

Epilogue: The Last Commandment

It had been weeks since Bill had been to the gym. This day in late summer, the club was not too busy, and Bill easily staked a claim to the usual bike in front, where he'd spent many a grueling hour sweating away his laments, and where he'd met Jamie.

A different crowd now exercised there. He did not recognize many people—one or two from jobs of years past, but not the same group that witnessed his descent into insanity. His motives on the bike did not involve fleeing escape from the panic this time. No, he had spent countless hours in that futile refuge, and did not wish to seek purpose there anymore.

An unfamiliar dark-haired attendant casually labored at drying off the equipment next to him. "Hope I don't take too long up here," Bill mumbled to her. She just looked up and smiled at him as they paid her to do, returning to her task.

Bill continued his meticulous biking as she moved to the next piece of equipment, curious as to what happened to the friendlier blond-haired attendant, who always had time to joke with the patrons as they sacrificed their calories to the demand of the aerobic machines. Even the staff at this gym had turned over, it seemed.

Through his increasingly speedier bicycle strokes, Bill peered over at the huge basketball court through the adjacent window, located on the other side of the wall in front of the cycle machines, close to the exercise charts offered to those beautiful patrons of this club. Through the large window that defined the center of this wall, he spotted one element of Jamie's world: the muscled, curly-haired, blond guy who she occasionally talked to. He was leaving the basketball court and talking on his cell phone, frequently looking up at Bill through his conversation.

The forgotten friend walked around the wall and situated himself at the corner of the exercise room, concluding his phone call. His unyielding gaze was locked in Bill's direction.

Bill looked around. There was nobody at any of the stations nearby, so who was this guy looking at? Bill returned his resolute stare and the man looked away, yet still not yielding the watch point so hurriedly claimed.

Was there somebody on the way to visit with Bill, perhaps to express animosity towards the attention that he once gave Jamie? Was Bill about to fall into some territorial dispute? Did Jamie's world blame him for her actions of the past year?

Through his descent into the hellish fires of divorce and his need to talk it through with his good friend at the club, Bill forgot the one thing worse than the flames that he feared: the fury of a woman denied what she wanted. In his attempt to bar her from the pain he was falling into, he had ignored her needs. Perhaps he should pay the price and face whatever antagonizers confronted him. What did she possibly tell them about their intently monitored public conversations?

For what he would be so coldly crucified? he wondered. This was not fair. He never really touched Jamie, except for their friendly handshake the day that they met. While in her company, he always treated her with the utmost respect, never uttering a single rude or suggestive motive. He was not afraid to admit having spent time with her, and felt no remorse towards anything they had done or discussed. How dare anybody possibly find fault with either him or her? Should they not be more appreciative that Bill did not seek out her pleasures instead of persuading her to back away from him?

Perhaps he was to pay the price for having fallen so badly for her back on that sunny day in March when their lives crossed with each other's for the first time. How strong were the desires he felt

for her that day?

Now Bill began to grow angry and started to weigh the possibility that he could lie in wait for whoever were to come for him. It had been years since he had really been in any kind of street fight. He could count the number of them in his lifetime on one hand, and so he would have to find some way to prepare for the encounter.