

26. NO ONE TO TELL

June and Bill thought that they had stopped me in my tracks. But I had again overcome their interference in my life. I almost felt impervious. At the same time, I had to admit that I was somewhat isolated out there. I was always on borrowed time, a Cinderella waiting for the midnight bells to ring.

I was up in my room making short shrift of my math homework. I started looking at the numbers on the page. I was noticing patterns among the multiples. I felt this was my story. The numbers rolled together like waves. They would all rush together. Then they would fan out into the universe until there were these galaxies that remained untouched by any other proximities.. These were the gaps, the pockets of nothingness that awaited the gravitational swirl to get everything going again. Then the massive dynamo would power itself up. And the circles turned within the circles. And I felt myself pulled along the cosmic journey.

This was my cue to get out of here. I had followed along this adventure in my mind. And I needed to satisfy my soul. I could hear the train echoing through the neighborhood. It was my call to the wild. If there was a party somewhere, I was its future guest. I needed some excitement to confirm this feeling that was brewing inside of me.

I hopped on my bike and headed off to find Rose. She would have some infernal scheme to get us two little devils going.

“I want to get high.”

“Chloe, you’re becoming some kind of fiend.”

“No, I’m not. I only smoke when I’m with you. You’re the one who’s doing it all the time. It’s rotting your brain.”

We both laughed.

What were the dark secrets that necessitated her anesthetic. I wanted her to tell me more about her life. She always made vague references to weirdness at home. There would be these incidents now and then. But she did everything that she could to deny the hurt that was dragging her down.

I was letting Rose’s story become my story. If my parents ever found out, would I end up the same way. I doubted it. Rose had been affected by this constant turmoil. There was a lot more going on. For my part, June and Bill simply left me alone. They never really threatened. And no one invaded my inner sanctum. I felt somewhat protected.

Despite my parents’ efforts, I was now out in the wild. There was no security. I loved it. But I was constantly afraid. I felt lucky that there was still a place to run back to. For all my mischief, I hadn’t gone all the way. I could rush back to my room and the school books and return to my former life.

“What do you want to do tonight, Chloe?”

She stopped me in my path to the nostalgia of home sweet home.

“Maybe, I’m not feeling it.”

“Not feeling it,” she ridiculed me. She wanted to jump start the fun. She continued, “Are you down for it?”

“Huh?”

My buzz was starting to kick in. It actually made me more confused. I didn’t want to do

a thing. I was already in a contemplative mood. This seemed enough in itself.

“This is a school night. Maybe I should get back. We can always go crazy tomorrow night.”

“Chloe, every night is a party night.”

“I’m still going to have to get up for class.”

I wonder if Rose had plans to ditch school tomorrow. Her attendance had been spotty in the last few weeks.

She knew had heard about some college party.

“Where did you hear about this?”

“From the guy who gets me drugs.”

“Is it OK to go. We’re going to look like babies.”

“They’re going to dig us. Follow my lead.”

Even before we had left for the party, Rose was trying to effect an older look. I had to check her twice. She was too good at playing the method actress.

Whatever Rose did, I felt that I had no chance among the college crowd. I always did my best to act adult. And I was always treated as if I was more grown up than the other kids my age. But I was going to be eaten alive. I couldn’t let myself be overcome by my fear.

“Rose, again, why are we doing this?”

“It’s going to be fun. Cute guys who know what they’re doing. I want my bell rung.”

I felt that I was going to be partying with Pavlov’s dog. Rose had her own ideas about the call of the wild.

“Don’t heels and a short skirt make you look a little too eager?”

“I know what I’m up against. I need to put all the other girls to shame.”

Rose didn’t want anyone to seem more knowledgeable than her. So she needed to pull out all the stops.

“I need every guy to be lusting after me.”

More than ever, she was playing this one like a contest. I was afraid that I was going to get thrown to the wolves.

“Just don’t leave me alone. I don’t want to end up crying in a corner.”

“There’s going to be a point in the night where it’s every girl for herself.”

“Rose, this is tough enough. Don’t mess with me.”

If I could have just gone home at this moment, I would have jumped back on my bike. But we were already too far along. And at this point, she wasn’t going to give up. I let myself get caught up in the moment.

“Act natural!”

I was too buzzed to go back to anything appearing natural. The pot hadn’t settled me down. It only highlighted the worst of my paranoia. My high was something that I felt that I couldn’t share. I should have realized that I was susceptible in this way. If I didn’t want to stay in this state, I would have to get more into party mode.

“We’re going to be fine.”

“Famous last words, Queen Bee!”

As we walked up to the house, I was panicking. There was nothing casual about this place. Everyone seemed to know each other. As we walked up to the house, I felt as if they all

turned to stare at us.

“Maybe we should go.”

Rose didn't notice a thing. She simply blended in. In hardly any time, she was surrounded by a couple of guys. And I was looking around for some kind of in.

“Where's the beer?”

Some guy pointed to the kitchen, “In there. There's cups on the counter.”

I needed to get a drink in my hand. I hardly wanted to seem out of place. Nobody was making it easier for me. I didn't want to look anyone in the eye. And everyone was in these serious conversations.

If I could only figure out an in, things would get easier. I ran through my first beer and rushed back for another so that I would look as if I was doing something. I didn't want to be a sitting duck.

It seemed tougher than ever trying to get a handle on things. Contradictory emotions were flashing back and forth over me. I just knew that I was going to say the wrong thing. I shouldn't have smoked the dope. It was clouding my judgement, and I needed to be sharp.

I walked back to find Rose. But it seemed difficult to enter her conversation. It seemed so easy just to walk out and head home. But I wasn't going to do this. I was going to do my best to stick it out.

“Are you friends with Rob?”

I jumped. Some guy had caught me.

“Yes, no, I mean I don't know.”

“Aren't you in my anthropology class?”

I just nodded.

“I thought so. I'm Terry.”

I turned away.

“What's your name?”

“Chloe. My name is Chloe.”

I felt as if I was answering questions at a job interview.

“Hi, Chloe.”

This guy was even more awkward than I was.

“I really should get back to my friend.”

“See you in class Monday.”

“Monday, yeah Monday.”

I no longer felt so bad. I had passed my first college test with flying colors. What next? It was so simple to get another beer. So I headed back to the kitchen.

“Portrait of a teenage alcoholic.”

He was keeping guard at the door.

“What?”

“I've been watching you, little girl.”

I wasn't sure what I should say now.

“And what have you noticed?”

“That you keep heading back to the kitchen. Do you have a problem with alcohol?”

He was really putting me on the spot.

“Huh!”

He laughed, “That was a joke. I guess no one gets my humor.”

He had a pleasant smile. He just couldn’t shut up.

“I just need another drink.”

“That’s going to be five dollars. The liquor’s not free here\.”

“Liquor, what? Huh!”

I wasn’t making much sense. That only made it easier for him. He tried to stare in my eyes.

“Is something wrong?”

“You’re cute.”

“Whatever. Does this kind of things ever work?”

“Just on young girls.”

I needed to pry myself away from his advances.

“I’ve got to find my friend.”

For once, I looked over at Rose, and she was finally alone.

“I want to leave.”

“Not having fun?”

“I’ve already had three beers. I don’t want to reach a point where I’m falling down.”

“I can’t leave now. I think I’ve got a live one.”

“Where is he now?”

“He had to take a piss.”

“Fantastic. What does that mean? You’re going to go home with him when he comes back.”

“I’m trying to be chill. No plans, no expectations.”

“You’re the one who came here with an agenda.”

“And I’m working on it. Don’t push me!”

She was getting short with me. I didn’t want to use that as an excuse for another beer. So this is how these college parties worked. Boredom sprinkled with booze.

I went back into the kitchen, and loverboy was waiting for me

“Are you following me?”

I smiled and stumbled over my words.

“I think it’s coincidence.”

He was getting to me. I just listened. He told me about his band. And he was studying architecture.

“My name’s Jeff.”

As he talked to me, he touched my shoulder. I moved slightly.

“I’m not making you uncomfortable.”

“Not at all.”

I was again feeling out of place.

“You seem different than the other girls here.”

“Do I seem immature?”

“No, there’s something different about you. Really intriguing.”

He talked like someone who read a lot. But he was a little self-centered. He was always

trying to make me laugh. He almost appeared to be going through a comedy routine. He'd chuckle at his own jokes and then move nonchalantly to the next.

"You look like the type who hardly ever studies. Brains and a great memory."

"Looks can be deceiving."

"I've got a good eye."

I felt that I could relax with Jeff. After we had been talking for a half hour or so, his friend came over.

"This is Adam."

Adam hardly said a thing. He let Jeff ramble on.

"Adam's in the band."

He was making jokes about Nickelback.

"Somehow we ended up at one of their shows. Adam's dad got us the tickets. And I'm looking around and thinking that I'm at a rodeo or something. I mean I just didn't belong. And Adam was just getting drunk the whole time. He might as well have been at Sunday social, whatever the hell that is."

He paused to get his requisite laugh, then he continued along.

"I don't want to become a band like that. They have fans, and they tour. But who really likes them?"

I answered, "People in rodeos."

I was sounding as silly as he was.

"Adam, what do you think?"

Adam just shook back and forth.

"Adam, are you OK?"

"I'm good." This was the first thing that even I heard him say.

Adam went to get more beer.

Jeff asked, "Chloe, do you want another one?"

"No, thanks." I needed to sober up.

When Adam got back with the beers, Jeff came even more alive.

"When our band is big, it's going to be really cool to have people that I don't even know singing our songs. I just want to be able go into a record store and see my face on the wall."

He wanted me to join in eagerly with his self-adulation. I went along the best that I could. It was more than just pretending. He had genuine charisma for me.

"Chloe, you're having a good time, aren't you?"

"Sure, I'm loving it."

He tried to get closer to me. He put his hand on my hip. I touched it, and pressed it against me. He smiled.

"Adam, she's a live one!"

Adam attempted to smile, but it only looked like a sneer.

I didn't want the attention to let up.

"I need another beer."

I jetted over to the kitchen, and then dashed back to hang with Jeff. I didn't want the excitement of the moment to dissipate. Rose saw us congregated together.

"Where have you been, honey?"

“Looking for some action.” She was her usual abrasive self. I didn’t want her to destroy my good times with Jeff.

“Chloe, there’s enough to go around for all of us.”

Was she right? She was looking at Jeff up and down. She was ready to attack.

“This boy may be a little much for you Chloe. You don’t want to fumble the ball at the goal line.”

I wasn’t sure if Jeff heard what she said.

“Chloe, what’s your friend’s name?”

“Rose.”

He smiled at her for a brief second, then went back to talking to me.

Rose was pissed that she was being ignored. It wasn’t her style to play second fiddle, especially to her understudy. She needed to turn on her maximum charm. She ran her fingers along her smooth long legs and hoped that Jeff would catch her gesture. He gave her all the play that she deserved then he turned back to me.

“Your friend’s all raw!”

Fortunately, Rose heard nothing. She went back to playing her game.

I was sure that Jeff was deep into me. Maybe something was going to happen. I was trying to keep up the front. I didn’t want anyone messing with me. My body seemed to be running away from me. And I was trying to catch up. It was a combination of the alcohol and the dope.

Rose was slurring her words and being generally obnoxious. I didn’t want her to ruin things for me. I thought about declaring victory and retreating for another day.

“You don’t look good. Let’s get out of here.”

She mumbled something back to me.

I was trying to keep it together. And I didn’t want to lose Jeff when he seemed so close.

“Rose, I think that someone put something in our drinks. I’m feeling weird.”

She was adamant, “I don’t want to go.”

I didn’t want to give up. But I couldn’t imagine carrying her. And we didn’t have rides home. I was starting to feel stuck. Just seeing her stumble around reminded me how terrible I felt.

“Rose, we’ve got to leave, now.”

“Why now?”

“I don’t feel right. This is only going to get worse.”

She wasn’t listening to me. If I was going to give up on Jeff, now was her chance to make a line for the prize.

Jeff turned to me, “Don’t leave now. The party’s just beginning.”

“I don’t know. Something just hit me!”

“We’re going to have some fun. Try to relax.”

He reached over to kiss me. It was perfect being with him. But I hardly felt at ease. And Rose was visibly angry. She had to figure out a way to pry Jeff away from me.

“Chloe, you’re right. We need to go.”

“Not now!”

Adam was sitting on the couch and was staring at us. Rose just needed an excuse.

“Chloe, get me a beer.”

“I can’t.” Didn’t she understand that I was in the middle of something.

“I brought you to the party. Show me some appreciation.”

I thought that it wouldn’t hurt to get her a beer. If Jeff liked me, it would be no big deal to separate myself from him for a second. He had kissed me so I knew where his affection lay.

“Just a second, dear”

I went to get another beer for both Rose and me. When I came back, I saw that she was playing with her hair and looking into his eyes. She radiated pure sex, and he knew it. I had been all too tentative.

My hesitation became worse. She was working her way closer to him. She was touching him as she spoke. He had his hand on her shoulder.

She held him closer, “Dance with me, baby. Chloe won’t mind.”

I simply gave up. I went to sit next to Adam. I watched the whole thing transpire before my eyes. Jeff and Rose started making out before my eyes. There was no shame.

“Chloe, keep Adam company.”

Once Adam started talking to me, I thought that things hadn’t turned out so badly. I didn’t know Jeff all that well. And he had been wrapping me around his little finger. It freaked me to watch him curled up on a chair with Chloe. They were grinding their bodies together. Rose knew exactly what to do.

Up close, Adam’s demeanor was eccentric, “You know what it’s like. One of your dumb friends picks you up. And realize that he’s cruising in a hot car. And you’re asking yourself what does it all mean. And then you just let go. It doesn’t bother you anymore. You dig the just the joy ride. Do you ever feel like that? Do you know how to just dig the joy ride.”

He gave me a weird look. I nodded. How did I get left with this creep. I liked his friend.

He kept talking, and I simply nodded in agreement. I looked over to the chair where Rose and Adam had been sitting.

“Where’s Rose?”

“She’s off with Jeff. Or should I say that Jeff is off on her.”

It seemed so final. I wonder why I hadn’t left when I had the chance. I hadn’t come here for heartache. Now I felt like a prisoner and my jailer was wearing me down.

He thought that he had the jump on me. And as he stared at me, his tongue seemed to wag, like a wild dog. And I did my best to recover my wits. But his eyes were still on me. I felt naked. I felt sicker than ever. But I had to float in that hollow. Just to soak up that empty feeling.

“I’m going to go. Tell Rose that I left.”

He thought of me as a prize that he had been given by Jeff. He didn’t want to let me go.

“Want to smoke?”

“I’ve had enough party for now.”

I noticed that most of the people had already left.

“I’m feeling really dizzy.”

Perhaps, we had been dosed. Everything was going dark. I could sense him guide me into a room. But I couldn’t see a thing. I needed to sleep it off. I needed to get home. I was losing my balance.

I realized that I was with a real creep. But I couldn't move. This was one of those nightmares where I wanted to scream out. But I had no voice.

I was trying to fight him off. I needed to sleep. I was fighting off sleep. I could feel myself slip down into nothingness. I just let myself go. I wasn't here. I was at home in bed.

I tried to shake myself awake. But I couldn't do a thing. I could sense the approaching doom. I was a driver careening into a wall. Oh, hell!

I lost myself completely. I closed my eyes, and went out like a light. I absorbed all the sleep that I could. I needed to be rested for class the next day. There was so much to do.

I braced myself as I went down. I came down like a ton of bricks. Maybe I was at home in my bed. I let the dream roll over me.

This wasn't so bad after all. I could take a little nap and make it home before my father got up for work. I would have to race that train. I needed to take time in my hands.

I curled up in the bed. I was safe. I felt protected. I heard the train whistle. Too much party for one night.

"I heard the train whistle."

What?

I had been unconscious, and now I awoke to the party. Where was I? I was totally freaked out. I yelled at the top of my lungs. But no one turned on the lights. They ignored me.

I was naked, and he was on top of me. This monster was inside me.

"What the fuck do you think that you are doing?"

I started to slap him. I scratched at him.

"What the hell are you doing to me?"

"You wanted it. You were playing with my zipper. You had your hands down my pants."

I kept flailing at him.

"The last thing that I remember is passing out. That's it. No hands down your pants, asshole."

I knocked him down. I knocked down this big bruiser, I kicked him. But he only laughed.

"You wanted it. I could tell. All night. You were coming on to me. You got me drunk. And you wanted me."

I wanted to puke. I wanted to die. This was the worst thing imaginable. I wanted to do something to him. I wanted him out of here.

I turned on a light and found my clothes. I dressed quickly and ran out. I didn't see Rose anywhere. I needed to find my bike. I needed to get home. I was a mess. My whole life was a mess. I wanted to die.

I tried to convince myself that none of this had happened. I had been passed out. But it still seemed so vivid. This nightmare played over and over again. I hadn't wanted any of this.

This guy had seemed like such a slug. A lump of flesh that had wrapped itself around me. I could feel him sucking all my life from me.

I needed to make it home in time for my father not to see me. I was all a panic and still I needed to maintain my composure just to work through the practical details. As I rolled close to the house, I saw that my father's light was on. This frightened me. I didn't even want to go in.

This was going to be tricky.

I worked my way into the basement entrance. I listened for noises. I passed through the living room. I jumped when I saw Bill passed out on the couch. The TV was still on with the sound turned very low. He had been watching it, trying not to disturb June, and he had fallen asleep. I wasn't going to wake up now. I just snuck on past him.

I needed a shower. I knew that it might disturb June. Or Bill might check on me. But I had no choice.

I couldn't shake the trauma. I kept replaying the same scenes in my head over and over again. I tried to forget what had happened. I tried to rearrange the story as if I was editing a movie. But even when I jumbled it all up, it kept coming back to the same thing over and over again. It was as if the pain was a stain all over my skin. Even if I didn't think about it, I could feel it burning me alive.

I washed. I showered. I did everything to wipe the marks away. They held. I wanted to run out of my skin. I was helpless. I was paralyzed. Nothing that I could do could ever make things right again. I felt as if I lost a limb. I was in pure shock.

I wanted to get back at the person who did this to me. I wanted the heavens to open up and send a purifying rain to get rid of all the filth that had got pushed inside me.

As I tried to put it all out of my mind. I imagined Bill chiding me, "You should have never gone out without our permission. You did this to yourself. You don't have a clue what real pain is!"

I was huddled in the corner of my bed with the covers pulled around me. I stared into the darkness. I couldn't sleep.

About an hour later, I heard Bill mumbling to himself. He was late. He had slept without an alarm close by. And his natural clock must have been off as well. He had no reason to look in on me. I was still sobbing, and my tears were punctuated by waves of murmurs. But I was too faint for him to hear.

I wanted him to give me an excuse to be mad at him. Part of me blamed him for what had gone on. My vulnerability. His siding with June. His obliviousness to my world and my life. I had been searching for something. And he didn't help. He only made me more desperate. This angered me.

I couldn't wait for him to leave. All his pattering was getting in the way of my concentration. Sure, I was all jumbled up. But he was adding to the confusion. I was ready to scream out when I noticed that he had already left.

It would only be a short while before June would look in on me. I just collapsed on the bed. I remained floating in a haze. Here was a demon that I couldn't cast out.

I felt the need to hurt myself more. If I could just distract myself from the pain inside. I wanted to disconnect myself from my terrible history. My past had caught up with me. And I was looking for the off switch.

"Honey, are you getting ready for school?"

June was her more than cheery self. This wasn't the time.

"I am very, very sick."

She walked around my bed and surveyed the damage. I was ready to fight her if she hoped to revive me. She didn't take the chance. Seeing was believing.

“Something must have come over you in the night.”

What a hideous understatement. June’s lack of awareness was more serious than Bill’s obliviousness. She was always meddling. And this was the result. I wanted her out of my life.

“You can get some breakfast when you’re feeling better.”

I was glad that she couldn’t smell the alcohol on me. All that she had to do was look at my body all twisted on the bed to realize that I was beyond hope. She would abandon me to the day.

I imagined that she whispered to me, “You asked for this. Down deep in your soul, you wanted this. And you got your wish.”

Then and there, I wanted to battle June. Before I could even move, she was out the door. What had she meant by *down deep in my soul*?

Here I was, alone in the house. I wanted to remain so still. I never wanted to do anything again. I was sinking deeper and deeper down a hole.

By mid-morning, the light had filled the room. The bad spirits were temporarily cast out. And I nodded off. It was afternoon by the time that I finally came to. I did a double take. I wanted to rush on back to the land of dreams. My troubles seemed doubly worse. And I felt more helpless.

“Have you even left this bed.?”

Early evening, June tried to roust me from my repose. I lay lifeless on the bed.

“What do I have to do to get you up? You’re scaring me.”

Indeed, I was scaring her. I was frightening myself. Could I ever be lifted from the land of the dead?

She didn’t want to shake me back to sanity. She left me in my mess.

“What’s going on in there,” Bill asked.

“I think that she’s challenging our authority. I don’t trust her.”

“We have been too hard on her. Maybe it would be better if we let her hang out with her friends.”

“We can’t reward her for one of her sitdown strikes. If that child doesn’t get out of that bed soon, I’m going to beat her out of her trance.”

“It’s Friday night. Let her sleep. She has the weekend.”

For the time being, they left me alone. I was supposed to soak in my misery.

This had all been a strange twist of fate. If only Rose had left me alone with Jeff. But if Adam was such a monster, maybe he was no different.

All my life I had been waiting for something to happen to put things in perspective. I had always felt somehow damned by the heavens. Nevertheless, I had done what I could to resist my vocation. There had constantly been a hollow inside of me. And this horrible experience showed me how deep was that pain.

I had let my numbness guide me through the horrors. Come to life, this was all too real. I had already felt alienated from my body. Now the flesh seemed totally other. I was possessed by a fiend whose illicit habitation now occupied my abode universally. My house was defiled. My domain lay in ruins. The sun wouldn’t even shine on my accursed land.

How had I let it happen? I was denying my physical desires. I had opportunities to be with guys. And I kept turning them down. I suppose that Adam took my reticence as an

invitation. Why was I even giving this sicko the benefit of the doubt?

I needed to do something to put this all out of my mind. Even after two straight days in bed, I couldn't get a handle on things. I didn't want to drown in my depression. And I needed to be fair to myself. This bastard had robbed me of something that was so mine. Wishing it away wasn't doing very good. He wasn't here with me. But I couldn't shake his presence. Even if I jumped up and down, he would still be inside. His awful presence seemed eternal.

Why had I drank so much? It only gave him an advantage. As much as I wanted to swear off that night, I wanted to drink. I needed something to help me dull the ache.

Late Saturday night, I followed my usual itinerary. I slipped down the stairs and snuck out the door. The night chill reiterated my misery. I had escaped June and Bill, but they had so little to do with how I really felt. I just let it pass.

I didn't know where to. I had left without a plan. I hadn't talked with Rose for days. She probably thought that I hated her. And she had a lot to answer for, perhaps too much for me to want to be with her again.

I rode around the block a few times. In my own way, it invigorated. The nasty feeling was still there, but there a bit less. I had no idea what I was doing. So I went back home.

The next day was a little easier to deal with. I couldn't face school on Monday. But a good sleep on Sunday night was enough to help me pretend. I didn't hold my head up as I walked the halls. I could feel the drag. I was just doing my best to live my life. It was all that I could do for now.