

CHAPTER 6

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The following week Son Source closed several days in honor of Eric. The funeral was not easy; seeing Eric's twin boys dressed in matching suits took its toll on everyone. Cindy was chemically sedated. The concern of a mental breakdown outweighed the risk to her unborn child. Zach offered his condolences; he had been instructed not to go in to detail about the accident. Cindy incoherently rambled that the Workers Compensation Department was already investigating the claim for death benefits.

Thursday morning a personal injury lawyer showed up at Son Source and started asking questions and taking statements. Zach had recently cut the business liability insurance back to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That amount would hardly cover legal expenses if the case went to court.

When Sally found out that the lawyer wasn't from the Workers Compensation Board she contacted the law office that represented Pastor Tomas's church. The head council at the church's law firm had her sign a power of attorney statement. This way they could offer Eric's estate fifty thousand dollars. A speedy settlement would be to everyone's benefit. The meager two hundred and fifty thousand dollar liability policy would barely cover legal fees.

By Friday afternoon Zach finally got the courage to go up to the roof. He slowly approached the edge and looked over. It was less than thirty feet down. *Eric might have lived if he hadn't hit the concrete and landed closer to the building on the grass or in the flower bed.* Zach's thoughts rambled on as he stared down at the body outline in white chalk.

When Zach turned back around a reflection under the test solar racks glimpsed his eye. Zach had to get on his stomach and stretch his arm out to reach the object. While laying flat on his soft belly Zach took note how the pea gravel and tar looked like something had been

33 pulled across the roof toward the edge where Eric fel. Zack's hand felt
34 several sharp points on the yellow metal object.

35 Back on his feet Zach examined the object. *Eric must have lost this*
36 *from his pocket. Its probably one of the twins toys. Those poor boys*
37 *don't have a father to play games with any longer. . .*

38 Back down in his office Zach examined the metal fighter jet. It was
39 very detailed with missiles attached to the wings and a machine gun
40 coming out the front fuselage. On the tail were the letters UPAF, Zach
41 smirked to himself. *The toy company spent all the time on detail and*
42 *then put the wrong decal on the plane. It should be USAF, for United*
43 *States Air Force.* Zach wiped at a tear then opened the top center
44 drawer of his desk and carefully placed the metal plane at the far back
45 corner.

46 With a get back to work or go broke determination Zach got up
47 from his desk and went directly out to the receiving dock. He searched
48 for a blue and orange FedEx overnight package without any luck. Back
49 in his office Zach called the solar tinting company and was informed
50 that the package was returned undeliverable. He explained being
51 closed for the funeral and also found out that the bronze tinting
52 required some special adhesive for application. New arrangements
53 were made for the solar tinting with the special adhesive to be shipped
54 out without a received signature required.

55 The weekend was somber around the Slenski home. Ben's team
56 won district, earning a berth at the State Playoffs. Kendra asked to
57 have another sleep over; Chelsea was a welcomed diversion. Sally's
58 busy schedule went on uninterrupted. Shuttling kids, shopping and
59 just the everyday chores wore her down to the point where just
60 getting into bed to sleep had precedence over any emotional comfort
61 found in intimacy. Zack was slipping further down the one way
62 depression path—guilt was pushing him to the edge.

63 Sunday morning Zach had just bent over to pick up the newspaper
64 when he noticed someone coming down the sidewalk.

65 "Good morning Zach."

66 Zack straightened up. "Good morning Dr. Kurtz."

67 "Remember, it's Coreen."

68 “Good morning Coreen,” Zach said, as he went down the three
69 porch steps to the concrete walkway.

70 Without hesitation Coreen wrapped her arms around Zach and
71 started rubbing his back. “I’m so sorry to hear about your employee.

72 “Thanks,” Zach tensed up then relaxed. Sally had yet to express
73 any compassion since the accident. The genuine embrace was
74 welcomed—yet awkward.

75 Coreen let loose and moved her hands down Zach’s arms and then
76 took his hands. “Are you doing okay?” she asked while looking directly
77 into his bloodshot eyes.

78 “Yeah, I’m okay. It’s Eric’s pregnant wife and twin boy’s I’m
79 worried about.”

80 Coreen massaged Zach’s hands. “Zach, they’ll be okay. I know you
81 feel responsible, but you’re not. I feel the same way when I lose a
82 cancer patient. It’s not only the patient I feel bad for, it’s the entire
83 family. My belief is that the patient goes to a better place, but. . .”

84 This time Zach pulled Coreen in. He felt the comfort of her chest
85 and pounding heart. Tears dropped off his face onto her shoulder.
86 Coreen embraced back and rubbed his back.

87 “Umm, hmm,” came from the opened door. Zach let loose and the
88 comfort diminished.

89 “Good morning Mrs. Slenski. I was out for my morning run and
90 stopped to offer my condolences.”

91 Sally stepped out on to the porch. “Zach the kids are up. You will
92 need to help them finish their breakfast. I’m headed down to the
93 studio. Pastor Tomasas needs me there early.” Sally disappeared back
94 into the house. She intentionally left the door partially open.

95 Zach looked back at Coreen. “I’m sorry. Sally just hasn’t been
96 herself since the accident.”

97 “I understand.” Coreen started down the sidewalk then turned back
98 around. “That offer for a personal tour of the new oncology wing still
99 stands.”

100 “I’m going to take you up on that,” Zach replied and watched
101 Coreen jog away.

102 When Zach came into the kitchen Sally was taking a carton of milk
103 out of the refrigerator. "The kids can have cold cereal."

104 "I can cook pancakes." Zach offered as he unfolded the newspaper
105 and sat at the table.

106 "Cold cereal is fine! I don't want a big mess when I get home."

107 Zach looked up from the newspaper. "What's your problem?"

108 "My problem!" Sally glared at Zach. "You've been moping around
109 all week. Now you're going to go take a tour at the hospital."

110 "What?" Zach was cut short when both sleepy eyed girls came into
111 the kitchen.

112 Sally grabbed her car key. "We'll talk tonight Zach." The door to
113 the garage slammed shut. Moments later the tires of the BMW
114 squealed.

115 "Is Mommy mad?" Kendra asked as she crawled up into Zach's lap
116 with a tattered blanket.

117 "No, she just has a lot on her mind." Zach pulled Kendra all the
118 way up into his lap while noticing Chelsea frozen in the doorway with
119 her thumb in her mouth. "Come on over here Chelsea and give me a
120 big hug or whisker man will get you."

121 A big grin sprung on Chelsea's face. She pulled her thumb from her
122 mouth, threw her arms above her head, and ran toward Zach. With
123 both girls in his lap Zach held them long and close, all the time
124 thinking about what the twin boys were doing. "Hey, how about some
125 pancakes?" Zach blurted out.

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127 When Sally walked on the set at the studio Pastor Tomasas could
128 tell she was upset. He insisted that they sit down and talk after the
129 show. Confidence, along with being able to put people at ease was his
130 fine tuned skill set. He insisted that they go out to brunch after the
131 morning televised bible show.

132 At the quaint restaurant Pastor Tomasas pulled out her chair while
133 he thanked Sally for her assistance with his bible show. The small talk
134 went on for the right amount of time before Pastor Tomas asked. "So
135 Sally, tell me what is the problem in your marriage?"

136 "What?" Sally replied and her stomach knotted. "My marriage is
137 fine. It's just what happened at Zach's work and all the insurance
138 stuff."

139 "Sally." Pastor Tomas sternly looked across the small white wicker
140 garden table. "Sally I can't help if you can't be honest with yourself.
141 You haven't been happy for the past six months or more. Let's be
142 truthful with each other."

143 "That is the truth." Sally took a small sip of orange juice. "All the
144 setbacks at Zach's lab, a possible lawsuit and . . ."

145 "When was the last time you made love?" Pastor Tomas casually
146 asked as he spread butter on a croissant and then handed it to her.

147 "What?" Sally's mouth dropped.

148 "The last time you made love. How long ago was it?"

149 "Pastor Tomas, I don't know if that is any of your business."

150 "Sally." He put down the butter knife and reached over and put his
151 hand on top of hers. "Please call me Tom. Pastor is not necessary
152 when we're alone."

153 Sally pulled her hand away. "Maybe I should go?"

154 "If you do, you will be running from your deepest feelings. I just
155 want to help you find your inner self. Don't you want that?"

156 Sally sat quiet for a moment and then awkwardly answered, "Yes, I
157 have some deep issues I'd like to get through someday. Issues that go
158 all the way back to my Dad."

159 "I understand, but always remember that God wants you to love
160 yourself," Tomas spoke in a trustworthy tone. Then he went on to
161 recite scripture, about how a woman needs to be submissive to her
162 husband. Tomas had a degree in marriage counseling and focused
163 right in on the problems Sally and Zach were having. Twenty minutes
164 later he had Sally at ease. She confided that there was some sexual
165 difficulty in her marriage. By the time brunch was over Sally had a
166 new insight on what her current problems were. Driving away from the
167 restaurant she called home and left a message that the morning bible
168 filming had run longer than expected.

169 Zach was at the community park watching Ben skateboard and the
170 girls swing. He'd never go for any sort of marriage counseling. Once

171 the quad panels were in production he'd spend less time at work. What
172 he lacked in meeting Sally's emotional needs was offset by his altruist
173 belief to love others more than himself. Saving the world came with a
174 price that he was unaware of.

175 Linda Buck picked Chelsea up at the park. Their second meeting
176 made Zach slightly uneasy when she informed Zack that her husband
177 was up for parole and would be looking for work. Zack didn't tell her
178 that Son Source had high hiring guidelines and that they needed
179 people with engineering degrees. Their chat ended abruptly when Ben
180 crashed riding a rail down the stairs to the sand pit. The sand saved
181 what would have surely been a broken arm.

182 Monday morning Zach rolled over and kissed Sally on her bare
183 shoulder. He thanked her for the pleasurable night and then offered to
184 get Ben and Kendra off to school. Their love making hadn't been
185 spontaneous for the last fifteen years. Relaxed content and still half
186 asleep, Sally groggily accepted the offer to stay in bed. She pulled the
187 comforter up around her neck and farted.

188 Down in the kitchen Ben ate breakfast right from the refrigerator.
189 With a milk ring around his mouth, a skateboard strapped to a
190 backpack in one hand and a bagel in the other hand he blasted out the
191 front door. At a more leisurely pace Zach made coffee and oatmeal
192 and then got Kendra off to school. There was no rush to get down to
193 the lab. The bronze tinting would not be delivered until late afternoon.
194 Zach went back upstairs. They had the entire house to themselves.

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