

ROBERTA KENNEDY

THE ASHES
of a
BROKEN LIFE

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To all who mourn in Israel, he will give beauty for ashes, joy instead of mourning, and praise instead of despair. For the Lord has planted them like strong and graceful oaks for his own glory.

– Isaiah 61:3

Prologue

May Second Week

Derek sighs with fatigue as he slips the keycard into his hotel room door. When the door opens, he sits his briefcase and computer case on the floor inside the door. "I'm going to enjoy my year off. No meetings, no eating restaurant meals, and most of all no travel unless it is to someplace for rest and relaxation." he said as he removes the jacket to his black suit, and hangs it in the room's closet. Because he's both famished and in need of a shower he settles for the shower, knowing it will wash some of his fatigue away with the days sweat. Kicking his fine black leather shoes off, he strips off his clothing on the way to the bathroom. Like Hansel and Gretel he leaves a path to where he can be found.

Once he is clean and dresses in jeans and a black t-shirt, he orders from the room service menu. While waiting for his meal, he checks for messages on his cell phone. Seeing no new ones he puts the phone on the lamp table next to the queen-sized bed. He has only one call to make, one that he makes every night while on the road. He will call Jack, his five year old son and his three year old daughter Lucy. "Jack and Lucy we will be able to do all the things that I have neglected." A smile wipes the tenseness from Derek's lean tanned face, a smile that also brightens his dark brown eyes. Thinking of his son and daughter always puts a smile on Derek's face.

Once his meal arrives and after he's eaten, Derek dials his son's cell phone number. When no one picks up, he decides he will try later. Maybe Jack has the phone turned off, which he has been taught to do while at school. He may have to try the land line a little later.

Not interested in any noise Derek lies on the bed on top of the quilted bedspread and closes his eyes. He figures he will rest his eyes for thirty minutes then try calling Jack again.

An hour later he is awakened from a deep sleep by the ringing of his cell phone. Rolling to his right side, he sees Jack's name flashing on the cell phone screen.

Before he can say anything he hears Jack sobbing into the phone. “Jack, buddy what’s wrong?”

First he hears Jack sniff, and then his son said, “Daddy, I’m scared, I’m hungry and my bottom hurt’s.”

“Jack, where are you, and where are Grandpa Bing and Grandma Stella? Why does your bottom hurt?”

He hears Jack sniff again before he said, “I’m in my fort. The bus driver let us off at our house this afternoon he thought Grandpa Bing and Grandma Stella were picking us up here. They weren’t here but Mommy was. I asked where Grandma and Grandpa were and she said that they told her she could watch us. I didn’t believe that, but was afraid to say anything. Mommy went out and my bottom hurts because Mommy got mad at me and spanked my bottom with the pancake pan. She also hurt Lucy. Mommy pulled Lucy’s hair really hard and made her cry. When Lucy said she was telling you Mommy hit her in the face and scratched Lucy when she tried to get away.”

Not wanting Jack to hear his anger at Jacks admission of getting beaten, Derek shakes his head and bites his lip before he replies, “Why are you in your fort at eight at night? Where is your sister?”

“Mommy made me, Lucy, Yates, Tralee, Garfield and Odie go outside. When we came home from school Uncle Sean was here. He and Mommy got into a fight and she sent me and Lucy to our rooms. I heard Uncle Sean leave, and sneaked down to the kitchen to get food for me and Lucy and our pets. I was also making a card for you. Mommy caught me, tore the card up and called me a bad boy.”

“The card was of you, me, Lucy, Aunt Flannery and the pets. When she saw the dark hair on the woman she asked who it was, when I said Aunt Flannery she was so mad she turned red and ripped the card to shreds. Daddy when she is angry like that she scares me and Lucy.”

Anger at his wife Chloe is so strong that it takes a few moments before Derek can speak again. “You are a wonderful boy. Actually you are the sweetest boy I have ever known, I love you and I’m proud to be your Daddy.”

“I love you too Daddy. I’m also proud of you.” At his sons words Derek cannot help but smile.

“Jack, I’m going to call Grandpa Bing and Grandma Stella and have

them come and get you, Lucy and your pets. The police may also come, so please stay in your fort and answer when they come for you.’

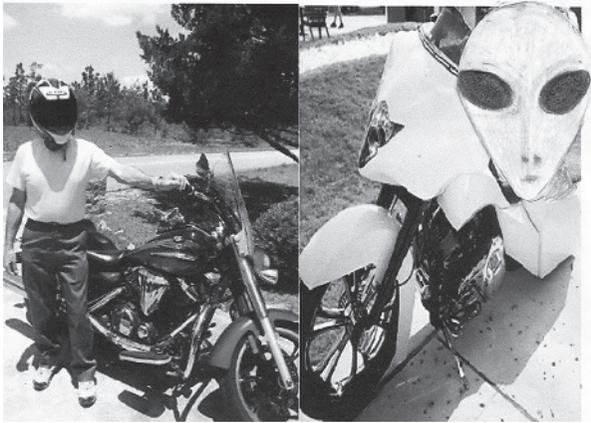
“Daddy, I can’t find Odie, Mommy threw her out the door, and she ran away.”

Shaking his head in disbelief, Derek said, “I’ll have Grandpa Bing call someone to find Odie. Answer your phone when it rings, I will call back as soon as I talk with Grandpa.”

“Ok Daddy, I’ll answer. Please come home soon. I miss you.”

“I’ll be there when you wake up in the morning.”

“Good Daddy. Good.”



Chapter One

“Jack, Lucy, where are you? Your Grandpa Bing called us. He’s on his way to get you. My partner and I are here to make sure you are ok. I’m Officer Henry and my partner is Officer Schaffer.” They are surprised that there are no outside lights turned on. Everyone in the upscale area has security and motion sensor lights. Maybe the security alarms and the lights have been turned off purposely is their next thought.

“We’re in our fort with our dogs and cat. We’ll be right there”.

With a flashlight shining on the wooden fort at the back of the large well landscaped lot, it is only seconds before the officers see the pajama clad, bare foot boy and a tiny pajama clad girl walking down the ramp of the wooden fort. With a golden retriever on their right and a border collie to their left, and a huge golden striped tabby cat in Jack’s arms, they meet the officers on the lush lawn of the beautiful back yard.

“You have three wonderful friends here.” said Officer Henry, as he studies the blood and dirt streaked face of the handsome little brown eyed blonde haired boy and his blonde haired brown eyed sister.

“Do you know if the alarm system and the motion sensor lights have been turned off? If so who would do so?” Officer Henry asks the little boy.

“I don’t know although Mommy sometimes shuts them off. I once asked her why and she said I didn’t need to know. I know from Daddy that they should remain turned on for our safety. If you ask him maybe he can tell you or maybe my Grandpa Bing. If Mommy was her she might have told you, but maybe not. She loves to be secretive?” The officers look questioning at each other. Apparently Chloe Maxwell MacDougall cares nothing for her safety or that of her children.

When the officers see Jack shiver Officer Shaffer said, “I’ll take you to the police car. You will be warm there. Your pets of course can come to.” Officer Shaffer is a pretty dark haired, slim woman of thirty. Officer Henry is a few years older but tall like Derek and soft spoken. Because the officers are friendly, but not overly so Jack thinks of his Daddy. Derek is also friendly, but not overly so when he and his children are out in the public

ROBERTA KENNEDY

eye. Derek is also soft spoken except when confronted by his wife's foolish and untrue accusations about his relationship about Flannery, his wife's half-sister.

Once Jack, Lucy and their pets are safely sitting in the back of the police car, and they feel at ease with the officers Jack said, "I'm hungry and so are Lucy and our pets, and do you know if someone will find Lucy's kitten Odie for her?"



"Someone will find Odie for you. She's probably hidden somewhere close by." said the pretty dark haired officer Shaffer while opening the glove compartment door of the car and pulling a huge Snickers bar out. "Do you like chocolate?" Officer Shaffer asked.

"Yes we do. Our Daddy always shares a huge Snickers bar with us when he's home. I love my Daddy. He always tells me I'm the sweetest boy he knows."

"I love him too. He's not mean like Mommy and he never hits us like Mommy does," adds Lucy who always takes a cue from Jack to talk with people

they don't know. She knows that the officers are safe or Jack would not talk to them.

"We will share this." said Officer Shaffer, as she unwraps the candy and breaking it into three pieces hand's first a piece to Lucy and then one to Jack.

"I'm going to check the house to see if anyone is there. I'll see if I can find something for Jack, Lucy and their friends to eat." Officer Henry said once Jack, Lucy and their pets are safe in the patrol car."

"Do you know my Daddy? Jack asks while eating his part of the Snickers.

"Actually I do know Derek. He was a year ahead of me in high school I also know your Aunt Flannery. They were always together."

Officer Schaffer always thought Derek and Flannery would marry. When they became engaged in college she was happy for them. Everyone who knew them could see that they were in love. Everyone was shocked to hear that they broke off the engagement only months before the wedding, when Derek and Chloe Flannery's half-sister, got married only months later they were the fodder for the gossip monger's tongue. After Jack was born and everyone saw how much he looked like Sean, Derek's half-brother, everyone knew that Derek had been trapped in Chloe's web of deception.

. Jack nodding his head at the officers statement, chews a bite of candy before he said, "My Aunt Flannery is sweet. She's never mean. I love her whole bunch, and she loves me."

With a smile that lights his eyes, and animates the little face, now streaked with blood, dirt and chocolate, Officer Shaffer cannot help but smile back. Lost in their own thoughts, while they eat their last bit of chocolate, Officer Schaffer sees Jack finally relax. The candy may have calmed Jack, but she is certain that thinking of Derek and Flannery's love for him is the reason

"I love Aunt Flannery too." Lucy tells Officer Shaffer with her mouth full of candy.

"You're very nice and I can tell that you like children." said Jack as he wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

Remembering that she has sanitary wipes in her pocket, Officer Shafer reaches into her uniform pocket and opening one of the packets

ROBERTA KENNEDY

and hands it to Jack. Jack cleans his hands and face before he said, "You have children. I can tell."

When Lucy wipes her mouth on her pajama sleeve, the officer opens another wipe, cleans Lucy's tiny hands and face, and then wipes some of the chocolate from the pajama sleeve.

When Jack hands the now soiled wipe to her she places it in a plastic bag hung on the inside door of the police car. She smiles at Jack and confirms his statement, "I have a boy your age. His name is Braden and also a daughter who will be three on Saturday. Her name is Mallory."

"I'm three." Lucy tells the officers as she also holds three fingers up for the officer to see.

"You're a very smart girl for being only three." Officer Schaffer tells the bright eyed girl.

"When was Braden five? I was five in April." said Jack wondering how the officer knew his age. "Lucy, my sister was three in March. She was born on St. Patrick's Day. We aren't Irish but we still celebrate because it's Lucy's birthday and because Daddy takes us to the parade in Chicago. The river is green. Have you seen it?" He is correct that Lucy isn't of Irish heritage but he is unaware that Sean's mother Stella has a great deal of Irish blood flowing through her veins.

Before Officer Shaffer can answer, Jack adds, "Our Grandpa Bing is from Scotland."

"Yes, I know your Grandpa Bing is from Scotland."

"Braden was five in March. If you are wondering how I know your age, your Grandpa Bing told the dispatcher when he called the police station."

Jack thinks about her statement for a short time then replies, "My Daddy always spends lots of time with me and Lucy when he's home. He's going to take a year off work so we can hang out and do all the things we haven't had time for." A huge smile paints the little boys face and he tells Officer Schaffer, "We, Daddy, me and Lucy are going to go to Scotland."

The three talk of things to do in summer, when Officer Henry returns with a small gray striped kitten. When Officer Henry opens the back door to the police car and puts Odie in Jack's arms the smile on Jacks face is so huge it gives the offices a wonderful feeling that their work is for

once truly appreciated. "Odie is Lucy's kitten. Daddy gave her to Lucy for her third birthday." Jack said before handing the kitten to his sister.

Lucy rubs her cheek against the soft kitten fur and tells Officer Henry, "Thank you sir officer. Odie is only a baby and Mommy scared her when she threw her out the back door."

When the Golden Retriever Yates and the Border collie Tralee greet the kitten with a sniff and the big golden male butt's heads with Odie, the four humans smile.

From his pants pocket Officer Henry pulls out a pack of cheese crackers and hands them to Jack, who opens them immediately and hands half to Lucy. From his shirt pocket he pulls out two broken dog treats, and from his back pants pocket he hands Jack a small pack of cat treats.

"Thank you." Jack said as he gives the hungry pets their treats.

When Officer Shaffer gives him a questioning look, Officer Henry shrugs his shoulders, and said, "That's all I could find. The refrigerator and pantry were bare."

"Mommy doesn't like to food shop. Daddy shops with us when he is home." Jack tells them innocently. "He's been out of town for two weeks because he is training someone to take his place while he is off. Because we have been at Grandpa Bings and Grandma Stella's or with Flannery's Granny Anne while he is gone no one has bought food for our house. We were going to take our pets with us but Daddy said it would be too much for those watching us so he's hired a lady to come in twice a day to feed them plus walk the dogs. Mommy isn't here much so Daddy figured that they would be safe."

The Officers look at each other with disbelief, knowing that Jack's family has plenty of money, but they have heard rumors about Jack and Lucy's mother Chloe, and know the rumors are true. Chloe Lorena Maxwell MacDougall has always been self-involved and selfish. Growing up she was spoiled and apparently she hasn't changed.

"Does your Mommy lock you outside very often?" asked Officer Schaffer while the four wait in the police car for Jack and Lucy's grandparents.

"Yes, whenever Uncle Sean comes over or when she is mad at us. I was going to tell my daddy, but was afraid to because she said she will take our pets to the pound if I do. My Daddy will make sure she doesn't do that."

ROBERTA KENNEDY

“We, Lucy and I missed our pets so Grandpa and Granny Anne said that when we come there, once Daddy is home, our pets are welcome to come with us.”

Jack is so engrossed with feeding his pets that he misses the disbelief in the two adult’s eyes.