

A Life of My Own - 4

by J. Mykell Collinz

Unexpectedly, in the middle of the day, my father arrives home, followed by an assortment of business types for an impromptu gathering to celebrate the completion of a profitable transaction. I listen to their conversation from an adjacent room, screening for usable bits of dialogue, as my writing tutor advised.

I hear my father saying:

"A wealth of profitable business opportunities will arise again in this country once the average worker's wages have been reduced to a competitive level in the global marketplace. And until then, my money will make money, as we all did today, by betting on other money, not by manufacturing products or offering services which create high paying jobs."

Unfamiliar voices respond:

"Amazing what people will do when they're starving."

"It's the magic of trickle down."

"Exactly the type of thinking leading us into this mess."

"Middle class workers and working class poor and the unemployed will soon be forming a revolutionary movement to break this stranglehold of corrupt elites."

"Corrupt elites? That's a good one, coming from you."

My father has become obsessed with making money and, in my opinion, he's hanging out with the wrong people. Actually, it's a gut feeling. I could not approach him with it. He wouldn't listen if I tried. And, if he's happy with his new friends, who am I to judge him?

Cautiously, I peer through the doorway into the large front room to get a look at who's there. My father immediately notices and he calls me in. Keeping my eyes glued to the floor, I walk self-consciously to his side. He places his arm across my shoulders and I look up to find all eyes are on me. My mind shifts into overdrive attempting to comprehend what I'm seeing. Expectant faces, faces of strangers, strange faces. My senses saturate with this rush of impressions. My heart expands to accommodate the increased rate

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of blood flow necessary to sustain the accelerated mental activity. My thoughts run together, modulated by hormones, complex emotions, and subconscious impulses I cannot control or even understand.

"What an adorable child," a woman standing next to my father says as she reaches out to gently stroke my bare arm with her soft finger tips, sending a pleasurable impulse tingling throughout my body, as though she had injected me with a euphoric stimulant. Her eyes capture mine. She's glamorous, well dressed, intelligent looking.

"Sonya owns a film and publishing company in Sweden," my father says, squeezing my shoulders for emphasis.

"I understand you want to be a writer, dear," she says: "Save all your early work. That's what I did. Inspiration doesn't last forever. You'll be glad you have it in the future. You can write and rewrite a dozen novels with it once you've developed the proper skills but you can never go back and recapture that original inspiration unless you have it coded into your early works, copious notes, bits and pieces."

I don't trust her. I don't trust any of them. They're after my father's money. Yet I know better than to say anything. Instead, I play along, like I'm interested in making their acquaintance. I count a dozen people overall, including a man and a woman arguing out on the patio and another woman pacing the garden path while talking on a cellphone and smoking a cigarette. They all squeeze my hand, touch my hair, give me a hug, a peck on the cheek, while they collectively smell of perfume, cologne, body odors, alcohol breath, and tobacco.

My early stories portray people who rented houses and apartments from us when I was younger. While my father and I became progressively more wealthy, they went sideways or declined. And a lot of them didn't have much to begin with. I don't see any of them anymore since we sold the business and moved away. But I still think about them, worry about them.

