

Preview of

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS:



The Misadventures of No One Famous

Kelli Jae Baeli



"What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger...unless it instead snaps your spine. Then it makes you a paraplegic." ~Kelli Jae Baeli



The Sound of my Own Thoughts: Prelude to Situational Delusion Predicated on Habit & Perpetuated by Toxic People

I've lost the sound of my own thoughts. I have so much trouble with that: just having a thought, recognizing it, communing with it. I noticed this the other day in a rare moment when I was having a smoke break alone on the front porch. The thoughts marched in and out of my brain and I didn't recognize them. They were disjointed, odd, meaningless--rather pathetic, actually. I can't recall now what they were exactly.

I crave some solitude, Some quiet--some time to reacquaint myself with my own thoughts. But the people around me are noises. A cacophony of sounds meant to suck the marrow out of my life, and drown out the melody of anything beautiful.

That's why I'm sitting in the driveway in my van writing this.

I'm about to enter a new chapter in my life. It could be the best chapter ever, the one I've been waiting for like some ticket-less wannabe passenger on the train of real life. I watch the trains come and go, see other people boarding and going somewhere. I wish I could go too. But am I running away, or running to? No matter where I've been or who I've been with, I never can count it as a success. I always have some screaming ugly in my brain, ripping my psyche to shreds, leaving me feeling victimized by my own mind. My error, I think, is in the notion that "success" and "normal" are terms that apply to me in the most fundamental sense. That's when I had my little mini-epiphany.

All these years, I have struggled to do the things i felt i must--offer what little talent i had to the world, hoping to finally create stability and calm in my day to day life--finally place my energies into art and writing and music.

But the reality is that those things are merely points of light in an otherwise darkened room. I still have difficulty dealing with stress. I continue to impose order on my chaos, inventing still newer ways to obsess and control the minutia of each day; still am thin-skinned and



self-loathing and angry that I can never be that person I was before everything good in me imploded and rained down like shards of glass, cutting me, creating more wounds in my scarred skin.

I don't think highly enough of myself that I can just dismiss my hideous behavior with, "Oh, it's just the way I am, and I don't care if anyone approves." I'm not strong enough to change certain behaviors--the chemicals fighting, brawling, wrestling in my brain are too powerful. And I'm not so naive that I believe it's acceptable to behave the way I do. I hate who I've become, yet I have been incapable of changing that reality.

I'm a nut-case. Crazy. Sick in the head. Messed up. Mentally ill. How tragic that is. What a total pathetic loss. Potential, just jack-hammered into smithereens.

The safest and wisest thing I can do is never again fool myself into believing that I can maintain a committed, co-habitation with anyone else. It would be asking too much from another human being. I should never invest too much emotionally in the success of a lover, or the success of keeping one. It's a fond, fruitless wish, an exercise in futility. The people who cross paths with me, or count themselves as a friend or acquaintance, should never have to see the ugly side of me. They can enjoy my momentary calm, the fleeting generosity and kindness, the humor over a cup of coffee, the painting I just finished, the song I just recorded, the novel I published--and never have to endure the stomping rages, the tearful despondency, the invisible self-esteem. They should only enjoy the fruits of those dark demons, but never have to do battle with them.

The real challenge, after truly accepting these things about myself, is to embrace fully that I will never again enjoy the company of that SELF that has been usurped by this new self. I have changed, slowly but surely. I must release my hold on the hope that I can be loving and kind and generous and easy-going most of the time. It has become obvious that the person who possesses those qualities is now possessed by this demon. My only hope is to keep the demon in check when I am in the company of others, and let her rant and rage around in the safety of my solitude; and to glean some creative penance in songs and books and art. I've run out of time. I'm 36 years old, and what could have been changed is now only a dream. And like a dream, I must allow it to fade from my consciousness and never let it interrupt

my day with the should-have's and whys that torture my waking moments.

My cat loves me and he won't walk out. He'll be the constant companion that helps me feeling needed and loved unconditionally. He won't argue and push all my buttons. He will give me hugs and make me smile and laugh, as he has always done. He will not have pressing needs and agendas and ambitions to tax my strength. He will only ask for food and water and a stroke on the head, and to curl up in my lap to sleep. He is the only one who can safely build his world around someone like me.

This does not bode well for my goal to avoid becoming the Crazy Cat Lady.



Genesis, Without the Big Bang

I am a homeless disabled lesbian veteran.

I thought it best to get that out in the open right off the bat. It's a little less shocking than "I'm a PMSing Vampire Lesbian From Hell," but perhaps that's just as accurate.

I'm not a movie star, a sports hero, a Wall Street Mogul, or anyone else well-known, outside my corner of the world. I just have a story to tell that I feel is worth sharing. I'm like most readers who will pick up this book. I hope a huge number of you will do that...then maybe I could become a celebrity, and stop writing disclaimers like this.

The *disabled* and *homeless* parts have everything to do with being a veteran. The *lesbian* part has nothing to do with any of it, other than I don't want to spend the rest of this book skirting it. That would insinuate that there's some shame or fear involved, which isn't the case. And it would be near impossible to tell my story without that aspect. I'd rather tell it like it is. And this story isn't about my sexual orientation. It's about relationships and challenges and all the things that every human shares, some of them with a fully loaded crap-wagon, and some notsamuch.

I consider myself an lipstick lesbian. I refuse to wear high heels or a dress, but I will wear v-necks, jewelry and earrings (in lobes only) pant suits and makeup. The butchest thing about me is perhaps my choice of underwear. I have sworn off those frilly, crawl-up-your-butt women's underwear. I prefer boxer briefs because they don't ride up, necessitating constant tugging, and they are just so damn comfortable, they last three times



longer, and are half the price. And they double as shorts you can tool around in while at home. Really, they're the only article of clothing I can say I am truly in love with. It is a bit of cognitive dissonance that I also wear a brown lacey underwire bra.

I don't wear cowboy boots or rodeo buckles, or "Lesbian Haircut number one" nor "Lesbian Haircut Number 2"—I actually use a blow-dryer and curling iron when it's in a longer phase, and don't like how butch I look when I had to cut it short. And yes, I shave my legs and my underarms. I believe in being feminine without being foofy or coy, and strong without being a ball-buster or man-hater. All it's about, really, is who I happen to be attracted to.

All I know is, I had never had an attraction to men, and never had much luck getting them to have an attraction to me. I was always repulsed by hairy arms, hairy legs, hairy pits. I didn't like sweat. I didn't like machismo. I didn't like the feel of hard muscle against me. Who wants to be hugged by a rock? I like the feel of softness. I never felt "safe in strong arms"—only a bit oppressed. A partner's "strength" for me is about things like character, love, loyalty, integrity and vulnerability, not muscle mass. I detest the idea that one person is often placed above another by virtue of genitalia.

When I was in High School, there was no such thing as "being out." There were no organizations to support Lesbians and Gays. In fact, I had no concept of what "gay" was, until much later. To me, gays were people who lived in San Francisco.

Although I did my share of Saturday night "cruising" and hayrides and parties, I never once had a "real" date in high school, except maybe Junior prom when my date was a gay guy. That was prophetic, but I

didn't appreciate the irony at the time. I only remember being so pissed off about wearing that horrid, floor-length dress. It got in the way of everything, including dancing, so I hiked it up over one arm and danced anyway. Not the least bit ladylike, but I just didn't get why boys could wear comfortable shoes and clothing, and girls could not. At an early age, my mother tried to put me in dresses, but I rode my horse and my motorcycle, climbed trees and played touch-football with the boys anyway, so she gave up.

I only had one real date in college—I mean, my initial college years, “pre-discovery.” It was a private Christian college, so it was not exactly an environment where I could explore anything about my sexuality—whether it was losing my virginity, or discovering I loved women. But this sweet guy named Steve took me to Steak and Ale and then to see “The Man From Snowy River.” I thought it was great, and I liked him as a person, I just didn't want to kiss him. I would have preferred to climb a tree or play touch-football with him instead.

So, at 22, I was still a virgin. (I heard someone gasping, “Oh my god!”) Let's keep things in perspective, class. These days, virginity is a badge of honor and disease-free flag-waving. But when I was growing up, AIDS either did not exist, or was just beginning to appear. Sex was not this game of Russian Roulette. But I was a late bloomer anyway. I didn't get my period until I was 17.

I made the actual discovery in 1984, (not my period, my sexuality) and was never more sure about anything



in my life. Suddenly everything made sense. Even being a virgin made sense.¹

I'm also an author, a singer-songwriter, a mixed-media artist, a masseuse, a freethinker, a non-religious humanist, an intellectual pilgrim, a coffee-Klatcher, and a rebel with a cause.

Since joining the Army Reserve and being injured in the Line of Duty in 1988, I have suffered from physical disability and several versions of emotional and mental illness. Most people will hesitate to mention the mental part, since there's such a stigma attached to it. For me, it's just that something's broken and it needs repair. If you broke your leg, you wouldn't avoid going to a medical doctor out of embarrassment. Although, I guess you would if you broke your leg doing something embarrassing. Like trying to sit down on a toilet in the middle of the night, half asleep, without any lights on.

My experiences with the Army have not been pleasant ones. I had hoped it would be the drastic change I needed to kick my sagging life into overdrive. It became, and still is, a regrettable decision.

I've been diagnosed with a plethora of ailments over the last 22 years since my injuries. Degenerative Disc Disease, Whiplash, cervical strain, lumbar strain, spondylosis, tendonitis, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Bi-Polar Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Depression, Panic Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder...I'm unclear about which of these are

¹ The Lesbian Community has a little anthem: "Penis Pure and Proud." I even saw it on a button during Gay Pride Week once. That only served to legitimize my virginity even more. To misquote a popular country song, "I was Lesbian, when Lesbian wasn't cool."

misdiagnosed.² I've never had the resources long enough to figure it out. But I always required certain medications to keep it all in check during that time. Some medications worked well, some worked for a while and then stopped working, and some didn't work at all. Prozac, Pamelor, Ascendin, Paxil, Lithium, Serzone, Deseryl, Effexor, Wellbutrin, Zoloft, Xanax, Soma, Flexeril, Dolobid, Motrin...³

My physical disabilities did nothing to alleviate my stress and state of mind. My activity level dropped to nil, my financial status went into paroxysms, and I only got by because I was in relationships with partners who wanted to support me. I didn't seek out people who would support me; I think I just attracted partners who had a sugar-mama complex.

Regardless, at this writing, I am on the precipice of a major change—again. The powers-that-be are challenging my tendency to depend on the financial support of my partners, and, I've come to believe, write this book. And I must say I've been pretty pissed off about it. It's gotten out of hand. This assessment will become clear after you, dear reader, after you have waded through this memoir.

² Nowadays, I have my own ideas about that. I think that most diagnoses of "personality disorder" are wrong, and the symptoms are merely coping mechanisms gone awry and should not be used as excuses to avoid personal evolution.

³ I created a fake prescription bottle once with a label reading, "Army Stress Tabs...when it's all you can do, to be all you can be."



Dirty Laundry with a Dash of Madness

It's cold out tonight. Cold, like it was that night when I was 16.

If I stand really still, it all comes back to me, I am there again: questioning the sky with an upraised fist-- the air icy against my face where the tears dry and are replenished over and over.

Here and there, my memory pulls back-- unwilling to let me see what had happened... where those two days had gone... it is a void in my mind. Those two days are lost. And yet, I can recall enough of what happened before, and enough of what happened after, to know that nothing is the same because of it.

I can see my mother throwing me out of her house, my wet laundry being pulled from the washer and thrown out the door after me. There was something about seeing my clothes fall in a sodden heap in the dirt, that made me scream inside. I wanted to hurt her. My own mother-- and I wanted to see her in pain. I didn't understand it then, but she WAS in pain. I saw only hate and anger. (To this day, I must have control of my own laundry).

She stepped outside and started screaming at me like a Harpy, talons invisible, yet hidden in her words. I felt like I was a six year old again. An ugly step-child. I couldn't understand why her face was so red, or even what she was saying. I turned to pick up my clothes to put them back in the basket. No sooner had I done it, than she came up behind me and knocked it out of my hands. The clothes went back into the dirt. She called me a tramp. To this day, I have no idea why. She might as well have called me a polka-dotted spider monkey. I had never fallen prey to the usual teenaged delinquency. Didn't drink, didn't do drugs, had never been in trouble with the law, honored my curfew, didn't have sex. I was a virgin then. I had never even been on a date. My head was in the clouds, yes. I was overly sensitive, yes.

But she said I was a sad excuse for a daughter. She said I had caused her nothing but trouble and disappointment. I told her that every time I tried to do something right, she'd call it wrong. She said I never did anything right, and that I was useless. A sorry excuse for a daughter. She said she wished I'd never been born.

My mother rarely hugged me. Never said she was proud of me. Seemed apathetic to my interests or development. To then pronounce me flotsam--floating debris--something to be released and lost to the murky depths--well, that was too much.

I screamed at her that someday I'd be somebody and she'd never say that to me again. She said that first I had to grow up; that I was nothing, a nobody--that I'd never be anybody. I was destined, in her estimation, for failure.

I felt myself start to bleed inside. Then I got angry and the two of us stood there on the pebble-filled concrete patio, screaming at one another. She told me to keep my voice down or the neighbors would hear. My response came at the top of my lungs, "I don't give a damn what the neighbors think!"

"Shut up!" she screamed, and started toward me.

I backed away, screaming, "Hear that, neighbors?! I don't give a damn!"

That's when her hand shot out and stung me across my cheek. I don't think I've ever felt anything like it. I've been in fights. I've even been beaten by two drugged-up hoodlums and left for dead. But there's something about getting hit by a parent. It hurts twice as much.

I tasted something warm and sweet in my mouth and reached up to touch my lip. Blood. I looked at her and tried to catch my breath. She just stood there--she didn't even look sorry she'd done it. No second thoughts. I said quietly, "I hate you."

This time she struck me next to my eye, and I don't know if her hand was open or fisted. But it turned to a black eye later.

I just turned around and started walking toward my beat up old Pinto. She said with caustic sarcasm, "You forgot your laundry."

At that moment, I really did hate her. I told her to go to hell.

I didn't see her for six months after that. I stayed with a friend and her family for two weeks. I was like a zombie. I finally had to be asked to leave. To me it only seemed a few days. So I slept in my car for a week or two--(or three?) and a friend in the city offered me a room in her trailer.

Lots of things happened after that. I started cruising around with "the gang"--drinking all the time, just to dull the ache in me, smoking cigarettes and dope. I got into several fights with girls who were bigger and tougher. Had to be taken to the hospital one night, but I was so drunk, I didn't feel a thing.



I started fooling around with a married man. He was 27 and I was seventeen. We never actually had sex, but that's the direction it was heading. Ironically, I had started going to church, hoping to get my life in a better direction, and had met him there. He was married to my Youth Group teacher. I began to feel so guilty. I had decided to break it off. I went to the basketball game at school and ran into the girl I'd stayed with for those two foggy weeks. We weren't really friends anymore. But she got me to talking about things, and I told her I had been seeing a married man and wanted out. She asked who, and I didn't want to say, but it felt so great that we were speaking again, so I told her she probably didn't know him. "Danny." She asked for his last name and I told her.

She knew him.

Then she clammed up and wouldn't even look at me. The ballgame was over and people were starting to leave. I asked her why she was giving me a dirty look and she said, "I think you're a liar." I was hurt and angry. So I shoved her. I just wanted to hurt her. She had betrayed my confidence in her about something very personal. They say that I tried to push her down the staircase, in the way that fictional dramas are created for those with nothing better to do. I don't remember it. They say she almost fell all the way, but a guy caught her. Perhaps I did do it. I was just blind with rage. I lost quite a few friends that night.

On the way home I cried and cried and cried. How could she think I had lied about my relationship with Danny? She thought I had made it all up. I agonized over this during the drive down the dirt road to my trailer and these headlights appeared behind me--flashing off and on, and I heard the horn honking. I was sure it was her. She had gathered a posse and they were going to beat me up. I floored the pedal and raced to my ratty, oven-hot trailer, with holes in the floor.

Jumping out of the car I ran to my door and fumbled with my keys. I heard steps behind me. Hands grabbed me and whirled me around.

It was Danny.

He asked me what was going on. I told him to go away. That I couldn't see him anymore. He didn't take me seriously. I begged him to go, but he wanted to come inside for a minute. I said no, and closed the door.

In his usual method of persuasion, he clawed on the door making whining noises like a dog and said, "You know, leaving me out in the cold is not a good idea...ever since i had polio, the cold is bad for me." The humor was charming, and I was too tired to argue.

He held me for a few hours and we kissed and petted each other. I just needed it. It didn't matter that he was married. I just didn't want to be alone.

He finally realized the affection would go no farther, and left me alone with my thoughts. All my stupid mistakes, my bitterness, my hurt, confusion, hatred. I just didn't want to be alive anymore. It wasn't worth it. No direction. No goals. No future.

I got in the car and drove. For hours. I didn't take anything with me. No driver's license or anything. I found that out later.

It started to rain and I kept driving. My head was swimming. I felt like I was running with no place to go. Like I could just run until I fell off the edge of the earth. I stopped the car and got out, walking through the pouring rain for miles. I don't know how far. I was just walking.

I sat down under some trees by the road and watched cars go by. They were moving fast enough to kill me if I could just step out in front of them. I got up and ran into the road--screaming. It was like someone else screaming. I was a disembodied spirit, tortured and pathetic. But it was me, and I couldn't stop. I couldn't stop because I had never screamed. I had kept it all inside too long; re-routing the pain into anger. All those horrible fights with my mother. All the things we picked up and threw across the room at each other. All those bandages I had to buy to cover the bleeding knuckles of my hands when I had punched the walls because I couldn't punch her--all of it came back every vicious thing she had ever said to me.

A few cars went around me, and one driver had to slam on the brakes because I tried to put myself in front of him. It was strangely exhilarating, to see the car coming closer and closer at such a speed...waiting for that blessed impact that would take the pain away.

I don't know how long I made myself a target on that road, but a man had come from one of the houses and pulled me away from the traffic. I couldn't stop screaming. He took me to the hospital.

I remember doctors and nurses all around me. I kicked and took swings at them so that they couldn't come near. A huddle of them descended upon me and secured my arms and legs to the bed. I was laughing and screaming and crying all at once. My mind was a jumble and it was all pouring out at once, like stale cereal onto a table with



no bowl. I had no control. I felt I was speaking in tongues, because words came out but I didn't understand them and couldn't stop. I would calm down until a nurse or doctor would come near and then I'd struggle and scream. I felt a small pin prick in my arm and then everything just melted away.

When I woke up, I was still strapped to the bed. Little white bands around my wrists and legs. A nurse came in and I told her I couldn't sleep with those straps on me. I guess I convinced her I was over my tirade, because she finally took them off. I thanked her and turned over and closed my eyes. When she had gone, I got up and looked for my shoes, but couldn't find them. I couldn't find my watch either, and I didn't know if I'd lost it or they had put it away somewhere. But I didn't care, except I didn't know what time it was. I just knew it was dark and quiet.

I made my way down a corridor away from the nurse's station, and as I passed another, a night nurse looked up at me. I smiled at her and she smiled back and bent back to her paperwork. I glimpsed the clock above her. It was almost 5 a.m.

It was relatively easy to just walk out. I was still in my regular clothes. My sock feet were the only thing that would give me away, and at that hour, there weren't many people around to notice. I simply padded out through the automatic doors and started walking. My head was a bit woozy from whatever they had syringed into my vein.

After some time, I recognized where I was and started in the direction of where I had left my car. Sometime around mid-day, I finally found it, and thankfully, my keys were still there and so was the car. One of the benefits of small-town life. I got in and drove home.

At the trailer, I had to sit on the edge of the tub and run water on my feet to release the coagulation of blood from walking so far without shoes. I poured peroxide on my feet and put on fresh socks, throwing the other ones in the trash. I took what little money I had and bought wine and chips. That's all I had for a while. I lost 20 pounds over the next 2 1/2 weeks. I watched my soaps, smoked at least a pack a day, got drunk every night, and when someone would knock at the door, I'd turn down the TV and pretend I wasn't home.

How All Of Part Of It Began

Some years later, I again became involved with the Nazarene church in another city⁴. After visiting Bethany Nazarene College in Oklahoma on a visit with the church volleyball team, I decided that I wanted to attend school there. I had no support from either of my parents on the matter, so the decision began and ended with me. I had already made up my mind though, and hitched a ride with two married friends from church to the college, where I appeared on the door step of the dorm mother with \$10 in my pocket and all my worldly possessions.⁵ I filled out forms, went through registration, and became a Drama, Speech and English major.

Although it was in many ways one of my best experiences, it was also one of the worst. A four month period there was filled with misfortune. My uncle died, and when I returned to Arkansas for the funeral, I also found out that my mother had filed for divorce from my father. I had to turn in a car my parents had helped me lease while at home, too, because they didn't want to pay for it anymore, and I couldn't afford to pay for it and my schooling, even though I had several jobs as a waitress and secretary while I attended full-time. Neither of them thought higher education was important. Thankfully, I knew better.

My father arranged for another vehicle to replace the new one, and it was an awful piece of machinery. An Ambassador OTR (On The Rag). The driver's side

⁴ Those religious types certainly are persistent.

⁵ These worldly possessions included my handwritten journals and a small wardrobe of decidedly antiquated clothes.



window wouldn't roll up, the tires were bald, it was huge and heavy and guzzled gas, and it was ugly, too.

When I got back to the dorm in Bethany after my Uncle's funeral, I discovered one of my best friends had been killed in a car wreck. In deep shock and mourning, I walked around in a sooty cloud most of the time, trying desperately to pull myself out of the gloom. I made myself go to a "powder puff" football game one night, hoping to be included, but the team members had already been chosen. Discouraged, I headed back to the dorms, and the Ambassador broke down on the dark stretch of road...



Becoming A Statistic

What a horrible way to feel. So alone, so isolated, so totally helpless. Me against the world. And the world was suddenly big and mean.

By the time I realized the danger, it was too late. I was the proverbial sitting duck. It must have seemed the perfect crime to them; A deserted road, a stranded young woman, and the cover of darkness to top it all off.

A survey of my surroundings stilled my footsteps. A blanket of darkness had settled over the long, blacktop, devoid of nightlamps. I studied the pavement behind me, stretching out of sight like a black snake. Ahead of me was the same. *What's wrong with me?* A girl had just been killed under the same circumstances only days before—and wasn't it on this road that it happened?

I had this awful, clenching feeling in my gut. This was bad. Something was wrong. I spun on my heel to go

back to the ballfield. Back to at least a place where there were lights, other people, safety in numbers. I would get a ride from one of my classmates after the game.

My eyes were caught by the double beam of headlights. My stomach pulled into a knot, and I felt the adrenaline rush to my heart, like some electrical appliance had just been plugged into my chest. It's nothing. Just a car. Don't panic. Could be anyone. . .the local mailman, the pastor from the church, the freakin' Good Humor Man.

The car was approaching too fast for me to decide between the weak alternatives. I had trouble deciding between paper and plastic at the grocery store. This was not going to happen in the nanosecond I had available to me. Still, I scanned my surroundings again, looking for a means of escape until the vehicle passed. I searched the brush along the roadside, but my attention was brought back abruptly by the high-beams which clicked up into my eyes, blinding me. I imagined my pupils shrinking to tiny dots, just like my options. Aware of my heartbeat pulsing at every part of my body, I was one giant heart muscle. Turning my back on the glare, I made a snap decision the hysteria of the moment, to walk deliberately as if I had a place to go and knew exactly how to get there. They've already seen you, idiot. They know you don't have a place to go, and you don't know how to get there. . .My mind whirled stupidly with what I would say if they stopped to ask me what I was doing out here all alone, and I knew that the usual answer, "I'm waiting for my linebacker-for-the-Rams-boyfriend to pick me up, he'll be along any minute now" would not do.

I watched the oval shards of light from the corner of my eye as they moved closer and became larger upon the blacktop. I could measure almost exactly where the car was by the position of the beams on the roadway,



and noticed they were veering toward my side of the road. Was it possible it was one of my friends from school? They were going to offer me a ride, and then all this brain-chatter and paranoid meanderings would be silly.

Before I could stop my brain from offering a hundred different “if’s”, I felt a sharp blow to my neck. I was thrown to the ground with the force of it. I touched my head, waited for it to clear, and peered up from the gravel and dirt. Something flapped onto the outside door of the car...a sleeved arm...he was pounding the outside of the car with his hand. Someone had actually knocked me down, like the limb of a tree would dismount a horseback rider in one of those comedy westerns. Except this wasn’t funny.

I pulled myself to my feet and brushed the dirt from my jeans, dusting methodically at the particles of gravel embedded in the palms of my hands. The car tires screeched and the brake lights flashed as they moved back toward me. My heart leaped in my chest, and amid my helplessness came paralysis. I could not make my feet move. I just stood there waiting like a confused child. *This is bad. This is bad.* The car was beside me and two hands reached out from inside the window, and grabbed my shirt at the lapels, slamming me against the body of the car. I struggled to free myself, getting twisted around with my back to him, but could not break away. I heard male laughter.