

THE CALLING

By
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The Calling • Jacqueline Druga-Johnston

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Dedication ...

To my daughters Ali and Veronica, for reading this story and enjoying it.

Acknowledgement:

Jerry I couldn't have written the medical portion of this without you. Thank you.

The band, The Calling, thank you for your song and support.

To F ... as always, you inspire.

THE CALLING

Chapter One - Danny

I called it the ‘Eve of my Immortality’. I wasn’t dying ... not me. Death became a dirty word, and in my heart and in my soul, there was no way I could die. A body is a vessel for the spirit—the soul. Though the body can weaken and die, surely our inner energy doesn’t extinguish and disappear like a heartbeat or breath. It makes us who we are; it is what shines from beneath the layers of epithelia to show our true being.

Dr. Michael Gorman will forever be an idiot in my mind. Where did he come from? Perhaps some Harvard twerp, I don’t know. I never stayed long enough in his office to check out his diplomas. More than likely he graduated from Taiwan Community college of Medicine because no one else would take him, and he shipped back to America when his reputation didn’t precede him. They say specialists often lack a bedside manner; Dr. Gorman lacked sidewalk manners. Granted, my time with him covered the short span of recommendation, examination, and review of test results. I never saw him after that day; there was no need. A soap opera pretty boy, barely over my age of thirty-five, peered at me through his false blue contacts and delivered my diagnosis like a lame weather report.

“Winds from the south, looks like rain will hit the east, up north there’ll be some snow showers, Danny Bishop there’s a inoperable tumor about the size of a plum on your heart and you have six weeks to live.”

What?

A simple physical for work sent me to this cardiologist because of an irregular heartbeat. That’s it. I felt fine; looked fine, and believed I was in the best physical condition of my life. Yet, he tells me I’m a dying man.

Wait. Hold up. It’s a heart, right? Piece of cake. Find me another. Hello? Ever hear of a transplant? Give me a fake one for Christ’s sake.

Not so simple. Never having the luck to hit the lottery, I acquired this incredible ability to defy the odds when I hit a ‘one in a ten million’ shot.

Highly unlikely, possible, but not probable that a heart would be found. Even then, I didn't qualify. See, those little benign tumors—most tumors on the heart are benign—had a nature that caused them to spread, straight up and along my carotid artery. Surgery was out. My biggest question was: When would I start to feel the effects of this tumor that soon would crush my heart?

“Soon,” Dr. Gorman said. “This isn't a condition that has been here for years. It developed rapidly.”

I nodded with my final question. “Shouldn't I have felt something before this?”

He shrugged with lifted hands. A shrug? This is supposedly a highly trained medical professional and he shrugged at me.

My first reaction was too seek a second opinion, a third. I did. Though delivered more compassionately, the news was still the same. The third doctor—at first—gave me two months.

Gee, thanks.

Two months. An entire ten days was wasted getting those other opinions. Ironically, my clock was ticking as my inner timekeeper—my heart—began to fail. Was it my imagination? Was I actually starting to wear down? No. No way. Often I contemplated whether it was timing. Would I have felt symptomatic had I *not* known? Alternatively, would I have just failed to wake up one morning?

No matter how I looked at it, I was grateful for the news. I wanted to know. Because I had every intention of winning. I wasn't giving in. I wasn't going to die—at least not conventionally.

Case Study

When I first met Danny Bishop it was in the middle of his search. I didn't think he'd come back to see me after our second meeting, not after the hard words I delivered and lack of understanding in his plight.

Danny Bishop simply wanted to defy death. Not by any medical means, but on a spiritual level. His request was outlandish and one I had never heard before. Was it possible? I didn't know. I looked upon him with blinking eyes, and wanted to blurt out to him, "Are you nuts?" More than likely, many before him contemplated his endeavor; I just do not believe any of them pursued it with the passion in which Danny did.

At first impression, Danny was a pretty boy who had it all. The control freak in him motivated his request—in my immediate opinion. But the more I grew to know Danny, the more I realized Danny wasn't motivated by selfish reason, he was motivated by the love of his wife and daughter. My instincts labeled them the victims in the eccentric quest Danny sought. How would they react? Would they succumb to his madness and fall into a trap that would only lead to pain, heartache and disappointment? Or would the realist in his wife defeat the dreamer in Danny?

The more I got to know him, I prayed that wouldn't happen. Danny's dreams and hopes were contagious. Danny ... was contagious.

As time passed, I came to the determination; his wife and daughters were not the only victims. Anyone who knew Danny was a victim, because the loss of Danny to this world would be nothing less than a crime.

Chapter Two – Danny

“I know this is going to sound stupid, and don’t be pissed, I’ve asked you this before ...” My wife Jessie approached me the instant I walked into our home from my appointment with Dr. Paul—the last and final opinion I sought. “But I really have reason to believe this one,” she said.

I chuckled as I shut the door. Her rambling, her smile, the entire sight of my beautiful wife was what I needed. “Believe what?” I asked.

“Are you having an affair?”

“What?” It was outlandish and my reaction showed it. I laughed heartedly, took off my jacket, stroked her blonde hair and kissed her on the cheek. “You’re cute, Jess. No.”

“I’m serious, Danny.”

“So am I. Where’s the baby?” I headed across the foyer, truly needing to see my daughter.

“Stop. OK?” Jessie grabbed my arm. “What’s going on? You’re keeping irregular hours at work.”

“I’ve been working late.”

“Well, you weren’t at the office today. In fact, they said you left at one.”

It dawned on me right then that I had been lying to my wife. I hadn’t told her anything. Maybe I was just hoping that it was all an error and I wouldn’t have to say anything at all about the doctor visits.

“Jessie, I’ve been doing something. I can’t tell you yet what it is, but trust me. It’s not an affair. OK?”

Jessie stared at me for a second, then nodded. I could tell by the look on her face, she believed me. She had no reason not to.

“Good.” I smiled. “Where’s the baby?”

“Wait.” She reached out and grabbed me again. “Then it has to be my other guess.”

Her *other* guess?

Jessie continued, “You’ve been ... please don’t think I’m

checking up on you, OK, I am, but you never use the money machine, Danny. Ever. Not from the family account. Denise from the bank called to see if the card was misplaced or stolen because amounts were being taken out from locations out of town.”

“Jessie, let me explain ...”

“Are you doing it again?” Jessie asked. “Are you worried that I’m gonna figure out how much you spent, so you’re throwing me off by taking out money for Christmas now?”

Christmas. I was barreled over. My immediate reaction was both physical and emotional. My God, if predictions held true it would be my last Christmas ever. The last time I would watch my five-year old daughter bask in the Santa moment. The best response I could muster up was a hard swallow of reality.

“You are.” Jessie grinned. “I knew it. I knew it. Ok.” She lifted a hand. “But please don’t go overboard again this year, please.” She darted a kiss to my cheek. “You’re still my best gift.”

My eyes closed. I wanted to grab Jessie, embrace her, and just hold her forever. However, if I reacted as such, surely Jessie would know something was wrong, and I never let her see that anything was wrong. Not intentionally.

Moistening my lips, my voice cracked. “Where’s Ni ... Nina?”

“In the living room. I’ll finish dinner.”

Nodding, frozen, I couldn’t move. The last thing I wanted to do was look up and see Jessie. I waited until I knew I could venture into the living room alone. Gaining my composure, and placing on the best ‘father’ smile, I went to find my daughter.

“Hey you,” I announced. “I’m home.”

Nina was petite like her mother, but she had my dark hair. Her big brown eyes connected with mine and she shrieked out the happiest, ‘Daddy!’ I swore I ever heard. Her call shot through me and I just wanted to drop to the floor. Then Nina flung herself at me, wrapping her tiny arms around my neck. I swept her up and cradled her with all of my being. It was at that moment, holding my daughter in my hour of darkest despair, that it wasn’t going to be over. There had to be hope. Whether a miniscule sliver, or a whisper, I didn’t care, I’d find it—even if I had to create it myself.

By no means am I poor; in fact, I pride myself on being comfortable. Pride myself on it because I worked my ass off to get to where I am today. An electrical engineer in an architectural firm I started with my two high school buddies—we have one of the most successful firms around. I believe our roots are the secret to our success. No job is too small, every person is important. None of us grew up rich. In fact, to say I am from a family of modest means would be giving my family far too much financial credit. My father adopted the name ‘Bishop’ in honor of the elderly couple that took him in when he was orphaned at sixteen. Which strangely enough occurred right after he and his parents emigrated here from China. He didn’t speak a single word of English. They took him in and helped him keep the values he had learned from his family. My father passed them on to us, his children. We all pitched in. I worked at McDonald’s starting at fifteen-years- old so I could help contribute to the household. My parents never asked me, I wanted to. They struggled and tried not to show it. I believe that is where I acquired the ability.

I bring this up, not because my work is of importance, but an incident of my childhood is. When I was sixteen, I begged and begged for contact lenses. I had to prove marked maturity, and after convincing my father, he helped me buy them. I was so happy. No longer was I the geek in wire rim glasses, I looked good. Two days after I got them, I was standing at the bathroom sink, and I opened the caps to the case of my one and only pair of contacts. Now, why I had placed them on the edge of the sink was beyond me, but when I reached for solution in the medicine cabinet, my hip bumped into the case. The case flipped over into the basin, and down the drain went my contacts. Standing there saying, ‘Oh shit. Oh, shit. What am I gonna do?’ I nearly jumped from my skin when my father knocked on the door, and in his stern, but calm voice, said, “Daniel, is everything fine?” I stuttered a ‘Yes, Father, give me a minute’. I know he probably thought I was in there masturbating or something, but at that moment, I’d rather have him think that then have him know I lost those contact lenses.

After taking a second or two to figure out what I would do, I opened the door, frantically blinking in confusion. My father was there and for some reason I muttered the lie that I had problems inserting my contacts and all was better. My father just acknowledged what I said and went in the bathroom. Easy enough. Solution found.

For an entire week, I pretended to have those contacts in. Despite the headaches, I pulled it off well. Hell, I even went as far as to give my mother a couple dollars to pick me up solution. The way I looked at it, three paychecks from McDonald's and I would replace those contacts without anyone being the wiser. No one knew I was blind as a bat. At least I thought ...

Eight days later, sitting at the dinner table, my father asked me, "Daniel, how are those contacts working out for you?"

I smiled and said, "Fine. I love them. They feel great."

"Then they must be magical contacts," he commented.

I chuckled. "What do you mean?"

He stood from his chair calmly and walked to me. "They must be magical if they have the ability to work when they are not in your eyes." Then he laid before me my contacts.

See, had I not been so nervous, upset and consumed with the fact that I thought they raced down the drain, I would have noticed them sticking to the side of the sink. When my father went into the bathroom after me, he found them. He held off for a week to teach me a lesson, or maybe just as punishment because I lied.

Either way, I learned something very valuable. No matter how much you think you can withhold the truth, the truth will always surface. Like hiding the fact that I wasn't wearing contacts, hiding the fact I wasn't well, would eventually come out, too. I knew I had to eventually tell Jessie. When? That day after seeing Dr. Paul? It had to be soon, of that, I was certain, but the problem was how could I face the love of my life with the news, when I myself was having a hard time believing it.

There is a lot that goes through one's mind when they are facing the hour of the reconciliation of their life. I laid in bed staring at my

wife until the sun came up. Sleep just didn't seem important anymore. I started calculating just how much of my life I wasted by sleeping. Averaging six hours a day, I cringed when I deducted that twenty-five percent of my life was spent sleeping. Twenty-five percent—nine years. For every month that went by, I lived only three weeks of it. Every week—I lost a little more than a day. It never seemed relevant until my time on earth was suddenly under the gun.

Dr. Stanley Paul was the third doctor I sought for an opinion. I didn't need it, perhaps in the back of my mind I was banking on the 'third times a charm' theory, and miraculously, Dr. Paul would say, "Those other guys were nuts. You aren't dying, it's a piece of fuzz on the x-ray." However, he didn't. He was rather sympathetic, but straightforward nonetheless. Like with the others, I left dejected. More so with Dr. Paul because I elevated my high hopes standards with him. Little did I know he would actually turn out to be the 'third times a charm' I hoped he would. Only differently than I anticipated.

Case Study

His fingernails looked manicured, you can say that was the first thing I noticed about Danny Bishop. Something about a well-groomed man always irritated me. Being a woman of simple means, I tend to like the rough and rugged men. Put some dirt under those nails, damn it. Show me you work hard. Danny did, just not in the physical way.

We met in a coffee shop because he didn't want anyone to see him coming to my office. Understandable, it wasn't the first time I had to meet someone in a public place. In my line of business, often people want to keep their visits secret.

Danny's wasn't a 'one stop' quick fix problem; his dilemma and request would take getting to know him and getting to know him well. That was if it could be accomplished at all. I wasn't quite sure of what to expect during our first meeting. Being successful in my field, I am booked weeks, sometimes months in advance. Danny had urgency to his life, that of course was his impending death. Nevertheless, he didn't want to tell my assistant that, instead he opted for lame lies to try to get him squeezed in to my scheduling book. My favorite was when he called and said that my Aunt Mary suggested I put him in my schedule immediately. Good try, considering ninety percent of American's have an Aunt Mary in their family. Unfortunately for Mr. Bishop, I fell into the ten percentile. After bribery failed, finally he was honest. By that point, we didn't believe him and our curiosity had piqued enough about this man to meet with him.

I'm glad I did. I can't say I was happy at first. His fingernails were in better shape than mine, and I couldn't stop looking at his hands as he cradled his Mocha latte. It was evident that Danny had adjusted to the news—at least somewhat—when he came to see me. I didn't know at the time that I was the fourth in my field he had been to. He searched adamantly and drove 200 miles to see me.

He said calmly, "I'm dying."

I'm pretty sure I reflected my disbelief, because he repeated his statement, then told me what he wanted.

After my initial indication of the preposterous nature, he asked, “Can it be done?”

I didn’t know. I honestly didn’t know. I told him, “Danny, as you know reassurance ...”

“Don’t.” He stopped me. “Don’t tell me I have to wait to be reassured. I want someone that can reassure me now. Are you that someone, Ms. Welsh?”

I can remember closing my mouth, tilting my head, and telling him, “I don’t think so.”

“A lot of people think you are. If you are, I’ll find out soon.” Then Danny smiled, laid a business card on the table before and stood. “If you are the one, someone will get in touch with you for me. When they give you a special code, or message, type it up, seal it in an envelope, and then email me to tell you that you have it. Don’t tell me the message; just let me know you got one. Thank you.”

As if I were some sort of prostitute, he laid a hundred dollar bill on the table, and pleasantly said, “Thank you for your time” before he left.

He just left.

I hadn’t a clue what the hell he was talking about. Code? Message? Plus, he paid me far too much. Danny Bishop was a mystery searching for an answer to a mystery. Regardless of what he thought, and what others said, at that point, I truly was convinced I wasn’t the answer to his mystery.

The Flip Side – Jessie’s Story

Danny Bishop is, was, always will be the love of my life. What’s so funny is, he claims I fell instantly in love with him the second we met and I just didn’t realize it right away because I was fighting it. In some demented ‘Danny’ way, he’s probably right.

If Danny were to share the story of our relationship he would, without a doubt, embellish to make it unbeatable and a love story like no other. I’ve heard him tell people we had been childhood sweethearts, that we met through personal ads, and even once he said he was a mail order groom specially discounted because he had six toes on each foot.

The truth of the matter is we’re normal. We met; we dated, fell in love, and married. Maybe not that simply.

Biologically, Danny is not responsible for creating Nina, but if he ever heard it being said he was not Nina’s father, then anger, seldom seen in Danny, would emerge. Nina was about three weeks old when Danny and I met. I was running away from life, just trying to get a fresh start somewhere. For some strange reason, I found it at 56 Olsen Street, Apartment 3.

Any credit I had was tainted, and my income was pretty much nil—though I was confident I’d get a job soon. Purposely, I sought only apartments that weren’t listed through a realtor, hoping against hope, I’d bullshit some private owner well enough he’d just let me have the apartment.

Danny owned the Olsen Street building. When I saw him, I worried. He was dressed in clothing that I knew didn’t come from a local discount store, and he smelled perfect. I recall just wanting to stand close enough to continuously sniff him.

I didn’t notice at first how handsome he was. I was too nervous to look at his face, but I did see that smile. Oh my God, how beautiful.

Though he threw me a bit, I stuck to the plan of action. Charm him, love the place, fill out an application, leave a deposit, and hurry to an important business meeting. Immediately following our

handshake, I started. I was cheerful, checked out my watch constantly as if I had a place to go. I even borrowed my mother's cell phone and had her call me twice so I could pretend to take care of urgent corporate matters.

I thought, I really thought, he bought it. I was certain. He looked at my check, and said, "Wow, most people wait until the credit check."

I chuckled. "Oh." As I flung out my hand. "I'm certain you'll find everything in order."

"Impressive application."

"Thank you." I smiled and readied for my escape.

"Now tell me the truth." Though he said it calmly, it hit me with a bombshell effect.

"Mr. Bishop, I'm sure I don't know what you mean. However ..." The liar in me became defensive. "If you don't want me, all you have to do is say so." I reached for the check.

"Uh-uh-uh." He pulled back his hand. "Not so fast. Just tell me the truth."

"Mr. Bishop."

"Don't 'Mr. Bishop'. OK, Jessica?"

"Jessie," I corrected.

"Jessie." He nodded once. "I'm a good guy. Really I am. Just be honest."

"How do you know I'm not?"

"For starters, you have written on the application the checking account is three years old. You gave me a check with the number 120. That's a new account. Second, those urgent business calls ..." Danny shook his head with a slight smile. "Your volume is up just a bit much on your phone. When you were stating, 'Get Duggan to handle it', I could hear the woman on the other line saying, 'Christ, Jessie this is ridiculous,' plus, I could hear a baby crying."

Busted. I knew it. I closed my eyes. "I'm sorry." I held out my hand. "I'll take the check back."

"Is it good?" he asked.

"Yes."

"So what gives?" he questioned further. "Just be straight with me. Are you working?"

“No,” I told him. “I hope to be soon. I have two interviews this week. Nothing corporate. Just jobs. I had to quit my last job because I had a baby. I’ve been living with my mother so I was able to save some money. Not a lot. My credit sucks. The baby’s father did that.”

“You’re divorced or getting divorced?”

“No. Never married.”

“Child support?”

“If I can find him. And ...” I exhaled. “ I won’t waste your time.”

“Are you one of these people who think certain jobs are beneath them?”

“What?” I asked a little offended. “No, why would you say that? I told you I am ...”

He held up his hand to stop me. “I’m not insulting you, I just have a friend who is looking for help in his store. Good guy. I saw him today. Thought ...” Danny turned over the application and wrote down the address and number. “I thought if you wanted to swing by there after you leave, you could. Here’s the address.” He handed me the application.

“Thanks, I will.”

“Tell him Danny sent you.”

I nodded again. “Thanks. And thanks for your time.” Taking a step to leave, I realized I hadn’t retrieved my deposit. After all, if Danny was giving me back the application surely giving me the apartment was out of the question. At least I thought. “Oh.” I snapped my finger. “My check.”

He shook his head. “Nope, I’ll need this. Deposit required, you know.” He winked.

“You’re kidding, right?”

Danny smiled. “Nope. I’m a great judge of people. Besides from being awfully cute, you strike me as a good person. You just need someone to give you a break. So call me ‘Mr. Break-giver’. That’s me.”

“Mr. Break-Giver, thank you very much.”

“You’re welcome. Call me tomorrow, let me know how the job thing went, and we’ll set up a time to sign the lease. You can pay the first month’s rent on the first. OK?”

I wanted to hug him. In fact, I took a step to do so, caught myself, and grabbed his hand. “You won’t regret this. I swear. I really swear. Thank you.”

Danny didn’t let go of my hand. When I tried to pull back, he gave a little tug. “One more thing.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Have dinner with me tonight.”

That was it. Our first meeting. Of course, I politely turned him down. Not that I didn’t want to go out with him, but I was a little fearful. After all, what if things hadn’t worked out. I was positive he’d find a way to evict me or something then I’d be back to square one.

Danny was persistent. I think more so because he knew I was interested. Eventually and obviously, I said ‘yes’. I also believe had I continued to say ‘no’, Danny would have continued to ask, because Danny goes after what he wants.

He pursues things with determination, and passion. There’s no obstacle in the world Danny would claim to be too big. I firmly believe with every ounce of my soul and being, if anyone could achieve the impossible ... it would be Danny Bishop.

Chapter Three – Danny

What were we thinking? Bid day in any contractual firm is always a hectic day. From the early morning arrival to the final exhale of submission. My firm was groundbreaking in the sense that none other was like us. We designed as architects, contracted, and constructed. We had it all under one roof. That wasn't to say that one portion of our firm wouldn't get the bid while another would. For example, if we secured the architectural bid, that wasn't a definite that we'd get the construction, as well.

Back to Bid day. There's a point here, I promise ...

Lewis National Bonds and Securities contracted us to design their new three building complex to be located a short distance from the city. This was a great project to design, but to be honest, we wanted the whole ball of wax. I wanted our construction division to handle the general contracting, too. Like every other contractor, we had to bid for the job. We had all portions going in, estimates coming from sub contractors, it was a biggie. But we were coming in high, especially on painting costs and carpentry. I knew if we didn't drop somewhere, there was no way we were going to come in lower than Massaro Corporation. So, I spent the entire previous night and morning looking up independent painters, carpenters, landscapers—you name it—calling and faxing them my personal pleas for low bids on this huge job.

I'm busy. I'm phoning, waiting, biting my nails, and generally having no time to even go to the bathroom let alone take a personal phone call.

About the three hours before bid deadline, Agnes my secretary said, "Danny, Stan Paul is on line four again. He said it is really urgent."

Stan Paul. Stan Paul. Who the hell was he? I racked my brains.

"Had he called before?" I asked.

"Three times. You haven't taken his call, yet."

"Is he a painter, carpenter, what?"

"I don't know. He's not saying."

I exhaled. “Ag, find out, because I need a painter. Thanks.” She told me to hold. I waited.

“He said he’s with the heart people,” Agnes said through the intercom. “He says you want to take his call.”

Heart. Heart. Immediately I checked out my list of subcontractors and saw it. Heart Painting. With a, ‘Yes, I faxed them’, and hoping he had a bid, and I lifted the receiver. “Tell me you have a good estimate for me,” I said.

“I certainly hope it’s good,” the gentleman replied.

“Excellent, excellent. Give me some numbers, I’ll take them down, then if you can just fax me a copy with your signature ...”

“Mr. Bishop ...”

“You did get a chance to look at the specs, right?”

“Mr. Bishop, did you pick up the right line? Are you certain you’re talking to me?”

“Of course, Stan Paul, from Heart painting, right?”

“Uh, no. It’s your heart doctor, Stanley Paul.”

“Oh, shit.” I plopped back down into the chair. “I knew your name sounded familiar.”

“I should hope so. I have been trying to reach you all day.”

“If you would have told them it was you, I would have taken your call.” I defended.

Dr. Paul chuckled. “And I would have stated I was your heart doctor had you not instructed me to keep your condition private.”

“I’m sorry, Doc. So ... what is it that you want to tell me?”

“I can’t make promises, so I’m not certain,” Dr. Paul said. “But Danny, I was wrong about there being nothing we can do. I think ... I think I may have found you some hope.”

The phone toppled out of my hand.

I told you there was something I liked about Dr. Paul. He reminded me of Jessie’s Uncle Phil. Silver haired that was tossed about like a mop, vigorously, pushing retirement age, and always looking like he tipped one too many gin and tonics. Perhaps that was why it didn’t surprise me when he used the phrase, “I was speaking

to a colleague over drinks.” It didn’t surprise me, but it did make me think, ‘Great, thanks, he’s discussing my medical condition while half sloshed.’

After picking up the phone that had slipped from my hand, on the busiest day of the year, Dr. Paul proceed to put it all on pause with one word ... hope.

Hope.

That’s all I ever wanted. Not false hope, real hope.

Dr. Paul explained how he tried not to, but he takes his patients home. He’s a puzzle and riddle man and the type of guy who’d sit up all night until he remembered that one movie name that no one else could think of. Because of that quality, he was able to come up with a Danny Bishop strategy.

Preoccupied with me—boy, do I feel important—Dr. Paul met with his long time friend for drinks like he does every other week. This friend, frighteningly enough, is a pathologist. In fact, our county corner. Dr. Paul told me how he discussed my dilemma with his buddy. How he was disturbed that a perfectly healthy man could suddenly be facing the last days of his life, and in a world of continuous medicinal miracles, I wasn’t a candidate for anything.

I’m not a doctor, nor will I even attempt to repeat how the conversation ended up where it did. The conversation went back in forth in debate, then after a few Manhattans, slightly intoxicated, these two guys found themselves online at two in the morning with the third college buddy, an oncologist in Utah.

Oncologist?

My first reaction was that I thought the density of the tumors showed they weren’t cancerous.

Correct.

Treat them as if they were.

Now, I probably said the word ‘but’ several million times, never able to finish my thoughts. Dr. Paul said they stayed up all night working out theoretical details so they could consult with a radical young brilliant oncologist in Texas first thing when he woke in the morning. This young oncologist had a reputation of being daring, trying new things, reworking old procedures, and getting in trouble with the American Medical Association.

My kind of guy.

He also was the coroner's son.

I can't tell you how grateful I felt when Dr. Paul recanted everything to me. I felt so alone in my plight, yet here's a man I barely knew and he was taking a personal interest in me. It didn't matter what solution he offered, he had given me a special gift just by showing he didn't want to give up.

Concisely, the tumors are inoperable because of their locations. They are progressive and fast. My best prognosis before my heart is crushed—eight weeks.

What they proposed was treating the tumors as if they were malignant tumors anywhere else in the body. Three weeks, twenty-one straight days of radical, pinpointed radiation treatments aimed at shrinking the tumors.

Physical side effects of the radiation were minimal, but there were other negatives to consider. Because of the location, more damage could be done to the heart. The radiation could cause pieces of the tumors to break off, clot, and result in a massive heart attack or stroke. Blood thinners, and an artery screen in my neck were preventive measures they could take.

Dr. Paul made it clear that I would have to dedicate three weeks out of my remaining time. Three weeks that may be in vain, or cut my life shorter. If I didn't want to gamble on what little time I had left, he understood.

However, on the up side of things, the best reason, there was a chance it could work. The odds were against the tumors being destroyed completely, but in the therapy worked, at the very least, the tumors would be minimal enough to give me more time to search out our next plan of hope.

I asked myself three questions to aid me in making up my mind.

Did I think it would work?

Did I want to gamble on the three weeks?

Did I want to live?

I answered a mighty 'yes' to all three and without hesitation, I told Dr. Paul, "Let's do this. Tell me what I need to do and when."

My mind was made up, no turning back. I was going to do it. However, there was a problem—Jessie. She didn't know, and I really

didn't want her to. How does one pull off three weeks worth of radiation treatments without a spouse being the wiser?

Flying in and putting up the Texan Oncologist in town was the least of my cover up worries. Though tough to hide, even the blue lines they'd paint on my body for radiation targets would be a doable dilemma. But there was no way in hell I was going to be able to explain why I was off of work and taking it easy for three weeks. No way. If I was going to do it, I was going to have to tell Jessie the truth, or figure out some ingenious manipulative way to keep it from her.

For that I consulted my best option: a sensible and not to mention, really cool higher source.

It doesn't matter who you are, whether Reverend Billy Graham or Mother Theresa, at one point in your life you will have questioned the existence of God. To never question is to believe without knowledge and to believe blindly. Personally, I think that isn't what God wants. I mean, would you want your wife or husband to love and respect you just because someone told them to? No.

Like most, I had my doubts about God, Jesus, and the whole thing. My wife called me the fair weather Christian. Similar to the fan that only likes his home team when they win, I used to only believe in God when I needed something, or it was Christmas.

That was until I met Fr. Michael Craven.

Now, he wasn't this spiritual man who floated into my life via a powerful holy message. He renewed my faith and gave me belief mostly because he has got to be the coolest person I have ever met in my entire life. The guy is great.

He moved to our parish in Sacramento because he was shipped from his own home parish due to problems. No, not the 'A' typical, 'Oh my God he's a pedophile' priestly problems, Fr. Mike was caught up in a whirlwind of nature that literally tossed his life out of control. A tornado ripped through his small town in Kansas and Fr. Mike in an attempt to save a nine-year-old boy was swept away. To me it was no less a miracle that this guy was carried twelve miles in the funnel

and survived, but the boy died and, as fucked up as it sounds, Fr. Mike was blamed.

Can you believe that?

I'm glad he came here. However, he came here alone, depressed, and on some sabbatical to get his head together. His first day here he met my wife Jessie and they've been inseparable ever since.

I think fate put them together; they have this undeniable soul connection.

Fr. Michael Craven looks as if he should be on a magazine cover posing in some Armani suit. Italian features, young, good looking, and dark hair that he keeps longer—no, he doesn't have a mullet.

He got me to go to church ... a few times, more so because he told me he was going to be delivering some radical sermon, always promising to play me his rocked out version of 'Hail Holy Queen', which I loved. The song would get me there, and I'd make faces. Fr. Mike is not only a priest in our church; he's my friend, Jesse's friend, and family.

He comes to our house almost daily. Sometimes just to visit, most of the time it's to work with Jessie on their music. Both of them play instruments and over the course of a summer, after numerous trips to the music store—courtesy of my credit card—they created a decked out mini recording studio in our game room. As repayment to me, I made him lay down his 'Hail Holy Queen'.

Once, the pastor caught wind of their musical endeavor, and excited, invited Jessie and Mike to play a few songs at the Annual Bishop's Luncheon. I snuck in to see, not only because I wanted to be the proud husband and watch my wife, but mainly because I knew the type of music they played, and I wanted to witness the faces of the holy community when Fr. Mike and Jessie ripped into a powerhouse acoustic rendition of Janis Joplin.

It was great.

Really, if you think about it, they could have gotten a few mellow songs together ahead of time, but they didn't. I suppose subconsciously, they wanted to shock the higher religious community as well.

Fr. Mike.

He was my higher source I needed to consult.

That night following my call from Dr. Paul, Mike was at my home. In his usual position, he sat on a chair in the game room looking so un-priestly. His favorite prison orange tee shirt, blue jeans, hiking boots. He played his guitar as his foot tapped to a beat that transmitted through the headphones.

What I wanted to say was preplanned in my head. Really, I was just going to tell him the truth and get his advice.

I knocked—he didn't hear—then I walked in. Fr. Mike gave on of those 'up' nods of his head as his way to say hello, and I inched my way to the mixing board. Waiting for him to finish, I looked at the little knobs and dials, wondering what would happen if I just turned one or slid a lever up. My hand reached at the same time Fr. Mike extended his arm and shut off the recorder.

"Danny, don't play with the knobs." He took off his headphones.

"Fr. Mike, don't you think I'd be the cool record producer, though?"

"No." Fr. Michael shook his head. "How did your bid go today?"

I shrugged. "I guess OK, we'll find out tomorrow if we get it."

"Did you need something? Are you OK?" Fr. Michael asked.

"Yes and yes," I answered and leaned against the table trying to look relaxed. "You know, Fr. Mike, you're looking awfully teen idol like today."

Fr. Michael chuckled. "You not gonna compare me to Bon Jovi again are you?"

"Nah, Bon Jovi stopped being a teen idol when his fans got old. So ... tell me, is this the week you may decide to, uh ... give up the priesthood and go for a more physical, personal loving relationship?"

"What?" Fr. Michael asked.

"Ready for a woman? I mean, Fr. Mike, you really think God intended ..."

"Danny." Fr. Michael shook his head and lifted the headphones. "I hate getting into this discussion with you. You know that? Why are you asking me again? You always do this when you have someone you want to fix me up with. And you always seem to have someone you want to fix me up with."

I snickered. "Yeah, I know."

"What makes it worse is you tell these women I'll go out with them." He shook his head with a smile. "Did it ever dawn on you to tell them I was a priest?"

"You never know what woman may make you change your mind."

"None, Danny."

"No, one." I lifted a finger. "I believe there is one woman who can make you leave the priesthood. In fact, in about two months I want you to hook up with her."

Fr. Michael was in the midst of placing on his headphones. "You're serious."

"She's perfect for you."

He laughed. "Danny stop. I'm not gonna *hook* up with anyone." He chuckled his words as he reached again for the headphones. "Who is this one? A client coming into town?"

"No ..." I paused. "Jessie."

"Jessie, as in your wife?"

"Yeah, maybe your wife one day. I want you to be there. Check this out." In my usual manner, I rambled excitedly. "I want you to be like a husband ... OK, maybe not a husband because that means you might have to have sex. I'm not sure I want you to have sex with my wife. Can you have sex? Not that you can't have sex. You're a young guy, you should be able to work. But do you know how? Never mind that may be too personal to ..."

"Danny, stop." Fr. Michael held up his hand. "You're insane. And where, my friend, will you be while I play husband to your wife?"

"Dead."

As if the universe pressed a 'pause' button, Fr. Michael was suspended in animation.

"Fr. Mike?"

"Usually, you're pretty funny, Danny. Not this time."

I cleared my throat breaking the awkward silence that stemmed from what seemed like a bad joke. "I'm not joking." Pulling up a chair, I sat near Fr. Michael. "Ok, here's the scoop. I went for a physical. My heartbeat was weird. They sent me to a specialist. I went

to three. All said the same thing. I have tumors on my heart and in my arteries and I am a dying man. No kidding, no shit, I have at the most two months to live.”

Pale.

I never believed that I would see a man instantly go pale, but Fr. Michael did. His face went white, he tried to stand, but he stumbled back.

“Oh, my God,” he mumbled and closed his eyes. “Oh, my God.” Immediately he began to do the priest thing and bless himself.

I grabbed his hand when he got to the left shoulder. “Mike.”

“Danny. When did you ... when ...”

“Find out?” I said. “About ten days ago. Which means my time is shorter now.”

“Jessie never said anything about this to me.”

“Jessie doesn’t know.”

Fr. Michael cocked his head and his big brown eyes met mine. “You haven’t told your wife?”

“I wasn’t going to either.”

“What!” He sprang up. “What were you going to do, just die?”

“Pretty much.”

“That’s wrong. That is so wrong.” Michael began to pace.

“It’s what I wanted. I didn’t want anyone to know, but now I have a dilemma and that’s why I’m talking to you.”

Fr. Michael stopped walking and faced me. “What is it?”

“There’s this doctor. He thinks he may have a radical way to add time to my life. Time that may afford us an opportunity to find another solution. But I can’t do the treatments for three solid weeks without Jessie knowing. So, I was wondering if maybe you could say there is a mission out of town that you have to go to. I’ll pay, and you can take ...”

“Are you nuts!” Fr. Michael blasted. “You want me to take Jessie out of town for three weeks so you can do these treatments?”

“Yeah.” I stood up. “Really, when you think about it. It’s the only thing we can do.”

“No, Danny, it isn’t.”

“Can you think of something else?”

“Um, yeah,” he said sarcastic. “Tell your wife. You tell your wife

right away or I will.”

“Oh, no. No-no.” I shook my head. “You’re a priest. What happened to the sanctity of the confessional? Confidentiality.”

“Sanctity? Confession? Confidentiality?” Fr. Michael asked with a hint of a snicker. “Danny, you’re not even a practicing Christian, they don’t apply to you.”

“Since when?”

“Since I said, that’s since when.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Life’s not fair.”

I shrugged, trying to make light. “Well, I don’t have to worry about that then. I won’t have to deal with unfairness for very long.”

“Will you stop? Can you just be serious?”

“No. Absolutely not.” I stepped to Fr. Michael. “I don’t want to be serious. The situation is serious enough without me wallowing in it every second. I refuse to let this get me down. I just have this slight problem, and I need you to tell me how to handle it.”

“I did,” Fr. Michael whispered intensely. “Tell your wife right away.”

I was scared that night. Not of death, not of Jessie, but of Fr. Michael. I really didn’t trust that he wouldn’t tell Jessie. His mood was not the same when we went upstairs for dinner. He tried to portray his usual demeanor, but Jessie knew.

Jessie kept on asking him, “Michael are you all right? Is everything OK?”

Michael nodded. But he was quiet. Plus the fact that he wasn’t gloating about some great guitar lead was clue to Jessie that something was amiss.

I feared the tattletale in him coming out. A payback for the time I told on him when he erased Jessie’s piano track. I know there’s a big difference between telling on death and telling about a missing piano track, but to me, in my state of mind, it was the same.

Despite the fact that I wanted to beat him to the punch, Fr. Michael was correct. Jessie had the right to know, and she had to be

told immediately.

I didn't want to piss around with it. I didn't want to sit her down, hold her hand, set up a dramatic scene so I could spew forth the devastating news of my forthcoming demise. Then we'd both end up in tears, dwelling on how much time I *didn't* have left.

No way, no how, that wasn't me. It wouldn't be like that.

Jessie made lasagna that night. She always made lasagna on Thursdays for Fr. Michael. Nina had her dinner early and was in bed. The pasta was served, Jessie dished out the salad, and I had just opened the wine for dinner.

"I need to know ..." I said as I walked around the table to pour Fr. Michael his drink. "Is it a priestly vow thing that you only drink wine?"

Slowly, Fr. Michael looked up at me. "It's a personal preference, Danny. You know that." He lacked luster in his voice and that concerned me. "Although tonight, perhaps something stronger is in order."

It was out of place, as if she were some ditzy blonde with a 'Clueless' complex. Jessie blurted out a bright and chipper, "Bourbon?"

"Um ... yeah," Fr. Michael stammered. "Please. Now. Thanks."

"Cool." Jessie stood up to retrieve it.

"Fuck," I wisped out.

Jessie quickly pivoted her body to me with a questioning look, "What?"

"Um ..." I stuttered. "We're out. I think."

"No." Jessie shook her head. "We have a whole bottle." She moved to the liquor cabinet. "Mrs. Davis from next door came over to borrow some."

"She borrowed booze?" I asked with surprise. "Was it bourbon specific or would any booze due to borrow?"

Jessie snickered. "You're funny, Danny. She asked for Jack Daniels specifically."

"Was she that desperate for a drink?" I asked further.

Jessie laughed. "No, it was for a recipe. Here." She lifted the bottle. "On the rocks, Michael or mixed?"

"Straight up," Michael said.

“Wow.” Jessie handed him a glass and then poured some in. “Bad day? Or bad track?”

Michael looked at me. No pun intended, my time was limited. I saw it in his eyes, he was gonna down that drink, and then after a strong gasp, he was going to spout out, ‘You can say it’s a bad day, Jess. Your husband told me he has a medical condition and is terminally ill.’

The first part of my inner prediction came true; Michael downed his drink. I could feel the tension and seriousness level raise when he asked Jessie for another.

“Something’s wrong,” Jessie said as she poured one for herself. “Michael? What is it?”

Michael was under the gun. He was cornered in a sense by Jessie’s sweet and concerned intimidation tactics. He wasn’t going to lie, the question was, how long would he hold out, or wait for me to break out with the truth. The longer Fr. Michael wallowed, waited, drank, and said nothing, the more he exuded an overwhelming air of sadness that couldn’t be covered. One thing was for certain, I wasn’t going to have the feeling of destitute and depression in that room for one second longer.

I did what I did best, projected optimism and energy. Upbeat and smiling, I shook my head and chuckled. “Jess, don’t worry about it. I know exactly what is wrong.”

“Really?” She glanced at me. “What did you do, Danny?”

“Oh,” I flung out my hand as I sat down. “Nothing much. I told him that when I got my physical they found an inoperable tumor and I’m dying in two months.” I shrugged. “That’s all. Can I have some of that Jack Daniels, please?”

Crash! Not only did the bottle fall right out of Jessie’s hand, Fr. Michael’s second drink proceeded to spray like a fountain from his mouth.

“Jess, you OK? Mike, you got the table wet.”

Fr. Michael coughed and wiped his mouth. “Danny, what the hell?”

“Yeah, Danny, asshole.” Jessie with anger, bent down for the bottle. “You’re not funny. No wonder he’s pissed. I can’t believe you lied to him like that.”

“It wasn’t a lie, Jess,” I said. “It’s the truth.”

I didn’t have to worry about saying anything more at that second; I didn’t have a choice. In Jessie’s shock, she lifted her head so fast, it banged off the edge of the dining room table, and she knocked herself out.

Chapter Four – Danny

It had reached the point that the paramedics were baffled. They didn't understand. After twenty minutes, Jessie was still out cold. Either she was comatose, faking her own 'blackout', or she had slipped into a catatonic state—which according to Michael wasn't that far fetched of a thought considering the emotional trauma I threw her into. I saw it as truth, not trauma. Michael called me ridiculous.

At the hospital, he went into the back room with Jessie. The doctors agreed, just on the outside chance I was causing her non-responsiveness. If she woke up and I was the reason she slipped into herself, then the last person that she could see when she opened her eyes was me.

So I waited.

The waiting area of the emergency room is a pretty interesting and informative place. I met an old man whose feet were swollen, and as if he were his own doctor, he told me he was just waiting for a physician to confirm that he was in congestive heart failure. Heart failure. How ironic.

When they took him to the back, I moved on to a young woman about twenty. She had this huge burn on her forearm. She was ironing her clothes for work the next day. She set down the iron when the phone rang, reached for it and ... sizzle. Her arm stuck. Nasty looking thing.

I guess you can say I engaged the longest and got the most out of my talk with a man named Leroy. He sported an obviously busted left leg, and not only did he handle it well, he seemed happy to be there. Then again, he was pretty strung out on heroine.

I liked him. He was honest. He enlightened me. In fact, in some obscure way, I looked at Leroy as an angelic messenger in a strung out body, sent from above to give me directions.

Am I embellishing, making this up? Even though I have a reputation of adding the 'Danny touch' to every story I tell, I don't need to add my touch to the Leroy encounter.

“So, how’d you break that leg?” I asked as I scooted next to him.

Slowly Leroy lifted his head and swayed it to me. “Huh?”

“Your leg?” I pointed down. “It’s broke right?”

Leroy shrugged. “I guess. I don’t know. Wait.” He reached down to the huge ice pack resting on his propped leg. He lifted the pack—his shinbone poked forward looking as if it nearly broke the skin. “Yep.” He replaced the pack. “Looks it.”

“How did you break it?”

Leroy tipped his head back and closed his eyes.

I waited.

He looked at me. “I don’t remember.”

“Ah.” I nodded. “One of those types of accidents.” What the hell that statement meant, I don’t know, but it sounded good.

Leroy agreed. “Yeah, dude, one of those. You don’t look sick. What’s wrong with you?”

“Me?” I smiled. “I’m dying.”

“No, shit,” Leroy said in a slow dragged out manner.

“No, shit. Heart tumor. I have two months to live.”

“Two months?” he asked.

“Two months.” I held up two fingers.

“Dude, if you have two months, why are you at the waiting room now?”

I laughed, a genuine laugh. “You’re funny. But, I’m not here for me. My wife’s in the back. She hit her head and knocked herself out.”

“Whoa. On purpose?”

“No. I told her about me dying, it shocked her and, well ... wham.”

Leroy nodded. “Are you really dying?”

“Unfortunately. But, I’m hoping this doctor can help at least make me live longer. He’s gonna try some things.”

“I hope it works.”

“Me, too,” I said.

“If it doesn’t, that will suck.”

I agreed. “Big time. I have a daughter I’d hate to leave.”

Then it happened, something that would be minor or perhaps even insulting to anyone else, was the golden halo and light I needed to see.

Leroy lifted a shoulder in a shrug. “But, you know, you have to look at it this way. If it doesn’t work, you’re not really gonna be leaving your kid, you’ll just be with her in a different way.”

“What do you mean?”

“Dude?” Leroy looked at me as if I were insane. “Um, ghost? Spirit? Guardian? Guide?” His eyes closed slightly in some ‘stoned’ thinking state. “Yeah ...” he wisped out. “My dad, I see him ...” Leroy chuckled. “His spirit tells me all the time ... get off the fuckin junk.”

“Your father’s ghost tells you this?” I asked with piqued interest.

“Yep.”

“How do you know it’s really his ghost and not your imagination?”

Leroy snickered and winked slowly at me. “I know.”

“Yeah ... but, was there proof?”

“A psychic told me.”

“A psychic?” I chuckled. “And you bought it?”

“Fuck yeah ...” Leroy fluttered his lips. “Told me the last words my father said to me.”

Being myself I was a bit sarcastic. “What? That he loved you?”

“No, that I was an asshole and to quit stealing from my mother.”

“Oh my God. Really?”

At that moment a nurse came over, said his last name—that I don’t recall—and she undid the breaks on his wheelchair. I was about to stop her, just to say goodbye to my emergency room buddy, when Leroy halted her.

He looked back at me and said, “Remember we don’t really leave, we just ... invade another dimension to finish things.”

I stood there in a thinking state, eyes blinking, watching them wheel Leroy away, when I saw Fr. Michael. He didn’t look happy. I panicked and rushed to him.

“Tell me,” I said, “Tell me they didn’t move Jessie to the psychiatric ward.”

“Danny, you’re an asshole.” Michael walked by me.

“What is it with that word today?” I tossed my hands up and followed him. “How’s Jessie?”

“Awake,” he answered. “And fine. No injuries. Doctor thinks it

was the shock that made her stay out of it.”

I nodded calmly. “Well, that’s good.”

Wrong thing to say.

As if possessed, Fr. Michael enraged, charged to me. “What the hell were you thinking?”

“When?” I asked confused.

“When? When?” He raised his voice.

“Fr. Mike, people are watching ...”

“I don’t care, Danny!” He moved closer. “I don’t care. What were you thinking blurting it out like that?”

“You said to tell her immediately.”

“Yeah, that night. Not over lasagna and the pouring of wine. You should have picked a better time.”

For some reason, this churned something in me and I became defensive. “Better time. To do what? Pull her aside; depress the hell out of both of us? Make us cry? Crush her like a scene from some lame three-hanky movie. That’s not me.”

“We know that’s not you, Danny. But there is a time to take things seriously.”

“I’m taking this seriously,” I said.

“Are you?” he asked. “You think it’s being serious telling you wife, ‘oh by the way I have an inoperable tumor?’”

“It was the Danny way.”

“It was the wrong way!”

“Bullshit,” I snidely replied. “It was the only way.”

“Danny, you’re a dying man.”

“No,” I said strongly with a wave of my hand. “I won’t be a dying man until the second I take my last breath. Up to then ... I’m still alive and I intend to live.”

Pause ...

Finally, a break in the argument and silence hit. Fr. Michael exhaled strongly and ran his hand through his hair.

“Fr. Mike?”

“I’m sorry, Danny.” He closed his eyes. “You’re right. You are absolutely right.”

Perking up some, I reached out to lighten the mood and I gave a pat to his cheek. “Thanks, Mike.” I grinned.

He grunted, and then whispered passionately. "This is killing me, you know that?"

"We'll get through this. We'll beat this."

Fr. Michael nodded, then his head cocked.

"What?" I asked.

"Jessie," he whispered.

Why? I don't know, but my stomach dropped to my stomach. It wasn't like I had never seen my wife before. I glanced quickly at Fr. Michael and mumbled, "This is gonna be difficult."

Jessie approached, looked at me and said; "I will not discuss this in an emergency room. Michael, take me home." Then she walked off.

I looked at Michael. "OK, maybe not."

Jessie didn't just avoid talking about the subject; she avoided me when we got home. Somehow, I thought the second we walked in the door she would bombard me with questions and such, but instead she took a shower. I needed Fr. Michael there, and I started to believe maybe she was just waiting for him to leave. Therefore, while she was in the kitchen eating—alone at her request—I knocked on the archway.

"I need to be alone a little bit more," Jessie said.

I stayed out of view. "I understand. But, Hon, are you like waiting for Fr. Michael to leave before we talk?"

Jessie didn't sound happy. She didn't sound sad, she teetered more on angry. "Don't be ridiculous, Danny," she snapped. "If I were you, I'd want him to be here. Someone has to give you last rites when I kill you."

"OK, thanks." I left it at that and sought out Fr. Michael who was in the living room.

"Well?" Fr. Michael stood when I walked in.

"She wants you to stay."

"Then I'm gonna need another drink."

"I can oblige." The bottle still was perched on top of the television and I retrieved it. "So do you think my illness is going to

make you an alcoholic?”

“If anything will, that will.” Fr. Michael lifted his glass and I refreshed his drink. Then I poured myself some. “Danny? Should you be drinking?” he asked.

“No. Probably not. Alcohol is not good for you.” I snickered. “Then again, why should I worry, right?”

Fr. Michael shook his head. “Are we going to have to listen to bad ‘I’m dying’ jokes from here on in?”

“Probably.” I lifted my glass in a ‘cheers’ manner.

“Swell.” Fr. Michael returned the well wishes, and downed his drink in two swallows.

“You know, that’s pretty impressive drinking for a man who usually sips.”

Over the rim of his empty glass, Fr. Michael peered at me.

“Mike,” I dropped my voice and inched to him. “In all seriousness.”

“Sure, Danny, you’re gonna say something serious.”

“I am.” I crouched down before him. “I know what’s going on. But I’m also a realist. No matter how this is bothering me, I refuse to let this change me.” He did that puppy dog, Rocky Belboa big brown eye look to me and I knew I was going to get through to him. “But ... I need you right now. OK? I need you to be my straight guy, my friend, my wife’s support, and the man with this enormous faith in a Greater Power that can pull in a miracle. You be Michael. The Michael you always are. I’ll be the Danny I always am.”

Jessie’s soft voice entered into the conversation. “And who, Danny, will I be?”

Immediately I stood to my feet and faced her. “The love of my life, Jess.”

It was the second time my simple words were the wrong thing to say. Like at the hospital when Michael reacted emotionally by getting angry, right there, my beautiful wife released a sob that broke my heart. Her hands shot to her face, her head lowered, knees buckled, and weakened she began to drop.

“Jess.” Leaping her way, I caught her in my arms.

Jessie, a petite woman, was consumed with the weight of her sorrow, and she slid from my arms to the floor.

“Jess.” I encompassed her with my arms from behind.

Her hand lifted, and she shook her head. She started to cry uncontrollably, “Tell me, Danny, please tell me, I’m not losing you. Please. Please, God, Please.” She huddled forward and into a ball. “I don’t want to lose you.”

It was near midnight when we finally settled things down enough to talk about it. I suppose I could have started the conversation sooner, but I didn’t want to discuss my condition with tears. Fr. Michael again used the word ‘ridiculous’ to describe me, saying how could we not discuss my condition *without* tears. Easy. We just stop talking when the crying begins.

Jessie was mad, and that was a good thing. I’d rather her have been angry. She sat with Fr. Michael while I played video games, until we could be rational.

“If I may,” Fr. Michael said before we began. “I think you’re asking a hell of a lot of Jessie, Danny. You’re wanting her to not show emotions.”

“No, I disagreed. I just don’t want her to cry.”

“She loves you. How do you expect her to act?”

“Like the strong woman she is.” I glanced at Jessie.

Jessie nodded while she played with the tattered tissue in her hand. “I can do this. Go on,” she said.

“Thanks.” I took a deep breath and waited for Fr. Michael to sit. “The condition has a name. Fibro—something or other. That’s not important. Dr. Paul has that info. Anyhow, what it means, is I have tumors ...” I stopped when Jessie started to cry. My thumb and forefinger went to my eyes. “Jess, Hon, please. Do this for me. OK? This is the exact reason I didn’t want to tell you in the first place.”

Immediately, Jessie stopped crying and looked up in shock. “You didn’t want to tell me?”

Hesitantly, I answered. “No.”

“At all?”

I didn’t answer.

Fr. Michael allowed for a few seconds of silence and then he

intervened. "Not at all, Jess."

I huffed out, "God, you're a tattletale."

"I'm honest," he defended. "Jess, he didn't want to tell you. He even wanted me to take you out of town while he got his treatments. He wanted you to know nothing."

Curiously, she looked at me. "You weren't gonna tell me anything? You mean, I would have not known anything until you died?"

I slowly nodded.

"God, Danny!" She stood. "Why did you tell me then?"

"What?" I asked.

"What?" Michael sprang to his feet.

"Why did you tell me?" Jessie asked. "You should have stayed quiet. I wouldn't be standing here in pain, feeling like my world is going to end."

I swung a point Fr. Michael's way. "Blame him. His fault. He said to tell you. I didn't want to."

"Michael," Jessie gasped. "Why would you make him tell me?"

"Hey!" he barked. "Enough! What is wrong with you two? Both of you are wrong. Wrong. You hear me? Danny, you did the right thing by telling her. You could have broken it better, but you had to tell her. And Jessie." He turned to her. "You disappoint me. You wouldn't want to know? How could you even make a selfish statement like that? What? You want Danny to carry that burden all alone? He's already carried that burden for ten days. This is ridiculous that this is even an argument. Now ..." Fr. Michael took a calming breath. "We are gonna sit down, listen to Danny. And Jessie, suck it up, don't cry, because I really don't want to wait until four o'clock in the morning to find out what the hell is going on. Danny, talk."

I stared at Fr. Michael for a second. "You know that's the Jack Daniel's that just gave you balls enough ..."

"Danny!" Fr. Michael snapped.

"Fine." I gave it a second for the feel of the room to calm, and then I started. "I have tumors. A big one on my heart and about eight on my arteries. The test show they are more than likely benign. But they are progressive. Meaning, they grow fast. Now, I asked how they could determine all this without a biopsy, and they said they could tell

by the density. Plus, they weren't on my x-ray last year. So ...” I clapped my hands together once. “I went to specialists. The first one said, pretty much, that I'm dying there is nothing they can do. I didn't accept that so I went to another. He ... well, pretty much said the same thing. Both these guys looked at the tumor on the heart, determined it was growing too fast, that I would have a heart attack in about six weeks and die.” Exhaling, I took a second to look at the surprised faces of Michael and Jessie. “Wow, we're doing good.”

Michael spoke up in question, “So a heart transplant is out?”

I nodded. “The tumors are in my arteries. Also, surgery is out. Well, not really, but the odds are I'd die on the table, so I'd really rather not go that route. The third doctor refused to give into the same prognosis. He and another doctor are going to treat me as a cancer patient. Except the radiation therapy they want to try will be radical, pinpointed, and not often used. I'm flying in a specialist Monday to begin three weeks worth of treatments. I could do it early, but I need tomorrow and Friday to organize things at work. I'm not gonna work while I get the treatments”

Jessie asked: “What are they hoping to accomplish with the treatments?”

“Shrink the tumors. Go after my bone marrow that is generating the cells that are forming the tumors. Give me more time to come up with another course of action. The effects of radiation treatments will be minimal and tolerable. I'm up for it. There is a chance I could have a heart attack, or something, but I'm positive that I won't. I have a good feeling.”

Jessie continued her asking? “You said they are treating you like a cancer patient. What about Chemo?”

“Ah.” I lifted a finger. “Dr. Paul said something about that. He said if the radiation doesn't work, he wants to slam me with Chemo. I said ... I said no.”

Both Michael and Jessie wheezed out a ‘what?’

“No,” I repeated. “If the radiation doesn't work, that gives me a little over a month left to live. I want to live as fully as I can. The nearer I get to my deadline, the weaker I am going to get. I don't want to spend the remaining days sick in bed, losing my hair, unable to move, and too weak to enjoy what time I have left. I also don't

want my daughter's last memories of me to be looking like that. It's quality of life versus quantity, and hey, I'm Danny, I choose quality every time."

Slowly Jessie stood up, "So that's it? That's all we have. Radiation treatments and if that doesn't work ..."

"Then it doesn't work," I said. "We face the inevitable and brace for it."

Jessie closed her eyes.

"Danny," Fr. Michael whispered and then as he rose, he laid a hand on my shoulder. "You're doing so well with this."

I chuckled. "No, I'm not. I'm a mess. But, I'm not going to be for long. I'll hold out hope until the very last second. And I promise both of you this ...even if this thing takes my life ...it won't beat me. I will not let it beat me. One way or another, trust me ..." I paused. "I am not going to die."

In all faith – Fr. Michael

If we are fortunate we will get a chance to encounter a person that truly demonstrates what it means to live.

Danny Bishop is the epitome of life.

All of us have an inner life force, our soul, and it shines from within us. I swear Danny's exuded from every square inch of his body. He is the type of man every man wants to be. How horribly ironic, the one thing that made him amazing was the one thing that threatened to take him from this world.

His heart.

From the second Danny told me he was dying, and for some time after, an ache formed in my gut and it wouldn't go away. I vowed to be what he needed me to be: strong, faithful, and just plain ... there.

I was. How could I not be? We're talking about Danny.

The last thing I want to do is make every one of my entries in this incredible 'Danny' story, eulogies type passages. I'll try my damndest not to.

No one turns Danny down, not because of the good that he does, but moreso because Danny wouldn't let you. He'd pester you to the point that you said 'yes' just to shut him up.

Danny and Jessie entered my life via heavenly influence. I'll swear to the day I die that they were no less than gifts from God. They still are. I was at my lowest point, and yet, another irony, it was Danny who showed me how to live.

Sometimes by getting me into trouble.

He'd say: 'Mike, can you wear the priest get up, I have a religious client I need to impress.' Or 'Mike, a friend needs a personal reference,' 'Mike, a big wig has an ugly daughter, can you go out with her', and always, 'I have this great idea for a practical joke'

It was always something, and I went along with it most of the time.

What Danny didn't drag me into, I'll tell you.

Usually, I'd promise to do it if he promised he wouldn't show up

at church to harass me—which he did. After my emotional sabbatical, I performed my first mass unexpectedly. A fellow priest was ill and I was called to duty. Jessie was at the first mass, and must have gone home to tell Danny I was back. Well, Danny showed up for twelve o'clock service. He sat right up front. Instead of giving me a proud look of support, possibly a wink as I proceeded up the aisle, Danny called out with a closed raised fist, 'You go, Fr. Mike.' Not to mention he whispered to everyone around him, "That's my friend up there. That's my buddy Mike, does he rule or what?"

Silent protocol in church was not Danny's forte. But ideas ... now, Danny was flourishing with those. Most of which were eccentric and out there, including his brainstorm in conjunction with his medical condition.

Danny never really comes out and says what he wants, he just starts a plan of action, and if he needs you to be a part of it, he pulls you in. He embarked on a quest when he found out he was dying. A quest, that to everyone but Danny, was impossible. I never really had a chance to give my opinion, objections, or concerns. I can be clueless at times, and trusting. Before I knew it, before I had a chance to say, 'hey, hold up, wait', I was knee deep in his crazy scheme. By the time I realized I was a part, I didn't want to get out. I wanted to be for Danny what he needed. I stayed optimistic, supported and helped him. Not because I felt bad for Danny, but because I wanted him to succeed in his endeavor. I had all the faith in the world that he wouldn't fail, because in all the years that I had known Danny, I've never known him to fail.

Chapter Five – Danny

It scared me. I lost my breath. I was rushing into my office—nothing out of the ordinary—and I went completely out of breath for a few seconds. I don't know if it was the lack of air or the shock of it that made me stumble back and sit down.

"Dan, you OK?" Bill, one of my partners, asked.

"Yeah," I answered airy and nodded. "Yeah, fine."

"You look pale," Bill said.

"Don't tell me that." I sprang up and flew to my private bathroom. The fear of seeing a ghostly white face hit me until I looked into the mirror. I looked fine. "Asshole," I commented as I walked from the bathroom. "I'm not pale. How can I be pale anyhow, I'm Chinese."

Bill laughed. "Got ya'."

Grunting, because I myself would have done the same thing, I smiled and sat back down.

"Seriously though, Dan, you OK?"

"Oh, yeah. Lost my breath for a second. But I'm good."

I hoped. Was it a fluke or were things starting to crumble for me? Was I actually feeling the effects of the tumor already?

No. I answered 'no' to that and put it out of my mind. I refused to be one of those people who felt perfectly fine and healthy until they found out they were ill, then 'bam' they started feeling like death was creeping up fast and ferociously.

Not me.

Adjusting in my chair, I prepared to go over the next month's projectiles with Bill. It all had to be done in order for me to leave a clean plate before my three-week absence.

"All right." I breathed out. "Where were we?"

"Sea World."

"Yeah, that's it." I opened a folder. "I have notices out to subs for that job, but I need to get reminders out. Now, I know we don't have the experience in doing a water project, but if we can find experts in that division, we should be able to pull it off faultlessly, so

I definitely want to bid that job.”

“I agree.”

“As far as electrical engineer consultant, I know ...” I smiled snidely. “I’m the man, but Stevens can handle my job without a worry. So ...”

“Dan?”

“Yeah?” I looked up.

“Why exactly are you taking a three week leave? Is everything OK?”

“Um, yeah, sure, it’s fine,” I said nonchalantly flipping through my papers, “I have a deadly tumor and I have to get radiation treatments to try to shrink it or I’ll be dead in a few weeks. Back to Sea World. I want ...”

“Dan,” Bill snapped my name.

I glanced up. “Yes?”

“This is a ‘Danny’ joke right?”

“Why does everyone ask me that?”

“Because we all know you. You’re joking right?”

“No, Bill, I’m not. Back to Sea world. As I was ...”

“Whoa.”

By the time I looked up Bill was standing. He looked as if he were trying to balance on some sort of surfboard the way his arms went out and his body swayed. “Bill? Are you all right?”

“No.” He shook his head. “No, I’m not all right. You just You just come in here, talk about Sea world, mention subs, and slip in there that you’re dying? How did you expect me to be right now?”

“In my defense, you asked. I answered. Can we get back to this?”

“Danny, come on,” Bill said with passion as he sat back down. “Don’t do this. Tell me this is a joke. Please tell me you’re ...” He paused and looked at me. At that moment, our eyes connected, and without verbal conveyance, he got the message. “Oh, my God. I’m sorry. I am so sorry.”

“Thanks. Anyhow. Bill?” I snapped my finger. “Can we work? I really want to get this all done, so I can have a clear conscious when I leave.”

“I can’t.” He held up his hand. “Not right now. Give me. Give

me a few minutes to let this sink in.”

“Um ...” I looked at my watch. “Sure.”

Panicked, Bill nodded. It was a weird feeling that remained in my office after he left. I thought he would handle it better. More than likely, he’d slip from the office into his own, close the door, smoke some weed, and return a but more calm. At least I hoped. There was far too much to do.

Preparing to get back to my papers, to sort out exactly what I wanted to discuss, I glanced up. The blinds to my office window were open and I watched Bill speaking to people. Undoubtedly he was telling them about my condition, because they all tried inconspicuously to show they weren’t looking at me. They were. So I waved. Then I smiled. I saw Fr. Michael step off the elevator.

Just the man I had been waiting to see.

Fr. Michael looked tired when he knocked on my open office door. He didn’t have that ‘zing’, he usually had. The essence that made all the women turn their heads when he walked by. Of course, all the women were too concerned with looking at me, the soon-to-be dying man.

“Fr. Mike.” I stood slightly then sat back down. “Come in. Tell me you don’t look this tired because of me.”

“Actually, Danny, yes.” Fr. Michael sighed. “Could I have coffee? Do you have any?”

“Sure ...” Reaching up, I pressed the intercom button on my phone. “Ag?”

No answered.

Beep. “Ag,” I called again.

“Maybe she’s not there,” Fr. Michael said.

Lifting up, I gained a view of outside my office window. Sure enough, there was Agnes, sitting at her desk. She stared at the phone. Walking around to the window, I knocked.

Agnes jolted and spun around with a shocked look.

After lifting a finger to tell her to hold on, I went back to my desk and pressed the intercom again. “Ag?” I called.

“Yes ... Danny?” She lacked enthusiasm.

“Can I get some coffee for myself and Fr. Michael?”

“Oh, my God,” she whispered.

“Not God, Fr. Mike. We both take it black. Thanks.” I leaned back in my chair. “Give it a minute.”

“Danny?” Fr. Michael questioned. “In the time it took for you to get her attention, walk to the window, knock, come back, and call her, you could have gotten the coffee.”

“Yeah, but I pay her well.”

Had I not heard the clanking cups, I would not have known Agnes entered with our coffee. She carried two cups and saucers and they rattled from her shaking hands. Fr. Michael stood up and took the cups from her.

Her eyes transfixed on me. Like I didn’t know what she was thinking.

“Are you all right?” Fr. Michael asked her.

Agnes nodded, then burst into tears as she spun and ran from my office.

“She knows,” I said.

Fr. Michael placed down the cups. “Knows?”

“Knows. In fact, everyone knows now.”

“Danny, tell me you didn’t just blurt it out to her.”

“No. No, not at all.”

“Good.” He sat back down.

“I blurted it to Bill, he told her.”

Fr. Michael whined. “Ah, Danny,”

“It’s fine.” I lifted my hand. “I’m glad you came by.”

“Yeah, you made it sound urgent.”

“It is. Then again, isn’t everything right now for me.”

Immediately, Fr. Michael’s hands went to his face.

“I have an idea. Something I am gonna start to work on,” I explained. “I want you with me”

“Absolutely, anything you need.”

“Excellent.” I smiled. “It’s important. And so is this ...” I opened my desk drawer, pulled out a small envelope, and gave it to him. “Part one of my plan ...”

“Plan?” Fr. Michael interrupted me.

“Plan.”

“A Danny plan,” he stated hesitantly.

“Yes, now ... I need you to hold this. It’s sealed. Don’t open it

until I tell you to. OK?”

“What’s it pertaining to?” he asked.

“What I asked you to help me with.”

“And that is?”

I smiled. “My destiny.”

Fr. Michael’s head shook slowly left to right. “I don’t understand.”

“You will.”

“You’re being vague.”

“I know.”

“Danny ...”

“Fr. Mike, you said you’d help.”

“But, what ...”

“You have to help,” I told him. “Not that you’d be actually doing anything. But you’d be my support. You’d be in this with me. Part if it. My accomplice.”

“Oh, brother.”

“You will help, right? You won’t change your mind.”

Fr. Michael breathed out. “Yes, I’ll help.”

“Great. I knew it.”

“Can you at least tell me what’s in this envelope?” he asked.

“You can say it’s my assurance.”

After looking at the envelope and placing it in his pocket, Fr. Michael stared at me. “Why do I get the feeling I’m gonna be asking what I got myself into?”

At that ... I grinned.

Case Study

I had my first real romantic date in over four years. It was great. I was still lingering in cloud nine status and was somewhere between thinking of Ray and slipping into a slumber state when I was rudely awakened.

I had an early morning call, and at two twenty-three in the morning, a man named Phil woke me up with a message for Danny Bishop.

You have got to be kidding me? I asked him, couldn't it wait until the morning or at least afternoon? Phil said it couldn't. Not that it was urgent, but timing was everything. I have to say I was shocked that Phil came to me. I had my doubts when Danny said someone would pay me a visit, give me a message that would confirm I was the one who could help him. A part of me wondered if Phil was really the message, for the answer to that I had to wait to hook up with Danny.

I made time for Phil; after all, he did go to the trouble to help Danny. We spoke for a while. Simply, Phil told me he had a knack for finding the messengers and *his* belief in me would be Danny's belief. After meeting Phil, it all started to make sense on how I fit in. How I was the right person to help Danny with his quest.

I followed Phil's instructions more so than Danny's. The message I placed in the envelope was actually a list of three things. I wrote them down, sealed the envelope, and then after Phil left, I went to my computer.

As instructed by Danny—but as told by Phil—my email only read: *Got a message. Meet me at noon at the coffee shop again. Call only if you can't be there. Otherwise, see you then. BW.*

That was it. At four-fifty-fifty in the morning, I hit 'send'. That was it. From there on, it was in Danny's hands.

Chapter Six – Danny

The oncologist from Texas arrived on a Tuesday and later that afternoon, I was to meet him for a consultation. It would be two days, at most, until I started my radiation treatments. I was ready. I had situated everything at work, and had even begun my quest.

It was five days after meeting Ms. Welsh—the same day the whiz kid oncologist came to town—that I opened the email from her. It was vague and left me wondering if she really had a message for me. To find out, two things had to occur. One, I had to meet with her. Two, I had to get Fr. Michael to come.

Fr. Michael was easy. I just phoned him, told him ominously, ‘It’s time’. Then after instructing him to grab that sealed envelope I gave him, I informed him I’d be by to pick him up in a half an hour.

I wasn’t wasting time. I of all people didn’t have time to waste. If Ms. Welsh was the one who could help, I wanted to start right away.

Jessie was multi-talented. Putting on her shoe, she tried to pursue me at the same time. “Danny, wait. I’m not even ready to go. I thought we were meeting Dr. Kramer at two.”

“We are.” I held the keys in my hand. “So you still have some time.” I turned to the door.

“But you’re leaving.”

“I am.”

“Now?”

“Yes. I’m getting Michael. We have somewhere to go.”

“Why?”

“Jess.” I stepped to her. “Why are you asking me all these questions?”

“Um, perhaps because we’re supposed to meet Dr. Kramer and ...”

“Jess,” I laid my hands on her shoulders. “We’re meeting him at the Hilton in a couple hours. We have time. Besides, I flew him in from Texas. Where’s he gonna go? I’ll be back.”

“Is this important, Danny, this thing you and Michael are

doing?”

“Very,” I answered. “And I’ll tell you all about it when I get back.”

Jessie nodded. “I don’t mean to harp, I just want to make sure everything goes fine with this consultation, and you’re running about the town with ...”

“Jess?” I cut her off. “I have to go.”

“Oh, sure, go on. I’m sorry.” She darted me a kiss to my cheek. “Good luck.”

“Thanks.” I grabbed the door and opened it.

“Where are you going?”

“Starbucks.” Only imagining the look I left on her face, I just walked out.

“Starbucks?” Fr. Michael asked. “You made it sound important. I grabbed the secret envelope, Danny. Starbucks?”

“Yeah.” I smiled and opened the door. “Oh, look no line.”

“Danny ...”

“What do you want?”

Fr. Michael grunted as we approached the counter. “Coffee.”

“Coffee?” I questioned. “Plain coffee?”

“Yes.”

Chuckling, I shook my head. “No one gets plain coffee at Starbucks.”

“Why are we here, Danny?”

I pivoted my body and peered around the coffee shop. There to the left, on the other side of the fireplace was Ms. Welsh. “See that woman over there.”

“What about her?”

“We’re meeting her.” I walked to the register.

After ordering our drinks, getting them in impressively good time, and keeping Fr. Michael in suspense, we approached the table. Ms. Welsh stood up.

“Danny.” She extended her hand. “Thanks for meeting me.”

“Actually, you’re meeting me. Thank you.” I winked and noticed her stare on Fr. Michael. “Ms. Welsh, meet Fr. Michael Craven.”

Something was up, being the perceptive guy that I am, I noticed the hesitation as she held out her hand in greeting to the honorable padre.

“Father ... *Michael* Craven?” she asked.

“Yes,” he answered.

“How odd,” she whispered.

I laughed. “Many women have that exact same thought. Can’t believe he’s a priest.”

“Well.” She tilted her head. “He is attractive.

“Yes, he is. He plays a mean guitar, and an awesome version of Hail Holy Queen,” I said. “But he’s taken. He’s gonna marry my wife when I die, but they aren’t having sex.”

Fr. Michael shot a look my way.

“Really?” she asked.

Fr. Michael exhaled in annoyance. “Danny has to learn tact. He has a health condition that threatens his life.”

“No, no-no.” She shook her head. “I know about the dying thing. I’m asking about you marrying his wife and not having sex.”

Fr. Michael grunted. “Danny tells tales.”

Seriously, I looked at Michael. “So you *are* having sex with my wife.”

“Danny,” he snapped.

“Sorry.” I lifted my hand. “Trying to lighten the mood. Why don’t we get started.” I motioned my hand to the table.

We all sat.

“First,” Ms. Welsh spoke, “I need to get this out of the way.” She laid a hundred dollar bill on the counter.

“What’s this?” I asked.

Fr. Michael questioned as well, “Why is she paying you, Danny?”

“I’m not,” she said. “I’m giving him back the money he paid me.”

“You paid her a hundred dollars?” Fr. Michael asked. “Danny, why are you paying her a hundred dollars?”

I answered, “Sexual favors. There are things Jess won’t do.”

Fr. Michael looked mortified. “What?”

Ms. Welsh rolled her eyes. "You don't believe that, do you? Do I look like a prostitute to you, Fr. Craven?"

I watched Fr. Michael stare at her. "Easy with that one, Mike."

Confused, he sputtered a shake of his head. "Danny, why are we here?"

After a silent pause at the table, Ms. Welsh handed me the envelope. "What you asked for."

I didn't take it. "You do it. You read it, please." To be honest, I didn't want to look; instead, I opted for staring at my latte.

"All right." She began to open the envelope. "I have to say, Danny, I was shocked. I really was. Now, I'm excited. He showed up at two in the morning."

Slowly, I lifted my eyes. "Who?"

"Phil, of course."

I clenched my fist. "Yes, how is he?"

"Entertaining," she said. "He told me what to write." She slipped the paper from the envelope. "Three things. That's it. In this order. First he said, 'Yes, but knowing you, you'll need more'" She glanced up "Then he rambled something else, but told me not to write it down. The next thing he told me to write was the name ..." she paused. "Fr. Michael Craven."

"No way," I said shocked.

She nodded.

"Guy." I gave a friendly smack to Fr. Michael. "You're special."

"No, I'm confused."

"Not for long," I said. "Continue, Ms. Welsh."

"Then he ..." She shrugged. "Said 775."

I laughed. "This is great. Really great. Fr. Mike, pull out the envelope. Ms. Welsh, you don't realize how much you are the one that can help you."

"I started to realize that last night," she said.

Fr. Michael laid the envelope on the table. "Now what?" he asked.

"Open it," I instructed, "and read what I wrote."

Fr. Michael did. He read: "The correct person to help me will come with the following information. A message from Phil. And answers to the following questions. One, is this message my

assurance?”

I interjected, “And he answered ...”

Ms. Welsh took over, “Yes. But you’ll need more. Besides that, Danny, you have to have preparation if this will work.”

Fr. Michael read on, “Second question, who can be my link here.”

I said: “Fr. Michael, which shocks me, but is cool.”

Shaking his head, Fr. Michael read the last one, “What’s a good lottery number?”

Ms. Welsh chuckled. “I got a good laugh out of that one, Danny. Funny. And I plan on playing it.”

“Me, too,” I said, “I can’t tell you how excited I am. Mike, isn’t this great? Phil went to see her and answered all my questions and he gave them to her.”

“Did you tell Phil?” Fr. Michael asked.

“Yes,” I nodded. “Isn’t this amazing. Not to mention assuring to an extent of breaching the impossible. You truly lived up to your reputation, Ms. Welsh.”

She lowered her head in a blush. “Thank you.”

“Wait.” Fr. Michael held up his hand. “Danny, what’s the big deal? You told this Phil to give her the answers to your questions. How is this amazing, let alone breaching the impossible?”

Calmly, I answered, “Because Phil’s been dead for fourteen years.”

‘Earth to Fr. Michael’ wasn’t working, so we just had to wait until the shock wore off. Michael had a hard time believing what we were talking about. For the most part, he sat there with his mouth agape, listening. I explained that I had known Phil since I was ten. He worked with my father, and hung out often at our house. Phil was one of those men who swore he was Native American Indian even though clearly—with a name like Phillip O’Connell, along with his red hair—he was Irish.

Phil got back to his Indian roots sometime while I was in high school. He smoked a lot of weed and passed the peace pipe constantly around the neighborhood. He insisted he saw spirits and

swore up and down that one day after he had died, 'He'd be back'. I firmly believed with every ounce of my being, that if anyone could do it, Phil could. He said there were things that each individual had to do to assure their return of spirit. It varied for each person, for that, they needed a teacher. Phil's preparation came through dreams—though after seeing the woman who prepared him for death, I'd have to say dreams and sex.

Phil prepared for death. It is customary to do so if you plan on coming back to guide. He also needed to find an earthly focus or ... link, for when he did come back. Once the teacher and link were found, Phil began his death journey. Funny thing was, Phil looked healthy, acted healthy, and swore he wasn't sick. Yet, he spiritually packed a suitcase, and following his lessons, he passed on. Monica Little Foot helped with his death phase, she merely said, Phil knew his time was coming.

Phil did everything correctly. Or so we thought. Mrs. Orbison, the sexy next-door neighbor was his link. When I came up with my idea, I went to see her. However, she said she has yet to hear from him. That was when my doubts set in until I saw all the crucifixes and religious articles. Then I realized perhaps she was just a tad too closed minded. Phil probably beat his head against the wall just to say hello, and Mrs. Orbison claimed in was the Holy Spirit or something. I needed someone with an open mind. To think of what type of person that would be just took common sense.

If I wanted to breach the spiritual world, I had to find a spiritual person. Or rather ... A psychic. When I decided on my quest and what I needed to assure me that my quest could be accomplished, the psychic hunt began. I asked several people for names of paranormal experts. You can say I put out calling cards everywhere. I figured, if they were real, and they could help me, then surely Phil would reach them.

I went to four local psychics. Then two from Colorado. But my highest faith was in a television psychic who had a high rated show and claimed to speak to spirits. For twenty-five hundred dollars, I was able to speak to him for twenty minutes. Though I paid them all differently, one thing was the same. I told them all the same thing. I stated I was dying and what I was searching for. Then I told them if

they were the ones that could help me, they'd receive a message from someone and I informed them on how to handle the message if received.

Two of them told me I wasn't going to die. In which I replied, 'Cool, thanks, let's hope you're right. You are psychic.' One, a "Mr. Charles", called me three times with different messages—none of which made sense. The television guy ... I still haven't heard from him.

One person. One person called me back and she was absolutely on the nose. Ms. Welsh. Since she proved her abilities beyond a reasonable doubt to me, in that coffee shop as I explained my steps on my plight, I hoped she would be the one to assist me in furthering my endeavor.

Fr. Michael looked baffled as I explained all that I had done—including putting notes on Phil's grave in hopes he'd find them. I am going to assume my notes, and candle light mini séances worked. Of course, Ms. Welsh insisted, that Phil was just gifted and the message would have been received whether I did all that or not. Then she called me cute. Hey, that's my line to Jess.

Back to the padre—

"I'm not understanding this link thing, Danny," Fr. Michael said.

Ms. Welsh was rambling in her own world. "This is fascinating. Absolutely, I'll help you, Danny. I'm not sure what I'll do, but I'll speak to my guides, I'm positive they'll assist."

"Excellent," I said excitedly. "What are guides?"

"What do you wanna be?" she asked.

"Oh yeah?" I gave a quirky smile.

"Hold it," Michael interrupted. "Can someone please explain the link thing? I'm really out here in the dark and you two are going on and on."

"Sorry," Ms. Welsh apologized. "Link. Connection. Best receiver. Make sense?"

Fr. Michael shook his head. "No, not at all. Receiver? Connection? For what?"

Ms. Welsh answered, "Danny, of course."

Fr. Michael tossed his hands up. "Of course," he said sarcastically. "I am so lost. Why does he need that? Is he not going to

be able to talk eventually?”

Ms. Welsh snickered. “More than likely. He’s dying. You’ll have to work, too. How I don’t know, we’ll figure it out. But he needs you. You are a vital part of all this. You are a key in this quest.”

Lifting a finger, Fr. Michael brought silence and gained our attention. “The term ‘quest’ has been used several times. But one thing wasn’t. What the quest is.” He looked at me. “Danny, what exactly are you trying to do?”

“I didn’t say?” I asked.

“No,” he snapped with a bit of edge.

“I’m sorry.” I nodded. “Basically, I am securing the fact that I’ll be back.”

“Be back where?” Fr. Michael questioned further.

“On earth after I die. I want to come back,” I explained. “When I die I want to be secure in the fact that I won’t ever be far from those I love.” I smiled. “Yes, Fr. Mike, I want to be a ghost.”

Chapter Seven – Danny

Jessie freaked. She did so right as we got out of the car and walked toward the Hilton to meet Dr. Kramer.

“Danny? You want to do what?” she blasted with a spin of her body.

“Jess, can we ... can we wait until after this consultation to discuss this?”

“Oh ... oh no.” She pulled out no stops being dramatic at that moment. She waved her hand in a fanning ‘no’ manner and I thought I caught glimpse of her stomping her foot. I’m not sure. “We will discuss this now.”

“Right here?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered adamantly.

I spun around to Fr. Michael who trailed behind. “Was this part of your priestly vows? Believe in God, have faith, practice celibacy, and be the world’s biggest tattle tale?”

“Once again, Danny.” Michael lifted his hands innocently. “I thought you told your wife.”

Jessie grabbed my shoulders and with a mighty little woman strength, turned me to face her. “Don’t blame this on Michael.”

“He told!” I barked.

“But you should have,” Jessie said.

“This is stupid. Why are we even arguing about this?” I walked right by her and through the doors of the hotel.

We made it about as far as the lobby, and Jessie started again.

“Let me get this straight,” she interrogated.

Fine. I stopped. Though I was walking impressively fast, I stopped midway toward the restaurant where we were to meet the doctor. “Get what straight?”

“You want to haunt our house?” she asked.

I scoffed. “Do be silly. I’m guiding you.”

“Guiding me,” she stated as a reiteration.

“You and Nina.”

“Me and Nina,” she repeated.

I tugged on my ear. "I hear an echo." Before anything further could be said, I yelped out when Jessie smacked my hand away from my ear. "Jess, a guide. I'll be there with you. Watching you two. I'll always be right over your shoulder."

"For how long?"

I smiled. "Always."

"Always? Like ten years later you'll still be there?"

"Yes," I took hold of her arm. "Now can we go meet the doctor?"

"Danny, in all seriousness, if you do this, how am I supposed to move on with my life if you are there?"

I froze. "Oh my God, Jess, I'm not even dead and you're thinking of that."

"Oh, no," she waved that finger at me again. "Don't go there. You are the one who has me promised out to Fr. Michael."

I shrieked and looked at Fr. Michael. "You told her that, too?"

"Again," Fr. Michael said, "something you should have ..."

"Yeah-yeah," I cut him off and glanced to Jessie. "I can be there if you're married to Mike, not like you guys are having sex." I snickered.

"Is this part of your plan, too?" Jessie asked.

"Yeah, of course ..." I paused. "Wait. He told you that I want you two married but he left out the fact that it would be a sexless marriage?" In my revelation I grunted an 'uh' and turned to Fr. Michael again. "You're gonna sleep with her."

Jessie folded her arms. "Don't be ridiculous Danny. I wouldn't make Fr. Michael give up the priesthood. I'll just ..." She tossed her nose in the air and snubbed. "Find someone new. There."

"You would." I followed her to the restaurant. "You know what Jess, why don't I help you?"

"I would like that." Jessie smiled. "We can find the right person for me to be with so it doesn't irritate you quite as much while you ... hover." She raised her eyebrows.

"Children," Fr. Michael interjected. "Can we save this? Please?" He gave a motion of his head to the hostess.

I sighed out. "Yes, we can." After a quick look at Jessie, I faced the hostess. "We are meeting a Doctor Kramer, do you know if he's

here yet?”

“Yes, he is.” The hostess smiled. “He’s right there.” With a half turn of her body, she pointed. “Waiting.”

In the midst of my saying ‘thanks’, I heard Jessie say, ‘Oh he’s cute.’ I looked at her; “You want me to add him to the list of prospects, Jess?” I reached into my pocket. “I have a notepad, I can keep track.”

Through clenched jaws, Fr. Michael whispered in a scold, “Knock it off, now.”

With a ‘fine’, I entered the dining room with Jessie and Fr. Michael.

Dr. Kramer was young; probably, he looked younger than he was. A little guy, blonde hair, kind of a nerd image. He stood and extended his hand. “Danny Bishop, I assume. I’m Dr. Kramer.”

“Pleasure.” I returned the greeting. “Dr. Kramer, this is Fr. Michael Craven and my wife, Jessie.” They all exchanged handshakes and we began to sit down. “Are you married, Doctor?”

He gained a quirky smile. “No why?”

I shook my head. “No reason thanks.” Then just to be visually sarcastic in a way only Jessie and Michael would understand, I pulled out my notebook and wrote his name in it. “So ...” I replaced my notebook. “Have you ordered?”

“No,” he replied. “I was waiting until you got here and thought we’d eat after our talk”

“Seems redundant don’t you think? I could lose my appetite since we’re discussing my illness.”

Dr. Kramer smiled genuinely. He captured my interest and trust right there when he made eye contact. “Lose your appetite. Mr. Bishop, I certainly hope not.”

I ordered the mussels right after Dr. Kramer got through the, ‘I’m not gonna lie to you, I’m not gonna downplay but ...’ part of the conversation. I knew, I just knew it was going to be an optimistic consultation.

“You’re not quite a one in ten million case,” Dr. Kramer

explained. "Perhaps one and three million. I want you to see something. Could the three of you scoot closer, thanks." After we did, he laid before us a computer generated sketch of a human torso. "The red dots are your tumors, Danny. Seven of them all together."

My finger trailed the picture. "Are they size comparison?"

"As best as they can be," he answered.

"The one on the heart looks a lot bigger," I said.

"It is. Most of them are one millimeter. The heart tumor is about four inches in circumference. Big. This is roughly, where you were a week ago. I don't believe they are much bigger if at all. Now ..." He removed the sketch and laid another before us. "Take a look."

The same human body had two tumors on the heart, and multitudes running up the artery.

Jessie sighed out. "Is this where Danny will be in time?"

Dr. Kramer shook his head. "This isn't Danny, at all. His name is Malcolm. Forty-one year old male from Colorado. Good health to an extent. He smoked. This tumor outline was done of his body at the time he came to see me. This is where he was." Dr. Kramer pulled out another sketch. "This ..." He laid it down. "Is where he is today ... two years later."

It was like a scene from a movie—like someone said something and all of the sudden all activity and sound ceased for a moment in time. Now I am sure that the people didn't all stop talking and eating. I pretty positive that the music didn't halt either. But to me, for that single instance, everything froze; at least at the table.

Jessie was the first to break the silence. Airy speaking, she said in shock, "Two years? He's still alive, right now."

Dr. Kramer nodded. "Don't get me wrong. We're still battling it. But he was given the same prognosis as Danny, six to eight weeks to live. We've hit two years."

"How?" I asked. "What treatment did you use?"

"Radiation," he answered. "Originally I thought—like with you—that if the radiation didn't work, we'd hit his bone marrow and go into Chemo Therapy. He chose not to, however, he's at the point now that the tumors are small. I've convinced him to try the chemo so we can finish this off once and for all. He's finally agreed."

I was impressed. "So my prognosis is good?"

“Genetic make up plays quite a factor in responses to different therapy,” he explained. “Patients react differently, tumors react different to the same treatment. So there are no guarantees that you’ll have the same results. Now that being said ...” He paused. “Yes, Mr. Bishop, I believe your prognosis is very good.”

I sat back with an exhale. “Oh my God.” I closed my eyes briefly in gratefulness, then grasped on to the wrists of Fr. Michael and Jessie. “Looks like I might be able to put away that bed sheet. Because ...” I smiled and spoke in shock. “I may not have to be Casper after all.”

In all Faith – Fr. Michael

Being a man of the cloth, I live and breathe the rule of faith. Faith in a higher power, miracles, and God's plan. Somehow, someway they're all supposed to intertwine in an obscure way. Believe that one would relate to the other.

Faith in a higher power – belief that there is a force that controls more than we see.

Miracles – The occurrence of something that has no explanation.

God's Plan – Things happen for a reason; His reason, and only He knows why.

In the case of my own situation a few years back it does fit. The higher power controlled the tornado, the miracle was my survival, God's plan was for me to leave Kansas and find Jessie and Danny.

For the life of me though, I could not apply all three to Danny. I could—literally. I mean the Faith in the Higher Power brought Dr. Kramer who would give Danny the Miracle, and God's plan was some lesson he had to learn through this all. But what lesson? To love life? Danny loved life more than anyone. Is it God's plan to put so much pressure and heartache on two people who have done nothing but good? I can believe that God has a reason, but I can not accept it. I heard what Dr. Kramer said to Danny. I saw the visual proof of the Colorado man's progress, but I didn't feel it.

I remained silent during the rest of the lunch, claiming Jessie and Danny's childish bickering gave me a migraine. I hoped that the 'Ghost' conversation would end, but it didn't. Even though Dr. Kramer delivered optimistic news, Danny still wanted to work on his back up plan.

I wondered about that. Was it really a back up plan, or did Danny sense the same thing I did at that table? It made sense, it sounded good, and workable ... for the man in Colorado. For instance, take French fries and Ketchup. They go together. However, Mashed Potatoes and Ketchup ... the premise is there, but it just doesn't feel right. Colorado man was French Fries, Danny, the mashed potatoes, the cure ... ketchup.

What worked for one wasn't necessarily going to work with the other.

I hated the fact that I couldn't get past the gloomy thoughts. However, it was more than pessimism. After Danny informed me of his condition, I truly felt—despite what I prayed for—that Danny was leaving us. Every time I looked at Danny after he told us, I could feel it, see it, and worst ... smell it. Those who are passing, carry with them a certain scent. A scent that grows stronger the closer one draws to death. Danny had it. The 'smell' was something I detected on people since childhood. I thought everyone had this ability, I learned as life went on; it was some sort of gift I was given. Maybe that was why I was chosen to be the earthly connection. Whatever the reason, I would take the responsibility of being Danny's link with honorable seriousness. I would do whatever I could to make sure that if Danny *did* leave this earth, if Danny *could* reach out, and then he would, without a doubt, have no problem reaching me.

Case Study

Danny called me right after his consultation with the doctor and asked me for my psychic opinion on if the treatments would work or not. My response to him was that there were three reasons why I wouldn't answer that question.

First, I hate those types of question and never answer them for anyone.

Second, to get a good reliable 'vibe' I had to have been sitting there when the doctor gave his prognosis and treatment regiment.

And third – I liked Danny way too much to even want to try to answer that question.

He informed me he was on a nice leisurely vacation while under going treatments and would like to start 'prepping' just in case. I saw no reason not to start working with him and the priest right away, but the hold up wasn't me, it was my lack of knowledge on what to do. I never prepared anyone for death and revival, nor did I prepare an earthly link. I told Danny I would consult my own guides on what would need to be done.

One of the initial things I did was give thought as to why Fr. Michael Craven was chosen to be the link. I didn't pick up any psychic ability in him, but then again, for some obscure reason I put walls up around myself when it comes to religious people. Perhaps it's a retrograde fear dating back to the Salem Witch trials, I don't know. But for the sure the priest had to have some psychic sense to him, there was no way, I was certain, that I could just 'teach' him to pick up spirit messages. My positive feeling was that I just had to work with the priest on using the gifts already instilled in him, gifts probably buried beneath years of bureaucratic closed minded Vatican brainwashing.

That night I sought guidance on what needed to be done. During meditation, I was taken to a plane of existence in which I had never been. Through my guides, I learned what steps needed to be accomplished in the preparation of death. *How* to embark the steps was to be determined by my instincts as an earthly guide and teacher.

There are three steps. Acceptance, resolution, and readiness. I didn't have to get Danny to just accept his impending death, I had to get him to accept one hundred percent that there was an 'other' side, and another stage of life he would move on to. I had some ideas on how to do that. Readiness, I believe would come as the end neared. I didn't worry about that stage. The stage that concerned me was resolution. Danny was so open and verbal, I was doubtful that he would even think he had anything to resolve. The problem is, everyone has issues. However, in order for Danny to freely have control of his post life destiny he didn't just have to resolve one or two things, he had to resolve everything—big and small—in his life. That worried me. Was it humanly possibly? I had my doubts, that even someone as open and honest as Danny could do that. But we would try. We'd give it our best ... and try.

Chapter Eight – Danny

Jessie was biting her nails while staring out the windshield with a freakish thinking look upon her face. I drove and was on the phone.

“What do you mean all resolutions big and small?” I asked.

“Exactly what it sounds like,” Ms. Welsh explained. “Once you have completed step one you’ll freely move on to step two. However, we can’t move on to step three without completing the resolution phase. And you must resolve things in your life.”

“Pretty much they are.”

“No, Danny, they can’t be. There are things that may need to be resolved and they may go back years.”

“We’re talking everything?”

“Everything.”

“So does this mean if there was some cheerleader in high school I always wanted to have sex with I should go and find her? Ow, my wife just hit me.”

“No,” Ms. Welsh chuckled. “I think they’re a bit more different. Here’s what you do. Imagine everyone you knew and loved disappeared tomorrow. Sit back, think, what would you regret not doing, not saying. Serious stuff. Make a list.”

I exhaled. “I’ll work on it.”

“Good then we can review it together if you’d like.”

“Yeah, I would. But right now, I have to concentrate on something else. My radiation treatments. I just arrived at the hospital.”

“Good luck.”

“Thanks. Any good vibes?”

“You know it,” she said.

“Thanks again.” I disconnected the call and even though I was still nowhere near parking, I stopped the car, and looked at the hospital. I had been there many times, but at that moment, it looked different. It looked scary.

Aside from the temporary three week, blue grid tattoo on my

back, I was given a list of possible and probable side effects from the radiation therapy. The target grid—not a problem, I can handle that. Slight burning to my skin, possible discoloration, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, headaches—all of those would be a piece of cake. But when the tech told me that I could lose some of my hair, or it could thin ... I freaked.

No. Not my hair.

You think I'm joking?

I'm not ...

"Danny, calm down," Jessie told me. "It's only hair."

"Only hair!" I shrieked. "No, no, that's blasphemy, Jess, only hair." I shook my head. "Dr. Kramer mentioned nothing about losing my hair. Chemo, yes, this no. I'm not so sure."

The tech, she looked at me as if I were some irritating little alien. "Do you hear yourself?" she asked. "Besides, I told you it's a chance. A slim chance, we have to tell you that."

"How slim?" I asked.

"Slim."

"One out of how many?"

She stuttered for an answer, "I don't know. Ten."

"Ten!" I gasped. "That's too high."

"You won't go completely bald," she said. "That would be extremely rare. It'll thin ..."

"Thin." I nodded.

"Or fall out in splotches."

I screamed. "Uh!"

"Mr. Bishop," she scolded.

"Danny!" Jessie jumped on the 'yell at Danny' bandwagon. "Stop this now, you're being ridiculous."

"No, I'm not. You would think with all the technology they have today, they would think of some way to stop people from losing their hair. It's stupid."

The tech exhaled. "It's a slim chance. You shouldn't worry about it. We can make you an ice bonnet."

"A what?" I asked.

"Ice bonnet. With Chemo patients, it's said to slow the hair loss

or even stop it if you wear an ice bonnet. Encapsulate your head in ice packs,” she explained.

“Do they make those?”

“Yeah, they are hard to find. In my opinion, if you’re creative you can do one specifically for your head. But for now, I can make shift you one if you’d like.”

After a moment of thought, I nodded. “Yes, yes, I would thank you. I’ll tip you.”

She chuckled. “Not necessary. I’ll be back.”

I watched her leave, grateful for her insight, honesty, and help.

“Danny,” Jessie grabbed my arm. “You worry too much.”

“You know how I am about my hair. Plus, it’s easy for you to say, it’s not your hair that’s at stake.”

“What if it is?” She raised her eyebrows.

“How?”

“I’ll make you a deal.” She dropped her voice to a whisper, “You lose your hair ... I’ll lose mine.”

“You’re joking, right?”

“No, I’m not. If yours starts to fall out, shave it. I’ll shave my head, too.”

“I won’t let you.”

“You won’t stop me. Deal?” She held out her hand.

I saw it. The seriousness on her face. Oh my God, my wife was offering to do this for me. Her beautiful long blonde hair, she would sacrifice for me? Just the offer alone, the intention, made my heart sink. I swear to God, right there, I fell in love with her all over again, and I just didn’t take her hand, I grabbed her, and pulled her into me.

I suppose I looked pretty silly. No, wait, I’m certain I looked silly. Why else would Jessie run down to the gift shop to buy a camera as if I were new born baby. I guess in my vanity indulgent moment, I disserved to be photographed while in some desperate fashion absurdity. By the time I had left the first treatment, I had some ideas on how to make my own ice bonnet.

Nevertheless, for the time being, the tech did a good job. She

took a few of those five-inch icepacks, sewed them together with medical tape, then secured the bundle on my head with a turban style towel, that she secured as well with tape.

The hair protector was heavy, however, I was lying on my stomach. The day at the hospital afforded me thinking time. From the wait, to the treatment, to finish. I don't recall how much time, it really wasn't as long as it seemed.

Ever notice when you're in intense deep conversation with someone—for example kicking back in the patio—you start at one topic and end up somewhere totally off the original topical spectrum.

One time, in the span of an hour, Fr. Michael and I went from discussing Fr. Paul at his church, to midget wrestling. Odd as it seems, I recall how it got there. We spoke of Fr. Paul and how he was from Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh made us speak about football for a while, and then Fr. Michael mentioned he played football in high school. I, of course, recanted my first high school girl friend named Sally. Fr. Mike laughed about his cousin Sally who was married to a man who used to direct porn stars. That made me reveal to Fr. Mike that Jessie was looking at porn sites on the web. The web brought us to Spiderman. Web get it? That brought us to the Tin Man in the wizard of Oz, and the Tin Man being a metal conversation brought us to an old wrestler named the Iron Sheik. That brought us to the final topic of midget wrestling.

In my rambling manner, I guess I'm getting back to my point on how we go from one subject to the next. That is similar to what I experienced on the table getting treatments.

The last thing I wanted to do was think about why I was there, or if it would work. I started feeling the cold effects of my headgear, and started to wonder when I first got obsessed with my hair.

The answer ... early.

For some obscure reason Asian's have this stupid racist based reputation of getting head lice. Why that is, I don't know. I never had head lice. Then again, because of that racist reputation, my mother shaved my head all through grade school.

She would say, "Daniel, you look different enough. We do not want the other children to avoid you."

Gee, thanks, Mom. If I look different enough, shaving my head

is gonna make me fit right in.

By the time sixth grade rolled around I was begging my mother to let me keep my hair. My father insisted I looked good with a crew cut. I looked honorable and responsible.

I was eleven for crying out loud. I didn't want to look honorable and responsible, I just wanted to have hair. Reluctantly they agreed, I vowed to take care of my hair.

I washed it every single day. Then I started using special oils and conditioners to make my hair manageable. I thrived on the compliments girls would give me. I was always up to date on the styles, though I never gave into the mullet phase. My hair was the one thing in my youth that I was confident of.

My hair thoughts bought me back to the origin of my neuroticism ... my mother.

Then thoughts of my mother returned me to why I was laying on that table getting gamma rays shot into my body.

I hadn't told my parents and decided I wasn't going to do so at all. My brother Sam wouldn't handle it. In fact, I can see him wanting to spend every single day with me, trying to make up for all the time he didn't spend with me growing up. My mother would cry; that's the last thing I would want to see. My father, I would have to say my father is the main reason I made the decision to keep my condition silent from them.

Johsen is the name of my father. A shorter man by average standards, but to me he is larger than life. His carpenter trade supported the family, while the great 'Chinese healer' others claimed him to be, gave us great tradition. It was pretty unique growing up, watching people come to him for advice and aid. The healing was something he felt a calling to as a young man. He practiced it faithfully—never would he charge or attempt to practice it professionally.

To say I admire my father is an understatement. I respect, love, and adore him. Being the youngest, I was fortunate. Sam, as the big brother was supposed to set a standard, thank God he wasn't great in school, it made me shine. Now, Sam was the sports guy, but my father wasn't into sports. While Sam was out playing ball, I was in my room inventing something or fixing something. A lot of times I fixed

things that weren't even broke, just so I could learn how they worked, and how to make the repair should the need arise. Then again, I never did fix the alarm clock—for some reason I assumed that would be a piece of cake.

My father spent a lot of time instructing me on life. He did so in his wise manner, using life examples to show me my errors. 'Daniel, a great man uses his mind as well as his hands, so please think before you touch anything again.' Or 'Daniel, it is unfortunate in this world that men get more respect than women. So cut your hair before people think you are a woman and treat you badly.'

He spent a lot of time pretending he didn't like me, but I was lucky enough to see right through that. My father was proud of me. Often he'd call me over while he was speaking with friends, so I could show that interesting gadget I concocted. My father once told me that if I was born a hundred years earlier, people would have been asking, "Albert Einstein who?"

Not just of me, but of our entire small family, my father boasted his pride. He held his head high, shoulders back, and never flinched in the face of trouble. He taught us to be strong, never quit, but always know when you have taken something as far as you can, and to accept the outcome. His strength kept our family tight.

For me to tell my father I was dying would be like me asking him to take responsibility for me. Even if I insisted he didn't have to, he would. Being retired, he would be there, I know it. He would make my focus on healing, while he focused on my family. Hoping for the best, but preparing for the worst. He would be that wall that no one could ever knock down. If I fell, he'd pick me up during the entire battle for life I was embarking. My father would make sure I stood on two feet, head high, with dignity and pride for as long as I could. He would do so with support and love.

Doesn't sound bad, does it? Sounds like something anyone would want to have during the time of need.

No. Not me.

I have never disappointed my father in my entire life. I never wanted to. My death would be his disappointment in more ways than one. Telling him would make me face my father as he consumed the greatest pain on earth ... the loss of a child. Watching my father's

heartbreak is something I refuse to witness. Yes, my passing would be devastating to him, but it would be a one-time devastation. Informing him ahead of time is making him worry, and hurt for months. I don't want that. I wasn't going to do that to him.

Not him.

I started to get depressed as I lay on that table. Not over what was happening to my body, rather, what if the cure failed, what if my back up to return failed, I realized how much I was going to miss everyone in my life.

I'll tell ya', that tech came in at just the right moment. Snapping me out of my thinking state, she was a bright face, and another focus.

"All done, Mr. Bishop," she said. "How are you feeling?"

"Good." It was kind of funny. I went to lift my head and had problems.

She chuckled and helped remove the ten-ton ice bonnet. "There."

Like a cat, I gave a twitch to my head. "I *will* invent a better bonnet."

"I'm sure you will." She aided me in sitting. "You can get dressed. And we'll do this the same time, some place, tomorrow."

Oh, yeah, she was flirting. Even with that ice bonnet on my head, I was betting I still looked good. "Same time, same place." I winked. "Sounds like an affair."

She laughed.

"How's my hair?" I asked.

"Excellent."

"Cool."

Again, she smiled, this time innocently.

The twenty-something tech was a perky and an extremely nice individual. Then again, a woman in her job had better be that way. Could you imagine, being diagnosed with cancer, being depressed, and walking into the radiation only to be face to face with constantly premenstrual radiation therapy tech. Wouldn't make for a pleasant experience. Knowing that I shouldn't have, I needed that 'up' after my low thoughts, so took advantage of her sweetness.

"Yeah," I said as I reached for my shirt. "We'll ... uh!"

She shrieked and jumped back. "What!"

“Oh my God.”

“What?”

With a look of panic, I glanced down to my own body. “My chest hair. I lost all my chest hair.”

“Oh, my God.” She stumbled back. “That’s never happened.”

At myself, then behind me, I peered about. “Where did it go? Did it disintegrate?”

“I ... I ... don’t know.”

At first I thought, ‘Oh man, my joke is ruined, she didn’t get it. I never had chest hair. I’m Asian. Asian men, rarely, if ever, even get noticeable body hair.’

She looked in sheer confusion. “Let me get my supervisor.” Hurriedly, she backed up and went into the other room.

I placed on my shirt with a smile, started to feel guilty, and figured when she came to get me in the waiting room, I would tell her of my practical joke, and apologize.

There was no need to wait for her. Leaving the treatment area, I saw her turning into the waiting room. I lifted my hand, and prepared to call out, but she disappeared too quickly. On my way to the waiting area myself, I shrugged, and figured I’d meet up with her there.

No sooner did I turn the bend, I saw her talking to Jessie.

“Slight problem, nothing major,” she said to Jessie—obviously not seeing me behind her.

“What’s wrong?”

“We had a bit of an incident. I’m waiting on my supervisor. It’s never happened, but ... your husband ... during treatment, lost all his chest.”

Jessie literary paused, her mouth agape in disbelief. “My husband ... my husband is an asshole.” Her eyes raised and she saw me. “Danny? That was mean. Did you tell her you lost all your chest hair?”

“Jess, in my defense ...”

“In your defense, my ass,” she snapped and looked at the tech. “He never had chest hair. In fact, he barely grows enough body hair ...” she sarcastically peered at me. “To cover his balls.”

“Ouch,” I said and moved to them. “Tech girl, I’m sorry.”

“That wasn’t right.” She glanced at me as if so hurt. “I believed you. I felt sorry. I was confused. I ... I made you that ice bonnet.” Without saying another word, she turned in a huff and left.

“Way to go, Asshole.” Jessie snatched up her purse. “First day. Nice impression. You still have to come back twenty more times.” She spun and moved across the waiting room.

“Jess, come on.” I couldn’t help it, I was snickering. “She’s a medical professional. Basic human anatomical knowledge alone would let her know Asian lack body hair.”

“Still.” She looked at me. “She was naïve. I hope they super zap you tomorrow.”

“Oh, mature, very mature, let’s wish to radiate our husband, shall we?” I followed her. “I was having fun. I wanted to smile.”

“If you needed to smile, Danny,” Jessie paused in opening the door. “You should have just looked in the mirror. Your hair is ... fucked up. So there.”

Before I could get out ‘what’, Jessie was gone. I flew to the picture that hung on the wall. Even though foggy, my reflection clearly showed my wiry hair. I peeped out a shriek and looked down a man who sat near by. “Does my hair look that bad?”

“I bet it’s seen better days,” he said.

Grunting, I looked at my reflection once more. “Tech girl told me it looked excellent. Just for that ...” I patted it down. “She deserved my joke. Don’t you think?”

He shrugged. “I ... uh, don’t ...”

“Yeah, she did. Tells me I have excellent hair when I don’t. Now that’s ... that’s mean. Wait until tomorrow.” I huffed and walked out.

The Flip Side – Jessie's Story

Yes, I fought with Danny. In hindsight, I believe it was a defense mechanism. If I allowed him to annoy me as usual and as if nothing was wrong, then perhaps, in my mind nothing was wrong.

Danny looked healthy, acted healthy, his personality hadn't changed, nothing was different. When I was awake, or not thinking, it didn't hit me. The second I closed my eyes, paused, or even slipped into a daydream state, all I saw was Dr. Kramer and the results of Danny's test.

It couldn't be right; something had to be wrong. My husband was not dying. Not my Danny.

As selfish as it is to say, it angered me as much as hurt me. For me, for my daughter, Danny's leaving us was not an option. Not in my book.

I recall that first night after he had told me of his illness. We spoke for a long time, and then he closed his eyes and went to sleep ... or so he pretended. I know my husband; he doesn't fall asleep that easily. I suspected he was done talking, and let him go. I looked into his eyes that first night and didn't see it. I didn't see any fear. I wondered if he hid it well, or just wasn't afraid. How could that be? I was scared to death.

To ask Danny what he was thinking or even feeling, he'd retort with some typical Danny response. 'Oh, I'm fine, Jess, how are you?'

"No, Danny. How are you, really?"

"Really?" Dramatic Danny pause. "I'm fine, Jess, how are you?"

Frustration.

Danny.

I would love to know what he was thinking. What went through his mind when the first doctor told him, or what did he think when he made love to me that night I learned of his illness. Did he wonder how many more times we'd get the chance to make love? Did he think, 'My God, I'm gonna miss this. Please don't take it away'. I did. The entire time he held me in his arms and loved me, I couldn't enjoy that moment, I was too consumed by the thought of what I was going to do if I lost him.

Danny sugarcoated everything. I truly believe he did so because a part of him thought if he just made it seem better, eventually, the positive thinking and energy would make it better. He was one step ahead of the game as well. When any other person would have been thinking about the radiation therapy that lay ahead, Danny was beyond that. He was thinking about after the treatments, if it didn't work, and making time for Ms. Welsh.

Danny's mind was always going. Always. It was never one thought. A million ideas zoomed through his brain, and for as fast as he moved, he talked just as fast. I can remember thinking, how he could concentrate on something when he had so much on his mind.

A cure was his miracle, to beat his illness, either through living or through his plan in death, was Danny's goal. If there was one thing strong about Danny, it was he achieved his goal. I didn't doubt him at all in his endeavors, because if Danny wanted it, he got it. His persistence got him things in life. He didn't know the meaning of the word quit. Also, in my opinion, more times than he would admit, my husband used humor—good and bad jokes—to front for any pain or nervousness he was experiencing.

Get scared. Tell a bad joke.

Get nervous. Laugh.

Dread something. Make fun of it.

That was Danny.

For example. After his first treatment, we stopped at the coffee shop for a coffee. I wanted to get something in his stomach, keep his strength up. I worried he'd start feeling badly, despite the fact that Danny insisted he felt like a million dollars.

The entire time in the car from the hospital to the coffee shop Danny complained about his hair and how no one was honest with him about how messy it was. Then he griped about the tech and questioned whether she had a good sense of humor and if he should attempt to 'kid' her again. No conversation about how the treatment went, how he felt as they drew the lines on him, what it would bring, or if he was nervous. Nothing serious.

Then we pull up. There wasn't a close parking spot at all. Danny spotted the handicapped space and commented how we really could park there since he was dying.

We go inside, get our coffees, and on the way out, Danny saw this elderly woman. She was about seventy and she was wearing a flowery plastic rain hood. One of those hideous things that have a little visor and tie under the chin. She's walking, minding her own business, and instead of going to the car, Danny walked up to this woman. The moment I saw her, I knew where Danny's mind was. It was on that hood.

Instead of telling her he liked her rain bonnet and asking where she got it, Danny asked if he could buy it from her. Of course she looked at him as if he were nuts, but Danny was insistent. He offered twenty dollars. She turned him down. At the point when a normal person would realize they could just go buy one for a few bucks, Danny kicked into gear. It was like a competition, a game, he had to win, and like everything else in life he wanted, Danny wasn't giving up.

"No," she said.

"Thirty," Danny offered.

"No, it's my hood. Go buy one."

"I want that one."

"Danny," I tried to get him to stop. "Let's go."

"Jess, please. This is now a mission."

"Leave the woman alone," I pleaded.

"No ... Ah, Jess, she's getting away. Damn it." He hurried to the little woman who tried to make an escape. "Hey."

He caught her, too. Danny kept raising his bid in five dollar increments, until finally—at fifty bucks—the old woman took the money, whipped off the bonnet, handed it to Danny, and actually said, 'Fuck it, take the goddamn bonnet and leave me alone!'

Flower bonnet clenched like a prize in his hand, Danny turned to me with a wide grin. "Yes! I can use this for my ice helmet."

I was stunned. "You ... you just paid her fifty dollars."

"Yes." He nodded. "But check this out. I can conform this to a really good ice bonnet."

"You paid her fifty dollars, Danny."

"But I can use this."

"That's besides the point. It's a three dollar bonnet."

"No, Jess, the point is I got it. I wanted this one."

“You could have gotten one anywhere.”

“Not one like this.” Danny held it up. “This is sturdy plastic.” He showed it to me. “Bet me she had this for about forty years. What if I would have given up, bought one, and the plastic wasn’t this thick. Huh? Think about that? Plus, check out the flower pattern ...”

“You’re insane.” I moved his hand from my view and started to walk. “Fifty dollars.”

“Jess, please it’s only money.” He followed me. “Plus, she’s old, she probably doesn’t have any and ... she can use it more than me. Not to mention she’ll have more time to spend it because she’ll live longer than me.”

I shrieked and pivoted to him. “Will you stop that?”

“Stop what?”

“Making dying jokes.”

“Jess, lighten up. I’m just ...”

“I know what you’re trying to do, Danny.”

“Jess, dying is a part of life. Well ...” He tilted his head. “A pretty big part of my life.”

“Danny!” I yelled.

“What?”

“Please stop. I swear to God, if I hear one more bad dying reference, I’m punching you.”

Danny snickered. “Jess, please. You’re killing me.”

“That’s it.” I revved back my fist.

“Jess.” Danny stepped back laughing. “I didn’t mean that one.”

I halted my punch.

Danny grinned. “Yes, I did.”

Screaming, I lunged for him. Danny took off running, and I followed in pursuit, yelling, “Daniel Jefferson Bishop. You’re not gonna have to worry about your heart killing you. You’ll be a dead man at my hands.”

Turning in his run, Danny held up his hands. He looked as if he had a hard time controlling his laughter. “OK I quit. I quit. Fine. You win. You’re right.”

I huffed as I neared him. “I’m serious, Danny.”

“I know you are. I deserve it. So go.” He lifted his chin. “If it will make you feel better. Hit me. Just hit me.”

I did.

In all Faith – Fr. Michael

I was called to give last rites to Mr. Simmons, a ninety-seven year old man in our parish who had been ill for several days. Placing on my jacket, getting ready to go, my receptionist informed me I had an urgent call from Danny Bishop. Urgent call from Danny? My heart raced, I knew he had been at his treatment. I paused in my leaving to take that call. His emergency—

“Fr. Mike, Jessie beat me up.”

What!

I asked him to repeat it incase I heard incorrectly, and when he said it again, irritated, I snapped, “Danny, I’m not in the mood for a joke.”

“I’m not joking. She did. In the parking lot of Starbucks. It took two employees, the manager, and some newspaper guy to pull her off of me. It was insane.”

“You’re serious.” I leaned against the desk. “Danny? What did you do?”

“Hey, I resent that,” he said. “She beat me up.”

“You’re right. I apologize. Are you hurt?”

Danny snickered. “Fr. Mike, please, it was Jessie.”

“If you aren’t hurt, why is this labeled urgent?”

“Uh ... spousal abuse maybe.”

“Danny.”

“Sorry,” Danny said. “Actually, Jess isn’t herself, and I was wondering if I can get you over here to do some priestly emergency marriage counseling, or something. Anything. Can you?”

“Sure. Not a problem.”

“I’ll see you in a few then ...”

“Danny, wait.” I called before Danny hung up. If I didn’t, then knowing Danny, I could see myself in the middle of last rites, a hysterical family surrounding me, all while my pager is going off insidiously because Danny needed to know where I was.

“You’re not coming?” Danny asked.

“No, I’ll be there. I have an emergency. Mr. Simmons is about to

pass away and I have to go administer last rites.”

“And you’re going there first?”

Irate, I responded, “Yes, Danny, he’s dying. I have to give last rites.”

“Yeah, but, Fr. Mike, come on. Think about it. He’s like a hundred, I would think he would have asked for last rites years ago just as a preparation.”

“I cannot believe you just said that.”

Silence.

“Danny?” I called out.

“I’m here. So, you’ll be by when? How long does this last rites thing take.”

“Danny ...”

“I’m, just needing to know if I should leave Jessie alone, or get her drunk.”

I breathed out, hoping he could pick up my annoyance over the airwaves. He didn’t. “Don’t get her drunk. Leave her be. And for heaven’s sake Danny, don’t irritate her.”

“Who me? Irritate?”

“See you in an hour or so.”

“Thanks, Fr. Mike. Give my best to Mr. Simmons.”

I grunted and hung up without a goodbye. After shaking my head to my receptionist, I left. For some reason, I knew meeting with Jessie and Danny was going to be far more stressing and depressing than administering a sacrament to Mr. Simmons.

And ... I was right.

Hinted in route by Danny’s calls. Calls mind you, not singular. The fight went from two employees, a manager, and newspaperman, to massive amounts of onlookers screaming, ‘hit him, hit him’ while the cops showed up with Billy clubs and mace.

Still, giving Danny the benefit of doubt, believing maybe he was originally downplaying, I walked into Jessie and Danny’s home ready for a war.

My calming tactics alerted Jessie, but by the time I got to the phrase, ‘let’s get Danny, I’ll be here in case of trouble,’ she knew something was up. Jessie’s being clueless made me ask myself, ‘what

was Danny up to?’

“He did what!” she blasted. “Danny!” she screamed across the foyer.

“Jess, calm down,” I told her.

“He said I beat him up?” she asked.

“Yes.” I nodded.

“He’s so goddamn fully of shit. Danny!”

I cringed.

Bubbly, as if nothing was wrong and without a care in the world, Danny walked in. “Hey, Fr. Mike. What’s up Jess?”

“Danny, did you tell Michael I beat you up in Starbucks parking lot?” Jessie asked him.

“Well, Jess, you did.” Danny shrugged.

Jessie screamed. “I did not!”

“Jess, Hon, please, you did, too. You beat me up.”

“Danny, hon., pleases. I did not, I slapped you in the arm.”

“Same difference.”

Jessie grunted.

I wanted to run.

“It is not,” she argued.

“Ok, maybe not,” Danny defended. “But it still hurt. Inside and out, Jess. Inside and ...”

I saw it. Through the corner of my eye, I watched Jessie’s hand raise, pull back, and power forward toward Danny again. As fast as I could I reached out, and grabbed hold of her wrists a split second before she nailed him.

In usual fashion, Danny made an attempt at humor. “Way to go Fr. Mike,” he said. “You’re my hero.”

Somehow, it wasn’t funny. I found myself ignoring him and concentrating only on Jessie—my fingers gripping to her wrist, eyes locked to hers. In spite of Danny’s history of exaggeration, I had to wonder if maybe there was a little underlying truth and concern within Danny’s call to me for help.

“Danny, please ...” I tried to keep my composure. “Wait in the hall.”

“OK, but if you need me, Fr. Mike,” he said.

“I’ll call you.”

“She can be violent ...”

“Danny,” I spoke through clenched jaws. “Go. I shut the door to the master bedroom and turned to face Jessie who sat on the bed. No sooner did I open my mouth to speak, there was a knock on the door.

Jessie grunted.

I lifted a hand to halt her. “Yes, Danny?” I called out.

“You’re in the bedroom, I don’t have to worry about you two having sex, do I?”

I bodily had to stop Jessie from charging the door. Calmly, I spoke out to Danny. “Go away. Please.”

“Fine.”

I waited, released Jessie, then quietly crept to the door and flung it open. “Danny!”

“Sorry.” He backed up.

“Go.” I pointed.

After watching to make sure he went down the stairs, I closed the door. “Now ...” I breathed out.

“This is stupid.” Jessie folded her arms. “Why are we in this bedroom discussing Danny?”

“You hit your husband, Jessie.”

Jessie laughed. “Not you, too. You’re gonna make a huge deal out of a simple slap.”

“It would have been two if I didn’t stop.”

“Thank you for being the hero, Michael, and saving Danny from two slaps.”

“Jessie, listen to yourself. It’s not the force of the hit, or how many, it’s the reason behind the hits.”

Again, Jessie laughed loudly, this time in ridicule. “Reason? Michael, he’s driving me nuts. Insane. He’s making all these jokes. Bad ones. I can’t take it.”

“Jessie, Danny’s always done that. You’ve never struck him before.”

“True.” She huffed. “But he was never dying before.” Jessie stopped, released a breath and with saddened eyes peered up to me.

“He’s dying Michael, he’s sick and I can’t handle it.”

“Yes, you can, Jess.”

“No.” She shook her head. “No, I can’t. I can’t.”

“I’m not understanding why Danny being Danny is suddenly driving you nuts.”

“Because I don’t want him to be Danny. If he’s Danny and he laughs, smiles, jokes and stays upbeat, then this whole ordeal is going to be so much more painful, because I’ll have to watch Danny, my Danny, go through this.”

“So if he acts differently, in your eyes, it won’t be so sad?”

“Yes,” she said with certainty.

“Oh, Jessie.” I stepped to her. “Danny being Danny is what makes us love him so much. How sad it would be if he lost the one quality that will keep him alive. Here and now, and even if he does leave us. Don’t make him change to conform to what fits sadness better.”

“But Michael, I can’t joke about it. I can’t.”

“No one’s telling you to joke about it,” I said. “That’s Danny’s job. He does it best. Besides, it’s Danny’s call on how he wants to handle it. He’s the one facing death. Not you.”

Jessie sadly chuckled. “Oh, Michael you got that all wrong. More than you know, if Danny is facing death, then I’m facing the end of my life as well.”

Somewhere between our talk, and three glasses of wine, I got Jessie back to her normal level of thinking. How long that would last I didn’t know. Jessie was not a violent person, nor did she get easily annoyed with Danny. In fact, Danny’s way of being is one of the main reasons she fell in love with him.

I saw her point. It pained me to laugh with Danny as well. I found myself questioning and thinking how badly if I would miss the wide, genuine grins, and belly aches from laughing I received from Danny. But they were part of his life, and what gave him life. In return all those things gave us life, as well.

We made a pack, Jessie and I. One Danny didn’t know about.

We would treat Danny the way he wanted to be treated. Not with kid glove care, not like an invalid, but quite simply—like Danny. We'd listen to his rambling, and encourage his ludicrous ideas as we always did. We'd laugh at his jokes, and even find the humor in his 'I'm a dying man' quips he seemed to come out with far too frequently.

In an obscure way it helped Danny face his battle to be treated nothing less than the man he was.

Behind closed doors, when support was needed, Jessie would vent on me, even slap me if she felt the need to physically release. Nevertheless, out front, we wouldn't change, we couldn't change. We had to do that for Danny. That was our resolution.

Chapter Nine – Danny

“Resolution.” Fr. Mike tapped his finger on the paper to gain my attention.

Me, I played with the mercury balls on my desk. I wasn’t working, but somehow, going to my office helped isolate my thoughts on to the list of resolutions I had to complete. The balls were a distraction though.

“Sorry,” I said, looking up. “Did you ever notice that when ...”

“Danny,” Fr. Michael stopped me. “You dragged me downtown to work on this list with you. I am here. Babette Welsh wants to see some progress for when we go to her house today.”

“She has a funny name.”

Fr. Michael just stared at me.

“What? She does.” I shrugged. “OK, resolutions.” I exhaled. “Can’t think of any. Hey ...” I snapped my finger. “Ms. Welsh thinks you’re psychic.”

Those big brown priestly eyes gazed up to me. “I’m not.”

“I think you are,” I said. “Bet me. Bet me when we go there to work on the acceptance phase, your psychic ability comes out.”

“Doubtful.” Fr. Michael tapped in the paper. “Resolution.”

“I really don’t ...” My hand reached for the mercury balls again.

“Danny,” Fr. Michael grabbed my hand. “Enough playing with your balls.”

Sorry. I couldn’t help it. I laughed.

Fr. Michael breathed out. “Should we take a break?”

“No, sorry.” I snickered. “Do you have balls like ...”

“Enough.”

“OK, sorry.” I wiped my hand under my nose as if a simple snuffle would smear away the giggles I was getting. “How’s that arm?”

Fr. Michael shook his head. “Slightly bruised, thank you.”

“Hey, you’re the one that said if I annoyed Jess, she could hit you instead.”

“Can you stop annoying her?”

“I’ll try.” Again, my hand extended for the balls.

Fr. Michael moved the rack away. "What's going on? You're awfully distracted. Aren't you feeling well?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"You look pale."

I laughed. "I'm never pale. I have a natural color."

"Pale." Fr. Michael sat back. "Your energy is down. And when you came out of the treatment this morning, you weren't joking around or asking about your hair."

"Which by the way thanks for taking me," I said, and then sat up in my chair. "I'm ... I'm all right." I shrugged. "I had a slight headache yesterday. Today I'm a little queasy."

"Did you ask your doctor about it?"

"Yeah," I nodded. "He said that usually around the fourth or fifth treatment you start feeling effects more. It was number five today."

"You want to work on this later?"

"Well, what time do we have to meet with Ms. Welsh?"

"Five. Yes or no. Want to work on it later?" Fr. Michael asked.

I glanced at my watch. It was only eleven o'clock.

"Danny?"

The last thing I wanted to do was show any weakness. In fact, I did my best to hide it. Figuring, if I pretended I was fine, and felt good, then I wouldn't feel sick. Mind over matter. However, I had to remember, it was Fr. Mike I was talking to. There was something about him that made me be honest. Not only that, I felt secure in telling him the truth. "If ... If I told you I'd prefer to work later and maybe take a nap ... you wouldn't tell Jessie would you?"

"I hate when you do this to me."

"Come on, Fr. Mike, I just don't want her to know that I'm tired and not feeling well."

Fr. Michael sighed. "I won't tell Jessie."

"Can I go lay down at the rectory?"

"Yes, you can lay down at the rectory," Michael said as he began to gather things.

"Will you play me Hail Holy Queen?"

Michael glanced at me. "Come to church Sunday."

"Dude, you run a hard bargain. Let me get back to you."

He shook his head. "Let's go now, grab a sandwich somewhere, and head to the rectory."

"Sounds good." I started to stand. "Thanks for this, Mike."

"I can't believe you're gonna have me lie to Jessie."

"No lie, just not tell." I smiled. "Besides why does this surprise you? I have this ability to get people to do just about anything for me."

"Yeah, right."

"I'm telling ..."

At that instant, Lesley, my partner's secretary knocked on my open door.

"Mr. Hoi?" she sweetly called out.

"Come on in," I instructed.

Nervously, she stepped in. "I hadn't had a chance to speak to you, I'm glad you're here."

"What's up?"

"I'm sorry about your dying."

I fumbled for words, stuck somewhere between wanting to say a sincere 'thanks' and laugh when Fr. Michael dropped his folders. "I appreciate that."

"With that being said ..."

She sighed out. "I just wanted to let you know, I always thought you were really a nice guy, incredibly sexy, and I always wanted to go to bed with you. So, if you want to before ... you know ... just let me know. OK?"

In a rare occurrence, I was speechless. "Uh ... gee ... um thanks."

"You're welcome." She smiled, nodded her head, turned, and walked out.

Fr. Michael, shocked, looked at me. "Did that just happen?"

I played it off. "Yeah, all the time. I'm used to it." I picked up the tablet. "Ready?"

Still a little stunned, Fr. Michael nodded. "Yes."

"Cool." I started to walk. "Oh." I snapped my finger. "Before I forget, put on our resolution list. 'Sleep with Lesley'. Thanks." I headed out.

"You're not funny," Fr. Michael said. "Not funny at all. I'm telling Jessie."

We were driving in the car. Did you ever notice that the best arguments get started in a car? Almost as if faith traps you into a closed in space, voices heightening, nowhere to go, no way to run. The passenger has the advantage, because the driver has to remain calm due to constricting circumstances.

So there we were, the three of us. Me, Jessie, and Fr. Michael kicking back in the back seat. The conversation was idle. We had just dropped Nina off at Jessie's mother so we could go meet Ms. Welsh, and it happened. That 'one topic leads to another' despite how much they do not have in common. Marge, Jessie's mother, was complaining because the last time Nina was there, she spilled cheery drink on the carpet and Marge used a whole bottle of 'Resolve' Carpet cleaner to get the stain out.

Resolve.

Resolution.

Maybe it wasn't the best response, but the second Jessie said to me, "Oh, so, Lesley is a resolution, huh?" I blurted out to Fr. Michael, "Man, you fuckin' tattletale."

Jessie gasped at me. "You just swore like that to a priest!"

I laughed. "A priest? It's Fr. Mike, he doesn't count. If the sanctity of confession doesn't hold water with him, his collar certainly doesn't hold water with me."

Michael, who had remained silent, spoke up, "You know, I don't how I got involved in this whole thing anyhow. You should have left me out."

"Should have, would have," I said. "But it's way too late now, Mike." Granted I had some hostility to my voice. "Now you're so fuckin' stuck in the middle, you aren't getting out ..." I peered in the mirror. "Tattletale."

"Will you stop?" Jessie yelled. "Don't you talk to him like that."

"Oh, that's right." I nodded. "Must have respect for your future husband."

Jessie snickered in sarcasm, "No, no. Not Michael. I'm finding someone else. Just so it really bugs you when you hover like Casper the friendly ghost. I'm gonna marry someone who's hot."

Silence.

With a smirk, I glanced at Fr. Michael in the review mirror. I guessed his reaction, and I wasn't wrong. Upon Jessie's comment, his head immediately cocked. "Ouch. Mike. That had to hurt," I told him.

"I'm not hot?" Michael asked innocently.

"Go on, Jess," I raised my eyebrows to her. "I want to hear the answer to that one."

"For your information ..." Jessie said smug. "Michael, you're beyond hot. You are sexy, incredible and ..."

"Hey," I interrupted. "I'm in this car."

"Really?" Jessie asked. "Hmm. Perhaps I'm pretending that you aren't so I know what it's like when you're hovering ... that way I'll be in good practice when you're in your state."

Michael leaned between the front seats and whispered, "Quit while you're ahead, Danny." He gave a pat to my shoulder. "You're not winning this round."

He was right. Plus, at the rate of acceleration with Jessie's mood, I wasn't surviving my death either. We were on our way to embark on step one of my preparation process ... the acceptance phase. I had to one hundred percent accept there was another side. I thought I had. Ms. Welsh said I hadn't, but she was certain after one meeting I would. How she was going to accomplish that, I wasn't sure, but I wasn't far from finding out.

Case Study

Jessie Bishop made me question how accurate my psychic ability really was. She was nothing like I had envisioned her to be. Physically, yes. Emotionally ... no. She was horrible, nasty, short, and snippy with Danny. So much so, I asked her to leave and go get us a coffee at a quaint little psychic coffee house a few miles away. I gave her directions, told her it was imperative that we got the 'Triple Bold Arab' blend to complete the process, and I sent her on her way.

Of course, there was no 'Triple Arab Blend', because there was no psychic coffee shop. I figured, by the time she realized she wasn't finding it, we would be finished. Something struck me as 'wrong' with her, that she wasn't being her normal self. After all, someone like Danny wouldn't be involved with a miserable human being. If he was, that miserable person would change, Danny was too contagious.

I didn't suspect Danny would be upset with me for pulling the wool of Jessie's eyes, at the point in which he arrived, Danny looked spent. My upbeat new friend lacked energy, his face drawn, and the tell tale sign something was amiss with Danny ... his hair was messy.

On the sly, Fr. Michael informed me that Danny was tired and the treatments starting to hit him. Danny blamed it on 'Taco Bell'. If there were a choice in the matter, I would have opted to work another day. But time was so of the essence, we couldn't waste a day. A day wasted was far too vital to Danny. Especially since I knew we would be getting caught up on the resolution portion of our training.

Acceptance of his impending death was a given. Danny wouldn't be seeking ways to conquer the spirit world if he hadn't accepted the fact that his body would succumb. In my arrogance and confidence, I found the challenge of getting him to accept another side, not such a challenge. To me, the best way to prove to anyone that there was an 'other' side was to bring the other side to them. I had to be careful though. So much of my information could have been misconstrued as part of my keen insight and psychic ability. Meeting Danny's passed-on friend truly gave Danny confidence in me; I could not assume it would breed confidence in the ghostly realm.

Seeing is believing.

Hating to pop a surprise spooky visit on someone with a bad heart, I had to. It was the only way.

I erred in my thinking. The egotistical psychic in me was assured that my predetermined path of convincing was foolproof. Acceptance, belief, how hard would it be?

I could have smacked myself.

The ghostly apparition that floated through the room bringing forth bright sparkling lights, misty movements, facial features, and a gust of comforting wind, caused Fr. Michael to pull from the table and reach for his rosary beads, while Danny chuckled out, 'Hey, that's pretty cool.'

What?

Cool. No doubt. When I asked Danny, about his reaction, he snickered and said, "Ms. Welsh, were you trying to convince me there was another side? Cause I believe in ghosts. Duh, why am I here?"

Duh? He said 'duh' to me, when I should have been saying, 'duh' to myself.

I was given surety to the fact that Danny needed to accept the other side along with his death. A phase we had to complete. After the 'duh' episode, I was baffled, if he already believed in the other side, if he had already accepted his impending death, then in my mind, there was no acceptance phase to complete. There couldn't be.

Yet, the tingle in my gut that was physical and unspoken permission to move on wasn't there. Acceptance wasn't complete. What was missing? What needed accepted?

I started feeling bad, useless, I needed to leave the room, go to another and seek the advice of my guides again. To make matters worse, as I went to do just that, Jessie returned. She looked frazzled and upset, blurting out, 'I swear I looked, I couldn't find it. I couldn't. I'm sorry.' Danny didn't help matters, when Jessie asked how things were going, he simply told her, 'not good, Jess, thank you very much.'

I had to leave and I hurriedly did so before I confessed my sinister move and made the angry little woman angrier.

After informing them, they could wait the half hour or so, or return, I went into my back room. I lit my candles, and burned my incense as I settled into a deep mediation state. It wasn't a normal

meditation, I had to reach out. I sought my guides. Actually, I chased them down. Astral projecting from my physical being took me through many realms and landed me in what looked like a courtroom. The guides who had advised me forever sat at a table with two others I didn't know.

Darius passed away in the early seventeen hundreds at the ripe old age of twenty-three. However, decades of wisdom gave him the job of an earthly form guardian angel—or guide—at the turn of the twentieth century. I always felt fortunate to have Darius. Tall, striking, he looked about fifty instead of a young man. He did all the speaking for the guides—probably because they feared him—and he seemed to carry a very condescending tone. Maybe that was why he and I clashed so often.

That day in the chamber was no different.

"You came to us, and may I add unannounced, unexpected and ... uninvited," Darius spoke nearly annoyed. "Why?"

"You know why," I said.

"Babette. Babette. Babette." He shook his head.

God, I hated when he did that.

Darius continued, "If it is answers you seek, find them. We can only guide you to the answers, we can not give them to you."

"But an exception needs to be made now."

"No," he answered adamantly.

"Yes. I need ..."

"We, guide, you ..."

"Yeah, yeah," I cut him off. "Not this time. You guided me wrong."

As if I said something extremely dastardly or exposed my breasts suddenly, all the guides gasped.

"We did no such thing," Darius snapped.

"Then where did I error?" I asked.

"Think about it."

"Tell me," I became more demanding. "Tell me now. Right now."

"How dare you?" Darius rose.

"I dare because I am not pissing around. Here's the deal, Bub, I was chosen, I didn't ask for this, and I don't have the time to play

riddle me this and riddle me that.”

“You’re arrogance and conceited nature caused your failure.”

“How! How!” I tossed my hands outward. “The task was simple. Get him to accept. Accept his death. Accept the other side. He has done both! But yet, I feel we can’t move on.”

“You can’t, because he hasn’t.”

“Then tell me where?” I requested. “What part did he not accept?”

“The other side.”

I believe I made the mistake of growling right then.

“Babette,” Darius said. “Are you that ignorant? There is more to acceptance. Much more. The *meaning* goes deeper than the surface. Acceptance *means* More.”

OK, I had been doing the guide to psychic communication thing long enough to know, when something is accented, it was Darius’ way to give me a hint. He accented the words ‘meaning’ and ‘mean’. I lifted my finger to him, nodded, and closed my eyes. I asked myself what ‘acceptance’ meant. Then it dawned on my, yet, another moment I wanted to hit myself.

“Flick me.” I said to Darius. “Just ... flick me.”

Darius sat down. “You got it, don’t you?”

“I think,” I sighed out. “Boy, am I dumb. There’s more to the meaning ... I was looking at the surface meaning and at what I wanted the definition of ‘acceptance’ to be. Acceptance doesn’t just mean to recognize or acknowledge, it means to take it, receive. To have. Danny doesn’t have to acknowledge the fact that there is a other side, he ...”

Darius finished for me. “He has to have reason to want to be there. To receive the other side.”

My head dropped. “He doesn’t want that, that’s why he wants to come back.”

“Exactly,” Darius said. “But you know as well, as I do, Danny can’t come back from a place he never went to.”

Bingo. I exhaled heavily. “If he doesn’t want to go there, he’ll never cross over.”

As if he were quizzing me, Darius asked, “And if he never crosses over?”

“He’ll be more than just a ghost, he’ll be an entity, a poltergeist.”

“He’ll be trouble, yes.”

“Fuck,” I wisped out. “Sorry.”

“Quite all right.”

“This will be impossible,” I said. “How in the world can I make him accept and want the other side when he’s so head strong on not leaving this side.”

“Many years before your mother died, she didn’t want to take that trip to Vegas with you. Did she?”

“No, she hated the thought of it.”

“But she went. Why?” Darius asked.

“Well, for starters, everyone kept raving about it to her and she got curious. Then she found out Wayne Newton was in town, and reluctantly she went. Hell, we went every year until she died. She loved it.”

Darius nodded with a huge grin. “There you have it. Your answer.”

I hesitated and thought. “Use the Vegas method?”

“Use the Vegas method,” he confirmed. “Which would be?”

I responded slowly, “Have people talk to him, pique his curiosity ... and find someone on the other side he wants to see. Really wants to see.”

“Exactly. Make him see that it’s really not just the other side, but rather, the better side.”

I was humbled. I jumped the gun, felt misled, when it was my own blocked mind that hindered me. I then knew what had to be done to get Danny through the acceptance phase. It wasn’t as easy, nor was it the given, I thought it would be.

After my mega meditation, I returned to the trio, who, of course, were arguing about the rules of the childhood game. ‘Red Rover’. I explained to Danny my failure, my error in thinking, and what we needed to do. I then told him the route I wanted to take. The explanation wasn’t without my heart felt apology for being psychically moronic.

Danny laughed about it, said he was up to the challenge of the acceptance phase, and looked forward to it. He must have sensed my disappointment, because he tried to be compassionate and uplifting.

He said, “Ms. Welsh, don’t worry about.”

“Thank you, Danny,” I responded.

“This may all be moot anyhow. I’m gonna beat this. And if by chance I don’t. Heck ...” he gave a pat to my cheek. “I have plenty of time. Right?”

I closed my eyes briefly and passed on to Danny a slight smile. Nevertheless, the smile hid the fact that my heart felt like dust at that moment. I couldn’t give a verbal reaction. I couldn’t tell Danny that when he said, ‘I have plenty of time, right?’ my entire being ached with the inner response of, ‘No, Danny, you don’t. More than you realize, you don’t.’

Chapter Ten – Danny

When I was eleven years old, my mother told me not to eat the piece of chicken that was left out on the counter for several hours after dinner. To me, the chicken was cooked, what was the big deal. I ate it and by the next morning, I was sick as a dog, throwing up my guts. I went the rest of my life without ever spewing foul regurgitation. Maybe throwing up one more time for old times sake was a resolution that I needed, if so, I achieved it. Not an hour after getting home from Ms. Welsh's, I vomited. My head spun, I grew tired, and I started feeling a throb in my head.

I was sick. Something didn't feel right, not at all. I phoned my doctor and asked about the lightheadedness, headache, and queasy stomach. His response was everyone reacts differently, however I was still in the realms of what was considered 'normal'. His solution, lay down.

To know me, is to know, I don't like wasting time. I laid down at the rectory for an hour. Lay down again? It sounded absurd, but hating to do so, I had to give in. I felt poorly and didn't understand why. Something inside of me screamed that it wasn't going correctly. So, breaking down, I told Jess, that the 'damn Taco Bell' Fr. Mike and me had for lunch was killing me—I had a history of that—and I went to lie down. Sure enough, two pills, and two hours later, I did feel better. Not a hundred percent, but I figured dinner and filling my stomach would remedy that. Despite the fact that physically I was doing better, something internally, instinctively didn't set right. I chalked up my concern to a bit of neuroticism.

A 'Get Well' card was placed at my spot on the dining room table after I stumbled down from my nap. A homemade card done up primarily in blue crayon proceeded to do two things to me when I saw it. One, it made me smile. Two, it broke my heart. The words 'I love you, Daddy' inside screamed at me, and I immediately sought out my daughter.

Nina was sitting in the living room playing with a puzzle when I

walked in.

“Hey you,” I softly called and crouched down by her. “I like the card. Thank you.”

She kept her focus on the puzzle. “You’re welcome, Daddy. I drew the pictures without Mommy’s help.”

“I know. Ni?” I whispered. “What did Mommy tell you?”

“About what? She tells me lots of things.”

“About me being sick?”

“She said Taco Bell hurt your stomach.”

I nodded gratefully that fast food was my wellness culprit. I don’t know why I feared it, I should have known better, but a part of me thought perhaps Jessie sat down with my daughter, and said, “Nina, Daddy is sick. His heart is bad and he is not doing good’

“You shouldn’t eat Taco Bell anymore, Daddy.”

“I know.” I ran my hand over her head. “But I like Taco Bell. And ... I like this puzzle. What is this, a dinosaur?”

“Silly. No.” She giggled. “It’s a rabbit.”

“A rabbit?” I laughed. “A green rabbit?”

“He’s sick like you.” Finally, Nina peered over her shoulder and gazed to me with her big brown eyes. “You look sick, Daddy. Are you still sick?”

“A little baby. Just a little. Maybe I need to just eat.”

My daughter stared at me for a second. “But Mommy cooked.”

I cringed. “Well, maybe it won’t be so bad.” I winked. “Don’t tell her I said that. And don’t tell her I’m still sick.”

“Why? Maybe she’ll make you Jell-O.”

“Ni.” I snickered. “Mommy doesn’t make Jell-O, she makes, sweet thick water.”

“It’s Mommy Jell-o,” Nina said. “But OK, I won’t tell her. Don’t you want anyone to know you’re sick?”

“No. No I don’t.” I laid my hand upon her soft hair, watching my daughter as I slipped into thoughts. I didn’t want anyone to know I was sick, not even at the expense and excuse of Taco Bell. I depicted myself a strong individual that let nothing get him down, and I was going to be damned if I was seen any other way. On the way to the rectory, Fr. Michael argued with me again about letting my family know the truth. Allow them to know the struggle I was facing.

But I was adamant about that. Not my family. They would not know, if they found out, it would be because I had no other choice. I actually stooped to making Fr. Michael pinky swear he wouldn't play heavenly tattletale. He agreed. He'd say nothing at all to my mother, brother, and especially not to my father.

In the midst of those thoughts, oddly the doorbell rang. I kissed Nina, informed her I'd be right back and stood. When I did, I felt dizzy, and a throbbing in my head. "Damn it," I whispered.

"Daddy?" Nina looked up. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." I forced a smile. "I got up too fast."

The doorbell rang again.

Jessie called from the kitchen, "Want me to get that?"

"No," I answered. "I got it." Catching my physical bearings, I walked to the door and opened it. To my surprise, there stood my father. "Father."

"Daniel." He nodded.

Admittedly, I didn't know what to say. I wasn't expecting him, and I certainly wasn't expecting him on a day when I felt so poorly. Quickly, I ran my fingers through my hair to straighten it as if that would make a difference in my sickly appearance.

"Daniel," he spoke in his usual soft, but firm voice, "Is there something wrong with your door that it does not open wide enough for me to pass through?"

"Oh, sorry." I opened the door allowing my father to come inside. As he did, that's when I noticed them. A suitcase and small duffle bag. "Father?"

"Ah," he rubbed his hands together. "There is a bit of a chill out there. Yes?"

"Yeah, what ..."

"Pappy!" Nina called excitedly.

"There she is." My father placed down his bags and embraced my daughter. "I see you are doing your rabbit puzzle."

"Yeah, wanna play?"

"Yes, I would," he answered.

"Wait," I called out grabbing on to my father's arm. "Before you do. Is Jessie borrowing luggage?"

"No." He shook his head.

“Are you going somewhere?” I questioned further.

“Yes, here,” My father answered. “Seems, Daniel ...” He sighed out. “Your mother and I have decided to take a break. I have left your mother.”

“What!” I blasted in shock. “Why?”

“She yells too much.”

“My mother has never raised her voice.”

“Be that as it may, she did so today, and I cannot tolerate that, so I left.”

“And you are Staying here?”

“Of course.” My father smiled. “Where else?”

“Uh, um, a hotel? Sam?”

“Daniel,” he spoke firm. “You turn away your father?”

I wanted to flub out a ‘well yeah, now’s not a good time,’ however, I didn’t. I stuttered some.

He continued, “You know it is custom in Asian culture that the youngest son take responsibility for the parents.”

“I thought it was the eldest.”

“Do you question me?” he asked.

“No.”

“Then I will be very happy here during my marital separation.”

I wanted to scream out an ‘uh’ and follow it up with ‘no way.’ but my daughter interjected saving me from further parent scolding and guilt.

“You can sleep in my room, Pappy,” Nina said.

“Perhaps I will.” He took her hand. “Now let us work on the puzzle.”

Dumbfounded by my father’s suddenly arrival, I stood there. I couldn’t let him stay with me, not that I didn’t love my father, nor welcome his company, I just couldn’t have it. Against the odds, I was feeling effects of the treatments, and I still had sixteen more to go. It wasn’t a case of the missing contacts; this was something I could not hide.

“My father cannot stay here,” I whispered to Jessie. With my

father 'Nina-preoccupied', I seized the opportunity, snatched my wife away from her frugal gourmet meal—I wish—and brought her upstairs to the sanctity of our bedroom.

"Danny." She chuckled my name like I was silly child. "What are you talking about."

"Jess? Hello? My father. He's down stairs with an arm full of Samsonite. He's living here. I can't have that." I kept my voice low.

"I'm not understanding why."

"Because I don't want my father to know about my condition."

"Maybe now is the time to tell him."

"No," I answered stringent. "Absolutely not."

"OK." She folded her arms. "So, don't tell him then."

I reached up and touched her blonde hair. "Is this affecting your thinking?"

"No, you can touch me."

"Not me touching you Jess, your being blonde is what I'm talking about."

"Yes, why?"

"Forget it." I paused. "I don't want my father to know. Him staying here will be letting him know. If he doesn't already."

"Danny, how is he gonna find out just by staying here?" Jessie asked.

"You can't be serious, can you?" I quipped. "Jess, Sweetie, I'm on sick leave. How do I explain that to him."

Smug, she answered, with a toss up of her head. "You tell him you're on vacation. There."

I stared for a second at her, refraining from mocking her in a nasal way. "OK, I'm on vacation for three more weeks."

"Danny, you think your father will be here for weeks? He's been married to your mother for forty years. He won't be gone that long."

"Yes, but he's never left her before, so therefore there's no precedence set. And ... and ... what if he only stays a day or two. Jess, I go for treatments daily."

Jessie fluttered her lips. "Piece of cake." She tossed out her hand at me. "Tell him you're taking a class. That's why you're on vacation. Make up a type of class, he'll never know. You're inventive."

"You thought of that lie way too easily."

Jessie smiled, "Pretty good cover up, huh? And you don't have to worry about him getting suspicious. I mean, let's look at the treatments. You're keeping your hair."

I nodded. "True."

"So far ..."

"Hey," I defended.

"You can just keep a shirt on to hide the gird marks and skin discoloration."

"Uh!" I freaked. "I have skin discoloration?"

"Yeah, a little." She cringed.

"Oh, my God, why didn't I know this?"

"Danny, you're being silly. Stop this. The treatments and effects are easy to hide. Plus ... You aren't getting sick." She hesitated almost sneakily. "Are you?"

Had she figured out the Taco Bell cover story or did she really think the treatments weren't making me slightly sick? My answer would tell me. "No." I lied. "I'm not getting sick."

"Good." She patted me on the cheek. "Don't worry about it."

"Jess, I have to. He'll know if he doesn't already."

"He doesn't know," she argued. "How would he?"

"He's a witch doctor."

Jessie laughed loudly. "You're father is not a witch doctor."

"He is too. He does that mumbo-jumbo magic ..."

"Healer." She interrupted. "You're father is a healer."

"Whatever." I shrugged. "He still will know. He has this psychic, I'm telling you. He's probably better than Ms. Welsh."

"Your father deals on a different metaphysical level, Danny."

"He'll still know," I was adamant. "My Aunt Martha ... she was sick. My father diagnosed her. He knew without a shadow of a doubt that Aunt Martha had Kidney Stones."

I nearly fell over when my father's voice entered the room and he stood in our open bedroom doorway.

"Daniel," he spoke soft. "I knew of Aunt Martha's kidney stones because the woman doubled over and urinated painfully. He stepped in holding a mug. 'I brought you tea with some herbs, Daniel.'"

I looked at Jessie. "He knows."

"Yes, Daniel, I know," he said.

I swallowed the lump in my throat.

“Shame on you.” He handed me the mug. “Drink. This will make you feel better. How many times have I told you that Asians and Mexicans do not mix.”

“What?” I asked confused.

“Nina told me of your bout with Taco Bell.” He shook his head. “Daniel. Daniel. Daniel.”

Jessie snickered. “Excuse me, I’ll leave you two be.” She kissed me on the cheek and whispered in my ear, “See, you’re good to go.”

Holding the cup, I scarcely nodded as my wife left.

“Drink up,” My father instructed. “That will make you feel better. Help with the queasy feeling and any cramping you have.”

“Thank you.”

“You must stay clear of take out, fast, Mexican food, Daniel. It does not bode well on a man’s system.”

“I understand. But I love it.” I sipped the tea and winced. “Bitter.”

“Bitter. Better. I say.” He smiled. “If you love Mexican food that is quick, go to Freda’s Burrito Barn. She is genuine.” He winked.

“Father, why do you have herbs with you?”

“I always carry herbs. Plus ...” He exhaled. “If I am to live here, I must have them. It is imperative. You and I know that.”

“Why?” I asked apprehensively.

“They will be needed.” Very seriously, my father stepped to me. He laid hand on my shoulder with a firm grip. Then after a brief pause of frightening silence, he grinned. “I have had your wife’s cooking.”

By no means was Jessie having a great hair day, but there was something about her hair that night. She was brushing it before her dresser, head tilted, slow and mission-like. Lying on the bed, I kept looking up to watch her. It captivated me at first, because usually, Jessie would run the brush through a couple times, whip it up into a ponytail, and get into bed. But on that night, she brushed repeatedly. After a while, she finally quit, and I had to admit I was curious as to

the sudden hair consciousness she was showing. After all, that's my department.

Setting down the brush, Jessie walked to the bed and sat down.

"You OK?" I asked.

"Oh, sure," she answered. "Why?"

"You were brushing your hair like a million times. I thought something was wrong. You don't think you have lice again, do you?" I said and scooted over a few inches.

"No." She laughed and playfully smacked my leg. "Did you ever notice how pretty Marcia Brady's hair was?"

The statement my wife had just made was so 'out of the blue' I couldn't muster up even a chuckle. "What?"

"Marcia Brady. You know who she is."

"Yes ..." I said slowly. "Why are we talking about Marcia Brady?"

"You asked why I was brushing my hair. She's why."

"You're brushing your hair because of Marcia Brady?"

"She said one time in an episode that you should brush your hair at least one hundred times ..."

"Stop." I held up my hand. "Jess? You're taking hair tips from an old seventies sitcom, as if Marcia Brady is some sort of beauty guru."

"Danny." She laughed. "I was only trying it. That's all. You're busy reading." She reached for her nightstand drawer. "What are you reading?"

"Oh, this is ..." I stopped. Watching Jessie grab the nail clippers was one thing, seeing her sit on the bed, grabbing hold of her feet was another. "Jess, please don't clip your toenails in bed."

"Huh?" She looked down to her hand. "Sorry." She set them on the nightstand.

"Anyhow ... check this out." I leaned to her. "These are emails from people with near death or death experiences. Babette wants me to speak to some of them, listen to what they have to say about when they crossed over."

"Part of the acceptance phase?" she asked.

"Yes, so I'm gonna pick a few. I might pause this though. I think I'm gonna have a snack."

Perky, Jessie swung her legs over the bed. "Keep reading. I'll make you something, stay put ..."

"Jess, that's Ok." I reached out and halted her.

"Why?" She looked at me. "Oh." She nodded knowingly. "My cooking. Are you gonna throw another dig my way?"

"No dig, Jess, truth."

"You know, I remember when you used to love my cooking."

"Jess? I never loved your cooking."

Jessie gasped. "But you said."

"It was all part of the first year thing. You know, the first year you're together, you eat whatever they cook, compliment all the time. We're way past that, so I don't have to ..."

"Lie?"

"Sweetie, no." I patted her leg. "Never lie. Protect. Better word. And ..." I looked down to my pages. "I haven't decided what I want to eat. If I decide on cereal I'll let you know and then you can make that."

"You're so rude." Jessie positioned herself back on the bed. "But at least I'm glad your appetite is back. Taco Bell did you in today."

"Yeah, those herbs my father gave me helped."

"Danny," she whispered.

There was something about the tone in her voice that made me think she was shifting the conversation from typical nighttime talk to something focused and serious. I turned my head to see her leaning to me. "What?" I asked.

She breathed in. Deeply.

Another sign.

"What?" I asked again.

"Think about this for a second." She fiddled with my hair.

Final signal given. She was nervous about talking to me. What didn't she want to say?

"Danny, if you're fathers herbs helped ..."

"No." I didn't even let her finish. I knew where she was going.

"But, Danny, listen to me. A lot of people say he has this power ..."

"Jessie, no." I sat up. "I don't want my father to know."

"Maybe it is time to tell him."

“Absolutely not.”

“Why are you so adamant about this?” She followed my actions and sat up as well.

“I can’t, Jess. I can’t tell him. If I tell him, he *will* want to try to help me.”

“Danny, my God, try. If he can do anything, why won’t you try?”

“What if he can’t help?” I asked.

“Then you’re no worse off. What is this going to hurt?” she questioned passionately.

“My father.”

Slowly, with a confused look, she shook her head. “I don’t understand.”

“Jessie, my father has helped so many people. In fact ... I’ve even seen a few miracles,” I said sadly. “But this is me. I am his son. It’s painful enough to lose a child. But can you imagine the pain my father will feel, if he tried to heal me and he can’t? I know him too well. The guilt he would carry, no matter how unfounded, would be too much. I don’t want my father to feel that.” I lowered my head closer to her. “I don’t want my father to know.”

Chapter Eleven - Danny

Upon head-on impact with her red Toyota, Rose Cortez ejected from her body, tumbled head over heels through blackness until she entered into a bright white light. There she was greeted by her mother who took her by the hand.

William Hall, stood from bed to get up, felt a sharp pain to his chest, and as his body hit the floor, blackness engulfed him. That was only momentarily. A beam of white light shot down and lifted him up. He went through some sort of white energy wall, and met up with his grandfather.

Lynn Deacon Overdosed on Heroine—her tale I still debate on. One second partying with friends, the next floating through blackness. She floated, mind you until speckles of white light swept her up and took her to a lake where sitting there fishing was her father.

There were way too many stories to read, my email was bombarded—where in the world did Ms. Welsh get these people. But as I read though them, yes, they differed, but they all shared common ground. All were in some blackness, all had a white light, everyone had a deceased family member waiting, and every single one of them said, ‘I felt so good I didn’t want to come back.’

I just couldn’t see myself saying that, I don’t know. Maybe I just needed a trip to the great beyond to convince me. Certainly, according to Ms. Welsh, these people who were contacting me, were gonna try to convince me as well.

They didn’t do too well through their letters. Maybe in person—that would be determined.

Fr. Michael and I discussed it in the car on the way to treatment number six. While I was under the ray, Fr. Michael would determine whom we’d go visit for the convincing, and call them accordingly. Gee, I can’t wait.

Leaving for the treatment was as difficult as I thought with my father staying at the house. He asked nothing as he had his Ritz Crackers and coffee. I safely assumed he just thought I was going to

work.

I picked up Fr. Michael and off we went. Everything went smoothly, I still wasn't feeling myself, and I guess I wasn't acting it either, because Amy, the tech, summoned my doctor. Dr. Paul tried to pass it off as an 'I was in the neighborhood' sort of thing. But I have great hearing, I heard Amy with her supervisor.

"I don't know," she said to her super. "I'm not a psychic, nor a doctor, but something doesn't feel right. He's not joking around."

I wasn't? I hadn't noticed. I made a mental note to do so, but for some odd reason, I couldn't think of anything sarcastic or jokingly to say when she returned.

Dr. Paul didn't seem too concerned. He popped in, smiling, with a 'Hi ya', Danny. How are you feeling?

The moment I said, 'fine', Amy came in the room.

"I don't think he is," she stated, but tried to pull off that she was kidding, "I mean, when he came in here, he didn't have his hair done, It's usually so perfect when he comes in."

This made me stop and think. No, I had done my hair. I distinctively remember pulling out the new bottle of spray. In that examining room, I walked to a mirror and became alarmed.

It wasn't the odd look on my face, it was my hair. It had lost luster. It didn't shine. I had coal black hair, it should have shined. It also was limp.

"What's wrong with my hair?" I asked Dr. Paul. "It's lacking."

He shook his head "Change of shampoo maybe?"

"No, No I didn't. And Amy is right, I haven't been feeling well."

One would have thought Amy was granted a pardon for some horrendous crime, because her shoulders dropped and she sighed out.

"What's the problem?" Dr. Paul asked.

"My head. I've had a headache for two days," I answered.

"Bad?"

"Tolerable. And some nauseousness. I threw up."

"How do you feel now?"

"Same." I shrugged. "Tired."

Dr. Paul nodded, and smiled "Danny, what you are experiencing is normal. I told you this before. Some have side effects, some don't.

You are. Don't worry. If the symptoms worsen, or you start getting dizzy, call me. OK?"

Why didn't I feel relieved? I agreed to his proposition, but I didn't feel better. I tried to project it to Amy. When Dr. Paul left, I released a 'whew'.

She smiled politely.

"What?" I asked her.

"If you even feel slightly worse, call him, please," she said.

"Amy, what's wrong? What do you think?"

"I don't know. I have been doing this for eight years." She explained. "You just don't look like yourself, Danny. Maybe it's my crush on you." She winked. "Makes me a little bit more worried. That's all."

As she left, I wondered if it was a crush, or if perhaps Miss Amy had been doing the therapy for so long, she recognized changes and warning signs, better than any doctor. Her recommendation to call Dr. Paul immediately with slight change, made me vow to stay on top of things.

I'd do my best.

I got tired of the question.

"Are you OK?"

How many times did Fr. Michael ask me that from the clinic to Mrs. Cortez's home, and back to my house. A dozen. Why? Why did he keep asking me? I'd say I was fine, wasn't that good enough?

"Sorry, Danny," Fr. Michael said as we drove, "It's just that, you're ... quiet."

"No I'm not. Just thinking that's all."

"You didn't tell me."

"I'm fine,"

"Not that," Fr. Michael said. "About what Mrs. Cortez told you."

"I don't know, Fr. Mike. She had a near death experience. It didn't sound like something I'd choose to do. Plus, all these people have someone they want to see on the other side."

"Don't you?" he asked.

“Not really.”

“No one?” he questioned as if he didn’t believe me. “There’s not a single person that you could sit back and say, ‘wow I’d like to see them again.’”

“Maybe if I thought about it. Off hand, no,” I replied as we neared my house. “Can you think of anyone?”

“What about God? Jesus?”

I couldn’t help it. In fact, I welcome it, instinctively, I laughed. “God? Jesus? Why?”

“I can’t believe you just asked me that.”

“Come on, Fr. Mike, think about it. Me dying to see God—excuse the pun. Nah. That’s your cup of tea.”

Very seriously, Fr. Michael looked at me. “Danny, are you positive that you aren’t doing this whole ghost thing just so you can find a way to get out of burning in hell?”

“Hey, that’s a good one.” I pulled into the driveway and put the car in park.

“And that’s a smile.” He pointed.

“They happen.” I smiled again. “But do you know who I would like to see?”

“Who?” Fr. Michael asked. “Danny ... what’s wrong?”

“Why do you ask that?”

“You haven’t turned the car off? You were just staring.”

“For a second.”

“Uh, no Danny, for a minute or two. I’ve been waiting for you to finish that thought.”

“What thought?” I asked.

“The thought about who you would like to see on the other side.”

“I was waiting for you to ask who.” I stated.

“I did.”

“No, you didn’t. If you did, I would have told you Elvis.”

“Elvis? Elvis?” Fr. Michael’s voice raised some. “And you’re insane.” He opened the car door. “Shut of the car, Danny.” Pausing before he left, Fr. Michael poked his head in the door. “Oh, and Danny. I spent the entire day with you so it would look to your father like you were working. I enjoyed it. I did. But this little fake amnesia

thing ...” He crinkled his face. “It’s not funny.”

I watched the car door close and my focus went to the windshield as I spoke out loud with concern to myself. “No. Not it’s not funny. It isn’t funny at all.”

Was Fr. Mike’s guitar lead that phenomenal that it made my head tingle? The sounds of his practicing with Jessie carried up to the dining room, and the second that one long note rang out with a twang, I felt a tickle—like fingers—race across the circumference of my head. I debated on whether to tell him ‘good job’ or ‘please don’t do that again’.

Maybe it wasn’t Fr. Mick’s playing, more than likely, it was me. My head started to throb, I was so tired, I could barely hold my head up, and focusing on the scrabble board was extremely difficult.

“Drink your tea, Daniel.” My father instructed. “Then take your turn. You’ve paused too long.”

“Sorry. Thinking.” I sipped my tea. “I did eat one of those crackers you made me with the gross green stuff on top.”

“No you did not.”

“Yes, I did. When you were with Nina getting her movie in the player.”

“Ah.” He nodded. “That was why I did not see you eat it.”

“That’s why.” I told him, knowing full well, I threw that cracker away. “So Why did you make me the crackers?”

“Always safe to have a coating follow-up to the taco Bell repercussions,” he answered.

“Coating?”

“Yes, an iron shield, I would have given you the crackers this morning, but you were rushed.”

“Why the tea then?”

“For your Taco Bell lunch today. You look as if you consumed more Taco Bell.”

“Not taco Bell.”

“Burger World?” he asked.

“You got it.”

Scolding, in a joking manner, my father graveled out, "Daniel. Rush-rush-rush. Always on the rush. I suppose today you rush with lunch, to get home early and start your vacation?"

From my line of blurry letters I peered to him. "Yes."

"You need a vacation, Daniel, I am glad that you have taken one this up coming week. You work much too hard."

"Nah, I love it." Tried, really tried to concentrate. I know, probably, the letters I had on my rack comprised a wizard of a word, but I couldn't think enough to spell the word 'sit'. All I wanted to do was sleep. Four o'clock in the afternoon and I longed for my pillow. But I couldn't do it, not with my father there. I couldn't say I wanted to take a nap. That wasn't me.

"Problem with the word, Daniel?"

"I have all constantans."

"You can play off this 'o'." He indicated.

I blinked and looked.

"You are tired," my father said. "You should nap."

I chuckled. "Me, nap?"

"You need it. Blame it on me." He tilted his head. "I should have warned you."

"Warned me?"

"Yes." He cringed. "The herb on the cracker will make you very, very tired if consumed with the herb in the tea. If you just close your eyes for one hour, you will feel refreshed. I will tell your wife that I have caused your weariness."

Way out found. I wanted to clench my fist, say 'thank you father' and jump right up and race to the stairs. Truth was, I could barely muster the energy to stand. I was afraid to be so physically weak in front of my father. But, how? How would I do it without alarming him. I was trying to come up with a way to get him out of the dining room, and get Fr. Michael to aid me. But quick thinking was out. I was far too exhausted.

"I think I will lay down," I said. "Thanks for letting me know about the cracker herb."

"Not a problem. I am sorry."

"No, no, it's OK." First thing first, put the tiles away. My hand reached ... I missed.

He saw it.

My father saw. I watched him subtly shift his eyes from me to my hand. When I gazed down, I saw that my fingers trembled and I formed a fist. I wanted to scream in frustration. What the fuck was happening? I wished to God I had eaten that cracker then in my mind I could have blamed my condition on something. My right hand wouldn't work. Again, I tried, aimed, tried and when I attempted the second time, the rack flipped over.

Just when I was at the point where I was at a loss for an explanation, my father stood up, shaking his head.

"I did it again," he said. "I must have put too much in. It won't be long term, Daniel." He walked over to me and grabbed my arm. "But, it will hinder your mobility. Let me help you up the steps."

My left hand laid over my father's and when I felt him squeeze my upper arm, I instinctively just clutched on to him in gratefulness. I needed him to help me stand, how pathetic and weak I felt. How much like a child.

Finally, I stood. Everything spun.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yes, I'm fine."

"Let us get you upstairs." He began to tug gently in a lead.

"Father."

"Yes, Daniel?" he locked eyes with me.

I felt something. I don't know. One thing that shot through me was a moment of weakness, a moment of wanting to tell my father everything right then and there. But I didn't. I shook my head. "Thanks."

He smiled gently, held firmer, and led me to my room.

I spoke to Jesus in my dream. Or, rather if I was a convinced Christian I'd say it was Jesus. He didn't say much, I did most of the talking. He nodded, looked like he had one too many wine coolers. Before he disappeared, he laid his hand on my knee and said, "Danny, it'll work out. Have faith."

I didn't know exactly what that meant. I do now. I should have

taken that as a sign or something, I woke up from the dream, thinking I had to go to the bathroom. I sat up in bed, Jessie was still awake. She looked at me from her laptop and asked, “Danny, what’s wrong?”

I remember trying to answer, but no words came out. My chest felt heavy, and as if I were on autopilot I went into our bathroom.

She called my name, but it sounded in the distance. Thick, blurry. I stood before the commode looking down. It was then, when I realized I didn’t know what to do, or why I was standing there, that something was terribly wrong. Turning to leave, everything started getting gray. I reached for the light switch and my arm ... it wouldn’t move.

I kept thinking, ‘Oh my God.’ Darker. Darker the room drew. My head tingled and suddenly, with the mustering of all my strength, I took a single step toward the bedroom, and managed to peep out my wife’s name.

“Jessie.”

That was it.

Everything went black. My knees buckled and I dropped. I don’t recall hitting the floor, I know I did. I felt as if I was suspended, but I couldn’t see. I couldn’t speak. I couldn’t call out, or even move. I was lost in a pool of thick black nothing.

I heard scurrying. Jessie called out, “Johsen. Oh, God, Johsen.”

“No, Jess, not my father. Don’t call my father.”

“Johsen, hurry.” She was close to me, her voice was right above me. “Danny, hold on. Oh, God, what’s happened? Johsen!” she screamed again.

“Jessie, no, please not my ...”

“What has ...” My father’s voice. He kept a calm cool sound to him. “Quickly, Jessie, call 911.” He instructed, his voice drawing closer. “Then get me a warm blanket.”

There was silence for a second, then I heard Jessie in the background. I guessed she was making that call.

Why couldn’t I see, move, or even speak? What was happening? Was I dead? Was that the blackness everyone spoke of? Was the light going to come for me? Those thoughts raced through my mind. I recalled hearing my father one more time.

Soothing, warm, he spoke soft. “Daniel, I know you hear me. It will be fine, Daniel. It will be just fine.”

With those words, and feelings of overwhelming despair and confusion, I passed out. That was the last thing I remember of that night.

In all Faith – Fr. Michael

“Danny’s had a stroke.”

I swear those words would be forever in my mind. I wasn’t sleeping. In fact, I was waiting for Jessie to call me with the new words to her song. Strumming along, writing down chords, the phone rang. I answered it, wanting to say as I did, ‘right on time,’ but as I took a breath to speak, I heard a single sob.

“Jess?”

“Oh, Michael.” She wept.

My legs swung over the side of my bed. “Jessie what’s wrong?”

“Danny’s had a stroke.”

“What?” It was stupid, a terrible response, and in no way did I mean that I didn’t hear her, I just couldn’t believe my ears. The last thing I wanted her to do was repeat it.

“Danny’s had a stroke,” she said weakly. “At least that’s what Johsen thinks. The paramedics are here now, they aren’t saying.”

“I’m on my way.”

“Meet us at the hospital. Please.”

Again, I repeated. “I’m on my way.”

“Pray for him, Michael,” Was the last thing Jessie said before she hung up.

Pray for Danny? How could I not? My soul beckoned my God, while I cursed him in the same breath. Why Danny? How could this have happened? Fully dressed, all I had to do was slip on my shoes, and run out the door. I grabbed my coat and my pouch to perform the sacraments, then after informing the pastor, I was out of there.

I drove like a bat out of hell to the hospital and arrived before the ambulance did. Was it one minute, ten? It seemed like an eternity waiting for them to arrive in the emergency room.

Johsen stepped through the doors first, then within seconds, the paramedic came crashing through with Danny. My eyes shifted with haste to catch a glimpse of him before they rushed him off. There was no pausing, no hesitation, they took him straight to the back. A few words were sputtered out between the paramedics and nurses. Something about no time to waste and ‘forty minutes down, we’re

nearing the zone.’ Like a coded message, they passed words back and forth. Things I didn’t understand. Then again, everything spun, like it was in a dream. Oxygen on his face, all I could see of my dear friend was his black hair as they whizzed by.

“Stay here,” the nurse told Jessie. “We’ll come for you. Stay here.”

Mouth agape, I believe my hand was still reaching outward in a hopeful extension to touch Danny. Then Jessie grabbed my hand.

“Michael, what are we going to do?”

I was so confused. “Jessie what happened?”

“He collapsed, Michael. He just collapsed.”

Then Jessie, leaning into me, collapsed in my arms.

The first five hours are crucial. That was explained to us after a brain scan was taken and the ‘stroke’ condition was recognized. In Danny. A medication TPA, was administered. If done correctly would dissolve the clot and halt up to 95 percent of the damage that could occur from a stroke.

If it didn’t, Danny wouldn’t be the Danny we knew any more.

The clot hit the left side of his brain and was being classified as a major stroke. Meaning, Danny’s right side was gone.

They began administering the treatment within a half an hour after he arrived at the hospital. The doctors were optimistic. I heard their words. But all I could see was my friend, laying in that bed. Not moving. Not responding. Just ... laying there.

The Flip Side – Jessie’s Story

Watching my husband fall to the floor destroyed me. I didn’t even think twice about him getting up to go into the bathroom, but something struck me as odd as he walked. He moved sideways almost as if he were drunk. I kicked myself for not recognizing the signs, then again, Danny held back giving us any hint that he wasn’t feeling well.

The radiation therapy tech, Amy, just so happened to had been at the Emergency room with her son when we brought Danny in. To say she was shocked would be a lie. When she spotted me, frantic, she laid her hand on my shoulder and turned me around, with question. I couldn’t answer. Michael had to interject. To be honest, what she asked, how she asked, is beyond me. At that second, I was told not fifteen minutes earlier they would get back to us.

Michael told Amy what had happened. Then she informed us how she called the doctor during Danny’s treatment. Something was alarming her about Danny. Inside she wouldn’t feel right if she didn’t bring it up. It was dismissed with warrant, and Amy had to let it go. Who was she—as she put it—to second guess a physician. The best she could do was telling Danny to call if he worsened. She felt bad, really bad, but I managed to thank her for caring so much about Danny.

Do you know what she said?

With a sad smile, she glanced at me and said, “How can anyone not care about Danny?”

I broke.

And a stranger named Amy embraced me. Even Fr. Michael couldn’t help me figure out which way to turn. It was all a nightmare I prayed, and begged to awaken from.

We stood a good chance of the anti-embolic medication working. Some after effects would remain, and Danny, eventually with therapy *should* be fine. That’s what they had said.

But my strong husband looked so weak, I couldn’t gaze upon him without falling apart. Neither me nor Michael was capable of

staying strong. Johsen on the other hand was a tower of strength. I suspected deep inside he was breaking, but he didn't let it show. He projected strong, so Danny could feel it. He thought 'well' energy so Danny could get it. While waiting on the results of the medication, Johsen held a five hour vigil at Danny's bedside, rubbing oils behind Danny's neck, holding his healing hands in a hover above Danny's head. After watching his diligence, I was convinced that even if the medication didn't work, Johsen could pull through. How could he not? He delivered his gift of healing not only through energy, but through an insurmountable and immeasurable amount of love. Danny had fallen, and Johsen was determined to find some way to pick him back up.

Case Study

Peculiarly enough, I wasn't even thinking about Danny when it happened. Actually, I was applying a subtle shade of lipstick—the final touches to my makeup for my date—when my right arm went numb and the tube dropped from my hand. I lost all ability to move. A tingling shot up my face, I felt the pull of my mouth, and my legs weakened. My initial reaction was, 'I'm having a stroke'. My mother went through my mind, for she succumbed to a stroke. She died at an age only a few years older than I was. My destiny was at hand, unfolding as a repeat of family history. My mother, my mother's mother, why not me? My left hand gripped the edge of the dresser waiting for some pain to ensue, and as my eyes raised, I saw Darius in the reflection. Behind him a bright light. That was my sign. I knew that when I turned around, my physical body would fall, my astral being would step forth and reach to Darius, and he then would take me away.

I slowly turned around. The whiteness of the light hit first against my face, then in a flash it blinded me. I brought my arm up to shield for a second. It was then I realized that my physical being moved quite well. My arm no longer numb, legs no longer weak. I brought down my arms. Darius was gone. But out of the light stepped ... Danny.

"Danny?" I wisped out in shock.

Breathless, looking a little scared, Danny reached out to me. "Babette, what's going on? What's happening?"

"Oh, Danny." I stepped to him. "It'll be all right." Just as I went to touch him, instantaneously, Danny disappeared, the light sucked away, and I found myself reaching to thin air.

I had to tap in to my psychic. Had Danny died? What occurred. Stepping back, preparing to call Jessie, I saw it. It laid on my floor. I know it hadn't been there before, not that. I bent down to retrieve it and found my answers about Danny—or at least found the place to start my search. I placed it in my palm, and stared at the silver parking token that read: St. John's Hospital.

With that, I hurried and went to St. John's.

The emergency room was in a typically packed evening state when I walked in. Immediately, I felt a sense of relief when I saw him standing by the counter waiting on a nurse or something. With a smile I prepared to rush him, but figured if 'he' were fine, then it had to be Jessie, or even Nina. Standing confident, I moved and slid my hand on his shoulder. "Danny, I had a premonition. Is everything OK?"

He turned around.

Yes, the hair was the same, the build, and the face was extremely similar, but it wasn't Danny.

"I'm sorry. I thought you were someone else."

"My brother, you thought I was my brother." He extended his hand. "Sam. You are?"

"Babette." I shook his hand. "I know this sounds horribly odd, but is something going on with Danny? I had a premonition."

Sam nodded. "Yes, but I don't know anything. My father called, said come to the ER, Danny was being brought here."

"Did you get a chance to ask?"

"My father hung up before I could. I'm waiting on the nurse now. I'm concerned. My father didn't sound himself."

Sometimes in life, when gifted with ability, you whisper out things without thinking. I did so at that moment. Grasping my right arm, I aired out, "He's had a stroke."

"What?" Sam asked. "What was that?"

"She said ..." Fr. Michael's voice interjected from behind me. "He had a stroke."

I turned around. Fr. Michael looked drawn. His circles were dark, eyes red, face lacking luster. "Michael?"

Fr. Michael swallowed so predominantly I watched his throat move. "She's right," he said. "Danny's had a stroke."

I *had* been contacted by Danny, and I knew it and sensed it the second I stepped into the room and saw him. He wasn't conscious,

and the doctor's predicted he wouldn't be for a while, at least until the medication kicked in—if that occurred.

I only made it as far as crossing the threshold into Danny's room, and I couldn't go any further. My heart broke. My sense in the whole matter was Danny would pull through, the medication would work and counteract the effects of the stroke, but still ... my heart ached.

Danny was not the Danny that made everyone feel alive. Danny of all people didn't deserve to be where he was at.

Jessie cried. That was all she could do was cry. I couldn't blame her. I too shed my own tears, in my own way.

Fr. Michael, rosary beads dangling from his hand, kept a corner vigil for our friend.

Sam was at a loss. All he kept saying was, 'How did this happen? How did Danny take a stroke? Not Danny.'

I knew the truth of Danny's condition was going to be delivered to Sam, I didn't want to be around for the reaction. I walked to where Michael sat and laid my hand on his shoulder as I crouched down and whispered, "Can I speak to you?"

Fr. Michael nodded, and rosary beads within his grip, he stood and followed me out. "Where is she?" he asked.

I was confused. "Who? Where is who?"

"Danny's mother. Isn't that why you came to get me? She arrived?"

"No." I shook my head.

"Oh." He nodded. "We're expecting her. She's not handling this well and Johsen asked that I be around for her."

"I understand," I said. "I won't keep you. I just need to tell you something. One as a friend of Danny's, the other because you are his earthly link."

What had I said? Fr. Michael looked as if his entire being disintegrated right then. His face went even whiter, his eyes widened.

"What's wrong?"

"You mentioned earthly link. I'm only that in connection to Danny's ..."

"Yes, but this has nothing to do with his passing. He'll be fine."

Again, a visual reaction from the priest that said more than any

words. Fr. Michael turned his head slightly and looked away.

“Michael, he’ll be fine,” I stated again.

Fr. Michael exhaled. “Yes. Yes he will.”

“What is it?” I asked.

He shook his head.

“Michael, talk to me.”

Fr. Michael peeked back into the room, took me by the arm, and led me further away. “Please don’t think I’m crazy.”

“OK, first off, you’re telling that to the wrong person. I would never think you’re crazy.”

“It’s not working.”

“What isn’t? The preparations? Michael,” I snickered. “We’ve only started. We have a long way to go. It will work.”

“Of that I’m certain,” Michael said then closed his eyes. “I just not so sure the treatments are working.”

“Why do you say that?”

He hesitated. “A sense.”

“A strong sense?”

Michael didn’t answer.

“You’re getting something aren’t you?”

“It’s sounds weird.”

“Tell me. Because for the life of me I haven’t figured out where your psychic sense lays. You have to have some tapped in ability to be chosen as the link, but you’ve not shown me what it is. Do you know?”

“You can say that, yes.” Michael nodded. “A little something I’ve known for a while.”

“And?” I beckoned for an answer.

“I sense I sense ...” Fr. Michael paused. “When someone is ill. When someone is failing ..” Then he stopped. He just said no more.

I waited. Then I knew. “Oh, my God, you sense death.”

Michael looked at me.

“For how long?”

“For as long as I remember.”

“And when you sense it, does your sense get stronger the closer death draws?”

“Ms. Welsh, please,” he said my name as if he didn’t want to speak any more.

“You do. Don’t you?”

“You can say that.”

“And you’ve known of this all your life?”

“It took me until I was older to figure out that was what was happening.” He explained. “I can control it, don’t get me wrong Usually. But with Danny.”

“You have no control.” I finished his sentence. “That’s because you have another purpose with him. May I ask what this sense is? An angel, a symbol, vision, what?”

“Smell.”

“Ah.” I nodded. “And the closer death draws the stronger the scent?”

“Yes.” He looked in Danny’s room.

“No more needs said. But may I ask you two questions?”

“Sure.” He shrugged half assed.

“Where you are in your progress of ‘sensing’, how long do you think we have to prepare him? To do these preparations?”

“Not long.” He hesitated in answering. “Six weeks ... tops.”

I ran my hand down my face in a physical attempt to contain myself. “Second question ... have you ever been wrong?”

“You mean have I thought someone was dying and they didn’t?” he asked.

I gave a nod as my agreement to his question.

“If I catch the scent, you can say ... I know.”

“Then I feel better about what I am going to tell you.”

I informed Fr. Michael about my ‘episode’ with the numb arm, then turning around and seeing Danny. Fr. Michael asked whether Danny would remember it or not when he woke, I couldn’t answer that. But fact remained, Danny left his body. That was a good thing in a way, because Danny still had to complete step one. Step one was to accept the other side, and what better way to ‘accept’ the other side, then to take a visit. Just like with my mother and her trip to Vegas. Then I told Fr. Michael what I planned to do, and that was to speak to Danny. Speak to him on another level, another ‘side’ and hopefully, through the tragedy of what Danny experienced in his

earthly form, I could pull some hope, by getting him through that crucial first phase of preparations. Michael agreed that it was a good idea. We had to get Danny through that phase. Oddly, all we saw was optimism that Danny would beat his illness, so much so, we forgot to see the urgency that was present, if by some chance, the treatments didn't work.

Attempting to astral project in an awake state takes an exuberant amount of comfortableness, concentration, quiet, and skill. I had the skill, it was the quiet and comfortableness I sought to conquer the concentration part. I was in a hospital, so where does one go? I only needed twenty minutes. I also needed something else, there comes a danger time frame when astral projecting, and where I was going, threw me into that danger zone. I needed a person to wake me, and pull me out. Fr. Michael was busy, so I had to seek out someone else, that person would be found with the solitude I desired.

En route, I passed three spirits heading toward the light. I waved to them, smiled and wished the happiness. The geriatric floor provided the spiritual level and quiet I needed, plus, there were more underpaid nurses aids than nurses, so bribery worked.

For twenty five bucks, I got an empty room and a guaranteed half an hour to do what I needed. The young black man aid, assured me that he would be back, and my sense trusted that he'd do so.

I closed the door, drew the blinds and sat Indian style on the far bed. Getting into deep meditation was easy, it was a second nature to me. Once I achieved that level of medication I began. My environment of my third eye brought about the sparkles of might I needed, and once I felt my inner being floating within my ethereal vessel, I reached out.

The vibrations of separations always frightened me some no matter how many times projected, and it was that fear that hindered me and brought me back. It took four attempts and I finally released.

My intention, my aim was on Danny. Like a spit fire, my astral being shot, through walls, people, and floors, floating at a high speed all the way to Danny's room. Once I arrived, I settled by his bed.

Everyone was in the room, Danny's mother hadn't arrived. It was quiet and solemn. Standing by Danny's bed, staring down to him, I readied to call his name, but was stopped.

"I'm not in there," Danny said.

Danny? I questioned to myself, then turned around. In the corner, Danny stood cross armed and looking scared to death.

"If you're looking for me," Danny continued. "I'm not there. As you can see. I thought I was dead, I don't think I am. I think ... I think I'm waiting to die though." There was a sadness to Danny's voice. "I didn't beat it after all."

"Danny, you are going to pull through this episode."

"How?" He lifted his hands. "I'm out of my body. In all intents and purposes, aren't I dead?"

"No." I shook my head. "Not at all. Am I dead?"

"Probably not. But you can do shit like this."

"Apparently, so can you."

"How?" Danny asked.

"First tell me what happened. Tell me what you've experienced."

"They are saying I had a stroke."

"Not with your ethereal body. With your spirit. Start from when you realized you weren't in your body anymore."

Danny chuckled. "It's actually kind of funny. I was in the CAT Scan, right? I hear them talking. I feel fine, think I'm wide awake, and call out. No one responds." Danny shrugged. "So I sit up. It wasn't until I was off of the table that I realized my body was still there. I stepped back, expecting fully for them to be calling for a crash cart, something, because obviously to me, I was dead. But I wasn't. They continued to scan me."

"What about before you woke up?"

"I was dreaming. The voices brought me out."

"Strange."

"No shit," Danny said sarcastically. "But will I get back in there?"

"Oh without a doubt. When your body awakes, you'll zap back there."

"Can't I do it sooner?" he asked. "Because this is killing me watching everyone so sad about me. I make people laugh, Babette,

not cry.”

“I understand that.” I could feel his pain, see it on his face. “But, Danny, I can almost assure you, none of this will be a memory. It will be like a dream, if that. OK?”

Danny nodded sadly.

“Come with me, Danny.” I extended my hand to him. “Let’s get you out of this room.”

“Where to?”

“A place that may cheer you up.”

The corner of his mouth raised some in a quirky smile. “Are we going to the psychiatric ward?”

“No,” I smiled. “Come on.” I gave a wiggle of my fingers to him, and Danny latched on. “This will be a trip. Hold tight.”

I heard him question my ‘hold tight’ comment, but my intention was set, and off we flew.

We soured like a bouncing beam of light. I knew that the course set could be dangerous, more so for me than Danny. There was a chance, that I could get stuck, die during my mediation. Why? Because the place I took Danny was usually one for those who had died. There were rules and boundaries, if I crossed them, I wasn’t returning.

An invisible energy wall existed at the entrance to the plane where we went. One could not see it, it could be felt. As if it wasn’t there, it allowed for those of us who projected, to see what was on the other side. It engulfed you and gave you limitations. If you neared crossing a forbidden line, you would feel a current go through your being.

The temperature was neither warm nor cold, but as perfect as perfect could be when we arrived. Colors were vivid, and before us was a huge grass covered field. Small hills were the landscape and set center of it all as the biggest orange tree I had even seen. I could hear the creek and the bubbling of the water. Birds chirped, and faintly in the background was Mozart.

“Where are we?” Danny asked.

“Where do you think?”

“Heaven?”

I chuckled. “Some call it that. This is the second realm. Actually,

the fourth, but you need not concern yourself with that.”

“It’s exactly what I envisioned it to be.”

“That’s because it’s yours?”

Danny looked at me baffled.

“It’s your heaven, Danny. Your other side. If your heaven were a fishing hole, then that’s where you’d be.”

“Amazing.” He smiled. “It’s so peaceful. I feel ...” After looking around, Danny faced me. “Extremely peaceful. Do you?”

“No, antsy,” I answered. “If it were my heaven, then I would feel the peace that you feel. It’s yours, therefore only you can feel it. Just like only you can pick an orange from that tree. If I touch something here, I will have broken rules and I won’t go back. If you touch something, though, it means you are accepting.”

“Then I won’t touch anything, because I want to go back.”

“You will, Danny. You’ll go back. This is just a preview of what you get when you leave this earth.”

“Is this supposed to entice me.”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Entice me to leave my wife, my daughter, my friends and family.”

“Danny, you aren’t looking at this correctly.”

“I think I am.” He nodded. “It’s great, but not that great. Take me back.”

“Danny ...”

“Please take me back now.”

I held out my hand. Had it been twenty minutes already. Just as our fingers touched, I felt the tremendous pull. Danny, lost, calling out my name, faded from site, as the nurse’s aid woke me.

Heaving out a breath, I spun on that bed in confusion.

“Are you OK?” He asked.

“Shit.” I sprang up.

“Ma’am, you said to come and get you. Are you OK?”

“I’m fine.” I rushed to the door. “I fear someone else may not be.” At top speed I raced down the corridor, to the stairwell and to Danny’s room. My entrance must have been pronounced and remarkable, because everyone seemed to snap in surprise and spin my way.

Fr. Michel stood up. “Ms. Welsh.”

Shaking my head, I walked to the bed. I peered down to Danny, then turned around the room. “I’m sorry,” I called out. “I’m sorry I left you. I’m sorry.”

Head down, feeling as if I failed somehow, I walked out.

In all Faith – Fr. Michael

Had it only been three hours? The time seemed to drag in waiting on the results of the medication. Danny hadn't awakened, not even a twitch. I began to get concerned, especially when Ms. Welsh informed us that Danny's astral being was present. Jessie started to cry ... again. I kept on telling her that Danny was going to be upset if she kept on crying. Danny's mother finally showed up, and left the room. She placed her motherly lips to her son's head, told of her love, and went to the waiting room.

Danny's father... Johsen was solid. He stayed focus on his energy work, and wasn't the least bit phased by Ms. Welsh's revelation.

Just after the three hour mark had passed, Ms. Welsh returned into the room and spoke to Johsen. My guess was that she was asking if there was anything she could do to aid. What Johsen whispered to her, I don't know, but she took the spot on the other side of the bed, and closed her eyes. Forty minutes later, she exhaled exhausted like, nodded to Johsen, stood tipsy, and excused herself saying she needed water and air.

The room was silent again, until we believed Johsen had a heart attack. He grabbed his arm, cringed in pain, hunched some, and breathed funny. Jessie and I both sprang his way, readied to call for a nurse, or someone. Then Johsen held up his hand, said he was all right, sat back eerily, and wisped out the words, "It is done."

What? What was done?

Not long after, a few minutes maybe, Danny opened his eyes.

There are a lot of fearful expectations when waiting on the first reaction or response from a recently comatose, stroke victim. I looked for the physically obvious. A distortion perhaps on the one side of his face. None was present, so I waited on the other physical side effects. Would Danny move, speak, react?

His mouth parted, as his eyes shifted about he room. We neared closer to his bed, hovering I guess in anticipation. The nurse hadn't come in, nor the doctor. How long had Danny's eyes been open? A

minute? An hour? Then I watched him moisten his lips slowly. To me that was an excellent sign, I knew he was going to attempt to speak.

Now, at that point, one, anyone, would fully expect the patient to ask what happened, or what's going on? Not Danny. We all smiled brightly and even laughed when Danny opened his mouth and with his first words, clearly and perfectly he said, "I bet my hair is a mess. Huh?"

He claimed a tingling and slight numbness in his right hand, but Danny claimed it inhibited very little if any from moving his arm. He waved and even flipped me off for the finger demonstration. To say we were filled with glee was an understatement. He hadn't tried walking, but Danny felt his legs and we assumed some mobility if not all would be there.

He was completely coherent and had no difficulty answering questions. We only got to speak to him a few moments before the doctors came in. They scheduled another scan to check on the clot. It was while we were waiting for them to take them, that I watched Ms. Walsh divulge into a series of questions. I knew from speaking to her that the questions were vital and they had a point. She presented them as if being asked out of curiosity.

What did he remember?

"Not much," Danny said. "Going to the bathroom. I felt my body go, and I passed out. I heard some stuff after, and that was it."

Danny didn't remember any of the experiences Ms. Welsh shared. He didn't recall leaving his body at all. That made Johsen feel better because he didn't want Danny to know he was performing healing on him. Obviously, if Danny didn't recall hanging about the room, then Danny never saw what Johsen did.

There was something that took me by surprise. Shocked me and Ms. Welsh. I'd even go as far as to say it pleased Ms. Welsh. Danny told us how he dreamt that he died and went to heaven, or what was it Danny called it, Paradise. No one was there that he knew. In fact no one was there at all. He told of an overwhelming peacefulness,

that was laced with a bit of fear. He said he felt alone at first, but there was this huge orange tree. The scent of which carried strongly in the breeze. He wasn't thrilled to be there, and even laid fact that he didn't like it and wanted to leave, that was until he took an Orange.

Then Danny said those immortal words. The ones we read in the one hundred emails. The ones he scoffed about and ridiculed with 'yeah, sure. Cliché'. The words that made Ms. Welsh claim that phase one was complete. Danny said, "I took a single bite and saw everything differently. It felt so good ... I felt so good. Fr. Mike ... I didn't want to come back."

Chapter Twelve – Danny

“We can’t figure it out,” Dr. Stanley told me, “Had I not see the initial scan results, I’d go as far as to say you were misdiagnosed.”

I baffled the medical community.

The massive clot that hit the left side of my brain had miraculously ... vanished. Now, the anti-embolic medication works good, but not that good. They couldn’t figure it out. Within hours I was regaining full use of my hand, my speech, though not slurred, did take some time to come out. I covered well, pretending that I was only seeking things to say. I found it easier to talk after a couple days, but I still wasn’t—in my opinion—at a hundred percent.

Nonetheless, I was a medical miracle. There goes that word again, huh? Miracle. I recall my reaction to them using the term ‘miracle’. I actually felt dejected. I mean, really, how many miracles does one get in their life. Ironically, it’s been something I have been searching for since finding out I faced death. I got a miracle—just not the one I wanted. I suppose, thinking about it, what good would I be alive and tumor free if I was unable to walk, talk, or speak. Right? An argument presented to me by none other than Fr. Michael Craven. I blamed him, you know, on the fact that a miracle was granted. After all, Jessie said he never left my side. A man of the cloth is a mighty powerful tool sometime. So is a father who is a healer. A combination of both fathers?

What caused the clot to hit me was explained early on before I even underwent treatment. Radiation therapy to the chest area often causes the blood to coagulate. The blood thinners didn’t work. Would it happen again? Chances were very slim. So knowing that, and hearing Dr. Stanley say there was no reason why we couldn’t continue on with treatments, I forged ahead and scheduled the next series of radiation therapy.

My decision didn’t receive the response I expected. It lacked enthusiasm and encouragement. Everyone said to me to give my body some healing time.

Time?

Time was something I didn't have.

Since finding out about the tumors and getting the initial prognosis of six to eight weeks, nearly three weeks had passed. Three weeks. If the initial and worse case scenario projection of my life's end held true, I would be on my death bed by Christmas. No way. No how. I was gonna keep up the fight.

I marked the calendar.

I was diagnosed and saw Dr. Stanley on November 13, a Wednesday. From Christmas Day through January 10, I marked each day 'DTF' for Death time frame. On January twelve, I had marked, "DD". The day I was predicted to die.

It was November 24th when I was released from the hospital and made the decision to continue on with treatments that same day. I would start again right the day after Thanksgiving. By my calculations, barring anymore problems, I would be treatment free, semi-tumor free a week before Christmas. What a present.

There was still so much to do, and I'm not talking about on a medical level.

Babette told me that while I was in the hospital, she started working with Fr. Mike on his side of the 'earthy connection'. I was curious as to how one works with a person on tuning in their psychic sense. She told me shock therapy, I didn't buy it. I suppose it was none of my business. But it was.

Good news though, I had moved on to the next phase. According to Babette and her guides, I had accepted the other side. That was based on the fact that I ate a piece of fruit while dreaming I was in heaven.

I do have to admit, though, a part of me wondered if it was a dream or if it was real. I was too conscious for it to have been a normal dream. I figured I'd find out when I left the earth.

On to resolutions.

Were the phases getting trickier or was it me?

I lived a simple life. I lived a good life. I really didn't believe I had any regrets. I racked my brains out trying to figure out what I had to resolve. It was a major step in the preparation process, so my initial thoughts were, I had a ton to resolve.

But what?

There was one thing I knew of. Initially, it came to mind, and by far it was the most obvious. My father. I had to resolve with my father. Importantly, one issue in particular. My illness. Now my father didn't have to be an Einstein to figure out something was wrong with me. Thirty-five year old men don't just collapse from a stroke brought on by fast food.

No. He knew. He had to. But he didn't know by my conveyance. I truly believed to resolve anything with him, I had to tell him, 'Father, I am dying.'

Of that I did not look forward to. So, I thought, I'd start out with other things first.

I went down the list of what, why, and how. I had never been angry with him, that I knew of. But there had to be other issues other than my pending death. So, I thought, and I thought, until I made a list. And without telling my father why, I simply requested of him, to jot down some things that he felt he and I needed to resolve.

It was the day before Thanksgiving, Jessie was at my parents' home, and I was with my father at my house.

He had prepared me a cup of tea and set it before me.

"Special tea for stroke recovery?" I asked trying to joke.

"No, a blend for resolution," my father replied.

"Really?"

"No, I joke." He smiled.

"OK, I'm really not gonna tell you why I need to resolve issues, but I do. There is something I'm preparing for and it's a part."

My father nodded, "I understand."

"Did you make a list?"

"I did." He pulled out a folded piece of paper. "And I assume you as well?"

"Yes," I answered. "I'm starting with you because you are my father and the most obvious person I need to resolve things with, even though a part of me feels I have nothing to resolve with you."

"But what if it is me who has issues to resolve with you?"

Shrugging, I gave a thinking look. "Could be."

"Have you made a list regarding your mother?"

"My mother?" I chuckled. "Why mom?"

"You must resolve with her."

To me it was if my father made the funniest of jokes. “Mother? What would I have to resolve with her.”

“The fact that she has always favored Sam.”

I paused. “Hey, you’re right.” I snapped my finger, whipped out my little notebook and made a notation.

“So we will begin this before your wife returns.”

“I hope to.”

“Who shall go first?”

“Flip a coin?” I grabbed a quarter. “Winner goes last. Call it.”

“Heads.”

I tossed the coin and it landed on heads. “Ok,” I sighed out, “I start.” I opened my notes.

“How do you want to do this?” my father asked.

“Well, I figure I’d state what I have. We’d either dismiss it, or discuss it.”

“Either way, talking about the issue shall bring it to the surface and cause resolution.”

“That’s what I’m hoping.”

“How many do you have?” my father asked.

“A few.”

“Have I been that bad?”

“What?” I snickered. “No, trust me I had to rack my brains. OK ...” I breathed out. “First one. Little league. You took me out of little league when I was nine. I asked you about it, and you said it was best. I’d still like to know why.”

“It was for the best,” he answered.

“Come on, I’m a grown man, tell me, now.”

“It was for the best. Leave it at that,” my father reiterated.

“Father, it is an issue that needs resolved. Please.”

“Fine.” He folded his hands. “No one liked you Daniel. Everyone said you were too optimistic, and did not play very well.”

“That sucks.”

“I agree. And when that coach said he would leave you on the bench. I removed you.”

“Shouldn’t it have been my decision?”

“Yes, I apologize.”

“Thank you.” I smiled. “Wow, that was easy. Next. When I was

twelve, you gave my skateboard to Tommy Winters. I resented that.”

“Daniel.” My father chuckled. “You rarely rode that skateboard.”

“Still, Santa brought that. It was good.”

“Yes, yes, it was. We paid hefty for hat.”

“So why’d did you give it to him?”

“What did I tell you?” My father asked.

“You said he needed it.”

“Ah, yes.” He nodded. “I recall. Tommy’s skateboard was run over by a car. Tommy was in that championship. His parents could not afford a new skateboard good enough for the competition.”

“So why didn’t we loan him that skateboard.”

“He needed it for a longer time. Recall he want on to further competition.”

“True, but ...”

“Daniel, you did not ride that board.”

“I did, too.”

“No,” he argued. “Twice. You fell the second time, received that scratch on your chin and were worried that you would be disfigured eventually if you continued to ride. You did not ride it. You did not use it.”

“You have a point.”

“Issue resolved.”

“No,” I shook my head. “It’s not. You never asked. You just gave.”

“I did not think you’d notice. And you did not for six months. Issue resolved?”

“Really Father, I would have said yes. I just don’t understand why you never ...”

“Fine.”

I blinked in surprise. “Fine? What do you mean by fine?”

“Fine, I will tell the truth.”

“The truth.” I sat aback. Was I getting more than I bargained for?

“Tommy’s father was a wonderful mechanic. We were poor as well. The tie rod had gone on the car, and Timmy’s father fixed it. I could not afford to pay him money.”

“So you paid him with my skateboard?”

My father nodded. “We had to. That was the price he asked for.”

“Really? That’s strange. Was it because he knew his son needed one.”

“No, it was because he fixed the tie rod. The tie rod was fouled up because your mother ran over Tommy’s skateboard.”

“Oh, my God. So it was Mom’s fault.”

“Yes.”

Out I whipped my notebook. “Thanks, I’ll add that to Mom’s list. Moving on.”

“Another?”

“Yes,” I continued. “Sam. You and I butted heads always on what Sam wanted to be when he grew up.”

“But Daniel, you were right.”

“How ... how can you say that? He wanted to be a professional wrestler.”

“True. But he was not big enough. You were right in the fact that he should pursue the career of his choice not mine. He did. It may not have been professionally wrestling, but had he not attended that wrestling school, he would not have met Brad, the manager of the hotel. Had he not met Brad, he would not have worked at that hotel’s restaurant and Sam would not have become the cook he is today. He would be making stir fry, instead of exquisite meals at the best restaurants.”

“Cool, thinking. Now ...”

“Daniel, may I?” my father interrupted.

“But I’m not done,” I said. And I wasn’t, I was leading up the years to the point where we were and I could tell him about the real reason for resolutions.

“I realize this, but I have a heavy resolution to make with you. It weighs much on my heart.” He laid his hand on his chest.

“Go on,” I said.

“I ... I did not leave your mother because she yells too much. I have lied to you.” He paused. “I felt the need to move in with you. I wanted to be close in case anything was needed.”

“Why?” I asked apprehensively.

“Because I knew of your condition,” he said.

“How? How did you know? I thought you did, but how?”

“Daniel,” he spoke with a hint of a chuckle. “I call you every day at the same time. Every day I called you were not in. So, I decided to stop in. No one could look me in the eye. Finally, Bob, he broke down.”

“And told you?”

“After he cried, yes.”

“Oh my God.” I covered my eyes. “So, you knew and let me lie to you. Did you know about the taco bell as well.”

“Yes. I knew. The herbs were for effects of your treatments.”

“Still, why didn’t you tell me you knew?”

“It was your decision to keep it from me. I figure you had your reasons. I did not want to push. Yet, I did not want to be far from you.”

“Father, I will not ask you to try to heal me,” I told him. Then I saw it, the look on his face. A squint of pain I believe he tried to hide. Perhaps it was my imagination.

“For as much as I would like to try to heal you. I will not make the attempt. That was not my intention for coming here.”

The part of me that holds a pessimistic nature seemed to ram forefront. “You can’t, can you?”

“My reasons have nothing to do with my ability to succeed or not. I am your father, I will not have a clear mind. I can not work on my own son.”

“So you didn’t work on the clot when I had a stroke.”

“No.” He shook his head.

“Fr. Mike said you did.”

My father gasped.

“So you did?” I asked.

“Seems Fr. Michael does not know how to keep a secret.”

“He’s a big tattletale you know.” I nodded. “But he didn’t tell me, I guessed. The way the clot disappeared told me a lot.”

“You deceived me.”

“As you are now.”

“No.” He shook his head. “Daniel, what is the reason for your not telling me of your condition.”

“Honestly?” I stated. “I didn’t want you to carry around any

guilt if your healing did not work on me. But that is not your reason. I believe you won't offer healing because you don't think that I can be healed."

"Daniel ..."

"Please tell me the truth. You're here to spend as much time with, of what little time I have left."

My father lowered his head.

"I see." I stood up. There was something about my father's reaction. It held more truth than any doctor report, diagnosis. "Is this the reason for your lack of enthusiasm over my decision to resume radiation therapy?"

"No," he replied without hesitation. "My lack of enthusiasm comes from your reaction to the last series of treatments. I fear your reaction again. You are a strong vibrant man. It breaks our hearts when you are down. You are not meant to be down ... not yet."

"And you think the treatments will bring me down?" I asked.

"Did they not before? Did they not make you ill, weaken you and tire you?"

"But that's normal."

"Not always." He lifted a finger. "Not always. Some handle. Some do not."

"What choice do I have?" Shaking my head, I rejoined him at the table. "Father ... I don't want to die."

Over the table my father reached and grasped my hands. "You will never die. You will move on."

I closed my eyes tightly. "I don't want to move on. Not yet."

"I understand. But I want you to feel life. Feel it. Not sleep it? Make sense?"

"Yes." I nodded and opened my eyes. "I have to try though. I really have to try."

"I understand. I will stand behind, support and even be enthusiastic about it then."

"Thank you. But I do need your help with something."

"Anything."

"I'm not a quitter. But ..." I softened my voice. "I need you to tell me, when it is time to quit. OK?"

"Daniel, that is something I can not do."

“Yes, you can. You will. I don’t want to die. But if I do, I want to go with as much dignity as possible. Help me to do that. Promise me, you will.”

My father locked eyes with me. “When the time comes when you must stop to enjoy life, I will tell you to stop and enjoy life. You will not go without the dignity and honor you have earned. That my son ...” He squeezed my hand. “Is my heart promise to you. “

The Flip Side – Jessie

The most painful thing in the entire Danny illness was watching him interact with our daughter. There was something different about the way Danny treated Nina since finding out about his condition, and to me it grew more pronounced after his stroke. Others may not have noticed it, I did. When he talked to her he filled his words with wisdom as if he were leaving her life's advice. When he held her, he gripped to dear life. When he made her smile, he brought forth a laughter that was better than any medicine.

They dressed like Indians on Thanksgiving and spent the entire morning making costumes out of construction paper. That may not seem odd to some people, but the construction paper was my tip off. Yes, Danny liked to be creative, but I also know Danny. He would have gone out and bought elaborate headdresses. Instead he made them with Nina. Hours spent on the floor, cutting, pasting, sizing.

Thanksgiving Day brought a lot of things to light for me. Forgo the obvious, 'I have this to be grateful for, and that', it brought to light family, and the realization that I wasn't the only one pained by what was going on with Danny.

The one thing I truly hated was the fact that no matter how hard I tried to be hopeful, no matter how much positive thinking I did, the pessimist in me took over. From the second Danny told me about his condition I felt an overwhelming sensation of 'doom'. That was reiterated when he had his stroke.

I had a friend Delia. A few years back, Delia's father was diagnosed with cancer. It hit his lymph nodes. When Delia told me this, for some reason I just didn't feel that dark feeling. I didn't feel that her father wouldn't pull through. Well, despite the odds, Delia's dad beat it. Went through every treatment, and is a walking talking survivor.

I wanted to feel that same optimism toward Danny. Perhaps it's my closeness to him, the fear of losing him that made me think negative outcome.

I don't know.

But I *do* know, I wasn't the only one.

Thanksgiving day, there wasn't a family member who treated Danny 'normally'. Every single person seemed to bring with them the fear that it would be the last Thanksgiving we would have with Danny.

I worried that Thanksgiving Day would end up being a disaster. Danny sensed the way everyone was, and that angered him.

My mother was the most obvious. Not a very nice person, she was June Cleaver to Danny. Could she get him this, or that. Danny even told her, 'Marge, insult me, please.' My mother couldn't.

Sam, Danny's brother.

For as many years as I have known Sam, for as many Thanksgivings as we shared, I have never known him to bring a box of memorabilia to the event. Pictures, videos cassettes, all from their youth. Things that would bring back memories and laughter.

Admittedly, it worked. It brought the focus to a lighter note. Those items started flashback memories, and then the conversation bounced on per Marla, Danny's mom. Who then became the reciprocate of Danny's resolution bashing. Jokingly of course, Danny put her on the spot with such things as, 'why didn't you ever make spaghetti, why were Sam's friends allowed over and not mine, and why did you always like Sam the best?'

Marla was amazing. She answered humorously making Danny gasp. Telling him that Sam was the better looking one, and how could she not like him better.

The evening ended up being a great time.

Then Danny left with Michael and Babette. The outer world trio. I would be lying if I said I wasn't bothered by the fact that they had this bond, and I was so left out. But I kept reminding myself that Danny was doing this for me. All so if he did leave this earth, he could come back to me. At times I wanted to scream at Danny, 'Can I have you now!'

He had to do what he had to do.

I suppose one of those things were to break my heart into a million pieces, a million times.

He did it without falling over, growing more ill, or even being in the house.

Because it realized me so, I prepared to play my keyboards while waiting on Danny to return. It was there I found it. Still connected to the notebook, and a post-it on top for me to read.

Jess, do you think you can work some magic and make this into a song for me? I wrote this—Danny.

Danny had written lyrics to a song? I feared reading them. Had it been before Danny diagnosis, the words would have been ridiculous, funny, sarcastic, and more than likely the song title would have been called, ‘*My wife’s the lust object of a Catholic priest*’.

Something told me that the song lyrics would be different, and that same thing told me I didn’t want to read them.

I did.

I wished I hadn’t.

I could only wisp out an ‘Oh, Danny.’

How could I write music to his words? It wasn’t that a melody couldn’t be placed to them, it was just that it was too painful to do.

The lyrics held more truths about what Danny felt than anything he had spoken or portrayed. Danny said so much within his words, he didn’t write a song, he wrote a legacy of what he wished.

*It’s two Am, and I’m staring at the clock,
Wondering how I can make time stop.
Can I drag it out by counting them all,
A million minutes remaining before things fall.
I never made a plan on a countdown of time,
Making the most of what I leave, without reason or rhythm
Before it all ends, there’s one thing you can give.
Carry me on, help to me to live
If I have to leave
Will you be me?
Will you breathe in my soul, so my heart can still beat
Tell a joke in my name, pass a smile on
Will you take me in your memory, so I will never be gone.
Take a look, and capture my face
In your mind, please find it a place.
Bring me with you wherever you go,
Even if tucked away and nobody knows*

*Once in while, just take a walk
Say some things pretend that we talk.
Never see it as time taken away,
We were given a gift, what more can we say?
But ... If I have to leave
Will you be me?
Will you breathe in my soul, so my heart can still beat
Tell a joke in my name, pass a smile on
Will you take me in your memory, so I will never be gone.*

Yes, Danny ... yes.

Chapter Thirteen – Danny

The Miracle Man was my earned title by those at Radiation Therapy. The man who beat the odds, snapped back, and walked into treatments. I waved my hand amongst the applause as if I were Elvis, but the truth was, I was scared. So much so, that losing my hair was barely a thought. I kept envisioning that radiation beam, turning my blood thick all over again. The entire way there, I was silent in the car. I told my father I was in deep resolution phase. I think he knew better.

But the resolution phase was never out of my mind. In fact, I drove everyone nuts with it. Thanksgiving, the next day, the next. In that three day time frame I had made seventeen phone calls, wrote eleven letters and sent thirty-six emails. I went back to high school errors, girls whose hearts I thought I broke, car mechanics I recalled yelling at. I even paid for a library book I never returned in sixth grade.

Resolutions.

I dug deep, and each time, at the end of each day I asked Babette, ‘well?’

Consulting her guides returned a big, ‘Um, not yet. There’s still something else to resolve.’

What? What was it that I had to resolve. Was it something off the wall like with the acceptance phase? I grew impatient. Babette asked me, “Danny, give it more time. Really, you’re thirty-five years old. Do you honestly think you can resolve all in three days?”

“Uh, yeah. I do.”

I guess I was wrong.

I wanted to move off the resolution phase. I did. I thought it was stupid, I knew if the treatments failed my time was getting shorter. I wanted to prepare, set up my return. I couldn’t do that without finishing the resolution. And do you know what drove me nuts? When I thought about it, felt for instinct on it, I too, felt there was something that I had to resolve.

The mystery of it was maddening.

Everyone’s advice—take a day of rest.

Day of rest ... Sunday.

I could do that. Sit back, watch a little football—even though I'm not a sports guy—but it all sounded good. Until, Fr. Mike called me right before I went to bed.

"What do you have going tomorrow, Danny?" he asked.

I laughed. It was so unlike Fr. Mike to ask as if we were drinking buddies. After all, I had just seen him, shared a pizza and listened to him and Jess play around with music.

"Tomorrow?" I answered. "Relax, kick back, watch the Pittsburgh Steelers lose, have a pretzel or two. Why?"

"Do you think you can make time for God?"

I laughed. "God? What is he stopping by?"

"Danny, you suck," he said. "I mean, can you come to church tomorrow?"

"Aw, Padre." I whined. "Do guys need money or something? Cause if that's the case, I'll just send an envelope with Jess when she ..."

"Danny," he grumbled. "I'm asking you to come to church. For me. Please? Noon mass."

"Noon mass?" I sounded offended. "That means I have to get up early just so I can shower, get something to eat, because you know your stomach always growls in church. There's usually a symphony because you Catholics forbid eating an hour ..."

"Danny." He cut me off ... again.

"Ok, I'll go. Can I ask why?"

Fr. Michael told me he had a kick ass sermon he was giving and he wanted me to hear it. Perhaps he didn't use the term 'kick ass' but he implied it. He rambled excitedly about it, said he had been working on it for three days. I commented with a 'must be good', but I knew Fr. Mike had an ulterior motive.

Somewhere in his priestly mind, I was wagering that he thought God was my resolution. That I had to find God, and he was going to bombard me with such a moving sermon that that I would stand up in church, look to the altar, raise my hands to the heavens and shout, 'Hallelujah, I found the Lord'

That's ... what I think Fr. Michael was hoping for.

If he was hoping he held my resolution in the form of a crucifix

and communion wafer, then Fr. Michael was looking in the wrong direction. I had faith. It wasn't his faith, Jessie's faith, or even my parents. It was my own faith. That was what mattered.

But still, Fr. Mike was my buddy. And if he did work on a sermon for three days, I wanted to hear it. I wanted to feel the people of the parish moved by his words. If that didn't do it, I wanted to hear him jam out his cool rendition of 'Hail Holy Queen'.

He promised me he'd do that if I showed.

So I went.

Twelve O'clock mass was packed. It always is. I pondered why that was. Was it just a perfect time for everyone to go to church. Sleep that extra little bit after heavy Saturday night partying? Whatever the reason, I don't recall ever seeing noon mass empty. Of course, I had only been there three times.

Four Altar Boys, a woman hailing a bible above her head, led Fr. Mike down the aisle to some 'high mass' organ music. But, the padre didn't let me down. He genuflected, walked across the altar, picked up his electric guitar, and then just after the slightest pause, Fr. Mike and a few guys totally ripped into 'Hail Holy Queen'. It was awesome.

Jessie had to nudge me when I clenched my fist with an excited, 'yes'.

Church was uneventful. Of course, it was a catholic mass, so most of it was repeated ritual. I couldn't tell you what the Gospel was about, but what Fr. Mike said in his three day sermon, will never, ever leave my mind.

"Thanksgiving," Fr. Mike said, holding the cordless microphone, standing so relaxed before the congregation. "Now I know last week, some of us gave that Thanksgiving sermon. But really, the week before Thanksgiving, you're so consumed on what the plans are, where you are going to go, what you are going to buy, we often forget what is important and what we need to be Thankful for."

Fr. Mike lifted his hand. "Guilty. I ... am guilty of that. All the hustle, bustle, we forget. I'm thankful for a lot. I am." He exhaled. "When you walk into church, you pass a small wall. It has the name of Jefferson Lyons on it. Mr. Lyons died twenty-four years ago. The memorial wall was erected two years ago. No one knows Mr. Lyons.

But when the church lost the left wing due to an earthquake, Mr. Lyons—unemployed—donated his time and hands to rebuilding that wing. With donated supplies, and some Mr. Lyons himself purchased, he pretty much single handedly rebuilt that wing. Not many know that. He had no family, no friends, nothing. So where did the memorial come from?”

He wasn't. I cringed. I knew where he was going.

Fr. Michael continued, “I was having dinner with Danny Bishop and I told him about the remarkable story. The next time Danny visited the church, he asked, ‘Fr. Mike, hey, where’s the recognition plaque for that Lyons guy?’” Fr. Michael chuckled “Trust me, that’s the way Danny talks. Anyhow, when I told him there was none. Within a week, Danny had one built. Danny had that wall built. You wouldn’t know that, because Danny wanted no recognition. Despite all efforts to keep his anonymity hid ...” Fr. Michael looked briefly at me as he made his way to the podium “... a lot of you know what he’s responsible for. Incase you don’t know, let me tell you.” Fr. Michael lifted a sheet of paper. “The nursery school playground. The senior center. Food bank. Fr. Paul’s cane. The replacement Fr. Joseph statue. Our walkway. Santa’s angel gifts for hundred families. Mrs. Gleason’s medical expenses.” Fr. Mike set down the list. “Danny doesn’t do it as a tax write off or for the recognition. Danny once told me ... you have to give it back. He never had all his life, so when he has, he gives. You don’t know Danny Bishop. So let me tell you who he is.” He paused. “Danny Bishop is my friend, and I love him.”

I didn’t know what to say. A lump formed in my throat. And I nodded with closed eyes.

Fr. Michael continued, “He’s the type of man that if you were cold, he’d give you the shirt off his back. Sad? Danny, oh, Danny can make you laugh. He can make you mad, but boy can that man produce a smile. Hungry. Danny would feed you. He’d walk a mile so a stranger wouldn’t have to. I am not exaggerating; he is an absolutely amazing, remarkable human being; he is the epitome of life. Now ...” he exhaled. “He’s gonna get mad, but I don’t care. For all that Danny is and has done; he isn’t immune from life’s unfairness. See, Danny, this thirty-five year old father, husband, friend ...” Fr.

Michael motioned out his hand. "Is fighting for his life. He's been given a prognosis of six weeks."

If it was more possible for that church to be silent, it was. I couldn't believe that Fr. Michael said that. I wanted him to stop, but a part of me couldn't react. I just grabbed Jessie's hand.

"It makes me sad more so it makes me angry. I keep telling Danny that I'm sure God has a reason, but for the life of me, I can't figure out what that reason is. Why? Danny? He hasn't given up the fight, and I truly believe if anyone can beat the unbeatable, it is Danny Bishop. So I bring to you my reason for this sermon. Thankfulness. I am thankful for Danny. And I want each and everyone of you. Young old, to do something for me. I want you to do a 'Danny'. I want you to think of something you are grateful for, and I want you to do something kind for someone else. Not out of money, recognition, but just because you have something to be grateful for, and you want to pass it on. Pass it on. And when that person says 'thank you,' I want you to say, "No, thank Danny Bishop, I'm following his example."

For some reason Fr. Michael froze. He stared down for the longest time at his hands, and then completely expended, he gazed up. "This week please. Then ... I then, excuse my language; I want you to pester the hell out of God. Pray for him. Pray for that miracle that Danny so much needs. Because in my humble opinion, a world without Danny will just be a plain ... world without." Fr. Michael stepped back. "God love you. Let us pray."

He went back into priestly mode, and led the congregation in standing and professing their faith. Jessie broke down and cried. I couldn't stand, I couldn't move or even mutter a word. I wanted to run up on that altar, grab him, and embrace him.

I did, when he was walking in the processional. I embraced Fr. Michael for the longest time. I thanked him for his words, and for giving me faith and strength to carry on. I thanked him for being in my life, and for shining the light on something else, I needed to do.

Case Study

“Do you know what it is?” I asked Fr. Michael as he and I had some ‘one on one’ practice time. I believe that was my first response to his telling me, ‘Danny has a plan.’

“Nope,” he shook his head. “Sunday after mass, he whispered in my ear that I gave him an idea. A resolution idea. Then ... he kissed me on the cheek.”

“Do you think he found God?”

Fr. Michael laughed. “As much as I would like to say ‘yes’, I have to say ‘no’. It’s something else.”

“Did you see him last night? How was he?”

“Fine,” Fr. Michael shrugged. “Just ... fine.”

“Hmm.” With a thinking stare, I leaned back in my chair and grabbed my mug. “Why do you suppose he enthusiastically stated he has a resolution idea and knows what he has to do, and not tell me.”

“Jessie maybe?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, she’s feeling left out. Danny knows this.”

“Jessie also knows, she can’t know what’s going on. If she does, when Danny passes, she will get frustrated, angry, hurt, and numerous other emotions will flood her waiting for his return. She’ll be looking for every sign we work on, every trigger. She’ll be pestering the hell out of you, Michael, until you have no clue whether it’s your imagination or Danny has contacted you.”

Michael, almost frustrated ran his hand through his hair. “I’m afraid of that as it is.”

“I’m sure.”

“How will I know, Babette?”

“We don’t.” She shrugged. “There will always be a shadow of a doubt. Even if it’s so minuscule, you, yourself as the messenger will always doubt whether or not you actually are making contact.”

“You know, Danny says he has a back up plan for my fears.”

“I bet he does,” I said. “I just wondered what his plan for resolution is.”

“Why don’t we wait to see what it is? Why so curios?”

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. “Have you tried guessing?”

“Yeah. But nothing that makes sense.”

“Do me a favor. Let’s call it part of our training.” I slid a tablet forward to Michael. “Take a moment, close your eyes, think Danny, and then write down the first thing that comes to your mind. But concentrate on him. Really concentrate.”

“This is silly.”

“It’s our training.”

“No, it’s you being nosey and not knowing.”

“Perhaps.” I smiled. I then watched our illustrious priest take the pencil. He held it apprehensively and closed his eyes. “Concentrate.”

“Concentrate,” He said. “I ...” the pencil dropped from his hand and his fingers went to his eyes.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Headache. Bad.”

“All of the sudden?”

“Yeah, but it’s gone now. Weird.” He shook his head. “I’ll try it again.”

Again he closed his eyes. The pencil hovered over the paper and Fr. Michael’s hand shook.

“Michael.”

“I’m really nauseas. Really, really nauseas.”

His words made my attention pique. “You’re tapping into him.”

“Wait.” He opened his eyes. “Does this mean, every time I tap in, I’ll get sick. Is this something that goes along with the territory?”

“Only if the person you’re tapping into is sick.”

He shook his head. “I don’t understand.”

“Danny must not be feeling well. Let it go, breathe out.”

As he did, so, slowly through his parted lips, Fr. Michael scribbled something on the paper and ripped it off. After he folded the paper, he sprang up.

“Michael?” I questioned as he raced from the room.

“I have to throw up.”

I paused. I had to. I recanted the symptoms that Danny had previously while undergoing treatments and it worried me that perhaps we were headed in a repeat direction. I hoped that wasn’t the

case. I hoped that Fr. Michael was just tapping in too much, and in doing so, was hitting some bad energy. Which was possible.

Standing, I walked toward the hallway and aimed my voice at the bathroom. "I know you're vomiting, but can you tell me if you have a foul taste in your mouth aside from the everyday vomit taste?"

Michael started to reply with a 'what' but it transformed into a long gag of regurgitation.

"Bad taste. Foul. Bile. Sour. Something. I'm trying to determine if it's Danny, bad energy or ..."

I suppose it was his attempt of interrupting me or responding, but instead all I heard was the thunderous noise of up heaving.

Shrugging, I stepped away. "Maybe you ate something bad." I walked back to the table and saw the folded paper. Reaching for it, my attention was drawn away when the doorbell rang. I wasn't expecting anyone, nor does anyone usually pop by in the middle afternoon. So I retrieved it.

Oddly enough it was the mailman, he handed me my measly stack of Tuesday mail, then an envelope I had to sign for.

It wasn't a bill, or prize notification; it looked more like an invitation.

The address wasn't handwritten, in fact it was typed. Carefully I opened the card and began to pull it out,

You are cordially invited ...

Michael returned, "Sorry."

"Are you OK?" I asked as my eyes started to read again.

"Yeah, better. Thanks."

"Good, I was ..." I stopped with an 'oh'.

"Babette?" Fr. Michael questioned. "What's wrong? What is that?"

"Michael, what did you write on the paper?"

Michael shook his head. "Doesn't make sense. Don't worry about it."

"I asked you to jot down the first thing that came to your mind when thinking about what Danny's plan was. What did you write?"

Almost embarrassed, Michael handed me the paper. "I'm sorry."

I unfolded the sheet and heaved out a breath as I read Fr. Michael's single word. "Well, seems as if you tap into Danny Boy

better than you think.”

“What do you mean?” he asked curiously.

“You wrote ...” I held up his paper. “The word ‘funeral’. Well, my friend, take a look at how right you were and what our boy is up to now.” I handed him the card.

“What is it?”

“Take a look,” I said. “It’s an invitation.”

Michael pulled the card from the envelope. “To Danny’s funeral?”

In all Faith – Fr. Michael

Undeniably, the first thought that came to my mind was that my dear friend Danny Bishop ... was insane.

You are cordially invited ...

Off peach colored stationary, computer engraved but, beautifully done. What was he up to? Then I read the invitation again.

You are cordially invited to attend the funeral celebration of Daniel Bishop. Saturday, December 7, at 1:30 PM. Reception will follow, live music, dress casually. All are invited. No tears ... laughter and happiness, please.

Funeral celebration. What is a funeral? A celebration of death? No, it is a celebration of life. It may be an end, but it is also the signification of something. Like a runner in a marathon. He doesn't keel over and cry, whimper in depression because he finished a great long race. No, he rejoices. Just like Danny wanted to do. He didn't want to whimper, he wanted to rejoice in the life, the great life he had.

My God, I believed he was on to something with his resolution.

Haven't you done it before? Haven't you lost someone, and said to yourself, 'Gees, if only I would have seen them. If only I would have told them.'

Danny was giving everyone the opportunity. Tell him. Tell him while he could still hear it, know it, and appreciate it. Friend, family, enemy.

Inside the little envelope, along with directions to his house, was a slip of paper that read, *'Did I do something for you? Did I not? Did I make you smile or piss you off? If I failed you or accomplished you. Tell me. And in return allow me to thank you for being part of my life ... Danny.'*

In other words, Danny was telling people, 'hey, say to me what you want.'

It was a brilliant idea. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to pat him on the back. It was if Danny was saying, "Yes I'm dying, but I lived life. I, Danny Bishop, refuse to go out with a whimper. I'm going out with a bang, and probably the best damn party anyone has ever been to.'

How symbolic of Danny.

I was positive; others like myself were preparing things to say to Danny. Of course, Danny informed me he was preparing to say a few things to people as well. It frightened me a tad when he said, people may be shocked because not all that he had to say were rose colored compliments. He promised me nothing mean was going to be said—Danny wouldn't do that anyhow—but he had a few things to get off his chest, and I was one of the recipients.

I would have pondered that for a while, but I kind of had a feeling what he was going to say.

No matter what it was, Danny found a way other than making a list, to resolve his life. He invited everyone he knew into one room, and would try to do it in one shot.

There was an older woman in my parish who knew she was dying. Two weeks before she left the earth, she called for her family. Her entire family. For five hours, one by one, in private, she spoke to each and every family member. They exchanged thoughts, feelings, and said their goodbyes. A goodbye to a loved one, while the loved one could still hear it.

Resolution.

The woman's family held a sense of peace after her passing. Peace because nothing was left unsaid.

Danny said I gave him the idea. I don't know how, I won't take credit. Nevertheless, I'm grateful Danny came up with it. While others thought it morbid, I thought of it as a gift. A gift from Danny.

He was covering all bases. Beating the illness or not, he was assuring not only resolution, but closure to his life. A great life, that I was glad to be a part of.

Chapter Fourteen – Danny

Fifth grade the doctors thought I had tuberculosis, and every day I had to go to the hospital for antibiotic therapy. Everyday. My father drove me. He adjusted his work schedule so he could be there with me to hold my hand. I felt as if I were in fifth grade again, when I began radiation treatments after my stroke.

My father went with me. You know what? I loved it. I truly loved him being there. I wished to be that child again, and have him hold my hand and say it will be fine. I felt his presence though, I truly did.

He made me breakfast; we got in the car, stopped at the coffee shop, and headed to the hospital. We even had lunch afterward. Our chats were chats. We laughed, and he was the only one who didn't scoff or seemed shocked at first about my funeral celebration. He responded, 'Only you, Daniel, only you.'

I was on the phone with the caterer, arguing with him and my father on what would be a better finger food choice when it happened. A strange sensation I probably wouldn't have thought twice about before, but I did at that second. The tingling. I knew I hadn't been feeling well, and was tiring easily the day before. I wanted to chalk it up to the treatments, and when a slight headache started, I grew alarmed.

However, the second I felt that tingle sweep across my head, I knew. Some may have called me paranoid, but I wasn't stupid. Same time frame, same treatment number. Something was up.

I finished the call with the caterer, calmly turned to my father, and said, "I think something is wrong with me."

"What do you mean, Daniel?" he asked.

"I think the treatments might be causing problems again. Call it hunch, maybe I'm imagining ..."

"No." My father halted me. "No one knows your body better than you. If this worries you we will tell the doctor. We will insist. We can make him rule out a problem before you get the treatment."

I sighed out in relief, "My thoughts exactly."

Then my father reached over and grabbed my hand. "It will be all right. Everything will be fine."

I knew it the second I saw Dr. Stanley. I believe my father did, too. We both knew.

He tapped my chart with a slight bit of nervousness across the palm of his hand, shut the door, and forced a smile.

I whispered, "I'm doomed" to my father trying to make light.

"Sorry it took so long," Dr. Stanley said. He then did that "There's something I don't want to tell you" exhale. "Danny, we had another clot."

I tensed up and nodded.

"Small, it the back portion of your left side of the brain. We call what you experienced a mini stroke. Obviously, your anatomical make up rejects the radiation therapy or fights it. We knew that was possible, right?"

Again I nodded. "What else?"

"We scanned for another clot. There isn't one. But, radiation therapy is out. Which ..." he paused. "Brings us to our problem."

I finally opened my eyes and looked at him.

"The scan showed something else." He laid down the chart. "The tumors, Danny, are still there. In fact, there is a remarkable increase in size."

I thought through my bombardment, I was going to die. I was pummeled. "They didn't respond at all?"

"I'm sorry. There ... there are five more as well."

Had I not been sitting down I would have fallen over. I felt my fathers arm wrap around my shoulder and he gripped to me.

"How long?" I asked, the words barely cracking from my throat.

Dr. Stanley looked at me, then my father. It seemed as if his moment of hesitation was a life time. "Two weeks."

"Oh my God." My entire body winced.

"They are progressing fast, and the weight of them will eventually crush your heart. I don't want to give up." Dr. Stanley said.

“We can call in a surgeon, risk the surgery, then bombard you with mega amounts of Chemotherapy to blast your bone marrow. Slow the cell process down ...”

“Chemo?”

“It’s a shot, right now. A shot I think we should take.”

I couldn’t say anything. I turned slightly toward my father.

“I’ll ... I’ll leave you two to talk for a moment. I’ll be back.” He walked to the door. “Shall I call Jessie for you?”

My father answered for me, “No we will speak to Daniel’s wife.”

I heard the door close and I looked up. “Father.”

“Daniel. I am sorry.”

“I thought ... I really thought I was going to beat this. Oh, God, I’m gonna die.”

“Daniel.” My father laid both his hands on my shoulders. “It is my greatest pain right now. My heart breaks. If I could trade places with you at this moment, I would. I have no words. All I can say, my son, you did beat this. In your own way, your own style, you have conquered so much with this illness.”

“It’s over,” I said with exasperation. “It’s really over.”

I couldn’t believe it. All the hope, all the optimism, went out the window within the thirty seconds that Dr. Stanley was in the room.

“I am ... I am so proud of you.” My father laid his hand on my cheek.

“What do I do?” I asked. “Do I try the chemo, what?”

“Only you can answer that, Daniel. But, there comes a time when we must look at the steps we have taken. You need to ask yourself. Are you wanting to fight for breath, or are you wanting to fight for life. If you want to fight for life, Daniel, you have that. It just ...” My father softened his voice. “It just might be time to fight to enjoy what is left.”

Chapter Fifteen – Danny

Decision was made. In a sense, during that short twenty minute car ride, and the coffee stop on the way home, in a sense I came to grips with that decision.

Dr. Stanley wished me luck, and then said he didn't blame me.

The next thing I had to do was just let everyone know. Let them know, that I, Danny Bishop, without a doubt was going to die.

Who would I tell first? My mother, Jessie? That answer was given to me, when I walked into the house and my daughter Nina flew to the door to greet me. I lifted her up in my arms, and I couldn't help it. I broke. I cried. I gripped onto her and cradled her chest to my chest and buried my head to her frail shoulders.

"Daddy?" she asked.

I shook my head. "Daddy's OK, I just need to hold you."

I raised my eyes to the sound of Jessie's voice.

My father lifted his hand. "I'll hold her off."

Barely able to speak, I whispered, "Thank you. I need to be alone with Nina."

My father nodded, called out Jessie's name, and disappeared into the other room.

I didn't put Nina down, until her and I went into the living room. I partially closed the doors and stared at them until I gained my composure.

"Let's talk." I said with a forced brightness. "OK, Ni?"

She must have heard me snifle because she asked, "Do you have a cold? Are you sick, Daddy?"

"You know what, Ni?" I walked to her and sat with her on the floor. My hand played with her fingers. "You're a big girl."

"I am." She smiled.

Her precious smile. Her precious face. I reached up to her and stroked her cheek. "You know how I was in the hospital?"

"You're better now."

I shook my head. "I wish with all my heart, Sweetie, you fully understood this. But I don't think you will. Not yet. When you're

older. But, Daddy ... Daddy is sick, honey. And I'm gonna be around, but pretty soon, I won't be around the way you are used to."

Nina shook her head, totally displaying she was lost.

"Ok, let me see if I can explain. See ..."

"Danny!" Jessie's scold carried in the room. "Stop it."

I jolted and spun to see Jessie standing in the doorway. "Jess, I was ..."

"I know what you were doping." She folded her arms. "Nina, pap-pap needs you go on. Hurry."

"We'll talk after, Daddy," Nina darted me a kiss and raced out.

"Jess." I stood up. "Look."

"How ..." She gaped at me. "How could you even think about telling our daughter that you ..."

"Are dying."

"She's four."

"She needs to know why I won't be around for Christmas, Jess."

Jessie froze. "You were going to tell her you won't be here on Christmas?"

"Yes, I wanted to prepare her for the possibility that ..."

"You're cracked." She spun from me. "She's four years old. You'll traumatize her."

I grabbed hold of Jessie and stopped her. "And having her wake up one morning, and me being gone won't traumatize her."

"It's not gonna happen."

"Yeah, Jess, yeah it is." I released her. "As of today ... no more treatments."

Jessie stepped back, looking totally offended, as if I called her some horrible name. "What?"

"No more treatments. They found another clot. Small. And in doing the scan ... there are more tumors. The ones that were there ..."

"No." She shook her head. "You're joking."

"I wish ... I wish I was."

"You're too calm. Too calm." She lifted her hands.

"I'm dealing with this. I really am."

"You're dealing with this, Danny." She kept shaking her head in denial. "You're not."

“Jessie, sweetie. It’s bad. OK. I wouldn’t say it if it wasn’t ... Dr. Stanley says in two weeks ...”

“No!” she blasted at me. “No. No. You ... you ...” she released a single sob. “You quit. I can’t believe you quit fighting.”

“Oh my God how can you say that.” I reached to her.

Jessie swung out. “Because you gave up. You’re admitting defeat.”

“No I’m only admitting that this is ahead of us now.” I stayed calm. “I never gave up. I won’t give up. Not Not until I take my last breath, will I ever give up.” I chuckled softly. “And even then ... I won’t give up. But I need to make peace with this, and I have to make peace with this now. To do that, I need you to make peace with the fact that I am dying.”

Tightly closed mouth, Jessie’s head went side by side. Her top lip quivered, she stepped back further and folded her arms. “Never.” She whimpered. “I will never be at peace. And if you need me to accept this, so you can be at peace. Then I’m sorry, Danny. I’m sorry.”

I felt the emptiness of not only the air, but of the room, and part of my being, when Jessie turned face on me, and walked right out.

Case Study

For the first time in eight years I lit up a cigarette. In fact, I smoked three from my house to the rectory to speak to Fr. Michael. It had been on my mind since I received the invitation in the mail the day before, but when Fr. Michael called me to inform me of the news, I informed him we had to talk ... immediately.

As expected the priest's reaction was, 'yes, we have to work harder now, but ...'

No, 'buts', to me, we had hit zero preparation time.

"What?" Fr. Michael nearly ridiculed me when I told him.

"Fr. Michael, you know this as well as I do."

"Does this have to do with what I told you Jessie told me."

"Oh it has everything to do with it," I said. "Have you spoken to Danny?"

Michael shook his head. "No, he said he was busy with something and he'd talk to me when he finished."

"He is."

Fr. Michael, again, shook his head. "You have me so lost."

"We've all been lost, Fr. Michael. Lost, confused, and way off course."

We were in the front office of the rectory, and Fr. Michael pulled up a chair from the receptionist's desk and sat down. "Talk."

"This whole thing has been a fucking riddle." I explained. "Why did Danny seek me out."

"To help him get assurance that he would return."

"And what has my role been in this?"

"Why are you asking me these questions? Are you uncertain?"

"Yes and no. Tell me. Tell me what my role has been. What purpose have I served so far."

"Well, for starters, and this is just my opinion mind you ..." he lifted his hand. "You gave me confidence in myself that if this is possible, then I can be the earthly connection. Plus, your ability alone, gave us both faith that it can be done. You brought Danny to the other side ... and most importantly, we wouldn't have a clue about the three phases if it wasn't for you."

“The three phases being. Acceptance, resolution, readiness.” I said. “Now where do you think we are?”

“We are finishing up resolution.” Fr Michael answered.

“I think he did it.”

“The funeral?” he asked. “Ms. Welsh, it hasn’t happened.”

“Remember we talked about a ‘play’ on words? Acceptance was a play on words. Resolution as well.” I started to pace, something I did often when trying to ramble and make sense to the person with whom I spoke. “Danny didn’t have an issue to resolve.”

Fr. Michael slowly stood up. “He had to resolve his life.”

I nodded.

“And not only did he resolve his life with the planning of the funeral, he resolved his life today when he made the decision to face his inevitable death.”

“And in doing that?” I questioned.

“Readiness.” Michael answered.

“Done.”

“All three phases are complete.”

“Hence, another play on words.”

Fr. Michael tilted his head to me in wonder.

“Why did we have the phases?” I questioned.

“He had to complete them in order to be able to come back.”

“Bringing my role into this. To help him with the three phases, right?” I shook my head. “Play on words number two. I only had to help him know the three phases. The three phases—play on words again—he *would* complete before he left us and returned.”

“I ... I don’t get what you mean.” Fr. Michael stuttered. Somehow I feel he did understand me and was just seeking confirmation of what he understood me to say.

“Michael, he didn’t have to complete them, he would complete them before he died. We weren’t rushing to get them done before Danny passed on. Danny was going to completely them anyhow.”

“They were the signs, to us, that he was leaving.”

“They were not only the three phases. They were signs. When done ...” I stopped. I said no more.

Fr. Michael sighed out. “When done, Danny leaves.”

“You said yourself, you sensed it was close.”

“How close?” he asked.

“Michael,” I spoke with sad passion. “He completed the phases already.”

Michael shook his head. “No, that doesn’t feel right. He didn’t. He didn’t complete the phases. I am going to argue.”

“Which phase?”

“Readiness.”

“But today ...”

“Means nothing,” Michael said strongly. “He accepted his death. No way. Danny is not ready. And I firmly believe, until he is at that moment of death, or until he says the words ‘I’m ready’, then we still have time with him.” He closed his eyes. “I pray.”

In all Faith – Fr. Michael

There had to have been to hundred people crammed into Danny's house. Eighties music played, waiters wore tropical shirts as they served finger foods. People laughed, smiled, talked. But one thing was missing from the preplanned funeral celebration—Danny.

Jessie made the announcement that Danny had passed on a half an hour after everyone arrived.

I woke up as soon as she said that.

It was a dream, yet it felt so real. I breathed heavily, couldn't think, sweat formed on my brow, and when I looked at the time, I had only been sleeping a few hours. I literally tried to stay up all night waiting for Danny to call me. He told me he would call when he was ready to talk to me. That was the afternoon before.

I grew worried and a little upset. Through the entire illness and preparations, Danny called me constantly. I was always there, but on one of the most important and devastating days, Danny was silent.

Why hadn't he called?

I couldn't wait. I just couldn't wait. Five-thirty in the morning or not, I freshened up and headed right over to Danny's house.

"Hey, Fr. Mike!" Danny answered the door brightly. "We do have a psychic connection, I was just gonna call you. Come in."

"When?" I asked.

"When what?"

"When were you going to call me?"

"Now." Danny shut the door.

"You're lying."

"No, seriously, I was. Right hand to your God."

I grumbled at that remark, and then when I settled down a bit I noticed his mood. "You're awfully perky." I told him. "How long ago did you just get up?"

"I haven't been to bed." Danny answered.

"You have to sleep, Danny."

"I will, after we talk. I don't want to sleep long. I'm spending the day with Nina and Jess at that kids pizza place. You know the one with the Giant Rat?"

"Chuck E. Cheese."

Danny snapped his finger. "That's the one. Besides, back to sleep. I'd rather watch my wife and daughter sleep. It's cool ... and, I had to finish up what I was working on all day."

"Which is?"

"Man you're snippy."

"I'm snippy because you said you'd call me back."

Danny leaned into me as if he were telling some big secret. "You know, if you would have given me a chance I would have called you back. I was picking up the phone when you knocked."

"Yeah, right."

"Yee of little faith." Danny laughed. "Ha. Yee of little faith. Man, I'm on today." He reached out and gave a pat to my arm. "What do you think?"

"Are you on some sort of medication?" I asked seriously.

"You mean like anti depressant?" Danny shook his head. "Nope, all me. I feel good. But, I do need to talk to you. Can we go to my den?"

"Sure." I followed him down the short hallway.

"Coffee's already made," Danny opened the den door. "See, I told you I was calling you. Come on in."

He was right. The Carafe was on the desk, two chairs were there. "Danny?"

Danny closed the door. "Have a seat." He motioned out his hand.

"What's this all about?" I asked and sat.

"Me." Danny joined me in a seat. "About me." He paused. "And my death."

"I see." As I nodded I watched Danny slide forward a huge manila folder which looked stuffed to the max. "What's that?" I asked.

"What I've been working on all day. Also what I need to talk to you about. But fear not, my dear Padre." He opened the envelope and pulled out a sheet of paper, "I outlined so I don't have to go over

everything.”

“Danny why are you discussing this with me.”

“Because you’re you.” He answered. “And, you’re the only one I can discuss these things with. They are wishes, details of my death, and so forth. You won’t think I’m morbid. My father wouldn’t think I was morbid, but it would be painful to him to talk to him about this. Understand.”

“It’s painful to me, Danny.”

“I realize that. But you’re my friend. I need you to also be my assurance.”

“You got it.” I laid my hand on his and squeezed. “Whatever you want.”

“Good.” Danny smiled. “Now, if you’ll forgive the switch of demeanor, I’m gonna be totally serious for this talk. OK? Everything I talk about is serious, I won’t be joining, no matter how outlandish.”

I nodded. “I understand.”

“Cool. We’re off and running. All right ...” he exhaled. “I didn’t know where to start, so I’ll start with you. I’m gonna come back. I will achieve that, when ...” he shrugged. “I don’t know. But I will. I kind of jotted down a plan of what to do. But basically, whether through a dream, a ghostly vision of me, whatever, I’ll give you a message. The message will be yours and Jessie’s assurance that I am hanging round.”

“I know that.”

“But you don’t know what the message is. I do. I’m not gonna tell you. But when you get it. You have to call Ralph Dodger.”

“You’re attorney?”

“Yeah, just like you’re my assurance, he will be your assurance that you made contact.”

“How?”

“Never mind that. He will. Let’s move on.”

Thinking, ‘OK’, I sat back. “What else?”

“Still on you. I know we joke, rather, I know I joke. But, I want you to know I will be all right with it if you end up leaving the priesthood down the line for my wife and ...”

“Whoa. Wait.” I held up my hand. Danny had just thrown me through a loop. “Danny, I’m not leaving the priesthood.”

“You may.”

“I’m pretty certain I won’t.”

“And, I’m pretty certain you will,” he said. “See, you’re a great guy. I would love for you to watch over my family. A part of me knows you love my wife, and she loves you. It’s a different love. Nevertheless, love. I really don’t think if you guys hook up and you leave the God business for her that it’s a mortal sin, I don’t know, it may be, I’ll be the one to find out, right?”

“You’re insane.”

“Call me perceptive. Next.” Danny’s eyes skimmed his paper.

“Is it all right to still be stuck on that last part.”

“Um ... no, we have to move on.”

“Of course.”

Danny continued, “My death.”

“Danny.” The words pained me.

Still, Danny spoke. “I don’t know what’s gonna happen. If I’ll go fast. Slow. No one knows. But, Fr. Mike I want to die here at home. No hospital.”

“Absolutely.”

“I also know there’s a chance that I may lay in some sort of coma. I don’t want everyone hanging over me, staring at my rolled back eyes, listening to my labored breaths, all while crying. I don’t want that.”

“You won’t have a choice.”

“Yeah, I have you.” Danny said. “Please. Not that I want to be alone when I die. I just don’t want everyone there for days waiting for me to die. Please.”

“Who ... who do you want there?”

“Ok, if I go fast. It won’t matter, But if it looks like I may hang on for a day or so, just you and Jessie. Her to hold my hand, you to do that prayer stuff. Have my parents, my brother, have them say goodbye before I take my last breath.”

“I will do my best to assure that.”

“Excellent. And there’s one other thing.”

“What’s that?”

“Because I am different, and because I don’t want that sad feel. When you think I’m going, could you play Quiet Riot’s ‘Come on feel

the noise’.”

My head cocked. “What?”

“Quiet Riot.” At that point Danny started to sing.

“I know the song.”

“Cool, then just pop it in the player and let it go.”

“While you pass on?” I asked.

“Yes.”

Clarifying again, I asked. “You want to hear Quiet Riot’s ‘Come on Feel the Noise’ as you leave this earth?”

“Absolutely. It will be some kick ass music for the greeters, angels, whatever, don’t you think?”

“Oh, yeah,” I said sarcastically. “The angels will love it.”

“Excellent. So you’ll do it.”

“This isn’t a joke is it? Because if I press play and offend ...”

“Nope. No joke. I told you.”

“Ok,” I exhaled. “Quiet Riot it is.”

“This is great. Thanks.” Danny grinned. “All right. Really morbid thing here.”

Rubbing my brow, I motioned my hand. “Go on.”

“I’m having this funeral so people can say goodbye to me. Pay their last respects in an upbeat atmosphere. Have fun, because that is who I am. So knowing that, I don’t want anyone to know when I die. I don’t want a viewing. No one hanging around a coffin staring at my corpse. Funeral done. I want to be cremated, and you, Jessie, my family, you guys do a quiet thing and spread my ashes.”

“That can be done.”

“Can you bring your guitar and play Hail Holy Queen. Because I love the way you do that?”

My head spun. “Yes.” I nodded. “Danny? Did you spend all day doing this, planning this.”

“And some,” he said. “Fr. Mike, I wrote letters. A created this really neat newsletter of my life, you’ll have to make copies.” he rambled strangely in an upbeat manner. “I made a cassette tape with your portable studio. Put some pictures together I want my brother to have.”

“You did all this. After finding out about the tumors. Does Jessie know.”

“Yeah,” Danny nodded. “She wasn’t really happy.”

“I would think not.”

“But I understand. I do. It had to be done.”

“You seem ... you seem ...”

“Happy?”

“If I can say that ... yes.” I told him.

“I am. Fr. Mike,” He folded his hands. “Something happened to me while I did this. I got a grander look at my life. I got to put my life in perspective. The letters, the pictures, and you know what?”

“What?” I asked.

“I had a helluva life. It wasn’t as long as I’d like, but it was one I loved.”

Smiling, I reached out to Danny’s hand. “You did.”

“Yeah, and in realizing that. The oddest thing occurred. I was hit with this peacefulness. I was peaceful about this whole thing. I was sitting back about midnight, and it dawned on me. I’m all right with this.”

“You’re all right with this.”

“Yes, the dying. Me having to leave.”

“We’re gonna miss you.”

Solemnly Danny smiled. “Yeah, but I’ll be around. If I can pull some ghostly practical jokes, you know I will.”

I chuckled, but it was sad. “I know you will.” My hand smoothed across the envelope. “You did well with this. It looks like you’re ...” I halted myself, when I realized what was about to slip from my mouth.

“Ready?” Danny asked.

My head sprang up, and my eyes met his.

“Yeah, Fr. Mike.” Danny smiled. “I guess you can say ... I’m ready.”

Chapter Sixteen – Danny

We were laughing. Four hours of exhaustible fun at the pizza place, a tad of indigestion, but we were laughing when we returned home. Nina had an armful of cheap toys she won. It was an afternoon to remember.

My father seemed waiting for our return, I believe he was waiting more so for the pizza. “It was fun?” he asked the second we stepped in.

Jessie answered, “You’re son is insane.”

“You’re just too grown up, Jess.” I lifted Nina and kissed her. “Tell Mommy. Grow down. Grow down.”

“Grow down, Mommy.” Nina giggled.

I set her down. “It was fun today. Jess, give my dad his pizza, he looks like he’s going to attack you over it.”

Jessie growled at me and handed my father the box. “Wait until you hear what he did.”

My father looked at me, then to his box. “Perhaps I shall enjoy my pizza first.” He grabbed Nina’s hand. “Come share with me.”

“A wise man,” I pointed to my father as he walked down the hall with Nina.

“You should learn something from him,” Jessie said. “He wouldn’t have done that.”

“What? What?” I laughed. “All I did was invite the rat.”

“No you invite Chuck E. Cheese to your funeral,” she said. “Danny.”

“He could add that spice.”

She closed her eyes and smiled. “You are so funny. I wish I could have seen his face when you asked him.”

“You did. He did this.” I grinned really wide.

Jessie laughed.

“Come here,” I took hold of her hand. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“Thanks for a great day.” Forward I leaned to Jessie and kissed her. It wasn’t one of those wild passionate kisses, but it was nice.

Soft, perfect. I wanted another. I brought my lips to my wife's again, this time with an ornery smile.

"What are you up to?" she asked.

"Nothing." Lowing my head, I stopped.

"Danny?"

What happened?

One second I was kissing my wife, the next ... I dropped. I just dropped.

No one called emergency services, for that I was grateful. No hospital, they just took me upstairs into my bedroom. My eyes opened—I don't believe I had control over that—and everything was blurry. More so, it looked as if I peered through someone's strong eyeglasses. The voices, though seemingly flowing through water, were clear.

At first you know, I thought I passed out and I was fine. I could feel Jessie's fingers wrapped around my hand; the sight of her was only through my peripheral vision. I truly, one hundred percent believed I could speak, and planned on doing so, until I heard Fr. Michael's voice.

Amen.

Then I saw him, he walked from the foot of my bed.

"Through the Holy Anointing," he said, "may the Lord forgive you whatever sin you have committed."

'No', I thought. He wasn't.

Fr. Michael continued, *"Lord have mercy on us. Christ have Mercy on us. Our Father who art in heaven ..."*

'Last Rites. He's delivering last rites.'

Through my left ear I heard Jessie whispering the pray.

"Hallow be thy name."

That was it. I was dying. The more I focused, the more I heard.

"Thy Kingdom come, they will be done. On earth as it is in heaven."

It was over. My breathing was short, marked, like a slow steady beat of a drum, I could hear my diaphragm snap out, and wheeze in.

'Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses.'

Out.

In.

“As we forgive those who trespass against. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil.”

I tried to speak, and heard the noise I made. A noise.

‘Save thy servant. Who puts his trust in Thee, my God.’

Like a moan, tiny, barely heard it escaped me. Jessie grabbed my hand tighter.

‘Send him help from the Holy Place, and from Sion come to his deliverance.’

This wasn’t me. It couldn’t have been me. I was leaving. I was dying. My wife. My daughter. Family ...

‘Be though to him a tower of strength against the face of the enemy’

Soon. But when? I saw my father, mother, and brother. Michael took a place on my other side.

‘Let thy enemy not prevail against him, nor wicked one have power to hurt him.’

It was at hand, the hour of my judgment.

‘Lord hear my prayer and let my cry come unto Thee.’

There was still more I wanted to say. To my wife, I love you. My daughter, you were my life. My parents. My God, what a life you gave me. My brother, you have been my confident. Michael, my friend. Suddenly my life seemed to flood my mind in an instantaneous moment. A rush of peacefulness took over.

My breath became more pronounced. Snap. Thump. Wheeze. Shallow.

‘The Lord be with you, and with your spirit.’

A silence took over the room. I could tell my breaths were growing more and more apart. Each moment without an inhale caused a loud silence to ring.

Then the silence was broken.

It was the last thing I really expected. I never thought he’d pull through.

Music.

Quiet Riot.

‘Mike, oh, Mike, you did it.’ I thought. ‘You’re the man. You’re so cool.’ I wanted to scream it out. How could I have even entertained the thought that Fr. Michael would let me down. He

assured I left this earth with a send off that was no less Danny Bishop.

“Michael,” Jessie wisped out softly by my ear. “Michael, he’s smiling. Hurry, look ... Danny’s smiling.”

The Flip Side – Jessie

Michael's dream ended up being prophetic. Not only about Danny passing before his preplanned funeral, but also regarding my waiting a half an hour to inform the party goers that Danny would only be there ... in spirit.

It put a slight damper on things for a spell. But I wouldn't let it stay that way. I beckoned everyone to tell me funny Danny stories, share with me about him, and drown my being in my husband. I needed it. Needed to smile because Danny always made me smile.

Life was missing. I knew the newness of his being gone was still present, but something about me died that same day Danny did. He was the brightness to my dark, the up when I was down. I didn't know left from right, I wanted him back.

Ms. Welsh gave me some explanation about those on the other side not having any essence of time. That there was a chance Danny didn't know how long he was dead. That didn't help me. He promised he'd be back, and I fully expected to see, or hear from his spirit immediately.

That didn't happen.

At first I thought maybe he was mad at me because I didn't call for an ambulance. I beat the hell out of myself for three weeks wondering if he we let him die too soon. Maybe if we would have called 911, Danny would have pulled through.

When he fell to the floor, a part of me sensed it was over. When Johsen said, 'Let us take him upstairs,' I trusted what the wise healer in my father in law had to say.

It still didn't stop me from feeling guilty, from feeling as if we allowed my husband to leave this earth a little too early.

Danny gave Fr. Michael an envelope, and inside were letters he had written to about twenty people. We handed them out at the funeral, then the next day—as requested by Danny—in a quiet service by the ocean, we set his ashes free. Then Fr. Michael whipped into Hail Holy Queen. Funny, how someone so un-religious like Danny, could love a song like that as much as he did. I never got it.

Obscure things, eccentric likes, that was all part of Danny. What

an empty place the home had become. No matter how much I tried to fill the silence, I couldn't. Nothing could replace Danny.

The final smile on his face, before he took his last breath, told me he was at peace. I was OK with that. Just ... OK. To me, that smile was his last gift. It helped in knowing he all right in where he went. I needed that. Danny's retuning to me, no matter how outlandish it sounded, was indeed something I count on. After a month of nothing, I had to resign myself that Danny was around, but in a different way than planned. He was still here. Through memories, through our daughter, through all of us ... Danny would always live on.

Case Study

It always baffled me how someone who gave so much life and love could cause so much desperation when they left the earth.

With in two months of Danny's passing, no one was showing signs of bouncing back. No one except Jessie. Now, granted two months is not a lot of time, but something had to give.

Danny had everyone wrapped up in waiting on his return, they forgot how to live.

Jessie lost Danny, but refuse to lose him all together. The maddening little woman who worked my nerves, made me so angry during my time with Danny, ended up being a friend. She was grounded, realistic, and held no expectations of Danny's spirit coming back to 'guide' her.

I didn't want to tell her, that I too waited on Danny. But, like Johsen, I was prepared for a long wait. There had been spirits that took a decade to make their presence known. Sometimes that is just the way it is.

For as much of an impact as Danny had alive on people, his death had just as big an impact. Danny Bishop became such an icon, like Elvis, I actually thought some TV station would air a documentary about him.

He left his wife well taken care of, so her financial worries were nil. Which was good because she had Nina to contend with. The four year old girl, stayed 'up' because each day she believed that Daddy was coming back.

I got the phone calls from his mother, brother, colleagues, Fr. Michael. I actually started worrying that perhaps Danny was in some sort of purgatory limbo for what he did to that poor priest. Fr. Michael Craven was beside himself. He was a lost soul.

I guess in a sense we were all lost souls. The adjustment period without Danny was unbearable. Even though Danny Bishop was in my life for a short span of time, I had been changed.

Nothing was the same for anyone.

Danny was missed terribly.

In all Faith – Fr. Michael

Nine months.

Why didn't I think of the significance of it? It was fitting. It takes nine months for a new life to begin. How ironic, at the end of nine months, I was beginning mine.

Nine months after Danny's death, I was in a place I never thought I'd be It wasn't with the church.

I didn't handle Danny's passing. I thought I would. I became obsessed with being the earthly link Danny needed. For the first few months, I drove Ms. Welsh insane. Every noise, bump in the night, dream, you name it, I wondered if it were my sign from Danny. The sign that he had come back.

His illness made no sense to me, and his death even less. For the second time in my life I questioned my faith, and what I stood for. I looked at Danny's life, a man who rarely went to church, proclaimed his lack of belief in God, yet, he lived an example life. A good life.

Not only had I become engrossed in being ready for the spiritual message from Danny, I became engrossed with Jessie and Nina. More and more I found myself stepping in, going with Jessie to take care of things, going over at the drop of a hat when she needed to talk. Doing things for people in Danny's name at Jessie's request. Keep it going, as he would have done.

At just about the nine month mark after Danny's passing, I found myself on a path. A path that led me to take a long sabbatical from the church. I was still a priest in a sense, but I would be working with the church in other ways to help people. Doing that, freed me up to be there for Jessie and Nina. That was something I wanted to do.

I remember the day well.

A little apartment not far from the church. I had just settled my things there. I was hooking up my computer when I saw the message light on my machine. I didn't hear the phone ring. Figuring, it was when I was getting something from my car, I pressed play on the old style answering machine.

"Michael, are you avoiding me." Jessie asked in her message. "I

hope not. I know you aren't wanting to hear me bitch. I can't believe you moved in that apartment. I have a spare room. It's my cooking, isn't it?"

Beep.

I chuckled, especially when a second message started again.

"Speaking of cooking, Dinner is at seven tonight. Nina has girl scouts."

Beep.

"Me again, can you take Nina? I forgot I have to serve at the senior center tonight. Let me know, thanks."

Beep.

"One more thing. Scratch dinner. We'll get pizza."

Beep.

I waited. No more messages. Shaking my head, intent on calling Jessie back, I reached for the phone. Before I even touched it, I heard.

Ping.

A sound I recognized well. A 'too easy' pluck of a guitar string.

My hand retracted and I looked around.

Silence.

Shrugging it off as being caused from a vibration, again, I reached for the phone.

Ping.

A note rang out. It was followed by another, then another.

Four notes played in a sequence. I knew it was no vibration. I sprang up, and spun to where my guitar perched on the stand not three feet away. My mouth formed to question, but I didn't speak a word when fast and ferociously, the small window in my living room slid upward.

It caused me to gasp, but not as much as the breeze that gushed in. It brought a coolness that could not have been produced on such a hot August day. I was frozen at a stand still. I didn't know what to do. Run to the window or run out.

Then what happened next could have been a nine point on the Richter scale, it shook my being more than any earthquake.

Beep.

The answering machine.

The click of it caused me to sharply turn my head to the red indication light. No sooner did I do so, it began to play.

Soft, angelic, and sounding like a choir of harmonizing angels, they slowly sang.

‘Hail Holy Queen and throne above, oh, Maria ...’

I lost all ability to breathe. My heart beat in my ear. My chest moved heavily up and down as I locked a frightened stare of that machine.

‘Hail Mother of Mercy and of Love, Oh Maria ...’

They held out the last note, as it trailed off it echoed as if they sang in a chamber. In fact, it was scary, because it sounded eerie. Then the machine clicked off, and another electrical contraption began.

My stereo.

Blasting, so loud, it vibrated my apartment was the sound and recording of my own electric guitar.

‘Triumph all ye Cherubim’s.’

My voice. My singing.

‘Sing with us ye seraphim.’

My rendition. My version.

‘Heaven and earth resound the hymn ... Salve Regina.’

Hail Holy Queen.

Doing the only thing I could do, I grabbed onto something to keep my balance and whispered out in my shock, ‘Danny.’

‘Don’t do this to me, Michael.’ Jessie begged me in near desperation as we sat in the waiting room of Ralph Dodger, Danny’s attorney.

‘I’m not doing anything to you. Ralph shouldn’t have called you. You don’t have to be here.’ I told her. ‘But I do.’

Jessie stared at me, her lips were pouty.

‘I have never come to you with a false message, have I?’ I shook my head. ‘No. I wanted to be sure.’

‘But you can’t be until whatever it is Ralph has is revealed. He’s your assurance.’

I chuckled. “Jessie, I don’t need it. I’m only hearing because it’s all part of what Danny wanted.”

“You’re that sure?” she asked.

Ms. Welsh’s voice entered into the office. “I don’t know what happened, but he sounded sure to me. Hello, Michael. Jessie.”

I flashed a smile. “To me, this is all motions. I’m sure. It wasn’t just the song, it was the chain of events.” I know I was rambling my words together. “It all happened and it was amazing.”

“Did you write down the message?” she asked me.

I handed Ms. Welsh a sheet of folded paper. “As per Danny guidelines.”

Jessie asked, “What does it say.”

Ms. Welsh shook her head. “Neither of us can look until Ralph shows up and opens that envelope.”

At that second, Ralph Dodger walked in. “I certainly hope this is the envelope you people are talking about.” The short, atypical looking lawyer held up a long brown envelope. “This is the only one Danny gave me apart from the will.”

I questioned, “What were his instructions?”

“That you’d call, and tell me I had something to open in front of you. We had to compare.” Ralph shrugged. “I don’t know what’s in here, it’s been sealed and stored since before Danny died.”

“Let’s open it. Let’s read it.” I beckoned.

“Shall we go in my office?” he asked.

“Here’s fine.” I said.

Ralph shrugged, and began to open the envelope as we all stood around. “It’s a letter.” He said, and then began to read, “Mike, I’m guessing if Ralph is reading this, then you believe you got my sign. There’s no doubt in my mind that you know it was from me. But, for Jessie, this is reassurance. I wanted no doubt in anyone’s mind. I asked you to write down my message on a sheet of paper. Can you give that to Jessie now, but Jessie don’t look.” Ralph paused in his reading to watch the exchange from Ms. Welsh to Jessie.

I watched Jessie shake as she held that note.

Ralph continued, “I don’t know how long it will take me to pull it off, but I want to do it right. I vow as I write this, I wouldn’t send a message until I could do it the way I want. Because it had to be

powerful, because you moved me, I wanted to move you, Mike. You will know that I am there, I am watching, when I proceeded to get a choir of angels to sing, 'Hail Holy Queen.'" Ralph lowered the letter. "That's it."

I was grinning ear to ear. "Jessie, open it."

Jessie hesitated, but slowly unfolded the letter. "An angelic choir ..." Jessie gasped out, dropped the note and stumbled back. I reached for her as she started to cry.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

Jessie turned her face into me, then her entire trembling body clung to me.

Ms. Welsh spoke up, "What, what does it say?"

Reaching down I grabbed the paper and handed it to her, "Hail Holy Queen." I smiled. "Danny's back."

Epilogue

It really wasn't all that difficult to pull it off, the choir of angels thing, and to be honest, I had returned a lot sooner than I gave indication. I just wanted to deliver my message correctly, and with the Danny Bishop flare that only I could give. Imagine my surprise though, when I popped back home, and it was summer. I had been so caught up on the other side; I never noticed how much time had passed.

But I did what I set out to do.

I found a way to live on. To watch out for my wife, and daughter, even if it's only until I know they'll be just fine.

Who said it couldn't be done?

I never doubted it. I called it the 'Eve of my Immortality', and I was absolutely correct.

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About the Author

Jacqueline Druga-Johnston is a Native of Pittsburgh, PA where she still lives today. She is the founder of LBF Books and resides with her husband and children.