

Sample 1

Pastor Steve's voice boomed out of the car speaker, "Do not doubt. Stand firm in your faith. Trust God to smash the obstacles in your path."

I pictured the veins bulging in his neck, his hand pounding the pulpit. I slapped the steering wheel and shouted back, "I trust God. It doesn't matter what Ma says. I will go to The Ark." If hearts smiled, mine was grinning.

The sermon ended and the cassette ejected out of the tape player. As I pulled into the driveway, my headlights shined on Gram's orange Gremlin.

Even though it was a warm July night, a chill ran down my spine. Gram didn't drive at night. When the sun went down, her bottle of Smirnoff came out. Light blared from every window on the first floor and flooded out the open front door. My heart hammered as I hurried up the brick stairs.

Quiet roared through the house. I rushed down the hallway toward the den and stopped. The furniture was cockeyed like we'd been robbed. My pulse pounded in my ears.

"Hello?" I backed toward the front door as I called out. "Anyone here?"

"I'm in the kitchen." It was Gram's hoarse voice.

She sat at the table hunched over a glass of vodka.

"What happened?" I said, afraid to touch anything.

Gram looked up at me with watery eyes. Her arthritic hand clutched an empty package of Camels. "She told BB her head hurt. She fell to the floor." Each word sounded heavy in her mouth.

"Gram, what are you talking about?" I spoke as if she were a deaf person.

"For Chrissakes, Kate, your mother."

Sample 2

I stood outside my parents' bedroom gathering the courage to go inside. I had to find out if Dad blamed me.

The closing music of the late night news trickled into the hallway. Dad couldn't see me, but I saw his bare feet on the bed. Ma's bureau was crowded with cardboard jewelry boxes, perfume bottles, and Hummel figurines. A V.C. Andrews' paperback still lay on her bedside table.

The last time I'd been in there was to help Dad's two sisters pick Ma's outfit for the funeral. We squeezed into her closet, but I had to get out. The clothes brushing against my body felt like a hundred of Ma's arms trying to touch me.

When my sisters and I stood at her casket, we stared at the dark pantsuit she'd never worn before. None of us said a word or shed a tear. I wondered if Pam and BB were also afraid that Ma might spring up and yell at us.

The sudden silence in the hallway meant Dad had turned the TV off. I stepped closer to the door and knocked twice.

"Come in," he said.

My breath caught. Ma's side of the mattress still had the indentation of her body. I had to steady myself against the footboard.

"Do you want something?" He picked up the newspaper lying beside him.

I waited a few moments while he scanned the front page. "Dad, I was wondering. All Ma's stuff, do you want help with it, we can donate her clothes to Goodwill or someplace like that."

He sighed. "Just leave everything alone."

"I'm only trying to help."

Dad barely raised his eyes. "I think you've done enough already."