

EXCERPT

Everyone thinks I was too young to remember what went down that day, but the entire drama still replays in my head as clearly as if it had happened last week.

It was a Saturday morning. I was sitting on the floor in living room eating a big bowl of Frosted Flakes, watching *SpongeBob Square Pants* on Nickelodeon.

Just as I was about to take another bite of cereal, there was a loud BAM! BAM! BAM! at the front door.

Gloria was still upstairs in her room asleep, and had always warned me never to open the door for anyone, for any reason.

Before I could go run and tell her that someone was beating on the door, it exploded open with overwhelming force, and a bunch of men in full riot gear came rushing up into the house waving these big ass guns around.

"Put your hands up!" they yelled at me. "Don't move!"

There were at least a dozen of them. The ones who weren't in full riot gear wore dark blue jackets with big yellow letters on the back of them that spelled out "DEA."

I had no clue why those men had barged into our house, but even at six-years-old, I had seen enough cop shows to know somebody was going to jail.

I did just what they told me to. I didn't move, because I couldn't. I was literally paralyzed with fear, and was so scared, I accidentally peed on myself. My *Hello Kitty* nightgown was sopping wet, along with the carpet underneath my feet.

Gloria ran out of her bedroom to see what the commotion was all about, and screamed, "What the fuck is going on?" and I remember feeling so embarrassed for her. Her Kimono robe was wide open, revealing that she was completely butt-naked. Her goodies were hanging out for all those strange men to see, but little did I know, that would be the least of her problems.

Two of the guys in riot gear grabbed Gloria roughly and wrestled her to the floor. They slapped handcuffs around her wrists, and four different guns were aimed at the back of her head. Even while they were treating her like an animal, she just kept talking to me calmly, saying, "Cherry, everything is gonna be alright; Everything is gonna be alright," over and over again, like her voice was stuck on repeat.

Some of the men spread out, and searched the house from room to room, while a few others stayed behind in the living room to keep their eyes and their guns on me and Gloria.

I listened as the DEA guys tore our house up from top to bottom trying to find whatever it was they were looking for.

"Well, here's Mr. Navarro!" I heard one of the men shout from deep within my mother's bedroom. Then they brought Julio out into the living room. Julio was Gloria's Mexican boyfriend, and like Gloria, he hadn't had time to get dressed, so black socks and tighty-whitey drawers were all that he had on. Julio's face was twisted with a look somewhere between anger

and confusion. "Hey man, somebody wanna tell me what the fuck this is all about?" he demanded.

The DEA guys all laughed like that was the best joke they had heard in a long time. Julio protested, but they hauled his ass away in handcuffs, right along with Gloria.

I kicked and screamed bloody murder as a man in what looked like a white spacesuit came towards me. He picked me up and carried me outside to an older, black woman with silver hair, who I later learned was a social worker.

"Don't you cry now, everything will be just fine," the woman said, settling me into the passenger's seat of her car.

But it wasn't going to be okay, they were taking my mother away, the mother who fed me and brushed my hair into neat braids before school, who took me on shopping trips to downtown Los Angeles with music on full blast, and who'd spritz me with perfume when I came into the bathroom at the right time.

She was all elegance, wisdom, and togetherness to me. At that time, my mother was my whole world, and my heart ached because I had no idea how long it would be before I saw her again.

I sat in the social worker's car while she talked to the DEA guys, and tried not to cry as they sectioned our house off with yellow crime scene tape.

Old Mr. Burton from across the street and other nosy ass neighbors stood outside their houses watching everything go down, and they all took turns talking to a reporter from Channel 8 news as if it was the highlight of their boring ass lives.

At the time, I didn't know Julio was a big-time drug dealer, and that the "DEA" on those men's jackets stood for Drug Enforcement Administration.

I also didn't know the authorities suspected my mother of being a big part of Julio's drug business, but I remember the last words she said to me: "Don't cry Cherry, it's all right. I promise you, everything is gonna be all right..."

But Gloria and that damn social worker both lied, because everything did not turned out to be all right. Things wouldn't be right for me, from that day forward.

Later that same night, the social worker delivered me to Grandma Hazel's doorstep, which was the very same house that my mother had grown up in, in the middle of a rundown neighborhood that had seen better days. Grandma Hazel politely thanked the woman for bringing me to her house, but the second she closed the door behind her, she poured herself a shot of booze and tossed it back in one gulp, without even flinching.