

December 25, 2006

Dear Diary,

Today is Christmas and you, my new diary, are a gift from Uncle Daryl. Generally speaking, Uncle Daryl and I don't get along and honestly, I was ready to hate whatever gift he gave me for Christmas, but now that I have you, I am going to record all of my secret thoughts on your pages.

I will think of you, dear diary, as my closest friend—someone I can tell my innermost thoughts to, only I had better find a good hiding place for you if my secrets are to remain a secret. There are a lot of nosy people around here, and there might be some things that I write on your pages that I would not want anyone else to know about. And maybe you, dear diary, will become famous one day like Ann Franklin's diary. Ann Franklin was a teenage girl like me who kept a diary. I think she lived in Poland or Switzerland. Anyway, she was sent to a concentration camp and her diary was published after she died and now she is famous even though she is dead. Maybe you, dear diary, will make me famous, too. It could happen.

If we are going to be friends, dear diary, you need to know all about me. Where do I begin? My name is Cassandra Lee Chumbley. Everyone calls me Cassie. I am almost fourteen-years-old and a seventh-grader at Calloway Middle School. My mom is dead. Her name was Donna Lynn Chumbley. I was just a kid when she died, so I don't remember a whole lot about her, but everyone swears that I look just like her. Granny, who is really my great-grandmother, sometimes gets confused and calls me

Donna instead of Cassie. Granny and my mom were really close. I suppose I remind Granny of my mom. I have learned that looking like my mother keeps Granny from going totally and completely ballistic when I do something that riles her.

I live with Granny and my Uncle Daryl. Uncle Daryl and I don't always get along with each other. When he isn't working, he sulks in his bedroom with a bottle of whiskey. He almost never leaves the trailer and he doesn't have any friends. The trailer belongs to Granny, but when Granny dies, Uncle Daryl will inherit all of Granny's possessions. Our trailer has just two bedrooms. Uncle Daryl occupies one of the bedrooms while Granny sleeps in the other. I don't have a bedroom, so I sleep on the sofa in the living room. I don't mind sleeping on the sofa. Granny and Uncle Daryl go to bed early, so I have the living room and the television and the game box to myself.

I have been known to slip out at night. I almost never get caught running around the trailer court after dark. Granny is a sound sleeper. Once her head hits the pillow, she is out of it until the sun comes up. From time to time, Uncle Daryl catches me slipping out the door at night, but he is usually too drunk to care or too drunk to remember the following morning. Uncle Daryl and I are always butting heads, but I know how to handle him.

We live in the Misty Breeze Trailer Court on Pisgah Pike in Calloway County. Ours is the fourth trailer to the right. Last year, Uncle Daryl gave the trailer a fresh coat of paint and Granny has a green thumb, so there are lots of flowers and the place looks pretty good.

Shortly after my mom's funeral, I moved south to live with my grandmother Nana, Grandpa Dewey, and their son Alfonso. Technically, Alfonso is my uncle, but I am six weeks older than him. I think it is kind of funny that I am older than one of my uncles. Alfonso calls me his "sexy niece." Anyway, right after Mom died, I went down to Mississippi to stay with Nana, Grandpa Dewey, and Alfonso. Alfonso and I got along really well, and Grandpa Dewey and I were pretty close, too, but Nana and I had plenty of run-ins. She brought out the worst in me and I suppose I brought out the worst in her. Nana once threw a lamp at me.

Nana was always accusing me of one thing or another. I won't say that I was a perfect angel while living under her roof, but I got blamed for a whole lot of stuff that I didn't do. She thought Alfonso and I spent too much time together. I won't deny that Alfonso and I were about as close as can be, but so what? Alfonso and I are about the same age and we have a lot in common. Technically, he is my uncle, but I tend to see him more as a really, really close and intimate friend.

Alfonso and Grandpa Dewey (who is really my step-grandfather) cried when Nana put me on a bus back to Kentucky, but Nana accused me of being "full of the devil" and insisted my leaving was in everyone's best interest. While Nana wasn't looking, Grandpa Dewey slipped a fifty dollar bill into my hand and told me that he loved me, but Nana had threatened to divorce him if I didn't leave and his hands were tied and there was nothing else he could do. Anyway, the long bus ride brought me back to Kentucky and I moved in with Granny and Uncle Daryl.

Uncle Daryl is a diesel mechanic. He works on school buses. He was married a long time ago. I am not sure what happened to his wife. I think she left him for someone else. I can't say that I blame her. Uncle Daryl is always in a rotten mood. He hardly says a word. He just sort of stares at people and broods. What people tend to notice about Uncle Daryl is his big head. He has a mammoth-size head. And his big head is more square than round. When Granny is annoyed with him, she calls him "Mr. Blockhead." If ever someone deserved the name "Mr. Blockhead," it is my Uncle Daryl. Deep down, Uncle Daryl hates me, but that's okay, because I know how to handle him. And he was decent enough to give me this beautiful diary for Christmas. I will cherish you forever, dear diary, even though you were bought and paid for by Uncle Daryl.

You may be wondering what else I got for Christmas.

Granny gave me a deluxe nail set, a new pair of boots, two sweaters, and a ten carrot gold ring (not gold plated).

Nana and Grandpa Dewey sent me a jigsaw puzzle, a purse, and a pair of earrings.

Alfonso sent me a really cute little lacy bra and matching panties set. The bra and the panties are pink and have tiny roses embroidered on them.

The Calloway County Fire Department dropped off a reconditioned bicycle. My old bike was stolen last summer. This year, the Calloway County Fire

Department refurbished nearly fifty used and discarded bicycles for needy kids.

Mrs. Trumbo, the lady who lives across the street, gave me a carton of Marlboro cigarettes.

Lila Jane, my best friend, gave me a stuffed walrus. I am going to name him Wally. He's so cute.

Jody Tyler, Lila Jane's twin brother, gave me a Kenny Chesney CD. I love Kenny Chesney. Secretly tucked inside the sleeve of the CD was a nudie of Jody taken with a Polaroid. On the back of the pic, he wrote, "What R U Waiting 4?"

Percy Bailey, my "sometimes" boyfriend, bought me a white tank top with a logo that reads "Naughty but Nice!"

Hobart Willoughby, another "sometimes" boyfriend, bought me a bottle of perfume and a tee-shirt with a Harley Davidson motorcycle on the back of the shirt.

Belinda Horn, Hobart Willoughby's half-sister, gave me some stickers and a box of chocolates.

Tabatha Gabbard, my second-best friend who lives in the same trailer park, gave me a ten-dollar McDonald's gift certificate.

Tina Dutton, who is my best friend when Lila Jane and I are not speaking, did not give me anything for Christmas because we got into a fight at school and both of us were expelled for three days. I don't expect us to stay mad forever, but for now, I hate her guts.

Lyle Parmley, another "sometimes" boyfriend, gave me a pair of bowling shoes. I am pretty sure he swiped these from the Calloway Family Fun Center on Nicholas Township Road. Lyle should know that my feet won't fit in a size 6 bowling shoe. I wear a size 7. When I told Granny that Lyle had stolen the wrong size shoes, she told me not to complain and reminded me that it is the thought, not the gift, that really counts.

It is time that I put you away, dear diary. More people keep stopping by and Granny needs me to help her set the table. Granny baked a ham and it smells so good.

I love you, dear diary!

Cassie

PS When no one was looking, Uncle Daryl poured a shot of whiskey into my Coke and said, "Merry Christmas, kiddo! Have a ball, but you had better not let Mama smell booze on your breath." In the spirit of Christmas, I gave Uncle Daryl a half pack of cigarettes. We smoke the same brand.

December 26, 2006

Dear Diary,

Guess who stopped by for a surprise visit? Give up? Beau Kerry and his girlfriend showed up at our door right after lunch. I can tell you are confused, dear diary. What's that? You don't know who Beau Kerry is? I will let you in on a secret, dear diary. I'm not sure who Beau Kerry is either. What I mean is I know who he is, but I don't really know who he is, if this makes any sense.

Beau Kerry was one of my mom's boyfriends. I think they lived together for about a year. After they split up, Beau Kerry was arrested on drug charges. He was sent to prison. I remember Mom and me visiting him in prison. The three of us sat around a metal table in the visitor's room. I wanted to get up and walk around, but Mom said I had to stay put. One of the prison guards gave me a cherry lollipop and he let me say "testing one, two, three" in his walkie-talkie.

Anyway, when I opened the door, there stood Beau Kerry and his girlfriend with a bunch of packages. He apologized saying, "I'm sorry to be a day late with your gifts, but we spent Christmas with Suzie's family in Indianapolis. Cassie, you know that I would never forget you at Christmas." Anyway, he gave me a brand-new winter coat with a fur collar, a portable CD player with an AM/FM radio, an oil painting set, a pair of Sevens jeans, and a one hundred dollar U.S. savings bond for my college fund.

Beau Kerry's girlfriend Suzie gave me a long, hard look and said, "Damn, that girl's the spitting image of you. She has your eyes, baby."

I could tell Beau Kerry was annoyed, but he didn't say anything.

I know what you're thinking, dear diary. You are wondering if Beau Kerry is my biological dad. Maybe he is, and maybe he isn't, but if you want my honest opinion, I don't think that he is. For a time, Mom insisted that Beau Kerry was my father, but then she changed her mind and said Scottie Gilmore was my dad. After Scottie Gilmore was killed in a motorcycle accident, she told me that Josh Barnes was my real father. Deep down, I wonder if Mom knew who my father really is.

Before he and Suzie said their goodbyes, Beau Kerry gave me a hug and said, "You turn fourteen in a couple of weeks, right? Where does the time go? I swear, it seems like yesterday when Donna brought you home from the hospital. Anyway, I won't forget your birthday, sweetheart. You can count on that."

After Beau Kerry and his girlfriend left, Granny looked at the artist set and said, "If you make a mess with that damn paint, I swear to God I will blister your bottom."

December 27, 2006

Dear Diary,

Guess what? I've got a job! And I'm going to make \$20 per night. Mrs. Holcomb needs me to look after her, and she's willing to pay me.

I almost forgot, dear diary, that you don't know who Mrs. Holcomb is. Mrs. Holcomb is the old lady who lives in the last trailer on the opposite side of the road. She owns that brown and white doublewide that has the old fishing boat parked in the side yard. Anyway, Mrs. Holcomb had emergency gall blabber surgery on Christmas day and she's in a lot of pain, so I am going to stay with her for the next two or three nights. I'm supposed to help her when she goes to the bathroom and I'm to bring her food when she's hungry. For this, I get \$20 per night and if she needs me three nights, I'll walk away with \$60 cash.

Since Mrs. Holcomb is on oxygen, I have to smoke my cigarettes outside, but for \$60, I would be willing to smoke on top of a telephone pole. And I get to watch whatever I want on TV and I can have friends over, too, as long as we don't make too much noise. Lila Jane said she would drop by for a visit this evening. We might munch on popcorn and watch scary movies. I don't like watching scary movies by myself.

Lila Jane also says she has some juicy gossip to share with me. I think I already know what this "big news" is all about.

I wouldn't be surprised if her brother Jody Tyler dropped by, too. Jody Tyler has a crush on me. Last week, Jody Tyler was giving me a hard time. He was teasing me about wearing padded bras. I told him I didn't wear padded bras, but he said he wouldn't believe me unless I lifted my sweater and showed him.

December 28, 2006

Dear Diary,

Today, I am \$20 richer, thanks to Mrs. Holcomb. I spent the night at her place while she recovers from surgery. I could tell she was in a whole lot of pain from the operation. She's weak and needs a walker to move about and once or twice, I had to steady her from falling. She said I was a "godsend." I took good care of her. When she was hungry, I prepared a fried bologna sandwich and when I got bored watching TV, I made myself useful by running the vacuum and tidying up in the kitchen. I wasn't hired to be a housekeeper, but I was glad to help out and go the extra mile. I'm a good person.

Mrs. Holcomb was sound asleep by 8 PM. Lila Jane and I popped some corn and watched "The Texas Chainsaw Mascara." Even though I have seen this movie a hundred times, there is that one scene that makes me want to pee all over myself.

Lila Jane was poking around this old cabinet in the living room and found a pair of opal earrings. If Mrs. Holcomb discovers the earrings missing, I hope she doesn't blame me. I don't want to snitch on Lila Jane, but I don't want to be accused of doing something that I didn't do. What Lila Jane does is her own business and, besides, who am I to judge? This is between her and God.

I was kind of hoping Lila Jane's twin brother Jody Tyler would stop by last night, but she said her brother was hanging out with some friends over in Tyner's Dump. I think Jody Tyler has a crush on me. I may have a crush on him, too. I've let him kiss me a couple of times, but we've never gone farther than that. Oh, he once pinched my butt in science class after Mr. Riggs stepped out of the room.

I've thought about going out with Jody Tyler, but dating my best friend's brother makes things kind of complicated. I mean, if Lila Jane and I have an argument, does this mean I can't talk to her brother? Or if I am dating Jody Tyler and we have an argument, does this mean I can't talk to Lila Jane? And if Jody Tyler and Lila Jane get into an argument, whose side do I take? And if Jody Tyler and I are arguing, whose side is Lila Jane supposed to be on?

Granny has warned me about Jody Tyler. She swears he is nothing but trouble. She must have heard about the group of boys who beat up the manager at the Seven Eleven. It was never proven that Jody Tyler was one of the boys involved in the fight, but Granny was ready to accuse him all the same simply because she doesn't like him. Anyway, Jody Tyler told

me that he never actually punched the manager with his fists, but he did shove the man once or twice. Well, he probably shouldn't have shoved the Seven Eleven manager, but it's not like he hit the man with clinched fists. Shoving and hitting are two different things.

Okay, dear diary, it is time for me to go.

Love you!

Cassie

December 29, 2006

Dear Diary,

I am not going to take all of the blame for the fire. For one thing, adults are responsible for keeping their liquor locked away when teenagers are around. Mrs. Holcomb should have kept that bottle of Jack Daniels in a locked cabinet or hidden in some out of the way place, but no, she left the bottle in the pantry right next to the corn flakes. I am asking you, dear diary, if you were an adult and you had teenagers visiting your home, would you leave your liquor out in the open? Everyone knows liquor is one of the biggest temptations in the whole world. I mean, what teenager is going to

ignore a bottle of Jack Daniels that's been left out in plain sight of everyone?

Lila Jane and I mixed the Jack Daniels with orange juice and made ourselves a couple of screwdrivers and then we played Yahtzee. Around 10 PM, Jody Tyler dropped by. I made him a screwdriver and he played Yahtzee with Lila Jane and me. During the middle of our second game, Jody Tyler said he was hungry, so he sent me to the kitchen to make him a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich. Lila Jane said a BLT sounded good to her, too, and I was kind of hungry myself. So I fried up a big batch of bacon, toasted some bread, and sliced up lettuce and a tomato. I also opened a bag of barbeque potato chips.

Anyway, I thought I had turned off the oven burner, but I must have left the burner on, because while we were eating our BLT sandwiches, smoke came pouring out of the kitchen. The skillet had caught fire. The fire chief called it a grease fire. Thankfully, the damage is mainly in the kitchen area, but because of the smoke, Mrs. Holcomb, who is recovering from surgery, can't stay in the trailer until all of the repairs have been completed.

I was so afraid that Lila Jane, Jody Tyler, and I were going to jail. Thankfully, we weren't arrested, but the three of us have to go to court.

As you can imagine, Granny is absolutely furious with me. I think she wants to kick me out. If she decides to boot me out the door, I don't know where I will go. I don't want to end up in foster care. I might never see my friends again.

None of this would have happened if Mrs. Holcomb had done the right thing by keeping her liquor in a locked cabinet. When adults ignore their responsibilities, bad things are bound to happen.

January 2, 2007

Dear Diary,

So far, the new year has not been kind to me. After the fire in Mrs. Holcomb's trailer, I'm being severely punished. I've been grounded. I can't go outside. I can't visit my friends. I can't talk on the phone. Granny is treating me like a prisoner on death row, and this is so unfair.

Things keep getting worse for me. I've been visited twice by the county fire marshal. Everyone is saying Mrs. Holcomb has hired an attorney who plans to sue Granny for a million dollars.

Granny keeps saying that she's too old to raise a teenager. She wants to put me up for adoption.

Except for you, dear diary, no one is interested in hearing my side of the story. First of all, the fire was an accident. It is not like I intentionally set out to burn Mrs. Holcomb's trailer to the ground. I'm not that kind of girl.

And who put the bottle of Jack Daniels out for the teenagers to find? Mrs. Holcomb, that's who. And who was demanding BLT sandwiches in the middle of the night? Lila Jane and Jody Tyler, that's who. My problem is I let people order me about like I am a slave or something. I really and truly think I am too nice for my own good. One of these days, I am going to put my foot down and refuse to let others push me around.

And if Mrs. Holcomb sues Granny for a million dollars, I am going to suggest that Granny sues Mrs. Holcomb for leaving a bottle of whiskey out for the teenagers to discover. According to the law, which is something I know about, Mrs. Holcomb is guilty of conspiracy to the delinquency of a miner. Mrs. Holcomb should be in jail. As I see it, I am the victim in all this.

Oh, Mrs. Holcomb owes me \$20. Just because her trailer caught fire doesn't mean that I don't get paid for doing my job that night. If I had not been on duty, who would have called 911 when the fire broke out? I earned that money, but knowing my luck, Mrs. Holcomb won't pay me.

Anyway, I love you, dear diary. Maybe things will get better. They couldn't get any worse.

Cassie

January 8, 2007

Dear Diary,

I know it has been a few days since my last entry, but so much has been going on.

First of all, I am currently staying with Hester Platt. For how long, I don't know. This is like a trial adoption. Hester is the song leader at Grace Pentecostal Church. The church is right around the corner where Old Simmons Road runs into Pisgah Pike. A couple of times a month, a bunch of us kids who live in the trailer court ride the church van to Grace Pentecostal for their youth outreach program. They serve pizza and hotdogs and we play games and then there's a Bible study and some singing. It's okay. It's something to do.

Hester said she would like to take me "under her wing" and raise me up the right way. She said Granny tries her best, but she is too old to raise a teenager. Granny may be old, but Hester is kind of old, too, though not as old as Granny. I don't know Hester's exact age, but she has a grown son who lives in Louisville. Hester is a widow. Her husband died the same year that my mom died. Anyway, Hester is a retired bookkeeper with the Calloway County Rural Electric Co-Op. She owns a three-bedroom house which means that as long as I stay with her, I have a bedroom of my own.

Hester is a good housekeeper. Her place is spotless. And she's a good cook, too. Hester goes out of her way to make dishes that I like. And she has a pickup truck that is practically brand new. For now, she insists on driving me to and from school, but I am hoping she'll let me ride the school bus so that I can hang out with my friends before and after classes.

Hester knows that I smoke, but she wants me to think about quitting. Until then, I have to smoke outside. Hester doesn't allow smoking inside the house. Last night, I smoked a cigarette in my bedroom because I didn't feel like standing outside in the snow. While Hester wasn't looking, I flushed the cigarette butt down the toilet and sprayed some perfume to kill the cigarette odor. Normally, I am pretty good about following rules and doing as I am told, but it was cold last night and I was afraid I might get numonia if I smoked outside. Why should I take chances with my health?

Like I said, I have my own bedroom (no more sleeping on Granny's living room sofa), and the food is good, but it is kind of quiet around here and I miss my friends. And Hester is strict when it comes to me doing my homework. She looks over every assignment and makes me correct all the mistakes that I make. As Granny never went beyond the third grade, she has always been good about keeping her nose out of my school assignments. I know Hester means well, but I wish she was more like Granny in that respect.

Now that I am staying with Hester, Granny telephones me every night. I think she misses me. Sometimes, she gets confused and calls me Donna, which was my mother's name. Granny and my mom were really close.

They had a special bond, so I don't mind when she calls me Donna. I've noticed that Granny treats me better when she confuses me with my dead mom.

I know that Hester is trying her best to make me comfortable, but I'd rather be back with my friends in the trailer court. And Granny isn't nearly as strict as Hester. Hester puts time limits on my telephone calls and she's fussy about what I watch on TV. And Hester has blocked some of my favorite TV channels. I know that she means well, but I am almost fourteen and old enough to make my own decisions.

Anyway, Hester says I can spend this weekend with Granny if I behave myself and turn in all of my school assignments.

That's all for now, dear diary.

Love you!

Cassie

January 9, 2007

Dear Diary,

Today at school, Jody Tyler asked me to go out with him. He said I was the only girl for him. I like Jody Tyler, but I am not sure that I am ready to comment to him. For one thing, Granny would be furious with me, because she hates Jody Tyler's guts. She says he's a hoodlum. About a year ago, Granny dreamed that Jody Tyler had been sentenced to death in the electric chair. According to her dream, Jody Tyler had shot and killed a police officer. Granny said he screamed at the top of his lungs when the warden pulled the switch. That dream really shook her up. She said it was like it really happened. When Granny told me about the dream, she warned me to stay away from Jody Tyler or the same might happen to me. I suppose dreams can be a sign from God and Granny is very wise and very spiritual, but then again, people are always saying bad things about Jody Tyler. He isn't half as bad as people make him out to be.

I will let you in on a secret, dear diary. I kind of like Jody Tyler and I wouldn't mind being his girlfriend, but I have my eye on another boy. I don't know his name, but he lives next door to Hester. As it happens, his bedroom window faces my bedroom window. Last night, he had his bedroom window blinds open, and I was able to see him sitting on his bed playing a guitar. He wasn't wearing a shirt. I peeped around the curtains to get a better look, but I was careful that he couldn't see me.

During breakfast, I casually mentioned the boy next door to Hester. I was hoping to learn something about him, but Hester said the family had only recently moved into the house, and she had not yet introduced herself to her new neighbors. I then casually mentioned that she might invite the new neighbors over for a little get-together. Hester said that sounded like a neighborly thing to do and that she would give this some thought.

He looks to be about sixteen, so I am pretty sure he goes to the high school. This would explain why I haven't seen him in any of my classes. I'm still in middle school. I should be in the eighth grade instead of the seventh grade, but I was held back a year right after Mom died. No, that's not totally accurate. I was held back a grade the year before she died. I remember my mom having to appear in court because the school filed truancy charges against her. Mom had trouble getting me to and from school. She had a lot going on in her life at the time and, frankly, I think everything was just too much for her. Anyway, I was held back, which explains why I am in the seventh grade instead of the eighth grade.

Like I said, Jody Tyler wants to go out with me and I am tempted, but I would like to know more about the boy who lives next door.

Yesterday morning, Alyson Brown's puppy was hit by a car on Pisgah Pike. Poor Alyson. She got the puppy for Christmas.

It's almost time for dinner. I smell lasagna in the oven. Yum!

Love you, dear diary!

Cassie

January 10, 2007

Dear Diary,

I wish I could meet the boy who lives next to Hester. I've been thinking about him. I can't seem to get him out of my mind.

Jody Tyler is putting pressure on me to go out with him. Today, he cornered me in the school cafeteria and said he needed my answer right away. I told Jody Tyler that I liked him, but I am not ready to commit to a relationship.

On a scale of 1 to 10, Jody Tyler is a 7 or maybe an 8, but the boy who lives next to Hester is a solid 10. Why should I settle for a 7 or an 8 if I can get my hooks in a 10? On the other hand, a 7 or an 8 is better than a 0, and right now, I don't have a steady boyfriend.

What would you do, dear diary? Jody Tyler has given me a deadline. Today is Wednesday. I have until the end of the week to give him a firm "yes" or "no" answer. If I say no and refuse to date him, he is going to ask either Belinda Horn or Mandy Drake to go with him. But if I say yes and agree to date Jody Tyler, my chances of dating the cute boy next door

would go down the drain. Tell me, dear diary, why is love so complicated? Maybe I should become a nun and forget about men.

Love you, dear diary!

Cassie

January 12, 2007

Dear Diary,

Have I got news for you! Big news! Last night, I met the cute guy who lives next door. His name is Roland Wick. He's sixteen and an eleventh grader at Calloway High. And guess what? He has a driver's license and he owns his own car. He also has a job at McDonalds. And there's more. Roland sings and plays guitar in a country rock band called "Snakeskin Cowboys."

Do you remember me telling you that he was a solid 10? Let me take that back. Roland, whose stage name is "Axe Man" isn't a 10. He's a 20. He's a 50. He's affinity. He's the best looking boy in the county. And I think he likes me, too.

So let me tell you how I arranged to meet him. Last night, I told Hester that I was craving cinnamon toast. Hester gave me permission to use the

kitchen, and said I would find the cinnamon in the pantry. What Hester did not know is that I had intentionally hidden the container of cinnamon under my pillow. Anyway, I rummaged around the pantry like I was looking for it, and then I called out, "I can't find the cinnamon, Hester, and I am like really craving cinnamon toast."

Hester poked around the pantry a minute or so before saying, "This is certainly curious. I was pretty sure I had a box of ground cinnamon, but for the life of me, I don't see it. I'm sorry that we're out of cinnamon, but I'll be sure to pick some up the next time I go to the market."

Without saying a word, I slipped out, walked next door, and introduced myself to the lady of the house. When she opened the door, I said, "Hi, my name is Cassie Chumbley and I'm your neighbor. I'm really sorry to bother you, but could I trouble you for some cinnamon? I am making cinnamon toast, but it's kind of hard to make cinnamon toast without cinnamon."

She invited me in and said, "It's nice to meet you, Cassie. My name is Ellen Wick and you are in luck, because I happen to have plenty of cinnamon."

Looking around, I said, "You have a very nice home. I hope you don't think that I am being nosey, but do you live alone or do you have a family?"

"My husband works for the highway department and I have a teenage son named Roland. I'm surprised you haven't met him. He's a junior at Calloway High and is a very popular young man."

“I’m still in middle school, ma’am.” As I didn’t want her to think I was stupid, I added, “I got held back a year when my mom died. Her death really shook me up, so I had to repeat a grade.”

Mrs. Wick gave me a sad look and said, “Oh, you poor lamb.”

“It’s okay,” I said. “The Bible says God won’t give us more burdens than we can bear. Anyway, I’m staying with Hester Platt who lives next door. She is a nice lady and is talking about adopting me, so maybe my life will have a happy ending. I can only hope, Mrs. Wick.”

She touched my cheek with the back of her hand and said, “You are such an incredibly sweet little girl. How would you like to meet my husband and son? Why not join us for dinner? Do you like fried chicken? And warm cherry cobbler with vanilla ice cream?”

“I would be honored to join your family for dinner,” I said.

“Don’t come alone. Invite your guardian, what’s her name—Hester? Invite Hester to join us.”

Having Hester tagging along and getting in my way was the last thing I wanted, so I told her Hester had made other plans, but I would be delighted to join them for dinner.

After dinner, Roland and I sat in the living room and talked until almost 9 PM. I think we really connected. He showed me his new Fender Telecaster guitar and sang a couple of Travis Tritt tunes. Roland is a really good singer. I didn't dare tell him I am only thirteen. I told Roland I would be fifteen on my next birthday on January 21. I didn't consider this a lie. I am very mature for my age.

I know this is kind of sudden and all, but I think I am already in love with Roland. He's the best. He's handsome and he's talented and he has a job and a car and everything. Anyway, I telephoned Jody Tyler when I got home and I gave it to him straight. "You can have your bad news now, or you can have it later. Which do you prefer?"

"What the hell are you talking about, girl?" he asked.

"I don't think you and I will be dating. I've met someone else."

"Who's that?" he asked.

"That's for me to know, and you to find out."

"Don't play games with me, Cassie. Are you seeing Lyle Parmley?"

"No, I am not seeing Lyle Parmley."

"Who is it, then? Percy Bailey? Hobart Willoughby?"

“You don’t know him,” I said. “He’s in high school. And he has a job and a car, if you must know. Middle school boys are too immature for me.”

Jody Tyler called me a dirty whore and said a few other hateful things before hanging up. Granny is right. Jody Tyler is trash. He’ll probably fry in the electric chair just like Granny predicted.

January 13, 2007

Dear Diary,

Damn! Damn! Damn! It is Saturday morning and I promised to spend the weekend with Granny, but I made that promise before meeting Roland. Now that I’ve met the super goodlooking boy next door, I’d much rather stay with Hester. If I hang around here, I might run into Roland, but if I spend the weekend at the trailer court, I won’t have an opportunity to see the man that I love.

I’ve got to go, dear diary. I need to pack a few belongings before Hester drives me to the trailer court.

Damn! Damn! Damn! I want to stay close to Roland. On the plus side, if I happen to run into Jody Tyler this weekend, he’s going to hear all about my new boyfriend who has a job, a car, and plays in a band.

Love you, dear diary!

Cassie

January 16. 2007

Dear Diary,

So much has been going on in my life, and I hardly know where to begin. Let me first burn a cigarette while I collect my thoughts and then I will tell you all about my adventures.

Okay, I'm back! I spent Saturday, Sunday, and most of Monday with Granny and Uncle Daryl at the trailer park. Since Monday was Martin Luther King Day, there was no school. I wish every weekend was a three day weekend.

After the fire in Mrs. Holcomb's trailer (which I argue is not my fault), Granny said she was too old to raise a teenager. She talked about sending me to foster care. Hester Platt, who is the song leader at my church, offered to take me in on a trial basis. Hester is nice and her house is nice, but she has more rules than I care to follow. She puts limits on my telephone time and she makes me finish my homework before watching

TV. Living with Hester is kind of boring. You see, all of my friends live on Pisgah Pike.

Anyway, Granny started missing me the very first day I moved in with Hester. She telephoned me twice the first night I was gone. Granny apologized again and again saying, "I love you Donna, but I am too old to bring up a teenager. If I were younger, I'd raise you as my own, but I'm almost seventy years old and I can't keep up with you anymore. It's not that I don't love you, Donna, but I'm all tuckered out. You understand, don't you, Cassie? I'm old. I don't have any business trying to raise an active teenager."

I tried making her feel better. "I know you did your best, Granny, and I love you, too. And don't worry. Hester is good to me."

Granny insisted that I spend the three day weekend with her and Uncle Daryl. At first, I was glad, because this meant I could hang out with Lila Jane and my other friends in the trailer park, but then, I met Roland Wick, the good-looking boy next door, and everything changed. I mean everything.

They say nobody is perfect, but Roland Wick is perfect. He is the handsomest boy I've ever seen. He has wavy blonde hair and blue eyes and he's tall and muscular. Roland sings and plays guitar in a band and he has his own car and he has a job at McDonalds. Roland is nothing, and I mean nothing, like the gross, stupid, ignorant middle school boys like Jody Tyler and Lyle Parmley. Roland is a real man.

Well, once I met the perfect boy who lives next door, I thought it would be best to hang out at Hester's place instead of visiting Granny. I was pretty sure I would see Roland over the weekend, but Granny insisted I spend the weekend with her.

Granny made a big pot of chili and she bought me a whole carton of Marlboros and a brand-new cigarette lighter that is guaranteed to light a thousand cigarettes or your money back.

And though I couldn't keep my mind off of Roland Wick, it was good to hang out with Lila Jane. Since Granny had given me some folding money, I treated Lila Jane to a large hot chocolate at the Seven Eleven down the road from the trailer court.

Since it was like freezing cold, we decided to hang out at her place for a spell. Do you remember me telling you about the little lacy bra and panties I got as a Christmas present from Alfonzo? Anyway, Alfonso, who calls me his "sexy niece," insisted on a photo of me wearing nothing but the bra and panties, so I posed while Lila Jane snapped a picture with her Polaroid. Maybe I shouldn't have agreed, but I let her take a second shot of me in the bra and panties for her twin brother, Jody Tyler. I want him to see what he can't have. Eat your heart out, Jody Tyler!

It is time for me to go, dear diary. Hester is taking me to Taco Bell.

Lots of love,

Cassie

January 18, 2007

Dear Diary,

As you know, dear diary, this Sunday will be my fourteenth birthday, but am I going to have a happy birthday? Probably not.

I had hoped to celebrate my fourteenth birthday at Hester's place. My plan was to invite Roland Wick, the love of my life, to my birthday dinner so that the two of us could get better acquainted, but Granny is insisting that I celebrate my birthday with her. She wants to throw me a party at her place. Granny said she would whip up fried porkchops smothered in milk gravy (one of my favorites) and bake a German chocolate cake (another of my favorites). She also said I could invite the kids in the trailer park to join in our celebration. I realize Granny is going through a lot of trouble for me, but I really wanted to spend my birthday at Hester's place so that I could invite Roland over to join the festivities. I have not seen my Roland even once since we met for the very first time last Thursday evening. A birthday party at Hester's place would give me an opportunity to have him over, but no! Granny is insisting that I celebrate my fourteenth birthday with her.

I know what you are thinking, dear diary. I can read you like a book. You are asking, "Why don't you invite Roland to your Granny's trailer on your

birthday? This would give you a chance to show off Roland to your family and friends while keeping Granny happy.”

This, dear diary, is exactly what I don’t want to happen. You know that I love Granny and I will never be able to repay her for all of her kindness, but Granny doesn’t always make a good first impression. She talks loud and when she’s mad, which is often enough, she cusses like a sailor. And many of Granny’s ways take some getting used to. When her nose is runny, which is often, she wipes the snot on her clothes if a box of tissue isn’t handy. I know this sounds gross, but I am used to it. Granny is Granny and I will always love her, but I wonder what Roland would think if he saw Granny blowing her snotty nose on her sleeve.

And I really don’t want Roland to meet the kids in the trailer park. I know what will happen. When my girlfriends are introduced to Roland, they will flirt with him from the moment he arrives until the time he leaves. I know these girls. I grew up with them. They are all barracudas who will be on their worst behavior, and I won’t see a minute’s peace.

And if Jody Tyler, Lyle, Hobart, and the other boys come to my birthday party, they will tell stories about me and do their best to make me look bad in front of Roland.

As you can see, dear diary, inviting Roland to my birthday party at Granny’s is not a good idea. And if Uncle Daryl, who likes to sit around in nothing but his boxers, insists on parking his big fat ass in the living room, I will die of shame. My friends are used to Uncle Daryl, but I don’t know how Roland

will take him. Without a shirt, Uncle Daryl looks just like a hairy ape. He is the hairiest man I've ever seen. Hair grows on his back and his shoulders and his chest and belly. He's gross. I don't want Roland to meet my disgusting uncle. Can you blame me?

Oh, another reason I can't invite Roland to my birthday party is everyone in the trailer court knows that I am turning fourteen, but I told Roland that I would be fifteen on my next birthday. I don't consider this a lie. I am very mature for my age. I am not your typical dumb kid. I've been around. I've seen something of this big old world.

Do you know what I want for my birthday, dear diary? I don't need a cake and I don't need presents. All I want for my birthday is to spend it with the man I plan to marry one day.

Love,

Cassie

PS You heard me right, dear diary. I am going on record right now by saying the day will come when I become Roland Wick's wife.

January 19, 2007

Dear Diary,

Are you ready for some big news? Hester has invited the Wick family over for dinner tomorrow night. This will be my pre-birthday birthday party celebration. I'm so excited! Hester says I can decorate and help prepare dinner. Roland will soon discover for himself that I know my way around the kitchen, and everyone agrees that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. I suppose Hester will do most of the cooking, but I won't mind taking some credit if this helps me score points with the love of my life and my future soulmate.

What should I wear? This is a good question. I thought about showing off my body in a slinky little halter top and short shorts, but Hester would probably object. And with snow on the ground, I suppose bare arms and legs might not be appropriate in January, so I will probably wear my fuzzy pink sweater and my new pair of Sevens. Thankfully, the Sevens show off my cute little butt. I'll make certain to do some strutting when Roland arrives.

I know what you are thinking, dear diary. You are thinking, "In matters of love and romance, Cassie knows all of the right moves." Indeed, I do!

Love,

Cassie

January 20, 2007

Dear Diary,

Damn! Damn! Damn! Why is life so cruel? Why am I being tormented?

The day started out well enough. We dusted furniture and vacuumed the rug. Everything was spotless. Next, Hester and I decorated the house with streamers and balloons. We made spaghetti, a salad, breadsticks, and a lemon chiffon cake with fifteen candles. Hester brought out her best china. She placed a "Happy Birthday" centerpiece on the dining room table. Everything looked very infestive.

Next, we went to work on me. I never looked so good. Hester helped me with my make-up and she styled my hair in a way that made me look very alluring. I am a knock-out in my Sevens jeans. They show off my cute little bottom. Jody Tyler once said, "Cassie, you've got the best damn-looking ass of all the girls in Calloway Middle School." And to top it all off, Hester gave me a spritz of real perfume. I couldn't help staring at myself in the full-length mirror and, dear diary, I liked what I saw. But will Roland like what he sees? That's the big question.

I kept watching the clock in eager participation. At 6 PM, the love of my life and his parents would arrive for my pre-birthday dinner. We would talk and

laugh and after dinner, Roland and I might slip off to ourselves while the grown-ups talk over coffee. If Roland wants to make out, I won't object. Alfonso showed me a kissing trick that drives the boys wild.

So what happened? Where is the smile on my lips? Where is the twinkle in my eyes? Why will I probably cry myself to sleep tonight?

At 6 PM, there was a knocking at the door. I had been waiting for this moment all afternoon. My prince had arrived, or so I thought, but when I opened the door, there stood Roland's mom and Roland's dad, but no Roland. As they passed through the door, Roland's mom said, "Our son won't be joining us. His boss asked him to cover for another employee who had called in sick. Roland sends his apologies, but it couldn't be helped."

I tried being cheerful throughout dinner, but inside, my heart was breaking.

The Bible says that God won't give us more trials and hardships than we can handle, but I feel like the Lord has pushed me to the limits. How much more heartache and disappointment can I bear?

I am going to smoke a cigarette and go to bed. And don't be surprised if, tomorrow morning, my pillow is soggy with tears.

Damn! Damn! Damn!

Cassie

PS Tomorrow is my fourteenth birthday, but do I feel like celebrating? No.

January 21, 2007

Dear Diary,

How about it, dear diary? Aren't you going to wish me a happy fourteenth birthday? What? You forgot all about my birthday? It slipped your mind? Don't worry, dear diary. I know you are only teasing. There's no way you would forget my birthday. So, dear diary, would you like to hear how I celebrated my big One Four?

Hester drove me to the trailer park around 11 AM. Granny, Uncle Daryl, Beau Kerry, Beau Kerry's girlfriend Suzie, Lila Jane, Mrs. Trumbo, and I had fried porkchops with milk gravy, a green bean casserole, cornbread, corn on the cob, and German chocolate cake. Everything tasted so good. Oh, do you want to hear something funny? Uncle Daryl showed up at the table without a shirt and Granny blew her top. "I don't mind seeing your hairy-ass self when no one else is around, but we have company, so put on a goddamn shirt."

That's not the only funny thing to happen. Beau Kerry told a joke about a gay guy getting his privates stuck in a vacuum cleaner, and Mrs. Trumbo laughed so hard, her dentures flew right out of her mouth and landed on the floor.

Birthdays mean gifts, and I did okay in the birthday present department:

Granny and Uncle Daryl gave me a gift basket filled with different kinds of make-up—you know, good stuff like foundation, eyeliners, blush, moisturizers, and mascara. The gift basket also contained these little sample bottles of cologne, assorted hair products, and a giant scented candle that smells like an ocean breeze—all girly, girly stuff, if you know what I mean.

Mrs. Trumbo gave me a carton of Marlboros.

Beau Kerry and Suzie gave me a fifty dollar bill and a stuffed panda bear.

Lila Jane gave me a jigsaw puzzle.

Nana, Grandpa Dewey, and Alfonso sent me a University of Kentucky sweatshirt. Go Wildcats!

At 4 PM, my other friends showed up for birthday cake, ice cream, and fruit punch. Thankfully, they arrived blaring gifts.

Jody Tyler gave me a Brad Paisley CD.

Tina Dutton and Tabatha Gabbard pooled their money to buy me a three volume set of R.L. Stine books. Let the spooky nightmares begin!

Percy Bailey bought me a pair of pink socks and a keyring.

Hobart Willoughby gave me a really cute pen with ink that smells like strawberries.

Belinda Horn, Hobart Willoughby's half-sister, gave me stickers and a box of chocolates. Didn't she give me stickers and chocolates for Christmas?

Mandy Drake gave me a Yahtzee game.

Speaking of Mandy Drake, she wouldn't leave Jody Tyler alone. What a flirt!

Hobart Willoughby complained when he found a gray hair in his slice of birthday cake.

When the toilet overflowed, Granny made Uncle Daryl mop up the mess. Someone had plugged up the plumbing with a tampon, and I think that someone was Belinda Horn.

After we finished off the cake and ice cream, Granny shooed us out of the trailer. I guess she was ready for some peace and quiet. Anyway, the weather was pretty warm for this time of year, so everyone except Jody Tyler headed for the Seven Eleven. Jody Tyler has been banned from Seven Eleven for a year, so he couldn't join us.

Granny warned me to be back at the trailer no later than 7 PM. Tomorrow is a school day and since I am spending the night here, I can ride the bus with all of my friends tomorrow morning. I like riding the school bus. The bus gives me a chance to hang out with my friends, but when I am staying with Hester, she takes me to and from school in her truck.

Well, it is 8 PM and Granny and Uncle Daryl are already in bed. I don't feel like watching TV, so I'm going to lay on the sofa and read one of my new R.L. Stine books before I nod off to sleep.

All in all, I had a pretty good birthday, but I would have preferred spending my special day with my special new boyfriend, but I suppose it wasn't meant to be. Anyway, I will be back at Hester's tomorrow, and one way or another, I am going to get Roland Wick's attention.

Love you bunches!

Cassie

PS This ink really does smell like strawberries!

January 22, 2007

Dear Diary,

Last night, I did something that I shouldn't have done.

Maybe I will feel like sharing the details later, but for now, I don't want to talk about it.

Love,

Cassie

PS Why do I listen to people who talk me into doing things that I don't want to do?

PS That's all for now, but I've got a lot more to say in future episodes!