



*The Fearless  
Moral Inventory of*

**ELSIE  
FINCH  
LYNN BYR**

CAPTURE BOOKS  LITTLETON COLORADO

**WATCH FOR POGO. HE'S GOT AN ABOUNDING SCHTICK.**

In February of 1957, Rich earned his next leave to visit Gail. This news did the glad job of making Gail's choice sure.

She offered to meet him at the airport and watched curiously as he stepped off the plane wearing his casual blue airman suit.

"Non-stop?" Gail asked.

"Of course."

"How does one get off a non-stop flight, Mr. Air Force?"

Rich stopped and looked Gail over. He didn't get her joke.

"You have luggage?" she asked.

"Yes. One case. Over this direction." He took her arm and led her down the corridor.

"Have you ever lost your luggage?"

"No. I haven't flown commercially much."

"I hear you can sue the airlines if they lose your baggage."

"Oh?"

"Yes, but there's no guarantee that you'll win your case." Gail skipped in front of her boyfriend and laughed in his face.

"What are you talking about, girl? I have no intention of suing the airlines."

Gail's teasing ceased. Rich, obviously, had no sense of humor. At least not her kind. Sobered, she let him take the lead.

He seemed casually confident throwing his bags in the back seat of her convertible, then asking if she'd like to go to the lake to let him give her a ride in a rowboat.

"I've taken the afternoon off, expecting to spend it with you, Mr. Air Force, so yes, I'll go along with you this once."

The afternoon air was full of warm caresses on their sun-licked arms driving to the park. Then, Rich picked a rose, handed it to Gail, and took up the oars. She stepped into the romance of Richardson O. Finch's world.

"How is officer's training going, Richardson?" she asked.

"Oh, I should know any day now. My chain of command lost the papers, but they've been found, so they'll let me know when I'm starting, very soon."

"You mean you've been to Saudi Arabia and back, and still no training?"

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He rowed silently through the lake and began to describe his most recent travels through Germany and Switzerland on his last leave as they followed the wake of ducks and geese. “You and me are going to have to visit those places together, someday, Gail. I took so many photographs! I have some good ones to show you.”

“Yes, you sent some interesting ones, but of course, I’d like to hear more about them.” Over on land, the park’s flower gardens provided a lovely evening succulence, almost mystical. Gail laughed radiantly and enjoyed being wooed.

Rich let Gail drive to the Showboat, where he hoped they didn’t require dinner reservations for servicemen returning from active duty. He read the map and pointed to where she needed to turn, and she felt safe.

Passing through Chinatown, Rich ordered, “Keep going along this road straight to Jack London Square, Babe. We’re eating on the wharf tonight.”

Sure enough, a table in the corner window was open for a swordfish dinner special under the influence of the Dick Lane Trio.

Gail’s stomach swished. She was giddy that Richardson knew how to make her happy.

Over dinner, she told him about the list of his assets that she had made from the letters he’d sent. She apologized for not giving him much hope, but it was because she just needed time, and she told him that they had the blessing of her parents. They liked him, even loved him, she said, making his heart beat rapidly.

“What do you want in married life, Gail?” he asked. She hadn’t thought much about her future so she said, “I just want a man I can respect and a dozen kids to herd!” Her beautiful smirk and jostling shoulders aimed to flirt with him, yet her whole response made him feel sick. Maybe it was a case of bad seafood.

His neck tightened at her ability to joke about so many kids. He knew nothing about children or raising even one of them. His own experience hadn’t been stellar. He’d pretty much raised himself, and his little brother.

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He chuckled at her joke and decided that this was a topic they would have to discuss when the wedding was out of the way. Besides, what could she do about it without his approval?

Before they took off from the wharf, he escorted her, arm in arm, around the plaza and finally knelt on one knee producing a velvet black box and inside, tiny diamonds in a row planted in a gold engagement band. Grinning up at her, he asked if he had finally managed to win her heart. When she nodded, he slipped the ring on her finger.

"I agree to marry, you Richardson, and I trust you. Thank you for such a lovely evening." It was all very pleasant and businesslike, but when he bent to kiss her, they kissed some more. She was absolutely sure of her choice.

*"What a beautiful, tender neck! What a lovely perfume! I am the luckiest man alive,"* he thought.

Gail's friends were eager to meet Rich, but also very surprised at the proposed union. They made comments like, *"how did you land that god-like looker?"* and *"Is he any good at kissing?"*

After shopping for dress patterns one Saturday, Gail and her best friends, Joan and Norma Jean, examined their choices. Rich stood erect on the side, almost formal, even after the rest of the family arrived.

"Aren't you exhausted, Richardson?", Gail asked.

"Not much." he said. "Just twiddling my fingers."

Mostly because Richardson described the fact that his papers were being processed for officer's training, Gail didn't feel too bad when her fiancé's leave was cut short and he caught a return flight to Luke's Air Force Base. He told her to schedule the church for a June wedding, when his next leave was scheduled, and she'd already managed to secure the date.

With her parents talking up her marriage to a quality young airman, she knew she'd have a lot of help planning the landmark celebration and reception.

Beryl telephoned Lugilla with the happy news. Lugilla told her daughter that she was hand stitching a quilt that should be ready for the wedding, and if not a gift for the wedding, then perhaps in time for the arrival of Gail's first baby.

"This year when I come visit, Mama, we can work on that quilt together! If n it's not finished by the time the baby comes, I'll finish it on my sewing machine."

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“Oh, no you won’t, Daughter! This quilt has to be handmade. I want Bertie Gail and her children to have somethin’ from me, special like, to remember me by.”

That set Beryl’s mind to thinking, too. She found a pattern for a Dutch Girl quilt and set about learning to cut and piece it together on her own free time. One of her children’s children would want that from their grandma. The idea appealed to her, as most of her mama’s ideas did.

Rich’s letters were fewer than before, strangely, but there were quick phone calls and promises to be realized.

It was Gail’s turn to be the love letter writer. She sent photographs of herself and her family and outings with her friends and she tore out pictures of recipes and household things she liked and wrote about all of this to Rich. She also began asking questions because she realized how little she really knew about Rich, not even a hint about his parents or whether he had siblings.

During one of their phone calls, Rich answered her question about his religious upbringing telling her that he had been raised for a couple of years by a grandmother in Oklahoma, and she was a Seventh Day Adventist. When Gail asked her mother what a Seventh Day Adventist was, Beryl assured her that he was a good Christian, even if he wasn’t a Pentecostal. “You’ll just have to show that boy how to let loose.” She laughed.

In one of his letters, Rich told Gail about his younger brother, Luster, stepbrother really, because Luster was born of another mother after his own mother passed away. He assured her that he’d take Gail to meet his family in San Diego when he returned.

When Rich arrived next in San Leandro before the wedding, Gail was “packed and ready to move to Phoenix as soon as the ink dried on that marriage license,” she said. Her beautiful curls made her look all the more exuberant and “*for goodness’ sake,*” he thought, “*she’s chatty!*”

“Do you have a scarf for that hair?” asked Rich as he opened the door to his soon-to-be bride’s sleek convertible. Giggling, she tied on her scarf, kissed her mama, and donned her new, glamorous sunglasses.

Riding down the coastal highway to San Diego, Gail relaxed in the wind and enjoyed the gorgeous beaches and coastline. Her whole

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future lay ahead. She grabbed Rich's hand and kissed it. As the morning sun began to burn Gail's face, Rich became more and more withdrawn.

Stealing a glance at her beau, she noticed his sagging cheeks and pursed lips. "*Down to San Diego' seems to be working on him somehow,*" thought Gail shaking her pretty shoulders to allay the nerves.

She moved closer to ask a question, but he moved his hand away to turn up the music. *That's odd,* she thought, but let it go.

Rich drove through a suburb of San Diego, and onward to the outskirts of town. He pulled her Sunliner into a gravel yard lacking a paved driveway, and when he opened her passenger door, he stood looking ahead at the tiniest trailer she'd ever seen.

When no-one appeared to notice the sound of their car, Rich knocked on the door and introduced Gail to Dick Senior, who motioned them inside. Rich's stepmom, Carmen, and his dad sat at a kitchen table only big enough for the two and motioned for Rich to take his girl and sit on the sofa.

"Well, Junior, tell us about your grand gal!"

Gail's sunburnt face accompanied her parched throat, but no-one bothered to offer her a drink. Shocked, and finding it a little creepy that Rich's parents lived in a 16' x 12' trailer, she greeted the couple quietly and then asked about Luster, Rich's brother.

Dick Senior motioned his son, "Let's head outside, Junior. We can pick up some burgers to go and let the women folk talk."

A little panicked, Gail graduated to the tiny table opposite the plump, scant-haired Carmen. Carmen's mousy colored hair was coupled with narrow eyes that blackened when Gail asked for a glass of water.

"Oh, sure, hon. Help y'rself. The glasses are above the sink on the left there." Again, there was silence, and still no response to her question about Rich's brother. She was about to try a different tack after downing a glass of water, when Carmen interrupted, "There's iced tea in the fridge if you'd like some, and I'd take a glass myself, kiddo."

When Carmen waved to the fridge, the flesh under her arm wagged. After pouring, Gail took a better look at her plain housedress and slippers from behind.

The young woman obediently brought back two glasses of iced tea to the table and sat looking around the room, a trapped animal behind zoo glass. She'd been taught to compliment her hostess on at least one thing

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when entering a home, but there was nothing more than curiosity in her paneled surroundings.

Carmen must have noticed Gail's focus on a row of dolls kept on a high shelf perimeter of the living room, in their original round plastic containers. "Dick traveled during the war and sent these to me from all over the world. They are my treasured souvenirs."

"Oh! They are beautiful, and so interesting. I can see that they have different costumes..."

"The thing you should know about me, kiddo, is don't ever cross me. I never forget and I never forgive."

"Oh! Oh, okay." Stunned, Gail nodded and acknowledged this warning and immediately wondered if her marriage decision was as good as she wanted to believe.

"So, tell me about your mama and daddy, then."

Gail talked about living in Arkansas, trying to find common ground with this step-mom of her groom-to-be.

Saved by the sound of Rich's car parking in the gravel and the doors slamming, she abruptly stopped her soliloquy in anticipation.

With a knock on the trailer door, Rich and Dick Senior entered bringing a sack of burgers and fries with a palate-pleasing variety of shakes, two strawberry, one chocolate, one vanilla. Gail waited for everyone to choose whatever it was that looked good, and she took the leftover burger and shake.

"Gee, I'm sorry. I should have warned you about my folks, Babe," Rich said as they followed the highway back up the coast. When Gail offered only a weak smile, he added, "I should have told you that I am the bastard child of my father. You'd probably want to know that."

"I was the product of my mother's affair with dad, in Oklahoma City, during a time when Carmen and Dad were broken up. She's part Cherokee Indian and she never got on with the religious folks around home. I know she can be a handful. Oh, you noticed?" Rich felt a giddiness about the shock he was delivering to the classy girl at his side. She could use a reality check.

"Well, after I was born, Dad apparently couldn't take the crying of a baby, and bashed my head against the wall above the crib to make it stop. I'm kind of deaf in my left ear because of that. So, my mother kicked him out. Dad went back to Carmen and she refused to stay in the same town as my mom and me. So, Dad took her way up to the

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shipyards of Washington during the war, where he worked till the end of it. We then moved down to see what all the fuss was about in California.”

“What about your mom and you?”

“Well, let’s see...I remember my mom must’a lost hope in Oklahoma City. I can recall waiting for her in the car while she went in to have a few drinks with whatever guy was buying, and then earn a few greenbacks for a little more effort.

“After a few years of being knocked about because she had a bad reputation in Oklahoma, my mom thought she was dying.” Rich looked to see if Gail was listening to his barrage of words. “She was sickly with TB and a heart problem. She always seemed to be sick as far as I could tell. Anyway, Mom took me up there to Washington with a brother I no longer know. She toted my older sister, Mary, from another man, up there, too.

“I remember standing by her side as she begged Dad to support us, but he refused, calling her every name in the book and threatening her to stay away.” Rich’s jaw clenched and the car swerved around another on the motorway. Getting back into his lane, he finished. “Finally, she took the train down to Los Angeles to lay us all at her sister’s doorstep, where she died. I was eight.”

“She died when you were eight years old?”

“All I remember was that my aunt couldn’t take me and my sister. She kept my younger brother, and he grew up with her. My sister went to live with a preacher and his wife in Texas somewhere. My granny accepted me back at her place, and that’s where I got my religion.”

His voice changed to a more tender tone and the Ford slowed to join in with traffic when he described an older woman he called ‘granny’ living in a tiny house with a white picket fence and a big garden.

“Every night she read me one of the Proverbs and something of a story from the Bible and then she prayed with me. It was the best memory of being a kid I have.”

He said, “It was only after my granny heard rumored ‘round town that Dad was coming to take me back to live with him and Carmen, that she put me on a bus and sent me up to a boy’s school in Kansas to hide from him. I was about ten or eleven then, and Dad came and found me and brought me to live in California. The trailer where you just saw them? That was where he and Carmen settled.”



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“But you and your brother and them couldn’t possibly have lived in that small trailer!” Gail challenged.

“No. No, we didn’t. They had another one out back. Luster was just a kid when I came to live with them, and they put us both in the other trailer with a couple of beds, and that was where I basically raised my little brother.”

“Oh, my word, Rich. Where is he now?”

“Dad said Luster’s been drinking a lot lately. He’s still a kid in his last year of high school, and he just has to find himself, but Carmen, is not at all happy with her favorite child. So, he’s ‘on the outs’ right now or he would’a loved to have met you. He kind’a worships his big brother. So, if he would’a laid eyes on you, -”

“Stop it. Stop it, Rich!” All of this information, all that she had seen today was too much for Gail to absorb.

She felt creepy sitting next to this desperado talking wild about everything bad and hopeless all at once. “I need some time to think about all of this.” Kids at school had called her family Okies and hillbillies, but they were a far cry from the meanness in that trailer.

“If you want to stop the wedding, darling, just let me know now. I mean if my past is too much for your pretty head.” He waited a minute, then added, “Geez, Gail, I knew I was overreaching and that you’d want all the best things, but I promise to do my best to please you, if you can be just a little patient.”

Gail’s tears swept off her cheeks and chin in the wind. They drove in silence, except that Rich put on the big band tunes that kept young lovebirds thriving, sensuous horns and violins that labeled them both idealists. When she arrived home, she jumped out of her door, said “Thank you, Rich.” She curtly turned away from her own car, letting herself into her parents’ front door. “I’ll call you tomorrow.”

## NEVER TRUST *ATOM* BECAUSE HE MAKES UP EVERYTHING

The sunshine and scent of honeysuckle streamed through her islet curtains, awaking Gail to a happy, fresh suspension of other facts.

She resolved to put away the day before. It served to make her feel she and Rich were actors in an Alfred Hitchcock film, perhaps *Rebecca* or *A Shadow of a Doubt*. It just wasn’t so.

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Now, laid out safely in her P.J.s, her rational mind assured her that Rich was not a bit like his parents. He had a future. He had multiple talents and he was ambitious.

Gail jumped from bed to call the Ford Motor Company. She put in her two weeks' notice. Life was moving on!

During this time, Beryl approached her daughter on two separate occasions trying to explain the difficulties with the facts of life as she knew them, but the awkwardness of the subject matter embarrassed Gail. She said, "Mama, I know, I know. Shush, Mama. I don't want to talk about this."

*"Laila didn't have any difficulties with her rite of passage, so why should I?"* reasoned Gail.

The day of the wedding, Gail turned radiant. So many of her mother and father's siblings came, filling every space of the house. Having saved the gown she'd purchased for her wedding to Bill, her twenty-three inch waist slipped back into the quarter length gown, and her mama and Baby Lou were nervous chambermaids.

Gail worried a bit about the cold sore on her lip. Doggonit. Why did she have to get a cold sore on her wedding day?

Since her hair and nails had been done at the beauty shop that morning, all that was left was to make it to the preacher at the Oakland Assembly of God on time. Daddy drove her with Mama in his new red and white Ford Fairlane.

This was a wedding to make them proud.

Sweating at the front of the church, Rich smiled his happiness to see the doors finally open. Dorjan and Gail began the father-daughter wedding steps on the red carpet to the front.

On one side, Gail looked up and grinned at Joan and Norma Jean. She greeted her groom, noticing his moist baby blues. He gave her the satisfaction that he felt all his dreams were coming true. Behind him, the figure of his awkward best man, Brent, jittered on a nervous knee. He adjusted his glasses and smiled. Gail had only met Brent once, and though she didn't consider him a likely match for her husband, his wife seemed very nice. She knew they'd make friends.

Rich's younger brother, Luster, offered a smile of wonder, glowing proudly behind Brent.

Afterward, they crossed arms and carefully fed a piece of white wedding cake into each other's mouths to the music of cheering and

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applause. Rich's charm when he shook hands with the guests and accepted their well-wishes, assured Gail again of her good favor and choice of husband.

Luster was a tall boy for his age. He gave Gail a boyish hug and said sheepishly, "I think you are a goddess. My brother married a queen." Gail smiled gratefully and gave him another hug. "Don't be a stranger, okay?"

Handfuls of rice showered over the couple with a perfect sendoff from the stone portico of the church. Rich's waiting rental, a gleaming black 1954 Customline, a classic ride complete with a chauffeur, welcomed the bride and groom who paused just long enough for professional photographs.

At first, the clanking cans attached to the back fender made Gail laugh, but on their way out of the parking lot, Rich told the chauffeur to pull over where the two men pulled off the noise makers, leaving only the giant white letters, "Just Married."

The chauffeur and formal getaway car was mostly a photo opportunity so that they could pick up Gail's car, and allow her to change into her going away suit. The suit, which was lovingly tailored by her mother, awaited in Gail's room. They stopped at the quiet Hudson home, and Rich ran around the car to help his bride, both train and veil in hand, disembark.

Uncle Dennis, carrying a pile of gifts to open, waited at the door.

In short order, a feeling of overwhelming happiness enveloped the couple as they drove an hour up the early June coastline to Monterey and Carmel-by-the-Sea. There, they checked into the honeymoon suite as Mr. and Mrs. Richard O. Finch.

Rich proudly escorted his finely suited bride into the dining room where they ordered two steak and lobster dinners overlooking a sunset vista. When it came time to establish the bill, the waiter refused, making it known that someone had picked up the newlywed's tab.

Sadly, Gail hadn't planned her wedding date well. At least that's what Rich sputtered in so many words when she appeared from the bathroom that night in her negligée only to inform her husband that her period had started.

"Are you kidding me? Is this a joke? It isn't very funny, if it is. Did you purposely plan to do this to me?"

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“Of course, not, Rich. It happens to women all the time. Some women’s cycles are so erratic that they couldn’t possibly guarantee it wouldn’t occur. I planned the date according to your calendar on leave, honey, and didn’t think twice about it. I can’t imagine why no one mentioned this was a possibility. I’m horrified, honestly. Please forgive me.” She kissed him gently.

He pulled away from her. He couldn’t account for the depth of animosity in his heart with the delay of the marriage’s physical union. He felt tricked out of the best day of his life by his own bride.

Monterey Bay was gorgeous and romantic, but neither of them felt like honeymooners regardless of what anyone said to them.

“Why spend another day waiting around for a honeymoon that wasn’t going to take off?” Rich reasoned with Gail. So, in the morning, they left, and went home to pack up their gifts to move to Phoenix and set up home.

## PHOENIX, 1957

### WHY SO *PUNISHING*, MY DARLING?

For three nights, they slept in a lovely little hotel and walked around neighborhoods seeking places to rent near Luke Air Force Base.

Riding through the developing new neighborhoods and the older, traditional ones nearer downtown, the couple found one place they agreed upon, mainly because it only cost \$18 per month.

“Will wonders never cease?” Rich whistled at the price. The cinderblock house was close to town and was less expensive than the brand-new apartments.

“It’s only temporary,” they told each other, until Rich’s discharge from the Air Force.

Unpacking the car the first day remained thrilling while Rich and Gail moved into their small adobe styled apartment house in Phoenix, Arizona. Then, Rich visited the bathroom and came out commenting, “Going to have to keep things tidy since the place is minuscule. Howdy! I’ve seen your bathroom back home, and I’m already having doubts about your ability to clean up after yourself, Baby.”

“What a thing to say!” But Gail nodded, and after taking a second peek herself, said, “All right. It is rather small, isn’t it?”

Looking around the place’s tiny spaces made her think of the term, “utilitarian” because there was only one small bedroom with a hall bathroom right next to the entrance. The hall fed into the living room and kitchen diner. She only liked it because of the friendly front window, but it seemed fine for a starter home. After all, they’d only be living there until Rich received his discharge, two years, tops.

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Next morning, after Rich went to work, Gail arranged their wedding gifts, mostly kitchen appliances and dishes, into cupboards. She was in a conflicted mood, both lonely, but happy, remembering each of her friends and family members who had contributed to her household as she unpacked each piece.

After that, she decided to make her mother's favorite casserole with the few tins of peas, carrots, pasta, and beef they'd picked up from the grocery store yesterday. Humming, Gail removed her curlers from her beautiful chestnut head and put on her makeup to make the surprise complete for Rich's arrival from work.

She was setting the table for dinner when he came in and kissed her. "I'll just put these things down and be back in a minute." He filed his draftsman briefcase and overcoat into the hall closet, then decided to empty his bladder before he sat down.

"Gail! Get in here...now!" As he surveyed the bobby pins covering the single cabinet top around the sink, his military ire rose. Gail's pink and teal curlers were piled high on the back of the toilet tank, too.

Thinking something had broken, or maybe Rich had fallen, Gail hurried to obey. Only, it was his bony fingers grabbing her arm, pulling her into the four by five-foot bathroom space to stand beside him, that made her wince.

"What's this? Wasn't I clear enough yesterday? I told you not to leave your things out! Don't tell me you can't clean up after yourself. I had a feeling you weren't going to be much good at this, so I'm just going to have to rub your nose in it like a dog for you to be able to acknowledge your own mess! Now, get it tidied up before dinner!"

Gail's shock was palpable. Eventually, she swept up the bobby pins and found a container in which to keep them as she shuddered with dismay. She was a fool, rightly humiliated for not knowing to clean up after herself in such a small place. "I'm sorry! I should have known, and I just forgot or something." She should

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have taken a moment to do this little thing. Why had it skipped her mind?

With that small question, an answer crept to attention. *You were unpacking and putting your kitchen together. You were making dinner. For your husband. You were fixing your hair and putting on makeup to please him when he came home. Then, you were distracted and went to set the table for dinner...*

### WHEN TIME IS HUNGRY IT GOES BACK *FOR SECONDS*

It helped Gail's desperate feeling of isolation to know she could call Coalbert, who had also just settled here with his cute new bride, and was already living just across town, if she needed him. She liked Lois, so there was likely to be an instant camaraderie. With two siblings in Arizona, surely Mama and Daddy would come for the holidays, perhaps in the rainy season, or by way of passing through on their way to visit Grandma and Grandpa Sanders. These were the thoughts in Gail's mind the next morning as she set about hanging clothing in the closets, putting linens away, and making up the bed.

When their neighbors came to introduce themselves, Al and Doris were a bright spot, inviting them to play cards together this weekend or next, or really any time.

That night, Rich and Gail tried again to have a romantic experience but were unable to succeed. Gail panicked to think that she and Rich may not be a good sexual fit for one another. The panic subsided into a general disquiet and disappointment after their third try at intimacy.

Punishing Gail for her unhappiness in his sexual performance, Rich told his bride a tale from Saudi Arabia, a tale which culminated in mutual hostility.

He turned on his elbow and ran his finger over her breasts as he revealed, "While I was at the base in Saudi Arabia, I was fixin' to take photographs in the marketplace, when I was approached by two young girls who bid me to

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follow them through a narrow entrance. I went into a darkened room. It was scented with incense and spice. There was a cassock lying on the floor, a woven bed the Arabs use, surrounded by platters of spiced meats and fresh fruits.”

Rich continued to arouse his wife. “After the girls fed me, they laid me down and undressed me and proceeded to give me an exquisite massage to please and excite me so that I couldn’t help myself. I had sex with both of them and then went back to the base.”

Gail leapt from bed and went to sit in the tiny bathroom, seething with grief and anger. Then tears began to roll down her cheeks. To consider that her husband was arousing her as he spoke of his betrayal made her want to jump into the shower. That he expected this kind of arousal from her in a culture so far flung, confused her. That he was not a virgin, and further that he hadn’t bothered to tell her this before the wedding, felt shameful.

Waves of rage washed over the building layers of regret for marrying Rich. The way he played with her in the telling of it!

His physical foreplay had readied her to try again, but now a sick feeling of remorse and hatred claimed her body. Gail stepped into the shower and steamed away her confusion, her disgust.

Gail wiped her tears and asked Rich to go sleep on the couch while in the same sentence informing him that she would be seeking counsel in the morning. She omitted saying what kind of counsel she would seek. She hardly knew herself.

Rich might have fought his wife on her request. Instead, in a fit of shame and excitement, he complied, all the while wondering how it was, he could yearn to woo her and to punish her with equally conflicting tenderness and resentment.

The next day, Gail awoke to blazing Arizona heat already filling the house, a heat to which she was not as yet unaccustomed.

Though she felt grossly defrauded by her husband, she determined to rise above her ignorance of these physiological levels of marriage and be pragmatic about the thing. There was



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nothing she could do about the past, but there was certainly something she could do about her future.

With her husband gone to work, she decided to move out of the hollow space of her bedroom and drift toward the kettle and coffee in the kitchen. She rallied as she looked through a phone book. She would find a nurse to ask about the subject of sexual incompatibility.

At the doctor's office Gail felt the heat rising in her awkward need to explain, but the nurse patted her hand and listened until she was sure she understood the problem. Then, she quietly and matter-of-factly helped Gail to comprehend that there was never going to be a physical incompatibility between men and women.

"From human biology and physiology," she said, "we know the genitalia was designed by the Creator to fit naturally together no matter if the male is a little bigger or smaller in size. However, she explained, a woman needs to relax and enjoy the process, so foreplay is normally practiced in the bedroom in order to arouse the woman. When she is enjoying the experience, she will naturally open up and experience a sensation of intense pleasure." The nurse said, "Foreplay is an exciting experience for both males and females, but sometimes a man needs to be taught to please his wife and not rush to please himself first."

Gail grasped that and immediately became indignant. Her feelings toward her husband and his demand to be serviced, his verbal manipulation as if he were the only one in the encounter, left her breathless with fury.

The nurse explained many young men had never been taught by their fathers or doctors that pleasuring their wives would make both experiences more climactic, so Gail might need to help her husband however she felt she could.

Gail nodded.

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Satisfied, the nurse pulled an illustration from her drawer to explain further that only foreplay needed to help her accept the man's penis.

"Shall I call in the doctor now?"

"Um, no. I think you're right. I think I'll go home and try to work this out on my own. If I need more help, I'll make another appointment."

After Gail's appointment, she drove into the City of Phoenix to seek out whether there were any posts for retail work or office work. Gail's second goal, to find work, was highly influenced by her immediate disillusionment in marriage. Her sis Laila's unhappy marriage could happen to anyone, she guessed.

She knew that she wanted to meet her own financial needs in the event her marriage did not succeed.

The 'Help Wanted' sign in an appliance store window felt hopeful. She was familiar with appliances from her first job at the Oakland Appliances store. Besides, what woman wouldn't be interested in the latest developments of household machines? She returned home with anticipation. She thanked God, thinking about how important this learning curve was to her. He must see her and care for her as she had been taught in all those years of church attendance.

When Rich casually asked her, over supper, if she would like him to help her learn to please him, she smiled. Yesterday, she would have taken his request as normal, but today, she invited him to learn to please her if he wanted her to love him.

"That's a hell of a thing! What do you mean?"

She simply served a slice of strawberry shortcake with a smile. Then, she quietly told him he needed to work a little harder for what he wants.

"My mom used to say that even an elephant in the room will stay unnoticed if you keep the lights off."

"What's that got to do with us?"

"Sexual intimacy concerns both of us, not just you, Rich. I am made differently than you are, so to be a successful husband, you

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need to practice being a better lover. I need to feel your love rising in me before I can physically accept it or return it. You know, silly me, I actually thought that maybe we were not physically suited for one another which is why I consulted with a doctor's office today.

"You did?"

"I was assured that there are no male or female parts in the whole wide world of humans that wouldn't fit together. It is playing together and showing love that opens the physical gates to married love and there is a divine pleasure that sets humans apart from animals. So, you, my love, need to find the key to the gates of splendor. It's no one else's responsibility."

Education is the best offense, but it is also a fine defense.

He was surprised by her sudden candor and clever challenge. "Okay," he said. "Let's give it a try right now." That night, she had no problem becoming aroused. Rich and Gail spring boarded into a mutually pleasing sexual relationship.

Just after the phone line was installed and a phone number was assigned to their place, Gail made a phone call to her mom. It was the second week, midweek, into living in Arizona, with lots to tell about, but it proved to be a short chat. "Long distance phone calls add to a normal bill, my darling girl. It's sure to be the expensive surprises that men don't take kindly to," so Beryl said, "phone calls shouldn't become a habit."

After that, Gail languidly relayed her news about the new job at the appliance store and finding their new home and meeting the neighbors. She'd earned this phone call.

Then, her mother conveyed some strange news. The Oakland pastor who had performed Rich and Gail's marriage counseling and ceremony had split with his wife and they had already filed for divorce. Rumors were running rampant. Gail listened to her mama's voice full of grief and confusion.

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She knew how her mother adored her pastor. How could this happen? But, the feeling of dread went much deeper in Gail's mind.

"Bertie Gail, there are bad things that happen in every marriage. Whenever you get two people from two backgrounds on the same wedding certificate, you're going to have to work things out. . . every day if need be. Lord knows, it's all about hearing the other one, and stepping into the headwinds."

That evening, while washing the car, Rich spoke to his neighbor Al, and took him up on his offer to play cards the next night. Gail invited Coalbert and Lois over, but Coalbert said he was too tired to do things like that after working all day.

"Put Lois on the phone, will you?" she asked.

When Lois came on, the young brides compared notes on the family and the husbands, on Gail's new job and whether Lois was going to go to work.

"Well, actually, no, see, I'm pregnant, and I'm having morning sickness an awful lot. I couldn't imagine holding down a job right now. Besides, Coalbert is doing well for us on his own."

"Oh, well, that's nice. I mean, well, congratulations to both of you, of course! That's exciting news!" Lois sounded so tired! "If you need some help, please call me. I'll do what I can." Gail hung up the receiver. She felt strange. She sliced a head of lettuce for lunch seeing the wedge between she and Coalbert's wife before covering it over with Mayonnaise dressing.

The appliance store's bookkeeping position provided Gail with the gal pal she needed. Fran was a happy jokester and someone who loved to shop. She and Gail began to confide in each other and arm in arm, slip out to go shopping and frequent movie theaters together when Rich didn't want to go, which was typical.

Having always longed for children and having made no particular effort to not get pregnant, Gail discovered in her

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second month in Phoenix that some things happen in due course. Cause and effect, she missed her period.

Though she had no morning sickness, she knew she was pregnant. Rich seemed happy to take this as a natural result of marriage, but it was Fran who helped her find a baby crib, clothing, bottles, and the stroller endorsed by the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. Being from the area, she had secrets to pull out of her sleeve, and Gail's genuine gratitude soon turned into a delightful momentum of preparation for the baby's arrival.

Her new doctor placed her due date mid-March, exactly nine months after she and Rich figured out how to be intimate. The nurse gave her a knowing smile.

Rich pulled out his little notebook and jotted things down.

"What are you writing about?" Gail ventured.

"Well, Baby, that's none of your business. It's just my way to keep the days straight."

Gail was impressed when Rich got permission from the landlord to turn a large bedroom window into a bookshelf and close up the exterior wall with matching brick so that they would have some room to store baby things. She watched him work in wonder. "Does my father or brother know that you know how to work with your hands?"

"Oh, I told them about a go-cart I built once when I was little."

"How little?"

"I think I was about eleven or twelve, just after we moved to San Diego. I put a motor in it and Luster and I drove it all over the place until we crashed it going down a hill."

"Was your father handy?"

"I don't rightly know, Gail. My father is the strong, silent type. I only know I have always had a talent for making things. It was something I enjoyed. I made end tables for my

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mom and I graduated from high school with honors in woodworking and tech, so I think it's just a gift I have."

"Good for us, then! Can you make a changing table?"

"Show me what it is, and I'll try."

After Gail took Rich to the department store to show him what a changing table entailed, he bought some 2 x 3 studs, some wood sheathing, and small screws. Then, he set about making a baby's table for changing diapers.

While she was folding clothes in the same room, she mentioned, "Whatever happened to your promotion, Rich? Shouldn't we be celebrating by now?"

"I told you. They lost my papers and said they couldn't give it to me without the proper documentation."

Gail's fingers froze. She stopped folding. "How is that possible?" She was sure he had never explained anything of the sort to her.

"It doesn't matter. I only have another year. Then, we can get out of here and get a real job back in California, maybe in electronics. I hear things are exploding in advanced technology in the U.S. I think I'm smart enough to find a place in the stream of things."

The young wife decided her husband had been practicing this answer to her in the quietness of his mind. She didn't believe a word of it, but what did it matter? She bit her lip. He was talented in many regards if not in leadership. Rich's charm affected so many people positively, it seemed her husband would be a natural leader. Was it due to Rich identifying as German on his applications after the war that caused prejudice against him or was it some other flaw? She went to the restroom to wash her face in cold water even as she flushed the dream for lifelong honor and privilege.

Perhaps, this was why Rich had mocked her when she pointed out a beautiful chandelier in a Better Homes and Gardens magazine. It sparkled in the interior grand entrance of marble floors and circular staircase. It looked the part of a fairytale, and

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like Cinderella, she pushed over the magazine under her husband's nose, laughing. "Do you think we'll ever be able to have one of these, Tom?"

He pushed it back with a broad grin saying, "The day you become my fairytale wife, you can have a fairytale light fixture and a winding staircase to go with it." He held her gaze with cruel, clear ice, a gaze from which she often shrank.

"Don't hang on the rope of animosity, Rich. It may break from the discord," she said.

Just after Thanksgiving, Gail walked into work, only to have her boss meet her at the door. Though he had always been a nice enough, when he quietly walked her to the back office, an odd atmosphere surrounded him.

"Fran has already cleared out her personal items, young lady, and I want you to do the same. I assure you, we have discovered what you've been up to. We won't press charges, but you are fired, young lady, and I wouldn't try to get another job in this town, if I were you."

Gail's hand found her desktop to steady herself in the shock of his abrupt words, being let go before the busy season of Christmas, of all things. Her boss' rudeness showed he was under the delusion that she and Fran had done something indecent together.

"What? What's wrong, sir?"

"You know exactly what's wrong, Gail, and I'm surprised that you have the gall, being pregnant with child, and with a husband in the U.S. Military!"

"I'm sure I have no idea what you are talking about, sir." She said this as she nervously gathered her few personal items, but when she looked at him, he merely held his hand toward the doorway and nodded.

When she told Rich what had happened, he stood at attention and simply informed her that she would have to "try to get another job. I appreciate your financial

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contribution to the household. Women are fighting hard for the right to equal pay, so let's see what you've got to offer, Babe. Don't get discouraged now!"

Gail felt slapped across the face, though he never touched her. Her husband showed not a whit of concern with the implication that his wife had been accused of something, something disconcerting enough to be fired over, and he didn't show any feeling of sympathy for her predicament. Rather, a smile played around his lips. He seemed amused to know that she found herself in such a precarious situation.

During the two weeks following her loss of employment, Gail did apply to a few other department stores because, with all the window dressings announcing Christmas, she knew they would be looking at the least for holiday help. Yet, after filling out application after application, not a call rang, and no one hired her.

She telephoned Fran. "We're being black balled!"

"I know. It seems he's told the whole city something that he couldn't bother to say to either of us!"

Gail, though indignant, had to let it go.

Instead of working a job towards saving money, she decided to invite her mom and dad out for Christmas and invite Coalbert and Lois over for a family meal. She bought new yellow curtains with white embroidered flairs on them and hung them throughout the house; she added matching throw pillows to the couch by cutting and hand stitching one of the panels of curtains into several squares. Then, she decided to paint a wall.

She also busied herself clipping grocery coupons from the daily paper Rich left for her after he finished it. She bought a Christmas ham. She found new recipes for candied yams, pies, banana bread, and vegetable dishes. She bought a centerpiece for the tablecloth she'd been storing for such a celebration. She was already pleased with how the house would present itself, but the shame of being fired kept slapping her in the face.



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Lois might appreciate her decision to stay home, but how would she explain her change of circumstances to her parents after just telling them how much she loved her new job?

It was back to milk toast with cinnamon sugar in the mornings. Thankfully, Rich found a used black and white television set he could fix, so she was able to watch *I Love Lucy* on the couch with a cigarette in the afternoons. Lucy brought laughter into some of the common conundrums of life. Gail wondered at the woman who repeatedly mouthed a smart comeback and a brilliant idea to every little affliction a housewife could encounter. *I Love Lucy* was addictive.

Closer to Christmas, while perusing the daily paper, she noticed a local police announcement detailing the facts of an accountant caught embezzling money from several local businesses that year. One of the affected businesses was the appliance store she'd been fired from.

"There it is!" She shouted and waved the paper in a fist of victory. She first called Fran, who seemed relieved. Her second phone call was to the owner of the appliance store to tell him that he'd better stop his campaign to ruin her name and Fran's since the real culprit of the thieving had been discovered. Her old boss apologized and agreed, chuckling with a little embarrassment. Then, he offered her job back.

"Are you kidding, sir? No thank you." She hung up. It was time for a cigarette.

### HOW *TEARABLE* A PAPER AIRPLANE THAT CANNOT FLY

Beryl and Dorjan stopped to visit Rich and Gail at their new digs that year on their annual trip to visit their families in Arkansas. Lugilla would ask how Gail and Rich were doing of course, and it was only natural to stop and deliver their Christmas presents, make a few observations, and share the meal that Bertie Gail had worked on so diligently before going to spend the remainder of the holiday with Lugilla. Daddy Sanders had passed away that year, and Beryl didn't

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like being gone too long from her sweet mother, but Lugilla refused to move to California with them, so as was their habit, they left Dennis in charge of their home and spent the winter holidays with Beryl's mama.

Dorjan wasn't sure why his new son-in-law kept his little pad of paper in his left-hand pocket, with the retractable pencil, but he watched Rich take that little pad of paper out every so often and record items in it. "Never trust a man with graph paper. He's always plotting something," muttered Dorjan.

That day after his daughter's husband purchased gas for the car, Dorjan watched the record keeping ritual and decided to ask him what was up.

Rich explained that he could tell all kinds of things about his vehicle, well Gail's car as the case was, and even the state of the economy by simply keeping track of the cost of gas, the amount of gas put into his tank, and the mileage that tank of gas was able to motor through.

Dorjan didn't know whether to admire the record keeper who'd been added to his family or just call the man odd for his dedication to recording small things.

Some people are record keepers. Lighthouse keepers, for instance. Weather keepers for the almanac. There are organizations with profound record keeping characteristics such as archivists for arts and history museums, research scientists, political biographers, and the recent Internal Revenue Service which could be up to no good, but what was Rich up to?

An hour ago, upon her parent's arrival, Gail seemed to be a nervous bride. Her smile was bright, and her baby bump was showing in her flowered shirtwaist dress with a circular, flouncy skirt. "Just a minute, Momma and Daddy," she said, pointing her finger from the corner of a brown box toward the hallway. She intended to store the box under the couple's rollaway bed.

Dorjan walked to the hallway and asked what so many small papers there were worth storing. "Mostly gas receipts and grocery bills, some tax documents we'll sort out later in the year,

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Daddy. If I buy clothing, Rich wants me to save the receipts in here too.” She shrugged.

“That man is obsessed with the cost of gasoline, Baby. I’m not one to complain, but I’ve never seen anyone like ‘em. Is he a government agent? You’d best watch your ‘Ps n Qs’ with him!”

While Dorjan took a nap, Gail and Beryl partook of a Fanta orange soda in a tall glass with ice too cool off. As Gail confided her first months of marriage to her mother, she paused in thought. “Mom, did you ever pray about my marriage to Richardson?”

Beryl shook her head. “Why, Rich seemed so ideal, honey. I just wanted my baby to be safely married, and he seemed right. I thought the Lord had provided, and I guess I really only prayed about you getting your heart around the idea—and of course, the wedding details. Did you, honey?”

“No, Mom. I don’t believe I ever did. I hoped, I worried, and I wrestled plenty with myself, but it never entered my mind to ask the Savior whether I should marry Richardson. I guess I thought Jesus was only interested in my eternal destination.”

In January, Lois had her little baby boy and soon after her own birthday in late February, it would be time for Gail to give birth to her first child.

Lugilla Sanders came into her house carrying her load of fresh blown and dried laundry. She always loved that smell. Her heart skipped a beat, and she set down the laundry basket, took a deep breath and sat on her comfy plump couch. She felt a strange heady sensation of floating away, watching the things in her living room divulge themselves of meaning. In an instant, she was standing on streets of gold in the courts of the Lord. Birds were singing. Palm trees were swaying just like she imagined they did in California, and then she saw her Savior face to face.

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It was nearing Easter. Gail was called to come to Arkansas for her grandma's funeral, but she was eight months full of her first child. She just couldn't.

Within the week, her sister Lou tried to commit suicide with an overdose of pills and was asking for Gail to come. Lou was living in San Francisco. It was warmer there. Gail couldn't refuse her baby sister's call. Though she could never get a straight answer out of Lou about what was ailing her, she did play the part of the nurturing elder sister, fetching food and water, washing Sue's clothing, and entertaining her with stories about her first two years of marriage to an Air Force serviceman.

"Did you ever fly in his plane, Gail?"

"Fly? Oh no. My husband is a draftsman, a measurements man, an engineer's interpreter, a plotter. Not a pilot."

### **THE MOTTO, "IF AT FIRST YOU DONT SUCCEED, TRY, TRY AGAIN," INSULTS A FIRSTBORN**

When she felt the labor pains, she called her husband. "Dagnabbit," he said. "I'm in the middle of a project on deadline! Is there any way you could call Lois? Or drive yourself there? I'll be sure to pick you up in a week, Baby. Call me if you need anything, okay?"

Baby Carlene was born right on schedule and came with a shock of yellow curls. Maternal love for her beautifully intricate treasure flowed into her nipples and into her heart and into her every thought. She longed to share this wonder with her husband and asked the nurse to call him and let him know about the successful delivery.

"Isn't he waiting in the stork room?"

"The stork room? No, I don't believe so. He had a deadline and had to work."

But Rich didn't show up that evening, or the next day or the day after that. By the fourth day, Gail's full heart began to shrink. Her postpartum hemorrhaging was better, but she was weak. She

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asked the nurse to put the baby's name as Carlene Ann on the birth certificate and named Rich as the father. "Is he involved?" asked the nurse.

"What? Yes, of course, he's involved." He's just emotionally available, she thought.

She telephoned her husband at work and left a message for the date and time he should make ready to pick her up. With a couple of days' notice, he should be able to clear his schedule.

Right on time, Rich stood waiting beside her convertible to welcome mom and baby in arms, a wide grin on his face.

The nurse helped guide her patient into the car and ignored the husband. Gail smiled and cooed and touched her precious bundle all the way home. When they arrived, she saw the crib, but wasn't yet ready to put her baby down.

Cooing at baby Carlene, Rich's pinched lips opened enough to put kisses on the child. He allowed her to hold his finger. Then, his eyes filled with tears as a feeling of awe overtook him and he laughed with the mother of his child for her success. Their miraculous new life sincerely surprised him.

"Well, tell me what you did for your week of vacation, Baby." He said this as he sat on the couch and patted to the space next to him. His wide grin came and evaporated.

Gail sat obediently. "I had a child, Rich. You wouldn't want to know about all of that. They do like to give a new mother and father some education for the arrival of a baby, though, things like bathing and holding, and safety precautions, and when to get vaccines, things like that."

"Okay, that's nice. I suppose you'll fill me in as needed?" Only he could feel the ebb and flow of the creek bed inside, the cool clear water disrupting the muddy sludge of soul.

"I suppose."

He began to realize that he was no match for his wife's technique of accommodation and avoidance.

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“There are some handouts in the diaper bag if you would like to look at them. Oh, can you pass me my cigarettes, please?”

He got up and found the box. Tossing it over, he said, “Well, there are some jobs that have come down the pike, so while you’ve been away, I’ve been filling out applications and planning for our future. I also telephoned Brent to ask him to keep an eye out.”

“Is that so?”

“He and his wife send their congratulations.”

“That’s nice. Coalbert and Lois will be by sometime this week they said.”

“Oh, you talked to them?”

She blew out a long, elegant cloud of smoke. “Of course. Mom and Dad called too, and I spoke with Norma Jean, and Fran, and Joan. In fact, I spoke with everyone this week except my own husband.”

“They don’t allow husbands in the delivery room.”

“No, but the delivery was over within a manner of hours, and there’s the stork room where men usually wait until the baby comes. Then again, I was in recovery bonding with our little one while we waited in the hospital for six more days, dear. It was so nice of you to show your concern.”

Gail’s sarcasm was not lost on Rich, who abruptly pushed himself off the couch. He said, “I’ve heard enough. I’m going to bed.”

So, Gail changed Carlene’s diaper and placed her in a blanket in the crib.

Around midnight when Carlene began to gurgle and whimper, Rich wheeled the crib out of their bedroom and into the living room and snuggled back under the blankets. When the cries grew louder and more incessant, Gail asked Rich to bring Carlene to her to nurse. When he didn’t reply and didn’t move, she stuck her legs out of bed and felt a rush of liquid leave her body. She was hemorrhaging.

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“Oh, dear!” She groaned. “Rich, I need to get into the shower. I was hemorrhaging in the hospital, and they thought that I was better. Apparently, I’m not yet, so if you could call the emergency number on the brochure and explain to them what’s happening and ask what’s to be done, I’d appreciate it.”

With the baby’s fussing growing towards a tantrum, and his wife’s blood all over their bed, Rich found the number and made the call.

“You are to maintain bedrest,” he shouted into the bathroom. Grudgingly, he cleaned up the sheets, sprayed bleach and lay down towels for his wife. Then, he hugged his pillow to his ears. His hopes were murmured so loudly, “this can’t be happening. It won’t become the new normal. This isn’t the way we’re going to live, I need my sleep!”— they felt like prayers.

When Gail returned to the room, she said, “I’m going to sit up in bed for a while. Can you get the baby from the crib and bring her back to me? Maybe I can calm or cuddle her.” She carefully sat down with her back against the headboard and began to pile up the pillows.

“You are spoiling her. Babies should cry themselves to sleep.”

“But she was sleeping and now she’s awake. She needs me or she’s hungry. Please bring her here.”

“No. I’m exhausted, I’ve changed the sheets, and I’m the one who has to go to work in four hours.”

So, Gail got up and brought Carlene into bed with her. In one fluid movement, Rich rolled out of bed and exited the room to sleep on the couch.

The crying and then the months of colic proved to be the worst part of being a new mother. It drove Gail to smoking more and eating less. Carlene Ann’s little fists would curl up in angry balls, her face would redden, and her little legs would go stiff in tension.

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Beryl telephoned to try to give hints and help that might work. “Gail, have you tried rubbing the baby’s belly or holding her up to burp her?”

“Of course, Mom.”

“Have you checked her for allergies?”

“I’m breastfeeding, Mama, what could she be allergic to?”

Pause.

“Well, I’m very tired, Mama, so I’m going to let you go now. Rich’s fit to be tied. He says he’s placing resumes around California, so here’s to hoping we’ll be nearer to you by this time next year.”

Rich took to sleeping on the couch like a cat since Gail insisted that Carlene’s crib be nearby.

“You can let the baby cry herself out, you know,” the cat snarled. “Doctors are saying that is the best thing to do, just let the baby cry herself to sleep.”

“She’s in distress, Rich. Somethin’s wrong with her. I’m not going to leave her alone as long as I’m here to try to solve it. I can at least rub her belly or jostle her.”

The next week, Rich brought home a spring-loaded basinet chair. “I found this at the center for recycled goods on base.” The next day, he brought home a new rocking chair. “Now, we’re talking,” Gail said and gave him a kiss.

The next time Gail called her mom, Carlene was sleeping soundly, and as Beryl told her the news about Laila being hooked on drugs due-and-owing to being abandoned by Walter, and how she was afraid for the baby, Gail said hmm and hmm. “It’s just terrible, Mom, really. But what can we do? I’m discovering that just because two people are married, that doesn’t mean they see eye-to-eye on anything at all, and it doesn’t mean you can make them behave either, so you just have to find a way to live with it.”

“Bertie Gail? It sounds like you and Rich are having problems of your own.”

“Well, nothin’s perfect, that’s for sure.” She stopped short of telling her mom that Rich had not received his promotion which



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meant they were living on pennies, and with her having to stay with Carlene, she was off of work, too.

“I’m going to bring this to the foot of the cross, and you’ll see. Things will get better.”

“Okay, Mama. I’m going to hang up now.”

Beryl quickly packaged up the quilt that Lugilla and she had made for the baby’s arrival. She’d been hand sewing the scraps, but her hands were too arthritic to finish the batting and backing. Beryl was done with the late evenings she spent whipping and tying up the quilt backing to the front and then binding it for her daughter. It was time to finally pass the special heirloom along.

### WINGING IT, BY PHOENIX RISING

One night, after fixing hors d’oeuvres for Canasta, Rich failed to appear at the card table.

A while later, Gail excused herself to look for Rich and Al said he’d look around outside. While Al looked in the garage and backyard, Gail found Rich in the bathroom taking a bath in the claw foot tub with Baby Carlene.

Deciding to avoid the oddity, she closed the door behind her and said, “Please give Carlene to me. Did you forget that tonight is game night? Al and Doris are here waiting to play Canasta. Can you hurry and dress?”

Before he could answer, she carried Carlene out and closed the bathroom door behind her.

Gail not only felt embarrassed to tell Al and Doris that her husband forgot their date, but she felt a curdling ire when she considered why Rich would be taking a bath with their baby. Gail quickly rinsed and dried Carlene at the kitchen sink and put her into her nighty for bed. She only ever bathed Carlene in the sink in a baby lounge. The rest of the game night “went off without a hitch” as Rich memorialized it in his pocket diary later, and to Gail in bed.

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Lois and Coalbert agreed to a Saturday outing with Gail and Rich because neither couple had yet visited the sand dunes. The new families carried all of their baby gear to the sand dunes along with blankets and a picnic lunch. They put out a blanket to eat on, and the two men walked off a ways to catch up.

Lois offered the news that she and Coalbert were going to be moving back to Arkansas, somewhere near the homestead so that Coalbert could start his own business with a chum back home.

Gail was going through the motions, politely congratulating Lois, when she felt a bitter sting on her heel. Nobody realized that scorpions hide in the sand until Gail got stung. The party ended with a hasty trip to the emergency room. While they all waited for news on Gail, Rich placed a call to the newspaper.

Two days later, a man came to the door offering to buy Gail's convertible.

"I don't know what you're talking about. It isn't for sale," she said. When he showed her the advertisement on the folded newspaper, she told him he'd have to come back when Rich was home from work. "How dare you sell my car out from under me!" She shouted at the walls.

Then, she placed her own call to her husband, who said, "Look, we have to find cash from somewhere. It doesn't grow on trees, you know. I can buy a 1953 Opel. I've already checked the car over, and we can save the difference to move back to California."

"But, Rich, it is my car. I worked hard for that car. And you didn't bother to talk over your plan with me! Were you going to forge my name on the title? Sometimes it isn't where we land that's so awful, it's the way we get there that's killing us, don't you see?"

"If you can think of a better plan, I'll hear ya out, Baby. We'll talk about it over dinner."

"Aren't you just one in a melon," she muttered. At dinner, Gail agreed to sell her car to save the difference for their move back to California, but she reminded Rich not to forget that these

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kinds of things are decisions to be made as a couple. Rich smiled to appease his wife and nodded agreeably.