

# 12:12

## *People ruin everything....*

This was what Miles Rockefeller was thinking when the two young women invaded his sanctuary, promptly setting up their sunbathing towels in the virgin grass just as he was finally feeling some peace from watching a wedge of geese ascend over the water. The girls were talking about drugs, which seemed to be everyone's favorite topic of conversation at the rehab facility—at the same time exchanging their growing list of withdrawal side effects in an effort to name something the other person hadn't experienced yet. Or, better still hadn't heard of before, or even thought possible.

"It's 12:12," one of them said to the other. "Make a wish."  
"What?"

"12:12," she repeated, glancing at her wristwatch again as if she suddenly didn't believe it, which reminded Miles that no one had their cellphones anymore.

"I thought that was only at 11:11?"

The other one scoffed, followed by a, "Whatever."

Just then, as if saving him from the girls' ridiculous banter, Miles heard over the loudspeakers: "Miles R., please come to the nurse's station. Miles R., to the nurse's station."

Heading back toward the main building, Miles felt irritation that they paged him so often; worse, they had to repeat his name in such quick succession that it was humanly impossible to respond to the first announcement before the second one seized the air. He also found it peculiar—although he understood the whole anonymity thing, attributed to everyone's so-called "disease"—that only a first initial was used for last names when addressed by the staff or printed on the

ID badges. First names were apparently okay, but no last names—although, in the cafeteria the day before, while Miles told a story to his table-mates, he accidentally blurted out his last name, causing him a mini-stroke upon the realization that this circle of addicts could now Google him once they returned to the real world of cellphones and social media. The punchline, however, was that his captive audience didn't even notice his gaffe.

He realized early on at the rehab center that the other addicts were all narcissists, only interested in their own backstories. Everyone else's seemed to bore them. Once in a while, if they somehow caught something during someone else's backstory—good listening skills weren't an attribute of most addicts—they would buzz in and say, "I didn't know you were in for opiates?" ("In" being code for "addicted.") This, in turn, would greatly upset the storyteller, who would then bark back like a rabid dog: "I told you twenty times I'm in here for benzos and opiates! Why do you think they have me on subs!" This, in most cases, would get a response something along the lines of: "You're on subs?" Which, of course, would only infuriate the storyteller even more. And if your backstory involved something non-drug related, such as an operation you had undergone, forget about it. Only a drug addict could be disappointed if you told them your injury was chronic, rather than from some grisly accident—although it wasn't a good idea to use the word "chronic" in a non-drug related story. Your thesaurus skills needed to be top notch.

Miles was always amused by the back and forth of constant confusion that permeated most of the conversations he overheard around the campus, so long as they didn't involve him. The more drug classifications people were in for, the prouder they seemed to be. If you were in just for alcohol, that didn't seem to impress anyone, even if you supposedly beat down three cases of beer or four pints of vodka a day.

But if you were in for heroin, for example—which was never a solo item—people knew immediately that you were probably addicted to everything else as well, and were therefore more interesting to talk to.

Entering the main building, Miles held the door open for three guys who were headed outside, two of whom were staff. They were known on campus as a “PSA,” although none of the addicts could agree on what the acronym stood for. That was the other thing—you could stand there all day and hold the door open for people, and hardly anyone would ever say “thank you” unless they worked there; even the latter wasn’t absolute. It was as if they didn’t even notice you holding the door open for them, and just figured it had magically opened on its own—or worse, that they were *entitled* to have the door opened for them.

As the thankless three passed him, Miles realized the entourage was on a one-way trek toward the parking lot. It was an official escort out of Shangri-La, and he knew the guy being taken away. It was Devin L.

“Devin!” Miles called out to him. “What’s going on?”

Devin turned his head to the side, his lips twisting in a Joker’s smile. This wasn’t a good sign, despite the fact that he usually looked like that. It was something else that didn’t seem right.

“I pissed hot,” he said proudly, without a hint of guilt.

When escorting someone off the premises due to a violation, the staff members always seemed to walk faster than normal, like they were trying to get a ticking bomb off campus without it prematurely exploding. Miles had heard Devin clearly and knew the ramifications of what he had said, but couldn’t come up with a quick enough response before he and his entourage vanished into the ether.

“Hey Miles,” a voice suddenly said from behind him. It was one of the girls from Miles’ group counseling. She was twenty, but looked fourteen and had a knack for saying crazy

things out of nowhere. It was as if the drugs she had abused were still in her system—heroin, molly, alcohol, benzos and opiates, if he remembered correctly—filling every pore, unable to escape. She was also famous for adding “spoiler alert” in the middle of her backstory whenever she told it, as if the listener hadn’t yet realized—or more likely, forgotten—that she was an addict.

“Hey Sasha,” Miles said, realizing that people usually looked like their names. Sasha looked like a Sasha, mostly because of how she wore her hair. Devin looked like a Devin—although he looked so high at the moment that he could have answered to any number of trust fund names.

Sasha gestured toward Devin, disappearing back into the real world: a dream which still took place with or without the addicts. Time was wickedly cruel, especially for those inside this bubble where the gears of the universal clock had somehow stopped moving forward.

“Looks like Devin’s escaping Alcatraz,” Sasha said matter-of-factly, as if they were actually on that concrete island in the middle of San Francisco Bay.

The loudspeaker came on again, still beckoning Miles to the nurse’s station, just in case he had forgotten.

Miles started. He had completely forgotten where he was headed because he’d been so completely mesmerized by the site of Devin walking off the grounds. “I gotta go,” Miles said, turning toward the door, which he still held open for no one in particular.

“Did you do the homework yet?” Sasha called after Miles, already several paces away. The worried-sounding tone in her voice made the question seem like it held life-or-death consequences. Miles hadn’t yet done the current assignment for the group counseling sessions he and Sasha attended, but he didn’t really care enough about it to engage in a conversation with her, especially since he was late for his medication.

One of the nurses was about to call for him again when

Miles entered through the half-open accordion doors. They never seemed to open the doors completely, as if they didn't want anyone to know they were actually there, behind the wizard's curtain, doling out the magic pills everyone so needed, especially the ones in detox whose bodies were endlessly betraying them.

The heavy-set male nurse—who usually worked the graveyard shift and played cool Pandora songs super loud on his iPad—eyed Miles' name badge, even though he knew Miles. The medical staff followed a strict policy, posted on the main door: NO BADGE. NO MEDICATION. NO EXCEPTIONS.

"You're due for your pheno," the male nurse said, monotone, like it was something he was tired of repeating. As Miles sat down, he handed him a tiny paper cup with the pheno-barbital in it and a slightly larger one containing water. The pill itself was almost as big as the cup that held it, but this didn't matter to Miles, who had recently become an expert at swallowing a handful of various-sized pills at the same time—something he had never thought possible, given he'd previously had trouble swallowing just one, even something as small as an aspirin.

"I'm only getting pheno now?" Miles asked, sounding like the paranoid drug addict that he didn't want to sound like. "I thought I was due for the anti-anxiety stuff."

The nurse turned back to his computer. "Not 'til 2:30."

"Oh," was all Miles could say. Arguing with the nurses about anything was a colossal waste of time.

The nurse half-smiled. "So, you looking forward to the Labor Day barbecue?"

Miles stared back, unimpressed.

The nurse's smile crept up like moss. "A little break in your diet, at least..."

"No, I won't be here for that, as lovely as it sounds. I'm actually leaving this afternoon."

The nurse glanced at a calendar hidden behind the computer, as if he wasn't sure what to trust—the month of September or Miles. He picked up a clipboard next to the phone. “I don't have you on the list for today,” he said. “What day are—” He interrupted himself. “No, wait, you're still in detox. You can't be leaving today.”

“I don't know. I'm not keeping count,” Miles lied, since he knew exactly how long he had been a “patient” there. The addicts, if not referred to by just their first name and last initial, were designated as being “in recovery” and never anything else, medical or otherwise. Like labeling was a crime the rehab center refused to commit, so the word “patient” was never used—the irony of which was also never mentioned.

Miles wasn't much of a numbers person, but he knew, almost to the minute, when he would officially get his walking papers. If he were to tell the truth, he had just passed the halfway mark—two weeks—even though it felt more like two years, especially since he was still being detoxed, as the nurse had just pointed out. Miles had been detoxed at a prior facility, but that detox had gone too rapidly, or so he was told—particularly for someone coming off benzos. And so, he had to endure a second round. But the worst news, which Miles learned from the present medical staff, was that his body could still be withdrawing for up to a year, and that it would most likely be similar to a roller coaster—with the ups and downs, curves and thrusts utterly at random.

Miles didn't want to make eye contact with the nurse, who now glanced at the video monitor above the computer, as he knew what the nurse was about to say.

“I've got a line,” the nurse pleaded impatiently, proving Miles' assumption correct.

Miles also looked up at the monitor. It was amazing, he thought, how one minute there would be no one getting their meds, and a second later a whole line of people suddenly appeared, like vampires materializing from thin air.

"See you back here at 2:30, then 5:30 for your dinner meds," the nurse said.

"I won't be here then," Miles countered, still not in complete control of the words coming out of his mouth. It was a bad day for his detox. He wasn't currently having hallucinations—at least not the visual kind—although he had recently started experiencing auditory ones, which in some ways were even scarier, as they teetered closer to believability and often had him answering someone who wasn't really there.

"Well, if you go to dinner early, as long as you're here by 6:00 that should be fine."

"Like I said, I won't be here then...I mean, I'm not going to dinner at all. I'm leaving this place just as soon as I can get a ride...but I'll obviously need my cellphone back first, so I can arrange it and stuff."

The nurse glanced at the video monitor again. "I have other people to get to," he said, his tone not as impatient as the words he chose. His manner of calmness every time Miles saw him was actually fairly impressive; perhaps it was a result of listening to music so profoundly, especially considering the stress of having a healthy dose of addicts nipping at him around the clock. (The ones who didn't nip only refrained from doing so because they were in half-comas already and couldn't nip anything even if they wanted to: for them, simply walking was the first, and sometimes only, hurdle.)

Miles scoffed. He didn't like it when the nurses ignored him. In some ways, it was the worst side-effect of them all. He glanced at the growing line on the video monitor, too, noticing his roommate standing at the front with that look of fear he always wore, subliminally screaming that there was no possible way he could deal with the day ahead, much less the next few minutes. He had droopy eyelids that almost covered his eyeballs, as if his eyelids alone were responding to his hopeless life and were just about ready to give up. The very sight of him irritated Miles to no end, mostly due to his

jealousy of those who had no trouble sleeping—a minority population for sure. Miles hadn't slept in three nights. His roommate, Kirk, slept like a baby, even on his first night—a rare occurrence in a rehab center, unless you came in day one fucked up on downers. It was either one way or the other: lots of sleep or no sleep at all. Extremes in just about everything were the norm there. And what irritated Miles about Kirk even more was the fact that the guy would just get in bed at night and immediately go to sleep without moving at all; he would simply drift off in whatever position he landed on the mattress in. No getting comfortable, no finding the perfect angle for his body to lie, no fidgeting whatsoever. Just bam. Gone.

Rufus Wainwright's cover of "Hallelujah" started to play on the nurse's iPad. Both Miles and the nurse paused, realizing the very sound of their voices was a violent disturbance to that sacrosanct song. Even the other nurse a few feet away, who had been busy taking someone's blood pressure, seemed to freeze in the moment.

Miles wasn't one for "moments" anymore, even though this was a favorite song of his, which he immediately reminded the nurses of (as if it were a quiz show and he had just buzzed in). Then he blurted: "I *am* leaving today, for real." He realized just then, however, how silly this empty threat sounded. Empty threats were popular songs performed by the addicts, and it was a never-ending concert. Plus, even if it were true, the nurse probably didn't give a shit either way. Miles was merely a receptacle of medicine to them—as long as he didn't have a seizure or die during the transaction. Seizures seemed to be a common worry there, especially with the patients in detox where anything was possible.

"Be that as it may," the nurse responded, "as long as you're in my computer here, you still exist in my world, despite your own claims to the contrary."

Now the nurse sounded like an existentialist Santa



Claus—the latter due to the hearty laugh that followed—although Miles had no idea what an existentialist was, if anyone happened to quiz him on that.

The nurse checked his computer again; doing this seemed to be the one non-musical thing that brought him any type of peace or comfort in the miasma of rehab. “You’re a minor, too, Miles, so I don’t think you’re going anywhere just yet.” He laughed again. How annoying, Miles thought, since it now seemed a bit condescending, too. That was another thing about the nurses there: one minute they were your “BFF,” and the next your worst, most immovable enemy.

“I’m not gonna be a minor for much longer.”

“Then let me be the first to wish you a happy birthday in advance,” the nurse said, smiling crookedly.

“This isn’t a prison,” Miles shot back, still on autopilot. “I can leave whenever I want...and I don’t have any parents either, so no one can stop me.” Miles said this in such a way that it sounded like fact, even though it was the furthest thing from the truth—and he knew it.

Miles gestured at the computer. “It does say that in there, right? That I don’t have any parents?” Without waiting for an answer, Miles continued, “I mean, you probably know when my next shit’s gonna be...in that fancy computer of yours.” Miles glanced at the nurse’s name tag. He had never noticed before that the nurses wore them, too. *Cody*, it read. The name tag didn’t show a last name, or even just a last initial like the addicts had on theirs. He was simply “Cody.”

Cody stared at Miles; this wasn’t anything new or revelatory. The nurses were trained to wait it out until the addicts wound down their assorted tirades. Stopping them mid-stream served no purpose unless it involved other people, or, of course, violence. And Cody had a special button on his phone just for that. It made him feel like the President of the United States, or so he had joked to Miles on more than one occasion, as if he had forgotten the other times.

The addicts were always telling their sob backstories to Cody, or any nurse that would listen—Miles had witnessed as much, and naturally shared his own—so they had probably heard everything there was to hear. Whether an addict found out that they were adopted (the story Miles told), or that their partner had cheated on them (a story Miles overheard once), causing them to use drugs and alcohol to numb the confusion of it; or, worse, had been involved in a car accident while they were under the influence—maybe with the latter as a trigger, or something along those lines—and injured or killed someone innocent, more than likely someone the addict knew or even cared about. Almost everyone there had an irreconcilable past that they had to deal with, including most of the staff; and now, the current addicts—the ones whose bodies were betraying them due to withdrawal and, most likely, sleep deprivation—were without an artificial substance to help them through it (other than cigarettes, of course, as addiction seemed to be a lot worse than cancer—at least while in rehab). Most of the nurses felt for the addicts, especially Cody—himself a former addict—but they could never play favorites. All the kids had to be treated equally, or at least subject to a pretense of equal treatment.

In this circumstance, however, Cody played along. He stared, and kept staring, at the computer screen, which was like the Ark of the Covenant at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. If Miles or Cody looked at it directly for too long, their faces would melt off as surely as the ill-fated Nazis.

“It says here your next shit is going to be in forty-five minutes,” Cody said flatly. Then he turned back to Miles and flashed that wicked smile of his. “So, now you know.”

“Ha ha,” Miles said, defeated, as he stood up finally from the chair that barely fit his ass. Not that Miles was necessarily a big person—he was just under 5’9” and 160 pounds—but the chair seemed too small for anyone above the age of nine. Every chair in the nurses’ station, save for the ones the

two nurses sat on, were too small for almost all the rehabbers, even the teenagers like Miles—despite his baby face, which made him look young enough to possibly fit. It was a sore point for Miles, since throughout Junior High and High School, “Baby Face” had been his nickname. His face was unconvincing in its plea that it would ever grow a beard; as a consequence, Miles didn’t have to shave very often. To counter it, he grew his hair long, which was not appreciated by his most recent foster parents, the Kellys. Though he hadn’t been born yet when the movie version of *Interview with the Vampire* came out, Miles was trying to emulate Brad Pitt’s tortured eternal soul, Louis—minus the colored contacts, but with the attempted sideburns. Just as Miles was finally leaving the nurse’s station, Cody said, “You know, if you tell someone to go to hell correctly, they will have no choice but to go.”

Miles stopped. Cody flashed him a much friendlier smile—an unmistakable invite to Armageddon. Then, because it seemed like the only response, especially in light of the grin, he said evenly: “Go to hell.”

Cody laughed despite it being the obvious punchline he had more than set up. Then he boomed to the waiting line outside: “Next!”