

*When it's over,
and you see it with your eyes,
Would you rather have the truth
or a lie?!*

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God's Phoenix Woman

Embracing The Truth

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This is a work of fiction.
Names, characters, places and incidents
either are the products of the author's imagination
or are used fictitiously.
Any resemblances to actual persons, living or dead,
events or locales, are entirely coincidental.

Please notice, however, that I'm winking at my
Wednesday Night Girls ☺

AND

Also please note that I must go on record as saying that I am eternally grateful to the wonderfully skilled and incredibly dedicated therapists (yes, more than one!) that have enriched my life as well as my family's. You are, beyond a shadow of a doubt, God's gift to me. Fictional Aileen was created long before you came on the scene - but God made her into a reality. *Thank you.*

Bibliographic credit appears at the end of this work.

To
Pam Frueh:

None of my books would be as polished if it wasn't for you
and your editing skills.

It's time I dedicated a book to you
although it's not the first time you've shown up in my stories:

You were specifically acknowledged
for all your hard work in editing and proofreading in

A Garden Walled Around and

A Well Behaved Woman's Life,

You were the physical model for the female minister in

Rules for Survival,

You were a banking magnate in *The Butler Did It,*

I killed you off in childbirth in *No Darkness So Great,* and

You were a nosy old woman sitting on the front porch in this one!!

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Therapy: The Hard Truth

Setting: Psychologist Aileen Burkart's office. It's March, 10, 2008, my very first visit to *this* therapist's office. I've dragged myself here out of desperation and as a last resort. Aileen reminds me a little bit of Jabba The Hutt sitting in her big throne-like chair, oozing power and superiority. I feel like Princess Leia must have felt in the wire mesh bikini with a slave collar chained around her neck. Yes, I'm here of my own volition, but only just. Kind of like if you felt yourself sliding off a cliff, and in desperation and panic you grab the vicious looking cactus to save yourself; it hurts like hell but it's better than the alternative.

Aileen: Here's the deal, Olivia. Therapists can only help you if you're willing to let them help you. You have to decide if you have a connection or not with that person. You have to be willing to have a dialogue with the therapist and feel that you would trust her observations, motives, and opinions. After a few sessions, you're going to have to ask yourself, "Is Aileen someone I can work with to make myself better?" Now, if I do something in particular that bothers you, let's talk about it. Maybe I can make accommodations that would work for both of us. But there may be some things that I just can't change. And if it's a big enough issue then I would encourage you to try another therapist.

Me: Like what?

Aileen: Well, say, for instance, you'd prefer to deal with a male therapist. (Chuckles.) I can't help you there, nor can I make any accommodations to satisfy that need.

Me: (Bitter chuckle.) Don't worry. I'd never seek out a male therapist. Hmm, I can see your therapist antennae twitching already. Better get your pad and pen out and start making lists of all the areas we'll have to "address."

Aileen: Sounds to me like you've been in therapy before.

Me: Yeah, in my teens. Out of sheer desperation, my mother and stepfather, Paul, thought that maybe talking to a *professional* might help me. Paul, being a therapist himself might have influenced that thought process a bit.

Aileen: Did it help?

Me: No.

Aileen: Really? That's too bad. So, if it didn't work then, why are you here now?

Me: It shows how desperate I am and how out of control my life has become that I've once again listened to Paul over fifteen years later. (I sigh.) *Really desperate.* Voodoo and crystals haven't worked. Why not try psychotherapy again?

Aileen: (Getting out yellow legal pad and pen.) Okay, so let's get started. Why don't we make a list of things that you'd like to address during our time together?

Me: (Reaching into my purse and pulling out a crumpled piece of paper.) Here. There's a million issues to deal with but we can just start with this.

Aileen: (Takes paper, adjusts glasses, and begins to read.)

Me: In particular I'd like to discuss the line that says "Dean Kelly is excluded from being the biological father of Olivia Kelly." Actually, I've known this truth since I was sixteen, but now that I've got actual proof, I need to figure out what I should do. I'm tired of being lied to and determined to know the truth. No matter how badly my mother wants to keep it from me.

*You can bend it and twist it ... You can misuse and abuse it ...
But even God cannot change the Truth.²*

1: Honesty Is The Best Policy, But ...

Friday, March 19, 2010

“Richard? What was your answer to problem six?” I called on Richard not because he had his hand up or because I thought he knew the answer, but more so because he was once again distracted by Marylynn’s outstanding cleavage.

“Huh?” Richard mumbled as if coming out of a deep coma.

His buddy William, required to sit on the other side of the classroom (to provide one less distraction for poor Richard), sniggered and called. “Yo, earth to Richie-boy. Get your head out of Marylynn’s rack, man.” The whole class laughed as Marylynn made an outraged gasp while still managing to appear delighted at being the center of attention.

Now I’d be the first to admit that Marylynn’s cleavage was impressive, but having seen it regularly ... perfumed, tattooed (a daisy skewed toward the left), encased in both spandex and cashmere ... sigh ... you get the picture. It’s reached the status of “same old, same old” for me. But then I’m not a fifteen year old male, so today’s display (yellow polyester camisole overlaid with black stretch lace) was just too impressive to be ignored. “I asked you to tell us the answer to problem six,” I said with skilled teacher-patience.

“Oh,” Richard shuffled through the papers piled randomly on his desk and spilling out of his notebook. “Yeah, I did that ... wait ... oh, here it is,” he spoke over William’s continued hoots and cat calls and Marylynn’s giggles, “... ah ... negative eleven?” He looked so hopeful.

“Good for you!” I exclaimed delightedly. Richard had come to extra help the last two Tuesday mornings (probably more for the donuts I always bring, but hey, whatever works) and I was happy for his success. He slumped back exhausted, as if he’d just run a marathon.

“William? Number seven’s answer?” I said to Richard’s friend who was still doubled over with laughter.

I watched William’s enjoyment of sixth period’s Algebra I class disappear as he struggled to get with the program. “Ah, Ms. Kelly, I didn’t get that one. I tried and tried but that one was tough. I even asked my dad for help but he couldn’t figure it out either.” His sincerity was almost as big as his size thirteen sneakers.

But now it was Richard’s turn to snigger and shout, “Hey! Get your head out of your ass, man! There *is no* number seven!”

As the class erupted in laughter, I wrote the night’s homework on the board and stood back to avoid the stampede as the dismissal bell rang. Richard and I exchanged a high-five as he rushed past and William shook his head as he passed me smiling sheepishly. “Good one, Ms. Kelly.”

“Do your homework tonight, William. *I mean it.*”

He sighed like I’d just asked him to come up with a solution to global warming. “I’ll try, Ms. Kelly. Honest I will.”

For some unexplainable reason, period six’s Algebra I was the most enjoyable of all my classes. It’s probably something I should take up with my therapist, Aileen, as to why I most enjoy the class with the worst test scores, the poorest homework completion rate, and the highest number of problem students. Maybe it’s a reflection of my own poor performance throughout academic life? Or possibly I recognize others of like-minded self-destructive behavior? Of course there’s always been my perpetual negative attitude towards authority figures ...

Aileen says, “Asking the proper questions is the central action of transformation. Questions are the key that causes the secret doors of the psyche to swing open.”³ This is why I would never in a million years really ask Aileen to help me analyze this. She’s always throwing crap like that out at me in our sessions and then giving me a smug, superior look over the

dark rims of her glasses. I suspect I spend more time trying to throw wrenches in her theories than I do trying to figure out the meaning of her quotes ... which is probably the reason I've been in therapy for over two years.

"You going to O'Reillys?" Clotilde, one of my teaching partners and my closest girl friend asked as she walked into my classroom. The boys absolutely love her with her white blonde hair, model thin body, and blue eyes the size of Delft platters. I'd tried to hate her when we first met but it's rather impossible. She's one of the sweetest people I know.

"What's on your face?"

Clotilde reached up and touched her cheek. "Here?" When I nodded she smiled, "We're dying eggs as part of my cultural immersion project. I was showing them how my Oma used to do it in Germany and I must have smeared the dye. One of the kids mentioned something but I was too involved to look in a mirror."

I shuddered in revulsion at the mention of her project. "You didn't ... do what you did last year, did you?" Last year, Clotilde had brought in a dozen eggs, wax, pins, dye, bowls, etcetera and proceeded to demonstrate how to get the raw egg out while preserving the shell. You could either blow it out into a bowl or you could ... suck it into your mouth and swallow it. Which, before a horrified class, was exactly what Clotilde did. The entire group of students had been heard screaming in disgust and one girl – Nancy something or other – made it as far as the girl's bathroom door before hurling her lunch all over the floor.

Clotilde rolled her eyes and sighed. "No, I blew the raw egg into a bowl this time." Glancing up at the clock and calculating that there was still a few moments to talk, she came in and sat down on the edge of my desk. "I apparently am somewhat famous, however, over last year's demonstration. A number of kids tried to get me to repeat the show. I still don't get what the big deal was all about." I shook my head and laughed. If I hadn't been able to get her to understand last year, I sure wasn't going to be successful today. Clotilde looked at the clock, stood up, straightened her skirt, and walked slowly backwards while saying, "Come tonight. You'll

have fun. I know you will.” She waggled her white-blond eyebrows suggestively.

I gave her a pointed look. I don’t always have fun. And she knew it. But I sighed and asked anyway, “Are you going right after work?”

The bell rang and Clotilde walked rapidly to her classroom across the hall. “No, we’re meeting at like eight o’clock. I’ll expect you!” she shouted and shut her door before I could answer. We both knew she could expect me all she wanted. That didn’t mean I was going. In fact, based on her firm push, the likelihood was that I wouldn’t show. I never did what anyone wanted me to do. It had been a persistent theme throughout my life.

Just ask anyone.

I began to pack up for home. I had the dream schedule this year. By sixth period I was done teaching for the day. Seventh period was my lunch, eighth period was prep (time to prepare my lessons) and ninth period was hallway monitor duty. Of course that meant I’d been going straight through from 7:20 a.m. with nothing but six minutes in between classes, but I was content.

That thought brought me up short and I stood there frozen in surprise, period three’s quizzes clutched in my hand. *I’m content*. Aileen would go nuts if she heard me admit that. Yet, stunningly, I found it to be true. Over the course of my thirty-three years, there had been very few times when I could honestly say such a thing regarding my personal *or* professional life. Why, I’d been screaming, fighting, demanding, and ... assuming forever. Much to my detriment.

Just ask my family.

But take it from me. It’s best to avoid my family. My perfect sister, Erin, would make you feel lacking in everything from chocolate-chip cookie baking to ideal child rearing to personal goals accomplished. My insane mother would tell you so many wild and crazy *true* stories regarding her and our family that your ears would probably start bleeding. My ... father’s ... sobriety was always inconsistent at best so who knew what you’d hear if you could find him. And my grandmother, should she deign to

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Speak with you, would probably give you nightmares (and that was if she smiled).

I know. You think I'm kidding. Or exaggerating. Perhaps you think like others have that I might have been trying to earn your sympathy or gain your undivided attention. Or perhaps you're under the mistaken impression that I subscribed to negative attention being better than no attention at all? Even as a child, I knew that no one could ever comprehend the truth about my family; unless they lived it. The trials, tribulations, emotions, and unspoken secrets made it impossible for anyone to put into words. Frustration created me: a seething caldron of angst and rebellion.

As a result, truth and honesty became of utmost importance to me. And while I can't trace the exact point of origin of that attitude, there wasn't really a moment in my life that it wasn't a focal point.

Unfortunately, that wasn't necessarily a good thing.

As a child, I used honesty as an opportunity for attention and was quite delighted with its results. I vividly remember my first grade teacher Mrs. Biuso saying, "Olivia, wasn't it nice to have Principal Munzenmaier visit with us today?" To which I responded, "No, her perfume makes me want to throw up." The shocked silence from both adults and children that resulted from my pronouncement ... did little to discourage me. My teachers rapidly learned that asking Olivia Kelly her opinion about something never resulted in the expected response, and that suited me just fine.

With the discovery of the power of stating the truth, I had honed my skill to a high art form by adolescence. I could antagonize my sister, brutalize my mother, and avenge most slights sustained (real and imagined) simply by voicing the clear, unvarnished truth to everyone within hearing range. Honesty may have been the best policy, but a little tact and consideration certainly would have helped a bit, too. As I'm only just recently able to acknowledge that fact you can imagine what it was like dealing with me: personally or professionally.

Because of my fierce desire for the truth or in spite of this (who knows really), discovering my mother's blatant deception regarding things specifically concerning *me* launched me onto a lifelong path of anger. The firm belief that "I must be honest" validated many of my choices and justified the deep seated fury that was literally the fuel that kept me moving.

In the past two years of my life I still embraced that mantra that honesty was the best policy but now I tried my best to follow it *only with good motives*. In the past, even if the truth made you gasp in horror, made you blink like noxious gases are burning your eyes, if ... Okay, I'll stop. You see, shockingly, *I've* been accused of not accepting the truth about certain things in my life, and much to my discomfort I've had to acknowledge that *perhaps* this was somewhat accurate. It honestly had never occurred to me – until very recently – that it was possible that there could be two versions of the same truth. Two years is a long time to be in therapy but not a very long time to completely reinvent yourself. I'm working as fast as I can.

Therapy: The Truth About My Mother – Part I

Setting: Therapist Aileen Burkart’s office. It’s August 11, 2008, five months into this experience with psychotherapy, and I *think* I’ve covered much of the horrible detritus that one needs to reveal about oneself in therapy. I’ve been mentally poked, prodded, unraveled and examined until I feel like a tangled mass of cold spaghetti. And I know we’re nowhere near done because ... I’m as nasty and as angry as ever. Aileen’s wearing a purple scarf today ... and purple socks. What compels someone to color code her socks with her neck scarf? Which begs another question: do therapists go to therapy? And, if they do, is there a whole different style of treatment? I mean, come on, how can anything truly be “discussed” when both parties *have to have* some serious deep seated, mumbo-jumbo styled agenda going on. As I attempt to get myself comfortable on the nondescript brown couch in Aileen’s office, I notice with cringing horror that my socks ... don’t match.

Aileen: (Pen and pad poised and ready.) How was your week, Olivia?

Me: So I took Paul’s advice and contacted you. Then I took your advice and asked Paul to talk with my mother. Tried to get him to get her to spill who my real father was.

Aileen: And?

Me: Well, if you were hoping for a gold star, a pat on the back, or even a deeply appreciative thank you, don’t hold your breath. (Mumble under my breath) That goes ditto for Paul, too.

Aileen: Do you want to be more specific?

Me: Has Paul told you that we had a very, *very* poor relationship when he was married to my mother?

Aileen: I told you, Olivia, I never discuss patients with anyone. Not even with other colleagues.

Me: Oh, come on. Not even in a vague sense like, “Oh, Paul. I have this severely angry and damaged woman I’m seeing who feels an incredible level of rage towards her mother. I’m afraid she may do

something irrational. Could you give me any insight, from your *vast life of experiences* regarding similar relationships you may have had to deal with?”

Aileen: (Makes a note on her notepad.) You view yourself as ‘damaged’?

Me: (Grinning like a Cheshire cat.) I *knew* you’d pick up on that. (At Aileen’s continued silence...) Sure I’m damaged. Hell, and that’s why I’m so angry at my mother. She owns it all.

Aileen: How so?

Me: Well, where would you like me to start? The fact that she has been married multiple times, and every single one of her husbands were Grade A, First Class Losers? The fact that the man I’d always thought was my father has *never* – and I am not exaggerating – *ever* been sober for more than six months? The fact that for a period of time when I was thirteen my mother, my sister and I *lived in her car*? Or, how about the time that she went completely nuts – I mean certifiable – so that they had to take her away and lock her up in a mental hospital when I was in college? As the story goes, a neighbor called the cops because she was outside in her pajamas *painting the family car* with an old bucket of paint. There were literally whole years of my life when I’ve been on my own – caring for my sister and myself because my mother was too tired, or too busy, or too crazy, or too *something* to care for us. I resent the fact that she considers herself a mother. And I’ve resented for as long as I can remember that I have to acknowledge her as my mother.

Aileen: You’re very angry.

Me: (Rolls eyes.) That’s an understatement. I’ve been angry for twenty years and it’s always been directed at my mother. (I think for a minute.) Maybe even longer. Why my earliest memory is being angry ...

¹ Caedmon's Call, "Manner and Means", from the album *Back Home*

² Michael Levy <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/you-can-bend-it-and-twist-it-you-can-misuse-and/386405.html>

³ Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*,
<http://www.dailycelebrations.com/questions.htm>