

# Den of Lions

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*...This is terrorism, nothing more than the entire future of the American race slowly being destroyed by automatic weapons...*

Gloria quickly reached her hand out to the dashboard and tapped the control knob of the stereo, bringing up the clock display, and shutting off the voice. Oh, she was late. She was really, really late. Well, she had stayed at the library two and a half hours longer than she was going to.

Well, there are plenty of reasons why she was even later than expected, she thought. Like the rain, sleet, or whatever storm this was that she'd been driving through for the last hour and a half in a trip that was usually forty minutes.

She couldn't control the weather. Now could she?

"When the weather's fast, slow down," her dad would always say. "Better late than never, Baby."

She glanced at Geoffrey. She would get Geoffrey home. Just really, really late.

Three times already this month. Mom would definitely have something to say about being late three times already this month. The first two times were because of Geoffrey, though. And not Gloria's fault. Not that mom cared whose fault it was anyway. She wasn't with them at the mall when Geoffrey crossed his legs, squirmed, contorted his face into all kinds of shapes and squealed. "Pleeease Mommy. Just five more minutes. There are soooo many toys here. We just might find something. Pleeeeee!"

Gloria would always give in because she was the coolest mommy in the whole wide world, as Geoffrey liked to tell his friends. And mommies had to be cool, way cool, Geoffrey would say.

Yea, but not broke, she would think.

"It's perfectly fine to be a little short on cash so long as you're filled with love," Grandma McKnight would tell her after seeing her grandson run through the house with his latest toy.

Full of love or not, at this point in her life, Gloria was growing accustomed to being broke. A single mother from the inner city trying to raise a five-year-old and put herself through college leaves little to the imagination, save for hard work, patience, and the support of family. Or at least this was what she had told her mother and father after moving back home with them while trying to balance the complications of a child, a job and her studies.

Gloria was dealing this afternoon with one of those complications, leaving the campus library in the Toyota Land Cruiser to pick Geoffrey up from day care.

Her mid-terms were next week, and she had completely lost track of time. Unfortunately, it wasn't the first time. Gloria was getting in over her head with being a student and being a mom; yet pride prevented her from realizing she needed help. Instead, she just tried harder.

Geoffrey hadn't noticed. And he wouldn't be upset. Between the big screen cartoons and all the toys at the day care, he would be preoccupied and not even notice she was late. Mom and dad were not so easy to fool. They had said for the last two weeks, she needed to sit down and talk with them. They understood how difficult her life was becoming, but Gloria needed to set priorities in order to avoid making some serious mistakes. Tonight was to be that night. She told them she would be home on time.

While Gloria was leaving the campus, however, a serious storm had moved in. And what had made everything worse, she lived miles outside of Dallas, near the lake, away from the city.

It was usually a nice, comforting forty-minute drive where she could unwind as she listened to Geoffrey tell her about his day, excitement in his eyes, describing each incident in detail. But not in a storm. Not tonight. Geoffrey was speechless, frightened by the rain pelting the windows.

Gloria squinted through the darkened windshield at the blanket of water, which was now streaking across the roadway. Visibility zip.

She tucked her hand into the sleeve of her sweater and leaned forward, rubbing it over the cold glass, hoping to improve things a little bit. She flopped back into the seat after a moment when it did no good. There was just no way Gloria could drive faster than thirty in this soup.

The headlights of the Land Cruiser reflecting off the guardrail markers took her mind off the roadway and onto mom and dad for a second. They were probably pacing the house and worried. She wondered if they had called her cell to check on her.

Of course, she answered herself. Parents were supposed to do those kinds of things.

They probably grew even more frantic when the voicemail automatically picked up after the first ring because Gloria had forgotten to charge the phone or bring the adapter for the car.

She looked over at the dash clock again. Four hours isn't that bad. Besides, look at this weather. Just look at it, Mom. Remember what Dad says, "Better late than never, Baby"?

How could she argue with that? She couldn't. And it's not like Gloria was being late on purpose. Her mother was way off there. And anyway, it's not like Gloria was a little girl anymore. She was a mother herself. She was independent, with her own life. A new age girl. Gloria had already been accepted to sit for the bar exam, the bar exam, and that would be the start of a career, not just a job, but a career. In another few years, Gloria would be a licensed attorney. Then she would be able to take care of Geoffrey properly, like a real mother should, and she wouldn't be so busy with her life. But right now, wearing his brown leather lace up shoes, blue jean overalls and his Scooby Doo sweater, Geoffrey was seated next

to her, concentrating on the flood coming down in front of the Land Cruiser, oblivious to the fact that Gloria was becoming frustrated, not so much from the storm she was traveling through on the road before her, but from the storm she was traveling through in her life.

Oh, they tell you that obstacles are nothing more than blessings in disguise, but it is an entirely different story when you are the one facing them. Just like with the rain on the windshield, you can never clear your view fast enough. You only end up splashing the cold water around in an antagonizing noise like the days of your life.

...splash...splish...splash...splish...splash...splish...

Gloria leaned forward and tried the sweater sleeve one more time on the windshield and that was when it happened.

The noise came first. A crack crack from the left lane opened up and grew in volume. She looked over to Geoffrey because some unknown feeling came over her that the crack just wasn't—

Suddenly, a wall of glass slammed into her side from the left and instantly the SUV was tossed from the roadway. An explosion of the airbags. Gloria screamed and choked on the gritty, dusty powder that filled her lungs.

She tried to hold onto the steering wheel, to keep the Toyota straight, but the force of the collision jarred it out of her hands. Gloria was slammed headfirst into the doorframe while the world became lost in a blindness of tremendous sounds and movement, rolling over and over.

She tried to stay upright and in the seat by pushing against the roof, but the pressure against the seatbelt was so intense, Gloria thought she would explode. She had no leverage.

Shattered glass, twisting metal. The Land Cruiser was keeping her alive. And somewhere in the midst of all that panic, Gloria heard a distinct, terrible scream for Geoffrey and then realized it was her own voice. A solid jolt and everything went black. Right before she lost consciousness, Gloria could hear her father whisper, "Better late than never, Baby, better late than never." And then there was nothing.

When Gloria came to, it had stopped raining. The water had gathered, pooling against her face and she realized she was no longer inside the Toyota. Gloria was lying on the asphalt of the road. It was dark, silent, but when her senses finally caught up to her, she heard a gathering of people and sirens. Red and blue lights were reflecting off the broken glass which littered the roadway.

Geoffrey.

Gloria heard footsteps, heavy and quick.

...Hey Sarge, I gotta live one over here!...

Geoffrey.

...Ma'am don't move...the ambulance is on the way...

Geoffrey.

...Ma'am you need to stay still...you've been in a serious accident...

Geoffrey.

...Geoffrey?...The boy in the car with you?...Ma'am you just need to stay still...

Oh God, Geoffrey. My little baby, Geoffrey.

## MOTHER AND CHILD KILLED IN DRIVE-BY SHOOTING

From Wire Reports

A five year-old Dallas boy and his mother were critically injured yesterday night in an apparent drive-by shooting on Interstate 30. Law enforcement authorities have stated that two members of rival street gangs became involved in an altercation in front of a house, which quickly escalated into a shoot-out. A short time after the initial exchange of gunfire, a dark colored sedan returned to the location and sprayed the house with automatic rifle fire. No one inside the house was hit; however, several of the shots missed their intended target and struck a vehicle traveling on the highway adjacent to the home.

A young boy and his mother inside the vehicle were struck by what authorities have described as rounds from a high-powered assault rifle. The mother, who was driving, was hit once in the left arm, causing her to lose control of the vehicle. The young boy sustained serious injuries from a bullet wound to his chest and was pronounced dead at the scene. The child's mother died later in surgery after being transported to Memorial Hospital. No suspects have been arrested or identified.

A police sergeant at the scene, obviously distraught, called the shooting a "disgraceful act toward our people" and the death of the young child and mother "senseless murders by heartless cowards." The sergeant went on to say that gun violence in the United States claimed more victims on a nightly basis than the U.S. waging war in the Middle East and that....This is terrorism, nothing more than the entire future of the American race slowly being destroyed by automatic weapons...

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