

In life, we cry tears of sorrow and joy. These tears come from the deepest parts of our soul because they shed that in which we feel so strongly for. These tears come at our greatest height of sadness or happiness, they are the physical proof that emotion and love are real. Have you ever wondered what tears are worth?

The Worth of Tears

by S. Arthur Martin

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S. Arthur Martin

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Chapter 1

A wise man once said the only real regrets in life are those things you never get the chance to do. Mistakes can be forgiven and undone, but it's our unfinished business that becomes our real regrets, left to echo on the strings of time.

I would give all my time to this girl who happened to sit directly one desk behind me in my sophomore literature class. If you were to ask anyone the color of her eyes, they would most likely say green, but I never realized their color until many years later. For me when I looked into her eyes, I saw a color that I did not understand. I saw a world that was beyond my own, and I found myself longing to live in it every second I wasn't next to her. It wasn't that I felt that I couldn't live without this girl or that she was all that mattered, it was just that when she looked back at me, I saw her eyes mimic what mine were doing and out of this a mystery was conceived. Unlike most mysteries that are of an ill nature or have a finality, this mystery was one that didn't have boundaries or any uncertainty of its intention. With just the call of my name, she could inject into my soul an understanding of an unseen power that can only happen when two people reach out to one another, not with their hands but a simple glance and how that simple glance can rearrange a broken soul into an almost perfect one. I guess a better word for it would be Love.

When Maura McDowell and I met for the first time, there's no way I could have known where life would take us. We both were on the brink of turning 16 and thought we had most of everything figured out like most teenagers. We dated on and off also like most teens, but we made it through high-school. It was between college and young adulthood that we found ourselves questioning where we wanted to go in our lives and if we were going to do it together or alone. I had just gotten home from school after a late-night class, and she was waiting for me in her car. As I got out, I glanced a smile at her, and she nodded her head as to get in the car. I got in, and she leaned over and gave me a big hug and kiss. "How are you?" She said as she smiled at me with her beautiful eyes. I guess I had a certain look on my face. Out of nowhere without realizing I was even saying it, I looked at her and said I needed time away from her for a while. Her face turned from happy to confused, and then misery. "Are you serious?" "Yeah," I said with a short breath. It stood silent for about half a minute, and I broke the silence. "I just feel like we argue all the time and that's all we've become." She sat there with tears welling in her eyes and slowly nodded her head in a way that pride does when it sets in and takes over as if to defend. "Okay, John. I guess you got it all figured out." She turned her head and looked out the window, and I got the gist. It took all that was in me to hold back my tears, and I quickly got out of the car and didn't even look back afraid that I might break if I did so I headed into the house to dwell in solitude.

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About one year had passed. We spoke maybe two or three times over the phone but only to say hi and see how the other was doing. I think we both missed each other so much but had too much pride to admit it to one another and even more so ourselves. A few more years passed, and I was doing my residency for trauma surgery at the hospital I had been working at right after high-school. I was talking to one of the other med students when I noticed a woman down at the end of the hall stop and looked at me. She stood there frozen as if she didn't know if she should hide or walk up to me. I politely excused myself from the conversation I was having and walked towards her. She had a smile of relief that she didn't have to make the first move. "Hey, stranger," I said as I gave her a tight hug. "What are you up to?" "My Mom was in a car accident a couple of days ago and had knee surgery this morning, so I'm visiting her." "I'm so sorry to hear that. Everything else was okay though? No other injuries?" "Yeah totally fine with everything else thankfully." I gave her a wink. "All right well I gotta get back to work." I realized that I felt this huge emptiness inside. I hadn't seen her in so long and learned to deal with her absence but seeing her now my heart screamed "Say something!". "Hey, I'll be leaving work around six o'clock. You wanna join me for dinner?" She thought for a second. "Okay." One of the doctors shouted from down the hall, "John we gotta go up to the fourth floor!" I put my hand on her shoulder and said "Hey meet me in the front lobby at six.

You know where it is?" "Yeah, I do." She said with that

same smile she had when I first met her. “All right, see you then Maura.” Wow. Was this for real? Did I just run into my first love? My mind was wheeling. Dr. Mills and I got up to the fourth floor to consult with a family about the recovery of surgery that had been done on their grandfather a few days before. We made our rounds to a few more patients, and I began getting anxious about meeting with Maura. I wasn't nervous but more excited and kept laughing inside why I was getting this way at all. Sometimes life feels like the movies. I took the elevator down to the lobby staring down at the ground just picturing her face and remembering so many good things about our past.

The elevator doors opened, and as I looked up, I saw her sitting on one of the lobby chairs. At the same time, she looked up with a smile that had already seemed to start before she even lifted her head. It was as if her heart whispered: “He's here.” I smiled back and felt stuck in time. As I walked towards her, she stood up still smiling and without any clue of why or if or even what her life consisted of, I put my hands gently on her face and kissed her on the lips like I hadn't seen her in a million lifetimes. She didn't resist she put her hands on my hips and held them there as we kissed. We stopped and looked at one another and tears fell from both our eyes and we both started laughing. “What the heck is happening?” I said. She could barely breathe she was laughing so hard. She looked up at me, and as her laughter subsided, she then got a more serious look in her face and eyes, leaned close to my left ear and whispered, “I think it's that you

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still love me, and I still love you.” My eyes were about to have a deluge. I felt every part of me weak like I wanted to fall, inside and out. I grabbed her hand and quickly walked out of the lobby. I wanted this moment alone with her. I wrapped my arms around her and cried my eyes out, and she didn't hold back either. We must have stood there crying and holding one another for about a good two minutes. These tears weren't like the last ones. These were tears filled with pure happiness and joy.

One year later we were married, and that was by design. We decided that it would only be proper to marry on the anniversary of our reunion. At first, Maura wanted the big, fancy and expensive wedding but within days of that decision she came to me and said she wanted a simple one. I didn't mind either way, but I was curious and asked her why. She said she didn't want all the planning and details to take away from the most important thing, us. She wanted just our immediate families and closest relatives along with our best friends. It was about a total of 30 of us. We married in the same church she grew up going to and the same priest that baptized her married us. We won't talk about the waterworks I had while we said our vows, I think I cried more than she did. We celebrated with our family and friends the whole night, and I will never forget that day. It was my happiest memory until the day we gave birth to a baby boy.

Benjamin Jacob Grove. The doctor handed him to me and can you guess what I did? Yeah tears, a lot of them. “Look at you. How can something be so perfect?” I said

softly as I looked into his tiny eyes. I embraced him and didn't want to let go. "Look what we created," I said to Maura as she lay in the hospital bed smiling at us. "What a miracle it was that we met that day while you were in the hospital and we just happened to be nice to each other," I said trying not to laugh out loud and bother the baby. She rolled her eyes and shook her head as she tried not to break a smile. That first night in the hospital I didn't sleep at all. It wasn't just because Benjamin was crying every five minutes, but I was just so happy. I had a beautiful baby boy, the best wife in the world and everything was amazingly good.

Years passed, and things were better than I could have ever hoped. I was working at the best hospital in the city and was the chief trauma surgeon. Maura had found her place in real estate, and she was excellent at it, having most of her clients of high monetary status. After coming home from the gym one day, I pulled into the driveway and just sat in my car looking at my house not believing that house was mine. As a child, I grew up in a small three-bedroom house and never thought I'd be living in a house like this. My car alone was worth more than the house I grew up in. I was proud of what I had accomplished.

"I guess this is the American dream," I said out loud to myself. I walked into the kitchen, and it smelled great. Aromas of vegetables and spices filled the entire kitchen, and I could see Maura and Benjamin were hard at work. "Benjamin?" I said in surprise. I had never seen him

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cook a day in his life. “Yeah, dad. Mom's trying to show me how to cook.” Benjamin was 17 years old now and started dating this girl that was in his history class. “Well, I gotta learn to cook for girls to get some brownie points, right!” Maura and I laughed out loud. “Yeah, Ben, it's definitely a plus when you can show a girl you have skills in the kitchen.” Even though Maura did most of it, the dinner turned out well. They had made some pan roasted chicken with vegetables that were more on the gourmet side. Maura had a natural knack for cooking, so she could usually whip anything up and make it taste better than what the recipe directed.

Every weekend we would have our family rituals. Saturdays were movie day, and day or night didn't matter just as long as we got to see a new movie out in theaters. Sundays were reserved for relaxing, watching football or playing board games. Many weekends I was on call and had to leave abruptly, but it was something we all got used to relatively quickly, and it became like second nature. It was just part of our life. My relationship with Benjamin was a good one. He always approached me with anything and everything that was on his mind. We earned one another's trust and loyalty but most of all friendship. Besides my wife, my son was truly my best friend, and I was so thankful for that. That night we went out to a movie and Ben had asked if he could bring his girlfriend. They had only been dating for about a month, and he had yet to bring her around so when he asked if she could join us for movie night I was thrilled. “Of course!” I said. When she pulled up to the house, Ben

walked outside to greet her at the car. It reminded me of when Maura and I were teenagers and all the excitement that came with seeing one another. Not to say we weren't still excited to see each other but now we lived together and let's be honest, sometimes you need a little break from your significant other.

I was looking out the window being nosy, and they started making their way for the front door. I quickly turned around and walked into the kitchen, so they didn't catch me snooping. "Well hello there!" I said as they walked in. Sarah had a shy smile on her face as they both walked into the kitchen. She had long, light brown hair and was tall for her age. About 5'11 I'd say. "Mr. Grove, nice to meet you," she said as she extended her hand to me. I reached out and shook her hand. "You can tell a lot about a young adult when they refer to you by Mr. or Mrs.."

"Dad," Benjamin said sounding embarrassed. "What!" I laughed. "It's true. Kids nowadays don't have respectful manners like they used to. If I had referred to my friend's mom or dads by their first names, they would've slapped me in the face, and your grandma would've told me I deserved it!" "You're right Mr. Grove. My mom always told me to refer to your elders by Mr. or Mrs. unless they told you the first name was okay." "Well, your mom is a good mom," I said. Ben rolled his eyes. Sarah and I just laughed. Maura shouted from upstairs, "You guys ready to go?" "Yes, mam," I shouted. "She jogged down the stairs and saw we had company. "Good evening!" She

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said with a big smile on her face. She was dressed fancy as she almost always was and somehow was still able to give me butterflies even after all these years. She and Sarah introduced themselves, and we were off to the movie theater.

The two of them walked ahead of Maura and me. I put my hands up in the air as if in confusion and asked Maura, “How does time pass so fast? Ben was born, then just grew up and now he's almost going to be in college. Has a girlfriend and all!” She looked up at me and said softly, “It sure is precious, isn't it?” I squeezed her hand. “Yes, my love, it sure is,” I said. After the movie, we got home, and Ben and Sarah talked outside for a bit while Maura and I did the dishes. I loved my life, and I truly had it all. It's a thought that ran through my mind often, and I didn't take it for granted. I was a blessed man.

Chapter 2

Battles consume us. In our thoughts, in our actions and hearts, battles take more precedence than we could imagine. We judge, like, dislike, love, hate and make choices, some good, some bad. This constant battle we tread all our lives dictates who we are and therefore our legacy and fate. We fight so greatly. In the end, we realize our greatest enemy was our self.

Benjamin began his first year of college and Maura, and I felt a little lonely at first. We didn't hear his loud music playing from his room or him and his friends shouting and laughing as they played their video games. The house felt a lot emptier. We were keeping our family rituals, but now it was a little different because Benjamin wasn't living with us. I guess I was feeling kind of bored with life. I wasn't sure why, but it was making me a little depressed, and I just laughed at the notion, though I could feel myself becoming distant. My distance wasn't only with Maura but with my friends and coworkers. I kept thinking maybe it had nothing at all to do with Ben but with myself. Perhaps it had something to do with my childhood and the absence of my father, or I was just plain being foolish and too much in my head. It's possible.

One day at work I was having lunch in the cafeteria, and I could feel someone watching me. I didn't pay much attention because there are always so many people

around you in a hospital and its what people do, stare. I finished up my lunch and got up to put my tray back, and I could see it was a younger woman probably in about her late 20's that had been looking in my direction. She was sitting with some of our nursing staff, so I figured she was new because I had never seen her before. She was a beautiful, blonde hair girl with dark blue eyes. Her jawline looked chiseled like the models looked in the magazines and had those high cheekbones that made her seem like she had some enhancement to her face even though I could tell she didn't. She just gave a friendly smile as I walked by. It made me a little uncomfortable, and I didn't know why. It should be a compliment, but I think maybe I felt guilty for finding her very attractive. I paid no mind and went about my day. A few months passed, and I would see her walking down the hall now and then, and we would say hi to one another just as most employees did walking down the hallways.

There came a day that we shared a mutual patient. I asked her how the patient was doing, and we walked into the patient's room and spoke with him and his family reassuring them he was progressing well and that he would be able to be discharged within two to three days. His wife and siblings thanked us, and we walked back to our desk. "So how long have you been working here," I asked her as I typed up my patient notes in the computer. "I just started here a few months ago. I moved here from Oklahoma." "Very cool," I said. "What made you move here?" "I have a friend who's also a nurse here. She doesn't work here at this hospital, but she loves it here

and has been begging me to come live here. I came from a smaller town and was feeling bored so figured why not.” “Absolutely,” I told her. “I always tell my son that as sad as I would be to see him move out of state if it's for the best and makes him happy then I would never hold him back.” “How old is your son?” “19,” I said. “And what's he going to school for?” She asked as she also typed away on her computer. “It's still between an M.D. like me or Information Technology. So completely different.” I said. We both laughed. I finished up what I had to and told her it was nice meeting her and went on with my business.

It's funny and sad all at the same time how quickly and vastly life can change in one single moment, with just an individual decision. Sienna, the new nurse I had met, had become more than a coworker and a friend to me. One night after work I went out with a few of the neuro docs for a few drinks. We were sitting at the table telling jokes and talking sports when in walked Sienna. She walked in with another girl that looked like they could be sisters and she saw me and ran over with excitement. She had a spunky, excited attitude about her. She gave me a big, unexpected hug and it made me happy. Maura gave me attention, but this felt like the different attention I was longing for, or so I thought. My colleagues left and went home, her friend left as well, and it was just the two of us there.

We talked for about an hour, and I could feel myself becoming anxious. I knew that deep down I was going to fail. I knew I didn't have to give in, but some part of me deep down that was weak and torn made an excuse for the rest of me. It made an excuse for the best parts of me, the parts that were filled with love for Maura and all the good memories we had together.

I left Sienna's apartment and drove home full of guilt. "What did I just do?" I said out loud to myself. I got home and laid down in bed. Maura shuffled a bit but didn't wake up. The next morning, I tried acting as normal as possible, but I knew she could tell I was a little off. "Hey, I have two appointments today, and I should be done around three o'clock. You wanna go out for a movie tonight?" She asked me in excitement. I felt horrible for not only what I had done but she also never asked to see a movie on a weekday, so this meant she wanted to go out on a date. The weight was heavy. My heart and soul clenched on to each other, and I almost wanted to cry, but I couldn't possibly let her know. "Of course, honey!" I said with the fakest tone and smile. I quickly went back to take another sip of my coffee so she wouldn't have to see my fake face anymore. "Love you." She said as she kissed me on the top of my head. She walked out the door, and I must've sat there at the kitchen table for 30 minutes wondering if this was real. I could never take back what I did.

I was back at work the next day, and I saw Sienna. No matter what had happened, I couldn't be a mean guy, so I

just gave her a quick smile as I walked past the nursing station up on the third floor. She smiled back but seemed like she didn't know if she should say hi or continue working. She immediately went back to work and began writing something down. I went to a desk on the other side of the floor, so I wasn't near her. The lead nurse was ranting to me about one of the other supervisors and the drama between the two and I couldn't hear a word she was saying because I was still beside myself.

"I'm sorry, Jean," I said. "Excuse me." I got up instantly, and Jean had a surprised look on her face because I cut her off mid-rant. I walked over to where Sienna was sitting. In a quiet voice I said, "Hey Sienna, can I talk to you for a sec." She looked surprised too. "Uh yeah," she said. We walked back to the staff break room and thankfully no one was in there. I closed the door behind us. "Sienna, you're a beautiful, amazing girl and I'm sorry last night happened. I should have never gone home with you, but now I feel regret. I'm married." "I'm sorry too." She said. "I mean I've known you're married but I figured maybe you weren't happy and if you went along with it then you were giving yourself permission to allow what happened to happen." "Yes, I did, and I don't know what got into me," I said as I slowly shook my head while looking down. I felt her hand wrap around my cheeks, and she lifted my head to look at her, and she began kissing me. I continued kissing her back and couldn't stop myself. We finally stopped when we heard voices outside the door. I took a deep breath and walked out of

the break room. My anger and regret had somehow turned to gratification.

Eight months had passed, and we still saw each other. I had become numb. I was living a double life. I always felt guilt and regret, but it didn't feel like it did at first. When we hurt those, we love the most, whether they know it or not, we always search for justification. Mine was that I wasn't perfect and that this affair wouldn't last forever. To me, it was "just a stage." Life was still good. Materially I had everything a person could want. Maura and Benjamin were still happy, and I felt happy too. I was over at Sienna's apartment having lunch with her before she had to go to work and there was a knock at the door. "Oh, I got it!" she said as if knowing who it was. "Oh God if this is Maura..." I thought to myself. A huge sense of relief when I saw it was another woman about Sienna's age. "Hey, John this is Ruth, Ruth meet John." "Hey!" Ruth said. "Ruth brought us a surprise!" Sienna sounded super excited. I laughed and said, "Oh yeah what's the surprise?" She pulled out a little bag with what looked like little pills. I inclined what they were by their size and color because it's what many doctors prescribe their patients for pain. "Percocet's?" I asked. "Yup. The good ones." Ruth said as she pulled two out of the bag and put them on the table. "Want one?" Sienna asked me with an unsure tone in her voice. "Nah, I don't mess with that stuff," I said. "You sure? It's just gonna mellow you out." Sienna was giving me a; please try it look. I took a deep breath. "Just give me like half. I've seen patients get addicted to this crap so just this one time." Sienna smiled

and looked relieved that I didn't yell at the both. She broke it in half for me, and I swallowed it down with my bottle of water.

Forget landing on the moon, I was on Jupiter. I wasn't sure yet if I liked what I felt. I was on call and had to go in for a trauma page about two hours after I had taken the pill. "*So, this is why people enjoy it.*" I thought to myself as I drove to the hospital. I felt fuzzy and numb and happy all at the same time. I walked in, and I think I was overdoing it because I seemed overly excited for a patient that I had just been in a bad car wreck. The EMTs gave the nurses, and I the patient's information and status and I stood there in the trauma bay kind of there and not there, it was more of a haze. The patient was a 41-year-old male who was sitting at a red light when a car came up behind him and rear-ended him doing about 50 miles per hour. It was a common thing to see because nowadays everybody is looking down at his or her cell phone, so the guy that hit this patient was doing just that. Thankfully both drivers were wearing seatbelts otherwise it would have been an entirely different situation. Besides a broken ankle and lacerations to the victim's face from the airbag deployment, he was going to be okay. I was still high out of my mind and feeling a little emotional and couldn't help to think of all the patients I had that didn't make it. I realized that my job was a tough but significant one. I was around death and fear all the time, yet I wasn't afraid of either of the two. I knew this was my calling and I felt great saving lives when I could and the ones I couldn't save as hard as I tried, I would always

say “it'll only make me better and stronger for the next.”

I got home late evening, and Maura was in the living room watching TV. “Hey hon,” she shouted as I walked in the house. “Hey.” I gave her a quick kiss on the lips. “I'm gonna run up and shower, and I'll come to hang out with you and watch some TV.” “Okay,” she said. I ran up to my bedroom and immediately texted Sienna. “Wow! Amazing little things.” I was referring to the pills. “Aren't they?” she texted back. I quickly deleted the text and started emptying my pockets and felt something hard on the side pocket of my scrub shirt. I pulled it out, and it was one of the pills Ruth had brought over. I stood there in the bathroom wondering how it made it into my pocket. “Sienna!” I whispered out loud. She must've slipped it in my pocket at her apartment while we were saying goodbye to each other. I thought about throwing it down the toilet but paused and figured it might come in handy for another time, so I hid it in my wallet.

How could something so tiny change a person so much? Months had passed since I popped that first pill and I found myself still taking them and not able to stop. My lies only got worse, and people were starting to notice. I felt tired all the time and was just happy when I was on the pills. Often, I was tired and in a bad mood. My entire demeanor had changed. One night we were sitting eating dinner, and I couldn't keep my eyes open because I was so high. My head dropped, and I almost fell out of my chair. Maura freaked out and thought I had some medical condition that caused me to do that. I lied and told her

that I was just super tired because of work and all the hours I was working. I said it was more of a “mental” thing than a physical one. She believed it. I was draining our bank account because Sienna and I couldn't get enough of these little pills. Street value they were expensive, usually about \$30 for one pill and between Sienna and I, we were probably doing ten of these pills per day. The money was adding up, being spent and I was using every excuse possible to lie to Maura. On one occasion I had pulled \$500 out of our savings account. About two days later she called me frantic that someone had stolen money out of our account. I had never taken that much money out of our account without first speaking with her about it, so naturally, she truly believed someone had stolen money from us. “John, there's \$500 that was taken out of the savings on Tuesday!” She said in a panic over the phone. I had been hanging out with Ruth that day, and we were in the car on our way to buy more pills. I put my finger up to my mouth and gestured to Ruth not to talk. She knew who was on the other end of the phone. “It's okay Maura,” I said. “A co-worker of mine just had a relative pass away and couldn't afford the funeral, so some other employees and I donated money to him to help cover the expenses.” It was the only lie that came to my mind at that moment. What a horrible lie to tell. She calmed down and told me how generous of a man I was to do such a thing.

I know Maura was starting to get suspicious but still hadn't figured out quite what it was. “It's just a stage” I kept saying to myself. I knew I wouldn't be doing these

things forever, so I just went with it. I knew too many doctors who got caught prescribing them without proper due so Sienna and I would buy them from people she knew to play it safe. We still were working hard and doing our jobs well, so everything seemed okay. Sometimes in life though, things aren't always what they seem. I found myself needing more of the pills to just feel normal, and even worse I began seeing another coworker that was an emergency room doctor, she didn't know about Sienna and Sienna didn't know about her. I knew it all had to stop and it had to be soon before Maura found out. I had a plan. I would first stop seeing my doctor friend and then end things with Sienna. Then after all that I would be able to stop taking pills because I wouldn't be around Sienna anymore.

Chapter 3

We often trade what we love most for those things we want at the moment. Our temporary desires then usually exceed the parts of us that sincerely love and care for others and we find what the true meaning of “selfish” is.

Two months had passed, and I had lost so much weight. I had been lying to Maura telling her it was the newest diet out that I was on and she believed it, but I can tell she still knew something wasn't right. When Ben had come home for a weekend, it had been a few months since he saw me and immediately had a look of terror on his face. “Dad, are you okay? I've never seen you this skinny in my whole life. You look pale too. You're not dying, are you?” It looked like he truly believed I had a terminal illness and I felt horrific for the way I was making him feel, for what I had done. “Ben.” I reached out and gave him the biggest hug. “No son. I've been on this diet, and I've been a little down lately, but I'm okay. I need to get off this stupid diet and stop being in my head so much.” He broke the hug and looked right in my eyes. “You promise me, Dad?” I thought for a second of telling him the truth but, how could I? How could I tell him of all the horrible things I had fallen into; the cheating, the lying, the drugs. I just couldn't. “I promise bud. I'm okay, and I'll stop this stupid diet. He gave me a slow but big smile. “All right, Dad. Do it today. You look like crap!” We both laughed. “I will. I will.” I said.

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A few weeks passed, and I had only taken a few pills in that entire span which felt like forever for me. Ben was back at college and Maura was out with some clients and I was home alone. I felt dark and lonely so decided to go for a walk to clear my head. I stepped out the front door and could smell the dirt and sweetness of the plants and trees. It had just started lightly raining, and I didn't want to bother grabbing an umbrella, so I just locked the door behind me and went for a lonely, gruesome walk. Doing these pills took all my energy, and I hadn't had any desire to go to the gym or even a jog for months. I felt horrible from the absence of not taking any pills, and I figured I might as well have a little to feel normal, so I quickly turned around and headed back for the house to grab one. I went to my hiding spot that was a jewelry box my grandma had given me when I was young. I kept all my watches in it. Behind the little drawer, I had the pills in a small bag. I was trying to hurry because I wanted to at least get a short walk in before the rain came down hard. I pulled out the drawer, and the entire box fell over off the dresser onto the floor. Ridiculous. I put the watches back in the box and opened the bag and popped one in my mouth. I never even heard her walk in.

“What the hell is that?” I froze. Maura had gotten home. I never heard the door open, or the car pull up or even the garage door open. “Oh, it's just a pill I'm taking for pain,” I said. “A pill? What kind of pill John?” She was not happy. At all. “Maura I've been having back pain for the longest time and never told you. Paul has been prescribing them to me.” Paul was our family doctor and

a friend of ours. “Why would you keep something like this from me, John? By hiding it, you make it a secret and therefore break trust. Why John?” Her voice was loud now. I felt like breaking down and crying and telling her everything just like I wanted to tell Ben, but I couldn't; it would just make things worse. “I'm sorry Maura. I thought you would get angry that I decided to take them and then I would be suffering from this pain.” “Really? What about trust? What about for better or worse? We've always had a good relationship because we've always been honest with each other, no matter the circumstances. This is what has always made our relationship so strong, and you couldn't tell me about this?” I sat there on the floor still trying to come up with a good answer, but she had me. She was right about everything. Even as teenagers we told each other everything and never held back even when we knew it would hurt the other drastically. I could hear this voice say, “Tell her. Just tell her.” I sat there staring at the ground. It just poured out. “I'm addicted to these things, and I've been seeing other women...” I looked up at her and tears fell endlessly from her eyes. She slowly walked over to the bed and sat on it staring at the ground. “I don't know how but somehow I knew it. I knew it all, and I didn't want to believe it. How long? How long has all of this been going on?” She said not crying anymore, but just pure curiosity and anger were coming from her voice. “A little over a year,” I said softly. She stood up and wiped the tears off her face with the back of her hands. “Grab your stuff, and whatever you need, you're not welcome here anymore. You need to tell Ben the truth, he

is your son and deserves to know how his dad failed. I'm going to make a run to the store and you better not be here when I get back." She grabbed her purse and walked straight out the door. I looked through the bedroom window and saw her backing up to leave. I could see she was screaming at the top of her lungs inside the car and crying hysterically. *What have I done?* "My God, what have I done?" I screamed out loud. Everything was just about as perfect as life could be, and I ruined it. I didn't deserve this good home and family, not at all. Maura and Benjamin deserved so much better.

I packed the most massive suitcase I could find with everything I might need. I thought about going to Sienna's but considered how and why. How long could I stay on this merry-go-round and keep living this way? I needed to change and get clean and do better. The truth was I had nowhere else to go because the places I could go, to the friends I still had left, I was too ashamed. So, I drove over to Sienna's. She wasn't home, but I had the key and decided to wait there till she at least got home from work and I would tell her goodbye and apologize for anything I might have ever done to hurt her because I was sure I did at some point. I walked in her apartment, and it smelled like a mixture of the rain outside and the flowery perfume that she would wear that always seemed to linger around. I was sad. I was angry and disgusted with myself. "Ah, what the heck," I said out loud. I went for Sienna's stash of pills and took a few. I needed to feel numb and make the pain go away. I turned on the news to get my mind off everything and fell asleep. I woke up,

and it was still raining hard outside. I didn't know what I was still doing there. I wrote Sienna a note; it read, *“Sienna, you’re a fantastic and beautiful human being. You have so much to offer this world, but you’ll always be held back as long as you’re taking these pills. I told my wife about us and my addiction. I still must find the courage to tell my son. I can’t go back home, but I also can’t stay here. A part of you will always be with me. Take care of yourself. Be a better person for you and for all the lives you will touch. - John.”* I grabbed my keys and decided that I would live in my car until I could let some time pass for Maura and Ben to heal, as well as myself. I didn't deserve a beautiful home. I didn't deserve my amazing job nor did my patients deserve a doctor who was always high. Their life was in my hands, and this wasn't fair to them. I hated myself. I would become a lonely homeless man because that's exactly what I deserved.

Chapter 5

A father is a great and wondrous thing. He's the man that teaches you how to become a man. A great father will always be a present, loving and humble father; one who shows you there is only one path you can take, and if you stray too far, you risk the chance of becoming lost. When a boy then grows into a man and becomes a father himself, he realizes the great significance in the role he must take. It's a role that will affect the lives of not only his offspring but that of generations to come. His words and actions dictate countless lives that do not yet exist, but it's what he sets into motion that will determine what kind of future will be constructed, a future made of love or one of complete carelessness. He creates the paradigm for generations to come. What a brilliant and generous gift to have...

We sat in the kitchen talking and laughing for a good while after our lunch. I still was in amazement of all the fancy objects that surrounded me in this house. The windows had grand beige shutters that were vertical and above those windows were other windows with no curtains or shutter's, but those windows ran horizontally, and the sun beamed right through them. The counter we made our sandwiches on was made of marble and had a deep onyx color with little blue speckles throughout. There was not one, not two but three sinks on the island

counter. The middle island was so big that it had room for three sinks. Why anyone would need three sinks was anybody's guess. There was a candle burning on one of the counters underneath a long row of high cabinets, and the scent smelled like a mixture of cedar wood and fresh evergreens. Between the scented smells and the cool breeze coming through the windows, I felt like I was on a mountaintop. Not exactly sure but I think the ceilings were 25 feet high. "Hey c'mon, I'll show you the rest of the house." I followed the young guy kind of like a young boy gets excited to explore an arcade.

"Hey wait," I said. "My apologies but I never asked you your name." "Brace!" He said with a smile raising his eyebrows. "Brace. That's a cool name." I said. "Thanks!" He said as he opened a door from the kitchen into another room. "A library!" I shouted out loud to the point where my voice echoed. "I am so sorry Brace," I said feeling horrible. He laughed. "Don't worry. They can't hear us from the other side of the kitchen, so you're okay to talk as loud as you want." I felt better. There had to be hundreds, maybe thousands of books lined up from wall to wall, floor to ceiling. I saw rooms like this in movies and large public libraries, but this was quite impressive to be inside someone's house. "Dude. This is awesome." I said to Brace as I walked around staring at this room and all its books in awe. A great, big chandelier hung from the center of the ceiling, and the light that emitted through the crystals made it look like some of the books themselves gave off a light of their own. I loved books and reading so this was fantastic for me. "What kind of

books are in here?" I asked. "Everything!" He said shaking his head like he didn't even know where to begin describing them all. "Wow. Wow, wow, wow." I said out loud. "Feel free to read anything you want." He said.

We went through another door that led to a formal dining area. It too was enormous. It had a long narrow table that looked made of solid oak. There was a great fireplace in the center of the room. Large wooden beams ran across the ceiling, and everything seemed brand new. We walked around more of the house and finally took a break in the courtyard. In the middle of the entire home was a decent size courtyard, probably about 30 feet by 30 feet. There were rustic wooden benches along some of the walls, and we sat there just talking and enjoying the beautiful weather. It was sunny and had gotten a little warmer out and was good weather for once in a long time. The air was clean and immaculate because there were no more odors of garbage dumpsters or dirt but just fresh, clean air that sat perfectly on my skin. We sat there having taken a break from our conversation, and we both just looked up at the sky watching the clouds randomly roll by. I closed my eyes and imagined I was sitting next to Maura, holding her hand as her head rest on my shoulder. I pictured Ben grilling up some hamburgers with Sarah next to him helping him out, and we were all happy. It was such a good feeling to have. "Hey, dad." I opened my eyes. Were they talking to me? It was Brace saying hi to his dad. I immediately rose to my feet. "Hey dad, this is John." His father was a tall man, with salt peppered hair and he was wearing casual khaki pants and

an old looking gray long sleeve shirt that had three buttons at the top. "It's a pleasure to meet you, sir," I said. "John, the pleasures all mine. I apologize for keeping you two out here so long. I heard you come in and was going to greet you, but this was the last session with the patient I just had so figured I wouldn't delay the process any longer." No worries at all." I said. "Is there anything I can get for you, John? Are you thirsty, hungry?" He said with a sympathetic face and tone. "No, no. Thank you so much. We had lunch a while ago, and I'm not too thirsty. Well..." I thought for a moment. "Actually, that sweet tea was delicious. I wouldn't mind some more." "Of course!" He said. "C'mon let's go and get some. I could use a glass too." The three of us walked back to the kitchen and filled up our glasses. "This is a beautiful home you have here sir," I said as I pointed my finger towards the windows. "Thanks, John, and you can call me Stephen." "Absolutely," I said.

We stood there talking about the weather and our favorite seasons. "I like autumn." Said Stephen. "I love how the leaves change colors. Even though they are dying, instead of their color turning to just a single dreaded dark color, they go through a beautiful pattern of colors. It's as if they have waited their whole life to prepare for this "fall" and saving their most beautiful colors for the end. Then you have the air that changes from hot and musky to cool and crisp, and it even wears certain perfumes and colognes on certain days. I mean to step outside and smell the air on an autumn day, it's like brand new life." I was thoroughly impressed with his description of the

autumn season. I had never thought of it that deeply, and it softened my heart a bit. “So, Brace tells me you were headed back home today. Any special occasion?” He said as he tilted his head slightly to the left. He looked like he felt sorry for me, I was still so dirty. I was so used to looking this way that I often forgot how awful I looked. “That is correct. I was heading back home to make amends with my wife and son.” I didn't feel weird saying this to him because he was a Doctor who counseled people for a living and who knows how many crazy stories he's heard. “Totally understand John. You wouldn't believe how many patients I've had that have made calamitous decisions but took time and then decided to ask for forgiveness. As every person should of course.” Tears started welling up in my eyes as he was saying this. I just wanted to be happy again. I wanted my family together again. He had a sad face, and he nodded his head. “John.” He said as he put his hand on my shoulder. “I'll tell you what. Please take my advice for what I'm about to tell you. You love your wife and son more than anything in the world, correct?” “Yes. Of course, Stephen.” I began wiping my tears away. “Okay. Then you want to give them the best part of you and be prepared for when you see them. Right?” “Without a doubt. I want total forgiveness and for them to know who I was wasn't the real me. I was someone different and completely wrong.” I looked down as I said all this. “John. Look at me. I will help you. My home is your home now. Stay here with Brace and me for a few weeks, and we can talk to one another and get you ready for this

reunion. You can eat as much as you like, and everything here is yours.”

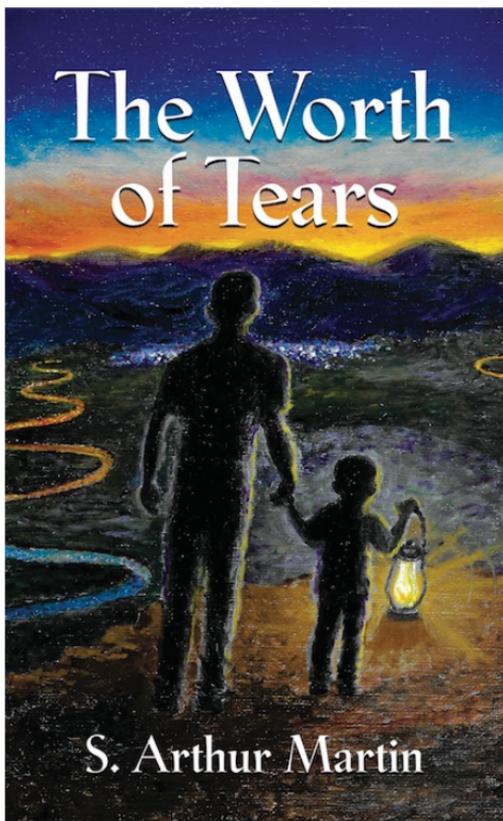
I began crying uncontrollably. He pulled me in and hugged me. “It’s okay John. We will make things right. Just trust me.” “I don’t know what to say but thank you, Stephen.” I turned and looked at Brace. “And thank you too Brace. Thank you so much.” I stopped crying and calmed myself down. “John, I only ask one favor of you,” Stephen said. “I want you to be my receptionist. My other receptionist found a new place, and I need one right now. It’s a simple job. Just greet the patient as they come in, have them sign in and most importantly sit and listen to what they have to tell me.” I was happy and confused at the same time. “What about patient confidentiality?” I asked. He now spoke in a more serious tone and manner. “John. If they agree to have you in the room and share their story with you, then it’s okay, and by doing this, it’s going to help you with your journey.” He was right. It was up to the patient, and this was his specialty, so I wasn’t going to argue. “I can’t thank you enough, Stephen. I will gladly do that.” I said as I shook his hand.

Brace led me up to the bedroom I was going to be staying. We walked up a broad, winding staircase that had wide smooth ivory colored stairs. The steps looked like they were made of granite. On the walls were huge paintings. One of them was of this beautiful field that had trees and flowers as far as the eye could see. The sky was filled with huge white clouds, and interestingly the sun wasn’t a circle like in most pictures, but the sun in this

painting was horizontal and took up the entire top of the art from end to end. The light coming out of it lit up the whole field in the painting in a light I had never seen before. It was an inspirational piece of artwork. We got to my room and walked in. This room was like a presidential suite. It was a great, ample room with a king size bed to the right, an enormous open area in the middle and even more. As we walked in, I could see light coming down from directly above us. I looked up, and there was a skylight, but this one was just immense, and it was a great big circular window. It made the room seem almost as if you were standing outside, even though it only took up about 25 percent of the ceiling in the bedroom. If that wasn't enough, I walked straight ahead to about ten-foot high sliding doors that led out to a balcony that overlooked the backyard. I had to catch my breath. The backyard was so large I couldn't see the neighbor's houses or where the yard ended. There were areas with trees that stood in a circle together surrounding what looked like a park bench. Then there was another area that looked like a garden with tomatoes and cucumbers and other fruits and vegetables I couldn't see. Another area had had trees, all close together that had hammocks hanging from tree to tree, and it was a nicely shaded area where they stood because those trees were a little taller than the rest. A lot to take in. "Amazing, isn't it?" Brace asked with a big smile as I walked back inside. "Talk about a nice piece of property," I said shaking my head in disbelief. "Hey before I forget! Everything you need is in here. There are new toothbrushes in the cabinet underneath the sink and all

the other toiletries you'll need, even scissors and an electric shaver to cut your hair and beard. If that's what you want to do of course." I laughed and said, "I cannot wait!" "And I have a bunch of clothes in the closet there that you can wear. Feel free to wear whatever you want."

"Thanks again Brace. This means more than you know." I said. I hugged him in thanks. "Hey. You believe my dad can help you right?" In all honesty, I did. They both seemed like good and humble people, and I was willing to do anything to make things right once and for all. "I do Brace. I really do." I said. He gave me a wink and walked out of the room. I stood there looking at this room. I hadn't slept on a bed, let alone have a roof over my head in a long time. I wanted so badly to run and lay on the bed because it looked so comfortable, but I was still dirty and had to get cleaned up first. Just as Brace said, everything I needed was in the cabinets. I had washed my hands earlier, but they were still dirty looking, and I could see dirt under my long fingernails. I took out the scissors and cut my hair as short as I could with them so that I could take the electric shaver and shave my hair all the same length. I didn't want to go too short so found a clipper that was a size seven and shaved my entire head. My head didn't feel so heavy anymore. I did the same with my beard and almost didn't recognize myself in the mirror when I had gotten out of the shower. I was clean for the first time in a while, but I still felt dirty. I still had to clean up my mind and heart.



In life, we cry tears of sorrow and joy. These tears come from the deepest parts of our soul because they shed that in which we feel so strongly for. These tears come at our greatest height of sadness or happiness, they are the physical proof that emotion and love are real. Have you ever wondered what tears are worth?

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