

# Sisters

---

**John Boston**

The first thing Jennifer Desaltis remembers upon opening her eyes was the fact that she was in pain.....like real pain. Her entire body was screaming at her, mainly her legs. She had no idea where she was or how she got there. She looked over at the ventilator pump and she quickly realized she was in a hospital. Something horrible had happened to her. She wasn't sure how long she lay there in that bed in agony until a nurse came in. It seemed like forever.

"Where the hell am I?" she said softly

The woman who was mopping the floor looked up at her as if she had just slapped her.

"Oh, you're awake. I'll go and get the nurse," she said and left the room. She returned a few minutes later with another woman.

"Jennifer? My name is Katherine. I'm the RN for this wing. Do you know where you are?"

"I'm in a hospital."

"Yes, St Mary's in Springfield. I'm going to call your parents and give them the good news. They've been spending so much time here, they needed a break. They had to return to work."

"What? How long have I been here?"

"A little over two months. You were in a terrible car accident. You're very lucky to be alive."

Jennifer started crying. The tears just rolled down her face. She was too weak to wipe them off.

Katherine wiped them away and then propped her up.

"You were given a second chance at life dear. Somebody upstairs likes you. I'll call your parents."

"Wait.....the guy I was with. I remember giving him a ride home. He worked in the same building as me. His car wouldn't start, so I gave him a ride home. Is he okay?"

"I'm sorry Jennifer. He died in the accident," said Katherine as she left the room.

"Could be worse kid. That poor bastard next to you.....he's a vegetable. Probably will be for the rest of his life. You got off pretty easy compared to him." said the janitor as she continued mopping the floor.

It took all of her strength to wipe away her tears. Part of her just wanted to close her eyes and go back to sleep forever. She had been asleep for over two months in a medically induced coma and yet, she had a hard time staying awake. She was afraid if she went back to sleep, she might not ever wake up again.

The only thing she could remember about that day was discussing why skittles were the best candy ever with Preston, the guy who worked in the warehouse. She remembers offering him some skittles and then seeing his face go as white as a ghost. She heard what sounded like her car being ripped apart, then nothing. Two months, one week, and six days later, here she was. Couldn't even stand up on her own without assistance. Lost thirty pounds. She was at rock bottom. As hard as it is to believe, this wasn't the lowest point in her life. Things would only slowly get worse.

Her parents came in and threw their arms around her. She had never seen her father sob before. He was bawling like a four year old in the supermarket who didn't get their candy. Her mother, Anne, wasn't much better. It was then that the seriousness of her situation began to sink in.

*"You in some deep shit here, girlie."* she thought to herself.

When they were finally more composed, they sat down next to her and held her hand.

"I think we all need to thank the good lord for what he'd done here. We thought we lost you, Jen," said Paul, her father.

"Just know we love you, dear. Paul, she's tired. She needs her sleep."

"Will she ever wake back up?" he asked

"Comas don't work that way, Paul, once you wake up, you don't fall back into a cationic-like state. It's a one-way trip," said Katherine who was smiling.

"Well, thank God for that. Thank you, dear Jesus. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for bringing Jennifer back to us. I owe you a big one here."

Jennifer motioned to her mother. She leaned into her.

"I've never heard dad pray before," she whispered.

"He's prayed every night since the accident. He's even begun to attend church. We both have. We've made a lot of changes since that night Jennifer."

"Guys, I think Jennifer needs some rest. Her vitals are getting stronger by the minute. She should be much better by morning."

"I'm staying with her Jen tonight honey. Roll out the cots Katherine," said Paul.

Jennifer cracked a smile. It had been so long since she had seen her father happy. She drifted back to sleep in less than a minute. She had only been awake for a few hours and she was already exhausted. Being in a coma can be exhausting.

The next few days were a blur. Jennifer began to slowly improve. On Friday, she finally got up out of her bed and walked down the hallway with a walker to use the bathroom. It was humiliating. She wasn't even thirty and she had to ask for assistance to clean herself. The staff at the hospital was excellent. They did everything they could to assist her. It was as if they were all one big family.

The next week. She was bathing herself and going to the cafeteria on her own. She got Katherine a hug thank you card. She was like an angel watching over her. Somehow, she knew if it weren't for Katherine, she wouldn't have pulled out of her coma.

Jennifer was transferred to another hospital the next week that dealt with physical therapy and rehabilitation. It was a grueling two months, but she could at least walk on her own with a cane. Others have pointed out, it could have been much worse for her, at least she could still walk on her own.

The hospital had given her two CT scans and a rather lengthy memory and IQ test to see if she had any brain damage from the accident. She did well on the test and her scans showed no abnormalities of any kind. All in all, she had been extremely lucky. Luckier than Preston, luckier than some who are in accidents.

Everything was finally beginning to return to normal, or some kind of quasi-normal. Perhaps normal might be too strong a word, less painful might be more appropriate. Jennifer was starting over from zero. She felt ok, not great. She would still get pains in her legs and lower back from the accident. An MRI showed her to have a pinched nerve. The last thing in the world she wanted to do was to go under the knife again, so she told them to give her some pain pills and she would deal with it. It was on that rainy afternoon when her mom threw her the first of what would be many curveballs.

"You know, you haven't asked about Gwen?" she said as her mom picked her up from therapy.

"Who's Gwen?"

Her mom nearly lost control of the car. She gave her a deadly serious look and kept driving.

"She's your sister, Jen." her mom said with a very serious tone.

"Mom, I don't have a sister."

"Yes, you do Jen. She's a year and five months younger than you. She's in medical school. She has some very important exams to take, otherwise, she would be here with us." she said as she pulled into their driveway.

"Mom.....I don't know who Gwen is. I would think I would know my own sister."

"Oh, dear God. Here I thought everything was okay."

"It is."

"No, it's not. Jen, she's been calling non stop asking about you since the accident. She was about ready to just fly home and I told her not to. She's worked too hard to get where she is, I didn't want her to throw it all away."

"I'm pretty sure the medical school would have understood."

"The exams cannot be made up. You either pass or you fail. She's worked so hard to get to where she is, I just didn't want her to fail now, not when she's so close to the finish line. You really don't recall anything about her? Nothing?"

"No mom, I don't. I don't understand how my memory can be perfectly fine, but I forget I have a sister? That doesn't make any sense."

"No, it doesn't. Look, maybe it will come back to you in time. Please, for me. Don't let Gwen know you don't remember her. It would kill her."

"Mom, why haven't I talked to her on the phone?" asked Jen

"I just assumed you did."

"Mom, I've never talked to her. My cell phone survived the accident, somehow, but it works. She never even tried to call me."

"Jen, she's very busy. She goes to Johns Hopkins Medical School. It's extremely competitive."

"What does that have to do with her not calling me?"

"She is in the middle of her residency. She works 24-hour shifts sometimes. It's brutal."

"Is she married?"

"No, no. School came first. Not that she hasn't had her share of boyfriends over the years. No one that made the cut though. She's still single. Once she graduates and completes her residency, then she'll get married. First things first."

Jennifer listened to her mom describe a total stranger. The more she talked, the more convinced Jennifer became she had a sister. Of all the things to lose in the accident, the memory of her sister, all 26 years of it, seemed far-fetched. Still, she could not understand why she had not tried to contact her. Just a simple five-minute phone call. Maybe her parents knew she didn't remember her. Maybe there were other things she couldn't remember either. Maybe they were trying to protect her. She was amazed to discover that her own sister's phone number was not in her contacts list. That also seemed odd. Jen quickly realized listening to her mother and the fact her own sister's phone number was not in her phone, that the two of them could not have been very close. Her mother was describing Gwen as if she weren't a real person, but almost like a

superhero. Graduated first in her class from high school, valedictorian of her college class, valedictorian of her medical school. An all-star athlete, who runs marathons. Then there was Jen, who barely graduated high school and did two years at community college. Hard to believe they were in the same family.

"Just give it a little while Jen. I'm sure you will remember her eventually. One thing's for sure: Once you meet Gwen Desaltis, you won't forget her."

Jen went to sleep that night listening to her mother sob in the bedroom next door. She could hear her father trying to comfort her. Then he would start sobbing and they would switch. Jen tried and tried. No matter what she looked at, nothing came back to her. It was like she was looking at a complete stranger. Gwen was pretty. She remembers taking many of the photos and yet, she could not recall her sister being there. She recalls the time they all went to Disneyland for the first time and her dad threw up on Magic Mountain. She was 16 and Gwen was 15 in the photo. She remembers the character who took the photo. She remembers what she was wearing that day because it was unusually cold in southern California. How can she recall those minute details, but not recall her sister being there? It just didn't make any sense. She recalls winning her softball championship when she was 10. Gwen was in that photo as well. Nothing. She hit a brick wall with this one.

She heard her phone ring and was delighted to see it was her friend Angie from work. Jen had discovered that she had no real friends outside of her work friends. She had been single for almost three years. Her life had been stuck in a major rut. Angie was one of the bright spots. They had cubicles next to one another and worked customer service for a major communications company. When they weren't on the phone with customers, they were chatting or texting with one another.

"Hey girl.....when are you coming back to work. His place sucks without you."

"Next week. I get to use a handicap parking space."

"Lucky you. I miss you girl. I'm so glad you're okay. I cried my freggin eyes out when I heard you were almost killed. I prayed to Jesus and Allah and Buddha and even a few others. I guess one of them listened."

"Hey, Angie. My memory is still a little fuzzy from the accident, but did I ever talk about my sister?"

"No.....I didn't even know you had a sister."

"Neither did I apparently. I never mentioned her to you, not even once?"

"No, I don't think so. Don't worry, I got a younger sister too, did I ever mention her to you?"

"No, no I guess you didn't," said Jen

"Yeah, she's in the Air Force in Japan. We don't really get along. I talk to her a few times a year, that's about it."

"Okay, you got a point. I'll see you next Monday."

"Love you bitch. Miss you," said Angie and hung up.

Jen held up a photo that was taken just last year at a family picnic at Lake Tahoe. She and her sister are holding up some fish they caught, with their father beside them. She remembers catching those fish. She remembers how surprised her dad was, he almost fell out of the boat when he saw the size of the trout. She remembers it like it were yesterday. She doesn't recall anyone else being there, no one, especially Gwen.

Jen went back to work the following week. Everyone was waiting for her to pull in. She got a cake with some presents. She lost it. She felt closer to her co-workers than to her own family. After twenty minutes or so, she sat down at her cubicle and began to take calls.

"I told them not to touch a damn thing. I told them you'd be back," said Angie in the cubicle next to her.

Just like that, she was back to her old life. Back to her long days and boring nights. A few of her co-workers asked her to join them for drinks when they were finished, but she declined. She was still not a hundred percent and didn't think a night of boozing was going to do her well. She hadn't touched alcohol since she woke up. She wasn't sure what kind of reaction she would have with the medications she was taking. She just turned off her computer, went back to her car, and drove home, like she had done every day before her accident.

Much to her surprise, when she arrived home, she saw her cousin Janine at the kitchen table waiting for her. Janine was younger than she was, but the two of them had always been close. Jen paused before throwing her arms around her.

"Did you forget I was black?" she asked

"No, it's just so good to see you. How long are you in town for?"

"A few days. I have to help my aunt move back with us," said Janine.

"I'm glad you're here. I missed you."

"I want you to know, we prayed for you every night. I cried myself to sleep the night my dad got the phone call. When your mom called me and told me you woke up, I cried again, but this time they were tears of joy. That's never happened before. There really is such a thing. I'm sorry no one came out to see you when you were in the hospital. We were all in shock. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Don't think for a second that we weren't thinking of you." said Janine with tears in her eyes.

"She called every night asking about you." her mom said.

"It doesn't matter. Here I am. A few more weeks and I should be back to normal. Won't be doing any running anytime soon, but other than that, I'm back to my old self." said Jen

Janine gave her another hug. The phone rang and her mom answered.

"Oh, it's Gwen. I'll let you two catch up," she said and took the phone into the living room.

"Janine.....I'm not a hundred percent. Not really. I'm fine, except for one little thing."

"What's that?"

"I have no memory whatsoever of my sister. She's a complete stranger to me. I look at every photo of her and nothing. It's gone."

"Oh my God. You mean like amnesia or something," she said in shock.

"Something like that. I just can't figure it out. How can I remember everything else, but not my own sister? Like the time you stole candy from that store and I pretended to be your mom and spanked you in front of the cashier so he wouldn't call the cops."

"You remember that?"

"Sure do. Or the time I was babysitting and you got your hand stuck in that canning jar. You were quite a handful when you were younger." said Jen

"How can you remember all that, but not remember you have a sister?"

"The mysteries of the human mind I guess. It's like I woke up in some alternate universe. One that was very close to mine, but just a little different. What can you tell me about her?"

"Gwen.....well, I don't really know her that well either. I mean she's cool and all, but we're not really that close, not like us. She was always busy or doing something when I was growing up. She never did babysit me. Not once. She told my mom, it was a waste of her time and her time was valuable. Just like that. My mom almost blew a gasket." said Janine.

"My parents are being so weird about the whole thing. You know, I haven't even talked to her since I woke up. She's never even called. Never texted, or emailed me, nothing. My mom says she calls all the time and asks about me, but I don't believe her. I don't think she cares if I live or if I died."

"Of course she cares. I talked to her one night after the accident. She was a mess. I've never seen your sister cry before and let me tell you, it was nothing but waterworks. She even said, she wished I had been her in that car and not you."

"Really? Well, why hasn't she called me then, or tried to get in touch with me?"

"I don't know Jen, but it's not because she doesn't care. She's kind of self-centered."

"I kind of already figured that out. Still, not calling me or anything. It just kind of hurts. Tell me, were my sister and I close when we were growing up?"

"I don't know. Not really. You never really mentioned her. Good or bad. Hey, you want to play the new Vice Cop game? I've got it on my phone." said Janine.

Jen's mother came back into the kitchen. Jen figured she would hand her the phone, instead, she just said goodbye and hung up."

"Mom.....what the hell? I haven't talked to her since I got back."

"Jen, your sister thinks it's a good idea for you two not to talk to one another until your memory returns. She knows it's difficult for you, but she says it's the best thing. Your memory has to return on its own. She doesn't want to jeopardize anything at this point."

"I think I can just say hi."

"Honey, she's the doctor, not you. If she thinks it's for the best, it probably is."

"Mom....why won't you let me talk to Gwen?"

"I just told you, dear.....she doesn't want your memory to get any more screwed up than it already is."

"My memory is just fine. I remembered everything. Even my password at my work computer. Kind of odd that I can remember that, but not remember having a sister?"

"Jen, please. She only wants what's best for you."

"Whatever. I just think the whole thing is weird."

"Yes, you have made that very clear. Now, what am I making for dinner?"

Jen noted that every time she brought up her sister, her mother would just change the subject. So did Janine. It was as if everyone just wanted to pretend things were normal when clearly they weren't. Nothing about this was normal. Jen went to bed angry. She was being lied to. Whether she talked to her sister or not didn't seem to make any difference to the rest of her family.

She slowly got back into a groove. Thank goodness she had health insurance. Her hospital bills were in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. After the deductible and copays, the entire hospitalization and rehab cost her just 4500 dollars. Not that she could pay any of it. The billing staff let her pay a hundred dollars a month. She hoped to have it paid off within a few years.

She had been back to work for a month. She tried to block it out, but she just couldn't. It kept eating away at her. She told herself that she should just forget about it. It wasn't worth getting upset about. If her sister wanted nothing to do with her, then so be it. She had her own life and her own friends, not many, but a few. It was quality, not quantity that mattered. She may not have many close personal friends, but the ones she did have, she'd storm the gates of hell for them.

Another two months went by. She noticed that her parents just seemed off. Something about them wasn't quite right. Her mom stopped talking about Gwen entirely, as did her father. Every

time she brought her up, they quickly changed the subject or got very angry. Finally, Jen had enough. She was going to confront her whether she liked it or not. The rage that had been building for a few months, was now ready to explode. She had nearly died and her sister didn't even think enough of her to call her and talk to her? That was messed up....that was beyond messed up. That was punch-worthy.

Her mom had last told her that Gwen had gotten a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study under the chief of surgery at Mercy General Hospital in Dallas. It was a four-hour drive from her house. She gassed up her car and left for Dallas right after work on Friday. She didn't know if her sister would be there. She searched the web for any news about her sister and was surprised to find nothing, not a trace of anyone named Gwen Desantis. She didn't understand how her sister could be the rock star she was and there is no mention of her anywhere, nothing. She checked the Johns Hopkins Medical School website and there was no mention of Gwen Desantis. Her mother told her she was class valedictorian. She thought it even more unusual that the class valedictorian was clearly not her sister. Also, why didn't anyone in her family go to her sister's graduation from medical school? That's a big accomplishment. Maybe they did and just didn't tell her, which pissed her off even more. Enough was enough. It was time to meet Gwen. She told her parents she was going to a concert and would be back Friday. She also realized that she needed to move out and be on her own. In the past few months, she had been home. She had noticed a change in her parent's behavior. It was like they were now just empty shells of people, with no purpose or anything. Some days her mother would just sit and stare at a blank computer screen. Sometimes she would be crying. Jen asked her what was wrong, but her mother just brushed her aside and told her it was nothing. She wondered if it was dementia or something, but it was both of them, not just one. Her father would come home from work and just sit in his recliner and drink a glass of wine. Sometimes they would discuss their days, sometimes they would sit in total silence. It was almost eerie. Jen had to get out of there and find a place of her own. Something was wrong in that house. Something was very, very wrong, she just didn't know what. Maybe talking with Gwen would clear it up.

She drove for over four hours by herself. It was just her and her old Ford Escort. This is how it was. Almost thirty and single. Almost thirty and nothing to show for it. Almost thirty and no guy would even look twice at her. Maybe that was for the best. She didn't understand why women thought being with a man was going to magically fix everything that was wrong with their lives. Sometimes it did. Sometimes it just made a bad situation worse.

The medication had completely killed her sex drive. She tried to get excited by watching porn videos, but it was no good. The pills that blocked the pain receptor, must have blocked all sensation. She couldn't even play with herself anymore. She decided on that trip to just stop taking the meds. They seemed to do more harm than good. Anything that kills your sex drive cannot be good for you. She didn't need a doctor to tell her that.

Mercy General is an enormous complex spanning four buildings that were the size of warehouses. It had started to rain and by the time she parked, it was pouring out. She didn't think to have an umbrella, she was going to get soaked on her way inside. She found the visitor center which was staffed 24 hours a day. She tried to dry herself off and walked over.

"Hi. I'm looking for Doctor Gwen Desaltis. I'm her sister, Jennifer Desaltis. She's kind of new. She just started here a few weeks ago."

The woman looked at her computer screen, then looked up at Jen.

"You're certain she works here?"

"Yeah. My mother talked to her a few weeks ago. She told her she was interning with the chief of surgery and would start on Monday. That was almost a month ago."

"Well, I don't mean to burst your bubble, but there is no one named Gwen Desaltis that works in this hospital."

"That doesn't make any sense. I'm sure she said Mercy General in Dallas. Is there another Mercy General in this city?"

"No, we are the only one."

"Then she has to be here. She works overnights. She's an ER Surgeon."

"Well, I know all of the ER staff personally and there is no one named Gwen on that staff. The last person to join the staff was hired about eight months ago. I'm sorry. Why don't you just call her and ask her where she is?"

"She won't take my calls. Is there another person on this staff named Gwen. Maybe my sister has a different last name."

"You don't know the last name of your own sister?" asked the woman.

"There's a lot of things about my sister I don't know. I'm sorry I wasted your time," she said. As she was turning away, the woman stood up and put her hand on her shoulder.

"Look, I'm not supposed to say this, but last year, we had a guy just walk in here and pretend to be a doctor. He did this for four days before we figured out he didn't work here. He actually prescribed medication for people and it was filled by our hospital pharmacy. Needless to say, things changed big time after that. Our CEO put everyone's picture on a huge board in the middle of the hallway by the fountain. Everyone and I do mean everyone from the volunteers who donate their time, to the surgeons has their name and photo on that wall. If your sister works here, she'll be on that board. There are over three hundred people on it. They update it daily. It's right down the hall. Everyone's name is in alphabetical order. She won't be too hard to find."

Jen walked down the hallway and found the board with everyone on the hospital staff. Sure enough, Gwen's name was not there. She looked through all the names and faces. She wasn't there. Jen was now not just scared, she was angry. She was very angry. She had been lied to by her parents. She just couldn't figure out why? None of this made any sense. She was really concerned about her mother's mental state. Jen needed answers and she needed them quick. She just didn't know where to look. She found a room at a motel that had a desktop computer that was hooked up to the internet. After she paid for her room, she got online and began searching

Johns Hopkins Medical School for any record of her sister. The graduating class of 2020 all had their photos listed and a short bio about them. Gwen Desaltis was not listed. There were over two hundred names and photos. Jen's stomach began to turn. Something was very wrong here. None of this made any sense. As wound up as she was, she knew she had to get some sleep. Tomorrow was going to be a very long day.

Jen was on the road by nine o'clock the next morning. She filled up her car and drove back home. Her mind was racing, but she still had no real answers. She knew one person that could give her some real answers and that was Janine. Her house was on the way. She could remember how to get to her cousin's house but not remember her own sister? No, Jen was beginning to seriously doubt for the first time that she even had a sister. She hoped Janine could clear up a few things.

Janine's mom, Kelley, was ecstatic to see her niece. She hugged Jen for what seemed like an eternity. When she let her go, she was crying. Unlike Gwen, her mom had a real excuse. She had lost a leg in an IED attack when she was in Iraq in 2007. She had prosthetic legs and had difficulty moving around. She was lucky to be alive. Jen remembers spending over a week with Janine when she got the news. The two of them became very close during that time and they remained close.

"My favorite niece. How are you?"

"I'm good Kelley....how about you?"

"Great, other than the fact I have no legs. You ever tried finding a guy that is into a chick with no legs? Good luck."

"Glad to see you haven't lost your sense of humor in all this."

"Come on, Janine's upstairs. It's almost noon, so she might be awake, hopefully."

They went into Janine's room. She was still asleep.

"Wake up sunshine, your favorite cousin is here," she said, shaking the side of her bed.

Janine rolled over and looked at both of them.

"I need coffee," she said as she rubbed her eyes.

"Don' we all. I'll be right back with your coffee honey, cause going up and down the stairs is so easy for me." said her mom as she rolled her eyes.

Jen waited until her mother was out of the room. She sat down next to Janine.

"Janine, what the hell is going on with Gwen?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean. She isn't in medical school, she doesn't work at a hospital in Dallas and there is no mention of her anywhere. What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know, Jen. Ask your mom."

"I can't. She's a shell of a person now. That is not the same woman I knew before my accident. What happened?"

"I don't know."

"Remember the time you shit your pants when you were ten in Wal Mart? Remember how I took you to the bathroom and cleaned you up? Would Gwen have done that?" said Jen looking right into her eyes.

Janine kind of slouched back under her covers and rolled over.

"Your mom made me promise not to tell you anything. She was so serious. I've never seen your mom act that way before. She made me promise not to talk about Gwen."

"Why would she not want you to talk about my own sister?"

"Cause she's not your real sister. You really don't remember Gwen, do you?"

"What? The hell do you mean she's not my real sister?" asked Jen in disbelief.

"Your real sister drowned on her twenty-first birthday. Some kind of boating accident, at least that's what the cops said. The dude she was with, his parents are loaded, so you know nothing is going to happen to him. He said she had too much to drink and fell overboard at night when they were racing. They found her body the next day. You don't remember any of this?"

"No.....nothing. So, then who is the woman who calls herself Gwen now?"

"Jen, you got to promise not to say anything to your parents, okay? They made me promise I wouldn't spill the beans. I've never seen them like that."

"Who is she?"

"All I know is one day, this woman who would be Gwen's age show up on your doorstep and asks if she can be your parent's daughter. I don't know who she is or where she came from, but for some reason, your parents are so screwed up, they let her in. They actually call her Gwen!"

"What?"

"My mom says it's just therapy for your parents. They have to go through this so they can move on with their lives, but I know what you mean. I saw the same thing that night at your house. Your parents, especially your mother.....she's not the same person. That woman is doing things to them. Then you have your accident. I think your parents just kind of lost it. Losing two daughters. That would crush anyone. Truth is, I don't think your mom was doing well even before your accident. I think she was kind of going bonkers."

"So, who is this woman pretending to be my sister? Have you ever met her?"

"No. No one has, not even my mom. Your mom just talks about her, like she never died and your father is the one who filled us in. He asked us not to say anything to you, cause you wouldn't understand."

"This is so messed up Janine."

"I know. I don't understand it either. I guess it's not so strange. In the hospital, the doctors would tell me stories about people in comas forgetting things like being able to count back change, or forgetting what kind of car they drove, but never forgetting your own sister."

"In a way, I think you're lucky. Having to go to your sister's funeral was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my whole life. You should be lucky you don't remember any of it."

"This psycho bitch is taking advantage of my mother. I can't imagine what she's stolen. Probably a con artist who saw an easy score in my mom."

"I just thought you had a right to know."

"Thanks, Janine. I knew I could count on you."

"Anything for my favorite cousin."

"I'm the only cousin you have."

"You're still my favorite."

Driving home Jen knew she had to confront her parents. There was no other way. At this point, she didn't know if Gwen actually existed or not. Was she a real person, or just a figment of her mother's imagination? Fragile or not, Jen had to put a stop to this. She could only imagine what type of damage a con artist could do to their finances if they were to get a hold of the checkbook. She felt a little ashamed and angry. She had no idea things had gotten this bad with her mother. In this particular instance, living at home with her parents had been the best thing to have happened to her. Her parents could not hide their problems from her any longer.

She came in and found her father sitting on the sofa watching TV. She grabbed the remote, turned off the TV, and sat down next to her father.

"Dad, we need to talk."

"Okay, let's talk."

"My sister died five or six years ago. She's six feet under and yet mom thinks this person pretending to be my sister is real. You see the problem we have here?" said Jen

Her father said nothing and wouldn't even look at her. He too was ashamed. He knew it was a mistake to let it go on this long, he should have stopped it a long time ago.

"Jen, you have to understand, I mean I don't know what you do and don't remember about your life before the accident. Things around here were not very good, not at all. Weeks would go by

before we spoke to one another. When we did it was just a few sentences. At one point, I was so concerned about your mother, I thought about having her hospitalized for her depression. She has been an empty shell of a person ever since Gwen died. I know it's easy to criticize here, but I think if you remembered how bad things were around here, you might be a little more forgiving."

"Dad, she thinks Gwen is still alive. I mean come on. She's completely lost it."

"I know Jen. I guess I just didn't want to admit to myself how bad things were. I honestly thought your mother might have a complete mental breakdown when we got the call about your accident. Instead, she spent hours talking on the phone to this Gwen person, your mom thinks is real."

"Is she real or not?"

"I honestly don't know. I'm inclined to think not."

"How did a woman show up on our doorstep one day and claim to be Gwen who has been dead almost six years? How does that happen?"

"According to your mother, Gwen did not die in that boating accident. To be fair, they never did recover her body. They know she went overboard out at a huge lake overnight in a bad storm and never found her body. There are rivers and waterfalls nearby, she could have been swept out to sea. To the insurance company, it was good enough. They declared her legally deceased."

"So, then why does mom think she's not dead."

"She says this Gwen person told her things only Gwen would know. I've never actually met this person. Your mother says I can when the time is right. Not before then."

"So, then my sister has just been hanging out for the last six years, working and living where? Doing what? Why did she come back at all if she's still alive."

"Two days before Gwen died, your mother and she had a big fight. She didn't want her going out on the lake with those boys, but she was almost twenty. She and her mother said some pretty terrible things to one another. I think it took that long for the wounds to heal. Your mother never did forgive herself for what she said. She said no mother should ever say those things to her daughter. Your mother had too much to drink. I don't know Jen. I don't know what to make of all this, but I do know that for the first time in years, your mother is actually a real person again. I just couldn't take that away from her. I can't. I just can't. If you really love her, you won't either. I'm asking you to just let this one go, please...for me."

"What if this person is real dad? What if she's just playing mom along until she gets a hold of her credit card or something."

"Your mother has a debit card with a five hundred dollar limit on it. That's it. Other than that, she has no access to our money. I might be crazy, but I'm stupid Jen. I've already thought of that."

"I don't know dad. I hear what you're saying, but I know this is not going to end well. Sooner or later, this fantasy world is going to come to a screeching halt and when it does, I don't think it's going to be pretty." said Jen

"No, probably not."

"Why didn't you tell me, dad? Did you really think I wasn't going to find out? Sooner or later, I'll remember everything. Good and bad."

"I guess we'll have to cross that bridge when we get there," he said.

Her mother came into the living room. She just came home.

"Hi.....did I miss something?" she asked, taking off her gloves.

"Just a whole lot of crap at work. Dad was letting me vent," said Jen

"That's what dads are for, honey."

"Yeah, that they are," said Jen quietly.

They ate their dinner in mostly silence. Jen told them she was considering leaving her position, where she had worked for the past three years.

"A near-death experience really puts things into perspective for you. I'm not going to waste another single second of my life," she said.

"I support you a hundred percent honey. Live your life while you can. It doesn't get any easier when you're older. You get stuck when you get older. Not so easy to just up and quit. Do it now, while the only person you have to worry about is yourself."

"Gwen called me today. She decided not to take that position in Dallas. She has decided to do another internship at a hospital in Philadelphia that specializes in trauma care and burn victims."

"I see. That's quite a sister I have. I make thirteen dollars an hour and she's a freggin medical doctor saving the world. Can't get much different than that, now can you?"

"Jen, you made your choices and she made hers, now let's not be jealous of your sister's success. She's worked very hard to get to where she is."

"You're right mom. I shouldn't be jealous of my sister, I mean there aren't too many families these days that can say they have a doctor in the house."

Said Jen trying not to look at her mother.

"That's better. Success will find anyone who is seriously looking for it. That's what my father used to tell us. He was a very successful banker. Made a good living at it. He was an excellent provider. Set the bar quite high. I guess I've lived a spoiled life."

"Really, Anne? Your father? He may have been good with money, but he was lousy at being a husband. He beat your mom like she was his sparring partner and screwed everything that wasn't nailed down."

Anne put her fork down and gave her husband a very nasty look.

"I'm sorry dear. I shouldn't have said that. Your father may have had his faults, but he was an excellent provider. Much better than I am."

"That's for sure," she said and went back to eating her dinner.

Jen then quickly realized that it was probably a good thing she didn't have all of her memories back. Some of them are probably best left forgotten. She could see the two of them had their issues. She knew once she left, the gloves would come off. It wasn't her duty to baby sit her parents. It wasn't fair to ask her to do that, it wasn't fair for anyone to have to do that. She had a right to live her life. She decided right then and there to just leave. Pack up and go someplace else. Might not be any better than here, but at least it was something new. Her husband could be there just waiting for her.

She cornered her dad in the hallway. Her mom had downed half a bottle of wine during dinner and was sound asleep.

"Dad, your marriage is a mess."

"Most marriages are a mess, Jen."

"Come on, even I remember grandpa was a dickhead. Mom is living in a fantasy world. That's not healthy."

"Wait till you're older Jen. Wait till you've lived some more. Living in a fantasy world won't seem so bad then."

"You got to stop making excuses for her. We have to confront her."

Paul sat down on the sofa and poured himself a glass of wine. Jen took it out of his hand and put it on the table.

"We have to stop living in fantasy land. If I have to be the grown-up here, I will be. You have to put a stop to this." she said putting her arms around him.

"Are you ready for what will come next Jen? You can just pack up and split. I'll be the one dealing with the mess."

"I won't leave you, not right now, not when mom needs us the most."

Paul put his hand over hers.

"We'll talk to her tomorrow morning before work."

"Don't you think one of us should be here in case she goes off the deep end?" he asked

"No, we will hit her with it in the morning, let it sink in for the whole day, then when we come home it will be round two. I'd rather just get the whole thing over with. Look, there is one thing. I'm ninety-nine percent sure Gwen doesn't exist, but I've seen the phone bill. Somebody is calling our house?"

He said.

"Yeah, not for much longer," she replied.

Gwen didn't sleep that much overnight. She doubted her father did either. They both should have just called in sick. She worked customer service for a cell phone company and he sold appliances. They weren't going to be missed. He knew her plan was risky, but probably their best bet. He just hoped he wouldn't come home to find his wife dead or missing. It was a risk they would have to take. She made a pot of coffee and they both sat down, waiting for Anne to come downstairs.

They were only waiting a few minutes. She was surprised to see breakfast made.

"Who made breakfast?"

"I did," said Jen

"I didn't even think you knew how to turn the stove on. This is a nice surprise. You even made pancakes.....I love pancakes."

"Sit down mom. We need to talk," said Jen.

Her mom gave her a funny look and sat down next to her.

"What's on your mind?"

"Mom.....this has to stop. Gwen is gone. She died almost six years ago. You have to let her go.....you have to." said Jen

Anne said nothing and started eating her breakfast.

"I know dear. At least that's what I thought too, up until a few months ago. I thought she was gone forever. A bright star extinguished forever. I should have known she didn't die in that boating accident. She's not that stupid. See Jen, some stars burn so brightly, they're too bright for the heavens. That's Gwen."

"Mom, she's six feet underground. She's dead."

"No, she isn't. Look, I know you must all think I'm nuts. It's easy to see why. She came to the house that day last November. I didn't recognize her at first. She's changed her appearance. She doesn't look like I remember. It took me a second, then I realized it was her. I almost collapsed in the doorway. She helped me up and brought me inside. Sat me down on the couch and told me

all about her best Christmas present ever. That giant dollhouse my father built for her. I knew then it was her. I kept asking her things only Gwen would know. She answered every single question correctly. I was overjoyed. I was sobbing hysterically. I asked her where she has been all this time. She wouldn't tell me, just that she needed to find herself and take care of some things before she came back home. I know you must think I'm crazy. I'm telling you I'm not. I'm just an old woman who has seen her share of heartache in this world and I just wanted to feel like a real person again. Is that so wrong?"

"So then you're telling us that Gwen is a real person? Not some figment of your imagination?" asked Jen

"Of course she's a real person. That I am not imagining. I'm telling you the truth. Gwen Desaltis is alive and well." she said defiantly.

"Ok, then mom. If Gwen really is alive, why not just invite her over for dinner? Have a few drinks? Relive old times?" asked Jen

"Don't you think I've tried Jen? She won't come over until she feels the time is right?"

"Right for what?"

"She wouldn't say.

"I see"

"She did say that when she gets her medical degree, she will spend the rest of her life helping others. She says it is her preordained mission from the man upstairs."

"That's great mom. You haven't given this Gwen person any money have you?"

"Well of course I have? Medical school is expensive. She's my daughter too Gwen."

"How much mom?"

"Not much a few thousand, maybe a little more. I salted away quite a bit of money over the years. I knew your father would never give me anything, so I had to earn it myself."

Jen looked at her father and then put her head on the table. A con artist was milking her whacko mother for every penny she had, which wasn't much. Jen was now livid at this imposter.

"Dad, can I have the phone bill from this month, please?" she asked.

Paul came back into the kitchen a minute later with the bill. Sure enough, there were many calls from all over the country, but most of them came from Detroit Michigan. Some lasted for over an hour. She was angry at her mother, but she was also angry at her father. He never should have let this go on for as long as he did. He wasn't doing her mom any favor by turning a blind eye.

"Mom, I am going to the police with this. Maybe they can catch this person."

"You know, she called her almost every night asking about you when you were in the hospital. She said you two were never close growing up, but she hoped that would change as you got older. She's trying here Jen. She really is. She wants us to be a family."

"She wants our money, mom. She doesn't care about us. God, how could you be so stupid?"

"She's alive Jen. Sooner or later, you're going to realize that," she said and went back to eating her breakfast.

She and her father went into the living room to plot their next move.

"You're really going to go to the cops?" he asked

"Yes. Some swindler is pretending to be my dead sister. You're damn right I'm going."

"Yeah. Look, I got to get to work. I'm already on thin ice with the boss, I really need this job."

"No, you don't dad. You and mom need to fix your damn marriage if that's even possible," she said and stormed out.

His name was Detective Ganetti. Young, but very smart and aggressive. He shook her hand and asked her to come into his office, which was nothing more than a desk with a few chairs around it.

"What can I do for you?" he asked offering her a coffee.

Jen started from the very beginning. The accident, the mystery, her mom's revelation this morning. He was genuinely interested. He had never heard of anything like this happening before.

"So, we have a hustler pretending to be you dead sister and milking your mom out of money?" he asked

"Yup. Is there anything you can do?"

"Unless your mother files a formal criminal complaint, not much. You said it was her money, not your father's, right? So he can't really file either. Problem is, other than your mom, she hasn't tried to defraud anybody using your sister's name. Even if we did find her and charged her, I'm not sure we could make anything stick. I'm just wondering if she's using her name to collect other money, maybe student loans or something?"

"She probably is. I'm sure my mom's money isn't all she's after. My grandfather left them a ton of money after he died. I think she found out about it and came up with this whole scheme so she could get her hands on it."

"Do you happen to have your sister's social security number?" he asked

"Right here," she said and gave them Gwen's card.

"Ok, let me call the Social Security Office here in town and we'll see if we can get something going. They can flag a social security number and see if it has been used since it entered the death index on their file. That would give them a good indication if anyone has used it. Give me a week. If I find anything out, I'll call you. I've got the phone bill also."

"Thanks. I really hope you guys find this son of a bitch."

"Of course. Just cause we can't arrest them, doesn't mean we can't scare them and throw them off their game. Sometimes that's all we need to get them to stop. Sounds like your mom is having a hard time accepting the death of your sister. You really can't remember a thing about her?"

"Nothing. Not one damn thing," she said.

Jen wasn't sure about her next move. She had to wait for Ganetti, but she couldn't just sit home and wait by the phone. She scoured the internet for similar stories but didn't find much. There was a case of a person claiming to be a missing son from a family in Oklahoma who was abducted when he was a child. The family was certain it was him, told him things only the child could know. Five years after being reunited with his family, DNA testing conclusively proved he was not the couple's missing son. That sucks.

She tried to get any information out of her mom she could, but it wasn't very much. Gwen was as elusive as could be. She left no paper trail or online paper trail. All they had was that mysterious phone number from Detroit. Turns out it was a disposable cell phone using the nearest cell tower, which was in a suburb of Detroit. That was all she had. A cell number and a general location. Gwen always took cash, never checks or anything else that could be traced back to her or have her image recorded on a security camera. She was a ghost. Jen figured she was setting them up for her big score and had to be careful. She had her name put on her parent's bank account and limited their daily withdrawals to no more than five hundred dollars. Judging by the days of the withdrawals from their bank account, Gwen showed up once every two weeks, looking for a handout from her mom. She was about due. It would have to be in the next few days. She figured she was using her cover story as an excuse to get even more money from her mother. Jen was setting a trap and was hoping Gwen stepped right into it.

Her father wasn't much help. He just seemed to want this whole thing to go away. He wasn't much of a father, just kind of limping through life. Losing a daughter is tough, but losing another one would be even tougher. They were both living in their own respective fantasy worlds. Neither one sounded very appealing to Jen. It would be up to her to keep the family together. They were getting older and in many ways had already checked out of life. They were just hanging out, waiting for the grim reaper to pay a visit. Life had stopped for them the moment they lost Gwen. She was clearly their favorite. Jen was just an add-on, even though she was the older sister, she was not the favorite sister. That honor belonged to Gwen.

Jen downed a bottle of wine while watching a movie one night. She spent most of her nights alone, without anyone to share them with. She didn't want to just limp along in life, like her parents. She wanted to live her life to its fullest possible extent and then go beyond that. As soon as she had this scumbag behind bars, she would leave and start a new life. She couldn't be expected to share her life with people who had already stopped living theirs.

She wouldn't have to wait long.

She parked her car down the street, far away from the house. If someone, namely Gwen, was to look at the house, they might think her mom was alone. That was the idea. Just let Gwen expose herself, just for a minute, then Jen would have her. She would follow her back to where she was staying and confront her. Just had to get her to take the first little step. She knew Gwen might expect her to be at home and would confront her mom when she was away from the house. That was a risk she was going to have to take. She couldn't watch her mother twenty-four hours a day. Jen made sure that all three of them had to sign off allowing any one of them to withdraw more than five hundred dollars a day. That meant Gwen was going to get peanuts. That might tempt her to go big or go home. Jen just needed that one break. That one brief second when she let her guard down and then Jen would swoop in for the kill.

Jen went out on a date with some guy Angie set her up with. Nice guy, but 15 years older than her and had a son. Jen wasn't interested. She was sitting on that see-saw age of being a teenager or an adult and neither choice was very appealing. She was in the middle of dinner when her phone rang. It was Detective Ganetti.

"Hi Jennifer, it's Detective Ganetti. I've got something, I can't go into all of it, because it's a criminal case, but we are looking at a person of interest who has been impersonating deceased family members. She definitely fits the bill. We have more than enough to arrest her, she's wanted in several states. Her last known address was a motel just outside of Detroit. I won't say I'm sure she's out girl, but she sounds like a very good suspect."

Jen was elated. She told her date, she had a family emergency and had to go home. She got home and broke the news to her father who was barely awake. She saw an empty wine bottle by his recliner.

"Dad, the cops think they have a suspect. She's done this before. As soon as they catch her, they're going to arrest her. The Detective working the case thinks she may hit up mom soon, looking for money. We've got to be ready."

Her dad just smiled and rubbed her hand before he passed back out in his chair. Jen just looked at her father and threw away the empty wine bottle.

She went back into Gwen's bedroom. Her parents hadn't changed a thing since the day she died. It was like a Gwen Desaltis Museum. She picked up one of the family photos and threw it against the wall. She was about to pick up another and throw it as well, but she noticed something in the glass. Something that shouldn't be there. Somehow the image of her sister had been photoshopped into the photo. Someone had cut out a picture of Gwen and stuck it in the family photo. The original photo had been just her and her parents, as she remembered. Gwen had been added later.

*"Wait just a second here, girlie! Why would they stick her picture in the photo after it had been taken? Was the picture really that damn important?"*

She thought to herself.

She took the other picture out of their frames and looked at them as well. Sure enough, not one of them seemed natural or authentic. *They looked fake because they were fake. This bitch was never in any of these pictures!*

Jen sat down on the bed. What the hell was going on here? Why had some altered these pictures? Where are the real photos of Gwen? She looked and looked all over the house. She went through their family photo album, but much to her dismay, there was not a single photo of the family and Gwen all together. There were several of Gwen by herself, but none with the rest of the family, or with anyone else. That didn't make any sense. The mystery was getting deeper. She wanted to wake up both her parents and ask them what the hell was going on, but she didn't think it would do any good. She scoured the internet for information about the boat crash that supposedly killed her sister, but there was nothing. Not a single article about it. That made even less sense. Something was very wrong in this house. She just hoped she could figure it out, with what little brainpower she had left. She had to find this person. She had to. This might be her only chance to get some answers. She needed answers. Nothing was making sense anymore.

Jen waited and waited. She blew off work, telling them she needed more time to recuperate. She was broke and coasting on fumes, but it was all or nothing now. She could almost sense that this impersonator was near. It was as if Jen could smell her.

Finally, on Wednesday, she got her lucky break. She noticed a car parked in the driveway. Her parents didn't even bother to ask her why she wasn't parking in front of the house. She had her phone and had downloaded several apps to record someone's voice. They were like the microcassette recorders of yesteryear, but far more sensitive. Everything this woman said would be recorded. When she saw someone get out and approach the door, she got very excited. The girl was young and wearing a baseball cap. It was as if she was trying to conceal her appearance. The girl rang the doorbell. Jen calmly opened the door and greeted her.

"Hi, can I help you?" she asked

"I'm canvassing the neighborhood, trying to make certain that everyone is registered to vote in this year's elections. Are you registered?" asked the girl.

"No."

"Would you like to be?"

"No."

"I see. Have you ever voted in any election?"

"No."

"I see. Well, are you the only one home? Are your parents registered?"

"You're just knocking on stranger's door and asking them these questions? What happens if you knock on the door of a rapist or something?" asked Jen

"My boyfriend is watching us right now. Anyone tries any bullshit, he'll shoot them." the girl said with a fake smile.

"Some boyfriend. Thanks, but no thanks. Not much point in voting when your only choices are voting for an idiot or voting for a criminal." said Jen and closed the door on the girl.

She watched the girl walk down her steps and go right onto her neighbor's house. He seemed far more enthusiastic about talking to her. She recorded the license plate number of the car, just in case. She watched the girl for some time. She had a bunch of forms with her and had some type of identification she showed to her neighbor. Jen gave up. This was turning into a bust. The phone rang and Jen answered it.

"Hello?" she asked

"Jennifer? It's me, Gwen."

Jen's heart nearly stopped. She could hardly breathe for a minute. There was an awkward silence between the two for a second.

"Jen, are you there?"

"Who are you?" she asked

"I'm your sister, Jen."

"My sister is dead."

"No, I'm still very much alive."

"Why are you doing this? Haven't you done enough damage? What more do you want? Do you want money? I'll give you whatever you want as long as you promise never and I do mean never to ever call here again." said Jen shaking.

"Do you hate me, Jen? I know we were never close, but they're my parents too."

"No, they are not. What the hell kind of a person are you? To do this to my mother. She's hurting, she's hurting very badly. Only the lowest form of life imaginable would take advantage of someone in that condition."

"Why are you so angry?"

"What do you want? Just tell me how much?"

"I just want us to be a family again."

"Really, then what?"

"Then we can be sisters again. I'm going to become a medical doctor. I've sacrificed so much to get to where I am. I know you're angry with me, I can understand that. I haven't handled this in

the best way possible, but if you knew, if you only knew what I've been through, then maybe you'd be more understanding."

"I have no memory of ever having a sister. I don't remember anything about you. You're a total stranger to me. I don't remember you dying, or your funeral, or anything. None of the newspapers even mention your drowning? How the hell is that possible?"

"Mom said your memory wasn't a hundred percent. That's very common in cases of severe trauma. I'm sure with the proper hypnotherapy it will all come back, it just takes time."

"Please, for God's sake, just leave us alone. If you have one ounce of humanity in your body, just listen to it and leave us the hell alone. You've done enough damage." said Jen with tears running down her cheeks.

Gwen said nothing as Jen's sobbing could be heard clearly on the other line.

"Do you ever wonder if you're still in a coma, imagining all of this?" said Gwen

"No, the thought never crossed my mind."

"Maybe it should. Maybe you can't remember having a sister because you never did. Maybe I made it all up. Maybe I just wanted a family too. Maybe we met when you were in that coma. You and I talked about it. We agreed that I would become your sister."

"Jesus lady, you really are a piece of work, you know that."

"I've always wanted a sister. I never had one before."

"Tell you what Gwen dear, why don't we meet over a cup of coffee and we can discuss this in more detail. I'll buy."

Gwen just started laughing.

"What's so funny?"

"Well Jenny, if you want to meet me, just come downstairs, to your basement."

Jennifer froze. She put the phone down and ran over to the cellar door. She made sure it was bolted shut. She ran back over to the phone, but Gwen had hung up.

Jen ran into her father's study and opened his desk drawer. She pulled out his pistol and made sure it was loaded. She stuck it in her pants, then walked back to the basement door. She was shaking so badly now, she could barely turn the knob. She unlocked the door and opened it.

She turned on the lights to the basement. She walked down the stairs with the pistol in her hand. She turned on the rest of the lights. She walked over to where the washer and dryer were. In all the time she had been home, not once had she gone down into the basement. She turned the corner and saw what looked like a bedroom. She pulled out her revolver. She saw something in the cot in the corner of the room. Someone had clearly been living here.

*"Jesus H. Christ on Roloids.....has this bitch been living down here all this time?"* she thought.

She walked over to the cot and pulled back the mattress. She recoiled in fear as she saw what was underneath. It was a corpse, or what was left of one. It was just a decomposed skeleton. Jen put the covers back over it and tried not to scream. She turned and was about to run when she tripped over some tubing and fell. The pistol fell out of her pants. She had to get out of there as quickly as possible.

"Jen?" said the voice from behind her

She slowly turned around and saw Gwen. She looked exactly like her. Gwen was holding the pistol.

"We're twins. I died at birth, you lived. Mom and dad never told you, did they?"

Jen could say nothing. There was no blood running through her body at that moment, only pure, unadulterated fear.

"But I came back. You told me to come back in your coma, remember? You told me to come back and say hi, so I did. Here I am. See, I never wanted any money. I just wanted us to be a family again."

Jen could say nothing. She lunged at the girl and tackled her. She heard the gun go off and felt something rip through her side. It took a few seconds, then her side felt like it was on fire. She grabbed the gun from Gwen, who was now just a rotting corpse. She stumbled back upstairs and dialed 911.

"Please help me, I've been shot. 218 West Eden Lane," she said softly. She was losing consciousness. She stumbled back over to the cellar door and slammed it shut and locked it. She lay on the kitchen floor, trying to stem the blood loss, but it was no good. She was getting weaker and weaker by the minute. The last thing she remembers was her sister standing over her. She was just smiling at her.

"Gonna kill you, bitch." she said as the blood dripped from her mouth.

"See you soon sis," said Gwen as she waved goodbye.

Jen opened her eyes and was back in a hospital room. It was the same room she was in when she woke up from her coma. She could barely move. She looked over and saw the same janitor cleaning the floor. She looked over and pulled the ventilator tube from her mouth and sat up in the bed."

"Where the hell am I?"

"Oh, shit....you're alive? Hold on, I'll get the nurse. She ran out of the room and a moment later, Katherine came back in.

"Jennifer. My name is Katherine, I'm the RN for this floor. You were in a car accident. You've been in a coma for over two months?"

"No, no I was shot," she said softly.

"No dear. You're very lucky to be alive. You had some pretty serious injuries. I'll get the doctor and call your parents, give them the good news.

"Holy shit.....what a dream," she said before she drifted back to sleep.

The next time Jennifer opened her eyes, her parents were beside her. She could see her mother had been crying.

"Mom, why are you crying?" she asked

Anne threw her arms around her daughter and started sobbing. Paul was right behind her. As weak as Jen was, she returned the hug.

"Oh, thank you, Jesus, thank you, thank you. I'll never say another bad word about you again," he said with tears running down his face.

"I had the craziest dream. Man, it was so real," she said

As her parents sat back down, Jen looked in horror to see Gwen seated right behind them. Jen sat up and nearly fell out of bed.

"What the hell is she doing here!" she screamed

"Jen, that's your sister. She flew all the way here from Dallas."

"Hey, sis. Glad to see you decided not to check out on us."

"NOOOOOOOOOO!" she screamed.

"Jennifer, what on Earth is wrong with you dear?" asked her mother

"That's my sister, always the drama queen. I missed you so much," said Gwen as she stood above her sister and smiled at her.

Jen had never seen a smile so fake and so cold and calculating in her life. She had somehow brought something back from her coma, something that would be with her now, forever. In this world or the next. She had created the scariest monster of all, a sister.