and said, "He looks pretty bad too." Then his face changed and he said,

"There's more ...

... he wouldn't stop, Mom. He kept punching me in the face and we were both bleeding. I'm strong, Mom, but he outweighs me by almost a hundred pounds. I got away from him and I ran up the stairs and he was coming after me. I thought he was going to kill me...beat me to death. I got my shotgun and I ran back and stood at the head of the stairs and I pointed it down at him Mom. And I told him, "if you come any closer I'm going to kill you." And,

Mom, the truth is I would have ... I would have put a bullet through him." And then my son started to cry.

"Okay, okay," I said, "calm down. It's over now. You're here. You're safe. It's going to be all right. You have to understand," I told him, "you have to understand your dad isn't mad at you. He's mad at me. He's been mad at me for a long time. Mad because I got pregnant, mad because he had to marry me, mad because I didn't act the way he wanted

me to act and I didn't do what he wanted me to do. And mostly mad because I'm here at graduate school. So keep telling yourself over and over he wanted to beat me up but he didn't dare. So he beat you up instead. Do you understand me? Do you understand what I'm telling you? You just took my beating. It wasn't for anything you did. It was for what I did or didn't do. Can you understand that?" Then I told him to go lie down and get some rest.

He was asleep before I knew it.

I went in to take a shower and while I tried to wrap my mind around what he had just told me I vomited three times in the tub and watched it spiral down the drain. Then I remembered a promise I'd made to my husband sixteen years earlier ... "if you ever, I mean ever, lay a finger on my son again, so help me God I'll leave you."

CALENDAR 1998

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Father's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 27

Set a Good Example

September 17
1998

when he was seventy-eight

Well, Nancy's finally gone and done it. Left her husband. I'm surprised. I thought everything was going well enough for her. She got her degree, two of them in fact. She finally gets a decent job. Buys a building for her studio. Has everything she ever wanted. Then one fine day after thirty-two years of marriage she just up and leaves her husband. I'll never understand my daughters. All of them married and divorced. Nancy will be the fourth. Their mother tried to set a good example. But

they're all so strong willed. No wonder they can't stay married.

Nancy told Pauline it was a hard decision for her to make. Said she'd just had enough. There was too much that couldn't be fixed. Probably there's more to it. But she doesn't tell us much about what she thinks or what she does. Seems they tried marriage counseling once again. That's what they do nowadays. Guess it doesn't always work.

I have no idea how she plans to make it on her own. But I guess she'll have to figure it out.

Virginia had a lot to say about Nancy's situation. In fact, before it was all said and done, I wished I'd never told her.

"Good for her!" she said.

"What do you mean by that?"

I asked.

"I've listened to you talk about Nancy for forty years. Sounded like she fought for everything she ever got. Raised their son

on a shoestring. Put herself through college against all odds. Got the job she always wanted. Was brave enough to make a tough decision after all these years. I say, 'Good for her.'"

Then she went on to say that she wished she'd stood up for what she wanted years ago and been willing to accept the consequences if she didn't get it. Then she wouldn't be in the sorry state she's in today.

"Sorry state?" I said. "What do you mean by that?"

And she said, "Yes, a sorry state. Did you ever stop to consider for one moment of your entire important fancy-pants life what it might be like being a prostitute to a married man for forty years? Playing second fiddle to a wife and family who live the high-life in the nice house, in the nice neighborhood, with the nice friends, while I've had to scrap by on welfare getting bits of your

attention when it worked into your schedule? I'm glad she has the guts to leave her husband and try to find happiness in her life. Why stay in a relationship if it makes you unhappy? I've pampered and supported you my entire life and have received a lot of heartache for my poor decisions. Wish I'd been as strong as her. If I had it to do over again, I'd want to be more like her."

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NOVEMBER

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Nancy's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 28

It's Good to Have a Plan

September 17
1998

when she was fifty-two

Raspberry-filled Archway cookies and milk. That's all I can stomach. Other than that I can't stand to buy, prepare, or eat food. It keeps things simple ... the refrigerator stays clean ... there's no need to cook ... no dishes to wash ... it's easy.

I sleep in my clothes because I haven't decided if it's better for people to know I'm a woman living here alone or if it's better for them to think the house is still vacant, like it has been for two years. The streetlight is out, the

house across the street is vacant and there are no neighbors in sight. If I scream no one will hear me. Maybe that's comforting. I mean, if I felt like screaming I could. It might make me feel better. But then again what if I need help? No one will come.

I figure if someone breaks into the ground floor I'll go down the second-floor fire escape and run across the field and over the bridge to the house of the man who mows the lawn. Or I could just hide in the bushes out back

until they go away.

A few nights ago I woke to the sound of an arrhythmic idling motor. An old paneled van had pulled up over by the barn. Out of bed and into my shoes like a shot in the dark, I crawled on my hands and knees over to the window and peered out, just as a blinding spotlight coming from the van swept across the yard and onto the side of the house. I ducked down and froze in place as my bedroom flooded with light. Poised ready to bolt, I waited.

Before long the van pulled back onto the road and slowly drove on by.

I'm not going to worry about them coming back. Maybe they will, but I have my plan. There are bigger things to worry about. Like tomorrow ... or the rest of my life ... all the unknowns.

When I told my parents I'd left my husband and was living in my studio they were okay with it. Well, sort of. They really didn't have much to say at all. My father

wanted to know if my husband was despondent or suicidal. When I said, "no" my dad seemed satisfied. That is for the first two weeks ... until my husband had a heart attack.

My son called me and gave me the news. I came back from New York City, where I was teaching, and spent the next two weeks living back at my former home and visiting my husband at the hospital every day. By the time he came home and a few weeks had passed, I realized nothing had

changed between us. I left again. This time no one was happy.

My mother came right out and said it, "Now that your husband has had a heart attack you can't leave him. You'll have to stay with him, no matter what." The following day my son called to say he didn't want to tell me what to do, but he thought if I didn't go back home his father would die.

All I've thought about for days is, "the two people I love the most want me to go back. Back to a

place I can not be, a place that took me more than thirty years to get myself away from."

As I see the problem, it boils down to this: if I go back to my husband, I will die, if I don't go back, he will die. Someone has to die. Either way I will be the murderer. Whose life is more important? His or mine? His message to me has always been that he was more important. So I should go back. But I can't make myself.

After giving it a lot of thought I realize there's only one way out and I've formed my plan. Quick and clean. Just in time too, because this very afternoon my therapist asked me, "Do you have a plan?" "Yes," I said, "I do. A simple and effective plan." "Will you tell me what it is?" he asked. "No. You don't need to know." "Then will you call me if you decide to carry out your plan?" he asked. "No. If I decide to carry it out I

won't have any reason to call
you."

"If I write you a prescription for
anti-depressants, will you get it
filled?" he asked.

"No. I don't take drugs."

"Do you have any questions for
me?" he asked.

"Yes. Have any of your other
clients taken their own lives?"

CALENDAR 2006

JANUARY

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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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AUGUST

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Father's DIARY and Daily Reminder

Chapter 29

Things Don't Last Forever

November 24
2005

when he was eighty-five

The call came one year ago today. Right after our Thanksgiving dinner. All the family was here, the children, their husbands and wives, the grandchildren too. Pauline said it was Mr. Bellinger on the phone ... Gerald Bellinger. "Who would call on a family holiday?" she wanted to know.

I knew immediately. It was Virginia's family. Gerald Bellinger was the code name we had arranged to use over forty years ago. Her sons used

this name if they needed to contact me with urgent news.

Before I retired as director of the agency, Virginia called me at the office every day and used her own name with impunity. Our involvement was certainly no secret there. Mr. Bellinger called me at home from time to time, once when Virginia was in an automobile accident, several times when she desperately needed money after Walter left, and of course when she had one of her many

nervous breakdowns. But there hadn't been much need for our Mr. Bellinger since I retired twenty years ago and my children were all grown and married. I called Virginia once or twice every day when Pauline was out of the house, in another room, or after she had gone to bed at night. And I spent every Wednesday with Virginia.

It was her youngest son who relayed the news ... "Our mother died early this morning. We

thought you'd want to know."

It was quite a shock. We sat in her living room and I held her hand the day before. She seemed fine. She made our lunch. We talked. Of course she had some medical problems, but nothing out of the ordinary really. I couldn't imagine how she could have died so suddenly. Then he told me the rest of the story. She had sent a friend to the store for a bottle of aspirin. She took a massive overdose and died of internal

CALENDAR 2006

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MARCH

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JULY

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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Nancy's
DIARY
and
Daily Reminder

Chapter 30

It Could Always
Be Worse

November 24
2006

when she was sixty

My dad isn't doing well today. It's his heart. He's filling up with fluid again. So much so that he couldn't button his pants around his waist this morning or get his feet into his shoes.

He's noticeably gone downhill since last Thanksgiving. I can remember he got tired last year and went to bed right after dinner. Before I left for home he seemed listless. But during our meal he seemed alert and talkative. Quite like his old self. I remember thinking what a bright man he is. He

can talk to anyone about anything. He's always been so curious about new technology and gadgets of any kind. If a salesman came to the door, he'd invite him in and talk to him for hours, inevitably buying "the first of its kind." He couldn't wait to get a computer, and he bought a cell phone soon after they came out. Even I don't have a cell phone.

This year he's different. He doesn't remember how to turn on his computer or dial the phone. Numbers confuse him. He only

knows it's time to eat because someone tells him so. He used to enjoy TV in the evening. Now the strange voices and flashing images only agitate him. Although he's lived in this house for fifty years, he's forgotten the way to the bathroom or how to find the front door. He's been calling me "Jennifer" for the past few days. Today he tells me he's down on the farm and he's having trouble herding a hundred cows across the road. Then he asks me where his mother is.

For as long as I can remember he was the one to say grace before we ate supper and he always gave a special prayer before our Thanksgiving meal. Today there was an awkward moment when he couldn't link the words together to form the blessing. After several tries he fell silent and stared at his empty plate. The rest of us looked around at each other teary eyed. Luckily my oldest brother had the presence of mind to pick up the thread and finish the blessing for him.

We should probably take him to the emergency room. We did that last time he started to retain fluid. It was on a weekend and they couldn't do much for him until the heart specialist arrived the following Monday. The cardiologist told us they could treat him but to expect this to happen again. There wasn't a lot that could be done. It would simply be a matter of time before his heart gave out. So we talked it over among ourselves and decided to enjoy our day together and take him in to the hospital the day

after Thanksgiving.

After the pies were eaten, the dishes washed and put away and most everyone had left for home, my mother told me that my father kept her up night after night telling her that he wanted to end his life. He begged her for the keys to his car and rummaged through drawers all over the house looking for them. Who knows what gruesome plan he had for his demise. We tried to imagine every conceivable scenario. My brother opened and examined the

safe in the cellar, and searched my father's file cabinets and desk hoping to find his pistol. The car was removed from the premises, the doors to the outside were locked, medications were hidden. Extra staff was hired to watch him every waking hour. We all kept our phones close by, expecting to hear the worst.

Eventually "the worst" did come. He didn't remember ever owning a car or what keys were used for. His hands shook so badly he couldn't hold on to his fork, let

alone a pistol. He forgot about going outside and turned inward to worry about "keeping the woodsmen on task cutting down the hardwood forest with their handsaws. How were they going to get the decaying bodies that were concealed inside the trees to the canning factory before nightfall?"