

What my daughter knows I know or some likely version

by Jodi Barnes

He doesn't call, not even on her birthday. She doesn't mention it or complain. She knows she doesn't have it as bad as some, even in this privileged Triangle of North Carolina. She is white and pretty and belongs to what's left of the middle class.

She has a mother and a stepfather, uniquely neurotic and annoying as hell, but they care. Sometimes too much. Sometimes, she just wants them to stop talking, to stop calling after school or dropping by at work, to stop asking if she'll walk the damn dog or who she's texting, having to know what and why, when she'll be home, or where she's going.

That last one makes her teeth clench. How is she supposed to know *if* college or which one and then what? Claim a major? It's hard enough to pass up a pipe between her pre-calc and AP English classes. A fucking major when she has no idea what she wants to be except not her mother or her sisters who she's convinced don't love her as much as she loves them.

Her two sisters got to bond a whole decade before she showed up. They have a father who loves them. When her dad left, they were mostly grown and slightly relieved. He left *her*--an 8-year-old on Christmas Day. Now she's an only child, the odd girl out, the half sister whose father is a narcissist. So she holds back, ready for them to cut ties.

Twice, she's planned to run away with her boyfriend who she'll admit to everyone but her parents is a jag, but he looks like her dad in a photo someone took when he was 18—before he had hurt anyone.

