

Chapter 9

You're Impossible

“You’re impossible,” I said about my dad after I slammed my bedroom door. Even when I was very upset I would not dare say that to him. Two years later at fourteen, I said it frequently, usually after an argument over rules or the war in Vietnam, but at twelve I still had enough good sense to hold back.

Sunday was Dad’s day off and he was usually in a great mood. That Sunday Dad acted like he had just done twelve hours of patrol duty. He was quiet during dinner and his eyes didn’t seem to focus on anything in the room. The Sox lost to the Yankees, 7 -5, that afternoon. I thought that might be it, but I was wrong.

Grandma baked her Irish apple pie for dessert. Grandma’s Irish apple pie wasn’t made from Irish apples; it was just that everything Grandma made had the word Irish in it: Irish pot roast, Irish potatoes, Irish coffee, Irish apple pie. Even Irish spaghetti. Dad always got the first slice of Grandma’s pie with two scoops of vanilla ice cream on top. Always. Dad would sing, “He’s got high hopes. He’s got high hopes, high in the sky, apple pie hopes.” That was a song by Dad’s favorite singer, Frank Sinatra. Dad sang a lot of Frank Sinatra tunes when he had a day off. He didn’t sing any on that day though, and when he refused dessert, I knew something was going to happen.

It didn’t happen until Dad came back from driving Grandma and Grandpa home. Dad closed the front door behind him and it seemed like our entire three bedroom, ranch style house tilted towards him. Dad was done being quiet.

“Eddie Reynolds called me this afternoon,” he said. Pat and I sat on the sofa. There wasn’t a spotlight in our eyes, but it sure seemed like there was. “He said, ‘Eileen left her bat at the field after practice today.’ I said, ‘no, you mean Pat left his bat. Eileen was just watching.’ ‘Just watching?’ Eddie said. ‘I couldn’t believe that I was watching a girl play ball like that.’

I couldn’t believe I was hearing this,” Dad said to me. The heat in his eyes caused me to lower mine. “Especially since I told you, just one week ago, that you were not allowed to try out for that team. Do you remember the conversation we had at dinner last Sunday, young lady?”

Dad only called me “young lady” when I was in serious trouble. “Yes, I remember,” I said. Dad was a good cop; he did this for a living. There was no pretending that I somehow misunderstood. “Keep the answers short,” I told myself.

“Let it blow over.” Pat slid close to the edge of the sofa. He wanted as much distance from me as he could create.

“Heck, the Hillpeppers heard me say that to you, and they are both hard of hearing.” It would not be a good idea to laugh at Dad’s “joke”. “Exactly when did you, young lady, decide that you were going to do what you wanted to do, and not do what I told you not to do?” It also would not be a good idea to correct Dad’s mangled grammar. “Well?” I was not sure how to respond to that.

“I was wrong, Dad.” That was never easy for me to say.

“You better believe you were wrong, and now you are going to face the consequences.” Dad believed in consequences. This was not going to blow over. He directed his steel-eyed wrath to Pat, who had one leg over the arm of the sofa. Pat looked like he ate two pieces too many of Grandma’s Irish apple pie. He did not have my seasoned experience at being yelled at by Dad. Pat also lived in fear of the whip.

The whip, or “strap” as Dad called it, was like a leather octopus. It had a series of foot-long strips emanating from a thick, leather handle. Dad broke up a street fight between two rival gangs one day and brought the whip home that night. The whip looked like it could separate muscle from bone. We were never actually hit by it though. Ever. It served more as a deterrent, sort of like the A-bomb. The closest we came to “getting the strap” was when Pat and I wrestled in the living room and we crashed into a table and knocked over one of Mom’s prized, ceramic roosters. Mom was in her “ceramic phase” at that time. She took classes every Tuesday night with her girl friends and turned our home into a showcase of her “talent”. Even though Dad claimed to like the ceramic trout on a hook that hung over his dresser, it was obvious that he barely tolerated the ceramic Santas, candy dishes, buffalo bookends, Civil War swords, bunny rabbit cookie jars, and roosters that were everywhere. “Wait until your father gets home from work!” Mom yelled at us after she discovered the shattered rooster. When Dad came home from work and Mom briefed him of our crime, he seemed puzzled about how to deal with us and not too upset. “Aren’t you going to do something, Stan?” Mom asked. She gave him a look that told him she expected much more. So, Dad got out the whip and wielded it, whacking an end table with the dangerous tentacles. He nearly took down the remaining ceramic rooster.

“Do you two want some of this?” he asked as he fought back a smile. The answer to that was an easy one. Ever since the demonstration though, Pat had nightmares starring the whip.

“I’m disappointed in you, young man,” Dad said. “You knew that Eileen did not have permission to try out for The Gas. It is your job to keep her out of trouble. It’s your job to tell me when she doesn’t listen to you. I want two hours of yard work out of you after practice this Saturday. Is that clear?”

What was clear to me was that Dad wasn’t very disappointed in Pat. Pat didn’t rat me out and Dad respected that. So did I. Pat was so relieved and grateful that the whip wasn’t going to make an appearance that he seemed downright eager to be raking leaves and pulling weeds. The yard detail was to be done after practice, too. Pat’s hopes for making The Gas were still alive. My high hopes died one minute later.

“Young lady, your two hours of yard work will be from 10 o’clock to 12 o’clock this Saturday morning.” That was baseball tryout time. “Obviously, you will not be trying out for The Gas this year or any year. Do you finally understand that?”

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