

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.

All names of places and people have been changed to protect the innocent.

Any similarities of characters in this book to anyone dead, living, or in jail, are not meant to incriminate anyone, or question anyone's ultimate intentions.

Part I

Chapter 1

We met at college in a city located on an isthmus between two lakes. The university was the life force of the town - vibrant, churning. The rest of the city remained relatively still and slow to change, with old Victorian houses lining the snowy streets each winter.

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

She was studying political science and minoring in business while I was majoring in math. Therefore, there was no competition between us. To a math major, political science was an unknowable mystery best left to dreamers, like the dark side of moon. In fact, I could measure the distance to the dark side of the moon on any given day, whereas, she could only consider who might own the moon some day after winning The Great Moon War. And who would own it one hundred years later after Moon War II.

Emily's room was typically designed as far as college dorms go. The decor might be called 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 actually take that opportunity. The overhead lighting's visual spectrum ranged between interrogation white and spotlight bright. The nightstands -- where textbooks, empty soda bottles and beer cans gathered -- had rickety drawers that you first had to tug, but then had to catch, since there were no drawer stops.

On this night, Emily's roommate, McKenzie, had decided to sleep at her new boyfriend's apartment.

Emily was lying on her stomach on her bed, reading. She was a bit of a chameleon visually. Her hazel eyes were sometimes more green than blue, especially at night. And her auburn hair was light brown at night, but red-streaked in the sunlight.

She looked up and caught me staring at her but thought nothing of it. She was reading about Nixon. That man was never going to put anyone in a fanciful mood. Nor would my studies of spherical trigonometry. But McKenzie was gone, and Emily was unintentionally very distracting.

Her old jeans looked comfortably loose on her. Her plain white blouse was half untucked. Observing the clothes hanging in her closet, it seemed likely she'd had a couple of binge shopping days at the Salvation Army downtown and called it a wardrobe.

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 umbrellas. The windows in Emily's room were being invaded. Raindrops sounded like pellets trying to batter their way through the window frame. Some made it.

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

"I know. This is drowning weather.... But I was trained to swim in Monsoons back in high school gym." I got up and began to reach for my coat.

"Jack, we've been study friends for a while. I trust you. So if you want, you can sleep in McKenzie's bed tonight. But just to sleep."

She got up and walked into the bathroom. The door was left halfway open as she began washing her face. She turned around and looked back at me with her face full of soap until I laughed. Then I watched her noisily brush her teeth. She combed her hair until a few stubborn knots were combed through.

"So, do you want to stay, or risk drowning?"

"Given the choice, I'll stay."

"Your turn," she said. "I always keep a new toothbrush in my medicine cabinet. You can use it. Take it home tomorrow as a party favor. You just have to buy me a replacement."

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

I came closer and awkwardly hovered over her.

"Hello? What are you doing?"

"Someone is already in McKenzie's bed."

"What?"

I pointed.

"That's her stuffed bear from the dark ages, back when she was ten.... It's domesticated."

"Ah, that's a relief. But do we have to sleep in the same bed? I don't sleep with someone I barely know."

"Funny little pun, I get it. I didn't know math majors had a sense of humor."

"We don't. It was a coincidental homophone."

"A *homophone*?" she laughed.

"Two words that sound the same but have different meanings."

"I see. Well, thanks for the homophone lesson. Don't call me, I'll call you."

This was a hallmark of Emily's. She was always far more quick-witted than I was. Always a step ahead of everyone else.

"Well, goodnight then." I reached out to formally shake her hand, but she batted it away and turned towards the window.

I got under the covers next to McKenzie's bear, and Emily switched off the nightstand light.

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

"Did you say something?" I whispered back.

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

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

The cold rain banged louder on the windows, jealously demanding we stop, or at least think things over. But we just heard falling rain.

In the morning, on the way to class, the streets were still wet from the night's downpour. The pathways were glossy with icy patches forming.

When it came time to walk in different directions her face came close to mine, "Well, that was interesting."

"It wasn't interesting to me at all.... In fact, I hate this."

"Hate what?"

"This stomach fluttering feeling."

"Did you eat a bird?"

"Worse. I think I'm falling in love with a human."

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

Before I could respond, she kissed me on the cheek and walked away.

Chapter 2

Unfortunately, I grew up in Long Island. A place where seven million people would try to pretend they were from New York City without actually having to live there.

Hordes of middle-class teens went to suburban schools, wandered in and out of suburban movie theaters, and looked enviously across the night sky trying to catch a glimpse of the ever-dangerous and alluring island of Manhattan, where real life happened. There was no Soho or Greenwich Village equivalent east of New York City.

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 president before my dad, but Uncle Ed 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 father came to my grandfather's rescue at my mother's insistence. He had to quit his job as vice president of sales at a textile company in the city (he was one of dozens of vice presidents of sales in his particular office building). 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 they loved him. He was honest. He was also a quick study. God had not blessed him with an innate knowledge of how thermometers worked. But my dad knew how to sell.

During the transition, we went from being a middle-class family to a lower-middle-class family. He had accepted

a big pay cut and took on my grandfather's mortgage. I was ten years old.

But by the time I went to college, the company was thriving and my dad was the family hero. My parents moved from a small house in Westbury to a medium-sized house in Great Neck, a huge step up.

He imagined me joining the business after college, but I wanted no part of it. I hated Long Island, and selling thermometers was not the career challenge I had in mind. I wanted to do something amazing, but I wasn't able to fill in the specifics just yet. I just knew I loved math and I loved technology.

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

In high school, I was lucky enough to have a few girlfriends without having to endure a devastating heartbreak.

I hit what ended up being a meaningless home run in a championship game in Little League. That was one thing I would always remember.

I also worked as a parking lot attendant at the Westbury Music Fair on weekend nights, and quickly found out that making minimum wage was only one small step above working for free.

In April of my senior year I got into a very good college. That was pretty much my life, until meeting Emily.

Whenever I asked Emily about her parents or her past she would say things like, "My parents are just normal people." Or, "I grew up in a normal way."

But I could sense there was something more going on. So one night, on a hunch, I asked if her parents had gotten divorced, or if they ever treated her badly. She laughed and insisted they were “just fine as far as parents go, and still together.”

"Sounds normal."

"Yep, normal."

Although she was reluctant to talk about any events in her life before we met, in class she was boundlessly outgoing, confident, and absolutely driven. When she first told me she was majoring in political science with a minor in business she said she had no idea how the two would fit together, but trusted they would someday. I didn't doubt her.

After our finals were over, marking the end of our junior year, Emily came up with an idea for the summer.

The previous year she had gone home to California, and I had gone back to Long Island. We kept in touch, but it was hard being so far away from each other. There was no way we wanted to be apart for an entire summer again. So she suggested, and I eagerly agreed, that after briefly visiting our respective families she would join me in New York for a few days, and then we would go to Italy together. I didn't personally have the financial resources required to buy a plane ticket. To say nothing of sharing the cost of food and hotel rooms. But she said she had saved up a few thousand dollars from having worked summer jobs through high school and she wanted to spend it on us. She wouldn't let me refuse the offer.

Chapter 3

Emily flew to New York, as planned, before our big adventure. My parents liked Emily right from the start. My father winked at me when she wasn't looking. She was dressed quite differently now. No more tattered college outfits. She seemed to have kept a lot of her fancier clothes at home.

On the one afternoon we had free before our flight, we walked up a hill to my town park. It was inevitable that *the story* would come up as soon as we came to the baseball field. In fact, that's why I brought her there.

I told her the last time I played on this field it was my final game in Little League. The championship game against our rival town.

"I was a pretty laid back at fifteen. I know that's hard to believe. But I didn't care that much about anything back then, really. I definitely wasn't one of those trash talking leader-types. Also, I batted eighth. I didn't have the physique or the power to hit home runs. But every once in a while, I would hit a flyball that would *almost* reach the fence in left field -- that fence over there -- and it would maybe bounce around for a triple. I could run fast. That was my one natural talent -- I could run."

I could see Emily picturing all this in her mind.

"Anyway, the championship game against Roslyn, the last game of the year, was a big deal. My parents were there. At least three hundred other parents and siblings were in the stands. It was our team's final at bat. We were down by two runs. Two outs, no one on, and I was at the plate. Our worst

hitter was coming up after me. So the whole team knew we were about to lose."

I pointed towards first base so Emily could visualize this, and said, "See right over there? The biggest, meanest kid on the other team played first base. This kid was named Kyle... or something like that. He was huge. Way taller than six feet. At least two hundred pounds. All game he was trash talking our batters, but for some reason, he was especially into messing with me. When I made it to first base on a ground ball single earlier in the game he said things like, 'Hey, you little shrimp, are singles all you got? I bet you couldn't hit a fly ball into the outfield off a tee. You got those little arms, just like a shrimp.' And then he said, 'Man, weaklings like you, I meet them somewhere after the game and take care of them 'til they don't look so good. Know what I'm sayin'?"

"I'm not saying anything back to him. And that's riling him up even more. Meanwhile, I'm on first base, the count on the kid at bat is 3-2. So now Kyle is starting to get even more into it. He calls out, 'I'm a gangstah, dude. I'm a gangstah! So you in trouble when this game is over unless you strike your ass out. You hear me?"

"I refused to even look him in the eyes, but he was towering over me. Spitting in the dirt.

"So here I was, in the ninth inning, the potential last out in the championship game. Down by two runs with the bases empty. But this kid is ragging on me when I come up to the plate. 'Hey, Shrimp with no arms!' After I fouled a line drive down the third base line I made the mistake of looking over at him. Then he says, "Hey, what are you, a gangstah too now? A midget gangstah? You aint gonna

touch the next pitch. I want to see you after the game, little gangstah' so I can whip your ass.'

"The pitcher was laughing at me. He and the first baseman were friends. They were pretty confident I was going to strike out and the game would be over."

Emily nodded excitedly. "Okay, so what happened?"

"Well, for one of the few times in my life, I *felt* really angry. I could feel it in my arms and hands as I gripped the bat. And when the pitcher threw a low fastball right over the middle of the plate I swung through my hips, and my wrists turned fast, and that ball flew into left field, but instead of bouncing off the wall, it carried ten feet over the fence, and landed right over there near that big tree. Then it bounced onto the sidewalk, and rolled under someone's parked car.

Emily laughed and kissed me. "Whew, yeah!"

"So as I rounded first base, I looked Kyle straight in the eyes and said, '*Gangstah that, you fat fuck.*'"

Emily started laughing out of control.

"Seriously, it was the worst thing that I had ever said to anyone in my whole life!"

"I believe, it!" Emily said. "Say it again!"

"No! Plus the story isn't over!"

"Okay, so, *then what?* Did you win the game? Did the kid who came up after you bunt his way on? I would have had him bunt! And then, the next guy hits a game winning home run?"

"No, actually, as I rounded first and broke into my home run trot I suddenly felt two hundred pounds flying onto my back. I fell into a heap with him on top of me before I could reach second. The umps and coaches ran out to where I was -- lying flat under him, with my face in the dirt -

- and dragged him off of me. My legs were twisted up underneath me and my head was pounding, but I got up, casually wiped the dirt off my uniform, and continued to round the bases, slowly, while staring right at him. I lifted my right arm high in the air as I rounded third.

"I saw his face turn red as they dragged him off the field. His coaches were screaming at him. The ump threw him out of the game.

Emily smiled, "So cool! Okay, and then what happened?"

"Uh, well, I mean, that's pretty much it. We were still one run behind. Steve Sverdlick came up next. He bounced the ball back to the pitcher. The new first baseman caught it. And that was that."

Emily looked disappointed.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, fine. But that was a bit of a bummer ending. I like to picture you winning, Jack. I like the thought of you and your whole team winning. Because you should know this about me, I'm always going to root for you to win. And as long as you and I are together, I'll do everything I can to help make that happen."

Chapter 4

Our flight was long, and our body clocks were way off. At 11 a.m., when we landed, it was 5 a.m. in the time zone we came from, and we hadn't slept on the plane.

The hotel itself was beyond impressive. I had no idea how much the room cost, but Emily told me she found all these great deals online. Everything was already paid for.

I was laying on the bed, zoned out, trying not to fall asleep, when Emily did something very out of character.

A bottle of champagne, a gift from the hotel, had been placed in a bucket of ice near the armoire. She opened it, poured herself a drink, then put three fingers in the glass and sprinkled the champagne on her neck. She flashed me a mischievous look.

She pulled her skirt to the floor and walked to the open window, which looked out to the plaza below. The people in the plaza were busy rushing somewhere. It was the middle of a business day in Rome.

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

I walked over to the window and began kissing her arm, then the back of her neck. She didn't move. Three white birds flew by. Her eyes stayed focused on the plaza. She leaned further out the window, pretending to get a better view and I pressed closer against her.

It was amazing, we made love in private, in front of hundreds of passersby, who just kept passing on by.

We fell asleep at three in the afternoon in our white linen bed.

Around nine 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 twilight. We passed by beautiful clothing shops and bakeries that wouldn't open until morning. We saw men in suits on small motor bikes going out for the evening. We saw women wearing 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 very different person here. She seemed far more sophisticated and sure of herself than she was back home. I was amazed at how happy and at ease she was.

After dinner, we headed back to our room. It was close to midnight, but our bodies weren't ready to sleep.

"Jack."

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

"You know why I like you?"

She was a little drunk, so I figured this was going to be an interesting answer. "Why?"

"Because 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. You shouldn't."

The words frightened me.

"Why not?"

She came closer to me. I thought she might confess that she was seeing someone else back home. An old boyfriend from high school....

"I'm keeping secrets."

I tried to stay light-hearted, "I hate secrets. And if you tell me, then they won't be secrets anymore, so...."

"What would you think if I told you that after spending all this money on us I'll end up so totally broke I'll have to get a job to pay for my senior year?"

"I don't know, I guess I'd get a job too. We could pool our money together."

"You *would* do that." She shook her head and stared at me.

I was confused.

She smiled, so I smiled back.

"You're too innocent for your own good, you know? What do you know about the world?" She looked away for a moment with a wine-glazed look in her eyes, then added, "I slept with a few other guys before I met you. Did you know that?" She blurted this out as if finally coming to some point.

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

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

"Okay."

"*Why* we broke up was... because they were *fakes*. They wanted more than just living a life. You know?"

I had no idea what she was talking about.

"We could have a repeat performance here."

"You think I'm like them?"

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

Was she making fun of me?

"I mean a repeat of... this afternoon... looking out the window. It would be a variation on a theme. The plaza is all lit up this time of night. And all the white birds are sleeping under the eaves."

She looked at me mischievously. Her silky blue dress was coming halfway off her shoulders. She pointed, "Go lay down on the bed just like it was before, and pretend you're very sleepy."

I laid down.

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

She went over to a new bottle of iced champagne the staff had left us while we were at dinner. She un-popped it quietly by putting a crocheted hand towel around it, drank straight from the bottle, then sprinkled a few drops on her neck like she'd done a few hours ago. And then... we went back in time.

When she opened the window this time the night air cooled us. There were a few people sitting by the fountain in the plaza, mostly lovers.

When I woke up the next morning, Emily was gone. I waited around for an hour, then ate a late breakfast at the café in the hotel.

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

She looked like an actress in one of those dark European 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 a second crazy day and night in Rome we took the fast train to Venice. We had lunch at one hundred twenty miles an hour, with cows blurring by, as thousands of acres of farmland streaked across our window.

We entered the city by boat.

Venice looked like a wavy water painting; ancient, sparkling.

Our hotel was beyond opulent. I felt like a prince. This was costing Emily a fortune. She seemed to revel in spending the money as quickly as possible. It was almost as if she enjoyed the thought that she would be left with nothing by the time we got home.

We were led up a staircase of 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 into a wide expanse of water, with small boats gliding by in every direction. Workers were moving equipment in small motorboats, others were delivering food to restaurants by rowing into a small dock.

The alleyways we chose to wander through were filled with people from all over the world. Small walking bridges spanned the narrow canals. And of course, on land there was not a single thing with wheels anywhere. No cars, no bikes, no skateboards. We had been transported back hundreds of years.

When we re-entered our room around seven that evening, a small square of chocolate had been put on each of our pillows.

"Chocolate is my favorite thing," I admitted.

"So I've noticed," she said, as she put her sunglasses on the dresser. "You've eaten chocolate for dessert every day since the day we met. In fact, you were eating chocolate the night I first met you at the university café, way before we became study friends. You were eating 'Polar Ice Caps' one at a time from a box you had 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 remembered that before we'd even introduced ourselves?

"What else did you notice about me back then?"

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

I laughed, "You have *more* secrets?"

"Spies can't answer that question. Unless they're pretending they're not spies."

She stared at me duplicitously.

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 to play."

The next afternoon in St. Mark's Square I took a photograph of Emily running with her arms spread wide apart, dispersing a huge 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 5

Our senior year of college went by in a blur. Fortunately, Emily didn't have to work to recover what we spent on our wild summer trip. She said her Uncle Alex had given her an interest-free loan. He was giving her at least five years to pay it back.

So we studied hard, and hung out together most nights. I don't remember much else. Except 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 pastel-colored building sitting right at the edge of the Grand Canal. We had been there.

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

"Like what? Come on, Em. Would you just... I know you're not a spy!"

She shook her head. "Maybe it's better this way."

"Look Emily, if your parents are too poor to pay for the wedding, we don't have to make a big deal of it."

She put her hand up to her mouth and became teary-eyed as soon as I said that. It seemed as if I'd struck a nerve.

I waited for her to say more, but she just stared at the painting on the wall and wouldn't meet my eyes.

Finally, I said, "Is this the longest 'no' to a marriage proposal in human history?"

She wiped a tear away and shook her head. "No, Jack. I just needed to take a long look at this painting of Venice one more time, in case we never get to go back."

"So...?"

She burst into tears and nodded her head yes.

Chapter 6

Our families had never met. And although Emily had met my parents briefly the previous summer, I had never met hers. I'm not even sure they knew my name. Emily never seemed to talk to them on the phone. At least not while I was around. But that was going to change. Everyone was coming to our graduation.

I had no idea what to expect. She still refused to talk about her childhood, or what he, or she, or they, did for work, or even where in California they lived.

The night before graduation, Emily, still broke from our summer trip, invited me out to the most expensive restaurant in town. She said she would pay for it with the last of Uncle Alex's loan. Her treat. We had both been extremely frugal all throughout senior year, so this felt like the perfect way to celebrate. And soon she'd be getting a job.

She wore a dress that I hadn't seen before. It was dark blue with 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.

"Do you know anything at all about jewels?"

"Not really. I mean, diamonds...."

"There are no diamonds. Not even one. They're just a string of taaffeite, alexandrite, red beryl, and jade."

"Wow, that's cool. Which one is the jade?"

She pointed to the one 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.

“Celebrating!” she replied.

The waiters were wearing white jackets. The atmosphere was quiet and serious. The wine was brought over with a ceremonial flare – an attempt to justify the price, I presumed. A small amount was poured into my glass and the waiter awaited my approval. I swirled the liquid around and sniffed it, like I'd seen people do in the movies. It almost made me laugh, since I couldn't tell the difference between house wine and hundred-dollar wine 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 halfway and slipped quietly back into the shadows, I toasted us.

We clinked our crystal goblets gently together and heard a sound like a pure bell ringing. It reminded me of a wind chime. I smiled. But I saw a slightly worried look in her eyes.

Chapter 7

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

She looked down shyly at the table.

My stomach tightened. I wondered if this confession could somehow lead to a very bad ending. I began to reel off a series of potential scenarios -- Does she have a secret boyfriend here at school? Was that the secret all along?

Or, is she sick, is she dying?

Or, is she *actually* a spy, working for the C.I.A? Is that why we went to Europe?

Was she a high-priced escort, scheduling her work around her class schedule? Is that why she can afford clothes like this? And that necklace. It looked like all the stones were real. They were all so shiny.

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

"Okay...." Was she abused as a young girl?

"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. "Is *that* your big secret?"

"Not quite."

I gave her a strange look. I was getting more and more concerned.

He also owns a regional airlines. And dozens of other companies around the world. In fact, he's kind of... a

billionaire."

"Are you serious?"

"Actually, a multi-billionaire."

"Emily..."

"Jack, my father is Samuel Briggs."

"*Samuel Briggs* is your...?"

"My father. Yes. Occasionally. When he's home."

She looked straight into my eyes. It was a worried look. It was like she was apologizing for keeping it a secret all this time.

"Twenty-one years ago, Samuel L. Briggs conceived, and then ended up paying full college tuition for, his only daughter, his only child, Emily Briggs. He also gave her permission, with the shrug of a shoulder, to take you to Italy last summer, and paid for it all, every Euro of it, without even knowing, or caring about, how much it cost."

"Why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"Because, Jack, when I was in high school, private school, of course, there were a few boys that were interested in me who I liked too. They were handsome and athletic. Smart. I had one boyfriend in my junior year, and another in my senior year. They both came from rich parents, just like me. But the 'daughter of a famous billionaire,' well, that was a whole other level of rich. It was high status to be with someone like me.

"It ruined my relationship with my first boyfriend because he started fantasizing that after we got married someday we could buy a castle in southern France and live happily ever after. I had been to southern France. I didn't particularly like it, and I wasn't about to ask my father to buy the castle in Ez. Or buy Ez. So I told him that wasn't

going to happen. It's not what I wanted. We got into a huge fight about it. The husband was supposed to decide where to live, apparently, and he wanted to live in a castle! I told him I had a dream of working for my father someday. "He said, 'That's crazy. You don't have to work! Why would you work?'

"I said to him, 'Why not? Women work too!'

"He said, 'Not billionaire women! I mean, why bother? You're not a slave like everyone else.' Of course, he didn't see the point of me going to college either. Let's just go straight to buying the castle!"

"Wow."

"Yes, then my next boyfriend, Jayson, who everyone called Jay, saw me as someone who was trying to control his life with my money -- His parents didn't even have *millionaire* money. Poor thing. I was seventeen, and I liked hanging out with him and didn't want him to work over the summer, before we went off to college, so I stupidly offered to pay him to hang out with me instead. Instead of him having to get a job. I mean, I was bored and lonely, and I thought it sounded like a cool thing to offer that. He accepted my offer. At first, every time I paid for anything he felt humiliated. But then he got into it, and everything was okay for a while. Until he asked me to pay for something he actually really wanted. It was a used car. A yellow Mustang. But I didn't want to buy him a *car*! I just wanted to pay him to hang out with me. So I said no. Things only got worse from there. He couldn't understand why *I* got to decide what to spend my father's money on." She started to laugh. "I mean, it's not funny. The money thing can really screw things up."

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 gold-colored boiled egg holder. It was cream of cucumber mousse. Quite fantastic, actually.

"So that's why, Jack, I decided to go to college incognito. I also didn't want to go to Yale. Or Princeton. Not that there aren't great people that go there. It's just the stereotype that I wanted to avoid. I just wanted to go to a normal university, where I could study, and not be constantly inspected and dissected and lurched at, and told how lucky I was. I wanted to go to a place where I would meet lots of different kinds of people, who didn't know or care who my parents were, or whether I had money. And that's how I came to meet you. I chose my own destiny, you see? And now you're my destiny."

"So, you're not a spy, or a high-priced escort?"

"What?" She laughed.

"My imagination kind of ran away with me there for a minute."

"Well I can be *your* high-priced escort! And we can be spies together now. But Jack, I don't want you to be naive about this. Don't take it lightly. It's hard. Money changes everything. My fear is, it could easily ruin us, now that you know."

"Emily, your plan worked. Because I don't care. I would have married you even if your father was homeless. We could have eaten a sandwich in your dorm room tonight, I would be feeling the same way about you as I do now."

"Well, my father *is* homeless. He's never home, and never in one place for long. But I know what you're saying,

Jack, and I believe you. That's why it feels so right to be with you. You're my guy."

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

Chapter 8

We received the all-important piece of paper that now officially declared we knew something. College diplomas look impressive. But they guarantee you nothing.

I took 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 also good with computers and programming. So I changed my major in the second half of my sophomore year to computer science. I wanted to find a job at a tech start-up.

The fact that Emily's parents had a lot of money didn't change anything for me, career-wise. I wanted to find a challenging job and become an integral part of a great company. I wanted to keep evolving my knowledge as technology evolved. I was looking forward to a multi-decade career. What else was there to do with my life? No doubt there would be room for family and fun at the same time.

My parents gathered around me after the graduation ceremony. I spotted Emily saying goodbye to some friends. We walked towards her and she motioned for us to come along as she walked off quickly in another direction. At Emily's request, I hadn't told my parents who her father was. Emily stopped in front of two very stately-looking people standing near a white stretch limousine parked in a restricted area.

Emily's father was telegenic, dignified in stature, wearing a perfectly tailored black suit and a yellow silk tie. His hair was dark brown, with tones of silver beginning to

show around his temples. His face was handsome, but a bit weathered. He had a few lines around his eyes that I imagined foretold more than his share of sleepless nights.

As I looked closer, I noticed his eyes were a very intense blue-gray, almost hazel like Emily's. He looked at me a bit warily at first. But when he realized who I was, his guardedness turned into a polite smile.

Emily's mother had natural 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. Her mom was sleek and dazzlingly dressed. She wore a white sequined women's suit with a silk Chinese scarf and a matching silk belt around her waist.

"Dad, Mom, this is Jack Hampton and his parents, Alice and John. And, dear Hamptons, this is my father, Samuel, and his darling wife, Adrian, a.k.a., mom."

My parents laughed. They enjoyed Emily's social grace and geniality.

Em's father was staring at me. At one point I thought I saw a slight shadow of disappointment cross his face. I searched for something to say. I couldn't say, "Glad to finally meet you, Emily has told me so much about you." And he wasn't helping me out in the slightest, since he refused to be the first to speak. He had no idea what Emily had said, or not said about the situation.

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

He smiled the narrowest smile imaginable, "Yes, I suppose so." There was a glint in his eye when he said it. So I began to assume maybe he didn't hate me.

My mom said, "Would you like to join us for dinner tonight? It would be our first official family gathering."

"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. Or if he owned the plane, or the entire airline, for that matter.

"So sorry to hear that," my dad offered. His apology sounded almost inaudible compared to the booming voice of Samuel Briggs. His personality tended to overwhelm and out-sparkle everyone around him. And that was quite intentional.

Emily's mom said, "Em, would you do me a favor and spend a bit of time with your father before he has to go? He's off to Singapore."

"Sure," she said dutifully. She shook my parents' hands goodbye.

I pulled her aside, "Em, would you and your mom like to join us for dinner? Or would you rather spend some time alone with your mom tonight?"

"Mom is flying back to California at six o'clock. Private jet. But why don't I join you and your parents after I see her off?"

Back at my mom and dad's extremely affordable hotel they commented on how unfortunate it was that Emily's father had to work on her graduation day. On a weekend. They didn't connect Sam Briggs with Briggs Worldwide. Why should they? There were other people named Sam Briggs in the world, including a stupid comedian we once saw at a beach club in Long island. They knew for sure that wasn't him.

While they got dressed up 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 itchy California King bedspread, pointing the remote like a handgun, firing in rapid succession. As always, nothing was on. Dinner with Emily would be, as usual, the most exciting thing going on for me that night.

Chapter 9

My life was going very well. Far better than I ever could have planned. 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 me to. She said she wasn't concerned about that, because most of her money was held in a private trust anyway. That had all been taken care of long ago, probably since the day she was born.

Could I succumb to greed and avarice? Yes, of course, to some degree. 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 too loud and kind of ugly. Teslas were way cooler. A hybrid would be fine as well.

Still, opulence was a normal part of our life now. There was no need to keep secrets, or hold anything back. After graduation, Emily and I took "one more vacation" at her insistence, before we settled down. Sort of a pre-honeymoon honeymoon.

This time we went to Maui, Hawaii. It was her treat, of course, so she booked a private beachfront villa at the Kea Lani Hotel. 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. He apparently found legal ways to deduct almost every dollar he spent.

We landed at the Kahului airport and were offered leis by a beautiful island girl as we collected our bags. We were then escorted to our white stretch limo. We were going on vacation, Emily-style, so that meant everything was meticulously planned to be a peak experience.

The outside of the Kea Lani hotel was meant to duplicate the Taj Mahal - bone white, with turrets. Our check-in was almost immediate. They were expecting her. They simply had her sign her name as the valet was taking our bags, and that was it.

We walked down to the beach just before sunset. We heard a conch shell blowing in the distance. Tiki torches were lit at the hotel's boundaries. The sun bid the world goodnight by dropping beneath the ocean, silent but triumphant, throwing pastel colors into the sky and electrifying the water. It cast itself into the sea with a quick final burst of green. Red and orange soon ricocheted off the clouds south of the horizon, marking the end of light for this day on earth.

That first evening, we were served cold gazpacho avocado soup. Then we shared an entrée of Opakapaka, a delicate Hawaiian fish, topped with Spanish olives and a hint of chili.

Walking on the beach after dinner, the stars were ablaze. It was a moonless night. If we looked straight up we could see the Milky Way. It made us dizzy with awe.

Cool wet sand gave way beneath our feet. We didn't want to move or speak. There was no planning for the future in this moment. There was no future. We were extraordinarily happy listening to the ocean swaying, hidden by the night. We found a sandy alcove to the north of

the main beach and made love on a hotel towel, laughing quietly together under an umbrella of stars.

The private villa Emily had us staying in was shaped like a miniature Taj Mahal, echoing the architecture of the main building. It rented for about three 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 on the boardwalk, a flagstone pathway that bordered the row of Wailea resort hotels. We began to discuss where we would settle down, and what we would do with our time once we got home. Emily wanted to work right from the beginning. She had absolutely no interest in bumming around after we got back.

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

I was more than skeptical. "Fair and square, Em? How is that ever going to happen? I thought that would be *the last thing* you'd ever want me to do. I thought it was important to you that I make it on my own. I don't want your dad setting my salary. And I don't want him deciding when to promote me, or telling me what to do. If you want to work there, it's fine. But I need to find my own way."

"Okay, okay, I understand," she shrugged. Then she got quiet.

Had that been a test to see what I'd say? Or was she serious? I just had to ask. "Did you really want me to say yes?"

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

"Well, what is it?"

"Look, I have a very complicated relationship with my father. I mean, everyone does with their father, I suppose. But as Sam Briggs' daughter, growing up was - let's just say it was uniquely difficult as a little kid. He wasn't around much, of course. Just like now. But when he *was* home he would hug me like I was his favorite person in the world, and always tell me how amazing 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 even the desire, to know any of that. He just gave me his love when he wanted to. When he was capable of it. I felt like a teddy bear he'd visit once in a while. Then, *whoosh*, he'd be gone again, racing around the world, making deals, conjuring up new ways to expand the empire."

She stopped walking and took my hand. "What I'm trying to say is, I don't expect you to work for him. But I want to show him who I really am. What I'm capable of. He has no idea. 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 guess the honest answer to that is, yes."

"So you'd step in there and immediately become president of one of his companies? Make a million-dollar bonus every year on top of a multi-million-dollar salary? How would that win his love, or even his respect? I'm just asking you if you've thought that through."

"That's just it, Jack, I wouldn't want it to be that way."

And believe me, I know my dad, he would never allow that. He's a master at putting people right at the level of responsibility they're ready for. He never plays favorites. His only favorites are the companies themselves. They're his family. People, including mom and me, just fill in pieces to his puzzle. He wouldn't offer me anything more than I could handle. But if I deserve it, if I was good enough, he'd start to need me. And I know I can be good enough."

I saw her in a different light now. The massive corporate kingdom her father owned and controlled didn't intimidate her. It was the universe she had lived in since the day she was born. Everything, in her mind, lived within, or was connected to, the kingdom.

I also discovered she had been managing her own stock portfolio since she was twelve. With help from the family office, of course, which included two private investment managers hired to work only for the Briggs estate. Still, she was in charge of all the final investment decisions for her very aggressive basket of ETF and equity positions, and had turned a million dollars into seven million in nine years. She had recently gone through the dot com bubble in the early 2000s. She knew how topsy turvy things could get in bad cycles. She learned patience. She learned to take risks when fear was the only thing the experts could talk about, and to take profits when they seemed to come too quickly.

In other words, Emily was playing high stakes financial games long before she decided to minor in business at the university, and made more money in the stock market than any of her business or economic professors could ever dream of making. Yet she only mentioned things like this to

me in passing. It was nothing out of the ordinary to her. It almost sounded confessional at times.

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 internal inferno, even if she wanted to. She was born to be a jewel in a very expensive family-owned brocade.

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 or Palo Alto, 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 after she had a chance to check out other opportunities. I wanted her to think it over before deciding to work at Briggs Worldwide, because I knew once she made that commitment there was no turning back.

By the fall we had rented a small house in Fairfax in Marin County, 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 scraggly neighborhood dogs often dozed off in the middle of the road, moving only when they had no choice.

The Fairfax movie theater had an electric sign above the theater that said "FAIRFAX." Except the burned out "A" and "X" bulbs hadn't been replaced for many years. So at night the sign just read, "FAIRF..." in bright red lights. People in town would say, "I wonder what's playing at The FAIRF tonight?"

While living in a town that had bulbs missing from the movie theater marquee, we would also occasionally visit Emily's parents in Ross. This town, about fifteen minutes away, was dotted with cute little fifteen-million dollar, three level houses with circular driveways and infinity pools overlooking the city skyline.

When I say that Emily's parents lived there, I mean to say Adrian, Emily's mom, lived there. Sam dropped in via helicopter every few weeks to say hello. Most of the time we visited, he was thousands of miles away. Even if he said he would be there, emergencies would inevitably come up. 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." It was a thirty-five-story building on California Street.

Adrian tried to make light of her husband's long 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 infused with mango or cherry puree.

One night, Emily and I 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. Her perfectly styled auburn hair had been recently dyed a punky reddish orange. Her lips were rose red. Her large hazel-green eyes were without eye shadow,

making them look almost alien against her alabaster-pale skin and glowing hair. Her wide smile was more muted than usual, expressing confidence and sophistication. She was also wearing a five-thousand-dollar black silk dress that night, while decked out in her mom's hundred-thousand-dollar necklace (just for fun). Emily put on a quite a show.

Part II

“The only thing that’s real is the personal monument we build to ourselves, by our own efforts. Our achievements, hard won by our own force of will, define who we are in the world, and what we stand for. Everything else we do is just mindless entertainment.”

—Samuel Briggs

Chapter 10

The quote on the last page from my father-in-law is detestable to me. But looking back, I see that even from a distance he was capable of controlling our agenda in many ways; in all the important ways.

Back in the fairytale beginning, however, I had found a good job by Christmas. It was with a start-up firm called Logix. They were located in Larkspur, a town close to ours.

I didn't have the working experience a lot of the applicants had, but they liked the fact that I had studied high levels of math as well as having a computer science degree. I also seemed to fit in personality-wise. The company had no profits yet. We couldn't afford to hire a marketing person yet. But I liked what we were doing, and I was willing to bet on our future.

Emily was skeptical. She said the team was just too "out there" for her. She saw the potential, but also thought the odds of failure were high.

After our completely over-the-top April wedding and honeymoon we moved to a more northern Marin town called Forest Knolls. We owned a house which was carved almost like a modern art sculpture out of redwood, with no detail left unattended.

I won't quote the price. Suffice to say that Emily accepted the wedding gift from her parents with humility as well as a little hesitation. It was our dream house, we just hadn't dreamt it up ahead of time. But Sam Briggs did.

Each night I would drive the thirty-minute commute home, winding over the hill that twisted through the town of Woodacre, past the Buddhist retreat center called Spirit Rock. Finally, I would turn into the circular driveway of our seven-thousand-square-foot 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. Up until now, all of her efforts went into furnishing and decorating the house, making sure she got my input whenever I wanted to give it. She promised to look for other work before committing to Briggs Worldwide, but working with her father, and proving herself to him, still seemed to be a driving force.

Meanwhile, during that beautiful brief time I have come to call "almost normal," Emily's sweet round tummy would welcome my touch when I came home from work. We made a few friends. We'd go to the Rancho Nicasio Bar and Grill to hear local music on Saturday nights. Everything seemed perfect.

When Chelsea was born we celebrated quietly. That's because Emily had to recover from a difficult birth. She had to stay in bed for a number of weeks.

When spring came and Chelsea turned six-months old, a cloud seemed to lift. Emily became her optimistic energized self again.

Chelsea's personality was a lot like Emily's. She was happy but very willful, very sure of herself, and very focused. She even had auburn hair and hazel eyes. The only physical feature that she and I shared was the shape of our

eyes. They had a subtle look of innocence about them, whether she or I were being innocent at the time or not.

My daughter and I 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 making Chelsea's breakfast. I'd sing songs to her while she made a mess of her food and stained yet another pretty white dress, right up until I had to go to work. I was a little surprised at myself for having found this much contentment in family life and a nine-to-five job. But each day seemed to float by, usually with at least one very satisfying moment to look back on that day.

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 the reason had anything to do with him missing his wife, or wanting to spend more time with his new grand-daughter – and he didn't.

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

Sure enough, when winter arrived and the days grew colder, Emily grew restless at home and decided the time had come. We hired an au pair to take care of Chelsea during the day and Emily went to work for her dad.

Getting into the city from Forest Knolls each work day was quick and easy -- she was helicoptered in from our

grassy four-acre backyard 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 more fulfilled and content than I'd ever seen her. She loved the daily chaos and the challenges work presented. I had to let go of the times when I'd arrive home to her smiling face while she held Chelsea in her arms. We had to adjust to a routine many working families permanently had. We were both working hard, meeting up at the end of the day.

My work was fine, fun in fact. And my time with Chelsea was always a joy. But as the year went by, I found that my relationship with Emily was taking a backseat to our work and to Chelsea, and even to the time it took taking care of our enormous estate. Emily was coming home later than seven most nights, excited, frazzled, and obsessed with succeeding every day. I was having a hard time reaching her on any level. She had lost her previously ever-present sense of fun. Sex became too infrequent. She was too nervous about work, too exhausted, or too angry about losing a contract to a competitor. Instead of her getting through to her father emotionally, she was becoming the female counterpart of him. She was now part of the internal wiring of Briggs Worldwide.

I began to feel like we were less a family and more a mini corporation. She was being paid six-hundred-thousand dollars a year in her first year. Six times more than me. 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 from all this? We could have chosen a whole new life plan any time we wanted to. But we didn't give that serious consideration at the time. Time was flying by. There was no time for dreaming.

It felt insane to think we had to, or should, delay things like fun, or caring, or joy, or love, for even a single minute more. It felt exponentially insane to put it off for months, or years.

Chapter 11

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

He would tell her that the companies he owned -- each with hundreds or even thousands of employees -- had to be seen as pieces on a chess board for any of them to survive, and for the employees to stay employed. Each business was in constant flux and took daily focus. He relied on the board of each company to manage daily operations and maximize profits. But he also relied on them to execute his vision for the future with no resistance, and no miscalculations.

It was important, he constantly stressed to her, to stay emotionally detached and stay out of micro-managing any one company, and not to get attached to any one, or any group of people. 'Never make anyone indispensable.'

He also said not to buy stock in any of his companies. "We already own them. Never leverage your risk."

His dispassion was his edge, he told her. Others in his position would make the mistake of caring too much. They let their emotions destroy their instincts and their creative problem-solving. In fact, when a company he didn't own was in financial trouble, that's when he would coldly assess why, and potentially swoop down and buy the failing company at a massive discount. It would inevitably be during a time of extreme distress, when the owners were desperate. He would offer them a pure cash buy-out during

a time of maximum fear, usually offering just enough to make them wonder why they should refuse it, and then he would hire his own people to turn the company into a "Briggs Brand."

He vowed to never have Briggs Worldwide on the stock exchanges, "Never be reduced to a ticker symbol." He insisted on being the sole owner and controller of his massive creation. Answering to no one. No one would ever be able to tell him what he could and couldn't do.

He began to treat Emily as a potential heir apparent. He warned her that banks weren't smart enough to loan them money. Too many delays. Too many stupid people standing in the way, asking stupid questions, fearing failure, trying to save their own skin if something went wrong. But there were other ways to get loans besides selling stock and banks.

In fact, this was his biggest weapon for success -- he had easy access to liquid capital whenever he needed it. And that's what Emily was involved in - a process of internal loans called asset backed lending.

It was far better than bank loans or offering stock, he said. Because everything stayed private, under the radar, and under their complete control.

He created asset backed lending hedge funds. Wealthy investors were eager to be silent partners. Cash was not going to be an issue if the payout to investors for loaning him massive amounts of capital made sense. And his deals always made sense.

But Emily also told me that while he bragged about all of these ventures, she also noticed a recklessness that scared her. The cool calm Samuel Briggs was mostly for show. His

bravado was not just pervasive cynicism, but a fear that if he stood still for even one hour, his life would fall apart.

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

Despite all the money he gave to charity, the selflessness of the act held no particular value to him. He did it to create good will for his company. Pure and simple.

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

So I was a bit stunned at Emily's confidential close-up assessment of him. I didn't see the recklessness, or sense any fear in him at all. He was obviously a very astute actor. A great showman who knew how to work a room.

Chapter 12

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, which were now worthless. Above and beyond that humiliation, I was now a stay-at-home dad with a wife that worked sixty hours a week, and a father-in-law that 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 a local park and rock on spring loaded horses; eat toasted bagels and cream cheese on their dad's lap at the local bagel store, then smear the left-overs on dad's pants and laugh about it; chew on toys in the bath tub; listen to music while dancing and throwing things, and laugh and cry at irrational random intervals.

Chelsea was funny and sure of herself. I found her personality, and her interactions with me, adorable. One day she pointed to a spider in the corner of our bedroom. She seemed nervous about it. I said, "Don't worry, it's just a little spider."

She took a step forward and looked closer, then said, "Act-chee, *big* biter." She said it with her round eyes looking up at me with an odd combination of worry, panic and defiance.

I took to writing down the crazy things she said in a notebook 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 13

Jordan Westbrook was a college friend of Emily's. They met in a political science class. He took an interest in her, but unfortunately for him, Emily and I had just started dating. She introduced him to me as "a math wizard." That alone made me hate him, since I was supposed to be her only math wizard. But when we met, I couldn't help but admire the guy. I mean, with his perfectly manicured looks you'd think he'd have become a model for GQ. But he became a math nerd instead.

During the rest of the time we were at college I wouldn't say we became friends, but it was hard not to enjoy his company when we ran into each other.

Fast forward seven years, he now stood before me as Jordan Westbrook, commodities and equities trader, with a loyal following of investors that considered him their golden boy.

He pulled into our circular driveway in his dark green Jaguar convertible. He wore a tailored suit and Italian shoes that were just worn in enough to prevent him from looking like a pompous ass. This was all well-calculated on his part. Yet, amazingly, he was still basically the same nerdy self-effacing guy he was in college. Nothing had changed, except that he had made millions for himself and his investors.

Successful trading is almost impossible unless your brilliant mathematical skills are equally matched by a decent amount of luck. The genius of Jordan Westbrook was that he knew this. In fact, that's why he came to see me.

"You know, Jack, the truth is, I've been making money for a handful of investors who now think I'm a god. But sometimes the difference between me making or losing a fortune is a news story that comes out mid-day. Or something a friend might say to me. I work with algorithms, trend systems, momentum oscillators. But as a mathematician, I realize the odds of any system working permanently is zero. So everything keeps changing. Of course."

"I understand what you're saying," I said. "In fact, even the odds of me keeping a job permanently has become zero."

"I know. Emily told me."

"How kind of her," I laughed.

"Well, hopefully it *was* kind of her, Jack. I've come to make you an offer."

"I'm not going to get involved with high finance and playing the markets, so..."

"You haven't heard my offer yet. And actually, I would never have thought of this offer if Emily hadn't told me that you were currently unemployed. No offense. I mean, I know being a house dad is a very important job... but just listen to what I have to say for a minute, okay?"

"A reasonable request."

"I'll state my case without the perfunctory hello, how have you been. I didn't come here to drink your wine, although Emily tells me you have quite a collection in your wine cellar."

"When did you see Emily?"

"Last week. We went out for a long lunch. That's when this idea was hatched."

"Okay...."

"Right down to it - I want to start a hedge fund with you. That's the offer."

"No way. I just told you..."

"Emily knew what your initial reaction would be. She's good, right? She has phenomenal instincts."

"Phenomenal."

"Jack, this would be a hedge fund like very few others on the planet. There wouldn't be any trading. No commodity bets either. No stocks. No timing systems. We wouldn't have to do any of that stuff, ever. This would be a hedge fund that absolutely could never lose money. Regardless of the direction of the market."

"Insider trading?"

"Jack, do I look like Martha Stewart to you? And you're not listening. I said no trading!"

He pushed his glasses back on his nose. A nervous habit he had. I'm not even sure he needed glasses. He may have used them as a prop to make him look as smart as he actually was.

"Look, Jack, Emily told me to make sure you hear me out, and not to leave until you did."

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

"That would change drastically.... 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 bullet points please."

"The *idea*," Westbrook leaned forward, "is based on a concept called asset-backed lending."

"Wow, now there's a subject that will keep me awake for about thirty seconds. Emily has already put me to sleep many a night with that opioid."

"HW Partners, L.P -- that stands for the Hampton-Westbrook limited partnership. It would be loaning money to a very reputable middleman who would cut us in on specific deals. All we have to do is find investors to put up the money for the deals and get a very good return in the process."

"Why would the middleman need our hedge fund's money? Why wouldn't they just get a loan from a bank?"

"Because bankers are dumb as mud and this deal is too complicated, with too many moving parts. Bankers hate complication."

"Well, where do 'we' find investors? I don't know how to market that kind of thing, and wouldn't want to."

"I can raise plenty of capital from my investors. But I need someone I can trust implicitly to calculate the actuarial values of the deals, and set prices before we sign off on each individual deal, and then track the deal from beginning to end. I need to be able to trust this someone with my life. Because if he ends up screwing me, or the investors, my career is over."

"And that trustable person is me."

"Yes, you! Plus, you'd be working in the office right next to Emily's. Plus, you'd be making a few million dollars a year. Plus... you can trust the middleman implicitly."

"Because?"

"Because the middleman is *E. Briggs Inc.*, an affiliate of Briggs Worldwide. And the 'E' stands for Emily. It's one of the businesses her father wants her to get more involved in."

"She's the middleman."

"Well, technically, the middle-woman. Her father is the middleman."

A thought flashed through my mind -- when I was ten, my father probably had no desire to go into the thermometer business until he was persuaded to by my mom. My grandfather had been defrauded by Uncle Ed. He needed my dad to save the day. And look how that turned out! My father was considered the family hero. It also brought my mom and him closer together.

"Emily is willing to lease us the office right next to hers on the twenty-fifth floor. You know the one that overlooks half the city?"

"Yes, I know. I've been to Em's office plenty of times."

"The good half of the city."

"The bridge, and all that..."

"And you would own *half*... of our company. Hampton-Westbrook limited partnership -- see I put your name first."

"Jordan, there are a lot of go-getters and math wizards out there who could help you with the forensics, and create the software, maybe even help raise capital. 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 ability and knowledge I wasn't able to save Logix, and I sure as hell would never be able to save you."

"Correct," he crowed. "Right on all counts. I love you. You're an honest man. But I'm coming to you because you have something unique to offer me that no one else can offer."

"And what might that be?"

"Your relationship with Sam Briggs. You're his *son* now! His only son, I might add. You could guarantee, just by being my co-General Partner that Briggs would never cheat me, or my investors, or pull the plug on the fund. And Emily

would always make sure to put us in the best deals, since she is overseeing the deal flow. We would have the biggest two risks to our investors 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 while we make a fortune -- then I guess I'll have to let go of being in 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! That's how the idea of talking to you came up in the first place."

"I see."

"She wants you. Literally. I'm just a way for her to get closer to you. That's the truth."

He fidgeted with his non-prescription glasses again. "Besides, she has her hand in almost all of Daddy Briggs' ventures at this point. She's way too busy to co-manage the little hedge fund next door while also providing the deal flow. Way too much paperwork and legal oversight and compliance issues. That's why she, I, we, came up with the idea of asking you. She kept saying to me that I needed to find a computer geek as my partner. Every time she brought it up she would stare at me with this odd smile on her face. Suddenly I got what she was driving at. She's a genius, you know. She got me to come up with the solution without her mentioning your name directly."

"Interesting. Sounds like Em."

"By the way, Jack, she was the only one in college who could beat me at chess."

"She knows how to play chess?"

"Like a freaking computer."

"She never told me."

"Well, Jack... do *you* play chess?"

"No."

"Then why would she bother telling you? It's just one of a thousand things she's amazing at. Right? And she's humble. Not like her father."

"Yes, I know that's true."

Westbrook finally came to the *pièce de résistance*. He was ready to close the deal. "Jack, Emily's office has a remote-control lock on the door. Wouldn't it be fun for you to be little college lovebirds again? Imagine that her one-thousand-square-foot office is just a glorified dorm room. You could do your homework together, if you know what I mean, with a world class view. And I hear her lunch is catered, delivered right to her office. She can eat whatever she wants, for as long as she wants. As could you!"

"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?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying."

I started weighing pros and cons in my head. "I don't know what to tell you, Jordan. I have to think about it."

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

I said, "There are lots of different ways to approach logic."

He nodded, "Calculations are never as linear and coldly obvious as people think. But that's why we should be partners, Jack -- we *both* know that before we even start."

Chapter 14

Emily confirmed everything Westbrook had told me. She added, "Jack, I realize we're not seeing enough of each other. And hate it too. This would solve that issue. Plus, it seems like a really good fit, you and Jordan. You're the last piece of the puzzle from my end of the deal. You'll be able to keep an eye on Westbrook and anyone else you hire. And you'll be controlling the books."

"It's not my dream job, that's for sure."

"What if I made it your dream job?" she smiled. "It would be so much fun to... *work* together. Don't you think? Especially during our extending lunch hour?"

"You never told me you played chess."

"Would you have cared?"

"Probably not."

"Let's just focus on things we can do together." She kissed me. Just then Chelsea started crying.

I started thinking, working next to her, sharing special lunches, might not be the worst thing.

So, with great trepidation, I decided to become Westbrook's partner. My main, and in fact, *only* purpose for doing it, was to rekindle my relationship with Emily.

Chapter 15

The first few days on the twenty-fifth floor of the Briggs Building was far better than I could have imagined. Westbrook wasn't all that bad to hang out with. And the work was actually semi-interesting. But most importantly, just as I'd hoped, 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 earlier days. Actually, it was more like the way it was when we were in college. We helped each other succeed. We cared about each other's challenges. Emily loved working with her dad, and loved working on a business venture that needed her broad array of skillsets. My work with Westbrook was something I could see myself becoming very good at. We were all suddenly on the same team.

I would sometimes meet Emily for lunch in her office at her invitation. Afterwards, she would remotely lock her office door and turn off her phones, then look at me and smile mischievously. Then perhaps she'd go to her huge picture window on the twenty-fifth floor – a window overlooking a great many beautiful hills and pastel-colored neighborhoods. It was a window twenty-two floors higher than the white-framed window above the central plaza in Italy, with its sculpted fountain. Instead, there was the Golden Gate Bridge shimmering in the mist. I would come closer as she looked out to the bay, with sail boats dotting a blue canvass of sea, and I would begin rubbing her shoulders. I would kiss the back of her neck as she casually leaned back against me. Sometimes we would make love like

that, while feeling the silky soft texture of an Arabian rug on our bare feet. She would often keep her eyes fixed upon the city, and the cars 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 16

Westbrook brought in all the investors. I interfaced with the accountants and with the "middleman" – Emily.

This was one of a number of projects Emily was overseeing for Briggs Worldwide, 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 working under her for this project.

I also found out that we were not the only limited partnership in on this deal. Emily was overseeing almost a billion dollars of investor assets. Five other hedge funds were involved. All five hedge fund managers and each of their employees had to be approved personally by Sam Briggs before he allowed Emily to let them in on the deals. But, of course, ours was the fund closest to the middleman, both literally and strategically. In fact, I was married to the middleman, and more than occasionally making love to the middleman in the middleman's office.

Investors flocked to us. A risk-free ten percent a year was unheard of back in 2006. It seemed like a magic bullet. We were bringing in millions of dollars of new investor money every month.

These were the best of times for Emily and me. Our sex life had been reignited. Our respect for each other's abilities was at an apex. And we were also both seeing a lot more of Chelsea, since we were now home-schooling her right in the Briggs building by hiring a retired Waldorf School teacher for Chelsea's ongoing education.

Eventually, we rented 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 at the Forest Knolls estate, or took quick 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 how long to stay, and then just take off - literally, since we frequently used the Briggs helicopter or his private jet to get around.

Before this, Emily had often been 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. So we occasionally took Chelsea on afternoon adventures in the city. On this particular day, we played hooky from work, and school, by going to Dolores Park with her.

Emily and Chelsea were so happy together. They were rolling down a gentle grassy hill, laughing out of control. I was sitting on a picnic blanket, feeling quite content, watching the city skyline bathed in a slow forming mist - the birthing of fog. 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 friendly dog a few yards away.

Emily leaned her head against my shoulder and closed her eyes. “Jack....”

“Mmm,” I was too peaceful to say a word.

"What would you think if... someday... we had another child?"

"Another...?"

"Yes. We'd have more days like this. And nights together as one big family. Wouldn't that be sweet?"

"Maybe."

"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 you and Chelsea, and all the other children!" She smiled at the thought.

"All?"

"Yes, in fact, *dozens of them!* I'm sure you'd love that." She was laughing now.

Then she sat up until we were face-to-face, "We could even bring an au pair with us to Europe. 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?

"In fact, we could 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."

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

"I don't like being so absent in her life," she said.

She squinted up at the hazy sky, "It doesn't have to be like that.... Not anymore."

Chapter 17

In the fall of 2006, Adrian invited Chelsea to spend a "special week with Grandma" while Emily and I went to Paris.

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.

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

From the airport, we took a limo to the Hotel de Crillon, a five-star architectural masterpiece in the middle of the city. 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 a cold winter night like the one we were experiencing – there was a steam bath in one of its two marbled bathrooms.

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

We shared a first course -- crispy hen egg yolk with golden oscetra caviar, accompanied by green apple jelly.

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, and seasoned with orange peels.

We laughed about what we would have ordered for Chelsea if she had been with us: "Oui, and may we also

please have one small bowl of cooked peas with salted butter, and a glass of milk? Merci.”

We stumbled back to our hotel laughing, very drunk on very expensive wine.

When we entered our suite, Emily immediately pulled her fancy dress to the floor and threw her diamonds onto an overstuffed chair. She 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 on the floor, Baccarat chandeliers on the ceiling. We were living the life I would have considered insanely over the top even a few years ago, but I realized we both relied on times like this now just to renew ourselves.

In the steam room, our naked 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 out the glass door gasping for cool air and leaped unto the soft bedspread. I pretended to be haughty and demanding, like Louis XV himself. He was quite an excited and formidable king on this particular evening.

By the end of our historic escapade we were sweaty, laughing, very high, and tangled up in each other's arms as we fell asleep.

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

Chapter 18

I recall an interesting business lunch I had with “Dad” late in the summer of 2008, a year after our son, Adam, was born.

I was working on my laptop in the office, as usual. Westbrook 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 this afternoon?”

After realizing who the request was coming from, I replied, “Yes, sure, okay,” I smiled nervously. I never called him dad. But calling him Sam or Mr. Briggs would have sounded off-key. So I usually avoided calling him anything.

At noon, I grabbed my coat and we walked across the street to his favorite neighborhood restaurant.

He began by telling me that he’d sent Emily up to his auditor’s offices for the day. They were huddled together on the thirty-third floor. No one ever saw the auditors. They were like moles, coming to work at dawn and leaving late at night.

He made a snide remark about whether I could handle Emily being gone for a few hours. He was drunk already and we hadn’t even sat down at our table yet. I just smiled and didn’t respond.

His hair had gotten a good deal grayer over the years. His face looked more weathered. Stress had taken a harsh toll, as did the drinking. He never used to drink this early in

the day. His eyes had changed over time as well. They were no longer like Emily's. They had become milkier, less intense, more self-absorbed.

We ordered. The wine came and he drank a glass quickly. 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, always wanting something from him, trying to humor him, please him, persuade him.

He stared at me, maybe trying to assess this person who had married his daughter. What was my game? What exactly did I want out of all this?

"So, little Adam is a very handsome boy. And Chelsea is still as strong-willed as ever, a bit like grandpa," he smiled, but it didn't quite seem genuine. I could read his cues better than most.

"Yes," was all I could manage.

He leaned back in his chair and began talking almost to himself. "A lot of people resent me, I know that. I'm very blunt with people. I used to try to sell them. I don't have to do that anymore." He took his phone out of his pocket and turned it off. I'd never seen him do that before. He leaned across the table.

I became visibly uncomfortable.

"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 better than an outsider, as if my kind of experience of running and

expanding companies grows on trees. Here's a 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 all their brains and all their college degrees put together, and they resent the hell out of me for it."

He ate a few bites of the food that had arrived then put his fork down. "So let me get to the point. What exactly do you want from all this, Jack, now that you have all this money?"

Although I didn't trust his motive, it was actually a damn good question.

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? Or tripping off to Venice, Italy, instead of meeting with a group of investors in Venice Beach? Playing in the park with my kids might even be more fun than either of those things.

So what *did* I want?

I stared back at him while taking a sip of my Chardonnay, refusing to answer his question. That was the only way to answer a question like that, coming from someone like him.

"By your silence, am I supposed to believe you're attempting to be condescending?" His silver-speckled eyebrows raised up as he chuckled. "Go on. I'm serious. What does all this money mean to you?"

"Honestly, it doesn't mean a whole lot."

"So you're just along for the ride, eh? Having fun in Emily's game."

"My love for your daughter isn't a ride. And I don't think Em is playing a game. She wants to work and be great at what she does, and frankly, win your respect." I was getting upset, and didn't really care what he thought about my responses. I felt like I had nothing to lose.

"Well, what if I told you there was some very bad news concerning Briggs Worldwide. And that it would affect Emily's work as well. Would you care at all about that?"

"Of course," I said reflexively. "For your sake. For Emily's sake.... What are you trying to say?" I expected a dismissive wave of the hand.

"I'm saying there's some very bad news."

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

"I see," I said, deciding not to pry further. It's not like I had anything of value to offer. I was not a business entrepreneur or a bankruptcy specialist. And Briggs Worldwide had survived things like this many times 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 business-savvy friends. He was smiling at me from time to time, apparently shrugging off his minor tragedy, and it seemed authentic.

"I bet you won't be the only airline in trouble."

This sat well with him.

He patted his mouth with his napkin, then stared at me for a bit too long. "I guess you're a good kid. Emily's right. She tells me that all the time, but you and I haven't spent enough time together, just the two of us."

I actually wanted to say thank you. He had an alarming ability to draw you into his world and get you to see him as an empathetic character, even after he just threw you against a wall, or under a bus. It was so easy to feel disoriented around him. That was part of his genius.

"So, let me tell you why I invited you to lunch today, Jack. Emily tells me you love chocolate. And that you've been eating Polar Ice Caps since the day you both met. I need a new CEO to head that company. I've been searching for a while. Dan Reese 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. Because they're not loyal to me, and they're not loyal to the brand. They're simply good at what they do. But that's not good enough. Besides, I want some new blood. New ideas. I need someone I can trust and who wants to learn from me." He looked straight into my eyes: "Interested?"

"Me?" I was stunned.

"I didn't invite you here to watch me eat!"

"Well," I began to laugh, then caught myself. "I'm flattered, but I have the hedge fund taking up all my time."

"You're easily replaceable," he said coldly.

"But I love the work."

"You love being next to Emily's office, no doubt."

"Absolutely! That too," I admitted.

“I can kick Westbrook out of there. The fund can find an office somewhere else. And you can keep that office next to Emily’s all to 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. It would be a big responsibility. You’d have to prove your mettle. But, you know... free chocolate!”

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

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

He figured this was an offer I wouldn’t be able to turn down. The problem is, I *was* going to turn it down. I didn’t care about the challenge the new work presented. I was happy working with Westbrook, and liked many of our investors. I felt a responsibility and a loyalty to them.

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

What I *didn't* know was... he was trying to save me.

He was offering me a lifeline.

I swam directly away from it, straight out to sea.

Chapter 19

Emily pushed hard for me to take her dad's offer. She pushed so hard it seemed irrational at the time. What was wrong with making millions of dollars a year *more* than working at the job I had? Same office. Bigger challenge.

I told her I had no desire 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. "That would be a real tragedy," I teased. But she was not in the mood to laugh.

She said she thought this would be a great move up. It would allow me to have the experience of being a CEO. And it would only be a temporary position until I was given something even more interesting and more important later. Maybe I could run one of his up-and-coming tech companies at some point, when I was ready. She tried everything to convince me.

I told her if it were up to me, I'd still be working with young crazy geniuses trying to change the world, like the people 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 in the first place.

"You didn't want to marry one of those guys, Em! The type of guy who would say yes and then set up a separate bank account."

"You're right. But Logix was just a bunch of kids with no idea what they were doing," she continued. "Polar Ice is an established, profitable..."

"But I *liked* the work at Logix!"

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

"Yes, they did. And I was as naive as they were about that. Still, the work was challenging day-to-day. And I was a necessary part of it. I was innovating with them. I enjoyed going to work each day."

She cut me off, "Well, you're even more naive now! You think if Westbrook hadn't come along you could have found a better situation? You made a hundred-thousand dollars a year at Logix, Jack. You make double that per week now, and you could make ten times that if you..."

"*Obviously, Emily, we don't need more money. 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 pace. Then 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! It's important to me."

I'd never seen her like this.

I did a few more days of 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 with the hedge fund was incestuous enough. I was already playing too close to the fire. Sam Briggs's fire.

As far as assessing the chess moves, being one of his many pawns was sickening enough. But what would I be if I accepted the new job? A bishop? A knight perhaps, that he

could have slain to honor his queen and cherished daughter whenever the time was right? There was something about the whole thing I didn't trust.

Sometimes you can guess right and be wrong all at the same time.

Chapter 20

2008 was an unforgettable year financially. It was the year the world fell apart.

Cities still lit up at night, fancy cars drove in procession up and down California Street, Lexuses and BMWs were still omnipresent. But in the deep recesses of everyone's financial lives, even for the mega-rich, *especially* for the mega-rich, something had gone terribly wrong.

Sam Briggs was usually immune, and therefore completely insensitive to economic downturns. In fact, this is when he would usually sweep in and make big money later, by buying companies with great business plans that suddenly found themselves just trying to survive. But not this time. Credit froze around the world. Even Briggs Worldwide couldn't find enough liquidity.

At first, as stock markets around the globe collapsed, with the US market losing more than forty percent in a matter of months, Sam Briggs smiled and called it a pity. He reminded everyone that almost all of his money was invested in his companies directly, not in stocks. So what did he care? Bonds and stocks were for idiots that trusted the government, and the CEOs, and stock brokers, and stock analysts whose careers relied on selling a rosy future, regardless of what the present future actually looked like. Investing was for bit players. Owning was for the king-makers like himself.

But suddenly, here Samuel Briggs was, shocked to find out that he could get blindsided by the same tsunami the bit-players were drowning in. It rolled over beach towns, and

kept on raging, gaining strength, flowing into the streets, then the lobbies and offices of the tallest skyscrapers, until the rising tide reached the castle mote, flooded the Great Hall, and eventually rose all the way up to the penthouse suite, where the king himself was hiding.

Chapter 21

One of the partners in our hedge fund, Jim Evans, had been an original investor with Westbrook, long before I was in the picture. Jim had become quite rich by starting an international online travel agency. He was happily married with two kids. We began to socialize 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, we were loaning Sam Briggs money for his asset-based lending business. It had no exposure to stocks or bonds. 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 to get into the fund.

Westbrook 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 ten to eleven percent interest with the stock market collapsing.

Jim would invite Westbrook and my entire family over to his mansion for parties, and cater barbeques and summer swimming extravaganzas.

During one of Jim's late summer parties Chelsea was in the pool with "Uncle Jordan," which is what she called Westbrook. "Uncle Jordan" was in the middle of a circle of about seven wild splashing kids, getting the worst of it, and loving it.

Jordan was the main guest of honor, as always. He usually brought a very sexy date. This time he'd come by himself.

Our son, Adam, was now two. He stayed at home on this particular afternoon with the nanny.

Jai Agarwal arrived with his new girlfriend -- a model from Paris who was living with him in his five-thousand square foot mansion in Kentfield. He was one of our biggest investors.

He cornered me with a scotch in his hand, "Jack, I am making a very large life transition soon. I am going to move back to India. So I've decided I'm going to redeem my money from the fund. I'm selling my house. I'll be leaving early next year."

"Wow, congratulations, I hope! What led to this decision?"

He looked over at his girl. "Well, it wasn't Juliet. She's moving back to Paris soon. Basically, I want to experience real life again. Life as I remember it growing up. I have a lot of family back in Delhi. I had to learn for myself in America what they told me when I was a young man. Desiring material things can become a dead end if your heart isn't in it. Relationships are like that as well. Maybe it's my Hindu upbringing coming back to haunt me, if you will, but I'm done. I guess I'm going to quit while I'm ahead."

I congratulated him and shook his hand. There was a part of me that wished I had that kind of wisdom and courage, but I was in too deep.

Meanwhile, Emily was walking around in a beige bikini that almost made her look undressed 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 perfect as ever. She had a disarming natural beauty. Her hair was still styled in a European shag, and was more red than brown from the summer sun. She wore very little make-up, and needed even less. There was no false pretense to her. No false eyelashes. No false shyness. She wore a modest amount of lipstick on special occasions. But this wasn't one of them. She left her diamonds and expensive jewels at home. She had no need to show off her wealth. She came off looking like an All-American girl, a cute young mom, a few freckles still showing on her bare shoulders, living a modest but fulfilling life with her loyal husband and her sweet family.

All the men, a good number of the women, and even some of the kids running around, would turn to look at Emily as she walked by. She was effortlessly magnetic. If a person's glance should happen to catch her attention, she would smile at them as a close friend might smile. Her skin glowed. She was thirty going on twenty-something. Everyone thought I was the luckiest guy on earth, for so many reasons. And I was envied, for so many reasons.

Later in the day, Emily and I went into the pool house to change out of our swimsuits. Chelsea was still with "Uncle Jordan." Jim's poolside bathroom was sizable, with a Jacuzzi tub, a shower for two, and two sinks. It had a big window overlooking a private garden down a sloping hill where the pool was. People walking by were at least ten feet below the window. All we saw when looking out were blooming flowers in the planter boxes.

Emily began to peel off her bikini. I took off my swim shorts. Normally this was something we would have done

without a second's 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 sitting on an antique dresser and dabbed a little on both of us.

She climbed on top of me with her arms 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 walked casually back down to the pool after we got dressed and took Chelsea out to dinner. At the last minute we offered Westbrook to come along too.

I had a strong suspicion that he had secretly loved Emily since college, but on this night in particular I really didn't care about that. Emily had been distant with me ever since I had turned down her father's offer. But an hour ago she had just made love to me with a recklessness and an intensity that, well, I could only really fully understand later. This was the last time we were together like that, before Emily got caught.

The party -- the memories -- Uncle Jordan holding Chelsea in his wet hairy arms while gliding her across the

pool; Jim Evans patting me on the back, thanking me for the work I was doing; Jai Agarwal deciding to redeem from the fund and move back to India, and, of course, my interlude with Emily – these are the images that rest inside me now.

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

Chapter 22

During the entire month of November, 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 trysts in her office. She didn't seem to have a whole lot of time for the kids either. She spent an incredible amount of time 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 working for the hedge fund. And I wanted her to quit Briggs World-wide as well. She'd previously had a dream that we could take the kids around the world for a few years with an au pair, 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?

The irony was, this was pretty much the same offer that was presented to her by 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, for the most part, her father's money.

The other problem - traveling around the world, even with full-time help, with two young kids, one of them being a two-year old, was - well, if you have young kids there's no need for further explanation. And if you don't have kids, then a thousand more words won't help you understand.

Ultimately, I really didn't care if we travelled around the world or not at that point. I just didn't want Emily to be

working for her father anymore. And I definitely didn't want to continue working with HW Partners. I was ready to give the whole damn enterprise to Westbrook and get nothing in return. I couldn't have cared less.

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

Chapter 23

On December 23rd, 2008, the FBI raided the offices of Briggs Worldwide.

The F.B.I. claimed, in a subsequently released affidavit, that Samuel L. Briggs and Emily Briggs Hampton, had conspired to commit fraud. The losses came to over a billion dollars, which meant it was one of the biggest frauds in U.S. history.

It involved an asset-backed lending scam. The hedge fund investors that loaned Briggs's companies money, including HW Partners, LP., were the victims.

Our investors' money was gone. All of it.

Westbrook was on an early Christmas vacation at the time of the raid. He and a woman he met at one of Jim Evans' parties were sipping tropical drinks in Bora Bora, staying in a hut built over the water. I was working alone in the office.

I remember the moment it happened. A man came barging into my office without knocking and told me to leave my computer on, leave my cell phone on the desk, and go home. He flashed his badge. For a moment I thought it was a Christmas party joke. But Sam Briggs had the sense of humor of a snail. He would have fired half the building and the entire security team if anyone pulled something like this. I realized something horrible was happening.

According to the FBI report, the fraud started in the early innings of what would eventually become the 2008 economic crisis.

Sam Briggs's dozens of businesses started accumulating too much inventory and not enough available free cash to pay their bills or their employees on time, or repay the so-called "asset backed" loans Emily had provided them.

It turned out the assets backing the loans were nothing more than the companies themselves. So if the companies couldn't repay the loans, then the assets backing the loans were also legally in default.

If one or two of Briggs' companies had gotten into financial trouble, the effect would have been minimal. But when over half his companies found themselves with negative cash flow, defaulting on a large number of these allegedly asset backed short-term loans all at once, it became a serious issue.

If the hedge fund investors found out the extent of the defaults, they would have inevitably all started asking for their money back at once.

The truth would have become clear - these asset backed guarantees of steady monthly interest on top of the guaranteed safety of the money originally invested, didn't really have the ability to guarantee anything to anyone if everything went wrong at once.

Chapter 24

Emily knew if too many of Briggs Worldwide's companies were declared bankrupt or insolvent, even if it was during a global economic crisis, Sam Briggs would have been seen as a massive failure. A fool. His life's work, his legacy, the personal monument he wanted to leave to the world, would have become a monumental failure.

So Emily chose to show her father the ultimate loyalty. Together, Emily and her father hatched an idea they believed could save her father and Briggs Worldwide at the same time.

Being the deal flow provider for all the hedge funds, including the one Westbrook and I were managing, Emily knew how to access all the books and records.

So she began to satisfy the initial investor redemption requests, like Jai Agarwal's, by moving money from loans that were being repaid on time, to defaulting loans on the books - even if the good loans were held by another Briggs hedge fund, with completely separate investors. The outcome would be, it would appear there were no defaults at all.

Sam Briggs assumed that within a year or two the economy, and therefore, most, if not all, of the Briggs companies, would fully recover. In time, the Briggs companies would be able to pay back all their loans, including what they considered "delayed loans," with interest. Emily would then put the books back in order. Everything would be back to status quo.

Sam Briggs was grateful for Emily's dedication and commitment to him. And proud of her for helping him come up with the idea that would very likely save him.

But sadly, he had no capacity to truly love anyone. He didn't think twice about allowing her to do something that could put her in legal jeopardy, and potentially put her in jail.

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.

Emily was simply seen as a dependable subordinate of Briggs Worldwide. A subsidiary unto herself, with rising value to the corporate vision. Knowing how to take risks, and "work around bullshit regulations" were just part of doing business in the real world. He was proud that Emily was learning that, and willing to play the game when things got tough.

Chapter 25

Emily loved each of us. I still believe that. Call me naïve, like she used to do. Call me mesmerized by her, or overly trustful. But I'm sure the reason I was kept in the dark is that she didn't want me implicated if anything went wrong.

She persuaded her father to get me out of HW Partners by offering to make me the CEO of my favorite chocolate company. It was part of the original idea, before she agreed to help him. She wanted me out of harm's way long before anything bad could happen. But I wouldn't take the gift she was begging me to accept.

It was then left up to her to save both her father *and* me, with her father's empire imploding, and the world crumbling into financial chaos.

There is no doubt that Emily was brilliant, tenacious, disciplined, charismatic, persuasive. As well as prone to secretiveness.

But for all her brilliance, I believe that getting caught for doing something illegal never seriously entered her mind. She felt sure she could pull this scheme 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 him? And his assurance came.

Without me realizing it, our partners' assets were worthless until Briggs and Emily someday had a chance to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. Their timeline to "normalize the books" was late 2009. Not too long at all,

according to a corporate calendar. They saw it as one very long year of rolling up their sleeves and making it work.

For a while the plan *did* work. Perfectly. The “Robin Hood” plan was not quite what Robin Hood had in mind. The plan was to borrow from the surviving corporations, and pay off the loans of the ones in trouble. Nonetheless, Emily, and even Sam Briggs himself, saw themselves as potential heroes.

By the middle of 2009, Sam and Emily Briggs were in jail awaiting trial. They had ended up being charged by the S.E.C with a Ponzi scheme, as well as accounting fraud.

Briggs cursed and chided everyone from behind bars, telling them it would have been far better if he was 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 and get investors their money back, including the accruing interest, if they just would let him go. Let him work.

Who was the idiot that blew the whistle on him? That's what he wanted to know. That's the person to blame for all this.

But even after he was released on bail, the government wouldn't allow him to take back control of the ship -- a ship where he had taken investors hostage -- even if he really was the best person to steer it away from the rocks the ship was heading toward.

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

Chapter 26

Emily stood before me at the front door, her face streaked with tears. She had been released on bail, but she knew that if she was convicted she could go to jail for years. If convicted, her father would be in jail for the rest of his life. As good as she was at assessing odds, she knew what no one else was sure of yet, at least in a court of law: they were guilty. And no securities attorney on the planet could get them out of this.

The kids, after a few ecstatic moments of seeing her, quickly made their normal requests, asking her to read them stories. Chelsea wanted her to play with her new doll. My son kept sticking his powder-blue robot puppet in her face.

She was very choked up as she read to them and played with them on the floor. She was shaken to the core. All of her normal cockiness and sparkle was gone. She looked panicked, mentally defeated, totally out of place.

After the kids were in bed, we went downstairs into her private home office.

She told me her intentions were good. She begged me to believe that. Everything would have worked out if they hadn't been caught. That was when she first told me she tried to get me to accept the CEO position at Polar Ice Caps to protect me, in case anything went wrong, which her father assured her was pure paranoia on her part.

She also told me that ultimately her father had set her up. She would never trust him again. She would never want to work there again. We could start a new life.

What I didn't know then, is that she had withdrawn all the money from our joint bank accounts and had wired it overseas.

Chapter 27

I told her I knew her intentions were good and hugged her until she was in a quieter, slightly less panicked place.

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 finger and destroyed me, just like he destroyed my mother, and probably would have destroyed you if you'd fallen into his traps. Day by day, hour by hour, he had his way. I don't know how he talked me into the things I did over the last twelve months. He said we had to act quickly. He said he was sure everything would turn out for the best for everybody, including the investors, and that there was no time to hesitate. He said if I followed his plan we'd all end up on top. Better and stronger than ever. And the investors would see us as heroes. So I helped him. I helped my father. That's as far as my mind could grasp things. I had to win the game, for him."

I listened quietly. It seemed like she had more to say.

She lowered her voice to a whisper, "I should have worshipped my mother, not him. She loved me. But her love was too easy. Like yours is, Jack. Too damn easy. You're both too good. There was no challenge to loving either of you. I didn't need to earn your trust, or your love, or your admiration. It was simply there, like air.

"He, on the other hand, demanded I become invincible, a superhero like him, before he would even look me in the eye and acknowledge my existence. And now his life is over. I just hope mine isn't too."

The original silver-framed Escher painting hanging on her office wall, the black mirrory plasma TV, which hadn't been turned on ever, the soft lights illuminating the driveway outside her office window -- everything was coated in a glassy mist. I don't know if I was crying, or my eyes were just exhausted from days of no sleep, or both. But everything was starting to become a soft silvery blur.

"So what are we going to do?" she whispered.

"Well, what *can* we 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 co-managed was considered one of the victims. And here we were together, trying to get her out of the mess she helped create.

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

I tried to think, but just like when her father offered me the CEO position at Polar Ice Caps, I didn't catch the hint. I didn't pick up on the clues.

I asked, "What other options are there?"

My response seemed to panic her, and at the same time secretly set something in stone.

Eventually we went upstairs to bed. It was very strange. She hadn't been home in weeks. Normally I would have been so happy to have her back in bed, touching her, kissing her beautiful lips. 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, then began to shiver. Her body literally shook for a moment. Then she regained her

composure, "You've always been such a good husband and father in every way. I know how worried you've been about me. You've lost weight, you know? You have dark circles under your eyes. You look terrible." She pushed my hair back out of my face. "I see a little gray in your hair. I've turned you into a worried mess. God, I'm so sorry."

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

"What are you thinking?" I asked.

She said, "I don't know. I'm not sure. But just please know I love you." She said this soothingly, almost to herself. "And I love the kids, *so* much. So much. Everything's going to be okay."

She kissed me, and a door inside of me opened just slightly. A door inside of me that she had walked through a thousand times. It had become closed, but it never became locked.

Her warm body surrounded me. But this time it felt like I was being pulled out to sea with her. I was drowning. I couldn't find a way back.

Afterwards, I fell into a terrible deep sleep.

Chapter 28

When I awoke the next morning and went downstairs, I began to wonder where they had gone.

I hoped, and forced myself to assume, that Emily and the kids were out for a late breakfast together. Or maybe they went for a walk down to the neighborhood park.

But after calling and texting and pacing around the house for half an hour, it occurred me to check the dresser drawers in the kids' rooms. Clothes were missing. Suitcases were missing.

They were gone.

Chapter 29

I called the police. They said they would check the local airports. But by the following day she still hadn't been located. Nor had they located Emily's car. I wanted to hire someone to track her down, but she left me with no resources. Because not a dime was left in any of the bank accounts. All the money was gone.

She was in control again, as usual, awash in secret plans. And I was officially broke for the first time since high school.

I couldn't very well ask my mother-in-law to help track her daughter down, so that she could be thrown back in prison.

I was going to ask my aging parents for a loan to hire a detective, but after talking to the F.B.I. they assured me they were already looking for her in ways no detective ever could.

My children had been taken from me. The house was held in the name of Emily's trust, paid for by Sam Briggs, ultimately owned by Briggs Worldwide. So I wouldn't be able to take out a loan against the house either. Even my car was leased in the company name.

I was also still co-responsible for a limited partnership that blew up, 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 eat or sleep. I hid myself away.

Chapter 30

I received an interesting call from a securities attorney in L.A at the beginning of the new year. He said Emily had left three million dollars in escrow for me to spend any way I wanted, as long as the money was spent on things not related to finding her, or the Briggs fraud case. On top of that, the Briggs estate was instructed to pay all my attorney fees directly related to defending myself in the fraud case *beyond* the three million dollars in escrow.

Who was Emily really?

A liar?

A kidnapper?

A master scammer?

A holder of deep secrets....

How ironic that we had somehow exchanged positions literally overnight. I was now the one being legally restricted, emotionally distraught, not able to be with my children, and left with the mess Sam Briggs had left behind. While Emily was free, financially solvent, living with our children somewhere safe from harm, and finding a way to start over.

She was probably living under a false identity in a foreign country by now. The wires she sent were to shell companies that re-wired the money to other shell companies. Sam Briggs had ways of moving money around without it being tracked by the I.R.S., or competitors, or anyone else. Emily knew how to use those loopholes. She knew everything the CFO and auditors knew.

It would take a long time for the F.B.I. to work through the maze and track the transactions. By then she would be across God knows how many international borders, children by her side.

If anyone could figure out a way to make this work, and thrive from the chaos, it was her.

Chapter 31

The night we talked in her downstairs office, when she was begging me to help her come up with a solution, was an invitation to me, exactly like becoming the CEO of Polar Ice Caps was an invitation. She had already found a solution. She thought it would have been obvious to me.

Let's run. Let's take the children, and hide away together.

She assumed I would come up with the solution on my own, if I still loved her. If I still trusted her. If I was still loyal to her. If I still deserved her love in return.

And in her mind, we could have all lived happily ever after.

She was waiting for me to say it. But since it didn't happen that way, she had to leave without me. She couldn't take the chance of telling me the plan directly. If I had refused to go along with it, refused to become a fugitive and accompany her, her plan would have fallen apart. There would have been no other option with time running out. I might have even had to turn her in to prevent myself from being an accomplice.

Either she had to get me to come up with the idea. Or she had to leave me behind.

So in her mind, I failed her, just like her high school boyfriends had failed her. Used her. Wanted her. Needed her. But never truly loved her; at least not enough.

And in a way, she was right. By the time she begged me to come up with a way out, I only thought about how to save myself.

Chapter 32

They could be in France, Italy, Spain, Croatia. Or somewhere in the opposite direction from any of my best guesses. Knowing her, she found a way to create new identities for all of them, and settle down in a perfectly unguessable place.

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

What will she say? Whatever she says, I'm sure they will believe her.

Here's the oddest thing. When I think of her, I can't help myself—I remember *all* the times, everything, all the way back to the beginning. Not just the ending.

And what if this is not the ending after all? What if there's more to the story?

I say this because she wrote a note to me.

I found it under her pillow in our bedroom a few days after they were gone. I guess she figured correctly it would be the last place I'd look after I began to panic.

I haven't shown it to anyone, or said anything about it, until now.

“Please believe me, I love you, Jack. I always will. You look so innocent when you're asleep. Your true nature shines through. I know you're upset, angry, scared. But listen to

me. We will all be together again someday. I promise that to you. I just have to think things through for a while longer. As soon as I feel like we're safe, I'll come up with a plan to be with you again. I refuse to lose you. All of us will be safe and happy, just like we were.

"I'll be in touch. Please have faith."

Sometimes I wonder why I still love her.

Sometimes I wonder why I'm still waiting.

The End

~ GM