

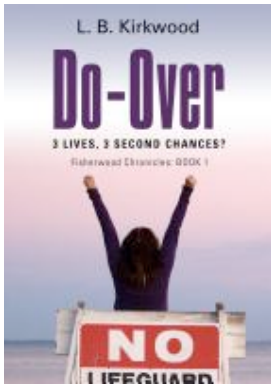
L. B. Kirkwood

Do-Over

3 LIVES, 3 SECOND CHANCES?

Fisherwood Chronicles: BODK 1





Seventeen-year-old J.T., a child of divorce, needs a fresh start before he ends up in Juvenile Hall. Simone, at 18, thinks she's ready to launch a solo singing career. But is she? And Prodigal son Adam had run off to California seeking fame and fortune, but ended up homeless. Will life in his hometown ever be the same?

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Do-Over

Laura B. Kirkwood

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First Edition

Dedication

For the late Alyce Voisine. We shared a dream way back when. This is for both of us. For Rose Holdwright and Mary Ann Ponte, who propelled this book forward. You will never know how much your encouragement helped me. And for my Mom, for all your support and faith that I “would make it, one day.” I love you.

CHAPTER 1

J.T. stared out of the window as the bus drove along the Massachusetts Turnpike, an MP3-player on his lap and headphones planted firmly on his ears. The seventeen-year-old glared unseeingly at the purplish shadows that were beginning to creep over the mountains of Western Massachusetts in the late afternoon sunlight. It was mid-September and the foliage along the Pike was beginning to take on the autumn colors of orange, crimson and gold.

J.T. might have enjoyed his ride from Connecticut to his father's place in Fisherwood, Massachusetts, but spending four hours breathing stale bus air was not his idea of fun. Especially today.

It wasn't that he didn't want to go to Fisherwood. He'd wanted to live with his father since his mother married Frank. He hated his stepfather and getting out of the house was a blessing. What he didn't like was being "kicked" out of the house. His mother had finally had enough and if he didn't go to live with his father, J.T. would probably end up in juvenile lock-up.

J.T. tried to tell himself that moving in with his father was what he had wanted and it didn't matter how he got there. But somewhere deep inside him, it did matter. He had left Connecticut in disgrace, as a punishment after getting arrested.

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“Get in trouble just a couple of times and your mom freaks out,” J.T. thought to himself as he glared out the window at the passing trees.

He found himself feeling too edgy and anxious to even listen to music. He switched off his MP3-player, slipped the headphones off his ears so they rested against his collarbone and stared out the window. The bus exited the Pike and headed into the town of Stockbridge. The bus would be picking up passengers there and then moving on to Sturbridge, for more passengers, and then there wouldn't be another stop until Providence, R.I., where J.T. would board the bus that would take him to his father's inn on Cape Cod.

As the new passengers took their seats and the bus started moving again, J.T. suddenly remembered why he'd put on his MP3-player. The group of college kids in the back of the bus hadn't stopped talking since they'd gotten on in Springfield. He quickly turned on his player again and put the headphones back on his ears, eager to drown out their endless chatter for the next two and a half hours.

But as boring as the bus ride might be, J.T. wasn't really looking forward to arriving in Fisherwood. Getting caught drinking behind the high school with his friends and getting into that stupid fight in the parking lot of a convenience store were bad enough. But he knew his father, the ex-cop, would have something to say about this shoplifting thing. J.T. only did it on a dare. It wasn't like he was some kind of hardened criminal or anything. But his

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mother had gotten so upset over it; he could only imagine what his father was going to say.

“Welcome to Fisherwood, the Gateway to Cape Cod,” the sign read as the bus turned onto Route 6. J.T. wondered how many times in the past ten years he’d seen this sign as he came to Fisherwood to spend his summer vacations with his father. During the summer, all the tourists traveling to and from the Cape made traffic unbearable. But summer was over and Fisherwood had regained its off-season calm.

Fisherwood was the picture of a quaint New England seaside town, nestled cozily between the Atlantic Ocean and numerous outcroppings of cranberry bogs. The bogs, in their neat squares separated by deep irrigation trenches, were tinged with pink in the evening light.

The bus drove through the town of Fisherwood itself, a collection of one and two-story buildings, some old and steeped in history, others new and modern. A hundred-year-old building that housed the pharmacy and a Laundromat stood across the street from the contemporary architecture of the bank.

Fisherwood didn’t have a bus terminal. Instead, the bus had to pull into the supermarket parking lot. And there in the parking lot was a green Ford Explorer, with Jake Robillard, J.T.’s father, leaning against it with his arms folded in front of him. A knot quickly formed in the pit of J.T.’s stomach. J.T. waited until nearly everyone was off

the bus before grabbing his duffle bag and making his way to the front of the bus. J.T. alighted from the bus and walked ever-so-slowly toward his father. J.T. thought he would jump out of his skin when Jake hurried forward, meeting him half way.

“How was the trip?” Jake asked, putting a comforting hand on his son’s shoulder. J.T. took a breath. *Of course he wouldn’t make a scene in public*, he thought to himself, *he’d wait until they were home for that*.

“Okay,” J.T. answered briefly.

Jake reached his hand toward the duffle bag J.T. had brought with him. “Let me give you a hand with that,” he said.

“I can get it,” J.T. said, perhaps too quickly. He grasped the bag more tightly and hoisted it to his shoulder.

Seeing them walking together, side by side, one would notice the strong resemblance between them. They both had the same shade of straight, ash-blond hair and the same dark blue eyes. They even had the same proud walk. The difference was in J.T.’s sullen gaze and the appearance of having an extremely weighty chip on his shoulder.

Although Jake tried to make conversation, J.T. hardly said more than two words on the entire trip to The Fisherwood Pines, the inn owned by Jake Robillard. As they entered the inn, Abbey, the manager, stepped out from behind the front desk and threw her arms around J.T.’s neck.

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“Well, ain’t you a sight!” Abbey cried, hugging him tightly. Abbey, a middle-aged woman of Afro-American descent, had taught Jake everything he knew about running an inn. She continued to be his “right hand” and the best friend Jake had ever had.

“Hi, Abbey,” J.T. murmured, managing a slight smile. He had always liked Abbey. She could always be relied on to tell him the truth.

“Your room’s all ready for you,” Abbey said. “Now you go put those things away. There’s some cold fried chicken and a piece of my special apple pie waiting for you in the kitchen.”

Ordinarily the mention of Abbey’s apple pie would have lit up J.T.’s face like Roman candles. And considering that J.T. had just arrived from a long bus trip, his muted reply of “thanks, Abbey” seemed quite subdued. J.T. hoisted his duffle bag to his shoulder once more and headed toward the rear of the building, where Jake kept a private apartment, complete with its own kitchen, living room, two bedrooms and a private bath.

“Well, he *is* in a mood!” Abbey exclaimed when J.T. had gone.

“Tell me about it!” Jake replied. “And I haven’t even talked to him about the shoplifting yet!” Jake then followed his son down the corridor.

J.T. was slowly emptying the contents of his duffle bag onto the bed when his father entered the room. J.T.’s head whipped around as if he’d been shot. Jake closed the door

behind him, even though they were the only two people in the apartment and it was unlikely that anyone would barge in on them. He then leaned his back against the mirrored bureau, arms crossed in front of him.

Here it comes, J.T. thought to himself.

“You know, I’m having a really hard time understanding how a son of mine could be involved in shoplifting. Maybe you could explain it to me.”

J.T.’s fingers tightly gripped the shirt he was holding as he tried to swallow past the lump in his throat. “I didn’t mean to get in any trouble,” he stammered.

“You mean you didn’t mean to get caught!”

“No, I didn’t mean to get into trouble,” he said louder. “I wasn’t trying to get arrested!”

“Well, you did a pretty good job for someone who wasn’t trying!” Jake took an involuntary step forward, causing J.T. to step back suddenly and bump into the bedside table in front of the window, almost knocking over the lamp that was on it. This response startled Jake. He didn’t intend to hit the boy; he only wanted the truth. Not wanting this to turn into an interrogation, Jake took a deep breath before continuing.

“Sit down,” Jake said softly. He gently pushed aside the clothes so that they both would have a place to sit down. J.T. sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the floor. Jake took a seat beside him. “What’s going on J.T.? This isn’t like you.”

“How do you know what’s ‘like me?’ You haven’t been around!”

“I think you’d better change your tone, right now,” Jake said with restraint. A long, uncomfortable pause followed. J.T. tried to lick his lips but found no moisture.

“I didn’t mean to steal anything,” he said. “Honest!”

“Then why did you?”

J.T. remembered how his friend Spike had jeered at him over the rack of DVD’s. He didn’t know that the store manager had been watching them all along. The manager knew Spike.

“Spike dared me,” J.T. said with a shrug, aware of how foolish he sounded. He noticed the quizzical expression on his father’s face, so he continued. “Spike said I was too much of a wimp and I wouldn’t do it. I had to prove him wrong.”

“Who is this Spike?” Jake wanted to know.

“He’s just this guy I hang out with back home,” he explained.

“I see,” Jake said. Spike must be one of the “bad influences” that his ex-wife had told him about. “And if Spike told you to jump off the Sagamore Bridge, I supposed you’d do that too!”

Even Jake couldn’t believe he’d just said that. Could he have *been* more cliché? Sometimes it surprised him when his own father’s words tumbled out of his mouth.

“I knew you wouldn’t understand!” J.T. got up and moved hurriedly across the room. Jake also stood up.

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“I do understand! You caved in to peer pressure! But let me tell you something; that’s not a good enough reason to commit a crime!”

J.T. stood silently with his back against the wall, staring down at the pattern of the blue carpet. “I didn’t mean to,” he murmured again, realizing that he had no other excuse. Jake moved over to his son and pressed his arm against the wall, less than an inch away from J.T.’s shoulder.

“Whether you meant to or not, you did,” Jake said quietly, leaning very close to J.T. “I thought you at least knew right from wrong, but it seems you forgot, so here’s a reminder. Theft is wrong. It’s illegal and it’s immoral, no matter who dares you to do it. Now, you’re grounded. And in case you don’t remember what *that* means, it means no phone, no internet, no video games, and you’re not to leave this property without asking my permission first. I’ll let you have TV, but if you step out of line, I’ll take that away, too. Have you got that?”

J.T. looked up and nodded. Jake turned and walked toward the door.

“For how long?” J.T. asked. Jake turned back.

“Until I can trust you again.” With that he turned and left the room, closing the door behind him. Glad to have that scene over with, J.T. leaned his head against the wall and closed his eyes.

Some time after his thorough chewing-out, J.T. came out of his room and glanced cautiously around the apartment. His father must have gone back into the inn. He then went into the kitchen and picked at a piece of chicken. Somehow he didn't feel very hungry. Not even the deep-dish apple pie looked good to him, so he put the food into the fridge and drank a glass of orange juice.

When Jake returned a hour later, J.T. still wasn't very hungry, so Jake polished off the rest of the friend chicken and had a piece of pie. J.T. hardly said two words to him for the rest of the evening, but that was all right with Jake. He was still a little steamed himself.

Jake sat at the desk in his office and tried to work after J.T. had gone to bed, at an unusually early hour, but he only managed to stare into space and puzzle out his son's recent behavior. J.T. had always been a good kid. Stealing and fighting weren't like him. Something had to be done, but what?

By breakfast the next morning, Jake had made at least one decision.

"After breakfast we should go over to the high school and get you enrolled," Jake said as he stirred a second spoonful of sugar into his morning coffee. J.T. looked up abruptly from his eggs.

"You're making me go to school?" J.T. asked, surprised.

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“Well, it’s either school or you can take an equivalency exam. Either way, you’re getting a diploma. That’s non-negotiable,” Jake replied, setting his jaw firmly.

“What, did Mom put you up to this?”

“Your mother doesn’t have to put me up to anything. You’re living with me now, under my roof, and no son of mine is going to be a drop out.”

“Why are you making a big deal of this?” J.T. persisted.

Jake had great difficulty keeping his temper under control.

“Most employers won’t hire someone without at least a high school diploma, including me,” Jake explained slowly and calmly. “You have one year to go before you graduate. The method you choose to obtain it is totally up to you, but you will get a diploma.”

Jake took a long sip from his coffee cup to allow J.T. the chance to mull over what he’d just said. J.T. could tell from his father’s expression that there was no way to change his mind. All the arguing in the world would get him nowhere.

“Well, which will it be?” Jake asked after a few moments had gone by. J.T. stared down at his plate, jabbing his fork into his eggs, which were now stone cold.

“The semester started a couple of weeks ago,” he mumbled.

“You’ve always been smart. It won’t take you long to catch up, *if* you do decide to go back to school,” Jake added slyly.

J.T. played with his breakfast for a few moments longer while Jake waited for his answer.

“Okay, I guess I might as well go to school,” he said finally.

Jake smiled into his coffee cup. When he’d drained the last of his coffee, he got up from his chair and headed toward the sink. On his way past, he gently placed a hand on J.T.’s shoulder.

“Why don’t you go get cleaned up and we’ll go over to the school?” he said quietly. J.T. nodded and got up to leave. When he was halfway out of the room, Jake called him back.

“J.T., your plate,” he reminded him, gesturing toward the dirty dishes on the table. J.T. obediently picked up his plate and rinsed it in the sink, then walked out of the room to finish getting dressed.

Jake smiled quietly to himself. Well, the first battle had been won. Besides going to school, Jake planned to have J.T. help out at the inn. He expected to have a battle over that issue too, but he didn’t want J.T. to have too much idle time on his hands. Besides, Jake would be able to keep an eye on him more easily if they were under the same roof.

Jake didn’t broach the subject of work until after they were in the car returning from registration at the high

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school. To Jake's surprise, J.T. accepted the proposition without argument.

"What difference does it make? It's not like I have any friends or anything," J.T. groused.

"You'll make friends soon enough," Jake assured him.

J.T. stared moodily out the window for quite some time. Just as Jake was wondering if he should say something, J.T. broke the silence himself.

"I can't believe I got stuck with auto shop," he muttered, unconsciously rubbing his thumb against the door handle.

"I was glad I had auto shop when I was your age. I had this old clunker of a car, held together by rust. I loved working on that car, though," Jake admitted cheerfully. "Maybe you'll be able to save up for a clunker of your own to fix up, since you'll be working."

J.T. looked up with sudden interest. "You're paying me?" he asked. Apparently he'd thought he'd be working for free.

"I pay all my employees." Jake allowed himself a slight sardonic grin at this.

"And you'd let me get a car?"

"Sure. Every young man should have an old clunker to work on," Jake replied. J.T. brightened at this prospect.

As soon as they returned to the inn, Jake put his son to work vacuuming carpets and polishing floors. With J.T.'s

attitude problem, Jake didn't want him coming in contact with any of the guests. His theory worked well for several days, but despite his precautions, Jake couldn't stop fate.

One day, while J.T. vacuumed the corridor outside his father's office, a guest approached him.

"Young man, would it be possible to get some extra towels brought to my room?" Mr. Ashton, the guest, asked.

The request was not an unreasonable one, but J.T. was in a foul mood.

"Do I look like a chambermaid to you?" he snapped.

Jake, who happened to be coming out of his office at that moment, overheard this exchange.

"J.T., I'd like to see you in my office," he said stiffly. J.T. scowled as he headed for the office. "I must apologize for my son's behavior. I've been having some problems with him lately, but there's no excuse for rudeness," Jake explained to his guest.

"I understand. I have three teenagers of my own at home," Mr. Ashton admitted.

"Then I don't envy you. One is quite enough for me. I'll see that extra towels are brought to your room immediately."

The two men shook hands and Mr. Ashton continued down the corridor. Jake stiffened his back and headed for his office. When he entered the room, J.T. was sitting on the edge of the desk. Jake eyed him angrily and slammed the door shut behind him. J.T. looked startled but indignant as he quickly jumped off the edge of the desk.

“You’ve been carrying around a chip on your shoulder since you got here, and now you’re taking it out on the guests,” Jake bellowed. “If you’ve got something on your mind, you’d better start talking!”

Jake waited for a moment, but J.T. remained silent.

“Jacob Tyler Robillard, I mean now!” he warned.

“Was it your idea for me to come live with you or did Mom have to talk you into it?” J.T. blurted out.

Jake looked confused. “It was my idea.”

“Are you sure Mom didn’t talk you into it?”

“No. Where did you get that idea?”

“I overheard Mom talking to Frank after I got arrested. She said she couldn’t take any more and that she was going to insist that you take me.”

“Is that what all this is about?” Jake asked, somewhat relieved. He moved a few steps closer to his son. “Well, she did call me to say that you’d gotten arrested, but if you’d heard the phone call, you’d know that she never got the chance to ‘insist.’ I suggested that it might be better for you to live with me for awhile.”

“Then you really want me?” J.T. asked sheepishly.

“If I didn’t, you wouldn’t be here,” Jake confirmed. He reached over and placed a hand on J.T.’s shoulder. “And don’t ever think that your mother doesn’t want you either. When she came back from her honeymoon with Frank, I asked her to let you live with me. But she accused me of going against the custody agreement. She wanted you to stay with her.”

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J.T. looked silently down at the carpet for several minutes. Suddenly the phone rang. Jake hesitantly reached over to answer it, not sure that this was a good time for an interruption. But a catastrophe in the main kitchen needed Jake's attention.

"I'll be right there," he said into the receiver. As he replaced it on the hook, he glanced over at J.T. "Are we all right now?" he asked.

"Yeah, we're okay," J.T. answered quietly.

Jake reached over and grasped J.T. by the back of the neck and looked directly into his eyes. "Hey, I love you. Remember that."

J.T. just smiled faintly. Jake turned to leave the room, but just as he reached the door, he swung around again.

"And one more thing, if I ever catch you being that rude to a guest again, I'll ream you out so bad you won't know what hit you. You got that?"

"I got it," J.T. replied quietly.

"Good, now get back to work." Convinced that his son was sufficiently chastened, Jake winked at him and headed out the door.

J.T. then went to the linen room and retrieved a few extra sets of towels and brought them to Mr. Ashton's room.

"Mr. Ashton, I'm sorry I was so rude before," he said. Ashton couldn't keep from smiling a bit knowingly.

"Your old man rake you over the coals, did he?"

"Yes, Sir. Anyway, I hope you can forgive me."

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“Don’t think anymore about it,” Ashton replied.

Later that evening, Jake himself paid a visit to Mr. Ashton, who suddenly found himself inundated with clean towels.

“Oh, didn’t your son tell you? He brought me towels earlier when he came to apologize,” Ashton informed him. Jake was a bit surprised by this news.

“No, he didn’t mention it,” Jake admitted. So, J.T. corrected his mistake without being told to. Pleased, Jake returned to his office with the feeling that he must have done something right.

CHAPTER 2

Jazz musician Billy Styles hadn't gotten rich, but he had managed to make a modest living in his thirty-plus years of living on the road. Many of those years were spent in Europe, particularly in France, where he'd kept a country house outside of Paris and married a pretty French girl. After his wife died several years ago, he decided it was time to return to his native United States, where he traveled with a band of musicians who he considered to be among the best in the country.

Fisherwood was the last stop in a ten month concert tour and Billy once again contemplated retirement. On his way back from rehearsals at the Fisherwood Athenaeum Theater, Billy came across an old boarded up restaurant. Hit by a sudden brainstorm, he got out of his rental car and examined the "For Sale" sign with great interest. For some time now, he'd toyed with the idea of settling down in one place and perhaps owning his own jazz club. As the years had passed, he'd grown increasingly weary of living on the road.

When he returned to his room at the Fisherwood Pines, Billy phoned the number of the realty office printed on the sign and arranged to take a look inside the building the following day.

From what he saw of the inside, the restaurant would have to be entirely renovated, but he liked the town and

restoring the building wouldn't be impossible, so on impulse Billy put down a deposit on the restaurant.

"Where've you been?" queried Jack, the bass player, as Billy arrived late to the rehearsal.

"I've got news for all of you," he said, motioning for everyone to gather around him. "I've decided to settle down here in Fisherwood. I'm buying an old restaurant that I'll be turning into a jazz club. When the club opens, I'll still need some musicians, so I hope all of you will decide to stay, but I'll understand if you want to continue your careers elsewhere."

Most of the band knew that Billy wanted to retire, often saying that he was getting too old for living on a tour bus or in hotels, so he received mostly good wishes from the members of his band, with a few regrets mixed in. One member was not especially happy to hear the news, however. Simone Audette, who sang background vocals for Billy's band, did not want to settle down. Just beginning her singing career, she did not intend to end it now.

Simone said nothing as she stormed from the stage.

"Why don't you guys get warmed up. I'll be right back," Billy said, going after her. Billy found her in her dressing room behind a locked door.

"Simone, open the door. I have to talk to you," Billy shouted, pounding on the door. After a few seconds of dead silence, Billy heard the sound of the lock being turned. He opened the door and walked gingerly inside.

“What do you think, Baby?” he asked.

“*What do I think?*” Simone answered in French, her native language. “*How could you make such a decision without asking my opinion? Or don’t your plans include me.*”

“*Of course they include you,*” Billy answered, also speaking in French. All his years of living in France had made him fluent in the language. “*You’re part of the reason I want to settle down.*”

“*Oh, am I?*” Simone said in disbelief.

“*Of course you are! You’re part of all the decisions I make!*”

“*And what have you decided about my career? I still want to be a singer, in case you’ve forgotten,*” she protested.

“*And you will be. We’ll still be performing. Only we’ll be in the same town every night.*”

Simone didn’t seem overly reassured by this statement, so Billy continued. “*You’ve come a long way, musically, but I don’t think you’re quite ready to launch your solo career. The club would be a great place for you to cultivate your talent. Once you’re ready, you’ll be free to go to New York or Hollywood, or wherever. Of course, you’re free to go now, if that’s what you want,*” Billy added.

Simone looked up at him, startled. She wanted desperately to launch her singing career, but she didn’t know if she could leave Billy. He could be irritatingly overprotective concerning her singing, and everything else

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for that matter, but he was also a wonderful teacher. She had learned a great deal under his tutelage, and though impatient to begin her own career, she felt she still had much to learn.

“No, I don’t want to leave,” she said quietly, in English. “But I’m still furious with you for not discussing this with me first, as if this doesn’t concern me at all.”

“You’re right, Baby. I’m sorry. I should’ve talked this over with you first. But, you know, I’m doing this for you, too. All the time we spend on the road, we hardly have any time to ourselves. It’s about time I retired from the road, and built a real life for us.”

“I’ve never complained about the way we live,” Simone replied.

“I know,” he said, gently brushing her cheek with his hand, “but what kind of life is that for a young girl?”

“I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way.” Simone wrapped her arms around Billy’s waist. She felt so safe and loved with his protective arms around her.

Billy tenderly kissed the top of her head as he and Simone rejoined the other members of the band, who had been warming up for what seemed an eternity.

When they’d finished rehearsal later that afternoon, Billy brought Simone by the restaurant. She didn’t think much of the boarded up building at first, but as Billy

explained the renovations he was planning, she began to see the club's potential.

Later they were in cheerful spirits as they pulled into the parking lot of the Fisherwood Pines and pulled up next to the large bus with the name "Billy Styles" splashed across its sides and back. J.T. was up on a ladder changing a fluorescent bulb over the front desk when they came through the door. Billy stopped momentarily to collect his room key and messages from Abbey, and then he and Simone disappeared up the stairs to get ready for that night's performance.

Abbey then looked up at J.T. on the ladder and noticed that he was spending more of his attention on watching Simone than on changing the light bulb.

"You planning on changing that bulb sometime today?" she asked sarcastically.

"Huh?" J.T. came reluctantly out of his reverie and continued with his task. "Abbey, what do you think of Simone?"

"You mean that little French girl who sings with Billy Styles? She's pretty enough, I guess. Why?" Abbey wanted to know.

"No reason."

Abbey suspected she knew the reason for J.T.'s interest; he was developing a crush on that pretty little French girl.

"Abbey, could you hold down the fort for a few hours tonight?" Jake asked, stepping up to the desk. "Billy Styles

just gave me two tickets to tonight's performance at the Athenaeum and I think J.T. and I could use a 'guys' night out.' That is, if his homework's done."

"It will be," J.T. said quickly as he finished replacing the bulb and jumped down from the ladder. Seconds later, he and the ladder both vanished down the corridor.

"Well, I didn't think he'd be *this* excited," Jake remarked.

"I think what he's excited about is the chance to see that little French girl strut her stuff," Abbey explained, exchanging an understanding glance with Jake.

The "guys' night out" proved to be an unqualified success, even if it did have more to do with J.T.'s interest in a certain young singer than in what Jake thought of as "quality time" with his son. Even so, each enjoyed an evening out at the Athenaeum, listening to the cool, mellow strains of Billy Styles' music. The theater held approximately 1,000 people, and each and every seat had been sold out well in advance, but Billy played the audience as an intimate gathering.

Billy's clear, throaty voice drifted up over the theater with songs mixing jazz and blues. His band consisted of Billy on piano, Simone on background vocals, a drummer, a bass player, a lead guitarist and a saxophonist. Individually, the band members were extremely accomplished musicians. Together, they were magic.

Jake couldn't tell how much of the music J.T. noticed, but he had no doubt that his son noticed the auburn-haired

girl wearing a rather slinky black dress. Still, J.T. and Jake enjoyed the evening immensely. Jake took the opportunity to thank Billy later as they sat together in the dining room after the show. Jake explained the situation with J.T. and how he thought spending the evening together improved their relationship.

No sooner had Jake expressed his gratitude when Simone approached them on her way up to her room.

“Are you coming, Billy?” she asked, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“In a minute. I’m still a little wound from the show,” Billy replied.

“All right. Good night then.”

“Good night, Baby.” Billy reached up and kissed her affectionately on the cheek.

From this, Jake suspected that there was more to their relationship than just boss and employee. They seemed to have a special closeness between them. Of course, Billy Styles was fifty years old and Simone was only eighteen, but who was Jake to comment on their May/December romance. Their relationship was none of his concern.

But Jake was concerned about J.T.’s growing infatuation with the girl. For the first time since arriving in Fisherwood, J.T. showed signs of adjusting to his new life. Finally, when J.T. had become more interested in something besides getting into trouble, the boy was about to be crushed by a broken heart.

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Jake debated on whether he should break the news to J.T. or let him learn the truth for himself. Jake didn't want to seem over-protective, but since J.T. wasn't in the strongest emotional state at present, his baby boy just might *need* a little protecting.

Before he could debate further whether or not to tell J.T. about Billy's relationship with Simone, Billy interrupted his thoughts by asking him how long he'd been in the hotel business. Jake paused a few seconds as if he'd just been woken up and then explained how he came to Fisherwood quite by accident after his divorce from J.T.'s mother. He'd seen a "For Sale" sign on the inn and had decided to buy it. He explained how he had been a cop with the NYPD until a serious injury resulting from a car chase forced him to hang up his gun. Jake confessed that at the time he knew nothing about the hotel business and that Abbey had taught him everything he knew.

Then Billy told Jake about his plans for the restaurant/jazz club. Jake suddenly realized that the two actually had very much in common and they would probably become good friends if Billy planned to stay in Fisherwood.

The next morning, Billy invited Jake and J.T. to come see the club when he was to meet with the real estate agent. On the way into the restaurant, Jake suddenly remembered that he hadn't told J.T. about Billy and Simone's

relationship yet. He'd decided to warn him before J.T. found out the hard way. Jake crossed his fingers all the time Billy showed them around the building.

Simone listened excitedly as Billy explained the changes he was planning, where he would put the stage, how many tables they would have, and how he planned to renovate the kitchen. When he finished his description, a delighted Simone threw her arms around his neck.

"Does this mean you like it, Baby?" Billy asked, laughing.

"Oh, Billy! I love it!" She held him close for a few more moments, and then suddenly pulled away. "What would you do if I didn't like it?"

"I'd probably keep it anyway, but I'm glad you do. Like I said, I'm doing this for us."

J.T. watched this scene in silence, his cheeks coloring slightly. Jake reached over and touched his shoulder sympathetically. He wished he'd had the chance to warn J.T., to prepare him for just such an event. J.T.'s eyes were downcast and he appeared to be more than slightly embarrassed.

Later, back at the inn, J.T. was tossing a basketball into the hoop that Jake had set up for him in the inn's parking lot. While J.T. was outside, Simone happened to come by, eating an ice cream cone from the shop down the street. The last thing J.T. wanted at that moment was to have

Simone stand there and remind him of his embarrassment, but stand there was just what Simone did. J.T. tried to ignore her as much as possible, hoping that she'd become bored and leave. Instead, she sat on the hood of Billy's rental car and casually licked at her ice cream cone.

"What did you think of the show last night?" she asked, her French accent only slightly apparent. J.T. loved the way her voice lilted when she spoke and the way the sun glistened on her auburn hair.

"It was great," J.T. said honestly. He had longed to spend a moment like this with Simone, but now he found spending that moment extremely difficult. "How do you feel about staying in Fisherwood?" he asked, trying to contribute to the conversation. He reached up and shot the ball into the basket. It hung in the netting for a moment and then dropped down, bouncing lightly against the pavement.

"I think I'm going to like it very much. At first I was against the idea, but settling down would please Billy."

J.T. felt as if a knife had just been thrust into his chest.

"Billy means a lot to you, doesn't he?"

"He's all I have," she admitted.

"What about the rest of the band?" J.T. asked.

"They are good friends, but they're not family," she claimed, crunching the last bite of her cone.

"Family?" J.T. wondered if there was even more to this relationship than he thought.

Simone detected confusion in his voice. "Yes," she said. After all, Billy *is* my father."

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Her words startled J.T. for an instant.

“Your what?” he said, not sure he’d hear her correctly.

“My father. What did you think he was?”

J.T. did not want to admit what he thought. “But you don’t have his last name.”

“Audette was my mother’s maiden name. I use it as a stage name, so people won’t think I’m singing just because I’m Billy Styles’s daughter,” she explained.

“Then why do you call him ‘Billy?’”

“Why not? That is his name.”

“My father’s name is Jake, but I don’t call him that.”

“Oh, you mean why don’t I call him ‘Papa’ or something?” she said, nodding. “I do sometimes, but Billy traveled a great deal when I was growing up. When I did see him, my mother called him Billy, so I started calling him Billy. He never seemed to mind it.”

This revelation greatly relieved J.T., and he would be very embarrassed if she ever found out what he’d been thinking about her relationship with Billy. He’d thought that Billy was robbing the cradle, but he felt great comfort knowing that this cradle was already Billy’s to begin with.

“How are you at shooting baskets?” J.T. asked, smiling. He lightly tossed the basketball toward her. Holding the ball in her manicured hands, she slipped from the hood of the car.

“I’ve never played before,” she said.

J.T. showed her how to hold the ball and Simone took a shot at the basket. The ball fell far short of its mark and J.T. laughed as he chased it.

“Here, try it again,” he said, throwing her the ball. “Throw it higher, toward the hoop.”

Her next shot lobbed over the backboard and this time, both of them laughed. After several more attempts, Simone finally got the hang of it and she and J.T. spent the next hour taking turns.

Inside the inn, Billy and the rest of the band gathered their instruments together for the trip to the Athenaeum for rehearsal. Billy happened to glance out the window, spotting Simone and J.T. having a good time.

“They seem to be getting along,” he said casually, shuffling through a pile of sheet music. Jake came out from behind the front desk to see what Billy meant. It surprised him to see J.T. and Simone having fun together, especially in light of this morning’s events. Then Jake wondered why Billy didn’t seem at all concerned.

“Does that bother you?” Jake asked.

“No. If Simone and I are staying in Fisherwood, she should have some friends.” Billy finished packing up and went to the door. “Simone, time for rehearsal,” he called out to her. Laughing, she and J.T. headed inside.

Aware of J.T. walking beside her, Simone called out, “Coming, *Papa*.”

Billy looked almost as startled as Jake did.

“All right, Simone. What do you want?” Billy asked.

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“What do you mean?” She blinked at him innocently.

“You only call me ‘Papa’ when you want something,” he said.

“I don’t want anything,” she said cheerfully. “Come, let’s go to rehearsal.”

With a puzzled expression on his face, Billy accompanied Simone out to the car.

“Papa?” Jake repeated in disbelief.

“Yeah, Simone’s Billy’s daughter,” J.T. informed him as he headed toward the kitchen, leaving Jake feeling bewildered.

CHAPTER 3

As the chill of evening descended, Adam Morgan arrived in Fisherwood, his hometown. He had come a long way already, hitch-hiking his way from California. Though he knew it was the right thing to do, his heart filled with trepidation. The argument with his father still lingered in his mind, but hopefully by later this evening, all that would be behind him.

By sheer luck, Adam came upon a parking lot with one of its corners hidden by shrubbery. The area was only about five square feet, but exhausted from his journey, Adam felt that this would be an ideal place to rest, completely concealed. He would need all his strength later when he would finally reach his parents' house. It had been many hours since he'd had anything to eat and his stomach gnawed with pain. He carefully rummaged through a few garbage cans until he found a plastic bag containing two end-crusts of bread and a can with twenty or so baked beans stuck to its bottom and sides.

Pleased with his good fortune, Adam sat down with his meal in the seclusion of the shrubbery. About a stone's throw away, lights went on in a neighboring house. The sounds of music and laughter filtered out over the parking lot. He rested his head against his nondescript, army-green backpack and nibbled on a handful of beans, mesmerized by the lights and sounds coming from the house.

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He had once lived in a house much like that one, he thought to himself, picking spots of mold from a crust of bread. But he'd ruined all that. He had to correct his mistake, if it wasn't already too late. He had to make it home again. Adam had traveled a long distance, spending many nights sleeping in the streets with only his backpack to his name. But if all went well, later this evening he would be back safe and sound with his family.

He'd only meant to rest for a short while and then move on, but after finishing his meager meal, Adam fell asleep, his head resting against his backpack. When he finally woke up, the early rays of sunlight were just breaking through the hazy gray of dawn. He sleepily rubbed a hand over his grimy hair, emerged from the shelter of the bushes, and stumbled out into the street, driven by his desire to make it HOME.

Adam picked through a few more garbage cans, but this time came up with nothing. Oh well, he thought, he'd try again later, or his mother would give him something to eat when he reached home. Suddenly he coughed violently and had to brace himself against a wall to keep from falling over. A feeling of nausea swept through his empty stomach and he had to swallow several times until it subsided.

He'd been feeling sick for the past few days, but now that he was so close to home, he just had to make it. He couldn't let his illness overwhelm him, not now. Perspiring heavily, he looked around him, trying to decide what he should do next. His father was a doctor at Fisherwood

Do-Over

Memorial Hospital, only a few blocks away. Surely he could make it there! And his father would know what to do. But what if his father refused him, Adam worried. He wouldn't think about that possibility now, he decided, he just had to make it to the hospital.

For a few moments Adam didn't know if his shaky legs would carry him the three or four blocks to Fisherwood Memorial, but he finally staggered up to the building. He arrived at the hospital before eight o'clock and most of the workers hadn't changed their shifts yet. Adam sat on the ground, resting his back against a cool stone wall. He was oblivious to several nurses who passed him, whispering and exchanging furtive glances. Either he did not notice them, or he did not care.

Suddenly a gray Lincoln pulled into the parking space marked "Jonathan Morgan, M.D." Adam struggled to pull himself up. Realizing how haggard he must look, he pushed his greasy hair away from his face and wiped his hand on his torn jeans. It was now or never, he decided, hoisting his backpack to his shoulder.

He watched as his father got out of the car and headed toward the hospital. Adam stumbled after him, but couldn't quite catch up to him as Jonathan passed through the automatic doors of Fisherwood Memorial. Adam was so close; he couldn't miss his chance now. Adam lunged after him, but lost his footing and toppled to the ground, his weight forcing the doors to remain open. Two passing nurses and a security guard rushed to his side.

“Get a gurney,” one of the nurses ordered. The guard rushed inside and returned with one. The nurse stopped a pair of orderlies who were just coming in, who hoisted Adam onto the gurney and wheeled him into the Emergency Room.

“What’ve we got?” asked the E.R. nurse.

“He just collapsed in front of the hospital,” the guard explained.

“Well, let’s have a look,” the E.R. nurse said, directing the orderlies to wheel the gurney into the examining room. The nurse carefully studied the unconscious patient. As she grabbed his wrist to check for a pulse, she thought he looked familiar, but couldn’t quite place him. Dr. Preston, the doctor on call at the E.R. that day, came into the examining room.

“Dr. Preston, does he look familiar to you?” she asked. Dr. Preston gazed down at the dirty, unshaven face and the stringy hair. He couldn’t tell whether he recognized him or not; but still, he thought he saw something around the eyes. Perhaps he *had* seen this face before.

“Yes, he does,” Dr. Preston answered as he began his examination. “But I can’t say how I know him. Is there any identification?”

The nurse searched his pockets and his backpack, finally retrieving a worn leather billfold with little more in it than a driver’s license.

Do-Over

“Adam Morgan,” she read. She puzzled over the name for a few seconds and then looked up in recognition. “Of course! Dr. Morgan’s son!”

Surprised, Dr. Preston took another look at the young man’s face. Jonathan Morgan was a good friend of his. How long had it been since Jonathan and his son had fought and the boy disappeared, he wondered. Could this be the same spirited, wise-cracking youth he’d known? Dr. Preston studied the face more closely.

“You’re right. I think this is Jonathan Morgan’s son,” he admitted finally. He could hardly believe that this thin, pallid face belonged to Dr. Morgan’s son, but it did.

“I think I’d better go call Dr. Morgan,” the nurse said, leaving Dr. Preston to finish examining his patient.

Jonathan Morgan was in surgery when the E.R. nurse phoned and left a message on his voice-mail. By the time Jonathan found out about his son, Adam had been admitted by Dr. Preston. Still dressed in his green surgical garb, Jonathan followed Dr. Preston to Adam’s room.

Jonathan paused at the door for a moment, staring at the thin, ghostly figure lying asleep in the hospital bed, an intravenous tube and various monitors attached to him. Adam looked so different that even his father had trouble recognizing him at first. His face had become drawn and his features sharp. He appeared much older than his twenty

years. Jonathan stared at his eyes and then became so filled with emotion that he couldn't speak.

"Is that Adam?" Preston asked quietly, though he knew it was. Jonathan only managed to nod his head and utter a quiet "yes."

"Look, I've got rounds, so I'll check in a little later," Dr. Preston said, lightly patting Jonathan's shoulder.

With his eyes fixed on Adam's face, Jonathan pulled a chair over to the bed. He didn't know what he would say to Adam when he finally woke up. Jonathan had tried to imagine what he would say to his son when he came home, *if* he came home. Adam had always been the rebellious son. Even though Jonathan had fought with him constantly, he still had doted on Adam. But the episode with the college money had struck the final chord and Jonathan had fumed over the insolence of the boy. He should be angry. He *wanted* to be angry, but how could he when his first born lie unconscious in a hospital bed?

He'd been sitting there for quite some time before Adam finally opened his eyes. Adam glanced around the room, unsure of his surroundings. Then his eyes met his father's. Well, this was it, Adam thought to himself, the moment he'd been waiting for and dreaming about. Adam smiled tentatively and said quietly, "Hi, Dad."

"Hello, Adam. Say, that's quite an entrance you made," Jonathan said softly.

“You know me. Always a flair for the dramatic,” Adam replied drowsily. He expected an explosion but it didn’t come.

“I *do* know you,” Jonathan said quietly. “It’s been a long time, Son. We have a few things to talk about, but that can wait...until you’re better. Right now you should rest. I’ll go call your mother and tell her you’re here.” Jonathan started to leave, but Adam reached out and grabbed his arm. He couldn’t stand the suspense any longer.

“Dad, wait,” he said. Jonathan turned to him; a kind face gazing down at his son’s pained expression. “Why are you being so nice to me? I don’t deserve this, not after everything I put you through.”

Jonathan took his son’s hand in his. Adam’s tormented expression just about broke his heart. How could he explain what he felt at that moment, when he didn’t even know himself?

“For three years I didn’t know if you were alive or dead. Now I know you’re all right. That’s all that’s important right now.”

Tears welled up in Adam’s eyes as he grasped his father’s hand. It took all of Jonathan’s self-control to keep from crying too. Adam hadn’t expected this kind of response. Where was the explosion, the anger? When he’d left, he and Jonathan had been screaming at each other. He thought he would have to beg to come back, and then work to earn his father’s trust.

“I don’t deserve this,” he said again.

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Jonathan couldn't bear it any longer. He gently sat down on the edge of the bed and held his son against him. Adam's hot tears soaked the shoulder of Jonathan's surgical greens, and this time, Jonathan let loose his own tears.

Jonathan Morgan could hear his wife weeping on the other end of the telephone when he told her about Adam. He explained that Adam suffered from exhaustion and severe malnutrition, but that he would be fine. When she got off the phone, Evelyn hummed to herself as she rummaged through Adam's room and gathered a few things he would need at the hospital.

By the time she arrived at Fisherwood Memorial, Adam had been washed and shaved and his still damp hair combed away from his face in waves of brown curls. At the first sight of his mother, Adam's eyes welled up with tears as he choked out the word "Mom." Evelyn dropped the suitcase and rushed to him. She wrapped her arms around him so tightly that she felt as if she were squeezing the life out of him. But Adam didn't seem to mind.

Some time later, Evelyn remembered the suitcase and withdrew from it a pair of pajamas, slippers, and Adam's favorite robe. All through his mother's visit, Adam fingered the folds of the robe, remembering a time when he had been happy and carefree, a time which seemed so very long ago.

Even after Evelyn had gone, Adam continued to clutch the robe as if it were a security blanket. If he let it go, would he wake up in the street, finding that all this had been a dream?

“How are we this afternoon?” a nurse said as she took his pulse and checked his I.V. drip. She peaked under the covered tray that sat untouched on his tray table. “Dr. Preston said you should have some solid food, so we can take out that I.V. soon.” The “solid” food consisted of clear broth, milk and green gelatin. Adam wasn’t sure he could get even *that* down. When she wheeled the table closer to him, she spotted the bathrobe draped over his knees.

“Here, let me hang that up for you,” she said, reaching for the robe.

“No, thank you,” Adam said hastily, grasping the robe, not willing to relinquish his security blanket.

“All right,” she said cheerfully, although she eyed him strangely. “Dr Preston also prescribed a vitamin regimen for you, so I’ll be back a little later with your shot. Try to work on this while I’m gone.” She gestured toward the tray. Adam managed to drink some of the broth he found under the covered dish. He also drank the glass of whole milk and a few spoonfuls of gelatin before he felt too nauseous to continue. By the next morning, however, he felt a bit better and managed to eat his whole breakfast.

“Well, you’re doing much better. You’ll be out of here in no time,” the day nurse said, after she had taken his pulse and blood pressure and listened to his heart. She

jotted some notes in his chart, which she tucked under her arm as she headed out of the room, almost colliding with Jonathan on her way out.

“How’s our patient today?” he asked.

“He’s been a good boy. He ate all his breakfast,” she replied, giving Adam a wink as she went into the corridor. Jonathan beamed when he saw how much better his son looked. Though Adam still looked extremely thin, his complexion had regained some of its color and his eyes their old sparkle.

“Well, you’re looking better,” Jonathan said, sitting by the bed.

“And it’s time to have that talk you mentioned yesterday, isn’t it,” Adam replied apprehensively. Somehow he felt more nervous at this interview with his father than he’d been the previous day, when he’d seen him for the first time in three years.

“Yes, I suppose it is.” Jonathan also approached the topic tentatively.

For the first time in three years, they talked about the fight they’d had when Adam had refused to go to college. That was his father’s dream, not his. Adam wanted to be a rock star, so he withdrew the money he’d been saving for his education and ran off to seek fame on the West Coast. But fame turned out to be even more elusive than he thought it’d be.

“It took a while, but I managed to blow most of it. I pumped gas in L.A. for a while, but when I lost that job I

had to sell most of what I owned to pay off my debts,” Adam explained.

“What about your car?” Jonathan asked.

“That was the first to go,” he said, smiling quietly.

“And your guitars?”

Adam nodded.

“All that’s left is what’s in my backpack.”

Adam then explained how he’d hitch-hiked back east, settling in towns along the way where he could find work. He’d waited tables in Las Vegas and worked construction in Pennsylvania.

Where he couldn’t find work, he went hungry and slept in the street. Ashamed to admit how foolish he’d been, Adam had prolonged coming home. Also, he wasn’t sure of the reception he’d receive once he arrived, but common sense finally won out over pride and he decided to take the chance.

Jonathan admitted that he’d fumed about the incident for quite some time after Adam had run off, but he assured Adam that he’d given up being angry long ago. Once he saw Adam, alive and *almost* well, nothing else mattered.

Adam smiled relievedly, comforted by the fact that his father and mother were ready to welcome him back into the family.

Adam’s condition was much improved by his third day in the hospital. Evelyn Morgan eagerly came to her son’s

room every day during visiting hours, and stayed until the nurses finally threw her out. And Jonathan had gotten into the habit of stopping in several times a day to check on his son's progress, and to assure himself that Adam was still here and this all wasn't just a dream. It was during one of these visits when Adam seemed especially quiet.

"Why hasn't Doug been to see me?" Adam asked suddenly. Doug had always been the "good" son, the one who never gave his parents a bit of trouble. This fact sometimes rankled Adam. Still, Adam had always been close to his brother, and he had been wondering why Doug had not come to the hospital a single time in the three days that Adam had been back.

"Well, he's been busy studying lately," Jonathan said, covering. "He's going to be a doctor, you know. Anyway, I suspect he'll be in to see you today."

Adam didn't believe that Doug had been too busy to see him. He suspected that his brother was angry with him for leaving, especially under such dubious circumstances. But Adam only nodded, seeming to accept his father's explanation.

"Anyway, I've got patients to see," Jonathan said finally. He patted Adam's hand, winked, and turned out of the room, leaving Adam feeling emotionally exhausted.

But Doug didn't visit his brother that day, and Jonathan brought up the matter to him at dinner.

"Adam was asking about you today. Aren't you going to see him?" he began.

Doug's dark eyes stared blankly at his dinner plate. Evelyn looked up hesitantly from hers.

"Doug, he *is* your brother."

"I know who he is!" Doug shouted hotly. "I also know how he ran off and blew his college money. You wouldn't let anybody even mention his name for a year, but now all that's forgotten?"

"He's still our son, just like you are. Adam and I had a long talk today and I forgave him," Jonathan argued.

"He doesn't deserve it," Doug exclaimed. He pulled away from the table and bolted out the door.

"Adam agrees with you," Jonathan shouted after him.

Doug steamed and paced for the better part of an hour before he decided to go to the hospital and have this out with Adam once and for all. His parents may have forgiven him, but Doug wouldn't, and he was determined to tell Adam this to his face. But as soon as he saw his brother lying in the hospital bed, he understood why his parents had been so forgiving.

Adam looked so frail lying there. What had happened to his once athletic frame and boundless energy? Seeing his brother this way quickly cooled the anger he'd been feeling. Doug had been standing in the doorway, motionless, for several seconds before Adam finally noticed him. Adam smiled faintly, but neither brother spoke.

“Hey, Doug!” Adam said finally, taking the initiative. Doug moved slowly into the room. “You’re looking good,” Adam continued.

“I wish I could say the same for you,” Doug replied.

Adam smiled again. “I’ve looked worse,” he admitted truthfully. An awkward silence followed.

“Why did you do it?” Doug asked finally. Adam had wondered when he would get around to asking.

“I don’t know,” he said with a shrug.

“Right!”

“No, I mean it! I never actually sat down and analyzed it.”

“You gave up everything, Man!”

“Yeah, I know!” Adam took a deep breath to calm himself and to sort out what he wanted to say. How could he make his brother, the perfect son, understand why he did the things he’d done. “Look, I don’t know why I ran off like that. I was under a lot of pressure, working to pull good grades, trying to win Mom and Dad’s approval. But I wasn’t perfect, so I got scared and skipped out. You don’t know what it was like for me! It was always easy for you!”

Doug had no idea that Adam felt this way.

“Who said it was easy for me? I had to work very hard for my grades, and I still do!”

“At least you could get the grades. I worked very hard just to pass. I’ve never really been good at anything.”

Do-Over

“What are you talking about? It wasn’t me who won all those trophies for playing guitar! Not to mention the two basketball trophies,” Doug reminded him.

“Mom and Dad still have those?” Adam seemed surprised.

“They’re in a curio cabinet in the dining room, though every time somebody asks about them, Dad changes the subject.”

Adam stared down at the bed covers for a moment.

“When I finally wised up and came home,” Adam said after a moment, “I half expected Dad to disown me, and I wouldn’t have blamed him if he did. But you know what? He didn’t disown me. He still loves me, even if I’m not perfect.” As simple as the idea sounded, Adam found it a novelty.

“What’re you going to do now?” Doug asked.

Adam shrugged. He hadn’t thought that far ahead yet.

“Maybe I’ll try to find a job and work my way through school or something. Hey, me in school. Can you picture it?”

Doug smiled.

“All I know is, I’ve got to get myself back on the right track, you know?”

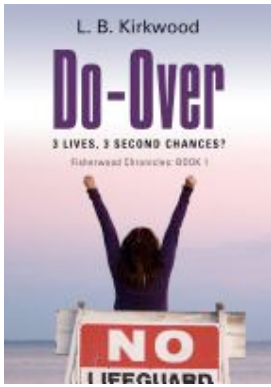
Doug nodded as he nervously played with the folds of the sheet.

“I’ll help you any way I can,” he said finally. Doug was a surprised as Adam was to hear those words come out of his mouth.

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“Do you mean that?” Adam asked.

“Sure. If Dad can forgive you, so can I.” Doug slowly reached out his hand toward his brother. Adam clasped it with both hands gratefully. “Welcome back,” Doug murmured with a smile, and for the first time, Adam felt as if he was really home.



Seventeen-year-old J.T., a child of divorce, needs a fresh start before he ends up in Juvenile Hall. Simone, at 18, thinks she's ready to launch a solo singing career. But is she? And Prodigal son Adam had run off to California seeking fame and fortune, but ended up homeless. Will life in his hometown ever be the same?

Do-Over

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