BY THE TAIL

Written by

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EXT. AIRPORT ARRIVAL PICKUP - DAY

A teenage girl, SAMIYAH “SAM” CHAMBERS, 15, slouches against a load of luggage, sketching away in a notebook.

In the airport terminal around her, families pile into illegally parked mini-vans. Reunited couples embrace.

Sam hears a familiar Southern drawl in her vicinity.

RONNIE CHAMBERS, 30s, a man of large frame and loud fashion, speaks into his mobile phone.

    RONNIE
    Mack, did it arrive alright? Talk about a last second delivery.

Sam walks over to greet her father.

    RONNIE (CONT’D)
    Today has to be absolutely perfect. So whatever it is, fix it.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ronnie notices Sam patiently waiting beside him.

Phone pressed between his ear and shoulder, he grabs Sam’s notebook from her. He scribbles a lazy signature in Sharpie over her drawing. He hands it back.

    RONNIE (CONT’D)
    (to Sam)
    Now beat it kid. I’m on the phone and waiting to meet someone important.

    SAM
    Dad? It’s me.

Ronnie pulls off his aviators and squints down at the girl. He cancels the call.

    RONNIE
    Sam? Sorry, force of habit.

He squats down to hug Sam. Sam’s arms stay beside her.

    RONNIE (CONT’D)
    Happy birthday, baby girl. Ready for a weekend with your favorite football player?
INT. LIMO ON HIGHWAY - DAY

Ronnie and Sam sit in the back seat of the stretch limousine. Radio sports talk provides ambient noise in the background.

   RONNIE
   I said I was sorry, Sam. Do you know how lucky you are to pull an apology out of Ronnie Chambers?

Sam stares at passing traffic out the window.

   RONNIE (CONT’D)
   Didn’t recognize you. It’s been awhile.

   SAM
   And who’s fault is that?

   RONNIE
   You’ve gotten so tall. Beautiful too, just like your mom.

Sam pulls her hoodie over her head.

Ronnie’s mobile starts CHIRPING but he silences it.

   RONNIE (CONT’D)
   Flight smooth? First class is pretty cool, huh? Did mom get you off alright? How do you think she’ll handle the empty nest for the next few days?

   SAM
   Dad, we have the whole weekend together. Can you cool your schtick for a little while longer?

EXT. MANSION DRIVEWAY - DAY

The limo stops in front of a super-sized McMansion. Ronnie’s residence fits the posh neighborhood like glitter glued on a diamond ring.

MIKE “UNCLE MACK” MCNAIR, 30s, sits on the front porch. He has the shape and sweetness of a giant Hersey’s Kiss.

Sam initiates an elaborate twelve step handshake with Uncle Mack, ending in a bear hug.
SAM
Great to see you, Uncle Mack.
What’s up?

MACK
Oh, you know. Working security for
your dad. The usual. Nothing out of
the ordinary, nope.

Uncle Mack seems to be melting in the South Florida heat.

MACK (CONT’D)
Uh, Ronnie? I need to talk with you
for a second. In private.

Uncle Mack glances at Sam.

MACK (CONT’D)
Let’s just say the cat’s out of the
bag and I need-

RONNIE
Actually, Mack, we’re going to get
Sam settled first.

Over his shoulder Ronnie mouths “WTF?” to Mack as they push
their way inside.

INT. MANSION GRAND FOYER - DAY

Ronnie joins Sam and Mack in front of the grand sprawling
marble staircase.

Ronnie claps his hands together.

RONNIE
My Sam. Welcome. Me casa, su casa.
Also, I realize I had a few
birthdays and Christmases to make
up for, so this particular present-

SAM
Dad, could we do this later? I’m
really tired from the flight and I
could use a nap.

RONNIE
Yeah, alright. Um, I can show you
your new room, it’s just up-

SAM
I’m sure I can find it fine.
RONNIE
The ninth door on the right. Next
to the bathroom. I’ll send Uncle
Mack up with your luggage. And I’ll
be up with your gift.

Ronnie watches Sam climb the stairs before turning his
attention to Uncle Mack.

As soon as Sam is gone, Ronnie grabs Mack by the shoulder.
Mack winces but Ronnie doesn’t seem to notice.

RONNIE (CONT’D)
How much could have possibly gone
wrong in a few hours? I saw the box
outside and you said the delivery
went smoothly. So where is it?

MACK
I brought it up to her room.

RONNIE
Why didn’t you say so? I wanted to
give it to her myself.

MACK
Are you sure that’s an appropriate
gift for a teenager girl?

RONNIE
Don’t tell me how to raise my kid,
Mack. Now go get the luggage.

INT. SAM’S BEDROOM – DAY

Sam pushes the door open to her new room.

An explosion of pink. Hot pink wallpaper, azalea bedding,
seashell furniture, rosette carpet.

She looks down at her black hoodie, black jeans and black
chucks.

SAM
(to herself)
Nice effort, dad, but it looks like
Barbie blew her brains out in here.

Sam collapses onto her bed.

A streamer hangs overhead. “HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SAM!”
SAM (CONT’D)
48 hours to go.

Sam notices a gargantuan TIGER laying motionless on the window sill. The seemingly stuffed tiger’s coat glows pearly white in the sunlight.

SAM (CONT’D)
FAO Schwartz? Lame again, dad.

EXT. MANSION DRIVEWAY – DAY

Uncle Mack bends over to pick up Sam’s luggage and winces.

He rolls back a jacket sleeve, revealing four long cuts, still wet and red.

MACK
The Chamber residence. Where bodyguards need bodyguards.

Partially obscured behind a luxury sports cars is a giant discarded upside down wooden crate labeled “CHINA DOLLS. DELICATE. FRAGILE. DANGEROUS. OPEN WITH EXTREME CAUTION.”

INT. SECOND FLOOR MANSION HALLWAY – DAY

Ronnie intersects Sam as she leaves a bathroom.

RONNIE
Sam. You been in your new room yet?

SAM
The pink nightmare with no bathroom attached? Yeah.

RONNIE
You didn’t see your birthday present yet, did you?

SAM
Dad, I stopped caring about stuffed animals ten years ago.

RONNIE
No, I definitely got you what you asked for. It’s the real mccoy. Getting it wasn’t easy either.

Sam sighs and takes her father by the hand. She leads him to the entrance of her room and opens the door.
SAM
See? I told you... wait. Where is it? Did you move it somewhere?

Sam cranes her neck.

SAM (CONT’D)
Wait, is that a....

Sam screams and slams the door shut. She stutters for words.

RONNIE
I’ll take that as a thank you.

SAM
Is that what why I think it is?

RONNIE
It is, indeed. Adorable, isn’t it?

SAM
You thought it was okay to put a tiger in your daughter’s room?

RONNIE
Well, Uncle Mack brought it up. But it was my idea, I bought it. Why, what’s the matter? You asked for a pet. I thought you’d love it.

SAM
A puppy. A kitten. I figured maybe a piglet if you went wild.

RONNIE
It’s a cute, little baby tiger. Same thing but way better.

SAM
That’s not a cub, dad. That’s a full blown man killer tiger. Not that matters.

Ronnie starts opening Sam’s bedroom door.

RONNIE
I know these cats run big, but-

Claws like nails splinter through the door as a massive force SLAMS it shut from the other side.

Ronnie leaps back and positions himself in front of Sam.
RONNIE (CONT’D)
That’s full blown man killer tiger.

SAM
Obviously. You bought it.

RONNIE
I thought it was a baby.

SAM
Dad, a cub is still a tiger! And anyways, what did you think it would grow into?

Mack waddles up the hallway behind them, Sam’s suitcases under each arm.

MACK
Have you named it yet?

EXT. MANSION DRIVEWAY - DAY
Sam sits on the hood of a luxury car, furiously texting away to any friend that will believe her.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY
Ronnie and Mack both pace around the kitchen.

Ronnie suddenly leaps at Mack and tries to strangle him. Mack, with his effortless girth, shrugs and Ronnie ricochets off him.

MACK
You must’ve screwed up the order.

RONNIE
Screwing up is ordering the wrong toppings on a pizza. How the hell did you think it was okay to let that monster into Sam’s room?

MACK
The delivery guys assured me he was a trained tiger. Documents and certificates. Bull in my opinion, it scratched at me on the way up.

RONNIE
I wish it mauled you to death.
MACK
This wasn’t my decision, remember?
Call animal control.

RONNIE
It’s a Siberian white tiger, Mack.
Illegal, smuggled through a black
market network. I’ll be suspended
from football forever, and that’ll
be the least of my troubles.

Ronnie buries his face in his hands.

RONNIE (CONT’D)
What kind of father am I?

Mack pats Ronnie on the back.

MACK
Alright, I got an idea.

RONNIE
Yeah?

MACK
We take all the raw meat from the
refrigerator. Then we hide
explosives inside the meat. When
kitty gets hungry... KABOOM.

RONNIE
That’s the ending to the movie
Jaws. No. Besides there’s only
grilled chicken and kale in the
fridge. The tiger came with papers?
Contact info? I want you to get on
the line with the original owner.

EXT. MANSION DRIVEWAY – DAY

Ronnie pokes his head out of the mansion’s front door.

RONNIE
Sammy, baby, daddy’s going to take
care of it. Just wait until it’s
safe to come back inside.

He starts to close the door before adding—

RONNIE (CONT’D)
And I better not see a picture of
you-know-what on Facebook, Twitter
Instagram. Or god forbid ESPN.
SAM
A Land Rover. That’s what every other spoiled athlete’s daughter gets on their sweet sixteen.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY
Ronnie finds Mack at the kitchen counter, phone to his ear.

UNCLE MACK
I’m still on hold. I’ll let you know as I soon as I talk to them.
What are you going to do?

RONNIE
Plan B. But I’ll need to grab a few things first.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY
Ronnie returns to the entrance of Sam’s room, still closed with claw marks.

Ronnie is donning his full NFL uniform, helmet and shoulder pads, for armor.

He stops in front of her door. He removes a handgun tucked into his back pocket.

Gun in one hand, the other covering the doorknob, he starts counting down.

RONNIE
Here, kitty, kitty, kitty. Alright, three, two-

Sam pops out into the hallway from the nearby bathroom.

SAM
Dad. Don’t shoot it.

Ronnie jumps back and immediately lowers the firearm.

RONNIE
Sam, I could’ve shot you. What are you doing up here? Go back outside.

SAM
I wanted to see how you got rid of it. But I didn’t think you were going to murder it.
RONNIE
You wanted me to get rid of it.

SAM
Yeah, I didn’t mean kill it.

RONNIE
Why not?

SAM
It’s animal cruelty. And that tiger is an endangered species.

RONNIE
Sam, I think we’re the endangered species here.

SAM
Return it then.

RONNIE
The tiger’s not a bathrobe. There’s no gift receipt for it. Mack is contacting the old owners but until then I’m dealing with it anyway I see fit.

Sam’s bedroom door shutters with a THUD.

SAM
Isn’t there a way to calm it down?

RONNIE
Maybe. I got an idea. Lock yourself in the bathroom until I return.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY
Mack listens to instructions delivered over the phone. He copies the information onto a napkin with a pen.

MACK
I see. Hmm.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY
Ronnie returns down the hallway with a plush tiger that has seen better days and knocks on the bathroom door. Sam comes out of the bathroom and stares at the stuffed animal.
RONNIE
This might calm him down. I can toss it inside and-

SAM
Wait. That isn’t... that can’t be..

RONNIE
It is.

Sam takes the plush tiger from her father.

SAM
Striper. How did you..? Didn’t Mom throw him away?

RONNIE
She did. And with good reason. You wouldn’t go anywhere without Striper. But really, you were so young, you could never pronounce the hard “ai” in his name.

Sam laughs.

SAM
But dad, really, how did you find him?

RONNIE
Well, mom said you couldn’t have it, but she didn’t include me. I snuck him out of the trash later. I liked having him around, it’s like having a piece of you here permanently with him.

SAM
And you were about to toss him to the tiger? And get shred to pieces?

RONNIE
I didn’t think he meant anything to you anymore. And I thought that he’d calm the tiger down.

Sam squeezes it beneath her arms.

SAM
No, I’m keeping him.

RONNIE
Damn, I should’ve just given you this in the first place.

(MORE)
RONNIE (CONT'D)
I thought you hated stuffed animals, but I remembered you loving tigers.

SAM
Thanks, dad. For all the effort you made today. I appreciate it.

The bedroom door SHUDDERS and GROWLS again.

SAM (CONT'D)
So, what are we going to do about the real enchilada?

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ronnie and Sam return to Mack in the kitchen. They wait for Mack to finish his phone call.

MACK
(into phone)
Thank you so much for your help.

Mack clicks off the call and turns to the Chambers family.

MACK (CONT'D)
Just finished talking to the owners. Good news and bad news. The good news is the tiger is a trained retiree from that Vegas magician act “Ziegfried and Ray”... the tiger even has a safe word. But...

Ronnie holds up a hand.

RONNIE
Mack, that’s awesome to hear. It sounds like you have a handle on the situation. I’m sure you’ll find the tiger a new home. In the meantime, Sam, Striper and myself are taking the Lamborghini and heading to my condo in Miami for the rest of the weekend.

With an arm draped over his daughter, Ronnie leads Sam away.

Mack takes a big gulp and looks at the notes on the napkin.

“BAD NEWS: TIGER WENT TIGER. ACT ENDED WITH TRAGEDY. ZIEGFRIED STILL DRINKING FOOD THROUGH STRAW”.