

CHAPTER ONE

A Family Gathering

“Jobs fill your Pocket ... Adventures fill your Soul”

The Beginning

Having read the last page, he signed, and passed the papers across the desk. The black ink sat drying on the Estate Documents. He finally became a free man.

Several days later ...

The car was swerving around the corner of a steep crest on a narrow highway tightly cutting through the jungle with panoramic views of the shining Pacific Ocean. He was on the way to a small Costa Rican city named San Isidro de General.

Ants were crawling on his right ankle. He scratched the tanned skin on his leg. The man known as TJ was grinding gears to keep the old blue convertible moving up the steep road at a slow pace to avoid slipping over the embankment.

The four-wheel drive was filled with dead fire ants, small spider mites and other bugs that had made the parked car their home for the last 6 months. A half empty bottle of bug spray was on the back seat. He had sprayed it liberally around the passenger compartment. A few of the small bugs were still alive and spinning their legs in the air. Dazed by the spray they crawled out of the small hidden areas of the passenger compartment. It had only been a day since picking up the rust spotted Chevy tracker at the farm. He had left the car with a friend. Left it sitting on its old tires in the grass. It made a great new home for the ant colony living close by.

A large grin was on his face. His smile was framed by a thick mustache and bent nose. Longer brown hair than was customary for his age was blowing in front of his eyes. Standing at medium

height and weight it was his green eyes that stood out in these parts with the local people. He had the look of someone of a European descendant.

At times he still wondered “How did I come to this point in my life?” Things could have turned out different and left him far worse off. He seemed to not have any permanent or negative consequences after his life altering experience.

Thinking back on the low points of his life, in which he lived each day with dread and hopelessness. Now he was buying a new house overlooking the beautiful hills of southwest Costa Rica. Each day was an improvement on the past and a much happier person had emerged out of the ashes of his former self.

“One day I will write a book”, he thought to himself, and his memories flooded back to the day his mother informed him that his uncle in Berlin had died. The family had not kept contact with many relatives after moving to Canada, but after Heinrichs passing, TJ was told he would inherit a large amount of money as his uncle was a wealthy businessman. All TJ knew of his uncle was from a short trip Heinrich had made to Canada, when TJ was still young. They were introduced without fanfare. Shaking his uncle’s hand for the first time, he felt uncomfortable at best. His uncle was small in stature with a much younger looking face than the years he had lived. He looked thin and fit with confident eyes.

They went for lunch at an expensive restaurant while his parents labored at work. To the dismay of the young nephew, he spoke German loudly in public. It was embarrassing to stand out from others speaking English. Sounding severe with no intonation of humor in the day’s conversation, TJ found the experience exhausting. Struggling to keep up the conversation and a good impression, the time passed painfully slow for the two of them. There was no connection between the two after visiting. A few days later his uncle was back on a plane to Europe.

Almost twenty years had passed. His mother was sure TJ was in the will, as well as his brother Peter. Heinrich was the younger brother of TJ’s father Joe and naturally everyone thought that he would do very well with the estate settlement.

When the day came, which had been written on the mailed notice, everyone was gathered in the large office. Three generations of family sat on chairs and stood in front of the desk. Excitement was abuzz in the air, but one person was missing, having not received an invitation.

The office furniture was modern and bright with a deep wood grain styling seen in most office areas where the clients were admitted. The lawyer being dressed in a dark suit, opened the envelope containing several documents including a letter marked “Heinrichs last wishes”.

Having done this form of work for untold years, he kept a casual atmosphere around the family members. After taking a breath he cleared his throat and started reading from the will. Speaking clearly, he said, “I hereby declare the bulk of my estate shall go to “Karsten” my Gay Lover of five years.”

The look on everyone’s face was immediate. Everyone’s face showed a look of shock, anger, and confusion as they immediately started to ask questions of the lawyer. As the lawyer continued reading...” The rest shall go as follows.... Three million shall go to my nephews and niece with all taxes due to be included and paid. My sister-in-law Irma shall receive \$600,000 in cash and my brother Joe the residual amount left after that.”

Everyone was told the bulk of the cash and a large house would go to the deceased family members boyfriend of five years. So, Heinrich was gay and had kept the secret hidden from everyone. Since TJ was left unmentioned in the will at all, he was absent from the room. He sat in the outer office and faced toward the closed door. Nervous and holding a magazine in his hands, he watched the closed door.

His mother would receive over a half million German Marks and his father was gifted the residue of the estate to be decided after all estate debts were paid. The strangest part of the will was the bequest to Peters sons and daughter for almost four million German Marks after taxes. Why would he leave such a large amount to three young children he had never met? The Gay boyfriend was to be the executor in control of the children’s money until the youngest turned 19 years of age. Trivial details were discussed and finalized. Everyone walked out of the office slapping TJ on the shoulder in silent condolences.

TJ was told by his mother, after the meeting, that he was completely left out of the will. He couldn’t understand why his uncle had not included him even in some small way. Was there something different about him and his brother? TJ and his brother shared little resemblance and family characteristics, but TJ never really thought much of it. He asked her “Why did Peter and his kids get included in the will? She looked down at the floor and grew quiet. What had Heinrich known about the brothers to base his decision on?

Growing up together had always been different for both. Peter was responsible but lacked adventure and imagination. TJ was a head in the sky thrill seeker always getting into trouble.

He thought about the time he had taken his car into a farmer's field to spins circles in the soft ground. The Beam of the Headlights lost in the dust cloud and the spinning tires forced him to hit a cement culvert jutting up in the dark. The hood crumpled and the car became wrecked on impact. He walked home to call a tow truck and pick the broken windshield glass from his forehead. No one understood what drove him to do those things at the age of sixteen.

Well, that settles it, he thought to himself, "I will make sure I never have children of my own to bring into the world. If he could not give them the same things as their cousins enjoyed, it wouldn't be fair. How would it look if his brother's children were to drive expensive sports cars to Ivy league schools while his own children would schlep to the local public-school riding on a public bus? Best to spare his unborn children the embarrassment and the misery of missing out on the big family inheritance. It would not be right to raise his children as have nots. At once TJ knew deep in his heart that he would never be a family-oriented person. He was on his own until he came to whatever end lay waiting in the future.

Back in the moment, he felt pushed against his seat attending to a tight turn up the hill. The morning's oncoming traffic was squeezing him close to what remained from a rusted, already dented loose guard rail. A three-hundred-meter drop to the bottom awaited anyone missing the turn. His hands grasped the steering wheel tighter, and TJ went back to his thoughts of the weeks following the wills announcement. Should he expect sympathy and understanding from his family? Surely, they would share a part of their new-found wealth since he was excluded and had received nothing? The family would take care of him, and in the end, TJ assumed that it would all work out.

Ten months Later

Fast forward close to a year later and the first of the checks deposited were now cashed. His father Joe was in a Mercedes Benz dealership buying a black two-seater sports car valued at fifty-five thousand dollars. Paying in full and driving it away from the lot with a smiling face, he was happy to have done well with the Estate residual paying out over seven hundred thousand dollars. He felt important and was satisfied with himself even after not talking or maintaining contact with his brother in twenty years. At first, he decided to give his son TJ a small gift of money he always saved in spare coins. A large 10-liter jar filled with coins held about a thousand dollars in change. After having second thoughts TJ was given the old car as his father had no use

for anymore. But even the old car came with a condition. He would have to sell the car and give half the proceeds back to his father. The car body and paint were in good condition, but obvious mechanical problems could be seen under the hood. Weeks passed without any interested party wanting to buy the old car.

Then one day a call came in. After negotiating the price was set at a mere six thousand dollars. A Car Lot in a neighboring town bought the car and was going to make a tidy profit with a little work. Days later the car was east bound on its way to the new owner. TJ handed over the three thousand dollars to his disapproving father. Joe was taken aback when told of the selling price, but a deal was a deal and TJ walked away with a small part of what he considered to be his inheritance. Next, he spoke with his mother, and she gave him the good news. She was willing to pay back his delinquent student loan. The amount was equal to three thousand dollars including interest owed on overdue payment charges. From his brother Peter and his newly wealthy children there was only silence. Nothing was forthcoming or offered. It was settled and the final amount for TJ to pocket was worth a six-thousand-dollar gain, on a multi-million-dollar Estate. Anger was starting to build in his blood with the fresh understanding that family meant everyone looked after their own interests.

Maybe if he had screamed at his family and called them all selfish asses or found a way to express how his uncle's final decision excluded him and made him hate the whole clan, things would have gone different. He wanted to yell or scream but couldn't find his voice. He felt small.

Outsiders would think he was selfish or small minded, but was it fair to leave the younger brother completely out of *the financial windfall*?

Why would everyone else benefit and not share their good fortune, or even worse just ignore his emotions and treat him distantly as an outsider looking in.

Damn them all! he thought to himself

The spark ignited, and the inner flame of jealous anger was starting to grow stronger each day. His anger with the family was increasing by the week, eating away at him in little pieces of self-esteem and confidence. Depression set in and clouded the thoughts in his head. Outbreaks of anger and thoughts of risky behavior soon became the new norm for TJ. Before he had socialized frequently with his parents and sibling, now he excluded himself from all family activities. No dinner invitation or offer was accepted. A big cloud was hanging over his head and everyone else

was sitting in sunshine. Self-doubt took over in his decision making and his life began to derail, moving off the proverbial tracks of the life he had been following. A breakup with his girlfriend of eight years put him into a tailspin that he could not pull out of.

Sandie, his now former girlfriend, was shocked after hanging up the phone. She expected things to go as had been planned out and hoped for a stronger commitment to come as the years passed. A tear rolled down her soft cheeks. She wiped it away with the back of her hand and called a friend who lived close by. Her girlfriend was going to stop by the house to console her and share a few drinks and some gossip. On arrival her friend could only sit and listen while Sandie let out her anger and tears.

“That bastard, I gave him everything a man could want and more.” Tears rolled down her cheeks as she sat in the fading light of the evening. Things became quiet around the house. She licked her wounds as she focused on her job and friends.

He had called off the relationship and announced it to the surprise of everyone. “Leave me alone already!”, he shouted into empty space. Then he found a private place to spend time on his own and to deal with the wounds caused by his family.

On his own and left alone from the self-serving attitude of his parents and only brother, one day while he was driving around the downtown area of the city. Ahead he saw a woman dressed in white jeans and a short sleeveless shirt with her thumb held out. There were many secluded side streets in this area the girls liked to walk down. He judged her age to be around nineteen and she was starring him straight in the eye. A strange feeling of **Déjà vu** came over him. He pulled the car over to the curb and stopped in front of her. He immediately fell under her spell. It was like he was not under his own self-control, like something odd was directing him. Some part of him felt that he knew this person on some other level, as if they were destined to meet or had met in some other lifetime, with unfinished business between them. He reached over and unlocked the door, smiled nervously as she silently climbed in and closed the door behind her. She introduced herself as Sharon and they drove for a few blocks in silence.

Breaking the silence, she said “Turn right here” she put her hand on his right leg and moved it to touch his private area. “Hey, you’re a big boy already! The blood was pooling around his groin and erection. She was getting pleasure from watching his excitement and the effect she had on his shaft.

Sharon was sexy, youthful and a little on the crazy side. She had long dark hair, stood about 5 foot 6 inches tall with a very athletic body. She was part Native, yet gave the appearance of being of Asian heritage. He noticed her dark eyes had a distant look about them.

They made a little small talk and found a private place. Afterwards he asked for her phone number and passed her some crumpled bills. She got out and walked away from his vehicle. She was the diversion from life that he needed at exactly that moment.

He spent the next few days thinking back on whether he should call her or just let it go as one of those things' guys do when they spend too much time without female company. Four days passed, and TJ picked up the phone and dialed the number. She picked up her phone on the third ring saying hello with a voice like she was being awakened from a deep sleep. He said in his own deep voice.... "I enjoyed your company and I want to see you again". He spoke with a slight hesitation.

They set a time and he picked her up in a nearby location. The homes in this neighborhood were average in appearance. They were lower middle-class wooden boxes set around the University area with small front yards, cement walks and large trees. She came from around the back of the house and walked past the small metal gate closing it before walking onto the road. This time she smiled getting into his vehicle. She knew she had him, and he knew he wanted to be had by her. They drove off with the silent understanding that this was going to be a longer-term arrangement. This area by the university was filled with small one and two-bedroom homes and walk-up apartment buildings rented out by students and blue-collar workers.

After the breakup, TJ moved out of Sandi's home, he decided to rent close by and was able to get a house which had been built in the 1920s for a decent price with a short-term lease. It was only ten blocks from where Sharon was living. On the first of the month, he moved in along with a few pieces of furniture and inexpensive possessions. Nothing fancy needed, he thought to himself.

The phone rang, and he walked over to pick up the handset. It was Sharon calling him and asking how he was doing, and would he like some company? He gave her the address and hung up, feeling excited she was coming over. She arrived no more than 20 minutes later in a non-descript yellow taxi. Getting out of the taxi and bouncing up the steps to the front door, she was grinning from ear to ear. She walked through the open door and down the hall into a more personal part of his life. Looking wide eyed around the small kitchen and living room, which was mostly empty, she asked if it was OK to smoke? TJ thought she meant a cigarette and passed her an ashtray.

She pulled out a glass stem pipe and inserted some crack cocaine into it, then lit her well used Bic lighter and touched the flame to the pipe. A cloud of smoke bellowed from the pipe and drifted toward him in a leisurely fashion creating little swirls and fanning out around the small room. She took him by the hand and led him to the bedroom, they both undressed and started to passionately entwine with each other and at the height of their sexual excitement she again lit the pipe and blew the smoke into his open mouth.

“How ya doin?” She asked, looking at his large round eyes as they lay on the bed. He felt the rush and said you’re looking fine and I’m going to make you mine.” Totally fixated on her naked body; the shape of an hourglass figure, she had curves in all the right places. Her skin was clear and tanned. She had a colored Tattoo on her chest of a Dragon. The body of the dragon was spread between her small breasts and its head was rising towards her neck. Fire came spewing out of the Dragons mouth in red flames.

His hands followed the lines on her back where the lower arch met with her tight cheeks. His fingers became completely sensitive to the feel of her tiny hairs around her pubic area and moved higher up to the back of her neck. She liked strong hands on her body and responded in kind by little gasps and groans around her nipples. Drops of sweat formed on his forehead with his effort to keep the thrusting of his hips in time with hers. Sex with strangers was a turn on she enjoyed when possible. No worries about hurt feelings or commitments to others or opportunities missed. A voice inside told him to be careful with this girl. She seemed innocent enough but there was something almost malicious in what she was doing.

His first response was to resist the smoke he knew to be highly addictive but something in his mind wanted to embrace it and her. The anger he had felt since the estate settlement seemed to quiet down, and TJ let the smoke enter deep into his lungs. He had done his share of smoking weed when he was younger and had tried snorting cocaine before. He knew that drugs removed inhibitions and put a person in a positive mood. He needed to forget the pain inflicted by his family over the lack of any inheritance. Sharon lit the pipe and blew large clouds of smoke into his lungs as they feverishly continued having sex. The more smoke he inhaled the larger became his sexual appetite and desire to be with her.

This soon became a regular part of his evenings and in a brief time TJ understood how deep seated the problem had become. He was at the point of mistaking love for lust and believed the feeling was mutual. Around her he felt like the first time he had fallen in love. He was giddy and awkward and drawn to her flame like a moth in the night. He wanted more from her. He wanted her to stay with him and live with him and never leave. They spent time together without the sex outside the house and the attraction increased.

He met her at a restaurant one night, she was wearing a long black satin dress that hugged her curves in all the right places, breath taking he thought to himself. She looked so alive, so amazing. Talking over dinner he forgot who and what she really was and was doing to him.

She played her part well, acting as if she cared deeply for him as well. Soon she was staying over till morning watching him leave the house for work to pay the bills and calling on other boyfriends to beg for drug cash.

TJ's wage was enough for a single person to have a comfortable life but not enough to pay for rent, expenses, and the cost of dope for two addicts. Hard physical work was necessary to earn his living. A respect for money was learnt early on in his career when he came home exhausted and drained after a full week's shift.

He stopped answering the phone when he saw her number on the display. When he finally agreed to see her, she was angry and defiant. She asked where the hell had he been? Why wasn't he in touch with her when she needed him? Little did he know that the feeling was mutual on her part. To some degree she also cared for him as well. But she was an addict who needed and wanted her men to be always close by. Maybe there was some love for him on her part but by the end of the argument it had turned to hate. He had to make a choice as to which fork in the road he would travel and chose to back off and leave the lifestyle for the weekends and Sharon to fend for herself. Even without being around Sharon, TJ found it hard to stay off the drugs and began to dabble and increase the amount he was smoking by himself. Then came the night he was alone and had intended to buy and smoke a small amount of crack by himself, but no matter how he tried he lost control of the situation. The dealer had mixed both Meth and crack together and TJ was on the ride of his life. Meth was overpowering his brain taking him into his own mixed-up reality, spending hour after hour lighting and relighting the glass stem pipe.

Hours later all the small plastic bags were empty. He dialed the phone number and a man answered. Getting into his car and driving the five city blocks to the nearest ATM machine he waited to meet up. Moments later the man pulled into the parking lot and TJ climbed into his car.

"Good dope, eh?" when he saw how messed up TJ was and smiled. Give me another 200 hundred dollars as he handed him the bills from his pocket. The young man gave him another ten small white pieces in transparent plastic. "Call me any time buddy." TJ looked him over and saw his short hair and stained cloths. An expensive watch was on his wrist and a small silver chain was hanging around his neck. He talked fast and had the slightest shake of his hands when passing over the pieces. TJ put the pieces in his pocket and opened the door, walked to his car,

and drove off. Carefully and slowly using the side streets to get back home, he arrived to find the back door wide open and music still playing with all the lights on inside. In his stoned state he had forgotten to lock or even close the door.

Sitting down in the living room, in front of the computer, he found a porn site and a sex video. Sound came out of the speakers as it started to play while he put the pipe to his lips and lit the end with the lighter. Each time he took another hit and exhaled the smoke, the scene on the TV monitor became more intense and realistic in his mind. Many clicks' latter he was engrossed with the sight of a woman thrusting her pelvis at a large mans engorged penis as a cloud of smoke came out of his mouth. The endless night continued. His awareness was focused on the scene playing out on the computer screen. Colors danced and moved around the screen. His perception moving into the action and taking part. Nothing else existed but the smoke and the characters he had joined in with. Pleasure screamed in his excited mind. He was in a Caravan tent with the slave trader's girl bent double. Other naked girls offered themselves to his touch.

After many, long hours the sun came through the window to illuminate the darkest night of his life. Hours after finishing the last of the dope his brain was squirming to get high again! He sat on the couch afraid to move. The phone was nearby. He would call one more time. Get some more pieces and rejoin the tent scene. He had done it. He had made himself an addict.

TJ knew he was screwed and had a choice to make; keep going till he was dead or in jail or have the inner strength to move on in life.

Suddenly the phone rang, he answered, and Sharon's mother spoke in a loud tone. "Were you with Sharon? "What did you do to her? Did you stab her with a knife? Why is she in intensive care?"

After he answered her questions, he found out that a bad date had stabbed Sharon multiple times and put her in intensive care. He swore he would never touch drugs again and drove to the hospital to pay a visit.

She was laying on the hospital bed beaming up at him. In her left arm was an IV line. She was in a typical white painted and sterile smelling private hospital room. She looked fragile and was marked by cuts up and down her shapely torso. He counted about a dozen in all. The cuts had been deep enough to cause heavy bleeding but not to be life threatening. There would be scars left for life, on her body and in her mind. TJ wondered how someone was able to control the

depth of the sharp blade to such an extent not to kill the victim. In the process the bad date had lost an eye. She had gouged it out with her fingers, and it could not be surgically repaired. The police wrote up all the details in the report and found both parties to be equally guilty. No charges would be laid.

They wrote it up to life in the drug trade, which was seen frequently by the beat cops and locals in the neighborhood. Neither party was charged with assault or attempted murder.

She interrupted his thoughts by saying, “So, how’s it going? look at me! That asshole made a mess of my belly. Stabbed me cause he went wacky on the dope. I barely escaped that crazy guy’s place and had the neighbors call the police. He was messed up bad and tried to bully me around like I was his toy or something. What an asshole.” She then changed the subject to her scars. TJ looked her stomach over closely, then looked away and noticed several different rose bouquets on the windowsill. It was obvious he was not the first man there to offer his condolences.

Sometimes after days without sleep or food, the drugs would make the user paranoid or angry, or both. “How could this girl have removed the man’s eye with her bare fingers while fighting for her life?” TJ thought to himself.

Blood-stained clothing and the neighbor’s report of wild screaming must have stirred up the neighborhood. TJ snapped back into the now and heard Sharon say, “I’m done with this bullshit... I’m getting out of town for a while”. Four days later the hospital released her to her waiting father. The two sat silently in the old pickup truck and then, for what seemed like sheer coincidence TJ was also driving down the same street at the same time. She gave him a sideways glance without any outward sign of emotion. Like two worlds apart, they lived different lives. TJ looked back at her behind the glass side window, shook his head, then turned off to go in the direction of his own house.

Sharon moved to a smaller city with a local pot dealer. Her intention was to clean herself up and live a quiet and normal life like many of the working girls do who finally leave life on the streets. She called a few times and asked in her most sugary sweet-sounding voice. “Can you come and get me? I’m so bored here with this guy. Pick me up for some play time please.” But TJ refused her offer and wanted her to deal with her problems alone without his help, or bad influence on his life.

The dealer rented a small apartment for the two of them in the low rent area of the downtown core. She took a job at the corner coffee shop and TJ was glad to have her living far away and getting on with her life, which left him with no excuse, not to stay clean and move on himself. Time passed quickly, as each day was less of a struggle. He was slowly returning to his old personality. His mind was clearing the thoughts and memories made hazy and incomplete from the use of drugs. Colors were no longer flashing with vibrant electricity the way they had when he had lived that long night in a psychotic episode. He was calmer, relaxed and felt self-controlled. He had money in his pocket to spend food or other items.

He had stopped renting and was in the process of buying and repairing an old bungalow which had never received a modern renovation. Everything in the old house was original and in need of repair or upgrading. TJ liked working with his hands and the feel of the wood that needed replacing. Rolling up his sleeves he started replacing the ugly interior with brighter, cleaner choices. A certain pride in workmanship and a feeling of satisfaction came as his reward after finishing the exhausting work.

Dating was casual and infrequent, and the time was passing quickly. One day he met a woman by the name of Allie. She was small boned with a slim body and shoulder length brown hair. No one would consider her to be a beauty, but she had a great smile. Modesty was the first trait people noticed about her. She was going through a divorce. She was a casual, easy going and a sensitive soul. They hit it off and spent time getting to know each other. She did seem to have some strange habits and ideas, such as the time she accused the married caretaker in her apartment building of using his key to let himself into her suite and sort through her underwear drawer. Other oddities followed, and TJ was starting to think she was suffering from some undescribed mental illness.

He kept his emotions in check and his heart guarded after the pain he experienced from Sharon's influence. Allie had a big heart and two small daughters which shined through her eyes. They dated for the summer months and became closer as time passed. Weekends at the swimming pool and walks down the historic avenue for shows and ice-cream cones in the evenings brought them closer to each other. A degree of trust was built, and the kids were eventually introduced to TJ.

They were smart young girls, always joking and laughing in their age of innocence. They saw the world in a different light and little darkness crossed their path even at night.

TJ was happy and living in the moment, content to be with her until the call came on his cell phone, Sharon was in town and wanted to see him. He knew it was a poor choice to go but some

part of him wanted to relive that excitement he felt around her. He went and picked her up for coffee, and realized after catching up, that she was still dabbling with the drugs. He told her the truth, that he was done with that lifestyle, as well as anyone involved with it, and that he had found a girlfriend in the last few months.

Days went by and another call came in from Sharon, this time she was in the hospital and needed help. Pulled off the street corner where she had been working, the cop saw how her condition was moving into a toxic overload of drugs in the system. Police are trained to spot a person suffering an acute overdose. In the back of the police car, she was shaking with slightly blue lips as they made their way to the hospital. Once admitted she received an antidote for the drugs which made her feel even worse. She wanted someone to come and sign her out of the emergency room and away from the cop standing at the entrance.

Playing the victim to his caring heart and emotions she hung up the phone. Leaving a friend's house with some small excuse, he went to the hospital and signed her out of the emergency ward, where a police officer had delivered her when she had overdosed. The officer looked at TJ with an angry glance. The officer saw an older male who was allowing her behavior to continue with the help and cash he offered the young girl. In his opinion these types of men should be punished as he thought of his young daughters at home. They fed the sex industry and sold woman into slavery with the fast cash and attention they offered.

But the cop never saw the other side of the story. He saw the girl as vulnerable prey for the older man. What woman would freely make the choice of acting out disgusting and lewd scenarios with older mostly married men?

If Sharon and all the other working girls did not need the easy money these men offered, they would have taken some responsibility for their own direction in life. In their eyes, they did not want to work at lower paying entry level jobs with strict bosses, timelines and the stress and daily loss of freedom these honest jobs offered.

Most of the girls thrived on the attention they sought and received. They lacked the self-confidence to take the hard road at the time they became self-sufficient from their parents' support. Sharon had no regret over what she did. She simply saw it as a tradeoff between two adult people. Sometimes she became friends with some of the men, but it was nothing she couldn't handle, she told herself.

The two sat in the car close together in silence and went to a nearby burger joint. TJ very much felt that initial need to protect and be with her. Come home with me tonight he said. "We can get a movie and order a pizza or whatever it takes for you to stop with the dope and get some sleep. "No thanks, I'm going to keep working tonight and you can't change my mind." TJ replied, "But you had enough already for a lifetime." With a shake of her head she yelled, "Who are you to tell me how much I can use and when? You're just around for as long as I keep you around." Looking shocked, TJ said, "then I guess I should have left you in the hospital for your own good." She looked at him... "I would have just called someone else and got out anyway. Why don't you hangout and smoke a little with me tonight?" Two possibilities came to his mind, the first was to keep her away from the streets until she could sleep and have some sense talked into her. The second was a night where he sat and watched over her to keep her safe. He chose the second option but lost the ability to keep away from her and the smoke curling around her lips. She had removed a piece of cocaine hidden in her jacket along with her pipe Well, I can't stop her now anyways so may as well baby sit for the night. He gave her a kiss and agreed to buy a small quantity and keep control of himself. He had a relapse that night. It started slowly but continued over the hours until all self-control was lost again.

He woke up and walked to the bathroom mirror to see his lip was burned where the hot pipe had touched and burned it. It was obvious and severe. A look in the mirror, and the evening came back in vivid detail. He hung his head low and felt the addict slide back into the fore front of his personality. How was he going to explain this to Allie? They had agreed to have dinner with her parents that weekend and his burned lips would be hard to explain. She called his phone and asked what was going on and why he was being so evasive. TJ had no choice, he told her the story of an old girlfriend being back in town and all the details of that night expecting her to toss him on his ear and have the good sense of leaving the relationship.

In a sexy voice she said, "If you want to get high and naked, do it with me this weekend. I will do whatever you desire, and it will be fun for the both of us, plus you won't have to call or talk with her ever again."

Instead of being angry and telling him things were over and finished, she insisted that if he relapsed, that he do it with her. Great, he thought, in a sarcastic way. Now I have permission to screw up with her watching over me.

He waited a few weeks and bought some pieces of cocaine and invited Allie over for the night. She watched as he lit the pipe, inhaled the smoke from it and a smile spread across her face. He's mine and I am going to keep him happy she thought. Late into the evening he smoked, and the thought came that he would give her a kiss with some smoke passing between them. He inhaled

from the pipe and reached over. Putting his lips to hers he exhaled a small amount into her waiting mouth. She inhaled and felt pleasure and relief at having her boyfriend in such a good mood.

Later into the night they had sex and TJ pulled the trick which had been pulled on him. He blew a large cloud into her lungs at the height of their love making. She closed her eyes and went quiet for several minutes after which she agreed how fantastic it made her feel. To feel more alive and have increased energy with incredible intensity was how she described it. She felt in control of her life, confident and unafraid to speak her mind. He wanted to warn her and started the conversation by saying, “keep it under control or it will start to control you.” But she insisted and said, “Yeah, well let’s get some more and do it. Don’t worry about me, I’m not gonna be like your friend Sharon.” TJ looked at her face as a trace of worry spread over both faces.

There was no stopping her from that point on. TJ explained passionately how if the drug was not kept under control, the Beast of addiction would begin to take over her life completely. If she continued to use steadily, the result would be the loss of her mind and her life. They tried to go back to things as before, but that night had changed everything. He came over on weekends to spend time together and the dating continued until a month went by and she asked to get high again. Sharon was living back in town and when asked by TJ, she used the phone to call her latest drug dealing boyfriend to get the goods. She came over and was introduced to Allie that evening. Sharon told her how great cocaine was for dieting and having fun but something menacing was in her eyes when she looked sideways at TJ. They all got high that evening together and so started the first part of the love triangle.

Privately she asked TJ why a woman with two small children would be dabbling in drugs. “What’s wrong with her TJ? If I had two girls, I wouldn’t touch the stuff. I think she’s crazy if she gets herself in trouble with that stuff.” But Allie wasn’t needed as a mother while her girls were living full time in the suburbs with their father. Allie had the time and freedom to dabble and hoped for some more excitement than her life had provided up to that time. She wanted to find that excitement with her boyfriend and kept things open minded.

TJ didn’t care, he was happy the two girls had made friends and it looked like he was going to benefit. Time passed, and it was now late into the fall. The three of them had partied together several weekends and somehow the dealer’s number was passed directly to Allie. She started to call for herself on a casual then daily basis. She went downhill fast and lost her job within a month. After that TJ again had to put on the brakes for his own safety. He knew how fast things could get out of hand in this type of situation.

As more time passed, Allie was still calling, but getting a frosty reception from TJ each time. It was best to keep her as far away from himself as possible to avoid his own addiction taking over. He knew she was lying when she told him she was staying clean. Her car was parked at a house which was frequented by drug users.

Her circle of friends had changed to a rough looking rag tag bunch of thirty something teenagers. One boring weekend TJ called and arrived at Allie's apartment with the intention of getting high.

It was a Friday night, and he was bored and unmotivated. On his way to Allie's apartment he picked up the dope. She had put the TV and Disc player in the bedroom. There was a submissive girl giving oral pleasure to a man on the large screen as the two smoked, played and had sex into the night. Clouds of smoke filled the room with sounds of soft moaning in the background. They were both facing the erotic image playing out on the TV. Allie was bent at the waist and was being pumped from behind. They were inhaling large hits from the pipe. As she pulled the smoke into her lungs, she began to feel like she was entering the scene on the screen. It all began to come to life inside her head. This was too good for her to give up and not touch again.

When TJ was finished with her, she wanted, and needed, urgently to find someone and repeat the climax in her mind and between her legs. She became Allie Cat. That was the name men called her when they drove around the downtown area where the streets were empty, and girls waited and hid in the shadows.

Again, things got completely out of hand with the large expense and time wasted. TJ was holding his aching head alone in the apartment after Allie had left to get more rocks and not returned. Looking around her unkept apartment he wondered what could have been if they had never touched the drugs. Once again, he swore not to touch dope and walked away from the building alone.

Some Time had passed. Both girls were surprised at the strength of his will power. Most men lost their jobs, life savings and wives when they reached this stage of addiction. TJ would party and work at his job the next day as a type of functional addict which he had become. The game the girls played was to get him started and keep him going into the night paying for the fun he was having. With two weeks of vacation cash paid out for the Christmas season and a lot of free time, he was smoking daily and spending more cash than his job was paying each month.

Mentally and physically, he was going downhill as coworkers and friends took notice. He had lost weight and his energy was now limited each day. Sleeping hours were extended to make up for the late nights.

One day his boss asked, "What's going on with you after work? You look like hell and there's rumors that you're doing drugs." No", TJ replied, "I just like to drink sometimes and work hard the day after." TJ's boss replied, "You're never late or sick, so for now just do your job, but... this is a warning to keep it that way."

He walked a fine line in having feelings for two women he loved but couldn't be with. Sharon came to visit him and made nights less lonely, but not on the personal level he wanted. Allie Cat came over and looked for some emotional attention. She promised to break free of her addiction and wanted them to be together again. The road to hell is paved with good intentions someone once said, but TJ couldn't remember who got the credit for that often-used line. Time was passing by for all of them, but little was changing day to day.

Sharon's mother had died unexpectedly. It was a frigid day with grey skies. The funeral home was near the city center. TJ was driving while Sharon was chewing on her nails and brushing her hair in the car's vanity mirror. "My whole families gonna be there. I can't deal with this, let's go get high. You're going and that's final TJ said. He pulled into the parking lot adjacent to the brick building. Getting out of the car, they walked to the entrance where her father and brothers were waiting. "About time you showed up. The service is starting in two minutes. TJ received a nod and hello from her brothers. Together the group walked into the Heavenly Highs Funeral home. Inside and passed the greeting area the large doors opened to the Chapel room. She walked with her dad to the front pews and sat among the extended family. TJ picked a seat towards the rear next to a retired couple.

Close by three attractive girls were laughing and joking with each other. Her cousins from out of town were gossiping about Sharon's lifestyle. "How many guys do you think she's done it with? The girl in the middle wearing a black sweater replied "She's probably done everyone in town by now in a giggly voice. "I wonder if her mother knew what a slut she is, asked the third girl.

TJ was about to tell the girls to shut their mouths and have some respect. A woman sitting Infront turned around and said "Enough already. TJ had met her mother a few times. She worked at the Hospital in the janitorial department at night. She failed to understand how the drugs had such a strong hold on her daughter but refused to throw her out on the street. Sharon's brothers worked hard honest jobs with good pay. They had girlfriends and played sports. Sharon's

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