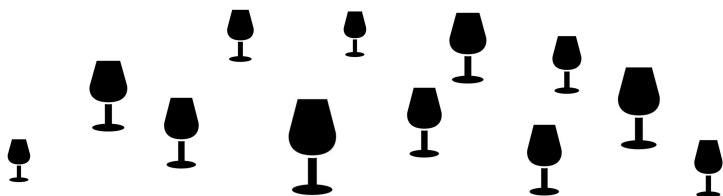




SMILEBLAZER

"Ignite your healing"

www.smileblazer.com



THE 12 GLASSES

The Resurrection of the Goodmans

A Novel

MATTHEW GOODMAN

*To My Beloved Jini
& Grandfather Gerry,*

Thank you for helping me put the shattered pieces of my life back together. I love you and miss you both so much.

*"Sometimes doing good means you got to get up and do it.
Sometimes doing good means not doing something."*

- Gerry Goodman

Author's Introduction

The narrative you are about to embark on centers around the complex, often elusive theme of healing. It arises from my personal journey to dismantle the generational curses that have haunted my family and extends this healing outward to encompass a broader, global context.

At the heart of this tale is my 102-year-old grandfather, Gerry Goodman, the resolute patriarch of the Goodman clan. At just 23 years old, amid the chaos of World War II, he conceived a vision that was both profound and prophetic. He seized twelve crystal glasses adorned with the Nazi swastika and envisioned a future in which each family member would shatter one at their wedding, adhering to Jewish tradition. This poignant act was to symbolize the triumph of good—encapsulated in our very name, "Goodman"—over the malevolence that once threatened our existence. Remarkably, this vision came to fruition. Through the lens of these twelve Nazi glasses brought back from the war, this story seeks to channel the wisdom and lessons of this monumental figure, who was a true hero and guardian in our lives.

I must be candid: as a storyteller, I have exercised a degree of creative license in recounting this tale. The narrative pivots around a vision of mine—Smileblazer, a pioneering organization in the medical cannabis space, aimed at "igniting healing" across our world—a vision as

ambitious as it is transformative.

It is vital to me that the authenticity of my vision is preserved by maintaining the true names of the characters within this narrative. For you, the reader, to understand these individuals as I do is paramount. They are nothing short of extraordinary, each holding a place of highest regard in my heart—they are my family.

As you delve into this story and its characters, my hope is that you will embark on a journey that is both exhilarating and transformative. Writing this narrative has provided me with the most profound healing experience of my life.

With deep faith, gratitude, and love,

Matthew Goodman

Founder, Smileblazer Medicine Collective

Prologue

JUNE 6, 1944

D-DAY

NORMANDY, FRANCE

The air was filled with the sounds of war—gunfire and explosions creating a jarring backdrop. Normandy Beach, once a peaceful area, had turned into a site of violence, the waves crashing against a shore stained with blood—a stark reminder of lives lost in an instant. Smoke rose on the horizon, distorting the landscape.

Amidst the chaos stood Gerry Goodman—a determined soldier, just twenty-three, moving through the destruction. Each step brought him deeper into the reality of battle. His youthful face showed a mix of determination along with the fear of what was happening around him. Today, he was driven by a sense of purpose that felt powerful amid the terror.

Each footfall sunk into the sand, a reminder of his mission. Bullets zipped by, serving as sharp reminders of the danger nearby. Yet Gerry moved on, eyes set on the enemy lines ahead. As explosions erupted nearby, a sense of urgency filled him. He was part of a greater cause—men united by courage and a shared goal, pushing through the chaos.

Glancing to the side, he saw rows of soldiers charging beside him, a sea of khaki and steel propelled by youthful drive. The

world narrowed around him; the noise faded into a dull hum as his focus sharpened. Gripping his weapon tightly, he felt a steady resolve and a glimmer of hope in their combined actions.

“Follow me!” he shouted, his voice strong amidst the fighting. His command inspired the soldiers behind him, turning fear into determination and pushing them forward.

As if defying fate, the smoke began to clear. Through the haze, Gerry and his fellow soldiers moved ahead, resisting enemy forces with their combined strength.

* * *

JULY 2, 2023
GERRY’S NURSING HOME
NORTHBROOK, ILLINOIS

Years had softened the memory of that fateful day, transforming it into a distant recollection, now carefully tucked away in the mind of a man aged by time. The noise of war had given way to a quiet atmosphere—a different sort of struggle. In a modest nursing home, a battle for legacy and remembrance unfolded.

The living room was decorated with framed photographs showcasing a life well-lived. Each image captured moments of joy—birthdays, anniversaries, and family gatherings that evoked warmth and nostalgia. At

the center of this collection hung a portrait of Gerry with his beloved wife, Gita—their faces full of life, contrasting with the fading memories around them.

Gerry, now 102 years old, sat in his favorite armchair, hands resting on cherished memories from a life filled with love and laughter. The photographs stirred a mix of emotions—joy intertwined with a longing for voices lost, along with the bitter realization of life's inevitable passage.

The door creaked open, bringing in Matthew, a handsome man in his forties whose presence brightened the room. Each of his measured steps seemed to carry him not just into his grandfather's space, but also into a rich history shared between them. In their brief shared glance, unspoken words conveyed a deep bond forged over decades filled with both laughter and silence.

Matthew reached out and placed his hand over Gerry's. The touch was reassuring, grounding them in their family connection built through shared history. Their bond—woven through time—spoke of love and respect. Gerry's spirit, though aged, remained resilient against the years that had passed.

"My legacy, Matthew," Gerry whispered, the words fragile yet heavy with significance. "It's time."

Those words landed between them with weight, anchoring their conversation in a deeper space. Matthew nodded, sensing the importance of their shared understanding. He lowered his head and pressed a kiss onto Gerry's bald head—a quiet affirmation of family devotion, recognizing that these moments were precious.

Slowly, with purpose, Gerry rose from his seat. A determined light shone in his eyes, revealing the vitality still present despite his physical limitations. He shuffled toward the old bookshelf filled with family history, memories clinging to its surface. There, he retrieved a small, ornate lockbox that had stood the test of time—a vessel waiting for its contents to be revealed.

With careful hands, he opened it, and sunlight illuminated a crystal glass inside—its surface etched with a Swastika, an unsettling symbol that connected personal stories to the larger struggles of humanity. In that moment, the distant echoes of Normandy Beach intertwined with the laughter and heartbreak of his family, merging past and present into a single thread—a legacy waiting to be defined.

In Gerry's mind, the waves continued their rhythmic crash, recalling tales of courage, sacrifice, and the relentless march of time. Each wave carried memories that would never fade—a reminder that the past remains a part of us, woven into the fabric of our existence.

As both men stared at the *final Nazi glass*—the last of twelve Gerry had shipped back during the war—they were drawn into contemplation of its deeper significance.

1

3 MONTHS EARLIER SMILEBLAZER HEADQUARTERS SEDONA, ARIZONA

The sunlight poured into Matthew's Sedona office, casting a warm and cheerful light that illuminated everything in view. The light had a way of brightening even the duller spaces, but Matthew's workspace was anything but dull. It felt more like a lively concert than a business environment. With a captain's hat perched amusingly on his head, Matthew danced energetically around the office, his movements both carefree and purposeful. Salt-N-Peppa's classic rap "Shoop" vibrated in the air as he bounced off the walls, rapping every lyric like he was delivering a manifesto. His enthusiasm matched the successful life he had built in the medical cannabis industry.

As he grooved to the music, the chaos in his office became apparent, showcasing an eclectic mix of awards and recognitions. Time Magazine covers featuring Matthew's innovations lined the walls alongside High Times accolades, Emmy awards, and other symbols of achievement that told the story of his ambition realized.

Posters promoted “Growin’ with Rogen,” a content series he created with Seth Rogen, and “The Uncle Herbacious Show,” where his Uncle Addy shared cultivation expertise alongside Matthew’s entrepreneurial insight.

Every surface was filled with signs of his entrepreneurial spirit. Packaging for edibles and gummies in exotic flavors cluttered his desk, competing for attention with the latest cannabis strains. Colorfully painted rolling trays were scattered among the bongs and pre-rolled joints. This vibrant chaos was a true cannabis lover’s paradise, showcasing Matthew’s role as the founder and CEO of Smileblazer, one of the leading medical cannabis collectives.

As the final notes of “Shoop” faded, Matthew gazed out the floor-to-ceiling windows. The serene Sedona Red Rock Mountains stood in the distance, their calm presence starkly contrasting the activity of his office. He took a moment to appreciate the view, allowing himself an introspective pause in the midst of his fast-paced life.

His attention was drawn to a mural featuring Smileblazer’s logo and the tagline: “Ignite Your Healing.” The phrase resonated deeply with him, reminding him that he was in this field not just for profit but to impact the lives of those battling illness. This ideal was a constant presence for him, despite the surrounding chaos.

Just as he lost himself in thought, his computer chimed with a FaceTime call, pulling him back to the present. A smile broke across his face as he saw his brother, Aaron’s name on the screen. With a casual gesture, he answered,

and the familiar face of Aaron Goodman, a well-respected doctor known as “Papa Heme,” appeared.

“What’s up, dude?” Matthew greeted, his smile mirroring the energy of the room.

“Same old, you know how it is,” Aaron replied, his tone warm yet laced with the fatigue of a doctor, his hospital office visible in the background.

“What’s the update? Are cancer patients in your clinic going to start using the medications we’re developing with psilocybin for treatment?” Matthew leaned forward, eager about the potential breakthrough.

“It looks like a couple of weeks. The FDA is still reviewing our research results. They’re making it difficult —too much red tape. It’s never-ending,” Aaron expressed, frustration evident in his voice.

Matthew nodded, accepting the familiar frustration with the bureaucracy they faced. “Patience... we’ll get there. You know how it is. There’s a target on our back.” Indeed, there was.

Matthew and Aaron were at the forefront of a groundbreaking approach to cancer treatment, using psilocybin, the psychoactive compound found in magic mushrooms. Their work was revolutionary, slowly gaining traction as the FDA began easing regulations on psychoactive drugs for medicinal purposes. But progress was painfully slow, caught in the bureaucratic machinery. Adding to their struggle, large pharmaceutical companies were fiercely opposed, creating obstacles that felt insurmountable.

"Fuck the FDA... And Fuck Big Pharma. That's what I say," Aaron muttered, lowering his voice as if unveiling a secret truth.

"Oh, we will," Matthew responded, a playful gleam in his eye. Just then, the door swung open, and their father, Allan Goodman, burst in, livening up the room.

"Yo Dad, come say hi to Aaron on FaceTime!" Matthew called out, rolling his eyes at his dad's exuberant entrance.

"Why'd you tell him you're talking to me?!" Aaron protested, irritation creeping into his voice.

Allan, 72 and sporting a full head of hair still drawing admiration, hurried over to Matthew's desk. While he also worked as a doctor, Allan was notably more uptight and neurotic.

Allan leaned in with concern etched across his face. "Aaron, did you get a dog?" The question was casual yet unavoidable.

With a deft pivot, Aaron responded, "I seriously gotta go. I have some rounds to do," effectively sidelining the family inquiry.

"Aaron," Allan pressed, tone sharper, "It's not a good idea."

"Dad, I told you. If I want a dog, I can get a dog. Goodbye!" Aaron retorted, abruptly ending the call.

Allan sighed, a familiar expression of paternal defeat overtaking him. "Why is he getting a dog? You've seen his place; it's already chaotic!"

"Relax, Dad. You're always on our case. Here, take a hit off this. You could use it," Matthew offered. His jest

disguised an underlying irritation—he believed cannabis might relieve Allan's persistent anxiety, making their conversations easier.

"No thanks. It's not just your brother; your mom and I worry about you too," Allan responded, his gaze narrowing on the scattered cannabis products.

Matthew bristled. "What are you talking about? I'm fine! Look, I'm Time's Man of the Year!" He held up the framed magazine cover as proof of his success.

"Seriously, I don't think you're doing as well as you think," Allan replied, his tone hardening. "Have you talked to your grandfather lately? He just fell and broke his hip; he could use a call." This comment pierced through Matthew's bravado, casting a somber shadow over their conversation. The thought of his 102-year-old grandfather gripped him with guilt, conjuring images of family gatherings now drifted into memory.

"Also, how's the Jini situation? You know, she has a point about your 'habit,'" Allan continued, his voice firm.

Jini's face flashed in Matthew's mind, a memory adorned with joy that now felt distant and painful. "Nothing new there. And yeah, I need to call Zayde," he admitted, feeling the weight of familial expectations pressing down on him.

"Okay, well, call Mom sometime too. She's worried," Allan said gently, placing a hand on Matthew's shoulder, a gesture filled with familial weight.

"Okay," Matthew replied, inwardly resisting the encroaching resentment. Allan navigated the room's chaos

and exited, leaving Matthew alone in the sudden silence that enveloped him.

Detached, he considered his grandfather, a quiet man confined to a nursing home, facing long, lonely days. Over a year had passed since Matthew last visited, and guilt resurfaced anew, a painful reminder of personal priorities lost amidst his driven ambition.

Jini's face lingered in his thoughts—a vivid reminder of what had once been joyful between them. He recognized the need to reach out, to bridge the increasing distance that characterized their relationship, to repair what had frayed due to his relentless focus on work.

Time, he reminded himself, was slipping away, and each moment mattered—a truth he struggled to embrace amid the frantic rhythm of his life. He shuddered as a painful memory surged, triggering an unwanted rush of the past.

* * *

ONE YEAR EARLIER
MATTHEW AND JINI'S CONDO
SEDONA, ARIZONA

"Come over here, baby," he called, his voice lifted by the warm air and the promise of sunset. "The sunset is beautiful! Let me take a picture of us."

The evening sun dipped below the horizon, casting a warm

light over everything. He took another deep hit from his three-foot glass bong, the kind that suggested he was either a dedicated smoker or trying too hard to impress a group of college dropouts.

Jini, who had just been beside him, now looked visibly irritated. She glared at him as if questioning his charm. "Stop taking pictures!" she exclaimed. "I can't stand you when you're smoking! It's disgusting!"

Matthew laughed, slightly high and riding the euphoric wave of the moment. "Baaaby, you need to be more open to this stuff! God created marijuana too, you know!" If he weren't so out of it, he might have realized how ridiculous he sounded – like a self-help guru for lazy stoners.

"READ THE BIBLE!!!" Jini shot back, frustration evident in her voice. "And for God's sake, stop talking to your ex!"

"Baby, Elizabeth's married with a kid! Stop being so threatened," Matthew defended, the urgency in his voice rising. "And I'm in love with YOU!" The proclamation hung in the air between them – bold but weighed down by their history.

This wasn't the first time they had danced this frustrating dance, and in a moment of desperation, Matthew waved a bag of Smileblazer weed as if it were a flag of surrender. "And who do you think paid for this place and that HUGE rock on your finger? God's greatest little green gift!"

He held the bag high, challenging her to acknowledge the irony of their situation – their financial reliance on a plant that some still considered sinful. Jini, clearly unfazed, stormed off, her frustration spilling over. He heard the bedroom door slam shut behind her, punctuating the moment with a finality that undermined his hopes.

* * *

Matthew blinked, suddenly back in the cluttered chaos of his office. He was still staring at that same three-foot bong, now feeling more like a burden than a trophy. A mix of regret and frustration stirred in him, prompting him to stand and hurl a baseball across the room.

The release was surprisingly satisfying. The bong shattered into countless pieces—a crash that resonated through the chaotic landscape of his workspace. The fragments sparkled under the overhead lights, a reflection of the countless fragilities he was juggling: his failing relationship with Jini, his complicated ties with his brother, Aaron, and the absence of his grandfather.

“Fuckin’ bong,” he muttered, watching the shards settle, feeling as if they symbolized the pieces of his heart.

PLANTING EDEN
CANNABS CULTIVATION POD #1
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Inside Cannabis Cultivation Pod #1, nicknamed the “Genesis Egg,” the air was filled with the earthy scent of marijuana. The Pod, the first in a global network of cultivation pods, served as a high-tech laboratory where plants grew, signaling a new agricultural era. Amidst the bright lights and organized hydroponic setups, Addy Goodman, Matthew’s uncle, seemed to be in his element—part visionary, part mad scientist, and wholly convinced he could change the world one plant at a time.

Addy took a draw from his one-hitter, his eyes sparkling with delight and a hint of self-importance. The large screen in front of him displayed the faces of cannabis growers from around the world, all engaged in their own endeavors, like an audience captivated by a TED Talk.

“Welcome, my magical garden gang!” he exclaimed, enthusiasm evident in his voice. “Thank you for joining our weekly call. We have a lot to cover today.” Leaning into the camera, his wild hair tousled, he added, “And I have a special guest! Joining us from Sedona, the illustrious Captain Pothead—Matthew, are you there?”

A moment later, Matthew's face appeared on screen, his oversized smile conveying a laid-back vibe. The contrast of his sleek office backdrop told the story of a different world where elegance and cannabis coexisted.

"Yes, Uncle! I'm here, ready to elevate the discourse!" Matthew chirped, taking a puff from his own one-hitter.

Addy inhaled deeply, his face lighting up. "As tradition dictates, we kick off these calls with a sampling of our latest crop." He held up a joint with enthusiasm. "Today, we're diving into my latest triumph, MaxMeshugina!"

Coughing slightly, Matthew let out a puff. "It's potent! Who came up with this?"

"Straight from my Swedish brother, Sven Jorgenson, at our first pod in Europe. Sven, introduce yourself!" Addy gestured to a new face on the call.

Sven, sitting comfortably in a rustic chair, greeted everyone. "Hello, everyone! Happy to join this gathering of cannabis connoisseurs."

Matthew leaned forward, inspecting the joint. "Kudos on this! It's... impressive! How did you cultivate such a beauty?"

Sven smiled broadly. "I've been collecting data from our growing pods for months, and through some clever algorithms, I developed an innovative watering schedule and even experimented with electrolyte water!"

Matthew took another puff, enjoying it. "Clever and delicious! You're truly the Einstein of weed!"

Sven bowed mockingly as if receiving an award, pride radiating from him.

Suddenly, Addy's demeanor shifted. "Matt, we need to talk about funding for Africa. I've got seven eager growers ready to join, and there's a lot of excitement!"

Matthew shifted in his chair, responding with an affected seriousness. "Relax, Uncle. I have investor presentations lined up next week. Patience is a virtue—just chill."

Addy twitched, scrutinizing him. "Cut that hippie-dippie crap, Matt! You're stalling!"

Matthew sighed—this was a familiar family dynamic.

"Look," Addy pressed, irritation clear, "you're controlling the platform's development without considering my advice! Planting Eden is MY idea!"

"Uncle, do you really think the partnership arrangement is unfair?" Matthew countered, trying to mask his irritation.

"Absolutely! I'm the EXPERT!" Addy exclaimed, frustration spilling over. "You're controlling everything, and it's exhausting!"

"I've said this before," Matthew replied calmly, "this is a collective. Everyone shares equally in creativity, resources, and ideas. We're all working toward a common vision for the greater good. You get that, right?"

Addy's frustration boiled over. "You don't know anything, nephew!" he shouted, his features contorting with anger.

"Uncle," Matthew said softly, "I'm on your side! You still own the Planting Eden Cultivation Platform outright. The collective made an exception for you. What's the

problem?"

In that moment, it was clear that Addy was overwhelmed.

"You're the problem!" Addy shouted, engulfed in anxiety. "You just won't listen to the EXPERT! One day, you'll see that Uncle Addy—who happens to be family—was right all along. You're not the genius you think you are!"

Matthew forced a smile, recognizing this was more about Addy's unresolved issues than anything else. He understood that Addy had faced numerous hardships—multiple divorces, financial struggles, and strained relationships with his sons. To Matthew, Addy was family, and family mattered. He believed that, with time, Uncle Addy would find healing.

"Oh, and go FUCK yourself," Addy added sharply.

Matthew allowed the smile to fade, accepting the tension as Addy's image disappeared from the screen. He was left staring at the remnants of the call, feeling the unresolved tension linger in the air. The irony of familial dysfunction settled over him, strangely comforting yet disorienting.

* * *

As Matthew leaned back in his chair, he was struck by the complexity of his emotions. Love and exasperation surged through him, filling his mind with memories of laughter that now felt distant, signaling that their family

ties were both strong and fraying.

With a resigned sigh, Matthew contemplated the roots of his current situation—the people who mattered most and the peace he sought with them. Maybe tonight, he would focus on reconnecting, bridging the gaps that seemed to widen as life advanced. For now, though, he would let the chaotic atmosphere settle and breathe deeply —this was the family business, after all, filled with highs, lows, and enough absurdity to keep him grounded.

Emerging from the building, Matthew squinted against the brightness of dusk. He had just wrapped up another day of blending business with family chaos, and now he was eager to escape. The sun hung low over the Arizona horizon, casting golden and orange hues that were visually striking, turning the parking lot of the Smileblazer headquarters into a vivid scene of ambition and family drama.

As he walked toward his Smileblazer Mercedes camper van, a collaboration that matched his over-the-top ambitions, he felt a mixture of pride and frivolity. To Matthew, it was a sign of his success—a shiny vehicle that proclaimed, “Look, Mom, I made it!”

The van gleamed in the sunset, sporting the bright design of Smileblazer, complete with swirling colors. With each step toward it, Matthew felt a hopeful heartbeat echoing against the van’s sleek lines. Maybe he could not only drive away but also outrun the lingering feelings of failure and heartbreak.

Opening the sliding front doors, Matthew surveyed the

van—the up-to-date kitchen he’d never used, a cozy nook at the back that seemed perfect for a getaway, and cubbyholes filled with Smileblazer branded products. He stepped into his little space, inhaling the scent of new plastic.

He grabbed an edible from one of the compartments, glancing out at the landscape and hoping that its potency might spark some emotional healing. With determination, he popped it into his mouth.

Settling into the driver’s seat, he turned the ignition. The engine hummed to life as Billy Ocean’s “Caribbean Queen” streamed from the Bluetooth speakers, filling the van with energy. He found himself bobbing his head to the beat, enjoying the moment.

“Caribbean queen, now we’re sharing the same dream...” he sang, tilting his head back as if he were the star of his own musical, lost in nostalgia. *“No more love on the run.”*

As he drove away, a cloud of red dirt formed behind him, blending with the colorful mountain reflections in the distance. The breathtaking view showcased twilight bathing the world in soft light, shadows stretching across the landscape like an impressionist painting.

But as the song neared its end, the mood shifted from buoyancy to introspection. Matthew parked in front of Cathedral Rock and turned off the engine. The music transitioned seamlessly to Paul Young’s “Every Time You Go Away.” The melancholic notes pulled him into a more reflective state.

He glanced at his phone, noting the familiar line of missed calls and unanswered texts, with nothing from Jini. The silence pressed down on him, heavy and disappointing.

"Every time you go away, you take a piece of me with you," played in the background, amplifying Matthew's sense of isolation.

He envisioned Jini's face, her laughter a stark contrast to the shadows in his mind. He recalled sun-soaked afternoons spent together by the pool in Fountain Hills, warm moments that had felt timeless. God, he missed those days of connection.

"God, I miss her," he whispered, the admission almost a plea. He let out a resigned breath as he turned off the engine, the sudden stillness echoing the chaos of thoughts inside his head.

The chorus washed over him as he remembered their last fight, frustration hanging between them like an unwelcome presence.

Suddenly, his phone rang, cutting through the melancholy.

* * *

The name illuminated on the screen was unexpected and unwelcome: Elizabeth, his ex-wife. Matthew hesitated for a moment before accepting the call, uncertainty fluttering in his chest.

The screen lit up to reveal Elizabeth in her home office,

her decor carefully arranged with books and framed photos reflecting her curated life. She wore a business casual top and smiled warmly at him.

“How are you doing?” she asked, her tone filled with genuine concern. “Long time no talk.”

“I’m okay,” Matthew admitted, though the weight of recent conversations lingered. “Uncle Addy is driving me nuts, the love of my life won’t talk to me, my parents are constantly up my ass—just the usual family circus.” As he spoke, a hint of laughter threatened to break through his frustration, the absurdity of it all starting to diffuse the tension.

Elizabeth smiled knowingly, as if sensing his struggle. Realizing it was his turn to ask about her life, he said, “How are you?”

“I’m good!” she declared. “You need to come see the baby! He’s walking and talking... he’s a riot.”

Matthew couldn’t help but inject some sarcasm. “Yeah, but I can’t right now with everything going on. Captain Pothead has responsibilities.”

She tilted her head slightly, becoming more serious. “I’m worried about you, Matt. I think you should consider talking to someone.”

Matthew felt defensive at her suggestion, as if she had offered an unwanted service instead of support. “I’ve got plenty of people to talk to. That’s the problem—everyone is so worried about me. Just let me heal on my own.”

She nodded, acknowledging the barrier he was putting up. “Alright, I won’t push,” she said, adjusting her tone.

"Mark says hi, by the way... He really wants to meet you."

"Remind me to take an extra edible before that," Matthew quipped, trying to force a lightness he didn't feel.

"Come on, he's a good guy. Just because you're my ex doesn't mean we can't all hang out."

"Yeah, right. Because that always goes smoothly." He rolled his eyes, half-joking.

Their conversation continued, shifting between nostalgia and current concerns. As they neared the end of the call, Matthew caught a hint of warmth in her demeanor that reminded him of their shared history filled with both affection and irritation.

"Well, I gotta go," he said with a sigh. "We'll talk soon."

"Okay. We better. And seriously, take a break from the pot!"

After ending the call, he leaned back in the seat, feeling the evening air wrap around him. He felt both solace and confusion, like being at the top of a roller coaster, ready for the drop.

With his heart racing, he turned off the van's interior light, letting the quiet of the Sedona night seep into his thoughts. Memories of Jini and Addy swirled in his mind, blurring together. He longed for clarity amid the chaos. As stars began to twinkle in the sky, he resolved to confront the reality of his life—injured but defiantly hopeful. Perhaps tomorrow, he would take a step forward—toward the conversations he had been avoiding and the connections he desperately craved.

With a deep breath, he prepared himself for whatever

came next, the shadows and echoes of his past swirling around him and leaving only a faint hint of possibility.

Lying back on the surprisingly comfortable bed, Matthew stared at the ceiling, illuminated by a nearby lamp. The sun had set, but his mind remained active. Memories flickered behind his closed eyelids, and a wave of nostalgia surged forward, not just a recollection but a poignant flashback to twelve years earlier steeped in the bittersweet essence of love and shattered dreams.

* * *

JUNE 11, 2011
MATTHEW AND ELIZABETH'S WEDDING
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The Standard Club in Chicago was an elegant venue, where rich fabrics and polished marble set the stage for excitement. It was late spring, a season filled with idealism and the promises that often accompanied weddings. Guests mingled, their laughter and whispers weaving through the air, adding to the festive atmosphere as they gathered for Matthew and Elizabeth's wedding ceremony.

Matthew, 29 and looking youthful in a tailored suit, stood at the altar. Sweat pooled at the back of his neck, a reminder of the expectations weighing down on him. Uncertainty churned in his stomach, refusing to settle as he prepared for what was supposed

to be a joyful occasion. Today was meant to symbolize the joining of two lives, yet doubt murmured beneath the surface.

And then Elizabeth appeared, gliding down the aisle in a radiant, ivory gown. For a moment, time seemed to stand still, and it felt as if only the two of them existed in that space. As she walked toward him with her father by her side, all thoughts of the past and future faded, replaced by the vibrant love and promise of their journey ahead.

The Rabbi stood beneath the chuppah, embodying years of tradition and wisdom. On a small table next to him rested a glass etched with **a Swastika**, a symbol of darkness that carried deep significance for those who understood its history. The glass drew the attention of everyone present, a reminder of both the past and the power of transformation.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the Rabbi began, his strong voice cutting through the celebratory air, "we are gathered here today to celebrate the union of Matthew and Elizabeth – a testament to the enduring power of love."

Guests leaned forward, holding their breath in anticipation. "But before we proceed, I must share a story that connects this moment to something profoundly significant."

Matthew's heart raced as he recalled family stories shared through the years – tales woven with pain and triumph. The Rabbi continued, shifting to a more serious tone. "This glass represents far more than its appearance. It carries the marks of hatred and oppression, but it also embodies resilience and love. Gerry Goodman, Matthew's grandfather, sent this glass home from World War II after storming Normandy."

All eyes turned toward Gerry, sitting proudly among the

crowd, history etched into every line of his face. In that moment, he was not just a grandfather but a living testament to countless sacrifices made for family and love.

"Gerry envisioned a day," the Rabbi said, raising the glass high, "when his family would stomp on this symbol of hate, reclaiming its power and triumphing over darkness. Today, as we witness Matthew and Elizabeth's union, we honor that vision by breaking this glass."

The atmosphere shifted as tears pooled in many eyes and emotions surfaced in joy and connection. Matthew felt the weight of that legacy seep into him. This day was not merely a backdrop for their vows but a reclamation of their family narrative.

"Let us now join together in breaking this glass," the Rabbi urged, his voice resonant in the stillness that followed. "With this act, we shatter the remnants of hatred and embrace the enduring legacy of love and hope that the Goodman family has bestowed upon us."

Matthew's gaze shifted from the smiling faces of friends and family to the glass resting beneath him, wrapped in cloth, heavy with meaning. Sweat dripped down his face, a sign of the anxiety knotting in his gut.

*With everyone captivated, Matthew took a deep breath, the weight of expectation pressing down. As he raised his leg, nerves tightened every muscle. **Boom.** He stomped down on the glass, the sound explosive – an echo that shattered the air, signaling a reclamation of power both exhilarating and terrifying.*

The sound resonated in the space, a catharsis as history seemed to fracture, mirroring Matthew's complex emotions – hope mingled with anxiety. Love, he realized, was delicate; it

could spark joy or splinter under reality's weight.

As applause and cheers surrounded him, Matthew looked toward Gerry. He saw pride in his grandfather's eyes, a man who had withstood time and trauma. Yet, Matthew couldn't shake the uncertainty clouding his own vows, feeling the promises made today linger precariously, like the shards of glass scattered at his feet.

Amidst the celebration, he felt the weight of his decisions pressing down, entwining love and duty, leaving behind an unsettling sense of foreboding. Was this union truly a triumph over darkness, or just another illusion disguising the complex history of their family?

* * *

Matthew jolted awake from the dream, the vivid images of the wedding day still fresh in his mind. Sweat clung to his brow as he considered the weight of time pressing down on him. "I need to see my grandfather," he murmured, urgency threatening to sweep him away like autumn leaves in a storm.

He grabbed his laptop, its cool surface grounding him as he navigated to the American Airlines website, fingers racing across the keyboard. Time slipped away like sand through an hourglass, each passing second a reminder of the emotional distance growing between him and his family.

After booking the ticket, he sighed heavily, closing the laptop and allowing the memories of the wedding day to

settle back into his mind. Phil Collins' "Take Me Home" began to filter softly from the Bluetooth speaker, a melancholy undertone threading through the van—a reminder of home, family, and the legacy intertwined within their fragile roots.

Matthew pulled the sheets tighter around himself, cocooned in a mix of anxiety and resolve. Tonight would not be another episode of avoidance; he was ready to confront the complexities of the relationships that shaped his life.

"Tomorrow," he whispered into the silence, hoping to hold onto the weight of connection as shadows deepened outside. Each flicker whispered promises of reconciliation—a reminder that love, like glass, could be both beautiful and painfully fragile.

The interior of the airplane cabin felt both claustrophobic and intimate, with the hum of engines and muffled conversations creating a unique soundscape. Sunlight streamed through the small windows, casting golden rectangles on the passengers' faces while fluffy clouds drifted below them, reminding Matthew of the fantasies he had woven in his youth. At this moment, he felt a mix of nostalgia and anticipation, like lingering in the space between sleep and wakefulness.

Settled in the plush confines of first class, Matthew leaned back in his seat, savoring the luxury that came with his ticket upgrade—a small victory in the daily grind of adulthood. As the flight attendant's voice announced the necessity of buckling seat belts, Matthew glanced at the passengers around him. They were wrapped up in their own dramas—clattering trays and the occasional squabble over armrests—as if they were characters in a farce.

Then, from the corner of his eye, a young man in the adjacent seat, sporting an impressive set of dreadlocks, turned to him with excitement.

"Hey, you're Captain Pothead, right?" he asked, his voice bursting with energy to match his tie-dye shirt.

Matthew couldn't help but laugh. "Yes, I am," he replied, leaning into the nickname like a well-worn joke.

How had he become that person? But perhaps absurdity was just another word for authenticity.

"Bro, let's get blazed! You got any of that Sedona Seduction on you?" The man's eager eyes sparkled—his excitement was infectious.

"Well, I wasn't planning on sharing," Matthew said, a playful grin spreading across his face, "but for you, I might just make an exception." He pulled out a small stash from his backpack, revealing the treasures inside as if he were showcasing prized candies.

"Thanks, man! This stuff is legendary!" the passenger said, taking the gummy with reverence. They both readied for their shared indulgence, the kind of camaraderie that smoothed over barriers.

"Before we partake," Matthew said, putting his hands together, "let's set an intention—for healing."

The passenger chuckled. "You're really going full zen here, huh?"

"Honestly, it's the only way to do it," Matthew replied, chewing the gummy and savoring the sweet taste of Sedona Seduction.

"Why are you headed to Chicago?" the passenger asked, intrigued yet unaware of the emotional depth behind Matthew's journey.

"I'm visiting my grandfather. He's 102," Matthew said, the words spilling out reluctantly, carrying emotional weight.

"102? Wow! That's incredible! My grandmother just turned 97!" The man's response was enthusiastic but also

revealed an odd competition as if they were in a reality show trying to one-up each other.

Matthew frowned slightly, irritation creeping in. “Right,” he sighed. “Listen, I’ve got some work to do. Could you excuse me?” He opened his laptop, diving into the productive focus that offered him a break from conversation.

But his seatmate, eager for interaction, wasn’t ready to let him retreat. “Whoa! Hold on! What’s this?” the passenger said, leaning in with curiosity. “‘Escape the Simulation’ – that’s a killer name!”

Suppressing a sigh, Matthew replied, “Yeah, it’s catchy. It’s our new strain. It’s like unlocking the mysteries of the universe.”

“Gnaaaarly,” the passenger murmured, his enthusiasm waning into a blissful daze, typical of someone overly absorbed in leisure. For Matthew, it was just another day at the office.

* * *

As daylight faded into night, the airplane cabin lit up with flickering lights, jolting Matthew from his creative reverie. “Welcome to Chicago,” the overhead speaker announced, the flight attendant sounding almost robotic. The warmth of summer air seeped through the cabin walls as if the city anticipated his arrival, wrapping him once more in its familiar humidity. He couldn’t help but smile at the irony – he had escaped the dry heat of Arizona only to

embrace Chicago's steaminess.

Preparing to disembark, he stretched his weary limbs and retrieved his carry-on. The terminal stretched before him, bustling with excited travelers and families, all signs of summer in full swing.

Matthew navigated through the crowd and called his father, Allan. "Yeah, I'm just grabbing an Uber," he reported, trying to sound focused.

"Any word from Jini?" Allan's voice carried paternal concern.

"No, she still hasn't called. Remember in this delightful tale, I'm the devil?" Matthew joked, attempting to lighten the mood despite his uncertainty.

"Make sure to give your grandfather a hug and kiss for me," Allan urged, his voice soothing amidst the din of the terminal.

"I will, Dad," Matthew promised, though a twinge of anxiety crept in. He wondered whether this visit would bring joy or merely resurrect what he had avoided.

Once outside, the humid Chicago air welcomed him as he climbed into the backseat of the waiting Uber. The driver, a young man with a friendly smile, greeted him warmly.

"I see we're off to the Courtyard Marriott in Glenbrook. Is that right?" the driver confirmed, glancing at Matthew and then at his phone.

"Yup, that's correct." Matthew nodded, tension fluttering at the edge of his thoughts.

"Wait," the driver exclaimed, his eyes brightening with realization. "You're that weed guy... right?"

"Yup, Captain Pothead himself," Matthew replied, amused by the attention. "Thanks for the lift."

"Awesome! Mind if we snap a selfie for my Instagram?" the driver asked, excitement bubbling over. "I love your product! It's really helped with my anxiety."

As Matthew posed for the picture, he felt both amused and slightly uncomfortable, aware that this strange fame was becoming part of his identity. The driver snapped the photo, capturing the moment as Matthew grinned, playfully striking a pose.

"Fuck yeah!" the driver cheered, his enthusiasm evident as he saved the photo, pleased with the encounter.

* * *

Entering the bustling lobby of the Courtyard Marriott, Matthew was surrounded by the energy of summer—families returning from tourist attractions and children darting through the hall, their laughter punctuating the busy atmosphere. The front desk was overwhelmed, a chaotic ballet of demands colliding with the stress of vacation season.

He approached the receptionist, who appeared to be juggling multiple tasks. "I'm so sorry, can you hold for just a minute?" she asked, her voice overwhelmed.

"No problem," Matthew replied, smiling at her frazzled demeanor. Their interaction felt like a sitcom, and he was

just a guest star.

After a lengthy wait, she finally turned her attention to him, her expression shifting from frantic to relieved. "I'm all yours," she said with renewed purpose.

"I was hoping for a room upgrade," Matthew began playfully.

As she typed in his information, her expression changed dramatically. "Got you the executive suite," she offered with a flirty wink, as if they shared a delightful secret.

"Thank you!" Matthew said genuinely. He pulled out some Sedona Seduction gummies and handed them to her as a thank-you gesture. "Here's a little something for your trouble."

She glanced at the brightly packaged edibles, recognition dawning on her. "Captain Pothead, huh? Enjoy your stay, Captain." She winked.

Matthew smiled, buoyed by their brief connection, even as he mentally noted to keep his reputation from overshadowing his life.

With the room key in hand, he caught sight of the receptionist's name scribbled next to her number. Was he really prepared to engage with a potential romantic interest? Jini would go nuts. "I'm here on strict family business," he said, asserting his commitment.

"Aye aye, Captain," she replied, and as he turned toward the elevators, he grinned at the playful exchange, feeling as if he had stepped into a whimsical indie film.

Inside his hotel room, Matthew found solace in the quiet—a refuge from the frantic energy of the lobby. He sprawled on the bed, staring at the ceiling and allowing the weight of the day to lift from him. Memories of Jini surged back with vivid clarity, pushing against his thoughts.

In his mind, he saw her laughing, her infectious giggle brightening their time spent overlooking the pier at Rocky Point, the setting sun creating a warm, familiar glow. For a moment, he could almost feel her presence next to him, recalling the shared whispers and quiet joys.

His reverie was interrupted by the sound of his phone ringing. “Hey, Cuz,” he answered, relief flooding his voice at the sound of cousin Jeremy’s familiar energy.

“You at the hotel?” Jeremy’s lively tone broke through Matthew’s nostalgic fog. “You wanna grab dinner?”

“Yeah, I’m in the mood for some Pita Pit. Sound good?” Matthew asked, feeling his earlier nervousness ease in the warmth of family.

“Oh hell yeah! Mind if Kevin tags along?” Jeremy’s enthusiasm was contagious, pulling Matthew further into the moment. Inviting cousin Kevin was also a good idea; he always provided some laughs.

“The more the merrier! I’ll meet you in your car in the parking lot. We should smoke a joint before we go in,” Matthew replied, laughing as remnants of his tension melted away.

“As tradition dictates” Jeremy chuckled, the promise of

good food and cousinly camaraderie wrapping around them like a warm blanket. It was a welcome distraction from the complexity of his thoughts.

As he hung up, Matthew lingered on a sense of wistfulness—the pull of memory mingling with the rhythm of the present. He thought of Jini and their connection, a bridge forged in laughter now marred by distance, the emotional landscape shifting as clouds drifted overhead.

In that quiet hotel room, as he prepared to connect with family, there was a hope fluttering within him. Tonight could be a step toward mending those connections. He was going to see his grandfather, armed with humor and the belief that the pieces could be put back together.

The night air was brisk as Matthew approached the SUV driven by his cousin Jeremy. The new Chevy Smileblazer gleamed under the flickering streetlights. It was a bold mix of practicality and style—the kind of vehicle that seemed to invite attention. Its glossy black finish and eye-catching fiery decals made it look like it was ready to be a part of a party.

Matthew tapped lightly on the tinted passenger window, excitement bubbling beneath the surface. Inside, the sounds of AC/DC filled the air, setting the tone for what promised to be a fun evening. Laughter from Jeremy and Kevin filled the car, their camaraderie creating a warm atmosphere.

“Looks like our plug has arrived,” Kevin said theatrically, his eyes lighting up when he saw Matthew.

“Please, I prefer ‘Captain Pothead,’” Matthew retorted, sliding into the backseat with flair. Jeremy and Kevin were part of the original crew, the ones who knew him before he became the larger-than-life personality he was today. “So, what trouble are we brewing tonight, gentlemen?”

“Got any goodies for us?” Kevin leaned in eagerly, like a child hoping to see a toy.

With all the gravitas of a showman, Matthew pulled three meticulously rolled joints from his jacket pocket.

“Tonight, I present to you three journeys, each a gateway to another dimension,” he declared, holding up the first joint. “This is Sedona Seduction—a blissful head high that feels like a warm hug.”

“Eh, I’ve been smoking that for the last month,” Jeremy replied, dismissively waving his hand.

“Alright, how about this next one?” Matthew said, showcasing the second joint. “This is MaxMeshugina—Uncle Herbacious’s favorite. It guarantees dizzying trips and manic laughter, but you might come away with an emotional hangover.”

“Hard pass!” Kevin interjected, laughter bubbling up. “I get those effects just from being around Uncle. I’ll save my brain cells for important things, like figuring out which Netflix series to ruin next.”

Undeterred, Matthew held up the third joint, rolled in paper covered with tiny ones and zeroes. “And this is our newest strain: Escape the Simulation!”

Jeremy and Kevin’s eyes lit up, excitement washing over them.

“I see we’ve found our winner,” Matthew declared, his voice tinged with irony. “Buckle up, cousins; this ride is about to get wild.”

* * *

Inside the nursing home cafeteria, 102-year-old Gerry Goodman sat amidst clinking dishes and chatter. Anticipation shimmered in his eyes at the thought of his

grandson Matthew's visit. He wore a festive look as he sat with close friends.

The room was lively but slightly subdued, the air carrying the scent of overcooked vegetables and nostalgia. The sunlight filtering through the windows cast long shadows over the tables.

Elliot Goldfarb leaned in, a mix of sincerity and grumpiness on his face. "Gerry, I'm serious. That marijuana is more harmful than you think," he insisted, channeling the fervor of a self-appointed guardian of decency, determined to make a point amid the casual conversations.

Gerry shifted in his seat, chuckling lightly. "You do know, Elliot, that marijuana is legal now? It's not the demon plant of old."

"Yes, I know, Gerry," Elliot replied, crossing his arms defensively. "But I don't agree with what Matthew does for a living. My grandson Jacob came home high on that pot—he's only thirteen!"

Esther, seated nearby, looked worried. "Is he okay?"

Elliot rubbed his temple, as if trying to fend off a headache. "He was acting all meshuginah, like he was trying out for that absurdist play we saw last year."

Gerry chuckled softly, appreciating the levity. "Well, according to Matthew, it makes you highly creative. I keep telling him he should write a book."

"I'm serious, Gerry," Elliot repeated, an authority in his tone despite his lack of awareness of modern attitudes. "That stuff is more harmful than you think."

Gerry chuckled again, shaking his head lightly. "I'll let

Matthew know your concerns,” he replied, acknowledging the lightness of the conversation despite its serious undertones.

* * *

Back in the Chevy Smileblazer, Kevin turned the key in the ignition, shifting the atmosphere in the SUV from exuberance to camaraderie.

Laughter erupted around them, fueled by shared experiences and the anticipation of their indulgence. They felt like three cousins navigating the evening with the enthusiasm of a rock band on tour.

“So, let me get this straight,” Jeremy began with mock seriousness. “You’re saying Jesus Christ was some kind of super-advanced spiritual extraterrestrial?”

“Exactly!” Matthew replied, feigning confidence. “He was an inter-dimensional being from another star system. Maybe he was just trying to unlock our spiritual powers—kind of a cosmic TLC.”

“Dude, that’s insane,” Kevin laughed, enjoying the absurdity.

“You see,” Matthew continued, leaning in, “Space Jesus was teaching us how to achieve enlightenment and unlock our spiritual DNA. You know that 90% we don’t use? It’s not junk; it’s a treasure trove of possibilities.”

“Really?” Jeremy asked, half intrigued and half amused.

“Of course! It’s just the other side of the universe we’ve yet to discover!” Matthew exclaimed, his enthusiasm

spreading. "Honestly, I should write a book. Through plants, I'm starting to uncover all this crazy stuff—and maybe even peek inside God's mind. Jesus must've been the OG pothead; he had it all figured out."

"How much of this have you been smoking?" Kevin wheezed, laughter escaping him as he coughed from a puff.

"It's good shit, right?" Matthew replied, pride swelling within him.

"Damn! It's getting late," Jeremy said dramatically, checking his phone. "Zayde's waiting for us. Kevin, you wanna come?"

"Sorry, guys, I've got to get home to tuck Timmy into bed," Kevin said, sputtering from the smoke. "Fatherhood and all that responsibility kind of hits after a point."

"Give Zayde a hug and kiss for me," Kevin added, waving as he left, laughter trailing off.

* * *

Back in the nursing home cafeteria, Gerry, Elliot, and Esther shared humorous stories about their grandchildren, trying to understand the rapid pace of modern life.

"You know," Gerry said, with a blend of experience and humor, "we need to be more open to what our kids and grandkids are going through. The world is a lot more meshugina now."

Elliot, usually a contrarian, finally relented. "Maybe that pot does help with dealing with things... But I'm not trying it. No way!"

Gerry laughed heartily. "Got it, Elliot. I hear you." He glanced at his watch, noting that it was almost time for Matthew's arrival. Excusing himself from the group, he stood with a slight creak of effort.

As he walked through the nursing home, residents greeted him with smiles and laughter, celebrating his presence. His vigor felt invigorating—a reminder of the connections he had nurtured over the years.

"Catch you later, gang!" Gerry called, buoyed by the warmth of the community—a testament to the relationships he cherished. The joy that followed him was a comfort, and he eagerly anticipated sharing those moments with Matthew.

In this rich tapestry of family and memories, Gerry prepared for the reunion, ready to embrace the chaos and joy that reaffirmed the vitality of their shared history. There was a lot to catch up on.

The Glenbrook Nursing Home stood before Matthew and Jeremy as an unremarkable structure, a place of aging memories wrapped in the tones of institutional necessity. Yet, within its walls, life thrived, filled with the bittersweet realities of aging, where laughter often masked the shadows of solitude. As they pushed through the revolving doors, sounds of clinking dishes and cheerful chatter greeted them, echoing the everyday chaos inside.

Matthew felt a surge of energy as he exchanged glances with Jeremy, both sensing that the evening would be memorable. "This should be interesting showing up here blazed," Matthew quipped, his humor breaking the tension.

Inside, the receptionist, a cheerful woman in her fifties, jumped from her seat upon seeing them. "You're here!" she exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. "Your grandfather has been talking about your visit ALL day!"

"Nice to see he still has the energy to stir up excitement," Jeremy remarked with a smirk. "How's the centurion doing today, Norma?"

"Whatever joy you two bring him lifts his spirits!" Norma replied, radiating warmth.

"Oh, we're gonna lift his spirits very 'HIGH!'" Matthew

declared, pulling a bag of joints from his backpack and offering one to her with a flourish.

“Awww, no you didn’t?!” Norma exclaimed, caught between surprise and delight.

“That’s how the Goodmans roll... like a joint,” Matthew snickered, leaving Norma shaking her head in disbelief as he and Jeremy headed down the hallway.

As they walked down the dimly lit corridor, the air was thick with the scent of overcooked vegetables and the soft sounds of crossword puzzles being filled in. Each step echoed softly, reminding them of the lives lived within these walls. They stopped in front of Gerry’s room, and Matthew knocked in a familiar rhythm.

“Come in, boys...” Gerry’s voice drifted from inside, warm yet faint, offering a welcoming invitation.

Stepping inside, they were greeted by a room filled with reminders of the past. Gerry was settled in his recliner, a cozy throw draped over his lap, with soft strains of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra playing in the background. Matthew and Jeremy leaned down to plant affectionate kisses on the top of his bald head, a ritual that had survived the years.

“Hey, Zayde,” Matthew said, warmth flooding through him. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too,” Gerry replied, his voice rich with experience, the kind of warmth that felt like a hug.

“Sorry we’re so late,” Jeremy added, settling into the familiar chaos.

“It’s okay. Come sit down. What’s that smell?” Gerry

asked, eyes sparkling with mischief as he took in the boys' entrance.

Matthew turned down the music and eased into the moment. "Sorry, we've been enjoying the family goods," he declared aware of his indulgence. "Anyways, I brought you something special." He reached into his bag, revealing a gift-wrapped box.

Gerry raised an eyebrow, skepticism mingling with affection. "What's this? My friend Elliot says I should be careful around you boys." He held the box aloft, curiosity lighting his eyes.

"Relax, Zayde," Matthew assured him, laughter bubbling beneath the surface. "You should really try it. All your friends should." Carefully, he unveiled the contents: a one-hitter and a bag of Sedona Seduction nestled inside. The aroma wafted up, rich and inviting—a celebration of life's simple pleasures. "It'll help with your glaucoma. You're 102; what have you got to lose?"

"Ha! My mind!" Gerry shot back, laughter filling the air, reminding them that humor could brighten even the simplest moments.

Matthew imagined Gerry and Elliot surrounded by other residents, sharing a joint on the patio while reminiscing about their lives.

Gerry snapped him back to reality, focusing on Matthew. "You didn't come all this way just to drop this off. My boy," he began, his voice deepening, "why are you really here? I appreciate this gift, but there's more on your mind."

Matthew shifted uncomfortably, the truth hanging in the air. “It’s Jini, isn’t it?” Gerry pressed, his knowing gaze urging him to confess.

The name hit Matthew hard. Memories of their last argument flooded back—words exchanged in anger that lingered like smoke from a forgotten fire. “I don’t know what to do, Zayde,” he admitted, vulnerability spilling out. “I feel like she uses me as a punching bag. She has so much trauma but rejects help... and she thinks this” —he gestured toward the pot —“means I work for the devil!”

Gerry listened patiently, absorbing Matthew’s turmoil with the understanding that came from a lifetime of struggles. “You can’t force someone to embrace healing,” he said gently.

“I know!” Matthew lamented, frustration weighing on him. “That’s what everyone says. I’m surrounded by ‘counseling can save you’ platitudes, but none of it seems to mean anything.”

“Tell me, my boy,” Gerry said softly, “why do you love her?”

Matthew paused at the weight of the question. “She’s my everything,” he replied slowly, each word weighted with affection. “She’s beautiful, the strongest woman I know. But her pride... It’s suffocating. She’s so wrapped up in her faith and Jesus! Nothing I say convinces her I’m a good man, even with my last name being Goodman!”

In the corner, Jeremy let out a soft chuckle as Matthew continued to vent.

"Worst of all, she gaslights me... says I need to find Christ. Jesus Christ! I'm Jewish!"

Jeremy burst out laughing, lightening the mood as Matthew's frustrations collided with humor.

Gerry nodded, not fully grasping the complexities of Matthew's life. "My boy," he stated, tone thick with wisdom, "she's not ready. YOU are not ready. Look at yourself—you're turning into your Uncle Addy."

"Ouch," Matthew muttered, the truth hitting hard. The laughter in the room faded, leaving a heavy weight.

Gerry's gaze drifted to a photograph on the wall, a moment of him and his late wife, Gita—young and vibrant, permanently captured. "From the moment I met your Bubby, she was fiery, just like your Jini. Stubborn, yes, but I loved her through it all," he reflected, a gleam in his eyes as he recalled his wife of over 70 years. "I need to tell you more about your Bubby and how I managed to deal with her," he added with a chuckle.

Matthew considered his grandfather's long marriage. The two had always seemed inseparable, a reminder of enduring love. When Gita passed, Matthew struggled to understand how Gerry would carry on without her.

"Yeah, tell me more, Zaydie. I could definitely learn from you and Bubby," Matthew encouraged, feeling warmth from Gerry's accumulated wisdom.

Gerry smiled, pleased that his words were reaching Matthew's heart, bridging generations with stories of love and resilience.

* * *

OCTOBER 23, 1946
HILLEL STUDENT SYNOGOGUE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

The Hillel Student Synagogue on the University of Illinois campus was bathed in the soft light of early evening as students filed in, filling the air with nervous laughter mixed with the faint scent of burnt candles and old books. It was 1946, a time when childhood innocence intersected with the realities of a world recovering from war.

Inside the small sanctuary, a handful of students gathered for Shabbat services, balancing sacredness with a familiar routine. The men wore yarmulkes and tallitot, while the women dressed conservatively. At the front of the room, the student rabbi led them in prayer, his voice steady amidst youthful restlessness.

"Baruch atah adonai elohenu melach ha-olam, vyit gadash vyit gadal schme rabah," he intoned, the words evoking tradition and reverence.

Gerry, seated in the third row, followed along in the prayer book resting on his lap. The flickering candles cast shadows across his face, concealing the uncertainty in his eyes until the sound of giggles erupted behind him, breaking the solemnity.

"Shhhhh!" Gerry hissed, finger pressed to his lips, but the laughter only intensified.

"Whoa, he's feisty!" Susan Saper, Gita's best friend, said, her

teasing voice punctuating the moment.

"I think he's cute!" chirped Mildred, Gita's younger sister, leaning in with youthful audacity.

Then Gerry's gaze landed on Gita. Their eyes locked for the first time, a moment charged with unspoken connection.

"Do you know where you are in the Siddur?" he asked, condescension creeping into his tone. "Do you need MY assistance?"

Gita shot back quickly, "NO, I don't need YOUR HELP!"

Her response triggered more giggles from her friends, and Gerry's irritation flared as he turned back to the Rabbi, feeling the sacredness of the moment slip away. But when the Rabbi glanced over and Gita winked at him, warmth surged through him, dispelling his annoyance.

* * *

Gerry sat in his nursing home room, reflecting on that cherished day. He glanced at his grandson Matthew, who sat across from him, looking anxious.

"Your grandmother was a challenging woman," Gerry began, his tone light but laden with nostalgia. "I knew from the moment I saw her that she was meant for me."

Matthew bit his lip, caught between family duty and his own turmoil. His mind raced with unanswered texts and looming deadlines, yet he sat there, on the verge of something profound.

"Matthew," Gerry continued, a smile spreading across his face, "the greatest loves are often the most challenging,

requiring strength and patience.”

Matthew felt a familiar pang of recognition. “Yeah, well, what they don’t tell you is that patience can be a real pain,” he replied, glancing down at his phone, where thirty-seven unopened texts blinked like reminders of his obligations. “It’s fine,” he added, trying to deflect the pressure, but his tone revealed his stress.

Gerry nodded, his gaze shifting to the lockbox on a shelf, where the infamous Swastika glass rested. “Well, look at that,” he said, a hint of humor in his voice. “You have plenty to keep you busy, don’t you?”

Matthew managed a half-smile, a fragile attempt to mask his unease. “Yeah, and I’ll be sure to tell those texts to be patient.”

Gerry’s eyes returned to Matthew, gentle but probing. “Come on, Matthew, you have the world at your fingertips... Give her some time.”

Matthew avoided his gaze for a moment, truth hanging heavy in the air.

Gerry continued, sensing Matthew’s pain. “As you said, she has so much trauma, right? You can’t fix her. Work on fixing yourself.”

“I know!” Matthew replied, frustration seeping through his composure. He pulled the pot from his pocket. “I’m the devil, right?”

Gerry’s expression softened with sympathy. “It sounds like you’re both caught in your own traumas. Sometimes, you have to let people find their own way to healing.”

Matthew sighed, feeling the walls closing in. “But the

collective could help her! We help a lot of people. If she only knew what this could do for HER healing—along with all the other plant-based medicines were developing like magic mushrooms! Psilocybin is amazing, Zayde, for healing!”

“Ah, Matthew,” Gerry began patiently. “Your passion is clear. But love is a dance, and right now it seems like you might need to step back. Maybe you’re both not ready for what comes next.”

The truth hit Matthew hard. “Ouch,” he muttered as the realization sunk in.

“Do I have to remind you again how your tone and frustration resemble your Uncle Addy’s?” Gerry stated, a hint of concern in his voice.

Matthew felt as if he’d been punched. “I’ll take that as a compliment... in an insult sort of way. Uncle Addy helps a lot of people.”

Gerry smiled at the jab, and for a brief moment, they connected at a deeper level. “From the moment I met your Bubby, she was a force of nature—just like your Jini. Sometimes, love means riding the waves together, even when you think you’re on separate boats.”

The weight of Gerry’s words resonated with Matthew, reminding him that life often centered on enduring challenges together. The bond between them surged with acknowledgement of their shared history.

“Alright, I need to eat something,” Matthew said, his voice lifting slightly. “If I don’t address this emotional upheaval on a full stomach, I might start crying into my

food.”

“Eat well, my boy,” Gerry replied, patting Matthew’s shoulder in a gesture of grounding affection. “Remember, sometimes just showing up is the most important part.”

Matthew smiled, feeling warmth amidst swirling doubts. As he stood to leave, he realized he was caught between nostalgia and resolve, where family ties echoed against the harshness of reality. Love could be both tender and brutal, woven into the fabric of their lives. He understood that the journey ahead would be complex, and he was ready to navigate it, believing the pieces could be put back together.

The kitchen of Elizabeth's suburban home was a lively mix of chaos and comfort, where love was expressed through slightly burnt dinner rolls and the sounds of laughter. The air was filled with the warm aromas of garlic and sautéed onions, wrapping around visitors like a comforting embrace. Sunlight streamed through the windows, casting patterns on the colorful artwork that adorned the walls; each frame seemed to tell stories of family moments, triumphs over everyday challenges, and lazy Sunday afternoons.

Toys were scattered across the floor, while Maya, the cat, patrolled her territory, her presence a silent ownership of the space. A smile spread across Elizabeth's face, a swell of pride flooding her—she had achieved her domestic dreams.

From her favorite spot in the kitchen, Elizabeth reigned supreme, wielding her spatula with authority as she orchestrated an extravagant feast. Her hair was casually tied back, flour dusting her sleeves, and her face radiated with the energy of someone in her element.

"Oh, that smells great!" Mark declared, appearing at the staircase, his playful swagger indicating that he had just conquered his own small challenge.

With a playful squeeze, he snuck a pinch of Elizabeth's behind, eliciting a giggle that mingled with the clanging of pots and pans. They were a picture of domestic bliss, love thriving amid the hustle—like a family gathering where everyone felt intimately included.

Just as the warmth enveloped the room, the doorbell rang, injecting a jolt of anticipation into the atmosphere. "Oh my God, oh my God! He's here!!" Elizabeth shouted, excitement tinged with a hint of nervousness.

"Relax," Mark said, adjusting the stove with the confidence of a seasoned chef. He gathered baby Isaac into his arms. "He's your ex, and he's a good guy!" He flashed her a reassuring smile, which seemed to soften the complexities of their history.

Matthew lingered just outside the doorway as Mark swung the door open. "Matthew!" Mark beamed, enthusiasm barely contained as he pulled Matthew into a hug that conveyed acceptance.

"I've brought some goodies for my family from my past matrimony," Matthew announced with a playful tone, a shield against the emotional nuances of the evening.

Elizabeth chuckled nervously, while Mark accepted the herbaceous green offerings—Matthew's casualness hiding his intent—and placed them on the kitchen table, a gesture that promised welcome.

"You can unbox them later," Matthew assured with a wink, then lifted one specific gift ceremoniously. "But this one!" He held it up like a prized possession. "This one is SPECIAL."

He presented the gift to Isaac, who stared with wide-eyed curiosity, fingers reaching out to explore the colorful packaging. “Hey there, bud! What’s up, little dude?” Matthew cooed, bending down to Isaac’s level, eager to forge a bond.

“Isaac, this is your Uncle Matt,” Elizabeth said, taking the baby from Mark’s arms. “Look! He has a gift for you!”

Matthew helped Isaac unwrap the package, revealing a shiny new tennis racquet inside. Elizabeth gasped, memories flooding back—carefree afternoons spent on the tennis courts with Matthew.

Laughter flowed around them, a blend of belonging and shared history. “So this racquet—my new favorite buddy,” Matthew said, leaning closer to Isaac. “I’m going to teach you how to use it! Everything I couldn’t teach your mom, I’ll teach you!”

“Finally going to step up to the plate, huh?” Elizabeth teased, raising an eyebrow. “Weren’t you the one who struggled with teaching tennis?”

“Oh please,” Matthew shot back. “Your mom just needed more practice—period, end of story.”

Laughter erupted again, filling the kitchen with warmth, a joyful embrace of family rediscovering their connections.

* * *

As the evening progressed, the kitchen overflowed with nostalgia and laughter, underscoring the renewed

connections. Matthew, always prepared for the heavier conversations, decided to address the elephant in the room: his life after the divorce from Elizabeth.

“Okay, kiddos,” he said lightly, popping a gummy into his mouth. “I wasn’t exactly ready for a joyful reunion. So how’s the marriage? Is it suburban bliss?” His attempt at humor prompted chuckles, lifting the mood in the room.

Mark leaned against the counter, arms crossed with a goofy grin. “Life in the suburbs is like a sitcom with an unending laugh track. I know it’s no ‘Sedona Seduction,’ but when the neighbors ask for sugar, it’s quite the adventure!”

“Only if it’s infused with CBD,” Matthew retorted.

The three laughed, a harmonious mix that captured their familial bond and shared quirks, like an off-key choir reveling in their unique dysfunction.

As they gathered around the table, exchanging affection and wit, the atmosphere became a celebration of connection. Though Elizabeth avoided mentioning Matthew’s recent heartaches, she felt their complexities lingering beneath the surface.

“Have you talked to Uncle Addy lately?” Elizabeth asked, veering into familiar ground, flicking away a piece of lint as if it were a daunting problem.

Matthew sighed. “You mean the family’s cannabis expert?”

“Oh no, he’s more than that,” Mark replied dramatically. “He’s the Cannabis oracle! The man can turn any conversation into a deep dive on how weed will save

humanity. Last week, he insisted we could irrigate crops with weed tea.”

The good humor lifted the mood even higher, the savory aroma still lingering in the air—a hallmark of home.

“Where’s my medal for this?” Matthew joked, nudging Mark as they prepared another round of snacks. “With how this evening is going, I should qualify for a Nobel Prize in Ex-husband Relationships.”

Mark just smirked, shaking his head.

As the evening wore on and Matthew prepared to leave, laughter began to fade, replaced by a sense of closure. He scanned the room, absorbing the warmth that felt like the final notes of a favorite song. “This was fun,” he announced, trying to bridge the past and present. “I’m genuinely glad we did this.”

Elizabeth glanced at Mark, an unspoken agreement passing between them. They exchanged warm smiles, though shadows flickered in their eyes—a shared understanding of the bittersweet blend of their histories.

“I was just wondering, Matthew,” Elizabeth ventured, her voice steady yet tinged with nostalgia, “could we make this a regular thing?”

“Regular thing? You want me to fit that into my busy weed empire?” Matthew teased, deflecting the emotional weight. “I’ve got healing to spread like peanut butter.”

“Just try,” Elizabeth pressed gently, her gaze softening. She understood how much this reconnection mattered for everyone.

Matthew reached out for a handshake goodbye, but

Mark instinctively interrupted. “That’s not how we do it here,” he said, opening his arms for a hearty hug that enveloped Matthew in unexpected warmth.

Elizabeth quickly joined the embrace, making him feel like a cherished family member returned home.

“Take care of this little guy,” Matthew said softly, kissing baby Isaac’s forehead as he stepped out into the night. “I’ll be back to make him the next Rafa Nadal!”

The lingering strains of music from the family’s Bluetooth followed him—a bittersweet reminder of the connections woven through laughter and love. As he approached his waiting Uber, he felt the vibrant threads of family weaving a new design—a kaleidoscope of joy and confusion, each thread a reminder that life was complex, as fragile as glass, brilliant yet capable of shattering. This was his reality, an intricate tapestry of relationships evolving and inviting him to embrace his past, one thread at a time.

With a creak and a solid thud, Matthew slid into the Uber, phone in hand, his thumbs darting across the screen in a frantic attempt to address the crises ignited by his co-workers and partners. A new strain of gummies had stirred up some sort of incident in Indiana—another problem that would undoubtedly land in Megan, his chief legal counsel's lap. But for now, none of that mattered. As the Uber started to move, he took a deep breath and redirected his focus to the one place that deserved it: his grandfather.

Their last meeting had been unexpectedly therapeutic, an emotional whirlwind that no plant-based medicine could replicate. His heart had ached from the poignant words spoken by his centenarian Zayde. The emotional reunion with his ex-wife Elizabeth and her husband Mark had left him feeling exposed and raw. Yet, he knew he had to navigate through this maze of reconciliations to emerge renewed. While plants could aid in healing, love—complicated as it was—propelled it more deeply.

"Man, this is what soul-searching feels like," he muttered under his breath as the Uber rolled along the streets of Chicago.

The driver, a single mom with infectious energy, spun around in her seat, her wide smile brightening the car. "So you're headed to Glenbrook Nursing Home?"

Matthew nodded, adjusting his backpack more out of habit than necessity.

"Small world! My mother is a resident there. Esther Rosenthal! She's a hoot, you'll love her. I'm Debra Rosenthal, by the way." Her words flowed as if she couldn't contain them.

Matthew managed a polite smile, despite the turmoil in his mind.

"Do you have a family member there?" Debra asked, clearly unfazed by his preoccupation.

"Yes, my grandfather," Matthew replied, his voice carrying a hint of resigned patience.

Debra's eyes lit up even more. "What's his name?"

"Gerry Goodman," he said, half-expecting her to react with excitement – and she did not disappoint.

"I'm sure he knows my mom. Everyone knows her! If you see her, tell her I said hi!"

Matthew stifled a laugh, imagining Esther Rosenthal not just knowing his grandfather but perhaps even sharing a joint or two with him. "I will," he promised.

The Uber arrived at the nursing home, and Matthew got out, his mind slightly quieter than before. As Debra rolled down the window, she had one final piece of advice.

"Listen to your grandfather today," she said with surprising weight. "Really listen. Our elders have such great wisdom."

Matthew nodded, her words resonating. They do.

Entering the nursing home, he rushed past receptionist

Norma, tossing her a package of gummies. "Thank you, Captain!" she called after him.

Matthew quickly made his way to the elevator and down the hall. He performed his signature knock on the door, announcing his arrival. "Zayde? I'm back."

"Come in, my boy. Time is precious. You know, I'm 102, and I'm not getting any younger," Gerry's voice, equal parts stern and loving, carried from the other room. "By the way, you sober today?"

Matthew smirked, walking over to the couch next to his grandfather's recliner. "Yeah, not loving it either," he replied, kicking off his shoes and settling in.

Gerry's sharp eyes softened as he regarded his grandson. "Just relax. Don't think about work or Jini. It's time I told you a story."

Matthew settled in, ready for an adventure only his Zayde could deliver—a tale that transcended their modest setting and transported him to a world rich with history and personal significance.

As the room filled with the intimate quiet of their connection, the noise of Matthew's complicated life faded away. The old man's voice began, and in that moment, nothing else mattered. Both were transported back in time.

* * *

JUNE 29, 1944
ALLIED LIBERATION FRONT
FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE

The French countryside seemed peaceful in the weeks following D-Day, with its green hills, quaint cottages, and gentle sunlight. It felt at odds with the battles that had surged through the area. Yet here, among these scenes, Gerry Goodman marched with his battalion. The calm was in stark contrast to the grim determination on the soldiers' faces.

Private Billy, a cocky recruit from Alabama, dragged three Nazi prisoners behind him. Billy had embraced the motto of "God, guns, and country." He grabbed one of the POWs by the collar and shook him aggressively. "You see that soldier?" Billy shouted, pointing at Gerry. "You see that AMERICAN? He is Juden, JEW, Juden! He captured you! YOU!! How do you feel about THAT?!"

The Nazi, bravado gone, appeared sheepish and terrified under Billy's relentless taunting. Laughter erupted from the other soldiers, a harsh sound that rang through the countryside. They reveled in the irony of their captives' downfall.

Billy laughed menacingly. "You Nazis are getting your asses handed to you! We're going to DESTROY every last one of you!"

Gerry's face remained stoic, as if carved from stone. He knew what the Nazis had done to his people. He'd heard the whispers of

unspeakable horrors that haunted him whenever he let his mind wander. But confronting those thoughts was something he avoided.

Billy sidled up to Gerry, his grin taunting. "How do you like that? Shows them Nazi bastards right, don't you think?"

"Yeah," Gerry replied flatly, lacking the enthusiasm Billy wanted. Inside, memories of family members who hadn't escaped Europe stirred up a tempest of grief. He'd set those thoughts aside for a day when he didn't also have to think about his own survival.

Billy's tone shifted, spreading the latest rumor. "You've heard about the camps? It's supposedly bad... really bad."

Gerry shook his head, his silence saying more than words could convey. The lack of communication in his family's letters confirmed too much already. Some horrors didn't need to cross the ocean.

Private Patrick, rough around the edges with a thick Boston accent, approached. "Look what we got from those bastards!" he said, showcasing a pile of Nazi loot.

The items were laid out like trophies – a grotesque display of knives, artillery, jewelry, and a suspiciously large wooden crate.

Gerry's curiosity ignited. "What's in the crate?"

Patrick grinned, showing his teeth beneath a grimy face. "Open it up, captain. See for yourself."

Gerry carefully unlatched the crate, each click pulling him deeper into the moment. The lid creaked open, letting in a shaft of light that illuminated the contents.

*Inside were **twelve crystal glasses**, each emblazoned with the swastika. The elegance of the glass was perverse, distorted by*

the symbol of hatred.

Gerry lifted one glass, captivated as it caught the sunlight and refracted a spectrum of colors. For a moment, he examined it as if it were a rare specimen. His face revealed nothing, but inside, a storm of thoughts and emotions surged.

The other soldiers fell silent, their curious eyes fixed on Gerry as he studied the glass. After a long pause, he turned to Patrick, his expression calm. "You mind if I keep these?"

Patrick shrugged. "Sure, they're all yours," he said, though curiosity and caution mixed in his tone. "What are you going to do with them?"

Gerry's face remained impassive, but a glint of defiance shone in his eyes. A powerful vision flashed through his mind – each glass stomped to dust, the hateful symbol obliterated by the very people it aimed to destroy.

With determination, Gerry responded, "I have an IDEA...."

* * *

Sunlight streamed through the blinds of Gerry's nursing home room, casting faint stripes across the floor as Matthew sat facing his grandfather, a mix of awe and disbelief on his face. He'd never heard the story of how the glasses had been acquired. The tale was as priceless as the glasses themselves.

"You knew right then and there, didn't you?" he asked, unable to hide his incredulity. "You knew you were going to use them at all our family's weddings."

Gerry smiled, a hint of youthful mischief lighting up his

lined face. "Yes, son, I did. I wanted our family to never forget what happened at the hands of the Nazis."

Matthew leaned in, his voice dropping to a whisper as if the room itself might overhear. "Wow. How did you get the glasses home?"

Gerry chuckled, a raspy sound. "Ahh, yes, that was tricky. I had a nasty lieutenant who always had a stick up his ass... I almost didn't!"

Matthew settled back on the couch, preparing for the next tale that was sure to resonate deeply.

* * *

JUNE 30, 1944
ARMY BASE
25 MILES OUTSIDE PARIS

"Get the gear packed! We're heading into Paris first thing at dawn!" Lieutenant Stick-Up-Ass barked orders that cut through the camp's noise.

Gerry, young and hopeful, approached the lieutenant with an expression that blended eagerness and uncertainty. His eyes were wide, filled with determination.

"What do you want, Captain Goodman?" The lieutenant's snark served as a barrier against any attempts at camaraderie.

"Sir, I was wondering if I could hitch a ride into town with a patrol truck to drop off this package at the post office," Gerry

ventured, his voice steady despite the absurdity of his request.

The lieutenant's face twisted with exasperation, as if Gerry had suggested an amusement park detour. "We're under pressure! The allied forces have orders from Patton to get to Paris by tomorrow. The answer is NO! And that's an ORDER!"

Gerry accepted the tongue-lashing with the composure of someone who had learned the importance of keeping his head down. "Yes, sir!"

As he walked away, an idea began to form—a reckless yet simple plan. His eyes fell on a food delivery truck parked nearby, its driver unaware of the scheme unfolding. With the stealth of a spy, Gerry ducked behind a hedge and approached the truck, slipping under the cargo tarp as if embarking on a daring adventure.

When the engine roared to life, Gerry felt the jolt of his risky choice. Each bump on the rocky path tested his resolve as he lay still, focused on his mission despite the discomfort.

Eventually, the truck stopped. Cramped but determined, Gerry lifted the tarp and peeked over the edge with cautious curiosity. The loading dock was empty; the driver had vanished into the warehouse.

Seizing his chance, Gerry jumped from the truck, the crate in hand, blending into the busy street like a disguised spy. His limited French turned this journey into a comedic obstacle course, his pleas for directions accompanied by exaggerated hand gestures that would have seemed humorous in less urgent circumstances.

The townspeople, amused by his makeshift French, welcomed him. Gerry symbolized their newfound freedom, his American

uniform a reassuring sign of the end of oppression. After what felt like an eternity, a kindly old woman pointed him to the post office, her gestures clear and comforting.

*With renewed energy, Gerry walked the two blocks and entered the post office, a wide smile on his face. In that moment, he realized he had achieved something significant: he had safeguarded a piece of history for future generations. **The twelve crystal Nazi glasses would make their way home.***

* * *

Back in the nursing home, the years seemed to blend as Matthew connected the dots between past and present. "Wow, you were a rebel, Zayde! How did you get back to the base from the post office, by the way?"

Gerry laughed, his eyes sparkling with the memory. "I used my good looks, how else?"

Matthew could almost envision it—a young French woman in a sleek black sports car, her smile inviting him in. French music likely filled the air, providing a lighthearted backdrop to the moment.

Gerry's laughter echoed through the years. "Oh boy, did those French women love an American soldier in uniform."

Matthew raised an eyebrow, tone laced with playful sarcasm. "So you were quite the lady killer?"

"You betcha," Gerry replied, grinning wider. "This was before your Bubby, you know. I had some fun back then."

They laughed together, their chuckles bridging the generational gap. Matthew reflected on his own youthful

escapades, recognizing a kindred spirit in his grandfather. Despite the years that separated them, there were universal truths connecting men, tinged with youthful indiscretion.

Gerry got up from his recliner and shuffled to his desk, ready to share his newfound interest with enthusiasm. He rummaged through a drawer, tossing papers aside until he found a stack of envelopes bound by a worn rubber band. This was not merely a collection; it was a tangible archive of his life.

"Here, let me show you something," he said, placing the stack on the table. Matthew leaned in, eager for this glimpse into his grandfather's past.

"These are all the letters I wrote to my parents in Kansas City, along with the ones my father wrote back to me. My father saved every single one. There are also letters about some of my romantic escapades in France. My dad loved those stories."

Matthew was in awe, overwhelmed by the significance of these family artifacts. "Wow," was all he could manage, his voice filled with reverence.

"Hold on, let me find the letter I wrote that accompanied the package of glasses." Gerry sifted through the envelopes, excitement building until he found the one he sought. "Ah, here it is. June 30th, 1945. Just a few days before my birthday."

Gerry handed Matthew the envelope, its age evident in the worn paper and crinkled edges. Unfolding the letter,

Matthew could feel the weight of history. He began reading it aloud in the dim sunlight streaming through the window:

Dear Mother and Father,

I hope this letter finds you well and in good health. I'm in the countryside of France right now just outside of Paris. We are making our way through the country liberating every town as we go. What I've seen and experienced, I don't even want to tell you. It's horrible. Just know your sonny boy is fine and I'm maintaining the best spirits I can. I have enclosed a package full of items that I want you to hold on to for me for safekeeping. They include 12 crystal glasses and other Nazi paraphernalia I have confiscated from captured Nazi prisoners of war.

I want our family to hold on to these items as a way to never forget what has happened here, especially to our people. What's inside the crate has a special purpose for our family, and I will share with you my plan when I arrive home in Godspeed. I'm sending you all my best, as usual, and all my love too.

*Your dedicated and faithful son,
Gerry.*

P.S. Father, give Mother a big hug and kiss for me.

Matthew looked up from the faded letter, tears welling in his eyes. The emotion tightened his throat, but he managed to say, "Amazing..."

Gerry's voice grew serious, filled with the weight of responsibility. "I want you to have these letters, Matthew. Hold on to them for the family. It's important!"

Matthew accepted the letters with reverence, feeling the trust placed in him. "Really? Me? The pothead?"

"Yes, you. I don't know how much time I have left."

"Stop, don't say that."

Gerry met Matthew's gaze, the gravity of his words leaving no room for denial. "I know you will keep them safe, just as my father kept them."

Matthew nodded, a newfound resolve in his voice. "I will do my best."

Suddenly, Matthew's phone rang, breaking the nostalgic atmosphere. He sighed, glancing at the screen as if it were an impending audit. The caller ID read "Megan," his lawyer.

Bracing himself, Matthew answered. "What now, Megan?"

Cut to Megan's office in Sedona headquarters—a space that exuded tasteful luxury. Plush carpets met mahogany furniture, and an expensive piece of art adorned the wall. Megan, unfazed by distressing news, exuded lawyerly poise.

"We've got a problem, Matt," she began, her voice sharp. "CNN, Fox News, and all of Twitter are buzzing about the new edibles and what happened in Indiana. They're

demanding a recall on every single product."

"What?! Seriously?" Matthew sounded as if he'd just learned his beloved pet was involved in a scandal. "Those effects are normal with plant-based medicine! People just don't get it yet! They're not ready!"

In the nursing home, Gerry observed the exchange with a mix of concern and dry amusement. Modern problems were nothing new.

Rubbing his temple in frustration, Matthew continued. "I'll issue a statement on my podcast tonight. Just enough to calm the waters. If that doesn't work, we'll recall them. What's one product? We have thousands."

"Ok," Megan calmly responded. "Sounds like a plan."

Once he hung up, Matthew let out a deeply philosophical sigh.

"Sounds like a big problem," Gerry chimed in, his tone dry.

"Yeah, I'm used to problems. Welcome to my life," Matthew retorted, bitterness coloring his voice.

"Welcome to EVERYONE'S life, sonny boy," Gerry replied sharply, pulling Matthew out of his self-pity.

Matthew blinked, startled out of his indulgent fog.

Gerry softened. "Let me give you some advice. Sometimes doing good means you have to act. Sometimes it means NOT doing anything."

The pause that followed was filled with the kind of wisdom only a 102-year-old could provide.

"Do you get it?" Gerry asked gently.

"I think so," Matthew conceded, sounding like a

chastened student.

Gerry reclined, a twinkle in his eyes. "Remember my S-Gun? You can always shoot that at people in your head."

A laugh escaped Matthew, temporarily lifting the tension. The imaginary S-Gun—Gerry's humorous invention for dealing with life's challenges—made him visualize aiming it at his critics and discharging metaphorical shots of human excrement, the 'S' standing for shit. The absurdity felt cathartic.

"Yes, it would be great to have the S-Gun right now. I'd shoot it at a million people!" Matthew's laughter was infectious, and Gerry joined in with a knowing smile.

"Take me back to your story," Matthew said, still chuckling. "Did you break the first glass at your wedding to Bubby?"

Gerry's eyes brightened, ready to delve back into his history. "Not exactly..."

* * *

OCTOBER 12, 1947
GERRY AND GITA'S WEDDING
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The restroom of the Chicago social hall greeted visitors with flickering fluorescent lights that illuminated cracked tiles and chipped sinks. It was 1947—the day of Gerry and Gita's

wedding. Gerry stood before a slightly cloudy mirror, meticulously adjusting his tie, each movement reflecting a sense of purpose.

Beside him, his well-meaning but bumbling father Max hovered. Max, always supportive despite his absent-mindedness, made sure his son looked presentable, even if his version of "presentable" was more about parental pride.

Max's thick Eastern European accent added warmth to the moment. "So, my boy, are you ready to take the plunge?"

Gerry met his father's gaze with certainty. "I am, Father."

Max's pride shone through the crinkles around his eyes. "You're looking like a true mensch! And this suit is tailored excellently! Gita's father knows what he's doing with the needle and thread."

"Yes, he does. And he's a good man like you." Gerry's words, though few, were filled with affection.

Max's tough exterior softened. "So, did you bring one of the glasses?" Gerry asked, excitement breaking through his usual composure.

Max's expression changed to one of dismay. "Oh no! I forgot it in Kansas City!"

"Oh, Dad, I really wanted today to be the day I broke the first glass!" Gerry's voice conveyed heartfelt disappointment.

Max's eyes filled with tears. "I'm so sorry, son. I completely forgot. Your mother was anxious about coming here, and I was focused on calming her down."

Gerry placed a reassuring hand on his father's shoulder. "Father, it's okay. I know Gita and I will have a large family. There will be plenty of special occasions to break the glasses."

Tears rolling down his cheeks, Max was choked with emotion. "I can't believe this day has come. You have truly become the man I always hoped you would be. Go marry that beautiful Jewish girl! I'm so proud of you!"

They embraced, a hug that transcended time and spoke of love, pride, and the journey they had shared together.

* * *

The air in Gerry's nursing home room was charged with shared memories, steeped in familial history. Matthew sat across from his grandfather, his gaze intense and eager to draw out stories from Gerry's past. The room felt like a bridge between eras, where the past intersected with the present.

"Yeah, it was heartbreaking," Gerry began, his voice carrying a hint of nostalgia. "But I knew there'd be many more occasions to break the glasses."

Matthew's curiosity was palpable as he leaned forward. "So when was the first glass finally broken?"

Gerry's eyes sparkled with remembrance. "Well, it wasn't for a while, but there was a moment in the early sixties when a glass was almost broken... Your Uncle Addy... oh boy..."

* * *

APRIL 9, 1965
MAX AND CILIA KATZ'S HOME
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The Katz family flat in downtown Chicago buzzed with the energy of a Passover celebration. The dining room table overflowed with food – matzo, brisket, kugel, and enough wine to satisfy any appetite. Max and Cilia Katz, Gita's parents, presided over the gathering, watching the familial chaos with both pride and amusement. Mildred and her husband Howard chatted animatedly with the other adults, while children zipped around like electrons in motion.

Gerry and Gita's children – Allan, Jordan, Janet, and Addy – competed with Mildred and Howard's kids – Suzanne, Larry, and Robert – in a spirited game of chaos. It felt like the room was coming alive with anticipation.

Addy, full of youthful energy, was bouncing off the walls.

"Quiet down, Addy!" Gita's voice broke through the noise. "Relax, sit down. We're about to start Passover!"

Mildred added her plea for order, her voice urging calm. "Kids, please come to the table. Zayde wants to start the Seder! Boys, stop that!"

Howard leaned in towards Gerry. "I bought some stock in a

new computer company called IBM. You thinking about investing?"

Gerry sighed. "Really?"

Mildred, ever enthusiastic about money matters, chimed in. "Gerry, you should invest with Howard! He did amazing things with Coca-Cola!"

Gita, practical as always, interjected. "Gerry, I told you we're saving for a new house. It's too big a risk!"

Suddenly, Max Katz brought everyone to attention with his booming voice. "Sheket! Gerry and I want to share something with the family."

Gerry, the reluctant magician, pulled a crate from beneath his chair, covering it with a worn blanket. The room quieted as he began to recount the story of the glasses, holding one up to catch the light and cast patterns on their expectant faces.

"Passover is the story of our people's exodus from Egypt," Max said with emotion. "This glass represents a different kind of exodus, one that our family is part of... Kids, do you know what this symbol represents?"

Allan answered quickly. "The Nazis."

Jordan nodded. "Yeah, my dad fought in the war and brought it home."

Max continued, his voice faltering. "Your father is a war hero... Did you know your grandmother and I narrowly escaped? We lost our whole families in the camps. Your Bubby lost ten brothers and sisters, countless cousins, and her dear parents."

The gravity of their shared history weighed heavily on the room. Gita held her mother Cilia's hand, feeling the painful memories surface as Max spoke.

Young Addy broke the silence. "Can I hold it? I want to hold it!"

Gerry exchanged a glance with Gita, concern evident. She nodded, giving silent assurance. "Go ahead, Gerry, it'll be fine."

Gerry handed the glass to Addy with caution. The other children gathered around, eyes wide with anticipation. As Gerry passed it over, the glass slipped from Addy's grasp. Time seemed to freeze as they watched it fall, collectively holding their breaths. Miraculously, Addy caught it just before it hit the floor.

"It's okay! It's okay! It's not broken!" Addy exclaimed, relief and pride evident on his face.

The room exhaled in unison, the tension released. The Passover dinner continued, filled with laughter and joy, the close call adding a layer of gratitude.

Max chuckled, shaking his head. "Oh, more mishigas, more mishigas."

Laughter rippled through the room, reinforcing their family bond.

* * *

Back in the nursing home, the joy of the memory had Gerry and Matthew laughing together, bridging the generational gap.

"Well, that was a close call," Matthew said, still amused.

"Yes, it was," Gerry replied, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes. "Those glasses were so treasured in our family. What they represent defines us Goodmans, and we made sure the kids knew that from an early age."

Matthew shook his head, trying to grasp the depth of their family history. "It's incredible how intertwined everything is—the glasses and our story. You had the foresight to ship them back home after losing so many family members to the Nazis. Great Bubby lost ten siblings, that's hard to imagine."

"I know," Gerry said, his expression shifting. "It's almost too much to process."

A silence fell, the topic of the Holocaust heavier than either wanted to address. Eager to lighten the mood, Matthew asked, "So Addy was a handful right from the start?"

Gerry's laughter emerged, warm and rich. "Yeah, he really put us through the wringer. Oh, don't even get me started on the testicle incident."

"No, please share!" Matthew urged, a mischievous glint in his eye, ready for some family lore that would liven up the conversation.

* * *

FEBRUARY 8, 1967
GERRY AND GITA'S HOME
HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS

The quiet suburbs of Highland Park, IL, were suddenly disrupted by a piercing scream. Gita and Gerry, nestled in their

beds, felt the calm of the night shatter.

Gita groaned, clearly annoyed. "What is that about?"

Gerry, already springing into action, tossed the sheets aside. "It's Addy... I'll go check!"

He rushed to Addy's room, his heart racing. There, young Addy lay, his face contorted in pain, clutching his testicles.

"Dad, my balls! They huuuuurrrtttt sooo much!!!" Addy's cries were loud enough to wake the dead.

By the time Gita arrived, the other kids – Allan, Jordan, and Janet – were gathered at the doorway, their eyes wide with worry and curiosity.

Gerry approached Addy's bed with concern. "My boy, let me see."

As Gerry examined Addy's condition, he quickly assessed the situation. "Quick! Gita, start the car. We have to go to the hospital!"

** * **

Both Gerry and Matthew were laughing as they reminisced, even though they knew it wasn't funny for Addy.

"He lost a nut, right?" Matthew asked, incredulous and amused.

"Yes," Gerry confirmed. "It's called testicular torsion, where the testicles twist. He was lucky. He didn't lose the ability to have children completely."

Matthew glanced at a framed photo on the wall – Addy beaming with his twin sons, Alex and Jay, reminders of

Addy's survival.

"Well, lucky bastard," Matthew said, relieved. "By the way, did you take that investment opportunity with Uncle Howard?"

Gerry shook his head, a rueful sigh escaping him. "I did not. Your Great Uncle Howard was a sharp investor. I should have listened to him."

Matthew laughed, filling the room with his mirth. "Yeah, you should have! Uncle Howard left his family millions!"

Gerry joined in the laughter, the sound resonating in the air. "Yeah, don't remind me."

After a moment, Matthew's tone became more serious. "So when was the first glass broken?"

Gerry leaned back, his gaze distant as he recalled. "Ahh, my boy, it was actually at your parents' wedding..."

JUNE 22, 1974
ALLAN AND SUSAN'S WEDDING
SKOKIE, ILLINOIS

The hotel banquet hall was alive with the mingling scents of brisket and cheap perfume. The decor struggled to convey elegance, with faux crystal chandeliers hanging above, and tablecloths stained from spilled wine. It was a classic '70s scene, filled with fringe tuxedos, pronounced sideburns, and a vibrant disco atmosphere.

Among the bustling crowd, Gerry and Gita stood as a solid couple, surrounded by their sprawling family: Jordan, Janet, Addy, Uncle Howard, Aunt Mildred, and a host of cousins. The conversations intertwined, sharing stories about children, Chicago sports, and the latest family gossip.

"I think I just tripped over the entire Katz family," Gita joked as they passed a cluster of relatives.

"Might as well set up camp right here," Gerry replied, gesturing toward a table overflowing with relatives creating family drama.

Allan and Susan, glowing newlyweds, greeted family with practiced grace.

"Mazel Tov, you two! Susan, you look radiant!" Mildred

exclaimed, her movements animated.

Howard, never one to miss an opportunity for humor, leaned in and quipped, "Allan, you really lucked out with this one."

"Ain't that the truth, Uncle!" Allan replied with a smirk, looking for an escape route among the excited crowd.

Uncle Howard pulled an envelope from his tuxedo pocket with the flair of a magician. "Here's something to get you started on your new life." He handed it over, the gesture laden with expectation.

Allan accepted it with mock seriousness, stifling a laugh. "Thanks, Uncle! I'll use this wisely – probably on whiskey after a long day of marriage."

"Come back and find me later," Howard grinned. "We'll play 'Guess the Wad' with your siblings and cousins!"

The game, a family tradition, involved guessing the cash stuffed in Howard's money clip.

Howard flashed his money clip – a thick roll of bills – like a trophy. "You might need this for some quality time!"

Allan chuckled, nostalgia washing over him as he remembered summers spent examining Uncle Howard's infamous wad.

As the newlyweds moved on, the scene shifted to young Addy across the hall, flanked by cousins Robert, Larry, and Suzanne, looking mischievous.

"What number drink is that, Addy?" Robert asked, part concern and part curiosity.

"I don't know, who's counting? They're free!" Addy shouted, his eyes sparkling with youthful rebellion.

Suzanne, stepping into her protective role, cautioned, "Addy,

you're only 14. You know your mom's not going to be happy if she catches you drinking."

"I can handle her," Addy replied, overconfident in his teenage bravado.

He glanced towards his mother as Gita, unaware of the impromptu cocktail party, was deep in conversation with Susan's parents, Leonard and Gloria.

"So we are 'mencha putem' now," Gita remarked, using the Yiddish term for in-laws, testing the waters of their new relationship.

Leonard looked puzzled. "I don't..."

Gloria, with her Jewish immigrant roots, smiled. "Lenny, it means in-laws! We have a new family now!"

Gita and Gloria exchanged smiles, a sense of camaraderie emerging, but an underlying competition simmered just below the surface.

"So is Susan going to get a job while Allan's in medical school? Someone has to pay the bills," Gita challenged, arching an eyebrow.

Leonard puffed up with pride. "My little girl will take care of your son. She's got a good head on her shoulders. Did you know she made the high honor roll at Illinois?"

Gita's eyes gleamed with competitive spirit. "That makes two of us... So did I."

A brief pause lingered, thick with unspoken tension – a rivalry that threatened to influence future family gatherings.

The camera shifted back to Allan and Susan, who were moving towards the head table. Gerry was there, a cloth bag in hand, standing as a pillar of gravity amidst the celebration.

He approached the newlywed couple and enveloped them in a warm embrace. "I've got something for you, son."

He produced the bag containing the remnants of the first Nazi glass, his expression a mix of pride and emotion. The room quieted in anticipation.

"I'll hold on to this for you tonight. It should go somewhere safe. You are the first glass, my son."

Allan looked at the bag with reverence, appreciation for this fragile heirloom filling his demeanor. "Thank you, Dad."

Gerry spoke with a sage-like quality. "One day you'll have sons too, and they'll have glasses for them as well. Remember, life is fragile. This glass is a constant reminder of that."

His words resonated with Allan, imparting a heartfelt lesson amid the celebration.

Suddenly, laughter erupted from across the hall, drawing everyone's attention.

"Suzanne! Addy!!!! No!!!"

The scene shifted to Addy, who was chugging his eighth vodka tonic, causing a ruckus worthy of a circus.

"Yeah, I know. Allan is the golden child! What are you talking about? I'm not ruining his wedding... This is bullshit!" he muttered, barely coherent.

All eyes turned to Addy, the unintended focus of the gathering.

Gita, acting on maternal instinct, rushed over and yanked the drink from his hand. "What in the world do you think you're doing?!"

Addy, emboldened by liquid courage, slurred defiantly, "Mom, relax! I'm just having a good time... It's a paaaarty."

"Give me this!" Gita snapped back, spilling vodka on Addy's tuxedo, a yellow stain blooming.

"Aww, Mom. Come on!" he pleaded, indignation flooding his voice.

"You are only 14! This is ridiculous!" Gita shouted, her voice rising to command the room's attention.

Gerry, standing with Allan and Susan, exchanged concerned glances, reflecting a shared family anxiety over the unfolding drama.

"Well, this should have been expected," Allan commented dryly, bitterness coloring his tone as he held the bag of broken glass shards, a fresh reminder of the fractures within the family.'

* * *

Back in the nursing home room, the chaotic wedding scene began to fade from Gerry and Matthew's minds. Matthew looked at his grandfather with deep compassion, eager to learn more.

"Yes, Matthew, Addy was always trouble," Gerry said, his voice a mix of affection and exasperation. "But I'm proud of you and him. I'm proud of how you both have created something that helps so many people. Even if I don't fully understand it, I see that Addy had something special in him all along. Thank you for helping bring it out."

Matthew looked up at Gerry, gratitude welling in his chest. "At least I got rich doing it! Working with him is a real pain in the ass sometimes," he quipped, a smirk on his

lips.

Gerry burst out laughing, a sound full of life that made the fluorescent lights almost seem to brighten. Matthew cherished these moments; hearing his 102-year-old grandfather laugh felt like a revival of his childhood.

"Man, Bubby was something else. She meant business!" Matthew said fondly.

"Yes, always. You didn't mess with Bubby. I learned that quickly. Keep a stiff upper lip; she was the boss," Gerry added with a chuckle.

"You know my mom didn't always have the best relationship with her," Matthew said thoughtfully.

"Yes, there was a rivalry," Gerry nodded, a hint of mischief in his eye. "Allan, your dad, was Bubby's pride and joy. He was the breadwinner — the doctor! It was tough for her to let him go. Your mom took good care of him, and together they formed an incredible partnership. Bubby learned to deal with it in her own way."

Gerry paused, and a cherished family memory surfaced in his mind — the sweet chaos of caring for Allan's children when they were young. Matthew and Aaron sprawled on the floor, laughing as they played a board game, a warm picture of innocence and family love.

Returning to the moment, Gerry said, "It became easier once you and Aaron came along. We're so proud of their marriage. What are your parents approaching? Fifty years?"

"Yep, fifty. It's incredible," Matthew replied, his tone serious. "Only twenty more to catch up with you and

Bubby."

A contemplative silence enveloped them as they reflected on the decades-long commitment, as fragile yet resilient as the glass that symbolized their family history.

Their reflections were interrupted by Matthew's phone vibrating, cutting through the moment.

"Oh no, it's Addy," Matthew groaned, a resigned smile creeping across his face.

Gerry chuckled. "You better take it."

"I think you should take it!" Matthew shot back, enjoying the playful banter.

Gerry laughed heartily, filling the room with warmth.

"Hello, Uncle," Matthew answered, bracing for the onslaught.

On the other end, Addy's frantic voice erupted. "Fuuuck! We got a problem! Our new strain of MaxMeshugina is causing hallucinations! Did you hear about the fuckwit in Indiana who jumped out of a window and broke his back? It's gone viral! What the hell are we going to do?!"

Matthew bit his lip, trying to summon patience as Addy's panic escalated. "This is your department, Matt. I just grow the stuff and smoke the stuff. I don't deal with crises..."

Matthew held the phone away from his ear, sharing this rare moment with Gerry.

"Plus, I'm high as fuck right now! I'm getting paranoid! That guy in Indiana – what the fuck was he thinking?!"

Matthew couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity. "Relax, I'll handle it. I'll talk to Megan. She'll know how to handle the legal side. I'll make a statement on my podcast later."

"You better take care of it! We spent two million on research and development for this product!" Addy's voice was frantic.

"Relax, it's under control. I got this," Matthew reassured him, ending the call and shaking his head at the chaos of family life.

Turning to Gerry, who watched him with unwavering compassion, Matthew felt bolstered against the pressures of modern life.

"What was that all about?" Gerry asked, genuinely curious.

"Oh, nothing, just our medicine," Matthew replied, dismissing the issue. "It's helping people, but let's just say there are some adverse reactions. We're working on solutions. It just takes time. I'll have to call Megan later."

Gerry's wise eyes remained fixed on him, offering support against the challenges of modernity.

"It's going to work out," Gerry stated firmly, his conviction cutting through uncertainty.

He could only imagine the challenges Matthew and Addy faced but trusted they were prepared for whatever life threw their way.

"Enough about me," Matthew said, eager to change the subject. "I want to hear more about you, your stories with Bubby and the glasses, and Addy! Got any more Uncle

Addy stories? They're always a riot!"

They both laughed, their laughter connecting past and present in a moment of joy.

"Oh, there's certainly more," Gerry said, a twinkle in his eye as if he were about to reveal a family secret. "But first, it's time for lunch. Your Uncle Jordan and Aunt Jackie are coming today. We'd love for you to join us if you don't have to make a call or deal with something."

"That sounds great! I could use some Jackie and Jordie time," Matthew replied eagerly.

The nursing home dining room was bright yet sterile, filled with the sounds of lunchtime chatter. Conversations hummed in the air, punctuated by the clinking of forks and the occasional laugh as residents tried to enjoy their meals. Sunlight streamed through tall windows, illuminating the faces of those who carried stories of rich and sometimes regretful lives.

At a table adorned with cheerful floral arrangements, Jordan and Jackie sat together, their youthful spirits shining through their slightly aged bodies. Their smiles suggested a genuine affection that could weather any storm.

"Hey, Matthew, my eldest nephew!" Jordan exclaimed, his voice booming as if welcoming a soldier home.

Jackie joined in, "Come here! Give me a hug!"

They rose to embrace Matthew, their gestures warm and inviting.

"You're looking good! Really glad your 'tuchas' is here!" Jordan added, easily slipping in the Yiddish word for tush.

Matthew laughed, feigning indignation. "Wow, thanks for that welcome. My 'tuchas' needs to visit more often. It's been too long!"

Their playful banter felt natural. Matthew pulled out a new recording device from his Smileblazer tote. "You need to start writing some songs for us. We'd love to have your piano playing in the films we're producing."

Jordan's grin widened. "Oh, I'll try, nephew. These fingers can still play."

"And Jackie," Matthew shifted, "I got some Smileblazer merch for you and your girls."

"Aww, you didn't have to — so sweet," Jackie replied, her warmth evident.

"I saw Jeremy and Kevin last night... We had a blast," Matthew mentioned casually.

Jordan, always the skeptic, replied, "I'm sure you did..."

Before their friendly teasing could continue, a server approached with a bright smile and crisp uniform.

"So, this is your famous grandson, Gerry?" the server asked, eyeing Matthew with curiosity.

"Yes, this is Matthew," Gerry affirmed, enjoying the attention.

"It's an honor to meet you. Your grandfather is a legend here," the server added, tilting her head slightly.

Matt, encouraged by the compliment, quipped, "He's a legend EVERYWHERE!"

"Oh, this is getting out of hand," Gerry chuckled, relishing the praise.

Jordan jumped in, adding playfully, "So is the legend eating well these days? My mother would make sure he ate his vegetables EVERY day!"

Gerry nodded. "Oh, she would! They feed me well here."

The server grinned. "Yes, your dad is quite the eater. Still has a great appetite at 102!"

Matthew laughed, charmed by the family narrative.

"Yeah, us Goodmans love to eat."

As they placed their lunch orders, the conversation shifted to Matthew's insights about Gerry's stories, particularly regarding the infamous glasses.

"I'm amazed by how much wisdom Zayde has," Matthew said sincerely.

Jordan smirked. "Woke up Mendel?! He's 102! Of course he has wisdom!"

Laughter erupted, reinforcing the warmth of their family bonds.

"I was just telling Matthew about Allan and Susan's wedding and your mother's reaction to Addy drinking," Gerry added, fostering shared nostalgia.

"Oh, I remember THAT... Don't mess with Bubby," Jordan chuckled, recalling the fond memory.

The jovial atmosphere changed abruptly as Matthew's phone vibrated unexpectedly—the chaos of family life creeping back in.

"Great," he muttered, sarcasm slipping into his tone. "This can't be good."

Gerry laughed at Matthew's tone, his amusement mixing with wisdom.

Matthew answered the call, feeling immediate tension. "Hey, bro, what's up?"

Suddenly, the scene shifted to his brother, Aaron, in a bright hospital room, illuminated by harsh fluorescent lights. Dressed in his white doctor's coat, Aaron looked the part of a harried medical professional.

"Hey, Matt," Aaron replied, worry audible in his voice.

"Juliette fell off her bike and hurt her head really bad. They're doing CT scans now. I'm going to check on her soon."

Matthew's stomach dropped at the news. "Yikes. I'm in Chicago with Zayde, actually having lunch with him, Jordan, and Jackie. Can I put you on speaker?"

"Sure, go ahead," Aaron said, his tone firm, though concern lingered beneath the surface.

Matthew pressed the speaker button, inviting his grandfather and the others into the chaos.

"Hey there, Aaron," Jordan greeted, his voice gruff yet warm.

Aaron provided an update on daughter Juliette's condition, doing his best to reassure them, but the gravity of the situation loomed heavy, dampening the earlier joy of their gathering.

When the call ended, they exchanged glances, the weight of the news settling over them. Any semblance of joy had dissipated, replaced by concern.

Matthew attempted to lighten the mood with a half-hearted joke. "Well, at least we scored some product from Uncle Herbacious to take the edge off," he said, holding up a pre-rolled joint of MaxMeshugina. "Anyone want one?"

Jackie giggled, her affection for Matthew evident. She appreciated his effort to find humor amidst his trials.

However, Jordan was less amused. "You need to cut back on the weed, Matthew. Your dad and I agree on that."

Matthew chuckled, even though the concern felt misplaced. "Everyone is always worried about me. It's like

a continuous loop, isn't it?"

Jackie gazed at her husband to back off and after a moment of playful banter, they turned toward the bustling exit of the dining room. Jordan broke the silence. "Matt, stop by Jeremy's if you have time later tonight. We're all gathering for dinner."

"I'll try, Uncle," Matthew promised, shooting a quick wink at Gerry, who nodded supportively.

As Jordan and Jackie rose, they exchanged warm hugs and kisses, their bond evident. They exited, leaving behind the remnants of lunch and the warmth of family connection.

* * *

Gerry and Matthew walked back to Gerry's room, their steps heavy.

"That Juliette," Gerry said, his voice calm and reassuring. "She'll be okay. This happens with children all the time. Kids are tough."

"Yeah," Matthew replied, still processing the gravity of the situation. The news had hit him hard, leaving him reeling.

Gerry's thoughts turned inward as he recalled the similar time when Addy had his testicle incident as a child. "We always get through it, that's what family is for."

"Yeah," Matthew echoed, contemplating Gerry's wisdom while struggling with his own fears.

"Addy is who he is today because he went through a

lot, some of which was probably me and Bubby's fault," Gerry said, a wry smile breaking through his sincerity.

Matthew instinctively defended them. "Don't say 'fault,' Zayde! I know you two did your best."

"True, but there was less focus," Gerry admitted, leaning back as if the weight of his years rested heavily on him. "When Addy hit adolescence and the other kids were out of the house, Bubby and I got a little too relaxed as parents."

Matthew found this profound. "Funny how relaxation can invite chaos."

"It's true. Addy learned through it all," Gerry continued, his voice gaining strength. "He had his ups and downs, but he persevered and found love again." He nodded at a framed picture of Addy and his new girlfriend, Lauren, hanging on the wall, their smiles a reminder that life goes on, even amidst chaos.

"The heart has an incredible power to overcome obstacles and seek love," Gerry mused, his conviction comforting Matthew. "Love will always find a way."

Feeling the weight of Gerry's words, Matthew walked over to the lockbox, which seemed to hold their family's history. He gently opened it and lifted out the final glass emblazoned with a swastika. Its pristine crystal caught the light, scattering rays like memories that represented their legacy.

"It's amazing what this glass symbolizes," Matthew said, emotion rising within him. "To think you had the foresight to bring it back almost 80 years ago is incredible."

Matthew's voice trembled slightly as he asked, "What will happen to this final glass?"

Gerry paused, considering the weight of his legacy. He looked directly at Matthew, the years between them seeming to vanish under the shared understanding of family.

"Well, my boy," Gerry said slowly, "the story is not done..."

As the afternoon sun filled the room, their eyes met in a silent promise that extended across generations, capturing a moment of revelation.

2 WEEKS LATER
SMILEBLAZER HEADQUARTERS
SEDONA, AZ

The glow of the computer screen illuminated Matthew's office, which had shifted from chaotic disarray to a focused creative space. Gone were the chaotic piles of marijuana products and forgotten coffee cups; the room now buzzed with organization. The floor was clear, the desk tidy—a sanctuary designed for inspiration.

Behind him, the whiteboard displayed vibrant storyboards, each one a testament to Matthew's ambition. In the center, a bold poster announced:

THE 12 GLASSES
The Resurrection of the Goodmans

Presented by
Matthew Goodman
The Smileblazer Collective
& Steven Spielberg (HOPEFULLY!)

An enthusiastic sticker reading “hopefully!” had been

awkwardly placed over Spielberg's name, capturing his naive hope to connect with a lofty dream.

Matthew sat hunched over his MacBook Pro, fingers flying across the keys, immersed in a world where storylines developed and characters came to life. He sang along to Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror," caught between the joy of creation and the reality outside his refuge. *"If you wanna make the world a better place, take a look at yourself and then make a change..."*

The music wrapped around him, and the lyrics flowed in his mind, an anthem of aspiration amid unresolved worries. Each note lifted him above concerns about product recalls, regulatory issues, and stakeholders demanding compliance. Today felt different; he was a creator on the brink of something transformative.

Just as confidence surged, a knock on the door disrupted the atmosphere, piercing the moment of reflection. He turned, breath caught between the song and reality. "Come in!" he called, voice slicing through the music.

Megan entered, a figure of authority clad in professional attire. As Smileblazer's chief legal counsel, her presence was commanding; her petite frame belied years of navigating tough corporate challenges. Her tightly pulled-back hair left no room for distraction, mirroring her seriousness.

Matthew, lingering in the glow of earlier inspiration, wore a grin that felt out of place against her stern expression. "What's up, you don't like Michael Jackson?"

he asked, leaning back, still infused with the rhythm of optimism.

"Matt, this is serious," she replied, her voice sharp. "The FDA is upset. Your statement helped, but we're on thin ice. We need to be extra compliant; they'll scrutinize our research results for any weakness."

Her words hit hard, deflating the room's earlier buoyancy. The weight pressing down felt heavy on his shoulders. "Paid-off shills!" he exploded, frustration breaking through. "What about big pharma and their drugs? Chemo, invasive procedures, expensive therapies—they harm people! But the FDA lets them slide because they're in bed with them!"

Megan met his furious gaze, her expression a mix of reassurance and annoyance. "Matt, we're fighting the good fight. We're winning."

He looked at her, amusement flickering, but frustration overshadowed it. "Fuck 'em," he muttered, weariness seeping through.

"So what's all this on the wall?" she asked, gesturing to the ideas cluttering the whiteboard. "A new project?"

Matthew's eyes sparkled with new enthusiasm. "Actually, it's a movie. I'm writing about my 102-year-old grandfather's life."

Her posture shifted; curiosity sparked within her. "Keep me posted and send me a draft when it's done. We need to protect your IP."

"Of course. Thanks," he replied, feeling warmth dissipate as she turned to leave. Yet, a deep sense of

purpose anchored him amid swirling emotions.

Once alone, Matthew sat in silence, the absence of Megan's presence pulling him back to his thoughts. He felt a call within, a connection to his family legacy. With sudden determination, he picked up the phone, scrolling to find his grandfather's contact.

"Hi Zayde... it's Matthew," he said when his grandfather answered, affection breaking through the distance.

"Oh, my boy! So good to hear from you! How is everything going?" Gerry's voice crackled with warmth, wrapping around Matthew like a familiar embrace.

"It's going well, all things considered," Matthew replied, the earlier tension easing through family comfort. "Megan's handling things on the work front. And Addy, well, he's calmed down. Everything should work out fine."

"That's good. I'm happy for you both," Gerry responded, his wisdom soothing Matthew's anxiety.

Matthew paused, heart racing as he seized the moment. "I've started a new project. It's about you—I'm writing a movie and book about your life, the story of the 12 Nazi glasses. It's called *The 12 Glasses*."

Silence hung, laden with disbelief. "You have?" Gerry finally asked, astonishment evident.

"Yes, I have. It's therapeutic to write about you, our family, and your story. There's so much wisdom to share."

"I'm excited to hear more," Gerry replied, pride filling his voice.

"I've written about thirty pages. Can I read you the

treatment and some opening scenes?”

“That sounds wonderful. Yes, I do have time,” he replied, eagerness evident.

As Matthew began to read, the words flowed, weaving their shared history. He could hear glimpses of emotion in Gerry’s responses—proud smiles and murmurs—reflecting the man behind the legend.

When he finished, silence enveloped them. Gerry finally broke it: “I’m impressed. I didn’t know you could write like that. It’s a monumental effort.”

“Yes, I know. I’m called to do this,” Matthew replied, determination igniting within him. “The world needs to hear your story on the big screen.”

“Well, let’s see what happens. Spielberg, really?” Gerry teased, laughter threading through his voice.

“Yeah, really. Wouldn’t that be amazing...” Matthew chuckled, feeling the warmth of his grandfather’s spirit.

As they exchanged hopes and dreams, their connection deepened, transcending the burdens they carried. In that moment of vulnerability, Matthew recognized the vast possibilities before him—a complex tapestry woven through time, bridging the lives of a storyteller and a life fully lived.

* * *

Matthew glanced at his watch—it was time for his next meeting at the plant-medicine cultivation facilities on the edge of the Smileblazer Estate. The sprawling space

featured lush greenery and a stream that wound through its center. People often joked that it resembled the Garden of Eden, though Matthew suspected that if Adam and Eve had run this place, they might have opted for a “no fruit” policy in favor of herbs.

As Ben and Matthew strolled through the facilities, Matthew could hardly contain his excitement. Ben Burke, Smileblazer’s Chief Cultivation Officer and Matthew’s right-hand man, had a talent for combining business with camaraderie.

“I want to show you our latest harvest of Uncle Herbaceous strains,” Ben said, leading Matthew toward a greenhouse filled with vibrant cannabis plants swaying gently in the warm breeze.

“Walking in here never gets old,” Matthew replied, breathing in the fragrant air. “It’s like a taste of heaven.”

“Tell me about it,” Ben said with a grin. “Welcome to the Smileblazer Garden of Eden.”

As they ventured further, they spotted a young woman jotting notes while examining the latest crop. Her easy demeanor and casual attire—cargo shorts and a Peace Lords T-shirt—exuded the confidence of someone well-versed in cultivation.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Rebecca,” Matthew said, extending his hand.

“The pleasure is all mine,” she replied warmly.

Rebecca Plotkin was their first choice for the lead cultivator position. Originally from North Carolina, she had traded her own growing facility for the expansive

Sedona campus, ready to share her expertise.

She enthusiastically detailed her cultivation methods, handing Matthew a freshly harvested bud. "Here, give it a sniff," she said, her eyes sparkling.

Matthew inhaled deeply. "Smells amazing," he said, temporarily overwhelmed by the aroma.

"Thanks! Now we just need to test it to ensure it heals our patients."

"It will," Matthew assured her confidently.

After a brief discussion about plant requirements and growing conditions, Rebecca excused herself and returned to one of the pods dedicated to Uncle Herbaceous's latest experiments. Above the pod hung a large poster of Uncle Herbaceous with the slogan, "Get Blazed. Get Healed."

"By the way," Ben said, shifting the conversation. "Your uncle is at headquarters today."

Matthew's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "No, I didn't know that."

"He flew in late last night—typical Herbaceous."

"Classic," Matthew laughed, shaking his head. "I have to see him; I need to tell him about the movie I'm working on about my grandfather."

"How's that going?" Ben asked, curious.

Matthew paused, considering the whirlwind of thoughts in his mind. "It's going... well. I've hit a writing vein, and the words are flowing. It's like trying to keep up with a fire hydrant at a dog park."

Ben chuckled. "That's great! I'm looking forward to reading it."

“Yeah, I’ll send it to you as soon as I have a draft. I’m just trying to quiet my inner critic for a bit.”

Matthew checked the time on his phone. The urgency of the moment crashed over him. “Okay, I’ve got to go! I need to find the one and only Uncle Herbaceous!”

They both laughed, their camaraderie brightening the lush surroundings of the Smileblazer Garden of Eden, where dreams were cultivated with as much care as the plants themselves.

* * *

Sunlight streamed into the cultivation pod at Smileblazer’s facilities, creating a warm atmosphere in the iconic Egg #2, the first Planting Eden pod at Sedona headquarters and a spinoff of Uncle Addy’s Genesis Egg #1 in Chicago. Matthew entered with a mix of pride and amusement, spotting his uncle enthusiastically addressing a group of visiting botanists from Argentina. Uncle Addy was passionately explaining the setup of the pod, detailing everything from the soil mixture to the watering methods.

Matthew paused at the entrance, smiling at how, just a few years ago, Uncle Addy had struggled to launch Egg #1. Now he was an agricultural rock star, inspiring a global network of pods with his techniques. The realization filled Matthew with delight as he considered how far his uncle had come.

As the seminar concluded, Matthew approached Uncle Addy, who broke into his trademark goofy smile.

"Come here, nephew! Give me a big hug!" Addy exclaimed, arms wide open.

The family embraced, a joyful reunion that seemed to dissolve old tensions.

"I need to talk with you," Matthew said once they broke apart, eager to redirect his uncle's enthusiasm.

"I'm free right now," Addy replied, still grinning. "I was heading to the cafeteria for lunch with Chef Daniel. Want to join?"

"That sounds great. I wonder what culinary marvel Chef Daniel has prepared today," Matthew mused, considering the cafeteria's reputation for creative dishes.

As they walked toward the cafeteria, greeting tourists and collaborators, Matthew reveled in their status at Smileblazer Headquarters. Smiles surfaced wherever they went, brightening the atmosphere.

Upon entering the cafeteria, Matthew felt a mix of excitement and skepticism. The open-concept kitchen buzzed with activity, with Chef Daniel, a Michelin star chef, at the center orchestrating the culinary hustle.

"So, what's on the menu today, chef?" Matthew asked, intrigued.

"Duck with foie gras and fingerling potatoes," Chef Daniel announced proudly, "and for vegetarians, a veggie steak made with cauliflower and garbanzo beans."

"Yes, but when are you going to fulfill my lifelong dream of barbecued meats?" Uncle Addy interjected, mischief in his eyes.

Matthew cringed, anticipating another enthusiastic

pitch. "Oh, not again..."

"We need to cook BBQ together," Addy continued, undeterred. "Get my smoker going! I trained for years as a pit master in Memphis."

Chef Daniel chuckled, sharing a knowing look with Matthew.

"I know, Uncle Addy, we all know," Daniel confirmed, his tone a mix of admiration and exasperation.

Addy pressed on, oblivious to the eye rolls. "This place needs more BBQ! I have the sauces and the methods. I've got everything!"

"We know, Uncle. Maybe we'll set that on the agenda for next quarter," Matthew interjected, trying to steer the conversation back to the food.

Impatient and eager to order, he turned to Daniel. "We'll have two ducks, Daniel."

He looked back at Addy with authority. "Just eat the duck, Addy."

Uncle Addy laughed, soaking up the attention. "BBQ! BBQ!! BBQ!!" He shouted, gathering amused and exasperated looks from other patrons.

"WE HEAR YOU!" Matthew shouted back, unable to suppress his laughter.

Chef Daniel finished plating their meals and handed them their trays. Matthew and Addy laughed as they made their way to a table on the outskirts of the busy cafeteria, ready to dig in.

Once seated, Uncle Addy wasted no time. "Mmm mmmm mmmmm... So good! So good!" he proclaimed,

devouring his meal with enthusiasm. Matthew watched, half-amused and half-horrified by his uncle's hearty appetite.

"So, what's on your mind, nephew?" Addy asked between bites, wiping grease from his chin.

"A LOT," Matthew replied with a playful tone.

"Seriously, what do you want to talk about?" Addy asked, shoveling in another piece of duck, blissfully unaware of the crumbs cascading onto his shirt.

"I want to talk to you about Zayde. I started a project. I'm writing a movie about his life."

Uncle Addy paused, his fork mid-air. His eyes widened in curiosity. "What's the movie about?"

"Well, it's called *The 12 Glasses*. I want to chronicle his life through the symbolism and narrative of them, showing how they represent both the fragility and strength of our family. It's quite a tapestry we've woven as Goodmans," Matthew explained, his voice warming with the thought.

Addy leaned in, intrigued, but his brow furrowed slightly. "Sounds ambitious... you smoke any of our CreativityBomb strain?"

"Yeah, I smoked a lot," Matthew admitted, chuckling as he considered how that strain mirrored his writing process. "The narrative weaves back and forth in time, told from each family member's perspective. It's quite breathtaking."

Addy continued chewing, nodding as he understood the enormity of what his nephew was attempting. "How can I help?"

"I need you to share some stories from your side. I want

to hear about your marriage and how you broke two glasses," Matthew requested, his tone turning serious.

Addy rolled his eyes, but the weight of the conversation settled in.

"You know, YOU broke two glasses, Uncle?" Matthew reminded him.

"I know, I know. But why bring that up? Those marriages are over! I have Lauren now. I'm GOOD!"

"Exactly. You ARE good. But those failures led to your success. That is the heart of the story. To show healing. Isn't that Smileblazer's mission? My story is the same with my marriage to Elizabeth. I'm going to share that part of me too. I need all the stories of ALL the glasses!"

Feeling the pressure of the moment, Addy relented. "Ok, Ok, OK!.... What do you want to hear?"

Matthew leaned closer, determination shining through. "Let's start with the first glass you broke. Your marriage to Karen?"

SEPTEMBER 17, 1986
ADDY AND KAREN'S WEDDING
HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS

The sanctuary of Congregation Beth El buzzed with excitement, laughter filling the air in a celebration of new beginnings. The synagogue, a relic of 1987, showcased families decked out in bold 80s fashion: towering hairstyles, oversized shoulder pads, and plenty of polyester. It was a big day for the Goodman family. Addy stood at the altar, ready to marry his new bride, Karen.

The Rabbi, with more wisdom than hair, guided the couple into the next chapter of their lives. "Addy and Karen" he intoned, hands raised, "I now pronounce you Husband and Wife."

In that moment, Addy's foot rose and came down sharply on a chalice, shattering it into glittering pieces. The crowd erupted in cheers and applause, as if they had just witnessed a sporting event.

Amidst the joyful crowd, the camera focused on Gerry and Gita, dressed in their wedding best, their faces beaming with pride for their son. Gerry's voice rang out. "Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov!" He smiled, embodying the joy of a loving father.

Back in Smileblazer's main cafeteria, Addy lost himself in memories of his wedding day. A flicker of sorrow crossed his face as he thought of his mother, Gita, who had passed away just a few years earlier.

"So what happened?" Matt asked, blunt and direct, snapping Addy out of his reverie. "What really happened with you and Karen? I was just a kid then, but I could tell you were struggling. My parents gossiped about it endlessly."

"Ugh, the family pariah," Addy sighed. "That's what you get for living authentically—people love to criticize. You know how it is, Matt."

It was a rare bond shared between the two Goodman men, both feeling like outcasts in the family. Despite their occasional rivalry, they recognized their connection in their shared outsider status.

"Yeah, I know... but it affected me as a kid. Their judgments of you made me think you were crazy too. Now I see you were just marching to the beat of a different drummer—like John Bonham from Led Zeppelin."

Addy laughed, appreciating the empathy from his eldest nephew. "Well, I did act like a rock star sometimes. That's something I'm still working on..."

"You think?" Matthew smirked, their laughter echoing the carefree spirit of youth.

"So really, tell me what happened?" Matthew urged, leaning in.

“Okay,” Addy sighed, a weight lifting as he prepared to share his story.

* * *

MARCH 22, 1993
ADDY AND KAREN’S HOME
NORTHBROOK, IL

Arguments ricocheted back and forth, each word loaded with tension as Addy and Karen’s marriage came apart. The once-cozy bedroom felt claustrophobic, filled with frustration.

“Addy! You’re all over the place! How much did you lose today?” Karen yelled, her frantic energy evident.

“RELAX! I know what I’m doing,” Addy shot back, waving his arms dramatically. “You make money, you lose money. OVERALL I MAKE!”

“It’s the instability! I can’t deal with it! Plus, you’re drinking and smoking weed! Are you doing coke too?”

Avoiding her penetrating gaze, Addy deflected.

“We have two young children! What kind of example are you for them? Everyone thinks you’re nuts! EVERYONE!”

“Maybe I AM! And what about your instability? After you had the boys, you were so depressed. What did you want me to do?”

Accusations flew both ways. “I couldn’t console you! Nothing I did made you happy. So I smoke a little weed, maybe

do a bump of coke," he said mockingly, pretending to sniff. "Everyone in my line of work does that! I'm a commodities trader! We're all like this!"

Karen's incredulous expression was cutting. "YOU ARE NEXT LEVEL! I love you, but I can't keep doing this... plus..." Her voice trailed off, the weight of her emotions gripping her.

Addy sensed the shift. "What the fuck? Are you seeing someone else?"

The question hung heavy in the air. Karen fell silent as tears streamed down her face. "I am. His name is Federico."

The camera zoomed in on Addy's stunned expression, his bloodshot eyes wide with disbelief. "Fuuuuck."

* * *

The cafeteria buzzed with activity, a stark contrast to the heaviness of reality. Matthew sat across from Addy, who seemed lost in thought. The shadows of Addy's past revealed a man grappling with memories and regrets.

"That must've been a shock," Matthew said, a blend of compassion and curiosity in his tone.

Addy took a deep breath, finally ready to share his heart. "We filed for divorce, and she moved in with her Italian lover, Federico," he said, throwing his hands up in exasperation. "How could I compete with an Italian Stallion?"

Matthew smirked. "C'mon, you still got the Goodman charm."

"Fuck yeah, I do," Addy laughed, shaking his head, nostalgia swirling around him.

"God knows what damage all those fights did to the kids. And having a broken family plus my substance abuse... I probably messed them up."

"Your kids turned out great," Matthew reassured him. "Jay is a post-doctorate chemist at MIT working with us on the chemical makeup of your Planting Eden products. And Alex works for NASA!"

Addy looked at him, brow furrowed in disbelief. "Yeah, it's kinda crazy."

"Wouldn't it be cool to test Smileblazer products in space? You wanna be the first pothead on the moon, Uncle?"

Matthew envisioned Uncle Herbaceous blissfully smoking a joint in the lunar module, clouds of smoke blocking the view of the moon.

"Fuck yeah!" Addy grinned, fully absorbed in the thought. "I know it all worked out... I'm still healing from it, I guess."

"We all are, Uncle. It's why we do what we do here. We're igniting everyone's healing," Matthew replied, warmth and conviction in his voice.

He gestured around the cafeteria at the posters promoting healing through plant-based medicine, a comforting embrace for Addy.

Addy locked eyes with Matthew, gratitude shining in his gaze. "Fuck right, we are."

They both burst into laughter, the moment of pure

Goodman joy softening the past as they rebuilt their connection one hearty laugh at a time.

* * *

After finishing their meal, Matthew and Addy headed to the cafeteria dessert stand, standing in line and eagerly scanning the array of tempting selections. The air was sweet with the smell of pastries, a welcome treat amid their busy day.

"Now can we talk about Shari? Glass Number Two?" Matthew asked, his words a blend of cautious curiosity.

Addy laughed, shifting to a more serious tone. "Now that one I KNOW I messed up. I was too proud and blind to see it back then."

"You sure were. Honestly, if there were a medal for avoiding responsibility, you would be the gold medalist in the 'I Rushed Into That Marriage Olympics,'" Matthew replied, shaking his head.

"Hey, it was a competitive event!" Addy shot back, mock seriousness creeping into his voice. "The pressure was intense, like these pastries we're about to indulge in."

"Right. Because when I think of messed-up marriages, I always think of the sugar content in pie," Matthew replied, rolling his eyes playfully.

As they waited, Addy couldn't help but let out a nostalgic sigh. "You know, looking back, I see my life as one of these dessert trays. Each relationship was a different dessert—some were sweet, others too rich, and a few? A

complete disaster.”

Matthew gave him a knowing smile. “When did you become Stoner Forest Gump?” he asked with a chuckle. “And which one was Shari? The fondue? Because that melted fast.”

“More like the overly ambitious soufflé,” Addy quipped. “Puffed up with promise until the slightest tremor brought it crashing down.”

* * *

APRIL 7, 1998
PASSOVER DINNER
HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS

Gerry and Gita’s dining room buzzed with energy as the family gathered for Passover. The room pulsed with vibrant personalities, with Gerry and Gita at opposite ends of the table, guiding the lively assembly with authority and affection. Laughter and chatter filled the air, uniting relatives from different generations.

Uncle Addy sat with his boys, Jay and Alex, along with Aunt Janet, Uncle Jim, their daughters Babe and Zoe, Allan, Susan, Uncle Jordan, and Aunt Kathy. The four oldest grandsons – Matthew, Aaron, Jeremy, and Kevin – were close to Gerry, eagerly soaking up his wisdom.

“Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melach ha-olam, borei pre

hagafen," Gerry began, holding up the ceremonial wine cup with the gravity that commanded respect.

As the Hebrew blessing echoed, the grandchildren burst into song, harmonizing the "Four Questions" with youthful enthusiasm. Little cousin Alex stumbled through the verses, prompting chuckles from the adults.

When the singing faded, Gita stood up and glanced at her daughter-in-law, Susan. "I'm going to get dessert. Susan, do you want to help me?" she asked, signaling a retreat to the kitchen that left the room to the men and children.

Jordan seized the moment, looking mischievously at Addy. "So where is Shari this evening?" he asked, leaning in, his tone teasing yet serious.

"I'd rather not say," Addy replied.

Jordan's brow arched. "You'd rather not say?!"

"Knock it off, bro! I don't want any of your crap tonight!" Addy snapped, a hint of frustration creeping in.

"Well, tough luck, younger brother. We're family! I'll say what I want!" Jordan shot back, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

The tension thickened, and the other guests shifted uncomfortably, wary witnesses to the familiar feud.

"Seriously? It's been less than four weeks since the wedding! Please tell me you signed a prenup!" Jordan's incredulity charged the atmosphere.

Addy avoided eye contact, staring at his lap as if looking for answers.

"So she gets HALF?! After just four weeks?!" Jordan pressed.

Addy remained silent, which only added fuel to Jordan's fire.

"Is she back with that ex-husband? You know he's antisemitic, right? Did you hear what he said at Allan and Susan's house?!"

The atmosphere tensed further as Jordan's voice rose. "This marriage was a con! They conned you!"

Addy's cheeks flushed with anger as he continued to avoid Jordan's gaze.

"And the glass! Do you realize you've wasted two of them?! That means TWO LESS for the grandkids!"

Gasps filled the air as wide eyes turned toward the frightened children sitting too close for comfort.

"And she left you for a NAZI! The irony would be funny if it weren't so sad!"

That was it. Addy exploded from his seat, the chair clattering backward. "SHUT UP, JORDAN! SHUT UP! ALWAYS THE ONE LECTURING!"

Allan, sensing the tension, attempted to intervene. "Hey, Addy! STOP!"

"WHO ARE YOU TO LECTURE ME, JORDAN? WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?! MAYBE ALLAN CAN LECTURE ME!" Addy's voice held years of resentment, each word laced with raw emotion.

Allan, protective of his family, wore a look of concern.

"ALLAN HAS THE GREAT MARRIAGE, THE GREAT JOB, THE GREAT KIDS! BUT YOU!? WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!"

Jordan, now out of his chair, met Addy's fury. "YOU'RE HIGH! YOU'RE ON DRUGS, AREN'T YOU?! THERE ARE KIDS AT THE TABLE!"

Eyes darted around the room, panic settling as the children

struggled to process the chaos.

"IS IT POT? COCAINE? WHAT ARE YOU ON?!"

Realizing he needed to leave, Addy stormed toward the coat closet.

"YOU NEED HELP! GET SOME HELP! YOUR KIDS DEPEND ON IT!" Jordan shouted, his voice echoing through the room.

Tension crackled as Addy grabbed his boys. "ALEX, JAY, COME ON! WE'RE LEAVING!"

"Why?" Jay frowned. "I want to play connect four!"

"Why?! Because your Uncle Jordan is an ASSHOLE!" Addy snapped.

Sister Janet stepped in, desperate to quell the rising conflict. "Hey! You guys are brothers! YOU LOVE EACH OTHER! STOP IT!"

"I'M DONE WITH HIM! I'M DONE!" Addy shouted, pulling his boys close and slamming the front door behind them.

Silence engulfed the table, shock rippling through the family as they processed the scene. No one spoke; each person was lost in their own thoughts – horrified yet transfixed.

Allan slowly turned to Jordan, disappointment on his face. "Cool it, Jordan. You didn't need to do this in front of the kids."

At the head of the table, Gita wiped her tears, locking gazes with Gerry. Their eyes exchanged a silent question: "What are we going to do?"

The room felt heavy, fraught with unspoken fears and unresolved tensions that hung in the air like the scent of burnt brisket.

Matthew lay in the back of his Mercedes camper, the soft rumble of the engine providing a soothing backdrop against the turbulence of his memories. The open sunroof framed the night sky, stars twinkling above him, each one a silent witness to the dreams and traumas that had shaped his life.

The sound of George Michael's "Heal the Pain" flowed through his headphones, the melody intertwining with his thoughts. The chorus echoed in his mind – "How can I help you? Please let me try to, I can heal the pain that you're feeling inside" – prompting him to reflect on the significance of the stories playing out in his memories.

His gaze shifted from the moonlit sky to his own history, recalling the moments that had scarred and shaped him. The fragile glasses that danced through his mind symbolized the shards of broken relationships and a shared family trauma. "Wow," he whispered to himself, struck by the realization. "My grandparents loved everyone through it all. They were the healing glue."

As George Michael's voice wrapped around him, he was transported back to the last Passover supper, where Gerry and Gita exchanged a piercing gaze, their love grounding the turmoil around them. It was a reminder that unity was possible even amid chaos.

Then, the tranquility shattered as another memory surged forth—Jini’s angry voice echoing in the confined space of the car, her frustration erupting suddenly. The guilt he felt as a child, watching his family’s conflicts from the sidelines, resurfaced with intensity, mirrored in Jini’s rage at him. The weight of that familiarity hung heavy, resonating with the refrain playing on repeat in his mind. “Whenever you want me, you know that I will be, waiting for the day that you say you’ll be mine.”

The clash of past and present felt almost unbearable. Memories collided like waves against a rocky shore, and for a moment, the weight of expectation threatened to pull him under.

Taking a deep breath, he reached for the nightstand light and switched it off, plunging the space into comforting darkness. As the melody faded, all that remained was the soft hush of the night.

Matthew closed his eyes, letting the remnants of the song and memories swirl around him as he drifted into sleep, determined to find clarity and healing in the morning light.

* * *

The morning sun streamed through the sunroof of Matthew’s camper van, warming his face as he awoke with a start, momentarily disoriented in the remnants of his dreams. He was naked, as usual; no need to complicate comfort with clothing. With a carefree leap out of bed, he

threw on a pair of boxers and began to orient himself to the day.

As he swished toothpaste in his mouth, Matthew moved through his morning routine with determination—brushing his teeth, hopping into the cramped shower, and picking up the chaos that defined life in a camper van. This was his patch of wanderlust, and he was its reluctant custodian.

After feeling more human, he grabbed his phone, bracing himself for the usual deluge of notifications. Twenty-seven alerts awaited him. He scrolled through the texts, his heart racing slightly with hope. The absence of any significant message from Jini lingered in his mind, creating a dull throb that refused to go away. He sighed, feeling a mix of frustration and longing in his chest.

Toby Mac's upbeat "Goodness" played through his speakers, its lively tune clashing with the weight of his thoughts. A flashback hit him: Jini and he belting out the song during a car trip back from Colorado, swaying and laughing together, their voices jubilant and wildly out of tune. It was one of those rare, perfect moments he wished he could revisit endlessly.

His reminiscing was interrupted by the shrill ring of his phone. Startled, he glanced down and saw "Aunt Janet" flashing on the screen.

"Hey, Aunt Janet! How are you?" he answered, shaking off the nostalgia.

"Hi there, eldest nephew! I hear you're working on a cool new project," she replied, her voice warm despite the

distance.

Matthew raised an eyebrow, feigning surprise. "I am. Who told you?"

"Just Zaide. He's really excited about it. And so am I! Is there any way I can help?"

"Well, actually, I was going to call you. I'm looking for more stories for scene ideas, specifically around the Nazi glasses. It would be great to get your perspective about them. Any come to mind?"

There was a thoughtful pause on the line, and Matthew could picture Aunt Janet rifling through her memories.

"Matthew, I have a million. Come on, it's OUR family! How are you narrowing it down?" she replied, a playful exasperation in her tone.

"By the grace of God, I'm finding a way," he answered, glancing at his notepad filled with potential scene ideas, one phrase standing out: "Goodman Divorces."

He pressed on. "Let me ask you about your first marriage to Bob. How did it end? How did Bubby and Zayde cope and support you?"

A slow sadness seeped into her voice. "You know, Bob just passed..."

"I do. I'm so sorry for your loss," Matthew responded, his compassion evident. He could almost feel the weight of Janet's memories pressing through the phone.

"Yeah, we were high school sweethearts. He was everything to me. I guess we were just too young..."

A lull hung between them as Janet drifted back in time, lost in the bittersweet echoes of her youth.

“Okay, I’ll share more about it...” Janet finally said, her tone a mix of sorrow and tenderness, intertwined with the healing they both sought.

* * *

JULY 9, 1979
JANET AND BOB’S WEDDING
HIGHLAND PARK, IL

The synagogue buzzed with lively chatter and laughter, embodying the optimism of 1976. Janet and Bob stood at the front, eyes locked, surrounded by family and friends dressed to the nines.

“Bob and Janet, I now pronounce you husband and wife!” the Rabbi declared, his voice resonating warmly through the hall.

Bob grinned broadly and dramatically stomped on the glass, the sound shattering the silence like a celebratory exclamation point. “Mazel Tov!” erupted from the congregation, a joyful cheer that seemed to fill the space and bounce off the stained-glass windows.

In that moment, as family members embraced and laughter filled the air, it felt like nothing could dim the brightness of the day – a day of promises and new beginnings.

1 YEAR LATER

Janet sat in her childhood bedroom, now a place that felt more like a tomb than a sanctuary. She sobbed uncontrollably, her face a mess of puffiness and sorrow, her eyes red and swollen. Gita, her mother, sat beside her on the bed, a comforting presence in the storm of emotion.

"Oh, honey. What happened?" Gita cooed, patting Janet gently on the back.

"I don't know," Janet wailed, burying her face in her hands. "He changed. He changed!"

"It's okay, dear. It's okay..." Gita reassured her, though uncertainty lined her voice. "Everything is going to be okay."

"We fought. A LOT..." Janet interjected between sobs. "But I love him so much. He has completely broken my heart!"

Gita's brow furrowed. "What happened? Did he cheat on you?"

"He's just not ready," Janet said, the words spilling out like a confession. "He doesn't want to be married anymore. He thinks we made a mistake... Oh, Mom."

Resting her head against Gita, Janet continued to weep, finding solace in her mother's embrace. "I'm not ready to give up. I think his mom got to him. She never liked me!"

At that, Gita bristled, but a hint of amusement flashed in her eye. "Now, now, Marlene Shulman loves you! Stop that!"

Downstairs, Gerry sensed the commotion and decided to

intervene. He knocked gently on the door, preparing himself for whatever emotional storm was brewing.

"Can I come in, sweetie?" he asked, his voice low and gentle.

"Ughh... OK..." Janet replied, resigned to the inevitable family intervention.

With a comforting creak, Gerry entered and sat next to Janet, his presence grounding. "My precious daughter, you know I love you so much?" he said, placing an arm around her.

Gita looked at her husband, concern mingling with affection. "Gerry, it's over... Bob wants out of the marriage."

Their eyes met, a silent understanding passing between them. They had weathered many storms, their love strengthened by the trials of parenthood. Gerry turned back to Janet, his expression softening.

"Sweetie, Mother and I are here for you always. You can stay here as long as you need until you're ready to move out." He wiped a tear from her cheek, the gesture both tender and protective.

"I'll help pack up your things at yours and Bob's place. Does that sound okay?" he offered, his voice steady and reassuring.

Janet, overwhelmed, wrapped her arms tightly around her father, seeking refuge in his embrace. "Awww, Dad," she cried, her raw emotion spilling over, her sorrow mixing with gratitude.

As she clung to him, Gerry exchanged a knowing glance with Gita – the unspoken words hanging in the air: "We got this." Their family saga, filled with struggle yet underscored by love, would continue.

Matthew stood outside his camper van at Bell Rock, the striking red rock formations of Sedona towering in the background. With the sun casting a golden hue on the landscape, he squinted up at the mountains while cradling his phone to his ear. The weight of his grandparents' legacy rested on him, heavy yet comforting.

"Matthew, your grandparents were rocks," Janet's voice crackled through the line, steady but filled with emotion. "They were always there for us. Always. No matter what."

Matthew nodded even though she couldn't see him. He felt the truth of her words resonate within him.

"And yes, sometimes Mom—your Bubby—could be difficult," she continued. "But I always knew it was because of how much she loved me. The silent love my father gave to her and us kids was constant and always felt, even at the lowest points."

A wistful smile formed on Matthew's lips as he stared at the mountains, each contour echoing the stories woven through his family's history. He pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and took a slow drag, letting the smoke drift into the air like the memories floating through his mind.

"Thank you for sharing that," he said, his voice contemplative. "That's definitely going in the script. Your story really made me think about mine. I've put my parents through some shit too."

"Oh, you have!" Janet laughed, the warmth in her voice bringing a brief joy to the moment.

Matthew jotted down a note in his notepad. "Meet with Mom and Dad," he scribbled under his growing list of scene ideas for *"Goodman Divorces."* Though simple, the task felt monumental yet necessary.

"I know my parents are part of my healing journey," he said, running a hand through his hair. "I need to meet with them soon. Thank you again so much, Janet."

"Always, my eldest nephew. I'm always here to help. Don't hesitate."

"I won't," he replied, the promise lingering in the air like the smoke from his cigarette, curling and dissipating into the vast openness.

After finishing his freshly squeezed Smileblazer OJ, he rinsed the cup and leaned back against the van as he turned the ignition. The rumble of the engine broke the morning stillness, and a renewed sense of purpose washed over him. George Michael's "Heal the Pain" played through the speakers, harmonizing with the beat of his heart.

As the van rolled off into the foothills of Sedona, red dust stirred up behind him, an echo of the trails he still needed to navigate. The landscape blurred around him, a tapestry of memories and stories colliding as he headed toward the next chapter, a testament to healing and the bonds that could withstand the test of time.

Inside a brainstorming bubble at Smileblazer Headquarters, the atmosphere buzzed with energetic chatter. Movie posters adorned the walls, showcasing past successes and hopeful visions, while mock-ups for the upcoming film illuminated the space. It was a lively mix of creativity and inspiration, promising whirlwind ideas and the occasional iced coffee spill.

Matthew swung the door open, and the chatter abruptly transitioned into an awkward hush, making him the center of attention.

"Relax, everyone," he said with casual nonchalance. "Carry on. Pretend I'm not here."

Confused expressions flickered around the room as colleagues assessed whether he was serious. Katherine, with her soft yet commanding presence, rolled her eyes at his display of mock humility.

"Seriously?" she asked, eyebrows arched in exasperation, though a hint of amusement played beneath her impatience.

Matthew laughed, breaking the tension. "I'm kidding; I know you're here to pitch me today. So what do you have? Let's get right into it!"

Katherine, in her late thirties and possessing an ethereal quality, began, "We've been working on some ideas to

promote your movie to studios and execs.” Her confidence resonated as she sought support from her team, heads nodding in agreement.

“You tasked us with developing a slick 30-second trailer and a PR release to accompany it. We think we’ve got some solid ideas,” she continued, gesturing for her colleagues to prepare the visuals.

“Go ahead,” Matthew encouraged, settling in with a growing sense of excitement.

Katherine launched into the trailer, showcasing a rapid succession of images: shards of glass shattering and reflecting fragments of the Goodman family’s past. Each broken piece of the 12 Nazi Glasses flickered with emotional resonance, teasing laughter and tears before the title card appeared: *The 12 Glasses: The Resurrection of the Goodmans*. Presented by Matthew Goodman and the Smileblazer Medicine Collective.

The room was electric as everyone awaited Matthew’s critique. “I like it,” he declared, nodding appreciatively. “Go with it. Who edited it?”

“Shad, of course. Who do you think?” Katherine replied, glancing at Shad, the lovable Art Director at the other end of the table.

Shad Schoenke, one of Matthew’s oldest friends, beamed with pride. “Good work, bud,” Matthew said, giving him a sincere nod.

“Thanks,” Shad replied, his smile broadening, knowing he had done a good job.

“I have one addition,” Matthew continued, his tone

becoming more serious. Katherine's eyes widened with anticipation.

"I want it to say, 'Presented by Matthew Goodman, the Smileblazer Collective, AND... *Steven Spielberg*.'"

"But we don't have Spielberg yet," Katherine protested, her brow furrowing.

"Just do it. We'll get him," Matthew asserted confidently, his eyes shining with the belief in his dreams.

Recognizing the enthusiasm that often led to success, Katherine relented. "Done. We got you."

Matthew stood up, a smile breaking across his face as he thanked everyone in the bubble—a small victory in this moment of creative collaboration.

As he stepped out, leaving the brainstorming activity behind, a sense of readiness filled the air, the palpable energy of possibility coursing through Smileblazer headquarters. It was a day marked by the balance of history and aspiration, one that could ripple through the future, cementing the Goodman legacy in the annals of their untold stories.

* * *

Matthew walked through Smileblazer Headquarters, where colorful artwork and movie posters decorated the walls, showcasing various projects in the pipeline. He greeted everyone with high-fives and bright smiles, fueled by a surge of optimism. The catchy rhythm of "Ain't Nothing Gonna Break My Stride" energized him further.

As he approached his office, he suddenly heard someone calling for him from down the hall. It was Jen, Smileblazer's Production Chief, known for her hippie aesthetic and authoritative presence.

"Matt! Matt! MATT! Stop! I need to talk to you!" she shouted, her hands waving to get his attention.

Matthew turned to see Jen rushing toward him and sighed, realizing he couldn't escape into his workspace just yet.

"Okay, you've caught me. What's the emergency?" he said, stepping aside to let her in.

Jen entered with purpose, standing over him like a general. "Have you talked to your brother lately? He keeps calling me, saying he can't reach you."

Matthew glanced at his phone and saw multiple missed calls from Aaron. "Damn! I've been so focused on the script that I completely forgot to call him back."

Jen gave him a stern look, the weight of her concern settling on him. "Matt, you've got to put family first. You know that!"

"I know," Matthew replied, meeting her gaze sheepishly. He wasn't prepared for this concern, especially since he was currently in charge of a project.

"How's he doing?" he asked, hoping to shift the focus back to Aaron.

"He's great. A content-making machine. We just finished his latest podcast with Vinay," Jen replied with a mix of pride and enthusiasm.

"Vinay? That guy is like a plant whisperer," Matthew

said, shaking his head at the thought of the oncologist discussing plant-based medicine. “I hope Aaron doesn’t start calling himself ‘Papa Plant Man’ or something.”

“Oh, trust me, he’s full of it!” Jen laughed, pulling out her phone. “Here, take a look at the recording.”

She turned the screen toward Matthew, showing the bustling podcast studio. It looked exactly like he had envisioned – brilliantly lit and buzzing with energy.

“Looks great,” he said. “But you know what? I’ve seen enough of Aaron’s content to know it’s going to do well.” He leaned back, surveying the eager faces in the room.

“How’s Juliette doing?” he asked, steering the conversation in warmer waters.

“She’s doing good! Aaron even brought her on the show and asked her a few questions. She really nailed it!”

“Cute kids always get the likes... Good move making her the star of the show,” Matthew chuckled.

“Give him a call,” Jen said, her tone turning serious again.

“I will,” Matthew replied, although a hint of reluctance lingered in his voice.

As Jen exited, Matthew took a moment to absorb his surroundings. He looked up at the poster for his film, *The 12 Glasses*, hanging prominently in his office, reminding him of the emotional complexities he was trying to weave together. It was time to face reality.

He opened his MacBook Pro and navigated to FaceTime, tapping on Aaron’s name. The call connected, revealing his brother’s long-haired face. Matthew felt the

weight of Aaron's disapproving gaze.

"Seriously, what the hell? You can't pick up your phone? I know you go into isolation mode when you're writing, but come on, bro," Aaron exclaimed, frustration clear in his voice.

"I know, I know... I'm sorry... Yeah, I'm really in it right now," Matthew replied, trying to brush off the guilt.

"Juliette is doing much better, thanks for asking," Aaron said with mock sarcasm.

"Good to hear," Matthew said, laughing lightly. He appreciated Aaron's ability to switch moods quickly, a skill honed in their family.

"Oh, and Mom and Dad are good too. I've been talking to Dad every day. They miss hearing your voice. Give the old farts a call," Aaron added, sarcasm thick.

"Okay, I hear you, bro," Matthew muttered, feeling the familiar chaos of family.

"So what else is up with you? How's this black hole of a project going?"

"Funny, it's not a black hole. Actually, it's a stunning supernova, with creativity exploding out of me." Matthew's energy rose as he envisioned a supernova's vibrant display echoing his creative process.

"Nice, dude." Aaron chuckled, clearly enjoying Matthew's melodrama.

"That's actually why I'm calling you. I need your input on some scenes."

"Okay," Aaron replied, intrigued.

"Yeah, you were there with me as kids. What do you

remember about Bubby and Zayde and the glasses?"

Aaron fell silent for a moment, then spoke thoughtfully. "Have you told the stories about Addy and the two glasses he broke?"

"Yeah, I've talked to Uncle Addy. There were almost three glasses. I'll tell you that story later." Matthew laughed, recalling Addy's mischief.

"Okay then, what about your glass from your divorce with Elizabeth? You cover that yet?" Aaron shot back, his tone sharp.

"Yeah, that's in there... I'm working through it," Matthew replied, rolling his eyes and resisting the urge to dwell on that memory.

"And what about my glass and my wedding with Amalia? You were a mess that day," Aaron teased.

Matthew considered the narrative, knowing it was important. "Ah, yeah... Let's talk about that..."

Their conversation flowed like a dance between brothers, intertwined with frustration and nostalgia. They navigated the complexities of life together, each glass and memory contributing to their family history, still at risk of shattering, yet filled with the resilient hope of healing.

* * *

OCTOBER 8, 2012
AARON AND AMALIA'S WEDDING
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

The sun shined brightly over Phoenix as guests gathered for the wedding of Aaron and Amalia. The outdoor hotel venue was adorned with flowers and decorations that conveyed an atmosphere of love and mild chaos. The Goodman and Kolber families filled one side of the aisle, dressed in outfits that hinted at the bold fashion of earlier times.

On the podium, a Greek Orthodox priest and a Jewish rabbi stood side by side, illustrating the couple's commitment to their blended heritage. Whenever the rabbi spoke, the priest would nod, as if they were sharing a private conversation.

Amalia made her entrance, radiant as she walked down the aisle with her father, Kirk, who looked proud yet somewhat overwhelmed. As she approached, a string quartet serenaded the couple with a Beatles melody – all perfectly fitting for an Aaron and Amalia celebration.

Aaron waited at the altar, his expression a mix of excitement and nerves. He was flanked by his parents, Allan and Susan, who beamed with pride. When Amalia reached the altar, Kirk handed her off to Aaron with a flourish.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the rabbi began, his voice filled with gravity. "Aaron and Amalia, I now pronounce you husband and

wife!"

As Aaron stomped on the glass, shattering it with a satisfying crack, the congregation erupted in cheers of "Mazel Tov!" that enveloped the couple.

While everyone cheered, Matthew stood at a distance, his expression unreadable, feeling a mix of pride for his brother and a gnawing sense of regret. He wanted to share in the joy, but memories of his own broken marriage lingered painfully.

As the newlyweds made their way back down the aisle, guests began to rise for the reception. Jeremy, the family jokester, spotted Matthew amidst the crowd and approached with a mix of sympathy and cheeky enthusiasm.

"I heard about your separation from Elizabeth. I know I'm not supposed to bring it up, but I'm sorry," Jeremy said, his eyebrows knitting together playfully.

"Thanks. Yeah, marriage is a big commitment. I wasn't ready," Matthew replied, leaning back slightly, bracing for a conversation about his feelings.

"It's okay; neither am I. I'm 31 and still a bachelor," Jeremy joked, nudging Matthew playfully.

"Probably for the best," Matthew quipped. "Have you seen some of the relationships in this family? It's like shopping for shoes at a thrift store – most of them looked better before they started falling apart."

"Hey, let's go party! We'll dance the hora like Goodman maniacs. At least it'll take your mind off things," Jeremy encouraged as they made their way toward the grand ballroom.

As they entered the lavishly decorated reception hall, Matthew's spirits lifted slightly, though he couldn't completely

shake off his feelings. The space was filled with floral arrangements and pictures of the happy couple, and a sign-in book invited guests to leave their well-wishes – an invitation he felt unsure about.

Allan appeared beside him, wrapping him in a comforting hug as they surveyed the festive atmosphere. “You okay?” he asked, his tone filled with concern.

“Yeah, I’m okay, Dad,” Matthew replied, though his voice hinted at the truth beneath the surface.

“I know this isn’t easy for you. Not inviting Elizabeth was the right decision. I know you still care for her, but it would have been too challenging,” Allan said, his wisdom clear.

“Yeah, I know,” Matthew conceded, feeling the weight of family expectations. The separation was still fresh, just three weeks.

Susan joined them, offering a warm embrace as well. “Congrats, Mom. You’ve got a new daughter-in-law. At least you got a quick replacement for Elizabeth,” Matthew joked, attempting to lighten the mood, though it fell flat.

Allan and Susan exchanged shocked glances as the comment hung awkwardly in the air. “Sorry, bad joke... I guess I’m not okay,” Matthew admitted, feeling self-doubt creep in.

“Aww honey, you’re going to be fine,” Susan said, her compassion comforting.

Matthew's gaze drifted to the head table where his grandparents, Gerry and Gita, sat side by side. Gita welcomed him with open arms, pulling him into her embrace.

“Come here, Bubby is going to make you feel better!” she announced, her warmth soothing his frayed nerves.

Matthew breathed in the familiar scent of her lavender perfume and felt the support of family around him.

"Thank you, Bubby. I love you," he murmured, grateful for her presence.

Gerry soon approached, his solid presence rounding out the moment. Like at all the Goodman weddings, he held a cloth bag containing the remnants of the glass Aaron had just broken. Matthew felt a pang as he glanced at the bag, a painful reminder of losses felt in happy moments.

"I'm sorry, Zaide, I wasted a glass," he said quietly, remorse washing over him.

"Matthew," Gerry replied, his voice warm and steady, "there's no such thing as wasting a glass! This is life. Some relationships just aren't meant to be."

Gerry's soothing words began to calm the storm within Matthew. "You know, you're not the only Goodman with this story."

"But now one of my cousins or Aaron's children won't get a glass," Matthew said, anguish creeping back into his voice.

"Ah, but you had the wedding of all weddings, and those memories cannot be shattered," Gerry reassured him, his words resonating deeply.

Matthew met Gerry's gaze, tear-streaked but warming with his wisdom. "Yeah, it sure was a great wedding."

As the music shifted, the band began to play a lively rendition of Hava Nagilah, signaling it was time to dance the Hora. Matthew took Gita's hand and pulled her into the energy of the dance floor, where laughter swirled around them. They joined the chorus, hoisting Aaron and Amalia into the air on chairs, their

joy contagious as the room filled with movement.

In the whirlwind of celebration, Matthew realized something profound: despite the complexities of family, love always found a way to endure. It was messy and vibrant, yet it compelled everyone forward, shattering expectations and allowing new beginnings to flourish.

The Sedona campus of Smileblazer had the charm of a wellness retreat designed with bright colors and a hint of quirkiness. Roosters welcomed the dawn, crowing like alarm clocks announcing the day. Pods inspired by the Garden of Eden thrived with greenery, their occupants blissfully unaware of the metaphorical weight they carried. Nearby, the dispensary prepared for business, embodying a blend of public service in a world caught between enlightenment and absurdity. Whether it was a holy haven or a capitalist venture was a topic of local debate over breakfast.

“What the hell...” Matthew groaned, blinking against the fluorescent lights as he struggled to shake off the remnants of sleep. Drool stained his shirt in an abstract reminder of last night’s regret—if only the setting felt less like a corporate bunker and more like a roadside diner.

“Get up, brotha from another mother!” Jen, the Production Chief and self-proclaimed Mother Bear, burst into his office, barely allowing him time to process her words.

“Wait, what?” he mumbled, still grappling with reality. “Where am I... What?”

“Your 9 AM is here! It’s your parents,” she announced with urgency.

Matthew's irritation flared. "My parents?! I didn't schedule a 9 AM with them!"

"No, I did! Family first, remember?!" Jen shot back, slamming the door behind her.

"Family first." The phrase echoed in his mind, mixing with a fresh wave of anxiety. His parents were on their way to disrupt his day. Before he could let his anxiety take over, a knock interrupted his thoughts.

"Matthew, it's Mom and Dad. Can we come in?" Allan called from the other side, his cheerful voice breaking the tension.

Allan and Susan entered the room, scanning the poster for Matthew's new movie with curiosity and concern. This wasn't just about a project; it felt like a window into Matthew's current state—a state that included drool and all.

"How's the script coming?" Allan asked, looking mildly concerned.

"Close to finishing Act 2. I actually fell asleep typing it," Matthew replied, using humor to deflect.

"You're writing fast," Allan noted. "It was only a week ago that you started. You sure know how to binge your own work."

"Every good story needs a crisis point," Matthew quipped. "Although instead of a turning point, I might just have a drool stain."

"Well, I'm glad you're doing it. Zayde's story needed to be told," Allan said.

Susan stepped in, wrapping her arms around him for a

hug. "Thanks, Mom. I needed that," Matthew muttered.

"Still no word from Jini?" Susan asked, concern lining her voice.

"No, nothing. Just silence." The memory of Jini's last outburst echoed in his mind: "I hate you. I hate you, I HATE YOU!!!" A wince crossed his face, one that Susan noticed.

"We need to talk," Allan declared. "We're having an intervention."

"Oh no, not again..." Matthew's heart sank, recalling the old wound of when they sent him to rehab several years earlier.

"No, it's not going to be like last time," Allan reassured him. "You're running a healing center now. We know you're in a good place."

"Honey, we just want to talk," Susan added gently.

"Okay." Reluctance seeped into his voice, like giving up on a disappointing Netflix series.

"We think you need to start dating again," Susan continued, her eyes filled with hope. "Don't you think it's time? She hasn't talked to you in nearly six months. You're a handsome man; you're rich and famous. You can have anyone!"

Matthew couldn't resist a sarcastic reply, "Well, I guess that's a perk. Let's add that to my resume."

"Seriously, Matthew," Allan pressed, "you need someone special in your life. Look at your mom and me. We've had each other for fifty years. Your Bubby and Zayde made it to seventy!"

Matthew raised an eyebrow. "So, what? I have to find a six-decade commitment now? Is there a handbook for legacy dating?"

"All I'm saying is you're practically writing a whole book about your Zayde's commitment to your Bubby. Don't forget Bubby was also committed to him. What about Jini? Where's her commitment to you?"

"Dad." The word came out as a plea. "I love her. I don't know how to let her go. I can't just cut people off. Elizabeth, Samantha—all my exes... I still have close relationships with them!"

Susan's expression softened. "Honey, it doesn't mean you and Jini can't be friends someday. Dwelling on her is draining you emotionally. We all see it."

Tears pricked at Matthew's eyes, the tenderness of the moment weighing heavily on him. "I know you're right," he whispered, caught between loss and reason. "But what if there are two worlds, two realities, we're living in?"

Allan and Susan exchanged curious glances, intrigued by Matthew's perspective.

"There's one world where Jini is gone," Matthew continued, looking down. "And I must look for love elsewhere." The weight of those words felt heavy.

"That world feels very dark. It's what most people see. However..." He lifted his gaze, seeking light. "There's another world where she's physically gone, but her heart is still with me."

His parents listened intently as he conjured the image—a moment frozen in time, a photo of him and Jini at sunset

in Rocky Point. "I know her heart is still connected to mine, no matter what. That world is much lighter and filled with her love."

"It's a conundrum because I feel like I'm living in both worlds." His certainty felt as fluid as the existence he was trying to explain, emotional currents swirling between them.

Matthew leaned back, staring at the ceiling. "The only truth that comforts me is that, with patience and time, her heart will heal and open back up to me... and the two worlds will merge."

Silence settled over the trio, infused with compassion and perhaps a bit of frustration at the universe for placing them in this moment.

Matthew stood and embraced his parents, their eyes sharing a gentle acceptance of life's complexities. "Mom, Dad, I'm going to be fine. Better than fine. I know I don't look it, but I think I'm close to healing."

As George Michael's "Heal the Pain" played softly, the moment lingered, buoyed by love yet tinged with the memory of unmade choices and unwritten futures.

In the bustling Smileblazer Recording Studio, Addy — aka Uncle Herbacious — sat before an array of colorful microphones and blinking lights, looking more like an eccentric wizard than a podcast host. His voice boomed through the speakers, filled with the enthusiasm of someone who clearly enjoyed the spotlight.

“Today we have a special show for all you Planting Eden gardeners! My nephew, Captain Pothead, is joining us to talk about an exciting new project!” The crowd responded with cheers and applause, as if a celebrity had just arrived.

Addy leaned in, his eyebrows dancing with mischief. “But before we get to the captain, I need to mention one of our blazing sponsors, Dank Lighting Company!” His eyes sparkled with excitement, more fitting for a cartoon character than a middle-aged man.

Meanwhile, in his dressing room, Matthew fumbled with the microphone, trying to ignore the faint sounds of a commercial playing in the background. A new cannabis cultivation lighting company was serenading the audience with a lighthearted pitch. Just as he secured the last clip, the door swung open.

“Hey, Captain Potfuck! You ready to go on the show?” Addy announced, bursting into the room like a game show

host meeting an unexpected contestant.

Matthew laughed incredulously. "Uncle, I swear if you call me that again, I'm suing for defamation."

"You realize you haven't been on the show since our fight?" Addy pressed, feigning offense as he dramatically placed a hand on his chest. "What the hell?! Is this how you treat your Uncle Herbacious?"

"Cool it. Be grateful I'm here at all. I could be on anyone's podcast in the world right now. You want me on Joe Rogan?" Matthew shot back, raising an eyebrow.

"Very funny. I see you're channeling your inner asshole, just like your Uncle Jordan. I like it!" Addy laughed, a laugh that hinted at mischief behind his wavy hair.

"Are you ready to talk to Zayde? Is our production guy in Chicago ready for the call?" Matthew asked, his tone sharp and focused. "Have you checked? Is Zayde even miked up yet?"

Addy, caught off guard by Matthew's rapid-fire questioning, took a moment to respond. "Hold on, let me get my PA." He called out, sounding more like a performer than someone asking for assistance.

The PA, a young woman named Kristen, appeared mid-stride, wearing a "Planting Eden" T-shirt that combined eco-friendly styles with a casual vibe—yet she seemed nervous, like a deer caught in headlights.

"Yeah, your grandfather is ready," Kristen stammered, glancing around anxiously.

Addy, sensing her discomfort, gestured theatrically. "Thanks! What's your name, by the way?"

"Kristen," she replied, her voice barely audible.

"Yeah, you're dismissed." Addy waved his hand, and Kristen hurried off, relief evident with each step.

"See? I told you! It's all taken care of. Relax!" Addy grinned like a politician after a successful speech. "I think you just need to get laid."

Matthew remained unfazed, crossing his arms defensively but resisting the urge to roll his eyes. "Funny," he replied, his sarcasm clear.

"Okay, I gotta run back to my booth. See ya out there, Captain Potfuck!" Addy called out, throwing an exaggerated wink as he returned to the production bustle.

Left alone in the dressing room, Matthew bit his lip, feeling a mix of anxiety and amusement. The anticipation of enduring his uncle's antics for the next thirty minutes was nearly unbearable, but he couldn't help feeling a flicker of excitement.

"Oh, this should be fun," he thought, a sardonic smile creeping across his face as he squared his shoulders for the impending chaos.

* * *

The production studio hummed with energy, filled with voices and laughter. Addy sat in the recording booth next to Matthew, his charisma on full display. The theme music for *The Uncle Herbacious Show* erupted, a blend of acoustic grunge and psychedelic sound that set the tone for the episode.

"Welcome back to the Uncle Herbacious show!" Addy announced, drawing laughter from the packed studio of relatives, friends, and even a few confused tourists.

"I'm here with my special guest, my eldest nephew, Matthew. You know him as Captain Potfuck, I mean Pothead!" he declared, his pride evident.

The crowd erupted into cheers as one of Captain Pothead's popular hip-hop tracks filled the studio, a fitting soundtrack for the celebration.

"So, I hear you have an exciting announcement today!" Addy leaned in, eyes gleaming. "What do you want to share with our plant-loving audience?"

As laughter faded, Matthew took a deep breath. "Yes, Uncle, today I'd like to announce my upcoming film project, *The 12 Glasses*, a story about my legendary 102-year-old grandfather, Gerry Goodman."

The crowd erupted again, applause and cheers echoing throughout the studio.

"I have a 30-second teaser trailer ready to play," Matthew said, enjoying the enthusiasm but feeling a pang of anxiety.

"Well then, let the trailer roll!" Addy encouraged, his excitement palpable.

As if on cue, the production tech took a hit from his one-hitter, filling the recording booth with smoke.

The trailer began to play on the large screen behind them, featuring images of Gerry and snippets of the family's history, drawing applause from the audience.

"Looks good, Captain, really good," Addy said, then

shifted to mock seriousness. "Don't mess up my dad's legacy, okay?"

"Thanks, Uncle, I won't," Matthew replied, rolling his eyes.

"Now we have a special guest, someone even more important than this idiot beside me," Addy quipped, gesturing to Matthew.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let's welcome my father and Matthew's Zayde, Gerry Goodman!" As Gerry appeared on the screen, applause reached a peak, his presence commanding attention.

"Hello, how's everyone doing?" Gerry boomed, his voice warm and welcoming.

"Apparently, they're happy to see you, Dad," Addy said, laughter filling the studio.

"Well, if I could see, I'd be happy to see them too!" Gerry shot back, earning another round of applause.

"Hi Zayde, it's Matthew here," Matthew called out, feeling warmth as he addressed his grandfather.

"Hi, my boy! How are you?" Gerry asked, genuine curiosity in his voice.

"Everything's great. So we're making a movie about you! Are you excited?" Matthew's question hung in the air, heavy with anticipation.

"I am, oh, I am!" Gerry's enthusiasm sent another wave of applause through the studio.

"So I thought, why not reveal you to the world on the world-famous Uncle Herbacious Show?" Matthew said, trying to keep the smile from spreading too wide.

“Uncle Herbacious, love that guy!” Gerry laughed, prompting more laughter from the crowd.

“Let’s give them some background on you—your story—and the 12 glasses. What’s the big deal with these glasses?” Matthew asked.

An image of the infamous Nazi Glass appeared on the screen, drawing gasps from the audience as they leaned in, curiosity piqued.

“I guess we have to start with me being an army veteran, fighting for our country during WWII...” Gerry began, grounding the moment with the weight of history—his voice calming the room.

As Gerry narrated his story, photos of his life combined with clips of the Goodman family on the screen. Matthew invited cousins Jeremy, Babe, Zoe, Jay, Alex, Kevin, and a host of uncles and aunts to share their own memories of Gerry.

The show lasted two hours, resembling a lively family reunion in front of enthusiastic fans. It captured the joy, heartbreak, and laughter of their shared experiences. When the final frame shifted back to Matthew, Addy, and Gerry, the energy in the room was electric.

Addy wiped away a mock tear. “Well, that’s it for now, folks. Stay tuned for updates, including who will help Captain Pothead direct *The 12 Glasses*! The captain is dreaming BIG!”

As laughter and applause filled the studio, the scene shifted to Chef Daniel in the Recording Engineer Studio, busy packaging the video into a shareable file. He wasn’t

just there to whip up gourmet meals; he played a crucial role in the production.

Matthew glanced at his phone to see social media coming alive, notifications pinging as the show went viral —likes and comments flooding in as digital support began to pour in.

But amidst the excitement, Matthew stood still, a pained smile on his lips. Despite the overwhelming joy around him, uncertainty loomed overhead—doubt mingling with pride, like threads woven into a tapestry he couldn't decipher. The moment felt grand, yet anxiety tugged at him, a reminder of the delicate journey he was on with his family and his grandfather's legacy.

* * *

Matthew sat in his dressing room chair, surrounded by clutter: tangled headphone wires, crumpled scripts, and a coffee cup that looked like it might sprout its own ecosystem. He leaned back, processing the electrifying chaos of the show, its highs and lows swirling in his mind.

Just then, the door burst open with little subtlety. Addy charged in, his exuberance a force of nature. Matthew's parents, Allan and Susan, followed closely, their expressions a mix of pride and concern.

"The show's ratings are incredible!" Addy shouted, his voice bouncing off the walls. "We're going viral right now!"

While Addy celebrated and high-fived everyone, Matthew found himself unaffected by the excitement, his

expression unchanged. He was focused on the script he still needed to finish, the emotional weight of his journey still uncharted.

As Addy exited in a whirlwind of energy, Allan and Susan closed the door behind him, restoring a quieter atmosphere in the dressing room. They turned to Matthew, concern evident in their eyes.

"Why are you still feeling down?" Allan asked gently, confusion in his voice. "Everyone loved it. *The 12 Glasses* is going to be HUGE!"

"It's because I'm not done with the script," Matthew replied, the weight of his words pressing down on him. "I still have a few scenes to go."

Allan's shoulders slumped slightly, as if struggling with an unexpected burden. "Well, both Mom and I wish you luck with it," he said, vulnerability evident in his tone.

"Thank you." Matthew's voice carried a hint of melancholy, a somberness beneath the recent highs of success.

In that moment, Matthew glanced to the other side of the room and thought he saw Jini, her smile breaking through his thoughts. But as quickly as he saw her, he shook his head in disbelief. It was just a mirage, fueled by yearning. He had heard from a mutual friend that she had moved back to Paris and wanted nothing to do with him. He snapped back to reality, the bittersweet memory dissipating.

As silence enveloped them, a moment of understanding settled among the three Goodmans. Matthew, Allan, and

Susan shared a look, their eyes searching one another for unspoken worries. In that silence, the intricate dance between hope and dread created a familial bond that felt fragile.

Their gaze lingered longer than expected, deepening their connection, until the weight of unspoken words became almost palpable.

ONE WEEK LATER
STRADA CAFE
PARIS, FRANCE

The small café in Paris buzzed with life, every table filled with laughter and conversation. The aroma of fresh pastries mixed with the scent of brewing espresso, creating a captivating blend in the air. Matthew sat at a window table, gazing out at the bustling streets, lost in thoughts that swirled like steam rising from his cup. After the long isolation of COVID, the world felt vibrant again, a lively backdrop of iconic architecture. His eyes lifted to the Eiffel Tower, glowing in the sunlight, stirring a mix of excitement and nostalgia.

In that moment, the noise of the café faded.

Matthew envisioned a happier time when he and Jini stood on an observation deck, enjoying a perfect Parisian evening. The song "Be Alright" by Evan Craft played in his mind, wrapping around the memory. He remembered showering her with kisses as they admired the skyline, their laughter ringing out—a moment that felt eternal.

Then, with a blink, he returned to the present, where the couple had been replaced by reality and melancholy.

Sighing, he glanced at his laptop, where the script for *The 12 Glasses* sat open yet unfinished. He had a few scenes left to write, but the pressure felt immense. He had come to Paris seeking clarity, yet unfulfilled longing clouded his thoughts. Mustering determination, he reminded himself that he had a purpose.

As he awaited his guest, he sipped his espresso, the bitter flavor jolting him back to the moment. He took a hearty bite of a flaky croissant, savoring its perfection. Delicious. We need to get this recipe for headquarters, he thought. Chef Daniel needs to start baking these ASAP!

The bell above the café door jingled, pulling Matthew from his reverie. He looked up as an attractive young woman entered, pushing a stroller. She wore designer sunglasses and a purple Smileblazer workout suit, embodying the effortless Parisian style he admired.

"Hi," the young woman said softly, removing her sunglasses to reveal a familiar face—one that also seemed somewhat foreign.

"Hey there," Matthew replied, pulling down his own shades as recognition hit him.

"Hey there, JuJu Bee," he said, diverting his attention to the baby in the stroller. "It's been too long. I missed you! Do you remember me?" He cooed playfully at the baby.

"She's getting bigger. Still the cutest in the nursery. Grandma must be going crazy for her as she enters her toddler stage," he added, his eyes brightening.

"Yeah, my mom is obsessed with her. Maybe a little too obsessed sometimes," the woman replied, a slight chuckle

escaping her lips that masked her underlying tension.

At the mention of "grandma," Matthew felt a pang of nostalgia. He envisioned Jini playing with her granddaughter, their laughter filling the air.

"So how is your mom?" Matthew asked, his heart heavy with apprehension. He had learned through a mutual friend that Jini had started work in the Japanese Embassy in Paris.

"Well, you know... she's my mom," the young woman shrugged, her casual tone betraying the complexity of their relationship.

Memories flooded back, taking him to the last time he saw Jini—her face twisted with anguish as she shouted, "I hate you! I hate you! I HATE YOU!" He winced at the memory, and the woman noticed his discomfort.

"Angelina," Matthew said, his voice cracking. "I'm still hurting."

Angelina looked at him, empathy in her eyes. "I know." She had no comforting words, a fellow traveler in this path of sorrow, caught in their shared history.

"Will she ever see me again?" he asked, his vulnerability raw and exposed.

"I don't know," she replied, emotion thick in her voice. "I want to believe she will. As you know, she's in pain too."

Matthew's mind returned to the painful images of Jini crying, shadows of sadness covering her features—hurt from past relationships.

"She's still hurt by her exes—my father, Greg, and then there's what happened with her uncles," Angelina

continued, her words weaving through Matthew's memories. "They caused her damage. I know it's not all you."

As they maintained eye contact, he felt her pain, a resonance of their collective loss.

"She still hurts from me too," Angelina admitted, the weight of her confession palpable. "I was too proud to call her for two years."

Matthew's heart pounded in sync with her sorrow. Her revelations felt like nails in the coffin of their shared anguish.

"I remember the day you two came to Kansas City to rescue me," Angelina said. "You drove the U-Haul with my things back to Arizona. You and my mom saved me that day. I was drowning."

The memories flooded back of that chaotic morning: Jini and Matthew bickering outside a U-Haul while managing the responsibilities of moving.

"Do you know my grandfather is from Kansas City?" Matthew said, trying to lighten the mood.

"Wow, I didn't know that," Angelina replied, surprise crossing her face.

Matthew appreciated the coincidence, sensing the subtle connection, yet inside he felt its deeper significance. Angelina placed her hand over his in a gesture of solidarity, creating a moment of possibility.

"Matt, you helped me in ways you'll never know. Thank you," she said, sincerity evident in her voice.

Tears filled Matthew's eyes, overwhelming him. All the

painful memories poured out, breaking through an emotional dam.

"I just wanted to reunite you and the baby with your mom. That's all I ever wanted," he sobbed.

"You did! You got us back together. YOU did it," Angelina said, her voice firm yet tender, affirming the love and restoration they both sought.

Matthew's mind flickered to happier moments—celebrations filled with laughter and joy, a time when they shared Indian food and felt whole together.

"I truly love you as family. I just want to be part of your family too," he confessed through his tears, feeling exposed.

"You are. You ALWAYS will be," Angelina promised, her emotions raw and genuine. "Even if my mom can't see it right now."

"Please, you and the baby must come to Smileblazer Headquarters in Sedona!" he implored. "There's always an opportunity there for you! We'll take care of you. If you need healing, we can help with that too!"

Overcome with grief, tears flowed down his face, the weight of his past colliding with the promise of a shared future.

"And your mom," he said, pulling a gold Smileblazer envelope from his pocket. "Please make sure to give her this."

He handed it to Angelina, desperation in his voice. "Make sure you read it too."

"I will," she replied, understanding in her gaze.

“Thank you for meeting with me,” he said earnestly, sensing the weight of unspoken words.

Angelina, now in tears as well, stood to leave. “Thank you,” she said sincerely, pushing the stroller toward the door.

The bell above the café door jingled softly as she exited, the weight of connection, grief, and hope lingering in the air long after she disappeared into the bustling life of Paris.

The presidential suite at the Four Seasons Paris radiated luxury that only someone like Matthew could comfortably inhabit. It was a place that invited relaxation, yet held a sense of formality, as if expecting guests to know which fork to use for which course at a fancy dinner. Matthew stood on the balcony, nursing a cigarette and a steaming cup of coffee, balancing two vices in his morning routine. Below him, Paris came to life, the sun rising in hues of orange and gold.

Matthew tapped away on his laptop, the soft clatter of keys mixing with the distant sounds of the city waking up. A phone wedged between his ear and shoulder, Megan, his lead counsel, was animatedly outlining the latest on cannabis legalization efforts in Europe.

“—and if you have time, swing by the French parliament and ask for Minister Henri. He’s the one with the broader smile than usual and a charm that grows with every glass of Bordeaux.”

Matthew nodded absently, more focused on the view than the details. “Sounds like a plan,” he replied, trying to mask his distraction.

After hanging up, he gazed at the horizon. The sun was rising, reminding him of Jini and her love for sunrises. He recalled a moment they shared watching the dawn from

their old place in Fountain Hills, her laughter mingling with the morning sounds.

Shaking off those memories, he pulled up the manuscript for *The 12 Glasses*. Scrolling through, he noted the word count had ballooned into the quadruple digits. “Wow, that’s a lot of pages,” he thought. “It’s a real Hollywood script now.”

Reaching the end, one headline stood out: “ACT 3, SCENE 55: Saying Goodbye to Bubby.” His heart sank. This pivotal scene required every ounce of emotional integrity he had left. He hesitated, fingers hovering above the keyboard. Was he ready to write these words?

He glanced at his watch. It was nearly midnight back in Chicago. His grandfather was likely already sleeping, and the old clock in his mind ticked louder.

Then a sensation washed over him—urging him to act. A familiar voice echoed in his mind.

“Call your grandfather. Call your grandfather.”

“Jini, is that you?” he thought. Jini’s gentle reminder resonated, urging him to nurture familial connections since she lost her own grandmother.

“CALL YOUR GRANDFATHER. CALL YOUR GRANDFATHER.”

“Jin!?” Matthew exclaimed, exasperation creeping into his tone. “But it’s midnight there!”

“CALL YOUR GRANDFATHER!” the voice insisted, rising in urgency.

With a resigned sigh, Matthew picked up his phone and found Gerry’s contact. He pressed the call button, his heart

racing. The phone rang once. Twice. Three times. Each ring stretched the anticipation until it felt almost unbearable. On the fifth ring, just as he considered hanging up, a voice crackled through the speaker.

“Hello?”

“Zayde?” Matthew’s heart surged at the familiar sound.

“Yes, Matthew, it’s me. Why are you calling at this hour? What time is it?” Gerry’s voice was curious, tinged with bewilderment.

“It’s close to midnight, Zayde. I’m sorry to wake you,” Matthew replied, guilt tugging at him.

“Ah, my eldest grandson! I’m 102. I’ve slept enough in my life, and I cherish every moment I can talk to you.” Gerry’s chuckle radiated warmth and wisdom.

Fresh tears welled in Matthew’s eyes. “Zayde, I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to let Jini go,” he admitted, his voice trembling.

Gerry recognized Matthew’s fragile state and guided him gently. “Let me tell you a story about letting go... but not really ever letting go.”

The conversation lingered in the air, binding generations across miles and the late hour. As Gerry shared his story, a complex tapestry of emotion unfolded—grief intertwining with hope, sorrow blending with new beginnings.

* * *

OCTOBER 31, 2016
GLENBROOK NURSING HOME
NORTHBROOK, ILLINOIS

The nursing home room in Northbrook carried an atmosphere of solemnity, reminiscent of Halloween – not the playful costumes or candy, but a weighty, tragic stillness. Gerry and Gita’s residence, usually filled with laughter and family warmth, now felt sterile and lifeless.

Gerry sat on the couch beside his son Addy, both enveloped in a silence that mirrored the heavy autumn clouds outside. On the bed, Gita lay motionless, her frail body cradled by Lupita, her dedicated caregiver. Everyone in the room understood that the final moments were drawing near.

Addy’s face reflected a tempest of emotions, tears threatening to spill as he pressed his head against Gita’s chest. The sound of her heartbeat, once a steady reassurance, now faded to a whisper. Outside, children dressed as witches and goblins roamed the hallways, oblivious to the true horror unfolding within.

“Mom,” Addy sobbed, his throat tight with emotion. “I love you.” The words came out muffled, overwhelmed by grief as he sought solace in her presence. Each gentle rise and fall of her chest grew still, and Addy felt as if the universe was shifting beneath him.

In the corner, Gerry held the phone to his ear, the voice on the

other end fading into the background against the gravity of the moment. He had just called Allan to deliver another painful update, nodding, his expression as stoic as an oak – each detail revealed through the hard lines of a man who had endured decades of life's challenges.

“Momma, no... NOOO!” Addy howled, the sound cutting through the room, shattering the silence. He pushed himself up, dread filling his chest as Gita's last breath escaped her lips. Silence returned, thick and oppressive.

Gerry approached, his gaze reflecting the delicate threads of love and loss. He knew this was the moment to say goodbye to the woman who had shared his life for seventy years.

“Dad, she's gone... I can't believe she's gone,” Addy cried, collapsing against him. The grief poured out, overwhelming the space around them.

Gerry remained steadfast, his heart still pumping, yet part of him felt anchored in mourning. His expression revealed a lifetime of memories – the jokes, shared dinners, dances in the living room – each slipping away like water through his fingers as he looked at his beloved wife, now reduced to a fragile form.

As Addy cried against him, Gerry turned his gaze back to Gita, holding back tears as he whispered words of love only the air could hear. In that painful silence, the moment stretched, his heart echoing the vastness of their shared history, a love that would endure even in the face of loss.

The screen glowed softly, connecting Gerry's nursing home room to Matthew's hotel balcony high above the streets of Paris. They shared a silence filled with unspoken understanding.

"I didn't cry that day, Matthew," Gerry said, his voice heavy with emotion. "I still don't know why I didn't cry."

"Shock... You were probably in shock," Matthew replied, wishing he could reach through the ether and embrace the old man.

"Your Bubby was sick for a long time. She suffered so much," Gerry continued. "A part of me was relieved she was finally free from pain. She was such a strong woman. She held on for a long time—probably too long, and maybe out of stubbornness."

Gerry chuckled, that familiar sound lifting a bit of the grief weighing on Matthew. He returned the laughter, a bittersweet mix of fondness and longing.

"That was your Bubby," Gerry mused. "She didn't want to leave any of us behind, especially Addy. She loved us all THAT much."

Matthew stood on the balcony, the sprawling Paris skyline in front of him. Despite the beautiful view, tears streamed down his cheeks, each drop a reflection of his struggle between joy and sorrow.

"Zayde, how did you get through it? How did you cope after Bubby's loss?" he asked, letting silence cradle his words. He thought of the decades of commitment that had

woven their lives together in love and humor.

"It's common for one spouse to pass shortly after the other in long marriages. They say they die from a broken heart. But look at you..." Matthew paused, gathering his strength for the question. "You're still here seven years later. And you're 102! You defy the odds, Zayde!"

Gerry's face showed a mix of shadows and light as he considered Matthew's words. His silence was thick with the echoes of a life fully lived.

"My dear boy," Gerry finally said, his voice tinged with bittersweet tenderness. "My heart hurt after she passed..." He hesitated, likely thinking back on their shared years. "But it was FAR from broken!" he concluded triumphantly, as if declaring an important truth that overshadowed their sorrow.

Matthew envisioned Gerry's face illuminated by a lamp's soft glow, each line and wrinkle telling a story of resilience and unwavering love. His mind then shifted to the grey November day of Gita's funeral, when his grandfather remained a silent pillar of strength amidst the losses.

* * *

NOVEMBER 3, 2016
SHALOM CEMETERY
NORTHBROOK, ILLINOIS

The cemetery in Northbrook was under a cold November sky, where the brisk wind rustled the fallen leaves. The Goodman family gathered around Gita's casket, united in their grief.

Allan's voice broke the silence. "My mother was quite a woman. As you all know, she wasn't easy."

A nervous chuckle rippled through the crowd, acknowledging that Gita had always been a challenging presence.

"Yet she loved us," Allan continued, reflecting both pain and pride. "Especially her children and grandchildren. Her family was everything to her."

As he spoke, the camera caught the tear-streaked faces of the Goodman clan: Addy, Jordan, Jacki, Kathy, and the younger ones like Zoe and Jeremy, each absorbing the warmth of Allan's words.

"My mother was the woman who complained about her food at restaurants and always sent it back." More laughter followed, blending with their tears.

"That standard of perfection extended to everything in her life," Allan said earnestly. "It made her children and grandchildren strong and motivated us to strive for greatness."

Matthew admired his father's ability to blend humor and heartache. Allan continued, his tone serious. "My mother recognized something about us that even we didn't know. Her

love for our father, lasting seventy years, showed us how to lead our lives."

Gerry sat quietly nearby, his expression stoic yet revealing deeper emotions beneath the surface. Allan met his gaze, and Gerry nodded, encouraging him to continue.

"Through all the heartache our family endured, her love – strengthened by my father – was the glue that held us together." Allan's voice wavered slightly under the weight of sorrow and gratitude.

Laughter erupted again when Allan added, "And as stubborn as she was, she gave her special brand of love to so many. To her sister, Mildred – you two were truly peas in a pod." The crowd regarded Mildred, visibly emotional. "Your sisterly bond inspired my siblings and your children, Suzanne, Larry, and Bob."

Mildred's children responded with quivering lips, their tears blending with the warmth of being remembered. "And to her best friend, Susan Saper," Allan continued, "you and Mildred were there when she met my father. Thank you for encouraging her to go after him. None of us would be here if you didn't."

The camera caught a glimpse of Susan Saper, older now, her eyes shining with the memories they shared.

"All of her friends, family, and students – she impacted so many. I can only imagine being in Mom's middle school biology class." The attendees leaned in. "She must've been that teacher you didn't mess with!" Laughter filled the room once more.

"And you, grandchildren, oh how she loved you. You..." Allan paused for emphasis, "...were her world!"

"And now my mother is in a better place," Allan continued,

his tone shifting to solemnity. "The pain is gone. She is with all her loved ones who passed before her." His voice quivered at the mention of Gita's sister. "Mildred, she is with your husband, Howard, and your parents, Max and Cilia Katz. They are all celebrating and looking down from Heaven right now."

As Allan spoke, Matthew imagined a gathering of family who had gone before, watching over them at the burial plot, a testament to their legacy.

"Mom," Allan said, choking up, "I love you so much. Thank you for always loving us too." The sincerity of his gratitude mingled with their shared sorrow.

As Allan's words hung in the air, Matthew's eyes met Gerry's, a single tear escaping down his cheek—a poignant symbol of love and loss. It was the only tear Matthew saw his grandfather shed.

* * *

When the funeral concluded, the mood shifted from somber reflection to the murmurs of communal grief giving way to casual farewells. Family and friends emerged from the burial ground, shedding their emotional burdens as they walked to their cars.

Matthew ambled toward his vehicle, his younger brother Aaron walking beside him. Both men were lost in their thoughts. The weight of loss lingered, but amidst it, a shared understanding tied them together through their collective experience of the day.

Suddenly, a voice called out, breaking the somber atmosphere.

"Matt! Over here!" It was Elizabeth, his ex-wife, stepping out from the crowd.

"Hey, I didn't know you were coming," Matthew said, surprised yet warmed by her presence despite the grief around him.

"I still feel like part of your family," Elizabeth replied, a gentle smile on her lips. "I love your family. I know how important your Bubby was."

"Thanks for coming. It means a lot," Matthew said sincerely.

A long pause followed, filled with unspoken memories.

"How's your family? Still as crazy as mine?" Matthew asked, trying to lighten the mood.

"Crazier!" Elizabeth laughed, her eyes shining.

Matthew joined in, sharing a brief moment of levity amid the sadness. "I KNOW," he replied, appreciating their connection.

"Someone should really make a movie about both our families," he suggested playfully.

"Maybe it's going to be YOU..." she said, a hint of belief in her tone.

Matthew chuckled, shaking his head. "Maybe. Maybe," he replied, feeling comforted by the nostalgic moment.

In that exchange, amidst the weight of grief, they found solace in laughter – a reminder that even in sorrow, joy and connection could still flourish, hinting at a cinematic promise of what was to come.

Back at his Sedona office, Matthew typed rapidly, fingers moving swiftly across the keyboard. The sun filtered through the large windows, casting shadows that seemed to dance with the creative energy in the room.

The song "*Say I Won't*" by MercyMe pulsed in the background, its powerful lyrics urging him to transfer his thoughts onto the page. *"Today, it all begins. I'm seeing my life through a different lens."*

He was deep into the final scene of *The 12 Glasses*, words flowing from him as adrenaline propelled his writing. The screen lit up with sentences that felt as if they were writing themselves—each key tap a release, connecting the fragments of his heart with the story within him.

Suddenly, memories engulfed his thoughts. He recalled young Gerry storming Normandy, filled with ambition and courage. Scenes shifted to Gerry laughing with fellow soldiers amidst the chaos, then to a moment with a cute French woman, the promise of youth in his eyes.

"Yesterday, I didn't understand. Driving 35 with the rocket inside, didn't know what I had," the song sang passionately, the chorus building in intensity.

More memories flashed through Matthew's mind: Gerry meeting Gita at Hillel, sharing smiles over a table

laden with traditions. The moment Gerry crushed the glass at their wedding, joy and ritual mingling in a single instant. Family dinners full of laughter and warmth, followed by Gerry lifting the cloth bag filled with shards at Allan's wedding, pride in his gaze.

As the music hit its rousing chorus, Matthew felt its rhythm course through him. *"I'm gonna run. No, I'm gonna fly. I'm gonna know what it means to live and not just be alive."*

He looked around the office, movie posters and storyboards lining the walls. One new addition caught his eye—a picture of Steven Spielberg's face with a target over it, a dramatic nod to his aspirations.

"Not enough is what I've been told. But it must be a lie, 'cause the Spirit inside says I'm so much more." The music surged, and Matthew's fingers flew over the keys, each word fueled by his fire for creation.

Flashes of family memories filled his mind: Passover gatherings filled with laughter, young Addy creating chaos—a sitcom moment frozen in time. The joyous scene of Allan's wedding, the Goodman clan dancing together, Addy drunkenly causing a ruckus, while Gerry remained calm.

"Say I won't!" The chorus rose again, shifting to Matthew's own past—his wedding to Elizabeth, laughter tinged with bittersweet recollections. Pain resurfaced as he remembered his brother's wedding, the mix of joy and sorrow. Gita's funeral and Allan's eulogy, heartfelt tears resonating within the family.

Matthew continued typing, sweat soaking his shirt as

the song reached its powerful crescendo. *"I can do all things, through Christ who gives me strength. So keep on saying I won't. AND I'LL KEEP PROVING YOU WRONG!"*

His mind overflowed with recollections: Jini's glare that once intimidated him; Gerry locking eyes with Bubby across the Passover table; laughter shared in the nursing home; Gerry holding his great-grandchildren, memories woven amid grief.

Each memory and fervent keystroke propelled him forward. *"I'm gonna run. No, I'm gonna fly! I'm gonna know what it means to live and not just be alive."*

Matthew was no longer just writing; he was challenging every pain and doubt that had clouded his journey. In a final flourish, he typed the closing words.

As the last note of the song echoed, Matthew leaned back, allowing himself a moment of stillness. Sweat dripped down his face, tears streaming freely — a mix of joy, relief, and the catharsis of creation.

The screen in front of him displayed the final words of his script, alive and glowing. He smiled through his tears, enveloped in bittersweet warmth. He had finished *The 12 Glasses*. In that moment, he felt the weight of his family, their memories, and their enduring love.

Matthew sat at his desk, a quiet hero in the aftermath of chaos, finally at peace with the legacy that bound him to the past and propelled him toward the future.

The glow of the computer screen illuminated the cluttered chaos of Matthew's office, casting shadows on the stacks of scripts and crumpled notes that represented his creative journey. Slumped over his desk, he resembled a weary soldier defeated by a long battle—one fought against time and his own relentless pursuit of perfection.

A sudden burst of energy burst into the room as Jen, affectionately known as Motherbear, barged through the door. "Wake up, Mothafuckaaaaah!" she exclaimed, her voice breaking the silence of his slumber.

Matthew jolted awake, disoriented and bleary-eyed. "I'm up, I'm up... What time is it?" he croaked, trying to gather his scattered thoughts.

"It's time for you to get your shit together!" Jen declared, her firm gaze carrying her motherly authority.

Matthew shot her a sly grin. "Ha! You're telling me to get my shit together?"

They both laughed, the irony pulling them closer. Their roles had reversed in a way neither had anticipated—once, he had tried to steer her life back on course, but now Jen had helped Matthew reclaim his own life. "You're the fuckin' Captain!" she exclaimed, her face lighting up with mischief.

"I hear you, sister," he replied, warmth underlying his exhaustion. "Don't worry. I just finished it. It's out of me. *FINALLY!*"

He rifled through his drawer, pulling out a fresh script

that felt like lifting a boulder, followed by several more like sacred relics.

“Please deliver these to Ben, Katherine, Megan, Shad, and Chef Daniel,” he instructed, his voice a mix of excitement and fatigue. “I want the six of you to read it first.”

Jen accepted the scripts, cradling them as if they were precious. She understood more than anyone the significance of Matthew's words. “I will. Thank you for letting us read the script first. I can't wait,” she said, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm.

Matthew studied her, weary but filled with love. He could see hope in her expression, a light strong enough to lift his fatigue. He nodded in appreciation, acknowledging the journey they had both taken to get to this point.

As Jen turned to leave, a current of support hummed in the air—an unspoken promise forged in the fires of shared struggle. Matthew watched her go, feeling a weight lift, if only for a moment.

In that cluttered office, amidst the chaos of his life and work, he found a flicker of peace, a reassuring whisper that everything would eventually fall into place.

* * *

Smileblazer's executive conference room buzzed with nervous energy, a blend of anticipation and excitement in the air. The walls, adorned with memorabilia of success

and creativity, seemed to lean in as if eager to witness Matthew's big reveal. At the head of the polished boardroom table, Matthew sat, his eyes fixed on the screen displaying the finalized movie poster for *The 12 Glasses*. His fingers tapped the cover page of the script in front of him, an expression of his pent-up enthusiasm.

"So, what did you guys think?" he finally asked, breaking the silence that had settled over the group.

As if awakening from a trance, the six other founders of Smileblazer exchanged glances, clearly waiting for someone else to speak first. The awkwardness thickened until Ben, the most straightforward of the bunch, broke the tension.

"It's good. So what do you want us to do with it?" he said plainly, his honesty refreshing, if slightly anxiety-inducing.

Matthew studied them, processing the question and realizing he was stumped. This was his brainchild, yet he felt uncertainty creeping in.

"Well, the marketing team has finished all the promotional work for the campaign," Katherine chimed in, shifting focus to her department's achievements. "We just need a final draft of the script and your approval."

Megan, their Chief Legal Counsel, leaned forward, her expression determined. "On the legal end, we've got you covered. I'm already working on copyrighting and trademarking everything, including the title, '*The 12 Glasses*.' I know how you operate, Matt. You're going to make this a franchise."

Matthew gazed at his team with gratitude. These were the people who had stood by him through every challenge. “Yeah, you all know me well,” he admitted, his voice thick with emotion.

Chef Daniel spoke next, his expertise extending beyond the kitchen. “I’m reviewing all the scenes and making some edits—just a few word changes and music ideas. You know I have a degree in English Literature? I think some of the Jini scenes—”

“Yes, Daniel, I know,” Matthew interrupted, suppressing a grin. “Thank you.”

He picked up his script, leafing through the pages with reverence. This was it—his life’s work laid out before him. He thought about how certain passages would resonate with his family, how they might smile or shed tears as they recognized the truths woven into the story.

“You think Addy will be okay with how I wrote his character?” Matthew asked, a playful wariness lacing his voice.

Jen, ever the Mother Bear, leaned in confidently. “Don’t worry about Uncle. If he has a problem, I’ll deal with him.” Her eyes sparkled as she added with a smirk, “Personally, I thought all the character depictions were pretty accurate.”

She winked, a silent message of appreciation for his hard work.

“Yeah, don’t worry about Addy. We’ll handle him,” Ben assured with a chuckle, his familiarity with the family drama evident. Megan and Katherine nodded in agreement, readying their plans for any fallout.

“What about your grandfather, Matt? When are you going to share the story with him?” Ben asked, shifting back to a more earnest topic.

Matthew's gaze softened. The thought of sharing the screenplay with Gerry filled him with a mix of wonder and anxiety. “Soon. I’m going to do it soon.”

In that moment, surrounded by friends who felt more like family, Matthew knew he wasn’t just launching a film; he was sharing a legacy, an embodiment of love and grief that resonated far beyond any box office success.

* * *

Matthew relaxed in his camper van parked at a scenic overlook, taking in the stunning views of Bell Rock and Courthouse Butte. As he gazed at the formations, a whimsical thought crossed his mind: What if extraterrestrial beings landed their crafts on Courthouse Butte? Wouldn’t that be an interesting first contact point?

He squinted at a cloud hovering over the butte, imagining it shaped like a UFO. For a moment, he allowed himself to dream that it concealed an advanced alien craft. A smile spread across his face, the absurdity lifting his spirits.

Taking a sip of orange juice, he glanced around the cramped interior of the van, cluttered with his belongings. He began tossing items into a Smileblazer branded suitcase he had designed with an Italian designer. As he packed, he admired the fine leather craftsmanship—who knew life

would take him down such a luxurious path?

“Let’s see,” he said aloud, narrating his packing process. “A couple of Smileblazer tops, check. Two pairs of jeans, check. Smileblazer underwear...” He smirked as he stuffed a pair in, adding, “As if I’d forget those!”

Next, he shuffled into the tiny bathroom, rummaging through his dopp kit. Toothpaste, a razor, and samples of organic lavender lotion found their way into the suitcase. He zipped it shut, feeling a rush of triumph similar to a soldier finishing off their gear before battle.

His gaze landed on his computer perched on the bed. “Can’t forget this!” he exclaimed, tucking it into the suitcase like a cherished pet.

Finally, he spotted the stack of scripts—his most valuable cargo. He gently handled the covers before sliding them into a Smileblazer box and placing it beside the suitcase. He took a moment for a final inspection of the van, nodding to himself as if that would ensure he hadn’t left anything behind.

Stepping out into the morning sunlight, Matthew felt the warm rays wash over him. He grabbed his RayBlazer sunglasses from his pocket and slipped them on, blocking out the glare of the world.

As he climbed into the driver’s seat, the familiar pulse of the open road filled him with excitement. The Sedona landscape unfolded outside, a blend of fiery reds and oranges, and as he pulled away, TobyMac’s “Goodness” erupted from the speakers.

“Make me wanna shout it, oh, you're the goodness in my

life," he sang, completely lost in the music, bobbing his head and throwing in some questionable dance moves.

Every car he passed offered puzzled looks and a few honks, people surprised to see him singing in a camper adorned with the logo of a healing movement. Did they know he was Captain Pothead, or were they simply entertained by his spontaneous joy? He hoped for the latter.

Just as he reached the chorus, his Bluetooth phone rang, jolting him back to reality. It was Aaron. "Hey there, bro, what's up?" Matthew answered, turning down the music but maintaining his enthusiasm.

"Same old, what's up with you?" Aaron replied, a hint of weariness in his voice.

"I'm on my way to the airport. Catching an early afternoon flight to Chicago," Matthew said as he navigated the winding roads.

"That's good. Are you ready to see Zayde?" Aaron asked, concern woven into the question.

Matthew shrugged, feeling his enthusiasm wane slightly. "I think."

"Well, I read the script. Good job," Aaron stated, his praise succinct and energizing. It was just what Matthew needed to hear.

"Thanks, I'm glad to be done with it," he replied, relief sweeping over him.

"Me too. We need you back to work on other projects. I'm dealing with a mountain of issues at Common Sense Oncology. The FDA and even the President are all over me

for our latest research initiatives!”

Matthew laughed reassuringly. “You got this, bro.”

“Yeah, I know...” Aaron replied, the weight of his responsibilities evident. “Anyways, I just wanted to wish you safe travels. I’ll see you soon!”

“Thanks, I love you, brother,” Matthew said sincerely.

“I love you too.”

With the call ended and the music swelling back to life, Matthew felt invigorated as he took one last look at the breathtaking Sedona views. Every mile he put behind him reminded him that life was an exhilarating ride—one worthy of loud shouts and bright laughter.

As he drove off, he couldn't suppress the grin spreading across his face. He was exactly where he needed to be—armed with hope and ready for the adventures that awaited just beyond the horizon. The climatic date with his grandfather was near.

Matthew sat comfortably in first class, enjoying the spaciousness that came with the upgrade. The empty seat beside him brought a sigh of relief; he was thankful to avoid a chatty neighbor eager to interrogate him about Smileblazer or pitch their own odd ideas for cannabidiol-infused cupcakes. He needed this quiet moment to prepare for the meeting with his grandfather.

As the plane soared through the sky, Matthew glanced at the box of scripts occupying the empty seat. He hesitated before pulling one out, a ritual of welcoming the thoughts buzzing in his mind. The specter of Jini lingered, reminding him of memories he wasn't ready to confront. He had also sent the script to Angelina and wondered if either had taken the time to read it or simply discarded it.

Shaking his head, he decided to let go and "give it to God." "Right, Jini?" he whispered to himself, recalling her serene attitude toward surrender. He relaxed, if only momentarily, as the plane continued toward Chicago.

The flight intercom chimed softly, prompting Matthew to focus on the present.

"This is your captain speaking. We are fifteen minutes from touching down at O'Hare Airport. The weather is sunny and humid, 88 degrees Fahrenheit. Thank you for flying with us."

Matthew's mind wandered as he pictured the Chicago humidity wrapping around him like a warm blanket. At least he was coming in the summer, he thought, imagining the discomfort of January's subzero temperatures. The thought sent shivers down his spine, and he instinctively pushed aside the dread of winter.

Chuckling softly, he put away the script and straightened in his seat, preparing for landing. As the plane dipped lower, anticipation mixed with anxiety surged within him. What would Zayde say? What would he feel?

He glanced around the first-class cabin, watching fellow passengers flip through magazines or tap at their phones. They seemed unbothered, lost in their distractions. Matthew felt a kinship with the quietude around him, realizing that while the world outside pressed on, he was cocooned in his thoughts.

As the plane prepared for its descent, Matthew took a deep breath, filled with determination and nostalgia. With each passing moment, he was one step closer to a reunion that promised to be both profound and emotional. Today, he would share his heart, his hopes, and the life's work he had carved from the chaos and love around him. His grandfather was waiting.

* * *

The O'Hare Airport baggage claim area had all the charm of a dentist's waiting room: fluorescent lights overhead, distant announcements echoing, and a sea of

impatient travelers fretting over their luggage. Matthew, wearing shades and a wide-brimmed fedora, blended somewhat into the crowd, though the hat felt less like a disguise and more like a beacon for recognition. He hoped no one would approach him today; he wasn't in the mood for enthusiastic fans or repetitive questions about *The 12 Glasses*.

His phone buzzed, and he sighed, knowing it was his cousin Jeremy.

"So, are you here? I'm pulling up to Terminal 2," Jeremy's voice crackled through the line.

A moment later, he spotted his suitcase on the conveyor belt, the bright Smileblazer logo an obvious declaration of success. "Yeah, I just got my bag," he replied, already moving toward the exit.

He pushed through the sliding doors and into the brisk Chicago air, greeted by honking horns and busy travelers. Jeremy pulled up in the sleek Chevy Smileblazer. With its clean curves and vibrant colors, it was hard not to feel a swell of pride as passersby began pointing and snapping photos. Matthew thought to himself, "That brand collaboration really worked."

Jeremy rolled down the window with a wide grin. "Hop in! Do you need any help?"

"No, I got this," Matthew said, chuckling as he tossed his backpack and the box of scripts into the cargo area. "Just one bag, my backpack, and this box. Thanks."

"Zayde can't wait to see you. It's all he's been talking about for the past week," Jeremy said as Matthew climbed

into the front seat. “Me and your other cousins are a little jealous of you. You’ve done something truly extraordinary.”

“Thanks...” Matthew replied, forcing a smile as he looked out the window, watching the concrete and steel world blur past. “I honestly don’t know how I did it. I had no idea how it was going to turn out.”

“Well, it turned out amazing!” Jeremy said, his enthusiasm clear as he navigated into traffic. “And the Uncle Herbaceous character...”

Jeremy burst into laughter, and Matthew joined in. “Freakin’ brilliant!”

“Yeah, he’s a trip,” Matthew said, still chuckling at the thought of his larger-than-life uncle.

“Well, we’re all proud of you, cuz. Even Addy loves it, though he has a few minor notes for later.”

Matthew could picture his uncle Addy, arms crossed and face scrunched in concentration, ready to deliver feedback like a heart surgeon. The thought made him laugh again. “That should be fun,” he said, dripping with sarcasm.

As they drove out of the airport and onto the highway, the chaotic pace of city life enveloped them. They were headed to the Courtyard Marriott in Northbrook, near Gerry’s nursing home—a familiar route tinged with both excitement and apprehension.

The skyline loomed in the distance, a testament to a city filled with memories and aspirations. “We Built This City” by Starship played on the radio, its nostalgic lyrics

prompting Matthew to sing along. He felt the weight of personal and familial history settle between the warm laughter and love surrounding him.

Matthew and Jeremy's voices melded with the song, their laughter spilling out of the windows as life raced forward, intertwining the past and future like the steady flow of traffic around them.

* * *

Jeremy pulled the Chevy Smileblazer to a stop at the entrance of the Courtyard Marriott, the sun glinting off its sleek surface. As the last notes of "We Built This City" faded, he turned to Matthew, whose fedora and shades gave him a stylish yet unapproachable look.

"Well, here you are, cuz. Need any help with your stuff?" Jeremy asked, glancing at the bags cluttering the backseat.

"No, I got this," Matthew replied with a wave of his hand, then hesitated. "Oh, wait, here." He leaned over to grab a script from the box beside him. "Here's a script. I know I already sent you a digital copy, but I want you to have a physical copy. I inscribed a note on the back."

"Awww, thank you, Matt," Jeremy said, genuinely touched. "I'm going to read it again tonight. Maybe I'll read it aloud to Tracy. She got a lot from reading it the first time too."

Matthew nodded, understanding the importance of shared experiences. "Send my regards to her. And tell her

thanks as well."

"I will!" Jeremy replied, his face lighting up as he watched Matthew gather his belongings.

Matthew climbed out of the Smileblazer, feeling strangely comforted by the weight of his packed bags, ready to face whatever came next, even if it involved his eccentric family.

He stepped through the automated sliding doors and into the hotel lobby, where bright lights enhanced the warmth of the space.

"Mr. Goodman! It's good to have you back! What's the occasion?" The familiar receptionist greeted him with a smile that was both friendly and slightly flirtatious.

"I'm here to visit my grandfather and give him one of these." He held up the box of scripts, feeling a swell of pride.

"Ah, *The 12 Glasses*, your new movie. I can't wait to see it. Are you really getting Spielberg to direct?" She leaned closer, intrigued.

Matthew shrugged, trying to play it cool despite his enthusiasm. "We'll see...I hope so."

"Well, good luck." She batted her eyes playfully, her interest palpable.

"Thank you, again." He aimed to keep it light, aware that there was no depth to pursue here beyond professional courtesy.

As she handed him the keys to his room, she leaned in slightly closer. "I upgraded you to our best suite." She winked, hinting at her interest.

Matthew felt flattered but reminded of the responsibilities ahead. He graciously accepted the keys, balancing both the allure of newfound attention and the weight of his obligations.

Grateful, he reached into his bag and pulled out a Smileblazer hat, presenting it to her with a flourish. "Here's a little gift for making me feel so welcome."

"Thank you!" she exclaimed, her face lighting up as if he had given her something special.

Matthew turned to leave, an amused smile on his face as he caught her putting on the hat, excitedly showing it off to her colleagues.

As he approached the elevator, he looked back for one last glimpse. The receptionist stood there in the Smileblazer hat, her joy infectious. While part of him appreciated the attention, another part was reminded of the fleeting nature of connection. He thought of Jini. She would not have approved of the interaction. Oh well.

* * *

Matthew stepped into his executive suite at the hotel, the door clicking shut behind him, plunging him into solitude. He tossed his belongings onto the bed and surveyed the plush surroundings: crisp white linens, soft carpet, and the disconcerting absence of human touch.

His mind drifted to the idea of a companion. A personal assistant might be useful to handle life's small annoyances. Jini would fit that role perfectly, he mused, with a touch of

wistfulness. He could imagine her moving gracefully through the space with effortless efficiency.

As he contemplated what could have been, thoughts of her flooded his mind. What was she doing right now in Paris? The question lingered, pulling him into an emotional spiral he wasn't sure he wanted to explore.

Suddenly, his mind shifted to a charming French restaurant, where Jini sat across from a well-dressed man, laughing and raising flutes of champagne, the city lights reflecting in their glasses. Matthew found himself half-smiling, a mix of envy and appreciation stirring within him.

Reality crashed back in as Matthew blinked away the vision, the solitude of his hotel room reasserting itself. She could see anyone she wanted, he reminded himself, fighting against a flutter of jealousy. She was a free woman. Yet the image clung to him, making it hard to let go.

In the blink of an eye, the fantasy morphed again. The man leaned across the table, kissing Jini on her neck, a bold and intimate gesture. Matthew winced at the thought, feeling the heat of jealousy swirl within him.

"ENOUGH!!! THIS HAS TO STOP!!!" he shouted into the silence, his words echoing off the walls.

Fueled by frustration and longing, he grabbed his headphones and slipped them on, drowning out the intrusive thoughts. He opened his music app and scrolled until he found Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

Much better, he thought, mentally pushing away the images of Jini and the man. He pressed play, and the

triumphant chorus filled his ears, the uplifting strings wrapping around him like a warm embrace.

Lying back on his pillow, Matthew let the music swell and wash over him, loosening the grip of memories he wasn't ready to face. For the first time that evening, he felt a sense of peace. Perhaps tomorrow would bring clarity, and today was simply for letting go.

* * *

Matthew awoke to the loud ringing of his phone, a jarring wake-up that made him groan. He squinted at the screen and saw Uncle Addy's goofy face, a permanent grin as if he had just stepped out of a cartoon.

"Great," Matthew muttered, dragging his pillow over his head to block out the noise.

"Hey! So you up?!" Addy's voice burst through the phone with infectious enthusiasm. "Big day, big day... Let's do breakfast! I've got the munchies!"

Matthew could picture his uncle bouncing around like a hyperactive jackrabbit. "I'm sure you do, Uncle. How much have you smoked already this morning?" he asked, stifling a laugh despite the early hour.

"Eh, only a couple of grams," Addy replied casually. "But it's good stuff! The new strain of Sedona Seduction is amazing! We're going to make some edibles with it. You're gonna love it!"

"Can't wait," Matthew responded, his enthusiasm barely registering.

“Come on, nephew! Get excited! You gotta be your Smileblazin’ self today! By the way, did you get laid yet? I’m telling you, THAT’S WHAT YOU NEED!” Addy’s tone was earnest, as if he were dispensing life advice while high.

“Enough! I don’t need this right now,” Matthew shot back, frustrated. It was too early for playful jabs or unsolicited concern.

Realizing he’d gone too far, Addy’s tone softened. “I’m sorry. I know you’re going through a lot. I’ve got your back. This whole family does.”

Matthew paused, taken aback by the genuine support. Those words felt comforting, lightening the weight of his emotions and reminding him he wasn’t alone.

“Thanks, Uncle. I know you do,” he said, his voice calmer now. “I’m going to pass on breakfast. I’ve got some things to prepare for my meeting with Zayde later.”

“Okay,” Addy said quietly, respect for Matthew’s space returning to his tone. “I’ll leave you to it. Just remember, I’m a phone call away if you need anything — like a pizza or an emergency edible!”

Matthew chuckled, warmth lingering as he hung up. Outside his window, dawn bathed the world in soft hues. He was reminded that life had a way of throwing challenges at him, but he had family to help navigate them.

With a sigh, he pulled himself up, ready for the day ahead — a day of memories, hopes, and perhaps a touch of magic in the air.

The hotel lobby was bustling with activity, filled with people moving in every direction. Matthew sat at a small booth in the corner, nursing a cup of coffee and lost in thought. His headphones played "My Story" by Big Daddy Weave, providing a reflective backdrop to the flow of humanity around him.

"If I told you my story you would hear hope, hope that wouldn't let go." He watched the guests pass by, each one a unique individual with their own life, struggles, hopes, and dreams. Every face held an untold story, many as remarkable as the one he was writing. *"If I told you my story, you would hear love, love that never gives up."*

The lyrics rushed over Matthew capturing the scene. With a sigh, Matthew set down his coffee and opened his laptop. The script was up to the final scene. He read it one last time, making a few missed punctuation edits. Satisfied, he closed the laptop with a decisive click, feeling a sense of completion. It was time to see his grandfather.

As "My Story" played on, Matthew packed his belongings. He glanced around the lobby one last time, taking in the array of "stories" walking by before heading toward the exit. Each person was absorbed in their own world, but the sight filled him with quiet appreciation for the extraordinary hidden within the ordinary. Perhaps they were all writing amazing stories. He stepped out of the lobby, ready to bring his own story into the light.

Matthew climbed into the back seat of the Uber, where the driver—a disheveled man in his fifties wearing a Cubs hat—greeted him with animated enthusiasm. He launched straight into a tirade.

“What do you think about the new Cubs general manager? I’ll tell you, he doesn’t know how to field a team,” the driver exclaimed, glancing at Matthew’s reaction in the rearview mirror. “They’ve got good prospects, but does he call any up? What a dipshit!”

Matthew chuckled at the driver’s passion. “I’m a die-hard Cubbies fan too. When I was in high school, I was a vendor at Wrigley Field.” Nostalgia bubbled to the surface.

He recalled his teenage self: a scrawny seventeen-year-old bouncing up and down the stadium aisles, shouting, “Peanuts here! Peanuts!” He felt both central and peripheral in a grand tradition, blending into the background of summer afternoons filled with cheers and the scent of hot dogs.

“Really? That must’ve been fun,” the driver said, genuinely intrigued. “Getting to go to every game and all.”

“Oh yeah, it was a blast,” Matthew replied, though the memory was tinged with the hard work it took. “One time, I spilled gallons of cola on a fan’s head!”

The image hit him vividly: the crowd parting as a wave of cola surged toward an unsuspecting woman, her horrified expression embedded in his memory. Her husband’s scream echoed as Matthew sprinted back up to

the upper deck, feeling like a guilty child fleeing a mistake.

"Still, it was like you worked for the team," the driver mused, laughing.

"Yeah, I guess," Matthew shrugged. "Who knows, maybe one day I'll buy the team." The absurdity ignited a flicker of joy within him.

He reached for his phone and typed into his notes with a grin: "*Call Cubs owner Ricketts.*" The thought made him chuckle softly as the driver navigated through the bustling streets.

"Well, if you have enough money to buy the team, I'll be your personal chauffeur," the driver joked.

Matthew shot back, "I might hold you to that."

As the city whizzed by, Matthew felt content. Life was unpredictable, messy, and anything but mundane, and he wouldn't trade it for anything.

Matthew hopped out of the Uber, a mix of anticipation and nervousness tightening in his chest. The nursing home stood ahead, its unremarkable facade concealing a wealth of stories and emotions within. Holding a box of scripts and a Smileblazer tote bag, he stepped inside, greeted by the enthusiastic staff who recognized him.

“Look who’s back!” Norma, the receptionist, exclaimed, her face lighting up. The front desk staff cheered affectionately.

“Don’t worry, I come with no baggage,” Matthew quipped, gesturing to the tote and box. “Just the essentials — artistic crises, revisions, and a few violations of personal space.”

One of the nurses laughed while another rolled her eyes. “You say that now, but you’re practically family,” she said with a smile.

The director of the nursing home stepped forward, smiling warmly. “Captain! It’s great to see you again. I can escort you to your grandfather’s room if you’d like.”

“Lead the way,” Matthew replied, his heart racing as he followed the director through the bright hallways decorated with cheerful craft projects and the scent of homemade cookies wafting from the recreation room.

When they reached Gerry’s room, the director shot him

a sympathetic look before excusing himself. Matthew took a deep breath, steeling himself for this moment. Each time he arrived, it brought a unique mix of hope and anxiety.

"Knock, knock!" he called, the sound echoing against the wood paneling.

"Come in, my boy! Come in!" Gerry's voice rang out, comforting to Matthew.

Matthew opened the door to find his grandfather comfortably settled in his recliner. The room was bathed in the soft glow of late morning sun, warming Gerry's face and making time feel as though it were slowing.

He crossed the threshold and kissed Gerry on the bald head, a tender and ritualistic gesture. Pulling out a Smileblazer branded hat from the box, he added with a playful smile, "I brought you something to wear." He placed the hat on Gerry's head and admired the fit. "That cap looks good on you. You wear hats well for an old geezer!"

"Only old? I prefer 'distinguished,'" Gerry replied, chuckling.

Hearing his 102-year-old grandfather laugh filled Matthew with joy—a reminder of the warmth still present despite the losses they had faced.

"I also brought some edibles—Sedona Seduction," Matthew said, lowering his voice playfully. "Some partners at work think it would be great if we got high together sometime and recorded it. No pressure!"

Both of them burst into laughter at the idea, the humor lightening the mood.

"I'll think about it," Gerry said, his smile lingering.

The shared joy hung between them, deepening their connection. Matthew shifted his tone, saying, "I'm here to read you the final scene of the script."

Gerry's eyes widened with interest. In the past week, his daughter Janet had read much of the script to him, but today was special—an experience reserved just for him.

Taking a deep breath, Matthew explained, "I purposely left out the final scene in all the scripts. I wanted to read it to you FIRST."

Gerry's expression shifted from surprise to awe, and as he adjusted himself out of the recliner, he settled onto the couch beside Matthew. "I want to hold your hand while you read these last words."

Tears pricked at Matthew's eyes, emotion swelling in his chest. A long journey had led to this moment, a culmination of struggles and triumphs.

"Okay, here goes nothing... Or should I say... HERE GOES EVERYTHING!" he exclaimed, a mix of adrenaline and affection surging as he prepared to read.

He carefully took the script from the box and settled into the leather couch beside his grandfather. As he began reading, the words flowed freely, each line filled with emotion and purpose. The narrative of their lives filled the space, creating a montage in Matthew's mind. Excitement, sadness, laughter, and surprise mingled together, reflecting their family's history.

Each detail came to life: And he was acutely aware of every tear and smile shared as he shared the epic tale of his

and his grandfather's journey together.

Finally, as they reached the end of the script, both men paused, their gazes lingering in a silent exchange of wonder. In that moment, Matthew saw his grandfather not as an elderly man but as a reservoir of stories, a living testament to their shared history.

"This story, Zayde... *It's OUR story*," Matthew said, the weight of the moment thick in the air. "Thank you for writing it with me."

Tears filled both their eyes. Gerry, lost in the moment struggled for words. Finally he uttered the poetic last line, "My legacy, Matthew, it's time..."

Matthew glanced at the bookshelf, where the final *Nazi Glass* rested in its lockbox—a symbol of everything they had achieved or lost. He felt the weight of the moment. Everything was culminating—every word, every scene from his life converging at this point.

This was the moment he had envisioned. His eyes flickered to the script, open to the final pages now unfolding in real time in his grandfather's room.

Gerry, with deliberate slowness, moved toward the *Final Nazi Glass*—the symbol of their family's legacy. He carefully opened the lockbox and removed the crystal chalice. As Gerry cradled it in his hands, he nodded at Matthew—a silent acknowledgment that it was time to bring the final scene of "*The 12 Glasses*" to life.

The two left the nursing home room, walking closely together down the long, sterile hallway. Matthew trailed two steps behind his grandfather, Gerry, as they navigated the familiar path. The distance felt both necessary and suffocating, each man carrying the weight of their shared history—years of laughter, grief, and unspoken fears. Matthew's heart raced, fueled by a swirl of profound emotions tempered by uncertainty.

He focused on the back of Gerry's bald head, familiar yet vulnerable. With a sigh, he stepped closer. This was the pivotal moment—the point where past and future collided, turning grief and affection into something tangible. When they reached the elevator, Matthew pressed the down button, and they stepped inside together, the silence enveloping them.

The doors closed with a soft hiss. As the elevator descended, memories washed over Matthew—joy, loss, anxiety, hope—each feeling crashing against him like waves. In that confined space, thoughts drifted mercilessly. He closed his eyes for a moment, struggling to absorb the tidal wave of feelings that surged within him.

The ding of the elevator roused them as the doors opened. They stepped out onto the first floor, the air buzzing with anticipation. Gerry turned to Matthew, a shy smile breaking across his face. It was a smile that held both uncertainty and comfort—a small beacon amid the chaos.

As they approached the event hall, Matthew carried a tote bag filled with scripts—remnants of their shared journey. He noticed Gerry clutching the final Nazi glass, its dark intricacies conveying the painful lineage they both hoped to transform.

“Ready?” Matthew asked.

Gerry nodded almost imperceptibly, but the weight of that nod felt monumental. Any remaining words dissolved between them; decades of dialogue were woven into this moment. It was time for the final scene to unfold.

Matthew pushed open the door to the event hall, allowing Gerry to enter first. As they crossed the threshold, the atmosphere shifted; the world erupted around them, enveloping them in celebration. *A crowd of Goodman family members and hundreds from the Smileblazer Medicine Collective cheered joyfully.*

Gerry was momentarily speechless, caught off-guard by the sheer weight of his legacy. The jubilant sounds of love and appreciation filled the room, mirroring the very scene Matthew had just read to him.

“Pretty cool final scene, huh?” Matthew teased lightly, despite the emotion tightening in his throat.

Gerry was speechless, joy glinting in his eyes, though an undercurrent of gratitude and recognition ran beneath. As the noise enveloped them, it seemed to sweep away old sorrows, transforming them into a current of joy shared across generations.

Amid the laughter, Gerry was embraced by his children and hundreds of Smileblazer workers and partners,

forming a barrier of love around him. Matthew felt the warmth radiate from the gathering, joy breaking through layers of stoic reserve.

Suddenly, he spotted a spread of food laid out in the back of the party—dishes made with love and family recipes. “I think Uncle Herbacious is trying to deliver his annual heart attack special,” Matthew said with a playful grin, pointing to plates piled high with sauce-drenched ribs and burgers.

Laughter erupted, rising above the surrounding noise. “If it takes a heart attack to make you love me this much, then so be it!” Gerry joked, basking in the affection.

Matthew stood back, taking in the vibrant scene. Tears threatened to spill over; this was the final scene of his epic. The significance of the glass Gerry held weighed heavy—what it represented for both him and their family—as all that love seemed to drown out the sorrow, if only for a moment.

It wasn’t just a celebration; it was a reckoning, one Matthew had scripted. Gerry, still surrounded by family, squinted through the joyful chaos at photos adorning the walls—snapshots of birthdays, weddings, and holidays. Every smile whispered stories of resilience born from shared struggles.

“Can you believe this?” Matthew asked, laughing between breaths. “I didn’t think my team could pull this off!”

“It’s a ridiculous spectacle,” Gerry replied, wiping a tear from his cheek—half joy, half disbelief—but the delight

in his eyes spoke volumes. "Who did the photos?"

Matthew smiled. "My dad."

As they approached the makeshift stage, Matthew felt buoyed by reverence. He guided Gerry gently, embodying not just a grandson's support but the collective strength of their family legacy. Surrounded by love and laughter, they stood together.

"Let's give him a real hero's welcome, folks!" Matthew called, raising the microphone. "Ladies and gentlemen! May I present to you the Patriarch of the Goodman Family, a living legend! My Zayde, Gerry Goodman!"

The crowd erupted, cheers echoing in celebration. "Gerry! Gerry! Gerry!" rang out, igniting every soul in the room. The chant pulsed with meaning, a litany of gratitude spanning generations.

Matthew glanced at Gerry, who was glowing with warmth, eyes sparkling with gratitude and shock. In that moment, he felt the culmination of years spent navigating grief; this was love incarnate—the familial ties that could weather storms.

"Gerry, you've officially made it," Matthew laughed, his voice thick with emotion.

The crowd's excitement reached a peak, a wave of love pulsing through the room as if they had all become one beating heart. Gerry was at the center, grinning like a child on Christmas morning, joy spilling from him. Matthew couldn't help but laugh through the tears that began to flow. The exuberance around him felt cathartic, purging years of unresolved grief and fears, giving way to laughter

and celebration.

Then, out of nowhere, the surprise guest appeared. Gerry looked at Matthew in disbelief. *Steven Spielberg*, the famous director, stepped up to the microphone, commanding the room's attention. "Where did he come from?" Gerry shouted to Matthew.

Matthew laughed and handed the mic to Spielberg, a gesture of humility amid the celebration. "Thank you, thank you!" Spielberg exclaimed, waving to the crowd as the room quieted, all eyes on the iconic director. "I can't believe I'm here, but let's be honest—this isn't about me." He pointed at Gerry, allowing the moment to settle with all the unspoken stories and emotions in the air. Gerry's cheeks flushed with joy; even at this stage in life, the warmth of adoration sparked a youthful glint in his eye.

The audience erupted again with chants of "Gerry! Gerry! Gerry!" The chorus rang out joyfully, creating a buzz in the air.

Gerry and Spielberg shared a warm embrace, the weight of years and experiences hanging between them like a well-worn fabric. Gerry glanced at the front row, where his grandchildren were crying tears of joy. The jubilant sounds filled the room, breaking through the tension and bringing a sense of timelessness to the occasion.

"You got him!" Gerry exclaimed, his voice a mixture of shock and delight, a childlike wonder coming to life in him.

Matthew, still caught up in the moment, laughed. The joy radiating from him transformed the atmosphere into

something euphoric. He took the mic back, his grin wide and inviting.

"The surprises aren't over just yet! Director Spielberg and I have another big announcement to make!"

The crowd responded with excitement, a collective roar rising in anticipation.

"We're going to shoot the final scene of *The 12 Glasses* RIGHT NOW!" Matthew's voice echoed through the room.

Spielberg leaned in, catching the audience's enthusiasm. "Heck yeah, we are!"

A wave of shock coursed through the audience. Confusion mixed with excitement as they realized they were not just participants in an event; they were about to be part of a live Spielberg production. The moment felt surreal.

Gerry began to grasp what was happening. The final scene Matthew had just read to him was now unfolding on stage. Reality blended with his grandson's imagination, creating a poignant tableau that blurred the lines between life and art.

"Everyone, quiet! We need to prepare you for the final scene!" Matthew called, waving his hands to hush the crowd.

He gently took the last Nazi glass from Gerry's hands, lifting it for all to see. The details of the glass—the swastika etched meticulously—were illuminated against the large screen at the front. The audience held their breath, gasps rippling through the crowd. Gerry's eyes filled with tears as memories flooded him, the last words he had shared

with Matthew still echoing in his mind.

"My legacy, it's TIME," he whispered, the weight of his life's struggles pressing on him.

Turning back to the crowd, Matthew announced, "Before we shoot the final scene, I have one more special guest to introduce."

Curiosity thrummed through the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, the Holy Man from the Holy Land, Rabbi Moskovitz from Congregation Beth El!"

The Rabbi, a familiar face from Matthew's wedding, stepped into the light from behind the curtains. Anticipation thickened the air as he made his way to center stage.

He exchanged knowing glances with Gerry, Spielberg, and Matthew. The crowd hung on the edge of their seats, emotions swirling as they awaited the next moment.

"I have a couple of special gifts to present to Director Spielberg," Matthew announced, excitement evident as an assistant brought forward a Smileblazer Megaphone and a Movie Action Prop.

"Mr. Spielberg, thought you could use these," he said, handing over the items with flair.

Cheering erupted once more, filling the room. Spielberg took the megaphone and commanded the crowd's attention with authority. "Okay, everyone, here's how we're going to shoot the scene." The hush that followed was marked by shared reverence. "When I roll 'action,' the rabbi will take the mic and say a few words about the significance of Gerry's final glass..."

As Spielberg laid out the sequence—each moment flowing like a well-orchestrated performance—Matthew, Gerry, and the Rabbi nodded in understanding. Their solemn nods reflected the profound weight of the moment.

“Let me check with my team to make sure all cameras are in position,” Spielberg continued, his focus gathering the room’s collective breath.

After surveying the area, he concluded, “Okay, I think we’re ready. Are you guys ready?”

With eager nods all around, he raised the signal with serious intent. “Here we go...”

“Action!!!”

The audience fell silent as the Rabbi began to speak. “We are gathered here today for a wonderful and historic occasion,” he proclaimed. “A celebration of a man, the family he created, and a legacy that will be remembered by anyone who knows his name.”

The Rabbi raised the *Final Nazi Glass* high. The silence in the room emphasized every word. “The swastika on this glass symbolizes everything we no longer want in our world. Breaking this glass is the final act in an epic story, a story that Gerry Goodman has been writing for 102 years.”

Gerry’s eyes widened as the Rabbi wove the tale of his life—shadows of darkness illuminated by light.

“Gerry represents the goodness in all of us. He is the light in all of us, representing anyone who strives to bring more goodness to the dark world.” The Rabbi’s voice rose fervently, igniting a fire in the hearts of all who listened. “Thus, it is fitting that his last name is Goodman. He is the

Good Man!”

As the Rabbi’s words filled the room, Gerry felt the weight of his years—the burdens and triumphs—wrapped in the collective understanding of those present. They had gathered not just for a production but to celebrate a life where love triumphed over hate and legacy roared.

“When Gerry decided to send back these Nazi glasses to be broken during his family’s weddings, he chose to honor his family’s legacy and love,” the Rabbi declared, his glistening eyes connecting with the shared emotions of everyone present. “Through your children and your children’s children, your legacy and love can never be shattered like this glass.”

In that moment, Gerry felt his spirit lift as he embraced the gathering. He looked at his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. The Rabbi’s words painted a picture of a life not merely lived but intricately woven into the lives and dreams of those who followed.

“This whole room is your family, Gerry. The Smileblazer Medicine Collective, a family born from your grandson’s vision—a vision that springs from your aspirations and the inspiration he drew from them. Their accomplishments, their achievements— They are YOURS, Gerry. They are shared because your spirit lives on in ALL of them!”

The crowd was moved by the profound power of the Rabbi’s words.

“And your loving wife, Gita, of 70 years—Her spirit is also in ALL of them! Because it was your unbreakable love for each other that helped them withstand all the darkness

and hate in our world. Your love has TRULY inspired us to conquer ALL!"

The room filled with poignant tenderness as Matthew prepared to take the final glass, the audience's anticipation reaching a crescendo.

"Matthew, the *Final Glass*..." the Rabbi announced, holding it toward him.

As Matthew accepted it, time seemed to freeze. In that moment of collective stillness, a sense of shared destiny and celebration of love, resilience, and light enveloped them.

With reverence, he approached Gerry, placing the glass gently at his feet. The significance of the moment left them both transfixed, and Matthew shook off any lingering apprehension. Suddenly, *a golden beam of light* pierced the room, illuminating the stage.

"Where did that come from?" Matthew thought, blinking in disbelief. The light felt otherworldly, suspending time.

He looked up and gasped as Gerry began to transform. Within seconds, the frail old man morphed into a younger version of himself, dressed in a captain's uniform from the war, angel wings unfurling gracefully from his shoulders.

Matthew felt a wave of disbelief wash over him. "This must be some special effect from Spielberg. Cutting-edge holographic technology..." he mused, surprised that Spielberg appeared just as perplexed at the unfolding drama.

Gerry's radiant smile was ethereal, surrounded by other

angels joining the scene—his Bubby Gita, Grandmother Gloria, Grandfather Leonard, Gerry's parents, and Bubby's parents. The sight enveloped Matthew in warmth and love; they formed a celestial tableau, ready to support Gerry as he prepared to stomp on the final Nazi glass.

Matthew's heart raced with joy and disbelief. "Is this moment real?" Matthew shook his head, focusing on the glow of his grandfather's face. The distance between them narrowed, their eyes locking in a mix of wonder and understanding.

The light surrounding Gerry became blinding as he prepared for the last monumental act. Matthew set the glass gently on the floor, before meeting his grandfather's gaze, feeling a divine connection pulse through the air.

Matthew's heart swelled as the moment crystallized. He sensed the culmination of everything Gerry had endured and everything he had hoped for. "It's time..." he whispered, steady despite the whirlwind of emotions within him.

Gerry's transformation continued. Matthew watched as his youthful grandfather raised a leg, now transformed into the limb of an angelic warrior. The moment stretched, suspended in time, before Gerry brought his foot down with tremendous force.

The sound of shattering glass resonated, breaking the tension in the room. Shards flew through the air, reflecting the joyful and tearful faces of the Goodman family. Each fragment captured the essence of moments lived—joy, sorrow, love, loss, and legacies.

As the shards danced in the air, reflections of Gerry's life played out like a film for the audience. The atmosphere felt electric, thick with emotion.

Then, as if the scene could not become more surreal, the ceiling dissolved into clouds. *Thousands of angels hovered above, each glowing with joy and love, affirming their presence amidst the profound event below.*

"No way," Matthew whispered under his breath.

He looked around, awe-stricken, and saw his own wings sprouting delicately from his back. "Oh my God..." he breathed quietly. What was happening? Everyone around him was transforming—his family, his Smileblazer partners—all growing wings.

Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of someone he thought was an apparition. Could it be? He turned, and there she was, glowing with a light that rivaled the sun—*JINI!!* She had transformed into an angel, tears of joy glistening on her radiant face. Her daughter Angelina and granddaughter LeLu were there as well, now also angels.

In that moment, Matthew's heart soared. He understood: this was more than a celebration; *it was an ascension, a transformation beyond human understanding.* The entire Goodman family and the members of the Smileblazer Collective embodied this miraculous metamorphosis.

Laughter bubbled up within him, overflowing as if he were the vessel of an ancient story finally coming to fruition. Here they were, standing together, transformed by love, rising with the *wings of angels.*

As Jini caught his eye, her expression conveyed a shared understanding. It was as if she was telling him telepathically, “I told you so.” Yes, she *knew* this moment would happen all along. The weight of eternity rested in the space between them.

Amid laughter mingled with joyous shouts, the air mirrored the sacred unfolding happening all around. The song “Take Me Home” by Phil Collins played on invisible speakers, reverberating with the truth that love had conquered all.

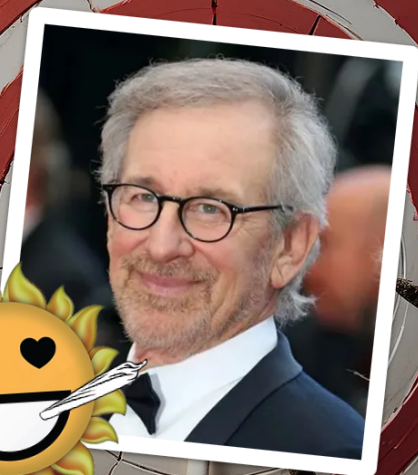
The scene burst through the mundane fabric of reality, weaving together threads of goodness, compassion, and ascendant love. “*We are part of the Company of Heaven,*” Matthew realized, glancing at the gathering of glowing souls, all radiant with light, their wings flapping.

The drumming of the song crescendoed, bathing the room in a reverie, a promise that the goodness shared would never fade. As Matthew held on to that thought, the beauty of love and legacy enveloped him. He looked at Jini again, and he knew – the journey had just begun.

In a flash, as laughter and joy intertwined, they had transcended; they had ascended. The Resurrection of the Goodmans was complete...

And it was ALL captured on film!

**HELP US GET SPIELBERG
TO DIRECT THE 12 GLASSES FILM!**



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AFTERWORD

The genesis of *The 12 Glasses* is as extraordinary as the narrative it contains. Just three days before my grandfather Gerry's 102nd birthday last July, my Aunt Janet posed a challenge to our family—each of us, including the myriad characters you've come to know, were tasked with writing a poem in his honor. As a writer, I eagerly took up the gauntlet, excited to distill my affection for him into lines of verse. With the assistance of AI, I forged a poem that unearthed something powerful within me. The legend of *The 12 Glasses*, long a part of our family folklore, had remained largely unspoken until that moment.

As I recited the poem aloud, I felt a nudge from something greater, an urge to tell the larger story—the full narrative honoring my grandfather's legacy. Admittedly, the prospect of framing a comprehensive narrative felt daunting; self-doubt loomed like a dark cloud. Despite my prior attempts at writing, those manuscripts languished unpublished, buried under layers of insecurity.

Then, a vision emerged—an alternate reality where my fledgling cannabis company, Smileblazer, and Uncle Addy's Planting Eden could coexist, resolving the real-world conflicts that had shaped our lives through the lens of fiction. This vision unleashed a torrent of creativity, a divine rush of inspiration propelling me forward.

What unfolded was not merely *The 12 Glasses* itself, but the tale of its inception—a meta-narrative where dream and reality intertwined, becoming indistinguishable. The ending felt like a surprise party in which all the threads converged, as if guided by divine intervention. Writing it was akin to channeling a presence that wasn't distinctly mine, drawing from a celestial script. Completing the manuscript on my grandfather's birthday felt like a spiritual closure—each word a shard of glass, pieced meticulously back into the mosaic of familial harmony.

Astonishingly, I completed the first draft in just three days, the manuscript polished and ready by a family call on July 2, 2023—an unforgettable gathering with Gerry, the sage patriarch of our clan. In the midst of emotion and tears, I shared my transformative odyssey—a journey we all collectively strained to comprehend.

In the weeks that followed the completion of *The 12 Glasses*, cherished phone calls with my grandfather became treasures. I shared passages from the story, ensuring the particulars truly reflected his character and our family's legacy. Those conversations were among the most significant moments of my life, revealing a man who embodied all I had written—humble, witty, wise, and enveloped in an unconditional love that felt eternal. Even in his frailty, his insights shone with a sharpness I wished I could bottle and extend into another ten volumes.

Sadly, just three months after I finished that draft, my grandfather passed away. It felt as though a higher power had kept him tethered just long enough for us to connect in

a deep, transformative way, allowing me the privilege of writing this homage in novel form. The morning he left us, the timing struck me—having just published my first children’s book, *Little Prayer Warrior*. His passing and my own breakthrough into the world of publishing coincided too perfectly to be dismissed as mere chance; it felt scripted, in harmony with a narrative cadence that defied logic.

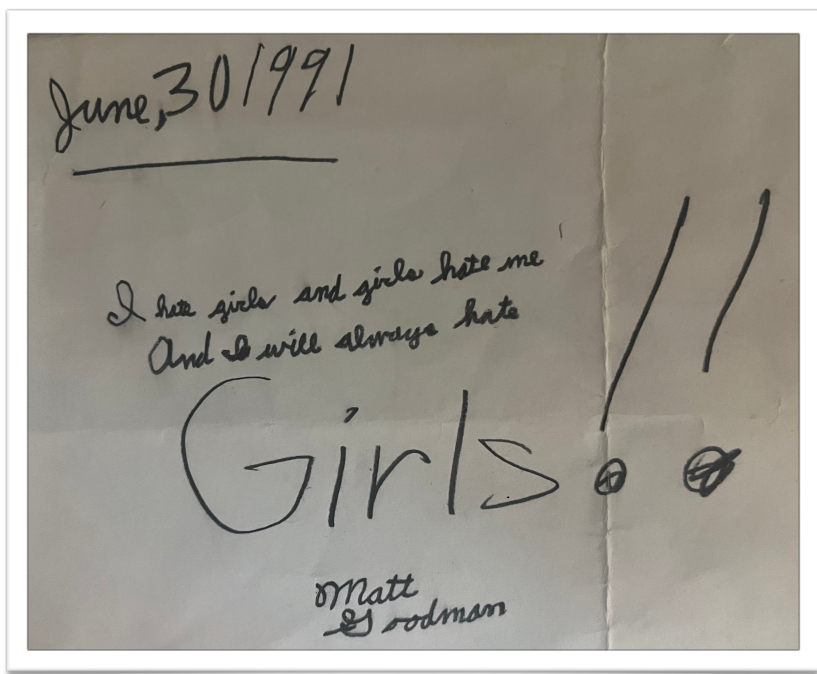
In the bitterness of his absence, I found solace in the belief that he was now free of pain, reunited with my grandmother and the celestial beings I had envisioned him among in the concluding scenes of my book. The knowledge of his spirit guiding us, watching over us, provided a comforting balm, particularly during his funeral, which eerily mirrored scenes I had written—our family brought to life, the shared grief and warmth hauntingly familiar.

Hours before his funeral, I stepped into his familiar nursing home room, a heavy fog of absence filling the air. There, we sifted through his belongings, claiming small artifacts that tethered us to the memories and love he embodied. These remnants invoked profound reflection—a reminder of the threads my grandfather had woven through the narrative of our lives.

As I rummaged through keepsakes reflective of our Jewish heritage—a cherished Kiddush cup, a Passover Haggadah, and his well-worn yarmulkas—I stumbled upon more intimate tokens: his eyeglasses, old passports, and his wallet. It was then that my uncle Addy’s girlfriend,

Lauren, presented a curious gem – something I’d written at nine years old, inscribed in childlike script, preserved among Gerry’s most cherished items.

Holding that note resurrected a memory with vivid clarity. After a turbulent school incident left me frustrated with girls, I voiced my despair during a Shabbat dinner. My grandfather, amused, challenged me to capture my feelings in writing, assuring me that one day I would laugh at my own melodrama. What I penned on that fateful day thirty-three years ago still stuns me:



As I read the note over and over – a tangible echo from my formative years – It allowed me to feel my grandfather’s guidance anew. Preserved for the poignancy of his funeral, Gerry was still imparting wisdom

posthumously, reinforcing the lessons of love and insight he had shared with me and our family across countless years.

During his memorial, I spoke of that note, of the unvoiced understanding woven between us—a tether that transcended time and memory. It became increasingly clear that he had known I would someday write *The 12 Glasses*, a means to heal wounds rooted deep within, wounds I had mistakenly attributed to the disdain of women—I didn't hate women. In reality, it was a hatred of myself. My grandfather had safeguarded that note for thirty-three years to teach me one last, vital lesson.

The entire service was recorded, capturing the profound legacy he imparted on all whose lives he touched, including mine. I delivered a heartfelt eulogy, reflecting upon the note I'd found, a testament to our enduring bond.

As I flew home from the funeral, sifting through Gerry's wallet, I uncovered aged, fragile papers—his revered poems, guarded for over fifty years. Among them, I found a copy of "If" by Rudyard Kipling, my grandfather's personal favorite. Tears streamed down my face as I read it during the flight, the words resonating with his essence, their meaning now irrevocably intertwined with my memories of him.

I find myself still sifting through the remnants of these moments, struggling to comprehend how the boundaries between my reality and fiction have seemingly merged. People often ask if the portrayals of my family hold true. Is Uncle Addy really like that? What about Jini? Is our

relationship as tumultuous and emotionally charged as depicted?

The answers are unambiguous: yes, yes, and yes. My ambition has always been to render each character with painstaking accuracy and integrity. Uncle Addy, like all of us, is a complex figure, layered—each of us suspended in various stages of healing. The dynamics between his company, Planting Eden, and my own, Smileblazer, are as genuine as they are fraught, mirroring real conflicts we’ve navigated. The events I’ve woven into this narrative echo my family’s truths, sometimes painfully so.

As for Jini, her storyline resonates with perhaps the most haunting and prophetic notes of this saga. Months after drafting the initial manuscript, I found myself on Camelback Mountain in Phoenix on Christmas Day, down on one knee. To my amazement, she said yes. But in a cruel twist of fate, just a week into our engagement, she vanished from my life—a real-world echo of the tale I had spun. Now, six months later, our communication has become ghostlike, mere whispers in the wind, as tenuous as the pages of the story I wrote.

It feels as though the lines dividing the world I created and the one I inhabit have all but vanished, leaving the ending tantalizingly unwritten.

Yet, what unfolds carries a distinctly cinematic twist—a promise that this novel will leap from page to screen, a Hollywood venture with Steven Spielberg at the helm. It’s an ending that feels both miraculous and fitting, a convergence of art and life. With divine guidance, I pray

Jini will be there, along with her daughter Angelina and granddaughter Lelu, perhaps holding the script for my own happy ending. Wouldn't that be amazing? If the dreams I crafted in my story actually manifested in my life?

I've relinquished the futile quest to impose logic on the narrative of my life. What's unfolding is orchestrated by a higher power; I exist merely as a participant in a greater tableau—rich and steeped in complexities I could never fully manipulate or predict.

In the following pages, you will find photographs of my family, my grandfather, and all the real-life characters entwined in *The 12 Glasses*. I must confess that my family has not granted me explicit permission to use these images; I fully understand the consequences I might face if they feel I have breached their privacy. I've always navigated these waters against my family's wishes, and I will continue to trust in the higher power that guides this creative process forward. My intent is transparent: to showcase how remarkable they are and the profound love I hold for them.

Moreover, I have ambitious plans to produce a documentary that unearths the story behind *The 12 Glasses*. My hope is that my Aunt Janet, the keeper of all our family documents—including the treasure trove of letters my grandfather penned during the war—will join me in developing this film. If you're curious about this project and wish to contribute in any capacity, please visit my company's website at **www.smileblazer.com**.

Lastly, I've included two poems in the appendix of this novel as well as images of my family. The first is "If" by

Rudyard Kipling, the poem that my grandfather cherished enough to carry in his wallet for over fifty years, preserved on a tiny, folded piece of paper. The second poem is one I wrote just three days before this novel as a tribute to my grandfather on his 102nd birthday; it's titled "The Goodman Legend." These verses encapsulate our shared journey, transcending silence and absence, memorializing a legacy that resonates far beyond the confines of mere existence.

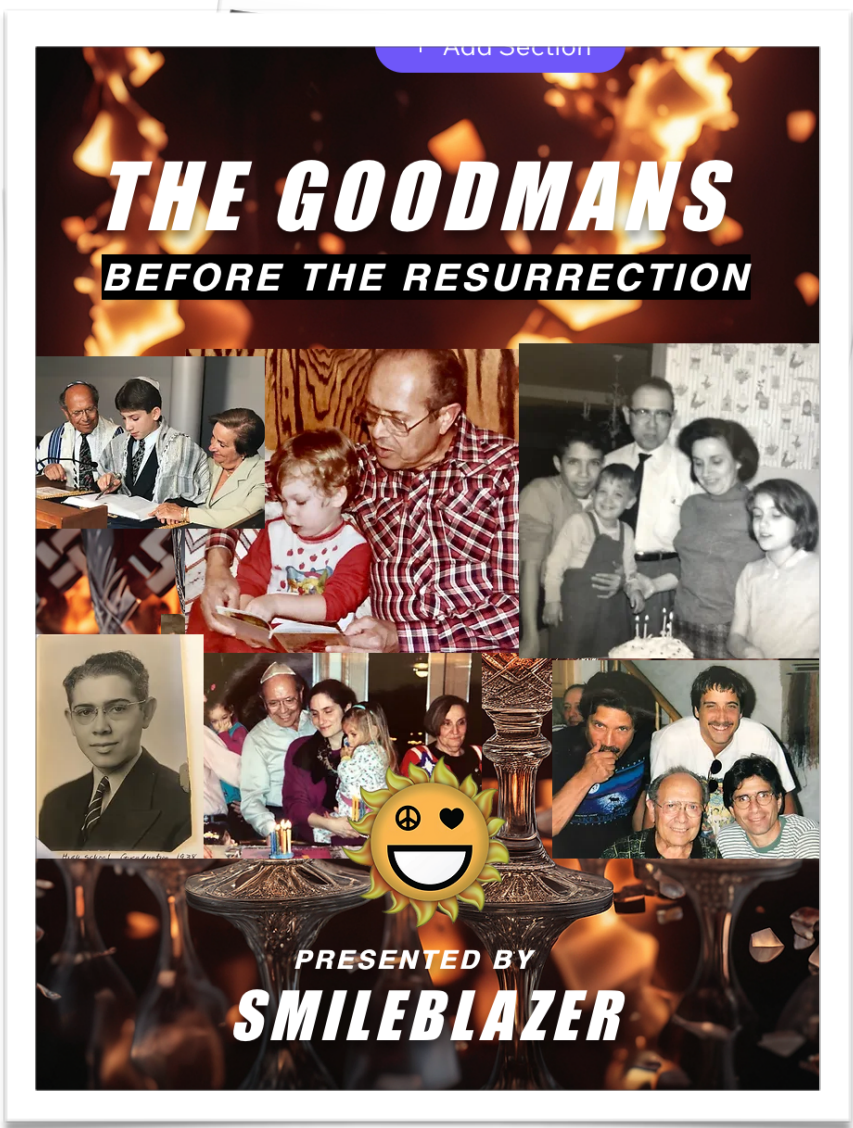
As is noted in the book, there remains one final Nazi glass in real life, its fate still entangled in a narrative that is being reshaped anew. Perhaps it is being held in reserve for the climactic scene of the film that Spielberg will inevitably direct. Given the surreal trajectories of my life, I refuse to dismiss that possibility; the peculiar often defies expectation. The fate of that final glass lingers in the space between reality and fiction.

So, does anyone happen to know Spielberg? Or perhaps some angels? Because I'm ready for anything... especially to roll – "ACTION!"

Until then, enjoy the *The Goodmans: Before the Resurrection*

With love and gratitude in Christ,
Matthew

APPENDIX #1



Gerry as a Child

Kansas City - 1923



Gerry During the War

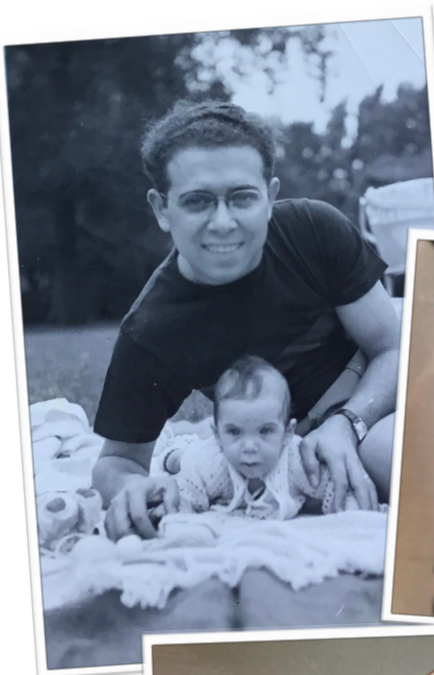


Gerry and Gita

University of Illinois - 1947



Gerry with Jordan



Gerry with Addy



Gerry with Janet

The Goodmans in the 60's



The Goodmans in the 70's



The Goodmans in the 80's



The Goodmans in the 90's



The Goodmans in the 2000's



Gerry's 100th Birthday



Addy and Matthew



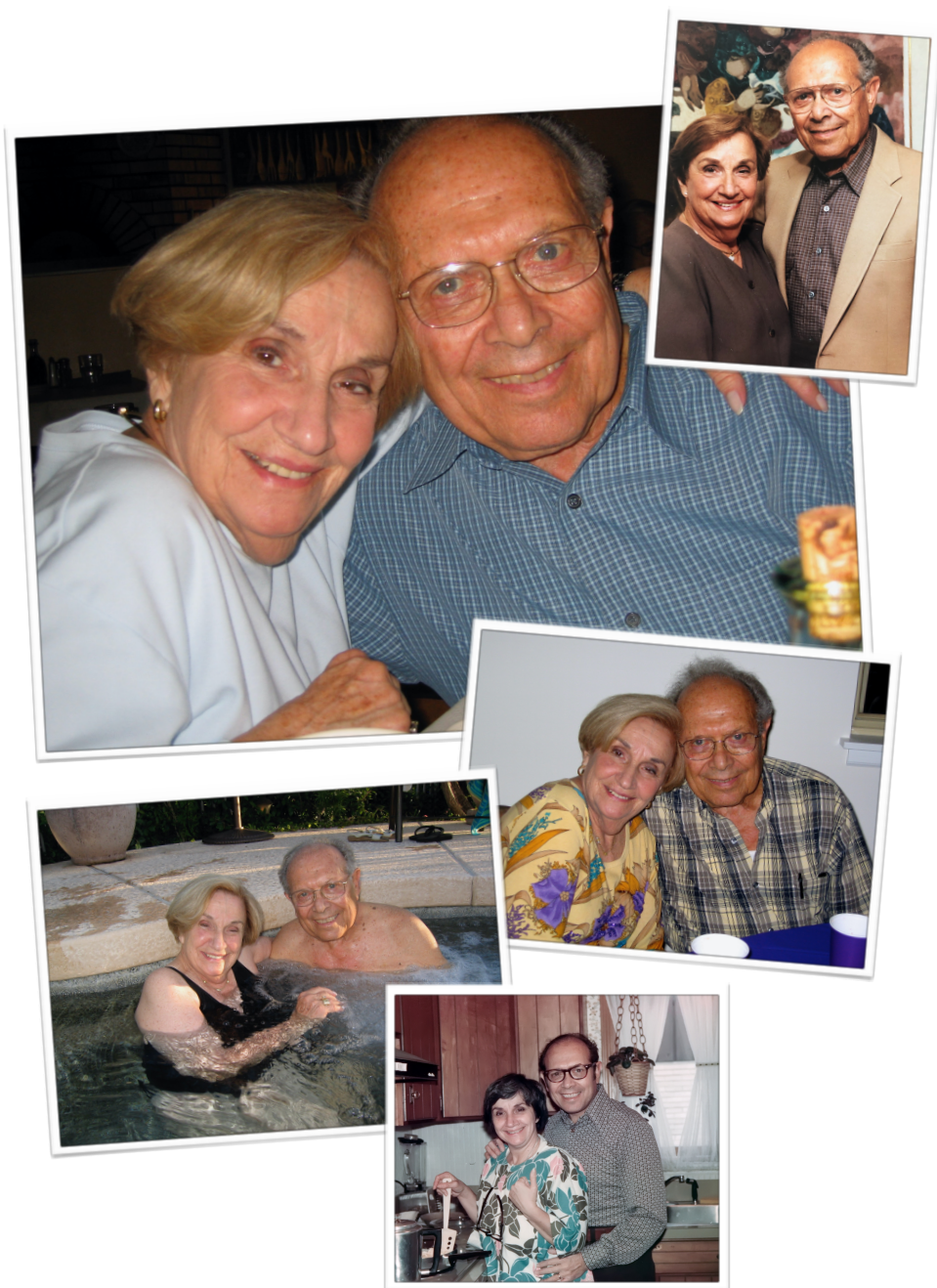
Gerry and Matthew



Jini and Matthew



Gita and Gerry - 72 years of Love



The Glass



APPENDIX #2
THE POEMS OF GERRY

"The Goodman Legend"

by Matthew Goodman

*Once upon a twilight dreary,
In the land of the Goodman family's story,
Lived a wise and loving soul, Gerry by name,
A patriarch of legacy and enduring fame.*

*With courage unmatched, he stormed the shore,
Normandy witnessed his valor, forevermore,
In World War II, he fought the fight,
A hero's tale, shining through the night.*

*But his true triumph lay in his heart's design,
A vision to transcend the hands of time,
He sent back 12 glasses, symbols of strife,
To shatter at weddings, marking love's life.*

*Gita, his beloved, by his side for seven decades,
Their love, a beacon in life's charades,
Through thick and thin, they stood tall,
A love that withstood life's every fall.*

*Their children, nurtured by his loving hand,
Jordan, Allan, Steven, and Janet, grand,
Guided by Gerry's wisdom, they grew,
A testament to his love, forever true.*

*Matthew, Jeremy, Aaron, and Kevin,
Babe, Zoe, Jay, and young Alex, driven,*

*Grandchildren, the legacy of his soul,
Their accomplishments, a story to behold.
Doctors, scientists, educators, they became,
Entrepreneurs, artists, musicians, their aim,
In their pursuits, Gerry's wisdom they embraced,
His guidance and love, never to be erased.*

*For Gerry's legacy transcends time and space,
In every achievement, in every embrace,
A testament to his love, enduring and strong,
His family's bond, an eternal song.*

*And as the great grandchildren now appear,
His wisdom, guidance, they too shall adhere,
A lineage of love, through generations cascades,
Gerry's legend, forever in accolades.*

*So let the world know of this Goodman tale,
Of Gerry's wisdom, never to fail,
For in his progeny's great works and art,
His love and guidance shall forever impart.*

*In every doctor's cure, scientist's quest,
Educator's knowledge, entrepreneur's zest,
Artist's creation, musician's melody divine,
Gerry's spirit, in every line.*

*And as time weaves its intricate thread,
Gerry's legacy, like a whisper, will spread,
His enduring love, wisdom profound,
In every creation, forever to be found.*

IF

by Rudyard Kipling

****Gerry carried this poem in his wallet on a folded up piece
of paper for over 50 years***

*If you can keep your head when all about you,
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too.*

*If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise.*

*If you can dream – and not make dreams your master,
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster,
And treat those two impostors just the same.*

*If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken,
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools.*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings,
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,*

*And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breathe a word about your loss.*

*If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew,
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you,
Except the will which says to them: 'Hold on!'*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much.*

*If you can fill the unforgiving minute,
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a novel as deeply personal as "The 12 Glasses" often makes words feel inadequate when it comes to expressing my gratitude for those who lived these stories with me. You, my family, paint these pages, creating an unvarnished, wacky, and cherished portrait. I hope I've honored you truthfully, though some exaggerations may have left a few raw edges—sorry about that. It's all about learning and healing, and I pray you've experienced that journey as well.

To my wonderfully eccentric family, the Goodmans—first, thank you. While not all of you cheered this project from the sidelines, I am grateful for your love. I know it's there, and I recognize the challenges that come with presenting our family's story. In our family's chaos lies talent, intelligence, and a resilient love that binds us into eternity.

Mom and Dad, Allan and Susan, thank you for your patience time and again, especially since you still claim me as your adult child. I own up to past blunders and cherish your steadfast support. You're my rocks. Love you!

Aaron, my rock star brother in life and hematology—Papa Heme, I hope you're okay with how I've portrayed you in this book. Let's grab some tacos and reminisce.

Uncle Addy, your vision for the cannabis industry is extraordinary. I apologize if my portrayal led to any hair-pulling on your part. Let's hash it out—Go Team Uncle

Herbaceous and Captain Pothead!

Aunt Jackie, your early edits and encouragement were a godsend. You've always been the family cheerleader I didn't know I needed — thank you!

Uncle Jordan, your challenges keep my wits sharp. As you remind me, "Woke up, Mendel!" — consider me awake, even if sometimes slowly!

Aunt Janet, our family's historian and glue! Thank you for keeping us together, especially during COVID. Let's team up on the "12 Glasses" documentary!

Cousins Jeremy, Kevin, Babe, Zoe, Jay, and Alex — we need to hang out soon and dive deep into more Zayde tales. I would love your input on the documentary!

Aunt Mildred, Larry, Robert, and Suzanne — your families are always part of our tribe. I hope Howard's portrayal raised a smile. I'll definitely keep "guess the wad" alive!

To my Smileblazer crew — Ben, Katherine, Megan, Chef Daniel, Jen, and Shad — let's unleash our dream and turn Smileblazer into a reality. Thank you for the support through the good times and bad!

Bubby Gita, I miss you dearly. Wherever you are, your mighty spirit nudges me forward every day. I love you so much.

To Zayde Gerry, I miss you tremendously too! Our story isn't over yet — hugs to Bubby in heaven for me! You're my hero and you will ALWAYS be!

Jini, my love, I will see you in the final scene, Spielberg-style — are you ready to make it happen? Let's not give up!

To my entire unpredictable, lovable family – this story is ours. Let's continue writing its future chapters together. And seriously, someone call Spielberg for me!

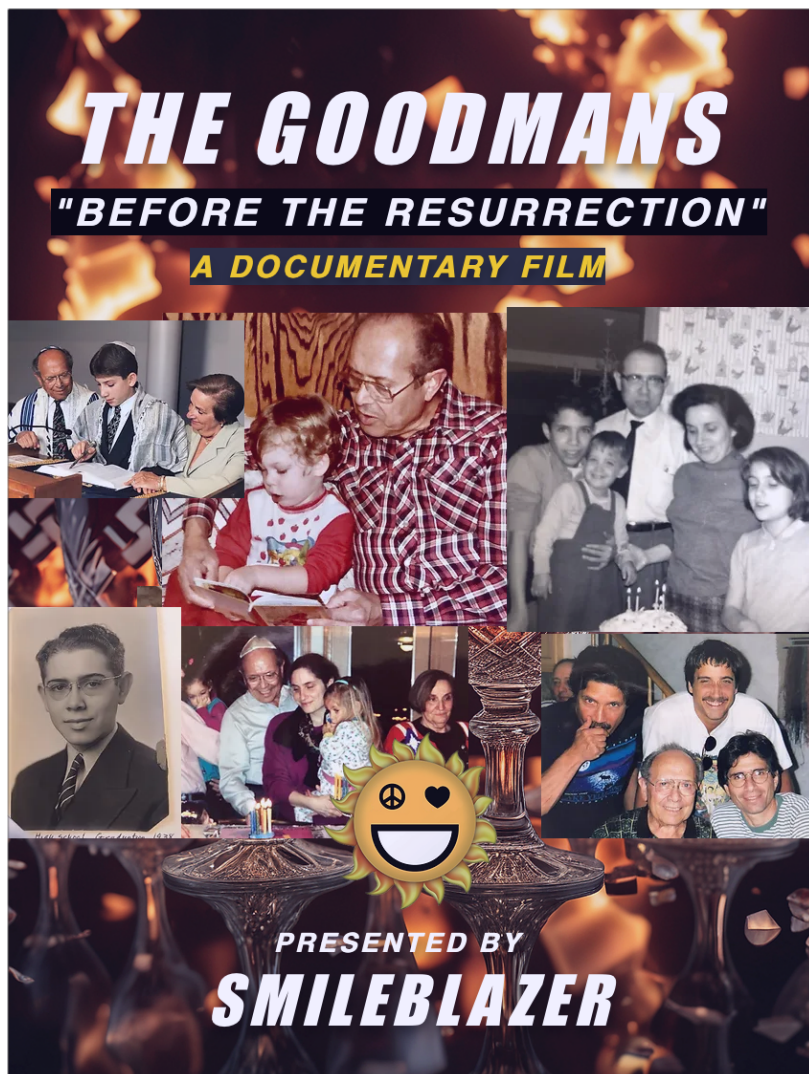
Finally, a big shout-out to all the guiding angels. I know you've been helping me this entire time! Thank you, Jesus, for your sacrifice! And thank you, God, for it all! All glory goes to you!

With Boundless Love and Gratitude,

Matthew

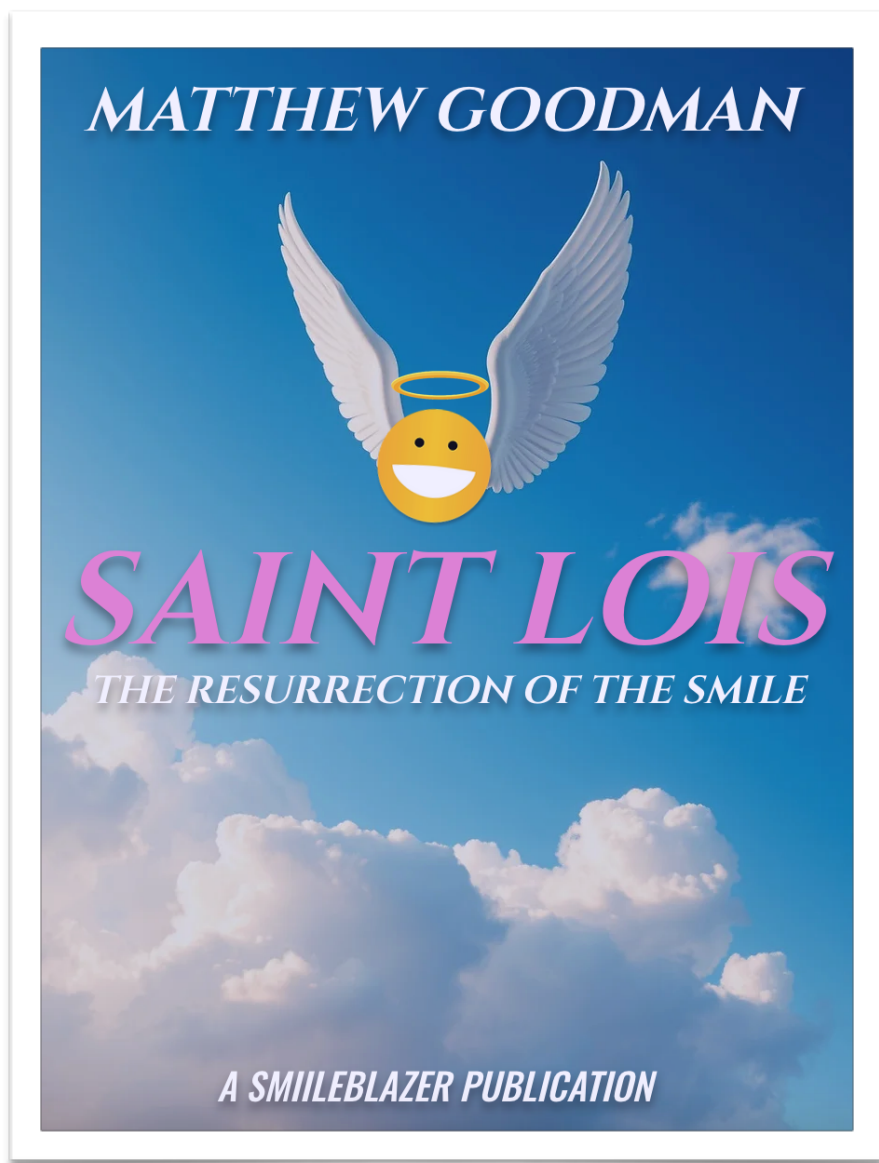
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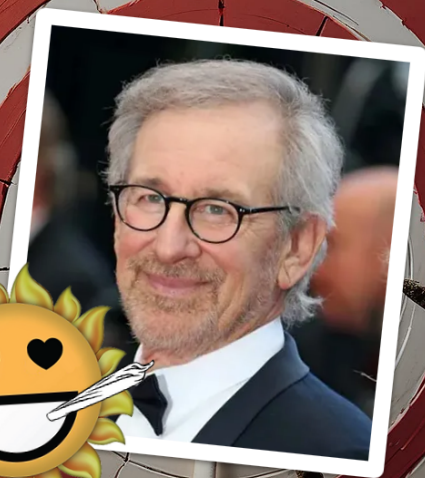
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