

Please Don't Remove
MarGreat's Glasses

By
Josh Baker



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Prologue



The aching in Timothy's head bloomed with a pain so severe it interrupted his dream and ripped him from unconsciousness. Disoriented and groggy, fear set in. "This can't be good," he told himself. An incessant, sharp beeping cut his ears with its serrated tone. Over and over the horrible beeping pierced his skull. He winced, unable to open his eyes. His face felt taut and restricted, then suddenly he was acutely aware of how uncomfortably sweaty his entire body was. Above the periodic tones, a nervous Hispanic voice pleaded in the distance, "Socorro, Socorro!" The voice called out far from where Timothy lay, eventually seeming to give up.

Gradually, he forced his eyes open. As his pupils painfully adjusted to the bright lights, he heard sheepish footsteps approach. A short older man holding a mop cautiously leaned over his bed. Trembling, the stranger's eyes studied the situation, and he then made an earnest sign of the cross before retreating. "Socorro!" the man yelled just once more from outside the room, then nothing.

Timothy's eyes studied the room, trying to maintain focus. He realized he was in some sort of hospital. The walls were dingy; the horrible beeping equipment nearby appeared outdated and yellowed. While struggling to stay awake, it dawned on him that there were tubes and a mask affixed to his face. Feeling claustrophobic, he reached up to free his mouth and nose from the restrictive apparatus, but his arms stopped. His arms were secured to the side of the bed with straps. As he fought clumsily to escape his binds, he noticed how pink and blotchy the skin up and down his arms looked. Timothy examined his mangled forearms, the remnants of an amateur skull tattoo barely recognizable below the welted skin. It was all coming back to him now. His hands trembled in the straps as he slowly rotated his palms upwards, revealing pink scar tissue that began at the base of his fingers and traveled well past his wrists. A sharp cleft vertically divided each of his palms. Yes, now he remembered. The collection of blemishes formed a roadmap of who Timothy Clement was and how he ended up here.

Timothy turned his palms back down and a tear rolled down his cheek. A familiar feeling came over him - aloneness. He meditated a while on the sensation, and his situation. His thoughts meandered back in time, reflecting on his childhood. He half smiled, recalling how he used to imagine that a stay in the hospital would be a treat. He had fantasized about how the nurses would wait on him hand and foot while he relaxed in a mechanical bed watching television. All of his friends and family would come by, concerned about his wellbeing and bring flowers and gifts. But here he was, all grown up and no one was coming for him.

He tried several more times to free his arms but failed. He rested again, then stiffened his hand and meticulously worked his fingers in and around one of the knots. At last, he felt his

finger in a loop and tugged desperately until he heard a loud rip. His hand darted immediately to his face and yanked off the mask. He gasped loudly. He grabbed his collar and ripped the front of his hospital gown to his stomach. Ineptly, he pulled away the ripped material until he found what he was looking for. It was still there! His finger gently stroked the rose tattoo on his chest. His mother's name, "Eunice" elegantly embroidered around the bud. Below, his sister's names "VICTORIA" and "ELIZABETH" were stenciled in all capital letters next to respective thorns on the flower's stem. Further down the stem there appeared a larger, gnarled thorn bearing his own name, "Timothy". A single rose pedal lie painted underneath on the flesh ground. Upon the fallen rose pedal were a teardrop and the name "Stephen" written in gentle handwritten script.

"Sorry Mom." Timothy whispered, his finger resting on the fallen rose pedal. His eyes welled up, and then more tears tumbled down his cheeks. He sobbed deeply. His heart was heavy and his head felt light. His vision so obscured by his weeping, he could not make out the face of the tall man who entered the room. Timothy thought he recognized a trace of a smile on the man's face through his tears, but he couldn't be sure. Before determining if he knew the man, everything faded to blackness and he lost consciousness.

Part I

Thrown Away



I lie down and I fall asleep,
[and] I will wake up, for the LORD sustains me. – Psalm 3:6

Chapter 1





Seven years earlier.

The small hand-drawn, not to scale, map on the back of the party invitation did not do justice to the entry road and guard shack leading to Alabaster Estates. Vibrations from the impressive cobblestone road buzzed Abby's tires as her BMW snaked its way up.

"Visiting?" The man stationed in the guard shack asked formally from behind his thick glasses. His eyes left hers to inspect the gift box strapped into the passenger seat.

"I'm here for the Timothy Clement birthday bash," the young lady announced proudly. "My name is Abby Anderson. I'm on the list." The guard flipped through the contents of his clipboard holding a frown. Abby could see large bunches of balloons billowing in the wind beyond the tall hedges in the distance as she waited impatiently.

"Nope, don't see you on the list. Lots of girls listed, but no Abby."

This perturbed Abby. "Abby Anderson I said! Both my names begin with the letter 'A' so I am probably at the top of the list." Abby let out an exasperated sigh. "You do know your ABCs don't you?"

The man never changed his tone, but began to search from the top page again. "I've got an Abigail Anderson, but no Abby Anderson."

"You have got to be joking! That IS me!" Abby dug into the small black purse lying on the passenger seat and removed her driver's license. "See!"

The guard took the license, examined it for a moment, then removed his glasses and squinted at Abby. He then put his glasses back on and studied the license again. "I suppose. This photo does not look exactly like you. You may want to get an updated one."

Abby snatched the license from the guard and glared ahead waiting for the guard to let her through the gate. A moment later the gate began to slowly open.

"It's always a good idea to get an updated license when you change hairstyles or put on a few pounds." The guard barely got the words out when Abby's tires squealed and her car jetted through the gate.

"Jerk." Abby muttered under her breath.

Once she made her way to the estate and parked, Abby spent a few moments touching up her makeup and making kissy faces at herself in her mirror. She eventually grabbed her purse, adjusted her cleavage, and proceeded to the party. This was a big deal for her. She and Timothy had spent the past year exchanging flirtatious messages while he took a year off to 'find himself' in Paris. Both of their families were peppered with well-groomed success stories so it seemed a perfect match to her. Wealth, status among the elite and having reasonably attractive features

were important, but the family name Clement was simply irresistible to her. She imagined how pleased her family would be if she were to marry a Clement boy.

"Your invitation, dear." The doorman smiled and held out his gloved hand. Abby proudly handed him the heavy French style invitation, strategically covering the party hat wearing cartoon character lurking at its top edge. The amateur drawing was immature to her and ruined the overall elegance of the invitation. Timothy Clement, the birthday boy, was known for his amusing drawings featuring the alter-ego of his kid brother, Stevie. Realistically, Timothy was not a very good artist. He was rather awful really. His comics consisted mostly of crudely sketched figures, rivaling something an eight year old might produce. "Please come right in and make yourself at home." Gesturing to the floral garden he added, "Mister Clement is currently entertaining guests just beyond the gazebo." A waiter stood nearby offering a tray with refreshments.

"Thank you." Abby chirped, taking a Champaign flute. She took a sip and weighed the glass in her hands, mentally gauging its value.

After high school Abby went off to the University of Virginia to study music theory like her father. Her entire family had a natural aptitude for music. By age seventeen, Abby had developed remarkable skills as a pianist, representing her family name on an international level. While competing in Paris she met Timothy and the two hit it off.

Rambunctious collegiate hoots and hollers bounded as Abby turned the corner. Several dozen young adults dressed in sloppy formal wear did their best to show they were not yet adults. For every tactless presentation of the female physique there was a matching half-tucked in shirt and loose necktie. Abby felt right at home.

"Abby!" Timothy called out from the rattan couch he was sharing with two young girls. She presented herself before him and smiled. He remained seated with both arms around his companions. After an awkward pause he abruptly sprung up to properly greet his guest. "Wow, you look great!" he said as he embraced her.

"Thanks, you too!" She handed him the small gift box.

"Oh, Thanks. Can I get you a little something?" Timothy asked holding up his red plastic cup.

"Um, no I'm good" Abby flashed her Champaign flute with a sly smile hoping he'd remember the bottle the two shared in Paris. He didn't. Instead he started to open the gift box.

Abby quickly put her hands on top of the box. "Oh, not now. That's a surprise for later."

Right then Timothy's father and younger brother Stephen approached. His father put his arm around Timothy's shoulder and squeezed him tight. "Hey birthday boy, I think we're just about ready to cut cake."

"Let's eat some cake!" Stephen urged, yanking on Timothy's tie.

His father continued. "Think you can pull yourself away from all these beautiful young ladies for a bit?" He winked at Abby.

"Sure Dad." Timothy held up his hands to Abby, and he was led away.

Abby tried not to let her disappointment show. This wasn't exactly the reunion she was hoping for. Furthermore, she was suddenly aware of all the catty stares directed her way. Bagging a Clement boy wasn't going to be easy.

An older girl came up to Abby wearing a plastic smile. "Try to not take it so seriously sweetie, he's just not capable." Abby gave a quizzical look as the girl extended her hand. "I'm Elizabeth, Tim's sister.

Abby lit up, the more family connections the better. "Oh, hi! I met Tim's other sister Victoria in Paris." Timothy's older sister Victoria was the piano coach of a nine year old Canadian prodigy. Abby was envious of her glamorous profession because it presented exciting adventures around the globe. The reality was that although Victoria was well paid, the hectic demands of her job kept

her from finding a husband and she was very lonely; lonely, and increasingly bitter as the years passed.

Elizabeth pursed her lips, unimpressed. "She's off somewhere in Asia and couldn't make it today - shocker!" Elizabeth paused and leaned in closer to Abby. "Listen, if it's a serious relationship you're looking for, then you're barking up the wrong tree."

Abby laughed nervously as she waved her hand. "Oh, you know how boys are."

"I know how my brother is. He's like an alley cat." As Elizabeth spoke Abby smiled uncomfortably not sure how to respond. "Don't say I didn't warn you." Elizabeth gave another insincere smile then wandered off.

Across the yard, Timothy's father and younger brother Stephen escorted him between the spread of rented tables filled with guests. Leaning in, his father said, "Your mother would have really enjoyed this." Timothy nodded then looked at his brother and smiled.

Timothy had a special relationship with his mother. His mother accepted him along with his faults since he was constantly trying to stay in his father's good graces. He was clearly her favorite and it created friction growing up. His older sisters called him, "Mamma's Boy" and his father found every opportunity to remind him he was weak. The afternoon of his mother's funeral, his father proclaimed in front of all those paying respects, that the umbilical cord had finally been cut. The time for Timothy to become a man had arrived. That was just over five years ago, but the sting remained fresh.

His mother battled cancer for the good part of a year, but its rapid conquest got the best of her. Timothy was the only one by her side when she passed away. The doctor's prognosis granted her at least another year, but one day while Timothy and Stephen swam in their backyard they heard their mother call from the upstairs window, "Timothy, can you please come here - alone." Timothy could sense fear in her voice. With his father and sisters away, it was difficult persuading eight year old Stephen to stay in the pool. Stephen shared an equal fondness for their mother and could also tell something was amiss. Eventually, the threat of a smack to the head kept Stephen waiting in the water.

Timothy made his way up the spiral staircase and approached the open door to his parent's room. He was frightened to find her curled up on the ground. "Mom, you okay?" He asked but she didn't answer. It was clear she wasn't. "I'll call 9-1-1!"

She held up her hand in protest. "Sit with me." She whispered and Timothy reluctantly sat down next to her. On the ground were pictures of the family and a Bible. Then he noticed the spots of blood on the front of her shirt and in the corner of her mouth. "Don't be afraid, Timmy." She said gently. "It seems The Lord is calling me home earlier than we thought."

"Mom, hang on, let me get a doctor." Timothy begged with tears in his eyes.

She shook her head. "I need you to listen to me. There is no more time. It's out of the doctor's hands." Timothy threw himself upon her and held tight while sobbing. "It will be okay son, don't be sad." She reassured him.

"No Mom. No!" He pleaded with her.

"Shhh. . . quiet now, I don't want to frighten your brother." Instinctively, she rocked him lovingly just as when he was younger. "Settle down." She whispered softly as she stroked his hair. Timothy continued to sob. "I need you to do something for me."

"What?" Timothy said barely above a whisper.

"I need you to promise you'll do it." She paused, waiting for him to commit. "No matter what, you'll do it for me. Promise."

Timothy sat up and looked at her. "I promise. What do you want me to do?"

His mother coughed while she removed an ornate patron saint necklace from her neck. The beautiful gold necklace was one of her most precious belongings. "I got this shortly after your

brother was born." She slipped the necklace over Timothy's head. "This is Saint Anthony of Padua. Have you heard of him?" Timothy shook his head. "He was a good man who lived long ago. He helps find people who are lost, like your father." She began to cough hard and wheeze. "Promise me you will look after your brother and keep him on the path to righteousness. He looks up to you." She slumped forward and coughed roughly.

"Sure, I promise, Mom." Timothy rubbed her back as she coughed. It all seemed like a dream to him. He couldn't believe this was happening. He thought about his brother waiting for him in the backyard and about the saint necklace. Then he realized she was no longer coughing. She was no longer with him.

Timothy's father gave him a hearty slap on the back of his neck. The time had come for the unavoidable charismatic toast to the birthday boy. "Many of you are well acquainted with the escapades my son Timothy has been on over the past year."

"It's Tim. Nobody calls me Timothy. Geez Dad!"

"Oh yeah Tim-o-thy" Stephen teased.

His father ignored the interruption. "In fact, I'm pretty sure some of you here are directly responsible for his little Paris diversion." The crowd laughed at his jesting tone. "No hard feelings, I can live with that knowing that in the fall Timothy will be beginning his studies at Yale." The guests let out a collective howl. Timothy's father smiled while pointing to the Yale Law Alumni pin on his chest. "We've got a fellow bulldog in the making!" They howled louder this time. "So I impart these words of wisdom on my freshly nineteen year old son: Get what you can in this dog-eat-dog world, because when you die they bury you and the worms eat you!" A few people clapped, but the rest waited to see if it was a joke. "If you aren't leading, you're following. If you aren't taking you're getting taken."

Timothy was uncomfortable with his father's one-dimensional chest puffing and finally intervened, "Okay Dad, I get it. Don't worry I'll get to school soon enough and conquer the world." The guests laughed.

Just then Timothy's two best friends, Fitch and Carlos, began chanting, "Miami, Miami, Miami!" Timothy's father raised his eyebrows inquisitively.

"It's just for six weeks Dad. We're staying with Fitch's cousin Bruno. I was going to tell you later." The guests burst into laughter. Timothy was glad it came out in this setting. He had wrestled with how to tell his father for over a week. "We're leaving next week. I'll be back well before orientation."

His father tried not to show his disappointment in front of everyone, but it seeped out from behind his forced smile. "What about our Annapolis cruise next month? You've never missed it." For the past three years Timothy's Uncle David treated the whole family to a summer Annapolis pilgrimage on his schooner. Timothy's father always had a great time bonding with his brother and the kids.

"Oh man, you're not coming?" Timothy's younger brother Stephen complained.

"You guys are perfectly capable of having a good time without me. Besides, there'll be more room for you and more food!" Everyone laughed.

Timothy's father let out a reluctant chuckle. "You hear that Stephen, more food for us? That is a very consoling!"

"It's a dog-eat-dog world out there Dad, you gotta grab what you can!" Everyone cracked up at Timothy's boomerang advice, even his father. "Fitch's cousin is letting us put in some hours at his import firm. It'll give me an edge."

"Very well son, enjoy Miami." Fitch and Carlos cheered obnoxiously as soon as the words left his father's lips. An army of servers appeared distributing cake to the guests. The music came back on and everyone went back to celebrating.

Abby waited another hour before approaching Timothy. She hoped he had respected her wishes and hadn't yet opened the present. "Timothy." She called out to him but he was too busy trying to release himself from Fitch's headlock to notice her. Those two imbeciles Fitch and Carlos were constantly around him and it irritated her.

Timothy's younger brother Stephen walked up and stood beside Abby. He watched the boys wrestle, giggling incessantly. Abby glanced over and realized it was Timothy's brother but wasn't sure if meeting the rest of the family was even worth it after the run in with Elizabeth. Then she noticed something funny about his face, something familiar. "Oh my gosh, it's you!" Stephen looked over at Abby apprehensively as she dug through her purse. "I thought you looked familiar." Abby then pulled out the party invitation. "A-ha! See, that's you!" She tapped the tip of her index finger on the hand drawn party-goer celebrating in the margin.

"Yeah sure, of course!" Stephen smiled proudly. "Tim draws me all the time. Stevie the Great!"

"Stevie the Great - that is so cool!" Abby suddenly had an appreciation for the art she had hidden under her thumb earlier. "You're lucky to have a big brother like Tim." Despite Elizabeth's warning, Abby was swooning over Timothy once again.

Stephen smiled. "Yeah, he is pretty cool."

As Abby and Stephen talked, Carlos held up an unflattering comic Timothy had drawn of Fitch sitting on a toilet and cackled, "It looks just like you man!" Fitch tightened the headlock. Carlos stopped laughing at Timothy and Fitch as soon as he noticed Abby's presence. "Dudes, it's her! Broadway girl!" He pulled headphones from his front pocket and put them in his ears. He then pressed play on a small portable music player and began singing in a girl's voice, "Oh the time in Paris was so beau-ti-ful to me. Oh, oooooohhh, yeah!" Carlos pranced around like a love-struck teenage girl attracting the attention of the other guests.

Abby looked down at Timothy who was laughing as hard as the others. She couldn't believe she had been such a fool. She had spent the past week writing and recording a personal birthday song for Timothy. She transferred it to a high-end music player engraved with his name as a gift. She had waited patiently to play it for him in private. Now her presentation was ruined by this unsophisticated man-child mocking the sentiment, pawing the gift with his grubby hands. All the while, the boy of her dreams guffawed carelessly from the sidelines. "Timothy Clement, you are the most rotten person I've ever met." Abby burst into tears and fled the party.

Timothy thought about running after her, but that seemed too hard a task in front of his friends. And besides, what would the other girls at the party think - that he was taken? That was definitely not an option. He blew it off. "Stupid girls, what can you do?" Fitch and Carlos couldn't high-five him enough.