

GIRLS' NIGHT OUT

Their daughters brought them together over a Kindergarten bake sale. Lane wasn't the volunteering kind, yet she'd offered to help. She had only the one child, and thought her best effort should always be made. Her goodwill didn't extend to baking, and the cupcakes she brought and laid out were store-bought.

Lane's new friend, Ginny, also had only one child. She belonged to a core group of women who hovered around the school, tutoring in classrooms, and serving as playground monitors. She was fluent in their language, which centered on their children, and how to keep them safe from sexual predators. Within earshot of their own sons and daughters, they talked about a girls' basketball coach across the water who had an affair with a sixteen-year-old. Then there was that woman who seduced a sixth-grade boy and had his baby. Lane didn't mind a certain amount of chatter, and the thrill of imagining such crimes, but it was overdone, and inaccurate, furthermore. Not all crimes against children were of a sexual nature.

At the age of five, Lane was abducted by her biological father and taken across the country in a pickup truck. Her mother was pregnant at the time with another man's child. The other man sometimes lived with Lane and her mother, and usually didn't. The story Lane was told was that her mother knew she was a poor parent, but couldn't make up her mind to let Lane's father have custody, so he had to steal her away. That wasn't true. Lane's mother was fine with letting Lane go, especially because money was involved, years of payments from Lane's father to her mother after Lane left.

When Lane turned eighteen, her father told her the truth. She was stunned. Her memories of her mother were dim, but still didn't sketch out a woman who'd sell her own child. He said it

Commented [HS1]: QA

I think a stronger pause is needed here to avoid confusion that this is an aside rather than the beginning of a new independent sentence. Eg. ...—and the thrill of imagining such crimes—...

You could also have it read ... amount of chatter or the thrill of imagining such crimes, but ... However, I think that may change the flow you were trying to create.

was up to Lane whether or not to seek out her mother after all this time. Lane gave it due consideration. She decided not to seek her out.

Lane's daughter was small for her age, with expressive brown eyes and a sharp tongue. Lane supposed she learned that from her. Lane was often short-tempered, particularly with her husband, who was sloppy and unconcerned with the necessities of running a household. Lane worked for a psychology practice. She handled insurance billing and claims. Her office was in the back, so she didn't often see the patients come and go. Sometimes she ran into them in the elevator. After meeting Ginny, and hearing all the talk of pederasts, Lane couldn't help wondering if someone she stood next to was guilty of that, or something equally unsavory. She didn't think so, though. They were probably just ordinary unhappy people who didn't know how to swallow the fact that life had fucked them up. Of course, any of the psychologists she billed for would say that the world was seldom at fault. It was just that some of us lacked the means to cope successfully.

Ginny's daughter was tall and lean. She was also a star student, and the most popular girl in the class. At the bake sale, she positioned herself squarely behind the table and directed customers toward the goods she was certain they'd like best. One woman was told to buy the brownies. The man next to her looked like he'd enjoy chocolate cupcakes with vanilla frosting. Ginny stood off to one side and chuckled at her daughter's efficiency. Lane didn't. Lane's daughter was supposed to assist in the selling, and had been summarily pushed out. She went to the playground in the back of the school, and swung slowly and methodically, back and forth, with a fierce expression. Lane's heart went out to her. At home, later that day, after Ginny had called to congratulate them both on how well the bake sale had gone, Lane sat with her daughter and told her that the world had two kinds of people in it: —those who were aware of others, and

Commented [HS2]: QA
This word is used for a very specific type of pedophile. Is that truly what you meant, or are you referring to pedophiles in general here?

those who weren't. The ones who were aware were charged with the burden of looking the other way when those who were clueless did stupid shit. She used those very words, though she forbade her daughter to ever repeat them. Her daughter nodded solemnly. Then she asked why she couldn't just kick the crap out of Ginny's daughter; instead,

Commented [HS3]: I smiled

Commented [HS4]: I laughed

“More trouble than it's worth,” Lane said, and put her daughter to bed.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.5"

*

Lane pursued the friendship with Ginny because she was lonely. Her husband traveled all the time on business. He was a software consultant, and spent a lot of time in the Bay Area. They lived in Seattle, where Lane's husband had gone to school. Lane didn't see why they didn't move back to California, so her husband could be closer to his work, but he wouldn't hear of it. He felt Seattle was more wholesome, somehow, and a better place to raise a child. It put a wedge between them, which Lane fretted over more and more.