

The Monday Wednesday Friday War

by Sturla Grey

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It all came to fruition on the idyllic, verdant campus of a primary school in Bel Air. There were grand redwood trees, two hundred years old and two hundred feet high, fir, Douglas pine, silver birch, towering eucalyptus, cypress, bird of paradise, a full and carefully designed array of succulents: yucca, aloe *brevifolia*, *mammillaria plumosa*, *disocactus*, and palm. There were volumes of creeping ivy, dawn and dusk clematis climbing rose on the vine, gardenia, great sprawling magnolia trees with blooms as large as heads, California oak, wych elm and slippery elm, cedar, juniper, foxtail pine, and pacific dogwood. A persistent, quiet stream flowed through the middle of campus with a quaint and beautiful bridge made of railroad lumber that connected the preschoolers' yard with the upper grades' yard. In the spring, each year in March, mother mallards would hatch their eggs in nests hidden along the banks of the stream and little cotton-ball sized ducklings would emerge, and populate the school with gentle awe. What seemed civilized, was not. What appeared to be regulated by decorum, class (the classy kind, not the echelon kind), and proper rules, was not. Where there ought to have been convention, a clandestine anarchy ruled, and the relentless heat of war among depraved grown-ups made the landscape vigorously unsafe.

Ginny Kenter was new on the scene. She'd brought her brood of two blondies to the school just the prior year, Gabriel, a third-grader struggling in his studies (ADHD), and Zoey, a disjointed little girl with tangled hair just entering fourth, who could not write a legible alphabet. The thing about the Zoey child was this stream of

spasmed facial expressions that would come across her face while she spoke, a sort of tic that lasted a few seconds each time, and dirty fingernails, and stretched out sweatpants she absolutely insisted on wearing every day. The girl had inordinately large feet.

Ginny, the mother, was a lark in every respect of the word. Born and raised in central California farm country, to a family of lower middle class means, educated in public schools in whose bathroom stalls she was deflowered as unceremoniously as a pig taken to slaughter, she was, until meeting her husband Thomas, pedestrian. The mother wore her hair, a tan-blond shade, straight, about shoulder length, parted on the side, unremarkable. She had green eyes, close-set, freckles, a fine, pointed nose and a mouth with thin, pale lips that were set in a line. When Ginny was happy her mouth could open but the lips remained, always set in a grim line, hovering slightly above a chin from where a pouch of skin filled with fatty tissue, though Ginny was not fat at all, simply hung as an unfortunate mass that had come to stay. Ginny wore no make-up, she was Green, in fact the Chair of the Green Committee at the school, she was opposed to containers that could not be reused, therefore would not purchase make-up, felt she didn't need it, instead scrubbed her face each day rigorously with homemade hemp seed soap — biodegradable.

Ginny was famously wealthy, by marriage, to a husband who had created seventeen television series in the span of five years, all spin-offs of the others, an endless web of inanity starring teenagers raised on set, of which the masses from Los Angeles to Delhi could not get enough. Thomas Kenter, wide, tall at six-foot-three, the dichotomy of the couple with a ready smile and an open, affable face that was fleshy and pale and covered with a permanent five o'clock shadow dappled with silver. He wore old, softly and meticulously faded Levi's jeans and drove the blondies to school in his dashing navy blue-on-tan convertible Bentley coupe. The Bentley coupe, a jaunty two-door, got eight miles to the gallon commuting in the city, and its seats, fine calf skin, diamond quilted — which required

fourteen calves to be raised and killed in order to make them, made a carbon impression on the planet that could be calculated as extreme for one unit of transportation among millions. The Volvo SUV which Ginny drove got fourteen miles to the gallon commuting in the city and her seats, made of ordinary adult cows, about seven in order to upholster her transport, had a slightly lesser imprint but not by much, as the length of time to raise an adult cow for their hide took abundantly more genetically modified corn to feed them all as well as their gastrointestinal gasses having pierced the Ozone for a longer period of time than had the calves'. Point this out to Ginny, who bought stainless steal reuseable containers for all four hundred students in the school, in order to dissuade the use of ziplock baggies in lunches — never mind the fact that stainless steal containers would never degrade once they made it to the landfill — and she would balk and keep moving, with a single purpose. Ginny also did not care to recognize that the family's Gulf Stream jet — put to good use for spring break vacations to Maui — burned more fuel in one trip than both the cars combined, for a year. It would be beating a dead horse to go into the amount of animals killed to cover the Gulf Stream inside or to fabricate the Louis Vuitton luggage that held the family's togs, so we will move on.

Ginny Kenter met mother Ramona Rae, the artist, on the first day of fourth grade. Ginny disliked Ramona on the spot. There was an elevated energy there, an optimism that fluttered about on a high-speed setting somewhat like a hummingbird, a twinkle in Ramona's eye that was unstable, giddy even — Ginny did not like it at all. There was a moment when Ginny considered whether Ramona was positioning her self as superior, with her colorful, vintage (*USED* if you wanted to be candid about it) outfits of flowing scarves and vegan platform shoes. Downright *haughty*, Ginny reckoned, no, she did not take to this kind of self-satisfaction from a single mother. Ramona came to Ginny and welcomed her warmly to the school on the first day, she pointed at her own fourth grade daughter, Flora, and suggested the two girls should have their lunches together in

the redwood forest. At the end of the exchange, Ramona horrified Ginny by giving her a friendly hug. Ginny watched in detached revulsion as Ramona's slim and firm ass, and long tapering legs, walked away from her. Later Ginny would scan the school roster and find Ramona there, no address listed, and no husband there either. Suspect, it was, and they were undoubtedly poor — it was decided.

Ramona Rae adhered to the practice of attachment parenting, she had since the day she learned she was pregnant with Flora. Ramona wore her child in a native sling until the child was ten months old and co-slept with the child and listened carefully to the child. When Ramona had discovered she was pregnant from an extended liaison with a man she dated up until it had been disclosed that he was a prominent Scientologist, she thrilled, she was giddy, she was terrified, and then she continued to work in her job as a movie studio publicity executive as though not much had changed. The budding mother looked at how the other women on the lot got it done, and she decided she would have the baby and continue to travel to any country on the map that had a film festival, all year round. No big thing.

Around the end of the second trimester, Ramona had scheduled an extended lunch break to walk over to the studio's *state of the art* childcare facility. Having banked on this resource to keep her income going, Ramona instead found a seismological shift in her mind upon the sight of daycare workers, most of whom looked like drug addicts on prison work-furloughs, in hospital scrubs and surgical masks, handling newborn infants lined up in rows of plastic bassinets. The experience horrified the new mother on a few different planes. One, her livelihood had just been dealt a deathblow, she knew she could not go forward with Plan A, and had no idea how she would support the small thing growing inside her. Two, she dwelt for a few days on the babies in that factory, that people factory, and saw them marching off to war, dutiful little

assembly line babies. A paradigm had been shattered.

So Ramona in that moment became a fierce wolverine, though she did not know it yet. She resolved to work her studio job until the day she gave birth, then resign, then take the awesome COBRA health coverage and the 401K money, and jump of the cliff — to see if she could soar. Ramona created a new profession, making creative and ingenious little artifacts for rich people and selling them — barely earning enough for food and rent. The freedom to breastfeed, she reasoned, made it worth the sacrifice.

The next thing that occurred was, baby Flora was diagnosed with autism just before entering preschool. Ramona moved from wolverine status to Gladiator status. At night, she sharpened her swords to deal with the endless stream of bureaucrats whose job it was to keep her low-income child from receiving cutting edge treatment and intervention. Ramona went to Sacramento. When the Sacramentoans did not heed the cry of her fellow autism parents, they all went to D.C., pounding their drums. In the process of challenging the machine, Ramona learned war. In court, Ramona beat the bureaucrats, and out of court tireless hours of every day were spent acquiring the best medicine and therapy for her little child who twirled and leapt inside the bubble of a multi-layered and complex disorder.

The end result was, though Ramona remained pretty and svelte and savvy, she became ruthlessly intolerant of anyone who was full of shit. Bullshitters were slashed and burned, and Ramona stepped over them with no reconsideration whatsoever. There was no time in the account for dawdling and pleasantries.

As a result of the medical situation combining with the professional situation, Ramona was poor. The little family hovered just above the poverty line while the stud who had fathered the child made money hand over fist producing motion pictures with busty girlies in them.

Not long after being offered a ratty trailer on the back lot of the local public school for her autistic child to be educated in, Ramona pledged that the child would never be placed at the whim of the public institution, which lead in turn to the finest private school being sought, and which in turn lead to the little girl attending the Redwood Forest School starting in kindergarten. They were the very model of a financial aid family, diversity be blessed.

At the beginning, in kindergarten things were placid. Ramona knew mother Alysha Murmur even before the first day of their girls attending school together, as the husband Orin Murmur had been a colleague making movies at the studio prior to Ramona's departure for maternity leave. Ramona had worked with Orin for seven years, shoulder to shoulder, making and publicizing the same films together. In the office, Orin was the guy that everyone liked, and whom no one ever suspected of sabotage. Orin held a loose way of greeting, calculatngly relaxed, laid back even, hands in pockets, and an easy smile that invited friendship. Once, Orin had set Ramona up with his buddy who worked for Nike, who flew Ramona to a U2 concert in Las Vegas and sent her track shoes later on as a thank-you gift. You got good mojo from dealing with Orin, there was nothing not to like.

Orin's wife, Alysha, was a princess, quite literally, descended from Las Vegas royalty — from hoteliers with quite a bit of real estate on the Strip. A classic beauty of the brunette variety, with caramel skin and brown eyes, and carefully perfected carriage. Calm, gliding, still, kind of like a winter lake with ice smoothing out its surface to utter stillness, yet a vicious current swirling underneath. She'd wear light gray flowing cashmere ponchos and suede boots to drop the children at school and always appeared impeccably put together. Orin and Alysha had birthed three little girls, the youngest, Marigold, or Goldy, the middle, Tabitha or Tabby, and the eldest, Dusty. Dusty was in the same class since kindergarten with

little Flora.

Dusty had Orin's face, completely. Dark chocolate eyes on the large side that had a friendly droop to them at each outer corner, and they would grow large with affected interest if a good story was being told. Alysha pulled Dusty's long light brown hair, straight back into a ponytail, which had the effect of revealing and showing the child's large elephant ears. The ears displayed .5 carat diamond studs mounted in platinum. Alysha declared that the child could not wear anything but fine jewelry unless she was to break out in an allergic reaction.

Dusty's dad, Orin, liked Ramona. There could never be an equal footing, Ramona's child could never meet the criteria to be a friend of the family, but Orin had seen Ramona at her best for quite some time, in many different time zones and climates, holding the hands of A-list celebrities, and deftly placing her shield of diplomatic protection between them and the press wherever they went. Ramona was terribly pretty, he thought, in that patently *goy* way, and carried herself like a ballerina. She was vaguely boyish but it worked, and her style was appealing. The male celebrities adored traveling with Ramona, they requested her presence, Orin liked sending her out, and he trusted her implicitly in her professional capacity.

The conflagration at school came about suddenly, though it was brewing for months. Flora had emerged in fourth grade very competent in her studies, excellent in fact, among the top few students in the grade with noticeable academic skill. The girl was so pretty in the face and graceful in the limbs, little boys could not help but think of her extra and pick on her with the hope of getting her attention in return. Where she floundered pitifully was in the social arena. Her disorder made it hard to look others in the face, the pain of it made Flora position her body away from any person she was speaking to, it was reflex. No amount of teaching in the

clinic setting could alleviate the discomfort of people's faces, their eyes looking into her. Noise was painful too, if several girls were chattering at the same time, it would make Flora's head hurt. The toilet was avoided, since the smashing sound of flushing water against the tiles in the closed room would shatter Flora's nerves. She emerged flailing from the restroom, jumping, with no way to simmer down for at least half an hour afterward. As a result of this odd combustion in her sensory receptors, other girls didn't want to play with Flora, it hurt their social profile to do so.

Flora could not tell very well that the girls didn't want her around. She dutifully and blindly went with Dusty Murmur, Zoey Kenter, and a third, fourth-grade girl Tristan Meeks who hung around the first two ring leaders only at their mercy, at snack time and lunch play time. Flora would join them in eating and in playing four square or jump rope. Upon returning home from school she would announce to Ramona that she had "good friends" at school in these girls, a term Ramona knew must be bombastic. Flora was blind in her contentment and Ramona continued to take her to speech and occupational therapy every day and teach her social skills in practicum, though it didn't seem to stick. Ramona adored her time with Flora, they clicked immensely well and understood each other beautifully. It was a glass of cold water whenever Flora appeared suddenly in stark focus at the time context came into play and she was amidst a group of *neuro-typical* peers in any public setting. All of a sudden Ramona would be reminded that Flora was odd, uncomfortable, and autistic.

After some months of what seemed status quo at the school, Ramona was surprised to hear that Flora wanted to be taken to school the next morning half an hour early, at Dusty Murmur's request. Flora, wide-eyed, declared that Dusty must have something very special and very important to share with her, she outright demanded that Ramona get her there before school.

“What is it about, pickle?” Ramona asked, concerned.

“I don't know, she didn't say, but I know it's got to be important! I have to be there by eight!” Flora reinforced.

The following morning Flora disembarked from the car barely pausing long enough to grab her backpack and lunch box. As Ramona watched her flee through the school gate she left all thought of the surprise rendezvous between the girls behind and drove off to meet a prospective client at her art studio.

Then, in the early afternoon, the email arrived. It was short, matter-of-fact and to the point. Blasé even. One of Flora's demonstration teachers, Ms. Rivera was writing.

Dear Ramona,

It began with rote formality that way, no big deal, then continued,

The girls got together and decided they don't want to play with Flora all week now, they are taking a break from Flora on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. We teachers have talked this over with them and agreed with the plan. Just wanted to let you know.
- Mrs. Rivera

Ramona's mind exploded when her eye reached the final line. She heard a battle cry ring out as clear as anything and her warrior nature bloomed a thousand blood red petals in one instant, and the weapons vibrated, present at her right hand side, ready to plough through this bullshit faster than a hot knife through whipped butter. Then, Ramona read the email again, six, seven, eight times, to make sure she comprehended its full meaning, to make sure she got it exactly right. Each pass brought her to a higher ground, where she saw the lay of the land ever so clearly, crystal clear, there was no

reading between the lines. It was all laid out pure, plain, and more outlandish than anything she could have mustered up in her tremendous imagination for what these self-entitled little pieces of shit could get up to.

Ramona was at school fifteen minutes before dismissal, positioned at the front of the car pool line. Her eyes trained on the gate, searching the concrete horizon for a sign of Flora emerging. Children began pouring out, and then there was Flora, walking amongst them, her blonde crown alight with the sun, and her face ashen, smudged, slack, eyes swollen from raging tears, shoulders slumped. Ramona boiled, her blood rowdy for someone to die immediately, for whoever spawned the little Murmur shit to roll under a city bus and have their guts pressed ruthlessly into asphalt like marmalade. Flora slid quietly into the passenger seat of the Volvo with her book bag resting limply on her thighs.

“Are you ok pickle?”

They slowly pulled out of the carpool lane so others could pass. It was silent for a long while, at least twenty five seconds, when Flora began to describe the horrors of the day.

“Mom” — the words jammed up in Flora's throat and her face flushed deep red again, she was gasping for breath, her little chest heaving. Ramona pulled the car over and instructed her child to breathe — she told the child she knew something had happened. When Flora gathered a piece of her breath back she told Ramona of how the girls had marshaled the classroom teachers to ratify a “No Flora on Monday Wednesday or Friday” plan, and this being Wednesday, how the girls had put the plan immediately to use. Flora told of how she sat on the wood railing at play time during the lunch hour and watched the girls play a rousing game of four-square with the others on the yard — because all the other kids were playing with Dusty Murmur, that meant Flora could not attempt to play with

them either. So Flora had sat, and watched, and sobbed, heaving and letting the snot run out of her nose, to the full satisfaction of Dusty Murmur and Zoey Kenter — who felt they had pulled off a master plan which succeeded in hurting Flora Rae, the gorgeous little autistic girl, as much as they could possibly hope for.

Ramona's rage came up at least five times more blazing than it had upon receipt of Ms. Rivera's email earlier in the day. She whipped out her smartphone and typed off a note to Alysha Murmur that instant — informing her the matter was urgent. After the mother and daughter had reached home a text came back from Alysha “Sorry, I was in the doctor's office, what is it?”

Ramona texted back asking was Alysha aware that her child Dusty had orchestrated an ostracization of Flora that left her ridiculed and tortured on the playground this afternoon in front of the whole class. Alysha texted back, diffuse, cool, unattached “That's not what happened.” Flora texted back: “It is what happened, and I can't believe, after our children attending school together for the past five years that you would allow such a thing, we would never dream in a million years of doing anything of the sort to Dusty, nor would I allow anyone to treat your child that way.” To this there was silence. And as a result of the silence, Ramona declared all-out war. She wrote it on the wall in wet dog-shit and she lit it on fire. Flora rather marveled at her mother's white rage, as she heard Ramona say “Those little bitches, you're going to see what happens now Flora — I will not let them get away with this!”

On the north-west side of town a counter-war was brewing. Alysha had called the mother of Dusty's BFF Zoey Kenter, immediately upon receipt of the text from Ramona. Ginny, upon listening to the words Alysha read her over the phone, cracked the widest, brightest smile she had felt peel across her face in a very long time. Ginny had that ungracious, loud-mouthed little hippie mama right where she wanted her at last, in the position of weakness. For a year now Ginny had marveled at how the school

administration *listened* to this irritating nobody with her ideas on how to get better entertainment for the teacher appreciation luncheon or what books they should add to the annual book fair. Ramona Rae wanted them to add, for the love of Christ — *Howard Zinn!* The bitch was a self-identified intellectual and nothing annoyed Ginny Kenter more than an uppity financial aid recipient. The time had finally come for the slut to get her comeuppance.

The Principal, Mrs. Octavia Salinas, wasn't terribly pleased to get the call on her cell phone from Ramona Rae at seven o'clock at night. Ramona was still too hot to take a step back and pace her attack with some good strategy, she had already burst out of the gate with all guns and napalm blazing. Ramona made the uncalculated mistake of demanding things of Salinas, which she had never experimented with before. Salinas was a woman from the projects, who still lived in a modest house in east LA with her husband despite her six figure income as principal of Redwood Forest School. In short, she didn't take no shit from no one and that included demands from Ramona.

Ramona burst forth on a third go-round with a Salinas she felt was not hearing her: "This is bullying, Mrs. Salinas, plain and simple" she said.

Salinas bristled at the word *bullying*. It said something about her, as principal, and she wouldn't have it.

"These are good girls you are talking about Ramona," Salinas pointed out calmly. "You can't say they are bullies."

Ramona broke eggs and shattered glasses moving forward with her weaponry all a-flail: "This is bullying, Mrs. Salinas, let's not try to put lipstick on a pig, the girls are bullying Flora, and something must be done to stop this. We are not going to adhere to a Monday, Wednesday Friday plan — nor any other plan to exclude a child on

the playground. It's *wrong*."

The only relief Ramona got from the call was finding out that Salinas had not heard of the Monday, Wednesday, Friday plan prior to the call and had not yet ratified it also. Ramona was told by the principal that she'd look into it further.

At seven A.M. the following morning Salinas was met at her office door by Ginny Kenter, Alysha Murmur and their husbands, who stood five feet back, each of them on their cell phones talking with Brad Grey and Joe Drake, respectively. Ginny snapped her fingers and clamped her jaw at Thomas as the principal let them into her office, to get the men to come along. Thomas, of course, immediately ended his call and attended.

"*This is what we want!*" Ginny came head first out of the gate before Salinas had had a moment to sit down. "I want this woman barred from the classroom, I don't want her looking at Zoey, and we want this plan *IMPLEMENTED*. It's a fine plan. My child has a right to play with who she wants!"

Alysha Murmur added "Flora has strange, um, mannerisms - it's off putting for Dusty" — although she spoke in support of her child, Alysha felt uneasy with heights of any kind of emotion, and the aggression coming from Ginny Kenter made her fidget.

Ginney interrupted, tearing her hand away when Thomas lightly touched her to try and keep her modulated.

"She's bizarre, she's special needs! Why is it our children's duty to keep her entertained? I'm not having it — you can't *make them* play with her" —

The men sat there in their cashmere v-neck pullover and Façonable button down and looked thoughtfully concerned.

Salinas listened. She didn't care for Ramona either, there was lack of humble servitude about her and it didn't sit well — *la princesa no me cae bien*— she thought to herself as Ginny ranted. She also

calculated exactly \$150,000 in cash money donated to the annual fund for the school rattling around in the pockets of the parents she had sitting in her room.

Ramona was called into the office of the Principal the following morning. When she arrived she was met by Salinas and Dr. Johanssen, the school psychologist, and the teacher, Mrs. Rivera, who had sent the email announcing the Monday, Wednesday, Friday plan. Sitting at the round table in the Principal's office, Ramona could see all their faces in equal measure, Rivera flushed and angry, averting her eyes and angrily writing something in a notebook, Salinas, perhaps even angrier, with shoulders squared and eyes narrowed — and Dr. Johanssen, doodling on a note pad with a freshly sharpened pencil.

Salinas pushed a file folder toward Ramona that had a couple of sheets of paper in it.

“We need you to sign this.” Salinas stated.

Ramona opened the folder and read a contract of sorts. It stated she was no longer allowed to come on campus, contact other parents for any reason, or send teachers emails.

“Are you *kidding* me?” Ramona Rae asked.

Salinas: “No, Ramona. You are no longer to enter Flora's classroom.”

Ramona: “You are fucking kidding me.”

Johanssen: “No, we are not. And I do not like your accusatory tone.”

Salinas: “Your attacking the teacher and then contacting the parent of the child who needs this space has shown me you are not fit to be

near the classroom. You are threatening to the children.”

Ramona: “Oh, really. I haven't talked to any of those children since they were in first grade! I am not threatening anyone!”

Salinas: “With your eyes, you look at them. If you wish to have your child stay in this school, you must sign and obey this protocol.”

Even in unbridled rage, Ramona knew when she was skating on thin ice, and she signed the paper.

Ramona: “What about this Monday, Wednesday, Friday plan?”

Salinas: “ We will be abiding by it also.”

Ramona: “Well I can tell you know — that it will not stand. I will not allow it to stand. I will defeat you.”

Salinas was repulsed by Ramona's directness, it *rankled* her.

Dr. Johanssen: “Sometimes kids need to take a friendship break.”

Ramona snorted audibly. Her facial expression belied a disgust laced with incredulity as she rose to depart.

“This is about money. It will not stand. Mark my words. I am pulling Flora out of school until you cease this disgusting plan of endorsed bullying, and you *will* cease.” Ramona looked like a mad woman as she snapped her head and stomped from the room without saying adieu. Had she a flaming shit bomb to hurl on her way out, she would have hurled it.

Back at home in the quad-level mansion in Manhattan Beach, Thomas Kenter enjoyed a celebratory, and extremely rare, dose of raucous victory sex from Ginny atop their white chenille chaise in

the guestroom on the upper floor. Perched on his prick at a ninety-degree angle, Ginny laughed as she rode it, no less deftly than a Napa Valley cowgirl would ride her pony. As she rode, she saw a dejected Ramona Rae, with soot on her face and her Urban Outfitters combat pants worn threadbare in several places, standing by the side of the carpool lane with a flailing child by her side, holding out a can for alms.

“Wanna turn over so I can do you from behind?” Thomas asked, almost giggling in his sudden good fortune.

Ginny shoved her hand over his mouth and held him down mercilessly, rocking forward for fifteen more seconds until she came, got up, and went directly to the shower to get it all off her.

Alysha Murmur had two hours in the late morning between when the children were dropped at school and Orin left for work, and when the afternoon cooking and cleaning staff would appear for duty. The family lived in a sun-drenched cape cod with seven bedrooms, six baths, a tennis court and pool - and a huge bright kitchen where Alysha spawned her ideas for her motherhood blog. The blog, in its fullness, addressed every mother's daily dilemma: *what to serve the kids for school lunch*. After carefully inspecting all the stainless steel appliances for smudges (and taking note, so as to instruct the staff when they arrived), and checking the countertops for crumbs (Orin's pet peeve was crumbs and there would be hell if he came home to find any there), Alysha sat down to craft her missive to the mothers: The Daily Lunch Box.

Alysha's children each had identical stainless steel compartment trays which each had several two-inch compartments to fit exactly two-inch sized foods. She created distinctive finger foods that would not be messy, and which would inspire the awe of her fellow mothers who read her blog, with the nutritional value and creativeness of them. Alysha would arrange a steel box with items to inspire delight

and envy. Today, she took no less effort in arranging a tray, which she would then photograph and Instagram to her blog and her Facebook page, though the simmering mess at school with Dusty and Flora Rae, washed vaguely through the back of her thoughts as she toiled.

Ramona was at home in the two bedroom bungalow in the gritty arts district in the West Adams corridor, submerged in legal research when the notification popped up on her laptop that a new post had been made by Alysha Murmur on facebook. Flora Rae was at home with her, they had spent the morning eating a leisurely breakfast while Ramona instructed her child how not to crumble, not to ever *ever* crumble, in front of bullies. Ramona went so far as to explain that the most popular kids in school, the ones who have it all together, who dress right and have all the other kids at their disposal, always turn out to be the rotund, bland middle-agers when they grow up. Ramona taught Flora that fame and revolution rested with the misfits, the odd ones, and she listed all the kids from her graduating class in high school who were marginalized all through school, and who had subsequently become celebrities and prominent local politicians. It helped that one such personality had recently graced the cover of every magazine in the nation because of his infamy in womanizing and winning Emmy awards. Flora knew the name.

Ramona had also given the child instruction on how to neutralize a bully bitch without physical violence, only with a cut from the tongue. The mother taught the child three brutal one-liners, to be delivered without the slightest *hint* of feeling, and she instructed her that, once used, the one-liner could never be used again. They rehearsed the one-liners several times until Ramona was satisfied her girl could recall one and deal it out without hesitation should the need arise.

It was after this morning of instruction on how to wrangle bullies

that Ramona was head-deep in legal research as to how she would bury her adversaries. There was always the Americans with Disabilities Act. She found statutes devoted to exclusion and discrimination, several of them, transcribed them carefully in typed pages and found cases from Superior Court which illustrated how they pertained to her child's dilemma at Redwood Forest School.

There was the Office of Civil Rights in the state of California which talked at length as to how schools and institutions that received state funds in any part to conduct their services were subject to strict laws against discrimination. Being that Redwood Forest was a lab school which received state funding from a huge university nearby that used its classes for graduate study, Ramona had her lynch-pin and was ready to go in for the kill. That was when Alysha Murmur's notification popped up with a heartening ding on the computer screen. A new issue of The Daily Lunch Box was ready!

Ramona read the blog ruefully and inspected the colorful Instagram of the foods that were neatly groomed to fit inside the two-inch compartments. There was bright orange Persimmon expertly julienned, half-moons of celery coated with organic almond butter and raisins ("Ants on a Log"), handmade goat's cheese with cherries and dill on small water crackers and heart-shaped open-faced smoked salmon sandwiches with French baguette. Ramona did not stew. She rose, with purpose, and felt lighter knowing that soon Alysha could shove that persimmon right up her carefully-buffed ass.

Ramona got a meeting with the Chancellor of the university and his panel of attorneys remarkably quickly, within two days. She laid out her case. The Chancellor, to his credit, dropped his game face and actually displayed open disgust for the Monday, Wednesday, Friday plan and cordially ordered his head lawyer to contact Senora Salinas immediately and quash the entire hair-brained scheme. Ramona shook hands with each of them before she departed the quietly

powerful conference room and had difficulty containing her sheepish smile, which belied the trump card, the neutron bomb, if-you-will, that was about to fall into the lives of Alysha and Ginny.

Checkmate. The principal didn't concern Ramona as much in the way of revenge. Ramona saw her as a pawn and left her to lay behind the shroud of her concocted power.

A week after the Monday, Wednesday, Friday plan had been returned to the diseased void from whence it had come, the children, Dusty, Zoey and Tristan, sought a way to torment Flora if they couldn't move in a circle sanctioned by the adults to ignore her. When Flora came out to join them for lunch one day, Zoey had instructed her to "Go sit over there and eat your lunch", gesticulating in her spastic way to a vacant picnic table where no one was seated, "we don't really want you here."

Flora stood up straight, looked Zoey Kenter in the eye and said: "I'm glad my heart isn't black and worm-eaten like yours." And she walked away with her head held in a regal posture.

Zoey Kenter would recall that sentence for the rest of her life, each time a thing did not go her way, or she was shunned by other girls or women. It gave her knowledge that something inside her was inherently flawed, and there would never be a way to fix it.

