

A story of a man whose choices lead him to a life of quiet desperation and loneliness. The angel Ashrael enters his life and leads him to a different path where he finds faith, love and forgiveness.

The Confession of Mason Young

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The Confession of Mason Young

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The Confession of Mason Young

Tom Carroll

Chapter 1

Prologue

When Mason Young was seven years old, God sent the angel Ashrael to the realm of Earth to task the child as a Helper of God.

Ashrael manifested in all of his heavenly glory and gazed lovingly at the sleeping boy; a perfect creation of God, pure of mind and soul, unblemished by ego and its fearful ways.

Ashrael loved his role as a Messenger of God. The core of his being was trembling with joy as he became part of the World of Man. His love radiated outward brightly, shining away the dark of the night.

In his untroubled sleep, little Mason dreamed. He floated comfortably in an infinite sea of light and love, warm and content, a peaceful calm washing over him in slow rhythmic waves of the Eternal Harmony. Ashrael slowly appeared to him, coming into perception as though through a thinning fog.

“Mason Young, be not afraid,” Ashrael spoke, using the greeting that all angels have used since time immortal when speaking to a human creature. Ashrael effortlessly glided up next to Mason, a serene smile masking his unreserved joy and love for this child and his part in God’s plans.

Mason held out his arms and was swept up in a loving embrace by the angel. He hugged him tightly as though the angel were a long-lost friend and looked up with wondering eyes into the

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angel's face. Ashrael was both handsome and beautiful, for the angel was neither male nor female, for those are human characteristics, not angelic ones. For this personification, Ashrael had toned his features slightly towards human female, for it was natural for a human child to respond positively towards a mother figure.

"I'm not afraid," said Mason. "You're my friend, although I can't remember your name right now".

"My name is Ashrael," the angel replied. "God has sent me to you. Our Heavenly Father has a plan for you, something very important that He would like you to do for Him."

"Why doesn't God just do it himself?" Mason asked a quizzical look on his face. "He can do anything, can't He?"

His heart dancing with sheer joy, Ashrael laughed in delight at the utter simplicity and perfect innocence of the question and said, "Yes, my child. God can do anything."

The angel looked deep into the child's eyes. "Mason Young. Listen and remember this: the World of Man has become overwhelmed with dreams of confusion. Man has forgotten his True Nature and has grown fearful. The fear has extended to become anger and even hate. God has sent Helpers to the world to shine a light on this growing darkness of the human soul. The light you bring, Mason Young, can help shine away the shadows of the world and bring forth the Truth of God's creation.

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“Before your birth, you requested Your Father to let you help bring Heaven to Earth. God has granted you that wish.”

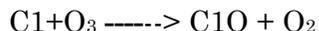
The angel leaned down and kissed Mason on the top of his blond head. “Return to sleep now, precious little Child of God. Later in your time, I will come to you again and together, we will work to help heal the world.”

Ashrael reached down with his hand and gently covered the boy’s eyes. Slowly, with the Peace of God enveloping him in the warm surety of love, Mason slipped back into his innocent childhood dreams and slid down the dark well of sleep.

Chapter 2

14 Years Later

The angry buzzing of the alarm jerked Mason Young out of a deep sleep. He opened one eye just enough to acquire the target and reached out to swat the snooze button on the clock. He rolled on his back and started to drift back asleep.



Uhh, too late, he thought. *Organic chemistry on the brain*. He groaned and sat up in his bed, stretching his arms and rolling his head back and forth until the mild crackling sounds from his neck stopped. A sideways glance across the small dorm room confirmed that the alarm had not disturbed the slumber of his roommate, Jim Stephens.

He dressed quietly, efficiently ran through his morning routine to make himself presentable, stuffed his backpack with the essentials and headed down the stairwell and out of the dorm. Squinting into the bright Texas morning sun, he retrieved the Oakleys from the rim of his tattered UT ball cap and set them in place, a quick nod affirming that all was well with the world.

The late night jam and cram session proved its worth as he breezed through the chemistry test without breaking a sweat. Mason took a lot of pride in his academics; he worked hard, not skipping classes – well, not too many – and he always established a relationship with the professor or teaching assistant for the

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course. He understood that they held the key to getting good research opportunities when he was ready to pursue them, as well as the pride of being known within the Microbiology Department as a diligent and serious student.

Ever since he first peered through a microscope in his fifth grade science class and discovered that other worlds existed, unseen to the naked eye, he had known that this would be his career. He would explore these worlds and try to understand the strange creatures that inhabited them – the bacteria, viruses and other organisms that co-existed with humans in numbers unimaginable, a changing and wide open field of study, one that we'll likely never fully understand.

Mason had frequent fantasies of making startling discoveries in his chosen field and becoming a science hero. He visualized himself standing on a stage in front of his peers, basking in their adulation, feeling the waves of applause wash over him as he graciously accepted the proffered award. He would become a household name, adored by millions for his contribution to the Greater Good of Mankind.

It could happen.

After a quick snack, he headed off to his other class of the day, Current Topics in Political Science. Mason was annoyed that they called this a science. To him, it was just a bunch of people endlessly arguing over who controls the power of government. Despite the hierarchical organization, in his mind it hardly could

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be comparable to the real sciences of the world. This was a filler elective, an easy 'A' to fill out the BS part of his BS degree.

He filed into the huge lecture hall, one of several hundred students in attendance. Shortly thereafter, one of the Teaching Assistants began the lecture, this one being on the glorious virtues of Reaganomics. Mason rolled his eyes and began taking notes, his brain switched to autopilot, the pen in his hand following suit. Tedium set in as the overheads flipped through their prescribed sequence.

“Excuse me, I have a question.”

Mason snapped out of note taking mode and glanced at his watch. Just five more minutes and class would be over. Nobody *ever* asked questions in this class. This is not normal behavior in here. His eyes scanned the cavernous room and found the student waving her hand.

A blond. A knowing smirk set in on his face as he judged her by sight.

“Yes, what is it? A frown betrayed his annoyance at the unwelcome interruption to his presentation. Nobody ever asked questions in this class.

The girl stood up and smiled sweetly. “Can you explain how cutting taxes and spending a greater percentage of GDP on defense is going to help our country?” she asked. “It looks like to me that we’re going to have to deal with dramatically increased federal deficits in the very near future.”

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A few muted laughs rippled through the hall. The TA looked momentarily stunned that an underclassman would question his lecture points. He quickly recovered and peered at her over his glasses.

“It’s not something that can be covered in the necessary detail in an introductory class such as this,” he replied tartly. “Respected economists have agreed that this is a necessary and prudent step to bring us out of the malaise of the previous administration. The slight increase in the federal deficit will eventually take care of itself.”

“Appointed Republican economists?”

Mason’s smirk melted into a smile of grudging appreciation for the unexpected banter. It looks like this girl has something on top other than blond strands. He strained forward to get a better look at her.

“Ronald Reagan is a visionary, a great man,” the TA retorted. “His economic policies will have a long lasting effect on our country.”

“Like mountains of debt. Nice legacy to leave your children.” She sat down, her head held high, her point made. More than a few students clapped.

The TA glared at her, beads of sweat visible on his forehead. “Are there any more questions, or may I continue with the lecture?” he said icily, his eyes scanning the rows of students. The room became deathly quiet.

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Afterwards, Mason struggled through the departing throng and caught up with her. “You know, most people in there don’t give a damn about politics,” he said brazenly. “This class is just a check mark on the degree plan.”

She pulled up to a stop and slowly turned to face him, an incredulous look on her face. “That’s exactly what’s wrong with our generation,” she said. “We’re so obsessed with making money that we ignore all that’s going on around us.”

“Whoa,” he said, throwing up his hands in a mock surrender. “I happen to agree with you. Lower the shields, Scotty.”

She visibly relaxed and gave him a dazzling quick smile. “Then you must not be one of the Young Republicans.”

Mason grinned and reached out his hand. “You got it partially right – I am a Young. Mason Young.”

She took his hand. “It’s nice to meet you Mason Young. I’m Anne Shepard.” She looked him over; a regular looking guy, a little skinny, longer brown hair, nice smile and deep brown eyes. *Cute; love the eyes*, she thought.

“The pleasure is *definitely* mine.” This was perhaps the biggest understatement of Mason’s life. “That was quite a performance in there.”

She shook her head in disgust. “I couldn’t take it anymore. That guy is such a shrill. I wouldn’t mind it so much if he’d get *some* of his facts straight, but he can’t even do that. He’s just

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trying to make a name for himself so that he can get noticed, become a congressional aide and join the Washington hypocrites.”

“Is that the new football team in Washington?”

A lilting laugh: “very funny. You know perfectly well what I mean.” She paused and looked at him cautiously. “I thought you said you agreed with me.”

Mason wasn’t about to let this opportunity slip away. Despite her striking appearance, she was clearly not the stereotypical blond of the popular jokes. She had passion and verve and a whole lot of brains to back it up. *Step carefully, Mason.*

“I’m just messing with you a bit,” he said with a sly smile. “That’s OK, isn’t it?”

She tilted her head back and with a hideous Scottish burr said, “Aye, Captain, but I’m not sure we can hold out much longer.”

They both burst out laughing, oblivious to the other students milling about them. The world suddenly got very small for Mason Young. His vision narrowed, with only Anne Shepard in his sight. *Who was this girl?*

She glanced at her watch and then looked Mason intently in the eyes. “I’d love to stay here and chat with you, but I have to get to my next class. We have a review today for the midterm next week.”

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“Can I see...” they both started simultaneously, and stopped, laughing.

Anne reached into her backpack and pulled out a scrap of paper. She hurriedly scribbled on it and handed it to Mason. “Call me sometime.” Smiling, she turned and walked away.

Mason stared at the scrap of paper in his hand. Anne. 756-4208. This little scrap of paper suddenly became Mason’s most valuable possession. Looking up, he watched her walk away. Perhaps sensing his eyes on her, she turned and gave him a quick wave before disappearing into the crowd.

Mason could not believe his good fortune. He looked up into the clear blue Texas sky and thought, “thank you.”

Standing invisibly next to him, Ashrael smiled, leaned over to Mason and said, “You’re welcome.”

Startled, Mason jumped a foot in the air like a scalded cat, whirled around to his left, saw nothing but other students who suddenly gave him plenty of space and weird looks. His heart pounded in his chest. *WHAT WAS THAT?* His brain demanded. *Calm down*, he thought. *It’s probably just wishful thinking.* Shaking his head, he turned and walked briskly to his dorm, Anne’s perfect smile fixated in his mind.

Throughout the rest of the day, all he could think about was Anne Shepard. Smart and beautiful. Serious and funny. The more Mason thought of her, the more he wanted to see her, to be with her. He wanted to talk to her, tell her about himself and find

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out what makes her tick. He wanted to touch her, softly, like she was a precious piece of art. For the tenth time that afternoon, he reached into the pocket of his jeans and pulled out the now well worn scrap of paper that she had written her name and phone number on and stared at it like it was a winning lotto ticket.

Later back in his dorm room, Mason paced three steps forward, turned a quick one eighty and three steps back. His roommate, Jim Stephens, had long ago fled in disgust, unable to cope with Mason's ramblings and nervous energy. Finally, Mason sat down on his bed, picked up the phone and dialed her number.

He couldn't believe how sweaty his hands were and how hard his heart was beating. He was sure she would hear it thumping away like a demented drummer when she answered the phone.

One ring. No answer. *C'mon...*

Two rings. No answer. *Answer the phone...*

Three rings. No answer. *Please...*

Four rings. No answer. *Crap...*

Mason was just about to hang up the phone when he heard it get picked up. Anne's breathless "Hello..."

"Hi Anne. This is Mason. Mason Young. We talked for a few minutes after polysci this morning. Do you remember me?"

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Man, was that totally lame. After all of the mental rehearsal, that was the best you could do??

“Mason. Of course I remember you. You’re the Young Republican,” she teased.

Serious Relief flooded through his body. “That’s me.” Deep breath. “Uh, I was wondering if we could get together sometime this weekend. You know, get a bite, talk about politics and world hunger and anything else that you’d like to discuss.”

Mason held his breath.

“That sounds great, Mason. I’d like that. How about Saturday night?”

Mason mouthed a silent *YES* and pumped his fist in exhilaration. He got her address, an apartment building a mile or so to the west of campus. “Excellent; I’m really looking forward to it. See you then, Anne.”

“Good bye Mason Young.” He heard the click of the phone as she hung up.

“Whoo Hoo!” He slammed the phone down, thrust his arms in the air and jumped high in jubilation. His right hand shattered the overhead light, creating a shower of sparks and glass. Mason stared dumbly at his gashed hand and watched the blood well up and steadily drip onto the floor. He reached over and pulled a large shard of glass from the fleshy area between his thumb and forefinger, grimacing at the pain and slightly nauseated by the

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loose flap of skin and tissue and the blood that quickly covered his hand.

“You dumbass.” He went over to his dresser, pulled out a tee shirt and wrapped his throbbing bleeding hand in it. Grabbing his keys from the top of the dresser, he stepped out into the hall to head over to Health Services for some repair work.

From down the hall: “Hey Young. What’d ya do to your hand?”

Over his shoulder: “Bite me.” Under the circumstances, it was the only thing Mason could think to say. He hurried down the hall and stairwell, trying to hide his embarrassment from the prying stares. While bloodied hands were not all that unusual in the dorm, Mason was not known as a hothead, so his problem drew immediate interest from his dorm mates.

At Health Services, Mason winced when the matronly nurse who looked vaguely like his Aunt Tilda unwrapped his makeshift bandage. She shook her head as she examined it.

“What did you punch out?” As a college nurse, she’d seen this type of injury many times before.

“A ceiling light. I didn’t exactly punch it out. I was excited and jumped up and accidentally hit it,” Mason replied.

She gave him a ‘whatever’ type of shrug. “Come on over here. Let’s wash it up and see if there’s anything in there before we get you sewn up.” She took Mason by the arm and led him over to a sink and held his hand under some warm running water.

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Mason stared at the pink water as it ran into the drain. He turned his head away when he saw her pick up a pair of forceps and start to probe the wound. A small tinge of pain and then the plink of a piece of glass dropped into a silver metal tray. After probing around a bit more, she put a compress on it, told Mason to hold it tight and left to attend to the next student. A few minutes later a very young doctor came in to the room. It took him all of 8.2 seconds to put four stitches in Mason's hand, less than a minute more to wrap the hand tightly in gauze. After the doctor was done, Mason finished the paperwork and trudged back up Speedway Ave. to his dorm room.

When Mason got back to his dorm room, Jim was waiting for him. Mason noticed that he had swept up the broken glass and had replaced the light bulb. Jim was a Good Guy. The glass globe would remain M.I.A. for the rest of the semester.

"What the hell happened, Mason?" asked Jim. "I come back and there's glass and blood all over the place."

"Too much air," offered Mason in return.

"I can see that. I guess she said no," Jim opined.

Mason grinned and shook his head. "Au contraire. Saturday night." Somehow, this made the aching pain in his hand seem worth it.

"Cool." Jim paused. "You were wound up pretty tight earlier," he commented.

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Mason shrugged. “You just never know.” He turned to face Jim. “This one is different – I can feel it,” he said keenly.

“Take some aspirin - you’ll feel better. C’mon Mason, you’ve said that before and after a few weeks something happens and you start all over again. Remember, I’m your roomie – I know you better than you know yourself.” Jim held up his hand for a high five.

Mason nodded, reached over and him a high five with his left hand. “Yeah, I know. Most of these girls here are either husband or head hunting. What’s a guy to do?”

Jim grinned and said “You’ll figure it out...”



Friday went excruciatingly slow. Mason only had two classes, but he gave most of his time and attention to watching the clock, much to the annoyance of his instructors. Saturday afternoon intramurals weren’t much better. While he always welcomed the rough and tumble exertions of intramural flag football, he obviously had his head up his ass, as one of his teammates so adroitly described him. After the game, Mason hurried back to his dorm room, showered and shaved. He carefully applied one tiny drop of Old Spice.

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Man, he felt like a sixteen year old on his first date as he drove up to Anne's apartment building. He knew exactly where it was, having scouted it out the previous night. He found a parking space for the Datsun, parked and gave his hair another quick once over in the mirror. *That's as good as it's gonna get*, he thought.

She opened the door at his knock, and stood there; an angel in a white top, poured on blue jeans and her hair pulled back into a golden ponytail that cascaded halfway down her back. Mason prayed he wouldn't say something stupid to start the night.

"Hey Mason – come on in, I'll be ready in a minute," she said as she headed back into the bathroom.

Mason stepped into the small living room. It was neat and tidy, decorated in Early College with the requisite cinder block bookshelves. Hung on the walls were a number of paintings, most of them in brilliant acrylics. While Mason didn't have much appreciation for the abstracts, he did admire several of the still life paintings. Hearing her boots click on the bathroom linoleum, he turned to see Anne come back into the room.

"Wow, you look real nice, Anne." *Stunning. Perfect.*

She blushed slightly. "That's sweet of you to say that. You ready to go? I'm really hungry tonight."

"Sure," replied Mason. "What are you hungry for?"

"I need some Mexican food, bad. A big plate of Campana's enchiladas would make me a very happy woman."

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At this point, Mason would've gladly jumped off of the Mopac bridge to make her happy. That particular suggestion would not occur to her for some time yet. Even though Campana was not Mason's favorite Mexican restaurant, he didn't care where they went, just as long as she was with him.

"That sounds good to me. Let's go..." Mason held out his hand. *IDIOT*, his brain screamed at him, *NOT SO FAST!* He started to pull back, but she smiled and took him by the hand and led him down the hall.

She nodded at his bandaged hand. "What happened?"

He shook his head. "Just a stupid accident." *Way to go Mason; at least it's a more thoughtful answer than 'Bite me'.*

"Are you going to tell me about it?" she asked gently.

Well son, there's no way out of this one gracefully. You either tell the truth or you lie. What's it going to be?

"I...ahh...accidentally high-fived the light fixture in my dorm room after you said you'd go out with me," he said sheepishly, his face reddening.

She pulled up to a stop and looked at him, obviously struggling not to start laughing. "Wouldn't your roommate been a better choice?" she teased.

"Yeah, but I'd already run him off."

"Oh, I see. Do you do this for all the girls you go out with?"

Mason shook his head and grinned. "Nope, you're the first for something like this."

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“Well, you probably won’t ever forget me. You’ll have that scar forever,” she said. More prophetic words were never spoken.

She was certainly right about being hungry. Mason was astounded that someone with her trim and beautiful body could eat so much food at one sitting, all washed down with sweet tea. Throughout the evening, Mason and Anne chatted easily like they were long lost friends. They talked at length about their backgrounds and history, found that they were pretty similar; upper-middle class suburban, she from Plano, he from Clear Lake. Their lives had been filled with lots of activities, from music to sports. They both were working hard at their UT education, Mason in microbiology and Anne in pre-law.

Mason was particularly struck by her self-confidence and sense of direction. Anne was clearly a woman on a mission; she was passionate about wanting to help people. He listened attentively as she described her plans to become a lawyer – not necessarily to make tons of money, but to understand and use the law to make a positive difference in people’s lives. She had it all figured out: the full-court press to get through her undergraduate work as soon as possible, then to Baylor law school in Waco where her father had matriculated.

“But why work so hard to become a lawyer if you’re not in it for the money? Mason inquired.

Anne hesitated. Mason could see the wheels turning in her head as she decided to open up to him.

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She took a deep breath and looked into his eyes. “God asked me to,” she said.

Mason was momentarily taken aback. While they had talked about many things so far that night, they had not yet gotten to religion.

“You talk to God?” Mason asked. “You mean prayer?”

She nodded her head.

“And he talks back to you?”

“In a manner of speaking. It’s hard to describe, Mason. It’s like thoughts without words, if that makes any sense.”

Make sense? Careful, son. You don’t want to make it sound like you think she’s a whacko.

“What church do you go to, Anne?” he asked casually.

She smiled. “I know this is going to sound contradictory to you, but I don’t go to regular church much. I seek God on my own,” she declared. “My church is whenever and wherever I want it to be.”

“Really,” he said, nodding his head thoughtfully. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard of that before.”

She leaned back into her chair and crossed her arms protectively. “It was something that my parents introduced to me after I turned sixteen. They had raised me in the Methodist church, but one day they sat me down and told me that that was just for social sake. Their true spiritual life was as Seekers.”

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“What’s that?” asked Mason, his confusion rising. *This is definitely starting to get weird. Was that some new California cult? What are you getting yourself into?*

“It’s the concept that each of us has a unique path to God. Seekers seek God on their own direction, mainly through prayerful meditation and study of all of the world’s spiritual traditions instead of just relying on the ancient dogma of the old organized religions and the direction of Holy Men.”

“It sounds...interesting.” Mason didn’t know what else to say.

They sat quietly for a minute, each lost in their own thoughts. Mason wasn’t quite sure what to make of this surprising turn of events. At first, she had seemed like someone who was so worldly and self-confident and in control of her life, and now it turns out that she talks to God and he *tells* her what to do! At this point in his life, he saw those as being contradictory and unlikely. It would be many years before he could recognize the Truth in her statement of faith.

Remaining unseen, Ashrael smiled. Metaphysically speaking, he leaned over and whispered into Mason’s mind: *Relax, it’s OK.*

It was like a cool breeze wafted over Mason’s mind.

Mason grinned and said, “I’d like to hear more about it sometime.”

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Anne was visibly relieved. She said, “Great. You know, I went out with one guy last year who really freaked out when I told him about my spiritual beliefs. He told me he thought I was probably possessed by the devil and needed to crawl back to church on my knees. Needless to say, we didn’t see each other after that.”

Mason chuckled. “His loss, my gain.” *What a loser!*

“Maybe.” She paused. “That’s not too far off of the mainstream for you, is it Mason?”

“No way.” Mason signaled the waitress for more tea. “Now that I think about it a little, it fits you perfectly. You’re certainly not like everyone else I’ve met here and I really like that.” The impish part of Mason’s ego wanted to ask her if she burned incense and chanted, but was quickly overruled by the angel on his other shoulder when he realized that would be *The Wrong Thing to Say. Take it slowly, son.*

When the fresh teas got to their table, Mason raised his glass and said, “Here’s to talking to God.”

She smiled and held up her glass for a toast, “And to those who listen...” She took a long drink and then paused for a few seconds. “And what about you, Mason? Do you pledge to any particular religious beliefs?”

“Well, I was raised Catholic, but I haven’t been to Mass very often the last few years.” *Very often? How about almost never?*

TOM CARROLL

“Why’s that, if you don’t mind me asking?” she inquired gently.

Mason shrugged. “I don’t know. Busy, lazy, I guess a lot of reasons.” He paused and thought for a moment. “I lost interest in what they were saying. I also have some problems with the Authority Thing and the bureaucracy of the church. Most of the edicts from on high seem to be straight out of the fourteenth century.” He started to feel distinctly uncomfortable, like he was giving confession to the parish priest.

“Sounds like you have some spiritual issues to me,” she said.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Well, if you don’t mind a piece of advice...” she started.

“I’d listen to anything that Madame Councilor had to suggest,” he bantered playfully, an impish grin on his face.

Under the table she gave him a gentle kick in the shins. “This is serious, Mason.”

“OK, ok. What’s your advice?”

“Don’t give up on God just because one of His churches isn’t filling your needs,” she said quietly, a sudden curious look of concern on her face.

Mason nodded and sat stock still for a moment, thinking about what she said. It was true; he *had* given up on God when he stopped going to Mass. It never really occurred to him that he could separate the two. While at times he had thought of going to another church, he always concluded that they were all pretty

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much the same: come join our Tribe, we alone have the Keys to Heaven. That always turned Mason off.

“OK, thanks. I’ll think about it, I really will,” said Mason.



Mason stopped the Datsun in front of her apartment building and shut off the engine. He quickly jumped out and came around to the other side of the car to open her door for her.

She smiled, surprised. “My, my; a Gentleman as well as a Scholar; you don’t see too many of those these days,” she said.

Mason was pleased. He played along, lowered his head and said, “My Lady...”

She joined the game, holding out her hand regally. He took it lightly and walked her up to the door.

She turned to him. “Thank you for dinner, Mason Young. I had a very nice time.”

“Me too.” That was a Serious Understatement. Mason was dazzled by Anne Shepard. Her magazine cover beauty and sharp intellect was a rare combination, even for Texans. “May I see you again some other time?” he asked nervously.

Anne put her finger up to the side of her head and appeared to be thinking intently. She enjoyed watching a concerned look grow on his face.

TOM CARROLL

“Yes,” with a playful smile.

Relief swept over Mason. He said, “Outstanding. Well, goodnight Anne,” He hesitated for a moment, and turned to walk back to the car.

She reached out, pulled him gently back to her and kissed him thoroughly.

“Good night, Mason.” She smiled and went into her apartment building.

Mason stood still for a moment, tasting her kiss on his lips, intoxicated by her lingering presence.

Life was suddenly Very Good for Mason Young.

Chapter 3

Mason Young opened his eyes and thought he was in heaven. He gazed in enchantment upon the loveliness and innocence of Anne's facial features, her face serene in sleep. Deep within his chest, an up swelling of emotion swept over him. It was a perfect moment as he basked in the warmth of love. After a few minutes, he reached over to softly kiss her forehead. She stirred slowly as she reentered the conscious world.

"Hi," she murmured softly. "I guess I fell asleep."

Mason tried to suppress a yawn, but failed. "Yeah, me too," he said. "This is a great way to spend Saturday afternoon. They should all be like this."

Anne smiled sleepily and made a kissing motion with her lips. "You're quite a lover. You sure wore me out." She rolled over and sat up on the side of the bed, her arms coming together high over her head as she stretched the sleep from her back. "I'll be right back," she tossed over her shoulder as she padded across the room. "Don't go anywhere."

Are you kidding me? thought Mason, as he rolled onto his back. He and Anne had been seeing each other almost constantly over the last month. They had quickly become new best friends, sharing laughs, long jogs through Zilker Park and late night pizza over eclectic conversation. Their relationship became increasingly

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physical as they explored the pleasures of passion and the mingling of their souls with their bodies.

It was all good.

Mason turned his head and watched Anne walk back into her bedroom. He could not take his eyes off of her; he was entranced by her beauty and grace. As she climbed back into bed next to him, she smiled, leaned down and kissed him hard on the mouth. After a long delicious minute, she stretched out next to him and laid her head on Mason's shoulder, snuggling up close.

"Mason Young – you've got me," she said quietly.

Mason took a deep breath. "I know how you feel – I've never felt this close to anyone else before. Everything before this feels like it's been training." He wrapped his arms around her and gave a squeeze, holding her close.

They lay quietly for a few minutes, enjoying the shared intimacy. A barely detectable breeze floated down from the ceiling fan rotating slowly overhead. As he lay there, Mason could feel her breasts pressing into his chest. He also could feel her heartbeat, slow and steady and wondered if she could feel his.

He wanted this moment to go on and on, and never stop.

"Mason?"

"Umm..."

"Where are we going with this? Are we just having a good time hanging out together or is this going to keep growing?" she asked gently.

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Crap, thought Mason. *Here we go. Careful how you answer, son.*

He hesitated slightly before replying, “I’m not sure, Anne. I do know that my life is very different than it was a month ago. Better. You are everything that I’ve ever dreamed of....” His voice tailed off as his anxiety level continued to rise.

“But...” she started for him.

“Well, it’s just that I didn’t expect to find this...you...so soon. I always thought I’d be older before...”

“Before what, Mason? Before love, is that what you’re trying to say?”

This was going in a direction that suddenly made Mason very uncomfortable. On one hand, Anne *was* everything he always dreamed of in a woman – beautiful, funny, smart, sexy, confident and mature. She didn’t seem to be like so many of the other women – girls really, that he’d met here at school who were husband shopping, looking for the cute guys who were *Going Places*. Not that Mason had ever had any problem playing that particular game; he’d ride it along with it for a few weeks, sampling the wares before moving on, oblivious and uncaring to any damage that he left behind.

The month that they’d been seeing each other was maybe the best of his entire life. When he was with her, he was happy and relaxed. He didn’t feel like he was constantly auditioning for another weekend date. It felt *natural*. They had talked at length

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about their experiences in life, the good times and the bad, and where they wanted to go after this part of their life was over. Whether it was a quick meeting between classes or just hanging out with friends at Zilker Park, he savored every moment with her. He was consumed with her and her with him, but was it Real Love or just the excitement of a new relationship?

Hello, a part of Mason's brain chided him; you are only twenty-one years old, for Christ's Sake. You're just starting to have some Serious Fun, after all these years and all of that hard work. You're free! Are you ready to give it up for a significant relationship, maybe even MARRIAGE??

Despite the cooling breeze of the fan, Mason felt a drop of sweat start to creep down his left side. The two sides of his brain engaged in a furious tug-of-war. All of a sudden, it seemed like his universe and future teetered on the edge of a knife.

Which way to go?

"I'm not sure I'd call it love." The fear was rising, starting to heartily assert itself deep in Mason's gut as a queasy feeling, sort of like the onset of the flu. "Anne, I want to be as honest as I can with you. I'm not sure I'm ready for this."

She closed her eyes, hoping that the tears she suddenly felt welling up in her eyes wouldn't splash on him, intuitively knowing where this conversation was now heading.

"I'm a little bit scared, Anne. The last month has been pretty overwhelming to me. I mean, it's been fun and all..."

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She sat up and looked at Mason. “And how do you think I feel?” she demanded, suddenly angry at the position she’d put herself in.

“I don’t know. Why don’t you tell me,” Mason replied softly.

“Well, you weren’t in my plans either. I thought I’d at least get through law school without getting this emotionally involved with someone.” She hesitated for a moment, but it was a tick of time that seemed like an eternity to Mason. “I could be in love with you just like that,” she said, snapping her fingers, making him involuntarily jump.

Mason looked at Anne and watched her closely, her features flickering with the candles on the dresser. He watched her take a deep breath and struggle with her composure, a single tear running down her right cheek, her lower lip beginning to tremble despite her efforts to keep her emotions in control. He waited, not saying a word, also knowing where this was headed.

“You know, I like being with you Mason. You’re smart, sexy and you make me laugh,” she said her voice tight with emotion.

“But...” he started for her.

“But if you’re afraid of being in love, or if you don’t even know whether or not you love me, I’d rather stop now before either one of us gets hurt.” She looked at him intently with moist eyes, unsure of his answer, the hurt on her face betraying her true emotions.

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“Anne, I don’t want to fight about this. Why don’t we let it ride for a few days and then talk about it some more after we’ve calmed down a bit,” said Mason, hoping to break the suddenly stifling tension that filled the small and musky room. The single candle on the dresser sputtered, making the shadows on the wall dance in sympathy.

She sighed and nodded resignedly. “Ok...”

Mason rolled over to a sitting position on the bed and rubbed his now throbbing temples. “I’d better go. We both have a lot to think about and I need to study some for finals.”

She sat there quietly, watching Mason get dressed, wondering if she’d done the right thing. He started to walk out the door, then turned and came back to her, bending down to give her a soft kiss.

“Good night, Anne.”

“Good night, Mason,” she whispered back.

He gently closed the front door as he left, pretending to not hear her muffled crying as she sobbed into her pillow. As Mason walked slowly through the twilight back to his dorm, a detached part of his mind sat back and watched the Pros and Cons go at it, a death match that could well determine his fate:

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You can't even conceive of a better woman than Anne. How stupid can you get?

She's talking about LOVE, you freaking idiot. Before you know it, she'll be talking about MARRIAGE!

So what? Is that the End of the World?

It might be. She'd probably want to live in Round Rock with the rest of the suburbanites.

I can think of a lot worse situations.

So can I. She'll want KIDS before you know it.

That'd be fine as long as they don't get the asshole gene from you.

Don't be so stupid, Mason. She's husband hunting, just like the others. It's just a more subtle approach.

Bullshit. She's gonna be a great lawyer and help people.

She'll sit on her fat ass all day eating potato chips and whining about how you ruined her career.

You're a sick bastard.

And you're a naive pendajo.

It'd almost be funny, thought Mason, if my life and my future weren't at stake here. God, what should I do?

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Ashrael, ever present, whispered into his mind: *The Right Thing*.

“Yeah, and what’s that supposed to mean?” Mason said out loud. He stopped, shook his head as though to clear it of errant thoughts. *I must be losing it*, he told himself. Discretely glancing around, he was relieved to see that no one was watching him have a one on none debate. He sighed and continued along the darkening streets towards his dorm.



As Mason opened his dorm room door and walked in, Jim Stephens looked up from his studies. “Jesus Mason, you look like a whipped puppy dog. What’s up?”

Mason rolled his eyes. “Girls; can’t live with ‘em, can’t live without ‘em.”

Jim barked out a short laugh. “You got that right, man. Hey, I know how to straighten you out,” he said, standing up and stretching. “Let’s roll on down to Sixth Street and get us a few cold beers.”

“Ehhh...I don’t know. I kinda don’t feel like drinking beer right now. I’ve got a lot of studying to do.”

“Aw, c’mon Mason. It’ll do you some good; get your mind off of...ahh...”

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“Anne. Her name is Anne.” *You stupid jerk.*

“Right. Anne. C’mon, man, let’s go...” Jim grabbed a protesting Mason by the arm and dragged him back out the door.

After a short walk toward downtown, they strolled into the Longhorn Roundup. It was dark, crowded, noisy and smoky, a typical Sixth Street bar where the names above the door changed about as often as the student clientele.

After a few cold Shiners, Mason grudgingly admitted that he did feel a bit better. While those little bastards Pro & Con were still going at it in his head, it was easy to sit back and groove with the tunes that were rocking out of the speakers all around him. *They’ll figure it out*, thought Mason. He looked up to see Jim walking back to the table. Not only did he have a couple of fresh longnecks in his hands, on each arm was a shiny young babe.

“Look what I found, Mason.” Jim shouted above the din. “These ladies are new to town this year. Staci here,” he tilted his head to the left, “is from Baytown and Amanda,” tilting his head to the right, “is from Spring. I told them that you were also from Houston.” Jim stood there beaming, obviously proud of his catch.

Aw crap, thought Mason. *This looks like trouble with a Capital T.* He smiled weakly and wondered how in the world he was going to get out of this one intact.

“What part of Houston are y’all from?” Staci squeaked at Mason.

“Clear Lake,” replied Mason reluctantly.

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Staci clapped her hands together. “How fun – we’re practically neighbors.”

Jim reached over and borrowed a chair from the table next to theirs and motioned for the two girls to sit down. For Mason, an exaggerated wink.

After another hour and several more beers, Mason couldn’t help but notice that Staci did have some really nice tits. She was certainly proud of them, keeping her shoulders squared back like that and all. While it was hard to carry on a conversation over the music, he picked up enough to be certain that she was a real lightweight between the ears. He wondered if there was a new dental hygienist school here in Austin.

Across the table, Jim was clearly making serious progress with Amanda. They were laughing and carrying on, constantly bending over to talk into the others ear. Mason saw that Amanda was also occasionally sticking her tongue into Jim’s ear, a wet exclamation point. The only time their hands were visible above the table was to grab a quick swig of beer. Finally, he saw her nod her head and they stood up. She bent over and whispered something into Staci’s ear. Staci smiled excitedly and nodded her head energetically in agreement.

Jim headed out the door, Amanda in tow. Staci reached over and grabbed Mason’s hand, pulling him to his feet. Standing on her toes, she said into Mason’s ear, “we’re all going back to your

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dorm room.” She then described in considerable detail what she had in mind for Mason.

Mason’s eyes grew large as petite little Staci with the unnaturally big tits told him what she planned to do with him. While Mason had no doubt that she was entirely capable of the feats she described, he felt uneasy about it. Even though he was no stranger to these ‘hi, how are you, let’s go get nekkid’ situations, he just couldn’t get Anne off of his mind.

Unseen, Ashrael whispered into Mason’s mind a single word: *choose.*

What the hell, I guess it doesn’t hurt to have a backup, thought Mason. He let Staci take him by the hand and she led him out the door onto the street. It had started raining while they were in the bar; he lifted his face up to the sky and let the soft warm rain gently shower over him, washing away his remaining inhibitions and common sense. Staci embraced him and pressed his hand onto her left breast. Mason gave it a good squeeze, and they started walking back towards campus.

When Mason and Staci turned the corner at his dorm, he looked up and his heart stopped, his forgotten fears realized. There, standing in the rain with a shocked look on her face, was Anne Shepard. They all stood there, frozen, for what seemed to Mason to be an eternity.

Anne’s mouth worked, but no sound came out. She stopped for a moment, a puzzled look giving quickly away to anger.

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“You sonofabitch...” she said in a low voice. “You sonofabitch...” louder.

“Wait Anne. It’s not what it seems...” came Mason’s totally lame response.

“Who’s this?” squeaked Staci.

Mason whirled around to face her and screamed, “GET LOST YOU SLUT!” Staci turned and fled in terror, crying in confusion.

Mason turned back towards Anne and caught a stinging slap across the face. He stumbled backwards and caught himself on a lamppost. Anne stepped forward, her green eyes flashing in anger.

“You sonofabitch...” She screamed. “I came here to tell you that I loved you, that I’d wait until you were ready, that I’d... that I’d...” she broke down, sobbing into her hands.

Mason felt like he was having a heart attack. His heart pounded and his vision was blurred from Anne’s verbal and physical assault. His knees were wobbly and he would have fallen if he didn’t have a grip on the lamppost. His stomach roiled with acid and too many beers and he knew that very soon he was going to throw up. Most of all though, he was sick with fear and self-loathing. It was a feeling that would not go away for a long, long time.

He looked at her one last time before she turned away. He saw contempt, anger and pity in her smoldering green eyes. He

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could not hold her gaze and looked away, ashamed of himself and what he'd done.

“I guess you made your choice,” she said coldly, her face streaked with tears, her hands clenched into angry tight fists.

Anne turned away from the broken soul that was Mason Young and walked out of his life with her head held high. As she faded from his view into the gray drizzle of the night, Mason's strength slowly drained away; he slid down the lamppost, sat on the wet grass and cried.

A story of a man whose choices lead him to a life of quiet desperation and loneliness. The angel Ashrael enters his life and leads him to a different path where he finds faith, love and forgiveness.

The Confession of Mason Young

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