

THE UPSHOT

by

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For Lost Souls

1

A Little Peace

It's been nearly a year since the tragic ordeal finally had somewhat of a resolution. I still think about it, nearly every day, but not all of it. Not everything. That one night twenty-five years or so ago, the one when it all began, changed my life forever, probably made me bitter about the world, skeptical of people, timid, and weak. Time made it worse, as I know it did for her. She was never the same. How could she be? If it had never happened, she might have gone down a better path. I take that back. I know she would have done something with her life. She was intelligent, confident, and beautiful. Everything was there for a life worth living.

If it had never happened, I'm certain we all would have gone down better paths.

For years after that night I used to try to make myself feel better by repeating over and over again that there was nothing that could be done about it, but I would never convince myself. It was selfish and ignorant thinking, I know now. As the years dragged on, the torment compounded. I'd be alone, and a sad song from that time would summon the memory. And, man, my soul would go dark, and I'd be angry at him and at her but angrier at myself. I'd weep uncontrollably—not softly but frantically. I'd want to burst with fury. I'd imagine myself seeing him some place and waiting until he was walking home, maybe through a dark alley at night. It would be raining, and I'd step out of the shadows and say, "Do you remember me?" He wouldn't answer, and I'd say something cheesy like, "Well, you're going to remember this!" And I'd punch him square in the jaw. He'd fall, and I'd pounce on his chest, pin him down with my knees, and then pound my fists into his face and release all that fury. Get it all out. All for her. All for us. All for humanity. All for truth.

Yes, I remember. Back then I'd imagine killing him to save her, to save us, to save the world. But that was back when I only fantasized about it. Those images now just clash with actual memories, the memories that fill out our history. Twenty-five years of fantasies mixed with what actually happened a year or so ago.

I used to wonder what he was thinking that night. I wondered what I was thinking. I wondered what she was thinking. What would have become of our lives had we done something about it? Maybe Holly Karlan wouldn't have ended up as she had, so self-destructive. Maybe I

wouldn't have been so sufferable. Maybe my best friend, Jimmer Cuddy, wouldn't have become so...disturbed.

Maybe the three of us would be together.

Maybe I wouldn't be living with yet another profound secret.

For years, Cuddy and I endured the heaviest of guilt, while Holly suffered a pain unimaginable. Back then I racked my brain every dark day, feverishly searching for a way to make what happened to her right, sometimes even considering just going to the police and telling them what I knew. After moving nearly two thousand miles away, after struggling through college, after pinning down a job, after marriage, after a kid, I couldn't shake what happened that night. I thought about going through the background check and the waiting period, getting a permit, and legally purchasing a gun, finding him, shooting him dead, and simply accepting the consequences. It wouldn't change the past, but maybe it would close the gaping void in my conscience. But then it would hit me, the rationale. My family would suffer the consequences of my actions. I'd be ruining lives the way Rory James ruined lives.

And then somehow, almost miraculously, a year or so after she died, a year or so after Cuddy and I stood atop this rock overlooking the valley near where we grew up and believed there was no way to make things right, a window opened. And my best friend, who had killed before, was willing to kill again. We could make it right with no consequences, maybe finally find some solace in our lives.

But I guess fate again stepped in the way.

No, I don't like to think about the way it all ended. Maybe because it will never end until I'm gone.

See, I believe that the only thing the three of us ever wanted out of our lives was a little peace. I hope my friends Jimmer Cuddy and Holly Karlan have their peace. I live for them. And I think that's why I'm back up on this rock, in this agonizing heat, overlooking the vast valley of this beautiful but complicated state, in this celebrated but vulnerable country, in this marvelous but troubled world, where the good try to survive among the evil day and night. Yes, I'm going to go on living for them until my time is up.

And may the three of us be together again someday, if the fates allow.