

*"Hope dangles on a string
Like slow spinning redemption
Winding in and winding out
The shine of it has caught my eye
And roped me in
So mesmerizing, so hypnotizing
I am captivated, I am*

*Vindicated
I am selfish
I am wrong
I am right
I swear I'm right
I swear I knew it all along
And I am flawed, but I am cleaning up so well
I am seeing in me now the things you swore you saw yourself"
~ "Vindicated" Dashboard Confessional*

OK so I was more than a little shocked by Uncle Derrick's confession that my mother had raped him too. It wasn't what I was expecting.

"She would come into my room after our parents were asleep and tell me to strip of my clothes then she would force me to have intercourse with her. If I tried to fight her or stop her she said she'd tell the police I raped her and it would be my word against her's so I kept quiet. After finding out what she did to my nephew I knew I couldn't keep quiet any more."

"And so you've decided to come forward."

"Yes. I couldn't stand by and watch my nephew be torn to bits when he is the victim."

"No further questions, however I would like to submit some hard evidence into the court."

"I'll allow it." The judge said.

"I present exhibit A. This box, which was locked and then locked in a safe in Mrs. Hall's home and obtained with a search warrant, contains numerous nude photographs of Derek Hall. As you can see your honor some of the photographs even show Derek tied to the bed as he described." Mr. Adam said.

My jaw dropped. There was a box of naked pictured of me? And it was in the courtroom?

"Your honor, may I ask for a short recess in light of this evidence?" the defense attorney asked.

"Yes, 15 minutes." The judge banged his gavel.

"Looks like you're gonna win." Hunter said.

"This is great!" April said coming up behind me.

"How dare you. You had no right." I said glaring at her.

Stacy

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I got myself in to see Nikki right before her hearing by pretending to be the grieving step-daughter.

"Well, hello Nikki." I said when I got in there.

"You brat...this is all your fault!" she cried.

"Now, now Nikki, better watch the temper."

"Why did you do this to me? What have I ever done to you?"

"You've done everything possible to make sure I never had a relationship with my father, well guess what, you lose. My father loves me more than he loves you...you were an arm ornament to him, I'm his daughter. You thought you could take down this family...well look where it got you."

"I did love you father at one time but he killed it."

“Bullshit, you never loved him.” I said.

“I did, but I wouldn’t expect you to understand that...you’re just like your father, not capable of love...it’s funny, you’ve fought your whole life to change your father, he’s the one that ended up changing you. You’re just like him now.”

“That isn’t true.”

“It is very true...sad that you don’t even see it.”

“Whatever. I just came to tell you I hope you rot in hell. See you in the courtroom Nikki.” I said turning and walking out.

I was expecting some dramatic, elaborate defense when Nikki entered the courtroom, to my surprise I got something dramatic and elaborate, but it was no defense.

“Your honor, I would like to speak before I make a formal plea.” Nikki started.

“You may.” The judge said.

“Thank you. I know what I’ve done is horrible. I’ve betrayed the man I love in the most horrible way. I was going to let him sacrifice himself for a mistake I made. I almost killed Harley Bradley and there is no fixing a mistake like that, no matter how much I would like to. Nothing I can say or do will undo the damage my actions have caused. To Harley, words can not express my remorse. To my husband, whom I do love, I am sorry for the pain I caused. To my stepdaughter, Stacy, who is here today, I am sorry for hurting you. I love you like my own child and there is nothing I wouldn’t do for you. On that note I plead no contest and am willing to accept whatever punishment is handed down to me.” Nikki finished.

I rolled my eyes and fought the urge to start clapping. After all, that was an award winning performance.

“Thank you for your words Mrs. Fernandez, I am ready to hand down your sentence. I sentence you to life in prison without parole. Case closed.” The judge banged the gavel and Nikki’s jaw dropped. I guess that performance was to get her a lighter sentence. I laughed and shook my head as Nikki was taken away.

I got up and headed for the prison. Krista would be visiting my dad and I agreed to accompany her.

April

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Derek seemed really mad at me so I didn’t go near him.

“What did I do?” I asked Harley, “I was only trying to help.”

“I know that, and so does Derek, he’s probably just embarrassed. Wouldn’t you be if a box of naked pictures of you showed up?” Harley replied.

“Well, yeah I guess so.”

“Just give him some time to think about everything. He’ll come around.”

“I hope so.”

“You care about him a lot don’t you?” Harley asked.

I nodded, “Yeah, I do.”

“Well don’t worry, cause I think he cares a lot about you too.”

“You do?”

“Yeah, I’ve seen the way he looks at you.”

“Did you see the way he just looked at me? That was hatred.”

“No, that was massive humiliation, he will think it was worth it when he sees his mom taken away in cuffs.”

“I hope you’re right Har.”

“Of course I am. I always am.”

I forced a laugh, “Let’s hope so.”

Derek

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I was so embarrassed it wasn’t even funny. I was glad when Uncle Derrick came and sat with me.

“You ok?” he asked.

“Yeah, I guess.” I replied.

“Pretty embarrassing to do this in front of so many strangers huh?”

“Yeah. It is.”

“I know...but it’s for the best. That girlfriend of yours sure went to a lot of trouble to make sure your case had enough evidence.”

“She isn’t my girlfriend and she had no right to bring those pictures in.”

“You’re mad at her?”

“Well, yeah!”

“Well you shouldn’t be...those pictures probably saved your case. It added much needed proof to your story. Without that the odds were Tara would get off scott free.” Uncle Derrick said.

“Derrick, how dare you come here, you aren’t even part of this family.” Dad said charging over.

“I am part of this family and I came to help my nephew.” Uncle Derrick said.

“You stupid fag, how could you do this to your own sister?” Dad said.

“Derek is your son Steven, now that you’ve seen proof how can you defend Tara?” Uncle Derrick said.

“How could Derek come forward? This is a disaster, everything is ruined. Our family is ruined. You couldn’t just keep your mouth shut.” Dad said rushing off.

I hugged Uncle Derrick, “Thank you for being here.”

“Anytime.”

“Where’s Uncle Kyle?” I asked.

“At home in Blue Bay. I decided to come on such short notice he couldn’t get away.”

“Well I’m glad you came.”

“Come on, the judge is about to call the court to order.” Uncle Derrick said leading me back into the courtroom.

Stacy

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I got to the prison and met up with Krista.

“Hey girl.” I said hugging her.

“Hey, you ready?” she asked.

“Yep, let’s go.” I said. We went in and got visitor passes then went to the room they would be bringing Dad into. When they brought him in I hugged him. “Hi Dad, I brought an old friend who wanted to see you.”

“Hi Trent, it’s good to see you again, I just wish it were under difference circumstances.” Krista said.

“Krista? Wow, I haven’t seen you in years.” Dad said hugging her.

“I know, you look good, all things considered.” Krista said hugging him back.

“You look amazing. Is that a real leather jacket you’re wearing? I thought you were into being Miss Earth Protector.” Dad said.

“I gave that up awhile back. Protecting cows isn’t gonna help make my company a profit.”

“Wow, you’ve changed.”

“From the looks of things I’m not the only one. Crooked business Trent? I would have thought you’d be smarter than that.”

“My business was sinking, I had to do something.”

“Should have called me. We could have worked something out, like I did with Stacy. You should be proud of her, she’s got a great deal for Fernandez Industries. We’ll both make a lot of money off of it.”

“Really? That’s great news.”

I nodded, “Yes, I think you’ll be pleased when you step back into your position as CEO.”

“When do you get out of here?” Krista asked.

“Well, officially, 6 months, my lawyer says if I behave there’s a chance I can get off after 3 months.” Dad said.

“That’s great. Well I guess I’ll just have to come see you every week until then.” Krista said.

“You want to see me again?”

“Yeah...it’s really nice seeing an old friend.”

“And I like having the company.”

I smiled at them. They were so into each other.

“You know, I never said anything, but I always had a crush on in high school.” Krista said.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Trent asked.

“Cause I dated Conner first and he was your friend, besides Kira was kind of a friend and you were dating her.” Krista said.

Ok, they had forgotten I was there.

“That might have changed if you said something.” Dad said.

I rolled my eyes. Could they flirt any harder? The ink on Dad and Nikki’s divorce papers hadn’t even dried yet and he was already trying to land the next hot chick in bed...I knew that’s what he was after, the second he was out of here

Krista and he would be sharing a bed...ewww, gross...bad mental image. I had to do something. “OK, I’m just gonna be going and let you guys catch up.” I said.

“Oh ok, thanks for coming sweetie.” Dad said hugging me.

“Anytime, I love you Dad.”

“I love you too.”

“Bye Krista, see you for lunch tomorrow?”

“Sure, see you then. Bye Stace. Krista said.

I left the prison with a smile. Sick as the thought of my dad in bed with Krista was I was glad he’d finally be with someone I could stand. Krista was becoming a friend. I wouldn’t mind having her as step mommy number 2 if things went that way.

Derek

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I sat next to Hunter and Mr. Adams as the court was called to order.

“Permission to speak?” the defense attorney asked.

“Permission granted counselor.” The judge said.

“In light of the new evidence my client would like to change her plead from not guilty to no contest.”

“Mrs. Hall, you understand that you will be sentenced as if you plead guilty.” The judge said.

“Yes sir.” Mom said.

“OK, then I will call on final recess while I determine sentencing. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you are dismissed. Court will reconvene in 15 minutes.” The judge said banging his gavel.

I sat there in shock. I couldn’t believe this was happening. My mother was going to pay for what she did...

“We did it.” Hunter said hugging me.

I hugged him back. I was still in shock.

“Doesn’t feel like you thought it would does it?” he asked.

“No. I thought I’d feel some relief...it’s just like a hollow victory.”

“I know, because what’s done is done. It happened and no amount of jail time can undo that.”

“Yeah.”

“I know, but she is going to pay. Take some solace in that...and you have a pretty great friend to help you through this.”

Hunter said looking over at April who looked very sad.

“I should apologize shouldn’t I?” I asked.

“Well, your mother would probably be walking free if she hadn’t helped you. You decide.”

I nodded, “Thanks Hunter.”

I walked over to April and sat next to her.

“Hey...” I said.

“Hey...” she said.

“Listen...April...I’m sorry I went off on you...I just...I was embarrassed and I took it out on you.”

“No, you were right, I never should have gotten involved.”

“No, I was wrong. If you hadn’t stepped in there would be no hard evidence and my mom might have gotten off. I’ll live through the humiliation, the important thing is she’s going to prison. Thank you April...”

“For what?”

“For being such an amazing friend...I couldn’t have made it through this without you.” I said hugging her.

Stacy

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I got back to my office and found a vase of flowers on my desk. A dozen white roses, my favorite. I smiled and looked for a card. I pulled the card out and read it. "Just thinking of you. ~ Noah" I giggled. Noah was so sweet. I decided to take the rest of the day off and do something special for him. I dialed his cell phone number.

"Hello?"

"Noah, it's Stace, listen, if you don't have dinner plans would you like to come eat with me at Fernandez Estate tonight?" I asked.

"I'd love to."

"OK, meet me there at 6:30?" I asked.

"See you then."

"Ok. Bye." I hung up and headed over there. I instructed the chef to prepare all of Noah's favorite foods then I went to the dining room and set it up. Tonight would be a night Noah would never forget.

Derek

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The judge finally returned to hand down the sentence.

"Tara Hall, you are hereby sentenced to 15 years in California State Women's Correctional facility. Case dismissed."

I stood up and Hunter guiding me from the courtroom. My father came running over to me.

"I hope you are happy! Look what you've done." He said.

"She raped me! How can you defend her?" I asked.

"Because she is my wife."

"And I am your son...or at least I was. Take a good look at me cause you're never going to see me again. Let's go Hunter."

We went back to his Jeep and piled in.

"I'm proud of you." Michelle said.

"Yeah, you handled yourself really well." Harley said.

"Where did my Uncle Derrick go?" I asked.

"He said he was going back to his hotel and that he'd check in on you tomorrow." Hunter said.

"Oh ok." I said. I was really looking forward to getting back to the Academy.

Stacy

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That night when Noah got there I guided him to the table.

"Wow, this looks amazing." He said.

"Thank you." I said as we sat down.

"Nice place."

"Yeah, my dad was involved in every step of the building process."

"Awesome. So you have like a real wait staff?"

"Yeah, I chef and everything."

"That's cool." He said.

After we ate I dismissed the staff and took Noah on a tour of the house.

"Wow, a pool, a pool house, 9 rooms, 7 bathrooms...this is insane." He said.

"Yeah, and this is my favorite room. This is the master suite." I said showing him in.

"This is huge! There's a Jacuzzi in the middle of the room."

I nodded, "And a bed on the other side of the room. This room is bigger than the living room."

"It's amazing."

"Would you like to try out the Jacuzzi?" I asked.

"I would but I don't have my swim trunks."

"That's ok...I don't think we'll need them." I said kissing him.

He smiled, "I like the way you think."

"So, I ask again, you wanna tryout that Jacuzzi?"

This time he smirked, “You bet.”

Derek

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When we got back to the Academy Hunter asked if I would mind sitting through group to fill the others in. I agreed and we all sat around, I told the others everything that happened.

“That’s awesome Derek!” Tiffany said hugging me.

“Totally, I’m so proud of you.” Destiny said.

“Way to go man.” Chris said high fiving me.

“Yeah, congratulations.” Jesse said.

“I can’t take all the credit. April helped.” I said.

“Way to go Ape.” Chris said hugging her.

“Yeah, you rock, that was really great.” Tiffany said.

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I could use some air.” I said getting up. I went off into the woods a bit before sitting down. A few minutes later April sat next to me.

“It’s really over.” I said.

“I’m glad at least one of us saw justice get served.” April said.

“Maybe some day...”

“No...it’ll never happen. Not for me. I have to go back to that hell.”

I put my arm around her. “No...he won’t touch you again. I won’t allow it.”

“You can’t stop it Derek...I wish you could but you can’t...no one can.”

“We’ll see about that.” I said as she rested her head on my chest. I swore to myself right then that April would never hurt like that again.