

# No Turning Back

Linda Berg

"You can't have that maniac's baby," Carolyn wailed, swirling around to face me. "I'll get you the money," she cried while shaking my shoulders in a controlled state of panic.

During my freshman year of high school, I met Carolyn through my best friend Joy. She was Joy's mother and became my own mother's closest friend. The four of us were inseparable, and we shared countless shop 'til you drop days and a few vacations and holidays, too.

During my junior year, Joy and I signed up for cosmetology school. However, Joy's dedication to vocational training was about as short-lived as her devotion to any of her boyfriends. Before our senior year began, she dropped from the program, and I picked up her clientele, including Carolyn who regularly scheduled permanent waves and who tipped extremely well. On that day, however, she gave me a "tip" I wish I could change forever.

Standing behind Carolyn at one of her appointments, I carefully wound each section of hair around the slender, pink perm rods while listening to her chatter. Within minutes, the developing conversation became anything but casual, and even now it rolls around my memories with spiraling sorrow.

"I saw Vicky today," Carolyn mentioned.

"Oh," I inquired hesitantly, pretending to hold an interest. Vicky was Carolyn and Mom's psychic friend, and I had visited her a few times myself. Carolyn, on the other hand, scheduled Vicky more in a month than she did hair appointments in a year.

"So what'd she tell ya this time?" I added, knowing she wouldn't be satisfied without my full attention.

Carolyn drew in a heavy sigh as if the air were too dense to breathe and gasped, "Well, she told me plenty, and I'm just dyin' to ask you something."

"Lay it on me," I responded half-wittedly, wanting desperately to curl up in the corner and hide from the discussion. I just knew she was going to mention the date rape again. In the back of my mind, I desperately wanted to withdraw the secret I unveiled at her house just weeks before, even though it had been relieving at the time. After all, she knew everything about our "harmless" partying and had even contributed a time or two. So, I trusted her with the secret about my all-too-promising boyfriend who forced himself upon me. After all, she never could stand him in the first place, and I certainly couldn't tell my mom. Telling Carolyn seemed strangely natural at the time, although I failed to mention that I had ended up pregnant. "*Surely she didn't know, did she?*" I wondered silently.

"Well," she replied with a strange twist in her voice, "Vicky said someone young and close to me needs help because she is pregnant."

As soon as the words slipped from her mouth, my jaw dropped open faster than the rubber banded perm rod could snap between my fingers. In a desperate attempt to mask the truth, my mind began sorting through a spectrum of lies.

“Linda,” she continued with a soft, somber voice, “is there something you should be tellin’ me?” Dead silence tainted the air in a mist of misery as she turned to face me before rephrasing her accusation.

“You fess up, right now young lady! Do you know if Joy’s pregnant?”

Instantly, my heart went from frigid fear to reckless relief, for I had misconceived the object of her suspicions. Yet, the grimace of my brow must have betrayed my inner secret, for she read my face like Vicky must have read her soul.

“Oh my God, it’s not Joy - it’s YOU!” she forcefully blurted, sending chills up my spine. “You can’t have that bastard’s baby!” Carolyn wailed, shaking my shoulders in a controlled state of panic. “I’ll get you the money. Don’t you worry! I’ll handle it, and your mom’ll never find out.”

Within a month, \$200.00, an appointment date, and a set of directions to the nearest clinic were slapped in my hand. Though I’d managed to do everything else my innocence once swore not to, this was the one thing I knew I couldn’t do. Yet, I somehow kept a guarded chill in my heart until the time approached, and I walked through the doors of my unchosen child’s grave lot.

After channeling through several different areas and having seated myself in the final waiting room, I noticed a girl slouched over across from me. She was a vision of unpretentious beauty with delicate, olive colored skin and long, flowing locks of hair. As she leaned on her knees, I could hardly see her face behind the black, velvety curtain of hair. Her chocolate eyes were perfectly cradled by delicately lined brows and full, lush eyelashes. She stared without blinking as if frozen in time, and her silence was somehow comforting. Yet, I was caught off guard as she slowly turned her head from side to side and softly echoed unsettling thoughts stirring around in her conscience.

“I can’t wait to get this over with,” said the woman who was looking at me. “I know what I’m doing. I can’t change my mind. Not a big deal. Doesn’t matter. You think?” she nervously questioned, reassuring herself.

I listened intently but couldn’t escape the surrealistic feeling or the theological blanket of mortal sin convicting me. Then, her name was called. She calmly lifted herself from the chair with an impractical poise. Crossing the floor, her bare feet crept with measured steps like that of an approaching bride. I watched her somber stride until she was swallowed up by the closing door, then reality began to wash over me like rushing streams during driving rains. At that moment, I felt downfalls of dread, and tears drenched my face as the hardened disguise I wore washed away. Listening to the small, lifeless room’s silence was deafening, and staring at the whitewashed walls drowned me in a flood of emotion, guilt, and confusion.

“Linda,” the nurse guardedly announced in a monotone voice while pushing open the groaning door. I instantly curled my fingers around the edge of the cold, metal seat and clasped its rim with death’s grip as my body tensed and stiffened.

“Are you Linda?” she queried, gazing at me with a shallow look.

While my mind was saying *no*, my feet gave way and led me through death's doorway to a room no less than an infant torture chamber. From the other end of the hallway, I could hear someone screaming and wailing, and I wanted to turn back.

"*Guess she wasn't so confident after all,*" I thought to myself while following the nurse's instructions. She directed me to sit on the table before strapping my legs in stirrups. Before I knew it, another nurse and a doctor had entered through an opposite door. I hardly remember lying back before hearing his assurance it would only hurt a few minutes. But I was anything but assured, and I desperately tried pretending this wasn't happening at all.

After feeling an injection, a whirring sound began like that of a suctioning steam vac. My shallow breathing accelerated with nauseating spasms, and the doctor's explanation of every invasive step delivered piercing pain through my body, spirit, and soul. While fixating my eyes on the ceiling, I channeled my feelings through an air shaft, imagining myself in my bedroom during a more sheltered place in time. Though I felt dead inside, nothing could numb the swirling scrapes and savage stabs piercing my womb and assaulting my soul. What seemed a mechanical raping sucked innocence from me in every sense of the word.

"Linda. Linda, I'm going to take you to the recovery area now," directed the nurse holding my hand, "so stand up slowly—just take your time."

*Time? Somehow, I knew time was something I would never have enough of to soothe my conscience.* I took a few short steps before pausing in the doorway to grab the nurse. Suddenly, my legs weakened, and tunnels of darkness surrounded me with swarms of buzzing sounds. Before collapsing, I glimpsed at the dark-headed girl in a recovery room recliner. Her hair strung down her face absorbing the torrents of tears, and her legs were tightly drawn in toward her chest in a somewhat distorted position. Her incessant sobs echoed in my mind as total blackness enveloped me, and unconsciousness granted me a brief escape from the unrelenting agony.

After that day, years slipped by before I opened my eyes to accept the light of forgiveness, and decades passed before I forgave myself. No time can pass nor bury the pain of my memories. Only seconds to conceive, minutes to abort, but an eternity to remember-- there is just no turning back.



## Where I'm From

Linda Berg

I am from hard-driven warriors  
From the paint of battle cries  
I am from will-power in a dark, dim hour  
Dancing, wailing  
And feeling one leg to stand on  
I am from the coyote's call  
The midnight howl  
Whose eerie groans I remember  
As once they seemed my own

I am from wild game and embers tall  
From forest park rangers and maize minded farmers  
I'm from the do-it-alls to the pass-it-downs  
From keep ups and let downs too  
I'm from Hail Mary's and Our Fathers  
With a hundred little beads  
And ten rounds I could say myself

I am from catfish fries and camp fireflies  
From fishing poles and whiskey tainted coffee  
I am the evergreen giant in Grandpa's research  
And the Golden Glove fists of Father  
From the boxing ring and beyond

But in my soul was a journal  
Spilling over from feelings and fears  
To nurture a rose among piercing thorns  
I am from circumstance  
Picked and pruned out of season  
But a blooming bud of the family tree

