



# IMBALANCE



By  
John S. McCormick

*Imbalance* by John S. McCormick

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First printing

All characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to real persons living or dead, is coincidental.

I dedicate this book to my mother, Barbara. Her positive and courageous attitude during her battle with cancer inspired me to write this book. I also dedicate this book to my best friend, Hakim, for all his continual support and encouragement.



I would like to thank my dear friends Joie and Paul for reading the first draft of my book and providing constructive feedback and input. I would especially like to thank Don for his assistance with the book cover design.



## Chapter 1

### DARK CLOUD



*“When I was young, I would stare out my bedroom window feeling the warmth of the sun on my face, while watching the clouds gently floating by. I would wonder where they were going, and wished I could ride on top of them to a grand adventure in the sky. At night, the moonlight would shine on me like a spotlight. I would imagine myself onstage -- the stars my audience. I could say or do anything, and everybody would clap and love me. But most of all, when I looked out my window, I would wonder about my future, and if I would end up happy. This was the first time I started thinking about my life overall, and how much say I would have in the matter of what might happen.*

*When I reached my mid-teens, while living in the Midwest, things started to turn around for me. I became an honor student in high school. As an adult, I always had a job and was promoted often. At twenty-eight, I gave up a great management job at a company I worked at for over ten years. I packed my bags, and without a job, place to live or knowing anyone, moved twenty-five hundred miles away to San Francisco, California. Within five weeks, I found a great place to live, met many wonderful people and landed a job*



*better than the one I left behind. My life seemed charmed for many years. For the most part, anything I wanted I got, because I worked very hard for it. Then some things happened over a period of years changing myself and my life forever.” ~ Sam Miller wrote in his journal a few years ago.*

## FAST FORWARD TO PRESENT DAY

Sam opens the front door of his apartment on Nob Hill in San Francisco, California. He comes inside. The window is open and although the rain has stopped for the time being, the sound of thunder can be heard. Also, the sounds of The City can be heard in the distance -- like a cable car, fire engine and car horn.

Sam places his umbrella near the front door, walks into the living room to his couch and places his backpack on it. He also places a small brown bag, some mail and his keys onto the coffee table. He walks back to the front door, takes his jacket off and hangs it up on a hook. Sam walks back to the couch, sits down in the middle and sighs deeply. He looks at his mail, picks an envelope up, looks at where it's from and opens it. Sam speaks aloud, “Past due!”

Sam places the letter face down on the coffee table, opens another envelope and speaks again aloud, “Final notice!”

Sam tosses that letter on top of the last one on the coffee table -- also face down. He opens a third envelope and this time speaks sarcastically, “Great! I’m being sued!”

Sam tosses that letter on top of the others again face down, while shaking his head. He glances over to the phone noticing he has messages on the answering machine. He presses the button and the first message plays.

“Mr. Miller, this is Ms. Williams,” she says. “I’m calling you, again, regarding your credit card account ending in

5203. As I am sure you are aware, you are ninety days past due on this account. We have currently tried to contact you many times about this matter with no response from you. When your account becomes twenty days past due, we may turn it over to a collection agency. This isn't a threat, Mr. Miller. This is normal procedure. Please keep in mind, no matter what happens, you are responsible for making payments on the account. I need to hear from you today. You can reach me personally at 1-800-555-1400, extension 462. Thank you."

Sam just shakes his head again, while the next message plays. "Sam, this is your boss, Bob Stone," he says. "I'm calling because you never called me back. I am very concerned about you. You haven't been to work for four days, and you haven't called us to say what's going on. That's not like you. I hope you are okay. Please call me or the office as soon as you can. Let me know what I can do. I hope to hear from you soon, Sam. Take care of yourself. Bye now."

Sam looks straight ahead for a moment with no emotion. He bends over with his elbows on his knees, putting his face in his hands and shakes his head. He raises his head up, looks at the open mail, picks it all up and slowly walks over to his desk. Sam throws everything into the waste basket. As he is pulling the chair out, the phone rings. He walks over to the phone, and decides to answer it. While standing, he reluctantly speaks into it, with no emotion, "Hello."

Sam keeps standing in the same spot, looking straight ahead. Then he hears a familiar voice speak. "Hi, Sam. It's Eric. Happy Birthday," Eric Thomas says.

Sam's mouth drops open. With a concerned and shocked look on his face, Sam sadly and softly replies, "Hi."

As Sam walks back over to his desk and sits down, Eric continues, “I hope you are doing okay. I’ve been worried about you, but thought it best to wait a few weeks before I called. And today is an important day for you -- your fortieth birthday.”

Sam picks up a picture in a frame sitting on his desk. He looks at it as he replies, “Hmm.” Then places the picture back on his desk in the same spot.

“You know I love you, Sam,” Eric says. “We were together too long for me not to.”

Sam looks slightly down, as he speaks sadly, “We were.”

Eric responds, “You are and will always be a best friend to me, Sam. Nothing will ever change that.”

Sam looks up, speaking forcefully, “I don’t want to be just friends. I want what we had. Why did you do it? Really? Why did you break up with me never calling until now, three weeks later? I’m really confused.” Sam becomes physically upset. His lips tighten and quiver as he looks straight ahead.

Eric responds speaking softly and calmly, “Sam, I... I didn’t call to upset you. I just wanted to check on you, and to tell you I will always be here for you.”

Sam shakes his head, while staring ahead, and responds forcefully again, “Oh, be here for me? Huh, you mean like the past three weeks when you knew I was upset and suffering and you never called?”

“When we spoke last, we discussed I would call as soon as I felt it was the right time for me. I’m sorry it wasn’t sooner than you needed me to,” Eric explains and continues. “We also discussed the last time we spoke about why I couldn’t continue in the relationship. You know that, Sam.”

Sam looks up with a puzzled look on his face, while squinting his eyes, as Eric continues, “I just couldn’t take the spending you do with nothing to show for it. These last few

months, you have lost almost all your money. And, your drinking has never stopped.”

Sam drops his shoulders, and sighs deeply into the phone, as Eric continues again, “Sam, I want a future with someone who will be an equal partner, not with someone who will destroy what we’re building together. It’s hard to build something, but so easy to destroy it. I’m sorry, Sam, but you asked why.”

Sam sighs again deeply into the phone and responds, “But, that isn’t a reason to break up with someone after being together for ten years. And, you did it during our anniversary dinner. Who does that? I wanted us to exchange rings on that day, not break up.”

Sam stands up, walks to the center of the room, looks straight ahead and continues, “I know we never lived together, but I always hoped we would buy a house someday, settle down and have a real life together.” Sam shakes his head.

Eric replies, “Sam, I wanted that, too. You know that. But, there are other reasons we already spoke about the other day as to why we need to move on. We discussed how we have grown into being just friends over the years, and how we haven’t been intimate in almost six months.”

As Sam replies, he is feeling more uncomfortable, “Well, with your schedule and mine, and the fact we don’t live together, it has made it hard for us to be together often.” Sam stares ahead.

“Don’t you think, Sam, if we really wanted to be together that way, and it was meant to be, we would have found a way?” Eric asks and then continues. “I don’t know what changed, and when exactly, but something did.”

Sam passionately speaks, “I’m still in love with you, Eric. That hasn’t changed.”

“Like I said, Sam, I do love you,” Eric says softly. “I always will, just in a different way.”

Sam paces back and forth and then stops in the center of the room. He replies firmly, “Fine. I need to go now, Eric.” Sam walks over to the base of the telephone.

“Okay, Sam. I understand,” Eric says and continues. “One more thing though. When it is convenient for you, I would like to come by and pick up a few things. No hurry though. Just let me know when I can.”

Sam says nothing, while staring ahead, as Eric continues, “Happy birthday, again, Sam. Let’s talk again soon.”

Sam looks down and quickly back up. He speaks with no emotion, “Sounds like your stuff is more important to have than me. Bye.”

Sam hangs up the phone, walks back over to his desk and sits down. He opens the desk drawer and takes out a small hand-held tape recorder. While holding it to his mouth and looking straight ahead, he turns it on and begins to speak emotionally into it.

*“If you are hearing this, then I was successful at ending my life. Please, forgive me and try to understand. This just wasn’t the life I expected nor wanted and I don’t see it getting any better. I really have tried. All I have is disappointment and pain. And, I... ugh... just please forgive me and I love all of you very much.”*

Sam turns off the recorder and again picks up the picture in a frame on his desk. With it and the recorder in hand, he rises from the chair. While slowly walking back to the couch, he looks at the picture, and says aloud, “I loved you, Eric. I loved you so much.”

Sam sits down on the couch and places Eric's picture on the coffee table standing up facing him. He lays the tape recorder next to it and sighs deeply. He opens the small brown bag and removes a prescription medication bottle. Sam lays the bag to the side and reaches into his backpack and takes out a fifth of whiskey. Sam twists the lid off the bottle and places the lid on the coffee table. Sam takes a big candle off a small black plate that is in the center of the coffee table and moves the plate in front of him. He picks up the pill bottle and is getting ready to open it.

## Chapter 2

### HOLDING ONTO HOPE

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Susan Miller and her best friend, Katie Taylor, are sitting at a small table in Susan's living room in her apartment in New York City drinking coffee. Bright light is shining through Susan's windows -- the curtains and windows open. The occasional sound of birds chirping can be heard.

Susan says to Katie, "I can't believe today is the day."

"Me, too, Susan!" Katie exclaims with enthusiasm.

Susan puts her cup of coffee down and continues, "Any moment now Dr. Reed will call with the results of my last tests."

Katie speaks empathically, "I know. I wonder what he'll say."

Susan picks up her cup of coffee back up and takes a sip while replying, "Yeah, I'll soon find out if I have finally won my battle. To be honest, I am very nervous."

"I am, too," Katie says and then continues with a lot of enthusiasm. "But, I am sure it all will be great news! I just have a feeling it will be!"

Susan smiles and says, "Thanks, Katie. I wish I felt as sure as you. It's been a long hard journey these past two years, ever since I was diagnosed. And, every time I have gotten

my hopes up, I have been disappointed.” Susan puts her coffee down while shaking her head.

“Yeah, I know. But, you seem to be doing so well lately, and for a while now,” Katie says reassuringly. “It’s very likely you will get good news.”

Susan responds concerned, “I guess you’re right, but I don’t want to get my hopes up. I just can’t. Not again.”

Susan has a serious look on her face, while Katie speaks empathically, “I know, Susan. Just try to stay positive.” Katie then sits up straight, putting her coffee down, while she continues. “You know Dr. Reed is a great doctor, and he has taken very good care of you. Every test has shown fewer cancer cells. You’ve made a lot of progress.”

“You’re right, Katie. I have been holding onto hope,” Susan says in agreement and continues. “And, Dr. Reed *has* done everything he can. I’m just still afraid he will call today with bad news.”

“I know, Susan,” Katie says understandably, while forcing a grin. “Just hang in there. You’ll know soon.”

Susan forces a grin back and says, “I will. Thanks for being here. It means a lot.”

Katie smiles big, picks up her coffee cup and replies positively, “Of course. What are best friends for?”

As Katie takes a sip of coffee and then holds the cup in her hands, Susan smiles back and says, “Also, my faith has helped me through as well. I feel so much closer to God than I ever have. He has always been there for me.”

Katie speaks enthusiastically, “That’s great, Susan! And, you’ve come so far in the last two years.”

“It’s true,” Susan says. “I remember when I was first told I had breast cancer. I was devastated.”

Katie nods understandably and replies, “Anyone would be.”



Susan says solemnly, “My first thoughts were I was going to die or have to get a mastectomy. That was a scary time for me.”

Katie replies, “I remember, Susan. That was a scary time.”

“So, I guess I have been very lucky in some ways,” Susan says, while placing both hands on her coffee cup. She forces a grin and continues. “Because none of those things have happened to me so far.”

Katie sits up forcefully, puts her coffee cup down, and speaks strongly, “And, they never will! So, don’t even think about it!”

Susan is taken aback with surprise in her eyes. She replies amused, “Okay! Okay! I will try not to!”

Susan and Katie laugh, and then Katie speaks seriously, “You know, Susan, you have always been here for me, too. You were here when I found out Rob was cheating on me.”

Susan looks back very seriously and nods. Katie continues, “You were here when he left me and Shelly after the divorce.”

Susan takes Katie’s hand as Katie continues, “You have always been here for me and Shelly. Thank you!”

Katie puts her other hand on Susan’s and Susan responds empathically, “We have both been here for each other.

Susan and Katie force a smile at each other, while Katie continues, “It’s hard enough to try to understand how he left me like he did. But, I can’t begin to comprehend how he could abandon his mentally and physically challenged daughter. He rarely speaks to Shelly or sees her.”

Susan squeezes Katie’s hand and Katie continues, “What a poor pathetic excuse of a man! I feel sorry for him. He is missing out on knowing a wonderful little girl.”

Susan nods and Katie again continues, “The last time we saw him was several months ago. The whole time during his

visit, all he could talk about was the lawn mower. He went on and on about how he could use one like it at his new home. I'm not sure if he was there to see us or for the mower. I surely didn't give the mower to him."

Susan and Katie both shake their heads.

"We've been lucky having had a lot of help, thank God!" Katie says smiling and again continues. "Shelly was given a very nice wheelchair and walker. The school picks her up in their special bus for kids with disabilities. She is doing so well in school and loves it there! Oh, she also has a boyfriend. How sweet is that?"

Susan and Katie smile at each other, as Susan responds, "That's all so great and is definitely sweet about her boyfriend. I'm so proud of Shelly."

Katie states matter-of-factly, "Raising Shelly practically on my own has been very difficult. But, it has also been a joy! I just hope I'll get to see her walk someday."

Susan smiles at Katie and confidently says, "You will, Katie! I just know it in my heart you will."

Susan and Katie squeeze each other's hand and Katie replies, "She is twelve, but will always be my baby... my little Shelly." Susan pats Katie's hand and smiles at her.

Katie repositions herself and continues, "Oh, by the way, are you and Paul still thinking about leaving New York?" Susan and Katie lets go of each other's hand.

"Hmm... I'm not sure," Susan answers and continues. "There are just so many things I love here. I would miss living in a big city so much. I would especially miss you and Shelly."

Susan smiles at Katie and continues, "However, it would be nice for a fresh start somewhere, and for Paul and me to stop wasting our money on rent. We could be buying a house that we have always dreamed of."

Katie leans forward and asks, “Have you decided yet where you might move?”

Susan thinks for a moment and replies, “Maybe Florida or California. We really want a place that is mostly warm all year round. And, my company has many branch offices in both states. So, it’s possible I could get a job transfer.”

While Katie is smiling pleased, she replies, “I know you have wanted this for a while.”

Susan looks serious for a moment and says, “You know, Katie, there are a lot of things I have been wanting to do for the past two years, but they have been put on hold.”

Katie replies, “I know, Susan. And, I’m sure you will get a chance to do them.” Susan reluctantly nods.

Katie continues, “And, you and I are still going to Paris some year in the fall, like we have always planned since high school. You will finally get to go back to France where your family lived when you were a child.”

“I hope so, Katie,” Susan says and then continues in a serious tone. “But, you know, if I never have or get to do anything I’ve ever wanted in my life, I wouldn’t care as long as I always have Paul.”

Susan and Katie smile at each other. Katie replies, “That’s true, Susan. How is Paul doing, by the way?”

Speaking proudly, Susan says, “Paul is doing great, especially at his new job. He is getting new clients every day. And, he may be getting a promotion soon, even though he has been with the company less than a year.”

Susan pauses for a moment smiling and then continues, “And, he could transfer with his new job to a new city. He just needs to work at the company at least a year first and he is almost there.”

“That’s great!” Katie says and then continues jokingly. “And, to think, you guys started out as an office romance.”

Katie laughs as Susan responds amused, “Now, you know it wasn’t quite like that. Paul worked at a different branch office and we met at the annual company picnic.”

Smiling, Katie says, “And, it was love at first sight!”

“Actually, you are right!” Susan replies with a reminiscing look on her face. “When I first saw Paul standing at the buffet table piling food on his place like he was going to feed a family of five, I felt an instant attraction. You know how I love to eat?”

Katie and Susan laugh and Katie replies, “I sure do! You and me both!”

“And, when we had a chance to finally talk, it was obvious to both of us there was a lot of chemistry.” Susan says, while smiling. “He was a true gentleman. When he took my hand to help me up from my chair, I knew he was the one for me.”

While also smiling, Katie says, “And, the rest is history. By the way, what is Paul doing today?”

“Paul was disappointed he couldn’t be with me today,” Susan replies. “He has a very busy schedule today meeting with clients. And, he said there is an important client he has to meet with.”

Susan is looking a little sad, while Katie tries to force a smile. Katie says, “Oh, I’m sure he will contact you at some point today, as soon as he can.”

“Yes, he will try,” Susan says and continues. “Katie, I need your help with something. Do you still have some time?”

Katie looks at her watch and replies, “Yes, I have a little bit more time before I need to be home when Shelly returns from school.”

Susan smiles and says, “Great!”

## Chapter 3

### LIFE HAS VALUE



Sam is sitting on his couch in his living room. While trying to open the pill bottle, someone begins knocking at his door and calling out, “Sam! Sam! Are you there, Sam?” It is Sam’s apartment building manager, Ming Lee.

Sam sits the pill bottle on the plate and places the whiskey bottle under the table. He then walks to the front door and opens it.

Ming is talking very excited and fast, “Hi Sam! I’m sorry to bother you, but Poufy is missing! She sometimes comes to your door. Have you seen her?”

While shaking his head, Sam responds, “No, I’m sorry, Ming, I haven’t.”

Ming shifts back and forth and looks concerned as she continues, “I think she got out by climbing over the screen in the window onto the fire escape. I don’t know why she would do that with the rain and all. Or, she ran between my legs when I opened the door without me seeing her. She has done that before. I always find her right away though.”

Sam is standing in front of the doorway blocking Ming's view into the apartment as she continues, "Poufy thinks she is a dog. She always wants to go out of the apartment, even though she is supposed to be an indoor cat."

Ming looks around Sam trying to see into his apartment and says, "I see your window is open. Maybe she came into your apartment and is hiding, like she did that one other time. Do you mind if I come in and call for her?"

Sam shifts back and forth feeling awkward, but reluctantly says, "Sure. Okay." He moves away from the door and Ming walks into the center of the living room.

"Poufy! Poufy!" Ming calls out. "Are you here girl? Poufy! Don't be afraid! Come to mommy! Poufy! Poufy!"

With a disappointed look on her face and disappointment in her voice, Ming turns around towards Sam and says, "I guess she isn't here. Where can she be?"

Looking concerned, Sam says, "I'm sorry, Ming. I'm sure she will turn up. You said she always does. Probably one of the other neighbors has her."

Ming slowly nods and says, "I'm sure you are right. I hope so. She's been through a lot in her seven years."

While looking slightly down shaking her head back and forth, Ming continues, "I almost lost her when she fell out our window as a kitten the time my friend left the window up too high. And, I almost lost her again when she got very ill with some unknown illness."

Looking back at Sam, Ming continues, "You know they say cats have nine lives. Well, she is using up hers fast. I wish humans had at least two lives. Then, my dear husband, James, would have gotten a second chance in life, Sam."

Sam nods, as Ming again continues, "He was a good man and a good provider. And, he was proud to be a war veteran, having served his country. He once saved a whole platoon.

Over forty men are alive today because of him. Everyone's life has value, Sam, and makes a difference to those around them."

Sam nods again as Ming continues, "I still can't believe he got pneumonia and is gone."

"I'm sorry, Ming. He *was* a good man," Sam says.

"He sure was!" Ming says smiling. She then twists her body around facing Sam's coffee table and then back at Sam and continues, "I hope you don't mind me asking, but I notice there is some medicine on your coffee table. Are you okay?"

"Oh... yeah... ugh... that's just to help me sleep." Sam says embarrassed.

"Well, there are a lot of natural things you can do to help you sleep instead of taking pills, Sam. I find taking a hot bath before bed or drinking some warm milk can help. I also find praying helps. God will solve all your problems. I see you have a cross on your wall. Are you a religious man, Sam?" Ming asks.

Sam looks at the cross on the wall very quickly and then back at Ming. He takes a moment to answer and then says, "Well, I was raised Baptist, then became an Apostolic Pentecostal in my teens, but I really haven't practiced neither for many years."

"It's never too late, Sam. God is patient. He is always there for you," Ming says.

"Yes, he is," Sam replies forcing a fake smile.

While moving out of Sam's apartment door, Ming speaks louder and faster, "Oh, gosh! I better go! I got to find my baby!" She then stops and turns around to face Sam. Ming lowers her voice and says, "Sam, you know I like you, but your rent has been past due for two months now. Is anything

wrong I need to know about? You have always paid your rent on time for the last twelve years.”

Sam just stares at Ming without responding, and Ming continues, “Well, if I don’t get a payment this month on time, I’m afraid it may be out of my hands. I really don’t want that to happen. I’ll hold off as long as possible. Like I said, Sam, I like you very much.”

Sam looks at Ming and speaks sadly, “I understand. I’ve always enjoyed knowing you too, Ming.”

“Okay then, Sam, let me know if there is anything I can do, and if you see Poufy,” Ming says.

While putting his hand on the doorknob, Sam replies, “I will, Ming. Thanks.”

Sam shuts the door, turns around and shakes his head, and walks to the couch. He sits down and sighs deeply. Sam places the whiskey bottle back on the coffee table and picks the pill bottle up and twists the lid off. He places the lid on the coffee table and then starts to turn the pill bottle as if to pour the contents out onto the plate.



## Chapter 4

### LAUGH TILL YOU LIVE

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Susan and her best friend, Katie, are standing at the small table in the living room where they just finished drinking their coffee. There is a medium-sized box, a Styrofoam head and many wigs on the table. Susan picks up a wig and puts it on the Styrofoam head.

“You know, Susan, I really love your wigs.” Katie says.

“They are great! Aren’t they? Paul loves them, too!” Susan says as she and Katie start laughing.

Susan continues, “You know the way I see it. If I’m not going to have any hair of my own, I’m going to have some very nice wigs.”

While looking at the wigs on the table, Susan says, “When I had chemotherapy for the first time, I had some very well-meaning ladies give me some wigs.” Susan picks up a wig from the table and continues. “For example, my elderly aunt gave me this one.”

As Susan and Katie smile at each other and Susan places the wig in the box, Katie says, “Bless her heart.” Susan and Katie smile again at each other.

Susan picks up two more wigs and says, “And, two ladies from my church gave me these.” Susan shakes her head affectionately while placing both wigs in the box.

“And, others were kind as well, but I’ve never worn any of them,” Susan says and continues. “Since I know I am giving all those wigs away, I need your help, Katie, in deciding which of the wigs I purchased to give away.”

As Susan takes the wig from the Styrofoam head and places it in the box, Katie responds enthusiastically, “Sure! I’d love to. Who are you giving your wigs to?”

Susan smiles and says, “Thanks for helping, Katie!” Susan appears to be getting amused as she continues to speak. “Do you remember my gay friend, Charlie, from work?”

Katie replies, “Yes, I do.”

“He said he would like to have my wigs when I hopefully don’t need them anymore.” Susan says as she is getting more amused. While she is smiling broadly and Katie is looking very curious, Susan continues, “He said his friend would love to have them for his drag show.”

As Susan and Katie are laughing, Katie says, “That’s too funny! Do you know his friend’s drag name?”

Still laughing, Susan replies, “Hmm... I think it is... Patty... ugh... Melt. That’s it... Patty Melt!”

Susan and Katie laugh again, as Katie tries to speak, “Have you seen his friend’s show?”

“I *have* seen his show. He is *really* good. He is hilarious,” Susan replies.

Susan is still laughing as she continues, “On celebrity night, he impersonates Dolly Parton, big boobs and all.” Susan uses her hands to show how big they were.

Susan and Katie can’t stop laughing as Susan continues, “I don’t know how he does it, but he even squirts water out

of them through his dress onto the audience.” Susan and Katie laugh harder.

Katie says excitedly, “Oh, I would *love* to see his show! Maybe we can go together sometime.”

Susan nods and replies, “That would be a hoot! Let’s do it!”

Susan places another wig on the Styrofoam head and Katie shakes her head no, so Susan places it in the box.

While smiling, Katie says, “That would be great, Susan. You know, I have always wondered how these guys come up with their drag names. The names are always so funny!”

Susan and Katie laugh again, as Susan responds, “Oh, Charlie told me once how they sometimes come up with their names.”

“Really? I would *love* to know what my drag name would be!” Katie says looking excited. Susan and Katie laugh again.

“Well, let me see if I can remember what Charlie said,” Susan says, while Katie is waiting with anticipation half smiling. “I remember. Charlie said to just take your first female pet’s name and the first street name you lived on and put them together for your drag name.” Susan and Katie laugh again.

“Really? Okay! Let me try it! This is fun!” Katie says and then continues. “Let me see. My first female pet was... ugh... a calico cat named Sissy. And, the first street I lived on was... hmm... Sherman. So, I guess my drag name would be Sissy Sherman!” Susan and Katie start laughing again.

Katie takes a long-haired wig off the table and puts it on. As she flips one side of the hair back, she says with a lot of attitude, “Just call me Sissy Sherman from now on! Aren’t I fabulous?” Susan and Katie are laughing hard now.

“That’s hysterical, Katie!” Susan says.

While Katie tries to stop laughing, she asks, “Well, what about you, Susan? What would your drag name be? Katie takes the wig off and places it back on the table, while staring at Susan with a lot of anticipation.

Susan smiles and says, “Well, as you know, my family lived in France when I was very young.” Katie nods as Susan continues. “And, my first female pet was an adorable small black poodle named Fifi.”

Katie bursts out, “Fifi? That’s so you!” Susan and Katie start laughing again.

Susan continues, “And, I lived on a very tiny street. I’ll never forget it, because my Mom still reminisces about being there. The name is Rue Lepic. So, my drag name would be Fifi Rue Lepic!” Susan and Katie laugh again.

As the laughter dies down, Susan looks at Katie seriously and says, “Thanks, Katie. I needed that. I’ve been so nervous about what Dr. Reed might say today. It was nice to have a good laugh, especially with my best friend.”

While nodding, Katie says, “It was. I loved seeing you laugh.”

“Me, too, Katie,” Susan replies.

Katie looks at her watch and says excitedly, “Oh, I got to go! I hate to leave while we are having so much fun. But, Shelly will be coming home from school soon.” She starts walking to the center of the room and Susan follows.

“I still can’t believe Shelly turned twelve last month,” Susan says.

With a smirk on her face and while snapping her neck back, Katie replies, “She is twelve going on twenty-five! She thinks she is the little adult.”

As Susan and Katie move closer to the doorway, Susan says smiling, “Well, at least she isn’t going on two again!”

Katie laughs as she says, “Good point! I don’t want to live through those years again!”

Susan asks, “Katie, do you still have a moment to say the Lord’s Prayer with me?”

“Of course, Susan,” Katie replies reassuringly.

“Thank you,” Susan says smiling, as Susan and Katie join hands, bow their heads, close their eyes and speak together.

*“Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.”*

Susan and Katie open their eyes, raise their heads, and let go of each other’s hands. Katie says, “Now, call me as soon as you hear something. I love you.” Susan and Katie hug.

“Thanks again, Sissy, for being here today! I will call you and I love you, too!” Susan says smiling.

Susan and Katie are laughing as Katie disappears through the doorway. “You know, Fifi, you are not just my best friend... you are also my hero! Bye, Hun!” Katie says.

Susan smiles as she replies, “Awe, shucks! Bye, friend!” Then, she walks back to the table still smiling. As she picks up the last wig she is giving away, the phone rings. It startles her and a concerned look comes over her face as she stares at her phone lying on the table.

## Chapter 5

### WHAT'S UP, DUDE?

∞

Sam is beginning to pour the pills onto the small plate, but before any pills come out, the phone rings. He looks at the phone and then back at the pills. When he looks at the phone again, he decides to answer it. He sets the pill bottle down on the plate and sits straight up, while he answers the phone.

“Hello,” Sam says.

“Hey, Sam! Happy birthday, old man! What’s up, dude? How are you?” Graham Michaels says with a lot of energy.

“Hi, Graham,” Sam says with no emotion.

“What’s wrong, man? Are you okay? You sound awful,” Graham says concerned.

Realizing how he is sounding, Sam tries to respond in a faster more energetic tone, “Oh... ugh... I’m okay! I’m just a little tired today! That’s all!”

“Right on! I’m glad you are okay! I can’t believe it’s your fortieth b-day. Mid-life crisis time, dude! I’m just kidding! That means I’ll be right there with you soon. Don’t they say life begins at forty?” Graham asks.

“I guess or it could end then,” Sam says solemnly.

Graham replies, “I know what you mean, man. Let’s hope not. Dang, this rain is really bumming me out! My bros can’t get any surfing in. And, with my broken leg, it’ll be awhile for me to get back on the board. And, I’m sorry, Sam, I can’t be with you on your special day today. The doctor said I must stay off the leg for a while. Bummer!”

Sam listens with no response.

“Hey, Sam, I need to talk to you about something,” Graham says a little seriously.

“Oh, okay,” Sam responds as he looks forward.

Graham continues, “Well, I hate to bring this up, man, but I was wondering if you have any of the money I loaned you?”

Sam doesn’t speak. He starts to become uncomfortable and stands up.

“I hate to ask. It’s just that my work called me today to tell me my job, along with many other employees, was eliminated effective immediately. Can you believe it after nine years? One more year and I would have been fully vested in my pension. Not cool, man!” Graham says.

Sam takes a deep breath and still doesn’t speak. He paces the floor, as Graham continues, “They say it’s due to the economy. However, I heard the jobs are being outsourced to another country! I believe to India. That is a real bummer, Sam! Messed up totally. So much for made in the USA!”

Sam stops pacing for a moment.

“Like I said, I’m sorry to ask about it, since I told you to take your time paying it back,” Graham finishes and awaits Sam’s reply.

Still feeling embarrassed, Sam nervously responds, “Ugh... I don’t know what to say, Graham. I’m struggling a lot right now myself, and I really don’t have it. I don’t know what to tell you. I’m sorry.”

Sam continues to feel uncomfortable. He looks down and then back up.

“Dude, don’t worry! I don’t need all of it, just some of it,” Graham says reassuringly.

Sam shakes his head back and forth and responds with no emotion, “I understand.”

Speaking with a lot of energy, Graham replies, “Okay! Cool! Just let me know! Thanks, man! You’re a great friend!”

Sam looks down and speaks sadly, “Okay.”

“We’ve been best buds for a long time... over seventeen years!” Graham says.

Sam raises his head looking straight ahead and doesn’t respond.

“I can’t believe it has been ten years since I followed you to San Francisco and you let me move in with you. We both were so full of hopes and dreams,” Graham continues.

Sam still doesn’t respond, as Graham says sounding amused, “Remember, those three months when we lived together as roommates before I found my own place? *Man*, it almost ended our friendship forever. But, somehow we survived!” Graham chuckles a bit.

Sam responds sadly, but reminiscently, “Yeah, we did.”

“We wanted to do so much, man!” Graham says energetically.

Sam doesn’t respond and decides to sit back down on the couch, as Graham continues, “You wanted to be a writer and filmmaker. I remember you wrote so many song lyrics and short stories. You also made that short film you wrote and directed. How is your writing coming around now?”

Sam responds with no energy, “I’ve been writing very little. I just haven’t felt like it much lately.” Sam looks down.



“I know. I, too, man!” Graham says empathically and continues. “I hardly ever sing anymore. I wanted to be a famous successful opera star, comedian, actor and poet. I haven’t done much of any of it. However, I did get head shots taken and had a professional artistic resume created. Boy, what happened to us?”

Again, with no emotion, Sam responds, “I don’t know. It’s very disappointing. I expected more from my life by now.”

“I know what you mean, dude!” Graham says and continues. “Me, too! Real bummer! But, at least you have an excuse.”

Sam looks confused and doesn’t respond.

“You know? With your illness and all,” Graham continues.

Sam stands up and starts pacing again, as he responds, “Yeah, I guess.”

“What you have gone through is unbelievable,” Graham says seriously.

Sam stops pacing and looks forward as he replies, “I guess.”

“What happened to you when you first got ill was horrible, but amazing at the same time,” Graham says and continues. “Can you tell me about it, again? I still can’t believe it.”

Sam walks back to the couch and sits down feeling uncomfortable with the topic of discussion and says, “You already know the story, Graham.”

“I know, but I still can’t believe it. Didn’t you say God spoke to you?” Graham asks.

Sam is becoming even more uncomfortable and not wanting to discuss the topic, but he answers Graham’s question anyway, “Yeah.”

Graham won’t give up and keeps questioning Sam, “And, at one point, you thought you were God, right?”

“Yeah,” Sam replies.

“What happened, again?” Graham asks.

Sam continues to be uncomfortable, but reluctantly decides to discuss the topic, “I stopped drinking for three weeks... the longest I had been sober at the time. I instantly became ill. It turned out the alcohol had been medicating my illness for years.”

“Yeah, man, I was so proud of you when you got sober! I remember making you a congratulatory certificate. Didn’t you start crying in public when you first got ill?” Graham asks.

Sam sighs and decides to finally talk about his experience fully and replies, “I did. People were giving me tissues. I was just so happy at the time that God was talking to me. I cried all the way home on the bus.”

“Man, that’s a trip!” Graham exclaims.

As Sam continues remembering what he went through, he keeps telling his story and says, “It felt amazing at the time. But then I couldn’t sleep for three days and it felt like God wanted me to go into my living room.”

“That’s when you had a vision, right?” Graham excitedly asks.

“Yeah,” Sam replies. “My living room turned into a desert. I saw people walking around and heard God telling me many things. He answered all my questions. I felt so blessed, not realizing it was only a hallucination.”

Graham starts to laugh as he says, “Wow, dude, all that and without doing acid! What happened next, Sam? This is all so fascinating.”

Sam continues, “I could see the infinity symbol in the sky above the desert in my living room. It glowed and looked like water, light and electricity all together moving very quickly along a figure eight laying on its side. And, God was

telling me everything was connected... people, animals, plants, air and water.”

“That’s wild!” Graham exclaims.

Sam continues again, “I remember talking to my sister on the phone while feeling a chemical change happening in my brain. I would go from being barely able to speak like someone was sitting on my chest, afraid of the dark, to moments later being full of energy speaking a mile a minute with delusions of grandeur. Then, I would be back to my normal self. And, it all happened very rapidly. I later found out that is known as rapid cycling. I also believed I was psychic at the time. It all seemed amazing, but also very scary.”

“So unbelievable!” Graham responds in amazement.

Sam pauses for a moment and then continues, “I then went on what I called my spiritual journey. I tried to seek out answers to what was happening to me. I first went to a Catholic Priest who said nothing like this has ever happened to him and that he never had God speak to him. He said I must be very blessed. Then, I went to a Buddhist Monk who told me I must be a total intuitive. I also did a lot more research and really never found any answers.” Sam shakes his head.

“Wow, man! Didn’t you then go to the hospital?” Graham asks.

“Yes, I did,” Sam replies. “I went from talking to God to believing I was the second coming of Christ, except I would be called Sam and not Jesus. But, when I believed I was God himself, I knew something was wrong. So, I had my neighbor take me to the hospital.”

“I forget what happened after that,” Graham says.

Sam stands up and starts walking around as he says, “The doctor on duty in the ER said there was nothing they could

do for me. He said I needed to see my primary care physician for a referral to a psychiatrist, since he felt it was a psychiatric matter. I thought I was going insane and very soon I would be so far gone that I would end up in a mental ward somewhere.”

“I still can’t believe that happened to you, Sam. I know you would call me crying hysterically and all I could do was cry with you. I felt your pain,” Graham says softly and seriously.

“I remember,” Sam says sadly and continues. “I know I drove you nuts with everything I asked you to do. You cleaned my entire apartment, did all my laundry and moved all my furniture around. As I said, I know I drove you nuts, but I am grateful for what you did. Thanks so much, Graham.”

“Oh, you are more than welcome. I knew you weren’t yourself and I wanted to help however I could. I was happy when you went to the doctor and found out you had an illness that was treatable. Isn’t the illness called manic depression?” Graham asks.

Sam sits down at his desk and replies, “Actually, the correct term these days is Bipolar Disorder.”

“Right! Thank God it’s treatable!” Graham says trying to sound positive.

“But, I still suffer very much. There are good days, but mainly bad ones,” Sam says solemnly.

“You’ll be fine!” Graham says reassuringly and continues. “The Sam I know is strong and confident!”

Sam replies speaking sadly, “The Sam you used to know doesn’t exist anymore. He has been gone a very long time. Now, there are three of me. Manic Guy when I am creative and full of energy. Panic Guy when I’m at my lowest, which is most of the time lately. And then there is the real me that

barely exists. Every day, I never know who I may be when I wake up. It is still very scary and I need an end to it. I want to end it.”

Speaking with concern in his voice, Graham asks, “But don’t you have meds, man, to help?”

“Yes, but they have never gotten my medications right yet for them to work together to be therapeutic,” Sam says looking down and shaking his head. He then continues. “I mostly feel bad and I can’t take it anymore.”

Still speaking with concern, Graham says, “Hang in there, Sam. I know you will be okay. Let me know what I can do to help. I’m always here for you, my special dude... my family. You know that. I love you, Sam.”

Sam is about to cry as he responds very sadly, “Thanks, Graham. Always remember I was grateful for your friendship and loved you, too.”

Without picking up on the past tense of what Sam said, Graham replies, “I will! Hey, man, let’s do something to shake your mid-life crisis as soon as I am able to walk again. We can go see a movie and have dinner, buddy. Okay?”

With an anguished look on his face, Sam tries to muster up some positive emotion as he responds, “Get better, Graham, and take care of yourself.”

“Well, I’ll talk to you soon! Get some rest! You really sound terrible! And, again, happy birthday, old man! Just kidding!” Graham says cheerfully.

Sam continues to try to sound positive when he says, “Thanks. I’ll try.”

“Goodbye, Sam!” Paul says.

Knowing it will be the last time he will speak to his best friend, Sam sadly responds, “Goodbye, Graham. I wish you a very happy life.”

Sam stands up from his desk and walks towards the couch.

“You, too, man! Talk to you soon!” Graham says and hangs up the phone.

Sam hugs the phone to his chest and closes his eyes while remembering his friend Graham and then he hangs up the phone. He sits back down at the center of the couch and picks up the pill bottle. Sam then pours all the pills out onto the plate on the coffee table. He lays the pill bottle on its side next to the plate. Sam looks straight ahead, takes a deep breath and lets it out. He looks down at the pills and reaches for some with his right hand.

## Chapter 6

### SURPRISE VISIT



Susan is still standing at her table with a wig in her hand as her cell phone is ringing. She slowly places the wig in the box. She has a concerned look on her face as she checks her caller ID. When she sees it is her boyfriend, Paul, calling, a big smile comes over her face. With a lot of excitement and relief, Susan answers the phone, “Hi, handsome!”

“Hey there, sweetie!” Paul replies.

While still smiling big, Susan says, “I was hoping you would call, Paul.”

“Well, actually, I’m not just calling you,” Paul says teasingly.

With a puzzled and confused look on her face, Susan asks, “Huh?”

“Right now, I’m standing outside your front door!” Paul says with a lot of energy.

Susan turns to face the door and jokingly says, “Really? You better get in here right now!”

“You got it, sweetie!” Paul replies still with a lot of energy.

Susan places the cell phone back on the table and walks to the center of the room facing the door. A few moments later, Paul quickly walks in with a booming voice, “Hi, sweets!”

Susan walks quickly over to Paul with a big smile on her face. And while they are having a long embrace, she asks, “What are you doing here? What about your important client?”

As Susan and Paul end their embrace and are now just holding hands, Paul replies, “He rescheduled for later today. So, I’m yours for a little while.”

“It’s nice having you here,” Susan says smiling, while she and Paul move to the couch and sit down.

“You know I would do whatever I can to be here. I couldn’t imagine you being alone today,” Paul says while kissing Susan’s hand.

Susan squeezes Paul’s hand and kisses it back and replies, “Thanks for being here! Actually, I wasn’t alone earlier. Katie just left a few moments ago. I’m surprised you didn’t run into her.”

Paul smiles as he replies, “No, I didn’t see her. I’m glad she was with you today. How is she?”

“She is a great friend and is doing well despite her challenges ever since she and Rob divorced. At least Shelly is doing very well. By the way, Katie asked about you,” Susan says.

Susan chuckles a bit as she continues, “We had a great conversation about when you and I first met.” Susan chuckles again.

“I’m glad she is well and you had a good talk,” Paul says smiling.

Susan looks at the box of wigs and then back at Paul and says. “We did more than that. I asked Katie to help me decide what wigs to give away since I have so many I don’t wear.”



Susan starts laughing as she continues, “We really had a blast doing that! We spoke about me giving my wigs away to my gay friend, Charlie, to be used in his friend’s drag show. We laughed so much!”

Paul smiles and squeezes Susan’s hand as she continues, “Katie and I were also discussing our first female pets and first streets we grew up on.”

While Paul smiles, Susan laughs harder and then asks, “By the way, what was the name of your first female pet?”

“Huh? My pet?” Paul asks confused.

“Yeah, your first female pet. I’m just curious,” Susan says trying to respond with a straight face, while trying to keep from laughing.

“So, this is what you and Katie were talking about?” Paul asks.

“Yeah, it was one of the things we spoke about,” Susan says, while still trying to keep a straight face. She stares at Paul with anticipation for his response.

“Ugh... jeez... that was a while back,” Paul says trying to remember as he continues. “I believe it was a guinea pig my older sister gave me for my birthday.”

Susan keeps staring at Paul with her eyes getting wider as he continues, “My sister insisted on naming her herself. I remember I wasn’t thrilled by the name. She named her... ugh... her name was... Peaches.”

Susan can’t control herself any longer and bursts out in laughter, which makes Paul laugh too, even though he is feeling confused.

“Susan, what’s so funny? Are you okay?” Paul asks laughing with her.

While Paul smiles, Susan tries to contain her laughter and respond convincingly, “Yes! Yes! I’ve just had a silly day with Katie talking about these things.”

“I love the name Peaches,” Susan says, while trying to contain her laughter. She continues, “Now, Paul, what was the first street you grew up on?”

As Susan waits with anticipation and trying to hold her laughter in, Paul replies, “My first street? Hmm. That’s when I lived in Missouri as a kid. The street was... ugh... Saint Claire.”

Susan completely loses it. She bursts out with laughter again as she says, “Peaches Saint Claire! Peaches Saint Claire! I love it!”

Susan continues to laugh as Paul looks very confused.

“I don’t know what’s so funny, but I love to hear you laugh!” Paul says, while smiling and laughing with Susan. Paul then takes a serious tone, “Susan, you said you are giving some of your wigs away. You’re not giving away... ugh... the one... that you...”

“Oh, no! That one is stored safely away,” Susan says interrupting Paul, while smiling and placing both of her hands on his hands.

With relief in his voice, Paul replies, “Good! I know you don’t wear it anymore, but... ugh... you know.”

“I know. I know, Paul,” Susan says still smiling. While getting a reminiscent look on her face, she continues, “It’s very special to me, too. I was wearing that wig the day we met.” Susan continues to touch Paul’s hands.

“And, it was one of the things that attracted me to you,” Paul says beaming. “I thought how pretty you and your hair looked.”

“It was funny when you told me that later about my hair. Funny, but sweet,” Susan says, while smiling affectionately at Paul. Paul smiles back.

Looking serious, Susan says, “You know, Paul, everything about you is sweet. You have been here for me

for the last year and a half through the good, but mostly challenging times.”

As Paul grins, Susan continues, “When I told you about my illness, you didn’t bail and run. You have stood here right beside me all the way.”

Paul nods as he replies, “I believe you telling me actually brought us closer together.”

“It sure did!” Susan says. She and Paul smile at each other as she continues, “Paul, thanks for being here today, and everyday being my Knight in shining armor!”

Susan hugs Paul and kisses him on the cheek. Paul grins and then takes a deep breath and then lets it out. A serious look comes over his face. Susan is taken aback and becomes concerned. “Paul, are you okay” Susan asks.

Paul takes another deep breath and lets it out. Susan’s mouth tightens as she waits for Paul’s reply.

“It’s serious,” Paul says. Susan looks confused and worried. “I need to talk to you about something. I have wanted to talk to you about this for some time now.”

Paul stands up, walks to the center of the room and faces straight ahead. He has his back to Susan. Susan then stands up and walks to the center of the room next to Paul.

Looking extremely concerned and confused, Susan says reassuringly, “Paul, whatever it is, we can handle it. Just look at what we have gone through so far.”

Susan continues to look worried. Paul turns around to face her and takes both her hands in his and says calmly, “Susan, you know I love you, right?”

Susan continues to be concerned and responds with a hint of impatience in her voice, “Yes, Yes, I do, Paul. What is it? What’s going on?”

## Chapter 7

### YOU ARE NEVER ALONE

∞

Sam is still sitting on the couch ready to pick up some pills when there is heavy knocking at his front door. A man is yelling, “Open up! This is the police!”

Sam turns to look at the door and is startled and confused. He covers the pills and pill bottle with the small brown bag and puts the lid back on the whiskey bottle and shoves it under a cushion in the couch. He decides to answer the door. When he opens it, a police officer is standing there.

“Are you Sam Miller?” Officer Hernandez asks in a strong authoritative voice.

Feeling scared and concerned, Sam replies, “Yes.”

“I’m Officer Hernandez. I’m here because there is a missing person’s report filed on you,” Officer Hernandez says. Sam looks confused as Officer Hernandez continues. “Your boss, Bob Stone, reported you missing. Are you missing, sir?”

Sam takes a deep breath and answers with a confused look still on his face, “Ugh... no.”

Officer Hernandez repositions himself, moving side to side, and says, “Your boss said you have been missing for four days. Why did he report that, sir?”

While moving around awkwardly, Sam replies, “I’ve been too ill to call in. That’s all.”

“Are you sure, sir?” Officer Hernandez asks, while moving his head forward and looking very serious. “Is there something you need to talk about?”

Sam takes a deep breath and replies, “I’m fine. I’m just still feeling a little ill.”

“Do you mind if I come in and take a look?” Officer Hernandez asks.

Still nervous and concerned, Sam replies, “Ugh... sure... I guess.” Sam then moves away from the door and Officer Hernandez walks in to the center of the living room.

After looking around, Officer Hernandez asks, “Well, everything looks okay, but are you okay, sir?”

Sam swallows hard and with a straight face, he responds, “Yes. Yes, I am.”

While jotting down some notes, Officer Hernandez nods in agreement and says, “Sir, you need to call your boss as soon as possible. He is very worried about you.”

“I understand,” Sam says with no emotion.

Officer Hernandez walks over to Sam’s window, and while looking out it, says, “You have a nice view. You can see the Golden Gate Bridge from here.”

“Yeah,” Sam says still with no emotion.

Officer Hernandez turns around facing Sam and says, “We had another jumper this morning off the bridge, but he survived. He is in critical condition though. A ferry spotted him jumping and raced over to rescue him.”

Sam becomes uncomfortable as Officer Hernandez continues, "He later said he regretted what he did at the exact moment he jumped. He realized he really wanted to live."

Sam feels more uncomfortable as Officer Hernandez gets more personal by calling Sam by his first name.

"You know, Sam, people come up missing every day," Officer Hernandez explains. "A lot are never found and others are victims of foul play, or they hurt themselves like the jumper this morning."

Officer Hernandez continues, "I can't understand how anyone could feel so desperate to do something like that. I don't feel anything can be so bad as to want to do that. There are a lot of desperate people out there, Sam."

Sam nods and then shifts back and forth getting more and more uncomfortable.

"I think as long as you have people in your life that care about you, you are never alone. There is always hope," Officer Hernandez says.

Sam nods without responding.

"Do you have family and friends, Sam?" Officer Hernandez asks.

Sam nods and replies, "Yes, I do."

"That's good," Officer Hernandez says, while smiling. "Now, call your boss."

Once again, Sam nods, while forcing a smile, and says, "I understand."

"Good. I'm glad you are okay," Officer Hernandez says, while moving towards the front door. He then turns around to look at Sam again and says, "Take care of yourself, Sam."

Sam also has moved towards the front door and with a forced smile says, "I will."

Officer Hernandez smiles and exits Sam's apartment. Sam closes the door and turns around. He has a confused look on

his face and shakes his head back and forth. Sam walks to the window and closes it. He lets the blinds drop and closes them as well followed by shutting the curtains.

Sam walks to the couch and sits down. He shakes his head again and picks up the small brown bag to reveal the pills again and tosses the bag aside on the coffee table. He also reaches under the couch cushion and pulls out the whiskey bottle. He takes the lid back off. It is at this moment he notices an envelope on the floor he missed opening earlier. He picks it up and is taken aback by whom it is from. He breathes deeply, while starting to become emotional.

## Chapter 8

### BIG QUESTION

∞

Susan is still standing by Paul in the center of her living room, while he has her hands in his and a half grin on his face.

“Well, what I need to tell you is... no matter what happens today or tomorrow or anytime in our lives, I will always be here for you,” Paul says, smiling.

Susan has no emotion on her face, except concern, as she says almost begging, “Paul, what is going on? Please, tell me what it is.”

Susan has a desperate look on her face, while Paul still has a half grin on his. Paul says reassuringly, “I promise I am getting there.”

Susan nods and says, “Okay.”

Paul brings Susan’s hands to his lips -- kissing them and then he smiles. Susan has a very confused look on her face, as Paul continues, “Susan, there is something I need to ask you.”

Susan responds with no emotion, while looking still confused, “Okay.”



Paul then bends down on one knee, smiling broadly and speaks lovingly, “Susan, I love you, and want and need you in my life forever. I promise we will always be together.”

Susan can’t describe what she is feeling. It’s so surreal. She slightly shakes her head and says, “Paul... ugh...”

Paul reaches in his shirt pocket and takes out a ring. He holds it up toward Susan. She has a shocked look on her face and is still shaking her head in disbelief. Paul says, “Susan, I wanted to ask you this tonight, but I can’t wait. Susan, will you be in my life forever? My sweets, will you marry me?”

Susan stares at Paul and responds very emotionally, “Oh, Paul, of course I will!”

Paul puts the ring on Susan’s finger and then stands up to embrace Susan who is now crying. He says, “Don’t cry, sweetie.”

“You have just made me so happy on such a potentially difficult day,” Susan says smiling.

Paul nods understandably and smiles as he explains, “I didn’t mean to worry you. I just wanted it to be a big surprise.”

“Well, it is a wonderful surprise,” Susan says. “For this to be possibly a horribly challenging day, it has been a great one so far!”

Susan and Paul embrace and kiss each other.

“You know, Susan, we may not get a chance to live a fairy tale life,” Paul says. “But it will be an interesting journey. It already has been. We’ll write our own story.”

While smiling and nodding, Susan responds, “We will, Paul! I’m looking forward to writing it with you.”

“Who are you going to tell first?” Paul asks smiling.

“I’m not sure,” Susan says. “We can decide that together. Maybe we can have a special dinner to announce it or something else. I’m not sure yet.”

“Whatever you decide will be fine with me,” Paul says, still smiling, before he looks serious again and continues. “Susan, I hate this.”

Looking puzzled and concerned again, Susan asks, “What is it?”

“I need to go meet my client,” Paul replies.

While putting her arms around Paul’s neck, Susan speaks disappointedly, “Oh, already?”

Paul hugs Susan and kisses her on the forehead and says, “Yes, I do. I am sorry, but I will see you tonight.”

Paul takes Susan’s arms from his neck and cups her hands in his kissing them and says, “Be sure to call me after you hear from Dr. Reed.”

“I will,” Susan says while looking glowingly at Paul.

Paul has his arm around Susan’s waist as they walk toward the doorway. As they turn to face each other, they embrace. “Okay, then. Good. I love you, Susan,” Paul says with a big smile.

“I love you, too, Paul,” Susan says also with a big smile.

Susan and Paul end their embrace and as Paul exits the apartment, he speaks again in a booming voice, “Bye, sweets!”

Paul disappears through the doorway. Susan walks to the center of her living room with her left hand raised up. While smiling and looking at her ring, her cell phone begins ringing. It startles her. Susan looks quickly at the phone with a concerned look on her face.

## Chapter 9

### REFLECTIONS



Sam is still sitting on the couch with an unopened envelope in his hands. When he opens it, he learns it is a birthday card from his mother, Barbara Miller. He decides to read it.

*“Dear son, I wish you a very happy birthday. I’m sorry you are so far away and that we can’t spend it together, but we will have Thanksgiving that’s coming up soon. I can’t wait until you are back home again. I understand you had to leave to follow your dreams. And I’m glad you have been given a chance to do so, even though I don’t get to see you that often. Thank you for everything you have done for me these past months with the money you sent me to help save the house. I still can’t believe that those people, with falsified documents, tried to steal the house after your father passed away.”*

Sam turns the card over and continues reading it.

*“I hope it didn’t cause you any problems sending the money. I know you said it didn’t, but \$18,000 is a lot of money. I hope you do something special on your birthday. You deserve it. I’m proud you are my son. I’ll talk to you soon. I miss and love you very much, Mom.”*

Sam starts to become emotional with tears in his eyes. He keeps looking back and forth at the card and the pills. He thinks of the things people have said to him today.

*“Please call me or the office as soon as you can. Let me know what I can do.” ~ Bob Stone*

*“You know I love you, Sam. You are and will always be a best friend.” ~ Eric Thomas*

*“Everyone deserves a second chance in life, Sam.” ~ Ming Lee*

*“I’m always here for you, my special dude... my family. You know that. I love you, Sam!” ~ Graham Michaels*

*“I think as long as you have people in your life that care about you, you are never alone. There is always hope.” ~ Officer Hernandez*

Sam has become more emotional. He looks at his mother’s card that’s still in his hands and then at the pills.

## Chapter 10

### THE CALL

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Susan is still standing in the center of her living room while her cell phone continues to ring. She walks to the table, picks up the phone and sees on caller ID it is Dr. Reed. Looking concerned, Susan takes a deep breath and lets it out, and answers the phone, while slightly looking down, “This is Susan,”

“Hi, Susan. This is Dr. Reed,” Dr. James Reed says.

Susan slowly sits down at the table and runs her hand through her hair. She is afraid of what Dr. Reed might say, as she responds with no emotion, “Hi, Dr. Reed.”

Susan is still looking slightly down bracing herself for the news she has been waiting for all day. Her right elbow is near the edge of the table. Her right hand is holding the phone, while her left hand is on her thigh.

“I have some good news for you,” Dr. Reed says.

Susan doesn’t change her stance and responds still with no emotion, “Oh.”

“Yes! You are one hundred percent cancer free!” Dr. Reed says with excitement in his voice.

Susan looks up and rises from the chair as she responds with a lot of energy, “What?”

Susan walks into the center of the room facing forward, as Dr. Reed continues, “And, you don’t have to test again for five years!”

With a huge smile on her face and lots of energy, Susan responds, “That is great news! Thank you so much!”

Susan continues to have a huge smile on her face, while Dr. Reed responds, “It’s my pleasure and congratulations! You are a true survivor!”

Susan continues smiling, as she ends her call with Dr. Reed.

## Chapter 11

### MOMENT OF TRUTH

∞

Sam still has his Mother's birthday card in his hands. He puts it to his lips, kisses it, and lays it face down on the coffee table. He picks up Eric's picture, kisses it, and lays it face down on the coffee table as well.

After repositioning the tape recorder, Sam sits straight up on the couch staring forward. He closes his eyes for a moment, as he takes a deep breath. He feels the moment of truth has finally come to execute his plan.

Sam reaches towards the pills and grabs a handful. He closes his eyes again for a moment as he takes another deep breath. Then he sighs deeply.

Sam slowly puts the pills near his opened mouth. As he is about to put them in, the phone rings. Sam is startled. He looks at the phone, keeping the pills at his mouth. The answering machine picks up and a woman starts to speak.

"Happy birthday, Sam!" Susan exclaims. "This is your sister, Susan! By the way, Dr. Reed called with some good news today!"

Sam doesn't change his position. He is still looking at the phone with the pills still at his mouth.

With joy and relief in her voice, Susan continues, "I am one hundred percent cancer free! I did it!"

Sam lowers his hand with the pills and begins to cry.

"You always have to have faith and hope," Susan says.

Sam looks at the cross on the wall while still crying.

Susan continues, "Things have a way of turning around eventually."

Sam looks at the phone, the cross, and then down where he is shaking the pills in his hand. He is deciding what choice he wants to make.

"I miss you. I love you. Please, call me soon. Goodbye," Susan says.

Sam panics and turns toward the phone, while throwing the pills in his hand onto the table. Crying uncontrollably, he grabs the phone and answers it.

"Susan," Sam says softly in between sobs with desperation in his voice. "Please, help me." Sam continues to cry deeply.

With great concern in her voice, Susan responds, "Sam! I'm here! What's wrong?"

While looking down with his elbows on his knees and crying uncontrollably, Sam responds, "Just help me be as strong as you. I just want to be as strong as you. I just want to be strong."

"Sam! Sam, are you hurt?" Susan frantically asks.

Sam looks up slightly and in between sobs tries to speak, "Pills... I just want... I want... to die."

Sam continues to sob heavily, while Susan asks, "Did you take some pills, Sam? What did you take?"

Sam tries to respond, but can't. He is sobbing too much. Susan starts to panic.



“Sam, stay on the line! Don’t hang up,” Susan says very concerned. “I am going to call for help on the other phone. Stay with me, okay? If we get disconnected, I will call you right back.”

Sam looks up and speaks softly, “Okay.”

Trying to stop crying, Sam wipes his tears away with his shirt. Susan calls 911 with her home phone. A few minutes pass and Susan is back on the cell phone with Sam.

“Sam, I’m back!” Susan says panicky. “Someone should be there very soon. Stay on the line with me until they come, okay?”

Sam is still crying. He is looking at the pills on the table as he says softly, “Okay. I was going to take all of the pills.” Sam starts to get very emotional again.

“The pills? Did you take any or none at all?” Susan asks trying to sound calm.

“None yet,” Sam says.

“That’s great, Sam,” Susan replies.

“I... I... don’t know... I don’t know what to do,” Sam says, while looking down crying uncontrollably again.

“You don’t have to do anything right now, Sam,” Susan says trying to continue to sound calm. “We will figure it out. We are together. I love you, and you are going to be okay, I promise.”

Sam just nods a little and looks down without responding, as Susan continues by asking, “Sam, have you been taking your medications?”

Sam looks up and shakes his head as he responds, “No, not since... not since Eric left me.”

Sam begins crying heavily again. Susan tries to remain calm and keep Sam talking until help arrives.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Sam,” Susan says sympathetically.

Sam stares straight ahead. With much emotion and his voice raised, he responds, “He left me! He left me after ten years!” Sam is shaking his head again.

“You will get through this. I swear you will,” Susan says reassuringly.

“I can’t live! I have nothing left!” Sam says still with his voice raised and continuing to cry.

“You have me, Mom and many other people who love and care about you, Sam,” Susan says.

Sam starts to become a little frantic and he begins rocking back and forth. He says loudly, “I... I can’t... I... I don’t... I don’t know what to do!”

Susan is becoming more worried. While trying very hard to keep Sam calm and on the phone, she says reassuringly, “Hang in there, Sam. Help will be there soon and I’ll always be here for you.”

Sam is still rocking back and forth, and now is squeezing his chest with his free arm. He says, “It just hurts so much! I can’t take it! I just can’t take the pain!” Sam keeps squeezing his chest and rocking.

“I promise it will get better, Sam. It will,” Susan says.

Sam stops rocking and takes his arm off his chest. He sits up straight, while looking forward. He responds loudly, “No! No! No, it won’t! I will just keep disappointing everyone!”

Susan is getting more nervous and worried about when help will arrive and whether Sam will make it until then. Susan says, “I’m sure people don’t see it that way. I don’t see it that way. People care about you, Sam. They love you, just like I love you.

“I owe so much money!” Sam exclaims shaking his head looking down. “I will never be able to pay it all back!”

“Don’t worry about money, Sam,” Susan says reassuringly. “Your life is more important than any money you owe.”

Sam looks up as Susan continues, “We need you in our lives, Sam. *I* need you in my life. We love you.”

At that moment, there is heavy pounding on Sam’s apartment door.

“Mr. Miller! Sam! This is Officer Hernandez. Are you okay? Please, open up!” Officer Hernandez says loudly.

Before Sam can move, he hears a key in the lock and the door knob turning. He looks at the door and slowly lowers the phone from his ear. Officer Hernandez walks in and looks in all directions until he sees Sam sitting on the couch.

As Officer Hernandez speaks reassuringly, a faint sound of an ambulance can be heard in the distance, “Sam, I heard the call come over the radio that you were in trouble. Everything will be okay now, Sam. You will be okay.”

As the sound of an ambulance continues to get louder, Ming, holding her cat, Poufy, walks in and stands behind Officer Hernandez. She has a sad and concerned look on her face. Sam looks back around straight ahead. He takes a deep breath and lets it out as he swallows hard. Sam closes his eyes for a few seconds, opens them back up, and stares straight ahead.

## Chapter 12

### SEEKING HELP



After Sam's sister, Susan, saves him, he is admitted into the hospital for observation for one week. During this time, he is going through detox and getting back on his Bipolar Disorder medications. He is also receiving counseling with a hospital therapist who recommends Sam continue therapy once he leaves the facility. His company has given him three months off work for treatment. They said they will hold his position for him until then.

Officer Hernandez even makes a surprise visit. He is only allowed to see Sam for a few minutes. "Hi, Sam. How are you doing, buddy? I'm glad you are getting help," Officer Hernandez says smiling.

"Thank you for coming. I'm getting better," Sam replies.

"Great!" Officer Hernandez says. "I was worried about you."

"Thanks, again. I truly appreciate everything you have done," Sam says trying to smile despite how badly he is feeling.

"Well, Sam, they said I can only stay a moment, so I better go for now. You hang in there and keep feeling better,

buddy.” Officer Hernandez says as he walks to the door and turns back. “I’ll see you later. Bye now.”

“Bye and thanks again,” Sam says as Officer Hernandez disappears through the doorway.

Upon leaving the hospital, Sam contacts his former therapist, Regina Nelson, and asks to be seen again. After briefly telling her what recently happened to him, she agrees to start seeing him again as soon as possible.

A few days later, Sam is sitting in her office.

“Sam, what brought on this latest setback that was so bad you wanted to end your life,” Regina asks.

“I just wanted to give up on everything,” Sam explains. “I have tried for years to change my life for the better, and I get nowhere. It’s like a horse chasing a carrot. What I want is always in sight, but also always out of reach.”

Regina jots some notes down and then says, “Tell me more of what has been going on, especially recently that lead you to want to overdose with pills?”

Sam replies, “Ever since college, my life has seemed charmed for the most part. Whatever I said I would do, I always accomplished it. Then, several years ago, everything changed. Recently, I have gone into severe debt and my partner broke up with me. It was too much for me to handle.”

“Sam, I know we have talked about a lot of issues when you were seeing me in the past. However, I feel we need to start fresh and maybe repeat some things we have already discussed and this time go into more details. Considering what you have been through recently, we need to not leave one stone unturned. Do you agree?” Regina asks.

“Yes. Yes, I do agree,” Sam says while nodding. “There are some things I haven’t gone into enough details about and it’s hard carrying it all around with me alone.”

“Good, Sam. I really feel it will be helpful to you,” Regina says, while smiling reassuringly. “We won’t try to cover everything today, but let’s try to identify some issues that are important to you to discuss, okay?”

“Okay, sounds good,” Sam replies smiling back.

“Well, before we do that, let’s finish talking about what we were discussing earlier,” Regina says. “You mentioned your life used to be charmed. Tell me of the time you felt this way.”

Sam takes a deep breath and answers, “Well, I always did excellently in school. I got hired for a great job right out of college. Then, I decided to move across the country two-hundred miles away. Once there, I again landed another great job. It was like everything I put my mind to, I was successful at. But, something changed. I seem to have lost all that.”

“Tell me how things changed for you,” Regina says.

“Well, I have lost jobs because of becoming paranoid that my boss and co-workers were sabotaging me and trying to get me fired. I started feeling depressed and not motivated to even try anymore. I basically gave up for a while, because I lost all self-confidence. But, for the past year, I have really been trying with no luck. Everything I need and want seems, like I mentioned before, out of reach and unattainable,” Sam says sadly.

Regina continues, “Tell me more why you felt paranoid that everyone was trying to sabotage you at work.”

“It was strange,” Sam says with a confused look on his face. “I was enjoying this one job so much and making the most money I have ever made in my life. But, then, all of a sudden, I felt like my boss was setting me up for failure. I didn’t feel he was giving me the tools I needed to do my job. I also believed my co-workers were jealous of me and

stealing some of my sales, causing me to lose commission. I had no proof of any of this though. One co-worker I still kind of trusted tried to help me refocus, but he was unsuccessful.”

“Are you having any paranoid feelings outside of work?” Regina asks.

“Not paranoid, but very negative. I feel this way most of the time,” Sam replies. “I find I have a short temper and can be right down nasty to friends, family and even strangers. I seem to have little patience and can’t bite my tongue. It’s like I have no filter. I am too honest with my thoughts with people most of the time. I’m aware of what I am doing, but I don’t seem to have any control over stopping myself when it’s happening. I hate it, because this isn’t really who I am or who I want to be.”

Regina nods her head and asks, “How are you sleeping?”

“It’s really weird,” Sam replies. “I either go through a period of too much sleep or one where I can’t sleep at all.”

“Tell me what is happening and how you are feeling when you sleep too much,” Regina says.

Sam replies, “It’s usually when I am feeling very depressed and down on myself. I just pull the covers over my head and stay in bed for most of the day, sometimes fourteen to sixteen hours at a time.”

“Now, tell me what is happening and how you are feeling when you can’t sleep,” Regina continues.

“I’m usually feeling positive. My thoughts continue to race all night long of amazing things I believe will happen. I also talk out loud to myself constantly during this time, even during the day,” Sam replies.

“We know you have wanted to harm yourself, but during any of this time, have you ever felt that you wanted to harm someone else?” Regina asks.

“No, never,” Sam says firmly.

Regina continues, “Is there anything else that has happened that has concerned you which maybe seemed out of the ordinary?”

“Yes. When I feel high energy, I spend too much money. This has really become out of control. I have almost maxed out my credit cards and am going deeper in debt. Most of my money goes to alcohol and eating out daily,” Sam says frustrated.

“Well, I’ve heard enough. A lot of what is happening to you is because of your Bipolar Disorder. Are you still seeing Dr. Rodgers for your medications?” Regina asks.

“Yes, I am. I have an appointment in two weeks,” Sam replies.

“Sam, we are about out of time. Let’s wait until next week to identify some the issues you feel you need to discuss here, especially the ones you said you need to go into more details about. Before you go today, I would like to read something to you I found in your file from a couple of years ago. It is something you wrote during a group therapy writing exercise. I want you to listen to it and next week we will discuss how some of this, if any, is still relevant today. By the way, here is a copy for you. You titled it ‘My Confession’,” Regina says and then reads it.

*“This is my confession  
The freeing of my soul  
Now, I am an open book  
The real me you will know*

*We are comrades  
Fighting our battles of addiction  
Together, we share our struggles  
And, our convictions*



*There are those that live the life  
Of honesty and redemption  
Instead, I live the life  
Of deceit and condemnation*

*There's a light at the end of the tunnel  
But, it's not shining towards me  
So, I'm here wondering  
Why is it only the dark I see?*

*I pray to God for answers  
Just to ignore the messages he sends  
I suffer in silence  
Instead of seeking out my friends*

*I'm living with a façade  
A mask to hide my pain  
Suffering from a broken spirit  
With nothing to gain*

*I'm drowning in my addiction  
And, the only breath I take  
Is holding onto my desire  
To no longer be a fake*

*I say and do what I think you want  
I smile and laugh at ease  
But, the real me you do not know  
Only what I want you to see*

*In my world, the sun doesn't shine  
The rivers have run dry*

*The moon has lost its light  
The stars have fallen from the sky*

*I often speak out loud  
Apologizing to myself  
For just wanting to die  
And, end this hell*

*I still have dreams and goals  
But, they are fading away  
I'm losing who I am  
Each and every day*

*So, this is my confession  
You now know who I am  
I'll be holding onto hope  
That I can rise again"*

"I remember this. It was when I was coming clean with the group that I had been drinking the whole time I claimed to be sober. I remember that lie ate away at me," Sam says.

"Well, time is up for today. Let's discuss your thoughts about this next week. I'm glad you're back, Sam," Regina says smiling.

"Thanks. Bye," Sam says smiling back and then walks out of the office.

## Chapter 13

### HISTORY OF ABUSE



Sam returns a week later to see his therapist, Regina Nelson. She greets him with a big smile and asks him to have a seat in her office. Sam forces a half-smile back and sits down.

“Sam, I’m glad you returned. We have a lot to discuss today and in the upcoming weeks,” Regina says and then asks. “How are you feeling today?”

With no emotion, Sam replies, “Honestly, I’m nervous. I’m afraid it’s going to be hard for me to discuss some things with you or anyone.”

“I understand, Sam. It’s normal to feel that way. Keep in mind though this is a safe environment to share your story. Only myself will know what you say in this room,” Regina says reassuringly.

“Okay. Good,” Sam says again forcing a half-smile.

“Sam, last week I read something you wrote in a group therapy session awhile back titled ‘My Confession’ and gave you a copy to read again yourself. Did you get a chance to read it? If so, how does your life compare today with how things were at the time you wrote it?” Regina asks.

“Yes, I read it,” Sam replies and continues after a deep sigh. “My life is still basically the same. That’s the problem. Things never change for me, except to get worse.”

“I see. Well, we will explore the issues important to you and try to identify what’s standing in your way to make them better starting today. But first we need to address what those issues are. We need to make a treatment plan. Okay. Sam?” Regina asks.

Still feeling nervous, Sam replies, “Okay. That sounds good.”

“If you had to pick the top five issues you are facing that you are having difficulty with, what would you say they would be?” Regina Nelson asks.

Sam thinks hard for a while and then says, “My history with my father, an incident I had in the diner as a teen, the time I knew Jim, alcohol addiction and financial problems. All in that order.”

“That’s great, Sam. Those all sound like very important issues to discuss further. We will over the next few weeks,” Regina says, while writing down notes.

Sam forces a half-smile again.

“You mentioned the history with your father first. Why is that?” Regina asks.

Speaking with no emotion, Sam replies, “Because, I feel the way I was raised may have been the main reason my life turned out the way it has for me as an adult, including today. I don’t know for sure.”

“Let’s make this what we discuss today and explore more about your relationship with your father as a child and adult, okay?” Regina asks.

Sam takes a deep breath and slowly lets it out and replies, “Yes. It’s time. I’m finally ready to talk about it.”

“Great, Sam. And, again, don’t worry. What you say stays in this room,” Regina says reassuringly and continues. “Tell me about how you were raised as a child.”

Sam takes another deep breath and slowly lets it out and replies, “My dad was a severe alcoholic and drunk most of the time when he was at home. Everyone on my dad’s side of the family were alcoholics. My dad had a short temper and would get upset very easily. When he was upset, he would blame my mom or me and take it out on us. I was afraid most of the time. I always had to walk on eggshells, especially walking up and down stairs. Still to this day I catch myself walking on my toes instead of my whole feet.”

“How did your father take it out on your mother and you?” Regina asks.

“For example, he would slap and push my mom if dinner wasn’t ready when he got home or if he didn’t like what she cooked. Sometimes he would spit the food back out onto her face or he would throw all the food on the floor and make her clean it up. He seemed to always be angry about everything and took it out on my mom and me,” Sam says shaking his head back and forth slightly.

“What are some things he would get upset with you about?” Regina continues with her questions.

“Usually, if I didn’t do something he asked me to or fast enough. Also, if I accidently hurt my younger sister while playing with her. And, pretty much about anything else,” Sam replies.

“What would your father do to take it out on you?” Regina asks.

“He liked to slap me in the face and other parts of my body. This is when he wasn’t punching me. He wouldn’t punch me too hard, just enough to hurt. He also liked pushing me into things. One time, he pushed me so hard into

the bookcase it fell over and the aquarium on top of it fell on top of me. He would spank me very hard using whatever he could get his hands on. He often made me go out to the tree in the backyard and tear off a switch from it to use on me. If I didn't get a big enough one, he would go out and get a huge one to use on me. I still have scars on my back from those whippings," Sam says, getting physically upset.

Regina asks, "Was the bookcase incident the worst he ever did to you or was there something even worse?"

"Even worse," Sam says with his eyes getting teary. "We were home alone together when I acted like I didn't want to get him another beer from the refrigerator. He got very angry telling me he works hard all day and that I was an ungrateful heathen. He then jumped up off the couch and started punching and slapping me hard on my arms, chest and stomach. Then, he claims, he "accidentally" punched me hard in the face making my nose bleed. He immediately apologized and asked me not to tell my mom or anyone."

"Did you ever tell anyone?" Regina asks.

"No, not until right now," Sam says shaking his head back and forth. "By the way, he would also punish me for wetting the bed, which I did until age fourteen."

Regina takes a few notes and then says, "You know, Sam, wetting the bed can be caused from a child suffering severe stress. It definitely sounds like you suffered with this stress."

"Yes, I most certainly did," Sam replies still shaking his head. "It wasn't just wetting the bed, I developed Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, too. At ten-years-old, I was obsessed with cleanliness. I would wash my hands fifty times a day and even bleach the walls and woodwork in my room."

"How long did you suffer with OCD?" Regina asked.

"A couple of years. I don't have it now," Sam replies.

“How did your mother react to the abuse you suffered at the hands of your father?” Regina asks.

“She would beg him to stop and sometimes step in between my dad and me. He would then start slapping her and pushing her away usually into something, while saying I needed the punishment to be a man,” Sam says shaking his head.

“What was your sister’s reaction to the abuse you and your mother endured?” Regina continues her questioning.

“She mostly stayed in her room playing music so she could drown everything out, or if it was daytime, she would go outside, usually to a friend’s house,” Sam replies and continues. “She actually would sometimes cause the abuse against me by lying to my dad that I did something I didn’t do. My parents always thought she was a little angel, but I knew better.”

“When did the abuse end? What age?” Regina asks.

“Well, it started when I was ten and ended at age thirteen,” Sam replies.

“Was there anything that caused the abuse to end?” Regina continues her questioning.

“Yes. One day, at age thirteen, I had enough of my dad’s abuse of my mom and me, while listening to him upset my mom on the phone. She was in the hospital and just had a hysterectomy. He was saying awful things to her, so I walked over and punched him as hard as I could on his leg and told him I hated him. I also told him if he would ever hit me or my mom again, I would find a way to kill him,” Sam says starting to cry a little.

“Oh, Sam, that took a lot of courage and I know you were scared doing it. So, what happened after that? Did your father change? Did he leave you and your mom alone?” Regina asked.

“Yes, he did. And, not only that, my mom threatened to leave and divorce him if he didn’t stop drinking and being abusive. She even had my sister and I pack our bags to be ready to go. It was a wake-up call and turning point for my dad. He totally changed for the better. However, my mom and dad compromised on his drinking. He was only allowed to drink beer, no hard liquor anymore, since beer only made him mellow and fall asleep easily, usually on the couch,” Sam says, while getting less emotional.

“Did your relationship change with your father? If so, how?” Regina asks.

“It changed drastically,” Sam replies. “We started doing a lot together. We took fishing trips and visited my grandma together in another state just the two of us. We also joined father and son bowling tournaments and won many trophies. We became very close, trust was rebuilt and eventually I forgave him before he passed away just six months ago. Even though we never spoke about it, he died knowing I forgave and loved him.”

“I’m so glad you were able to make peace with your father, Sam. So many people never can do that. And, I feel it was so important for you to finally speak today fully about everything. How do you feel having discussed everything about it?” Regina asks.

Sam says with a half-smile and relief in his voice, “It felt good to finally discuss everything with someone. Now, I feel I can let it all go and put it behind me, especially since my father has passed away.”

“Great, Sam. We are making progress,” Regina says and then asks. “What is the relationship like with your mother and sister now?”



“I’m very close to both. I tried before I got depressed recently to make a point to call them once a week,” Sam says. “I’m doing that again these days.”

“That’s great, Sam. I’d like for you to do one more thing concerning your father before we move on in your treatment plan,” Regina says and then asks, while standing up, “Sam, can you come with me?”

Sam looking puzzled stands up and replies, “Yes.”

Regina leads Sam to a flight of stairs and asks him to walk up and down them using his whole feet, instead of just his toes. She asks him to think of the peace he now has with his father and that he no longer has to be afraid to upset him. Sam does what he is asked to do.

“That’s great, Sam. How did that feel doing that,” Regina asks.

“It felt good. I will always try to climb stairs that way from now on,” Sam says smiling.

“Great, Sam,” Regina says smiling back, as she and Sam walk back to her office.

“Unfortunately, we are out of time for this week. Next week, I want to discuss with you the second important issue on your list, which is what happened at the diner when you were fifteen, okay?” Regina asks.

“Okay. I’m nervous about that. It will definitely be a hard one for me to discuss,” Sam replies.

“I understand, but keep in mind again this is a safe environment to discuss anything. It will never leave this room,” Regina says and continues. “Well, Sam, have a great day and I’ll see you next week.”

“Thanks, and I’ll see you then,” Sam says as he exits the office.

## Chapter 14

### NIGHTMARE AT HAWKS NEST DINER



Sam once again is in Regina Nelson's office. He has come to feel she is an excellent therapist because she has helped him discuss things he has never told anyone.

"Sam, it's been a week since we discussed your father. How are you feeling today about that discussion?" Regina asks.

Sam takes a short breath and replies, "I'm still feeling relieved I was able to finally discuss things I never have before. It was nice to get everything out."

"Good," Regina says and then asks. "Is there anything else you want to discuss about that topic before we move on?"

"No, I'm ready to move on," Sam says smiling.

"Great," Regina says and then continues. "As you know, today we will be discussing what happened to you in a diner at age fifteen, the second thing you listed on your treatment plan. How are feeling about discussing this today?"

Sam takes a deep breath and then replies, "Honestly, I am very nervous. This is the hardest thing I have to discuss openly. I've never told anyone the full story until today."

"Sam, I want to remind you, like I do every week, this is a safe environment to discuss anything important to you.

Everything you say stays in this room with me,” Regina says reassuringly.

“Okay. Good,” Sam says with slight relief in his voice.

“Sam, I know this topic is difficult for you, so take your time and try to start at the beginning,” Regina says still trying to sound reassuring.

Sam takes a few deep breaths and then begins to tell his story, “It was a peaceful Saturday night during the Fourth of July weekend. It was around eleven-o-clock. My friend Lisa and I had just watched a movie at the drive-in theater. I forget what we saw. Lisa drove because she was sixteen and had her license. She and I had known each other since we were toddlers. I’ve always thought of her as a sister, but I later learned I was to her the love of her life she never had.

Anyway, we decided to stop at a diner, Hawks Nest Diner to be exact, for ice cream sundaes before we headed back home. When we arrived, there were a lot of people there. Later, I learned there were sixty people in the diner at the time.

Lisa and I discussed the movie we just watched. I thought it predictable and she loved it. She even cried at the end. As we kept this debate going, having a wonderful time, five men entered the diner quickly pointing guns everywhere saying this is a robbery. They told everyone to get down on the floor.”

Sam stops telling his story, while shaking his head. Regina says, “It is okay, Sam. Just take your time.”

Sam finally continues after several deep breaths, “Some people didn’t get down fast enough and they were beaten and forced to the floor. A lot of people were screaming in pain. I saw one robber appear to have broken a man’s arm. Others were bleeding in the head from being pistol-whipped.”

Then these same two men picked up huge bags and walked around telling everyone to put all their valuables in them. They said they wanted to see wallets, purses, watches, rings, necklaces -- everything. They started walking around collecting these things. I saw one elderly man swallow his and his wife's wedding rings. People that didn't take things off fast enough got beaten and one man got shot in the buttocks for refusing to give up his ring. When the gunshot went off, some people screamed and we all knew this was real. While the robbers were doing that, another robber was watching out the window as a lookout."

"You said there were five men. What were the other two men doing?" Regina asks.

Sam looks down and sighs and then looks back up saying, "They were doing what would ultimately be the worst for all of us in the diner."

"I see. Is this the part of your story that's the most difficult to talk about?" Regina asks. "Because if it is, just take your time."

"Yes, it is. I will," Sam replies and continues his story. "The other two robbers were harassing one of the waitresses. They were grabbing her buttocks and breasts. They kept asking her to show them her breasts. She kept refusing. Then they stopped asking and demanded her to do so. When she kept refusing, they started slapping her in the face and threatening to shoot her. Everyone else in the diner was helpless to assist her.

The men then told her to strip off completely. When she refused, one man punched her in the face. As she was doing what they asked, one of the two men yelled out he had an idea. He demanded everyone in the diner to strip completely naked. He waved his gun and said this isn't a joke and started

kicking bodies saying to do it. People that refused were beaten into submission.”

Sam takes another break in telling his story.

“Did you and Lisa do what they asked?” Regina asks.

After a deep breath, Sam replies, “Yes, we did, but like everyone else, we were trying to hide our genitals with our hands and arms. But, then we were instructed to lay on the floor on our backs with our hands behind our heads. Again, there were people who didn’t do it and were beaten into submission.

All the robbers could do was laugh at us. Then came the worst command of all.”

Sam once again has to stop telling his story.

“It’s okay, Sam. Take your time,” Regina says reassuringly.

After a few minutes, Sam continues his story, “Two robbers dragged the waitress into the kitchen. Then, the worst was asked of us. The robbers demanded all of us in the diner to start having sex. I was terrified. I didn’t want to hurt Lisa. She kept saying it’s okay, but I just couldn’t do it. I couldn’t even simulate sex like most people were doing in the diner. Everyone was forced together. Couples, some just dating, were forced together, along with men and women that didn’t even know each other. Women without partners were also forced together. One couple was chosen to perform special sexually requested acts. Anyone refusing got beaten and forced to comply with the robbers’ demands.

When one robber got to me and Lisa, he demanded I have sex with her. I said I can’t. He smacked me in the head with his hand and demanded I do it. I once again refused to do it. He said for me not to test him and that he wasn’t in the mood. But, he said he was in the mood to shoot someone. He put the gun to my head and said this is the last time I’m asking

you. I refused again. He then pulled me up by my hair, since I had long hair at the time, and said you're coming with me and pulled me towards the kitchen."

Sam looks terrified as he pauses his story again.

"Are you okay, Sam? Can you continue?" Regina asks.

"Yes, I can. Just give me a moment. What I'm about to tell you I have never told anyone before," Sam says taking deep breaths and then continues. "As I was forced into the kitchen, we passed the waitress being raped by two robbers. Her and my eyes caught each other and I could see the terror in hers. I was terrified, too, because I feared I was being taken away from everyone to be killed.

When we arrived in the back room from the kitchen, the robber punched me in the face knocking me to my knees. He said that's exactly where he wanted me and then unfastened his pants and let them drop. He forced me, while grabbing and pulling my hair, to perform oral sex on him. He would let go of my hair at times to slap me hard and tell me I was doing a lousy job. He finally got irritated and frustrated enough he pulled me to my feet, while still pulling my hair.

After slapping me again, he said maybe I'd be better at something else. That's when he turned me around and bent me over a table. He said he was going to make me into a man. Then he raped me. Not once, but twice in a row. The second time was more painful. Every time I begged him to stop, he threatened to put the barrel of the gun up my anus and shoot it. I felt humiliated, violated and scared. At the time, I had no idea two guys could do something like that."

Sam has tears in his eyes at this point telling his story.

"Oh, dear, Sam. I'm so sorry to hear that happened to you. What a difficult secret you have kept all these years," Regina says softly and continues. "Please continue when you are ready."

Sam continues, “After raping me, he took me by my arm and lead me back to the group and threw me down on the floor. I could see Lisa hiding herself under a booth table with our clothes hiding her for the most part. Eventually, the robbers left leaving chaos. Everyone was trying to find their clothes and many others decided to leave as soon as possible before the police arrived. Lisa and I decided to leave, too. We, like some others, didn’t want anyone to know we were ever there because we knew some people would make fun of us. For example, several weeks after the incident, I heard of a man who came into the diner. When the waitress, the one who got raped that night, asked him what he wanted to order, he said to sign him up for the next orgy. The cook, who was in the diner when the robbers came in, came out of the kitchen and asked the man to leave.”

“So, you never told anyone?” Regina asks.

“No, Lisa and I never did. It has been a secret we have kept all these years until discussing it with you today. She asked me what happened in the back room. I just told her the robber roughed me up a bit just trying to scare me and didn’t really hurt me much.” Sam replies.

“What happened to you after the diner? What did you do and how did you feel?” Regina asks.

“Immediately after I got home from the diner, I noticed blood on my underwear. I had been bleeding from the anus. I was scared, but I was unable to tell anyone. I instead took a long hot shower and then cried all night. I didn’t deserve what happened. I did nothing wrong. I was trying to protect Lisa. I was just a kid, a good kid. I also wanted to track the man that hurt me down and kill him. I was obsessed with that thought. In the end, I just hoped he would get caught and arrested, but he never was.

I had difficulty concentrating for months. My school grades suffered. I went from straight A's to some B's and one C. I stayed in my room all the time. I was afraid of adult men, since both my dad and a stranger have now physically hurt me," Sam explains.

"That's all understandable, Sam. You went through a very traumatic experience. How do you feel about having discussed this topic today?" Regina asks.

Sam takes a breath and says, "I feel just like I did last week after discussing my father. I feel relieved and hope someday I can put it behind me. I'm still angry about this one."

"I'm glad you are relieved, Sam, and I understand your continued anger. What you went through was very traumatic." Regina replies and continues. "I'm sorry. Once again, we are out of time. Next week, we will discuss the third thing on your treatment plan, your time with Jim. Goodbye, Sam, and have a wonderful week."

"Thanks. You, too," Sam replies, as he leaves the office.



## Chapter 15

### THE SHY GUYS

∞

Sam returns to Regina Nelson's office for continued therapy.

"Hi Sam. It's nice to see you again. How are you today?" Regina asks.

"I'm doing well. I'm just nervous about the topic we will discuss today," Sam replies.

"About Jim?" Regina asks.

"Yes, Jim," Sam replies. "It's been a while since I've discussed him with anyone, although I think of him often."

"Well, like I say in every session, this is a safe environment to discuss anything. It won't leave this room," Regina says.

Sam smiles and replies, "I know and I appreciate that."

Regina smiles back and says, "Well, whenever you are ready, I suggest you start from the beginning."

"It's a long story, so I wrote it down in story form to read before we discuss it. I'm trying to get back into my writing. Is that okay?" Sam asks.

"No problem," Regina says. "Take as much time as you need. I'm glad to hear you are writing again."

Sam takes a deep breath and reads his story about Jim.

*My mother stopped in front of the YMCA to drop me off. She was supposed to return at closing time, which was 2:00 PM, to pick me up. It was Sunday, so the facility closes earlier than it does on other days of the week.*

*I was still fifteen at the time and very shy. I had no friends other than Lisa. That's why my parents decided to finally let me join the YMCA. They hoped I would make new friends and become more social.*

*As I entered the building, I felt excited and anxious at the same time. I wanted to become a member for a long time. While checking in at the front counter, I was informed I needed to speak to a membership representative for an assessment of my goals and interests before I could use the facility.*

*While waiting in the membership representative's office, I saw posters of kids having fun together, which is something I have rarely experienced myself. I also noticed a lot of sports trophies, reminding me of when my father would participate in father and son bowling tournaments when I was younger. We won many trophies together. While I looked at the swimming pool through the big window behind the desk, the membership representative walked in. He said with a huge smile on his face, "My name is Dave Kearney."*

*I shyly said, "Hi."*

*Dave said, "I want to be the first person to welcome you to the YMCA and ask you if you have ever been a member at any YMCA before?"*

*I said, "No."*

*"That's okay," Dave said. "I want to spend a moment talking with you to help determine what your goals and*

*interests are coming to the YMCA. I also want to know how we can help make sure you are happy here."*

*I said, "Okay."*

*"Tell me what you are interested in at the YMCA," Dave asked.*

*"I don't know," I said. "Maybe swimming."*

*"Can you swim now, Sam?" Dave inquired.*

*"No, but I want to learn. I also would like to know how to dive," I explained.*

*"Well, we do offer swimming lessons where you could also learn how to dive. Is that something you would be interested in?" Dave asked.*

*"Are the lessons free?" I asked back.*

*"I'm sorry, but unfortunately, they're not," Dave said.*

*"My parents barely let me finally join. They say they can't afford it, so I'm sure they won't pay any extra for lessons. So I will teach myself how to swim," I said with determination in my voice and then asked. "Is that okay?"*

*"Of course, Sam. And, I'm sure you will learn by watching others. Just be careful of the pool. It is very deep in spots, so stay in the shallow areas always, okay?" Dave warned.*

*"Yes, okay, I will," I replied.*

*"Sam, is there anything in addition to swimming and diving you would like to do?" Dave asked.*

*I thought for a moment and said, "Nothing I can think of right now."*

*"Well, we also have social events for young men your age to participate in where you can meet other young people and be involved in activities. Is that something you think you might be interested in?" Dave asked.*

*"Ugh... no, not really. I just want to learn how to swim and dive, nothing else," I replied.*

*“Sam, why is learning to swim and dive so important to you?” Dave asked.*

*I started to become a little embarrassed with my face turning red, but replied, “When I was ten, another boy at a public pool pushed me in the pool at the deep end. I was drowning until that same boy dove in and saved me. That’s why I want to know how to swim,” I said and continued. “I ultimately would like to be a diver. I admire a few who are Olympic gold medalists. I know it’s crazy, since I can’t even swim now, but I’d like to be a champion diver like them.”*

*“Sam, that’s not crazy at all!” Dave said with a lot of energy. “You can be whatever you want to. I hope here at the YMCA we can help you reach that goal. That’s what we are all about.”*

*I forced a grin, while still feeling embarrassed.*

*Dave continued very positively, “Okay, Sam, that’s great! Start with swimming and diving, and if you want to participate in anything else, just let me know, okay?”*

*“Okay, I will,” I replied.*

*“Well, it was nice meeting you, Sam. I wish you the best here at the YMCA. Good luck with your swimming and diving. Be sure to let me know how things are going for you. Goodbye for now,” Dave said with a big smile on his face.*

*Dave raised from his seat and so did I.*

*I shyly said, “Thank you.”*

*“You’re welcome,” Dave said.*

*We both walked out of the office.*

*As I arrived in the locker room, I saw many young and older guys in partial dress to total nudity. It immediately made me feel uncomfortable. I started having flashbacks to the time in the diner. I found a locker far away from everyone else. I quickly and awkwardly changed into my swimming trunks.*

*To get to the pool, I had to walk through the showers. Once again, I felt uncomfortable seeing another guy nude. I opened the door to the pool area and realized the pool is clothing optional. I later learned only males are allowed on Sundays.*

*As the sunlight from the windows glimmered onto the water of the pool, it made the water sparkle and seem to dance. It hypnotized me, making me even more determined and interested in wanting to learn how to swim and dive. I immediately noticed another boy swimming very well. The sunlight shown on this boy making him almost seem to glow like an angel.*

*I watched him for a while before deciding to get in the pool. I stayed in the shallow area trying to figure out how to swim. I kept watching him swim and tried to do what he was doing. But, I wore myself out from all the effort and decided to get out of the pool and walk around a bit. At this point, only he and I were in the pool area. Even the lifeguard was gone.*

*While looking around, I noticed the high diving board. Just for fun, I decided to climb the stairs to the top and walk to the edge of the board and look down. Once I was standing there looking at how high I was, I imagined diving off it. I realized how much I really did want to be a diver. While I was standing on the board, I noticed the other boy was paying attention. He looked confused maybe because earlier he witnessed me unable to swim, and now he is seeing me on the high diving board.*

*As I turned around to walk off the board, I slipped on some water and fell backwards off the board landing in the ten feet deep water below. He immediately saw what happened, he told me later, and rushed over to help me. He couldn't see me, so he dove under the water. He could then see me all the*

*way at the bottom of the pool struggling to make it back to the surface. So, he dove even further down to where I was. He grabbed me around the waist and got me to the surface. At that point, I was unconscious.*

*He was barely able to get me out of the pool and lie me alongside it, but he managed. He yelled for help, but no one was around, so he performed CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on me himself. He tried to get me to cough up the water. I later found out he learned how to do all this at summer camp a year ago. It was an optional training class offered.*

*He told me later he was panicking until I finally came to. As I opened my eyes, I could feel his mouth on mine, and then I started coughing up water. I understand he turned my head to the side, so the water could flow out.*

*After a few moments, I was confused and asked, "What's going on?"*

*"You fell off the diving board up there," he said pointing to the board, while trying to talk still out of breath, "And, you landed at the bottom of the pool. I managed to get you out and performed CPR, since no one else was around."*

*When I sat up, I said, "Thank you. I'm so sorry I was so stupid to go up there."*

*"Well, you should probably go to the hospital or something," he suggested.*

*"No! Please, don't tell anyone. If you do, my parents will find out and they won't let me come back here again. Please, let's keep it between us," I begged.*

*He sighed and said, "Okay, but please promise, if you start to feel bad, you will tell your parents and get help."*

*"Okay. Deal. Thank you again so much. You saved my life. I wish everyone could know, but just not right now," I said smiling.*

*"It's okay. I understand. I'm just glad you are okay," he said still exhausted. "By the way, my name is Jim Barrett. I noticed earlier how much you were struggling to swim."*

*"My name is Sam Miller," I replied still smiling. "And, I noticed how well you can swim."*

*"I was thinking maybe I could help you learn how to swim," Jim said smiling back. "I really don't mind doing it."*

*"That would be great! Thanks so much again for everything," I said with a lot of enthusiasm.*

*"My mom only allows me to come here on the weekends," Jim explained. "She doesn't want me doing poorly in school by my studying and homework suffering."*

*"Oh, okay. I'll try to be here on the weekends, too," I agreed.*

*"Well, we only have twenty minutes now before the YMCA closes. We better get out of here," Jim said with urgency.*

*As I stood up and walked out of the pool area, I stumbled a bit feeling lightheaded. Jim grabbed my arm to help me.*

*Once in the shower area, Jim stopped and took his swimming trunks off and started showering. I was so embarrassed to not shower, so I did with my swimming trunks on. I occasionally looked over at Jim and thought how I wished I looked like him. Jim was taller than me with short blonde hair, blue eyes and a swimmer's build. I had bushy shoulder length brown hair, brown eyes and a thin build. I decided to quickly leave the shower area and go back to my locker.*

*While I was waiting at the entrance to the YMCA for my mother to pick me up, Jim walked out and stood next to me.*

*"Thanks again, Jim. I appreciate everything you have done for me today. You are a true hero," I said smiling and then I looked concerned. "Just please don't tell anyone in your family. My parents may find out."*

*“I promise I won’t tell anyone, Sam,” Jim said reassuringly.*

*“Thanks,” I said in a grateful relieved tone.*

*Both of our mothers showed up at the same time. As we walked to the cars, we nodded goodbye. While in the car, on the way home, all I could think of was Jim. I thought about watching him swim well, feeling his mouth on mine, him saving my life and being in the showers. It made me feel confused and weird inside. I was also already thinking about next weekend when I would see Jim again, which excited me.*

*All of the next week, I built up anticipation to go back to the YMCA and see Jim. When my mother dropped me off on Saturday, I desperately kept looking for him, but he never showed up. I was disappointed as I left the YMCA a few hours later. However, on Sunday, Jim did show up. I was very pleased to see him and, as promised, he started helping me learn how to swim. But, every time Jim would put his hands on my stomach and chest to help keep me afloat, I felt weird and awkward inside. It was a feeling I had never felt before.*

*While meeting each other almost every weekend, we started to become very good friends. I learned he was also fifteen and joined the YMCA six months before me. And, like me, he was shy and had no real friends. Eventually, our parents agreed to allow us to spend time together outside of the YMCA. At times, we would have stay overs. Usually, we stayed at my home. I had a better selection of video games that I was able to buy with the money I earned from my newspaper route and mowing neighbor’s lawns. I also had bunk beds.*

**SEVERAL MONTHS HAVE PASSED**



*One night, while Jim was staying over at my place, something felt different between us. We kept glancing at each other, even when we were supposed to be focusing on the video game we were playing. While sitting on the couch just inches between us, an energy and connection kept getting stronger.*

*Jim and I continued to sit and stare at each other, without speaking. I nervously reached for Jim's hand and Jim held my hand back. Jim reached his other hand out and touched my face caressing it.*

*Jim broke the silence by saying, "Hey, Sam, I think you are beautiful inside and out. I really love being with you."*

*"I love being with you and think you are beautiful, too," I said with a half grin. I started caressing Jim's face, as well, and then continued, "I really want to kiss you. May I kiss you?"*

*Jim grinned big with a sparkle in his eyes. He leaned in and put both hands on either side of my face and gently kissed me quickly on the lips. Jim smiled, and while laughing a little, said, "I'm sure we will get better at that."*

*"I just want to kiss and hold you in my arms forever," I told Jim.*

*I turned off the video game and TV. Jim and I kept kissing and hugging each other for hours until we fell asleep in each other's arms.*

*The next day, when Jim had to leave to go back home, he and I were standing in my bedroom kissing and hugging each other again. We lost count on how many times we had kissed at that point.*

*"I don't want you to go," I said pouting.*

*Jim smiled and replied, "I know, but you'll see me again real soon."*

*Jim's mother, Karen Barrett, had become friends with my mother. She was in the living room waiting for Jim to come downstairs. After waiting for a while, she decided to call up the stairs, "Jim, we need to go. I have to pick your sister up at your father's. Tell Sam goodbye."*

*Jim's mother was legally separated from Jim's father, Mike Barrett. They had joint custody of Jim and his twelve-year-old sister, Beth Barrett.*

*"I'll be right down," Jim called back. A few moments later, Jim appeared.*

*While in the car, Jim told me his mother asked, "What is wrong with your mouth? It is very red and looks swollen."*

*"Nothing, mom. I'm okay," Jim said he replied as he turned his head looking out the passenger's side window smiling. He told me he was thinking of kissing me.*

*Over a period of months, Jim and I kept getting closer. Then, on one of Jim's visits to my place, I said, during one of our make out sessions, "Jim, I love you so much. It's painful inside how much I love you, especially when you're not here with me."*

*Jim smiled and kissed me on the forehead and replied, "You know I love you, too, with all my heart. My heart doesn't belong to me anymore. You have possession of it. You took it from me."*

*At that moment, we decided it was time to become even closer in our relationship. We decided to start having sex.*

### *SEVERAL MORE MONTHS HAVE PASSED*

*Jim and I are now sixteen. We decided it was time to tell our mothers about our relationship. So, one day, while both mothers were in my living room talking, Jim and I gave each other a quick kiss and hug.*

*“Okay, are you ready to do this?” Jim asked and then said supportively. “It will be okay, I promise.”*

*“I’m ready,” I replied. “With you by my side, I feel I can do anything.” With that said, we took each other’s hand and headed down the stairs.*

*As Jim and I walked into the living room, still holding hands, it immediately got both of our mothers’ attention. We walked over to the loveseat and sat down, never letting go of each other’s hand.*

*“What’s up, guys? What’s going on?” Jim’s mother asked.*

*Jim and I looked at each other for a moment, smiled and then nodded in agreement to move forward with our plan.*

*“Mom and Barbara -- Sam and I have something to tell you,” Jim said. “It’s hard for us to do so, but we want to share with you something important and special to us. We love you both and wish for your blessing.”*

*“Does it have something to do with you guys holding hands?” Jim’s mother asked smiling.*

*“Yes, it does, Karen, and mom,” I said. “We just want to share with you both something we are very happy about.”*

*“Tell us guys what you need and want to say. It’s okay,” my mother said reassuringly.*

*I looked at Jim and Jim continued, “Well, as you know, Sam and I have spent a lot of time together. And over time, we have become very close. With that said, Sam and I love each other in a romantic way. We consider ourselves boyfriends now and are dating. We hope you understand and accept what we’ve told you because we are very happy together.”*

*Both Jim and I had a scared and determined look on our faces. We were squeezing each other’s hand tightly with both of our hands.*

*Our mothers turned to look at each other for a moment and turned back around smiling.*

*“Guys, we both already figured that out a while ago. We’re very happy for you and glad you finally told us. That took a lot of courage. We’re proud of you both. And don’t worry, we aren’t going to kick you out of the house to the curb,” Jim’s mother said.*

*“That’s right. We love you both and only wish the best for you. And how would you think we wouldn’t know by now? We live in the same house with you guys,” my mother said, while smiling amused.*

*Jim and I were smiling too, as I said, “Thank you both so much.” Jim and I gave each other a hug. Then, without thinking about it, naturally kissed each other quickly on the lips.*

*Both of our mothers smiled broadly. Jim and I then stood up and walked over to them giving each one a huge hug and a kiss on the cheek.*

### *THREE YEARS HAVE PASSED*

*Jim and I are nineteen and still together as a couple. We are both in college and working part-time jobs. Just recently, we told our mothers our intentions to get married. We all had a nice talk about what the wedding would be like. But first, we decided to finally move out of our parents’ homes and get an apartment together, so we could be in each other’s lives more.*

*Over Labor Day weekend, I had plans to look for a place for us. I had made a few appointments. Jim was on a fishing trip with his father, taking their boat out on Lake Savage. It was kind of awkward for Jim because he had never told his father the truth about our relationship and our future*

*together. Jim had hoped by the end of the trip he could do so.*

*But then Jim's mother called my mother and said, "Barbara, I have horrible news. I am still in shock. I can't believe it."*

*The following is what my mother said was spoken between her and Jim's mother.*

*"Karen, what's wrong?" my mother asked concerned.*

*"Oh, my God. Oh, my God," Karen said frantically. "I just can't believe it."*

*My mother just stayed silent for a moment as Karen then continued, "Barbara, my ex-husband and Jim were fishing on their boat when a larger boat became out of control and crashed into theirs at full speed."*

*"Oh, dear. Are they okay?" my mother asked worriedly.*

*"No. No, they aren't. Oh, my God. They both didn't make it. They're gone. My sweet precious beautiful son is gone. I wish I could be with you when you tell Sam. Tell him I love him," Karen said crying.*

*"Karen, I am so sorry. Please tell me what I can do to help," my mother said sadly.*

*"Nothing right now. I'll let you know. Just take care of Sam," Karen said.*

*The following is what my parents told me happened between them that day.*

*My mother called my father, Greg Miller, at work and asked him to hurry home. She told him what happened with Jim. I later learned my father already knew about Jim's and my relationship, even though I had never talked to him about it. I understood he more than once caught Jim and I kissing without us knowing we could be seen.*

*My father made it home in time before I arrived. He and my mother were trying to keep it together. They didn't want to be falling apart. They wanted to be strong for me.*

*I finally made it home and walked into the living room where my parents were. My mother instinctively got up from where she was sitting and hugged me. "Mom, what's that for?" I asked.*

*"I just wanted you to know how much we love you," my mother said, while sitting down again holding back tears.*

*"Dad, what are you doing here?" I asked. "You are always at work now."*

*My father replied, "I just want to be here with you and your mother right now."*

*"Oh, well that's great," I said with a smile on my face.*

*"Sam, can you sit down?" my father asked solemnly.*

*"Dad, I can't. I don't have time. I have an appointment to see an apartment in half hour and I still need to take a shower. I was at the gym," I said and then asked, "Oh, by the way, have you heard from Jim? He was supposed to be back from his trip by now and call me, but he hasn't. I tried calling him, but all I get is his voicemail. I've left messages, but he hasn't called me back."*

*"Yes, son, we heard about Jim's trip," My father replied with no emotion.*

*I said excitedly, "Great! When is he supposed to come over? Did he say?"*

*My father took a deep breath and asked, "Sam, can you please sit down between your mother and me?"*

*"Huh? What's going on? Is there something wrong?" I asked concerned.*

*"Yes, son, there is," He replied.*

*With panic and fear in my voice, I asked, "Is it about Jim? Is he okay?"*

*“Please son, sit down,” my father asked again.*

*I reluctantly sat down between my parents, and then asked, “Okay, dad, what is it? What do you need to tell me?”*

*Both of my parents put a hand on my back rubbing it. I was feeling more fear of what’s going on.*

*“Son, there is no easy way to tell you this, so I’m going to just say it,” my father said.*

*With more fear and worry on my face, I replied, “What is it, dad? You’re scaring me.”*

*“Son, there has been an accident. While Jim and his father were in their boat fishing, another boat lost control and crashed into theirs,” my father explained.*

*“Oh, my God! Is Jim okay?” I asked. “Tell me he is okay. Please tell me he is okay. Where is he? Can I see him?”*

*“No, son. Both Jim and his father had serious injuries,” my father replied.*

*“What? Oh, my God! Tell me Jim is okay,” I said with tears in my eyes.*

*“I’m sorry, son, but neither Jim nor his father made it. They were both killed. I’m so sorry,” my father said, while rubbing my back faster.*

*I quickly stood up screaming, “No! No! No!” I had both hands on my head. Overcome with emotion, I fainted hitting my head on the edge of the coffee table causing bleeding. As I lay on the floor, my father tried to help me come to, but there was no response.*

*My mother called 911, while my father was still trying to get me conscious. By the time the paramedics arrived, I was sitting up aware again. The paramedics treated my head injury and encouraged me to go to the ER, but I refused.*

*I then went into my room and refused to come out or to eat. For three days, my mother and father begged me to*

*come out. They were especially concerned about my head injury. I just kept saying, "I'm not ready."*

*My mother knocked on my door the fourth day and said, "Jim's funeral is in two days and Karen wants you to be there, sweetie. She's worried about you and loves you. We all need to be there for each other."*

*I opened my door. I hadn't bathed or shaved in four days. My mother hugged me and kissed me on the cheek. I said, "I don't know if I can go, mom. I am scared to see Jim that way. I want to be there, but I'm just not sure if I'm strong enough. I've been doing nothing but crying until no tears come out anymore."*

*"Honey, that's natural. Crying can help you heal. And, your dad and I will be there with you," my mother said reassuringly.*

*"Okay, I'll try, but if it is too much to handle, I'll need to leave," I replied.*

*My mother said again reassuringly, "Okay, dear. That's wonderful. As I said, your dad and I will be there with you."*

*"How is your head?" she asked.*

*"I'm okay. Don't worry," I replied.*

*"Okay, good," my mother said relieved.*

*"Mom, so dad knew about Jim and me?" I asked.*

*"Yes, dear. He figured it out and he has always been okay with it. He loves you just like me unconditionally," my mother answered back.*

*As I arrived at Jim's funeral, I was terrified to see him in his casket. However, I knew how important it was to see him one last time.*

*"Mom, can you ask Karen if it's okay for me to touch Jim when I see him?" I asked.*

*"Sure, honey," my mother said gently squeezing my right arm.*



*Karen walked over to me with my mother and said, “Oh, Sam, thank you for coming, dear. I love you so much. And, of course you may touch Jim.”*

*“Thanks, I love you, too,” I replied, as Karen and I hugged, while trying to hold back tears.*

*Both Karen and my mother walked with me to Jim’s casket. They were on either side of me with an arm each around my waist. Upon seeing Jim, I started to shake a bit and tear up.*

*I reached out and placed a hand on top of Jim’s and said, “Thank you for saving my life the day we first met. Also, thank you for continuing to save me over and over by having been in my life.”*

*I took my hand off Jim’s and placed it on the right cheek of his face and continued, “Thank you for always making me feel loved. I’ll never forget you and will always love you forever.”*

*I leaned down and kissed Jim on the lips and then while looking at him for the last time, I said, “Goodbye, Jim. I’ll miss you horribly. I know we will meet again.”*

*I quickly turned around and fell apart crying uncontrollably and becoming inconsolable. I left the funeral home immediately with my parents at my side.*

### **SEVERAL MONTHS HAVE PASSED**

*I finally had the courage to return to the YMCA. I looked at the pool and had flashbacks of when I first saw Jim swimming and when he saved my life. The sunlight was shining once again through the windows onto the water. And, just like before, it made the water sparkle and seem to dance. I decided to go to the high diving board and climb the stairs to the top.*

*I walked to the edge of the board and said, “This is for you, Jim. I’ll always love you.” Then, I dove off it. Jim taught me how to dive years ago, even though I never became the champion diver I wanted to be.*

*After coming up for air, a young man around the age I was when I first joined the YMCA, told me he wished he could swim and dive like me. So I decided to teach him.*

“Well, that’s it. That’s my story about Jim. I know it was long and detailed, but I wouldn’t have had it any other way. Jim deserves this story. It’s to honor his memory and pay tribute to him,” Sam says with tears in his eyes.

“It was wonderful how you told the story, Sam. It’s obvious that you loved him,” Regina says and then continues. “Unfortunately, we are out of time today. Let’s discuss Jim more next week, okay?”

“Okay. I know the story took up all the time this week,” Sam admits.

Regina stands up and so does Sam. As they both walk to the office door, Regina says, “That’s okay, Sam. Goodbye for now. I’ll see you next week.”

“Goodbye. Have a great week,” Sam replies, as he exits.

## Chapter 16

### BATTLE OF ADDICTIONS

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“Hi, Sam. Welcome back,” Regina Nelson, Sam’s therapist, says. “Please have a seat.”

“Hi,” Sam replies and sits down.

“I am still in awe about your story you shared last week about Jim. What you wrote was beautiful about your short time together. How are you feeling today about having shared your story?” Regina asks.

“I feel great about it. He was the love of my life,” Sam says getting teary-eyed and choking up a bit.

“Before we move on, is there anything else you want to say or share about Jim?” Regina asks.

“Oh, I could go on and on and on about him, but I won’t,” Sam says smiling. “I’m ready to move on.”

“Okay, we will then. Looks like we are at number four of five on your treatment plan concerning alcohol addiction. Let’s start with you giving an overview of what you feel has been your challenges with alcohol,” Regina says. “Maybe try to start at the beginning of your alcohol use.”

Sam thought for a moment and then replied, “My challenges started from the moment I started drinking at the age of twenty-two. It was three years after Jim passed away and I finally felt a need to meet new people. I was still shy, so I would have to drink a whole bottle of wine before I could have the courage to go out to a bar or club. I guess alcohol immediately became my liquid courage and new best friend. This proved to cause me a lot of problems though.

I got a DUI within six months of starting to drink. I was also charged with indecent exposure because I was driving nude. I still don’t know why I was like that. There were other risky behaviors, as well. Everything from unprotected sex to standing on the ledge of my apartment building ten stories high in the pouring rain -- all while drunk.

Alcohol has also cost me a ton of money. I estimate I have spent so far at least one hundred thousand dollars on alcohol in my lifetime.

I later learned that alcohol addiction and having Bipolar Disorder go hand-in-hand. I learned most people with the illness suffer with one or more additions.”

“What made you finally decide to get treatment for your alcohol addiction?” Regina asks.

Sam thinks for a moment and then replies, “The turning point was after I almost fell off a cliff because I was hiking drunk.”

“Tell me more about your experience on the cliff,” Regina says.

Sam shakes his head slightly and replies, “I drunk almost eight beers while hiking. I wasn’t paying attention and hiked accidentally within inches to the side of a high cliff. I got scared and panicked. My legs started shaking and I was afraid I would fall, so I sat down. Immediately, I was sliding closer to the edge of the cliff, since it was on an incline. As

I kept sliding closer, a warm feeling came over me, like a blanket being wrapped around me. At that moment, I accepted death. I remember just hoping it wouldn't hurt too much when I hit the rocky coast below, and that my partner, Eric, won't suffer too much. I also hoped he would eventually find the happiness I felt he could never find with me. I believed I had destroyed most of what he tried to build for our future. He was the hand that builds and I have been the hand that destroys.

While continuing to slide further to the edge of the cliff, my whole life flashed before me, mainly my secrets and lies. The truth is I had blown through all my money on my alcohol addiction and overspending by dining out and shopping. I had lied about why I lost my six-figure job, saying it was just because the boss sabotaged me out of jealousy. It was also because I came to work in the morning and/or after lunch drunk often or with a hangover. I had been lying at the time about looking for work. Instead, I spent the day wasting time sleeping late and taking naps. In addition to spending money on my addiction, I continued to dine out every day and buy unnecessary expensive things. On the cliff, I thought of how severely in debt I was and how my credit cards were maxed out. The guilt and shame started to eventually overwhelm me.

As I continued to slide a little further to the edge of the cliff within a few inches of falling off, I kept having more flashbacks, mainly of my life with Eric. I remembered the first time we met and all the wonderful plans we made to stay together. It made me realize how much I wanted to live and to do the right thing by telling Eric the complete truth because he deserved it. I thought of how I wanted to go into rehab and to do all I could to fix things.

I started slipping faster now and was only an inch from going over. I started to panic. I was pressing my hands strongly beside me on the ground against the tiny pebbles that were now embedded painfully in my palms. I tried to clear a path by shoving the pebbles aside. I knew I only had one shot to make a move to safety. I just kept thinking of Eric and how much I loved him as I quickly scooted sideways to the right. In doing so, one of my feet slipped off the cliff, but I did manage to make it to safety.

I felt an adrenaline rush I had never felt before and enormous gratitude to still be alive. It concerned me about telling Eric the complete truth, but I was ready to do so. I just hoped I wouldn't lose him. I was ready to face the consequences of my actions. I was also ready to face the future without secrets and lies. Going into rehab was number one on my list."

"Did you then tell Eric about your alcohol addiction?" Regina asks.

"Yes, I immediately came clean and surprisingly it brought us closer together at the time," Sam replies. "He even came with me to a couple of my therapy sessions. However, I started drinking again and lying to him about it. Eventually, at times he would catch me drinking. Each time I had to convince him I would stop for good. Eventually, recently, it was one too many times and he left me."

"Now I know you have been in and out of therapy with me and with some groups. In addition to our time together, will you be rejoining any therapy groups?" Regina asks.

"Eventually, I will. I find them helpful. I would like to rejoin an abstinence group I once belonged to because abstinence is my goal," Sam replies.

“Sam, I also remember you took a medication that caused an adverse reaction if you would drink alcohol. Have you thought about taking that again? Regina asks.

“Yes, I have thought about it. The only thing that concerns me is if I drink while taking it. I ended up in the hospital two times because of doing that in the past,” Sam replies.

“Well, it sounds like you have a plan for treatment,” Regina says. “It looks like we still have time to discuss your last topic in your treatment plan. Let’s take a five-minute break and then we’ll switch gears.”

Sam leaves the room to go to the restroom and get a drink of water and returns to Regina’s office.

“Sam, we finally made it to the last topic on your treatment plan, which is financial issues,” Regina says and then asks. “Are you ready to move on to this topic?”

“Yes, I am,” Sam says.

“Well, actually, it seems that we have already discussed this topic many times. It’s because it ties in with your illness, Bipolar Disorder, and with your alcohol addiction. All three go together. Tell me, Sam, is there anything else about this topic you feel you need to discuss?” Regina asks.

“Just that I need to develop a realistic budget and stick to it. I need some strategic technique to prevent me from overspending. I just need more control with money,” Sam replies.

“You are right, Sam. We have identified the challenge. Now we need to come up with a plan to help you have more financial control. I have a technique you may want to try. I call it the STOP technique. The way it works is you take each letter of the word STOP and it becomes a step. Let me write it down for you.”

- S – Stop whatever you are about to do/buy
- T – Think what you are about to do/buy
- O – Overview all your options on what to do/buy
- P – Pick the action best for you

“Does this seem like it might work for you, Sam?” Regina asks.

“Yes, I can try. I’ll remember to just say STOP to myself,” Sam replies.

“Well congratulation, Sam. We have made a lot of progress these past few weeks. We managed to complete all the areas you wanted to address. We can continue our sessions together. Is that something you would want to do?” Regina asks.

“Yes, I would,” Sam replies.

“Great, I’ll see you next week,” Regina says.



## Chapter 17

### MY NEW LIFE

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Sam continues his sessions with his therapist, Regina Nelson, for six more months, at which time he decides he is doing well enough on his own and ends them. He continues to see his psychiatrist ongoing to monitor his medications for Bipolar Disorder to ensure they are therapeutic. He sometimes will have mild episodes, but they are always manageable.

Sam writes in his journal.

*“I feel much more stable these days. My job is going well and I am paying off my debt without accruing more. I have been sober for almost a year and my medications for my illness are working well. Recently, I started going to sober social events. And best of all, Eric and I are giving our relationship a fresh start. I don’t plan to ruin what we have this time. My new life seems promising, and I am truly hopeful for the future for the first time in a long time.”*

THE ~~END~~ BEGINNING