

**In Plain Sight**  
By  
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**At the bottom, every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this Earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvelously picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is, ever be put together a second time.**

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

## Current Time

### Chapter 1

Nothing upset Avalina more than when her world became a chaotic three-ring circus. Mostly when that chaos was from the hired help, no less. It was her mother's doing. She was sure of it. Sending the most disgruntled and most irritating staff. Miss Bethany, older than dirt she was, yet here she was fussing about.

"Miss Bethany, don't you have something to do elsewhere in the house? Some other room to clean, perhaps sweep the driveway, clean a stature, or go shopping? Lord, anything but here?"

A perfunctory reply, as straightforward as Miss Bethany is, "No, Mum."

Avalina would have to speak with her mother about this constant intrusion on her life. How dare she, Avalina thought, vividly angry now, and she was barely now awake at this ungodly hour of noon.

*Thinking to herself, The help should not just enter a bedroom as they please, she thought. God, it's so impersonal, sitting right here, not even gone for the day, yet. How absurd, she thought, fuming over it, this hired help in my room while I do my makeup and hair.*

Avalina hated her life as it was. The house, the cold marble floors, the grand nature of it all. Wealth had its cross to bear, apparently. Avalina calmed down and finished her preening in the mirror. Family secrets, hushed conversations had driven her to a near breaking point. Her escape from the humdrum was the Pop-up Raves, the large gatherings, and the clubs' bump and grind. She wanted excitement, vibrant surroundings, not this stuffy, overgrown funeral parlor.

Her most recent indulgences were the places no self-respecting young woman should go, her mother had told her.

*Ha, we'll see about that. Mother, can't stop me now. I'm an adult.*

Waking well after the noon hour, dressing for a night out, party until dawn was Avalina's current obsession with life, and she loved it dearly. Drinking, dancing, flirting with men, laughing at the boys stuttering over their words to be with her.

Meeting new people, going to nightclubs, and dance the night away. That was living, she thought.

"What now?" Avalina fumed when she heard a knock on her door.

"My God, is this Grand Central Station? I'm getting dressed," she yelled.

Her brother, Aldred, strolled in like he owned the place, "hi Sis, where to today?"

"God, did mom put you up to this? I'm going out is all, just out, like I do every day."

The now twenty-one-year-old stormed past her brother while grabbing her car keys and matching clutch purse. With a huff, went out.

Aldred followed her down the grand staircase, stopping as their mother exited from the dining room, hearing the banter of voices coming down from above. Meeting in the large entry foyer as Avalina barely dressed in a far too short minidress and heels, stalked by her and out the ornate front doors.

A look transpired between mother and son. It was the same each day, and something had to be done. No words were needed as they heard Avalina leaving the circular driveway with a screech of tires from her ice blue metallic Ferrari 488 Spyder.

The ever serious, ever vigilant Aldred looked at his mother and said, "Mother, she can't go around showing out like this. We can't afford the publicity or, worse, her photograph on the front page. If she gets in a wreck or, worse, arrested. We can't risk being found again. We escaped the last time by the skin of our backsides. You have become far too soft on her."

Saree, the matriarch of the brood, nodded patiently to her son.

Aldred, with the burden of a much older man, said, "mother, it is time she knows. I realize I know things because I was old enough to be aware; she was not the last time. You had no choice but to tell me things. She is the heir, and by God, it's time to bring her into the circle. Before she gets on whoever's radar. Let's not have to run again. I beg you to not let this go any further. I realize I can never know it all, but she must grow up, please."

The twenty-five-year-old going on seventy stopped talking when his mother raised her finger. Saree said, "I know, I do know." She walked away, leaving her son Aldred to his own devices. His mouth agape at the response to his little outrage. He returned to his office, where he kept track of the family's fortunes.

Saree went to her safe place, her sanctuary that overlooked her prized courtyard garden. Making a decision, she pressed a line on the desk phone.

Ruhll, her trusted head of security for the estate, all these years answered promptly.

"Yes, madam?"

"I trust you are aware? You saw her head off again?"

"Yes, ma'am, I happened to be in the monitoring room when she left."

"Ruhll, I know you'll be discrete. I know you are fond of her." Saree stopped letting the silence take hold. Then said, "she and I need to come to grips with a few things. She has turned of age, and I can't delay another day. Would you be so kind as to locate her and bring her home?"

"Yes, ma'am, immediately."

"I need to be absolutely certain there will be no mistakes, no public scenes this time either. If it's not possible, just wait until you can make it happen."

"I understand, Madam. I will handle it discreetly."

Disconnecting the line, Ruhll shook his head and wondered if that one mistake will haunt him forever.

*My men are the best. The last time was a freak accident, a mistake made by a rookie. It won't happen again."*

Ruhll chose his best two men. Pieter Collan and Micah Teague both coming from families before the time when they had been discovered. The children then were totally innocent. Watched over like a hawk. The Tribe, the Clan, handled things then. The security

was loose-knit, watching over the family then, not as a security team but an entire family unit. No one bothered them as everyone was the children's parent at times.

It was not anyone's fault that the family's stay in County Cork, Ireland, had been discovered. Call it fate, or destiny, however you define the cycle of life, they had to flee for their lives. The family exposure was too great to stay once known by forces; they still don't fully comprehend. They came down on the estate like whirling dervishes. Many of the men who rallied to defend, bearing arms, were killed in a crushing defeat.

Ruhll had risen to the challenge of seeing his friends and family members killed. When all looked lost, their final act was invoked with a nod from Saree. The unknown enemy swarmed the old stone house. A plan of escape, the proverbial, all is lost plan was now being implemented. The handful of trusted soles gathered in the basement. A door opened, steel hinges ready to close again. Furtive, fearful looks among them, and Ruhll encouraged a quick retreat into the darkness. The small, close-knit group went down the stairs to below the lowest basement of the manor.

The cold air enveloping them in their summer clothing as the enemy searched above. A long hewed tunnel, timbers creaking and groaning overhead, dirt scuffed underfoot as they made their escape. Ruhll taking charge of the few as they made way down the tunnel. He stopped behind them at various points. Enclosed switches flipped were being flipped. A circuit created that would leave no one behind to know of their escape, in the off chance the tunnel was discovered.

The tunnel and estate would become rubble in the off chance it was found. The circuit had a failsafe. Ruhll could disarm it remotely once they were clear of things. Having been slowed by pooled water, Ruhll having to stop to test its acidity and depth. Finally, after walking down so long, the group forged ahead, now on the definite incline. Finally, the group exited into a large hanger. A plane large enough to hold everyone in a hidden hanger.

Ruhll quickly adhered letters and numerals from an assortment stowed in an exterior compartment. The tactics were born of the drug cartels. The protection of such precious children and adults called for measures that were not necessarily legal here or where they were going. His connections, as did Saree's, ran deep. Ruhl had been with Saree then and now. Her self proclaimed protector in chief. He knows more than most and did his job well except for that one time when things went askew.

Decades later, he started out of his self-indulgent revelry, watching from across the street of a clandestine pop-up Rave. The three security men knew exactly where to find Avalina. Not only was her destination a nightclub, but it was also one she had frequented before. As well her car was pinging a small discrete signal that was tracked by the central security room at the estate.

After tasking her trusted security staff, Saree sat reflecting on the life they have had. Of all that had occurred. Avalina was now acting like a typical spoiled rich girl, replete with tantrums. Her own self imposed isolation for years, only now testing the established gentry's waters here in St. Augustine, Florida. All the family had accomplished, all they had protected for centuries, was now at risk. This was the first rebellion of a female in the family since time began. It worried Saree that she may have lost her daughter or, more to the point, her daughter may have lost her way.

In her office now alone, Saree sat reviewing business reports and graphs. Aldred would print them off for her every few days. Saree smiled at the small joke of never bothering to study them and how it infuriated her son.

Two marvelous children born of the same womb, yet so totally opposite. Personalities so polarized were a mystery. Always worth a bit of humor when reflecting upon those differences, thought Saree. Herself, a big picture thinker, couldn't care less about details. Aldred, her loyal son, was a hundred times better at the details anyway. Poor Avalina was good at nothing but buying things and going to night clubs.

Three hours later, the van returned, visible on the security cameras, entering the underground garage. The skilled security force had tracked Avalina to a nightclub, and without anyone knowing, had used a rag with chloroform to make her appear inebriated. Simple but effective methods were sometimes the best.

The hallway leading to the makeshift restrooms had been a perfect location. The timing was even better; Avalina was alone. Rendered unconscious, they escorted her out to the van, looking no worse than just having too much to drink. No one would remember. The security footage would cycle through and be copied over in a few days. Being security, they had made friends with others like themselves in the seedier side of town. His black suit still crisp, his earpiece in place, he nodded at Saree as she entered the underground garage, having been alerted to their arrival.

"She is safe and sound. No harm has come to anyone in her return."

"Thank you, you may go now. I will sit here with her until she awakens.."

"As you wish, Ma'am." Ruhl turned on his heels and went to the stairs, to disappear from wherever security people stay and wait to be called.

Avalina laid there in the back of the security van, seatbelts holding her as Saree couldn't help but reminisce back over the years. Their escape when her daughter and son were both so young. Saree had loved Ireland, she missed it, but one must do what one must do, she thought. How they fooled those who wanted them dead. How they came to this place and, over time, built a home where no one would look for them. At least so far, no one had.

"Avalina, wake up, darling," said Saree, her mother whispered as her daughter stirred from whatever had been used to subdue her. Groggy and still incoherent, the girl looked up into her mother's eyes.

"Where am I? What is happening?"

"You're safe, dear, all is fine?"

Avalina slowly sat up and began to recall everything that happened, saying, "I remember going to the ladies room at the Club, then someone grabbed me, now I wake up here, how?"

"I sent them. You were in no state to go about partying. You were belligerent and argumentative. I can't have that. You know the rules."

"Mother, I don't care anymore!"

"Dear, you don't know the level of jeopardy you are putting us all in. we cannot be found again. Do you care about our safety at all? Come with me. It is time you learned of things that you are old enough to know. Hopefully, I can convince you differently."

Groggily, embarrassed and, living in her Mothers house that she ruled with an iron fist, they walked. Saree held her daughter's arm in case the after-effects of being drugged caused her to stumble.

"I don't know how you manage to walk at all in those godforsaken high heels you wear."

"mom, you cant go clubbing in flats, how Gosch."

They walked to the back of the underground garage. A simple storeroom, a small cleaning closet, was opened. Then an electric panel with breakers like a million others was opened. Saree flipped what seemed like random switches, and the back wall of the closet swung open.

“Mother, what the hell is this? Where are we going? What is this place? It feels so dirty down here.”

“I need you to be open-minded, clear-headed, and to just hear me out. We are here for you to understand things.”

“What things, mother, we are rich is all, right? What else is there?”

As they walked, individual sensor lights came on. One door led to another, a narrow corridor about the width of a sidewalk. A place Avalina had never seen before, never knew existed before now.

“Why didn’t I know this was down here?”

“That young lady is about to be revealed to you. I should have brought you here sooner. For that, I apologize. It is customary for a daughter to understand certain aspects of our family. We should have visited this place when you turned eighteen. For not doing so, again, I apologize. I see now that it was my mistake. Today I sent men to retrieve you before you could draw undue attention upon our family.”

“You have always hinted at something. I never knew what. I guess now I am about to find out?”

Another door, only this one, was opened by her mother, placing her flattened palm to a stone in the wall. A wall that, at this point, appeared to be merely a wall. A rush of air came from the opening, stale but dry clean air, resulting from some unseen positive pressure rushing past them.

“What is this place?”

“It’s a museum, a reserve of our wealth, and so much more. All in due time, here slip this on over your clothing.”

They both donned white paper jumpsuits. Even cloth shoes were worn. Saree accessed a panel in the more modern wall, an electric panel, and started turning on the lighting.

With a sigh, Saree started, “We came here so many years ago. You were relatively young and have no real memory of things. We rented a nearby home then. Merely a roof over our heads, dear. I was betting on this location being nearby. I had no money. I actually waited tables at the local diner. We had rent to pay and groceries to buy, like everyone else. The fear of being found again was always at the back of my mind. We got lucky. No one noticed us; we were safe once again.

Forces that you will learn about wanted us dead. I had outsmarted them by coming here to this place, the one place they would never think to look.

“What are you talking about, Mother, you speak of nonsense, like some movie script? Are we in the Witness Protection thingy? Is that it?”

An odd smile, an appeasing sort of smile, came over Saree as her daughter questioned her.

“I had not looked at it that way, but in a way, yes, I suppose we are part of a protection program.”

“What, your joking with me? I’m not dumb. Really?”

“Not in any way you are thinking. I didn’t witness anything criminal.”

“Then what?”

“Sometimes the truth, dear, is much more bizarre than something as trite as the Witness Protection Program.”

“A look of genuine curiosity came over Avalina as her mother continued in this vein of thinking. She could see her daughter's fascination with the modern world of crime fiction and leaned heavily on it going forward.

“You see, dear, I brought you to this pretty town, this location for a good reason. I had hoped for two things then. I expected to live in peace, no one hunting us. I also hoped for a miracle of sorts to reveal itself to me.

I gambled that living in the open, changing our name would confuse whoever for a time. Since we had been in Europe, they spent years following up traces that we had planted there.”

Avalina was awestruck, “Europe? Your kidding. I was born here, wasn't I?”

“Not exactly.”

“Then, where?”

“Think, you've heard me speak of family, the old country haven't you?”

“Well, a lot of families immigrated to this country way back.”

“You are correct. Just not when you thought we had. May I continue now?”

“Yes, please do,” Avelina almost sounding flippant.

“The Clan excelled in leaving traces of our living here and there, worldwide, even in America. Just not too close to us.

Besides, they would think it too stupid for us to come here.”

Mother, what are you saying? Are you for real in this, people hunting us? Who are they?”

“Our kind, our bloodline has been hunted time in memorial,” Saree let this sink in as if it was a fishhook in a trout's mouth.

Saree mused to herself, *What you will inherit is more bizarre than your innocence can handle, dear daughter. There is no choice in this. It's yours now.*

Continuing her tale, Saree said, “I had hoped that I was right. It had been puzzling for so long, what had been hidden long ago. Once I had worked out the details, I spent two years waiting tables to keep us in food and shelter. I caught a break.

The house sitting on top of us here came up for sale. I spent rent money, bought a new dress, and pretended to be in the market for a home. At the time, I couldn't even afford cab fare to get here; I walked.

“Wait! You said others had come with you. Where were they in all this?”

“Very good, my Dear, at least I know you are listening. When we safely had gotten to America, Ruhll set up a false trail. He rented a house in California, the staff went with him. The idea was for Ruhll to be in the open. To see if anyone had come after them.

Meanwhile, we were here playing the part of an itinerant poor as poor could be family, a single mother down on her luck. It was risky. We were living in plain sight. The stakes were high, we knew that, but the reward was far more significant. All we had to do was find it. Shall I continue?”

Avalina was beginning to see a much different side of her mother.

“It was an Open House. I had gone by more than once, and the sign appeared one day. A local realtor had listed the empty home. I was shaking as I presented myself trying to look almost casual and disinterested. At the right moment, I sneaked into the basement. I

knew what I was looking for then; it took me staying in that basement until after the open house was over. I was trespassing then if I had been caught.”

The rapt attention by Avalina to this very accurate tale of past adventures was enough for Saree to know she had fully set the baited hook in her daughter's mind.

“Mom, why had I never heard any of this before, my goodness? How old was I?”

“You were all of two years old. Your brother was nearing seven. He had some memories of things where you had none. Which I was grateful for.”

“Why?”

“Well, I had no childhood. I wanted you to grow up near-normal, or as close to it as I could provide.”

“My brother knows all this, and I don't?”

A smile of seeing the competitive relationship between siblings, “actually his knowledge is limited, as it should be, his role in family affairs is mostly financial, and all he knows is that one day I would reveal things to you. Things that he can never know. That is unless you decide to tell him after I die.”

“Oh...”

“Once I located what I knew to be below this house, I carried out enough gold with me that night to buy the entire block.”

“Gold?”

“Yes, don't interrupt me now, Dear.”

“Sorry.”

” Mother turned another series of lights on, and small-windowed rooms began to blink their lights on down the entire length of the corridor. Seeing in the first of the places, Avalina gasped. One of many apparently, the small room was full of artifacts: cups, bowls, utensils of all shapes and sizes. The collection was entirely in gold, at least what appeared to be solid gold. The one oddity was they were more substantial than any tableware Avalina was accustomed to. As they slowly walked along, Mother gave her daughter time to absorb what she saw for the first time.

“I had to make a few trips but managed to get enough. The next problem was how to turn that gold into cash. Fortunately, I had come across a set of molds at a local garage sale no less. You see, Dear, Graphite is one of the best mold materials for melting gold. I didn't ask, and they did not say how they came to possess them. I learned later that the family was a long lone of Jewelers. Most likely, the molds served as collection bins for a stray gold bit while making jewelry. With only a few molds, the size I wanted to make small squares of gold—something you could easily carry in your pocketbook.

“You mean you destroyed some of the old artifacts, cups, and such?”

“Had to be.”

“Working evenings and days off, while you and your brother were sleeping, I melted down gold and made it into small ingots I could carry.”

Avalina shook her head s if learning a secret.

“I found an agreeable buyer, someone who would remain quiet. The bank of Ireland was a friend to us, even if they didn't know who I really was. Others still there were in a place to make contact. They gave me top dollar for each ingot, and we did that a few times a week. It didn't take long to have stashed away enough cash for an offer on the original property here. It was the one address we had to have for everything to work out. From there, we bought up the surrounding lots and eventually turned it into what you know it to be

today. The house had been renovated and made livable after a time and Ruhl and the others came here. They never had any indication of being hunted. Our escape had been clean.

Room after room of treasure revealed itself as they slowly made their way along. Saree knew her daughter would be full of questions after seeing the artifacts. As a mother, Saree was saddened by the burden of knowledge. The knowledge that her daughter's life will take an abrupt turn into the most bizarre world of their own family legacy.

Her life would now change, just like her mother's had when she learned the truth and how things changed. No longer just a wealthy socialite with two children to raise, she was now on a path of revelation that had occurred before. For this was the legacy of being born into the bloodline of the first.

With little fanfare, Saree lit the next set of rooms, end to end were coffins.

"Oh, my God, are these real? Who are they?"

"I told you our bloodline goes back very far."

"Yes, but still?"

"These coffins represent the entire line of our family's time here."

"But why here, not a graveyard?"

With a sigh Saree said, "discovery would be complicated on us. Let's agree that soon you'll understand everything. All I ask is that you let me tell it in my own way."

"How does...?" Avalina counted the coffins she saw, "How do sixty coffins represent a family that you say is old?"

"Please, you will know more as we go forward, dear. Let me do this my way, not yours."

Avalina felt rebuked and excited at the same time. This did not feel like her mother had criticized her, yet she had. So she swallowed her pride and waited.

That first revealing day was difficult for the pampered and spoiled Avalina. Saree had felt unprepared.

It was difficult for most to hear. Of course, Saree only had her mother's word, and now Avalina had a version of that same set of stories. Mother to daughter, handed down over centuries, was how it was done.

For Saree, the legacy gifted to her was in the form of tall-tales. Her mother had chosen the concept of fairy tales told over time. That idea was not relevant to Avalina for two reasons. First, she was an adult now, and secondly, time was their enemy. For Saree, who heard in the quiet of the night, while others slept, fairy tales heard by the fireplace had made sense then.

Stories of ancient peoples, their life, their most cruel death in some cases had horrified Saree as she remembered back to her own raw truth sessions. Words that dovetailed with other historical events learned in school, but with such a familial perspective, they had to be true. Each story heard at her mother's side was built on the stories heard before. How her family held the secrets of the past so close was mind-boggling to a novice. So private that no one had ever revealed a thing outside of the chain of mother to daughter. Of course, male siblings knew enough to be useful, but not the entire story.

Once Avalina was awed by the shiny metal in the rooms, her real teachings began. Never easy, never quick, sometimes happening over months of questions and answers secretly in the middle of the night. In Avalina's case, she was schooled faster, but no more than she could absorb at one sitting.

Saree knew a young mind was more readily able to grasp such things, now with Avalina a young adult, it would take longer. This was a first in the succession line with a cautious timeline combined with the wealth in hand. Each day for weeks, Avalina would come down to the tunnels alone and marvel at the scope of their wealth. Slowly Avalina gave reverent thought to the coffins sitting in the far reaches of the tunnels.

*Are all these coffins my ancestors, my kinfolk? How far back do we go?*

Avalina had still not reconciled the years and the minimal number of caskets.