

**Deathbed
Confession:
My Son Was A
Stolen Baby!**

By Danielle Parks

This book is dedicated to the people who suffer in the day to day as a result of being victimized, please know you are not alone. This story was inspired by actual events which drove me to find healing. Although fiction, it tells my version of how to survive through hope.

Own what happened, never be ashamed of it, speak it and heal from facing it. The writing of this book was cathartic and spawned the hope that anyone suffering will find a table to feast at, a place where they belong.

Danielle Parks

Chapter 7

Bettie followed her morning routine of breakfast, bible study, washing and drying dishes. Putting the melamine dinnerware immediately away in the cupboard, she moved on to removing food from the freezer for that evening's meal. All this occurring in conjunction with her mentally preparing for her trip to visit Mary at the hospital. She began waxing sentimental on the life she had lived. The years since the divorce from her husband had been tough. The decision to leave and start anew had been her choice. She believed this was the best way to move forward, out of a relationship full of anger and despair. As a result of her daily visits with Mary, she began to question the choice. Her perspective of her former mother-in-law had changed over the past few weeks. Seeing the agony endured by Mary, the pain suffered during the first round of cancer, and now repeating the fight to no avail, caused Bettie to question many of the choices she had made in her life. She realized she was guilty of making snap judgments, not taking time to know the reasons why people

acted out. Bettie never sought to understand how one's own reality developed or molded their behavior. While she quietly brushed her hair that morning before leaving, she thought about Mary's strength and drive to keep going. Laying her brush down on her dresser, she began a prayer of thanks for this woman in her life, a thoughtful meditation lasting the entire drive to the downtown hospital. Spending time in contemplative prayer forced her to slow down, observe the people around her. People she selfishly never gave the time to take notice of before.

The limestone hospital building which would be Mary's last home, sat on top of a divine gently rising hill. Wooden benches selectively situated under large oak trees on the perfectly manicured lawn led the way to the entrance. Two stone water fountains sat on each side of the front veranda, providing a soothing cascade of sound as one passed by. If one looked to the right from the doors, beyond the water features, the beautiful slow-moving river crossing the flat prairie land was visible, just beyond the edge of the hospital boundaries. The rich, fertile soil flowed from the waterfalls down to the river's edge. On the other side of the water, the flatlands filled with native grasses, perfect for feeding cattle, began. As Bettie walked past the benches under the oak trees, strolling towards the sliding double doors into the

hospital, she was reminded of a quote she had recently read in her bible study material.

“Life without hills to climb, leaves one without an appreciation of when walking is effortless”.

Arriving on the oncology floor, Bettie exited the elevator to be met by one of the nurses attending to Mary. She asked Bettie to wait in the chairs by the nurses’ station.

The nurse informed Bettie that the doctor had just left the room and the news was not good. She went on to inform Bettie John Edward needed a few moments to confirm his mother’s do not resuscitate wishes. The nurse gently patted Bettie on the shoulder and smiled sweetly.

Bettie’s eyes began to swell with emotion, she looked around to find a diversion to focus on. Her eyes landed on the bag hanging from the IV stand the nurse was holding onto.

“There’s not much left to do but maintain comfort at this point.”

The plastic bag filled with morphine; Mary Bennet’s name was on the label.

A few minutes passed before John Edward stepped out from the room to find Bettie.

“She is wanting to know where you are.”

Bettie smiled and confessed to seeing the morphine bag and assumed they were focusing on comfort versus treatment. John Edward shook his head, affirming her statement and asked her to please go and visit.

“According to what the doctors are telling me, she will become less lucid every day until she finally just goes to sleep. We have to make the most of the time we have now. I am thankful that you are here for her. She seems hell-bent on spending time alone with you.”

John Edward was curious as to what they were talking about, but something deep inside told him not to pry. He and his ex-wife had not had a meaningful discussion in the past ten years; if his mother wanted him to know something that pertained to him, surely she would tell him.

Bettie gently touched him on the elbow, acknowledging his pain with a simple smile before speaking.

“Go home and get some rest. I’ll be here until around 3:30.”

Bettie walked the long hallway peering into other rooms, wondering who else on this floor had been told their time on this earth was nearly over. She stopped short of Mary’s door summoning that good old southern charm into service. Taking a deep breath while pushing the door open, she entered the room. The giant faux smile on Bettie’s face did not fool the woman lying in bed.

Mary looked straight into her eyes.

“You never could hide anything, I see it in your eyes, you know I’m done for!”

The smile slid from her lips as she genuinely felt sorry for this woman. Bettie remembered a time, some twelve years back, when Mary had the double mastectomy, being assured by the doctors, all the cancer had been removed from her. Yet here they were, once again, fighting the dreadful disease and this time with minimal hope for recovery.

Lost time never to be reclaimed.

“Bettie, I don’t blame you for your divorce. I know you think I do, but I don’t. In many ways, I am an old, bitter woman, I own that. I made choices long ago that seemed the right thing at the time. This long life I have lived has contained more bitter than good. It is important I leave this earth with a few things cleared up. I cannot tell John Edward what I am about to tell you. He must never know how I stole the most valuable gift in the world because of mine and Thadeus’ selfishness. I need to make peace on this earth for the next life.”

Mary was beginning to slightly slur her words as she spoke. The morphine coursing through her veins was beginning to do its job.

“I was once so young and free, without a care in the world. Life was very promising, and without complication before

my Dad died when I was nine. Life was gay and full of music and dancing, grand parties with beautiful full orchestras playing the most exquisite music. Waltz's so grand I could not stop myself from spinning around as if I were a top. After his death, my grandparents began providing care for us. They were so kind to Mother and me, providing all that we needed. The house we lived in was quite lovely, you know the one I'm talking about. The Austin stone house that sits on top of Penn Street, looking down to the river."

Mary stopped speaking and looked around, intently trying to focus on where she was. An identifiable tune gently escaped her dry, cracked lips as her eyelids begin to relax.

Bettie turned from where she had been looking out the window, one eyebrow raised to a point.

"The Hamilton-Smith house?"

Mary confirmed with a nod.

"My father was a Smith. After he passed, we lived in the carriage house at the bottom of the hill. My grandmother would take me shopping for clothes, hats, and shoes. There was a maid to clean the house and a cook to manage the kitchen. I would've thought this to be a wonderful life for my mother, but she was not content. Wonderful parties at my grandparents' house that I was allowed to attend until nine in the evening, when I would then be escorted back to the carriage

house by one of the butlers. They were required to report back I was safe at home and that mother was there with me. Mother was not allowed to attend the parties, I never told anyone why.”

Mary’s breath becoming shallow caused her words stretch on slowly. Speaking words lost in the past, speaking as if she was reading a script for the first time. Intermittent moments occurred in between the sentences when Waltz Brilliance would bounce across her vocal cords.

“For my tenth birthday, my grandparents threw me the most beautiful birthday party...over one hundred people, most of whom I didn’t know. All my favorite foods were served...la da dee la la da...and I was given wonderful gifts. My mother immediately refused them on my behalf—ohhh she made an embarrassing scene in front of the guests.”

Mary began to doze off, her eyes moving in a rampant back and forth motion. Drooling on her chin, she continued to talk, faintly, softly.

“There was a great discontent within her, for which I would suffer for years to come...I didn’t know anything of what restrictions ...la da dee la la da...were placed on my mother after my father’s...death. Mother became very secretive...little patience for the rules imposed on her. Her anger was...overwhelming...la da dee la la da...anyone who crossed her suf-

fered her wrath. I expect if it hadn't been for... me, she would have been cast into the...la da dee la la da...streets without a dime...Mother consistently complained how...they were controlling her to avoid her having... happiness.”

Mary's words became labored and monotone as she continued on with her tale, her interspersed bits of music now without rhythm or tone. Once again she stopped, her eyes tightly closed. The opioid finally in control, forced her into a deep slumber. Bettie moved to her bedside and began to arrange Mary's pillows for comfort, assuming she was out for the count. While she was organizing the bedding, Mary opened her eyes wide and reached for Bettie's hand. The surprise was two-fold. First, it was the shock of an almost dead woman reaching out to her, and second was Mary's touch. She had never been affectionate, not to her son, her husband, grandchildren, or anyone. Bettie maintained her composure from the shock and gripped Mary's hand tight, enveloping her fingers. Mary stared at Bettie, her intense, steady gaze giving in to the medicine again. Fading back to slumber, Mary suddenly opened her eyes and looked at Bettie.

“It wasn't until that bastard came along...”

Closing her eyes and relaxing into the pillows, sleep finally was upon her. Bettie unfurled their interwoven digits and placed Mary's hand gently on the bed, tucking the covers in

neatly around her. Bettie stood for a moment looking at the body wasting away, staying close should there be another burst of energy or dialogue. A few minutes of silence passed, Bettie reasoned enough time had gone by that it was safe to have a seat in the handsome brown Naugahyde chair, where she began work on her crochet. It was rare these days she had time to just sit and do her craftwork, the time here a nice diversion from her daily life, all things considered.

Bettie looked up at Mary often while observing the monitors; confirming heartbeats continued to be counted and sleep was still in play. She noticed Mary's eyes moving quickly, mumbling incoherently. Every once in a while, a word would slip out, firmly spoken, clear as could be.

Mary shouted out in full voice.

“Stop!”

Bettie immediately looked up to observe the worry showing on Mary's face. She quickly pushed the footstool away from under her feet. Leaving the warm chair she moved swiftly to the bedside, in hopes of providing some physical comfort. She lovingly touched Mary's arm, very softly as to not startle her. Mary yanked her arm away and screamed,

“Don't take my baby! Nooooooooooooo!”

**This has been a Preview
of**

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and Audiobook.

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The End