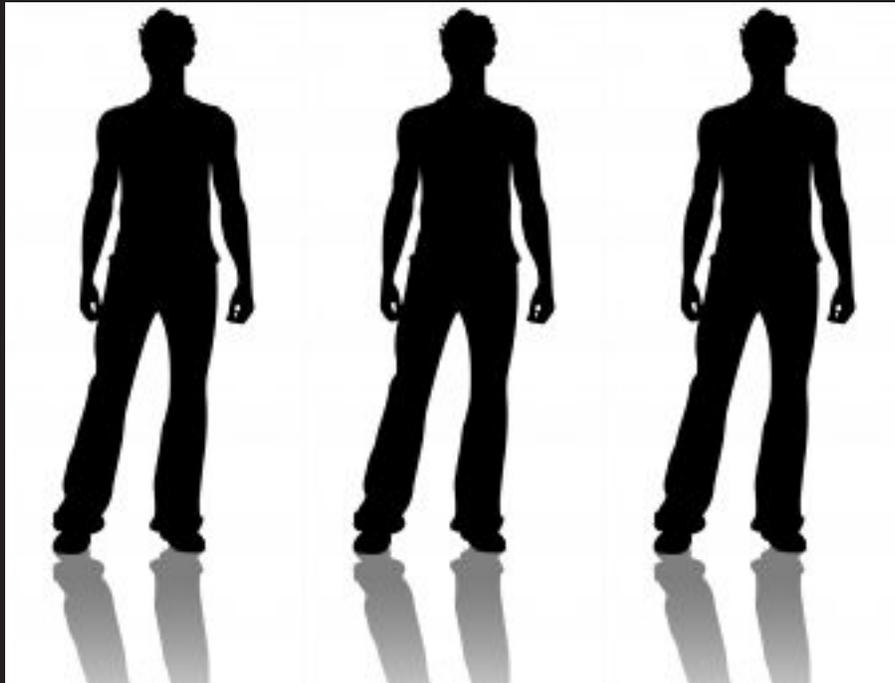


MICHAEL SMITH
MICHAEL SMITH
A Common Name
For an Uncommon Story!

Mikey

Jake

Michael



By: Michele L. Hinton

Michael Smith

Michael Smith

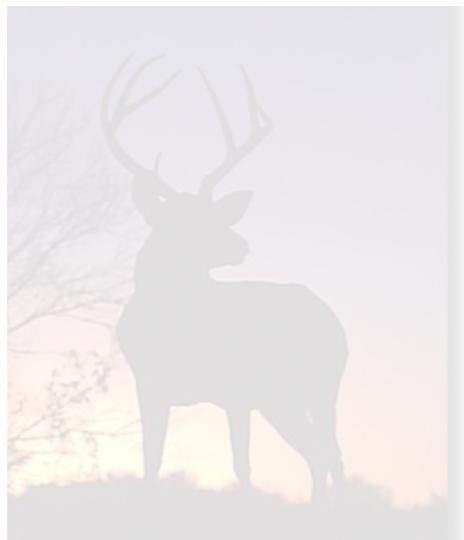
Michael Smith

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Year 1976

It was that time of the morning or what most people would call the middle of the night. A light breeze rustled through the trees, crickets were chirping, and water from a brook could be heard moving along the rocks. Nature's night symphony entered through the open window of the small house in the woods, serenading the dreams of Michael and Cathy Smith as they slept.

Suddenly, Cathy felt a sharp pain. She waited to see if another would come. When it did, she'd thought the brook had changed course – her water broke.

“Michael, it's time.”

“Just five more minutes,” he replied not quite coherent to what she was saying.

“Michael!” she reiterated, shaking him again. “It's time!”

He leaned up on his elbows and looked sleepily at his wife. “Are you sure this time? Or is it the peanut butter, mayonnaise, and pickle sandwiches?”

“I'm sure. The dam broke and Niagara Falls just flooded our bed,” she said smiling happily. “Are you ready to be a new daddy?”

Michael brushed a strand of bright red hair from her face and looked into her blue eyes. “I can hardly wait,” he said anxiously. He kissed her. “Come on - Mommy, let's go.” He picked up her night bag and helped her into the car.

This would be the third time this week they'd have to make a trip to the hospital. The first time was just a case of severe indigestion from too many tacos, three jars of Maraschino cherries, and the ice cream sandwiches which she'd craved on Monday. Then on Thursday it was the baby's practical joke on

them. It was now early Saturday morning and after the first two false alarms, he was more relaxed about the whole thing.

Michael was just as excited as his wife was for their first baby. Unlike other young couples, they didn't want to know the details of the baby during the ultrasounds that had been done by Dr. Reid. The only thing they wanted to know was that it was going to be healthy and there were no problems. Although, they had a fairly good idea that it might be twins. Cathy said it had to be, unless she was carrying an octopus. Several times she'd felt more than one kick at the same time and from opposite sides of her abdomen.

They lived in the country. They felt that the woods that surrounded their little house would be a perfect place for children to grow up instead of a subdivision. Yet they were still close enough to town to take advantage of shopping and date nights on a regular basis without having to drive too far.

They were laughing and joking in between Cathy's pains about the names they would call their children; if there were indeed two. Suddenly, a deer darted in front of their headlights and Michael laid on the horn. He applied his breaks as he swerve to try and miss it, but the deer changed direction and he hit it head on. The animal's body slid across the hood of their Gremlin and shattered part of the windshield. The car went crashing into a deep ditch and hit a tree.

Debbie and Richard Smith went to bed Saturday evening with a lot to think about. Richard's brother had asked him to consider moving to Lexington, Kentucky and partner with him on his horse farm. Their own small farm did fairly well, but not nearly what his brother's did. His brother had two Kentucky derby winners come from his stables.

Suddenly, both were awakened from their sleep by the sound of a car's horn and then a crash. Richard jumped up from the bed and looked out the window. The light of the street lamp at the end of his long driveway illuminated a car in the ditch and a dead deer on the road.

"Call 911," he said as he slipped on his shoes. "Someone hit another dam deer!"

Richard went outside to see if anyone was hurt. The front end of the car was folded like an accordion and laid on the passenger's side. He looked through the windshield and saw that the young couple inside were unconscious. There was blood splattered on the window where the woman's

head leaned against. He tried opening the driver's side doors, but they were locked.

"The ambulance is on its way," said Debbie as she joined her husband. "Are they hurt?"

"They're not moving. We've got to do something now. There's a very pregnant woman in there. I'd bet anything that they were on their way to the hospital at this time of the morning. No telling how long it will take the ambulance to get here." Richard ran up the driveway toward the garage.

"I'll get my medical bag," she replied.

For the past several years, Debbie had been a doctor of veterinary medicine, but she also knew her way around the human body as well. She'd started out as a nurse, before she married her husband ten years ago, and worked at the small local hospital; which was more like a glorified clinic. It took care of births, minor surgeries, and a variety of other ailments around the community of Bronston, in the Lake Cumberland area of Kentucky. Sometimes she was called in to help out when they were short handed, for she was still considered a registered nurse at the hospital. She was not only good with animals, but with people as well. Everyone in the community affectionately called her Dr. Debbie.

A few minutes later, Richard returned with a sledge hammer. He broke through the back window of the Gremlin to unlock the driver's side door so he could pull out the man who was tethered by the seat belt.

Debbie also returned and spread a sheet on the ground where her husband laid the injured man. She tended to the laceration on his neck made by the seat belt and the gash on his forehead where he'd hit the steering wheel. He was also bleeding from the mouth and nose and she suspected he had a fractured skull.

Richard returned for the woman. He decided the best way to get her out was to bust out the rest of the windshield. Pulling her up from the driver's side door would have been too difficult in her condition. When he lifted her head, he saw a piece of glass embedded in her temple. As carefully as he could, he pulled her out and laid her on the sheet next to the man.

Debbie checked for a pulse. Not finding one, she pulled out her stethoscope and listened for a heartbeat – but nothing. The woman was dead. However, there was still a chance she could save the child, for she could feel movement. She dared not wait for the ambulance and decided to do a C-section immediately if she wanted to save it. She quickly made the incision and delivered a baby boy. She handed him to her husband.

“Thank God, the baby is fine,” he said as he cuddled the crying child.

“I’m not done yet.” She returned to the woman. “There are two more.”

As Richard cleaned up the first child, the man started to groan. “Cathy?” he heard him say.

Richard brought the boy closer. “Mister, you have a son.” He decided not to tell him the condition of his wife at the moment.

Michael looked at his child through a haze and smiled. He knew he was dying. “Tell him he was wanted and I loved him before he was born. And my wife, tell her...” but that was all he was able to finish. Michael Smith died.

Richard tried administering CPR for his wife was still busy with the babies, but it was a fruitless effort. The man’s head injury was too severe.

Debbie finished sewing up the incision she’d made and turned her attention to the three identical infant boys. She picked up one and cuddled it as she looked to their poor unfortunate parents.

“Such a tragedy. Neither of them can be more than twenty-five years old,” Debbie said as she held the baby close. “I feel for all of them.”

She’d desperately wanted children, but she’d had four miscarriages. After the last one, they’d decided to quit trying. It was to heart-breaking. They’d tried fostering children, but also found it emotionally draining when they had to give them up after getting attached. Adoption was also not an option, for besides the expense, there was a waiting list for babies.

Richard also wanted children and here were three that were now parentless. He looked up at his wife and saw the expression on her face that mirrored his thoughts.

“They’ll never let us keep them,” said Richard. “Newborns adopt out too easily.”

“Triplets are rare, and this one...” She kissed the child on the forehead. “...was hiding. He was probably never picked up on an ultrasound.”

“Are you thinking what I am?” Richard smiled.

“Dare we?”

Richard took the baby from his wife’s arms. He went quickly to the house and hid the child safely and securely and rejoined his wife outside. They discussed their plan until they saw the whirling lights of the ambulance and the local police.

Debbie knew the ambulance drivers well and accompanied them to the hospital with two of the babies and their deceased parents. She needed a birth certificate for the child they wanted to keep and the only place to get one was at the hospital.

Dr. Reid had just entered the hospital to wait for the arrival of Cathy and Michael Smith. He'd also received a page from one of his other patients, Mrs. Mary Jo Smith. She was experiencing some abnormal bleeding and her husband was out-of-town, but due in at any time. An ambulance had been dispatched to pick her up.

He walked up to the nurse's station. "Betty, let me know when both of my patients arrive. I'll be in my office."

"Dr. Reid, I'm afraid I've some horrible news. Michael and Cathy Smith were in an accident. I'm afraid they didn't make it."

"Oh no," he replied sadly. "Those poor kids – and the babies. They were going to have twins."

"The babies are fine. The accident was in front of Dr. Debbie's house. The ambulance driver just called it in. She's coming in with the twins, which is good," she said changing the subject. "We had three call-ins. Suzie, Karen, and George are down with the flu."

"What else is going to happen tonight?" He shook his head and went to his office.

A short while later, two ambulances pulled in front; the one transporting Mrs. Mary Jo Smith and the one carrying Debbie Smith and the twins. Hospital bassinets were waiting to take the infants to the nursery, and a gurney for Mary Jo to take her to surgery; she was now hemorrhaging badly.

"Am I glad to see you!" exclaimed the nurse when she saw Debbie approaching her station. "Do you mind staying for a while? We're shorthanded and I need someone to help out until I can call in reinforcements."

"I don't mind."

"Thank you," she sighed in relief. "It's been crazy around here tonight."

"Would you mind if I saw to the babies first?"

"That was my next question. Could you process the paperwork on them and call social services? Suzie is out."

"No problem. Happy to do it."

Debbie headed to the nursery. She couldn't believe her good fortune. Betty just made it easier for her to obtain the birth certificate for her new son. Now she wouldn't have to explain herself if she was caught in the file

drawers.

Debbie had just taken one of the twins from the viewing window to record the vital statistics on his chart as a man came up and started looking over the babies. He saw seven in the window. He scanned the names on the basinetts. "Baby girl, Lester; baby girl, Johnson; baby boy, Britt..." David Smith smiled with delight. "Baby boy, Smith."

One the other expectant father's came to the window. "Yours?"

"He must be." David looked at the other names on the basinetts. "I just got into town. My neighbor told me that they brought my wife in earlier. A tear of joy streamed down his face. "He's the most beautiful baby in there, don't you think?"

The man smiled. "Only until my wife delivers ours."

David laughed. "I see your point. If you'll excuse me, I need to check on my wife."

Dr. Reid had just exited the operating room. He took off his surgical cap and sat down on a chair in the hallway. His nurse, Silvia, sat beside him.

"I don't know how I'm going to tell David and Mary Jo that the baby didn't make it," he said. He rubbed his eyes and ran his fingers through his salt and pepper hair.

Dr. Robert Reid had been an obstetrician in the county for twenty-five years and had delivered about a fourth of the population in the small community.

"Mary Jo had such high hopes for this one," said Silvia. "It was only two weeks from being full term. This was the third one they've lost."

"Is David here yet?"

"Oh, Dr. Reid!"

He looked up and saw the man coming down the hallway. "I hate this part of being a doctor." He stood to greet him.

"I just saw him!" David exclaimed. "He's beautiful. I was worried when I found out she had to come in." He grabbed the doctor's hand and shook it vigorously. "Thanks so much for saving this one. If we'd lost him, I think it

would have devastated my wife more than the other two. How's Mary Jo?"

Dr. Reid and Silvia stood there stunned. Both knew he was talking about one of the other Smith babies that Debbie had delivered.

"Mary Jo had a rough time of it. She'll be in recovery for about an hour," answered the doctor.

"Will she be all right?"

"She'll be fine. But I want to keep her here for several days. She lost a lot of blood. Now about the baby..."

"He's alright isn't he? If there's something wrong with him, I don't care what it costs; I'll take him to a specialist to fix it."

Dr. Reid could hear in the man's voice that he'd already mentally bonded with the other Smith baby. He hesitated before answering. He was about to break so many laws, both legal and ethical, that he didn't even want to think about it.

"No, your son is fine," he said with a smile. "I just wanted to tell you that when Mary Jo is out of recovery and awake, I'll have him brought to her room. What I need you to do is go to admitting. They probably have some paperwork for you to fill out."

David grabbed his hand again. "I just can't thank you enough, Doc. He's our miracle baby."

Silvia's chin dropped. She was about to say something when Dr. Reid held up his hand to stop her.

"I already know what you're going to say. What I want you to do now is have everyone that knows the David Smith baby didn't survive, go to my office immediately. Then tell Debbie to keep one of the Michael Smith twins out of the viewing area and go to my office as well.

Debbie was just about to put the other Smith baby beside his brother, when Silvia stopped her and informed her of Dr. Reid's request. At first she thought she'd been caught, but when she arrived at his office, she saw several other nurses and the anesthesiologist in the room.

Dr. Reid sat on the edge of his desk. When everyone was assembled he addressed the staff. "The reason I've asked you here is to tell you two stories. As all of you know, two families named Smith came to this hospital by ambulance tonight. Michael Smith and his wife were killed in a tragic accident, but due to the skill of our own Dr. Debbie, the twins survived." He hesitated while Debbie was given her well deserved praise. He continued. "The other couple is the David and Mary Jo Smith. David's child was still born. However, when he arrived this evening he saw one of the Michael Smith

babies and believed it to be his. I couldn't tell him it wasn't."

The staff was shocked. "You could lose your license for that!" exclaimed the anesthesiologist. "Do you know how many laws you've broken?"

"I'm well aware of it. But I also have two other stories to tell you. Michael and Cathy Smith were both brought up in the foster care system. I've known them for most of their lives. They have no relatives to claim those two babies. They'd would also go into foster care. However, I'm sure they'd be adopted quickly, and more than likely would be split up anyway."

He let his staff absorb what he told them for a moment and continued. "Now for the other story. David and Mary Jo Smith have tried two other times to have children and both of the pregnancies ended badly - now this one." He looked at Debbie and spoke softly. "There's one person in this room that can tell you exactly how it feels to lose a child that's wanted." He hesitated again and watched as one of the nurses put a comforting arm around her then continued. "I know what I did was illegal, but what I have done is give a family a child that desperately wanted one and I know he'll be well loved."

"I agree with Dr. Reid," Silvia added. "Some one else would just make the decision as to who they would go to. This once, why can't we make that decision? David and Mary Jo are good people. I think a couple of you know them."

"Everyone in this room has to agree to this," Dr. Reid continued. "If anyone has any objections, I'll let you tell David Smith that I lied and his baby is dead."

"I don't think David Smith would believe us anyway," said Silvia. "You should have seen the expression on his face when he thanked Dr. Reid before we had a chance to tell him." She wiped a tear from her eye. "It was heart-breaking."

Everyone was quiet for a moment until one of the nurses broke the silence. "But what about the other twin and the child that died?"

"It will all be a matter of paperwork," answered Silvia. "The death certificate for the real David Smith child hasn't been made out. When social services arrives for the twins, we can just say that the other Smith twin died of S.I.D.S., *Sudden Instant Death Syndrome*."

Dr. Reid was relieved that his staff agreed with his decision and listened as they worked out the details. He knew that he was putting them in a legal bind by asking them to agree to it, but he knew his people. It would have been heartless to tell David and Mary Jo anything other than they had a healthy child.

Everyone left the room except Debbie. She was starting to feel guilty about keeping one of the Smith babies for herself, until Dr. Reid exposed his own doings and the reasons why.

“Anything wrong, Debbie?” the doctor asked.

“I have a confession to make. There weren’t twins born – there were triplets. Richard and I decided to keep one of them. So while you’re signing birth certificates, will you put your name to another as well?”

By the time social services arrived, all forms had been filled out and everything looked above board and without the slightest suspicion of any wrong doing. Debbie greeted the woman and assisted with the paperwork.

“I’m sorry to hear about the child’s sibling,” said Mrs. Fielding, the social worker. “I would have made two families very happy instead of one.”

“Very sad,” Debbie shook her head. But she already knew two couples that were very happy; her and Richard, and David and Mary Jo Smith.

“I’ll be calling the expectant parents when I get back to the office. You’ll more than likely have a visit from a Mr. and Mrs. Jack and Angela Smith. They’ve waited a long time for an infant.”

Debbie couldn’t help but chuckle slightly. “Smith did you say?”

“Yes.” The social worker looked at her strangely. “Did I say something funny?”

“No,” Debbie tried to cover her amusement. “It’s just that we’ve been inundated with families by the name of Smith today.”

“It’s a common name,” the social worker replied with a shrug. “Well, I’ll be in touch.”

Shortly after the social worker left, Debbie caught a ride home from one of the staff that was going off duty. She told her husband everything that had transpired that evening, including what Dr. Reid said when he granted her request. *In for a penny, in for a pound*, is what he said as he signed the certificate. It was to be a secret between them.

They walked to the crib Richard had pulled out of the attic and assembled

while his wife was gone. Their new son, Michael Anthony, was sound asleep. They decided to name him after his birth father.

They also made another decision; they were going to make the move to Lexington and do it as quickly as possible. No one in Bronston would ever know they had a child. It would be too hard to explain, especially as they got older; three boys growing up in the same town; going to the same school; with the same face; and with different parents.

As far as their family was concerned, they were scattered across Kentucky with Richard's brother in Lexington being the closest, and they hadn't seen any of them in over a year. All they had to say, was they didn't want to tell anyone that they were expecting until the child was born, since she'd had so many previous miscarriages. Later that evening, they called everyone and told them the happy news.

David Smith entered his wife's room. She was just waking up. She looked up at her husband with a deep sadness in her eyes. "I'm sorry David, I lost another one."

He bent down and kissed her. "No you didn't," he said lovingly. "He's fine. It's a beautiful baby boy."

Mary Jo started crying happy tears. "I must have dreamed it. I thought sure I heard someone say he didn't make it."

"It must have been the other child they were talking about. Twins were brought in tonight and one of them died. It was that crib death you hear about occasionally."

The door opened and a nurse brought in the child and put it in his mother's arms. She looked at him lovingly and then at her husband. "He has your eyes!"

David bent down and took his new son. "And look, he has your dimples in his little cheeks. "Which angel name have you decided on; Gabriel, Raphael, or Michael?"

"Michael," she said. "Michael David Smith, our little angel."

David and Mary Jo discussed their future while she was recuperating in the hospital. They decided to sell their house and go on the road. David was a trucker and owned his own rig. They wanted to stay together as a family and since Mary Jo was also skilled at driving the big rigs, they had a good opportunity to work for JS Transporters, a new company in town that had

several other locations across the U.S. They could enhance their income by accepting the long hauls that took them across country. It would also give them the opportunity to sightsee all the places they wanted to go when they didn't have a load. Then when Michael was old enough to go to school, they'd find a place to settle down.

Two days had passed and Jack and Angela Smith entered the hospital and went to the nurse's station. "I believe the social worker, Mrs. Fielding, left word that we were coming by," said Jack Smith.

"Oh yes," said Betty. "I have a note here. Just a moment and I'll page Dr. Reid. His office is down the hall on the left."

They headed to his office and waited. A few moments later, Dr. Reid entered followed by a nurse with the child and handed him to Angela Smith. "Look at him, Jack. Isn't he precious?"

"Very." He put his arm around his wife. Then he looked at the doctor. "Can you tell us a little about him? Mrs. Fielding didn't have much information on him as of yet. He wasn't from parents of drug addicts, was he?"

"No, he came from good stock. His parents were killed in an accident on the way to the hospital to deliver him," he replied. "Would it have mattered?"

"No," said Angela. "We plan on telling him he was adopted. We just want to be able to tell him everything about his parents when he's older. We'd like to be able to paint a good picture for him."

Dr. Reid told them everything he knew about the child's parents. Normally, it was left for the social worker to do, but he didn't see the harm.

"It's too bad about his twin dying," said Angela as she cuddled the child. "I wish we could take him home today."

"You know how paperwork is, dear," said Jack as he took the boy. "We'll have him with us soon."

"Have you picked a name?" Dr. Reid asked.

Jack laughed. "That's been a touchy subject with our families ever since we found out we were going to get him. One side wants to name him Jacob after my father..."

"...and Michael after mine," added Angela.

"What have you decided on?"

"Both," Jack replied, "Michael Jacob Smith. Now that you've told us what his birth father's name was, that decides which of the names we put

first. It will settle another argument. I think it's perfect."

Jack Smith handed the child back to the nurse. He pulled out a business card and handed it to the doctor. "My phone number is on this card where I can be reached if there are any problems."

"JS Transporters," Dr. Reid read. "You're the owner of the new trucking company in town."

"Whatever your shipping needs are, from furniture, to horses, we have the equipment to meet your needs," he said as he shook the man's hand and bid him good-day.

Dr. Reid did his best to keep from laughing in front of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Smith. He sat down in his chair and leaned back. He wondered if something other than coincidence had been involved with the naming of the three babies of Michael and Cathy Smith.

He decided that someone else other than himself should know about all three children. He decided to call Debbie. She was leaving town in a few weeks with her little Michael Smith. He'd asked her how they were going to explain an infant in their possession if he was seen before they moved. She said all she would have to do is say she was babysitting for a relative.

When he got off the phone with her, he sat back in his chair and thought: *I wonder what would happen if the three ever met?*

Year 2010

Michael David Smith (Mikey)

Mikey was behind the wheel of his Kenworth. He felt his stomach growling and picked up the mike of his CB Radio. Normally, he would just use his cell phone, but they were in a dead zone on this stretch of I-64. “Breaker 1-9, Lady Jo-Jo, got your ears on? This is Archangel, come back.”

“I’m knockin’ at your back door, Archangel,” replied Mary Jo in the rig behind him.

“What do you say we stop at the choke and puke at the next exit? My stomach is running on fumes.”

“Right behind you, son. We could use some refueling ourselves. Over and out.”

For the past twenty-eight years they’d been living in Topeka, Kansas. David and Mary Jo Smith settled there when Mikey turned five. With the money they’d saved during those years, by denying themselves simple luxuries and comforts, they were able to pay cash for a modest house in a central location that crossed David’s route.

However, with the death of her husband last year, Mary Jo decided she wanted to move back to Bronston, Kentucky where she still had family and friends. Mikey decided to make the move also. So when his mother’s house sold, he left his apartment, loaded their trucks, and headed for the four bedroom country house they’d purchased together several months earlier. Though his mother was now sixty-three, she could still handle a big rig with the best of them.

Mikey pulled into the truck stop and waited for his mother to park. He helped her down from the cab and went to the other side and assisted his wife, Kit. He brushed a strand of bright red hair from her face and kissed her. Then he put a hand on her rounded belly. She was a little more than six

months along in her pregnancy with their first child.

“You must have been reading my mind,” said Kit rubbing her stomach. “Your daughter is starving!”

“It’s telepathy. I have this paternal connection with my daughter. If I’m hungry, I figure she must be.”

Mary Jo laughed. “The two of you go on ahead and get us a table. I’ll be with you in a moment.”

“Is she bringing what I think she’s bringing?” Kit sighed as they walked.

“She is,” he chuckled lightly. “She never goes anywhere without him.”

They found a seat and Mary Jo joined them a few moments later. She set a container on the table that was about the size of a large soup can with David’s picture wrapped around it. He’d died of a heart attack and it was his wish to be cremated. She had his remains sealed in a can so he could be buried with her when it was her time.

They looked over the menus then a short, middle-aged, blonde-haired waitress came up to their table, chewing on a piece of gum. “Hey, guys! Good ta’ see you. It’s been a while.”

“You to, Mabel,” Mikey replied.

She turned to Mary Jo. “I heard about David from some of the other drivers, Jo-Jo. Sorry, he was a good person.”

“Thanks.” Mary Jo put her hand on the can. “At least it was quick and he didn’t suffer.”

After they exchanged pleasantries the waitress asked for their order. “Well, what do you wanna’ get indigestion from today?”

“Depends. What level of disgusting is Fred’s chili?” Mary Jo grinned.

“About a level two,” she replied. “He made it yesterday.”

“I’ll have that.”

“I’ll have the usual,” Mikey said when the waitress looked at him.

“BLT, fries, and a banana split with extra cherries,” she wrote. “What’ll you have, Kit-Kat?”

“Peanut butter, mayonnaise, and pickle on whole wheat, for the baby,” she said leaning back in the booth to show off her condition. “And I’ll have a banana split also – olives on the side.”

“Well, how about that! Congrats, you two! A little Mikey?”

“No, a little girl,” he said proudly. Then he stood. “Now, if you ladies will excuse me...” He headed for the men’s room.

Before rejoining his family, he washed his face and looked in the mirror at his features. He thought about his father and how he wished he could have

lived to see his granddaughter.

Then he wondered which side of the family she would look like when she was born. He may have had his dad's blue eyes, but that was it. His hair was brown, and both of his parents were blondes. When they attended family reunions, he noticed he didn't resemble anyone on either side of the family.

Once when he was about sixteen, he'd asked his mother about it. She said that he looked like his great-grandfather on his father's side. She'd pulled out an old, faded, black and white picture of the man, but he still had to take her word for it, for his great-grandfather's face was mostly covered by a wooly beard.

Then he smiled. It didn't really matter whether he looked like either of them. They'd been good parents and he loved both of them. He just chalked it up to being a throw back from another generation. He'd had friends who also looked nothing like their parents either.

After finishing their meal, they were again on their way. Only four more hours and they would be at their new home.

Michael Jacob Smith (Jake)

Jake Smith stood beside the grave of his birth parents and twin brother. He knelt down and placed flowers next to their headstones. His adoptive parents, Jack and Angela Smith, had made it a yearly ritual to visit the cemetery where they were buried. They'd told him all they knew about Michael and Cathy Smith. His adoptive father was able to acquire all their possessions for him. He had pictures of their wedding, vacations, picnics, and snap-shots of his birthmother in different stages of pregnancy. He could see how happy they looked in those pictures, and knew that if they'd lived, he was a child that was wanted.

However, he was no less loved by Jack and Angela Smith. Normally, they came along with him, but they were now up in their seventies, and they weren't quite up to the two hour drive from Bowling Green to Bronston this trip. They'd moved there when he was three to open up another JS Transports location and decided to settle there permanently.

After placing the flowers, he walked to the bench and sat next to his wife and put his arm around her. Her name was Katherine Taylor Jenkins when he met her, but she went by her middle name like he did. She'd been named for her paternal grandmother, but when her mother divorced her father, she decided to call her Taylor.

“Too bad you never knew them,” she said as she laid her head on his shoulder.

“Yeah,” he sighed. Then he pulled out a picture of his birthparents and showed it to her.

“You have your mother’s blue eyes, but I can see definitely see you favor your father. You have his brown hair and dimples.” She kissed him on the cheek.

“I can see something else my birth father and I had in common.” He grinned at his wife.

“And what would that be?”

“We both have a passion for beautiful red heads,” he said running his fingers through her bright red hair.

Taylor laughed. “That just means you both had good taste.” She and Jake had been married for a little over a year. When they first met, he had introduced himself as Michael and had called him that for a while until he introduced her to his family, who called him Jake.

She was curious as to why he didn’t introduce himself as Jake in the first place. He said it was because of his grandparents. His father’s side called him Jake, after Jack’s father. His mother’s side called him Mike, after Angela’s father. When he was growing up, he was called both. The name Jake stuck when his Grandpa Jacob came to live with them until he passed. He said he used Michael for initial introductions and business purposes, and Jake for family and friends.

She handed the picture back and he continued to tell her about his birthparents. He looked at it for a moment then put it back in his wallet.

“My father worked for the post office as a letter carrier. My mother was going to school to become a teacher while she worked as a beautician. I was told that before he died, the last thing he said was to tell me that he loved me before I was born.” He looked at Taylor and grinned. “I was delivered by a veterinarian in her front yard you know.”

She laughed. “I don’t care how many times I hear that, it will always be funny.” Then she kissed him on the cheek. “It was good of Jack and Angela to tell you all that about them.”

“My adoptive parents were great. I couldn’t have asked for any better.” He looked toward the graves. “They made sure they had a proper funeral – they paid for everything.” Then he turned back toward her and laid his hand on her stomach. She was in her seventh month. “I hope I can be just as good of a parent.”

“Of that I have no doubt.” She smiled at him warmly.

“Well, we’d better get going. Lexington is still about another two hour drive from here.”

“I’m sure my mother’s on pins and needles.” Then she heard her cell phone ring and looked at the number. “Speaking of which...” She put her phone back in her purse without answering it.

“Do you think she’ll ever forgive me for taking you so far away from her?” he sighed.

“Probably not. Especially now that she’s going to be a grandmother and won’t get to see her grandchild regularly.”

“I could always move us closer to Lexington. JS Transports has a company there also. I could move our base of operations.”

“Are you crazy!” Taylor exclaimed. “She wouldn’t give us a moment’s peace. Why do you think I was anxious to move to Bowling Green? I love my mother, but she would have interfered in our lives so much, you’d probably divorce me!”

“That would never happen!” he laughed. He kissed her lovingly then they headed for the car.

When they were back on the road, Taylor felt her stomach rumbling. “I’m hungry.”

“What do you say we stop at the DQ? They have the best banana splits.”

“Sounds good to me.” Then she sighed. “But would you mind putting a hold on all those cherries you like to load it down with? Lately, the smell of Maraschino cherries nauseates me.”

Jake shook his head. “What a man has to endure when his wife is pregnant. I’ll be glad when this baby comes, so I can enjoy my banana splits properly – with cherries!”

She held back her laughter. “Just drive!”

Michael Anthony Smith (Michael)

Michael and his father, Richard, were in their box at Churchill Down in Louisville waiting for the race to begin.

“I wonder what’s keeping your mother and Jenny?” asked Richard.

“You know, Mom,” Michael replied. Then he laughed. “She’s probably brushing the horse’s teeth and Jenny’s whispering words of encouragement in its ear! You know how vets are.”

“I heard that!” Debbie said as she and Jenny joined their family.

“For your information, Mr. Smarty Pants, your daughter was kicking my bladder. We stopped at the ladies’ room.”

“I knew you were there all the time!” Michael said with a laugh. “I just wanted to see what you would say.”

“Yeah, right!” She gave him a quick kiss and sat in the seat beside him.

Michael and Katherine Jennifer Adkins had been together for a little over seven years. They met when he was at a farm in Louisville on business. She was treating one of the horse. She’d just graduated as a doctor of veterinary medicine.

They had two children; one from Jenny’s previous marriage, a girl named Elizabeth, and their first child together, Michael Anthony Smith, Jr. Now they were expecting a third in about six weeks.

Though Michael had asked her several times to marry him, she still refused, though she loved him dearly. Her first marriage had left a bad taste in her mouth, and she preferred to leave things just the way they were. However, what she did do was take his last name by legally changing hers to Smith without the formality of a marriage. She’d wanted to get rid of her ex-husband’s last name anyway.

“So, you two, have you decided whether or not you’re going to move back to Lexington?” Richard asked.

“The *Saddleback Stable* is looking for a good vet,” Debbie added.

“It’s tempting,” Jenny replied. “The kids would love to live on the *Double S*.”

“You know my thoughts on this, Pop. Wherever Jenny is, that’s where I want to be.”

“I tell you what,” said Richard. “Come up next weekend. Talk to the people at *Saddleback*.”

“And I can spoil my grand kids rotten!” Debbie said with a laugh.

“They’d love that!” Jenny replied. She hesitated a moment in thought. “I’ll talk to them. We’ll be up next weekend. Now if you will excuse me. The baby is tap dancing on my bladder again.” Then she got up and left.

“Michael, when are you going to make an honest woman of her?” Debbie asked.

“When she lets me,” he said with a shrug. “You know how red heads are – stubborn! Her ex cheated on her constantly. She says men are more faithful when free.”

“Depends on the man.” Debbie put her arm around Richard and he kissed her.

Michael considered himself fortunate to have parents that still loved each other. His mother was sixty-seven and his father a year older. As he looked at his parents, he'd often wondered which side of the family he looked like. His hair was brown like his father's, but it was straight; his father's was curly. His mother's hair was auburn and her eyes were blue like his, but those were the only similarities. One time he asked them why he didn't resemble either of them very much. They would look at each other, sigh, and say – "Because you look like the mail man."

The Mall

A month had passed, and Mikey, Kit, and Mary Jo were now settled in their new home in Bronston. He was on his way to South Carolina with a load, but would be back in about three days. After that, he was taking a well deserved vacation so he could be sure he was there when the baby came.

Kit and Mary Jo decided to go to the Richmond Mall, near Lexington, for a little shopping trip the day after he left.

Jake left Taylor with her mother in Lexington. He'd been gone for the past two weeks on business, but was due back at anytime. They'd also decided to transfer her medical records to an obstetrician there, so her mother could be near when the baby was born. They thought that would put Jake in a more favorable light with her mother, but such was not the case. Janet Jenkins was a stubborn woman.

"Taylor, sweetie," her mother said. "Phyllis and I are going to the Mall in Richmond. Do you want to come along?"

"No, Mom, I just want to chill in the recliner with my feet up."

"Are you sure? If you want me to stay..."

"No," she interrupted. "You go ahead. I'm probably going to just take a nap."

She was glad to have the time to herself. All her mother did was compare Jake to her old boyfriend, Mark. She would say:

Mark is rich, handsome, and a well respected doctor right here in Lexington. He still talks about you.

It didn't seem to faze her mother when she reminded her that Mark cheated on her with another woman. It also didn't matter to her that Jake was also rich, handsome, and a well-respected businessman in Bowling Green. Her biggest objection to him was – he lived in Bowling Green.

Her mother gave her a kiss good-bye and reminded her for the fifth time where all the emergency phone numbers were in case she needed to call anyone.

Michael and Jenny had decided to move their family to Lexington and live on the *Double S* with Debbie and Richard. They'd been there for a month. Jenny was going to take the job as vet for the *Saddleback Stable* after the baby was born. The current veterinarian was retiring after that.

One afternoon, Michael and Jenny decided to take their six year old daughter, Elizabeth, to the mall in Richmond for ice cream. They left their two year old son with Grandma Debbie.

"I'll have a banana split, extra cherries," Michael said after his wife and daughter ordered.

They went to the table in the food court and sat down. They talked and laughed about names for the new baby when it came. Then Michael told Elizabeth to open her mouth and he tossed one of his cherries up in the air and she caught it.

"Too bad sardines aren't included as one of the toppings." Jenny grinned as she dipped her spoon in her hot fudge sundae.

"Sardines!" Elizabeth giggled. "Gross, Mommy!"

"Yeah, Mommy!" Michael agreed as he laughed with her.

Janet and Phyllis had just come out of the Baby Emporium in the mall. They'd been shopping for the past two hours.

"I'm getting hungry," Phyllis said.

"Me too. How about going to the food court? That pizza smells out of this world!"

"Suits me."

The two women headed for the food court when Janet stopped dead in

her tracks. She drew a deep breath and quickly turned her back.

“What is it, Janet?” Phyllis asked concerned.

“That no good, two timing, son-of-a-bitch!” Janet whispered. “Look over by the ice cream parlor. It’s that bastard son-in-law of mine! He’s supposed to be out of town.”

Phyllis saw the man sitting with a little girl and a pregnant woman. “That’s Jake!”

Janet turned around. “I’m going to give that bastard a piece of my mind!”

She started to march over there, but Phyllis stopped her. “Just hold your horses, Janet. The woman he’s with may not know anything about his infidelity. You might send her into an early delivery. Do you want to be responsible for that?”

“No,” she huffed. Then she had a thought. “Do you have your camera phone? I could take a picture of him with the other woman.”

“Yeah, but I forgot to charge it,” Phyllis sighed.

“Mommy, I’ve got to go to the potty,” Elizabeth said after finishing her ice cream.

“Me too.”

Jenny and her daughter stood. The public restrooms were just in sight of the ice cream parlor.

“I’ll wait for you here,” Michael said as he finished his banana split.

As he waited, he looked around at the faces in the mall. Then he noticed two women, in their late fifties or early sixties, staring and pointing in his direction. Then one of them started toward him.

“Now’s your chance!” Phyllis exclaimed. “The woman and the little girl are gone.”

Janet was determined to give him a piece of her mind. She marched toward him then stood there glaring at him with her arms folded.

Michael looked up at her and smiled. “Can I help you, ma’am?”

She couldn’t believe it. He spoke and looked at her as if he didn’t know

who she was. “Why you bastard! What do you have to say for yourself?”

“Excuse me?” He was shocked by this strange woman’s attitude toward him.

“Don’t play dumb!” she returned.

“I haven’t a clue what you are talking about. Who are you anyway?”

“What are you trying to pull here, Jake?” She glared at him.

It was apparent that this was a case of mistaken identity. He smiled pleasantly. “Lady, I think you have the wrong person. My name is Michael Smith.”

“No shit!” She put her hands on her hips. “You have a pregnant wife at home and here you are!”

“Listen, lady, Jenny and Elizabeth are in the bathroom, and I’ve never been married. Now if you’ll excuse me...” Michael stood and was about to head toward the restroom to escape this crazy woman, when she smacked him across the face.

“When I get home I’m telling her!”

Janet turned and left with Phyllis, and Michael stood there stunned. Jenny and Elizabeth came out of the bathroom just in time to witness the incident and rejoined him at the table.

“What was that all about?” she asked.

“Beats the hell out of me!” he exclaimed as he rubbed the sting from his cheek. “That crazy woman said she was going to tell you something and that you were at home. Then she hit me for no reason!”

“Well, I don’t know who she was, I didn’t recognize her,” Jenny said as she put her arm around him. “Maybe it was a case of mistaken identity.”

“That’s what I thought. But she knew my name.”

“Did she hurt you, Daddy?” Elizabeth asked.

Michael bent down and picked her up. “Yes she did. I think I need a kiss to make it feel better,” he replied pointing to his cheek.

She kissed him. Then the three of them decided they’d had enough shopping for the day and headed for the car.

Kit and Mary Jo had been in and out of stores for the past hour looking at baby things, until Mary Jo heard the call of nature. Kit said she’d wait for her on the bench outside the restroom by the Mall’s food court. Usually, it was her that had to go about fifty times a day.

She saw a pregnant woman and her little girl exit as her mother-in-law went in. Then she heard a commotion by the ice cream parlor and sat there stunned when she saw the man who was involved. It was Mikey! A woman smacked him and left. She was about to rise when she saw the pregnant woman and a little girl joined him. She saw her husband pick the little girl up and she kissed him.

Kit started to cry. She would have never believed that he would cheat on her like this. Then her cell phone rang and she tried to choke back her tears as she answered.

“Hey, Kitten,” said her father. “How’s my favorite daughter?”

“Hi Dad,” she squeaked out.

“What’s wrong?”

“Mikey’s been cheating on me,” she cried. She heard a beep from an incoming call, but didn’t answer.

“I can’t believe it!”

“It’s true,” she sniffed back a tear. “I saw him with another woman and a little girl.”

“Are you...”

“Hello? Dad?”

Kit looked at her cell phone. The battery had gone dead. She put it back in her purse and tried to dry her tears. She thought they’d been happy together. She watched as the three headed for the exit. He’d been lying to her for years! He had another family on the side.

Mary Jo left the restroom and saw Kit on the bench crying. She sat down beside her. “What is it Kit-Kat?”

She couldn’t bring herself to tell her mother-in-law that her son was a dirty cheat. She loved her as if she’d been her own mother. “Just hormones,” she lied. “I saw a little girl kiss – her father.”

“That happens,” Mary Jo said. “I did a lot of crying when I was pregnant with Mikey. *Little House on the Prairie* tore me up all the time.” Then she changed the subject. “Oh, guess who called while I was in the stall?”

“Who?” Kit sniffed back a tear.

“Mikey. He just pulled into a rest stop and guess what. Your dad’s truck is there. He tried calling your cell, but it was busy.” Then she shook her head and laughed. “One of these days, Harry is going to get a cell phone instead of dropping money into pay phones. Were you talking to your Dad?”

Kit stopped crying, ignoring her last comments. “He’s at a rest stop?” she repeated.

“That’s what I said.” Mary Jo looked at the curious expression on her daughter-in-law’s face. “What is it?”

“Mary Jo, did you say Mikey was an only child?”

“Hello! Hello!” Harry hung up the pay phone. “Dam cell phones!” He would have never expected Mikey would do that to his daughter, but why would she lie? He left the booth and turned around. He saw his son-in-law get out of the truck and headed for him. “I’ll teach him to mess around on my daughter!”

Mikey saw his father-in-law approach. Harry was a big bear of a man, but as friendly as they come. He’d raised his Kit by himself. Her mother had died when she was ten.

“Hi Harry!” he shouted pleasantly. However, the expression on his face was anything but good. Then something happened that he had totally unexpected. Harry punched him in the eye and he fell to the ground. “What the hell did you do that for?”

“Cheating on my daughter!” he shouted.

“What! Who the hell told you that?” he shouted back. He stayed on the ground, stunned by the man’s action and the declaration he just made. If figured if he got up, he would just be hit again.

“My daughter – that’s who!” he said angrily.

Mikey was confused. “Why would she say that? I would never do such a thing.” Then his cell phone rang and he answered it where he laid. “Hello!” he said harshly. Then he held the phone to his father-in-law. “Harry, it’s for you. It’s Kit.”

He watched as the man nodded his head as he listened to his daughter. Then he turned his back and walked off.

“Hello! Hell...” He walked into a dead spot and got cut off. Harry stared at the cell phone. “This piece of shit isn’t worth the plastic it’s made from!” Then he turned back to his son-in-law and extended his hand.

“You’re not going to hit me again are you?”

“No,” he said apologetically and helped him up. “It was a case of mistaken identity. If her dammed phone hadn’t gone dead in the middle of our conversation, this would never have happened.”

After his father-in-law apologized again, he explained what his daughter had seen.

Taylor was furious with her mother. “How could you say a thing like that, Mother! Jake wouldn’t cheat on me? Never in a million years!”

“I’m not lying, Taylor,” her mother insisted.

“It’s true,” Phyllis joined in. “I saw them with my own eyes.”

“The two of you are as thick as thieves,” she shouted. “I’ve got a doctor’s appointment tomorrow. After that, I’m packing my things and going home. I’m sick and tired of you putting down my husband. He’s been nothing but nice to you. All you’ve been is insulting and hateful to him and I’ve had it!” Then she left the room and slammed the door.

Jenny and Michael sat down at the dinner table with Debbie and Richard. Michael talked about the crazy woman who’d slapped him at the ice cream parlor.

“And you have no idea why?” Debbie asked.

“Not a clue, Mom,” Michael said as he wound the spaghetti around his fork.

“All I can think of is that it was a case of mistaken identity,” Jenny added. She took a bite of her garlic toast.

Debbie and Richard looked at each other. They were thinking the same thoughts, but neither said anything.

Then Jenny changed the subject. “I’ve got a doctor’s appointment tomorrow at 1:15. You want to come along, Debbie?”

“I would, but something came up today that Richard and I have to see to.” She gave her a smile. “Maybe next week.”

“I’ll go with you,” Michael said. “I don’t have to go to that horse auction tomorrow.”

“No, that’s okay,” she replied. “I know you’ve had an eye on that bay filly. You go on.”

After dinner, Debbie and Richard went for a walk so they could talk and not fear being heard. “Do you suppose one of Michael’s brothers is in town?” Richard asked.

“It could be,” Debbie replied.

“So, where are we going tomorrow?”

“Bronston – to see Dr. Reid. I haven’t heard from him in a few years. Maybe he’ll have an update on where the other two are located now.”

Kit talked to both Mikey and her father on the cell phone while she and Mary Jo headed back to Bronston. She was immensely relieved that the man she’d seen wasn’t her Mikey. She also noticed that her mother-in-law was very quiet on the way home. She wasn’t very talkative at dinner either.

“What’s wrong with you, Jo-Jo?” Kit asked when they sat down to watch a little TV. “You haven’t been yourself since we left the mall.”

Mary Jo sighed. “The incident with the man you saw today was a reminder of something I hoped I would never have to face.” She hesitated a moment, and wiped a tear from her eye. “I don’t think Mikey is my true son. I think my real son died.”

Kit was astonished. “Why would you think that?”

“When Mikey was five, he had his tonsils removed. They typed his blood. His father and I are both type O. Mikey was type AB. David never thought a thing about it. But I did. When I was in surgery delivering him, I thought I heard Dr. Reid tell the nurse that my baby was still born. Then when I woke, David came in all excited about our new son. I thought I dreamt what the doctor had said. David told me about a set of twins that was brought in that night. Their parents were killed in a car accident. I read more about it in the newspaper the next day. A veterinarian, named Debbie Smith, delivered the twins in her front yard. But one of the twins died from crib death the night Mikey was born. I’ve always had the suspicion that it was my child that died and Dr. Reid replaced him with one of the twins.”

“Did you ever contact Dr. Reid to ask him?”

“No. I was afraid to. As far as I was concerned, Mikey is my son and will always be. But when you saw the man who looked exactly like him, I now have to face that probability.”

“What are you going to do?” Kit asked as she took Mary Jo’s hand in hers.

“See if I can find Dr. Reid tomorrow – if he’s still alive. He’d be in his eighties now. If Mikey has a brother, he has a right to know about it.” Mary Jo smiled sadly. “Will you come with me tomorrow?”

“We’ll go together.”

The Next Day

Mary Jo and Kit knocked on Dr. Reid's door at 10:00 a.m. She'd sent him pictures of Mikey from time to time when he was younger as he'd asked her to do. She hoped he still lived at the same address.

A woman of about thirty years answered the door. "Can I help you?"

"Hi, my name is Mary Jo Smith. Does Dr. Reid still live here?"

"He's my grandfather. I'm Connie Duncan. Won't you come in? He's very popular today," she said with a small laugh. "He rarely gets visitors anymore."

Mary Jo and Kit followed her into the living room and saw a couple sitting on the couch.

"This is Richard and Debbie Smith," Connie introduced. "They arrived just moments before you."

Mary Jo wondered if this was the same Debbie Smith that delivered the twins. She was tempted to ask, but decided against it.

Debbie and Richard recognized Mary Jo immediately. Dr. Reid had sent them pictures of Michael's brother and the family who had him. However, she also said nothing and was curious as to why she was here.

"If you'll wait here a moment," said Connie, "I'll go upstairs and get him. Though, he may not recognize you anymore. He has Alzheimer's. He barely recognizes me from day to day."

When the doctor's granddaughter left, the four of them sat there, not knowing what to say. Debbie was tempted to broach the subject of the boys, but couldn't bring herself to do it. Mary Jo was trying to think of what to say. She hadn't expected there would be others in the room. Richard couldn't stand the uncomfortable silence anymore and started to talk about the weather.

A few moments later, Connie brought her grandfather down and he sat in his usual chair by the fireplace. His salt and pepper hair was now totally gray.

Debbie got up and knelt down beside him. "Do you remember me? I'm Debbie Smith – Dr. Debbie?"

The man looked up at his granddaughter. "Am I sick again, Connie?"

"No, Grandpa, Dr. Debbie is your friend. She's come for a visit."

"That's nice." He smiled at Debbie then looked up at his granddaughter. "Nurse, will you give her a shot of Vitamin B-12 and set her an appointment for next week." He looked back at Debbie. "Make sure you take your pre-natal

vitamins, young lady.” Then he stood and started walking back toward the stairs.

“Sorry,” Connie said with a sigh. “Maybe another day would be better. I’ll show you to the door.”

The two couples exited the house and exchanged the customary good-bye, before they headed for their vehicles.

“Sorry, Mary Jo,” Kit said as she opened the door of the pick-up.

She smiled at her daughter-in-law. “It doesn’t really matter.”

Debbie and Richard looked at each other as they stood beside their car. “Should we tell them, Richard?”

“That’s what we’d planned to do anyway, isn’t it?” he replied.

“Mary Jo...” Debbie called out. “...would you care to have an early lunch with us? We have two – or should I say – three little things to talk about.”

The Doctor’s Appointment

Jake tried several times to call his mother-in-law’s house to speak to Taylor, but every time he called Janet hung up on him. His wife’s cell phone didn’t get reception inside her house.

He’d finished his business early and was now only minutes from Lexington. He knew Taylor had a doctor’s appointment today and he would be just in time to make the appointment with her, if she didn’t leave the house early. He pulled in the driveway of his mother-in-law’s house and knocked on the door.

She glared at him when she opened it. He was glad that a look couldn’t kill or he’d be a dead man.

“You’ve got your nerve!” Janet exclaimed, “Coming here after yesterday.”

Jake shrugged. “What! I just got into town!”

“You lying s.o.b. I can’t believe it!” she yelled. “You’re going to deny that I saw you with that other woman yesterday!”

“Of course I’m going to deny it! I haven’t a clue what you’re talking about. I was in Chicago,” he said angrily. “Is Taylor here or not?”

“No!” she exclaimed. She decided to slap him again and slammed the door in his face.

Jake heard the deadbolt click in the lock. “Crazy woman!” He rubbed his cheek and shook his head as he walked to the car. He decided to meet his wife at the doctor’s office.

Taylor walked into the offices of Doctors' Hatch and Dodd. It was her first appointment with Dr. Dodd and probably her last if she decided to go on back to Bowling Green. This last incident of her mother defaming Jake's character was the final straw. She sat down and filled out the paperwork.

Jenny had just finished filling out the paperwork to see Dr. Hatch and picked up a magazine. There were about seven other pregnant women in the waiting room.

About fifteen minutes later, the nurse came to the door. "Katherine Smith."

Both Jenny and Taylor stood. They looked at each other and laughed, as did the others in the room.

"Which one?" Jenny asked.

The nurse laughed. "The one seeing Dr. Dodd."

"That would be me," Taylor said.

She followed the nurse to a small room to take the usual temperature, blood pressure, and weight, which she dreaded whenever she stepped on the scales. Afterward, she was put in another waiting room. About five minutes later, Jenny joined her.

The two women introduced themselves, and found it funny that not only did they prefer to use their middle names, but they were also red heads to boot. They talked about their due dates, the gender of their expected children, which were both girls, and wondered how long they would have to wait in this waiting room before they would get to their examination rooms to again wait for their doctors.

"Does your husband ever come with you?" Taylor asked.

"We're not married," Jenny replied. "I had one bad marriage, and didn't want to go through another, but Michael has been asking me for years."

Taylor started to laugh. "You've got to be kidding me! You're husband's name is Michael?"

"Yes, what's so funny?"

"My husband's name is Michael also, but he goes by Jake," Taylor laughed.

Jenny joined in on her laughter. "I'll show you a picture of mine."

Both women started digging through their purses and each pulled out a picture of their Michael Smith and traded. The smiles disappeared and their laughter stopped. They leaned back in their chairs and were silent for several

minutes.

“Were you at the ice cream parlor the other day?” Taylor asked. She couldn’t bring herself to look at the other woman.

“Yeah, he was slapped by a crazy woman,” Jenny replied as she stared at the picture.

“That was my mother,” Taylor said evenly then added, “I should be crying my eyes out by now.”

“We’re in shock. We’ll both cry later...” she looked at Jenny, “...after we smack the shit out of him the next time we see him!”

“I never knew,” Taylor said. “He travels a lot.”

“Neither did I. Apparently, he traveled between us!” Jenny said angrily.

“When he gets back, I’m going to give him a piece of my mind!”

“Gets back – Ha! He’s at the *Double S* now, or will be later!” Then she had an idea. “How would you like to follow me to the farm? We’ll surprise him and see how he wiggles his way out of this.”

“Good!” Taylor exclaimed. “Then we can both smack the shit out of him at the same time.”

The Gathering

Jake had hoped to be with Taylor during her examination, but he’d gotten stuck in traffic and knew he probably missed it. He turned down the street that the office was on and saw Taylor’s SUV turning out, but she was headed in a direction that was opposite from home. He decided to follow her. What else could he do? His mother-in-law was being totally bitchy, and talking crazy, so he had nowhere else to go.

“Where the heck is she going?” Jake wondered as they twisted and turned down the different streets and then they were headed into horse country. He would have honked his horn to get her attention, but there were three cars in between them. “She must be following someone home,” he muttered to himself. Then he came to a light and had to stop. He saw Taylor’s car drive on ahead. “I hope I don’t lose her out here.”

Michael returned home from the horse auction. He was pleased with the little filly he’d bought. He wanted to surprise his daughter, Elizabeth, with it. Even though the child wasn’t his biologically, he loved her just the

same. He was the only father she'd ever known. Her true father had nothing to do with his daughter; as if she'd never existed.

He'd put the horse in the stall, fixed a large red bow around its neck, and headed for the house to wait for Jenny. Just as he was about to enter the house, he saw her car and an SUV coming up the drive and went to meet her. Jenny and another pregnant woman got out of their vehicles. They stood next to each other staring at him with their arms folded as he approached.

"Hi honey," Michael said. "Wait until you see the filly. Elizabeth will love it!" He started to kiss her, but she pushed him away.

Taylor stood speechless for a moment. He acted as if he hadn't a clue who she was.

"Hi honey, my ass!" Jenny exclaimed then smacked him across the face.

Taylor walked up to him and smacked the other cheek. "My mother was right. You're a cheating bastard!"

"What the hell is this!" Michael exclaimed. "What did I do? And who the hell are you!" Michael said looking at Taylor.

"What are you trying to do, Michael?" Jenny asked. "Pretend you're a split personality or something? She has a picture of you and her together!"

"How could you do this to us, Jake?"

"Jake who!" Michael exclaimed as he shrug. "My name is Michael! I've never seen you before!"

"No shit – Michael!" Taylor thrust the picture of them into his hands.

"I didn't do anything to anyone!" Michael exclaimed. "I just bought a damn horse today that's all!" Then he looked at the picture and raised his eyebrows. He thought: *It looks like me – sort of. It couldn't be me – could it?*

"I'm getting my children and I'm leaving!" Jenny announced.

"But why?" Michael asked.

Jenny glared at him. "You marry another woman behind my back and you ask me why!" Then she turned to Taylor. "Do you mind company at your place until I can get an apartment?"

"Sure," Taylor replied. "I'll help you pack!"

Michael watched as the two women walked off. He was very confused. He'd been smacked three times in two days by three women for – Infidelity?

He looked at the picture again. He'd heard of people with alternate identities, but he thought they were people who had an unstable childhood with abusive parents. His was anything but!

He heard the crunching of the gravel in the driveway and looked up to see a car and a pick-up truck. It was his parents coming back from Bronston

and someone was following them. When the vehicles parked, his parents got out of theirs and – *Oh no! Another red headed pregnant woman!* he said to himself.

Mary Jo and Kit walked up to Michael. They couldn't believe how much he looked like their Mikey.

"Unbelievable!" Kit remarked as she looked Michael up and down. "It's Mikey!"

"Please! Don't hit me!" Michael exclaimed backing away. "I didn't do it! And if I did, I swear I wasn't myself!"

"Michael, what the hell are you talking about?" Richard asked with a laugh.

"Pop, I think I need help. I think I'm suffering from some sort of schizophrenia." Then he turned to Kit. "Lady, if I got you pregnant or married you or something, I swear I didn't know it!"

Debbie and Richard looked at each other, then at their son. "Are you feeling alright?" Debbie asked.

"No, I'm not! I was – now I don't know!" Michael replied.

Debbie just shook her head. "This is Mary Jo and Kit Smith."

"Oh God!" Michael sighed, as he leaned against a car and slid down the side of the door and sat on the ground. "I married you too!"

"Too!" Richard laughed.

Then Jenny and Taylor came out of the house with Elizabeth, Michael Jr., and an overnight bag in hand.

"Where're you going, Jenny?" Debbie asked.

"I hate to be the bearer of news like this, but your son is a cheat. This is Taylor. Michael married her and you can see what else he did," Jenny replied indicating her pregnant condition.

Taylor raised her eyebrows when she heard Jenny say that these people were Jake's parents. "But they aren't his parents," Taylor said. "I thought this is just where he worked. Jake's parents live in Bowling Green. Their names are Jack and Angela Smith."

Jenny and Taylor looked at each other. Now it was their turn to be confused. Before anyone could say a word, another car came up the driveway.

"That's our car!" Taylor exclaimed.

Jenny, Taylor, and Kit drew in a breath when they saw the man that got out.

"Good! I got the right place. Hi honey!" Jake said as he approached his wife. "I pulled into two other farms when I lost you at the light down the road.

“Who are your new friends?” He gave a stunned Taylor a kiss. “What’s with your mother? She wouldn’t let me in the front door and slapped me. Can you believe it? She accused me of infidelity.”

“I don’t believe it!” Jenny said as she stared at Taylor’s husband then looked at hers.

Kit was also amazed as she joined the other two red headed women. She shook her head. “Remarkable!”

Jake was bewildered by the look of astonishment on his wife’s face and comments made by the other two women.

Michael stood up. He hadn’t seen the face of the man who’d just arrived and wondered what all the commotion was over him. “Hey! What’s going on here?”

Jake turned around and extended his hand to introduce himself. “Hi, I’m Michael Smi...” But the rest of his greeting stuck in his throat as he looked into the face of a man that could almost be his double.

Michael hesitated a moment then accepted his hand. “Hello, I’m Michael Smith.”

The two men stared at each other intently. “How is this possible?” they said simultaneously. Both men looked at Debbie and Richard.

“I think we have some serious explaining to do,” Richard said with a sigh. He was about to explain, when they heard the crunch of gravel and saw a semi coming up the driveway. “There’s Mikey,” Mary Jo said.

“Mikey?” Both Michael’s asked.

“My husband and Mary Jo’s son,” Kit replied. “Michael Smith.”

Mikey turned onto a gravel driveway. He saw a group of people standing there, but his focus was on Kit and his mother, who were approaching his rig. He thought about the strangeness of the past two days. His father-in-law apologized to him several time after the misunderstanding the other day. He kept blaming the cell phones all through dinner he paid for. Then later, Kit explained that he had a body double running around and they joked about him being cloned.

Then two hours earlier today, as he was about to exit the Cumberland Parkway and turn right on Hwy 27 to head for Bronston, Kit called. She told him that it was extremely important that he meet her at an address in Lexington, so turned left instead. Her call had been very mysterious and very

vague. She assured him that they were fine and nothing physically was wrong with them, but neither she nor his mother would elaborate what it was. Then they put a man named Richard on the phone to give him directions.

“Hi honey.” Mikey got out of his rig and kissed his wife then his mother. “What’s up?”

“What happened to you?” Kit asked. His eye was black.

“A miss understanding,” he replied .

“Dad,” Kit sighed. “I’m sorry.”

“That’s okay,” he gave her a reassuring smile. “So, what gives?”

Kit turned to Mary Jo. “Can you tell any difference?”

She looked at her son intently. “Sorry to say – no – except for the eye. I don’t think I could tell them apart.”

“Will one of you tell me what’s going on and why we’re here?” But as soon as he said it, he saw two other men coming forward.

“What the hell!” he exclaimed as he approached two men whose faces were similar to his. They stared at each other for a moment. “Hi, I’m Mic...”

“Don’t tell us,” interrupted Jake.

“You’re name is Michael Smith,” said Michael.

“Yeah, but who the hell are you two?” asked Mikey.

The two other brothers looked at each other and shrugged. Then they both said simultaneously, “Michael Smith.”

Mikey looked questioningly at Mary Jo. “Mom?”

“Yes – and...” she hesitated then added sadly. “...no.”

“How is this possible?” Michael asked.

“We can explain everything,” answered Debbie.

Everyone entered the house and sat down at the kitchen table. Debbie and Richard started at the beginning and told the truth about their birth and the reasons why they were split-up. Debbie told her son, that their desire to have a child overwhelmed their sense of what was ethically and legally right. In Mary Jo’s case, her husband, David, had seen one of the twins and assumed it was his. She explained that Dr. Reid didn’t have the heart to say it wasn’t when Mary Jo’s child didn’t survive the birth.

Mary Jo also imparted her explanations to her son. She told him about her suspicions, but refused to think about it for fear of losing him also. Then there was David. He would never have believed Mikey wasn’t their God given son; tests or no test. She wiped away a tear from her eye. The realization that her natural son had died at birth had just settled in.

“What’s the matter, Mom?” Mikey asked.

She gave him a smile. “Nothing, son. I’m just glad you were in my life.”
He gave her a kiss and a hug. “I’ll always be your Archangel.”

Debbie and Richard told Jake that his adoption was above board and – legal. She also said that they more than likely would have been split up anyway. They apologized to the boys for not revealing the truth to them sooner, but they never thought they’d meet.

Richard said he also feared the legal ramifications, if it were ever found out that their Michael Smith was not really their biological child, and for all intent and purpose, he was kidnapped at birth.

Jake confirmed that there were no other living relatives, for his adoptive parents did an extensive search with their own investigators. They didn’t want someone coming out of the woodwork to claim him, for it had happened to them with a child before him. Then he pulled a picture of their birth parents out of his wallet to show his newly found brothers.

Richard and Mary Jo explained to the boys how they decided upon the name Michael for their sons, and Jake gave the complicated story of his naming.

Debbie apologized for their actions, however, because of the love each felt for their respective parents, none felt animosity toward them. They even laughed about the whole situation.

After all was revealed, Taylor apologized to Debbie’s son for slapping him, as well as for her mother’s actions at the mall. Then her cell phone rang. She took it from her purse and looked at the number. “Speaking of my mother...” She didn’t bother to answer it. She laughed and put her arm around Jake. “I can’t wait to see the expression on her face when I introduce your brothers to her.”

Janet paced the kitchen floor of her house. She’d tried to call Taylor at least three times and she wasn’t answering. She wondered if she’d made true her claim and was on her way back to Bowling Green. She just couldn’t fathom why her daughter would believe she would lie about something like this. Granted, she didn’t like the fact that Jake had taken her daughter away from her, but she wouldn’t make up anything about him like that either. A few moments later, she heard the front door open.

“Mom! We’re home,” Taylor shouted.

She walked into the living room, “Oh, sweetie, I’m so glad...” she

abruptly changed her tone when she saw her husband. “What’s – he doing here!”

Taylor grinned. “You owe Michael an apology.”

“When hell freezes over!” she yelled. “I don’t care if you believe me or not. I didn’t lie. He’s been cheating on you with another woman.”

“Who – Michael?” she replied, toying with her mother. “This isn’t Jake.”

“What are you talking about, Taylor?” Janet folded her arms and frowned.

“Truly, I’m not,” he said. “I just met her today.” Then he put out his hand. “Let me introduce myself. I’m Michael Smith.”

“This has gone far enough!” Her mother rolled her eyes. “If you want to go back to Bowling Green – then go!”

“Mother,” Taylor laughed. She put an arm around her. “Truly, this isn’t my husband...” then she looked toward the door which was still open. “...he is.”

Janet’s chin dropped when she saw a duplicate of her daughter’s husband appear through the door with the woman she saw at the ice cream parlor. She looked from one man to the other. “But – but I thought he was an only child?”

“We thought so too,” replied her son-in-law as he stood beside Taylor. “Would you like to meet the rest of the family?”

Janet was dumbfounded. A third clone of Jake walked through the door with another pregnant woman on his arm. “Triplets!” She backed up and flopped down on the couch.

“Mom,” Taylor laughed. “Let me introduce you to Michael Smith.”

“All three of you are named Michael Smith?” She shook her head.

“It’s a long story,” replied her son-in-law.

With the little joke on Taylor’s mother done, Debbie, Richard, and Mary-Jo entered the room. They’d been outside listening with amusement. After introductions were made, and all the Michael Smith’s and their wives were sorted out, Debbie told the story of the three Michael’s from start to finish – again. Afterward, Janet made her apologies to Michael for the incident at the mall, and to Jake for her behavior toward him.

“I’m getting hungry,” said Kit. “I’m in the mood for ice cream.”

“Me too!” Jenny said as she heard her stomach rumble.

“I just bought some this morning. I’ve also got some bananas. Anyone for banana splits?” Janet asked.

Then the three Michael’s said at the same instant. “Got any cherries?”

Conclusion

The three brothers spent the next week together to see what all they had in common besides the love of cherries and red headed women. Traveling was another thing they found they enjoyed. When Jake offered his brother, Mikey, a management job at one of the JS Transport operations, he said he appreciated the offer, but he enjoyed the open road.

Jake took his brothers to Bowling Green to introduce them to his adoptive parents, Jack and Angela Smith. Michael thought it odd that his two brothers never met, since Mikey drove for Jake's company. Jake explained that it was because his father, Jack Smith, sold the Topeka branch in Kansas years ago, but allowed them to retain the same name, so they never visited that location.

As the weeks passed, Jenny delivered Michael a beautiful baby girl. They called her Michaela, a name they'd decided on months ago. Jenny was hesitant at first, for that would make another name similar to "Michael" and there were already enough in the family. But the others laughed and said, "Why break a family tradition."

Not long after that, Taylor gave birth to Jake's daughter. The three brothers suggested that they name her Michaela also, but Taylor, Jenny, and Kit said, "Absolutely not!" But what they did do was name her Cathy after the boys' birthmother.

It was three o'clock in the morning when Kit felt a sharp pain and woke. She waited several minutes and felt another one.

"Mikey," she said as she shook him. "It's time."

"Just five more minutes," he said sleepily, not quite coherent to what she just said.

"Mikey!" she reiterated. "It's time!"

He lifted his head and looked at her. "Are you sure this time? Or is it the peanut butter, mayonnaise, and pickle sandwiches?" They'd had a false alarm the day after Taylor's child was born.

"I'm sure," she said. "My water just broke."

He got out of bed and quickly pulled on his pants. Then he had a mischievous thought. "Say, how about we just have Debbie make a house

call. Then she can deliver our daughter in the front yard of our house just like me and my brothers were?”

Kit laughed and felt another pain. She put her hand to her stomach. “If we don’t hurry, it might be you making the delivery!”

“Then what are we waiting for,” he replied as he helped her up.

They knocked on Mary Jo’s bedroom door and shouted that they didn’t have time to wait for her. As they drove, they started joking about the baby’s name. Mikey teasingly suggested Cathy Michaela Smith, after their two nieces.

Suddenly, a deer darted out from the woods and stopped. Mikey slammed on his breaks and laid on the horn. He was able to stop before he hit the animal, which just stood there.

“That was close!” Mikey sighed.

“Too close!” Kit was reminded of Mikey’s birthparents. The same thing could have happened to them. She felt another pain. “We need to hurry.”

Mikey honked the horn to get the animals attention. “What’s wrong with that crazy deer!” He blew the horn again.

“Maybe it’s blind and deaf.”

He started to slowly move forward and the animal darted back into the woods and they continued on his way. A little further on they came upon a man on the side of the road waving his arms over his head frantically. Mikey stopped and rolled down his window.

“Thank God you stopped,” said the man with a sigh. “There’s an oil spill just ahead. My buddy and I hit it just a few minutes ago and ended up in the ditch.”

“Is anyone hurt?” Mikey asked concerned.

“Luckily no,” he replied. “I’ve already called the authorities and they’re on their way. It looks like an oil truck had a leak or something. We didn’t want anyone else to hit it, so we’re at opposite ends of this road flagging down people to warn them to go slow until help comes. There are a lot of trees along the ditch. It was just lucky we didn’t hit one. We could have been killed.”

Mikey thanked the man and Kit quickly called Mary Jo to warn her as they continued on their way. They saw the oil slick and slowly swerved around it. They also saw the man’s car in the ditch. It had missed a tree by only a few feet. Neither wanted to say it, but both were thinking that if it hadn’t been for that deer, it could have been them in the ditch.

They arrived at the hospital none too soon. Kit delivered their little girl an hour later. When Mikey’s brothers arrived with their families, he

announced that they'd decided to name their child Angel. They told everyone about the incident on the road and figured it was an angel that was watching over their child. Mary Jo was proud and pleased. Her archangel had a little angel of his own.

Debbie and Richard Smith had just left the hospital after visiting newest member of their family.

"You're very quiet," Richard said to his wife as they drove.

"Just musing," Debbie replied. "It was a deer that was responsible for taking the boys' parents. Now it seems, a deer also saved one of their sons from their same fate." She hesitated a moment then added, "Coincident you think?"

He smiled and took her hand. "God only knows."