

The sun heated the sand under the park swings. Evelyn curled her toes around the warm golden grains and smiled at her three-year-old daughter, Stacy, running on the clipped green grass. Evelyn breathed in the smell of freshly cut grass as she sat and hugged her knees.

Aware of her mother, Stacy turned and waved. The distance must have seemed a kingdom away to the small child, but Evelyn knew that with a few strides she could easily have swooped up the giggling three year old and carried her off with kisses and hugs. Stacy's blue eyes sparkled and she threw her mother one kiss and then another before stretching out her arms to turn in dizzying circles that children enjoy. Her daughter's laughter brought a smile to Evelyn's lips.

As the overcast skies of a long winter gave way to the light of spring, this park, so close to their new apartment, was a godsend. The park made it easy to let Stacy soak in the glorious sun that added a little color to her cheeks and relieved Evelyn's cabin fever.

Evelyn looked around at the various groups of children. One mother held her daughter's hand. "You touch gently, like this," she was saying. A father was down on his knees loosening his son's strangle hold on his perplexed friend's leg. It looked to Evelyn as if the dad was teaching lesson number 101 in hugging, "How not to become a permanent fixture on your friend's body." Other moms and dads pushed toddlers in swings, rolled balls toward small hands, and chatted with one another, one eye

monitoring their children's play. Evelyn kept Stacy in constant view, calling if the three year old ventured too far for comfort.

Stacy was so much like her father. She had his blond hair and his laughing, "devil may care," blue eyes. I am totally loved and safe was her attitude. Stacy was such a child of their hearts that Evelyn sometimes held her small, blond daughter a little too tightly. But today the sun was bright, the sky clear, and this park was a great place for play and rest.

Having shortly moved to their new apartment, Evelyn had noticed that the neighborhood used this area often. Older children intermingled with younger ones and older folks walked the paths nodding and smiling to the children at play. Today must be an early day from school, thought Evelyn. It was mid-morning and yet older children were here running and tumbling with one another.

Evelyn beamed as Stacy bent to examine some rocks near the teeter-totters. Evelyn closed her eyes and breathed in the fresh warm air.

Without any warning, a shot rang out. The sound echoed, repeated and again echoed.

Evelyn's eyes flew open. She jerked up. Where's Stacy? She bounded up, screaming and running. Voices crying, feet stumbling. Panicked mothers lying over children. More shots. Evelyn reached Stacy. Evelyn cradled her daughter, blond hair turning blood red. She was beyond hearing.

Evelyn sat moaning, holding the small body, touching the tiny hands. Her mind in shock. The blood seeped. Stacy slipping away. Time stood still. Nothing existed, not the warm sun, not the fresh grass, not the birds' songs.

For Evelyn there were only screams, Stacy's blood, and a cave where her heart had been.

*Eve lay sweaty and exhausted on a birthing spot covered with grasses, moss and blood. She floated out of consciousness only to be brought back sharply with each searing pain. If she could only sleep, stay away, but that was not possible. Just let me rest, she thought, just a short rest.*

*Deep in the shadows of her memory she knew that this was not what had been intended. The Ancient Ones who came knew that before children came there must first be a great cleansing of evil, and then the design of a multitude of abundant gardens from the resources of Mother Earth, an anchoring from love and creation of beauty. Her creations, all manner of creations, were to have been birthed with ease into a world designed to cause the restoration of the family's Divinity in an environment of peace, plenty and love.*

*And here she lay, bloody and exhausted, her value squelched. She gave birth to children through great pain, with great difficulty. She brought babes into a world in which she had no voice. She had no say for their welfare, their future, their guidance. They belonged to others, to the Outsiders who took them as laborers, as warriors, as slaves and fodder.*

*Eve let out a scream as she was swept by the next wave of pain.*

*Oh god, when will it be over?*

*And her Ancient teacher; cursed, hobbled and alienated, wept tears to witness this immense destruction of the plan.*

*And through her tears she cried, Oh Great Council, when will it be over?*

Wrapped in a bathrobe, dishelved black hair, Bob opened his door and reached for the morning paper. Crisp morning air rushed in. Bob breathed the mist and freshness, smiled as he closed the door. He stood, looked out over the budding lilacs. The tulips and crocus were finally open splashing color through his yard. He smiled, breathed in the crisp morning air and stepped back inside. He loved his new morning routine. After eight years of spending hours at the office, Bob had decided to start appointments later in the morning. That made for an unhurried morning and he loved it.

He pulled the paper from its plastic bag and walked to the kitchen for a steaming cup of coffee. Balancing coffee cup in one hand and morning paper in the other, Bob lowered himself onto his couch. He sipped the steaming brew, set it on a coaster, and opened the paper.

The newspaper headlines blared out at him.

"Thirteen Year Old Shoots and Kills Friend and Three Year Old."

Bob's stomach churned.

"Wednesday, what began with clear a spring sky erupted into a nightmare of terror. Parents sharing a spring break with their children were horrified when a thirteen-year-old boy suddenly pulled a gun from his backpack and began shooting into a playground full of children and adults.

"Six shots were fired before the young boy was tackled and brought to the ground by a father. In the short, but deadly shooting spree, two children, one twelve and the other three were fatally

wounded. Two others were hit by the gunfire and are still in local hospitals"

Bob's hands flew up to his forehead. He could visualize the drama.

A young mother holding her dying child. Sorrowful wails. Blood flowing. A vibrant, laughing child lay limp. Mother's tears streaming. Rocking her child, a world shattered.

And then the scuffle. Mothers shielding their children. An angry father. The boy crashing to the ground. The father's rage driving the weapon from the boy's hand, a hand too small for a weapon, an act too final.

How long before the sirens screamed and a crowd gathered? How long before covers were laid over the dying children? Did the young mother have to be torn away, hands reaching to grasp her child? The cameras flashing and videos rolling, recording for all time the anguish and despair. His heart ached. Bob felt a hollow space open inside. No wonder parents looked in on sleeping children, searched for ways to fortress them from dangers.

Absently, he moved into the bathroom and hung up his robe. He stepped out of his pajama bottoms, kicked them across the smooth tile floor, stepped in, and turned on the shower. The spray pelted his body. Warm, salty tears flowed down his face as the water from the shower stung his skin.

Bob's mind ran over the newspaper story. Why does a thirteen year old have a gun in his backpack? Why does he even have a gun? Why haven't we found answers? Do we prevent solutions? And the media? Are we after answers or numbers?

The questions came fast. He scrubbed hard. His mind clouded. Bob turned the water handle to cold, took a deep breath, and stood in the spray. This story wouldn't let go. What is happening? he asked.

At 9:30 a.m., Bob parked his car and walked briskly into his office building. As he walked through the door into this suite, Joanne, his secretary looked up with a smile that quickly dropped away. Bob was clearly not his usual self. She quietly handed him a telephone note.

Bob looked down; the note, a call from Rory. Rory was just the person who would understand, Bob thought. He took the note, totally unaware of his effect on Joanne. Without a word he went into his office and closed the door