

IMPOVERISHED WEALTH

The Anthology



JAKE CAVANAH

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Danny Cunningham

Wednesday Evening

Danny Cunningham divided up his vegetable medley into different sections on his plate, designating certain areas around his main entree for each vegetable. His salmon was cold and untouched with the exception of one corner. His mother had made him try it and in doing so scolded him so sternly, a few patrons sitting nearby risked a glance their way. Danny just wanted a hamburger like all the other dignitaries' children, but his mother shot that down.

“Because Cunningham children are held to a higher standard than the rest. That’s why,” Monica Cunningham said to him on the ride over to Pacific Palisades, a premier coastal city on the Westside of Los Angeles where the event was being held.

Of course, Danny’s younger brother Troy could order a hamburger.

When Danny was nearly done situating his carrots on the right side of his salmon, he peered up towards his mother, who was glaring at him with wide eyes, a locked jaw, and a convulsing throat. He got the message and set his silverware aside. Monica inhaled and exhaled deeply, shaking her head in disappointment.

Since he was too afraid to take out his phone and play games on it, all that was left for Danny to do was pay attention to his dad's speech.

“I look around and see some of the most talented and accomplished people in the history of mankind in one room, but not for the reasons one would expect. Sure, some of you who I’m looking at have either one of the most recognizable faces in the world or have played an instrumental role in creating one of the best motion pictures of all time. Then of course, we know one who has done both.”

Christian paused to flash his iconic smile and allow the crowd to chuckle at his self-praise.

When it died down, he continued, “But on a serious note, all of you have sacrificed so much to give back to those in need, those who were not born under the lucky star most of us were, and that, my friends, is what makes me genuinely proud to be able to call you my peers. On behalf of my entire organization, thank you so much for being here and for all you do to ensure everybody has an opportunity to be successful in this lifetime.”

As he wrapped up his speech the entire audience, including Danny, Monica, and Troy, gave him a standing ovation. Christian Cunningham was one of the most respected and successful movie producers Hollywood had ever seen. He had exceeded the expectations of the entertainment industry when he burst onto the scene as his father’s career as a legendary director was coming to a close.

For the cameras and crowd, Christian planted a kiss on Monica’s lips and hugged his two sons. Danny noticed his dad’s embrace of Troy was much stronger than what he received.

After Christian’s speech concluded, the auction took place. Goldendoodle puppies, limited-edition sports cars, and even real estate were some of the available items. The organization claimed all of the proceeds went to poorer communities’ middle school and high school drama programs, but everyone knew salaries and appearance fees took precedence.

Danny once envied how dedicated Christian was to his organization, but Danny had since determined he was wasting energy by seeking his dad’s approval. Four more years and he could distance himself from his family permanently, and if that sacrificed his shot at the trust fund his parents incessantly threw in his face, then so be it.

His priorities significantly differed from those of Christian and Monica Cunningham.

After the auction wrapped up, Monica, Danny, and Troy loaded themselves into the Escalade that would take them home while Christian exchanged farewell pleasantries with Tom Caplan. Tom played the lead role in four of Christian’s movies, and even Danny, who now couldn’t care less about his dad’s professional dealings, knew one of Christian’s main goals when making a movie was to have Tom be the star.

With a grin on his face, Christian walked over to the SUV, but it vanished as soon as his door shut.

“Jesus Christ, I swear he gets gayer every time I talk to him,” Christian said.

Monica let out a disgusted sound from her throat. “I know. When he walked in tonight you could just feel it. All of that work he’s had done on his face isn’t helping. You better get him to do another movie before he looks like Mickey Rourke.”

Christian ignored his wife. He was already on his phone finding out what the Internet thought of his event. Monica took out hers and looked at pictures from the night, making comments to herself about how awful everyone’s outfit choices were.

When she became bored with that, she moved on to Danny. “Danny, it would’ve been nice if you showed a little more maturity tonight. Your father put on quite a show, and his children, especially his eldest, are expected to rise to the occasion. And that doesn’t include playing with your food like a little boy while he’s giving a speech.”

Danny felt his face get red and eyes begin to water. He wished he could close his eyes and not wake up until he was alone in his room, where neither his mom or dad were to tell him how big of a disappointment he was. He saw his mom look at his dad to see what he had to say on the matter.

Monica had to say something to get him to offer his opinion. “Christian, what do you have to say to your son?”

Christian let out an “ugh” and rolled his eyes. “Maybe one day it will all click. Until then, I’m not going to get my hopes up.”

Monica smirked in agreement.

Even though it was dark and Danny’s gaze was at his feet, he felt his mom’s piercing stare. She could belittle him just by looking in his direction. He didn’t know if that or his dad not bothering to look up from his phone when he addressed him hurt his feelings more.

Troy was sound asleep by the time the Escalade pulled up to main guard gate of their neighborhood in Hidden Hills. Monica was back to judging all of her ‘friends’ on Instagram. Christian was on the phone with his team to review how the event went. Danny stared out the window with his forehead pressed against the cold

window, anxiously waiting for his family to go separate ways once they got home.

The Cunninghams resided in one of the most exclusive parts of Los Angeles. On top of their neighborhood employing around-the-clock security, Christian ensured the family home had its own security team that worked twenty-four seven, three hundred sixty-five days a year.

A team of twelve bodyguards surrounded the Cunninghams' ten-acre property. Six of them patrolled the premises with an over one hundred pound female Cane Corso at their hip. When Christian learned female dogs were the preferred gender in dog fights because they were instinctively more aggressive than males, he demanded 'bitches only.'

Two of the guards with canines stood pat on both sides at the bottom of the driveway, and did not so much as flinch when the Escalade drove up after the gate opened.

Before the driver brought the car to a stop under the driveway overhang, a group of maids and butlers were already standing by waiting to open the car doors. They didn't receive one word or gesture of acknowledgment as the Cunninghams exited the vehicle.

One of the maids gently picked up the sleeping Troy and carried him to his room.

Christian raised his voice at whoever was on the other end of the phone.

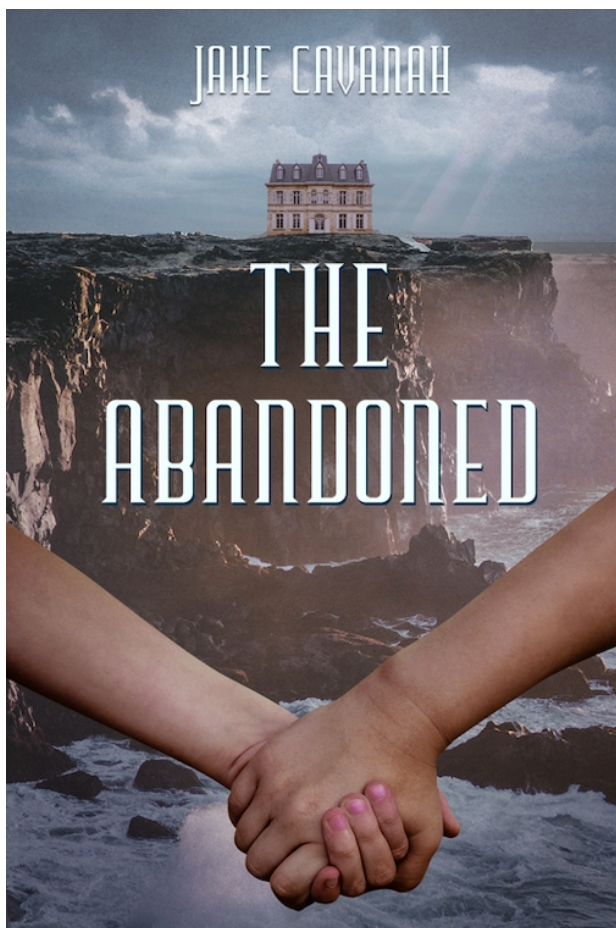
Monica was still scrolling through her Instagram feed as she ambled towards their home.

Danny sauntered his way inside— where he became the most anxious and fearful.

From the Author

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