Jamison Whiley’s first foray into the practice of law began at age fifteen, when he woke up to the sound of the FBI pounding on his front door, and the sight of them hauling his mother away in handcuffs. On most Sunday mornings, Jamison was jarred from his slumber by his mother’s loud arguing with his grotesque step-father, the little-known and lesser accomplished professional con man, Saturn San Pellegrino.

His mother Louise and Saturn argued about everything – from the pair of panties she found in the glove compartment of their jointly-owned Range Rover, to the excruciating blend of tobacco and another woman she smelled on his breath, to his latest scheme that lost all their money.

A groggy Jamison could hear snippets of what his mother cried out as she was manhandled into a massive, black Chevy Suburban. “Jamison, I love you! I’m innocent! Don’t blame Saturn, I love him! It’s all his fault!” Her contradictory exclamations were nothing new. She continued, “Saturn will take good care of you! Saturn, you better watch out for Jamison, you sick son of a bitch!”

Jamison watched Saturn watch his wife driven off by the Feds and was appalled yet unsurprised by his step father’s utter lack of action or expression. Saturn calmly gulped from the bottle of a three-dollar red wine, his beverage of choice before 10:00 a.m. Jamison knew very little about the man his mother hated to love, other than Saturn’s proud claim that he had legally changed both his first and last name a record nine times, finally settling on his favorite planet and second-favorite brand of sparkling water.

That night marked the first one-on-one dinner between Jamison and Saturn. Papa John’s was partnered with a Coke for Jamison and a few bottles of Cabernet from the 99 Cent Store for Mr. San Pellegrino. Jamison was still in shock from what transpired earlier that day. He broke the silence with a simple question: “Why was my mom arrested for identity theft and how are we going to get her back?” Saturn pondered this for an extraordinarily long time then responded, “Damn it Jamison, we were having a nice evening!” Saturn yelled back, “My mother is in jail!”

Saturn turned philosophical, calmly replying, “Aren’t we all in jail to some extent?” Jamison stared at him in disbelief. Saturn continued, “Aren’t we all imprisoned inside these things we call clothing, these materialistic items of needle and thread that manipulate us and dictate how we live, how we breathe…”

Jamison had actually walked out of the room halfway through Saturn’s second sentence. Saturn either didn’t notice or didn’t care. Jamison, fed up with Saturn’s bullshit rants and attempts to sound smarter by employing fake Swedish accent, arrived at two epiphanies. The first was that his stepfather was a shithead, and that Jamison was the only person his mother had in this world who might be able to get her out of jail. The second was that his stepfather was a shithead. And somehow, was behind his mother’s predicament.

Jamison spent the next three weeks writing letters to his mother “in care of” the Julia Tutwiler Penitentiary for Women, and learning everything he could about identity theft in the
federal penal code. In fact, Jamison did more research and studying in those 21 days than he had in his entire scholastic career. A mediocre student who never had much interest in any subject, he found the law not just interesting but empowering. He knew then what he wanted to do when he grew up, although something told him he grew up the minute that FBI agent knocked on his door.

Meanwhile, as Jamison camped out in the University of Alabama’s law library, Saturn spent those three weeks opening -- and predictably closing – Tuscaloosa’s first Smoothie Museum. What initially sounded intriguing to most of Saturn’s middle-school investors, failed due to lack of fresh fruit smoothies and a 17-dollar entry fee. But Saturn’s continued lack of concern over his wife’s disastrous mid-life incarceration reassured Jamison that the solution to Louise’s predicament would be found in some scheme-gone-awry from the lowest, most egotistical fraud of a man ever created.

Three weeks of living under the roof of the devil was about enough Jamison, or any teenager, could endure. It was time for Jamison to take matters into his own hands.

Jamison named his plan “Operation Re-Born Identity.” He would free his mom from prison while simultaneously screwing his stepdad. Jamison filled out forms, filed briefs, and befriended a local police detective who “despised Saturn the moment I laid eyes on him trying to fish money out of an ATM with a coat hanger.” The local cop said that Jamison’s detective work was remarkable. The local legal aid attorney who helped Jamison with his filings said Jamison’s briefs were top notch. But “the system” moves slowly, and days went by then weeks went by and Jamison began to lose hope. Had his plan failed? Was it time to go back to the drawing board?

Then came the knocking. Jamison didn’t even have to get out of bed. He knew. It was the same obnoxiously loud rapping on the hollow metal front door that preceded his mother being whisked away. Only this time, the Feds came for Saturn San Pellegrino, real name Marshall Q. Arbitman. He had stolen multiple identities and framed his own wife for it.

Jamison and his mom didn’t attend the trial. Even though it would have been nice to see the bewilderment on that prick’s face when he realized it was Jamison who untangled his web of lies, and even though it would’ve been entertaining to watch Saturn try to explain for the umpteenth time in his life that nothing was his fault, Jamison didn’t want to spend another second of his life within 1,000 yards of that man. However, once his ex-stepfather was in jail himself, Jamison did send him a letter. It read simply, “Aren’t we all in jail to some extent?”