

A SOUL FOR SALE
a true story

Carol Kornacki

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A true story by Carol Kornacki

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This book is dedicated to Aaron and Abigail.

My precious ones, you have decorated my life. Words cannot sufficiently express the love that I carry in my heart for you. You have loved me unconditionally and brought me unspeakable joy.

My prayer is that when you have read this book, you will understand that all the pain and agony I've suffered through the years came to an end the day I met the Lord and then held each of you in my arms.

And...

Lorraine Araquistain

This book would be incomplete without a special thanks to you.

How many times you said these words: "Carol, your life story needs to be told; it gives hope to a hopeless heart."

Lorraine, you have spent the whole of your Christian life investing in souls. Whatever it required, you made the sacrifice!

I believe this book is part of your work! Great is your reward.

Acknowledgments

Marilynn Kornacki Bonner

I love you baby.

Linda Smith

This story might not have ended as it did, had you not answered the call to rescue me. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for loving me when I was unlovable, for reaching out to me when everyone else had given me up for dead, and for leading me to the only “One” who could give my life back to me.

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“A friend loves at ALL times” —that is you, Jackie.

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Your work on this book has been a big undertaking. I see your fingerprints throughout it. Thank you for your tireless work and dedication to “getting it right.”

A very special thanks to *Phil Blanks*, your friendship is priceless!

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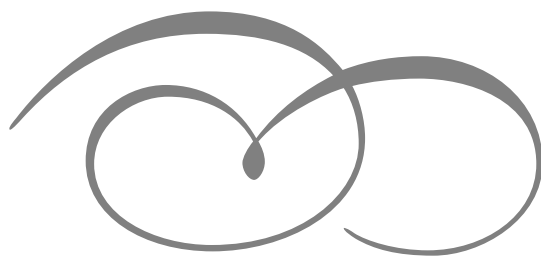
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Introduction

The pages you are soon to turn will lead you through a storied past. All of the people you have known and the stories you have heard may well pale in comparison. This is the story of an often frightening, always tragic, life full of chaos and surreal circumstances. This is the tale of a compromised spirit, a searching soul and a broken woman. Turn the next pages and you will be committed to a journey that rivals any I have known or heard of! Easy to read and sometimes hard to digest, there is a powerful message contained within; I have never been the same since hearing it, I don't think you will be either.

Christi Cross Fenton



CHAPTER ONE

A Dead Girl Walking

The Arrival

*W*e drove through the city streets without speaking. Every now and then, I could hear Richard sighing. He had agreed to come with me, but I suspected he was having second thoughts.

When we arrived, the parking lot was packed. After circling the building at least three times, he spotted an open space and raced over to get it, cutting off a person who was about to pull in. He shut off the ignition and we sat there staring out the window. Then he said, “Carol, before we go in here, can I ask you a question?”

I avoided looking at him. “Sure, go ahead.”

“For the last six years, you have been practicing witchcraft. You do incantations, cast spells, read cards and communicate with the dead. Don’t you think that this is a bit out of your league?”

I was annoyed at his question. “Yes, in fact, it is way out of my league, Richard. However, I’m curious. You agreed to do this. You’re not backing out now, are you?”

He shook his head. “No, I’m not, but I think coming here is a waste of your time.”

“That’s a laugh. According to the doctor, I’ll be dead soon. So tell me, my husband, does it really matter how or where I spend my time?”

Rather than answer my question, he reached under the seat and pulled out a bag. “Before we go in here, I’m getting high.”

I snickered, “We’ve been on a perpetual high every day for the last ten years!” In spite of my sarcasm, I wanted a hit as badly as he did, if not more.

He opened the plastic bag, stuffed some of the contents into a pipe, struck a match and drew the smoke deep into his lungs. Then he passed it to me and I did the same. The stuff went right to my head. I let out a soft sigh and sunk down into the seat. Complete silence.

A few minutes later, he sat up, put his stash back under the seat, opened the car door and announced, “I’m ready; let’s go.”

“Wait a minute,” I protested, “give me a second. I need to pull myself together.”

He slammed the door shut, pulled a cigarette out of his pocket and fired it up.

A Killer Virus

I flipped down the visor and gazed at my ragged reflection in the mirror. I ran my hands over my face, pushing the long stringy hair away from my eyes. My eyelashes were crusted and glued together from day-old mascara. I attempted to rub it off, but it smudged—great, now I looked like a vampire! I pulled up my sleeve and looked at the fresh needle marks on my arm. They were raw and sore. I spit on my finger and rubbed the blood-streaked puncture wounds.

I was a “shooter.” I had been putting drugs in my veins for a long time. However, it never occurred to me that some of the needles I shared were infected with Hepatitis B. Now I was carrying the deadly virus in my body and it was slowly destroying my liver. The resulting jaundice was evident through the sickly yellow tint of my skin and eyes. I never felt good; I had a constant dull ache on my right side and most of the time I was fatigued. I was undernourished. My body was thin and frail; my skin hung on my bones like a draped sheet.

Repulsed, I slammed the visor shut!

“Maybe this wasn’t a good idea after all,” I blurted out.

“Does that mean you want to leave?” Richard asked anxiously, his hand on the key, ready to start the car.

“No, wait,” I mumbled.

“I wish you would make up your mind; go or stay—which one is it?”

I shook my head, trying to clear my jumbled thoughts, and took a deep breath. “Okay,” I said, “I’m ready; let’s go!” I opened the door and stepped out. My legs hurt, and I could barely stand on them.

Richard came around the car. “You okay?” he asked. “You don’t look so good.”

I steadied myself and replied, “I’m fine.”

“You might want to close the front of your shirt, you’re hanging out.”

I looked down and sure enough, my breasts were exposed. I tugged at my dirty shirt in an attempt to cover them, but to no avail, it just popped open again. “Hey, if these people don’t like the way I am dressed, too bad,” I snapped.

Richard tossed his half-smoked cigarette to the ground and grabbed my hand. “You’re fine. Let’s get this over with!”

We dragged our feet through the parking lot to the entrance and went in. The crowd was enormous; people were walking around in all directions. Some were hugging each other and saying weird things like “Praise the Lord.”

Richard had a quirky look on his face. “These people are freaks,” he whispered.

We began looking through the crowd for a sign of Linda Smith; she was nowhere in sight. I could feel people staring at me as they passed us by. I stared back at them with cold eyes that reflected “nothingness.”

I Am an Addict

Yes, I was a drug addict and it didn’t happen overnight. It took me ten long years to achieve that status. My drug of choice was anything and everything; if you had it, I would take it. By mouth, in the arm or up the nose—did not matter. My most frequently used word when getting high was “more.” Pot, heroin, coke, meth, pills—they ruled my life!

This driving madness possessed me every hour of every day. My arms were a graveyard of collapsed veins and rock-hard calluses. Each day, like a dog returning to its vomit, I performed the same ritual. First, I put the powder into a spoon, added a little water, and then put a flame under the spoon to dissolve it. Then I drew it into the syringe. Meticulously, I searched my arms, hands and feet for an entrance. It was difficult because my veins were so badly damaged. When I found one, I pierced my flesh with the needle and watched hungrily as the syringe emptied into my arm. My blood stream was like a rushing river that carried

the dope to my brain. Upon impact, I was breathless—what dopers refer to as a “rush.” And it was pure ecstasy! Every fiber of my being was drenched in an indescribable warm liquid high. I was completely oblivious to the world around me ... in the no-pain zone! The downside? In a few hours, the drug would lose its effect, which meant that I would be back out on the streets searching for ... more!

The Grim Reaper

Wherever there is drug addiction, the Grim Reaper is stationed close by, waiting patiently for his next victim. He knows it is only a matter of time. I have seen him a few times. Once, he was lurking in a dark corner of the room, watching me as I collapsed to the floor after injecting too much heroin.

He wears a floor-length black cloak with a pointed hood pulled over his head. Around his waist is a belt made of rope. His face is a human skull, void of skin or muscle, and his eyes are empty black sockets. His feet and hands are skeletal. In his hand is a sickle; it has a long wooden handle. At the end of it is a razor-sharp blade. His voice is ominous; when he speaks, it sounds like he is talking through a hollow tube. His words are threatening: “Soon you will be mine! Then I will take you to hell, where suffering is eternal!” His laughter is bone chilling.

He is Mr. Death!

At times, the sight of him gripped me with fear. At other times, I challenged him. “Go ahead, take me. I am not afraid of dying!”

“In time, my pretty, in time,” he cackled as he slipped away into the darkness from whence he came.

The Reaper's Victims

I knew countless people who died because of drugs. Addicts reaching for the ultimate high inject a lethal amount into their veins, and the next thing you know, they are on the floor, dead as a doornail! The majority of drug dealers are murderers and they have no conscience. Greedy for more money, they cut the drugs with dangerous fillers. Unfortunately, some poor addict in a hurry to get high doesn't taste it. Once it is injected, well, then it's too late!

I knew a guy named Billy, who gave his young girlfriend a shot of what he thought was heroin. She flew against the wall and went into convulsions. Then she lay still in a heap on the floor with her tongue hanging out. Billy stood over her in shock. She looked up at him with a death stare, her eyes wide open. Turns out the drug was cut with battery acid.

Violence lives on the streets where drugs are sold. All too often, the exchange turns ugly and somebody winds up getting wacked (killed). However, that never stopped me from wandering into these dangerous neighborhoods to get drugs. I did whatever it took and never gave it a thought that I was risking my life. When I got the drugs, I took off out of there as fast as I could. The sound of gunshots or an addict lying on the curb, wounded and begging for help, didn't slow me up. I just kept going, leaving the suffering and death behind me. Clutching my drugs as if they were gold, I pressed on in search of a public john where I could put the stuff into my starving vein.

"Another One Bites the Dust"

I can't count the many times I was informed of a car

accident that claimed the life of someone I knew, and it was often related to drugs.

My friend Pam was one who didn't die in the accident but wished she had. While partying one night, she and her boyfriend, Jeff, accepted a ride home with a guy that was stoned out of his mind. He couldn't walk or talk—the guy looked like a zombie. The car they were riding in was traveling at a death-defying speed, on a slick rain-soaked highway. Pam and Jeff were in the back seat smoking crack. Without warning, the car skidded out of control. It lurched from side to side, hit a guardrail and shot out into an open field. In that wide-open field, there was but one solitary tree, just one, and the car was headed right for it ...

At impact, the driver hit the windshield; he was killed instantly! The doors flew open and Pam and Jeff were ejected out of the car. They went sailing through the air like rag dolls and hit the earth with a thud.

The dewy wet landscape was now dotted with two mangled bodies. The creatures of the night fell silent as the sound of groaning was heard from the injured and dying. Ambulance sirens roared, rushing to the scene of the accident, their red lights flashing. Police marched through the high grass with glaring flashlights in search of the victims.

Three people got into the car that night. Only one survived.

When I walked into the intensive care unit to visit Pam, I was shocked at her appearance. She suffered a ruptured spleen, liver damage, as well as broken arms and legs. After a long hospital stay, followed by months of therapy, Pam was released. But she was never the same. Sadly, a few years later, she died of an overdose.

There is an old song “Another One Bites the Dust.” The song rang through my head at her funeral; she was twenty-two years old.

Funerals

I hated funerals with a passion! I used to tell my friends, “Listen, when I’m dead, just toss me in a dumpster and make it simple.” For me, viewing a dead person is morbid. Therefore, in order to attend, I had to get pretty stoned ... and Pam’s funeral was no exception.

The putrid scent of the embalming fluid made me sick and the place reeked of it. I crept over to a chair in a corner to hide, hoping I would be invisible. Watching and listening to the family wail was disturbing. Even worse was the sight of a distraught mother with her body draped over the casket, sobbing.

After hiding in a corner for as long as I could, I got the courage to make my way to the coffin to pay my last respects. Lying on a bed of satin with her head resting on a soft pillow was the shell of someone I once knew. As I viewed her lifeless figure, I asked myself the same question over and over again: *When I’m dead, will anyone weep for me?*

R.I.P.

After the viewing, I followed the slow procession of cars to the cemetery. While the others walked over to the gravesite, I sat in my car with the windows open, listening to the eulogy. The priest read a bible verse, then turned to the family and assured them that their dearly departed was now at “eternal rest.”

When it was over and the last car had left the cemetery, I sat alone. That is when I spotted him standing behind one of the tombstones, carving a new notch into the wooden handle of his sickle: the Grim Reaper. His sardonic laughter filled my head.

“Eternal rest for the dead,” I murmured, “I doubt it!”

Linda Finally Shows Up

Richard and I were getting antsy, standing around waiting for Linda to show up; besides, the big crowd made us super paranoid.

Richard was ready to leave. “Okay, Carol, where is your friend Linda? I thought you said she was going to be here to meet us.” He yanked on my hand, “Come on, let’s get out of here. These people are a bunch of loonies and this place gives me the creeps!”

I agreed and we headed for the door. Just as we were about to exit, I heard someone call my name.

“Carol, over here!”

I whirled around. It was Linda! She came rushing over, smiling from ear to ear. She hugged us both and then led us through the crowd to a row of empty seats. After we were seated, she explained the order of the service.

“The music will begin in about an hour—”

Richard interrupted her. “Wait a minute, *an hour* before this thing starts? Then why are we here so early?”

“Richard, this speaker draws a big crowd, so I wanted you to get here early enough to secure a seat.”

There was aggravation written all over my husband’s face, and to be honest, I was not keen on the hour-long wait either.

What the Heck Kind of Place is This?

Linda suggested we walk around before the service started and meet some of her friends. I assured her that we were fine sitting there but insisted that she should go ahead. As soon as she walked off, Richard got up.

“Carol, I feel weird. I am going out for a smoke. Do you want to come along?”

“Why are you leaving?” I whined.

“If you think I am sitting here for an hour, you’re crazy,” he replied.

Before I could say another word, he was out the door.

With nothing else to do, I looked around the building. It was very modern. The carpets were colorful and the seats were padded. It looked more like a conference hall. *This is a strange church*, I thought. It did not have any statues or a crucifix with Jesus hanging on it. Instead of an altar, there was a platform with musical instruments and a Plexiglas podium. I wondered if this was not some sort of a cult.

I had only attended one church in my life and it was when I was nine years old. It was a massive old stone building with huge hand-carved wooden doors. Posted on each side of the entrance was a marble angel, each holding a bowl of “holy water.” It was customary upon entering or leaving the church to dip your finger in the water and make the “sign of the cross.” Inside the dimly lit building, ornate lamps hung down from the high cathedral ceiling. At the front of the church was a lavishly adorned, gold and ivory altar. Over this costly altar hung a large wooden cross, upon which was placed a plaster depiction of Jesus. He had

wounds painted on his hands and feet, and there was a hole in his side with blood coming out.

God Answers Prayer?

I was taught that when I prayed, “He” heard me and would answer my prayer. I was also taught that He was everywhere and saw everything. So if I sinned, I risked falling into His wrath!

Knowing this, I strove to be good, because I wanted God to answer my desperate prayers. I not only prayed, I prayed with passion and deep conviction. I pleaded with God to put a stop to the violent fights between my parents. I prayed that we would have more food to eat. I pleaded with Him to heal my dad’s mental problems and depression.

Sometimes, as I knelt on the hard pew, I would beg for forgiveness for letting that man sexually abuse me. I knew I could not tell anyone because he would just deny it. Therefore, I cried out to God. I was ashamed and I felt dirty. I wanted God to make me feel clean again.

My most fervent prayer was for my mother. I prayed that the ice around her heart would be shattered and that she could learn to love me.

For one whole year, I hung onto the promise that God hears and answers prayers. I waited for changes that never came. I concluded that my prayers were not heard by God or that He just didn’t care!

God is Dead!

One warm spring morning after mass, I sat on the pew and stared up at the cross above the altar. “How can a dead man hear my prayers?” I whispered.

I had sent so many faithful prayers up to heaven, but they were ignored. I couldn't hold back the tears; they came gushing out of my eyes and pouring down my face.

My humility and brokenness suddenly turned to bitterness and rage. I addressed "Him" with burning questions. *If you are God and you see everything, do you see me eating out of garbage cans because there is not enough food at home? And, when my father's belt tears the skin off my legs, doesn't that bother you?*

I buried my head in my hands and cried.

Then I stood to my feet, raised my clenched fists toward heaven and uttered this defiant prayer:

From now on, I will not depend on you for anything! I am going to make my own rules, and whatever it takes to survive, I'm going to do it! You are not a savior; you don't care about my soul. So, as of right now, my soul is for sale and I intend to sell it to the highest bidder!

I grabbed my sweater off the pew and stormed out of the church.

Meet Linda Smith

Linda and I met at the Poets Lounge, where I worked as a waitress and she was the nighttime disc jockey. From the first time I laid eyes on her, I sensed she was "different." The girl was just too nice! In addition, she did not hang out with the crew after hours, and although drugs flowed through the place like a river, she stayed clear of them. She shunned gossip and never used foul language. Strange! Besides that, she was a knockout and could have had her pick of any man in the place, but every night she went home to her husband, to the dismay of all the men who lusted after her.

So why was a girl like that working in a cheaters' bar? Curious, I posed the question to the bartender.

"Hey Ray, what goes with Linda? She is so straight!"

He laughed. "Haven't you heard? Linda is religious."

I was surprised. "Really? Tell me, how does God feel about her working in a bar?"

"I don't know; if you're interested, why don't you go over and ask her?" Ray suggested.

I shook my head and replied, "No thanks, I don't need to hear any of that religious crap."

Weeping Waitresses

On the job, Linda never tried to shove her "religion" down anyone's throat. Good thing, because I did not want to hear it, and I was prepared to tell her off if she started talking that jive mess to me! Still, she intrigued me, so I watched her from afar.

One night I overheard her talking to one of the waitresses. The girl's name was Leah. Seems Leah had an affair with one of the customers who frequented the Lounge. Her husband got wind of it, slapped her around and then filed for a divorce. Leah was crying as she explained to Linda how it all happened.

"Working in a place like this makes it hard to be faithful, Linda," Leah explained. "Everyone is drinking and partying. One thing leads to another and before you know it, you're doing things you regret, only by that time it is too late."

I pretended I was busy, but believe me, I was listening to every word.

"You must think I am an awful person," Leah sobbed.

Linda corrected her, "No, I don't!"

“Will you pray for my marriage, Linda?”

“You can count on it, Leah,” Linda assured her.

As I watched this drama unfold, I wanted to laugh out loud. *Give me a break, what a crock! Prayer is a joke and Linda is a Jesus freak*, I thought to myself.

Though I felt like the whole prayer thing was a waste of time, most of the girls that worked in the Lounge didn't agree, and they genuinely liked Linda. None of them hesitated to come to her for prayer, advice or a shoulder to cry on. On any given night, before the place got busy, you might see Linda off in a corner listening intently as one of the girls poured their heart out to her. Linda did not repeat things entrusted to her, and in a place like Poets Lounge, that was major!

Ray

Ray was the bartender. He was a handsome guy with a smile that boasted rows of pretty white teeth. We worked together on the night shift. We shared stories, jokes, insults and drugs. As time went on, we became good friends and we looked out for each other. When Ray lost his license for drunk driving, I made the long trip to drive him home after work at four in the morning. When my car broke down in a rainstorm, he was the one who crawled underneath and got it running again.

Ray loved to mock people, so I found it surprising how he would jump to Linda's defense when I made fun of her. For example, I noticed between sets, she had her eyes closed and her lips moving. Thus, I brought it to Ray's attention.

“Hey, check out Linda. I think she's up there praying. She's a strange bird!”

Instead of joining in, he responded, “Carol, I need all the prayer I can get, and by the way, so do you!”

Ray, I Think I Am Dying

Some weekdays, Ray and I would volunteer to work the lunch shift. One afternoon, following a busy lunch hour, we finished our chores and stood around in the waitress station, drinking coffee and chatting. I noticed he was staring at my face.

“What the heck are you looking at?” I asked.

“You look like you have lost weight and your skin is a funny yellow color. You feeling all right?”

I ignored his question, but my pensive behavior only stirred his curiosity.

He pressed on for an answer. “Well, Carol, are you going to tell me? Is something wrong?”

I took a deep breath and answered, “I have Hepatitis B. My skin color is a symptom of it. The doctor said my liver is drying up.”

Ray set his coffee cup down on the counter and leaned in to get a closer look. “Yeah, I noticed it about a week ago; the whites of your eyes are really yellow.”

“Yes, I know. Besides that, I have peptic bleeding ulcers.”

He looked surprised. “When did you find all this out?”

“I had tests; the doctor called and talked to Richard,” I answered.

“So, what are they going to do for you?”

“I'm not sure. They have this new medicine that helps to heal ulcers, but the liver thing is very serious.” I looked around to make sure no one was listening; this sort of thing

could have cost me my job. “Ray, you can’t tell anyone about this!”

“I won’t,” he promised, “but I suggest you lay off the hard stuff or you’re going to land up six feet under.”

A Night at Poets

It was Saturday night at Poets Lounge. Every table in the place was taken and people were five deep at the bar. The sound of music, laughter, and buzzing conversation filled the place. On the dance floor, couples were swaying to the beat of the music. Linda was up in her box playing piped-in music between the live band sets.

I spent half the night in the john doing lines. I’d come waltzing out with white powder lacing the inside of my nostrils and my eyes bugging out. Still, I kept up with the demands for drinks and food that were coming at me with rapid speed. My feet would have been killing me, given the exhaustive work, but the cocaine kept me numb.

I signaled to Ray, letting him know that I had left a stash for him in the bathroom. He disappeared for a few minutes and then returned, buzzing from his “coke jolt.”

Somewhere around four in the morning, he made “last call.” It was time to get the people out the door and clean up the place.

When I finished prepping my station, I sat down. I slipped off my shoes, poured my tips out on the table and started counting. Ray was finishing up behind the bar. I called over to him, “Ray, make me a 151 rum and coke, will ya?”

“You don’t need a drink, Carol; you’re wasted, and besides, the insides of your nose are snow white.”

“Just give me a drink, Ray,” I insisted.

He made the drink and slid it across the bar to me. “You better take it easy,” he warned.

Linda Makes Her Move

About this time, Linda came strolling over. She had a steaming cup of coffee in her hand and a big smile. “So, did you make out good in tips tonight?” she asked.

“I did all right,” I answered. “I thought you’d be on your way home by now, Linda,” I said, hoping she’d go away.

“Do you mind if I sit down for a minute?”

I told her it was okay, but I was lying. I wanted her to get lost. I tucked my money into my purse and took a swig of my drink.

“You look tired, Carol; are you okay?”

“How do you mean?” I asked suspiciously.

She moved her chair closer to mine. It made me uncomfortable. “Well, I heard you’re sick and I wondered if I could help.”

I felt like someone sucked the air out of the room. “Who told you that?” I bellowed.

She looked over to the bar where Ray was cleaning up. I thought I was going to blow a blood vessel. She reached over to touch my hand; I pulled it away.

“Carol,” she said tenderly, “I’ve been praying for you.”

“Listen here, Linda,” I said, my voice dripping with venom, “I don’t want or need your stupid prayers. I’m not one of these flunky waitresses who cry on your shoulder. My life is none of your business!” I raised my glass in the air with a mock toast, finished the contents and slammed it down on the table.

Betrayed

I stood up, grabbed my purse and shoes, and left her sitting there. “And a good night to you too, blabbermouth!” I shouted to Ray as I stormed out.

In the parking lot, I fumbled with my car keys, opened the car door and jumped in. I was shaken to the core. “Who does Linda think she is?” I mumbled, “And Ray selling me out? It’s a freaking conspiracy; those jokers are going to get me fired!”

I drove down the road, pressing the pedal to the floor. I ran a red light and hit the curb. Finally, I pulled over. I couldn’t think straight. I reached in my purse and pulled out my stash. I sent a load up my nose. The drug hit me fast and hard. But it didn’t make me feel any better.

“Why won’t people just leave me alone?” I whimpered, “I don’t want to be rescued.”

I pounded my head on the steering wheel. The harder I slammed, the better it felt. The pain I inflicted was more bearable than the pain in my heart. I felt a warm liquid trickling down my forehead; I wiped it with the back of my hand, spreading blood all over my face.

The Kiss of Death

Ray had betrayed me and it hurt.

The next afternoon, I put a lot of dope in my vein. As soon as the stuff got in my system, I knew it was too much. The room started spinning. I could not catch my breath. I grabbed the tub and slid down to the floor. I could feel the drug running through my body, slowing down the functions. My heart was beating very slowly and my breathing was shallow. I decided to relax and let it happen.

As I tumbled down into the abyss, I could hear a faint voice in the distance calling my name, pleading with me to “come back!” Someone was shaking me and forcing me to walk. My heart picked up its pace and I could breathe again. I just barely opened my eyes and saw my husband standing over me.

“Carol, I thought I lost you. I was sure this time you weren’t coming back!” He lifted me up, carried me to the bedroom, and gently laid me down on the bed. “We have got to stop living like this! You almost died ...” His words were etched with emotion.

My tongue felt thick; I could barely speak. “I’m okay, Richard,” I whispered. Within minutes, I fell into a deep sleep.

When I woke up, Richard was not there. I kept seeing the look on his face, sheer panic. I knew this time I had really scared him, but truthfully, I wished he had let me die.

My Grandfather Died (Again!)

My liver hurt, my joints ached and I had a horrendous pounding headache. I called the manager to get out of going to work.

“Kenny, my grandfather died. I have to go to the funeral.” I was trying to sound grief-stricken.

“I thought you said he died a few months ago.”

“No, that was my other grandfather,” I argued.

“Yeah, but last year you told me your grandfather died too,” he argued back.

I knew that he was at his wits end with my excuses.

“Okay, Carol, I know you’re lying. You got three days off. After that, you’d better get your butt in here or you’re

out of a job, you understand?” He slammed the phone down in my ear.

Three days went by quickly, but I knew if I did not get back to work, I would be fired. So I pulled myself together and went in. When I strolled into the waitress station to get ready for the busy night, Ray spotted me and came over.

“Hey, I heard your grandfather died, *again*. Let me see, is that the fourth or fifth time?”

“Ha, ha, very funny.” I was annoyed that he was amused.

He didn’t stop. “Carol, I suggest you start killing off your grandmothers if you’re going to ask for time off!”

Ray was funny, and he had a point. I gave in and laughed with him. That broke the ice between us over the Linda thing. Nevertheless, later that night, I confronted him about it.

“Ray, why did you tell Linda what I told you? You know that if management gets wind of my condition, I will be out of a job.”

He began his defense. “Listen, Carol, I was just trying to help. Linda doesn’t repeat things; she would never put your job in jeopardy.”

I questioned him, “How did you think she was going to help me?”

“I don’t know; I guess I thought she might pray for you,” he answered sheepishly.

“Are you nuts, Ray? Prayer is a joke and so is she!” I turned and stomped off.

Something the Cat Dragged In

Three nights later, on my day-off, I wandered into the Lounge. I was stoned out of my mind. I was wearing a pair of slinky black pants that had slits down both legs, a glittery

gold tube top that barely covered my breasts, and oversized hoop earrings to finish off my ensemble. My arm was streaked with blood, and my mouth was stained with dried saliva. I looked like something the cat dragged in.

I stood at the door, teetering on my stiletto heels. Someone tapped me on my shoulder; it was Linda.

“Hey Carol,” she was shouting to be heard above the loud music, “are you okay?”

I smiled smugly and walked past her. Ray saw me coming toward the bar and came right over.

“Man, Carol, you look wired! You need to go home and sleep it off.”

I glared at him. “Give me a vodka and orange juice.”

He leaned over the bar. “You don’t need a drink.”

“I am a paying customer tonight, and I want a drink, Ray!”

He poured a glass of orange juice, topped it off with a dribble of vodka, then brought it over and set it down in front of me.

“I asked for a drink, Ray, not an O.J.”

He looked me up and down. “What exactly are you dressed for? It’s a bit early for a Halloween costume, wouldn’t you say?” he snickered and walked away.

Mistaken For a Prostitute

I pushed the drink across the bar and left.

Outside, I stood in the middle of the parking lot, looking around for my car. I could not remember if I drove there or if I was dropped off.

I started walking down the highway, heading towards a bar up the street. It was a dark black night, not a star in the

sky. I felt a raindrop and then it started to pour.

I tripped and fell headfirst into a ditch filled with water and mud. I hit my head on the side of the hole. Immediately, a bump formed on my forehead. I was feeling dizzy from the fall, so I plopped down on the curb. I had broken off the heel of one of my shoes and was fumbling to try to reattach it.

I was blinded by headlights; a car pulled up. It stopped and I heard a man's voice.

"Hey honey, I am looking for a good time. You working tonight?"

"I'm no prostitute, you moron!" I shouted at him.

"Well if you're not, you sure look like one," he retorted as he took off, spinning his tires and sending a blast of mud and gravel in my face.

I slowly got up on my feet, still wobbling with the broken heel, and tried to walk. I had lost all sense of direction.

Again, bright headlights blinded me. This time, it was not the guy looking for a good time; it was the cops. An officer got out of the patrol car and approached me.

"Lady, what are you doing wandering the streets at four o'clock in the morning? Let me see your I.D."

I was dazed and confused, but managed to reply, "I think I lost my purse, Officer."

He took me by the arm and led me to the car, put me in the back seat, and took me over to the local precinct. When he put me in a cell to sleep it off, I went crazy.

"Why are you locking me up, you freaking jerk? You are infringing on my rights. I didn't break any laws."

"Shut that hole in your face," the officer ordered, "before I ship you downtown."

I continued to rant, peppering my insults with obsceni-

ties. Within an hour, I was transferred downtown to the holding center for prostitutes.

A Night With the "Girls"

I woke to the sound of shuffling and movement. I was lying on a cold concrete floor. My head was throbbing and I had a big lump on my forehead. My clothes were covered in dried mud and I only had one shoe on. I heard a female voice addressing me.

"Come on, honey," the voice cooed, "we know you're holding, and we know where you got 'em hid."

I rubbed my eyes and tried to focus. I was surrounded by a bunch of prostitutes. The taller girl got down on the floor next to me. I could smell her cheap cologne. She pressed her greasy face against mine. I turned my head in the other direction.

"I am not holding, and I don't have any drugs hidden in my body crevices," I told her.

She kept it up. "Girl, unless you haven't noticed, you are all alone in here, and I could put a hurting on you!"

I had no doubt that she could easily hurt me; she was much bigger and stronger. However, this was not the first time that I was confronted by someone who was threatening to beat me up. I learned early on that you never back down; it might mean that you are going down, but you never show fear!

I pulled myself up off the floor, took a deep breath and stood tall. I glared directly into her eyes. "Now, you listen to me," I declared boldly, "like I said, I ain't holding, and I don't scare easy, so back off!"

I was expecting her to nail me; instead, she stood there

staring me down—still, I did not flinch!

In the corner, sitting against the wall, was a woman; she let out a howl, exposing a mouth of rotted teeth, and then said, “Oh my, this little white girl ain’t scared of you, Jessica. No way, she is standing right up to you!”

The girl backed off. A few minutes later, my name was called and I was released.

Shut Up, Ray

When word got around the Lounge that I had been picked up for loitering and jailed with prostitutes for the night, I became the brunt of all the jokes. A few times, I threatened to punch someone in the face if they didn’t lay off.

“Don’t get so mad, Carol,” Ray chuckled, “you landed up in the tank with a herd of prostitutes. People are going to rib you about it, so just take it in stride.”

As for Linda, the church lady, I had both guns loaded if she dared to approach me. I intended to ward her off with more four-letter words than she had heard in a lifetime.

Strangely, she never said a word about it.

Ray kidded me though. “Hey, Carol, I think Linda has increased her prayers for you since your night in the clink.”

I was angry and defensive. “Buddy, if anyone here needs prayer, it’s you!”

Ray’s voice turned serious. “Yes, you’re absolutely right! I have a lot of issues, but I’m not the one who is dying, am I?”

Supernatural Power

One night when leaving the Lounge after work, I spotted Linda in the parking lot. I pretended not to see her and

quickly got into my car. I started the engine and began to pull away, but a tapping on the window startled me. I looked up; she was peering through the glass.

I rolled down the window and asked, “What do you want, Linda? I am in a hurry.”

“Carol, I just wanted to invite you to one of our Friday-night services.”

I started to close the window and replied, “No thanks.”

She put her hand out to stop it from going up. “There are people getting healed by God.”

“Getting healed?” I mocked. “Linda, you must know how crazy you sound!”

She stepped back. “Do I, Carol? You’re involved in witchcraft and you operate in supernatural power, right? What’s so hard to believe that God can and does heal people?” she asked.

I forced the window closed and drove away, leaving her standing there.

After that encounter, Linda barely talked to me. She was cordial but distant, and believe it or not, it bothered me!

Ray noticed and commented, “Did you and Linda have a falling-out?”

“What makes you think that?”

“Well, she usually has coffee with us, and she hasn’t come near the waitress station lately.”

Okay, I will go!

A week later, I strolled over to the disc jockey box. Linda was busy putting things up for the night. She turned around and I was standing there.

“I have decided to come to one of your meetings.”

A SOUL FOR SALE

She raised her eyebrows and asked, “Oh really?”

“Well, I am interested in the supernatural. I have read about witch doctors that can heal people. I also studied Edgar Cayce. He fell into trances and diagnosed illnesses. I’m intrigued with that sort of thing.”

Linda seemed amused at my comments. “Okay, the church is on Union Road in Orchard Park. I would suggest you get there about six.” She smiled and went back to what she was doing.

If I was expecting her to jump for joy over my decision to attend one of her “religious meetings,” I was wrong; she didn’t.