

29. THE REFUGEE

I was in no man's land. The clock was ticking. If I didn't make it back in time, I'd be out here forever. But I wasn't ready to go back to Bill and June. I needed to create a purpose. I could let myself get caught. I could invent an excuse. I knew that I'd be back before they knew that I was gone.

Even though my curfew wasn't as rigid, it was still there. I really didn't have the choice to stay out all night.

Rose warned me, "They catch you just once, and your idyllic household is going to turn into death row. You can joke all you want about the prison that you inhabit. You don't know the half of it."

I had been having these dreams of Bill acting like Adam. Now, I wondered if there was some kind of foundation for my fright. Was I remembering events that I had repressed? Was Bill simply waiting for an excuse to go over the edge? I did what I could to put these thoughts out of my head. I couldn't let my imagination get the best of me.

Rose mocked my plans to leave the manor, "You're not going to run away from home. You're afraid just to hook up with a guy."

I felt that I could handle it. I had already been submitting to my own vision of life.

Rose was persistent, "Being on your own is going to be a million times harder. Where are you going to get the money? You're young and totally naive. You're the perfect mark for any con artist who comes along."

I had a lot to figure out and only a little time to figure it out. The Gulag was becoming overly oppressive.

"Chloe, you don't know how good you have it. You can hide out in your room, and they don't even bother you. At my house, I'm always public enemy number one."

Bill and June would leave me alone now and then. But that was all part of their plan. They were trying to work me down.

"Rose, I need to get away."

"You need to act more assertive. Find a guy who can help you out."

"I'm not like that. Neither are you."

"It doesn't hurt to have someone to get you started."

It wasn't as if Rose was introducing me to billionaires.

"This is your lottery, Chloe!"

"What's my trick?"

How did she suggest that I beat the house?

"It will happen if you want it."

"Like running away."

"I told you that you need money."

I had some stashed away. Was she telling me to dip into June's purse? Or was I supposed to look for Bill's piggy-bank?

"Don't rush things. Wait until the time is right. You don't want the police bringing you home some night. Whatever you do, don't turn tricks to stay above water. It's the stupidest thing that you could do."

I was skeptical, “I don’t see that happening to me!”

I was taking Rose’s warnings seriously.

It was well past two in the morning. And June was about to lose her shit when she saw my father come out of my room. He closed the door after him which made it all seemed more bizarre.

She tried to play it calm. “What are you doing in there?”

He looked puzzled. He didn’t say a thing.

“What the hell are you doing in there?,” she was yelling in the middle of the night.

He flung open the door, “This is what I’m doing in there. She’s nowhere to be found.”

I had no idea what the commotion was about. They had almost caught me. I had just got back in. Fortunately, my pajamas were in the bathroom. I quickly hid my clothes in the clothes hamper.

I called to them from the bathroom, “What are you guys doing in my bedroom? I just got up to go to the bathroom.”

June was still in shock. And Bill had been beat at this own game. He wanted to snoop around. But June had just played him to an ugly stand-off. He had to leave it at that.

They had both been traumatized. I casually walked into my room and closed the door.

“See you both in the morning. Nighty night!”

June’s suspicions had been raised for no other reason than her general paranoia. But she would use the to her advantage. Bill had been humiliated even though he had the truth on his side. I began to wonder what kind of asylum I lived in. But I settled off to sleep.

June was losing her grip over me. And she needed someone to blame. Bill didn’t have a chance against her. He could sense that something was very wrong. That only made him crave catching me doing some mischief. At the same time, he didn’t want to appear as unreasonable as her. Everything was really heating up!

“Your father is a pervert!” Rose pressed me!

“No, he’s not!”

“I know what I’m talking about.”

I didn’t want her imposing her history on my life. My nightmares were hardly the same thing as real events. Even if Bill acted like Adam, he was not at all like the little monster.

“You can bury the truth deep in your psyche! But it will come out.”

“Are you telling me that I need therapy?”

“Therapy only makes you want to get more crazy. It’s as if you want to scare the poor analyst!” Rose knew all too well. “I just say, keep your eye on that guy.”

Rose’s therapy was to head off the another party. I tagged along even if I wasn’t feeling it. This was getting old.

Rose was already high when we met up together. She kept downing drinks. Something was getting her really pissed off.

“I don’t want to talk.”

I glanced across the yard at two weird guys. Both of them seemed totally messed out of their minds. They had seen Rose talking to me. And they immediately swarmed around her

“Hey, babe. You are cute.”

“Yeah, really bumping.”

The one with the long blonde hair grabbed her by the ass, "You are one hot thing."

She smiled. I couldn't even look at them.

"It that your friend?"

She nodded. "That's Chloe. I'm Rose."

The other guy went to get us drinks. When he came back, blondie was already making out with Rose. He just moved in to surround. And the two of them went at it.

"Do you want to join in?"

"No, thanks."

I didn't even take the drinks from the one guy. Rose kept drinking. She became so zone out that she was barely conscious. I was trying to get her away from these dudes. And they were working the full-court press on me. I didn't stand a chance.

I looked at her in the hope that I could signal her that this situation was way out of control.

"Chloe, I'm digging this. Leave me alone."

"Girl, you want to come with us. We can make you feel great."

I couldn't see myself surrendering my will to these two freaks.

"Chloe, you're so judgmental!"

"Somebody needs to hold it together."

The boys had that haunting stare that I saw in Adam. They were cool if they got their way. Otherwise, they just went psycho on you.

I did my best to understand Rose. They almost had her stripped naked. One guy was kissing her breasts. The other was caressing her butt.

Rose kept mumbling to me as if she was casting spells. She was in this place where I couldn't reach her.

"Come on, guys, let's get some privacy."

"Are you sure that you don't want to come along?"

I shook my head, "I've had enough already."

"Chloe, you're always the buzz kill."

There was a couch on the covered-in porch. I watched as they pulled Rose's jeans off. Blondie tossed them on the floor. Rose was now in her bra and panties. The two dudes were virtually naked. She got on top of one of them and began to slowly ride him. The other guy was kissing on her. He pulled off her bra. I couldn't watch any longer.

"Why did you let me do that?"

She was coming to her senses. This wasn't so much regret. She was testing me out.

"You said that you were digging it."

"I was zonked out of my mind. I had no idea what was going on."

"You didn't have fun?"

"It's not like that. I didn't know those guys. They could have done anything to me."

She seemed to be inconsistent.

"You've done stuff like that before. What was the big deal?"

"I've never been so fucked up. I think that they dosed me."

She seemed genuinely concerned.

"I was there all the time."

"They could have just killed me."

I asked, “Are you telling me that you didn’t want to have sex with them?”

“I don’t know what I’m saying. The whole situation was a disaster. I don’t want that happening again.”

But she did want it. This was part of her drama. She liked all the fuss. It also made me feel stupid, as if I had egged Adam on. That wasn’t how it happened. But it hardly seemed to make a difference anymore.

Rose had reached a limit with her behavior. This most recent incident was an embarrassment. There was nothing cute about it.

“You’re create a spectacle out of your life. What do you expect? That someone is going to rescue from the shit.”

“You don’t know what I feel. When you give in, it a blast.”

“You really feel all that great about it.”

“You’re not my Mom. I like sex.”

I chided her, “Rose, that wasn’t sex. That was torture.”

Indeed, it was. Her performance had been too painful to watch. And she was showing off. More than that, she wanted her conscience to catch her in the act. But she had become so immune to her own hurt that she had to keep pushing until it was even more self-destructive. That alone might wake her up.

“Chloe, you’re not my therapist. I created you. Without me, you’d be nothing.”

Perhaps, it was the other way around. I had created Rose to justify my own exploits. I wanted to be an exhibitionist, Rose introduced me to a world where the nasty game was the only option.

“Be honest, Chloe. Those guys wanted you more than me. You’re fresh meat. I’m too easy. But you’re never going to say yes.”

This was getting more and more brutal. Where was she going with this?

“You have no understanding about what’s really going on. Why are you drawn to this world? You’re curious. You want to explore. But you don’t want to deal with the burden. So you push all your moral judgement on me. You wanted to be lying on your back with two guys going at it.”

Was this where I was headed? I reacted against the night and the crazy extremes. But she was right. I’d seen this before. I was the one who went back to Lance’s.

“I’ve been trying to explain to you all along. This is a power that we can’t control. It gives us everything that we need. But it can also destroy us if we’re not honest. Chloe, you’re going to get hurt.”

I didn’t need to remind her of what happened with Adam. I just couldn’t let my guard down. She had encouraged me to act out my pain. I was only retreating into myself.

“Rose, you’ve said it. It’s overpower you. You’re like a fiend!”

“Chloe, if you think that I’ve gone over to the dark side, get a goddam stake and drive it through my heart.”

We both smiled.

She needed me to put her through an interrogation. I had wanted to invite her along on my journey, but I knew how it would turn out. I needed to separate myself from all this stuff that was wearing me down.

“You could put on a jumper and patent leather shoes and head back to the straight and narrow.”

I laughed, “I thought that was what I was doing anyway.”

I had learned to well from June. I could play the part of the moralist until the break of day. But I was getting off on Rose’s escapades. This symbiosis had become way too advanced. I was never going to live my own life. I would just watch her spiral down and would feed off of her energy.

“Chloe, you’re one strange bitch.”

“But you love me anyway.”

We hugged. I knew my die was cast.

When I got home, I found out that Josh had run afoul of the security system. He was all flustered. And my parents were doing everything that they could to excuse his actions.

“Maybe there’s a flaw in the system, Bill. It was meant to catch intruders not our son Josh.”

There were way too forgiving. He wasn’t just a jerk and a snitch; he was a dolt. I wanted to score points, but it was a losing proposition. I would get blamed for his mistake. While I had the opportunity, I rushed off to my room.

There was no justice under this roof. There never would be. It was as if I was emblazoned with some kind of testament to my offenses.

“June, I am most sorry!”

I felt nothing for them and their silliness. Not only were they cruel, they were bumbling. It might as well have been Bill who tripped off his own alarm. June had her suspicions about him. Nothing that he did would ever erase that picture from her mind. It made her feel superior. But she had lost her sense of trust.

Josh really believed that he could make things worse for me. I was nowhere to be seen. And he was still doing his best to convince Bill that he knew what he was doing.

“I’m your son!”

“I know!”

Bill had his regrets. Josh was the sniveling sycophant that Bill had always detested. Nevertheless, he was a valuable line of support for Bill’s method. At no point did Josh criticize the security system.

I recognized that this was the path to the rigid rule-abidance that now afflicted our nation. Josh knew little about the world, but he was ready to take his orders.

They were all ready to catch me in their net. They wove the threads finer and finer so that there was no means of escape.

“We’ve got you now!”

“Yes, you do.”

By dinner time, I hoped that they would have it all figured out. There were still in a circle around the system, and they were trying to tinker with it until they got it right. I walked past them, and got some food and headed back to my room.

“I have to get out of this place!”

I spent the night lying on my bed. I couldn’t try to catch up with Rose. She had drained me the other night. I was exhausted, but I didn’t want to give in to sleep. I needed to work

through my dilemma/

I closed my eyes with the idea that I could better concentrate on the puzzle. I stayed like that for a while, then I felt sleep overcome. I fell asleep in my clothes.

When I woke up at one thirty, June was up using the bathroom.

“Where have you been?”

“Nowhere, I fell asleep in my clothes.”

“Why are you lying?”

“I’m not. It’s cold outside. And I’m all warm. Touch me.”

She wasn’t giving me the benefit of the doubt.

“I have class tomorrow. I need to sleep.”

She was firm, “You really do. We’re going to talk about this tomorrow after school.”

“There’s nothing to talk about. Didn’t you fix the alarm. I would have tripped it if I went out.”

She was angry, “You knew that we didn’t fix it! And you took advantage of the situation.”

“Snuck out where? I’m in my school clothes. June, you’re crazy!”

I befuddled. There was little more that she could say. I didn’t want to wake up Bill. I was very tired. I needed more sleep.

The next day, June realized that I had called her bluff. So she didn’t say a thing. She and Bill troubled themselves with the security system. That was her excuse for not following up her suspicions. I needed to act quickly. There was no telling what was going to send her completely off the deep end. The security system gave her new powers. She had longed for such a weapon.

I envisioned a high-powered light running over my window to make sure that I didn’t try to escape. I imagined the guards manning the perimeter with an electrical fence. If only they had been that adventuresome, I wouldn’t have had a chance. But I was dealing with the Keystone Cops, and their blunders only multiplied.

“I am waiting for her to send me to a reeducation camp.”

“A private boarding school is just around the corner. She doesn’t want you sassing her.”

“I guess that I should polish the patent leathers.”

“You need to see the proper reflection of your sin.”

I wanted to get high. I needed to put her interference out of my mind.

“Rose, I don’t want to go to a party. Let’s just hang out.”

“No boys?” she wondered.

“No boys!” I assured her.

Rose seemed almost tolerable tonight.

“You’re sure that you can get back in!”

“For now! They have no idea what they are dealing with. I don’t think that a flash of light is going to give them the insight that they lack. They are clueless.”

I was finally face to face with the very weaknesses that joined together Bill and June. Their haphazard spiral was a lot more fatal than Rose’s. If I remained here, I was going to get consumed by the it.

Bill and June were hardly as intentionally cruel as Rose’s parents. But the result was all the same. Worse. I couldn’t resist temptation forever. I liked to drink. I enjoyed getting high. Eventually, I would be just as random as Rose and have to deal with a disaster of my own making.

For now, I had the strange reminders of everything that we had been through. Even Bill's overreaction of the other night added to the horrible picture. That was all that I needed to convince myself. I couldn't let myself be that vulnerable. And I couldn't keep trusting my abilities to penetrate the security system.

"Rose, I've got to go."

"There is a party!"

"You go on! I need to call it a night!"

I was in bed before the Gestapo did their rounds. I had again succeeded. But I just didn't want time to run out when I was this vulnerable.

In the middle of the night, I heard Bill fumbling about. He was readying another day. All the security and all the snooping wasn't going to change his basic reality. I took his trek as my death knell. I needed to wake up for good.

"Do you have enough money?"

"I'm still not sure how much is enough. I have a few thousand. I can get started somewhere new. Maybe take a bus or a train."

Rose wanted to prepare me for the eventual.

"You have choices!"

"Lance? You're kidding, aren't you?"

After that jab, she seemed at a loss for words.

In math class, I imagined that the teacher was running through the equations that applied to my life.

"I think that I can solve them!" I claimed boldly.

"You have to start with enough money!"

"How much is enough?"

"Enough for a year or two. Maybe more. You don't want to die on the road."

"What is the equation for dying on the road?"

How much was enough? I couldn't worry about it. If I did, I'd always be living in this prison.

At home, June was lecturing Josh, "School gives the chance to live your dreams. Wilder dreams than I could ever know."

That was why she had settled for her divine right of queens. I guess that was the basis of a parent's vocation.

"I'm not trying to spoil you. It's more of a reward."

Sure it is Josh. I do better in school. I make less waves. But you're the one who's due for the reward.

"Don't complain, Chloe. Your reward is just taking longer in coming."

Had she really said that? I wasn't even in the conversation. What was the moment when I realized that June was full of it? I had always been the obedient daughter. And I learned all the lessons. Then I figured out something that she didn't know. That was what most upset her. On my own, I had discovered a deeper truth about what moves the universe.

My master was no longer this hapless little creature. I was in a dialogue with the cosmos. Once June recognized my knowledge, she took it upon herself to persecute me. She wanted to make sure that the future promised me no reward. If she held out a promise to me, it was simply a

lie. It was all part of her excuse that she was denying me my rightful recognition.

“You’re not a princess. There’s no legacy trust that is awaiting you. You’re going to have to fight tooth and nail out there. I can simply be your inspiration.”

“Really, Mom!”

Why had Bill allowed this to happen? It was almost by his intention. If he favored me, he didn’t want it known. She understood this and took it upon herself to dismantle any gain on my part. I hated to see my path to liberation as being based on my persecution. It only made me feel that I was exaggerating my plight. But if I didn’t assert myself, I would be lost here forever.

“Girl, you’re living in your head!”

“Yeah, it’s the only place that I can be safe!”

“Safety is a luxury.”

“That is why you are making such an effort on a security system.”

I couldn’t keep on with these imaginary conversations. There had to be a world where people really did talk back to me.

“Chloe, have you decided on what you’re going to do?”

Rose looked across from me at lunch.

“I’m going to sit here and eat my lunch. Then I’m going to class.”

“Are you going to run away?”

“Rose, I’m losing my mind. Running away isn’t going to help.”

I needed her reassurance.

I continued, “We’re really talking here. This isn’t a dream. You’re not an imaginary playmate. I didn’t make you up.”

She smiled, “You’re scaring me.”

“I’m scaring myself. My outside world is becoming so screwed up that it’s beginning to mess with my inside world.”

“Inside, outside, it’s all the same!”

“Rose, you are the philosopher.”

“So what do you want to know? “

”Is there life on other planets?”

“You don’t think that aliens are going to rescue you.”

I observed, “It could be a way out.”

“What if we could design our own alien?”

“A sex doll?”

“No, a friend. A true friend.”

“That sounds pretty enlightened coming from you, my alien friend.”

“I didn’t mean me.”

“What did you mean?”

She further explained her idea, “Someone who knew your inner thoughts. Someone who you could really communicate with.”

“June wants to know my inner thoughts. But that’s not going to make it any easier to communicate with.”

She defended her idea, “That’s not what I mean.”

I answered back, “That’s the problem. Whether it’s alien or human, it’s the same old

thing. Someone wants to get in your mind and control. The only place where you can really be alone where you don't have to submit to their rules. And they want to rule over that place too."

"I guess it comes down to the same thing: alien brainwashing."

We both laughed. We would have fun traveling together. But it would come down to the same thing again and again. I'd always be bailing Rose out of some desperate situation.

If I wanted to stand up for my own beliefs, I would really have to stake a place on my own. This was version of freedom. I was afraid. It was going to be tough holding myself together. It was already becoming excruciating.

"Let's have one more big blow out!" Rose suggested.

"I've got to think about it. If we blow it out to much, I may never escape."

I really did have to think about it. That was the last part of her cycle that sent her back into the same mode over and over again. The party meant that she would need to recover. And by the time that she recovered, she was back in the shit for good.

"There is no escape anyway!"

"Rose, I can't take that attitude. I've got to take a stab at it."

"Sure, you do!"

I knew that Rose had the power to dissuade me. I couldn't let that happen. We'd had great run. She had given me the courage. But this was my own story. I had to make of it what it was.

"June wants to see you."

"What is it now, Josh?"

"She didn't tell me." He gave me nothing but attitude.

I figured that it was more of her complaints about the security system. Had she found out about my breaches?

I pretty well forgot about June's intent. I went up to my room for a quick nap before dinner. I wasn't in to doing homework.

"Dinner time."

June was calling me.

"We'd like to eat together more! It might be a way to promote better communication."

"Do you want me to confess my sins?"

Josh sneered at me across the table.

Bill interceded, We'll have none of that. Your mother has a great suggestion."

"Bill is going to try to be home at a reasonable hour."

That was all that it took to restore family order. I did what I could to hold my tongue. I didn't want to disrupt our familial bliss now that we had it in tow.

"Isn't this lovely?"

If only she could cook a little better. I guess that I could have done a little more to help. But I didn't want to interfere with her highness. So I let her play the part.

"I found this recipe in a magazine."

That was why it tasted like paper. We were being forced to live in this two-dimensional world.

"June, it is wonderful."

"I love it too," Josh added with a most obsequious manner.

“Chloe, do you like it?” Bill was pressing me go along.

“It’s edible.”

“Chloe, you never say anything nice to me,” June asserted.

She was playing the martyr again!

“I guess it’s good. It’s just not my style.”

“I made it with a pack of soup!”

Bill played along, “Innovative.”

I felt as if was playing bridge without even being dealt my cards. What was I supposed to say? Three hearts. Hearts all around. One good meal and you’ve been absolved of all your sins. Amen! I could see them fitting my boarding school uniform right now.

“We have ways of making you talk.”

“It was the soup. It just made me loopy!”

I was lucky to slip away from the bunch of lunatics. I let them finish their feast of artificial flavors and synthetic colors. This was how we learned our first lessons. With our tongue. Paradise in a package.

“It’s good for you. Lower in sodium, higher in nutrition.”

“Did you read that on the package too?”

I put my dish in the washer and went back to my room. I could have done more to straighten up, but the longer that I hung around with them, the more likely that June would discover something new to harass me. I could remember past incidents and feel unpleasant enough.

A little spat at dinner was hardly reason enough to run away from home. I had met Adam because I had been hanging around with Rose. All my troubles came from going against my parents’ rules. Was I really going to venture off on my own merely because I’d been upset a time or two?

I flipped through my home work then I spent my time resting on my bed. The constellation of ideas filtered through my brain. The road had more than its share of Adams. And it wasn’t as if I had any idea where I was headed. I had been really insane at some of Rose’s parties, but this really was going too far.

I put my crazy dream away and went to sleep early. Maybe a good night’s rest would give me a clearer picture what to do.

“You’ve given up the idea?”

“It was a silly idea. I have hardly a worry at home. If I’m out on my own, I’m going to be struggling just to survive. What will I have gained?”

“You’re always going to reason yourself out of acting.”

“I’ve got to be intelligent.”

“So you go back to being the good little girl and stay put.”

I challenged Rose, “You were the one who doubted that I would ever leave. Now you’re questioning my reasoning.”

“But you’re just giving in.”

“It’s not as if I’m just sneaking off the mall.”

“I know that!”

“There’s not a place that I’m going to land, the home for runaway girls.”

“You’re going to have to be clever. You’re going to have to become something that you’re not.”

I added, “Yeah, I’ll have to tell people that I’m eighteen. It’s not going to happen.”

“Maybe a little makeup.”

“Then they ask for my ID, and I’m screwed.”

“There are ways!”

“Yes, there are! But I still have no idea what they are. The hell that I live now is not as bad as the hell that I will have to live if I leave home.”

She asked, “You’ve made your decision?”

“I don’t know that I’m doing.”

I couldn’t keep on with this pretense. Every time I returned home, I was reminded how the walls were coming up for good. They were shutting me in.

“Josh, what is it? I thought that you were off playing with your friends.”

“I live here too!”

“Yes, you do. One of the crosses that I bear.”

“You could be nicer to me.”

“I have been nicer, and you always act like some kind of prison guard.”

“Poor Chloe and her complaints. No one wants to here your shit. Not me, not Mom, not Dad.”

What if he was right? Why should I hang out here anymore?

I gave him a nasty look and went up to my room. I hardly felt welcome here. I couldn’t stay hidden in here for the rest of my teen years. Something needed to be done.