

Chapter X

The Story of Del

Warm streams moved down his face. He could feel the tingling sensation as he sat motionless, unable to move. He tried to open his eyes but they wouldn't cooperate. He tried to reach a hand up to touch his face. Maybe he could figure out what was causing the odd feeling. It was like a warm shower in slow motion; warm water trickling down over his hair, onto his face, then down on his neck. But that wasn't it. He'd have heard running water if he were in the shower. He concentrated hard on opening his eyes and they finally opened ever so slightly.

He looked at the blurry image in front of him. There. He could see glass. Then he saw the liquid running down the glass. It was a dark liquid, almost black, but it was hard to tell. It was dark out and his vision was blurred. He felt a chill over his entire body. The air wasn't cool. The chill was from the inside.

It was a struggle to keep his eyes open so he let the lids relax. His eyes closed and he was back in darkness. The strange sensation of the warm liquid running down his face returned. He smiled to himself as he drifted off again, his thoughts drifting back to earlier in the day.

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Kendall Byron Winston walked up to the front steps of his fabulous brick home. Actually, it was his parent's home but he lived there, too. He didn't think the house was anything special. He looked at the etched glass of front door and he saw his reflection. What he saw was a kid with golden hair down to his shoulders, fair skin and handsome features. He thought he could pass for Brad Pitt's younger brother, a thought echoed by a few of his female friends. All he thought about was getting laid and getting high. But today he had one more thing on his mind. Within the next hour he expected to be sitting behind the wheel of his new Mazda Miata. He'd been pleading with his parents for the past eight months about getting a car for his sixteenth birthday and today was the day. He thought the car might be sitting in the brick driveway when he got home from school but the driveway was empty. His parents always kept their cars in the garage. 'You have to take care of your car so it will last longer and maintain its value longer.' His Dad was always preaching to him about caring for his stuff. His Dad called them 'assets'. *What a stuffed shirt my old man is.*

Kendall also despised his given name. Everyone called him Del; everyone except his parents. They made it a point to call him Kendall. There was something worse, though. That was when they were angry with him and called him by his full name. That was happening more often as he grew older. He tried to hold his temper because he knew what was at stake. His Dad had been suggesting that he might not get the car because he was becoming 'belligerent'. Del thought, *Is that even a real word?* But to Del it seemed that everything his parents said was stupid. How had they lived for so long being this ignorant? His friend, Sandy, said that her parents were more stupid than his. They agreed that parent's brains must deteriorate with age.

As he walked through the front door he shouted, "Anybody home?" No answer. *I might have time to hit the bong, catch a little buzz before dinner.* He dropped his books

on the entry floor and headed upstairs to his room. As he closed the door he heard the sound of a car door shut in the driveway. *Damn, that'll have to wait.*

He ran back downstairs and hid behind the front door as it swung open. His Mother, Silvia Winston, walked through and turned towards the stairs. She shouted, "Kendall, are you home?"

"Hell yes!" he shouted in his Mom's ear. She jumped from a combination of surprise and her eardrum hurting. Del smiled at his little joke and hugged his Mom. She smacked him on top of his head.

"How long have you been home?"

"I just got here. Where's Dad?"

"He had to make a few stops this afternoon. He'll be along in an hour or so. We'd like you to be here for dinner please." His Mom's smile had a sly slant.

"Why? Is there anything special happening tonight?"

His smile grew as her expression gave away that she had a secret. She had a lousy poker face. She tried hard to contain the words that he wanted so badly to hear. She almost giggled when she said, "Well, we'll just have to wait and see."

Del whined a drawn out "Mom, just tell me."

"You'll just have to wait. She turned and headed into the kitchen. As she walked down the hallway, she gave a loud, VROOM, VROOM. Then she let out a laugh and turned to Del. "Don't you dare tell your father."

"Mom, you're the greatest." *Fuckin'A. This is so kick-ass.*

Del got on the phone right away and called Sandy. They made plans to go out and celebrate. That meant some booze, some chronic, and maybe some action. Sandy would surely be hoppin' out of her panties once she was in his new wheels.

Twenty minutes later Del heard a car pull into their drive. He'd never heard the sound of this engine before. His parents' cars were both diesel Mercedes. This had a higher pitch to the engine. He looked out his bedroom window and looked down at the bright red Mazda Miata convertible. Like a bullet, he was out his room, down the stairs and out the front door. He nearly knocked his Dad over as he headed for the driver's side door.

"Whoa there, cowboy. Slow down. Before you do anything we have a few things to talk about."

Del wanted to say, "Fuck that; just give me the keys." But he stopped and stood in front of his Dad.

Andrew Winston started his responsibility speech. It went on for several painful minutes as Del tried to look interested. All he heard was "Del you have to blah, blah, blah. And don't blah, blah, blah." Finally, the last blah, blah was finished and Andrew handed Del the keys.

"Cool." Del hopped behind the wheel and started the engine. He turned the stereo up full blast and started to leave when his Dad shouted for him to stop again.

"Son, do you have your license with you?"

Del reached into his wallet, pulled out his license and showed his Dad. Then he said in a sarcastic tone, "Is that all officer?"

"Look Kendall, don't be such a wise-ass. If you want to keep this car, you watch your mouth." Andrew's stern look followed the warning.

Del gave his Dad a salute, put the car in gear and headed out the drive. He made the turn onto Rosemont Drive and accelerated down the street.

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Andrew and Silvia sat at in the dining room playing with their food. Del was late. They waited as long as they could before deciding to start without him. The mood was tense. The conversation was non-existent until Andrew threw his fork down on his plate.

“I told you he’s too irresponsible to have his own car. He may be sixteen but he acts like a ten year old. He’s disrespectful and rude. And he hangs out with the wrong crowd. I especially don’t care for that girl, the one with the gutter mouth and the tongue stud and all the other body-piercings. What’s her name?”

“Sandy. Her name is Sandy. You have to give him some credit. He’s working hard to keep his grades up. He does most of his homework.” This drew a look of doubt from her husband. She kept talking, defending her son. “He is! You aren’t here most of the time so you don’t know!” But she did. She knew she was stretching the truth to say he was doing his homework. But mothers will defend their children. “You have to give him a chance to prove he can be responsible.”

“We’ve tried that, dear. He hasn’t shown an ounce of responsibility.” He looked down at his plate of steak and shrimp. “I think we made a mistake giving him this car. I hope I don’t end up regretting this day.”

Silvia looked indignant. She pushed her chair back and stood. “I can’t believe you’re talking about your own son that way. I’m not hungry. I’ll clean this up later.” She turned and headed for the library. As she walked away, her own fears invaded her mind. Was she too supportive of her only child? Should she have sided with her husband, forcing Kendall to be more responsible? No. She had to trust that he would grow up in due time. Kids had to have time to be kids. He’d have to grow up soon enough.

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Del woke with a start. He felt a sharp pain in his chest. His arms felt like lead. He opened his eyes again. This time he could focus better. Light shown through glass in front of him but it was scattered, like a stained glass window. *Where am I? Why does my chest hurt so bad?* He couldn’t hear anything except a ringing in his ears. He tried to turn his head but his neck was as stiff as a board. He tried to move forward. His strength was there but he felt as if someone was holding him down. He looked down and saw why he couldn’t move. A car steering wheel was tight against his chest. His memory flashed and he saw the road in front of him. He was riding on the yellow no-passing double lines. The road was winding and hilly. The car was moving fast. He saw lights coming in their direction. *Our direction. We.*

Del again tried to look to his right. The pain was so great in his neck but with the knowledge that there were two of them in the car, he had to look. It took what seemed like hours just to turn his head. He was sorry he did. His eyes closed once again. His mind fell into darkness.

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Del drove through the tree lined boulevards until the layout changed to less expensive homes. Finally, his new Miata sped to a neighborhood where the homes were small, mostly three bedroom, one bath with brick veneer facades and car ports. Only about half the lawns in this neighborhood had been recently mowed. Many had no real

grass at all; just weeds and crabgrass. Del pulled into the driveway of an average looking home. He took out his cell phone and dialed Sandy's number.

"Hey, are you busy?"

"Hey yourself. It depends on what you have in mind."

"How about a ride in my new car?" Del was smiling. He knew Sandy would be out in a flash when she saw the car. She loved living in the fast lane and this car said "fast lane" all over it.

"Where are you? You sound close." Sandy sounded giddy when she asked.

"Look out your front door." Del saw the curtains pull back. Within seconds Sandy was out the front door and in the passenger seat.

"Oh my God, this is hot! Where are you taking me? Wait. Never mind. I don't care. Let's just go."

Del took his cue and started to back out of the drive. Sandy's Mother came out the front door and yelled, "Sandy. Where are you going? You've got chores. Dinner's almost ready."

"Mom, I won't be back for dinner. Put it in the fridge and I'll eat later."

Sandy's Mother raised both arms in the air in an exasperated gesture. The message was clear. Why do I bother to do anything for you? You don't appreciate a thing. Then she yelled, "You stay out of trouble, you hear me?"

Sandy yelled back, "Don't worry Mom. I'll be home later."

She turned to Del, "God she can be such a bitch. She doesn't want me to have any fun."

Del thought Sandy was a bit hard on her Mom but he said, "Yea, parents can be like that. My folks suck pretty much. Mom's usually okay but my Dad is such a prick. He's always trying to run my life." Del shook his head as if he had a really tough life. Forget that he'd just received a \$35,000 car for free. That didn't count in Del's mind.

The act wasn't lost on Sandy. She knew Del was born with the silver spoon. She didn't care either. He was fun to be around and he didn't mind spending his parent's money on booze and grass. He was a popular guy in the party scene, even at sixteen.

"So, where are we headed?" Sandy shot a seductive smile in Del's direction.

"I've got a bottle of Crown Royal and Seven-Up in the bag behind my seat. There's some weed under your seat so we're ready to go anywhere you want. There's a party at Ray's. Then I was thinking we'd go up to my folk's cabin.

Ray lived with his Mom who was divorced. She worked evenings and Ray had the house to himself most nights. Because of this there was a party at Ray's almost every night. By the time his Mom got home she was too tired to bitch at Ray. She ignored the mess and went straight to bed. On occasion she had to throw a couple of teens out of her bed in the early morning and change the sheets before she could go to sleep for the day. She used to raise hell with Ray about it but she gave up trying. He'd be out of her house soon enough and things would get better.

Sandy agreed to Del's plans. It was going to be a fun night.

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Bright flashing lights woke Del again. He was in even more pain now than before. His legs ached and his back was stiff. The pain in his chest was worse than before. But all that physical pain was nothing to the mounting mental anguish. He looked to his right again. He felt a wave of nausea overwhelm him. He heaved and blew

a stream of liquid over the steering wheel and onto the dashboard. The scent of whiskey filled the air, mixing with engine oil and gasoline. Tears streamed down his cheeks. He looked again. It was her. Sandy was covered in blood. Her head was stuck in between the windshield and the dashboard. It looked like her neck was gone, crushed into her body. Her head had slammed against the windshield, a spider-web of cracked glass heading in all directions from the point of impact. The flashing lights that were approaching caused a light show in the shattered glass. Del closed his eyes and wished that this was a dream. He opened his eyes again, but the scene was still before him.

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The party was great. There was so much booze that you didn't have to worry about variety. People were pounding shots like crazy. Del's buddy Ray was the hit of the party. The music was loud. The variety was great. Every hot chick from school was there. Even the rich, snotty chicks were there and loosening up, having a good time. The crowd was an odd mix, but everyone seemed to get along.

Del found Sandy talking with some of her friends. Over the music he shouted, "Want to go for a ride?"

She shouted "Hell Yea!" They were both loose as can be and were ready to party even more. On the way out the door, Del grabbed a half-full bottle of Jack Daniels and two plastic shot glasses. "For the road," he shouted to Sandy who screamed her approval.

Del made his way to a winding mountain road. With the stereo up loud he and Sandy traded a couple of shots of JD. Del decided it was time to see what his little Miata could do. He sped up and started taking the turns at faster speeds. Sandy was screaming her approval which only excited Del more. On a short straightaway, he managed to get the speed up to eighty miles an hour. He backed off quickly as he approached a curve but not before his back tires caught the edge of the road. The car fish-tailed but Del somehow managed to maintain control.

He sped up again at the next stretch of road. He got up to ninety-five before backing off. He was riding down the center line when he reached the next curve. The shots of whiskey were catching up to him. He was having a hard time keeping his senses. He came to the next straight-away and told Sandy, "We're going to hit 100. Watch the speedometer." They both watched as the speedometer climbed past eighty, then past ninety. Finally the needle hit one hundred.

Del looked up too late. The next curve was already upon them. The car flew off the right side of the road into and out of a ditch. It hit a tree on the passenger side crushing the right side of the car. The car bounced off the tree back out onto the road, spinning 360 degrees several times before coming to rest in the middle of the road. The smell of gas, burned rubber, and human waste filled the air around the car. The car sat for fifteen minutes before the first car happened by. They immediately called 911 then left the scene believing that there was nothing they could do to save the couple in the car.

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Del heard the doors shut. He didn't know where the sound came from but he saw the flashing lights. He figured it was either an ambulance or a Sheriff. He figured he was in deep trouble, if he lived. His mind was trying to rationalize what had happened but he could make no sense of it.

He heard voices now. What were they saying? He thought they said, "Forget about the girl. She's gone. Check the boy."

Tears again filled his eyes and he blacked out.

Del awoke again as a hand touched his. He was bewildered. He didn't feel a stabbing pain in his chest and his body felt normal, even light. He looked down and the steering wheel was pulled back away from his chest. He couldn't smell the oil, gas, burned rubber, or any of the odors that had filled his senses earlier. The warm moisture that had covered his head was gone. Then the hand gave his a light squeeze and pulled as if to say, come this way. Del panicked. *Am I dead? What's happening to me?*

He looked at the hand pulling at his. It sported a white glove. He followed the arm up to the body. A man with sunglasses in a dark suit and chauffeur's hat stood next to his battered car. The man was still pulling lightly at Del's hand. Del responded by stepping out of his Miata. To his amazement, he could walk. He felt fine. He started to turn around to look at his car but the chauffer led him away and placed his other hand on Del's cheek, directing his face towards his own. The chauffer slowly shook his head as if to say, don't look back. There's nothing you can do.

Del was led to a mint condition, dark black Limo. He figured it was a vintage model around 1959. The chauffer opened the back door and extended his arm, indicating to Del that he should take a seat which he did. When he sat back in the comfortable leather seats, he nodded off again. He dreamt of Sandy. It was a sweet dream of them together, caressing each other on a secluded beach, in perfect conditions. He dreamt that he'd taken Sandy out of her squalid existence and shown her a whole new luxurious lifestyle.

The ride in the Limo was smooth. He asked the driver, "Where are we going?"

The driver didn't respond. He kept his eyes on the road and drove under the speed limit. They approached a train crossing and the lights began to blink. Del heard the sound of a train. The driver slowed then stopped well short of the tracks.

Del asked, "Why don't you move up to the white line? That's where you're supposed to be."

The driver shook his head slowly and remained far from the tracks as the train passed. Del wasn't sure but he thought he heard the driver wince as the engine approached. Then Del sat back and enjoyed the rest of the ride. The Limo pulled up in front of Del's house. It was now daylight. It appeared to be mid afternoon. The Limo driver parked the car, came around and opened the back door for Del. As Del exited, the chauffer handed Del a business card. Del read it. *Second Chance Limo Service*. His eyes welled up again. He didn't understand what it meant but when he looked up again the Limo was gone. He looked down the long drive to his house and saw taillights turning onto the street. He wiped his face with the back of one hand and turned towards the door. What was he going to tell his parents? He wrecked the car that they gave him as a gift. He killed his girlfriend in the process and he'll probably spend the rest of his life in prison. What have I done?

He went into the house and called out in a meek voice, "Mom, Dad? Anybody home?"

He was startled when his Dad hollered from the kitchen, "We're in here, son. Come in. We need to talk"

Del was scared to death. They must have head. I'm in so much trouble.

He walked into the kitchen and saw the looks on his parents' faces. Serious looks. This was it.

“Sit down, son.”

Del sat.

“We have some bad news.”

Del braced for the worst.

“We’ve decided that we’re not going to give you a car for your birthday.”

Del gave them a confused look. To his parents it must have looked like pain, like they were taking away his birthright. Del said, “What do you mean?”

His Mom spoke up, “We just don’t think you’re mature enough to handle a car.” She paused as she were in pain then continued, “You need to take more responsibility for your actions. You need to be more respectful of others. And you need to stop drinking.”

Del’s face twisted into sheer confusion. His mind raced. What was going on here? Had they forgotten about the car? How could they? He said, “Mom, Dad, what’s going on here? I thought you gave me the car for my birthday.”

“We decided against that, Kendall. Remember this is our decision to make. Now, are you going to be here for your birthday dinner tonight?”

“Tonight? My birthday is today?”

His parents looked at him with a worried expression, but a smile came to Del’s face. He reached into his pocket and felt the business card. Then it all started to make sense. Could it be? Was he getting a chance to make it all right? He had to make sure he stayed home tonight. That wouldn’t be too hard without a car.

He turned to his parents, his eyes starting to water, and said, “Mom, Dad, I love you guys.” His next words choked out, “I’ll try to be better. I really will.”

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Del stayed for his birthday dinner, all the while wondering how he deserved this second chance to straighten things out. He went to bed with renewed faith that he was going to be alright. He slept a dreamless, restful sleep.

When he went down for breakfast the next morning, his parents were already at the breakfast table. The expressions on their faces caused him to wonder if they found out that he’d really wrecked the car. They pointed to the television.

Del pulled up a chair at the breakfast table and watched as a reporter spoke to the camera. “A horrible accident occurred in the early morning hours on a winding mountainous road near Front Royal. Two teenagers were killed when their Red Mazda Miata left the road and struck a tree. Their families have been notified. Sandra Vincent, a passenger in the car . . .”

Del’s mouth dropped. If Sandy was killed, who was driving his car?

The reporter continued. “The driver of the car, Raymond Welch, was declared dead at the scene. Police believe alcohol may have played a part in this tragic accident.” The reporter continued with details as Del’s mind raced. Finally the reporter finished, “Jim, back to you.”

“Sherry, do police know where the teens got the alcohol?”

“That is still under investigation but the two left a party at the home of Raymond Welch. Apparently a large party was in progress at the Welch home when police arrived to notify the boy’s mother, who was at work at the time of the accident. She apparently had no knowledge of the party.” The video cut to a scene of Ray’s mother who was sobbing at the news of her son’s death.

“Thank you, Sherry. Such a tragedy.”

Del's Dad said, "It's a good thing you weren't there. That could have been you."

Del didn't hear his father. He was stunned. "I'm not hungry" was all Del could say and he went back to his room. Lying on his bed he stared at the business card.

He shouted at the ceiling, "Where is Sandy's second chance? How am I going to live with myself now?" He closed his eyes but all he could see was Sandy's crushed body and blood-stained face. He rolled over and cried, his tears falling on the card from Second Chance Limo Service.