

# 806

a novel

BY CYNTHIA WEIL

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## prologue

To: DSC.org  
From: NonameBand@aol.com  
Subject: Successes and Failures  
Date: July 17, 2008

Your website says that you want to know about successes and failures that have come about from using the website, so I'm writing to tell you about me.

Contacting DSC.org was the scariest thing I've ever done, but it changed my life, so I'm sending you my story. Even though it's probably way too long to post, and you actually may know a little bit of it, (you'll see what I mean when you get near the end), I wanted to write to you because I realize how much I owe you. Without your help, I never would have found out who I am. So, along with my story, I am sending you a big, fat thank you.

Yours sincerely,  
Katherine Lambert



## chapter one

My mom, Kim, looks a lot like Reese Witherspoon, if Reese wore a Burger Boy manager's uniform. But in spite of that, she's lost every man she's ever loved or thought she loved, beginning with my father, who dumped her when I was just a baby bump. The day she lost Bruce, her latest boyfriend, kind of pushed me over the edge, but it turned out to be the beginning of everything.

On the day the Bruce thing happened—June 13, 2008, to be exact—I was actually feeling sort of happy because it was the last day of school. My school, Central High in St. Louis, had the garden variety mix of cheerleaders, popular kids, jocks, freaks, nerds, goths, and druggies sprinkled with

some G wannabees and a few genuine OGs who had never been able to pass something or other and would no doubt advance to be AGs (ancient gangsters) before they managed to graduate.

Then, in a category all our own, there was yours truly and Sasha Greene. She was my best (and actually, my only) friend and the drummer in our band, Noname. Sasha and I kind of looked alike. We both had black hair with blue streaks, and we both got the blue dye at CrazyHair.com. The only difference was that her hair was dark, so she had to bleach some of it for the blue dye to take. My hair is actually blond, so I had to dye and tone.

But back to my story. When I got home from school that day, I was a little freaked out to see Mom's car parked outside our garden apartment because she usually does payroll on Friday and rolls in around 7:00 p.m.

I walked in the kitchen door and knew right away what was going down when I heard my mom and Bruce arguing in the living room. In times like these, and there have been more of them than I can count, I began to think of my mom as "Kim" instead of "Mom" because she would act like such a kid. I even called her Kim sometimes, which she pretended not to notice. Whoever said "history repeats itself" must have known my mother intimately. I knew this discussion by heart, only the names of the men involved changed.

I would have bet my last guitar pick that Bruce had texted her at work, saying they had to talk, and she had insisted that they see each other, like immediately.

When someone says “we have to talk,” even though you know they’re not going to talk about anything good, for some strange reason, you absolutely have to hear what they have to say ASAP.

I used to fantasize about making Mom sit down and write “nobody likes needy” a thousand times and paste the paper on her bathroom mirror. Then she would see it every day and possibly remember it when the next “one” came along.

I could hear their voices clearly through the wall, even though I didn’t want to. I figured if I made a smoothie, the sound of the blender would drown them out. So I opened the fridge, which was filled with Burger Boy food (I find that stuff seriously disgusting), and pulled out yogurt, orange juice, and strawberries for a healthy, soothing, (and I hoped) calming beverage.

The dialogue coming through was so loud and so clear that the noisy blender didn’t stand a chance.

“Kim, it’s not you, it’s me,” Bruce insisted. “I’m not good enough for you.”

“That line was a whole episode of that sitcom ‘about nothing.’ It didn’t work there, and it doesn’t work here.”

“But it’s true, Kimmy. I swear.”

“You know ‘good’ makes me feel bad about myself. I don’t want ‘good.’ I want you,” she said in her little girl voice, which I found embarrassing and sad.

That last statement shook me up on so many levels, I had to roll my eyes even though there was no one

there to see it. I was so bummed that I almost forgot to put ice cubes in the blender. This could have led to a warm smoothie crisis, but it was easily fixable. I took a few out of the freezer with a flourish and popped them in. That's when I heard Bruce, his voice half annoyed and half guilty, saying,

"I'm not as mature as you, Kimmy. I'm just not really ready for marriage."

"It was a suggestion, not an ultimatum," my mom explained. "I mean, I was actually trying to find out the level of your commitment."

That in itself was so lame I almost cried.

Bruce just got more annoyed. "I'm not ready to settle down. The truth is, I need to find myself."

Then I heard my mom clear her throat, which she always did before putting on her make-believe "tough" voice. I don't know how she came up with it, but it sounded like a combination of an angry Cher and an indignant Miley Cyrus. She thought it was venomous, but truth be told, it wasn't very scary, just very weird.

"I think somebody saw you in Pittsburgh. Why don't you start looking there? Now!" she spat in that strange voice.

After the longest, quietest ten seconds ever, Bruce mumbled, "I better go."

I punched "blend" again and didn't even look up as he walked past me, headed for the back door. Then I hit the "off" button and poured some of the smoothie into my glass. He stopped and turned to me with a funny look on his face.

"Bye, Bruce," I said.



"It's Bob," he answered. "Uh, can I have my blender?"

I unplugged it, walked over to him, dumped the rest of the smoothie into his jacket pocket, and handed him the blender. He took it with a sheepish look that told me he knew he deserved the gift.

"Have a nice life," he said, almost like he meant it. Leaving a trail of smoothie drops, he slunk out the back door.

There were no sobs coming from the living room, but I knew my mom was holding them in. Part of me wanted to make her cry hard for screwing up again, part of me wanted to find a way to make her feel better, and another part of me just wanted to get into my room so I could pick up my guitar, write a song, and forget what a dumb life I had in the family department.

The minute I tiptoed into the living room, Kim looked up at me like a pooch who had just been left at the shelter.

"Bob's gone," she said.

"Surprise, surprise." I took a few steps toward my room.

She bit her lip, swung her chair around, and began clicking the keys on the computer. "What do you think about my changing to JDate?" she asked. "My mother always told me that Jewish men don't leave."

"Grandma was divorced three times."

"But none of them were Jewish."

"If she didn't take her own advice, why should you?"

She stopped typing. I should have just walked into my room right then, but, no, I had to twist the knife. I was sixteen, after all. So when she started with, "Do you know what he said?" I cut her right off.

“‘It’s not you, it’s me,’ a popular phrase around here favored by Kevin, Chris, Walter, and Tim,” I announced. “I personally preferred Jerry’s ‘I love you more than life, but I feel suicidal,’ and Gary’s ‘This isn’t easy, but neither are you’ was a close second.”

She winced. “Thanks for running down my lousy romantic track record, Katie. I guess I don’t feel bad enough for you.”

“It’s KT, Mom. I told you.”

My mom sighed. “I thought KT was just for the band.”

“No, Kim, it’s not just for the band,” I snapped. “It’s my new name.”

“That’s a really mean tone, whatever your name is,” she said in a shaky voice. “And this is not the time to use it.” She was trying to say what she thought was “mom” stuff and failing miserably.

Then she just gave up, leaned forward with her elbows on her knees, and covered her face with her hands. Her blond hair fell around her face like a curtain. Something in me wanted to throw my arms around her and kiss the top of her head the way I did when I was ten, but I knew where that would take us, so I put down my smoothie and pulled up a chair close to her.

“Mom, I’m sorry I sounded mean. I don’t understand why you think you have to be with someone to be complete. I didn’t want to sound obnoxious, I just get so frustrated when I see you getting hurt over and over again.”

“I know,” said her muffled voice. “Me too.”

“Remember when I wrote that song for you after Gary? You promised to sing it to yourself whenever these things happened.”

She nodded.

“Remember the words?”

She shook her head. I leaned in close and started to sing to her.

“When you headed out that door

Betch ya thought I’d fall apart,

But you didn’t break me, babe,

You only broke my heart.”

Then she pushed back her hair and joined in, kind of half-hearted and off-key.

“So if you think you did me in,

You better think again.

The truth is there’s no way you could be wronger.

Baby, you just made me stronger,

You made me stronger.”

She smiled a sad but hopeful smile and blew her nose. “I’m going to remember that, Katie. I really am. From now on.”

“I hope so,” I said, and then I noticed her eyes drifting toward the computer screen.

“Oooo, look, honey, here’s something interesting: ‘Banker, homebody, looking for shiksa soulmate who likes cozy nights in front of the fireplace, good wine, fine dining, and . . .’”

I couldn’t believe her. I was scared that I was going to lose it because I knew deep down inside she was never going to change, no matter how many songs I wrote for her. I just headed for my room.

“Katie, KT, sweetie, listen,” she called after me. “I

know you need a dad, and I'm going to find one for you if it kills me."

"And me, too," I mumbled.

She was so not getting it. There was something I had wanted to say for a long time, but I hadn't because I didn't want to hurt her feelings. I just wanted to get her off JDate and shake up her world and maybe get even with her, just a little, for screwing up again. So I spit it out: "I am so done with listening to stuff like this. I don't want you to find a new father for me. I have a father, and I want to see him. I want to talk to Max."

Mom turned to look straight at me with her "remember I'm the mother" face.

"Listen to me, Katie," she said. "You know as well as I do that he never tried to make any contact with us after he left. He moved away for years. He never called or wrote or tried to—"

"Do you know where he is?"

She swallowed, coughed, and burped, all at the same time, which she does when she's anxious. Her eyes got hard . . . as hard as eyes can get when you look like Reese Witherspoon. "That man walked out on us," she said for the hundredth time.

I took a slug of smoothie. Then I said the worst thing I could think of, which I'd been thinking for, like, forever. "He didn't walk out on me, Mom. I wasn't even born yet. He walked out on *you*. Just like everybody else."

I saw her flinch before I stormed into my room and slammed the door. I was sorry the minute the words

came out of my mouth, but everything inside me felt incredibly screwed up.

I picked up my guitar. Making music was usually a way to take the edge off everything and make me feel better. But then I looked up and saw the framed picture of Kim and Max staring at me from my dresser. The photo was vintage '90s. Mom looked really young and really knocked up. She was balancing a sad little bouquet on her tummy, and Max, kind of grungy and wearing a tuxedo T-shirt, had his arm around her. They were both smiling, but anyone looking at them could tell they definitely were not going to be one of those couples who stayed married for sixty years and were so in love that they died within an hour of each other.

I took a pillow off my bed and threw it at them. The frame plunked down backward on the dresser.

Then I played around with my new song, "A Rock and a Sad Place" for about twenty minutes, trying to find the perfect groove until there was a feeble knock on the door.

A yellow paper slid under my bedroom door. I walked over and picked up a page from the *St. Louis Yellow Pages*. There was a huge ad for The Palace of The Plasma Prince and the words "Max's work" written on it and circled in red.

The crappy thing I said had hit home. Max was back. I didn't know when he came back, but I now knew he was here in St. Louis and where I could find him. My heart was beating so fast and so loud, it felt as if it was going to explode out of my chest. I thought I was going to be one of

the youngest people ever to have a heart attack, but I didn't have time for that.

I was finally going to meet my dad.