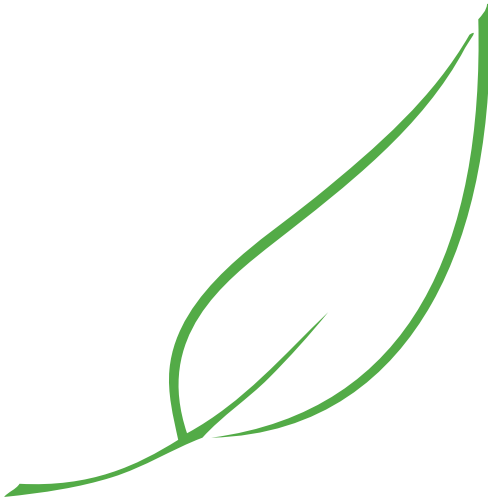


The Knot

By TA Powell



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THE KNOT

By TA Powell

THE KNOT

By T.A. Powell

SYNOPSIS: Jane Knowles has been holding on to a secret for 63 years. Today, however, everyone she ever cared about and anyone who might be hurt by what she knows are long gone. After being asked to recount the tragic events that occurred during the landmark fire of 1942 that burned the Martin Institute to the ground, Jane has finally decided to speak about that day. Her unlikely confessor, 17-year-old Ryan Skinner, is as awed by her colorful language as he is by her vivid tale of guilt and heartbreak. Alas, his judgemental tone causes the cantankerous Jane to oust the boy from her lifelong home, without an ending to her fascinating story. Will Ryan ever fill in this hole? Or will he end up at the end of his rope without a knot to hold on to?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 male, 2 female)

JANE ELIZABETH

BRYANT-KNOWLES (f) elderly woman (134 lines)

RYAN SKINNER (m) Ryan, 17 years old, later 30
(183 lines)

EDITOR (f) woman, 30 (50 lines)

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 The Survey

SCENE 2 The Fire

SCENE 3 The Truth

SCENE 4 The Rope

Intermission

ACT TWO

SCENE 1 The Tracks

SCENE 2 The Soldier

SCENE 3 The Confession

SCENE 4 The Knot

I have always felt there is a story in everything and that for every story there is a perfect title. The trick is to find them both to make a perfect fit... like Tupperware. Sometimes it takes a while, even for the most skilled of writers... and sometimes it takes 27 years...

TA Powell

ACT ONE, SCENE 1**SETTING:**

Victorian sitting room of an old house filled with antiques and old photos. 1940's era style dress on main female character. Old woman with gray hair. Old steamer trunk under glass in front of couch. Long couch and one wing chair flanking the fireplace. Mantle filled with photos and a small mason jar with watermelons seeds tucked inside. One hidden in the trunk as well; along with World War II mementos. Stacks of letters tied with blue ribbons. Old boots and military garb attire. Piled with books. Video equipment being set up inside the room; with additional lighting for filming. Liquor bar with several bottles and glasses set on library table behind couch; but visible to audience.

AT RISE:

Jane; female lead is sitting at the couch, opening a large manila envelope that holds the survey and information they will work from. As the young man; Ryan sets up his equipment; she pulls the papers out of the envelope and begins to read out loud from them to fill up the silence in the room. The young man does his best to arrange lighting, while trying not to blind her. He arranges microphones and then sits down on the wing chair opposite her near the fireplace. Old Music is coming from the radio on the end table at the opposite end of the couch. Each table has an old lamp set on it with various knick-knacks galore throughout. Before she enters the room and the lights come up full; she is downstage right retrieving manila envelope from a mail box. She is in spotlight and reads aloud. When she is finished with the synopsis, she walks upstage into the room and sits at couch, looking at the papers as Ryan brings in the last light stand to set up.

JANE: (Reading from survey.) Number one: Where were you January 13, 1942 when the Martin Institute burned down? (Looking up from survey.) This was the first question on the survey they had sent to my childhood home at 97 Sycamore Street some 53 years after the Institutes' timbers had been reduced to ash... the bricks had blackened to blend in with the night and the embers had glared back at me; like the end of Emory's cigarette that morning,

from under the watchful stained glass eyes of the martyrs in the church windows across the way. There were other questions on the page as well. All properly spaced and numerically sequenced. This wasn't meant to be a test... just a testimonial of sorts. The location of my whereabouts that day has affected my life far more intimately than any loss of pencil or paper...notebook or chalk board ever could. I meant to record my answers; so as not to lose what few details I could successfully recall... But arthritis had crippled my fingers and then the thought occurred to me... What would I write down anyway? Or more to the point...what would I confess to, if indeed I could bear to write it all? I picked up the small mason jar of watermelon seeds from the mantle and phoned the paper and requested a private recording of my oral history. Breaking a fifty three year silence proved to be harder than I thought. For me it meant closing up just one of many holes in my life... and a chance to let go of a knot I tied 53 years ago. It wouldn't be easy; but for the first time I was about to find out what was at the end of my rope. I only hoped that when Ryan got to the end of his some twelve years later, he might find the same thing. Somebody else to share the tale of the watermelon seeds with. This is the tale of a small towns' greatest tragedy; the story that the local newspaper reported and the truth that was never reported; as told 53 years later by an elderly woman who was there the day it happened and saw the unthinkable.

Ryan continues to set up lights, microphones, etc. as Jane again reads from the survey and answers the questions aloud.

JANE: Introduction: Oral Histories Survey for Jefferson, Georgia's Bicentennial Celebration and Exhibit. 1805-2005 Please fill out and return to Jackson Herald c/o Bicentennial Committee or contact Committee Leader; Brenda M. Blackstock-Harper.

Name: Jane Elizabeth Bryant-Knowles

Birth date: None of your damn business!

Current address: 97 Sycamore Street

Jefferson, Georgia 30549

Original address: 97 Sycamore Street

*This perusal script is for reading purposes only.
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Jefferson, Georgia 30549

Please answer following questions with as much detail as you can recall, in an effort to paint a true picture of our community's past and the events that shaped our little corner of the world.

Sponsored by Bicentennial Celebration Committee of Jefferson, Georgia. 2005 Your memories are an important key to preserving our community's history. Thank you for your efforts in advance.

Sincerely yours, Mrs. Brenda M. Blackstock-Harper

RYAN: You knew Mrs. Blackstock?

JANE: Yes I did. Quite well, as a matter of fact. That's what gives me the right to say; Sincerely yours... my ass!

RYAN: Excuse me?

JANE: Never mind. You finished rearranging my house yet? If I'd have known it needed redecorating; I'd have called Christopher Lowell...not you!

RYAN: I think so. I just didn't want the extra lighting to blind you. I'll put things back when I'm done.

JANE: No chance...

RYAN: No chance to what?

JANE: Blind me. Cataracts! You couldn't blind me if you wanted to...Already there! Now...turn that thing on and let's get this over with.

He adjusts one more light and turns on the camera.

RYAN: Today is March 18, 2005. This is an effort to record the oral history of one: Jane Elizabeth Bryant-Knowles.

97 Sycamore Street.

Jefferson, Georgia. 30549

(706) 367- 74...

JANE: Nobody will be needing that; but my lawyer when I'm through. Skip the formalities and cut to the chase.

END SCENE 1

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

RYAN: Okay. Miss Knowles, you have been selected to participate in the Oral History of the tragedy of the Martin Institute fire section of the survey, is that correct?

JANE: I haven't been selected to participate in any sections that I know of. Your Committee never contacted me. I contacted them.

RYAN: Mrs. Blackstock didn't contact you? It must have been a mistake. According to this form; you've lived here all your life, in the same house. How come?

JANE: As a child I grew up cradled in these walls. As a young lady; I cared for my parents caged behind these walls. As an old lady, I will most likely die unnoticed in them as well. But not today; if that's what you're afraid of.

RYAN: I wasn't thinking that. I was thinking; if you've lived here all your life... There can't be anything about this town and its history that you don't know!

JANE: True... and I imagine that is exactly why she did not contact me. And by the way, young man... the past does not have sections. It has holes. No one person can have all of history contained within themselves. Only parts. And without all the parts... you cannot have the wholes. Get it?

RYAN: Sorta.

JANE: Here's a riddle my Aunt Shirley once shared with me. "There once was a man on a horse, who was trapped in a room with no windows or doors....just a table in the center of the room. How did he escape?"

RYAN: I don't know, Miss Knowles. With no windows or doors...How did he get in there in the first place, is what I want to know?

JANE: Good question...wrong answer! How do any of us get into the fixes we find ourselves in? But that's not important. You're focusing on the wrong issue. The issue of how he got in is no longer relevant. He's there! How is he to get out, should be the more pressing question? Don't you think?

RYAN: No windows or doors... Hmmm. I guess... I can't see any way out for him.

JANE: Ooooh, come on. Think! Trust me. There's always a way out...sometimes it's just not obvious. Give up?

RYAN: Yes ma'am.

JANE: Okay..."The man got down off his horse; looked around and when he saw no way out. He used that saw to cut the table in half. Two halves make a whole. He jumped on his horse and rode through the hole to make his escape."

RYAN: What?

JANE: You see...even when there appears to be no way out...you can always make a hole. If indeed you can't find the one others have conveniently provided for you.

RYAN: But that doesn't make any sense. That wasn't a real hole. It was just a bunch of silly gibberish. Like a nursery rhyme. A real man on a real horse can't escape through an imaginary hole.

JANE: A real man doesn't escape from anything. Mounted...or not. He stands up to it...But, if the place you started from was just as imaginary... Hmmmm?!

RYAN: So...what you're saying is? That if the man, the horse and the hole are all imaginary...then none of it matters; cause it never really happened?

JANE: Or...?

RYAN: If something really happened and the only way out was through your imagination? Would the hole be real enough and would it still count as an escape?

JANE: Nicely done...

RYAN: So? Which is it?

JANE: Guess that depends on the person who is trying to escape, now doesn't it?

RYAN: So ...is the hole real or imaginary?

JANE: Again you're focusing on the wrong issue. It doesn't really matter if it's real or not. If it's perceived it's there...It's there!

RYAN: So what's the trouble?

JANE: Only trouble is...holes don't always last forever. Somebody, somewhere always knows the difference. Because somebody, somewhere always knows the truth...and then the holes disappear and you're trapped with the truth! It's amazing what

the human mind can create... if indeed it no longer recognizes; what in fact is real.

RYAN: I don't understand?

JANE: That's good. Only people in desperate situations understand that kind of logic. Think about it for a moment though... If what I said is true; and all of history is filled with holes...Just think how many halves it took to make them. And how many truths have slipped through them...

RYAN: Well... this is certainly not going to be as boring as I thought it might be. (She glares at him.) Sorry! I just meant...

JANE: Oh...That's all right. I know what you just meant. Sitting around; listening to a bunch of half dead folks rambling on about shit you don't think matters in the bigger scheme of things, is sheer torture on a beautiful day like today. It's all right. Fact is, I wouldn't sit around all day and listen to your shit either, if I could get up and walk out of this house. (Tugs at her cane.) But I can't! And today...at least for the next few hours; neither can you! Welcome to my world...Rookie!

RYAN: (Breaks into a huge smile and laughs.) Rookie! I can't believe you just said the word *shit*! Twice!

JANE: And I can't believe you're pretending like you never heard it before! Twice!

RYAN: My Grandma never swears!

JANE: She did when she was younger. Swore like a sailor. Smoked too. You can tell her I said so.

RYAN: Oh my God (Laughs) I can't believe you said that! That's okay. Just knowing it is enough for me to make it through Holiday dinners across from her.

JANE: Believe it...I said it. Hah! But just knowing something is never enough. Humph. Ah Hell... I just thought I'd break the ice. Your grandma did smoke though. But you can keep that as our little secret. It's just that, I hate the way some of you young people look at me. Like the buzzards were already setting on my shoulders ... picking my brains.

RYAN: I'm not here to pick your brains. Just record them.

JANE: No...not you. The buzzards, I meant. So...you're gonna take down all my memories and put them in that little black box?

RYAN: Little...? Oh. You mean my video cam. Yes ma'am. I'm gonna try.

JANE: I can't imagine being able to pigeon hole a person's whole experience into one little box, to be fondled and picked over later by strangers; like discards at a garage sale. Scavengers plucking out just the ones they want and throwing the rest aside. Although when you think about it, a coffin does the same thing. It's just a bigger box, I guess.

RYAN: You're quite a character, Miss Knowles. I'm not here to pick at anything. I just record them, ma'am. I don't do anything else. I'm not responsible for what happens to your memories after I'm through.

JANE: How can you not be responsible for them after that? By telling them to you; they become a part of you and then that makes them yours as well. It's called a cumulative experience, I think. Or is it a; collective experience? Either way... I won't have this shit to deal with on my own any more. I'll have you to help carry the load. So, plug that thing in and let's go. I'll talk...you record... and we'll let history figure out what else to do with this shit! Deal?

RYAN: Fair enough. Let's start with the first question again. Where were you January 13, 1942 when the Martin Institute burned to the ground? You started to answer before I was recording and I didn't get your introduction down? Do you remember what you said?

JANE: I might be a tad bit older than you; but I'm not deaf and I'm not dumb. Stop interrupting me, Rookie. Now, do you want to hear the story or not?

RYAN: Yes ma'am.

JANE: All right then. As I was saying...Not everyone that day stared panic-stricken and teary-eyed at the raging inferno that had been the premier educational facility of an entire region. The fact that I had missed most of the chaos that day was not an indication of insensitivity or frailty on my part. Things happened and some things... Well, they just are what they are. Sometimes they are not meant to be anything more than just that.

RYAN: That; being the fire?

JANE: No! That; being one of those things people in hind sight—weak minded people—tended to call fate, instead of simply accepting the fact of their role in the scheme of things.

RYAN: I'm sorry. I think I need to adjust this just a bit. (Jumps up to check his recorder.) Could you repeat that for me?

JANE: Would you ask Shakespeare to repeat his thoughts; because you were too damn slow to keep up? (She glares at him. He sits back down.) I thought not. Let's move on.

RYAN: I'm sorry, Miss Knowles. Go on. It's recording now.

JANE: Fine. Where was I? Oh yes...Some of us older girls had successfully campaigned to take that morning off; to go down to the tracks that ran right through the mill to greet the young men that rode the freight trains in from Gainesville or Athens to sign up for the war effort; before heading south to Atlanta.

RYAN: Was this a common practice at the time?

JANE: What? Boys and girls ogling one another from afar? You don't have to be common to be horny, young man...But people tend to be less shocked by it, if you are! May I continue?

RYAN: Yes ma'am. Sorry.

JANE: You know that to take a real oral history of somebody's life...you're supposed to shut up and listen...not talk through it! Right?

RYAN: I know that... It's just that they told us to ask questions if you seemed stuck. You know; like a prompter. In case you forget where you were or forget to mention something you might have forgotten to remember.

JANE: Did it ever dawn on you idiots; there might be plenty we'd like to forget? Hmmm! May I...?

RYAN: No ma'am.

JANE: You let me do the remembering, all right? While we told our parents in front of the churches, we were ready to roll up our sleeves and do our patriotic duty to bolster the courage of our boys heading off to war... we were hiking up our skirts behind the water tower and bolstering our bosoms with whatever fit the bill.

RYAN: (Snickers) So your patriotism wasn't altogether altruistic then?

JANE: Altruistic? With the ratio of girls to boys dipping dramatically due to the onset of the war? Hell no... we stacked the odds in our favor whenever we could.

RYAN: Who was this, “we” you refer to?

JANE: Brenda, Betty Jeane, Laura B. Fair, myself and a few other girls from the upper grades. We were to meet at the Institute that morning and gather the banners we had made in art class the day before. We planned to hold them up as the train slowed into town. We knew it would pass by us slow enough for each party to get a good look at each others’...assets, as it were. Exchange a glance or anything else that could be accomplished under the steam of a moving train. At least that was the plan that morning before all hell broke loose.

RYAN: Was that why you gathered there? To solicit prospective husbands?

JANE: You’re a bright one! (Sighs) It was 1942 and pickings were mighty slim around town. Take a look around! Things haven’t changed all that much. (He Laughs.) Maybe it was true for some of the girls. I wasn’t looking for a Roman god or a knight in shining armor myself, mind you. Fact was, I wasn’t looking for anybody at all. I was just along for the ride. I wasn’t looking for anything at the Institute either, that morning... but I got an eyeful just the same.

RYAN: But I thought you said you had missed all that in your first answer?

JANE: I never said I wasn’t there at all. I just said I wasn’t there for the chaos that ensued, “after” the fire started.

RYAN: When were you there then?

JANE: I already told you. We were supposed to meet there to get the banners. Well... as usual. I was the first one there and the doors were still locked out front. I tried the bell, but to no avail. So I thought I’d run round back and throw rocks at JT’s dormitory window when I noticed some movement in the azaleas behind the right end of the dormitory wing.

RYAN: Cat?

JANE: It’s rude to keep interrupting. Rookie! I was waiting for Betty Jeane to meet me at the corner to go on to the Mill tracks with the banners; as they were too cumbersome to carry alone. When I recognized Brenda’s little brother as the “cat” I thought had been in the bushes. He wasn’t really younger technically. They were both 17. Fraternal twins. But she had beaten him into the world

by 4 and ½ minutes and had ever since lorded it over him; claiming birthrights' for the whole family.

RYAN: And Brenda was one of the, "we"?

JANE: She was the number one, "we". My best friend. When I called his name to ask him if Brenda was on her way...he dropped his cigarette into the pine straw beside his crumpled trousers. I didn't understand the look on his face at first. I'd seen him in more compromised positions before. Hell... When we were kids we used to take a shit on the backside of old man Thompson's barn on a dare! He was the only one that never got caught! We all thought he'd lost a fair bit of oxygen drafting Brenda into the world and breaking that outhouse mentality had been difficult for him as well. He had that, "deer in the headlights" look about him as he yanked up his trousers. Forgetting the lit cigarette and bolted without a word. I could have cared less about his sneaking a smoke. He'd been doing that for years. I didn't care either if he had been taking a primordial leak outside. He's always been a little different. I just didn't understand why he would be doing both at 6:40 in the morning behind the bushes...when he could have stayed just inside the portico and out of the wind. No teachers patrolled the grounds at that hour; so it didn't make sense. And then... I saw the black collared shirt of the Baptist preacher, choking the reddened face above it as I heard the unmistakable zip of a pair of pants...and I finally understood. In the span of twelve seconds I had seen the ruination of a family, the loss of a friend; the sacrilegious abuse of religious vows and the appalling exploitation of a young man's indecision. And there with the whipping of one small breeze; two futures went up in smoke... along with the Educational Institute one had sworn to protect and the other to attend.

RYAN: Holy shit!

JANE: Yes...Quite literally... or at least he would have wanted you to think so. Shit is shit...as far as I'm concerned! It all smells the same... Ordained or not! As the Preacher, the azaleas and the eyes of the stained glass guardians of the adjacent church began to glow red; I turned and ran. I did not stop running until I found myself out of breath at the end of Mahaffey Street. Catatonic,

holding white-knuckled onto the icy railings of the water tower steps as the sirens started to howl above my head.

RYAN: Shit...you're shaking! Are you okay? Can I get you a glass of water or anything?

JANE: No...no. I'm ...okay.

RYAN: Do you want to go on? I could call somebody else, if you need...

JANE: It's only a memory now. It can't hurt anybody anymore. I've outlived them all...except one.

END OF SCENE 2

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

RYAN: Oh man... I can't believe this shit. Sorry...

JANE: Me too... For more reasons than you will ever know.

RYAN: Jesus! This is nothing like what they said happened. Not any of it! Not even the papers mentioned any of this stuff. I know...We studied all this in our journalism class; to help write the survey questions. They said it had something to do with the electrical system. It was reported in the Jackson Herald that Preacher Crawford had seen the fire from the church and had died trying to wake the residents inside the dormitory and lead them to safety. You mean... that's not true either?

JANE: It may have been. I don't know. By the time I saw the smoke from the end of Mahaffey Street... I'm sure half the building was ablaze. If he had gone back in to save the residents... Then why was it Emory's body was found crumpled next to JT's bed, along with the Preacher's; when JT had made it safely out?

RYAN: I...I don't know. The papers made no mention of that. Nor did the police give any reasons to investigate further.

JANE: Neither the police nor the papers had seen what I had seen. There's your first hole, Rookie. That's how the truth escapes...

RYAN: So what do you think really happened?

JANE: What I think and what I know are not the same and so your question is unfair and it would be unwise of me to speculate openly.

RYAN: But if you were to guess...

JANE: But, if I were to guess...I wouldn't guess at all! I would start with the facts and work backwards. Both he and the Preacher had been found together at the end of JT's bed. Fact. So... the papers simply put the best face on it they could. Fact. They said Hulon had died trying to save one more of the residents and both were overcome by smoke. Fact and Hole! Dying there together. Fact. "What a comfort that must have been to the boys family"; they quoted in the paper. I remember vomiting the day I read it. Fact!!!

RYAN: And your guess would have it ending another way?

JANE: Maybe...Preacher Crawford had short timer's disease by then. He was a balding, portly feller with big teeth, as I recall. Had we known anything about homosexuals back then... We'd have said he was too damn ugly and too old to be a male model. Too thick in the ankles to be a choreographer and just too damn altogether disgusting to have answered the call, that God had obviously not made!

RYAN: Miss Knowles!

JANE: Oh quit. I couldn't embarrass you if I tried. Let me finish my thoughts. This was his last church before retirement. Rumor had it, the last revival hadn't gone so well and there were rumors he was into saving more than just our young man's souls, before they went off to war. My guess is that, maybe only one of them thought the fires of hell would purify his soul and that the other was too weak of both body and spirit to protest and so suffered the same fate. Fact! One died a martyr...and one died a saint. Hole! Where else but in a small, pretentious southern town in 1942, can you die with your pants down...but with your boots on... I ask you?

RYAN: Jesus, Miss Knowles. Would you like to take a break?

JANE: I've been on a break for 53 years and you've seen worse on MTV. So, cut the theatrics. Go get us both a drink of water. I'll take mine with scotch. You can take yours with ice and...let's get back to work. I've got a library book and a video over due I need to get back before 6:00.

RYAN: Okay. (He gets up and fixes her a drink and himself a soda.) Which movie?

JANE: Driving Miss Daisy. I've driven so many miles with her...we both ought to be in Canada by now. Keep forgetting to return the damn thing; so I just keep watching it over and over. You finished there? I'm thirsty. (Returns to the couch with her drink and then takes the chair opposite.)

RYAN: Let me check the tape. We're good...So when you left...you ended up where? At the Mill to wait on the train? Where were all your friends at the time?

JANE: Remember; it was still fairly early. At 7:15 they straggled in unawares; one after the other; pony tailed and painted until the sirens would not end and the Mill shut down to send workers to aid in the effort to subdue the flames and save the surrounding buildings.

RYAN: And you never spoke a word to Brenda about what you'd seen? Her brother and the Preacher? You kept that a secret?

JANE: I had no choice. At least that's what I told myself as the others ran back up the hill to see what all the commotion was about. I already knew how the fire had started...I just never knew how it ended till later that night.

RYAN: Did you tell her about her brother dying?

JANE: I did not know about Emory's death. Nobody knew for hours where everyone had ended up. I had no idea they had both run back into the building. I can only assume that Emory had made a bee-line to his best friend's side and that the Preacher followed Emory back into the dorms to solicit silence from the boy.

Forgetting all about the cigarette that had been dropped, until it was too late. When the flames engulfed them... I imagine he felt God had served penance upon them both. How ironic that they found him in that position...I can only hope that this time he was kneeling in prayer and not in prostitution.

RYAN: Holy shit...So you never knew Emory had gone back into the building until that night?

JANE: How could I? Had I known of that; I would have told Brenda to get Emory back home straight away. Truth is; I never thought about where Emory was headed when he took off. I couldn't get the image out of my head as to where he had been. I s'pose I was in a state of shock. I needed time to think.

RYAN: What did you do?

JANE: With the sirens blowing above the roof of the Mill; I stood shivering, listening to the gush of air that slapped the sides of the Mill's loading dock doors. Making them appear to breathe in and out with every passing rail car that charged between them and myself. The memory of the morning that would divide and define the way I saw truth for the rest of my life... Fact! I saw the end of my world in the end of that cigarette in more ways than one and....

RYAN: So you took that saw...

JANE: Yes...I did. I took that saw...like the man on his horse. I cut the truth in half. Two halves made a hole... and I... and everything innocent I had ever known, along with the memory of Emory's face... crawled right through it and escaped...Until today.

END OF SCENE 3

ACT ONE SCENE 4

RYAN: Miss Knowles, this is some kind of story.

JANE: No story, Rookie. Stories are what we tell ourselves and others when we're to chicken shit to face the truth. I know. I've been chicken shit for 53 years.

RYAN: Holy shit...

JANE: Yeah... Holy shit! Speaking of...Damn diuretics. I gotta use the little girls' room. Make yourself a sandwich or something...if you can stomach it and come up with something more original the next time you feel the need to freak out. Holy shit's getting a little old and you're gonna end up in a dark room for the next three days editing this; if you don't cut it out! I'll be back in a minute.

RYAN: Sorry. Thanks about the sandwich...maybe later. May I look at some of your photos over there? The ones on the mantle? My Grandpa had a truck like that one, out on the farm.

JANE: Sure. Just be careful not to break that little jar up there.

RYAN: What's in it?

JANE: Watermelon seeds.

RYAN: Why are they in there?

JANE: Keep them safe. At first, I thought they were my hole... Then later; they became my knots. I needed to hold onto to them.

RYAN: Is a knot like a hole, Miss Knowles?

JANE: Kinda. You're catching on mighty quick. There's hope for you, Rookie! Most folks never bothered to understand my theories on knots and holes. Personally, I think it clarifies things a bit for you, if you can call them out by name! It helps you recognize things for what they are. A hole is an escape...

RYAN: Okay. So what's the knot for?

JANE: See that little bit of twine up there next to the last photo on the left? The one by the mason jar?

RYAN: Yes ma'am. Do you want me to get it?

JANE: Uh-hum. Lay it out here on the coffee table... (He does.) A knot... as my dear friend JT once explained to me. (Fingers the small piece of rope as she speaks.) Need not be the obstacle that prevents our rope from stretching out smooth...Now...hold it up from the top down....knot at the lower end. (He does.) See the difference? What once appeared as an obstacle; sometimes becomes the thing we learn to hold on to... when we get to the end of our rope.

RYAN: I never thought of things that way before.

JANE: That's why you're a Rookie.

RYAN: And what you saw that day sent you to the end of your rope?

JANE: That day and everyday after. Everything had changed for me. There was nothing left to hold onto, until the watermelon seeds came along and saved me. In that little bitty jar, I had finally found the knot at the end of my rope. A knot therefore, Rookie... is something to hold on to. It keeps us from falling off the end of our rope and into another hole! (She exits to use the rest room and he sits. Staring at the small jar; its contents and the small bit of twine that curled around it.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO, SCENE 1**AT RISE:**

She has yet to return as he wanders the room; looking at various photos and knick knacks. He puts the jar back on the mantle and replaces the thin rope with a knot at the end in front of the photo of a pretty young girl. He picks it up and stares at it for a moment. When she re-enters he asks her about the trunk that is under the glass top of the coffee table.

RYAN: Is this yours; or just an antique.

JANE: Humph. (Sits down.) Anything that was ever mine is an antique by now, Rookie... including me!

RYAN: I'll make you a deal...I'll stop saying Holy shit; if you'll call me by my real name instead of Rookie. Deal?

JANE: Getting a little cozy now, aren't we? Next thing, you'll be wanting to marry into the family! Hah!

RYAN: No ma'am. I just think you oughta know my name... unless it's easier for you to tell a stranger all this. In that case; Rookie will be fine.

JANE: Okay. I'll agree on one condition. You stop treating me like some old moldy relic...like this trunk here. Deal?

RYAN: Yeah...okay. It's Ryan. Ryan Skinner. And you know what I meant though, about the trunk. It's cool. I was just curious if it was yours as a kid or did ya buy it?

JANE: It belonged to a good friend of mine. He left it to me when he died.

RYAN: It's cool. What's in it?

JANE: His 1976 red Monte Carlo was "way" cooler...as you kids say. But my granddaughter got that. I can't drive anywhere anymore. That's why I got Miss Daisy over there and I got this shit trunk of his over here.

RYAN: Anything inside?

JANE: Never really bothered to look through it, closely. Just a bunch of papers and crap. I'd have given it to Good Will...But, they got the rest of his stuff and I didn't want to bother anybody else. So I just kept it.

RYAN: Sentimental reasons?

JANE: I'm too old for sentiments...and too much older to move the damn thing. So there it sits. My Granddaughter thought it would make a nice coffee table so... I told her to give it to somebody who drank coffee! I prefer scotch. She'll get it when I'm gone, I s'pose... She likes coffee!

RYAN: Very Funny, Miss Knowles.

JANE: You know. You can call me Jane. It'd be nice to hear my name again too.

RYAN: Okay...Jane. Ready? (Adjusts the camera and turns it back on.) So when we left off... You were standing alone at the tracks, while the rest of town tended to the smoldering carcasses of your Alma Mater, your friend and your pastor?

JANE: Not my "Pastor". I'm a Methodist...we have enough troubles of our own; without borrowing more. Where was I? Oh yes. Standing at the tracks... I couldn't even feel the wind or smell the smoke. I was numb. I followed the plan... because to follow anything else would have been disastrous.

RYAN: The plan to greet the train? But weren't you alone by then?

JANE: Yes, but...The Mill doors breathed in and out as I stood there and so did I... unable to move. Life went on, Rookie, whether I wanted it to or not. It is a daunting thing when you lose control of your world. Humiliating and humbling at the same time. But the train whistle blew and saved my life.

RYAN: How so?

JANE: When train whistles blew, pretty girls all over the nation stood wide eyed and pink cheeked; lining tracks everywhere waiting for some handsome boy and some not so handsome boys to throw addresses' out of windows in exchange for throwing hair ribbons in. It was a fair trade. We gave them thin strips of colored silk and sash and in return they gave us excuses to stay home Saturday nights; when hometown boys had lost their charm. My ribbon was corn flower blue to match my skirt and the eyes of the boy I'd hoped to pen. But when the mill whistle blew that January morn; it blew not for the boys; but for the few men left to man the pump trucks that raced into town.

RYAN: Pump trucks?

JANE: Fire trucks that had to hold their own water. While folks ran frantic with buckets and pails; scattering before the black columns of smoke... rail cars three blocks over passed through phantom columns of Homecoming queens and sophisticated debutantes. Save for one real girl who stood, clad in a brown wool coat and a blue skirt... alone in the lower docks of the deserted Mill.... Waiting for the railcars to teach her how to breathe again and to bring her a forwarding address for survival.

END OF SCENE 1

ACT TWO, SCENE 2

RYAN: Did the train stop?

JANE: Oh...it stopped all right. 500 yards down the tracks from the Mill. Half way up Hochston Street. The smoke was so thick; the engineers could not see far enough ahead and so they ground the wheels into a gritty stop and the engines hissed as the cars settled into the rails; a heaving an exhausted sigh of relief. I stood there with a banner draped around my ankles as I had no strength to hold it up. I remember the engineer asking questions. I do not recall if I even responded. Some minutes later; he and several others went from car to car; banging on the sides and telling the boys to file out and fall in.

RYAN: Fall into what?

JANE: Lines. Lovely lines of young men lined the tracks; while smoke swirled in and around them and I had the bizarre sensation that they were there for my review. Out of all the girls in the town, I was the only one there to see this wondrous sight. How odd that I was not only the only one there; but the only one that didn't give a shit about catching a beau. Ironical, Huh?

RYAN: So what did you do?

JANE: I changed my mind! I figured after what I'd seen...I deserved for one day to do just whatever the hell I wanted. Damn the consequences! All I had to do was pick one out and take his hand... So I did.

RYAN: You picked out a total stranger and held his hand?



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