

*A Novella About Pie That
Should Have Starred Jason
Sudeikis*

Richard W. Kelly

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Testament

The Psi-Chotic Adventures of Drew Darby

The Kings of One Color

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

This one is a first for me. I had a dream back in 2016. It was a dream about a movie that starred Jason Sudeikis. And in my dream, I watched that movie from start to finish. The next day I was determined I should write the story. But most of it was kind of foggy nonsense like most dreams are. I knew that it had Jason Sudeikis, a diner, pie, and screenwriting. I knew it was a love story and that it was not like anything else I had written at the time. I tried a few times to outline it, but I couldn't get past the opening scene.

In 2021 I started putting some time banging out stories again. And after a few short stories I got the itch to write out the pie story. So I got to it.

It is the first novella I've written, but it came out in record speed. This was five days of writing mostly late at night, but whenever I could find the time.

This is actually the first of two dreams I had that played out as a movie. This one sort of romance with a little bit of comedy in there. The other was more of an arthouse psychological horror film. We will see if that

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one ever comes spilling out onto the page.

CHAPTER 1

KEY LINE

The buzz of the fluorescent lights hummed behind the conversation. It was three A.M., and the group of writers were making their usual Wednesday night ruckus. The wait staff of Larry's Diner didn't mind the group. They were the only thing keeping the staff awake on such a slow night. Maribel leaned against the wall watching the group applaud each other. She stood next to her trainee Jenny who tried to imitate the full-figured woman by spending most of the night leaning. The sight was almost a before and after picture. Jenny was in her early thirties, barely wider than a broom. Her long black hair contrasted her stark white waitress getup. Maribel on the other hand was five years older and five times as large. Her hair, also black, didn't contrast her uniform as much as the uniform was old, tattered, and not really white anymore.

It had been nearly half an hour since group arrived, Maribel motioned for Jenny to go check on the table. After all, Jenny was the new girl and what was the point in training someone if it didn't mean you get to be lazy. As Jenny approached the table expecting to fill a round of coffee mugs, she was stopped by one of the men in the group leaping from his seat.

The man, Charlie, was a good looking, clean shaven, guy somewhere in his early forties. His dark brown hair classically parted on the side bounced as he hopped from one foot to the next. He turned slowly while he continued his hopping. "Jenny." He paused leaning in towards the woman a bit. "Can we please get..." He stopped as the other six people at the table all leaned in and started drum rolls with their fingers on the table. "A key lime pie cut into seven pieces!" He finished his statement at a near shout and continued his odd hopping moving his arms up and down as if he was performing a bad dance.

Jenny laughed at the rambunctiousness of the group as she twisted between them to get their coffees refilled. Once she was done, she turned her back on the group and held up her red pen, "I'll grab that pie for all you." This was met with loud cheers that nearly shook the windows.

Jenny came back around the corner where Maribel was biting her lip and giving suggestive winks to Julio, the only overnight cook. The sight of Jenny had Julio retreating to the kitchen.

"You've been flirting with that guy for two nights straight, why don't you just ask him out?" Jenny questioned as she opened the display case where the pies sat.

"He doesn't speak English. I tried telling him he was

hot, and I wanted to jump his bones, but it just kind of deteriorated into me trying to seduce him with elementary school stares and eyebrow raises.” The defeated waitress watched Jenny pull out a full, faded green pie. “They are getting a pie?” Maribel suddenly sounded interested.

“Yes, they we all kind of excited about it.” Jenny placed the tin on the counter and grabbed a knife, attempting to measure where to cut seven pieces. “Are they always that excited about pie?”

“They are a writers’ group. And they come here trying to write most of the time. But, when one of them sells something they wrote, they celebrate with pie. And they get real excited about pie.” Maribel kind of faded off as she turned around to see if Julio was back from the kitchen, “They almost never get pie though.”

Jenny grabbed the pie and the knife heading back to the table of writers. Maribel shrugged at Jenny’s apparent dedication to being a waitress and snuck off into the kitchen to harass the cook some more.

As Jenny approached the group they screamed, “Huzza! Pie!”

She nearly dropped the dessert from the sheer volume of the screams. She placed the pie on the table and took a deep breath to compose herself. She had hated herself for taking the job at the old diner, but now she felt like it may have been fate. “So, I didn’t cut it yet. Because if I cut seven pieces it won’t be even and at least one will be larger than the others.”

A little rat faced man in the group giggled, “I think someone just wants a piece of our pie.” The comment was received with rounds of laughter.

Charlie smiled and nodded at the rat man’s comment but looked at Jenny with true curiosity. “Well

little lady? Are you hoping for a piece of pie?"

"I don't want to impose, but I am a writer as well and was kind of hoping that I might see if I can be a part of your group?" Jenny cringed as she said the words feeling like a small child on a playground asking for friends.

The rat faced man, "Eight pieces of pie?". The small girl next to him, "Eight pieces of pie...". Charlie raised both hands to the sky, "Eight pieces of pie it is!"

The celebration continued and Jenny spent much of the night sitting with the table, getting up occasionally to check for other customers, the only one that showed up Maribel took care of.

Jenny was introduced to the table, names exchanged, contact info collected. Charlie was a bit older than the rest, but the best looking of the bunch. The rat faced man was Randy, the tiny blond next to him was Missy, his fiancé. Then there was Nina and Maria, two tall skinny, sexy, Puerto Rican women that Jenny was pretty sure were lovers. The other two at the table were a couple of young pudgy boys named Matt and Mark. Jenny was positive they were not lovers but seeing how close a friendship they had were probably teased about being lovers on a regular basis.

Jenny had pieced together that Randy had sold a script. It had something to do with a real estate agent falling in love with a walrus. She wanted to dismiss the idea, but if he sold it, then maybe there was something to it. The majority of the talk was about Randy and proud everyone was. There was a bit about what everyone was working on. But as the night came to an end and the sky outside the windows started to look like it may be changing from black to blue, they put a bit of focus on their newest member.

Matt leaned in with his hand on his forehead trying to keep alert. “Jenny, why are you working as a waitress?” Mark, also just as tired leaned back in his chair looking at the ceiling, “Right? If you are a writer, shouldn’t you be writing not waitressing?”

The group moved their focus to the girl. Jenny could feel her breathing speeding up. Her hands started to fidget. “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize you were all so successful. I just like to write. I haven’t sold anything.”

Nina and Maria leaned over and bopped the boys on the head. “Don’t mind them, Jenny. None of us are successful yet.” Nina tried to sooth the girl with her kind words with a hint of a Latin accent. Maria chimed in, “Seriously, we are meeting at a low-end diner in the middle of the night on a Wednesday. Sharing a single pie eight ways. We aren’t exactly famous.”

Jenny bowed her head in relief and let out a little laugh. Randy reached across the table and patted Jenny on the hand. “I sold my script to a college student so they could do a final project for a film class they are in.” He squeezed her hand slightly, “I think the pie and coffee took twenty percent of my profits.”

Everyone laughed at the joke except Missy who elbowed her fiancé in the ribs so he would retract his hand from the pretty new girl. Charlie noticed the slight jealousy coming from Missy and swooped in.

He got up and rounded the table to Jenny where he took her by the hand and gave her a deep bow. “Welcome to the Writers of Larry’s”

She giggled at the man before her. “Wait, you named your group after the diner? That was the best a group of writers could come up with? Wow, maybe I should stick to waitressing.” She put on a thick sideways grimace for the last part.

Charlie looked up at the girl having some middle-aged knee issues trying to stand back up. “We were named by Allen Sidleson, thank you very much!”

Jenny suddenly was excited again, “The author of all those witch books?”

“Yep, he used to be in our group. And so did Debra Dvorak and Stan Cooperstein.” Charlie was now back to his feet with his chin raised high showing his pride in their little rag tag group of writers. “See, when one of us sells a script or book or poem we celebrate with pie. But our goal is for one day, all eight of us to be successful enough to move on to bigger and better things than this diner.

Mark shook himself awake, “But for now.”

The entire group cheered, “Pie!”

As the sun came up Jenny was done with work and walking out of the diner. Randy and Missy were close behind with Randy asking about whether or not she had a ride, if she would make an appearance next week, what type of writing she preferred. Missy was not amused by the infatuation of her fiancé. She held back and tapped Charlie on the shoulder motioning towards Randy and his oblivious flirting.

Charlie jogged up to Jenny and stole the conversation away from Randy. “Did you have fun?” he let the end of his sentence go up half an octave.

“I did. I did.” She was a bit embarrassed being a grown woman and excited about meeting strangers at a diner.

“So, why don’t you work on something to bring and show us all next week?” Charlie stopped to look Jenny in the eyes while he waved his hand to the side, giving his farewell to Randy and Missy.

Jenny paled a bit at the thought of presenting her work to the group. “Like you want me to bring some of

my writing?”

“We are kind of a support group. We share, we recommend, we help each other out. We’ve all done it. And as long as it isn’t about the love of a Walrus, I think you are fine.” Charlie gave her a playful punch to the arm.

Jenny nodded. “Ok, but you think you can help me out and read some of my stuff first? You know, critique and stuff so I don’t look like a loser the first time I share with you all?”

“Of course. I’m free this afternoon.” Charlie let out a smile that said a little too much. Too much pride, too much excitement, just too much.

As the two walked down the sidewalk towards the public parking Maribel yelled out to Jenny, “You coming back tonight?”

Jenny spun around on her heels with a new excitement in her belly. “Yep. See you tonight at midnight. But I think I’ll be busy next Wednesday.

CHAPTER 2

POT PIE

Commitment. It was one thing that Charlie didn't have an issue with. He drove through the winding streets to his mother's house thankful for the early morning sun to keep him from falling asleep. He normally would spend the next couple hours with his mother before he went home to crash in his bed for five or six hours. But this day he had told Jenny that he would help her out this afternoon. As much as he wanted to beat himself up over the commitment, he enjoyed helping people too much.

Charlie walked into his mother's house calling for her while he brought in her mail. He walked through the living room picking up blankets and gathering dishes, "Mom. You still in bed?"

Delores emerged from the hallway taking the small steps that were common in women over eighty.

“Charles? Is that you?”

Charlie rushed over to help his mom as she made her way towards the kitchen where they typically would chat. He held her arm and slowly walked her to her favorite chair. She was a small lady, showing her age with stark white hair and an inability to stand perfectly erect anymore. It was a strange sight for Charlie because it reminded him of his grandmother. Every time he came over, he could see that circle of life where we become our parents. Of course he never would mention this to his mother, it was the last person she would want to become.

“How are things Charles?” Delores asked the question out of habit more than anything.

Once he was sure his mother was situated in her seat, he headed over to the sink to work on the dishes flipping the thermostat down to the lower eighties on the way. “Everything is good mom. I am working on some website copy, a couple of text ads for emails, and my screenplay.” He said these things trying to sound annoyed, but any time someone asked about his life he felt it was a jab at his lack of success.

“You are going to do so well. Your father and I just know that this bachelor’s degree is going to take you places.” She said the words in almost a sing song way. She smiled and looked down at the tablecloth comparing her skin to its pink and white flowers.

Charlie sighed and went to the fridge to get the pitcher of water. He poured a glass and brought it to his mother. “Mom, do you remember me telling you I was dropping out of school to be a writer?” He placed his hand on her shoulder as gently as possible knowing that this startling news from two decades ago was going to upset her, but it was what the doctor had suggested they

do.

“Oh. Well.” She focused on her water. “You still have your whole life in front of you. Just don’t be afraid to go back to school honey.” She used both hands to bring the glass of water to her mouth similar to a child.

Charlie agreed with his mom but wanted to tell her he didn’t have his whole life in front of him. He dropped out of school twenty years ago and had been struggling ever since. He wanted to tell her that her failing brain was tormenting him day after day reminding him that he should have gone back, that for twenty years he ignored that advice. But in the end, he just smiled and said, “I will remember mom.”

Some days were better than others. Some days Delores knew she was in her eighties. Some days she knew her husband had been gone for six years. Some days she even knew that everyone thought of her as an old senile woman. She never mentioned that, but some days it was clear to her.

But as usual Charlie sat with his mom for a few hours and told her about his life. “You will never guess what Randy did. I don’t get him.” Charlie rolled his eyes at the stupidity of one of his oldest friends. “We met this girl last night, Jenny. She is a writer too.”

Delores perked up, “Grandkids?”

“Mom, I just met this girl. And what I was going to tell you was Randy was hitting on her right in front of Missy.” He paused for a second but recognizing the confusion on his mother’s face he added, “His fiancé.”

“Men are terrible! Your father used to make eyes at other ladies, but I always put him in his place. When he gets home, he will tell you.” She thought for a second to herself, “But if Randy is spoken for then there may be a chance for little grandbabies running around my house.”

He smiled and nodded. It wasn't something that had crossed his mind, it never did when he met women. His life was pretty full as it was and there was no chance, he was having children at his age, but he did think there was something sweet that even in senile state she was still putting the idea of love into his head.

The continued their chat for a couple of hours, but Charlie had made plans with Jenny and he was going to keep them. He kissed his mother on the forehead and told her to have a good day. He would drop by tomorrow hoping that they could continue their conversation, but he knew there was a chance he would have to start over.

He left the house and headed back to the diner. The trip was filled with the moments when he would feel himself drifting towards sleep but would shake himself back to reality. He kept the windows down and the music loud, but his mind continued to drift. He reminisced over his parents and his younger self. He wondered if his mother was right and maybe he should be looking at this girl in a romantic way. And he tried to find a new angle for the end of the world screenplay he had been working on for over three months.

The drive took the twists and turns that kept him somewhat alert until he reached the diner. He got out grabbed a table for two and was seated in the back corner where he would meet up with Jenny. He ordered some coffee and grabbed a pen and a napkin to jot down some notes on what his mother had forgotten earlier in the day. He had become almost methodic in tracking what was happening in his life. The notes would do for now, but when he got home, he would transfer them to the journal he had been keeping about his mother.

The next thing Charlie knew Jenny was sitting beside him eating a plate of pancakes. His shoulders and neck

were so stiff that the slightest movement made what felt like a creaking noise. He looked over at the girl next to him, her slender face not noticing his return to consciousness. She let her left-hand glide over the pages that she had brought with her while her right cut into the short stack on the plate just caddy corner to her seat. She had a sweet smell to her that reminded Charlie of a wisteria tree in his yard when he was a little boy. Even the aroma of the pancakes did not hide the scent. He took a deep breath through his nose.

Jenny dropped the fork onto the plate with a sharp clank. She turned towards Charlie with a mouthful of pancake. "Oh. You are awake. Yay." She said these words in a deeper tone trying to keep all the food in her mouth.

"Sorry, I guess my lack of sleep caught up to me." He was starting to stretch his arms and neck trying to get a grasp on the world.

"It's ok. You were so peaceful that I figured I would go ahead and eat and go over what I brought for you to read. I think it is a bit juvenile." She placed her hand over the stack of papers in a weak attempt to cover her work.

"Oh, don't sell yourself short. Let me see." He reached over for the stack of papers. "Breakfast for lunch huh?"

"Try breakfast for dinner..." Jenny tucked her chin letting a smirk emerge on her face.

"Dinner?" Charlie quickly looked out the window to try and keep his bearings.

"It's almost 6pm. You've been sleeping here with me with for almost four hours." She giggled knowing that this would be a bit of a shock to him.

"Shit. I don't have long then. I have a lot of work that I got to get out before tomorrow morning." He

looked helplessly at the table in front of him. “I’m sorry, I really wanted to help.”

“If you need to go, that is fine. If you think you will have any time before midnight, maybe I could stop by your place and we can chat about writing?” She seemed a bit hesitant. Charlie couldn’t tell if she was being shy about her work or about being so forward about showing up at his place.

“If I head home in the next thirty minutes, I can probably finish the ad copy by ten. If you want to stop by my place.” His mind was so focused on getting his work done, there was no ulterior motive to the suggestion.

Jenny finished her pancakes, while Charlie held a pleasant conversation with the girl. It was the basics, where did you grow up, what are your aspirations, what things do you do for fun. Just the normal chit chat.

When she finished her dinner, they both walked to the parking lot. Charlie took the stories Jenny had printed and headed back to his apartment.

CHAPTER 3

MINCEMEAT PIE

Rather than going home and getting some sleep Charlie worked on the advertisement he had due the next morning. He worked on the phrasing for an hour before he called Randy over to help him make some sense of it.

“You are looking too deep into this dude! Come enjoy our new tasty dessert menu. There is something for everyone.” Randy put emphasis to the end of the ad sweeping his arms in front of him. “That is good enough, no one is going to be upset about that ad.”

“Look, I need these contract gigs, so they ad copy has to be perfect. Are you sure that is better than... Our new dessert menu has something for everyone. Come enjoy something tasty.” Charlie was frantic and tired and truthfully sick of working on this ad campaign.

“Dude! Just send the damn thing.” Randy had given up and laid dead on the couch.

“Fine, I’ll send it.” Charlie sat down in front of his laptop when a soft knock came from his door. “Will you grab that, Randy?” Charlie was determined to send off his finished work.

Randy popped up from the old corduroy couch walked across the minimalist loft to the front door. He peeked through the peephole before he opened up the door. The city wasn’t Randy’s idea of a safe place. When he saw Jenny on the other side, he put himself in the right frame of mind, brushed his hair behind his ears and opened the door with a single smooth movement.

Jenny watched the thick wooden door swing open to the dark apartment. She could see a stained concrete floor, brass fixtures with an early electricity motif, some dark and dingy furniture and then right in front of her was Randy. Not the person she was hoping to see welcome her to the apartment.

“Randy.” Jenny acknowledged the man as she walked by him to enter the apartment.

Randy leaning against the door attempted to look as suave as possible, but he was of no interest to the girl. He closed the door behind her and slowly walked behind her. “Did you have fun at our little soirée?”

“Soirée? The meeting at the diner? Yes, I thought it was awesome. And congrats again on that script sale. I think it’s the first time I’ve ever heard of a walrus love story.” She tried not to giggle at her backhanded jab at the sleazy guy behind her.

“When you write for art students that produce trash. You write artsy trash.” Randy didn’t take any offense to his work, as far as he was concerned, he got paid and that made him a professional writer.

Jenny swiveled on the balls of her feet to face Randy. "You know I hadn't thought of it that way. Good point. Congrats on selling trash."

Randy snorted at the constant attempts at insulting him. He walked past the girl casually calling back to her, "You want a drink or something?"

She waved him off as she saw Charlie sitting at his desk, she had work in a couple hours anyway, it was no time for a drink. She slowly crept her way towards him giving a small childish wave when she grabbed his attention.

Charlie finished sending his email and spun his chair around to face his new friend. "Hey, welcome. Sorry, I haven't had a chance to look at your work yet." He motioned to the pile of paper on his coffee table. "I have been focused on this contract work."

Randy flopped back down on the couch, "Yep, a couple hours of enjoy the tasty menu versus enjoy something tasty. I don't know how he ever finishes anything he writes." Everyone in the room laughed over the statement. "But while he was complaining about menu advertisements, I read some of your stuff. And it is pretty good. It's girly and emotional and is begging me to drum up some tears, but it is pretty good for chick lit."

Jenny took a deep breath giving into her need for critique and turned her attention toward the man who she knew was trying his best to come on to her regardless of the existence of his fiancé. But she was being given the attention that she had been trying to lure out of Charlie. All she wanted was someone to take an interest in her work and if that had to come from the little rat faced man then that would have to do.

Charlie watched as the two writers talked back and forth over their writing styles and what constituted good

literature. He felt a little left out, but it was his own fault. He had taken on too many responsibilities. He was boxing himself out of the career he had sacrificed most of his life to.

Charlie joined in the conversation but didn't have a lot of feedback for Jenny since he hadn't taken the time to read what she gave him. He instead started feeling bad for Missy who was probably at home planning their wedding while Randy flirted with someone else.

Eventually he snuck his way into the conversation by attempting to get a bit of feedback on his own script. "Guys, I kind of wrote myself into a corner. I got this young kid who is leading a small platoon of soldiers, think like Ender's Game, but not with all the space stuff. And he is having to overtake an amusement park that has been infiltrated by terrorists. Think Die Hard, but in Disney World or something. And they have to strategize to keep from killing hostages. Think Speed, but without the bus. Anyway, all I have is action at this point. I don't really have much to drive the story other than troop movements and war strategy."

Randy immediately spoke up, "Anytime you are dealing with a war type situation..."

Charlie jumped in before his friend could give any real advice, "No, sorry. No walrus love in my scripts." Even Randy laughed. The walrus jokes were starting to get a bit old, but when they were well timed.

Randy threw his hands up in surrender thinking his pal might be looking to get some input from Jenny.

"What is the situation? Does the kid know the hostages? Does he know his troops? Is he in danger himself?" Jenny immediately started throwing questions.

"Yeah, I guess. I mean it's the kid's hometown and

an amusement park that he goes to, so he might know some of the hostages. And of course he is in danger he is fighting terrorists. But what I need is to move plot.” As Charlie laid out the answers Randy took the hint that the other two should get some private time. He gathered his things and made an excuse to leave, although his fiancé at home waiting for him was more real than an excuse.

The door made its customary involuntary slam as Randy left the apartment. Jenny continued, “Charlie, I get it, it’s an action movie, but as a writer we are supposed to elicit emotions. Maybe the kid sees an old friend with a gun to his head, maybe he sees an old rival executed. There needs to be some kind of emotion making this kid’s decisions for him, otherwise it’s just...” She didn’t know how to finish the statement. She tried to regroup to keep from hurting his feelings. “What was it that inspired you to write this?”

Charlie perked up at the question, “When I was younger, I worked at an amusement park and there was this group of hoodlums that hung out there. And I realized that everyone who worked there worked in specific zone or ride or game or restaurant. So it was kind of like the game risk.”

“No. Charlie.” She paused with a short sigh. “What experience in your life made you feel the need to write about terrorism and hostages?”

“That’s just where the plot took me. My real idea behind this was more of a live action strategy board game.” He was starting to move things off the coffee table to create a mockup for better clarity.

“Charlie. I would love to read what you have and see if there is anything I can contribute to. But I think you should consider writing more from your heart and experience.” She had a look in her eyes that Charlie

knew. It was a look of sympathy, a look of compassion, but he didn't read it that way. He saw pity. She pulled a napkin out of her shirt pocket and handed it over to Charlie while looking for something in his eyes.

"I guess I left my notes behind at the diner." Charlie wouldn't return the gaze. He held his head downwards.

"I'm sorry. Is it your mother that is having trouble?"

"Yes, but I don't want to talk about it." She reached over and gently lifted his chin with her pointer and middle fingers. As their eyes met Charlie jerked back and pulled away from the girl. "It's fine, it's something I have to deal with."

"I'm sorry. I just wanted to tell you I'm here if you need to talk." She watched him get up and refocus himself in the kitchen. She knew she had pushed him too far. She didn't want to be a burden on his day. "Look, I have to go get ready for my shift."

Charlie cleared his throat and called to the other room, "Sure, have a good night. I will read through your stuff tonight and let you know."

Jenny retreated out of the apartment somewhat ashamed of the way she went about the delicate subject. She heard his words as the door swept behind her. Just as it closed leaving its loud bang echoing into the hallway, it overshadowed her response to Charlie, "Call me."

CHAPTER 4

CHOCOLATE FUDGE PIE

A week went by before the Writers of Larry's met up again. This time Jenny was not scheduled to be working although she did most of the refills anyway. For the first time in the nearly four years the group had been meeting they celebrated in consecutive weeks with a pie. This time it was Randy's fiancé Missy that had sold one of her works. She had sold a non-fiction piece about the fall of Rome.

Missy sprung for the top-of-the-line pie in the case, the Grandma's Chocolate Fudge Pie. It was heavy, overly sugary, but felt like a status symbol to Missy who desperately wanted to outshine Randy.

"This was a big deal. I feel like I may end up on the list with Allen Sidleson, Debra Dvorak, and Stan Cooperstein." Missy tooted her own horn suggesting she

would soon have some modicum of fame.

“You are going to leave the group?” Matt cried out with genuine surprise.

Mark chimed in trying to keep things a bit more cheerful. “We are going to hang our hopes on Walrus love again? Oh no, this won’t do.”

Jenny having been anxious all week about the group seeing her work spoke up trying to move the conversation in her direction. “Well, if you are going to be leaving us, I need your critiques. It will be great when I can say I got advice from a famous writer.” He quick response did the trick, and the group collected the pages Jenny had brought and casually looked over them.

Charlie having already read everything earlier in the week gave his suggestions to her. He questioned the audience of the piece and he said he didn’t feel the main character’s excitement over a date felt realistic. “You say over and over that she can’t wait, but I don’t feel it. I don’t think the character is actually feeling those butterflies.” He looked at her with a smirk and in what was meant to be a tease, but came out a bit rude, “When in your life did you feel those butterflies, maybe you should focus on your heart and experience.”

Jenny recognized the words immediately, but she didn’t take offense, instead she saw the prime opportunity to get to know Charlie better. “Maybe I haven’t felt those butterflies in a while.” Her voice slowed in pace while her eyes captured his.

Charlie almost felt dazed staring at the girl’s eyes, there was this deep intoxicating connection that he couldn’t deny in the moment. “Then you might need someone to sweep you off your feet.”

“Then what are you waiting for?” She said the words so casually and let a deep grin just barely surface

on her face. The butterflies she needed to write about were picking up pace in her stomach.

“Pick you up tomorrow at six for dinner?”

She nodded her head and drew her shoulders in towards one another. Her face flushed such a bright red that everyone noticed, but no wanted to bring attention to the new girl, no one knew her well enough to rag on her yet.

Charlie couldn't keep a smile down either. He turned to face the rest of the group grinning with much exaggeration. He slid his hand down by his side and grabbed hers under the table. They both glanced at each other through the corners of their eyes. Neither of them felt the need to bring attention to it, they didn't tell anyone else in the group.

The night continued as usual with congratulations and a few quick questions about who needed help with what in the group as far as works in progress were concerned. But it was the end of the night that would stick with everyone.

Randy stood up to leave a bit earlier than usual. “I have a couple things I want to get done tomorrow so I think we will have to call it a night.” He reached down to pull Missy's chair out for her.

“Randy.” She paused starting at her fiancé in disbelief. “This is my night. I want to celebrate.”

“Missy, I have to get up at ten and pick up that furniture...” He was starting to drag his words out and lower his voice to try and emphasize that he didn't want to elaborate in front of everyone.

Missy was annoyed. She never understood why Randy didn't want to tell his friends that he was a carpenter. As much as it was supposed to be his side gig, the lack of interest in his writing made it his main gig.

“And I have a meeting at nine with the publicist and the movie studio. Who cares, sit down and celebrate with me.” This caught everyone’s attention since they knew she had sold a manuscript for a non-fiction book, but they hadn’t heard anything about a movie studio.

Maria and Nina in unison, “Movie studio?!”

Missy bobbed her head left and right acknowledging that things may be a bigger deal she led on. “So, they want my book largely because there is a big blockbuster movie they are about to film about the same subject and they want me to be a historical consultant on the movie.”

The table erupted in shock and excitement. Randy wanted nothing to do with it. “If you want to stay up all night so you are exhausted for that meeting and blow your one chance, then go ahead, but I am going home to get some god damned sleep!” Randy was suddenly furious. It was part being tired, part being questions, but mostly being outshined by his fiancé. Randy stormed out of the diner and took off in his fifteen-year-old minivan.

Missy looked around at everyone’s shocked faces from the blowup by Randy. To break the ice, she said, “Guess I need a ride tonight.”

Nina and Maria offered both a ride and a place to sleep as they assumed her going home to Randy would result in less sleep, more anguish, and general bad juju for her meeting.

Missy let the rest of the group know how she felt, “You know what? Fuck him. He has had this superiority complex forever and now that I have finally reached up and grabbed the ring before he did, he can’t take it. I sold this manuscript for enough money to sustain me for a couple years. He sold his stupid script to a college student for two hundred bucks.” Everyone chuckled uncomfortably but kept to themselves letting the girl

vent. “And they were so impressed by my research they offered me the consultant position on the movie they are making. They want my input for historical accuracy of the script, costumes, makeup, set design, and I don’t even know what else. I sold that manuscript two days ago and I have had two dozen agents call me. I already have people asking when I can start researching for my next project.” She stopped almost panting from lack of breathing during her tirade. “And the worst part is I was thinking of not taking it because I have to move to take this job. I was thinking of Randy and not myself. Fuck him. Sorry guys, I think I’m moving to Hollywood.”

The night ended pretty abruptly after that. But everyone tried to show their support and excitement for the girl. It didn’t matter they all felt the underlying unease that would follow any time they ended up in a room with her and Randy ever again. Randy may have been an asshole, but Missy put the nail in the coffin to that relationship, all of their relationship.

CHAPTER 5

LEMON MERINGUE PIE

Charlie went straight from the writers meeting to his mother's house. He was happy the group ended early, around four thirty because he had to take his mother to the doctor, and it would be nice if he could get a few hours of shut eye first. He made the trek to his mother's house, quietly made his way in and retired to the guest room leaving a note taped to the door.

The night had sent Charlie's head swimming with chaos. He had already been worried about his mother as each trip to the doctor seemed to reveal things constantly getting worse. But that mixed with the excitement of going on an actual named date. The excitement of his friend selling her manuscript. And the crashing down of his oldest friend's romantic relationship. He assumed by this time tomorrow the

wedding would be officially off.

He lied there staring at the ceiling trying to make heads or tails of his day. But the one emotion that kept making its way to the surface was the excitement for dinner tomorrow. The jittery anticipation he was feeling was something that he had long forgotten, something that he had at one time decided was nothing more than childish inexperience. But there was something about this girl that made his world turn a bit faster than normal.

He eventually would pass out and be woken up by his mother telling him it was time for school. It was a strange situation to wake up to, having to acclimate to the real world while the person jarring him awake was not acclimated to the real world their selves.

“Morning mom. No school today. We have to go to the doctor.” He blinked his eyes while he swiveled to a proper sitting position. “We should have some breakfast before we go.” One of the tactics the doctor had been teaching him was to change the subject and push conversation away from the dementia.

Delores appeared a bit confused but followed the direction of the conversation. “Ok dear. I will go heat up some of those biscuit and sausage sandwiches.” She smiled as she made her tiny steps out of the room to go prepare breakfast.

They ate the sausage biscuits and Charlie told his mother about the blow up between Randy and Missy. She seemed concerned, but Charlie didn’t think she had any recollection of them. He assumed she was feigning concern for the sake of her son.

When they finished breakfast Delores went to get her purse while Charlie loaded the dishes into the dishwasher. As he came around the corner into the den, he saw his mother take a step but not quite get her foot

off the ground. When she tried to plant her foot back down her toes caught the long shag carpet and curled under foot. Placing her weight down she instinctively repositioned to avoid the pressure on her toes and she her bodyweight flung forward.

Charlie tried to leap to his mother's aid, but he was too far away. The moment moved in slow motion to him, watching his mother fall forward. She tried to brace the fall and landed first on her left wrist, then her hip and finally her face bounced against the floor. Even with the soft cover of carpet there were both cracks and thuds that panicked Charlie.

Sliding to her side he was nervous to touch her, "Mom! Mom! Are you ok? Are you hurt?"

She moaned from the ground looking over to the side of the room. "I fell." It was a statement of shock. "I don't think I'm hurt." She got to her elbows and Charlie tried to help her up. "I fell."

The doctor office was located at the hospital so Charlie assumed it would be faster to keep her appointment rather than try and get in at the ER down the hallway. It was a terrifying few hours. They both were afraid there would be big complications to the fall. The idea that she would continue to live alone seemed to be up in the air to say the least.

They sat in the tiny patient room for endless amounts of time, mostly in silence neither knowing what to break the tension with. Charlie was afraid for his mother and afraid for himself. He didn't know how he was going to take care of her with his lack of income.

Delores was afraid because for the first time in a while she realized how much her body was giving out on her. She still didn't have the clarity to understand how old she was or how alone she was, but she knew she had

fallen.

The tension was broken by a nurse coming to assist Delores to have x-rays taken. The young Hispanic girl took Delores by the arm and slowly walked her out of the small room. Charlie watched as the blue scrub clad woman held firmly onto his mother's right forearm keeping her gaze alternating between the floor and the patient.

Shortly after the door closed Dr. Ortiz entered. "Hi Charlie. Sorry to hear about your mom. It's terrifying when someone falls. There is this internal struggle of how I lost my faculties to the point that I can't walk from a to b."

Charlie sat on the butcher paper and nodded his head in agreement. "I watched her doc. She just didn't pick up her foot. Do you think it's bad? Do you think she's hurt?"

"Her left hand may have some issues, but she is up and walking around. I don't expect a broken hip or leg, so she should be fine. We will run some nerve function tests and some reflex tests to see if this is something that may come up more. How is her cognitive ability coming along?"

Charlie felt the weight of his world starting to squeeze him. "It's not any better. Most of the time she thinks I am twenty years old. I don't think she knows who my friends are any more. If anything it is worse."

"I don't like to say it, but we have adjusted her exercise, her diet, her hormones. I don't think we caught it early enough. It's not likely she will just snap out of it. But that doesn't mean she can't enjoy another ten years of life, she just may be enjoying a slightly different reality than you." Dr. Ortiz patted Charlie on the shoulder as he knew the news wasn't what the man wanted to hear.

“It’s life. We all go through it. Hang in there, even this time you will look back at with fond memories.”

Dr. Ortiz left the room and Charlie wiped some tears from his eyes. It wasn’t a cry or a sob, but just the pressure of life squeezing a bit of emotion out of him.

Later that night he took his mother back to her house. She had some bruising on her face and hip, she had a slight fracture in her left wrist. But she was fine otherwise. The tests all came back normal, and Dr. Ortiz was under the impression this was a fluke mishap and she wasn’t in any more danger of falling than someone half her age.

Charlie put his mother to bed and wrote a note for his door retiring to the extra bed for the night. He lay there thinking about the day, worried about his mother. Would she be happy living in a fictional world for the rest of her life? And how long would that life be? The doctor suggested that she could live another ten years. Charlie was already in his forties and having to pretend he was in his twenties. Would that continue into his fifties or sixties. Would he be tormented by the ravages of age while he convinced his mother that everything was fine?

CHAPTER 6

PECAN PIE

The next night at six sharp Charlie was knocking at the door of his date. The neighborhood left a few things to be desired, namely plants, streetlights, and maybe a few less drug dealers hanging about. It wasn't often that he felt overdressed with a polo and khakis, but this was one of those moments. The door was answered by a woman he had never seen. She was average in every way possible, mid length brown hair, average build, slightly tanned European skin tone...

"Is Jenny here?" Charlie suddenly felt like he was meeting Jenny's parents. The woman pointed and walked back into the apartment. Charlie looked over to see Jenny in some fashionably torn up jeans and a flowy top. As she turned to walk towards him her black hair fluttered to the side as if she was in a shampoo

commercial. “You look stunning.” Charlie let the words roll out with hesitation that said, I can’t believe how true this statement is.

Jenny blushed and sunk her neck into her shoulders out of embarrassment. She waved goodbye to her roommate who didn’t seem to notice and the two were off.

They went to a local Italian restaurant. It was locally owned but had an exclusive feel to it. When they walked in sporting their lazy Saturday type attire, they both realized they might be a little underdressed. Jenny tried to find a new place to eat, but Charlie would have none of it.

He grabbed Jenny by the hand and followed the waiter down the marbled floor to a big room with a chandelier and a tuxedoed man playing the piano. They sat at their table slightly hidden away in the corner.

“This is fun, right?” Charlie was amused by their appearance in such a fancy place.

“A bit embarrassing, but...” She was cut off almost immediately.

“Come on! This is memorable. And no one here is going to see us again. Enjoy it, “He looked across the table at his date, “Please.”

Jenny agreed and smiled at the man who brought her there, letting the familiar rush of butterflies coat the inside of her stomach. She perused the menu while Charlie started in on the questions.

“So, tell me about yourself. I know you are a waitress and a writer. I know you need to move to safer neighborhood with a roommate that gives a shit. But what else? What else can this beautiful angel tell me about herself.”

“No siblings. I am from Blytheville Arkansas. And if

you think this apartment is bad you should see where I grew up.” She popped open her menu trying to look fancy.

“And you moved up in the world be going from Arkansas to Texas? Why not Hollywood or New York City, or Nashville?”

“Trust me. It is a step up. My life was one of those old stories where no one ever leaves town, and they all grow old and don’t realize their dreams. That was going to be me. So I left. And maybe Dallas isn’t the land of opportunity like L.A. might be, but here I am not lost in the millions of starlets that come to ‘make it’.” She held up the air quotes.

The waiter came by and asked for their order. His voice was low and drawn out almost a caricature of what a snooty waiter should sound like. Jenny politely ordered ravioli while returned the request with an imitation snooty voice ordering wine, cake, lasagna, salad, water, and bruschetta to be delivered to their table in that order.

Once the waiter left Jenny hit Charlie with the menu, “You know you are such an ass.” She laughed hysterically at the situation. “Why are we eating our appetizer last?”

“It’s just fun. Relax, tonight isn’t about common sense.” He gingerly took the menu from her so she could not attack him again. “But what makes you tick? I mean I read your story and it moved me. A young girl defies the odds and builds her own church in some small town. That was beautiful, but where was the inspiration? What made you write that?”

“It is the story of my mother. She grew up in Blytheville and didn’t agree with one church that was around when she was a kid, so she built a church,

developed a congregation, and kind of lived her dream. I always respected my mama because she did so much on her own. She didn't meet my dad until she was already the pastor of her congregation. The last scene of my story that you so valiantly told me had no feeling to it." She attempted to raise one eyebrow and lower her glare at her date, but instead raised both eyebrows and dipped her chin.

"That is what tonight is for! To inspire you to write that scene with an overwhelming flow of love and excitement." The sound of his words seemed to almost arrive in time with slow dinner music the pianist was playing.

"You sure put yourself on a pedestal."

"It's because I'm so charitable." Charlie smiled as the wine arrived. Two bottles, one red, one white. Charlie knew nothing of wine and had just randomly picked two wines from the list that were under thirty dollars a bottle.

The dinner went well. They ate their cake, then their main course. The salad filled them up, but the wine ran out just as the water arrived. As each course came out both Jenny and Charlie started to complain about the music. It wasn't just that it was elevator style piano music. The problem was they realized the pianist was playing a two-minute loop of music. It was the same thing over and over.

As they sat and waited for their appetizer Jenny decided it was time for the conversation to go a bit more serious. "How is your mom doing? I noticed you had some more notes sticking out your pocket there."

Charlie had hoped she wouldn't bring it up, but if he was going to try and make a real connection with this girl, he needed to let her in. "She isn't doing great. She has

dementia and she fell yesterday afternoon.” He took a deep breath and exhaled hard at the table. “The doc said she was fine, but he doesn’t think she is going to get her mind back.”

Jenny reached over the table and grasped his hand. She squeezed to show him that if he needed support she was there. “I’m sorry to hear that. Do you take care of her?”

“Sort of. She lives alone, but I come by every other day or so. I help her with laundry and chores. She has my dad’s social security and pension, so she has money, just hard because she is alone now.” Charlie felt himself delving into an unexpected depression, so he fought it. “But that is something for another night. Tonight, I need to do something about this music. It’s as if they are drilling that tune into my head.”

Charlie jumped up from his chair and grabbed Jenny’s hand dragging her past the waiter who was delivering their bruschetta bread. He hopped across the room with the girl in tow until he reached the piano. He spun around to face the pianist and whispered, “When she says yes, I need you to play Pachelbel’s Canon in D.” The pianist let a huge grin emerge across his face as he pulled his hands back from the keys.

Charlie then turned towards Jenny and projected his voice so all corners of the room could hear him. In the fake snooty voice, he used with the waiter he loudly proclaimed, “Samantha. My love. I was going to wait until this evening with all our family in attendance, but with an excitement I can’t deny. And a desire to change the damn music. I ask one question of you.” He stepped backwards into a strange genuflect and looked up at the girl who was on a first date with him. “Samantha, will you marry me?”

Immediately there was happy laughter, some light applause and many adorable oohs and aahs. Jenny looked down at her date unable to hold the laughter back and said as loudly as she could, “No. You are a crazy person.”

Charlie dropped his head down towards the ground with a new embarrassment he expected to hoist on Jenny. She retreated to the table while the entire restaurant stared at the man who was shot down in his proposal. The pianist offered his condolences. Charlie looked over at him and shook his head with a loss of words, then said, “Do you know Dido’s Lament?”

The mission to get the dinner music changed was a success, but the end of the dinner was not what he had imagined. He expected to be speaking with patrons, getting congratulations, and well wishes. Instead it was filled with awkward hushed conversations, evading glances, but it did include free dessert since the waiter felt so bad for him. Jenny did a good job of looking uncomfortable, but lost her poker face the second they were back outside.

She broke out in maniacal laughter, doubled over and pointing at Charlie. “You thought I would just go along with you?” The hysteria continued, “You don’t know me so well yet.” She smiled and hopped over to the car.

Once they were both in the car she asked, “Where to now stud?” She licked her lips trying to be more seductive.

Charlie smiled and then led into a polite speech. “I’d love to keep this going, but I really need to go check on my mom.”

Jenny leaned over putting her palms on his cheeks. She pulled him into a long and soft kiss. “Take me with

you. I want to meet her.”

Charlie nodded drove the car to his mother’s without a word. He parked and walked around to open Jenny’s door for her. “We don’t have to stay long if you don’t want to. I just need to see that is doing ok after the fall yesterday.”

As they walked into the house it was quite dark. The lights were on, but the old ranch style home didn’t spread light well with its dark wood paneling and dark shag carpet. He led Jenny through the entry way around the corner of the living room to the den. Delores was sitting in her recliner covered in an old quilt watching the television. She looked up to see her son, “Charles. Are you home for the night?”

Charlie let the insinuation that he still lived there alone. “No, mom. I just wanted to see how you are doing.”

She looked at him and smiled but seemed to be looking through a fog. “I don’t know. My left hand hurts.” She raised her left arm which was in a blue sling. “I think I did something to it.”

Charlie now on both his knees in front of his mother’s chair patted her on the shoulder, “Do you remember falling today?”

“I fell?” The same words she echoed when the fall happened. “I don’t remember.” She furrowed her eyebrows annoyed at her lack of recollection. She looked up past her son and saw the young lady standing meekly in the corner. She held her elbow with her arm in front of her and slumped her shoulders in an attempt to hide. “And who is this?”

Charlie stood up and went to Jenny’s side to introduce her. “Mom, this is Jenny. She is a new friend in my writing group.”

Delores slowly got to her feet with both hands out to shake the woman's hand. She was so excited that her smile widened, and eyes opened as wide as they could. Jenny tried to express her gratitude to meet Delores, but Delores jumped in. As she touched the smooth hands of Charlie's date she leaned towards her son and told him, "This is the one who is going to bring me grandbabies." She said it too loud and Charlie's ears started burning. "I remember this one. This is my ticket to grandbabies." She cackled a happy coughing sound and turned back towards Jenny who she still was holding her hand, "Great to meet you, Sweetie." And with that Delores passed by Charlie and Jenny to make her way to her bedroom to retire for the night.

Charlie couldn't stop smiling. His mother had remembered something. And it was something that he didn't think would have been a big deal. He thought for a few moments maybe his mother as on her way back.

Jenny looked over at Charlie with an opened mouth smile. "Babies huh?"

Charlie flushed red and tried to cover, "I never said anything like that. I just told her I had met you and she kind of jumped to conclusions."

Jenny walked closer to Charlie and held a single finger against his lips. "Shhhh. Want to go back to your place and make some grandbabies?"

CHAPTER 7

SWEET CHERRY PIE

The night was magical. Everything had led to the perfect date. Charlie was encouraged by his mother's memory, Jenny was flattered have someone take a real interest in her and what she was doing. They both had more fun than either of them had for quite some time.

The rest of the night was within walls of Charlie's simple and nearly empty apartment. They spend hours learning each other's bodies and how they reacted to each other. Hours of connecting at a level neither of them had with anyone else in years. There was passion that crept beyond the superficial and physical burrowing its way deep into emotions that they could not control or ignore.

As Jenny laid in Charlie's arms and across his chest she breathed in his strong musky scent. It was like that of

pine in a marsh. Something slightly sweet, yet powerful.

“That was the best date I’ve had...” She thought as she trailed off, “ever.”.

Charlie smiled from the flattery and pulled the girl in for a deep and welcomed hug.

“Will you do me a favor?” She took a deep breath knowing that she was about to bring something up that could turn the night.

Charlie kissed her forehead and agreed to do her the favor.

She closed her eyes as she spoke the next words. “I think you need to write about your mother.”

Charlie felt the annoyance burst from his mind, “Why?”

“Because it helps. It is like therapy. And you need to process what is happening.” She started to roll to her front so she could face the man she had almost fallen in love within a single night.

“But she is doing better. She remembered me telling her about you. You saw how excited she was. That was clarity, she was in the moment.” Charlie defended his position.

“Please don’t let yourself get fooled. She didn’t remember falling.”

Charlie was breathing deep, starting to feel his pulse rise. Jenny was nearly sitting up to keep her eyes locked with her lover’s.

Charlie relented hoping to return the passion and love he had been feeling all night. “Ok. So on top my script, and my ad copy, and spending time with mom, and spending time with you, and keeping the Writers of Larry’s together. I will find time to write for therapy.”

It wasn’t the appreciation she was looking for, but it felt like a win. She collapsed back onto his chest and

Richard W. Kelly

quietly thanked him. Her life felt like it was finding the right track. She had spent so many years just trying to separate herself from her family and from her hometown that she forgot to try and keep her head above water.

Dallas had been a tornado of bad luck. The diner was her fourth job in three months. She thought her roommate was stealing from her, but there wasn't much to steal. She had met a couple of sleazy men who tried to lure her to night of drugged up partying. She had tried so hard to cultivate her surroundings to not kill her dreams she ended up in a bad situation.

But laying there in Charlie's apartment, looking up at the drop ceiling with no tiles, just a maze of air conditioning tubing she felt that she was safe and happy. Maybe this was the beginning of her success story.

CHAPTER 8

APPLE PIE

Over the next week the world seemed to be smiling back at Charlie. He had landed three contract jobs where he could write ads and make more than his rent that month. He had delved farther into his script even if it was just non-stop action.

He was finally getting his name out there. Multiple of his contacts from the advertising world had inquired about his movie script. He even had a couple of people suggest that might could get him an interview with studio to pitch his idea.

Jenny and Charlie were practically attached at the hip. She would work all night while he would sit in her section and work advertising copy. Every once in a while, he would get inspiration from seeing her gorgeous figure walk back and forth between the tables serving coffee

then he would switch over to one of his other writings be it the script or his therapy writing he promised Jenny he would attempt.

Delores had a good week as well. When she saw Charlie and Jenny, she knew who they both were. She asked to both of their embarrassment about grandbabies at least a dozen times.

Charlie helped Jenny learn what to say and how to phrase things so that Delores didn't get depressed or upset from the senility. She knew to change subjects to avoid conversations that were factually inaccurate. She learned to ask about events in the past when Delores was reliving a past time period instead of telling her it wasn't the time she thought. And she understood to slow down and let Delores speak at whatever rate she needed to.

Everything was going perfectly. On Wednesday night while waiting for the group to assemble at the diner Charlie received a call from a former advertising client who had read through his script.

"Charlie! I wanted to say I read what you sent over and it is great stuff. I don't know if ViaMar has any appetite for this kind of story, but I would love to get you some FaceTime with the decision people. Let you make a pitch, if nothing else let them know who you are and that you are on your way up."

Charlie almost dropped the phone from excitement. It was the opportunity of a lifetime and was surrounded by all the greatness that happened that week. "Thank Stan. You know the script isn't finished right?"

"Not an issue. Like I said it's not their normal type of show, they may pass due to it not being their cup of tea, but I think you need to start getting execs to see a face to the name because your name isn't going away."

"Thanks Stan. You don't know how much I

appreciate this.”

“No problem. Four weeks, I’ll send you the details.”

Charlie hung up the phone and sat in disbelief of the conversation he had just had. Jenny walked by and he yanked her apron ties pulling her into his lap. She landed a bit hard but twisted her body to plant a kiss on your man.

“Guess what?”

Jenny smirked, “You just found an old bitcoin and now we are rich?”

Charlie laughed at her joke.

“You had an epiphany and now understand how to defeat cancer?”

“No, I...” He tried to stop her jokes.

“You realized that entire box of Tic Tacs you’ve been eating is actually a Viagra prescription and you need to get me home right now for some you know what.” She was biting her lip and leaning back into his arms starting to let her imagination run wild.

“No, stop.” His voice was playful, but he was running out of patience to tell her the news. “Just got a call from a guy with ViaMar.”

“The movie studio?” She sat up suddenly very interested in what he had to say.

“No, see, he is with their ad department, but he knows me from work. And I let him read my script and he want me to pitch it to the studio division next month.”

“Oh my God.” Her voice was just a whisper. “Oh my God.” And then she was shouting. “This is it! This is the shot!” She leapt from his lap and ran into the kitchen to tell the news to Julio and Maribel.

He pulled out his script to try and see how much else he could fit into it in the next month before he was before a panel of movie executives. Screaming and

general happiness came from the kitchen as Maribel suddenly thought she was going to know a celebrity, not that she had any idea what studio ViaMar was.

The air was joyous, and Charlie couldn't wait to tell the rest of the crew what was happening, but by the time their meeting rolled around no one had shown up. Jenny continued to work, and Charlie sat in his booth daydreaming about what might be to come.

At some point Charlie snapped out of his daydream to see Nina sitting in front of him. She had a humorless look about her and let her dark penetrating stare bore into Charlie's soul. At least that was her intent, but Charlie wouldn't be intimidated that night. He smiled and greeted his fellow writer.

He leaned forward and whispered, "I have a meeting with ViaMar." He drummed the table in excitement and gave a strange yeehaw towards the island beauty.

"I am happy for you Charlie." She pushed forward a stack of papers. "Here are the remarks on her writing from last week." Charlie scooped up the stack and started straightening them on the table. "We've all decided that we are kind of Missy's side. And if you are going to stick with Randy and the new bitch we can't participate in the group. It was great knowing you, Charlie."

Nina stood up and walked out the door of the diner holding up a big middle finger to the kitchen as she passed. Jenny tried to get Nina's attention but couldn't get the woman to acknowledge her. She came running over to the table Charlie was at and slid into the booth with him. "What was that?"

Charlie handed Jenny the stack of papers Nina had brought.

Jenny looked over them and of course recognized the story she shared with the group. There was a big message written in red over the cover page.

‘If you want my help to become a better writer then you shouldn’t be a skank and flirt with men in front of their fiancé’

Jenny didn’t like the suggestion. She felt she had handled Randy fairly well without really rocking the boat. She wanted to go find Nina and plead her side of the case, but she knew it would be a fruitless venture. She looked back at Charlie who was staring at the page and realized that she had become the reason his little group was disbanding.

“I’m sorry Charlie. I didn’t want to be the Yoko.” She whispered into his ear and nuzzled her nose into his neck.

He rubbed her leg and slowly nodded his head trying to piece together what all went wrong. After a few minutes he kissed Jenny on the lips and said, “It’s not you. It’s Randy. He was the one acting like a moron when we met you.” This lifted up her heart a bit hearing that her man wasn’t blaming her.

“Come on. We have to find Randy.” Charlie grabbed his girl’s hand and whisked her out of the diner.

“I’m still on the clock, Charlie.” She protested as he pulled her out the front door of the restaurant.

“You are on break. I’ll explain to Maribel after we find Randy.” His voice was measured and steady but erratic at the same time.

Charlie drove them by Randy and Missy’s apartment, but her car was in the carport. He knew that the two of them wouldn’t be together. “Where do you think he went?” Charlie paused as he pulled to the side of the road. “He just found out that his group of friends

are siding with his ex-fiancé and not him.”

“Does he have family around?” Jenny didn’t know him well enough to have any idea.

“No. He moved here after college and only really had me and Missy.”

“Is he a drinker?”

“Bullseye.” Charlie pulled back out into the road headed for the hole in the wall bar that Randy most likely would-be finding solace in. It was closer to the side of town Jenny’s apartment was at. A sleazy little joint called the Haven. It was typically overrun with motorcycles and scantily clad women, but late on Wednesday it was just a few drunks moping around the place.

When Charlie and Jenny busted in, they immediately saw Randy sitting at the bar with six empty glasses around him. His forehead was against the bar, but he was so short he was still able to sit up nearly straight.

Charlie sat in the stool next to Randy and Jenny came around the other side putting a hand on his back. Charlie motioned to the bartender for a couple of beers. “Hey bud. You doing ok?”

Randy didn’t move a muscle he just let his arms dangle towards his feet while his head kept him from falling into the bar. “I really fucked it up this time, didn’t I? I mean she got this great opportunity and I kind of shit all over it.”

Charlie paid the bartender as the glasses came sliding down the bar. “It wasn’t the smoothest thing you ever did. But don’t sweat it. You can move on from this.”

Jenny took a drink of her beer, shuddering at the power of the hops within. She tried to sooth the little rodent looking man. “She was obviously a very angry person. You don’t really want people like that in your

life.” She rubbed his back as she tried to make him feel better.

Randy put both his hands on the bar and pushed his head back up. The room swam in circles. He wondered if it was the movement or the drinks that were causing the motion. He opened his mouth to speak, but quickly dropped his face back to the bar with solid clunk. “I don’t even have anywhere to go. The lease was in her name, so I am technically homeless.

Charlie put his arm around Randy hoping to drag him off the barstool. “Let’s go back to my place, decompress, figure out what the next step is.”

“Nope. I’ve given up hope. Everything has turned bad. I need to know something good is happening in this world before I decide to move on.”

Charlie helped Randy to his feet and said, “I have a meeting ViaMar in a month.”

Randy looked up at his friend with a big goofy smile on his face. “Ok. Good news. Thank you maybe I can try and move on if there are still good news.

CHAPTER 9

RHUBARB PIE

Over the course of the next week things began to fall apart. Charlie and Jenny were constantly joined by Randy who had nowhere else to go. He had turned the corner of Charlie's apartment into a workspace for his carpentry. He would spend late nights making chairs and stools to sell to local stores. Not that Charlie had seen any of the money. He was trying to hide his annoyance of his best friend, but every day that went by of him living in his apartment for free, eating his food, taking time away from him and Jenny, and leaving sawdust in the living room left him daydreaming of the day when he would get out.

"I am going to go to the diner and sit in Jenny's section tonight." Charlie told his annoying friend as he screeched wood across a table saw.

“What?” Randy shouted as he turned off the table saw.

“I am headed up to the diner.”

“Cool. I’ll finish up and go with you.” Randy jogged over to the corner to pick up another set of wood.

“No. I need to work on my script. I only have three weeks left before I meet with the studio, and I want it fleshed out as much as possible.” It was just an excuse to get away from Randy.

“Oh. Then I’ll stop by later to see how you’re doing. Don’t worry I won’t stick around.” Randy felt a bit defeated, but he knew that his friend was giving him a lot of help.

Charlie walked out of the room without saying anymore. He let the bang of front door be his last word.

He drove to the diner trying to focus on his script, but he was bombarded by other thoughts. Could he really blame Randy for the disintegration of his writing group? He had been a part of the group since the beginning, it started out just the two of them. When Missy and Randy started dating, she was brought in so she wouldn’t be jealous of him spending time with the group.

The twists and turns of the road seemed to sway Charlie’s mood with the trip. He knew that Randy was being a bit open about flirting with Jenny, but for that to destroy the group. If she was just the waitress, then it would have blown over. Although he knew deep down that they still would have broken up. Randy wasn’t handling the success of his fiancé very well. But it was Jenny and the reminder of Randy’s inappropriateness that drove everyone away.

He arrived at the diner and took his stuff in and sat in the back corner where Jenny usually worked. He put

his laptop with the script pulled up to his right and his handwritten story about his mother on his left. To some degree it felt like a decision he didn't want to make. There was the thing his mind told him was the right move and there was what his heart was pulling him towards.

He started typing on his script knowing that he was running out of time. The story or his therapy writing he could always come back to. But the story just wasn't coming out of him. He would write a few lines, a few actions, some scene settings. Then he would re-read it and delete it.

He stared at the screen for twenty minutes and did nothing but erase his work four times. He looked back at the story but shook his head and focused on the script.

Jenny eventually came by and gave him a hug and a coffee. "What are you working on?" The diner was dead like usual on a Saturday.

He let out an over-exaggerated sigh. "My script. I can't work on it at home because of Randy. Now I can't focus on it here. I have too much going on in my brain. I don't know what to do."

Jenny put her hand on his shoulder. "Why don't you go to your mom's house. It should remove all the distractions."

Charlie was so frustrated he wanted to cry and appreciation. Instead he grabbed her hand tightly and put his cheek against their embrace. "Thanks. That is a great idea." He gathered his things and retreated to his car.

He drove to his mother's house realizing that no matter how he felt about Jenny and if she was the impetus of the writing group's demise, she was also the thing that was bringing back his mother. Because of Jenny being in his life, his mother had started to

remember some things and been more playful with everyone around her.

He hopped up the steps to the house with his laptop under his arm and pulled out the keys to the house. He quietly opened the door and went inside. He set the laptop down on the shelf in the entryway and jogged to the kitchen to get a sticky note and pen so he could leave a message for his mother and she would know he was in the extra room.

But when he grabbed his supplies, he heard a bit a yelling from the back of the house. He dropped what he had in his hands and took off to the back of the house at a full sprint.

“Mom!” He twisted around the corner in the hallway. “Mom! Are you ok?”

“Charlie?” His mother called back as he rounded the final corner to her bedroom. “Charlie! Was that you making all that commotion out there?”

Charlie immediately knew something was wrong. She had not called him Charlie since he was in high school. She started calling him Charles once she said she felt he was an adult. He looked down at his mother sitting up in bed with a light blue nightgown. The sling was tossed to the side of the bed and her left hand looked swollen.

His mother started yelling at him, “Charlie what were you doing outside at this time of night? It is a school night, you can’t be out riding your bike in the middle of the night!”

His heart broke as he knew that she had reverted back again. “Mom, I was at the diner with Jenny.” He blurted it out hoping that the name would jog her memory.

“The diner? At three in the morning? Where is your

father? You are going to be in it deep when he hears about this!”

Tears started pouring out of Charlie. He couldn't hold anything back. His mind released everything that it had been trying to keep under wraps. “I was out with Jenny, mom. Don't you remember? You wanted her to give you grandbabies.” His eyes darted back and forth between his mother's pupils. “No? Mom, dad is dead. Has been for six years. I am a grown man.” He collapsed to his knees with his arms motionless in his lap. He kept mumbling words as his mind gave up hope. “You fell. You don't remember anything.”

Delores looked to the empty bed beside her. She looked at the bruising on her left hand. She realized how much of grown man her son looked like. She felt panic well up in her abdomen as she couldn't put memories to anything, but the things her son was saying seemed to line up. She slowly got out of bed and walked to the full-length mirror in the corner.

She traced the deep wrinkles across her face and pushed at the sagging skin over her cheeks. “I'm old. How?” Tears flowed through the wrinkles she had just traced, and she sat in the chair next to the mirror looking back at her son that she couldn't remember growing up.

CHAPTER 10

BLACKBERRY PIE

Charlie calmed his mother down and put her back to bed. It took over an hour. An hour of the two of them sobbing for what they lost. Charlie had spent the last few years hoping and praying for a recovery and let himself childishly believe it was happening.

Delores went through all the emotions that Charlie had been dealing with for years over the course of an hour. It was why the doctor had suggested that he don't correct his mother but change the subject. It was why he was supposed to ask questions to see what she remembered rather than hoist the truth on her. If he reacted this way his mother would go through all of every day.

After he was sure she had gone back to sleep he gathered his things and drove back to the diner. He thought he should tell Jenny and maybe her comforting was what he needed.

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He arrived at the diner and parked where he could see her tables. There was a young couple there sitting on the same side of the booth together. They were hugging one another and enjoying each other's company. The rest of the diner was empty except the back corner where he usually sat.

Back in the corner he saw Jenny sitting next to Randy. They were both smiling and laughing. It wasn't the scene he needed. He wanted to walk in and say what he had to and have his girl calm and sooth him. But, not with Randy there. Not with them in such high spirits.

Jenny got up to go pour coffee for the couple on the other side of the room. As she stood up Randy poked the skinny waitress with his index finger making her hop out of the way and then slap at his hand. She scolded him with her finger, but Charlie could see the fun on her face, she was enjoying the banter.

Charlie put the car in reverse and left the diner. He drove slow and deliberate as he was in no condition to be operating heavy machinery and he knew it. He arrived back at his apartment and put his laptop on the kitchen table and spread out his therapy story. He walked over to a half-made stool and lifted it over his head and threw it down on the ground shattering the legs into dozens of splintery pieces.

He stopped to breath and think. All that was running through his mind was how he had lost everything. His writing group was gone. He couldn't stand to be in the same room as his best friend. And his mother was back to slipping away. He didn't want to blame that on Jenny because it wasn't her fault, but since his mind had equated her presence to his mother remembering things, it was impossible not correlate her decline with Jenny as well.

He grabbed a marker and looked around for some scratch paper. By the television was Jenny's story. He grabbed the top page and started writing a message on it, but then he noticed the next page was the one that Missy had wrote her own note on. Charlie, hurt and wanting to pass that pain on grabbed that sheet of paper. He flipped it over and wrote his note.

'I need you both out for a few days. Go somewhere else. I need to think. I don't know that any of our relationships are working anymore. BTW Mom doesn't remember you anymore.'

He went back inside and sat down in front of his laptop. He channeled his anger and his disappointment in himself to write his script. He kept looking over at the story about his mother, but he didn't want to tarnish her great legacy with his pain and irritation. He put hours' worth of work into his script in just thirty minutes. He was writing faster than he ever had in his life.

His emotions were painting the picture and the characters were taking out all of his frustrations with the story. After a couple hours he started to slow. His mind started to go back to the thoughts of Jenny and Randy at the diner. And just the image of her started the thoughts again. She was why he lost his friends, he was why he couldn't stand his best friend, she was why he was reliving losing his mother.

Just as he decided to try and get some sleep the front door opened. "Charlie..." Jenny called out with a hesitation that was felt in the air.

"Go away." He didn't want to say any of the things he was thinking because somewhere inside he knew they weren't true.

"I'll go. I'm going to take Randy to my place. I just wanted to know. Did you mean to write this on this

specific piece of paper?”

Charlie could hear the hitch in her voice. He knew that she was on verge of tears, he also knew it was a shitty thing to do to her. But of all the hatred that was brewing in him he couldn't keep it all bottled up. “Maybe I thought you needed to revisit those suggestions.”

The door banged closed. Charlie sunk into the couch immediately regretting what he had said, but it was already done.

CHAPTER 11

AMERICAN PIE

Randy drove because Jenny was too distraught over her lover treating her the way he did. She sat in the passenger seat and balled. The seat belt was soaked in tears and Randy had just been driving in circles trying to give her time to calm down.

As the sun was coming up, she started to give out directions. Left here, right there... Randy was nervous because he had gotten the lowdown from Charlie how run down and dangerous her place looked but it didn't seem like they were headed to less safe side of town.

Instead they were going through some of the older neighborhoods that were kept up pretty well. Huge trees lined the sides of the streets and full brick mailboxes touched the edge of driveway.

As they went around the last corner they came to a

street with a big hill on the right and she pointed to one of the houses that were built on the hill. Randy followed the directions not really understanding what was going on.

Jenny noticed the brow furrowing and decided to explain to Randy what she was doing, "We can go back to my place in a minute, but Charlie said his mom doesn't remember me. And I thought if I can help her remember..." She stopped talking and threw open the passenger side door while taking huge steps trying to scale the hill. "Call nine one one!" She screamed in panic back Randy still confused in the driver's seat.

He grabbed his phone and dialed as he got out of the car. Looking up to where Jenny had reached there was an old woman lying unconscious on a step halfway up the hill.

Jenny was rubbing the woman's arms and half screaming, half crying, "Delores! Delores! Are you ok? Tell me you are ok!"

Randy spoke with the emergency operator realizing that they were at Charlie's mother's house. He slowly walked up the steps unable to see much of Charlie's mom behind Jenny who was on her hands and knees pleading with the elderly woman to respond. It was like the world was moving at half speed. He gave the details of where they were and what he knew to be happening. By the time he finally reached Jenny he could hear the ambulance turning onto the street.

He bent down pulled one of Jenny's shoulders to suggest she make room for the EMTs. In the split second before Jenny jerked back forward Randy could see Delores. Her face was covered in blood, her left hand was swollen to an unrecognizable degree, and there was an obvious break in her leg. He could tell she wasn't

breathing.

“Delores! Talk to me!” It would take two EMTs to get Jenny away from her boyfriend’s mother.

They spent the day at the hospital. Randy tried calling Charlie a dozen times on the way, but he wouldn’t pick up his call. He left message after message. Once they arrived at the hospital, he left text after text.

Jenny stayed curled up in a ball on a chair in the waiting room for hours on end just existing in the cold fluorescents of the waiting room. Randy was left to relay the news from the doctors to Jenny and the unanswered texts to Charlie.

Randy tried to sooth Jenny, but she didn’t want him to touch her. She didn’t want to be around anyone but Charlie and that wasn’t an option at that moment.

It was the third time the doctors came out that they told Randy she didn’t make it. No one really knew what happened. They assumed that with her dementia and old age she wandered out in the dark and fell down the concrete steps. They said looking at the injuries she was probably out there alone in the dark and in pain for less than an hour.

Randy left Charlie’s information with the hospital for next of kin. He went over to his friend in anguish trying to hide from the scenes of the day. He leaned over and told her he was sorry, but Delores was gone. He texted Charlie that he should call the hospital.

Until Jenny could verbalize, they remained at the hospital. Randy had nowhere to go and unless she could tell him where she lived, he was no worse off at the hospital.

Eventually Jenny put herself together enough to get in the car and give directions to Randy. They ended up at her apartment around five pm. She led him up to the

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door and showed him around. It was not as bad as Charlie had made it out to be, but it wasn't nice. Regardless he appreciated her willingness to let him stay there for a little while. He realized that he would be making home on the couch as there was not much there other than the two bedrooms, a couch and the kitchen.

Jenny quickly went into her room and slammed the door and went back to crying. She didn't care at that point who heard, or she was doing it. She just wanted to make the hurt go away.

Randy made himself comfy on the couch and sat down trying to process what had happened.

CHAPTER 12

HUMBLE PIE

The funeral was hard on everyone. There was an ok turnout. Lots of people from Delores's neighborhood showed up to pay their respects. Jenny, Randy, and their roommate Susan, the plain girl Charlie had met on his date with Jenny all came together. They largely stayed in the back and let everything happen without their influence.

Charlie of course helped organize the entire thing. He worked with the priest to get the right music and scriptures. It was a beautiful moment that was meant to honor his mother. He was at the front of the church during the ceremony and didn't pay much attention to who had shown up. He was exhausted from a day with the priest, a day at the funeral home, a day contacting friends and family.

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Once the ceremony started Charlie was highly attentive. He needed to know this moment so well. He needed to make sure his therapy story, which had become his tribute to his mother, got an exact recollection of her funeral.

The priest stood at the front of the room with the closed black casket on the alter in front of him. He raised his hands to quiet the room, but the black vestments he adorned made it feel as though death was present. That this wasn't just mourning of cherished loved one, but entrance of death in everyone's life.

"Ecclesiastes three versus one through four. There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." The priest said the words with such authority it felt as if the walls were echoing in support of the message.

"We lay to rest our friend, and mother, and neighbor, and Christian, Delores Sample. As many of us will Delores tried to hold onto this world longer than she could. For those of you who have been interacting with her over the last few years since her husband passed will understand what I am saying. Graciously God reminded Delores that there is a time for life and there is a time for afterlife. Just like everyone of you have this time to mourn. But it is imperative to our work with the lord that we take this time to mourn. This time. Specifically, now. And when all is said and done and we all appreciate the love and sacrifices Delores made for us all there will be a time to dance. I am not saying that will be today. Probably not tomorrow, but there will be a day when it

comes. Today may be our time to weep, but soon there will be time to laugh. And this may be our time to uproot, but soon there will time to plant.”

As much as Charlie wanted to burn the scene from his mother’s funeral into his mind it all went fuzzy after that. There was the rest of the ceremony and the drive in the limousine to the cemetery. Then a couple of people spoke about his mother while the casket sat above an open grave adorned in flowers.

He wondered a lot about the flowers and who they were from. Should he have found flower from those she loved the most to send down into the grave with her? Should he have wiped them all off the casket since she wasn’t taking anything with her.

He stood in a line and greeted everyone as they were leaving the graveyard. He shook hands, thanked people, and nodded at their sentimental words. Randy, Susan, and Jenny were among the people that came through the line. He almost nodded them through without realizing who they were. He was in a sort of autopilot for much of the day.

When Jenny reached his she wrapped her arms around his neck and squeezed him to the point of pulling a muscle in his back. “I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry” She repeated herself over and over.

Charlie pulled her away and put a firm hand on each of her arms. He looked her straight in the eye and told her, “No. I’m sorry. I’m sorry I was blaming you.”

She jumped forward and hugged him again, but he again pulled her off. “I’m sorry but give me a little more time.”

She agreed and left.

Charlie finished the line and had to go back to his mother’s house for the repast. It was filled with people

he had met once or twice. He wandered the house being stopped every few minutes while someone told them how badly they felt for him and would typically tell him a story of her life.

Before the end of the night he had learned that his parents honeymooned on a deserted island on the northern end of Lake Michigan they sailed to and lived in a tent until police told them they were trespassing. He learned that his mother wanted to become a roller derby player until she realized that it wasn't fake and probably hurt. And he learned that she always told her neighbors how proud she was of her son.

After the repast Charlie found himself in his apartment in front of his laptop with his script pulled up and the story, he had been handwriting of his mother's life. He looked over at the screen trying to figure out how he was going to end his script. Then he looked back at the stack of notebook paper representing the life of his mother.

"What was it I said last time I decided not write this story?" He asked himself aloud. "It is something I can always come back to." He laughed at the ignorance of himself from just a few days before. He slowly closed the laptop and moved the notebook paper in front of him. "I guess I get it now. I can't always come back to my mom. She is gone. And this is the time to mourn."

He didn't sleep for a couple days, he did nothing but write. And once he was finished with his story, he put it in a folder and put that folder in his laptop bag. After that he had three more days until his meeting and it was now time to dance.

CHAPTER 13

BANOFFEE PIE

Charlie sat in the waiting room making small uncomfortable movements in his chair. He was trying not to bring attention to himself, but he never wore suits. His suit was riding up crevasses in his body that he thought shouldn't be hosting clothes. The receptionist for the executives at ViaMar kept looking over at Charlie from the corner of her eye. He wasn't the typical Hollywood pitch man that came through there.

The girl was gorgeous, most likely no more than twenty years old, flawless skin, long red hair, and a figure they could model a mannequin after. "Do you want some water or something?" She couldn't hide her disdain for anyone that came through the office. She was in Hollywood to become a star, not be the receptionist while others made it.

“No. No thanks.” Charlie haphazardly let out while he continued to squirm in his chair.

“Ok.” She was at least happy that this loser wouldn’t be beating her to stardom. “There is a bathroom right over there if you need to” She paused while she thought of the right words, “adjust?”

Charlie panicked because that meant his discomfort in his clothes was very obvious. He stood up to head into the bathroom when a buzzer rang on the girl’s desk.

“Sorry. No time. They will see you now Mr. Sample.” The girl grinned with the animosity she had towards all people in that town.

Charlie turned his back to the girl and adjusted his pants. “Thank you.” He said with his eyes wide trying to show some kind of dominance but just looking like he hurt himself in his zipper. He grabbed his laptop bag and headed into the room.

It was as he would have pictured it. A huge room with wooden walls, picturesque view out of a wall of windows, a massive television screen at the end of the rectangular wooden table, and four men who all looked much more comfortable in their suits than Charlie was.

One of the men spoke up. “Welcome. We hear you have a pitch for us. If you want to hand out the script and get started, we will look through the writing while you go over the main idea.”

Charlie pulled out four folders with the script printed in each and slid them across the table. The four men leaned back in their chairs flipping through the pages while Charlie stood in front of the television trying to summon up the courage to perform.

“We open with our hero. Not your everyday hero, but your typical band nerd from high school. He is awkward, skinny, tall, maybe he doesn’t have the best

complexion. But he is on a date with his girlfriend when he gets a phone call. On the other end of the phone is his sergeant. He is told that a group of terrorists have taken over the amusement park in town. And that they are calling in his special team to take care of it.”

One of the executives holds up a hand to stop Charlie, “I have the wrong script here.”

Charlie looks into his bag and sees one folder left, he realized that he had given the man the story of his mother. He reached in and grabbed the right folder and slid it over. He tried to regroup, but he felt that he most likely just blew his chance right there.

“Go ahead.” The man said opening up the new folder pushing the old one just a few inches to the side.

“Where was I?” Charlie was drawing a blank and staring up at the ceiling tried to figure out how to stall for time.

One of the first executives jumped in, “I think you were about to tell us that this kid is a part of some psychic army.” He placed the script on the table and pointed at the page number so the other executives could find where they were.

“Yes, thank you. Drew is a part of the United States Army’s Psychic Operations.” Charlie was regretting not taking the water from the bitchy girl in the lobby. “So, he heads down to the amusement park where doesn’t recognize anyone from his squad but falls in line ready to fight off the group in the amusement park.”

Another of the men held up a hand stopping Charlie from his pitch. “I would like to say that reading through this, you wrote it very well. And I think this could be a movie, but not at ViaMar. If you want to be a screenwriter, I suggest you go make this movie and shop it around a film festival. It is kitschy and kind of fun, but

way too juvenile for our movie house.” Three of the four men slide the scripts back to Charlie and get up to take their leave of the meeting.

They thank Charlie as they pass and congratulate him on a great script. One tells him that he will love to do business with him in the future and he can’t wait until he comes back with more experience.

Charlie sits on the table feeling defeated. He lets out a sigh knowing that coming back with more experience is akin to saying come back when you win the lottery.

He reaches down for his bag and puts the folders back in. The last man is still looking over the script. Charlie walks over to him. He looks at the folder on the table, it is the movie script. Realizing that the executive is reading his story about his mother he quietly grabs the script and puts it away.

The man squints one eye at Charlie and kind of belches out some words, “Can I keep this?”

Charlie, shocking himself with rebutting a movie executive replied, “It’s my only copy.”

The man laughs and yells out, “Emma! I need some copies!”

The girl from the lobby walked in and saw Charlie next to the movie executive and snatches the folder from his hands to go make copies.

The man laughs again, “That girl hates everybody.

CHAPTER 14

CHOCOLATE SILK PIE

Wednesday night at three am. Maria and Nina sat in the booth. Across from them was Randy and Susan. Jenny sat between Matt and Mark. Everyone had an invitation that said ‘, There is a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build. You are cordially invited to a time to heal and a time to build. With the Writers of Larry’s.’

They had all sort of hashed out their issues waiting on Charlie. They all knew this was Charlie putting it all together. The four who left apologized to Randy for taking sides. They felt that he had been in the wrong until Missy took advantage of each of them and then ran away to California.

Randy introduced everyone to his new girlfriend, Susan. Everyone was unimpressed with averageness,

but they all left it alone.

Eventually the topic of Jenny came up. And while the subject of the group dissolving a week after she showed up, Jenny was starting to get really angry with Charlie for setting this up and not being there. It all blew over when Jenny apologized as she didn't want to break up any friendships. Everyone accepted this and started to finally think of her as part of the group.

Fifteen minutes after three Charlie came into the restaurant. He made his way to the back corner where his group traditionally met. He came to the end of the table, opposite Jenny and put his palms on the table.

"I hope we are all moving past whatever it is we were holding against one another. Those of you who don't know. My mom passed a couple weeks back. She had a great life and I am so proud to have been a part of it." He paused and faced Randy, "Randy, I am sorry I broke one of your stools, but I don't think we can live together. I think I will eventually kill you." There was genuine laughter around the table. He looked Jenny in the eyes, "Jenny, I am sorry for blaming you. For my mother, this group, my friendships. I was unfair to you. I was lucky enough to see my life both with and without you the other day. I saw how what I drive to on my own doesn't compare to what you drive me to."

Maribel slowly walked in behind everyone and slid a chocolate silk pie onto the table.

Maria started shaking her hands back and forth and squealing the tiniest bit in excitement. "You sold your script!

Charlie jumped back into the conversation, "No. I didn't. It wasn't good enough. But a story to ViaMar. It was what Jenny pushed me to do. It was her belief in me that I could move hearts with my own experiences.

Thank you, Jenny.”

Jenny got up and ran over to Charlie giving him a powerful embrace. They both let tears rise up. It was something that for such a short period of time they had that fulfilled them and then it was gone. They both wanted it back. Charlie stepped back lowered to one knee and said in his most snooty voice. “Jenny. My love. I had to wait until this evening with all our family in attendance” he waved his hand about the room acknowledging his friends as his family, “but with an excitement I can’t deny. And a desire to hear some damn music. I ask one question of you.” He took a deep breath and pulled a ring box out of his pocket. “Jenny, will you marry me?”

Jenny looked down at him shaking her head in disbelief, but after the last couple of days it didn’t matter to her how little they knew each other, how short a time it had been. She knew it was worse without him. “Yes. I think I will. But you are still a crazy person.”

He stood back up while he slid the ring on her finger and the group clapped as they twirled in a deep hug. Charlie looked over at the table and loudly whispered, “Someone hum Pachelbel’s Canon in D.”

Everyone looked at each other with no idea what he was talking about.

He let go of Jenny. Stood in front of her and wrapped an arm around her waist, “It is now time for dancing.” He started humming the song he requested from the group and they danced and twirled in the diner.

As the song went on, they started to recognize it, before long the whole table was humming and singing Pachelbel’s Canon while the happy couple danced their new life into view.