

“He’s Going to Kill Me” by Niki Rossakis

“Move, bitch! I said get downstairs NOW and clean that axe!”

I’m crying, I’m angry, I’m scared, but I’m also determined to defy him. *Enough is enough!*

“No, that’s your hunting shit...” I am sick and tired of this bastard pushing me around and adding to my already long list of “wifely duties.”

I’m pissed. The back yard looks like the scene of a mass murder.

Gary was an avid hunter. Hunting season was like a vacation from prison for me. He would disappear with his friends for days on end, and I felt free. I luxuriated in the total relief of not having him around to abuse me. If he happened to get a deer, he typically took it to his taxidermist friend’s house to butcher, but on this particular day, I don’t know what possessed him to bring the deer to our house.

The more adamant I was not to obey him, the angrier he became. Suddenly, he grabbed my right elbow, and speaking through clenched teeth, he forcibly escorted me down the basement stairs.

He said, “When you finish with the axe you are going to clean up the back yard!”

I feel sick. I am petrified. His left hand has a vise-like grip on my right elbow and he’s got that robe on. I know he’s got the gun in the right-side pocket. On our way downstairs, I am shaking my arm.

“Let go of me, you bastard!” I yell.

I hear Johnny cry from upstairs, “Daddy, stop hurting my mommy!”

This infuriates him.

“See, bitch? You’re turning my son into a little pussy, a mama’s boy.”

I yell, “You’re the fucking mama’s boy!”

I hit a sore spot. We are three steps from the bottom when he suddenly hurls me towards the area where he has deposited all his hunting gear, and of course, the filthy axe. I land hard. The next thing that happens stops my heart. I am faced away from him and I hear a loud pop! The bastard shot at me! I smell the cordite sulfur of the gunpowder and I see the carpet an inch away from my foot smoking. A tumult of emotions assails me all at once: I’m scared, I’m furious, and I feel defeated.

He roars, “NOW, CLEAN THE FUCKING AXE!”

Through the tears that are rolling down my face non-stop, I am nauseated to see this axe that he and his friend have used to butcher the deer in our back yard. Rather than clean it off himself, he places it next to his hunting equipment and wants me to clean it. I look at it. I am grossed out. I am nauseous. It's full of blood and guts. I start gagging. I don't turn around lest he decides to shoot me. I hear him stomping away, back up the stairs. I hear the latch. *My God, I think this bastard has just locked me in the basement!*

I hear Johnny cry, "Where's my Mommy?"

Gary shouts, "SHUT UP! STOP CRYING LIKE A LITTLE GIRL!"

My poor baby, he is only three-and-a-half years old. His bastard father is traumatizing him. I am furious. I feel drained and I am powerless. I can't stop the tears that are rolling down my face. *I can't believe this is my life!*

I pull myself together and muster all my strength to clean his disgusting axe. As I'm cleaning, I can't get past the bullet in the carpet where he shot at me. My mind is racing with all sorts of thoughts: *He's going to kill me... I know it... I've got to get out of here... I can't do this anymore...*

The tears won't stop. I hear the door unlatch and whomp! My heart's racing 100 miles a minute. *He's coming down here to finish me off!*

He stomps down the stairs, grabs the axe, inspects it and then orders me to clean the carpet where he shot at me. There's a distinct black ring in the gold-colored carpet. *How the hell am I supposed to clean that?* He stomps off again. I hear him go up the stairs and lock me in the basement again. I can't see shit from the waterfall of tears. I start spitting into my hand to wet it and I start rubbing away at the carpet, as if this is magically going to make the round black burn mark go away.

I hear Johnny crying, "I want my mommy."

I also hear the baby, who is six months old. He's crying, too! I hear the door again. I guess he can't take the kids. He stomps downstairs again and says, "I'm going to lie down. I've been up since 4:30 this morning. That deer leg better be ready for dinner."

I go upstairs, a prisoner just released from solitary confinement. I look with contempt at the detested deer leg he has left in the kitchen sink.

"Yes, Gary," I say obediently.

He stomps upstairs to the bedroom. The kids are crying, I'm crying. I hug them and try to comfort them.

"Mommy, I hate Daddy. I'm scared of Daddy!" Johnny says.

*How do I say that I feel the same? How do I tell my child that I hate the bastard and fear him, too?* I try to reassure him, "Daddy loves you. Daddy loves us all. He would never hurt us."

These words ring hollow in my ears. I quickly settle Johnny and Baby George in front of the TV to watch a Disney movie so I can get to work on cooking that deer leg and hose down the bloodied back yard.

I am pregnant and the smell of the gamey deer leg, the metallic scent of blood, and the sight of the leg in my kitchen sink are making me nauseous. I am gagging. I want to throw up. Suddenly, I look out the window and see my sister and her boyfriend approaching, like a Godsend. I cry tears of relief.

*God, thank you*, I utter in prayer. My sister asks, “What happened?”

I quickly tell her and then go into overdrive, “Quick! Get a garbage bag, open it...”

She does. I grab the deer leg and put it into the bag. I ask her to please put it in my 81-year-old neighbor’s trash can, not in mine. *With my luck, the bastard will see it.* Then, I ask my sister and her boyfriend to run to the butcher shop and buy five pounds of lean beef, cubed. They hurry to help me out. In the interim, I run outside to hose down the backyard.

When Lillian and her boyfriend return, I quickly get to work making my husband’s favorite stew. They leave and wish me “Good luck with the barbarian.”

Four hours later the stew is done. The aroma permeates the house. The beast wakes up and comes downstairs to eat. He eats with gusto and transforms into the loving husband and father again. I play it off that I won’t eat because, “You know I don’t eat deer meat.”

He calls out, “Stupid, you don’t know what you’re missing...” and proceeds to wolf down the stew. I’m thinking to myself, *choke on it you bastard!*

The next day he takes the stew to his workplace to share with “his boys” the proceeds of the latest kill. That night I get several calls from the wives of his hunting buddies. They want to know, “What’s my secret?”

Their husbands have boasted of eating my stew and there is no gamey taste to it.

“How do you make it? How do you get rid of the gamey taste? I have been cooking this stew for years and no matter what I do I can’t get rid of the gamey taste.”

I reply nonchalantly, “Oh, just marinate it in lots of wine vinegar with oregano, basil, rosemary, garlic, salt and pepper...”

But I really want to blurt out, *Dummy, just go to the supermarket or butcher and buy some beef.*

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On January 21st, 1993, I shot and killed Gary.

I lie here in my 8 x 10 cell, waiting for the next beating, as gradually the pieces come together. I replay my married life in my head. Realization of what I've done begins to slowly set in and I experience feelings that alternate between profound sadness and intense anger. I can't believe I have just killed the man I loved, the man I married, the father of my two sons. If only the police had helped when I called them, this tragedy could have been averted.

People ask, "Why didn't you just leave?"

The truth is, I couldn't. Oh, believe me, I thought of it, but I wanted to do it in an amicable way. I wanted to talk to Gary and make him see that our marriage was not working out. I wanted to do this because I didn't want him coming after me. I stayed because, at first, I thought I could change Gary, but then I grew scared of him because he made it patently clear that, "Divorce is not an option. I'll kill you first."

My fear of him multiplied tenfold and I simply did not know how to leave. The more I think about it, the angrier I get. I tried to make our marriage work. I begged him to go to counseling with me. I begged him to go to therapy, but he refused. Counseling and therapy were for "crazy people" and he insisted "I'm not crazy!"

As time passed and the violence escalated I was so scared that I became helpless. I was in a hopeless situation and all I could do was cry and pray. I resigned myself to the fact that this was my life and I would bear it for the sake of the kids. Children need both parents. Today, I realize I was doing more damage to my children by staying rather than leaving the toxically abusive marriage.

Fear paralyzed me and made me so helpless that I did not know how to leave, so I stayed. Now, I am in jail and realize: for the first time in my life, I feel safe. No one is beating me. No one is raping me. Yet just a few weeks ago, I was begging for mercy.

My God, six weeks ago the attack was brutal. I replay it in my head, over and over again. I ran for the phone, dialed 911, and two police officers were dispatched to the house. I am bleeding. Johnny, like me, is frantic and scared. I muster all the strength I can to assure my little boy everything's okay.

"Mommy, I'll protect you."

My God, I should be telling him that.

"Honey, Mommy's okay. Daddy was upset and did not mean to hit Mommy. It was an accident."

My poor Johnny, he isn't buying it. His young eyes have seen too much to know that this was no accident.

"Mommy, I'm scared of Daddy. Please, let's go to Yiayia's house."

"Honey, Daddy loves us. He was upset and didn't mean to hurt Mommy."

“Yes, he did. I SAW him. You were bleeding. He was MAD, Mommy! He’s going to do it again. Please, let’s leave!”

I can still see it all as clear as day. I call for help. One officer brushes by Gary and heads straight for me. The other clearly knows him. I see him pat Gary on the back of the right shoulder as they head back into the house. They are laughing, a good old boys camaraderie. What are they talking about? *She got a little mouthy and I had to put her in her place?!*

I am petrified. By the looks of things, and despite the gun that’s clearly visible in his robe pocket, it doesn’t look as if he is going to be arrested.

“Did you hear what I said? Look at me. Look at my name...” the officer that beelined it straight for me is saying, while holding out his nametag for me to see OFFICER SONNENBERG.

I quickly nod, while holding ice to my mouth with a blood-soaked towel that used to be white.

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There’s banging at my door. My heart jumps, it skips a beat, it’s beating wildly.

“Miss, Miss, are you all right? Aren’t you going to eat? You haven’t eaten anything in three days.”

“Where am I?” I ask frightened.

My voice sounds weak to my ears. I feel confused. I am disoriented. *Where are my babies?*

The officer and captain exchange a look before turning to me.

“You’re on Rikers Island.”

*That’s jail*, I think to myself.

“How does one eat around here? I need to use a phone.”

The officer’s tone softens a bit. She unlocks the door and takes me to the phones.

“I will get you something to eat,” she says kindly.

The next thing I know, all goes black. When I next open my eyes, I’m lying on a hospital bed. A nurse comes over and asks, “How do you feel?”

Again, I ask, “Where am I?”

“You are in the infirmary, you fainted, and now I have to draw some blood.”

I am too weak to ask anything more. She draws the blood and orders food and juice. I see spots before my eyes, as if you snapped a picture with a flash. I blink and blink. They’re not going away.

I keep replaying what led up to that fateful morning. It goes back six weeks, to the day, he attacked me, and I called the police. It was November 24th, 1992. The police came but did not arrest him. I had a busted lip and Gary would not let me go to work at my Dad's shop, lest my dad saw my injury. Gary stayed home from work, too, to make sure I did not go to work. Dad kept calling, and Gary would not let me answer the phone. He was like my jail guard. Dad told him, "It's Thanksgiving, and I need my daughter here at the flower shop."

Gary's response was, "I need her here, too," and hung up the phone.

No matter how much I pleaded and begged, he wouldn't let me leave the house.

Two days later he wants to make nice, to caress me and make love to me as a show of his remorse for brutally attacking me on November 24, 1992. No matter how much I pleaded "NO," Gary still forced sex on me—he raped me. I cringe at his touch. Those same hands that "caressed" were the very same hands that brutally beat me—they felt like knives raking my skin.

He finally lets me go to work.

My period does not come.

*Where is my period?! I ask myself frantically, all the while thinking, Oh, God, please don't let this be what I think it is.*

I go and buy a pregnancy test and as luck would have it, I am pregnant. I'm crying.

"Now what the fuck are you crying about?"

In the midst of my upset I blurt out, "I'm trying to get away from you and now I'm pregnant!"

"So just go get an abortion, you idiot," was his cruel remark.

I quickly make an appointment with my OB-GYN, who verifies that I was, indeed, pregnant and schedules me for the abortion.

On January 7th, 1993, Gary takes me to the doctor's office and I have an abortion. The doctor hands him antibiotics and ibuprofen for me and tells him, "No sex for six weeks."

I'm still woozy from the anesthesia and don't know of their exchange. The doctor tells me, "No sex for six weeks, and I want to see you in a week for a post-partum check-up."

Two days later, Gary's harassing me for sex and I am staving him off.

"I've just had an abortion, and the doctor said I can't. Please, just let me heal!"

"I don't give a fuck what he said. You're fine, and I want to have sex!"

Each night I fight him off and on January 14th, 1993, I go for my post-partum checkup. The doctor checks me out and says, "You're healing just fine. Remember, no sex for five more weeks."

At this point, he is still standing where he has just examined me. I freak out and grab the doctor by the lapels of his white lab coat, and frantically say “NO. You don’t understand, SEW ME UP!”

The doctor is taken aback. I start crying, but don’t elaborate further. I am embarrassed by my outburst. I want my vaginal hole sewn up. To my desperate way of thinking, Gary can’t penetrate me if there is no hole.

The doctor leaves me to get dressed and makes notations in my chart about bruising on my inner thighs and writes “Abuse” with a question mark.

I am distraught. On my way home, I’m thinking, *how I can buy myself time? I need to heal physically and mentally.*

I endure a week of hell. I manage to plead, no, beg, “NO! Gary, please, just let me heal!”

On January 20th, 1993, the night before I killed my husband, he grabs me when I come out of the shower, throws me on the bed and shoves his fingers into my vagina. I don’t know how, but I somehow muster up the strength to kick him off me and run out of the room. I’m in my bathrobe. I’m in tears. *God, help me!*

That night I don’t sleep in our bed. I get this brilliant idea to make him his favorite meal for the next day, and calmly explain to him that he must abide by the doctor’s orders, and that means NO SEX, so I can heal. I spend the remainder of the night on the couch.

The next morning, January 21st, 1993, I am getting ready for work. I am quietly getting dressed. I have managed to put my underclothing and turtleneck on. I’m about to put on my pants when Gary suddenly awakens and tells me to get him some Advil. I run and do his bidding. I grab a glass of water from downstairs and bring 15-month-old-Georgie into the room with me. My hope is to distract him with the baby long enough, so I can get dressed. That doesn’t work.

He roars, “Get him out of here!”

My heart’s beating. I take the baby downstairs and settle him in his playpen with a bottle of milk.

I go back upstairs to get his Advil and finish getting dressed. I open his nightstand drawer where he keeps Advil, and there’s the gun. He keeps it there as the proverbial threat.

I’m panicking inwardly. I give him his Advil.

“Rub my head!” Gary orders.

“Gary, I have the baby downstairs, I can’t...” I say, my heart pounding erratically.

“Do it!” he yells.

He’s lying on his side and I go from behind and rub his head.

“You’re not doing it right! Come sit here!” he indicates for me to come sit on the bed in the crook of his body.

I'm scared but obey. As I am rubbing his head, his hand suddenly moves to my upper thigh, right by my vagina. I quickly grab it and push it towards him.

He says, "I'll get you later, bitch."

"No, you won't," and I grab the gun and shoot him.

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Indictment #444-93.

The bailiff announces, "People of the State of New York versus Niki Rossakis."

The attorney nudges me and in a whisper quickly says, "That's us, stand up!"

I do. Words are exchanged in the courtroom. It's all so surreal. I don't know what's going on.

"Today was just a formality. We have a bail hearing scheduled in two weeks. I will come and see you, so we can talk. Take care of yourself and EAT!" he adds before departing.

Corrections officers on stand-by quickly usher me out of the courtroom through a side door.

"But wait..." I say a little too late, turning my head as the officers are leading me away.

He's gone, and I am taken to a holding pen. An officer unlocks the gate and I am told to "Step in."

I do and the gate is quickly locked behind me.

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"Mommy, when are you getting out of the hospital?" Johnny asks with concern.

I look at my mother who points to my wristband with her eyes. Understanding dawns on me.

"I don't know, honey, but you will be with Yiayia until Mommy comes home."

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"Move, bitch! I said get downstairs NOW and clean that axe!"

The words echo in my head. I am standing in the court room telling about the day when he came after me and forced me into the basement. My unwillingness to comply with his demands



infuriates him so much that he actually shoots at me. My poor little boy can't stop crying, but Gary won't stop. My heart is racing as sheer terror engulfs me. *He's going to kill me.*

The women of the jury are crying as they listen to the testimony. The prosecutor is not pleased with the emotion that recounting this horrible scene has evoked from them. She faces the jury as I am testifying and rolls her eyes. She desperately wants to discredit me. First, she tells the jurors not to believe me, despite the piece of carpet retrieved from the basement with the bullet hole in it—one of my exhibits.

Next, she tells the jurors that my private investigator shot his gun in my basement to help my case. This blatantly insulting remark upsets the private investigator who is a man of integrity. He asks and is granted permission to retake the stand where he makes it patently clear that he is a former homicide detective who would never jeopardize his name and reputation by doing something as unscrupulous as that.

The jurors are not pleased with the prosecutor's antics. The forewoman asks the judge to speak in chambers with only the attorneys present and is granted the private audience. She explains to Judge Fisher that the jurors collectively are getting tired of the prosecutor making faces and rolling her eyes every time I testify.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I urge you to look at this picture. This was a man who loved life, loved his sons, and the deceitful woman sitting before you, callously snuffed out his life. This was an assassination.”

“OBJECTION, your Honor...”

“Ms. Pomadore, can we get on with the trial?”

“I'm sorry, your Honor. I got carried away. I can't abide by the defendant's lies.”

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We're driving to Aunt Rose and Uncle Jimmy's. Gary hates them but must keep up pretenses because his Uncle Jimmy is very well-connected with Mobile. I am not allowed to sit up front because I will not repeat after him, “My mother's an asshole.”

I hate him. He puts three-and-a-half-year-old Johnny in the front seat and I am seated in the back holding 6-month-old Georgie.

“That's right, bitch, you will always take a back seat to my sons,” he utters with contempt.

I have a splitting headache and just want to go home. He keeps babbling, “And when I tell you to do something, you do it!”

*You uncouth bastard*, I'm thinking to myself. This jackass does not even realize the mental damage he is doing to Johnny, who is looking at his father from his peripheral vision. Poor kid is

so scared he won't turn his head to look at the beast, especially now that the beast is on a roll. He threw back a drink or two before we left the house and is enjoying putting me down in front of the kids.

He starts up again, "Say it, 'My mother is an asshole.'"

I feel defeated, but will not give in. *I can't believe this is my life.*

"Gary, would you please stop! Just stop! You sound immature..." I want to say more but I don't.

I wish I could go to sleep and never wake up. He's going on and on and so is my headache.

He repeats himself and adds, "The longer you take to obey me and follow orders, the worst your punishment will be."

Suddenly, I can't take it anymore. I can't take him insulting my family, especially in front of the kids, particularly in front of Johnny who can understand. So I unleash a torrent of my own expletives about his family, colorful enough to make a beautiful necklace to choke him with.

"Your sister's a cunt... Your brother's an asshole... Your mother is the Grand Hyatt Mystic poutana (a throw-back to Jackie Gleason's *The Honeymooners*'s Ralph Kramden when he talks about the Raccoons club leader with reverence, calling him 'the Grand Hyatt mystic ruler')... Your brother's a pussy... Your uncle's a faggot..."

I continue along this vein and can't shut up. I spare nobody. I'm on a roll, gaining momentum with each insult, and it feels good to let loose with the only weapon I have—my mouth.

Suddenly, out of the blue, while holding the steering-wheel with his left hand, he swings his right hand over the front seat and backhands me in the mouth. He hits me so hard my lip is cut and I'm bleeding. I turn beet-red with fury. And what timing! We've just arrived at Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Rose's.

Gary knocks the car into park reaches over the seat and grabs the baby from my arms. Now I am hysterical.

"Give me the baby. I'm going home!"

He ignores me, takes Johnny by the hand, and with both kids proceeds towards the front door. Aunt Rose has opened the door and realizes I am not there. She runs over to the car. I am so embarrassed. There's a lump in my throat. The tears are just sliding down my face non-stop.

"Aunt Rose, I'm not coming in, I'm going home..."

She gently prods me out of the car and to her bedroom via the backyard door. She brings me some ice wrapped in a towel and a big glass of wine. She asks what happened and I tell her everything.

This is one of many such brutal memories that I recall as I'm sitting on the stand at trial. It keeps me feeling apathetic. There's no affect during my testimony.

I'm fighting for my life. I am numb and terrified.

“He treated her like a queen. He never abused her. The stories of abuse simply aren’t true. They are her lies, her fabrications of events that never occurred,” the prosecutor continues.

The jury’s women are crying. I’m testifying in a blunt emotionless tone that I can’t shake off. My having to relive all these experiences for the courtroom is taking its toll on me, especially when the prosecutor is making it a point to let the jury know that they are watching a cold-blooded murderer talk about the victim, a wonderful and gentle person.

Our justice system confers sainthood on brutally abusive people who are dead, like his family that wants to sanctify his memory. To the public, memories must remain that he was a gentle giant, not a brutally violent tyrant. Accordingly, I must be portrayed as the violent person because I killed him and survived.

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“What is she doing here?”

He sees my mother at our house and stomps into the house with his grease-coated shoes. Mom runs out the back door. I am pregnant and poor Mom trekked out to Astoria to help me. She will not come over when he’s here because Johnny tells her how “Daddy hits Mommy. He pushes her down and makes her cry.”

“I know he abuses you.”

I am sad and silent. I don’t want Mom hurting for me. I do not tell her of the hell which is my life, but Johnny does. The older he gets the more frightened of his father he becomes. He is happy when we are on our way home, until he spots his father’s jeep in the driveway. Then he starts crying and begging, “Mommy, please take me back to Yiayia’s, Daddy’s home. I’m scared of Daddy.”

I have to coax and cajole my child to please come out of the car lest his father kill me.

“Yianni, Daddy loves you. He wants to see you and Georgie.”

Johnny is afraid of his father. He fears his father’s temper. He doesn’t like “Daddy hitting Mommy and hitting me when I try to help and protect Mommy.”

“Now, bitch, I told you to be home by 5 p.m. Because you defied me, your punishment will be to drive to Yorktown Heights tonight.”

“Gary, you know we are busy in the flower shop for the holidays, you knew this when you married me. There was no way I could leave and be home by 5 p.m. My eyes hurt. I can’t drive tonight. Please, let’s just leave first thing in the morning.”

“I said no. We’re going tonight, and you’re driving.”

“Please drive, I can’t.”

“I SAID, DRIVE NOW, BITCH.”

We arrive at his sister’s house Christmas Eve. I am crying and emotionally depleted. He takes the kids and goes inside. I stay out in the car until I can calm down enough to plaster a phony smile on my face.

People start to come out and get me. I don’t feel like leaving the solitude of my car. Everyone there understands how “Sadam Hussein” (their pet name for Gary) is.

“Come in and have a glass of wine, unwind...”

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“We’re scared of her. She knows where we live,” reads Jennifer’s letter to the parole board 23 years later. This is from a woman who married into the family several years into my incarceration. She is urging the parole board to keep me in prison because she is picking up the family’s cudgel.

I don’t have a violent bone in my body. I am not malicious. I am a very kind and caring individual who committed a horrible crime as I was at my wits’ end, a crime committed over two decades ago that should not define me—it was an act of pure desperation.

Over two decades ago, Family Court Judge Fran Lubow appointed a psychologist to interview the parties, in this case Gary’s parents against me, to decide custody of the minor children. The children are the priority, “the best interest of the children.”

My in-laws went first. My mother-in-law dominated the interview acting as if she was speaking to her own personal grief therapist. She put me down relentlessly, telling the psychologist she can’t believe what happened, “Gary was so big and strong.”

She proceeded to say that she knew this was going to happen, that he and I were fighting so bad she felt it, but it was supposed to be me, and not Gary who died, because “he was so big and strong.”

The psychologist was so appalled that this woman was saying that I was supposed to die because her son was a lion of a man, that she made out her report 2000% in my favor, stating that even if I would be incarcerated for life, I should always be responsible for decisions concerning my sons.

On the other hand, when it was my turn to see the same psychologist I told her that in the event of incarceration I would want my family to have custody of my sons because my mother essentially raised them, she watched them when I worked, and they were comfortable with her. I added that his family would always have access to the kids, but that I felt as if his parents—more so his mother—initiated the proceedings to take my sons away from me because I took her son.

This is not to say that she did not love her grandsons, but her motives were more to hurt me. She always avoided my sons in the past if I asked her to split the week with my mother so I could work full-time. She said she couldn't, because she had to be available if her daughter, Gary's sister, needed her. Gary's sister had a nanny and housekeeper.

My mother-in-law could not handle two active little boys. Yet, here she was telling the psychologist she wanted custody of her son's children. My father-in-law made it clear that he did not want custody of the kids, at which point his wife elbowed him and told him to "Shut up."

Of course, this report never made it into trial either because Gary's mother never took the stand.

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"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the defendant will try to convince you that this gentle bear of a man, who loved his sons more than anything on earth, hurt his child, when everyone knows it was clearly a case of 'tennis elbow.' And, she is so conniving that she undoubtedly paid her son's pediatrician to alter the record. I urge you to keep this in mind."

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"Wait, Daddy. I want my Mommy."

"Your mother is making you a little girl. Now, I said COME ON!"

I feel sick. I'm pregnant and miserable. It's not the baby. It's Gary. I come out of my room to see what he's doing to my baby.

I approach the top of the stairs and see Johnny resisting going down the stairs.

"Gary, please leave him alone."

He ignores me. Johnny's is grabbing the rails beneath the banister with his left hand to keep from being forced a step further downstairs.

He is crying, "I want Mommy! I want my Mommy!"

"SHUT THHE FUCK UP!" Gary roars as he yanks him by the right hand, lifting him off the step and tromping with him downstairs.

He deposits my baby there and storms out of the house. Johnny's crying uncontrollably. I run downstairs to grab my child. I try to cheer him up. I take him to the kitchen and get him his favorite fruit roll-ups. Then I take him to the couch to watch a Disney film. Johnny cannot stop

crying. I am looking at him. He is walking funny. His left shoulder is lower than his right. He can't explain what hurts.

"Mommy, it hurts."

"What hurts, honey?"

I go to hug him, and he sobs even harder. There is something wrong with his arm. It suddenly dawns on me that Gary hurt him when he hoisted him by the right arm, to force him downstairs. I hurry and call his pediatrician, who urges me to bring Johnny to the office immediately. Once there the doctor asks, "Johnny, what's wrong?"

I start to talk to the doctor and am abruptly cut off. Johnny is crying, "My daddy did this to me."

The doctor takes Johnny into the examining room, but I am told to wait outside.

It was all so surreal. I'm thinking to myself, *What's going on?*

After about ten minutes, the door opens and the doctor tells me to come in. He does not make any mention of what he said to Johnny or what Johnny said to him. He tells me that my son's elbow is dislocated and he is going to snap it back into place. I feel faint. I begin to tell the doctor that Johnny was playing rough with his father, but again I am quickly cut off.

"Johnny told me what happened."

The doctor is angry. He tells me that what he is about to do will hurt Johnny for a second but then Johnny will be okay. I'm crying at this point. I feel so helpless.

In one quick motion he snaps Johnny's elbow back into place. The crying doesn't abate. The doctor's tone softens. His demeanor is more empathetic.

"This child is only two-and-a-half-years-old. Tell his father not to dislocate his arm again. He was *not* playing rough with Johnny. Johnny told me what happened."

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"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, don't be fooled by her. She's slick and will say anything to avoid going to prison. You must reach a verdict of guilty and make sure she does not walk free."