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## **You Were Supposed to Love Me**

“What if it turned out a client was my half sister from a relationship my father had that I didn’t know about? Would it be appropriate to terminate?”

Dr. Neal stared quietly at Davis. The older man’s bearded chin sat solidly on the tips of the triangle created by his long, thick, brown fingers. He studied his client before taking a stab at interpreting Davis’ latest attempt at running away.

“Is that the case, Davis?” Neal had determined during the last year as Davis obsessed over his young female client, Andrea, that Davis could not skillfully manipulate a single inquiry the way he could mangle multiple ones. Throwing a cluster of questions at Davis was the same as tossing multiple balls at a master juggler. The initial reaction would be fear and doubt, but once he got into it, assessed the challenge and set his pace, Davis would whip through the task leaving a dust storm of confusion for his audience.

“No, well, I don’t know for certain.” Davis scratched his chin, uncrossed and crossed his legs. He was ready to construct a connection bizarre enough to make termination mandatory and a referral for Andrea to another one of his unfortunate colleagues a professional obligation. “It’s a possibility, though. I mean, considering that we’re both black.”

Neal chuckled, falling for the easy joke Davis seemed pressed to throw out as often as he could manage during every session.

Neal had admitted to his own therapist that the young psychologist often had him on the ropes. Davis was complicated. Neal didn't know whether to treat him like a legitimate client, a fellow colleague, or a friend. And then there were times, like in this session, when sixty-year-old Neal wanted to take Davis to a bar, buy him a strong drink, and school him on the ways of the world like he'd done with each of his three sons.

“So, we're all potentially related, right brother?” Neal scratched his short afro comprised of more salt than pepper then took a very deep, deliberate breath. “Listen Davis, you've got to get a hold of things. This client has had your head spinning since the first day she walked into your office. You were reluctant, but you've worked with her for nearly a year now. We've determined that progress has been made. Andrea has been receptive to therapy and you believe you have helped her. And yet,” Neal leaned forward and looked directly into Davis' eyes with the intention of ruffling some part of the younger man's composure, “during every one of our monthly sessions you talk mostly about ending your therapeutic relationship with her. Now, you know you don't need my permission to terminate with a client, yet you've been actively seeking it. And you won't be straight with me about why you want this. Davis, there are a million ways to terminate therapy, but it's the reason for doing so that has the real meaning.”

Neal sat back in his chair satisfied with the barely discernible twitch of Davis' left eye he'd spied as the last word left his lips. Even if no new revelations came forth before their hour ended, Dr. Neal would chart the involuntary movement as a breakthrough.

As the men sat with the silence in the room, Davis' twitch became more obvious. Its intensity increased to the point that Davis was aware that Dr. Neal was aware of his body's betrayal.

“She reminds me of a woman I knew. A woman I hurt.”

Dr. Neal's glee was quiet and internal so as not to frighten his young client and send him diving back into the protection of his façade. It had seemed inappropriate to Neal that the twenty-eight year old Davis could hold a PhD and practice psychology on real people with real, enormous problems. He didn't know anything about life; he couldn't. What Neal had ascertained from the last twelve months was that Davis had been at the top of every class he was ever apart of and chose to study psychology in graduate school because he wanted to learn how to hypnotize his dog and eventually teach him to speak English. After their initial session it had taken a great deal of self-control for Neal to refrain from writing in his notes that Davis' education had been a waste of resources on a silly man-child who was hiding from his real life by burrowing into the private pain of strangers.

But over the months, Neal had gradually adjusted his opinion. Often his sessions with Davis trailed way from the unearthing of the young man's hidden poisons that were to be collected and analyzed so they were not splashed on his clients' lives, and stumbled into deep discussions about the purpose of their science and its usefulness. The question that all therapists secretly lived with ("Do I do anyone any good?") had been given freedom to roam between the two men.

Neal tingled under his client's gift of confession. Now, they just might be able to get some work done.

"Tell me about this woman, Davis."

She was the only reason Davis had entered into therapy. And if Andrea, Andy, had never found his practice, Davis would have never inquired about Dr. Neal. And if Andy's chestnut skin, short, curly afro, and petite frame had not screamed the woman's name at him so loudly, Davis would still be on the path of fixing people's hurts and teaching his dog vocabulary words.

“She was my girl in college. We lived together for about a year after graduation.” The twitching eye relaxed under the expansion of tension over Davis’ entire body. His long, muscular frame was rigid, nearly petrified as he began to finally tell the truth in session. “She wanted to get married. I convinced her that living together meant we were together for love and not the tax credit.”

“Original,” Neal held in his chuckle. “What was her name?”

Davis didn’t want to say. He had avoided saying it since the night she left him. Davis avoided knowing people who had her name. But under Neal’s observant gaze, Davis knew he couldn’t run from her anymore.

“Helen.”

“How long did you know Helen?”

“Forever. It felt like that most of the time. We met second semester of freshman year and we were together for five years.”

“Did you love her?”

“I worshipped her.”

Davis stared at his hands. Dr. Neal glanced at the clock on the wall behind his client. They had forty-minutes; time enough to get a handle on how worship had manifested in Davis’ life.

“Say more about that.”

Davis looked at the man sitting across from him in the dark brown leather chair identical to his own. It was odd for Davis to be in the position of truth-telling, but, finally, he was ready to speak on what he did to Helen.

“I didn’t want to be without her. If she went to work or out with her friends or even to the store...it was like I went through withdrawal. It got to the point that I wouldn’t let her out of the apartment.”

“What does that mean?” Neal’s face and body were tight. He encouraged himself to stay mindful of his own breathing. He made a mental note of Davis’ labored efforts to take in air.

Davis shifted his eyes. He examined the parallel blue and brown lines that marked the cheap carpet. He was stuck on whether to tell the absolute truth or offer a modified version of how he’d driven the only women he’d ever loved insane.

“I’d gotten sick with the flu and Helen took care of me. It was pretty bad. I’d never been that sick before. All of the drinking I was doing then probably didn’t help. Helen was working nights teaching English as a Second Language and doing some one-on-one tutoring. She was supporting us.”

“And where was this?”

“New York. We’d graduated from NYC together. After school I found myself lost. I had a degree in education and I got sick every time I thought about stepping into a classroom. I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I had no clue about my next step. Helen took care of everything. She wanted a husband and kids and the house. She was willing to carry me to have all of it.”

“And when you got sick?”

“Helen took care of me all day then went to work. For the first time she passed on going to see her mother, who was dying of cancer, to stay with me. She had her friends shop and run errands for her. Within a few days she wasn’t leaving the apartment at all. She was with me every day, all day for two weeks. I liked having her with me all the time. I loved it.”

Dr. Neal watched his client instead of interrupting the silence Davis left. The young man's eyes were changed. After studying the patterns on the floor as he told his story, Davis looked Neal in the face and his caramel eyes flashed like a recovering alcoholic's would if his favorite brand of vodka were placed in front of him.

"I had her complete attention. Anything I wanted, she made it happen. She was always within reach. I would go to sleep and when I woke up—every time—she was right there." The flash suddenly dulled, announcing the inevitable shift that Neal had anticipated. "By the end of the second week I was feeling better. Helen's friends were calling and coming by trying to get her to go out. They told her she needed a break from me."

Davis stood abruptly, causing Neal to stiffen. He watched the young man, dressed in a stripped button down shirt and jeans, walk to the wall of windows to his right. They were on the 38<sup>th</sup> floor of an office high-rise in Midtown Atlanta. Dr. Neal had spent many sessions regretting his choice of office space.

"How did you feel about that, Davis?" Neal asked as if it wasn't obvious. Davis' possessive nature had been evident throughout his time in therapy. He had not been willing to part with very much of his emotional estate. Jokes and political commentary were abundant. Questions about therapeutic techniques and therapist self-care were constantly presented. And of course, no session with Davis ever ended before grounds for terminating Andy were discussed.

"It felt like she was abandoning me."

"Because you felt she should have wanted to be with you all the time just like you wanted to be with her all of the time."

Davis turned to look at his therapist and immediately acknowledged the feeling in his chest that must be what his own clients experienced when he named their deepest desires. He ran

his hand over the lines of jet black, flat waves that clung to his scalp then moved it over his broad forehead, down the long bridge of his nose stopping at his mouth. Davis left his hand over his mouth as if to physically stop the words he felt an urge to expel.

Neal was still and watchful. The night sky that served as Davis' background was easily visible through the large windows with the blinds pulled to the very top. The blackness outside twinkled with the lights of sister buildings and sparsely assembled stars. Davis had his back to the scene. His head was bowed, his body tense and vibrating with a need to tell.

“What happened to Helen, Davis?”

The silence in the room began to warm the air. Neal had noticed that this happened when anxiety and fear were the catalyst for his clients' quiet spells.

“She left me, that's all. I don't think I want to talk about this anymore.”

Neal knew that pushing Davis could cause him to shut down, abruptly ending his breakthrough. But, the right amount of pressure could be just what was needed to encourage Davis to say what Neal believed the young man had wanted to say for a long time. After thirty years in practice, the doctor knew some clients needed to be chased.

“Davis, you wouldn't have said her name if you didn't want to talk about her. It's not fair to stop now, not to you or me. Not to Andrea.” Neal leaned forward, hands clasped together in front of him, his elbows pressed into his thighs. Davis was back in his chair, sitting rod straight, hands grasping the armrest; his distorted face betraying his agony.

“Once I got better and Helen started leaving the apartment again, I would tell her that I wanted to spend time with her,” Davis' voice was so low, Dr. Neal had to lean into the sound to follow the words,” then I would go out or not show up at the restaurant or I would spend the time

ignoring her. Helen was a classic co-dependent. She would go out of her way to try to make me happy. She never knew that nothing she did would work, because I didn't want it to.

I punished her often. I forgot important dates, broke every promise I made to her and still accused her of being too clingy. I blamed her for my inability to find a job. I even stop having sex with her when she decided that the way to my heart was to give herself to me more often."

"Passive-aggressive. Did you know that at the time?"

"No. It came to me a year later after I took an Abnormal Psychology class. "

"How did Helen handle all of this?"

"She fell back into some old habits."

"What were they, Davis?"

The men stared at each other. Neal's resolve was set: he would not allow Davis to leave without a full disclosure. Likewise, Davis knew he would be held captive until he'd said it all. That's the way he would have dealt with his own client.

"Helen was a cutter. She'd started when she was in middle school after her father committed suicide. Every time I rejected her, I'd find blood in the bathroom. When I did offer her sex I would discover new cuts. One night, she cut too deep. "

"Wrists?"

"Jugular."

Neal sat up straight. He did not attempt to hide his disgust. Davis had pushed him beyond his limit.

"You said she left you, Davis. Helen killed herself and you said she left you. Do you not see a problem with that?"

“Of course, that’s why I became a therapist. And that’s why I need to terminate Andrea. All I want to do is save her. I want to fix her and make her whole.”

“You want redemption. Davis, do you really think...”

“I think if you would just tell me how I can legitimately terminate her, then I could stop pretending that I can be forgiven for Helen’s life by saving Andy’s.”

Davis’s voice was heavy with remorse. Neal went inside himself to find empathy and professional advice. He came out with a plan.

“Okay Davis, let’s talk about how you’re going to end things with Andrea.”

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“You have to trust me, Andy. I won’t let anyone hurt you.

Davis knelt in front of the couch where Andy sat stark still, one hand clinging to the armrest with a death grip. They had been headed towards their last session for three weeks and, finally, the day had come. Davis and Andy had worked out an elaborate “break-up” plan, as Davis liked to call it, that incorporated Dr. Neal’s suggestions and Andy’s fantasies of confronting the men who’d hurt her. They brought each man in for a session during Andy’s last three weeks in therapy.

Douglas was the first guy Andy slept with. They had both been art majors hawking quick portraits of anyone for cash to stave off their school induced poverty. Andy had been saving herself for the mystical man that is promised to all good girls. She’d decided that Douglas was her soul mate when she saw his work. He painted women in romantic scenarios being traditionally courted and chased; the men always noble and elegant. It was the kind of art that sparked women’s fantasies.

“I can’t even say that he seduced me. I went after him. I wanted to be the woman in his paintings,” Andy had confessed early in therapy. Aside from her physical presentation, this revelation had solidified for Davis that his new client was Helen incarnate. The need to please above all else would ooze from Andy’s pores emitting a scent that most men would be drawn to initially. Later in the relationship, the same fragrance would trigger their gag reflex.

“I didn’t tell him that I was a virgin and I found it strange that he didn’t notice. When I told him afterwards, he acted as if I’d accused him of rape. I had to actually talk him down from ending our relationship. I guess if I were stronger then I would have seen it as a sign that he was not “the” one.

Andy spent weeks describing how Douglas gradually pushed her out of his life. There was more sex after their initial coupling, but he was robotic. Soon, it became difficult to track Douglas down just to talk or hang out. The more she chased, the more elusive Douglas became.

“I guess I just really want to know why he turned away from me,” Andy hid tears by tucking her chin into her chest exposing the top of her curly head. The image set a flash memory off in Davis’ mind of Helen asleep with her head in his lap; Helen kissing his chest when she was on top. Helen going down on him.

“You want to know what you did wrong.” Davis re-directed his thoughts; forced his feelings back into the present moment. “I think we’ve established that this is a pointless exercise. Men are not inclined to tell the truth in these types of situations. It’s easier to run.”

The day Douglas came to the office Davis sat next to Andy on the lime green couch that filled half of the room. His office was a small room in a small house in Decatur that he had purchased at a foreclosure auction. There were two small bedrooms, a tiny den and kitchen, one full bathroom, and a half bath that he affectionately called a water closet due to its compact size.

Davis lived and worked in the house. The office was furnished with a desk, leather swivel chair, and couch, all of which had been left by the previous owner. He kept the paneling and the puke green carpet as well. The only thing he added was a separate entrance for his clients.

Andy cried through most of the session while Douglas sat in Davis' chair, uncomfortable and unsure as to why he had agreed to come. Davis suspected guilt. He suspected that Andy was Douglas' Helen.

“I thought you were the one.”

“I'm sorry I was such an ass to you, Andy. You were a great girl. You were a great artist. You were so sure about everything: your work, your ability; me. I didn't think I was good enough for you.”

Davis was silent, present, but not intervening. He recognized the escape route Douglas chose. The “I'm not good enough for you” line was in the *Man's Book of Bull*. Davis turned to Andy. Her face was dry and her eyes had hardened. The therapist's heart leaped when he saw that Andy was fully aware of the crap the man in the hot seat had set out as a sacrificial offering. Davis turned back to Douglas, his eyes beaming with his impending success and freedom. They were ready to move on to the next one.

What surprised Davis about Eddie's performance was that none of it was for Andy. It was all for Davis' benefit. What Eddie didn't know was that he and Davis could have passed for twins six years ago. Image had been everything to Davis then and it didn't matter that the truth, his truth—his unemployed, alcoholic, driving his girlfriend insane truth—was known to his audience. What mattered was that Davis was convincing in his performance.

“The truth is I never stopped loving Andy. I just couldn't give her what she wanted. I couldn't make her happy. I guess I just wasn't good enough for her.”

There was that phrase again. Davis was beginning to see that Andy had not dated individuals, but a subtype of men who saw life as something that was done to them as opposed to being participants in it. This guy, Eddie, sat in the chair opposite Andy and Davis like an eight year old: slumped over, head down, no eye contact, and mumbling. This was the man Andy had almost married. They'd lived together for three years. During that time, Andy completed a master's in art and began exhibiting her work in small galleries on the East Coast and taking on commissions from professionals with lots of discretionary income. Her work had become dominated by images of men being both adored and punished, as well as bloated, indiscernible silhouettes requiring imagination and the projection of the viewer's life experience for interpretation to occur. Other pieces were so precise, violent and grim observers would be forced to look away.

While Andy was rising in the art scene, Eddie, who had three years of college credits and fifteen years of retail, convenience store, and odd jobs experience, traded one poorly paying job for another. When Eddie was home, his routine consisted of watching cartoons and sports, eating everything available in the house, and sleeping.

While Andy was working and planning their wedding, Eddie would disappear. At first he claimed to be working late then he just stopped coming home. For days Andy would not know where her fiancé was and then she'd come home and he'd be on the couch watching the game or X-men. He would shoot her a hesitant glance and half whisper a hello, but not offer an explanation until she got in his face.

"How long did you take this, Andy?" Davis had asked, slipping out of his therapist straightjacket and into big brother mode as they discussed the entity called Eddie two days after the session with him. They had decided to double up during the last few weeks of their

relationship. The first session of the week was the meeting with the ex of the moment. The second session, two days later, was for processing the first one. Davis insisted on Andy having time to live with each experience because he wanted a response from her that utilized all of the things she had learned in therapy.

“I put him out six months after he started going M.I.A. Each time he came home I convinced myself that he was nervous about the wedding and that I was just being unreasonable and pushing him too hard. I told myself that everyone needed time alone and that I was the only one who seemed to need to be consumed by another person.” Davis knew the truth was that Andy spent a great deal of time alone creating her work, which meant that when she came out of her cave, she was in dire need of attention from the man who claimed to love her.

He had been so proud of Andy when she sat quietly across from Eddie, non-responsive to his expanding victim act, which included an outburst of tears and a confession of infidelity while they were together that he pleaded with Andy to forgive. At the end of Eddie’s forty minute discourse, Andy—who had spent the time quietly watching the man she once loved make a fool of himself—turned to look at the man she had grown to trust and respect. “I think we’re done here.”

The third man, Andy’s current live-in boyfriend, required a bit of strategy. Andy had been making plans to leave William for the last month. The session would be her opportunity to tell him with Davis’ presence feeding her courage.

At first glance, this guy appeared different to Davis. William was educated, a professional. He held a MBA and worked for one of the largest banks headquartered in the southeast.

“I’ve decided to move out, William. We both know that marriage isn’t an option because you made that clear upfront. And to be completely honest, I thought I could change your mind. But after five years, I know for certain that I can’t. The truth is I want more. And as soon as I end things with you, I can open the door to what I want.”

She had arranged for her friends to move her possessions out of William’s house while they were in session. As Andy described it, William had come close to hitting her before. Ever since the economy started tanking William’s anxiety had risen and Andy seemed to be his only release. He spent most evenings screaming at her and calling her everything but lovely. Davis was aware of the risk and he was mindful of the tension between the two of them. Before the session started, he had tucked his Glock underneath the couch cushion. Just in case.

William had been polite and cordial in the beginning. He reported being supportive of Andy’s decision to enter therapy and stated he could see a positive change in her. When Andy told him she was leaving, William’s smile slide off his face and a flush of anger reddened his ecru skin causing Davis to slide his fingers into the crevice of the sofa and fondle his gun. But just as suddenly as the anger had risen up, calm quickly relaxed the man’s shoulders and softened his eyes.

“Well, that’s one less mouth to feed, isn’t it? I was thinking about selling the house anyway or maybe just walking away from it since I’ve been struggling to pay the mortgage. Where are you moving to?”

Andy was shocked. She had been making a good living as an instructor at Georgia State and selling her artwork at galleries and private showings. William had never let her pay for anything. Davis knew that something in Andy wanted to break loose from the confident, secure

woman she had morphed into over the year they'd worked together and stay with William until she could make everything all right for him.

“That’s not an appropriate question, William. All you need to know is that Andy is ending her relationship with you and she won’t be living in your house anymore.” Davis looked quickly from William to Andy and back then decided to end the session before his client backslid. “And that’s all we have. I appreciate you coming in today. It really has helped Andy with getting closure. I’ll walk you out.”

Davis had not been able to understand why the men had all agreed to come. Did they expect Andy to magically see them as bigger than they ever were or could be? May be they all needed counseling and this was the only way they could convince themselves to go. By the end of it, Davis only cared that Andy had made it through.

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“I don’t know if I can do this.”

Davis looked up at Andy and smiled. She was indeed an exact copy of Helen. For the first time since meeting Andy, Davis did not feel compelled to hold her or kiss the tears from her checks. His sexual fantasies, which had made conducting therapy extraordinarily difficult, had dissipated after the planning session with Dr. Neal. He saw Andy for who she was: a talented, beautiful, smart woman who was finally aware of her value; who knew for sure that she was lovable and worthy of unconditional love from the next man she invited into her life.

“You can do this, Andy. You know you have to. I’m right here. Nothing is going to happen to you.” When the door to the office opened, both Davis and Andy looked up. The

medium height, slightly overweight, charcoal colored man entered with hesitation. Davis rose and crossed the short distance to greet him. Andy was stuck to her seat.

“Mr. Brady, thank you so much for coming. Andy and I really appreciate you helping us out.”

Davis showed Mr. Brady to his chair. Andy did not move or speak. She had not seen either of her parents since entering therapy. It did not require much experience to see that Andy's low self-esteem, her sense of failure even when her success was obvious, and her choice of the same type of unavailable man was the direct result of her relationship with her father. She had taken Davis' advice during the first session to “separate” from her parents by not calling or going to see them. It had been a difficult decision for Andy that got easier as time passed and neither one of her parents reached out to her.

“I'm not sure why I'm here. You know, Andy and I don't talk much. And she stopped talking to her mother a few months ago. That hurt her. But then Andy has hurt her mother a lot. Me, I pretty much wrote Andy off when she left home the way she did.”

It had taken two minutes, from threshold to chair, for Andy's father to start in on her. Davis looked to his left and witnessed Andy folding into the couch, trying her damndest to disappear. He stared at Andy until she responded by turning to him. His eyes told her that she was not alone.

This was Dr. Neal's contribution to Davis' termination plan. He made it plain to Davis what his role was to be and how perfectly executing it would free Andy and redeem him.

“You have to be the father Andy did not have. You have to be physically present, so sit next to her when the men in her life come to session. Speak up in defense of her when they say

things to hurt her. Check in with her quietly by seeking out her eyes throughout the sessions. She should have no doubt that she is not alone.”

“Mr. Brady, I know there have been problems in your relationship with your daughter, but I cannot agree with your assertion that she is the cause of all of it. Andy was a child when she left home; only seventeen. And she didn’t even go far.” Davis waited. He wanted the stocky man in front of him to challenge his knowledge about his parent-child relationship. Davis did not have the words to express his disgust when Andy told him that she had runaway to a neighbor’s house just two blocks away from their family home. While her mother wanted Andy back, her father had refused to open his door to his only child again. Andy’s mother always went along with what her husband wanted.

“Well, she was always full of herself. She always tried to be too much. She’s a girl, there are limits. But Andy never believed that. She had these big dreams about living off of her art. As far as I know, all she’s been doing is living off of one man after another. That’s what her mama tells me.”

The sad truth that Davis had learned during his third session with Andy was that she did not have the devotion of either one of her parents. Her father did not believe his only child, a female, should have ever crossed the boundaries he set. His wife, a broken woman, simply fell in step with her husband. She never stood up to him, not even to protect her child.

“Mama doesn’t tell you the truth. It’s easier to make up a negative story so that she can ward off the inevitable jealousy.”

“So, you’re calling your mother a liar? You hear that?” Mr. Brady turned to Davis seeking the empathy of the other man in the room; the only other whole person present. “What kind of daughter calls her mother a liar?”

“The kind who wasn’t cared for enough.” Davis checked Andy for tears and was surprised to see her dry face. Her eyes and voice were calm. She wasn’t afraid. She wasn’t angry. Andy was solid and strong.

“You were taken care of, Andy. Don’t tell that lie just because it sounds good in front of the shrink. All of your needs were met. You were just selfish. Did she tell you she tried to kill herself when she was fifteen? Damn near destroyed her mother. She cried the entire time Andy was in the hospital.”

“Three days. I was there for three days and you never came to see me once. You didn’t even help Mama get me to the hospital.”

“Yeah, but I paid all the bills that came with your little temper tantrum. I mean, did you tell this guy how you waited to drink the pesticide right before your mother came home from work that evening? It was just Andy trying to get attention, like she wasn’t already getting enough.”

“I wasn’t. That was the fucking point.”

Andy’s anger seeped slowly into the room in low tones, fully expressing the harm that had been done to the damaged little girl who continued to live inside of her. Davis kept his eyes on Andy, but remained quiet. “Eventually,” Neal had told him as they stood at the end of their session, “Andy will stand up for herself because you gave her a foundation of strength. The foundation she should have received from the man she is confronting.”

“You listen here, Andrea. I’m your father and no matter what, you will respect me. Now, I realize that you’ve made a mess of your life, seeing as how you are in therapy, but that’s not my fault. People always want to blame the parents. I did what I was supposed to do. I kept a roof over your head and you were never hungry. We made sure you went to school and we tried to

teach you some manners so you'd grow up to be decent. That's more than I got from my father. I don't know what else you think I was supposed to do." Beads of sweat dotted Mr. Brady's forehead and his breathing became audibly labored. He looked to Davis fully expecting support. Davis continued to look at Andy.

"You were supposed to love me."

Davis focused on his breathing to keep his heart from exploding. It was a simple truth that he had not spoon fed Andy. She'd come to it all on her own. Davis took his eyes off of Andy, leaned back into the sofa and allowed himself a smile as he refocused his attention on the man in front of him.

"When I came home from the hospital you told me my soul was going to hell. You made me feel like I was nothing. Like I should not have been allowed to live. And I believe, even to this day, that if Mama had not come home when she did, you would have let me die.

"It does not matter that you paid the bills and put food on the table. Mama worked all of my life, too, so it's not like you did it alone. What matters to me is how you made me feel about myself. You failed me. You were supposed to love me and you didn't. And because you didn't, I have spent most of my life feeling worthless. I am a MacArthur Fellow, Dad, and a sought after artist. But, because you didn't love me, I've never chosen a man who could. I honestly didn't know what it meant for a man to love me until I got into therapy."

"I didn't come here to be mistreated." Mr. Brady pushed himself out of the chair and headed for the door.

"Dad," Andy spoke in the direction of the chair left empty by her fleeing father, "tell Mama not to expect me to call any time soon. I'm enjoying the distance."

Andy's father slammed the door and Davis stood to stretch his legs. He looked at Andy, searching for remorse, guilt; fear. Instead he found a smile that reached her eyes.

"I'm not going to need the second session this week, Davis. I'm ready to end it today." Andy stood and draped her messenger bag across her torso. "I thank you so much for everything you've done for me. I see my life so differently now and that would not have happened if I had not found you."

The hug that often marked the end of a counseling relationship was not at all uncomfortable for Davis. Andy lingered in his arms pulling away only after she had taken something with her: Davis' regret.

Andy left smiling; happy. Davis, with his own grin tattooed across his face, sat behind his desk and pushed the first button on speed dial.

"Dr. Neal, we have success."