

## Chapter 2

Rob raced up the stairs to his mother's apartment. It was just past 6:30 at night. He was late and worried.

"Where the Jeezus H. Christ have you been?" his mother slurred. "You are supposed to be here at six on Monday nights. It's the only time we have together."

A bottle of Beefeater gin stood half empty on the kitchen counter next to the sink.

Catching his mother's glassy-eyed scowl, Rob was daunted by how her tipsy condition masked her dark, refined good looks. The long, black hair looked dirty, the makeup old.

"I was having coffee with someone from school. I am really sorry I wasn't watching the time. It was my first day at school."

"Why lie? You don't even drink coffee! Now you sound like your father. Always apologizing for being inconsiderate. I cooked you dinner. If you want it, it's in the garbage."

Rob dropped his backpack on the floor and took in the empty macaroni-and-cheese box and the dirty pot on the old stove. The sink was full of sticky dishes and the kitchen was cluttered with empty bottles, cartons and other trash. The linoleum was filthy with months of stains and grime. A large ashtray filled with cigarette butts decorated the middle of the kitchen table.

"Oh, your black eye looks lovely, Rob. You're at it again, huh?"

"No."

"Yeah, right! You're lying."

Rob's mother walked to the sink and poured a large shot from the gin bottle into a tall glass, topping it up with soda. She shuffled back to the table and the glass hit the table so hard some of the drink slopped out. She mopped it with her hand. Flopping into a chair, she fumbled with a cigarette package, then with the lighter. The cigarette shook in her mouth while she tried to steady it with one hand and light it with the other.

Blowing smoke out, she said, "I ain't cooking anything else. You can cook your own goddamn dinner."

Rob stared at the clock above the sink and leaned back against the wall. He mumbled something under his breath.

"You got something to say? Huh?" Her hand arced through the air and cigarette ashes dropped to the table. "Forget it, Rob, you never have anything good to say to me. Don't waste your lousy breath."

This was familiar territory. Rob had learned not to suggest by gesture or word that anything was wrong with his mother's behaviour. It just made it worse. He already felt shameful for

giving her reason to start up with him by being late. He promised himself again not to be so careless in the future.

"Would it be alright if I go?" Rob said softly, looking away, carefully keeping disgust from his face.

"I'll tell you when I'm finished with you for Jeezusss H. Chrissakes. You just stand there and let me finish."

His mother took two large gulps from her glass then pointed her finger at Rob.

"You don't give a damn about me. I just get evicted and you don't even offer to help me move outta here! I don't deserve to be treated like dirt. Your father treated me like dirt. You shouldn't be like him. Like he knows anything, huh."

Rob's mother butted her cigarette out on the edge of a dinner plate, missing the ashtray next to it. Brushing the ashes onto the table into a pile, she pinched them between her index finger and thumb and dropped the mess in the ashtray.

"I am sick and tired looking at your black-eyed face," she slurred, waving her hand in the air. "Go!"

Lighting another cigarette, she swore and muttered as Rob turned and left, closing the door softly behind him, thinking that living alone with his dad was so much better than before his parents' separation.

On the bus ride home, he blocked his mother's words. He repeated over in his head that what she had said was crap. Anger

and upset were not supposed to be part of his existence any more.

Over the years, Rob had learned how to make his mind numb. But one diversion brought him fully to life. When it called to him, he indulged - and then afterwards hated himself.