

Prologue

As the prison door quietly closed behind him with a soft whoosh, Josh thought to himself that he had finally come full circle. He was in the very same place his father had been all those many years ago and he knew he would be here for a very long time. He hadn't listened when they told him had control of his life, even if he had a disability. He had always blamed others for his actions, complaining that he never got a break in life. He used the excuse that everyone was against him and everything that happened to him was someone else's fault.

These thoughts ran thru his mind as he surveyed his new surroundings as even now he tried to blame his partners for being in this prison cell. He tried to say that they were the ones who screwed up causing him to be convicted. Josh couldn't find it in him to place the blame where it really belonged. It belonged with him.

This was now his home. As Josh looked around he saw the remains of others who had been here before him, the graffiti of lewd drawings and comments about women they had known or wanted to know. He saw the iron bunk-bed attached to the wall with the paper thin mattress, the single flat pillow, the single sheet, and the prison gray issued blanket. He saw the windowless 6x9 space that held no privacy. The toilet was the focal point of

the cell, like an obscene piece of art work. It sat in the middle of the far wall so when he had to relieve himself he was in full view of the guards and other inmates. The sink was stainless steel with no personality. Next to the toilet there was a small desk attached to the wall with a chair slid under it, opposite the bed.

As Josh surveyed his new surroundings, he began the journey again in his mind. It was a journey of how he wound up in this place and why. Josh had been moved to his new home away from home in the middle of the night. He had been sleeping in the county jail awaiting transport when the guards had rudely awakened him and told him he was traveling. Josh knew it was going to happen, he just didn't know when. This had always been a part of his life.

He never knew when he would be awakened in the middle of the night, as a child, to be placed in a car and moved to a new environment.

First it was with his teenage mother as she moved from place to place always one step ahead of the law and family and children services. Then it was with his mother and his real dad after he was released from yet another stint in prison for one crime or another.

Josh never remembered being in a place for more than a few months and most of the time it was a place shared with people

his parents knew. He never lived one place long enough to make the right kind of friends or stay in school long enough to get a decent education.

As Josh took a trip down memory lane, he saw the images of his past; present and future begin to blend in one tangled mass of prison gray nothingness. As his visions of his mother and dad lost focus, his vision of the prison gray walls came back into view. Josh knew he had fulfilled the prophecy of his birth: he was in prison for the next 10 years. His crime was one of stupidity mixed with the lack of not being able to say no. He had been part of a loose gang of misfits whose idea of a good time on a Saturday night was to break into the disabled man's house. The man was the uncle of one of Josh's friends who Josh had met while living in Alabama. The idea was to just scare him and steal his money and anything else of value. However, that idea took on a life of its own when the man tried to fight back.

Now Josh was here and his friends were someplace else. Josh was serving time for being an accomplice to robbery and murder, all because he did not have the right stuff to say no and to protect the innocent. So, now at what should have been the beginning of his journey as a productive member of society, Josh at 17 years old was now a convicted felon and a non-productive member of society.

He had lost his identity. He had become a number and a statistic.

Joshua Ruben VanPelt ID # K-13798, inmate at Hardwick Prison in Hardwick, Ga.

Part One

Brianna &

Josh

The Baby

July 7, 1990, at 2:30 in the afternoon in a local hospital located in Commerce, Ga. a baby was born to Brianna VanPelt, 17 years old, blonde and petite with green eyes that darkened when she was angry. She had a smile that would charm anyone and usually did. Now, she wasn't smiling, her eyes were snapping in anger. She was tired from 24 hours of labor and she hated all who were in her line of vision. The main focus of her anger had been directed at the result of this birth, this baby a beautiful baby boy with deep blue eyes and a head full of dark fuzz.

However, Brianna didn't see the beauty of this innocent baby, all she saw was her future going down the drain because she hadn't really wanted this child.

In fact she hated him from the moment she knew she heard the news that she was pregnant. She was still in school and one of the most popular girls in her senior class. She had a scholarship to a major university in Athens, Ga. She was involved in cheerleading, the school newspaper and on the annual staff. She didn't have time for this bundle of crying human

flesh still covered in the blood of his birth. To her he was ugly and she hated him. But she hated her parents more.

Her parents had told her that she would have this child, and she didn't have the right to destroy it. Brianna had always been a good kid. She had always done the right thing in her life. She knew in her heart she couldn't destroy this being, but she still hated it. She knew she had to accept the responsibility of the action she took the night she slept with her boyfriend. Still she didn't like it and at the moment the only person she could take it out on was this baby.

So, Joshua Ruben VanPelt came into this world, born to a mother who was still a child herself, who at this moment hated him for screwing up her world, and born to a father who was at the current time in prison for boosting a car and assaulting the driver.

He would be gone for a couple of years. Brianna hadn't heard from him again after the night he had talked her into a night of what he had called lovemaking, but was really just sex and lust. Good old Benny Ruben, how he could charm her, and charm her he did- right out of her clothes and her virginity. Brianna was no match for him.

Benny had a hero and that hero was the old time heart throb, James Dean. He spent his entire life trying to look, walk and dress like his idol.

Benny was tall, dark and handsome in a strange sort of way. He had a square jaw, liquid blue eyes one could fall into and drown. A smile that could knock a girl to the ground and a come hither look girls went wild over. His hair was dark and wavy long and combed back in a pompadour style. He always wore tight fitting jeans and white tee shirts with his cigarettes rolled up in the sleeve. Benny's favorite jacket was a leather biker's jacket that closely matched that of his hero's on one of the many posters which lined his walls.

Even though Brianna knew in her mind that Benny was bad news, she couldn't help but fall into his web of lies and deceit. So was the downward spiral of Brianna's life and that of her son Josh, who was now cleaned, wrapped in a blanket and letting the whole room know he wanted to be fed and he wanted to be fed now.

Brianna had finally agreed to hold this creature that had been part of the ruination of her life as she used to know it. As he was placed in her arms, she looked in his eyes and the hate began to dissipate. Brianna knew she had to step up to the plate and take care of this small creature; she did not love him as one would love one's child, but she felt a sense of ownership.

Brianna still resented this baby and she didn't know how she was going to take care of him and go to school at the same time. But she knew that she was expected to take that

responsibility seriously. She knew she could still live at home and her parents would help her to some extent. But the burden was hers to carry.

Two days later Brianna arrived home from the hospital with Josh in tow. Her room no longer had the décor of a teenager's room filled with posters of her favorite movie and rock stars. She no longer had make-up piled on her vanity. Instead she had baby lotions, powder, and other necessities, along with a baby bed with blue accessories providing Josh a place to sleep. There was a diaper hanger hanging on one corner of the bed post to hold the diapers. Baby clothes were folded neatly in the drawers which used to hold her chic clothes for school and play.

Included with her phone numbers of her girl friends were the phone numbers of the baby's doctor, her doctor, the hospital and the pharmacy. Gone were the vestiges of being a teenager with the only worry of making good grades and what to wear for Saturday night. In fact, gone was the Saturday nights out with the gang. Instead, she had three am feedings to look forward to, as well, as walking the floors all night with a baby who cried because of colic.

As Brianna laid Josh in his bed, she said to no one in particular and to walls in general, "Well, Benny, this is another fine mess you've gotten me into."

She thought of other times she had been with Benny and the really dumb things they had done. To the baby she said, "Well, kiddo. Welcome to my world. It is going to be a long ride. I don't suspect that I will ever be able to love you, but I will look after you. I will do the right thing as always. But I can never love you."

The ice formed around her heart and soul.

As days and nights began to weave themselves together Brianna tried to adjust to a new life with this new creature. She forced herself to struggle thru school each day while taking care of the new baby's every day needs spending many sleepless nights changing diapers and giving three o'clock feedings. She was constantly exhausted from too little sleep and trying to study in order to graduate. Brianna's distance from Josh continued to grow.

She didn't hate him nor did she really love him. She just tolerated him. She never cuddled him when she feed him, but propped his bottle on a pillow so she could study while he ate. When Brianna would get phone calls from her friends wanting her to go off on a Friday night she couldn't go. There was no one to take care of the baby. Soon the friends stopped calling. As time went on Brianna became isolated in her life.

There was no social life, no quiet time, no sleep and no relief from taking care of Josh. She wondered if there would

ever be a day in her life when she did not have to take care of this child.

When Josh was eight months old, something happened which would change the way she felt about him. Brianna had been fighting with her parents. She was tired, they were tired and the baby had not been feeling well. Brianna wanted to get away for just a little while.

She asked her mother if she would look after the baby for a couple of hours.

"Yes", her mother said, "But no longer than two hours, we are supposed to go out."

Brianna's mother, Joan, was an average looking woman who had learned the hard way about life and the pitfalls it contained. She had lost her youth and beauty much the same way as Brianna. She at one time had been the homecoming queen and the most popular girl in her school. However, she had made the same bad decision as her daughter. She had a child way too young. Joan's husband Bob was a successful CPA. He had worked his way up in his company and tonight Bob was being honored at a dinner for his years of service.

Bob had just come in from the yard and heard the last part of the conversation between Brianna and her mother. As Bob began washing the dirt and grass from his hands, he asked, "What is it that Brianna wanting to do?"

"She wants to go off for a couple of hours and leave the baby with us." Joan replied.

"No, Bob said, "He is not our responsibility and we have to start getting ready for the dinner. We can't get ready and look after a baby. She will either have to take him or else stay home. We will not be worried about her getting back in time for us to leave."

"But Dad", Brianna whined, "I need some time to myself. The baby is draining me and I want to go out with my friends."

"You should have thought about that when you were messing around with that boy." Her father replied.

Bob still refused to call Benny by his name. He hated that boy with more than he ever thought possible. He felt as if Brianna had ruined her life and Benny was her enabler.

Brianna turned to her mother with a questioning look on her face.

"You told me you would look after him for me", she said.

Joan looked at Bob and then looked back at her daughter.

"Brianna, your dad is right. The last time you said you would be home at a certain time when we kept the baby it was 2:00 in the morning before you came strolling in the house. The baby had kept us up because he was not feeling well, we didn't know where you were and you wouldn't answer your cell phone. As much as we both love Josh, we are not going to raise him. He is your

responsibility, and if it means you have to forgo a social life to raise him, then so be it. I tell you this, not because I don't love you or the baby, it is because I do love you both."

Brianna's anger began spilling out with snapping eyes and verbal hatred for both of her parents.

"Well, fine then, if you don't want me to have any friends or see my friends, then it will be your fault when you are not allowed around Josh at all. Some day you both will want to see him and I won't let you. I hate both of you I am leaving and taking him with me. Then you will be sorry."

With that last statement Brianna stormed out of the kitchen and into her bedroom. The yelling had awakened the baby and he started crying. Brianna yelled at him in her anger. This became too much for Joan and Bob, they both almost ran to towards the bedroom door and at the same time said, "Do not take your anger out on the baby, it isn't his fault. You are supposed to be the adult." Joan opened the door and took the baby out of his crib and in her arms.

As she walked away with him she heard her husband say to Brianna. "This is it! We have had enough! If you choose to live on the streets, then go, however, you will not take Josh. Your mother and I will get custody and then you will be the one who will not see him. We won't have him always in the middle of one of your battles. We won't allow you to ruin his life

because you are mad at us and want to use him as a pawn to emotionally blackmail me and your mother.

Brianna, you made an adult decision to sleep with that boy. By making that decision, you have to accept the consequences. That is called life. Now deal with it. Your life is no longer yours. It belongs to Josh until he is old enough to take care of himself. You now have to make sacrifices in order to take care of him and make sure he has his needs met. You have to finish school so that you can get gainful employment in order to take care of him. You can't go back to being a care free teenager who is always trying to win a popularity contest. There is no room in the adult world for such childish games. It is now time to take the bull by the horns and become an adult.

If you choose not to take the responsible adult path and you choose not to take care of Josh, then you leave me and your mother no other option, but to take him and do it for you. Someone has to be responsible for this baby's life, if not you then us. So the decision is yours. Be the adult or be the child. Either way you make the call."

With those last words, Bob with a very tired and old look on his face, turned and walked out of the bedroom. Brianna stared at him wishing she had some smart hurting comment to make. He left her speechless. She had been her father's child. He had

never spoken to her that way before, very quietly, with no emotion and no facial expression. He left without telling her he loved her and that she was still his girl.

Brianna was crushed, angry, hurt and confused. She didn't want to be in this house another minute. She didn't want her parents to have access to Josh and in her anger that was the best way to hurt them back for the things her father had said to her. A plan began to form in the back of her mind.

It started out as a small voice, saying "Show them. Show them they will be sorry. They will be sorry when you and Josh are no longer here. They will never have to worry about you again. Take Josh away from this place. Take him away from those people. Make them very sorry."

Brianna sat at her computer and instant messaged her best friend Gayle. The plan was beginning to take shape. Brianna knew what she was going to do. The only thing she had to worry about was timing. Brianna heard her mother bring the now sleeping baby back into her room and lay him in the crib. She didn't look away from her computer and she didn't acknowledge her mother had entered the room. When Joan tried to speak to Brianna to let her know that she was loved and that they were only trying to help her, Brianna acted as if she was not listening. In fact Brianna in her mind was answering her mother with snide comments that all the things her mother was saying were lies. Joan looked at

her daughter with wise, sad eyes, if Brianna had turned to look at her at that moment her resolve for revenge, might have dissipated. However, she was so bent on revenge and so wrapped in her own anger, she didn't see the tear that slowly rolled down her mother's cheek. She didn't see the sadness in her mother's eyes and the knowing look that she knew exactly what Brianna was about to do and there was nothing she could do to stop the train wreck. Joan slowly turned and quietly left the room. Brianna never turned from the computer and her plot to leave with Josh.