

A crippled man returns in time to his high-school days and attempts to convince his younger self not to break up with the girl who he now knows to be the love of his life. A strange love triangle.

Second Chance

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2859.html?s=pdf>

Second Chance

Copyright © 2007 Richard Lemmon

ISBN-13 978-1-60145-164-4

ISBN-10 1-60145-164-4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Booklocker.com, Inc.

2007

Second Chance

Richard Lemmon

CHAPTER 1

HOUSTON, TEXAS 1980

Dick Marlowe raised his eyes to a faraway God who had, up to now, ignored him and whispered, "Keep the damn cheese, just let me out of your trap."

"What's that supposed to mean?" his wife Marsha grumbled as she stared into the bedroom mirror, laying a heavy dose of scarlet across her lips. "Another dig aimed at yours truly? Well sit on it, why don't you?"

Dick shrugged. "A dig? Hell no. Just another useless prayer flung into the universe. Makes you kind of wonder if anyone is listening."

Lipstick properly blotted, make-up deep enough to fill in the wandering wrinkles, Marsha patted her black hair, stood up and started for the door. "I'm on my way since there's no use talking when you're in one of your woe is me moods."

"What's on for tonight, or should I say who?" he yelled at her departing back. "And while you're at it, try not to breathe in my direction when you come home."

"Fuck you too, Mister Good Shoes," she returned the yell, already halfway into the sparsely furnished living room.

Another shrug and Dick continued into the bathroom toward the tub, an old family antique. "Look out world here she comes," he muttered to himself. "Twenty-five years of marriage to that poor excuse of a witch ought to get me some kind of medal." Bending over the tub he opened the tarnished brass faucet and watched disgustedly as a rusty torrent of water surprised a cockroach and caused it to scramble up the back in a futile effort to escape. "Too long in one place, and life catches up with us, he said, shooing the roach back down the drain.

He watched the murky water collect in the bottom. Twenty five years gone to hell and he now in his mid-forties. Three hundred

months, mostly unhappy, excepting the first few when he'd met her at a party. Young, vibrant, sleek, she'd been everything he'd imagined. A teenage boy's wet dream of what life would hopefully be about. Never mind the day to day, there would always be the nights. And so there had been until her affairs began.

Baggy eyes shifting to a full length mirror in the corner, he unconsciously tried to suck in the sagging paunch, fighting to hold the pose until his next breath. Mangled right knee up on the edge of the tub, he gently massaged it. Injured in a football game years before, it was just another cross to bear. Easing himself into the tub's welcoming warmth, he shifted his mind to Anne. How would she look after all these years? Who had she married? Why had she married when he had loved her so much? All of these years and he still thought about the softness of her hair, the arch of her neck, the love in her eyes and the smile that had won him from the start. Settling back he closed his eyes and imagined what his life might have been, could have been, if only—

"Landlord wants the rent," Marsha screamed through the closed bathroom door. "Or this time he says we're out in a flash."

Shit, she was still there. "Gave him a check yesterday," he returned fire.

She opened the door and stormed into the bathroom. "Guess I must have beaten his check to the bank yesterday because he said the one you gave him bounced. Was that the last of your damn severance pay?"

"Yep."

"That being the case, lover boy, I'll leave a hundred dollars on the dresser for you before I go. I'll need the rest for a little trip Bob and I are planning."

"Bob?"

"A friend of mine," she explained, bending down over the tub to pat his shoulder, allowing the hand to stray underwater to his buttocks.

"Have you given him that old routine that you're pregnant and he's the daddy?"

"Whatever else happens when I'm gone--and this is my last run at the brass ring--don't let anyone suggest you don't still have a great ass. Too bad you were so young when I reeled you in."

She slammed the door and was gone. He breathed a sigh of relief and resettled himself under his watery security blanket. What in the hell had he ever seen in Marsha. Young enough to believe her tall tale of being pregnant, naive enough to think that the honeymoon was the marriage.

He rearranged his knee then patted the tub that pressed against it. The only family heirloom he'd saved from the auctioneer's gavel, excepting his father's gold wedding band, and once again, damn, his thoughts returned to Anne. Rocking him back and forth in her arms while they waited for the doctor to look at that knee. Hugging him tight to her breasts while his mother ran around urging him to think positive thoughts. "Good is as good thinks," she'd reminded him.

Reaching for the tarnished, aging dolphin faucet, he opened the cold water tap for a few seconds of heat relief, then abruptly closed it. Squirming around, he tried his best to squeeze a six foot frame into a five foot enclosure, ignoring the irritating drip from the faucet until he could stand it no longer. Slowly raising his right foot, ignoring the pain in his knee, he inserted his big toe directly in the guilty dolphin's faucet-mouth, halting the irritating drip. Reverie restored he sunk low in the water when suddenly, without warning, a headache to end all headaches exploded in his sinuses, cut across his eyes and wound up somewhere in the middle of his brain, spreading right and left from there until the rest of his brain began to fog over. Screaming at the top of his lungs, he fought to rip through the skin into the brain.

But the fog in his brain continued to expand and he felt himself slump even lower, until his face was underwater, preferring the demons of no air to the ones loose in his brain. The water burned the inside of his mouth as his throat did its best to hold back the tide. Too weak to scream, even if he could breathe, he tried to gouge his eyes in a futile effort to release the screaming demons inside. The sounds, the wails, my God, would it ever end?

Blubbing youthful prayers, he sank lower and lower before resurfacing, using the sides of the tub to pull upright. Upright finally,

strength slipping, he couldn't slide back into the depths, continuing to fight for air in the sudden mist that was everywhere. Thick enough to hide the sides of the tub, unaware that his toe was still tightly wedged in the dolphin's mouth. He struggled to maintain consciousness.

Nauseous with the turgid chlorine like smell of the enveloping fog, he tried to vomit, anything to overcome the paralysis gripping his chest. Nothing worked as the growing paralysis and the whirling acceleration froze his body, leg by leg, arm by arm, even down to the fingers now clutching aimlessly at the edges of the tub.

Ready to die, pleading to end the ordeal, he was a statue, helpless, until, without warning, the paralysis began to fade and a gathering cloud of white fought the blackness.

Hours or maybe only minutes later he slowly regained his senses, limb by limb although he was still pinned back against the tub. And then new sounds. Soothing sounds, relaxing sounds ... was it over? Gone were the raucous howls of the freeway diesels, giving way to the sounds of children in play ... alee, alee in free, last one home is it. Behind those sounds the creak of a porch swing, the chirp of crickets, the rustling of leaves, sounds long ago forgotten. "Good vibrations pep us up," and the feeling from this one was definitely good.

Eyes open, ears relaxing in the soothing sounds, his headache faded as he tested his muscles one by one, noting that the water now felt like ice. Right arm over the edge of the tub, he felt the floor underneath and his breathing slowed. What had happened to the linoleum he had installed a few years before? Wiping the hand back and forth across the surface of whatever it was, he felt a sudden sting in his finger and pulled up his hand to remove a splinter. Wood where there should have been linoleum?

Right hand back on his chest, safely home, Dick next lowered his left hand, hoping to brand the findings of the right hand erroneous. There couldn't be wood underneath, there had to be linoleum. Wrong. Left hand back home he curled up and did nothing as the minutes, maybe it was hours, waltzed past his consciousness. Finally, unbidden, his curiosity returned and he opened his eyes to see what he could see. He was in a room, outlined only through a dimly lit doorway, letting just enough light seep in to show a wooden floor. Ignoring the pain of

the splinter, he stood up, trembling, and reached for the towel he'd thrown over the back edge of the tub. Nothing.

Where the hell was he?

Waiting until his heartbeat slowed enough to support movement, he lifted himself out of the tub onto the wooden floor where he took his first step toward the dimly outlined door, hoping to find a light switch somewhere near it.

Finding that switch he turned on the lights. A bathroom. His eyes adjusted to the yellowish light and slowly swept the room. A porcelain sink near the tub with the same dolphin faucets. Soul mates to the tub's faucets. The light itself came from a tarnished brass fixture on the wall alongside the sink. There was something about that fixture that was vaguely familiar. Above the dolphin sink, an old wooden medicine cabinet, its cracked and blackened mirror reflecting the room's dinginess.

Inside the cabinet he found the same remedies his Mother had used when he was a child. Ben Gay, Sloan's Liniment, Bayer aspirin, Milk of Magnesia ... no generic here. And nothing here either that would be have been capable of dulling the almost constant pain of a later cancer ion the stomach.

Next he marveled at the ceiling. Twelve feet up, reminding him of the one he'd helped Mr. Kuen lower in their old bathroom years before. Near the tub a clothes hamper and a window with a cracked parchment shade. Further away the toilet and a towel rack. Recognizing he was naked, wet and shivering, he moved toward that welcoming towel and knotted it around his waist. "If you got it," he sucked in the sag, "flaunt it."

Flagging spirits uplifted with his feeble attempt at finding something funny in the situation, he looked toward the sound of an opening door, the only door in the room, and started at a hand coming through that door feeling for the light switch. But just as that mysterious hand approached the light switch he had just turned on, the room went dark and only the sound of the dripping tub faucet could be heard. Suddenly, once again there was light and in it he could see a portly, middle-aged man in a rumpled three piece suit enter the bathroom, his hand still on the light switch.

"Sorry about the water on the floor," Dick began, unsure how to account for his presence in a strange bathroom. A man from God's knows where with one of this man's towels around his waist and a bloody finger.

The man ignored him and closed the door as he walked over to the sink, ignoring Dick's apology.

Panicked, Dick edged back toward the tub. "I really can't explain how I got here, but=="

He might as well have saved his breath as the portly gentleman turned on the tap water and began to scrub his hands, still ignoring Dick.

"Excuse me," Dick gathered strength in the man's silence, "I was speaking to you. Advancing toward the sink where he reached out to tap the man on the shoulder. "I said I didn't know how it happened. OK?"

No response. Damn.

Finally close enough to touch the man's shoulder, he tried to do just that, shocked to find that his hand had continued to travel right through the man's suit and out the other side as if there was nothing in between. Cloth, skin, muscle and bone, the hand had traveled straight ahead through all of them. Had the man no substance? Was he a ghost? Cranking up his courage another notch, this time he tried to grab the man's chest, once again unable to feel anything but air. His heart began to race and he could feel the pounding in his chest.

Finished with his washing, presumably still unaware of Dick's presence in the bathroom with him, the man reached for the towel rack Dick had already visited. Dick's face tightened and he muttered, "Better deal with me this time, old man. I've got your towel."

Instead the man simply dried his hands.

Dried his hands? How and on what when the towel was around his waist? Panicked he stared down at his waist. Sweet Jesus in heaven the towel, 'his' towel, was no longer there. It was in the man's hands. He instinctively crossed his legs and watched in sullen silence as the man turned off the light and left, closing the door behind him.

Suddenly, just as the door closed, he felt the barest tug around his waist and looked down to find 'his' towel back in place and the

lights back on. Everything was as it had been, meaning he'd been either ignored or invisible. Which one depended on what was on the other side of that bathroom door.

Towel hitched in place, he stepped into the hallway.

CHAPTER 2

ROSEMONT, TEXAS 1946

Wet and shivering, still musing on the uncanny similarity to the bathroom of his childhood, Dick moved into an hallway lit only by a shaft of light spilling through a doorway. Much as the bathroom, this too seemed familiar.

Opening out onto that hallway, dimly visible in that light, were three doors, one on his left, closed, another straight ahead behind the stairwell and the final one on his right. The same arrangement in his old house. This had to be some kind of dream, he thought, fed by the memory of times long gone. The closed door, if true to his dream, had been his bedroom, the one to his right a spare room and the room full of light would have been his mother's bedroom. He idly wondered if the accuracy of his dream would extend to the first floor, and in pursuit of that curiosity, clutching at the towel he had lost in the bathroom, he moved toward the stairs, leaving a wet puddle in his wake. Idly running his hand down the banister as he descended, he couldn't help but recall the times he had used a more tender part of his anatomy to descend.

At the bottom a few feet ahead was a front door surrounded by glass blocks framed in white lace. This doorway too fit nicely in his memory, taking its place alongside the cabinet in the bathroom, the upper hallway and the banister. Quietly opening the door, he stepped onto a porch that he somehow knew encircled the house. Across the street, directly under a streetlight, was a bakery. Kuen's according to a grand opening banner, much like the bakery his mother had worked at.

Parked at the curb in front of the house was the dream car of his youth, a brand new Studebaker Commander, a dead ringer for the old Studebaker his mother's doctor had driven. The front yard, another memory tickler, was a page right out of Tom Sawyer, even to the white picket fence in need of paint. Crickets cricketing, the old oak tree and the sweet smell of oleander everywhere, this was a dream to end all

dreams. Staring at the oak he could still see Anne there in the swing, laughing at the jokes he read to her from an old Readers Digest. Anne. Sweet Jesus in heaven what a mistake leaving her behind for Marsha. Even in his dreams he knew enough to chalk up that mistake.

Back inside on his right there was a familiar sliding wood door that disappeared into the wall when open. The dining room beyond that door though struck the first discordant in this dream. The furniture was new, something he'd never seen as a kid. A long walnut table, eight velvet chairs and a matching hutch. Alongside the hutch a swinging door opened into a room he could see was the kitchen.

To his left a hallway and another sliding door, this one fronting an old-fashioned parlor, lit by a tall brass lamp on an end table. Again, the furnishings seemed unfamiliar, prompting him to wonder how, in a dream about his past, the familiar and the unfamiliar could exist side by side. Noting that the lamp had been left on he was tempted to turn it off, recalling his mother's frequent admonitions about enriching the electric company. But not all the furniture in this room was unfamiliar, especially the rocking chair he'd ridden when chasing Indians, using his trust Daisy air gun to keep them at bay.

Through the living room to another room and his heart began to pound. Dream or not, real or not, the roll top desk in the corner brought him up short. A lot of homework done on that desk, at a lot of prompting from his mom. Walking past the desk on his way to the kitchen he glanced at an open newspaper, idly noting a headline about a new subway opening. H

He moved next into a kitchen, only somewhat familiar thanks to a difference in furnishings. A wooden table, theirs had been bamboo and a couple of chairs in need of paint, but the same stove and refrigerator. Musing once again on the general overall accuracy of his dream world, he was startled by the sound of a baby crying. No, not crying, screaming. At the top of its lungs.

Quickly back to the stairs he started back up, careful once again to be quiet. Closer to the second floor he could now hear the sound of a slap, once again followed by wailing. Pausing at the top of the stairs, he looked back toward the only room with light. And then the sound of conversation.

Tip-toeing toward the dream room that so exactly duplicated his mother's bedroom, he noted that the sound of a crying baby was getting louder. Just as was the sound of two men talking.

"By golly, Doc," one of them shouted, "you've really outdone yourself this time! The little guy looks to me like a chip off the old block."

The one called Doc laughed, then replied, "Quiet down Jack, before you scare the be-Jesus out of your son."

A newborn son, a proud father, a doctor and somewhere within that room, the mother. The dream had broadened. Closer, he peered around the door and stared at the two men. One, obviously the doctor, looked familiar. Squat and with a huge red nose, he looked very much like the doctor who had cared for his mother. Only much younger. The other man though, painfully thin with a small mustache had no place in his dream of things familiar. This was the man called Jack by the doctor and the doctor was the man who had stolen his towel in the bathroom. Unconsciously he looked down to make sure he still had the towel and breathed a sigh of relief. Returning his attention to what more current events, he watched the man called Jack walk over to a bed in the corner and bend down to pat a woman's arm. The newborn's mother, if that is what she was, appeared to be asleep as the newborn nestled deep within her arms.

"Go on and let her get some sleep," the doctor advised and the father nodded and patted the woman on the forehead.

"She's doing fine," Jack whispered, bending over to give his wife a kiss.

Still hidden behind the half-open doorway, Dick suddenly wondered if he was still as invisible in his dream as he had been in the bathroom. Suddenly the child in Jack's arms began to scream and his tiny hands and feet sprang into action, moving everywhere at once, each limb demanding some kind of individual attention from the father.

"Back to Mama," Doc ordered. Jack complied and then turned toward the door, catching Dick by surprise. Scurrying backward down the hallway to get out of the way, Dick found the other room on that side of the stairway and hurriedly opened the door. Hiding behind it in the darkness he awaited the two men on their way to the stairs. Deep in

conversation they finally passed the door while Dick took a moment to study the new room. A nursery, filled with the usual, including a pile of diapers.

Eyes back on the men still at the head of the stairway, Dick studied the doctor's clothes more closely. Rumpled. But then everything about this man screamed rumpled, just as the doctor in his memory had been rumpled. Dick's gaze drifted down to the heavy gold chain at the doctor's waist. A pocket watch there and in all his memories he'd only known one other man who wore a pocket watch, and that man, a member of his real world of memories had also been a doctor. Maybe they were issued pocket watches in medical school. The one he remembered sported a carving of a stag on the lid.

Finally, chit-chat done, Doc and Jack headed down the stairs while Dick crept to the top of the stairs to monitor their progress.

At the front door, back-slaps and chuckles finally over, the two men said goodnight and parted, Jack for the kitchen, Doc toward the curb. Quickly over to the hallway window. Dick watched the doctor drive off in that great old Studebaker.

Determined to finish his dream with no outstanding questions, Dick returned to the only room he hadn't examined. The room on the other side of the stairway. Opening the door to that room, another bedroom, he stepped in, leaving the door open for light. The bed was unmade, in fact, some pajamas and a flannel nightgown still lay atop it, everything evidently giving way to the sudden birth of their son.

Staring at the nightgown, he was reminded of the one his mother used to wear. Atop the dresser, drawers half-open, was a wooden picture frame, loose change, keys, a Zippo lighter and a pack of Lucky Strikes. He turned the picture frame, he had one just like it, toward the light and silently screamed in surprise. A younger edition of his Mom, a more serene edition, forcing him to recall all the problems he saddled her with as a kid.

He tip-toed back to the birth room, pausing at the head of the stairs to make sure that the father was still in the kitchen. Peering carefully round the door to make sure the mother wasn't awake. He could see they were both asleep. Mother and child, eyes closed, both unmoving. But as he began to walk toward the bed, the woman

suddenly turned toward the sound of his steps although her eyes remained closed. Had she heard him? The man in the bathroom hadn't. He paused, then content it was an accident, pressed on toward the bed again and for the first time, saw her face. The same one in the bedroom picture, the same face his mother might have had minus the worry lines he'd been responsible for. He squatted alongside the bed and touched that face as softly as a butterfly might alight on a flower. His eyes began to fill with tears as the old memories returned unbidden.

Memories such as the day he'd hurt his knee. Or the day Anne told him of her father's death. The tears they had shed together that day ... are those things you can ever forget? As if in a dream then, Dick bent down and kissed the mother's forehead, only to find himself staring deep into her eyes! Open now ... for how long? He jumped up, hurriedly back-peddled through the open door and back into the hallway.

This was a dream to end all dreams but it was time to end it all and wake up. Pausing at the bathroom door, eyes still full of tears, he shook his head in disbelief. Never in his life had he experienced anything even remotely like this dream. It had all seemed so real, but that was impossible. If that had really been his mother for example, her face would be more lined.

But the implications of this dream were undeniable. Somewhere, somehow, he had dreamed about his birth, even recreating a father he'd never known. As to his mother's lack of worry lines that could well have been because he had yet to bring on those worry lines.

Back in the bathroom, anxious to escape the dream, he eased himself back into the tub, fighting hard to escape those ghosts of a life long past. But instead of safely hiding him away, the icy waters shocked him into action and he found himself wildly slapping the sides of the tub as he urged his ghost horse onward.

To no avail. Dammit!

"Maybe if I duplicate the previous actions that brought on the dream." Inserting his toe back in the dolphin's mouth, dripping sound stopped, he closed his eyes ... and then sweet Jesus ... the headache, the mists, the whirling, swirling accelerations, all together

right on schedule, obscuring the room and the tub. "Thank God," he whispered as the blackness descended. "Thank God the dream is over."

A crippled man returns in time to his high-school days and attempts to convince his younger self not to break up with the girl who he now knows to be the love of his life. A strange love triangle.

Second Chance

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2859.html?s=pdf>