Chapter One

*Combat Soldier*

Driving home.

Numb without.

Pain boiling within.

McCoullangs & Ebster’s. Julio’s Tapas. Urban First Health Club. Open 2 Dawn Café. Toshio’s Teppanyaki Restaurant & Karaoke Bar.

Roundabout.

I let out a groan of pain and look right. A silver car flies by. “Welcome to Paradise,” blasts out. I remember moshing to that song as an angst- filled teenager.

Has anything changed?

Have I changed?

Beeeeeeeeeeeeep!

I take the second exit off the roundabout and drive over the bridge. The beeping car speeds past. The driver gives me the finger.

Nice.

Lymin State High School. I felt so alone at that hell hole. Goldfield’s park. Lymin State Primary School. Lymin train station. Lymin sports field. Good memories there…not

Second roundabout.

I let out another groan of pain and look right. All clear. I keep on going. I need to get home now! Mansfield Street. I turn into it. I want to get the hell out of this car and crawl into bed. I don’t want to wake up. Bright yellow headlights shine in my mirror. I pull over. My tortured heart beats too quickly as the tailgater speeds past. At least he doesn’t give me the finger. I turn off the car and lean my head back against my sweaty seat. I close my eyes. I’m on a deserted island. I’m lying in a hammock. The waves are crashing onto the sand. The sun is shining. The sky is cloudless. Seagulls are calling out to each other. Salt’s in the air. Palm trees are swaying. I can…tap, tap, tap. I open my eyes and turn to see two old people looking back at me anxiously.

“Are you alright son?” the old man asks, peering at me through his horn rimmed glasses.

“I’m…I’m…” I stutter out.

Then the old woman with purple hair leans forward.

“Are you having a hard time?” she asks.

The tears finally come much to my disgust. I thought I had forgotten how to cry, obviously not! I turn away and start up the car.

“Son?” she asks.

I speed into my street.

Alpine.

I wipe away my tears and drive up the hill.

There’s the house.

Modern.

Grey and white terracotta.

Skylights.

My house.

Our house.

Alice and I.

I drive into the carport.

Who am I kidding?

It’s mostly William’s house, after all, he helps us with the mortgage repayments. We couldn’t afford it otherwise. Alice loves the house. I feel like a stranger in a strange land, a puppet forced to obey the master, a slave forced to obey the owner. The master and the owner are William and I’m a dependent boy, a shadow, a worthless, piece of rotting garbage.

Sigh.

I turn off the car and lean my head against the sweaty steering wheel. My iPhone rings. I can’t answer it. I just can’t. I’m twisted within, black to the core. Is it my fault? Is it? I don’t know, but I’m struggling again…with life…feeling like a broken man boy with a dark toxin slithering through my bones, poisoning my blood, distorting my thoughts, obliterating my reasoning, weakening my immune system. I sit back up. I need to get inside. I look at my watch.5:30 pm.

Peak hour!

I open the car door, step out gingerly and grab my sachet.

“I said give me that!”

Falcon’s demanding voice knocks me back.

“No!”

Legacy’s weepy voice is a dagger in my heart.

“Isaidgivemethatnow!” Falcon yells out. “Giveit!”

“But it’s mine!” Legacy whines.

I close the door and lean back against the car. It’s hot, like I am. I can’t deal with this. It’s too much. It’s way too much. I’m damaged. I’m used. My life is over at…how old am I again?

“Noitsnot!” Falcon shouts.

“Yes it is!” Legacy cries out.

“Mum!” Falcon shouts.

“You boys get in your rooms right now!” Alice orders. “And Falcon squeeze Charlie!”

“No!” Falcon shouts.

“Squeeze him!” she cries.

My body tenses.

“Fine!” he snaps.

Silence.

I let out a sigh and shake my head. I can’t do this father and husband thing. I don’t have the energy. Please forgive me Alice. Please forgive me Falcon. Please forgive me Legacy. I’m a **combat soldier**, fighting every damn second for my survival! That’s all I know how to be. That’s what I’m comfortable with. That’s…

“Hi Logan,”

I blink back my tears and look around to see Silvia standing there, jogging on the spot. Her brown hair is tied back in a ponytail with a pink ribbon and she’s in pink exercise pants and a white singlet thing that reads, ‘I’m A Stay At Home Mum. Don’t Mess With Me!’

I want to throw up.

“How are you?” she asks with a wide, ‘life is great for me’ smile.

Oh, I’m doing just fantastic! I mean, I hate food, I self harm, I think about suicide, I can’t stop these negative thoughts from tearing through my mind, people I work with are annoying me, I’m struggling with putting petrol in the car…

I force a smile. “Good,” I reply. “Just good, really good.”

O.k, serous overkill there Logs.

“Fantastic!” she exclaims and laughs.

What the hell is so funny?

Has she self-medicated?

I lock the car.

“You know it must be a relief to be home at this time,” she says, still smiling.

No, not really.

“Eric doesn’t get home until 8 most nights, leaving me with the four girls,” she carries on, still smiling, “Lucky for me, they all super angels.”

She’s definitely self-medicated.

“You know, he was saying just the other day that we all should go out for dinner again,” she says.

I turn away.

“Oh, O.k then, I guess I’ll see you later,” she says to my back. “Nice talking to you. Have a great night.”

Her bubbly personality is right out of a horror move.

I hurry up the stairs and rest my hand against the door handle. I can’t do this. I really can’t. I’m in turmoil. I’m riddled with pain. I’m caught in a tsunami. I have no hope left. My iPhone rings again. I ignore it and open the front door. It’s firm and sturdy, unlike me. I’ve never been sturdy and firm. I’ve never been stoic and invulnerable. I’ve always… been me.

Chapter Two

*Solitary Confinement*

“Daddy!” Legacy calls out. He starts to rush towards me when he trips over a pair of black school shoes and falls onto the carpet.

“Ow!” he cries out.

“Are you alright?” I ask.

He nods and gives me a big hug. “I’m fine,” he says and looks up at me with those adorable green eyes of his. They’re Alice’s eyes, disarming emeralds.

“Guess what?” I ask.

“What?” he replies.

“I bought you something,” I say.

“Really?” he asks.

I nod. “A few things actually,” I reply.

“What did you…?”

“Wassup Logan,” Falcon interrupts and runs down the other end of the hallway. He stops just front of me.

“You better have bought me something too,” he says.

“First of all, stop calling me Logan,” I reply.

He rolls his big blue eyes. They’re my eyes; demanding sapphires.

“O.k. *Dad*, what did you buy me?” he asks.

“I…”

“CauseyouknowthatGrandadboughtmeafoostablelastweek,” he blurts out.

“Where’s Charlie?” I ask.

“Idon’tneedthatstupidyellowball!” he cries out.

I step back. I can’t deal with him when he gets like this. I can’t. It’s too much. He’s too much. It’s all damn too much. It’s all… then I see Alice at the top of the stairs, about half way along the hallway. She’s my foundation, the source of my stability and a needed fixture in my life.

“Falcon you need to squeeze Charlie and finish off your homework,” she calls out, “You too Legacy.”

“Why do I need to squeeze Charlie, Mummy?” Legacy asks.

Falcon rolls his eyes, “No, she means you have to finish off your homework too,” he says.

“Oh,” he replies when Falcon again stretches out his hand and this time Legacy copies him as he always does. His older brother is definitely his idol. It’s a shame that Falcon doesn’t feel the same way. Legacy is an embarrassment to him, probably because he trips up a lot and gets fixated on stuff. Last week it was green M&Ms, this week its pink milk.

“You haven’t bought them anything have you?” Alice asks.

“HebetterhavebecauseheboughtLegacysomething,” Falcon replies.

“I said squeeze Charlie!” Alice orders.

He watches me like a hawk so I quickly take out a soccer game for him from my bag.

“Here you go,” I say.

“Logan!” Alice cries out as Falcon snatches the game from me.

“FIFA Soccer 13!” he exclaims. “But I wanted the Pro Evolution soccer game!”

“Well your dad can just take it back then!” Alice snaps.

“NoitsfineI’lltakeit,” he replies and hurries into his bedroom.

“Don’t forget to do your homework!” Alice calls out after him while I pull out the books for Legacy.

“And these are for you,” I say.

“What!” Alice cries out.

Legacy looks at the books and then at Alice and back at the books. I can see the longing in his eyes.

“Go ahead,” she says with a sigh.

He takes the books and looks at them.“Yes, Frozen Fear!” he exclaims, “And Tomb of Doom, Night Raid and Lunar Strike! Wow! Thanks Daddy,” he says and gives me a hug. “You’re the best.”

“You’re welcome,” I reply and he hurries to Alice.

“Look what Daddy bought me,” he says.

“That’s great honey,” she replies, “Just what you needed for the series.”

He smiles at the books.

“Now you need to finish off your homework,” she says.

“O.k Mummy,” he replies and walks into his bedroom.

Alice turns to me.

Uh-oh

“Did you have to?” she asks.

My iPhone rings a third time.

“Don’t answer that,” she says.

I stare at the phone as it rings out.

“Well?” she asks.

“It’s just a game and some books,” I answer.

“But the boys get enough stuff bought for them,” she points out.

“Yeah, all from your dad,” I reply.

“That’s not fair,” she says.

“He bought them a foosball table last week, Alice!” I say.

“He just likes to spoil his grandkids,” she replies.

“Yeah, but what about me?” I ask. “You *know* that it makes me feel so damn inadequate! I mean, it’s bad enough that he’s helping us with the mortgage.”

“We need his help,” she replies.

“We can ask my parents,” I say.

“They don’t have the money,” she points out. “Dad does.”

“Yeah and doesn’t he like everyone to know that,” I say.

“That’s enough,” Alice replies.

“Whatever,” I say. “I’m tired, frustrated and over it.”

I look at the family photos crammed on the wall.

“Logan,” Alice says.

“Forget it,” I reply and walk down the stairs into the dining room.

Alice follows.

“Do you want to talk?”She asks.

I look towards the kitchen.

“I’d rather help with dinner,” I mutter.

She slowly nods. “You can make the salad,” she says.

I open the fridge and grab the lettuce, half a dozen carrots, some celery, some snow beans, a few tomatoes and…

“Um, I think that’s enough,” Alice says.

I glance at the vegetables in my arms.

“Yeah you’re right,” I say and put them on the island bench. Then I head back to the fridge.

“What are you doing?” Alice asks.

“I just need some cheese, some spinach, some bok choy, watercress and some dressing,” I say.

“Sound great,” she replies as I put the stuff on the bench.

I look at the dressing.

“So how was your day today?” she then persists.

I look at the block of cheese.

“Logan?” she asks.

“Just to let you know, I won’t be adding any cheese or dressing to the salad,” I reply.

“Why’s that?” she asks.

“They’re not low fat,” I point out.

“Does it matter?” she asks.

“Of course it matters,” I say and shake my head. “Does it matter that there are terms like man bag, man flu and metrosexual being used by ignorant people?”

She looks at me a moment.

I know what’s she thinking, ‘alert, alert, my husband is losing it…again’

“Why don’t I take over the salad?” she then asks.

“No, I’m fine,” I reply. “It just annoys me that people use those terms,” I say. “They’re sexist and wrong! I mean, why can’t men have a bag? Why can’t men get the flu? Why can’t men shop? Why can’t men enjoy chick flicks? Why can’t they emotionally eat? Why can’t they hate sport? Why can’t… ”

“Logan!”

I stop and look at Alice.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“Take a look at the floor,” she says.

I see pieces of carrot scattered everywhere. How did they get there? I look at the knife in my hands and back at Alice.

“I’ll take that,” she says and puts it down on the bench. She then takes a deep breath and looks up at me. “You need see a Psychologist again,”

I look away. “So how was soccer training?” I ask.

“Did you hear me Logan?” she asks.

“I don’t need a Psychologist,” I reply. “There’s nothing going on with me! Its society and their unrealistic expectations of men! They want us to be stoic and invulnerable cave men, when in truth we’re all suffering from eating disorders, depression, domestic violence, abuse, rape…” tears fill my eyes.

“Oh Logan,” she says and puts her arms around me.

“No I’m alright,” I reply and pull away. “I have to be.”

“No you don’t have to be,” she says.

“Yes, I…” my iPhone rings. “I have to get it.” I say.

Alice opens my sachet, takes out my iPhone and looks to see who it is. “He’s going to have to call you later, Bella,” she then says and puts my iPhone back in my sachet. “Now do you want to call up the G.P to get the referral or do you want me to?” she asks.

“I’m fine,” I reply.

There’s a crack in my voice, a subtle one, but Alice picks up on it. I stare at the white tiles.

“Logan,”

I look back at Alice.

“Mummy, I finished my homework,” Legacy calls out from his bedroom.

Alice clears her throat. “O.k, sweetie, I’ll come check it now,” she calls back, “and yours too Falcon.”

He lets out a loud groan.

“We’ll talk later about this,” she says and walks out of the kitchen.

“But there’s nothing to talk about,” I reply.

She doesn’t say anything and walks up the stairs.

I’m perfectly fine. I’m better than fine. I’m invincible. I’m stoic. I’m…

“Do you wanna play with some Lego, Daddy?”

Legacy is standing in the kitchen. He’s all Alice’s side with those bright green eyes and that thick, wavy brown hair. He puts his tiny hand in my own.

“Daddy?” he asks.

I look down at him. “W…what?” I stutter out.

“Do you wanna play Lego?” he asks swinging my hand back and forth.

I nod, although I feel like crawling into bed and never waking up again.

“O.k,” I say and he takes me by the hand down into the longue room. “You sit here,” he says and I sit on the carpet as he brings to me a massive container of Lego that he’s accumulated over the year thanks to Father Christmas himself. That is thanks to William, my BFF.

“Should we play Star Wars or Harry Potter?” Legacy asks.

“You choose,” I say.

I feel like a corpse.

He looks inside the container. “Then I choose Harry…no…I choose Stars Wars,” he says and takes out the pieces.

“Do you want to be the Galactic Empire or the Rebels?” he asks

“The Galactic Empire,” I say.

“Then I’ll be the Rebels,” he replies.

I nod and we begin playing.

“What are you boys up to?”

We turn to see Alice standing there with Falcon in the dining room. He has his arms folded across his chest with a scowl on his face.

“We’re playing Lego Star Wars, Mummy,” Legacy says.

“*We’re playing Lego, Mummy*,” Falcon mimics him.

She gives him a look. “You have chores to do,” she says.

“But that’s not fair!” he cries out.

“Legacy finished his homework. You were playing the game that your dad bought you,” she points out. “Now get in the kitchen.”

He shakes his head and storms into the kitchen.

Alice rolls her eyes. “Can we swap?” she asks.

“Um…”

“Just joking,” She replies, “Well, not really, but you two have fun.”

She walks slowly into the kitchen after Falcon.

Wait a minute, should I have swapped? Did she want me to? Then again, if she wanted me to wouldn’t she have asked? Oh, no, she did and I…and I. I can’t deal with this! I can’t. I really can’t. I suck at being a husband. I try and fail. Try and fail. What’s wrong with me? Am I programmed to be alone? Am I wired for **solitary confinement**? Am I…

“Daddy, why aren’t you playing with me?” Legacy asks.

Great, now I’m a bad father! I *am* wired for **solitary confinement**. I am…but I don’t want to be wired for **solitary confinement**. I want to feel the light on my face. I want…

“Logan,”

I look up to see Alice standing in the dining room.

“Luke Skywalker just killed Darth Vader,” she points out.

“Oh,” I say.

“Are you alright Daddy?” Legacy asks.

I want to burst into tears and let it all out but I can’t.

I force a smile. “Not now that you killed me,” I say.

“But you were too slow,” he replies and turns to get another Lego figure while I stare at Darth Vader in my hand. We have a lot in common.

Chapter Three

*Freak*

The table is set and for dinner we have….chicken drumsticks swimming in oil, rolls covered in butter, and salad drowning in dressing and cheese!

I feel sick.

Too much food.

I can’t eat my share.

I can’t.

Too many calories.

Too much fat.

Nope.

I can’t eat it.

I’ve eaten too much today anyway. For lunch alone I had a vegemite sandwich and an apple. That means I must skim on dinner. I have to. I need to maintain my weight. I’m already 68kg. I’m not sure how I gained weight. I used to be 67kg. I’m…

“Looks good doesn’t it?” Alice asks.

I look down at all the food and nod.

“So what did you do today at school Legacy?” she says. I look up to see her put a fatty chicken drumstick and some fatty salad on her plate. How can she do that without a second thought? How? I can see the pool of oil underneath the chicken!

“I…” Legacy begins when Falcon interrupts, grabbing three chicken drumsticks at once!

“Hey, I should go first, not him!” he cries out.

“I’ll ask you next,” Alice says and picks up a roll. I can see the butter oozing out….yuck!

“But I don’t want to wait for him,” Falcon replies and grabs three rolls.

What’s with this kid?

“You went first yesterday,” Alice says. “Now it’s Legacy’s turn to go first.”

“But he talks about boring stuff!” he replies and shoves a roll in his mouth.

“I do not…” Legacy begins when I zone out.

I look at the pile of chicken drumsticks still on the serving tray and at the pool of fat under them. This time I know I’m going to be sick. I can’t believe Alice cooked this fatty food. We may as well have gone to KFC! Is she trying to poison me? Is she…she’s putting one chicken drumstick after another on my plate.

“Whoa, what are you doing?” I ask.

“Helping you partake in this wonderful meal,” she says.

“Well three chicken drumsticks are plenty,” I point out.

“You’re ten year old son has three,” she replies.

I look over at him as he tears off a piece of chicken with his teeth. I look away in disgust as Alice puts a fourth fatty chicken drumstick on my plate.

“That’s enough,” I say.

She just shrugs and puts two rolls next to the fatty mess. I watch the butter oozing out of them in horror.

“Now for the salad” she says and heaps it on. “Dig in.”

I glare at the food.

“Come on Logan, you need the protein so you can get ripped,” Falcon says.

“Get what?” I ask.

“Get ripped, like Mike Price’s dad,” he replies and tears off the chicken from his third drumstick. “He’s massive! Mike said it’s because…”

I glare at the mountain of food. I have no damn choice but to eat this imitation KFC. But how am I going to get away with skimming on breakfast? I have to skim on breakfast the next morning. That’s how I compensate if I have to eat a big meal. But the problem is, we eat breakfast together every morning and Alice will be watching me. I’ll just have to throw out my lunch!

“Wait!” Legacy cries out.

I see him looking at Alice. She’s standing there with glass of strawberry Nesquick in her hands. I didn’t even realize she had gone to the kitchen.

“I’m waiting,” she says.

“Did you put skim milk in it?” he asks.

“Of course I did,” she replies and takes another step.

“Stop!” he cries out again.

“Really?” she asks and shakes her head.

“Did you put three spoons of the pink stuff in it?” he asks.

She nods.

“Are you sure it was three?” he asks.

“Yes, it was three,” she says.

“And what kind of cup do you have?” he asks.

She holds up a cup with the Avengers on it.

“Satisfied?” she asks.

“I don’t know what that means,” he replies.

“Do I pass the pink milk test?” she asks.

He nods and she passes the cup to him and sits back down.

“Not that I haven’t passed the pink milk test a billion times before and…”

The fatty mess on my plate draws me back. How can I eat it all? How? How? I glance at Falcon devouring his fatty mess like a wild animal and look away quickly. Yuck! But what damn choice do I have. Then again, why shouldn’t I just eat the fatty mess? What’s wrong with me?

“Logan!” Alice cries out.

I jump. “What! I’m sitting right here,” I reply.

“Then why didn’t you answer Legacy’s question?” she asks.

“What question?” I ask.

“He asked you how your day was,” she says.

I look at Legacy. He looks hurt. Great. Good on you Logan.

“I had the best day,” I say.

“What did you do?” he asks.

“Well, I…”

“Can I have your chicken?” Falcon interrupts.

“No you can’t,” Alice answers for me.

“I asked Logan,” he says and looks my way.

“I’m…I’m still eating,” I say.

“Well can I have something else to eat?” he asks.

“You’ve just had three chicken drumsticks and three rolls,” Alice says.

“But I’m still….”

I look back at my uneaten food. Why can’t I just eat it? Why am I such a **freak?**

Chapter Four

*Imprint*

Later on that night, after the boys have gone to bed, I watch a DVD in the study. I’m thirty minutes into it when Alice walks in and pulls my headphones off.

“We need to talk,” she says.

“But I’m watching my favourite movie,” I reply and put the headphones back in.

She pulls them out. “Walk the Line?” she asks, “Great movie choice, Logan.”

“Hey, at least it’s not one of those unrealistic, life is a bed of roses ones you like to watch,” I reply.

“But ‘Walk the Line’ is depressing,” she says.

“It’s about hope,” I argue.

“Well there’s hope for you Logan, if you go back to a Psychologist,” she replies.

I don’t say anything.

Alice kneels down in front of me. “Please talk to me,” she pleas.

“I don’t want to,” I reply.

“Haven’t I earned your trust be now?” she asks.

There are tears in her eyes.

“This isn’t about trust,” I say.

“Then why can’t you open up to me?” she asks.

“Because I’m trying to protect you,” I say.

“From who?” she asks.

“From me,” I reply.

She takes my hands in her’s. “But you don’t need to,” she says.

I pull my hands away. “Oh really?” I ask.

“Yes really,” she replies.

I shake my head. “I’m restricting what I eat again Alice and…”

She pulls up my sleeves and sees cut marks there.

“Its worse this time,” I say

“Why?” she asks.

“It’s stronger than before,” I reply.

She pulls down my sleeves. “That’s because you haven’t properly dealt with it,” she says.

“I saw Jake twice before Talia ordered him back to New Zealand with her,” I reply.

“Logan, Talia didn’t order Jake back to New Zealand,” she says. “He wanted to go and anyway, Talia needed more support.”

“She had us,” I say angrily.

“She needed her parents because Jake was starting to lose it again, like you’re losing it now,” Alice replies.

“That’s not fair! I’ve been trying really hard lately,” I say.

She pulls my sleeves back up. “You call this trying hard?” she asks.

I pull down my sleeves. “I’m going through hell!”I cry out.

“Then see a Psychologist,” Alice says.

“Why do I need to see a Psychologist when I’ve got Jake?” I ask.

“Because he can’t help you anymore,” Alice says.

“But he helped me last time,” I reply.

“How?” she asks. “He was falling apart!”

“Well that’s how he helped me,” I explain.

She stands up and shakes her head. “You’re not making sense,” she says.

I look away. “He helped me feel normal,” I say.

“Because of what happened to him?’ she asks.

I nod.

She kneels down again and takes my hands in her’s. “But that wasn’t normal, sweetie, nor was what happened to you normal.”

“Oh really? It wasn’t?” I ask.

She stands back up. “Can you please just call the medical centre tomorrow?” she asks. “If you don’t want to do it for yourself, then do it for me and the boys.”

I shake my head, “No can do, I’m working tomorrow,” I say.

“Then call up on your lunch break,” she replies.

“Yeah because that’s what I want to do on my lunch break,” I say.

“Then do you want me to call up?” I ask.

“You shouldn’t have to,” I say.

“Well I do, since you won’t do it,” she points out.

“Fine,” I say. “Can I watch my movie now?”

She looks annoyed. “You know, the least you can do is say thank you,” she says.

I’m annoyed too now. “The least I can do is say thank you?” I ask, “What for?”

“Because I’m taking time out of my day to make an appointment for you,” she says.

“Oh yes, it must be so hard for you to make a simple appointment for me,” I reply.

“Then you do it,” she says.

I shake my head at her. “You’re missing the point,” I reply.

“Which is?” she asks.

“I’m going through hell!” I yell. “The least you can do is make that damn appointment for me!”

“Mummy!”

It’s Legacy. Alice glares at me. “Thanks honey,” she replies.

“Anytime,” I reply and she walks out of the study.

Moments later she walks back in the study.

“He’s gone back to…”

“Mum, I’m hungry,” Falcon cries out.

She hurries out. “What are you doing out of bed again?” she asks.

Falcon doesn’t sleep well. Have I mentioned that? He’s like an insomniac at ten…Yay.

I shake my head, close the door, put on my headphones and continue to watch the movie. How selfish of me right? I’m the worst husband and father, but I don’t mean to be. Can you see that? Can you feel my pain? That’s what prevents me from supporting Alice at times; my ugly pain. It’s been with me since as long as I can remember, an unwanted fixture; an **imprint** in my very bones.

Chapter Five

*Darkness*

I open my eyes and turn on my side. No Alice. Where’s Alice! I sit up and look at the clock. 6 am. She’s running. I lie back down and stare at the ceiling. Then after a while the door opens.

“How are you feeling this morning?” Alice asks and closes the door.

I don’t answer.

“That good, hey?” she asks and walks towards the bathroom.

The door opens again.

“Mum, I finished my homework,”

It’s Falcon.

“That’s good,” she says.

“Can I play my game now?” he asks.

“Sure,” she replies, “But for no more than an hour.”

“Why?” he asks.

“Because you need to get ready for school,” she says.

“But it only takes me a few seconds to get ready for school,” he replies.

“It takes you a lot longer than that,” she says.

“No it doesn’t,” he replies.

“Falcon, end of discussion,” she says.

“No!” he cries out. “I want to play longer!”

“Well you can’t,” she says.

“What if I get ready for school now?” he asks.

“Then you can still only play for an hour,” she says.

“Why?” he asks.

“Because that thing fries your brain cells!” she snaps. “It’s not good for you!”

“I don’t care!” he yells and slams the door behind her.

She shakes her head. “Thanks for backing me up, Logan,” she says and opens up the door and hurries out after him.

“That’s mine!” I hear him yell.

“Mummy!” I hear Legacy cry.

I close my eyes. I’m on a deserted island. I’m laying in a hammock…the door slams shut.

“You need to call up the medical centre now!” Alice says.

I open my eyes.

“I hate you Mum!” Falcon yells.

“That’s fine with me!” Alice says.

“Mummy!” Legacy calls.

“Just stay in your bedroom, honey, Mummy needs a shower,” she calls back.

“O.k,” he returns.

He sounds fragile, like me.

“Well?” Alice demands.

“Well what?” I ask.

“Why are you still in bed? I told you to call up the medical centre now!” she says.

I look at the clock.

“Its 7 am, Alice,” I point out.

“O.k, so give them a call at 8 am,” she replies. “They’re opened then.”

“But I thought you were going to do it,” I say.

“I’ve got enough to do today now I’m a solo parent,” she replies.

“What?” I ask.

She shakes her head. “Never mind,” she says and walks into the bathroom. “I’m taking a long shower.”

I sit up, “But…”

“Deal with it,” she replies.

I shake my head. Deal with it? Deal with it? Doesn’t she care what I’m going through?

“Mummy,”

“Mummy’s in the shower, Legacy,” I call out.

He opens the door. He looks smaller than usual or is it just me.

“But I’m hungry,” he says.

I get out of bed. “Well how about I make you some breakfast?” I ask and take his hand in mine.

“But I don’t like burnt toast,” he says as I walk him out of the bedroom. I close the door behind him.

“I accidently burnt the toast once,” I reply, “once.”

“Twice,” Falcon calls from his bedroom.

I ignore him and walk into the kitchen with Legacy. That’s when my mobile iPhone rings. I pick it up. It’s Mum.

“Why didn’t you call back last night?” she asks.

“I…”

“I phoned you three times but you never once called back!” she complains.

“I didn’t…”

“What were you doing that kept you from calling back?” she asks.

“Daddy, I’m hungry,” Legacy says.

“Is that my little Legacy I hear?” Mum asks.

“Yes, it is,” I reply with a sigh.

“Put him on the phone,” she orders.

“He’s hungry Mum,” I reply.

“Logan,” she commands.

“Fine,” I reply and give the iPhone to Legacy.

“It’s Grandma,” I say.

“But I don’t want to talk to her,” he replies. “I’m hungry.”

“Please, Legacy, just say hello to her,” I beg.

“O.k,” he replies and takes the iPhone. “Hi Grandma,” he says.

I walk over to the pantry and pick up the box Wheet Bix.

“Can I come out of my room now?” Falcon calls.

“I don’t know,” I call back. “You’ll have to ask your mother.”

“Where is she?” he asks.

“In the shower,” I call and pour some Wheet Bix in a bowl for Legacy.

“Then how can I ask her?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” I reply, feeling frustrated and put the bowl of Wheet Bix on the kitchen table.

Legacy turns to me. “Daddy, I don’t like Wheet Bix,” he says.

I can hear Mum still talking to him.

“Yes you do,” I reply.

“No, I don’t,” he says and puts the iPhone down on the island bench.

“Legacy, Grandmas is still talking to you,” I reply.

“But I don’t like Wheet Bix,” he says and bursts into tears.

“O.k, o.k.” I reply and give him a hug. “Then what do you like?” I ask.

“Coco Pops,” he says, “With pink milk.”

“Legacy, are you still there?” I can hear Mum’s voice coming from the iPhone.

“Do you mean Coco Pops with a glass of pink milk or…”

“I hate you!” I hear Falcon cry out.

“Just stay in your room,” Alice cries.

Then she’s stomping down the stairs.

“Who’s on the phone?” she demands.

“M…Mum,” I stutter out.

She picks it up. “Call back later Bella,” she says and hangs up. Then she looks at the Wheet Bix.

“He doesn’t like Wheet Bix,” she replies. “He likes Coco Pops with strawberry Nesquick,”

“In the same bowl?” I ask.

“No, separately,” she replies and dumps the Wheet Bix in the sink. She then takes out an Avengers bowl and cup when my iPhone rings again. I pick it up. It’s Mum.

“Why does Alice keep on telling me to call later?” she asks. “And why did Legacy stop talking to me. I…” this time I hang up the phone.

“I thought I told you to deal with breakfast,” Alice says and she puts a bowl of Coco Pops along with the cup of Strawberry Nesquick on the dining table. Legacy starts eating while we go into the kitchen.

“I’m doing the best I can,” I say, feeling out of breath.

She shakes her head. “Then how come I’m always the bad guy,” she says.

I look at the floor. “Please, Alice,” I reply. “I’m not…”

“I’m hungry,” Falcon calls.

“Then you should have thought about that before getting out of your room without being told you could,” Alice returns.

“Well you didn’t tell me how long I had to stay in my room for,” he calls back.

“I said that I would come and get you,” she calls out.

“You were taking too long,” he returns.

“So you thought you would interrupt my shower time?” she asks.

“I’m hungry!” he replies.

She shakes her head. “Then you can come and make your breakfast,” she says and looks at me. “You need to have a shower.”

“Mummy, Falcon ate some of my Coco Pops!” Legacy cries out.

We both turn to see Falcon standing there.

How fast is he?

“No I didn’t,” he says.

Alice walks towards him. “Then why is there milk dribbling down your chin?” she asks.

“I’m hungry,” he replies.

“Then get in the kitchen and make some breakfast for yourself,” Alice says.

“But it will take too long,” Falcon replies.

“I don’t care,” she says.

“Aren’t mums supposed to care?” he asks.

“Hey, who washes your clothes? Who helps you with your homework? Who watches your soccer games? Who makes your dinner? Who drives you to school? Who…”

“O.k, o.k., chill out,” he says and walks into the kitchen.

“Oh I’m chilled Falcon,” she replies

“Yeah, right,” he says.

Alice looks at me. “Shower, now,” she orders.

I hurry up the stairs, through the hallway and into the bedroom. I slam the door behind me, but I can’t walk into the bathroom. I can’t go to work now! Instead I run my hands through my hair and pace up and down the room. I need something sharp! I need it! There’s too much crap within me. I can’t control it! I can’t! I need to get it out. I grab a pen and use it to scratch up my arm. Then I scratch up my other arm. That’s better. I drop the pen and let out a sigh of relief when the door opens.

“Why aren’t you in the shower yet?” Alice asks. Then she sees my arms and the pen on the carpet. She closes the door behind her.

“Great, just great,” she says.

“I can’t help it, Alice,” I reply.

“Oh don’t give me that,” she says. “You can. You know you can. You just choose not to.”

“That’s not true,” I reply as tears fill my eyes. “I can’t just stop crap that explodes within me like a grenade.”

“Then you should have called out for me,” she says and picks up the pen. She looks around the room, grabs a few other pens, her nail filer, a pair of nail clippers and throws them in the nearby waste basket. “What else?” she asks.

I look away as the tears run down my cheeks. She lets out a sigh and takes my hands in her’s.

“What else?” she asks, this time in a softer tone.

“The…the bowl of shells in the bathroom,” I say.

She grabs them and puts them in the waste basket. She then picks up the waste basket and walks out with it.

“I’ll be back soon,” she says.

I nod and sit on the bed with my head in my hands.

“Logan,”

The door closes as Alice walks back in with the empty waste basket.

“Are you able to go to walk today?” she asks.

Falcon bursts in, “Logan, its Grandma!” he says.

“Doesn’t that woman ever give up?” Alice asks and walks towards Falcon. “Have you been eating doughnuts?” she asks him.

“No,” he replies as she takes the iPhone from him.

“There why is there icing around your mouth?” she asks.

“I…”

“Logan is busy Bella,” Alice says.

Falcon takes the opportunity to run!

“No, you can’t!” Alice cries out. “I told you…I know he’s your son but…”

I close my eyes. I lose track of time until I feel a hand on my shoulder.

“Logan,”

Her voice calls me out of the **darkness** and I open my eyes.

“Your mum isn’t very happy with me,” she replies.

I can’t answer.

“Are you able to go to work today?” she asks.

I shake my head.

“O.k.” she says. “Why don’t you get back into bed and I’ll call Garry,” she says.

I nod.

“Then I’ll make an appointment for you,” she continues. “Hopefully I can get you in for today.”

I lie back in bed, close my eyes and descend back into **darkness**. I‘m, happy there in my own messed up way.

Chapter Six

*The Beast*

“Logan,”

I open my eyes.

“I got you an appointment for today,” Alice says.

I sit up and stretch.

“What time is it?” I ask.

“9: 30,” she replies and sits down beside me.

“Who took the boys to school?” I ask.

“Dad did,” she replies.

I look at her fearfully. “You dad was here?” I ask.

She nods.

“Did he ask any questions?”

“I just said that you were sick,” she says.

“What did he say?” I ask.

“That he hopes you get better,” she replies.

I shake my head and look away. “Why didn’t you ask Mum to drive the boys to school?” I ask

“She was at Hope’s,” she replies.

“My Dad?” I ask.

“With your mum,” she replies.

I don’t say anything. I can’t. I just close my eyes again.

“I’m sorry that I called my Dad, alright,” she says. “But there was nobody else around.”

I open my eyes.

“You didn’t have to call him at all,” I say. “You could have been back in time.”

“Not with school traffic,” she points out.

“You’re right,” I say and look back at her. “I just hate your dad knowing that I’m sick.”

“Everyone gets sick,” she replies.

“Your dad never gets sick,” I say.

“He does get sick,” she replies.

“O.k, what I mean is that he doesn’t have what I have,” I explain.

“Yeah, but he’s still grieving for Mum you know,” she says.

“That’s all?” I ask.

Alice stands up. “Look, you need to have a shower,” she replies. “Your appointment is at 10” 30.”

“So soon?” I ask.

“There was a cancelation,” she says.

I get out of bed. I feel lightheaded.

“Lucky for them,” I reply.

“Logan, you need this,” she says as I head towards the bathroom.

“I know,” I reply. “I just…” I stop and turn around. “What am I going to say to the G.P?” I ask. “How am I going to trust?”

She takes my hands in her’s. “You don’t need to trust,” she says. “You just need a referral to a Psychologists and some medication in the meantime.”

“But I’ll have to confide in the G.P,” I reply. “Do you know how hard it is for me to do that?”

“Just tell the G.P the basics,” she says.

“Like what?” I ask.

“Like you’ve been having recurring episodes,” she explains.

“You make it sound easy,” I say.

“It is,” she replies.

“Maybe for you,” I say, “but I always feel like a deer in the headlights.”

“Just take a deep breath,” she replies.

“Can’t you be my spokesperson?” I ask.

“This is something that you need to do on your own,” she says.

“But I can’t do it,” I reply.

“Logan,’ she says. “I’ve already taken too much time out of my schedule this morning. I need to get back to work.”

I cross my arms across my chest. “Then that’s it?” I ask.

“Logan,” she says.

“You’re just going to throw me to the sharks,” I say.

“Logan, you’ve received a referral from a G.P already at the medical centre,” she replies. “They’ll have your records still.”

“But I didn’t follow through with that referral,” I point out.

“It doesn’t matter, they’ll still have your records,” she says.

“Fine,” I reply and walk into the bathroom.

“You can do it honey,” she calls after me.

I don’t reply because I can’t do it! I can’t do anything but let the **beast** drain me of life. I don’t care. The **beast** is welcome to me. What have I got to offer this life anyway?

Chapter Seven

*Thumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumthumpthumpthumpthump…*

Driving out of the car port. Numb without. Pain boiling within. I see Silvia standing on the footpath. What is that preppy housewife up to now? She waves at me. I don’t bother to wave back as she walks towards the front door of our borrowed house. Why is she visiting Alice? She’s working. She’s…Beeeeeeeeeep! I turn to the side of the road as a black car flies past. My heart is beating fast when in my mirror I see both Alice and Silvia hurrying towards me. I don’t think so! I turn back onto the road and speed down Alpine. Then I turn into Mansfield. Roundabout. Lymin State High School. Goldfield’s park. Lymin State Primary School. Lymin train station. Lymin sports field. I turn left. Lymin Shopping Centre. Red light! I hear Katy Perry’s “Roar” and turn to see some teenage girl dancing in her car to it. She smiles at me. I don’t smile. Green Light. I continue driving along. Lymin’s Medical Centre. I pull in and try to find a car park. It’s packed. I can’t believe there are so many messed up people living in Lymin. Who would have thought? Everyone around here looks superficial to me. Obviously that’s a mask. There’s a park! I pull in just as my mobile phone rings. It’s Alice.

“What?” I ask.

“Nice, Logan,” she says.

I exhale heavily. “Look I’m just nervous alright,” I explain.

“I know,” she says. “But you can do this Logan, I know you can.”

“I shouldn’t have to,” I reply and get out of the car. I feel shaky. “What did Silvia want anyway?” I ask and close the door.

“To invite us out to dinner,” she says.

“Well I hope you said no,” I reply.

“I said yes actually,” she says.

Indian restaurant. Georgina’s Café. Pharmacy. I pause outside the medical centre.

“Why would you say yes when I’m about to see a Shrink?” I ask.

A mother with a whole lot of kids walks past me.

“What’s a Shrink” one of the kids asks her.

I can’t help but smile as she gives me an apologetic look and ushers her kids into the medical centre.

“Logan, your whole life doesn’t get put on hold because you’re seeing a Psychologist,” she says.

“But I don’t even like Silvia and what’s his name,” I complain.

“His name is Eric,” she replies.

“Yeah, well I don’t care,” I say. “They’re not our type of people.”

“Because they’re not messed up?” I ask.

“Exactly!” I exclaim.

“Logan, they have their own problems,” she says.

“Like which country to visit next” I ask.

“Now you’re being rude,” she says.

“Thanks for the support honey!” I yell out and hang up. I can’t go into the medical centre now! I hurry away and feel tears in my eyes.

“Are you alright?” an old woman ask me with purple hair.

I don’t answer her as I…purple hair! The old woman from last night? I turn back around. Is she stalking me? She smiles. Well she can stalk someone else. I turn around and hurry into the car park. That was rude. I stop and turn around. The old woman is gone. Was she just a mirage? Was she a figure of my imagination. No, she…

“Logan Emerit?”

I see a woman with a baby nearby. She looks familiar as I quickly wipe my tears away.

“Logan?” she asks again and walks closer.

She looks like she’s stepped out of one of those trendy woman magazines.

I nod. “I’m Logan Emerit,” I say.

She pulls off her sunglasses. “It’s me, Tina,’ she says, “Tina Giles, well, Gartly now although I used to be called Giles.”

“Tina!” I cry out. “We used to mosh to Green Day!”

“Sure did,” she says.

We smile at each other. “And who is this?” I ask, gesturing to the baby.

“Her name is Amber,” she replies, “and she’s seven months old.”

“Is she your first?” I ask.

“Um, she’s my sixth,” she says.

“Your sixth?” I ask.

She shrugs, “What can I say?” she asks. “My husband is hot.”

“Well he has to be to get away with Gartly as a surname,” I say

“Yeah, I know,” she replies and starts laughing. So do I. It feels good to laugh.

“So what are you up to these days?” she asks. “Still moshing?”

“I wish,” I reply. “But no, I’m a respectable husband and father these days.”

“You?” she asks.

“I know, it’s hard to believe,” I say and we laugh again.

“Then what brings you here?” she asks.

I look away. “I’m not well,” I say.

“Me too,” she replies.

I look back at her. Is she messed up as well?

“Do you have a cold?” I ask.

“Depression and anxiety actually,” she replies, “And you?”

“Nothing that meds won’t fix,” I say.

“Well I hate to say this, but I’ve been on meds for about six months now and they haven’t fixed everything,” she replies.

“Then what am I doing here again?” I ask.

“They’ll still help you,” she says, “but weren’t you walking away?”

“Hey look fartly,” I reply with a smile.

“It’s Gartly,” she says. “Tina Gartly.”

“It’s hard to spill your guts to a complete stranger, you know,” I reply.

“Tell me about it,” she says. “The spilling of your guts never stops by the way along with the meds with their side effects and…”

“Meds have side effects?” I ask.

Her baby starts crying.

“Sorry, I have to take this one home,” she says “Nice seeing you again, Logs,”

And with that she walks away.

“Wait, you said there were side effects?” I call out.

She turns around. “Look, everything will be alright,” she says over her baby’s cries. “The hardest thing is just to get started.”

“But what about the side effects?” I ask.

“Just get started!” she cries out and hurries away. I watch her for awhile and then look back up towards the medical centre. I can do this. If Tina did it, then so can I. I walk towards the medical centre. Wow, I can’t believe I ran into Tina Giles. Last time I saw her was twenty years ago. We used to be in the same group at school, ‘the lost ones’ as we called ourselves and we still are, well at least me and Tina are. I wonder if the others still are as well? I look at the tinted door of the medical centre in front of me and pull it open. Oh, wait a minute, it says push. I push it open and walk in. A ton of people stare at me. I feel embarrassed and look ahead. There’are three receptionists at the counter. Two are grandmotherly types and the other is around my age I guess and bald. Bald! What’s her story? She’s talking to a man with a screaming toddler in his arms.

“Look I’ve been waiting for twenty minutes already,” the man is saying to the bald receptionist.

“I know and I’m sorry but there’s…”

I look away. Why can’t he stop that toddler screaming! I can’t focus!

“Excuse me Sir,

Why did I come here? I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to…

“Sir!” the voice cries out.

It’s one of the grandmotherly types. I look around at the other patients. Most are staring back at me like I’m a freak. A teenage boy with messy hair sitting in the back row of chairs smirks and texts quickly on his iPhone. Is he texting about me? Is he texting how some freak is standing in the middle of the medical centre looking like a deer in the headlights?

“Sir.”

I look back at the grandmotherly type. She looks concerned and beckons me towards her.

“You’re next,” she says in a kind voice, one that makes me want to tell her everything over hot milk and cookies.

“O.k.” I reply and walk towards the counter.

“About time,” someone mutters behind me. I don’t turn around.

“Jimmy Michaels,”

I look to my left to see a tall doctor standing there looking like he just stepped out of GQ magazine. I look down at my old, worn clothes… like me. That’s when I notice an Avengers sticker on my jeans. How did that get here? I peel it off.

“Jimmy Michaels,” the GQ looking doctor calls out again.

This time the teenage boy with messy hair stands up.

“Alright, I’m coming,” he calls out, like the GQ doctor is inconveniencing *him*. The GQ doctor shakes his head, walks into his office and the teenager slowly follows him looking all cool and stuff.

“Sir, are you alright?”

I look down at the grandmotherly type. “What?” I asked.

I’m confused.

What’s new?

“I’ve asked you your name twice now but you seem distracted,” she whispers.

“Oh, I…9:30,” I whisper back.

The grandmotherly type receptionist looks down at her computer. I can hear someone laughing from the front row. How could they have heard me? I want to die! I want the floor to open up and suck me in.

“Let’s start again, shall we honey?” she asks me.

I nod gratefully.

“What’s your name?” she asks.

“Lo…Logan Em…Emerit,” I stutter out.

“Logan,” she repeats and looks down at her computer again. “You have a 10: 30 with Doctor Miles,” she informs me kindly.

“O.k.” I reply.

She looks back up at me with a smile. “Now, honey, you’re a few minutes late, but I haven’t heard your name being called out so you’re good to wait.”

“O.k.” I say and stand there like a complete mental case.

“You can have a seat honey,” she replies.

“Anywhere?” I ask.

I’ve lost it. I should have a label on my forehead saying, “*Mental breakdown in progress. Please don’t come any closer.”*

“Yip, anywhere is fine,” she replies and I stumble away.

“Next please,” she calls out.

People stare at me as I pass the rows of chairs; the man with the screaming toddler, an older couple who look like they could die any second, a woman with three little kids playing around her like’s she’s their own personal jungle gym.

“Do you want some?” one of her kids asks me. She’s younger than Legacy, maybe 4 or 5 with thick curly brown hair and brown eyes. She offers me a plastic piece of cake.

“I…I…I…”

“Leave the poor man alone, sweetheart,” the woman says and pulls her away like I’m contagious. I walk pass a few more women with their rowdy kids, before making it to a chair along the back row in the far corner. There’s only a few people in this row and they don’t look at me. There’s a man with a ton of tattoos. A girl Legacy’s age sits next to him who smiles at me. She needs to blow her nose. Maybe I should tell him, but he looks kind of dangerous so I just look away. On the side wall there’s a bunch of pamphlets about all kinds of medical conditions. There’s even one about prostate cancer. They have a lot of awareness programs in the media about prostate cancer. I wonder if I should get checked for prostate cancer.

“Logan Emerit,”

I look to see a big man with a ton of grey hair standing across the waiting room.

I freeze.

“Logan Emerit,” he calls out again in a loud, scary, booming voice.

I’m intimidated.

I feel like a little boy again.

I’ve lost all confidence.

He looks monstrous. I don’t need monstrous. I need someone I can confide in. I would have confided in that GQ doctor. He seems around about my age, but…

“Logan Emerit,” his voice booms out again.

The grandmotherly type looks over at me.

“That’s you honey,” she says.

Yeah, good times.

I stand up. I feel like everyone is watching me as I hurry towards scary Doctor Miles.

“How are you Logan?” he asks and stretches out his huge hand.

I just stare at him.

“How…are…you?” he asks again slowly.

I blink, well, I’m self harming, have some kind of eating disorder, can’t relax, feeling dark, can’t seem to be happy, can’t seem to be positive about anything, I feel anxious…

“O.k.,” he says when I don’t answer him the second time. “How about you come into my office?”

**Thumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthumthumpthumpthumpthump…**

Here goes nothing.

Chapter Eight

*Raw*

About thirty minutes later I stumble out dazed and confused with an appointment card in my hand and a prescription for something called Lexapro. The monstrous doctor turned out to be a gentle grandfatherly type but the whole thing still scared the hell out of me. Still I’m seeing a female Psychologist named Star next Friday. I’m also seeing a Psychiatrist called Dr. Aman in two months time…now to get this Lexapro. With shaking hands I walk towards the pharmacy. I’m not sure how I feel about it being in sight of the medical centre. I mean, won’t people know why I’m going there? Won’t they…

“Fox!”

Oh, no! Only one person in this world calls me by my middle name. I turn around slowly. It’s Aunt Dominic.

“Hi there,” I say nervously, shoving the prescription in my jeans pocket.

“Hi yourself,” she replies and gives me a kiss and a hug. I’m almost covered by the Persian carpet looking thing she’ wearing.

“So what are you doing here?” she asks.

Hmmm, gee, I don’t know.

“I’m not feeling well,” I say.

“Oh, that’s not good,” she replies with a hand on my shoulder. “You are looking a little pale and as always too skinny! Why doesn’t Alice cook better?”

“Aunt Dominic!” I exclaim.

“You should tell Alice to come and see me tonight,” she says. “I can show her…”

“That won’t be necessary,” I interrupt, “and anyway, we’ll be seeing you this Sunday so there’s no…”

“But you need to eat,” she interrupts and tosses her thick black hair back.

“I do eat,” I reply. “Alice makes the best meals around. You should taste her chicken drumsticks.”

She raises her eyebrows at me. Aunt Dominic is a formidable woman, she’s actually taller than me and I’m six foot two!

“Did she buy them from the shop?” she asks.

“Yes,” I reply.

“This is not cooking,” she says. “Now, you tell…”

My iPhone rings. It’s Ferris. Why is he calling me up? He never does. Well he sometimes calls me up, but usually when he wants something.

“I’m sorry I have to take this,” I say.

“Sure, Fox, no problem,” she replies. “Just make sure you tell Alice to come and see me tonight.”

She hurries away before I can answer her.

“Hey Ferris,” I say.

“Why are you and Alice hanging up on Mum?” he asks.

“I…”

“She doesn’t deserve that,” he says, “Especially not from that wife of yours.”

“I…”

“You need to call Mum back up now!”He demands.

“You need to mind your own damn business!” I say and hang up. How dare he interfere in my life! How dare Mum call him up, the blessed firstborn son who of course can do now wrong. I mean he has a MBA, lives in a mansion in Lymin Hills, is married to a criminal lawyer, has one perfect child and works as a soccer agent with Sports Agents Australia. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh….what’s Aunt Dominic still doing here? Then again, what was she doing here in the first place? She doesn’t look sick. Is she stalking me like the old woman with the purple hair? She’s looks around. She’s on her iPhone. She’s probably reporting back to Mum. The two of them are thick as thieves. They’re both alike. Black hair. Blue eyes. Loud, out there, involved in everyone’s lives whether they want them to be or not. She just smiles at me but hurries away. I shake my head and walk towards the car park when I remember my prescription. I turn back around, wondering who else is spying on me. I walk towards the pharmacy when my iPhone rings.

Really?

It’s Hope.

“Don’t tell me, Mum called you as well?” I ask.

“Yip, she sure did,” she replies. I can hear the twins crying in the background. “But I wouldn’t worry about it, she’s just being Mum.”

“Is everything alright, Logs?” she asks.

“I’ll talk about it later,” I say.

“O.k,” she replies and then breathes heavily into the phone. “I’m pregnant again.”

“What!” I exclaim, “I mean, hey congratulations!”

“I’m having twins, Logs!” she exclaims.

“Oh,” I say.

“Yeah, I know, another set of twins!” she says. She sounds like she’s on the verge if tears.

“It could be worse,” I reply.

“How?” she asks. “I’ve already got four kids under six. I don’t need two more!”

“Well how did Dean react?” I ask.

“He was ecstatic, can you believe it?” she asks.

“I…”

“It’s alright for him! He works 60 hours a week! He’s not the one who has to…I’m just going to have to ask Mum and Dad to move in,” she says.

“Um, Hope, shouldn’t you ask Dean first?” I reply.

“He’s not the one having another set of twins!’ she cries out. “His opinion doesn’t matter. His…” I hear a noise like somebody has farted.

“I have to go,” she says. “The twins are still crying and Fyre just pooed on the tiles, thank goodness Asher is at school.”

“Yip,” I say.

“We’ll talk later,” she replies.

“O…”

I hear another fart noise and she hangs up quickly. Poor Hope. I can’t believe she’s going to have six kids…and she’s only twenty eight, with six kids! I shake my head and walk into the pharmacy. That’s when I see Cas.

“What are you doing here?” I blurt out.

“Um…you know, bro,” he says, looking down at his thongs.

I don’t know how to answer him when my iPhone rings. It’s Dad! Wow! He never calls me up!

“Hi Dad how….”

“You need to phone your mother,” he interrupts and hangs up.

Yip, that’s my Dad, the great conversationalist. I shake my head and look back at Cassium, but he’s not there anymore. Hmmm, another mirage?

“Can I help you?”

I look at the Pharmacist and pull out the prescription from my jeans.

“I just need this please,” I say and give it to him.

He looks at it and then at me. “Right away,” he says and hurries off. I feel conspicuous standing there so I browse the shelves. Multivitamins. Didn’t the doctor say I needed some of them? I pick up some Cenovis Men’s Multivitamins and see some other products of interest. Iron. Yip, I need some of that. I pick up a bottle. Fish Oil. Should I get 1000 mg or 2000 mg?

“Can I help you Sir?”

I look around to see another pharmacist smiling at me.

“Yeah, I need some iron, fish oil, and vitamin B something according to my doctor,” I say.

“O.k, well I see you have a bottle of iron tablets in your hand,” she replies.

“Oh, right,” I say. “Well I just grabbed any brand.”

“Well those in your hands are actually for woman,” she replies.

I look at the bottle. “And so they are,” I reply and give it to her. She puts in back in the shelf and then gives me another bottle.

“These are the ones for men,” she says.

I look at the label. “They are too,” I reply and laugh. “I’m sorry; I’m new to this…stuff.”

“No problem,” she says. “At least the multivitamins are for men.”

I look at the label. “Yay,” I reply, feeling like a lunatic.

“Logan Everit,”

I see the pharmacist at the counter with a bag.

“That’s me,” I say and put the iron and the multivitamins back.

“Excuse me Sir, don’t you want these?” the other pharmacist says.

I take them from her hands. “My bad,” I reply and laugh. Lucky the pharmacist at the counter has only one other customer and he’s busy picking his nose.

“Here you go,” the Pharmacist at the counter says. I take the bag from him.

“Is the medication in there?” I ask.

“It sure is,” he says. “Now remember to take only one a day with food and if there are any side effects just see your doctor.”

“Side effects?” I ask.

He nods.

“And what are the side effects of this medication?” I ask.

“Didn’t your doctor mention them to you?” he asks.

“Well to be honest I kind of went blank towards the end of our appointment,” I say. “You know…” I pretend to be a zombie. He looks at me.

“Right, well, just look them up on Google,” he replies.

“And what am I taking again?” I ask.

“Lexapro,” he replies. “It’s an anti-depressant.”

He whispers the last word.

“Now I remember,” I say, pay for the medication, the multivitamins and iron and walk away from the counter.

“Come again,” he calls out.

“I hope not,” I call back, but realize how stupid that sounds since it seems I’ll be taking this Lexapro for the rest of my life! I hurry towards the car park when my iPhone rings. This time it’s Alice.

“I’m so glad it’s you,” I say.

“So I take it the family has been on the phone to you again today?” she asks.

“I even saw Aunt Dominic,” I say.

“Where?” she asks.

“At the medical centre,” I say.

“What was she doing there?” she asks.

“I don’t know, but after talking to me she was on the phone to Mum,” I say.

“That woman needs to mind her own business,” she replies.

“My whole family needs to mind their own business,” I say.

“So how did the appointment go?” she asks.

“As good as could be expected,” I say.

“Meaning?” she asks.

“I’ve been put on anti-depressants, scheduled to see a Shrink next Friday called Star and a Psychiatrist in two months time called Dr. Aman…oh and Hope is pregnant again.”

“Hang on, what anti-depressants are you on?” she asks.

“Lexapro,” I reply, “There’s side effects apparently.

“We can see what they are later,” she says.

“Why later?” I ask.

“Because Dad is here,” she replies.

“What!” I exclaim. “Do you mean the whole time we’ve been talking he’s…”

“…been in another room,” she says.

“Are you sure?” I ask.

“Of course I am, I’m not an idiot,” she says.

“I didn’t say you were,” I reply.

She doesn’t say anything.

“So when is he going?” I ask.

“I’m not sure,” she says. “I don’t think he’s having a good day.”

“And that’s our problem because?” I ask.

“Don’t be rude,” she says.

“Well I’m tired,” I reply. “I want to come home.”

“You still can,” she says.

“Not with your dad there,” I reply.

“He knows your sick,” she says.

“Yeah, but not mentally sick,” I point out.

“And how would he know the difference?”She asks.

“Because I feel like it’s stamped on my forehead,” I say.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she replies.

“Then tell him to leave,” I say.

“Logan, I told you, he’s not having a good day,” she replies.

“Well nor am I!” I snap and hang up. I can’t believe it! She’s chosen William over me, her own husband! Damn her! Damn him! Damn me! I hop in the car, throw the bag with my meds and other stuff over my shoulder. I hear it land on the back seat as I blink back tears. Betrayed by my own wife! How could she do it? How? I need to get out of here, but where should I go? The beach! I wipe my tears away and take off, feeling **raw.**

Chapter Nine

*Mental Asylum*

I park the car and get out. I can smell the salt in the wind. I can hear the seagulls. I can feel the wind on my face. I close the door and walk down to the beach. The sand is cold beneath my feet, but I don’t care as I walk along. Then my iPhone rings. It’s Alice.

“Dad’s gone now,” she says.

I don’t say anything.

“Did you hear me?” she asks.

I don’t reply.

“Logan!” she cries out.

“What?” I ask.

“Did you hear me?’ she asks. “Dad’s gone. You can come home now.”

I don’t have the energy to speak with her now.

“Logan?” she asks.

“I need to be alone,” I reply and hang up. I stop walking and look out at the choppy waves. I wonder what Cas was doing at the Pharmacy? Is he on something as well? No, not him. He’s happy go lucky Cassium, the laid back, surfing ninja.

“Hi Logan,”

I turn around.

“Hi…”

What his name again? He’s the scientist guy who lives a few house down from us. He reminds me of a hobbit. Anyway, he and his wife invited us to a dinner party at their house once. I hated every second of it. The guy is a tool. She’s a lot nicer, very free spitted. I have no idea how they ended up together. Still the same could be said of me and Alice.

“It’s Jarvis,” he says.

“That’s right,” I reply and look at his wife.

“Hi…”

“Alina,” she says with a smile.

“I’m so sorry,” I say. “I’m having a shocker today. I mean I was at the doctors just this morning. It turns out I have depression and anxiety. I even have…” I stop. Oops, over share. He looks uncomfortable and shuffles his hobbit feet around while Alina just continues to smile at me. What is she, some kind of robot? Didn’t she hear me?

“So how’s the water stuff going?” I ask him.

“Oh, that’s a question for Alina,” he replies, “She’s the Hydrologist.”

“The whatagist?” I ask.

“The…” he begins when my iPhone rings. No! I’m not answering it. No way! I just let it go.

“You know you could have answered that,” the hobbit man says.

“No, its fine,” I reply. “It’s probably just my psycho mother or my brother, he’s the favourite you know, or my sister who’s pregnant with twins…again or…”

“Look, Logan, we have to go,” the tool interrupts.

“Oh, o.k. then,” I reply.

I’m a mess.

He quickly walks away, pulling his wife with him. Seriously what does she see in him?

“I’m a recovering alcoholic,” she then calls out.

“Good for you!” I call back and turn around.

Wait, what did she say? I turn around, but they’re out of sight. Did she say she was a recovering alcoholic? Wow, first Tina says she has depression and anxiety, then I see Cas at the pharmacy for something and now Alina says she’s a recovering alcoholic. I feel better now. I walk back to the car with a smile on my face until my iPhone rings. It’s Mum. This time I take it.

“Are you going funny again?” she asks.

I lose my smile.

“What do you mean?” I ask and hop in the car.

“Are you going funny?” she asks. I close the car door.

“I don’t know what you mean by that,” I say.

“Are you doing…stuff,” she says.

I turn on the engine.

“I don’t have time for this,” I say and hang up on her.

I drive away from the beach. You know that really annoys me. Why can’t Mum just ask me if I’m having episodes or whatever again? Why does she have to sound so awkward? Yeah I do stuff. Get over it. I didn’t have the same fantastic life experiences as Ferris. He was always class captain, school captain, sports captain, academic genius, the most popular, the most fairest while I was the younger loser brother. What a shame no one knew about the sexual abuse I was experiencing! Mansfield Street! I’m hungry. I drive around and head to the nearest bakery. I park the car, get out, order one steak and bacon pie, one cottage pie, a custard tart, and a caramel slice. Then I drive like a mad man home. That’s when I see a few familiar cars parked outside the house. Great, this is all I need. I turn off the car, get out and see Alice hurrying towards me.

“They’re all inside,” she says.

“All of them?” I ask and look around at the cars.

“Well your parents, Aunt Dominic, Hope, the twins and Fyre,” she replies. “But it feels like all of them.”

I close the car door and shake my head. “I just bought us…”

“There you are,”

Mum hurries towards me and almost takes out Alice.

“Where have you been?” she asks, giving me a hug. “We’ve been waiting for ages.”

“Ten minutes actually,” Alice manages to get in.

“And what have you got there?” she asks.

“Bakery…”

“You didn’t have to buy your own lunch,” she interrupts.

“Your mum and Aunt Dominic are making…” Alice begins when Hope hurries outside and hands Alice one of the twins.

“Your right, Mum, he does look too skinny,” she says.

“Hope!” I exclaim when Alice attempts to give her back the baby.

“Oh, no, he loves you,” she says to Alice. The baby lets out a loud wail just as Silvia comes running past. What else does she do besides running?

“Hi all,” she almost sings out.

“Hi Silvia,” Alice calls out over the crying.

“Hope, Fyre just pooed on the kitchen floor,” Aunt Dominic cries out.

Alice looks at me in horror.

“Oh, how, cute,” Hope tells us. “That’s means he feel comfortable in your home.”

“No, it means he hasn’t been toilet trained properly,” Alice replies and gives Hope’s baby back to her.

I look away to hide my smile.

“Um, Alice, maybe when your kids were Fyre’s age that what it meant but these days it means they’re comfortable in someone’s home,” she says.

I look back around and shake my head slightly at Alice. She just grabs bags from me and looks in just as Silvia joins us. She’s still in her sweaty jogging clothes.

“Beautiful day isn’t it?” she asks.

Mum snatches the bags from Alice and gives them to Silvia.

“You could do with these my dear,” she replies.

“Like hell she could!” Alice snaps and takes out the custard tart and crams half of it in her mouth.

“Now you’ve just ruined your appetite,” Mum says.

Alice ignores her and hurries back inside with the other half of the custard tart.

“Does she want the caramel slice too?” Silvia asks.

“No…”

Mum begins when I interrupt.

“Hope, you need to clean up the crap,” I say

“Yay,” she replies and hurries towards the house. I follow.

“You keep the pies, dear,” I hear Mum say to Silvia while inside, Alice slams the study door behind her.

“What’s her problem,” Hope asks.

“Just clean up Fyre’s crap,” I say.

“I am,” she replies and goes to give me the baby but I back away.

“I don’t think so,” I say, “Give her to Dad.”

“He’s asleep in the longue room,” she replies.

“Great,” I say and take baby Summer.

“Where’s Autumn?” I reply.

“He’s in the longue room,” Hope says as she walks down the stairs.

“But it’s not baby proof,” I reply and hurry down the stairs past her. Then I hurry down the second flight of stairs and see baby Autumn throwing dirt around from one of the pot plants.

“Hope!” I call out and put Summer down. She starts crying. Then hearing his twin, so does Autumn. “Hope!”

“I’m cleaning up poo,” she calls back from the kitchen.

I shake my head and try to console them when Fyre stumbles down the stairs. I catch him before he hits the bottom.

“That was fun,” he says and runs to Legacy’s Lego container. That’s when I smell poo on my clothes.

“Why are you letting the babies cry?”

I look around to see Dad awake.

“I’m not…”

Mum then walks into the dining room. “Mum, help!”

“Where’s Hope?” she asks.

“I’m with Aunt Dominic,” she calls out from the kitchen.

“I thought you were cleaning up the poo,” I call back.

“I have,” she calls back.

“Well did you disinfect your hands?” I ask.

“Of course I did,” she calls back.

“Of course she did,” Mum says.

“Logan, the babies, silence them!” Dad orders.

“Mum!” I cry out.

“I’m still making dessert,” she says and walks into the kitchen.

“Fine, I’ll do it,” Dad says and gets up. He then picks up the twins and takes them outside.

Phew, quiet.

“Uncy Log,”

Fyre shows me Darth Vader. He’s covered in poo! Great! Just what I need, to be thrown into **a mental asylum.**

Chapter Ten

*The Comedy Hour*

“What a shame that Alice couldn’t stay for lunch,” Mum says again for the tenth time.

“Mum, she leads a pretty busy life,” I say and look at the meal in front of me.

“Now, isn’t this cooking?” Aunt Dominic asks.

“I guess,” I say.

“You guess?” Mum asks. “Does Alice make you lamb curry with sweet potatoes, basmati rice and naan bread?

“And does she make blueberry mascarpone tart like your mother?” Aunt Dominic asks.

“She makes great spaghetti,” I reply lamely.

“Ha, anyone can make great spaghetti,” Mum says. “But it takes real talent to make…”

“Can you stop being rude!” I snap.

“Logan!” Dad cries out.

I look down at my uneaten meal. “She just needs to practice,” Hope says.

“She’s a great cook,” I reply, “She’s also a great soccer player, a great car mechanic, a great mother, a great mediator, a great problem solver…”

“I’m all of those things too, but I still make Dean meals like this,” Hope says.

“You don’t play soccer, sis,” I reply.

“I make fabulous Mongolian beef,” she replies.

“Well good for you,” I say and shake my head. “Now can you tell me what you’re all doing here?” I ask.

No one replies.

“Dad?” I ask.

He looks at Mum and then back at me.

“Are you going funny again?” he asks.

I roll my eyes. “I have depression and anxiety Dad!” I exclaim.

“No you don’t,” Mum says.

“Well according the doctor I do,” I reply. “I still have to see a Psychiatrist for an official diagnosis, but in the meantime I’m going to see a Psychologist next Friday called Star and I’m on Lexapro.”

“What kind of name is Star?” Hope asks.

“What kind of names are Asher, Fyre, Summer and Autumn?” I ask. “Are you going to call the next set of twins, Spring and Winter?”

“You’re pregnant again?” Mum asks.

“Thanks big brother,” Hope says.

“I thought you told her already,” I reply.

“You know I tell you everything first,” she reminds me.

Oops! I look away.

“You need to eat,” Aunt Dominic says to me.

“What’s Lexapo?” Dad asks.

“When are you due?” Mum asks Hope.

“20th of November,” Hope says.

“So in seven months,” Mum replies.

Hope nods.

“What’s Lexapo?” Dad yells out.

I jump. “I’m not deaf, Dad,” I say.

“Then why didn’t you…” he begins when Mum speaks over him.

“Does Dean know?” she asks.

“Eat,” Aunty Dominic orders me.

I take a bite.

“Yip,” Hope says.

“How did he react?” Mum asks.

“He was ecstatic,” Hope replies.

“He’s crazy,” Mum says and then she looks at me. “Sorry, Logan,”

I shake my head as Mum looks back at Hope.

“The twins aren’t even a year old,” we all look over at them. They’re sleeping in the massive pram for now. “Fyre is four,” he’s playing with the Lego. I lost count of many Star Wars Rebel figures I’ve seen covered in poo. “And Asher is six.”

“I know the ages of my kids Mum,” Hope says.

“Then what are you going to do?” she asks.

Hope looks down at her food. I feel bad for her, after all, she’s my little sister. She’s only had one job in her life. She met Dean straight out of high school and they got married and pregnant in the same year!

“Aren’t we here because of Logs?” she asks.

“Oh don’t put the attention back on me,” I say.

“Eat!” Aunt Dominic says.

“I am!” I cry back.

“Don’t raise your voice to your aunty,” Dad says.

“It’s not like she’s my real aunty!” I snap.

Aunt Dominic stops eating. She wipes her mouth with a napkin and then stands up.

“Aunt Dominic,” I say.

“Morris, Bella we’ll catch up later,” she replies. “I know when I’m not wanted.”

She grabs her hand bag and heads up the stairs.

“Dom,” Mum calls out. “Logan doesn’t know what he’s saying. He’s gone funny!”

“I have depression and anxiety Mum,” I say.

“Will that lexapo cure it?” Dad asks.

“Its Lexapro and no, it won’t cure it,” I say.

“Then why take it?” Dad asks as Mum goes after Dominic.

Hope’s iPhone rings.

“That’ll be Ferris,” she says and picks it up.

“What?” I ask. “He’s come to the party as well?”

“I’ll put you on speaker,” Hope says and puts the iPhone in the middle of the table.

“Well Dom’s taken off,” Mum says as she walks back down the stairs.

“Why?” Ferris asks from the iPhone.

“Your brother insulted her so she left,” Mum tells him as she sits back down.

“Good one,” Ferris says.

“I didn’t insult her,” I reply.

“Then who did?” Mum asks. “You’re other personality?”

“Logs has a split personality?” Ferris asks.

“No, he has depression and anxiety,” Hope says.

“He’s on Lexapo but it won’t cure it,” Dad adds.

“It’s Lexapro Dad,” I say. “And it will help me.”

“How?” he asks.

“It will improve my mood and not make me as anxious,” I say.

“You’re moods don’t need to be improved,” Mum replies.

“I’m up and down like a yo-yo,” I point out.

“So is your mother,” Dad says.

“Well maybe she should be on it too,” I reply.

“I’m not going on some illegal medication,” she says.

“They’re not illegal Mum,” I reply. “I bought them from a pharmacy.”

“You know those drug companies just want your money, right Logs,” Ferris says.

“A G.P diagnosed me,” I point out.

“So what,” Ferris replies. “Maybe he gets pressured by the drug companies.”

“Well we will see what the Psychologist and the Psychiatrist report,” I say.

“Are you sure that Psychologist is a reputable one?” Mum asks.

“Why wouldn’t she be?” I ask.

“Her name is Star, Logs,” Hope points out.

Mum’s iPhone rings.

“This will be Lisa,” she says.

“Why did you…”

“Hi dear,” Mum speaks over me. “O.k, I’ll put you on speaker phone” she looks at Hope “How do I do that?”

Hope rolls her eyes and puts the iPhone on speaker.

“We’re all here Lisa,” Hope says.

“O.k, what have I missed?” Lisa asks.

“Hi honey,” Ferris says. “How’s your day been?”

“Brutal,” she replies. “Don’t expect me home til late again.”

“Don’t worry about anything,” Mum says, “Dani can come over to our place for dinner again.”

“But I need you at my place,” Hope says. “Dean has a two day conference in Perth.”

“Why can’t you ask Sheryl and John?” Mum says.

“Because I had an argument with Sheryl last week, Mum, remember I told you that,” Hope replies.

“Can you have Dani at your place?” Ferris asks me.

“Until what time?”I ask.

“I’ll be home by 7,” he replies.

“I…”

“Thanks Logs,” Lisa says.

“But…”

“Look I’m back in court, talk you all on Sunday,” she says and hangs up.

“That’s my girl,” Ferris replies. “Always on the go.”

“Yeah, but what about Dani?” I ask.

“Our daughter is fine,” he says,

“But you know that she doesn’t want to play the piano, right?” I ask.

“How do you know?” Ferris asks.

“Because I actually talk to her,” I say.

“Are you saying that I don’t talk to my daughter?” he replies.

“Well you and Lisa both work ten hours a day, five days a week,” I point out.

“We have the weekends,” he says.

“Dani says you take work home for the weekends,” I reply.

“Hey why don’t you mind your own business?” he asks.

“Oh, like your minding your own business right now?” I ask and hang up on him.

“Logan Fox Everit!” Mum snaps.

“He’s not perfect Mum!” I snap back.

“I know that!” she cries out.

“Then how come you worship the ground he walks on?” I ask.

“That’s enough!” Dad orders.

“You’re right Morris,”

Alice is standing at the top of the stairs.

“It’s time to leave,” she says.

“I don’t…” Mum begins when Dad interrupts her.

“Fair enough,” he says and stands up.

“But…”

“We’re leaving Bella,” Dad says and she stands up.

“You take extra care of my Logan,” she says to Alice. Alice walks down the rest of the stairs and into the kitchen.

“She always does,” I reply. Mum gives me a kiss and a hug. Dad shakes his head and they’re gone.

“Do you mind if I take this food home?” Hope asks.

“Be my guest,” I say, “But can you leave behind Mum’s blueberry tart?” I whisper so that Alice doesn’t hear.

She smiles. “No problem,” she says and we hug each other.

Phew, **the comedy hour** is over.

Chapter Eleven

**My Sunshine**

That night, me and Alice are laying together on one of the lounges outside, looking at the stars. Winter hasn’t kicked in yet, but still for April it’s pretty cool and we’re covered in a warm blanket.

“I’m sorry about my family,” I say.

“You’ve already apologized on their behalf already Logan,” she replies, “and I told you it’s their responsibility to actually apologize to me, not yours.”

“I know, but the problem is…”

“I won’t get an apology out of them?” she asks.

I nod.

“I know,” she replies and shakes her head.

“They’re good people, honey,” I say.

“I realize that, Logan, but they can also be judgmental, rude and overbearing,” she replies.

“And your family doesn’t have any faults?” I ask.

“Oh don’t get defensive, Logs,” she says. “I know my family has faults too, but we’re talking about your family now and I want an apology from them. I deserve one.”

“They don’t think they’ve done anything wrong,” I say.

“Then explain how it looks from my side,” she replies. “They insulted me.”

“I know, honey and I will,” I say.

“Then call them up right now,” she replies and sits up.

“Right now?” I ask. “I’ve kind of had a big day.”

“But they were rude to me, Logs,” she says.

“They were trying to help,” I reply and sit up.

“By insulting my cooking? Blaming me for you looking so skinny! For coming over uninvited? If that had been Dad you would have had no problems going off at him!” she says.

“You left Alice,” I point out, “Isn’t that bad enough.”

She stands up. “If you don’t want World War Three to break out then I suggest, you call up your mother right now,” she orders.

I look away.

“Fine, then I will,” she replies.

I grab her hand. “Please Alice I will do it in my own time,” I say.

“Which translates into never,” she replies and pulls away.

“Alice, please!” I cry out as she opens the sliding door.

“Don’t worry I’m not going call your precious mother!” she cries out.

I follow her.

“Then where are you going?” she asks.

She turns around.

“To bed,” she says. “I have to wake up early tomorrow to catch up on the work I missed due to your family!”

“Alice!” I plea, but she walks up the stairs and down the hallway. I look away. AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! I hate my life! I hate my life! I hate my life! I hate damn life! I hate…I fall to my knees and bow my head! My iPhone rings. JUST GO AWAY GO AWAY! It stops after awhile and I look around wildly. I need to cut myself. I have to! I stand up and grab one of Legacy’s pooy Lego figures when my iPhone rings again.

“WHAT!” I cry out.

“And hello to you too, Logs,”

I breathe in and out heavily. I can’t answer Jake at first. Instead I drop the Lego figure onto the carpet and walk onto the balcony, closing the sliding door behind me.

“So what’s your favourite colour, Logs?” he asks.

I pace up and down the balcony.

“Come on Logs, you can do it,” he says.

I let out a groan and run my hands through my stubborn black hair.

“I want to cut myself,” I cry out.

“I know, but for the moment I just need you to listen to my voice,” he says.

“Fine!” I snap.

“What’s your favourite colour?” he asks.

“Blue, alright!” I yell out and start pacing again.

“Beach or the mountains?” he asks.

“What do you think?” I snap.

“Beach it is,” he says.

“Walk the Line or Mary Poppins?”

I stop pacing and laugh.

“Well?” he asks.

“I hate you,” I say.

“Just answer the question,” he replies.

“Walk the Line of course,” I say and stop pacing.

“Feel better?” he asks.

I sit on one of the lounges.

“Yeah, feel better,” I reply.

“Good,” he says.

“Logan,”

I look around to see Alice standing there.

“Tell your queen I said Kiaora from the land of the long white cloud,” Jake says.

“Will do,” I reply.

“I’ll talk to you again real soon,” he says.

Tears fill my eyes. “O.k,” I reply and he hangs up.

I then drop the iPhone on the longue and cry.

“Oh Logan,” Alice says and puts her arms around me. “I’m so sorry,”

I can’t reply. I’m too cut up inside.

“You have been through a lot today and I was really inconsiderate and…I’m just so sorry,” she says. There are tears in her eyes too now.

“Was that Jake on the phone?” she asks.

I nod.

“He’s a good man,” she says.

I nod.

Then she holds me in her arms for a while and I close my eyes.

“I’m so proud of you,” she says. “It must have been difficult to see the doctor today.”

I open my eyes.

“I saw an old friend from school there,” I reply.

“I know, you told me,” she says gently.

“And I saw Cas from work,” I reply.

“You told me that too,” she says as I wipe my tears away.

“I think he has depression,” I reply.

“Remember I told you that he may just been sick,” she says.

I just look at my shaking hands. “The doctor said that I need a blood test,” I reply.

“I’ve already scheduled one in for you for next week,” she says.

“He also says that I need exercise at least 40 minutes a day,” I reply.

“Didn’t he say 30 minutes a day?” she asks.

I smile. “O.k it was worth a try,” I reply. She just shakes her head.

“Did you want to buy a gym membership from Urban First?” she asks.

“I guess so,” I reply.

“What about getting out from the library those books the doctor wanted you to read” she asks.

“I didn’t even get through The Hunger Games,” I reply.

“I know, but the books will help you,” she says.

I nod.

“I’m going to pick up some B12 as well and buy more green veggies, nuts, fresh fruit and lots of food with protein in them,” she continues.

“Like what?”

“Chicken, fish, eggs…”

“I don’t like eggs,” I say.

“Well now they’re your new best friend,” she replies.

“I thought your dad was?” I ask.

She laughs.

“Did you look into the side effects of Lexapro?” I ask.

“Yip,” she replies.

“And?” I ask.

She looks at me for a moment. “Are you sure you want to hear them?” she asks.

I nod.

“Really?” she asks.

I nod again.

“O.k, so there are rare side effects, more common side effects and less common side effects,” she replies.

“Are you serious?” I ask.

“I’m afraid so,” she says and stands up.

“You’re not leaving me are you?” I ask and grab her hand.

“I’m just going to get my notebook,” she replies.

“O.k,” I reply. She’s back in a few minutes, though for me it felt like hours.

“So the rare side effects are,” she begins and looks at her notebook, “coma, confusions, convulsions, decreased urine output, dizziness, fast or irregular heartbeat, headache, increased thirst, muscle pain or cramps, nausea or vomiting, shortness of breath, swelling of the face, ankles and hands, usual tiredness or weakness,”

I look at her in horror.

“It’s not really that bad,” she says. “I had half of these side effects when I was pregnant with each of the boys.”

“You weren’t in a coma,” I reply.

“No, but some days it sure felt like it,” she says.

“Great, Alice,” I reply and look away.

She closes her notebook. “It’s late why we don’t…”

“No, I want to hear the rest of the side effects,” I interrupt.

“Logan,” she says.

“Just rattle them off, Alice,” I persist.

“Fine,” she says and looks back at her notebook. “The more common side effects are feeling full…”

“That’s a good one,” I interrupt.

Alice looks at me.

“What? I’m just saying,” I say.

She looks back at her notebook. “Decreased interest in sexual intercourse…”

“Don’t like that one,” I say.

Alice smiles and shakes her head. “They get better,’ she replies.

“Fire away,” I say.

“Diarrhea, dry mouth, ejaculation delay…”

“What!”

“Gas in the stomach, heartburn, inability to have an erection…”

“Oh come on!”

“Loss in sexual ability, desire, drive or performance,”

I stand up. “That’s it I’m not taking them!” I snap.

She looks up. “Sit back down and don’t be such a baby,” she replies.

“But…”

“Sit down Logan,” she orders. “You wanted to hear this.”

“Fine,” I say and sit down.

“Sleepiness, trouble sleeping or unusual drowsiness,” she continues.

“Great,” I reply and shake my head.

“Look do you want me to stop?” she asks.

I nod.

She takes my hand in her own. “It will be alright, Logs,” she says.

“How Alice?” I ask and stand up. “There’s too much I have to do to get better! It’s not fair! Crap things happen to me yet I’m the one who has to get a blood test, read ten thousand books, eat more veggies, eat more nuts, eat more protein, exercise, see a Psychologist, see a Psychiatrist, take meds that have fifty billion side effects, put myself out there, suffer and bleed just to get better!”

“Don’t you think it will be worth it once you’re mental health improves?” she asks.

“Good mental health is overrated,” I mutter and sit back down with my head in my hands. Alice doesn’t say anything at first. Then she lays a hand on my shoulder.

“You are **my sunshine**,” she sings, “my only sunshine.”

I look up.

“It’s your turn,” she says.

“I don’t feel like singing,” I reply.

“For me, Logs, please,” she says.

“Fine,” I reply and clear my throat. “You make me happy when skies are grey,” I sing back to her off key.

“You never know, dear, how much I love you,” she sings back.

Tears fill my eyes. “Please don’t take my sunshine away.”

I bow my head and cry. Alice takes in her arms. My Alice. **My sunshine**

Chapter Twelve

*Brothers in Arms*

“Logan,”

I open my eyes to feel a sweat drop fall on my forehead.

“Yuck,” I say and wipe it off.

“Sorry about that,” Alice says as she leans away from me.

I stretch, yawn and fart.

“Nice, honey,” she says.

I yawn again.

“What time is it?” I ask.

“5:30,” she replies.

“You’re kidding,” I say.

“Have a look at the clock for yourself,” she replies.

I do.

Its 5: 30 am.

I lay back down again.

“Oh, no you don’t,” she says and pulls me up.

“Get away sweaty woman,” I reply.

“Not until you get up and head out the door,” she says.

“What for?” I ask,

“Because today you’re going for a walk,” she replies.

I raise my eyebrows.

“You’re not running Logs, you’re skinny enough,” she points out.

“What if I run for 15 minutes and jog for 15 minutes?” I ask.

“How about you jog for 15 minutes and walk for 15 minutes,” she replies.

“Fine,” I say, knowing it’s pointless to argue with Alice. She may be tiny but she’s fierce. That’s why she’s one of the best midfielders around. I head over to my chest of drawers.

“You just need some shorts and a t-shirt,” she advises me.

“I know how to dress to go for a jog slash walk,” I reply. “How do you think I got in such great shape?”

She shakes her head at me. “You got too skinny through not eating,” she replies and gives me a sweaty kiss.

“I…”

“Have fun,” she interrupts me and walks into the bathroom. And what’s wrong with skimming on your meals once and awhile? Everyone should do. It’s worth the effort. I look in the mirror. I can see my hip bones. I can see cut wounds up my arms. I look wrecked. I feel…

“Logan you should be out of here by now,” Alice calls out from the shower.

I put on a pair of checked blue and black shorts and a red t-shirt with ‘what day is it today’ on the front. That explains everything about me. I walk out of the bedroom, close my door behind me and pass Falcon’s bedroom.

“Where are going?” he asks me.

“For a jog slash walk,” I say.

“So which one is it?” he asks.

“Are you supposed to be on your DS?” I ask.

He gets out of bed and closes the door.

Whatever.

I walk past Legacy’s room. He’s sound asleep holding a stuffed brown bear. The bear has lost an ear and one of his arms are coming off but Legacy loves him.

I smile. Innocence is a great thing. Easy to have. Easy to lose.

Next minute I’m running down the hill!

“Hi neighbor,”

I look around

“Hi Don,” I reply and look straight ahead.

“Um my name is Eric,” he says as he runs up beside me.

I shake my head. “I know…It’s just…have you seen Mad Men?” I ask. “I mean, I haven’t see it. I’ve just seen the advertisement for it on TV and…not that I watch TV that often. I’m usually too busy…”

“Cutting yourself?” he asks.

I stop running.

So does he.

“I…I…”

He the shows me his cut wounds up his arms and legs.

“**Brother in arms,** right?” he asks.

I shake my head. “But aren’t you a stock broker?”I ask.

“What does that have to do with anything?” he asks.

A couple of women jog past and look Eric over. They ignore me of course. I’m skinny with big eyes and spiky hair that won’t ever sit down.

“Well aren’t stock brokers supposed to be…stable?” I ask.

“Are you being serious?” he asks.

“And why haven’t I ever seen those cuts before? I ask. “I’ve known you for ages!”

“Why haven’t I seen yours?” he returns and starts jogging on the spot.

“Point taken, but still, you come across as being this hugely successful guy who can do no wrong,” I say.

“Haven’t you heard of masking your pain?” he asks.

I look away. “Yeah, I’ve heard of that,” I reply when he takes off.

“Are you coming?” he asks.

I catch up with him.

“So what have you been diagnosed with?”I ask.

“Mostly depression with a bit of anxiety thrown in the mix,” he replies. “Plus I tend to overdo stuff and cut.”

“Are…are you medicated?” I ask.

“Zoloft,” he replies.

“Zo…can we stop running for a second?”I ask.

He stops and starts jogging on the spot.

“You know for a skinny guy you’re not that fit,” he replies.

I don’t answer him for a moment.

“Trying to catch your breath?” he asks.

I nod.

He just smiles as a group of women run towards us and then slow down to a jog as they pass so they can perv on Eric. They they take off into a run again. And they say men are obvious.

“O.k, feeling better,” I say.

“Well can we at least jog?” he asks.

I nod and we’re off.

“So what’s Zo…”

“Zoloft?” he asks.

“Yeah, Zoloft,” I reply, trying to not get puffed again.

“It’s an anti-depressant, like Prozac,” he replies. “Have you heard of Prozac?”

“Yip,’ I say.

“What are you on?” he asks.

“Lexapro,” I say. “I’ve just started.”

“Then did the powers that be tell you about the time lapse?” he asks.

“Powers that be? Time lapse?”I ask

He glances at me for a moment. “You’re green to all of this aren’t you?” he asks.

“I’m green to the medical stuff but not to the suffering,” I snap and stop jogging. He stops too.

“Hey, my apologies, I didn’t mean about the suffering part,” he says.

I just walk on ahead. He jogs beside me.

“I know what you’re going through,” he says.

I look away.

“It’s does get better,” he says.

“What? You mean, after my meds have kicked in? After I eat all my green veggies? After I’ve downed my nuts and protein and read a thousand books and taken half a pharmacy and seen a Shrink and his mate Shrink Two?” I reply.

“Shrink Two?” he asks.

“The Psychiatrist!” I snap.

“Well yeah, after all of that life does get better,” he says.

I shake my head and try not to cry. “Is it…is it all worth it?” I ask.

“You have a wife and kids too,” he replies. “What do you think?”

I nod.

“So do you have any plans for tonight?”He asks.

I shake my head.

“How about we go shopping?” he asks.

“I’m banned from shopping,” I reply.

“What did you do?” he asks.

“I bought a Ben Sherman jacket,” I reply, “along with a couple of Fred Perry’s shirts and a few pairs of Ralph Lauren jeans.”

“Oh, right, well how about we go shopping at the pharmacy instead,” he says.

“The pharmacy?” I ask.

“Didn’t your doc tell you to shop for some vitamins and other stuff?”He asks.

“I have the Lexapro, some iron tablets and multivitamins,” I reply.

“Why did you buy iron tablets?” he asks.

“Don’t know,” I say.

“Fair enough,” he replies. “But you’re going to need some other supplies.”

“Like what?” I ask.

“Fish oil to lower the risk of you doing yourself in, magnesium so you can actually sleep, Vitamni B12 to help your messed up brain and maybe Zinc for stability,” he says.

“Great,” I reply.

“Hey it could be worse,” he says.

I run up the hill to my house and Eric follows.

“Well you could have been admitted,” he says and easily takes the lead.

“Into hospital?” I ask and pass him.

“No, into a pscy ward,” he replies and makes it at the top. “Adrian!” he cries out.

I just make it up the hill and look at him in exhaustion.

“Who’s…who’s Adrian?” I ask and lean over to catch my breath.

“Haven’t you see Rocky?” he asks.

I stand back up. “You’re weird,” I say.

“So are you,” he replies as I walk and he jogs towards our houses.

“I’ll meet you outside here at 7,” he says and gestures to a spot outside the carport.

I don’t feel well.

“Alright?” he asks.

I nod.

“Cool, see you then,” he says and sprints to his house.

Youarenothingbutaworthlesspileofrottinggarbage!

No!

I stumble up the stairs, open the door and stagger down the hallway when Alice hurries to me from the dining room.

“Dad’s…”

“Is that my favourite son in law,” William calls out.

I look at Alice in horror. Then I hurry towards the bedroom and slam the door.

Fatdumbstupiduglypuridoozingshaowynothing!

No!

I fall onto the bed when Alice comes in.

“Close the door!” I snap.

She does and then sits on the bed beside me.

I brought you your meds and some multivitamins,” she says.

I just lay there.

“Can you sit up?” she asks.

Youarenotamanyouarenotagoodfatheryouarenotagoodhusbandyou…

“Logan!” Alice says.

I sit up, take the medication and the vitamins and lay back down again.

“I’ll call Garry,” she says.

I crawl into a ball as she closes the door.

Brothers in arms

Brothers in arms

Brothers in arms

Brothers in arms

Brothers in arms

Am I cursed? Will I ever get better?

Brothers in arms

Brothers in arms

Brothers in arms

Brothers in arms

Brothers in arms

Shadow….

Chapter Thirteen

*My Temporary Demise*

The next few days are consumed by a massive episode. Alice tells everyone I caught a nasty cold. Her Dad has the boys over one night. Mum and Dad have the boys over another night. Aunt Dominic brings over a big bowl of Butter Chicken and tells Alice that she forgives me. Hope calls a few times. Eric sends me a text. So does Garry, Cas and Randal. I take my medication, my vitamins and force myself to function before school and after school. In between those times I’m in hell. Then on the third morning since **my temporary ‘demise’** Alice finds me coming out of the shower.

“Nice timing,” I say and flex my muscles.

She smiles at me and shakes her head. “I see someone is feeling better,” she says and puts a glass of water down on top of my chest of drawers along with my meds and vitamins.

“Come give me a hug,” I say.

“But you’re all wet,” she replies.

“Fine,” I reply and dry myself off. Then I open my arms and she hurries into them.

“I’ve missed you,” she says.

“I’ve been right here,” I reply.

“You know what I mean, Logan,” she says and looks at me. There are tears in her eyes.

“I know,” I reply and we kiss. “So what day is it today?” I ask and pull on some shorts.

“Friday,” Alice says and wipes away her tears.

I put on a sweater.

“Right,” I reply and dry my hair. I look in the mirror. I look like I’ve seen a ghost.

“Here’s your tablet,” she says.

I swallow it with some water.

“And here’s your vitamins,” she says.

I swallow them with water.

“Here’s some fish oil too,” she says.

I swallow the massive tablet with water.

“Thanks for buying me some,” I say.

“Eric did actually,” she replies. “He went shopping to the pharmacy when you couldn’t go with him and bought the fish oil, Vitamin B12 tablets, magnesium and zinc.”

“He’s a good friend,” I say.

“I thought you didn’t even know his name,” she replies with a smile.

“Didn’t I tell you we went for a run slash jog slash walk the other day?”I ask.

“No, *he* told me that because you’ve been…not with it these last few days,” she says.

I look down.

“Sorry about that,” I say.

She kisses me on the check. “Don’t be,” she replies and makes the bed.

“So did anything exciting happen while I was…gone?” I ask.

“Well, your Mum told Lisa who told me that Hope and Dean had a massive fight because she wants your Mum and Dad to move in with them and he doesn’t,” she informs me.

“Well that’s fair enough,” I say.

“I told off Aunt Dominic,” she replies.

“Because of her digs at your cooking?” I ask.

She nods. “And I also told off Ferris,” she says.

“What did golden boy do now?” I ask.

“He said that what you’re going through is just in your head and you should and I quote ‘get over it,” she replies

I look around my room.

“It’s not worth it,” she says.

“Where’s my iPhone?” I ask.

She takes my hands in her own. “Just let it go,” she says. “You know what Ferris is like,”

“Yeah, but what a jerk!”I cry out.

“He doesn’t understand,” she says. “He’s all about facts and figures and statistics. He doesn’t understand emotions. He’s not programmed to.”

“Your right,” I say, “But there’s no way I’m going to Mum and Dad’s place for dinner this Sunday,”

“Do you want to cause World War Three?” she asks me.

“Didn’t you cause it when you threw them out that time?” I ask.

“They came over uninvited for lunch,” she replies.

“Then are we in agreement that we boycott the dinner?” I ask.

“Your Mum will speak to us again,” she replies.

“And that’s a problem because?” I ask.

“Logan, she’s still your mum,” she says.

“Fine, but I’m not happy with any of them,” I reply.

“What did Hope do?” she asks.

“Allowed Fyre to poo all over Legacy’s Lego,” I say.

“Yeah, that was gross,” she replies. “I had to wash every figure he had.”

“And she’s have another set of twins,” I say.

“I know,” Alice says.

Then we both laugh.

“Oh I almost forgot that Eric and Silvia invited us out again when you feel up to it,” she says.

“Why not tonight?” I ask.

“Don’t you think that’s a bit soon?” she asks.

“I just want to get back to a sense of normalcy,” I say.

She looks at me for a moment. “Then I’ll call Silvia now,” she replies.

“Do you think tonight will be short notice?” I ask.

“No, Eric’s been struggling a bit as well so maybe it will do us all good,” she says.

“I hope so,” I reply, “Because I can’t deal with another episode of that magnitude.”

Tears fill Alice’s eyes. “Don’t you dare say that!” she snaps.

“Alice,” I say.

“No, Logan, no matter if you go through another episode worse than the one you’ve been through you must survive it,” she pleas and puts her arms around me.

She’s shaking.

“Of course I will,” I say.

She looks at me. “Promise me, Logan, promise me no matter how bad it gets you won’t take…” she looks away. “ You will survive for me and the boys… and for yourself,”

“Alice,” I say and she looks back. “You and the boys are my very existence. I love you guys.”

“But do you love yourself?” she asks.

Now it’s my turn to look away.

“Logan?” she asks.

“I’m trying Alice,” I say

“Then try harder Logan, because I want you to survive not only for me and the boys but for yourself,” she replies.

I look back at her.

“Promise me that,” she says.

I nod.

She then rests her head against my chest. Does she realize that it will take a long time for me to love myself? It won’t happen overnight. It may never happen, but that’s alright, isn’t it?

Chapter Fourteen

*Roller coaster ride from hell*

“Are you sure you want to go out tonight?” Alice asks me as she’s putting on some lipstick. She looks like a goddess in a pair of jeans with a grey knit top and some black boots. She’s pulled her wavy brown hair back in a messy bun, but it looks good. She looks good. She looks hot.

“I’ve been house bound for three days,” I reply. “I need to get out.”

I come behind her and kiss the back of her neck.

“Hey there’s no time for that,” she says and I smile.

“But you look so damn sexy,” I reply and kiss the back of her neck again.

“Well I see that’s one side effect you don’t have,” she says and I laugh.

“Thank goodness,” I reply and go to kiss the back of her neck when the door opens.

“Grandpa’s here,”

Legacy walks into the bathroom.

“Whoa, you look great Mummy,” he says.

She puts her lipstick away.

“I just need one last thing,” she says and takes out of her drawer a colorful Macaroni necklace. She puts it on.

“Now I look better,”

Legacy laughs and gives her a hug.

“What about me?” I ask.

I’m wearing my blue Ralph Lauren jeans and a V-neck tan cardigan. I tried to part my hair but it refused. So instead I just let it stick up everywhere. Who cares, I guess it’s my trade mark, right?

“You look alright,” he says.

“Oh really?” I ask and tickle him.

“I’m coming in guys, I hope you’re decent,” William calls out.

“They’re never decent,” Falcon says.

“Hey!” Alice says as they walk in.

“You look just like your mother,” William says.

She looks at her dad.

“Well I guess we better get going now,” I say and take her hand.

“Yip, we have three restaurants to get to tonight,” she replies.

We all walk out of the bedroom.

“Why can’t we come with you?” Falcon asks. “It’s not fair.”

“Because we’re having grown up time,” Alice replies. “No kids allowed.”

“I’m not a kid,” Falcon says. “He’s the kid! He’s a big baby!”

He shoves Legacy against the wall.

“Did you really have to?” Alice asks as Legacy bursts into tears.

“You’re going into your bedroom young man,” William says and grabs Falcon by the collar.

“Don’t touch my son,” I say.

He lets go of him and Falcon smirks.

“Its alrigth, Logs,” Alice says.

“How is it alright?” I snap.

“Don’t raise your voice to my daughter,” William says.

“I…”

The door bell rings.

“Time to go,” Alice says and pulls me away.

“But I …”

“We’re coming,” she calls out.

“O.k.” Eric and Silvia say from outside our door.

“Falcon into your room for shoving Legacy,” Alice says.

“No way!” he calls back.

“Now!” she snaps and we hear his door slam shut.

“And Dad no dessert tonight for anyone,” she says.

“Hey I’ve been good,” Legacy pipes up.

“I know but I heard about the caramel sundae you had at Grandma Bella and Grandpa Morris’s the other night,” she says.

“It was the best sundae I’ve ever had,” Legacy says.

“Oh really,” she replies.

“Yip,” he says. “It had…”

“We have to go,” I interrupt.

“O.k,” she replies and gives Legacy a hug.

“Love you Mummy,” he says.

“Love you too,” she replies.

I give him a hug.

“Love you Daddy,” he says.

“Love you too,” I reply and I open the door.

“Love you Falcon,” she calls out. “Be good.”

He doesn’t reply and she shakes her head.

“Just make sure he doesn’t hide Charlie again,” she says to William.

“He’ll be fine,” he replies. “Just go and have fun,”

She gives him a hug, Legacy another hug and then she’s out the door.

“Thanks William,” I say.

He nods and glances at Legacy. “I think Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles has started,” he says.

“Yay!” he cries out and run downstairs.

“I’ll see you later,” I say to William when he puts a hand on my shoulder.

“Can I speak to you for a second?” he asks.

I look at him. “You’re second is up,” I say and close the door in his face. That was rude wasn’t it? But I don’t care! He’s ruder! I get in the back of Eric’s car next to Alice.

“Hey there,” Eric says.

I mean, who does he think he is? He’s just my father in law. He’s not really family. He’s not anything to me at all. Who does he think he is? What does he know?

“Alice, what have you said to your dad?” I ask.

“Yeah that sounds good,” she says to Silvia.

“I’ve said nothing to him,” she then whispers to me.

“Does that sound good for you as well?” Silvia asks.

“What?” I snap.

“Logan,” Alice says.

“If we have Mexican for our entrée, Chinese for our main and Italian for our dessert,” Eric explains.

“Whatever,” I reply and look out the window.

“Logan, I didn’t say anything to Dad,” Alice whispers to me.

“Then why did he want to talk to me before I left?” I ask.

“He’s not stupid Logan,” she says. “He knows something is up.”

“Do the boys?”I ask.

“The boys are ten and six,” she says.

“Well I don’t want your dad knowing anything,” I reply.

“But your parents know,” she says.

“That’s because I trust them,” I reply.

“How could you not trust my dad?” she asks.

“He’s only family because of you!” I cry out.

“He’s still family,” she cries back.

“No, my family is Mum and Dad, Aunt Dominic, Ferris, Lisa, Dani, Hope, Dean, Asher, Fyre and the twins,”

“But Lisa and Dean are in laws and Dominic isn’t even your aunty,” she points out.

“It doesn’t matter!’ I snap. “They’re blood!”

“You’re ridiculous,” she snaps back.

“Why because I won’t trust someone I’ve only known for eleven years?” I ask.

“What about Lisa, Dean and Dominic?” she asks.

“I’ve known Aunty Dominic all of my life, Lisa for fourteen years and Dean…”

“Go on,” she replies.

“Look, just understand that it’s hard for me to trust,” I say.

“Oh really?” she asks. “I’ve never noticed!”

“I’ve had my trust broken, Alice!” I yell out, “in the most brutal way!”

“Um, we’re at the restaurant,” Eric says.

Alice looks at her hands. I look out the window.

“How about we do this another time?” Silvia asks.

“Are you kidding?” Alice says. “I haven’t been out for months! I need this!”

She gets out of the car and grabs Silvia’s hand. “Come on, we’re having a girls’ night!”

“Oh, O.k,” she says and they leave us.

“I can’t believe her,” I say once they’re gone.

“I can’t believe you,” Eric says to me.

“Excuse me?” I ask.

“If you weren’t up to going out why did you force yourself to?” he asks.

“I was up to coming out until William…”

“No, don’t blame him.” Eric interrupts. “You were feeling overly sensitive. You set yourself off. Not him.”

“You know, I don’t really like you,” I reply.

“Tough because you’re stuck with me,” he says, “Now get in the front.”

I do but I’m not happy about it.

“Are you driving me home?” I ask.

He takes out his iPhone and calls up someone.

“Yeah, hi honey, just wanted you to send me a text when you and Alice are ready to get picked up,” he says. “O.k, I love you, bye,”

He hangs up.

“I’m not driving you home,” he says.

“Then where are you driving me too?” I ask.

“Maccas,” he replies. “I’m hungry and you’re paying.”

“Fine,” I say as he drives away.

What’s wrong with me? I’m a **rollercoaster ride from hell**.

Chapter Fifteen

*Tearing myself apart*

Saturday morning finds me watching Falcon’s soccer game with the family.

“You know he has a lot of potential,” Ferris says as Falcon scores a goal.

“Way to go Falcon!” Dad calls out. He has Summer while Mum has Autumn.

“I did a big poo in the toilet,” Fyre tells us all as Hope brings him back from the bathroom.

“That’s great,” Mum says while Asher, Legacy and Dani laugh.

“I’m going to sit down,” Hope says and walks over to where Mum and Dad are.

“What about Fyre?” I ask. He’s running around his cousins.

“Can’t you look after him?” she asks.

“No…”

“That’s fine,” Alice interrupts and takes Fyre by the hand. “Can you see your big cousin?” she asks while Ferris nudges me.

“What?” I ask.

“You should think of getting some soccer sports agents out here to look at your son,” he says.

“Aren’t you a soccer sports agent?” he asks.

“I can’t watch him,” he says. “That would be a conflict of interest.”

“Then what are you doing now” I ask.

“I’m here as his uncle, Logs,” he says.

“Then go ahead and send one of your friends next Saturday,” I reply.

“Mummy farted!” Asher calls out. She and Legacy start laughing while Dani looks embarrassed. She’s six years older than them.

“Ash!” Hope says.

A few people look over.

“I’m pregnant with twins!” she snaps at them.

They look away.

“You know, I can do it,” Ferris says.

“Do what?” I ask.

“Sorry I’m late,” William says as he gives Alice a hug.

“There’s a seat here for you Will!” Mum calls out.

“Thanks Bella,” he replies and walks over.

“….happen,” Ferris says.

“What?” I ask.

“Oh get your head out of the clouds,” he snaps at me. “That boy of yours has potential to go all the way and I can make it happen.”

“Then make it happen, Ferris,” I say. “Just leave me alone!”

I begin to walk alone when Alice grabs my arm.

“Where are you going?” she asks.

“I just need time out,” I say.

“But Falcon…”

“Mummy I did another poo,” Fyre calls out.

We all turn to see him with his pants down.

“Being pregnant is horrible!”

We see Hope telling another pregnant woman.

“I fart all the time and get all sweaty and…”

“Hope, Fyre needs you,” Mum interrupts.

“I don’t care!” she snaps.

“Why don’t I help him out,” William says and hurries over to Fyre.

“Don’t you fart and sweat?” Hope asks the woman.

“I…”

“You don’t?” she asks. I shake my head and hurry away. What is wrong with my family? What is wrong with Alice? What is wrong with me? I stop by the playground. It’s packed with kids but I don’t care as I have a swing.

“Hey you can’t do that!” some kid calls out.

I ignore him.

“Mummy, there’s a man on the swing,” he shouts out.

“Fine!” I cry out and get off. I glare at the kids and hurry away from the sports field and go sit in the car. I hate being here! I hate being…

“Your son scored again,” William says as he gets in the car.

“Are you lost?” I ask.

“Are you?” he asks.

“That’s it get out!” I snap.

“No!” he snaps back. “I’m just trying to…”

“Get out!” I shout. I’m close to tears now. I wonder if William knows that as he hops out and I take off, arriving at the house in record time. Then I sit there for a moment as the tears come. I hate feeling this way! I hate it! I slowly get out of the car and hurry into the house. That’s when my iPhone rings.

“What!” I shout into it.

“Just breath,” Jake answers back.

“You damn well breath!” I yell at him. “I’m done breathing!”

“Lo…”

I hang up and throw the phone down the hallway. I then let out a scream and pull the photos off the wall. I can’t stand this! I run into the bedroom and look around. There is nothing in here that’s sharp! No! I slap myself a few times and then punch myself in the stomach. I hate myself! I hate myself! I…

“Logan!”

It’s Alice. I close the bedroom door.

“Open it right now or I’m calling the police!” she cries out.

I open the door.

“You’re going back to the doctor’s first thing on Monday,” she says.

“Why? I’m fine,” I snap.

“You are not fine,” she replies. “You need a stronger dosage.”

“Well didn’t you read,” I say. “It takes up to a month to kick in!”

“I don’t care,” she replies. “You’re out of control!”

“Oh I’m out of control am I?” I ask.

“Yes you are!” Alice screams at me

I look at her in astonishment and then look away.

“I love you Logan, but you’re tearing me apart, don’t you realize that?” she asks.

I’m tearing her apart? I’m **tearing myself apart**!

Somebody is at the front door.

“Tell them to go away,” I say.

She doesn’t answer me as she hurries out.

“Alice!” I cry out.

“He’s in the bedroom, Morris,” she says.

What! Dad’s here! Dad!

I sit on the bed nervously as he walks in. I can’t look at him. I don’t need to. He doesn’t say anything as he sits down. Then he puts his arms around me.

“I love you son,” he replies.

I don’t answer him. I can’t. I’m in tears

Chapter Sixteen

*My Hope*

Legacy is reading while Falcon is on his DS. We’re on the balcony in each other’s arms.

“I told your Mum that we’ll come over next Sunday,” Alice says.

“And she was fine with that?” I ask.

“Well she wasn’t happy but …”

“Mum, Logan, everyone’s here,” Falcon calls out from inside.

“What!” I snap as we sit up.

“Just let it go,” Alice says. “You’ve had a restful day.”

“I know but…”

“Let it go,” she interrupts and stands up.

“There you two are,” Mum says and hurries out with Dad following as usual.

“Hi Bella,” Alice replies.

“Hello my dear,” Mum says and they give each other an awkward hug. “Logan!” she says and gives me a kiss and a hug while Dad gives Alice a kiss on the cheek.

“I’m sorry about this,” I hear him say.

“Sorry about what Morris?” Mum asks.

He clears his throat. “Now Bella you know that Logan hasn’t…”

“Are we eating any time soon,” Ferris walks onto the balcony.

“I know he’s struggling again, but we’re his…” Mum talks over Dad.

“Mum!” Ferris interrupts.

“I said you need to look at the Robinson file,” Lisa yells out over Ferris as she walks out while talking on her iPhone.

Ash and Legacy rush out at the same time and down the outside stairs.

“I’ll look after them,” Dean says with a squirming Fyre in his arms.

“You do that,” Hope replies as she walks out. “Wait a minute,” she rushes back inside and grabs Summer. “You can go with Daddy,” she says. He puts down Fyre as Hope gives him Summer. Then Autumn starts crying.

“Hope, I can’t…”

She rushes inside again and grabs Autumn.

“Give him to me,” Dad says and Hope puts him in his arm.

“Come on son, we can do this,” Dad says to Dean.

He nods and they walk down the outside stairs.

“Where’s Dani?”Ferris asks.

“I don’t know,” Mum says.

“Lisa where’s Dani?” he asks

“Shhh Ferris I’m on the phone here,” she snaps.

He shakes his head. “Always working,” he replies.

“She’s playing that box thing with Falcon,” Aunty Dominic calls out from the kitchen.

“Oh I forgot I was helping Dom,” Mum says and goes back inside. Ferris follows while Hope farts. She shakes her head and looks down at Dean.

“Yip, I’m a farting machine now! Thanks honey,” she says.

“You’re welcome,” he calls back up.

“I’m going for a bath,” she says.

“But…”

“Feel free,” Alice interrupts and Hope hurries back inside.

“She’s crazy,” Ferris says and looks at me, “Oh, um, sorry little brother.”

I look away.

“I think I’ll go and do something,” he says and walks back into the house.

Alice then sits on one of the lounges. I join her and we start laughing. How can we not?

“I’m serving the entrée now,” Aunt Dominic cries out.

Fifteen minutes later we have two tables joined together on the balcony.

“This taste delicious,” Dad says to Aunty Dominic.

“Oh its nothing,” she replies.

“Lisa, come on!” Ferris calls out. She’s inside talking on her iPhone.

“Mummy, what are the green snakes thingies?” Legacy asks.

Asher screams.

Falcon shakes his head. “Kids,” he replies.

“They’re asparagus guys,” Alice says.

“Asparawhatta?” Legacy asks.

“Asparawhatta,” Falcon mimics him and laughs.

“It’s a veggie,” Alice says.

“Do you know what veggies are?” good old Aunty Dominic asks Legacy.

“We have no idea,” Falcon says. “We only eat KFC, Maccas and Hungry Jacks.”

“You’re joking, right?” Mum asks him.

“Of course he is,” Alice says and turns to Dean.

“So how have you been?” she asks.

“I’m not,” Falcon says to Mum and Aunty Dominic who both look outraged, “I need more veggies,” he says and pretends to cry.

“I’m doing…” Dean begins when Alice turns back to Falcon.

“That’s enough,” she says.

“That’s enough,” he mimics her.

Falcon!” Dad snaps. “Apologize to your mother.”

“Lisa!” Ferris calls out again.

“Sorry Mum,” Falcon replies.

“Mum’s always on the phone,” Dani says. “She never does anything with me.”

“That’s not true,” Ferris replies.

She just rolls her eyes.

“Are you eating without me?” Hope exclaims as she walks out in Alice’s bathrobe.

“It’s only the entrée,” Dean says.

“Where are the twins?” She asks.

“Asleep in the pram,” he replies.

“Asher?”

“Here Mummy,” she says.

“And Fyre?” she asks.

“I’m here Mummy,” he calls out. He’s at the other end of the table covered in salsa.

“You’re not supervising him?” she asks Dean.

“I was trying to get the twins to sleep,” he replies. “I’ve just sat down too.”

She stands up and begins to rush towards Fyre when Dad stands up.

“Sit down, Hope,” he says.

“But…”

“Just let the boy enjoy his meal,” he says.

“He’s…”

“Sit!” he orders and she returns to her seat.

“So what are we eating?” Lisa asks as she finally walks outside.

“Green snakes!” Legacy says with a smile.

“Actually its pepper beef fillet on lemon bean with asparagus and béarnaise sauce,” Aunty Dominic says.

“Always the gourmet cook,” Lisa replies and sits down. “Mine’s cold,”

“That’s because you’ve been on the phone for the last half an hour,” Ferris points out.

“You know I’ve got…” Lisa begins when Hope interrupts.

“So what do you think about moving in?” she asks Mum.

“What!” Dean and Dad both exclaim at once.

“I’m having another set of twins people!” Hope cries out. “I’m not doing this alone.”

“Yay, Granma and Grandpa are moving in!” Asher cries out.

“No we are not,” Dad says.

“Morris!” Mum snaps. “Hope needs us.”

“Hope has Dean,” he replies.

“He’s never around,” Hope says.

“Well that can change,” Dean says.

“What? You’ll cut down from 60 hours to 50?” she asks.

“I have to make a living,” he says.

“Then work with Logs,” Hope suggests.

“In a call centre?” he asks.

“Are you too good to work in a call centre?” Hope asks.

“No…but that won’t support our standard of living,” he replies.

“Mum and Dad can help,” Hope says.

“Of course…” Mum begins when Dad interrupts.

“No we won’t,” he says.

“Morris!” Mum snaps.

Asher screams.

“Stop it Falcon!” Legacy cries out.

“Put down the asparagus,” Alice says to him.

He rolls his eyes and puts it back on the plate. “Any more attitude and you’re going to the room for the rest of the night.”

“How do you afford this house?” Ferris asks me.

Someone’s iPhone rings.

“I have to get this,” Lisa says and rushes out.

“Should we move on to the main?” Aunty Dominic asks.

“I’ll help you clear away the dishes,” Alice says.

“So will I,” Mum adds.

“Do I have to?” Hope asks.

“No, of course not, but it will be nice if the men help out,” Mum says.

Dad stands up. “I’m at your service,” he replies.

“I’m going to check on the twins,” Dean says.

“And don’t forget to clean up Fyre,” Hope says.

“I need a release,” Ferris says.

“What’s a release Uncle Ferris?” Legacy asks.

“It means he has to go to the toilet,” Dani says.

“Why doesn’t he go here?” Fyre asks.

“Because only babies go on the floor,” Falcon says.

“I’m not a baby!” Fyre cries out. “I’m…”

I stand up and head down the other end of the balcony so I can breathe better.

Another long and tiring twenty minutes later, the main is on the table.

“So what do we have here Dom?” Mum asks.

“Lisa, the main is ready!” Ferris calls out.

“Can’t you just go to her?” Dad asks.

“I don’t want to stand up,” he replies.

Dani rolls her eyes and stands up. “I’ll tell her,” she says and walks towards her mum.

“Are we eating more snakes?” Legacy asks.

“Snakes!” Asher screams out.

Hope farts.

“Not a single word from anyone,” she says.

“I can’t remember you farting with the others,” Dean says.

“I said not another…”

Someone farts.

“Really Hope?” Mum asks.

“That wasn’t me,” she replies.

“It was me,” Falcon says and then points at his plate. “What’s this?” he asks.

“Salmon,” Aunty Dominic says.

“Salmon? What’s that?” he asks and grabs three bread rolls at the same time.

“One’s enough,” Alice says and puts two of them back, but he grabs them again and stuffs bits of them in his mouth.

“Mum’s coming back soon,” Dani says and sits back down looking sad.

“Lisa is very good at what she does,” Ferris says.

“Go to your room,” Alice orders Falcon.

“No!” he says.

“Now!” Alice orders.

He jumps off and runs inside.

“Thanks for the support,” she whispers to me.

A piece of salmon then flies into Hope’s drink.

“Where did that come from?” she asks.

“Me Mummy!” Fyre calls out.

Then the twins start crying.

“I’m going for another bath,” she replies and walks inside.

“Then I guess I’ll be the solo parent tonight!” Dean calls after her.

“Lisa!” Ferris yells out.

“I like this fish,” Legacy says to Aunty Dominic.

“That’s…” she begins when good old Mum interrupts.

“Do you eat fish a lot?” she asks him.

“Looks great,” Lisa says as she walks back in.

Ferris makes a point of ignoring her. I start to feel dark inside. My strength is running out. Without another word I stand up from the table and walk inside the house going to the bathroom. I pull out the Lexapro. I’ve already had my 10 mg this morning, but I need more. I’m swimming in my pain.

“Logan,” Alice says.

“I need another one,” I reply.

“Then how can I keep back the pain” I ask and lay on the bed.

“You’ll have to go back to the doctor to up your dosage,” she replies.

“Do you know what you’re asking me to do?” I ask.

“You need a stronger dosage,” she says.

“No, I need to be normal,” I reply.

“Is everything alright in here?” Dad asks from the doorway.

“Yes, Dad, I’m not trying to do myself in,” I reply. “I’m on Lexapro, fish oil, multivitamins, magnesium, B12, iron and zinc!”

“Well that’s good son,” Dad says. “I guess I’ll just leave you to it.”

“Then leave,” I reply and he walks out.

“That was rude,” Alice says.

“I know, but I didn’t think they would tire me out,” I reply.

“Hey the hot water runs out,” Hope says from the doorway.

“Dessert is ready!’ Aunty Dominic calls.

“Yes!” Hope exclaims and hurries away.

“I’m going to…” Alice begins when Falcon walks in.

“Can I get out of my room now?” he asks.

“Fine,” Alice replies and he walks out. “Do you want any dessert?” she asks me.

“I want everyone to leave,” I say.

“I’ll take that as a no,” she replies and walks out.

“Alice!” I call out

“What?” she asks and comes back.

“Tell everyone to leave,” I reply.

“They will go after they eat their dessert,” she says and hurries away.

Fine! I slam the door behind her and lay back on the bed. Why do I have to put up with all of them? Why! I’m going through hell and they come over uninvited, talk over each other, don’t even ask me how I’m doing! How rude are they! Maybe I should tell them to leave since Alice won’t do it. Why won’t she anyway? It’s not like she gets along with any of them. She doesn’t. Well she does with Dean and Hope, but Ferris and Lisa just annoy her, not to mention Mum and Aunt Dominic. I stand up. Stuff it. I’ll tell them to leave myself. I walk towards the door when my iPhone rings. It’s Jake.

“Why don’t you Skype me?” he asks.

“Good idea,” I say and hang up. I hurry out of the hallway and see Asher and Legacy run into his room.

“Uncy Logs, look at my shirt,” Fyre then says to me.

He has half his 3 course meal covering it.

“Looks good,” I reply.

He laughs and walks into Legacy’s room.

“Hey, no babies allowed in here!” Asher cries out.

“I’m not a baby,” he cries back.

I continue to hurry away. They’re not my kids. What’s that smell? I see Dean changing the twins in the study.

“Sorry,” he says.

I don’t say anything as I hurry back outside.

“There you are!” Mum says. “Did you finish your main?”

“I…”

“Now tell me the truth?” she asks.

I have to get out of here! I run into the longue room.

“You’ve been on the iPhone the entire time!” Ferris is saying to Lisa.

“That’s because I’m on a tight deadline,” she replies.

“Well that’s not good enough,” he says.

“What about you?” she asks. “You’re hardly home!”

“That’s not…”

I hurry backout onto the balcony.

“Why can’t you move in Dad?” Hope is asking.

“Your mother and I have lives you know!”He says.

I look over at Alice. She stands up and leaves Falcon with Dani. They’re talking about soccer.

“Do you want to get out of here?” I ask.

“So would you like the sticky date pudding or the vanilla pannecotta?” Aunty Dominic asks me.

“I don’t eat dessert because I’m trying to lose weight,” I say.

“Logan!” Alice cries out and I hurry down the stairs to the backyard where the pool and spa are. She follows. There’s a tropical garden nearby and we sit there on a bench.

“Oh no!” I exclaim.

“What?” she asks.

“I was supposed to Skype Jake,” I reply.

“I’m sure he’ll understand,” she replies and gives me a kiss.

“I love you,” she says.

“I love you too,’ I reply. “You are **my hope**,”

Chapter Seventeen

*Wrecked*

The next day, I’m jogging down the street with Eric.

“So are you going to work today?” he asks.

“Yip,” I reply.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” he asks.

“Why?” I ask back.

“Well after last week, you don’t want to lay low for a few days,” he says.

“I’m fine Eric,” I reply. “I’m going to make an appointment with the doctor to up my dosage.”

“Just wait until they kick in,” Eric says, “Then make the decisions or just switch to Zoloft. There’s no time lapse at all.”

“I shouldn’t have to experience this,” I reply.

“Experience what?” he asks. “The med thing?”

I nod.

“That comes with the territory,” he replies.

“How can you be so laid back about it all?” I ask.

“Well what else can you do?” he asks.

“But how can you…” I begin when he interrupts me.

He jogs on the spot. “Look, I work from 8 to 7 everyday, I run every morning, I do Pilates, yoga, netball, hang out with the fam, baby sit you…”

“Ha, ha very funny” I say. “When do you do yoga?” I then ask as we keep jogging.

“Wednesday night,” he replies. “Why?”

“How many people do it?” I ask, “because I don’t really like the whole public exercise thing.”

“Um, we’re publicly exercising now,” he replies.

“No, we’re not,” I say. “There’s just you and me.”

“Whatever,” he replies. “The offer is there if you want to come, but it costs about $10 I think.”

“I can afford that,” I say.

“Good then come along,” he replies. “You’ll…”

“Excuse me,”

A woman jogs alongside us.

“I don’t usually do this, but are you single by chance?” she asks.

“I’m actually married,” I say.

“I meant your friend,” she replies.

Eric bursts out laughing.

“Sorry,” she says to me. “You’re good looking as well, but in a kinda of a bookish way.”

“I’m married too,” Eric says,

“Well that’s a shame,’ she replies and gives him one last look before jogging ahead of us.

Eric laughs again and I shake my head.

“Unbelievable,” I say. “I don’t even read.”

“Well you look like you do,” he replies.

“Because of the glasses?” I ask.

“Yip,” he says.

“Maybe I should get contacts,” I reply.

“Hey, your glasses do it for me,” Eric says and laughs.

“Shut up!” I reply and run ahead of him.

“Wait up!” he cries out.

At home, I quickly have a shower. When I get out, I find Alice sitting on the bed waiting for me.

“Do we have time?” I ask with a smile.

She rolls her eyes. “Logan, we need to talk,” she says.

I walk over to her. “Don’t you want to do something else that doesn’t involve talking?” I ask.

“I think you should stay home,” she replies.

I shake my head and dry off.

“Alice, we’ve already been through this,” I say. “I’m going to up my dosage once I get in with the doctor and everything will be better.”

I put on a pair of blue Ralph Lauren jeans

“But you haven’t even made an appointment yet,” she points out.

I pull on a stripy red Fred Perry polo shirt.

“Then I’ll make one now,” I say.

“That doesn’t mean you will be able to see the doctor today,” she replies.

“Why not?”I ask and out on some socks.

“Because it’s winter, the flu season,” she says.

I put on my white loafers.

“I’ll get an appointment,” I reply and walk out.

“Logan!” she says.

I speed off to work, pull into the car park when it hits me like a tsunami. What the hell! I sit in my car for a moment. I can hear my heart beating in my ears. Even though it’s cool outside I wind down my window. I want to crawl into a ball. Eric and Alice were right. I should have….

“It’s alive! It’s alive!”

I look out the window to see Randal standing there. A few of our colleagues laugh at him and then walk on.

I force the crap down. “Are…are you alright?” I ask.

“You’ve never seen Frankenstein?” he replies.

I force a smile “Only the one with Robert De Nero,” I reply. “And I don’t remember that line used in the movie.”

I’m out of breath.

“It’s actually from the old movie when…”

I shouldn’t have come back to work. What was I thinking? Crap!

“Logan,”

“What!” I snap.

“Are going to get out of the car?” Randal asks.

“Yeah, sure, of course,” I reply and grab my sachet.

“So you must have had some nasty cold,” he says.

“Aha,” I reply as I close and lock the car door.

“You not still contagious are you?” he asks and backs away, “Because we have a gig tonight and I can’t get sick.”

“Is it a paying gig?”

We turn around to see Petra standing there.

“Of course it is,” Randal replies and then looks at her hair. “Got enough hairspray in there?” he asks.

“My hair is all natural like Amy Winehouse’s hair was,” she replies.

“Um, sorry to break it to you Petra but I don’t think her hair was natural,” he replies.

She just rolls her eyes and glances at me.

“How’s the man bag, Logs?” she asks.

I can’t answer her.

“Are you alright Logs?” Randal asks.

I feel sick.

“Logs?” Randal asks again and lays a hand on my shoulder.

I jump.

They both look at me in concern.

“Hey Petra, your hair looks great,” Denise then says as she walks up to us.

“I know, right,” Petra says and walks ahead, humming ‘Valerie;’ as she goes.

“Why is it that it’s Winter and she’s in a short denim skirt, a tight white top and bright yellow stilettos?” Denise then asks.

Petra’s iPhone rings and she answers it.

“Hi Alicia,” she says in a loud voice. ““No, I can’t come shopping tonight, Game of Thrones is back on,”

She then pulls out a cigarette and puffs away.

“If you had a hot body you would show some skin too,” Randal says.

Denise looks at him.

“What, it’s true,” he says.

She rolls her eyes and walks on ahead.

“What’s her problem?” Randal asks.

“She’s a recently divorced mother of two teenage boys,” Cas replies joining us.

Cas. The Pharmacy.

“Her days of showing skin are long passed.”

He and Randal laugh while I look at Cas’s arms for any signs of cuts.

“So how was the surf?” Randal asks him as we walk into lobby. There’s already a long line for coffee.

“Pumping,” he replies. “I surfed through the green room of this bomb. Man it was zen!”

“What are you…”

I hurry through crowded lobby.

“Hey, where are you going?” Randal calls out.

I run into the men’s toilets. They’re empty as I hurry into a stall and sit down with my heads in my hands. Keep it together, Logan, Keep it together. My iPhone rings. Keep it together! Keep it together! Please! Please! I let out a groan. My iPhone stops. I close my eyes. Oh please God, help me! I plead. I need to be normal! I have to be! I have to be! Damn it. I have to be! I let out another groan. I feel sick. I should….no, I can’t go home! I need to provide for my family! I must! Why can’t I? Because I’m sick! No, I’m fine. Do you hear me? I’m damn well fine. I’m… I let out another groan and look at my watch.

9 am

I rush out of the stall and out of the bathroom. The foyer is empty now, except for Cas who walks over to me.

“Are you alright?” he asks.

“Are you?” I ask back angrily.

“Hey, I’m good,” I say.

“Then why aren’t you upstairs yet?” I ask.

“Hey chill,” he says.

“You chill!” I snap

He shakes his head at me. “What’s your problem?” he asks.

“I don’t have a problem,” I say. “You do. I mean you wait for me to come out of the bathroom and then ask me if I’m alright! Aren’t you messed up too?”

He steps back. “Why don’t we talk later,” he says and hurries away.

“I know you’re messed up too,” I yell.

He doesn’t answer me as I push the floor number. I breathe in and out heavily.

“Oh you’re late too,”

I look around to see Petra walking towards me.

“I was having another ciggie before work,” she says. “You know how Garry is.”

The elevator opens up and we walk in.

“So I went to my nail technician last night and…”

Oh why did I come to work today? Why? I wanted to be normal, that’s why! The elevator opens and we walk out.

“I mean, I know every thinks I look better as a brunette, but don’t blondes have more fun?”

I have to get out of here! But I can’t! I’m trapped! I walk on ahead.

Petra grabs my arm. “Logan, you didn’t…”

“Get away from me!” I yell.

She stumbles back in her stilettos and hurries into work. I stand there for a moment and feel cold and then hot. Finally I walk into work, passing Randal.

“Hey are you alright?” he asks.

“I’m fine,” I snap and walk on ahead.

“Logan,”

Garry is hurrying towards me in his designer brown suit with a purple shirt, black tie and shiny black shoes. What a tool!

“Are you feeling better today?” he asks.

“Why does everyone keep asking me that?” I snap.

He looks at me a moment and I push past him and sit down at my computer. My hands are shaking when he walks up to me.

“I think its best you go home,” he says.

I ignore him as I adjust my head set and call the first number on my screen.

“Hello,” a tired voice answers.

“Good morning,” I reply. “My name is…

“What are you selling?” she interrupts me. I hear a baby crying in the background.

“Well…I’m…I’m…” I stutter out.

“Look, I don’t have time for this,” she interrupts me again. “My baby is crying and…”

“Then shut it up!”I snap at her.

“Excuse me?” she asks.

“You heard me!” I snap. “Shut the baby up!”

“How dare you…”

“No, how dare you!” I interrupt her and disconnect.

“Logan, you need go, now,” Garry then orders.

“JUST GET OUT OF MY FACE!” I yell and hurry through the room until I’m standing in front of the elevator. I push he bottom. Come on! Come on! The elevator door opens and I hurry in. Floor Seven, Floor Six. The doors opens and I jump wipe away my tears as two men walk in suits. They don’t say anything as the tall one presses floor two. Pain. Pain. Pain, Floor Four. Someone gets in. Smells horrible. Floor two, the men get out. Floor one the horrible smelling person gets out. It’s a woman. Ground Floor. Foyer. I rush out of the building and to my car. No keys! I kick the tire of my car! And lean against it. Pain…Pain…

“Here’s your sachet,”

I turn around to see Randal standing there.

I snatch it off him.

“What’s going on, Logan?” he asks.

I take my keys out and then drop them on the road.

“I’ll get them,” he says and picks them up.

I snatch the keys from him, unlock the car door and hop in.

“Logan, are you alright to drive home?” Randal asks.

“I’m not drunk,” I say.

“I didn’t say…” he begins when I slam the door shut and take off. Some singer is going on about something. He sounds fake! I change the channel. Bruno Mars. Good song. Pain, hurt. Where am I going? Where else can I go? Home. My refuge from the world. I can’t handle it! I can’t handle it! I can’t. I can’t. I can’t. My iPhone rings and I pull over.

“Where are you?” Alice asks.

She sounds worried.

“I’m on my way home,” I reply.

“Randal called me,” she says, “and Garry,”

I don’t reply.

“Are you able to come home?” she asks. “Or do you want me to come get you?”

“How will you do that?”I ask.

“I’ll see if Dad…”

“I’ll be there soon” I reply and hang up.

**Wrecked!** I’m wrecked!

Chapter Eighteen

*Unholy Fire*

Twenty minutes later I’m turning into the carport. Alice is waiting for me outside as I turn off the car and get out.

“I failed,” I say and burst into tears like Legacy would.

“No you didn’t, Logs,” she replies and leds me inside my safe haven, away from the monstrous, outside world. I can’t bear the monstrous, outside, world anymore. I can’t. I used to, now I can’t. I just can’t. I tried. I tried to be normal but this pain is penetrating into every part of me! Do you understand? Every damn part of me is on fire! Fire! An **Unholy fire** of self destruction.

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asks.

I shake my head.

“Well I’m going to call up the medical centre to see if we can’t get you in quicker,” she replies.

I sit down as she picks up her iPhone.

“Yes, hello, its Alice Everit here,” she replies.

I close my eyes.

“Logan,”

I open them again.

“Doctor Miles can see you this afternoon,” she replies. “There was a cancellation.”

I nod.

“Are you tired?” she asks.

“O.k then, let’s get you upstairs,” she says.

She walks me into the bedroom. I lay on the bed and she takes my shoes off and tucks me into bed.

“Can you stay?” I ask.

“Oh Logan, I need…” she begins when I interrupt her.

“Please?” I ask and take her hands in mine. “I don’t want to be alone.”

“O.k,” she replies and lies down beside me.

3:00 pm comes too fast and I’m walking through the heavy doors of the medical centre. As usual it’s packed as I approach one of the grandmotherly types.

“Hi there,” I manage to get out.

“Hi, how can I help you?” she asks.

“Um, I have an appointment with Doctor Miles,” I say.

“Your name?” she asks.

“L…Logan Everit,” I reply.

“Logan Everit,” she repeats back and looks at her computer.

I look around. A fat man in the back row lets out a loud sneeze. I jump and quickly look at the floor in embarrassment.

“Here you are Logan,”

I look back at her.

“You had an appointment with Doctor Miles about ten minutes ago.”

“What does that mean?” I ask.

“Well, it doesn’t mean anything because doctors are always late, especially Doctor Miles,” she replies.

“Why is that?” I ask.

“He’s popular,” she replies

“Oh,” I reply and look around again.

“Why don’t you take a seat, honey,” she then says.

“O.k.,” I say and walk past the rows of chairs. Everywhere is full except for the one next to the fat man. As I near it, I see a pile of magazines on it.

“Is…is anyone sitting there” I ask.

“Does it look like it?” he asks.

“I…I…”

“It’s free sweetie,” the woman on the other side tells me. She’s skinny with massive glasses and a big head.

“Thanks,” I say awkwardly and pick up the magazines.

“I’ll take those,” the woman says and grabs them from me.

“Thanks,” I say again and sit down, wondering who the woman is. She can’t the fat man’s girlfriend, can she? He’s…fat and…smells. Great. I take out my iPhone, suddenly feeling claustrophobic. Nothing on facebook. I put it away and stare at my sweaty hands. I feel hot. I tap my foot. The fat man looks at me. I stop tapping and play with my hands.

“Can you stop that?”

The mother in front of me reprimands her toddler.

I tap my foot again. The fat man glares at me. I can’t stand him! I can’t stand being here! I stand up and walk nervously to the counter. Is everyone watching me? Are they?

“Roger Miller,” The GQ doctor calls out.

“That’s us,” the skinny woman calls back to the GQ doctor. “Well, my husband,”

She stands up and then pulls him up after her.

“Excuse me,”

The fat man and the skinny woman walk towards the GQ doctor and he leds them into his office.

“Logan,”

Doctor Miles is standing there in a bright green shirt.

“That’s you sweetie,” the grandmotherly types says.

I just nod and walk towards Doctor Miles.

“How are you Logan?”He asks and shakes my hand.

“F…fine,” I reply as he leds me into his office.

“So what brings you here today?” he asks.

I feel like a deer in the headlight. “Um…I…” tears fill my eyes and I look at the floor.

“You’re in a safe place,” he says.

I take a deep breath. “I ran out of work this morning,” I manage to get out. “I couldn’t…I felt…”

“What medication are you currently on?” he asks and turns back to his computer.

“L…Lexapro,” I reply.

“Yes you are,” he replies, “10 mg, its reads here that you have an appointment with Star this Friday at 2 pm and an appointment with Dr. Aman in two months time.”

I can barely look up at him. “I’m not going to make it,” I say.

“What do you mean by that?” he asks.

“I don’t know!” I snap. “You figure it out! Why should I do all the damn work?”

“Are you planning to kill yourself?” he asks.

“No, of course not,” I say.

“Do you fantasize about killing yourself?” he asks.

I nod.

“Then I’m going to increased your dosage to 20 mg and see if I can get you in with Star quicker,” he replies and stands up. “Just wait there.”

I nod as he leaves the room. I can hear y heart beating in my ears. I feel hopeless, trapped in a merciless darkness that wants me dead.

“I’m sorry Logan, but it seems Star is booked up,” he replies.

I don’t say anything as he prints out my new prescription.

“Just use up the ones you have first,” he says.

I nod and stand up. I can’t move. I don’t want to face the outside world.

“It will be o.k. son,” Dr Miles says.

Tears fell done my cheeks and I wipe them away.

“How do you know that?” I ask

“Because I’ve seen it,” he replies.

I just shake my head and hurry through the waiting room.

“Do you want another…” one of the receptionists calls out to me as I close the door. I then take another breath and head towards my car when Tina comes out of the pharmacy.

“Hey here,” she says.

“Fartly,” I reply and burst into tears.

A few minutes later we’re down by the lake on the swings.

“So where’s your baby today,” I ask.

“With Mum,” she replies and smiles. “Thank goodness for mums,”

I look at the lake.

“You should congratulate me,” I say.

“What for?” she asks cautiously.

“I’m now on 20 mg of Lexapro,” I reply.

“That’s all?” she asks.

I glance at her. “What do you mean?” I ask.

“I’m on 60 mg,” she replies.

“60mg!” I exclaim. “Whoa you must be messed up!”

We both laugh.

“Can my little girl have a swing,” some mother then asks me.

“Oh, sure,” I say and get off the swing feeling embarrassed.

“Here you go sweetie,” I say to the little girl.

“Say thank you to the nice man,” the mother says.

She looks up at me. “Thank you nice man,” she replies.

I smile. “You’re welcome,” I say and walk away with Tina.

“You know that’s why I carry on,” Tina says.

“Because you like swinging?” I ask.

She laughs. “No, because of my children and husband,” she replies. “I carry on for them.”

“But what if…what if…” I look away.

“What if?” she asks.

I look at her for a moment. “Never mind,” I say. “I better get home.”

“Wait a minute Logan,” she says and grabs my arm. “I’m not going to judge you here. We’re in the same situation, remember?”

“I know,” I reply and look at the grass. “I was just going to ask if…”

“Logs?”

We both look around to see Hope waving out to me while Mum and Dad are watching the twins and Fyre in the playground.

“Is that Hope?” Tina asks.

“Sure is,” I say as Hope rushes over and gives me a kiss and a hug.

“Hey, what are you doing here” she asks and then looks at Tina. “You look familiar,” she says.

“It’s me Tina from school,” she says.

Hope looks at her for a moment. “Oh I remember you,” she replies. “What are you doing out and about with a married man?” she asks.

“Hope!” I exclaim.

“I’m married too,” Tina says and shows off her massive diamond wedding ring.

“You still haven’t answered my question,” Hope replies.

“Back down,” I say.

“Where’s Alice?” Hope asks me.

“At home,” I reply.

“Oh how convenient,” she says.

We glare at each other.

“O.k. well, I’m going now,” Tina says.

“Yes, you go girlfriend,” Hope replies without looking at her.

“You know there’s no need to be rude,” Tina says.

Hope glares at her. “Don’t mess me with!” she snaps. “I have two children, a set of twins with another set on the way.”

“Well I have…” Tina begins when I shake my head. She just rolls her eyes. “I’ll see you around Logs,” she says and hurries to her car.

Once she’s gone, Hope punches me on the shoulder.

“What’s that for?” I ask her.

“What do you think, Logs?” she asks me back.

“We’re just friends,” I say.

“Your school days are long over,” Hope replies. “You’re married with kids. So is she.”

“We were just talking about our meds,” I say. “It’s not like I planned for it to happen.”

“Does anybody plan to have an affair?” she asks.

“Damn it Hope, I’m not happy an affair!”I snap.

“You don’t have to yell at me!” she snaps back.

“Well you didn’t have to be rude to Tina,” I say. “She has depression and anxiety like me. That’s all we share. Now get back to your kids. Mum and Dad do enough for you!”

She glares at me. “If I found out Dean was out with another woman I’d cut his…”

“Well that’s just great, Hope,” I say and walk away as tears fill my eyes.

“Logan!” Mum calls out.

I run towards the car.

Chapter Nineteen

*Lucky*

I pass Aunt Dominic driving away from the house. I wave out at her but she just ignores me. What is going on? Am I really the crazy one here? By the time I get inside, Alice is in the longue room, eating a bowl of chocolate ice-cream.

“I can explain,” I say.

“Explain what?” she demands.

“About Tina,” I reply.

“Oh that,” she says. “Yeah, Hope called me up. I know you’re not having an affair! Hope is just…pregnant and emotional and losing it.”

“Phew,” I said.

“But I still don’t think it’s appropriate to be out with her alone,” she replies.

“I didn’t plan to,” I say.

“I know,” she replies. “Just hang out with Eric next time,”

“He works,” I point out.

“Then just come home,” she says.

“I was a mess,” I reply.

“Then send me a text next time, and I’ll come pick you up,” she says.

“Tina has depression and anxiety too,” I say.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean you can spend hours in each other’s company,” she replies.

“We didn’t spend…” I begin when she interrupts me.

“Look, just don’t hang out with her on your own, o.k.” she replies.

“Fine!” I snap.

“It’s for your own good,” she says.

“O.k,” I reply. “So what did Aunt Dominic want?”

My iPhone rings. “It’s Mum,” I say.

“Just hang up,” she replies.

“I’m going to have to call you back,” I say.

“But…” Mum begins when I hang up.

“Good job,” she says and gives me a kiss.

“So what did Aunty Dominic do this time?” I ask.

“She came around to give me advice,” she replies.

“Advice?”I ask. “What about?”

“She thinks you have an eating disorder,” she replies.

“Well I kind of do,” I say.

“Yeah, I know but not a full on one,” she replies.

“That’s because my kind of eating disorder has some other competition,” I say.

Alice looks at me in concern.

“Just go on,” I say.

“Well Dom said that I need to keep an eye on what you eat from now on and make sure you attend a support group and counseling and blah, blah, blah,” Alice says. Tears fill her eyes as she eats some more ice-cream.

“Oh Alice, I’m so sorry,” I say and put my arms around her.

“You know sometimes I just want to move away from all of this and take my dad with us,” she replies.

“What about my Mum and Dad?”I ask.

“Seriously Logan?” she asks. “They’ll drive me crazy!”

“Well it’s not fair that…”

“You know, you need to get over your dislike for my family because they’re all coming over next week for a visit,” she says.

“What!” I exclaim.

She eats another scoop of ice-cream.

“Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?”I ask.

“I only found out today from Dad while you were on your rendezvous,” she says.

“Alice, I already…”I begin when she interrupts me.

“And don’t worry everyone is staying at Dad’s” she says.

I look at her and then at the ice-cream. “Can I have some?” I ask.

“Be my guest,” she says.

I take a huge scoop. “So when you say everyone, who exactly are you talking about?” I ask.

“Susan and Tim and James and Jasmine and Carmen and Stuart and Daisy,” she replies with a smile. “They’re all coming here.”

I take another huge scoop.

“At least they’re staying at your Dad’s,” I say.

“Yeah, but James is going to want to stay over here,” she replies.

“Why?” I ask.

“Because he gets along with Falcon, you know that!” she exclaims and stands up. “I’m going back to work.”

“Why?” I ask.

“You’re starting to annoy me and anyway, I have a few things to do,” she replies and walks back up the stairs. I shake my head and look at my prescription for more drugs. Maybe I should have asked for 60 mg like Tina. I stand up and look around. I don’t know what to do. What do I do now? Read a book? Exercise? Think positive thoughts? Meditate. My iPhone rings again. It’s Mum.

“Why didn’t you come over and say hello when we were at the park?” she demands

“Hope annoyed me,” I reply.

“Why?” she asks.

“She thought I was seeing the woman I was with,” I explain.

“Well are you?” she asks.

“I’m not going to answer that,” I reply and hang up. My iPhone rings again. It’s Mum.

“Do you have an eating disorder?” she asks.

“No I…”

“Are you anorexic or bulimic?” she asks.

“I’m neither!”I snap.

“You don’t have to…”

I hang up. My iPhone rings a third time. You have got to me kidding…phew, Its Jake.

“Hey sorry about…”

“Logan!” Alice calls out.

“Hang on Jake,” I say and look towards the study.

“What?” I call back.

“We’ve been invited to the Harris’s place for dinner,” she calls out.

“Who are the Harris’s?” I ask.

“You know, Jarvis and Alina,” she calls back. “He’s a Microphysicist and she’s a Hydrologist.”

“I didn’t know we were friendly with them,” I call out.

“Well I am with Alina,” she says. “You’re just the token invite.”

“Nice,” I reply.

“Anyway it’s next Friday at 6 pm,” she says.

“But aren’t your family here?” I ask.

“We’re still going,” she replies. “The boys can go to Dad’s…”

“How about to my parents’ place,” I interrupt.

“Logan, my family sees the boys once a year!” she cries out. “They’re going to Dad’s place to spend time with their cousins and that’s final.”

“Fine,” I reply as she slams the door.

“Sorry about that,” I say to Jake.

“This is me you’re talking to,” he replies.

“You’re right,” I say. “But I still have to apologize for not Skyping you back the other night.”

“Again, Logs, it’s me, don’t worry about it,” he replies.

“Well why don’t I Skype you back now?” I ask.

“Aren’t you on your lunch break?” he asks.

“I had to come home early,” I say.

“Oh, right,” he replies.

“Aren’t you working?”I ask.

“I’ve got the week off,” he says.

“Lucky you,” I reply.

“I had an episode at work, Logs,” he says.

“Then…unlucky you,” I reply. “I’ll Skype you now,”

I hang up and a few seconds later I have Jake on Skype.

“You were skinnier than the last time I saw you,” Jake says.

“Oh you now, it’s not eating season again,” I reply.

“Are you seeing a Shrink?” he asks.

“Yip as of this Friday,” I say. “Her name is Star. She’s supposed to be very popular.”

“I was popular,” he replies.

“You were the best,” I say.

“Hey, I still am the best,” he replies. “I’m just having a…break,”

He looks haunted.

“So do you know when you’ll be back at work?”I ask.

“Don’t know,” he says and looks down. “The nightmares are back.”

“Jake who is it?” Talia asks from the background.

“It’s Logs,” he calls out.

“Oh true,” she says and next minuet she’s sitting on his lap.

“Kiaora bro,” she says.

“Hey Talia,” I reply. “What’s been happening?” I ask.

“Oh you know, nothing much,” she says, “Just looking after my pretty boy here.”

“That must be hard work with all the hair dye, contacts, hair gel, fake tan, teeth whitening and protein powder to buy for him,” I reply.

She laughs.

“Hey, I’m all natural,” he says.

“Then why can I see your brown roots babe?” Talia asks

“They’re golden brown,” he says.

“You just keep on telling yourself that babe,” Talia replies.

“I will,” he says and they kiss.

“Do I hear Talia’s voice?” Alice asks from upstairs.

“Is my girl home?” Talia asks

Alice runs downstairs and sits on my lap.

“Kiaora girl,” Talia says.

“Hey, Tals how are you?” Alice asks.

“I’m great…”

I tune out and glance at Jake. During high school he was everything that I wasn’t; popular, good looking, good at sports, always with a girlfriend, the best surfer around. Then one day I caught him crying in the boys’ bathroom. It was during second period. I don’t think he thought there would be anyone in there. At first he was embarrassed and then angry. He threatened me so I wouldn’t tell anyone, not that I would. He avoided me after that, until a few months later, while I was waiting for Ferris to pick me up after school he approached me. He didn’t say very much. He just thanked me for not telling anyone. Who would believe me if I did? This was Jake Robinson. He ruled the school. Anyway it wasn’t until a year later after we became friends that he finally told me why he was crying that day. He had been rape by a friend of his mother’s. She was twenty years older than him. Like me he had had his innocence stolen. He hadn’t gotten **lucky**. He hadn’t passed through an important rite of passage. He hadn’t wanted it because he was a teenage boy and she was ‘the older woman’. These are the lies society tells. These are the lies that destroy boys who in turn become dysfunctional men drowning in addiction, living with mental health or taking their own lives.

Chapter Twenty

*Hamartia*

“So are you sure you’re up for a yoga class?” Eric asks me as I hop in his car.

“You asked me the same question twice this morning,” I say.

“That’s because it’s Wednesday and you haven’t been to work since Monday,” he points out.

“Just shut up and drive,” I say.

“Said RiRi,” he drives down our street.

“Who’s that?” I ask.

He blasts a song.

“Oh, Rihana,” I say as we listen to ‘Shut Up and Drive’.

By the time we get to the place, though I’m feeling agitated.

“We’re here,” Eric says.

I grab my towel and mat.

“Are you up for this?” he asks.

I nod and get out of the car, but I’m not up for this, I’m really not.

“Hey Eric,” some woman says nearby.

“Hi Sonya,” he replies and she smiles at him.

“Looking good Eric,” another woman calls out.

Someone even whistles.

“Does Silvia know that you have your own personal fan club?” I ask as we walk towards the building.

He shakes his head. “What can I say?” he asks. “I’m hot.”

“And humble too,” I say.

He just laughs when we step into the room. Then it hits more like a tornado, tearing away my stability in seconds. The room is crowded! Absolutely crowded! There’s probably like forty people in there or more! I can’t do this!

“Hi there,”

I really can’t. What was I thinking? I hate public exercise. I hate…

“Logs,” Eric says.

“What!” I snap.

“This is Carol,” he replies.

I look at a woman with frizzy red hair sitting at a desk.

“Hi,” I say.

“Hi there…again,” she replies.

I look back at Eric.

“This is when you pay the money,” he says.

“Oh, right,” I reply and begin to take out my wallet when I get distracted by all the people again.

“Hey, Eric is your mate o.k.?”I vaguely hear someone ask.

“Logs, you don’t have to do this,” Eric says.

I look back at him and then at the woman with the frizzy red hair and at some others waiting for the crazy man to pay.

“Get out of my way” I snap and push past Eric and the others and outside.

“Hi bro,”

I see Cas in my way.

“Leave me alone!” I snap and push past him towards Eric’s car.

“It’s going to be alright, Logs,” Cas says and hurries after me.

“And how the hell do you know?” I ask. “You’re Mr. laid back surfer! You don’t know anything about…”

“I have bipolar disorder,” he interrupts him.

“I don’t care!” I snap and lean against the Eric’s car.

“Get in,” Eric says to me and unlocks the car. Then he looks over at Cas.

“Who are you?” he asks as I hop in the car.

“I’m Cassium,” he replies.

“Eric,” he replies and hops in. “I’m taking you home,” he then says to me.

I don’t answer. I can’t. In less than twenty minutes I’m in bed. Alice is sitting down beside me.

“Do you need anything?” she asks.

I barely shake my head.

“Logan?” she asks.

“Just leave me alone,” I reply. “You don’t need to see this.”

“I have seen it,” she points out.

I let out of groan of pain.

“Well you shouldn’t have to,” I say.

“You’re my best friend,” she replies.

“So?” I ask.

“So that means I am where I need to be,” she replies and lays a hand on my shoulder.

I turn around.

“Oh go away,” I plead.

She lies down beside me. “Never,” she replies.

I start to cry.

“You are my sunshine,” she sings. “My only sunshine…”

The next morning, I feel like I’ve been hit by a monster truck when Alice walks in.

“Eric is waiting for you,” she says.

“Tell him I’m not coming,” I reply.

“Logan…”

“Don’t Alice,” I interrupt. “Just don’t.”

I close my eyes and go back to sleep. It only feels like seconds when I Alice wakes me up again.

“You have your blood test in an hour,” she replies.

“I’m not going,” I say.

“Logan…”

“Please Alice,” I interrupt and close my eyes again.

“Logan,”

I barely open my eyes.

“I’m going to get the boys now,” Alice says.

I close my eyes.

“Logan,” Alice says.

I open my eyes.

“Dinner’s ready,”

“I’m not hungry,” I say.

She closes the door behind her.

“Dad’s here,” she replies.

I sit up.

“What?”I ask.

“He’s cooked us homemade hamburgers,” she replies.

“I don’t care!” I snap. “Why is he here?” I ask.

She sits on the bed. “I called him,” she replies and looks away.

“Why?” I demand.

“Because I was going out of my mind with worry over you!” she snaps

“Well couldn’t you have called my mum and dad?”I ask.

“I needed my dad!” she cries out as tears fill her eyes. “Now come for dinner!”

She stands up while I shake my head.

“I can’t believe…”

“Oh go to hell!” she snaps and hurries out the door, slamming it behind her. I lay back in bed fuming! How dare she call her dad! What did she tell him? She better not have told him anything! I don’t trust him! He’s fake! He wants to get rid of me as my family’s provider! He thinks I’m not doing a good enough job. He thinks he can do better! Well I’ll just tell him to get the hell out of…a note from Legacy. I pick it up from the side table and read it.

‘I love you Daddy,’ he reads. ‘You are my avenger’

Tears fill my eyes and I look at a picture of me, Alice and the boys taken a few months ago. My anger subsides. I breathe in and out and then take a shower. Fifteen minutes later in I’m in a pair of green corduroy pants and blue polo. I walk down stairs into the dining room, where I see the table is clear except for a plate with two hamburgers on it and some fries.

“They’re still hot,” William says as he comes out of the kitchen.

“Thank-you,” I ask. Then I hear the boys and Alice. I walk outside onto the balcony and see them jumping on the trampoline. They’re don’t even notice me, they’re having so much fun.

“You have a good family there,” William says as he stands beside me.

I nod.

“They love you, you know,” he says.

Tears fill my eyes and I look away.

“They adore and respect you,” he says and puts a hand on my shoulder.

“I…” I shake it off and hurry inside. William follows.

“You know I tried to kill myself when Elsa passed away,” he reveals.

I stop and turn around.

“Eat,” he says and points to the hamburgers.

I sit down and start eating. He sits across from me.

“Alice and her sisters don’t know,” he replies. “I plan to tell them someday.”

“But why did you tell me?” I ask.

“Because you’re so guarded Logan,” he says, “and I wanted you to know that you’re not alone. There are many people are there who are suffering as well.”

I don’t know what to say and take another bite of the hamburger. It’s actually really good.

“Did you know you’re mum is trying to set me up with your aunty Dominic?” he then asks.

I shake my head.

“She actually called me the other night to try and persuade me to ask her out,” he says. “Of course I said no.”

“You said no to my mum?”I asked.

He nodded with a smile. “You’re mum is very hard to say no to,” he replies.

“I know,” I say.

“But she accepted it eventually,” he replies. “I actually get along well with your aunty Dominic. She reminds me of the way Elsa used to be before the cancer made her into someone else.”

He looks away. I can feel his pain.

“I’m sorry, I’ve been so standoffish,” I reply.

He looks back at me. “Don’t be,” he says. “Your saw what I wanted you to see.”’

“And you saw what I wanted you to see,” I say, “before it became too much too hide it.”

“At least you’re getting the right help now,” he replies.

“Yeah, but I feel like I’m trying harder than I’ve ever tried in my life and still I’m not coping,” I say.

“You just have to give it time,” he replies.

“I just want it to go away,” I say.

“Why?” he asks.

“Why?” I ask.

“Yes, why?” he asks.

“Because I can’t…I can’t…tolerant it,” I reply. “I can’t tolerate not being perfectly stoic and invulnerable,”

“Who is?” he asks. “Everyone has problems in life.”

“Well I shouldn’t!” I snap. “I should be perfect and strong and able to get rid of this depression and anxiety and whatever else I have!”

“And that’s your **hamartia**,” he replies.

“You’re flaw,” he says. “You can’t tolerate your depression and anxiety so you fight against them, when all you need to do is accept you have them and learn to live with them,”

“But do you know what that means?”I ask.

“Yes, it means letting go of all this energy you use to try and control it,” he says.

“And what’s wrong with that?”I ask.

“You can’t and will burn out,” he says.

“Yeah but I’ve done pretty well these twenty years when it first reared its ugly head,” I reply.

“At a cost of your health,” he says.

I take a bite of the second hamburger.

“I just hate it,” I say.

“And that gives it more energy,” he replies.

“But how am I going to accept it?” I ask.

“That’s for you to work out,” he says.

I take another bite and swallow. “This sucks!” I reply.

“Well it could be worse,” he says.

“How?” I ask. “How could it be worse?”

“You could be alone and dealing with this,” he says.

I look towards the balcony and hear the boys and Alice laughing.

“You have them,” he continues. “And you have me and your mum and dad and brother and sister and their families and your sister in laws and their families and others like Eric, Jake…”

I take another bite and swallow.

“You’re right,” I say.

“Then now that your house is filled with water, put on your gumboots, put on your rain jacket, put on your rain hat and get in your boat and laugh with those who love you,” he replies.

“That was a metaphor, wasn’t it?” I ask.

He laughs.

“What are you two doing?”

We look to see Alice walking in.

“Can’t your dad talk to his favorite son in law?” he asks.

She smiles. “O.k, well, I was just wondering if you want to join us on the trampoline?” she then asks me.

I nod. “I’ll just finish off dinner and then I’ll come downstairs,” I say.

“Great,” she replies and then looks at William. “You’re invited too Dad,” she says.

“What? This old geezer?” he asks and shakes his head. “No, this old geezer is heading home. I have to prepare the house for the family come over next week.”

“You know we have room here,” I say as he stands up.

“No, that’s fine, Logan,” he replies as I finish off the hamburger and stand up. “I love having everyone under the same roof.

“Well maybe the cousins can all have a sleep over here one night,” I say.

“Sure, Logan, I’m sure the kids would love that,” he replies and grabs his car keys. He gives Alice a hug.

“Tell the boys I’ll see them on the weekend,” he says.

“Will do,” she replies and then he gives me a hug.

“You’re a good man,” he says.

“Thanks William,” I reply and he walks out the door.

Once he’s gone I sit back down and eat the fries.

“What was that all about?” Alice asks.

I shrug.

She punches me playfully on the shoulder.

“Logan!”

“What?” I ask and eat the last fry.

“Since when are you and my dad BFF’s?” she asks.

I stand up. “You’re my BFF,” I say and head down the stairs. “Are you coming?”

She follows and shakes her head at me.

“You’re not going to tell me what you talked about are you?” she asks as we walk out on the balcony.

“Hey Daddy, watch me!” Legacy cries out. He does a flip on the trampoline.

“Good one son,” I say.

“Was it about…” she looks away, “Was it about Mum?” she asks.

“Why do you say that?”I ask.

“Logan, I can do a better flip,” Falcon calls out.

“I’m watching,” I say.

“Because he looked sad when I walked in,” she replies.

“Did you see?” Falcon asked.

“Yip, I saw,” I say.

“So it was better, wasn’t it?”He demands.

“It was equal,” I say.

“What!” he cries out. “You need to get new glasses!”

I just shake my head and take Alice’s hand. “Come on lets jump,” I say.

“Logan,” she says and pulls me back.

“Look, Alice,” I say. “I will tell you just not yet,”

She looks at me a moment. “O.k,” she says and we walk down the stairs together. “It’s good to see you and Dad talking,”

“Yeah, well I’m trying to trust more,” I reply.

“I’m glad,” she says and gives me a kiss

Chapter Twenty-One

*Dissected*

“So today is the big day,” Eric says as we’re jogging down the hill.

I roll my eyes. “You know that I’ve been to see a Shrink before,” I reply.

“I think the more politically correct term is Psychologist,” I say.

“Whatever,” I reply as a group of woman approach. “Here comes your fan club,” I say.

“I only want one fan,” he replies. “My wife.”

“Good morning Eric,” the women say and jog slowly past him.

I shake my head. “Just my luck to be friends with neighborhood’s eye candy,” I say.

“Hey, I can’t help it I’m this good looking,” he replies. “It’s a curse really.”

I just laugh when I see an old woman walking towards us with purple hair. Purple hair. Why is she familiar?

“Hi there son,” she says to me.

“H…hi,” I stammer out as she passes.

“Whoa, look at you cougar boy,” Eric says.

“I don’t even know her,” I reply.

“Well she seems to know you,” he says, “are there something that you’d like to tell me?”

“You’re a sick man,” I say.

“Good morning,” two women greet him.

He just nods at them.

“I know her!” I cry out and stop jogging.

“Who do you know?” he asks.

“The old woman with the purple hair,” I say.

“Ah, so you admit you,” he says, “you are a cougar boy,”

I turn around and job back towards her.

“Hey, what do I tell Alice?” he calls out.

I don’t answer as I pass the two women who greeted Eric.

“It’s a shame he’s married,” the brown haired one is saying.

“I know,” the blond haired one replies. “He’s hotter than Brad Pitt.”

“He’s off the Richter scale,” the brown one says.

I ignore them as I catch you with the old woman.

“Ex…excuse me,” I say.

She looks around.

“Yes?” she asks.

I don’t answer her at first as I catch my breath.

“I’ve seen you before,” I say. “First when I was driving home from work one day and second at the medical centre.”

“That’s right,” she says.

“I’m…I’m sorry was rude to you the first time,” I reply, “and the second time.”

She smiles at me. “You weren’t rude,” she says. “You were in pain. There’s a difference.”

“Still, I should have at least…” she steps forward and takes my hand in her own.

“Oh my goodness, did you see that,” the blond haired girl asks her friend as they jog pass. “I think that old woman is a cougar,”

I look at the old woman in embarrassment. She turns around.

“This cougar also has a black belt,” she calls out. “So if you don’t want me to break those nose jobs of yours I suggest you run as far away from me as possible.”

They look at each other and then run. I shake my head and smile as she turns back around.

“I’m not a cougar by the way,” she says. “I have five children, twenty grandchildren and one great granddaughter. But I do have a black belt.

I nod.

“I also suffer from Dysthymia,” she adds.

“I’m sorry, I’m not familiar with Dysth…”

“It’s a mood disorder,” she replies.

“Oh, right,” I say.

“See I knew you were struggling that night,” she replies. “I could feel your pain. So could my husband.”

“I know,” I say, “but I wasn’t thinking straight.”

“How are you thinking now?” she asks.

“Clearer,” I reply.

“Well that’s good,” she says and then gives me a hug. “You take care of yourself now,”

“I will,” I reply as she walks away. “My name is Logan, by the way,”

“And I am Natia,” she says. “It means hope.”

I nod and turn back away.

A few hours later I find myself sitting in my second home – medical centre.

“Logan,”

I look up at a tall woman in purple jeans and an orange sweater with pinkish hair.

I stand up.

“Come this way,” she says.

The grandmother type smiles encouraging at me as I follow Star. She ushers me into a lightly dimmed room with cream walls, a brown plush carpet, and white couches with brown cushions and a few chairs. There’s a sweet smell in the room.

“This looks cosy,” I say and sit on a chair with a massive white cushion.

“Thanks,” she replies and takes a seat across from me.

I take off my thongs and lay my sachet on my lap.

“So I’ve read your doctors notes,” she then informs me.

I nod.

“How are you feeling today?” she asks.

“I’m o.k.,” I reply and look around the room.

“Now before we get started I just need to some history from you, is that alright?” she asks.

I nod.

“Great,” she says and pulls out a lap top.

Here we go. I take a deep breath and tell her my history along with all of my deep, dark secrets. There’s no privacy in one of these sessions. You have to be an open book or it just turns out to be a waste of time for you and the Psychologist. Still it hurts, I mean who likes to be stripped naked and examined by a virtual stranger, fugitively speaking of course. It’s not the most pleasant experiences. It really sucks and guess what? I get to go through this again whenever the next appointment is and with the psychiatrist in two months time. Yay!

Around half way into the session, I’m getting over it and she can sense it but I don’t care.

“I just need a bit more information and then we’re all finished for now,” she says.

For now? Really? I can’t believe I pay for this tortue! As my hour finishes off, I’m given some ‘homework’ to do and told to come back the same time next Friday. Fantastic! My iPhone rings as I hurry out. It’s Alice.

“Hey just to warn you that Hope and the kids are here,” she says.

“What!” I cry out. “Can you ask them to leave?”

“Sure,” she replies and I hang up.

I blast ‘Chandelier’ by Sia in the car. That’s exactly how I feel. I’m barely hanging on. I then blast ‘Back to Black’ by Amy Winehouse, ‘Young and Beautiful’ by Lana Del Ray, ‘Demons’ by Imagine Dragons, ‘The Scientist’ by Coldplay and then I’m home and Hope hasn’t left yet! Are you kidding me! I park the car and beep the horn. Alice comes running out.

“Why is she still here?” I ask and open the car door, but I don’t get out.

“I was trying to…”

“There you are,” Hope walks out with one of the twins. “So how did it go?” she asks.

I can’t answer.

“Logan!”

Mum walks up beside the car.

“How come you didn’t tell me you have an eating disorder?” she demands.

“Bella!’ Dad exclaims.

“And why didn’t you tell me you were coming over here?” she asks Hope.

“I…”she begins when Mum interrupts.

“Where is Fyre and Summer?” she asks.

“Summer is here,” Hope replies. “Autumn and Fyre are inside.”

“You left them alone?” Mum asks and hurries into the house.

“Mum, they’re fine!” Hope cries out and hurries after her.

“Quick, escape now,” Dad says to us. Alice hops in the car and I drive off.

“So where should we go?” she asks.

“To the beach,” I say. “I need its healing proprieties.”

“Have you been listening to Cas again?” she asks.

“No, I’ve been reading up on Ecopsychology,” I reply.

“What’s that?” she asks.

“It’s the relationship between us and nature,” I say.

“Sounds…”

I let out a groan and pull over.

“You’ll have to drive,” I say.

“No problem,” she says and gets out of the car.

“I see your session went well, hey?” she asks as I move over.

I can’t answer as I close my eyes.

“Logan?” she asks.

“I’ll be fine,” I say. “I’ve just been **dissected**. “

“Right,” Alice says and drives away.

Twenty –One

*Stinky Man*

“Alice is merciless,” Ferris says as we watch her defend one of her team mates.

“Of course she is,” I reply. “She’s a midfielder.”

He looks at me in astonishment.

“What?” I ask.

“I didn’t know you knew that term,” he replies.

“Oh come on,” I say, “give me some credit.”

He just looks back at the game.

“So nice of you to take off the other day,” Hope then says as she walks up to us.

“I just got back from a counseling session,” I reply. “I wasn’t in the mood to talk.”

“But I’m you’re…”

“Hope, Summer wants a cuddle,” Mum calls out.

“Summer gets plenty of cuddles, Mum,” Hope calls back and shakes her head. “On second thoughts I don’t want Mum and Dad living with me.”

“Dean will be glad to hear that,” Ferris says.

“Actually he was coming around to the idea,” she replies.

“Really?” Ferris asks.

“You know I’m quite persuasive,” she says.

“You mean, you bullied him into it,” Dean replies.

“I did not bully him into it!” she snaps.

“You did, Hope!’ he snaps back. “You walk all over him. You always have!”

“I do not!” she cries out.

He shakes his head. “Fine live in denial,” he replies and looks back at Alice’s game.

“What do you think Logs?” she asks.

“I couldn’t care less!” I snap.

“What’s your problem?” she asks.

“My problem is I’m just getting by without going under,” I say. “So can please stopping talking to me for a minute!”

She glares at me “Fine!” she cries out and hurries away.

“That was harsh,” Ferris then says.

I don’t reply. I can’t.

“I know you’ve got a lot going on but so has Hope and so have I for that matter,” he replies.

“Well I’ve got some advice for you,” I say. “Spend some more time with your daughter.”

With that I walk back to the boys who are with Asher and Dani.

“Come on, we’re going home,” I reply.

“What about Mum’s game?” Falcon’s asks.

“She won’t mind if we leave early,” I say. “I’m not feeling well.”

“o.k., Daddy,” Legacy replies.

“Well I’m not leaving,” Falcon says.

I shake my head and turn to Mum and Dad.

“Can you please drop off Falcon?”I ask. “I’m not feeling well.”

“Then you should be eating more,” Mum replies.

“No problem,” Dad says and I take off with Legacy.

That night, I’m sitting outside with Alice after the boys have gone to bed.

“Sorry I had to miss the rest of your game,” I say.

“Its o.k., I understand,” she replies.

“But that’s the problem, you shouldn’t have to understand,” I say.

“You’re not well,” she replies.

“But that doesn’t excuse the fact that I’m treating the ones I care about like crap,” I say.

She looks at me for a moment.

“You know that it will get better,” she replies.

“Really?”I ask, “Because I feel like I was better off without all this so called help that I’ve been receiving,”

“You were burning out,” Alice points out.

“Yeah, but I could have gotten better,” I say.

“No, you couldn’t have,” she replies. “You were in a dark place.”

“Aren’t I in one now?” I ask.

“Not as dark as it used to be,” she replies, “Before you has shut everyone out, including me.”

“Well now everyone is suddenly confessing how messed up they are,” I say.

“That’s because they saw you were suffering and it made them comfortable enough to share their suffering with you,” she points out.

I look away. “I guess connecting with others has done me some good,” I say.

“Yip,” she replies and I look back and smile at my best friend. How could I live without her? She means the world to me. She is why I exist. She loves me unconditionally. She accepts the darkness and light within me. I am complete because of her. She is in my very blood, imprinted on my bones, a fixed, permanent part of my very being.

“By the way,” I say. “I don’t want to go to Mum and Dad’s tomorrow night.”

“O.k. so we won’t go,” she replies.

“Yeah, but then they will come here like last time,” I say.

“Then why don’t we drop the boys off,” she replies.

“Or we could get Mum and Dad to pick them up,” I say.

“Even better,” she replies and gives me a kiss. I take my iPhone out and call Mum.

“Hi, it’s me,” I say.

“Have you called up Ferris and Hope?”She asks.

“What for?” I ask.

“For being rude to them today,” she replies.

“I wasn’t rude to them today,” I say. “I was in pain.”

“But that doesn’t give you the excuse to…”

“Look Mum, I need you to come over and pick up the boys tomorrow night,” I interrupt her.

“Please,” Alice prompts me.

“Please,” I add.

“Why?” she asks.

“Because we want need a break,” I say.

“You need a break?” she asks. “What about me?”

“Then cancel the dinner,” I say.

“I can’t do that!” she cries out. “We have them every week.”

“Then it won’t matter if you cancel one,” I say.

“But it’s important that we spend time together,” she replies.

“Mum! We spend too much time together!” I cry out.

“How can you say that!” she cries back.

“Because it’s true,” I say. “Now If you’re not going to cancel the dinner, can you please pick up the boys,”

“But I want you and Alice there,” she replies.

“Mum, we need a break,” I say.

“You mean, you need a break,” Mum points out.

“Yes, I need a break!” I cry out. “Can you blame me? I’m seeing a Psychologist and a psychiatrist in two months time, I’m taking anti-depressants, fish oil, multivitamins, magnesium, iron, zinc, exercising, eating green veggies and nuts that are probably the reason why my poo is looking dark green and nutty plus I’m reading everything from Ecopsychology to Art Therapy!”

Silence.

“Are you still there?”I ask.

“Yes,” she replies.

“So can you please pick up the boys?” I ask.

“O.k,” she replies.

“Thank-you,” I say.

“You’re welcome,” I reply.

Silence.

“Logan,”

“Yes Mum” I ask

“I love you to the moon and back,” she replies.

“I know,” I say, “and I love you too,”

She hangs up and I put my iPhone down.

“Is that true about your…poo?” Alice then asks.

I nod.

“I just noticed the other day,” I say. “My wee is also bright yellow.”

“Why don’t I research that,” she replies.

“And I’m my farts are a lot more deadly,” I say.

“You have been doing more of them as well,” she adds.

“Do you think it’s all the pills I’ve been downing?” I ask.

“I don’t know but you really stink,” Alice says.

“Well I love you too, honey,” I reply and give her a kiss.

“And I love you my **stinky man**,” she says.

Chapter Twenty –Two

*Dance Off*

The next night finds out lying on the couch watching ‘the confessions if a shopaholic’.

“I think I’m a shopaholic,” I say.

“That’s why I took away your bank cards,” she replies.

“I know,” I say when I receive a text.

“Is that Hope again?” she asks.

“Yip,” I say. “She says they’re eating grilled chicken and mango,”

Alice shakes her head.

“You know you don’t have to…”

Another text comes in.

“And now she’s saying that Lisa has been off her phone for thirty five minutes now and counting,” I read.

Alice takes the phone from me.

“Enough,” she says and puts it away.

“Well I don’t want to watch this DVD,” I say. “I’m bored.”

“Then what do you want to do?” she asks.

I turn on my iPAD.

“Have a dance party,” I say.

“Don’t you think we’re a bit too…?”

I blast out ‘Let’s Get Ridiculous’ and stand up and do the running man.

“Logs, it’s too loud!” Alice cries out over the music.

I ignore her and do the nut bush.

“Logan!” she cries out when there’s a loud knock on the door. “It’s the police!”

“It can’t be the police!” I cry out, but turn the music down anyway.

Alice hurries up the stairs.

“And how come we weren’t invited?” I hear Eric ask.

I laugh and turn up the music.

He runs down stairs and does some sort of dance move.

“What’s that?”I ask over the music.

“The moonwalk,” he yells out.

“Cool,” I reply when Alice turns the music down.

“Hey!” we both cry out.

“You don’t want the neighbors to call the police do you?” Alice asks.

“They won’t care,” Eric says and does another dance move.

“What is that honey?” Silvia asks.

“I call it starting the lawn mower,” He says.

She laughs. So does Alice.

“Hey, Sil,” I say. “Do you know that Eric has a fan club?” I ask.

I put on ‘Lose My Breath’ by Destiny’s Child.

“Which fan club do you mean?” she asks, “The ones who follow him when he’s running or the ones at yoga?”

She does some funky move.

“Go Sil,” Alice says.

“Those women don’t follow me,” Eric says to Silvia.

“Hey I don’t care if they do,” she says and grabs his arm and spins into him. “You’re all mine.”

“And they know it,” he replies as they kiss. “Anyway,” he says as he spins her out. “At least I’m not a cougar boy,”

“What?” Alice asks and dances towards me.

“Yip, some old woman with purple hair has him wrapped around her gnarled finger,” Eric jokes.

“Is that so?” Alice asks and shakes her butt in front of me.

“She has a mood disorder,” I say.

“Yeah, yeah,” Eric replies. “You know she wants you!”

“That’s it!’ I cry out and put on ‘It’s like that’ by Run DM C and Jason Nevis. “We’re having a dance off”

“You’re on!” Eric says when Silvia backs away.

“What do you say to letting the boys go for it,” she says to Alice.

“I don’t think so girlfriend,” Alice says and does some funky move. “It’s between me and you too.”

“Oh then you better bring it,” Silvia says.

“I will,” Alice replies as the **dance off** begins.

Chapter Twenty-Three

*Phoenix*

“Are you doing Zumba?” Alice asks.

“It’s actually called Zumberimng,” I say as I’m doing the samba.

“He’s embarrassing,” Falcon adds from the kitchen table.

“I think he’s ‘the man’” Legacy replies.

We all look at him.

“What?” he asks.

I look back at the TV.

“So why aren’t you running with Eric this morning?” Alice asks while the boys eat breakfast.

“Because I’m bored with running,” I say. “I need a break.”

“O.k,” she replies as I miss a step and get behind.

“This is hard to keep up with,” I say.

“Well have you been through the introductory DVD?” she asks.

“No,” I reply.

“But that’s when they take you through the dance moves, slowly,” she says.

“I know, but it was too slow,” I reply.

“It’s supposed to be too slow,” she says.

“But I need to lose…I mean I need to just get on with it,” I reply.

She pauses the DVD.

“Logan, you’re exercising for you wellbeing remember,” she says.

“I know that, but I need to lose weight as well, don’t I?”’ I ask.

“No, you don’t,” she replies. “That’s why you do thirty minutes low impact exercise,”

“But what’s the point in that?” I ask and play the DVD again.

“Logan!” she snaps and pauses the DVD, “You have to get out of the mindset that you exercise to lose weight.

“Yeah, Logan,” Falcon says.

“Then why else do you do it?” ask.

“I just said,” she replies. “For your mental health,”

“What’s mental health?” Legacy asks.

“Alice!” I snap.

“It’s alright, we know that you’re crazy Logan,” Falcon says.

“I’m not crazy,” I reply.

“Yeah Grandma told us everything,” Falcon says.

“Falcon!” Alice says.

“It’s true, isn’t it Legacy,” he says.

“Yip,” Legacy replies. “Grandma said that you were taking pills so you wouldn’t shut down.”

“What?”I ask and hurry up the stairs.

“Logan!” Alice calls out.

“Mummy!” Legacy says and burst into tears.

I hurry into the bedroom and pick up my iPhone.

“Hi Logan, how was…”

“How dare you tell the boys about my problems?” I snap at her.

“They had a right to know!”She cries out.

“Just like I had a right to a childhood, right mum?”I demanded.

“I…I…”

“And I lost that right because of your lack of parenting skills!” I shouted and hang up.

Alice walks in.

“Are you alright?” she asks

“I have to get to work,” I say and head into the bathroom.

“Logan,” she pleads.

“I don’t want to talk about it!” I snap.

I’m trapped in dark cocoon as the rest of the morning passes painfully. Then I’m parking the car at work, but I can’t get out. I’mfatuglyworthlesspurtidtoxicpileof…

“Hey Logs,”

Randal is knocking on the window.

I open the door.

“So where have you been this week?” he asks.

“Sick,” I reply as I close the door and lock it.

“Like the flu or something?” he asks.

I can’t reply.

“Are you alright?” he asks.

I finally let go of the car door.

“So how did the gig go the other night?” I ask.

“Sweeet,” he says. “We have another one…”

Too many people around. They’re looking at me. They know. They can see. They…

“…come?”

“Sure,” I say as we walk into the lobby.

“Hi boys,” Petra greets us. She’s standing with Denise. I don’t make eye contact with her. I kind of snapped at her remember?

“Look what I bought for Petra,” Denise says and holds up a long sleeve jacket.

Randal laughs.

“What?” Denise demands and glares at him.

“Um, n…nothing,” he replies. “It’s looks…very warm.”

“Well it was half price day at the op shop,” she says.

“But it’s a little big,” Petra says.

“Well it will keep you warm, dear” Denise replies.

“I need a cigarette,” Petra says.

“They’ll kill you, dear,” Denise points out.

“Oh really?” Petra asks and walks back outside, pushing past Cas.

“What’s her problem?” he asks.

“Where do I start?” Denise asks and shakes her head. “Anyway, it’s time to go to work.” She says and puts the jacket back in the bag. “I can’t wait to get more sales than you boys…again.” She hurries away and then stops. “By the way, I’m glad your back Logs,” she says and walks away.

I look at the floor, feeling Randal and Cassium looking at each other.

“So…um…how was the surf?” Randal asks Cassium.

“Yeah…pump…”

I hurry outside to my car.

“Logan!” Cas cries out.

I unlock the door and hop in.

The passenger door opens up and Cas hops in.

“I don’t think you should be driving home,” he says.

I turn on the car.

“Logan,” he says.

“Why didn’t you tell me you had bipolar!” I cry out.

“Does it matter?” he asks.

“Yeah, because here I thought you were this laid back surfer dude with no problems in the world!” I snap.

“Well I’m sorry I gave you that impression,” he replies, “But I couldn’t exactly wear a label on my shirt saying ‘I have Bipolar’”

I look away.

“Now can I drive you home?” he asks.

“What about your car?” I ask.

“I can drive it,”

We both turn to see Randal standing there.

Cas looks away. “Did, you…did you…?”

“I’m a recovering Bulimic,” Randal interrupts.

We both look at him in astonishment. He does look skinny in those black jeans and the pixies t-shirt. But I never noticed until now. I don’t know if Cas did.

“How…how long have you been recovering for?” I ask.

“Going on two years now since I threw up a Big Mac meal deal,” he replies.

“Bro, it must have been a bad Big Mac,” Cas says.

I look at Randal. He just bursts out laughing and then Cas and I do as well.

“What’s so funny?”

Garry is standing in a black suit with a thin black tie and a white shirt. He’s wearing a headset.

I look at Cas, he stares at his thongs. I don’t dare look at Randal.

“Is everything alright here?” he asks.

Come on someone say something.

“Um, Logs…” Randal clears his throat. “That is Logan isn’t feeling well so Cas offered to drive him home and I offered to drive Cas’s car t pick him up.”

Garry then walks passed Randal and looks at me.

“You’ve had a lot of time off recently, Logan, what’s going on?” he asks.

I can’t answer him.

“Um, I don’t think that Logs is up to speaking right now,” Cas says.

“But he seems able to laugh,” Garry points out.

Good one Cassium!

“Well Cas is pretty funny,” Randal says.

“Really?” he asks. “Then I’m sure Cassium won’t mind sharing with me what made all of you laugh.”

Oh no!

“Look,” Cas says. “With all due respect, Garry, I need to get Logs home since he’s…”

Stuff this!

“Garry, I’ve been having a pretty bad week…month…year…years,” I say. “I have just been diagnosed with depression and anxiety, I’m seeing a Shrink and soon a Psychiatrist, my poo is dark green with nuts in it, my wee is bright yellow, my farts are lethal, I stink all the time, I just snapped at my Mum because she told my sons that…”

“Which Psychologist do you see?” he then interrupts.

“Um…what?” I ask.

“Do you go over to the medical centre on Stanford Street?” he asks.

“Yes,” I say in shock.

“Then you must see Pauline, Jules or Star,” he replies. “I see Jules. He plays in a cover band on the weekend,” he turns to Randal, “I’ve been meaning to give you his number t. He may have some contacts for you.”

Randal looks like a deer in the headlight. “Y…Yeah,” he stammers out. “That’ll be great.”

“Good morning Garry,” Petra says as she walks over.

“Aren’t you supposed to be at work now?” he asks.

She plays with her long black hair.

“Oh, I just saw you all here and thought we still had some time,” she replies.

Is she actually fluttering her eyelashes at our boss or is there something in her eye.

“Nope, its work time now,” he replies. “I’m just taking some time out to give a motivational talk to the boys here.”

“Well they are on the bottom for sales,” she says and plays with her hair again.

“And you will be too again, if you don’t get to work,” he points out.

She loses her smile and hurries away.

“So how about some breakfast?” he then asks.

I’m still in shock and can’t answer. Cas is fixated on his thongs. It’s up to Randal. He clears his throat.

“Well I already had breakfast,” he says.

“Haven’t you seen the Lord of The Rings?” he asks.

That question engages Cas as he looks up from his thongs.

“Which one?” he asks.

“The first one,” Garry says. “Where the Hobbits believe in having a first breakfast and a second…”

I can’t believe Garry sees a Psychologist. I can’t believe Randal is a recovering Bulimic. I can’t believe that Cas has Bipolar. I can’t believe that Eric has depression. I can’t believe that William tried to kill himself. I can’t believe that Tina has depression and anxiety. I can’t believe…what’s her name again? The water lady who lives on my street. I saw her at the beach. She’s a recovering alcoholic and what about the cougar…well she’s not really. That was just a joke. She has…Dysth…something. Wow! My own world has changed over a few weeks. I used to think those around me were perfect and now, they’re just as messes up as me. Hmmm, I shouldn’t really say we’re all messed up. I should say that we’re what…consumers? I can’t stand that term! But messes up? Well I’m not offended by that term. How about mentally health challenged or…

“Logan!”

“What?” I asked Randal.

“Are you coming for breakfast?” Garry asks.

“Um…but…we can’t just leave…I’m sick you know,” I finally get out.

“So am I ,” Garry says.

“Me too,” Cas adds.

“And me,” Randal replies.

“Then I’m in,” I say.

“Great,” Garry replies. “We can take my car. I brought the SUV thinking my ex-wife was finally letting me see the kids again, but she changed her mind just a few minutes ago.”

“You were married?” Cas asks.

“Yip”

“With kids?” Randal asks.

“Yip, I have four girls,” he replies.

“Can your wife do that?” I ask.

“Well she does have full custody of the kids,” he says, “after I had a mental breakdown.”

“You had a mental breakdown?” I ask.

He looks at me and then at Cas and Randal.

“We don’t know each other very well do we?” he asks.

We shake our heads.

“Well let’s eat and talk then” he says, “How about the Coffee Club? They have the best pancake stack with ice-cream.”

“Do they have a toilet nearby?” Randal asks.

We all look at him.’

“I’m joking you guys,” he says with a smile.

Phew!

So for the next two hours four men who couldn’t be more different eat pancakes with ice-cream and talk. It turns out that Garry has been divorced for two years now. He’s a fiercely devoted father when his ex wife allows him to be and loves shopping. He proudly told us he’s wearing a Van Heusen suit, a Cooper’s Brother slim tie, and Christian Louboutin black shoes. He’s also seeing a Psychologist weekly. Cassium has been dating a truck driver named Cindy for a year now. He showed us a picture and she looks like January Jones. I’m not kidding. He also plans on becoming Australia’s best surfer, idolizes Joel Parkinson and one day wants to design boardies. He sees a Psychologist fortnightly, a Psychiatrist monthly and is on Lithium. Randal wants to get back into the dating scene again now that he can eat without throwing up. His band ‘The Space Tigers’ have had one gig some far. They’re a cross between Arcade Fire and Muse. I had no idea what that meant! He also loves to play chess in his free time and plans to add more tattoos to his already heavily tattooed chest…yes he showed us his heavily tattooed chest right then and there at the Coffee Shop. It was funny! He sees a Psychologist weekly and attends a support group fortnightly, even though he’s the only male there.

They are the real heroes in society! Not these celebrities, sporting athletes and intellectuals. They are combat soldiers like me. They fight an opponent that is merciless, malicious and inexhaustible. Yet each one of them is a **phoenix**. You know they rise from the ashes to begin again.

That’s what it means to be a man, to rise watch time you fall.

Being stoic and invulnerable is overrated. It is weakness that is killing men.

Chapter Twenty –Three

*Buzz*

I’m actually smiling on my way home. Yeah I only made two sales. Yeah Denise and Petra were on the top again, but I made three new friends today that I’ll have for life. Our suffering has brought us together. We share a common understanding. We have formed a brotherhood that is unbreakable. A bond that is…my mobile phone rings. I put it on speaker. It’s Alice.

“Hey, you never guessed where Garry took us today?” I ask.

“Logs, everyone is here,” she says.

She sounds nervous.

“Who?” I ask.

“Dad and…”

“Well that’s fine,” I interrupt. “Anyway…”

“Susan, Tim, James and Jasmine, Carmen, Stuart and Daisy,” she interrupts.

I breathe in sharply.

“I’m sorry Logs,” she says “I tried to get them all to leave, I really did.”

I breathe out calmly.

“No, that’s fine, Alice,” I reply. “We can make homemade pizza.”

“Um…what?” she asks.

“We can use the pizza oven,” I say.

“Are you…feeling alright?” she asks.

“Sure am, why?” I ask.

“It’s just this morning you had an episode,” she points out.

“Yeah I did but then Randal just told Cas and I that he’s a recovering bulimic, Cas has bipolar by the way and Garry, yeah GQ Gary, had a mental breakdown a few years aga,” I tell her, “Isn’t that great!”

“Um…sure,” she replies. “So you’re fine having everyone here?” she then asks.

“I am tonight,” I say. “I’m not sure how I’ll be for the rest of the week, but since I’m feeling hospitable now, I say let’s go with it.”

“Deal,” she says.

“Do we need anything for the pizza?” I ask.

“Wait, let me just check if everyone’s fine with having pizza,” she says.

“Alice, we’re having pizza,” I reply. “I want to use the pizza oven.”

“But we can’t just make pizza if some of the family don’t want pizza,” she points out.

“Tough luck,” I say. “I’m making it and so they will eat it and enjoy it without a word of complaint!”

“Logan!” she cries out.

My **buzz** has gone. I’m back in reality.

“Fine, ask the family then,” I say.

Man, democracy sucks!

“Hey how does everyone feel about having pizza?” I hear her ask.

“I want Burger King!” one of the girl cousins cries out.

“It’s called Hungry Jacks here you weird!” Falcon says.

“Falcon!” Alice reprimands him.

“And Daisy, it’s not your place tell your aunty what you want,” one of her sisters says. It must be Carmen, since Daisy is her daughter. Then again, Alice’s side has a habit of ‘communal disciplining’ which I absolutely hate but my side does it as well so…

“I want Taco Bell!” James cries out.

“No, Maccas!” Falcon says.

“Don’t forget that Jasmine is intolerant to…”

I hang up and drive to Coles. I buy a ton of pizza ingredients and then I head for home. As I’m driving into the car port my mobile phone rings. It’s Ferris. I turn off the car. This should be good.

“I can’t believe you!” he cries out.

“You know Ferris, what happened between Mum and I is none of your business,” I point out and grab the grocery bags,

“Hey Logs,”

“The hell it’s not!” Ferris snaps. I hang up and look around. It’s Eric. Its looks like he just got back from work too.

“Hey,” I say, “Your home early.”

“I had enough for one day,” he replies and looks away.

“Do you want to talk about it?” I ask.

“Logan!”

We both look to see Alice hurrying towards us. She looks stressed.

“You look like you have company,” he says, “How about we catch up for a run tomorrow morning.”

“Hi Eric,” Alice says.

“Hi Alice,” he replies,

“Sounds good,” I say.

“Well, have a good night then,” he says and hurries away.

“Wait Eric, why don’t you and your family joins us?” I ask.

“Logan!” Alice exclaims.

He turns around. “Um…no that’s fine. It’s Chicken cacciatore night. My favourite.”

“Well I hear Silvia is the best chicken cacciatore cook around,” Alice says.

“She sure is,” he replies, “Good night then,”

“Good night Eric,” Alice says.

“Yeah see you tomorrow morning,” I say.

Once he’s gone I shake my head at Alice.

“Did you have to be so rude?” I ask.

“Can you be more of a hypocrite?” she asks me as we walk towards the front door.

“Hey, I went to the shop and bought some ingredients for the pizza *I’m* making for *your* family,” I reply. “How is that being rude?”

“You hung up on me Logan!” she snaps. “Only half the family want pizza!”

“Then I’ll feed only half of your family!”I say.

“You’re being ridiculous,” she replies.

The door opens.

“Daddy!” Legacy rushes out with his girl cousins. He gives me a hug. “Look who’s here.”

“Hi…there,” I reply and they give me a hug.

“What’s in the bag?” one of them asks as we all walk into the house.

“Hey, Logan, James has got FIFA Soccer 13,” Falcon says. “And he says its way better that what you bought me.”

“Stay out of the bags,” I reprimand one of the girls.

“Why did you buy flour?” she asks.

“It’s for the pizza,” I reply.

“But I’m intolerant to that flour,” she says.

“Logan!” Falcon cries out.

“I’m right here,” I say as we walk down the stairs. Everyone is congregated in the dining room for some strange reason.

“I want FIFA Soccer 13!” He cries out.

“Hi all,” I mange to say to everyone before turning back to Falcon.

“Why don’t you help me in the kitchen?” I ask.

“If I do can you buy me that game?” he asks.

“Whatever you want son,” I say absentmindedly as I hurry into the kitchen,

“Logan!” Alice cries out.

“Um, Logan, just to let you know that Jasmine can only have gluten free flour and…” I interpret Susan.

“Then why don’t you go buy her something then,” I reply and start unpacking the bags.

“Need any help?” William asks as he walks in.

“Sure,” I reply when my mobile phone rings.

“Dad, we can’t eat pizza,” I hear Susan telling William as I answer my phone. It’s Hope.

“Why are you blaming Mum for how crappy your life is?” she asks.

I walk out of the kitchen and down into the longue room.

“Hope, I can’t talk to you now,” I say.

She bursts into tears and I walk onto the balcony. Stuart and Tim are now standing out there and I walk down the outside stairs.

“Hope, this is really between Mum and I,” I say.

“No, Logs, is between all of us,” she replies. “Don’t you know how crushed I was when I found out about your abuse?”

“Logan!”

I look up to see and angry Alice.

“What are you doing?” she asks.

“It’s Hope,” I say.

“Well can’t you talk to her once my family has gone?” she asks.

“She’s upset, honey,” I say.

“Then why isn’t she speaking to Dean?” she asks.

“Because everyone has found out about me snapping at Mum this morning,” I explain.

“She told the boys about your depression and anxiety without our permission!” she snaps.

“She’s their grandmother! She has every right!” Hope shouts in my ear.

“Look,” I say to Alice. “I won’t be long,”

“But Dad is making the pizza with the kids and Susan has sent Tim to buy some Thai and I don’t know what Carmen and ….”

“Alice, they are not my concern,” I interrupt.

She glares at me. “Of course not,” she replies and walks away.

I let out a sigh. “Hope, just drop this, o.k,” I say. “What Mum did was wrong.”

“And do you think you and Alice not telling the boys was right?” she asks.

“They’re kids!”I snap.

“They still had a right to know!” Hope snaps back.

“But they didn’t know what was going on!” I cry out.

“Falcon did,” Hope says. “Even told me that…”

“Enough!” I interrupt.

“Why because you know I’m right?” she asks.

“No because your nothing but a murderer!” I snap.

“What!” she exclaims.

“You murdered their innocence by telling them about my condition!’’ I explode. “How dare you! How dare…”

I feel a hand on my shaking shoulders and look around. It’s William. I hang up the phone and look away as the tears come.

“Where’s Alice?” I ask.

“Finishing off the pizza with the boys,” he says.

I wipe my tears away. “Why are you here?” I ask.

“Because I heard you, Logan,” he says.

I turn back to him. “Did everyone…”

He nods.

“Great,” I reply.

“I think you’ll find them very understanding,” he says.

“So they know that I’m on meds?” I ask.

“No,” he replies.

“Then why would they be understanding?” I ask.

“Because most people generally are,” he replies, “unfortunately you’ve just been hurt by the minority”

“Well the minority feel like the majority to me,” I say.

“I know, son,” he replies and I look away again.

“He hurt me, William,” I say and bow my head.

“It’s going to be alright,” he says as I sit on the stairs. He sits down too.

“How is it?” I ask. This time I don’t bother to wipe away my tears. I trust William.

“Because you have a wife that loves you, boys who adore you,” he replies.

“But they know about the depression and anxiety and probably all the other stuff,” I say.

“And have you felt them treat you any different?” he asks.

I shake my head.

“Your right,” he replies. “I know that Legacy gave you one of his big hugs when you got home and Falcon was his usual demanding self so it’s all good.”

“Buy Mum broke my trust,” I say.

“Your mum did what she thought was best,” he replies.

“For her,” I say.

“Do you really believe that?” he asks.

I don’t answer him.

“I may not have known your mother for as long as I have but from what I’ve observed underneath that tough exterior is a woman who loves her children and would do absolutely anything for them, like I would do absolutely anything for my girls,” he says.

“So are you saying that I should forgive her and move on?” I ask.

He nods.

“Life is too short to let things like this destroy relationships,” he says. “You need your family and they need you.”

“Even if they’re loud, overbearing and obnoxious?” I ask.

“Elsa was the same,” he says. “But there isn’t a day that I don’t wish she was with me.”

Tears fill his eyes.

“You have depression and anxiety,” he then continues. “Who cares if your boys know? Who cares if one day the whole world finds out! Does it matter?”

I shake my head.

“Then why don’t we wipe out tears away and have dinner?”

I nod and stand up.

“Can you help an old man out?” he asks.

He gives me his hand and I pull him up.

“Thanks for that,” he says.

“Anytime,” I reply and we walk up the stairs.

Chapter Twenty-Four

*The Greatest Hero in the World*

Then next morning I’m running down the hill with Eric.

“So I just learnt that…” I fart. “Great,” I then say. He just laughs.

“Do you need to go to the toilet?” he asks.

“No, it’s the nuts and green veggies, I think,” he replies.

“Are you sure?” he asks.

“Well I’m not entirely sure but my poo is green and nutty,” I say.

“Then why don’t you lay off the green veggies and nuts?” he asks.

“Hi Eric,” the two women we see every morning say.

“Ladies, I am happily married to the hottest woman in the world,” he replies. “Give it up already.”

They look at him in astonishment and jog away.

“What was that all about?” I ask.

He shrugs. “I just need to have more respect for Silvia, that’s all,” he says.

“So do me,” I reply. He looks at me. “I mean, for Alice.”

“There’s always something isn’t there?” he asks.

“There sure is,” I reply, “but what can you do?”

“Go with it,” he replies. “It can also be worse.”

“Yeah,” I say. “I just found out that my mate Randal is a recovering bulimic,”

“Is that even a term?” Eric asks.

“Well Randal uses it,” I say.

“Then it’s a term,” he replies.

I laugh. “And my other mate Cas has Bipolar,” I continue.

“Ouch,” Eric says.

“And my boss had a mental breakdown,” I add.

“They sound like good guys to get to know,” he says, “where do you know them from?”

“Work?” I reply.

“Wow, I wish my work mates were like that,” he says.

“How do you know they’re not?” I ask. “I mean, I had no idea my work mates had mental health illnesses.”

“Then how did you find out?” he asks.

“Well you met Cas the other night at yoga,” I replied.

“Oh the tall guy with the blond hair?” he asks.

“Yip,” I say.

“Right,” he replies, “Well what about the other two?”

“I had an episode at work yesterday and they opened up to me, then we all had breakfast at the Coffee Club,” I say.

“Well I had an episode yesterday at work and all I got were shocked expressions,” he replies.

“Then I’m afraid to say that your work mates are probably not mentally health challenged,” I say.

“Mentally health what?” he asks.

“Mentally healthy challenged,” I say.

“Hmmm, I don’t even know if that makes sense,” he replies.

“It doesn’t have to be when we use it,” I say.

He shakes his head and laughs. “You know I’d like to meet those guys,” he says. “Why don’t we all go out for something to eat sometime?”

“How about this weekend?” I ask.

“Isn’t that too short notice?” he asks.

“Why don’t I just ask them?”I suggest.

“Sure go ahead and then text me back,” he says.

“It’s a deal,” I reply as we run back up the hill. “By the way you know that old woman that I talked to the other day.”

“You mean the cougar with the purple hair?” he asks.

“She’s not a…” he just laughs. “Anyway, she has something to,”

“She does?” he asks. “What?”

“Dyth…something,” I say.

“Dysthymia?” he asks.

“That’s it,” I reply.

“It’s a mood disorder,” he explains.

“Oh right,” I say.

“Well did you want to invite her out as well?” he asks.

“Um…no,” I say. “Let’s just have a boy’s night out.”

“Sounds good,” he replies.

Back at home, after a quick shower, I’m sitting at the table in my Ralph Lauren jeans and Fred Perry polo shirt with my hair combed to the side with copious amounts of gel when Legacy looks at me gravely.

“Daddy?” he asks.

“More pink milk it is,” I reply and stand up.

“I like yellow milk now,” he says.

“O.k yellow milk…”

“What’s d…d…?”

“Finish off your pancakes, Legacy and then you can go brush your teeth,” Alice interrupts him.

“It’s called depression, doofus!” Falcon blurts out.

“I’m not a doofus!” Legacy cries out.

“Yesyouareyesyouareyesyou…”

“Squeeze Charlie,” Alice says.

“Idon’tneed…”

“Now Falcon!” I order him.

He looks at me in shock and then hurries to his bedroom.

“Falcon is right, it’s called depression,” I say. “I also have anxiety.”

He nods. “Grandma explained to me what they are I just don’t remember,” he replies.

“Does it matter?” Alice asks.

He looks at her. “I guess not,” he replies and goes back to eating his pancakes.

“Alice,” I say.

“What?” she asks.

“I really don’t mind explaining what they mean,” I say.

“But he’s too young,” she replies.

“But I want to know,” Legacy says, “because I think that Daddy is **the greatest hero in the world.”**

Tears fill Alice’s eyes and she hurries up stairs just as Falcon is hurrying back down stairs.

“Is Mummy sad?” Legacy asks.

“Mummy just has a hard time with it all,” I say.

“Just like I have a hard time with Legacy tripping over all the time and getting stuck on stuff like pink milk,” Falcon adds.

“I can’t help it,” he whines.

“He knows,” I say and give Falcon a stern look.

“I’m just saying,” he replies.

“Well I have a hard time with you squeezing Charlie,” Legacy says.

“At least I squeeze him at home,” he replies.

“Yeah, but at school you don’t bring him end up talking too fast for anyone to understands,” Legacy says.

“I do not!” he cries out.

“I do too,” Legacy replies.

“Boys!” I say. “Does it really matter?”

They look away.

“I just hate squeezing that yellow ball,” Falcon says. “I feel like such a baby.”

“I feel the same way when I fall over,” Legacy adds.

“Me too,” I reply.

“From the d word?” Legacy asks.

Falcon rolls his eyes.

“I have depression and anxiety,” I say.

“But what does that mean, Daddy?” Legacy asks.

“Do you remember in Iron Man 3 when Tony Stark keeps on breathing funny and acting funny?” I ask.

“You mean when he stops the car that time and jumps out,” Legacy asks

“Yip,” I say.

“Is that anxiety?” he asks.

“Yeah something like that,” I say. “You just feel sweaty and hot and…”

“Like you’re covered in spiders?” Legacy asks.

I smile. “Yeah,” I say.

He thinks about this for a moment. “Then what about d…”

“Depression doofus!” Falcon cries out.

“That’s enough!” I snap.

He smirks at me. “Chill out Logs,” he says.

“You know Falcon, I don’t like it when you call me that,” I reply, “because I’m your dad!”

“But Mike calls his dad by his first name,” he replies.

“I don’t care if Mike calls his dad by his first name,” I say. “I love you. I take care of you. I clothe you. I feed you. I shelter you. The least you can do is call me dad in return.”

He looks at me for a moment and then shakes his head. “Fine,” he says.

“Now depression,” I say to Legacy, “Is when you feel sad all of the time.”

“All of the time?” Legacy asks.

“Yip,” I say.

“But you have all of us Daddy,” he replies.

“That’s true,” I say.

“Then why do you feel sad all of the time,” he replies.

“I don’t have enough of a chemical called serotonin,” I say.

Legacy looks at me for a moment. “So it’s a chemical problem?” he asks.

I nod.

“Then you’re not sad because of us?” he asks.

My heart breaks.

“No, of course not,” I say. He looks away. “Come here,” I say and he hurries into my arms.

“You too Falcon,” I say.

“No way,” he replies. “I’m too old for…”

“Now!” I interrupt him.

“O.k,” he says and he’s in my arms too.

“I love you boys,” I say. “You and your mum mean the world to me.”

“You mean the world to me too Daddy,” Legacy says.

“Yeah…you’re alright,” Falcon adds.

I smile. “So are we cool?” I ask.

“Yip,” Legacy says.

“Falcon?” I ask.

He half smiles. “Yeah…Dad, we’re cool,” he says.

Phew.

“Good, now go brush your teeth,” I say

They hurry to the bathroom and I walk up the stairs and into the bedroom. I open the door.

“Are you still in here Alice?” I ask.

“Yip,” she replies. I walk in and close the door behind me as she walks out of the bathroom.

“I need to get the boys ready,” she says and goes to walk past me when I grab her hand.

“Dance with me?” I ask.

She wipes her tears away.

“But I need to get the boys ready for school,” she replies when I put on ‘The Way You Look Tonight’ by Frank Sinatra.

“Take my hand,” I say.

“Logan,” she replies.

‘Someday when I’m awfully low, when the world is cold, I will feel a glow just thinking of you and the way you look tonight.’

“Please dance with me,” I say.

She looks at me a while and then nods. So we slowly waltz in our bedroom. She’s tense at first and then slowly she eases into me and for that moment, nothing else matters.

Twenty-Four

*Sugar coating*

I get out of the car and stand there for a moment looking up at the building where I work.

“So how are you doing this morning?”

I turn to see Randal standing next to me. He’s wearing jeans with a white t-shirt and a black leather jacket.

“You look very 1950’s” I reply.

“What able the hair?” he asks.

“Again very 1950’s,” I say.

“Good because that’s the look my band is going for,” he replies.

“Well you nailed it,” I say.

“He nailed what?” Cas asks.

Cassium looks the opposite in every way. His blond hair is messy and falls into his eye and he’s in a pair of baggy pants with a printed t-shirt.

“I’m going with the 1950’s look for my band and Logs said I nailed it,” Randal replies.

“Well do I nail the surfy look?” he asks.

“Yeah,” we say together and he laughs.

“What’s so funny?” Garry asks. He’s in a tan jacket, a checked shirt and white pants with his brown hair combed to one side.

“Cas was asking us if he nailed the surfy look when he doesn’t even have to try,” Randal says.

Garry looks at Cas, “You’re right there,” he replies and looks back at the building. “Had a tough night,” he then says.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Randal asks.

“Just felt like crap and all the rest,” he says.

“Yeah, last night pretty much sucked for me as well,” Randal says.

“Did you relapse?” Cas asks.

“Close to it,” he says.

“What was the trigger?” Garry asks.

“Uncle Tom and his ignorance,” Randal replies and then looks at me. “By the way, you didn’t answer my question?”

“Sorry,” I say. “It’s hard to give up old habits.”

“Like deflection?” Randal asks.

“Well you did look very 1950s,” I say.

“And what look are you going with?” he asks.

“The preppy look, today,” I reply, “and tomorrow probably the what was on special look,”

“Man, your good,” Cas then says.

Randal gives him a confused look.

“Bro, he deflected you again,” Cas points out.

“Which mean he had a tough night too,” Garry says.

“Did you?” Randal asks.

“Not until I found out Alice’s family was around,” I admit.

“Ouch,” Randal replies.

“Hey, at least you have family around,” Garry replies.

“Yeah, but they annoy me,” I say.

“Life annoys me at the moment,” Garry says.

“You know you all should take up surfing,” Cas replies.

“I think I might just do that,” Garry says.

“Yeah, me too,” Randal says, “the girls at my support group aren’t my type.”

“Well there are some hot girl surfers,” Cas replies.

Randal lays a hand on his shoulder. “Then you better introduce me to some of them bro,” he says.

Cas laughs. “There you go!” he replies. “You’re already s surfer. Now we just need to get you a magic stick,”

“A magic what?” he asks.

“It’s a surfboard,” Petra replies as she walks up to us with Denise

“So are you boys ready for another whipping?” Denise asks

“Hmmm, not by you,” Randal says.

“Well I have whipped you boys for the last month!” Denise cries out and realizes what it sounds like as we laugh. “Nice,” she replies and hurries away.

“Don’t be late,” Petra replies. “Or the boss will get angry.”

She winks at Garry. He just shakes his head and she hurries away.

“Wait!” Cas then calls out to her and she turns back around, “How did you know what a magic stick is?”

“Did you think you’re the only one who surfs?” she asks.

“But why didn’t I know that?” he asks.

“Hmm, let me see,” she says, “because you get to work late usually, in the lunch break you’re looking at your surf app and after work you take off.”

He looks at her for a moment. “Right,” he replies and she smiles at him and then takes off.

“Who would of thought?” he asks.

“Yeah,” we all say.

“O.k, boys,” Garry then says, “work time,”

“What no coffee club today?” Randal asks.

“Nope, not today,” he says. “We just have to suck it up.”

“How about tomorrow?” Randal asks as the two of them walk away.

I stand there for a moment.

“Do you feel up to it?” Cas asks.

I nod and we walk towards the building. Then I remember what Eric asked me this morning.

“Hey, I almost forgot, what are everyone plans this weekend?” I ask.

“Well you’re all coming to my gig aren’t you?” I ask.

The others nod but I’m confused.

“Gig? I didn’t know you had another gig?” I ask, “When is it,”

“This Saturday night at 9, remember?” he asks. “I invited you and you said yes.”

“Well I probably wasn’t zoned out when you asked me but sure I’ll be there,” I reply. “Can we eat beforehand? My friend Eric wants to meet you all.”

“As long as it’s early,” Randal says.

“How about 5?” I ask.

“Sounds good,” he replies.

“Yeah?” I ask the others. They nod.

“We can eat at the mexican restaurant near the venue,” Randal says.

We all nod and they continue on their way. For some reason I stop again.

“Just shake it off,”

I look around. It’s Petra.

“I…I thought you were already up there,” I say.

“I had to dash out for a ciggie,” she replies, “and please spare me the lecture about how they’re bad for my health and blah blah blah because what I’ve been through in my life doesn’t compare with a few toxic.”

Wow! Double whammy, she surfs and she hasn’t had the best life. Then again has anyone? I mean, don’t get me wrong, some people have had a pretty charmed life but I’m starting to learn that many others haven’t. That makes me feel better about myself in a twisted kind of way.

“Look, Petra,” I then say. “I’m sorry about…”

“Don’t worry about it,” she replies and smiles up at me. “I know it wasn’t you.”

I smile back.

“So are you and that man bag of yours coming?” she asks.

“It’s actually called a sachet, you know,” I say.

“Whatever,” she replies as we walked into the crowded lobby.

That night, the kids are all downstairs on the trampoline and us adults are just finishing off a gluten free and dairy free cheesecake with chocolate and strawberries.

“This is amazing!” Alice says and takes another big bite.

“I’m glad you liked it,” Susan says.

“Like it? I love it!” Alice says. “You must give me the recipe.”

“Sure,” Susan replies. “Can have your lamb saag recipe?” she then asks. “It was delicious.”

“Of course, you can,” Alice says. “But there really is nothing to it.”

“Your sister is being modest,” I say. “She spent hours making it.”

“Really?” Susan asks.

“I…” Alice begins when I interrupt her.

“Yip, hours,” I say. “How good is she? If it was up to me I wouldn’t have bothered!”

“So how’s the teaching going, Tim?” William asks.

“Well I’ve got fifth grade and the boys are devils,” he replies.

“Like Falcon,” I say.

“Worse,” he replies.

“Impossible,” I say.

“Logan, Falcon isn’t that bad,” Alice replies.

“He’s not exactly an angel,” I point out. “I mean the other day he dacked some kid in front of these girls.”

“That’s nothing,” Tim says. “This boy told me to beep off last week.”

“To beep off?” I ask. “That’s all?”

“Tim’s censoring it, Logan,” Alice says.

“Oh right,” I reply, feeling embarrassed.

“That’s why I work with numbers and not with kids,” Stuart then says.

“Yeah and how’s that going for you?” Tim asks.

“It’s going…I’m so bored,” he replies and everyone laughs, except me.

“Oh honey you are a great accountant,” Carmen says.

“But it’s boring! Numbers are boring. There I said it,” he replies.

“I don’t get it,” I reply. “If you don’t like it then look for another job.”

“His dad owns the firm,” Carmen explains.

“So?” I ask.

“He’s the only son,” Susan adds.

“I’m still not getting it,” I reply.

“So any other chance of you girls moving back to Oz?” Alice asks.

“I love New York,” Carmen says.

“And I love Chicago,” Susan adds.

“But dad’s here,” Alice replies.

“I don’t mind moving out here,” Stuart says. “I can start fresh and…”

“Don’t be thinking about moving back on my account,” Dad says, “Apart from attempting suicide I’m doing great!”

They all look at him in astonishment.

“Um, I have depression and anxiety,” I say, “Tada!”

They all look at me except Alice who shakes her head.

“Maybe we should make the move,” Stuart says.

“Dad?” Carmen says.

“Did you just…did you just…”

“Just breathe Susan,” William says.

“When did you try to take your life?” Alice asks.

“Alice!” Susan cries out.

“Look my husband has depression and anxiety! I’m used to this stuff,” Alice says.

Susan glances at me.

“I’m not contagious,” I say.

“She knows,” Tim replies.

Susan looks back at Dad. “How could you be so selfish as to try and take your own life!” she cries out.

“Susan!” Both Alice and Carmen cry out.

“You girls can **sugar coat** it all you want,” she says, “but suicide is an act of pure selfishness.”

“Who was sugar coating anything?” Alice asks.

Susan just shakes her head.

“How are you doing now Dad?” Carmen asks.

“I’m doing great,” he replies, “and to answer your question, Alice just after your mother died. I wanted to join her.”

“And to hell with all of us,” Susan replies and stands up.

“Where are you going?” Alice asks.

“To a hotel,” she replies and pulls up Tim. “Come on, we’re going! James! Jasmine!”

“You don’t have to leave,” Alice says.

“I think I do,” Susan says. “James! Jasmine!”

“It’s o.k, Alice,” William says.

“No its not,” she replies and stands up.

“You leaving now is a act of selfishness,” she says.

“That’s it I’m going,” Susan replies and hurries up the stairs.

“What about the kids?” Tim asks.

“You get them!” she yells at him and then she’s out the front door. He looks at William.

“Sorry about her reaction,” he replies

“Don’t be,” William replies and Tim heads downstairs.

“Are you…are you suicidal now?” Carmen asks.

“No I’m not,” he replies. “I’m working through my grief with a Psychologist.”

“That’s news to me,” I say.

“What? You knew about Dad trying to take his life?” Alice asks.

Uh oh.

“He told me the other day,” I say.

“And you didn’t feel the need to tell me?” she asks angrily.

“I told him not to,” William says.

“Why?” Alice demands. “Why couldn’t you confide in us?”

“I needed time,” he says.

“You had time,” Alice replies.

“Look, it doesn’t matter,” he says. “I was in a bad place when I tried to take my life, but now I’m not.”

“Who are you seeing?” I then ask.

“Jules over at the medical centre that you go to,” he replies.

“Hey my boss sees him,” I ask.

“Well Jules is a great Psychologists,” he says when Tim returns without James and Jasmine.

“Sorry Will, they don’t want to come,” he says, looking embarrassed.

“I’ll drive them back later,” he replies.

“Thank you,” he says and hurries out.

“Are you on any meds?” I ask.

“I was just prescribed Zoloft,” he replies.

“Wow, how lucky are you,” I say. “There’s no time lapse with…” that’s when I feel the others looking at us. I turn to them. “I don’t mean he’s lucky, lucky,” I continue. “I just mean….”

“Anybody for more dessert?” Alice asks.

Chapter Twenty –five

*Don Draper*

The rest of the week got better. Alice forgave me for not telling her about William attempting suicide although he told me not to. Susan and William had a heart to heart. William and his girls went out to dinner while I was stuck with Tim and Stuart and you know what? They turned out to be alright to hang with. Don’t get me wrong, I can’t see myself Skyping them or anything but it was kind of nice to be around not mentally challenged people for a change. Oh yeah, Dad, Ferris, Hope and Aunty Dominic all tried to call me but I didn’t pick up for any of them. I guess I’ll have to face them all on Sunday. It’s going to be epic! Anyway this brings me to Friday. I arrive at work, am joined by Cas, Petra, Garry while Denise stays for about a minute but no Randal.

“Has anyone seen him?” I ask.

They shook their heads.

“I’ll give him a call,” I say. He doesn’t answer. “I’m going around to his house,” I then say.

“I come with you,” Cas replies.

“I’d love to boys,” Garry says, “but I have my boss coming for a visit so I’ll just cover for you two instead.”

“What about you Petra?” Cas asks.

“Can I just be an honorary member of the Scooby gang with mental health issues?” she asks.

“You have mental health issues?” Cas asks.

She rolls her eyes. “Look I’m not good with this sort of…stuff,” she replies and takes out a cigarette. “Just text me when you get a chance,”

“Fine,” I reply and hurry towards my car.

Twenty minutes later I’m parking outside Randal’s flat.

“His car is still there,” Cas points out.

“Maybe he’s just sick,” I reply and look at Randal’s silver Volkswagen Beetle.

“Then why didn’t he pick up?” he asks and gets out of the car.

“He’s sick, Cassium,” I say.

“Still why didn’t he just answer your call and say he was sick?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” I reply and we walk towards his flat. We stand outside his door anxiously.

“Well aren’t you going to knock?”I ask Cas.

“You’re the captain here,” he replies.

“Me?” I ask. “The most mentally health challenged of us?”I ask.

“Hey, I’m on lithium,” he replies.

“Fine,” I say and knock on the door.

“You call that a knock?” Cas asks.

I knock again.

“Seriously?” he asks and knocks loudly.

“Go away,” we hear Randal cry out.

“Its Logs and Cas,” I say.

“Don’t care,” he replies.

I look at Cas.

“What now?” I ask.

“I don’t know,” he says and I let out a sigh.

“Are you sick?” I then ask Randal.

“No…I mean yes…I mean kind of,” he replies, “Look can you please just go away!”

“I think he’s relapsed,” Cas says.

“Well how am I supposed to ask him that?” I ask.

“Have you thrown up?” Cas asks.

No answer.

“If you have just let us in and we can talk about it,” he says.

No answer.

“Look we’re not going to judge you,” Cas says. “We’re brothers, remember.”

Still no answer.

“Come on,” I say. “Let’s just give him some time to…”

The door opens. Randal looks terrible. His styled 1950’s hair is now a gelly brown mess. His jeans are hanging low. He has a stain on his white shirt.

“I threw up,” he confirms.

“Did you want to talk about it?” I ask.

He nods and let’s is in. His flat is a mess. There are old records scattered across the floor, dirty dishes piled in the kitchen sink and clothes everywhere.

“I think it was just the pressure of tomorrow night, you know,” he says and collapses into an arm chair while Cas and I move some junk mail off a couch before sinking into it. “I felt it coming on just before our first gig but I had the strength to overcome it. Last night I didn’t. It was all too much so I binged and then threw it all up.”

“How do you feel now?” I ask.

“Like I don’t want to live,” he replies and breaks down.

I look at Cas. He looks at me.

“I mean, I had a relapsed guys,” he says tearfully.

This is getting too much for me, but I have to say something, Cas looks like a deer in the headlight.

“Look Randal, yes you had a relapsed but you don’t need to beat yourself up over it,” I say.

“Then what do I do?” he asks.

“You start over,” I say, “increase your visits with your Shrink, lean on us a bit more, take time out to get healthy again.”

“But I shouldn’t have to,” he replies. “I mean, I have a gig tomorrow night. I can’t let down the rest of the band.”

“You can’t let down yourself, Randal,” I say.

He wipes his tears away and shakes his head. “It’s just not fair,” he replies. “Why can’t I just be a normal musician?” he asks.

“Musicians aren’t normal,” I reply. “I mean, look at Daniel Johns. When he was a teenager he had anorexia.”

Randal just looks at some pictures of the wall of some bands. I don’t recognize any of them.

“I just feel like crap,” he says. “I’ve been trying so hard and now it’s all ruined!”

“I can see you think that, but it’s not ruined, Randal, it’s really not,” I reply.

“Maybe not for you because you been doing well lately,” he says.

“Are you kidding me?” I ask. “I had an episode on Monday.”

“I had one on Saturday,” Cas adds.

Randal looks at us for a moment and then laughs. So do we.

“You know that makes me feel a lot better, is that wrong?” he asks.

“Not at all,” I reply.

“I agree,” Cas says.

We laugh again.

“I’m going to have a shower,” Randal then says.

“Good idea, since you stink,” Cas replies.

Randal laughs as he walks to his bathroom.

“I’m all good now if you guys want to leave,” he says.

“It’s fine,” I reply. “Garry is covering for us so I think we’re stay here for a little while longer and clean.”

“What?” Cas asks. “I don’t even…”

I elbow him. “I mean yeah, lets clean.”

“O.k,” Randal replies and closes the bathroom door.

“Good one,” Cas says. “I hate cleaning.”

“Well I’m not leaving him yet,” I reply. “He’s still weak.”

“I understand that feeling,” Cas says and I stand on.

“Come on, it’s cleaning time,” I reply. He just stands up and groans.

That night, we’re getting ready to go to what’s his name’s and Alina’s dinner party but I don’t feel like going. I’m still concerned about Randal. He had to call up his band mates and day he couldn’t make it. They were disappointed but he was more disappointed in himself. That’s the price we pay I guess for getting better. At times we have to put our dreams on hold.

“Are you alright?” Alice asks me as she puts on some earrings.

I sit on the bed. “I worried about Randal,” I say.

She puts on pair of green high heels. They match her dress.

“Is the one who has Bipolar?” she asks.

“No, that’s Cas,” I reply. “He’s the one recovering from Bulimia,”

“That’s right,” she says and looks at her hair in the mirror. She has out it swept up in a bun with a few tresses left out. She looks hot. I could…I shake my head. Randal!

“Maybe I should go around there,” I say and stand up. I’m wearing a suit with a tie that matches Alice’s dress and tons of gel, mouse and hairspray to kind of side part my hair. They didn’t help. My hair is still half sticking up.

“Go where?” Alice asks.

“To Randal’s place,” I say.

“Now?” she asks.

“Alice, he threw up today!” I exclaim.

“I know. You told me,” she replies.

“So don’t you think I should be with him and not at some superficial dinner party?” I ask.

“How do you that this dinner party will be superficial?” she asks.

“Because those attending have successful careers and are loaded,” I say.

“How do you know that?” she asks.

“They’re medical, sciency types!” I exclaim.

“Doesn’t mean they’re successful, loaded and superficial,” she says.

I look away.

“What’s going on?” she asks.

“Mummy, Daddy, Grandpa is here,”

Legacy comes flying in and falls over.

“I’m alright,” he says.

“You are such a klutz,” Falcon comments.

“Am not!” Legacy says.

“Am too,” Falcon replies.

“Why don’t we take this argument outside?” William suggests as he stands in the doorway.

“O.k,” they reply and he ushers them out.

“Thanks Dad,” Alice says.

“Anytime,” William replies and closes the door.

“What is this really about?” Alice asks and takes my hand in her’s.

“Look, I do want to see if Randal is alright…”

“Then send him a text,” she interrupts.

“But I also feel out of place among normal people,” I reply.

“How do you know that they’re normal?” she asks.

“I just know they will be,” I reply.

“That’s a massive judgment call to make,” she says. “I mean, you didn’t know about your other friends and about Dad.”

I stare at the carpet. “O.k, I guess I’m just anxious,” I reply.

“About what?” she asks.

“I haven’t been in a social situation for a while,” I say.

“Well you’ll be with me,” she says, “and I won’t leave your side.”

“Promise?” I ask as I take her in my arms.

“I promise,” she replies and we kiss.

The door bell then rings.

“That’ll be Eric and Silvia,” she says and looks in the mirror. “Can you get that?”

“You look hot,” I reply.

“Just get the door bell,” she replies and I hurry out of the room, but William is already opening the door with Falcon and Legacy beside him.

“You must be Eric and Silvia from next door,” William says.

“I see our reputation has preceded us,” Eric replies.

“Sure has,” William says and they laugh. “By the way, has anyone told you that you look like **Don Draper** from Mad Men?”

“Only your son in law,” Eric replies as I walk up beside William and the boys.

“I didn’t know you watch Mad Men?” William asks.

“Occasionally,” I reply when Alice walks up.

“Wow, you look pretty Mum,” Legacy says.

“But you smell like fly spray,” Falcon adds.

“Gee, thanks,” Alice replies.

“What did I say?” he asks.

“Come on boys let’s play the ZBox,” William says.

“It’s called an Xbox,” Falcon replies and rolls his eyes as they walk down the stairs.

“That dress is stunning,” Silvia then says.

“I love that yellow won you,” Alice says as they walk outside. I close the door.

“So I see your coordinating too,” Eric comments.

I nod “Just the tie, but look at you go,” I say gesturing to his tie and shirt.

“I’m wearing matching socks too,” he replies and lifts up his pants’ leg.

“Way to go,” I say as we walk down the streets. Silvia and Alice are just ahead chatting away. I’m glad they get along so well since Eric and I do, partly because we both have depression. It’s interesting that something that weakens us also strengthens us at the same time.

“So are you up for tonight?” Eric then asks.

“Are you?” I snap.

“Hey, chill,” he says.

“Sorry,” I reply. “It’s just aren’t you going to struggle with this as well?”

“I’ve had more practice,” he says. “But it will still affect me too.”

I look up at the stars.

“So how’s Randal,” he asks.

“That’s right! I was going to call him,” I reply. “Man I’m an idiot.”

I take out my phone just as we get to what’s his name and Alina’s place. There are already a fair few people walking towards the massive front entrance. Their house or mansion really looks inviting, surprising since what’s his name is a complete tool, must be Alina’s influence.

“Hey, Randal,” I say.

“Hey Logs,” he replies.

“So anymore bulimic episodes?” I ask.

A few couples look at me in shock.

“Just walk on, people, walk on,” Eric says.

“Logan!” Alice exclaims

“Where are you?” Randal asks.

“About to walk into a pit of vipers,” I say.

I see Alice look around in embarrassment.

“Well it sucks to be you,” he replies.

“Yeah, thanks,” I say, “and by the way you deflected my question.”

“Logan,” Alice cries out.

“No more bulimic episodes,” he replies, “Cas and Garry are here anyway, not that I’m wanting to stick my finger down my throat without them being here.”

“Are you sure about that?” I ask.

“No, but…I’ll try to resist the urge,” he replies.

“Fair enough,” I say.

“Logan!” Alice cries out.

“You should go,” he replies.

“Alright, well I’ll see you tomorrow night,” I say.

“Yip, see you then,” he says. “Oh, wait, Cas wants to know if he can bring Cindy,”

“Well, we’re we going?” I ask.

“Yeah, we’re we going guys?” Randal asks.

Eric taps me on the shoulder and I look around to see Alice and Silvia walking into the mansion.

“Look, Randal, I’ll call you tomorrow,” I say.

“O.k, then no problem, later,” he replies.

“Later,” I say and hang up.

“We better get in there Eric says and I no. However when we walk in, I look around at the crowd of people, turn around and hurry back out again. I can’t breathe! I take off my black shoes and socks as I hurry past the water fountain and leave them on the drive way. Ignoring the looks of those still coming I run up the hill and take off my jacket, it drops onto the footpath. Then I undo my green tie and it drops onto the footpath too. I un-tuck my shirt and find myself standing in front of my house.

“Phew, you’re not naked,”

I look around to see Eric standing there with my shoes, socks, jacket and tie in his hands

“Where’s Alice?” I ask as he gives me back my things.

“I told her to stay and enjoy herself,” he says.

“Because I can’t?” I ask as tears fill my eyes.

“I couldn’t either,” Eric says. “I just didn’t happen to make such a amazing exit.”

“I’d say,”

We both turn to see Alina hurrying up the hill in a flowery dress.

“I can’t stand these dinner parties that Jarvis throws,” she says and takes out the pins from her bun. Her hair falls around her shoulders. “That’s better,”

“So what now?” Eric asks as I’m putting back on my shoes.

“Well I’m starving,” Alina says.

“Max Brenner?” Eric asks.

“Why not,” Alina says.

I look down at my stomach. What the hell! Who cares! I’m haven’t thought about putting on weight in ages.

“Let’s go,” I say.

“We can take my car,” Eric says.

Chapter Twenty- Six

*Darkness is my Friend*

For the first time none of my family are watching soccer.

“Alice is on fire,” William says as he walks over from her game.

“So is Falcon,” I reply with my eyes on him.

“Daddy I’m bored,” Legacy whines.

William takes out some money. “How about you can and buy yourself something from the canteen,” he replies.

“Thanks Grandpas,” Legacy says and hurries away. I feel slightly annoyed at my father in law because now I have to watch both boys.

“I see none of your family here,” he comments.

I don’t reply.

“Is everything alright between you and them?” he asks.

I don’t reply.

“Logan, what’s wrong?” he asks.

I glare at him. “Look old man, just because you tried to kill yourself, doesn’t make you and me friends!”I snap.

He looks hurt and takes a step back.

“Why don’t I just see how Legacy’s doing,” he replies and hurries away.

Damn it! I don’t mean to take stuff out on him. He’s been one of my biggest supports lately. Its just…I pull out my mobile phone and call Hope.

“What do you want?” she replies.

“You do realize that both Alice and Falcon are playing today,” I point out.

“Look, the twins aren’t one hundred percent and I needed a break,” she replies.

“A break?”I ask.

“Yeah something that you will never understand given that you can get pregnant!” she snaps.

“Is this Mum still?” I ask.

“No, it’s about me being pregnant with twins, farting all the time, sweating and feeling itchy,” she says.

“And about what happened between me and Mum right?” I ask.

“You were rude to her, Logs,” she says.

“Then punish me, not Alice and Falcon,” I reply.

She hangs up.

Oh, no, she doesn’t get to hang up on me! I’m the older brother. I call her back.

“What?” she demands.

I hang up on her.

Now that’s better. My mobile phone rings. It’s Hope. I don’t answer it. It goes silent. There’s no way I’m going to dinner tomorrow. No way in hell! No way! I’m done with the lot of them!

After the games, William comes back to the house for lunch, but I completely zone out of the conversation. I feel hopeless again, drained, used and thrown aside.

“Logan,”

I look at Alice. That’s when I notice there are just us at the dining table.

“Hi,” I say.

“Hey there,” she replies and takes my hands in her own. “You need to take some time out.”

“Why?” I ask and pull away. “I’m fine, never been better, fantastic, over the moon,”

“Don’t lie to me,” she replies.

I look away.

“I know you’re hurting,” she says.

“I’m not…”

“Are we seriously back there again?” she interrupts.

I look back at her.

“I have too many people dependant on me,” I reply.

“And that’s not what you need at this time,” she replies.

“What?” I ask, “Suddenly I can’t have any friends?”

“No, I’m not saying that,” she replies.

“Then what are you saying?” I ask. “Come on. Be direct for a change.”

“What I’m saying is that you need to take care of yourself first before helping out your friends,” she points out.

“Well that’s selfish!” I exclaim.

“No, it’s about practicing some self care,” she replies.

“I don’t understand what that is,” I say.

“Self care is making sure you take care of you,” she explains.

“I am,” I reply.

“Yeah, but don’t forget, you helped out with Randal yesterday and look what happened last night,” she says.

“That wasn’t a result of helping out Randal,” I reply.

“Then can you honestly answer me and say if you’re stressed levels were low you would have still left the party?”She asks.

I stand up. “Look I don’t have time for this,” I say. “It was the right thing to help out Randal,” I reply.

“I’m not saying it wasn’t,” she says. “You just need to also take care of yourself and know when you needed to have a break.”

“What choice did I have?” I ask. “We had a party to go to,”

“But If you weren’t up to it you should have told me,” she replies.

“I did,” I say.

“When?” she asks.

“I said that I felt anxious and you said that you would stay by my side,” I reply.

“And I was until you felt the need to call up Randal after being with him that morning,” she says. “It was too much for you.”

“It didn’t feel like too much,” I reply.

She stands up. “Well it was because you couldn’t even stay at the party,” she says.

I look at her for a moment. “I still don’t think it’s connected,” I reply.

“Then you just think that Logan,” she says. “I’m going outside to see what the boys are up to and you have a session to get to.”

I look at my watch. “Great,” I reply.

One hour later, I’m sitting in my favourite chair in front of Star.

“So how have you been this week?” she asks.

Here we go again.

That afternoon, after a nap, I walk downstairs to find Alice preparing dinner.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Um, making lamb chops,” she replies.

“But I thought you were coming out to dinner with me and the others,” I say.

She stops seasoning the lamb chops and turns to me.

“Logan, I contacted Eric and said that we weren’t going out tonight,” she replies.

“You did what?” I ask.

“Please Logan, you need a break,” she replies.

“But it wasn’t your call to make!” I cry out.

“It was when you’re not thinking straight!” she snaps.

“I am thinking straight and I’m…” my mobile phone rings.

“Don’t get it, Logan,” she says.

“I can do what I want,” I reply. “You don’t control me! No one does!”

I pick up my mobile phone. It’s Dad.

“Hi Logan,” he says.

“Hi Dad,” I reply. “Is everything alright?”

“Is everything alright with you?” he asks.

“Why?”I ask as I walk onto the verandah.

“Well you sound upset,” he says.

“Probably because none of family was there today,” I point out.

He doesn’t reply.

“Well?” I ask.

“I tried to come but I didn’t want to look like I was taking sides,” he replies.

“Well by not coming you did, Dad,” I point out.

He doesn’t reply.

I don’t say anything.

“Hi Daddy!” Legacy calls up from the trampoline. He’s jumping with Falcon.

“Hi boys,” I reply.

“Look your Mum doesn’t know that I’m calling,” Dad then says.

“And why are you calling?” I ask.

“To see if you’re still coming over tomorrow,” he says.

“You’re kidding right?” I ask.

“Um, no I’m not,” he says.

“Unbelievable,” I snap. “Why would I come over tomorrow?”

“Come inside Logan,” Alice says.

I ignore her.

“Because I know your mum wants you there,” he says.

“She hasn’t said that to me,” I reply.

“You know your mum is a proud woman,” he says.

“Well she needs to get over her pride and tell me herself,” I reply.

“Logan, be fair,” he says.

“Be fair?” I explode. “I’m going through hell here and you say to me….” tears fill my eyes when Alice takes the phone away.

“Hi Morris, Its Alice,” she says.

I don’t hear the rest of what she says. I’m over it and walk inside in a daze. I feel disconnected. I feel like I’m not really here. I feel like…

“Logan, why don’t you watch a DVD,” Alice says.

I shake my head.

“Well how about you read a book?”

I shake my head.

“Then why don’t you play with the boys outside?”

“The boys?” I ask. “You’re right! The boys! I’m suck!”

I spend the rest of the afternoon with them, but I’m really not there. My heart and soul are trapped in the darkness of my mind. Only my hallow corpse remains.

“Dinner,” Alice then calls out.

“Yay!” the boys say and run upstairs. I follow.

“Wash your hands first,” Alice tells them once we get inside.

“I’m having a shower,” I reply.

“But I just made dinner,” she points out.

“I’m going out with the others,” I say and run up the stairs.

“I don’t think…”

Half an hour later, I hear the door knock.

“Logan, Eric and Silvia are here,” Alice calls out.

I look in the mirror again. After much hard work, my hair is finally side parted! I nod in satisfaction and then hurry out of the bedroom and down the hallway.

“Here he is,” Eric says and smiles.

“Hey guys,” I reply.

“Hi,” Silvia says and then glances at Alice. “I guess it’s just me and the boys tonight,” she

“Cindy will be there too,” I reply.

“Oh that’s right,” she says, but she doesn’t look happy about it. Maybe it’s because Cindy is a truck driver and Silvia thinks she won’t have anything in common with her because she’s a stay at home mum. Well if that’s the case she better get over that.

“I’ll see later on tonight,” I say to Alice and give her a kiss.

“Be careful,” she tells me.

I just hurry out towards Eric’s car and let myself in.

“Are you hungry?” Eric asks as he and Silvia hop in.

I don’t answer.

“Logan,” Eric says.

“What?”I snap.

He looks at Silvia and then back at me.

“Nothing,” he says and drives away from the house.

When we get to the Mexican restaurant across from the beach I feel like crap. No, worse than crap. I feel out of control. We sit at a big round table; Eric, Silvia, Randal, Garry, Cas, Cindy and me.

“You’re right, she does look like January Jones,” Randal says to Cas.

“Did he really say that about me?” Cindy asks and flicks back her blond hair like a superficial space cadet.

“He sure did,” Randal says and gives her a wide grin. Is he actually flirting with her?

“Well do you know who I think my Cas looks like?” she asks in her sickly sweet voice.

“The Joker?” I blurt out.

Everyone looks at me in astonishment.

“Um, I was going to say Ryan Gosling,” she replies.

I don’t say anything. I feel really annoyed.

“So are we alright to order now?” the waitress asks.

“Is there anything low in fat from our friend here?” I ask and point to Randal.

“Oh, I’m fine, Logs,” he says.

“Are you sure we won’t find you running off to the bathroom?” I ask.

“Logan, that’s enough!” Eric snaps at me.

I glare at him and stand up.

“And you call this five star?”I ask the group and hurry out of the restaurant. What is wrong with me? These are my friends? Why am I insulting there? Why? I don’t care why. I’m over it. I feel stretched and done. I hurry across the road to the beach. I kick off my shoes. The sand is cold underneath my feet as I walk down towards the crashing waves. Its dark but I don’t care. The **darkness is my friend** now. It’s my only friend now. I barely feel the salt water crash over my feet as I look up into the night sky. How could I have ever turned my back on the darkness? It’s the only true friend I have ever had. It never meant me any harm. It was only trying to protect me. It really was. I’m knee length in water now but I don’t care. I just want this all to end.

“’Logan,”

I stop and look around. It’s my friends standing there. Eric called my name and is in the water with me.

“Isn’t it too cold for a swim?” he asks.

I don’t answer him.

“You know if you wanted me to teach you surfing you could have just asked,” Cas says and walks into the water too.

“I can buy us some surfboards,” Garry says and walks in too.

“And I’ll buy us breakfast to eat after,” Randal replies.

Silvia and Cindy are the only ones on the beach now.

“Come on Logan, Alice and the boys are waiting for you,” Silvia says.

Tears fill my eyes.

“Is she angry with me?”I ask.

“No, she just wants you to come home,” she says.

I turn around and stare at the darkness. It’s so alluring, so seductive.

“Logan,”

Eric grabs my arm. His touch forces me back to reality.

“I’m tired,” I say and bow my head and cry.

“I know,” he replies and helps me back to the beach with the others.

Chapter Twenty Seven

**Tools**

I don’t go to the family dinner tomorrow. Dad calls, but Alice’s answers it. She doesn’t tell me what he says. I don’t ask. I’m in a stupor, trapped in my own world of pain and too tired to escape. Monday comes and goes and I force myself to interact with the boys for their sake, but it tires me out quickly. William takes the boys Tuesday and Wednesday and then Mum calls Wednesday night, but again, I don’t answer it. Alice does and she doesn’t tell me what they talked about. I don’t care. Jake calls on the Thursday so does Eric and the rest of the guys, but I don’t have any energy for human connection. I just have enough for my own family and that’s all. On the Friday morning I’m staring up at the ceiling when Alice walks in and sits on the bed.

“I made an appointment for you to see Doctor Young,” she replies.

I look at her.

“But he isn’t my doctor,” I say.

“Doctor Miles is away until next month,” she replies.

“Well that’s just rude of him,” I say.

“Logan, I’m going to drive you this time,” she replies.

“Don’t you have other things to do,” I point out.

She stands up. “I’ m driving you” she says. “We leave in half an hour.”

I don’t answer her.

Half an hour later, I’m in the car dressed from head to toe in black.

“Really?” Alice asks me

“Really what?” I ask.

“You look like you’re going to a funeral,” she replies.

“Maybe I am,” I say.

“Isn’t that from Walk the Line?” she asks.

“Maybe it is,” I reply.

She rolls her eyes and we don’t speak again until we get to the medical centre.

“Do you want me to…?”

I hop out and walk towards my second home. The same receptionists are at the desk.

“I…I…”

“Just take a deep breath dear,” the annoying grandmotherly type says.

“I’m so sick of everyone telling me that!” I snap.

“Logan,” a tall doctor with bushy eyebrows calls out.

I raise my hand and he looks me up and down.

“This way,” he replies and walks into his office. I walk in after him.

“So what brings you here?” he asks.

“D…don’t you have it all on record?”I ask.

I don’t like this doctor with the bushy eyebrows. I don’t feel safe. He turns around and looks at his computer.

“Says here that you’re on 20 mg of Lexapro,” he replies.

I nod and he turns around.

“What’s a young lad like you doing on an anti-depressant?” he asks.

Huh?

“I…”

“Why are you depressed?” he asks.

“I’ve been through a…hard time,” I reply.

“Well so have I,” he says. “And so has everyone else!”

My heart is beating too quickly. I hate this guy!

“I’ve…I’ve been sexually abuse and stuffed,” I say.

“When?” he demands.

“When I was a child,” I reply.

He shakes his head. “Well, you should leave the past in the past and….”

I zone out. I have to. I can’t believe this tool is saying these things to me! How dare he! How dare he! Doesn’t he understand the cruel nature of sexual abuse? Doesn’t he know it becomes a fixated part of you?

“….o.k?”

I nod.

“Now what do you want from me?” he demands.

To drop dead.

“I need more drugs,” I reply.

“What?” he asks.

“I’m…I’m not doing so well and need a higher thing of Lexapro,” I reply.

“A higher dosage?” he asks.

I nod.

“What for?” he demands.

“Because I am not coping again,” I reply.

He looks at me for a moment.

“You know a higher dosage may not…”

“Just give me the damn higher whatever so I can go home and crawl into a ball,” I snap.

He looks at me for a while and then finally prints out a prescription. My mobile phone then rings. I pick it up. It’s Alice.

“I’m waiting in the…”

I hang up and snatch the prescription from the tool.

“You’re welcome,” he grumbles out.

I ignore him and hurry the hell out of there. The pharmacy is packed, but I push my way to the counter.

“I need this,” I say to the pharmacist and then hurry away from the counter and pick up some containers of stuff. I don’t know what they are as I put them on the counter.

“I need these too,” I blurt out.

“O.k,” the same pharmacist says as I tap my foot on the floor. What seems like hours later I have my drugs and other stuff in a bag and I’m hurrying towards the car. Alice looks worried as I jump in.

“What do you have there?” she asks.

I shrug as she opens the bag.

“O.k so you’re now n 30 mg of Lexapro,” she says. “Well that’s good.”

Yeah, it means I’m a bigger failure.

“What else do you have here,” she says. “Primrose oil, liver detox tablets, Elevit, calcium tablets and healthy care royal jelly.”

She puts them all in the bag and gets out of the car.

“Stay here,” she says.

I just close my eyes and wish I was dead. You know everyone thinks is so hard to kill yourself. It’s not. Death is seductive. It’s not ugly and cruel, malicious and offensive. It’s alluring, powerful and has the ability to infiltrate your entire being, like it was infiltrating my entire being, whispering sweet promises to me. Do I believe him?

Night comes and I’m in bed by 8pm. Then the morning tortures me awake and Alice is staring down at me anxiously.

“I want you to stay at home today,” she says.

“I have a session with the Shrink,” I reply and yawn.

“That’s not until 2,” she says.

I nod, lie back down and fall into soothing darkness.

“Logan,”

I open my eyes.

“Its 1o’clock,”

“Not going,” I reply and close my eyes again.

“Please Logan, I almost lost you,” she replies.

I open my eyes. She’s crying, but I can’t feel her pain. I’m too lost in my own. It’s taken over my whole existence. Why didn’t I ask for Zoloft? I have to wait another month for this higher dosage to kick it don’t I? Or don’t I have to wait longer because Lexapro is already in my system?

“Logan,” Alice says.

“What?” I snap.

“You need to hop in the shower,” she replies.

“Why?” I ask

“You’re going to see Star in less than an hour,” she replies.

“I don’t want to,” I say.

“Please do this for me and the boys,” she pleads, the tears still there.

“Everything I do is for you and the boys,” I say. “Why the hell do you think I’ve been functioning this week?”

“You call this functioning?” she demands.

“The only thing I’m not doing is going to work,” I point out.

“You’ve barely spoken to me and the boys all week!” she snaps.

I close my eyes. “I can’t deal…”

“Open your eyes damn it!” she yells out.

No. I can’t.

“Logan, now!” she shouts.

I open them.

“Fine!”I snap.

She shakes her head. “Get out of bed and get in that damn shower!” she orders me.

“Or else what?” I ask. “What are you going to do?”

“Leave,” she replies.

My heart skips a beat and I look away.

“You…you wouldn’t do that,” I say.

“I would to protect the boys and….myself,” she replies.

I look back at her. There are tears in my own eyes now. “But I wouldn’t hurt you and the boys,” I say.

She sits down beside me. “You did, Logan, can’t you see that?” she asks.,

“How? When?” I ask.

“When you walked into the ocean,” she points out.

“But I wasn’t going to kill myself,” I say. “I just needed to feel that I was.”

She sits back up. “You’re not making sense,” she replies.

“To you I’m not,” I say. “To myself I am. I just can’t explain it in a way that you can understand.”

She looks at me a moment. “So you weren’t going to drown yourself?”She asks.

“I was mentally but not physically,” I say.

“Logan!”She snaps.

“No I wasn’t, Alice,” I reply. “I was flirting with the idea. I was going to consummate it.”

“O.k,” she says.

“Fine,” I reply.

“Now, can you please hop in the shower,” she says. “I’m driving you to see Star.”

I get up. “But don’t you have work?” I ask.

“I’m taking some leave to be with you,” she says.

“Can we afford that?” I ask.

“Dad‘s helping out,” she replies.

“Great!” I snap.

“Hey, I thought you were getting along better with Dad,” she says.

“I was,” I reply. “I mean I am. It’s just…hard to accept another man’s help.”

“Come here,” she tells me.

I walk towards her and she gives me a hug and a kiss. “You are a good father and husband,” she replies.

I don’t answer her because I don’t agree.

An hour later, I’m sitting across from Star.

“Bad week hey?” she asks.

I pull my legs under me and hold my sachet tight.

“Would you like to talk about it?” she asks.

Tears fill my eyes, but I don’t want to cry. What’s the point? Do you think there is a point?

“Doctor Young told me you’re on 30 mg now,” she replies.

I nod.

“Doctor Young also said that you need to let go of what happened in the past,” she says.

“Well you and Doctor Young are **tools**!” I snap and walk out.

Chapter Twenty Eight

**Ahhhhhh**

Friday night, Mum and Dad pick up the boys. I don’t answer the door of course. Alice does. I don’t hear their conversation. I’m too out of it. Saturday I stay at home alone. I hear from Alice that the whole family was watching her and Falcon play today. Even Lisa and Dean were there and they’re usually working. On Sunday, Ferris picks up the boys for family dinner. They ended up staying the night at Ferris’s as well. He brought them back Monday afternoon. Again he had a conversation with Alice but I was too out of it. Tuesday came and went. So did Wednesday. Alice kept the boys busy, but I knew they were hurting having to deal with an absent father. On Thursday morning Alice walks in.

“Are you able to talk to Jake?” she asks.

I sit up. “Why?” I ask.

“He’s on Skype,” she says.

“Have any of the others called?” I ask.

She nods. “Eric, Cas, Randal, Garry, Petra, Dad, Hope, Ferris, both your Mum and Dad,” she replies.

Tears fill my eyes.

“You’re loved, Logan,” she says and sits beside me, “Especially by me.”

I just cry.

A few minutes I’m looking at Jake. He looks like a pin up boy in some band while I know I look like crap.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he asks.

I shake my head.

“Do you want me to just talk?” he asks.

I shrug my shoulders.

“Come on Logs, I know you’re going through hell, but you have to give me something,” he says. Why do I have to give you something? Why can’t I just lie here in a stupor forever? I don’t want to engage. I don’t want to connect. I don’t…wait. That’s my problem. I need to reconnect. I need to reengage. The worst of its past now. I need to get out of this bedroom and start living again. For my family of course, but for me because I deserve it, right?

“You…you talk,” I say.

Baby steps first.

“O.k, well, I’ve decided to leave my profession as a Psychologist,” he says.

“Wow! I didn’t see that coming!” I exclaim.

So much for baby steps.

“Nor did I,” he replies, “but I’m still struggling with my stuff and anyway, I sucked.”

“You helped me,” I say.

“Um, we helped each other,” he replies.

“So what are you going to do now?” I ask.

“Stay at home with Moana while Talia works full time,” he tells me.

“Is she going back into physiotherapy?” I ask.

“Yip,” he replies, “a cousin of her’s…well, I don’t know if it’s her actual cousin who someone she just calls her cousin,” he shakes his head. “It gets confusing here. I mean everyone here is aunty and uncle and bro and cousin so I don’t really know who is actually related and who isn’t. Anyway a cousin of Talia has a phsyio business and she said Talia can work for her. ”

“That’s great,” I say.

“Yeah, it is,” he replies.

We’re both quiet for a moment.

“So how are things between you and Talia anyway?” I ask.

“A lot better,” he replies. “I mean I’m still having nightmares and all the rest of it, but now that I’m getting help, our marriage is growing stronger every day. I love her. She is my foundation.”

“Yeah, so is Alice,” I say.

“How lucky are we?” he asks.

“Yip,” I reply and for some reason we burst out laughing. “I wish you guys could move back here,” I then say.

“Me too, but Talia is happier here,” he replies. “She has heaps of family and they’re always around, eating us out of house and home!”

“What about you Jake?” I ask.

“Well Mum and Dad are flying in next week,” he replies. “And I’ll see Kelly and Owen and the kids for Christmas.”

“And are you happy with that?” I ask.

“Hey, Lia is happy being in the land of the long white cloud so I am happy,” he says.

“But Jake…”

“You of all people know the hell I put her through when I was there,” he interrupts.

“I know, Jake, I know,” I reply and we both grow quiet.

“I’ve made friends with some other guys who have depression and stuff,” I then say.

“Oh…o.k, but how did that come about?” he asks.

“Well you know how I was I guess unofficially diagnosed with depression and anxiety,” I reply.

“Wait, you were?” he asks.

“Didn’t I tell you?” I ask.

“I can’t remember,” he says.

“Same,” I reply and we laugh.

“Well, um, I’ve been unofficially diagnosed with depression and anxiety and put on Lexapro,” I say.

“When do you get officially diagnosed?” he asks.

“Next month,” I reply, “but my doctor is pretty certain. That’s why he put me on the anti-depressants.”

“Are you seeing a Shrink?” he asks.

“Yip,” I reply.

“How’s that going?” he asks.

“You would have been better,” I say.

“You’re just biased because we’re brothers,” he replies. “Speaking of brothers how is Ferris and the rest of your crazy family?” he asks.

“Still crazy,” I reply, “but I haven’t seen much of them lately. I haven’t seen much of anyone lately.”

“You will soon,” he says.

“Yeah I know,” I reply. “It just hurts me because of the boys.”

“I know,” he says.

“They don’t deserve this,” I reply.

“Nor do you,” he points out.

“Yeah, but I’m used to it,” I say.

“You shouldn’t be used to it,” he replies.

“It doesn’t matter about me!” I snap. “I don’t care! You can throw into a gutter. I don’t care! I am nothing! I am putrid, garbage, worthless and…”

“Logan, that’s enough,” he interrupts.

I disconnect from Skype and close my eyes. How dare he tell me that’s enough! It’s not enough! It can never be enough! I’m fat! I’m ugly! I’m weird! I don’t fit in! I deserve to hurt! I’m hurting my beautiful innocent boys so I deserve to be destroyed! I do! AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!

Chapter Twenty-Nine.

*Jelly*

“I hate feeling this way,” I say.

Star looks at me sadly.

“I just want to be normal,” I say, “Is that so hard when you don’t feel normal like everyone else.”

“You know Logan, that term normal is self degrading,” she replies.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Well, struggling with life isn’t abnormal,” she says. “Not struggling with life is abnormal.”

“So what are you saying/” I ask.

“That you’re normal,” she replies.

“And your full of it,” I say.

“No I’m not,” she replies. “You are,”

“I am?” I ask. “How?”

“You’re playing right into that vicious stereotype that has been drummed into society’s head since the dawn of time,” she says.

“And what is that?” I ask.

“That men are stoic and invulnerable,” she tells me.

I sit there for a moment. She’s right! Even though it’s hard for me to admit, deep down in my subconscious I feel that I must be stoic and invulnerable and that if I m anything else I failed. In what? Being a man. That’s the stereotype right? We men can’t struggle. We must just get over it or bury it down or ignore it or be in denial or turn to alcohol and drugs, you know hide it under an addiction or by working long hours even though you don’t need to. We can’t express our emotions. We can’t cry. If we do we have to man up and what about eating disorders? Men don’t gave those. Rape? Impossible if a boy is underage he’s just lucky! If he’s of age then he’s lucky as well. How messed up are we? That’s why more men commit suicide than women. Is it all changing? Yeah, there’s more awareness around. I know that the NRL are working with the Black Dog Institute and AFL are working with Beyond Blue so I guess the message is getting out there, but still there is…

“Logan,”

“Hi,” I say.

“Hey,” she replies. “Where did you just before?”

“Runaway thoughts,” I explain.

“Well can you please reign in those runaway thoughts so we can work out some strategies,” she says.

I nod. Yay, strategies…just another day in the life of someone mentally health challenged.

That night, I make a better effort to engage in the dinner conversation.

“Why can’t I have **jelly** with my hamburger?” Legacy is asking Alice.

“Because you eat jelly separately,” she replies.

“But I like jelly with hamburgers,” he whines.

“Since when?”I ask.

He looks at me in shock. So does Falcon and Alice.

“I…” he swallows. “Since, yesterday,” he says.

I smile. “Well I would like some jelly too with my hamburger,” I reply.

He smiles and then jumps off his chair and throw his arms around me.

“I love you too,” I say.

He cries for a while and then he looks up at me.

“So what flavour jelly do you think we should have?” I ask.

He wipes his tears away. “How about green jelly?” he asks.

“Sounds good to me,” I reply, “do you want some Falcon?”

He doesn’t say anything at first. Then I realize he’s been crying too.

“Oh, my son,” I reply, “Come…”

He wipes his tears away and smiles. “You guys are freaks,” he then says.

“So I take it that’s a no?” I ask.

“Yip weird,” he replies and I glance at Alice.

“You do realize it takes about four hours for jelly to set, right?” she asks.

“Then I guess we’ll have it as a late night snack,” I reply.

Alice just shakes her head and walks into the kitchen.

“Are you sure you don’t want any?” I ask Falcon.

He nods.

“O.k, then,” I say and tuck into my hamburger.

After dinner, Alice and Legacy clean up giving me an opportunity to have a chat to Falcon. His door is close so I knock, hopefully that he lets me in. I know that he played it cool at dinner, but he’s hurting.

“What?” he calls out.

“Can I come in?” I ask.

He doesn’t reply. I wait. My heart is beating loudly. I can hear it in my ears. Oh please forgive me and let me in!

The door opens.

Yes!

“What do you want?” he demands with his DS in his hands.

“To talk to you,” I say.

“But I’m busy,” he replies.

“Look, it won’t take too long,” I reply.

“How long will it take?” he asks.

“Five minutes max,” I reply.

“Two minutes max plus another game and you have a deal,” he says.

“How about three minutes max and I won’t tell Mum you’ve been playing on your DS instead of doing your homework,” I reply.

He looks at me for a moment. “Fine,” he says and I walk in. It’s been awhile since I’ve been in his room. It’s a mess. There are clothes, games, balls and other stuff everyone as I sit on his unmade bed and look at a picture of one of those famous soccer players. He sits at his desk.

“Who is that again?” I ask, pointing to the picture.

“Cristiano Ronaldo,” he replies.

“That’s right,” I say, even though I had no idea who it was. “So”

“So what?” he asks.

“How have you been?” I ask.

“Really Dad?” he asks.

I look away. “Falcon, I’m trying o.k,” I say.

“Well try harder because you’ve sucked as a dad lately,” he replies.

“I know, but I haven’t been feeling the best and…”

“Dad, I know that you’re got depression and anxiety,” he says.

“O.k,” I reply.

“I thought you’ve got some medication to help you be normal?” he asks.

“I needed some more,” I say.

“Until you lose it again?” he asks.

I look back at him. “Falcon, I don’t mean to be this way,” I say. He looks at his DS. “I can’t help it. It’s a chemical imbalance.”

“You’re three minutes are up,” he replies and plays his DS again.

He’s breaking my heart as I stand up. I look at him. Maybe Ferris can do a better job at raising hm. I mean, Falcon is a sports agent and mad about soccer. He’s also mentally healthy as far as I’m aware. Maybe I should…no! He’s my son! Sure I have no idea about soccer but I want to learn. I want to be close to him. I pick up his soccer ball.

“Do you want to go play?” I ask.

He looks up at him. “Are you serious?” he asks.

I nod.

“But you can’t play,” he replies.

“Then can you teach me?” I ask.

“No way,” he replies and goes back to his game.

“Please son,” I say.

He ignores me. No! I’ve lost him for good. I’ve ruined his life. I put the ball down and turn around. Then I stop and turn back around.

“I love you Falcon,” I say.

He doesn’t look up.

“I know I’m not a soccer star like Uncle Ferris and I know I’m not shredded like Mike’s dad but I love you,” I say.

He still doesn’t look up. Broken hearted I reach out and open his door

“Dad,”

I turn around. He has the ball in his hands.

“I guess I can show you some basic drills,” he says.

Late at night, after we had our jelly snack, including Falcon, the boys are fast asleep and Alice and I are wrapped around each other.

“I’m proud of you,” she says and gives me a kiss.

“What for?” I ask.

“For reconnecting tonight,” she says.

“It was hard and I’m tired but I don’t want to go there again,” I reply.

“Go where” she asks.

“Into the darkness,” I say.

“Why would you?” she asks.

“Because it’s easy too,” I reply.

She holds me tight.

“You know I want to actually celebrate my birthday this way,” I say.

She smiles at me. “How?”

I think about it for a moment. “I want carnival theme with fairy floss and a jumping castle,” I say.

She laughs. “Are you sure are friends won’t just send their kids instead?” she asks.

“Those of our friends who will understand will come with their kids,” I reply.

“O.k, then,” she says and gives me another kiss.

Chapter Thirty

*Mi Amor*

Saturday I manage to watch a game…for half an hour at least. I don’t really say much to my family. Just a greeting and a comment about the weather. That’s all I can do really. Then in the afternoon , I hear a knock at the door and Eric’s voice. I sit up on the bed and put my book down. Yip, I’ve been reading lately. I’ve read *The Fault in our Stars*, *The Perks of being a Wallflower*, and now I’m hooked on *The Silver linings Playbook*, I’ve already got another book lines up, *A Long Way Down* by Nick Hornby.

“Logs the guys want to take you out,” Alice says as she hurries in.

“We won’t take no for an answer,” Eric calls out.

I get out of bed.

“Um…”

“Can you handle this?” Alice asks anxiously.

“What choice do I have?” I ask.

“Well you can always tell them no,” she points out.

“Yeah, but I’ve hardly left the house in weeks,” I say.

She looks at me for a moment.

“If you think you can handle it, then go for it,” she says.

I pull off my pajama top.

“Just be careful ***mi amor***,” she replies.

“Huh?” I ask.

“Its Spanish for my love,” she says.

“Right,” I reply and shake my head.

The next day, after ice-skating for three hours and falling over for three hours, my body hurts all over.

“You’ll get better at it,” Alice says as we breakfast together.

“Where are the boys?” I ask.

“Falcon is playing soccer with Ferris , Dani, your Dad, Dean, and Aunt Dominic,” she says, “and Legacy is a part of the cheer squad with the rest of the family.”

“Why wasn’t I invited?”I ask.

“Because I said that you were all mine this morning,” she replies. “They can have you tonight.”

“Is that right?”I ask and we kiss.

But I don’t make it to the family dinner. I’m too tired again. Instead I crawl into bed with a hot chocolate with pink and white marshmallows and read my book. Alice comes in a few hours later with the boys.

“Hey there,” I say and put down *The Silver Linings Playbook*. I’m on the last page.

“The boys wanted to say goodnight,” Alice says.

“Of course,” I reply and they both hug me, yes even Falcon does.

“I love you Daddy,” Legacy says.

“I love you too,” I say and then he’s out the door.

“You know you’re a better dad than Mike’s Dad,” Falcon says.

“Thanks,” I reply and he’s off to.

Once Alice sorted out the boys, she comes back in and lies down beside me.

“So how was my crazy family?”I ask.

“Pretty subdued actually,” she says.

“What do you mean by that?” I ask and look at my book; I’m a paragraph away from finishing the book and getting on to my next one.

“Well, just that, they weren’t overbearing as they usually are,” she replies.

“That’s a first,” I say.

She shakes her head at me, “They are concerned about you,” she replies.

I look away from the book. “I know and I will try to get the next week’s dinner,” I say.

She gives me a kiss. “They would rather you just get better,” she replies.

“I just nod as Alice sits up.

“So Dad was there tonight,” she says.

“Really?” I ask.

“Yip,” she replies.

“Why” I ask. “He’s never been invited before.”

“That’s because he’s never had a reason to be invited,” she says.

“And he does now?” I ask.

She nods. “He’s been dating Aunty Dominic!” she exclaims.

I sit up. “No!” I cry out.

“Yes,” she replies.

“No way,” I say.

“It’s true Logs because they were at dinner as a couple,” she replies.

I look at her for a moment. She’ seems upset.

“Are you alright with it?” I ask.

“I guess,” she replies. “I mean, Dad’s happy and that’s the main thing.”

I take her hands in my own. “It’s not the main thing,” I reply.

“I’ll get use to it,” she says. “I just need time.”

I give her a hug. “Your mother was a good woman,” I reply.

“So is Aunty Dominic, apart from her overbearing ways and the fact she still thinks you have an eating disorder and that I can’t cool to save myself,” she says.

“Then why don’t we invite her along with the rest of the family over here and show them what a great cool you really are?” I ask.

She looks at me. “Are you sure you can handle everyone around here?” she asks.

“I’ll tell them to leave if I get over it,” I say.

“O.k then,” she replies, “Oh by the way, Hope doesn’t need your mum and dad moving in now,”

“Really?” I ask. “I thought she was losing it.”

“Well Dean apparently is going to be working less hours and Hope seems to be growing into her pregnancy,” Alice replies. “She told me tonight she still farts and has hot flushes and the usual stiff but she’s happier.”

“I’m glad,” I say.

“There was tension between Ferris and Lisa though,” she replies.

“Between the golden couple?” I ask. “How is that possible?”

She shakes her head. “It’s possible, Logs,” she replies.

“I wonder what’s going on?” I ask.

“Dani did tell me that her dad thinks her mum needs to be home a lot more,” she says.

“Poor Dani,” I reply.

“I know,” she replies.

“I need to give him a call,” I say.

“Logs, you aren’t exactly close and anyway, you need to take care of yourself,” she reminds me. “You’re not one hundred percent yet.”

“I know, but we used to be close, remember,” I ask.

“I know, but just give it time,” she replies. “You don’t want to be accused of butting in where you not wanted and anyway your family is probably all over it.”

“Probably,” I reply as she gets up. “Where are you going?”I ask.

“To plan next Sunday’s dinner,” she replies.

“But why now?” I ask.

“Because I’m going to need that long,” she replies and gives me a kiss. I look back at the last paragraph of my book as Alice walks out but I don’t feel like reading anymore. I’m worried about Ferris and Lisa. They’ve been together since grade 10. They married young at 18 and had Dani seven years later because Lisa had a few miscarriages. I put my book down. I need to call him. I grab my mobile phone. Wait, Alice is right. I’m still healing. I need to just lay low for a while. I’ll call him when I’m back to better health. I put my phone down and pick up the book however I don’t feel excited about finishing it off. I’m too worried about Ferris and Lisa…and Dani.

Chapter Thirty One

*The Happy Club*

Monday morning I’m finally back to running with Eric.

“It feels good doesn’t it to get out,” he says.

I nod.

“Are you going to work today?” he asks.

“No,” I reply. “Maybe tomorrow.”

“Or the next day?” he asks with a smile.

“Hey I’ll get back there tomorrow,” I say.

“Or maybe your just over it,” he replies.

I think about his for a while. “You’re right,” I say. “Five years later I am over it.”

“So what are you going to do?” he asks.

“Wait until I’m a bit better and look for something else,” I say. “I’m enjoying reading lately. Maybe I can get work as a librarian,”

“You need a degree for that,” Eric points out.

“Then I’ll look for something else,” I say.

“Like what?” he asks.

“I don’t know, but something,” I say.

“Something that pays well and keeps you focused,” he replies.

“Yip,” I say, not sure what job that could be. I mean at the beginning of my first year studying Business at Lymin University, the dean said we would be earning around $50, 000 after we graduate and most likely be employed with giants such as BHP, Telstra and Rio Tinto. Instead a month after graduation I was flipping burgers at Maccas with boys almost half my age. O.k that’s an exaggeration, but you get the point. It didn’t get better after that. I went from Maccas to KFC and from KFC to Hungry Jacks, from Hungry Jacks to Subway, but at least at Subway I made it to assistant manager before I moved on into the elite retail industry where I worked at Big W, K-Mart, Just Jeans, Cotton On and Jay Jays before the lights and excitement of the call centre seduced me and here I am, working as an insurance agent. Did I mention my long stint receiving Centrelink benefits in between a few of my jobs? Thank goodness I went to university!

“Well in the meantime, I think we should start a club,” Eric then replies.

“A what?” I ask.

“A club, you know what people form with the same interests,” he explains. “In our case, our club should be for people who have chemically imbalances, or have tried to commit suicide, are recovering alcoholics and drug addicts and…well, you know, our kind of people.”

“And who are going to be in our club?” I ask.

“Cas, Randal, Garry, Alina, your father in law, that chick your sister accused you of having an affair with, that cougar,” he says.

I smile at him and shake my head. “O.k, but where will we meet? How long for? What we will talk about? I mean are we even qualified to do this?” I ask.

“Why don’t we send out an EOI first,” he says.

“A what?” I ask.

“Expression of interest,” he replies.

“How?”

“Facebook, twitter…”

“Hell no!” I snap and run faster.

“Why not?” he asks.

“Because I don’t want the world to know I have…” I stop running. Eric stops too and looks at me.

“What were you going to say Logs?” he asks.

I look at him disgusted at myself. “N…nothing,” I stutter out. “Come on let’s get back it.”

He grabs my arm. “First tell me what you were going to say,” he replies. He’s clearly upset and I don’t want to upset him further.

“Look, Eric, it was nothing,” I rely.

“Then if it was nothing, just tell me then,” he says.

I look away. “Fine,” I reply and pull away. “I was going to say that I don’t want the whole world to know I have depression and anxiety,”

“That’s just great,” he says.

“I didn’t mean it,” I reply.

“You did Logan,” he says. “You just didn’t want me to hear it.”

“That’s not fair,” I say.

“No, Logan, what’s not fair is you supporting the stigma around mental health,” he replies. He goes to run off when I grab his arm.

“Hey, everyone knows about my condition,” I say.

He pulls away. “Yeah, but you can’t accept it and that’s the problem,” he says and runs up the hill. He then turns around. “There’s no shame in what we have,” he calls back. I want to call back that I know but, do I? He turns back around and I stop running. I am such a hypocrite. First I go around saying how men are being strangled by this stoic and invulnerable stereotype when I believe it and secondly I go around staying how there should be no stigma about mental health when I can’t accept myself. Who am I kidding? I am the enemy! That’s why it’s hard for me to recover. I believe in the stereotype and the stigma. That’s why I struggle against what I have. Wow! What a breakthrough. I wonder if I’m having a cathartic moment. I shake my head! I can’t believe that the stereotype and the stigma have been ingrained that deeply in myself that I didn’t recognize it. I couldn’t see that I was struggling because of the infamous two! I look back up the hill but there’s no sign of Eric. I then run back up and knock on his door. One of his daughters answers the door.

“Hey Caitlyn,” I say.

“It’s Cerry,” she replies.

“That’s right,” I say.

“Is your Dad here?” I ask.

“Yip he’s…”

“What do you want?” Eric interrupts.

“O.k,” Cerry says. “I’m out of here.”

Eric walks out and closes the door behind him.

“Well?” he asks.

“Look sorry about before,” I say. “You’re right, I don’t accept my condition, but I want to.”

“Are you sure?” he asks.

“Yes, I am ready to facebook, twitter and whatever else you need me to do,” I say.

He looks at me for a moment. “Fine,” he replies. “We start tonight.”

“Really?” I ask.

He raises his eyebrows at me.

“I mean, Yay,” I reply.

After I get out of there boys have gone to school, I find Alice looking through cook books.

“So how is the dinner planning going?” I ask.

“Great,” she says.

“Really?”I ask.

“O.k, not so great, but I’ll get there,” she says.

“I’m sure you will,” I reply and give her a kiss. “So I have some news for you,” I then say.

“Whose episodic now?” she replies.

I can’t help but laughing. “No one,” I say.

She lets out a sigh of relief. “Oh I’m glad,” she replies.

“Um, Alice, we’re all medicated, right,” I say.’

“I know, but didn’t Randal have an episode the other week?” she asks.

“He had a relapse,” I say.

“Oh,” Alice says and looks back at the cook book.

“Don’t you want to hear about the news?” I ask.

“Is it positive news?” she asks.

“Well…”

“Wait,” she interrupts. “Sometimes you think that negative news is positive news like guess what Randal ate something today or Cas only cut himself once last week.”

“Randal ate more….”

“Is it news that a normal person will think is positive?” she then asks.

“I…”

“Sorry, Star said that using normal is self-degrading so how about is it news that a person without a chemical imbalance will think is positive?” she asks.

“Eric wants to start a club,” I say, feeling slightly frustrated at Alice.

“Oh, what kind of club?” she asks.

“A club for people with chemically imbalances and other stuff,” I say.

“Like what?” she asks.

“You know for recovering alcoholics like Alina or those who tried to do themselves in like your father or…”

“Logan, do you think that’s a good idea to have everyone together that is…unstable?” she asks,

“Alice, those who will join are linked in with a support worker or a psychologist or a psychiatrist or a social worker and are on meds,” I say.

“I know, I just don’t want you all to have episodes together,” she replies.

I can’t help but smile at her. “Look after having a cathartic moment, I think it’s a great idea,” I say.

“You’ve lost me,” she says.

“Well I said no to Eric at first until I realized I’ve been perpetuating the stigma of mental health and the stereotype of being stoic and invulnerable,” I reply.

“So what are you saying?” she asks.

“That I’m all for it and we start recruiting tonight,” I reply.

“Sounds great,” she says.

“I’ve even thought of a name for the club,” I say.

“What?” she asks.

“**The Happy Club**,” I reply.

“But you’re all on meds and stuff,” she says.

“That’s the whole point,” I reply.

“I’m lost,” she says.

“Look…” I begin when my mobile phone rings. It’s Hope. “Should I answer it?” I reply and show her who it is.

“Of course,” she replies. “She missed you last night.”

I nod.

“Hello,”

“Hi Logs, its Hope,” she says needlessly.

“Hey, how are you?” I ask.

“More importantly how are you?” she asks back.

“I’m getting there,” I say.

“That’s good,” she replies. “Because I want to take you out today.”

“Where to?”I ask.

“Out for a pedicure and lunch,” she replies.

“A what?” I ask.

“A pedicure,” she replies. “You know, foot soaking, foot scrubbing, nail clipping, and nail shaping…the whole works.”

“But I don’t need a pedicure,” I reply. Alice gives me a funny look.

“Well I do and you’re coming along. So is Ferris. My shout,” she says.

“What! Ferris actually agreed to this?” I ask.

“Surprising yes,” she replies. “He seemed really down on the phone actually.”

“Wait a minute, how can he come out for a pedicure when…”

“…and lunch” she interrupts.

“…and lunch if he’s working?” I ask.

“He’s on leave,” she tells me.

“Are you serious?” I ask. “Since when has Ferris ever taken leave?”

“Well since now,” she replies.

I don’t answer her for a moment.

“Hope, what is going on between him and Lisa?” I ask.

“The truth?” she asks.

“Of course,” I reply.

“I have no idea,” she says.

“Well maybe when our feet are soaking one of us can subtly ask,” I reply.

“Oh come on Logs,” she says. “Since we have any of us been subtle?”

“Good point,” I reply. “Let’s just interrogate him then.”

“Now that’s what I’m talking about,” she says.

“So where and when shall we meet up?” I ask.

“How about at Lymin Shopping Centre, on level one near the information desk at 11:00,” she says.

“Did you already make an appointment?” I ask.

“No, but I know the manager,” she says.

“Yeah, but still if they’re already booked up,” I reply.

“Hey, Logs, no one says no to a pregnant woman,” she points out. “Especially one who is carrying twins.”

“O.k so I’ll see you there,” I say and hang up.

“What was that all about?” Alice asks.

“I’m going out for pedicure and lunch with Hope and Ferris,” I reply and hurry up the stairs.

“You leave your older brother alone,” she calls out.

I smile to myself.

“Logan!” she calls out

Chapter Thirty Two

*Stone Pedicure*  
  
 “So what’s happening between you and Lisa?” Hope asks Ferris.

We’re sitting next to each other having our feet rubbed with hot stones and oils. It’s called a **Stone Pedicure** and I’m loving it.

“What do you mean?” Ferris asks.

“You know exactly what I mean,” she says.

He doesn’t answer her.

“Why don’t we talk about this over lunch,” I say.

“Why do you think I want to talk about it with either of you?” Ferris asks.

“So there is something happening between you and Lisa,” Hope says.

He rolls his eyes.

“Hey, don’t be embarrassed,” Hope says and looks around. “There’s no one here but us, and these ladies have heard it all. Pedicurists are the same as hair dressers,”

“Last week this woman said that she was leaving her husband for his best friend,” Hope’s pedicurists say.

“And that makes me feel so much better,” Ferris says and shakes his head.

“Oh come on Ferry,” Hope says

“Ferry?” he asks. “You haven’t called me that for a while.”

She smiles. “Ferry, Berry, Merry, Serry, Terry…”

“O.k, you will,” he says.

“Hey, that didn’t take you long to crack,” I say to Ferris.

“Sorry, Logs, but little Hope here has always been my favourite,” he replies.

“Well she’s always been my favourite too,” I say. We both look at her.

“Hey, I love you both equally,” she replies.

We just laugh.

“So?” Hope then asks.

“So what! I am a rock star…”

“Stop singing Pink and tell me…” I nudge her. “Tell us what is going on.”

He looks at his pedicurist. “You have nice feet,” she replies.

“Um…thank you,” he says and looks back at Hope and then at me.

“I’m surprised that Mum and Dad haven’t told you by now,” he says.

“What?” Hope asks.

“Lisa and I are separating,” he replies.

I can’t believe it. Nor can Hope by the looks of her. Then Ferris does something I’ve never seen him do. He cries. His pedicurist stands up quickly and passes him some tissues.

“Thanks again,” he says.

She then gives him a packet of chocolates.

“They’re on the house,” she says and goes back to washing his feet.

“We have a whole in supply for moments like these,” my pedicurists add.

“Nothing like chocolate to heal the wounds,” Hope’s pedicurist says.

“She’s right,” Ferris replies and downs three chocolates in a row.

“Give me those,” Hope says and takes them off him. “You’ll ruin your appetite.”

“You’re right,” he replies and looks forlorn.

“So what happened between you two?” I ask. “Of all the high school couples you guys were voted as the couple most likely to get married.”

“And we did get married,” Ferris says. “We just grew apart,”

“Why?” I ask.

“We want different things,” he replies.

“But haven’t you always wanted different things?”I ask.

“Yeah, we have,” he says. “I mean, I didn’t want Lisa to only be a stay at home mum. I know that she planned on going to law school and stuff like that,”

“Then what happened?” I ask. “Why did you wanting different things lead to this separation?”

“Lisa’s pregnant,” he reveals.

“What!” Hope and I cry out.

“How far is she along?” Hope asks.

“Six weeks,” he replies.

“Well that’s great…”

“She wants to have an abortion,” Ferris says, interrupting Hope. She looks sick so I intervene.

“So that’s where the differences matter,” I say.

He nods. “She doesn’t want to have another child. She wants to continue on working. I said that she doesn’t have to stay home with the baby. I will but she said that she has an important case coming up and wants to be considered for senior partner and blah, blah, blah, me, me, me!”

I don’t know what to say.

“I can’t believe she wants to have an abortion,” Hope says.

“Well she didn’t want to have Dani at first,” he reveals.

“What!” Hope and I blurt out.

“Something happened to her after she miscarried our fourth baby,” Ferris says. “I don’t know what but when Lisa unexpectedly fell pregnant even while on the pill, she was angry instead of happy.”

“Angry at who?” Hope asks.

“I don’t know, the powers that be,” he replies.

“It sounds like she’s still grieving those lost babies,” Hope says.

“She may need to see a Psychologist,” I add.

“She’s not crazy like you are!” he snaps at me.

I look away. I don’t need this, especially from him.

“So what you’re saying is that you’re separating because she won’t have the baby,” Hope says.

“Yeah,” he replies. “I mean, it’s not the baby’s fault that she doesn’t want have him or her.”

“But it’s not her fault either,” Hope replies. “Like Logs says, she needs counseling to sort herself out.”

“And who’s going to suggest that to her?” he asks.

“I will,” I reply.

“You?” Ferris asks.

I nod. “It will come better from me,” I reply.

“And why is that?” he asks. “I’ve know her for most of my life.”

“But you haven’t been to counseling,” I say. “Nor have you fought against something that is destroying you without you knowing it.”

He looks away.

“Are you sure you’re up for it?” Hope asks.

“I don’t know but what choice do I have?” I ask.

“Well don’t you know, have another break down or anything,” he says.

I shake my head. “I’ll try not to,” I reply and shake my head. “You know you can be a real jerk sometimes.”

“O.k, so where do you guys want to eat,” Hope says, “My treat.”

Neither of us say anything and we end up having lunch at this Turkish restaurant. Great food but lousy company. I’m annoyed at Ferris. He’s annoyed at me. Hope is annoyed at both of us.

That night, after dinner, the boys are finishing their homework while I fill in Alice about the Ferris/Lisa drama.

“And you thought you had problems,” she replies.

“I do have problems,” I say.

“I know,” she replies. “I’m just saying that Ferris’s life isn’t as perfect as you thought.”

“Yeah,” I say and look away. “I did offer to speak with Lisa,”

“You did what?” she says.

The door bell rings.

“I’ll get in,” both boys cry out.

“Its Eric,” I say and hurry up the stairs just as Falcon is pushing Legacy away from the door.

“Stop that Falcon,” I intervene and open the door myself.

“He started it!” Falcon cries out.

“Hey there,” I say to Eric.

“No I didn’t!” Legacy cries back.

“Boys go and finish off your homework,” Alice then says as she joins us.

“Hey Alice,” Eric says as I close the door behind him.

“Hey Eric,” she replies. “Pleased excuse me while I escort these gentlemen to their rooms.”

She then ushers the boys away.

“You mean while she forces us back in prison,” Falcon says.

He laughs.

“So are you ready to get recruiting?” I ask.

“Yip, let’s get face booking and twittering,” he replies.

The next day, I’m walking towards Lymin’s Magistrate Courts feeling very underdressed. Alice didn’t want me to come. She wanted me to go back to work, but I needed to do this, even if Ferris is such a jerk. I walk through the main building and to my surprise I see Lisa sitting outside a coffee shop with some others.

“Lisa!” I call out.

She doesn’t recognize me at first or pretends not as. I can’t say I blame her. I haven’t shaved for a while, my hair is messy and I’m wearing a pair of faded jeans and a jacket that I has a hole in it. What can I say? When I’m determined to do something, nothing else matters.

“Oh hi Logan,” she replies, trying to not look embarrassed. I don’t blame her. The others wait to be introduced but when Lisa makes no attempt to turn to them.

“I’m Logan, Lisa’s brother in law,” I say.

They look at Lisa and she nods.

“Hi,” they then reply in one voice.

“So what brings you here?” Lisa asks.

“Um, can we talk?” I ask.

Lisa looks at her friends and then back at me.

“You know Logan this isn’t a good time,” she says. “I’m really busy.”

“Yeah I can see that,” I reply.

Awkward.

“Look I don’t mean to be rude…”

“But you’re going to be,” I interrupt.

“You should leave,” she says.

“Not until you hear me out,” I persist.

One of her friends stands up, the one with a lot of makeup one.

“Well don’t we just leave you tow alone,” she says and the other two follow.

“Sit down,” she orders them, but they remain standing. She then looks back at me.

“Logan, what happened between your brother and I is really none of your business,” she says.

I sit down.

“Lisa, you need counseling,” I reply.

Her friends look at me in astonishment. So does Lisa. She stands up.

“Have you forgotten to take your meds today?” she asks.

“Nice deflection but it won’t work,” I reply and stand up. “I am the king of deflection”

She walks away and her friends follow.

“By the way, congratulations on the baby, Lisa!” I cry out, stupid I know, but what else could I do? She stops and turns around.

“What’s he talking about?” the same friend with too much make up on her face asks.

She doesn’t answer her and instead hurries towards my grabs my arm.

“You’re pathetic,” she says.

I don’t answer her as she drags me to her car.

“Get in,” she says.

I hop in.

“Now what the hell are you trying to do?” she asks.

“I’m trying to help you,” I say.

“By telling my colleagues that I’m having a baby?” she demands.

“Well your pregnant aren’t you?” I ask.

“I’m scheduled in an abortion for next week,” she replies. “So thank you for making this tremendously awkward for me.”

“Why are you having an abortion?” I ask.

“Because I don’t want this baby!” she snaps. “Why the hell do you think?”

“I don’t believe that,” I reply.

“I don’t care what you think!” she shouts at me. “You’re nothing to me!”

“And your still grieving,” I reply.

“I am not grieving!” she snaps. “I made my peace.”

“How can anyone make their peace in such a shorter time as you have?” I ask.

“Easy,” she replies.

“Easy?” I ask. “You lost four babies,”

She looks away.

“Did you hear me?” I ask.

She doesn’t reply.

“Lisa,” I say and lay a hand on her shoulder.

“What!” she snaps and pulls away.

“Look at me and tell me you are at peace,” I reply.

She doesn’t move.

“Look at me and tell me your at peace,” I say.

She bursts into tears.

“Oh, Lisa,” I say and give her a hug.

Chapter Thirty three

*Boiling*

The next morning I’m looking up at the HQ Building again when someone lays a hand on my shoulder. It’s Garry.

“Hey there,” he says.

“Hey,” I reply.

“Feeling functional?” he asks.

“Reasonably,” I reply.

“So I’m excited about the club’s first meeting,” he says.

“Yeah, me too,” I reply. Then we both go quiet.

“Logs, I need to speak with you for a moment as your boss,” he replies.

I look at him.

“O.k,” I say.

He takes a deep breath. “I’m going to have to let you go, Logan,” he says.

“I know,” I reply.

“I don’t want to but your sales have been down lately and even though I tried to explain to my boss…”

“Hey Garry,” I interrupt. “I understand. I’ve been thinking about leaving anyway.”

“You have?” he asks.

I nod.

“So no hard feelings?” he asks.

“Garry, you’re my brother in arms,” I say. “Of course not.”

He smiles at me. “Phew,” he says, “because I thought you would hold it against me and I would lose you as a brother and I know I look confident and all but really I’m a big mess and…”

“Garry,” I interrupt. “We’re good.”

“Oh, right,” he says.

“Hi boys,”

We turn to see Petra walking towards us.

“Nice man bag,” she says and continues on walking past us.

“Nice second rate impersonation of Amy Winehouse,” I reply back.

Garry laughs.

Petra stops, turns around and lights up a cigarette. She then blows it towards us.

“You know second hand smoke will kill you,” she replies.

“Not if I fire you first,” Garry says.

She stamps out her cigarette.

“That’s was a joke,” she replies.

“Hmmm,” he replies and she hurries away.

“So I’m thinking surfing this Saturday morning,”

We turn to see Cas walking towards us with Randal.

“How early?” asks Garry “because you know I need my beauty sleep?”

“And lots of it,” Randal adds.

We all laugh, even Garry.

“How about we meet at the South Lymin at 6,” he replies.

“I’ll have to late night shopping then on Thursday,” Garry says.

“Why is that?” Cas asks.

“I don’t actually own a pair board shorts,” he replies.

“Same here,” Randal says.

Cas looks at me.

“Hey, the beach is my zen,” I reply.

He turns back to Garry and Randal.

“How is that possible that you don’t own a pair of boardies?”He asks.

“I’m always working,” Garry says.

“And I’m always jamming,” Randal adds.

He just shakes his head.

“Speaking of jamming,” I turn to Randal. “I have a gig for you,”

“Where?” he asks.

“At my place,” he replies.

“What!” he exclaims.

“For my birthday party,” I explain.

“Wow, sounds great,” Randal says.

“You guys are invited,” I say to Cas and Garry.

“When is it?” Garry asks.

“Well given that it’s not until June 12th, I going to have a pre-birthday party,”

“Genius,” Cas says.

I just smile.

“And when is this pre-birthday party?” Garry asks.

“How about next weekend?” I ask and then glance at Randal. “Can you and your band be ready by then?”

“Course,” he replies, “but this isn’t a free deal is it?”

“Nup,” I say. “I’m paying you. What’s the going rate?”

“$600,” he replies.

We all look at him. “There’s five of us in the band,” he replies.

“Fair enough,” I say.

“Great! I’m going to phone the others now,” he says and takes out his phone.

That night the boys are watching a DVD and we’re sitting outside on the verandah.

“So when is your last day at work?” Alice asks me. She looks worried. I don’t blame her.

“Garry said that I have one month,” I say.

“One month,” she repeats.

I nod.

“Well you better start looking for work,” she replies and pulls me up.

“Alice, can I look for work tomorrow?” I ask.

“What’s wrong?” she asks.

“Nothing wrong,” I reply and sit back down. “I just need a breather.”

Alice sits back beside me. “Do you even know what kind of work you want?” she asks.

“No idea,” I reply.

Alice looks away. “This is bad,” she replies.

“That I’ll be unemployed in a month or that I have no idea what I want to do?” I ask.

She looks back at me. “Both,” she replies.

“Well I can always be a stay at home dad,” I say.

“But I don’t want to work full time,” Alice replies.

“I thought you like doing all the admin for the soccer club,” I say.

“Yeah, but there’s not enough to extend my hours,” she points out. “I’d have to leave and I don’t want to do that.”

I don’t answer her. I can see my future. Another breakdown. Bleak I know, but if it’s up to me to look for another full time job, that’s what will happen. I know. I can feel the storm clouds building within me already.

“Why don’t you go back to one of your other jobs?” Alice then asks.

“Where I flip burgers?” I ask.

“Or the assistant manager one,” she says.

“I can’t just go back to Subway and ask for my old job back,” I point out.

“Well you have to do something because we need the money,” she says.

I feel a black pit opening up underneath me. “Why can’t William help us?” I ask.

“He’s already helping is with the mortgage on this place,” she replies.

“We can always move,” I say.

“I love this house,” she replies.

“It’s just terracotta brick,” I say.

“Not to me,” Alice replies. She looks angry.

“Well I’m going to need time,” I say.

“How long?” she asks.

I glare at her. “What’s with the pressure?” I snap.

“I need to be able to pay our bills,” she replies.

“And I offered you a solution,” I say. “We move out and…”

“I’m not moving,” she replies.

“Then you get a full time job that keeps us in this house,” I say. “You have two degrees. It will be easier for you.”

“What about the boys?” she asks.

“What about them?” I ask.

“Well do you even know our morning routine?” she asks.

I look at her blank. Morning routine?

She shakes her head. “No, Logan, I need to be home for the boys. You need to get a job,” she replies.

I look away. I’m angry, frustrated and annoyed and her, at myself, at this house, at the cost of living, at…

“Talk to me Logan,” she says.

I breathe in and out.

“I just want to be left alone,” I say

“Are you going to cut yourself?” she asks.

“No,” I reply, trying to keep calm.

She stands up. “I love you,” she says.

“I love you,” I reply automatically.

“Logan,” she says.

“Just go!” I snap and she hurries into the house.

I sit there for a while. I don’t feel cold. I feel boiling inside. What am I going to do? What the hell am I going to do?

Chapter Thirty- Four

**Superman**

Friday comes around too quick. I’m not ready to see Star. I come home from work after lunch and call up the medical centre.

“Good afternoon, Lymin Medical Centre,”

“Oh, hi it’s Logan,” I say. I hate talking on the mobile phone. I never know what to say. O.k, really it’s just I hate my voice. I never got over the fact that there have been three times where I have been mistaken for a girl. First, I was eight years old and out with my Grandmother Isa. We were talking to a blind ‘Santa’ when he asked if I wanted a Barbie doll for Christmas. I asked him why I would want a Barbie doll for Christmas. He said doesn’t every good girl want a Barbie doll for Christmas. Yeah, I know my voice hadn’t broken yet but still…what eight year old boy wants to be mistaken for a girl? Second I was maybe ten years old and this teenager in my old neighbor said that my voice was higher than my young sister’s voce! Ouch! Third, I was fourteen years old and I saw a friend of mine in the line at the canteen. I called out to him and he looked at this girl standing next to me until he realized it was me. Then in an unforgiving loud voice said I thought you were that girl! Soul shattering!

“Hello!”

Oops,

“I’m still here,” I reply. “Just time travelling.”

What did I just say?

“Right,” she replies. “Well how can I help you?”

Give me a new brain.

“I need to cancel my appointment with Star today,” I say just as Alice walks down the stairs.

“What are you doing!” she snaps and takes away the phone.

“I’m sorry. He’ll be there,” she says and hangs up.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Stopping you from cancelling a much needed session with Star!” she cries out.

“Well I’m over it!” I snap.

“It doesn’t matter,” she replies. “You need to go!”

“It’s alright for you to say that,” I say. “You don’t have to go there and get probed and plodded and told to do this and do that and take this and take that!”

“No, I just get you after the session,” she points out.

“I’m not that bad,” I say.

“You are Logan,” she replies.

“Well can you blame me?” I ask.

She steps back from me. “I can’t do this anymore!” she snaps and walks back up the stairs.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

“Out,” she replies and slams the door behind her.

Out? Out? But where? I open up the front door to see her driving away. No! Alice, please don’t leave me! I run my hands through my hair and slam the door closed. I need to call someone! I’m feeling a rush of pain tearing through me. I can’t control it. It’s too powerful and quick. Help! I don’t want to cut myself! Help damn it! Help! Help! I look at my mobile phone. Everyone is at work who I trust. I hurry down the hallway and let out a groan. My hands clench and I go to scratch my arm, but I stop. No! I can’t do it! I can’t do it! Oh I just can’t but the pull is strong, unbelievably strong. No one can judge me! No one who hasn’t felt like I’m feeling now! Oh the pain. The pain! The…knock on the door. I turn around and hurry back down the hallway. Who could it be? A stranger? I need to suck it up! But how! Oh the pain.

“Who…who…it?” I cry out.

“Logan, its Mum and Dad,” Mum replies.

Yes!

I open the door and burst into tears.

I don’t know how long later but I feel a hand running through my hair. I open my eyes.

“Alice!” I say and sit up. I wrap my arms around her. “Please don’t leave me! I will do anything you want me to do! I will! I swear! I…”

“Logan, I wasn’t leaving you this afternoon,” she replies. “I just needed a break.”

I look at her for a moment.

“A break?” I ask.

“Yeah, a break,” she replies. “Sometimes I need one.”

“Away from me?” I ask.

“Away from life,” she replies.

“Do…do you feel better now?” I ask.

“A little bit,” she says.

I nod and look down.

“What time is it?” I ask.

“Its 9 pm,” she replies.

“What?” I ask.

She nods.

“But the boys and…”

“Logan, the boys are fine,” she replies. “I brought them home from school when you were sleeping and your parents told me what had happened.”

“When did they leave?” I ask.

“Not long ago actually,” she says.

“Wow, how did you handle that?” I ask.

“It wasn’t that bad,” she says.

“Really?” I ask.

“Yip, really,” she says. “Your mum wasn’t as loud and overbearing as she usual is. She even took her turn talking.”

“No,” I reply.

“Yip,” Alice says and gives me a kiss. “I’m sorry for putting pressure on you last night.”

“I’m sorry for you shutting you out,” I reply.

“We do need to discuss about what we’re going to do, but it can wait,” she says.

I don’t reply.

“So I rescheduled your session with Star for next Friday,” she replies.

“Can we re-schedule with Star say for the week after?” I ask.

“Why is that?” she asks.

“I kind of told the others that I wanted to have a pre-birthday party next weekend,” I say.

“Kind of?” she asks.

“O.k I told them,” I reply.

“And I’m guessing the others are Eric, Cas, Randal and Garry?” she asks.

“Yip,” I say.

She shakes her head at me. “A pre-brthday party hey?” she asks.

“Cas said that was a genius idea,” I say.

“O.k,” she replies.

“O.k to what?” I ask.

“O.k to your pre-birthday party next Friday night,” she says.

“Really?” I ask.

“Hey we both deserve it,” she replies and I give her a hug.

“Oh, yeah, there’s something else,” I then say.

She looks at me warily. “Am I going to like this something else?” she asks.

“Um, well, I kind of…”’

“Logan,” she says.

“O.k, I told Randal that he and his band could play at my pre-birthday party,” I reply.

“For free right?” she asks.

“Not exactly,” I say.

“Then how much are they charging?” she asks.

“Um, 60 dollars plus another zero,” I say.

“What!” she exclaims. “But they’re not even famous!”

“There are five of them, Alice,” I say.

“Well that’s not my problem,” she replies.

“But they’re really good,” I say.

“Have you even heard them?” she asks.

“No, but I just know they are,” I say.

She looks at me for a while.

“Please,” I say

She lets out a sigh. “What if Randal has another episode in the lead up the night?” she asks.

“He relapses,” I say. “And he won’t because he’s been doing much better lately.”

“Yeah, but so have you and looked what happened this afternoon,” she points out.

“I thought you were leaving me,” I say.

“Well I wasn’t and anyway, why didn’t you just gave me a call?” she asks.

“I was too scared,” I say.

“Why?” she asks.

“You stormed out of me and I wasn’t thinking straight,” I say.

“Now that’s the real reason,” she says.

“Hey, you can be quite scary at times,” I reply.

“But your twice my size!” she exclaims.

“Are you calling me fat?” I ask.

She rolls her eyes. “No, I mean in height,” she says. “You’re twice my size in height.” She shakes her head. “Are you restricting what you eat again?”

“No,” I reply. “But I still struggle with my weight. Just as I struggle with not cutting myself and the negative thoughts and not being so ditzy and…”

She kisses me. “You’re my **superman,**” she says.

“So are you saying yes the band?” I ask.

She nods.

“But can we afford it?” I ask.

“The band can be Dad’s present to you,” she says.

“Well I kind of booked them for my actual birthday as well,” I reply.

She shakes her head at me. “Well that’s for you and Dad to sort out,” she says.

Lucky we’re BFF.

Chapter Thirty-Five

**Hooked**

“Logan,”

I wake up to Alice’s sweaty face.

“What?” I ask.

“Cas is on the phone,” she replies and gibes me my mobile.

“Hello?” I ask sleepily.

“Bro where are you?” he asks.

Oh right surfing!

“Sorry, I’m leaving now,” I say.

One hour later, I’m lying on a surf board on the sand.

“I don’t get this?” I ask.

“Look, first you need to know which foot feels naturally for you to use,” he says in a business like way. This is a side of Cas I have never seen. Usually he’s laid back and jokes around a lot.

“And how do we do that?” Randal asks. He’s in a pair of bright orange boardies, slang for board shorts. He’s really white and skinny! At least I have a tan and…well, I don’t have a six pack but my stomach is kind of muscly. Of course Cas has a six pack and so does Garry. He’s a gym junkie.

“We do my musical friend by standing up straight,” he says.

We look at him blankly.

“Well stand up straight,” he orders.

We do.

“Now close your eyes,” he says.

“You’re not going to dack us are you?” Randal asks.

“Um, no,” he replies.

“Well o.k then,” he says and closes his eyes.

I do after a while, but I don’t like it. I can feel my heart beating quickly already.

“Now, I’m going push you forward,” he says.

We both open our eyes.

“Why?” Randal asks.

“To see what foot you use to steady yourself,” he says.

“Why is that important?” Randal asks.

“Because that is your leading foot,” Cas says, sounding frustrated.

I nudge Randal and he shakes his head. “Fine,” he replies and closes his eyes. Man, I thought I had issues closing my eyes. This is why I am so glad these guys are my friends. Nothing is word to them! I then close my eyes and moments later, I feel Cas push me forward. I open my eyes.

“Wow, you have a goofy foot stance,” he replies.

“What does that mean?” I ask.

“It just means your right foot is your leading foot,” he replies.

“Is that very common?” I ask.

“Nup,” he replies.

“Is that a bad thing then?” I ask.

He laughs. “Some of the best surfers in the world are goofy foot,” he replies “Kai Otton, Nat Young, CJ Hobgood…”

“What am I?” Randal then interrupts.

“Natural,” he replies.

“That sounds like a stupid name,” I say. “So a goofy stance is not natural?”

“Well most surfers do surf with their left foot forward,” Cas says.

“That’s the same as saying most people don’t have depression!” I snap.

“Why did you have to do there?” he asks.

He looks even more frustrated but I don’t care. I hate closing my eyes in public and I hate learning new things in public as well. He then looks over at Garry.

“What is that poser doing?” he asks

“Poser?” Randal asks.

“Yeah, someone who poses really hard as a surfer,” Cas replies. “I mean look at him. He’s in a pair of Block Party Fuse 3.0 Sport boardies…”

“Wait how do you know that?” Randal asks.

“Because he told us all remember, when we were waiting for Logs,” Cas says.

“Yeah, sorry about that,” I say.

He just looks back at Garry. “I wonder what he’s telling those beach bunnies?”

“Beach bunnies?” Randal asks.

“Hot girls who spend their time at the beach,” Cas says.

Randal looks over at them. “You’re right,” they are pretty hot,” he says and hurries over with his magic stick, slang for surfboard.

Cas shakes his head at them and then looks back at me. “Can we continue this later?” he asks.

“Yeah, no problem,” I say, feeling over it.

I sit back down on the sand and he takes off into the water.

There is something about the water that is really soothing. What is it? Is it the movement? The smell? What…

“Hey Logs,” I look over at Randal, Garry and the Beach Bunnies. “We’re going for breakfast, want to do come?” Randal asks.

One of the three beach bunnies winks at me.

Um…married, happily…

“Nah, I’m good,” I say and look away.

“O.K., well we’ll see you later,” Randal says and they off. I wonder if those beach bunnies actually know that Garry is in his late forties. I mean he doesn’t look like it at all. He looks like a GQ model that has it. I know different. I look back at the water. Wow, how beautiful does it look? The white wash, the seagull’s, the sand, the shells, the salt breeze. I stand up and find myself walking towards the waves. They splash over my feet. It feels soothing, comforting…reminds me of an article I was reading about Ecopsychology. This is unreal. This is…

“Hey where have the others gone?” Cas asks me as he surfs towards me.

“For breakfast with beach bunnies,” I reply, still transfixed by the water.

“So they’ve chosen the path of a poser,” he says.

I try not to laugh.

“What about you?” he asks.

I look at him. “What about me?” I ask.

“Are you ready to be schools by the surf Jedi master?” he asks.

I bow. “Please impact your wisdom to your padawan,” I reply.

He splashes me, “Get your magic stick,” he says with a smile.

I give him a confused look.

“Your surf board,” he replies.

“Oh, right,” I say, feeling like a moron and take off.

Moments later I’m back in water as he gets out.

“Not here,” he says.

“Why?” I ask.

“Are you questioning me my young padawan?” he asks.

I roll my eyes. “O.K. cut the crap,” I reply, “and tell me why.”

“Too crowded,” he replies. “If you’re seriously about learning the sacred art of surfing the kai, you’re going to need space and lots of it.”

He starts walking up the beach.

“The kai?” I ask.

“The ocean,” he replies. “She is our teacher. Sometimes she is kind and accommodating. Other times she is cruel and selfish.” he stops for a moment and looks like. “She is why I didn’t take my life five years ago.”

I look at him for a moment, but don’t ask any more about it. He continues walking.

“You know Logs, there is a real skill to surfing,” he says. “You have to know how to read the waves, for example if it’s a sleeper than you have to approach it differently than…”

I interrupt. My mind can’t take anymore.

“Can we talk about that later,” I say. “I just want to get in there.”

“Alright,” he replies and looks around. “This spot is pretty quiet, let’s get in there.”

I nod and we walk into the kai. I’m not nervous. I’m not anxious. I feel at peace.

After thirty minutes of watching and waiting, I catch my first wave. Unfortunately another surfer is already on it, but I didn’t see him, nor did Cas.

“Oi,” he yells at me.

I fall off my surfboard and resurface to hear Cas having a go at him.

“Lay off my friend, he’s a kook!” he snaps at him.

Yeah thanks Cas.

“Then tell him not to drop in on a more experience surfer next time,” he snaps and paddles away.

“Tosser!” Cas yells back.

I paddle towards him.

“Thanks for that,” I reply.

“Hey, no problem,” he says.

“But next time can you not say I’m crazy,” I point out.

He laughs.

“A kook means an inexperienced surfer,” he says.

“Oh, right,” I reply.

“Bro, you have a lot to learn,” he says.

“And I’m ready Master Jedi,” I reply.

We both laugh.

Around mid-morning I finally catch my first wave.

“Yeah!” Cas cries out.

I stand up. “That was awesome!” I yell and pump my hand in the air. “I’m ready for another.”

I paddle towards him.

“Why don’t we come here again tomorrow?” he asks.

“Why?” I ask.

He looks around. “It’s getting crowded,” he explains.

I look around. There are a lot more experienced surfers around now.

“I can take them,” I blurt out.

“Um…

“Now I know why you surf every day,” I interrupt. “I’m hooked! I’m…”

“Get out of the way!” Cas interrupts as I see surfer coming towards us. We both duck dive under the wave.

“Yeah, maybe you’re right,” I say and paddle back to the shore.

The sand is hot as we walk towards the surf life saving club.

“They have the best…”

I zone out and look back at the waves. How good was that? I mean, I felt for the first time invincible, seriously, surfing those waves was the best experience I have ever had. There’s nothing like it. Nothing like the smell of the salt, the feel of the water, the…

“Logs!” Cas cries out.

I look at him.

“What?” I ask.

“I just asked you if…oh no,” he says.

“What?” I ask.

“You’ve got bitten,” he replies.

“Bitten by what?” I ask.

“The kai,” he replies.

“You’re not making sense,” I say.

“You’re **hooked** on surfing now,” he explains.

I look back at the kai. “Yip, I am,” I reply.

He just laughs.

“Come on let’s eat,” he says

Chapter Thirty-Six

*KFC*

Sunday at 6 pm and Alice is reading a magazine in the longue room while the boys are playing on the trampoline downstairs.

“Um, you do realize the family is going to be here in 15 minutes,” I point out.

“Yip,” she says.

I look in the kitchen.

“But where is the food?”I ask.

“For what?” she replies.

“For dinner,” I say and walk out of the kitchen.

“Oh, that,” she replies and looks up. “I guess I better get moving,”

She walks up the stairs and grabs her handbag.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

“To get dinner,” she replies.

She gives me a kiss. “I’ll see you soon,”

She walks to the front door.

“Hang on!” I exclaim and hurry after her. “Are you buying dinner for everyone tonight?” I ask.

She nods. “Yip,” she replies. “They can pay us back later.”

I can’t believe it!

“But I thought you wanted to outdo Aunt Dominic and Mum?” I ask.

“Screw them,” she replies and opens the front door. “I don’t care that they think I can’t cook and anyway if Aunt Dominic is going to my step mother in the future she has to impress *me*!”

With that she’s hurries out of the door. I shake my head and set the table.

Thirty minutes later, the family is here and we’re outside the verandah, with half a dozen plates of fried chicken, coleslaw, potato salad, nuggets, chips and rolls.

“Wow, this looks great,” Mum says.

“I couldn’t agree more,” Aunt Dominic says. William has his arm around her. He looks happy. So does she.

“Well let’s eat,” Alice says with a smile.

The twins then start crying.

“Dean,” Hope orders.

He gets up slowly and goes over to their prams.

Fyre then drops his chicken on the floor.

“Dean!” Hope cries out as she keeps shoveling food on her plate.

“Go enough there?” I ask.

She ignores me, while Dean has Summer in his arms as he helps Fyre with his food. Dad then gets up to see Autumn.

“No, Dad, Dean needs to see to him,” Hope says in between mouthfuls.

Dad ignores her and picks up Autumn.

“This fried chicken tastes familiar,” Mum says.

I try not to laugh. I’m surprised that Falcon hasn’t blurted out the truth yet, but he’s talking away to Dani. She looks happier too, until Lisa’s phone rings. She then does the unthinkable and turns it off. We all stare at her.

“What?” she asks.

“Well you usually take that,” Mum says.

“I know, but I’m taking a break from work for a while,” she replies. “We can afford it, right honey?”

“We sure can,” Ferris says and they kiss.

“Yuck!” Dani replies.

“By the way, I’m pregnant,” Lisa then announces.

Hope looks at her for a moment and then bursts into tears.

“Congratulations!” Mum then cries out. We all say the same thing.

“Sorry,” Hope says. “Hormones!”

“That’s o.k,” Lisa replies and looks around. “I’ve also been referred to a psychologist,”

“Have you lost it like Dad?” Falcon asks.

She just laughs.

“What has Daddy lost?” Legacy asks.

“Never mind,” Falcon replies and rolls his eyes.

“Lisa is still grieving,” Ferris then explains. “So am I.”

He looks at me.

“Are you going to a Psychology too?” I ask.

“Well now that you’ve made it normal, yes,” he replies.

“Is that an actual compliment coming from you dear brother?” I ask.

“Mummy I did a poo,” Fyre says.

“Dean,” Hope orders.

“I’ll help him,” Mum says.

“Thank,” Dean replies. He’s trying to put Summer back to sleep.

“It is a compliment,” Ferris says and we smile at each other.

“Um Alice,” Aunt Dominic,

“Yes,” she replies. I can feel that she isn’t comfortable with her Dad being with Aunt Dominic.

“Can I have the recipe for this fried chicken,” she says.

“Oh, I can’t do that,” Alice replies. “It’s a secret recipe,”

“Really?” William asks.

“It’s **KFC**!” Falcon finally bursts out.

Everyone looks at Alice.

“Well I think it’s the best KFC that I’ve ever eaten,” Ferris says.

“I agree,” Lisa adds.

“Its food,” Hope says and keeps and eating.

“Yeah, Is there any left for me?” Dean asks.

“I love KFC,” Asher says.

“What!” Mum replies as she walks back outside with Fyre.

“We’re eating KFC, Bella,” Aunt Dominic says.

Mum sits down.

It goes quiet.

No one moves.

I barely breathe.

“Well I love it,” she replies. “What’s for dessert?”

“Frozen cheesecake from Coles,” Alice says.

“Yummy,” Mum replies.

We all laugh.

“What do you think, Dom?” Alice asks.

“I love it,” she replies and forces herself to eat another bite. I try not to laugh.

After our deluxe dessert everyone except, Hope, Ferris and I go down and play downstairs. I stand with my siblings and watch them all.

“So do you think he’ll marry her?” Ferris asks.

“Who?” I ask.

“Your father in law,” he replies.

“I don’t know,” I say, “haven’t they just started dating?”

“I don’t know,” Ferris replies.

Hope farts.

“I’m having no more kids do you hear me Dean!” she then yells at him. “No more!”

“I love you too sweetie,” he replies.

She rolls her eyes. “I’m getting some more cheesecake,” she mutters and goes inside.

“You gotta feel sorry for her,” Ferris says.

I nod, “They’re going to have six kids under 7,” I reply.

“That could have been Lisa and I,” he says.

I glance at him. “It’s good that she’s keeping the baby,” I reply.

“Yeah about that,” he looks away. “Thank…thank-you.”

“You’re welcome, I reply and he lays a hand on my shoulder. That’s what Ferris calls a hug.

“There’s my boys,”

We both turn to see Mum walking towards us.

“Where’s your sister?” she then asks.

“Eating,” I reply.

“I think I’ll join her,” Ferris says and walks inside.

We stand there in silence for awhile, watching the fun downstairs.

“Your brother is not subtle is he?” she asks.

“Who is in our family?” I ask

“Good point,” she replies.

We stand in silence again.

“Logs…”

“Mum, its o.k,” I say.

Tears fill her eyes.

“You know I’ve always blamed myself for what happened to you,” she says.

“Mum…”

“No, Logs, hear me out,” she says.

I nod.

“When you told me you had been sexually abused, it tore me apart within,” she continues. “For awhile there I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat. I couldn’t do anything but sit on the couch and cry.” She looks away. “I was angry at the person who…but I was angrier at myself for not being more protective of you.” She looks back at me. “Can you ever forgive me?”

I put my arm around her. “Yes,” I whisper and we hug.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

*Hero*

Monday morning, I wake up feeling like crap. No, no! I need to get on top of this.

“Eric is waiting for you,” Alice says as she walks in.

I jump up.

“I slept in,” I reply and throw on a pair of shorts and a t-shirt.

“Are you alright?” she asks.

“Fine,” I reply and hurry out.

“Logan,” she calls out.

“Shhh!” I say, “The boys are still…”

“I’m not!” Falcon calls out.

I shake my head and open the front door.

“Hey Eric,” I say.

“Hi…”

“Sorry Eric,” Alice interrupts. “I need to speak with my husband.”

“No…”

She closes the door.

“What is your problem?” I ask.

“You lied to me!” she snaps.

“When?” I ask

“I asked you if you were alright and you said you were fine,” she says.

“Well I am fine,” I reply.

She shakes her head. “Logan, I know you by now and you’re not fine,” she points out.

Tears fill my eyes, but I blink them away. “O.k I’m not fine,” I reply.

“Then why did you say you were?” she asks.

“Because I wanted to be,” I reply and look away. “Now can I go?”

I feel her eyes on me, but I can’t look at her.

“You can go,” she says and I manage a kiss on her forehead.

“I love you,” I reply.

“I love you,” she says and I open the door. “Sorry about that Eric,” she then says.

“Hey, not a problem,” he replies. “It’s…”

“Come on,” I interrupt and run away from Alice…from my problems…from me.

“What’s going on?” Eric asks me as he catches up with me half way down the hill.

“Good morning boys,”

Alina joins us.

“I didn’t know you run,” Eric says.

“I don’t usually,” she replies, sounding puffed.

“Then why this morning?” he asks.

“I’m not doing the best,” she replies. “I want to drink myself into oblivion.”

“Me too,” I add.

They both look at me.

“I mean I want to do other things to myself that…no, I meant…life sucks!” I finally get out.

“Yip,” Alina replies.

“I would normally agree,” Eric says but I just recently had my meds changed so I’m as high as a kite,”

We both laugh.

“What are you on now?” Alina asks.

“Prozac,” he replies.

“I used to be on diazepam when I was withdrawing,” she replies, “now I just attend a support group, take a heap of vitamins and try to keep busy.”

“By doing water stuff?” I ask.

She smiles.

“Yip, I’m the water lady,” she says.

We laugh.

Man it is so good to be around messed up people! I don’t care how politically incorrect that term is. I feel a sense of understanding and acceptance. I feel that from Alice too. It’s just nice to be around people who struggle and withdraw and crave and snap and cut and starve and all the rest of it. They are my heroes. I am a hero…then I arrived at work a few hours later and sat in the car and sat and sat until Garry knocked on my window. I opened the car door.

“You know that work has already started,” he says.

I nod.

“Are you doing o.k?” he asks.

I shake my head.

“Would you like me to call Alice?” he asks.

I shrug as tears fill my eyes. Garry then takes his mobile phone out and calls Alice.

“She’s waiting for you at home,” he then says. “Are you o.k to drive?”

I stare out the window. He lays a hand on my shoulder.

“Logs,” he says.

I close my eyes.

“Can…can…”

“Sure,” he says. “I’ll just get Randall to follow us.”

I don’t say anything to Garry on the way back home. He doesn’t say anything to me. I’m glad because I really don’t want to talk. I feel lost in my emotions and unable to express myself…I don’t want to express myself.

Alice is standing outside as Garry parks the car.

“Thanks Garry,” she says.

“No problem,” he replies and gives me the keys. I just stare at them until Alice takes them off me.

“Why don’t you go inside and lay down,” she says.

I just nod and walk up the stairs. Inside I stare at the family photos like I don’t know who they are. I feel like a stranger in a strange house. I feel disconnected. I don’t feel anything.

The next morning I’m crawled up in a ball in bed.

“Are you going to work today?” Alice asks.

I don’t answer. I can’t.

The rest of the week blurs past. I’m trapped in a pain induced coma. I hate feeling this way!

On Wednesday Ferris calls up to see how the job search is going. I hang up on him.

On Thursday, he calls again, so does Lisa, Hope, Mum, Dad, Garry, Cas, Randal, Eric, Alina, William and Aunt Dominic.

That make me feel better.

On Friday I actually walk down for breakfast.

“Yay, its Daddy,” Legacy calls out.

I give him a hug.

“Feeling better now?” Falcon asks me.

“I’m o.k,” I reply in shock.

He just smiles at me.

“Are you going to work today?” Alice then asks me when the boys are brushing their teeth.

I shake my head. “Not today,” I reply. “I need to take some time out. Then I’m meeting with Star around lunch time.”

She nods and kisses me.

“I love you,” she replies.

“Why?” I ask as the tears come.

“For a lot of reasons,” she replies as I wipe my tears away.

I look away.

“You’re a good man, Logan,” she says.

“No, I’m not!” I snap. Then the boys come thumping down stairs again.

“Mum, can we play on the trampoline for a bit?” Falcon asks.

She nods.

“Yes!” They cry out and thump outside.

“I’m sorry,” I say quickly.

She nods. “I just wish you could love yourself the way you should and ought to love yourself,” she replies.

“But how can I love this?” I ask, gesturing to myself.

“Easy,” she replies.

“But I’ve failed again,” I say.

“How Logan?” she asks.

“I’m having another episode or whatever,” I point out.

“Yeah and?” she replies.

“I shouldn’t be having them anymore now that I’m drugged up,” I say.

“Oh give yourself a break,” she replies. “Just because you’re drugged up doesn’t mean you’re going to have perfect happy days.”

“I’ve been wiped out this entire week,” I say.

“Then have a chat to Star about it and up your dosage if you need to,” she replies. “Just don’t beat yourself up about it. Accept the darkness and light in you. The darkness in you may not react in such a vicious way if you just accept it.”

“You mean don’t fight back?” I ask.

“Yeah, remember,” she says. “Just go with it, take the precautions and don’t intensifying it by beating yourself up.”

“Do you know you’re asking?” I ask.

She takes my hands on her. “You want everyone to accept you for who you are right?” she asks.

I nod.

“Well how about accepting yourself first?”

Wow, she’s right.

“So are you still having your pre-birthday party?” she asks and stands up, “because I’ve had everyone texting me.”

I want to go back to bed. I want to never wake up. I want to cut myself. I want to starve myself. I want to…I feel you. I hear you. I smell you. I taste you. I see you. But that’s all. You are there. You have always been there, but I am no longer going to fear you or hate you or be afraid of you. Come and go. Just know I am not going to show you any attention. No, you won’t get any satisfaction from me. I won’t be trapped in you any longer. I know you exist, but so does the sun. I want to accept you. I’m going to try with everything I have to accept you, but I will also remain a combat soldier. I will fight you. I am fighting you with drugs, vitamins, exercising, therapy and all the rest of it. I just won’t give you the additional power over me that makes you stay on. I won’t react to you. I stand up slowly.

“Sure,” I reply.

She gives me a hug.

“We all need one,” I say.

“Then are you able you contact your friends, especially Randal?” she asks.

“Why Randal?” I ask

“Because isn’t he playing?” she asks.

“Yeah, you’re right,” I say and take out my phone. I just stare it at.

“Logan,” Alice says.

“No, I can do this!” I snap and begin to phone him when Alice stops me.

“It’s alright, I’ll organise tonight for you,” she says.

“But that’s not fair on you,” I reply tearfully. “I should…

“Logan, remember, accept how you’re feeling at the moment and it will go away quicker,” I she says.

“I…” I stop; I can feel the dark storm raging for a moment. It’s smiling at me. Taunting me. Taking pleasure the fact I am its servant. Well screw you! I put down my phone.

“You’re right,” I say.

No! I can imagine the dark storm screaming out.

“I’m going to take a long bath filled of bubbles,” I say.

The dark storm lessens its grip.

She smiles up at me.

“You are my **hero**,” she replies.

“And you are mine,” I say and we kiss.

Chapter Thirty- Eight

*Chewing Gum*

I see Tina heading out of the pharmacy.

“Hey there,” I reply.

She looks at me and then hurries on ahead.

“Are you doing anything tonight?”I ask.

“You mean apart from doing myself in?” she asks.

We both laugh while an older woman gives a concerned look. That’s makes us laugh harder.

“O.k so what’s happening tonight?” she asks.

“A pre-birthday party at my house,” I reply.

“A pre-birthday party?” she asks.

“Just go with it,” I say.

“O.k, well what’s the dress code?” she asks.

“Whatever you want to wear,” I say. “in fact I’m going to text everyone right now to come in your pajamas or as a tiger…”

“A tiger?” Tina interrupts.

“Hey, life is messy right now,” I point out. “Why not?”

“Yeah, why the hell not?” she asks.

“I’ll text you my address,” I say, “and don’t forget to bring your husband unless you want another attack by my very pregnant sister,”

“Um, no, I don’t want another attack,” she replies and shakes her head.

“So see you tonight?” I ask.

“Yep,” she says, “Look for the Joan Jett impersonator,”

“Huh?” I ask.

“Google her,” she replies and walks away.

“O.k I will,” I say as I walk into the medical centre.

“Hi Logan,” the bald receptionist greets me.

Yip I’m on a first name basis here.

“Just take a seat, Star won’t be long,” she says.

I just nod and take a seat and start facebooking for everyone to come dressed up. Who will I dress up as? Santa Claus? No. Jimmy Hendrix? No, he’s too cool. A pirate? Lame Logan, totally lame.

“Logan,”

I look up. It’s Star of course. I let out a sigh. Here we go again.

After that fantastic, uplifting session…not, I drive quickly home to see Alice and Silvia talking outside.

“So you’re having a fancy dress party, now are you?” Silvia asks.

“Yip,” I reply and close the car door.

“I don’t think everyone is going to come dressed up,” Alice says.

I give her a kiss.

“And why not?” I ask

“Um too late notice,” she replies.

“Crap! I didn’t think of that!” I say. “Should I facebook around to tell people not to worry about it.”

“Just leave it,” Alice replies. “If people want to come dressed up they can.”

“I want to dress up,” I say.

“As what?” she asks.

“I don’t know yet,” I say.

“Then why don’t you look at that costume shop across from KFC,” she replies. “Silvia and I are having a goss here.”

I smile. “O.k,” I give her another kiss. “I’ll see you ladies later.”

Twenty minutes later I’m at the costume store when guess who walks in? The old woman with the purple hair. You know she’s the one who Eric jokingly called a cougar. She has some kind of depression. What was it…

“Hello there young man,”

“Oh hi,” I say.

“Fancy seeing you here,” she replies.

“Yeah, I had today off work,” I say.

She leans towards me. “Are you having a bad day?” she replies.

“Well kind of, but I’ve see my shrink and now I’m seeing rainbows,” I say.

She laughs.

“So what are you doing here?” she asks.

“Oh, it’s my pre-birthday party and I’m looking for something to wear,” I reply.

She looks confused. “Um, are you having a costume party?” she asks.

“Well I was going to,” I say, “but I only text everyone today and Alice said that it was too late, and I said that I wanted to still dress up so here I am.”

She looks around the costume shop. “See anything you like?” she asks.

I shake my head.

“Well I’m looking for a costume to wear to my friend’s eightieth,” she replies.

“I didn’t know old people have costumes parties,” I blurt out.

She raises her eyebrows at me.

“I mean, um…”

“You know us old people do a lot of things you young people do, we just don’t post about it on facebook, which reminds, what is this I’m hearing about some club for happy people?” she asks.

“Oh yeah, the happy club,” I say. “We’re recruiting.”

“Well count me in,” she replies.

“Cool,” I say.

“Cool,” she replies and we smile at each other like we have a secret, I guess that secret being that we have a mental health condition that separates us from others who don’t, but that’s not a great loss. I have acquaintances and neighbors who I number amongst my closet friends because of what we have suffered.

I drive back home having bought nothing. That’s when I see, Alice and Silvia helping Alina into Alice’s car.

“What is going out?” I ask and close my car door.

“She’s drunk,” Alice says.

“And passed out,” Silvia adds.

“She came stumbling up the street a few minutes ago and mumbled something before falling into the garden,” Alice explains.

I shake my head.

“We’ll take her back home,” Silvia says and they’re gone.

I seat down on the steps.

This is another side of having a mental health condition.

The relapse.

The falling back into darkness.

The forgetting your meds.

The forgetting to attend an appointment.

The ignoring of stress levels.

The ignoring of your emotional state.

That damn darkness always there, always waiting and biding its dam time. It wants you to cut, starve yourself, drink, take drugs, get depressed, get too high, follow the voices, take your life and all the rest of it. That’s the ugly side of mental health.

The Psychologists.

The Psychiatrists.

The meds.

The side effects.

The guilt.

The pain.

The time lapse.

The GP.

The Mental Health Plan

The stigma.

The stereotypes.

I hate it! But this is life for me, for my friends. That’s why we have each other. That’s why we need each other for when we fall, for we struggle, when we get over it. The pull, the probing, the try this, the try that, the long waiting in between the appointments. How crippling are those waits!

“um, hi,”

I look up. It’s that tool Jarvis. The red hobbit.

I don’t smile. I just stare at him.

“Do you mind?” he asks.

I don’t bother to answer him. He doesn’t seem to care as he takes a seat next to me.

“Why aren’t you with your wife?”I then ask.

He looks away.

“I couldn’t see her again like that,” he replies.

I just nod.

“I know what you’re going to say to me,” he says and looks back, “that I’ve failed here, that I should get the hell out of here and be there with her, that I…” he looks away again.

I let out a sigh and pull out some chewing gum from my sachet.

“Here,” I reply and he looks back. He doesn’t bother to wipe his tears away.

“Thanks,” he says and takes it.

We then both sit there **chewing gum**. What else can you do?

Chapter Thirty Nine

*Cleo, Jul and Cris*

9: 30 pm and the…what’s the name again? I can’t remember. Wait…Space…oh well. Anyway, Randal’s band is going off. His vocals are incredible as they belt out song after song. I am so proud of him! Everyone else is going off too; even Mum and Dad are dancing away. By the way they were the only ones to dress up. Mum is **Cleopatra** and Dad is **Julius Caesar**. I’m not sure how they got the costumes so quick, but they look great. I am the only other person and guessed what I’m dressed as? A soccer player! **Cristiano Ronald.** Well kind of.

Chapter Forty

A month later, we’re at one of Eric’s parents’ houses. Did I tell you they are absolutely, stinking rich. They are even richer than William and that’s saying something. Any way I look around the large group. They seem to be waiting for something. Then I realize they’re waiting for me to start the first get together of the happy club. Oh no! Not going to happen. No way. No how. No…whatever. I nudge Eric.

“What?”He asks.

“Aren’t you going to say something?” I ask.

“Aren’t you?” he asks.

“Why me?” I ask.

“Because I don’t know anyone here,” he replies.

“You know Cas and William,” I say.

“Yeah but that’s all,” he replies. “You know the rest, so stand up and get this thing going,”

“But it’s your house,” I point out.

“It’s my parents’ house,” he replies.

I look around. All eyes are on me. I swallow and stand up. I’m shaking too much to say anything at first. Then William stands up. He smiles at me and then looks around.

“Hi all,” he replies and waits.

“What are you waiting for?” Eric asks.

“Well doesn’t everyone have to say hi William back?” he asks

“This isn’t AA,” Eric replies.

“If it was I would have run for the hills by now,” Alina says.

Everyone laughs.

“Maybe we should say hi William back,” Garry says.

“Should I do a runner now?” Alina asks.

Someone mobile phone rings.

“Hello,”

It’s Petra’s.

“Hey, off the phone Amy,” Cas says.

“Amy?” Tina asks. “I thought her name was Petri,”

“It’s Petra,” Petra says and carries on talking to whoever is on the phone.

“Excuse me young woman,” William says.

Petra doesn’t hear him.

He then walks towards her, grabs the phone and turns it off.

“Hey, that was rude,” she says.

“No ruder than talking in a meeting,” he says.

“I thought this was a support group?” Randal asks.

“It is,” Eric says.

“Really?” Alina says, “Because you advertised it as a club.”

“Meeting, support group, club, is there a difference?” Eric asks.

“What’s with the name anyway?” Tina asks.

“Yeah, I mean the happy club?” Alina asks. “I’m not happy. Is anyone happy here?”

“That’s why we named it the happy club,” Eric says.

“Because we’re not happy?” Alina asks.

“Yip,” he replies.

“I’m happy,” Cas says.

“What are you on?” Alina asks.

“Lithium,” he replies.

“Well there you go,” she says.

“Is there a time lapse with Lithium?” Eric asks.

“Yip,” Cas says.

“Can we get on with this tortue?” Petra asks.

“No one forced you to be here,” Randal says.

She rolls her eyes.

“Should we change the name?” Alina asks.

“How about…”

“It’s alright to be nervous being here,” Natia then interrupts. William sits down. No one says anything. “We’ve all felt alone, judged, misunderstood and rejected our entire lives. These experiences leave an imprint on our hearts. Yet here, amongst this group, we don’t have to feel this way because we understand and accept each other.”

She sits down.

The nervous tension lifts and I stand up.

“Hi all,” I say. “My name is Logan and I have depression and anxiety.”