

The Brooch

by [Peter Glassman](#) (June 2022)



Portrait of a Lady, A. S. Finlayson, 1940s

Phoebe Devilbis lay on the living room rug before the crackling fireplace. Her right eye was swollen shut and congealed blood from a laceration above her left eye limited her vision. She looked in the direction of her husband Nathan's voice. "Nathan, I have to get help. I think my leg is broken. I can't get up off the floor. The pain in my face and leg is unbearable. Please, please get me to the hospital. I'll tell them I fell down the stairs."

Nathan growled as he wiped Phoebe's blood from his hands, "Here's your cell phone." He placed the phone next to her left hand. "You want help, call an ambulance. I'm leaving and won't be back until morning." He put on his winter coat and went out through the garage into the light October snow.

She managed to open her phone to her speed dial contacts and could just barely visualize the 911 number, which had to be connected first before an ambulance could be dispatched. Phoebe had trouble with her speech. Her swollen tongue was bleeding from Nathan's beating. The last words she remembered saying was the location of the front door key. "The key to the house ... is ... under the front ..." She gagged on a blood clot. "... the front door mat. Please ... hurry ... I can't ..." Everything turned to blackness.

Dr. Michael Waxman was covering ER trauma at Medford General Hospital. The ambulance attendant and the ER trauma nurse announced the patient's name for their first assessment.

Nurse Ginny Tiblit repeated it as Waxman verified her vital signs were normal, "Looks like a lot of bleeding but pulse, blood pressure, and oxygen saturation are normal. Was she conscious at all when the ambulance got to her?"

"She woke up for a few seconds when they first moved her. The only thing she said was that she had fallen. Her cell phone was clutched in her left hand."

Waxman examined the unconscious Phoebe and ordered lab work, x-rays, and an oxygen mask. Ginny looked at the ER stall computer screen after she entered the Devilbis name. "Dr. Waxman, it looks like she's been here before—four times—also for falls."

Waxman looked at Phoebe's previous admission workups, "She's had complete neurological and physical evaluations with total body MRIs. There's no evidence of any systemic reason for her falls." Waxman looked closer at a bruise on Phoebe's forehead. "Wait, look at this." He beckoned to Ginny, "What does this look like to you?"

"I think we've got something this time." Ginny cleaned the area with an alcohol sponge. She reached for Waxman's hand. "It's just like an image of a class ring—like yours, Doctor. See the round red lines where the stone in the ring is set surrounded by the metal circles." She handed him a magnifying glass, "And look at this, it shows part of a date ... a year ... yes ... it looks like 1992."

"I agree, Ginny, she's been beaten up pretty bad. Call her next of kin so we can get more information on her domestic situation. Get the police officer for suspicious trauma over here."

Phoebe's grandmother, Hortense Krane, held her hand to her mouth. "My God, you look like you got hit by a moving van."

Phoebe looked at her hand mirror and smiled a crooked smile, "You should have seen me the day after I was admitted. I looked worse than the blood and lumps and bumps suggested. My Doctor, Dr. Waxman, said I was lucky. I had no fractures and my cuts on the face should have minimal scars."

"Has Nathan visited you yet? I remember the other times. He never came to the hospital."

Phoebe lowered her voice and frowned, "Dr. Waxman thinks my fall was no accident. He says I was beaten up by someone who was wearing one of those big college class-rings."

Hortense allowed her anger to distort her face to a most serious mode, "Phoebe, you must stop your denial of what really has happened to you. I talked to this Waxman Doctor, and he and the police think you're the victim of domestic violence."

"What! Oh no, no, no Grandma, Nathan has a temper but he would never lay a hand on me."

Hortense adjusted her clothing and exposed a large coral-colored cameo brooch. "Phoebe, look at my blouse. Look at my brooch. Keep your eyes on the cameo and tell me again what happened at home and why Nathan doesn't come to see you or talk to us, the family."

Phoebe suddenly heard a distant ringing in her ears. She felt light-headed and her vision of the coral cameo turned to the scene of her recent assault by Nathan. "Oh Grandma, it's Nathan. He's complaining again about my wanting children. Oh no, he's slapping me hard. No, no ... please stop. No, don't hit me with that chair."

Hortense held Phoebe's hand with both of hers. "Keep looking at the cameo, my dear, and listen to me. You will just hear my voice. Nathan is a bully. In all our family from times even before I was born, we had a means of stopping such violence in the home. This brooch is very special to the women in our clan. Look closely at the cameo. Focus on the cameo profile. Follow the shape of the head and tell me what you see."

She complied and felt her pulse throb and speed up, "Grandma, what's happening to me?"

"Phoebe, your injuries will now heal overnight. Now look again. Do not take your eyes from the cameo shape. What do you

see? What or who does the cameo look like?"

Phoebe, stared and gradually the outline of the cameo face seemed to enlarge and reach out to her.

"Grandma, the cameo, it has the same shape nose as you and I. It has a small bend in it." She touched her nose while her eyes were still fixed on the brooch."

"Yes, my dear, in our families some ancestors have the nose of the eagle. We have the power to protect ourselves and our loved ones. I'm going to pin the cameo on your gown and you will wear it at all times and in all places."

Phoebe felt her aches go away. She felt stronger than she ever had. She also felt a resolve that her domestic life would be different from now on. What she didn't see was the imprint of Nathan's college ring disappear from her face.

Two days later Hortense took her granddaughter home. There were no remnants of the trauma inflicted upon her. She smiled, "Well Phoebe, what did Dr. Waxman think of your remarkable recovery?"

"Oh, Grandma, he couldn't believe it. The last few times I was in the hospital from Nathan's beatings I stayed over two weeks.

"The cameo looks larger on you somehow. Remember, to wear it at all times, especially in Nathan's presence. It may change his attitude about everything."

"I don't see how, he hates jewelry and criticizes my wearing of any."

"Just do as I advise. I can now tell you that getting beaten by my husband was once a problem for me until my mother passed on the brooch."

Phoebe got settled in her house. She cleaned up dusty areas and got rid of the stains from Nathan's assault. She touched the cameo on its eagle beak nose. "I don't know how you do it cameo, but Grandma has great trust in you, and now so do I.

It was sundown when Nathan came home from work. He went directly to the living room following the sound of the television. His first words were like acid, "I don't want to hear any words about my not seeing you in the hospital. Just remember it was me who put you in there." His eyes suddenly made contact with the cameo.

"Jewelry! I told you no jewelry. You're to wear only a wristwatch and your wedding band. That's all."

She remembered her grandma's instructions, "Nathan, take a closer look at the cameo. My grandma gave it to me. It cost nothing."

Nathan exploded, "I don't care if it's a valuable antique piece from Tiffany's! I've told you what you can wear and cannot wear."

Phoebe persisted, "Just look at it. Do you see something familiar?"

Nathan reached out for the Cameo pinned to the right side of her blouse. He shouted, "Ha, this is the most stupid cameo I ever saw. It even has your bent nose." Suddenly Nathan recoiled, "Wait, the cameo's face—it's turning towards me. The eye's are turning bright red. My God, the face looks just like you." He reached to her blouse to tear the cameo off. "Ow, the face on the cameo bit me. That thing is alive." He backed away.

"One thing you're going to relearn, Phoebe. My rules are absolute and violations are punished. You're going to get new

scars on that pretty face of yours. Nathan raised his right hand to slap her face and his left to punch her in the belly.”

Phoebe swiftly extended her right and left hands to intercept his. She stopped his pugilistic threats in mid-air. “Nathan, the days of your aggression and dictatorship are over.” She began to squeeze her hands over his.

“He grimaced and screamed with pain, “No, no, stop ... please stop! You’re crushing my hands.”

She ignored his pleas. “If you want the pain to stop, stare at the cameo face.”

He did and started with a new complaint, “The eyes of the cameo are still red. I can’t see. I hear a strange voice telling me things. It wants me to promise something. The voice hurts my head.” Nathan shouted to the brooch. “Yes, yes, I accept your terms.” He collapsed at Phoebe’s feet and was silent and immobile for ten minutes. He opened his eyes again and looked up at his wife who now held the brooch in her hand.

“Nathan, I’m going to press the brooch against your right shoulder.”

He shouted in agony as the image of the cameo was burned sharply into his flesh. A full-faced scar with the features of his wife and beak-shaped nose was now a lifetime brand. Nathan rose slowly to his feet and faced Phoebe.

“Phoebe, honey, are you okay? I had this terrible dream that I somehow brought you mental and physical anguish and pain. It was the worst nightmare I’ve ever had. He embraced her as they sat on the living room sofa.

She replaced the cameo which now resumed its lateral profile.

Nathan stared at it. “Is this something new? It’s absolutely beautiful. I seem to recognize it, yet I can’t remember giving it to you.”

Phoebe reminded him that it had been her grandmother's.

He rubbed his right shoulder. "I seem to have a sore on my shoulder, dear, and look, my shirt is torn there." Nathan removed his shirt and glared wide-eyed at the facial brand. "My God, this looks like you even down to the nose." He looked at the cameo back on her blouse. "And this cameo you wear has a bent nose like yours!"

She smiled, "Don't you remember, you got that imprint instead of a tattoo ... to be a constant reminder of our marriage and love for each other."

Nathan rubbed his chin, "Yes, I do remember. And I also remember that we've not taken any vacations since our honeymoon four years ago. Let's plan a cruise." He looked at the cameo and his shoulder again. "That brooch looks so familiar."

"It looks like my grandmother, and like me as you said. It's an heirloom passed down to the family member who inherited the cute bent nose."

Nathan smiled. He kissed her lips and then her nose. "Yes, the nose, it's as beautiful as the rest of you. I hope our children will be blessed with it."

Phoebe hugged him, "I'll meet you upstairs. I have to make a phone call to grandma first."

He kissed her again and ascended the staircase.

Phoebe made the call, "Yes Grandma, it worked. His attitude change was almost immediate."

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