

## *RUN OR CONFRONT - PREFACE*

*Long, black hair gleamed in the sunlight as familiar visions began their torturing play inside my head. I always wondered why my brain did not possess a natural protecting aversion to beautiful, black hair. Rather than a protection, my demented brain seemed to gain pleasure from the torturing visions of hope that would soon fade into grave disappointment. The long sweeping locks danced in a different direction so that the owner's face would momentarily be revealed. "Turn away," a voice inside of me screamed, but I refused to listen for fear my daily quota of disappointment would not be met. Without warning the face for which I had relinquished everything and everyone else I had loved was only a few yards away from me. At first I thought my hopeful visions had trumped my tortured brain, but the face remained the same verifying this time she was real. She smiled, the most radiant smile I had ever seen, and uncontrollably my breath was taken away. I registered how absolutely happy she looked. I couldn't divert my attention to what she was doing or if anyone was with her terrified the vision would disappear as so many visions of her had disappeared before. The fifteen years that had passed since the last time I experienced that enchanting smile had not changed her at all. If it was even possible, the years had only made her more beautiful and irresistible. I had fifteen years of training preparing me for this moment, and now with the moment not one of my fabricated visions, but reality, uncertainty flooded through me. I had two choices: I could run away, or I could confront her. Soon enough she would see me, and she would have the same two choices. Would she recognize me? It wasn't fair! This shouldn't be her choice! She had deprived me of enough; she would not deprive me of being the one to make this choice. A moment I had equally coveted and dreaded its arrival was here. My legs began to move before the rest of my body was aware of their amble in her direction.*

## *A BECKONING BETRAYAL*

*As I walked toward her, I contemplated what Devin would have done in this situation. My contemplation was wasted energy because I was certain Devin would stride confidently toward our mother and unleash a tirade of hatred that one would assume could only be meant for Judas himself. Devin did not struggle as I did with the battle of hope and hatred. As much as I refused to relinquish my hope of finding the mother who abandoned us, Devin refused to relinquish her hatred for her casual departure from our lives when we were way too young to face the world without a mother. That departure had proven to have devastating effects on both of us, but for some unknown reason all the hatred I should be feeling right now was completely resolved. As I finally reached her, my only feeling or desire was to have my betrayer embrace me. Without reservation, I said, "Mom."*

*At the sound of my voice proclaiming her as my mother, Anna turned to look at me. As a child I could easily read and understand all of my mother's expressions. Now fifteen years of absence seemed to have diminished my powers of connection to my mother, and I struggled to interpret the expression on her face as she looked at me. This infuriating struggle produced a lingering bit of hatred for her inside of me that demanded I not allow the expression on my face to convey that her reaction to my arrival was in control of my emotions. Although we probably both knew she was just as she had been since the day I was born. Some gravitational pull of needing her to smile at me, to love me, to hold me had controlled every emotion and action I had ever had. As I struggled to be expressionless, Anna smiled at me. I wasn't expecting that. Then her smile widened and with certitude, almost as if fifteen years had not passed since she had seen me, she endearingly placed her hand to my face and said, "Drea." Before I could object or concur that this is all I had craved for years, she enveloped me in her arms. I breathed in her sweet scent, felt the safety and security of her embrace, and began sobbing like*

*a little girl. My mother didn't try to stop my tears; instead she held me tighter and let me cry out the past fifteen years of confusion, rejection, and unending mistakes that unguided children make.*

*As Anna held me, her gravitational pull on me enlarged and virtually catapulted me back to a day four years before when that gravitational pull had proven to be the sole motivator in every action that I made. Devin and I were in the bedroom that belonged to my five year old daughter, Bree. I was packing Bree's favorite belongings for the plane ride that would move us from sunny Los Angeles to cold New York because I could not resist that gravitational pull of Anna wanting me with her. "You won't find her!" Devin finally screamed at me as I folded a pair of jeans and placed those in the suitcase. I had felt her agitation rise with each new item I placed in the suitcase, but now all I felt was the sting of her words that was intentional to let me know that she saw through my façade of wanting to move to New York to advance my career. Moving to New York meant extreme hassle of constantly returning to Los Angeles for production meetings and filming. This, of course, would mean I would have to take Bree out of school often as she was about to begin kindergarten, and Devin knew that I had no family in New York to help me raise my daughter. All of that hassle and the turbulent effects of such a major transition seemed trivial compared to not acting when I heard HER beckoning me to New York. Devin knew it, and now she was confronting me with her knowledge. We were each other's only support system so confrontation between us was rather unusual, but in that moment I knew confrontation had become inevitable making now the time to sink or swim. I turned around so suddenly that Devin almost fell backwards at the sheer force of my surprise attack, but Devin's lapse of readiness for this battle was only momentary. She quickly raised her eyes level to mine showing she was equipped and ready for fierce competition. Identical blue eyes stared determinably into mine. We looked identical in every way, except that Devin had recently dyed her normally black hair to platinum blond as her declaration of independence on the hold our mother had on her. But in that moment the*

blonde hair, or any other defining difference between us, faded away as we looked deep into each other's eyes. Behind both sets of eyes was one motherless similarity that echoed an ocean's worth of pain and torment that had been accumulating for eleven years with no relief. An ocean of pain could easily be hidden from the world, but not from a twin sister. As much as both of us wanted so badly to ease some of that pain for the other, we accepted that we had tried and failed for years and that we were both just incapable. The eye contact and the reminder of all the pain we had endured became too overpowering for both of us, and in a rare moment Devin accepted defeat by turning away from me to retrieve a stuffed animal she had picked out and given to Bree on her last birthday. **You won't find her** was now one more stone in our carefully sculpted dam that held back a flood of unspeakable topics.

Devin placed the stuffed animal in the suitcase, but she hadn't abandoned the fight. "Please don't go, Drea. Think about Bree. She loves it here. She won't have any friends there." **I won't have any friends here** went unsaid, but Devin's fighting attitude compelled her to try every approach she could think of to get me to change my mind and stay in Los Angeles. Deep down I think she knew all of it was a futile effort, but she wouldn't be Devin without putting up a fight. After all of her fighting was expelled, I zipped the suitcase then turned lovingly to her. I was about to launch a reassuring fight of my own, but I recognized something hidden behind her dark blue eyes: **betrayal**. My move was as much of a betrayal as Anna's departure, maybe more of a betrayal. I was leaving Devin, taking away not only her twin sister but her beloved niece too, all in an effort to be close to Devin's source of eternal hatred. Feeling the full weight of my betrayal as she stared at me, the only fight I had in me was to embrace her, tightly, a long time, attempting to hug her long enough my love would be permanently inside of her. Then Bree and I slipped out of Los Angeles and made our new life in New York.

That independence had proven to be incredibly beneficial for me and Bree, but a few months ago the dam broke and drowned Devin to the point of near fatality. As I thought of the horrifying

*moment of finding Devin in complete devastation because of the pain our mother had inflicted on her, I felt I was betraying Devin all over again four years later by being in our mother's arms. My allegiance to Devin, my identical twin sister, overpowered my gravitational pull to my mother, and I pushed Anna away from me. However, I couldn't run away; my feet stayed firmly planted a foot from her, and my hands moved up to wipe my tears that Devin would surely mock.*

*"Would you slap me in the face if I started with 'How are you?'" Anna started. I could tell she didn't want me to leave, but she had no clue what to say. What do you say to the twenty-five year old woman who was crying like the ten year old girl you abandoned?*

*"I guess not, but I reserve the right to slap you later," I finally said trying to act tough. I had acted in a million movies, even won Academy Awards for some of my portrayals, yet right now I could imagine my tough act was not convincing at all.*

*With a smile Anna said, "That's certainly your right." Her smile widened, it was surprisingly a mother's smile that flashed on her face. I recognized that smile; it was the same smile I always had as I basked in Bree's every move and accomplishment. "Drea, you look absolutely stunning, more beautiful than even in your movies. I've seen them all. I'm so proud of the career you have had." That really did matter to me that she had seen my movies because she was the only reason that I acted at all. I loathed acting, but I had to have a reason for Anna to notice me. For years I had endured agonizing torture that was just part of the world of acting: kissing slimy conceited men who were terrible kissers, fake blood around me performing scenes that gave me nightmares, overinflated egos of famous co-stars and directors, the press scrutinizing and ridiculing my every move, my daughter having kids only want to be her friend because of who her mom was or them not wanting to be her friend because of the latest tabloid scandal about me. I've endured all of that torture just to have Anna notice me. I dreamed she would show up on a set one day and tell me how much she loved me and what a mistake it had been to*

*leave me behind. I even made sure I was one of the best at what I loathed; I was constantly winning awards, so I knew there was absolutely no room for error in her knowing how famous I am. Devin, of course, had drastically different reasons for her famous acting career, still her reasons centered on our mother. In Devin's perception everything was a fight. Despite Anna being a completely silent competitor, Devin saw the two of them in the most prevalent war of Devin's life. Devin felt like every movie she made was spitting in Anna's face that she was more famous than her, and that each movie was a direct hit to our mom that Devin had been successful and just fine without her. Devin had not been fine without her, and neither had I. Still Anna looked as if everything was fine because she had seen all of my movies without once bothering to show up on set or attempting to contact me. **She must like not having me in her life.** Every muscle in my body tensed at this thought, but this thought was so contrasting to the way she was looking at me, like she had missed me so much.*

*Reality of my battling emotions hit her, and she said, "I guess we have a lot more to discuss than your career."*

*I dropped my head for a moment feeling completely overwhelmed. Then I looked at her and with all honesty said, "I don't really know where to start or what to ask. As much as the big question of why you left us needs to be asked, I can recognize that I'm not ready for any explanations no matter what those are. I'm overwhelmed just by seeing you. I need time to process that before I know anything else. Can you be supportive of that?"*

*"I admire your ability to understand and express your limitations. You are far wiser than I have ever been. I can be supportive of whatever you need, Drea, even if that is walking away and never seeing me again. Although that is certainly not what I want; I want the chance to get to know you and be in your life. I want to make sure you know that is what I want, but what would you like right now?"*

*I had no idea what I wanted right now. As many times as I had played out this scenario in my*

*head, I had never thought past the moment of us seeing each other, embracing each other, and life just magically transitioning back to how happy it had been before. Now I realized those were the dreams of ten year olds. Dreams of fairy tales like Bree's movies filled with princesses, fairies, magic kingdoms, and happily ever afters. That's why those were called Fairy Tales because they weren't ever true, and even if happiness could be possible, it certainly was not easily obtained. I realized having Anna in my life now was not going to make the past fifteen years of pain, rejection, and bad choices disappear. All of those obstacles would still have to be dealt with, as well as new obstacles of forgiveness and rebuilding a broken relationship. Here she was - I could have my mother - but at what cost?*

*"I don't know," I finally blurted out. "I honestly can't tell you what I want because I just don't know!" She had been so patient during my long silence, and this was all I could muster to answer. I lowered my head because I felt tears resurfacing, and I didn't want to start crying again. I took a deep breath and gave myself a moment to allow the shock to settle in. After the shock had settled, I knew exactly what I wanted and declared it with confidence. "I would like to get to know you, the woman you are now, and you know me, the woman I am now. I would like to take it slowly, and see what develops. I may not be strong enough, but I would like for us to try. I don't have any idea how that is going to develop, so I would appreciate any suggestions you have."*

*Anna smiled. I had not rejected her when I had the chance as she had rejected me. She also realized I had not fully accepted her either; I knew she grasped that. I was willing to try, and I knew that was all she needed. I had her with me, I had her smile, and to me that meant I had her love. Why did I so desperately need the love of someone so determined to keep that love from me so I could feel like a whole person? As if she was reading my mind and trying to reassure me that she wasn't trying to keep her love from me now, Anna said, "Maybe we could go to dinner. A non-threatening but very busy place so you might think twice if you decide to kill me."*

*I laughed at her humor, amazed at how easy it was to feel so natural in her presence right now. Of course then I was immediately astonished at my amazement. A tornado could feel at ease in Anna's presence; it was her charm, and the ease that she looked at situations and people. I remember that ease and calm I always felt around her, and know that is what I have spent fifteen years searching for. Everything is different now; she took my peace with her and hurt me in ways I can't even describe. Yet here I was in front of the person who had hurt me more than anyone on earth, and I was agreeing to put myself right back into harm's way. **Harm's Way**, echoed in my mind. Even that thought could not overrule the gravitational pull to her, and the words came so willingly, "Dinner sounds like a great idea. When and where?"*

*"I'm assuming from your earlier statement of being overwhelmed at just seeing me, you could use a little time to soak this in and prepare yourself for dinner with your enemy." A guilty look spread across my face, and she began her motherly assurance, "Oh, don't try to pretend. I always knew if I ever got another shot with you girls, there would be hell to pay. I'm prepared for that, because the blessing of having you back in my life will far outweigh the hell I will go through to get there."*

*At least she was realistic, this wouldn't be easy for anyone involved, but I felt obligated to let her know just how much hell she was inviting into her life. "Don't expect any kind of welcome from Devin. Devin hates you with the fire of a million burning suns. The last thing she needs right now, when she has just gotten her life back together, is the presence of the one who left her which brought nothing but destruction and misery into her life. She has done some extremely outrageous and dangerous things to herself trying to escape the pain of her hatred for you, and finally she has found a way to be stable. I will not allow you to come back into her life and turn it upside down again. Don't try to contact her. If we continue to build a relationship and I feel the time is right, I will let Devin know, and I will be the one to tell her. That's my only condition. Take it or leave it. If you leave it, I*

*walk away now, and you will never see me or Devin again.”*

*“I see your intense sense of protection for your sister has not diminished over the years. I’m glad it hasn’t. I accept your terms. I promise not to contact Devin or take any matters into my own hands. I will trust your judgment and decisions where Devin is concerned. Since I have accepted your terms, will you have dinner with me tomorrow night, if it’s not too soon for you?”*

## *A BURNT OFFERING*

*“Ugh,” I grumbled as for the third time that week I stepped into the wet evidence of Bree’s most recent guilt trip about being an only child. She had convincingly argued that a puppy would help with her development since she would never have a sister or brother. That was for sure. I loved Bree with all my heart, but obviously she had been a complete accident. Not many fifteen year olds get pregnant intentionally. Or had I? We were in the pet store the day after I ran into my mother who had abandoned me, and her reentry into my life brought a few revelations I had never allowed to enter my thoughts before. Had I gotten pregnant intentionally at fifteen? Was I looking for something, someone who would never leave me? As soon as I allowed the thought to play in my head, I realized I was not prepared to fully take on that weird mind trip. I immediately dropped \$1000 for a puppy and became the hero for a day for my daughter. It was the least I could do to absolve my guilt of thinking I had her enter the world to be my one thing that would never leave me. Then we, of course, dropped another \$1000 on puppy accessories and clothes, and even a few matching Bree/puppy outfits. Oh what a great feeling that was: an entire weekend of her exaggerated adoration for me which I gratefully accepted after battling a turbulent roller coaster of emotions that had been produced by seeing my mother.*

*A week later I was standing in pee with my foot wet feeling completely disgusted and ready to return that puppy/guilt trip. “Breanna,” I screamed toward the void at the top of the stairs. I suddenly realized she had rarely heard me call her Breanna before. I refused to ever say her full name around Devin because it inflicted too much unnecessary pain. She had never grasped what had possessed me to give my daughter a name that included our mother’s name. I had never quite been able to produce an adequate defense for my choice of a name for my daughter, but I had found a way to placate Devin by ensuring she and Bree shared the middle name of Elizabeth. As I heard Bree begin her descent*

*down the stairs, I prepared myself for her barrage of questions about my use of her full name.*

*“Yes, Mom,” Bree said as she came into view apparently unfazed by being called Breanna.*

*However, I was certain she had become accustomed to a lot of strange behavior on my part in the past week. Being called Breanna might be the least of her concerns right now.*

*“Belle peed on the carpet again. Clean it up,” I said as she reached the bottom of the stairs.*

*“Mom,” Bree argued.*

*“You wanted her; you are going to take responsibility for her. And you better start doing some reading on training her to pee outside and how often you need to take her out. By the looks of it, you need to start with every ten minutes.”*

*Bree laughed showing an appreciation for my ability to have a sense of humor in the moment. She left and returned with cleaning products. I bent down to help her clean the weapon of my wet assault. “Thanks, Mom,” she said so innocently, grateful for my help that probably signaled to her a truce between me and the puppy. I began to furiously assault the carpet. I wasn’t quite aware of how fervently I’d been stroking the cloth to the carpet until Bree asked, “Are you nervous about tonight?”*

*The stain was gone, still a wet spot, but the stain was gone and probably a spot of carpet was gone too. I surrendered my fight and admitted, “Yes, I am.”*

*My beautiful nine year old daughter sat down beside me looking as if she were about to reverse the roles between us. “I would be nervous too, if I were meeting my dad, I guess. That’s as much as I have to be able to put myself in your shoes. That’s what you always tell me to do, put myself in the other person’s shoes. Maybe you could put yourself in Gran.. um, Anna’s shoes,” she hesitantly corrected. “I guess I don’t know her well enough to call her Grandma,” Bree expressed with a giggle.*

*“She may never be one who wants to be called Grandma,” I countered with a nervous laugh.*

*Bree placed her small hand inside of mine as I usually do when I am the one between us*

*providing the comfort. Then she continued her pursuit to make me comfortable about tonight by asking, “What did you like most about your mom when you were a kid?”*

*This innocent question was the most blessed gift she could have given me then. She was offering me a chance to be a daughter again, a part of myself I had all but forgotten. I felt like the daughter I had been was walled up like some secret garden that held all the keys to my happiness but was never capable of escaping. Bree knew all the parts of me except this one, and suddenly I was bursting to reveal this part to her (and myself). “Anna was an excellent mother, so there is a long list I liked about her when I was a kid. She was always able to completely abandon being an adult and excitedly embrace whatever girly activity we were doing whether it was playing castle or with our Easy Bake Oven. Her thrill for these childish endeavors showed she treated all of our activities with importance which made us feel important. Despite having twins, she always treated me and Aunt Devin like complete individuals. She really knew us so intimately. She was so instrumental at cultivating my abundant creativity. I had a wild imagination, and Anna would sit for hours letting me tell her creative stories. Sometimes she would enhance my stories by adding a little creative detail of her own, and that made me feel like we were painting the world to our liking together. No matter how difficult a task was for us, she never let us give up. Usually she was so encouraging and offered a different perspective on our difficult situation, that we overcame the obstacle feeling like seasoned champions. She always put these sweet notes in our lunchboxes. Every day I looked forward to lunch time so I could get Mom’s little note. I don’t think even once it occurred to me that I could open my lunchbox any time of the day. Probably because reading the note at lunch seemed to evenly break up the length of time I was away from her. With all those great things I loved about her, my absolute favorite was just her. I loved climbing in her lap so she could hold me and I could just soak in her love and peace. Usually we didn’t say anything, she accepted that I needed to be held and needed a quiet respite from Devin. She pulled*

*me tenderly into her arms and held me as long as I needed while I took in her enchanting scent and played with her beautiful hair. It seemed in those moments that we had entire conversations without ever saying a word.”*

*“It sounds like you guys were as close as you and I are. Anna sounds like a great mom, and I should know since I have the best mom on Earth,” Bree said reflecting a mirror image of the child I had been at her age. **Her age: nine, before it all happened, or ... was it happening, even then?***

*“God, you’re a great kid,” I beamed at her approval and easily switched back over to Mommy. Mommy was easier than nine year old happy daughter soon to be abandoned by her own mommy.*

*“Does that mean you’ll keep me?” Bree asked as she tipped her head to the side allowing long black locks to cascade about the carpet and fluttering her long eyelashes over her dark blue eyes.*

*“Yep, I got a no return policy when I stole you from the stork,” I joked, and she laughed like this was the funniest thing I had ever said in her whole life. I loved my daughter’s laugh; it made the entire world make sense.*

*“Maybe Anna got a no return policy too, she just thought it was for exchange for a while,” Bree laughed harder continuing the charade, and I couldn’t help but laugh with her even though she had no idea how crude or painful that remark was. However, in her young world, it was funny, and I had been the one to embark on the stork jokes. Once she managed to compose her laughter, she resumed her original mission for this conversation by saying, “I think you will have fun tonight. You seem to like her a lot. I know you don’t like that she left you and Aunt Devin, but you do seem to like Anna a lot. I think you’ve been looking forward to this for a long time, and everyone needs a mommy.”*

*“Fun, huh?” I said as I realized Bree was right; I did like Anna a lot.*

*“You’ll be fine, kiddo,” Bree joked. She was adorable. Then she asked a question I was not prepared for, “When are you telling Aunt Dev?”*

*I looked at her, realizing that was a legitimate question to a nine year old. Anna was Devin's mommy too, and Bree had just stated that everyone needs a mommy. As worried as Bree had been about her Aunt Devin in the past few months, I was certain she thought Devin having a mommy could only help her. However, Bree was not privy to the understanding of how much Devin hated Anna, and fortunately Bree had not had a front row seat to Devin's destructive path of attempting to escape her hatred for our mother as I had. "Probably not for a while, Honey. I don't think this news would be good for Aunt Devin right now. She's just starting to get stable again, and I worry about her state of mind right now. Even if you can't understand all of that, could you please not tell her until I'm ready?"*

*Awkwardness seemed to take over my daughter as she thought about her aunt only a few months before. She wasn't quite capable of understanding all that happened to Devin so she concealed her unease with an attempt at humor, a tactic Devin would have used as well. "Sure, for a Hummer," Bree said conceitedly shaking her head.*

*"Wow, you'll be like the only nine year old on the block with your own armored tank," I easily mocked like an excited teenager because I needed a little humor and joking around with my daughter.*

*"Well, it's not like you can't afford it," Bree snidely commented like a country club wife. This was really just too much.*

*"At least I know you won't be driving it for the first two weeks because you'll be grounded for acting like a complete snob."*

*"Ok, I concede. I won't tell Aunt Dev, and I won't demand a Hummer. Maybe, just an Escalade," Bree said with a laugh.*

*"Are you learning anything at that fancy school I'm paying for besides expensive vehicles? Maybe I should send you to public school."*

*"Oh the horror, public schools. NO, I'll do anything," Bree exaggerated, and I feared for her*

*natural acting abilities. The last profession I would ever want her to take up would be acting, hypocritical, I was well aware, but human also. The doorbell rang then announcing the arrival of Bree's best friend, Raven, and her mom, Rachel, who had become our make-shift family. The three of them were leaving for the weekend to go to my beach house at Martha's Vineyard, a vacation the four of us took every year for Labor Day weekend. A vacation I was trading this year in exchange to get to know my mother. All three members of my little family had been supportive of me taking this time to have with Anna. In lieu of a mother, Bree would have a new puppy with her for the weekend. The four of us worked in tandem, as we did with every area of our lives, to get Bree and Belle's belongings together. As my little family was leaving without me, Bree wrapped her arms tightly around me and said, "I love you, Mom. Remember to have fun tonight. You deserve it."*

*When they were gone, I felt the roller coaster of emotions begin: elated to be seeing my mother, terrified to be seeing my mother, and every range of emotions in between. What if she decided not to show up? It had been a week since our initial contact; maybe she had changed her mind about wanting me in her life. She had done that before. Left us. Vanished. No explanation. All my worries about her vanishing again were miniscule compared to the feeling that I was betraying Devin and our bond of sisterhood that had been the only comfort we had to hold onto since Anna's departure. I thought of Devin. I missed her, I decided to call her. I knew it was to absolve my own guilt, it was a burnt offering, but I had to make a gesture of love toward her before I sailed off to dinner with her sworn enemy.*

*"Hey Sis," Devin said as she answered the phone. "I'm driving down the freeway, so totally late for this at dusk scene we just have to film. But hey, some things never change, huh?" Devin said with a sarcastic twist that was pure Devin and exactly what I needed in that moment. I could picture her driving down the freeway, top down, lots of blonde hair flowing in the breeze, dark sunglasses on. My sister was a mixture of complexities, still she exemplified every stereotype of the egotistical starlet.*

*Nevertheless, I loved her with all my heart. I adored her. She was mean at times, could be counted on to be selfish more often than not, refused to spare anyone's feelings for needing to express her opinion.*

***Yet, she was my sister, and I was not complete without her.***

*I laughed. "One increased maturity step at a time, Sis," I assured after her statement of still being late even though she had recently changed so many other bad vices in her life. In that moment, even though she was 3000 miles away, I could feel her with me, smiling, letting her guard down like she only did with me, and feeling the peace and security my unconditional love always granted her. Maybe I could love her enough that she could love Anna again? And maybe I would get home one day and Bree's new puppy would have cleaned the entire house and folded the laundry, I laughed inside my head at myself. "So what's new with my favorite sister?"*

*"Your only sister," Devin corrected before beginning her rambling rant of what was new in her life. "Mostly getting my feet wet again with getting back into acting. I am so loving this character, but my leading man is going to be the death of me. God, now I remember why I don't date actors anymore. Gary Rides is my leading man. Oh he's a worse actor than I am," Devin joked. She had always possessed a sense of humor about riding the coattails of our famous parents and grandparents while not possessing any acting talent of her own. I had always found it refreshing that she was realistic about the fact that she was famous, not necessarily a talented actor, but famous, and that was all she cared about anyway. She only wanted a life of enjoying the perks and keeping her name around.*

*"So, you're good?" I asked quaking with apprehension.*

*"Yes, Drea. I'm great! Quit acting like I'm a china doll about to break!" Devin demanded, and, for what seemed like the first time in months, I allowed myself to breathe. I wasn't glad she yelled at me, but the yelling was a clear sign the fighting spirit in Devin had returned indicating she really was going to be ok.*

*“I’m sorry, Devin. I probably have been treating you like a china doll about to break. I know how hard you have worked these past few months, and that you are a very strong woman,” I assured, maybe more for my benefit than Devin’s.*

*“True dat,” Devin acknowledged about herself, but quickly changed the subject. “I miss you so much, Dre. When are you coming this way again?”*

*I decided not to push her too hard. When Devin was finally ready to talk to me about all she went through a few months ago and is going through now, I knew she would open up because Devin had never been one to hold back. Until she was ready, I accepted that I would be pushing her further away if I pressed too hard. Sticking to a topic I knew was safe, I said, “I’m not sure, Honey. Bree went back to school this week, so our lives are a little hectic right now. And to add to the craziness, Bree got a new puppy, a Maltese. She’s just adorable. Bree named her Belle after her favorite movie she loves to watch with you, *Beauty and the Beast*. I’ll never figure out why you two love that movie so much.”*

*Devin didn’t pause for even a second in answering my completely rhetorical statement. “Because he doesn’t just see her physical beauty, he sees all of her, and she doesn’t just see him as a monster, she sees the real him. It’s so beautiful,” Devin romanticized. I could imagine Devin and Bree curled up on the couch with wistful expressions on their faces watching *Beauty and the Beast* for the hundredth time. Each time they watched this movie together, their desire to be Belle and one day be loved by a handsome prince became more and more transparent. I had often wondered if romance was a girly gene that had somehow skipped over me. In the womb maybe I seized all the compassion and wisdom and Devin seized all the sarcasm and romance, and that was just that. We were both stuck with ourselves and our lot for all eternity.*

*“Is that what you’re looking for, Devin? Your Beast?” I asked genuinely trying to understand the years of compulsive, binge dating and sexual escapades that Devin had relentlessly pursued that*

*always resulted in disaster.*

*“Not right now. I’m just looking for the real me, whoever-the-hell that may be,” Devin declared. A vulnerable and honest moment from Devin, I was very impressed.*

*“At least you’re honest,” I said. “I’m glad to see you focus on yourself right now.”*

*Devin paused so long I fantasized she was about to open up. Somewhere in her silence she decided she wasn’t ready. We returned to a shallow conversation. “What else is up with Little Bree?”*

*“Little Bree,” I repeated in a sarcastic tone, accepting my lot in her life right now. “I swear that child thinks she’s thirty already.”*

*“Oh good, she’s older than us,” Devin joked, and we both laughed. Devin could always be counted on for a joke that exploited her vanity.*

*“She’s great. She thinks she’s big stuff now that she’s in the fourth grade. She seems to really like all of her teachers this year, which is nice. She also decided to add swim team to her activities, so afterschool we now have karate, soccer, and swimming. We have one night a week we are not at practice or Girl Scouts. Of course that night we are catching up on homework. I’m not sure when fourth grade became the year they send home three hours of homework a night.”*

*“You crack me up,” Devin interrupted. This was a battle cry.*

*“Why?” I asked realizing somehow we had entered an argument, and I had not even seen the gauntlet thrown down.*

*“You’re Drea Devane! One of the most famous and talented actresses of our time, and you talk like you are the normal soccer mom.” She said **normal soccer mom** like it was a cult that imprisoned innocent passerbys and was the last thing she would be caught dead joining.*

*I was not clear about her motivations behind this particular fight, but I was very certain we were in one. I attempted to defend myself without detonating an invisible Devin grenade. “When it*

*comes to Bree, I am the normal soccer mom.” I worked hard to repeat the phrase without the dripping tones she had used. “Besides I haven’t done any acting in over six months,” I informed realizing how long it had been. And realizing even more how much I had not missed it at all. Which ding, ding, ding was the culprit behind this sudden confrontational rise in Devin. She didn’t want another area in our lives that separated us. She had hounded me for months to return to acting, but just as she wasn’t revealing what happened to her a few months ago, I wasn’t revealing the extent of what that night had done to me and my acting career.*

*“What are you looking at right now? A big production, all on location in Los Angeles, one of those that will take four years to make?” She was still fighting this battle but employing cuter tactics.*

*“Certainly,” I mocked as I rolled my eyes. Then I decided to give her a little peace that I hadn’t abandoned acting, thereby abandoning Devin, entirely. “I’ve had a few scripts hit my path recently, nothing I was dying to do. I haven’t accepted any offers yet. To be honest, right now I am just enjoying being a mom, and this time in Bree’s life.”*

*Failure. Devin was struggling to get her career back at all, and I was turning down roles I hadn’t even auditioned for. She dropped cute and shifted right over to blunt. “Yeah, yeah. It’s always the people with all the talent who hate their jobs and can so easily walk away.”*

*“I don’t think I’ve completely walked away, Devin, but I have to admit the break has been nice, almost addictive, some might say. Aren’t you at the studio yet?” I said realizing we had been talking awhile and any further participation in this insane argument was only emotional suicide on my part.*

*“Oh yeah. I’m just sitting in the parking lot talking to my sister.” Fight over. Devin won. I couldn’t always tell when the moment of victory had occurred in her perception, but I could always tell when her tone of voice shifted to playful letting me know I was off the hook.*

*“I love how off handedly you consider your paycheck,” I said. And mine. Every minute we lose*

*is costing me more money, I thought but refused to confess to her that I was an anonymous producer for the movie she was filming.*

*“Oh like they are going to fire me. I may not be that talented, but I bring in lots of moola and horny young boys,” Devin said with a mischievous laugh. There she was, the sarcastic Devin that you just had to love. I knew then that even our hard core director would succumb to her charms, and there would be no conversation about responsibility. There would just be playful joking around about the big egos of famous actors when Devin finally made her grand entrance. And honestly, that was fine with me because my sister could use a break right now.*

*“I’ll let the people with jobs go do them,” I said endearingly.*

*“I’m glad you called, Drea. It’s nice to talk to my sis occasionally.” Despite all the bating she had done, I knew she meant it.*

*“Yes, it is,” I agreed, but then decided to do a little bating of my own. “You know you could always come here sometimes too. Go to a soccer game or two. Do some power shopping.”*

*There was a long pause before Devin said, “Maybe sometime. Love ya, Drea.”*

*“Love you too, Devin.”*

*As I hung up, I realized she had said ‘maybe sometime.’ That has never happened before. She had come to NYC for the occasional premieres, awards, and talk show circuit of promoting her movies, but she made sure every moment of the 48 hours that she consented to being in NYC was scheduled. She claimed to hate NYC, but I knew she loved the shopping, the atmosphere, the sarcastic attitudes. Devin hated the thought of being in my home that was my separation from her. She had never even been to my home, and she refused to buy me out of the home outside of Los Angeles that we owned together and Devin still lived in. Every request I had ever made for her to visit in the past four years had received a stern refusal, but this time she said, “maybe sometime.” Maybe there is hope after all.*