

**I Shall Not Want:  
Sample Chapter 2 Shall Obey Thy Will**

**March 18**

I updated my boss, George, about my situation with Mom and Dad. I told him that I couldn't work full days. I had to be with both of them. If either of them took a turn for the worse, I would have to leave. That's it. He seemed understanding, but he was under the stranglehold of compliance, like the rest of us. Whatever personal concern he had for me would have to be compromised by the corporation, the one that claims to be committed to our health and well-being. He understood, however, that my outside concerns took priority over my job.

"Did you at least complete the module for your goals?" George asked.

"Goals? What kinda goals do we need now?" the question perturbed me.

"Safety goals. You have to have two personal safety goals. They can apply to home as well as work," he said.

"Uh, no. We're going to keep the goals here. Let's see. I'll keep the sink chemical free and..."

"One more." George said with a smile.

"Hmm... I'll clean out the microwave once a week. How's that?" I asked.

"Works for me. Thanks, Terri."

"No problem."

I left work two hours early and took Route 73 East to Jeanes Hospital. Mom was sitting up eating dinner when I arrived.

"Terri, hi sweetie!" Mom said. I reached over to kiss her.

"You look a lot better, Mom. How do you feel?" I asked.

"This food sucks," Mom said.

"It looks pretty tasty to me, Mom. What's wrong with it?" I asked.

"Everything sucks. No salt, no sugar, two percent milk."

Here we go again. I sat down next to her bed.

"Mom, they're trying to get you well and you know that salt is an enemy to you. It's not that bad, you have to get used to it.

"One pat of butter!" Mom complained. "They bring coffee with no cream, or they bring one creamer and no Sweet and Low. I can't wait to get outta here. I want you to take me to the Red Lobster for good solid meal."

I didn't say a word. I reached over and kissed her again and rubbed her hand.

"I'm sorry, baby," she said. "I'm fussin at you and I know it's not your fault. I just get so fed up sometimes. You know this is no way to live. I feel the quality of life leaving me." Mom's glassy eyes looked into mine. It was as if she was seeking a new lease on life through me.

"You'll be a lot better once you get home into your own bed," I reassured her.

“Have you been to see your father?” she asked. I didn’t want to lie, but I didn’t have the heart to tell her Dad was dying. She didn’t need to hear that right now.

“Uh, well, after I leave you, I’m going to stop by to see him,” I said.

“Oh, that’s good. Maybe when I’m better, I can go with you.”

“Sure, Mom, you know that’s a given. Finish your food.”

“I don’t want it.”

“Eat just a little bit more.”

“No.”

“C’mon now. You can’t get your strength back until you eat something.”

Mom felt the potatoes with her finger.

“It’s cold.”

“I guess so. When it was hot you were complaining about it. If I can find a microwave, will you eat a little more?”

“No. I’m done.” She threw up her hands.

“So am I.” I moved the tray toward the door for pick-up.

“Well, Mom, I’m going to leave you. I want to stop by to see Dad before it gets too late.”

“Good. You go ahead. Ella is getting ready to come on. You know I love Ella,” Mom finally smiled.

“I know. You started me liking The House of Payne.”

I kissed Mom on her forehead.

“I love you, Mom. I’ll be back tomorrow.”

“Okay, sweetie. Mommy loves you too.”

I drove back to Route 73 and headed west, to see Dad. As soon as I went through the front door, I realized I had forgotten to eat, again. I walked into Dad’s room and found him sound asleep. He was snuggled in under several blankets. I sat down beside him and watched him sleep. I pulled out my little book of the New Testament that also includes the book of Psalms in the back. I read the 19<sup>th</sup> Psalm. I watched him and kissed him and rubbed his soft hands. My hunger pangs begged me to go home and eat.

At home, I sat in silence again. I ate in silence. I didn’t feel right. I fell to my knees with a spirit unnerved with darkness and prayed.

*Oh Father,*

*Please grant peace to my father and comfort to my mother. I need your strength to persevere. It is by your sufficient grace—your love and mercy that brings comfort to wearied souls.*

*Amen*

It was time to call my cousins in Durham, North Carolina and tell them about dad. I knew in my soul he only had days to live.

## March 19

Mom's doctor filled out the forms I needed to submit to Human Resources, so I could qualify for family leave. I figured, with a combination of vacation and leave time, I could stay home for a while to take care of Mom, see about Dad, take care of household business and maybe get some rest. I brought the forms to work with me and made an appointment to meet with HR just before lunch. In the meantime, I had a lot of paperwork and data entry to do. Small comfort brought great peace with a perfect cup of coffee. For some reason, my coworkers were missing in action, which made the morning seem much nicer. I began my data entry while listening to Steve Harvey. I stared at my monitor, thinking about Mom and Dad, the finances and the house. I began to think about my future. Something inside of me refused to accept this job of mine was the end of the road—to be nothing more than an extension of someone else's agenda, but it seemed I didn't have a choice. I know good and well that God put me on this earth for a reason. The suppression of my potential and my creativity will have to end soon. I can't live this way. The old soul within me has slowly revealed itself. I'm just beginning to understand its revelation and the significance it will play in my life, but I don't know how. Ponder not, I told myself.

I turned away from the monitor and I opened my notebook, when the thought occurred to me to write Dad's obituary. No sense in waiting until the last moment. By the time I completed the first draft, my comrades were returning from a meeting. I didn't know what the meeting was about, and didn't care. All I knew was it wasn't a mandate. I finished the rest of my data entries and went to get my lunch. After eating, I went to the only refuge I had—my car. I drove up to my family's old home in Penllyn. I found a secluded area in a small park in Penllyn where I could sit in peace. I began to think of all that a woman has to do; what she has to be in the world: a wife, a mother, a daughter, a friend, a sister. I'm thankful when I think about other women. Some have children and maybe grandchildren to care for. Others may have siblings to fight with over their parent's affairs. I have a life of ease by comparison. In spite of mom's sickness, I have peace at home. I want so much to care for Mom and Dad. I want to care for my husband, and live up to

my full potential at the same time. The totality of womanhood cannot be fully realized until she is aware of all that she is:

*The woman in me wants to heal  
And soothe another's pain  
She wants every soul to feel  
Transcendence over tribulation  
Like a soft pacifying rain.  
The mother in me wants to enlighten  
Foster growth and develop minds  
She wants a future to be brightened  
And knock down social order confines*

*The friend in me wants everyone in her life  
To understand how much she honors what the world has thrown away.  
She will not be cowed out of her convictions,  
She's sincere in what she conveys  
The daughter in me wants to coddle those who coddled me  
She wants to honor to the depth of her soul the two special people who brought her to be.  
The lover in me wants to not just satisfy,  
but be an everlasting partner.  
Not just a best friend, but one who will fortify  
When he fumbles and falters.  
The bitch in me will take a stand and speak  
She will not be shut down and rendered voiceless and weak.  
She has no desire to run other peoples' lives  
Just left in peace to struggle and to thrive.  
The sister in me wants communion of those who seek the same  
Nubian and Nordic women mentally able  
Throw away gossip and petty games  
And bring something meaningful to the table  
All of this is in my body and thoughts  
I'm perfect in the image He made me  
I'm everything that cannot be bought  
All that I am is all of me.*

Damn it. Lunchtime was over. Time to get back to work.

I crunched out calculations and caught up on my notebook until about four. The numbers and words began to run together. I looked up at the bleak walls around me to give my eyes a break. My ears were no longer able to hear the white noise that filled the lab. I could hear nothing. It seemed as if everything was standing still, that any sign of life would've violated a compliance code. I turned back to my terminal when my boss came over to me. I thought he was looking for the latest data I had prepared, but I was wrong. He was more concerned with what was going on with me. He told me he understood where I was, in my despair. His eyes understood as I told him of my uncertainty of when I could return to work.

“I’ve gotta get outta here, George. I’ll keep you posted.” I gathered my coat and walked out the door. I sailed through the construction zone on Route 309 south, and turned to Route 73 East to see Mom. When I got to her room, she was resting comfortably in bed.

“Hey, sweetie. How are you today?” I said as I kissed her forehead.

“Oh, Terri, I didn’t expect you this early! You either left work early or you burned up that 309!”

I smiled. “Maybe a little of both.”

“I feel fine, now that I have you here,” Mom said with a gentle smile. “Come here and help me out of the bed. I want to sit in the chair.”

I helped her up and walked her over to the window to take in some sunshine. She was a little stronger. She stood by herself, for the most part. She looked at the late afternoon sun and a sense of pleasure appeared on her face, for the first time in a long while. I brought her back to sit down. It was almost time for her favorite program, *Tyler Perry’s House of Payne*.

“Turn Ella on for me,” she commanded.

“Mom, I’ll be back. I want to see if I can speak with your doctor.”

“Okay, ask him when I can come home,” she said.

“Will do.”

I walked to the nurse’s station, where Mom’s nurse paged the doctor to come and see me. He arrived in a few minutes and told me Mom’s heart was her problem.

“Is that the reason why she can’t breathe? I thought it was her lungs. She smoked Pall Mall for about fifty years,” I said.

The doctor said, “Amazingly, no. Her lungs are clear. I didn’t see any spots anywhere, but her heart muscles are very weak. A healthy person’s heart works at about sixty to seventy percent capacity. Your mom is about twenty percent—maybe less. That’s why she’s tired. Her body isn’t getting the oxygen or nutrition it needs. I’m going to give you her prescriptions. I have something here that will help to strengthen her heart.”

“Okay. Thank you for your time, doctor. When will she be discharged?” I asked.

“Tomorrow” he said.

“Thank you.”

I went back to see her.

“Tomorrow, Mom. I can take you home tomorrow.”

I was hungry and tired, but didn’t want to leave too soon. I sat with mom to watch *The House of Payne*.

“I’m gonna get going. I want to see Dad before it gets too late.”

“That’s fine, Terri, go and see your dad. I’ll be fine. Just help me get back in bed and then you can go.”

I lifted mom and put her into bed. We kissed and hugged. I rubbed her head, thinking that she has no idea how close to death Dad is. I didn’t have the heart to tell her.

I turned the radio up loud on my way to see Dad. The Average White Band’s *Pick up the Pieces* was playing. It reminded me of Dad with his band. He would have the house jumping on Thursday night rehearsals. The reed section played the bridge over and over again. It burned into my brain so deeply, I still heard it on my way to school the next day.

I pulled into the parking lot at Hillcrest. I was on auto-pilot, unaware how tired and hungry I was, how I had lost weight. I was unaware of the toll on my body.

“Terri, are you okay? You must be worn out,” Dad’s nurse said.

“I just left Mom at the hospital,” I said.

“Did you go to work today?” she asked.

“Yeah. I’m okay, just a little hungry.”

“And tired. Take of yourself. Your father is comfortable. I just checked him.”

“Thanks. I won’t be long,” I said.

I walked into Dad’s room. The fluorescent ceiling lights were off. Someone had placed a small lamp that was dimly lit on his night table. He was sitting up in bed, staring blankly at the wall. His eyes were half open, but they were not seeing. His soul seemed to have already left his body. I felt a strange chill and heard an uneasy silence as I sat in the chair next to his bed and reached out for my father’s hand.

“Dad?”

He was blank—a dead stare at the wall. I rubbed his hands. No response. I kissed him and felt nothing in return.

I began to read the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm. I looked at him again.

“Dad? It’s me Terri. I came to see you, baby.”

He wiggled his toes a little and his tongue rolled inside his mouth, but he said nothing.

Another nurse walked in.

“Terri. Came to see Dad huh? You are such a good daughter.”

I said nothing. She looked at Dad and then at me.

She said, “I’ll get you some ice cream to feed him. You know how much he loves his ice cream.”

She left and came back with two little cups of ice cream and a spoon.

“Here, Terri. Feed your Dad. If you want me, just call.”

“Thank you, Carol,” I said. She barely nodded her head and slowly left.

I dipped up some ice cream and gently put the spoon to his mouth. He ate it the same way a newborn does.

“It’s good, Dad, isn’t it? Don’t you like it?” I was desperate for a response. Eventually I got one.

He softly said, “yes.” He finished his ice cream without his eyes ever moving. His hands gently kneaded his bed linen and when I touched his hand he stopped. I kissed him on his cheek. He didn’t move.

“I love you, Dad,” I said softly into his ear. He said nothing. “I’ll be back to see you tomorrow.”

I left. I just couldn’t take it any more. As soon as I got home, I reached for a drink and sat down in the living room in the dark. I heard the same uneasy silence. It defied my denial of what was soon to be the painful reality. At forty-eight years old, for the very first time, I had a broken heart.