

Elizabeth

Prologue

Welcome. If you're reading this, it's probably safe to assume something about the story (or its author) interested you. I'm glad. Before you start reading, however, let me tell you a little bit about what this story is - and what it isn't. It isn't a Downey-esque love story. It's not *Finding a Place*, or a "give me the insulin"ly sweet romance. It's not a tragedy either. It's the story of a very special young lady, who's had a rough life, and takes it out on everyone. She came to me and ordered me to tell her story, and so I shall. It's about her journey into the world, and her experiences, and what it was like for her along the way. Elizabeth isn't going to be a short story, not by any means. I don't know exactly how the story will end - or even *when* it will end (I already see it as a novella-length piece, and don't have an ending in sight). I hope Elizabeth will be happy. I hope she'll find her true love, as the author did once upon a time. But I don't know. That's up to Elizabeth to decide. I hope you'll join me for the journey, as I'm sure it will be quite an adventure.

I do have to say a brief thank you here, before we get to the story. First off, to Frank Downey - a better writer I've rarely had the pleasure to read, and *Dance of a Lifetime* is easily my absolute favourite online story. If you haven't read it, finish *Elizabeth* and then GO! (Sorry Frank, but this *is* my story after all ;-)) Then read *Naked in School*, *Michelle's Story*. If it weren't for Frank, and especially for that latter story, I never would've gotten back into writing here. Thank you, Frank. I appreciate it more than you could know, and (I hope) my readers will as well. Also, big thanks to the members of the FDWritings and FKWLounge groups, especially Girl Friday and my editor Ed. Without you guys, this (and I) never would have gotten off the ground.

Finally, now that I've bored all of you to tears, and probably made most of you run for the hills, on to the story...

Dedicated to P.A.W., my very own Mish. You'll always be missed.

Chapter 1

“Damn you!” she yelled, falling to her knees in front of the low-set granite marker in the ground. The cold wind stung at her face, freezing most of her tears before they had even begun to fall, as she brushed her ungloved fingers over the raised words on the stone. Eleanor Lynn Miller. Daughter, Wife, Mother. August 9, 1958 - December 12, 1998

“Why did you have to leave, mom? Why?” She cried aloud, knowing full well she would never get an answer. Elizabeth had asked that same question here at least once a month, since the day she turned eleven, when her mother died, but she hadn’t ever found an answer. She laid her head next to the old, dried flowers resting on the headstone, the flowers she had left here just a few weeks before, and the memories all came flooding back.

First her mother’s headaches, the way her hand would just start shaking, all on its own. Then came the fainting spells, and the doctors’ appointments. Finally, the visit to the specialist. She’d gone with her mother to that.

“Brain cancer,” the doctor had said. “Chemotherapy and radiation for starters. Then hopefully we’ll be able to operate.”

If only she’d known then what “chemotherapy and radiation” really meant. Her mother had just said “I’ll have to take some medicines.” Some medicines indeed. Poison. That’s what it was.

Elle began sobbing more heavily then, remembering how her mother had looked, how she'd tried not to let her daughter see what the treatments were doing to her. A year, it all lasted. Then, the doctor's appointment, a month before her eleventh birthday. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Miller, but the tumor isn't responding to our treatments. I'm afraid it's inoperable now. There's nothing more we can do, besides making you comfortable. You probably only have another few months, a year at the most."

One month, almost to the day, is how long she had. She was feeling sick the day of Elle's party. As she was cutting the birthday cake she collapsed, shaking. Elizabeth ran to her side and grabbed her hand, as her breathing ceased. And then she was gone.

Elle sat there for some minutes with her knees curled to her chest, hugging herself against the wind and sobbing silently; once again asking all the questions she longed to know the answers to, but most of all, why?

The chime of her watch brought her back to the present, making her pull her eyes away from the tombstone. Another hour had gone by. It wasn't until she glanced at her watch, however, that she realized how late it really was. The small lit digits showed it was just after 5 O'clock.

"Oh shit!" she said out loud, jumping to her feet. "Randy is really going to be pissed at me this time, if he's already home," she mumbled under her breath, already starting to turn towards the path home. Elizabeth put the thoughts of her mother aside - as much as she could at least - as she started running the two miles back to the house. In the midst of a harsh Illinois winter, it wasn't a fun experience.

Elizabeth looked up as she neared her house, glancing at the clean

exterior and the spotless front porch, before looking quickly to the driveway and garage, hoping not to see tire tracks in the coat of snow on the driveway. It had been snowing off and on most of the day, just enough to leave a few new inches on the ground, and as it hadn't been shoveled since this morning she was hoping there wouldn't be any tracks in it. The set of tire treads imprinted in the snow brought her back to reality, at least until she saw the strange cars parked at the top of the drive. The sight made her shiver under her heavy coat, and turned her blood cold. Her face, already red from the cold and snow, turned a dull shade of white as her stomach tied itself in knots. She silently hoped her worries were misplaced, but a glance in the back seat of one of the cars as she jogged up the walk quickly robbed her of her last hope for a reprieve. She walked around to the back door, dreading what she'd find inside. For a brief second, the teenager thought about simply turning around and leaving. Running away. Maybe going back out west, where her family had used to live; her real family, that is. Moving back to the last place where she was happy. Instead, she took a deep breath and opened the door, all the while silently praying for her mother to protect her.

"Where have you been? You were supposed to be home from school an hour ago! I was expecting dinner to be ready by now!" her stepfather shouted, before the door had even closed behind her. By the time she turned around and looked up, Randy was standing up and heading towards her. Elizabeth backed up, trying to duck out of his reach.

"I...I'm sorry Randy - I'll start dinner now, and I'll be better about keeping track of time from now on," she said, stammering and cowering back by the stove. He kept coming towards her, the look in his eyes telling her all she needed to know. He was drunk again.

"Hey, Randy," came a voice from the other room, making Elle jump in surprise. "The game's back on."

Elizabeth breathed a quick sigh of relief as her stepfather turned back towards the den.

“I want dinner ready in half an hour, and don’t you even think about leaving this house again tonight.”

“Yes, sir.” Elizabeth was already starting to look through the refrigerator, searching for something she could prepare for dinner quickly, hoping to be safely asleep in her room before the game ended.

She almost succeeded. She was just finishing drying the dishes when she heard the men in the den cheering, and her stepfather calling for her to bring them more beers. She knew better than to argue, going over to the fridge and pulling out two bottles.

“Now, you little slut!” Randy hollered, causing her to jump and sending one of the bottles crashing to the ground. She knew she was in trouble the second she heard it shatter on the hardwood floor.

“What the hell was that?!?” Randy yelled, rushing into the kitchen in time to see his daughter frantically trying to clean up the puddle of liquid on the floor, and collecting the pieces of the broken bottle. The minute she saw him in the doorway, she froze, stiff as a board.

He exploded.

“Where the hell is my beer you slut! What did you think, that I wouldn’t notice I was one bottle short? You did this on purpose, didn’t you? You saw that there were only two left, and you thought you could stop me from drinking if you wasted them, is that right? Huh?” He was shouting now, slurring his words. He was well past simply ‘drunk’, and Elizabeth could see the anger boiling up in his

eyes. "You're going to pay for that beer -- It cost me money, you know."

"B...Bu...But, you know I don't have any money to pay you with, sir... I don't even have any lunch money for the rest of the month," Elle mumbled, almost inaudibly. He'd spent her lunch money on alcohol last week, and she hadn't gotten an allowance since shortly after her mother died. He wouldn't let her work, so the only money she got was the occasional bit that he would give her for clothing or "personal items", and the money she had to do the shopping with when she could - but she had to have receipts for every penny... 'And they'd better match up!' he'd told her, the first time he sent her shopping. Sometimes, if she was lucky, a relative might give her a bit of cash, for her birthday or Christmas. That usually went towards clothes or makeup. "I'll pay for it as soon as I can find some money, I promise," she said, figuring she could get some kids lunch money from school tomorrow to pay him back with. That's how she usually got the money for food, anyways.

She knew it was a mistake before the words were even out of her mouth.

"You ungrateful SLUT!" Randy screamed, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her to him. "How dare you bitch to me about not having money. Do you go hungry? Do you have clothes on your back? You've got what you need! I don't give a fuck if you don't have lunch money for the month. You could stand to lose a few pounds anyways; the diet will do you good. You'd better be able to give Rob in there money to buy more beer tonight, though... I'm not waiting around for you to try and rip me off. I know you've got some money stashed in your room for clothes, or makeup, or some shit like that... You think I'm stupid?!? You march your ass upstairs and get it - and I mean ALL of it - and bring it back down here. RIGHT NOW!

"I... I don't, sir! I don't have anything... maybe a couple of dollars in change, pennies and stuff, but nothing really," she gasped, barely able to talk

through the fear and sobs.

“A slut like you doesn’t have any money? Why do I find that hard to believe...? Well then, if you can’t pay for the beer you wasted in cash, you’ll just have to pay some other way.” Randy sneered, grinning foully and pulling her towards the living room, ripping at her shirt.

“Hey Rob, we’re gonna have some fun tonight!”