

Coming Home

As I stared out the windows that spanned the train station, the dark angry clouds had rolled in and lightning spidered across the night sky. Rain pummeled the glass as thunder boomed and rattled the building. Hypnotized by the rhythms of the rain, I stared at my reflection in the windows and shook my head in disbelief. *How did you let yourself go down such a dark road, Angel?* My fingers went to my neck, and feathered the bandage across my throat. I had come so close.

The little girl with blonde hair, who sat across from me, captured my attention. She reminded me of myself, all those years ago, when the world had been mine to conquer. The innocence. The dreams of the future.

Now, I sat unable to move. I couldn't go back to the streets, and I couldn't go home. My shame and pride wouldn't let me. A tear slipped down my cheek. What was I going to do?

The constant stream of people going in and out of the building brought a cold draft with them. I shifted on the cold plastic chair and pulled my jacket tighter around me. My travel bag sat beside me. It had been six years since I had run away, but the other night made me realize I wanted—no, needed to come home.

But my heart struggled to let me. So, here I sat fighting the battle within. I never wanted to face my dad again. How could I when I'd done everything he warned me not to do. How stupid could I have been? I couldn't live like this anymore. Closing my eyes, I could almost reach out and touch the past six years. I was taken back to my first days in the big city.

I had stepped out of the train station and gazed up at the tall buildings. My eyes widened and heart fluttered. People rushed past me and car horns blared. Loud voices, carried on the

breeze, swirled in my head. The city was mine to seize. My dreams awaited. I finally had freedom from that man's dumb rules. Who wanted a father like that when all *this* was out here to be had?

Within days my money had run out and I had to sleep in the park. I thought I had been saved when Bobby found me.

"Hi there, honey. What's your name?"

I studied his clean-cut appearance and nice clothes. He must be okay. "My name's Angel."

"Sure it is, honey. Okay Angel, would you like a warm bed and a hot meal tonight?"

"Yeah, I guess that'd be nice." I followed him to my new home and my new life.

I soon found out the price for a warm bed cost me more than any hotel ever would.

Years later, I walked through the dimly lit alley toward Ninth Street to take my place on the street corner for the night. I spotted Angie waiting for me on the corner. We always stayed together when neither of us had a client. Like every other night, my too-short skirt and five-inch heels, made me feel cheap. But what choice did I have? I could never go home and admit my mistake to my father. My pride was in the way and the shame too great. I didn't want him to see what his little girl had become.

Angie and I stayed under the street light and waited for our regular johns. I rubbed my arms trying to warm myself from the cool breeze of the night. My heels clacked against the pavement as I walked around to keep my blood moving.

Just beyond the lighted sidewalk I noticed a figure hunched over. I narrowed my eyes at the man huddled under a coat.

With a nudge to Angie, I jutted my chin toward him. “Hey, Ang. I’m gonna go see if something’s wrong with him.”

“Be careful, Angel.”

I walked over and knelt down beside him. “Hey mister, are you okay?”

The rancid smell of booze choked me. I shivered when I stared into his wild eyes. Within seconds, the man sprang up and grabbed me by the shoulders and spun me around.

Angie screamed. Her wide eyes made my pulse race. It was then I realized the man had a large knife against my neck. Bile filled my throat. I was going to die.

The blade cut into my skin. My warm blood dripped from my throat down the front of my thin blouse. The cut stung like that of a swarm of bees. My eyes watered and my chest pounded. Suddenly my father’s rules didn’t seem so important.

Why had I left my family? I didn’t want to die alone out here without them. Sirens wailed and the shouts of officers brought me back to reality.

Angie had saved my life when she took a risk and called the cops.

After the paramedics treated my cut and reluctantly let me go, with Angie’s prodding I made the decision it was time to face my humiliation and put my ego aside. I had almost gotten killed trying to stay away from the man who made rules to keep me safe. The time had come to go home. Would my father understand? Would he still love me?

A cold waft of air from the open door brought me back to the present. My gaze shifted to a figure standing near the entrance. I sucked in a sharp breath. My father stood a mere few feet away. How did he know I was here? With his eyebrows raised and arms wide, he waited for me to make the choice.

I stared at his open arms. Could he really accept me back so easily? Shame and pride weighed down on me, but I couldn't go on like this. I rushed to him and threw my arms around him. Tears spilled down my cheeks. "Daddy."

"I'm here, baby. You're home now. You're safe." He brushed my hair with his hand and kissed the top of my head.

"Oh Daddy, I'm so sorry." I clung to him afraid to let go.

Something tugged on the hem of my coat. I looked down to see those adorable blue eyes staring up at me through wisps of blonde hair.

"Mommy? Is this my grandpa?"

I bent down and placed my hands on her shoulders. With tears streaking down my face, I smiled. "Yes, sweetie. This is your Grandpa Jim."

I peered up at my dad. "Dad, this is Bethany. She's your granddaughter."

His gaze darted between Bethany and me. He laid his hand on my shoulder.

Understanding and love poured from his touch.

My dad picked Bethany up in his arms and kissed her cheek. "Nice to meet you, ma'am."

Bethany giggled. Oh, how I loved that sweet sound of innocence.

I had made the right decision to come back to my father and let him back in my life. He not only accepted me after all of my mistakes, but accepted my daughter as well.

Tears welled in my father's eyes. "Welcome home, Angel. I love you."

Luke 15:24 NIV "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."