

# **THE BECOMING**

**Brooke Gantt**

# The Becoming

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## Prologue

I squint at the setting sun and mumble under my breath as I search in my handbag for my keys. I'm standing in front of my parent's building, but as always, I find something to delay me and hold off going inside. I like to think I'm wary of my mother but deep down, I know what I really feel towards her and that is sheer, undiluted terror. Dad and I are pals and he, coupled with my beautiful niece, whom I love dearly, are the only reasons I still come here.

I focus on my handbag; there's a lot of junk inside it and even though I keep saying I'll clear it all out, I never end up doing so. I hiss impatiently, as my search turns up a scrunched receipt for a cute, multi-colored pair of socks I saw in the department store window close to my apartment last month and couldn't resist buying. I throw it back into the bag and dip my fingers inside again; out comes an old gum wrapper, a felt-tip pen that I haven't used in ages, my grocery shopping list, a tiny jotter I take everywhere I go, because you never know when a great idea will pop into your head like Jerry from Tom & Jerry - the jotter ensures I always catch the idea by its tail, before it darts out again - an old earring, and finally! Ah, I can touch the keys. I drag my hand out triumphantly only to see it's not my keys, but the keys to my boyfriend's old 2004 dirty Chevy I used to drive here.

"Urgh!" I exclaim, my breath wheezing out in disgust, as I stomped back to the car just so I could slam the car keys on the hood, my purse dropping from my shoulder lying in the cup of my forearm. I'm about to go all the way and take my frustration out on the poor car by slamming my foot against its tires, but luckily common sense prevails and stops me just in time. The keys will turn up somewhere soon, placing my purse back on my shoulder.

I get into the car and decide not to visit my parents after all and drive over to my boyfriend's house instead because I'm certain I gave him my spare keys, even though he has never used it I'm sure it's in his bowl of things he needs that sits on his shelf. The excuse to avoid seeing my mother rings hollow even to my ears. I stubbornly shrug it off as I hear sounds of police sirens speeding pass me. *Odd.* I thought to myself. *The neighborhood is as peaceful as still waters, except for my parent's frequent squabbles.* I wondered who the police had come for, and after I couldn't guess, I resigned to saying a silent prayer for them.

Not too long afterward, I noticed three uniformed men of different ranks standing near my parent's place. I stepped out of the car as a cold chill ran through my spine at the thought of what might be happening. I calmed down and approached the sidewalk. "You will stand back miss," a stern voice shouted at me, as officers ran into my parents building. The officer with the stern voice had his hand on his gun holster as if I was a criminal. The nosy neighbors were all up in our business now, but I was too busy to pay them any mind. I had my eyes fixed on the police officer, as I swung all twenty-two inches of my wavy nut-brown hair to my backside.

"My parents and niece live in there," I pointed out to the average-built officer. The officer questioned me asking what my parent's names are, which apartment do they live in...? I glared at his jaded jade eyes. He was ready to take down anyone including victims, as my sister darted out of the building accompanied by my mother, my niece wrapped tightly in my mother's arms bawling uncontrollably.

I haven't seen my sister for a few years now. Her last episode at the mental hospital made it clear she was not coming out anytime soon, but it was obvious she was here to get her daughter back. Long overdue is an understatement. I detest the fact she had to leave my niece with my mom.

On the day my niece and her brother were to be released to my mom, my sister's 8-year-old stepson yanked the social worker to the side and said, "I rather be with strangers." Sad because he had always been protective and a responsible older brother to my adoring niece, Victorious. However, Victorious' brother found my mom incredibly fearful and even the mere thought of being around her made his heart race and his palms sweat. Though it broke his heart to consider leaving Victorious behind, my sister's stepson made a difficult decision – he would choose to live elsewhere. His love for his sister was unwavering, but his fear for his own well-being pushed him to make this tough choice. With a heavy heart, he knew that with the aim of protecting himself he could provide a safe environment for Victorious one day, so he had to find an alternative path, as he was sent to another family.

My niece was too young to decide or understand, which led me and my dad to protect her until she was old enough to be on her own or rescued by her brother. And out of nowhere I heard a yell, who I decided was the detective say to the officer with jaded eyes, "Cuff her!" staring at my sister. Instead, the officer released and grabbed his handgun pointing it at her. "Stand down officer!" the detective said. The officer ignored the command. "Stand down!" the detective repeated. Usually, I play the role of referee and arbitrator in my family arguments, but as I stood watching that late afternoon, I was certain the situation was more than just an argument, and the officer with the jaded eyes was out to kill. "I'm going to ask you one more time to stand down, officer!" He finally placed his gun back in his holster and like a virus, the news had spread throughout the entire neighborhood, including my eery next-door neighbor who carries an axe.

Our neighborhood has turned into a tourist attraction, as the detective looked towards me and says, "Miss, I'm Detective Shawl. What is your name? Do you live in this building?" Bombarded with more questions. I have some of my own. "Where is my dad? Do you believe in police brutality? Your officer was about to shoot my sister!" The detective looked at me with disgust and said, "He was just doing his job." Right then and there I knew the law was not on my side.

"Everyone is fine," the detective continued. "Cliff and his wife-" I was sure he said my sister's husband is here as I interrupted with a trembling voice, "What?! My sister's husband is here!" The detective looked towards my niece and said, "From what I have learned so far, they came to take their daughter back, turning into a heated altercation. The police were called just in time. Everything is under control." I could tell he was not telling me everything, my sister screaming, "I want my lawyer!" They shoved my helpless handcuffed sister along the newly cut grass, my niece kicking and crying simultaneously now in an officer's arms with jet black hair.

"Victorious!" I shouted to my niece, dashing to her and shrieking, "Let her go." The officer with the jet-black hair strutted towards me. "Stay away from my grandbaby!" my mom said to me. The bewildered officer stepped back as I reminded my mom Victorious is my niece.

My dad angrily reminded her as well and he shouted to my mom from the front of the building, "Stop acting like a crazy woman." I was so happy to see my dad was okay, grabbing my niece from the officer with ebony hair. "Shut up goofball," my mom said. "Something is seriously wrong with you woman, can someone put her in the police car?" my dad said. My mom roller's sprung from her head as she charged towards me while yelling at my dad a few steps away from her, "Oh yeah take her side like you always do, you low life piece of crap." She turns and looks me straight in my eyes and says, "I hate you." I moved back concerned for my niece.

My mom certainly thought this is my fault, as was every other family mishap. "Why do you treat me this way?! You should be talking to my sister and her husband like this. They are the crazy ones who caused Victorious to be taken away," I reminded. "Liar! I don't trust you, not one bit!" my mom said lunging and grabbing my arm, shaking me as she slapped me in my face releasing me from her grip. Naturally, I held my sore cheek and it took no time before I fell to the ground and hit my head on the concrete ground, knocking me out cold right there. "Mam!" the puzzled detective shouted, the officers holding my mom off me. Eventually regaining consciousness, I swung my head here and there to regain focus. Blurred figures standing around me were all I managed to see and the voices that came from the mouths of the blurred figures sounded distorted. "Help me!" I cried, as splattered crimson blood rushed from my arm while I lay there drifting unconsciousness.

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Several beautiful encouraging and hopeful words filled the air, and some of them even came from unexpected people like my mom as I lay there in silence, with my eyes still closed. The words that soothed me the most were the words from my dad's mouth. They were most sincere. From the conversation I overheard, I knew I was at the hospital. The doctor had sometimes come for updates. The last update was that I miraculously made it through my operation and was okay to go home. He then mentioned something like "bullet," but I failed to understand it, so I listened on. According to him, I had been shot, and the bullet had hit an artery in my arm, therefore; I won't be able to use my arm for a month. Otherwise, I risk losing my thumb if the artery didn't heal correctly. My dad suggested I stay at the house with them, as the doctor handed my dad a manila envelope. "This is for your daughter. It's the results of her pregnancy test," the doctor said, my mother ripping the envelope from my dad's hands. "Let me see this!" she exclaimed. *Pregnancy test?* I thought to myself. I slowly opened my eyes with hazy vision, lifting my injured arm engulfed in a cast. "Ouch!" I shouted in agonizing pain. My parents rushed to my aid. My niece and my boyfriend were nowhere to be found.

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The drive home was filled with nothing but unanswered questions. *My mom only slapped me how did I end up on the ground with a bullet in my arm? Who would want to shoot me? Where is the pregnancy test? Did my mom see the results? Well, I doubt it. Although I'm grown,*

*she still thinks I'm a child so if she has the results and it was positive, she would have cut up my head in 50,000 pieces by now simply because I'm not married,* I thought to myself.

My mom thanks God for my recovery and then calls my dad all sort of names. I still couldn't understand how there was a shooting in plain daylight right under the noses of the cops. What I also could not believe was that I just moved into my own place after a few years of living home with my parents, and now I was stuck in the house again with my mom for the next month or so.

The car finally became quiet, and I dosed off to sleep still exhausted from the drugs the doctor administered. Thirty minutes later we arrived at my parents' place, but before parking the car, my father yelled, "Oh man!" "What!" my mom screamed. "A black cat just ran in front of my car. I got enough bad luck in my life. I don't need anymore," my dad continued. "If you had Jesus in your life you wouldn't worry about bad luck," my mom informed. Great now he got her started again, as he reverses his car to break the cat's line at least this is what he was told to do when this sort of thing happens. I don't believe in bad luck either, but I do remember the Black Out in New York City. On my way to an audition, I had just walked under a latter and all the lights in Manhattan went out, so I got to wonder, and I rubbed my bed ridden eyes and yelled to my dad, "Back up the car again dad," I chuckled.

Meanwhile, my mother chatters on the phone to family and then to the detective. He claimed they were done with the investigation since they found a pistol in Cliff's hand. They believed he shot me and according to Cliff right before he was shot down by the police he claimed, the bullet was meant for my mother who took their daughter. That was the motive and that was the story they were sticking with.

Entering my parent's home, I looked intently. *This place will never be the same again,* I thought to myself. My sister's husband was apparently responsible for this as I looked at where he was shot, and every other place or object loved. They had cleaned up as much as possible, but the atmosphere and air stank of what happened. *What a messed up, and abusive husband my sister had,* I thought to myself, *but I never thought he was capable of murder.*

My mind drifted to when my boyfriend Jay-O and I met and I smiled dreamily, as I saw the unopened envelope with the pregnancy results hanging out of my mom's handbag on the table. I grabbed it and ripped it open, reading the results. I heard a knock at the door, peeping through the peep hole and it was him, my boyfriend. I opened the door blissfully wearing a sleeveless shirt and broad shorts, as he kissed me and I kissed him back, nervously throwing the envelope back on the table. He had a concerned look on his face. I did not want to worry my boyfriend, so I told him my injury was just a flesh wound. "Yeah, yeah, cool," he said as if he didn't care. I followed his eyes to see what he cared about. He was staring at the envelope and the words pregnancy test as big as day staring back at him.

"Are you pregnant?" he asked. "Shh my parents are in the other room," I informed. "I asked you a question," he said. I ignored him and wrapped my uninjured arm around him so tightly, laying my head on his shoulder, closing my eyes, and smiling. He grew more elusive than what I bargained for, pushing me away, my wounded arm in pain as he yelled, "Answer

me!" I grabbed my fragile arm. He calmed down, and gently held me realizing my arm was in the way of his shove. "I'm sorry," he said. I forgave him like I always do. I was just so happy to see him but there was one problem as I looked up from my boyfriend's embrace and asked, "What is she doing here?"