

GRAYSON SPRINGS

Chapter 1

“Fuck you!” I screamed over Beethoven's sixth symphony—Melanie's high-society choice in music. “You hate my clothes—you, you don't like how I walk, how I talk. You fucking tell me what to eat—”

“I do not tell you what to eat. I make suggestions.”

“Liar! You even tell me how *much* to eat—”

“I do not!”

“And, and now you want to tell me who I can be friends with!”

“Brooke, don't you see what this new school has done to you? You're becoming like one of those—”

“Those what? How can you? *You* do what *you* do and you want to call *me*—”

“What do you mean, what *I* do? What *do* I do?” she shouted while waddling up against me.

“Don't act stupid Melanie—and get the hell out of my face!”

“Don't curse me, and don't call me Melanie! I'm your mother—and I'll get in your face if I want to!”

“You're not my real mother. And if you think I won't bust you because you're pregnant—”

“You wouldn't,” she dared, standing so close that I could feel her spit hit my cheeks.

One instinctive right-hook sent my 43-year-old mother-by-adoption, backwards over Daddy's leather recliner. Seconds later I knew I'd screwed up. She lay there on the floor, on her back, barely conscious, with both hands holding the bulge of her nearly eight month pregnancy. Blood trickled from her nose, and the skin around her left eye had already begun to discolor and swell. “Oh shit,” I whispered. “I'm—so sorry—you were in my face.”

Kneeling on the floor, sitting on my heels, I propped her head up on my legs and thought, *God don't let that baby be hurt*. Her blood dripped onto my black leather Rag & Bone Skinny Jeans.

Eyes still closed, Melanie mumbled, “Help me.”

Anxious to the point of nausea, I pulled out my phone and dialed 911.

* * * One month later * * *

“All rise!” demanded the sheriff's deputy. “This session of the New York Family Court is now in session. Presiding will be the Honorable Judge Bernard Stinson.”

“Please be seated,” spoke the robed, middle-aged man as he stepped to his high backed chair, poured a glass of water, and then took a seat himself. While he settled in, looking down at papers, everybody else in the room seemed to be going about their own business.

I sat there at the defendant's table, next to my attorney, Mr. John Sebastian. He's the only man I know who can dress sloppily in a thousand dollar suit. And to think, he told me to, “Tidy up a bit,” in a Ralph Lauren skirt and jacket. Daddy hired him more than once to get me out of

trouble.

A young, male assistant from the Juvenile Prosecutor's Office winked when he saw me looking. His unsightly, senior counterpart, Mary Anne Glover Esq., could very well have been the reincarnation of Boston's first known witch. When she stared at me over her reading glasses I felt something scary drift between us.

My parents were directly behind me in the first row of seats. Daddy—Dr. George Green—is a sixty-year-old practicing psychiatrist. His thin bony face and long silver hair, tied up in a ponytail, reeks of the mystique one might associate with a man who has for so long made his living treating mental illness. Melanie, beautifully blonde and only days away from delivery, sat leaning against him. Anyone with common sense could tell they were not my real parents—Daddy at 6'1" and her being 5'8". Hell, I'm 5'3" and not likely to ever grow another inch. And my hair is blood red.

Mrs. Jackson, a well-dressed guidance counselor from my school, Stuyvesant High, stared at her cell phone, texting I suppose. The only other occupants in the room were a court reporter, two Sheriff's deputies, the Court Clerk, and in the back of the room, a man I'd never seen before. Judge Stinson kept looking toward the guy and whispering to his Court Clerk.

Finally, the clerk turned and said, "Would the defendant please rise?"

Mr. Sebastian and I both stood, as Judge Stinson began. "I hope we all had a good weekend. Our docket is full today. I want everyone to pay close attention so we do not waste time. If your cell phone rings in my court, it will be confiscated." He scanned the room one more time, and said, "In the case of The State of New York vs. Elizabeth Brooke Green, we are here this morning for the sole purpose of delivering sentence...."

"Excuse me Your Honor," interrupted my attorney.

"Mr. Sebastian, I say we are in a hurry, yet you interrupt."

"May I approach the bench?"

"I must remind you Counselor, that we have already heard this case. If you insist, make it snappy. Would the prosecution approach also?"

I stood there unaware of what was going on. Turning, I received a smirk from Melanie and knew right away that something bad was about to happen. The group up front spoke quietly, until the judge raised his voice.

"Postpone! For how long?"

After more whispering, he blurted again, "Six weeks! You honestly believe six weeks can change this girl?"

A few whispers later, the prosecutor grinned, and my stomach began to churn. As the attorneys returned to their places, Mr. Sebastian winked at Daddy. *Not good*, I thought. *Something tells me I'm screwed.*

Judge Stinson again glanced around the room, and then spoke. "Miss Green, this is in fact the third time I've had to consider your fate. This court anticipates that young people will learn from their mistakes. Yet, with you it is as if you can't even remember the first time you were in trouble..."

.....Hell yes I remember. I was living in hell, that place where no one cared. Having to bathe and sleep with others, older kids who put their hands on me in the middle of the night. They called me evil because I fought. But why shouldn't I? My first time in trouble, I was five-years-old. They sent me to see a lady doctor in a white coat because I surprised a boy in his sleep and beat his face with my fist, over and over until he bled all over the sheets. I didn't talk to the doctor. Didn't talk to anyone in those days. Why should I? I hated them all.....

“Twice,” continued Judge Stinson, “you’ve been granted leniency, and now here you are again. I cannot with good conscience disregard the path of destruction that you have chosen. You first came before this court for theft. Shoplifting at a young age is often seen as a statistic of normal societal behavior. However, I find it most unusual that an eleven-year-old would steal a firearm. You somehow convinced the court that you did not know why you stole the weapon. When you returned at fourteen for beating a classmate, your system had tested positive for marijuana. Could anyone blame Sacred Heart Academy for expelling you? Do you even realize how much money your parents have spent on your education....? How you managed enrollment at Stuyvesant High is beyond me and at least a testament to that institution’s dedication to our city’s brightest students. Most with your IQ would jump at such an opportunity. And now look at you. Despite the patience of this court ... despite the patience of those who care for you—”

Yeah, right.

“—you return for attacking the very woman who has raised you. Do you have no respect for the unborn baby she carries?”

“I feel sorry for it!”

“Do not speak out in my court, young lady,” scorned the judge.

“You asked me a question.”

“I did?”

“You did, Your Honor,” reminded the clerk.

“Well, I didn't mean for you to speak, and do not until I grant you permission....”

Oh my god. What kind of drug is this guy on?

“Miss Green, your excuses for the things you do are as troubling as the acts themselves. One might suspect conditions not revealed in your psychoanalysis. You keep making unwise decisions. May I remind you that the defining difference between me, your father—”

You don't know my father. Not my real father.

“—and anyone else in this room, verses those spending their nights in jail, is discipline. We all think or consider stupid acts sometimes in our lives. But it is those who lack discipline that carelessly act *stupidly* upon their *stupid* thoughts. One must take time to think before acting. Consequences, Ms. Green ... acts of stupidity carry consequences. Do you understand what I am telling you?”

For some reason, I did. And the judge was right. *But, what about all those other stupid people who ruined my life, abandoned me, left me to be abused?* Rather than speak, I nodded slowly.

“And I tell you right now,” rambled the judge, “were you eighteen years old today, I would

likely be sentencing you to time in an adult facility.”

Judge Stinson hesitated, glancing down at the papers given to him by Mr. Sebastian. Looking back up he said, “Now it is my understanding that your parents are requesting a postponement on your sentencing so that you might participate in some rehab program of their choosing. Miss Green, are you aware of this arrangement?”

I stood silent while the judge stared into my eyes. *You’ve seen them before, asshole.* It’s been the same each time I appear before him. He stares and stares. It’s as if I were cursed at birth with eyes so different that everyone I meet looks at me like I’m a freak. Those few seconds seemed forever, like a dream, as I glared back, rapt in what seemed like a standoff. My mind drifted into his, reading some sort of sympathy in his thoughts, and I began to wonder if perhaps he was not as mean as he had let on to be.

“Young lady, do not ignore my question.”

“You ... have not granted me permission ... sir.”

After a deep breath for patience, Judge Stinson said, “You have my permission. Now answer the question, please.”

“No, Sir, I *was not* aware of their arrangements, but I guess I am now.”

“And do you believe that time away in such a facility can bring you back to reality?”

“Is it like the prison I’ve been in for the last month?”

“Prison! Miss Green, I can assure you that the juvenile center you’ve been held in is not a prison. Its conditions are nothing like what you may soon be facing.”

Bite me.

Focusing one row behind me, Judge Stinson said, “I would like the parents of the defendant to stand also.”

Glancing back, I saw the man in back of the room had removed his glasses. He seemed concerned. After Daddy helped Melanie to her feet, the judge continued. “Doctor and Mrs. Green, in six weeks your daughter will no longer be a juvenile. For me to postpone sentencing today, you *and* your daughter must agree that when she returns from the facility you call Grayson Springs, in Kentucky, this Court will have the option of sentencing her as an adult.”

“Kentucky?” I blurted. “How could you?”

“Miss Green,” the judge scolded. “Hold your comments!” After hesitation, he continued, “As I was saying, if your daughter does not come back with a good report and a better attitude, I warn you now that she may be spending time in jail. Not a juvenile center, but an adult facility.”

I turned to Daddy and whispered, “How could you?”

“Do you as legal guardians understand and agree?” reiterated the judge.

In unison, both stated, “Yes Your Honor, we do.”

“And you Ms. Green ... do you fully understand the ramifications of postponing your sentencing as I have described?”

Fuck yes, I understand! They’re sending me back to hell. “Yes, Your Honor ... I do.”

“Good,” announced the judge. “Let the Court make record that the defendant and her parents have indicated they fully understand all that has been said.... Dr. and Mrs. Green, though I have

no control over such, I suggest you avoid contact with your daughter during her time away. She has ignored your good advice, as well as that of this Court and her school advisors. Perhaps time away will do her good. She needs to miss you and to see what she is potentially giving up.” After scanning his calendar, he continued, “Ms. Green ... today is Maaaaaaaay the sixteenth. Your program is to start on ... the twenty-third. Six weeks will put us in the holiday week of the Fourth of July. I’ll not return myself until the following week. You be back in my court on Monday, July the eleventh. I suggest you make the best of your time away. Come back here a changed woman, or your Independence Day celebration will be short lived.... Next case.”

Outside the courtroom, my parents stopped to speak to Mr. Sebastian. Two of my classmates from Stuyvesant were waiting. Jason—dressed in black, decorated with a studded necklace, multiple piercings, and coal black hair—greeted me with a quick kiss on the cheek. “Sorrrrreeee sweetie. It was already started when we got here, so we were afraid to interrupt. You okay?” he asked.

“No,” I answered honestly.

“What’s the verdict?” asked Darleen, a female version of Jason.

“I have to go away.”

“To prison?” shrieked Darleen. Over her shoulder, I grinned at my girlfriend from Sacred Heart, Shauna, a well-dressed opposite to Jason and Darleen, as she hurriedly joined us.

“No,” I answered. “Some place in Kentucky.”

Pushing between Darleen and me, Shauna gave me a hug, and then a quick kiss on the lips. Releasing her squeeze, she backed off and said, “You told me ten o’clock. What the hell happened?”

“They moved it up.”

“And the judge sent you out of state? Can he do that?”

“My parents are sending me there. His *Honor* called it a rehab.”

“Well, if it’s anything like where my Uncle Charles went, it’ll be a resort.”

“Don’t worry girlfriend,” encouraged Jason. “Your parents aren’t going to send their baby girl to a bad place.”

“You don’t know my parents.”

“Brooke’s right,” Darleen agreed. “Her parents suck.”

“By the way,” added Shauna as she took a step back, “you look nice in that outfit.”

“Fuck you.”

Chapter 2

Episodes of disagreement with Melanie often ended with me crying myself to sleep, trying to remember something, anything about my real parents. Who they were? What did they look like? Why did they leave me? My heart longed for what my mind seemed determined to forget. While

counselors and psychologists prodded for details, Daddy, the man who took me away from the dark woods and into the city lights, refused to share things he surely had to know.

For a whole week, the thought of returning to those hills of Kentucky brought back flashes of the bad years, and it scared the shit out of me. It didn't help that I'd seen movies like *US Marshals*, and *Fire Down Below*, where rural Kentuckians were portrayed as a bunch of inbred hillbillies. I anticipated thick skinned, toothless people that drove old cars and hung their clothes out on a line in the yard.

For the trip, I wore my hair up under a Yankee's baseball cap, in a ponytail that hung to the center of my back. My low rise, denim-jeans and a dark blue full length jacket were from Dolce & Gabbana. The smallest breasts in the senior class at Stuyvesant High were covered with a baby blue t-shirt that displayed "Screw the World," a statement hidden from Daddy by my buttoned-up jacket. My handbag was an oversized Balenciaga, and the black Lanvin sneakers on my feet were a seventeenth birthday present from Grandma Green.

Daddy's dialogue free drive to LaGuardia airport came as no surprise. Since being arrested, I'd gotten little attention from him. There never had been a whole lot of talking in the Green household. We lived in an apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side, right across from Central Park. Meals were usually on the run, conversations too scholarly, too sophisticated to enjoy. In a way, I even felt sorry for Melanie. She'd wasted her youth with a man old enough to be her father. I suspected an affair. The woman had been spending way too much time primping for someone—not likely the old husband who spends too much time with patients—and there had been a couple occasions when she cut a phone call short upon my untimely arrival.

As we sat waiting in the airport, near the ticket counter, Daddy leaned forward, elbows on his knees, chin in his hands, and broke the silence. "How has it come to this Elizabeth?"

"My friends call me Brooke, thank you. If you were around enough you'd know that. Even your wife calls me Brooke."

"I'm sorry. Brooke is fine. But please. Tell me why this had to happen."

"Why? Your wife hates me, and always has."

"I'm sorry you feel that way. She's your mother, and she's a good woman."

"Yea right. Pregnant after alllll these years and going to have, 'my own little baby,' in her words. Daddy, do you seriously think that baby is yours?"

"Brooke, don't. Even if ... that would not give you the right to physically attack her. You could have harmed the fetus."

"Oh, my god. You sent me to Sacred Heart Academy, and then call it a fetus. It's a baby for Christ sake ... not just some chemical react—" I cut myself short, realizing for the first time that Melanie's pregnancy might have been derived artificially. "You're right you know, I could have hurt the baby, but I didn't. All I did was give Melanie the reason she wanted—what she needed to get rid of me. If she hadn't been pregnant, I might have really let her have it."

"Melanie and I have spent years trying to pull you out of whatever it is that bothers you so."

"You've spent years trying to fix me. You've never stopped treating me like one of your patients. All I wanted was someone to love me. Every time Melanie tells you I said thiiiiiss, or

did thaaat, you start analyzing. I'm not supposed to be your patient. I'm supposed to be your daughter. You really want to know what is wrong with me? Count all the missed opportunities to hug me and hold me quietly, or just listen to what I have to say about *my* day. All you ever get about me is what *she* tells you. And believe me, she's no shrink. The woman has no idea what is on my mind.”

“I, I do love you....”

“Daddy, do you even know what love is?”

“Brooke—”

“I would love to read your definition of love. Write it down. Text it to me so I can see if you even have a clue.”

“Amazing,” observed Dr. Green. “To think I met you because you wouldn't speak. Now listen to you.”

.....I remember it well. The boy who spit on me during my first and only day in kindergarten. I beat him so badly that they kicked me out. Two days later, a strange man came to see me. He made the ugly people leave the room. At first, being alone with him was frightening. He said he was a doctor, but he didn't wear a white coat, and he was nice. He seemed to understand why I didn't talk. He asked me to draw pictures about how I felt, and so I did, and it made me feel better. That night I did not cry. When the man came back the next day, I knew he liked me. I drew more pictures. On the third day, the doctor asked if he could brush my hair. It was always a mess, tangled. I never let the ugly people touch me. The man gave me a mirror to hold while he brushed. It hurt when he took out the tangles, but I loved the way it felt, someone touching me in a good way. When he finished, he said, “You are so pretty.” I looked into the mirror and for the first time saw pretty. I hugged Dr. Green and said, “Could you be my daddy?”.....

The PA system broke my trance. “Would Elizabeth Brooke Green, please report to the gate 17 ticket counter? Elizabeth Brooke Green to gate 17 ticket counter.”

Daddy had been gawking at my sudden silence. We both stood, and I said, “I loved you because you seemed to understand me. You didn't scream at me for not talking. And when I did, you listened.”

He wrapped his arms around me, squeezed tight and said, “Brooke, honey, I'm not the one who's changed. I still listen, but when I do, you say I'm analyzing.”

I pushed away from the hug and stared at his statement. His grin spoke before he did. “Now who's analyzing whom?” he asked.

I knew he cared about me, but something was missing. *The look of love in his eyes when he rocked me on his knee and called me...* “Daddy, when did you quit calling me Sunshine?”

He looked surprised and said, “Baby I've never called you Sunshine.”

Ughhhhhh. He doesn't even remember. I shouldered my Balenciaga and said, “I've got

to go,” then added, “Regardless of how it got there, it’s a baby. Don’t treat it like a fetus. If you treat it like an experiment, it will not feel loved. Believe me, I know.” That said, I turned to walk away.

“Brooke, wait,” he begged. I looked back and he said, “In all these years, you’ve never quite adjusted....”

“So your sending me back, like a faulty product! You think someone there can fix me?”

“I’m sending you back further than you think....”

“And what the hell does that mean?”

“You’ll know soon enough. It’s kind of like going back in time.”

If only I could, I thought. *If only I could go back far enough to meet my real parents.*

“Try to enjoy the ride,” he continued. “Just be careful. We want you back in one piece.”

“Better talk to Mommy Dearest about that,” I said as I began walking away. Glancing over my shoulder I added, “And don't forget, this was your idea.”

At the Gate 17 ticket desk, an assistant checked my reservation. “Miss Green, we have alternate instructions for you.” As the lady spoke, another woman behind the counter overheard the conversation and interceded.

“Ah yes. This must be our special guest today. Please follow me, miss.”

The employee escorted me ahead of the group of passengers waiting in line to board. For an instant, I felt privileged, like a celebrity. Before entering the tarmac, I glanced back to see Daddy, still standing, watching, looking as if he were heartbroken. He mouthed the words, “I love you.” I blew him a kiss, and then followed the attendant.

Entering the plane, there were greetings from two flight attendants, the plane's captain, and his younger co-pilot.

“Good evening Ms. Green. My name is Captain Johnson. I hope you will find our flight accommodations suitable. After we land, please remain seated until your escort arrives.” I sensed sarcasm. When the pilot turned toward the plane's cabin, his co-pilot smiled, winked, and followed.

As Flight 3056 taxied toward the runway, a flight attendant began announcing instructions over the PA system. I pushed the call button. The second attendant glanced at her partner, shook her head, and then walked toward me. With that, *here we go attitude*, she spoke, “Is there something I can do for you?”

Sensing animosity, I replied politely, “Yes ma'am. I was wondering if I might move to the window seat.”

There were only a handful of passengers in first class, all adults, dressed in business attire. Both seats between mine and the window had been left empty. Apparently relieved at my politeness, the stewardess said, “Go ahead.”

At 10:57 p.m. the engines revved and the scenery outside passed quickly. When the jet airliner tilted upward, I watched my world, my friends, and my Manhattan city lights being left behind. I plugged in headphones, selected music, and then relaxed into the luxurious seat.....

