



A forty-year-old mother of twins dances with delight and demons when she moves back to her hometown in suburban Detroit. Her best friend labels this chapter of their lives "The Great Snap" and the past is explored, to explain the present.

The Great Snap

By Christine M. Alward

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"Like the Detroit song titles that lead each chapter, this sassy story by Christine Alward, a first-time novelist, is very entertaining, always moving forward, and will have readers turning the pages!"

— **Michael Patrick Shiels**, AUTHOR, SYNDICATED RADIO HOST

The Great Snap

A NOVEL



CHRISTINE M. ALWARD

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Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-946-3

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-64719-947-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2022

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Alward, Christine M.

The Great Snap by Christine M. Alward

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022902600

Chapter One

2016
“Looking at You”
by MC5

“Am I about to get fucked, Jack? Just give it to me straight. I know it can’t be good.” said Nicolina Carlson-Pratt, looking lovely in a black Jessica Simpson sundress. She was already in such a state, that she had begun to lose her manners and class when speaking to her late father’s best friend and lawyer.

Nicolina, “Lina” as most called her, was impeccably made up, with every blonde hair in place, and sporting a fresh manicure. Her closest friend, Ricky, had advised that the dress brand was perfect, as most noted that Lina herself resembled a trim Jessica Simpson, with Liz Taylor’s violet eye color. She had decided if she was going to be broken on the inside, she should at least look fabulous on the outside.

June’s humidity had made its first seasonal appearance in suburban Detroit that week, and the air conditioning at Anson’s funeral home struggled to keep the conference room cool. Lina’s skin clung to her dress as she shifted anxiously in her seat. She was running on empty in so many ways, and the lack of sleep and nourishment for the last several weeks had amplified her discontent. Terror had set in at the realization that Lina’s stepmother was probably controlling her father’s assets the same way that she manipulated his life. Everything had happened so fast, and now Lina was sitting across from a man she had known her entire life, at Bill’s last big event.

Jack studied the face of Bill's daughter. At forty years old, Lina was just as stunning as she had been in her youth. As pretty as she was, when she opened her mouth and spoke, it was the same direct, no-nonsense words and attitude of his newly-departed old buddy. The Carlson's certainly never minced words.

William "Bill" Carlson, father of Lina, had died just four days earlier. His family had lived in Rochester, Michigan for over eighty years. Bill's father before him, Bill Senior, had started a lumber company in town several decades before. Carlson's Lumber had put Nicolina's grandparents at the top of Rochester society back in the 1940s. They were still considered pillars of their affluent suburban city and of Greater Detroit as a whole. Jack Nelson, Brad Bates, and George Anson all came from original Rochester families and were lifelong friends of her father's. At age sixty-five, the four men, including Bill, had still been shooting skeet together several times a week, and all belonged to the Oakland Creek Country Club, located just north of town.

Jack cleared his throat and spoke calmly, unable to disguise the grief in his voice.

"Now, it's customary to have this meeting after all of the funeral proceedings have ended. But since the guys and I are leaving tomorrow to honor your dad's wishes, I thought we would talk now."

"You're taking his ashes to Lake Superior tomorrow? Already?" asked Lina, incredulously, as her jaw slightly dropped.

Jack was shuffling folders and paperwork around as he answered absentmindedly, "Yes, everyone has the time to do it this weekend. And the weather will be perfect."

I'm completely left out again, she thought.

Lina had moved to Southern California in 1994, after high school graduation, to attend San Diego State University. In her twenty-two-year absence, it was as if everyone had forgotten she existed or that she was Bill's only child.

I should be the one taking his ashes to Lake Superior and making all the decisions, she thought. Nobody even asked me.

All of this was simply adding fuel to the fire that had already begun to burn through Lina's peace of mind.

"Are George and Brad going with you? Oh, and by the way...why is George kissing Carol's ass?" asked Lina, becoming more emotional by the second.

"George is not kissing Carol's ass. He owns the funeral home, and she is a client," Jack managed to say before being cut off.

"Am I about to get fucked, Jack?" Lina repeated. She had never sworn in front of her dad's best friend before this day. She was usually very proper and polite around certain company, including her dad's conservative friends. Lina's grief and frustration, along with all the other challenges in her life, had come to a head.

Jack let out a long, apologetic sigh. His face softened into a sympathetic half smile as he sat and looked into Lina's unique eyes. Jack didn't know Lina very well anymore, but he had fond memories of her as a child, and loved his best friend's feisty little girl. He remembered how charming little Lina had been at dinner parties as a child. Like an old soul, laughing at adult jokes and sneaking sips of champagne. But Jack had practiced law for over thirty-five years and knew that legally there wasn't much he was going to be able to do for her.

"You aren't going to be *fucked*, Lina," said Jack in a calm, gentle voice. "Your father left you two life insurance policies and a few of his belongings. He left you his Corvette..."

“What about the house? My *MOTHER’S* house?” interrupted Lina.

Jack took a careful breath before speaking. He had paperwork he was placing in front of her.

“This is the prenup that your dad and Carol signed.”

Tears were filling her eyes, causing the words on the page to appear blurry.

Jack spoke again. “While you are the legal owner of the house, Carol is allowed to stay in the home as long as she pleases. As long as she follows the conditions in the prenup.”

Lina felt her world crumbling with Jack’s words. She was sick to her stomach.

How could my dad do this to me? she thought.

Lina dug deep to control her emotions before speaking again. “What are the conditions?” she asked.

Jack looked at the prenuptial document he had drawn up with Bill before his wedding to Carol. Jack didn’t like Carol, but Bill had been a grown man and was free to make his own choices. Jack was just there to legally protect him from his choices.

“She has to pay the mortgage and taxes and keep up on any and all repairs to the property,” answered Jack.

One of Lina’s tears had escaped down her face. Grabbing a Kleenex from the box on the funeral home desk, she dabbed under her eyes.

Lina spoke again in desperation. “What about everything that is in the house? What about all my mother’s things? How is there even a mortgage? This doesn’t make any sense!” she said, shaking her head as she spoke. “Jack, I went over there the other night...the night that my dad *died*. I had to beg to be let in the house!”

“My partner will go over the details. Your Dad had clever ways of writing off taxes. The mortgage is relatively new.” said Jack, trying to fit a word in.

“How long does she get to stay there? Forever? Is there a deadline? When do I get to occupy the house I own, Jack?”

“There’s no deadline, Lina. As long as she follows the conditions, she can live out her days there.” said Jack, looking down.

“Jack...her mother just died last year at age one-hundred! My parents died at thirty-five and sixty-five...that bitch is going to outlive me! I don’t believe this!” she cried.

Jack understood Lina’s emotions. He didn’t blame her. “Lina, I did everything I could do when we created the prenup. At least I got him to keep the house legally in your name. Your dad didn’t even think he’d need a prenup! I stepped in and had him do it this way. I’ll talk to her about the house contents, but unfortunately, Carol was upset with your dad about the prenup. She threatened to call off the ceremony at city hall, so your dad hastily crossed things off the document, to make her happy. Poor guy. He had just thrown her that elaborate engagement party. He didn’t want to look like a fool.”

Each word that escaped Jack’s lips were like loose embers meeting with volcanic ash, that already resided within her. Lina felt her skin flush as there was nowhere for the eruption to escape. Her eye released another tear, but the steam had already traveled to her mind, causing her newly-broken soul to simmer. She felt intense, bottled-up anger towards her father and he was gone.

Lina had only been ten when her mother, Fara Mancini-Carlson, had succumbed to a heart condition. Fara’s father, Frank Mancini, had comforted young Lina through her grief. But Grandpa Mancini was gone now too, and Lina had never felt more alone.

“What about my mom’s will and trust!?” she countered desperately.

Jack answered her question with a balanced, firm tone. “Your dad became the executor of the trust when your mom passed. He had the legal right to change it.”

Lina stared at Jack blankly before speaking.

“This woman was married to him for one year,” she said with increasing frustration. “One fucking year! She is the new character that joined the cast, the last ten minutes of my dad’s movie...and she is taking half of my money??? The money my mom had made sure was put away for ME? And now Carol is allowed to legally stay in my mother’s house that I own?! And I’m just supposed to be cool with it? What the FUCK?!”

In an effort to distract Lina and calm her down, Jack stood calmly and lifted a large box off the counter that had been sitting there the whole time. Lina was so upset, she hadn’t noticed it.

“Here is a box containing all of your parents’ legal documents. Deeds to properties, copies of birth certificates, passports. Oh...and he left the apartment building downtown to you. Carol gets the place in Cabo. Rest assured, the house at Crystalline Lake is still owned by the Carlson family, of course. You, your Aunt Isobel, and Cousin Miles.”

Jack’s words became babble to Lina’s ears. He may as well have been an adult in the Peanut’s cartoons. “*Womp, womp*” was all she heard anymore. There was so much coming at her and she was already struggling in so many ways. Her cheating husband, raising young twins, and readjusting to life in Michigan were already taking a toll. She had hoped to move back into her childhood home, while she contemplated the future of her marriage. Now that plan seemed off the table and her list of responsibilities had grown. She was now landlord of an aging building that would constantly need repairs, and faced the heavy task of pulling off her dad’s final construction project for the family business. She felt overwhelmed as the weight of the world seemed to shift and rest on her shoulders.

She looked at the large cardboard box. It had “Carlson” written with a black Sharpie marker in large letters. This box would come to be known as her “orphan box.” It contained all of her parents' hopes and dreams. Paperwork they had excitedly signed when buying a new home, documents they had notarized while grieving their own parents, everything that would be important for Lina to have one day. Their whole lives condensed into a neat, brown box to be given to Lina at one of her darkest hours. The box that would aid their only child, as she took over the reins of life for the Carlson family one day.

She had known and buried all of her grandparents. Now, her parents' generation was gone. She could feel her own mortality moving up to the front of the death line.

“Well, my parents are both dead. That means I’m next! I’m a forty-year-old orphan! That generation is gone! I’m next!” exclaimed Lina, now acting and sounding like a crazy woman. Like the homeless people she had seen shout at nobody in the streets of San Diego.

Jack tried to break in. “Lina, you’re only fort...”

She cut him off. “FUCK THAT BITCH! FUCK THAT FUCKING WHORE!” She screamed through tears as she rose to leave. A couple of guests who were standing outside the conference room door looked both ways before walking away uncomfortably. An older woman took their place to try to listen. Lina couldn’t bear this. She needed some nicotine. Jack spoke, very aware that this woman was breaking before his eyes.

“Lina, try to calm down. Look, I have another trip booked right after I return from Lake Superior. My partner at the firm will handle everything for you in my absence. Just call the office for anything you need. Again, he will go over more details with you about the mortgage and estate.”

Lina didn’t mean to be rude to Jack. None of this was his fault, but she had lost control of her emotions. Something her

father would have criticized her for. The way he had criticized her at her mother's funeral for crying in front of guests at age ten. For appearing weak. For being an outwardly-emotional Italian like her mother. Lina took a deep breath.

"Fine," she said, carefully dabbing her tears as she approached the door. She felt too upset to leave the room and face all those people, but knew she had no choice. Visitation had been in intervals starting the day before, and the final morning service was to be followed by that evening's big banquet, which was scheduled to begin in half an hour. Jack stood to help her with the door.

"I'll have someone bring the box to your house," he said softly. "I'll see you shortly in the banquet hall."

Nicolina Carlson-Pratt simply nodded at Jack and emerged from that conference room a changed woman. An angry woman. A woman who was tired of being nice. A woman who seemed to be losing her cherished childhood home, her husband, and her youth. A woman who no longer had any shits left to give. This was the moment that Lina had snapped.

The thumb had met the middle finger to form the snap a year before, when Lina had first met her father's new wife. Her dad's terminal illness and death had moved the thumb along the middle finger, and the news that her late father's closest friend just delivered had created the official sound. Lina would remain in full snap for the next six months, as her best friend, Ricky, would relay to future generations.

She entered the main parlor. She had to walk through all those people in order to exit the building and get to her car, where her vape pen awaited her. She had quit smoking cigarettes ages before, but had started vaping upon learning her father was terminally ill. She was on a mission. *Must get to vape pen, she thought. I need some nicotine before I fucking kill someone.*

Brad Bates stood by the door with a short glass in his hand. Brad was her father's other close friend who would be joining Jack on the ashes trip. As she began to pass him, he leaned into Lina.

"I think this water could use some whiskey," said Brad, already visibly drunk.

Since George Anson was the owner, all the old friends from school had already been permitted to enter the bar area and return to the visitation center with drinks. George himself was grieving and tipping the bottle, so all normal rules went out the window.

Lina flashed some semblance of a smile and kept walking, when she saw a circle of three visibly-intoxicated men. She realized the loudest one, who was joking and laughing with the other two in a yamaka, was her father's dentist, Dr. Stein. The other men were Harvey Glickman and his son, Seth, whom Lina had grown up with.

"Hello, Gentlemen," said Lina politely, while trying to brush past without stopping to chat. Dr. Stein's arm fell around her shoulders.

"I'm so sorry about your father," slurred her dad's dentist. "He was a great guy."

"Thank you," managed Lina, while noting the alcohol on his breath.

As she broke from his drunken embrace, she felt his hand move to her bottom and make a quick squeeze. She ignored the advance and kept heading to the doors. *Dr. Stein did not just grab my ass at my father's funeral. Seriously?!* she thought, craving nicotine more than ever now.

She spotted her Aunt Isobel, arriving fashionably late to her younger brother's visitation.

"Darling," said Aunt Isobel, coming in for a light hug and air kiss. Lina could smell the scotch whiskey on her breath.

“How nice of you to join us. Several of the elders from town have been asking for you,” Lina said with polite annoyance.

“Well, I wasn’t able to get the proper jewelry from the safe without assistance, my dear. I spent the *entire* day here yesterday and wanted to look my best for the party. You *do* understand, darling,” said Aunt Isobel in her high class American/British accent, like someone from the 1950s. Lina had used this form of speaking quite regularly in her own life too. By watching Aunt Isobel, she learned that you can say the bitchiest thing to someone, but if done using an old movie accent and vocabulary, you could get away with it. After all, no one can be angry with a person from the 1950s.

As Aunt Isobel turned away to greet a guest who had just arrived, Lina started working her way toward the door again.

“Lina!” said a familiar female voice. When the woman grabbed Lina’s arm, she realized it was Mitzy Hamilton, a bitch she had known in school. Mitzy’s father owned the local insurance agency that her family had used for generations, which gave Mitzy a valid reason to attend this event. Mitzy’s mother was the librarian at the local public library. Lina hadn’t seen Mitzy in years, but knew full well that Mitzy was only there to collect gossip.

“Mitzy! Good to see you. I have to go,” said Lina, barely pausing to make eye contact.

Mitzy gently held onto Lina’s arm to keep her in place for a moment. “Lina, I am so sorry for your loss.” Her face arranged itself in a fake look of deep concern. “I don’t know what the inheritance situation is,” she said in almost a whisper, while moving her hands in front of her chest as if performing a magic trick with cups, “but we will need to discuss all of that. So be sure to call the office for an appointment!”

Lina had already freed herself from Mitzy's grasp and was walking again. She was a woman on a mission for the sweet relief of nicotine.

"Lina, honey. What did Jack have to say?" asked another female voice. This time it was Denise, the mother of her best friend Ricky. Her wife, Greta Goldman, was standing beside her. Denise was Ricky's biological mother, and Greta had been there since Denise was pregnant. The two women owned the famous *Motown Mood Café* on Main Street and had proudly raised Ricky together. They were also like mothers to Lina.

"Can we discuss it later? I just really have to get out of here," said Lina with a quick peck to Denise's cheek.

The women stood watching with concern as Lina hastily walked away. Greta put a comforting arm around Denise.

An older woman whom Lina recognized as a friend of her father's family was moving towards Lina.

"Nicolina, don't worry! Your father is still alive in Heaven," stated Mrs. Howell, while smiling brightly at Lina.

"Nope! I saw him. He was definitely dead!" Said Lina, as she began to walk away. "Dead as a fucking door nail," Lina said quietly to herself, although everyone in earshot heard her, as she passed through the nosey crowd.

She needed to get to her car immediately. She wanted that vape pen to calm her nerves. She knew she was growing bitchier and more emotional by the second, and nicotine withdrawal wasn't helping.

She reached her white Ford Flex, jumped inside, locked the doors, and took a long, deep puff. *Alone, safe and secure*, she thought. Feeling calmer now, she looked past her windshield at the bustling downtown area. For other people in the world, this was just another day of work and cooking dinner. She noticed that the parking lot was filling quickly with guests for her father's memorial banquet, and she slumped in her seat as she

exhaled her vape down low, so nobody would see. After a few minutes, she knew she had to go back inside, and the vapors escaped into the humid breeze as she opened her vehicle door. She struggled to find her footing to go back inside, as going in and out of air-conditioning on an empty stomach was making her dizzy.

All the funeral guests were now funneling into the banquet center behind the parlor. The Anson's had expanded over the years, and they now owned several funeral parlors with adjoining banquet halls all over Metro Detroit. They were known for upscale accommodations in their clients' times of need. Lina and Carol had met with Kyle, the son of George Anson, three days before to make meal and drink selections. Carol Lipschitz, Bill's dark-haired, pale-skinned, underweight new wife, had wanted to have a cash bar and a buffet. Carol had suggested that they save money by catering the event with her own catering business, a food truck, but luckily that was not permitted by Anson's.

Lina had already experienced a sampling of Carol's food from the "*Carol's Creations*" truck and wondered how she managed to stay in business. "*Never trust a skinny chef,*" Lina's father used to say, until Carol and those little blue pills had entered his life, making him forget all about that funny tip he always used to give. Carol could do no wrong in Bill's desperate eyes. He had been alone for a very long time and had money, which made Bill an unsuspecting target for gold diggers. There had been other ladies, such as Bill's maid, who had been happy to spend the night and help out, along with several other "friends" that Bill would entertain over the years. But Bill had never allowed anything to become serious and by the time he had reached his sixties, there had been far less options and loneliness had set in. Carol had obviously sensed this when she met Bill just over a year ago, and seemed to be a quick study. It had become apparent to Lina that Carol had manipulated her way into

matrimony and just three months after their visit to the court house, Bill learned he had terminal cancer.

Lina had been horrified at the thought of Carol's tacky food truck supplying the food for her father's banquet. She even heard a rumor that a cockroach had been seen scurrying away from the truck one day. Even though Ricky believed that had been a different food truck, Lina was adamant that it was *definitely* Carol's food truck and that Ricky should never correct her while she told the story.

Lina had also been raised to believe that a cash bar was wrong and that a buffet was only acceptable for small affairs.

"Aunt Isobel would be mortified!" she had said before having a fit at the meal selection meeting. *"You wouldn't invite someone to a party at your house and ask them to pay for a drink! How could you even suggest we go cheap on my father? The whole city, hundreds, if not a thousand, will be in attendance and you want to have a cash bar and a fucking buffet?"*

Carol had been infuriated that Lina wanted her to spend so much of her new money on this. *Spoiled little bitch. Go back to California*, she had thought as she conceded to Lina's demands. *You'll be the one picking up the tab for all this*, decided Carol, silently.

Between the effects of the outdoor heat and everything unfolding with her stepmother, Lina felt as though she might faint as she entered the banquet hall. Brad, already on the microphone at the front of the crowd, was giving an impromptu eulogy with slightly-slurred speech. Brad, known for his charm, had the room full of laughter as he spoke. The ballroom looked lovely with all the floral arrangements brought in from the visitation room and the marble floors that gleamed in the lighting as she made her way up front.

Lina took a seat at the reserved table near where Brad was speaking. Her children and husband were already seated with

Ricky, Denise, and Greta. In usual fashion, her husband Luke barely glanced her way and didn't greet her. He was a quiet man who gambled, cheated, lied, and ignored his wife. Nobody thought he deserved to be with Lina. Most guys who knew her assumed that he must make a lot of money in order to have snagged her. Unfortunately for Lina, that wasn't the case. Lina had married Luke because he seemed quiet and safe. His gambling problem hadn't surfaced during their short courtship, and he had seemed like a good guy on paper. Not only was Luke employed, but he had never been married and had no kids. And most importantly, he actually *wanted* to settle down, which had been hard to find in Southern California. After reaching the age of thirty, her father would ask when she was going to settle down on every phone call home. She had wanted to have a family and didn't want to wait too long. Luke had seemed like a Godsend just ten years prior.

Lina picked up one of the two cocktails that Ricky had waiting for her. He knew she would need it. As she finished the first vodka and cranberry, she noticed a plate of loose Oreo cookies sitting on the table. A quick glance around the room revealed that they were on every table.

"What the fuck is this?" asked Lina with an annoyed whisper in the direction of Denise, Greta, and Ricky.

Ricky shrugged.

"Carol said your dad liked Oreos and put them out." answered Denise.

"Where *is* Carol?" asked Lina, as civilized as she could. Her anger and annoyance were mounting at Carol's tacky gesture.

"I don't know, hon. Last I saw her she was outside, speaking to a gentleman I didn't recognize." answered Greta in a whisper, before adding, "Hey, I ordered some Kabbalah information from Amazon for you and Ricky to get started. You guys are forty now, and I really think it could help you with your grief, Lina."

The room erupted in applause and drunken whistles as Brad finished giving his eulogy speech. Now very buzzed, having not eaten that day and just downing her second drink, Lina decided it was time for her speech.

Lina rose and approached the microphone, giving Brad a kiss of thanks on the cheek as he left the podium to take a seat. She saw Aunt Isobel enter like a debutante, as she was ushered to their table.

Lina smiled brightly at the large audience of family, old friends, colleagues, and even enemies of her late father's.

"I just wanted to say I am humbled by the outpouring of love and concern from everyone at this trying time," she said. She smiled, making eye contact with people throughout the room before continuing. "You know, when Carol first suggested we have a buffet and cash bar for this event," said Lina, talking like a motivational speaker to disguise her irritation, "I just knew we had to do better."

A couple of wealthy wives of Bill's friends grinned and nodded knowingly that a cash bar just wouldn't do for this occasion.

Still sporting a big, superficial smile, Lina continued. "This party isn't just to celebrate my father's life, it's to celebrate all of *you* for being such an important part of it. You are all the threads that created who my father was, and the backbones of this fine community. I thank you all for taking the time out of your day to provide comfort to my family and me," said Lina as she blew a theatrical kiss out to the crowd.

Before leaving the podium, Lina leaned back into the microphone. "Oh, and a proper dessert will be served after the meal. Not just cheap Oreos that have been left out in the elements for people to sneeze on," she stated in a chipper tone, smiling big with her mouth only.

Aunt Isobel kept her same pleasant expression as she began to applaud, having no clue what was going on, as she had been drinking scotch all day. As the equally-buzzed audience clapped, Lina leaned over to her husband and whispered quickly that she *had* to go and she would see him at home. He nodded.

Tipsy Lina exited the banquet hall and was back in the lobby of the funeral parlor. George Anson, the owner and close friend of her father's, stepped out from his office with a portrait of Bill.

"Nicolina, where would you like us to put this?" George asked, speaking low and sympathetically as he held the large, framed photo in his hands.

Lina didn't even slow her pace. She was angry that George had seemed to be catering to Carol more than to her in this process.

"How about up Carol's ass, George?" called Lina, still walking. She had never addressed Mr. Anson as "George" in her entire life.

Surprised and confused, George Anson watched as Lina walked off. Just then, Carol exited the women's powder room, where George was standing.

"Ah, uh, Carol?" said George, nervously offering the portrait to her.

Ricky had pulled up his getaway car out front and was now standing in the lobby looking fabulous in a trendy, form-fitting suit with his Afro pulled neatly into a bun. He had been there long enough to witness the interaction that Lina had just had with Mr. Anson. Kermit Karnes, the most flamboyant gay in town and former love interest of Ricky's, walked over to join Ricky near the doors, while sipping his cocktail from the banquet.

Lina was still walking, as a young male assistant began to hold out a vase of flowers for Lina to take. Without stopping, she grabbed the flowers by the heads and threw them in the garbage can just ahead of her. The assistant was still holding the vase and

looked shocked, before Lina paused for a moment, remembering her manners and turned her head to explain.

"Allergies," she said, with a polite smile and nod, before springing back into motion. Her expression quickly turned to a look of desperation, as she faced Ricky and Kermit again and headed for the exit.

Just as Lina was nearing the doors that lead to the getaway car, Kyle Anson, the son in charge of the banquet hall, stopped Lina.

"Mrs. Pratt, I see you are leaving. Here is the bill for the banquet portion of the event." Lina glanced quickly at the bill Kyle held in his hands. It was for \$33,800.

"My father's wife will be handling the bill. She's right over there," said Lina, pointing in Carol's direction. George and Carol were still off in the distance, talking about the portrait.

Lina spun on the balls of her open toe, sling back stilettos and was opening the door to freedom. At that, Kermit Karnes turned to Ricky. "Best funeral *ev-er!*" exclaimed Kermit, as he sipped from the straw of his drink excitedly and walked away.

Ricky joined Lina outside, and both were finally seated in the car, alone at last. Ricky took a breath, then smiled and looked at Lina. "That was straight up *gangsta!*" whispered Ricky, smiling with admiration. His inner excitement and laughter were now mounting within him. "Did you really just fuckin' do that? Oh, my God!" Ricky covered his mouth and began to bounce with laughter. He did his best imitation of Lina, "My father's wife will be handling the bill. She's right over there."

"GO! Come on, drive!" urged Lina

"That was some *Dynasty* shit! That was awesome!" said Ricky, still laughing hysterically while pulling away from the curb and into traffic.

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Lina also began to laugh. Ricky had a knack for finding humor in everything, and it was one of the many reasons she loved him.

“STRAIGHT UP GANGSTA!” Ricky exclaimed as he tapped the top of his steering wheel with his fist, still laughing.



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