

BEFORE THE BOY - SAMPLE CHAPTER

Prologue - Present Day

Billie Nickerson has three minutes to live. It won't be fast and it won't be painless to die. She knew this day would come, but not that it would be today or this way.

She has lived 100 lifetimes that she cannot remember and will live 100 more before she has paid her Karmic debts. But in moments, this life - her most pivotal incarnation, the one that makes every past life immaterial and every future life a stepping stone to eternity- will end.

Billie's daughter, Sally, who brings a sunshiny light into every room just by entering, sleeps peacefully in the back seat. Just a few days into her teen years now, she will be crippled, her legs mangled, an unintended consequence.

Sally's older brother, David, a music prodigy despite his deafness who is destined for a greatness that he cannot imagine at this moment, sits by her side, daydreaming about how he will execute a new music piece Billie has taught him. His life will be spared but he will hate his mother forever for dying.

Billie has just a few seconds left now to be with her cherished husband, Isaac, who deftly steers the car down the treacherous winding road home.

"Please buckle your seat belt, Billie," Isaac admonishes. "I don't know what I'll encounter in this fog."

"I will, Isaac. I just have to adjust it. It's too tight and I can't get it to expand far enough for comfort."

"Can't it wait until we stop? Just put the damn thing back in the buckle for now. It's not like you to be careless."

"It's not like you to be so adamant about driving in this fog for a bunch of papers." It's the last time Billie will chastise Isaac for being so wed to his job.

"They're not just papers. They're important blueprints for the ship design that could set us on the road to financial independence."

Isaac turns to look at Billie, not knowing it's the last time he will see her face unscarred, and fails to see the headlights in his rearview mirror. He slows down to find the freeway exit, but misses the turn.

The impact from behind is instant and powerful. The semi plows into the Nickerson car with such force it becomes an uncontrollable projectile. Isaac's air bag deploys and he is momentarily blinded then passes out from the shock of the crash. Billie is thrust forward almost through the windshield but is forced down between the dashboard and the front seat. The passenger side airbag fails to deploy, a convenient stroke of fate.

When Billie's pulmonary vein tears she feels the blood gushing through her chest with such force a huge wave of nausea overtakes her. In a suffocating blow her heart is thrust from left to right, rupturing blood vessels and threatening to dissect her aorta.

In an instinctive move, David reaches for his sister but is restrained by the lap and shoulder harness. He will feel the pain from a fractured sternum and neck lacerations later. But for now he is ensconced in a confused world of silence, seeing and feeling the carnage around him but unable to hear the blast of the semi's horn, the screeching of tires on the highway, the steel upon steel as the vehicles collide and tear the guardrails out of their foundations. Nor does he hear the sirens of the emergency responders as they arrive on the scene.

The semi hangs precariously over an embankment but the driver is pulled from the cab miraculously alive and alert. The Nickerson SUV has suffered the worst of the crash, and is almost unrecognizable as a car.

"Jesus. The engine is almost cut in two. Cut the damn horn," one paramedic shouts. "I can't hear myself think!"

The other paramedic pulls futilely on the crumpled doors, desperate to assess if there are any survivors. "We need another bus," he yells. "There are four of them."

With blood oozing from her nose and mouth, Billie groans and thrashes her arms around, jerking out the drip the paramedic tries to insert into her arm while she is still trapped in the vehicle. Her utterings are incomprehensible and incoherent.

"What is she saying?"

His partner, trying to calculate how to free her from the wreck, just shakes his head. "I can't understand her. She's in shock. I don't see any visible head injury, just a big gash on her cheek. Blood seeping from her nostrils. Guarantee you there are some badass internal injuries."

"Leave me alone!" Billie implores, willing to die. She knows this is her end and she accepts it as prophecy, as the only way to save her family and to allow David to receive the extraordinary intuitive gifts he was born to inherit.

"I've got to get her to accept some treatment." The paramedic injects drugs to reduce her agitation and places an oxygen mask over her face. "See what you can do for the others."

"Jaws of Life will need to pry them out. Here comes the crew."

Like scissors cutting paper, the sharp blades on the Jaws pop open the twisted back doors. David and Sally are pulled out and they are placed on gurneys. Isaac is removed from the mangled vehicle after being disentangled from the deployed air bag. With sirens blaring, the first ambulance transports the three of them to the hospital trauma unit as the emergency responders work feverishly on getting Billie removed without injuring her further.

Billie's heart stops for the first time as she is taken out of the wreck of the SUV. Immediate cardiac massage is applied and her heart restarted. Sirens blare and lights

flash from the rig as the driver races against time, but Billie's condition deteriorates again. By the time she arrives at the ER, trauma staff are on hand ready for a worst case scenario. Surgeons slice open her chest and work feverishly to repair the tears and ruptures. But the loss of blood is too great and they hold out little hope.

"She's going down!"

Don't fight it Billie. I am here with you. Just let go."

"Stop compressions...check pulse..." There is none.

That's it, dear. Just a few more seconds now and we can walk your path together.

"Charge paddles to 300...clear!" Repeated electric shocks fail to revive Billie and she flatlines. Reluctantly, the doctors accept they can do no more to save her life.

"Want to call it?"

"Time of death 17:40."

God. Am I really dead? I'm floating but my body is lying flat in the hospital bed. Everyone thinks I'm dead, but I'm not. I want to shout that I'm alive. Don't pull that sheet over my face.

"Wait, wait!" The pulse on the monitor is weak but measurable. One doctor checks her eye response while the other checks Billie's respiration.

"No response in the pupils. No brain activity."

"No breath sounds. Yet the monitor shows a pulse."

The doctor places his stethoscope on Billie's chest. "It's erratic and faint. It's not possible. But let's intubate and maybe..."

Don't hesitate, Billie. Your time on this Earth is done.

No. Wait. I'm afraid. I don't want to leave yet.

I know. But remember this is what you wanted. And it's my task to make your transition easy, to take you where you are meant to reside for eternity. Soon you will have no memory of the pain of Earth, your death, or your family's grief.

Isaac sits on an ER gurney just steps away from Billie's treatment room. Suffering only facial contusions and burns on his hands from the deployed air bag, he is devastated and guilt ridden. How could Billie's air bag not deploy? Was there a recall notice? Did I forget to have it checked? Isaac ruminates painfully over every memory leading up to the crash. "I've killer her," he sobs. "I've killed my wife!"

Immobile in her ICU bed, Sally is sedated to keep her spine as still as possible, but will awaken to find she is paralyzed from the waist down. Her spinal injury might not have been as severe had she been sitting upright in the back seat instead of sleeping in a fetal position. The impact threw her forward into the driver's seatback and stretched her seat belt to its failure point. The impact from the semi hitting the rear of the car shoved the seat into Sally's back, sealing her fate.

David refuses pain medication for his amazingly minor injuries, though he is stunned and shocked from the ordeal. Unable to stand without wobbling, he signs frantically to the nurse that he needs a wheel chair to go see his mother. Not knowing

sign language, the nurse is bewildered. David shores up his strength and yells, in his near-perfect speech, "I want to see my mother!"

Rushing into the ER and frantic with worry, Dorothy Nickerson arrives and informs the staff she is Isaac's sister. Older than Isaac by about 15 years she is nonetheless spry and athletic from years of sailing and hiking through exotic archeological sites.

"Where is my family?" she demands. "I want to see them. Please tell me what happened."

After being briefed on everyone's condition, Dorothy insists she be able to accompany David to see his mother. With foreboding she maneuvers his wheel chair to the trauma room. At the sight of Billie's lifeless body on the gurney, violated by invasive tubes and intravenous lines, Dorothy is overtaken with grief. The hopeless rhythm of the ventilator makes her stomach turn and she is glad David cannot hear it.

Through the night and into the next day, Billie hovers between a machine-supported life and an irreversible death that will come when the machine is turned off. Despite the admonitions of the medical staff, that there is no brain activity, no hope of survival, Isaac cannot bear to remove life support.

"Not yet," he refuses. "We're not ready yet."

Vigilant through the interminable hours, David sits by his mother's side and demands that she live, that she not give up, that somehow, miraculously, she can will herself to return. He rises to his feet to move closer to her.

"Mom," he whispers. "I know you're in there. I know you can hear me. Come back to us. Just try harder. I know you can do it. You taught me everything I know - music, sign language - you taught me to never give up no matter what. Please, please. Don't give up now."

"Oh, David, don't."

"No, Aunt Dorothy. I won't stop. Mom can't stop trying. Tell her," he implores.

"It's too late. She's gone, David. She's gone."

The scream of the heart monitor pierces the air but it's the green flat line signifying his mother's death that pierces David's heart. He grabs his mother's hand desperately.

"No! Mom, if you die I'll hate you forever! I'll never forgive you for leaving me!"

"Please, David. You don't mean that," Dorothy sobs. "You can't say goodbye when you're so angry."

Dorothy and an orderly force David back to his wheelchair and remove him from the room as he pounds furiously on the arm of the chair.

You didn't tell me he would hate me! Please bring me back so I can explain!

It's too late, Billie. We can't bring you back. This was the deal. Your life for David's soul, for his gifts to the world.

There must be a way...

No, dear. Come now. There are important things for you to do. You'll see. It was meant to be. You cannot hesitate or there will be consequences for all of you.

Outside, the fog has lifted to reveal twilight, Billie's favorite time of day, when the setting sun tints the sky with red and purple ribbons that melt into an indigo curtain.

When her respirator is turned off, the blackness of unconsciousness dissolves into blue, white and golden light. Billie Nickerson stands on the threshold of a world where there is no pain, no sorrow, no regret, where the burdens of jealousy, pride and judgment are as light as air and lifted away into the ether.

Still, there are memories that float by swiftly like flotsam - early days as a happy child, adolescent insecurity, abandonment, love, loss - her conscious mind clearing the debris that would hold her back on her soul's journey. The annoying drone of a complex earthly existence segues into an echo of bells, soft bells like wind chimes, as she moves through the loosely-bound arms of a galactic cloud.

How peaceful, she thinks. How loving. Is this where I belong?

Unexpectedly, invisible hands pull her back trying to keep her earthbound. Her husband, son and daughter entice and plead with an energy so strong it is almost palpable. But a force much stronger attracts her and she is once again tranquil, bodiless, in a space beyond space. Welcoming souls who will initiate Billie and guide her to the hereafter appear. It seems as if they are all swimming, being carried along by a current they can't control, under the direction of someone or some thing indescribable.

Billie is caught in the flow, but she is compelled to turn back, to look one last time at her family, at their sorrow and anguish, and she vows to return, not realizing it could mean an eternity in limbo.