

Emily's Game

Gary Marks

© 2016 by Gary Marks / Marksland Entertainment LLC

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced
without written permission from the author.

Part I

Chapter 1

We met in college, in a city known for its curvy streets and harsh winters. Observing the town from above one might think the curves looked like a mosaic of an exotic woman dancing with her hands folded above her head; a town created in the shape of a seductress. Held between her hands like a jewel was the lake. The town's true heartbeat.

Then there was the university, pulsing, pumping out wide-eyed adrenaline-seeking teens from its dorm rooms and classrooms and the sparkling new library where the cranes had only recently departed.

The university was the one vibrant thing in the town, rebirthing itself throughout the decades. The rest of the town remained relatively still and slow to change, with old Victorian houses lining the snowy streets.

This particular night was a study night, like so many others I'd had with my friend, Emily.

It actually helped that Emily was studying political science while I was studying math. There was no competition. Nothing to try to "teach" each other, or argue about, or feel superior about. To a math major, political science was like the dark side of the moon. In fact, I could measure the distance to the dark side of the moon, whereas, she could only consider who would own the moon some day after winning The Great Moon War. And who would own it one hundred years later, after "Moon War II."

Chapter 2

Emily's dorm room had been decorated by the school in what I would call modern artificial Norwegian. The wooden furniture was too hard to sit on, the couch and bed were raised only high enough off the floor to squeeze a vacuum under, though few students would ever want to take that opportunity. The overhead lighting had a visual spectrum range between spotlight bright and interrogation white. The night stands, where textbooks and empty soda and beer cans merged, were plain teak, with rickety drawers that you first had to tug, but then had to catch, since there was no drawer stop.

On this night, her roommate, McKenzie, had decided to sleep at her new boyfriend's apartment. This was an exciting moment for McKenzie, and, of course, for her boyfriend. But Emily and I were stuck studying, as usual.

Emily was lying on her stomach on the bed reading. She had hazel eyes and auburn hair that I thought of as chameleon brown, since it turned luminous red in the sunlight and dark brown at night. Her hair was as much of a chameleon as she was.

She looked up at me and caught me staring back. She furled her eyebrows.

She was reading about Nixon. The man was never going to put anyone in a romantic mood, dead or alive. Nor would my reading about spherical trigonometry.

She usually wore simple clothes. Her jeans looked comfortably loose on her. Her plain white blouse was half untucked.

It was raining outside; a cold windy sideways rain, the kind of rain where pigeons couldn't hide under eaves, and students couldn't protect themselves beneath an umbrella. The umbrellas would turn megaphone shaped. The windows in Emily's room were being invaded. Rain drops sounded like pellets. Water drops were finding their way through the window frame.

At midnight she shut her book rather loudly. "Well, this is going to be a fun walk back to your dorm."

"I know. I could drown out there in like thirty seconds. I could blow away and end up in the lake, and then drown *again*." I began to reach for my coat.

"You can sleep in McKenzie's bed."

"Thanks. But I don't want to sleep in McKenzie's bed."

"Okay, then. . .?"

"But it's better than drowning."

"Possibly."

She got up and walked into the tiny bathroom. She left the door open halfway then began washing her face. She turned around and looked back at me with her face full of soap. I laughed. Then I watched her noisily brush her teeth, then brush her hair until a few tiny knots were vanquished.

"Your turn. I always keep a new toothbrush in my medicine cabinet. You can use it. Take it home tomorrow as a party favor. I'll replace it."

When I emerged from the bathroom she was in bed wearing a light blue flannel pajama shirt, with the sheets covering the rest of her.

I came closer.

"What are you doing?" she said.

"Standing here."

"Why?"

"Someone is already in McKenzie's bed."

I moved sideways to impede her view, "That's her stuffed bear from the dark ages, back when she was ten. . . don't worry, it's domesticated."

"Ah well, good night then." I approached the edge of her bed to formally shake her hand, but she laughed and turned away towards the window.

I got under the covers next to McKenzie's bear and she switched off the lamp.

About ten minutes later she whispered something but I didn't quite hear her. I was almost asleep.

"What?"

"I said, 'Okay Jack, I'll shake your hand.'"

I got out of bed and held my hand out to her in the dark. She reached back until our fingers met then pulled me slowly under the covers.

The cold rain banged louder on the windows, begging us to stop. But all we could hear was each other's breathing.

In the morning, on the way to class, the streets were still wet from the night's downpour. The pathways were glossy with occasional icy patches. Emily and I hadn't said much to each other after we awoke. We were both rushing to get to a morning class. But when it came time to walk in different directions her face came close to mine and she said, "Well, that was interesting."

"It wasn't just interesting to me. . . . In fact, I hate this feeling."

"What feeling?" she said, looking concerned.

"This stomach fluttering feeling."

"Did you eat a bird?"

"Worse. I fell in love with a human."

"That's definitely worse," she nodded. "Who's the lucky girl?"

Before I could respond with a kiss she walked away.

Chapter 3

Unfortunately, I grew up in Long Island, a place where seven million people tried to pretend they were from New York City without actually having to be there. There were hordes of middle class teens going to suburban schools, wandering in and out of suburban movie theaters, looking enviously out across the night sky, past miles of freeways, trying to catch a glimpse of the ever-dangerous and alluring island of Manhattan, where real life happened.

My father was the president of my grandfather's thermometer factory in the godforsaken industrial town of Freeport. My Uncle Ed, an electrical engineer by trade, had been the president before my dad, but he embezzled my grandfather out of five hundred thousand dollars, a great deal of money back in the day, and ran off to South America. My Aunt and cousin were left with their fully-paid-for ranch house in Massapequa. But their bad luck continued. A week later their dog (who loved Ed) ran away. Their life was quite messy for a long time after that, even after they got a new dog.

And I doubt the old dog ever made it to South America.

My father came to my grandfather's rescue at my mom's insistence. He quit his job as vice-president of sales of a textile company in the city (he was one of hundreds of vice-presidents of sales). He knew nothing about thermometers at the time, and he told all the employees the first day he arrived that he had no idea what he was doing. That's one of the reasons why they loved him. He was honest and a quick study. God had blessed him with an

innate knowledge of how thermometers worked, and how to sell them. God always seems to get the credit when good things happen.

We went from being a middle class family to a lower-middle class family. He accepted a big pay cut and took on my grandfather's mortgage. I was ten at the time.

By the time I went to college the company was thriving and my dad was the family hero. My parents moved from a house in Westbury to a town house in Great Neck, a huge steps up.

He wanted me to come join the business and become vice-president after I graduated, but I wanted no part of it. I hated Long Island, and thermometers. Although I always did love my grandfather. He was a true English gentleman.

As it turned out, turning down jobs was something I would become very good at.

I excelled in math in high school. I was lucky enough to have a few girlfriends without the heartbreaking endings, for me or for them. I worked part-time as a parking lot attendant at the Westbury Music Fair.

That's pretty much the highlight reel of my entire life until I met Emily.

Chapter 4

Whenever I asked Emily about her past she would say things like, "My parents are just normal people. I grew up being normal. I'm still pretty normal. What you see is what you get."

But I could sense there was something more going on beneath all the "normality." So one night, on a hunch, I asked her if her parents had been mean to her, or had gotten divorced. She just laughed and insisted they were "just fine, and still together."

"Sounds normal."

"Yep, normal, normal, *normal*."

Her auburn hair and her naturally pale skin sometimes gave people an impression of shyness or meekness, but actually Emily was very outspoken, boundlessly outgoing, and absolutely driven. Driven to study politics, with a minor in business. She told me she had no idea how the two would fit together, but she trusted they would someday.

Outside of class she had a lot of friends. But in class she was reserved. Even among friends she would never discuss anything about her past. And even though she was studying political science, she didn't seem to have a particular affiliation to the left or right, Democrat or Republican. She had no cause. She told me she just wanted to understand and study people, but was less interested in taking sides.

After finals in our junior year Emily came up with a plan for the summer.

During the first summer of our relationship she had gone home to California and I had gone home to Long

Island. But there was no way we wanted to be apart like that for another summer. So she decided, and I agreed, that after a short trip home to our respective parents, she would join me in New York for a few days and then we would go to Italy.

I mentioned that we could save up money by getting part-times jobs. But she said she had saved up a few thousand dollars from having worked summers through high school and she wanted to spend it on both of us. She wouldn't let me refuse the offer.

I remember picking her up at JFK a few weeks later. At baggage claim I noticed her suitcases were brand new. I saw a Louis Vuitton trademark. I mentioned that her luggage looked pretty wow-ish. "A gift from my uncle Ed," she said.

My first thought was, her uncle Ed was a lot different than my uncle Ed.

Chapter 5

We landed in Rome, jet-lagged, then fought through customs and made it to our hotel near the Spanish Steps. Once we entered our room Emily did something she had never done before.

I was laying on the bed reading a magazine, trying not to fall asleep. It was two o'clock in the afternoon in Rome, but to our bodies it was eight o'clock in the morning, and we hardly slept on the plane. A bottle of champagne from the hotel had been placed in a bucket of ice near the armoire. She opened the bottle, poured herself a glass, then put three fingers in the glass and sprinkled the champagne on her neck. She flashed a mischievous look at me.

I was suddenly wide awake, licking myself drunk.

She pulled her skirt to the floor and stood up, pulling me up with her. All she had on was a short-sleeve yellow blouse and the fake diamond necklace that she wore on the plane.

Emily walked to the open window and looked to the plaza below. Three white birds flew by. The people in the plaza were busy rushing somewhere. It was the middle of a business day in Rome. The central fountain was pouring water into its tiled pool, but it was mostly ignored this time of day.

"I think I'll just lean out this window and watch all the people go by. Nothing will be able to disturb my concentration."

I was standing behind her. I moved closer and began kissing her arm, then the back of her neck. She didn't move. I

curled my fingers under her blouse until my hands hooked under her shoulders. She leaned further out the window, pretending to get a better view. I did everything I could not to call attention to our window perch.

The passersby kept on passing by.

We ended up asleep at three in the afternoon in our very wide soft bed.

Around eight that evening we walked to a restaurant Emily had reserved. She had evidently done quite a lot of research and planning ahead of time.

It was still light out. We passed by beautiful clothing shops, and bakeries that wouldn't open until morning.

I saw men in suits on motor bikes going out for the evening. I saw women in heels as tall and thin as pencils walking arm in arm with men in black tee shirts whose faces were perfectly unshaven for exactly two days, with cigarettes hanging from their mouths at just the right angle. Things were very different here.

Emily was also a different person here than the one I had known at the university. She seemed far more sophisticated and sure of herself. She knew her way around somehow. I was amazed at how happy she was.

After a great meal that a friend of her father's had told her about we headed back to our room.

It was close to midnight. But our bodies weren't ready to sleep. We were now in sync with our surroundings.

"Jack."

"Yeah," I said. I was sitting in an antique rocking chair with my eyes closed, thinking how crazy it was that we were in Italy.

"You know why I like you?"

She was a little drunk, so I figured this was going to be fun. "Okay, why?"

"I like the way you look at me. I can tell when you look at me that I can trust you. I mean, really trust you."

"I trust you too, Em. . . ."

"Well *don't*" she said in a concerned voice. "You can't." The words frightened me.

"Why not?"

She came closer to me, I thought she might kiss me and then confess to me she was seeing someone else back home.

"You can trust me to be loyal to you," she said as if reading my mind. "But there are other things," she laughed in a drunken, almost girlish way. But she also seemed sad at the same time.

I tried to stay light-hearted, "I hate secrets."

"Well, all I can say is this; it's a question, actually: What would you think if I told you that after I spent all this money on us I will be totally broke? Penniless. And that if I plan on finishing my senior year I'll have to get a job to pay for the tuition."

I said, "We'll make it work. I'll get a job too. We can pool our money together."

"You *would* do that, wouldn't you?" She shook her head and stared at me.

I must of had a confused look on my face.

She smiled so I smiled back. But I couldn't read her.

"You're innocent. You know that?" she continued.

"You're just too damn innocent for your own good. What do you know of the world?"

She looked away with a glazed look in her eyes. She added, "You know, I slept with a few other guys before I

met you." She blurted this out as if finally coming to some point.

"Yeah, I figured that, Emily, it's fine. Do you want to tell me about them?"

"We broke up!" she laughed. "That's all you need to know." She was definitely very drunk.

"Okay."

"*Why* we broke up was. . . because they were fakes. They wanted more than me. More than love. More than just living a life."

I had no idea what she was talking about.

"We could have a repeat performance here."

"You think I could be. . . a guy like that?"

"No! You couldn't be like them if you tried! You wouldn't know where to start."

Was she making fun of me?

"I mean a repeat of. . . this afternoon. . . champagne, neck, window, and maybe some variations on the theme."

She looked at me mischievously. Her blue dress was coming half way off her shoulders by the time she stood up.

She pointed, "Lay down on the bed just like before and read your magazine."

I obeyed.

"No, your socks were on, remember? And you weren't wearing a dinner jacket."

She went over to a new bottle of iced champagne, they replaced the other bottle while we were gone. She un-popped it quietly by putting a crocheted hand towel around it, drank a sip straight from the bottle, then sprinkled a few drops on her neck, and then, we went back in time.

When she opened the window to lean out the night air cooled us. Birds gathered underneath the empty tables of a closed café across the way. There were people sitting by the fountain, mostly lovers.

Chapter 6

When I woke up the next morning Emily was gone.

I waited around for an hour, then ate a late breakfast at the café across from the hotel.

When she finally returned she had a new haircut. "It's a European shag. You like it?"

It was cut short, but not too short. She looked like a European actress in one of those dark underground movies. The natural red in her hair was highlighted. It was kind of a controlled out-of-control look. In a way it matched her personality here.

After another crazy day running around we took the fast train to Venice. We had lunch at one hundred twenty miles an hour, with cows blurring by, and thousands of acres of farmland whizzing past us.

We entered the city by boat.

Venice looked like a wavy water painting, ancient, sparkling, multi-colored. Emily said it reminded her of a surrealistic dreamy version of San Francisco.

Our hotel was beyond opulent. I felt like a prince being welcomed home from the wars.

We were led upstairs on plush red carpet until we came to our room on the third floor. After washing up and changing into fresh clothes we wandered the streets for hours.

The grand canal opened to a wide expanse of water, with small boats gliding in every direction. Workers were moving equipment, others were delivering food to

restaurants, all by water. Every alleyways we randomly chose were filled with people from all over the world. Small walking bridges spanned the canals. And of course, on land there was not a single thing with wheels. No cars, no bikes, no skateboards. We had been transported back hundreds of years.

When we re-entered our room early that evening we saw the housekeepers had put everything back together for us. They had even put Emily's skin cream back in her travel kit. Our toothbrushes were laid on fresh white hand towels with golden borders. The shower robes had been replaced. A small square of chocolate lay on each of our pillows.

"Chocolate is my favorite thing," I admitted.

"So I've noticed," she said, as she put her sun glasses on the dresser. "You've eaten chocolate for desert every day since we've met. In fact, you were eating chocolate the night I first met you at the university café, way before we became homework buddies. You were eating 'Polar Ice Caps' one at a time from a box in your pocket."

"Wow, you noticed that?"

Polar Ice Caps were popular chocolate minty nuggets that I had grown addicted to. But how could she have picked up on such a subtle thing before we had even introduced ourselves?

"What else did you noticed about me?"

"I can't reveal that. I'm a spy. Those are spy secrets."

I laughed. "You like secrets, don't you?"

"Perhaps. But spies don't answer that question. Unless they're not. Or pretending they're not."

She stared at me duplicitously.

I didn't care enough to take the bait. All I could think of is that we were in Venice.

I pointed to the window with a mischievous look in my eye. She shook her head, "This isn't Rome. We're in a different movie now. We'll have to figure out another game."

The next afternoon in St. Marks Square I took a photograph of Emily running with her arms spread wide apart, dispersing a flock of pigeons into the air. I snapped the picture just as the birds began to scatter and take flight. I still have that photo.

Chapter 7

Our senior year of college went by in a blur. I don't remember much. Except for the day I asked Emily to marry me.

There was an art museum in town. I proposed while standing in front of an oil painting of Venice. It was a painting of a building on the Grand Canal with a single white window open to the sky.

She was a bit stunned when I asked her. She whispered, "You still don't know everything. There are things I need to tell you. . . ."

"Like what? Would you just. . ."

"Like, what if I came from the poorest family, the least classiest parents, imaginable? What if I couldn't make it on my own? What if we had a kid some day and I didn't want to work? How is a math major going to support me and a little screaming baby, or two? A college romance isn't like marriage. We have to think about the future."

"Emily, I can't promise you an opulent life, or a trip to Italy every summer. But that's not what would make us happy anyway in the long run."

"Well then, what would?"

"We would, I hope! Us. Being together."

She stared at me, "You're as innocent as a puppy, you know that?"

"Well, you know how male puppies like to play with female puppies. Maybe that's not so bad."

"True."

"Is this the longest 'no' to a marriage proposal in marriage history?"

"Hmm. I guess it's the longest yes. . . I just need to look at this picture one more time," she said. "Because if we can never afford to go back to Venice again, then this is as good a time as ever to say goodbye."

Chapter 8

None of our families had met. But everyone was coming to our graduation. I was far more nervous about meeting her parents than she was about meeting mine. That's because I knew my parents would love Emily. I had no idea what her parents would think of me. In fact, I had no idea who they were. She still refused to talk about her childhood, or them, or what he or they did for work, or where they lived. Emily's life before me was a total blank.

The night before the ceremony Emily invited me out to the most expensive restaurant in town. We had been carefully saving pennies throughout our senior year and we would have never thought of going to such a fancy place before now, except to look for part-time work waiting tables.

She wore a dress that I had never seen before. It was made of dark blue silk, and had narrow delicate white lace sleeves. She was wearing a brocade necklace that looked very expensive to my untrained eye. I complimented all the beautiful colors and how it made her eyes sparkle.

"Well, you know, they're not real diamonds. They're just a string of taaffeite, alexandrite, red beryl, and jade."

"Wow, which one is jade?"

"She pointed to a green gemstone."

We sat down, and if I hadn't been dazzled enough, she proceeded to order a one hundred dollar bottle of wine.

"May I ask you what in God's name you're doing?" I was laughing, but also a bit concerned.

"Let's have a drink first," she replied.

The waiters were wearing white jackets. The atmosphere was quiet and serious. The wine was brought over with typical ceremonial flare – an attempt to justify the price. A little swig was offered to me. I swirled the liquid around and sniffed it. It almost made me laugh, since I couldn't tell the difference between the house wine and the most expensive wine in the restaurant even if my life hung in the balance.

I wondered what would have happened if I had said, “No, it’s a little young. Let’s try something else.” But of course I didn’t dare.

When the waiter filled our glasses half way and slipped quietly back into the shadows, I toasted Emily. We clinked our crystal goblets gently together and heard the faint sound of a pure bell ringing, reminiscent of a distant wind chime. I smiled. But I saw a worried look in her eyes.

Chapter 9

She cleared her throat. "There's something I've been keeping from you for a long long time. Since the beginning, in fact."

She looked down shyly at the table.

I couldn't read her. My stomach tightened. I wondered if this confession would somehow lead to the end of us.

I began to wonder -- is she sick, is she dying? Or is she *actually* a spy working for the C.I.A? Or was she a high-priced escort working for some fancy agency, scheduling her work around my class schedule? Is that why she has clothes like this? And that necklace. . . .

"It's about my father," she said. She took a sip of wine and took a deep breath.

"Remember when I told you that I noticed you eating Polar Ice Caps the first day we met?"

"Yes. . . ."

"Well, he owns the company that makes them."

I started to laugh. "Okay! Is *that* the big secret?"

"He also owns a regional airlines. And about a dozen other companies around the world. . . . In fact, he's a billionaire. . . ."

"What?"

"My father. . . my father is Samuel Briggs. . . . Thusly, begetting his daughter, Emily Briggs."

"Samuel Briggs is your. . . ?"

"Well, we just call him Briggs most of the time."

She pursed her lips and looked straight into my eyes. It was almost like an apology.

I cocked my head to one side, "So why the secret? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Jack, when I was in high school, private school, of course, there were a few boys that were interested in me that I liked. I had one boyfriend in my sophomore year, and another in my junior year, and *another* in my senior year. They came from rich parents too, like I did. But the 'daughter of a billionaire' thing, well that was a whole other level of rich. It somehow took on a life of its own. It ruined my relationship with my first boyfriend when he started envisioning that after we got married someday we would buy a castle in southern France and live happily ever after. I had been to southern France. I didn't particularly like Niece, and I wasn't about to ask my father to buy me the castle the French turned into a four star hotel in Ez. So I told him that wasn't going to happen. We got into a huge fight about it.

"He said, 'You're not going to work, are you?'

"I said, 'Girls work!'

"He said, 'Not billionaire girls. I mean, why bother?'

"The next boyfriend saw me as someone who was trying to control his life with my money, since I didn't want him to have to work one summer and stupidly offered to pay him to hang out with me instead. I was seventeen! I was bored and lonely and thought it sounded like the polite thing to offer since his parents didn't even have a million dollars!

"The last boy I dated saw me for who I was, because I didn't tell him who my father was. I really liked him. But eventually someone *else* told him. As soon as he found out

he asked me to marry him! Six weeks after he knew me. He wanted to retire as soon as possible, before ever working, or going to college. He said to me, 'Are you kidding, retiring at nineteen would be amazing. Who needs to go to college if I have you?'"

A small silver tray was brought to our table. We were served something we hadn't ordered – a special appetizer compliments of the chef, delivered in what looked like a very fancy golden boiled egg holder. It was cream of cucumber mousse. Quite fantastic, actually.

"That's why I decided that I was going to 'dress down' in college, so to speak. I also wanted to go to a normal college. Not Yale. Not Princeton. So I chose a school with high academic credentials that wasn't "Ivy League." That wasn't 'prestigious.' I chose to go to a place where I would hopefully meet all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds. With things on their mind that weren't just about money. And that's how I came to meet you. I chose my own destiny, you see?"

"So you're not a spy, or a high-priced escort. I'm relieved."

"What?"

"My imagination ran away with me for a long minute."

"Jack, I don't want you to be naive about this. don't take it lightly. Money *changes* everything. My fear is it could ruin everything."

The food came slowly, one celebrated course at a time. Another bottle of wine was called for. This new bottle was way more expensive than the first.

Chapter 10

We received the all-important piece of paper that now officially assumed we knew something.

Graduation Day is the day you look back and realize you spent an incredible amount of money learning things that would soon be forgotten, if you hadn't forgotten them already. I had taken AP calculus and trigonometry in high school. After that, you either major in physics so you can go to grad school to study something else, or you become a math professor. But I was good with computers and programming. I'd learned programming on my own. So I was hoping to find a job at a tech start-up. The fact that Emily's parents had all this money didn't change anything. I wanted to find enjoyable work and challenge myself.

My parents gathered around me after the ceremony. I spotted Emily saying goodbye to some friends. As we walked towards her she waved and motioned for us to follow. She walked two stately looking people standing near a white stretch limo parked in a restricted area.

Emily's father was dressed in a perfectly tailored black suit and a red silk tie. His hair was dark brown, with tones of silver beginning to show around his temples. It made him look quite wise. His face was a bit weathered, but not just from age. He had a few lines around his eyes that foretold more than his share of sleepless nights.

His eyes were a very intense blue-gray, like Em's. His mouth looked a bit severe and critical. But his smile was immediately bright and welcoming.

Emily's mother had red hair and a face shaped like her daughter's. I could imagine what Emily's face might age like, and wasn't terribly displeased by the thought of it. Her mom was sleek and beautiful. She wore a white sequined dress with a silk Chinese scarf around her waist.

"Dad, mom, this is Jack Hampton and his parents, Alice and John. . . . Dearest Hamptons, this is my father, Samuel Briggs, and his darling wife, Adrian, otherwise known in our family as mommy."

My parents laughed. they immediately adored her.

Em's father was staring at me. I thought I saw a bit of disappointment cross his face. I searched for something to say. . . . I couldn't say, "Glad to meet you sir, Emily has told me so much about you." And he wasn't helping me out since he refused to be the first to speak.

Emily said, "Dad, I told you he was cute. Don't you think I was spot-on?"

He smiled and frowned at the same time, "Yes, I suppose so."

My mom said, "Would all of you like to join us for dinner tonight?"

"I'm so sorry," Emily's dad said a bit too quickly. "I am a slave to my work unfortunately. I have to catch a plane in a few hours." No comment about what he was doing, or where he was flying off to.

"So sorry to hear that," my dad offered, his voice sounding almost inaudible compared to the booming proclamation of Samuel Briggs. Even when he was apologizing, Briggs' personality tended to overwhelm and out-sparkle everyone around him. And that was quite intentional.

“Emily,” her mom said, “Would you do me a favor and spend a bit of time with your father before he has to leave? He’s off to Singapore and it’s going to be a torturous flight.”

“Sure,” she said dutifully. She shook my parents’ hands.

“Em, would you and your mom like to join us for dinner?” I offered quietly. “Or would you rather spend some time alone with your mom tonight?”

“Mom is flying back to California on a six o’clock flight. Private jet. Why don’t I join you at the restaurant after I see her off?”

Back at my mom and dad’s extremely affordable hotel they commented on how hard Emily’s father seemed to work, and what a shame it was he had no time to spend with his daughter on her graduation. They didn't connect him with Briggs World-Wide name. There are a lot of Briggs's out there. Including a stupid comedian we once saw at a beach club in Long island. I just shook my head “Yeah, it’s a pity.”

While they took their showers and primped themselves for what they considered to be an exciting evening with their son and his fiancé I surfed through channels on the TV. I sprawled across the rough itchy California King bedspread, pointing the remote like a hand gun, firing in rapid succession. As always, nothing was on.

I found myself alone in a cheap hotel wasting away the first hours of my math degree mesmerized by an episode of “Sponge Bob.”

I tried to see it as an elementary study of spatial relationships. A square yellow sponge in rectangular pants,

and a very dumb pink starfish with five equidistant points.
Underwater comedy for all ages.

Chapter 11

My life seemed to be going well. I was marrying the girl I loved who also happened to be an heiress. To prove to Emily I wasn't interested in taking advantage of that fact I told her I would sign a prenuptial agreement if she wanted one. She said she wasn't concerned because most of her money was held in a trust.

Could I succumb to greed and avarice? Yes. But overall, Emily got what she was hoping for -- someone that loved her and didn't really care about living in a huge house or driving a Lamborghini. In fact, I thought Lamborghinis were loud and ugly.

Still, the opulence continued. After graduation Emily and I took "one more vacation" at her insistence, before we settled down to a more normal life and found work.

This time we went to Maui. It was her treat, of course. During our two weeks there we would try to decide where to live when we got back, and what we wanted to do in the next phase of our life together. She teased me that it would be a working vacation. Possibly tax deductible since her dad was paying for it.

We landed at the Kahului airport and were offered leis. They were gently put around our necks by our waiting limo driver. Apparently, we were going on vacation Emily-style.

We were escorted, drinks in hand, in a white stretch limo, to the Kea Lani hotel in Wailea. We made it in time to walk down to the beach just before sunset. We heard a conch

shell blowing a sweet longing sound in the distance. The sun was large and triumphant, throwing pastel colors into the sky like wedding rice, until it cast itself into the sea with a quick final burst of green light. Red and orange ricocheted off the clouds near the horizon, marking the end of time for this day on earth.

That evening we ate at Sarentos. We feasted on cold gazpacho and avocado soup. Then we shared an entrée of Opakapaka, a delicate Hawaiian fish topped with olives and a hint of chili.

Walking on the beach after dinner we watched the stars floating in the sky. Blazing actually. The air was so clean and clear we could see the Milky Way. It made us dizzy. As we came to the end of the beach, a place with no manmade light to interfere, the stars looked magnified, electrified.

Cool sand gave way beneath our feet. This place was a resting place for our thoughts. We didn't want to move or speak. There was no planning for the future. There was no future.

We were extraordinarily happy hearing the dark ocean sway, and making love under a rain of stars.

Chapter 12

Emily had rented out one of the villas on the beach, a few hundred feet from the ocean. These private abodes, shaped like little Taj Mahals, rented for about two thousand dollars a night. I didn't ask for, or refuse, anything. I decided to not make a big deal of it either way.

The next day we took an early morning walk. There was a half-moon suspended over the ocean, dressed in a faint chalk white, while the sun rose up behind us.

We began to discuss where we would settle down. Emily wanted to work right from the beginning. She had absolutely no interest in bumming around since we got back.

"Okay, I thought of a plan. It could be controversial, Jack. But how about coming to work for my dad -- we could both work there, and work our way up the chain, fair and square."

"Fair and square? How is that going to happen? Emily, I thought that would be *the last thing* you'd ever want for me! Or for you. I thought it was important that I make it on my own. I don't want your dad setting my salary. I don't want him telling me what to do."

"Okay, okay, I understand," she shrugged. But then she got quiet. Had that been a test to see what I'd say?

"Did you really want me to say yes, Em?"

"No, I'm glad you don't want to. It's just. . . something else, really. It's not about you."

I waited.

"Jack, I have a very complicated relationship with my father. I mean, everyone does with their father, I guess! But as Sm Briggs' daughter, it was. . . let's just say it was uniquely difficult." She took my hand as we continued walking. "He wasn't around much, of course. And when he *was* home he would hug me like I was his favorite person in the world and always tell me how great I was. Even though he had no idea who I was, or what I was thinking, or what I liked, or didn't like. He didn't have the time or desire to know. He just gave me love. I felt like some teddy bear he'd visit once in a while. Then, bang, he'd be back at it, racing around the world making deals, conjuring up new ways to expand the empire."

She looked at me, "What I'm trying to say is, even if you don't want to work for my dad, I might want to."

She took on a pained expression. A look I hadn't seen before. "I want to show him who I really am. I want to show him how hard I can work, and how much I can help him if he'd let me try."

"You want to win his love, and that's the most direct way to do it. "

". . . I think the answer to that is yes."

"So you'd step in there and immediately be president of one of his airlines? Make a million dollar bonus every year. How would that win his love, or even his respect?"

"That's just it, Jack, I wouldn't want it to go down that way. And believe me I know my dad, he would never allow it. He's a master of putting people at the level of responsibility they're ready for. He never plays favorites. His only favorites are the companies themselves. People just fill in pieces to the puzzle. He wouldn't offer me anything

more than I could handle. But if I deserve it, he would allow me to work my way up. He wouldn't be able to resist, if I was good enough."

I saw her in a different light now. The massive corporate kingdom her father owned and controlled was the universe she had lived in since the day she was born.

I found out she had been managing her own portfolio of stocks since she was twelve. With help from the family office, which included private investment managers, of course. Still, she was in charge of all the investment decisions of her portfolio, and had grown a million dollars into five million in seven years.

She had gone through enough crazy market cycles to know how topsy turvy things can get in the bad times. She learned patience. She learned to take risks when fear was the only thing all the market experts could talk about, and to take money off the table when profits seemed to come too quickly.

Emily was playing complex games at high stakes levels long before she got a college degree in business, yet she only mentioned things like this to me in passing.

The Briggs empire was ingrained in her, like silicon dioxide is ingrained in a fire opal.

I wasn't sure she would ever be able to fully escape the inferno, even if she wanted to.

Chapter 13

I suggested we take things a step at a time. We could move to the San Francisco Bay Area, where the Briggs offices were, but not live in the city. We could find a place to rent in Berkeley or Marin County, and I could look for a job. I asked her not to commit to working with her father until after we were settled into a routine, with me working, and she had a chance to check out other opportunities.

By the fall we had rented a small house in Fairfax, in Marin, located on a street that was anything but ultra-wealthy.

In fact, for the most part, our neighbors drove around in beat-up cars, and their living rooms were filled with used furniture and scraggly neighborhood dogs. No interior decorator had ever darkened their doorway.

The movie theater was officially named, "The Fairfax Movie Theater." It had an electric sign above the theater that said "FAIRFAX." Except for many years the "A" and "X" bulbs remained burned out. So at night the sign simply proclaimed, "FAIRF. . . ." And that's what everyone called it. We'd say, "I wonder what's playing at 'the FAIRF' tonight?"

At the same time we were living in a town that had bulbs missing from the movie theater marquee, we would visit Emily's parents every few weeks in Ross, a town about fifteen minutes away, which had rows of fifteen million dollar houses with gated secured fences, and infinity pools overlooking the city skyline.

I say Emily's parents lived there, but what would be more accurate would be to say Adrian lived there. Sam dropped in via helicopter every few weeks to say hello. Most of the time we went to visit he was thousands of miles away. Even if he said he would be there, emergencies were constant. Sometimes he was out of state, sometimes he was out of the country. Other times he stayed overnight in the city at a penthouse created just for him at company headquarters. "Briggs Tower" was his "house in the city." A thirty-five story building on California Street.

Adrian tried to make light of her husband's absences. She was used to it, decades of it. The house chef would always make us a great meal when we came. Adrian would create the menu around Emily's tastes, but would occasionally surprise me with one of my favorite dishes. Apparently Emily and her mom would discuss ahead of time what my preferences were. It always ended with some variation of a chocolate desert, usually a soufflé.

One night we went to the Mill Valley Film Festival and borrowed her parents yellow Aston Martin. That caused quite a stir. They thought Emily was the star of one of the movies, with her European shag auburn hair, hazel green eyes sparkling like demantoid garnets, a wide confident smile, perfectly sculpted nose and rosy mouth.

She was wearing a five thousand dollar red silk dress. Decked out in her mom's hundred thousand dollar jewelry (just for fun). Emily put on a quite a show.

Part II

“The only thing that’s real is the personal monument we build with our own hands, our own effort. The rest is just mindless entertainment.”

—Samuel Briggs

Chapter 14

The quote on the last page from my father-in-law is detestable to me.

I believe none of it. But looking back, I see that even from a distance he was controlling our agenda.

Finding a good job was my main goal back then. And I got lucky fairly quickly. It was with a start-up firm called, "Logix." They were located in a town close to us called Larkspur.

I didn't have the working experience a lot of the applicants had, but they liked the fact that I was a math wizard and could program. I seemed to fit in personality-wise. We were like a think tank, but with nobody outside the company listening.

We had no profits. There was no marketing person to sell the brand.

I asked Emily what she thought about the people and the opportunity. She said the team was just too "out there" for her. She couldn't see the potential.

After over completely over-the-top wedding and honeymoon we moved from Fairfax to the more outer reaches north of Marin, a town called Forest Knolls. We bought a big beautiful house, carved almost like a sculpture out of wood, with no detail left unattended.

I won't quote the price. Suffice to say that Emily accepted the wedding gift from her parents on behalf of both of us.

Each night I would drive the thirty minute commute home, winding over the hill as Fairfax receded behind me, twisting through the town of Woodacre, past the Buddhist retreat center called "Spirit Rock." Finally I would turn down the long newly paved circular driveway of our massive home.

A few months after we moved in we found out Emily was pregnant. We were both ecstatic about it. She decided to wait until the baby was a year old before starting to work for her father. I was hoping it would never happen.

Emily's sweet round tummy would welcome my touch when I came home from work. Everything seemed perfect.

When Chelsea was born we celebrated silently. For two months Emily recovered from a difficult birth, mostly asking to be left alone with the baby. In fact, she had almost died in labor. She had refused drugs. We had a mid-wife at the hospital guiding her through it, but there were complications. The baby was fine. But Emily had to stay in bed for three weeks after the birth.

When spring came and Chelsea turned six months old a cloud seemed to lift. Emily became her optimistic self again. Chelsea's personality was a lot like Emily's. She was happy but very willful, very sure of herself (regardless of outcomes) and very focused. She had straight light-brown hair and blue eyes. The only physical feature that she and I shared was the shape of our eyes. They exuded an innocence, whether she or I were being innocent at the time or not.

We enjoyed a special relationship. I put her to bed each night with made-up stories, and let Emily sleep as late as she wanted each morning by taking care of Chelsea's breakfast.

I'd quietly sing songs to her while she made a mess of her food and stained another pretty white dress until I had to rush off to work.

One fairly startling change that occurred in the first year of Chelsea's life was that Emily's dad abruptly decided to stop globe-trotting around the world. He assigned others to go in his place. He was going to run the show from the home office on California Street.

No one asked him for a reason. You didn't ask Sam Briggs to explain himself. But none of us assumed it had anything to do with him missing his wife, or wanting to spend more time with his new grand-daughter – and it didn't.

This was an important development, because Emily's plan to work for her dad could now include being around him day-to-day, not just chasing his shadow.

Chapter 15

When winter arrived and the days grew colder Emily grew restless at home and decided the time had come. We hired an au pair and she went to work for her dad. She was ready to fulfill her master plan.

Each day she was helicoptered from our grassy two-acre back yard to the rooftop of the Briggs building in San Francisco. She would leave about twenty minutes after I went to work and come home just in time for a seven o'clock dinner, which the au pair we hired prepared for us before leaving for the evening.

Life became hectic, there wasn't much time to play. But Emily seemed fulfilled with her work. I had to let go of the times when I'd arrive home to her smiling face and Chelsea's waiting arms. Now we had to adjust to a routine many working families endured. This is what I had wanted in some way – both of us working, coming home to each other at the end of the day. But the truth was, it wasn't as noble or romantic as the vision it conjured up. I felt a strange dissatisfaction.

My work was fine, fun in fact. And my time with Chelsea was always a joy. But my time with Emily was getting shortened in terms of both quality and time spent in each other's presence. She was coming home late, excited, frazzled, obsessed with succeeding every day. I was having a hard time reaching her on any level. She had lost her normally ever-present sense of fun. Sex became infrequent and mechanical. She was too nervous about work, too exhausted, too angry about losing a contract she was

bidding on. Instead of her getting through to her father she was becoming the female counterpart of him. She was now part of the internal wiring of Briggs World-Wide.

I began to feel like we were less of a family and more and more a mini-corporation. She was being paid \$400,000 a year in her first year. Between the two of us, our bank account was growing steadily. But what did it really mean? We could have asked her dad for a five million dollar loan, or asked him to buy us a two million dollar yacht, and he would have written a check and forgotten about it a week later.

What did we really want? What was the meaning, the goal of working, spending? We could have chosen a whole new plan any time we wanted to. But we didn't even have time to consider it.

I had always been very wary of organized religion. But I began to go to Spirit Rock on Monday nights, meditating for an hour, then listening to "a talk" afterward by the head teacher there, Jack Kornfield. He spoke of things that made me long for Emily, back in her dorm, kissing each other on a magical rainy night. And of our time in Venice, and in Maui. Not specifically the places, but the way we were connected to each other there. I wanted that dream back. I wanted a life that felt right, in the present. Not attached to work or material things. It was insane to put off things like caring, or joy, or love, for even a minute. It became exponentially insane to put it off for months, or years.

Chapter 16

Emily was spending more time with her father than she ever had as a child. He would open up to her emotionally at private lunches, just the two of them, over a few glasses of wine.

He would tell her about how the world-wide companies he oversaw, each with hundreds or thousands of employees, have to be seen as pieces on a chess board for any of them to survive and for the employees to stay employed.

Each business, in fact each industry, was in constant flux, and took daily focus to keep up with their various markets and technological changes. So it's important, he constantly stressed to her, to stay emotionally detached and stay out of micro-managing any one company or set of companies, or get too attached to any group of people. Never make anyone indispensable.

He would fire an entire board of directors before he would fall prey to trying to run the business for them. If admitted if he tried to actually run any of the businesses he owned everything would fall apart.

His dispassion was his edge, he boasted. Others made the mistake of caring too much. They let their emotions destroy their raw intelligence. In fact, that's when he would swoop down and buy their company for a massive discount. It would inevitably be during a time of extreme distress, when the owners were desperate. This was usually after they had destroyed their own creation out of love or care, or

because they let their personal integrity get in the way of expansion. He would waive cash or Briggs stock in front of their faces at a time of maximum fear, just enough to make them wonder why they should refuse it, and then he would virtually steal the company from under them.

He would get the company back on solid ground with a new board and iron-fisted leadership. And of course, he had easy access to liquid capital whenever he needed it. Banks bowed down to his every whim. He was never forced to beg for cash.

But Em also told me that while he bragged about his ventures, she also noticed a recklessness that scared her. The cool calm Samuel Briggs was mostly show. His bravado was not just a pervasive cynicism, but a fear that if he stood still for even just one hour his life would fall apart.

There was nothing else for him to live for except to build a monument to himself, which needed constant redesigning.

Despite all the money he gave to charity, apparently to create good will for his companies, ultimately, even life itself was of no particular value to him. Nor was love. Nor was money. Nor was respect. It was all just a cold game played for reasons sometimes even he could no longer rationalize.

When I spent time with him I thought he was quite brilliant, charming and affable. And of course, very generous. All he wanted to talk about was Chelsea. Business never came up.

So I was stunned at Emily's close-up assessment of him. He was obviously a very astute actor. A great showman who knew how to work a room.

Chapter 17

Emily's instincts about Logix, the start-up company I had devoted my life to for the past two years, were right. Just before Christmas Santa Claus handed me a pink slip. The company folded. I had taken half my pay in stock options that were now worthless. Above and beyond that humiliation I was now a stay-at-home dad with a math degree with a wife worked sixty hours a week, while her dad bought us anything we could ever desire, except time.

Here is what I learned during this interlude between jobs: there are specific things two-year olds like to do – such as go to the corner park and rock on spring loaded horses; eat toasted bagels and cream cheese on their dad's lap at the local bagel store and then smear what they don't want to eat on dad's pants; chew on toys in the bath tub; listen to music while throwing things. Chelsea was funny and precocious, almost like a little Shirley Temple at times. She pointed out a spider in the corner of our bedroom one day, looking scared. I said, "Don't worry, Chelsea, it's just a little spider, it won't hurt you." She looked closer and then pulled away, "Act-chee, big biter!" she said with her round eyes looking up at me in an odd combination of panic and defiance.

I took to writing down the crazy things she said in a notebook that had I planned to give to her when she was eighteen. The question in my mind was would Emily and I be able to survive the life we were setting up for ourselves until then?

Chapter 18

Jed Whipple was a dork, a nerd. But he was also street smart. Now anyway.

He was a college friend of Emily's. She introduced him to me back then as "a math wizard." That alone made me hate him, since I was supposed to be her only math wizard. I felt jealous and competitive before we even met. But when we did meet it was far stranger than I had imagined. Because *he* was strange. Almost no one got his sense of logic, or even understood what it was he was saying in his mumbly, nervous, eyes-constantly-glued-to-the-ground way.

During the rest of the time we were at college I wouldn't say we became friends, but at least I restrained myself from making fun of him and his profusely long crooked nose, his paddleball ears, and his thick overly red lips. I would never have called him a fat clown's version of Albert Einstein, as others did, but that's only because any comparison to Einstein was ridiculous.

Fast forward seven years after graduation, and here was Jed Whipple, ex-commodities trader, now mega-rich, with a following of dozens of hungry investors that think he's a golden boy.

Up into our circular driveway he rides in his dark green Jaguar convertible. Out of the Jag he steps with his tailored suit and Italian shoes. Amazingly, he was still his same nerdy self. His tie gave it away – too wide, and dull gray with little red balloons swirling around in the foreground. Somehow he made his Italian suit look frumpy, like he'd

bought it off a Salvation Army rack. Nothing had changed, except he had made millions trading in the futures markets.

Successful commodities trading is an almost impossible task except for those whose mathematical skills are matched only by dumb-assed luck.

The genius of Jed Whipple was that he *knew* it had been more luck than calculation. In fact, that's why he came to see me.

Down he plopped on our red couch. He asked for something to drink before I could offer it, then stayed glued to the cushion while I pretended to happily serve him a glass of white wine from the fridge.

After glugging it down in two swallows and tipping the glass towards his bespeckled eyes to see if there were perhaps a few stray alcohol molecules skateboarding around at the bottom of the bell curve, he began to explain his visit.

"I've been skating on thin ice for years, making crazy amounts of money for a handful of investors who now think I'm God. But some days the difference between me making or losing a fortune was a coin flip. I've flipped right a few dozen times in row over the last five years. As a mathematician I realize the odds of something like that repeating another dozen times is about the same odds as me jumping off a mountaintop and catching hold of someone else's parachute."

"I know the feeling," I said. "I just had a job where we all jumped off and caught nothing but air on the way down."

"I know. Emily told me."

"How kind of her."

"Well, hopefully it *was* kind of her, Jack. You haven't heard my offer yet, and I'd never have thought to offer it to

you if Emily hadn't told me you were currently a house bum. So just listen, okay?"

"I'm all ears." I laughed a little too loud.

"I know, I know. *I'm* all ears too. Very fucking funny. More wine please."

"No."

"Okay, fine. Anyway, the involuntarily unemployed need alcohol far more than I do."

"So what exactly is the offer you have in mind?"

I want to start a hedge fund with you, man. That's the offer!"

"No."

"I was just about to say -- but before you say no, hear me out. See, I guessed your first reaction. I'm good, right?"

"You're amazing. But no."

"Jack, this would be a hedge fund like no other. There would be no trading. No commodity bets. No stocks bought or sold or borrowed short. This would be a hedge fund that absolutely could not ever lose money! Regardless of the direction of the market!"

"Insider trading?"

"Do I look like Martha Stewart to you? And you're not listening. I said no trading of any kind."

"Look, point 1, Jed, is I'm not interested in being involved in a hedge fund. Point 2 is, I have nothing of value to offer even if I did have an interest."

"Well, if 1 precludes 2 than I'm done talking to you before getting to 2b."

"Fine. Then stop."

"But Emily told me to make sure you hear 2b, and not to leave until I did."

"You mean the Emily I see once a week these days?"

"That's 2c. That would change drastically after 2b.

Would you just hear me out please?"

"Go ahead. But when Chelsea wakes up from her nap it's going to get a lot harder. So cut to the chase."

"The *idea*," Whipple crooned, "is based on a concept called, 'asset-based lending.'"

"Wow, now there's a subject that will keep me awake for about thirty seconds."

"This could change your life for the better, Jack, and I'm not just talking about the money. So give me one fucking minute."

His body language begged for an apology by way of a refill, so I poured him his second glass of wine and he gulped half of it down instantly before continuing.

"Here's the bottom line: HW Partners, L.P. -- that stands for Hampton-Whipple -- see I put your name first -- would be loaning money to a deal flow company. The deal flow company takes the money and buys electronic goods for half-price from a wholesale manufacturer because the manufacturer has newer models coming out and needs to make room for them in their warehouses."

"Okay, so. . . ?"

"So, the deal flow company is the trusted middle man. But before they buy this shit they already have a signed contract from a discount store to buy it and pay within ninety days of delivery. The discount store would then sell it to Joe Consumer at a 'sale price' but still make a nice profit. Then, like magic, the new models arrive right around the time the old stuff on sale sells out. See? Everybody wins."

I nodded wearily.

"The key to the whole deal is that HW Partners would have a special relationship with the deal flow company."

"Why would the deal flow need our money? Why wouldn't they just get a loan from a bank?"

"Because bankers are dumb as mud and this is too complicated. They hate complication."

"Okay, so where do *we* get the money to lend to the deal flow company? You want to raid Emily's fortune, right?"

"Absolutely not! I'll raise the capital from investors. I can do that easily. And I have the contacts to do it. But I need someone I can trust implicitly, and who gets the math. I need someone who can calculate the actuarial values, and track the deals, but also someone I can trust with my life."

"Me."

"*You!* Emily's husband! Someone I could trust to never rip me off, or rip-off the investors. Look, neither of us need the money, but we're both looking for a challenge. We're looking for an *adventure*. Right? But we want a mathematical adventure, not real adventure where we can freeze to death on Mount Everest, or get eaten by sharks scuba diving off of Cocos Island. No! We're nerds, for God's sake. And here it is, Jack, a mathematical adventure, with no risk!"

"Okay, I get it."

"So then?" he smiled.

"No."

"*No?*"

"Correction. No *thanks*."

However, aside from being a math wizard and a commodities trader known throughout the industry for his

uncanny sense of timing, Jed Whipple was also a master chess player who used humans as chess pieces. He had anticipated my resistance and total lack of interest at this point in the conversation. But he was ready to put me in checkmate.

"Well, my dear college friend, it's too bad you won't see clear to join me. Because I thought with the added perks of working in the office right next to Emily's, making a few million dollars a year, and looking like a big shot to her billionaire father, this deal might have enticed you. . . . And by the way, the deal flow company is named, *E. Briggs Inc.*, an affiliate of Briggs World-Wide."

"What are you talking about?"

I still thought that nothing could entice me to do this. But another thought flashed through my mind -- my father probably had no intention of going into the thermometer business until he was persuaded by my mom, another very good human chess player. And look how that turned out.

"Emily has granted me a lease for the office right next to hers on the twenty-fifth floor. You know the one that overlooks the Golden Gate Bridge?"

I squinted at him.

This could have the potential of resurrecting my relationship with her — sharing lunches, going out to romantic dinners together in the city occasionally.

I might also be seen as an up-and-coming business person by none other than Sam Briggs. Not a big goal of mine at all. In fact, far down on my Christmas wish-list. But it wouldn't hurt to fall into his good graces, for Emily's sake.

"Jed, there are a lot of go-getters and math wizards out there who could help you with the forensics of these deals,

or raise assets for you. I'm not a CPA. I don't do audits. I'm not a salesman. I'm just a glorified computer programmer. And with all my math knowledge I wasn't able to save Logix, and I sure as hell would never be able to save you."

"Correcto," he crowed. "Right on all counts. But I am coming to you because you have something unique to offer that no one else does. You just don't realize it."

"And what might that be?"

"You know Sam Briggs personally. In fact, you're his *son* now! You could guarantee me, just by being my co-General Partner, that Briggs would never cheat us or pull the plug on our fund. And Emily would always make sure to put us in the best deals since she's the deal flow provider. We would have the biggest risks completely taken off the table before we even hang our name on the door."

I was silently calculating

"And, Jack, if you refuse to help me after seeing what my true motivation is -- which is the protection of our investors' capital -- then I guess you just wasted a couple of glasses of mediocre wine on me. I'll have to let go of that office next to Emily's and not sign the lease. Because there's no way I would start this thing without you. . . partner."

"Why don't you ask Emily to be your partner?"

"I did."

He drank a few last drops of wine and put the glass back on the table a little too loudly. "But she's too fucking busy to take this on full-time. She has her hand in all of Daddy Briggs' ventures at this point. She's a hell of a smart girl, Jack. But she told me I needed a math geek as a partner. That's not where her interests lie. And then she kept staring at me. Suddenly I got what she was driving at. She's a

genius, you know. She got me to come up with the solution without saying another word. By the way, she was the only one in college who could beat me at chess."

"She plays chess? She never told me."

"Well, do you play chess?"

"No."

"So then why would she bring up that she plays chess? It's just one of a thousand things she's amazing at. And she's humble. Not like her father."

"Yes, I know."

"So?"

"So. . . why does Briggs need our money? Why doesn't he just use his own capital to fund these deals?"

"Why should he use his own capital for a stinking twelve to fifteen percent and then get taxed on it? He borrows money from small fries like us for these kinds of things. He uses all his free corporate cash for much bigger deals. Deals that can buy him companies in trouble and can double his profits in a year or two."

I poured myself a glass of wine, and poured him another.

Chapter 19

I began to calculate the pros and cons:

Pro 1: I get to work next to Emily. My biggest issue at the moment – that of not seeing her enough – could be permanently resolved.

Con 1: I didn't want to ask her, or her father, for anything, or have anything to do with the businesses Sam Briggs was running. I wanted to make it on my own.

Con 2: I wasn't sure she'd want to have me working right next to her office. But if she didn't, then why would she want me to do this?

Con 3: I wasn't sure I'd like the work. In fact, I was pretty confident I wouldn't like it anywhere near as much as the work I did with the guys at Logix.

Pro 2: But Logix was dead. I needed a job. And I could probably choose exactly what I wanted to work on if Whipple and I were co-partners. We could hire others to do what neither of us cared to deal with.

Con 4: I wasn't too sure I wanted to work with Whipple.

The cons won, 4-2.

Whipple was reading my mind. "Jack, Emily's office has a remote controlled lock on the door. Wouldn't it be fun for you to be little college lovebirds again? Imagine her thousand square foot office is just a glorified dorm room. You could do your homework together."

"Your motive for asking me is solely that you need me to connect your game with Emily's game. Is that what you're saying?"

"Basically. . . ."

"So you can live on easy street without any risk, thanks to Sam and Emily Briggs."

"Actually, just Emily. It's Emily we need because she oversees the deal flow. . . her father just got her a seat at the table, that's all. So if we ever need anything, we'd just ask Emily."

"We'd just ask Emily."

"Bingo!" His unblinking gaze unsettled me. He didn't need to beg me for this. He wasn't desperate for this to happen. He already had enough money to last him for decades. It was simply the best investment idea he could think of at the moment. This was not the awkward Jed Whipple I'd known in school.

"I don't know what to tell you, Jed. I have to think about it."

"Understood. As long as you're being logical, Jacko, I will accept your decision."

"Well, as you know, even in mathematics there are lots of ways to approach logic."

"Yes, math is never as coldly obvious as people think, right? *Isn't that right?* That's the secret to *the art* of math. We both know that."

Upon rising from his chair his suit looked no more wrinkled than when he walked in, because it was wrinkled to begin with. Was that also part of his show? He looked sophisticated in a rumped suit kind of way. His beady eyes stared through me one last time. I could feel the gears of logic in my brain trying to create a new paradigm.

Chapter 20

B.W., "Before Whipple," (Whipple's appearance would mark the biggest turning point of my life) I was just barely surviving, trying to keep myself occupied.

After the ignominious failure of Logix and my unexpected unemployment status I sought out something reasonable to do with my time. I hated to just sit around. I was never into watching T.V., or rooting for a sports team.

Contrary to what one might think matches the personality of a math geek I did like to play basketball at the gym. And with our au pair overseeing Chelsea until Emily came home late at night I found a bunch of guys that would come to the indoor court right from work and play for a few hours, three days a week.

One of these guys was named Shelly Swaminathan. He was born in Delhi, India. He was tall and thin and very athletic. He was also surprisingly strong. As a small forward he had no problem getting under the basket and pushing the center around. Before you knew it he had half of his team's offensive rebounds.

After the games he and I would usually stick around the gym and work out for a while. Eventually we became gym rat friends.

He told me his Indian parents moved to the States when he was a small boy. He graduated from Yale and started a software company, which he sold for thirty million dollars at the age of twenty-eight. He lived alone in a big house in Kentfield. He too was looking for something to do

with his time, and his money. Things weren't adding up emotionally.

I could relate to his restlessness. But he had a spiritual perspective that was quite different than my Jewish background and Emily's Catholic one. He didn't eat meat or fish, and he meditated once a day. He said the concentration he developed from meditating not only helped him in his business life, but it helped his three-point shooting.

I mentioned that the name, Shelly, seemed like a very unique name for someone born in India. "Were you named after someone your parents knew in the States?"

"Ah, yes and no. I don't mean to obfuscate or be evasive about it. It's just that I've heard two different stories from my parents."

"They disagree?"

"Totally, yes. But it doesn't mean one is lying." He smiled. "You see, my father said I was born on a beach in India, because the labor came too fast, so they had no way to get me to a hospital. And he said the beach was very shelly. He said the shells were quite annoying for my mother, who was on her back for three hours straight. And they hurt my father's feet as he was running around trying to gather water and other things to assist my mother. So I guess they were prescient enough to realize I would be a very annoying child, and that I would eventually hurt my father, like the shells hurt his feet, by not becoming a doctor, as he wished. So they named me Shelly."

"Wow. Okay, so what's your mother's story?" I found Shelly to be quite entertaining. I wanted to hear more.

"Well, when I was ten and went to verify my father's account of my birth name with my mother she scoffed at my

father's explanation, which wasn't unusual because scoffing was a big part of the way she communicated. The image I have of her is that any time my father said anything she would wave her hand at him, as if she was waving off a fly. Anyway, *she* said I was born on the beach like my father said, but I was named after a Jewish children's story writer named Shel Silverstein. She especially liked his story, 'The Giving Tree.'"

"I *read* that to Chelsea a few weeks ago!"

"Yes, well I read it out of curiosity a number of years ago. It's quite moving, really. He must have studied Buddhism at some point."

"But whose story is the truth?"

"They both might be telling the truth! It might just be that they agreed on the same name for different reasons. I can live with the paradox. My name is Shelly. That's all I really need to know. I'm not really into the whole genealogy thing."

"Two things can be true at once."

"As they say in India, it's almost always true that nothing is ever clear."

We laughed.

I went back home to meet up with Emily.

Chapter 21

Shelly told me this story a few hours after Whipple made his offer to me. I found myself intrigued and repelled at the same time. One second it made sense, the next it didn't. Two things could be true at once.

Emily came home from work exhausted, as usual, and told me that right after a late dinner she was going off to bed. But when I casually mentioned the potential deal with Whipple she became very excited and animated.

Later that night, for the first time in months, she seduced me. When we were in bed she grabbed my wrists and wriggled on top of me like a crazed animal. She said we could have some very “interesting private meetings” in her office during the afternoons.

Emily's dad had given complete control of this part of his business to her. There wouldn't be people coming in and out of her office all the time. She told me to say the word and it could all come together quickly.

I asked her if she had put Whipple up to this, but she said she hadn't thought of Whipple in years until he showed up with the offer.

I don't think it would have made a difference to me either way. Maybe I would have even been impressed and flattered at her attempt to get me to be closer to her.

After a few days, with Emily's excitement and promises to me clearly playing a big role in my decision, I decided to say yes to Whipple and his eager investors. This was purely

a “saving the relationship” decision. I didn’t think Emily and I could last more than a few more years on the path we’d been on.

Shelly Swaminathan, my basketball buddy, became one of our first investors.

Chapter 22

My first few days at my new job on the twenty-fifth floor of the Briggs Building was more fun than I had possibly imagined. Emily seemed like her old self again. And really, Whipple wasn't all that bad to hang out with. He wasn't a total nerd. He just needed to get rid of the balloon tie.

Before long, a radical shift occurred in my relationship with Emily, both at work and at home. We seemed to be back to an emotional and sensual place that was reminiscent of those sweet days before we were married. Neither of us would have predicted the swiftness or intensity of the shift. But the fact was, Emily loved me being in her dad's building, working on a business venture that included and needed her and him. We were now all on the same team.

This was exactly the type of thing I would have thought she would have been afraid of: a husband using her to get to her father and his money. But Emily's game was very complex. It wasn't linear. It had its own internal rules and logic based on her instincts and base needs – to love me, to love her father, and to somehow make those two radically different worlds merge into one unified emotional reality. That was the game she was trying to win. . . in the beginning.

I would sometimes meet Emily for lunch in her office at her invitation and not return for a few hours. She would lock her door with a remote control after I entered. And after our catered meal was over she would look at me and smile. Then perhaps she'd go to her huge window on the twenty-fifth floor – a window overlooking a great many beautiful hills in

this wind-torn city, a window twenty-two floors higher than the white-framed window in Venice, this time with the Golden Gate Bridge shimmering in the mist – and she would begin to slowly undress. I would come closer as she looked out to the bay, sail boats dotted impressionistically upon a blue canvass, and I would begin rubbing her shoulders, as white and smooth as porcelain. She would casually lean back against me while looking out the window. Sometimes we would make love like this while feeling the silky soft texture of an Arabian rug upon our bare feet. She would often keep her eyes fixed upon the city moving in rhythm beneath us while I fixed my attention only on her.

Every day I long for *that Emily*. Not the one that hid the truth from me. Not the Emily that eventually ruined my life.

Chapter 23

Whipple was good at what he did, but fairly boring to be around eight hours a day. That came as no shock. What did come as a bit of a shock is that I was really enjoying my work, and seeing the management and performance fees roll in. I had fallen into the world of high finance and felt the rush from time to time.

Whipple brought in the investors. I oversaw the company, interfaced with the accountants and with the deal flow provider – Briggs – whose liaison was Emily. She was now running the entire deal flow business for her dad. This was one of a number of projects she was overseeing for Briggs World-Wide, but the only one that her father had given her complete autonomy over. In fact, he made it clear he didn't want her to have any other employees. He wanted her to run the deal flow side by herself.

We were not the only hedge fund doing this deal with Briggs and her. There were eventually about three billion dollars of assets invested in this asset-backed inventory lending strategy Emily was overseeing. Only three other hedge fund managers had been accepted by Briggs as lenders. But we were the fund closest to the deal flow provider. In fact, I was married to the deal flow provider, and occasionally fucking the deal flow provider.

Sam Briggs had hand-picked each hedge fund manager as a pay-back for a favor they did for him long ago. They each worshipped Briggs in their own way.

Investors flocked to us. We were bringing twenty to thirty million dollars of new money into the fund every month.

These were the best of times for Emily, Chelsea and me. The aphrodisiac of us studying together in her college dorm was being closely matched by our working together in her father's sky scraper. Our love life had reignited. And we were also both seeing a lot more of Chelsea, since we were now home-schooling her right in the Briggs building, having recently hired a retired Waldorf school teacher for Chelsea's ongoing education.

A few months later, we decided to rent a penthouse right on California Street so we could walk to work. Chelsea could now be taught "at home" in the penthouse. We spent weekends in Fairfax, or took trips to Monterey or Mendocino or Los Angeles. We would decide on the spur of the moment where to go and what to do and just take off, literally, since we frequently used the Briggs helicopter or private jet to get around.

Chapter 24

One day we picked up Chelsea and went wandering off to the various city parks for the afternoon. We were all playing hooky, taking half a day off.

Emily was often tormented by the fact that she didn't have enough time to spend with her only child. She certainly didn't want to repeat the mistake her father had made for the exact same reasons.

This day, at Dolores Park, Emily and Chelsea had rarely been happier together. They were rolling down a gentle grassy hill, laughing out of control. I sat contented, watching the city skyline floating on the horizon, bathed in a slow forming mist – fog trying to be born. The city would soon disappear in a shroud of cool white linen.

Emily looked back at me and waved, then took Chelsea's hand and rolled down the hill again, until they fell together in a heap at the bottom. When they came back over to me Emily's hair was tangled, grass was stuck to her cheek. She was breathing hard, smiling.

Chelsea went off to play with a big friendly dog a few yards away.

Emily closed her eyes. "Jack. . ."

"Hmm," I was too peaceful to say a word.

"What would you think if. . . some day. . . we had another baby."

"Another baby? We're working so hard we hardly have time for Chelsea."

"Well, we'd have days like this! And nights together as one big family! Wouldn't that be sweet?"

“I suppose so, yes.”

“You know, I won’t always want to be working this hard. I eventually want to go back to our favorite places, travel the world, with Chelsea, and all the children! We could even bring my mom, or an au pair, and just go off for a few weeks like we used to. We could do that!”

I nodded, smiling, but not wanting to show too much enthusiasm for such a crazy idea. Work had been so overwhelming for both of us lately; realistically, when would we find the time to break away for that long?

“We could even travel the world with the kids for months, or years! We could do it, Jack! We need to spend some more quality time as a family. Work isn’t the only thing. But of course, you know that.”

She looked at Chelsea trying to kiss the dog as it rolled on its belly and leapt to its feet.

“I don’t like being as absent as I’ve been. . . .” she said, squinting up at the hazy sky.

Almost to herself, she added, “It doesn’t have to be like that. Not anymore.”

Chapter 25

Fall, 2006, “Grandma Addie” took Chelsea for a special week with Grandma, and Emily and I went to Paris alone.

We knew it might be a little cold and rainy, but we could relax and visit museums and eat great dinners without tourists crowding us out. We both thought about taking Chelsea with us but Emily said she had a plan in mind for this particular trip that didn’t include Chelsea.

The Briggs World-Wide private jet whisked us into Charles de Gaulle International Airport after stopping for a day to see my parents in New York.

We took a limo to the Hotel de Crillon, a five star architectural masterpiece in the middle of Paris. We stayed in the Louis XV suite, a fifteen-hundred square foot room with a private bar, a five-hundred square foot terrace overlooking Place de la Concorde, and, for cold winter nights like the one we were experiencing – there was a steam bath in one of its two marbled bathrooms.

We slept off the flight in an 18th century canopy bed, and then took a limo to Le Meurice for dinner.

We shared the first course -- "crispy hen egg yolk with golden oscetra caviar. Accompanied by acid green apple jelly with aniseeds."

For the main course, Emily ordered the "braised brittany blue lobster with crêpe mushrooms, cooked in a brill, eggplant purée and coral juice."

I chose "partridge with juniper berries, with melted green cabbage, strongly seasoned with orange peels."

We laughed about what we would have ordered for Chelsea if she had been with us: "Yes, and one 'glass of milk, accompanied by a bowl of peas with butter,' merci."

We stumbled back to our hotel laughing and very drunk. When we opened the door to our suite Emily immediately pulled her fancy dress to the floor and told me to hurry into the steam room with her. She was cold from the damp night.

There was an original Dali painting on the wall. Aubusson carpets, Baccarat chandeliers. We were living the life I would have considered abhorrent a few years ago, but I realized we both relied on times like this to renew ourselves.

In the steam room our bodies quickly became hot and wet. We allowed our drunken passion to consume each other until we couldn't stand the heat anymore.

We bolted the steam room gasping for cool air and leaped unto the soft bedspread. I tried to pretend to be Louis XV. He was quite an excited king on this particular evening.

By the end of our historic escapade I was clawing at Emily's back, sucking on her neck.

This is how our son was conceived. Royally. Drunk. In Paris. During the best of times.

Chapter 26

I recall an interesting business lunch I had with “Dad” in late 2007, a few months after our second child, Adam, was born.

I was working on my laptop in the office, Whipple was on the road whipping up a group of new investors in San Diego, when I heard a knock on the door.

A tall figure entered. I almost didn’t recognize him at first because of his overcoat and the lack of lighting at the other end of the office.

“Care to dine with me?” Sam Briggs himself stood at the door.

“Yes, sure, okay,” I smiled nervously. I never called him dad. But calling him “Sam” would have sounded off-key. Calling him “Mr. Briggs” would have been way too formal for a son-in-law, so I usually avoided calling him anything.

I grabbed my coat and we walked across the street to his favorite restaurant.

He began by telling me that he’d sent Emily up to his auditor’s offices for the day. They were ensconced on the thirty third floor. No one ever saw them. He made a snide remark about whether I could handle her being gone for a few hours. He was drunk already and we hadn’t even sat down yet. I just smiled and didn’t reply.

His hair had gotten a good deal grayer over the past few years. His face looked more weathered. Stress had taken a harsh toll. As did the drinking. His eyes were no longer

like Emily's. They had become milkier. Cataractic. Less intense. More self-absorbed.

We ordered. The wine came, and he had a few glasses before saying much. He took an urgent call on his cell phone, lectured someone loudly, then fell silent again, but was uncomfortable with me being equally silent. He was used to people asking him a million questions. He was used to people feeling a rush of excitement being in his presence. Wanting something from him. Trying to humor him, persuade, beg. Outmaneuver. He stared at me, trying to assess this person who had married his daughter. What was my game? What exactly did I want out of all this?

"So Emily and you seem to be getting along well," he smiled disarmingly at me. His question felt a bit off. I didn't trust it.

"Yes, we definitely are. She's a great person." I thought that would make him smile, and being satisfied, he would change the subject.

"She's a great person?" he laughed almost to himself. "You don't know her."

"Well, I've known her for eight years. . ."

"And I've known her for twenty-seven years, so I think I'm qualified to say for certain that you don't know her."

I shrugged, "Okay."

I refused to touch my wine. This lunch was not going to be easy to get through. And I wouldn't survive it drunk.

"You're placating me," he continued, "but I know what I'm saying."

"And what exactly *are* you trying to say by saying it?" I shot back.

He leaned back in his chair, a bit nonplussed by my voice being slightly raised. It was the first time I had shown any kind of disrespect to him.

“A lot of people resent me, I know. I’m pretty blunt.” He took his cell phone out of his pocket and turned it off. He leaned forward across the table.

I became visibly uncomfortable.

“The banks resent me because they know if they don’t give me leverage when I ask for it I might just buy them out!” he scoffed. “And the CEOs of the companies I own resent me because they know every time I tell them what to do, and they do something else, they end up screwing up. CEOs love to think they know what the hell they’re doing for their company better than an outsider, as if that kind of experience of running and expanding a company grows on trees.”

He took a hefty self-congratulating slug of wine.

“Here’s the secret. It’s not about smarts, or college degrees, or even on-the-ground experience. It’s instinct, and the guts to follow that instinct. They know my instincts are better than their brains, and all their degrees put together, and they resent the hell out of me.”

“Well, I don’t resent you,” I offered, trying to stroke his ego and get out of this conversation as quickly as possible.

“Of course you do.”

“No I don’t! Why should I resent you?”

“Don’t fuck with me, son.” It was the first time he had ever called me son, ironically using it not literally but idiomatically. He said, “You can tell me what you think of me. It doesn’t matter. You can’t stand that Emily is so close to me, and spends so much time trying win my respect and

love, can you? She admires me, she needs me. She needs me to love her. You hate that. Hence, *resentment*."

He was really extraordinarily drunk now, having downed almost an entire bottle of very expensive wine in ten minutes.

"Can I be honest with you, sir?"

He nodded and smiled in an almost sinister way. His antennas were up. When someone says "can I be honest with you?" it usually turns out to be a set-up. He was waiting to pounce.

"You want to know what I think of you, sir? Here's my answer: I *don't* think of you. You're not a part of my thinking."

He laughed. "Good! Good come back!" He raised his glass to toast me. Of course, he thought I was BS-ing him.

"And what *do* you think about then? What do you want, son, now that you have all this money of mine?" He said this professorially. Leaning back. Is this why he took me to lunch? To question my motives for being in the family?

Then it dawned on me that actually, although his question was incendiary, accusatory, it was still a damn good question. What did I think about having all this money. . . of his? What was the point of it all?

In fact, what was the point of being here with him right now, wasting my precious time, instead of being on a beach somewhere with Emily far away from here? Tripping off to Venice? Or playing in the park with my kids?

I stared back at him while taking a sip of Chardonnay, refusing to answer his question.

"So by your silence am I supposed to believe you're trying to be condescending?" his silver speckled eyebrows

raised up as he chuckled. "Go on. Tell me. What does all of our money mean to you?"

"It means Emily is happy. She gets what she wants. And I get her. But more personally, it just doesn't mean a whole lot to me."

"Well, what if I told you there was some very bad news concerning Briggs World-Wide. Would you care at all about that?"

"Of course," I said reflexively. "For your sake. For Emily's sake. But is that a hypothetical, or is there actually something that's concerning you?" I asked this not expecting an answer, but perhaps just a dismissive wave of the hand. This test would hopefully come to an end soon.

"Yes, in fact."

He wrapped his fingers around his wine glass, then nervously put them on his lap instead. "One of my companies, my mid-west airlines. I don't think it's going to make it. Oil prices are up above a hundred dollars on the futures market. It's hurting us. I think we're going under."

"I see," I said, deciding not to pry further. It's not like I had anything to offer. I was not a business entrepreneur or a bankruptcy specialist. And Briggs World-Wide had survived things like this before.

"Wanna buy an airline, cheap?" he laughed. "You know how it is when you play: win some, lose some. Sometimes it's a tie. This one, I would've settled for a tie."

His demeanor had completely changed. He was speaking to me now in that confidential manner usually reserved for friends. He was smiling at me from time to time, and smiling at his minor tragedy, and it seemed authentic.

“I bet you won’t be the only airline in trouble,” I offered.

This sat well with him.

He patted his mouth with his napkin. Stared at me for a bit too long without speaking. “I guess you’re a good kid, really. Emily’s right.”

I actually wanted to say thank you, whereas a minute before I wanted to bolt from the table and never see him again. He had an alarming ability to draw you into his world, and get you to see him as an empathetic character, even after he spit all over you and ripped your world apart. It was easy to feel disoriented around him.

“So let me tell you why I invited you to lunch.”

I waited for the next round.

“Emily tells me you love chocolate. And that you’ve been eating Polar Ice Caps since the day you both met.”

Ah, I get it. After messing with my head he wants to treat me to a chocolate soufflé, and that was going to make me so very glad I came to lunch with this madman?

“I need a new CEO to head that company. Dan Reesdorf is retiring and everyone on the board is falling all over themselves to prove they’re worthy to be his replacement. But they’re not good enough to fill his shoes. Besides, I want some new blood. New ideas. A new direction. I need someone whose honest, with good instincts and a strong backbone. I need someone who can be patient and think long-term.” He looked straight into my eyes: “Interested?”

“Me?” I was stunned.

“Well,” I stammered slightly, “I’m flattered, but I have the hedge fund taking up all my time.”

“You’re easily replaceable. The oversight of the fund is something any CFO or forensic accountant could do. It’s beneath your capabilities.”

“Well. . . but I love the work.”

“You love being next to Emily’s office, no doubt.”

“Absolutely! That too,” I admitted.

“I can kick Whipple out of there, you know. The fund can find an office somewhere else in the building, or even downtown in the ferry building where all the other hedge fund managers work. And you could keep that office next to Emily’s all for yourself. Of course, you’d make far more money than what you make with your hedge fund. Somewhere around twenty million a year, with perks. But it would be a huge challenge. I won’t kid you about that. A big responsibility. You’d have to prove your mettle.”

I nodded. “I appreciate the offer. I really do. I’d like to take a few days to think about it.”

“Well then, you’re paying the check!” he boomed, smiling. He got up and patted my back, then went off to the restroom.

He figured this offer was something I wouldn’t turn down. The problem is, I did turn it down. I never had that kind of ambition. And I wasn’t willing to do what my dad did – learn a whole new business after I had already learned one and was succeeding at it. I didn’t care about the challenge the new work presented.

Also, if I had accepted his offer, I would have been working directly under him, something I couldn’t imagine wanting to do voluntarily. He’d have complete control over me and every move I made.

What I didn't know was, he wanted to save me. He knew I was about to go down with the ship.

As it turned out, I unwittingly refused to get in the rowboat he sent me.

Chapter 27

Emily pushed hard for me to take her dad's offer. She pushed harder than I could have ever imagined. But I told her I had no desire or ambition to be the head of a chocolate company. I liked to *eat* chocolate, not manufacture it. And if I worked under her father I'd probably never want to eat chocolate again. Think of a tragedy like that, I mused. But she was not in the mood to laugh.

She said she thought this would be a great move up. And only a temporary position until I was given an even higher position later.

I told her if it weren't for me being able to spend more time with her I wouldn't even be doing what I was doing now. I would still be hanging out with a bunch of brilliant wild men, like the ones I worked with at "Logix."

"Logix *folded!*" She was clearly exasperated; frustrated by the same attitude about money and lack of ambition that attracted her to me in the first place.

"You didn't want to marry one of those guys, Em. The type of guy who would say yes."

"Logix was just a bunch of kids with no idea what they were doing," she continued.

"But I liked the work."

"They gave away all their best ideas, like chumps!"

"Yes, they did. And I was as naive as they were. Still, the work was challenging, I enjoyed going to work each day.

"You're even more naive now!"

"Really? Well, I think if Whipple hadn't come along I could have found similar work with a better organization."

“For fifty thousand dollars a year? You make double that every week now, and you could make five hundred times that every year for the rest of your working life if you just say yes!”

“We don’t need more money, Emily! Why would I care about what my salary is?”

“Well, being the CEO of a company isn’t exactly the worst thing in the world, you know! *Damn it!*” She began to cry. But it wasn’t out of anger. Why was she pushing this so hard?

“Please take the job, Jack,” she begged, almost in a whisper. “Please.” She literally got down on her knees. I’d never seen her like this.

I did a lot more soul searching, for her sake. But in the end I just didn’t want to get more hooked into her father's world than I already was. What I was doing now was incestuous enough. The thought of being one of his many pawns was sickening. But now what would I be? One of his bishops? A knight perhaps, that he could slay the queen? It was all too much for me. I was happy with the status quo.

But status quo was about to change.

Chapter 28

2008 was a year to forget for most people in the business world. Financially, it was the year the world fell apart.

Cities still lit the sky at night, fancy cars passed each other on California Street, Lexuses and BMWs were still omnipresent. But in the deep recesses of everyone's lives, even for the mega-rich, something had gone terribly wrong.

Sam Briggs was usually immune, and therefore completely insensitive to this kind of economic downturn. This is where he would sweep in and make big money, buying companies with great business plans that suddenly found themselves on the ropes. But not this time. Banks refused to lend to anyone. Even him. They literally didn't have the assets. Credit froze around the globe. Even Briggs World-Wide couldn't find liquidity. And liquidity was King. The financial world had been checkmated.

As stock markets around the world collapsed, with the US market losing more than forty percent, Sam Briggs smiled and called it a pity. He reminded everyone almost all of his money was invested in his companies. So what did he care? Why buy the stock when you could own the company outright? He would remind us of this all the time. As if anyone else but him had that kind of choice. Stocks were for pedestrians. Stocks were for bit players. Stocks were for suckers.

Chapter 29

One of the partners in our hedge fund, Jim Fellers, had been an investor with Whipple way back in his days as a commodities trader. Jim had become quite rich by starting a web shopping network, and was happily married with two kids. We began to socialize together occasionally, and he started to put more and more money into our fund, which hadn't had any down months ever, even during the recent credit panic.

The reason for that was that we were loaning Sam Briggs money for his inventory lending business. It had no exposure to stocks or bonds. These were all short-term loans (sixty to ninety days) that huge chain retailers would pay back with interest, on time, so they wouldn't be assessed a penalty.

It was a locked-up deal for the privileged few whose high net-worth qualified them to invest. Our 3c7 partners had to have a net-worth of five million dollars to even qualify as an investor.

Whipple and I were now considered saviors, geniuses, and best friends to our investors whose assets (and asses) we were saving. We were a magic bank, producing 12% interest in a 1% world.

Jim would invite Whipple and my entire family over to his mansion for parties and cater barbeques and summer swimming extravaganzas. He would call me sometimes on my cell and we'd discuss his estate plan. I was now considered an expert in anything financial.

One of Jim's late summer parties was particularly memorable.

Chelsea was in the pool with "Uncle Jed," which is what she called Whipple. "Uncle Jed" was in the middle of about seven wild splashing kids, getting the worst of it, and loving it.

There were a lot of very well-to-do clients and potential investors there with their families, and Whipple, when on dry land, was explaining to everyone who would listen why our hedge fund would survive the economic mess now darkening the world.

Our son, Forrest, was now almost two. He stayed at home on this afternoon, probably napping on and off during these precious hours while the nanny alternately texted us and her boyfriend.

Shelly Swaminathan, my basketball buddy, arrived with his new girlfriend, a model from Paris who was living with him in his five thousand square foot mansion in Kentfield.

He confided in me, "Jack, I am making a very large life transition soon. I am going to move back to India and give all my money to a charity that my guru is recommending. So I am going to redeem all my money from the fund. I am selling my house. I will be leaving early next year."

"Wow, what led to this decision?"

"Well, it wasn't Juliet, that's for sure! She's been quite fun to be around. But she's moving back to Paris and I don't want to follow her there. And basically what I'm coming to is, I want to experience real life. Not a life of material things or money or mansions or the mind running me around.

Desires suck. They're only good when you get what you want. But when you don't life is a nightmare."

I thought about that and knew he was probably right, but I was way too far into the game to consider the consequences of desire when it came to my own life. I continued to listen politely.

"And my guru said this is a good time to sell. He said last year, 2007 was the end of something, a turning point. He said I need to sell everything and join him now. I don't know exactly *what* point is turning! But I'm going to trust my guru and live in his ashram. I'll meditate there, and live simply, and see what happens."

Meanwhile, Emily was walking around in a beige bikini that almost made her look naked from twenty feet away. It was a new thing -- the nude look.

Even after giving birth to two children her stomach was flat and toned; her body was as thin and curvy as ever. She had a disarming natural beauty. She wore very little make-up. There was no false pretense in her eyes. No false eyelashes. No shyness. A modest amount of lipstick, but only for special occasions. She left her diamonds at home at events like this. She came off looking like the All-American girl, living a fulfilling life with her sweet family.

All the men, including Shelly Swaminathan, and a good number of the women, and even some of the kids running around, were turning to look at her as she walked by.

Maybe she was getting Chelsea a water toy near the pool's edge, or getting a drink for herself at the outdoor bar. One person's glance would catch her attention, and she would smile at them, her perfect white teeth sparkling in the

sun. Her skin glowed, a bit tan, slightly freckled along the shoulders. She was thirty going on twenty-something. And I was the luckiest guy, on so many levels. Envied for so many reasons.

Later in the day, Emily and I went into the house to change out of our swim suits and back into dry clothes. Chelsea was with "Uncle Jed." Jim's poolside bathroom was sizable, with a Jacuzzi tub, a shower for two, and two sinks, with a big window overlooking a private garden down a sloping hill.

Emily began to peel off her bikini. I took off my swim trunks. Normally this was just something we would have done without a second thought. We would politely hand each other towels after a quick shower and then rush back to Chelsea. But Chelsea was in good hands. And Emily had had a little too much to drink.

She came up to me and whispered something affectionately sloppy in my ear. Then she sat me in a softly cushioned chair next to the vanity. She opened up a canister of potpourri sitting on the bureau and the scent filled our little corner of the room. Then she chose a scent from Jim's wife's toiletries and dabbed some on me. She climbed on top of me. Her arms were holding on to the top of the chair. We tried to keep our moans quiet. But the ending was a bit too loud. As we were laying in each other's arms trying to catch our breath someone knocked and asked if everything was alright. I couldn't speak. But Emily managed a "Yes, thank you. I'll be out in a minute."

We sauntered back down to the pool after we dressed and took Chelsea and Whipple out for dinner. It was the least we could do. It's always hard to find a good baby-sitter.

Emily had been distant with me lately, ever since I had turned down her dad's offer. But she had made love to me with a recklessness and an intensity that, well, I could only really understand in retrospect.

This was the last time we were together before Emily got caught.

The party -- Uncle Jed holding Chelsea in his wet arms while gliding her across the pool; Jim patting me on the back, thanking me for the work I was doing; Shelly Swaminathan deciding to redeem from the fund and move back to India to peel away his desires, to try to feel life with intensity again; and of course, my interlude with Emily -- these are the images that rest inside me now.

It was one of the last truly wonderful and innocent days of my life.

Chapter 30

During the entire month of October, 2008, things were tense in the family. Emily was not herself. She was not spending any more time with me than she had to. We weren't having lunch together, or sharing afternoon interludes in her office. She didn't seem to have a whole lot of time for the kids either. She spent incredible amounts of hours at work. Once again, I was questioning what the hell we were doing with our lives. None of this was making any sense.

One night I told her I wanted to quit. And I wanted her to quit. She had a dream that we could take the kids around the world for a few years, and this was as good a time as any. We'd be able to re-think things. Why not live out her dream before she worked herself to death?

Of course, the irony was that, on the face of it, this was the same idea presented to her by each of her high school boyfriends. It was their way of getting what they wanted at her expense, literally.

I was, in essence, asking her to run off with me with what was really her father's money, and buy the castle in Ez.

The other problem was that traveling around the world, even with full-time help, with two kids, one being a two-year old, was – well, if you have kids there's no need for further explanation. And if you don't have kids, then a thousand words won't help. So suffice to say, you don't want to know.

I really didn't care if we travelled around the world or not at that point. I just didn't want Emily working for her

father anymore. And I didn't want to continue working at HW Partners. I was ready to give the whole damn enterprise to Whipple and get nothing in return.

But it was too late for dreamy plans. Too late for rich lush fantasies. Too late to sell out, or retire, or walk away. Life as I knew it was about to blow up in my face.

Chapter 31

The FBI raided the offices of Briggs World-Wide on December 23rd, 2008. Whipple was taking an early Christmas vacation at the time with a female lobby security staff member who worked twenty-five floors below us and greeted us with her badge and gun each morning. They were sipping tropical drinks on a hut built over the water in Bora Bora. So I was working alone in the office when our lives blew up.

A man came in without knocking, told me to leave my computer on and to leave my cell phone on the desk and go home. He flashed his badge. At first I thought it was a joke. But too many agents were swarming through all the offices for it to be some elaborate dark prank. Besides, Sam Briggs had the sense of humor of a snail. He would have fired half the building and the entire security team, whether they were in Tahiti at the time or not. I realized something horrible had gone wrong.

The F.B.I. claimed in a subsequently released affidavit, that Emily Briggs Hampton and Samuel L. Briggs had conspired to commit fraud to the tune of about three billion dollars – one of the biggest frauds in U.S. history.

It involved an inventory asset-based lending scam. The hedge funds that loaned Briggs the money were all part of Briggs' huge Ponzi scheme. All of our investors' money was gone. Irretrievably lost.

I found out later that the fraud started about a year back, at the start of what would eventually become the 2008

economic crash. Sam Briggs kept his cool regarding his companies' disintegrating values. He thought for sure in a year or two America would be back in business and stronger than ever. And if John McCain was elected president there would be corporate tax breaks for years into the future, and bail outs on the way with nothing expected in return. His businesses would thrive once again, soon enough. But he needed to keep his companies afloat until then. So he came up with a secret plan.

I didn't know business on the level that Sam Briggs knew business, but I saw through my own experiences that "free capitalism," and de-regulation failed to take the human condition into consideration.

Parents know two-year olds have no conscience other than the conscience imposed upon them by the parents. Deregulation, and believing in simplistic slogans like, "the government is the problem, not the solution" was akin to a two-year old thinking "parents are the problem, not the solution," (imperfect as parents and governments may be).

The global house of cards came tumbling down – derivatives, sub-prime loans, CDOs, CMOs, ABLs -- all the games that banks and corporations created because there were no longer any laws in place to stop them, they all failed at once.

Back in time, in mid-2008, Emily was still, as ever, politically agnostic. She didn't care about de-regulation or politicians, or anyone outside of her immediate field of view: in other words, herself and her family.

So when she realized the trouble her father was getting himself into she could only think of one thing -- if she could

get her father out of this mess she would become his permanent hero. A genius in his eyes. He would be forever grateful. And then, she could stop.

She loved each of us. I still believe that. Call me naïve, like she used to. Call me mesmerized by her, or insane, or blindly in love. But I believe she loved me too much to tell me what was going on. She persuaded her father to get me out of HW Partners by making me CEO of my favorite chocolate company. She wanted me out of harm's way long before anything bad could happen. But I wouldn't take the bait.

So then it was up to her to save both her father *and* me, against the backdrop of her father's empire imploding, and the world crumbling into financial chaos.

Chapter 32

Sam Briggs' secret plan was complicated. But he felt that everything would be okay as long as he and his affiliates could remain solvent until the end of 2009.

As long as they had enough liquidity to survive the economic onslaught, perhaps they could even expand, cannibalizing the competition, and in the end, they would come out further ahead than ever.

Where would that liquidity, that ready cash, come from to keep his businesses afloat with banks failing and refusing to lend? And with his own corporate and personal cash already spent? Why, it was simple. He would siphon off the incoming money from the asset-backed hedge funds -- instead of using the money for deal flow he would use it as temporary loans to his own companies.

He would eventually pay the funds their fees within a year or two instead of sixty to ninety days. No one needed to panic as long as the investors didn't redeem their capital all at once.

But that's exactly what happened. This was 2008, after all.

Shelly Swaminathan redeemed and got his money early in 2008. He was already living in India with his apparently prescient guru. But everyone else left in the fund was now trying to cash out from every investment they could. Not to move to India and give their money to charity. They needed all the cash they could get their hands on to survive, just like Briggs did.

Credit was freezing up all over the world. Banks were not able to loan anything to anyone. Not Briggs. Not General Motors. Not the biggest insurers in the world. Not anyone.

Briggs finally saw the writing on the wall.

All of his free cash, including the cash he received from HW Partners, was already loaned out to his affiliates by the time Thanksgiving arrived. Investors were redeeming from their investments en masse. He was quickly running out of time.

He fired thousands of people in his various companies. Infrastructural excesses were coming back to haunt him. He was slashing corporate budgets, cutting research projects, and canceling plans to expand.

But he still would need hundreds of millions to keep his companies afloat for the next year or longer. After that, he might just become the richest man in the world. If he could just hold on until the tidal wave of economic panic receded.

The FBI files are incomplete. Because no one to this day knows if it was Emily or Sam Briggs himself who first came up with the plan.

Sometime in mid-2008, false purchase orders were created so that all four of the hedge funds Briggs had hand-picked, including HW Partners, were unknowingly taking part in risky corporate loans.

Inventory lending had suddenly become a Ponzi scheme of enormous proportions.

If Briggs' other companies had stayed afloat against all odds they would have cornered the market in so many industries. Briggs would have become the next Warren

Buffett or Bill Gates. Only he was going to do it during the worst economic environment since the Great Depression.

But if Briggs World-Wide went under, Sam Briggs would have been seen as a massive failure. A sucker. A fool. His legacy, the personal monument he wanted to leave to the world, would have become a monumental failure.

That outcome would have been far worse than being caught in a fraud. In fact, being seen as a failure would have literally been worse than death to him.

Emily chose to show her father how loyal she could be. She would help save him, and his life's work. Maybe she could save Briggs World-Wide single-handedly. Because she was going to be the point-person for the game Briggs needed to play.

Only the two of them could know about this. She had long ago been put in sole charge of the deal flow. She knew how to access all the books and records.

Most importantly, she bought into the idea that if this plan worked, in a few years Briggs World-Wide would be stronger and more respected than ever. While everyone else died in the global wreckage, Briggs World-Wide would thrive. As long as they were not caught in this "temporary transfer of assets," this would be the most ingenious solution imaginable – a desperate organization of this size finding a way to loan itself money at a time when no loans could be found anywhere in the world.

It was a brilliant solution, in a way.

On the other hand, if she failed, or if she refused to act, her father would be ruined, and her family riches – which she relied on more than she would ever let on – would

implode overnight. If they ran out of money, or ran out of time, they might even end up in jail.

Chapter 33

There is no doubt that Emily was brilliant. Tenacious. Disciplined. Charismatic. Persuasive. As well as prone to secretiveness. Getting caught for doing something illegal never really seriously entered her mind. She felt sure she could pull it off with her father behind her. Her father had been invincible for longer than she had been alive. If he assured her the plan would work, how could she doubt it?

Briggs was grateful for Emily's loyalty to him. But sadly for Emily he had no capacity to love anyone. He had no conscience. Just like a corporation itself has no conscience. I guess that would be the best way to describe him – he was a human corporation. Success had to be achieved at all costs. Especially now.

Chapter 34

For a while the plan worked perfectly. The “Robin Hood” plan was not quite what Robin Hood had in mind. This was a plan to borrow from the rich and loan to dying corporations.

But the mood around our house was constantly tense. Especially after I had refused to take the CEO job for Polar Ice Caps, Inc.

Without me realizing it, our partners’ assets were worthless until Briggs and Emily someday decided they could afford to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. Their timeline was late 2009. Not too long at all, according to a corporate calendar. It was just seen as one very long year of rolling up their sleeves and making it all work.

Once the massive amounts of redemptions were due Emily asked the fund for a little more time. This had never happened before. Suspicions were aroused.

She told the managers and investors that the loans were not defaulting, they were simply being extended with full interest. They would profit from the delay.

But one of the investors got concerned something wasn't right and called the FBI. At first the call was handled as a routine investigation. After all, they and the S.E.C. were now receiving calls from disgruntled investors all the time.

But as more facts were uncovered, the dam broke.

Chapter 35

I never was able to discover the fraud on a forensic level. I accept full responsibility for that. I was too lazy to check every purchase order against goods sitting in one of hundreds of warehouses all around the country. That task in itself would have taken up all my time. It was someone else's job.

But that someone was hired by me. He reported to me. So I take full responsibility in the end.

Looking through a dark lens, I have to say, with hedge fund managers and all of their employees constantly looking over her shoulder, Emily did a phenomenal job of covering her tracks. Until she ran out of time.

Chapter 36

By the middle of 2009, Sam and Emily Briggs were in jail awaiting trial.

Sam Briggs told the F.B.I. he invented the plan and forcefully coerced his daughter to take part in it. He said he threatened her with physical harm if she didn't cooperate. There was no evidence at the time to substantiate or refute that. But she refuted it fiercely.

He also cursed and chided everyone from behind bars, telling them it would have been better for everyone if he had been free to steer the companies through the ongoing economic crisis and guide them out of harm's way. He insisted the plan had been working, and that he could still be successful, with investors paid back, including interest, if they just would let him go. He insisted he was the only one that could make this mess right.

Who was the idiot that blew to whistle on him? That's who's to blame for all this.

At the same time he was willing to lie for Emily and look like a monster if it meant getting her free.

Our two children were too young to know what was going on. They only knew that mommy was "away on a long trip with grandpa." All they had now was me.

Chapter 37

It was 6 pm on October 29th, 2009, when I heard a knock at the door. When I opened it, I felt like I was seeing a ghost. Emily stood before me – my wife, pale and shaking, her face streaked with tears.

She explained that a million dollars bail had been posted by her mother on her behalf. Her father was denied bail. Her mother was now totally broke and had gone to live with her sister in Missouri.

The kids, after a few ecstatic moments of seeing her, quickly fell into their normal requests, asking her to read them stories. Chelsea wanted her to play with her new dolls. My son kept sticking his all-cotton powder-blue robot in her face. She was very choked up as she read to them and played with them on the floor. She was visibly shaken to the core. All of her normal cockiness and sparkle was gone. She looked panicked, beaten up, out of place.

After the kids were in bed we sequestered ourselves downstairs to her home office to talk.

She was trying to convince me of her innocence. She told me that her father set her up.

But what I know now, that I didn't know at the time, is that on the very same afternoon of her release she drained all of the money in our remaining family bank accounts. All the money I had earned and saved, as well as all of hers.

Chapter 38

"I have some news for you," she said.

"What's that?"

"I'm quitting Briggs World-Wide!" she said perkily.

"Emily, Briggs World-Wide is. . . "

"I'm *joking*," she laughed nervously.

She looked down at the plush red carpet, then whispered, "Jack, you were right all along. I should never have gone to work for my father. He wrapped me around his little finger and destroyed me just like he destroyed my mother. Day by day, hour by hour, he had his way with both of us. I don't know how he talked me into the things he did."

You stole investors' money, Em. Didn't you realize what you were doing was illegal?"

"No! He said we had to act quickly. He said he was sure everything would turn out fine for everybody, and that there was no time to hesitate. He said if I followed his lead we'd all end up on top. So I figured out a way to get him what he needed at the time. That's all I could think of."

She began to ramble, "I should have worshipped my mother, not him. She loved me. But her love was too easy. Like yours is. There was no challenge to it. I didn't need to earn it. It was simply there. Like mother's milk. He, on the other hand, demanded I become invincible, a super hero, before he would even look me in the eyes and acknowledge my existence. And now his life is over. I just hope mine isn't."

The Escher painting on the blue wall, the dark mirrory plasma TV, the house lights shining just outside her office

window, were all coated in a wet glassy mist. I don't know if I was crying, or just exhausted from days of no sleep, or both. But everything was starting to become a blur.

"So what are we going to do?" she asked quietly.

"I don't know! What we *can* do, Em! Other than rely on your lawyers to get the truth out about your dad, and rely on my lawyers to try to get some of our investors' money back."

I said this cautiously. It was bizarre, she was part of the fraud, while the fund I managed was considered one of the victims. And here we were together trying to get her out of this crazy mess.

"Isn't there anything else you can think of that we can do, together?" she pleaded.

I tried to think, but I was no good at coming up with devious plans. "I don't see any other way."

Just like the offer of the CEO position at Polar Ice Caps, Inc., I didn't get the hint. I didn't pick up on the clues.

"Yeah, yeah, I guess not." She seemed seriously disappointed in me.

"Emily, you and I have been on different tracks for a long time. I never cared about the money. I just wanted to raise our family together in peace."

"Good old American values," she whispered cynically.

"They're human values! What's so wrong with that? With living a sweet simple life?"

"Yeah Jack, what the hell does that look like?" she cried. "Who lives a sweet simple life? Your basketball buddy, Shelly Swami-something, who lounged around his pool in Kentfield with his model from Paris? You think he's actually happy now sitting on his meditation pillow in

India? *Really?* You know how the mind works. There's no stopping desire, no stopping the human mind always wanting more. And how about Whipple? Was Whipple living a sweet simple life? Who ever does? Poor people are freaking out about their next meal. And people who have more money than they know what to do with are stressing out about all the crap they own while sitting on a beach in Hawaii. If you're not in love you're lonely and empty inside. And if you've been in love too long you're lonely and empty inside! Nobody's truly happy, Jack. *Nobody* has the answer."

"I don't believe that! Our children, those two sweet kids asleep in their rooms upstairs – they're happy, as long as they have us! They don't need this fancy house or bank accounts. They just want us. And I'd do anything, and give anything, just to keep them safe, and see their eyes staring up at me before they go to sleep each night, loving me the way they do. And loving you."

"Until they grow up," she shot back. "You know what I'm talking about, Jack! I know you do. Life isn't just for sitting around on a tropical island and fucking and having babies. Or meditating in a cave until some animal interrupts your thoughts with its claws on the back of your neck. Come on! We're not made for that. We think too damn much to ever be satisfied with anything for long. The game is to keep moving, keep changing, that's what keeps us alive."

There was no need for me to agree or disagree. I was listening to the female version of her father now.

Eventually we went upstairs to bed. It was strange. She hadn't been home in over a month. Normally I would have been so happy to have her back in bed, touching her skin.

But I felt dead inside. I crawled under the covers feeling cold and absurdly distant.

She came close to me and touched my face, looking at me in the dim light. She sighed and a shiver ran through her. Then she whispered, "You've always been so good, Jack, and so loyal to me. I can see how worried you've been. You've lost weight. You have dark circles under your eyes. You look terrible." She pushed my hair back. "I see a little gray. I've turned you into a worried old man, haven't I? God, I'm so sorry."

I felt nothing but a dim fear.

"Let me put you to bed," she whispered. "You look so tired. By morning a solution will come. I just know it."

How she could be so naïve and so cynical at the same time? I must have had an incredulous look on my face.

"What are you thinking?"

"I knew you were at least part optimist deep inside, Em."

"I'm optimistic about us too," she said soothingly, "and the kids. Everything's going to be okay."

Then she kissed my lips and a door inside me opened slightly. A door inside me that she had walked through a thousand times. It had been closed, but not completely locked shut. Her warm body surrounded me like a turbulent ocean. I was becoming lost in her again. But this time it felt like I was being pulled out to sea. I was drowning. I couldn't find a way back. After we made love I fell into a terribly long deep sleep.

Chapter 39

When I awoke late morning and went downstairs, at first I wondered, and hoped, and forced myself to assume, that Emily and the kids were out for a late breakfast together. Or they went for a walk to the neighborhood park. But after waiting and pacing for half an hour, with a bad feeling in my stomach growing worse by the minute, it hit me like a flash to check the dresser drawers in the kids' rooms. Clothes were missing. Suitcases were missing. They were gone.

Chapter 40

I wanted to hire someone to track her down. But she left me with no resources, not a dime. All of our money had been withdrawn from our accounts. She was in control of the money, awash in secret plans, and I was officially broke.

I couldn't very well ask her mother to help track down her daughter and throw her back in prison.

I called the police and the FBI. They assured me they were already looking for her.

My children had been taken from me. I was without a job. I was without a way to pay for the upkeep on our house. Besides, the house was held in the name of Emily's trust. I wouldn't be able to stay too much longer.

I was also stuck trying to unwind a business deal that went south because of her, with no way to repay angry investors. The phone kept ringing all day long, but it was never anyone I wanted to talk to.

I couldn't sleep or eat. I hid myself away as much as possible. Basically Emily had turned me into a ghost.

Who was Emily really? A liar. A kidnapper. A master scammer. A holder of deep secrets.

How ironic that she had escaped. We had somehow exchanged positions. I was now broke, and in prison emotionally. Friendless. Lost. Alone.

Emily was free and financially solvent, starting over.

She was probably living under a false identity in another country by now. Children by her side. If anyone could figure out a way to make it work, and thrive from the challenge, it was her.

Chapter 41

When I look back, I realize that night when she was begging me to come up with an solution she had already found one. She thought it would have been obvious to me. She would let me come to the solution on my own, if I still loved her. If I still deserved her: "Let's run away, all of us, Emily. Tonight. Let's escape together." And in her mind we could have all lived happily ever after.

She was waiting for me to say it, and believe it, and therefore by totally loyal to the plan. But it didn't happen that way. So she had to leave without me. She couldn't take the chance of telling me the plan directly – if I had refused to go with her, refused to become a fugitive and accompany her, her plan would surely have fallen apart. I may have stopped her. She would have ended up back in jail, maybe for life. I could have either stopped her from leaving, or at the very least stopped her from taking the children. So it had to be a secret plan. She had no choice.

Or maybe, when she pleaded with me, almost frantically, "Isn't there anything else you can think of that we can do, together. . . if I hadn't been so callous, so dispassionate, so fearful of the situation, maybe I would have come up with some other answer that made sense, something she hadn't considered, and I would have saved us both. But my plan would have had to be something more than "trust the attorneys." Something more than "family is everything." In her mind I failed her, just like her high school boyfriends had failed her. I wasn't able to truly see her, and love her. I only wanted what was best for myself.

Chapter 42

They could be in Paris, Rome, Spain. Or somewhere in the opposite direction from any of my best guesses. Knowing her, she has found a perfectly unguessable place.

I am sickened more and more each day by the loss of my children. I know she loves them. I know her capacity to love is real. But I keep thinking they will suffer deeply without me. They are missing me. Crying sometimes. Asking her sometimes where I am, and why didn't I come with them. What will she say? Will they believe her?

I want them back.

She is a fugitive, wanted by the FBI. Now kidnapping has been added to her two counts of fraud and jumping bail.

But here's the oddest thing. When I think of her, I can't help myself – I remember all the times, everything, clear back to the beginning. Not just the ending.

And what if it's not the ending? What if there's more?

I say this because before she left she wrote a note to me. I found it under her pillow a few days later. I haven't shown it to anyone, or said anything about it until now.

It said: "I love you, Jack. We'll all be together again someday. I just have to think things through. As soon as I feel like we're safe and can come up with a plan I'll be in touch. I promise you. Please have faith."

Sometimes I wonder why I'm still waiting.
And sometimes I remember.

~ The End - GM