

Prologue

I never wanted to move here. I was content with the life I had, the friends I still have, and the way my life was. It is said that with death new opportunities arise, and new opportunities arose, albeit for other people to ruin my life. If there is one lesson I learned from my ordeal, it was to always expect the worse from people, no matter how caring they may seem or how inclined they appear to make you feel welcome. If you enter a door promising paradise, expect hell. In addition to that, never walk into unfamiliar territory and expect a warm reception, because more often than not, somebody does not want you there. Unintentionally, you may cause a ripple effect which hampers their plans for life. I learned two important things from my short stay in Branton: the first is to never forget. Second, naïveté can be the downfall of anyone.

Chapter 1

I was in the process of feeding my History Channel addiction when the phone rang. Reluctantly, I pulled myself off the couch and answered the phone.

“Hello?”

“Is this the Adams residence?”

“Yeah.”

“This is Michael Sullivan from Baer, Werner and Associates in Boston. I’m calling regarding Mae Hickey. Is Sarah Adams in?”

“Sure, hold on. Mom! Telephone!”

The phone calls lately have been nonstop regarding Aunt Mae. She’s been in poor health for a number of years now, and since my mom was the only niece who cared about Aunt Mae’s health, she became the de facto caretaker. She’d been driving down to Aunt Mae’s house in Branton every other day for the past year to cart her around to appointments and such. I assumed it was the doctor’s office to confirm another appointment. I went back to watching my documentary. Five minutes later, my mom came in and asked me to turn off the television.

Teary eyed, my mom said, “Daniel, Aunt Mae is gone.”

“What? How?”

“Natural causes, last night. One of her friends came to pick her up for bingo, and when there was no answer at the door, they called the police. They found her in bed. We have to go to the law office tomorrow and discuss her will.”

She looked like she was about to speak again, but couldn’t find the right words.

“I’m sorry, Mom.”

“I know, Daniel. I’m sorry too.”

“Let me know if there is anything I can to help in any way, Mom.”

“Thank you, Daniel.”

Chapter 2

Baer, Werner and Associates was the prototypical law office; volumes upon volumes of bound law books crammed into bookcases buckling under the weight, offices with walls of diplomas, accolades, and family accoutrement; elder looking men, dignified with thousand dollar suits and seventy dollar haircuts; and finally, the cheery receptionist at a cherry front desk.

“Can I help you?”

“Yes, we have an appointment with Michael Sullivan.”

“Your names, please?”

“Sarah and Daniel Adams.”

“One moment, please.”

The cheery receptionist left her cherry desk, presumably to fetch Mr. Sullivan. She soon returned with Mr. Sullivan in tow, who seemed out of place with the décor of the office, as he seemed to be much younger than any of his co-workers.

“Hello Sarah, Daniel. I’m Michael Sullivan, the executor of Mrs. Hickey’s estate. Please, come to my office and discuss the terms of the will. In the interests of expediency, I will show the part of the tape which pertains to you.”

We sat in Mr. Sullivan’s office in front of a television and VCR which held the last words of my late Aunt Mae. Sullivan turned on the video, and the static gave way to my Aunt Mae, sitting composed, facing the camera. The words Aunt Mae were about to speak, although I was unaware of the consequences they were going to have in the future, seemed common and typical for the situation at hand. Nothing would indicate about how my life was going to be turned upside down, and how the words uttered forth from Mae’s mouth would have an ironic twist in the future.

“To my niece, Sarah, for your unquestionable devotion and selflessness, I leave you my house and all the belongings contained within, including automobiles. In addition, a savings account at Rockland Federal Credit Union is in my name with you as the beneficiary. May you use this money to better your life for yourself and my nephew, to move away from the unfortunate neighborhood in which you currently reside and live a life which you so rightly deserve. To my...”

Sullivan rose out of his chair and turned the TV off. I looked at my mother, who had tears in her eyes, then looked down at my feet, trying to soak up the contents of the tape. New

house? Money? I didn't want a new house, but the money was sure was nice. Money was something we didn't have, but a house, or rather an apartment, was what we did have. An apartment near friends, near school, near my life. Exultation turned to indignation as I knew that my mother had already made her decision.

“We'll be in touch, Ms. Adams. Here's my card.”

“Thank you.”

Chapter 3

“No, I’m not leaving.”

“Daniel”, my mother said, “this is an opportunity for us to better ourselves. We finally have a chance to get out of this terrible neighborhood and live a better life. And God help me if I let this opportunity get away without taking a hold of it. This is chance to leave it all behind, Daniel. You can get away from all the troubles you’ve had in the past. Not many people get a chance to start over. Daniel, you would be stupid not to take an opportunity like this and run with it.”

“I don’t care, Mom. I’m happy with what I’ve got here. You’re asking me to just get up and leave all this? Huh? What about what I want, what I have here? I don’t want to move, plain and simple. And why do we need new house? What we’ve got is fine.”

“Do you really like hearing gunshots every night and dodging drug dealers on the way to your car? Daniel, the heartaches, all the troubles we’ve had to go through, with barely being able to pay the rent every month and not always having food on the table? That’s what you want? You want to continue living like this? Daniel...” the words caught in her mouth as she attempted to choke back tears. “Daniel, we need this. For us. Please, Daniel. Please.”

For as long as I can remember, it’s always been me and my mom. I never really knew my father, only getting a curt, angry response from my mom whenever I asked about him. All I ever managed to glean from our conversations was that he left her when she was pregnant with me, and she never heard from him again. I was the only man in her life, and she proved that time and time again by doing everything in her power to make me happy. She’d often work extra hours during the holidays to buy me things that I really wanted (like my Xbox), and I can remember her working 70 hour weeks during my freshman year because I needed new skates. I wasn’t a little boy anymore; I was a man in my mother’s eyes, and I knew that a man had to sacrifice for his family. Seeing the pain in my mother’s eyes crushed me. She deserved this. She had sacrificed so much for me, and it was time for me to be a man and sacrifice for her. “Okay, Mom.”

Chapter 4

My Corsica rumbled around the corner of Third and Main to Big's house. My mother told me that Aunt Mae had two seasonal cars in her garage that were hardly ever used. I thought it kind of ironic to have two cars and never drive. Once the paperwork went through, Aunt Mae's 2000 Crown Vic would be in my name. Maybe the Crown Vic would start every time I turned the key, as opposed to my Corsica which started when it felt like it. Big was on his front stoop, smoking a cigarette.

"Danny, what's up, kid?"

"Hey, Big, what's shaking?" I took a drag off his cigarette.

"You looked like somebody just ran over your puppy. Still upset about your Aunt?"

"Yeah, amongst other things."

"What else?" he inquired.

"Big, I'm moving. To Branton."

"Where the fuck is Branton?"

"That's where my Aunt's house is."

"Damn. I guess that means you're leaving Central too, huh?"

"Yeah, I don't have a choice. I gotta go to Branton High. I looked into staying at Central, and athletic rules said you hafta attend the district where you reside, or some bullshit like that."

"Coach know?"

"Yeah, I saw him in the principal's office when I was getting my transcripts sent over."

"He's gotta be pissed."

"More upset than anything. We talked for like an hour. But he understands. He knows I don't wanna leave." I shook my head in disdain. "This sucks, Big. This was gonna be a big year for us. We were a shoe-in for the Super 10. Now I gotta play for Podunkville High."

"What division are they?"

"C. Not nearly the skill level in our division."

"So you'll burn these kids."

"That's not the point. I'd rather stay at Central and have a terrible season than go to Branton and score 100 points."

"Well, you know me and the crew are here for you."

“I know. Thanks, Big.”

I walked to my car and opened the door. “Big.”

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry.”

Chapter 5

“Where is Branton anyways?”

“About 20 miles south of here. It’s much, much different than Boston, Danny.”

“How different.”

“Much. It’s only about 15,000 people, one high school, very small commercial area. But it is on the beach. It’s a bit of a change compared to what we are used to.”

Great.

We pulled into our new house. Since everything inside was given to us, moving in was simple enough. I had my clothes, my hockey equipment, and my Xbox. My mother, being a woman, had enough clothes to open her own clothing store. It took about an hour to unload the car. “A bit of a change” was an understatement. The house was freegin’ huge. Since there were four bedrooms in the house (the master bedroom defaulting to my mother), I had my pick of the remaining three. I picked the biggest.

“So, what do you think.”

“It’s big, Mom.”

“It’s better than our ratty old apartment.”

“Yeah.”

“I know this is tough for you, Daniel. But really, it’s the best thing that could have happened to us. You get a fresh start and we don’t hafta penny pinch anymore.”

“Yeah.”

“We’re going to Branton High tomorrow to get your schedule set up.”

“Ok.”

Chapter 6

If Central High was a pay-be-the-hour motel, Branton High was the Ritz. Everything was new and immaculate, and it didn't have the same, stench, that Central had. I took in the newness of everything as we stepped into the principal's office.

"May I help you?"

"Yes, I'm Sarah Adams, this is my son Daniel. We just moved to Branton and we're looking to get Daniel enrolled and his schedule set up."

"Ah, yes, Adams. Paperwork came in today. Have a seat."

It took all of ten minutes to set up my schedule. English, Pre-calc, History, Art, and Spanish. Hopefully these classes weren't any harder than they would be at Central. Once my schedule was finished, we thanked the secretary and were set to head out when the hockey coach came in.

"Daniel Adams?"

"Yeah."

"Coach Brimmer. Pleased to meet you." We shook hands. "Have a few minutes to talk?"

"Yeah."

"Ms. Adams, if you would excuse us for a few minutes, I'd like to talk a bit to Daniel about the hockey program. Feel free to get more acquainted with the school."

"Ok. I'll see you in a few minutes, Daniel."

"Aight, Mom."

Coach Brimmer doubled as Athletic Director. He was short and stocky, maybe an athlete in his days. If those days ever existed, they were long behind him. His hair was long and graying in the back, a feeble attempt to compensate for his rapidly receding hairline, while his nose was bulbous and red at the end. I was covered in a spray of spit as he opened his mouth to talk.

"Daniel Adams. I've heard about you. First freshman to ever win City League MVP, and then you repeated as MVP Sophomore year."

I stared.

“Boy, did we ever get the luck of the draw. You’re an excellent talent, Daniel. You’re gonna be a star on this team. We got a great shot at the title this year with someone like you on our team.”

“I know.”

“Confident, too.” He chuckled. “Wait til I tell the team. They’re gonna be ecstatic.”
Whoopdyfreegingdo.

“We start training in October, and captain’s practices start at the end of September. Usually, that’s a chance for the captains to evaluate the new players, but there is no need to evaluate you. I’m sure I’ll run into you when classes start.”

“Yeah”, I intellectually replied.

He extended his hand. “Well, good luck with getting situated, I’m sure this isn’t easy for you.”

“Yeah.”

I shook his hand and then met my mom outside.

“So?”

I shrugged my shoulders. I seemed to be doing that a lot lately.

“Oooooook.”

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