

The Eye of the Story

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The Good Father

By Alana Cooper-Prince

I saw *the* most gorgeous scarf today.

It was this deep magenta color, cashmere, so soft. I can still feel it now, calling out to me to just buy it. Maybe I should've bought it. I stood there staring at it for about a half an hour, wanting it but knowing that I would never wear it. I could tell that the woman in the store, who had been watching me stare at the scarf, was really invested in my buying it, so, since I need a scarf anyway, I bought the same one, but in black. Big surprise.

I just realized that I've started this journal commenting on a scarf. A scarf that I didn't even have the guts to buy. How sad is that? And the whole stupid point of this stupid journal is because I want to change, and yet I couldn't even buy a stupid purple scarf.

I guess it all goes back to my father. This journal, the scarf. Everything goes back to him, to the "before" and "after". To when he was there, and I thought everything was okay, and then when he was gone, and I didn't know what to think anymore.

When I was a kid, I loved bright, cheerful colors. Purple was my favorite. I always wore whatever I felt like, giving no thought to how I might look. But after, I just wanted to blend in. I didn't want to be noticed, and wearing dark, muted colors were the simplest solution. Especially in perpetually rainy Seattle, it's easy to get lost in a crowd, to blend in, when you're dressed in dark greens, grays, blues, black.

When it all happened, there was so much news about my father and our family. I wanted all the attention to go away, and so I wanted to make sure that everything I did made me not stand out. Now, years later, the fact that my father even had a family is largely forgotten, yet old habits die hard. I knew that I was being ridiculous, that wearing one purple scarf would not be the end of the world, that people would not all of a sudden look at me differently, but I just couldn't do it. I thought that I could, that I was ready to change, but I guess not. Not enough to buy a stupid purple scarf.

I've never kept a journal before, or really written about my life in any way. I've never wanted to, and I don't really know if I really want to now, but I feel like maybe it's necessary. I feel weird writing about my life, my thoughts, my memories, especially since I've done just about the exact opposite for over half my life. But I really am trying to make a change, and if I wasn't brave enough to buy that scarf, then I'm going to commit myself to this.

It started about a week ago. I got a letter in the mail from a director, who wanted to know if I would be interested in being interviewed for a documentary he's making about my father. He said he would be talking to psychologists, the law enforcement officers that were involved in finding him, and some of his victim's family members. My mother also got a letter asking her to consent to being interviewed, but she called the guy back right away and told him there was no chance. My first instinct was to do the same, but I decided to consider it, knowing that it really wasn't likely that I would accept, but giving myself time to think anyway.

A few days later, it was my birthday. I didn't have anything special planned. My mom just stayed in, ordered Chinese, and watched a movie. She got me a few presents, and then it was time to blow out the candles of the cake she had ordered for me. For years, my birthday has meant the same cake from the same bakery with the same message of congratulations for making it through another year of life. The only thing that changes are the numbers. Yet somehow seeing the cake, surrounded by candles, illuminating the words "Happy 25th Birthday, Veronica!", just really hit me. It's my 25th birthday. I've already lived a quarter of my life, and that's assuming that I'll be lucky enough to live to a hundred. A quarter of my life, and the only one here to wish me a happy birthday is my mother and our cats. How sad is that? And the worst part about it is that I know that it's my fault, it's the choices I've made to close myself out from the rest of the world.

Ever since my dad, I just wanted time to keep moving, to separate myself more and more from memories of him. I didn't want to think about him, about my life before and my life after. I just wanted to keep going, pushing everything out of my mind, for some later date when I felt I was ready to deal with it.

And the thing is, I'm not. And I don't know if I'll ever be. But when I saw that cake I realized that I couldn't just keep pushing everything away, that it's time to at least try to deal, try to change, try to actually live.

So that's why I started this journal. Because the only way for me to move forward with my life is to deal with my father. I've spent my life trying to separate myself from him, thinking that if I could just get enough distance between us, then I would be okay. But I know now that that didn't work. As much as I want to have nothing to do with him, he is still a big part of me, and I can't keep ignoring that. And I feel like I need to write this down, because I feel like I can't keep quiet anymore, but I'm not yet ready to talk to an actual person. Also, because everything I've just described as wanting to do is really scary for me, and I want to do something that's out of my comfort zone, something that scares me, and if it's as little as just writing down my life for the next week or month or year or however long I write, then I'm damn well going to do it.

The day in court when my mom and I heard for the first time what my father was actually being accused of, that was the last time that I saw him. It didn't have to be that way-- I could've visited him in prison if I'd wanted to. And there were some times when I really did want to, if only to hear his voice one last time, to see the face that had brought me so much comfort for so many years. My mother would have supported me if I'd asked her to take me there. She wouldn't have gone in to see him, but she would have understood if I needed to. But I just couldn't do it.

She and I haven't really talked much about him. That day in court was the last time that she saw him too; she filed for divorce the next day and never once went to visit him or spoke to him on the phone. She has her own reasons for this. I'm sure that some of her reasons overlap with mine, but we don't bring them up.

The first year after his arrest, he would try to call us, but we would always hang up when we were asked if we would accept the call from the prison. He wrote us letters that first year also. There would always be one for me and one for Mom. I don't know what hers said, but mine were always asking about school, friends, how I was doing. We never wrote back.

Eventually the calls became less and less frequent. So did the letters, and then it was several months later and I realized that I hadn't heard from him at all. That was it.

The only way I knew that he even remembered my existence was from the birthday cards he would send me every year. They would always be the same: generic, impersonal, the kind of flowery, frilly, pink and purple card that you'd find in the "Girl's Birthday" section of a drugstore. And every year he would write the same exact thing "Happy birthday, Veronica. I love you- Daddy."

Even though it was my choice to cut him out of my life, there's still a part of me that feels hurt that it took him so little time to give up. I mean, if he really loved me, he wouldn't have given up on calling after only a year, right? I'm his only child. That should mean more than just a single birthday card every year.

But then there's a part of me that feels ashamed for even thinking that way. I don't want to care about him, or about what he was thinking. I don't want to be mad that he didn't try to reach out to me more. He didn't deserve for me to reach out to him, to feel like I was giving him any sort of absolution.

What he did was unforgivable. He ruined lives. He ruined so many lives. So why, even after knowing about what he did, why do I still care that he gave up on me? Why does it still hurt?

When you see somebody who's so happy that they're practically glowing, there's usually two possible reactions that you can have. The first is that a certain type of osmosis occurs, where, in just being around all of that positive energy, some of it transfers to you, and you can't help but be happy for that person and maybe, even if it's only for a little while, you feel happy and light also. The alternative is that it makes you wonder why they're so happy, and then wonder why you're not that happy, which just kind of creates a cycle of depressing internal questions and then equally, or maybe even more, depressing answers. It's probably obvious that I'm the type of person who falls into the second reaction.

Today was an especially slow day at the bookstore, and I was several hours into my shift when a woman, who looked about the same age as me, came into the bookstore. She was radiant, which is a tough thing to be in the middle of Seattle's rainy season. It was almost like she had her own personal ray of sunshine following her wherever she went. I hadn't even said anything before she started talking to me about how she had just gotten engaged to her high school sweetheart the night before. She talked to me for what seemed like forever (it was probably only around ten minutes) about their entire relationship. I don't think I showed any sign that I was even listening to her, but that didn't seem to make a difference. After she finished telling me about the proposal, and showing me her ring, with me congratulating her as enthusiastically as I could manage (which was not very), she finally turned her attention to the actual books. I suppose I shouldn't complain, since she did end up spending a lot of money on books and bridal magazines, but I find overly cheerful people unsettling. I don't really get them, and I have no interest in changing that.

Normally, on my walk home, I keep to myself as much as possible, focusing my eyes forward and moving as fast as I can. But today, for some reason, I took an alternate route, the one that passes a park with a playground. I stopped for a minute to watch the parents interact with their kids, to listen to the laughs and the tantrums and all of the noises that inevitably follow little kids around. There was one woman who was kneeling beside a little girl, who had just fallen running from the slide to the swingset.

She was crying, and the woman was trying to comfort her. The last thing I saw before I kept moving was her mom kiss the spot where the little girl's knee had been hurt. The little girl got up and started toward the swings again, picking up right where she left off.

I would have never paid attention to these things before. But now I can't stop thinking about them: the look of pure happiness on the newly engaged woman's face, the bond between the little girl and her mother.

I've never even thought about those things in my own life, asked myself those questions. Do I want to get married? Do I want a family, my own kids? Those questions never seemed to apply to me before. My thinking was always, that's way in the future, it doesn't have anything to do with me right now. But at some point the future has to become the present, and I'm not saying that I'm quite there yet, but it's also not some far-off concern anymore.

I guess I've just been thinking that, since I wasn't quite ready to move out of the past, that the world would pause around me, until I was ready and the time was right. But that isn't what happened, and I'm just now realizing that years have passed, time has kept going without me, and now everything is coming at me all at once.

I know that I'm still young, that it's not like I've missed my chance to have those things. But I'm not a child anymore either. The future isn't as far away as I've been pretending it is, and I think maybe it's time I start dealing with it, even if it's scary and unknown, instead of pushing it away.

I've worked at the bookstore now for a little over three years. I'm pretty sure management loves me, because I've never once asked for a raise or tried to get a promotion. But I've never wanted those things. I like just working there, being around books, and I love the fact that even at its busiest there's still almost never very many people. I guess I should want more, be more ambitious, but honestly I don't really know what that would mean. I just don't know what I want to do with my life, and while I like my job, I'm

pretty sure it's not what I want to do forever, but I don't know what the next step is. I don't know what I want the next step to be.

The busiest the store has ever been was a few years ago, when we had a book signing with Margery Hawthorne. The book was called *The Last to Suspect*, about infamous serial killer Tim Brown. Several factors drew the crowds in, the first being that Ms. Hawthorne is a local author. The second was that Tim Brown's first victims were University of Washington students, and the store is located just on the outskirts of the campus. The third was that Ms. Hawthorne had actually gotten to know him after his arrest, which made for a compelling story about her relationship with him, one which the whole country had taken interest in.

I found the whole situation pretty ironic, though of course no one realized why it would be: the book that this woman wrote, the book which basically made her career, was about my own father, and she chose the bookstore that I was employed at to do the signing, though she didn't realize that Tim Brown's daughter worked there, and I wasn't going to say anything.

I've refused to read the book, even though it's been sitting prominently on the window display for three years, along with a picture of Ms. Hawthorne at the signing. I've sold it to many customers. I've directed people to it when they ask for it. But I never wanted to read it.

The truth is, I don't know much about him. Or at least that part of him, the part that the rest of the world knows. I was only ten when he was arrested, and I've learned bits and pieces about his crimes over the years, but I never wanted to know the whole story. There was a part of me that wanted to keep the good memories I have of him, even as I've spent these years hating him for what he put our family through.

I don't want to read the book now. But I have to. Not only for myself, to help me move on, but because I feel like I owe something to the people he hurt, to the people whose lives he took. Not that I know that reading this book will make any sort of difference, but I have to try.

My father and I look a lot alike. There's a picture of us, taken during my 8th birthday party. We had it at our house, and it was carnival themed, with different games set up and prizes and cake and my parents even rented a bouncy castle. All of that is in the background, though. In the picture he's kneeling on the ground next to me, his arms around me, and both of us have matching smiles, the kind that lights up your entire face.

My father's hair was very dark, almost black. My own hair in the picture is a much lighter shade of brown than his, but as I grew up it darkened to the same shade as his. My hair is wavy, exactly like his was when he let it grow out. He had a small gap in his front teeth, something which I got from him. We have the same features: high, pronounced cheekbones, slight, sharp nose, prominent forehead.

I finished the book last night, but I've had a hard time getting my thoughts together. I really wanted to hate it. It should've been easy to hate; I mean, it's called *The Last to Suspect*. I honestly don't see how the title could be more cliché. But the thing is, it was actually very well written. I even forgot at certain points that the man that Ms. Hawthorne was writing about was my own father. I didn't know that man: the man who spent a decade in prison I made the choice not to know. But the man who did all of those terrible things at the same time that I was growing up-- I still don't know him, and I still don't understand him. She could have been writing about a stranger. If his name wasn't constantly brought up, I might have forgotten that it was my own father she was talking about.

I've been looking through old pictures, the ones that we've kept in storage all these years. I had to remind myself that I didn't make it all up-- he really was there, during my childhood, giving me hugs, comforting me when I was upset, reading me bedtime stories. He really did love me.

But then I think: How could he love me, and my mom, and still be able to do so many awful things to the women he killed? How could he be eating dinner with us one night, and the next night be searching for his next victim?

I can't say that I enjoyed the book, but I am glad that I read it. I feel like I know the side of him that the rest of the world knows. But I'm still having a hard time thinking of that man, the murderer, as the same one who made me think, growing up, that I was the luckiest girl in the world to have him as a father.

Probably the worst thing about reading the book was my initial response to it. I was offended, actually offended, that I was mentioned so little. How terrible is that? That what bothered me the most about it was that I was hardly in it. There's so much about my father that's in it, a lot about the women whose lives he took, even a lot about the law enforcement and prosecutors who were responsible for catching him and putting him away, yet there's hardly anything about my mother and I. I know that it's so awful and petty and self-centered to be bothered by that, but I can't help it.

Growing up, I thought that I was the center of my father's universe. I thought that I was the most important thing in his life, the one he loved the most. But a man who did the things that he did, how much could his family, his own child, really have meant to him? He couldn't have loved us, could he?

Sometimes, when something big happens, something that will completely change a person's life, there is no warning. One moment, everything is normal. The next, everything is different, unrecognizable, and it will never be the same.

That was how it was on that last day, the last day when everything was fine, when I was still a kid who thought that as long as her parents were there, nothing really bad could ever happen.

My father left for a work trip to Utah in September of 1980. It was supposed to be just a regular trip, like the ones he'd taken many times before. He said goodbye to my mother and I, with a promise that he would bring me back a present, as he did whenever he went on a long trip. My last memory of him, untarnished from anything that I'd learn about him later, is of him walking down the driveway toward the car and putting his suitcase in the trunk. My mother closed the door, telling me that it was time for me to

hurry up and get ready for school, but I looked out the door one last time. He was just about to open the car door, but he looked up and smiled at me one last time before the front door closed.

We didn't hear anything from him for several days, but that wasn't so unusual when he was on a work trip. Eventually we did get a call, but it wasn't one that we were expecting. He called us from the Salt Lake City police department, telling us that he'd been arrested for possession of burglary tools, but that we shouldn't worry, it wasn't a big deal and the charges would be dropped soon, he was sure.

Of course, what he didn't tell us was that yes, that was officially what he was being kept under arrest for, but that he had been caught by an off duty police officer driving in a residential neighborhood. The police officer became suspicious, because he didn't recognize the car that my father was driving, and it drove by the same street several times. When the officer pulled him over, he noticed that the passenger seat was removed and there were handcuffs, a heavy pipe, and a mask made out of pantyhose. When the officer found out his name, he recognized it and the car's make and model from unsolved cases, cases that involved the murders of several young women. That was when the department began to look more into my father's record.

But we didn't know this. We only knew what he told us, and so we wired the money for him to post bail and flew out to Utah. That was the last time that we would all be together. Even when we realized that it was more serious than he had made it out to be, he was so persuasive in explaining it all away. On the same day that he was supposed to have gone home, he was charged additionally with the kidnapping and attempted murder of Sherry Harris, a young woman who matched exactly with all of his other victims, and she identified him in court as the man who tried to kill her.

My mother and I were in the courtroom that day, and there had been no sign that they were going to add these charges. They had been gathering evidence quietly, trying to make sure that they would have a solid case, and they didn't want him to know yet what they suspected him of. At that point, we still

thought that it was a big misunderstanding, that once the judge heard his explanation, the charges would be dropped and my father could return home.

The evidence against him in the case was largely circumstantial, and it would be up to the jury to decide whether or not to convict. But my mother and I were in the courtroom on the day that Sherry testified, and hearing her describe what happened, and seeing her absolute certainty that the man who had taken her was Tim Brown, really shook us. It was at that point that it really began to sink in for both of us that something was terribly wrong, and that he was not the person we thought he was.

That day in court happened several months after his arrest, and the trial would go on for a couple more months. My mother and I had had to resume our lives in Seattle, me with school, her with work, while this was happening, but we flew down to Utah again to attend several days of the trial. After the day of Sherry's testimony, though, we would never attend another session.

While the Utah trial was going on, Idaho, another state that he visited frequently, was quietly putting together several murder cases against my father. It was looking more and more like he was going to be found guilty, and to the public it was looking more and more like he actually was guilty. I don't remember much from that year, to be honest. I was ten and eleven years old, already an awkward age, my father was in another state, in jail for doing terrible things (although at that point I didn't really understand anything beyond that), and it was just my mom and I. But I still hoped that it was all a mistake, that of course he hadn't done these terrible things. I think that my mom still held out hope also, even though she had already filed for divorce from him.

Then he was found guilty in the Utah case, and immediately after that he was transferred to Idaho to stand trial for those cases. It was 1982, and it was clear that he wasn't going to be able to charm his way out of the trouble he was in. That was when he escaped. It was a combination of a well placed system of vents, too much time in between meals, and a lot of luck. It seems ridiculous even writing it, but it's all in the book, I swear.

My mother and I got a call from the police, telling us that he had escaped, and that it was possible that he was going to come looking for us. He was gone for two months, and we spent that time frightened and worried that he was going to show up any time. There was a small part of me, though, that wished that he would come back for us, even though I knew that it would be very bad if he did.

But it turns out we didn't need to worry. He had gone to Colorado, given himself a new identity in Denver, at the University of Colorado. At that exact time, young women began to turn up dead, in the same manner as they had in Washington, Utah, Idaho. He would be caught in Colorado, and that's where he would spend the rest of his life.

Whatever hope that I had held those years, that I'm sure my mother held even if she doesn't like to admit it, that my father wasn't the killer that the country was claiming he was, was gone. There was no denying anymore that something was wrong with him.

They don't know for sure who my father's first victim was. The first one they tied him to is Susie Johnson, so the official list of his known victims begins with her and ends with Kelly Hanson.

When he was arrested in Colorado after his escape, the detectives who had him in their custody and who were interviewing him that first night claim that he admitted his guilt to them, though not in any detail. The tape that was supposed to have recorded the entire interview was later discovered to have malfunctioned, so the only statement they had was what the detectives would later recall. Tim would recant everything several days later, saying that he he had been exhausted that night, and that the detectives had elicited a confession from him unfairly.

I don't doubt that he was exhausted that night, but I also don't doubt that the detectives were telling the truth about what he had confessed. But the situation was too ambiguous, so the judge wouldn't allow for the statement to be used as evidence in the case against him. That was the only time that Tim

would ever admit his guilt or confess in any way; for the rest of his life he would claim he was innocent, that he was being railroaded by the police, who held a grudge against him.

The official victim count for Tim Brown is nineteen, but those who knew his case best, who were most familiar with his M.O., are fairly certain that the number is much higher. After all, he travelled a lot for most of his adult life because of his job, and all across the country there are unsolved cases that seem to match up very well with his known cases. Susie Johnson's death happened six years before his first arrest, but he would have already been 29 at that time. It seems very likely that she wasn't his first, but there's no way to know for sure now.

I don't know what worse to think about-- that he might have decided to bring a child into the world, knowing who he was and what he had done, and would continue to do, but chose to do have that child anyway, or that he started when I was just a little kid. I know that there's no right answer. Either way it's terrible, and it makes me a terrible person that I even think about it like that. I know, in my head, that it wasn't about me, that there was something terribly wrong with him, and that of course the most tragic part of it all is the victims, and all that was taken from them and their loved ones.

But I can't help but wonder about it, wonder why I wasn't enough, why he did what he did when he had a daughter who loved him and looked up to him. In my head, I know I'm being unfair to myself, that there was something wrong with him that nothing could fix; but I still wonder.

My father used to do most of the cooking when I was growing up. He really seemed to enjoy it, trying out new recipes all the time, wanting to experiment with flavors and ingredients. Sometimes he would follow a recipe, sometimes he would make it up as he went, but it would almost always turn out really good.

As a child, I loved that it was my dad who did the cooking. I thought it was just another example of how special he was, and how lucky I was that he was my father. And cooking was always something we did together. Whenever he made dinner, he would ask me to help him. He would teach me how to

chop vegetables, what the difference was between stirring and whisking, what different spices would add to what was being cooked. I was the official taste tester: I got final say on whether the food was ready to be eaten.

Some of my fondest memories are of being in the kitchen with my father, but without a doubt my favorites were on the day before Thanksgiving. Every year, I would wake up in the morning to the sound of someone moving around in the kitchen, and when I went in, there he was, just waiting for me to wake up. There would be eggs, milk, flour, baking powder, butter, vanilla, all lined up on the counter, ready to be made into a cake.

I'm not sure why or how this tradition started. After all, cake isn't necessarily a traditional Thanksgiving food. But every year since I can remember my father and I would spend the entire day baking this cake. The special thing about the cake was that we would dye the batter into different colors, and every year it turned out differently from the year before. On that last year, he let me choose how I wanted the cake to look, and I decided that I wanted a rainbow cake with five layers. I knew that the only thing different about it was the dye, but I remember thinking that it was the best cake I had ever eaten. I was so proud that day.

I loved the cakes when we finished them, but the entire day was what made it special. We would have to make the batter in batches, and after each batch my father would wash all of the dishes, and I would dry, standing next to him on my little step stool. By the end of the day, we would both be exhausted from all of the cooking and cleaning. But still, I remember going to bed on those nights, feeling so happy and so safe, the smell of cake and vanilla still in the air.

I hate thinking of my father like this. He doesn't deserve to be remembered this way, in a way that makes him seem like a good person. But when I think of him, I can't help it. Mixed in with all of the horrible things, I'll remember those days, the days when he would be elbow deep in soapy water, me next to him, the cake in the oven, and I'll smile.

I've been having this dream lately. It's been going on for a couple of weeks, since I read the book. It's odd, because in the dream I'm my 1995 self, twenty five years old, but I know somehow that in the dream world it's still the '80s.

It begins on an empty street. I'm walking alone, in a neighborhood I've never been to before, but somehow I know where I'm going. I'm in Colorado; the only reason I know this is because of the person I'm going to see. It's a nice suburban neighborhood, with nice big houses. It's the kind of place where you imagine having a family, raising kids, being happy. The kind of place where the truly horrible doesn't happen. Nothing bad is supposed to happen here.

I stop at the big brown house with the big green yard and the white picket fence. There's a tire swing attached to a sturdy looking tree on the right side of the lawn. A family lives here. I walk up the path, climb up the front steps, knock on the door.

A woman opens the door with a welcoming smile on her face. She doesn't know who I am yet, but I know who she is. She invites me in for some lemonade, without even asking my name. It's a hot day, and that's the kind of neighborhood this is; people don't have a reason not to be trusting to strangers. Although this house, this family, should be different.

We sit down in the living room, her on the chair, me on the couch. She's still smiling, still welcoming, as she pours the lemonade. When she learns my name, I know it will all be over, but this is the reason I'm here. To tell her who I am, to talk to her.

We make small talk for a little while, about the weather, the big game. I'm not a big fan of football, but she tells me that both of her sons love it. The older one, John, is graduating high school this year. He's been offered a full ride at several schools to play football for them. The younger son, Allen, is only ten, not yet able to play, but she tells me that it's his dream to follow after his brother.

“I’m sorry, but what did you say your name was again?” She asks this when there is a lull in the conversation, though I never did say.

I tell her, knowing that she needs to hear who I am, but not wanting to ruin the moment.

Though of course it does. Where before she had been open, smiling, she’s now closed off, instantly on guard. I can see her making the connections; anyone who's ever seen my father up close, as she has, would be able to make the connection between my name and my features, so similar to his.

“Why are you here?”

“I just--I wanted to talk to you, I guess. To see how you’re doing. How your family is,” I say, knowing as I’m speaking that it’s not right, but not knowing what else to say.

“How I’m doing? How do you think I am? We’re getting by, but we’ll never be okay. Because of your father. Because of you.” She’s getting angrier with every word. By the end she’s almost yelling. And I don’t blame her. Her daughter isn’t here anymore because of my father. Her family will never be whole again because of him.

Kelly Diane Hanson was a very pretty, intelligent girl. She was only twelve, but she looked several years older. She had her whole life ahead of her, and I don’t doubt that it would have been a long and happy one had she had the chance to live it.

She was my father’s youngest victim. Nobody who knew him, who was familiar with his record, can figure out why he picked someone so young, when his other victims had been almost exclusively college aged girls. It’s been speculated that it’s because he knew he was getting closer and closer to being caught. After the massacre at the sorority house that had occurred just a few days before, he was careless, and becoming and increasingly unhinged. Maybe he knew that this might be his last chance. Or maybe it was just simply a case of Kelly being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

No matter the reason, the outcome is the same: Kelly is dead, and my father killed her. He was arrested the next day. They had caught him, finally. He was in prison, would never kill again, but it was too late for Kelly. Her remains were found eight weeks later.

Mrs. Hanson takes a deep breath, visibly trying to calm herself. "I think you should leave now."

I know that I should take the out. That nothing good can come from staying, trying to talk, yet I try again. "I just wanted to talk to you--"

"No. You wanted to make yourself feel better. Because you know that it's your fault too. If you had paid more attention, been less self-involved, had reported him, he would have been caught sooner. And my daughter would still be alive. But she's not. She's not because you chose to see what you wanted to see. And now, I think that it's time for you to leave."

And that's when I wake up. It's always the same, and the dream always ends before I can respond. Not that I know how I'd respond. Obviously, there's some part of me that feels at fault, like I'm somehow responsible for what my father did. And I keep going over those years, my childhood years, trying to see what I missed. Anything odd, or suspicious, that I chose to ignore, to not see.

But the thing is, I can't. Usually when you hear about a situation like this, there was something that gave away that there was something off about the person. Some sort of sign, even if only in hindsight, that something was going on. But I can't think of anything. Growing up, I thought that I had the best dad in the world. I never sensed anything that would suggest who he turned out to be.

And maybe that's the worst part. Because if I could think of something like that, remember a moment where something wasn't right with him, than it would mean that I had known the real him, even if it was only a glimpse. Because not having that means that it really was all a lie. That I never knew him, never had any idea who he was. And that's a really painful thought.

Everybody who knew my father would describe him as being a very charming, charismatic person. That was, I think, largely why it was so difficult for people to believe he was guilty of what he was accused of when it first came out.

He grew up in the Pacific Northwest, mostly in the Seattle/Tacoma area. He went to school at UC Berkeley, and got his degree in political science. From there, he spent several years travelling the country working for the Democratic Party, doing various jobs and moving up the ranks. Eventually, he wanted to stop moving around so much, and moved back to Seattle, where he started working as a political advisor in the Western Washington area. He met my mother while she was working as a journalist for one of the smaller Seattle papers, when she was sent to interview him about his work.

They got married a couple of years later, and about a year after that they had me. My dad's career became more and more successful-- he was highly in demand the entire time I was growing up, and it allowed him to have a lot of freedom when it came to his work. We spent my whole second year out of state because my dad had been hired by several politicians in Southern California for his help in upcoming elections. We moved back to Seattle after that. They bought a beautiful old house in a nice neighborhood; I loved that house, and my fondest memories come from the time we spent there. We would move again, this time for about six months, to Utah, when I was eight. But no matter where we went, Seattle was home, and we would always return to it.

People wondered, when the truth finally came out about my father, how it was that his own wife and daughter had never suspected anything. After all, shouldn't it have been obvious from all of the late nights, the time spent away, the mysterious blocks of time when he disappeared, when we didn't hear from him for several days? My mother and I have never engaged, never tried to answer or explain, but the truth is that at the time, that was just what our life was like. My mom had a job reporting on international news for a Seattle paper, which she was able to do even when we were living out of the state, and besides that, she was busy raising me. Both of my parents were very involved with raising me, something which I

always appreciated because most of my classmates fathers didn't spend nearly as much time with them as my dad spent with me.

Because of my father's success, he had a lot of freedom when it came to his hours, and he was able to take a lot of time off. But he also, when he was at the height of a campaign, spent a lot of time working late nights and full days. He also loved hiking and camping, something which my mother and I never liked, so he would do that occasionally. When he became a suspect, detectives were able to link many of the times when he had told us he was camping to the times of disappearances in the area, but there was nothing to make us think that he was lying about where he was and what he was doing.

That was how our life was. In hindsight, there are lots of things that, when you look closer, you see the faults, begin to question what was going on. But at the time, it was all easily explained. He did spend a lot of his time away, but he spent a lot of his time with us. Nobody who knew him at that time had a clue that he was responsible for the horrific things that had been occurring. When he was with us, he was loving, caring, funny, engaged. There was nothing to suggest that something else was going on with him. How could we have known that there was a side of him that was so completely, terribly different from the person we thought he was?

Sometimes I wish that I had a sister, someone who I could talk to, who has the same memories, the same experiences. But then other times I think that it's good that I was an only child, so that nobody else had to go through what my mom and I went through, the doubt, confusion, disbelief that comes from finding out that the person you looked up to, loved, is not who you thought that they were.

Of course, it doesn't do me any good to think about the sister that I never had, I know that. But I still find myself wondering sometimes if my life would have gone any differently, if I had had somebody with me through all of those years after. If maybe having somebody to talk to, who understood, would have kept me from feeling so alone.

I decided to call up my friend Janey, to ask her to meet me for coffee. Out of all the people who I've made friends with over the years, Janey is the one who I've always felt the biggest connection to, who I've always been fondest of.

She and I met during our junior year at UW. We were both in the same World Literature class, and during the second week of class she came in late and ended up sitting next to me in the back of the classroom. If it hadn't been for her tardiness, we probably never would have met, let alone become friends. She's the type of person to sit in the front of the classroom and raise her hand all of the time, whereas I always sat in the back, never saying a word. She always dressed in bright colors and patterns, and she has a laugh that can be heard from a mile away. Janey and I are, in many ways, complete opposites, and I never would have thought, just from looking at her, that the two of us would get along. But one day she sat next to me, and we've been friends since.

We haven't seen each other much since UW, but a couple of times a year I'll get a call from her and we'll have lunch and catch up. I always look forward to those times, but I've never been able to bring myself to be the one to call her, until now.

We met at a coffee shop a couple blocks from my apartment. I saw her coming from a block away; she was wearing bright pink rain boots with flamingos on them, and a neon green coat, so she stood out against the dark, nondescript colors of the people walking around her. She yelled when she saw me, ran, and gave me a big hug, which I had been expecting, but that didn't stop me from being self-conscious of the attention that it drew from passersby.

We went, ordered our drinks, and sat at a table in the back corner. We spent some time catching up-- as usual, I didn't really have much new and exciting to talk about, so it was mainly her telling me what was going on in her life. After graduating, she had spent a year in Korea, which was where her mom is from, teaching English as a second language. She loved it, because she finally had the chance to get to know that side of her family better. She's now in graduate school, hoping to become a psychiatrist. She

tells me that she's planning a trip to France over the summer, and I can't help but wish that I had some of her adventurousness.

There have been a couple of times over the years that I had thought about telling her about my father, but I just never did. I was too scared of what she might say or think, but I think that another part of it is that I've never told anybody about it before, that it's just so weird to think about letting it all out. But I realized that I just really needed to talk to someone, let someone in, and if I was going to trust anyone with this, it would be Janey.

And so I spent what must have been about two hours just talking, telling her about my father, about who he was, about some of my own feelings. There were a couple of times when I almost started crying, but I never did. And she just listened, hardly saying anything. It wasn't until after I finished that I realized just how much I needed to just get it all out, talk to somebody who would just listen to me without judgment.

It was only after I finished that she said anything, and even then it was to ask about my contact with my father.

"Have you tried talking to him since-- you know?" She said the last part kind of hesitantly, like she wasn't exactly sure how to phrase it. *I still hardly know how to talk about the situation either.* "Not that I'm encouraging you, but it just seems like you have a lot of questions, and maybe he might be able to give you some answers. But I don't know."

"No, I never wanted to talk to him. I guess I was maybe there was a part of me that didn't want the answers. Now I'm not so sure."

"Well, if you wanted, couldn't you talk to him now?"

"He died a few years ago."

“Oh.” It doesn’t surprise me that she didn’t know about his death. My father, as with many others who have been in the public eye, was sensational only while he was still out in the world, still dangerous, mysterious. Once he was in prison, no longer a threat, people stopped caring what happened to him.

The last thing I talked about was the documentary, how I still can’t decide whether or not I’m willing to be interviewed. Whether I want to associate myself with my father in any way, after spending a lifetime trying to distance myself from his shadow. The director gave me a couple more months to make a decision, but I’m no closer to making a decision than I was when I first got the letter. I told her about my doubts, how unsure I am about what the right thing to do is.

“If I do it, then I’ll become recognizable. And I’m worried that if they ask me about what it was like having him as a father, that I’ll make him sound sympathetic, which I don’t want to do. But I also don’t want to lie and say that he was a terrible father, because he wasn’t.

“But then if I don’t do it, I could be sending the message that I just don’t care. About the victims, about their families, about the pain that he caused. I just don’t know what to do.”

I stopped for a minute. “Just to be clear, I’m not asking you what you think I should do, so don’t feel pressure to give me an answer, Janey.”

“Well, that’s good, because I have no idea what the right answer is.”

That got me to smile.

That was where our conversation about my father ended. But I’m fine with that. I wasn’t expecting her to have any life-changing advice or to have answers to my questions. I just wanted to talk, and I did feel better. Lighter. A little bit less alone.

We left the cafe, and walked around for a few blocks, in a comfortable silence. Before we said goodbye, she invited me to a holiday party that she’d be going to. Normally, I wouldn’t even consider it, would just make up an excuse about why I couldn’t go. Parties aren’t usually my thing. Well, people,

actually, aren't usually my thing. But I told her I'd think about it. After all, I'm trying to change, right? And letting Janey in seemed to be a good thing. So maybe I will go.

My father was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the murder of Kelly Hanson. She was the only Colorado victim who they could tie without a doubt to him. The others were circumstantial, so the prosecution decided to focus all of their energy on the case that they felt had the highest chance of conviction.

He was caught, again, by complete coincidence. He was pulled over by a state trooper for speeding. By then it was a day after Kelly had last been seen at school, and a description of the man had been sent out by the witness who had seen him pull up to the school and tell Kelly to get in the car was already circulating around the area, memorized by law enforcement. When the officer pulled him over, he said that Tim was acting strangely, he looked exhausted and was behaving very evasively. That was when the officer checked the trunk, saw a burglar mask made out of a pair of pantyhose and a pair of handcuffs. It was almost the exact same things that he had been caught with in Utah.

When a forensics team went through the trunk of the car, they found blood that matched Kelly's type, as well as several hair strands that experts would testify were a perfect match to Kelly's hair. The final nail in the coffin was the crowbar they found in the backseat, which had dried blood on it, which matched the indentations on her skull that were identified as the cause of death.

They had caught him again, and this time it would be for good. My mother and I weren't at that trial, but we didn't doubt that he was guilty of what he was accused of. He was sent to Menard Correctional Center in Illinois, where he was to spend the rest of his life. We never saw or spoke to him again.

Timothy Robert Brown died eight years later, at the age of 45. I had just turned 20 when we got the call. He had suffered a major heart attack in the middle of the night, and by the time the guards realized what was going on, it was too late.

My mom and I didn't really acknowledge his death. After all, it had been nearly a decade since our family was all together. It was all over the news that day, reporters rehashing what he had been accused of, interviews with those who claimed were closest to him in his last days, who said they had known "the real Tim Brown." It was all bullshit, and we turned the TV off after a few minutes.

The truth is that I still don't really know how I feel about his death, even five years later. I had made the decision not to see him, not to have any contact with him. When he was alive, I made that choice, but with the knowledge that he was still *here*, that it was still an option for me to talk to him if I wanted. When he died, I just tried not to think about it, about the fact that the choice was no longer in my hands. But now I can't stop thinking about the lost opportunity, the fact that I can never see him again, never hear his voice, never ask any of the questions that I have. I'm left with all of these questions, and no way to answer them.

Besides the obviously unfortunate fact of having a loved one turn out to be a mass murderer, my mom and I were actually fairly lucky when it came to our life after we found out about my father. My parents had had a lot of money saved up from both of their careers, and though a lot of it was spent on his legal fees before their money was divided up in the divorce, we still had a considerable amount left. My mom put our house up for sale; I wouldn't say I was happy about it, but I understood it. That house was meant for a family. It was where we were a family. It had been a place of comfort and safety, but it turned into a place of doubt and lies. There was no way to be in it without questioning all of the good that had happened, whether or not it was real. We moved into an apartment in downtown Seattle. It's a nice place, in a good

area. It allowed me to go to UW without having to move into the dorms. It's where my mom and I have been our own little family all these years.

My mom was able to take a couple of years off of work to take care of me and spend some time writing for herself. Her career wasn't impacted too much by our last name being printed in all of the newspapers; she had never changed her professional name when she got married. We both had our last names changed to her maiden name, so that our names wouldn't be recognizable. Thankfully, the only pictures that had been printed of her and I were very grainy. People learned all about my father, but we were kept largely out of the spotlight.

After the break, Mom began working part-time again as a journalist, which she still does, and the rest of the time she spends writing science fiction novels. I think that she likes being able to step into a new world temporarily, because sometimes this world can be a difficult place to be in. She's actually become fairly successful, and is well known in the genre.

I spent the first few months crying constantly, confused about how I felt, how I was supposed to feel. My mom spent a lot of that first year crying also, but she would try to do it when I wasn't around. It was almost as if we were in mourning; I think that that's what our new neighbors thought, but they didn't know that the person we were mourning was still alive, in a prison several states away.

That year, almost every night, my mom and I would end up sleeping in the same bed. I had nightmares. They were about my father; usually it was him being taken away from me, leaving me alone, screaming and crying, which was how I would wake up. Sometimes my mom would lie next to me in my bed and comfort me. Other times I would crawl into bed with her, and I would snuggle close to her, trying to get back that feeling of safety that I had taken for granted for so long.

Eventually, the frequency of the nightmares began to slow, then eventually stop. I made the decision that I was going to try to forget my father, to forget everything about him, the good and the bad. I didn't yet know all of the dark details about him, but I knew that he was a bad person, that I should forget

him. I knew that I shouldn't miss him, that he was a bad person, that he hurt a lot of people. But sometimes, even when you know you shouldn't feel something, you can't help it. I thought that I could control my feelings, make myself forget him, but that's not usually the way life works.

Heather King was a twenty-one year old attending Boise State University. She was a very good student, and there was no reason why she wouldn't be able to achieve her goal of becoming a pediatrician and helping children in developing countries. On the night of September 25th, 1978, she had just gone on her third date with a man she met while volunteering. When she got to the house she shared with her two roommates, she called her sister to tell her about the date. She was very excited; it had gone very well, and she really liked him. She said goodbye to her sister, said goodnight to her roommates, and went into her basement room. Her roommates didn't realize that anything was off until the following night, when she never came back from class, and they realized that they hadn't seen her at all that morning, either. When they went into her room, they saw that the bed was made, though not in the way that Heather usually did it, and when they pulled back the comforter they saw blood staining the sheets. They called the police, who found the clothes she had been wearing the previous day stashed under the bed, torn and bloody. They did what they could, but there wasn't much to go on. Heather was never seen again.

On April 11th, 1979, Kathleen Manson was walking home after meeting some friends for dinner several blocks from her Salt Lake City home. Kathleen, a high school senior, came from a large, devoutly Mormon family. She was the third of eight children, and she had found out a few days before that she was going to be an aunt for the first time, something which she was very excited about. She had a loving family, was active in her community, and had her pick of schools to choose from upon graduation. Nobody thought that anything could happen to her, especially not on the same short walk that she had taken countless times before, and yet she never made it home that night. Two weeks later, her body was found several miles away on the edges of a remote field.

Denise Rule was a twenty year old University of Washington student; she had just recently declared her major in English Literature, because she wanted to become a high school English teacher. It was 1974, and she and a few friends had gone to spend the hot summer day at the beach a couple hours drive away from campus. They were having a good time, laughing and talking about the upcoming school year. She and her boyfriend had just made up after a disagreement, and things were going really well. Late in the afternoon, she excused herself to use the restroom. It should have been so safe; the beach was packed with people taking in the sunny weekend day. Yet several hours passed, and she never came back. The group waited until late that night, hoping that she would come back with a reason why she had been gone so long. But that never happened, and so they called the police. Again, there was hardly any evidence or any leads to go on, except that a several witnesses recalled seeing a man wearing a sling walking with a girl who matched Denise's description to a car. Some young women who had been at the beach that day said that they had been approached by a man, also wearing a sling, who asked them if they wouldn't mind helping him carry some things to his car. They had all, for various reasons, said no, but it seemed that he had found help in Denise. It would be six months later that a pair of hikers would come across what turned out to be her skull in the nearby mountains.

These girls, and all the others that I haven't even mentioned, should have had their whole lives ahead of them. They had so much potential. They had families who loved them, communities that they were a part of, hopes for the future.

They were real people, with real lives, which is something that I don't think I had fully realized until I read the book, read their stories. Even now, I'm not sure that I totally get it.

The odd thing about it is that, for me, I feel this sort of connectedness to them. I remember my father's numerous trips to Idaho when I was growing up. When Heather disappeared, was that during the same trip when he brought me back my favorite teddy bear? 1979 was the year that we moved to Salt Lake City for a year, because he had an especially long commitment there. Was it on one of those nights

when he said he had to work late, but would call during my bedtime to say goodnight to me and wish me sweet dreams, that would turn out to be Kathleen Manson's last?

I loved going to the beach when I was growing up, and often our family would make it an all day thing, heading out early in the morning and staying until it got dark. The beach that we used to go to was the same one that Denise disappeared from. Did we go there that same summer? If we went there after Denise was there, was my father thinking about her and what he had done while he was playing with me in the sand or swimming in the lake?

There was no way that he could have known back then how I would turn out as an adult. But reading about Denise in the book, I couldn't help but be struck by how similar we are. We look very similar; looking at the two of us side by side, we could be sisters. We majored in the same thing. She is how I imagine I would have been in college if I had actually tried to enjoy the experience, a group of friends, a boyfriend, hopes and plans for the future.

And that's what's so tragic about the whole thing. This girl, Denise, she could have lived a long, happy life if she had been given the chance. And she was, from all accounts, taking full advantage of the opportunities she had, living her life to the fullest, working hard to achieve her goals. But all of that was taken away from her in one moment, and she'll never have the chance to graduate, to be a teacher, to get married and have a family. To just enjoy taking a walk on a warm, sunny day.

And I have had the same opportunities as she did. I could have done so much, but instead I just wasted all of these years doing nothing, just existing, not enjoying life because I didn't want to, because I made the decision not to. And that's so awful, because Denise wasn't given a choice. Her choice was taken away that day at the beach when a stranger asked for her help, and she agreed. But I had a choice that I didn't even deserve, that Denise should have had, a choice to really *live*, and I chose not to.

I spent today walking around the University of Washington campus. I had always enjoyed it there, how big it was, how old the buildings were. It was always a place that allowed me to get lost, to feel that I was just one of many, that things had gone on before me and they would continue on after me.

But today I went there with an entirely new view of the place. Walking behind the sorority houses, where before it had been an alley that offered a shortcut between classes that were across campus, now I saw it as the last place that Melanie Roberts was before she disappeared. The Ave had been the place to get food on campus without it being the cafeteria offerings, a place to be close to the world outside of UW while still be close to what was familiar. But now it's also the place where I know that my father used to spend a lot of time, waiting for the next opportunity to present itself. The whole campus has changed; now every place has some significance, some awful tie to my father.

Finally, I just couldn't walk anymore. I ended up sitting on a bench on one of the side roads off the Ave, thinking about everything. The entire day had been cloudy, threatening to rain all of the time, and it was somehow fitting that it started to rain right after I sat down. I just couldn't stop thinking about what had gone on here, wondering what his victims were thinking, how their last moments were, what their final thoughts had been. I couldn't help but think about my father, what had been going through his mind. Had he even thought about what he was doing? Did he ever think about how what he was doing would affect my mother? Me? Did that ever make him pause, make him try to stop?

I just became overwhelmed. There was too much going on in my head, too many thoughts, too many questions that could never be answered. For the first time in years, I finally just let myself feel everything, let myself cry.

I think I sat on that bench crying for about three hours. It rained the entire time, and I just sat there, hunched over, shivering, cold and wet, waiting until I stopped. I'm sure that people passing by thought that I was crazy, but I didn't care. I don't even think I knew what I was crying about, just that I had to get it all out.

Now, thinking about it later, I think that I was crying because of everything. I was crying because of the young women whose lives were taken for no reason other than just being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and catching the attention of the wrong person. I cried because of all of the good things that had the potential to happen had those women not been taken too soon. I cried for their families--so many people loved them, and all of them lost someone who they can never get back. Their lives will never be the same. I cried for my family, the people who loved my father-- their lives will never be the same either. They lost somebody they loved also. I cried for myself, for all the years that I've lost because I couldn't move on from the past. For the father that I lost when he was arrested, when the truth came out about what he had done. And finally, I cried for my father, for what made him the way that he was, whatever that may have been, that obviously there was something so wrong with him, something that maybe even he couldn't control, that made him do the things that he did.

And I'm angry writing about it now, I shouldn't be crying over my father. He was a monster. He did terrible, unimaginable things, he hurt so many people. He doesn't deserve my tears, and that makes me angry. There will be many things in my life that will be deserving of my tears, but my father shouldn't be one of them.

And yet. I should hate him, and there is a part of me that does. But there's also a big part of me that, no matter how hard I try, still loves him. I want to forget that part of me, the same part that can't help but remember the good times with him growing up, that can't help but wish that he was still here, that I could talk to him, that he could tell me that everything is okay.

The rain was gone today. I went back and bought the scarf, and I even wore it on my walk home. My hands were shaking as I wrapped it around my neck, but I did took a deep breath, and told myself that I could do it, that everything would be fine.

And everything was fine. People didn't look at me differently, nobody judged me. The world didn't end. For the first time in years, I wore something bold, something bright, and nothing happened. I was just a girl wearing a purple scarf, walking down the street on an ordinary day.

After my big breakdown yesterday, I realized that what I've been hoping for, been expecting, in writing this journal, in learning more about my father and really trying to understand my feelings about him, is that I would come to some sort of conclusion. That there would be a resolution, where I would have some sort of realization that would make everything okay.

But it will never be okay. Nothing about it is okay. My father was a terrible person. He did terrible things. The world will remember him for that, and hate him for that. And they should. And there's a large part of me that hates him for all the pain that he caused to so many people. There will never be forgiveness. The pain that he caused will not be forgotten.

But there's a part of me that can still remember him as the loving father who read me bedtime stories, who watched cartoons with me on Saturday mornings, who spent so many nights with me cooking dinners, talking and laughing and teaching me. And that part of me will always love him, even if I can't forgive him, even if the other part of me hates him.

And I'm starting to realize that maybe that's okay. It's okay to have these two parts of me, coexisting, even if they don't seem like they should be able to. There is no resolution, because what happened is not okay. It will never be okay.

But I'll be okay, I think. I've been thinking that I have to choose, to either love him or hate him. But I've realized that I don't. That I can accept that I will always have these two parts of me, and I shouldn't try to force one of them out. I've spent years doing that, and all that it's brought me is a fear to move forward, to move on from the past. And I don't want to be that way anymore. I'm going to try not to be that way anymore.

So I called Janey, and told her that I would like to attend that party. And maybe I'll even wear the scarf. It might be awkward, I will probably be uncomfortable, but I'm going to do it.

And I think that when I'm done writing this, I'm going to write to the director, tell him that I think that I will do the documentary. I have a feeling that I'll regret it if I don't.