

One: Lamb Shanks

I step out of the Metro station and feel a blast of cold air. The inauguration of Barack Obama is only four days away. I am thrilled to be here, and thrilled about Barack Obama! As a long-time civil right activists and professor working toward racial equality, I am elated about the election of our first black president. Eloquent, principled, worldly and black, he is the bridge between the radical politics of my childhood and my yearning to be hopeful about the future. I am here, in Washington D.C., to witness, even if from a chilly distance, his swearing in as the forty-fourth President of the United States.

As soon as I ascend the steps of the Metro stop, the frigid wind cuts through my multicolored wool sweater, black cashmere cardigan and red ski jacket. I stop at the Metro entrance to put on gloves with liners, an ear warmer, and a neck warmer. I am ready for the short walk to my daughter Rachel's house.

Pulling a suitcase, wearing a backpack, and holding a shoulder purse, my body braces against the icy cold that pours through my carefully planned layers. At a little after 7:00 p.m., it is already dark. The sky above is a solid grey, no wispy clouds floating across a starry sky. In the bitter wind, my reverie about the election begins to give way to a desire to be warm and with Rachel.

I walk up M street and then wonder whether to turn right on 11th or 10th. Pulling my rolling suitcase, I imagine I look like the tourists who walk nervously down 11th Street, passing several liquor stores as they head to the hostel a few doors from Rachel's house. At the last minute I decide to turn onto 10th Street, unaware that this small decision will impact my life, forever bifurcating the years before January 16, 2009 from the years after. I

have always enjoyed walking down this street, lined with majestic three-story brownstones, and tonight, the homes look especially beautiful, illuminated by soft lights against the backdrop of the dark grey night.

Rachel is bartending at Cork, a wine bar named by the *New York Times* as THE place for Democrats to gather during the inaugural days. Cork is located on 14th Street NW, a street rapidly becoming the “It” place in DC. It is also an easy walk from her house. Anticipating dinner at Cork, I ate very little all afternoon except a cup of black coffee and a chocolate- covered donut from the Dunkin Donuts kiosk at Bradley Airport. I’m planning to leave my suitcase and pack at Rachel’s house, clean up a bit, and then walk to 14th Street.

My thoughts shift to what I’ll order for dinner. I remember the menu at Cork from other visits and in my mind I glance through the options, then decide on the lamb shanks cooked in red wine, the kind with the meat falling off the bone. I can almost taste them. Rachel will choose a delicious red wine to pair with the lamb. I can easily imagine sitting on a bar stool; warm and surrounded by the din of conversation, a long- stemmed wine glass filled with Italian red sitting before me. While waiting for my dinner, I’ll engage in conversation with other customers about who President Obama might choose for his cabinet. We’ll share election stories while I delight in seeing Rachel: I’ll have to restrain myself from telling everyone, “See that lovely woman, she’s my daughter!”

I start to turn left down the alley that abuts Rachel’s house. I can see the lights in her living room and I begin to feel warmer just knowing that in a minute or two I’ll be inside her house. Alleys in this area, lit by streetlights, are wide enough for a vehicle to drive through. It seems more sensible to take the alley rather than the longer route of going

to O Street and having to walk around the block. Then, I feel something hit my head. I think it might be from a roof. I turn to look up - and my life changes forever.

I see a man's face inside a hood. Years later, some of the riders on the metro will be clearer in my memory than *his* face. I know it's a man. He's tall. He's African-American. He is doing something to me. These are the only images I will recall and they'll remain like a grainy, underdeveloped picture, vague and hard to decipher. I am overwhelmed by terror. I can feel the inside of my body rearranging itself - blood leaves my feet and races to my head. I can't hear or see. I feel nothing. Terror consumes me; I am only terror. I am being sucked into a void, an abyss without time, place, thoughts, or feelings. Darkness surrounds me and I hear a scream, a sound I've never heard before, but I don't know it's coming from me. The sound goes on and on, high-pitched wails without volition. Then I'm on my back, kicking and keening. My mind flashes to a personal defense instructor once saying, "kick a man in the balls." So I kick wildly. I don't see anything. I don't know if my eyes are open or shut. I don't feel pain; I don't feel or think anything. I have no conscious sense of fear--fear requires thinking and having a sense of what is happening and what might happen next.

I have no idea how long I am in this world of horror, but I know I can't struggle anymore--my body is slumping. I feel my purse being pulled from my shoulder. The pounding stops. I sense I'm alone now. I try to lift my body off the ground as I feel excruciating pain in my hands. I see a hooded shadow running down the alley across the street, holding my purse like a football. I don't recognize anything around me. I think I see a pink house. Panic overtakes me. Where is Rachel's house? Where did the pink house come from? Then two women are standing next to me. One says, "Are you cold? Do you need a blanket? Do you need help?"

I respond, "Please take my gloves off." I think that the pain will stop if only my gloves are off.

Over the years, my understanding of this moment will become clearer: the shadow is running down the alley where I am lying, not across the street. The alley does not continue across the street. My limited vision distorts what I see. There will be no mention in the police report of bystanders. Maybe there really are two women standing next to me, or maybe no one is there. I don't remember being covered with a blanket or touched by anyone. Someone, though, hears me yelling and calls 911. That call saves my life.

"Can you tell me your name?" I hear the question and realize that I am in a vehicle, probably an ambulance.

"Do you have my luggage?" I ask.

"Yes Ma'am. We have everything. Can you tell me your name?"

"JoAnne Jones."

"What's your birthday?"

"November 12, 1946. Please call my daughter."

"What's her number?"

From someplace I dredge up her cell phone number. "*She's* working at Cork now, it's a wine bar on 14th Street. You can just take me to her house. I'm fine."

"I respect your opinions," he replies. "In this case, only my opinion matters. May I cut off your neck warmer?"

Years later, Rachel will tell me that I could not have had this conversation. "You weren't able to speak, mom. You only made sounds, horrible shrieks." I will never know whether the conversation was audible, or happened only in my head. Other than this

remnant my memory is blank. For years, though, I will feel panicked by the sound of any ambulance siren.

