

CORPORATE HORDES

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To Katy and Gracie

Wherever you are....

CHAPTER ONE

The golden sun winked a cascade of blinding light upon the shades of tall grass and cornfields in the meadows. There were no houses for miles except for a small ranch house on top of a cedar hill. An old man sat on the bench of his porch. This old man was named Frank. He was a retired broker, feeble, well into his eighties, and his legs could no longer be trusted without a cane. For most of his life, he never smoked. After his retirement, however, he enjoyed sucking down on his wooden pipe and watch for nature.

The screen door swung open. He had been meaning to fix the hinges. His wife Agnes stumbled out with a cane. Her wrists sent shocks and vibrations down on her cane. Frank looked up at her with her bundled grey hair, her creased face, and her polka dotted nightgown that she never planned on changing because they weren't leaving the house that day. She was still just as beautiful as when he first met her.

Her shuffling feet helped her join next to him on the bench. Not a word was spoken as each of them quietly admired the view of the endless cornfield in the horizon. Frank just kept puckering his lips. He liked to play with his dentures in his mouth. It used to annoy Agnes but she got used to it over the years.

A wind settled in and the cornfields swayed like blankets tossed in the rain. It sent a chill down both Frank and Agnes' spine. Agnes finally craned her head to him. Frank noticed, but he was still entranced with the beauty of nature.

She said to him, "Looks like rain is a comin'."

Frank just responded with, "Yeah. I reckon it is."

"Let's go inside. Our favorite show is comin' on."

The two of them muscled up from the bench with their canes. Frank shifted his position to ease on his back. He massaged his lower pelvic region as he waddled through the screen door with his wife. They shuffled their feet to the living room couch. It was like the two of them ran a marathon as they leaned back in their seats and let the air seep through their lungs.

Frank bent over to find the remote on the nightstand. He knew exactly what channel their favorite show was on. Agnes was reaching in from the side of the couch. By the time she got up, Frank smelled a familiar scent that he could not resist. It was tantalizing, soothing, and he wanted it so bad.

Agnes said to him in her tired, timid voice, "Would you like to smoke this joint with me?"

Frank turned to her with a peaked smile and replied, "You got weed?"

Agnes told him, "This is some bomb ass shit!"

"Let's toke that shit!"

As Frank and Agnes enjoyed their daily dose of marijuana, the television was staring at them. From the other side, in the heart of Washington, a middle-aged man

dressed conservatively in a suit more expensive than his life watched them from the monitors. He was balding, goatee, very thin, and he was seething with anger.

Then he asked over the com system, “Why is that old couple smoking weed? We didn’t legalize it yet! Send in the troops! I want those two arrested!”

Out of nowhere, a SWAT team busted through their house. Frank and Agnes screamed as officials pinned them down and slapped handcuffs behind their backs.

One of the officers said to them, “You’re going to jail, grandma!”

The Government official paced around the room of monitors and telecommunications equipment as each screen from television sets, computers, to the small screens on cell phones monitored every citizen in America. He was languishing in power, and because of this, he enslaved himself to find Intel on every breathing person.

He said, “I refuse to allow my country to not uphold the law. As God as my witness, I will create fear in the general public!”

He noticed a hot couple making out in the backseat of a car. The guy was well built, bald, and after she undid his pants, was well endowed. The girl was busty, model material, and had a smooth naked body when she undressed herself.

She said, “Oh Tyler! Give it to me!”

Tyler replied, “Oh Char! I love your naked body against mine.”

They were being monitored from their cell phone. The Government official was watching everything. His anger split his lip and he ordered out, “Arrest them!”

A team of cops opened their door and pulled the screaming couple out of the car. The Government official laughed as he watched every monitor for every home.

Then a female voice said, “Why did you say I was busty?”

I looked up at my computer monitor when I heard her say that. Reluctantly, I flipped the screen of my manuscript over to Skype where I saw my ex-girlfriend Char on the video monitor. A gorgeous girl with short dark hair, a beautiful smile, and even in her late thirties, she had a young face. She was communicating with me all the way over from Hawaii. Some years ago she left me and remained in her hometown ever since.

My name is Tyler Moore. I'm forty-two and just now trying to make something out of myself. One of the reasons Char left me was because she felt I had no ambition. I had been lazy in the last few years trying to get this book done. Every now and then I would work on it but sometimes life stuff got in the way. Unfortunately part of that life stuff was money problems which got me in this mess with Char in the first place.

I answered her with, "This is going to be my magnum opus, Char. Oh, and uh, busy just sounded better."

"Oh, I see," she said. "Well, it's good so far!"

"Thanks! Listen, just for motivation purposes, if this book makes it big, you think you can give me another chance?"

"You don't need me to motivate you, Tyler!"

"I'm not asking you for much, I just miss you. That's all."

She smiled and said, "Oh, I miss you too, Tyler! How is everything going?"

"Nothing much. I'm still trying to find Ramone a date."

"Ugh, you still hang out with him?"

"Oh, you should hear this! Why just last week...."

Chapter Two

My two brothers and I visited our dear friend Ramone Sanford at the checkout line at the dollar store. It wasn't all that busy and there was no music on the overhead speakers which made the place more like a silent solitary confinement than a work place.

Despite not being busy, there were at least two checkout lanes open with one being Ramone and the other was some hot redhead two lanes next to him. She, like Ramone, was wearing one of those white aprons the store required you to wear so we couldn't get an accurate depiction of her rack. She wasn't like anorexic thin or anything with her puffed up cheeks, but her flowing curled red hair and her sweet smile gave off the impression she was easy to talk to.

We debated whether or not to take that lane instead, but we finally concluded to see Ramone so we could give him shit. Ramone was a Puerto Rican who wasn't easily identified. He was often mistaken for a black man. Ramone was, what I described, a living cartoon character. With his goofy smile, goofy laugh, and all around goofy personality, incidentally inspired me to privately draw cartoon panels based off him.

What set him apart from most people I know was how determined he was to find a woman, and not just any woman, a beautiful woman to claim around his arm. I guess at this age, most people struggle to find the right significant other to spend the rest of their lives with. In Ramone's case, he was searching for the woman who was easy on the eyes across the breakfast table. Unfortunately for him, the women were searching for the same thing and he just didn't get that.

My brother Sam was the first to speak and he said to Ramone, "Hey Ramone, you goofy fuck!"

"Hey, slice of pork."

My brother Sam was the only brother out of the group with a full set of hair. It was believed he got that from mom's side of the family. He was exactly my height and he was the middle brother of the three. I was the youngest. My other brother Manny the Man was the tallest, always sporting a leather jacket, and a cocky demeanor. Although we had a family of smartasses, we always had each other's back. It was widely known that my brothers never approved of Char. Any woman who spent so long not giving it up to their mate was dead to them.

Then Ramone added, "It's not Ramone," he then said with an accent, "it's Ramone!"

"Yeah, whatever," said Sam. "Hey, who's that girl over there in the next lane?"

"That's Amy. Why?"

"Is she single?"

"Who wants to know?"

“That means yes. Then why the fuck haven’t you asked her out yet? Better yet, why aren’t you talking to her? You two are standing here bored and neither one of you sparked a conversation yet.”

“...We talked.”

“When? Before we got here? I swear to God, man, you have no game! Tell you what, give me your balls. You obviously don’t use them. In fact, give me your dick also. It’s detachable, right? I know some people who would actually use that dusty old thing! You can probably see the tumbleweeds rolling by!”

Then Ramone got mad but he was still smiling and said, “You know what? I’m tired of you! I’m going to go over there and ask her out right now.”

Ramone started jotting something down on a piece of receipt paper. Manny asked, “What are you writing?”

“My phone number.”

Sam asked, “You’re going to give her your phone number? Why aren’t you just asking for it?”

“Let me handle this, okay? I got this.”

Sam and Manny backed off as Ramone bravely walked over to Amy. The three of us watched as Ramone said something out of ear to her and she just smiled off. He handed her his phone number and she accepted it.

Manny commented, “She accepted his phone number.”

Sam retorted, “Yeah, but will she give him hers?”

We watched as they chatted and smirked and the anticipation from my brothers was getting on edge. Finally Ramone walked back and Manny announced, “Nope!”

Ramone walked back with a big smile on his face and said, “Now what, bitches!”

Sam responded, “Good question. Now what? Is she going to call you because I didn’t see a number given back to you!”

“She says she’s going to text me tonight! She said she likes a man who isn’t intimidated by her looks.”

“Really?” said Sam. “Assuming that she texts you tonight, and you go out on a date—“

Manny and I started laughing.

Sam continued, “I know. I know. Let’s humor this and say that she is. Let’s make a bet on how many dates Ramone will go on with this girl. I’ll start. I’ll say just one. He’s going to fuck up after one date!”

Ramone responded defensively, “Fuck you, Sam! God, I hate you!”

“Manny, what would you say?”

Manny replied sullenly, “I don’t even see one. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, but Manny, you have to suspend disbelief. Assume that she will text him and go on a date with him. How many dates you see them on?”

Manny just concluded, “I have to say one. I don’t believe there will be one but I will say one.”

Sam went to me and asked, “Tyler? You’ve been quiet in all this. How many would you say?”

“Well,” I thought, “I’m going to give Ramone the benefit of the doubt.”

“So you think she’s going to keep dating him?” asked Sam.

“No, I didn’t say that. I’m going to give him two dates and then he’s going to fuck it up!”

Then Ramone responded, “Fuck you, Tyler, you fat piece of ham! I’m going to prove all three of you assholes wrong! I’ll even invite her over and she can tell you herself how many dates we’ve been on!”

“Tell you what,” said Sam, “If you invite her over, like let’s say on your third date, and she tells us all in her own words that this is your third date, we all owe you three hundred dollars. That’s a hundred dollars each. I know Tyler doesn’t have a hundred dollars so guess what; I have to fork over two hundred dollars to your sorry ass! I’m not worried though and you know why? I know I won’t have to worry about losing two hundred dollars because your dumbass is going to fuck this whole date up!”

“God I hate you!” shouted Ramone. “You got me revved up now! I can’t wait to go on this date!”

Chapter Three

To everyone's surprise, including God, she sent him a text that night, and even more surprising, she was willing to go on a date with him. He took her out to some Coney Island place that was about as luxurious as you can get from an honest Ramone paycheck. To make matters more surprising was that he managed to get her in the backseat of his car which was a milestone in Ramone's dating life. He had the satisfaction of massaging her back and she even moaned that she was enjoying it. Ramone actually grew a pair, and nibbled on the back of her neck like a rabid chipmunk. It only tickled her into a laugh.

She stopped him and asked, "Ramone? Can we go in your apartment? It's a little uncomfortable back here."

"Why can't we go to your place?"

"I told you, my parents are home. My dad would shoot you if he saw you. I think your place would be the better bet. You live alone, right?"

At the time, Ramone was living with his ex-girlfriend Spacey. Her real name was Stacey but my brothers and I gave her a nickname. Ramone did the damage by living with her way too fast. They would always fight, generally about financing and jealousy.

Currently, she had been living in a hotel and always calling him for money. Ramone had said that any time she would call, it was always about her asking for money. It didn't even matter what situation he was in, she would always ask him for money.

Ramone could be lying on his death bed, waiting to die from cancer, and she would call him. Elated to get a call from someone who cared, Ramone would pick up the phone and answer, "Hello?"

Then she would answer, "Hi Ramone. What's going on?"

Ramone would answer, "I'm lying in my death bed. I'm going to die any minute now."

Then she would answer, "Oh that's too bad. Hey, before you die, could you loan me twenty dollars? I have to buy my cats food."

Or even another scenario like his funeral where his dad would be giving a eulogy. I could imagine his dad saying, "Ramone was—a different person. I still loved him anyway. I miss his goofy laugh. I miss all his failed dating attempts and having to listen to it. I miss him saying stupid things like "slice of pork" or "MEEELLLKK" but most of all, I miss my son. I love my dead, retarded son!"

Then a phone would ring and everyone in the audience would look around their pews to find out whose phone was ringing. Ramone's dad would get mad and say, "Who brought their phone to my son's funeral? Speak up! This is a very serious moment!"

Then he realized that it wasn't the people present with a ringing phone but instead the sound came from one of the pockets in dead Ramone's suit. He fiddled with the pocket and pulled out the phone and on the caller ID it said *Spacey*.

He answered the phone and said, "Hello, this is Ramone's dad."

Spacey answered, "Hi is Ramone around?"

Ramone's dad responded, "I'm sorry," he started crying and said, "Ramone's dead! I'm at my dead son's funeral right now!"

"Oh that sucks. Hey, you know if he left me twenty dollars? He said he was going to but I guess he died on me. It might be in one of his dead pockets."

Ramone's dad just stood there flabbergasted with the phone surgically in his ear. He then let out the words, "Yeah, sure, I'll check for you, YOU HEARTLESS BITCH!"

So at the time, Spacey was still living there and Ramone invited her in the apartment in fear that she would be there. Spacey would get jealous if Ramone brought home any girls to the point where she would actually fight them. Surprisingly, during these times, Ramone was able to bring home girls. Since Spacey left, Ramone was left in a dry spell.

The door opened to his kitchen and the first one to greet them was Ramone's dog Milo. He was one of those black-spotted Jack Russell dogs who loved to play and smile a lot. Amy was elated to see him and bent over to pet him.

"Oh, your dog is so cute!" she said. "Wait, what's this in his mouth?"

"Bad dog!" shouted Ramone.

She managed to pull out whatever was in Milo's mouth and asked, "Is this a strap-on?"

"I don't think so."

"Yes, it is a strap-on! Why would you have one in your house? I thought you lived alone?"

“That’s probably my ex-girlfriend Spacey’s. We used to live together. She must have left it here.”

She peered at it for several seconds before glancing up at a gulping Ramone and grinned devilishly.

“Oh, I just had an idea,” she said.

“What?”

She stood up to face him with this wicked grin on her face. She asked him, “How about I fuck you with this strap-on?”

“Yeah, right! How about I fuck you with the strap-on, huh?”

“Please?” she begged. “I’ve always wanted to fuck a guy with a strap-on.”

It was in that moment where Ramone flashed back at Sam proposing that three-hundred dollars he so desperately needed. He then whined, “We have to?”

Sure enough, Ramone was flat on his stomach, and Amy, who was nice enough to at least be in her bra and panties, was on top of him. Unfortunately for the eyes, Ramone was naked and she was having a ball with her new strap-on. She leaned over, giving Ramone a woody with the press of her bra, and handed him one of those squeaky dog bone toys to his mouth.

She said to him, “Bite on this.”

Ramone bit it and a loud squeak flopped the ears of his dog.

His butt tightened when the strap-on slipped in the hole. His squeak toy drove the dog nuts as she began pounding him from the back. Ramone just laughed but was really fending off the pain. He was trying so desperately to keep this date and to prove everyone wrong.

“Down, Milo!” Ramone said in a muffled voice.

The dog was trying to leap at him on the bed.

“Go away, Milo!”

The dog just wasn't listening. Amy was making sex noises in the back and was still pumping away with the strap-on.

Ramone asked in his muffled voice, “Can I have sex with you now?”

“No!” she said. “I think I'm going to cum!”

“No, don't cum yet!”

That was when she walked in the door. Amy stopped pumping and Ramone, letting off one last squeak of the toy before the dog nabbed it from his mouth, looked up and saw Spacey standing there at the door with eyes as wide as a freight train.

She shouted, “What the fuck is this?”

Amy replied, “I'm so sorry! He told me he lived alone!”

“She's not my girlfriend!” shouted Ramone.

Amy quickly gathered her clothes and Spacey stepped out of the way for her to run out. Ramone quickly put back on his pants without his underwear and fell off the bed. Amy was just about to leave the apartment until Ramone caught up to her.

“Wait! Don't go!” he said. “She can just stay in another room.”

“Sorry, Ramone, I mean thank you for letting me live my fantasy and all but I really have to go!”

“Are we going to have a second date?”

She thought about it and said, “I don't know, you're nice and all—“

“Please! I really need that three hundred dollars!”

“Three hundred dollars? Did you make some sort of bet?”

Ramone stopped and realized he said something stupid.

“You’re an asshole! Fuck you and have a nice night with your girlfriend!”

She bolted out the door and Ramone shouted, “Wait! Don’t go! God, I hate my life!”

“Oh, that Ramone,” said Char, shaking her head.

By pure coincidence, Sam texted me about Ramone, and I stared at it for a good solid five seconds.

Char asked, “What is it?”

I told her, “It’s from my brother. They’re taking Ramone to the hospital. They want me to go with them.”

Chapter Four

We had to pass one of those automatic revolving doors. It was like an obstacle course because it would just keep going around in circles and just when the opportune time came, we would run right in and follow the doors so we wouldn't get pushed behind us. Ramone went ahead and filled out the paperwork at the receptionist desk. We figured since he was having abdominal pains that they would let him right in. He just went and sat down in the waiting room.

Sam asked, "Well?"

"They told me I have to wait."

Manny and Sam looked at each other and Manny announced, "Let's go eat!"

Sam said, "Yeah, we got to go meet our dad. Have fun, Ramone!"

Ramone said, "Wait! Bring me back something."

Sam pointed and said, "See that vending machine?"

"Fuck you, bitch dog!"

My dad already saved a table for us at the Coney Island. Immediately Sam noticed the waitress, Elaina, who knew us by name. She was a petite girl, with dark

black hair, and a flirtatious smile. She passed by us and said with a smile, “Hey boys!” and walked behind the counter.

The three of us looked at her in awe and Sam nudged me and said, “You should ask her out on a date.”

“That’s okay.”

“You’re sounding like Ramone. I’m sure she would say yes!”

“I’m sure she would too.”

My dad invited us to the table. I sat next to my dad with my brothers across from me. Spread in front of him was neatly stacked papers with a black stamp on the cover sheet. It was the one that caught our eye at the table. That and the fact that my dad was looking more grey, and balder than the last time we saw him.

He informed us, “I’m going to cut to the chase and just get this over with. In front of me is my will. I’m splitting sixteen thousand dollars between the three of you. I’m also setting sixteen thousand for John. Now I’ve been thinking long and hard about this and I have to decide on a beneficiary.”

“Me.” Manny raised his hand.

Then my dad said, “And I decided it should be John.”

“The stepbrother?” asked Manny. “The rich son? May I ask why?”

“The reason why is that he had experience in this kind of thing with his own father and I know you kids would be very distraught after my death, probably won’t have much experience with handling the money and whatnot, so I figured having John handle this kind of thing is the right decision.”

Sam tried to say something, but Manny interrupted immediately and said, “You know what’s going to happen? I’m sorry, I’m just going to blunt about this, but I don’t see us seeing a dime in this. Not that I feel that the money is important in all of this, okay, because I think I speak for the rest of the brothers that my dad is more important than money.”

Sam and I agreed.

“However, it’s the principle of the matter. I’m going to be honest; I don’t trust him or your wife, for that matter. I’m sorry; I’m just being honest in all this.”

“I respect that,” said my dad.

“And the fact that we don’t get invited to family functions. I see you take vacations even with some people in your side of the family. We don’t get an invite. In fact, we have a stepbrother and we don’t even have remote contact with them. Now, here we are, and you want to make someone we don’t know a beneficiary on your will. You see where we are going with this?”

“And believe me, I thought about that too but hear me out. John has invited all of you to his daughter’s birthday party.”

Manny laughed, “Oh so now he’s inviting us to stuff?”

“This was before I put him as a beneficiary. His wife felt it would be best to get to know the other family. It’s a formal party, and I would even consider you all to bring a date if you can, but they would very much like to get to know you guys and start with a clean slate.”

Sam and Manny looked at each other as if asking each other through telepathy if they should accept this offer. My dad didn't give them too much time to talk and said, "Just think about it. You don't have to come up with a decision right away."

"I'm in," said Manny.

"I'm in too," said Sam.

Manny looked at me, "Tyler, are you in?"

"Yeah," I said.

"You know this means we have to find you a date, right?" informed Sam.

Then I said, "I can find my own dates, thank you very much."

Finally, my dad said, "Now that that's settled, I have one more thing to address."

We got quiet.

"As you know, my brothers and I cannot take over your grandpa's house. As of next week, it's going up for sale. I highly suggest coming out to Ohio and pick up whatever it is that you want before we auction it up for sale."

"Why can't John take it?" asked Manny.

"He doesn't want it," said my dad.

Our waitress finally came, no doubt knowing the importance of the meeting was dwindling down, and asked, "Hi boys, can I start you off with something to drink?"

Sam said, "Hey Elaina, could you be my brother's date to a formal party?"

I immediately got nervous and said, "Oh please, don't listen to my brother."

My dad was paying the bill when the three of us opened the glass doors to the inviting cool air. Manny was picking his teeth with a complementary toothpick from the jar and Sam and I enjoyed watching our cold breath exhaling out.

Sam turned to me and said, “You know she would have gone with you, right?”

“I already have somebody.”

Before Sam asked anything, Manny interrupted and said, “That’s some real bullshit right there. You know what’s going to happen, right?”

“Just like you said,” Sam agreed.

Manny looked off and said, “We aren’t going to see a dime of that money.”

Our dad walked out the glass doors with us and comforted his hands in his coat pockets from the cold. He asked us, “So what’s your plans for today?”

Sam asked Manny, “Yeah, aren’t we forgetting something?”

Manny asked, “Did I leave the oven on?”

Sam asked, “Did I forget to lock the door?”

I asked, “I think I forgot my wallet?”

Then Sam said, “Oh wait!”

The three of us announced in unison, “RAMONE!”

We didn’t want to but we had to pick up Ramone from the hospital. He was back in the waiting room watching some talk show we never heard of on the mounted TV. We figured he was waiting for a long time just by the way he immediately stood up when he saw us.

Sam asked, "Well?"

"Oh it's nothing," replied Ramone.

"Why do you mean it's nothing?" asked Sam. "It had to be something that we rushed you all the way here for!"

"Oh I just got hepatitis, that's all."

"Hepatitis!" the three of us all said at once.

The drive home had to be the fastest Sam ever drove. I was stuck in the backseat with the diseased Ramone as Sam and Manny just made matters worse with their mouth. Truth be told, I was feeling bad for Ramone but picking on him during this endeavor helped us forget that meeting with our dad earlier.

"Drive fast, Sam!" shouted Manny.

"I am! I don't want hepatitis in my backseat!"

"Hey I'm stuck back here with him!" I shouted.

"Come on, you guys," said Ramone. "I just got it from a toilet seat! Besides it's only hepatitis A. If it was hepatitis C I would understand!"

"Good," said Sam, "Then you'll understand that we have to disinfect this car when we kick your ass out!"

"Fuck you, Sam!"

"No, someone fucked you and probably gave you hepatitis."

"I told you it's from a toilet seat! Here we go, I got hepatitis and I want to sit on public toilet seats. God I hate people!"

Manny murmured to Sam, "It had to be a toilet seat. You honestly believe someone fucked him?"

“You got a point.”

“Fuck both of you! God I hate you!”

By the time we reached Ramone’s apartment, I had the pleasure of literally kicking him out with the heel of my foot. Ramone went rolling out on the concrete as Sam told him to get the fuck out. He then drove off with tires squealing. I thought I heard Ramone laughing.

Chapter Five

Sam was finishing disinfecting the backseat with a spray bottle and a washcloth when Manny walked up behind him. Manny asked, “You ready?”

“Yeah, I think I got all of it. I’ll tell you what; he ain’t riding in my car again.”

“Touché.”

The three of us packed the car and drove off into the adventure of Michigan traffic. Michigan drivers were notorious for being assholes. I think Sam nearly got into two accidents just by someone cutting them off yet the other driver was the one cursing and saluting the middle finger at him. Not only that but the people there were rude, as they like to honk at him because he was going the speed limit. No wonder cops liked writing up tickets.

Driving off into the expressway wasn’t much better. The rough terrain was enough to think we might have been driving on a flat tire. Sam assured it was just the road and he was right.

After about an hour, Manny asked, “Are we in Ohio yet?”

Sam smiled and said, “Oh, you’ll know.”

Sam was right again. That rough terrain suddenly became smooth and we looked back at the huge billboard that said *Welcome to Ohio*. After some scenery of some farmland and cornfields, we had an opposite take of the people compared to Michigan. Instead of yelling at us, they waved to us from their cars as if they knew us. Panhandlers smiled and waved as if welcoming us into their town. It was like everything became surreal.

We made it into the small town of Larue without much hassle, and there were cars already parked around our grandpa’s house. A gathering of people loitering outside my grandpa’s house we couldn’t recognize and we started to wonder if our dad was anywhere around. The three of us looked bewildered as we stepped foot on the wooden porch, and some guy bolted out the door with an antique painting with no regards if we wanted it or not.

We walked in the house and immediately spotted our dad helping someone separate the table by the window. He had his back turned so he didn’t catch the expression of disappointment in any of our faces.

Manny said, “Hey dad.”

Our dad turned around and exclaimed, “Hey! You made it!”

“Yeah,” said Sam, “what’s with all these people taking things out already?”

“That’s my wife’s family. They got here just before you did. I guess they got first dibs.”

We never met his wife’s family before this day and knew nothing about them. However, our first impression of them wasn’t a good one. Considering his wife married

him mainly for financial support, it wouldn't surprise us if the rest of the family was just as money grubbing as she was. From the looks of them, we could be right.

"Jeez, dad," said Sam, "I don't know, shouldn't immediate family come first?"

"These are family, son."

"We never met this family before."

"I understand that but look, there's plenty of stuff left over. Have a look around. He has a ton of neat stuff upstairs."

The floor creaked with every step from the stairs to the top floor. Fortunately, it was quiet up there and it appeared no one was around. The room to my right was my grandma's old room. She passed away when I was younger. I gently creaked open the door and the only 'neat stuff' I saw was a bed and a mirror. Still, I took a gander inside the room and recollected seeing my grandma one last time.

I remembered just before she died, she was lying on that bed and I approached her like a lost child. She wanted me to come close. She took me by the arm and said to me in a timid, old lady's voice, "I want you to promise me something. When you get older, please take care of this house. This house has been in the family for generations. I don't want it to change hands to someone else. Become someone and make sure this house stays within this family. Will you promise me?"

My little self replied, "Yes, grandma."

My flashback evaporated when the closet door flew open and coat hangers danced back and forth. I slowly edged myself and said to it, "Alright, alright, I'm leaving!"

I raced back downstairs and saw my dad watching the table he helped take apart be carried by two people out the door. He precariously waved goodbye when I approached him from behind.

I shouted, “Dad!”

My dad turned to me asked, “What’s wrong?”

“You can’t sell this house! Don’t you remember? Grandma wanted it to stay in the family.”

“I know, son, but none of us can afford the upkeep of this place. There’s too much money to go into this place and I’m afraid we don’t have the finances for that kind of thing.”

“Then give me some time then. My agent wants to work real hard on this book! I’m almost done with it! Just let me finish this book and once my agent takes care of it, maybe we can—“

“Son, that’s for the banks to decide now. Unless you can purchase the house, I’m afraid it will go to some other family now. I’m sorry.”

I was pretty much moping in the backseat on the way back. My brothers spent the better half of the trip complaining about how much bullshit it was that the other family got all the good stuff before them. It seemed every time we turned around, our dad just kept pissing us off.

Then I said to them, “I’m going to get that house back.”

Sam responded caustically, “Well, you better write that book really fast then.”

“I just can’t believe grandma’s dying wish was to keep that house in the family and nobody is willing to fulfill that wish.”

“Uh oh,” said Manny.

“What?” asked Sam.

“Welcome to Michigan.”

We hit rough terrain as soon as we passed that billboard. I continued to speak even though the rough bump of the tires hitting the pavement drowned out my voice.

I said, “I’m going to get that house back. I’ll spend all weekend working on it if I have to.”

“Look at this,” said Manny as he looked at his cell phone. “Tornado warning is in effect.”

Sam asked, excitedly, “Really? When?”

“Tomorrow. I guess it’s a big one.”

Then we all exclaimed, “YES!”

Chapter Six

I must admit, hearing the boom of thunder was the first step to an erection. It was at the pharmacy, which sucks, because I'd rather be at home enjoying it than being stuck at work. What made it even better was that there was a tornado warning issued for the area that once again made it worse because I would rather die at home.

What made this even more messed up was that I was the only one enjoying the harsh weather outside. There were hardly any windows in the pharmacy, or at least not in the area they put me in. What we got instead were white walls and tiled floors that better suited for a mental institute. We would have to walk a good twenty feet in the oppressive space of medicated racks if we wanted the luxury of a window. What I saw captivated me because the rain came down like a monsoon and the trees danced violently with the angry winds. If I was at home, I would be staring for hours. Unfortunately that wasn't about to happen.

My good pharmacist friend Cornelius Vancowski came up from behind me. He never had anything important to say. He was on this mission to get me over Char and my introversion and be with a woman. This time was no different.

He said to me, “I caught that Britney chick staring at you when you were walking to the window. You should go over there and talk to her.”

I never noticed this before but Cornelius looked like a weasel with slicked back dark hair. I’m jealous myself because I have none. Cornelius always labeled himself as fat but I like to think of him as big boned. If he worked out, he would probably have a good build but he probably figured why should he? He was married with two kids and his wife definitely had him on a leash. Very seldom we would hang out at the local independent wrestling joints provided that his wife authorized him permission.

Now I don’t know why he was pushing for me to ask this Britney chick on a date. She was widely considered to be the hottest girl at the pharmacy. She was tall, slender, noticeable luscious curves, and a long blonde hair that I swore I saw in a modeling magazine when I was ten. This girl was way out of my league and most of the time she walked with her nose in the air as if avoiding any male contact whatsoever.

I wasn’t going to bother with a reply, but to get him off my back I said, “I don’t even know what to say to her.”

“Invite her on John’s boat! Seriously, tell her there’s an event coming up on John’s boat and she should go. Then, check this out, we get her drunk, put you two in one of those private rooms—“

“Oh man, that’s so wrong!”

“Yeah but think about it, that would be the hottest chick you would ever lay!”

“Char was hot.”

“No, dude, she can’t be as hot as that!”

It was that moment when we looked that she flung her hair back. It was like in those movies where you see the hot girl and in slow motion you watch as she twirled her hair. The slow motion didn’t happen, of course, but I would like to think it did.

“Oh look,” Cornelius exclaimed, “I think she looked over at you!”

“I think she was looking towards the door.”

“I’m serious, now is your chance, go talk to her!”

I was pushed forward like a rag doll. Somehow this motion caught her eye because now she was acknowledging me. I didn’t think she would say anything. Sometimes she would just avoid me or just not saying anything at all when I spoke to her.

Then like an idiot, Cornelius loudly whispered, “Talk about the weather!” I say idiot because I think she heard him say that.

Then I said the most clichéd line you can give anyone when you can’t think of anything to say. I asked, “So how ‘bout that weather?”

What happened next surprised me, Cornelius, a few co-workers, the ghosts that walk the pharmacy, the angels in heaven, and even God himself nearly choked on his martini, when she actually said to me, “I know. I love storms!”

It wasn’t much, but she was actually inviting a conversation. The funny thing about conversations was that they were like games. One person speaks, the other engages a sentence or two back, then in hopes to follow up with another conversation, and in this case, I just hope this conversation would keep going without it feeling too awkward on her part.

Then as casually as I could, I replied with, “Me too! I was just thinking how I would rather be at home enjoying it than being stuck here!”

Did this spark up a response? There was a couple brief seconds for him to ponder that when she replied with, “I hate it here too! I have to drive all the way from Howell to get here!”

“Really? That’s a long drive!”

Oh no, I was running out of things to say! I couldn’t come up with something to follow up with. She was bound to get awkward in this conversation. I could almost feel the heat of sweat coming from the dome of my bald head.

Then a loud boom of thunder jumped the both of us. It felt like it shook the whole pharmacy. To my relief, it saved me in this conversation.

“Wow,” I said, “that shook the whole pharmacy!”

We were both about to share our surprise with that massive grin on her face, when my arch nemesis JR Thompson broke up the conversation. He said, “Why are you talking to this slacker over here?” Then he said to me, “Don’t you have some work to get done?”

I always thought JR looked like an old fisherman. He sported a gray oval-shaped beard around his chin that matched the color gray of hair ringing around his head. Now I’m not sure if it’s just an act, but he always seemed in a bad mood everywhere he went. Most of the time he came off as a grouchy old man, unless some hot young girl happened to be talking to him and then those muscles he uses for a smile would start to hurt. It’s funny because his wife worked with him and she never seemed to mind his flirtatious ways with the young women.

Cornelius tried to coach me into breaking up her and JR's conversation which consisted of smiles, nodding, and talking. Maybe I was just being a pussy but I felt it was too late. My dumbass just stood there and watched as neither one of those two acknowledged me standing there like a psychotic watcher. All I needed was a tree next to me and I'd be all set.

Then our secretary, Charnette, an obese black woman, ran into the pharmacy with arms waving, yelling, "A tornado is heading this way!"

Then, like out of nowhere, she just flew up like dragging a mouse across the computer screen. She was gone off the roof in an instant. Suddenly that vibrating noise we heard earlier was all around us, with winds violently shaking the building, and the warning sound of a train was gradually getting closer and closer.

Maybe I was just dumbfounded for a few moments but it just registered that the ceiling had a few openings to the mucus green sky. I could feel the strong winds circulating from the crevices, almost whirling around me as I felt my scrubs weigh me down to the floor.

Cornelius and the other co-workers already sought refuge under the desks in their cubicles. He was signaling me to take the one next to him. I tried to walk in there but those strong winds acted like a force field and blew me back right into the arms of JR who caught me from hitting the floor.

He had to shout because the winds were getting really loud at this point and mostly because they were already circulating around the pharmacy. He yelled, "Hurry up! We got to take shelter!"

"Where?" I yelled back.

“Anywhere!”

The three ran down the aisle of the medication racks that were rolling back and forth with the wind. We heard a concussive blast from the ceiling above that startled Britney to a sharp yelp. I looked up and noticed more pieces of the ceiling being taken away with some blurry images of the sky.

“The tornado is right above us!” yelled JR.

Those racks just kept getting in the way. One slid past us with us full well knowing it was going to slide back and possibly hit us. We kept moving along, each competing in keeping Britney as safe as possible. What made matters worse was that the electricity was going on and off, and the spots of darkness affecting our vision made dangerous rack dodging worse than it already was.

The three of us were holding hands, with Britney in the middle so I didn't have to touch JR's hand. At some points the periods of darkness were a little longer, which caught our breath because if the darkness didn't come back we were going to be in big trouble. I could hear the sound of a train getting deafeningly loud and even I knew that we had mere seconds before all hell broke loose.

One of the racks was spinning out of control. I grabbed Britney close to me as we maneuvered out of the way and nearly pushed with the rack to the other side. JR waited for us at the other side and pulled us out before being spun around again. At that point, it was getting more chaotic. A rack was closing in on us like a wall about to smash us into another rack. JR pulled us away, seeing an opening between two racks that led to an aisle free of this mess. I managed to pull Britney through just in time before the racks had a chance to close in and smash us.

By the time we reached the aisle over, she looked over at me. At first I didn't know what it was until I realized from her looking down that I was holding her hand. Quickly in embarrassment, I let go.

Then we heard something in addition to the wind that sounded like decking playing cards. Neither of us wanted to but we turned around anyway to see the tiles from the floor rise up in a pattern that was coming towards us. Britney and I briefly wide-eyed each other and took off running just behind in tow with JR. The tiles rose closer and closer and we felt the suction of the wind pulling us back.

Up ahead I saw the mounted table that I frequently use every day. I never thought I would ever rely on that as our safety measure. Britney was falling back so I took her by the wrist and instructed everyone to, "JUMP!" and the three of us dove right on the table top and held on for our lives. The suction of the wind sent us all on an angle and cluttered our feet together in waving bumps.

Through all the deafening chaos of wind and trains, I heard the drivers banging on the door. I had forgotten that they didn't have access out of the drivers' area and they were trapped like prisoners in there. Unfortunately it was too late for them as I heard the sound of shattering glass and those desperate hands on the window pane sucked back like they were sent through a jet engine.

Then I heard the spark of bad electrical wiring. The printers we use to print our labels danced in the wind over each other and were pulling to our general direction. I tried to warn the others but the strong current of winds overpowered my voice. One flew my general direction and I dodged releasing one hand and quickly grabbed back for

comfort. Another flew at Britney and I used my quick reflexes out of nowhere to hit it away from her as it passed her by.

Then the table top slid.

It was coming loose. I had forgotten that the table top was never sturdy since it was put back on. We may be in some big trouble.

Desperately, I tried attaching my hands to something stable below so I could put pressure on the table top to the actual table. Then I quickly realized it didn't work because the table top slid off to the crevice in the ceiling and Britney flew back. I reached out and grabbed her hand but found myself flying off only to be grabbed by JR who held on.

I shouted to him, "Thanks for saving me!"

To which he replied, "I wasn't saving you!"

This brought a smile to her face again. That smile quickly vanished when everything suddenly went still. Then we found ourselves falling into the opening of the table. It hurt like hell but it was even worse when we looked up. Falling debris fell on the table and we found ourselves trapped in pitch darkness.

I think texting Cornelius on my cell worked because the firefighters muscled off the debris to get us out of the table. One of them commented, "What? No threesome?" Which was what I was thinking.

A firefighter carried me off from the debris and I was shocked to find that the entire building collapsed. He asked me repeatedly if I wanted a hospital and repeatedly I

declined. Cornelius waited for me at the other end and asked the usual question if I was all right. I nodded and looked off only to see Britney in JR's arms. I felt something at the pit of my stomach. I saved her life a countless number of times and I still wasn't acknowledged. Watching her reminded me of why I shunned off dating in the first place.

"Don't worry about it," assured Cornelius.

"I saved her," I told him.

"I'm sure she knows that."

"I don't think so."

A black SUV pulled up and some of the co-workers had to dodge out of the way. It was our boss, John Ketola, with his transitional sunglasses, styling out of the vehicle. I can recognize that receding hairline anywhere. Word around the pharmacy was that he never cracked a smile. I haven't once seen that happen. He looked young, thin, with a little meat around the edges, and noticeable grays spotting around his brown hair. From the looks of it, he must have gotten back from one of his facilities because he was wearing his brown hooded coat he always walked out with.

"All right, everyone," yelled out our fearless leader, who I was sure to be the voice that would calm all these hysterical people down. "You know the drill. We need to meet up at the Kresky's parking lot."

"With what car?" asked Tim, a burly black guy that worked in the IV department. He pointed out the flooded parking lot of cars turned over on their backs.

"Hmmm," John analyzed, "I see a car that hasn't been tampered with. Whose vehicle is that? We can use that as transportation. Somebody tell me whose car that is?"

“Are you insane?” asked Tim. “We all have been in some trauma! The last thing we want is to go somewhere else to get sucked in some tornado! Have some mercy!”

“Look, people, I know you have been through a very traumatic ordeal but we still have a job to withhold and we need to shake off the nerves and get back to work! I know if I was in that building, I’d be scared too. The best thing for you right now is to think to yourself that I am alive right now. I am alive. Just repeat that to yourself. Once you realize that you’re alive, shake those unnecessary nerves off and start thinking about what’s best for grandma. Grandma needs you right now. On my watch you’re still on company payroll.”

Some woman spoke out who worked in some department I never go to and shouted, “I ain’t going nowhere! I have a family to check on. As far as I know, my baby is probably sucked up in that tornado!”

John maliciously responded, “Then make another one! If your families are dead, there’s nothing that can be done about it. You might as well finish out the day servicing grandma.”

The woman replied, “I’m going home.”

Then John held up his wrist with no watch and said, “Is it time for you to go home yet? I don’t think so. If any of you decide to go home, that’s a point. Now let’s find out who owns that vehicle and get to that parking lot. I promise you, once we finish out the day, there’s a pizza party for everyone!”

“A pizza party?”

Cornelius whispered to me, “You know whose car that is?”

Then I regretted my response of, “Yeah that’s mine.”

Chapter Seven

It was always a rare occasion when the four of us attend one of the local wrestling shows. I was joined with Cornelius, our Spanish friend Xavi ElManatial, and our Puerto Rican friend Ramone Sanford. Cornelius was driving with me in the passenger seat with poor Xavi stuck with Ramone in the back. Xavi was a family man, but don't ask me how many kids he had because I was never briefed on that. This man always looked like a comedian to me. He had a nice build to him, not fat, just a burly frame to his body. His black rimmed glasses just made his jokes even funnier. I swear some of the stuff this man says just didn't look like it would come out of his mouth.

Where Xavi looked like a comedian, Ramone looked like a living cartoon character and acted like one too. Ramone only had four things on his mind: Wrestling, sex, video games, and sex. He was desperate for a woman, but it always seemed like he was more desperate to get laid than a long lasting relationship. Lately he had been

working out to impress the ladies and considered himself to be a good looking guy. This attribute is self proclaimed, as I had yet to hear a woman say this. Granted, he did have a nice build to him and that big belly of his tucked very well under his shirt. If there was an attribute that everyone could agree about regarding him, was that he had a goofy smile: almost child-like. In fact, he was goofy all around.

Xavi was having us sample his food for his upcoming restaurant on the way to the show. He saved the best for last, and it was in one of his plastic containers. We didn't have to question what it was. He shouted it for us, "Churros!"

Churros, for those that don't know, are sugary pastries. Think small donut sticks and you're in the right ballpark. Churros were essentially the symbol of our friendship. It's like our battle cry. I have no idea why.

"Churros!" We all yelled.

"Don't eat all of them, cow pod!" said Ramone, who only felt the need to point out my weight. Seriously, I think it made him feel better to point out my flaws and make himself look good.

Of course, I had to defend myself. I shouted back, "Shut up, you human piece of turd!"

This just made him unleash his goofy laugh. Cornelius broke it up by changing the subject. He asked, "Hey Ramone, you ready for all those divas?"

"Yeah, boy! SCARLET! Ooo baby! I would get her on top of me and show me that nice belly! I love a woman with a nice belly, boy!"

Xavi commented, "Somebody needs to get this guy laid!"

"Ooo, getting laid!"

“What the fuck is wrong with this guy?” laughed Xavi.

Then Ramone got obnoxious and cried out, “Show us your tittays! Give me some MEEELLK!” Ramone was saying milk but in the most obnoxious way possible. Somehow this was his way of scoring a woman.

Then Cornelius chimed in, “All right, Ramone, I’ll tell you what, I’m sure there are going to be some hot chicks at the show. Why don’t we score some numbers for you?”

“Ooo baby!” replied Ramone.

Apparently relying on Ramone to talk to a woman on his own was completely out of the question. We were outside enjoying a cigarette when an attractive woman asked him for a cigarette, talked to all of us, and walked off and he didn’t say a word. Then to make matters worse, he was wishing he did. Honestly, if I would have known that he liked her, I would have been more persistent in having her talk to him. As it became apparent, we were going to score some phone numbers for him ourselves.

We were at a seedy bar called The Ritz located just across the street from some power plant. The staff rounded us all up in this cramped room while the patrons were busy setting up the ring. We came about an hour early to get some good seats. After a few minutes of waiting and strangers awkwardly eyeing over to us, Cornelius got the idea to wait at the bar. It was just a straight walk from the ticket booth. I was scoping out the scene and from the looks of it, the bartender, though slim and attractive, she was a living

canvas of tattoos noticeably on her upper chest and arms. She just didn't strike me as the Ramone type.

Of course, Cornelius and Xavi sat next to each other to discuss their restaurant plans. After all, Cornelius was the silent partner. I was stuck next to Ramone who awaited me with a barrage of insults only a toddler would find humorous.

"Hey slippery frog!" He said to me. Then he repeated himself with a goofy laugh of AH HA like what he said had to be shared at a comedy act.

It was in that moment that I didn't pay any more attention to him. Instead, I was eyeing this waitress with the largest and the perkier breasts I've seen. Oh and she was pretty attractive to boot. Ramone had this notion that he was a good looking guy, therefore, he could only settle for girls that look noble around his arm. The two of us shared a mutual friendship with a very attractive model friend that he repeated time and time again that he could have slept with her.

The story went like this: she asked him to come over to fix her car one day. Naturally, since a hot model blonde invited him over for anything, he was right over. He fixed the car and she made him lunch. The kicker was that she didn't want him to leave but he had to go somewhere. I forget where. It was probably to go home and beat off or something. He swore up and down that if he would have stayed that he would have had sex with her. Since then, his standards went a little higher. My guess was she was being nice and just enjoyed his company. Ramone always had sex on the brain so at least he had something to jerk off to every night.

Ramone spotted the same waitress and commented, "Look at those watermelons. I would suck on those, boy! Like deep sea diving! Give me some MEEELLK!"

During his intellectual sentence, I was writing his phone number down on a napkin. I was just about to get up to go give it to her when he stopped me.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to give her your phone number!”

“Come on, Tyler! No!”

“How are you ever going to be with a woman if you’re scared all the time?”

“I will, just not now!”

“When will it ever be now? Swear to God if we leave here today and you don’t at least make an attempt with that waitress over there, you are going to go home and jerk off over her and regret not speaking to her. I bet you!”

“Why don’t you go talk to her then? She won’t want you because you’re too fat!”

Then he followed with his goofy laugh. I watched that waitress chest out her breasts to an old drunk guy. I couldn’t see how I would be much different.

Then he coerced, “Come on, cow! You think you’re so confident!”

“Fine. I will.”

This prompted Ramone to say to the others, “Hey guys, the cow is going to try to get that waitress’s number over there! Cowy McFat Pants thinks he can get a woman!”

Cornelius responded, “Come on, Tyler! I got fifty bucks riding on you!”

Xavi added, “Churros!”

Then Ramone just made his goofy laugh, and that dimwitted look on that dimwitted face reminded me of a happy puppy. I’m being serious, that wide open grin and the gloss in his eyes reminded me of a cross between a toddler and a puppy wagging his tail.

Still, I took a deep breath and my jelly legs managed to carry over almost to the halfway point around the bar. I looked back and that stupid grin was still on his face.

Ramone shouted out, “You scared, cow?”

It was enough to agitate me to walk even further. I wasn’t even at eye level with her and she turned to face me. I had an impending view of her face. It was beautiful, but a little older up close. It wasn’t evident further back, but she had noticeable chubby baby cheeks. It was still sexy, like the kind of cheeks you would like to suck on. Briefly I had a look at her pretty hazel eyes but I always had trouble making long eye contact with anyone. Her hips had a little bulge on her but even Ramone had to admit that there was nothing wrong with a little meat on a woman.

She asked me, “Can I get you something?”

At this point, I was at a loss for words. Had I lost my game? I just said the first nonsense that came to mind which was, “Hi, I... uh, was wondering if you’d ever consider acting?”

She laughed, “What? Why are you a movie producer?”

“I make independent films!” I lied. “I was just wondering if you can act with my buddy over there!”

I pointed out Ramone who looked in awe with Cornelius and Xavi. To my surprise, she smiled and waved at them and they all waved back in unison.

Then she asked something that never even crossed my mind. She asked me, “Are you making a porn?”

Immediately I chimed in, “NO! No, not at all! Well, unless you want it to be.”

“Seriously, I would love to be in a porn!”

“Really?”

“I love flashing my breasts! Seriously, look at them.” She started hugging them and rubbing them closer to her chin. I could see the guys’ mouths watering from my peripheral vision.

“Are you yanking my crank?”

“Not at all! I actually fuck like a porn star in bed! Guys love it! They even tell me I should be in porn. It’s just that—“

“What?”

“It’s just—does it have to be with him?” She pointed out Ramone who looked like he was playing with himself under the counter.

“Why? What’s wrong with him?”

“I mean—”

Then a familiar face interrupted our conversation. She asked, “Tyler?” And it was a blast from the past. It was Megan.

Looking back, I always thought of Megan as being the most beautiful woman I’ve ever known. She was still just as petite as she was back then. Her hair long, black braided hair matched the color of her dark skin which stuck out with her silk white gown from whatever special modeling occasion she participated in that night. She gazed at me with that warm flirtatious smile and her piercing eyes. They were such beautiful eyes that I swore I could get lost in them.

Megan was with me during my horrible roommate experiences in the past. She was one of the few who didn’t think less of me when I chose bad roommates. We worked retail together, and at one point she even wanted to be my girlfriend. I was a

dumbass then because I was too wrapped up about Char even when she was denying any relationship with me after saving her from her abusive ex-boyfriend JR. After moving away from that hellhole of an apartment, we lost contact. I think I got a new phone and lost her number. I really couldn't remember. Some old friends will never go away.

“It is you, Tyler! Oh my God, how's it been?”

“Megan! Long time!”

We hugged but it wasn't those light hugs. She made sure I was tight and close to her body. I could tell from the hug that she legitimately missed me. Those moments were rare for me.

Then she asked the dreaded question, “How's Char?”

“Um, well, we broke up and she moved back to Hawaii.”

“Oh I'm so sorry!”

I cut to the chase and asked, “Wait, are you single?”

“Yeah, why?”

“You remember that kiss we almost had?”

Megan laughed, “That was such a long time ago! I'm over it, Tyler!”

“Don't you want to know what it would have been like?”

“How about if we talked first?” she asked.

“We can talk later! You can really make me look good right now!”

“Who are you trying to impress?”

“The guys!”

“Where's the guys?”

I pointed out the table to my far left but I was trying to be discreet about it. I guess nudging my head slightly to the left wasn't high on her charades. She was somewhat getting the clue but even though she was on the verge of turning her head, she just got more flustered than anything else.

“Are you having a seizure or something?” she asked.

“They're over there!” I finally exclaimed.

She was about to look when I halted her and said, “No, no, don't look! Just, uh, pretend like you're enjoying my company or something!”

“You didn't give me enough time to enjoy your company.”

“Fine, say—you like local wrestling?”

She took a slight glance to her left at the guys and she had this wide smile and asked, “What are you getting at?”

Chapter Eight

We all cheered when T.D. Williams slammed Dickie Bronson in the ring. Megan cheered along next to me seeming as though she was having the time of her life. Ramone sat next to her with the notion that it was his date. Cornelius was at the far end and he was louder than all of us.

Cornelius shouted, “Give him the herpes suplex, STD!”

T.D. Willaims, who we all called STD, a well built young black man in purple spandex walked to the apron and shouted to him, “Ask your mother about the herpes!”

That’s when the audience went OOOOOOoooo and I had to shout to the other wrestler, “Sucky sucky Dickie!”

Dickie broke out of character and shouted to me, “Yeah, you know all about sucky sucky!”

There was some laughter. I turned to Megan and said to her, “I think they are going to kick our asses.”

That’s when I noticed a text from my brother Sam asking, “You got a date yet?”

I took in a sigh and turned to Megan to ask.

After the four hour event that was local wrestling, Cornelius and Ramone hung back as I walked Megan to her car. I’m not good with cars or anything. All I could tell you was that it was black, looked better than mine, and it was a two-door.

We were just wrapping up our conversation with Megan asking, “So this stepbrother of yours, he’s like rich or something?”

“Yeah, John he’s like some big computer guy or something.”

“So this party he’s having, it’s like some formal rich party, I take it?”

“What? Oh no! It’s a birthday party for his daughter. I doubt he would want us wearing anything fancy or anything like that! As if!”

“Hm, I don’t know Tyler. So what happened with you and Char? You two seemed so happy together! I thought if anyone would stay together, the way you were so infatuated with her, that nothing could tear you two apart.”

I didn’t know how to tell her that I was a bum, or how she didn’t think I was ever going to amount to anything in life, and all the other mistakes I made. For some reason, a part of me wished I sided more with Megan than I did with Char. Nothing against Char, but the beautiful smile resonating off of her was worth a thousand nights with her.

So basically I spewed a condensed, nicer version of what really happened which was, “I suck.”

She laughed, “Tyler, you don’t suck! I’m sure you have a lot to offer!”

“Well, I’m writing a book. In fact, I already have an agent lined up for it!”

“Look at you! Tyler the writer!”

“Tyler the writer? I like the sound of that.”

“What’s it about?”

It’s called Anarchy. It’s about a group of guys fed up with our government and how they screw people over so they wage war to overthrow them.”

“That sounds—interesting. Shoot, what time is it?”

I fumbled in my pocket for my cell phone but it looked like Megan beat me to the punch. She checked her cell phone and sure enough she had that look of distress.

She said, “Oh sorry, Tyler, I have to go.”

“It’s okay.”

“What time did you say tomorrow?”

“Five. I’m sure I’ll be out of work by then.”

“Oh, well, give me a hug.”

We embraced. Of course, I wanted one other thing. I asked, “Goodbye kiss?”

She pecked my on the chin. She asked, “How’s that?”

Then I touched my lips and said, “My lips are a little chapped.”

“Goodbye, Tyler.” Unfortunately she got in her car.

As she drove off, I turned to my fellow friends who watched me the whole time. My response was, “I don’t kiss on the first date.”

“Look at Tyler,” exclaimed Ramone, “You are the man!”

“Yeah,” said Cornelius, “you should be giving Ramone some pointers!”

“I am the man, aren’t I?” I realized. “I got a hot date for this birthday party and slowly moving in on a kiss. Not yet. I’m getting there.”

“HEY!” we heard a voice yell.

Coming out of the crowd of people was our dear wrestling friend Dickie Bronson. I never noticed this up close but he had this baby face on him. He had to be in his early twenties. The bangs hanging on his face just screamed something out of the 1950’s. He had on this black tank top with his face all over it. Apparently this made the girl I talked to at the bar hot and wet because he was holding her by the hand.

Dickie said, “I knew I’d find you assholes after the show! Now here’s my face! Talk that shit like you did when I was in the ring!”

“Dickie!” I exclaimed.

Cornelius chimed in, “Oh dude, we’re great fans of you!”

“Bullshit!”

“We are! We just like to have fun, that’s all!” said Cornelius.

“Oh yeah? I bet it ain’t fun going to the hospital, now is it?” said Dickie.

Then the girl jumped in and said, “Dickie, it’s not worth it. Come on.”

“We mean no disrespect.” Cornelius said, though as hard as he tried to compose himself, we could tell he was nervous.

“Talk that shit again. Go ahead. I’m right here,” Dickie pressured.

He looked at Ramone who just said, “Hey, I’m not with these guys.”

Then Dickie looked at me. I just said, “Hey, you aren’t in the ring right now.”

Dickie said, “You know what? Next time I hear you clowns talk shit when I’m in the ring, I’ll know now what pussies you guys really are. Let’s go, Hillary.”

I shouted, “It was nice talking to you, Dickie!”

“We’ll buy your T-shirt!” Cornelius added.

Then Ramone said to us, “He’s right. You guys are a bunch of pussies.”

Then I shouted like I just had an idea to the girl. I shouted, “Oh! I almost forgot! Hillary, is it?”

The two of them stopped to look. Hillary responded, “Yeah?”

“Are we still shooting that porn together?” I asked.

Then she gave a big smile and responded, “Oh hell yeah!”

And the classic moment of the night was Dickie shouting, “WHAT!”

Chapter Nine

I left home early to find the new building my company graciously leased after the collapse of their last building. It wasn't easy to find. For some reason a big brown building with nothing of our company name ASAPS INC. inscribed anywhere on the outside rendered it very difficult to spot, especially with all those encompassing trees blocking my view. Because of that, I was ten minutes late and wouldn't you know it the company was going to hold me responsible for that. We always had to punch our timecards in the break room. Several of my co-workers congregated and exchanged stories about their tornado experiences. I noticed a person was waiting for the next minute on the time clock to roll over. She asked me if I needed to use the time clock and I pretty much announced I was late.

Let me tell you, as soon as your card swipes through that slot, you know that your freedom is over for eight hours. I had never been to prison, but I knew what it felt like. Typically my blood pressure was very high and I blame this place for it. Hypnotic waves of stress flowed and joined together at the pit of my stomach. Somehow, my arms bore down as if my shoulders were weights. I knew that once I opened that door to the pharmacy my interpretation of hell will rear its ugly head.

There was a warehouse that separated between the break room and the pharmacy. This would buy me at least thirty seconds to a minute of breathing time, depending on how fast I felt like walking. There was only one person there, JR Thompson, who was busy trying to ignore me and check on the orders from an outside warehouse.

“Hi best friend JR!” I would say to him.

And his typical response would be, “Shut up.”

Then it was the door to the pharmacy. I took in a breath and plunged in like a brave soldier storming the beaches of Omaha. Luckily for me, it was quiet. However, like any day at the job, the first couple hours were always quiet and then a drastic turn will take place.

Debbie was finishing up an ASAP when I arrived. We deliver to nursing homes and a lot of times they would call the pharmacy to ASAP their drugs out to them. We would fill them onto this tray with a sheet on it with numbers depicting the orders. A lot of times they would be controlled substances that we had to get from an area called the cage where some of our most belligerent of staffs would work. Seriously, every time the wrong person goes in there they would scream like banshees and try to rip your skin off. It's awful.

Then most other times they would rush out the most inane drugs like cough syrup. Some of these homes abuse the ASAP policy and we just allow them because we like to suck dicks for business. I always imagine a representative of our company being called up by one of our homes.

The nurse at the home saying, "I'm still waiting on my seven pills of aspirin chewables! Why aren't you people over there taking this seriously? I'm terminating your business!"

Then I see the representative saying, "I'm so sorry. Is there any way we can make it up to you?"

"Yes, you can start by coming over and kissing both cheeks of my ass. I will be waiting with my skirt down!"

"Yes m'am. Are there any dicks you wish of me to suck? You know we specialize in that."

"Hm, yeah, our boss isn't getting head from his wife. You can suck him under the table."

Debbie handed off the ASAPS to me with some not even filled because she refused to fill them once she saw me. She had pull from the bosses for some reason which is why I couldn't fight it. All she needed was to bitch and complain and they were right there by her side. It happened more than once. Being that she was a feisty black woman helped in her cause too. A lot of our upper management people were predominately white and when it came to taking sides between a white or black person, they would always bet on black. The fear of the race card frightened them. They were paid too well to risk their jobs.

That was the start of my day. I was just about to go and fill an ASAP when Kaycee came out with her hands on her hips. Immediately I knew what it was about. Our stupid boss had this print schedule where in each specific time we would have to print all the labels to fill the drugs. As precious as ASAPS were to him, almost to the point of giving him an anxiety attack if not filled in a timely matter, I'm surprised this job was given to the ASAP guy.

"What time is it?" she asked. Kaycee just turned 21 this year. She was very petite, an attractive girl with long brown hair and a very young dimply face. In fact, one of the pharmacists who used to work there wanted her to pose for some Detroit Ad he was making. I don't know what came of it. He moved to Florida.

I responded, "Oh I just got here and I just got this ASAP..."

She interrupted, "I don't care! See this face? This is me not caring! Print those labels!" I forgot to mention she had an attitude ninety percent of the time.

As she walked off, I shouted, "No problem, Kaycee! I'm right on it!"

Of course, then there was the forty-something, weary-eyed, dirty blonde haired Tammy. She walked up to my table and told me, "I'm going to take a quick smoke."

I just approved and she walked off. A lot of people complained about Tammy taking a lot of breaks. What they should be complaining about was how the big bosses just let her get away with it. Some speculate that because she reports everyone to them, changes her schedule to accommodate them whenever they lose a person, and helps with their scheduling (something which she lived by) then they were afraid to say something because she was an intricate part of how they operate.

The first couple hours were great. It wasn't too busy and I was able to laugh and joke with my crew. After that second hour, though, was when the shit started pouring in. We got these ASAPS called new admits. I hate new admits. Basically it means there is a new patient at the home and we immediately need to send out at least twenty to thirty different medications for one person. I always said that if I ever need that many meds, please shoot me in the head.

Not only were there new admits, but there was one after another. Did everyone decide to take grandma to the nursing home today? Like did they to say to grandma, "Hey grandma! Guess where you're going today? That's right! You're going to the nursing home! I know you took care of me for most of my life and I really appreciate it. It's just that, well, you're old and I have a family now and quite frankly you're starting to become a burden and the wife and I are tired of taking care of you. Now don't you worry, we'll come to visit you at the nursing home and you'll sure as shit see us around the holidays. Hey, maybe we can order you some pills to go in your stuffing!"

I dropped that tub of blisters, cooler bags, and over the counter medications all clumped together onto the pharmacists' table. Cornelius looked at it like he didn't want to touch it. I didn't want to fill it. It was his people who started it in the first place. I looked over at my own table and saw three trays of endless labels just waiting for me to fill. To add insult to injury, another ASAP sheet rolled off the fax machine. I didn't even want to look at it.

Before I even touched them, the phone rang. We had a phone next to the computer in case any delivery driver calls or some numbnuts up front had a question they can usually figure out themselves.

I answered the phone angrily and shouted, “WHAT!”

Some female voice on the other line replied, “Oh hell no! You ain’t talking that way to me.”

It was the girl I frequently took out on dates named Deshawna. She was one of our drivers. Oops.

Now I never actually slept with Deshawna. We would go out and I would treat her to a trip to a movie theater or buy her a drink. Mostly we chug on drinks. We did a lot of drinking. She never liked me drinking that cheap shit. Whenever I would go buy a bottle of vodka for a mere five dollars, she would always stop me and show me the sixty dollar alcohol bottles. My wallet said no. Unfortunately I felt it was a special occasion anyway. So I bought it. It just gave me a splitting headache. Suddenly she just got so drunk and jumped all over me.

Now don’t get me wrong, she was a beautiful girl. Her body wasn’t bad either. Compared to most of the women I slept with, she had a nice, firm silky body with a curve that went down her butt so she would grind really smooth. Her butt cheeks were like soft coconut bottoms. I know this because I saw them. She ripped off her clothes like a desperate housewife to a mailman, and her blackish brown nipples sparkled in the moonlight. It was all I had to see as I was laid flat on my bed.

Then as she grinded on my software, I noticed she was getting off. I wasn’t feeling it going in but she continued to make noises like this was being filmed for porn. As she got more aggressive, bouncing her butt cheeks on my legs like a bouncing anvil, I noticed my nards were flopping like bunny ears. I started to panic. The splitting headache just overtook the situation and forced me not to pay attention on getting a hard

on, but rather the immense pain throbbing in my head. I wanted the moment; however, circumstances had befallen on me.

Afterwards, I could feel the disappointment in her as she was sighing. I just kept complaining about my headache which later I found was a no-no after sex. Well, I was just being honest. Then she had to leave when originally she was going to spend the night. She made up some excuse about seeing her kid and proceeded to look and put on her clothes. I fell for the excuse and she left without a goodbye kiss.

And here we are. I started to work my charm and approached her. She backed off a little when I said, “Hey, Deshawna, I was wondering when we are going drinking again?”

“You crazy!”

“I’m serious! I was thinking we can meet up across the street from my place and have a few drinks, maybe more...”

“You just want me to get in bed with you!”

“No! You’re like my drinking buddy! Lord knows I don’t have any of those. Look, last time that expensive stuff just gave me a headache. So if you let me drink that cheap shit...”

“You aren’t drinking that cheap shit!”

“Hear me out! If you let me—”

“No I’m not letting you. Fine, we go out drinking. If we go in the bedroom this time—”

“We won’t! We won’t!”

I had worked the charm. Just then, an older blonde woman named Lisa walked in. She came in from the sliding door that you normally need a badge to get in. Today she was wearing her red work shirt and her hair hung back behind her neck. Now she was a little chunky but a little meat wasn't a bad thing.

"Hi Tyler!" She gave off this large smile. I couldn't tell if it was fake or inviting but she pulled it off well.

"Lisa!" I decided to work my charm. "Hey, you are looking hot in red today!"

"This is what I wear everyday when I come here."

"Yeah, it suits you. It makes you look... how should I put?"

Then Deshawna shouted out, "He's just trying to make me jealous and it's not working!"

"Ah, but you're thinking I'm making you jealous which means there is something there!"

Then Francisco popped in out of nowhere and said, "Hi Tyler!"

Francisco was an older Mexican who had a football player body. He was bulky, but meaty, with a face that always smiled, not in a gentle way, but more of a sneaky way like he had a joke he just couldn't say. He was an easy man to get along with and Tyler admired his sense of humor.

I said to Francisco, "Go away, Francisco!"

"Tyler is over here trying to make me jealous," said Deshawna.

"And it's working! Because me and Lisa are going on a date!"

I just had my arm around her with that fake proud smile on my face when Francisco said, "Oh you met my wife? Where are you two going? Can I come?"

“This is your wife?”

Suddenly I felt very uncomfortable having my arm around her with her husband right there. Then his wife said, with my arm still wrapped around her, “Looks like you’re in trouble now, Tyler.”

I let go and made haste to the door. I heard Deshawna say, “Yeah go get my ASAPS.”

I swung that door open like I was king of the pharmacy. I just looked onward at the pharmacy like the cool guy that I was and marveled at everything like it was my homeland. True, it was just me playing a part for the sake of being bored but that’s why the women love me.

Waiting for me at my desk were the women from the carpet. They get calls from the nursing staff of our homes mostly to bitch and complain. They all seem to be yelling at me at once. There was like five of them and they were all around me running their mouths.

I couldn’t make out what they were saying. I was too busy in my happy place. The happy place where I would be living would be my luxurious new home with the arcade room, a water park in my background and all my friends and family members were over enjoying Ramone’s grilling. Sometimes mind needed a heaven. It helped to reduce stress and complications of the heart.

Of course all good happy places get interrupted by your arch nemesis like JR Thompson. It plopped some labels on the table and asked me a very simple question which was, “Why were these backordered?”

“Because we don’t have any.”

“We don’t have any? There were some on the top shelf.”

“They must have appeared there,” I said almost cryptically.

“That’s ok,” smiled JR. “You can explain that to Patty.”

It was in that moment where the people around us stopped and gasped. A silence fell to the room and JR gave off a smug and went his merry way back to the warehouse. The stares went back at me and I only smiled and assured.

I said, “Don’t worry, people! Relax! That mean ol’ Patty won’t be coming in—”

Suddenly I spoke too soon because the doors concocted a violent smash into the wall. A giant monster of a beast reared out from the shadows. She let out a roar so thunderous, it sent earlobes chiming into an obnoxious buzz. Quickly she grabbed for the nearest running employee and bit off his head and chewed it like bubblegum. Her eyes looked dead at me. Those eyes, pungent with a mix of blood and fire, speared out an invisible blade into her target, my forehead. I jumbled back but regained composure. She was lumbering over at me with grunts of a giant purring cat. I watched in awe as she towered over me with a body so huge, it dimmed the lights into a shadow.

She roared so loud, the skin off my face started to peel off. Actually she was a normal woman, but my perception of her was just that. She was just burly blonde woman with a frown struggling to be upside down. All she did was complain about why we were taking backorders and I tuned out most of what she was yelling about because most people were used to her bitching.

Patty Marie Smith was in charge of purchasing. Not many people could see it but she had a softer side to her. Sometimes we would laugh and joke with each other and

other times we would jump down each other's throats. Half of the time we never knew what mood she was in. She loved to talk about other people. If anyone was the queen of gossiping, it was her. However, most employees were scared to see her in her office. You just never knew if it would set her off. I often looked at her office like the cauldron of death. I could see the flames from the creases under the door. Inside her office I could see her brewing a large pot with a broom and a shrieking laughter that could scare children.

She said, "You have to look! We can't keep backordering, you have to look! I'm tired of this!"

"I'm so sorry, it will never happen again."

She could sense my caustic tone. Things were saved when I saw John walking toward me and I kept hoping it wasn't about something I did wrong. Turned out, he had five men in suits walking behind him with countenances so emotionless, I could feel the expensive ego oozing out of them. They were middle-aged men with the one in center having crystal white hair. He was the only one whose suit was grey while the other four men styled with black. Their feet sounded like cattle as they walked, and the rhythm of their walk sang in unison.

They were approaching me but stopped behind John as if he was the mediator. All eyes directed at me, and I stood there behind that desk like a slunk child.

John spoke first, trying his best to avoid questions, and said to the group, "This over here is the dash. This is where all the ASAPS come in."

After getting over the shock, I realized I needed to be working so I started punching buttons on the keyboard to my computer. I accessed anything just to give the

illusion that I was working. From the corner of my eye I caught a mustached man furrowing his chin. I knew I shouldn't have, but I raised my eye at him like a guilty man trying not to look.

Then the grey man asked, "Why doesn't he have an ASAP right now?"

"I caught up with them!" I blurted out, trying my best not to look intimidated. Then I backed up with, "I got them all out. I'm just waiting on the next one so I can, you know, get that out too."

Then John introduced, "Tyler, these are the representatives from the CEO. They are here to look around and see how the job is functioning."

"Really? Great! I finally get to meet you guys! Listen, I hope this walkthrough you're having turns out well and hopefully things will improve from here."

"Improve?" asked the mustache man, "So you're saying we need improvements?"

Then suddenly three of the men got comfortable at the other end of the table. The short, fatter CEO asked, "We obviously came to the right man. What kind of improvements?"

"Well, for starters, we may need more people. Oftentimes, the Ohio facility dumps their labels at us when they can't handle it or their robot breaks down, so it would be nice to be prepared for situations like those."

Just during my speech, I did hear the fax machine roll off an ASAP sheet behind me. I was too in the moment and a little nervous to grab that sheet. A thought came over me that as soon as I touched that paper, those eyes would be staring right at me the whole time.

The short guy then said, "That is very interesting. We will have to look into that."

The mustache guy interrupted and he had a smirk on his face as he asked, “You going to get that ASAP paper?” His tone wasn’t friendly; it was more of a test.

“Oh yeah, sorry. I was so busy talking.”

My soul dropped when I touched that paper. The ASAP papers always rolled in upside down so it was a surprise if the ASAP was just one item or the dreaded thirty. My dumb luck was that it was the latter. Everything felt in slow motion when I saw the New Admit ASAP in front of my face.

Then it got worse. John was about to direct them to another area when the mustached man said, “No, wait! I want to see this. I want to see how the ASAP process works in its entirety. You seem to know a lot about this place. Show me how you get an ASAP.”

I was lost like a deer caught in headlights. Just as I feared, the five men darted eyes at me like I was about to take a field test. I edged over to the computer to try not to waste valuable time. My fickle fingers had to adjust the paper accordingly on the table. I logged in to the ASAP file and saw that the numbers for the order was there. I had to page down to at least three screens to see how much was displayed.

The labels rolled out like noisy toilet paper when I printed them and to my dismay, a lot of them were partial fills. The partial fills were always the worst part of the New Admit. Normally we had thirty packs situated by racks on the floor and it was easy to just pick up and label them. However, with the partial fills, I would have to reconfigure and hot press every single one ranging from seven pills to fourteen. That was time-consuming.

The mustache man boldly asked, “You need help?”

“I got this.”

“He got this. This is a very fast man on the ASAPS!”

Then I heard their smug laughs.

There weren't enough people on the floor to help and I doubted either of these jokers would lift a label. I had to think logically in the situation otherwise we would never get any additional help.

With the labels crumbled in a tote, I left my post to go fill it on the floor. The five men marched behind me with their hands folded behind their backs. I could hear the leather boot heels snapping the tile floor. I set the tote down and began looking in the alphabetized bins for each corresponding drug. After I found the drug in small blistered pockets, I took one of the blister packs which were like cards with fitted holes in them and reconfigured the drug into the seven pills indicated on my label.

The mustached man asked, “Why are you getting those drugs individually? Why not all at once?”

I answered, “This is how I get the ASAP.”

“Okay. Please continue.”

I didn't know what that meant but the next endeavor was the hot press. This was where I would take a bottle and fit each pill into what they call the bubble. It had rolls of bubbled film on it that fit neatly into a blister pack. I was just running the hot press when I noticed Debbie sorting out the labels in my tote. She must have sensed I was taking too long and decided to help me into not looking like a disgrace in front of these pompous bastards.

But the mustached man said, “Don't help him.”

I countered with, “Sometimes my employees help me if my ASAP is too big.”

“You’re doing just fine. Keep going.”

A sweat beaded from my forehead as I watched the machine we call the REM star roll down racks of bins for all the over-the-counter drugs. I selected a row number on the circuit board and the machine just kept rolling down with the sounds of metallic bumps and whirs.

The mustache man asked, “Why is this taking so long?”

I responded rather shakily, “I know it sometimes takes too long.” I think he heard the crack in my voice.

“It’s okay,” he said, “Just relax.”

“I’m relaxed. I’ve done this a thousand times.”

“Really? I couldn’t tell.”

Finally we got to the fridge. It’s this little area where a row of refrigerators house insulin and pens. I happened to be fitting a vial with a small label flagged onto it into a small box. It was a little disconcerting, and I had to shove in the vial in order for my nervous fingers to close it. I don’t think they liked that.

By the time we got back to my table, I brought out my pen from my necklace to check off the list of drugs. I thought this would be the end of it when the mustached man pulled out some ASAP sheets from under the fax machine.

He asked in a placid tone, “What is this? Why are these sitting here?” He slapped them on the table and asked, “How long were these sitting here?”

All I could come up with was, “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? How long did that ASAP take? Twenty minutes?”

The grey man responded, “More like thirteen minutes.”

“Thirteen minutes? So in all that time, within thirteen minutes it took you to get that ASAP, these papers were just sitting here? Unacceptable.”

“I can get to them really quick.”

“It’s not about how you get to them really quick; it’s about how long they’ve been sitting there.” He looked over at John and said, “What I just discovered here, I’m not impressed. I want him properly trained, and I want him on this dash every day, is that understood?”

John nodded and responded, “Yes, sir.”

“I will be back, I don’t know, when do you say we’ll be back?”

The shorter man replied with, “We got that meeting in Kentucky. We have that fundraiser with Lobaskin.”

“Right. We’re coming back. I can’t say when. I’ll give it a couple months. If I witness what I’ve just seen here tonight, I’m going to be cleaning house. That desk of yours, John, is going to be squeaky clean when I get through with it. See to it that your employee, if he’s still working here, learns the proper way in handling an ASAP.”

I took a couple steps before he turned to me and asked, “I’m sorry, what’s your name?”

I had my tongue tied.

The shorter man said to him, “His badge says Tyler Moore.”

Then the mustached man said, “I’m going to remember that.”

The five men walked past my sight of John. He was just staring me down like a disappointed father. No words were spoken, and he followed behind the suits while I stood behind that table like a defeated loser.

Kaycee walked up and slammed the ASAP down and said, “Here’s your ASAP, faggot!”

Then Tammy walked up to me and said, “I’m going to take a quick break.”

I wanted to comment on her breaks, but I was too stricken with nerves to let out anything cohesive. I heard my cell phone beep and I immediately grabbed for it to stop the noise. It was Megan texting me asking if I was still going.

I looked at the ASAP sheets in front of me and up at the clock and I knew I wasn’t getting out of there on time. I responded back with, *I’m going to be a little late.*

Then Debbie came up to me and said with concern, “What those guys did to you was wrong, Tyler! You should report this!”

I answered, “It’s okay. I’ll get them back.”

Chapter Ten

I knew it was against the law and everything but I had to make a quick call to Gina while driving. Gina was my movie date but we were never actually dating. It was always good to walk in the theater with a hot girl. I caught a couple of the ushers staring and probably wondering why a bum like me was out with such a hottie like her. She was shorter than me with thick dark hair. The best part about her was her warm smile. I get to see that just before we hug. She felt good around the arms and I loved the touch of the curves around her waist. That was as far as I got.

“You know where Morton Taylor is?” she asked.

“Yeah I know that road.”

“Take that and a couple streets down you should come across a light. Take a left and you should be right on his street. Tyler, you really should get a GPS!”

“Thanks, Gina and oh, are we still on for Halloween night?”

“Yeah, sure. I don’t have any other plans.”

“Cool can’t wait! I’ll see you then!”

I banked a left at the light as she instructed and suddenly I was warped into a street of the biggest and most beautiful houses my eyes had ever witnessed. The way the trees aligned reminded me of knights drawing up their sword for the majesty. It was truly majestic.

I found Matt's house rather easily as Megan was already waiting for me at the foot of his driveway. I parked at the other side of the street and I didn't even shut my engine off before Megan started making comments.

She said, "What took you so long? Did you leave work that late?"

I didn't want Megan to know I got lost so I replied, "I got held up in traffic. I didn't have time to go home and change."

I got out and revealed my scrubs. Megan, on the other hand, looked smoking. She had on this silky black and white blouse that looked sexy enough, but she even went the extra mile to doll up her face with kissing lipstick. Her hair was perfectly braided, and a strand of it overshadowed her eye and made her look almost seductive.

"Megan, you look—"I chose the word carefully, "Divine."

"Divine?" she laughed. "Who says divine these days?" Then she mocked, "You!"

"Okay, okay, you look sexy! There I said it! You look so hot tonight that I am having unusual tingly sensations on the lower part of my body."

"Okay, Tyler, you don't have to mention the lower part of your body."

"What? I can't mention my gonads?"

"Actually, I am a little curious."

I looked down and replied, "So am I!"

She laughed, “Let’s get in the house!”

She took me by the arm and we made steps to the front porch. I smiled and took the liberties to knock on the door. Almost immediately a forty-something year old woman swung open the door. She had little bags under her eyes but the hotness was still there. I could imagine she was probably a runner-up for the cover of women’s magazines once but the years probably passed her by. She was an attractive woman, by all means, and she had this bubbly personality that tried so hard to win over her guests.

She exclaimed, “You must be Tyler!”

“Hi!”

“I’m Jenna, John’s wife! I’m sorry,” she went to Megan, “What’s your name?”

“I’m Megan.”

“Megan! Oh my God, you look so beautiful!”

“Thank you!”

“Tyler, is this your girlfriend?”

“She can be.”

I caught Megan just smile on that one.

Then Jenna said, “Come inside! Welcome to the Rivera family!”

She invited us on the marble floor of their home. I took a quick peak left and I noticed a piano and some chimes in another room. Megan was busy looking upward at the mystique view of the winding stairs and the chiming chandelier. Jenna was too busy walking the hallway in front of us with various paintings mantled on the wall.

Jenna said to us, “Follow me. The party’s this way.”

We both looked at each other and we knew we had the same communication. The two of us heard slight ambience of an orchestra in the next room. At first I thought this was on some CD player with the speakers cranked right up. To my surprise, we turned the next room where there was an actual orchestra playing. From the looks of things, everyone at the party dressed up. Men were in tuxedos that looked like money, and the women tried on their best renaissance dresses—the ones that blossomed on the floor.

Then the orchestra squeaked and halted playing. The party in this room stopped their chatter and locked eyes directly at me. Everyone noticed my scrubs. I could tell Megan was embarrassed as she looked away as if she found herself out of a coma and was locked arms with this guy. At that moment, I realized I should have called this one in sick.

I thought I would break the silence and announce, “Hi everyone! I’m the guy who just showed up at this party. Next to me is a girl who doesn’t know me.”

Megan nodded and agreed with that one.

Then John stepped out of a crowd and asked, “Tyler? What the hell is this? I thought someone told you this was a formal party, not a nine-to-five! You can’t wear that ridiculous work outfit you got on!”

John Rivera: better known as my rich stepbrother. He was a man who used to be a nice guy until he became filthy rich at being a computer expert and working for the top clients in the country.

John came from a house of a conniving mother. She would yell up the stairs and say, “John! Get your fucking ass down here, you motherfucker you!”

Then he would shout, “Coming, ma!”

He would instantly jump out of his uncomfortable cot he slept in and march down with the same clothes he slept with. Waiting for him down the stairs was the angry, disappointed face of his mother.

She would say to him, “Look at you! With that frizzled hair, ragged clothes, and those ridiculous looking glasses! If you think you can live here until you’re eighty years old, you got another thing coming, you motherfucker you!”

“Yes, ma!”

He sat at the breakfast table with my dad. My dad just looked at him with disgust as John devoured a bowl of cereal. Maybe it was how each lick of the spoon required a slurp at each taste. That was probably part of it but his real beef was John’s lifestyle.

Then John stopped to look up at my dad. My dad just said in disgust, “You disgust me.”

Then he said words I wish he never said. He said to him, “Why can’t you be more like my son, Tyler? He’s an honor student and he has ambitions. You have ambitions, John?”

“I want to get into computers,” he said as he took a drink of his milk.

“You want to get into computers? Have you done anything productive to get into computers?”

“I’m reading books.”

“I don’t see you reading!” my dad said.

Sure enough, he was. Late at night with his flashlight he was hitting the books and hoping he didn’t wake up his bitchy mother. Then one day, in secret, he forked over the three-hundred dollars to take the test. It was all done by computer and enclosed

cubicles. Each station equipped headphones and a series of tests under a strict time limit. After the test, he would have to wait in line so that the next available representative could tell him his score. He passed and he celebrated with a few beers at a bar walking distance from his house.

Then here he was in a black, pin-striped suit. His neck tie looked as if it was washed in dotted rainbow colors. His black hair was slicked back with hardened gel. There was no need for his glasses anymore. He took care of that with laser surgery.

I replied to him with, "I didn't know. I thought it was just a birthday party."

He then said to me, "Just a birthday party? I think I have one of my old suits upstairs. It should fit you of your size. Can someone take him to my room and help him with my suit?"

My dad walked up like he was his master servant. He replied, "I'll take him up there."

"Good. See to it he's nicely dressed. After all, he might need some help."

I gave him that look. After being humiliated at work, I certainly didn't need this from him at his daughter's birthday party. I just walked away and followed my dad up the winding stairs.

My dad did the honors of tying my tie. From the looks of the mirror, I was being fitted into a funeral suit. It was a very cheap suit compared to what everyone else was wearing at the party. This was probably one of John's suits when he was living with his mother.

I finally said to my dad, "I seriously didn't know it was a formal party."

“I thought I told you,” he said. “It doesn’t matter now. What’s done is done. The important thing is you’re here and you are on your best behavior. John’s wife wants to merge our families together.”

It took them twenty-something years to finally make that effort. For years, my brothers and I heard about the holidays they spent together, the family vacations, and visits to relatives of our family. My dad used to show off photos to us on their Caribbean vacations like we needed to be jealous or something. I don’t remember much of those photos. I was around my teens then. However, there was one photo I remembered of John and my dad riding a jet ski. To this day, I don’t know why that photo stuck out the most.

Then my dad changed the subject and asked, “Who’s that girl you came with?”

“That’s Megan. She’s an old friend of mine. We ran into each other at the bar the other day.”

“I’m going to tell you something from your old man that I never thought I would ever be saying to my son. I’ve been married to my wife for over fifteen years. I can honestly say that she made me a very happy man. Sometimes I pity those who don’t experience true love from your best friend. I call my wife my best friend. I just hope that some day before I go to my grave, I die knowing that my sons finally found that person that makes them happy as much as my wife made me. Someone who makes you feel like the person you always wanted to be. I wish that upon you, son.”

Even though I wanted to tell my dad what a hopeless cause that was, and that the hopes of me finding the right woman was slim to none, I only replied with, “Thanks, dad.”

There was too much emotion from my dad to ruin the moment. He smiled and slapped me on the back and said, "Let's go join the party."

"We really have to?"

"Come on now, his wife makes a lovely cheesecake."

Chapter Eleven

I was the worst dressed at the party but that was because my suit looked so plain and ordinary. Megan didn't seem to mind since she immediately sprang from her seat to give me a hug.

She said to me, "Look at you! You look so divine!"

I laughed and said, "You look divine yourself!"

That's when I looked up. Coming in from the same hallway we made entrance to came two people I didn't want to see for the rest of my life. It was my ex-girlfriend Cheryl and her fiancé Tyrone. There were many reasons why I broke up with Cheryl. Besides her stinky breath, or those chipped black teeth, she was also a hypochondriac. There hadn't been a day where she didn't complain about her medical problems. Each day was a roulette wheel of which kind of pain she was feeling: back or knee. A driver rear-ended her three years ago and she still kept bitching about her back. We thought Tyrone stuck around until the settlement money wore out. Then again, rumor surfaced that when a settlement was made to them, they turned it down for more money. They were put under investigation. It wouldn't look good on Tyrone though. Neighbors told us that some days they heard him hitting her. The brothers and I would listen by their doorway, and all we heard was arguing that stopped.

Whenever I see Cheryl, I always look to see what brace was on. It changed every visit. One day she would wear a knee brace and the very next day she wore a hand cast. When we asked why she was wearing that, she would feed us lines like she discovered she had carpal tunnel. She must have forgotten about her knee brace.

Today she wore on her lovely knee brace that looked cleaner than all her other knee braces. This one must be new. She was the short little blonde, I would call her. Standing proud next to her was Tyrone in a black tuxedo I'm sure Cheryl bought for him. He had this devilish grin on his face like he was proud of his date that evening. He was tall, sprightly, and an obvious well build considering he was flexing his other arm for some reason.

Unfortunately they were coming my way. I was joined by my two brothers who looked guilty of expecting them. Right away I knew who the culprits were.

I just asked them, "Why did you invite my ex?"

Sam responded, "She's part of the family!"

"No she's not! She's my ex! We don't get along and my fucked up family keeps inviting her to family functions. I'm not married to the girl and you sure as fuck aren't, so why did you decide to invite my slut of an ex-girlfriend?"

Then Cheryl and Tyrone came in closer from the noise.

Cheryl said, "Hi Tyler! Oh hi Sam and Manny!"

Sam and Manny smiled and waved. Then Tyrone had to ask the same question I always wanted to ask. He asked, "Why do you keep going to these family functions?"

"They're like my family!"

“You slept with all three of those homeboys! This is like some Jerry Springer shit here! How’s a nigga supposed to keep dating his girl, when she keeps going to her fuck-for-all brothers’ family functions. Nigga, please!”

“Cheryl!” I exclaimed. “Tyrone!”

“What’s up, Tyler! What’s up!” said Tyrone.

“Oh my God, Cheryl! What happened to your knee this time?”

She then brought attention to her knee and said, “Oh it’s that same stupid accident again. I swear this pain will never go away!”

“But that was like three years ago! I thought it was your back?”

Sam stepped in and said, “Hey, why don’t we all sit down?”

As we seated in the round table, and it was literally a round table, John continuously tapped on his goblet with his crystal spoon. Everyone seated had their very own goblet. I sat across from Cheryl and Tyrone with Megan sitting very close to my left. I could feel the heat leaking sweat into our legs.

Tyrone asked, “Tyler, who’s that girl sitting next to you?”

“That’s my friend, Megan.”

“Just a friend? Yeah I thought so. Hey girl, let’s say I get your number and we can hang out sometime.”

Megan asked, offended, “You’re asking me for my phone number?”

“Just go out as friends! My baby understands! We can go to the Savannah Café. Let’s say we go there, kick it a bit, and have fun.”

“Oh my God!” Megan just had that smiley awe facial expression as she retorted with, “You’re such a pig! I can’t believe you’re asking me out in front of your girlfriend!”

“Fiancé!” I corrected.

“Even worse!”

“He’s not asking you out,” Cheryl said, emotionlessly.

Then Megan pointed and said, “You’re fucked up!”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” announced John, “It is my dubious honor that we are here to celebrate my daughter’s sixth birthday!”

The audience clapped like we were in an ending of a play. John tipped his head, smiled, and waved his goblet to the crowd. He then proposed another announcement which was, “Tonight! We celebrate the merging of two families! The Moore Family.” He paused for applause but it was as silent as a cough. He then added, “My step family!” And this got the applause he was looking for.

His daughter, a homely looking blonde girl, wearing a pink mini-shirt with the buttoned up blouse, tugged on her dad’s expensive coat and asked, “Daddy! Daddy! When are we going to open my presents?”

“Oh honey, you’ll open that pony soon enough!”

Everyone in the audience, except our group, laughed at that comment. I looked over at my brothers who just passed a smirk over to me. Megan leaned at my ear and whispered loudly, “Tyrone keeps making a pass at me!”

I looked at Tyrone who smooched a passionate kiss. John sat down with his daughter seated on his lap. He told the group at his table, “You know what my daughter wants to be when she grows up? Tell them, April.”

“I want to be a singer.”

“You hear that? She wants to be a singer! Sing them that song you sang me the other day.”

April just smiled and looked nervous.

“You know that song! You remember that song you sang when you and daddy were watching the football game? What was the name of that song?”

“The Star Song!”

“The Star Song! Show everyone how you sing The Star Song!”

“Oh say can you see, by the twilight can be near!” Then she stopped from all the nerves and hugged on her dad.

John shouted, “Give it up for her everybody!”

Everyone cheered.

“Wasn’t that beautiful?” He shouted. “That’s my little girl! She’s going to have a contract some day! Mark my words!”

As a group huddled over her and they went into quiet chatter, my brothers turned to me and Manny asked, “Hey Tyler, did you get that Obamacare yet?”

“No, I just stuck with my work insurance.”

“Telling you man,” said Manny, “Don’t get it. I’m telling you—”

Tyrone interrupted and asked, “Yo, man. What’s wrong with Obamacare?”

“Why?” asked Manny. “You like to be here all night?”

“I just don’t like it when you mess with my boy, Obama.”

“Oh really? Did you say that with Bush? Did you say that with Clinton? No, so unless you played basketball with him, he’s the President of the United States! Color isn’t the issue. I have my God given right as an American citizen to say whatever I want about the President of the United States! End of story!”

“I’m telling you, man! That’s racist!”

“How is that racist? Explain to me how that’s racist! I would really like to hear this.”

“White man talking shit about the black man just makes my skin boil, alright. Are you getting what I’m saying?”

“Yeah I’m getting what you’re saying. No I’m not getting what you’re saying. So if the President was white and making these dumbass decisions, it’s okay. But if you slap a coat of black on him, it’s automatically racist?”

“You just don’t get it! It’s alright. It’s cool!”

“No, is that what you’re saying?”

“Man, don’t let me get into the whole history and all. The history how you people enslaved us!”

Then Manny shifted his seat and got ready for action. He responded, “Okay, look, I’m sorry we owned you as slaves. I really am. It was a dumbass thing! I’m sorry! Nothing can change that now! You gotta let it go!”

“No, you got that ass backwards! You gotta let it go! Not me! Shit!”

As they argued back and forth, I apologized to Megan by saying, “I’m really sorry for all this racial talk. I swear, I think I was adopted.”

Megan laughed.

Then Manny shouted, “You got the BET channel! I don’t see a WET channel! That’s racist! You got a month! There’s no White History Month! There’s no White People Awards! That’s racist!”

“You racist, motherfucker!”

Suddenly the music kicked in to a start of a waltz. Megan got off her chair and gently escorted me out of my seat. This stopped Manny and Tyrone to look. I felt her from the legs up in rhythm with the music. As I adjusted my posture, we locked fingers and raised our arms with the music. I had one hand on her hip and the other lifting her other hand. We took one step in front of each other and suddenly we were dancing.

It was in that instance that the audience faded to black and the clandestine light above chaperoned us in the spotlight. I was unsure of myself. Megan was leading the dance with the lump caught in my throat. I made eye contact with her seductress eyes. It was in that moment that I remained in eye contact with her. She was confident, with her eyes beckoning me to be the same.

The orchestra played a little louder and faster, and she led me into the middle of the dance floor where the whole audience could revel. I was hoping it would just be basic dancing because anything other than that and I might embarrass myself in front of all my onlookers. For a moment, we were basically just dancing, staring at each other with bedroom eyes. I panicked a little when she pressed backwards, dipping my arm up into a triangle, and twirling herself.

Then I said to myself *fuck it* and took advantage of the situation. Aggressively, I twirled her back into my arms. I had a lock around her waist as she looked back at me

with a face that wanted to orgasm. She gently strode her back against my chest that moved down to my nether regions. I think she felt my excitement.

Instantly the music revved up and we were aggressively pulling each other on the dance floor. I heard banter coming from the audience as Megan spun from my direction, stopped with the pull of the arm, and then spun right back into my arms. The posture she gave looked as if I was comforting her from the cold. She spun out of my arms again and we did a quick pull with both arms. That moment when she yanked my arms, I could see the inviting of sex with the sultry expression on her face. She loved that I was dominating on the dance floor.

I reeled her in close, and the two of us waved down a half circle with the touch of our hands. The music kicked into a crescendo and we did some quick leg work as we gazed into each other's eyes. She fell backwards and I caught her biting a rose from a water jar as she straightened herself back to me. I loved her smile as the rose sandwiched between her white teeth. We turned heads at the opposite direction in rhythm with the music, and Megan blew the rose from her lips perfectly into Tyrone's glass of rum and coke.

We took the dance center stage. Megan took me by the hand up a set of stairs and startled the orchestra as she pulled me by the hand again and led me back down the stairs in rhythm with the music. We faced each other, and I stepped in, she stepped back and took a step in and that's when I went in for the kill. She laid back in my arm and I watched as her eyes were closed and something told me she was inviting me for a kiss. I leaned forward, cooing my lips, and even though I was overwrought with nerves, I dove

in slowly. She had to feel the silhouette of my face over her nose, and as I pulled in forward for the kiss, I noticed she wasn't resisting.

I was surprised when my lips touched hers. It wasn't much of a kiss as more of a press of each other's lips. Her eyes fluttered open, and quickly she led the dance further down the dance floor. For some reason, we were treated to rainbow colored spotlights while she took me by the hand in the colored mess of lights. We danced again, slowly, under a hanging chandelier. Her hand caressed my cheek as her eyes were barely open. Gently, I strode my hand across her back. She gasped and straightened her posture and her eyes went back to mine.

The audience leaned forward in anticipation. My dad smiled graciously, my brothers sipped their drinks with a straw, and just as the music reached its climatic end, I kissed Megan under the chandelier. It was one of those short, getting-a-feel kisses, but when she returned the favor, I opened my mouth and dug my lips into hers. As soon as her arm covered the back of my head, the audience cheered in an uproar. I had ceased the night.

John smiled and raised his goblet.

Chapter Twelve

I knew Megan followed me home for a reason. We were the last ones to the party and the first ones to leave. Megan actually suggested it. She brought up having a couple drinks at my place and the idea sounded more appealing than this pompous party. If we had to sit there and watch John gloat one more time, we probably would be dancing on corpses.

Megan forgot where I lived so I drove as she tried to keep up. I hated streetlights because I was so afraid to lose her from behind. Thankfully, our drive was a smooth one since my apartment wasn't too far from John's house. It was at that moment when I parked that I felt a little bit nervous. Maybe I was just dumb, but I wasn't too sure if Megan's motivations involved the bedroom.

I apologized for the apartment before going in. My dishes were still sitting in the sink. Unfortunately, my dishwasher couldn't wash worth a shit. My glasses always came out with these milk stains with tiny black pellets.

I hated calling the maintenance man. They would always come in with an attitude. I would often get this old guy with a bushy goatee, and he would a lot of times just ramble off about similar apartment experiences as if trying to say that he went into far worse apartments. I always had a bad vibe with that guy. It was almost those unexplainable premonitions where you knew that you would never hang out with this guy.

We walked in the kitchen and Megan noticed my computer on. She asked, “You left your computer on?”

“Yeah,” I said, “I’m writing a book to save my grandpa’s home. It’s haunted.”

Megan put down her purse and laughed, “Why would you save a haunted house?”

“My grandma wanted me to.”

“Aw, how sweet!”

Megan walked over to me in a smile. I didn’t expect the hug that came next. I’m sure she felt my heart racing. Her chest was right up to mine. She was a tall girl. I felt her long, press-on nails claw across my spine. Her warm breathing boiled a spot on my neck. I felt her looking at me from the corner of my eye.

Then I said the dumbest thing possible. I asked, “I thought we were drinking?”

She kissed me. I could feel the sexual tension. She kissed me like she just exploded from the anticipation of kissing me again. Women always said I was a good kisser. Before I knew it, I was handheld in the bedroom.

I heard her lay back on my mattress and undressing herself. I heard the panties slip off. Then I heard her whisper, “Take your clothes off.”

Awkwardly, I slipped off my clothes and tripped over the bed taking off my pants. She wrestled with me and pulled me in her clutches up the bed so her head was resting on my double pillows. My gonads were jolted forward with her hands firmly places on both butt cheeks. I didn’t feel anything go in.

Finally, I just asked her, “Can you be on top?”

She stopped to think for a minute, and she replied, “Sure!”

I twisted over on my back like a child being tucked to bed. Her knees buckled over me and felt one of her knees on the mattress next to my leg. I could only feel my way through because the room was pitch dark. My teeth grinded though, as I felt her something warm slip into my gonads. It was in that moment I knew that I was finally sleeping with Megan.

I heard some slapping as she bounced up and down. She made a sexy gasp but only in a whisper. For some reason I wasn't feeling anything. Then I realized what was slapping. What made it more embarrassing was that it felt like it was being yanked to get hard.

The worst of it was when Megan stopped. After not even a minute, she completely stopped and I could feel her looking directly at my face.

She asked, "Tyler?" She took a moment to breathe before asking, "You have erectile dysfunction?"

"I don't have reptile dysfunction."

She laughed, "Not reptile! Erectile! You know what erectile is, right?"

"Oh Megan, I'm just trying to get over Char!"

"If you were still over Char, you wouldn't be in this bed with me."

I stopped because I knew she was right. Then she reached for her phone and asked, "What time is it?"

"I think it's almost ten."

"Oh, I better get going."

"You really have to?"

"Yeah, Tyler. I have to work in the morning."

“All right, maybe next time I can go downtown.”

Megan laughed and replied, “I’ll hold you to it!”

Many years ago, Megan asked me if I ever went downtown before. She was massaging my back at the time and my experiences were that massages always lead to sex. If they didn’t, there was something wrong with you. Well, it didn’t lead to sex. I wasn’t over Char.

I kissed her goodbye before she left my apartment. Normally I would walk her out but I couldn’t find all my clothes. Luckily I managed to at least get my white T-shirt on. It wasn’t until I shut my door when I realized I blew my chances with the world’s most beautiful girl. If my mojo worked properly, I would have given sex worthy to be above sub par and she would be my girlfriend. Not only that, but Megan wasn’t exactly a commodity, as she would make a perfect trophy wife. Sure, Char would be a trophy wife but God was giving me second chances.

That was when I started pacing around the apartment, occasionally hitting myself on the head, and constantly cursing at my penis.

I started saying things like, “You had one job, penis! One job! Why can’t you stand in attention? My mind was getting horny, but you weren’t! Why? Why am I cursed with such a stupid penis? That’s right, penis, you’re stupid! That could have been my girlfriend if you were working properly, you limp son-of-a-bitch! But no, you want to just lay there like a slug, you fucking fat—“I started fighting the air and letting out frustrated screams.

Periods like this continued until the dark night turned to light. I hadn't slept a wink all night because my anger and frustrations got the best of me. With the heat sweltering on my forehead, I finally took in some breaths.

Then I said to myself, "I need some air!"

Outside wasn't much better. Sure, I was walking it off but pedestrians couldn't stop staring. Some guys got out of my way. I had seen even this muscular biker guy with a long beard and a serious case of tattoos who first just looked at me and then stepped aside for me to pass.

Within a few minutes a cop car pulled over on the side. I heard a brief police siren go off and those colored lights. A cop walked out of the car and said, "I want you to turn around and face me. Hands away from your pockets."

I did just as the officer said with my hands raised and a curious expression. The officer approached me and asked, "How are you this morning?"

"Look, officer, I know I look a little crazy, okay? But you would be too if you blew your chances with a girl this hot. Can I show you a picture?"

The officer stopped before me with his hands on his hips. He answered, "Go ahead. Show me."

I reached into my pocket and quickly took out my cell phone in case he thought about his gun. I brought up the picture of me and Megan at the wrestling show. I had my arm around her and she was leaning forward like she was inviting it. She was looking hot that night. She was originally going to the bar and see what happened.

The officer looked like he was studying it. I caught him furrowing an eyebrow under his dark sunglasses. Shockingly, he said to me, “I apologize for the inconvenience, sir. You may carry out your business.”

I continued to walk off muttering to myself of how stupid I was when I heard a jingle on my cell phone. My heart raced when I thought it was a text from Megan.

To my dismay, it was Ramone. He was asking if I wanted to go to Wall-Fart.

Chapter Thirteen

I started having flashbacks working in retail as I walked in that store. Ramone was texting on his phone. We were walking through crowds of people and he didn't even bat an eye. So my curiosity got the best of me and I asked him, "Who are you texting?"

Then he replied like he was pretending to be a tough guy with, "None of your business!"

"Okay."

Then as I was going to go about my business, he answered, "I'm talking to Gina!"

"Gina? My Gina?"

"Yeah," he said, still pretending, "you got a problem with that?"

"Will you please stop trying to date my hot friends? Most of them are creeped out by me because of you!"

"That's all they'll ever be is friends! They won't date you because you're fat! They would date me because I'm good looking!"

"I'm sorry, did I call you a friend at some point? If I did, I had too much to drink."

Then he went back to text on his cell phone and said, "God, man, Gina is the most gorgeous girl I ever saw! I want to get her naked in my room, sexy belly style!"

I had to ask, “What’s going to happen when you get with a girl who doesn’t look hot for you every day or she gains a little weight?”

“I wouldn’t be like that!”

“I know you’re an asshole, you don’t have to hide it from me!”

Ramone farted. He then said, “My butt has spoken.”

“It’s a mystery to me why you’re single.”

Then I noticed the Birthday Cake Cupcakes. Lately that flavor had been a common thing. Between that and Red Velvet, I found it difficult to believe that those two qualify for an actual flavor. Both are really good, though, and I fell victim to trying out the different platforms that taste bestowed upon.

I exclaimed, “Oh cool, birthday cake cupcakes!”

“Ew, you like birthday cake cupcakes?”

“See? That’s the problem with assholes like you. A new flavor comes out and people automatically think it’s disgusting because it’s out of the norm. No, can’t try something other than chocolate cupcakes. You start putting different flavors on it because I only like one flavor and I will eat that flavor for the rest of my damn life! That’s why most of them are on a limited time. God I hate people!”

“You’re fat!” Ramone commented out of nowhere.

“I don’t get it! I constantly move all the time at work and I even jog sometimes yet I’m still not losing weight!”

“That’s because your body is used to it.”

“The human body is stupid. Doesn’t it know people don’t roam the earth and climb mountains and shit? They sit around and watch TV now. The human body should

fix itself so that it's working out while you're watching TV! There's no use for us running around all the time. Instead it still wants us to keep running! And running!"

I started jogging in place, "And if you're watching TV you keep running so that I don't get flabby or anything!"

Ramone just did his goofy laugh until I turned to find yet another blast from the past. It was Skye Labelle. She was behind a shopping cart with her little boy riding in it. It had been almost twenty years since I saw her and she hadn't changed since then. She still had the same dark hair, a little red in the highlights, and the same busty cleavage she had before. Since I last saw her, she put on a little weight, mostly around the center and her ass. Seeing as she had a kid, I assumed that was probably why. The woman was still just as beautiful as she was then, and just as she was when we last saw each other in the eighth grade.

I just turned and finished jogging in place when I saw Skye's beautiful smile behind her shopping cart.

She continued smiling and asked, "Tyler? Oh my God!"

"Skye Labelle? It's been like twenty years!"

"The last time I saw you, I think you were trying to straighten things out with your girlfriend?"

"Yeah, we broke up anyway."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that."

A pathological liar named Matt forged these pictures to make Char look like she was cheating on me. Skye was the one to knock sense into me that Matt was probably lying the whole time. When I confronted him, he gave up the pictures and I raced to see

Char before she headed home for Hawaii. It wasn't a very good conversation. She even called me a loser which, looking back, I think she really thought I was a loser but was just hoping I would change for the better.

Somehow, the next night, she came back for me. I don't know what sparked inside her. I was dueling with Raven when she found me, much like my fight with her abusive ex-boyfriend JR. Of all things, Raven and I were sword fighting. Not many people could say that they had a sword fight with a guy in clown makeup, long black hair and a dark trench coat and not many people could say they won the fight. I embraced in Char's arms that night in front of a crowd of cheering people who watched the whole time.

Then she mentioned that night by saying, "You know that night you fought that scary guy with the trench coat?"

"Yeah, that was Raven."

"Yeah, I actually came over to see you. You were hugging on some girl so I just left."

"Oh, that's too bad. I see you have a kid now."

"Yeah, but his father isn't paying child support. What a loser. It's just me and him most of the time."

"So that means you're single?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"I have an idea. Why don't you come out to the Halloween party with us tomorrow night?"

"Does that mean I have to wear a costume?"

“Well, yeah, I think so. We should have fun.”

“You mind picking me up? I don’t have a car.”

“Great!”

Chapter Fourteen

It was early evening but it felt late because I wasn't used to it getting dark so early. I'm sure it always had but when you work at a job that had no windows you seem to miss out on the passing of time. I was bored and I was watching an old friend's independent film for the first time and about ten minutes into it I was yearning for a good Hollywood made movie. My vocal cords spontaneously shouted out the words "This blows" without me even realizing I said it. That was how bad the movie was.

The most I could tell you about the movie was that it was about someone wanting a relationship. The main character was a female and she couldn't make up her mind if she wanted a man or just wanted sex. I guess she wasn't picking just one. Immediately right away you could tell it was shot on shiteo. Shiteo meant that it was shot using a very bad video camera. Besides the poor camera, the acting was atrocious but I blamed the director which was my friend. I would say she was learning but she had been making movies for the past seven years.

Then there was a knock on my door which shocked waves of stress through my body. I never get any visitors. People stopped coming over mostly because my place was a mess and I was boring. My first thought was that I was hoping it was a woman coming over for some sex. Then I got disgusted with myself because I was feeling like

that horrible movie I was just watching. Unfortunately for me I looked through the peephole and it was a guy. It was my friend Aaron who I hadn't seen in months.

I opened the door and greeted him with a big hello. It was nice to see him after all these months. I was starting to think he forgot about me.

"Long time, Tyler," smiled Aaron.

"Well come on in!" I said and he came right in.

Aaron was the person Ramone always feared. He never liked Aaron on our outings because he was a threat to any woman who might find Ramone attractive-- not that I ever found any. Aaron was the type of guy that whenever he came into contact with girls, we would always listen to them talk about what a hot guy he was. It was once demonstrated when Ramone walked out of the room and women talk about how glad they were that he was gone.

Aaron was in his forties just like I was. His hair was receding around the dome and neglected to shave it bare like I did years ago. There was noticeable scruff on his face like he couldn't afford a razor. He was laden down, like he hadn't slept in months, and I could see the pot belly as he bent for a sit on the couch.

I drew forward trying to figure out what was wrong. He spoke before I did. He asked, "Why are you watching my wife's movie?"

"I was going across some movies and I happened to find that. By sheer luck, you happen to come over at the same time."

"Yeah, well, she's my ex wife now."

"Really? What happened?"

As if I needed to ask. A few months back I attended their wedding. It was a themed wedding like something out of a cartoon princess show. By the time the music came and she walked out on the aisle with her wedding gown, she wouldn't get off her damn cell phone! She was texting and updating her Facebook. She was even taking pictures of the attendance and some of her girly friends bounced up and down with her as Aaron stood there by the altar dumbfounded.

The highlight of the night, for me, was when the minister said, "You may now update your status." It was a joke but she actually did it before the kiss. I never attended a wedding like that before. I guess after seven marriages, she doesn't take them as seriously like she did the first six times.

Her name was Kelly. Aaron and Kelly first hooked up six months ago when he was called over to fix one of her pipes. They knew each other back in school and somehow during one of her independent films he became a part of, she had been keeping in close contact. After he finished plumbing, he noticed she was crying in her bedroom. He kneeled before her and asked her what was wrong.

She replied, "My marriage is falling apart!"

"Didn't you get married like not even a month ago?"

"I know, I know, it was a mistake! I don't know what I was thinking!"

If anyone hadn't figured out, Kelly gets married for attention. Think about it. When she announces it on Facebook, she would get at least sixty likes and several comments on how happy they were for her. Then when she gets engaged, no one seemed to call her out on why she would get married for the billionth time. She had a lot of support from her girly friends. There was always a lot of "I love you" in the comments.

Then once the wedding day came she was showered with all kinds of attention. That was the day she could have everything her way. The photographer would have to obey her every command and it was like Kelly Day with hugs and love from all her friends.

Then after the wedding day -- the attention stops. Suddenly her comments weren't getting enough likes on Facebook. It was like she was attracting a crowd of people to her product who slowly walked the other way to find another attraction. Because of this, she would be miserable and pick at whatever problem her new husband had that was apparent before the wedding but now was a problem. It was like building blocks to cover what the real problem was -- her.

Aaron, like the other six men, was a victim of this. He came home one day to their two-story home that he pulled out the mortgage for, and right away he could feel the tension in his own home. For the past five months she had been struggling to get a divorce. It seemed every time something would go wrong, she would automatically opt for divorce. It was like even a situation as simple as missing a spot mowing the grass where it would be easy to just mow over it, she would jump right to getting a divorce.

This argument was something special. Aaron walked into that home making careful steps. He would ask, "Honey?" and not knowing she was taking one of her many naps during the day. Yes Kelly always had to take naps. She didn't work or anything. In fact, she rarely ever cleaned. Her naps were always more important.

Then she got up and went to his face. At least that was the story I got. She asked him, "You remember before we got married, you asked me about my last husband about didn't we marry like not even a month ago? You remember saying that?"

Aaron thought for a moment and then replied, "Yeah, I think so."

“What did you mean by that?”

“That you were upset about your husband and you weren’t married even a month?”

“So—” she was digging for words with her hands, “what were you trying to say? That I suck at being married? Was that what you were trying to say?”

“Why are you bringing this up now, woman? Damn! We haven’t even been married a year and you’re yelling at me about shit that happened before we got married?”

“Well, if you knew when to keep your mouth shut and be home more often, maybe I wouldn’t be yelling at you about shit!”

“I have to pay the bills, woman! Someone has to.”

“Oh, oh, so you’re saying I can’t keep a job?”

“Well, you aren’t working.”

“Oh, I see how it is! I’m just some broke ass loser with no job!”

“I wouldn’t say loser.”

“Go fuck yourself!”

Kelly slammed the door behind her and locked it. She didn’t talk to him for the rest of the night.

The next day, however, Aaron came home early to surprise her. He thought he would make it up with some flowers. What he found out was that there were candles everywhere. At first he thought she did some kind of cult witch practice until he found her coming out of her room in a robe. Then behind her, was some guy in his underwear.

She yelled at him for throwing him out the window.

This brought him to my place. The last time he heard from Kelly, she was boo-hooing to her friends about how bad Aaron was. Aaron, like the six victims before him, became the bad guy. Comments like “You can find better” and not “Maybe the problem is you” flooded her comment section. She moved out to her mother’s house and left him with all the bills. Now she was trying to get him to help pay for the divorce since she was expected to get married again.

“What a whore,” I finally said to him about his wife. I had been wanting to say that at a time where I knew it wouldn’t hurt his feelings.

“Yeah, I can see it clearly now,” he said.

“So where have you been staying lately?”

“At my sister’s. It’s just been hell for me, and the kids, and man, I shouldn’t have ever married her.”

“What’s done is done. Hey look, I’m going out to a Halloween party with some friends. You should come.”

“That sounds like a plan. So are we dressing up?”

“In costumes? Yeah.”

“That’s what I meant.” Then he got serious. The look in his bewildered eyes suggested he had something boiling in his mind.

He asked me, “Tyler, am I an asshole?”

“You’re more like an ass swimming pool than an asshole.”

Chapter Fifteen

I drove the three of us to pick up Skye for the party. We all had our costumes on but we weren't very innovative. I just wore my trench coat and hat and passed myself on as a detective. Ramone wore nothing but spandex and called himself a wrestler. Aaron just put on a baseball cap and declared himself a baseball player. We were really lazy before we left. It was nothing like the last minute. I think Ramone went out and bought his spandex for the night. He found it at a thrift store for three dollars. It was used.

We were a little late getting to Skye's house because I couldn't see the address on the house. The other two weren't much better because they needed glasses. After the third pass down, I saw Skye standing outside with a couple of her kids. She had on a fairy costume with clear butterfly wings on the back and one of those plastic magic wands. It actually took a moment to register that she was actually wearing a Halloween costume instead of the lazy wear we had on. I was too busy staring at her busty cleavage on her royal blue dress.

"You found it!" she exclaimed referring to her house. Then she asked, "Where's your Halloween outfits?"

I answered, "I'm a detective." I pointed to the two boys in the back. "Ramone is supposed to be some wrestler. I wouldn't look."

"Shut up, Pillsbury dough bitch!" cried out Ramone.

“And Aaron just put on a cap and called himself a baseball player.”

“It’s a good thing they aren’t passing out awards,” she said. “Look, I hate to trouble you, but is there anyway we can drop my kids off at my sisters?”

“Sure! How many you got?”

“Six?” She gritted her teeth.

“Six? Two more and you’d be Octo-Mom.”

“So is that okay?”

I asked, “What about these two?” referring to Ramone and Aaron.

We had Ramone and Aaron wait outside with the other two kids as I managed four of them to sit in my car. Skye held the youngest one up front who looked to be about three years old. She then poked her head out the window to my friends.

She said to him, “I don’t really know you two but would you promise not to kidnap or molest my kids while I’m gone?”

Aaron and Ramone just looked at each other.

“What the hell?” whispered Ramone, but we could hear him.

Aaron responded, “Sure, not a problem.”

“Oh thank you! Not that you two look like child molesters or anything but, okay maybe one of you.”

Then I asked her, “Are you ready to go?”

I drove off and Aaron and Ramone yelled out to the street, “WHO?”

As I was driving off to her sister’s house, I made a comment with a smile saying, “We are going to be a little late to the party but that’s o—”

That's when I noticed her giving kisses to her kid. They kept kissing and kissing which I was guessing was fine until the next thing that happened.

Her three-year-old said to her, "I want to marry mommy!"

She pressed her head to his and said, "Mommy wants to marry you too!"

Then the little kid said, "You're my mommy! No one else can have you!"

They started kissing which in my peripheral vision looked like they were making out. When I looked it stopped and she proceeded to laugh and hug him.

Then she asked me, "Isn't he the cutest kid in the whole world?"

"He's great. Where's your sister's house again?"

After dropping off the kids which seemed to have taken forever, we made it back to her place finding her two remaining kids bashing Aaron and Ramone on the head on the porch. They were just sitting there bored and it looked they were so bored that they were immune to head damage.

Skye immediately got out of the car and yelled at them saying, "Stop bashing our new guests on the head! What is the matter with you?"

The little girl bashing Ramone on the head whined, "But it's so soft and mushy!"

Ramone just did his goofy laugh.

"I'm done! When we get to your aunt's, you're going to bed!"

"I don't want to!"

"Then stop hitting poor Ramone on the head."

The kid finally stopped.

Aaron commented, "That's okay. She was probably making him more intelligent."

Ramone shouted, "Fuck you, dick mouth!"

On our way to her sister's, the little girl who I found out was named Kira, kept pushing Ramone's head to the window.

As soon as Skye heard Ramone say, "OW! Stop it, kid!" She immediately turned around and yelled, "What did I just tell you?" She tried to hit her with the magic wand but Ramone's head got in the way.

"Oh!" She fanned her mouth. "I'm so sorry, Ramone!"

"Wow," I said, "Ramone is getting all kinds of abuse tonight!"

We were an hour late to the party thanks to the adventure of dropping off children. On the way there, we learned all kinds of new things about Skye like having six different fathers with six different kids. She claimed that they were all losers which didn't help her case much. I could tell she was embarrassed explaining herself. However, she would tend to cover up by saying how proud she was of being a mom. Just before we got there, we would have spit our drinks when we discovered that she actually wanted more kids.

After everyone got out of the car, I stopped Ramone while Aaron and Skye proceeded to go inside the house. There was a bunch of young drunks outside that our old asses didn't want to concern with, but I had some important matters to discuss.

I pointed out the message on my phone to Ramone on my cell and said to him, "Gina's inside the house. Look, Ramone, Gina is a very beautiful girl. I know they say to be yourself when you are on a date, but in your case, don't be yourself. In fact,

channel every smooth, suave, cool person you ever watched on TV and be those people. I'm pretty sure she doesn't want to be dating Mr. Bean's retarded doppelganger."

Then Ramone retorted, "Why don't you worry about your damn self, okay? I know how to date!"

"Really? Because it sure don't look like it."

"You're fat, okay? I'm good looking. I have a better shot than you!"

"Okay, then you show me how it's done."

"Damn right! I'm going to fuck the hell out of Gina tonight!"

We entered the rather loud house. The screen door just flew wide open and right away we were greeted with a huge keg full of people inhaling from hoses. I watched as some guys from the sidelines yelled and cheered them on as these people were obviously about to suck that keg dry.

Ramone tapped me and pointed to the direction to our right where many hot women were dancing in the living room and shaking off their rears. Ramone just kept yelling stuff to them but I think it was because no one could hear him anyway because the house was way too loud with music and people already yelling.

We found Aaron sitting at a table nursing a beer. He was watching the girls dance toward him like they were trying to show the sexy right off of them. Naturally Ramone went to sit next to him. I was just about to sit on the available seat next to him when I saw Gina fanning me over from the kitchen. With Ramone's back still turned, I quickly joined her in the kitchen.

After Ramone sat down, he asked, "Where did Tyler go?"

Aaron, too busy watching the girls, took a swig and answered, "I don't know."

Gina pressed her back against the wall. She was wearing a genie costume for the night which looked more sexy than it should. Her bra looked like clamshells and I don't know what she was thinking showing off her petite belly for someone like Ramone to see. I should have warned her that he had a fetish for bellies.

She said to me, "You have to get me out of here!"

"Didn't you just get here? What about Ramone?"

"He's the reason! Tyler, when he asked me to go the party, two things occurred. One I was drunk and two he is your friend. I thought okay since I don't have a date and you and I weren't going together per say, then I guess one of Tyler's single friends should be fine. I swear to God I will never drink again!"

"He's not that bad. I mean, you just have to get used to him. Can you at least give him a chance?"

We looked back at Ramone and Aaron still sitting there in front of the girls. Ramone commented, "Look at those sexy bellies, boy! I just want to dig my face in it!"

Then Gina went back to me and said, "Tyler, he's a pig! Oh God, I wore this costume showing my belly! What if he tries to dig his face in it?"

"Oh come now, Gina. He's much too shy for that!"

After I said that, a fat girl sat on the seat I was originally going to take. She wasn't a grotesque fat girl or anything. Although her proportion was rather large, she did have a beautiful face with long, brown perm hair. I could even say that she would be quite the catch if she lost all that weight. Ramone didn't see the inner beauty she possessed. He just looked at her with a disgusted look on his face.

She said to them, "Hey boys, enjoying the party?"

“My God,” said Ramone with that disgusted look never wiping from his face.

“Would you care to dance?” she asked.

“Not with you. You’re too fat!” Ramone blurted out. It must have been the booze though nobody remembered him drinking anything.

“I wasn’t talking to you, asshole! I was talking to your hot friend sitting next to you.”

Then Ramone said, “Ew! He doesn’t want to dance with you!”

Aaron then got up and said, “Fuck him. Let’s dance!”

As they were going to the dance floor, she said to him, “I would never fuck him.”

“No girl would.”

Ramone just said to himself, “Aaron likes fat people. She smells like egg wash and broccoli with a side of rotten cheese.” Then he just started laughing to himself. He repeated, “Rotten cheese,” like that part of the sentence was the funniest part.

We saw a blockade of people hindering our view of Ramone. I took Gina by the hand, which felt nice, and bent low into the dancing people. I could see quick blurs of Ramone as we pass each frame of body stepping and twirling. There was some bodies stepping before us and my senses told me to look ahead of me. We almost bumped into them. I had to jolt Gina by the hand and I heard her make a quick yelp but she seemed to be laughing behind me. Maybe Ramone made a dumbass look.

Then a group just pushed us along. I wasn’t sure if it was part of the dance or they were pissed off at us. They just pushed us along as if fate and destiny meant we had to stand before Ramone, which we did. Ramone just stood there with a goofy look on his face and I started daydreaming about cartoons. Gina didn’t look much better. She had

this disgusted look of shock on her face. It was like a combination of shock and disgust and she just wouldn't stop staring at Ramone.

Then he spoke, which made things worse, and he said, "Did you try to run off on me?"

I looked over at Gina who wasn't much help. Seriously, I didn't know whether to bullshit or tell him the truth. I didn't care either way because, well, he's Ramone. You would get a goofy reaction to him either way. Finally, I decided to punish Gina for not saying anything.

"No, I was going to pass the dance along to you, Ramone!"

Ramone smiled and said, "Ah, isn't that nice?"

"Yeah, here Gina," I pulled Gina along who struggled and I was looking like a rapist even more as soon as her hands made contact with his body. It wasn't like I really pulled her in or anything. She just didn't want to touch him.

"TYLER!" she yelled.

"Okay," I said. "Have the time of your life!"

I started singing the song as the music stopped at that point and the crowd was loud anyway. Ramone just started moving around like he was trying to dance with her. Gina wasn't moving and didn't seem fazed by the amount of knee slapping he was giving her.

Then he said in his goofy romantic voice, "I think you're pretty."

"UGH! Tyler? Where's your date at? Did she come?"

Tyler turned and realized, "Oh yeah, where did she go?"

Chapter Sixteen

Skye found the punch bowl at the dining room of the house. She was just pouring herself a cup when her ex-boyfriend Keith showed up. He was well-built, a body builder, and was still wearing his tank top from the gym. Skye nearly dropped her cup when she saw him, as she was taken back by his image. He approached her with that debonair walk, but the silly baseball cap on his head bushed out his black hair and made him look like a bum.

“Skye,” He said, “I didn’t know you were here!”

“Keith! This is an unpleasant surprise. Where’s my child support?”

“The check’s in the mail, babe.”

“Yeah, okay, I heard that one before. Like seriously, you’re a bum. You probably aren’t working, are you?”

“I told you it’s tough finding a job.”

“Bullshit! You’re probably at home, playing video games, and banging that bimbo of a girl in your bed!”

“I told you. There was no other girl.”

“You’re such a liar!”

“Look, the guy who told you was probably my buddy Dave. He wanted you before I even married you. He feels he can blackmail me—”

“The GUY who told me was a girl! Get your facts straight. God, you can’t even lie right!”

“He must have started some chain reaction or something. The point is that I love you, always had, and I always wanted us to be a family. We can raise Anakin together.”

Then she looked at him with passionate bedroom eyes and said, “I really want that.”

“Let’s go make a family together!”

She could see the passion in his lips. If he was telling the truth or lying, he was really good at it. Skye drew in to his magnetism, and the two of them embraced with the biggest hug and pressure of a kiss two lost lovers could give. She shoved him along to the bedroom. They didn’t know what bedroom they were going into but there was an empty bed and lots of moonlight to see each other.

I saw the punchbowl. Not that I could make heads or tails at the time but I found my way into that room. A crowd of people was walking out laughing to the adjacent hall next to me. I saw some young teens giggling and looking inside a room. I thought I heard bedsprings. What I saw was a silhouette of some woman on top of some guy on the bed. I quickly jumped away out of the embarrassment of watching someone else having sex. The two teens seemed to enjoy it.

I walked off back to the dance floor and hoped that Skye was just dancing with the crowd of people. Come to think of it, I never really did a thorough look of the dancers on the floor. Skye could be anywhere. I did see Ramone and Gina still dancing and I decided to walk over to them just to talk.

I heard Ramone say out of context, “I have to poop! I love pooping. You love pooping?”

“Why don’t you go poop?”

“Okay, oh there’s Tyler! I gotta go poop!”

Ramone took off in a hurry while embarrassingly holding his butt. I think he was trying to be silly and impressive with Gina. She wasn’t having any of that. I had never seen a woman grunt and turn around so fast since overacting in a porno film. To think, I actually had to run to catch up with her. It didn’t help the fact that there were dozens of people dancing and pushing in my way.

As she made it outside, she only stopped because she was lost. I heard her yell, “Oh shit, where’s my car?”

“Gina! Listen, wait, I want to hang out with you!”

“I’m sorry, Tyler, we can go out to a movie sometime or something but I can’t keep being in the same house with that—that—”

“I get it! You just have to get to know him! He’s a harmless guy.”

“He has hepatitis!”

“Wear a rubber!”

“Bye Tyler.”

“Wait!”

“I’ll message you on Facebook. Don’t worry, we’ll make plans soon!”

Then as the complete shades of black covered her like a closing curtain, I decided to go back in the house to continue my search for Skye. A lot of people were acting like

a robot. God, I hated the robot! It was one of those dances that never failed to make you look like an idiot. I guess that's why I did it at school dances.

Then Aaron and his girl partner bumped into me. It was Aaron's way to get my attention. Their arms were swinging as he spoke, as he asked, "I'm going to ride home with Chris, okay?"

"Chris? Is that like one of your friends you ran into at the party. Where is he?"

"No, this is Chris," he nudged his head over to his girl partner. She just let off a flirtatious smile that went back on Aaron.

"Oh, Chris is a woman? OH! Hi Chris!"

I thought she said hi but the noise drowned it out. Then I asked Aaron, "Have you seen Skye?"

Aaron bent his ear over for another listen. Somehow my words didn't register the first time. Finally I yelled in repeat that probably sent shivers down his ear drums. He then nodded and actually released one of his partner's hands to point.

He replied, "Yeah, she's fucking some dude in the bedroom. Go take a look! Yeah, like everyone's watching, dude. She's got some big tits!"

Chris hit him.

"What? It's true!"

"I got big tits too, you know?"

"Why, is there another room?"

Suddenly she took him by the hand and they raced to another room and ruptured the hinges at the slam. This left me standing there with a circle of dancers not even turning around to greet me. I saw a lot of girls dancing together and a couple of guys just

hunched and faced together looking like a couple of football players dribbling an imaginary ball with their hands.

I walked right past them and headed to the hallway Aaron pointed to. The two teens had left but there was some guy jacking off and looking into the room. Maybe that was why the two teens left. I quickly jogged and looked into the room and saw Skye in the moonlight with her large breasts illuminating in the light. For that second, I just started thinking about that girl I went to middle school with. Those breasts took me back.

It didn't last long. The man lying on the bed shouted at me, "Hey jackoffs, get your own bitch!"

Then she immediately jumped at the door and shouted, "Get the fuck out of here!" And slammed the door in our faces. The jerkoff next to me looked like he was about to climax and I didn't want to look.

Then I heard Skye shout to him, "Did you just call me a bitch?"

I just smiled and said to myself, "At least I saw her breasts."

Then I heard Ramone say, "There you are!"

He found me in that hallway. I didn't have the heart to tell him Gina stormed out of the party. Even though he was a total dick to me, I still wanted to see him happy with a woman. Cornelius and I had tried, but we could never figure out who would make Ramone's definition.

"Let's go, I'm too old to be at this party anyway."

Ramone asked, "What happened to Gina—oh, I have to poop again."

"Go poop! Hurry up!"

Ramone ran off again looking like the toilet paper was stuck in his asshole. We did make it home that night. I immediately went to bed and plugged in my cell phone. I took one last look while charging. I brought up the gallery and stared endlessly at the picture of Char and I in a Mexican restaurant. We went to Mexican Town in Detroit. I always wanted to go there so for a big surprise, Char took me there on my birthday. She was really good at it too. All she did was drive me and every time I would ask, she would tell me it was a surprise.

The food was to die for. I always try for the latest fajitas. It was so long ago, I couldn't think of the restaurant's name. I think it was something in Mexican but I digress. Anyway, the food was extraordinary and Char and I had the best night of our lives.

After a while I put the phone down and rolled over in my empty bed. My thoughts of making it big with my book and winning back Char took me into dreaming.

Chapter Seventeen

The next morning I went to my car. It was just an SUV that defies the word gas hog. Since I got it, it felt like every other day I had to get gas and I only really drive it to work and back. My work was only seven miles and twenty bucks wasn't going to keep my SUV from feeding gas from every trip back. God forbid I travel to a store or something.

I turned the key in the ignition and after the thrill of the vehicle starting up without giving me a hassle, my gas was almost on the needle by E. Instantly I pulled out of the parking lot. It was so low that I was afraid I was going to run out of gas just in park.

Driving on the road wasn't much better. There were so many numbnuts on the road driving really slow and I was on a one lane road. I only had one more streetlight left and I saw a red light indicate on the dash that read "Check Fuel Gage" which was another way of saying "Get Gas Motherfucker".

Luckily I was able to idle next to a fuel pump. I checked my phone and was reluctant to find that I left early enough to still have time to spare to get to work. I ran into the actual gas station and immediately went to the clerk.

"Twenty bucks on three, please."

I handed him my debit card and the clerk, just making noises with his mouth, swiped the card and was about to use it as a credit card. Suddenly he stopped and for some reason my heart sank.

The clerk handed back my card and said, "I'm sorry. Your card was declined."

"That's impossible!" I said though I full well knew I was low on cash.

"Would you like me to run it again?"

"Yes!"

He swiped it through and he just shook his head. He said to me, "Declined again. Says you have insufficient funds. You have any cash?"

"No!"

How embarrassing. I walked out of that store without having a plan at all. Then I realized I had pop bottles in the vehicle. Quickly I rolled up a cart and searched under seats and in the trunk for as many pop cans as I could. I also had a trash bag in the trunk that I forgotten about.

As I rolled up the cart in the store, I felt a little panic with thoughts that these bottles might not be enough. It wasn't until I put the bottles away when I received five bucks for them. In the bag was a bunch of beer bottles and to my delight, they kept rolling in the machine and the ten cent meter kept increasing. I was so glad my friends always brought me beer.

Eleven dollars I gave the clerk. I never felt so happy to see a gas meter go up. It was enough to get me to work but probably not enough to get me back home. I would have to find someone to give me ten bucks or hope Cornelius was working.

The first person I passed was JR Thompson. He hated my guts so it wasn't worth asking him. Then I saw Debbie. I bummed too many cigarettes off her to ask her. She wanted me over in a hurry. My first initial thought was the building was closing down.

She said to me, "Tyler! Guess what! I was in John's office and he has a whole wall of surveillance cameras right in front of his desk!"

"So he's watching us?"

"YES!"

I could picture John sitting on his desk laughing hysterically in front of the wall of surveillance with his latte. Our evil company always had this thing about monitoring their employees' every move. Badges to move through every door, everything you log into required a name and password, and security cameras at every corner. This was a company high strung on catching any employee's capabilities. If John showed up and gave a half-assed hello, chances were that he caught you slacking off on the job.

Yet I didn't care for that whole monitoring at the time. I was on a mission. The only notable person I saw was Francisco. I talked and joked with him for a bit but I was just too afraid to ask him. Francisco was a man of building money, and he hoped to one day build enough money to support his family. I wanted to give him that gift with my book even though he would never read it. He strayed away from reading anything that went against his religion.

I said my goodbyes to him and he replied, "Thanks, Tyler!"

"Always a pleasure to see you, Francisco. You had made my day!"

He always had that laugh like a genuine man even though he had lied to me a few times. I blame myself for that because I used to pull practical jokes on him that I didn't

have any ASAPS for him to drive out. A few weeks ago I told him I was quitting and he and his wife actually believed it. When the time expired that I was supposed to be there, I was caught by his wife. I masqueraded that I was Tyler's brother but she wasn't as fond of me after that.

When I entered the pharmacy, Soosan was waiting for me by my table. She had this to say to me, "Tyler! Oh my Goodness! We were looking for you!"

"That's not a surprise." I swore, every time I took a piss, I was always coming out to people looking for me.

"John was asking about you."

"What, he didn't see me on his security cameras? I swear to God I don't care what that man sees on his—"I noticed Soosan giving me that troubled look. I just asked, "He's behind me, isn't he?"

And low and behold he was right there. I jumped back and gasped like I just saw the ghost of my dead ancestor or something. The man must have mastered the art of transporting because he wasn't there a second ago.

"John! Wonderful to see you here!"

John just cut the bullshit and said, "It's time for your evaluation."

I just couldn't move after that. After nearly badmouthing him, evaluating my work ethics wasn't something to look forward to.

Then he said to Soosan, "Soosan, run the dash until we get back."

We walked away from poor Soosan at the other side of that desk. She just waved her arms in the air and shouted in her Indian accent, "Oh my goodness!"

We sat on a table across from each other. We were centered in a room with nothing but tables and chairs. It wasn't a break room or anything. It was the room where they invited guests for meetings and serve salads and homemade cooking. Several of their guests always fell in love with the secretary's homemade meatballs. The ups (the word I called upper management) always encouraged her to make her delicious homemade meatballs. She did so she would always keep her job.

John mainly concerned the evaluation with, "You know corporate is going to be returning in a few weeks?"

"Yeah I know."

"I'm just giving you the heads up now, but they will be here all day. They will monitor everything and how it works. One slip up, they will fire you on the spot."

"Maybe they will see that we would need stuff changed or hire more people?"

John shook his head and said, "Corporate doesn't care about that. Let me explain to you how corporate works. Their only interest is money. Are you familiar with Joe Alotek?"

Now I had heard stories on Joe Alotek. If there was ever a person who cared so little of human life, it was Joe. He was pro-corporate. The worst part about him was that he traveled to each facility. He was the kind of man where everyone knew who he was when he walks into a building and everyone was willing to steer clear out of his way.

Many tales have said that he wasn't the one to mess around with. He doesn't have a sense of humor and had very little to say to the employees. It was rumored that he fired his own father and stepbrother. Only one still talked to him. I'm assuming it was his dad. If that wasn't bad, he fired an entire facility because he didn't like how things

were ran. He was what the ancient Indians would call *Athamavillathu manusian* or The Man With No Soul.

“I heard of him.”

“Well, if we don’t get productivity up, he is coming here. He’s not the man you want to come to this facility. I highly suggest you, as the lead, get yourself and your crew up to speed, or I’m sad to say, I can’t have you as our lead anymore. Is that understood?”

How could I argue with that? I just nodded my head and I didn’t have much to say on that issue. I felt John was a little worried about the situation even through that monotone skull.

Then John asked, “Is there anything else you would like to add to this?”

“Yeah,” I swallowed, “you wouldn’t happen to have ten bucks, would you?”

I slept in my SUV that night. Thunder crashed and heavy rain pocked my windows and suddenly it was like hearing pellets off my roof. I huddled under some grocery bags and some scattered paper littered in the back of my SUV. It was going to be a long night and my cell phone had a half a battery left and no charger.

The next morning I rolled over and saw that my cell phone had died! Immediately I started thinking I was late to work. Quickly, I rushed in the back door that took me to the drivers’ area. I looked up at the clock and I had two hours of sleep left. With that breather out of the way, I went into the bathroom because I had to go so bad.

My watered eyes stared at my pasty complexion in the mirror. To make matters worse, my breath stunk so bad, I could feel the putrid smell coming out of my own breath. I definitely needed a shower since I smelled like mustard and my feet reeked of bread.

It wasn't until I walked out of that bathroom when I saw the most beautiful girl walk in the driver's area. The first thing I noticed was her black hair. It was so black that it just stuck out there. She smiled like the girl next door as she walked in from the slider door. She was carrying a cart full of totes behind her. I noticed her brown skin which was a turn-on for me because I was always a sucker for brown women. Something about the mystery of the color of their nipples just always put a large rise in my levis.

"Hi!" she smiled. She said hi first, always a plus.

My response back was, "Hi!" And then my conscience said to me, *You don't even help her with her stuff?*

Then I asked, "Did you need help with your stuff?"

"No, I got it. Thanks!"

"I never seen you here before. Are you new?"

"I just started like a few weeks ago. I'm helping out my mom and dad."

Then she laughed like what she just said to me was embarrassing or something. I countered it with, "You have a beautiful laugh."

"Thank you," she blushed.

"I'm so sorry, I'm just blunt and honest. I always feel that the best way to talk to a woman is to always compliment her. Not that I compliment all the time, I'm just saying."

"No, that's ok!"

We smiled in kindness and stopped to look at each other. For some reason, looking at her I just felt immediately comfortable. I then got the courage to ask, “Listen, maybe sometime we can—“

Then Cornelius barged in the door. I gave in to defeat.

Cornelius said, “Oh! Tyler! There you are. I was looking for you. Check this out! Our friend Xavi is having his cousin fly in from Spain to marry a guy for ten thousand dollars just to get a green card. Guess who Xavi chose? Ramone.”

“This cousin is a girl, right?”

“Yeah, I saw her picture! She’s hot, dude!”

“She’s hot? Wouldn’t that lessen Ramone’s chances?”

“No, dude, she’s desperate to marry a guy for a green card! She’ll probably live with him, give him a fuck, and who knows!”

“So when are we going to meet his future ex-wife?”

“That’s the thing, dude! We take his date out and you, me, Xavi and whoever else all go to the Christmas Wrestling Show, and dude we can all wear Santa hats! We’re going to heckle the hell out of them!”

Then he added, “Oh Xavi’s only concern is if he is going to say MEELLLKKK on his date? That’s actually his only concern about Ramone. So you think he’s going to say it?”

Now I recalled every moment Ramone used that embarrassing line. The first was at the supermarket and he was yelling MEEELLLKKK as he was standing in front of the glass of dairy products. I heard from the grapevine that a girl he dated stopped talking to him because he thought it was cute to say MEEELLLKKK! Ramone had a one-track

mind. Once he thought something was funny, he had a tendency to always want to perform it.

Then I answered, “No, I don’t think so.”

“Fresh! Then he’s in! We are going to the Christmas Show with Ramone and his new date!”

“That sounds like a plan. Ah, you know what, I need a date.” I turned around to the girl I just spoke to behind me who heard every word of it.

I asked her, “Hi, what’s your name again?”

“Suzanne!”

“Hi, I’m Tyler!”

“Hi, Tyler!”

“Listen would you be my date for this wrestling show? It’s around Christmas.”

“Okay! Should I give you my number?”

“Yeah, I’ll give you mine!”

As I walked over to a table to write it down, I heard Cornelius say, “You are the man, dude!”

It earned me the ten dollars to gas up my car.

Chapter Eighteen

Thanks to Cornelius's funding for my gas, I was able to make it home. That night I nervously stared at my cell phone. I wanted to text Suzanne so bad but I didn't know what to say and my nerves got the best of me. I paced around the apartment with my cell phone at hand. Occasionally I would stop, stare at my phone again, and just pace around some more.

Then I decided to play a quick video game while my cell phone was on standby on the arm of my couch. True, I was a big pussy but for some reason I didn't want to screw it up with this girl. Then I just got impatient with myself and picked up the cell phone again and breathed.

Then, low and behold, she texted me! She texted *Hi Tyler* and that was it. I was elated. With a big smile on my face, I texted back *Hi* and waited for a response. Then I just waited. And waited. Her response sure took a long time. I didn't want to look like an asshole so I just paced around again until I got a response. She just texted *How are you?* I just stood there looking at my phone like somehow this was a hard question. To keep the conversation going, I texted back *I'm fine, how are you?* Then I started to get worried that I was boring or something.

She did text back something interesting, though, which was *I'm fine, just feeling a little lonely*. I took that as a hint and decided to feel my way in to see if she was implying

something. Not being creative or even bold, I text back *Why are you lonely?* Then I played the waiting game as I paced back and forth in my apartment. Either she was typing something long, the message took too long to send, or she was ignoring me altogether because that response took a long time to send back.

Finally I just sprawled out in my bed. I didn't want to go to bed or anything but I was antsy of her response, or the lack of a response that I just slipped under my covers in hopes of my phone's ringtone to go off. Sure enough, I heard the double buzz, and I instantly checked my phone and saw her leaving this message: *My now ex moved out of the state without discussing it with me first and now I'm all alone in this apartment. I just wish there was someone here with me.*

I just looked at the message. There was like a billion things I could say at this point. It was time to make my move. There was something I had to know. I texted her: *So you're single?* I noticed there was a SENDING icon next to the message. It was taking longer than expected. I waved the phone high in the air just to search for a relay point so the message would send. Once I saw that it sent, I breathed in relaxation.

Not even a minute rolled by and she texted this: *Yeah and I'm really horny right now.* A smile shone across my face, a tingly sensation vibrated in my shorts, and I got the nerve to type: *Want to come to my place?* SENDING. I waved the phone in the air again and it still kept saying SENDING.

"Come on, you stupid phone!" I yelled.

SENDING.

I kept waving it and waving it and it just wouldn't send!

Then she texted: *Can I come to your place?*

It was still sending!

I tried to text again but I got a FAILED TO SEND message to go along with it. I had to get out of that apartment. My signal kept failing the longer I was in it.

I ran outside in the dark to the parking lot right outside my apartment. I felt it was far enough away to get some kind of signal. Then she sent another text: *I guess not*. My texts still wouldn't reach out to her.

Finally I just called and it was too muffled and the more I kept trying to call for her, the more I realized how useless it was. I cried out her name several times and constantly she would say, "Hello?" It was followed with a lot of static and muffling. It was useless.

"I need to climb a cell tower!" I said out loud to myself. I was getting desperate at this point. Just off in the distance, with a blinking light in the horizon, was my answer. I ran as fast as I could to the cell tower.

She sent me another text: *Sorry, I guess you're weirded out by me. I should probably get to bed.*

"No! No! No!" I yelled. "Don't go to bed!"

Even though I was winded, I got to the cell tower sooner than I expected. The message still wasn't sending so I began climbing in hopes to get a relay on my phone. Halfway up climbing, I started realizing how pathetic this was, but I was desperate to reach Suzanne some way or another.

Then she texts: *Goodnight, Tyler*. What made that heartbreaking was the period at the end. It wasn't even an explanation point. True, we sound different when we text

but the fact that she took the time to put a period at the end just made this whole situation worse for me.

I tried to text: *Wait!* As I held out my phone in the air to the full moon lighting me from above, I watched the LCD screen in hopes that the message would finally send. It just kept saying SENDING and I stretched my arm as far up in the air as I could.

FAILED TO SEND.

“FUUUUUUCCCCCKKKKKK!” I howled to the moon.

Then I got another text. I said out loud to myself, “Did she get it? Did she get my text?”

It was Ramone.

He texts: *Wanna go to Rally's with me?*

I breathed out in frustration and texted back: *Sure.*

The message sent.

Sadly, I started to regret sending him my text. I was in the passenger seat of Ramone's car as he loudly complained about the drivers on the road. Suzanne wasn't returning any of my texts. She must have really gone to bed.

Ramone shouted, “Here they go, MOVE, you pickles!” He started mocking, “Hey honey, I hear Ramone is going to Rally's! Let's tell all our friends to go on a drive and slow him down from getting there! Gee, that would be great, honey! MOVE YOUR ASSES! God I hate people! Why do they always gotta be around?”

“Suzanne isn't returning my texts.”

“Ooo Suzanne! Pacqui is in town but of course she won’t go out with Ramone! God, I’m trying to text Xavi and, here he goes, won’t let me take her out at least for one night before wrestling!”

“Didn’t she just get home? Doesn’t she need to spend time with family first?”

“I don’t care! If she wants to marry me, we need to go out.”

“Yeah,” I said sarcastically, “You’re a real prize.”

“Can you imagine? I’m getting married. I’m getting married and I’m getting ten thousand dollars! I’m going to tell her too. If we get married, it’s going to be for life. If she’s going to marry me, it’s going to be that she’s going to be with me.”

“I don’t think that’s what the ten thousand dollars is for.”

“Oh man, you know what? I’m going to have to buy her a car!”

“Why would you turn around and buy her a car with the ten thousand dollars she just gave you?”

“Yeah, you’re right. I’m going to have to fly us to Florida to meet my parents. Then I have to fly my parents in for the wedding. Then to pay for the honeymoon and I still have to buy her a car!”

I gave up from there. Let his stupid ass buy her a car. From the look of things, he’d run of that ten thousand dollars before he even got married. Still, I hadn’t met this Pacqui and Cornelius really talked her up like she was model material. If this chick really did marry him, I started thinking what their life would be like.

I could just see Ramone coming home with his dollar store apron like he was wearing a suit and hanging it up on a rack next to his door. He would say, “Hi honey, baby bear is home!” This girl was significantly older than him at about ten years.

A hot, young looking Spanish girl with a slim body and long dark hair would rush out to greet him. She would say, “Honey, you’re home! I missed you so much!”

Ramone holds up his phone to show her and said, “Look what I took in front of the mirror today. I look good!” It was a picture on his phone of him without his shirt.

“You look so sexy without your shirt! Wait, are you taking selfies for Facebook again? What did I tell you about that? I’m tired of chasing all those girls away. You stop that, mister!”

“I just can’t help it when I’m this damn good looking! Aaron ain’t got nothing on me, boy!”

“You’re the sexiest man alive!”

“Give me some MEEELLLKKK!”

“Milk or breast milk?”

Ooo breast milk! Show Baby Bear that sexy belly!”

Pacqui lifts up his shirt and Ramone just gives this goofy face and lets out an unexpected fart. He then covered it up by saying, “My butt just got excited!”

Pacqui laughs, “Oh Ramone, you’re so funny! That’s what I love about you!”

That was about as far as I got into thinking about that scenario when we got to Rally’s. Ramone complained about the pickles in his sandwich by saying, “Ew, pickles? I hate pickles!”

“I’ll eat the damn pickles!” I said.

“You’ll eat anything because you’re fat!”

“Thanks for reminding me.”

We walked away from the concession stand when Ramone blurted out, “Oh man, that means she’s going to have to live with me! I’m going to tell her, too! I can’t pay for a family making ten bucks an hour!”

“I just don’t get it,” I said. “Why aren’t women swooning to you? You’re such a catch, Ramone!”

“Fuck you, cow slop!”

Chapter Nineteen

It was a tradition we all just started: if we couldn't make a wrestling show all year, at least make it to the Christmas show. This year's tagline was Season's Beatings and it was called A Hooplah Christmas. I didn't know much about it other than wrestlers beating the shit out of each other in the ring. Somehow I thought they would be wearing Santa hats but we were the only schmucks that seemed to be wearing them.

As promised, Xavi brought Pacqui to be chaperoned by Ramone and I was fortunate enough to have Suzanne as my date that night. Cornelius left the wife and kids at home but seemed to be content at having Xavi as his date.

There were five rows of classroom chairs lined up around the ring. We took the first row on the far left because Cornelius figured we would be in on more of the action. Unlike the last show we went to, this place was very well lit and surprisingly more clean. We were hoping it made more of an impression on the women but somehow we didn't think so.

Cornelius was right about Pacqui. She was gorgeous and came off as a classy woman. What I didn't know until that night was that she didn't speak a lick of English. She only spoke her native tongue of Spanish. Often her and Xavi would communicate through Spanish especially if she needed whatever Ramone said translated to her. In fact,

it was hard to tell if she was into Ramone or not because her and Xavi communicated with each other so often.

One of the wrestlers, possibly on steroids, with spiky orange hair and a tattoo that said BIG MERFF jumped on the apron and faced us. He flexed his chest muscles and yelled out, “You like that, ladies? BIG MERFF!”

“God,” said Suzanne, “sit your ass down, jeez. Nobody wants to look at your sweaty body.”

I laughed, “You fit right in with our crowd!”

“Really?”

“Yeah, we like to heckle all the wrestlers when they come out. Our goal is to make them pissed off at us by the end of the show.”

“Are you serious? Have they got pissed off at you?”

“Every show! I had a wrestler throw me right off the seat before.”

“I don’t want some wrestler throwing me off this seat. I’m too lazy to be getting up.”

“I doubt they throw off women.”

Then an announcer from out of sight said, “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the third annual Hooplah Christmas Show!”

The audience cheered. Suzanne commented, “There were two more of these? Why?”

“Remember all donations go to the homeless. Please deposit all can goods at the door. With that said, please welcome Truth Martini and the House of Truth’s divas!”

Suzanne asked, “That’s his name? Truth Martini?”

Cornelius and Ramone shouted together, “HOOPLAH!”

“What the fuck is hooplah?” asked Suzanne.

“I have no idea,” I answered.

From out of the curtains came Truth Martini holding his House of Truth book like it was the Bible. He escorted two gorgeous girls: one being Randi West who looked a lot like my ex Cheryl and the other was Ramone’s crush Scarlett. That red headed beauty might as well not be wearing anything because that outfit that she had on, with the blue bra that served the only purpose of hiding her nipples and the panties that did a good job hiding her crotch, but from behind, it only hid her butt crack and spread her cheeks like wildfire.

Ramone yelled out to Cornelius and Xavi, “Look at that ass, boy! She has a nice, apple ass! I’d dig my face in it, boy!”

I looked over and saw what he was talking about. Scarlett just went under the ropes but continued to be bent over to the boys so they could admire the work she put into her ass. She turned around like some sex machine, her face looking as if she wanted to orgasm, and she rubbed up from her leg all the way to feel her chest. She tossed her long red hair from side to side.

Suzanne commented, “Slut.”

All Ramone could say was, “Look at that sexy belly!”

Cornelius chanted, “Take your clothes off! Take your clothes off!”

Xavi jumped up to the ropes just to get her picture. Ramone stood next to him and shouted out to her, “Breast MEEEELLLLKKK!”

“Oh my God,” said Suzanne. “Isn’t that his date sitting right there?”

I noticed when Xavi went to go back to sit down, the two of them conversed with one another in Spanish. I answered back, “Yeah. I just hope she isn’t understanding what he’s saying.”

“She may speak a different language, but she’s not dumb!”

Then Truth spoke to Ramone and Cornelius saying, “Hey, hey, hey! You two go back to masturbating in your bedrooms. Just take one of our brochures. You can jack off to Scarlett right on the cover! You can watch her hang off my balls!”

Cornelius bent over to me and said, “Let’s shout Clash pays more!”

“What’s Clash?” asked a rather lost Suzanne.

We both shouted it anyway. This made Truth rather perturbed. Since he had the microphone, he was able to overpower us with his voice. He was right up close too. With his long, hippie hair and big dark glasses better seen at Halloween stores, and looking more like a rock star than a wrestler, shadowed over us with his presence. All of us smiled up at him while he had something to say.

He said to us, “Let me tell you something about Clash, boys. If you like Clash so much, get your happy asses out of this arena and go to Melvindale where they would love to see dicksuckers like you. Oh, but ladies, you can stay. I would be proud to have you two ladies be my divas. In fact, why are you hanging around these bums anyway?”

Suzanne and I smiled at each other. I looked over to Pacqui who didn’t look over to Ramone. She probably had trouble translating what he was saying.

Later that evening, we were watching a match involving STD and Fag Dragon vs. Dickie Bronson and Jaimy Cox. You can imagine the puns we shouted out there. Cornelius and I chanted, “STD! STD! STD!”

Then Fag Dragon shouted at us, “Shut the fuck up!”

“Fuck you, Fag Dragon!” I yelled back.

“No wonder they threw you off the seat!” commented Suzanne.

STD threw Jaimy Cox over the apron and landed on my feet. Cornelius whipped out his cell phone to take a pic and Xavi laid out on the floor in a pose next to Jaimy Cox’s fallen body. When I looked over, Suzanne was walking to the double doors. I followed after her.

Meanwhile, Truth was watching us from the curtains. Scarlett was right next to him with her hand firmly placed on his chest. This must have been a daily thing for him because he wasn’t the bit fazed that this extremely hot girl was all over his jock.

He just said to her, “What a bunch of assholes. I think one of them is stupid enough to try and join us. I say we need to make a trap, wouldn’t you say?”

Scarlett just smiled at him and the two of them looked at each other as if awaiting a kiss.

Suzanne was warming herself from the cold when I joined her outside. She looked cute, especially when she smiled at me and asked, “What?” like she had something on her face. I stuffed my hands in my trench coat pockets and tipped the ears in my fedora. It wasn’t completely cold out, per se, but it was cold enough to feel like cold crystals on parts of our bodies.

I just replied with, “Nothing. You just look so beautiful standing there.” I’m very blunt. Over the years I discovered that there was nothing wrong with complimenting a woman. Rule of thumb: get to know them first. I learned the hard way that complimenting a woman before you even learn one thing about them could lead to lots of trouble. Unless you care what people think, you may risk her telling everyone what a creep you are.

She just replied with, “Thank you!” and gave out a playful laugh. Then she said, “I’m just not very good in a room full of people. I just don’t really like people, I guess.”

“Oh, I hate people! I used to work retail.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, and the amount of stupid people I get is amazing. Not only that, but people like to bitch about the dumbest shit! Like I had this one customer go off on me because we ended our sale the day before! It’s like, isn’t there more pressing matters in life than getting ten percent off? Like, I don’t know, is my mom going to have breast cancer today? Like that would be something to worry about, right? Not ‘I can’t believe I missed a sale, now my life is ending!’”

“Oh my God, yeah, I hate stupid people. I almost hate people in general. I don’t know. I just get so irritated when I drive out to these homes and I get bitched at about something that’s the pharmacy’s problem. Like seriously, dude, I don’t know what to tell you. I just deliver your shit, have you sign the papers, and I go to the next home. You know what I’m saying? I don’t know, I’m just more of a sit at home and watch movies kind of a girl.”

“That is awesome! So that means I don’t have to worry about taking you out and impressing you?”

“No, I just like to sit at home, watch movies, maybe smoke a joint or two, and sometimes have sex, you know?”

“I feel like I found the woman of my dreams!” I wasn’t lying.

“Speaking of smoking a joint, you mind if I smoke in my car? You can come with me if you want?”

“Can I smoke too?”

“Sure!”

“YES!”

After two puffs I was in love with this girl. I hadn’t smoked weed in twenty years. It may sound kind of strange, suddenly revisiting my youth, but I felt alive again. Not just with getting high, although that’s a throwback, but talking with this girl and the flowing conversations we were having while smoking that joint really helped me realize that I wasn’t completely lost in the realm of women. I was highly relaxed, as most weed usually does, but I was also relaxed with her.

“I love weed!” I told her.

“Me too! Like seriously, sometimes I just smoke it like all day. Like if I had a million dollars right now, like, I don’t know man. I would probably buy like a huge mountain of weed and just smoke the shit out of it.”

I laughed really hard at that one. It was probably the weed that made me laugh harder but I thought it was seriously funny. I was high so I didn't care whether she thought I was weird or not.

As she took several puffs and a long toke, I said to her, "If my book makes a ton of money, I'll make that happen for you!"

"Thank you! What is your book about? I meant to ask you that."

"It's called Anarchy. It's about the Government taking over our lives and the people overthrow them."

"Oh really? That sounds like that one movie I watched. I forgot the name of it."

"Shit! There's already a movie like that?"

"I think so. I'll have to look that up."

Then we both sighed and embraced the quiet moments. In other words, we were enjoying our high. I had this feeling that came over me like the weed is about to take control of my mind. That was the defining part when you know you smoked some good weed.

Then I started seeing cartoon characters singing at me. My vision was overtaken by sliding cartoon wallpaper with little animals lined in a row singing. There were chipmunks, turtles, an elephant, and others my brain wasn't registering at the time. The art style reminded me of those old cartoons before I was born.

They were singing, "Tyler! Tyler! He's a little faggot! Tyler! Tyler! He has a little dick!" Then they started laughing.

The chipmunk pointed at me and said in a chipmunk voice, "You suck turtle balls!"

Then the turtle laughed, poking his head in and out of his shell, and said, “Turtle balls! Heh! Heh! Heh!”

Then the chipmunk said, “Look at her! She wants you!”

I looked at her and she was just finished her smoking her blunt and smiled at me. I smiled back because I was high and the chipmunk continued, “She wants to have sex with you! Oh, but there’s a problem! You have erectile dysfunction!” The chipmunk looked like he wanted to laugh.

Now back to the wallpaper and the animals saying, “Erectile Dysfunction! Heh! Heh! Heh!”

The chipmunk went further by saying, “How are you going to please her if you can’t get it up?”

Then the animals started singing, “Dysfunction! Dysfunction! Erectile Dysfunction! Dysfunction! Dysfunction! You can’t get it up!”

The cartoon animals laughed.

I was interrupted by Suzanne asking me, “You want another joint?”

I looked at her with a puzzled look.

She laughed, “I was asking if you want another joint?”

“Oh, sorry!”

“It’s okay!”

“I was just enjoying my high. You think we should go back in there?”

“You really want to go back in there?”

I thought about it for a moment. Then I said, “Not really!”

The two of us smoked another joint.

After the show, Dickie Bronson approached Ramone. It wasn't aggressive or anything, he was relaxed and approached him like he was not his wrestler self. Dickie tipped his head up, gesturing a "what up" to him, and Ramone exchanged the glance.

Dickie said to him, "I like what you did to our Facebook page."

Ramone set up his own wrestler page on Facebook. He proved that he was more of a fan than me, Xavi, and Cornelius all put together. Sometimes he would host events like people voting for wrestler of the month. Cornelius and I laughed at the bullshit we saw with the brackets. He would have these voting brackets that would update to see which wrestler was ahead of who. A lot of times he would check his phone and remind everyone when the voting ends. For a while, I thought there wasn't a chance in hell any of these wrestlers would take this buffoon seriously. Oddly enough, I was wrong. They loved him for it. In fact, they love his drive, his motivation and especially his love for the profession. He shared the same love as the rest of the pack.

"Thanks," responded Ramone.

"Listen, uh, I heard you were interested in training with us."

"Yeah, I am."

Keep in mind, during his conversation with Dickie, his date Pacqui was taking pictures with wrestlers behind him. It wasn't just pictures really and it was said later that she really seem to be digging Jaimy Cox. She rubbed the greasy sweat right off his chest. If she was in any other position that night, she might have went home with him. She modeled in front of that camera, sometimes sticking her leg out in front of his and held on

close to where it was close for her to kiss his cheek. Jaimy didn't resist either. Why would he? Pacqui was attractive enough. Not only that, but considering she was Ramone's date that night was a bonus to every wrestler in that arena.

"Well hey, uh, Truth is willing to train you for a reasonable price if you want to come up and see us sometime. He's very flexible and he's an excellent trainer, dude."

"Okay, I'll check him out."

At about a quarter past nine, Suzanne dropped me off at my apartment. I knew she wasn't coming in. It was late and we both needed rest more than a fuck. I also didn't feel prepared because of my problem.

I turned to her and asked anyway, "You want to come in?"

"No," she said, "I'm so fucking tired. I can probably stop over next weekend or something. I just have to check my schedule."

"Great! Thanks for getting me high, by the way."

"Oh, no problem. I enjoyed getting high with you."

We laughed and we stopped. Normally this was a moment for a kiss. We looked at each other passionately. She smiled but it didn't follow with the awkwardness that we experienced outside the building. I embraced her and chickened out with a hug. If there was anything I learned about dating, it was never to kiss on the first date. Of course, a lot of girls expected it but what I learned was that if she went out to screw some other guy because she didn't kiss you, then she wasn't worth it in the first place.

We said our goodbyes outside the car. I watched as she drove off and my heart felt numb and sinking into my chest. For the first time I didn't know what that meant. I concluded that I found the girl I had feelings for and I had another date with her next weekend. When I saw the taillights disappear in the thickness of the dark, I cheered to myself and went into my apartment a happy man.

Ramone's departure was a different story. Cornelius dropped him off in front of his apartment while he sat in the backseat with his arm around Pacqui. Xavi was in the backseat with him encouraging him to be a little more romantic.

Cornelius turned to him and said, "Alright bro, thanks for coming out."

"Well, I guess its time for me to make my promos!" laughed Ramone.

"Puedo darle un abrazo?"

Throughout the night, Ramone was using his cell phone to translate her Spanish into English. Unfortunately for him, his battery was low and he really wanted to get back in his apartment.

Instead, he said to her, "Goodbye to you too? I better go! See you Xavi!"

"See you, my man! Churros!"

"Churros!" laughed Ramone. "Cornelius?"

"Alright, bro! Check you out!"

Ramone gave a slight hug to Pacqui that was more of pat on the back. He got out of the car and she was on her way out with him. By the time she squeezed her way out of the car, she saw that Ramone was not standing there waiting for her. She looked around,

confused. Once she heard the squeak of the door, she looked up to see one closing at the apartment.

The translation to what she said to him was, “Can I give you a hug?”

Chapter Twenty

“You just ran to your apartment?” I asked, in shock of his stupidity. Yes, Ramone had been stupid plenty of times before, but this time his stupidity reached a new low.

Cornelius was with us too. We were having breakfast at the Coney Island: the same restaurant my brothers and I met our dad. Elaina was working again that day too. She was also serving us. We were just looking at our menus when Ramone broke the news of his lack of dating skills.

“Yeah, Tyler! I did, now will you shut up?” said Ramone.

“I thought you said you knew how to date? Dating 101...”

“Will you shut up? God I hate Tyler! Why did we bring him?”

“You’re the one who texted me, stupid.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m sorry.”

Then Cornelius said, “Well, she’s looking on Craig’s List for a man to marry for ten thousand dollars now.”

“It could have been Ramone,” I said.

Ramone commented, “I know. Now she’s going to find some loser ass thug who is going to beat on her and she’s going to be wishing she married a nice guy like Ramone who wouldn’t beat on her!”

“You tell her, Ramone!” I said.

“That’s okay,” said Ramone, “I’m going to the House of Truth and see if they can help me become a wrestler. I’m just going to focus on that now.”

I asked, “How much is that going to run you?”

“About two thousand dollars. They might slash me a better deal.”

“How the hell are you going to get that kind of money?”

“I have ways.”

I turned to Cornelius and said, “Cornelius?”

Cornelius said, “Hey, if you give me a blowjob, I’ll give you five bucks a shot. My wife doesn’t give me one so I have to get it from somewhere.”

“No, that’s okay,” said Ramone.

Then I exclaimed, “That’s a great idea, Cornelius! Ramone, if you blow Cornelius four hundred times you will get that money!”

“No, that’s you Tyler!” said Ramone.

“Blow him, Ramone. Blow Cornelius. It’s a small price to pay to achieve your dream!”

“God I hate you! Why did we bring him again?”

Then our waitress Elaina approached our table. She asked us, “Are you boys ready to order?”

“Oh I’m sorry,” said Cornelius. “Just give me a couple minutes!”

“Okay, I’ll be back in a couple minutes,” she said, and passed me this flirtatious look that even Ramone caught.

“You should ask her out,” said Ramone.

“My brothers said the same thing. I’m seeing what’s going on with Suzanne now so I don’t know.”

“Then I’m going to ask her out then.”

“Ramone, would you please stop—”Then I thought about it and said, “wait, it’s you. You’re no threat to me. Go ahead. Ask her.”

Ramone started jotting his phone number on a napkin. Cornelius and I looked at each other knowing full well what was going on in our minds.

I just had to ask, “Seriously, Ramone? You’re just going to give her your phone number?”

“Yep.”

Elaina came back and asked, “Are you guys ready now or you want me to come back?”

Cornelius said, “I think I’m ready now. I’ll just have your barbeque chicken wrap and your chili cheese fries.”

“I just want a chocolate milkshake,” I said.

“What?” said a surprised Ramone.

“I’m not hungry.”

Elaina went to Ramone and said, “And you?”

“I just want your patty melt and some fries.”

“Is that it?” she asked.

“Oh, and I want to give you this.”

Ramone handed her the napkin with his phone number on it. She took it without really acknowledging it. She did ask, “What is this?”

“You’ll see,” laughed Ramone with that goofy look on his face.

“Your food will be out in a few minutes, boys.”

She left the table but was out of Ramone’s view. It was starting to become obvious that Ramone was nervous after giving her his number.

Ramone asked me, “Did she look at it?”

I was watching her. I didn’t want to give him an answer until I knew for sure. Unfortunately for him, she did look at it, crumbled it, and threw it in the trash.

“Well,” I said, “I think you should have given her the number AFTER we got our food.”

My brother Manny opened the door to Sam’s apartment and invited me in. They were expecting me as they invited me over via Facebook for an all night drinking binge. The half gallon rum was already set out on the table with my very own glass waiting for me. Manny did the honors of playing bartender and poured me a drink. We clinked glasses and went bottoms up.

Finally, I asked, “Where’s Sam?”

“He’s in the other room being asked a million questions by Becky.”

His girlfriend Becky was very annoying. Whenever there was an event, she would ask a million questions and sometimes ask the same questions twice. She was one of those people that wants to know all the facts.... Twice. Like Cheryl, they accepted her as part of the family so in the event her and Sam break up, she probably isn’t going anywhere.

Then I said to my brother, "I got a new girlfriend."

"You lucky dog!" Manny exclaimed. "So you're finally getting over Char."

"Well, not fully."

"Who is this girl? You got a picture of her?"

I showed him the picture at the wrestling event last night. It was about the only picture I had besides her Facebook page. Manny's eyes widened and approved with the nod of his head.

"She's cute!" He said. "Let me show your brother."

He took my phone and went to his room. Sam was still on the phone. Manny shouted to him, "Hey, get off this phone and see this picture of Tyler's new girlfriend."

"Well, not a girlfriend yet." I said.

I heard Sam say, "Give me a few minutes!"

Manny then said, "Tell that bitch you'll call her back and check out this picture of Tyler's new girlfriend, uh, what's her name again?"

"Suzanne!"

"Suzanne! She even has a cute name."

Sam chuckled, "Becky said fuck off."

"Hi Becky!" laughed off Manny.

Later Sam sat us down in front of his forty inch HD TV he liked to show off for some funny movie he just saw. It didn't matter because Manny and I didn't pay any attention. Manny was too busy asking questions about Suzanne to fully give two shits about what was on Sam's precious HD TV. It was blatantly obvious that Manny was a

tad jealous of Sam's TV given that he still owed child support. If it wasn't for that, he would have an HD TV bigger than his.

"So where did you meet this girl?" asked Manny.

"I met her at work. It's really cool because I just flat out asked her out on a date."

"You got some balls. So what have you two done on your date?"

Sam was getting agitated.

"We just talked in her car, smoked some weed..."

"You smoked some weed? Where is it?"

Sam pressed pause and shouted, "Are you guys going to watch this?"

Then I answered, "I don't have any on me right now."

"Well, invite her over!"

"She's probably sleeping now. She works midnights."

Sam pressed stop to a commercial on TV and said, "You guys are fucking dicks!"

I noticed on the commercial was an ad for an erectile dysfunction medication. As Sam and Manny sorted out their differences, I paid close attention. I certainly didn't want to lose this information, in fact, it could be a sign.

It was a stupid commercial too. Basically, it showed some forty-year-old guy out on some date with this girl and some narrator talking about their new product called Dymindall. They just hugged on each other in some car, going boating together for some reason, and the narrator just talked about the effects of erectile dysfunction using words that would make children laugh.

Manny just said, "Oh, sorry Sam, I forgot you wanted to show us some movie."

“It’s not some movie—you know what, fine, just get it out of your system and then we can play the movie! Tyler’s banging some chick named Suzanne—GO!”

“Did you bang her yet?” asked Manny.

I was too busy paying attention to the commercial. However, I did find out that it was stocked in some dietary stores. Unfortunately I don’t know any around me.

“Tyler?” asked Sam.

I zapped out of it.

Sam laughed, “Were you really into that erectile dysfunction commercial?”

“It was educational.”

Manny changed the subject by saying, “Oh should we tell him about Cheryl and Tyrone?”

“What about them?” I asked.

Apparently they heard them fighting again not too long ago. Sam and Manny took me two apartments down with our drinks still in our hands. You could hear the ice tingling a mile away. Slowly we opened the door that led to the hallway of doors. Cheryl and Tyrone’s was the door on the left. We crept in, slowly, with the ice making more noise than we did. Sam and Manny hung back behind me as I listened in on the door. Sam whispered over to me and I relayed that I didn’t hear anything.

Then I tried something that I never tried before: I peered through the peephole. At first it was dark but I thought I could make something out. It was only until the door flung open of what I was making out—It was Tyrone.

“Tyrone!” I shouted.

“Tyler! You just happen to be in the area?”

I could tell my brothers were grinding their teeth at this point. It was safe to say that the next response had to be my own because they weren't much help.

I just responded, "Yeah, uh, I thought I saw a spider or something at your door here. It's gone now!"

"A spider, huh?" Tyrone didn't look convinced.

"Yeah, big one."

Then Tyrone smiled and exclaimed, "Get your asses in here, man. Come on in!"

He seemed relatively happy for three guys spying on his apartment. I looked over to my brothers with their drinks squarely palmed in their hands. They just walked over to me as if to follow me in the apartment. The three of us walked in and closed the door.

The first thing that grabbed my attention was Cheryl standing there with the bathroom door open. At first I thought she was just airing out the stink but she seemed to be watching something in there. Then I just thought that maybe Tyrone took a huge dump and it birthed into the blob or something.

I had to ask, "Why are you standing by the bathroom, Cheryl?"

"I'm watching Tyrone's niece?"

Sam had to ask, "You're watching his niece? What is she not potty trained yet?"

"Yeah, she's only nine-years-old."

"Nine?" asked Sam. "Shut the fucking door!"

"Seriously," said Manny, "let the girl take a dump in peace!"

Tyrone said to her, "Shut the door, baby."

"Alright, but she better not go on the floor again."

Cheryl shut the door and joined with Tyrone on the couch. They were watching the baseball game on their little ten inch TV that barely got a reception. I looked around the apartment and noticed something was missing.

Tyrone said to us, "Sit down, man! Shit!"

Manny responded, "Oh we aren't staying long."

"Where's the dog?" I asked.

Tyrone responded, "We had to take her to the humane society."

I had to ask, "You didn't have her put to sleep, did you? The dog was only ten years old."

"Shit, man, the dog couldn't see. You don't want to go the rest of your life blind, do you? I didn't think so. We did that dog a favor. That's okay, though, we getting a pit bull now!"

"A pit bull? That was her mother's—"

Sam said to me, "Tyler! Let it go, okay? Relax!"

That dog was a cute little lhasa apso with black and white fur. She was very playful and loved just about everyone except the mailman. She feared Cheryl and Tyrone for some reason and some say Tyrone abused the dog. Often when the dog saw us, she would bark and struggled to be with us instead of them. We were dog lovers and I often think most dogs knew that.

Then Tyrone said to Cheryl, "You know what time it is, honey?"

Cheryl responded, "I know, my mother is with me right now."

"I see her. She's right there."

Tyrone pointed next to her on the couch.

He continued, “She’s standing right there. You see her?”

“I see her.”

Sam announced, “Well, we don’t see shit. Enjoy seeing imaginary ghosts. We’re going back home to get drunk.”

We said our goodbyes and left. I didn’t say shit but my brothers did. Tyrone said to Cheryl after we left, “If those crackers stayed any longer, I would have shot their asses.”

Chapter Twenty-one

I hate doctors. Just want to throw that out there. I must have been waiting in the doctor's office for at least twenty minutes before the doctor showed up. The doctor sat across from me on the only chair in the room as I sat on the exam table.

He said to me, "Tyler! How are you today?"

I replied, "Well, not very good if I'm in the doctor's office. I hate going to the doctors."

"Oh really? Why is that?"

"I just had some bad experiences."

I really did. Every single time I went to the doctors in the past ten years whether it was at the doctor's office or the hospital I would get into a fight with either a doctor or a nurse. Many had told me that if you think you are having problems like breathing problems or chest pains, it would be a good idea to go to the doctor. Unfortunately the ones I had been to they automatically think I'm faking it.

The doctor went on by saying, "So what brings you here today?"

"Well, you probably seen everything, right? I mean, I'm sure there is nothing that comes into this office that would make you, I don't know, like it seems weird to you or anything?"

“Tyler, there is nothing I haven’t heard before. I’ve been at this business for a very long time. Tell me your problem.”

“Well, you see, I never told anybody this. I mean, in fact a girl I was sleeping with pointed this out to me. You see, I was getting it on with this girl and my, uh, wee-wee couldn’t get it up and I think I have erectile dysfunction.”

The doctor snickered.

“Was that funny?”

“I’m sorry, it’s—“the doctor started laughing. “Please, don’t mind me.”

“It’s a very delicate issue!”

The doctor started laughing hysterically. He even fell to the floor laughing. A sexy nurse with long blonde hair and the biggest boobs opened the door.

The nurse asked, “Something funny, doctor?”

The doctor tried to compose himself, laughed a little bit more, and said, “He’s got erectile dysfunction!”

Then the nurse started laughing. Together, the doctor and the nurse laughed in unison, and the nurse brought the attention to the other staff. Suddenly strange heads started poking in and the nurse had to address my problem to them too.

All of a sudden there was an uproar and staff members brought out the patients to hear my problem. They started laughing too. I even heard an old man cured himself from cancer from laughing so hard. Suddenly I became a sideshow with people taking pictures and a reporter was jotting notes into his tablet.

Then the worse thing happened. Suzanne walked in. She had a look of distress. The look I gave her was the look of fear. I knew right then it was over.

She asked me, “Tyler, why didn’t you tell me?”

I shot up from my bed in a cold sweat. Thank goodness it was all a dream! After a couple breathers, I checked my phone. I had a message. It was from Aaron.

He messaged me, “You want to meet me at the mall later today?”

Ramone and I went down one of those escalators at a huge clothing store connected to the mall. I couldn’t remember which one because I was only passing through to get to the actual mall part of the building. Ramone was still running his mouth, and after a bit of daydreaming, I started to pay attention to what he was saying.

He was saying, “I bet Pacqui is dating some loser thug right now. Then she’s going to marry him, and then he’s going to hit her, and then she would be wishing she had Ramone—“

“You’re still going on about her? You met her like one time! It didn’t work out. Move on.”

“I am moving on. Next weekend I’m going to bible studies at this church. Someone told me that you can meet some fine ass single girls there and a lot of people hooked up just by going there. You should come too!”

“Why would I want to go there?”

We finally stepped foot on tile. I felt the earth shift a little bit as I stepped forward.

“Just come with me!”

“What happened to concentrating on becoming a wrestler?”

“I am, Tyler, so please just come with me!”

“Fine! God!”

We happened to run into Aaron and Chris. The two of them were smiling so I figured they were still happy. I caught Ramone giving a disgruntled look over to Chris. This probably won't turn out well.

Aaron asked, “Oh you brought Ramone?”

I answered, “Yeah, he followed me along. I tried to get away.”

Then I heard Ramone mumble, “Fat people!”

Aaron looked off to the side and his eyes widened. He exclaimed, “Oh check out that leather coat!”

Aaron went over to a leather jacket on display and felt the leather off the sleeve. Chris coerced him to try it on, and Aaron put on the black jacket and it fit him like a glove. In fact, he looked like he was in style.

Aaron then said, “Oh but its three hundred bucks, though.”

“I told you I would buy anything for you, honey! You want it, I'll buy it!” exclaimed Chris.

“But honey, I told you! You shouldn't keep buying things for me. I got stuff I haven't even opened yet!”

“I just want to make you happy.”

Ramone commented, “I want a leather jacket!”

Aaron put the coat back on the hangar. He said, “I'll think on it.”

“Okay,” said Chris. “How about we all have lunch? My treat. I’ll even pay for fucking dickheads like you, Ramone!”

“My God! I like fat people!”

Chris did exactly that. We all went to this restaurant and she even offered us to order whatever we wanted. There was no limit to her spending. We had a good time and talked about life and stuff. By the time we got out, we decided to split in groups to check out the mall.

“Thank you very sweetly!” said Ramone.

“You guys know if there’s a dietary store around here?” I asked.

“It’s about time!” Ramone said as he gave off his goofy grin.

Aaron pointed and said, “Yeah, there’s one right down there.”

“Thanks.”

Aaron and Chris went the opposite direction with Aaron saying, “Meet you guys in an hour!”

Ramone said to me, “Now I want to go out with her. She can pay for me!”

“See, asshole? That’s what happens when you judge people.”

“I am an asshole, aren’t I?”

As we paved our way along the crowds of people, I bent low so Ramone could hear me so I could tell him, “Listen, Dildo Faggins, I’ll meet you at the video game store. I just have to stop at this dietary store and I’ll meet you there.”

“Dildo Faggins!” Ramone laughed it off.

With Ramone out of the way, I was face to face with the dietary store. I was a little nervous. Even though I would never see any of these people in this store again, I

just wasn't comfortable purchasing dietary supplements for my problem. I stared into the store with crowds of people walking behind me like I was about to plunge into an infested dungeon.

The moment I stepped foot onto that carpet, a young male employee with a goatee asked me, "Hello, sir! Is there anything I can help you with?"

"Oh, I'm just looking!" I answered.

"If there's anything you need help with, you can just let me know, okay?"

I thanked him and walked around the store. There were plenty of bottles on racks and against the wall. It was such a dimly lit atmosphere that it was hard to make out what bottle was what. There were so many of them that they started to all run together.

Then after a scan across the wall, I saw it. There, on the center of the wall, was a big bottle of Dymindall. The price was a little steep at about twenty bucks. It was a small price to pay in order to please Suzanne. Still, I just had to build the courage to even pick up that bottle.

I walked past it giving it occasional glances. Periodically I would look at something else but the corner of my eye still locked onto that bottle. I counted to three and walked over to the bottle only for a customer to walk toward me and I turned the other way. At that point I was kicking myself in my brain. I looked over at the customer who was hovering over the Dymindall. He looked like he was debating on buying it. Then he picked up the bottle, read the back, and studied it for a good solid minute.

Thankfully, he put the bottle down and left. Quickly, I ran over to the bottle, grabbed it, and like a force from beyond I took it all the way to the register where the

checkout girl was waiting for me. She had short black hair, and thick eyeglasses, and very petite.

She asked me, “Is that everything for you today?”

I answered, “Yeah, that’s it.”

She took the bottle and said, “Dyminall! That’s a very popular item. You know erectile dysfunction is common for men in their forties?”

“That’s good to know.”

“Would you like this in a bag?”

“Hell yes!”

I was fortunate that it was a very big bag with a big black store logo on the front to hide the product. Never had I wanted to walk out of a store so fast before but when I did, my friends were waiting for me outside the store. I don’t know how long they were standing there but all eyes hunted at me.

Aaron asked, “Hey, Tyler! What’s in the bag?”

I had to think of something quick. I responded with, “It’s uh, your anniversary present.”

“Anniversary?” asked Aaron.

“Yeah, when you two are together for a year, I’ll give this to you.”

“Wouldn’t it expire by then?”

“Maybe.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

For the longest time I stared at the bottle in the bathroom. I was looking at the back of the bottle where it said for me to call this number for any questions or concerns. That was good to know in case my dick fell off or something. Still, I had to sample it ahead of time so I knew it worked. I would hate for it not to be properly tested before the big night and all these pills turned out to be a dud.

So I just said, “Fuck it!” and I popped a pill in my mouth and dunked my lips under the running faucet. Keep in mind, I started with one. I went and sat in silence on the couch thinking that magically my dick was going to say hello out of my pants. Of course, nothing happened.

As usual, I started pacing around my apartment thinking that the adrenaline was going to somehow go straight to my penis. After ten impatient minutes, I went back in the bathroom and popped another pill in my mouth. My face buried in the sink trying to feed off the running faucet. After swallowing, I had an epiphany. Immediately I opened my closet doors and found a DVD of one of my pornos.

I said out loud, “Matt’s Tricks Unloaded!”

Once upon a time I had the original Matt’s Tricks in my collection and I even met one of the stars by accident in that porno. Unfortunately my dad discovered it later on and borrowed it. Suspiciously he lost it and I never got it back. I’m sure I could find

another copy online or something but the cheap bastards were still selling it for fifteen dollars. I hate spending money on something I already bought. My dad never offered to pay for another one and I'm too much of a good son to ask him to.

Like the previous Matt's Tricks film, I had to sit and watch atrocious acting in order to get to the good stuff. I felt no sensation below the belt and the horrible acting wasn't going to suffice.

It had some guy in black sunglasses and a trench coat sitting on a chair in front of some chick with shaved black hair with his fists out.

The man said to her, "My right hand is the blue pill. This means you have years of nobody ever wanting sex with you and you are forced to give yourself hand jobs for the rest of your life."

"Oh!" the girl said. "I don't want that."

"Or you can take my right hand..."

"You mean your left hand?"

"Yes, that's right, my left hand. This hand means you get to have sex with me!"

"Then I take the left hand!"

Even after they took their clothes off and went into the slow phases of having sex, I just wasn't feeling it. After a few minutes of that, I decided to go back in the bathroom and swallow another one. When I came back, the segment was over and something caught my eye.

The next girl to get naked was a Mexican! Not only that, she had similarities to Suzanne! It was in that instance when I started to become aroused. Even better she was

about to have sex with a bald white man. It was like the stars aligned and something was trying to tell me something.

Then I felt a rise. It was a rise that wanted to rise out of my skin! Then I had that feeling in my ass where I couldn't sit anymore. I dropped to the floor and rolled over trying to shake that sensation off. It felt like I was lying on something long and thick. Immediately I got up and started pacing again.

“Down, boy! This is just a test. You can calm down now!”

What made it worse was the fact that the Mexican girl had bigger breasts than Suzanne. She was riding that guy like a pony. Finally I just couldn't take much more of it so I stopped the DVD player and watched whatever was on TV. I flipped it over to cartoons and even that wasn't helping much.

An hour went by and my penis wasn't showing any signs of wanting to be software. I instantly grabbed the bottle, dialed the number, and waited for a representative to pick up the phone. That was how desperate I became.

The representative answered, “Hello, Dymindall incorporate this is Ron speaking, may I help you?”

“Hi, I just bought your Dymindall thingy and I took three pills. Is that bad?”

“Ooo, yeah, that can be bad. Not to worry, you have any girls you can be sleeping with at this moment?”

“I can probably call one over?”

“Yes, call one over. Having sex will bring you back to normal.”

I texted Suzanne but she had to be at work. I didn't really tell her that I wanted to have sex. We weren't at that point yet. However, I was with Deshawna and I called her up.

"Hello?" she answered.

"Deshawna! I have an erection that won't go away! You need to come over!"

"You silly!"

"I'm serious! I have to get rid of this erection. I swear to God it can be the best sex ever if you get over here right now!"

"I can't right now. I'm at the casino."

"At the casino? I really need you right now!"

"Just, I don't know, find a blowup doll or something."

She wasn't much help. I dialed back the operator and he had this to say to me, "Alright, listen, you have anything around you can stick your dick in to?"

I looked around and concluded, "No."

"Is there a woods near you, by any chance?"

There was a set of woods in my backyard. I used to cross there to get look out at the expressway. I said to him, "Yeah."

"Good. Find a tree, see if it has a knothole, and stick your dick in it. After several minutes of screwing that knothole, your dick should go down."

"That seems a little weird."

"Find a knothole. It's your only chance."

"Knothole. Okay."

I did as the operator instructed and went into the woods. It was getting dark so I had to make this quick. Traveling in the woods at dark was a sure sign that I may not find my way back. I searched every tree as I held my dick close to my body and I wasn't seeing anything resembling a knothole. The deeper I got in the woods, the less sunlight I was getting. I had to find this tree fast.

What transpired after that was a discovery I never thought my eyes would witness. I found a tree that looked like a giant vagina. Seriously, it was like a vagina was split in the middle of the tree. What made this even more amazing was the convenient knothole just lending out the invitation to my dick.

So I looked around, it seemed quiet, and I pulled my pants down just enough to get in trouble for indecent exposure. I took in a breath and I stuck that bad boy right in the knothole. It felt weird at first. Like a real vagina, it was soft and mushy. I slid it out and went back in. That sensation was still there and it wasn't making any improvements to my predicament.

Then I stopped. It felt like my penis was covered in something. When I pulled out, I saw a thousand ants covering my dick. I jumped away from the tree and batted them, hurting my dick in the process, and fell to the ground.

The operator was right.

Chapter Twenty-Three

It was later in the week and I had Suzanne by the arm—and Ramone came with us. I had to stop over the department store to see my dad. My dad always bitched about that store because of the women. This was my first time experiencing it. The first thing I noticed was the customer service desk. It was right at the front because the store knew that anyone who walked in that store would probably need assistance. The store was humongous. It was probably the size of a football field with massive racks and even showers hanging on the ceiling.

My dad always said it was the women and right at the customer service desk was a woman. The other side wasn't much better. That was a woman too. She was flipping her gums, looking almost eighty, and had this sarcastic attitude. You know, the attitude that makes you want to sock her in the mouth. Now the woman was asking her about the size of a wood. Her response was exactly the way my dad put it.

She said, "Go see a man."

The woman got pointed to the right direction. She just went her merry way and asked my dad. He was easy to find. He was bent low sawing off some plywood on the floor. I took the other two and decided to get this over with.

My dad just sent the woman off when we approached him. I smiled and said, "Hi dad."

“Tyler! How the hell are you?”

“I’m great. What’s going on?”

“You see how I’m cutting this plywood down here? It’s because the women asked me to cut it for them. They said it’s because customers could trip on this! Now you think they are going to get themselves a saw and cut this shit?”

One of the older women laughed and said, “Don’t hurt yourself down there!”

My dad shouted off, “Come over and saw this shit!”

She was already gone.

Then I realized my friends were there and said, “Oh this is Suzanne!”

My dad shook her hand and said, “Hi Suzanne.”

“Hi!” She said in almost kind of a blush.

Then he asked, “So what brings you three here? Oh, I heard you have a girlfriend.”

I looked over at Suzanne with my peripheral vision and she was still smiling so I was in the clear. I just said back to my dad, “My brothers think I have a girlfriend. No, we just came to visit, and I’ll come back to get that sign for the book signings.”

“Okay, I’ll let you know which one.”

Another one of the girls, with the last girl, walked by the other end of the aisle to shout to my dad, “Can you get back up?”

My dad shouted to her, “You want me to saw your ass cheeks apart?”

As we walked away, Ramone asked me, “Is she really your girlfriend?”

“Shut up, Ramone.”

After a talk at the restaurant, we rendezvoused back to my place. We introduced Ramone to weed. He just kept laughing and acting goofier than normal, if that's possible. Suzanne and I were laid back at the couch enjoying our high. Ramone was sitting on the floor just laughing his ass off. Next thing we knew he sat next to Suzanne on the couch and she was off in la-la land.

He asked her, "You got anymore weed?"

"Damn, Ramone, chill out on that shit!"

Ramone had a mission that night to see if he could get Suzanne to like him. He figured I wasn't over Char so taking her for his own wouldn't be a problem. Unfortunately for him the more he got closer, the closer she moved over to me. That sealed the deal for my night.

Then he got up and said, "You know I need to go check on the dog."

"Yeah, go check on the dog." I said.

"I'll be back though," he said, as he was leaving.

"Please don't!"

He closed the door.

After a few brief seconds, Suzanne said to me, "I'm really horny."

I never knew a chick would come out and say that. This girl was really awesome! I had to clear a lump in my throat, as the initial surprise dropped into my vocal cords. Surprisingly I wasn't nervous or anything. I think the high took care of that.

So I responded, "I'd take care of that, but I don't know when he's coming back."

"Yeah, that's true."

We looked at each other just then and the look on her face was just too sexy. I kissed her lips. It was a short kiss. She wasn't expecting the kiss. I just dug my kiss onto her lips and like a dance, we were making out. Once the kiss got sloppy, I licked on her ear and moved my way onto her neck. She started making noises then. She took off her shirt and I helped release her bra. I started kissing and sucking on her chest and she continued to make noises.

When I moved my way up to kiss her lips, she asked me, "Can we go into the bedroom?"

I checked the status of my dick—it was up. I mean, I didn't even take the pills and I was ready for action. I took her by the hand and carried her into my room and I pounded her into my bed. Neighbors heard her screaming all across the building.

About a half hour of sex, Ramone walked in the door. We didn't even bother locking it. He took only a few steps in when he heard Suzanne getting loud in my room. She sounded like she was in pain. The only dead giveaway was my headstand for my bed kept clanging into the wall.

Ramone quickly turned around and quietly left out the door.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The next day at work I felt super fine. I danced around the pharmacy with jazzy music playing in my head. I even kicked a bottle like a Hackensack and caught it in mid-air. The women in the pharmacy just laughed as I strutted along like a guy doped up on coffee.

I heard Debbie comment, “I see somebody got laid!”

Even the sound of an inconspicuous phone didn’t bother me and I picked that receiver up like a man about to talk to his lover. I was close. It was Deshawna. She asked for her ASAPs and I gladly brought it out to her. I was strutting myself with the asap trays in hand and she just laughed.

“Look at you!” she laughed.

I handed her the ASAPs and said, “ASAPs for you, my dear!”

“You got some, didn’t you?”

“Me? Nah!”

“Look at you! Yeah you did!”

Just then, Francisco and Lisa walked in. They said hello to me and Deshawna had a different way of saying hello.

She said to them, “He got laid!”

Suzanne walked in from behind them.

I fanned out my arms and yelled, “No! No! I’m just in a good mood today! Can’t a guy come to work feeling good?”

I looked over to Suzanne who just smiled at me.

“What?” asked Francisco. “You drink some coffee?”

“Something like that.”

“You meet our daughter?”

“She’s your daughter?”

What?” asked Suzanne. “You didn’t know?”

Deshawna stuck her head in and said, “He got laid!”

I found Suzanne alone in the parking lot. Her parents left before she did. She was putting the ASAP away in her car when I found her.

I asked her, “I didn’t know that was your parents?”

“I’m sorry! I thought someone told you.”

“I mean, that’s okay. That’s cool!”

“I’m glad. Listen I want to tell you that you were amazing last night. You really were! But I’m not completely over my ex. So I really can’t fully date you until I get over him, you know what I mean?”

“Okay, yeah...”

“I mean once I get over him, you’ll be the first I will date.”

“Okay. So hey, look, Michigan Machete Massacre 3D plays this weekend. You want to go see it?”

“I haven’t seen the first one.”

“Well, why don’t you come to my place and we can watch it. The first one, I mean.”

“I just have to check my schedule. Okay!”

“Great! Oh, I have to go to church with Ramone first.”

“Why?”

“So he can meet women.”

Chapter Twenty-Five

It was never a good sign when the church bells were ringing the moment we walked up to the church. I wasn't as nervous as I was when I was first introduced to the idea of it. After brief periods of thinking at my job, I came to the conclusion that maybe this was a good thing for Ramone and maybe it was just a ploy to get him to go to church. For the past few years I had been meaning to go to church. My family did the same thing growing up. None of them went to church until they started getting up in age. Sometimes I just think that church was our way of coping with death.

It was like an ancient church. It was grand, archaic and an awful lot of angel and Jesus statues. Either this was the very first church or someone had a lot of money. Some of the churches were small by compare. A lot of them looked like a house. The only thing that gave them away was that peaked point with the cross on it.

We would be like, "Yeah, that's a church!"

This one had some serious balls. It was right at a busy road and people could see for miles that they were driving right by a church. You would literally feel like you were in the dark ages as soon as you open those double doors. The scent of old dust tingling under the nose passed under our bridges. You immediately see the pedestals going right down the aisle to a stone table with a candle and some cloth under it. I could see two old

people kneeling and praying before the candle. They weren't alone. Some ten or more people were sitting on pews behind them.

Off to the far right was a pool. I couldn't see much from the people's heads but it looked like a baptism was going on. What I did catch was a minister in a robe dunking some man in a suit. I never witnessed a baptism before so I thought I would witness my first one.

He pulled the man up from the water. I stopped at the edge of the pews but just enough distance from the pool. The minister turned to me, the man's hair still in his hand, and that sinister goatee. His face was like a wooly wolfman, with eyes that twitch when they glare, and those feral eyes stared down at me like I was the next pray. Then I knew who this man was.

"Oh my God, that's Reverend Gabe!"

"Who?" asked Ramone.

"He's my ex's stepfather. He hates me."

He walked over to me, unhuman-like, almost like a troll preying his victim. My chest sank when he stopped in front of me. His head veered down at me with an ominous snare.

Ramone asked before I realized it, "Did he just growl?"

Reverend Gabe was growling.

I got nervous and I said to him, "Reverend, hi! As you can see, Char and I aren't together anymore."

"Good."

"I'm dating a new girl now."

“Did you give her a dolphin ashtray for Christmas?”

Ramone laughed, “A what?”

“He gave my precious little stepdaughter an ashtray for Christmas.”

Ramone responded, “Girls would like that.”

“She doesn’t even smoke!”

Ramone did his goofy laugh.

There was nothing like having another man manhandle your face and crush it down into the pool. Reverend Gabe had me on lockdown and he kept saying things like, “Total damnation! Feel the demons flowing inside of you!”

The rest was muffled from the screams of the pool. Ramone laughed and Reverend Gabe crushed his forehead into the pool too.

We arrived drenched from head to toe to the bible studies room. Right away we caught the heads of every old person in the room. It was literally old people in the room. Ramone wanted to turn back but the old lady on the counter next to us offered us bibles. I knew we had to sit down.

There was literally a half a dozen chairs all circled around in this one big room. It looked like it doubled as a children’s room as coloring books were off to the side and cartoon drawings were placed on the walls. By the time our butts made squirting sounds with the seats, the old people went back to paging their bibles. Ramone and I did the same so we at least looked like we were interested in the bible. I haven’t looked at one since I was in elementary school and Ramone probably didn’t look at it often either.

Ramone whispered to me, "It's all old people!"

"At least you won't burn in hell for this."

As soon as I said that, a girl dressed in a white dress sat across from us. The radiant glow of the sunlight sparkled on her, with her cute girl next door smile, and hair as red as scarlet. She was smiling over to us and I could have sworn it was right at Ramone.

When I caught the connection, Ramone wasn't paying attention. I nudged him really hard and pointed over to the girl. She poked her head immediately at the bible when he looked.

"You see that?" I asked. "She was just looking at you."

"She was?"

"Yeah, you dolt. Pay attention!"

A woman announced herself coming in to the room. She was a little heavy set, with flowing hair, and breasts the size of canopies. She wore this tight shirt that demonstrated their true form and I was starting to think if she was coming to meet a man too.

She said to everyone, "Hello, everyone. My name is Jan. I'm your bible studies counselor. Oh dear, what happened to you two?"

We looked at our clothes and I caught the girl smiling and being flirtatious with her pen. She did that kind of lick to the pen with her eyes once again beaming over to Ramone. He was too busy eyeing Jan.

I smiled and said, "We just got baptized."

“Oh,” she said. “That’s a good thing. Now before we begin, I believe Mr. Allen wanted to say something.”

Mr. Allen announced like a preacher, “I just wanted everyone to know that last night, I found Jesus! Yes, m’am, I did. I saw him as clear as day! Can I get an Amen?”

“AMEN!” said everyone in the room, except us.

As much as I enjoyed listening to him talk about Jesus, I just couldn’t help notice that girl constantly glancing at Ramone. I whispered over to him, “You totally need to make a move, dude!”

“Not now, Tyler.”

“Write down your phone number!”

“Goddammit!”

That one came out sporadic like his brain muscles atoned to saying words like that. The preacher stopped and everyone just looked at us. The girl just smiled again and that was all that really mattered.

I just covered it by saying, “He’s got Tourettes.”

The preacher went back to his speech and Ramone handed me the phone number. I extended my arm out to her and waved the piece of paper and the girl just looked at it like I was holding a gun. I went back into my seat and I knew it caused for desperate measures. I hopped my seat a couple skips to the right and I was sitting a little closer to the girl across from me.

Jan stopped the preacher and asked, “Excuse me, is there something wrong with the seat?”

All eyes turned at me. Ramone was digging his face in his hand. I said to her, “Oh I was just giving her this piece of paper. It’s a bible inscription.”

I dropped my knees to the floor and politely handed the piece of paper to her. She opened it up see Ramone’s phone number on it and smiled over to him. He didn’t catch that one either.

As I got back to my seat, Jan asked me, “Is there anything else you would like to add?”

“Oh yeah, you have a car? We walked here.”

She only brought a smart car. Ramone fastened his seatbelt on the passenger side and she revved up the engine like she was driving a sports car. I was standing in front of the hood, smiling and waving, and Ramone laughed about his seatbelt being stuck.

He did ask me, “Are you going to be okay?”

“Yeah, I like walking. Have a good time!”

She threw the car in reverse and they took off like a banshee in an open road. I stood there for a minute, watching as people pass me by, and I began my long, treacherous walk back home.

Chapter Twenty-Six

It only took me an hour to get back. I still had time to clean up the place a little before Suzanne arrived. We were just finishing up smoking weed on the couch when I asked her, “Should we have a quickie before the movie?”

“That’s fine. I have to tell you that I may have to cancel out on the movie this weekend only because I’m going to see my ex in Philadelphia.”

I held my chest acting like I was in pain.

“I know. I’m sorry. I mean, it’s not for sure yet. I would have to see but I’ll text you and let you know.”

“So what, is this like seeing if you want to live there or not?”

“Yeah, but I can already tell you I’m not. I don’t want to leave my family. I already screwed it up for them once, I don’t want to again.”

“So no sex?”

“I told you I would.”

“You’re awesome!”

She laughed when I took her hand to my room. Once again, we were going to have a wild time. I was sure that somewhere out there, Ramone was getting the same treatment.

The girl allowed him to be shirtless on his bed. He laid there with a sly grin on his face as the church chick licked on his nipple. She smiled up at him, not with that girl next door smile, but more of a devilish, seductress smile.

She asked him, "How is my baby bear?"

"Baby bear likes that!"

"Does baby bear like this?"

She licked from his nipple up to his neck. It tickled him and he laughed. He replied with, "Ooo baby!" He started laughing and said, "I'm silly!"

"I want to rock your world! I want to give you the best sex a virgin could have."

Then Ramone told her, "I'm not a virgin."

She stopped and asked, "You're not?"

"No!" he laughed.

"You're kidding? I thought for sure you'd be a virgin."

"Nope!" he laughed again. "Is there something wrong?"

She went to sit down next to the bed. She cupped her face in her hands and went on about, "I thought for sure you were a virgin. I feel so dirty!"

She started brushing off her arms, flinching, and then looked like she was batting at flies. Ramone just laughed and asked what's wrong. She pushed herself off the bed and stumbled out of the bedroom. He didn't follow her right away. For a couple moments, he just laid there wondering if this was some kind of joke. Finally he got up out of bed and followed her.

As soon as he got out of the bedroom, his dog whimpered and hid into his room. Ramone whispered over for his dog and looked back toward the kitchen because she was nowhere to be found in the living room.

“Hello?” he asked. “Are you there?”

He didn’t know her name. It would help to call that out in situations like this. He crept around the corner to the kitchen and saw her facing her back toward him. She was hunched over with her hand clawing on the kitchen counter. He walked closer to her and stuck out his arm to touch her back.

Then her face turned and morphed into some gray-faced, glowing eyed demon with a clandestine orange light protruding from her o-shaped mouth. Ramone screamed like a girl as the bitch whipped out a long pair of scissors intended straight for his arm. From all that screaming, he didn’t realize she had one of his arms captive.

Church Chick shrilled with her screams as she slashed her scissors right for Ramone’s arm. Ramone broke free and left a nasty gash on his counter. She wasn’t letting up and her scissors went back for the ceiling as she made a mad dash at Ramone’s right arm. He dodged forward by twisting his body and the Church Chick fell onto the floor.

His trembling legs carried him to the front door. He just reached for the doorknob when a knife sliced right into the wall next to him. It was a clean cut too. He saw the demonic bitch standing at the other end of the hall in shadow. It was all he could take. He ran out of there like a screaming girl and tore past the hall and out the door to safety. About four people standing outside and none of them paid much attention to a screaming guy yelling that someone was going to kill him.

They stopped in attention when the screaming witch with the scissors flailed out of his apartment. Onlookers went, “Oh shit!” and ran for cover. Ramone didn’t see where they went; he was too focused on the door coming in front of him. He immediately sailed it from the hinges, and he turned to see the bitch in knifing distance in front of him. The door sealed him like a cage closing a monster and the knife went right through the door.

She pulled the knife out and began screaming and wailing at the door. Her eyes grew a bright red, and the orange glow almost blinded, as the chick pounded on the door again and threw her head down like a peacock. Ramone looked out at the tainted glass, and the bitch was nowhere in sight.

Suddenly the lights started dimming. Ramone looked up and circled around the hallway. All of the lights were flickering and the blink of dark terrified him. Vacuous echoes invaded into his ears, and the faint cries of demonic chanting stirred him into a frenzy.

A door squeaked open and Ramone jumped into a panic when he heard it. It was a neighbor, wearing a red and black flannel, goatee, and a baseball cap, opened the door.

“Yo, man! Relax! I was just wondering why the lights were flickering out here.”

Ramone tried to let the words out when he looked down his living room, his eyes widened, and he tried to point. The Church Chick crashed her smart car into the man’s living room. The man instantly turned and was tossed like a bowling pin off the hood of her car and her foot slammed the accelerator.

Ramone dashed and jumped out of the way as the smart car plunged through the door and into the wall of another apartment. The crash was so deafening, it alerted the

neighbors to poke their head out their doors. Ramone noticed when he ran up the stairs that the neighbors immediately closed their doors when they saw him. The crime level must have scared them off.

Ramone panicked and cried out, “Help me get away from that crazy bitch! She’s insane!”

He tried opening their doors but everyone had it locked. All of a sudden there was crumpling up the stairs, and like a lowrider, the smart car was hobbling up the stairs. The crazy bitch was going to ram him upstairs!

He jumped backwards to the door at the other side of the hall. It was already unlocked as he twisted and opened it without losing sight of the micro smart car that just touched wheels with the floor. She was hammering that accelerator after him and without hesitation; she crashed right into the storage room.

Ramone rummaged through the dark as he pushed back against cages for people’s storage space. The bumper was trying to hit his knees, and Ramone fell back against the wall with a nervous smile on his face. The car was revving up the engine and Ramone had a quick second to grab a set of fake flowers in a cage and hold it up to his chest. By that point, he was airborne straight through the wall.

He was hanging off the hood of the car, his feet dangling over a horizon, and all the while he held the flowers up to the windshield. With a smile, he yelled over the wind and her screams, “I got you flowers!”

The bitch was not amused. She lunged at him right through the windshield. Ramone screamed as the bitch shrilled her screams like a vampire in his face as the two jettisoned into a lake and fell into the water.

Ramone eventually came to the surface. He was frog swimming in a lake as black as chocolate syrup. His head tried not to bob in the water, and held high so his lips wouldn't lick the skin off the lake. The bitch was preying him like a shark attacking legs in the water.

Ramone kept shouting, "Help I can't swim!"

There was nobody around to hear him. He felt something tug on his feet, and sure enough, he was flailing his arms as his head dropped under the surface. A million air bubbles spit like a geyser above the water until air bubbles fizzled into obscurity. For several moments, there was silence. The only sound left was a distant lawnmower and some chirping birds.

Then a black tar monster bellied over and fell on grass. The black monster washed himself to reveal Ramone. He crawled out of that lake walking like he had something shoved up his ass. On top of that, he tripped when he walked and his shaky knees carried with will power.

Then he noticed not all of the black mush washed off. He tried to bat out a spot on his chest when he realized it was a living, breathing thing. It was a leach! He twisted and turned screaming as he tried to bat out all the leaches. There were at least three of them.

After batting off the third leach, he was pounded by a spear from the Church Chick that sent them right through a glass window. While Ramone was seeing stars on a puzzle of glass, Church Chick was tearing down his pants. Ramone caught the draft when he saw that chick on top of him, trying to lure her demonic vagina, and Ramone had to struggle to fight with her as he felt the pain of broken shards piercing his back.

Suddenly his unit found the hole, and the worst of it was her vagina was a leach.

We were holding each other on the couch as the end credits rolled up on Michigan Machete Massacre. The rock music at the end was really loud so I had to turn it down with my remote. I turned to her and asked her, “So what did you think?”

“That was terrible!” her immediate response was.

“Come on, it was Michigan made!”

“I don’t care! They need to make it better! Like seriously! They need better actors, a better director, and just better everything. How the hell did it make it to theatres?”

“It didn’t last very long.”

“I can see why.”

“So this means you aren’t going?”

“Like I said, I have to see—”

She was interrupted by the door opening. I got defensive to see who it is and it turned out to be Ramone. He was panting and hunched over. He was also shirtless.

I warned Suzanne, “Don’t look! He’s shirtless!”

“Oh God!” she said.

“Fuck you, Dumbelina!”

“Why are you here?”

“I had to run somewhere. I was almost killed!”

“Really?”

“Yeah! That church chick you tried to set me up that I wasn’t paying attention to, she almost killed me! You asshole!”

“I didn’t know she was nuts!”

“Well, she tried to kill me. God man! Why am I always getting the bad luck?”

Then he added, “She also raped me!”

“Rape you? How? You’re Ramone! You’re lucky if a girl wanted to picture you naked!” Then I said, “I’ll tell you what, since Suzanne is naked on my couch, and I—”

“I got clothes on!”

“You’re naked. I’ll walk you home so we can tag team that bitch, and you can get the hell out of my apartment. How’s that?”

When we exited the apartment building, I formed fingers to make it look like I had a gun, and pretended to be a secret service agent scanning a room. Ramone just did his goofy laugh and I remained in character.

“Alright, knock it off, fat!”

I walked along with him and smiled but that quickly deteriorated when I heard the clanging of a muffle and the familiar smart car idling over to us. We took in a breath and got prepared but that was over with when we saw her hanging out the driver’s side and she was actually smiling.

She was holding up the polka dotted flowers and said to Ramone, “Thank you for the flowers!”

She drove off and Ramone just looked at me in shaken fear.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

On Christmas Day, I had to work. Our job remained open every day of the year and Christmas was no exception. As all the other disgruntled CEOs, managers, supervisors, were all spending time with their families at home, I just looked out the office window. The snow was coming down that day, and I watched my own reflection fold his arms back at me as I gazed out into a beautiful Christmas weather. I would get off soon enough. My time ended at three and I was going to run out of that pharmacy.

Eventually I took a walk and noticed that even the pharmacist looked like he was falling asleep. It was a clear sign that it was a very slow day. I couldn't help but to yawn. The job was at least gracious enough to offer coffee, but someone didn't make a pot and I didn't feel like making one. Instead, I walked out to the drivers' area when I noticed Deshawna.

She was just about to call for an asap when she saw me, and considering I was the one bringing it to her, she decided to hang up the phone. I was shocked when I saw her and said, "Deshawna! I didn't know you worked Christmas!"

"Yeah, I was about to ask you, you still want to go to that movie Friday night?"

"You know what? I have to get back on you on that because someone wanted me to go with her to the movies. Let me see if she texted me here."

I looked at my phone, saw that she left a text, and only saw the word CANCEL on it. Immediately I went to her and asked, “What time Friday night?”

“I’ll text and let you know.”

“You know what? I am a little broke.”

“I’ll pay for you.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, you covered for me the last time; I’ll pay for you this time.”

Then I had to ask, “What about drinks?”

“I’ll pay for that too.”

It was a deal I couldn’t pass up! I decided to text back Suzanne and tell her about it. She didn’t seem to mind.

That was until we got to the movie theatre. She texted about how upset she was because it was a movie we were supposed to see it together. I felt really bad. At the time, I didn’t know she was all that serious about it. In the back of my mind, she was a woman I felt was too beautiful for even me! She wouldn’t want to be caught dead with me!

Just on her text I could tell she was being serious and I felt terrible. Somewhere inside of me I just cared for this girl so much. I would text back that I was sorry so many times, and I even mentioned the free drinks, and she was still mad. Maybe it was a hunch, but something inside of me just kept saying she was using this to draw away from me and more toward her ex.

My nose was digging into my cell phone when I walked into that movie theatre. Eventually I would lose a signal and I would have to continue my apologies after the

movie. Deshawna sat up when she saw me and didn't even crack a smile. She was just hustling it like I needed to come with her.

I felt her handing me a ticket and we immediately passed the ticket holder and looked over at a bar at the other side of the lobby. I'm sure concessions were waiting for us but we had alcohol to tend to.

As her feet walked on that velvet red carpet, she asked me, "Who are you texting?"

"I just lost a signal now but I was talking to Suzanne. I was constantly apologizing to her."

"Who's Suzanne?"

"You know, I think she's my girlfriend. I don't know. We act like boyfriend and girlfriend but she's like still into her ex so I don't know."

"Is she the one that gave you some?"

I ignored that question and said, "I mean, how am I supposed to know if she wants to be with a forty year old guy?"

"You look good for your age."

"Really?" I smiled.

"I mean, you aren't like, you know—" She cupped out her hands to like the size of an elephant and covered up with, "Like super huge or anything!"

We got our drinks and I walked with her and said, "You know, let's see a different movie. I thought you wanted to see that Perry Lee film?"

"Tyler, I already paid for these tickets."

"I know. I just feel bad!"

“Tyler, you can see the movie again. Now let’s go!”

She practically threw me into that theatre. We were sitting on the seats when I noticed I was the only white person there. I didn’t mind. When I was working for the temp agency, I worked in places where I was the only white man. Sure, some of these people were passing me disconcerting looks but I shrugged it off.

Then she asked me, “What sign are you?”

“Sign? What like in a stop sign?”

“No, I mean your horoscope! You crazy!”

“Oh! I’m Aquarius.”

“Oh okay.”

She slunk back in her seat and held her knees. What I didn’t like was that breath afterward. That was the breath where she had something on her mind.

I asked. “What?”

She bluntly answered, “Oh, that just means Aquarius are known to be liars.”

We didn’t say much after that.

That night I was in the dark in my bed with the only light coming from the screen of my cell phone. She wasn’t responding to any of my texts. The battery was running low so I charged the phone for the night. I rolled over in my bed and tried to worry about it tomorrow.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

A few weeks went by and I was invited to my stepbrother's boat. Deshawna came as my date and my brothers brought their lovely models as well. Becky had a mole on her face and Manny's ex wife Shannon came along. She would always lie to him, sleep around with other guys, and Manny still invited her as his date. It wasn't like Manny didn't have a lot of choices. He was the ladies man out of the brothers. For some reason, he always chose Shannon.

Deshawna was already drunk when John brought out the wine glasses. He handed them to us first and passed on down the line. My dad and my stepmother were the last to get theirs. He held up a glass and a wine bottle and we all raised our glasses. Deshawna stumbled over a bit.

He said, "A toast! For long lasting families and may we all get drunk and naked!" He heard booing so he instantly tried to defend himself.

Then he said, "No, what I meant was I hope for long lasting families and cherish it for many years to come!"

"Here! Here!" shouted my dad.

We all took a drink and Deshawna spilled some on her white shirt. It was the red stuff too so it definitely needed to come off. She asked me, "Can you come with me so I can wash this up?"

“Sure.”

“Thanks baby!”

She called me baby. My brothers, including John, watched us go into the cabin. John turned to the others and said, “How much you wanna bet? Those two are going to get naked.”

“I don’t know,” said Manny, “she called him baby.”

“She’s a nice piece of ass too. How does your brother do it?”

Sam and Manny shrugged and said, “I don’t know.”

Manny concluded by saying, “He’s got a gift.”

I was holding Deshawna by the hand in a little wooden hallway so she wouldn’t trip. She was so consumed with alcohol, she could see wavy patterns that made me look better than I normally look. It was only when she stopped halfway when I bent over to her to see what was wrong. The next thing I knew I was pinned against the wall and she was biting my lower lip.

We fell into a room and I was pushed over until we toppled over a bed. She had her arms pinned by each of my temples and she dug her lips into mine. Sexual urges were taking over her, and I was fighting back the temptation. I turned my head to the side and she was scraping her teeth into my neck.

But then she stopped.

Slowly she looked up at me. It was like she was looking at me like I did something wrong. I finally just laid it out to her and said, “Look, its Suzanne. I don’t

know if she's my girlfriend. If you were my girlfriend, I wouldn't be going to Suzanne, but you know, stuff like this happens."

Then, out of nowhere, she threw up on my face. It was nasty too. It was like hot green dough of liquidated chunks boiling over me like a pillow. When the nasty rubbed off my eyes, I saw the green drool, and the look of fear on her face that she was about to throw up again. It was too late before I batted her off as a tidal wave of acid green covered my head once again.

I darted off from the bed like it was covered in maggots as I shook off the green pastry off my clothes. By then I shouted, "Good God! Now I have to see if I can use the shower!"

"Sorry!" she said.

I walked back out on the deck and everyone turned and laughed at me. Even John had the best laugh out of that as he pointed to the glob of mess on my head and my clothes.

He was also the first to ask, "Were you that bad?"

Sam commented, "Yeah, she saw his dick and thought it looked like a mushroom!"

"Yeah, she hates mushrooms!" laughed Manny.

Then my dad joined in and said, "He still has his penis when he was born!"

Everyone laughed louder.

I took in all the insults.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Dana Sorenson was just straightening his suit after coming out of the bathroom when his secretary, Annette, showed up. She was your typical nerdy secretary with the ridiculous glasses and black hair that looked straight from a doll. She was holding her clipboard up to her chest and she looked in concern.

She said, "Sir, they are expecting you at the meeting."

"I was just in the bathroom. Can't a man use the facilities without someone asking him where's he's going all the time? Christ, I'm a CEO, for God's Sakes! I take orders from no one! I'm the bank. I'm the money. If anyone has a problem with that, then they need to be fired."

"I'm sorry, sir, they were just concerned."

They walked through those corridors that looked something out of a space station. A lot of people wondered why the corridors were so big and so metallic looking. Then word got out that they were playing laser tag in those hallways. Nobody could prove it. The CEOs all voted for no security cameras on their floor. After that, they voted themselves for a raise.

Dana was the same guy who badgered me about those asaps. His country boy mustache, serious expression, and his clean expensive suit that was probably worth more

than the car he bought, all defined the man that he was. He walked down that hallway like a man who meant business.

He was also a man of fun. He stopped to take a few baskets behind a counter. A well paid old man stood there and supplied the basketballs as he missed each shot. The old man acknowledged him when he left, but Dana didn't return the favor.

He walked with her some down more corridors and said to her, "Tell them to keep their concerns to themselves. Productivity is down at ASAPS incorporated again. I won't be able to make a visit so I'm sending my best man."

Dana played on one of the arcades and shouted, "Yeah, check this out! My favorite arcade! We use free play! I don't use quarters for arcade machines. A quarter saved is a quarter earned."

Dana bolted away from the arcade and Annette kept up with him. They passed down a hallway served as a gallery for paintings of their ancestors. Each generation ruled with an iron fist.

Annette had to ask him, "Who is your best man?"

Dana opened the doors with hands in the air and joined his chatting group of CEOs at the long table. He posed next to them and said, "I'm about to announce it."

Annette waited for his announcement.

"Gentlemen, I have come to a decision. My vote is to bring in Joe Alotek. The first thing he's going to do is fire John Ketola, and he is going to take over his position."

The look in his eyes after he said that assured he had something evil planned.

"That's great," said Germunder, one of the other CEOs. "But we have more important matters to vote into. All in favor of a raise, say yay."

All of the CEOs raised their hands and said, “YAY!”

Joe Alotek strapped on his snow goggles and mushed a sled of eight dogs down a steep mountain. He was enjoying his vacation at the quiet hills of North Dakota. The one thing that he loved was the sound of his whip. Sometimes he would get a laugh whenever a dog yelped from the sting. He would even down a bottle of whiskey. The man did not care.

Suddenly one of the dogs huffed and puffed and slowed down. The whip gashed off a chunk of skin from the dog’s leg. He hobbled on three legs as Joe pulled back on the sled and immediately got out of his seat. The dog cowered as he lunged over at him. Joe just stood there looking down at the poor dog with disappointment.

Then he beat the dog with the whip. The other dogs turned away and tried not to look. A few others looked the other direction like there was something interesting out in those hills. But after a few lashes, the dog was a blood soaked mess. He was trembling in a ball as tiny whimpers could be heard under her breath.

Joe returned back to his sled and the dogs looked back to the fearful dog shuddering in the snow. A ring tone went off and Joe instantly reached for his phone, eyes still locked on the dog, and answered it.

“Hello, this is Joe!”

As Joe brought up the dogs to go sledding again, he was getting the call about taking over John’s position. After the situation was explained to him, he accepted the offer and followed up with, “I’ll be there first thing in the morning!”

The dog wasn't keeping up again. He was too much in pain to go on. The sled stopped again and the dog collapsed to the ground. He knew what was coming and Joe went over and shot the dog square in the head with a revolver. The other dogs turned away as Joe released the dog from the chain and kicked it down the mountain.

Joe got back in that sled and those dogs never got tired again. He was a very evil man.

Chapter Thirty

Joe kept his word and got to the pharmacy in the morning. It wasn't first thing in the morning. He showed up around nine. As usual, when he stepped in that front lobby, people look at him with eye shock. Some would say hi to him but the ones that didn't know him felt dread off that tailor-made suit.

He demanded to the secretary, "Where can I find John?"

"I can see if he's in his office for you."

"Could you do that for me, please?"

Sure enough, John was confirmed to be in his office and he was waiting. Joe passed down a hall, through a door, and down an archives room. Two of the ladies worked there for years so they had seen him before. They waved and said, "Hi Joe!" But Joe was too irate to respond to them.

He banked a right and exited out the door to a warehouse. JR Thompson was working there but he didn't acknowledge him. He turned a left into a small, cluttered hallway to a door leading to the medical records room. In there were small cubicles with ladies behind the computers. They only sapped up at him as they knew that seeing him was a bad thing.

Joe closed the door to John's office. John remained in his seat as Joe stood with his hands behind him. He said to John, "You know why I'm here?"

John shrugged his shoulders.

“Productivity has been down considerably—”

John was about to say something when Joe said, “And I’m relieving you of your duties. You may exit the building now.”

Like a piece of shit, John was escorted out of the building. They did it quietly though. John just had to clean out his desk and Joe opened the door for him in the back. No words were exchanged and Joe closed that door as if telling him to never come back.

Joe walked into that office like a man in charge. He hired some help with his project as JR and Eric helped redecorate his office. The security cameras were all in place and he looked at them with one hand striking his chin.

“Now why isn’t there a camera over there? We need to have more cameras out there. That’s right, everyone. There’s going to be some changes around here.”

Jackie, his new secretary, announced over the speaker of his phone, “There’s a nurse on hold for you. She seems very upset.”

Joe angrily said, “Put her on the line.”

I came in to stacks of blisters on the counter. Debbie told me they were left there from last night. I asked, “Who left them here?”

“Kaycee.”

“Kaycee!” I said to myself. She always caused me problems. Finally, after much debating, I said, “I guess I’ll asap these...”

When I was distributing an asap marked Notting Hill to one of the drivers, Joe busted in the door. I never met the guy before. He was old, sort of Frankenstein-looking, with a gray mustache right out of the Monopoly guy. His voice wasn't intimidating but his anger was.

He asked, "Is that the Notting Hill asap?"

"Yeah."

"I want that to get out right away, right this second; I want that to be the only stop and that's final!"

He slammed the door and I went to the driver taking it and said, "You hear that?"

When I got back to the pharmacy, I was rolling in a table when I heard Joe shout, "Where's Tyler? I want Tyler over here right now!"

"I'm coming!"

I saw JR and Eric at the other side of the table with fear turning them into statues. Debbie was at the other side of the table giving me a look of distress. I walked over next to Joe who was standing in front of the computer.

He said to me, "Show me your ques! If you don't know how, I will have you properly trained!"

He was looking out in the distance as I logged into the computer. I could hear the panicking silence as I booted up the screen he apparently wanted me to go to.

After a few types I asked him, "What did you want me to show you? The morning run? Fives? Which ones?"

"I want to see all the ques! Show me right now!"

I took him to the screen with a lot of numbers. It paged down for at least twenty pages on the screen. Finally he just asked me, “Why is there so many?”

“It’s always that many this time in the morning.”

“Unacceptable! I want this que cleared when I come back at one o’clock. Is that understood? That asap was sitting here for seventeen hours and I want to know why!”

I snapped and said back, “I don’t know what happened. I just got here. Seventeen hours ago I was getting puked on by a drunk girl on my rich stepbrother’s boat. Okay, I had no idea this happened and nobody working here knows anything either!”

“Well, somebody knows something!”

“Well, maybe it was from another shift!”

“I want these ques cleared when I come back!”

When Joe left, everyone exhaled. I didn’t know how I would clear those ques. Nobody had seen them cleared since this place first opened. So I just figured I was fired.

“Well, I’m fired!” I said.

“It was nice knowing you,” said JR. “Well, maybe not.”

Then my phone rang. I answered it.

“Tyler, it’s me, Francisco.”

“Francisco, hi.”

“Are you okay? I heard the big man was yelling at you.”

“Yeah, I don’t even know who that is.”

“You don’t know? That’s Joe Alotek!”

That was when the lump caught in my throat.

It was almost one, and Debbie rushed over to me to check on the ques. I logged them up and we were considerably down from where we were in the morning. It wasn't zero but it was the best we were going to get.

"We still got a few things," I said.

"What are you going to tell him?"

"I don't know. I'll think of something."

"I'm scanning as much as I can!"

"I know you are, Debbie."

Just then, the big man walked through those doors. He was walking right towards me and he looked like he meant business. We both stood there behind the table, watching him gaze at us, and we didn't know what to say.

Joe asked, "How are the ques?"

"Great!" I said. "We had it clear but a few more popped up in there. We are getting it down, though!"

He said nothing and walked away.

I could deal with nothing.

Chapter Thirty-One

That night I shivered in bed knowing I would soon I have to face that man again. Lately it felt like going to bed would magically transport you to work. That night was no exception, and when I woke up that morning, it felt like I went to bed five minutes ago. I kept telling myself that I still had to drive there and it would take at least fifteen minutes. Unfortunately those fifteen minutes flew by and I found myself parking at the back of the building sooner than I intended to.

Punching my card released all kinds of butterflies in my stomach. I would have to face that man at some point in the day. Passing by the warehouse I saw JR but I was too nervous to say anything to him. It was only until I opened the door to the pharmacy where I miraculously became relaxed. Maybe it was the quiet around me that helped me lower my blood pressure, or maybe some force beyond calmed me, but whatever the case I was feeling better than I was a few seconds ago.

As usual, I took over duties at the dash. Cornelius was our pharmacist on the floor like any other day. For the first hour, things were going okay. I didn't see or even hear about that disgusting new pig of a boss they put in charge. It wasn't until Patty came out when I really started feeling the blood circulating, and she had a label in her hand.

She handed it over to me and said, “Joe wants this compound made and wants it ASAPed right away!”

It was a label for thirty morphine syringes. I didn’t know how to make it and apparently no one in the pharmacy acquired the knowledge to make it either. My brain went chugging like a machine about to lose a cog.

I told her, “I don’t know anyone who can make that.”

Then she said, “You’re the team leader. Figure it out.”

I was about to say something when the phone rang. With Patty a waste of my time, I picked up the phone and answered, “ASAPs.”

A driver on the other end said, “Yeah, I got a return.”

“I’ll be right there.”

I slammed open the door to the driver’s area and it was a black guy I never seen before. He just had some paper bag with a shipper on it, and graciously had me sign my life away.

The driver asked me, “How is your day going?”

“Downhill.”

The driver laughed.

I took the bag and was just opened the door when I heard Joe’s voice out there say, “Where’s Tyler?”

I closed the door and looked back at the driver. He just looked at me like I was crazy. I said to him, “It just hit rock bottom.”

“You serious? What for?”

“Joe’s out there! Tell him you never saw me!”

I hid in the bathroom. As soon as the door closed, I heard Joe bolt right through that door like he was a raging tyrant. I heard him ask the driver, "Have you seen Tyler?"

The driver shook his head and answered, "I don't even know who that is."

That was the extent that I heard before the door shut. I had to look around for options for places to hide. My only chance was the stall, and quickly I opened the door, shut it behind me, and locked it. That wasn't enough for me. I hopped on that toilet and lifted my legs up so it wasn't visible at the empty space below the stall.

Then I heard the door open. I cocked my head down to look under the stall. I saw alligator shoes. He was walking over to the stall. At first I heard silence. The man didn't make a sound.

For a lingering minute, I just sat there as I listened in total silence. I almost thought he left. Then he tried to open the door and frantically he shook it so hard, I almost felt the walls coming apart from the hinges. He just stood there in front of the door. I could tell because I could clearly see his alligator shoes. Then I watched those shoes walk over to the sink. It was right next to me.

The scary part was that his shoes floated up away from my view. My heart raced as I saw two clenched hands grabbing the top of the stall. I bent lower this time, close to the floor, just enough so I would be out of view from the toilet. Joe was looking down over the stall. He must have not seen anything because he stepped back down. I used the noise from the accidental faucet running to get back up on the toilet.

However, the faucet kept running. For thirty seconds I remained in my position. My legs started to shake like jelly and my butt started to feel the pain. I had to look. Slowly I cocked my head down again and to my elation there were no alligator shoes.

I fell back down to the floor and breathed.

That night, before bed, I made it a mission to finish my book and send it out to my agent. It was approaching midnight and I was almost done with the editing. My eye sockets sacked over like I had a rock sitting on them. After I read over the entire book, I sent the attachment to my agent and I was done.

“It’s all done,” I said.

Char said on Skype, “You sent it? It’s done?”

“Yeah, it’s done. I sent it to my agent.”

“Oh Tyler! I’m so happy for you!”

I brought out my cell phone and started to text. Char asked me, “Who are you texting?”

“Suzanne. Not that she would answer me back.”

“Who’s Suzanne?”

I stopped when I realized that I had been hiding her from her for so long and I didn’t even think when I said it. To make matters worse, I acted like a child caught red handed. It was just that I didn’t ever want to see the day where I would see myself losing Char for good. I was going to tell her eventually. At that point in time, I wasn’t a hundred percent sure of what my status with her was.

Then she asked, “Is she your girlfriend?”

“I don’t know what she is. I mean, we go out and everything, we’re really close and all—”

“Did you sleep with her?”

Those words brought me down like cannon fire. I just had to admit, “I don’t know what she is. Doesn’t matter, she’s really mad at me for going to the movies with some other chick.”

“Did you go?”

“Yeah, I went! I felt terrible about it but she already bought the tickets.”

“She?”

“I have female friends. You know that!”

Then she got serious and said, “So does this mean you’re over me?”

At that moment I felt the like the light against the shadow in my face symbolized my final grasp on Char. I couldn’t lie. My thoughts were on Suzanne.

I told her, “I wouldn’t say over with. I’m just saying it’s time to move on.”

“I’m so happy to hear that, Tyler! I didn’t want to tell you for so long, because I was afraid to break your heart, but I had been seeing someone. It’s nothing serious. He’s a hard working lawyer. Things are going good so far.”

Then I said something I never thought I would say. I said to her, “I’m happy for you.”

Char was the first girl I ever felt love for. And she was gone.

Chapter Thirty-Two

I only had one day to deal with Joe and I could enjoy the weekend. You think after three days he had already done his introduction. To Joe, the third day was a good day to give his introduction. It wasn't a meeting; it was more of a threat. Joe walked out there pissed and he was going to hold a meeting pissed.

I was behind the dash counter like I was about to take your order. Debbie stood next to me like a woman who was about to be hung. Everyone else stood around Joe like it was a funeral ceremony.

Joe had this to say, "For those who don't know me, my name is Joe Alotek. I am vice CEO of the company, and I am not here to fool around. I would be walking around here by the clock and if I see anybody, I mean anybody, not living up to their assigned duties, I will fire that person right on the spot. I fired an entire facility before, and I sure as hell can fire another one."

He turned around and looked directly at me when he said it. Debbie and I looked at each other. It was like her heart was beating into mine.

Joe continued relentlessly, "Next week I am going to be out here monitoring everyone's performance. This place will be running on schedule, we will see improvements around here, no questions asked! Am I making myself clear?"

Suddenly I heard my phone vibrate. I thought it was supposed to be quiet but it buzzed and smacked on wood from under the table. My reflexes grabbed for it and Joe didn't turn my general direction. People around him heard it. Kaycee made a stupid face at me.

I quickly looked to see who texted me and it was Suzanne. My shocked face had to clue in Joe somehow.

Instead, Joe was saying, "If this job is too hard for you... If it makes you feel stressed and work at your own speed, well, maybe this isn't the job for you."

I kept my hands under the table and checked Suzanne's message. It was a long one too. She texted, "That's really awesome of you to finish your book! Can I come over and talk to you tonight?"

I looked at Joe, who had his back turned, and I texted her, "Sure."

Then Joe asked, "Is there any further questions?"

I raised my hand. I caught a couple people fan their eyes.

"Tyler?"

"Can I call in sick next week?"

Suzanne walked in my door! I was so excited! She even laughed at how excited I was. I even forgot how open I was around her.

I lend her hand over to the couch and we smiled at each other like we saw each other yesterday. Then I said to her, "I'm just excited to see you come back!"

"Well thank you!" she laughed.

“So what is that you wanted to talk to me about?”

“Well, I went to Philadelphia. Everything was good. You know, I just didn’t feel it with him. He’s a different person to me. I mean I love him. I just wasn’t digging it, you know what I mean?”

“Yeah, something like that happened to me last night.”

“Then I found out I’m pregnant. Yeah, he got me pregnant. You know what he said to me? He said, ‘I don’t want this child.’ That’s what he said to me and you know what? I didn’t want to be around him.”

“So are you over him?”

“Yes and no. Yeah. I wouldn’t say I’m completely over him but I think its time to move on.”

“Listen, serious talk now, if you need any help with the baby, I am here for you. Anything you need, just ask. I’ll help you in any way that I can.”

“That’s so sweet of you. Seriously, I’m about to cry!”

I held Suzanne in my arms and suddenly I felt a whole new beginning.

“Oh and one more thing, I did see that movie with Deshawna.”

“Was it any good?”

“I covered my eyes. I wanted you to see it with me.”

“You didn’t cover your eyes!”

“Seriously, I didn’t pay attention. Come on!” I put my arm around and held her close. I said to her, “It could be our first movie together!”

“Michigan Machete Massacre?”

“Michigan Machete Massacre.”

She did make that our first movie. We held hands at the theatre and I got to play with her leg. What made the experience even better was that we were high. That 3D had so many deep meanings when you get high. Our 3D glasses had extraordinary talents that nobody else in the theatre had.

We also put other talents to rest as we went to my bedroom. It always would start in the living room and she would ask me, "Can we go in the bedroom?"

I took her in there and made sure she started screaming.

My goal was to just impress her. I got her to go to a karaoke bar by the next weekend. It was hard to get her to beyond watching a movie so when I told her that they smoked weed at the bar, she was willing to go. I was half right. The owner of the bar usually has a private room to smoke weed. He let us use that room while he smoked with us. He was a huge pothead and liked to smoke everyone's weed. What a friend pointed out was that he would wait for the other people to smoke first and then he would be the last to hit. He was cautious about undercover cops.

All the colors seemed brighter when we walked out of there. I was surprised I could even walk. We sat at a table with Aaron and Chris who were looking at the karaoke menu. There was only one at the table.

Chris ordered me a drink. Suzanne just drank water. It was noisy so we couldn't even talk to each other. I went up on stage though. I sung one of Suzanne's songs. I couldn't sing but I made up for it with the dance moves and my two week trial of learning

how to play the harmonica. Then I did this cool thing at the end where I threw it up in the air and caught it with my pocket. That got me some sex that night.

For those two weeks, I was enjoying life. What I didn't enjoy was the painfully obvious—my job. I still had to deal with that super prick of a boss Joe Alotek. I was behind the computer when his angry self said hello to my peripheral vision.

He hissed at me, "I want to know why Oakwood didn't reach the facility yet!"

So I checked into our driver's website to find out why. I rallied back to him, "He just got delivered, sir. The home just got it. Oh, by the way, happy birthday."

He grunted, "Thanks!" and walked off.

Debbie walked up to me and asked, "Did you just tell Joe happy birthday?"

"Yeah, it's his birthday, right?"

That was the day I received the contract from my agent for my first publishing company to ever accept my work. It was a small publishing company out of Wisconsin, called themselves Bookworm Publishing of all things, but my agent raved about how much they loved my book and wanted to see it flourish into a movie one day.

I signed the printed contract at a Mexican restaurant with my entire family present. The margarita glasses rose when my pen made John Hancock on the printed line. A lot of the customers turned heads at the commotion at our table and the sound of clinking glass passed around to familiar smiling faces.

Of course, the popular question that night was, "Where's Suzanne?"

When I told them she couldn't make it, the popular response was, "She couldn't make it to her own boyfriend's important occasion?"

Truth was, I didn't know what she was.

I was at work when I stuck the contract in an envelope and sealed it with my saliva. Quickly I wrote the addresses down in the front without really thinking about it. After work I had it stamped and mailed at the nearest post office and celebrated that night with a couple drinks.

Two days later, my brother Sam called me while I was at home and exclaimed, "Hey guess what? Your publisher sent me your mail."

"Already?" I asked.

I wrote my address as my brother's address. With me being so careless and lazy when it came to getting mail, I figured something important like this could be in the shuffle with my brother's mail so it would never be lost.

My initial reaction was, "That was quick."

Then I remembered something. I had to ask my brother, "Where did I write their address?"

Sam answered with, "Uh oh."

I wrote their address on the top left corner. Mark that as the most stupid thing I have done in recent years. I made a quick trip to my brother's and paid the extra money for it to be sent right and first class.

In a few months, we were coming dangerously close to Suzanne giving birth. I was performing amateur stand-up at a local comedy club that Suzanne's parents showed up for. She decided not to go because she was uncomfortable with her parents finding out about us. Lately I had this bad habit of not being able to keep my hands off of her.

I was just called on stage and my brothers cheered the loudest. Francisco stopped me just before I went on stage and said, "We have to go, Tyler! Suzanne is going into labor! Sorry we can't stay!"

And with that, Francisco and Lisa hurried out the door. I stood there as the host was calling me up there like I was stoned off my mind. The truth was, I was wishing I was there with her. That was when I realized that a part of me wanted to be a father.

I got up on stage and did my routine. It gave a few chuckles somewhere in the audience. It wasn't until a couple weeks later when I was invited to Suzanne's apartment and I saw the baby for the first time. She had a beautiful baby girl. I arrived, as promised, with diapers as my own personal baby shower. She hugged me, we kissed, and we looked down at the crib to admire the sleeping baby.

We managed to sit down in her living room. Her place was cleaner than mine. It was also tarnished with polish wood -- the floors, walls, though the ceiling had a pasty white to it, but she had a nice place. Her TV wasn't as big as mine but it got all the cable channels. For someone who claimed to be lazy, she kept the place looking clean. She even had these soft cushioned stools we could prop our feet up on when we laid back on the couch.

"Thanks for the diapers," she smiled.

"Look, I'm here for you. I will be there for you whenever you need me."

“Thank you so much, Tyler! You are the sweetest.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“What’s that?”

“What does the future hold for us?”

“I don’t know. Like what do you mean?”

“I mean, like, you see a future in it with us? I’m just curious.”

“I can see something happening.”

“Really? Like I would so have another kid with you.”

“I would love to have another child.”

That was when I held her hand. That night we talked marriage and kids. I felt I was going to spend the rest of my life with the girl of my dreams. In my eyes, she was the most beautiful girl on the face of this earth.

Chapter Thirty-Three

The next day I took a ride with Ramone and Cornelius to a city way out there. They took me to a spot where it was in this small parking lot that we had to go down a street just to make a turn into it. The building was next to a main road but it had a funny way of entering it. It was just long rectangular building with brown bricks and not a lot of identification of what building this was.

I had to ask, “This is The House of Truth?”

All I saw was a dentist office. I was at looking my right. Apparently I needed to look left as Cornelius pointed out. Surprisingly, it didn’t say House of Truth on the front. Instead, it was called United Wrestling Foundation. I started to think Truth Martini forgot to include his name on his building.

I asked over to Ramone, “Are you sure this is what you want?”

He responded with a simple, “Yeah.”

We took that to heart and we all went inside. What we saw was nothing that we expected. When we thought House of Truth, we were thinking something along the lines of a big building with a cross on it, and inside would be super massive with people everywhere, and a bunch of cool things to see. What we got instead was a large brown room, a ring that would barely qualify in the big leagues, and a few guys wrestling each

other. Right away I recognized Dickie Bronson, but the other guys must have been the kin who signed up for training.

While they weren't paying attention to us, I went to Ramone and Cornelius and said, "Man, last night I was at Suzanne's and we actually talked marriage and kids."

"Really?" said Cornelius. "Congratulations!"

"Thanks! You know, when I was a kid, I always wondered who the girl I would marry would be. I would love to go back in time and tell that kid he was going to marry the most beautiful girl he's ever seen."

Cornelius said, "I'm really happy for you, Tyler! I hope it all works out for you."

"Thanks."

Ramone was too busy trying to get someone's attention. Dickie Bronson eventually left the ring and approached Ramone.

"Hey Dickie!" smiled Ramone.

"Ramone! You made it!"

Cornelius exclaimed, "We love the Dickie!"

Dickie responded, "Yeah, I know you two love the Dickie!" He was referring to both me and Cornelius, "Because you two are a bunch of faggots!"

Ramone laughed.

Then Dickie asked Ramone, "So you here to see Truth Martini?"

"Yeah, is he here?"

Dickie called out to someone named Austin who was with the other guys in the ring. He called out, "Austin! Is Truth Martini still here?"

"I think he just left!"

Then we heard Truth from a door just ahead of us, holding a cane in one hand, and his House of Truth book tucked under his arm at the other. He was saying, “I’m right here, gentlemen.”

We gazed over to him. What appeared especially odd was how he looked like something out of a biker from Wonderland. He had this black bandana on that could not hide the long brown hair in the back. His sunglasses made him look like something out of a cartoon, as they were like two big black ovals with white rims. He also had on this black pimp trench coat with cloudy-like fur on the collar. Our best guess was that he was dressed up for his next show.

Cornelius asked, “Heading off to the next show?”

“Just about to,” he said, walking over to us with his cane. “I have some time to kill. So tell me, Ramone, what made you decide to train at my school?”

Ramone responded, “I want to become a wrestler.”

“You want to become a wrestler. You are aware of the trials you will face, right? This isn’t for the faint at heart. We will run you into the ground and make you wonder why you signed up in the first place. There’s no bullshit in my school. I iron out the weak and the strong. I guarantee that you will feel the pain well into the next morning. But believe me, if you stick around, face the trials head on, then I will turn shit into chocolate. You will be a wrestler by the time I get done with you. If any of this makes you change your mind, there’s the door right there.”

“Oh, I’m ready boy! I got a name for myself and everything!”

“Well, all that comes later. If you are really serious about this, I’ll tell you what. We are holding a death match in Indiana this summer. If you show up for that, I will give you training at my expense.”

“Are you serious?” asked Ramone.

“You have my word.” Then Truth turned to us, “Any of you two want to become wrestlers?”

Cornelius shook his head. I just said, “Hell no.”

Cornelius followed up with, “If it was twenty years ago, I would.”

“Totally understandable,” said Truth. “You know some of the best wrestlers started late in their career, right?”

Cornelius said, “Well, that’s good for them. Hey, what’s in that book, by the way?”

Truth looked at his book tucked under his arm and asked, “This?”

“Yeah.”

“Want to see?”

“Sure!”

Truth opened his book to Cornelius to see and slammed it hard right at his nose. Truth gave this maniacal laugh and Dickie and Ramone laughed with him. Cornelius and I were both thinking Ramone was starting to become a traitor.

After walking out of there, we had to listen to how Ramone was so excited about this wrestling event coming up. Then he had this to say, “I’m going to be called Raging Ramone! I’m going to win every time. I will refuse to lose!”

Cornelius asked, “What if they tell you that you have to lose?”

“Nope. Raging Ramone always wins!”

Then I asked, “Don’t you think that it’s a little odd that he’s giving you free lessons at a death match in Indiana?”

Ramone responded, “No, why?”

“I don’t know. It just seems a little odd.”

“You’re odd! Look at Tyler. Why don’t you join, huh? You can get free lessons.”

“I don’t want to become a wrestler, Ramone.”

“That’s right, you would have to lose some weight.”

It didn’t change the fact that I thought this whole situation seemed strange. However, since Ramone decided to be a dick, I figured he could see for himself. Besides, Cornelius and I still didn’t think he was going to go through with it. Cornelius did offer to drive, and even planned the trip, so the idea of him training didn’t seem too much of a stretch.

Chapter Thirty-Four

The next day at work I had my daily conjugal visit from Joe. As usual, he didn't seem too happy. I was once again behind the table looking like someone who was staring death in the face.

He handed me a sheet and said, "I want this ASAP done right away and I am delivering it personally to the home."

"Yes, sir."

He gave me this heated, disgusted look on his face as he walked off to those magical doors of disappearance that led back to the warehouse. Debbie rushed to my aid because apparently she knew Joe was coming way before I did.

She asked me, "You need help?"

"The more I can get. Thanks. You know, one day I'm getting out of this place."

Then JR walked by and said, "You're a lifer!"

"I'm not a lifer! Tell him, Debbie!"

I was printing out the labels as Debbie said, "No, your book is going to make a lot of money and you're going to walk out of this place."

"See!"

"Then I'm going to demand half or I'm going to Star Magazine and I'm going to blackmail you in a sex scandal and then you will have to give me money! So now what!"

“Ha! You can’t get me in a sex scandal! I’m still a virgin!”

“You a damn lie!”

Coming home from work felt like coming home from a big war. I felt fatigued, battered, and in need of a drink. Somehow, all those feels quickly vanished as I saw a big box with my name and address on it in front of my door. Elated, I quickly carried the box in my apartment. I didn’t care what I used to open it even it was just a pen which I used to slit open the tape at the top. Finally I muscled the folding and rummaged through brown filter paper before I laid eyes on my very first book.

It said Anarchy on the top with a painting of the White House caught on fire with a tattered American Flag. On the bottom I tickled with delight at the read of my name. For the first time, I felt like I accomplished something in life.

Then I heard a knock at my door. Normally I would panic but I was so enthralled at the sight of my book that I didn’t even care who it was. When I opened the door, I was even more shocked when I saw Megan standing by my door.

“Megan!”

“Hi, Tyler. Sorry I didn’t return your calls. I was having problems with my phone. I thought I would just come over.”

“Yeah, I thought you gave up on me.”

“We’ve been friends for how long now? Please.”

“Come on in!” I exclaimed. “See what I got!”

I rushed over to the box on the dining room table and held up my book. She gasped with her hand gently on her chest like I was holding up the Holy Grail.

“Oh wow! Congratulations, Tyler! Did you just get it today?”

“Yeah, I just got it! This calls for a time to celebrate.”

“You should, Tyler.”

Then I asked, “Are you up for the Beer Garden?”

Our friend Xavi had his own cart just off the outskirts of the Beer Garden. He just started a Spanish restaurant called Simply Spanish. It was in this little area in a gated community in the great outdoors. There were many other carts around him ranging from BBQ, Mexican, Chinese, and whatever assortments people wanted to go to. Then they can take their foods to one of the wooden cafeteria tables or just take it to the Beer Garden located past this gate behind Xavi. I couldn't help but notice these Indian dancers behind him. They even gathered quite a crowd.

Xavi was saying to Ramone, “I'm sorry things didn't work out between you and Pacqui.”

“Oh well,” said Ramone. “There will be others.”

“That's right, my friend. There will be others!”

Xavi noticed Megan next to me. She was looking hot too as she was wearing tight green clothes without a hint of fat on her. I think Xavi noticed that the most.

He said to her, “You are looking beautiful! Are you sure you don't want to work for me?”

We all laughed as Megan smiled and shook her head.

“Are you sure? I pay good money!”

“That’s quite alright!” she graciously responded.

Ramone was the one left laughing which got Xavi’s attention. Xavi said, “This motherfucker right here, he was the only one that paid for anything. The rest of you cheap bastards can go fuck yourselves.”

We all laughed as Xavi added to Megan, “Except you!”

Megan just laughed.

Chapter Thirty-Five

As part of promotions for Xavi's new restaurant, we had a huge pan of paella that could feed an entire army. Paella was a Spanish rice dish with chunks of bean and chicken. Cornelius and Ramone announced and offered people to try it as Megan clapped her hands. I was too busy eating.

As a two-for-one bonus I brought my book and they tried to promote that. Some people would thumb through it, ask about it, and then promise to check it out. It was better than some other people who claimed they couldn't read.

While Ramone and Megan were busy promoting, I waited in line with Cornelius to get an alcoholic beverage of our choosing. The line would go to a concessions stand with a menu written on chalk and two hot girls would take your order. The whole Beer Garden, especially the concessions, looked like something out of Rio. It had this whole summer vibe with wooden tables around, laced trees, and a large banner hanging over us. The atmosphere was relaxed too. It wasn't an obnoxious crowd or anything. We were near college town and even though we had a good number of college people, including hot women, there were also a lot of middle-aged people as well.

"Okay, here's the plan." said Cornelius. "We scope out this place and at least get one phone number for Ramone."

"You mean give them his phone number?"

“There has to be one willing girl to give him her phone number!”

I looked around, and even saw a group of very attractive young girls, and I could only answer, “I believe in miracles.”

Then Cornelius said, “That’s going to be our mission!”

When we got back to our seats, Megan was thumbing through my new novel. Cornelius had paid for all our drinks and placed Ramone’s Obereon Beer in front of him. I handed Megan her drink.

She said, “This is very good, Tyler!”

“Really?”

“How long did it take you to write this?”

“Probably about a year.”

“That’s very good. You think about where you’re going to have book signings?”

Cornelius added, “Yeah, Tyler! You still have book signings to go to.”

Ramone said, “You should try Comic-Cons!”

Then Megan said, “Yeah, there we go. I know there’s one coming this month. You should see about going to that one.”

“We can all go!” said Cornelius. “We can help bring people to your booth. We should have a grand entrance though, you know, like something to get people looking. You should go with us, Megan.”

“Oh, I don’t know.”

“Come on, you can be the sex appeal for the guys. I’m sure you got something glamorous you can wear.”

“So I should stand there in a dress and just wave my hand to the guys?”

“There you go! Now we just need a hot guy for the women. I know none of us qualify!”

Then I said, “I’ll ask Aaron.”

“Fresh! I think we got this day planned!”

Then Ramone nudged Cornelius and pointed to the table across from us. He said, “Check out Pocahontas over there.”

“You want to talk to her?” asked Cornelius.

“Nah, that’s okay!”

“C’mon, I’ll talk dumb stuff and make you look good by comparison.”

Ramone thought about it and then said, “Okay.”

The two of them left me alone with Megan at the table. We just smiled at each other and ate off the pan of paella in front of us. For a few moments, we just ate, and I looked back to see Ramone standing there as Cornelius talked to that hot little Pocahontas girl Ramone was referring to.

Megan asked me, “Is he talking to her?”

I answered, “Cornelius is. I don’t see Ramone saying anything.”

Megan then asked, “You aren’t going to ask any of these girls out?”

“Me? Nah. I have a woman now.”

“Are you serious? Who?”

“Suzanne. I met her at work.”

“How is everything going with that?”

“Well, she just had a kid with her ex, he split, and I’m helping her take care of the child. She means a lot to me. I really like her.”

“I’m glad you’re happy, Tyler, but just be careful with that.”

“Why?”

“Just saying, some girls are funny like that. If the baby daddy decides to be back in their lives, they’re going to choose the baby daddy. I’d be careful with that.”

“She’s not like that. Trust me, this baby daddy is in a different state. He’s neglected four of his kids already.”

“How old is this guy?”

“He’s in his forties. She moved on from him. In fact, we talked about marriage and her having more kids.”

Just then, Cornelius and Ramone returned to the table. I had to ask them, “Any luck?”

Ramone responded, “She has a boyfriend.”

“What were you two talking about?” asked Cornelius.

Megan answered, “Tyler was telling me about his new girlfriend.”

Then I replied with, “And I see a bright future with her.”

Cornelius said to me, “Oh okay. Hey Tyler, why don’t you wait in line with me? I’ll buy.”

“Okay.”

The two of us waited in line which wasn’t as long as it was the last time. We were far enough way for Megan and Ramone not to hear us.

Cornelius said to me, “Hey, listen, I’m telling you as a friend, that you should really keep your relationship on the down low with her.”

“Why?”

“In case things don’t work out with your woman, at least you got a rebound! She really digs you, dude! Keep her on a tight leash in case something happens between you and Suzanne.”

“Why is everyone thinking something wrong is going to happen with me and Suzanne? We are perfectly happy together.”

“I know, but just keep it in the back of your head, that’s all.”

Suddenly Xavi came out with bowls of Churros. He even called out, “CHURROS!”

Cornelius and I both yelled out, “CHURROS!”

The Beer Garden was closing and we were walking back to the car. Cornelius spotted a group of girls behind us who arrived late to the Beer Garden. The employee by the gate shunned them off and this left a perfect opportunity for Cornelius.

He said to us, “Hey, you think we should see if they would go to a bar with us?”

I just looked over at Megan who didn’t say anything. Ramone didn’t say much either. Cornelius decided to go it alone and asked the girls, “Hey, can you believe they closed already?”

One of the girls was like, “Yeah, that sucks.”

“Hey, you know where there’s a bar or somewhere to hang out at tonight?”

The girls started to look uncomfortable. One of the girls said, “There’s a bar right up the street. We’re probably going to go someplace else.”

“Oh okay, thanks!” smiled Cornelius.

Ramone commented, “You see how that girl looked when you asked that? I hate it when girls do that, boy! That’s like one of my pet peeves!”

“I didn’t even see it,” said Megan.

“Here they go, they’re probably looking for some loser ass thug, and have them drive them around everywhere, and spend all their money!” Then Ramone just laughed about it so hard like this was the first time he ever said this before, and fell to the ground on his knees.

I looked over at Megan and asked, “You see why he’s single?”

We were just about home. Cornelius was driving. I noticed he kept looking at the rearview mirror at us. Megan and I were sitting really close. Our hands could just about touch each other. I never reached for it. However, it did cross my mind. All I could think about was being with Suzanne.

By the time we got into my complex, Cornelius announced to us, “Hang on, guys.” For some reason, he stopped the car.

I didn’t know what he was talking about at first. Then I noticed the blue and red lights flickering in his car. It didn’t take long to register that there was a police car right behind us.

“What the hell have we done?” asked Ramone.

A woman cop that I could barely see approached the driver’s side window. She automatically said to him, “Sir, did you know that your middle taillight is out?”

Cornelius responded, “No, I didn’t know that! Thanks!”

“Can I get each of your licenses so I know who I’m talking to?”

“Sure.”

We all pulled out our licenses and handed it to the cop. I was a little more reluctant, though. I haven’t gotten my mail in months and I was afraid I might have missed a jury summons or something.

She asked him, “So where were you coming from?”

“From Ann Arbor. Our buddy just opened his own restaurant there called Simply Spanish.”

“Oh okay. May I ask that you step out of the car, please?”

“Oh sure.”

As Cornelius stepped out of the car, Megan asked me, “Are we going to jail?”

I joked, “Damn, I guess we made an illegal turn.”

“Well,” she said, “at least I can honestly say that I’ve been stopped by the cops three times and I wasn’t driving in either one of them.”

Then the cop said, “Back driver’s side. Please come out.”

“Bye, Megan.”

Megan sighed and got out of the car. After she closed the door, Ramone said, “We didn’t even do nothing! Here they go, all these criminals on the street, they gotta pull us over? Why?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“We should take off running.”

“Yeah, sure. I’m sure we would get home and no cops would be searching for us at all. I’m sure Megan would love to talk to me after that!”

The cop announced, “Front passenger side! Please come out.”

“That’s you, Ramone.”

Ramone got out of the car. He walked to the back of the car where the cop was waiting. She was asking him, “You have any alcohol or drugs on you?”

Ramone answered, “No.”

“You know about any of the break-ins that have been happening in this complex?”

“No, I didn’t. Really?”

“Yeah, you’re clean. Back passenger side! Please come out.”

I sighed and opened the door. Immediately I was smacked by a branch of a tree. A male cop said to me, “Watch your head, sir!”

“Thanks!” I said, sarcastically.

I nearly slipped on the hill and balanced myself to the back of the car. I was holding my book too which caught the male cop’s attention.

“What’s that in your hand?” he asked.

I saw Megan, Cornelius and Ramone all sitting on the side of the street. The female cop was frisking me as I still had my book in my hand.

I told the cop, “It’s my new book. It’s called Anarchy!”

“What’s it about?”

“It’s about the people overthrowing the government!”

Ramone laughed.

The cop laughed and said, “That sounds like my kinda book!”

“Buy it!” I smiled.

Suddenly, Ramone and Cornelius started chanting, “Buy Tyler’s book! Buy Tyler’s book!”

Pretty soon Megan joined in. The cop gave in with a laugh and said, “Alright, I’ll buy it!”

That night I made my first sale with a cop.

Chapter Thirty-Six

As planned, we were going to take the Comic-Con by storm. We definitely got their attention and that was remarkable considering all the people dressed up in robes, monster costumes, and any dork cosplay one could think up. We, however, dressed in suits. Cornelius and Aaron took the front. I was in the back with Xavi. In the middle of our group was Ramone looking like a million bucks. Cornelius went all out in making him look important and rich. That was the key to the whole thing. Our main goal was to make him look like a celebrity. Chicks like to bang celebrities.

Ramone was strutting in the middle with a briefcase specifically provided by Cornelius himself. The rest of us four communicated by cheap bluetooths that we just got at the cellular store. The trick was giving the illusion that we were talking to someone at a security booth when really we were just communicating with ourselves. The plan seemed to be working. I caught a few hot girls turning to us with bedroom smiles. The deal was that if any girl looked like she was willing to sleep with Ramone, it was automatically a code red.

Cornelius phoned in to us and said, "Code red! We got a code red! I just caught a girl at twelve o'clock looking right at Ramone. I think she wants to sleep with him. We need to send someone who isn't good looking to go talk to her. Tyler, no wait, Tyler you stay here! Xavi, you go see if she wants Ramone's jock!"

“Roger that, fuckhead!”

Xavi fell back and approached the girl with really dark hair and a terrific body. She was cosplaying as a princess and it just made her look even sexier. Xavi asked her, “Excuse me, miss. You see that guy over there with the briefcase?”

“Yeah.”

“I was wondering if you would like to go on a date with him?”

“Um, he’s okay, I like the guy in front. What’s his name?”

“Aaron?”

Xavi phoned to Cornelius, “False alarm! We got a false alarm!”

Cornelius said back, “I think I saw a lot of girls at this side. Let’s make a right!”

We turned the next corner, which was like the back of the building, where merchants and gatherings all moved out of our way so we can escort our rich client. I looked to my right and saw a security guy looking at us with a peculiar glance. This idea started to worry me at that point.

Then a really hot dark-haired girl caught up with Cornelius. She asked him, “Who are you guys?”

“You see that guy in the middle?”

“Yeah!”

“He’s a very rich man. He’s been all over the news.”

“Really? How is he rich?”

“Oh, he’s an owner of a very popular restaurant. Maybe you heard of it. Simply Spanish?”

The girl thought, and said, “It sounds familiar.”

“Well, he’s the owner. You know what? He’s available! He would date a girl like you!”

“Oh really? I never dated a rich guy before!”

“There’s a room up here. Why don’t you two get acquainted!”

“Okay!”

Ramone nervously got pushed along in this room in the back. The girl already went in there. Cornelius and Xavi stood guard and folded their arms in front of them. This just left me and Aaron.

Cornelius said to us, “You two go get the booth ready. You got a book to promote!”

“Right!”

I took off with Aaron as Cornelius and Xavi stayed behind. They were at least able to hear what was going on in the room.

The girl was saying to Ramone, “So how rich are you?”

“Oh, don’t listen to them! I’m not that rich!”

Cornelius slapped his forehead. Finally, he admitted, “I give up!”

The girl approached him and said, “You’re just being modest!”

“Seriously!”

“What’s in the briefcase?”

“Wanna see? I don’t even know what’s in the briefcase.”

He unlatched the briefcase and opened it for her to see. Her smile turned upside down when she looked what was inside. Ramone looked and couldn’t believe what he saw.

She asked him, “Why is there a penis pump in your briefcase?”

“That damn Cornelius!”

Then she smiled and said, “Put it on!”

I was walking with Aaron to the other side of the building to where my booth was supposed to be. He didn't seem like himself. In fact, he seemed just as down as the night he told me how he split with his wife.

So I asked him, “How is everything with you and Chris?”

“Oh, man, we split up.”

“Really? She seemed like she really wanted you!”

“I mean, what girl doesn't? No, she was smothering me and I started liking this other chick so I had to let her go.”

“That sucks.”

“Yeah, listen, I have to get my stuff out of her house. Could you come with me? She would be less emotional if you were there.”

I didn't know how to take that comment, but since he was my buddy, I answered with, “Sure, no problem.”

We followed the map to my booth and it was located at an aisle filled with other people trying to sell books and comic books. I was in what they call the independent section of the Comic-Con. This was the section where starving artists beg people to buy their work. The group next to me groveled to people in a professional matter to people walking past. Whenever someone would walk by, they would always ask for a minute of

their time. It seemed to work for them. A lot of people stopped by, and even chatted with him, and showed a lot of interest in his product. However, I never did see anyone buy anything despite him having a laptop and a register handy.

The person across from me was probably the most prepared. I didn't know what he was selling. It looked like he was selling artwork because he had a huge stand around him showcasing various artworks that never seem to intertwine with one another. They were cool looking. Some of them had a guy with a gun that resembled more of a detective in the future. What threw me off was that there was a lot of fantasy art too with knights and dragons and stuff. Then there were ones that looked straight out of a comic book. This guy got the most attention out of anyone and I could see why with his work.

I saw on my empty booth full well knowing I had competition. Where everyone surrounded themselves with flair: I just had a table, a white cloth, and a chair. Below the table was my box with ten of my books. That was all my paycheck could afford. Ironically, I had to buy my own books for this event. Aaron, trying to be a good Samaritan, helped me open the box and he did the honors of setting them up on the table.

The girl next to me, a brown girl who looked mixed, with intellectual glasses and dark, conservative dress clothes said to me, "Finally made it, huh?"

"Yeah," I said, as Aaron set the table.

I noticed she had more than one book on display. Her friend or sister: a darker girl with longer hair stood next to her and occasionally would straighten some of the books. She sat there with her cell phone possibly either sending out a text or playing a game or something.

After wasting a good ten minutes straightening my books, Aaron stood next to me with his arms folded in front of him and we waited. Neither one of us said a word to each other as we watched as people panhandled down the aisle, some not even making eye contact, and we sat there and watched. I felt like a circus attraction with a third eye on my forehead and people, regardless if they turned away or passed a glance, still didn't change the fact that I was feeling like a silent beggar.

Aaron asked me, "So this is your first book signing, huh?"

"Shut up. Where the hell is Megan?"

Not even thirty seconds after I said that was when Megan came running in. She was just as glamorous as she was the night I danced with her. She even wore these long gloves that sparkled as it went down to her arm. She wore this silky light green dress that went down and split like a towel between her legs. We could see that she was wearing leggings, and her legs looked smooth to the touch.

She said, "Sorry, I'm late! I had to go all the way to BFE just to park."

"That's okay! Now that you're here, I'm going to have you two take over as I pose with some celebrities with my book! Aaron, you're me!"

"This is the worst cosplay I ever had," said Aaron, as he took over my seat.

Megan asked Aaron as she showed off her wrist band, "Where's your wrist band?"

"Tyler didn't get us one."

I immediately said, "They didn't ask them when we came in."

She said, "I would be careful with that. If security finds out, they could either force you to pay or throw you out of here."

“Security isn’t going to find out. You just look gorgeous and attract people to come over here. Aaron, put on your charm, and sell some copies. I’m going to pose with some celebrities with my book!”

What I didn’t know was that the same guy who was watching us escort Ramone gathered with the rest of the security guys. The main guy in this who was this old guy, with these insane muscles on steroids, directed the traffic of his security people to different parts of the building.

They were out to find us.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

The girl came running out laughing and Cornelius and Xavi looked very perplexed. When they poked their head in the door, they saw Ramone trying to pull something out of his penis.

“Help me!” said Ramone. “My penis pump is stuck!”

Before Cornelius said anything, he overheard one of the worker women passing by saying, “Morgan Freeman just got here.”

Instantly, Cornelius asked her, “Morgan Freeman is here?”

She turned to him and asked, “You didn’t see the brochure? Morgan Freeman is our main attraction today.”

He turned to Xavi and said, “Help him with his dick! I have another mission!”

Cornelius ran off and Xavi went over to a frightened Ramone and said, “Okay, I’m going to yank your penis right off, are you ready?”

When Cornelius reached for one of the books, he noticed guys hitting on Megan and girls wrapping themselves around Aaron. At least that plan seemed to be working. Quickly he nabbed one of the books and took off running. Security spotted him and pinpointed the missing wrist band which alerted other guards. Cornelius dashed and

dodged down a sea of cosplay people who yelled and shouted obscenities. Security was right behind him but the barricade of people was too much and held them back.

I happened to be posing with Hannah Fierman from the movie VHS when I caught Cornelius running with my book. At the time, I didn't know what it was about. Finally I just asked Hannah to say her famous line, "I like you!" She did just that and we had a good laugh.

Morgan Freeman was in a special tent at the very back of the building. A couple of workers blocked Cornelius's path as he held up the book for them to see. Out of breath, he told them, "I need to see Morgan Freeman! My friend has this book and he desperately needs his help!"

The woman said to him, "Sorry, sir, nobody is allowed to see Morgan Freeman at this time!"

Behind him, one of the security officers spotted him and yelled to the others about his discovery. Three security guys were now running after Cornelius behind his back. In the meantime, Cornelius was begging to see Morgan Freeman.

"Please, it's for my friend's book, I just need a minute of his time!"

"Sorry, sir, he's not available to see anyone right now!"

Suddenly a worker came out and whispered in her ear. She changed her tune and said, "Morgan Freeman said he would see you now."

They allowed him access and the three security guards were held back and trying to reach for him as the workers said to them, "If Morgan Freeman wants to see somebody, he gets to see somebody!"

I was just posing with Ernie Hudson when a loud speaker overtook the Comic-Con. That voice sounded vaguely like Morgan Freeman. Those words he spoke sounded familiar. What were those words? It was almost like listening to heaven above. As I was following the resonance of his voice, I noticed everyone around me was looking up as if searching the heavens. Then I realized, he was reading off the first chapter in my book!

I walked down the other end of the building which took me back to my booth. It was there where I found Morgan Freeman reading behind my booth as crowds of onlookers stared at him as he read the chapter that I wrote. Cornelius was smiling proud next to him. Aaron and Megan were next to each other as if fully entranced by the godly presence of Morgan Freeman.

But then when Morgan Freeman said, “She said,” he followed this by looking up and asking, “Did you want me to read this with helium?” He had a balloon ready.

We turned around and saw the crowds of people replaced by security guys. Before we knew it, Cornelius, Ramone, Xavi, Aaron and then me, were all tossed outside. The old security guy shouted, “And stay out!”

I asked, “Can I have my books back?”

One of the security guys held up the box and then one by one he started throwing books at us like we were target practice. I had one hit me right on the nose. After eight books, they threw the box in my lap and closed the door behind them as they laughed.

I turned to Aaron and asked, “We only sold two copies?”

Cornelius said, “I gave one to Morgan Freeman!”

“Only one?”

Megan walked outside, folded her arms, and asked, “Are we done in there now?”

Chapter Thirty-Eight

The next day, Ramone and I went with Aaron to pick up his stuff at Chris's house. It was in this ritzy neighborhood at the secluded side of town with so many big and nice houses, I dreamed about living in one of them. Chris's house was just as nice, and it seemed like she left the sprinklers on to water the driveway. She must have known we were coming.

I got out of the car and immediately got sprayed with water. Ramone got the worst of it and he took off running. Aaron didn't seem to mind being wet.

Although I did have to ask Aaron, "You know, you could have parked on the side of the street!"

"There's no parking."

I looked at the street and sure enough there was a sign that said "No Parking" right there for us to see. She really had this planned out. We raced for refuge at the porch and all three of us were soaked. Ramone was the most dramatic out of all of us. He dangled his arms low and breathed heavily like he just ran through an air raid.

Then I asked Aaron, "Are you ready?"

"Let's get this over with."

"Yeah," said Ramone. "She's fat anyway!"

Aaron knocked on the door and we heard a dog bark inside. Then we heard someone trying to shut the dog up and followed with a bunch of clicks and clonks. The suction opened and an extremely beautiful woman stood there at the door. She had long, dark hair, an hourglass body, and perky breasts. She tossed her hair as she opened the door, and I could see the dimples on her cheeks. Her eyes looked familiar. I started thinking I knew this girl.

“Hey Chris,” said Aaron.

Ramone and I both said, “This is Chris?”

“Surprised there’s a princess under this frog? What do you think of me now, Ramone?”

“My God! You look good!”

“Good, well have fun jerking off, because I would never go out with you!”

“Good, I didn’t what to go out with you anyway.”

“Bullshit! You’d fuck me in a second.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

Then I said, “Just don’t gain any weight!”

“Yeah, that reminds me,” she said, “what will happen if you finally find this beautiful woman and she starts gaining weight? Or she gets up in the morning and her hair is a mess and she’s not wearing any makeup, huh? Are you going to be that nice guy then?”

Ramone just did his goofy laugh.

Then she followed with, “That’s what I thought! You are just as bad as all the other guys you were talking about!” Then she went to me, “And you!”

“Hey, I was nice to you!”

“Fuck you! Next!”

“Oh good,” I said, “I got off easy.”

Then she looked at Aaron and said, “You sure you don’t want to make love one last time?”

Aaron sighed, “Yeah, I guess so. I just have to make it to my daughter’s soccer practice in an hour.”

She pulled Aaron in the house. Aaron said to us, “You guys can wait in the living room!”

Like idiots, we waited in the living room as we listened to Chris scream upstairs. I’m sure she was sending a message to Ramone. We just sat there looking with our phones as we listened to her loud orgasms.

I said to Ramone, “If you were nicer, that could have been you.”

“Fuck you, pig fat!”

Suzanne woke up one night as I was rocking the baby to sleep. She was in her white nightgown when she saw me, and I caught her warming herself against the wall with a romantic smile drawn across her face. I turned and saw her, still rocking the baby, and we didn’t exchange any words.

The baby managed to go to sleep, so I tucked her back into her crib. She must not have thought I was good with babies, and I really wasn’t, but I did have a niece and

nephew so that helped. Suzanne walked over to me and I couldn't resist touching her, and I wrapped my arms around her waist.

"Sorry," I said, "I was trying to let you sleep."

"Oh thank you!" She said. "I have to get up for work anyway. My mom is going to be here."

"I know, I have to leave."

"Sorry."

"I'm going to be gone for the weekend. The boys and I are heading out to Indiana for a wrestling show."

"Oh okay. I would say that sounds like fun but I hate wrestling."

"Yeah, I know. It's supposed to be Ramone's big debut. He's supposed to be wrestling, I guess."

"Is that like his ambition or something?"

"No, I think it's his way of getting women."

"Why are you still trying to set him up with people? Haven't you figured out that it's hopeless already?"

"This is the last time. This is also our last wrestling show. This is it."

Chapter Thirty-Nine

It was going to be the biggest night of our lives. We weren't sure why it was at a strip club. The wrestling event was being held at the Rustic Frog Gentleman's Club. It was one of those seedy strip clubs illuminated by blue light to help chaperone in the dark. The first thing that hit us was the neon lights in our eyes.

Ramone looked like he was living in a dream. His beady whites, the serious goofiness in his face, and not to mention his passion and his drive to be a part of this that night, all of that made this trip somewhat worth it. I didn't know what music they were playing, but I was a dancing fool in the back, and Cornelius was looking for directions to the ring.

Ramone fixated on the dancing naked girls while Cornelius searched around for someone to help him. One of the girls working at the bar, topless I might add, was the one Cornelius stopped for directions. While he was busy with that, another girl approached Ramone.

She asked him, "Are you in the show tonight?"

"Yeah, I am. I start training tonight."

"Oh yeah? Would you like to go in the back with me?"

"I don't know if I want to. How much is it?"

"Twenty bucks to start."

I gave her money, and said, "Here! It's on me! Please take his virginity away!"

Ramone laughed, "I'm not a virgin, Tyler!"

"You might as well be. Take him away!"

"God I hate you, Tyler!"

The girl grabbed him by the hand and led him somewhere in the back. It looked like a room draped in cloth. Cornelius came to my side and said, "I found out where the show is. It's in the back. Where's Ramone?"

"He's with a stripper in the back."

Cornelius looked at his cell and said, "Well, we got time."

Ramone was sitting in a small room with just him, her, and an MP3 player. The girl was blonde, which was a turnoff for Ramone because he hated blondes, but she had a big enough rack for him to salivate over. She teased him as she played with her bra strap, and smiled at him as he looked like a salivating dog.

"Ooo, baby!" said Ramone.

Then the song stopped. When that happened, she stopped too.

"Why'd you stop?" he asked.

"Oh honey, its twenty bucks a song. You owe me forty dollars already."

"Forty dollars?"

"I'm on the third song. Once I get my money, I'll take off my bra."

"What happens if I don't have any money?"

"Well, they need someone to clean the cum in some of these rooms."

That was when Ramone peeked out of the cloth and saw us two waiting for him. He was in a panic, and we were just the guys to help.

He said to us, “Guys! Guys! She gypped me! I need forty dollars!”

“Sure, no problem,” said Cornelius, “Tyler, you got a twenty?”

“Yeah,” I said as I reached in my wallet.

“I don’t even like her anyway,” said Ramone. “She smells like horse radish and sauerkraut. I don’t even like blondes either! Thanks a lot, fat! Here you go, I got money to take Ramone in the back!”

“Whoa, whoa, hang on a minute. I was trying to help you out.”

“Well, don’t help out, you cow pod!”

“Oh, okay, I won’t then. We’ll just save this money here and let you take care of this mess.”

“You got me into this mess, fat!”

“Come on, Cornelius, let’s take this forty bucks and stuff it down some fat woman’s pants.”

As Cornelius and I left, Ramone shouted, “Come back here! God, I hate fat people!”

Ramone turned to the girl, who was putting back on a shirt, and he said to her, “Don’t put your shirt back on!”

“You know, I have other clients.”

“Please don’t make me clean out the cum! I can get you the money!”

Suddenly, another person removed the cloth. Ramone looked and breathed when he saw Dickie Bronson.

Ramone exclaimed, "Dickie!"

Dickie said to him, "Ramone! You made it!"

I returned back to my seat next to Cornelius. We sat in the second row so we wouldn't get any blood on us. I was hoping to come back with some good news but unfortunately I didn't.

"Ramone's gone," I said.

"That's weird."

"I wonder where he went."

All of a sudden, someone came out on the speaker from the other side of the ring. It was Truth Martini. He was holding that same book under his arm, and he was joined by Dickie Bronson and STD. It looked like the show was about to start and we started to get a little concerned for Ramone.

"Welcome everyone to IWA!"

The crowd cheered in an uproar. Some people in the back started chanting. Truth continued, "Let's get this party started! Let's bring out our first opponent—The Raging Retard!"

Overhead someone played his theme music which sounded like something out of the cartoon. Through the deafening cheers I could hear kazoos being played in the song. Ramone came out wearing nothing more than spandex underwear. For someone who spent several months planning his personae, he sure looked generic. Still, I had to address this issue.

I turned to Cornelius and said, "They're making a mockery out of him."

Ramone looked nervous on that stage. He circled around reveling his cheering audience and he could only laugh. I wasn't sure if that laugh meant that he was living his dream or that he was really nervous.

Truth went on, "Our first match, The Raging Retard will be wrestling for the lovely Scarlett."

Scarlett walked out from the curtains and the whole audience cheered and whistled as she turned and rubbed up from her leg to her ass. She was looking like a sex object up there as the fans egged her on. Cornelius was getting in on the action as he got up from his seat and cheered.

"What was that, Scarlett?" asked Truth, as he bent low with the ear. "You want to wrestle him?"

"Ooo baby!" shouted Ramone.

"Go wrestle Raging Retard!"

Suddenly it got dark. People panicked and we couldn't even see the person next to us. We heard Truth say, "What's going on with the lights? I don't know what's going on here!"

The lights kicked back on and a hulking, steroid-inducing, muscle of a man stood right behind Ramone. He had tattoos all over his body and his arms were bigger than his head. He fiercely looked down at Ramone, as he towered over him in height, and Ramone backed off in intimidation.

Truth said, "Oh I'm sorry! Not Scarlett! SEAN SCARLETT!"

Dickie took the mic and said, "We're trying to get back at those two bitches!" He pointed right at Cornelius and me.

Ramone said out loud, "I don't even like those guys!"

"Ring the bell!" yelled Truth.

The bell rang and Ramone cowered under the hulking Sean Scarlett. It was like staring down at a lumbering ogre. The only thing he was missing was a club. Ramone tried to reason with him but Sean whipped him into the apron. Like a pussy, Ramone began pleading with Sean but he wasn't having any of it. He chopped him on the chest. It was a smack so loud that even the audience reacted to it.

Cornelius said to me, "We have to help him!"

"Why?"

"You want to listen to him cry all the way home because he didn't get Scarlett?"

I thought about it and replied, "Let's go help him."

Ramone was flipped over on his back when I ran up to the ring. Sean was busy looking for a weapon when I yelled to him, "Ramone, listen, I know you're used to losing, but now is not the time!"

"Fuck you, cow smell!"

Then I looked up and saw that Sean was scattering thumbtacks all over the ring. My jaw dropped. For once, I actually felt sorry for Ramone. It was like saying goodbye to a dear friend as he was carried up, draped over Sean's shoulder, and then slammed right into the thumb tacks. The look of pain on his face was surreal. He rolled around on those thumbtacks so hard, one almost hit me on the eye.

Finally I had enough. I ran down the aisle toward Truth and his cronies because I had a few words for him. That was when a douse of flames blocked my path, and Truth was laughing devilishly from behind the flames.

I looked back at Ramone who wasn't fairing much better. Sean was hitting him on the back with one of those long fluorescent light bulbs. Cornelius was looking up on his cell phone on how to handle each situation as if training him as he went along. Sean hit Ramone right at the back of his legs and the pain sent him on his knees. Finally, that last hit broke it in pieces over his head and Ramone went down like a ton of bricks.

One of the attendees in the audience, Andrew Lee, shouted, "We want blood! We want blood! We want blood!" This caused a chain reaction to the rest of the audience shouting the same thing. Even my heart sank at that one.

Sean brought out a bat laced with barbed wire. Cornelius tried to reason with him but Sean wasn't having any of that. He went back into that ring and waited for Ramone to get back up.

"Don't get up, Ramone!" I shouted.

He wasn't listening to me. Ramone pushed himself up and exposed that face. Sean brought the bat back, and went batter up with his head. Cornelius ducked and a splatter of blood drenched all over Andrew Lee. He looked like he just got massacred.

Cornelius said to him, "And he's got hepatitis!"

This sent Andrew Lee screaming in the back. I smiled knowing it served him right for making that chant in the first place. Still, I had to reason with Truth. He just couldn't mess with Raging Ramone's character.

I said to him, "Truth! Look, you have to make Raging Retard win! His character isn't supposed to lose. He always wins!"

"Oh yeah?" said Truth. "Is that in the contract?"

I thought about it and said, "Yeah, it's somewhere in the back."

Ramone rolled out of the ring and joined with Cornelius. His face was raining blood on the floor as he bent low walking with him. As much as we wanted to ring the bell, considering all of his blood loss, we really wanted him to win.

Cornelius said to him, "Come on, Raging Ramone, you almost got him!"

"I want to go home!"

Sean Scarlett grabbed Ramone again and pulled him over to a glass table lit with fire. This time, Ramone screamed like a little girl. What came next even made me turn my head. Sean pulled Ramone on top of these chairs, and slammed him right into the glass table of fire. That crash was loud, and the fire erupted so high, it set Ramone on fire. He screamed as he ran around engulfed in flames and Cornelius only had a quick second to devise a plan.

Quickly, Cornelius grabbed for the nearest bucket and tossed the water at Ramone. The fire went out, but Ramone went screaming and dancing all over the arena. He looked in more pain than usual.

A security guy said to Cornelius, "Hey man that was rubbing alcohol!"

Cornelius responded, "Somebody should have cleaned out their desk."

Sean stopped Ramone and tossed him back in the ring. Ramone rolled on his back, smoke relieving from his body, and his arms fell back in defeat. I ran back to the arena, not willing to take defeat even if Ramone could, and I had to think of something. Sean got down to pin Ramone and Cornelius and I looked as if we were accepting our fate.

Ramone kept saying, "Just beat me already. Get it over with. End my life."

The ref got down on all fours and hit the floor counting, “ONE!” The audience yelled with him. “TWO!” Then his hand was about to hit the floor for three, but Sean lifted Ramone’s head up and laughed.

Ramone said, “No! I don’t want to wrestle anymore. I’m done!”

I yelled to Ramone, “Think about Scarlett!”

“I don’t care about Scarlett.”

He looked like a dummy to a ventriloquist. Sean just laughed right in his face and I took about as much as I could take. I told Cornelius, “God he’s a pussy! Distract the ref! I’ll take care of this!”

Sean helped Ramone back up on his feet. He was just wobbling there with his knees buckling. Sean was about to give him a super punch when he heard a whistle from the back. He turned only to get stapled on the forehead. I stapled a note that said, “I SUCK” on it and Sean turned around. I stapled a KICK ME sign on his back and Sean danced all over the ring trying to get it out.

In the meantime, the ref was arguing with Cornelius. He didn’t even turn to see what I did to Sean. However, Sean pulled the I SUCK note off from his forehead. This gave me ample time to hit him over the head with the barbed wire bat. Sean went down next to Ramone. I took advantage in laying Ramone over him for the pin and rolled right out of the ring.

Truth yelled out, “Get rid of the pyro!” And the fire evaporated. He sent his two cronies out to the ring as the ref went for the count.

“ONE! TWO!”

STD and Dickie Bronson slid into the ring. Just before they kicked Ramone off of him, the ref had already counted to three. The bell rang.

The audience erupted as STD and Dickie looked around. This distraction was their last as Cornelius and me charged at them and threw them out of the ring. They landed in a long table of fire and we celebrated out to the audience who went nuts. They kept shouting, “HOLY SHIT! HOLY SHIT! HOLY SHIT!”

We picked up Ramone’s carcass off the floor and celebrated with him. He looked deader than a doornail but he will live. Truth didn’t seem too happy as Scarlett tried to reason with him.

The announcer said, “And here is your winner—THE RAGING RETARD!”

The ambulance came that night. Ramone was lifted up in a stretcher. He had to wear one of those neck braces that prevented him from moving. Scarlett was with him too. We were surprised about that.

She said to him, “I would kiss you but there’s too much blood.”

Ramone said something deferrable but damned if we knew what it was. As the ambulance pulled out, Scarlett waved goodbye. Cornelius and I just stood there in the middle of the street.

Cornelius said to me, “I hope he’s going to be okay.”

“He’ll be fine. Hey, want to grab some shawarma?”

“Okay.”

Chapter Forty

It took some convincing but I managed to talk Suzanne into going to my stepbrother's Fourth of July party. I had to basically trick and kidnap her to go. We were seeing a movie, and afterwards we witnessed a lot of fireworks going off, and she made a nice comment about it. I took full advantage and took her to my stepbrother's house. It wasn't a struggle or anything. She agreed to go in condition that we didn't stay long. I accepted that. Besides, she had weed to smoke.

Everyone was conjugating out on the driveway. I saw my brothers first who were elated to see me holding hands with a beautiful woman. She was smiling back at them as they walked over to me with their arms out for a hug. I hugged them, of course. It was weird seeing them so happy.

Manny exclaimed, "Oh my God! Is this Suzanne? She's beautiful! Give your brother a hug!"

Sam said to Suzanne, "I'm Sam, by the way."

"Hi, I'm Suzanne."

They shook hands. Sam introduced, "This is Manny the Man."

"Hi Manny the Man!"

Manny the Man replied, "Call me."

Sam said to me, "Tyler, how the hell did you snag such a beautiful girl?"

“Just lucky, I guess,” I replied.

“John’s setting up for the fireworks,” said Sam. “Each year they have a competition to see who lets off the best fireworks. C’mon, you should see this!”

John didn’t acknowledge Suzanne as he was too busy getting the fireworks ready. His neighbor, a shadow next door, was firing up as well. Sam pulled a beer out from the cooler and handed it to me. I first declined but my brother convinced me to have one drink. Sam and Manny got themselves one too and Suzanne thoroughly declined any alcoholic beverage.

John yelled out to the neighbor, “You aren’t winning it this year, bub! My fireworks are the shit!”

He let out the fireworks which was a spectacle of shapes and animals that awed everyone watching. The last one cracked everyone up because it was the shape of a middle finger. His neighbor didn’t seem impressed.

He yelled out to him, “Yeah, very classy there, John! How about this?”

The neighbor released his fireworks and it was an even better show with marching soldiers, biblical images, cartoon characters, and the last being a giant ass with one last firework to make the lips on the left cheek. This resulted in an uproar of cheers from everyone. Neither of us had seen a spectacular display of fireworks and doubted we ever will again.

“You motherfucker you!” cried out John.

After the clapping died down, Manny turned to us and asked, “So when are you two getting married, you two crazy lovebirds?”

Suzanne laughed, “What?”

I noticed Manny was a little uncomfortable and asked, “You two are going out, right?”

I quickly said, “I’m not the marrying type, Manny!”

People were gathering back in the house. Suzanne wanted to hang back, and I knew it just by the tug of my arm, and everyone else continued to go back in the house including my brothers.

She even asked, “Can I talk to you?”

“Look—my brothers, they just want to see me happy.”

“Have you been telling people we’ve been going out? I’m just asking because I thought we had this agreement that I won’t date until I’m completely over my ex.”

“Look, Suzanne, I’m not going to lie. I have feelings for you. If your parents asked me how I feel about their daughter, what I would say would make any parent accepting. You’re like the world to me. For once, I am able to move on with my life from Char. When we broke up, I was filled with an emptiness so deep, I never thought it could be filled again, but you fill it, Suzanne. I can look at you and think you’re the most beautiful woman that ever walked this earth. If I had the world, I would give it to you. I love the way you make me feel. It just—I like the person that I am when I’m around you. Until you came around, I never thought I could care about anyone else. I don’t think I ever cared about anyone this much.”

Then she said, “That’s all very sweet, Tyler. It really is. But the truth is, I love my ex. I love him more than I love myself. Tyler— “that pause meant that she was about to say something she didn’t want to say. She went along and said, “I could never

love you. Not ever. I enjoy the sex with you. You're amazing. I just could never love you. I just can't see myself with you."

Fighting back the hurt, I responded without trying to sound upset by saying, "I mean, if you want to love someone who moves to another state and does nothing for his kids, then I guess—"

She loudly interrupted, "I'm done with this conversation. Take me home. I want to go home now."

I could only answer with, "Alright."

I drove her home. The entire trip home she was quiet and looked out the passenger side. I just concentrated on the road. What made this trip really messed up was that I was conflicted. One part of me wanted to quickly take her home while the other part wanted to savor her because this may be the last time I ever see her again.

I didn't even finish parking the car before she got out of the vehicle and rushed to her door. She straightened her purse around shoulder when she did. I watched her get in her apartment and that was when I knew it would be the last time I ever saw her again.

At that moment, I imagined myself at a castle and an old man in robes stood before the doorway that led to Suzanne lying in bed in a coma. He told me, "Only a true love's kiss can awake her from her slumber."

"Allow me to try," I said.

The old man stepped aside, and it was just me a few feet away from Suzanne lying peacefully in her bed. The moonlight above sparkled over her in heavenly solemn. I hovered over her beauty, nervous, as I prepared for the lover's kiss.

Nervously I wiped away the wet from my lips with my wrist and I bent into the moonlight to give her that kiss. When I released, fluttering open my eyes, she was still lying there entranced.

The old man said to me, "You aren't her true love."

A voice said from behind, "Allow me to try."

It was her ex. He was well built, a little meaty but it could pass as muscle, handsome like a model for JQ, and piercing dark eyes. His hair was parted, but combed, and he his dressy clothes made him look like a million bucks. I stepped aside for him, and he approached her with loving eyes.

He said to her, "I love you, Suzanne."

It was then he bent over in the moonlight, silently kissed her, and her eyes opened before his. A lump dropped to my chest, and I heard her say these words to him, "I love you more than anything!"

I watched as his four kids stood by a doorway with sorrowful eyes. They paid no attention. Instead they kissed and pretended they were never even there.

I could only say, "We will always have Facebook."

A couple weeks went by, and it was about as much as I could stand. Something came over me and I wanted to know if it was truly over between Suzanne and me. I sent her a text, it was probably something I shouldn't have done, but I sent her, "I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I truly care about you deeply and I enjoy being with you with every second of my life. I hope we can get together soon."

I put the phone down and went back to writing my next book when I heard the buzz on my phone that I got a text back. Instantly, I checked the phone and what I got was something no person would ever want to see.

It was a text from her phone saying, “This is Suzanne’s fiancé. Please lose this number. She will never see you again. She is blocking you from Facebook also.”

I just looked at my phone like it was a bomb waiting to go off. For several moments I stared at that message until it burned in my image. I finally deleted the thread and eventually dropped her number to the recycling bin.

She did block me on Facebook for two weeks. She opened me just enough to show her and her new husband’s wedding photos, the two of them kissing, and shots of their honeymoon in Bora Bora. The smile on her face reminded me that she was happy with him and she wasn’t even thinking about me. That was for a week until she blocked me. This time she blocked me permanently.

Chapter Forty-One

The torrent of rain was my friend that night. I sat on my bedside looking at my cell phone. For hours I didn't even move. Suicidal thoughts wore down on me and I went to think about what a piece of shit I was. The rain just facilitated my worthless thoughts.

My light was on in my room. It was dimming because I needed a new light bulb, and it gave off this orange and yellow look to my room. Shadows of the rain dripped down along the circumference of my window. I could hear the beat of the rain and tiny waterfalls raining off my gutters.

Sam helped himself inside my room. I left my door unlocked. He sat next to me on my bed and neither one of us spoke a word for several seconds. I could tell he knew what I was thinking.

Finally, he said to me, "Bitches, man."

"Yeah. I always seem to get close to something but I can never achieve it. It's like I'm cursed. I always fail at everything."

"That's not true. You were the fastest sperm. Think about it. Millions of sperm and you were the one that got through. That's quite an accomplishment! You did it! I'm so proud of you!"

I just looked at him and was not amused.

“You know what would make you feel better?”

“A bullet to the head?”

“Come outside with me.”

“It’s raining outside.”

“I know. Just come out there with me.”

I followed my brother outside. The first thing I saw, besides the rain, was my brother Manny out there smoking a cigarette. Immediately I went to him and asked, “Let me have a cigarette.”

Sam said, “He’s depressed. Give him one.”

Manny handed me a cigarette. I put it in my mouth and he did the honors of lighting it for me. Never before had smoked ashes felt so good bellowing in my lungs. I didn’t care. Lung cancer was what I needed that night.

Sam asked, “You notice anything?”

I did notice there was a river going down the street. It had to be waist deep. There hadn’t been rain like this for many years. One thing my brothers and I shared was that we all loved bad weather.

Sam even showed us a raft that they brought. He smiled as he showed it to me and said, “See? I came prepared.”

After Manny and I finished our cigarettes, we took the raft for a ride. Manny took front, Sam took right and I was at the left. We followed Manny’s lead in steering as the raft careened down that street like a zipline. There was even a car slowly heading our way and we used our weight to the right to avoid it. I watched as the raft slipped the

surface off the car as we tilted away from it. We brought the raft down and explosions of water rained on us. All the while, we just laughed from the exhilaration of it all.

We even passed a downed bus, a car stopped in the middle of the street, until finally we hit land. The three of us laughed and I just realized that my brothers helped me forget about her all that time.

I had to tell them, “Thanks, you guys!”

Manny showed me his hand and said, “That’s what brothers are for.”

I slapped it and we all laughed. Then the laughing slowed down when we realized where we stopped at.

It was Tyrone and Cheryl’s apartment.

Sam asked, “Should we go spy on them?”

Manny said, “Why not? Nothing else going on.”

I followed my brothers to the door and inside the apartment building was a different story. The first thing we heard was yelling and it was coming from Tyrone and Cheryl’s door. All three of us looked at each other in confusion of what to do next. I took it upon me to run up to the door. That was as far as I got before my brothers tried to talk me out of it.

Sam whispered loudly to me, “Tyler, stop. You don’t want to get involved!”

I told him, “I don’t support domestic abuse. If he’s hitting her, I want it to stop! Bad enough he kills animals!”

Manny said, “Come on, man! We’ll call the police.”

But it was too late. The door swung open and a black arm pulled me in the apartment. It was Tyrone. He violently threw me in the apartment. I noticed he was

wearing a white wife-beater, grey sweat pants, and a nice little revolver clenched to his hand.

Cheryl was huddling with fear by the couch. I could see the bruises on her face. It didn't take long for me to figure out what had transpired.

Tyrone pointed the gun at my brothers and demanded, "Get your asses in here!"

All three of us had our hands up, and my brothers joined next to me with the gun aimed right at us.

Sam reasoned with him with, "You don't want to do this, man! Put the gun down!"

"Man, how the hell did I know you were going to say that shit? Why the hell were you outside my door?"

Sam continued, "Our raft took us here and we decided to come right over. It's raining hard outside, man! You should see our raft! Anyway, we heard commotion over here and wanted to see what was wrong."

I had to ask, "Why is she bruised up?"

Tyrone answered, "She fell. A lot. You know how clumsy she is."

Manny and Sam both said, "Yeah, we know how clumsy she is, right?"

Tyrone shouted, "Shut up! I know why you crackers were outside my door. You think I've been hitting her. Well maybe I had been hitting her. What the fuck you going to do about it, huh? Yeah, I thought so! I just want her to feel what my ancestors felt!"

We all shook our heads on that one. He retorted with, "You three want to be shot? This is some serious shit! I'll shoot your asses right here and now—"

That was when I lost it. I whipped his arm down and punched him square on the cheek. The next thing I knew I was charged and pushed out the window with Tyrone landing on top of me. Those shards of glass didn't feel good on my back.

My brothers tried to help but Tyrone's new pit-bull jumped out of nowhere and knocked down poor Sam. He was fighting with the dog as Manny tried to pull the dog off. Those sharp bites of his teeth nearly took out his nose.

Cheryl seemed more concerned for Tyrone than the dog. She went out in the rain trying to pull him off of me. His strength overpowered hers and the two of us rolled down a wet, grassy hill and plunged into the currents of the river.

Manny managed to get the attention of the dog by the stove. The animal drove and jumped right at him. Like a champ, Manny dodged to the side and opened the stove. The dog fell in and he closed the door behind him. Manny smiled and waved to the dog and joined with Sam outside in the rain.

Sam pointed to Tyrone and me drifting off in the river. He said to him, "We're too late! Look at them!"

Manny said to him, "Get the raft!"

By the time Manny and Sam drifted off in the raft out in the river, the dog ran out into the rain. He stopped by the bank and barked at them. Sam was taking point as Manny kept a keen eye on the dog.

Sam said to him, "Good thing we got out here when we did."

"Just keep steering! We got to catch up to Tyler!"

The dog ran along the bank as the raft accelerated with the currents. They banked a right turn and Tyrone and I weren't getting any closer than what we were before. The

dog was running out of road and suddenly he hopped right in the water after them. He was swimming on his front paws right at their raft.

Manny said to Sam, “You need to move a little faster, Sam!”

“I’m trying!” he shouted.

“Here comes Cujo!”

The dog jumped on the edge of the raft. He was biting at Manny’s feet. Manny kicked around trying not to succumb to doggy saliva as Sam twisted and turned in attempt to shake the dog off.

A car was coming up ahead. Sam said to Manny, “I’m going to need your help here!”

“I’m a little busy over here! I really don’t like to be human dog chow!”

Sam grinded his teeth and tilted the raft to the side as once again they slipped the surface off the car. The dog, however, locked his teeth onto Manny’s shoe and wouldn’t let go. Manny bellowed out a scream and soon the explosions of water rained back on them again.

“It’s got my foot!” yelled Manny.

“Shake it off!”

Manny tried to shake the dog off but it only growled and tightened his teeth some more. Up ahead, Sam could see Tyler and Tyrone punching each other in the currents. At least I was still alive.

Finally, Manny kicked at the dog and sent it airborne. The dog flew inside the downed bus, dropping the window, and the dog barked and followed the raft until the bus

caged him from going any further. Manny watched as the dog pressed against the glass and barked at them.

Manny sighed, "Thank God!"

Sam pointed out, "Look!"

The currents dragged Tyrone and me under a car. From what they saw, we didn't come out the other side. Sam parked the raft against the car, looked back at a ready Manny, and the two of them dived into the water. Sam took one end, Manny took the other. The currents rendered it difficult to navigate but Sam held onto the car as he investigated for signs of any bodies. He did find someone but the darkness prevailed and he could barely see a thing. It wasn't until he reeled in closer before he saw who it was.

It was Tyrone and it looked like he was unconscious. Sam grabbed a hold of his body and started to yank him out from his feet. Suddenly, Tyrone's eyes opened and a fist went three-dimensional right in front of his eyes. Sam fell backwards and Tyrone plunged at him and carried him up to the surface.

Meanwhile, Manny found me unconscious at the other side of the car. He released me and carried me up to the surface. After he pulled up on land, he saw Sam and Tyrone going round and round in fisticuffs in a wide open grassy area. Manny continued to pull me up on the surface.

Sam shouted, "I'm going to need some help over here!"

Manny was pumping my chest when he said, "You're brother isn't breathing over here! You have to wait a minute!"

"He isn't breathing?"

The two continued to fight and Sam had to ask, "Is this fight really necessary?"

“Hell yeah!” said Tyrone. “You pissed me off!”

Manny kept pumping and yelling, “Wake up, Tyler! Come on! Snap out of it!”

Finally, some water gushed out of my mouth and Manny stopped pumping. He said, “Oh thank God. You’re okay!”

I replied back, “I think so.”

“Good! I would be happy about saving you, but right now I have to go save your brother.”

Tyrone just knocked down Sam and faced Manny with his guard up. He said to Manny, “Oh you want some of this too?”

Manny said to him, “Why can’t we all just get along?”

“Rodney King! Clever! Now I’m going to kick your ass, you racist prick!”

I heard them fighting when I lifted myself off the ground. There was something about lying in wet grass and soiled mud that didn’t sit well with me. I knew my brothers were losing the fight but I had to regain my strength to be of any help to them. My arms were like breakable tree branches, and the gravity tend to wobble my legs. I was in no shape to be in a fight.

Sam backed off and held Manny back as well. Tyrone was still in a fighting stance. He said to him, “Listen, man, we never wanted to fight you! Why are you acting like this?”

“Ask my ancestors!”

Tyrone kicked Sam so hard on the face that Manny felt it behind him. The two of them fell down, rolling in mud, and Tyrone faced my standing body. He went back into a fighting stance. I wasn’t sure why he did. This was one fight he was sure to win.

He said to me, “Oh, you want some too! I can go all night! I was in the marines, motherfucker! Show me what you got! Come on!”

“I’m not going to fight you, Tyrone.”

“What do you mean you aren’t going to fight me? You backing out? No one backs out on a fight with me! Not you! Not anyone! I want to see what you got!”

I walked in closer, practically limping, and said to him, “Just go home, Tyrone. You win.”

“Just like that, huh? I don’t think so, cracker! I’m going to beat you so hard, your ancestors are going to feel it!”

“I’m a slave too, Tyrone.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“We all are. Except I get paid for it. You get paid for it. Slavery never left. The system just wanted to give us money for it.”

“I see what you’re trying to pull. I’m on to you, motherfucker. Thinking you can pull this reverse psychology shit. Ain’t working. I’m too smart for you, cracker.”

“Then the only racist here is you.”

“What did you just call me?”

“You called me a cracker.”

“I know what I just called you, motherfucker! I take offense to that. I’m a black American, okay? I can’t be no racist!”

Suddenly he pulled his revolver on me. I forgot he even had it. At first it frightened me, and then I remembered I had nothing to lose. I walked toward him like I was a man wanting to be sentenced to death.

“Why you walking up on me like that, huh? You want to die? Is that it?”

“Just pull the trigger, Tyrone. That’s what you want, right? Pull it!”

My brothers looked to me with dread. They were still on the ground. Tyrone looked like he was debating on shooting me but he was conflicted. I just stood there in front of him waiting for his decision.

Then Tyrone said, “You got five seconds.”

Then I said, “F1.”

He lowered his gun down and asked, “What?”

I punched him. He fell hard on some jungle gym. I kept punching him until he released the revolver from his grip. My brothers held me back and I just realized there was blood all over my fist. When I looked down, I saw Tyrone’s face covered in blood. It took a moment to register, but I think I finally made my point.

I said to Tyrone, “H1 hit, I just sunk your battleship, bitch!”

And I walked away from him. I turned to my brothers and said, “Let’s get out of here.”

That night, we drank on top of one of the cars. Sam brought one of his coolers. After a while the cold rain was nothing to us. The alcohol took care of that problem.

Chapter Forty-Two

The next day I received a letter from the mail from my publisher. For some reason I didn't want to look at it right away. I was just too afraid. However, I did take it to John Rivera's house. My brothers drove me this time. I sat in the backseat with their dates. We all dressed up this time, including me. By the time we got there, John's wife was waiting for us by the door.

She asked me, "Tyler, how come you don't have a date?"

I just said to her, "Don't ask."

We sat at the same table as last time. John didn't want to invite the orchestra this year. It was probably not in his budget. His daughter looked taller than last time. She had to be since it was two years ago since we last attended her birthday.

I had the letter under the table. For some reason I wanted to open it but I wasn't ready. John had his daughter on his lap again. It was the same as last time.

He said to her, "My word, have you grown! My daughter is eight years old! Can you believe that?"

Everyone clapped after that. John pumped up the crowd and said, "Give it up to her! This is my daughter!"

Everyone cheered after that. I was the only one who wasn't.

John must have noticed this and asked me, “So Tyler, tell me, how is your book coming along?”

Then everyone went silent. All eyes directed at me. Finally I gave in and revealed what I had under the table.

I said to him, “I did get this from my publisher today. I hadn’t opened it yet.”

“Well,” said Sam. “Open it!”

“I’m just afraid of what it could be.”

“Your book is published. How bad could it be?” asked Manny.

“I mean, there is a remote possibility it could be good.”

“Yeah,” said Sam. “Would you like me to open it?”

I thought about it and finally just handed it to Sam. He didn’t waste time in opening the envelope. Inside was a folded letter and he opened it and cleared his throat. I caught him reading for a bit and then his eyes bulged.

I asked, “What?”

Sam asked, “Tyler, you know what this is?”

“No.”

“This is a letter offering you a full-time writing career! They want you to have a career writing books!”

“Let me see that!”

I took the letter from my brother and sure enough, he was right. It was a letter offering me a considerable large advance income to start my writing career. Apparently the publishing companies wanted me.

Then my brother said something that struck a cord. He said to me, “You can quit your job!”

John stood from his seat with his goblet raised. He smiled graciously. It was genuine and I felt the mutual respect between us. The whole room stood on their feet with their goblets raised.

John announced, “I propose a toast. To Tyler. To great success.”

I raised my glass to him. We exchanged glances.

After the toast, I went outside. I don't think I cried like that in years.

Chapter Forty-Three

By Monday morning, I arrived to work without a care in the world. I was surprised I even got out of bed that morning. I walked in the pharmacy where Debbie was waiting for me and I asked the question I always wanted to ask.

I asked her, “Who am I supposed to ask when I want to quit?”

“I think Joe. Why? Are you quitting?”

I was on my way back out the door and said to her, “Yep!”

Normally I would be nervous going to Joe’s office. He was one of those people that would bite your head off. I couldn’t help but dance to imaginary music in my head. The medical records girl looked at me like I was crazy as I danced right by them. Jackie was walking out of the door and I spun around like a dancing fool.

She just smiled and I spun right out the door. By the time I got to Joe’s office, I was still in a good mood. Joe was sitting at the desk that used to be John’s desk. He looked like an ant from where I was standing.

Joe asked me, “May I help you? Oh, it’s Tyler! Just the man I wanted to see.”

“Yes?”

“We got visitors coming today. I bet you know who they are.”

Sarcastically, I replied, “Are they my friends from corporate?”

“You got that right. I sure hope your performance improved. They are itching to fire people today. I would hate to see you first on the list.”

“You know, sir, I would hate to see it too. I am looking forward to seeing corporate today!”

“I bet you are.”

By the time I got to the pharmacy, I was still dancing. Debbie walked up to me and asked, “So did you quit?”

“Nope!”

“I thought you were? Why did you ask me then?”

I played drums with the table and said, “Because my friends at corporate are coming!”

“Oh my God, what are you going to do now?”

I smiled and said, “I’m going to have some fun with them.”

The limo arrived at the back of the building. Annette was first to get out of the limo and held up her cell phone to take a picture. Dana Sorenson threw away his glass and posed with the other four suits for the company photo. She took the picture and gave a big smile.

She exclaimed, “Great! This is going to the photo album!”

Dana and the four suits wasted no time in finding Joe’s office. Joe immediately sprung from his seat and shook their hands. He said to them, “It’s good to see you all again! How is the trip here?”

Dana responded, “Excruciating. I like the improvements you did with this place.”

“Why thank you,” said Joe. “I’m fired up as you are!”

Joe and the suits all laughed like what he said was the funniest thing in the world. Their laugh could be heard from the secretary next door. She just shook her head and continued typing.

“Now let’s not waste any time,” said Dana. “Take me to the pharmacy.”

I was still dancing in the pharmacy. Flipping bottles, spinning, catching them in mid-air and not giving a care of what anyone thought was the order of the day. I just couldn’t stop dancing. Sometimes I would slide down in the aisle. The co-workers passed glances but I was a guy without a care in the world. I knew this day was going to be my last day and I was going to make the best of it.

By the time the suits stomped hooves in the pharmacy, I was behind the desk. All five of them, with Joe, walked directly at me. I was smiling. Prior to them coming, I debated whether to act scared or just not give a shit. I chose just not giving a shit.

Dana said to me, “Tyler Moore. You remember me?”

“It’s my corporate buddies! Missed you guys!”

They all laughed.

Dana said, “I sure hate firing people so I hope you took what I said to heart and improved on your asaping skills since the last time I saw you.”

“I most certainly did. You know, I saw a whole new light since the last time you were here.”

“Good!” laughed Dana. “Good! That means we shouldn’t have a problem then. I should be blown away today, am I right?”

“Or just blown!”

We all laughed except Dana. He didn’t find the humor in that.

Dana looked behind me and asked, “Is that an ASAP I see?”

I looked behind me and saw that a sheet was coming out from under the fax machine. I smiled back at him and said, “That most certainly is!”

“Are you going to get that?”

“For you? Anything!”

I took the sheet and stuck it in the tote. Dana had to ask, “So what are you doing there?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry! I’m putting this sheet in the tote. You must have forgot since the last time we did this.”

“You know, it’s been a while. You’re going to have to refresh me. Where’s our—“

Jackie arrived with a cup holder of drinks. The suits took a cup and Joe helped himself with his. Dana commented, “Oh, there’s our drinks! I was wondering when that was going to arrive.” Dana took a sip from the straw. “Oh, this is very good espresso! Where did you get this? Belgium? Prague?”

Jackie responded, “The gas station.”

“Oh.” Then Dana went back to me and said, “Well, go on. That ASAP isn’t going to ASAP itself!”

“So sorry! Anyway, I am going to put all these labels in the tote.”

Dana responded, “Yes, very good. What’s next?”

“Then what’s next is I’m going to take this tote—“

“Uh huh.”

“And I’m going to shove it up your ass!” I said it with a smile.

Dana and the suits choked on their drinks. Dana asked, “Excuse me?”

“I just had an amazing idea! Why don’t each of you assholes take turns kissing my ass! How about starting with—” And I pointed to each one and said, “You! You! You! You! You and you!”

Joe replied, “I beg your pardon!”

I stood up on the table, pulled down my pants, and turned around so they saw my bare ass. Then I said to them, “Kiss the right cheek and make the left cheek jealous. If you can’t tell from left and right, that’s okay. You can make any cheek jealous! Then after that, go fuck yourselves!”

Dana said to me, “Get down from there. Right now!”

I pulled up my pants and dropped down next to Dana. Unfortunately for him, I wasn’t done with him yet. I said to him, “And you! Let’s see how you handle pressure!”

I pulled Dana by the tie and led him behind the counter. He just kept yelling, “What the hell are you doing? Let go of me!” His peers didn’t seem to put up much of a fight. Joe just folded his arms.

“Show me!” I said. “Show me how it’s done!”

“Show you what?” growled Dana. “That’s what we have you degenerates for! This is why we hired you! If you can’t properly perform the job, we get rid of you! And you—”

“Alright, you talk too much!” I went to Joe and said, “Show him how it’s done, Joe! If you don’t know how, you can be properly trained!”

Joe just looked at me with anger. I just went back to Dana and said, “See how this pressure makes you work slower. It makes your head a little fuzzier. See how this process of intimidation doesn’t work? Now you and the rest of your idiots can get this ASAP yourself! I quit!”

I walked out of there and Dana just panicked behind that table. Dana shouted at me, “You will pay for this! You will never work for this company ever again! You hear me? Joe, show him the door. He’s fired!”

I yelled back at Joe, “Joe, if you show me anything, I knock your ass out!”

Joe just stayed behind. I heard Dana and his cronies did the ASAP themselves. They broke a record for the longest time it took to get an ASAP done. I became a legend at the pharmacy because of that incident.

The sun blinded my eyes when I stepped out of that pharmacy. It didn’t matter to me. Those shades of colors in my eyes only represented freedom to me. I loved how the fresh air felt against my skin.

Chapter Forty-Four

For once, I drove to Ohio all by myself. I loved how the rough surface of the expressway changed textures to smooth. It was in that moment when I reached the border of Ohio. It would be another hour until I made it to Larue. There were an awful lot of farms and cornfields on the way. I just told myself I would have to get used to that.

My grandpa's house hadn't changed at all when I saw it two years ago. Last I heard there were two old women living in it. I parked along the side of the road in the grass. After I shut off the engine, I heard the hooting owl that never left since I was a kid. It brought a smile to my face when I got out of that car.

The wooden porch gave away my presence with just a squeak. I saw the same swinging porch swaying back and forth with the wind. The chimes were new. They must have just decorated with that.

I took in a breath and knocked on the door. One of my fears was that I might look intimidating with my trench coat and hat, and the duffel bag strapped around my chest. It was too late to worry about that now since someone was opening the door. Sure enough, it was an old woman. She still had on her blue nightgown. It was only eleven before noon so I knew it wasn't too early for me to arrive. Of course, I didn't call ahead of time.

She asked me, "May I help you?"

“Yeah, my grandpa used to live here. I know this sounds strange but I was wondering if we can sit down and talk. You might want to hear what I have to say.”

Surprisingly, she let me in. Not only that, she didn't question the duffel bag. I thought for sure it would be the first question. She took me into the living room where the other old woman enjoyed her rocking chair. The old woman who let me in introduced herself as Donna. The other old woman was Dorothy. After working at my job, I saw a lot of old people named Dorothy.

I sat down at the only other available seat. Donna took a seat on the couch. She asked me, “Would you like some tea?”

“No thanks,” I said.

“Are you sure? It's something called raspberry and honey.”

Then I thought about it and said, “That sounds good. I'll try that.”

As she was making the tea, she asked me, “So what kind of business you have out here, Mister, uh, I didn't catch your name?”

“Oh I'm sorry! My name is Tyler Moore.”

“Tyler Moore? Why is that name so familiar?”

Dorothy responded, “That's because his grandfather used to live here.”

Donna replied, “Oh that's not it! I feel like I heard that name somewhere else.”

Without revealing too much about me, I just said to her, “Let me cut to the chase. When my grandmother died, she wanted to keep this house in the family. My dad and his brothers couldn't afford it. I had a dead-end job and my rich stepbrother had no interest in it. What I'm trying to say is—”

Donna handed me the tea and said, “Careful, it's hot.”

It was hot. I positioned my hands so I wasn't hurting them and held the tea close to me. I wanted to drink it but the steam scared me.

“What I'm trying to say is that I want to give you an offer for this house.”

Donna laughed, “Oh I'm not sure. We lived in this house for a year. Sure, it's a little haunted. At night I would hear footsteps, sometimes stuff would be moving, but its home. I learned to accept it for what it is.”

“You even want to hear my offer?”

Donna took a drink and asked, “How much are you willing to offer?”

“A million dollars.”

Dorothy nearly spit out her drink. She had to ask, “A million dollars?”

Donna asked, “Did you bring this million dollars with you?”

I opened the duffel bag and showed them piles of hundred dollar bills inside. I couldn't help but to smile.

Donna replied with, “Oh my.”

I took a drink.

Chapter Forty-Five

In a couple months I moved in my grandpa's house. My brothers and my father helped move my stuff in before the big truck arrived the next day. During the move, my father found my Matt's Tricks Unloaded DVD. For the longest time I did a good job hiding it from him. It took me to move for him to find it.

He said to me, "I'm going to borrow your Matt's Tricks Unloaded video."

I smiled and said, "You can have it, dad."

Sam was next to leave, and he said to me, "Good luck in this haunted house, bro! I felt like I was tripping balls last night!"

"Goodbye, Sam!"

Manny was next to leave, and he said to me, "I'll come and visit, babe. We need to go ghost hunting in this house!"

After they left, I waved and said, "Bye, everyone!"

That first night at the house by myself was a memorable one. Nothing significant happened. I was just overtaken with loneliness. For some reason, I tried to sleep on the floor without any noise like a fan or a TV. That never holds well with a haunted house. Not only that, but my brain wouldn't shut up.

So that night I started a new book on my new laptop. It was a romance novel of all things. I was going to write about all my exploits with Char, Suzanne, and everything I have come across in my life. It helped me forget.

For months I cooped myself up in that house. I doped up on coffee and energy drinks just to keep myself going. Most days I didn't even experience the weather. I only heard about it from the weather service on my computer. Every now and then I would go to this restaurant in town my brothers and I liked to call Choke and Puke. It was really called The Greasy Spoon. I would seldom have breakfast there and occasionally a lunch or two and then it was back to writing.

By the third month I was experiencing anxiety. Sometimes I wasn't sure if I was talking to a ghost or the epitome of my imagination. That month I talked to some guy named Peter who always sat on my couch. He would just remind me of my failures with Char and Suzanne. I tried to block him out. Sometimes I would figure out that it was my conscious talking. Other times I would believe him.

There were times when I was just sit down and watch my table. I wasn't even high. Sometimes I would just get into those modes where I would have imagined my life of being something different. What would happen if Suzanne was there? I'm sure we would be smoking weed. I wouldn't want it in this house. In respect for my grandparents, I would take it out the garage. That was where I picked up my smoking habits.

Then, when I got really lonely, I thought of Char. What would have happened if I developed this lifestyle early? I imagined us there talking. It wasn't a typical conversation like what happened early that day. We would talk about stuff. I could say

something stupid like setting up ghost traps and she would come up with some lucrative invention. I missed our conversations. Suzanne was the same way. What the hell happened?

The fourth month I finally finished my book and turned it in to my agent. It caused for celebration so I walked to The Greasy Spoon. I sat in the back corner like I always had and made company with my cell phone. Since I moved there, nobody in that restaurant bothered to get to know me. I guessed this was the day they were making the effort.

The waitress warmed my coffee cup and asked me, "How are you today?"

She was roughly my age, little older, with dirty blonde hair and saggy bags under her eyes. She was a little plump, average size, like the weight a normal American would have. For an older woman, she was still easy on the eyes. She didn't have to put on makeup, and her hair was fixed up in a ponytail, and she talked with a Jersey accent.

I answered her with, "I'm fine."

"Oh yeah? You new here, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"What place did you move into?"

"That haunted house down the road."

"You moved in there? How can you afford a place like that? Are you working anywhere around here?"

"I'm a full-time author."

"Oh yeah? What books did you write?"

"Anarchy, Spiritual Curse, Romancing Ramone?"

Well, I'll be!" smiled the waitress. "Hey Bonnie, did you hear this? This man here is the author of Anarchy!"

"You're kidding!" shouted Bonnie from the back.

I was taken back by this because I never thought any of my books would be recognized by anyone. It was a good enough time to show them pictures. I brought up the gallery on my phone and showed her and this Bonnie some of my photos I took.

I said, "This is me accepting my award."

Bonnie, an obese redhead, stared with the waitress at my photo. They were just in awe. Then I heard the waitress say, "I can't wait to tell my husband about this!"

I just smiled.

Walking home, I started having collective thoughts about my home in Michigan. Luck may have it, I saw familiar people standing at my porch. It was Ramone and Megan. I laughed when I saw them. They turned to me and smiled too. It was a reunion I never expected. Megan must have sought me out.

"Did you think you could get away from me?" laughed Megan.

"Look at you!" exclaimed Ramone.

Megan came at me and gave me a hug. I didn't give Ramone one.

I told them, "You came at a good time. I'm taking a break from writing." Then I had to ask, "What brings you two here?"

Megan answered, "Well, I knew Ramone knew where you were so I had him help me find you."

“That you did. Come on in. Make yourselves at home.”

I took them to the room known as the family room. It was a little dark but it was the room that had the stairs to the second floor. They looked impressed when they saw it. It definitely had a grandfather feel once you walked in.

Ramone shouted, “WOW! It’s clean!”

I led them to the kitchen which was right at the next corner and said, “Over here is the kitchen. I got something boiling in the crock pot.”

Ramone asked, “Wow! You got a crock pot?”

“Shut up, Ramone.”

Megan asked, “So this is what you were telling me about? Your grandpa’s house?”

“Yeah.”

“And it’s haunted?”

“Yeah.”

“Ooo, let’s go ghost hunting!” exclaimed Ramone.

“Let’s not,” said Megan. “Tyler, I have to talk to you.”

“Is this an alone thing?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

Then I said to Ramone, “Ramone, could you wait outside?”

“Aw, man! I have to?”

“Yes.”

“I have to pee!”

“Go outside!”

As Ramone went outside, I sat across from Megan by the window in the living room. We waited for the screen door to shut before we said anything. Megan sat there with her fingers folded in front of her. I just had my shoulders on the table.

Then I said to her, "So what's on your mind?"

"I heard what happened with you and this Suzanne."

I looked down.

She continued, "I heard from the grapevine that it was eating you up inside. It was awful what she did to you."

"I'm over it now."

"I don't think you are."

"I wrote a book about it. Besides, I don't date anymore. I'm too old for that now."

Megan asked, "Too old for that?" like it was the most stupid thing she ever heard.

"Yeah, if it hasn't worked by now, it will never work."

"You don't know that. You can be staring her right in front of your face."

"Well, I direct all girls to Ramone now."

We looked out the window and noticed Ramone was pissing on the side of my garage. My eyes widened and I really wanted to shoe him off with a broom. He only disproved my point.

Megan said to me, "Tyler, just because of a couple girls doesn't mean you can shun off dating altogether."

"But I suck at dating. I'm not good at it. At all. Lately I just keep writing and writing, just trying to block out those memories. I write books about it so it can help me

forget. I'm not sure if I can deal with the pain again. If there was one thing I learned in life, there is always an end."

"That is true," she said. Then she added, "But wouldn't you rather end with good memories with someone else rather than regretting what memories you could have had?"

I sighed and looked down at the table. I said to her, "I'm not sure if I would find that."

"Tyler, can I ask you something?"

Then I heard a thunder. I looked up and asked, "Did you hear that?"

"That thunder?"

I took her by the hand and asked her, "You remember when we danced those years ago?"

"Yeah?"

"Let's relive those memories."

I slow danced with her and she laughed and said, "This is exactly what I'm talking about, Tyler. Memories. Love with another person always starts with memories."

"We did have some memories, didn't we?"

"Yes we did. I was there when we worked retail together."

I laughed and said, "Those horrible days."

"I was there when you had all those horrible roommates."

"Okay, these memories aren't as good as I thought."

"I was there when I almost kissed you."

Suddenly I heard another thunder followed by some lightning that flashed in my house. I looked out the window and saw the trees swaying and the sky turning green. A harsh wind shook the house and I was really starting to enjoy the moment.

“It’s getting bad out there,” I said.

“The weather said a tornado is coming.”

“You don’t say. Look at this, you and I aren’t even at work.”

“Nope,” she laughed.

I spun her around and we embraced back to a dance. I saw the lights flickering and I was getting even more anxious about the storm.

“It looks like its going to get dark soon,” she said.

“Any second now the lights are going to go out.”

I looked at the light above which was flickering wildly with the harsh winds hitting the house. Our time with the light was drawing to an end.

I said to her, “One. Two. Three. And we’re off!”

The lights went out.

