

and how she and her dad had moved in with her mother's parents. They'd raised her while her dad traveled to sell pharmaceuticals.

There were the facts of when her father had returned from a trip and shocked them all by introducing his new bride and her young daughter. There was also a note of how six months later the grandparents had moved to Florida.

Hallie looked out the window of the plane. The report just told the facts, not how Hallie had cried and begged to please, please be allowed to go with her grandparents. She'd already had six months of Shelly and her mother, and all she'd wanted to do was get away from them.

But no amount of begging swayed her father. Ruby said Hallie needed to stay — "She can help Shelly" — and at that time, in the first passionate flush of their marriage, anything Ruby asked for, her new husband gave to her.

The report went on to record that Ruby and Hallie's father had together been killed in a car wreck just as Hallie was entering her second year of college, and Shelly still had two years of high school to go.

It made a note that Hallie quit college to take care of and support her stepsister. There was no mention of the hell of those two years, of Shelly always angry because the money was so tight and they lived in a house where nothing worked properly. Shelly'd had it in her mind that there was life insurance and Hallie was keeping it from her. No amount of telling Shelly that the insurance policy had lapsed for lack of payment years before made any difference.

It also in the report of the rage Shelly had left in, swearing that she was going to go to Hollywood and make it big — but that she'd never share a penny with Hallie. "Just as you've never shared *anything* with me!" she shouted in parting. Hallie's dropping out of college, taking on three jobs and trying to scrape together enough money to feed them, were dismissed in one sentence.

No, just the facts were in the report, none of the emotion or the turmoil, none of the drama that always followed Shelly wherever she was.

Hallie looked back at the paper and wondered how long it would take her stepsister to get over her fear that Hallie would prosecute her. A week? Two weeks? All Hallie knew for sure was that when Shelly had come up with enough excuses to explain away what she did, she'd be back on Hallie's doorstep wanting money.

As always, Hallie had no idea how she'd deal with that when the time came, but right now she just wanted to enjoy the flight.

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For Hallie, it was nice to have someone defend her. In her experience, people mostly took Shelly's side. If her stepmother were still alive, Hallie had no doubt that she'd have two women relentlessly hounding her to sell both houses and give Shelly half of the money.

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his wife. Hallie knew he was talking about what Shelly had done. She could also tell that he was trying to keep his anger under control, but he was having a hard time of it.

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But like the toys of her childhood, Shelly had taken that away.

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Many years of "sharing" with Shelly came back to her. "You're older, you should know better," she'd heard a thousand times. Always from Shelly's mother, the same woman who said, "Hallie, that belongs to Shelly, so give it back to her."

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After her mother died, she and her father had moved in with her mother's grieving parents. Her dad's job as a salesman of pharmaceuticals took him away so much that when he was there it was like a treat, something special.

Most of the time it was just her and her grandparents and they'd lived a quiet, easy life. The backyard had been a glorious cottage garden, part vegetables, part flowers, all of them

intertwined in beautiful, orderly profusion. Both her grandparents loved to cook and Hallie had lived on home-grown produce and spent her summers helping in the garden. It had been a wonderful time in her life!

But everything had changed when her father returned from a trip and shocked them by introducing his new wife and her daughter. Not long after that the Great Swimming Pool War began, her grandparents moved to Florida, and Hallie was left alone with her stepmother and Shelly.

Hallie shook her head to clear her thoughts. That was behind her now.

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“I’m curious about your full name of Hyacinth Lauren Hartley. How did you come by it?”

“Lauren was my mother’s name, and as you saw, Hyacinth came from an ancestor on my father’s side.”

“So you do know about your father’s family’s history.”

“No, not at all. There used to be a big box of papers that belonged to my father. It was the only thing he had from his parents. My mother went through them and the name Hyacinth was on some of them. She liked it, so she gave the name to me.” Hallie smiled. “I was told that her plan was for me to be called Hyacinth, but my grandfather nicknamed me and it stuck.”

“You said ‘used to be.’ What happened to the papers?”

“Right after Ruby — she was Shelly’s mother — married Dad, she threw everything out. All photos of my mother, me with my parents, them together, everything was tossed. Ruby said life was too short to live in the past.”

Jared didn’t say what he thought of that desecration, but it was in his eyes. “What did your father do when he found out what she’d done?”

Hallie shrugged. “At first he was furious, but Ruby lured him into the bedroom and closed the door. By the next day he’d forgiven her.”

Jared’s stern expression showed that he didn’t find the story amusing.

“It’s okay. By the time I left for college, he’d quit forgiving Ruby for anything.”

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