CHAPTER ONE

My Chosen Road

I walked into our large walk-in closet and looked around at his things, the things he had come to acquire during our nineteen years together. The things he had come for. He had not come for forgiveness or out of fatherly duty, but for these things that lined our closet shelves, the shelves that he built with his own two hands when he still loved me.

 My knees buckled, and I fell silent to the floor. As I looked up at these things, I could hear my daughter and my mother in the background. Their voices rose surrounding him like a whirlwind of clatter, of items being tousled. I heard his tone of disapproval screaming up at me from downstairs, demanding for me to put a stop to this. He yelled and screamed his orders, as though he still had the right, as if I still belonged to him.

 I felt my body weighted beneath me, as he made his way up the stairs, my daughter, Saline screaming behind him.

 “You were the only one not happy Dad! Why, why are you doing this to us?” Saline followed her dad part of the way up the stairs. “Where are you going? Are you just going to leave us?”

 “No, I told you, nothing is going to change. Your mother and I just can’t do this anymore!” Jack said, climbing the stairs.

 “Mom didn’t want this! Why are you leaving us, huh? It’s not about us. It’s about you, Dad!”

 “I’m not going to do this with you right now, Saline. I just came to get my things. Now please, sweetheart, just let me get them, and I will get the hell out of here.”

 “But we weren’t unhappy, Dad, it was just you. Why are you doing this to us?” He pushed past her and my mother making his way up the stairs still yelling.

 “Sarah…Sarah, can you please get them under control. You told me this wouldn’t happen. You promised me.”

 He was right. I had promised. I promised anything to get him back under this roof. I thought somehow if I could get him here, that seeing the children and myself and how broken we all were, he would be that man again. He would be that father and that husband again, and we would be okay. And he would stay and it would be as if he had never left. So, yes, I promised anything.

 “Yes, Jack, and what about your promise to them?” My mother screamed up behind him. “What about your broken promise to your family!”

I listened unable to speak or move surrounded by his things. His suits he bought just for show hung neatly on the top wire rack. The golf clubs lay perched next to the wall, amongst his many shoes. His baseball bag full of gear from the church league lay underneath his many baseball caps and the black cowboy hat I had just bought him for Father’s Day.

He entered our master bath looking for me. He then turned facing the master closet door where he found me keeling on the floor. His cold pitiless eyes looked down on me in disgust as he continued to rant on about his things.

“Sarah… Sarah, are you listening to me? You said it wasn’t going to be like this. I just need to get my stuff and get the hell out of here! Sarah, are you listening to me!” He looked down on me with his hands on his hips, bringing his hands up in disgust as he spoke at me, pacing back and forth, longing for the cigarette that awaited him in his truck.

“Are you going to let me get my stuff or not?”

But I did not move; I did not speak. I sat there looking up at him, blank, a mute, frozen in time. I was waiting. I was waiting for him to love me again. But he didn’t. Somehow, some way, he just stopped loving me, and I could see it in his eyes. At the time, I didn’t know why. But I knew I had failed. I sat there looking back at his precious things.

His words became blurred. He stood there yelling at me, flinging his arms back and forth and my rage started to flare like a dormant volcano, building up over centuries. The web of lies, all those years, and my rage grew. I looked around at his things, the things he had come for, and I started to grab them, one by one.

“You want your precious stuff, your shoes, your golf clubs!” I abandoned myself and drifted down deep inside of my brokenness. I gained strength from my anger. I gathered his shoes and golf clubs at first as if in slow motion and then as if I were a patient in an asylum making my escape. I slung them at him with all my might. I left my conscious self and all the insanity that surrounded me, and I gave him what he wanted.

“You want your stuff, your precious stuff that means so much to you. Here, take it!” I grabbed his dress shoes and launched them at him. I grabbed the clubs sending them sailing, like spears, through the air as he ducked to miss the flying metal projectile aiming for his face.

“Never mind—just keep it! I’m getting the hell outta here,” he yelled in disgust while batting away the flying objects heading straight for him, now on their way to the nearest wall. “I will get all new stuff!” He shouted as he left the room, the objects continued to fly out of my hands, clamoring against the wall causing scars upon scars.

I laid my hands over my face, collapsing onto the floor, melting into the carpet, slowly hoping to disappear.

“It didn’t have to be like this, Sarah. I just wanted to get my stuff!” He shouted as he headed down our long hallway and down the stairs where Saline was waiting for him.

 “It was you, Dad, who was unhappy—not us; you are doing this for you, not for us!” She shouted uncontrollably in tears, as her father walked swiftly past her and past my mother who looked at him in anger, but said nothing.

 My daughter wept as I forced myself up. My feet carried me to her, past my other three children. Unaware of their location until that moment, I memorized how they huddled together in the bottom of my son’s bed. They hugged each other as if life would end should one let go, as their father flew past, without a word, without a smile, and without a goodbye.

Saline, my oldest at the age of 17, stood there crying, more angry than weak. She fell into my arms as we heard the garage door slam behind him.

 “I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry, Sweetie,” I said.

 “For what, Mom, you didn’t do anything.”

 “I did. I did. I picked him. I’m so sorry I didn’t pick someone better, someone worthy of you.”

 And my daughter looked at me. She grabbed my face, “Mom, none of this is your fault. It’s his fault.” We gripped on to each other as the world rose up all around us and the clouds spiraled in the sky. The lights dimmed to a haze and we had made it through one more day, one more occurrence. My other children joined us forming a circle of tears and interwoven arms losing ourselves, briskly swirling up, up above it all. Then slowly returning to each other’s arms, holding on for dear life, and my mother looked on in a tear-filled silence...

Nineteen years earlier.