

All the  
**INNUENDO**  
*Half the Fact*



*Reflections of a  
Fragrant Liar*

**KIMBERLY JAYNE**

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Half the Fact**  
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**For Tyson, Nicole, Aleta, and Brittany**

I love you guys to the ends of the universe.  
Buttdogs.

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## The Sag Zone

---

I just turned fifty–f-f-f-two. I can hardly get those words out of my mouth.

Thirty years ago, I looked at my current age as far off in the future, in a land far, far away where gravity was of infinitesimal consequence. Back then, the concept of time was alien and against my primal mantra of *I am young, I am invincible, I am the skinny girl with perky breasts*. In fact, I thought this age only happened to other people, like my parents and ex-presidents and despicable bosses who deserved it. But not me.

No, this number does not fit me.

Of course, there are signs that things aren't what they used to be. Where the firm muscles of my arms, torso, hips, and thighs used to broadcast my juvenescence, vitality, and catch-worthiness, I am now faced with the voice of Rod Serling broadcasting that I have crossed over into *The Sag Zone*.

The fast-firing synapses of my brain, which once kept my cranial performance and databanks in peak condition so that I could leap complex problems in a single bound and photographically recall who said what about whom and in what tone during a late-night drinking binge and still recall the details three months later had vaccinated me against making such statements as:

- I can't. If I don't get my sleep...
- Where are the shoes with good arch support?
- No thanks; that has dairy in it.
- What do you mean I can't wear leggings?
- So, you don't have decaf?
- *Achoo!* Oops.

These days as I prepare to speak, my measureless experiences crowd into my frontal lobe, jockeying for position to blast off my tongue first. Pick me, pick me, they clamor. One thought breaks through the throng and lines up on the launching pad that is my tongue. It's coming... it's coming... Wait for it. It's... it's... gone.

I am humbled by an insidious brain fart.

Or, perhaps it's not that simple. Perhaps it's really that I am so inundated with broad-spectrum knowledge that my advanced intellectual facilities are nearing capacity. Without a back door to push out the inconsequential and traumatic, I'm forced to zip-drive it all into a warehouse somewhere around my hippocampus where its retrieval

could take days—weeks even—much like rummaging through attic boxes for one's first Drunk-and-Naked-on-Sixth-Street photo. Do we really want to wave that around? Perhaps a brain fart serves a higher, more practical purpose.

For me, it's all about the number. When you say you're over 50, people regard you with a piteous gaze—if they see you at all. They try to assuage your assumed bruised ego with commentary like, "But you look so much younger." Or, "I hope I look that good when I get old—er, *that* age."

At least we can be thankful for good manners.

If only this could be said of one's family. When mine became aware of my 50th birthday, it was like I had a big, waxy Number 50 birthday candle melting all over my head flaming everyone with the inside information that I had reached a cultural milestone.

At 40, I got those black Over the Hill balloons and greeting cards depicting my nipples dangling around my ankles. That was child's play compared to the ridicule I endured my 50th year as the recipient of a wall-to-wall Grim Reaper banner.

I guess it might have been easier to accept my age gracefully if I hadn't been throwing myself on the ground kicking and screaming; but I had just realized I would now be required to check off the 50-65 age box on the forms in my doctor's office—or worse, the 50+ box, a group encompassing me and all those on the cusp of fossilization.

Fifty is the new 40, some say. In fact, my current decade is a huge disconnect between who I am, what I look like, and how I process fiber. I feel the same as I did at 29. No, I'm not kidding. The biggest difference is that I'm smarter. I regularly wax wisdom all over the place. I just have trouble remembering... uh, wait. What was I saying?

Oh, yes. My age cannot possibly reveal the person I am, inside or out. The numbers do sometimes lie, or at least mislead. I'm still fun and fabulous, vibrant and vital, sexy and sentient. After all, I'm only fifty-f-f-f-two.

## Spanxed!

---

I needed an undergarment for my new sweater dress, which hugs my curves a little too well. However, it was Sunday night when I decided this, and in Marshall's all I could find was Spanx.

First off, on the hanger this shaper looks like a body bandage for a two-year-old, though the tag said it was LARGE. It fits me from boobage to mid-thighs. I did look stylin' in my sweater dress, and I wore the ensemble, including black bootery, all day. However, a lot of tugging occurred as my Lycra contraption rolled up from the bottom and down from the top.

I finally gave in by early afternoon and let the girls swing free since they have little tolerance for compression at a hundred-thousand pounds per cup. I simply slid the elastic cinch below the boobcage, and suddenly I could breathe better. But eight seconds later I had gained a new appreciation for bucking broncs. Incredibly, I made it through the whole day without tearing it off.

Later that evening, in my closet, it was time to disencumber myself from the Spanx. You might think, "Easy peasy." But you would be wrong. Perhaps it was the route I took. The over-the-head route.

I had grabbed the hem and pulled it all the way up, over my head, at which point I realized, with my arms pinned across my chest, elbows akimbo, and bionic Lycra stretched as taut as a Bay Bridge cable, that I had effectively strait-jacketed myself. That's because wearing Spanx is like stuffing yourself into an elf's condom. Unless you can shrivel up on demand, you're a captive little fucker.

So I stumbled around my closet in a wrestling match with my Spanx and gave myself a full nelson. Disoriented, I tripped over my boots and flailed around on the floor. I paused in my hapless exertion to enjoy a moment of debilitating terror, imagining I might die and no one would find me till the next day when my putrefying scent would overpower the cat box. That, or being so tightly encased, if the thing hardened, I might actually emerge with wings and a penchant for light bulbs.

Fifteen minutes later, I managed a Houdini-esque escape by dislocating both shoulders and using my rabid spittle and sweat as a lube. I staggered to the shower, exhausted, out of breath, my hair electrified, and I stood under the water in a daze—like Goldie Hawn in *Overboard* after her nightmare with a chainsaw. *Buh, buh, buh, buh.*

Tragically, my cat Matilda saw the whole thing. Next morning, she hunkered down and growled as I waved the Spanx in her face in an effort to desensitize her. When I left her, she was mumbling incoherently about throwing herself in front of a car.

Heed my warnings, people. Spanx should be worn at your own risk. I'm in recovery

now, wearing a muumuu that leaves me shapeless. Ramping up for: Spanx vs. Me, Round 2.

## The Morning After

---

You know how in the morning before the sun rises and you're groggy because you finally took a Xanax at 4 a.m. to get some sleep? And your alarm goes off and you smack at it blindly and crack your hand on something hard that's not the clock, and you cuss yourself awake even though you yearn for those extra nine minutes of snoozing?

And now that's not possible so you pitch yourself out of bed, except your feet are all tangled up with your sheets and your blankie foot warmer so your head craters a hole into the carpet?

And as you dangle upside down, you wonder if you broke your neck? And you kick and squirm to extricate your feet and when you're finally free, you're satisfied that you got in an early workout? And you cuss as you limp across ice-cold Travertine toward the bathroom in the dark?

And you know when you sit your bare butt on a frigid toilet that feels weird somehow, and it dawns on you that your foot is strangely wet?

And you cuss while flipping on the light, which is like a punch to your eyes, and you squint at a smashed cat turd on your heel while realizing that some male didn't lower the toilet seat and your thighs are making friends with all kinds of organisms that should never contact human skin? And your stomach lurches as you beeline it toward the shower like you're dragging a ball and chain?

And you know how you get into the shower and your arm loops through the bendy hose of your handheld Waterpik showerhead and you gasp and flinch, envisioning a ghost grabbing your arm? And the showerhead plummets from its little overhead slot, right onto your head?

And you cuss and slump to the bottom of the shower stall and through your tears you see that your foot still has doo on it and the ick melting off it is swirling around the drain, which is also precariously close to your hooaha? And you finally get all lathered up and say, "I'd rather look like an orangutan than shave right now?"

And you know how you reach for your towel and discover it's wet from god knows what, but certainly something to do with those bad, bad children you live with?

And you cuss and step out in search of a dry towel, when your phone rings and you lunge to answer it because at 6:45 a.m. it might just be the new hottie your buddy introduced you to? And your boss is on the other end of the line and she says, "Don't bother coming in to work today, because it's a *snow* day"—in Austin, Texas?

Now that is a great way to start out the day.

## Oh, Poop

---

When my daughter Tyson was pregnant with her third child, she had gestational diabetes and morning sickness that lasted all day. Having birthed four kids of my own, I was no stranger to the joys of 24/7 nausea. During that time, Tyson, her husband, and two kids lived with me; and while we shared the house equally, I tried to let their family life take precedence.

I am always there for love and support, but it made sense to me that my daughter should set the ground rules for the house, while I moved about autonomously.

That was cool because my daughter is very domestic and, well, since the kids left home, I'm not. Instead, I provide fun and educational activities, like taking the kids for ice cream before dinner (the coffee-infused flavor is especially good on a weeknight), or showing them how to do cheerleader Herkies off their beds (missing the overhead fan is key, although not missing it gets you style points), schooling them in performance art (*Skippyjon Jones* in my south-of-the-border Chihuahua voice), and belting out music at the top of our lungs. This is a job I can take seriously.

This evening, while her husband is away, Tyson, five-year-old Miss America, and I watch our favorite show, *So You Think You Can Dance*. We never miss it, and after the kids have their baths, we settle on the couch with popcorn, ready to be dazzled by footwork—and a lot of shaky, shiny stuff on barely there dresses.

During a sock-hop number, three-year-old Destructo tears in front of the TV speaking gibberish so fast, I think he will launch himself into hyperspace. He dances frantically while holding his behind. There's only one reason a three-year-old does that, and it's not because he wants to try out for *SYTYCD*.

Tyson's eyes roll in my direction, her face pales, and she moans, "Mo-o-o-m."

It's times like these that you want to say to your grown daughter who's nine months pregnant, "I was only kidding when I said you could always count on me." Because let me tell you, I normally balk at the combination of kids and bodily functions. It never ends well.

Still, I like to pitch in when my daughter makes me. I mean, when I am needed. And how hard could it be? It's a simple matter of letting the kid stop, drop, and let it roll out, right?

"C'mon, Nah," Destructo says, extending his tiny hand.

Mm-hmm. I see how he's going to play it. He's got that "adorable" factor dialed all the way up to eleven. I sigh and unfold myself from my comfy slump on the couch, resigned to my maternal task.

Destructo leads me down the hallway to our half-bath. I flip on the light for him, pull

down his pull-ups, help him scooch onto his potty seat atop the big-people toilet, and hand him the *Hello Kitty* book. Who better to inspire an indoor poop-fest than a cat?

Once in position, Destructo jams his little arm straight and points toward the door. "Out!"

"What?"

"Out, Nah!"

"Geez, I get it, you don't want an audience. Girls don't mind an audience, you know. Girls go to the bathroom in pairs."

Destructo's brows dip into a deep V above his button nose.

Hmph. I exit and close the door, when I hear him scream like a baby banshee.

"My god!" I say, jerking the door open. "Hemorrhoids?"

He says something in three-year-old twaddle that I take to mean he just wants the door almost shut. More importantly, he wants to see me through the crack in the doorway and know that I haven't left his fate up to the fiendish flushing machine.

I've been down this road long ago with all four of my daughters, so I give the kid his semi-privacy and take the opportunity to peek at the hoopla on *SYTYCD*. I leave one foot in place where Destructo can see it and lunge on the other, as far and low as my thighs will let me, to see around the corner to the TV. But I'm vertically challenged and, as it turns out, horizontally as well. Along with the bones in my pelvis cracking, I only hear Tyson and Miss America wow-ing and laughing and clapping and generally relishing my show in front of the big screen where I should be.

I sigh and move back to check on Destructo. "You done, buddy?"

"No, Nah! OUT!"

I feel like I should click my heels and spout, "*Ja wohl!*" But instead, I invoke some long-dormant facility for patience and give him a few more minutes, alternately observing him through the space in the doorway, staring at the ceiling. Mares eat oats and does eat oats...

"You're missing it, Mom!" Tyson shouts from the living room.

"Not like I can press the fast-forward button," I mutter. "How ya doing there, buddy? All done?"

Destructo concentrates and scrunches up his face till it has an inflamed quality. Because I'm missing my show, I figure, hey, a little forcing can't hurt. I don't know any three-year-olds with hernias, and hurrying things up can only bring this little adventure to its happy conclusion—and by happy conclusion, I mean the most important part of my job, the sole purpose for my existence on earth in this moment: the wipe.

Destructo grunts. I peek. He gestures. I sigh. He decrees, "Nana be gone," and I suggest prunes.

This goes on for another 15 minutes, during which time I miss the poignant moments of my show. I hear Nigel give critique of a Bollywood number and Mary Murphy shriek that the couple earned a seat "on the Hot Tamale Train!" Their voices taunt me while I stand sentry over a toddler version of *The Thinker*. By this time, Destructo has been at it so long, now I have to go to the bathroom.

"Be right back," I promise. "Nana will be really quick, okay? Uh, don't go anywhere." Like that kid is ever getting off the pot.

Ninety seconds I am gone. Ninety. Seconds.

On my way back, I get a whiff of the boy's poo-pourri. Fabulous! Congratulations are in order, along with a quick swipe between the cheeks, and then I am back on the couch. Hallelujah!

That is, until I notice Destructo—in ninety seconds—has taken matters into his own hands. That is a literal translation. Telltale smears of his effort have inexplicably gotten onto his nightshirt. And his thighs. And the walls. He has completely unfurled the toilet paper until there isn't any left on the roll, and the puddle of tissue on the floor is, shall we say, not recyclable.

My eyes roll back into my head and I feel faint. "No-o-o-o-o!"

Why me? I already graduated Mommy School. I let other people cook for me now. I get out of the house in two seconds instead of two hours, with just my purse. I get drunk without worrying about toddlers. I have sex without birth control! I've... *matured!*

Tyson yells from the other room. "Everything okay? You got it, Mom?"

Got it? I got it all right—if it means a direct gift from the fecal gods.

Destructo clutches a spit wad of soiled toilet paper. To be honest, it would take a trowel to get that stuff out from under his fingernails. Where is Mike Rowe and his industrial-strength disinfectant for an epic taping of *Dirty Jobs* when you need him?

"Sorry, Nah," my grandson mutters. His tiny expression is contrite, bewildered, and defeated.

I sigh and remind myself I am helping my nauseous preggo daughter while she incubates an unborn child—a child who is likely to require my rusty butt-wiping skills at some point in the future. But something snaps inside me: a little thing called motherhood. Tyson's, and my own.

I worry about my daughter overdoing when she feels so tired and sick. Nobody had been around to help me when I had morning sickness or the complicated migraines that dominated my third trimester with my fourth daughter. When my kids were little, I became a single mother long before my husband and I split up. Tyson's husband works long hours, and I don't want her to feel like I did, like she carries the load alone. Plus, I'm looking at that cherubic face, haloed by those silky shocks of vanilla hair.

Destructo stands very still, staring up at me.

"It's okay, buddy," I say. "Not that I don't love what you've done with the place, but let's get you out of here."

Right then, I channel the attentive, competent, no-nonsense mommy I was in my twenties and thirties. I tell him to wait right there while I sprint into the laundry room and grab a towel. In one swift move, I pull Destructo's shirt over his head and toss it; wrap his sticky little hands and arms under the towel; and pin him inside it, straitjacket style. I scoop him up and shuffle past the couch potatoes reveling in TV-land, and I drop him into my shower where I lather and quarantine him until he is properly sanitized.

Then I stand back. "Stick your fingernails in the soap," I suggest. "Like, you know, claw the soap."

He glares at me through the shower glass and raises his arm, pointing toward the bathroom door. "Out, Nah!"

I smile, but I'm not budging. "Sorry, dude, not this time. Nana's calling the shots

now."

He sinks in the stall and rolls around under the spray, then presses his nose against the glass and grins at me.

"I luh you, Nah."

Oh, poop. There he goes again, dialing up the adorable—all the way up to eleven.

## Yap Yippity Doo-Dah

---

I have flown to Florida to surprise my mother for her 75th birthday. She cries when she sees me, and it's a sweet and touching reunion—which lasts all of 60 seconds. After that, it's *Fergie, Fergie, Fergie*.

Fergie is a silver and brown, tube-shaped DOG—my parents' 18-month-old Yappie, whom they introduce to me as "your new little sister."

My mother rejoices in saying, "Oh look!" as her precious yapping machine hops around my feet. "She wants you to pay attention to her!"

She and Dad are aglow, while the bark-o-meter peaks with reverb off the walls at a level even wolves would consider shrill. Of course, this is the benefit of aging. Your hearing goes, which spares your eardrums from your dog's ear-splitting yelps. However, since I am but their human offspring, my intact eardrums verge on bursting.

Dad sheds a wistful tear as he coos, "Aaww, look at that. She's talking to you!"

It's as if the dog is Helen Keller eking out her first word. *Aaaaaarf!*

Later, I find my parents standing around the dining room table.

"She thinks she's human!" my mother says, with the same look of wonder I would expect to see if she found the face of Jesus in her toast.

My father is equally spellbound, grinning like Howdy Doody.

They are enchanted by the divinity in motion that is the dog. On top of the table. Where we eat!

Could it get any worse? Oh yes. It could.

When Fergie leaves a reeking tootsie roll on the carpet, I wait for the satisfying comeuppance sure to befall her.

"Fergie!" my mother snaps, with her hands on her hips. Then her scowl transforms, and suddenly, she shrugs. "Oh, we-e-e-e-ll." Gleefully, she baby-talks. "Isn't her just the cutest thing?"

After which, her pooping prodigy gets swooped up into a hug.

A HUG!

Listen, when we were kids, any pet that dared crap in the house was booted outside with the horny toads and snakes and occasionally my dad. These days, a good poop is only as revered as its architect. And apparently Fergie's creations are akin to Frank Lloyd Wright's—a *modern movement that invites the outdoors in*.

When Mom and Dad leave the room, I crouch down to Fergie's eye level. "Two can play at that game," I say. "Have you SEEN me roll over and shake? You have much to learn, Yaphopper."

Fergie's ears perk up, her head cocks sideways, and her nose twitches as we clash in

a Close Encounter of the Turd Kind. She tootles off with those tiny toenails tapping on the tile; and minutes later, Mom is again squealing and cooing and fawning all over her.

*Kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss!*

My mother was never that enamored with her flesh-and-blood grandchildren.

The worst part is that Fergie gets it that her sudden position at the zenith of the inheritance ladder is assured with every revoltingly cute thing she does.

But it ain't over yet, Yaphopper.

This Easter, I'll be filling up a basket with gaudy-colored eggs to hide. You know how there's always an egg or two you never find? Frankly, I wonder if Fergie would fit into a basket.

## Feeling It

---

I was the last one to leave my office one evening, and I had stopped into the johnna before the long ride home. I was wearing a cute little sweater dress with black tights and boots, and by the time I'd gotten myself put back together, including my coat, bags, and purse, something didn't feel quite right.

As a veteran thongster, I can swear on a stack of Dan Brown novels that once I'm in my thong, I don't feel it. Sometimes I have to ask myself, *Hey, did you remember to put on panties?* But apparently this night, because of the snug fit of my tights and the unusual tugging I'd done to get them up and in place, it felt like somebody was behind me stretching my thong up over my head.

But I am in a hurry to get home to watch *Cougar Town*, so no going back in to the johnna to readjust. I get to our lobby and call the elevator, and shimmying and shaking in an effort to reposition the thong via osmosis. I wish the elevator would hurry. It's so quiet at night on our floor, and kind of creepy when all you can hear are the noises of the building's inner workings—the ticks, the grumblings, and the air handlers.

I'm also thinking osmosis is a lame concept, and I can't stand one more second of this discomfort because the back of my thong could be lodged crackside for eternity. With briefs, you can just tug on the leg band and the annoying clump of fabric between your cheeks is a thing of the past—for about thirty seconds. Not so with a thong. Much more complex operation, I assure you.

So I drop everything I'm carrying and lift up the back of my dress, grope blindly for the waistband of my tights, and then shove my hand down there—waaaay down there. More shimmying and shaking is required, plus a little "spread 'em" action.

After tussling with the recalcitrant wedgie, the front of my thong is now wonky and only half of my hooha is covered, which is a bit like wearing your bra on only one boob. That ain't right. So I continue readjusting until the tiny cotton panel is in the right place.

I hear the air handlers kick on and think, even though I'm alone, there's something weird about my skirt being hiked up around my waist and my hand buried in the back of my tights. I can't put my finger on what that would be...

It is at this moment the elevator dings, signaling the arrival of my ride down. I barely have time to unfinger myself, when I hear noises to my right and two guys in jeans and tennies appear in the hallway. Carrying toolboxes, they stop abruptly, ten feet from me. Their expressions say it all.

In one fluid movement, I release the thong, withdraw my hand, and grab my stuff from the floor. I throw myself into the elevator, pray the workmen are not going DOWN, and smack the close-the-damn-door button. After interminable seconds, the doors seal

me inside—alone—while the sounds of tittering men echo in my brain.

Thus, a proud moment imprints itself into Fragrant Liar history.

The upside is, I don't think they could recognize me again. They weren't actually looking at my face.

## Taken to the Cleaners

---

Okay, so this is between us, right?

In the middle of the night, I wake in a heart-pounding sweat. Holy crap. I took my suede coat in for dry cleaning and forgot about it. In the dark, I realize it's been there for at least two months. Panic grips me as I imagine the bastards have sold it by now. Why else would I not get a courtesy call? They have my phone number, I know, because I recite it at every visit.

*Don't forget. Don't forget. Don't forget, I tell myself. Go straight over there today and give them hell for not calling with a friendly reminder.*

But of course, I do forget, because that is the invisible badge you wear when you hit 50—the Spaced It Again badge, which, if it worked properly, would blink a red warning and spit out a fortune-cookie-style message detailing what you'd abandoned and where to pick up the trail.

My memory returns in the afternoon while I'm on my way to the store with Tyson. "I forgot!" I shriek, running off the road. "We've got to stop at the cleaners for my coat. Those bastards should have called me."

Tyson rolls her eyes and elects to wait in the car as I dash into the cleaners.

"I'm here to pick up my black suede coat," I announce to the clerk. Then I tap my fingers on the counter, impatient to be reunited with my beloved Suedey.

"I'm not seeing it," the ridiculous woman says upon checking her online inventory. "When did you bring it in?"

"Well," I stammer, "about two months ago. It slipped my mind, what with the holidays. Who could blame me? No one called me. Perhaps you should check your racks."

Off she goes, affecting bewilderment, and returns empty-handed. Surprise, surprise. She is in cahoots with the thieving staff, or she herself has absconded with it.

She says faux helpfully, "Let me try one other place."

I give her the stink-eye to show my displeasure at her incompetence and betrayal of my trust. I've been coming to this place for years. Another five minutes go by, and I turn to give my daughter a shrug through the window. For good measure, I scowl emphatically to be sure she's clear on the depth of my aggravation.

The colluding clerk looks up and speaks. "I'm sorry, ma'am, but I'm not showing it in the system. I've checked our affiliate sites, and it's not coming up there either."

*Damn, they paid you off! Somebody got greedy! Why can't you just admit it?*

"Oh really," I say, my nose wrinkling. "So, it just *disappeared*?"

She tries to use good customer service on me, and I sneer at her in the way only a

disgruntled retail shopper can. My mother—who never met a vendor she couldn't take down—would be proud. Then I huff out, robbed of the ability to slam the glass door.

Back in the car, I vent to my daughter about the criminals I've been doing business with. She ventures that I may have dropped it off somewhere else, while I mutter obscenities and threats of lawsuits. Then beside myself with loss, we head home. I have a heavy heart because I know with certainty, Suedey is gone.

*I'll miss you, Suedey.*

At home, I try to distract myself by helping Tyson with the birthday party for my granddaughter, Miss America. I offer to wrap presents. Or more rightly, to bag the gifts. I have accumulated a ton of gift bags for every occasion, which I reuse repeatedly (as long as the giftee lets me have it back). The bags are in a closet, and as I remove a pile of "birthday for girl" bags, I spy something black and velvety, with ever-so-subtle scuffs on the shoulder.

*Suedey!*

Wait. Suedey has been here the whole time? You mean I only dreamed I dropped it off at the cleaners? And actually acted on a dream?

Wow. Heh. Tyson will laugh at this right?

In my defense, who is surprised?

## Zombies in the Attic

---

I am awake at 2:30 a.m., stirred by shuffling, scuffling, scraping noises like something or someone stuck in a wall and clawing its way out. Or in the ceiling, dragging its leg along the rafters. My first thought is, naturally, zombie rats.

Zombie rats are not what you want to wake up to, especially, zombie rats in the throes of excruciating death. With all that noise, I imagine the creature is caught in a trap, unable to escape.

*Noooo! Don't let me bear witness! Stop suffering, little zombie rodent. Go to sleep.*

But ignoring the shuffling, scuffling, scraping noises is impossible. Zombie rats are insistent in the dark.

Pollyanna being my childhood mascot, I invoke her to help me look on the bright side and be glad. Thankfully, Pollyanna is always game. She drags me into a misty forest where we encounter a tribe of muscular, bare-chested male figures, led by a sleek-physique named Jacob. We double-team him under a new moon. Oh yes... Pollyanna is a slut. Jacob has just phased on the fly when the zombie rat in the attic again demands attention.

*No, zombie rat! I toss and turn and wrap my pillow around my ears. Pollyanna, beefy naked wolfmen, take me back to the forest!*

The sounds become more ominous, like those noises pea-soup-puking Reagan endured, which resulted in her getting a professional exorcism. You know how that satanic shit starts... always, noises in the attic. Thank god I don't own a crucifix.

I hear a mewl then. *Oh, torturous pain of death!*

I gasp and sit straight up, grappling for my bearings. My heart is thumping against my chest. Where is that coming from?

The noises stop, and I second-guess myself. Surely, there is no threat inside my house. In the darkness. Where I won't see it coming.

Dammit.

I ease out of bed and pad warily into the hallway, trying to be invisible and imposing at the same time. My eyes dart anxiously, scanning for movement, and the hair on my skin stands erect as my guilty conscience asks who might know what I did last summer. I peer at the ceiling, listening, twitchy muscles ready to launch me back under the covers. Because that will be a safe place.

Wait. Is that a mewl, or a mew?

To the left of me is the bathroom, and I hear more scuffling from behind the closed door. I turn the knob cautiously. In the dimness, I can make out that all the drawers are open.

Satan wants my vibrator?

Knocking noises around my feet compel me to flip on the light. Like Uncle Buck in *Bonnie and Clyde*, Matilda rocks aimlessly on all fours, scraping her little cat skull against the cabinets. Her head is stuck all the way to her collar inside a large, orange Mr. Potato Head.

She mews plaintively, "WTF!" (Obviously, I speak cat.)

"Oh, my god," I say, picking her up. "Are you okay?"

Holding her in my arm, I rifle through the bathtub toys in search of plastic eyes, a hat, and a mustache to complete her ensemble. I wonder how long she's been like this and whether she's done it to herself. I do live with little ones who are endlessly fascinated by the calico bolt of lightning that is our resident feline.

Matilda issues another appeal for mercy.

"Shhh," I say. Then I take her picture with my phone.

Perhaps Matilda is the victim of zombie rats, or perhaps we will one day soon need the services of an exorcist. In any case, I think the experience proves Matilda is incredibly intelligent. By sliding the drawers open and shut, she has been S-O-S'ing me!

Now that I know my cat's a genius, I'm going back to bed, back to the misty forest with my sexy werewolves, where everybody knows there's no such thing as zombie rats.

## Unspoken Parenting 101

---

As a single mom of four daughters, I have to say part of my joy in life has been doing things they don't expect. This is Unspoken Parenting 101. But there's no sliding down the bannister when they bring a boy home to meet Mom anymore because they're all married now, and their husbands have figured out what they've gotten themselves into. I'm forced to be more creative these days, but it's not hard to get a rise out of my girls and, frankly, there's nothing more rewarding.

One Friday evening before I raced out of the house for my weekend getaway at a Hill Country B&B with Mr. Fine, my BF du jour, I shared a delicious moment with my eldest.

I was at the door with her three-year-old son Destructo, who had pillaged my jewelry box and given me the sendoff of sendoffs.

"Here, Nah." His round little face grinned up at me, delighted to be helpful.

*Oh my. This is one for the books.*

I disguised my shock with unbridled glee, glinting at his mother and dangling the proffered pair of shiny silver handcuffs where everyone in the family could see them.

"Hey, thanks, buddy," I said, fluffing his silky blonde hair. "Good idea. See you guys Monday!"

A gratifying mix of horror and disgust bloated Tyson's face. Horror and disgust. Yes, I live for this stuff.

## I Didn't Shave My Legs for Sex

---

I shaved my legs this morning. No, I'm not getting ready to have sex. Actually, my rule is I shave no leg before its time. When my Neanderthal roots start sprouting, only two things can happen. Either I break out the "Closed for Business" sign, or I break out the quad-steel blades and mow the lawn.

What I want to know is who made up the rule that we Western babes weren't acceptably beautiful if we didn't depilatorize? Especially where sex is involved, since sex is such a primal act. I'm not happy with this cultural standard. What other creature in the animal kingdom de-hairs itself before coitus? I mean, is this really what we're using our superior brains for?

Let me help you make sense of this. You know you want me to.

Seems the earliest shaving paraphernalia was a flint razor, way back in 30,000 BC. Flint dulled fast, and since no one had yet invented the Mach 3 Turbo, flint stones became the first disposables.

You ask me, flint may be responsible for a lot of premature cavepeep deaths. Hungry man-eaters get a whiff of all those razor cuts, they'll lunge in for the mauling. The perfect example of how pretty can be perilous.

I'm guessing the next big invention after the wheel was that little box we call a bathroom, sparking the onset of civilized society. Everything calms down when you lock yourself behind that bathroom door. Am I right?

Then, in like 54-68 AD—Rome, of course—Nero's wife Poppaea used cream as an alternative to razors. Poppaea and her counterparts used inventive ingredients like resin, ass's fat, she-goat's gall, bat's blood, and powdered viper. Those crazy Eye-talians will try anything once, I'm telling you.

If my own ass's fat performed such miracles, you can bet I'd be harvesting and selling it for fun and profit. Plus, I'd be flaunting the chiseled mini-butt of a 14-year-old by now.

I think it's clear. We can blame our ancient ancestors for having to shave our legs. If they were here today, I'd do the only civilized thing. I'd withhold sex.

## G-A-S Spells Gas

---

When I was five, I spelled my first word. Back then, few kids went to Kindergarten, so I learned about letters and sounds on my own. I was pretty proud of myself when I took my carefully crayoned word in to my father, who was doing his business on the toilet.

Unfazed at my interruption, he said, "Do you know what that spells? G-A-S. That spells gas."

The irony of that moment did not occur to me until I wrote this. That aside, GAS was officially my first word, and I got a lot of mileage out of it. Heh.

I easily remembered the letters' names and the sounds they made, and from that point on, my older cousins could no longer spell all the sneaky things they were up to. As in, "Hurry, hide the P-O-R-N-O." Because I'd just head to the kitchen and say, "Grandma, what's porno?" And the whole world would light up.

As an aside, that's how I learned the valuable skill of flustering the hell out of relatives.

By the time I entered first grade, I was ahead of most kids. Nobody could lasso syllables like me: "Por-no. Hey, that's two syllables!"

Soon after, I was writing stories. My first one, scrawled on a yellow-lined tablet while sitting in my grandfather's real estate office, was about pigs that could fly. Why yes, this is THE story that spawned the internationally famous expression. My mother still has the original, so I can prove it. (You do still have that, right Mom?)

It wasn't until after I got married and began popping out babies that I tried serious fiction (pregnancy at the rate of wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am will inspire you to make shit up in your mind just to get away for awhile). With four kids, a full-time job, and despite an absent and volatile husband, I stole an hour here and there and before long realized that writing was my true calling.

Which brings me to the point of this post. Here I sit, broken-hearted, came to share, and instead I martyred. I'm staring at colored folders containing six plotted novels in various stages of writing or rewriting, completely out of G-A-S. I'm not blocked; my muse is on strike, and I don't know why.

On this perfect rainy writing day, for all I've accomplished at my true calling, I might as well be watching P-O-R-N-O.

## The Grosser Sex?

---

My friend Julie has raised three boys. Based on our many long talks about our kids, she seems certain that boys must be the grosser sex. Though moms may beg to differ, one thing I can state unequivocally about raising all girls is that they have within them the capacity to defy the "sugar and spice" stereotype with off-the-charts vulgarity. And I had done a fine job of putting their potential for ribaldry out of my mind until one Saturday morning after my car wreck.

My two nanaboys and their mom, my daughter Nicole, went with me to the crowded car rental office so I could switch out vehicles. While waiting our turn behind other customers at the counter, Nicole indicated to ten-year-old Mack, who was sniffing and snorting from horrendous allergies, that he needed to go blow his nose.

So what does the kid do? He sticks his finger up there.

Hey, why blow when you can troll, I always say. Especially if there's a big fish in the pond. Yes, I have a pubescent boy's sense of humor. Still, Nicole and I blanched when Mack hooked something, hauled it out, and examined it—I don't know what exactly because I didn't see it, Your Honor. But my imagination was in overdrive.

Seven-year-old Ashton, lover of all manner of grossities, did see it. He grinned and fidgeted with newfound energy and respect for his big bro.

Nicole, however, was mortified. She searched the austere waiting room for Kleenex and found none. Desperate, she pointed a stiff arm toward the glass door, which led to the parking lot.

"Outside," she ordered in the take-no-prisoners mommy voice. "Go! Do something with it."

I added helpfully, "There's a bush out there; go wipe it on the bush."

Nicole whipped her head around. "Mom!"

I shrugged. I had yet to see anything, and it wasn't like there was a loogie trash bin out there. I have changed diarrhea baby diapers. I have cleaned up projectile vomiting from everywhere, including my ears. And don't get me started on pet poo. So I ranked Mack's development at about DEFCON 4.

Off he went with one weirdly adorned finger poised stiffly in the air, Ashton on his heels to witness his big brother's disposal of the offending bodily bi-product. After much ado, they returned with only a case of the giggles.

Crisis averted, Mack located the water cooler, pulled out a paper cone, and filled it. Moments later, I heard Nicole and Ashton groaning. They shielded their eyes, recoiling with anguished facial contortions.

"What?" I said.

They pointed, unable to speak. Mack was still giggling with the cup in his hand. I'm guessing he got exactly the reaction he was going for. Kid was on a roll.

Finally, Nicole, writhing in her chair, managed to blurt, "He shot snot into his cup!"

Even I have my limits—we are in public, so there is a certain decorum we observe for polite company (read, strangers). I seized Mack's cup to dispose of it myself, but then, I couldn't help it; I gazed into the cup. Sometimes there's no explanation for why I do things.

"I don't see anything," I said.

"That's because he sucked it back up in his nose!" Nicole was nearly apoplectic, and her shell-shocked brain compelled her to rattle off descriptions so graphic that even I had to wince.

And still, Mack couldn't stop the giggle-fest.

This would seem to make my friend Julie's case that boys are the grosser sex; however, let's look at history, shall we?

When Nicole was in the fourth grade, she and her sisters cornered the nanny in our laundry room with behemoth-sized green loogies on their fingers. With no escape route, Nanny Terri screamed and crumpled into a convulsing puddle on the floor. After the little "snots" ran off, Terri managed enough of a recovery to give them a severe reaming.

When I arrived home after a long day at work, Nanny Terri greeted me at the door and informed me in high-pitched Spanglish that she couldn't take it anymore and that my daughters were devil spawn (she actually said something unintelligible, but you can bet this was the translation).

When I investigated and the girls explained what they did, I lined them up firing-squad style and explained to Nanny Terri that their loogies were not really loogies at all, but scoops of a moldy science experiment, fished from under the bed where it had languished for weeks and grown exponentially into something worthy of, er, sharing, and didn't she feel special?

Nanny Terri refused to believe she'd nearly expired over fermented mold. Instead, she delivered her walking papers and headed out the door, never to be heard from again.

I chuckled to myself as Nicole forcibly dragged Mack into the bathroom at the car rental place to blow his nose once and for all. And I thought, You aren't fooling anybody, Miss Suddenly Grossed Out By Loogies. I know exactly where you came from.

## Heaven's a Bad Place

---

“Heaven’s a bad place.”

So says Miss America as we cuddle on the sofa watching *Shrek2*.

“What?” I say, refraining from spouting my jaded philosophy on heaven with a four-year-old. I stick with the conventional line. “Heaven’s a good place.”

Miss America shakes her head and looks up at me with big brown eyes that reveal how much she’s learned of life and death in the recent months since my sister died. My sister Dee and Miss America were very close—an understatement if ever there was one.

“I don’t want to go to Heaven,” Miss America says firmly.

“Well, you don’t have to go there now,” I say.

“Only people gets dead there.”

I can’t argue this point.

“So I don’t want to go,” she continues. “Heaven’s a bad place.”

She reaches for her brightly colored spiral notebook, opens it in her lap, and informs me, “I’m going to write that down in my *diarrea*.”

Some days, that’s the only view that makes sense.

## How to Ruin Your Daughters

---

I've ruined my eldest two daughters, who are in their late twenties. In my kitchen candidly discussing sex, where they explain how it all works to me, Tyson reveals what she witnessed at roughly age eight.

Twenty years ago, apparently my then-husband and I were not content to mess around in our bedroom. The details are so vague that I barely remember this. However, for my daughter Tyson, this memory is so vivid, she is destined to squirm for the rest of her life.

See, laying in the dark of her room one night while her younger sisters slept, Tyson heard some racket in the hallway. It was then that she saw her stepfather lugging something over his shoulder—um, me—as he hurried down the hallway. And, she described with profound facial contortions that he and I were completely naked.

Tyson's recollection slowly sinks in. All I can do is bury my face in my hands. "Are you serious?" I peek through my fingers. "You saw us? Naked?"

I'm not modest, but this is my kid. I can't imagine she has ever seen me in any kind of compromising position ever. Sure, I've written about sexual things for *Playgirl*, but, you know, behind the veil of humor. No photos. No evidence.

"Mom," she says, "I have one word for you. Floppy."

I bust out in a nervous sort of hyena laugh at the same time I wish ardently for a deep, dark hole to squeeze myself into and zip shut.

"And I heard weird noises from the living room, Mom. I was scared and I couldn't go to sleep."

Oh. My. God.

It all comes back to me then. I remember that night. Quite fondly.

Tyson rolls her eyes.

That's when my other daughter, Nicole, says to me, "That's nothing, Mom. One time, I saw you..."

Ah, but that is a sordid story for another day, after we've all had therapy.

## I'm Not Paranoid, But They're Out to Get Me

---

Cookies are my crack. I can't resist them. In fact, they should not be called cookies at all. They should be called crackies.

I have been known to tuck a fresh new box of Nutter Butters under my arm and scurry off to some secluded corner for a covert crackie high. It's times like these, one needs to be alone. Plus, everybody knows addicts shouldn't share Nutters.

My greatest fear over the holidays is that my family will find me in the bakery aisle, slumped beneath a display case with my zipper down to release the pressure, dried crumbs freckling the lower half of my face, and my head lolling to one side in a crackies-infused trance. My nanababies would place a sign over my head that reads, "Just Say No to Dough."

Call me paranoid, but guess who's driving the crackies train? None other than my daughter, Notorious TMG, who received a brand-spankin' new Kitchen Aid from her G-ma and G-pa. To think, my own parents are behind this conspiracy. The horror. I face an onslaught of temptations that spell my doom via my expanding waistline.

TMG has labored relentlessly in her mix lab, whipping up homemade batches of crackies laced with the most potent ingredient known to man: toffee bits.

I also take issue with angelic-looking but no less notorious imps outside Wally World who are crackie dealers in disguise. I have been held up at charity point while Children of the Crackies implore oh-so-innocently, "We don't have enough money to go to Paris, France. Boo-hoo, it sucks to be us. Can we interest you in some crackies?"

And you know they always tack on a "ma'am" at the end. Despicable!

Equally disturbing are my co-workers—enablers unconstrained by even one shred of human decency—who partake of crackies right in front of me, moaning sensually when they swallow.

Just yesterday at lunch, having witnessed one of them inhaling a line of chocolate chip, I could not stop myself. I scarfed an entire Panini, yet returned to the display case and bought not one, not two, but three gargantuan crackies (you can't put just one on your Visa).

Though I kept telling myself, "Don't do it!" once I had those crackies in my mouth (*What a rush!*), I was destined for rehab.

Hey, I smell...

OMG, TMG is in the kitchen again. Already, I can feel the warmth flowing through me. Looks like I'm gonna need an intervention.



## Hold It!

---

Raise your hand if when you sneeze, you also pee yourself a little. Don't be shy. It happens. Guys included. This convulsive expulsion bursts out at over 47 mph (or 75 km). At that speed, if you didn't release a little pee, you might spurt around the room like a balloon. Conservatively, at least 33.3 percent of all females who sneeze—or cough or laugh or do aerobics or, my favorite, jump on trampolines—leak a little.

FYI, Kegelmeisters, your beloved Kegel can only do so much. I personally perfected the Squeeze-n-Sneeze. Cross your knees, brace yourself, and then ACHOO! But everybody knows what you're doing, right? Don't answer that.

So I go to the doc for a urodynamics test. This is the worst test you can undergo ever. Ever.

One word: cath, short for catheter, which can no longer be uttered in my presence without putting your life in danger. You get a cath up the old U-ha and suddenly you're in your tech's face threatening to kill her for doing her job.

I mean, I'm just guessing.

As a result of this torture, my doc decides I am a candidate for the bladder sling. He says, "Why don't you try a pessary first, though, before we go the surgical route?"

A pessary is a flat, circular, spacecraft-hard plastic device about two inches in diameter, with holes. Think giant white button, circa 1950, on your mother's polka-dotted cocktail frock. A pessary sits horizontally inside the hooah. Think flying saucer embedded inside the Holland Tunnel. Its position keeps the urethra in place so you don't leak when you sneeze. Sounds like a reasonable solution, right? Except for a little thing called logistics:

### **Logistics Issue 1:**

Blind installation. It's not like you've got a telescope that sees around corners. That's as down there and out of sight as it gets.

### **Logistics Issue 2:**

Navigating tender vajajay tissue with fingernails, especially acrylics. Does this really need explanation?

### **Logistics Issue 3:**

Remember when you lost your earring down the drain? Did sticking your fingers down that hole really work? You never recovered it, am I right?

After only 48 hours of feeling like I am incubating an alien, I toss my pessary into a drawer.

Weeks later, my eldest daughter Tyson texts me. "Hey, what's that thing that looks like a button in your room?"

"No clue," I reply.

"Kids are playing with it."

I text back, "Still don't know what you're talking about."

"They're tossing it around like it's a Frisbee."

"Nope," I say, "I don't have a— Er. Wait, looks like a little disc, with holes? White? Hard plastic?"

"Yeah."

"Um, you don't want to know what that is."

"Destructo had it in his mouth," Tyson says of her two-year-old. "He was chewing on it."

I blink at my phone, rereading her text. A little bit of hysteria washes over me, and I cringe convulsively. If she only knew what other lips that Frisbee has touched. Such news requires a quiet mother-daughter moment and some tequila. *A lot* of tequila.

I text her back, "Hey, how about those Cowboys?"

Not long after, I call my doctor and sign up for the bladder sling. The Squeeze-n-Sneeze will soon become a thing of the past. But the Feminine Frisbee? Nope, that story is galvanized in our memories and expected to live in infamy. I'm going to bring it up again about the time my grandson starts bringing girlfriends home to meet his parents.

I cannot wait.

## Lint in the Butt

---

Tyson has brought her daughter, Miss America, downstairs to my bathroom where I am getting ready for work. "Tell your Nana what you found," she says, teetering between empathy and impatience.

In her pleated jeans skorts (and topless), four-year-old Miss America looks up at me with sad, teary brown eyes and a pouty lower lip I could set my coffee cup on.

"What's the matter, sweetie? You okay?"

Miss America's chin quivers and she clams up, wiping at her eyes.

"She found lint in her butt," my daughter explains with that exasperated smirk that's half chuckle and half I-can't-believe-I'm-a-grown-woman-talking-about-lint-in-the-butt. You know the one.

"Lint?" I ask.

Tyson nods. "She's freaking out."

"But how did she—"

My lightning quick faculties assess the situation. Miss America has found lint in the crevasse of her butt. How she managed to find it is not my concern. The important thing is that she is not happy to discover this little treasure and has promptly fallen apart.

"I hate it when that happens," I say. "It's okay. Really, it's just lint. I get lint in my bellybutton sometimes. There's lint on everything."

I can see my little cherub wants to believe the offending lint has not emanated from her behind; but then her eyes grow wide, which I take to mean: If there's lint on everything, maybe there's reason to panic on the scale of a planetary invasion.

"Come here," I say. "Let me show you."

I take her hand and we wend toward the laundry room. At the dryer, I pull the lint catch out of its slot.

"See?" I stroke the screen with my fingertips allowing the thick, flaccid cushion of speckled fuzz to fold over itself and into the trashcan. "Lint is in all fabrics. All the clothes you wear have lint in them. It's everywhere, like germs, but you normally don't see it."

Maybe that's not the right analogy. Given her look of repugnance, I suspect the wheels of her imagination have turned that big swath of dryer fuzz over her crevasse and left an unwelcome hanger-on. Time for some backpedaling.

"This like, almost never happens. It's a fluke that you even found it."

Miss America nods and whimpers. "Will you make sure it's off?"

"Um... sure?" I lead her back into my bathroom where Tyson is in my adjoining closet jacking my wardrobe. I pull a rag from the linen closet, run it under the faucet,

and squeeze.

"Drop 'em," I say.

Miss America slides down her skorts and undies, and I zip the rag between her cheeks, then hold it out for inspection. "See anything?"

Fingers in her mouth, she mumbles no.

"That's because there's nothing there."

Tyson peeks out of the closet and rolls her eyes.

I toss the rag into the hamper and dust off my hands. "I think my work here is finished."

I join Tyson in my closet. We hold up blouses and dress pants, assessing them for wearability based on how skinny we don't feel. We hop around without modesty in our bras and panties (thongs, for me), trying on one outfit after the other.

Miss America watches from her perch on the edge of the bathtub. Her small voice stops us, each near naked with one leg in pairs of pants we have exchanged.

"That's disgusting," Miss America says.

The village idiots look skeptically into the big brown eyes of the cherub with the scrunched-up face.

"That's disgusting," she repeats.

This, from the child with lint in the butt.

## Whack-a-Mole

---

Be honest. Does anybody really think a facial mole is sexy? Enrique Iglesias had one, and he was smart enough to get that sucker removed. Obviously, something that distracted from his shagability was a trademark worth violating. I, too, had a mole, right under my left earlobe; and after living with its unsightliness for 40 years, I had that sucker removed.

Wow, Enrique and I have one thing in common.

Let's back up just a hair or two, because yes, healthy moles grow hairs. As if they're not absurd enough. Said mole, which was the size and shape of a double meat cheeseburger, made me so self conscious I never turned my face away from people for fear they would see it and get the flyswatter.

Plus I had a nightmare that while I slept, mice had come over for a nibble. It's why I slept on my left side most of the time—or my right side when I was defying my fear of nibblery, kind of like draping your arm over the side of the bed and forcing yourself to keep it there to prove there are no monsters under the bed. I always caved on that one. You can never be too careful. Hence, after a short time with my mole exposed, I sheltered it against my pillow.

So, I made up my mind to see a dermatologist. The doctor assessed Gigantor and scheduled me for surgery.

I said, "Surgery? It's a mole, not a tumor."

But doc insisted, and a week later, I reported for my big operation. I mean, that doctor was all decked out in scrubs and a mask, and Gigantor was given special treatment for his swan song.

A protective covering was laid over the side of my face, with a tiny opening for a precision gigantorectomy. I'm grateful my little G spot got the respect of a heart transplant, but is this overkill?

She then gave me ten shots in and around the G spot to be sure it was plenty deadened; and by the time she'd finished, I thought, "Gosh, I'm glad I didn't feel any pain for this procedure."

Then Doc brought out the big guns: scissors. *Scissors!*

I heard the snip, snip, snip of Gigantor being whittled away and had to send myself to a happy place: *La la la la la. Gee, this time next week, I can wear my hair behind my ears. La la la la la.*

Then came cauterization. Ugh. I smelled my own G spot burning.

Next, more slicing and dicing and stitches, inside and out. That's when I realized they should have knocked me out. In real surgery, they knock you out. I was robbed.

This procedure had pharmaceuticals all over it, and I was denied.

Flash forward six months. Gigantor is gone, but I still hesitate to show the left side of my neck. Like phantom pain, I feel it there. You don't realize how pervasive your negative self-talk is until the reason for it isn't there anymore, yet you continue to be reminded of it every single day. The ways we torture ourselves over perceived imperfections, I swear. Of course, that's easy to say, now that Gigantor is gone. Good riddance.

But I'm still sleeping on my left side. Just in case.

## A Senior Moment

---

I had a great visit with my parents in their Florida retirement community, The Villages, and if at least some of the geezers of my age look this good when we retire, my single life will not be boring. That'll be a future post: From Shaggable to Saggable, Life Beyond the Gravy Train.

Ahem, so Sunday morning it was time to head back to Austin. On the way to the airport, Mom, Dad, and I stopped at Denny's for breakfast where I was shocked to discover that the "Senior Menu" was earmarked for people age 55+.

Say what? Aren't seniors supposed to be at least 65? I'm still a midlifer, thank you very much, and I'm stretching that out for as long as I can. Denny is pushing me.

Since a 3-egg omelet with all the add-ons from the regular "youthful people" menu seemed too much for me, I thought I'd sneak an order of the healthier 2-egg veggie omelet off the Senior Menu, which featured smaller portions. I was in the vacation mindset of "Hey, just try and stop me. I want what I want." Once a rebel, always a rebel, so I threw it down.

Our waitress kept writing and said, "Okay, hun. And for your sides?"

Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Smack the foul buzzer!

Whatever happened to "May I see your ID, please?" What about, "I'm sorry, young'un, but that menu is for seniors only." What, no, "Are you kidding me? You can't possibly be trying to cram in a bucket list."

Talk about your Grand Slam. *Why, I oughtta...*

Then our waitress, who was clearly a senior herself, noted the resemblance between Mom and me, and played the "You two could pass for sisters" card.

My mom couldn't stop smiling, and while my mother is absolutely beautiful, she's 75 and I am—er, *younger!* I wanted to object, but how can you do that without inadvertently insulting your *sister*?

And then the waitress was off on a Q&A tangent, inordinately concerned about side dishes. She sounded like Charlie Brown's teacher (Wa-wa Wa-wa Wa-wa), and I kept nodding because my ego had co-opted my brain, obsessing over my waning collagen production and various other unpleasant deconstructions.

Were my gums receding? Had marionettes carved gullies into my nasolabial folds? Did my neck wattle look more like a vagina? I pressed my hair over my elongated earlobes and adjusted my butt on the seat so my hemorrhoids would slink back where they belonged. How dare she consider me a senior!

When the waitress brought out our order, I had a 2-egg omelet plus hash browns, grits, four hotcakes, toast, and a Jenga of jelly. So much for eating light. I would now

pay double for food I had accidentally ordered because the waitress had so misidentified me, I lost all my youthful faculties on the spot.

With her beady eyes glinting at me, she refilled my coffee cup. And then she winked, like she knew exactly what she'd done. Denny's should pay her more.

## A Wrinkle in Time

---

HELP ME.

It's happened. It's like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* with a cruel twist—*crueler*. You better sit down.

It's Sunday morning, and my daughter Tyson has donned a cute top that is nevertheless wrinkly. I remark as much, and she says, in the harried and desperate way that only young mothers of three rambunctious rugrats can, "I know. I know." Then she frowns and slumps, defeated.

When I give her my WTF-you're-wearing-it-anyway? look, she says with that imploring I-love-you-mommy face: "Did you want to iron it for me?"

Iron? Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! I *speet* on *thees* archaic beast called the iron.

The iron does not contain pushbuttons that engage any "do it FOR me" tasks. There is no "GO" button. It does not give me immediate access to friends and family. It does not make my life easier, quicker, better. It does not connect me with my inner spiritual giant, it does not make me want to dance, and it doesn't provide even a smidgeon of instant gratification, which at my age has become the primary qualification for everything from pedicures to men.

No, this beast represents manual labor, which I have given up. I am not about manual anything unless it comes with batteries, three speeds, and some lube.

And yet... as my eyes glaze over with Sucralose shades of my Mommy Life Past, this foreign word oozes out of my mouth like putrid slime: "Ye-e-e-e-s-s-s-s."

Tyson has that shirt over her head and in my face in .000523 seconds flat. "Thanks, Mom."

And there I stand, all retro-maternal, wrinkled shirt in hand, heading dazedly downstairs to find the beast and its wobbly metal counterpart on stilts. I'm surprised that in my stupor I don't trip and fall, head over heels in a viral spinout, and sprain my wrist so as to have a convenient excuse for not making good on my offer.

Alas, I am that overcome and confused. What have I done? Plus, I can't even remember where I last saw the beast. Didn't we throw the last one out with the eight-tracks?

Here's the part that will just make you want to curl into the fetal position. After I dutifully iron my daughter's quite lovely blouse (now transformed from an ordinary top), I—I can hardly say it—I am excited at how easily domesticity has taken shape inside me. It's as if aliens have taken over my body completely. It's as if I've turned into Martha Fucking Stewart!

And then... and then? I hurry to my closet and pull out five blouses that I have been

wearing with that right-out-of-the-dryer look. And then?

I iron them!

As I gaze upon the fruits of my manual labor, I feel like I've been beast-slapped and body-spritzed with an entire can of starch. Plus, how in the world can I wear these blouses now? They'll just get wrinkled.

## Little Bastard

---

Okay, so facial hair.

I don't mind telling you, I appreciate facial whiskers like Frankenstein appreciates a good bonfire; like my cat appreciates a terrible two-year-old with a flyswatter; like guys appreciate their Kielbasa mistaken for a Vienna.

This morning on my way to work, I stop at a red light and notice my visor mirror open. I proceed through the light and reach up to flip it shut when the sun shines at just the right angle along my jawline, and there in my reflection is a chin whisker with the length of a pubic hair and the sheen of dental floss.

I jerk in horror and swerve my car, nearly running a guy off the road.

As he lays on his horn, flips me the bird, and mouths a litany of profanities through his open window, I am shocked and appalled and brought to tears wondering, How the hell did I miss this whisker? Astronauts could see it from outer space.

Immediately I try to rub, swirl, scrape, and otherwise pluck that sucker out with my bare fingers. Out! Out! Little bastard!

To no avail. Without tweezers, I am forced to huddle in my cubicle the entire day where no one can look at me and make the "Ew!" face.

It is universally accepted that women don't have whiskers; only men occupy the whisker domain. I am not a man, so this is horribly wrong.

After confiding in one of my coworkers who, like me, does not carry emergency tweezers, I was taken aback by her flippancy. "You can thank the Big Guy Upstairs for that," she said.

Yeah, well, I'm not a devotee of the BGU, but let's say this is all his fault. Perhaps he was hitting the tequila a little too hard when he made us estrogenders. What if he was stumbling around up there in the clouds, giddy at how hilarious it would be to plant a couple tufts along Evie's jawline? Time-released follicles engineered to sprout just when she was starting to really feel bitchy about how much her body had changed since that day in the garden. I guess he could have just been confused, right? After all, the BGU had never made a woman before. He surely had to be looking at his Miraculous Recipes book and debating how much hair was too much and how much was just not enough.

*Let's give the girls just a smidge, right there, where everyone can see it.*

I could be wrong. I was wrong about something in 1999.

You'll have to excuse me now. I'm marching into the bathroom to take matters into my own hands. I've got the antidote, \$4.95 and all sharp, shiny jaws of high-precision, slant-tip stainless steel.

*Say hello to my leetle friend!*

P.S. I told my daughter I would not write about the whiskers on her chin, because she doesn't want anybody to know she has them, so I'm not going to tell you.

## Promises

---

It is the end of a long Fourth of July weekend where I have reclined feet-up in Darvocet decadence for days. My daughter occupies the other end of the sofa, relaxing.

Miss America scoots between our feet and talks to her mom. The kid is so adorable that when she opens her mouth, I stir from my stupor and pay close attention. It's as if her mere presence in the same room activates my serotonin valves and I get a nice blast of happiness.

Such is the power of a seraphic five-year-old.

Miss America's energy level at 9:00 p.m. is barely containable. "I had a great time today, Mom."

Tyson pets Miss America's hair and smiles adoringly. "You got all your promises today, didn't you?"

Miss America lavishes praise in her very small voice. "Yup! My dad promised me Chuck E. Cheese and he did it, and you promised to paint my fingernails and you did it!"

Miss America then glances over at me and smiles. "And Nana promised me nothing. And she did it!"

Aw. Wait. What?

## It's the Lighting

---

"Can I sleep with you tonight, Nana?"

"Sure." Miss America is too cuddly and adorable to say no to.

She smiles as she hops onto the bed. "I love you, Nana."

"I love you too. You're my girl."

"Do you want to talk about my day?"

This is our ritual. We settle in, plump up pillows, snuggle under the covers, and she tells me whatever it is she wants to tell me.

Tonight, with the light from my headboard shining dimly, she tells me about getting ready for their family trip to Florida to see my parents—her great grandparents; and she shows me her new doll, which is some variation of Barbie with long purple hair and flippers instead of legs—an exotic mermaid with an impossibly flat stomach who bends at the hips. Talk about an unrealistic image of a woman. Who do you know that's purple?

Then I realize I'm laying on something hard and pointy, and after some under-the-cover gyrations discover it is Shirtless Ken. And not the Ken of old.

"Whoa," I say. "Now this is a Ken doll. Surfer dude. Look how buff he is. I could use one of these."

Miss America indicates Ken's bare chest with her chubby little fingers, then scrunches up her face. "But, you need a new face first."

I blink at her. "A new face?"

Her look is a doctor's when all hope is lost. "Mmm, yeah."

I grin (crookedly). "A new face?" At which point, I begin to laugh.

Her small voice says, "I do good jokes, don't I?"

"I don't get it. What's wrong with my face?"

"Um, you should look in da mirror."

I look over my shoulder at the mirror on my headboard, then back at her. "It's the lighting."

She looks at me doubtfully, scrunching up her face again.

"How am I going to fix this face?" I say.

"I'll help you in da morning. You need makeup."

"I need makeup? That's all?"

Again with the scrunchy face. "A LOT of makeup."

Miss America studies me for a moment and gestures with her hand. "You can laugh now."

I am slightly hurt but realize that to a five-year-old, I must appear so old as to need

carbon dating. I think how cute and precious she is. Must. Not. Strangle. Her.  
I set Fish Barbie and K-Buff on the nightstand and hand her Boudreaux the Bear.  
She snuggles into my shoulder. "I do good jokes, don't I, Nana?"  
I kiss the top of her head. "Mmm-hmm. Better sleep with one eye open, kid."

## Pigs in a Blanket

---

“You have to come see what your grandson is doing now,” my son-in-law Carl said. “Guess he found something in the pantry that he wanted.”

Apparently 25-month-old Destructo’s new door-opening skills were paying off.

When I arrived on the back deck, little Destructo was shoveling inch-long, imitation pigs-in-a-blanket doggy biscuits into his mouth. By his mother’s count, he’d already scarfed half a dozen. She had that sort of stupefied-with-pride look on her face as she watched him intently.

Carl scratched his head, looking to me for either validation that it was okay to let the kid fill himself to the gills or an urgent warning that a poisoning was in progress and we ought to stop the madness. Certainly the child’s mother was too entranced to undertake any decision-making.

“Guess it can’t hurt him,” I said, as he shoved another one into his mouth. “They’re dog treats. They must be, er, edible.”

Big sister Miss America gaped incredulously at the all-knowing adults. Even at four, she knew the proper protocol for dog treats did not include human consumption.

Then my daughter awoke from her trance. “Try one,” she challenged Carl.

Carl and Tyson share a mischievous love of dares. They taunt each other to try things, just so one can claim superiority over the bigger wuss who fails to show the appropriate courage, however stupid that might ultimately prove.

Carl hesitated only a moment, then shoved his hand in the box and pulled out a cylindrical biscuit. We all squinted as he chewed the crunchy morsel expectantly.

“Oh!” He recoiled as he tasted something foul. “There it is.”

Destructo happily shoved another pig-in-a-blanket into his mouth, and my curiosity got the better of me. Tugging on the box (Destructo was not inclined to share), I plucked out a biscuit, examined it for purity, freshness, and cleanliness, because I would recognize that in a dog biscuit if I saw it, and then bit it in half.

Hmmm. Crunchy... dry... bland... dry... barely swallowable. I popped the other half in my mouth because I don’t like to leave things unfinished, and I shrugged.

“Not bad.” My tongue lapped noisily at the parched roof of my mouth, and I couldn’t help scanning the deck for a water bowl.

Destructo enjoyed several more biscuits while our Chihuahua waited patiently below him for a morsel to be tossed his direction, while I went for my camera. I mean, there are few things more fascinating in life than a two-year-old chowing on dog food.

This is one for the baby books.

## All By Myself

---

I am on my own now. That is, living with no other adults or kids—for the first time in my life.

Yeah, well, it takes time to get the chitlins raised. They have finally quit rolling their eyes when I open my mouth, popping the bird finger at every photo op, and back-talking whenever I voice dissent about something dumb they're planning to do. But enough about my exes. The kids are fine, and I am free at last!

In fact, all four daughters are grown and paired off with males only now discovering what they got themselves into. The torch has been passed, times four. They all have rugrats of their own and Mom's assistance isn't needed anymore. No checking in for dinner, no taking the beauty babies to school, and no competition for front spot in the driveway. I'm calling myself an *emptynexter* because I imagine all the new adventures that await me.

And I hear this:

*All by myself,  
Can't wait to be  
All by myself  
Furthermore.*

*When I was young,  
I only needed number one,  
And there was freedom in the sack,  
Those days are back.*

Heh. Just kidding. Er, sort of. While I'd love to be in a long-term relationship that accompanies me on the countdown to my last gasp, just past Centenarian Time, I sorta like living alone. I also appreciate things only a person who's lived decades with children can appreciate, like these Seven Wonders of My World:

1. Walking around—or in my case, dancing—completely naked and without fear of another human shrieking, "Mo-o-o-om!"
2. I am able to have a man over without explaining that kissing doesn't equal marriage; and no little ones happen to barge in on me while I shower, just to shoot the shit and ask me about my bits.
3. Having no witnesses. If nobody sees me scarf a dozen fresh-outta-the-oven

- peanut butter crackies, did it really happen? I don't think so. My secret is safe with me.
4. The garage. It's my dream to park in one, versus veering through it on foot, past the pool table, darts station, bikes, and smelly asstrays. Wait, did I say ass? I totally meant ash. Musta been a Freudian snit.
  5. Working out in the middle of my living room without the snickering that accompanies my son-in-law whenever he catches me doing anything jumpy or crunchy.
  6. The remote. Booyah! No more Fantasy Football fights and game-channel flipping. Screw the disgusting "C" words tossed around our house so irreverently—Chargers and Cowboys.
  7. Quiet. Sshh. Did you hear that? Neither did I. Sweet!

As an *emptynexter*, I have ultimate power over everything in my little kingdom. I have even finished my novels, since I've had fewer distractions—except for those pesky males I infrequent. This is a fantastic time in my life. But, sometimes I can't escape the feeling that with my entire family living elsewhere, some way too far away, I'm missing out on the good stuff.

Please don't forget me, my lovelies. I'm still here. All by myself.

## Ode to U

---

For a long time, I missed U. U were the perfect companion for so many years—the yin to my yang, the in to my out, the one who showed me the real meaning of life. Before I found U, I didn't have a clue what I was missing.

I can honestly say that no one has ever known me so intimately and no one ever will. No one has been with me through thick and thin—not like U. U were always reliable and rarely complained—in the beginning.

And it wasn't just me. Truly, U carried the load for many. I confess, I put U in the line of fire often—I dare not tell anyone just how many times. What would they think of me? But U took it lying down or standing up, whatever I wanted. And U were great about receiving so many guests on the spur of the moment.

Yes, I took U for granted. Maybe I should feel guilty. I don't. But it was heartbreaking to lose U so young—too soon! And yet, not soon enough.

What can I say? In your later years, U got so bloody bitchy. Ay ay ay. U and your companions, the twins, so cramped my style. I couldn't wait till U all got your own pad because U always showed up at the wrong time.

Still, when U knew we'd gone as far as we could together, U accepted your fate and let me cut U from my life.

After 14 years, I've moved on without U, my womb with a view to all my children. I don't miss U anymore, but I will be forever grateful for the times we spent together as one with the Universe and for the four lives you incubated for me. They are my world.

Take heart, dear Uterus. U can never be replaced.

## Panties in a Bunch

---

A few years ago, I was part of the coolest scheme ever. I know these two words will strike terror in your heart: chain letter—but bear with me.

The deal was this: when you received your chain letter, it contained a list of ten women and you were to return the letter to the first person on the list. The kicker was that you returned it to this woman with the size and style of brand-spanking-new panties that she specified by her name. (Yes, not only was her name there, but the size of her butt). Then you sent the letter to ten more people and added your name and panty preferences to the bottom of the list. The idea was that the next person to receive a letter with your name on the top of the list would send you some brand-spanking-new panties.

I hesitated for all of five seconds—totally embarrassed, of course (eh, heh, heh—Mom, did I ever have modesty? Oh yeah, puberty). But off I went to the mall in search of size 8 cotton bikini undies. I bought a cute pair for about \$10 and sent it to the lucky lady at the top of the list plus ten more letters to select recipients with my name at the bottom. If those women each sent it to ten women and then those women sent it to another ten each, well, the possibilities would be endless. I could get panties from Fiji.

So I waited. And waited. And waited. Until one evening after work, a puffy manila envelope sat on the kitchen counter waiting for me. That's weird, I thought, having nearly forgotten about my little foray into panty mail (no jokes about snail mail, please—that's just rude). I opened my package and there they were: a lacy pair of pink thongs.

I heard a choir of angels singing from on high.

And I squealed and held them up for everyone in my family to see. "Woo-hoo! Check these out. Somebody sent me underwear."

"Ew."

"What? They have the tags on. They've never been worn."

"Ew."

I twirled them in the air and sang giddily. "You're jealous, you're jealous. Cuz I got undies in the mailbox. And you didn't."

The next day, I played show-and-tell with my coworkers. They, too, shook their heads. "Underwear from strangers? That's just wrong. You're weird."

But I would not be defeated by cynicism. My panties were gifts from the universe. Or at least some woman who got that chain letter with my name at the top of the list.

And then something miraculous happened. I got another pair of brand-new panties in the mail. This time a stretchy gold lamé thong—we're talking the Cadillac of lingerie. A few days later, I got two packages, each with a sleek new thong. The following day I got a fifth pair. Soon I began running to the mailbox after work, eager for the day's sexy

surprise.

Over the next three weeks, I acquired 14 new pairs of thongs from total strangers. It was like panties from Heaven. Blossoming in butt-floss, I supplanted my old raggedy panties with these lovelies. Not bad for my \$10 investment, eh?

I was sad when it all came to an end. Pathetic really. I'd be standing there, staring into an empty mailbox, whimpering. Somebody broke the chain. Somebody let us all down. Somebody thought it was icky and wouldn't play. If only I knew her name. I'd send her a letter with a picture of all my new panties so she'd know exactly what she missed out on—and the additional booty she robbed me of. Plus, my size and style, in case she wanted to assuage her guilt.

## Vulnerable

---

Lean into discomfort. I'm inspired by that idea. Dr. Brené Brown talks about discomfort in her spiel about "The Power of Vulnerability." She says vulnerability is at the core of our shame, fear, guilt, grief, and struggle for worthiness. And, I'll venture, insanely bizarre fetishes, although I'm not going to say which insanely bizarre fetish so you don't think I'm picking on you. I don't want to be the first to tell you that the fetish you revel in most is insanely bizarre. No, I wouldn't even bring that up.

So this core of vulnerability is also the birthplace of creativity, joy, belonging, happiness, hope, gratitude, and love. Think of it as, out of your deepest private place, there's a nasty slimy oyster, but also a double-fudge chocolate cake.

People with a strong sense of belonging, love, and worthiness are "whole-hearted" people, and they also have these things in common: courage, compassion, and connection—plus a willingness to let go of who they thought they should be to be who they are. Which is totally where "to be or not to be" comes from. Shakespeare was probably whole-hearted, though it's questionable he was the whole of who he said he was. More like a pseudonymous shell for other-hearted Bards. With fetishes. But stop distracting me.

Brené Brown says that making connections with other people is why we're here. Also to enjoy ice cream and cookies, but treats weren't part of Brené's study. She says to allow connections with other people, you have to allow yourself to be seen, and for deeper connections really seen, which leaves you wide open and vulnerable, sometimes excruciatingly so.

But it's not just being seen physically; it's revealing who you are inside as a person.

I think I'm whole-hearted. The whole-hearted fully embrace their vulnerability. *Check!* I admit, I am often right out there, pretty much letting it fly, though good manners do rein me in. Usually. When I have self-doubts, it's not easy to blast through them, but I know I have to if I really want something.

The whole-hearted believe their vulnerability is neither comfortable nor excruciating, just necessary. *Check!* Like when you need to go from A to Z, you have to stomp on LMNO to get there and you can't be all squeamish about it.

The whole-hearted are willing to do something, to risk being vulnerable, without a guarantee of the outcome. *Check!*

Like I'm seeing this guy, and who knows how it could end up. He could have three wives in four different countries. One in a Gobi Desert tent cultivating an insanely bizarre fetish; one swinging from the tree canopy in the Amazon—herself an insanely bizarre fetish; and one buried in two places. Still, I feel compelled to engage in judicious

risk-taking anyway because, well, I like him. A lot. And I own my story here, as Brené says. Plus, maybe I just want what I want when I want it. That has been said about me before... with that tone.

Thing is about vulnerability, you can't selectively numb out of it. You can't numb yourself to what makes you feel bad without also numbing yourself to what makes you feel good. Plus, pretty sure feeling vulnerable means you're alive, and human. Probably. All this to say, be brave and lean into your discomfort, and then you can lean into joy.

I hope you've learned something here today. I know I have. I'm due for some double-fudge chocolate cake.

## I Cried Today

---

I don't cry very often, unless we're talking gripping emotional cinema, like *The Last Samurai* or *Game of Thrones* (Noooo, not Ned Stark!), and of course *Bambi*—and potentially *Old Yeller*, which I confess I've never seen. But it isn't a movie that has me all choked up today.

I called my incredible pops earlier and wished him happy Father's Day. He is the most loving man I know, and he's instilled in me a great appreciation for all things men (well, er, most things). I miss him because he lives so far away, but he's not the reason I cried today.

I had another great date with a handsome, sexy guy, so only smiles there.

My eldest and youngest daughters were together in a land far away, and they called me three times while I was on my date. I didn't hear the rings, of course, so I didn't answer. They also sent me some bawdy texts most kids would never send their parents, so after my date I called them back to share a good laugh.

Then they said, "We just wanted to wish you a happy Father's Day."

I wasn't sure at first why those words hit me so hard—like in that place right at the core of you, the place I rarely let anybody get to. But I almost couldn't talk with that big lump in my throat. After all these years of being the only parent they've ever known, it was the first time they acknowledged that I have been both their mother *and* their father. We always try to compensate for what we feel our kids are unfairly doing without. Like a father. So when they said that, I felt like they understood it wasn't always easy. They got me and what I went through for them.

Yes, I boohooded today, because I got the best Father's Day gift ever. Made me exceedingly proud to be their mom.

Ah, parenthood. Who but your kids could take you out with a one-liner?

Then we had a good laugh about the adult things their mother might be up to these days. Those apples did not fall far from this tree.

## Spooning Made Easy

---

Spooning, much like kissing, is highly underrated. Truly, is there anything more fulfilling than getting as close as you can to someone you're supremely attracted to, without having sex?

I mean, let's leave the bennies of coitus and, you know, that "O" thing out of the equation, okay? Spooning is a sacred and intimate yet entirely innocent act. Naturally, somebody—not sayin' who—might wanna take advantage and get a little sum'n-sum'n when the parties involved are skin to skin, but that just shows a lack of self control because spooning is the ultimate No Sex Zone. Obviously.

I know, I know, spooning can be complicated. But let's easify, shall we? Because I really want you to try this at home.

First, assume the position, which is fetal. We don't want to call it fetal because that evokes all kinds of birthing shit; however, pick a side, okay? Just do it, is what I'm saying. You are now the *spoonee*.

Second, allow your partner to park behind you. It'll be like docking the Enterprise at Deep Space Nine. Let him pull in and get comfy with his chest/belly to your back. Your partner is now the spooner. Together, you are in the Pringles position and must move in tandem to prevent crushing and crackage.

Third, your spooner must employ skills. These are advanced critical thinking (ACT) and total indifference to a really exposed derrière (TIRED) skills. For this mission, one assumes your spooner is so equipped. Here are the logistical considerations for successful spooning:

**ACT TIRED One.** Does he drape his arm across your waist? Your hip? Your shoulder? Depends on where he intends to place his hand.

**ACT TIRED Two.** To cup your boob or not. That is the question. Or hold your hand? Or tuck his hand under your belly? Or somewhere else, which I can't imagine. At all. Positioning depends on your self-esteem and whether or not you have a headache. You must guide your spooner's hand to the proper coordinates.

**ACT TIRED Three.** Does he wedge his knees behind your knees? Or drape a leg over your hip? Or attempt to basket weave your legs with his? May I say, go with the wedge. Anything else, and somebody gets hurt. Seen it before.

**ACT TIRED Four.** Does he cradle his chin in the crook of your neck? Or bury his nose in your hair? Unless you're Hallie Berry, you must wrangle your coif neatly to the side so it doesn't tickle his nose, causing him to jerk upright, slap his own face, and roll over.

**ACT TIRED Five.** What does he do with his other arm? Really, do you even care? It's

the placebo—looks real but adds zippity-doo-da to the experience. Your spooner can just lay on it or something.

**ACT TIRED Six.** Is his little guy willing to stand down? This is the crux of spooning. Little guy has to go to sleep for spooning to work properly. Otherwise, the TIRED ACT is just a sordid ruse that you fell for; and next thing you know, spooning turns to forking which is a whole 'nother story.

And there you are, spooning easified. Send pics.

## Dad's Favorite

---

When you derive from a big Jack-Catholic family—prime breeding ground for, you know, *children*—surviving and thriving in the family unit becomes a numbers game. As the firstborn of six, and with apologies to my siblings who think they alone put the sacred glow of adoration into Our Father Who Art in Florida, my coveted number-one spot in the birth order makes me Forever #1, and therefore Dad's Favorite.

Oh, the wars have long raged about the crosses I have borne which make me, shall we say, unsuitable for the #1 position. And my siblings, in their lesser positions, have through the decades made feeble attempts to knock me from my glorious pedestal.

My little brother Chris, for instance, liked to act weak and innocent to garner my parents' favor; and once or twice, I admit, my mother who is too enamored by underdogs did succumb to his trickery. But not my father. No, our wise and intelligent patriarch could not be fooled, and I retained my revered esteem. Naturally.

My youngest sister was infamous for trying to usurp my position. Our vivacious Dee, who is sadly no longer with us, once defaced a treasured family photo with this inscription: "I'm their favorite."

Then there are the middle two brothers, Jody and Steve, who struggle in vain to be taken seriously against my superior rank in the genealogical hierarchy. Laughable, really. All that cute boy stuff they did, like serenading Dad with the yuletide favorite, "Ooooooh, bring us the piggy pudding," or tacking "Faaaaarrt" to the end of the Popeye song, does not engender supremacy. Nay, nay.

The only one who could actually be considered competition is my middle sister Eryn, who consistently pulls my father's attentions because of some underhanded Shirley Temple "Captain January" shtick they have going ("I love you, Cap!" "I love you, Star!"). Pffft. Please. As if such sweet asides and affection could de-throne my first-childedness.

Why, I remember when my inimitable pops overheard me call him a prick because he wouldn't let me spend the night with a friend; caught me ditching seventh period for, oh, a semester; discovered I'd turncoated to liberal politics and prayed at the feet of Jon Stewart; and more recently recoiled in horror as I dissed his beloved Faux News—all of which should have placed my life in mortal peril. But did not.

Yes, we all think we are the sweetest apples of my dad's eye, but it's clear I can do no wrong. Or, more precisely, even if Dad thinks I've done a shit ton of wrong, my reign as #1 seed remains intact. Still, my siblings enjoy fabricating cases for their number oneness, and try as they might, they fail to convince the world that I am not Dad's Favorite.

Right, Dad?

Dad?

## When Good Women Get Pissy

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You know how you spend your whole adult life trying to be cool-headed and thoughtful and role-model-y for your kids? You might be all angelfishy in the tanky-poo, but then something royally hinky happens to screw up your day, like your lawyer forgets you exist and your case languishes in some dusty file room, and you feel landlocked cuz you wanna swim with the sharks, or better still, be the shark.

Uh-oh.

Yeah, suddenly you're transformed. You spit the serenity prayer. You burst your spongy stress ball. You gnash on cheery rainbows. You roll up your sleeves and dare your foe to *Bring it!* You huff and puff and lather yourself into a white-hot frenzy that can only be cured by excoriating your victim with a serrated-edged tongue, after which you must shove your overheated body into the freezer.

Naked.

Family Safety Hint: During this time? Do not approach your supreme leader. She must cool down, and you cannot facilitate this process with tepid apologies. Plus, she wants to revel in her righteous indignation because it's liberating and empowering and all kinds of orgasmic to be the firing squad for a change. But because she's not normally a sprayer of evil, she is out of practice and you will likely get some on you.

Run.

Losing it is not a moment that the kind-hearted, compassionate woman is going to feel proud about afterward. But she will damn well feel sensational after clearing her head of the nice-girl clutter, the pretentious civility, and the ridiculousness of trying to look at assattery from someone else's viewpoint. Allow her space. And ice cream.

Amen.

You probably didn't know that storming and stomping around is healthy, but the pissy woman gets all aerobic in the venting process. Plus, she will get a blog post out of it. And if a man is involved, he may get take-it-out-on-you sex. Not making promises, but there's anecdotal evidence that it's happened at least once in recorded history.

Google.

## Gravity is an Asshole

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Gravity and I are not getting along. The friction is palpable. I try to appreciate his theoretical beauty, but he's obsessed, like an old lover who can't let go of me, can't quit grabbing my ass and dragging it down. I am sagging with the futility of resisting his overtures.

I do defy him, of course, walking and running 2-4 miles a day and blasting my limbs on the leg press, lifting dumbbells to counteract the lazy sway of my biceps in the breeze, and planking my core in the Earth's most fruitless attempt to disintegrate the accumulating midriff rolls.

Just kidding, I don't plank anything except the skip across my daughter's dock. The only six-pack I care about is the one I carry to the lake. I'll give you that one, Gravity. Wipe that smirk off your face.

It's bad enough that Old Man Time is the consummate ogler of everything I do and has made a laughing stock of my memory, but these two working in concert to bring me down is a conspiracy of Obamatational proportions. As our lifelong battle escalates to epic, weighty distortions and my disgust swells with the expansion of my six, I realize this is exactly what this evil duo wants.

It's not funny, Gravity. Stop being an asshole.

## Toe-Chi and the Pedi Bitches

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These are serious times. Some major shit is happening in the world, which is why I feel compelled to discuss my toes. I have ten of them, and mostly they look normal. In fact, I was once told by two hunky podiatrists at a Lake Travis marina that I had absolutely *beeaauu-tiful* feet. Of course, I had on a bikini and they weren't exactly ogling my feet when they said that. Still, I think they look okay.

But because my feet are so sensitive, I avoid drawing attention to them. What if someone decides he simply can't stop himself from petting them? Because that is like lighting my ass on fire. Touch the dogs and I pretty much teleport to the next galaxy over.

So you can imagine how I feel about pedicures. Those pedi-bitches are all combat on your feet. It's ancient toe-chi warfare as they scrub and rub and exfoliate your tender insteps with the zeal of Canadian seal clubbers.

My pedi-bitch speaks zero English. She nods a lot, smiles, and giggles at me—all innocent and friendly like—which only prods me to reciprocate in a feeble attempt at polite communication. But what she's really doing is disguising her torture tactics. She then turns to her cohort doing my friend's pedi and *hai-ching-dows* something totally gossipy about what a silly, squirmy woman I am. Obviously, I speak *hai-ching-dow*, so nothing is lost on me.

Then with my feet in her grasp, she deftly sets me to writhing and wriggling and recoiling and grimacing. And even though it's consensual? I can't watch. I tense up everywhere in anticipation of the next little cruelty. Plus, I'm too busy fighting with an industrial-strength massage chair that tenderizes my back into pulpy flank steaks and vibrates my eyeballs with the ferocity of a jackhammer. By the time I get out of that chair, I'm exhausted and a little ready for a barbiturate.

Given my clear aversion to such brutality, why would I go through this? Simple. My plain jane feet look awesome all dolled up. Something about buffed, polished, shiny toenails that make you feel sexy everywhere else, as if you might use those feet for something, you know, provocative later.

And then someone completely HAWT and utterly kissable recently said he liked "Red, always red." And I thought, hey, that's an invitation... Red it is.

To be honest, my feet are not my best feature, but all dolled up they look incredible, and that's something when there's some serious shit going on in the world.

## Good Enough

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Dear Santa,

I've been exceedingly good enough this year. I know you're going to need an explanation about that, so here it is...

It's really not that bad to cuss habitually. My dad and mom always do it, and I don't want to disappoint them by breaking with a beloved family tradition.

Always telling the truth is overrated. Little white lies are actually beneficial under opportune circumstances, and saving my own ass is Priority One because, really, this shows I love myself. It's a proven fact that one must love oneself first in order to love others.

Vanity is just part of being a woman. I take pride in my appearance so I can be a good example for my daughters. How else would they know how much makeup and jewelry to don before they do anything strenuous? I'm a nurturer.

Shooting the bird at strangers is educational. As both a student and teacher of life, I perform a valuable public service with a single mad flourish that says, "You have annoyed me in a way that makes me incredibly immature." In this way, they learn not to make that mistake again, and I learn that imparting my true feelings is the safest way to cleanse myself of nasty toxins.

Embarrassing your children builds character. It instills in them a healthy dose of humility and an endearing penchant for storytelling they can share with others year after year. Intrigued therapists will take copious notes until their hands cramp up, and I ask you, how else would they learn to write like real doctors? Win-win for everyone.

Just saying no is not really selfish. Deny, deny, deny, because people need to become self-reliant. If I loan some chick all my cherished *Hunger Games* tomes rather than letting her drive her ass to Barnes & Noble to buy her own damn books, she will never grow as a person. Withholding is its own reward.

For goodness sake, Santa Baby, this is by no means a complete list of the ways I've been good enough all year. But since you're coming to town, and I may be inebriated by the time you get here, I want to make sure there will be no misunderstandings between us on Christmas morning.

In holiday merriment,  
Your Fragrant Liar

P.S.

It's totally pervy that you can see me when I'm sleeping.

## Warning to New Moms, Or How I Asked for It

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I have always encouraged open and candid communication with my daughters. We actually *talked* about stuff when they were growing up. Highly personal stuff. That's how I gained a freakish knowledge of all things catty, hormonal, and melodramatic. While not for the faint of ego, this up-frontness takes a whole lot of complications out of the mother-daughter dynamic.

Now that they're adults, saying pretty much whatever comes to mind is an ingrained practice. All topics, including the bat-shit crazy, gory, juicy details, are fair game. I know this isn't every mom's cup o' whiskey, but I prefer it.

Let that be a lesson to you.

Take my youngest, a 29-year-old who feels competent and entitled now to pay back all the sage dating and relationship advice I gave her, lo those many moons ago when she was still sneaking smokes in the garage, ditching first period, and pretending to have cramps. I was on a first date the other night, when she texted me to "do" something to him, which I cannot actually repeat here because *my* mother reads this stuff, and well, she is a little more old fashioned about conversations concerning men and sex. Anyway, I later replied to my daughter, and the convo went like this:

**Me:** You're gross.

**Brittany:** U did it, didn't u??!! LOL

**Me:** My lips are sealed. (A) because you don't really want to know, since I'm your mother, and (B) because, well, see A.

**Brittany:** LOL. I know we are past the mother/daughter privacy thing, so I have to assume it was all rated "G." Boooooooooo.

**Me:** Yeah, it was all G. Except when he... and then I... and then he... which made this thing happen... and then OMG! PLUS, then he did... and so I couldn't help myself, and I... Well, it's all too much to put in a text message. Let's just say it was, um, not G.

**Brittany:** So in other words, he kissed u goodnight and u like him a lot. Glad I had a good time, Disney. LOL.

**Me:** He sure did kiss me goodnight. He likes to say goodnight. I mean, he could not stop saying it. And pretty soon I thought, if he doesn't stop saying goodnight, somebody's gonna be saying good morning!

**Brittany:** So UR the Disney whore.

Sigh. Your efforts to outsmart, out-manuever, out-embarrass, out-quip your adult children will come back on you like a well-chugged *cerveza*. Still, for me, it does feel good to be able to express myself to loved ones, knowing they will return the favor when they need to confide something important or just express something outrageously inappropriate. See, I don't judge my daughters or make them feel like idiot savants for offering their unsolicited and misguided opinions, which I do accept wholeheartedly out of the purest unconditional love.

Because I understand the future. I know one day I will come flowing right out of their mouths when they least expect it, and they will stop and think, lovingly, *Oh. My. God.*

There is no escape.

I imagine Brittany is passing all my best parental gems down to her own two daughters right now. So I'm going to just sit back with my feet up, a lovely glass of Malbec in my hand, and bask in the sunny glow of my greatest future accomplishments.

## A Revealing Performance

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Hey, world-class sports aren't limited to the Olympics. Sometimes you go to the competition, and sometimes the competition comes to you. Or, well, me.

Saturday, we all trek to the Lions Club Water Park, a couple miles from Fort Hood. Mostly this park is for the little ones, but we adults can relax or nurse our hangovers reclining in six inches of sparkling blue liquid that's one part water, three parts kid pee. Booyah.

I keep hearing thunder in the distance, but it is 103 and clear skies. I think maybe sonic booms from the base, until I realize the noise is coming from the bowl slide, in which us two-leggers become human marbles.

Naturally, I have to conquer it. It is there.

Imagine, if you will... I'm at the top of the slide. I take a deep breath and center myself for the performance I'm about to deliver. I jump feet-first into the chute—bit of a steep drop, I don't mind telling you—and at its end, I'm catapulted into a ginormous funnel. I make two dizzying, involuntary spirals around it, flailing like a bug in a whirlpool, after which I am flushed at high speed down the drain. This is what it's like to be a turd in a toilet bowl. Olympic style.

Happy enema to me too. On my drop into the drink—er, for my freestyle dismount, I do an excellent pike, ass first, which precipitates a minor wardrobe malfunction and a targeted pressure wash. I'll spare you the contortionist details, but with my bikini bottom around my knees, network coverage is quite limited.

But I do have an audience.

*Hey, little boy, whatchu lookin' at? Yeah, that's what that is...*

On the Olympic scale, I'd score my performance a solid ten with a point-666 deduction for accidental mooning and the emotional scarring of a child, which was only a little out of bounds considering the degree of difficulty.

I'll just go ahead and stand at attention while y'all play the national anthem.

## Ixnay on the Itchy Trigger Foot

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Y'all, 47 percent of Florida's elderly population is driving with an itchy trigger foot. This appears to be an age-related entitlement, and nothing we can do about it because they'd get crankier if we "youngsters" started telling them what to do. They'd start withholding the Christmas Florentines, the Eye-talian cream birthday cakes, and the annual Bludgeoned Chickenfest while firing up the guilt grill.

No sir, that will not do.

But back to the itchy trigger foot. Here's why it's a problem. When the old farts take their daily joy ride to the post office, a disturbing number of them are exiting the parking lot via the building's front windows. Why, only a month ago, a woman said she was startled by something falling from the sky, so she accelerated into the post office lobby—prompting the police to schedule a pickup. Perhaps the sky was falling, or perhaps it was air mail, but I doubt this is what the USPS had in mind when they started their "Stay Connected" campaign.

This year in Central Florida alone, there have been eight sudden detours. Fortunately, the USPS isn't punishing folks by calling out fake take-a-number tickets. No, they're actually asking Floridians to stop crashing into their post offices. Like this: "Please stop crashing into our post offices." And the USPS is being really nice about it by saying "please" and including helpful tips. Pretty sure there's one that goes, "Don't get behind the wheel while the key is in the ignition. Please."

Now I'm sure, when I get very, very old, a joy ride to the post office will be on my agenda too. Along with a leisurely stop-nosh-and-shop at the Cracker Barrel. I can even imagine myself after an unfortunate rendezvous with my post office lobby, where my official statement will be, "It's the darnedest thing, Whippersnapper. I stomp on the brake, and I'm always surprised at how much faster I go. *Wheeee!* Hey, anybody seen my teeth? Probably left them at the Cracker Barrel."

But to ixnay the itchy trigger foot, I suggest the USPS and the police combine forces with a new service called, "Priority Tracking and Confirming Your Old Farts." This just shows you love them. You could go online and, instead of looking up a zip code, you could GPS the location of your old farts, then request a certified return receipt to ensure your package arrives undamaged at his or her destination, steering clear of sidewalks, glass, and screaming postal workers.

Naturally, this would necessitate your oldest farts getting tattooed with a Forever Stamp on their foreheads. To stay connected. They'll go for that, right?

## Fight Night in the Name of the Tooth Fairy

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When my daughter Aleta's son Kael announced his first loose tooth, my girl summoned her spontaneous family genius—she does proudly derive from a long line of women who otherwise look normal. Though Aleta had six years to think about what she would do when Kael's first dental milestone finally arrived—time for the genius juices to ferment into some alveolar nectar of the gods for delivery unto the Tooth Fairy—like her forebears, she instead just crossed that bridge when she came to it.

First, she counseled Kael on the fine art of wiggling it, followed by some soft-pedaling of the extraction process with a calculated lack of detail so he wouldn't freak out on the scale of Krakatoa. You remember what a volcanic freak-out was like; most of you were children at one time.

She then commanded Kael to open wide while she carefully tied one end of a string to the tooth and the other end to a Nerf bullet. Finally, she locked and loaded the spongy ammo into a fluorescent Nerf gun and handed it to the lad so he could shoot out his own tooth.

From the dining room, Kael anxiously held the pistol at arm's length and aimed over the living room couch, and with some trepidation he fired off a shot. The projectile sailed across the room and took the whole string with it, minus the tooth. So mom dutifully fetched the bullet, helped him reload, and reattached the string to the tooth.

Again, Kael aimed and fired. And again the squatter slipped free of the noose, flatly refusing to exit the premises. They reloaded a third time, but with a third misfire on her hands, Aleta contemplated switching tactics, from extraction to excavation. One can only imagine the mental gymnastics derived from a rich ancestry of improvisational genius.

While Aleta wished she had a movie camera, Kael wasn't so sure. It was at this moment, my girl figured her son was losing faith in the process. Probably because he said, "I don't wanna do that anymore."

So she suggested a mock boxing match in which she would casually pop him in the kisser and dislodge the tooth. Inexplicably, Kael objected to this method of orthodontia and took off running.

With his mother in hot pursuit, Kael giggled furiously, at which point his mother caught up to him, tickled him, and accidentally did perform some kisser popping, which prompted the recalcitrant tooth to tumble right out of Kael's mouth. Much celebratory jumping, hooting, and applause followed.

The only other witness to the hoopla was Aleta's enthralled second son, age two,

who learned a valuable lesson for a memoir he will later pen, *Dentistry for Dummies: How Mama Taught Me to Knock Some Teeth Out, Round One*.

Subsequently, young Kael made inquiries about how much that tooth was worth on the open market, and by the next morning, the Tooth Fairy had slipped a crisp fiver under his pillow. Upon discovering his windfall, Kael told his mom, "I guess he is real!"

Raising boys is so different than raising girls. But so I'm not left out of future teachable moments, I am relying on my spontaneous genius to get me at the next shoot-out with my movie camera.

Locked and loaded here, sweetness.

## Vacationing in the Lake

---

I peed my pants today. Several times, in fact. A small indignity for those who spend their days floating in lakes, getting dragged behind all manner of watercraft, and dodging piranha-like perch on the hunt for a tasty freckle. Which brings me to today's lesson. Listen up, fellow liars, as I wade in on this genuine real-life-deal-with-it topic.

First, a day at the lake means it's perfectly pardonable to have the urge to pee and remain right where you are to do your business. Unless you're in the boat, in which case, etiquette dictates you hop, skip, and jump into the vast blue-green wave-maker to relieve yourself properly, in a civilized manner.

But don't kid yourself. What you're doing requires a significant suspension of disbelief to relax and let it flow while maintaining the casual body language that says, *Who me? I am not doing what it looks like, which is totally not peeing.* But you know you're actually, for real, peeing in public, something you can be ticketed for on dry land (especially in the city) and branded a deviant—after which, you could be escorted by the popo to the drunk tank.

People on dry land will throw empties at your back while shouting things like, “You sick asshole!” Nothing you do thereafter will assuage their absolute, all-encompassing disgust. Lake people, by contrast, will join you in the same pee pool or shout ribald jokes and throw you a fresh can from the ice chest to fill you up for the next pee-fest. After which, you realize you might already be in the drunk tank.

The civilized method is to swim away from shore or your compatriots to do your business inconspicuously. This is where you learn there are two types of people. The Lake Rats who have no qualms about joining you for group relief, and the Novice. The Novice sloshes over to hang out with you—because no one likes to be left alone at the lake. Except for pee-ers, Novice; that should be your first clue. If you miss it, you most assuredly won't miss the second clue, which is a distinct warmth enveloping your submerged lower three-quarters.

This is the only moment a pee-er actually feels embarrassment. Not in the act of peeing—nay nay—but in painting someone's skin the castoff shade of amber. Because inevitably, the unsuspecting pee-on's face goes through several contortions, from WTF to OMG to AYFKM? And back again to WTF. And whose fault is that, Novice? Have you no shame? You have embarrassed a pee-er doing what pee-ers do in a lake: pee their pants.

Well, sun's going down, I'm just finishing up another beer, and the water looks delightful. I must, therefore, wade on in.

## Vagina Vagina

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I'm sitting on the couch in my GYN's office, and we are discussing lady infections—or as I like to call them, *infuctions*. Doc sits across from me in his white lab coat, speaking with some formality about vaginas and sexual intercourse and the flora that naturally exist in there but get out of balance from time to time. Then he says with a complete straight face that one of the infections we women get is not an infection at all, but a colonization.

"A colonization?" I say. And then I laugh like a hyena.

Well, come on. A colonization? In my vagina?

My imagination runs wild. I envision thousands of battle-weary farmer Johns, storming the valley with long-barreled muskets to sack Fort Hooaha. The unsuspecting natives are overrun 13 ways to Sunday and sent packing with only their loincloths; and suddenly those plucky pioneers have infiltrated the countryside, rowing and hoeing a flourishing cotton crop.

I wonder, how many settlers can fit into one vagina anyway? And what's their method of transmission? The Mayflora?

Naturally, the first thing I do is call my eldest daughter, who lives now in Atlanta. She's not too old for her mama to explain the birds and the florabees. So what if she's had three kids? I've had four, and colonization is news to me. I must prepare her.

"Mom," Tyson says. "You're talking about your vagina?"

"Yes," I say. "And the flora."

"I don't want to talk about your vagina. Or that other thing."

"Flora," I say. "Not just my vagina, but yours too. And your sisters.' And the flora that's already in there but gets all greedy and starts land grubbing—"

"Mom, you're talking about va-gi-nas."

I shrug. "Well, only cuz you have one. And I have one."

The line is quiet enough to hear a queef.

"What?" I say. "You just don't like the word. Vagina, vagina, vagina."

"Mom!"

"What?"

"No."

"I was sure you'd want to be forewarned," I say. "The flora are coming, the flora are coming."

I imagine my daughter scowling across 1,200 miles, and I laugh quietly. And I think, I must prepare her sisters, too. All three of them.

## Starting Over... Again

---

Starting over is never easy. I did it four times in the last few years and managed as many epic failures. Sometimes you just don't see things hurtling right at you. You're all trusting that life is what it looks like—pretty cool and exciting and full of promise, and there's not even an inkling that cosmic assattery is brewing on the horizon—and then a meteor blasts through your atmosphere, shatters your windows, and knocks you flat on your keister. I still can't sit down.

But that's when resilience is key. If you can catch your breath and lean into the discomfort, you're telling the universe, *Oh really? Is that all you got?* Even though the shockwaves are still reverberating deep inside your chest, you can't indulge them too long. Because you know all problems have a life span. The use-by date is in your control.

*Last Year* and his predecessors used me up and spit me out in the ditch, and then steamrolled me just for kicks. But Last Year will get exactly what he deserves in the end and, truth is, now Last Year is just somebody that I used to know.

So here I am, not only hoping for my good fortune but planning on it.

And it reminds me of the time I was starting over many years ago with a new, much younger guy. He was fun, sexy, and charming, of course, and on our second date, he picked me up in his snazzy Toyota compact. We were laughing and cutting up on the drive, when something caught my eye. Something in my lap—or more precisely, in the deep V between my legs—something that wasn't supposed to be there.

I reached down and pulled out a tiny curled piece of white paper. On it was some Chinese scribble, my lucky numbers, and the promise of something incredible "between the sheets."

"Ooooh," I said. "So that's where those come from."

Pretty sure that's the moment he fell in love with me, proving unequivocally that we do make our own fortunes.

Sum-yum-gai anyone?

## **Thank you!**

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It is my great hope that you enjoyed this book. If you did, please tell your friends. And don't forget, people can't read this book if they don't know about it. Your review will help them find it. To leave a review on Amazon, follow the link [here](#).

For more about Kimberly Jayne, visit [www.readkimberly.com](http://www.readkimberly.com).

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