

MONICA

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## CHAPTER 1

"Watch out, Bob!" yelled Monica as she saw the red pickup truck cross the yellow line onto their side of the road.

One minute, laughter and gaiety, the next tragedy.

Monica's warning was too late even before she opened her mouth. The truck thundered into the automobile, the two vehicles locked as though engaged in the act of love.

Pieces of headlamps flew into the Saturday morning air, the sun's rays bouncing upon them in firefly fashion. The truck's bumper fell to the ground, mangled. Both fenders of the automobile crumpled giving the appearance of used aluminum foil. Green coolant flowed from the radiator of the auto finding a path through the twisted metal to the road, then trickled off the asphalt to the gravel coated berm.

Spreckles of red and green paint danced together in the air, settling within a few seconds to Mother Earth.

The windshield on the pickup truck was torn from its moorings, the driver hung over the steering wheel, his head seeping red liquid onto the dash. In the automobile, lay two more bodies. Bob's forehead swelled above his right eye, the result of his head hitting the top of the windshield. Monica's yellow hair was streaked with blood from her head wound. The windshield on her side was cracked in spider web fashion. Neither of them was conscious of the sound of a rig rumbling down the road towards them.

The trucker screeched his tractor to a halt behind the automobile, switching on his turn signals as he opened the door.

"My Lord, my God!" he said, running to the wreckage. "No one is moving," he said to himself. "I better see if any gasoline is leaking."

He looked around very fast, then scrambled to his truck. His hand reached for the CB microphone.

"Anybody, come in, this is Harry Rhoades on Route 909 where there has been an accident between a car and pickup truck. Please send ambulances. Come in, do you read me, anybody?" He listened for a voice over the radio. None came. He repeated his message once more. "Please send help to an accident about three miles west of the intersection of 909 and 307 on Route 909."

"10-4" came a cracking voice over the CB. This is Trooper Johnson about two miles from your location. "I'll call the ambulances and have them there in a short time. Can you tell me how badly the people are injured and how many?"

"There are three people injured, one in the truck and two in the car--a man and a woman," said Harry.

"10-4," said the trooper, "We'll be right there."

With the message relayed, Harry ran back to the tangled mess to see what he could do to help the people inside the wreckage. He reached into the pickup truck and lowered the man back onto the seat.

"Doesn't look like he's breathing. I better feel his pulse."

"Nothing," said Harry after placing his thumb on the wrist of the driver of the truck. "Boy, he sure smells of booze." It was then Harry noticed the broken bottle of liquor on the floor of the pickup.

"This makes a lot of sense fellow," said Harry, "killing yourself and maybe two others because you had to drink while driving."

Harry ran to the automobile carrying Bob and Monica. Without hesitation, he felt Bob's pulse, then Monica's. Both of them are still alive, thank God." He looked at the blood oozing from Monica's head and tried to see the cut. He pushed back the drenched hair and found the slit, applying pressure with the fleshy palms of his right hand to the wound to stop the bleeding.

The grass blowing in the breeze, the chirping of a bird in the brush on the hillside did nothing to prompt the stillness of Harry's thoughts.

"Seems like hours have passed and I've only been here a few minutes."

He slowly raised his palm from the cut, to see if the blood had coagulated.

"Looks like I can remove my hand, now. I don't think either of you are going to wake up very soon," Harry said, moving away from the car to look down the highway.

The silence in his little world was broken by the long and short blasts from sirens. Each blare began to get louder and louder. A few more seconds passed before he saw the noisy vehicles coming into view. The police car was leading the brigade of three, which included two red and white ambulances.

Within seconds, the officer and paramedics lighted from their vehicles. There were two paramedics with each ambulance. One group ran to the pickup truck while the other ran to the automobile.

One of the men dressed in blue reached inside the pickup to feel the driver's pulse.

"We can't do anything for this fellow," he said to his partner. "Let's go see if we can help with the other two victims."

"Looks like this man had more than one too many," said his partner, pointing to the broken bottle.

"From the smell his body generates, I'd say you're not exaggerating. He has taken care of all his problems, but we still have two people, I hope, that we can do something for over in the auto."

The two then went to the aid of their comrades.

"Your man doesn't need any help?" said the tall member of the other ambulance group as the two approached him.

They shook their heads in unison.

"You can help us get these two out of this wreck," said the tall man's partner.

Ever so easily and gently, the paramedics removed Monica and Bob from their circumstantial prison. The policeman and Harry pulled the buggies from the ambulances and already had wheeled them to the area where the two prone bodies lay.

"Let's get them on the carts," said one paramedic, "and see if we can find out more about their injuries."

The tall paramedic looked at Bob first, observing his body for wounds

"This fellow only has a lump on his forehead and doesn't appear to be hurt in any other spots, although internal injuries are difficult to diagnose," he remarked while watching the other paramedic examine Monica.

"This woman has a bad head wound and may have a fractured skull," said her examiner. "She is lucky not to have been decapitated. My guess is that she very definitely has internal injuries judging from the way her body was twisted in 'the seat. I think we better put the board under her back. Let's get them to the hospital where their problems can be taken care of in a little better fashion."

"Right on," said one of the medics while searching for one of the straps to pull the buggy.

As he started Bob's cart, Bob began to move his hand. His eyes opened and he peered into a white collared blue sky.

Either he was spinning or the picture he viewed was, regardless, he wanted to stop the revolving.

"Let me off!" he cried, trying to raise himself from the cart only to find his efforts were futile fighting the straps binding his body to the buggy.

"Off, off, I want off this damn merry go-round!" he yelled, rolling his shoulders from side to side while shaking his head up and down in a last ditch effort to free himself from his encompassing bonds.

"Take it easy," soothed the paramedic, "you have been in an accident and we are taking you to the hospital."

"I don't want to go to any hospital, I just want to stand on my own two feet," blasted Bob.

"Okay mister," said the medic, "we are going to give you something to calm you down."

One paramedic already had the shot ready and without further hesitation proceeded with the injection into Bob's arm.

"You can't treat me this way," Bob grimaced before he settled into silence.

Monica had been placed into the ambulance and now it was Bob's turn.

The men moved quickly to load him so they could get on their way.

One of the paramedics crawled in with the two sleeping victims, while the other got in the driver's seat and put the gearshift in drive, then started out slowly, picking up speed as he continued down the highway.

"I'll call into the coroner to pick up the body in the truck," said Trooper Johnson.

"Since we are not needed anymore, we will move on," said a paramedic from the remaining crew.

"Okay, fellows, thanks a lot," said the policeman. "I'll look after things here."

The flashing red light on the ambulance gave all the other drivers on the highway notice that something was awry on that morning of May 28, 1977.

Most motorists in front of the ambulance pulled over to the side of the road upon viewing the fast moving van, which signaled its presence by a revolving ray of light.

The vehicle entered Oakmont, Pennsylvania, moving rapidly down Hulton Road to Allegheny River Boulevard.

The paramedic riding in the back of the ambulance recalled another time in his life whenever he was in the back of a car racing down the steep hill to the Boulevard. He and another young fellow, both were fourteen at the time, were hitchhiking a ride to the movie theater in Oakmont.

They were picked up by a fellow from the patch where they lived and as the auto proceeded on its way, another passed theirs, making the driver of their car very mad. This event took place near the country club on Hulton Road. In an effort to tell the driver of the passing auto what he thought of him, Ollie pushed the gas pedal of his old Packard to the floor, but never did catch the passer. Nevertheless, he drove down the steep hill with the gas pedal to the floor scaring hell out of his teenage passengers.

"Here I am now, racing down the same hill and getting paid for it," he whispered, "but for a much better reason."

The ambulance driver switched on the signal to make a left onto the Boulevard. He slowed down, then wheeled the vehicle onto the red and yellow brick roadway.

He pressed on the pedal to feed the engine more gas, then slowed down for the first intersection he reached until he was sure all other drivers were going to let him through.

The ambulance continued onward to the next crossing, slowing down once more. An auto coming from the right wasn't going to stop. The small vehicle had its left turn signal blinking.

The paramedic hit the brake in the ambulance just as the automobile stopped. Squinting from the bright orange box was a little old woman. She looked up, raising her head back to peer through her bifocals to see who was blowing the horn.

"Get the hell out of the way!" yelled the medic.

"Stick it in your ear," warbled the old lady.

"If you don't get out of the way, I'll push you onto the railroad tracks!" admonished the ambulance driver.

"You can't speak to me like that," retorted the woman.

The driver of the ambulance began to move his vehicle toward the obstinate driver, whose mouth opened in crocodile style when she saw that her adversary meant business. She needed no further prodding and quickly gunned her bucket of bolts into a telephone booth.

"I guess I scared the little old lady," smiled the medic, "but I didn't drive her into the phone booth."

"Luckily, a police car happened along and the policeman inside saw to the little orange car and its passenger, enabling the ambulance to continue on to the hospital.

Once more the red light atop the ambulance signaled the necessity for letting the vehicle pass in a hurry. They encountered no more opposition in traffic on the way to their final destination.

Within a few more minutes the driver could see the eight story redbrick hospital and the sign on the front lawn displaying the location of the emergency entrance.

He slowed his vehicle as he approached the driveway, then edged into a right turn toward the emergency area.

Before he had the ambulance backed to the glass doors, two nurses and an intern had rushed through the entrance and were standing on the curb waiting to open the rear doors. The red and white people carrier came to a halt and the medical personnel began the task of removing Bob and Monica.

"The man seems to only have a bump on his head, but may have -internal injuries," said the paramedic who had been riding in the rear of the ambulance. "We did give him a shot to quiet him down, but he wasn't complaining about anything except being strapped on the cart. That's why I don't think he really has any problems other than the large goose bump. The woman has lost a lot of blood, but the flow was stopped due to direct pressure applied by a truck driver who came onto the scene of the accident. She may have a fractured skull and we believe she has internal injuries, possibly to the spine, because her body was twisted in the wreck."

Both nurses helped the driver paramedic push Bob down the corridor to a room near the emergency reception area.

The other paramedic and doctor pushed Monica along very rapidly to the emergency room, where they lifted her onto a padded table. Grabbing hold of the cart used to carry her in, the medic pulled it through the swinging doors back into the hallway.

The intern set about doing what he was trained to do for his investment of forty thousand dollars. He looked at the head wound and called for a nurse to come and clean the scalp so he could stitch the open gash, which had started bleeding once more.

"Yes, doctor," the chubby nurse spoke as she came to the table. "Please clean the wound so I can stitch?" responded the doctor.

"Certainly," she responded and proceeded to use a cleansing agent on the wound.

The doctor prepared the stitching apparatus and when he saw the nurse finish, he immediately began sewing, using fourteen stitches to close the wound.

"Now that we have that taken care of, we can check for other injuries," the intern said placing the tools into the nurse's hands so they could be re-sterilized.

He examined the rest of Monica's body finding only bruises and minor scratches.

"I think we better have her X-rayed to determine the extent of the head injury and any other body injuries," he said. "Call and have the technician prepare for X-raying," he ordered the woman in white.

The nurse left the room and headed for the communication station. She rushed back to help the doctor load Monica onto another buggy so she could be moved to the X-ray room. They rushed her through the doors and down the hallway to the elevator, where the intern pushed the button to go down. The doors of the huge elevator sprung open revealing a glowing inside which, almost like a whale, waited to gobble up the soon-to-be occupants. They pushed the cart inside and hit the "B" button.

The elevator moved rapidly downward but came to a comfortable halt, and the door opened.

"Get up front," said the doctor, "and I'll push from behind."

"Okay," she said moving to the lead.

They departed to the left down the green colored hallway toward the doors, which read NO ADMITTANCE-X-RAY ROOM, AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY.

When they passed through the combination glass-wood doors, they were met by two technicians, who took over from that point on until the photographs were completed.

The nurse watched the two roll Monica away and wondered about the verdict.

## CHAPTER 2

Monica opened her eyes slowly the next morning, almost as if they were controlled by the sunlight, which passed through the window.

The brown tubular rail upon which the curtain rods rode to hide the occupant of the bed wasn't familiar to her. She wondered why such a thing was needed in her apartment.

"I wonder why my alarm didn't go off this morning," she said, blinking her eyes. "I'll probably be late for work. Funny, I can't remember where I do work. Have to get up and see what time it is."

Her brain gave the signal to move, but her body would not respond.

"What is wrong?" she yelled, "what is wrong with my legs?"

"Ma'am," said a middle-aged nurse who rushed into Monica's room. "You were in an automobile accident yesterday, and,"

"You mean I've been unconscious since yesterday," interrupted Monica.

"Yes, I'm afraid so," said Maggie, her nurse. "You have a cut on your head and some other problems which the doctor will tell you about this morning when he comes in to see you. He has to look at the X-rays taken of your head and body yesterday."

"Was anyone in my car with me when the accident happened?" questioned Monica.

"I believe a man named Bob was driving your automobile when a pickup truck collided with your car," Maggie answered.

"BobBob, I don't know anyone named Bob," Monica gave a puzzled look. "What time is it, nurse?"

"It is ten minutes past eight," said Maggie. "The doctor will be in at nine-thirty to check you over and have a talk with you. Meanwhile, I will go and get you something to drink."

Maggie now knew something the doctor didn't know; Monica was probably suffering from amnesia. She thought about what she would do if she were in the same dire circumstances. Maggie was just as attractive as Monica, a little heavier at one-hundred-thirty eight pounds as compared to Monica's one-hundred fifteen pounds. Both of them were five feet, five inches tall.

Maggie could see herself twenty years ago, when she was twenty-five. Monica and Maggie both sported blonde hair, but the color of their eyes was different. The blue sparkled in Monica's, but Maggie's twinkled just as brightly. Maggie and Monica's features were sharp, their noses curved exactly right and in a ratio, which paralleled the ears, eyes and mouth. The weight of both bodies was distributed properly over their bones, with no excess hanging in the flab state. Their lips were luscious without being highlighted with brilliant lipstick. The nationality of the two was different, Monica being Irish, and Maggie, Italian. They even liked country music and both had learned to play the guitar at the age of twenty.

Maggie reached the area where the beverages were stored. "I need a glass of ginger ale for the patient in room 426," said Maggie to the attendant.

"Coming right up," said the young man with long hair.

"Thank you, Jim," she smiled.

"You are welcome, Maggie," responded the fellow.

Maggie traced her footsteps back to the room where Monica lay. "Here is some ginger ale for you," Maggie said upon entering the room.

"Thank you very much for getting it for me," Monica smiled. "Would you help me to take a sip or two?"

"Sure," said Maggie. She held the Styrofoam container near Monica's mouth and positioned the straw for her. Monica opened her lips and accepted the long cylinder, which would allow her to suck the liquid into her mouth. Three sips and she forced the flexible tubing

from her mouth by turning her head.

"Boy, that really tasted good going down the throat," said Monica.

"I'm glad you like our brand of ginger ale," smiled Maggie. "We do have people who think it looks like pee water. Some have even mentioned that it tastes like the waste."

Monica chuckled, "I don't know about that, but those people probably drink more than I do. Can I have some more, please?" She drank half the contents of the container and stopped once more for a rest. "What is your name?" she asked the nurse.

"My name is Maggie."

"That's a nice name," said Monica. "How long have you been a nurse?"

"In July, I will have been a nurse for twenty two years, taking out two years when I had my two children."

"Has your husband wanted you to work all these years?" Monica poised another question.

"He enjoyed having me working and having a career, which is unusual, but we did get to travel a bit. Unfortunately, my husband died from a heart attack last year while we were camping. Bill and I were the same age, and forty five is a very young age to die."

"I'm sorry," Monica's expression changed from a smile to somber.

"That's okay," said Maggie, "Bill and I had a lot of good times together. We were married for twenty years and I have many memories of the life we shared before he passed away."

"I didn't mean to bring up painful memories," interrupted Monica.

"Believe me, Monica, none of the memories I have are painful, no matter how much trouble we ever had together. The only problem I've had is getting adjusted to not seeing him at home, but my son and daughter try to make up for the loss. They both resemble Bill, or maybe I just see them that way. Naturally, they both miss him and the things they used to do together. When my son was small, he had his father teach him how to play ball, swim, golf, fish and hunt. They spent a lot of time together while young Billy was growing up and it seemed they were always together in the last few years before my husband died. Bill spent just as much time with our daughter. He encouraged both of them to live a good life and nobody in our family drank or smoked. Gee, here I am rambling on and on and you are the person with the problems. "

"That's okay," said Monica, "I really enjoy listening to people talk, and you seem like such a wonderful person to have such a tragedy darken your life."

"Thank you," Maggie said, reaching for Monica's hand, then gently squeezing it.

"The doctor should be in to see you shortly," said Maggie, "so I'll let you get a little rest before he shows up. If you need anything, Monica, just press the button on the cord laying on your bed, near your right hand and either myself or one of the other nurses will come to you."

"How do you know my name is Monica, Maggie?"

"That's the name the police found on your driver's license in your purse, and your companion, Bob, also identified you."

"I really don't know any Bob, Maggie. Do you think this man called Bob forced his way into my car and was responsible for the wreck?"

"No, I don't think so, Monica, because Bob, I understand is your fiancé."

"My God, I wish I could remember who I am and where I was going yesterday," Monica questioned herself.

"See you later," said Maggie, waving to Monica.

Monica's eyelids became heavy and she dozed into thoughtless sleep. Her eyes would open briefly and then close once more.

At ten o'clock, her sleep was aroused by peoples' voices. Her eyes flickered and she saw a man and woman standing at the foot of her bed.

They noticed she was awakening.

"Hi again, Monica," said Maggie, "this is Doctor Stepanic. He is here to speak with you about your injuries."

"I'm very glad to meet you, Monica. You seem to be in good spirits after having a terrible accident yesterday. We usually don't find many people feeling as good as you seem to be after suffering the types of injuries that you have," Doctor Stepanic said, offering his hand to Monica. "The nurse tells me you are having a little trouble remembering just who you are supposed to be. Is that correct?"

"Yes," she answered, "I don't know what my name is."

"Well, that sometimes happens when people have taken a bump as hard as the one you had," said the doctor. "The windshield which you came in contact with must have taken quite a beating. You do have a fractured skull, Monica, not a bad one but enough so we'll have to keep our eye on you for a period if time. You also have numerous scratches and bruises on your body from being tossed

around. Those we can take care of without too much difficulty. Your scalp wound took fourteen stitches to close. I understand that the truck driver who came upon the accident yesterday had a lot to do with saving your life when he applied pressure to the wound to stop the bleeding. It's probably lucky for you and your fiancé that the trucker happened along when he did, otherwise you might not be able to see the sun and sky today."

"What about the rest of my body, doctor? I tried to get up and couldn't. Why can't I move my legs? What's wrong with me?"

"We aren't exactly sure about the injury to your back at this point, Monica," he replied, his voice almost changing to a whisper, "but you do have spinal problems."

"Spinal problems," cried Monica. "Does that mean I won't ever walk again?"

"I don't know right now," he said trying to calm her down.

"You don't know! Well, I know. If my brain tells my legs to move and they don't, that means I can't walk. How could this happen to me? I don't even remember being in any accident and the next thing I know is that I can't walk. This must all be a bad dream and I'll wake up soon and find myself in my apartment." Tears began to roll down her cheeks.

"Give her a sedative," said the doctor to Maggie. "I think she could stand some more rest. I'll speak with you later, Monica," he promised.

"I don't need any sedative," said Monica. "Just tell me whether I will be able to walk."

"We'll talk later on after you have had some more rest," assured Doctor Stepanic. "By that time, I will have consulted with some other doctors about the injury to your back."

"You already know the answer, don't you?" she questioned. "You just will not tell me right now."

Maggie entered the room with the shot for Monica and walked to her bedside to administer the injection.

"Get away from me with that needle," yelled Monica, "I want the doctor to tell me what's wrong with my legs."

Doctor Stepanic moved to help Maggie roll up Monica's sleeve so she could give the shot. He said nothing more and in a few minutes Monica was persuaded to sleep without any more talking. "When she awakens, Maggie, please give me a call and I'll come over to see her."

"Certainly, doctor," Maggie smiled.

They both walked to the door.

As they meandered back to the nurses' station, Maggie said, "Do you think she has temporary amnesia, doctor?"

"I believe so, but that doesn't bother me too much or I should say as much as the injury to her spinal cord and how she will accept the fact that she possibly may not be able to walk for the rest of her life. Even with amnesia, she doesn't seem to like that, not that any person does, but we'll find out a little more today. I have Doctor Smythe and Doctor Leving looking over the X-rays to see if they confirm my prognosis. Where is her chart?"

"Here it is," Maggie handed it to him.

Doctor Stepanic bid the nurses at the station goodbye and started for the conference room where he was to meet Doctors Smythe and Leving.

When he opened the door to the room, neither of them was there, so he sat down into a cushioned chair at the head of the long brown table. As he sunk into the chair, the door opened and six foot, two hundred twenty five pound Doctor Smythe entered, followed by Doctor Leving, who was somewhat shorter at five-eight. These two doctors were the best around as far as Doctor Stepanic was concerned and he always praised them whenever he had the opportunity to toot their horn.

"Good morning, Jim," said Doctor Smythe to Stepanic.

"Hello Bob and Lou," said Doctor Stepanic to Bob Smythe and Lou Leving. "How are you fellows doing this fine morning?"

"We are doing great," said Bob, "I even let Lou buy my breakfast this morning, since we had a bet on who would win the baseball game last night and guess who won?"

"I didn't mind buying breakfast, but did you ever see this guy eat?" laughed Lou.

"Yes, I have seen him have a bite or two," Doctor Stepanic replied. "I remember the time we were in college and he ate ten hamburgers at one sitting."

"Well, I'm certainly glad we didn't bet on buying lunch or dinner," quipped Lou.

"If we keep talking about all the good food I eat, we'll never be able to discuss your patient," Smythe said with a smile.

"You are right," added Lou, "let's get down to the problem."

"Jim, we have looked over the X-rays of your patient and we agree with you that the woman will probably never walk again. She has

severe spinal damage and nothing short of a miracle will allow her to regain the use of her legs."

"That's what I thought," said Jim. "It's really too bad that at this stage in the girl's life, along with the spinal problem, she has amnesia."

"Do you believe that to be a temporary problem?" asked Bob.

"I think it will prove to be that, but maybe if she can't remember who she is, the knowledge that she will not walk again might not be too hard to swallow, but I doubt that," said Doctor Stepanic.

"We'll be glad to consult with you on the patient at any time," responded Lou.

"Certainly, if we can be of help let us know," added Bob. "Thanks guys," Doctor Stepanic gratefully responded.

"Well, we have some other cases and patients to look at, Jim, so we had better hit the trail since no one has yet figured out how to increase the number of available hours in each day," said Bob Smythe rising from his chair.

"Okay, I'll see you two later, and thanks for your help."

The two consultants left the room while Doctor Stepanic sat in the brown chair pondering how not being able to walk would affect Monica.

"No matter how many times I go through this, it's never easy to tell a patient about their problems which will have a stinging effect on their life," he said aloud while pulling a pen from his shirt pocket.

He rapped the table with the blue purveyor of words and designs thinking just a little more about how he would finally tell the girl she would no longer be able to walk, then he sprang from the chair and left the room for his next patient.

### CHAPTER 3

At three o'clock in the afternoon, Monica's eyelids flickered open; her blue eyes scanned the green walls and window.

She wondered how long she had been sleeping.

"The room is still the same as before," she said. She had hoped that she would awaken from a dream.

"Come on legs, move!" she commanded, but as before, they would not stir. "Why won't you move, legs, why?"

No answer came.

"Why God, why did this have to happen to me?" she spoke looking at the ceiling. "If you are here, answer me."

"What is it, Monica?" asked Maggie, standing in the doorway. "I thought you had a visitor when I heard talking in your room."

"I was just having a conversation with myself and haven't really gotten any good answers," said Monica, her voice crackling. "Your being here makes this no dream, Maggie. Why can't this be a nightmare?"

"You'll be okay, Monica," assured Maggie. "I'll get hold of Doctor Stepanic and tell him you are awake."

"Don't do that, Maggie," pleaded Monica. "He won't tell me what is wrong with my legs."

"I'm sure he will tell you everything you want to know," said Maggie.

"Please don't call him?" said Monica, raising her right hand from the bed trying to reach Maggie.

"He has to be informed that you are awake so he can examine your wound and talk with you about your condition."

"What does he really care about my condition?" Monica responded. "I don't want him for my doctor. Get me someone else."

"You can tell him that yourself when he comes to see you." Maggie didn't give Monica an opportunity to answer, as she abruptly left the room to call Dr. Stepanic.

Monica lay in bed clenching her teeth, then puffing her jaws. She wanted to get up and stomp out of the room, down the hallway and out of her prison, but her brain could not compel her body to rise.

She could hear the request for Doctor Stepanic being broadcast over all speakers in the hallway.

One hour passed before she heard footsteps coming down the hallway, and for that time, her request not to see the doctor, had been fulfilled. He poked his head into the doorway. "I hear you don't want me around here anymore," he said, "and I'm trying to make sure that you are not going to throw anything at me, like my wife does when she doesn't want to see me."

For the first time, Monica took a good look at Jim Stepanic. He was an attractive fellow with round cheeks, but wasn't overweight. His facial features were round, and he had brown hair and blue eyes. Jim was forty-two, but still didn't have any real noticeable graying at the temples, although his hair was getting a little thinner. He liked to joke around with his patients to make them laugh at times when they were feeling down, but he sympathized with them when they couldn't laugh.

"Come on in," she smiled, "I wouldn't throw anything at you because there are no objects to use as a weapon."

"Well, I'm certainly glad to know you don't have anything available to zing at me. I really didn't feel like ducking from any flying objects having my name on them," Doctor Stepanic laughed.

Monica smiled again and chuckled.

He pulled one of the two chairs sitting by the wall near the door, close to the side of Monica's bed.

"You and I are going to have a hearty talk, Monica," he began, "about the damage done to your body in the car accident. You are suffering from amnesia, which we hope will be only temporary and that you will remember who you are in a short period of time. Exactly how long it will be before you remember, we really don't know, but we hope your memory lapse will be gone in a few days. I have spoken at length with your fiancé and he tells me that you have no living relatives."

"I must have. He is wrong!" she interrupted.

"The most important thing in your life at this point, Monica, is the severe injury to your spinal cord. It was severed somehow in the accident and that is why you cannot control your legs when you want them to move. You want the truth, don't you, Monica?"

"Yes," she answered, her eyes fixing on his.

"You will not be able to walk again," he said softly.

She began to gather tears in her eyes, and Doctor Stepanic pulled out his handkerchief from his left rear pants pocket, and began to wipe below her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Monica, that I don't have better news, but two of our best doctors have agreed with me."

Monica could see his saddened eyes and when he quickly wiped his eye with the white cloth, she knew he was crying for her. He reached for her right hand and held it for a few seconds.

"We'll do all we can to rehabilitate you so you can still lead a good life, Monica. The therapy that is available now may even prove us wrong and could surprise everyone including yourself."

"What do I do now, Doctor? I was always very active and liked all kinds of sports," she begged of him. "I'm beginning to remember who I am and what I used to do."

"The jolt of not being able to walk again is enough to make anyone remember, I guess," he said.

"My name is Monica Rawlings and I live in an apartment on Seventh Avenue in Oakmont, with my roommate Rose, who is on vacation. I'm twenty-five and I work at Spencer's Clothing Company. I re...remember now, Bob and I were on our way to the company picnic when we were hit by a truck driving on the wrong side of the road. We didn't have a chance to get out of the way because he was coming so fast. What happened to Bob?"

"He is okay, Monica," replied the doctor, "and he will be in to see you this evening. He was treated here yesterday, then released."

"Does he know I can't walk?" asked Monica.

"No, he does not," replied Doctor Stepanic.

"Don't tell him, please, don't tell him yet," pleaded Monica.

"One of us must tell him in the near future and I'll let you decide which one of us will get the job. I don't know what kind of future you two have planned together, but it is important for Bob to know of your condition."

"I'll tell him when I'm ready, Doctor," she said, "and I promise not to wait very long."

"That's fine, Monica," encouraged Doctor Stepanic, "not only for his welfare, but also for yours as well."

"Well, we settled on who gets the job," Monica smiled.

"Yes, we sure did," agreed Jim. "I'd like to examine your scalp wound now." The doctor rose from his chair and did the job.

"How many stitches were required to close my wound?" queried Monica.

"Fourteen", he answered, "and it was done by a good seamstress."

Monica let go with a ha-ha.

"I thought you might find my remark amusing," chided the doctor, "but I expected a little healthier response than ha-ha."

"I'll have to agree with you, Doctor," she smiled. "Your remark was a little funnier than I gave it credit for. You really like to joke around with your patients, don't you, Doctor Stepanic?"

"Yes," he agreed, "trying to make people laugh when they are sick is pretty important to me and always has been. I guess, in a way, I'm what you could refer to as a clown healer."

"Do you run into a lot of patients who do not appreciate your humor?" asked Monica.



"Every so often, I do encounter someone who wouldn't laugh at anything funny. As a matter of fact, they would pass for a cigar store Indian."

"I suppose you have seen many cases like mine," said Monica, her smile drifting away.

"We doctors see many different injuries to people and the suffering they go through. Most patients do quite well in recovering, although some just never accept the inevitable. You see, Monica, quite a number of people are in great spirits and health one day, and the next day the bottom of their world drops out. I know it isn't easy for you, or anyone else who has experienced a problem, to accept it and continue on in life. Not only is permanent disability hard to accept by persons experiencing the same difficulty as you, but loved ones also find themselves doing some soul searching. It is tough to be waited on, but even tougher to have someone perform the task practically all the time."

"Do you really think Bob will take me the way I am now?" asked Monica.

"I really cannot answer the question, Monica, because I don't know Bob very well, nor how well your relationship with him is doing.

"We were really having a grand time together and planned to be married next year. But I guess that will change now that this has happened." Monica turned her head away from the doctor.

"I am sure things will change, Monica, but exactly how much of a change, that is something you two will have to work out together," said the Doctor.

"There probably never has been an easy way out of something like this," said Monica, "for the people involved. Why should my case be any different than the rest." She turned her head toward the doctor once more. "You will help me through this, won't you?" she asked.

"That's what I am here for, Monica. I have never refused to help a patient with any problem and I'm not the type of doctor who runs away from a person just because he or she doesn't like me. As far as I'm concerned, likes and dislikes have nothing to do with my relationship with any individual in my line of work. My job is to help people in every way I can, but sometimes it is even tough for me to convince myself that a patient needs my help. I have been sworn at, yelled at and told to get lost, but for some reason I hung in there and survived the onslaught for my head. There are a lot of things to live for in life and the individual has to determine for his or herself why they must survive. There I go again, sounding just like a psychiatrist trying to explain the woes of the world in a few breaths. I don't want to bore you with my thoughts on life and living, Monica, so you can tell me when to shut my mouth."

"I don't mind listening to you talk about your beliefs, Doctor Stepanic," she smiled. "It has always been one of my favorite pastimes...listening, I mean, and you do sound like an honest man. I would even bet you have a lot of people who owe you money that you don't care about getting back."

"Now that you bring up the matter, there does happen to be several people who owe me a few bucks and in certain cases, the person was one of those hell-raisers that I had to put up with until the light struck them."

"As soon as I get out of this hospital, Doctor, I will become your bill collector. You know I can be pretty mean when I try," Monica opened her eyes wide.

"I see exactly what you mean by the expression on your face at this time," laughed the doctor. "There isn't any reason why you couldn't be my collector of bad accounts and since you are such a pretty young lady, I don't think anyone will say no to you when you call upon them to make their overdue payments. I know I would pay up if someone with a smile as yours came to call on me."

"What would happen if I came to you in a wheelchair, would you still find my smile pretty?" Monica asked.

"It wouldn't make any difference to me, Monica," he answered.

"No, since you are a doctor, my appearance wouldn't affect you at all, but what about other people?"

"One thing you will have to learn and to accept in your future life, Monica, will be the opinions of other people, sometimes they will hurt you, but you must keep a stiff and stalwart shield. Although you will think many times about why you are in the position you are, and why someone else isn't there, no person can give you the answer. I have asked myself the same questions over and over and never received an answer from above. Why do murderers get away with the acts they commit? Why do innocent people suffer for the sins of others? I don't know where the answers to these questions lie and I doubt very much if I'll ever find the solutions. But just because I never get any feedback, I will never quit asking God why He allows such things to go on and on and why He doesn't stop people from hurting each other."

"I didn't think about those things until now," said Monica, "and I never even knew anyone cared about them until I heard you speak about your concerns."

"While it is true, that your life has changed rather drastically, you must learn to live with your assets and liabilities," said the doctor. "No one will act the same, necessarily, given the same set of circumstances. And certainly, when permanent disability is introduced into the picture, the odds on the injured person's reactions are pretty hard to estimate. Just how well you will respond to the rehabilitation program which we will set up for you, isn't know at this point. I do believe your attitude is pretty good, but attitude is always subject to change without notice."

Monica interrupted, "You think my attitude is good whenever I wanted to fire you."

"You haven't been the first person to shout at me or to tell me to dive into a waterless swimming pool, and you surely will not be the last." Monica laughed.

"I don't see any bumps on your head, so I guess you didn't take the suggestions to heart," she said.

"Not those type of suggestions," he answered. "My head wasn't built for bumps and empty pools are notorious for causing injury to persons taking a quick dip."

"Do you have a swimming pool at your house, Doctor Stepanic?" asked Monica.

"Yes, I do."

"The apartment building where I live has a pool, too," said Monica, her eyes shifting to the left and holding a stare for ten seconds before returning. "I used to spend a lot of time in the water and enjoyed getting a tan."

"Don't worry, Monica." said Doctor Stepanic, "there will be many things you will remember in your life that you have done or were planning to do in the future, and although we can't cancel out the past and blank out memories, we can do something about tomorrow and perhaps, a little about your destiny. The work will be pretty much up to you, and there isn't any doubt about you having the toughest part in our play. I can't tell you what is in store for you, Monica, but we can put forth some effort and help you to survive with your present affliction."

"A doctor who sounds like a philosopher. Now this is really something," said Monica.

"Some of my friends have likened me to Socrates, from time to time after listening to some of my long-winded speeches," said Jim.

"You certainly do expound on words," laughed Monica.

"If my sounding like a great philosopher is making you laugh rather than cry, I guess my ideas can't be too bad, or maybe you are laughing because they are so terrible you can't cry."

"You could have been a preacher or one of those fellows who rides the circuit telling everybody to repent and give their small change of ones and fives," Monica said.

"I often thought about doing exactly what you suggested," said the doctor, "but I could never get up enough nerve to ask people for money just by telling them something they wanted to hear."

"You are going to charge me for something I didn't want to hear," she said, "what the heck difference does it make?"

"When you come to a point, you certainly don't spare the jab," he smiled, "do you Monica?"

"I don't mean to sound rude or to offend you, Doctor Stepanic, but I really enjoy speaking with you. You are very easy to converse with and you respect other people's opinions and quite a few people do not operate the way you do, especially doctors."

"My wife should hear you talking about how great I am and maybe she would listen to me."

"She is as nice as you are, I'd bet," said Monica.

"Hey, I have to get out of here and look in on some other patients," Doctor Stepanic said after glancing at the digital wristwatch on his left wrist. "Your fiancé, Bob, will be in to see you tonight, and I won't be back to see you until tomorrow. I want you to behave this evening and try to look ahead with everything you have going for you."

He squeezed her right hand with his left and said, "Don't quit, Monica, there are plenty of people rooting for you."

The doctor strolled to the door and Monica said, "See you, Socrates." He smiled and waved his clenched fist of his hand.

At seven-thirty that same evening Bob walked into the room occupied by Monica. He walked to her bedside and gently kissed her on the forehead. She didn't move, because of her sound sleep, so he backed to the cushioned chair at the foot of the bed and sat down intending to stay until Monica awakened.

When visiting hours were over at nine, Bob was still sitting in the chair waiting for her to show signs of the living. A nurse came around to the room and informed Bob that visiting hours were over.

"But, I didn't even get a chance to talk with her," he argued.

"I am sorry, sir," she responded, "but, visiting hours are over and we have to enforce the rules."

"Rules are rules," he agreed and left the room.

#### CHAPTER 4

When Monica awoke the next morning, the absence of sunlight scurrying through the window left the room dark. Tapping on the window were small token raindrops. The tinkling was gentle at first, then became louder, the balls of water trying to smash the glass with their swift force, only to find the panes would not mellow.

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