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Intervention

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The interventionist stood on the sidewalk at baggage claim, smoking a cigarette and chugging a Red Bull. What irony. The woman who'd promised to help rid Barbara's daughter of her addictions clearly had a few of her own. Barbara considered driving past her, leaving her to get back on the plane and return to the rehab she ran. She could work this out herself—lock Emily in her room and take away her car keys, force her to stay sober. But hadn't she already tried that? Despite Barbara's best efforts to turn their home into a lockdown, Emily still managed to sneak out and get high.

How had this happened?

That familiar knot burned in Barbara's stomach as she pulled to the curb and waved at the woman. It had to be her—the long red skirt, the white peasant blouse, just as she'd said. The outfit made her look more like a college student than someone who could escort a determined addict across the country. What if Emily put up a fight? How would this petite thing handle her?

Barbara stopped along the curb and pulled the lever under the dashboard, popping her trunk. Forcing a welcoming smile, she got out of the car. “Hi, are you Trish?”

“Sure am.” The woman dropped her cigarette on the concrete and stomped it out with a sandaled foot, then thrust a hand out to Barbara. “Trish Massey.”

“I’m Barbara Covington.”

Barbara glanced at the small bag at the woman’s feet. “Is this all you have?”

“Yeah, I won’t be here long.”

She picked up Trish’s bag and set it on the backseat as Trish got into the car. Barbara slipped back into the driver’s seat. The car that she’d freshened with Febreze suddenly smelled of smoke. “How was your trip?”

“Uneventful, which is always a good thing.” Trish was all smiles. “So where did you tell Emily you were going?”

“To an Al-Anon meeting.”

“And that’s okay with her?”

Barbara breathed a laugh. “Oh, yeah. She likes it when I’m working on her problem. She would love it if everybody she knew were going to meetings and wringing their hands. She loves to keep us playing the What-To-Do-About-Emily game.”

There she went again, letting her bitterness spill out to a stranger.

“Meetings are good,” Trish said. “Have you really been to any?”

Barbara slipped the car into Drive and pulled away from baggage claim, heading to the loop that would take them out of the airport and into Jefferson City. “Plenty. I’ve done the workbooks and gone through the twelve steps, like I’m the one with the problem. I’ve done everything they’ve told me to do. But she’s still using.”

“Al-Anon meetings are to help *you* cope, not to give you some secret code to sober up your loved one.”

Barbara knew that now. She’d gone to a few meetings, hoping to learn what would work with Emily. When she didn’t get those answers, she’d lost interest. Her own sanity would return when her daughter was sane.

Strange, that a woman who couldn't be more than thirty would be counseling Barbara now. And who was Trish to counsel an eighteen-year-old? Emily would take one look at her and declare her dominance.

What was she doing? Maybe this was all wrong.

"You're doing the right thing," Trish said, as though she'd read Barbara's mind.

Barbara didn't want to cry in front of the stranger. For a moment she drove silently, staring at the taillights of the car in front of her. Finally, she spoke again. "When Emily was going into preschool, I personally visited fourteen schools. I interviewed teachers. I even spent a day with her at the one I liked, to see how she fit in."

"I don't blame you. I'd probably do the same thing if I had children."

"It's no easy thing, sending her to a place like this, halfway across the country. But I had to act quickly. There wasn't time for a careful, deliberate search. I should have been more prepared when things escalated."

"You mentioned on the phone that she'd stolen money?"

"Yes. Not the first time, but this was the most she'd taken. Four hundred dollars, right out of my account. She got my debit card out of my purse. Spent every penny on drugs."

"How do you know?"

Barbara's fingers tightened over the steering wheel. "Because she didn't come home for three days. I found her strung out at a friend's house. I got her to come home, and while she was sleeping, I searched her things. Found some credit cards she'd taken out in her dad's name. John, my husband, died four years ago."

Barbara paused, expecting a gasp, but it didn't come. She supposed Trish had heard it all before. "You had to intervene," Trish said. "It sounds like her life has spun out of control."

Barbara's *own* life had spun out of control. First, John's cancer had disrupted their idyllic lives. When he died, she swam through grief so deep it almost drowned her. Being a forty-year-old widow with two children was the next mire she slogged through. But now, Emily's drug abuse was more than she could take.

“You won’t be disappointed in our program,” Trish said.

Barbara glanced at Trish. “She’ll be locked in, right? Because if she isn’t, she’ll leave. I’ve tried treatment two other times—one time, she ran away after only a week. The second time, she smuggled drugs in and got kicked out.”

“We don’t lock them in, but she’ll be monitored at all times. Don’t worry, we do this all the time. She’ll be very comfortable.”

Comfort wasn’t Barbara’s main concern, though she didn’t want Emily to be miserable. Barbara bit the inside of her cheek as she pulled onto the interstate, headed for the hotel she’d reserved for Trish. She was sinking thirty thousand dollars into Road Back Recovery Center, money that had come from a second mortgage on her house. But being expensive didn’t guarantee that it was good. Even the best rehabs had underwhelming success rates.

She wished Trish inspired more confidence. “You seem very young. How did you come to own Road Back?”

Trish flicked her hair behind her ear. “I’m a recovering addict myself. I got clean at Road Back, and when I graduated, I stayed and worked there. I’ve been doing interventions for them for five years. A couple of years ago, the directors wanted to retire, so I decided to buy it. I couldn’t stand the thought of it not being there anymore. That’s how much I believe in the program.”

That made Barbara feel somewhat better. She wished she could go to the facility herself to make sure it was all they advertised. But once she’d made up her mind to do the intervention, there hadn’t been time to take a trip to check it out in person. Waiting could have resulted in Emily’s arrest.

And Barbara knew she couldn’t take Emily there herself. No, it would take a professional to convince Emily to go, and Trish had to be the one to escort her. Barbara was sending her daughter off to some unknown place with this woman she didn’t know. Emily would pass this new threshold all alone . . . and be there for ninety days.

Emily had once been a fan of Hello Kitty and Amelia Bedelia. Now she collected pictures of her hero, Amy Winehouse, the famous addict with the hit song about avoiding rehab. Barbara still

loved Emily with a love so painful that it ached through her at night, keeping her from sleep, but she didn't like this person who'd replaced her daughter. If only this rehab could exorcise the addiction within her, and return Emily home in her former condition . . .

It would be a miracle.

But what if this failed too? What if turmoil and madness were all the potential Emily would ever fulfill?

Blinking back tears, she took the exit near her home. The Hampton Inn sign loomed ahead. "I hope the room is okay. I went ahead and checked you in." Barbara handed Trish the key card.

"It'll be fine. You should see some of the places I've had to stay." As Barbara pulled into the parking lot, Trish shifted in her seat to look at her. "So, did you write the letters?"

"Yes." She parked and got the envelopes from her purse. "Here they are."

Trish took them and turned on the overhead light. "And who is Lance?"

"My son. He's fourteen. It's just us."

"Did Emily's problems start when her father died?"

"Not right away. But losing John was hard on all of us. Over the next year she got in with the wrong crowd." She paused and settled her gaze on Trish. "I want you to know, we're not like this. There was never even alcohol in our home. I've taken her to church every Sunday of her life . . ." Her voice faded. Trish had probably heard this same song and dance from every parent she dealt with.

"It's not your fault."

Then whose fault is it? Pursing her lips, Barbara let Trish read.

Finally, Trish looked up. "Will anyone else be at the intervention? Grandparents?"

"They're too far away, and not in good health. I've kept them in the dark about all this. It would kill them."

"Friends? A boss? Teachers?"

"Emily dropped out of school several months ago. Her senior year, six months before graduating, so there aren't teachers. Her friends are like her. They don't want her sober. And she lost her job

three weeks ago. Hasn't been sober enough to get another one, so there's not a boss who can get through to her." Barbara glanced at Trish in the shadows of the car. "Is it a problem that it's only my son and me?"

"No, we can work with that." Trish handed the letters back. "You both did a good job with the letters. You told her what her addiction is doing to the family, how you see her destroying herself, and what you're asking her to do. The main thing is that you stick to your guns about what will happen if she refuses to go. To bring about change in her, you have to be willing to throw her out with no resources."

Barbara said nothing. She had grappled with that issue for months now, and lain awake for the past three nights, begging God to give her a way out. Why couldn't he sweep down and deliver Emily, before Barbara had to send her away for help or throw her out on the street?

"Are you ready for that? Putting her out if she refuses to go?"

Barbara swallowed. "I don't know. I know it's what I should do, but it's like giving up. She'll die for sure."

"Or she might hit bottom and decide to get help."

Barbara wondered what hitting bottom really meant. The picture that always came to mind was of a body lying broken and bloody on the street after falling from a twenty-story building.

"I've tried tough love. The third time she got arrested for a DUI, they sentenced her to three weeks in the juvenile detention center. I didn't bail her out. It was the hardest three weeks of my life."

"But it still didn't scare her straight."

"No. She went back to drugs a week after she got out."

"Did you really think it would change her?"

"I'd hoped. What good was all that suffering while she sat in jail, if she didn't change?"

"Your suffering, or hers?"

Barbara looked at Trish. "Both."

"Again, you're doing the hard things *because* you expect them to change her. You need to shift your thinking. Tomorrow, if she

refuses to go and you have to put her out, do it because you and your son refuse to keep participating in her destruction. Do it for the mental and emotional protection of you and Lance. And you have to convey that to her. Make her understand you've come to the end of your rope."

Barbara leaned her head back on the seat. "She has to go with you. That's all there is to it."

Trish reached over the backseat and got her bag. "Sometimes they want treatment," she said. "Sometimes they're more fed up than you know with the endless cycle they're caught in. Constantly trying to get enough money to score another hit, thinking about it every waking moment, and never able to get that high they're looking for. Running on that horrible treadmill just to feel normal—or their version of normal. Do you think she's there yet?"

"I don't know. I really don't. I was hoping you were here to convince her, even if she doesn't want help."

"I can only do so much."

So what had this extra thirty-five-hundred-dollar fee paid for? A free vacation for this woman? "She *has* to go with you. If she doesn't, she'll wind up in jail."

"Or dead."

Dead. No, Barbara couldn't survive burying anyone else. "I can't let that happen. This has to work."

"I'll give it everything I've got. Maybe she's sick of her disease."

Barbara fought the urge to argue semantics. She hated the AA words like disease and relapse, like it was a virus Emily had caught somewhere. Yet she couldn't deny that Emily was sick.

Trish opened her car door. "What time will you pick me up?"

Barbara tried to think. The flight she'd booked for Trish and Emily was at three p.m. tomorrow, and this thing could take hours. They had to start early. "Eight a.m. I'll get her up while you're there."

"Tonight, you need to take her car to a friend's house. Park it there and hide the keys. If it's not in the driveway, she can't talk you into giving her the keys. If she leaves, it'll have to be without the car."

That wouldn't be hard. Emily could have one of her drug buddies there in minutes.

"Hopefully, her connection with you and her brother will be enough to make her go. And I'll do my part to make her see the possibilities." She got out her cigarettes, pulled one out. "It'll be okay. Most of the interventions I do are successful."

"But there's no guarantee."

"I'm afraid not."

She'd have to pay her whether Emily agreed to go or not. It had to work. Her resources were running out.