

# I am a Consequence of Bad Decisions

Jackie Haze

I have a friend who once told me I would make a fabulous dominatrix. I imagined what that would look like. Standing there in a hotel room in attire I would never otherwise wear, getting ready to degrade or hit someone. Sure, it is a form of therapeutic release for them. Sure, I could fake it until I make it. I had always wanted to act.

"Five foot ten and white," she said, "You'd make a killing."

I couldn't even defend myself growing up.

It was nearly daily that I would come back crying after another kid called me another name, slammed a desk into my stomach, threw rocks at me, punched me in the chest with a chain-wrapped fist, tripped me and taunted me with my puppy they briefly took from my hands—you get the idea.

My mother, fed up, told me to clock them. "Why don't you stick up for yourself?"

"I can't hurt their feelings," I'd say.

She should've known; even the bus driver had informed her he saved fire drills for days I was not on the bus because of how tender he saw I was.

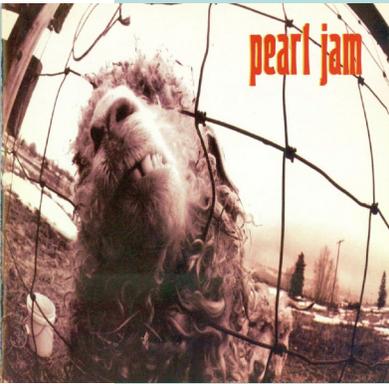
But my mother seemed perplexed. After all, she had no problem barreling her fist into another human's face. It was far too often her default. Similarly, my biological father, who was likely sitting in a prison somewhere at the time, like any given time, had a penchant for wailing on someone and feeling okay about himself.

In fact, according to my mother, it is possible he killed someone.

I don't even know why I asked her. It's similar to how I found out there was no such thing as Santa Claus. I was seven at that time. The hunch was there, so I inquired. My mother confirmed my suspicion. I started crying. She tried to take it back. I responded through sniffles and that fuh-fuh effect a hard-crying session creates, "No, it's okay." But now, on the phone with her, I was thirty-four, and she didn't take this harrowing information on my potentially murderous sperm donor back. And it wasn't okay.

I had been pacing through my empty New Orleans apartment while my partner sat on the only piece of furniture we had, a bed, in the tiny back room of our shotgun-style apartment, browsing through her phone and peeking up at me during moments I popped in as she heard bits and pieces of the speakerphone conversation with my mother echoing between the hardwood floors and barren off-white walls. To my pleasant surprise, it was on a day my mother was not slurring from heavy doses of prescription medications, and I could make out all of what she was saying in her slightly raspy voice. For some reason, I decided to ask her if it's possible my biological father, Danny, ever took someone's life.

She said yes.



Pearl Jam

"Daughter"

Vs.

10/1993

Epic

Then she said she is pretty sure, but the only person who took the conclusive answer with her to her grave is the mother of one of the children he put out there. My mother didn't think he would trust her with such information. She told me it's highly likely. That, in fact, due to strange things uttered, which she did not go into, it is most likely.

I shuddered. I listened to her tell me with a kind of apathy, it seemed, along with her pleasure in telling such stories. I thought of all the years I've spent looking at the smallest hair on my body and being both disgusted and saddened by how it came to be, where it is from. What it is comprised of. I am a consequence of bad decisions.

She went on to remind me of the grisly triple homicide of Pavilion Township, Michigan, as I paced through the shotgun-style duplex, tracing my finger across the rough texture of the walls. "He was asked to do that, but he just couldn't," she said. I'm not sure how true this is. Five young people were convicted. "There was potentially a lot of money involved." It was rumored that they kept large sums of money in drawers rather than in banks. They thought it was a robbery, but not much was taken but a gun. Money was left in the drawers and the elderly victims' jewelry remained untouched. "The police never released this information to the public, but they were cut up and put into bags. He knew he could keep this information for a bargain if he ended up in prison again." The autopsy, however, revealed that they were beaten with a baseball bat and stabbed. They were found in their basement.

After I hung up, my partner, who had heard part of the conversation on speaker, looked up at me from under her perfect mess of black curls. Her face sunk. I'm assuming she saw how crushed I was. "I can't stand it. I can't stand where I come from," I said.

"You're not Danny, Jackie. You are not your parents. Just because he did shitty things doesn't make you that kind of person. You don't even eat meat because you see the animals' faces." I fixed my eyes on the only other object in that room beside the bed she was sitting on—the ukulele my partner had given me for my birthday. I had been determined to learn the song "Daughter" by Pearl Jam:

*Don't call me daughter, not fit to  
The picture kept will remind me...*

I told her it still lingers; it still has its effects.

I knew he helped sink a body. In a lake that I swam across. I picture the hollowed eyes of a skull who was once somebody's baby staring up from their final resting place that Danny helped choose. Staring up, from the seaweed and dirt so far below, at Danny's carelessly cast-off progeny gliding above, breathing in the world above the surface.

It's fucked up.

It was a rumor that was verified. About eight years before this conversation with my mother, I was sitting at a picnic table on the shore of that small lake one day with a friend when Danny, a stranger I had not seen in ages and who I always tried to avoid if the mere possibility of his presence arose, walked up, and invited himself to say "hi." Shaken, I said, "What are you doing here?" He told me, "Taking a bath. I got a bar of soap and was cleaning myself up." My stomach turned. "Danny," I said, "Is it true you sunk a body in this lake?" He stumbled. "Uh...maybe."

Aside from a time I had seen him briefly before that, I had not seen him perhaps since I was a child. I had not too long before revealed my attraction to women. Never once did he

ask about who I am as a person. Never once did he ask what my life was like. Instead, he said, "I heard my genes is strong. Both my boy *and* my girl luuuuuuh da pussy."

And my mother must have thought this was a fine person to have children with. I try to make sense of it. I look at their faces from their younger times and I try. The photos are tinged with that orange cast that photos from the seventies carried, and they looked young. Both of his blue eyes are intact, his jaw is chiseled, he is fit, and he smiles brightly. He looks like the superman actors of the time. My mom's features are soft, her eyes dark and deep, her hair long and ironed straight, and she has the slight smile of Mona Lisa.

I try to remind myself that they loved each other in their own versions of what love is. They met because, after spotting each other, he knew her route on Burdick Street and pretended to hitchhike. She picked him up. She loved his waist-long hair. He used to hop trains across the city to see her. The news once claimed that all the flowers in Crane Park were missing and she went out to find them in her car. Love is blind. And somewhere in that, they believed children should come of it.

I have always fantasized about discovering my mother had an affair, only to find that my "real" father is, in all actuality, a decent, upstanding, loving man. Who could potentially love me, too, since I never had that. Maybe we'd talk hours over a coffee or beer, catching up on lost time. Maybe we'd take a trip. I'd finally discover where I got my longer fingers and nose, and why I'm taller than everyone I come from. He might tell me he was terribly scattered between numerous creative talents and could never settle on one but, helping to settle my worries, he finally made it. He finally got it together. He landed. He might tell me he feels it all, every energy and every emotion in any given place, but has worked it out. He'd actually ask about me. I'd ask about him. Maybe I'd find an alien sense of home. But I unfortunately have Danny's cheek bones and gummy smile.

I joke often that my energy source was floating through this world laughing and questioning why literally everything is done the way it's done in this world when Danny got out of prison for a bit and banged Sue and I got pulled in physically against my will. I can see my spirit feeling the tug, protesting with a foreboding "No." Each no became a crescendo until the final, long descending "noooooooooo..." as I got sucked into this world in a similar fashion of a dissipating tornado, the water swirl above a bath drain, smoke on rewind, or a genie being vacuumed back into its lamp.

I say I didn't want to come here. This can be loosely confirmed by my nearly month late arrival after minimal movement, cracking my mother's pelvic bone and inhaling meconium on the way out, volunteering myself to blue and gray skin and an extended stay in the hospital. My mother did walk in one day to find Danny had taken me out of the incubator. Cradling me, he looked up at her with tears streaming down his face. "She was so cold," he said.

I still can't make sense of it.

I had spent many days in the large back yard that my younger brother's dad homed us with as a child—the days when my hair either had to be like Mr. Rogers or Patty Duke, when I was riding my pink bike insisting I was a boy, when I wanted to marry Jesse from Full House but was dressing up like Eric Martin from Mr. Big serenading visitors—daydreaming that Samantha on Bewitched was my mother. I didn't know why, but I felt guilty about it.

Perhaps it was during a daydream session that I fell asleep at five in my sandbox under the swing set that sat near diamond shaped trees my brothers and I would use to play

baseball, when I was woken by my biological father, who I did not know very well due to his long stints in prison. I darted into the 175-year-old house that was assumed haunted by the neighbors, up the stairs, and into my little room, dove into my closet and shut the door, submerging myself in the pile of clothes and toys to hide from him. I was devastated when he unburied me.

It was also around that time when I was standing in the room of a prison looking up at him, who seeded my mother with the consequence of me, sitting behind the glass with a telephone up to his ear. My mother said into her receiver, "Oh, Danny, look!" Turning to me, she said, "Jackie, take your shoes off." I didn't want to. "Take your shoes off and let us see your feet," she insisted. Not wanting to, I slowly did. "She's got your sister's feet!" she told him. *No, I have my feet*, I thought.

In fourth grade, the teacher told the class it would be mandatory to sign our last names. Having vehemently avoided it, I refused. She told me I have to. I started crying. She brought me in the hallway to talk with me about it. To this day I have trouble signing it and being addressed by his name. His name. Not mine.

He has spent probably most of his life in prison. "Well, his mother was mean," my mother says, "The kind of woman who could put her son in a trash can like a piece of garbage or chase him with an axe." I try to remember we all deal with things differently. I teeter between not knowing what it's like to be them and the fact that we make choices. My mother beat the shit out of me and emotionally tore me down. She said she hates me. She's told me I am dead to her. I am not sinking bodies. I've put bugs outside.

I question myself all the time as to why I offer anyone but them a generous helping of understanding, compassion, empathy, and forgiveness.

His robberies have been in the newspaper with no suspect, Danny going undiscovered. He didn't spend his years in prison for said robberies or for sinking a body or for, potentially, taking a life. It was always for domestic abuse or drugs. Most recently, a meth lab, from what I heard.

At the time that Danny told me that his genes run strong, he was going to fix the brakes on my car as a result of an unknown invitation from my mother. As he looked at my car, I studied the swagger in his walk, the lines down his cheeks, the way they crease around the slightly upturned corners as if he is always on the brink of another lewd comment, the missing eye from his many fights. I considered his past. Dubiously, I asked, "Are you sure you can fix it?"

He looked at me, someone who had been considering joining the sex industry to try and leave my less than fortunate circumstances, and he replied, "I can fix anything but my own fucked up life."

*The shades go down*

*The shades go go*

*Go*