

THE 12 GLASSES

THE RESURRECTION OF THE GOODMANS

MATTHEW GOODMAN



A SMILEBLAZER PUBLICATION



SMILEBLAZER

"Ignite your healing"



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, 1945 - NORMANDY, FRANCE

The air was thick with the echoes of war, a dissonant symphony of anguish and agony. Gunfire pulsed rhythmically, intertwining with the dull thuds of explosions—a haunting soundtrack enveloping the souls caught in the carnage. Normandy Beach, once a serene stretch of sand and surf, had become a hellscape, the waves crashing relentlessly against a blood-soaked shore, turning beige sand to stark red—a grim reminder of lives extinguished in fleeting moments. Smoke curled on the horizon, a sinister shroud twisting the once picturesque landscape into a nightmarish tableau.

Amidst the chaos stood Gerry Goodman—a resolute yet youthfully naïve soldier, just twenty-three, forging ahead through devastation. Each step pulled him deeper into the visceral reality of conflict. His youthful face, etched with fierce determination, reflected dreams and fears intermingled against the horrors unfolding around him. Today, he was driven by an unwavering purpose that felt as powerful as the terror surrounding him.

Each footfall sank into the unforgiving sand, a grueling reminder of his mission. Bullets whizzed by like angry hornets, sharp reminders that death lurked nearby. Yet Gerry pressed on, eyes fixed on the distant shoreline, where enemy lines awaited and confrontation was inevitable. With each explosive tremor,

urgency coursed through him like a jolt of lightning. He was part of something larger—a tide of men united by courage and a shared purpose that defied the chaos.

Gazing sideways, he saw rows of soldiers charging alongside him, a relentless wave of khaki and steel propelled by the indomitable spirit of youth. The world around him narrowed; the cacophony dulled into a low drone as his focus sharpened. Gripping his weapon tightly, the cold metal steadied his resolve and embodied the hope that their collective action might change the unforgiving world.

“Follow me!” he shouted, his voice resolute amidst the din of combat. His fervent command ignited the soldiers behind him, transforming fear into strength, a surge of solidarity propelling them forward.

As if in defiance of fate, smoke began to clear. Through the haze, Gerry and his fellow soldiers advanced, pushing back against enemy forces, their collective strength pooled for that desperate moment.

* * *

JULY 2, 2023
NORTHBROOK, ILLINOIS

Years blurred the edges of that fateful day, transforming it into a distant, haunting memory, now carefully tucked away in the recesses of a mind weathered by age. The chaotic clamor of war had yielded to an atmosphere steeped in the serenity of stillness—a different kind of

battlefield. Here, in the quiet confines of a modest nursing home, a struggle unfolded, intricate yet enveloped in the unrelenting grasp of time—a battle for legacy and remembrance.

The living room was an homage to a life well-lived, adorned with framed photographs celebrating a tapestry of existence. Each image radiated with the quiet joys of birthdays, anniversaries, and the snapshots of familial love that echoed warmth and nostalgia. At the center of this gallery hung a radiant portrait of Gerry and his beloved wife, Gita—two souls suspended in time, their faces alight in an exuberance that starkly contrasted the spectral memories of days once vibrant, now trailing like shadows in the recesses of his mind.

Gerry, now a 102 years old, sat perched in his favorite armchair, weathered hands cradling memories like sacred manuscripts—a cherished life punctuated by affection and the laughter of those who had shared this journey with him. The photographs evoked a kaleidoscope of emotions, weaving together threads of joy and subtle sorrows—the unshakeable longing for lost voices, the aching realization of moments surrendered to life's relentless passage.

The door creaked, ushering in Matthew, a handsome man in his forties whose presence sliced through the heavy air like a flash of spring. Each step he took was intentional, measured, as if he were walking not just into his grandfather's space but also into the weighty history that lingered there. In the brief shared glance between them, unspoken words fluttered, a powerful connection forged

through decades comprised of both laughter and silence.

Matthew reached out, placing his hand over Gerry's. The touch was both soothing and grounding; it tethered them to the lineage of family ties forged in shared history and mutual love. Their bond—a rich tapestry woven through time—spoke volumes about reverence and profound love. Gerry's spirit, though markedly aged, remained resilient against the relentless tides of the years that had swept past.

“My legacy, Matthew,” Gerry whispered, the words fragile yet imbued with significance that reverberated through the room. “It’s time.”

Those words, heavy with meaning, landed between them with an unmistakable weight, anchoring their conversation in a space that transcended mere exchanges. Matthew nodded solemnly, recognizing the formality in their shared understanding. Lowering his head, he pressed a tender kiss atop Gerry’s bald crown—a quiet affirmation of familial devotion layered with an acknowledgment that these moments were fleeting.

Slowly, deliberately, Gerry rose from his seat. A determined glint ignited in his eye, betraying the physical toll of his years even as it radiated a fierce vitality. He shuffled toward the decades-old bookshelf steeped in family history, memories clinging to its surface like dust from forgotten years. There, he retrieved a small, ornate lockbox that had weathered the passage of time—a vessel waiting for revelation.

As he opened it, sunlight spilled across the contents,

illuminating a glistening crystal glass nestled within—its surface etched with a Swastika, an unsettling emblem that transcended personal narrative to echo larger tales of humanity's struggle and resilience. In that poised moment, the distant echoes of Normandy Beach began to mingle with the laughter and heartbreak of his family, swirling together like dancers bound in a perpetual waltz. The weight of history settled heavily within the room, merging the past, present, and future into a singular thread—a legacy waiting to be not merely acknowledged but also defined.

In the recesses of Gerry's mind, the waves continued their rhythmic crash against the shore, whispering tales of courage, sacrifice, and the inexorable passage of time. Each wave carried the indelible shadows of memories that would never truly fade, echoes of a world forever changed—a reminder that the past remains a part of us, inextricably woven into our tapestry of existence.

As both men were transported back to the present, they stared with wonder at the final Nazi glass, the last one remaining of twelve, which Gerry had shipped back during the war.

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THREE MONTHS EARLIER

The sun streamed into Matthew's breathtaking Sedona office like liquid gold, bathing everything in a warm, incessantly cheerful glow. It was the kind of light that could uplift even the most mundane corners of existence, though in this case, mundane hardly characterized Matthew's workspace. Instead, it felt more like an exuberant concert than a place of business. Matthew, with a captain's hat cocked rakishly atop his head, danced with abandon around the office, his movements both carefree and purposeful, his energy almost electric. The beat of Salt-N-Pepa's 90'S rap "Shoop" thumped through the air as he bounced off the walls, rapping every lyric as if delivering a manifesto for a generation. Exuberance radiated from him, matching the wildly successful life he had constructed in the medical cannabis sphere.

As he gyrated to the rhythm, the chaos of his office took shape, revealing an eclectic assortment of accolades cluttering the walls like trophies from a triumphantly charmed life. Time Magazine covers featuring Matthew's innovations hung prominently alongside High Times distinctions, Emmy awards, and other symbols of recognition that told a story of ambition turned reality.

Posters decorated the space as if he were both creator and curator, advertising “Growin’ with Rogen,” a content series he had produced alongside Seth Rogen, the roguishly charismatic cannabis enthusiast, and “The Uncle Herbacious Show,” where his Uncle Addy’s passionate cultivation expertise intersected with Matt’s own entrepreneurial vision.

Every surface, every corner, was littered with the remnants of his entrepreneurial spirit. Packaging for edibles and gummies in exotic flavors lay strewn across his desk, matched only by the latest genetically engineered cannabis strains, which seemed to compete for attention like eager children. Rolling trays, each painted in a riot of colors, complemented the bongos and pre-rolled joints scattered liberally about. Here, in this vibrant chaos, was a true weed lover’s paradise, every item bearing testimony to Matthew’s ascendancy as the founder and CEO of Smileblazer, the hottest medical cannabis collective in the world.

As the final notes of “Shoop” faded and the silence began to seep into the room, Matthew turned his gaze towards the expansive floor-to-ceiling windows, where the breathtaking Sedona Red Rock Mountains loomed large in the distance. Out there lay a striking serenity that contrasted sharply with the vibrant tumult of his office. He paused to appreciate it, a moment of introspection that felt almost foreign amid the frenetic pace of his life.

A large mural on one wall caught his eye, elegantly emblazoned with Smileblazer’s logo and the bold, driving

tagline: “Ignite Your Healing.” The phrase resonated within him, affirming why he had thrown himself into this world —not merely for fiscal gain but to effect genuine change in the lives of those grappling with illness. It was an ideal that lingered close to his heart, despite the chaos.

Just as he submerged himself in contemplative thoughts, his computer chimed with a FaceTime call, pulling him back into the present. A grin spread across his face as he read the name on the screen—his brother, Aaron. With practiced ease, he answered, and the familiar visage of Aaron Goodman, the renowned doctor known in circles as “Papa Heme,” flickered to life.

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

“Same old, you know how it is,” Aaron replied, and yet the warmth in his voice was coupled with a weariness befitting his white doctor’s coat, draped heavily over his shoulders as he occupied his hospital office, medical plaques and honors a proud background ensemble.

“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, the excitement of possibility rendering him momentarily serious.

“It’s looking like a couple of weeks. The FDA is still reading our research results. They’re giving me a hard time — all the bureaucratic red tape. It’s never-ending,” Aaron said, the frustration in his voice tight and palpable.

Matthew nodded. “Patience... we’ll get there. You know

how it is. There's a target on our back."

"Fuck the FDA... that's what I say," Aaron muttered, his voice lowering as though speaking a forbidden truth.

"Oh, we will," Matthew replied, a playful spark dancing in his eyes. Just then, the door swung open, and in burst Allan Goodman, their father, an embodiment of enthusiasm, the sunlight pouring in alongside him.

"Yo Dad, come say hi to Aaron on FaceTime!" Matthew called, rolling his eyes knowingly at his dad's exuberance, but smiling nonetheless.

"Why'd you tell him you're talking to me?!" Aaron's voice rose, tinged with irritation.

Allan leaned in, a wide grin plastered across his face. "Hey Aaron!" he beamed.

But Aaron, slipping into work mode, cut the moment short. "I seriously gotta go. I have some rounds to do," he said quickly.

"Did you get a dog?" Allan asked, his probing casual yet unavoidable.

"Dad, I told you. If I want a dog, I can get a dog. Goodbye!" Aaron shot back, the tension mounting as he malformed the familial dialogue with brusque urgency.

Allan sighed, shoulders sagging in a defeated manner. "Why in the world is he getting a dog? You've been in that house; it's already a zoo!"

"Relax, Dad. You're always up our ass. Here, take a hit off this... You could use it," Matthew teased, though the truth lurked underneath the levity, an inkling of annoyance sparking in him.

"No thanks. It's not just your brother, Mom and I are concerned about you too," Allan countered, a disapproving gaze drifting toward the assorted cannabis products scattered throughout.

Matthew's frustration bubbled beneath the surface. "What are you talking about? I'm fine! Look, I'm Time's man of the year!" He held up the framed Time Magazine Cover.

"Seriously, I don't think you're doing as well as you think." Allan steadfastly continued, "Have you talked to your grandfather lately? He just fell and broke his hip; he could use a call." The grave reminder pierced through Matthew's lighthearted facade.

The thought of his 102-year-old grandfather gripped Matthew like a vise, a painful awareness washing over him. A framed photo of family gatherings flickered in his mind's eye, the living legend at center stage, surrounded by laughter that now felt unreal. He allowed himself a moment of guilt; it suffocated him, thickening the air in the room as he resisted the tightness in his chest.

"Also, how's the Jini situation? You know, she's got a point about your 'habit,'" Allan pressed, his voice adopting a firmer tone, cutting through the haze of earlier conversations.

The image of Jini flashed in his mind, radiant and warm, a photograph taken at sunset, an embodiment of joy from five months past when their love felt buoyantly effortless. The memory, bittersweet and unwelcome, served as a painful reminder of the distance that had grown

between them.

“Nothing new there. And yeah, I need to call Zayde,” he replied, the weight of familial obligations pressing down on him like the very burdens he had sought to relieve in others through his work.

“Okay, well call Mom sometime too. She’s worried,” Allan said, his tone softening ever so slightly as he placed a hand on Matthew’s shoulder, the gesture resounding with the gravity of familial bonds.

“Okay.”

Nodding, Matthew inwardly chafed at the encroaching resentment, shaking his head slightly as Allan exited, navigating the chaos of the room expertly. The door clicked shut, leaving Matthew alone in a swift silence that seemed to cloud the space around him.

Detachment settled in as he pondered his grandfather, that quiet man adrift in a nursing home, alone during endless days that seemed to crawl forward, unyielding and immutable. Over a year had passed since his last visit, a wound of guilt opening anew, a stark reminder of priorities misplaced, lost amid the whirlpool of his pursuing ambition.

And there it was again, Jini’s face—a vivid image that cast a shadow across his thoughts and brought a sudden ache to his heart. He needed to reach out, to bridge the growing distance between them, to mend what had frayed in the wake of his intense focus on work and success.

Time, he reminded himself, was a fleeting commodity, slipping further away with every breath he took. Each

moment mattered, a truth he struggled to forgive himself for both overlooking and failing to recognize in the frantic blur of his life. He shuddered and another painful memory flooded his mind, triggering an episode of PTSD that sent him hurling into the past.

* * *

ONE YEAR EARLIER

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

The evening sun melted down the horizon, bathing everything in a romantic glow that would have made even a nihilist feel something. He took another deep rip from his three-foot glass bong, the kind of contraption that suggested he was either a connoisseur of smoke or desperately trying to impress a group of college dropouts.

Jini, who had moments before occupied the space beside him, was now visibly agitated. She fixed him with a glare that implied she had no idea he was supposed to be charming. "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 wasn't blazed out of his mind, he might have realized just how ridiculous he sounded – like a self-help guru for lazy stoners.

"READ THE BIBLE!!!" Jini shot back, exasperation spitting from her lips like venom. "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 escalating. "And I'm in love with YOU!" The proclamation hung in the air between them – bold yet somehow wilted under the weight of their shared history.

This wasn't the first time they had danced this tragic little two-step, and Matthew, in a fit of sheer desperation, waved a bag of Smileblazer weed like a flag of surrender. "And who do you think paid for this pad and that HUGE rock on your finger?! God's greatest little green gift!!"

He held the bag aloft, daring her to acknowledge the irony of their existence – their financial dependency on a plant that some still viewed as sinful. Jini, clearly unimpressed, stormed off, her resolve folding under the weight of frustration. He heard the bedroom door slam shut behind her, punctuating the air with a finality that seemed to mock his idealistic hopes.

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Matthew blinked, thrown suddenly back into the cluttered chaos of his office. He was still staring at that same three-foot bong, a bizarre relic of his former life, now feeling more like an anchor than a trophy. A mix of regret and frustration coiled within him, prompting him to stand and hurl a baseball across the room.

The force was surprisingly cathartic. The bong shattered

into a million glittering pieces—a crash that echoed through the chaotic landscape of his workspace, a symphony of destruction that felt alarmingly cathartic. Glass fragments glittered feebly under the overhead lights, a metaphor for the thousand fragilities he was currently juggling: his fleeting relationship with Jini, his complicated ties to his brother, Aaron, and the haunting absence of his grandfather.

“Fuckin’ bong,” he muttered, watching the shards settle as if to symbolize the fragments of his heart.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
CANNABS CULTIVATION POD #1

Inside Cannabis Cultivation Pod #1, nicknamed the “Genesis Egg”, the air was thick with the sweet, earthy scent of marijuana, one of those fragrant bouquets that could either intoxicate you or send you spiraling back into introspection—maybe both. The Pod, the first one in a global network of cultivation pods, stood as a bastion of ambition, a high-tech laboratory where plants grew as if they were knitting together the fabric of a new agricultural revolution. Here, amidst high-intensity lights and meticulously arranged hydroponic setups, Addy Goodman, Matthew’s uncle, was as high as a draft in a summer breeze. The archetypal eccentric, Addy was a wandering spirit in a world of green: part visionary, part mad scientist, and wholly convinced that he could change the world one plant at a time.

Addy took another deep gulp from his one-hitter, a tiny smoking apparatus that felt more like a relic than a tool, and his eyes sparkled with a mixture of delight and the kind of self-importance usually reserved for celebrity chefs. The large screen in front of him flickered with the faces of cannabis growers from across the globe, all huddled around their own agendas, watching their leader like an

audience at a particularly captivating TED Talk.

"Welcome, my magical garden gang!" he exclaimed, his voice rich with enthusiasm and perhaps a touch of delirium. The flickering screen was an invitation to a party of green-thumbed idealists. "Thank you for joining our weekly call. We've got lots of stuff to cover today." He leaned into the camera, his wild mane slightly tousled, as if the wind had just passed through a bush of sage. "And I have a special guest! Joining us from the mystical lands of Sedona, the illustrious Captain Pothead—Matthew, my dear nephew, are you there?"

A second later, Matthew's face appeared onscreen, looking relaxed but eccentric with an oversized smile and a touch of that charming, self-effacing quality he always affected when around Addy. The contrasting backdrop of Matthew's sleek office told the story of a different world, where elegance and cannabis coexisted, albeit awkwardly.

"Yes, Uncle! Here I am, ready to elevate the discourse!" Matthew chirped, puffing from his own one-hitter, exhaling a cloud of nonchalance.

Addy inhaled deeply, his face lighting up like a candle at an unexpected birthday party. "As tradition dictates," he began, his voice booming with a theatrical flair that shattered the mundanity of all Zoom calls, "we kick these calls off with a sampling of our latest crop." He brandished a joint with an almost ritualistic reverence, its tip glowing—a beacon of serenity and chaos combined. "Today, we're diving into my latest triumph, MaxMeshugina!"

With a nervous cough, Matthew let a puff escape his

lips, his professional face cracking slightly. "It's potent! Tell me—who came up with this magic?"

"Ah, delivered 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 adorned with what might loosely be described as 'modern art' from IKEA, greeted the gang on the call. "Hello, everyone! Happy to join this astounding gathering of cannabis connoisseurs."

Matthew leaned forward, inspecting the joint as if diversifying his investments. "Kudos on this!" He held it aloft like an unwanted gift from an aunt: "It's... expansive! How did you cultivate such a beauty?"

Sven, smiling ear to ear, grinning like a child who has just been praised for ingenuity. "Well, I've been aggregating data from our network's various growing pods for months, and through some clever algorithms, I devised an innovative watering schedule... and even experimented with electrolyte water!"

Matthew, taking yet another puff as if savoring a fine wine, replied, "Clever and delicious! You're truly the Einstein of weed!"

Sven bowed mockingly, as though receiving a trophy at a high school science fair, pride radiating from his expression.

Suddenly, the mood shifted as Addy leaned in, the joyous ambience turning slightly serious, like a sitcom breaking into existential musings. "Matt, we need to talk

turkey. When is the funding coming in for Africa? I've got seven eager growers ready to hop on board, and there's palpable excitement—like puppies before a walk!"

Matthew leaned back into his chair, eyeing Addy sideways with a mock solemnity reserved for actual death threats. "Relax, Uncle. I've got investor presentations stacked like my natural urge for tacos next week. Patience is a virtue—like waiting for an artisanal coffee."

Addy twitched, eyeing him like a hawk. "Cut that hippie-dippie crap, Matt! Seriously, you're stalling!"

A sigh escaped Matthew, the type you let out not because you want to, but because life demands it. This was all just a familiar family dance with no winners; he could hear the music.

"Look," Addy pushed, the irritation in his voice palpable, "you're controlling the platform's development without listening to my advice! Planting Eden is MY idea!"

"Uncle, you really think the partnership arrangement is unfair?" Matthew countered, his voice carefully crafted to mask the bubbling irritation he felt.

"Damn right it's unfair! I'm the EXPERT!" Addy exclaimed, an explosion of frustration that felt almost theatrical against the comfort of his surroundings. "You're controlling everything, and frankly, it's exhausting!"

"Hey, I've said this a thousand times already," Matthew replied, the calm in his voice an oasis amidst the rising storm. "This is a collective. Everyone shares equally: creativity, resources, ideas. We have a common vision for the common good. You do get that, right?"

Addy's emissions of frustration now resembled the whirrings of a malfunctioning blender, his emotions spinning out of control. "You don't know shit, nephew!" he shouted, the anger transforming his soft features into a war-torn visage.

"Uncle," Matthew said softly, his composure nearly breaking under the weight of familial love and irritation, "I'm on your side! You still own the Planting Eden Cultivation Platform outright. The collective made an exception for you. We've never done that for anyone! What's the problem?"

In that moment, it was clear: all logic had evaporated from Addy's brain like the last of a bowl at a late-night session.

"You're the problem!" Addy bellowed now, fully engulfed in his anxiety. "You're a maniac! You just won't listen to the EXPERT! But fine, you do you! One day, you'll see that Uncle Addy—who happens to be family—was right all along. You're not the fucking genius you think you are. Everyone will see it!"

Matthew forced himself to smile, aware that this was projection, a projection fueled by his uncle's unresolved trauma. The whole collective felt like family to him, each member a part of that strange fabric. He had faith that, with time, Uncle Addy would heal.

"Oh, and go fuck yourself," Addy added, his voice turning sharply as if wielding a weapon of family disconnect.

Matthew allowed the smile to fade, though that flicker

of disbelief transformed into acceptance. As Addy's face vanished from the screen, Matthew was left staring at the remnants of the call, the unresolved tension lingering in the space between breaths. The irony of familial dysfunction washed over him like a gentle high—comforting yet disorienting.

As Matthew leaned back in his chair, he was struck with the paradox of it all. Love and exasperation surged through him, a bittersweet cocktail that danced at the edge of his consciousness. The laughter they used to share, once filled with warmth, now felt like smoke dissipating in the wind—an ominous sign that their familial ties were strong yet fraying.

With a resigned sigh, he contemplated the tangled roots of his current state of affairs—the people who mattered most, the people he longed to be at peace with. Maybe tonight, he would focus on reconnection, a way of bridging the creeping gaps that only seemed to widen as life spiraled. But for now, he would let the chaotic ambiance settle and breathe deeply—this was the family business, after all. And like any good business, it was filled with intoxicating highs, bewildering lows, and enough absurdity to keep you grounded even as you floated.

Matthew emerged from the building, squinting against the brilliance of dusk. He had just finished another day filled with the dizzying intersection of business and familial chaos, and now he was ready to escape—both literally and metaphorically. The sun hung low over the Arizona horizon, drenching the world in hues of gold and

orange, creating a vision so idyllic it could have served as the backdrop for a cliché romance film. But this was no ordinary sunset; this was a moment of transition, framed perfectly in the parking lot of the Smileblazer headquarters, where the convergence of ambition and family drama played out in technicolor.

As he walked toward his Smileblazer Mercedes camper van, a new collaboration that seemed as over-the-top as his ambitions, he felt a surge of pride mingled with frivolity. To Matthew, it was a manifestation of his success, a shiny mobile toy that screamed, “Look, Mom, I made it!”

The van sparkled in the sunset like a beacon of absurdity. It was bedecked in the trademark fiery design aesthetic of Smileblazer, swirling with colors so bright they could induce a headache. With each step towards it, he could hear the sound of his own hopeful heartbeat, echoing against the van’s sleek lines. Maybe he wouldn’t just drive away; maybe he could outrun the murmurings of failure, of heartbreak.

As he opened the sliding front doors, Matthew took stock of it all—the state-of-the-art kitchen that he’d never used, the cozy nook at the back that was almost certainly tailored for a romantic getaway, and cubbyholes stocked with Smileblazer-branded products, a cornucopia of green delight. He stepped into his little kingdom, inhaling the scent of new plastic and optimism.

Pulling an edible from one of the many compartments, he glanced out at the sprawling landscape and said a silent prayer that perhaps some of this potency would also ignite

his emotional healing. With a firm resolve, he popped it into his mouth.

The world shrank around him as he plopped into the driver's seat, turning the ignition. The engine murmured to life just as Billy Ocean's "Caribbean Queen" flooded from the Bluetooth speakers, filling the van with vibrant energy. He couldn't help but bob his head in time with the beat, allowing himself to revel in the ridiculousness of the moment.

"Caribbean queen, now we're sharing the same dream..." he sang, throwing his head back as he became the star of his own sunset-lit musical, lost in nostalgia and a touch of melancholy. "No more love on the run."

As he drove away, a cloud of red dirt kicked up behind him, blending with the colorful reflection of the mountains in the distance. The view was nothing short of spectacular—twilight bathing the world in soft clarity, shadows stretching across the rocky landscape, making the whole scene feel like an impressionist painting come to life.

But as the song cycled toward its chorus, the mood subtly shifted from buoyancy to introspection. Matthew parked in front of Cathedral Rock, turning off the engine, but the music continued, morphing seamlessly into Paul Young's "Every Time You Go Away." The melancholic notes washed over him like an unwelcome tide, pulling him away from the ecstatic high of earlier into a more reflective state.

He glanced at his phone, the screen revealing a familiar line of missed calls and unanswered texts. And there it was

—nothing from Jini. The silence hung heavy, an emotional gravitational pull that sat squarely on his chest.

“Every time you go away, you take a piece of me with you,” resounded in the background, a painful mantra that punctuated Matthew's isolation.

A vision of Jini's face flashed in his mind, her laughter a bright contrast to the current shadows occupying his thoughts. He recalled their afternoons spent poolside in Fountain Hills, the water shimmering, their bodies entwined in warmth and sun-drenched moments that had once felt eternal. God, he missed those intimate, sunny instances where everything felt possible.

“God, I miss her,” he whispered to no one in particular, the admission rolling off his tongue as though it were an incantation meant to bring her back into focus. He gave a resigned sigh as he turned off the engine, the sudden stillness of the van echoing the cacophony of thoughts now swirling.

The chorus echoed in his mind as he remembered the way she stormed off after another fight—frustration dancing between them like a persistent and unwanted guest.

Suddenly, his phone rang out, slicing through the melancholic veil. The name illuminated on the screen was as unanticipated as it was unwelcome: Elizabeth, his ex-wife. He hesitated a moment before accepting the call, uncertainty fluttering in his chest.

The screen sprang to life, revealing Elizabeth in her cozy home office. The meticulous decor seemed to scream

“adulting” —shelves lined with neatly arranged books and pictures of a life meticulously curated. She wore a business casual top, her face relaxing into a warm smile that seemed to wrap around him like a comforting blanket.

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

“I’m okay,” Matthew admitted, though the weight of the previous conversation lingered. “Uncle Addy is driving me nuts, the love of my life won’t talk to me, my parents are perpetually up my ass—just the usual family circus.” As he spoke, he felt a hint of laughter bubbling underneath his frustration, the absurdity of it all creeping in to diffuse the tension.

Elizabeth smiled, the kind that suggested she could sense his struggle without prodding too hard. “How are you?” Matthew asked non-enthused. “I’m good!” she declared. “You need to come see the baby! He’s walking and talking... he’s a riot.”

Matthew couldn't keep the sarcasm from creeping into his voice. “Yeah, but I can’t right now; not with the circus going on in my life. The elephants are going nuts.”

She cocked her head slightly, a hint of gravity entering her expression. “I’m worried about you, Matt. I really think you should consider talking to someone.”

Matthew felt a defensive prickling at her suggestion, as if she had delivered a spa treatment instead of a supportive nudge. “I’ve got plenty of people to talk to. That’s the problem—everyone’s so worried about me. Just let me heal on my own.”

She nodded, recognizing the wall he was trying to erect against the world. "Alright, I won't push," she said, adjusting the tone. "Mark says hi, by the way... He really wants to meet you."

"Remind me to take an extra edible before that," Matthew quipped, forcing 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-jokingly.

Their conversation continued, weaving between nostalgia and present concerns. As they neared the call's end, Matthew caught a hint of warmth in her demeanor that reminded him of their shared history, a tapestry woven with both affection and irritation.

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

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

As he ended the call, he leaned back against the seat, the evening air wrapping around him like a cool embrace. He felt both solace and confusion in equal measure—a sensation not unlike being at the top of a roller coaster, ready for the plunge.

With his heart and mind 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 spiraled through his mind, blending, blurring—how he wished for clarity amid the chaos. As stars began to speckle the night sky, he

resolved to face the reality of his life, bruised yet defiantly hopeful. Maybe tomorrow, he would finally take a step forward—toward the conversations he'd been avoiding, toward 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 like the smoke that had just vanished into the ether, leaving only the faintest hint of possibility in the air.

Lying back on the surprisingly comfortable bed, Matthew stared up at the ceiling, a blank canvas punctuated by the soft light from a nearby lamp. The sun had set, but his mind refused to dim. Memories flickered behind his closed eyelids, and suddenly, a wave of nostalgia surged forward, declaring itself not just a mere recollection but a poignant flashback, steeped in the bittersweet essence of love and shattered dreams.

* * *

JUNE 11, 2011
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The Standard Club in Chicago was a sanctuary of elegance, a realm where rich fabrics and polished marble intertwined with the palpable excitement that hummed through the air like electricity. It was late spring, the season when love was not just romantic but also precariously idealistic, inebriated on promises thick enough to choke on. Guests, a sea of familiar faces woven together for this grand occasion, filled the hall, laughter and

whispers coiling around each other like wisps of smoke rising from a celebratory cigar.

Matthew stood at the altar, dressed impeccably in a tailored suit that felt more like an encumbrance than a badge of honor. Sweat pooled at the back of his neck, a tangible reminder of the looming expectations that draped over him, heavier than his unbrushed formal wear. Uncertainty fluttered in his stomach, refusing to settle like errant wedding confetti flitting about in the air, stubbornly resisting the clarity of the moment. Today was meant to symbolize the convergence of two lives, yet the buzzing beneath his skin whispered of doubt, masking itself in the jubilant chaos of wedding bells.

And then Elizabeth appeared, gliding down the aisle, her presence both radiant and enchanting, a vision of beauty framed in ivory. For a moment, time itself seemed to dissolve, allowing just the two of them to exist in a bubble of delicate ecstasy. He could only focus on her as she walked, her father at her side, friends and relatives fading into a blur. In this moment, all questions about the future and past dissipated away, replaced with the vibrancy of love – a spark, a twinkle, the very promise of a shared journey ahead.

The Rabbi stood beneath the chuppah, solemn and filled with gravitas, embodying years of tradition and wisdom. On a small table next to him sat the infamous glass – a Swastika glass, etched with a symbol of darkness that weighed heavily in the memory of those who understood its significance. It was as if the glass itself was a vortex, drawing the gaze of all present into its depths, looming with an intensity that mutely screamed of both history and transformation.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the Rabbi began, his rich voice cutting through the jubilant atmosphere, "we are gathered here today to celebrate the union of Matthew and Elizabeth—a testament to the enduring power of love."

The guests leaned forward, breaths held in anticipation, their shared curiosity hanging like the subtle notes before a climactic crescendo. "But before we proceed, I must share a story that intertwines this moment with something profoundly significant."

Matthew felt his heart thud in his chest as he recalled the family stories that trickled through holidays and family gatherings—tales swirled with threads of pain and triumph. The Rabbi continued, his tone shifting into something heavy yet hopeful. "This glass before us represents far more than mere opacity. It carries the marks of hatred and oppression, yes, but also embodies resilience and love. Gerry Goodman, our esteemed patriarch, sent this glass home from World War II after storming Normandy."

All eyes turned, a collective surge of reverence directed toward Gerry, who sat proudly among the crowd, the weight of history etched into every line of his face. In that moment, he wasn't just a grandfather; he was a conduit of memory, embodying countless sacrifices made in the name of family and love.

"Gerry envisioned a day," the Rabbi continued, raising the glass high above him, "when his family would stomp on these symbols of hate, reclaiming their power and triumphing over darkness. Today, as we witness Matthew and Elizabeth's union, we honor that vision and celebrate the profound love that binds all of us here by stomping on this glass!."

The room shifted, an electric ripple coursing through the assembly as tears pooled in many eyes, emotions surfacing and bubbling over the joy of connection. Matthew felt the gravity of that legacy seep into his bones. This day was not merely the hook on which they hung their vows; it was a reclamation of their family narrative.

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

Matthew's gaze slipped away from the glowing faces of friends and family to the glass resting beneath him, wrapped in its cloth, heavy with meaning. Sweat dripped down his face, a testament to the simmering anxiety lodged in his gut—a tight coil of uncertainty that refused to be ignored.

With the crowd locked in rapt captivation, Matthew took a deep breath, the weight of expectation pressing down upon him. As he raised his right leg, nerves began to tangle, tightening every muscle in anticipation. Boom. In one powerful motion, he stomped down on the glass, the sound explosive—a triumphant echo that shattered the air, signaling a reclamation of power that felt both exhilarating and terrifying.

The reverberation sliced through the moment, an eerie catharsis, as history itself seemed to fracture and disintegrate into shards that mirrored Matthew's own emotional landscape—a complicated mix of hope and anxiety. Love, he mused, was a fragile thing; it could spark joy or splinter under the weight of reality's incisive truths.

As the clapping and cheers washed over him, Matthew's gaze drifted toward Gerry. He observed a proud glimmer in his grandfather's eyes, a man who had withstood the crucible of time and trauma, yet Matthew couldn't shake the lingering uncertainty that accompanied his own vows—a sense that the promises made in the midst of this celebration hovered precariously in the air, not unlike the shards of glass scattered at his feet.

In that moment, even amidst the jubilant celebration, he felt the weight of his decisions crushing down like a thick fog. Love and duty intertwined in a tight embrace, leaving only the bitter hint of foreboding lingering behind. Was this union truly the triumph over darkness, or just another illusion veiling the stark reality of familial history?

* * *

Matthew jolted awake from the dream, the vivid imagery of the wedding day still lighting up the corners of 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, the urgency of his resolve threatening to sweep him away like autumn leaves caught 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 like a relentless reminder of the emotional distance creeping between him

and his family.

He booked the airline ticket, and with a heavy sigh, he closed the laptop and let the thoughts of the wedding day settle back into the recesses of memory. Phil Collins' "Take Me Home" began to filter softly from the Bluetooth speaker, a melancholy undertone threading through the van's intimate space—a reminder of home and 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; tonight he was prepared to confront the complexities of those relationships that shaped his life.

"Tomorrow," he whispered into the enveloping silence, hoping the weight of connection would persist as the shadows outside deepened, each flicker whispering promises of reconciliation—a reminder that love, like glass, could be both beautiful and shatteringly painful.

The interior of the Airplane Cabin exuded a mix of claustrophobia and intimacy, the hum of engines and muffled conversations creating a unique soundscape that was simultaneously comforting and oppressive. Sunlight streamed through the tiny windows, casting golden rectangles on the passengers' faces while cotton-candy clouds drifted lazily beneath them, reminding Matthew of the naive fantasies he had woven in his youth. At this moment, however, he felt a strange fusion of nostalgia and anticipation churning within him, a sensation akin to lingering in the liminal space between sleep and wakefulness.

Settled in the plush confines of first class, Matthew leaned back in his seat, attempting to savor the luxurious isolation that came with a ticket upgrade—his small victory in the daily grind of adulthood. As the flight attendant's voice chirped through the intercom, announcing the mundane necessity of buckling seat belts, Matthew cast a quick glance at the passengers around him. They were occupied with their own little dramas—clattering trays and the occasional squabble over who got the armrest—as if they were characters unwittingly cast in a farce of air travel.

Then, from the corner of his eye, a young man in the

adjacent seat, adorned with an impressive set of dreadlocks, swiveled to him like a dog spotting a squirrel.

"Hey, you're Captain Pothead, right?" he asked, his voice bursting with enthusiasm that matched the vibrant colors of his tie-dye shirt.

Matthew couldn't help but laugh, a rich sound that bubbled up from somewhere deep within. "Yes, I am," he replied, leaning into the nickname like a well-worn joke. How had he become that absurd person? But maybe absurdity was just another word for authenticity in this world of sameness.

"Bro, let's get blazed! You got any of that Sedona Seduction on you?" The man's eager eyes gleamed—the excitement like a child's at a carnival.

"Well, I wasn't planning on sharing," Matthew said, the playful grin spreading across his face, "but for you, I might just make an exception." He produced a small stash from his backpack, revealing the treasures tucked inside—as if he were unveiling a prized collection of illicit candies acquired on a schoolyard.

"Thanks, man! This stuff is legendary!" the passenger said, reverently accepting the gummy. They both prepared for the ritual of their shared indulgence, the kind of camaraderie that whittled down barriers like a blade through butter.

"Before anything else, though," Matthew said, putting his hands together for emphasis. "Let's compress this moment into a spiritual intention. For healing."

The passenger snorted, the sound a mixture of

amusement and intrigue. "You're really going full zen here, huh?"

"Honestly, it's a hard habit to kick," Matthew replied, chewing the gummy and savoring the sweet juicy taste of Sedona Seduction.

"Why are you headed to Chicago?" the passenger interjected, intrigued yet oblivious to the depth behind Matthew's journey.

"I'm going to visit my grandfather. He's 102," Matthew said, the words spilling out reluctantly, grappling with the emotional weight.

"102? Wow! That's incredible! My grandmother just turned 97!" The man's response was enthusiastic but also showcased an odd, offbeat competition as if they were both on a reality show where survival depended on one-upping each other's familial legacy.

Matthew frowned slightly, irritation creeping into his thoughts. "Right," he sighed. "Listen, I've got some work to do. Could you excuse me?" He opened his laptop and settled into his work, embracing the liberating claustrophobia of productivity.

"Whoa! Hold on a second! What's this?" the passenger leaned in, curiosity igniting his voice. "Oooh, 'Escape the Simulation' – that's a killer name!"

Suppressing a sigh reminiscent of a disillusioned parent confronting a perpetually curious child, Matthew replied, "Yeah, it's catchy. So you're trying to get a peek behind the curtain of my work, aren't you? I know, it's like unlocking all the mysteries of the universe."

“Gnaaaarly,” the passenger added dreamily, his enthusiasm giving way to a blissful daze, the kind reserved for someone who had journeyed deep into the green waters of indulgence.

* * *

As daylight faded into night, the plane cabin was suddenly illuminated by flickering lights, jolting Matthew from his brief creative reverie. “Welcome to Chicago,” the overhead speaker announced, the flight attendant sounding like a pre-recorded robot. The warmth of summer air could be felt through the cabin walls as if the city awaited him with open arms, embracing him again with that familiar humidity. He could hardly suppress a sardonic grin at the irony—he had escaped the dry heat of Arizona only to embrace the steaminess of Chicago.

As he prepared to disembark, he stretched his weary limbs and retrieved his carry-on. The terminal stretched before him like a vast hamster maze, filled with excited travelers and bustling families—all signs of summer in full swing, chaotic but vibrant.

Matthew navigated through the throng, calling his father, Allan. “Yeah, I’m just grabbing an Uber,” he reported, trying not to sound distracted.

“Any word from Jini?” came Allan’s voice, steeped in paternal concern, echoing across the miles.

“No, she still hasn’t called. Remember in this delightful tale, I’m the devil?” Matthew ventured with a chuckle,

hoping to punctuate the uncertainty with humor.

"Make sure to give your grandfather a hug and kiss for me," Allan urged, his voice soothing against the backdrop of cacophony.

"I will, Dad," Matthew promised, though a twinge of anxiety crept into the corners of his mind. He wondered if this visit would bear joy or merely resurrect all that he had avoided.

Once outside, the humid embrace of Chicago wrapped around him, filling his lungs with a sense of belonging as he climbed into the backseat of the waiting Uber. The driver, a young man with an amiable smile, greeted him with an air of familiarity.

"I see we're off to the Courtyard Marriott in Glenbrook. Is that right?" the driver confirmed, his gaze flicking from Matthew to his phone.

"Yup, that's correct." Matthew nodded, though an undercurrent of tension prickled at the edge of his thoughts.

"Wait," the driver exclaimed with sudden realization, his eyes brightening as if a light bulb had flickered on. "You're that weed guy... right?"

"Yup, Captain Pothead himself," Matthew replied, letting a smirk slip into his voice, embracing the absurdity. "Thanks for the lift."

"Fuckin-A! You mind if we snap a selfie for my Instagram?" the driver asked, excitement spilling over. "I love your product! It's really helped with my anxiety."

As Matthew posed with the driver, he felt both amused

and slightly uncomfortable, acutely aware that this strange form of fame had become part of his identity. The picture snapped, capturing the unlikely idol as he stuck his head closer to the front seat with an exaggerated grin, a sort of ridiculous pose that could only be described as “trying too hard to be cool.”

“Fuck yeah!” the driver cheered, his enthusiasm palpable as he stored the moment in his phone, pleased with the casual encounter he’d just curated.

* * *

Matthew entered the bustling lobby of the Courtyard Marriott, where the summer energy unfolded in layers—the families returning from tourist attractions, children racing through the hall like wind-up toys, their laughter punctuating the busy atmosphere. The front desk appeared overwhelmed, a chaotic ballet of demands colliding with the stress of vacation season.

He approached the reception, instantly sensing that the receptionist was trapped in the chaotic grip of too many tasks and too little time. “I’m so sorry, can you hold for just a minute?” she said, her voice teetering on the edge of frantic.

“No problem,” Matthew replied, cracking a smile in response to her frazzled demeanor. Their interactions felt like a long-running sitcom, with overworked characters

slipping in and out of the plot, and he was merely a guest star for the day.

After a comically long engagement with the ringing phone that seemed to mock them both, she finally turned her full attention to him, her complexion transforming from overwhelmed to relieved. "I'm all yours," she declared with a glimmer of renewed purpose.

"I was hoping for a room upgrade," Matthew began, his tone casual yet playful, like a magician ready to pull a rabbit out of a hat.

As she typed in the information, her expression transformed almost immediately. "Got you the presidential suite," she offered, a flirty wink escaping her lips as if they shared a delightful secret.

"Thank you!" Matthew said, his gratitude genuine. Returning to a customer service golden age, he pulled out some Sedona Seduction gummies and handed them to her as if presenting a prize. "Here's a little something for your trouble."

She glanced at the brightly packaged edibles, realization dawned on her like a late-night epiphany. "Captain Pothead, huh? Enjoy your stay, Captain." She winked.

Matthew smiled, feeling buoyed by the small connection they shared, even if he had made a mental note to limit how much his reputation would overtake his life.

With the room key in hand, he cast a glance at the hastily scrawled number alongside the receptionist's name. Was he really prepared to engage with a potential romantic entanglement? Jini would go nuts. "I'm here on strict

family business,” he declared, his tone asserting both innocence and commitment.

“Aye aye, Captain,” she replied, and as he turned toward the elevators, he couldn’t help but grin at the theatrical charm of the exchange, almost like a scene from a particularly whimsical Indie film.

* * *

Inside his hotel room, Matthew found solace in the quiet confines—a sanctuary away from the frenetic energy of the lobby. He sprawled on the bed, staring at the ceiling, allowing the weight of the day to leach from his bones. Memories of Jini burst into his consciousness with rebellious vivacity, recollections that pricked him like the gentle sting of a bee.

In his mind's eye, he saw her laughing, that infectious giggle escaping her lips as they sat overlooking the pier at Rocky Point, the sun setting around them like a halo of warmth and familiarity. For a fleeting instant, he could almost feel her presence beside him, the enchantment of shared whispers and quiet joy.

Yet his reverie was disrupted by the sound of his phone ringing, looping back into his reality with spiral precision. “Hey, Cuz!” he answered, relief flooding his voice as he recognized Jeremy, his perpetual source of vitality.

“Safe and sound?” Jeremy’s lively energy cut through Matthew like a stream of sunlight, dispelling the lingering shadows of nostalgia. “You wanna grab dinner?”

"Yeah, I'm in the mood for some Pita Pit. Sound good?" Matthew asked, his earlier nervousness dissipating in the warmth of familiarity.

"Oh hell yeah! Mind if Kevin tags along?" Jeremy's enthusiasm felt infectious, pulling Matthew further into the present. Inviting cousin Kevin was a good idea too, he always provided some welcome 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 with a laugh, the remnants of his earlier tension melting away.

"Sounds like a plan!" Jeremy agreed, the promise of good food and camaraderie wrapping around them like a warm shawl on a chilly night.

As he hung up, Matthew lingered on the edges of wistfulness—the pull of memory mingling with the rhythm of his present. He thought of Jini and the connection they had, a bridge forged in laughter and warmth but now marred by distance, the emotional landscape slowly changing like clouds overhead.

In that quiet hotel room, as he prepared to connect with family, Matthew felt the lingering weight of the Nazi glass—the fragile promises of love and connection shimmering in the air, both beautiful and potentially perilous. It fed into an unshakable truth: love, like glass, carried the potential for brilliance or cracks—all framed within the intricate design of his life.

Tonight could be a step toward mending those connections, he thought, the ghost of hope fluttering within

him. He would navigate whatever came next, armed with a sense of humor and the conviction that the pieces could be put back together.

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