

Life Without Parole

John Kinsel remains in prison even after alleged rape victim recanted.

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Even drunk, John Kinsel knew what to expect the night he was arrested for driving a tow truck into a ditch in West Monroe, Louisiana. He'd go to jail, make bond and pay a fine. By his early twenties, the blond-haired, blue-eyed Texan already had a knack for getting into trouble. He'd been in jail once before for stealing a car in Dallas.

Kinsel served a month in jail in 1996 and decided to pay his fine to get out. The prison guard checked to see how much Kinsel owed, and when he pulled up Kinsel's records, he found something alarming. Kinsel had a warrant for his arrest in Jefferson Parish. In disbelief, Kinsel told them they'd better check again; they had the wrong guy. "No," Kinsel remembers the guard telling him. "They're coming to get you."

That's when Kinsel learned his girlfriend's nine-year-old daughter Alyssa Medlin had accused him of raping, choking, and threatening her for nearly three years, from the time she was six to eight and a half. (The *Houston Press* made several attempts to reach Medlin for this story, all of which went ignored.) Kinsel almost passed out when he was told the charges. He'd beaten men up for the same acts. Kinsel waived extradition from West Monroe to Jefferson Parish, confident he'd be able to straighten out the situation in a few hours. "I'm no angel," he said. "I've raised hell all my life. But shit like this? No, never."

Come December 1999, Kinsel began his life sentence in Louisiana's notorious Angola prison. His sisters Mary and Alice nearly went broke hiring lawyers, but nothing could undo the accusations the little girl had made.

Not even Medlin herself, who would come forward at age 19 and say she made the whole story up. Not even a judge who ordered Kinsel a new trial.

While a federal court tries to decide at what point they should believe the girl, a proven courtroom liar, Kinsel is going on his twelfth year behind bars in the largest maximum-security prison in the country with no hope of parole. Ever.

Trinity, Texas, is a speck of a town 80 miles north of Houston, with one high school and two stoplights. Kinsel grew up in Trinity, the youngest child of seven. There was little else to do but grow up fast. When Kinsel was eight years old, his father shot himself in the head. His older sister Mary found him in a pool of his blood, painkillers and a .22 scattered across his bed. A year later, Kinsel's mother died of breast cancer. The orphaned son went to live with another

sister's in-laws, who sold all of his parents' possessions in a garage sale and put Kinsel to work tarring roofs. Mary, who was 18 at the time, took her brother away to live with her.

Kinsel dropped out of high school freshman year and moved to Dallas, where he got a job hanging drywall. Then, at 19, he got arrested for stealing an Oldsmobile. He was convicted of auto theft, but didn't show up for his probation; instead, he skipped town for a few years and moved to South Carolina.

When he turned 22, Kinsel moved to Monroe, Louisiana. He was hired as a tow truck operator at a local wrecking service, and every day after work, he'd unwind at a neighborhood bar. He fell in love with Adrienne Alberts, the 28-year-old brunette bartender. Kinsel would drink beer and flirt with Alberts until the end of the shift, when he'd take her out for breakfast. By that point, Kinsel had fathered two children with two different women, and Alberts had three kids of her own and a husband she was in the process of divorcing. But they started dating in January 1992 and soon fell madly in love, according to both of them.

In November, Kinsel, Alberts and her three kids moved to Gretna, a tightly knit town just across the river from New Orleans. For a few weeks, they stayed with Alberts's older sister, Stacy Plaisance, who quickly adopted Kinsel as her brother. "My sister was always a goody two-shoes," Plaisance said with a laugh. "He seemed like somebody that would probably run in my crowd...me and him just clicked instantly, like good buddies." Plaisance introduced him to her brother-in-law Mark Plaisance, who liked Kinsel and got him a job at his towing company. Then, they found a place of their own, where Kinsel, Alberts and her three children would live for the next year.

It was no storybook relationship. The couple broke up in November 1993 because Alberts discovered Kinsel was smoking crack. Alberts moved back in with her father, and Kinsel moved out. But while they were broken up, she found out she was pregnant with his baby. Swearing he'd get clean, Kinsel went to rehab, and Alberts took him back when the child was born in June 1994. The next year, Kinsel moved in with Alberts, her parents and her kids.

Alyssa Medlin, Alberts' middle child, was a rebellious fourth grader at the time. With golden hair and blue eyes, Medlin looked like an angel. "She's a devil in disguise," said Stacy Plaisance, her aunt. Plaisance said she remembers finding Medlin's mother in tears, trying to figure out why her daughter would steal \$80 of rent money from her purse. Kinsel didn't approve of Medlin's behavior, and Medlin didn't like the discipline he brought into her life. "She hated that John wanted order in the house," Plaisance said.

One of Medlin's childhood friends was Lacy Plaisance, who is the daughter of Mark Plaisance. Plaisance slept over at Medlin's house every weekend, and she remembered how much Medlin hated Kinsel. "When we ate dinner, we had to wash our plate when we were finished," Lacy Plaisance said. "Little rules like that, she didn't like them." One night, the two girls had a sleepover with another girl named Lacie Kersey, who offered Medlin a suggestion. "Lacie said, 'Well, all you have to do is say that your stepdad molested you, and he's gonna go to jail,'" said Plaisance. It had worked for her sister, Kersey had said.

By November 1995, Kinsel had moved back to Texas. The relationship was over. After Kinsel served five months in Dallas for his probation violation, Kinsel and Alberts started talking again on the phone. There were hints of yet another reunion.

That's when Medlin began telling people she had been molested by Kinsel. She first told a school friend in March 1996, and in May, she told her mother. Alberts was cooking dinner when Medlin approached her and said, "Mom, I just want to tell you that when you and John were together, he was molesting me," according to Alberts's court testimony.

"She also told her mom that my dad molested me," Lacy Plaisance said. Alberts called Plaisance's mother, who sat her daughter down and questioned her. Plaisance told her mom that it absolutely wasn't true, that she had never been molested by her father and that Medlin had gotten the idea to accuse the fathers at the sleepover. "I knew when it came out that it was a lie," Plaisance said, referring to Medlin's accusation against Kinsel. Lacy Plaisance's parents never let Medlin sleep over at their house after that.

Alberts didn't believe her daughter either. But just to be sure, Alberts had her roommate ask Medlin what color Kinsel's pubic hair was, according to an interview Alberts later had at the Children's Hospital. Black, Medlin had answered. Blond, Alberts knew, relieved. She dismissed her daughter's accusation as another of her everyday lies. Meanwhile, Alberts never told Kinsel of the accusations, even though they were talking. July 1996 brought another dynamic turn to their relationship, when Alberts got a restraining order against Kinsel on her and her son's behalf. She claimed that Kinsel had threatened to take their son away and put her in the hospital if he found her with another man. If Alberts was worried at all about Medlin's accusation, the restraining order didn't show it. Alberts only demanded that Kinsel stay away from her son, not her daughter.

While Medlin's mother and friends ignored her, the nine-year-old girl found a much more responsive audience in her elementary school's social worker. On August 27, 1996, she told the social worker that Kinsel had abused her. That day, the social worker called Child Protection, who called the Jefferson Parish sheriff's office.

A few days later on September 3, Medlin had a videotaped interview with a forensic interviewer at the Children's Advocacy Center. There, she unloaded an arsenal of accusations against Kinsel. She said that Kinsel had raped her for almost three years, from the time she was six to eight-and-a-half. The first time, in September 1993, she said, Kinsel had taken her into the bathroom, forced her to undress and threatened to kill her if she didn't comply. He raped her anally and forced her to perform oral sex. When they moved again, Medlin said that Kinsel would perform the same sexual abuse most mornings while her brothers and sisters were asleep and her mother was at work. Medlin said that Kinsel used drugs, and choked her when he found out she had told her boyfriend about his drug use. Then, Medlin said, he took her into the bathroom and raped her vaginally.

The next month, Alberts and her daughter went to the child abuse ward at the Children's Hospital for Medlin's examination. Alberts was first interviewed by Dr. Scott Benton, the director of the program. Benton noted in his report that Alberts was concerned her daughter was lying. "She

bases some of her concern on the actions of Lacey Kersey [sic], Alyssa's friend, who she believes lied about sexual abuse before," the report said. But the wisps of her mother's concerns were brushed away by Medlin's interview and examination. According to the doctor's report, Medlin told the doctor she had been anally and vaginally raped "every morning." Medlin's examination revealed no anal scars, fissures or bruising, which the doctor noted wasn't uncommon in sexual abuse. Her hymen was present, but narrowed with a slight piece missing, "consistent with previous blunt penetrating trauma," Dr. Benton wrote. By the end of October, Kinsel was wanted for aggravated rape of a child under 12.

Kinsel spent two years locked up in Jefferson Parish until he was granted house arrest in December 1998. In May, he was given permission to travel back to Trinity for three days, in time to be with his sister Janet as she died from breast cancer. "Don't you just want to get in the truck and run?" asked his sister Alice after the funeral. "You've got money and a credit card; you can go anywhere." Kinsel told her that he wasn't guilty, and that he was going to face the trial. Hours after burying his sister, Kinsel returned home, put his ankle bracelet back on and waited for his day in court.

Just a day before Kinsel's trial was to take place, on August 31, 1999, 13-year-old Alyssa Medlin frantically called her Aunt Stacy from a restaurant and told her she needed to speak with her. "She took me in the bathroom at LeBlanc's and told me that she didn't want to go through with this, but she was afraid...that no one would ever believe anything she had to say again if she didn't do this," Stacy Plaisance would testify the next day. Medlin would also admit that she had not wanted to testify. "Of course she didn't want to be in here," argued Donnie Rowan, attorney for the state. "Who the hell would want to be in here?"

It would be years before Medlin revealed the real reason she hadn't wanted to testify that day; according to the court hearing when she took her story back, she had known her trial testimony was a lie. But Medlin did testify that day. She stuck to her original story, with a few exceptions. She denied ever saying that Kinsel molested her every day at one of the residences, and said instead that it must have happened five or six times. She mixed up some dates, and didn't recall as many specific details as she had on the videotape at the Children's Advocacy Center, which was also shown to the jury. As for the pubic hair discrepancy, Medlin said she always had her eyes closed and guessed at the color.

Dr. Benton, Director of the Child Abuse Program, called Medlin's physical examination "suggestive" of sexual abuse and consistent with her story. Although he said her abnormality was not entirely indicative of abuse, her anatomy "puts her more in the category of someone who has experienced sexual abuse, than someone who has not." Benton said that her cleft was unlikely to be caused by an accident, although he acknowledged that it could have been caused by a crayon being shoved in her vaginal area, which is what Alberts testified Medlin did at age two. Benton added that though her anal exam was completely normal, "scarring is very rare with the anus, in general, despite bad things happening."

Kinsel's case, like most child rape cases, had no DNA evidence or other witnesses to the alleged crimes. Besides Medlin, the doctor, a police officer and the woman who interviewed Medlin at

the Children's Advocacy Center, Medlin's 15-year-old brother, Jason, was the only other witness who testified on the state's behalf. He stated that when he was eight, he saw his sister go into the room with Kinsel and heard "kissing sounds."

Testifying on behalf of Kinsel were some of the most important people in Medlin's life: her mother Adrienne Alberts, her grandfather Earl Alberts, her friend Georgette Evans, and her aunt Stacy Plaisance. Even Kinsel himself testified. Kinsel's attorney Bruce Netterville had hired a doctor to testify, but the doctor could not make it to trial.

Except for her brother Jason, Medlin's family plainly did not believe her. Alberts did Medlin's laundry for years, and said she never saw evidence of discharge or blood or heard complaints from her daughter of soreness. She testified that her daughter had a history of lying. She added that during part of the time these acts were supposedly going on, the whole family of five was living and sleeping in a single room together. Earl Alberts, at whose residence Medlin alleged six months of sexual abuse by Kinsel, testified that Kinsel wasn't even living in the house during the time frame.

Medlin's friend Georgette Evans also testified. She said she once asked Medlin why she had said these things about Kinsel, and recalled Medlin's response: "I don't think my mom was happy so I said all that stuff 'cause I never liked him..." So, she had to get rid of him, that's what she told me," Evans said. When Evans was asked if Medlin had ever told her she was lying about the allegations, however, Evans said no.

At one point, Netterville tried to introduce evidence that Medlin could have been raped by a different relative: her biological father. Netterville was stopped on objection, and in a bench conference with the judge, he tried to explain that Adrienne Alberts was getting ready to tell the jury about a time when she saw her ex-husband do something "inappropriate" with her daughter. This act, said Netterville, would explain how Medlin was able to concoct the stories. The objection was sustained, and the story remained untold.

Stacy Plaisance told the *Houston Press* she knows the story Alberts was about to tell that day in court. In fact, she says, the incident happened right in front of her when the whole family was staying with Plaisance for the weekend. Plaisance said she caught Medlin's father standing in the bathroom in nothing but a towel, with Medlin standing underneath it. After the incident, she suspected something untoward concerning the girl's father, and Plaisance found it suspicious that Medlin's father stayed far away from the trial. "You best believe that if somebody molested my kid and they was having a trial, my ass would be parked in that fucking courtroom," she said. Medlin's father did not return calls for comment.

The jury had a choice. Believe Netterville, who claimed Medlin had been asked leading questions by the Children's Advocacy Center, that the girl was never credible to begin with and that the physical evidence was laughable. Or believe Greg Kennedy, one of the prosecutors for the state, who said that every detail had happened, that the physical evidence was damning and that Medlin was the "epitome of bravery" to come forward and testify.

"She has never, ever, ever, ever once said, 'This did not happen,'" Kennedy said in a final push. "Because the minute she does that, the second she does that, this case is over. It's over."

Nine jurors found Kinsel guilty. Three found him not guilty. Ten were needed to reach a conclusion, so the judge sent the jurors back to think again. With one juror's flip to "guilty," Kinsel went on the books as another win for the state of Louisiana, home to the highest incarceration rate in the world. Kinsel was sentenced to life without parole at Angola.

In Texas, only capital murder cases warrant a sentence of life without parole. In Louisiana, a life sentence for any crime means you never leave prison. It could have been even worse for Kinsel. His could have been a capital case, but the court chose not to pursue the death penalty. Such draconian sentences are partly a result of place. In a handful of states (Louisiana and Texas are two), judges are elected, not appointed. And in Jefferson Parish, where judicial candidates brag about their high conviction rates to win voters, it certainly doesn't look good to be soft on child rape. Donnie Rowan, who was the state's attorney in Kinsel's case, ran for judge in 2007 and boasted a 99 percent conviction rate during his time as a prosecutor, according to the *Times-Picayune*. He won.

But what happens when the victim wants the accused set free?

In October 2005, 19-year-old Medlin showed up at the office of Laurie White, Kinsel's attorney at the time. Medlin said that she had made up the allegations that put Kinsel in prison and wanted to set the record straight. She issued a sworn statement with White. According to court transcripts, Medlin went to the district attorney's office a year later to officially recant. She said she was threatened with perjury, and was told that she would need to be recited her Miranda rights before continuing.

Terrified, Medlin left the D.A.'s office and hired an attorney, Gary Bizal. Bizal told her that she could indeed be charged with perjury, but Medlin issued an affidavit in June 2006 that she was prepared to testify in open court, even if it meant going to jail. "When I testified at trial that John molested me, I lied," Medlin wrote in the affidavit. "Since John Kinsel's conviction, I have lived with guilt about what I have done...I now must do whatever it takes to correct this wrong."

Bizal told the *Houston Press* that in his 29 years practicing law, he's only had two victims recant. Bizal believed Medlin was sincere in recanting. He had no reason to doubt what she was saying. Recantations are always viewed suspiciously by a court, he said, but the very act of recanting should call into question the alleged victim's first accusation. "Somebody coming in and recanting just suggests to me that you've got sort of an unstable person to begin with," he said.

For the second time, Medlin's testimony single-handedly convened a court hearing. On October 4, 2006, Medlin testified that John Kinsel never molested her, and that she had lied at trial. She had been sexually molested by someone, she said, but it wasn't Kinsel. The perpetrator was a "young unknown male" according to the affidavit she gave to Bizal, and he performed many of the same acts — oral sex and inappropriate touching — she had ascribed to Kinsel, short of rape. She told the court she had never been raped. "I took what happened years before, and because I

disliked John Kinsel, accused him of sexually molesting me," she wrote in the affidavit. Medlin said she also got the details for her original testimony by using parts of the stories she heard from a friend who had accused her stepfather of sexual abuse and retelling them, assigning them to Kinsel because she "hated him with a passion," she said. "My dad wasn't really in the picture, and when he tried to be, John was there and I didn't like him because of that," Medlin explained to the court. She said she still doesn't know who sexually abused her.

But much of her testimony was inconsistent. In addition to her past anonymous sexual abuse and stories from friends, she said she got the material for her accusations from children she met in group therapy at the Children's Advocacy Center — a chronological impossibility. She also said that even though she knew she had been lying for seven years, she hadn't come forward until then because she wanted to speak for herself and didn't want to go through an adult. That had never stopped her before, the state pointed out. She later admitted that she just didn't want anyone knowing her business in the new town to which she had relocated. Medlin denied that anyone had pressured her to recant, but said her relationship with her mother improved a good deal after she decided to recant.

"She was not a very good witness," Bizal told the *Houston Press*.

Vince Lamia, Chief of Investigations for the Jefferson Parish District Attorney's Office, even remembered Medlin's visit to the DA's office differently than she did. He testified that when Medlin was advised that she could be charged with perjury, she said, "Look, I'm not saying it didn't happen, I'm not saying he didn't do it, I just want to get beyond all this." Lamia wrote up Medlin's words in an affidavit the day after she visited the office. Medlin denied ever saying it.

The one consistent point Medlin maintained during the hearing was that Kinsel never raped her. Throughout the testimony, Medlin averted her eyes from Kinsel, who was in the courtroom. When asked why she wouldn't look at him, she replied, "I don't have the heart to."

Judge Charles Cusimano minced no words with Medlin. "All I can say is you are the court's worst nightmare," he told her. He said that his task — deciding when Medlin was a liar and when she was not — was deeply disturbing. "I wish they would let him take a polygraph," Cusimano said in closing, only half-jokingly. "It would make me feel better."

One week later, Cusimano granted Kinsel a new trial. "I'm not sure I believe her about whether it happened or not, but I don't know at which time I am supposed to believe her," he said. "I find that in no way can one convict absent her testimony." Kinsel's sisters, Mary and Alice, clung tearfully to each other in the courtroom, overjoyed that their baby brother would soon get a shot at freedom.

Without Medlin's testimony, the state had no chance of keeping Kinsel locked up. But prosecutors weren't about to lose him without a fight, and they filed writs with the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Because Cusimano called Medlin a liar, they argued, the recantation itself was unreliable.

On February 6, 2007, the Fifth Circuit upheld the state's appeal, finding the trial court "abused its discretion" in granting Kinsel a new trial. "Only in rare instances should a new trial be granted based on recanted testimony," the court ruled. One of the three judges dissented, arguing that the appellate court would be out of line in substituting its own credibility determination of a witness it had never even seen.

Jerri Sites, a leader in the Child Advocacy Center movement in Missouri, has worked for 18 years in the field of child abuse investigations. Her expertise is recantation, a topic she has consulted about for the past four years. Sites says that in child abuse cases, about 25 percent of victims recant. "Practical parts of their lives falling apart can cause a child to recant, not to mention feeling the pressure to recant because of the effect it's had on their families," she says. The vast majority of alleged victims who recant revert back to their original accusations sometime in their lives, she says, once they feel supported by their non-offending caregiver.

Studies show that in fewer than 3 percent of child abuse cases, a child will make up a false statement and blame someone for something they never did. It's incredibly rare, Sites says.

But it's not unknown. Sites trains investigators to thoroughly analyze the circumstances surrounding a recantation in order to determine its credibility. This means investigating the initial accusation with the same scrutiny. When she does forensic interviewing, Sites always asks the non-offending caregiver if there is any reason to believe the child is lying, or if the child has a history of lying. If there's any suspicion, she investigates it thoroughly. "It's just as much our responsibility to determine that it didn't happen as it is to find information to corroborate a child's statement that it did happen," she says. "We never want to falsely accuse anybody."

Things were different a decade ago in Jefferson Parish. No state investigator ever called Lacy Plaisance, Medlin's friend who was at the fateful sleepover. Nor did anyone ever call Lacy's father, Mark Plaisance, whom Medlin falsely accused of molesting Lacy.

Adrienne Alberts, who was once positive her daughter was lying, says she's not as sure now. She says her daughter has problems and goes to therapy. "Is it because she put an innocent man in jail? Or is it because he did this to her, and she's having to learn how to live with it?" Alberts says she asks herself every day.

Alberts feels guilty about never believing her daughter. She is convinced that family pressure made Medlin recant, despite the fact that Medlin was an adult with her own family and life when she came forward. Now, she always takes the side of supporting Medlin — whichever side she happens to be on at the moment.

Though Alberts admits she's still in love with Kinsel, she's tried to cut him out of her and her family's life. She raised the son she shares with Kinsel telling him that his father was dead, but a family friend told him the truth. Kinsel tried to reconnect with his son. "I sent him stuff for his birthday and Christmas, but I don't ever get any response from him," Kinsel said over the phone.

Said Alberts, "Sometimes I wish John would just fall off the face of the earth and disappear, because maybe then my family would be left alone."

Alyssa Medlin has since moved back to Louisiana and is pregnant, according to her family and friends. Her recent ex-boyfriend, who is 46 and not the father of the child, spoke with the *Houston Press* on condition of anonymity. He dated and lived with Medlin for three years (while Medlin was married), and broke up with her six months ago. He said she had stolen a couple thousand dollars from him and had taken the pain medication he was prescribed after surgery.

The man said that before they were living together, Medlin told him that her male roommate was inappropriately touching her. The boyfriend immediately insisted that they move in together for her safety, and rushed over that day to help her move. "Later, she told me he didn't touch her, that she made it up," he said. "I'm just glad I got away when I did."

Kinsel doesn't let himself think too much about being set free. But if that day comes, he knows he'll leave Louisiana. Asked what he would do if he ever ran into Medlin, he paused. "I'd have to go the other way," he finally said.

Looking up toward the mahogany ceiling of the courtroom, Alice Wilkinson presses the puffy bags under her eyes into obedience. "I promise I'm not going to cry today," she says. It's been five years since she and her sister Mary have made the trip from Texas to Louisiana to sit in a courtroom. But today they've allowed themselves to be hopeful one more time. It's February 28, 2011, and Kinsel's newest lawyer, Autumn Town, has been granted a rare oral argument in front of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. After the same court axed Kinsel's new trial, it's a big step. Only 12 percent of requests are granted.

Town says she hasn't seen a case similar to Kinsel's, and it is one she feels strongly about. "His life, anybody's life, is way more important than keeping this conviction when the victim has come forward and said it didn't happen," Town said.

She and the prosecutor for the state, Anne Wallis, stand before three judges. Wallis argues that everything is fine as is. Town argues that Kinsel has a claim of actual innocence.

"He meets that extraordinarily high threshold required to make a showing of actual innocence," Town argues. "What we are asking this court to do is let us get in front of a jury to show them that."

A prisoner's ability to argue "actual innocence" after being convicted is thanks to Missouri attorney Sean O'Brien, who got the Supreme Court to adopt the notion in 1995. But it's grueling to claim successfully. "By and large, there's a powerful doctrine of finality to a jury verdict," O'Brien says. Changing convictions means acknowledging the system is at least sometimes flawed. The other barrier is the fear that the case will set a legal precedent that allows other prisoners — particularly those facing the death penalty — to undo their convictions later down the road. It's not impossible to overcome both hurdles, but O'Brien says it's always a lot of work

to dismantle a prosecution. "Any time you win one of these cases without DNA, even with DNA, you come away from it feeling like you've moved a mountain," O'Brien says. "It's exhausting."

During a post-hearing powwow in the back of the courtroom, Town tells Kinsel's sisters that she expects a ruling in two to three months.

"Now, the fun part," she says. "We wait."

At the tiny Presbyterian church in Trinity, Texas, the minister is getting around to the part where he declares Cassie Kinsel — John Kinsel's 23-year-old daughter with a woman he knew before Alberts — married to Darren Cobb. "Is she gonna be perfect?" he asks Darren. "Will she occasionally burn the steak? Sure, she'll make mistakes," he says. He turns to face Cassie. "He will too, I promise you," he says. "Men do that."

While the minister waxes on, the well-wishers fan themselves with wedding programs. John Kinsel is the first name printed, under "Parents of the Bride." But, with a nod to reality, Cassie's uncle is listed under "Giving the Bride." The ceremony ends, and Cassie's last name is changed.

Just before Cassie and her new husband get in their car to drive to the reception, Aunt Alice gets a phone call. It's John. She runs up to the bride and hands her the phone. "Hey, Daddy, I just got married!" Cassie says, beaming. "Thank you for calling." She tells him she's about to go to the reception and get drunk. A pause. "What kind of beer do you like? Cold? Okay, so any kind of beer," Cassie laughs.

"He's got 15 minutes," Alice whispers.

A bridesmaid in a leprechaun green dress shouts to Cassie from the church. "Cassie? What do you want from inside?" she whines. Cassie ignores her.

"Do you want your shoes?"

Cassie tosses her a glare. "Yes, get everything, please," she says impatiently. She smiles at something John says at the other end of the line. "Well, I'm talking to you. It's different when I'm talking to you than anyone else," she says.

The mother of the groom bounces over from the waiting car and steals the phone from Cassie. "You have a wonderful daughter and she makes me cry," she gushes. "We're taking tons of pictures so you can see." After handing the phone back to Cassie, the woman runs back to the car, leaving Cassie to a few more private minutes with her father.

"That was Darren's mom," Cassie says. "Maybe one day you can meet all of them."