

## Chapter 44

DICK

Though modest, it was the most beautiful home I had ever seen. It had three tiers of floors and window-lined walls, which led to an opened ceiling. It was small in dimension but still gave me a feeling of space. Everything inside the house was decorated in creamy white tones, yet I knew nothing could soil there. The entire lakeside wall of the house was an enormous window pane, containing no glass barrier to the outside. It was okay, because I knew it didn't snow or rain there. And it didn't seem to matter if someone saw in; the house was open to all.

From every corner of the room, I could see the expansive wooded yard and a cleared pathway through the middle of its lush greenway, allowing access to the dazzling, aqua lake beyond. Sitting in front of the window pane facing outward toward the tranquil scene was a white, bentwood rocking chair. I assumed a small child lived there with me.

Then I awoke, noticing that I had fallen asleep on the couch again. When trying to remember the details that got me to this place from the bar, I could merely conjure up pieces. Only short clips came to mind—like those from the preview of a movie, falling short of revealing the plot. This wasn't the first time I had lost recall of the night before. This lapse of memory concerned me a bit, but not enough to give up my emotional escape at the municipal bar with my friends.

A familiar pain simultaneously shot through my temples and lower back as my feet hit the floor. I glanced at the clock above the television, it was already ten o'clock. Danny must have gone off to school already, and your mother must have been running errands on her day off.

*Okay, it's Tuesday,* I thought and remembered that I had an appointment with a potential lease customer in an hour. We also had conferences for Danny that evening. Looking through the slits of my eyelids, I made my way into the kitchen to ingest three ibuprofen tablets.

A familiar disgust consumed me. *What a mess I am; no wonder my wife is pushing away from me.*

As the shower's water flowed over me, I shook my head to clear the fog from my brain. I thought of our boat ride just the day before. *Why was she asking about the price of homes on the lake? Was she planning on leaving me?* I had always felt secure in our relationship, but I wasn't feeling that way anymore. *When was the last time we had said "I love you" to each other?*

*I've got to try harder. I just don't know if I have the energy,* I thought as the warm water washed away the smoke fumes from the bar.

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Your mother and I navigated through the sea of knee-high humans and their parents. The drone of excited chatter moved in a wave of unified voices through the school cafeteria. I was unable to distinguish one voice among the many, but your mother could clearly hear the ghosts of that place from a different time.

*"I'm so sorry, if there's anything I can do..."*

*"Be assured, God doesn't give us anything we can't handle..."*

*"Feel blessed, you still have another child..."*

*"Sometimes people learn too late about the dangers of living on a lake..."*