

Excerpt from
Lost in the Reflecting Pool: a memoir

Prologue

I listened, hypnotized by the rain, staccato taps like a piano against the window.

On that day, as I looked out at the steel-colored sky, a crash interrupted my thoughts. I jumped and saw the lithe gray shadow leap past. *Mr. Buttons?* My gut churned.

It was July 1994, only months before my mother's death. Charles and I and our two children had just moved into the charming farmhouse on St. John's Lane. Mr. Buttons, the previous owners' gray tabby cat, often found his way back to the house. He would climb onto the roof and scratch at the window. I would call his owners, the Masons, to come get him. Elisabeth, our five-year-old, and Sammy, then two and a half, loved Mr. Buttons's visits.

"Let's get him some milk and tuna fish." Elli would laugh and run down to the kitchen to retrieve whatever she could find for her new love.

Sammy would squeal, "Kitty, Kitty," stroking the cat's long gray fur and playing with his toes and tail as Mr. Buttons cuddled with him on the bed.

"I hear Mr. Buttons at the window, Mommy. Can I get his food?" Elli started down to the pantry.

"Sure." I nodded and dialed his owners.

"Elisabeth!" Charles snapped. "Do *not* feed that cat. It will only make him come here more often, and we don't want that. I don't know why your mother doesn't understand something so simple." Charles glared at me; his eyes narrowed.

My response caught in my throat, unspoken.

“He’s hungry. I want to give him a snack. Don’t be mean, Daddy.” Elli started crying. She ran into her room and slammed her door. Having already let the cat in, Sammy lugged Mr. Buttons past us as we stood in the hallway.

“Elli, I’ve got him. Let me in so we can play.”

I heard her door open and Sammy say, “Don’t cry, Elli, Mr. Buttons is here.”

Charles stood there, silent, oblivious to and disconnected from Elli’s cries and Sammy’s words of comfort.

“What was that all about?” I looked at Charles with controlled calm, but my head spun and a vise tightened around my chest. I hated when he treated the children with such disregard. I hated when he treated me that way. And it was happening more and more.

“Why don’t the Masons keep better track of that damn cat?” The muscle in his cheek twitched. His cold eyes pierced me.

Outwardly I controlled my rage; inside I pushed it further down. I turned away and called the Masons.

A few evenings later, we were both upstairs, doing paperwork, when I saw Mr. Buttons through the glass. The children were already asleep, and I automatically opened the window.

“Why the hell did you do that, Di? You know how goddamn tired I am of that stupid animal. I’ve had it with his irresponsible owners!” I reflexively jumped as Charles shoved his chair, grabbed Mr. Buttons, and stomped downstairs.

I heard a door slam. I held the phone in my hand. I sat and stared. Popping sounds; rain hitting the tin roof; firecrackers in my head; puffs of gray and white; difficulty catching my breath. I put the phone down and walked unbalanced into the bedroom.

I don't know how much time had passed when I noticed Charles standing in the doorway.

"It's done," he muttered.

"What's done?"

"That damn cat won't be coming back. I took care of it."

"What does that mean?"

"I told you, I took care of it. He won't be coming back." Charles turned away.

I stared at the back of his head, but my gaze was on the old sepia photo of my grandmother that hung on the wall behind him. I sat silently. The hands on the clock did not move, nor did my eyes. My lips were parched. Everything stopped.

Then, without warning, a churning storm rose in my gut. I tried to, but couldn't, make it into the bathroom. Sitting, soaked in the foul stench of my vomit, I wondered, *Whose reflection is that in the mirror. Is it me? Is it Charles? Are we any different from each other? If I don't speak up, if I forget, if I'm complicit, are we the same?* I sort of knew, but at the same time I couldn't remember anything at all.

I stood up, threw my nightclothes into the trash can, stepped into the shower, and turned the hot water on full force.

