

# CHAPTER ONE



**Place:** Puerto Rico

**Time:** 1950

For each cut, she used a different razor blade. At first, the blood appeared trickling down her left arm. Not satisfied, she pressed harder, deeper. Then, with a quick slash downward, her skin split open like a splayed fish. She didn't cry or make a sound, as blood escaped down her thin, little arm onto the white sheets depleting her body's lifeline.

It spread like a Rorschach print defying anyone to stop it, much less explain the reason why this child, three-weeks short of her fourth birthday, would want to tear up her left arm with a razor blade? What was her intent? What could have hurt this child so deeply that she wanted to leave this unforgiving world?

On that particular hot, muggy morning, Diane and I woke up just like every sunrise to watch our father shave.

He mixed the shaving cream in a ceramic cup, with that same clicking sound, as the ceiling fans. He carefully brushed the shaving cream over the stubbles on his cheek, chin and neck. We giggled as the foam covered his face, leaving behind a white foam, like a Santa Claus beard.

Once he completed that task he snapped a new blade on the metal handle. Then slowly and carefully, he guided the razor along the edges of his jaw line to eliminate the stubbles. When he cut himself with the blade he would stop and reach for a small piece of toilet paper that Diane would quickly hand to him.

He'd stick it to the blood on the cut and kept going. He finished with a gentle slap of Old Spice, flipped the used blade into the band aid box, snapped the lid shut and placed it at the highest corner of the cabinet.

"You must never touch this," father said, every time he shaved.

We nodded our heads in agreement and stood there staring at him. He finished with a gentle face pat of Old Spice to our little tanned, cherubic faces then it was back to our bedroom.

A few minutes later, he appeared again in our room, dressed in his military uniform. Turnina followed close behind him.

"I want you girls to mind Turnina," he said. "And don't wake your mother. She needs her beauty sleep."

Then he left with Turnina following close behind him. She would make sure that the gate lock, at the top of the stairs, was secure. Then she would disappear downstairs.

Most of the time we fell back to sleep but today Diane had other plans. She sat up in her bed, waiting until she could no longer hear any movement in the hallway.

"Let's go on a treasure hunt?" she said, softly.

"Yes," I said. "We have to find the sunken treasure."

Whenever Diane moved she looked like a mystical, fairy fluttering through the air with light-footed grace. She twirled and leapt with excitement that made me want to follow.

Once she made sure the coast was clear, she turned the door knob like she was cracking open a safe. When it clicked she waited a moment and peeked out in the hallway just to make sure no one was around.

"Come on, follow me," she said, softly. "The coast is clear."

She headed straight for the bathroom. Her ability to climb and perform acrobatic stunts in her cotton, white baby doll gown captured my interest. My pajamas consisted of a long cotton shirt and a cloth diaper covered by plastic pants. Once we entered the bathroom she jumped on top of the toilet lid and leaned towards the sink.

She placed her left knee on the edge of the white porcelain sink and at the same time she reached with her left hand to open the medicine cabinet. Her right hand grabbed the band-aide box as she jumped down to the cold, tiled floor. I followed as she tip-toed back to our bedroom while I crawled back into my crib.

"Here, take some?" Diane said, shaking the razors in the tin box.

I shook my head "no" and waited to see what she was going to do next.

"Okay, I will keep them for myself," she said.

She crawled into her queen size bed with white sheets, crossed her tanned little legs in a lotus position, and dumped the razors in front of her. She picked one blade and tested it on her finger. After a few first tries, the blood streamed down her hand and decided that it was sharp enough.

She proceeded to cut her left arm vertically and then horizontally. She hesitated, at first, trying to see how deep the blade would go before she felt it. There was no blood, at first. When she picked the next blade she pressed harder, the blood started to seep out, with a sudden flow running down her arm.

"Oh, no," Turnina cried, as she entered the bedroom and saw Diane bleeding profusely.

Mother heard her cry out and ran up two flights of stairs.

"What did you do to yourself?" mother said, wailing like a wounded animal. "Why Diane? Why?"

A neighbor overheard our mother's cries and notified the Military Police. Minutes later, we could hear their heavy boots thunder up the stairs, guns drawn and a K-9 dog straining at the leash, ready to attack.

They expected to take on an escaped predator from the jungle, not a curly haired, blonde little girl holding a razor in one hand with blood running down her left arm.

The moment they entered the bedroom and saw the bloody scene they stood frozen. They looked as if they weren't sure of their next move, that's when Turnina took control of the situation, ran to the bathroom and came back with a cold, damp hand towel.

She wrapped it around Diane's arm as our mother picked her up and ran down the stairs, with the Military Police and their K-9 dog, close behind her.

Turnina picked me up, ran out of the bloody scene, two maids met us in the hallway, on their way to clean up the mess. Everything in our bedroom had to be scrubbed back to its clinical white color. A new mattress replaced the old one with new, freshly washed and pressed white sheets.

The next day Diane and I sat on two overturned buckets on our circular driveway. We were dressed in our gold lame' swimsuits with our feet dangling in a round metal tub filled with ice water. I ignored the skin colored stretch arm bandage wrapped just above Diane's elbow to the middle of her fingers.

Turnina stood holding the hose, to replenish the cold water, as we playfully kicked and splashed it at each other. Whatever happened the day before had to be forgotten.

Life was back to normal. Or was it?