

Chapter 1

My Ninth Life

My attorney looks like the “Wizard of Oz”, thus I nicknamed him the “Wizard”. It’s an apropos nickname too, because he’s a self-proclaimed magician in court. But the movie’s wizard was taller and thinner than my wizard attorney, didn’t sport copious hair plugs, or wear suspenders that pulled taut across a huge gut. I view all of this now as my friend Jane and I approach him. I’m late again for court, of course, my fault.

It’s not like I’m arriving to the operating room a few minutes late. The eye surgery can’t begin without the eye surgeon, right? Appearing in court late is different; a late defendant angers the Judge, not to mention one’s Wizard even though he can simply bill more. Late for court is “ka-ka”, an old Upstate New York term, especially for an educated doctor. Doctors are expected to know better, and are held to that higher standard.

I dread going to court. I always seem to lose, *by a lot*.

Entering a courtroom to me is like trying to win a track race on a pair of poorly fitted crutches, one big crutch for being a doctor and the other for being a strong woman. By the time *I* get passed the baton, it’s a tremendous haul to catch up and win against whomever the plaintiff.

Life has been quite the hard race. Sometimes I think I must be part feline; I’ve run through at least eight lives and should have been a corpse many moons ago. Instead I

luckily land on my feet, no matter how badly wounded and keep persevering relentlessly. Anyone who knows me knows I never give up. Bring it on!

This morning, however, on my way to defend myself from going to jail, I'm feeling a little down on my luck, tired and very afraid. (Did I just think "Bring it on"? Yikes!) Calm down, stay "cool", c'mon Mary Ann, I encourage myself as I push my shoulders back and walk into the stuffy vestibule outside of the courtroom as proudly as I can.

I introduce the Wizard to Jane and they shake hands. Jane is my born again Christian girlfriend who never swears, doesn't have sex and never even drinks real coffee. Jane offered to drive me to court after Edward, my soon-to-be-*ex*-boyfriend told me he couldn't, because he had an "important meeting at work". I wanted to punch him last night for picking a fight with me and leaving me alone just before the hearing. Luckily for Edward, he laid rubber on my driveway before getting mangled. Such a great guy. Most likely he was craving a scotch, but I certainly could have used a good dose of multiple orgasmic therapy, no doubt, especially if I get locked up for a while. Oh well, to hell with him. I should have known better about him a long time ago.

My luck with men thus far has not been good; maybe it will be in my next life. Ah, Jane can handle court better than "Prince" Edward (I call him behind his British back), anyway. Her husband hung himself while she was trying to have his baby. She was hoping to be pregnant even after his suicide but remains childless. If Jane could handle that, she can handle anything.

"You look just right," the Wizard compliments me.

“Thanks, wish I felt it. I hate this boring brown suit. My pumps already hurt and I didn’t wear any makeup.”

“You’re fine.” (I *hate* that word. The acronym for F.I.N.E. from rehab is “fucking insecure, neurotic, and emotional”.)

“Oh, really? Then why did your secretary call me yesterday to tell me to be sure to refill any medications I might be on?” I fire back.

I know the Wizard thinks I talk too fast so he always pauses, but this pause I don’t like. Jane and I exchange a quick look. Oh God, her pupils are dilated. She’s anxious, too; that’s a sure sign.

“Just a precaution. Listen, I’ve struck a great deal with the State’s Attorney. They are going to ‘Nolle Prosequi’ most of your charges.”

I can hear people walking and talking around us but all I can do is stare down my Wizard’s hair and fire back, “What’s ‘Nolle Prosequi’?”

“They aren’t going to prosecute you for them.”

“Why not? How’d you pull *that* off?”

“I just did. But you do have to plead guilty to a few charges, because you *are* guilty, you do understand me?” All of a sudden I feel very hot and I’m usually cold. I’d rather be operating on my ten most difficult cases than standing in this stuffy basement of a courthouse waiting to see a Judge. Or maybe I just want to go back outside, breathe the biting November air and feel free.

I am still in complete shock that me, a respected ophthalmologist and a good, God-fearing small town girl, is in so much trouble. But I am, and I shouldn’t be, not *this* much, after so much hard work. I had to pull the Wizard’s

measly fee, \$15,000.00, off the trees in my yard. It was back-breaking work all by myself, but there's nothing green in the bank. All my savings are gone and only a few credit cards with space left. I abused alcohol during my divorce and lost my life's work along with custody of my precious children! For God's sake, why do I have to plead guilty to anything except "temporary insanity", which is exactly what it was?!

"You have three DUIs and three DWIs, and several other charges, remember?" the Wizard states. I barely nod and look toward my friend. Jane's eyes are as wide as saucers; they show real concern.

He now boasts, "I got the State's Attorney to agree to drop two of the DUIs, if you plead guilty to one of them, and the other two will be reduced to DWIs." I am confused and blankly stare at my attorney. It's too noisy in this hallway. What did he just say? What kind of options are those, I ask myself. I hired the Wizard because he told me his record for "NO Jail Time" was defending a man with *seven* DUIs, and the Wizard helped write the traffic laws for the State of Maryland. (So who better knows how to defend them *or navigate* around them?)

The Wizard runs an impatient hand through his hair probably to refrain from chastising me with a squeeze on the cheek. "I know I've already explained this to you. The meaning of DUI is different now. A DUI is 'driving under the influence', and a DWI is not 'driving while intoxicated', but 'driving while impaired.' A DUI is a much harsher charge than a DWI." (In reality, the blood alcohol level for DUI is .1 and for DWI .08.)

"I'm sure you told me, but that was before I went away to rehab for four months, remember? I've only been home two weeks. I can't keep your legal mumbo jumbo straight! Medical jargon is enough for me, and anyway,

I've been trusting your negotiating skills to get me off, because I *did* do that jail-like rehab for so long." The Wizard is a wee bit annoyed with me, but hides it well, as he should for \$15,000 dollars. "Okay," I say to him, "please, go on."

"A first DUI can mean up to a year in jail, two more DUIs with all of your other charges could be much longer... years." The Wizard has totally stunned me now, and I can feel my heart beating hard in my chest. "I got the two other DUIs reduced to DWIs, and the sentences to run concurrent."

"Sentences can run concurrently?!" I'm lost again and Jane looks at me bewildered.

"*Concurrent*" the Wizard retorts. "All three sentences run at the same time, instead of one after the other, so time is served for all of them at once. We (meaning the judicial system, I presume) do this all the time." That makes *no* sense to me whatsoever, overlapping jail time for different arrests? But I'll take it; no argument here.

"The State's Attorney will 'Nolle Prosequi' everything else, and she is recommending suspending six months of your sentence, so the most you will serve is six months, and I'm trying to get you home confinement."

"*Trying* to get me home confinement? I thought that was a given. I'll stay locked in my bedroom for decades, but could I still go to jail for a whole year?"

"Honey, I told you I'm trying to keep you out of jail."

The Wizard didn't answer my questions.

"You are going to stress... that four month, thirty-thousand-dollars-plus-jail-like rehab time I spent?"

“Of course.”

“Is my judge a woman?”

“No.”

“Damn. Do you know him?”

“Yes.”

“Is he nice?”

“It’s Judge Collins. He’s retired, but they call him in when they get really busy.” That wasn’t the answer to my question either, but at this point I finally realize that the show must go on.

“Great, listen, I won’t talk back. You just keep me out of jail.”

“That’s what I’m trying to do, Honey, but remember, when you’re asked if you plead guilty to one DUI and two DWIs, the answer is ‘yes.’ We’re not coming back to court, because we’ll never get such a good deal on an appeal. An appeal could get you *several* years. Now c’mon, we’ve got to go in.”

I look at Jane. She read my mind. The Wizard did not answer my most important questions and scared the hell out of me with that “several years” comment. Jane looks freaked out. It’s the “fight or flight” response, a rush of adrenaline causing dilated pupils, increased heart rate and more blood flow to the muscles, readying one to flee from danger. I want to sprint home in my stockings but no such luck. I slowly follow the Wizard into the oppressive courtroom, as noisy and crowded as the hallway.

Dear God, I think for the zillionth time; how could I let such a horrible thing happen to get me into so much trouble?

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It is a full house, just before 1:00 p.m. Terrific, I didn't want a front row seat anyway.

Geez, what a zoo this "courtroom" is. It's not like in the movies where everyone is sitting straight in their chairs, looking perfectly starched and powdered. This courtroom seems *unorderly* to me. People talking, slouching, not too well-dressed, and others scurrying around like they had ants in their pants. I figure the "ants-in-pantsers" are the attorneys, still striking deals, as the Wizard calls it.

Everything seems so surreal, but it isn't. It's REAL. I really *am* in court, really charged with three DUIs, three DWIs, and three times three, nine other charges that my wizard attorney somehow made disappear up and away, like a balloon from Oz. I wish I was anywhere else but in this room. I let my mind wander for a minute. It's certainly not like the disciplined, organized, sterile perfection of the operating room in here, not one little bit. But who expects organized, disciplined perfection from lawyers anyway? *Only doctors are expected to be perfect.*

Lawyers have the luxury of not having to be perfect. They lose cases all the time and still get paid in full, or they sue you for it. So you can pay another attorney to represent yourself against the attorney who's suing you. What a racket! And if you're *my* Wizard, you get paid up front. I asked him in his office if I could pay a percentage, with the rest to follow after the case, and he bluntly stated, "No. We take Visa and MasterCard." One hundred and eighty degrees different from medicine, where a surgeon has to wait at least thirty days to get paid after the operation. Then, if the surgery doesn't go well, an attorney's letter arrives causing chest pain. Mine's feeling tight right now for the first time in my life.

I look up as his Honor enters the courtroom, “All Rise.” *Uh, oh*, honorable Judge Collins doesn’t look like he’s in a very good mood. I whisper to Jane, “He looks grumpy and stern.”

“Shhh, he’s a Judge.”

We were supposed to be in court at one o’clock, but I guess so was everyone else. Something makes me turn my head. There’s Alma, my 72-year-old AA sponsor, with her Amish-looking boyfriend, Henry, and his scraggly beard. She smiles at me. God bless Alma, she did come, after all, to support me like she said she would. She also brought a girlfriend of hers who had been through this before. I smile gratefully at all of them. Three other people here to support me besides Jane and the Wizard, who was paid to show up, but no boyfriend because he had an “important” meeting. Damn it. Why didn’t I call all my grateful patients to come and pack this place with fans? Too late now, Mary Ann, they probably wouldn’t have believed it was true anyway. Plus I couldn’t ask the big Duke family to drive down, because there aren’t enough people in this room who know CPR if I *do* go to jail.

I should have taken a second 800 mg of ibuprofen for my pounding head if not my heart.

Judge Collins bangs his gavel, “Order in the Court!” Everyone grabs a seat but still do not shut up. This is “order”? I think again about the organized clean and quiet of the operating room and really miss it.

My daydreaming is being crushed by the insanity around me. Judge Collins, I’m sure, didn’t have sex last night either, or last week. Perhaps, not even in the last six years. Everyone seems to be leaving in handcuffs! But the other people ahead of me have done *very* bad things. Yeah right, Mary Ann, like it’s okay to drink and drive. Stupid ass. I certainly wouldn’t have done it if I was in my right

mind, or even if I was *in* my mind at all... Three blackouts. I don't remember a single minute of any one of them. I just remember waking up in a hospital with horrendously tight bed ties on all four limbs. They were the same type of restraints that I've helped put on "difficult" patients, who were combative and wild from drugs or just plain old craziness while in med school. I never thought I'd have the "pleasure" of experiencing such humiliating torture firsthand.

Oh my God, I could have died in any one of those wrecks or killed someone else. God spared me. (I think He really wants me to write about all of this since He knows what a great challenge it will be.)

"Let's go!" the Wizard nudges me. I didn't hear my name called at all. Shit, this is it!

I turn to Jane and give her my purse with my medication in it. She gives me a weak smile and hands me the speech the Wizard had me prepare. It's a heartfelt monologue about being an upstanding citizen of the community, very regretful, a good mother, eye surgeon and extensive rehab. I am chagrined that my life had taken such a turn.

The State's Attorney and my Wizard exchange banter with Judge Collins. The Wizard introduces me to the Judge and he replies, "Yes, I *know* Dr. Duke."

What? I think. I've never seen him before; how does he think he knows me? How does he know me? Damn. I've been in this Montgomery County court system for *way* too long and must be becoming famous or infamous, neither by choice.

I hate courtrooms with a passion. I always seem to lose to the "good ole' boys" sitting on the bench. So many multiple court appearances for my divorce and custody

battles that probably every judge in Montgomery County knows Dr. Duke in Potomac. (The “Beverly Hills of Washington, D.C.” as I call it, certainly a lot different than where I grew up in Upstate, NY.)

Still, I am amazed that even a semi-retired judge like Judge Collins has heard of me since this is the first time I am in his courtroom because I broke the law. Immediately, a feeling of cold doom surrounds me, and I stand shivering slightly as I break a sweat. Why am I not just a Susie Homemaker right now? Why do I always stand out a little? Just because Dad taught me to march to my own beat and people don’t like that? Is it better to meander with the herd like most?

The Wizard nudges me hard in the ribs. Ow! Oh, it must be his signal to read my speech along with a sideways glance. I hold my speech up and read it proudly and loudly, like I always speak. “I am a respectable member of the community, a caring physician and mother...” Glancing up, I see Judge Collins looking down, but not at me. I think, damn... he’s not listening to a single word.

The drivers of the two cars I sideswiped before totaling my 750iL BMW, at least 50 miles per hour into a tree in my third and final DUI, now have their turn to speak. The first woman appears in her seventies and speaks softly: “She crossed over the line and hit my car near the front.” The woman is not speaking in an angry tone at all. I look at both women with great compassion and remorse.

The second woman is something more.

“I didn’t get hurt, but she crossed over into my lane so fast, and if she had hit me just a little further back, *she would have KILLED me!* I don’t care about jail, but *I never*

want her to drive AGAIN!”... For the first time all afternoon, the courtroom went dead silent.

The Wizard turns his face up to mine with now a twist in his hair plugs and rolls his eyes. Honorable Judge Collins’ face muscles tightened. Everyone in this courtroom can easily see his wrath and I am only a few feet away. My vision is great, even though my hearing is going a little in my 40’s, but *this* lady, I’m quite sure, was heard outside the building and well across the street. (I have to agree with her, though, I’ll *never drive again*, just don’t make me go to jail!)

I look down. Oh, Sweet Jesus, the Wizard looks none too pleased either. His Honor barks at the State’s Attorney for her recommendation. She recites, “The State wants to impose a one year sentence for DUI with six months suspended, and sixty days for each DWI to run concurrent, and for the plea bargain to be binding.” As always, I can’t follow the legal mumbo jumbo. There are many ‘Nolle Prosequis’, but my adrenal glands squeeze tightly yet again at that “one year sentence” part; it makes my ears start ringing deafeningly loud.

My low blood pressure has just skyrocketed.

Judge Collins turns his seems to me angry face to the Wizard and I. The Wizard is a smooth talker, as he should be. “Dr. Duke has taken tremendous strides, your Honor. She understands the seriousness of her offenses. These offenses occurred, however, during a blackout period... Her use of alcohol was greatly exacerbated...”, and the Wizard winds on doing a decent job, I think.

“We would appreciate credit for the four months she has undergone rehabilitation at the renowned Talbott Recovery Center, in Atlanta. Dr. Duke paid for her treatment at great expense. I have here the records of her successful recovery from her doctor including all negative

random urine alcohol and drug screens...”, and the Wizard is still speaking, but the ringing in my ears is so loud, as I watch Judge Collins’ increasing scowl, that I can’t understand him anymore.

His Honor does not hesitate with his reply, but I can’t hear it! I can only hear bits and pieces. Judge Collins is seemingly tongue thrashing the State’s Attorney and the Wizard and me all at once. That’s all I can tell. OhMyGOD! It sounds like he’s going along with the State’s Attorney’s recommendations! He’s not going to credit me the four months of rehab? Why not? *It* was like jail! Six months? Six months with possibly six more and probation for three years??? Yes, that’s what he said.

I poke the Wizard in *his* ribs and hiss “What about home confinement?” The Wizard requests, “Would your Honor consider home confinement?” Before I could begin to hope for it, His Honor belched a resounding “NO!” and he finishes his tongue thrashing with: “Don’t you ever bring another case like this into my courtroom again!”

I hear that last part, along with the loud “NO!” But now I’m totally numb and lightheaded. I feel like I might pass out. I’ve never fainted over anything. All of a sudden I’m pissed off too, and I complain to the Wizard, “Is *this* what I paid you fifteen thousand dollars for!?” He doesn’t even look up at me.

Some “Magician”, huh?

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The State’s Attorney is trying to get my attention. I can’t hear her. I can’t hear again! “What?!” I yell. She asks me something about my “free and voluntary plea of guilty” to something or other. I glance at the Wizard who mouths “yes.” It seems like she’s asking me the same thing over and over again. She is...Oh my God, I’m doing it,

I'm pleading guilty to three drunk driving charges and waiving my right to an appeal. Oh my dear God, I'm really going to jail!!...And I can't hear anything! Why can't I hear?!

Someone else is behind me, talking to me. I can't comprehend a word. Now they are roughly grabbing my arms from my sides and pulling them behind my back. I'm being handcuffed with a guard on either side!

The room is spinning. I can't hear a damned thing, and everyone's face is getting blurry. I stand proud, though, and turn around as I'm being led out of the courtroom to look at Jane one last time. There's Edward sitting next to her. He came. He *came after all*. I've always been a sucker for a broad-shouldered, good-looking man, but his big green eyes look so sad. His whole face looks terrible. It's too long and so very sad. I've never seen him look that way, not even at his mother's funeral. Jane looks like she's about to cry.

I'm being led away, very fast.

But my brain feels like it's in slow motion. Like in a movie scene where the sound goes out and the camera slows everything down for emphasis. I see Alma. She looks terrible too. I've never seen faces look like hers and Edward's. I mouth, "I'm sorry" to her. I don't know why I do it, I just do. Maybe I'm really saying I'm sorry to Baba, my dear grandmother. Dear Baba, dear Baba help me. Pray for me up there. Pray for my babies. Please. I'm sorry!

I can't cry. I usually cry at the drop of a hat, but somehow I do not cry. "I need my medication," I tell the guards, as one is gripping either arm. They ignore me. "No, I *need* my medication." Since I am going to go jail, I am not going without my sleeping pills. Well, Mary Ann,

looks like you are going to be sleep deprived yet another six months...dear God, in jail.

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My vision is still blurry as I walk down a narrow hallway with my hands cuffed behind my back and a guard clutches either arm tightly. They lead me into a small elevator with them. It has two doors, and can barely hold a fourth person but a third guard squeezes in. WTF, I'm in a small cage. This is terrible. A cockatoo gets a bigger cage than this closet. My claustrophobia kicks in big time and I feel my throat tighten. We are going down, far down. To hell, I think, and this is my cagey casket of an elevator.

Damn, my blood pressure *must* be soaring with this pounding headache! But at least I'm getting some hearing back and my sight. And these damned tight pumps are going straight in the garbage when I get home. Yeah, right, *when* I get home. Oh fuck, these handcuffs hurt! They're way too tight! Why did they have to handcuff me anyway? I would have gone with them peaceably. I'm a well-respected doctor in the community, not some crazy criminal. I think, "This, Dr. Duke, is by far the most humiliating and disgusting day of your life. Grin and fucking bear it".

"This is Miss Duke." That's all the guard says. I'm dropped off, after finally getting out of that birdcage of an elevator, to face three different guards and a desk with monitors on it. It's like a nurses' station in a coronary care unit where the nurses watch patients' EKGs and vital signs; however, *these* monitors are watching caged humans.

One of the guards is a woman in a dark uniform, pants and shirt, same as the men. I don't see their weapons, but getting shot does not scare me now as much as going without sleep does. I know sleep deprivation from residency and having children and how horribly miserable

it feels, and I'm going to need sleep to cope. "I need my medication that is back in the courtroom. Can someone please get it for me?" I ask her quietly. She doesn't even look up; she totally ignores me too. I'm not used to being ignored.

"Are you all deaf"?! I bitch to myself. And by the way, I'm *Dr.* Duke, not *Miss* Duke. Thinking too much Mary Ann, rein those thoughts in. Super, at least *my* brain is working again. Geez, I haven't been called Miss in over twenty years since graduating medical school. No, don't correct them on that, Mary Ann. Better to be a "Miss" in jail. Don't let anyone know that I am a doctor, or everyone will probably treat me harsher, make sure I get put down even harder. (At least that's been the Montgomery County Courts' M.O. for me.) Be a Miss for once. I usually correct people to call me Doctor because I earned it, but not today.

The sitting female guard looks up while the bigger of the two male guards produces a huge set of keys and takes my arm. Still no one speaks to me. I am led through a thick metal door into a small hallway, all gray. Gray cement floor with gray cement walls with no windows, and three cells with gray bars, much darker and mustier than any courtroom. Two women are sitting in each of the first two cells on a gray metal bench that is attached to the wall. They both are sitting on their own benches staring at the floor. One is in street clothes and the other in an ugly tan jumpsuit. Neither woman bothers to look up at me, as I stare at them.

The guard opens the third cell door and pushes me in. "Turn around!" he barks. I turn around. He takes off my handcuffs, doesn't say another word to me, leaves, locks my cell, walks the short hallway, opens the big metal door, then slams and locks it again on the other side. I'm left standing there, just standing in a totally gray, ugly cell

that's smaller than my bathroom at home. Immediately, I feel the worst claustrophobia ever.

I look at my bleak surroundings. I'm staring at a dinky gray metal sink, and a gray metal toilet jutting out of the gray cinderblock wall, with no cover and even no seat. "Good thing Mom taught me to always squat in public places", I think to myself.

I walk over to the tiny sink to get a sip of water. I'm so thirsty. Since I had sweated hard on the bike this morning, in a vain attempt to calm my nerves, I'm totally parched. The faucet, opened full bore, only lets out a trickle of lukewarm water. There are no paper cups in sight, not even a bar of soap. The trickle is so slight that I would have to touch the metal back of the sink if I wanted to cup some water in my hand. "Jesus Christ", I bitch to myself yet again (and I *always* hate myself for taking the Lord's name in vain), if the last person in here had A.I.D.S., that damned HIV virus can live for up to twenty-four hours on a moist surface, so don't touch that metal! Give it up, Mary Ann. They must bring you something to drink in this place and not expect you to put your mouth on that gross metal to reach that stupid trickle of a faucet.

At least I don't have to use the disgusting toilet right now because I'm dehydrated. I turn around and through the bars see the little red light of a camera. That's right. *Beautiful*. They're watching me on a monitor. Do they even watch me squat and pee? Oh God, they must! How fucking rude.

It really did happen. I am in jail. For six long months. *Oh... my... God!*

I sit on the cold, hard metal bench with no cushion whatsoever and put my head in my hands. I am going to go crazy in here. There isn't even enough *air* in here. One could probably lose their mind in six months.

I try to give myself a pep talk like I did before a track race in high school. You know, Mary Ann, it's not like you haven't been in a real jam before. But this is different; jail is not the real world. I can fight and stick up for myself in the real world, and that's enough of a bitch. In this shit-hole I've lost my freedom. I will have to be submissive and not talk back. Oh sweet Jesus, you know that's impossible for me.

My thoughts are everywhere at once. I tell myself, I can do it. I am Dr. Mary Ann Duke. Oh NO, my poor babies! *My poor babies!* They are going to be so unhappy. They don't deserve *any* of this!! My eyes well up with tears. I have to persevere. I have to, for them, and for me. Even if I go a little insane from claustrophobia, I have to get through this for them. Six months, six months, I can do *anything* for six months. Sure you can, Mary Ann, keep thinking that way. Look at what you've done before, and still come out smelling like a rose. Thank God it isn't a whole year and could have been. But look at this bloody awful cell. Even a God damned gerbil has a treadmill in his little cage.

Who is going to pay my bills while I'm in jail? Who is going to watch over my home? Edward moved out for good two years ago and went back to his Dad's home after his mom died to help his father. We have been fighting so much about his drinking, that I wouldn't dare trust him with power of attorney, even though he keeps nagging me for it. I'm almost out of credit card room, been putting the more than \$8,000 grand mortgage, and every other bill on them, for months. My house didn't sell while I was in rehab, so I took it off the market two weeks ago to spend the holidays at home with my children and now this. How am I supposed to keep from losing the one thing I have left, my home?

Dear God, when am I going to see my babies again?! My poor, sweet children. Dear James only turned ten and is already acting like a little man, not like the little boy without troubles he should enjoy being. He's protective of his three little sisters. My dear baby girl Marika is only eight and looks the most like my side of the family with brown hair, big brown eyes and big smile. Marika is very positive and strong, but no little girl should have to endure this. Nadia is only six and a beauty, fair and blue eyed like her father, my ex-husband. But like me, marches firmly to her own beat already. Luckily she has Marika and James to watch over her.

But then there is three-year-old little Eloise, and she is all alone without siblings under the same roof to play with. Eloise is Edward's child, the soon-to-be-ex-boyfriend, not my ex-husband's child. (Just think of them like Dr. Seuss's "Thing 1" and "Thing 2"; they *cleaned me out* financially and emotionally.) They don't deserve the outstanding children I bore them, when all they did was annihilate my hard-earned financial resources and devastate all my dreams.

My eyes well up with tears again. I am going to miss each of my children desperately, my little angels from heaven. I hope some day they will understand more and forgive me. I certainly never meant to hurt them at all. I would give my life for any one of my little angels. I wipe my eyes with my sleeve. Those damned tight-lipped guards. I'm not going to give them the satisfaction of watching me cry!

I've not been in this cell ten minutes and I'm already starting to go out of my mind. So I start to pray, but not on my knees, not on this dirty gray floor, and not with those guards watching me.

Please, God, watch over my children. Give them strength, and please, help me to persevere, too.

Dear Baba, how did your little darling get to this point? We were always so positive, and strong and happy with our lives. *What the hell happened to mine?*

