



Nancy Price

Black Ballers

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A Novel by
Nancy Price



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CHAPTER 1

It was a sizzling hot day in August, 1988. Marcia was pushing the grass mower while her daughter, Jessica, moved the garden hose. Marcia had been sober for over two months now. She had yet to find a sponsor for her Twelve Step work.

“Will you open the back gate?” Marcia asked Jessica. “I am finished with the front yard and ready for the back.” Jessica was always a bit afraid of her mother, Marcia, because of the drinking that caused numerous bouts of anger and violent temper. Jessica ran to the back gate, hoping to be punctual enough for her mother.

“You don’t have to run,” Marcia said. “You have plenty of time. I’m in no big hurry.” It would take Marcia and Jessica many weeks to adapt to the new way of living without alcohol. Although Jessica did not drink, she was indirectly affected by Marcia’s usage.

“Will you try to lay out the sprinkler on the north side of the house for us?” Marcia asked as she began mowing the grass in the back yard. Jessica found the correct hose and properly aligned it with the side of the house; turning on the faucet was an easy task.

The wind out of the south was hot and dry, blowing Marcia’s short, straight blond hair and cooling her sweating brow. She finished mowing the back yard. She emptied the bag for the fourth time; then she cleaned the underside and blades of the mower in the alley. She checked on Jessica and the front yard water. It seemed like such a waste to water in the heat so they waited until late in the day, hoping to water for four hours before bedtime. Jessica had done a great job setting the hose; and for a

reward for their hard work Marcia suggested they go for a Dairy Queen.

Jessica was Marcia's only child. Her hair was long, blond, and wavy. She often braided it to abate the wind's damage. The girls were decked in shorts, tank tops and sandals; this was typical for western Kansas. They got in the 1984 Nissan and headed for ice cream.

Because the heat would melt their cones rapidly, they turned on the car's air conditioner, hoping this would help. Jessica ordered the chocolate dipped cone while Marcia chose a strawberry Sundae. As they sat in the car with the engine running, Marcia said, "Thank you so much for helping me with the yard work. This autumn, would you like to plant some flowers with me?"

"That would be great. What kind?"

"I thought a few tulips to bloom in the spring time and some bright red mums for bloom this year. That would be a good start. What do you think?"

"I don't know. I've never planted flowers ever."

"Well, girl, it's time we did a lot of things different. How old are you now – 13?"

"Yes," Jessica said. "I'll be in seventh grade next year. No more St. Mary's school for me, hurray."

"You didn't enjoy going there, did you?"

"Nope. Too much church."

"Your father and I thought it would be a good idea. We wanted you to get a good education and a spiritual knowledge of the church."

"Sunday service is enough – not every day."

"So we celebrate your starting school soon too."

"No – this celebration is just for mowing the grass. I want another celebration for starting junior high school."

Jessica and Marcia laughed with each other; then, Marcia drove them both back home. The ice cream was a great treat for them both.

CHAPTER 2

The next day, Marcia drove Jessica to her father Raymond's place. Marcia and Raymond had been divorced for nearly two years. Raymond lived in the basement of his parents' home. Jessica stayed with Raymond on weekends and whenever Marcia needed help with babysitting arrangements.

This night was Marcia's chance to be at her Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. As she shut the car door behind her, she finger combed her hair back into place and entered the AA hall. She was greeted at the door.

Dick whispered to Clifford, "Who let the Al Anon out of the nut house!" Then Dick laughed. Clifford shook his head, annoyed with Dick's statement.

Marcia found an open seat beside another female member. Dick went to the coffee pot, returning to Clifford to fill his cup; then he offered coffee to Marcia.

"No, thank you," Marcia said.

"My coffee not good enough for you?" Dick asked.

"I just don't want any coffee, thank you anyway."

Dick returned the coffee pot, and then went the podium to begin the meeting by asking for a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer.

After the meeting, Dick invited Marcia to join the others for coffee at a restaurant on the east side of town. "It will be a good way for you to build a fellowship with other members. It will help your sobriety and you need their phone numbers," Dick said.

"Okay, I'd love to join you and the others," Marcia said.

Dick asked, "May I have a ride with you?"

"Sure, why not."

Dick was pleasant and handsome. Marcia did not think she was very beautiful so being around somebody like Dick made her feel important and worthwhile.

Dick ordered coffee for the two of them. Marcia said, "I don't want coffee." She was looking over the desert section of the menu. She said, "I'd like a piece of cherry pie and a glass of ice water instead of coffee."

The waitress came to the table for the group's orders. She knew to put all of them on separate tickets. This was the usual after meeting hangout and the waitresses knew what to expect. Dick did not pick up her ticket; instead he asked his sponsor Paul to take his tab.

Paul was average height and had a beer belly. His hair was graying and he had a large bushy gray beard and mustache. Paul said, "Dick, I don't have enough money to pay for your coffee tonight. You need to be responsible and pay for your own. You have a decent job now, so cough up your own money."

After coffee, Dick asked Marcia for a ride home from the restaurant. She was somewhat hesitant, but agreed. While she was driving Marcia asked Dick about the guy with the beard. Dick said, "Oh, that's Paul. He's my sponsor. He doesn't take shit off anybody. Who is your sponsor?"

"I don't have a sponsor yet," Marcia said.

"Why not?"

"I've asked a couple of people, but they said 'No'"

"Why don't you ask Paul's girlfriend – Gloria? She'd make a good sponsor for you."

"How do you know she would?"

"I just think so. Wouldn't hurt to ask her."

"I don't think I know her."

"She works evening shift, and doesn't come to many meetings during the week. She's tall and very overweight. She's cute

and laughs a lot. She often comes to birthday night – the last Saturday of the month – that’s this weekend. Can you come?”

“Where do I turn for your apartment?” Marcia asked.

“Two more blocks, then turn right and go one block. I work at a convenience store near by and walk to work.” Dick said.

“I’ll think about coming next weekend. I might have to trade days of work with somebody. I work out of town.”

“There is my apartment. You can stop here. This is good for me. Thanks so much for the ride.”

“Thanks for inviting me to coffee afterwards.”

“Will I see you tomorrow?” Dick asked.

“I don’t know. I work twelve hour shifts and I need to take my turn watching my daughter at night time. No, I don’t think I will be there tomorrow. Probably see you on birthday night. Do I need to bring anything special?”

“You can make a salad or dessert if you like. Plates, silverware, and drinks are provided.”

“Okay, I’ll probably see you then.”

“Good night.”

It was Saturday night. Marcia dressed in her black jeans and a red, elbow length light sweater top. She wore her favorite brown sandals with hopes she would stay cool enough in a room filled with 40-50 recovering drunks. She baked a chocolate cake with chocolate frosting to take to the birthday night celebration. She did not know what to expect since she had not been to this gathering yet. She assumed there would be something special for those persons celebrating their annual sobriety birthdays. She was excited about the new adventure of meeting more new friends in the AA program. She was hoping she would meet Gloria and ask her to be her sponsor. And she was smiling with the thought of seeing Dick again.

Marcia always thought of herself as shy and withdrawn, but others in her alcohol and drug treatment center told her that she was arrogant and aggressive. She did not like either of those two

characteristics, but the labels were given to her by her AA peers so she took them to be truth.

Marcia arrived at the meeting; she took her dessert to the prepared table and took an open seat. The room was full of people and of smoke. She caught Dick's eye. He approached her with a Styrofoam cup and a pot of coffee. He asked, "May I serve you tonight?"

"No coffee for me tonight, thanks any way." Marcia replied. "Is Gloria here?"

"Yes, she and Paul just walked in. They are over there by the door. He is wearing blue jeans and a white tee shirt. She has on a blue plaid sun dress. See them?"

"Ah, yes, I do. I want to ask her to be my sponsor if I like her. I want to choose somebody similar to myself, somebody with long term sobriety, somebody working the program; you know what I mean by the qualities of a good sponsor."

"Yes, I know what you mean. Gloria will fit all of your requirements and more." Dick said.

"Where are you sitting? I'd like to sit next to you tonight."

"I'm chairing the meeting, so just pick a place. Will you be getting a chip tonight?"

"What do you mean?" Marcia asked.

"This is birthday night and we give out medallions for time in sobriety. We give out a chip to all newcomers with 24 hours of sobriety, a chip to those with 30, 60, and 90 days of sobriety, and then chips for each anniversary of one more year of sobriety. Paul, my sponsor, will pick up a chip for five years of sobriety. Gloria has probably been sober for over four years now."

"Wow. That's a long time to stay sober. I just got out of treatment last month."

"Did you get a chip or anything to celebrate your first 30 days of sobriety?" Dick asked.

"No, I got nothing, because I'd only been sober 28 days when I left treatment. Then I did not know about birthday night here."

"Then, you should take a chip tonight."

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“I would feel foolish.”

“Nonsense.”

“I’ve done nothing special to win a chip. Wouldn’t that go against deflating of the ego. I think my pride would get bigger and I could get drunk. That’s what we were told in treatment.”

“But, this is a special gift and you need to feel grateful for your sobriety also.”

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