MONSTERING
INSIDE AMERICA'S POLICY OF
SECRET INTERROGATIONS AND
TORTURE IN THE TERROR WAR

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CHAPTER THREE

LYNNDIE IN LOVE

The IGA supermarket in Fort Ashby (population 1,354) is boarded up, and an Authorized West Virginia WIC Vendor sticker on the front door is faded and peeling. Two boys ride their bicycles near the store. One pops a wheelie. A hawk flies low overhead, and insects buzz in the still, eighty-seven-degree air on this August 2006 afternoon. Kansas’s “Dust in the Wind” blares from the radio of my rental car: “All we are is dust in the wind. Nothing more than dust in the wind.” Three decades after its release, the song resonates here in the parking lot.

“How many people pay attention to the cashier in the grocery store?” says Lorraine Boles, seventy-one, who works across the street at Fort Ashby Books. “I have a picture of one of the girls who worked there—the one I think was Lynndie. She had a pretty smile.”

I came to Fort Ashby because I wanted to find out about Lynndie England, who was serving thirty-six months at the Naval Consolidated Brig Miramar in San Diego for detainee-related abuse. In the midst of the global scandal of Abu Ghraib, England had remained frustratingly silent about her role at the prison. Since her arrival at the brig, she had received only two visitors—a civilian lawyer and a legal associate who claimed to represent her (they didn’t). Not that others had not tried to get in touch with her. England receives requests every week from journalists for interviews, says her civilian attorney Roy T. (“Tuck”) Hardy. Yet no one had spoken to her. I figured the best thing to do was to ask her parents, Terrie and Kenneth, if I could talk to their daughter. Their mobile home is down the road from the IGA in a dirt-and-gravel patch of land situated off Route 46, behind a sheep farm, next to the windowless Roadside Pub. On summer afternoons, the trailer park smells faintly of manure. Terrie, Kenneth, and England’s two-year-old son, Carter Allen (the child of Graner), live here in a $200-a-month rented trailer. England’s sister, Jessie Klinestiver, her brother-in-law James, and their two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Allee, live in a mobile home yards away. It is hard to tell which trailer belongs to the Englands, so I choose one at random and then see a cooler that says CSX—the name of the railroad Kenneth works for—next to the front steps.

A skinny woman clutching a pack of Bronco Lights answers the door. Terrie, forty-six, a former housekeeper with Dawn View Center, a retirement home down the road from the trailer park, looks at me. She has pale eyes, deep etches in her face, and three gold rings on her left hand. She stands in the doorway for a moment, smoking, and I show her a magazine article I wrote about female soldiers killed in the Iraq war. She invites me inside the trailer.

ECHOES OF ABU GHRAIB

The one-stoplight town of Fort Ashby has a frozen-in-amber quality that makes it seem like a small town in the 1970s. The main hangouts are 7-Eleven and Evan’s Dairy Dip. And a Cumberland, Maryland, radio station 106.1 WKGO (“Go 106.1”) plays not only “Dust in the Wind” but other mid-1970s hits. I heard Heart’s “Magic Man” three times in twenty-six hours while I was in town.

The Fort Ashby Public Library is located near the IGA parking lot. It is the site of a Brown Bag Program for low-income families. One August afternoon, more than twenty men, women, and children
stop by the library and pay $5.00 for a month of subsidized groceries. They carry away cardboard boxes full of applesauce cans, soup, cooking oil, KitKat bars, Pace salsa, and other items. The median family income in Fort Ashby is $32,375, according to data provided by librarian Cindy Shanholz, who helps coordinate the Brown Bag Program. But many survive on less. Kenneth makes $1,500 a month as a railroad utility worker when he doesn’t put in overtime, says Klinestiver, twenty-seven. She is heavily pregnant with a second child and dressed in an oversized T-shirt and a navy baseball cap. Nobody in the England family, including both sets of grandparents, parents, and children, has a bachelor’s degree. Klinestiver has made it the furthest. She did half a semester at Potomac State College in Keyser, West Virginia, hoping to study accounting, before she dropped out. Meanwhile, the men in their family work the night shift—Kenneth at CSX; their younger brother, Josh, twenty-one, at Wal-Mart; and Jamie at Pilgrim’s Pride, a chicken-processing plant in Moorefield, West Virginia.6

England and Klinestiver wore their hair short while they were growing up in the trailer park. They played softball and joined Future Farmers of America. And they used to watch Where the Red Fern Grows, a film based on a Wilson Rawls novel about a ten-year-old boy and his two hunting dogs in the Ozarks during the Depression. The video still sits on a shelf in her parents’ trailer. “We love animals—cats, dogs,” says Klinestiver. “We’re real tender with them.”

They roughhoused with Josh, though, and they never wore makeup. They didn’t want “to be all girly pretty,” says Klinestiver. Instead, they played cops and robbers, carrying pop guns and shooting them off as they ran through the tall grass. “Lynnndie was always the cop. That was her big thing,” says Klinestiver. “That didn’t work out too good.”

England’s ticket out of the trailer park was the U.S. Army. She signed up at age seventeen in a Pittsburgh recruiter’s office in December 1999. She did it over the protests of Terrie. “I joined because I wanted to. And I wanted to pay for college,” England says. (I had several lengthy conversations with England over a two-day period in the brig in August 2006—her first interview in prison and to date her only print interview.) “I didn’t think there would be a war. But I was ready to go if there was one.”

Long before England was deployed to Iraq, Terrie tells me, she and her sister worked the same shift as cashiers at the IGA. England met a stock boy, James Fike, and fell in love. He is five foot, seven inches tall, and he has dark brown eyes and a steely gaze. They got married in March 2002. Like many people in eastern West Virginia, England and Fike applied for jobs at Pilgrim’s Pride. At the factory, England made $10.50 an hour, more than twice a cashier’s wages. Moorefield is more than an hour’s drive away from Fort Ashby. So they carpooled. For a while, Fike rode a shuttle bus that was operated for workers who live in distant villages and towns.

Fike worked in Breast/Debone, and England worked in Marination. The plant is located on South Main Street, a narrow, two-lane road clogged with logging trucks, motorcycles, and Chevrolets, across from an antiques store called Tony’s Flea Market. In front of the store, a dusty ceramic chicken and a $25 chicken-shaped glass serving platter are displayed on a small table. People around here say they’re tired of chicken. Dorinda Barr, a Dollar General Store cashier and a former Pilgrim’s Pride worker, says she won’t eat the stuff—not “on the bone.” (She doesn’t mind chicken fillet.) It is not hard to see why. Black smoke pours out of steel pipes at the plant and, depending upon which way an orange windsock is blowing, the place smells like gasoline fumes, decaying carcasses, or a Tender Roast.

Nevertheless, the factory jobs are coveted because of their high wages. Working conditions can be rough, though, and former employees say they have little influence over how things are run at the plant. As a mixer in Marination, England noticed that discolored, unhealthy-looking chicken parts were being sent down the line. She told her supervisors, but they ignored her. Her sister recalls her walking over to her station and taking off her smock.

“I said, ‘What are you doing?’” Klinestiver says. “We’ve only been at work for an hour.’ She said, ‘I quit,’ and walked out the door.”
"I didn’t like the way management was doing things," England explains. "People would take the good chicken off and put the bad chicken on. Management didn't care."

It was worse in Live Hang—located in Pilgrim’s Pride Moorefield Fresh Plant next door. During her shift as a cashier at the nearby Dollar General Store, Barr describes the plant’s slaughterhouse. Workers grab the chickens, fasten hooks on their claws, and hang them upside down from a conveyer belt, she explains. Then chickens are transported to the “kill room,” where, Barr says, “They go through an electrical shock. There’s a big saw where their necks go across.” Workers in “Live Hang” earn an extra twenty-five cents an hour—a compensation for occupational hazards they face. "You get pooped on when you work there," she says.

A People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) activist was hired as a plant worker and conducted a secret, eight-month investigation of the plant from late 2003 to early 2004. The workload in the slaughterhouse was intense, the anonymous PETA investigator explained in an article entitled “What the Investigator Saw: Eyewitness Testimony From PETA’s Investigation into a Pilgrim’s Pride’s Chicken Slaughterhouse.” Yet managers rarely made an effort to cut back on their requirements, he wrote, or to reduce the number of chickens supposed to be slaughtered. Workers simply couldn’t deal with the large volume of poultry. So they took the chickens from the conveyer belt and threw them in a large bin or hopper.

“Sometimes, this would cause animals at the bottom of the pile to suffocate,” he wrote. Workers also used the chickens to get back at coworkers.

“In some instances, live chickens were discarded in this manner merely to create extra work for an unpopular person who had been assigned to [pick them up],” he wrote. Workers jumped and stomped on the live animals, soaking the room in blood. Yet the supervisor did not seem bothered, telling workers to curb their behavior only on the days when they were being watched by inspectors. “Don’t kill the birds in the improper way because we have inspectors here today,” a supervisor once told workers, according to the PETA investigator.

There were other incidents reported by PETA:

On November 13, 2003, approximately two hundred live chickens “were slammed against the wall” by employees. “Several hours later, many of the birds were still alive.”

On November 17, 2003, a worker “twisted the neck of a live chicken until the head popped off; he then used what remained of the bloodied body of the chicken to write graffiti on the wall.”

That same day, a worker “intentionally squeezed two live chickens so hard that feces squirted out of them. [He] directed the feces into the eyes of seven other live chickens, exclaiming, ‘They shit all over us every day!’”

A worker also “used a concrete-filled coffee can to crush live chickens, and the chickens did not die instantaneously.”

“Echoes of Abu Ghraib in Chicken Slaughterhouse,” Peter Singer, a bioethics professor at Princeton, and Karen Dawn, the head of an animal advocacy group, DawnWatch.com, wrote in a July 25, 2004, Los Angeles Times article. “In both Baghdad and Moorefield, West Virginia, a simple cruel dynamic was at work,” they wrote. “When humans have unchecked power over those they see as inferior, they may abuse it. Slaughterhouse workers do not expect to be chastised for hurting animals. And the American soldiers at Abu Ghraib clearly did not expect punishment, or they would not have posed for photographs.” Several employees were fired after the PETA investigation. But no one was prosecuted.

Klinesfiver says the employees did more than beat the animals. During her job orientation, a supervisor stated the ground rules of the factory: no sexual activity with the chickens. Klinesfiver says she was surprised to hear the announcement. Then, after she started working at the plant, she heard stories from coworkers and began to understand why she and other new employees had been warned about mistreating the animals. “They told me that people there actually fucked chickens," she says. “They’d grab the beaks and rip them apart and make them bigger. Then they shaved their sexual parts into their beaks. Besides being overly gross and sexual, it was like morally wrong.” (Efforts to reach the factory workers who
spoke about the sexual abuse were not successful, and the claims could not be substantiated.)

Klinestiver and England were both shocked by the behavior of coworkers at the plant. And England had even protested shoddy plant standards. She was a whistle-blower.

"A lot of people complained about it," England says defensively when I point this out to her. "It wasn't just me." Did it ever occur to her, I ask, to protest the following year when things seemed wrong on the job at Abu Ghraib? She looks down at her hands and doesn't answer.16

MEET CHARLES GRANER

After leaving her job at Pilgrim's Pride, England, twenty, got a job as an army administrative clerk in Cresaptown, Maryland. She processed the paperwork of Graner, thirty-five, for the 372nd Military Police Company when he arrived in November 2002. That fall, he used to follow her out to the smoking area when she went to have a cigarette. He didn't smoke, though. He just wanted to see her.17 "He was funny, the joker," she recalls. "Was he too old for me? I didn't think about it at the time. He acted like he was three years old." He may have been childish at times. Other times, he was raunchy and bad to the bone. "An outlaw," she calls him. Their affair started in March 2003 while they were stationed in Fort Lee.18

"After Lynndie joined the army and was working as an orderly in the U.S., she didn't know anybody. She was a really quiet girl," Karpinski tells me. "Enter Charles Graner. He's much older, and he's full of himself. He's just got that kind of personality."

"She was blown away," Karpinski says. "She felt like someone was finally talking to her. Paying attention. He seemed far more experienced and worldly than anyone she knew. It only took a few, short conversations. She was enamored with him.19

"Graner was the total opposite of Jamie [Fike]," says Klinestiver. "Lynndie told me, 'He's real open. He likes to do stuff. Wild stuff.'"

England brought Graner home to speak with her parents in early 2003. With a foul mouth and pierced nipples (they saw those later), he did not make a good impression. "If he showed up on my doorstep, he'd get shot," says attorney Hardy. "This is West Virginia."

Graner walked into the Englands' trailer and looked around at the three-bedroom unit with a linoleum-covered floor, the living room decorated with a painting of a red covered bridge and a framed print of a deer. Two plastic fly swatters and a wooden plaque bearing the message "I [heart] Kentucky the Bluegrass State" hung from a paneled wall in the kitchen. "I said, 'Charles, you're more than welcome to sit down,' Terrie recalls. He remained standing. "We were just like, 'There is something wrong with this guy,'" says Klinestiver. "I don't know what. Maybe when he was born, something fell out of his ear that was supposed to be attached to his brain."

Terrie says she took an instant dislike to him. "I told him, 'You're nothing but trying to get into my daughter's pants,'" she recalls. "He said, 'No, ma'am, my intentions are honorable.' He was blowing smoke up her ass. I said, 'Here's the door and don't let it hit you on the way out.'"

Graner has admitted to beating his former wife, Staci Morris, and dragging her by her hair across a room. He was accused in a federal suit, Horatio Nimley v. Charles A. Graner, filed on May 25, 1999, in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, of injuring an inmate, Horatio Nimley, while Graner was working as a prison guard at Pennsylvania's State Correctional Institution—Greene. On June 29, 1998, according to the suit, Graner and another guard hid a razor blade in a side dish of mashed potatoes that was served to Nimley. He bit down on the razor, slicing the inside of his mouth, and bled profusely.

Less than four months later, according to the suit, a guard slammed Nimley's arm in a narrow opening, known as a "pie hole," in his cell door. Nimley shouted in pain. Then, according to the suit, Graner heard the commotion and ran up a flight of stairs and headed for the cell. He was accused of hitting Nimly's arm, which was jutting out of the slot in the prison door, four times with a baton.20
PORN VACATION

In March 2003, England went with Graner and another soldier to Virginia Beach. Their friend took a picture of England performing oral sex on Graner. In addition, Graner took a series of pictures as they engaged in anal sex, showing the progression of the sex act, “minute by minute,” says Hardy. Graner photographed England as she placed her nipple in the ear of their friend, who had by that time passed out in a hotel room. Graner was photographed as he exposed himself near their friend’s head while he was asleep in the room. Soon it became their new game: whenever Graner would ask her to, England would strike a pose.

“Everything they did, he took a picture of it,” says Hardy. “She was asked why she let him. She said, ‘You know, guys like that. I just wanted to make him happy.’ She was like a little plaything for him. I think the sexual stuff—and the way he put her in those positions—was his way of saying, ‘Let me see what I can make you do’”

After the Virginia Beach trip, they rented a car and drove to see her family in eastern Kentucky. Terrie, Kenneth, and her paternal grandfather were hunting turkey together in Daniel Boone National Forest. For years, the Englands had visited the park. England even named a male cat, Boone (pronounced “Boonie”), after the place, says Klinestiver. That day, England sat with Graner and her parents at a picnic table. She asked Graner to show the Virginia Beach pictures. He handed a packet to Kenneth. Her father opened the envelope, looked through the pictures and handed them to Terrie. “He said, ‘You might not want to show them to your dad,’” Terrie recalls.

Terrie looked at the photos and could not believe what she saw. The photos depicted nudity and sexual scenes. “I was really bent out of shape,” she says. Graner flaunted his affair with England, and the photos were passed around among the soldiers in their unit. Military rules forbid soldiers from taking lewd photographs. Also, England was married to Fike. Her affair with Graner violated army rules. Neither England nor Graner got in serious trouble, though. Several weeks later, they got ready for their deployment to al-Hilla, Iraq.

During this time, men and women in Detroit, San Diego, and other cities were being recruited for civilian support jobs for the army, including positions as interpreters in Iraq. Some of the people hired for these jobs seemed to have a less-than-professional manner, according to former interpreters who worked in Iraq. They would all end up together at Abu Ghraib.