

The Place In Between

This one is for Sara Marcella.

Mi hermosa Nightingale.

*"The gods visit the sins of the fathers upon
the children." Euripides*

STATESIDE, 1986

Rusty knew there wasn't going to be much left of her. She'd been inside Del far too long. She was most likely already more than half-eaten. He waited patiently, staying put in the corner of the bedroom, hiding behind a tiny dust bunny. He'd been there for weeks, maybe months, even. Rusty was single-minded in his concentration. The ghost had to save his step-daughter, Luci from her prison. He had this one mission left to complete. Then, if he succeeded, perhaps all could still be forgiven.

Such an advantage, being a sentient ghost: he could make himself as large or as tiny as he wanted. Rusty was still tiny. As tiny as the dust bunny he was hiding behind.

Rusty had to wait until Del was alone and in a deep sleep before he could attempt another rescue. The girl with the dreadlocks Del had shackled up with concerned the ghost. There was much more to her than met the eye. The ghost had to watch out for her and be very careful. If the girl caught him going after Luci, his goose would be thoroughly cooked. But she was gone right now. This was unusual. It seemed as though the girl never left Del. Rusty wondered where she went.

Del was sleeping by himself on the bed but the sleep was restless. The ghost would have to wait

until Del was deeper down the rabbit hole of sleep than that. Rusty would have to stay tiny and take no chances. Being so small was actually a great boon to the ghost, one that he would try to use to his supreme advantage.

Finally, the ghost could hear Del's breathing change. It lengthened and softened. The air entered slowly and left just as placidly. Now Del was deep enough for the ghost to go inside of him and hunt for Luci.

The ghost grew a little larger in size. He needed to make it across the carpet before daylight brought the sun shining through the window. He couldn't have Del awaken before helping Luci escape. Rusty ran from the dust bunny that now stood no taller than his ankles. Then he darted from a dirty sock to a musky pair of panties to the edge of the bed. The ghost climbed the comforter, scaling the mattress mountain range quickly.

Rusty hid briefly behind a rolling hillock of bed sheets, detecting no movement. Del was still breathing evenly - still sleeping soundly. The ghost crept along the periphery of Del's giant outline. He was seeking the healed and closed stoma in Del's belly. Del lay on his left side so that his stoma opening was now just a touch above the ghost's head. Rusty grew himself a wee bit more in order to face the hole squarely. He took two fingers on his right hand and forced them through Del's coarse and sticky scar tissue. The colon gas whistled out, whipping in a brief fury the ghost's hair in a stinky wind. He was dead already, so any stink less than his own completely bypassed the ghost. He knew this might hurt the sleeping man. The hole the ghost was making was small, but he couldn't take any chances of Del awakening in mid-rescue.

When Del didn't budge an inch, the ghost leaned in to him. He pushed his hand all the way into the healed scar tissue. He ignored the small leak of

liquefied stool that splashed his arm, all the way up to the elbow. He slid in the other hand and pulled the hole open enough for the ghost to slip in. First he pushed his head in and then, gaining purchase on the inside of Del's abdominal cavity, he pulled himself the rest of the way in.

The ghost stood up inside of Del's thick, spongy colon and looked all around. He had no idea how he would find Luci, but he knew she was in here somewhere. Rusty saw it happen. Luci had to be someplace nearby. He called out to her, but she didn't answer. Not knowing what else to do, the ghost began walking. Right down the middle of a nice straight section of Del's lower intestine, searching frantically for her. Hoping against hope she wasn't already gone; that nothing remained of beautiful Luci.

Rusty grew out a fingernail until a long sharpened length emerged. As a nervous tic, he began to re-open the scars on his chest. The blood fell in drippy sheets as he went along Del's lower colon, his feet squish-sucking, desperately seeking Luci. He was hoping against hope that when he did finally locate her, she was more than just a big old pile of her bones.

Wishful thinking.

The dreadlocked girl was sitting miniscule and cross-legged on a red blood cell, enjoying a magic carpet ride.

She rode Del's veins, stopping where the blood drains into his gastrointestinal tract.

She left the blood vessel and dropped down into the sleeping man's colon. She landed on her feet with a squish.

The girl fell in to a lock-step behind the ghost. She had known this ghost for decades now, long before Rusty had died.

The two of them had some business to conclude that was long overdue. She had followed him as he began this quest for his long-estranged step-daughter. However, Rusty had her to reckon with first.

The ghost was surprised. He thought he had escaped the dreadlocked girl, but she wasn't finished with Rusty yet.

Not by a long shot.

Her eyes began to glow red as she reached for him.

ONE

Eight months earlier....

Delano sat at attention. He was sitting up straight and tall on the very edge of his bed. He held a target loaded .45 and waited for his cheating wife to come home. The five shot ball loaded clip-fed gun felt both heavy and comfortable in his sweaty hand.

She's going to like this one, he thought. *The dog-fucking coke-whore is going to get a real kick out of it.*

The camos Del wore as the Ordinance Safety Officer at the pistol range were rolled up to his elbows. He stared at the *forever* tattoo on the underside of his forearm. He had it inked for his and Lucita's fifth wedding anniversary. It used to be Del's favorite one. It had beautiful lines and vibrant colors. The tattoo seemed trite and ridiculous now.

The cleaning kit sat open on the deck between his boots. The gun oil and brushes dropped as he'd used them. There was no more need to be his usual meticulous and methodical self. As a career Navy man, Del took a big chance sneaking the gun off the base. He knew he'd be in deep shit if he ever got caught with the range pistol. It was not like him at all. Del usually chose the straight and narrow path. He was everything that his father – the Sergeant – was not.

He didn't do drugs and he didn't drink to excess. He never raped or tortured anyone. Del's father could not say the same. His old man had been involved in both the *My Lai* and *Co Luy* fiascos. He served, apparently with a certain cold, cruel distinction, under the now infamous Lieutenant Rusty. And although the sergeant never had to serve any prison time for the murders committed, he had also showed little remorse for his actions. He had even visited the lieutenant in the brig a few times over the years – the disgraced officer was probably still rotting in a jail somewhere. Or maybe he was dead. Del didn't know and he didn't care to keep track. The sergeant himself had died a number of years ago. Near the end, there was nothing much left of Del's father. He left this world a burnt out, drugged up shell of his former self. It was quite poetic, really.

The Sergeant's myriad sins had absolutely nothing to do with Del and the life of honor he'd built for himself and Luci. That's part of why his wife's indiscretions hurt him so much. Del had tried his whole life to do the right thing. He wanted to re-establish the family line of distinguished career Navy men. Del wanted to be like his grandfather and his grandfather's father. He wanted to follow the rules and be the good guy. Del joined the Navy and happily did everything right and above board. He wanted to be the polar opposite of his father, the baby killer. Del wanted to be the man who returned honor and respect back to the family name.

So, after all he'd been through, after repeatedly bending over backwards for that bitch-twat of a junkie-ass wife of his, being sent those horrible pictures pushed Del off the bow and into the deep drink. A bullet seemed to be the only answer.

He looked to the pistol again, still not believing that he was actually holding the illegal firearm.

It wasn't supposed to ever leave the range, but Del needed it.

He was waiting for her to come home, so he could harm her in the surest way he knew how.

Del had never done anything like this before. Breaking the rules wasn't in his character. But neither was looking the other way while Luci fucked that piece of shit. Not for the cocaine he gave her. Hell, not for any reason. It wasn't just her indiscretions that got on Del's tits. It was *him*. Sancho was a fucking *derelict*! Beautiful Luci was cheating on Del with a can't-hack-it fucking washout. The guy was a huge flake. One who got booted out of the Navy, but stuck around the periphery. He preyed on weaknesses like Luci's love for cocaine.

Del had hidden their assets from her a long time ago, so she couldn't bankrupt them again. This wasn't her first rodeo. He had sent her to rehab again. Then he requested an emergency transfer to shore duty. The Navy takes care of its own. They sent Del from West Pac to the East Coast. Far enough away, Del had thought. And she had been good for a while; a handful of years, in fact. Then that monkey-fuck Sancho found her.

Del wondered how that had happened. He was curious as to just exactly how they had met. What the circumstances had been. He had thought she was being good and behaving herself. But he wasn't going to ask her. He didn't want to hear her lie again. No matter. Del knew how it would go. Just like the other times in the past. One line would lead to twelve and soon she would be sucking on a crack pipe, like she was sucking on the derelict's dick.

He knew that last part was already happening. He wished he didn't know about the affair. Sancho made sure Del knew. Sancho hated the Navy that kicked him out and all who thrived in it like Del, so you can bet he made sure Del knew all about it:

"Ouch, baby, it hurts..."

"Do you want me to stop?"

"No, Daddy. Please, no..."

Then the rat-fucking bastard actually turns to the lens and winks. The only thing missing was the sordid, off-camera details.

This washout wanted to humiliate Del. There was no other reason to send him those nasty pictures. Luci did not even look like she knew she was being filmed. And Sancho took care to ensure Del knew the cock she was bouncing on was his. Del knew who Sancho was, alright. There was no way he'd be able to forget. Del was hoping Sancho had been put away for good, but guess not. It looked to Del like the moth-erfucker was back.

Well, that's just terrific, Tom! And judging from that exclusive film clip, Del's wife appears to be on a liquid diet, as well. She sure does seem to enjoy it, Tom! Fantastic!

It was too much for Del to handle. He couldn't - strike that - Del *wouldn't* go through that shit with her again.

God damn them. God damn them both.

Del heard Luci's key engage the lock on the front door. He should still be at the Naval Station, but he kind of ran the little show there at the pistol range. Del could cut out early, the .45 notwithstanding, without any issue. He just never did. Today, however, was a special occasion.

"Hey, honey," Del heard himself say. Of course she was startled a little. At least she was by herself. That was something. Del wanted this to be a private affair. *Affair*, Del chortled. What a word. It sounded so painless.

"You home, Del?" Luci called out, stating the obvious and shutting the door.

Del laughed low and smiled cruelly, shaking his head. "Yeah, I'm home," he said.

And ain't you the fucking genius.

Del heard Luci making her way back to the bedroom. He put the .45 between his legs and waited.

Del looked overhead, staring at the tiny cracks and imperfections in the ceiling that he had never noticed before. Just like the first handful of times Luci had pulled this shit. He was done overlooking all the flaws and blemishes in their travesty of a marriage. He was sick of this shit; tired of letting it go. Del would make double-damned sure she would pay for this one. Dearly. When Del was done with her, she'd never do it again. He squeezed the solid butt of the pistol with a death-grip. He began to shake, but only a little.

I'm going to show you I mean business, Luci, dearest. I'm gonna press the no-bullshit end of this gun right into the flawless flesh of your forehead, Del thought wickedly. Yeah, sugar-pop, make you feel it. Make you sweat a little. And then? Two quick pops, baby, right between your beautiful blue eyes.

TWO

Luci stood with her legs apart in the shower stall. The motel room Sancho got for them was only a few miles from base, but far enough away to keep Del from knowing about it. She hoped. Luci knew he'd kick her ass if she was discovered fucking around on him again. But Sancho gave her uncut virgin shit. The most potent crack she had ever smoked. She'd shake the vial until she heard the rock form. It *clink-clinked* around and it'd make her wet. And then when she was high, all she wanted to do was fuck. Sancho was, after all, very handsome.

Luci had seen him for the first time at the Tier II brig. He was striking. Even though Sancho looked like he'd been to hell and back. She saw him coming out as she was going in. Despite being underweight, covered with bruises and a couple of chipped teeth, Luci was blown away. Sancho was a wounded bird and Luci definitely had the wounded bird syndrome. The beaten young man looked downtrodden and lost, but he still smiled a huge, charming smile when he saw her in the out-processing area. Seeing him looking so forlorn made the maternal side of her swell. Luci was coming to sign the paperwork so the military could bury her 'father'. Well, sort of a de-facto step-father: He was sandwiched between her mother's 18th and 20th boyfriend out of 30 or 40 something dudes

before her mother finally died years ago. Luci didn't know why Rusty chose her as the next of kin:

"You have girlfriend, Vietnam Joe?"

"Don't need one, little yella sista. This dumb bitch left us with her little tight daughter right here. She's only half-gook, but slanty enough to get the job done."

Maybe he still held on to those woefully pleasant memories of gang-raping her when she was young.

Her mom would be gone somewhere – usually at work. Rusty would get himself nice and liquored up and call over some friends. Then he would take her down to the basement.

Rusty would shed his clothes, the criss-crossed scars on his chest shining pale white against his red flushed muscle and skin. He and his buddies would run trains on Luci like she was some gook whore they were having fond fevered memories of.

Luci finished squeezing the store-bought douche up her vagina, trying to rinse Sancho's seed out of her. Vague bad memories of telling her mother about being raped by Rusty and his buddies pushed their way to the front of Luci's mind. Showing her how to douche properly was her mother's only response when she told her about the attacks. They were bad memories, for sure. But that mean old bastard finally died. She had the paperwork to prove it.

Luci was going to surprise Del with the proceeds of the life insurance she was sure Rusty would have left for her, but there was nothing. A few bits and pieces of personal effects and not even any retirement benefits. Rusty ended his military prison sentence with a Dishonorable Discharge. He would have lost any benefits Luci might have been entitled to anyway. What a piece of shit. Fucking Rusty. His last act was inconveniencing Luci, without even

leaving her anything in return. And when she finally signed all the paperwork and collected his dog tags, she felt the most uncomfortably horrible feeling she'd ever had. Her entire body felt ice-cold and her thinking became muddled. Luci felt like she'd hurt her back. It was like she had twisted it in some weird way because her back never did feel right after that.

Then, for the first time in years, the thought of cocaine became much, much more than the wistful wishes she'd had since rehab. It became a powerful lustful urge that morphed into a full-blown obsession. It happened right there while she was holding Rusty's tags and signing paper work. She left the brig and saw the hang-dog handsome young man waiting for her. Luci felt an instant relief when she saw the former sailor. She just knew he'd be able to help her with her desires. Luci was right on the money. Sancho knew exactly where to go. It turned out to be a very good thing that she'd kept her 30 mile drive secret from Del, after all.

Christ, she thought, still squeezing the douche. Imagine if Sancho knocked me up. Fuck! She knew she should have made Sancho wear a raincoat, but she always got caught up with the crack and the cock. Luci couldn't help it. She tried what she felt was her best to kick the love of cocaine, but its grip on her was fixed tight. She was fine, she had thought, following her months of rehab. But not now. It seemed that these days the monkey clawed at her constantly. She couldn't escape its magnetic pull. Luci realized now that even when she was in rehab, she was merely going through the motions. Luci knew Del would never understand. Hell, maybe he couldn't. He was such a *Dudley* fucking *Do-Right*, he probably couldn't even conceptualize doing anything he wasn't supposed to. He was a Navy man, after all, and he was comfortable toeing a straight line and obeying direct orders. Luci chafed at the very notion.

Out of the shower, Luci dried herself off and got dressed. She waited impatiently for the anti-anxiety pill Sancho had given her to kick in. She couldn't go home and face Del this twisted but luckily Del never came home early.