

The
Sisterhood
Of The
Rubber Ducky

A Novel By
Greg Wagner

Also By Greg Wagner

Dragons Don't Grow On Trees – A Magical Tail

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At The End Of Forever - A Historical Fiction Book

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The Adventures of Esme The Wonder Dog

The New Adventures of Esme The Wonder Dog

A Cold Day In Hades

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This book is dedicated to all the people who believed in me, especially my wife Roberta, because without her help, I would have had to pay someone for all the proofreading, editing, cajoling, consoling, and comfort when the times got tough.

Table of Contents

Chapter One	- 5 -
Chapter Two	- 10 -
Chapter Three	- 18 -
Chapter Four	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Five	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Six	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Seven	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Eight	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Nine	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Ten	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Eleven	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Twelve	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Thirteen ..	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Fourteen .	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Fifteen	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Sixteen ...	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Seventeen	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Eighteen .	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Nineteen .	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Twenty ...	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Twenty One	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Twenty Two	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter Twenty Three	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter Twenty FourError! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter Twenty FiveError! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter Twenty SixError! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter Twenty SevenError! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter Twenty EightError! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter Twenty NineError! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter One

A small group of shadows made their way quietly past a brightly lit security shack and then headed toward the big metal gate that was the only real barrier to the entrance of the main cattle pens. A man working on the inside of the operation was supposed to have left it unlocked for them. Once there, Mona Drake pushed hard on the designated gate and slammed face first into it, followed shortly by Ray and Steve as the three of them proceeded to make a neat little “Agri-activist sandwich” in the darkened and dusty aisle way.

“I thought you said it would be unlocked?” she asked in a frustrated whisper.

Steve gave her a hurt look as they untangled themselves. “George said he’d make sure he took care it, right after the last feeding, something must have gone wrong.”

“Well a lot of good that’s going to do us now,” Mona said putting her hands on her hips.

Ray dug around in the many pockets of his ninja style coveralls, his long grey ponytail, sneaking out from underneath a black knit skully cap, which kept trying to fall off, due to the lack of hair everywhere else on his head.

“Peace man, here let me get that.” He edged forward, then pulled a large ring of “master” keys out of his pocket, and started inserting them into the lock one by one.

The fetid smell of “cow” was heavy in the air and low contented “moos” could be heard on the other side of the fence as the three of them stood huddled together in front of the gate, waiting for Ray to find the right key.

I’m getting too old for this shit, Mona thought to herself, as she craned her neck, anxiously watching the guard shack for any signs of movement.

This wasn't Mona's first "covert-operation" with Ray and Steve. The three of them had been friends for many, many years, and shared a counterculture history that went all the way back to the seventies, when it was considered fashionable to "*stick it to the man*" in the name of freedom and justice.

"I got it!" Ray exclaimed, accompanied by the muffled "clank" sound, of a chain being dropped, and then frantically caught again before it could make any more noise.

"Be careful," Steve said over his shoulder as he took the lead, making their way between the jam packed cattle pens. They split up and each went quickly and efficiently from gate to gate, unlatching them and swinging them open wide, creating a clear route of escape for the oppressed bovines. When Mona got to the end of the building, she turned around in time to see her two "would be" partners in crime, come running up out of the darkness.

"That's it, let's get out of here." Ray threw the rear gate open and started slapping rumps to get the sleepy cattle moving toward the hole that they had cut in the main fence. "Come on guys," he told cows, "we don't have all night, unless you *like* the idea of being hamburgers."

Once the main stall was cleared out, they closed all the gates behind them and started making their way back towards the front gate and the operations building.

As if on cue, blinding lights started coming on all over the feedlot. Mona could hear yelling coming from in front of them and the sound of a truck starting up. They stopped in the shadows between two cinderblock buildings. Steve pulled a little black box out of his jacket, smiled, then theatrically flipped a toggle switch and pushed the big red button in the middle of the box's front panel.

Nothing happened.

Mona frowned at him, "What?"

He slapped the remote and tried it again, then he looked at her helplessly and shrugged, “The batteries must be weak; we’re going to need to get closer.”

George Rodriguez stood in the corner of the feedlot’s main office, squirming and looking nervously out the front window.

He didn’t know when he told Ray that he would let the gates open, that tonight was the night that the owners of the five biggest ranches in the area, get together for their big monthly “high stakes” poker game. George took the job at the beef producing facility a couple of weeks ago, and even then only so he could help his friends out, but now it looks like all his efforts will have been for nothing.

The big poker game was taking place in the next room, but George was expected to stand guard outside, along with another ranch hand, just to make sure that *the law doesn’t show up unexpectedly* and disturb their slightly less than legal gambling event...*and that blows me being able to unlock the gate for Ray.*

George had heard a lot about the poker games that took place here. Millions of dollars won and lost on just one hand. Some of the bigger games said to have gone on for weeks on end.

This particular game was currently in its second hour of play. Smoke and laughter poured out of the poorly ventilated room as George stood outside fretting. He kind of hoped that his friends could have just called the whole operation off, but unfortunately when he found out about the game at the last minute; he hadn’t been able to get a hold of anyone.

Just then Big Jim Kinder, the owner of the Circle K Ranches came swaggering out of the conference room-cum-gambling den, unbuckling his massive belt as he went. In spite of the more than impressive name, “Big Jim” Kinder only stood

5'8" in high-heeled cowboy boots, but what Big Jim lacked in height, the multi millionaire more than made up in girth, as he had to bend sideways and at an angle in order to make it through the front door.

"I'll be right back boys; I got some business to take care of." He winked at George conspiringly and grinned, "You'all keep a watch out for them *dirty revynuers* while I'm gone."

George nodded and smiled weakly as the cattle rancher went out onto the front porch and proceeded to relieve himself over the wooden railing, all the while annoyingly whistling the same three bars of the tune "Oh Susanna" off key, over and over again.

Suddenly the whistling stopped and George could see Big Jim standing up on his toes looking around behind the building. "*Holy shit!*" he yelled, "*We got us a jailbreak!*" He came running back into the office still pulling his pants up.

"*Dave, Jerry, John, shit, git out here fellas.* You there," he pointed at George, "get the other hands together; we can't let those cattle get past the perimeter fence or we'll play hell ever getting 'em back in again.

The occupants of the conference room came running out as one, but being men of *more than* considerable stature, they had to stop at the door, so that they could each pass through it one at a time.

George lagged behind for a few more moments, looking around and waiting for...

A huge explosion rocked the office building. Windows rattled in their old wooden sashes as the shock wave echoed across the feedlot. The assembled group of middle aged, overweight millionaires standing around in the parking lot in front of the office, turned in the direction of the blast.

It was only Big Jim Kinder, who at the last moment, understood the significance of the sound, and in his infinite wisdom, he *quite accurately* muttered, "Oh shit..." a half a

second before two million gallons of fermented, putrid, “semi liquid” manure, came raining down on all of them in one great torrent, immobilizing everyone and everything within a thirty foot radius, in a two foot thick coating of stinking, chunky, green/brown/yellow slime.

Chapter Two

It's so big, Daphne Johnson thought, looking up at her husband in disbelief, *I don't know how it will ever fit*, and he wasn't being gentle either, but the more he pushed, the easier the going went.

Less than a minute later she was screaming, "Oh yeah, that's it Wren, ram it in there!"

She closed her eyes and tilted her head back, arching her spine, and digging her nails into the full grain leather upholstery. Wren leaned into her, thrusting with all his might, six-pack abs rippling with the effort, his soaking wet, chin length, black hair swirling around at the whip of his head, as the sweat poured off him "flash dance" style. Daphne leaned back even further, poised right on the edge, but not quite ready to go all the way.

"Harder," she whimpered, biting her lip.

"Are you sure?" he asked politely.

"Yes, YES, give it to me!" she screamed at her husband.

Wren was waiting for this and must have taken it as his signal, because he really put his weight into it now, pushing with all his might, groaning with the effort. Daphne was there right with him too, as she met his thrusts with a steady rhythmic hip movement of her own.

There was a grunt and suddenly, "Oww, hey wait, I don't think..." as the big brown, full grain leather couch that had been "Stuck like Chuck" in the living room doorway, had finally come loose.

Daphne flew back, and ended up on her butt as the sectional continued to fly through the air for a few more feet, then came down with a thump and continued sliding slowly across the hardwood floor to almost where they were planning on putting it, followed shortly by her now thoroughly exhausted husband.

He lay on the floor panting and smiling, “I told you it would fit.”

“I know, you did,” she agreed, but something about all the “sweating” and the “pushing” had Daphne’s thoughts somewhere down near the gutter.

“I knew it,” Wren insisted, still staring at the ceiling, panting and sweating from the recent exertion.

She smiled evilly and helped him up, tilting the couch back they both collapsed on it together. “I would have never guessed though,” she said seductively, “*it’s so big.*”

He finally caught the tone of her voice and responded in kind, “Big?” he reached for his zipper, “you want to see big?”

With that, the two of them started slowly taking their clothes off, caressing each other and preparing to christen their new leather sectional in style, but then impatience took over and instead, the clothes flew in every direction.

Loretta Lynn Miller leaned on one foot in the living room of her modest three bedroom suburban Houston apartment and frowned at the ceiling.

She currently had a clean disposable diaper balanced “like a hat” on her curly blond head and she was holding her youngest son in one arm and talking on the phone at the same time. Little 11 month-old Dexter had an ear infection and a fever, and was in the process of throwing up onto a towel that Loretta fortunately had the foresight to drape over her shoulder.

“No, no, I told you I can’t do weekends,” she looked around the room, “no sir, yes sir, and um, I really don’t think my children would approve of me taking my clothes off in public.”

“Yes sir, of course, thank you,” she shook her head and hung up the phone.

In her search for a job, in addition to the more conventional methods, Loretta had subscribed to every “job find/employment” website on the internet, at least all that *she* could find.

Careerhack, Jobshop, Infi-employ, Gigantalist, were just a few of the many places where she posted her credentials in hopes of garnering some interest. Unfortunately as neat and orderly as her resume was, the sum total of her entire working career only took up a half of an 8 ½” x 11” sheet of paper.

Even more unfortunately, it wasn’t until after she had put her email address out there for all to see, that she realized some of the websites weren’t legit. The first clue was all the emails that she started getting wanting to “enlarge” her penis, “enhance” her performance, *help her grow more hair than ever before*, or even better yet, a rather impressive request from a rich African Widow to help administrate her \$2,000,000 estate to charity, while letting Loretta keep 20% of it.

The most interesting of the emails have been the ones with all sorts of curly ques and flourishes attached to the letters of the text that looked like a poorly disguised effort to trick spam filters. Nine times out of ten the invites were to chat/meet with (insert name here, *usually Russian*) “and I have big boobs and a big butt and I know how to use them.”

In the two weeks that Loretta had been looking for a job via the web. So far most of the responses that she’s had, have been from, three strip clubs; *who would love to have a woman of my stature come work for them*, a real estate broker; who swears and declares that she can make millions of dollars, if only she takes a \$500 two-week class *at her expense*, sits for a \$200 two-hour test, then pays a \$1000 to get her license, *and then he gets half of everything that I make...yeah right*, and last but not least; a cute little white haired old man, who wants to hire Loretta to be his administrative assistant and personal “S&M” bondage mistress.

I always did have a dominatrix fantasy, she thought, but somehow I don't think that it would be a very good career move at this point in my life. She smiled and glanced down at her still shapely thirty four year old calf...I do look good in skin tight leather though.

She has another interview this morning for a position at a downtown advertising agency, *but I have my doubts as to how productive that's going to be.*

Her daughter Emily strolled into the kitchen just then. She looked up at the baby and rolled her eyes. At eight years old, Emily already had sarcasm down pat, *and I can't imagine where in the world she gets it, Loretta thought rolling her eyes. They grow up so fast these days, and smart? Where do they learn all this stuff?*

Loretta smiled over her shoulder, pulled the clean diaper off her head, laid it delicately on the table, and then plopped Dexter down on top of it, peeling and slapping the adhesive tabs in place with fluid grace. She gingerly removed the now vomit soaked towel and threw it in the hamper, being extra careful not to get any on her clean dress as she spun around with the grace of a ballerina.

"You and your brother ready?" she asked Emily on her way to the refrigerator.

"I am," she rolled her eyes again, "I don't know about Dorkwad though."

"I'm here," Bud Jr. called from behind his sister, where he was sitting on the floor still tying his sneakers. "Can I pack today?" He made a face that caused the freckles on his nose to scrunch up, "They're having stewed tomatoes, and I hate that crap."

Loretta turned from the fridge holding out two brown paper bags. She handed one to Bud, "Peanut butter and jelly, just the way you like it, all piled into the center of the bread," she patted his cheek and he smiled up at her.

She handed Emily the other bag and her daughter rolled her eyes again. As fast as lightening Loretta grabbed the little girl's face, gently but firmly turned her head so that they were face to face, and then looked her in the eyes.

“Egg and olive on toast just the way you like it, toast in a separate bag, hold the attitude,” she let go of her face and spun around to deal with little Dexter who was now unsuccessfully trying to eat the dishwasher, “and your brother is not a dorkwad by the way.”

Emily frowned, “But Mom he is, and I have to walk to school with him every day.”

“Sarah walks along with you.”

“Oh yeah and a teacher's aide too, well that improves my status 300 percent,” she stomped her foot impetuously, “I'll just die being seen with them.”

Loretta spun back around quickly and her daughter flinched, so she stopped and held her hands out, to show that she had no intention of hitting her, *right now*, she thought.

“Honey listen to me,” she squatted down in front of her, “there are way more important things in life than being cool. Trust me, “cool” is just an elaborate marketing scheme that rakes in billions of dollars a year from poor misguided suckers who don't have enough brains to realize that most of what's in style, is just last year's repackaged garbage anyway.” She stopped to take a breath and smiled sweetly, “So if you want to be a tool to the corporate retailers, then go right ahead, but I just don't have time for it.” With that, she spun Emily towards the door just as the doorbell was ringing and Sarah appeared.

“I really appreciate you helping me out Sarah,” she smiled at her neighbor, “and I promise, I will make it up to you as soon as I get things squared away.”

“Oh, no problem Mrs. M, I don't mind” she laughed and scuffled Bud Jr's hair and then pulled Emily in for a hug, producing another eye roll from her only daughter and a *see I*

told you so look, “these guys are great. I’ll have them home around four, unless you have to be somewhere.”

“No,” she shook her head, “not tonight anyway.”

Loretta stood at the door and watched them disappear down the block. When she was sure that they were gone she pushed the door shut, leaned her back against it, and closed her eyes. Tears started to run out of the corners and down her cheeks as she finally let her “happy” face down.

Things have been really hard for the last month since the separation, although given the fact that Bud hasn’t been around much these last few years anyway, things really haven’t changed a whole lot...*except for the money.*

All Loretta ever wanted to do was be was a “stay at home” mom. The thought of being there for your children through the most impressionable years of their life was her lifelong dream. She never really had much in the way of outside of the home employment, except for the two years that she worked at Dairy Queen when she was in high school.

As soon as she came to the conclusion that things were over between her and Bud, she started squirreling away cash here and there whenever she could, because she didn’t know how long it was going to take for her to find a job. In a few months, she had amassed a nice little nest egg, and by the time she finally worked up the nerve to leave, it was even bigger, but now that money has quickly dwindled to almost nothing and her prospects for employment still weren’t looking good.

Maybe I should have stayed...

When they met in high school it was “love at first sight” for Loretta, and her mother absolutely forbid her to see Bud at all, saying that he’d never amount to anything and that he was too smarmy, *and to this day I still don’t know what that means.*

Needless to say she ended up marrying Bud anyway, and he has always provided very well for the family, so her mother was wrong on that count.

As the head salesman at Billy Bob's BMW – Lexus – Porsche – Mini of South Houston, Bud clears well over a million dollars in sales every month. He once told her, "It's all about figuring out what motivates people, and then applying just the right kind of pressure to that spot."

She absolutely adored Bud, when they first got married she used to lie in bed in the morning and watch him get dressed. It was kind of like a ritual. The night before, he would always lay his clothes out for the next day. After a long hot shower in the morning, he would put on his "pressed and dry cleaned" beige polyester slacks, *one leg at a time, of course*, then he would carefully tuck his light yellow "palm tree print" button down, silk shirt in around his waist, then check his slicked back black hair in the mirror, running a dab of pomade through it with a comb until it was smooth.

Sometimes he would lean in close and finger a particularly uncooperative spot into place with a quick pat, and then he'd lean back and straighten his collar, rearrange his gold chain necklace, and flex his arms "strongman" style in the mirror, before winking, giving his reflection the "thumbs up" and coming over to kiss her goodbye on his way out the door.

Bud was her idol.

The biggest problem was that it was always about Bud, *everything, and that was fine in the beginning* when Loretta was young and naïve, but one day she woke up and realized that half her life had passed her by and she hadn't even done anything with it.

On top of that, it was through that whole enlightenment process, that she also came to realize, that somewhere along the way she had acquired, *a major case of low self-esteem, an unhealthy dose of co-dependency and a little bit of obsessive-compulsive complex thrown in to boot.*

Imagine, all that, and while I wasn't even looking.

Needless to say, every time that she mentioned getting help, Bud would just blow it off with some sort of glib comment about how *you can't trust shrinks these days, and you're just fine the way you are Baby, why mess with perfection?*

It wasn't until she did get help, that she realized he liked her that way, and that was because he had a major role in making her that way.

Sometimes passive aggressive behavior can be more damaging than active aggression, Loretta thought wryly, it just doesn't show as much.

Chapter Three

Daphne Johnson repeated the coffee order back for the customer standing in front of the counter, “Ok, so that’s an extra hot, tall skinny, half sweet, no foam, caramel macchiato.”

The older heavysset woman standing in front of her looked up, frowned, and pursed her lips, reminding Daphne of the little South American Yellow Puffer Fish that she has in an aquarium at home.

“No,” the woman snapped, clearly irritated for some reason, “I said a tall skinny, half sweet, extra hot, caramel macchiato, no foam.”

“Yes ma’am, you did,” Daphne came back, the smile never leaving her face.

“Hunh?” the woman pursed her lips again, “well that’s not what you said.”

“Yes, ma’am it is.”

The woman stepped back, “*Hurumph*, young lady are you getting smart with me?”

Ignoring her irritation, Daphne smiled and hit the enter button on the cash register, “No Ma’am, I wouldn’t think of it, that will be \$3.76”

The woman looked up her nose at Daphne, apparently trying to give her the evil eye, and looking a little uncomfortable in the process, as she was just barely five feet tall, while Daphne topped out at 5’ 11” *in flats*, something that had a tendency to give her 6’ tall husband occasional inferiority issues, especially if she wore heels.

“Well ok, *here*,” the woman said, handing the money over, and making a grab for the cup.

Daphne stopped, held the cup up just out of the woman’s reach, and pointed out the handwritten notes on the side as she read them off, *just like she was trained to do at Barista High*.

“Ok, so that’s an extra hot, tall skinny, half sweet, no foam, caramel macchiato.”

“Yes, yes, that’s good,” the woman shook her head and replied haughtily, grabbing her drink, then turning and stomping off.

Daphne chuckled; she wasn’t too crazy about working at the coffee house. For the most part, it was dealing with people. The majority of the ones that she encountered throughout her day were OK. They were just here looking to get their caffeine fix and then get out, but some people just seemed like they were never happy unless they had something to whine about.

...but it helps pay the bills, she reminded herself for the third time today.

Daphne and her husband live in a one bedroom, efficiency loft apartment in the art district of the downtown Houston area, *the trendier side of town*. Wren works in the tech sector as a freelance computer analyst, one of the most needed and at the same time, sought after jobs in the city. He made really good money...*when he had the work*. When he didn’t, the two of them existed on two day old baguettes, and cheap ramen noodles that they bought by the case at the Asian grocery store down the block.

Daphne really didn’t mind, as long as the two of them were working together towards a common goal.

She looked at her reflection in the stainless steel finish of the espresso machine.

At twenty-six Daphne still retained most of the youth and beauty that she had in her teens. The reflection looking back at her showed that most of her shoulder length coal black hair, was still tucked up into the severe ponytail *that was required of all baristas*, giving her full red painted lips and lily white makeup contrast to the black “Clark Kent” horn rimmed glasses that she wore whenever going out in public.

By the time her shift was over, nighttime had already fallen across the city. She hurried down the darkened street as quickly as possible, trying hard not to look too much like a target. She only lived a few blocks away, but she had to go through part of the infamous Red-light District, *unless she wanted to walk another four blocks out of the way*. She was almost to the fringes of the Mid-town when suddenly screaming erupted from down the block. Without thinking, Daphne started running in the direction of the cries. When she rounded the corner, it was to see a very large, well-dressed man, beating on a smaller scantily clad woman.

“*Bitch, I told you before about withholding on me,*” he yelled at her raising his fist again

“*OH MY GOD NO!*” the woman screamed, putting her hands up and backing away in horror.

“*HEY!*” Daphne yelled, digging a hand down into her purse, frantically searching for her pepper spray.

Hearing her yell, the man stopped, stood up straight and shook his head, then turned around slowly. His hand was already in his jacket and he was frowning. Eyes wide with fear, the woman that he was beating on, slowly inched away from him.

Daphne had his full attention now.

“You ain’t got no business around here Missy,” he slurred like he was drunk and made a dismissing motion with his hand, “so just move along,” but contrary to the gesture, he was still walking towards her at a steady pace, eyeing her up and down like a piece of fresh meat.

“Hmm,” he said as he sauntered toward her, stroking his chin. “Nice looking girl like you, in a place like this, it ain’t safe,” he leered, “might just have someone take something from you that you wouldn’t normally be willing to give.”

He smiled even wider as he got closer, showing off the gold “grill” that he wore on his front teeth, *and the rest of his teeth*, that were just as yellow as the grill, *only more so from*

apparent lack of proper dental hygiene, she thought, than adornment.

Daphne froze for a second, appalled and hypnotized at the same time by the man's brazen self-confidence. Then she saw his hand come out of his jacket, and only waited long enough to see the glint of metal in the streetlight, before pulling her mace out and hosing him down with the whole 4 ounce canister of industrial strength, 5.3 million Scoville, Capsicum spray.

The cell phone he was reaching for clattered across the sidewalk and he bent over rubbing his eyes frantically.

"DAMN YOU BITCH! WHAT THE FUCK?"

By this time, the woman that he had been beating on was long gone, so Daphne proceeded to slink away, leaving him cursing and spitting. *For a brief second*, she felt bad for putting the man through so much pain, but then she quickly came to her senses and hurried down the block toward home.

Mona Drake sat on the front porch of her aging doublewide trailer and stared blankly off at the highway in the distance. Headlights traced the long line of Old Farm Route 1488 in the dusky evening light where it ran along her piece of property forming a kind of "free barrier" between the Glasgow Mining and Manufacturing Company and the 500 acres of farmland that she'd purchased years ago from a horse farm that was going belly up.

The two lane "Farm to Market" road that ran some forty miles from the little town of Hempstead, Texas to right outside of Egypt near Conroe, was originally designed for farmers, but now catered more to the minerals extraction crowd. At any given time if Mona listened hard enough, she could hear the roar of diesel engines coming from the overloaded ore trucks trundling down the straight away.

There has been a conspicuous absence of the night insect's song lately. Gone for the season are the June bugs, crickets, and the fall "eaters" with their constant grating nocturnal catcalls. The great sand hill cranes are finally back from a summer of vacationing in the upper states, with their bald red-skinned Trump comb over's and five foot wingspans. The evenings are getting much cooler now, all once again foretelling the coming of winter to the South Houston area.

Mona was in a particularly bitter mood tonight.

The amount of liquid in the bottom of her \$16,000 bottle of Glenfiddich whiskey was getting down to the last inch and for some reason she was still upright.

Well...mostly upright.

She sat up a little straighter in the dollar store chaise lounge, ran her fingers through her chin length snow-white hair, tore the hangtag off the neck of the bottle of distilled spirits, and started reading.

This Glenfiddich 50 Year Old™ is our heirloom and the pinnacle of our years of whisky-making; the culmination of the skill and dedication from our Malt Master, Brian Kinsman; and the crowning glory in the pursuit of excellence that began with our founder William Grant back in 1887.

She held the bottle up to the light of the 120 watt industrial strength bug zapper and watched as the dark amber liquid in the bottom glistened in the eerie blue-green glow.

This exquisite whisky has been drawn from two casks, both having spent the last 50 years maturing in the cool darkness of Warehouse 8. Before bottling, our Malt Master married them for six months in an American oak barrel to give the wondrous array of flavours and aromas an unrivalled harmony.

She held her empty glass up to the light and ran her finger around the edge in an effort to clean some of the dust out of it, but then she just gave up and drank straight from the bottle.

Every bottle of this finest Single Malt is uniquely hand-blown and individually numbered in wax before our sixth-generation silversmith, Thomas Fattorini, applies his finishing touches. Presented in a classic, hand-stitched, black leather case with accompanying hand-woven silk lining, one is left in no doubt as to the pedigree of this creation.

Mona swallowed the last of the mind numbing nectar, and then brought her arm back and threw the bottle at the stone fireplace sitting out in the yard. The bottle shattered into a myriad of tiny shards that glittered and glistened in the porch light. She stared blankly at it for a few minutes, and then finished reading the last of the hangtag.

Great for: Those seeking the very best and extremely rare piece of history. Unique and classic, a beautifully harmonious nose compliments cascading flavours in this flagship malt.

History, Mona thought to herself, yeah right.

Never in her wildest dreams did she ever think she would end up here, pushing the front side of sixty and all alone. She had such lofty dreams in her youth and the resources to reach them too, and yet...

Being born into a wealthy family isn't all that it's cracked up to be.

Mona's parents were both already pretty old when they brought her into the world. Her mother was an aging trophy wife, and her father an overweight trust fund raised, third generation, septuagenarian, oil tycoon. Mona's favorite aunt Lydia used to say that only person to ever have to do any *real work* in the Drake family, died over a hundred years ago.

As a "change of life" baby, Mona was showered with everything that she ever wanted or needed, *except love and human affection*. For the first few years of life, she was taken care of by a herd of over protective nannies. When her parents found out just how messy having a child around the house could

be, they shipped her off to a private school, only to have her return on holidays and briefly during the summer each year, to wreak havoc upon their quiet and organized lives. Coming home for the holiday season was always *awkward at best* for all parties involved, and everyone was always relieved when it was over and they could stop pretending that they were a loving, functional, family.

At the age of twelve Mona was enrolled at the prestigious Riverside Academy, a success driven prep school for academically exceptional children, in other words: *a place to dump your spoiled rich kids off and hopefully, they can do something with them.* The tuition alone was over \$60,000 a year, but with 100% college graduation rates and AP testing well above average across the board, her parents must have thought that they hit the jackpot in overachieving exclusivity.

Mona learned early in life, that if you wanted to survive you needed to blend in, and that you had to choose your battles. To her, school was an eighteen-year *necessary evil* that she had no problems dealing with. She found the curriculum well below her capabilities from the very beginning, when as a first grader; she was teaching fourth graders how to read. Later on, she found tutoring to be a great way to earn favors and make money on the side. For some reason even then, she felt that the *less* dependent that she was on her “part-time” parents, the better.

Even so, she suffered from boredom daily, which eventually led her to mischief.

The majority of that mischief usually took place in the form of what she liked to refer to at the time as “acts of civil disobedience.” Many such acts in the beginning, involved three boys that she affectionately referred to back then as the “geek squad,” who she just happened to be tutoring in math that semester.

Greg Wagner lives with his wife Roberta and their three dogs Esme, Abby, and Jackie, on the side of Wagner Mountain (actually more like a big hill) in Maysel West Virginia.

In between his many part time jobs and honey-do lists, Greg manages to find time to spin yarns of wonder and amazement. In whatever spare time is left over, Greg enjoys making glass beads (www.randgswv.com), reading, riding motorcycles and playing music.

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