

# JENNIFER



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## About the Authors

Joan is a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She has raised six children, three of them adopted. With four children already in her family she continued her love of learning with an Associate Degree in Social Science, then a B.A. in Elementary Education, an M.S. in Conflict Management, and finally, (her husband hopes) an M.Div. from the University of Notre Dame.

After completing her M.Div. Degree she was given the position of Pastoral Director for first one, and then a second Catholic parish where there was no resident priest.

Joan is now a full-time advocate for the full inclusion of women in ministry including the priestly ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church. In 2006, intentionally breaking Church law to change it, she was ordained a priest through the Roman Catholic Womenpriest initiative (RCWP), and in 2009 was elected and ordained bishop for the Great Waters Region of RCWP. In 2019 she retired as bishop, but continues in active participation in RCWP.

Joan remains committed to the Roman Catholic Church, and works continually to convince her Church to ordain women for the good of the Church and for the women who are called to priestly ministry.

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John is a native of Dayton, Ohio, with a B.S. in Civil Engineering from the University of Dayton. His engineering career took the family to numerous places as he worked on a multitude of projects. John loved the challenge of building things; especially things that had never been built before and sometimes in new and unusual places while helping Joan raise their family.

John is now retired and is a full-time supporting partner in Joan's ministry. He shares her fire and enthusiasm for the inclusion of women at all levels of ministry and the professions. He is pleased that in his engineering field the participation of women has gone from essentially zero to approximately 30%.

After years of being "on call" John enjoys the freedom of not carrying a mobile phone or maintaining an e-mail address. He enjoys the company of his two Tomcats and writing as a creative outlet, including letters "to the editor" and to their children and grandchildren.

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*Photo by Jane Pitz*

*The Authors on 60<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary*

## Preface

As we write “Jennifer”, we remember ancient stories. The world is always new, but some stories continue to be repeated. So Jennifer’s story reflects the stories of people we know today yet takes us back, connecting the new and the old.

Six years ago, we began writing love stories. We followed the old adage to write about what you know. After 60 years we have the right to claim success in love, and we like writing about love together. We know a love story when we see it, and we see love in our story. The Jennifer Story will have its own dominant theme different than the first four stories, yet familiar.

Story 1, “Allen and Sue” is about two people who suffered the effects of violence in their lives. In Sue’s words, “It’s over” but then she discovers that being over not good enough, and love finds a way to new beginnings.

Story 2, “Megan and Nick” are Allen and Sue’s best friends. Their story is all about two people, who, in Nick’s words, found “life can flow like a meandering stream in a meadow” only to discover love entering their lives in new and surprising ways, and their meandering stream becomes turbulent.

Story 3, “Billy” is Allen and Sue’s only son. Billy’s Story is the story of a young man looking for love but love finds him and he was, in his words, “only being himself”.

Story 4, “Maryam” is afraid. Then she is befriended by identical twin girls, Billy’s daughters, Dorothea and Bertha. The twins may look alike, but they are very different people. Will the twins really help? Maryam will find love or will love find her, or maybe not? Even on soft mornings we cannot be sure.

Story 5, “Jennifer” is Allen and Sue’s first child whom everybody loved. She had a perfect life. In her words, “I would call it idyllic if it didn’t sound fairytale-ish.” Then everything changed, and again in her words, “Mom, I don’t even know where I am.” Can Jennifer find herself? What kind of help will she find, or not?

All five stories continue the story of Allen and Sue and their family and friends. Love always wants to be forever. Everyone who has experienced love knows that this is true. Our Christian hope is that our love for one another does not disappoint.

“Jennifer” and all of our other four stories are available to be read, downloaded and shared from Joan’s web site: <http://joanclarkhouk.com>.

DOCTOR JENNIFER BAXTER, M.D.



*“I had an idyllic life as a child.”*

Doctor Jennifer Baxter was tired. Not sit down and rest tired, but fall to the floor tired. It was 2 a.m. Saturday morning in the emergency room, and Doctor Baxter looked around for some mental space between gunshot wounds – one probably wouldn’t make it – and a stab in the stomach – that was a bad one – but there was no place for her mind to rest. She told her nurse, I’m going to the break room. I’ll be back in a minute. Who’s on the gurney in the hall?

A woman, no internal, but her mother wouldn’t recognize her. She’ll be OK for a minute. Go take a break.

As Doctor Baxter walked down the hall her over-loaded mind flipped to an alternate universe where this work in the ER was her dream, not her nightmare, her dream. She was the ultra-competent Jennifer that everyone loved and she was going to save the world. Then she opened the break room refrigerator, took out a juice and took the two pills that were in her pocket. If ever there was a two-pill night, this had to be it, she thought.

Then she sat down on the couch. Just for a minute – just for a minute – she repeated to herself. Then she felt herself slowly slipping to the side thinking about frost bit fingers. Who gets frost bit fingers in Chicago? yet there they were in the ER, and she felt warm. The pain in her right wrist was going away. She may need carpal tunnel surgery but not tonight. Then her mind shut down and she slumped to the floor.

That's where the giant orderly found her and picked her up and placed her on the couch. He checked her pulse – normal, lifted her eyelids – pupils normal – then he went to tell the ER nurse that Doctor Baxter was out, *I mean really out*, on the break room couch.

They moved her to a room and put a pressure, pulse and blood oxygen monitor on her. That was how she found herself when she woke up four hours later. She disconnected herself and found her way back to the ER. Her relief had been called in early, and she went up to him. Thanks for coming in early. I don't know what happened.

Jenn, go home. There are other people who are going to want to know what happened, and you had better have a good story.

It looks bad, doesn't it?

Go home, Jenn.

She left the building and started walking north toward her apartment building. She was dressed for a typical winter day, but the wind blew away her warm bubble and she felt instantly chilled. It was no more than a ten-block walk that she had actually come to enjoy, but not this bitter early morning. She shivered in her cloth coat and thought if a bus comes along, I will take it. Then she did see a bus in the next block, only it was headed south. She crossed over went to the bus stop and waited. When the south-bound bus arrived, she got on.

The bus was nearly full, but she found a seat next to a large woman who was staring out the window. As the bus started to move, she turned toward Jennifer. Where you goin' hon? I ride this bus every morning and I don't remember you.

Jennifer took it as a friendly invitation to conversation, but she didn't know the answer to the woman's question. Where was she going on a south-bound bus when her apartment was in the opposite direction? So she gave this woman an honest answer. I don't know. I was cold.

Lots of people use the bus to warm up, but you don't look like a homeless person. You look like you could just wave a cab and go wherever you wanted.

Homeless people ride the bus to get warm? I didn't know that.

I'm no homeless person, hon. If that's what you're thinking. I clean rooms. It's good money. Most everybody on this bus has a job.

I treated a man with frost bit fingers last night. The person who brought him in said he found him sleeping against a dumpster. He wouldn't have made it through the night.

Lord, are you a doctor and you don't know where you're goin'? That's the strangest story I ever heard on this bus, and I've heard a lot of strange stories.

Jennifer thought, I need to get off of this bus. This woman is right – my being here doesn't make sense, not to her and not to me. So she got up to head to the door to get off at the next stop. The large woman put her hand on Jennifer's arm. It's OK if you sit with me. It's cold out there. I didn't mean I thought you were crazy or anything. It's just a strange story. Sit back down. Are you really a doctor? Do you give free advice? Come sit back down.

Jennifer sat back down. I'm an ER doctor and I had a really bad night.

Oh, I hate the ER, but sometimes that's all there is for poor people.

You said you clean rooms. Where do you work?

At a hotel about a mile down the street.

Do they have a restaurant?

Yes, but I never eat there.

Is it OK if I get off with you and have some breakfast? I'll buy you a breakfast.

Lord, Doctor you get stranger by the minute. I have to check in. There's no time for me to chat with the customers. Would you really buy me breakfast?

Yes, I would. Maybe another time? Would you tell me your name – my name is Jennifer Baxter.

Name's Paula. Everybody on the bus and at the hotel knows me.

Paula, I'm going to get off with you and have some breakfast.

That's nice, hon, but I am still worried. You told me you don't know where you're going. That's a problem. I don't want to leave you lost.

It's OK, Paula. I'm taking my doctor's advice. I'm going home to get some sleep. You asked about advice. Do you have a problem I could help with?

It's my wrists, Doctor Baxter.

I know that problem well. It's not likely to get any better, but don't take Oxy. Try Ibuprofen three times a day. You may need surgery. The wrists can only take so much.



Lord, Doctor. I can't do surgery. How would I work?

I'll think about it, Paula. Maybe I can help.

This is my stop. Time for us to get off. Enjoy your breakfast, Doctor Baxter. Everyone in the hotel knows me. Are you sure you're OK?

Yes, I think I know why everyone knows you. I'll be in touch.

Jennifer was escorted to a table with linen and silver and given a menu.

Would you like coffee?

Yes, a carafe would be nice. Regular, no decaf. She looked at the menu and knew why Paula never ate there; bagels and cream cheese \$15 was the cheapest. Her coffee came and she ordered an omelet with toast, and she sat back, finally taking off her coat. When the waitress brought her omelet, Jennifer asked, do you know the large woman who works here named Paula? She didn't add "Black" because she had seen the front desk and now the restaurant staff, and they were all Black people, and all of the customers were White.

Paula is everyone's friend. You had better be prepared for a hug if you meet her in the hall.

Thanks. And I see your name is Charlotte. Thanks for the extra coffee, Charlotte.

You're welcome. Enjoy your breakfast.

Jennifer didn't want to think about the inquisition she would face at the hospital. It was impossible to even think that her dream job was in jeopardy, but she knew it was. She would go in for her regular shift and go from there. But what was she doing on the southbound bus and in this strange hotel? Should she just get a room and wait for her head to clear? A warm bed sounded so very good. Her right wrist had begun to ache. She had some pills in her purse. Maybe she should take one now.

She started to open her purse, then felt a sudden fear. What if she had taken all the pills? She checked, no pills, and dropped her purse. Suddenly, she began to sweat. She could feel the sweat running down the valley of her back. All she could think of was *Go home, Jenn*. She picked up her purse, put on her coat, paid her bill and used her phone app for a ride to the only place she knew for sure that they would let her in. She knew they would even let in Doctor Jennifer Baxter the junky who ran out of her Oxy pills. Jennifer had to go home.

~ ~

Jennifer recognized the ride-share car. She walked to it and got in the back.

Where to, Doctor?

She gave the driver the address.

That's a long way to the South Side. You have time for a nap.

Jennifer took a \$20 bill out of her purse and handed it over the seat back. The driver took it and handed a little zip-lock back. Jennifer swallowed one pill and put the rest in her purse like they were a million-dollar gift. Then she fell back in the seat for the long ride.

It was still early and it was still cold when she stepped out in front of the only real home she had ever known, college dorms and city apartments didn't count. She stood for a moment looking at the square brick two-story with full width front porch, a lot of good times on that porch. She saw that the swing was new – well that's what Dad would do – keep things in good condition. Finally cold seeped in and she went up the walk to the flower pot where she knew there was always a key. Probably every friend, family and neighbor knew where the key was and she wondered why they even bothered to lock the door.

Mom and Dad were early risers so she expected an empty house, but it was delightfully warm. As she dropped her coat on the nearest chair a black and white cat came from wherever it was taking its nap. So, she thought, they have a new cat. Isn't he handsome in his black and white tux? She sat down and the cat jumped up beside her. She remembered the quote, *Time spent with cats is never wasted*. Was that Freud? She took out her phone to look up the saying then put it down. Maybe she should get a cat. Maybe she should be more cat-like herself. Cats aren't driven to do good. Maybe she should get some sleep. She knew her breakfast coffee would not keep her awake. So, she fluffed up a pillow at the end of the couch, pulled her coat up and stretched out. Her mind went to the first time she came into this house that had quickly become her forever home.

She remembered the little girl next door, and realized that she had neglected keeping in touch with her forever friend, Anne. Where was she? oh yes, in California. Bad marriage so she went out west for a new start. Her ER work was her life, wasn't it? Her life was her work. Her life – and she drifted off. The cat sensed that it was not going to get any more attention and went back to its nest.

It was about noon when her phone chimed. She willed herself awake and looked at the text message. *Come main office. Explain last night.*

She replied: *Can't come today. At parents' house. Send*

*No shift until meeting. It needs to be soon.*

Reply: *Tomorrow at 10. Send*

Well, that's over, at least for today. Tomorrow she would deal with the hospital; right now she felt like shit. Her mouth was gritty and she felt aches and pains in strange places. She knew that when someone is moved in an unconscious state, the body gets pushed and pulled in ways it's not use to. Even so, she felt strange. She needed a shower. She found a new tooth brush in its bubble pack and went to the bathroom.

The shower was wonderful. She and her mother were similar enough in size that she was able to put on some clean clothes. As she passed the hall mirror, she stopped and turned. For a moment she was her mother, and it gave her a shiver.

She found some Swiss cheese and rye bread, a little mustard, and she raided her small stash of pills. What to do with the rest of the day until Mom and Dad get home, and what would she tell them? She didn't want to think about it. She didn't want to think about last night or the hospital tomorrow or what to tell her parents when they got home and found her in her mother's clothes so she put on her coat and went to see her old friend, Tina, who lived next door. She would find out all the latest on her childhood friend, Tina's daughter, Anne. No thinking, at least for an hour or two. Tina, a retired nurse, was home.

Jennifer, you startled me for a second. You look so much like your mother. Come in out of the cold. Is that your mother's outfit? It looks good on you. How have you been? Sit down and tell me all about yourself. This was exactly what Jennifer didn't want to do.

I haven't heard from Anne in a while and was wondering how she is doing? You look great. Retirement is good for you.

Anne is doing well. She likes the hospital where she is working. Her apartment is her big complaint. It's way too much money but she can't sleep in her car. Now what about yourself?

Jennifer was being pushed to say something about herself so she said, I see all kinds of things at the ER, but I like the view from my tenth-floor apartment. I can watch the sun come up. I have a little Sunday morning ritual, coffee and a fresh bagel and watch the sun come up.

That sounds really nice, Jenn. Would you like some coffee? I made a fresh pot for my lunch.

Yes, with cream please.

Tina reached for the coffee. I remember, coffee with cream. How many years have we known each other?

Since Anne and I were four years old.

Jennifer, I watched you grow up like my own child. Here's your coffee. Careful, it's hot.

Jennifer reached for the cup to take a sip. The cup rattled against the table and some coffee spilled.

Jennifer, I am not only your second mother but I am a nurse with thirty years of experience. What's going on? Out with it.

Jennifer felt like a deer in headlights. There was no escape. For a moment she thought she would excuse herself and leave. She almost said, I need to go.

It was like Tina read her mind, and she put her hand on Jennifer's arm. I'm your friend, Jennifer. You can't fool your old neighbor. You come to my home in the middle of the day in your

mother's clothes and can't hold a coffee cup. If it needs to be just between you and me, then that's the way it will be. Tina sat back and waited.

What flashed through Jennifer's mind frightened her. She should have taken three or four pills last night then all of this would be over. Maybe that's what she should do now, escape wonderful escape, and she said nothing. She was frozen to the chair. After a few moments Tina offered, perhaps the coffee was a bad idea. Let's have a small glass of wine together in those old soft chairs you always liked to play on. Come sit down with me.

Jennifer allowed herself to be led into Tina's living room and took the small glass of red wine she was handed.

Tina again. I always loved having you around my house except sometimes you would get a little noisy and I would have to say, *Jennifer, go home*. Do you remember?

Jennifer's mind replayed, *Jennifer, go home*. Yes, I remember. Now I think my life is over.

Tina responded, we have all afternoon. Jennifer took a deep breath and slowly began to tell her story.

~ ~

I was a precocious, privileged child. Everyone liked me. I would call it Idyllic if it didn't sound fairytale-ish.

I remember, Jenn, only people more than liked you; they loved you.

Jennifer began to cry.

It's true, Jenn, what you say is the way I remember it. You were everyone's darling child, and pretty too.

Tina, it was so easy. Friends, school, it was all so easy. Was I really pretty?

Oh yes. Didn't you know it? Maybe that was your charm, I mean your not knowing."

I had dreams of being a nun who would help poor people. I knew there were poor people. I even knew there were homeless people. Tina, in my dreams I would fix all that.

You saw the nuns every day at school. I can understand why you might like to be like them. You had the kind and compassionate dreams of a child.

They were stupid dreams.

Jennifer, that's way too harsh.

Anyway, when I went to college, you know I was the first one in my family to go on to college, I began to doubt. It was scary, Tina. Who was I supposed to be, a nun? The boys liked me and there were so many options, crazy options, fun options, bad options. Then there was Jimmy.

Oh, I never knew there was someone special, Jenn.

We wanted to get married. We were going to tell everyone after graduation that we were going to get married and go to med school together.

You never mentioned this Jimmy. Where is he now? I know you didn't get married, or did you?

Jimmy was on his way home to New York after the big graduation celebration and there was an accident. He died, Tina. I never saw him again. I had everything, I had Jimmy, then I had nothing. He was gone, Tina, gone.

I'm so sorry, Jenn. But you did go on to med school.

I was living our dream. There were times when it was like he was still with me, and there were times when I felt I just couldn't do it alone. I chose the most difficult course work and the hardest specialties. I pushed and pushed. I was going to do it. I was attracted to trauma. I wanted to be able to heal the worst pain. I wanted to be with people in pain and fix it. Can you believe that? Then I broke my foot.

I remember you came home once with a boot on your right foot.

That's when I discovered what opioids would do for me, Tina. They took away the pain in my foot, and Tina, they took away the pain of my lost dream. It was wonderful, Tina. I was the do it all Jennifer all over again.

It's a dead-end street, Jenn.

That's exactly where I am, Tina. I'm at a dead end, and how do I face my family? How do I face myself? It would be easy to die.

What happened today? Why are you here?

I passed out last night and couldn't finish my shift. I guess I took one too many.

One too many. You realize that you could have died!

Yes, and now what? I have to face the hospital tomorrow morning. I think they will throw me out.

You can expect the worst.

What can I do?

Can you afford a residential treatment program? If you can, that's what I would recommend. They will get you off of the pills, but I see a bigger longer-term problem.

I know. Other people experience losing someone they love and don't become addicted to a chemical fix. How do they do it?

There are a lot of people with deep emotional scars. There is no way of making Jimmy's death go away. Wanting to carry on with your med school dream could have helped you. Instead, it turned into a daily reminder. That's not good. You need to find a different way.

It was an hour-by-hour reminder. Tina, some days it seemed minute by minute. Jimmy was always right there.

Your way didn't work, Jenn. You need to get off the pills and out of the ER, maybe out of medicine altogether. Not only do you need to do it, you may have to do it.

When my mom and dad get home will you come with me? I don't think I can face them by myself.

They are not strangers to this kind of problem, Jenn. Your dad is a firefighter; they get more OD calls than they do fire calls. Your mother sees the medical costs in her work for a medical insurance company. They are not strangers to the problem of addiction.

I am a drug addict. That's the first time I ever said those words.

That's a beginning. Would you like to stay here until your parents get home?

No, I'll go back to my house. Can I call you over later?

Yes, of course. Do you have any pills with you?

Jennifer hesitated. She thought if I say yes, Tina will want me to give them to her. If I say no, we will both know I am lying. So she said, I have to keep them. I can't let you take them. What if I need one and it's not there? I can't let you have them.

OK, here is what we will do. You give them to me and I will give you one, just one, to keep in your purse. For now, it will be there and you will know it's there.

Just one?

Just one. Let's call it your security pill. This is your old nurse second mother talking.

OK, will you come when I call?

Always, Jenn, always, but you need to get help and find a different way. The pills are a dead-end street.

~ ~

The cat heard the door open and close, and it came in with its tail high expecting some attention. My, you are a handsome one. There was a low purr like it was acknowledging how pretty it was. Jennifer stroked the cat thinking what am I going to do for two or more hours by myself? The thought frightened her. She didn't want to be alone. Should she call Tina? She willed herself to take deep breaths. Then she got out her phone and searched for *residential treatment for drug use Chicago*, and then added *South Side*. Click

There they were listed on her phone. She picked one and texted: *Can you do an emergency admit today? Dr Jennifer Baxter* Send And she waited. Then the chime. *Yes. Call this number* She tapped it in, and heard it ring.

This is Charles. Is this Doctor Baxter? How can we help you? Is your patient with you? What can we do for you?

She almost dropped the phone, thinking, I'm supposed to be the doctor not the patient. What am I doing? Then she said, It's me, Charles, and I need help now.

Oh, I see. Yes, we can help you now. Do I need to send a car for you? Do you want to give me your address?

Grasping for some lingering control over her world she replied, I need to go to my apartment and pack a bag and then come to you myself.

Is someone with you?

She thought yes, then no. No, I am by myself, but I am not with my clothes and personal things.

I would strongly advise that you come directly to us. I can send a car right away.

Silence.

Are you there, Doctor Baxter?

Yes, yes send a car. No marks on the car, please. This is the address, and she knew it by heart.

She looked for a paper and pen. She did not want to talk to her mom, or her dad especially. What would she say? And how would she say it? so she wrote:

Please talk with Tina.  
I will try to call tomorrow.  
Getting help.  
So sorry.  
Jenn

She stuffed her dirty clothes in a plastic bag, combed her hair and applied some lipstick, said good-bye to Tux the cat, and went out and sat on the front step. It seemed only a few minutes

until a grey SUV pulled to a stop. A young woman got out and held the back door open. Jennifer got in and looked away from the house she knew so well. As the car started to pull away, she called out. Stop, stop, please, and the driver stopped. Jennifer got back out of the car, walked to the porch and put the key back under the flower pot. The nervous driver had started to follow her but relaxed when she realized what was happening. Doctor Baxter was exercising some control over her life.

Jennifer walked in with her purse and plastic bag of dirty clothes in one hand, opening the door for herself with the opposite hand. There was no receptionist, and her young driver did not follow her. The only living thing in the entry way were two large palms in huge pots. Palms in Chicago, in the winter? Her struggle to gain some mental control took a hit, palms, really? Then a grandfather type in short sleeves seemed to just pop into her view. Then he spoke.

My name is Charles. You must be Doctor Baxter. Please come with me.

Jennifer followed him down a short hall and into a small office. He closed the door.

It must be difficult for you to come to us on your own initiative, a little disorienting, perhaps.

The palms didn't help, Charles.

Charles visibly relaxed.

That was a normal response, Doctor Baxter. We have a company that rotates large plants from their greenhouse to keep our entry way inviting. This month it was palms. You said emergency admit on the phone. Those words get our attention and we respond quickly.

I am surprised you didn't send me to the ER.

That would have been a first option, but then you told me you were a doctor so there was a professional courtesy to consider. Besides you were lucid and direct in wanting an unmarked car, no ambulance, so that also guided my response. Now how can I help you?

I think I am addicted to Oxy.

You think?

Jennifer looked at her shaky hands clutching her purse with her one pill. Finally, she said, It's bad, Charles. I am an ER doctor and last night I took two on a break and passed out. Tomorrow I face the hospital admin people and it all looks bad, Charles. I don't know if this is the place I need to be, but I don't want to go down this path I'm on any further.

Your walking in the door is not the standard way we do things. We normally have psychological workup and history that helps us to know we are the right place for someone.

Yes, I suspected that, but I was reaching out in the quickest direction I could think of with encouragement from a long-time nurse friend. And Charles, I was afraid to be alone and I was at my parents' house and I didn't want to face them.



They were at work?

Yes.

What prevents you from going back to their house? You must know them well. How would they treat you?

It's not them, Charles. They would do everything they could for me. It's me. I'm the failure. It's me – she dropped her head down as tears silently rolled down her cheeks.

You have supportive parents. I don't think you need to be here. How long have you been on Oxy?

It started when I broke my foot last year.

That's not a story of failure, Doctor Baxter. That's a story of being caught in the pain pill trap. You should know what a common story it is. You worked in the ER; you should know the opioid trap.

I saw it, but I didn't know it.

Well, now you do. Let's take this one step at a time. Do you have pills?

One. My nurse friend took all the rest.

Do you think she thought you may harm yourself?

Yes, I believe that's what she thought, and I think that's why she suggested I call someone like you.

Then step one is to keep you safe until that is no longer a concern. Do you agree?

I'm afraid to be alone, but I can't face my parents or the hospital administrators; I'm afraid, Charles.

Here is what I suggest then. I will call the hospital, explain who I am, and tell them you simply cannot meet with them and that you are asking for 30 days leave. I will tell them that you are actively seeking help for a pain pill addiction.

You will do that even though I am not one of your patients?

Clients – but yes, I would make that call and it would be truthful; you are seeking help. I have no doubt about that. Then if you want me to, I will call your parents with the same message that you are seeking help.

I left them a message to talk to Tina, that's my nurse friend, but I can't let them think I may harm myself. I must call them myself.

OK. How about your spending the night here with us?

Professional courtesy?

Call it what you like. It is safe and quiet, and I can give you something to help you sleep.

I can keep my security pill?

Yes. Only one; is that correct?

Yes.

Would you like someone with you when you call your parents?

Would you do that, Charles?

I would, and I expect a good outcome.

You mean from the call?

And from your continued recovery.

It is like a recovery from an illness, isn't it?

That's exactly what it is, Doctor Baxter.

Jennifer.

OK, Jennifer. I'll have a staff person show you to your room. Would you tell me what is in the plastic bag, and what time will you make that call?"

Dirty clothes, and would 8 o'clock be too late?

I'll be with you at 8 o'clock. Would you like us to wash your clothes?

No. That is still something I can do for myself.

There will be a gown in the room if you need it for sleeping, and there is a little café down the hall if you are hungry. I will see you at 8.

Jennifer found herself in a very upscale room with a comfortable chair, a little desk, colorful bedspread and drapes. It was small but without any sense of being confined. She sat down and wondered if she should go to the café. The very soft chair took over and she drifted into sleep.

There was a light tap at the door and Charles looked in. Are we ready to make that call?

Jennifer hesitated, thinking no I really don't, then she said, they will be worried. I can't let them worry, Charles. And she found her phone and called her mom's cell. The call was answered on the first chime.

Jennifer, is this you? Where are you? Are you OK? We have been worried sick.

I'm sorry Mom. There is someone with me here; his name is Charles.

Mrs. Baxter, Jennifer asked me to sit with her when she called. She told me she left you a note. Have you talked with her friend, Tina?

Yes, we have, Charles. Who are you and where are you? We want to come and see her.

If you have talked with Tina then you know that Jennifer has an opioid pain pill addiction. She has come to me for help and I intend to give her support. I am a specialist in addiction recovery. Jennifer will stay with us tonight, but we think (looking at Jennifer) that she does not need a residential program.

Mom, I feel really bad about this. I must be a terrible disappointment to you and Dad.

Then she heard her father's voice. You have never been a disappointment to us, Jennifer. We want to help any way we can; (but always the practical father) you are staying the night, but what will you do tomorrow. You can come home and stay with us as long as you need to if that is what you want.

Dad, I knew you would say that but I want to go back to my own place tomorrow.

Charles reentered, is it possible one of you could be with Jennifer for a while? Jennifer shook her head no, but Charles persisted. Jennifer has had a shock both medically and emotionally. In my capacity as her doctor, I advise that it would be best if someone would stay with her for a few days.

Mom, I really don't need you to stay with me.

Jenn, it seems like it is doctor's orders. I think you should allow it. I can come get you in the morning. We can go to your apartment, and I can stay as long as I need to.

Jennifer began to cry, but she gave in to "doctor's orders". OK, Mom. Charles will tell you where I am. Mom, I don't even know where I am.

Her father's voice, thank you, Charles. Can we count on your continued support for Jennifer?

I will always be here for her.

So will we, Charles. Thank you again.

Jennifer put the phone down and said, there's more to my story than a broken foot, Charles.

I suspected there might be, but I advise dealing with the pain pill addiction now. Whatever else is going on in your life will be easier to deal with without pills.

I don't know if that's true, Charles.

Let's get you off of the pills. That's our first step.

One step at a time, Charles?

That's the way it works best, Jennifer.

Thanks, Charles. I'm very tired. I don't think I need anything to help me sleep.

Someone is always at the desk if you need anything.

Thank you, Charles.

## PAULA



*“Mom, I like the bus better than this place.”*

The ride to Jennifer’s apartment had been quiet. Jennifer’s mother, Sue, was unsure how to reconnect with her daughter, and the last thing Jennifer wanted to do was spill out her confused thoughts. She was still carrying her plastic bag of dirty clothes when she entered her apartment and still wearing her mother’s clothes from yesterday.

Mom, I want to clean up and put on some of my own clothes.

OK, is there anything you would like me to do?

No, Mom, just relax. I’ll be back out in a few minutes, and she walked into her bedroom, tossed the bag in her closet and laid out clean clothes. She thought, I’ll step in the shower for a minute then dress.

When she came back into her living room she looked and felt closer to normal. Her mother had found the coffee maker and made herself a “Donut Shop” cup.

Charles wants to treat me like it’s a pain pill addiction. He wants to take me off slowly. That’s not going to be easy, Mom. There is more to this than the old pain in my foot and now my wrist.

Tina told us that Jimmy had been more than a friend. We didn’t know that. How many years ago was that, I mean Jimmy’s accident?

More than ten years, Mom, but some days it seems like yesterday.

I can remember the first time I saw your father, and some days it does seem like only yesterday.

That’s a good memory, Mom.

Yes, Jenn, it is now but it wasn’t then. I was in serious emotional trouble and so was your father. We both had PTSD. Life was dark for both of us.

Dad had a bad experience in the Army. I remember that, but he never talks about it.

He moved on, but it, the PTSD, is still there. He goes to talk to our friend, Nick the counselor about it when it bothers him. Traumatic experiences don't just go away.

But you just said you had it too. I didn't know that. You have always seemed to have it all together.

Well, I don't. When you have a husband and children and a job you hold it together, but I never forget the mistakes I made and pray that you and your brother, Billy, don't make the same mistakes.

You mean like getting married young and to the wrong person? We haven't done that, Mom.

I know, but it seems I may never let go of that worry. When I got divorced, I thought it was all over, but it wasn't. I had to learn to start again. Beginning again is what I have been doing all these years.

You've done a great job, Mom.

Sue took a deep breath and got up and went to the window looking out at the tall buildings in the distance. Then she turned around.

Jenn, it's your turn. Charles will get you off the pills, but you must be the one that begins again.

I don't know how to do it, Mom.

Your father did it. I did it. Look out that window. How many people out there have had to do it?

A lot of people, Mom, but where do I start?

Let's start by going out for a really upscale lunch. You know with linen and silver.

I know just the place, Mom, and with a little luck I will get to introduce you to my new friend, Paula, but don't we need to dress for this fancy lunch?

Yes, we do. You first. I have just the things I need with me.

Jenn went back into her bedroom, took off the jeans and sweater and found her tweed suit, cashmere turtleneck and heels. Sue got a two-piece from her suitcase and they were ready. So Sue said, OK, where are we going?

To get on the south-bound bus.

The bus? Really!

The bus. Let's go.

~ ~

Sue was trying to remember the last time she was on a bus. It must have been years, she thought, and we don't fit – two fancy dressed white women on a mid-day bus with a scattering of older poorly dressed women. Jennifer sensed that the woman across the aisle had caught her mother's eye.

Some people ride the bus to warm up on a cold day, Jennifer said explaining the woman with the big black plastic bag in her lap.

Oh, I see. How did you know that?

My friend, Paula, told me.

Soon Jennifer saw the big hotel coming up on the right side and motioned her mother to the door. As they entered the glass and marble entry way the visual contrast with the badly worn and a little smelly bus was shocking. An attractive young woman in uniform approached them. How can I be of service?

Sue responded, we are here for a fancy lunch if you can direct us that way.

Please take the door on the right and there will be a hostess to seat you. Enjoy your lunch.

Sue looked at Jenn as they headed toward the restaurant door. I didn't know you ate in places like this.

I don't, but today was special you said, so let's enjoy it.

I think your taking me on a bus ride was important. What was that all about?

They were shown to a table and the waitress hovered. Sue reacted. Two coffees, please, and menus, then to Jenn, why the ride?

I was cold, Mom. Not chilled. I was almost afraid cold. I saw the bus and got on, only it was going in the wrong direction. I sat next to a woman that works here and we talked then I got off the bus with her and had breakfast here.

That's a nice story but we could have gotten a cab or called a car today.

Yes, I guess we could, Mom, but, and this may sound strange, but I liked the bus. The bus saved me from the cold and I made a new friend, so I wanted to ride the bus again.

The coffee was placed on the table and they looked at the menu. Sue spoke first, again.

I would like the fruit plate with chicken salad on a croissant.

Jenn put down the menu and said, I'll have the same, please. Mom, you made it sound good.

Then going back to Sue's interest in why the bus, Jenn said, Mom, I liked the bus better than this place. I mean, I was more comfortable on the bus than I am in here with all the upscale tables and food. You know the people on the bus run this place. This fancy hotel couldn't run without them.

Jenn, I can see how all the staff probably got here on a bus, and I can understand why you might not be completely comfortable in this ultra-fancy place. We never took you to places like this.

No, Mom, but you did take me to the homeless shelter and I had forgotten that.

That was all our old friend, Nick's doing. You know I still think he sometimes eats his lunch there.

How is he, Mom? I haven't seen him in a long time.

Not good. It's just his age. He forgets things, and he doesn't drive anymore. Actually, he has always been a bus rider, now that we are talking about bus riding.

You were right, Mom – here comes our lunch – you were right to want me to go out fancy for lunch, which I never do, and experience the change. I think you are right; I need a change. I knew I needed to get out of the ER. Now I know I need a complete change of scenery.

The chicken salad is excellent, Jenn. I could get use to this.

Maybe, Mom, but I want to get to know my bus friend, Paula, see what her life is like, not eat in fancy places.

OK, Jenn, but let's enjoy what we have in front of us.

Mom, let's see how fancy this place really is. Then to the waitress who was bringing more coffee, I need a piece of paper and an envelope and pen, please.

The waitress blinked, then smiled and hurried off. In a few moments she was back with pen and paper on a silver tray. Jenn smiled and said, thank you, and then wrote a note:

*Dear Paula,  
This is your friend, Doctor Baxter, from the bus. I want to help with  
your painful wrists. I will call the hotel tomorrow and get your address, if you  
will leave it at the desk. Then I will get wrist braces and come show you  
how to wear them.  
Jennifer, your bus friend*

She folded the note, sealed it in the envelope and wrote, "To Paula in Housekeeping – Personal". She waved at the waitress and handed her the note. Please see to it that this gets to Paula. It's important.



The waitress took the note and hurried off. Sue had seen the whole thing. This is a big hotel; there may be more than fifty people on staff. Jenn, are you sure that note will find its way to the right person?

Everyone knows Paula, Mom.

Really? She must be a special person.

She is, Mom. Wait until you meet her.

Me?

Don't you want me to have a change of scenery? That includes you.

~ ~

The next day was quiet, but relaxing wasn't easy for Sue or Jenn. Then in the evening Sue and Jenn stopped at the address Paula had left at the hotel desk for them, and looked up at a large and very old apartment block. There were bundled up kids playing outside and some litter along the curb, but the place looked inner city clean. They walked up three flights of stairs and knocked on 301. Waited, then knocked again. Finally, Paula opened the door and Jenn was relieved that at least they were in the right place. Sue saw a very large, rather imposing person, who smiled and gave Jenn a crushing hug.

Come in! So, is this your mother? Your daughter is a special person. Come in.

Sue stepped into the apartment and took a quick look around. It was like stepping back in time, she thought. Everything looked like it belonged to an earlier generation, but it was clean. Sue walked over to a floor lamp and to open some friendly conversation said, my grandmother had a lamp like this. This one still has beautiful colors in its glass shade.

You got the generation right, hon. It was my grandmother's and so is almost everything else in this place except the bed. My back couldn't take the old bed. Would you like some coffee or juice? Have a seat.

Jenn said, I would like coffee, Paula.

Sue passed, and sat down on the ancient couch which seemed to swallow her completely. Then she asked, do you live her by yourself?

The kitchen was open to the room and Paula had her back to Sue but answered, I'm a widow and my son is in prison. So I live by myself. Here's your coffee. Hope you don't mind instant. You said you may be able to help me with the pain in my wrists.

Sue answered before Jenn could say anything. I'm sorry your husband died and that you have to live by yourself.

Thank you ... how should I call you?

Sus is fine.

Well, Sue, I've been a widow for some time so it isn't a fresh loss. My husband was a good man, but never healthy. Finally, his diabetes did him in. My son was dealing pot, but he may get out early. I have a good life, in my grandmother's old flat.

Jenn got out the wrist braces she had picked up at the medical equipment store and showed Paula how to wear them. You should wear them when you are working; they will take the strain off of your wrists.

I look strange with these things on, but I'll do what you say and give it a try.

Sue still trying to connect said, what was your grandmother like?

Would you believe she was a real little woman, and look at me, big as a horse. She was very fussy. Everything has its place. When she died, I moved from my old place into this one. I like it better but I'm not as neat as she was. Jennifer, is it OK if I call you, Jennifer? you weren't doing too well when we met, and here you show up with your mother.

I wasn't doing well, Paula, and my mother is helping me sort things out. We think alike. I need some big changes.

Oh, and you still think of my wrists. You two are nice people. What can I do for you?

What's it like to live in this neighborhood?

We mostly get along with each other, but I don't think you would fit well, if that's what you're thinking. Anyway, why would you like to live in a place like this – run down city Black folks' neighborhood – doesn't seem like a good fit.

I need a change, Paula, a big change in my life, but I don't know where or how yet. So I guess I'm looking everywhere.

Are you still going to be a doctor?

No, at least not now, maybe some time again. I can't say. Would it be possible for me to stay with you here for a few days, maybe a week, to see what it's like?

Lord, I can't believe you would want to do that, but I guess you could. There is a little room with an old single bed. Yes, I guess you could stay a week if you really wanted to.

I would like that, Paula. I'll come back tomorrow evening with some clothes for a week.

OK. If that's what you would like to do.

As they were leaving Jenn could see a worried look on her mother's face, that "are you sure about this" look that she had known all her life.

Later, Mom. We'll talk later.

~ ~

Jenn had tried to put her mother's mind at ease but on the phone her father was not so easy. Allen knew neighborhoods and Paula's was not one of his favorites. Finally, all he could say was, don't go out at night by yourself. Don't look lost. Always walk with a purpose. Don't take a car and park it on the street.

So when Jenn got to Paula's place the next evening all she had was a warm coat and a small bag and some nervous mental leftovers from her conversation with her father. Paula was already in her kitchen and Jenn could smell cooking before Paula opened the door.

As Jenn came, in the warmth and the delightful smells calmed the second thoughts she had been having. Her parents were worried and she had agreed to call them every day. It helped Sue to know that Jenn had called Charles, her doctor, and discussed her alternate living arrangements. Charles liked the fact that someone would be with her at night, and that she, Paula, was a big, everybody's friend kind of person. Paula broke into Jenn's thoughts.

I invited a friend over for dinner. I hope you don't mind. She lives here in the building and we often share dinner. Her name is Jane and she knows everybody around here so if you want to talk about the neighborhood, she's the one to talk to.

I don't mind at all. I do have some questions, like where do you shop for food? I didn't see any stores, and where do the kids go to school?

Oh, I can answer those questions. I often stop on my way home to shop because there isn't any place around here except for a little mom and pop if you want bread and milk. The kids walk to school. It's not far, but it's an old run-down place and the city isn't likely to do anything about it. I hear Jane. Paula went and opened the door, and Jenn saw a white woman about her mother's age with a bottle of wine in one hand and a loaf of long French bread in the other. Jane introduced herself.

Hi, I'm Jane Farley. Paula and I like to eat together. I hear you will be staying for a few days. That doesn't surprise me. Paula is like that. Are you really a doctor? There must be a story to tell. I've got all evening.

What small nervousness Jenn still felt faded completely. She loved the way some people could put you immediately at ease, and she could tell that Jane Farley was one such person.

Hi, my name's Jennifer Baxter, and yes, I am a doctor, and I have all evening.

~ ~

The old mattress had lumps in strange places but by moving a little here and a little there, Jennifer found a comfortable position and knew she would sleep well. It had been a mellow

evening. The pasta was good if not great, and the wine, well, let's not talk about it, she thought, but the crusty bread was great. She would need to ask Jane where she got it.

The evening was so pleasant that she considered not taking her low dose med but remembered Charles saying, take them on schedule and we will evaluate next week, so she took it. She really didn't want "20 questions" from her mother so she texted, *nice evening, new friend, I'll call tomorrow.*

As she drifted off the sharp contrast between this evening and a night in the ER kept repeating in her head. She was in the ER, why was there no exit wound in this gunshot patient? She was sipping wine with new friends and laughing. She was so tired she could hardly stand. She was so relaxed the old couch held her like a child. Someone needs to patch up wounds. Someone needs to laugh with friends. Someone needs to make the beds like Paula. Someone needs to paint walls, and write and draw and help people, and who knows what else, like Jane. Her mind kept going back to someone needs to laugh with friends, and Jennifer finally slept.

What time is it? She found her phone and it said 9:00 a.m., and she sat up surprised at the late time. As she found her way to the bathroom, she sensed that she was alone, no sound, well there was a clicking from the old radiator. She didn't want to be alone – what to do? Call her mother – she had promised she would do that – then what – take a walk – find people and she washed up and dressed.

Hi, Mom.

Jenn, are you OK? Do you need anything? How are you feeling?

Conflicted, Mom. I still have a lot of stuff to work out, but last evening was very nice. I'm going to take a walk to see some of the neighborhood.

Be careful.

I will. Bye, Mom.

There was a note on the table, and a key. *Spare key. Be sure to take it with you if you go out. Help yourself to whatever you can find for breakfast. Paula*

She stuck the key in her purse and put on her coat. Breakfast later, she thought. I don't want to eat by myself. Then she changed her mind about the key. She put the key in her pocket with a little money and left her purse on the bed and went out.

It was cold but still and she began to walk briskly – get some circulation going, she thought. One block, then two, then four, then turn right and maybe loop back. That's when she saw the "golden arches" in the distance and thought, people and a hot breakfast and she set off toward McDonald's.

By the time she got there she was cold and thinking, I need to get a better coat. There was no one at the counter, and glancing she saw only three or four customers at tables. As she walked up to the counter a smiling young man came out from the back and greeted her.

I'm hungry. What do you suggest?

How about a Big Breakfast?

The Big part sounded good. I'll have the Big Breakfast and a large coffee with cream, please.

As she waited, she took a more careful look at the scattered customers and they were a rough looking bunch, poorly dressed, needing haircuts and shaves; there was one woman, rather young, she thought, but hard to tell. She picked up her tray and walked to a table.

The food was hot and the coffee surprisingly good, and she began to enjoy her meal. She was nearly finished when the young woman got up and approached her.

I need money for a bus pass. Can you help me?

I don't have much money but I have enough to buy you breakfast. Have you had breakfast?

Only coffee.

Well, tell the kid at the counter what you want and I'll pay for it; tell him I'll pay for it.

The girl, yes, she was really only a girl, Jenn could now see that, and she could also see that this girl and the others were probably street people. Well, she thought, who else would be in this McDonald's in the middle of the morning, certainly not office workers.

Jenn saw the girl being handed her breakfast and got up and paid for it then said, come sit with me if you are by yourself. The girl hesitated then came and sat at Jenn's table.

Do you come here for breakfast? I don't remember seeing you before, and thank you for breakfast. I was hungry but didn't really realize it. I don't often eat here. Mostly I eat at the homeless shelter.

Jennifer asked the girl, is that near here? I'm not familiar with the neighborhood.

It's a good ways, but I walk.

Oh, will you be going there today?

Yeah.

May I walk with you?

Surprised, the girl blurted out, would you really want to do that?

Yes, I would.

OK, I'll show you where the shelter is. Thanks again for breakfast.

~ ~

There was one more day left in her “week” at Paula’s, and Jennifer was sitting on her lumpy bed getting ready to end the day with her good daughter call to her mother. That the days had gone by quickly was a little surprising, but her big surprise was how quickly a routine had developed. Sleep late, breakfast at McDonald’s, walk to the homeless shelter, help in their kitchen, eat lunch with them, walk back to Paula’s place, pick up a Trib along the way, read the news and wonder what magic Paula would work in her kitchen. How did this happen that she would create a routine for herself in only a few days? Had she always done that, create routine without really thinking about it? She called her mother.

Hi, Mom. Yes, I’m fine. I see Doctor Charles in two days but I feel OK on the low dose. We will see what he wants to do next. Mom, have I always created routine? You know, wanted to do things a certain way at a certain time, etc.?

I don’t remember that you were all that different than anyone else.

Well, that’s what has happened this week. You and I agreed for me to find new scenery – we said – and I chose time with Paula. That I developed a new routine so quickly has surprised me.

There probably wasn’t a lot of routine in the ER. Am I right?

Yes and no, Mom. We saw different people with different conditions, but we quickly assigned a routine for each one. This one is a gunshot wound so we would immediately go into a gunshot wound routine.

Jenn, maybe that’s what you did this week. What do you think?

Mom, I think you’re right. Very quickly I stopped looking for the new scenery and opted for the routine. I think I learned something important about myself this week, Mom.

Every day can’t be full of surprises, Jenn.

Maybe not. I know how important it is to have a gunshot wound routine; people would die if we didn’t. But every day shouldn’t be exactly the same, should it? Remember the movie, “Groundhog Day” where the poor man kept repeating the same day over and over. No one wants that; it would drive them crazy.

So maybe you should do something a little different tomorrow.

Yes, and I know exactly what I want to do. As a treat and a thank you, I’ll take Paula and Jane to a nice place for dinner. Mom, I’m going to take them to that hotel where Paula works.

I’m not sure about that, Jenn.

Will you join us, Mom? The more I think about it, the more I like it.

OK, Jenn. Let me know what time.

It's going to be fun, Mom.

Not everyone may like your idea of fun, Jenn, but I'll be there.

~ ~

Jane thought it was a wonderful idea, but Paula had to be talked into eating dinner in a place she had always thought was off limits to her, but she finally agreed. Sue met them in the lobby and the four women, all nicely dressed, were escorted to a table. Jennifer insisted on a good bottle of wine and appetizers, and told her friends not to look at the prices on the menu but order whatever they would like. There were some smiles of recognition from the wait staff when they saw Paula, and Paula smiled back. By the time they had finished dessert it was approaching 9 o'clock.

Jane was interested in Sue's work at the health insurance company. Jane saw problems among the people she knew, and wanted to talk about high deductibles. She thought they were a trap for people who were falsely led to believe what their policies would pay for. Sue listened and suggested that Jane come to her office and talk more about what she was seeing. Jane agreed.

As they were preparing to leave their table a well-dressed man came up to them and asked, are you Paula from housekeeping? There is a little buzz about the hotel that you were eating here tonight. A look of "oh, I've been caught in a place I shouldn't be" flashed over Paula's face but she quickly recovered and said, yes. The elegantly dressed man introduced himself as the night manager and that he had heard things about Paula, and would she mind coming with him to his office. Paula, not sure this was a friendly request, agreed and left with him leaving the other women with worried looks, especially Jennifer, who was thinking I hope I haven't gotten Paula in trouble with her employer. There was nothing to do but wait. After what seemed like a long time to the worried three women, Paula returned to them and said, he's a nice man. Would you believe he offered me a job working the front desk on the night shift?

Jane responded, well tell us. What did you tell him?

I said I live on my tips and he asked me what I would need as a salary to make up for it so I told him, and he said OK, that's what I'll pay you. It seems, ladies, that he really needs someone and, would you believe this, he has a file of good comment cards from customers about me. And he said that when he saw me nicely dressed with friends, he meant white people, but he said friends, that he decided to ask me to work for him. If I had just come to him on my own, the outcome would not have been the same.

Jane again, well are you going to do it?

Yes - I told him yes, and he said I could start as soon as they could get uniforms for me.

Jane laughed, I bet they didn't have any your size, and everybody laughed.

Jennifer added, no more straining your hands and wrists. That's wonderful!

Yes, and I didn't even want to come here to eat. Life is full of surprises, and everyone agreed.

~ ~

Jennifer was telling Charles about her week and how surprised she was that she had settled into a routine so quickly. I don't plan to live in that neighborhood but it was a good experience, and I made two new friends and I didn't expect that would happen. Jane wants to take me to meet some of her friends that belong to a Catholic Worker House. I knew there was such a place. I guess now I'll get to meet them.

Your mother's advice that you get a change of scenery was very good. When you do that, it gives your mind something to do except worry. It's like a vacation for the brain. Don't obsess about forming a routine. That's natural. It probably would have happened any place. It even happens to people on real vacations.

I am worried how I would feel if I were completely off my meds, but this week has been good for me.

I suggest we drop down one more level to an even lower dose. This time for two weeks, but I want you to call me after one week to let me know how you are doing. Will you go back to living in your apartment?

I don't think living alone is a serious problem anymore, Charles, but I liked, no really liked, the evenings with friends. Would you believe I even liked being with strangers when I would have breakfast at McDonalds? I had friends before, but not "every day eating with" kind of friends.

I think you are learning some new things about yourself and it's all good. Do you have plans for the next two weeks?

I have a brother and his wife in Germany. I have thought about visiting them. There is a long-time friend in California who I'd like to see. Or I could stay here in Chicago, spend more time with my parents. This evening I am going to dinner with Jane and her Catholic Worker friends.

Family and old friends are valuable, even essential, Jennifer, but consider your mother's good advice and open some new doors for yourself. Finding new ways to enjoy life is an important part of recovery. You want to avoid falling back into old habits.

Thank you for using the word "recovery". I needed to be reminded that you are my doctor.

That's the best thing you have said to me today, Jennifer. Remember routines are necessary but when they take us down the wrong path, we need to break out of them. Call me in a week.

OK, Charles. I like my parents' new cat. Maybe I should get a cat.

Good idea. Relaxing with a pet is a good way to give the mind the rest it needs.

I'm going to spend some time with my parents, Charles.



Another good idea. Don't forget to call me.

OK, Charles, and thank you.

~ ~

Sitting in her mother's kitchen, Jennifer said, Mom, it was rice and black beans with some greens I didn't recognize. There was a small pumpkin pie for desert and they counted people around the table and cut the pie so that everyone got a little piece. It was nice, Mom, but so different. They don't have anything, and if I understood right, they don't want anything.

I've heard a little about Catholic Workers, but it's more interesting when you tell it. Does Jane live there?

No, but they all know her. I think she helps them out but I'm not sure how. They told me to come back anytime and I think they meant it. It's like they take in most anyone.

Would you do that? I mean go live with them? That would really be a change.

I don't know, Mom, but Charles agrees with you that it's best for my recovery that I don't fall back into old habits. But, Mom, I feel so good that I need to remind myself that I could still slip back.

Why don't you stay here with us for a few days? I know your father would like that.

OK. I called Anne in California. She would be glad to see me, but she lives in a studio with separate bedroom, and she works nights. She even takes all the extra hours she can get. I would just be in the way.

Have you thought about your brother? Billy and Liesel have a big house and now that their twins are married, they have a lot of space. I know they would love to see you.

I'll call them tomorrow. It's way too late over there now. When does Dad get home?

About now, but it's never a sure thing. Why don't you take a shower and freshen up while I finish making dinner?

Jennifer started for the bathroom and Tux, the new cat, followed her. I don't think you would like it in the shower, Tux. Tux wasn't convinced that there was something more interesting than Jennifer in the bathroom until it heard the front door open and went to see who was coming in. Sue called from the kitchen. Allen, is that you? Jenn's in the bathroom. Dinner will be ready soon. She's going to stay with us a couple of days.

That's nice. What's for dinner? Your favorite, Allen, pot roast in the slow cooker.

That's why it smells so good in here. Hi, Tux, what's up with you? Move out of my way so I can take my shoes off. That's exactly what Tux was waiting for; shoe laces were for playing.

## JOSEPH



*“You have quite a load. Can I get a cart for you?”*

In the morning Jennifer called her brother in Germany and it was arranged. The following week she would fly over for a visit. They had suggested that she stay through the holidays. Christmas and the new year were only two weeks away. They would take her to the Christmas Mart. It would be a fun time together.

It was Sunday and Sue and Allen went to Church leaving Jennifer and Tux alone in the house. How would you like to spend the week with me? I’m thinking of getting a cat.

Tux purred as if to say, that’s a good idea, so it was settled between them. When Mom and Dad got home Jennifer told them. Tux has agreed to spend the week with me if it’s OK with you.

Sure, but Tux doesn’t travel light. There’s bowls, food, litter box and cat carrier, and oh, some favorite toys.

OK, Mom. Tux and his kit will go home with me after lunch. Tux heard “lunch” and looked up. Oh, so you know “lunch” – my, aren’t you a smart cat. We will have fun this week. Tux headed to the kitchen and lunch.

The trip to Jennifer’s apartment building went smoothly, but the trip across the lobby with Tux and his carrier in one hand and his kit in a large plastic bag in the other was becoming a challenge. As she struggled across the lobby a young man fell into step with her, and asked, you have quite a load; can I get a cart for you?

Thank you, that would be very helpful.

And she put down her load as the man disappeared then came back with a cart. Jennifer placed the carrier and bag on the cart and started for the elevator bank. To her surprise the young

man walked with her. She smiled, and when the elevator door opened, she pushed the cart on and the man got on too. She was becoming a bit uncomfortable but she pushed 10 and asked, I'll push the floor for you, what number?

Oh, 10 is fine. I see you have a cat.

It's rather obvious, isn't it?

I like cats, in fact, I have one of my own.

Finally, she had to say it, are you following me?

I did want to see that you got comfortably to your apartment, and then I can take the cart back down for you.

So, he wants to know my apartment number. This Helpful Harry was becoming a pest so she said, I think I can manage from here. I'll take the cart back down to the lobby when I am finished with it. Thank you for your help, but I can manage from here. Just then the door to floor 10 opened and she pushed the cart out, and he stepped out with her and the elevator doors closed.

I apologize for not introducing myself. Most people in the building know me but I guess we haven't met. My name is Joseph, and I am the building manager. Seeing you comfortably to your apartment is something I would ordinarily do for one of my residents.

Joseph could see Jennifer visibly relax and knew he should have made his introduction in the lobby. If you would rather that I leave you here I understand, but I do have one more responsibility. I must make sure you have a copy of our animal rules. If you don't have a copy, I can bring you one.

That would be nice, Joseph. My name is Jennifer Baxter and I live in 1050, and if you would like to take the cart back down that would be helpful.

She pushed the cart to 1050, opened the door and pushed it in. He stood respectfully outside in the hallway and she noticed his nod to her privacy as she pushed the cart back into the hall.

I will bring you a copy of our animal rules. This is the time of day that I get my Starbucks fix. I would be happy to bring you one as a gift and an apology for not introducing myself in the lobby.

Joseph, I think that is probably beyond your normal list of duties but OK, double cream.

As Joseph disappeared down the hall Jennifer closed the door and opened Tux's carrier. Tux, I was nervous and he was just doing his job. I need to relax. Come on out and see your vacation home.

Tux stepped out and took in the scenery then proceeded to go about the apartment marking every edge with his cheek. If this was going to be his place, it had to smell like him. A few

minutes later there was a knock. Jennifer went to the door and there was Joseph with an envelope and two coffees. He handed Jenn the one in his right hand and smiled.

“Double cream”

Joseph, you make a good building manager. Thank you for the coffee. Since you are a cat person, would you like to come in and meet Tux.

Yes, I would like that. I am sure he is a well-behaved cat, but I do need to point out that any damage to the carpet is the resident’s responsibility.

Jennifer turned to the cat. Remember that, Tux, no clawing the carpet. Have a seat, Joseph. Is there anything else I need to know?

Tux’s tail went up acknowledging that he was part of the conversation. Then he went to Joseph and gave him the sniff test. Joseph commented, what a beautiful cat. Perfect markings.

Yes, and he seems to know how handsome he is. He will only be with me for a week, but really, is there anything else I need to know?

The usual. No big animals. No barking dogs. No flushing things that shouldn’t be flushed. All the usual stuff. I see you have an east facing window. I love to watch the sun come up.

Well, we have at least two things in common, cats and watching the sun come up. Right now I have some things I need to do. You have been a big help.

I’ll go back to my office and watch for ladies in distress. It’s good to know you, Ms. Baxter.

Jennifer walked him to the door and turned to the cat. Nice man, Tux. What do you think? Tux was reserving his opinion as he began to search out places he may not have marked his first time around.

~ ~

The next morning Jennifer was up early to watch her sun rise. Yes, she felt some ownership, after all, who else was up this early and had a tenth-floor window facing east? She was comfortably seated in her night gown waiting for the show to begin when she heard a light tap at the door. She wasn’t dressed to answer the door so she put on robe and slippers, went to the door and opened it. No one was there. She almost closed the door when she looked down and saw a Starbucks coffee and a little note, “from the management, double cream”.

Well, she thought, he didn’t need to do that but she picked up her hot coffee and went back to her sun rise chair determined to enjoy her surprise coffee.

She spent the day restocking her refrigerator and planning what to take on her trip. Today it seemed like getting ready to travel was a lot of work. Maybe her mother wasn’t completely right about a change of scenery. She watched the Late Show and slept well. She was almost late getting up to see her sun come up, but she was comfortable in her sun rise chair when she

heard a light tap on her door. Really, she said out loud, and Tux looked at the door. But by the time she got her robe on there was only the coffee and note when she opened the door.

There was no room service in this apartment building, she knew that, and one gift coffee was nice but two was, what? The “what” that occurred to her was that there was more to this coffee than management pleasing residents. She immediately dismissed the idea that maybe there was more. She took the coffee, why not, and went back to her chair for the show, but the thought wouldn’t go away – Joseph likes me – so she made a plan to stop this coffee business before it went any further. The next morning, she was dressed and waiting.

Sure enough there was a little tap and she jerked open the door and said, Joseph, this is enough! – only it wasn’t Joseph. A small brown skinned woman jumped back almost dropping the coffee.

Who are you? Jennifer asked, trying to lower and calm her voice.

My name is Maria, and I work for Joseph. He asked me to bring you coffee.

How many other residents are you taking coffee to, and please give me the coffee before it gets spilled. I’m sorry I startled you.

You are the only one – 1050.

And why do you think he is buying me coffee each morning?

Maria stood quietly for a moment, then being an honest person, she had to say, I think he likes you.

You tell Joseph for me that he should stop sending me coffee, and my name is Jennifer, and thank you for bringing it to me, Maria.

I will tell Joseph what you said, Jennifer, but I really think he likes you.

Jennifer looked down and saw Tux sticking his nose into the hall and she pushed him back with her foot. The last thing she needed was Tux wandering down the hall. Step in, Maria, I need to close the door.

That’s a beautiful cat. What’s its name?

Tux and I have changed my mind about the coffee. Tell Joseph that I like warm bagels and cream cheese, plain, with my coffee.

Marie smiled like she was part of a conspiracy and said, I’ll tell him, and I think he will like that message better.

As Maria left, Jennifer noticed Tux’s continued interest in the hall outside the door. She would need to keep a closer watch on him.

The next morning, she found that she was actually anticipating the tap on the door, but Joseph's possible interest was like a silly game. She was obviously older than he was and she didn't need or want a man in her life. She was in recovery, she reminded herself, but she was going to play Joseph's game more as a distraction than anything else.

The idea of her bagel and coffee showing up at her door was a pleasant thought. When she worked the ER night shift, she could pick it up on her way into the building. Now she would need to dress and go across the street in the morning if she wanted her bagel and coffee. Then she heard a knock on her door and opened it, and Joseph was standing there with a bagel bag and two coffees. She didn't trust Tux so she said, come in Joseph.

He stepped in and she closed the door.

When I worked night shift, I could get my breakfast on my way home. Now it seems that you want to bring it to me. I have to admit that I like room service, but you don't need to do this, Joseph.

I couldn't think of anything else to do. I couldn't stand in the lobby all day waiting for you to need help with packages.

No, that wouldn't have worked, would it? But this is not a good time for me, Joseph. I have too many other things going on in my life, and I will be leaving next week and be gone for maybe a month or more. This isn't a good time for me to make new friends.

If my timing is right, the sun is about to come up. You don't want to miss it, Ms. Baxter.

It's Jennifer, and no, I don't want to miss it. Then surprising herself she said, sit with me and watch my sun come up, then you can go back to being a good building manager.

I would like that, Jennifer. As you can see, I brought two coffees. This is the double cream.

She took the bagel and the coffee and went to the kitchen and put the bagel halves on two little plates; she called over her shoulder, cream cheese?

Yes, please. I didn't expect to share.

It's my mother, Joseph.

You must have a nice mother.

Nothing more was said as they waited.

There was the sudden blaze of light with pinks and lavenders. Then almost as quickly, it was gone.

It can happen like that on a cloudy day like today. A flash of light under the clouds and then it's gone. You should go, Joseph.

If I am making you uncomfortable, I will go, but can you tell me how long you will be gone? You said you were going to be away.

I'm going to visit my brother in Germany, and I'll stay through the holidays.

Is he in the Army?

He was, and he married a German woman and stayed. Now no more questions.

OK, but will you call me when you get back? I would like to take you to dinner.

I'll think about it, Joseph. Tux seems to find you very interesting.

It's my cat he smells. What will he do while you are gone? Tux is on loan. He will go back to my parents' house.

I see. On loan, you say.

No more questions, Joseph.

As Joseph moved toward the door, he persisted. Please call me when you get back. I am a very persistent man.

There is another word for that, Joseph.

Oh, you mean pest.

Good-bye, Joseph.

Maria likes you. That's a big plus.

Thank Maria for me. Good-bye, Joseph.

Well, he's finally gone, Tux. What did you think? Tux jumped up on her lap as she sat down to finish her almost cold coffee. She called Billy hoping the connection would work. It did. Hi, Billy, it's Jenn.

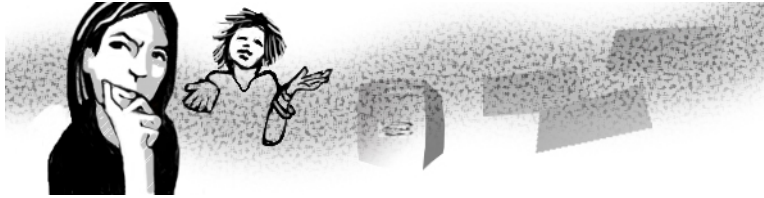
Good to hear from you. I hope your plans haven't changed.

No, but I may like to stay a little longer if that is OK.

Sure, move in if you like.

I'll consider it. See you in a few days.

## Liesl



*“I need to get a mirror like this for my apartment.”*

Tux went home with no complications, and Sue took Jenn to the airport to get on the evening flight to Frankfurt. Jennifer had called Charles and told him she may be gone for a month or more, and he ordered a supply of meds with one more step down. He told her that if she goes through this next step without any new problems developing, she may need no additional medication, but that he wanted to see her when she returned from her trip.

The food was good but the seats were not for real people. She would upgrade on her way home. Her sister-in-law, Liesl, met her. Jenn, you look good considering you spent the night sitting in an uncomfortable seat.

Well, you know what it’s like

You can wash up and sleep all day if you like.

That sounds like just what I need. How is Billy?

He works too much. He’ll be home for dinner.

So Jennifer found herself in a warm comfortable bed, not sure why she was here in this place, but pleased that she would get to spend time with people she liked.

Liesl and Jennifer ended up eating alone and had cleaned up the kitchen before Billy got home.

We needed to finish the job today. People can’t be without electricity in this cold weather. Jenn, you want to have a beer with me?

OK, Billy. Can I help fix you something to eat?

No, I can see Liesl fixing me a plate. She is used to me coming home late, aren’t you, Liesl?

Liesl shrugged and gave Billy a hard roll and sausage with mustard on the side. Jenn wanted to talk, but she knew her condition had been discussed with her parents so why talk about it? But it would be the elephant in the room, so why wait? The beer tasted good, and for some reason she thought of Joseph.



You two know I'm in recovery and on administrative leave from the hospital.

Billy responded, we know you will talk about it when you want to or never if that's how you want it. We are just pleased to have you visit. You can have the run of the house, and the village is all walkable. They are putting up the stands for the Christmas Mart. So there are lots of interesting things to see and do. You could even take the train and go anywhere you want. Jenn, you are free to do and go. It's just good to have you here with us. Liesl, do we have any more to eat?

That was a nice speech, Billy. Looking at Liesl, does he usually talk so much?

Only when he's drinking beer.

I want to tell you about Joseph. Would you believe it? It seems I have attracted a man. It has only been talk, but he is very persistent. And she told them the "coffee at the door" story. Everybody laughed. This was good medicine and they all knew it.

Liesl said, I think you should look carefully in the mirror. I can see why many men would find you attractive. Let's get a new hair style, some shoes and some new clothes. I want to dress you up. I think it would be fun. There would be men from the village knocking at the door wondering who the beautiful visitor is.

I don't want to attract men.

Why not? I think it would be good for you.

Liesl, would you believe this Joseph is maybe ten years younger than I am?

Yes, I believe it. You underestimate yourself. Let's dress you up and see what happens.

Billy had been just listening. Finally, he had to say, men don't stand a chance, do they? To which Liesl added, oh, you men are beautiful too. I remember when I first saw you. You were very handsome and so much American.

So it was agreed. The plain and simply dressed trauma doctor would get a makeover, German style.

Jennifer went to bed thinking, do I really want this, and at the same time rather excited that she would get to see herself in a new way. The change of scenery would be herself. Oh, she thought, that German beer is stronger than what I am used to, and she drifted off to gently sleep, still thinking about Joseph.

~ ~

There was a large full-length mirror in her room, probably left over from one of the twin girls, who were grown up and gone, and Jennifer found herself standing in front of it. She took off her clothes until there was nothing between her and the great mirror. Had she intentionally

made herself plain and uninteresting, she wondered, as she turned slowly around. She saw no great flaws, no sagging, no lumpiness. While she had not been watching, time had been kind to her. If she had been intentionally plain and uninteresting, why couldn't she be – what? It was always “what”. Did she really want to attract men? She didn't think so. Did she want to like herself in the mirror? Yes, she decided that she did. That was the what. She wanted to like herself. She put her clothes on and went out of her room wanting a new way of seeing herself.

Liesl, I want to do it. I mean, I really want to look nice.

Jenn, you can look better than nice. You can look awesome.

How do we start?

You walk.

I walk?

Yes, every day you walk all over the village, even to the castle and back. You walk quickly. The village is all hillside. You walk up the hills, and in a few days, you will feel better and look better. You walk at least one hour each day.

I think I need different shoes to walk.

Yes, and shoes to show off your walking legs. Tomorrow we shop. And you must eat like I eat, not like your brother. He eats too much, and only one beer.

I will watch how you eat. I think this is going to be fun.

Yes, and we will buy some new clothes for the holiday. No more pants.

You mean slacks?

Yes, yes, no more slacks, and the skirts above the knee.

I thought I was too old for this.

I think we are nearly the same age. I am a little older than Billy, and the younger men still turn their heads.

Liesl, I don't want to attract men.

It will happen, and then you will perhaps like it.

Jennifer had made the final decision to visit her brother to hide from herself, and maybe from Joseph, and now she was looking at herself in a new way. She sat down in a big soft chair next to a little table with magazines. On top was a women's magazine with a beautiful model on the cover. She looked at the model and thought, she can't be more than 17, too young, no interesting features, just a child. She surprised herself by being critical, but knew she could look

even better than the almost child model, and not only could but would. She turned the pages looking for new styles for herself.

~ ~

The full-length mirror had become Jennifer's friend. She saw herself at least twice a day. In the morning after coming out of her shower and in the afternoon in her style of the day. She was pleased with herself, and thought, I need to get a mirror like this for my apartment.

Two days before Christmas Liesl brought out a finely crafted nativity set and placed the figures on a low table in the living room. We started putting it here, she told Jennifer, when the twins were little. It was the right height to attract their interest, and they often played with the figures.

It's beautifully done. I don't believe I have ever seen one so nice.

Billy and I bought it together at the Christmas Mart on our first Christmas together.

Jennifer sat down on the floor to look closely at the pieces, and Liesl went to check the mail. She came back saying, Jenn, you have a letter or maybe a Christmas card, and handed the piece of mail to Jennifer. The return address was a stick-on from the apartment complex where she lived.

Why would they be sending me a, oh, I wonder if it's Joseph, but how did he get this address? She opened the card and it was a very artistic Holy Family on fine linen paper. The message said, *Wishing you a Holy and Happy Christmas. Joseph.*

It's from the man I spoke to you about. You know the "coffee at the door" man. But how did he know this address?

Liesl, who could see the card said, there is a message on the back, and Jennifer turned it over.

*Dear Jennifer,  
I hope this gets to you by Christmas.*

*There is an empty unit on floor 8 with an east facing window. I take my morning coffee there and watch the sun come up. I hope you are in a place to see the sunrise.*

*Your mother gave me this address, and I had to ask her to spell Königstein. It must be a small place and much different from what you are used to. I do hope you are enjoying your time away, but I am looking forward to your coming back.*

*Your sunrise friend,  
Joseph*

*P.S. You listed your mother as a reference when you signed the lease. She is a lovely person on the phone.*

My mother gave him this address. Why would she do that, Liesl?

She must have thought it would be good for you to get a Christmas card from a friend, don't you think?

You make it sound so natural, but this man is a pest. He won't leave me alone, Liesl.

Oh, Jenn, one card is not a pest. Isn't it clear that he likes you?

But it may not be just one card, Liesl. You watch. He will fill your mail box with cards and letters.

Would that be so terrible?

Yes, it would, Liesl. Well, I'm not going to open them.

He may not do what you think, Jenn, but I would like to get a letter a day.

You would?

I think so, but it has never happened to me, Jenn.

Billy didn't write to you when he was deployed?

No. It was Skype once a week. Nice, but not very romantic.

God, I hope he doesn't have your e-mail address. He's a pest, Liesl.

We will see what tomorrow's mail brings. I am planning a Christmas dinner for friends. Would you like to help me?

When do we start?

Today we go find the goose.

~ ~

The mail came on Christmas Eve and there was nothing for Jennifer. Liesl tried to show no expression, and Jennifer felt disappointed, but she wouldn't say it. She had to ask herself, am I really disappointed? No, then what do I feel? Neglected, like a child who got left behind when other children were chosen for the team; she felt left out and it made her angry. Yesterday Joseph was a pest and today it was as if he didn't care. Realizing her childlike response made her even more angry so she said to Liesl, I'm going for a walk.

OK, we are going to Mass this evening. You should come with us. You will like the music. The Christmas music is quite nice.

Liesl watched Jennifer leave the house in a huff. So Jennifer didn't get a letter today and tomorrow there is no mail, but there will be friends for her to enjoy. Liesl went to her kitchen shaking her head.

Jennifer walked down into the village and across to the village square thinking about her childhood and Christmas music. There was Christmas everywhere she looked in the village and she stopped in the decorated bakery and bought herself a roll and coffee. They should learn about bagels, she thought. But the thought of Christmas as a child with her parents' nativity set brightened her spirits. She would go to Mass with Liesl and Billy.

The Christmas Mart was beginning to close down, but Jennifer wanted to send something home to her parents. What to send? Then she saw music boxes, and one was labeled "Silent Night". She asked if she could have it play, and the smiling sales person wound it up and let it play. Yes, Jennifer thought, I will send this home. So it was neatly wrapped, and as she picked it up she was surprised by how heavy it was. Mom and Dad are going to like this, and I'll get to enjoy it too.

The walk back uphill to the house was her endurance test, and the heavy package didn't help. The first time she stopped twice to rest. Then it was only once. Today she was determined not to stop, so when she got to the front of the house she was out of breath, and stopped at the porch steps. She didn't want to go into the house gasping for breath so she stood in the cool. As she was standing there a small delivery truck pulled up and a man got out with a large box and a pad. He looked at the pad and said, Jennifer Baxter?

Yes, I'm Jennifer Baxter.

"Unterschreiben Sie bitte", and he handed her the pad.

She signed and was handed the box. She took the box into the house and opened it – flowers and a note – *Merry Christmas, Joseph* – in a strange hand, but the message was clear enough. Liesl walked in and saw the box and the flowers.

Perfect for our Christmas table, don't you think?

I don't know what to think, Liesl.

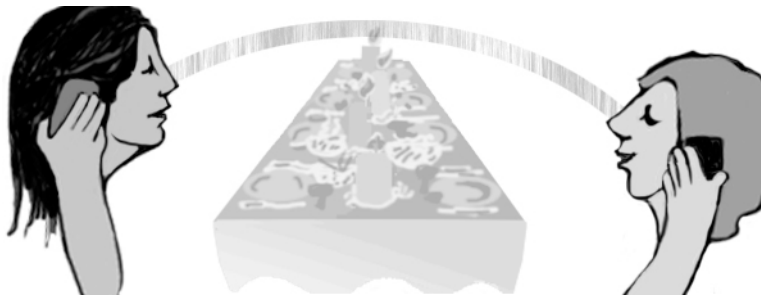
Enough thinking; enjoy the flowers. Come, I will teach you some German cooking.

It was dark when Liesl, Billy and Jennifer got to the Church. Jennifer had walked past the Church but had not been inside. Each person got an unlit candle as they entered. The Church was dim but not dark. She could see that the old Church was freshly painted and decorated. The stone floor was worn down in the center aisle, and the wooden pews were from a different century. This was a very old but well-kept Church, and Jennifer relaxed in a center pew. Could she be at home in this old Church, she wondered, and the answer that came to her was, yes. Today's low and high moods were forgotten as the priest came from the sacristy with two altar girls and everyone stood up.

At communion time she wondered, should she receive? it had been a long time. Did it matter how long it had been? She didn't think so. Did it matter that she was a recovering pain pill addict? She didn't know, but when everyone in the pew moved, she went with them. Why had she stayed away? There were a dozen reasons, but tonight none of them seemed important. She got flowers on Christmas Eve, and now it was like the whole congregation was carrying her to the front of the Church. The priest said, "Leib Christi", and she answered, Amen.

As she sat in the pew the lights went out and a lit candle passed down the aisle until everyone's candle was lit. Then the congregation began singing "Silent Night". It didn't matter to Jennifer that the words were all in German, she knew *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht, Alles schläft; einsam wacht* and as the words rang through the Church, she began to cry. In a Church she had never been in before, she was home.

## CHRISTMAS



*“My, aren’t you the popular one.”*

When the guests started to arrive, she saw two distinct groups of people, the people who worked with Billy were dressed nicely but they looked like working people on a holiday. The people from the bank where Liesl worked were fashion plates from a magazine, almost but not quite formal, except for one tall individual who one could say crossed the line into formal. He was handsome in his fine clothes and he immediately took an interest in Jennifer. Hello, my name is Ralph, and you must be the visitor from Chicago that Liesl told me about.

Yes, I am Billy’s sister, and I am visiting for the holidays.

Ralph was interested. You will be here for the New Year celebration then.

Liesl has been telling me what it’s like, and I am looking forward to experiencing it.

I will be in Paris for the New Year. Have you ever been to Paris for the New Year? It is quite wonderful.

No, I have never been to Paris.

Then why don’t you come with me? I believe you would find it to be a wonderful experience.

No, Ralph, I don’t think that would work with my plans. I must see if Liesl needs my help.

I know she must have a woman helping her in the kitchen so I doubt that she needs your help. What can you tell me about yourself? Is it true that you are a trauma doctor? That must be quite interesting.

Billy had been observing the conversation and moved to rescue his sister. Ralph, how nice to see you. You always improve every party. I just don’t have your taste for clothes.

Jennifer excused herself, and went and found Liesl. Working hard not to raise her voice, Jenn confronted Liesl, why didn’t you warn me about Ralph? He has asked me to go to Paris with him.

And what did you say?

No, of course. Liesl, why would I go off to Paris with a man I just met? Surely you don't think that would be a good idea?

Well if I were not married, I might go with conditions, like separate rooms. Paris can be a lot of fun.

Conditions or not, Liesl, I'm not going.

Yes, I understand. Perhaps I should have told you about Ralph. I suspected he would find you interesting. Then it would be your decision how to respond. Men are going to be attracted to you, Jennifer.

And you think I should enjoy the attention?

I do. You can always say, no. We are about to eat. Help me to finish the table and gather the guests.

The Christmas dinner table was magnificent. Jennifer was watching and helping Liesl with the hope that someday she would be able to host a Christmas dinner like this. In her own childhood home, the food was plentiful and delicious, but it never looked like what she saw today. Liesl brought out the good China, cut glass goblets and silverware, which were placed on a red and green tablecloth. Down the center of the table, lit candles encircled with evergreens, little red bows and gold stars created the perfect setting for the plump goose and apple sausage stuffing. There were steaming bowls of red cabbage and tender potato dumplings. On the dessert table were the traditional Christmas stollen full of fruits, nuts and marzipan, and lebkuchen, everyone's favorite. The intoxicating aroma of glühwein meant that Christmas is here. Jennifer thought to herself, I could live like this.

~ ~

All together it had been the very merry and happy Christmas that Joseph had wished for Jennifer. So why did she feel so sick the next morning? Both Billy and Liesl were home today so when Jennifer went into the kitchen, they were already quietly talking with their morning coffee. Liesl looked at Jennifer as she came in. You don't look well this morning. Perhaps too much rich food and celebration.

I don't feel well, and I guess I look like I feel.

Would you like me to fix you some breakfast? Maybe some scrambled eggs with a piece of toast.

Oh, no, Liesl, please don't even talk about food. Maybe a little coffee with some cream.

Billy got up to get his sister some coffee. He knew she liked cream with a little coffee. As he brought it to her at the kitchen table he said, eat light today and take the day off from walking.



Anyway, it is not a nice day. No sun, and a mix of rain and wet snow. I will make a fire in the fireplace, and later you can call home. Mom and Dad would like to hear from you. I know you didn't get a chance to call yesterday.

Thanks, Billy. I'll do what you say. You always know how to make my coffee. And she took her coffee and cream to a big chair and watched her brother make a fire.

In the early afternoon Jennifer called her mother. Sue answered the phone. Is that you, Jennifer?

Hi, Mom. Billy and Liesl would like to say, Hi, also. We had a very nice Christmas here. You should see the way Liesl sets a Christmas table. It's beautiful, Mom, and how was your Christmas?

We had a traditional meal, and Megan and Nick ate with us.

How is Nick doing? He was having some problems, I remember.

He still enjoys a good meal. Megan is very patient with him. We had a good time together. How was your day?

There were some interesting people here. One man asked me to go to Paris with him for the New Year celebration. Of course I turned him down. Joseph, who you gave my address to, sent me flowers.

My, aren't you the popular one. I hope that makes you feel good. You need positive vibes.

I guess, Mom, but I don't feel good this morning. Liesl thinks I had too much celebration, but Billy is doctoring me. Is Dad there?

As the phone got passed around at both ends, Jennifer was pleased and happy that she was part of a loving family. She could even feel the glow of Christmas Eve and the Christmas table lingering in her mind. She also felt she need to stay near the bathroom, just in case she needed it quickly.

~ ~

December 28 came and Jennifer woke up to a quiet house. Liesl and Billy had gone to their work, and looking out the window she could see that it was another rainy day in the village. Her stomach was not right. She wasn't violently ill, but this was the third day. She sat by the window trying to enjoy what little light filtered in and tried to diagnose herself. If a patient came to her and said she felt sick for the first hour or two of each day, what would she prescribe? a pregnancy test. Ridiculous, she thought.

She had felt hot getting out of bed, but now she felt cold; she put on her robe and sat back down at the window. There was no way she could be pregnant. The old story that you could get pregnant from a public toilet seat was just old and not true. So what was it? She mentally

went back over what she had eaten, and had to drink. There was nothing obvious, but she resolved not to repeat any suspicious food or drink today as a precaution.

Could it be the low dose meds? She had been scrupulous about taking them as prescribed, but she wanted them to be done and over with. That would be like a sign to her that it was over. She would just be Jennifer Baxter again; Doctor Jennifer Baxter, she thought, or maybe not the doctor part. She had experienced no previous stomach issues from opioids. No, it wasn't the meds. If today was like yesterday, she would feel better later in the morning and would take her walk even if it was a little wet. She went to her shower determined to continue the rhythm of her day. She liked the sound of having a rhythm to her day rather than routine. The shower felt good.

At about noon she checked the mail, nothing, at least nothing for her. This was the third day without a card or gift, well Christmas didn't count, or did it? He could have had some gift delivered even on Christmas. Maybe he had lost interest. That didn't last long, she thought, but she didn't want another man; she couldn't survive losing another man.

Walking cleared her mind and finally settled her stomach. Was that why she pushed men away, she couldn't deal with the thought of losing another one? Why hadn't Jimmy's death become part of her past? It had been years, how many, more than ten and the memory of that pain, the pain of his loss, was still there. No, she never wanted to repeat that pain, ever. She lengthened her stride and became more conscious of the village around her. Why doesn't everyone live in a village? Why doesn't everyone have a bakery, and yes, a church they can walk to?

She knew she had just done some clear thinking as she came up to the bakery for her now daily roll and coffee, but she also knew that she would check the mail tomorrow.

## LOVE



*“Damn it, Nick, are you too old to understand what I am telling you?”*

The next day was the same, sick in the morning and no mail. That evening she told Liesl, I was sick again this morning. Whatever is bothering me will not go away.

Tomorrow if you still feel badly, we will go to my doctor. She is very good. You will like her.

Jennifer agreed, and the next morning she could not eat. Liesl put her in her car and took her to her personal doctor. Jennifer knew she needed to tell the whole story.

I was addicted to pain medicine, opioids, and was put on a recovery program of progressively lower doses. I have one more week of this medicine then I will be off of opioids completely. I have felt physically well until five days ago when I began to feel sick in the morning, and that’s why Liesl thought I should see you.

May I see your medicine, please? The doctor read the label on the bottle and handed it back. Lay down here, please. She felt Jennifer from her neck to her pelvis. We will do a blood spectrum and urinalysis. Please, go with my assistant.

Jennifer expected they would find nothing, but she waited with a magazine she couldn’t read.

Your doctor is very blunt – and, Liesl, what does this say?

She is a German doctor and very competent – and it says, you must use this product to be beautiful. You are already beautiful. You do not need this product.

The assistant motioned them back into the examination room and the doctor came in and closed the door. Your blood test is normal. No diabetes, no high cholesterol, no sign of inflammation. This is very good. You are a healthy woman. Your urine test shows that you are pregnant. This explains your morning sickness. I hope this pleases you.

No, I can’t be! Doctor, this is not possible! There is no way I can be pregnant!

This test is very good. No false positives. You are pregnant. If this does not please you, you must act quickly to terminate, and the medicine you are taking is not good for your pregnancy.

Jennifer looked at her hands knotted in her lap and kept shaking her head, NO. Then she looked up, her eyes wide in disbelief, and fainted. She woke up with the doctor holding her hands to keep her from falling from her chair. There was only one thought in Jennifer's mind. She looked at Liesl and said, I've got to go home.

If that is what you want, I will go with you.

Thank you, doctor. I really have to go home.

You must sit for a few minutes to be sure your legs are steady. Remember if you choose to terminate this pregnancy, you must act quickly.

Jennifer smiled a thank you and stood up testing her legs. Then she took Liesl's hand and they left.

On their way back to the house Liesl waited for Jennifer to explain or tell whatever she needed to tell, but Jennifer said nothing.

There was a small box at the door with Jennifer's name on it. She picked it up and handed it to Liesl.

Would you like me to open it?

Jennifer waved her hand at Liesl and fell into the big chair. Liesl took this as a, yes, and opened the box. Inside was a small bear with a party hat and a note which read, *Happy New Year*.

What a cute bear. It must be from your Joseph.

He's not my Joseph, and I don't want his bear.

Do you think he is the father?

No – no, Liesl. There is only one possible way this could have happened to me and I can't believe it happened, but it must have. I must have been raped, Liesl. That's the only possibility.

This could have happened without you knowing it?

Only one time, but, yes. I had passed out in the break room and they, whoever they were, placed me in a hospital bed. I woke up much later and left knowing I needed help with my addiction. That's how my recovery began. I must have been raped while I was unconscious, Liesl.

In a hospital bed? Are you sure that is the only possibility?

Yes. It's the only way.

Then you do not want this pregnancy?

I don't know what I want. Well, yes, I do. I want to go home, and I want someone in prison.

Liesl made reservations for both of them for the next day.

~ ~

On the plane to Chicago Jennifer was quiet, but Liesl wanted to talk. I can understand why you want to go home. Years ago when I got pregnant with our twins, Billy had left on deployment, and I didn't know your family. I needed to talk to your mother to know what to do. She was wonderful with me, Jennifer.

I was away at school, but I remember now that you had visited.

Sue told me she wanted me to keep Billy's child even if I didn't marry him. We didn't know they were twins. That was exactly what I hoped she would say.

I don't want this baby, Liesl.

I understand perfectly.

Liesl, thank you for coming with me. I'm going to try to get some sleep. How long until we get to Chicago?

At least two more hours, I think.

It was more than two hours, and Jennifer did sleep. Sue met them and soon they were at the old house Jennifer knew so well. Her change of scenery had come full circle, and she wondered why she had left. It felt so good to be back.

Sue was nervously walking about the house waiting for Jennifer to tell her what she thought had happened. Finally, Jennifer began. There is no confusion in my mind about this, Mom. There is only one possible way that I became pregnant. I was raped while unconscious at the hospital.

What will you do now?

I want to go directly to the police, Mom. The person who did this to me should not be free to do it to someone else.

Your father needs to hear this story. I think it would be good for you to talk with him before you go to the police. He often works with the police and may know what questions they will ask.

OK, Mom, but tomorrow I want to go to the police.

It was a quiet dinner, unusually quiet for the Baxter's house, but everyone wanted Jennifer to take the lead so no one pushed or asked questions. When the meal was over Jennifer said, Dad, I want to talk with you before I go to the police tomorrow. What kind of questions will they ask me?

They will want to know the details of that night, but also your relationship with men, especially at the hospital.

Dad, I didn't have any male relationships at the hospital.

Perhaps there was a relationship you weren't aware of. How many men at the hospital?

Hundreds.

And people walk in and out?

All the time, Dad.

Then you see how important it would be to narrow it down.

Dad, you are saying it was likely someone I know. Someone I know has betrayed and abused me? How could they do that to me!

Yes, that's what you need to think about, Jenn. Who liked to be close to you? That's what they will want to know. DNA can prove who the father is, but you can't get a court order for DNA for the whole world.

Don't call this person a father. He's an abuser, a criminal!

OK, Jenn, but if this rapist is identified, they may push back – say it was consensual. A court proceeding could get very ugly, Jenn. None of this is going to be easy.

Are you saying I should pretend it didn't happen? Just get an abortion and go on with my life? I can't do that.

I am not telling you what to do or how to do it. I am telling you what to expect as best I know it, and I hope you don't decide to have an abortion.

I don't want a rapist's child, Dad.

You know we will give you whatever help you need. Why don't you talk with Nick? He has a lot of experience counseling people.

I thought he was struggling with old age problems.

He is, but he may be helpful. I would suggest going to our pastor, but he is young and new to the parish.

I don't need a lecture from the Church, Dad.

What about Nick then?

OK, call him and see if he will see me in the morning, you have known him forever.

He will see you. I know Nick.

I'm tired, Dad. Thanks for trying to help.

~ ~

How long have you known my family, Nick?

If it doesn't sound like bragging, I introduced them.

You remember that?

Oh, yes, like it was yesterday, but I probably shouldn't say like yesterday because my yesterdays can be fuzzy.

I see that you still have your big fish tank.

I can't take care of them anymore so I have a man come once a week to clean the tank and check the water. Would you mind if I go get a cup of coffee? Would you like some yourself?

No, I don't need anything, Nick, and, no, I don't mind if you get yourself some coffee. I'll just sit here with your fish. As Nick left to get coffee, Jennifer jumped up out of her chair and began to pace. How is this old friend going to help me? Then she noticed the framed documents on the wall, degrees from Marquette and certification as a clinical psychologist from the State of Illinois. She sat back down and thought, maybe he can help but he can't change what has happened to me, and she watched the beautifully colored fish gracefully glide through the water.

Nick had been counseling people for many years, first at his parish and then in his own home, but he had always had a big salt water fish tank. He believed that watching the fish calmed his clients so he would leave them alone with the fish for a few minutes while "he went to get some coffee". When he came back with his coffee he would sit quietly and wait. This had been his way and that's what he did today; he sat and waited. Finally, Jennifer spoke up.

I have been in recovery for a pain pill addiction.

Opioids?

Yes, and things were going well. I even began a new routine to improve my health and physical conditioning.

That all sounds very good.

Then I discovered that I was pregnant.

I see.

No, you don't see, Nick. It had to be rape, Nick. I was drugged, well I drugged myself, and someone raped me.

Nick was quiet.

Nick, are you listening? I don't want this pregnancy and I want to put the person who did this to me in jail.

Nick took a sip of coffee.

Damn it, Nick, are you too old to understand what I am telling you!

Is there a man in your life?

No, well yes, but he has nothing to do with this.

Do you think he is in love with you?

That's not possible, Nick. How can he be in love with me? He hardly knows me.

Yet he came into your mind just now. Why is that?

He brings me coffee and bagels, he sends me flowers, he even sent me a teddy bear. I didn't ask for any of his attention and I don't want it. Anyway, he has nothing to do with my being raped and pregnant.

That may be true, Jennifer, but he may be a part of your future.

I don't think I have a future, Nick.

Your mother came into my office years ago after her divorce from a violent marriage and said those same words to me. She didn't think she had a future, but she did, and so do you.

But I feel completely defeated, Nick. There is no fight left in me. I don't want another man. I couldn't stand the pain of losing another man.

You lost someone?

Years ago. He died in an accident before we were married, right before we were to be married, Nick. I can't go through that again.

Do you think the same thing might happen with this person, and what is his name?



His name is Joseph, and of course he would just walk away from a drug addict, raped and pregnant woman. He would just walk away if he really knew me, Nick. I can't go down that road. Wouldn't anyone just walk away, Nick? Wouldn't they?

Your family won't leave you. I won't leave you, ever, and I think you know that.

That's different, Nick.

How so?

Well, my family loves me, and I guess you like me, Nick, but I don't know why.

They do love you and so do I. Isn't it possible that this Joseph loves you?

He doesn't know me, Nick, how can he love me?

Love is a strange and wonderful thing, Jennifer, because it can happen in an instant, and love always wants to last forever.

You make it sound magical, Nick.

It was for me. My life completely changed when I realized that Megan loved me. It was the most awesome feeling, and it still is.

And you think Joseph loves me?

I think you need to find out for yourself. When you do, other decisions will be easy for you.

~ ~

That evening Sue wanted to know what Nick had told Jennifer. How is Nick doing? Did you see Megan? Is she still working?

Megan wasn't home and Nick seems to be fine. I don't know why people worry about him, and we didn't talk about what has happened to me.

Nick never asks questions, Jenn.

No, not like some people, Mom.

I'm sorry. I know I'm full of questions. That's just the way I am. You know that.

OK, Mom. We talked about my future and about Joseph.

For once Sue was quiet.

He isn't going to leave me alone, Mom.

You mean Joseph?

Just then Liesl came out from the back bedroom. Hi, Jennifer. If you are talking about Joseph, I believe you are right. Billy called me earlier and said there is a letter for you. I told him to keep it. I hope that's alright.

See, Mom. He sent me flowers on Christmas and a New Year's teddy bear. He won't leave me alone.

And what did Nick say?

He said that love can happen in an instant and last forever. I don't believe that.

Oh, it happened to me when I met Billy, Jenn.

Sue added, your Dad tried to give me space when we first met because I had been through a divorce, but I didn't want it. I wanted him.

You pushed Dad?

Oh, yes, I did. I wasn't going to let him get away, and there weren't going to be any secrets between us. When there are secrets between people then fear creeps in, fear that they may walk away if they ever really knew our secrets.

Mom, if Joseph knew all about me, he would walk away.

How do you know that?

Anyone would, Mom.

I won't. Your Dad won't.

Liesl added, you know Billy and I would never leave you alone.

Jenn questioned, but how will I ever know that about Joseph? How could I ever be sure?

Liesl answered, maybe you should read your letter. Billy would read it to you.

I'm afraid to start down that road with him, Liesl.

Listen to the letter, Jenn. How can it hurt to listen?

Liesl, it's right over there. Billy will be asleep.

He always answers my number, Jennifer.

You are so sure about him, aren't you?

As sure as the sun will rise in the morning, Jenn.

Then call him.

Billy answered Liesl's call and agreed to open Jennifer's letter and read it to her over the phone. Jennifer asked Liesl to put it on the speaker so they could all hear. Billy began:

*Dear Jennifer,  
I hope you have been celebrating the holidays. The weather here is cold, and it is raining.*

Billy interjected, are you sure this is necessary? Liesl responded, just read it, Billy.

OK, OK. I'll read it.

*I had a long talk with my assistant, Maria, who I think you met. We often talk about particular residents. She is very good with people.*

Billy paused trying to get his half-awake head around why this was important, but before Liesl could prod him again, he continued:

*I told Maria I had sent you cards and gifts, and Maria shook her head and said, "friends first". Well, I thought that was what I was doing, but I guess I was not very good at it. To back up some and start over, you have been on my mind for some time. I ride the bus and I would see you walking home from work and wondered how I could meet you. I guess you would call me shy when it comes to meeting women, but I saw my chance when you came into the lobby with a cat carrier and packages so I asked if I could help and you said, yes. The rest of the story you know. I had to find a way to introduce myself to you, but if I have been too bold, please give me a chance to start over.*

*Looking forward to your coming home.  
Joseph*

Jennifer asked, is that all?

Billy responded, I turned the paper over and there is a post script on the back. It says:

*Maria is getting married in a few weeks and has invited me to come to her wedding. I would like you to go with me. It would be an opportunity to meet some of my friends, and I know the food would be good. Please think about it and let me know. If you decide not to go, I will go by myself. There isn't anyone else, Jennifer.  
Joseph*

Billy yawned and said, that's all there is. Can I go back to sleep?

Liesl responded, what do you think, Billy?

There isn't much to know about him, but he sure likes you, Jennifer. Can I go back to bed now?

Jennifer responded, thanks, Billy, sorry about waking you up.

Anything for you, Jennifer. This Joseph likes you. Bye.

Jennifer leaned back from the now quiet phone and looked at her mother and Liesl, and said, so maybe he's a nice person. He takes advice from a woman. That's different.

Sue looked at Jennifer and said, I think he may be good for you. Liesl nodded agreement.

He doesn't know me.

The two women responded together, then tell him!

OK, I will and that will be the end of it.

Liesl responded, or the beginning.

~ ~

Anyone seeing Jennifer Baxter walk across the apartment building lobby the next day would say to themselves – there goes a determined woman, head up, long strides, determined to accomplish something important. She walked straight into the building manager's office and found Maria behind the desk.

Good afternoon. It's Jennifer, isn't it? How nice to see you. What can I do for you?

Is Joseph here, Maria? I need to talk to him.

He had business elsewhere and is gone for the rest of the day. Is there something I can do for you?

Jennifer softened as she realized that Maria was really trying to be helpful. I need to talk to him, Maria. Will he be in tomorrow?

I expect him to be here early. It's his routine. Can I take a message?

Yes, tell him I need to talk to him. That's Baxter in 1050. Oh, and you won't need to bring me coffee anymore, Maria.

Jennifer, you sound almost angry. Are you sure there isn't something I can do?

I don't mean to sound angry, Maria, but I need to clear the air with Joseph.

Has he done something wrong? That's not like him. He is a very kind person.

Jennifer suddenly felt defeated and sat down in Maria's visitor's chair not knowing what to say.

Maria got up and went to a little dorm room refrigerator, got a small water and gave it to Jennifer.

Thank you. I seem to be surrounded by kind people who don't know me. Joseph sent me a letter and in it he said that you were getting married. How nice. When is your wedding?

In two weeks on Saturday. We have been planning it for a year. Why would Joseph mention my wedding in a letter?

He asked me to go with him. I guess you invited him.

Oh, please come. We are planning a big party. I am sure you would like it. But that was very bold for Joseph. He is a very shy man.

If he is so shy, why is he sending me gifts and letters and asking me to go with him to your wedding?

Isn't the answer to your question obvious?

Jennifer opened the small water and took a sip. I don't want to go down that road with Joseph or any other man, Maria.

He needs to know that, but he will be very disappointed.

You seem to know him well, Maria.

We work together. I am his assistant but he encourages me to do everything. I hope you will be kind to him.

I need to be honest with him, Maria. Send him up to 1050 with two coffees in the morning so we can talk privately.

I will leave him that message; double cream. I remember.

~ ~

Jennifer sat looking out the still dark window the next morning practicing what she would say to Joseph. She wanted it to be quick and clean, but her mind drifted, first to Paula and the bus, then the steep hills in the German village. Did Joseph say in his letter that he rode the bus? She needed to call Charles and tell him she was "done" with low dose medication. Then she remembered Tina and how her nurse friend allowed her to keep one pill. She wondered if it was still in her purse. Maybe it was just what she needed to get through her meeting with Joseph. Just one, she thought. It would calm her; help her focus her mind on what needed to be said. She went to get her purse to look when she heard a knock at the door – he was early, there was not even a hint of dawn out the dark window. She went to the door. Why was she thinking that he would come with the morning sun? Why was he early? She opened the door.

Joseph stood there with two coffees and two bagel bags. Maria told me you were back and wanted to see me so I brought coffee. I hope this is a good time. I can see you are not dressed yet. Should I come back later?

Come in, Joseph. You will have to put up with my fuzzy robe and messed up hair. Come in. Put the coffee on the little table and I'll fix the bagels.

She realized that she was acting like Joseph was an old friend and that she felt calm and actually looking forward to coffee. What about her planned speech? This was not what she had rehearsed. Joseph put the coffee down and remembering how they had watched the sun come up, moved a chair for himself beside the second chair and little table. Jennifer brought the warmed bagels with cream cheese, and sat down facing the east window. Then she surprised herself and said, I'm afraid of you, Joseph. I shouldn't be sitting here with you. I don't know why I let you in. I should have written you a letter or e-mail or something telling you not to come to my apartment. You shouldn't be here.

This is the only place I want to be, Jennifer. There isn't any place else for me to be.

She stood up and turned her back to him and said, I have been addicted to drugs, been raped and now I'm pregnant. Go away, Joseph. Please just go away, Joseph.

I can't.

What do you mean you can't? Just go, Joseph!

You have had a rough time. I hear that. There is no way I can walk away and leave you alone. I just can't do that.

He stood up and took a step toward her back and put his hands on her shoulders and said again, I can't go, Jennifer. I'm in love with you.

She turned to face him. That's not possible, Joseph.

Oh yes it is. Sit with me and watch our sun come up.





## Epilogue

Jennifer tried to bury her loss in hard work, the most difficult work she could find. Paula offered her a simpler way of life. Liesl offered her a new way of seeing herself. She may even go back to being an ER doctor. And Joseph loves her. There are no conflicts here. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive. It's not this way or that way. God's world is a both-and world. Jennifer has choices which may include all of the above.

But right now, Jennifer has an invitation to sit and watch her sun come up with someone who loves her. Love has found Jennifer. It can happen. It did happen.

Jennifer's still unwashed clothes helped to identify a certain person, who was asked to resign. It would have been a "he said, she said", so he was not prosecuted. However, there would be an asterisk in this person's file so that no job referrals or references would ever come to this person from this hospital.

Jennifer and Joseph decided together that they would call the child, Joey. He will become a child who experiences each day to be "the best day ever." Then COVID-19 happens while Joey is becoming his own person. What will Joey bring to our world? Stay tuned.

## Afterword

You may be tempted to think like Jennifer, "if Joseph knew all about me, he would walk away," but Joseph didn't walk away. Our great Christmas story is also about a Joseph who didn't walk away. That Joseph took the pregnant Mary *into his home* and *she bore a son and he [Joseph] named him Jesus*. Our tradition of this story includes an angel telling Joseph, "*Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.*" Just like our Jennifer story, this ancient story was a triumph of love over fear. When we celebrate the birth of Jesus each year on December 25, it is our perpetual celebration of this triumph of love over fear.

But, you want to say, this doesn't happen today. Jennifer would be right; a man today would just walk away. We, the authors, were privileged in 2020 to hear a woman tell her story in a public forum of how she, as a young woman, became pregnant and the man involved did walk away. However, another man walked with her during her pregnancy and was there for her when the child was born. They then married and had children of their own. Another "Joseph" did not walk away.

Jennifer's story did happen a long time ago, and continues to happen today. God's voice in the form of Joseph's angel continues to tell us, "*Do not be afraid.*" Love will find you in unexpected places. "You have quite a load. Can I get a cart for you?"





*Photo by Susan Mielke*

JOEY