

THE COALITION TO SAVE ANDREW

John Boston

He didn't really know why or how He got involved with Andrew Gonzalez and his drama. He figured he's at a point in my life when he's come to realize it's not all about him. He had never seen a woman so upset as his mother Isabelle. He saw her one night sobbing in front of our trash dumpster. She was almost hysterical. He stopped and looked at her. He figured a woman sobbing hysterically in a public place wants someone to help her....anyone to help her. I was up.

"Don't you live upstairs from me?" I asked and offered her a cigarette.

She just nodded and took the smoke. I lit it for her and had one myself. Nicotine is always a great ice breaker. We said nothing for a few seconds, so I figured it was on me.

"Tough day at the office, huh?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Christ, I must look like a mess." she said, smiling through smoke and tears.

"My son, Andrew. He tried to kill himself today. I almost lost my son today." she said sobbing.

"Jesus.....is he ok?"

"He'll live. The metal beam he tied the knuce to broke, thank God. He was so upset with himself, he jumped off the roof and onto the lawn, only it's grass, so all he did was break his arm. I don't know whether to hug him or beat him. Do you have kids?"

"No, none that I know of anyway."

"They're a blessing and a curse at the same time. When I was his age, all I wanted to do was party, meet people and just have a good time. All he wants to do is stay locked in his room and play video games all day. We couldn't be any more different if we tried, yet he's half of me, go figure."

"I don't think that's too uncommon. I think having kids is kind of like a lottery system. Some parents get the jock or the nerd, others get the bully or if you've really pissed someone off, you get the sociopath. Don't worry, It's nothing you did wrong."

"I'd like to believe that. Some days I'm not so sure. His father left us a few years ago. He wasn't much of a father anyway, but at least he'd show up once or twice a month. We haven't heard from him in over two years. Andrew did not take it well. The last conversation he had with his father did not go well. He's blamed himself ever since."

"Maybe it's for the best. Toxic people just ruin everyone around them sooner or later."

“Yeah, I just wish Andrew would see it that way. He really looked up to his father. I used to look up to him too. My name is Isabelle. Everyone just calls me Belle. Nice to meet you.” she said and extended her hand.

“Kevin McDonnell. Nice to meet you.” he said, shaking her hand.

Kevin felt the instant spark between them. He hadn’t felt that spark in quite some time.

“You want another one?” he asked

“Oh, no. I’m trying to quit. I know everybody says that, but I really am. My mom died in her fifties from these damn things, you’d think I would know better.”

“I live right below you guys. I make a much better listener than this dumpster here.” he said.

“Thanks, Kevin. I’ll keep that in mind. Thanks for listening to the crazy lady.”

“You’re not crazy, just having a tough time. Happens to the best of us.” he said and headed back to his apartment.

Walking back, he was almost a little turned on. Belle was much younger than him. A few pounds too many, but still attractive. Maybe it could just be a booty call thing. Who knows. He figured with that whacko kid, no guy would stick around very long. As long as the kid stayed away, he and Belle could become good friends. Kevin McDonnell just doesn’t do crazy, there’s enough of that to go around already.

He didn’t think anything would come of it, which is why he was kind of surprised when he saw her walking up to her apartment two days later. He came out and offered to help her with her groceries.

“Why thank you, I didn’t think there were any real gentlemen left in this world.” said Belle.

“Momma didn’t raise me to be a pig.” he replied.

He helped her up to her apartment, then went back to her car to get more bags. When he was finished, she offered him a beer. The two of them sat on her balcony. Kevin wasn’t sure what she was after. Maybe she just wanted to get some advice on her son. He had learned over the years, through trial and error, just to shut up and let the girl do the talking. Pretty girls called the shots. Guys like him were just lucky enough to be in their presence.

“How’s Andrew?”

“He’s in a psych unit at Morningside Regional for ‘observation’.”

“Sounds like fun. How long will he be there?”

“Until our insurance runs out.” said Belle.

“I can’t imagine what you must be going through. Must feel like you have no control over what’s going on around you.”

"I don't have any control. I can't even stop my own son from trying to kill himself. Some mother I turned out to be."

"Belle, I don't think you can blame yourself for all this. At some point, our kids have to start making their own choices."

"I love Andrew more than anything in this whole world. When he was younger, we used to hang out and get ice cream, spend the whole day together. Now, he won't even talk to me. I'm lucky if he even says 'hi' to me."

"I don't think that's too uncommon. I guess that's part of being a teenager. You have a hard time escaping your own drama. I'm sure he'll grow out of it."

"If he makes it that long. I just can't understand what he's thinking? How does ending your own life sound appealing to some people?"

"Hopefully that's what the hospital can find out."

"I just hope they don't put him on some kind of weird brain candy that's going to make him into a zombie. I've seen people on that stuff. They become shadows of real people. I don't want that for Andrew."

Kevin lost track of the time. A few minutes turned into an hour. Belle cried, then laughed, then started crying again. He knew this was therapy in a way, she just needed someone to talk to. She told him she hadn't spoken to her mother in almost five years and the two of them really had no close family. It was Belle and Andrew vs. the world. He could feel them growing closer to one another. He would just shut up and listen and she would tell him what was on her mind. She was a smart lady, who could easily have gone far in life, had she not gotten pregnant at age 18.

"My mother actually called me a 'whore' and told me to get out of her house! I was three months pregnant! Where the hell was I supposed to go? My ex had a cabin in the mountains. That's where we stayed. I had to get firewood in the snow while I was pregnant. Needless to say, Andrew has seen very little of my side of the family. Listen to me, I've been babbling on for almost an hour. I haven't even asked about you." she said wiping away the tears.

"Right now Belle, my job is to listen. I've met a handful of people in my life that could actually do that, just listen. I think we as a society have forgotten how to do something as simple as that."

"C'mon, everybody wants to talk about themselves, a little."

"Well, I'm 43 and single. I work a shit job, because I have nothing else better to do with my time. Not that I'm a loser, I was in the Army and saw the world. Saw some things I wished I hadn't seen. I have been engaged. I guess this is not where my 18 year old self saw future me."

"You don't have a girlfriend?"

"No, too much work. I like to keep it simple. Most days I can barely take care of me."

"You have a kind heart. You haven't even tried to get into my pants yet."

“I figured with Andrew’s situation, that would probably be the last thing on your mind.”

“I could use a distraction right now. Pretty soon the hospital will call and reality will come crashing back in. I just want to feel happy again.”

“Is that really what you want?”

“I think so. Why are you so hesitant?”

“Well, it’s just been my experience that there is no such thing as a one night stand with a single mom. Once the deed is done, you screwed the mother and become a father to the kid. Not that I don’t want to help, I just don’t want to make things any more difficult for you.”

“Mr. Kevin, you are a diamond in the rough, I must admit. You continue to surprise me. At first I just thought I would bang you, but now I’m generally curious about you. I don’t meet many men with substance these days. Us girls like to say that by our age, all the good ones are taken, truth is, there really aren’t many good ones to begin with.”

“Oh, I’m sure you can do much better than me. I’m just a middle aged nobody with a great resume, but still single.”

“It’s hard not to like you. You’re a very likable guy. If you put yourself out there more, I’m sure you wouldn’t be single for very long.”

“Ah, being single isn’t the worst thing in the world. Being with the wrong person is the worst thing in the world. Waking up every morning and realizing the person sleeping next to you isn’t the right one. I couldn’t imagine that.”

“Well, Mr. Kevin, I have to go to work. I do hope we continue our conversation at some future time.” said Belle.

“Me too. I hope I helped.”

“You did. You’re one of the few people I’ve met that actually has helped in all this. Don’t be a stranger. Kevin.....why didn’t you try to kiss me? I figured you would. Are you not attracted to me?”

“Belle, I’m very attracted to you. I don’t know, I guess I just figure that I would be taking advantage of you right now. I’m your friend too and friends don’t take advantage of each other.”

“You can take advantage of me anytime you want to.” she said as he left her apartment.

Kevin went back to his apartment and relieved himself in the bedroom. He hadn’t been with a woman in almost a year and he strikes out on three pitches.....or more like fouled out. At any rate, he had passed on a big opportunity. Maybe he really was getting older. Maybe he should just think about retiring at this point.

A decent looking woman throws herself at me and I turn her down? The hell’s wrong with me?

He looked at himself and then it hit him: If he did her right then and there, it would be a one time thing. Now, he had his hooks in her. By turning her down, he had made certain it wouldn't be just a one time thing. With age comes wisdom, or something like that. He was setting her up. He didn't even realize he was doing it. He smiled at himself.

She actually thought he was a nice guy. *I am a nice guy, but I'm also a guy.* She must understand that. Problem was, he wasn't just screwing Belle, he would have to deal with that whack job kid of hers. Almost made him think twice about it. Kevin's problem was that his life was stuck in a rut, but he didn't want to damage his axle trying to get out of it. Being a fake dad to a psycho kid was a little more than he was willing to bite off at this point. He had to chuckle at himself. Ten years ago, maybe even five years ago, he would have screwed her brains out. Something had changed inside of him recently. He was older and by older, he also meant cautious. He had seen too many hot romances blow up into full fledged disasters because neither party had thought it through. He had also seen women ruin men financially. He had worked hard for what he had. He wasn't about to just throw it away. Hopefully at his age, he was beginning to think with the right head. His penis no longer called the shots.

He didn't see her for the next week. He figured she probably just moved on. Most women don't handle rejection very well, which is why he was surprised when she rang his doorbell one afternoon. He opened the door and there she was. Wearing cut off shorts and a tee shirt. His mood suddenly improved. He popped a piece of gum in his mouth and opened the door.

"Hi Belle."

"Hi yourself. Andrew is home from the hospital. I guess he's better. He promised me he wouldn't kill himself again, so I guess I have that going for me. I was just wondering if you would like to join us for dinner tonight. I'm not much of a cook, but what I can cook, I can do it very well."

"Well, I'm not much of a cook either, but I am a very good eater. What time is dinner?"

"Six o'clock. I hope I see you there. You won't flake will you?"

"If I'm still breathing at six o'clock, I will be there."

"Great, I'll see you then. Andrew is looking forward to meeting you."

"I'll see you then." he said.

He hopped in the shower and then found his best clothes. He even broke out the iron. Kevin didn't want to show up to dinner looking like a slob.

He knocked on the door. Belle answered. She looked incredible. She was wearing a flower dress and sandals. She had her hair down. With a little bit of work, she could be a real knock out. He brought 2 bottles of wine, one white, one red. Belle was impressed.

"Wow, I wasn't sure if you were going to show up or not."

"Belle, I didn't get this nine dollar haircut for nothing, now" he said and handed her the wine.

"Wine....I am impressed Kevin. Are you trying to get me drunk?"

“I’m trying to get me drunk.” he replied.

The two of them sat down and talked for a few minutes. Belle made lasagna. Kevin helped set the table. When the food was on the table and the wine poured, she went to get Andrew. Kevin sat down and held his breath.

They returned a minute later. Andrew came in and actually shook his hand.

“Nice to meet you sir.” he said meekly.

“Nice to meet you too Andrew.” he said shaking his hand.

They all sat down to eat. Belle began talking, probably to break the ice. She had gotten a promotion at work and was fired about the possibilities.

“I’m not a pee on anymore! People have to listen to me now. My opinion actually matters.”

Everyone was trying to ignore the giant elephant in the room, which was Andrew’s suicide attempt. He was polite, but Kevin could tell, he just didn’t want him there. It was probably a lot for a fifteen year old kid to take in. Some new guy was going to be banging his mom? That was bound to create friction. Kevin figured he would try to break the ice as gently as he could.

“You play any sports Andrew?”

“No sir. I’m a gamer. I’m competing this weekend. Top prize is five thousand dollars.” he said without looking up.

“Five thousand? I guess I should start gaming.”

“Andrew isn’t into sports. I wasn’t either. I can’t even catch a football.” said Belle.

“Everybody is good at something. I used to play football in high school. Up until my little incident.”
“What little incident?” asked Andrew.

“Well. I was the kicker. I was pretty good too. Field goals, punting. Even had a few scouts look me over. My idiot coach decides to put me in one game to return a kick. I pleaded with the guy not to put me in, but he said there was no one else. We were down four players. The running backs had to block. So I catch the kick, then I see these Neanderthals running towards me at full speed. I’m not sure why, but I turned right around and ran back through my own end zone, over the fence and back into the locker room, still holding the football. Unfortunately, the AV club was filming the game, so the entire episode was caught on film. Even made the six o’clock news. I was kind of a local celebrity, but for all the wrong reasons. I got kicked off the team, my girlfriend broke up with me and my parents decided to send me to live with my relatives in West Virginia for the rest of the school year. You ever been to West Virginia?”

“No.....are you serious?”

“Oh, yes. Couldn’t make it up if I tried.”

Andrew just looked at him and then started laughing.

“That’s the funniest thing I’ve ever heard.” he said, laughing hysterically.

Belle was laughing too, but in a different way. It was more of a sign of relief.

You’re in now Kevin, don’t screw it up.

The ice had indeed been broken. Andrew looked at Kevin and just assumed he was a big jock in high school. He was in for quite a shock to discover that Kevin was no jock. He was just as dorky as every other kid his age. Andrew was still laughing a few minutes later.

“Why didn’t you just run out of bounds or something?” he asked

“I didn’t want to get hurt. I wasn’t going to take the chance. Coach never should have put me in.” Andrew wanted to know all about Kevin’s high school career after that. Andrew was beginning to discover that he was not the only one who had problems in high school.

“I graduated in 1994, well, I got my GED then. I still couldn’t graduate with my class. The principal didn’t want me on stage, said I was too big of an embarrassment. Got my diploma mailed to me the next week. High school was kind of a disaster for me.”

“I’ll bet. Your girlfriend left you?”

“Yup, the very next day. She didn’t even want to hear my side of it.” he said.

“Wow, that must have sucked.” said Andrew.

“Oh, it did. I guess even back then I knew I just wasn’t somebody who did what everybody else was doing. I do my own thing. Clearly, that was not football.”

“So, what do you do now?”

“I drive a forklift at a big warehouse in town. Union job. Good money and benefits. It might not sound like much, but I’ve done far worse things for far less money.”

“So, are you going to date my mother?”

“Well, I guess that’s up to you Andrew?”

“How is it up to me?”

“Your mom’s priority right now is to be your mother. She can’t really do that if you don’t want me around. I don’t want to create any friction between you two.”

Andrew was stunned. No one had ever asked his opinion on anything before. He was almost being treated like an adult. This was a first for him.

“You aren’t going to try and be my father, right?”

“Andrew, I’m just here to help. I’m not trying to be anything to anyone. I just know that in life, when you’re lucky enough to find someone you can stand to be around for more than five minutes, you have to hold onto them, that’s all. I like Belle, she likes me. You got to think about the future Andrew, not dwell on the past.”

Andrew slowly nodded. He finished his dinner, then helped his mom clean the table. When he was out of sight, Belle threw her arms around him and kissed him.

“You handled that better than I thought you would. You’re right.”

“About what?”

“About holding onto the people who don’t make you vomit.”

“I was trying to be honest.”

“I know, that’s what I like about, you’re honest.” she said and kissed him again.

As Kevin was about to leave, Andrew came back into the room. He didn’t say anything, but Kevin knew something was on his mind. So did Belle. They both shut up for a second and let Andrew speak.

“You’re okay, Kevin. You can date my mom if you want.” he said and went back to his room.

He and Belle looked at one another. Neither of them saw this coming.

“Well, thank you Andrew. I might just do that.” said Kevin.

“You know, the more I’m with you, the more I like you.” she said, putting her arms around him.

“I feel exactly the same way Belle.” he said

“I hope you come and find me on your next day off.” she said.

“If I can ever get a day off, I promise I will.” he said and stepped out of their apartment.

He didn’t see either of them for nearly a week. He didn’t want to try and force anything. He just figured it would happen when it happened. He then remembered his brother had given him two tickets to a hockey game. He now had an excuse to see Belle. He walked up the stairs and rang the doorbell to her apartment. She answered the door wearing almost nothing. It took all he had not to take her right there. “Why Kevin, I thought you had forgotten about us.”

“Belle, you are rather unforgettable. No, I was just wondering if you wanted to go to the hockey game with me tomorrow night.” he said and showed her the tickets.

“Hockey! I love hockey. The fights are the best part. Hell yes, when do we leave?” she asked
“Game starts at seven. I’ll pick you up at six.”

“Sounds good. I’ll let Andrew now. I haven’t left him alone since his incident.”

“Oh. I’m sure I can get another ticket if he wants to go.”

“I’ll ask him. I guess I have to leave him alone at some point. Yeah, this will be fun. I’ll be ready.”

There was an awkward pause between them for a second. Kevin knew it was now or never. He leaned in and kissed her on her lips. She kissed him back and a few minutes later, they had their clothes off and were screwing their brains out. It happened so fast, he could barely believe it.

“That was the best minute and a half of my life.” said Belle.

Kevin looked over at her and she started laughing.

“You got the full two minutes. I was watching the clock.”

“You brought your A game, huh?”

“Only game I got.” he said and gave her a cigarette.

She told him that Andrew would be home for school soon and she didn’t want him to find them together. It was too soon to drop this on him. As she was getting dressed, she voiced some concerns to Kevin.

“He’s wearing this weird pentagram around his neck. Says a friend gave it to him. He doesn’t have any friends, so naturally I was curious. He just sits and stares off into space sometimes. Almost like his body is here, but his mind is somewhere else. He’s motionless, like a statue. Creepiest damn thing I’ve ever seen.” she said as she got dressed.

“You didn’t think this was all just going to go away did you?”

“I love Andrew to death. He’s my baby boy, but sometimes.....I don’t know, I’m almost afraid of him. It’s like some kind of alien or monster has taken over his body. Every day it seems like I’m losing him a little bit more.”

“Maybe it’s his medication.”

“Maybe. I don’t really want him on that crap. If you aren’t crazy when you start that stuff, you will be by the time you’re off of it.”

“I better get going. I’ll see you tomorrow night.” he said and kissed her on her lips. If he had just a few more minutes, he would have screwed her again.

“Tomorrow night.” she said and blew him a kiss.

Kevin was ready at five forty five. He knew Belle would need more time, so he showed up a few minutes early. He knocked on their door. Belle answered with a towel around her hair. She was on her phone. She just pointed to the living room. Kevin walked and sat down across from Andrew who was sitting across from him on the sofa. He just smiled at Kevin.

“You got a cigarette?” asked Andrew

“Andrew, you shouldn’t smoke. It’s a terrible habit. Believe me, I know.”

“If it’s so bad, why you do it?”

“Nicotine. It’s as bad as heroin, only it’s legal.”

“Come on, I won’t tell my mom. This medication is fucking me up so bad, I need one, please.” he said.

“This isn’t some kind of weird test is it?” he said and gave Andrew two cigarettes.

“Thanks man. I knew you’d be cool.”

“What kind of crap have they got you taking?”

“It’s got some big, long name. Stuff is messing me all up. I can’t concentrate. All I want to do is sleep.” Kevin genuinely felt bad for the kid. No 15 year old should be going through what is. He was being robbed of his childhood, something he will never get back.

“Your mom and I are going out tonight. You’re going to be cool while we’re gone, right?”

“Yeah, I’ll be cool. I’m going to game once my friend gets off work. I’ll be busy for the whole night.”

“You can go if you want.”

“Naw, I hate crowds. You guys go, have a good time. So, you finally screwed my mom, huh?”

“What makes you say that?”

“She hasn’t stopped smiling for the past two days. She was even singing to herself this morning.”

“I’ll see you later Andrew.”

“Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” he said from the chair.

Kevin had to chuckle to himself. There really was no such thing as teenagers any more, just small adults. The internet and social media made sure of that.

The two of them could barely keep their hands off one another during the game. At one point, they thought about leaving and just getting a motel room for the evening, but there was Andrew. As badly as Kevin wanted her, he just wasn’t going to take the chance. He would never forgive himself if something were to happen and neither would she.

The more they talked, the more he realized that Belle was really just a closet wild child. She had spent the better part of the last two decades caring for her son and now, it was time for her to start living her life. She had a lot of lost time to make up for. She had Andrew when she was just 18. His father was ten years older than her. He wasn’t sure if she was really that into him, or just wanted to make up for lost time with the first available man who crossed her path. Not that it mattered, right now, they were both crazy for each other. Neither of them were even watching the game, except for a fight. Belle ran

down to the glass and started pounding on it. When it was over, she returned to her seat.

“Weak.” she said laughing.

When the game was over, Kevin knew he had to bring her back home. She told him to take a turn and park on a deserted street.

“What are we doing here?” asked Kevin.

“You’ll find out in about one minute.” she said and began taking off her pants.

The sex was quick and furious. They both climaxed at exactly the same time. Kevin hoped she was using birth control.

“God, I needed that.” she said as she pulled her pants back up.

“I didn’t even know it was possible to do that in this truck.” he said, still in awe of what had just happened.

“Well, now you do.”

She and Kevin were now texting each other frequently. He didn’t really want a relationship, but he wanted Belle. She was almost intoxicating to him. This was no one sided relationship. Within three weeks, they had gone from having their first conversation, to screwing one another twice or three times a day. They just couldn’t get enough of one another. Relationships had never really been his thing, but with her it seemed so easy. He didn’t have to try or pretend, he was just himself. Maybe that’s why they worked. They could just be themselves around one another.

Andrew’s condition hadn’t worsened, but it hadn’t gotten any better. He was under a court order to take his medication. Belle had searched the internet for the medication and it’s side effects and they were rather severe.

Severe changes in personality and appearance.

Nausea and vomiting.

Decreased sex drive.

Constipation.

It may also cause death in severe cases.

Its side effects were pretty much the same as arsenic or cyanide. Kevin just couldn’t understand how this medicine was so dangerous, yet it was handed out as if it were candy. The effects weren’t just physical, the real damage was mental as well. *Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, or SSRIs* as they were called in the industry. Belle was getting nervous. Andrew’s behavior was getting more and more bizarre. He had gone from being depressed to paranoid. He believed someone or something was following him. Kevin was thrown right in the middle of all of this. He really didn’t know how to help Andrew, but he knew that he had to get this kid off of these drugs and fast. Problem was, Belle could go to jail if he got arrested and the police discovered he was not taking his medication. It was insane, but that’s what the law says. He was *violating a court order*. Kevin just called it *saving the poor kid’s life*.

"I just don't understand how the court can force somebody to take something as dangerous as this and make themselves immune from the side effects. The hell right does a court have to tell somebody what medication they can take? This is America right?" he asked one day a few weeks into their relationship.

"It's America in 2019. Right is wrong. Up is down, Black is white. I gave up trying to figure this country out years ago." she said.

"Well, 2+2 is still four in my book, not 22. I don't think Andrew should be taking any of this crap.. It clearly states on the bottle to stop taking it if any of these symptoms appear and I think we can both agree they have appeared."

"He isn't suicidal anymore. That has to count for something."

"He's not a person anymore either. That should count for something too."

"If you think he should stop taking it, then tell him to stop." said Belle.

"That's not my call to make, Belle. I just think this crap is doing permanent damage to him that can't be easily undone."

"Let's just give him a little more time. If he gets any worse, we'll take him off the meds, okay?"

"It's your call. I know you don't want another suicide attempt, but this stuff might kill him before he gets the chance."

Things did not get any better for him over the next month. He and Belle were now officially a couple and went everywhere together. Andrew had unfortunately become almost a third wheel. He had also grown fond of the boy. He would sneak him in cigarettes when Belle was at work. She had even given him a key. Andrew called him "fake dad", but he did it in a half hearted way. The two of them were growing closer. Kevin was the only real friend he had besides his mom. Andrew taught him how to play video games and Kevin tried to keep him from going insane. It wasn't easy.

At one point, he was tempted just to throw away all of Andrew's medications. He hated to see what this stuff was doing to the kid.

"Christ Belle, he'd be better off smoking pot. We know that won't kill him."

He could see the changes in Andrew. The meds weren't just making him sick, they were slowly stripping away his personality and everything that made him unique. His sleep schedule was erratic. He was almost becoming nocturnal. He had missed so much school, Belle doubted he would graduate on time. His grades were in the toilet. He had a hard time concentrating. It almost killed Kevin to see a kid have to go through this. Belle didn't like it either, but he was no longer suicidal, so in theory, the meds did work, just not in the way they were supposed to. Kevin later discovered that the medication Andrew was taking had been fast tracked for approval by the FDA. They had never even undergone Phase 2 or Phase 3 trials as prescribed by their own regulations. He and Belle had also reached their first plateau, something Kevin should have seen coming, but didn't. As much as Belle loved her son, she also loved being a woman again. She loved waking up next to someone and making love before she has her morning coffee. It had been years since she had been in a relationship. As attracted as he was to her, he was a little upset at the fact that she seemed to be ignoring Andrew's deteriorating condition.

She snapped at him a few times when he brought it up. She just wanted to pretend everything was all better, when clearly it was not. Andrew needed her now more than ever.

"I don't have to worry about finding him dead when I come home from work! That has to count for something." she said one afternoon.

"They are using him as a guinea pig? Doesn't that bother you?"

"What do you want me to do? I have two shrinks telling me this is my best option. I don't want him to stay at the whacko farm, so what other choice do I have?"

"There's got to be a better way than this. Did he ever tell you why he tried to kill himself?"

"I never asked. Whatever the reason is, it's not a good reason, so I figured, why bother?"

"He just seems more and more strung out every time I see him. It's like he's taking LSD or something."

"He has to go and see the doctor next week, maybe we can get his meds changed, okay?"

Kevin did not want to let it go, but they had to get ready to go to her company's Christmas Party. She wanted to show him off to her co-workers. Kevin didn't want to start a fight, not right now. As disturbed as he was by what was happening to Andrew, he knew it was not his call to make. He was her boyfriend, not Andrew's dad. All he could do was be there for him and listen to him, like his real father should have done.

At month five into their relationship, they had gone from quick, almost violent sex to being a more stable couple. Kevin still kept his apartment, but had moved into Belle and Andrew's place almost full time.

The doctor had thankfully lowered Andrew's dosage for most of his meds. His condition had improved, but he was still far from normal. The medication tended to make him almost delusional and paranoid, so he had to take another pill to counter the side effects from that pill. It was ridiculous, but that was the American medical model. Profit at all costs, even the well being of the patient. As upset as he was with her, there was no going back now, he was all Andrew had. His real father had sent him a get well card after his suicide attempt.

"A goddamn card! The bastard didn't even have the decency to come and see him in the hospital!" screamed Belle.

They had told each other several times they were madly in love with each other and neither one was lying. They were exactly what each other needed. Kevin was a stable adult and Belle was still an immature, free spirit, who was trying to make up for lost time. They were doing things that a college couple would do, not really appropriate for someone their age. Not that either one really cared what others think. They were on each other's minds all the time. Kevin and Belle's relationship was in the big leagues now.

One night in the apartment, Belle had been called into work, she wouldn't be back home until late. Kevin made dinner and both he and Andrew were watching TV. Andrew had lost even more weight and barely finished his dinner. Kevin was now very worried about him. Anyone with half a brain could

just look at him and see that he was not well. Everyone it seems, but his own mother. The two said nothing for a few minutes, then Andrew suddenly came to and looked around the room. He looked worried....*very worried*.

“What’s the matter?” asked Kevin.

Andrew said nothing and just sat back in the recliner.

“Come on man, something’s bothering you.”

“Nothing, Kevin.....I’m hearing things and seeing things. Things I know aren’t there, but if they’re not real, then why do I see them?”

“What do you see?”

“I keep seeing this guy. I don’t know who he is or what he’s doing, but I keep seeing him. It’s like he’s following me or something. He’s just this average guy. Maybe not average, he looks like he’s going golfing or something. He wears this stupid outfit. He’s trying to control me. He wants me to do horrible things Kevin....terrible things.”

Kevin didn’t know quite what to do. He wanted Andrew to tell him everything. The kid needed a real person to talk to, not a doctor.

“Andrew.....I think you should stop taking those damn meds. Just throw them away. The hell with the court order. It’s your own goddamn life. Do what is best for you and throw them away. Did you start seeing this guy before you were on them?”

“No, no I didn’t.”

“Well, there you go. Tell me the truth, did you really want to die that day?”

“No, not really. I could have just taken mom’s gun and shot myself if I really wanted to. I guess it really was just a pathetic cry for attention. No one really wants to die, even somebody as fucked up as me.”

“Those meds are killing you. Get rid of them.”

“Yeah, I think you’re right. Kevin, can you buy me some weed at the dispensary?”

“That would not go over very well with your mom, Andrew.”

“She doesn’t have to know. I’ve smoked a few times, I think it helps me, calms me down. I feel better after smoking.”

“Andrew, she’d kill me, remember, I’m still on my probationary period with her. One screw up and I could be given the boot.”

“I doubt it. She’s nuts for you. I haven’t seen her this happy in....well forever. Some people just have to be with someone, mom’s like that. Please, Kevin, I just want to feel like myself again.”

“One joint. I don’t want you turning into a pothead.”

“Fine, it’s like the only real medication there is. it’s what I need.”

“You better not tell your mom.”

“I won’t. Thanks man. You’re the first person I’ve met in a long time who doesn’t suck. I’m glad you hooked up with my mom. She’s dated a lot of losers before you.”

Andrew did something that completely shocked Kevin. He actually got up and gave him a hug. Not like the kind of hug you give your grandma, but a real hug. *Like the kind you give to someone who just saved your life.*

Kevin hugged him back. He might not be his father, but the two of them were now as close as father and son. His mission had become painfully clear.

Somebody has to save this kid from himself.

It was now month seven of their relationship. He had wanted to propose to her, but didn’t want her to feel like she was trapped. Kevin was unaware that Belle was secretly hoping and praying he would. The two of them never went anywhere without one another. They were literally joined at the hip. Andrew’s condition had also greatly improved, once he stopped taking his medication. He still had his bad days and had been expelled from school for threatening to kill a bully, but that aside, he was showing improvement. More importantly to Kevin, he was beginning to look and act like a real person again. Not some drugged out zombie that could barely form coherent sentences. That’s why it came as a complete shock the day Belle called him, hysterical and broke the news to him work, while he was loading a semi truck at work.

“Kevin.....Andrew just shot some kids at his school.” she said, gasping for air.”

“What! Jesus, where are you?”

“I’m at the school. They have him in custody. He’s alive.”

Kevin jumped off the forklift and told the warehouse manager what was happening. He was in his truck a minute later and sped off towards the school. He was hoping this was a bad dream, a horrible dream and he was going to wake up in his bed and be grateful for the fact that it wasn’t a dream. *The nightmare was real.*

There were police lights and ambulances everywhere. The police had set up a roadblock, stopping everyone. Kevin told one of the officers that he was Andrew’s father. The officer got on his radio and two detectives met him at the roadblock. Hundreds of parents had showed up and the police were having difficulty controlling the crowd. It was total chaos. Kevin saw dozens of heavily armed officers in body armor drive into the school.

“Are you Andrew Gonzalez’s father?” asked one of the detectives.

“I’m his mom’s boyfriend. I live with him.” said Kevin

“So, then his biological father doesn’t live with him?”

“No, I’ve never even met him. I consider him to be my son.”

Kevin followed the officers back to the TAC Center. He met several other officers. They broke the news to him and he couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

Andrew had shot a total of thirteen people shortly before second period. Three were dead, the others were wounded, but will probably live. Kevin collapsed on the hood of one of the cars. Andrew had been taken into custody. Belle was at the station being interviewed. Kevin asked if he could join her.

“What kind of gun did he use?”

“9mm. He was tackled by some other students when he tried to reload. Fortunately, the kid couldn’t shoot worth a shit, otherwise the death toll would have been much worse.” said a police lieutenant.

“Holy shit.”

“Sir, do you own a 9mm?”

“No, I have a revolver I keep hidden in my closet. I don’t see how Andrew could have known about it. It must have been his mothers, but she keeps it in a safe. Andrew doesn’t have the combination. She made sure of it.”

“Well, clearly he got it somehow.”

“It uses a combination. I don’t even know what the combination is.”

“We’re going to have to search your apartment. Do you need a warrant or do we have your consent to search?”

“No, do what you have to do.....three kids are dead?”

“Yes. We’re going to get you out of here for your own safety. If I were one of those parents, I’d want you dead.” said the detective.

Belle ran up to him and threw her arms around him. She was sobbing. Kevin just hugged her for what seemed like forever. Two officers separated them and told them that they were going to be interviewed separately. Kevin understood. For all intents and purposes, both he and Belle may have been the shooters. The police told them what they had discovered and told them that they were now searching their apartment. They would try to be as careful as they could, but there were no guarantees. Andrew was a mass murderer, now and as far as the legal system is concerned, he had very few rights, if any.

“Well, this is what we know so far: At 8:43 this morning, Andrew walked into the school library and just started shooting everyone in sight. We have him shooting people on the CCTV cameras, as well as fifty witnesses who identified him as the shooter. As far as a case goes, this one is pretty much open and shut. He wasn’t too familiar with how a handgun works and had difficulty reloading the bullets into the clip. Two students and one teacher tackled him and held him down until we arrived. That’s it in a

nutshell.”

Kevin heard the officer, but it was like he wasn’t really talking to him.

This can’t be happening.....this just cannot be fucking happening. No way, no how.

“Isabelle identified the gun. It’s hers. Any idea how he got it?”

“She keeps it locked in a safe. After Andrew’s suicide attempt, no way was she just going to leave a gun laying around the house.”

“Did she write down the combination someplace?”

“No, she told me she was the only one who knew the combination. Didn’t even have a key. She didn’t want him to get a hold of it and open the safe. Did he break the safe or something?”

“No, the officers say the safe looks just like it had been opened with no forcible entry. He knew the combination.”

“He’s going to be charged with murder, isn’t he?”

“3 counts of first degree murder and thirteen counts of attempted murder, not to mention other charges. He is co-operating, but at this point what's done is done.”

“I know he’s got some issues, but I just can’t believe he would do something like this. It just doesn’t make any sense. Did he say why he shot all these people?” asked Kevin

“Says he doesn’t remember a damn thing. Doesn’t remember taking the gun, doesn’t remember firing it. Doesn’t remember anything until he was tackled by the others. Just one big black hole.” said one of the detectives.

“Oh, dear God. Can I see Isabelle?”

“As soon as we’re done here. You must understand that because you are not the boy’s biological father, you don’t really have any legal rights to see him or to speak with him. He’s being booked at the county jail. Since he is a juvenile, he won’t be housed with the other inmates.”

“He’s going to spend the rest of his life in prison, isn’t he?”

“That’s not up to us to decide, we gather evidence. Not that there’s much to gather at this point. Look, I get it. No parent in the world would expect something like this to happen.”

“I just can’t believe Andrew would do something like this. Yeah, he’s got his problems, but he’s not a murderer. He’s just a screwed up kid. I can’t believe he would just do something like this.”

“Well, he did. We just got word that one of the victims died on the operating table. That makes a total of four dead.” said one of the officers.

Kevin put his head on the table in the interview room. He knew what was coming. Both he and Belle’s

lives were over. There would be no coming back from this. They had just run right in a giant concrete wall going a hundred miles per hour.....and they weren't wearing their seat belts.

Both he and Belle had to leave their apartment complex. The media was waiting for them when they came back home that night. Neither of them really knew what to say, but they knew they ought to say something. Belle tried to offer a heartfelt apology. She had to regain her composure several times while reading a statement.

"To all the family and friends of the victims of the shooting today, please let me be the first to say that I am so sorry for the actions of my son. There are just no words to express how terrible we feel right now. I wish I knew what to say, only that I am so sorry for the actions of my son." she said and quickly ran upstairs to her apartment.

Neither he nor Belle got much sleep that night, nor did they get any in the days and weeks that followed. The tragedy was used by every extremist group to further their agenda. To the left, it was a cry for more gun control, to the right, it was another glaring example to let school teachers be armed. The resource officer was handling a dispute in the parking lot between two parents when the shots were fired. It took him almost eight minutes to get to the library. By that time, the shooting was over. Andrew was lucky to be alive after what he did, not that he would have much of a life, but at least he was still breathing. When the media circus died down a few weeks later, the library had been reopened, but the scars were still present. The school board hired two new officers for the school, but it was just feel good window dressing. There really is no way to stop someone from committing an act of pure evil, as Belle and Kevin quickly discovered.

They hired an experienced criminal defense attorney, who strongly advised them in their first meeting to simply take the state's plea deal.

"We have a few things going for us, the most important being that Andrew is a juvenile. He might be tried as an adult, but he will go to a juvenile facility until he is 21. The second is his obvious history of mental illness. It won't be too hard to establish a clear pattern of mental instability. My advice is to take the state's plea deal, they don't want this to go to trial and neither do we. A life sentence for a juvenile is only 20 years. We could roll the dice and plea insanity, but that's a big risk. We lose and Andrew is locked away in a state prison with monsters for the rest of his life, or he could be given the death penalty. It's too big a risk to take."

"I talked to him that night after the shooting. I asked him why he did this. He doesn't remember a thing. Nothing. He doesn't remember taking the gun that morning or shooting all those people. He's blocked it out."

"That's not very uncommon. He's done a horrible thing to his peers. It won't help us in court. Whether he remembers it or not doesn't matter. The school cameras will be all the evidence the prosecutor needs." said their attorney.

"They aren't really letting us talk to him right now. I have to wait for visiting hours which aren't until next week again. I talk to him on the phone, but it's not the same. He's so scared. He doesn't believe he did what he did."

"It's those goddamn meds he was on. Made him into some kind of monster." added Kevin.

“About that. When the police searched your apartment, they found all of Kevin’s meds. He was under a court order to be taking them and clearly he had stopped. That’s not going to help our case one bit.”

“He stopped taking his pills?” asked Belle.

“Yes. He still had two bottles of unopened pills. You can see the problem we’re going to have here.”

Belle just looked at Kevin and he looked away. He knew right then and there they were in big trouble and not just legal trouble. Belle waited until they were back in the truck to explode.

“Did you tell him to stop taking his medication? Look me in the eye and tell me the truth.” she said

“Christ, they were killing him. I didn’t know this was going to happen. How the hell could I have seen this coming?”

“This is your fault! It’s your fault my baby is sitting in jail right now. You should have just left us alone. We were doing fine before you came into our lives.” Kevin had never seen her so angry. You could almost see the anger radiating off of her.

“Is that really how you feel?” asked Kevin.

“Right now, yes.”

Kevin knew she needed time to cool off. When they arrived back home, he packed some of his things from her apartment and his, then left. This was either going to drive them apart or bring them together, he figured he now had his answer. Belle said nothing as he packed. She slammed the door in his face after he left.

“Back to the drawing board I guess.” he said to himself and left.

He had inherited his late uncle’s garage in town. It was not in the best neighborhood, but it had a working bathroom and shower. Kevin had kept the power turned on, as he was trying to sell it. He was going to use the money to pay for their wedding and honeymoon. So much for that plan.

He unlocked the garage door and pulled in. He turned on the lights and found a cot in the backroom his uncle used to sleep on when he was too drunk to drive home.

“I’m a bigger failure than he was. At least he never lost his girl.” he thought and drank himself to sleep.

Belle wouldn’t take his calls. She had dropped him for all intents and purposes. He knew their relationship was done, but he still wanted to see Andrew. He wasn’t the boy’s real father and had no rights as far as the law was concerned, but that didn’t stop him from trying. When the message on Belle’s voicemail said she would be away for a few days, he knew it was his chance. He had to see Andrew without his mother being there. It was the only way to get some real answers.

He had his ID run for wants and warrants. He was searched, then finally he was seated behind the glass and waited for Andrew. He came in a few minutes later wearing orange prison clothes. He had lost weight. He looked like shit, but his face lit up when he saw Kevin. He came over and put his hand on

the glass.

“Hi Kevin, good to see you!” he said into the microphone.

“Good to see you too man. They treating you alright in here?”

“Yeah, thank God I’m a juvenile. I got my own wing, even my own cell. There’s about a dozen of us in here. We have to be kept separate from the other inmates. I heard you and mom kind of broke up. That sucks.”

“These things happen. I just didn’t want you to think I had forgotten about you. I’m still thinking of you.”

“Kevin, I’m fucked man. Mom says to take the plea deal and I’ll avoid the death penalty, but that will mean being a prisoner for the rest of my life. I almost wonder which one is worse.”

Kevin found it almost disturbing that any sixteen year old kid would be talking about this as if he were discussing football scores. It would be overwhelming for a man his own age to have to make this decision, let alone a sixteen year old kid.

“Andrew, why did you shoot all those people? What did they do to you?”

“Kevin, I swear man. I don’t remember anything about it at all. I just blanked out. I don’t remember firing the gun or anything. Nothing.”

“You and I both know it was those goddamn meds you were on. They rewire the chemistry of the brain. This wasn’t your fault Andrew, it was the drug companies that are responsible for this, not you. They’re the ones who should be put on trial. You would think with all the mass shootings, someone would start investigating, but I guess that’s asking for too much.”

“My lawyer says I should just take the deal. He says I will be confined to mental institutions for the rest of my life, but I won’t go to prison. I think it’s my only option at this point.”

“Andrew.....you really don’t remember anything about that day? Nothing? I just don’t understand how you can not remember blowing somebody’s head off.”

“Kevin, the first thing I remember is Mr. Clarke tackling me. I’m thinking: why the hell is this guy trying to fight me? Then I see I’m holding a gun. Then I see the blood. It all just hit me at once. I don’t understand either, but that’s what happened. It’s like someone else was in control of me. Like I was their puppet and they were pulling the strings.”

“I wish I could help you Andrew, I really do.”

“Kevin. I’m going to be real with you here for a minute. This just stays between us, okay?”

“Of course.”

“I know why I killed those people. He made me do it.”

“Who made you do it?”

“That weird guy I was seeing. The one who looks like he’s going golfing.”

“How did he make you do it?”

“I don’t know, but I know somehow he was involved. I’ve had a lot of time to think in here, cause that’s all I do. Sit in my cell and think and let me tell you, it sucks. I asked myself the same question: why did I shoot all those people and I came up with a theory. I know it’s crazy, but it’s honestly what I believe to be true.”

“What’s your theory?”

“I never saw any of them before I started taking my psych meds. It took a little while, but eventually, I was seeing them everywhere. These weird looking people. It was like they were watching me. I wrote it off as just the meds and that was true, but these people, they’re bad people, real bad people. They can control your mind and put all kinds of terrible thoughts in it. You don’t even realize it’s happening. No one else can see them, or if they do, they just ignore them, but for some reason, when you’re on the meds, it makes you vulnerable to them. Our brain has defenses against them and when we screw it up, they take over. Some days I would just find myself somewhere and I had no idea how I got there, or what I was doing. I wasn’t in control of myself anymore. I know somehow, they put that gun in my hand and made me do what I did. *I didn’t do it, they did, only it was my hand that did the shooting.*”

Kevin had to sit back. The kid was either full blown nuts, or maybe, just maybe, he had given him the first clue in this puzzle. There was certainly a strong link between this brain candy and mass shootings. Kevin had noticed that prior to the advent of PROZAC in the late 1980’s that mass shootings were rare. Up until Oklahoma City, the worst act of mass murder in the country was the Bath School Bombing in Michigan in 1927, where a disgruntled school board member blew up an elementary school. As doctors began shoving these meds down people’s throats, the number of mass shootings began to increase. It wasn’t just the kids that were affected, it was everyone. Maybe they were just evil people, maybe they always had these thoughts in the backs of their minds, but never acted on their urges. Maybe the meds were like some key that unlocks a little doorway in their minds and allows something else to enter. Either way, these medications might help some people, but they were a nightmare for others. If only Kevin had been aware of this months ago.

“Wait, I thought you stopped taking your meds?”

“I did, all but Doexyaquel. That stuff called to me. It was like candy for my brain. The rest of them were just tranquilizers. Doexy was the one. It’s the one that caused all of this.”

“Andrew, I know this has got to be a nightmare for you, but I want you to know, I’m always here for you. Anytime you want to talk, you just give me a call.”

“Thanks man. I was so ashamed of what I did. I figured you wouldn’t want to talk to me. I let everybody down, especially you. I’m sorry.”

“What’s done is done. I didn’t put my foot down, cause I’m your fake dad and I didn’t want to upset your mother. Clearly that was not the best decision I ever made.”

“You think I should take their deal?”

“I don’t think you have any choice. Anything to keep you out of prison.”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t last five minutes in there. This kid in the cell next to me wants me to join a prison gang called *the Whiteboys*. Says it’s the only way I won’t get killed. I didn’t tell him I’m half Mexican. I got to take this deal. I’m just afraid they will turn me into a zombie again. I have no choice in the hospital. I have to take the meds. I won’t get killed, but I won’t be alive either, you know?”

“Yeah, that’s a tough call to make.”

“God let this happen to me for a reason. I have no idea what that reason is, but I’ve got to find out. Maybe I can just try and warn people about the pills and what they can do to you. Maybe that’s my mission in life.”

“Keep in touch man, our time is almost up.” said Kevin as he put his hand on the glass. Andrew put his up to it as well, then the officer escorted him back to his cell.

Kevin sat in his truck and just had to shake his head and wonder how things had gotten this bad for him and for Andrew. He needed to talk to someone. Some who would just shut up and listen and not try to steer the conversation towards their problems. He knew just the guy. He was a Filipino priest at Kevin’s church, Father Dennis. Kevin had known him since he was a teenager and made his first communion. He had gone to the priest before and always felt better after talking to him. Dennis wasn’t your typical priest. He confessed to Kevin that he has a wife back in the Philippines. Kevin found it reassuring. At least he likes girls.

It had been a while since I had spoken to Father Dennis. He was lucky enough to find him in the rectory of our local church. His face lit up when he saw him.

“Kevin, good to see you.” he said and came over to shake my hand.

“Good to see you too father. It’s been a while.”

“Too long. Please, step into my office. I just got some coffee back from the Philippines. It might not have much, but the coffee there is hard to beat.” he said and poured me a cup.

“So, what’s wrong?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“People don’t come to see their priest when everything is going well.”

“Well, how much time do you have?”

“As much time as you need.”

Kevin started from the beginning. He told Dennis everything, right up to the shooting at the school and his break up with Belle.”

“Do you miss her?”

“Of course I do. I understand she’s upset with me, but I also think she needs someone to blame for all this. I just happen to fit the bill.”

“I can’t imagine something happening like that. Are you praying?”

“No, I kind of figured the man upstairs was more than a little unhappy with me.”

“You know, when I was a boy, my father was in the Bata’ann Death March. He told me stories about it that have scared me so bad, I almost left the country for good years ago. In my 81 years on Earth, nothing will ever prepare me to accept the evil and horror that man has sought to inflict on his fellow man. I’ve seen things I wish I could forget. Things no one should ever have to see. Even us priests suffer from PTSD. We’d like to think that higher power is responsible for all of this, but I’m just not so sure. We all make our own choices. It’s living with those choices that becomes the hard part. Some people just don’t seem to mind doing horrible things to other people.”

“Andrew isn’t a bad kid, he’s just nuts. He can’t even remember shooting the other kids. I don’t think he was responsible. I think those meds he was on somehow re-wired his brain and made it sound perfectly logical to pick up a gun and start shooting your classmates.”

“How is he doing?”

“I’m sure he’s not well. I think the only thing holding him together right now is the fact he can’t remember shooting them. He wrote letters to the victim’s families but they were all returned, unopened. I can understand their feelings. He’s genuinely remorseful. Says he still can’t believe he did it. I don’t know what to believe, but the Andrew I knew wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

“Well, Kevin, I don’t really know what to say, other than I am so sorry this happened to you. I do know, nothing in this world is an accident. Everything has a purpose, as hard as that may be to believe at this moment.”

“What purpose would a senseless stupid act like this have, other than to cause heartache and depression?”

“I don’t know, but I can tell you that God let this horrible event happen for a reason, it’s just up to us to determine what that reason is.”

“Sorry Father, I guess I’m just not really much of a catholic.”

“Well, I’m not really much of a priest. I guess we have more in common than we think.” he said.
“What do I do now?”

Father Dennis paused for a moment before responding.

“You be there for Andrew and his mom. They need you right now more than ever. Even his mother, who hates you, needs you right now. Don’t walk away. God did not put you in this nightmare just to have you walk away now.”

“God’s plan is very, very bizarre. I only wish no one had to die in all this. Sometimes I think there is someone controlling all of this evil. Like some kind of super evil person controlling all of us, making us do these terrible things to one another.”

“Maybe there is, maybe Andrew is just psychotic?”

“Even psychos have their own logic. There is just isn’t any in this case. It’s like some evil force just took control of him. He says there are men dressed up like golfers that caused all of this. Says only people on these psych meds can see them. I want to say he’s crazy, but maybe he isn’t so crazy. You can’t be crazy if you’re right.”

“Kevin, you have to be the adult in this situation. You have to be the one they can lean on. You can’t be sucked into their way of thinking. I mean Andrew is clearly delusional. Whether his medication played a part in it or not is beside the point. If you start thinking like a crazy person, you’re going to start acting like a crazy person. It’s that simple.”

“Andrew may have had his problems, but he wasn’t crazy until he started taking that Deoxyquil. That stuff is bad news. I read there suicides during the clinical trials of it and yet it was still allowed to be sold to the public. For every one it helps, it destroys two others. I guess in medicine those are just acceptable casualties, but when one of them is your own son, it hurts, it really hurts.”

“Be there for them Kevin, but be the one they rely on, not the one who indulges in their fantasies. That’s your job right now.”

“Yes, Father. Thanks for listening to me.”

“Anytime. It was great to see you again. How are your parents and your brothers? it’s been ages since I’ve seen them.”

“They are fine, my parents still go to mass every Sunday. Catholics till the bitter end.”

“That’s what I love about them. If I had a church full of people like them, my job would be a hundred times easier.” he said and finished his coffee.

He followed Kevin out to the parking lot. Kevin looked back and saw Father Dennis waving goodbye. Something about it just seemed odd, like he was wishing him *farewell* and not goodbye. Like there was some kind of sadness in his wave. Like he was being sent on a mission *with no chance of ever coming back home alive*.

Andrew decided to take the plea deal. He would spend the rest of his life in a mental institution. Had he of been just two years older, he would be facing the death penalty. He will spend the rest of his life behind bars, but at least it’s in a hospital and not a cell block. He wasn’t too thrilled about it, but it could certainly have been worse. Kevin saw him two days after he took the deal. Belle signed the paperwork and the Judge agreed. He would never get married or have children, or drive a car, or go to a whore house. He was a ward of the state and the state was a terrible parent. He took it well, for now. Once the reality set in, it was going to be much different. Still, he seemed upbeat about the whole thing.

“I’m going to Sonora State Mental Hospital, a few hours up north. I put you on my guest list. I hope you won’t forget about me.”

“Of course I won’t. How’s your mom?”

“She’s good. I think she misses you. She kind of told me one night a few weeks ago that she misses you and she was too hard on you. You were only trying to help me. She says she wants to call you, but she doesn’t know what to say.”

“How are you doing would be a good start.”

“I told her you come to visit me and she just couldn’t believe it. I guess she figured you would just forget about us.” he said.

“I don’t think I could forget about you guys if I tried. I miss her too. I miss her crazy ass and her temper tantrums. Sometimes I think I miss her a lot.”

“You could be the bigger person and just call her you know.”

“I could, but there is something I have to do first. Something I have to do *off the books*. I don’t want her involved.”

“What is it?”

“Andrew, do you honestly believe those people you saw were real, or just figments of your imagination?”

“You mean the guys who dressed funny?”

“Yes.”

“No, they were real. I’m sure of that.”

“How can you be sure?”

“Cause they lived across the street from us. I saw them every morning when I was waiting for the bus. It was a husband and wife. Maybe a few others. They live in that house across the street from our old apartment.”

“You think somehow they were controlling you?”

“I don’t know Kevin. I still don’t remember a damn thing about that day at school. I know it’s crazy, but I’m telling you the truth. I don’t know why, but I know that dude had something to do with me shooting those people. I can’t explain it, it’s just a feeling I have. I never told the doctors or anybody about it, because they wouldn’t believe me. I’m off the Deoxyquil now and I can think much better. Stay away from that guy, he’s bad news.”

“Yeah, what’s done is done. I’d just like to know how he controlled you. We can’t let something like that happen to somebody else.”

“Kevin, stay away from them. I know they look all innocent and dorkish, but believe me, they aren’t.

They're some bad kind of people. I think he's the one who gave me that pentagram I was wearing. I don't even know how I got it. I think it was made out of bones."

"Maybe he really is just a dork?"

"Maybe. Maybe I'm the one who's crazy."

"You gonna be ok in here? You can call me anytime, night or day, I'm always here for you."

"Thanks man. My real dad won't even come to see me. Piece of shit. You are my real dad, not him. He's the fake dad, not you. I'm sorry I let you down. Sorry I let everybody down."

"You really think I should call your mom?"

"Yeah, I do. Maybe bring her some flowers. You are still going to have to grovel."

"I'm good at groveling."

"Well, then you should do fine." he said.

Kevin stood across the street and watched the house. He watched an older couple go in and out. He had watched it now for three days. He was certain there were only the two of them inside. There wasn't a whole lot of room for error. It was now or never.

He ran across the street after they left and went around back. It was a two story duplex. He climbed onto the porch. He wasn't certain if anyone or not would recall his face. He didn't want to wear a mask. That would attract too much attention. He was pretty certain the couple would want the downstairs apartment. He looked inside. It looked pretty immaculate. He saw a toaster and a TV that looked right out 1989. This had to be their apartment. He knew old people loved their security alarms and many of them had installed cameras inside the house as well. Once he was inside, he would put on his ski mask, but not until then. He looked around. It was a busy street in the middle of the day, but there was no one around in the backyard. He took out his small glass cutter and cut a small piece out of the window, stuck his arm underneath and unlocked the window. He slid it up and stepped inside. He closed the window behind him and pulled the curtain down.

He didn't even know what he was looking for. Pentagrams? Weird looking symbols? Anything. He walked slowly around the apartment. He was 90 percent sure he was alone, but he didn't want to take a chance. He walked upstairs and looked around. He found it odd that two people would need such a large apartment, but that appeared to be the case. He watched the windows, making sure he could still escape if the cops came. He went room by room, looking for some type of clue. All he found were several bowling trophies and an entire room devoted to the occupant's golf accomplishments.

Jack Brewster.....sounds like a golfer. He thought to himself after picking up one of the trophies. He tried to be as careful as he could. He searched closets and all the bedrooms. Nothing. Not one damn thing out of the ordinary. When he had looked through all the rooms upstairs, he went back downstairs and looked some more.

These people cannot be as evil as I think they are and not leave some kind of clue. There has to be something here!

Problem was, there was nothing. If they were up to something, they kept well hidden. This trip had been a bust. He was starting to wonder if Andrew really had gone off the deep end and simply imagined the whole thing.

He went back into the living room and picked up a picture on the table. It was their wedding photo. They had gotten married in June of 1981. He wasn't sure if that was his current wife or not. He put the photo back down on the table and he immediately sensed that something wasn't quite right. *Something was a tad askew.*

"Can I help you?" said Jack Brewster from behind him.

Kevin turned around slowly. He was a good head taller and probably sixty pounds heavier than Jack, not to mention about twenty years younger. Kevin wasn't thinking at the moment. *He was merely re-acting.*

He took his gun out of his pocket and pointed it at the old man.

"Jack?"

"Yes."

"I have a bit of a problem. I was kind of hoping you could help me."

"Put the gun down and I'll see what I can do."

"Sorry Jack, gun stays. I don't want to kill you, but you do something stupid and I just might have to do something stupid too."

"If you want money, just take it. I won't try to stop you."

"I don't want money."

"Well then, what the hell do you want?"

"I want to know what you did to Andrew?"

"Who the hell is Andrew?"

"Andrew Gonzalez. Shot a bunch of his fellow students last year at the high school."

"What does that have to do with me?"

"That's what I'm going to find out?"

"What is your name, sir?"

"Kevin."

“Well, Kevin. Look, I don’t know Andrew and I certainly don’t know what would possess someone to shoot other people, so I guess you have your answer.”

Kevin grabbed him and threw him down on the couch. He pointed the gun right at his head.

“Jack, for some reason, I just flat out do not believe you.” said Kevin.

“What you believe doesn’t matter. Facts are what matter and the fact is, I....how in the hell am I responsible for that little whacko shooting all those people?”

“He said you were controlling him.”

“I was controlling him? Are you serious Kevin? You might want to seriously start thinking about your future here. You want to go to prison? You want to be passed around in the shower room by every nigger and degenerate in there? Cause that’s your future if you don’t get out of here. Prison, my boy. Not a pretty picture.”

“I’m willing to take the chance. Someone has to stop you.”

“Stop me from what?”

“From causing any more shootings. Something about them just doesn’t add up. It’s like there’s some kind of invisible hand controlling all of this chaos and I think you have something to do with it. I wasn’t sure at first, now I am.”

“Are you listening to yourself. What, are you the boy's father or something?”

“Or something?”

“I know it must be hard to accept this as a parent. Andrew killed all those people on his own. Neither I, nor anyone else had anything to do with it. Those are the facts, Kevin. Deal with it.”

Kevin was tempted just to shoot him, but he knew he needed more information from him.

“What do you do for a living, Jack?”

“I’m a pharmacist.”

“Really?” asked Kevin.

“Yes, why is that so hard to believe.”

“Just kind of odd?”

“What’s so odd about it?”

“Deoxyquel? Familiar with it?”

“Of course.”

“So you know what it can do?”

“No, not really, I just fill the bottles, Kevin. It’s not my job to determine if a pill is safe or not, that’s what the FDA is for.”

“You knew he was Deoxyquel. You knew he was susceptible. He was like a lamb hanging out with a bunch of hungry wolves.”

“You lost me Kevin. What does this have to do with me?”

“I’m getting there, Jack. I don’t have all the pieces yet, but I will soon.”

“Kevin, you don’t have any pieces. You’ve concocted this absurd story in your head. Look at you! Normal people do not walk into other people’s houses and point guns at them.”

“Maybe I’m not a normal person, but neither are you. Just give me enough time and I’ll figure it out.”

“Get out of my house. This is your last chance. I’ll give you a ten minute head start before I call the cops.”

“That’s awfully thoughtful of you Jack, but I think I’m going to hang around for a while. If it’s all the same to you.”

“Kevin, did it ever occur to you that you might have some kind of mental illness as well?”

“No. I’m not crazy Jack, I just want some answers, that’s all.”

“Did it ever occur to you that maybe, just maybe there are no answers for what he did? He did something that has no explanation. You aren’t going to find it here. I wish I could help you Kevin, but I can’t.”

“No, you won’t. Jack, I may not have a whole hell of a lot of skills, but I do have one and that one skill is being able to spot a liar, even a very good liar, like yourself. We both know you’re lying to me. What are you hiding?”

“Okay, Kevin....let’s indulge your little fantasy here: let’s say I did have something to do with all of this. How did I do it?”

“That’s what I’m going to find out. You’re some kind of Satanist, or hypnotist. You can control people without them being made aware of it.”

“Control them, how?”

“Well, you got me there. I haven’t figured that one out yet, but I will.”

“Think about it for a minute. How would I do this? It’s physically impossible. Hypnosis is a great party trick, but in reality, it just doesn’t work. You can’t just hypnotize someone into committing an act of mass murder.”

"I think you could. I think you could convince someone to do just about anything?"

"Don't you think somebody, at some point in time would have discovered this? If what you are saying is true, then the whole planet would just be happy, obedient slaves and clearly we are not."

"What if a small group of people discovered it and kept it hidden, just using for their own benefit and pleasure. What if they secretly control everything behind the scenes. We are all hypnotized but we don't even realize it?"

"Wouldn't causing a mass shooting bring the very type of scrutiny this group would be trying to avoid?"

"Who's going to listen to a crazy 16 year old who just did something horrible?"

"Well, clearly you have, Kevin."

"I know Andrew. He isn't a murderer."

"Sorry Kevin, he most certainly is. That's what murderers do, they murder people."

Kevin had to take a step back and regroup. As certain as he was that the old man was lying to him, he wasn't going to get anywhere like this. He had to take it up a notch.

"Upstairs, Jack. Let's go."

"Kevin, take that ski mask off and let me have a good look at you. I'd like to look them man who is going to kill me, right in the eye before he does it. Let him know what kind of a person he really is." said Jack

Kevin grabbed him and pulled him off the couch. He led him up the stairs and into one of the bedrooms. He pointed to a chair and told Jack to sit in it.

"Move and I'll blow your head off, Jack. I'm much faster than you are."

Jack sat in the chair and said nothing. Kevin walked into the closet and found a piece of electrical cord. He then found another one. He used his knife to cut the cord off of a lamp, so he had two good size pieces. He grabbed Jack's hands and tied them behind his back. He did the same for his feet. Jack wasn't going anywhere.

"I see you really thought this one through, huh Kevin."

"Shut up Jack."

"Just digging yourself into a deeper hole here my boy."

"Last time I'm going to ask. How the hell did you do it?"

"Kevin, if you are going to kill me, at least have the decency to do it quickly. I'm an old man, It won't take long."

"I don't want to kill you Jack, but you aren't leaving me, much choice."

"You're the one calling the shots here. You can end this anytime you want."

"I finish what I start. I'm not leaving here, till I have some answers."

"I see. No point in trying to reason with a crazy person. Well, if you're not going to kill me, could you at least bring the TV in here, I'd like to watch some golf."

"Are you serious?"

"What am I supposed to do, just sit here and wait for you to come to your senses? That might take a while."

"You make any noise and you're done. I'll be right back."

"Kevin, my wife will be home in less than an hour? Are you going to kill her too?"

Kevin just looked at him. Jack was just screwing with him now. He knew Kevin wasn't going to kill him and thus, his entire plan had gone out the window. He had less than an hour to get some answers or he was in deep shit. *Even deeper than he was now.*

"These things never go according to plan, now do they?" said Jack from his chair.

That little shit is just playing with me. He doesn't think I'm serious. Maybe I'll have to show him how serious I am.

Kevin ran back down the stairs and began looking around. He was lost. He had nothing to show for his efforts. As bad as things looked for him, he knew in his heart this guy really did have something to do with this, he just needed something, anything he could take to the police.

"Kevin.....could you pour me a glass of lemonade please?" said Jack from upstairs.

The last place to look was the basement. Kevin tried the handle, but found it was locked. He ran back upstairs to Jack.

"Jack, where's the key to the basement?"

"I don't know. I haven't been down there in years."

"Where is it Jack?"

"I don't know. It's on one of my key rings."

"Where are they?"

"I think they are hanging up in the pantry. I'm not even sure which key ring it's on."

Kevin ran back downstairs to the pantry. He opened the door and saw a dozen key rings. He looked for one to a deadbolt. He tried several of them, but none worked. He ran back upstairs and untied Jack.

“So, that’s a no one the lemonade I take it?”

“Shut up, get your ass down the stairs?”

“Kevin, I’m not even sure where the key is.” he said as they entered the kitchen.

“Jack, you’re a golfer, right?”

“Yes.”

“I take it you are pretty good.”

“Scratch handicap. I would have been on the tour, but my wife never approved.”

“I see. So, then where are your clubs?”

“They are in my trunk?”

“No, not your practice clubs, you’re real clubs. No self respecting golfer in the word would be caught dead using these things in a real game.”

Kevin immediately knew he had Jack. His patience had paid off. Jack was now backed into a corner.

“Those are my real clubs. I gave up competitive golfing decades ago.”

“Jack, this neighborhood sucks. No way in hell would you keep anything as valuable as those in your trunk. So, I’ll ask again, where are your real clubs?”

“I keep them at the country club.”

“I doubt it. I think you keep them down cellar. Why don’t you just open the door and you can prove me wrong.”

“I’ve already done that numerous times.”

“See, I think the key is with your car keys. Might I try?” said Kevin taking his car keys. Jack tried to protest, but Kevin just shoved him to the floor.”

“I wonder what I’m going to find down there?”

“Boy, you got no idea what you’re getting yourself into here.” said Jack coldly.

“Ah, the plot thickens. Guess I’m not so crazy after all, now am I Jack?”

“You don’t want to go down there Kevin.”

“Oh, I think I do Jack. Now, the key, please?”

Kevin was thrown off his game for just a second when Jack's wife came through the door. She smiled when she saw him.

"Honey, you didn't tell me we had company."

Her smile vanished when she saw the gun. Jack pushed her into Kevin. He darted out into the living room.

"Call the cops and I'll kill you both."

The woman just looked at Jack and nodded. Kevin thought seriously about just cutting and running. Jack came back in a moment later holding a 9mm. He had the gun trained right on Kevin.

"You might be bigger and stronger, but I'm faster. Go head, boy, try me." Kevin could feel his heart beating. He had come so close, only to have it end this way.

He was going to go out like a crackhead, instead of like Wyatt Earp.

"Jacky.....what on Earth is going on here? Where did you get that gun?" asked his wife.

Jack turned the gun towards her and fired three shots into her chest. Kevin froze. He watched the bullets rip through her body. She was dead before she hit the floor. Jack then walked over to her and fired another shot in her head. He wiped the gun clean and then washed his hands. Kevin was frozen in fear. *Like a deer in the headlights.* Jack yanked Kevin's gun out of his hand and put the 9mm in Kevin's hand. He raised his hand and fired two shots into the kitchen wall.

"You stepped into something here my boy. Should have just let the kid rot, he wasn't worth a fuck anyway. Not worth all this."

"Jack, why did you just shoot your wife?" asked Kevin softly.

"Kevin, when the hell are you going to learn that we all have people we answer to. I just do what I'm told, just like everyone else. I'm not special and neither are you." said Jack

"Guess, I won't make my tee time tomorrow morning." Jack said.

He opened the revolver and made sure it was loaded. He then pointed it away from his head and squeezed the trigger. The blood spurted out against the wall and into the kitchen sink. Kevin watched his lifeless body on the floor. He tried to breathe, but it was as if he had the wind knocked out of him. He grabbed the key ring from Jack's belt and unlocked the cellar door. He turned on the light and went downstairs. He was holding Jack's 9mm. He didn't even check to see if it had any rounds left in it. He turned on the light and walked down stairs. When he was at the bottom of the steps, he turned on more lights and what he saw stopped him dead in his tracks. It was some kind of weird pentagram with an altar in the middle of it. He walked over and saw the candles lit. He then saw a picture of himself in the middle. The entire room was just plain eerie. It had a presence all to itself.

Jesus Christ Kevy.....what the fuck have you stepped into here?"

He saw their pictures. Newspaper clippings and articles, with notes and other scribbling written on them. There were letter grades on all of them. They went back decades. He saw the bottles of Deoxyquel on the table. He had a list of everyone he had given the medication to. He looked through the papers and sure enough, there was Andrew's name. Jack Brewster was up to his eyeballs in this thing. Kevin knew he was lying.

The more he lied, the more convinced Kevin had become.

He came to a small door. He held the gun into his hand and slowly turned the knob. He pushed the door open and saw an elderly man sitting at a desk, with a stack of papers in front of him. He was wearing wire rimmed glasses. He looked up when he saw Kevin.

"Sorry about that upstairs. I had to control you in order to get rid of those two. I was afraid they might get suspicious if I did it any other way. They were becoming problematic." he said nonchalantly.

"What the hell is going on here?"

"Kevin....you need to forget you ever saw me. You need to forget about all of this. It never happened. You are going to wake up in the morning and forget this ever happened. I control you. You shit when I tell you to shit. You are my dog and I am your owner. Got it?"

"Yes sir." Kevin said meekly. He didn't know what it was about the old man, but he had never been so terrified of anyone or anything in his life. He was shaking so bad he could barely sit still. He had never seen this man before, but at the same time, he knew him very well. *Like a hunter and his deer watching each other from a distance.*

"Sit down."

Kevin quickly sat in the chair across from him.

"You've been a very bad boy, haven't you?"

"Yes sir. I'm sorry." said Kevin with his head down. He wasn't sure if this was actually happening or not. It felt like a dream, but it wasn't. This was really happening. He was so scared he was having trouble breathing.

"Kevin, many moons ago, the government started playing around with mind control. It was called MK ULTRA. It wasn't long before they discovered the secrets to mind control and in doing so, they discovered Satanism. I am the last of a long line of people involved in the project. When I die, it stops with me. I own you. You are mine. That dumb skank of yours is mine as well. I let you find me, because you fit into my plan. There is no reality for you. I control your reality. I need you to do a little favor for me, will you do that?"

"Yes sir."

"Good, we got a little mess to clean up here. I need you to bring those two bodies down here and burn this house to the ground. I have plenty of gasoline in the next room. So, you better get started, we don't have much time."

Kevin nodded and got up from his chair. He dragged the two dead bodies down the stairs. When he was finished the old man got up and walked over to him using a walker.

“See Kevin. I only used Andrew to bring you to me. I couldn’t use the boy, he would have just screwed this up. Takes man to do man’s work. I had to make him do those terrible things, so he would tell you about me. I knew you would come. I had to get rid of those two upstairs. It all worked out in the end. No one will remember anything. It will be just like it never happened.

“How do you control me sir?” he asked without looking up

“Kevin, look at what you’re wearing. I gave this to you, remember?” he said and touched Kevin’s pentagram he was wearing. He had been wearing it this whole time and never even realized it. Then he remembered: *He had given the same one to Andrew!*

Kevin looked at it and began weeping.

“Now, Kevin, let’s not have any of that. Good boys get rewarded. Would you like your reward?” asked the old man.

Kevin simply nodded.

“Then burn this goddamn house to the ground, okay?” he said.

Kevin smiled and started pouring the gasoline all over the floor, until the entire basement reeked of gas. He covered everything. The entire basement was soaked in gasoline. He helped the old man up the stairs, then he walked back down and lit the book of matches.

“Amen, my boy.” said the old man from the top of the stairs.

Kevin, you’re going to get in big trouble for this. Big trouble. Like a spanking and being grounded for a month.

Kevin tossed the book into the gas and the entire room lit up. He ran up the stairs and saw the old man was gone. The smoke was filling the house. Kevin simply walked outside and sat on the grass until the police and fire department arrived. He had been such a good boy. He was now ready for his reward. The last thing he remembers is finally figuring out who gave Andrew the combination to the gun safe. He was now upset. *Some reward that turned out to be!*

He remembers just sitting in the interview room. There were three detectives in the room with him. They were waiting for him to speak.

“How did I get here? Where am I?”

“Do you want to tell us what happened?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean why did you burn that house down? Fire department found two bodies in the basement. Bullet holes in both of them.”

Kevin thought it was a joke at first, but this was no joke. These guys were deadly serious.
“You were just sitting there on the lawn while the house is burning. Creepiest fucking thing I’ve ever seen. Why did you kill those people?” asked one of the officers.

“I didn’t kill anybody, what are you talking about?”

“Kevin, we just want to know what happened? That’s all. We’re cops. We investigate. We have to know what happened in that house. You were holding the gun in your hand when you were arrested. It’s been fired. You have powder burns on your hands. We have enough to convict you right now, we just want to know why? Why did you kill those people and burn their house down?”

“Guys.....I don’t remember a damn thing. I know I went into that house to talk to them. That much is true. I don’t remember anything after that. I’m sorry, I’m not lying, it’s just the truth. I don’t remember anything.” he said.

“Kevin, you are being charged with two counts of first degree murder and two counts of aggravated arson, as well as burglary. You’re in some seriously deep shit here. Playing deaf and dumb with us isn’t going to help you one bit.”

“I’m sorry guys, I wish I could help you, I just don’t remember a damn thing.” said Kevin with tears running down his cheeks.

“Well, you’re going to have a lot of time to try and remember.” said one of the detectives.

It had been over a year since he had seen her. He couldn’t believe she was here, sitting across from him. Both he and Kevin were in the same pod at the county jail. Andrew would be leaving next week. She just looked at both of them and started crying. She put her hand on the glass.

“I loved you Kevin. I loved you. I brought you into our family and look what you did.”

“Mom.....what is that around your neck?” asked Andrew. Kevin recalls seeing the same one. It invoked such a strong response from him, but he couldn’t place where he had seen it.”

“Oh, this. I don’t know. It’s just something I picked up. Not even sure where I got it.” she said.

“It looks weird, like it’s made out of bones or something.” said Kevin.

“Yeah mom, take it off. It just looks creepy.”

“Yeah, maybe I will. I mean looking at you two right now, I don’t know how my luck could possibly get any worse.” she said softly.