

AMANDA MEMORIES

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CROSSING THE LINE
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As a footnote, this book is dedicated to all those who suffer from emotional challenges, whether brought on by biochemistry or by those people around you who contributed to your distress. I hope you find the courage and resources to support your quest for comfort, resolve, and healing.

One

WEST PALM'S BEACH STRETCHED AWAY IN THE SHIMMERING HEAT OF late afternoon, lazy and golden. The somnolent surf lapped at the eternal shore.

Driving along the coastal road Brian Roberts was agitated and distant. The tropical air whipped through his hair, stinging his cheeks and eyes as he swung his convertible up the winding airport driveway.

Although on time for his flight back to Los Angeles, Brian raced through the concourse, the heels of his loafers reverberating hollowly on the polished tile as he headed for his gate. A Cleveland Indian's baseball cap was pulled down over his forehead and dark Oakley sunglasses hid most of his face. Although his clothes, a pair of creased, custom-tailored khaki slacks and a Brooks Brothers pinstriped shirt rolled up at the sleeves, did suggest his trademark look, he hoped the three-day beard would help disguise him. As he neared the American Airlines gate, he cast a furtive peripheral glance. *No press. Thank God.* He couldn't take them anymore. The pain was still there, gnawing at him like a hungry squirrel. Couldn't they leave him alone for just a day or two? And to think, he once craved the attention of the media.

Head down, he made his way along the wide, sunlit corridor leading to his gate. Usually he felt secure here; was it because he

had been here so many times? But today it offered little comfort. Although he walked amidst a sea of people, he felt desperately alone even as he clung to his anonymity. He hung close to the wall as he walked, as if it offered some maternal protection. The only change he'd ever seen made to this section of the airport was the art exhibits on the walls. Always observant, he'd made a mental note long ago that a new exhibit was displayed at the beginning of each month, which he thought to be a nice gesture for frequent travelers like himself. Brian recalled how he used to enjoy taking time out to study the exhibits and read about the artists. Longing to escape his troubled life, it was a struggle to keep from doing so today. From the corner of his eye, he'd recognized a new exhibit by his favorite artist group. Children. The pictures were probably originals from the kindergarten basement of some local elementary school. Each piece included a small school photo of its creator in the bottom left-hand corner of the cardboard frame, along with a short quote or title in the child's handwriting. Brian longed to slow down and read every one of them, to study the colors and shapes in a desperate attempt to know each child better. Instead, he concentrated on the backward "E's" and "R's" of the quotes and realized that not one had been written perfectly.

"Are you feeling all right, Dr. Roberts?" The flight attendant appeared genuinely concerned as she handed Brian back his ticket. No doubt she too had heard the news.

Brian flashed the smile that had charmed the likes of Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Princess Diana, and numerous celluloid dignitaries.

"Fine," he responded in a voice just above a whisper. "Thanks for asking," he said with a wink.

It was Saturday, August 4, 1990, and Brian was returning home following a brief but devastating reunion with Amanda Wagner. She had been his first patient, fourteen years earlier, when he was an overly eager doctoral student in the psychology

program at Florida State University. Amanda, then twenty, had come to the University Counseling Center with what appeared to be typical relationship problems, not an uncommon diagnosis among undergraduate patients.

Brian closed his eyes and recalled Amanda. Tall and willowy, curvaceous with a flawless complexion and a quick smile. But most of all, he remembered her eyes, deep green and luminous. Sometimes smiling, more often searching, but never untroubled. Soft strawberry blond hair cascaded softly over her shoulders highlighting the captivating sadness of those eyes. His first impression of her was that she had style beyond her years and on her it was charming. But Brian quickly learned through her actions that she was much more like a child. And, perhaps most perplexing, she exuded an air of intrigue that contrasted with her innate innocence; this played tricks on his mind.

Restlessly, Brian awoke from his daydream. Already twenty minutes into the flight, he pulled a *People* magazine from the front seat pocket and mindlessly scanned it. His eyes dilated and he swallowed hard as he read the headline, “*Talk show doc, Brian Roberts, great with one-liners for all that ails you.*” Flinging the magazine into the empty seat next to him, his thoughts returned to Amanda. Was he really obsessed with her? Squinting against the glaring sun, Brian stared at the mesmerizing vapors of cloud formations. A needed tranquilizer.

By the end of his first year of studies, Amanda had grown to be the primary focus of his energy. It was a time that preceded his Hollywood image, a time when he took pride in his work and cared about others.

Although always safely cocooned in a “doctor-patient” relationship, an immediate chemistry had developed between him and Amanda. He knew that she placed her trust in him and secretly he relished her heroic worship. His devotion to her was complete.

His gaze now deep in the passing cumulus, he recalled the hours spent inside and out of therapy committed to her case. Brian

had hoped that Amanda's treatment would have proven successful by the time he graduated and she would be strong enough to survive on her own. But when that time came, Amanda was still relapsing into fits of rage ruled by the other personalities within her. The hardest reality was that he had to turn her case over to another intern and move on. There were other people depending on him; the whole world, in fact, stood waiting.

It all came rushing back. The torment, the enigma in her compelling green eyes. Brian now realized that Amanda's pain had never disappeared and he knew those eyes would haunt him forever.

"Care for the salmon? Or the pressed duck?" The attendant was hovering over Brian's first-class seat.

Brian snapped his head from the window and then relaxed. "I think I'll just have another scotch, thank you."

He returned the petite young woman's smile. She had an allure, that rare mixture, a paradox of the innocent and the beguiling that reminded him of Amanda.

Brian rolled his head back toward the window and returned to his reverie. Against the dull thrum of the plane's engines, he ceased the mental struggle, intervening only when his mind tried to take on thoughts of the future.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are now preparing for our descent into LAX Airport," the pilot announced matter-of-factly. A dull pain just beneath his heart reminded him that he would somehow have to return to the pressures and complexities of his daily life.

L.A. was a much easier exit for Brian. His personal attachments in West Palm were vast and deep, but L.A. was neutral for him. He thought about the irony of this; after all, it was here that he had made his fortune. It could be counted by bankers and stockbrokers, real estate agents, and car dealers, but deep down, he valued none of it.

Mindlessly, he descended to the lower level of the concourse and stepped onto the speed walk. A crawly, insistent claustrophobia,

so often described to him by his patients, made his impulse to run almost irresistible. Only his fear of attention stopped him.

He reached his car and as usual was intoxicated by the hum of the finely tuned engine. The sleek black Porsche raced out of the airport and he was fixating on the feeling of the powerful machine. Soon the sting of the salty Pacific was beckoning him.

Brian's grip tightened on the black leather steering wheel now wet with perspiration. Beads of clammy moisture formed between his fingers and in a nanosecond flashed him back to the sight of blood spurting between his hands and fingers. He tilted his head back and screamed into the wind, "Amanda! Why?" He struggled to hold on to the steering wheel and to his sanity, but fragments of the past few days continued to surface even as he tried to block them out. He pressed the accelerator to the floor and drove on mindlessly, weaving in and out of freeway traffic.

As he entered the suburbs he was blind to the beauty of velvety green lawns, rows of royal palms, and pastel colored homes with Spanish tile roofs. After stopping at the gates of Bel Air, he peeled off and soon was racing up the driveway to his secluded home. As he screeched to a stop at the front gate, he saw them. An army of reporters camped out, his lawn a tangle of wires and communications gear. Cameras everywhere. Depressing his remote opener, he sped past those in the crowd, actually brushing one or two of the most persistent, and quickly closed the remote gate behind him. Once out of reach, Brian sat absorbed by the sudden stillness. His heart thumped loudly in his chest. He listened to the crackling sounds of his engine as it cooled. Then, more out of habit than vanity, he reached up and pulled down the sun visor. Peering into the mirror, he stared critically at himself. Although his dark brown eyes looked like road maps, his teeth were still as white as ever. He was a tall, slim man, considered handsome by most. His caring nature, wit, and quick sense of humor inspired close and lasting friendships. But his rise to fame had dramatically changed the focus of his life. He wondered about the dying

relationships and if any of them were salvageable. Staring in the mirror, he thought about fate and destiny. He knew how it all began but had no idea when it all changed or how it would end.

THE ELDEST OF two children born to Darla and Ben Roberts, Brian spent his childhood in cramped housing. Money was always scarce but like so many poor kids he never realized or felt he was that poor.

His most vivid memories were of family vacations at the decrepit beach-side bungalows of Coney Island. To Brian, those were magical times, laced with excitement. Somehow, his mother managed to transform their summer shack into a seaside palace. One particular memory served as both a fearful reminder and a source of motivation. Brian recalled a Saturday afternoon in late July when he went with his mother to the local store. Upon entering, the musty smell of rotten wood assailed the boy's senses. His mother cared for some neighbor children and the meager wages she earned had to cover the cost of their groceries. Brian cringed as he remembered her trembling hands counting out the nickels, dimes, and pennies. He remembered his mother's panic as she discovered that she was nearly a dollar short. He never forgot the troubled, almost fearful look on her face.

Old Mr. Glenn, the shopkeeper, said, "Mrs. Roberts, why don't you just owe me the money?" But his mother, stiff lipped refused with thanks. Walking out of that grocery store, Brian's face hardened, the blood pounding in his ears. He vowed that his future success would change the world for his mother. It had to. There would be no excuse for failure. Not for Brian. There never was.

BRIAN ENTERED THE house through the garage door, away from the maddening crowd. Nobody was home and he was relieved. He stood in the opulent foyer and drew a deep breath, momentarily absorbed by the grandeur of the place. Even after all these years, it still amazed him.

His home was a showplace, more than 10,000 square feet of hospitable perfection. From the third floor bridge overlooking three marble fireplaces, to the commissioned artwork all matched to the hardwood floors, cream carpeting, and furniture—it was magnificent. A far cry from his New York City roots.

The blare of a car horn startled him. He glanced out the foyer window and saw Nancy fighting her way through the masses. She visored her eyes against the glare of the media onslaught. Brian watched her inch her way around the back into the garage. She would be livid. He took a deep breath, and felt like a schoolboy waiting in the principal's office.

Brian listened to the staccato clicking of her high heels on the pavement of the garage floor. Quickly, the door opened. Nancy's blue eyes, icy and narrow, lasered into him. "Look at this street," she said. "There's a media zoo out there Brian, and I don't like living in a damn glass cage! They're like vultures, sticking cameras and recorders in my face. They go everywhere I go, the mall, the club, everywhere! I just feel like jumping out of my friggin' skin."

Brian listened but did not hear, his thoughts moving in slow motion. Before he could focus on her first sentence she was raving on. *Who is this woman? This is not the person I married. But then again, I'm not the same either, especially now.*

Her tone seemed to temper a bit. "I'm sure this is tough on you, but why should I have to suffer? I did nothing to deserve this nightmare." Her voice began to take on a hard edge again. "Asshole, this is all your fault. You finally went too far with that girl, didn't you? Why couldn't you just let go? I warned you, didn't I? But would the hotshot Dr. Brian ever listen? Well, maybe you got what you deserved." Finally, breathless, she withdrew.

Nancy's dazzling blue eyes complemented her elegant black Dior evening gown. A sheath, it revealed much of her slim and toned figure. Five feet two and perfectly proportioned, her body reflected hours laboring in health clubs with her personal trainer. The rest of her days were spent on Rodeo Drive and Fifth Avenue.

She carried herself with the confidence and poise of the nouveau riche.

Flustered, Nancy glanced at her watch. She was dressed and ready for the evening banquet at which Brian was scheduled as the featured speaker.

“Brian, you’re never going to be ready on time. The limo will be here in less than thirty minutes and, quite frankly, you look like shit.”

Brian simply shrugged. Once that remark would have stung. He thought about his Nancy, a caring and supportive wife. *God. What’s happened to her? When did she become so self-centered, so, so superficial? So damned trendy? The quintessential socialite?*

“Listen, after what I’ve been through, I could care less about what I look like or tonight’s bullshit banquet. Couldn’t you have canceled it for me? After what I’ve been through, I would at least expect that. You know Nancy, I’m not the enemy here.”

She glared as he struggled with his emotions. His voice was weak. “Don’t you even care at all? I mean,” he paused, half surprised by the choking sensation in his throat, and then whispered, “at all?”

“Hey, don’t blame any of this crap on me. I told you to stay away from her. That girl has been nothing but trouble since the day you met her. What do you want me to do anyway? It’s not my fault and I refuse to let you take it out on me. Besides, I think it’s about time that you realized that you can’t control everything and everybody.”

Nancy turned to wipe a tear from the corner of her eye. Unyielding, she continued. “Now get upstairs and make yourself presentable. I don’t want you to embarrass either of us by letting Amanda get in the way, again. Besides, you’re going to have to face the press at some point. Might as well get the madness over with tonight.”

Brian felt cemented to the ground. The numbness following his shell shock was returning. *Banquet, tonight, got to get ready.* Trance-like he headed toward the stairs.

As Brian ascended to his bedroom, the reality of it all began to sink in. He hadn't the strength to fight it any longer. *What has become of my life? I've completely lost control of everything.* Undressing, he stood momentarily absorbed by the bloodstains still detectable on his shirt. As dark thoughts persisted, he wondered about the parallels. The stain wouldn't fade from his heart either.

As he pulled open the shower curtain the flashbacks returned. There he was on the sprawling FSU campus. He remembered the sea of young people consumed by a common mission, one that he shared. He was going to be among the best in his field, respected for his accomplishments. Brian tilted back into the steamy water as he lunged forward and slammed his chest against the white tile. He couldn't stand it any longer. Flailing at the wall as if there was something there to hold on to, he fought off his obsessive thoughts.

"What are you doing up there? You are never going to be ready on time," Nancy's voice rose up from the foot of the stairs.

Brian heard her, but remained silent, still simmering. *Fourteen years of marriage. What happened to the joy? When did it all become a battleground? Cars, homes, clothes, and prestige had become my reward. What happened to homemade ice cream, pretzels in the park, intimate picnics, and the deep feelings of love and oneness with Nancy that once satisfied our dreams?*

Brian somehow got himself ready in time and slowly descended the stairs where Nancy stood watching the crowd from the foyer window. As the couple made their way to the front door, Nancy's mouth remained uncharacteristically tight.

Outside, the limousine swept the Robertses away, down the massive driveway and through the clutter of reporters. As L.A. images whooshed by, Brian's mind again drifted back to August of 1975 in Tallahassee. Brian's FSU days replayed in his head, once again.