That's on me. That's on all of us.

Then there is this:

I'm also an alcoholic and a drug addict. I've bought crack cocaine on the streets of Washington, DC, and cooked up my own inside a hotel bungalow in Los Angeles. I've been so desperate for a drink that I couldn't make the one-block walk between a liquor store and my apartment without uncapping the bottle to take a swig. In the last five years alone, my two-decades-long marriage has dissolved, guns have been put in my face, and at one point I dropped clean off the grid, living in $59-a-night Super 8 motels off I-95 while scaring my family even more than myself.

That deep descent came not long after I hugged my brother, Beau, the best friend I've ever had and the person I loved most in the world, as he took his last breath. Beau and I talked virtually every day of our lives. While we argued as adults almost as much as we laughed, we never ended a conversation without one of us saying, "I love you," and the other responding, "I love you, too."

After Beau died, I never felt more alone. I lost hope.

I've since pulled out of that dark, bleak hole. It's an outcome that was unthinkable in early 2019. My recovery never could have happened without the unconditional love of my father and the everlasting love of my brother, which has carried on after his death.

The love between me and my father and Beau—the most profound love I've ever known—is at the heart of this memoir. It's a love that allowed me to continue these last five years in the midst of both

CHAPTER SEVEN

CRACKED

About four months after I got back from Esalen, I dove into the kind of next-level bingeing few addicts see coming.

I'd stayed sober since shortly after that drunken barricade in my apartment. I was a steadfast outpatient at a rehab clinic in Washington, where the staff tested me regularly for alcohol and drugs. I was getting my health back, ate well, and attended a yoga class every day, all while rejoining the real world by consulting for five or six major clients.

Then, over Memorial Day weekend 2016, I flew to Monte Carlo to attend a meeting of the Burisma board. I felt strong enough by then to bring along my oldest daughter, Naomi, presenting the trip to her as a gift for graduating earlier that month from Penn.

The weekend quickly turned contentious—then disastrous. The board meeting itself was unremarkable and mostly pro forma. However, I soon stepped on a stage to discuss global economics with a

The discussion quickly turned combative, then bordered on ugly. I spotted Naomi squirming in the audience.

I got through it but reached for a couple of drinks afterward. That night, while Naomi went off with Zlochevsky's daughter, I wandered into the hotel nightclub and drank some more. Monte Carlo provides a temptation for any taste. When I went to the restroom, someone offered me cocaine.

I took it.

I regretted the slip immediately. When we returned to the States, I went straight to the clinic and confessed to my counselors what I'd done. I even discussed it at that day's group session. I saw my relapse as a troubling but hardly irreversible setback. I was still committed to recovery.

Then a counselor told me he had to inform Kathleen of what had happened—that was the deal cut when I started there. He also said I needed to take a drug test, even though I'd just admitted what I'd done. Kathleen and I had been separated for close to a year and our divorce was imminent. The drug test was not covered by the privacy guidelines in HIPAA and could be used in court against me. I felt ambushed. I refused to take the drug test while continuing to own up to what I'd done. I didn't want it on paper. I just wanted to get better.

The debate grew heated. A counselor at another clinic had already told my daughters months earlier that if they spoke with me they'd be complicit in my death—in my mind, an infuriating breach. So I was working with a short fuse anyway. That fuse was then lit by the clinic's stubborn insistence on a drug test to prove something I'd openly conceded.

After that first bell ringer, I smoked it every day for the next two weeks. It was, indeed, my new best friend; booze was now like an old high school buddy I still got together with but saw less of as time went on. I spent a couple of thousand dollars on crack in those first two weeks, with Rhea serving as my conduit. Before I knew it, I was all in. In the big, bad world of functional substance abuse, as practiced in polite society, I'd crossed what for many is an unfathomable line. I knew it as I crossed it. I'd lift a crack pipe to my mouth, flick the lighter with my thumb, and before inhaling think, *What the fuck!*

But my new best friend turned more and more demanding. Addiction's most self-defeating algorithm: if you're numbing yourself against acute feelings of emptiness or trauma or self-loathing, those feelings will double in intensity as each high tails off.

The antidote is simple: more. Yet the more of the drug you use, the less effective it becomes—the less bang that you and your self-worth get for your buck. There's an antidote for that, too: *lots* more. The power of not feeling, if only for increasingly fleeting seconds, remains the only power you have.

Crazy as it sounds, a substance abuser often feels like a smarter version of a non-abuser. I wasn't a sloppy or mean drunk; I wasn't an addled or dangerous crackhead. Whether it's genetic or physiological, I have the capacity and tenacity to use to excess, and a single-minded unwillingness to quit. That makes addiction easy rather than hard. I had figured out how not to feel bad while still going on about my business. I couldn't comprehend how people who weren't addicts didn't understand how great crack cocaine is. I mean, if you

addiction is so complex, so individual, and dependent on so many factors that combating it can often make an addict feel like a rat in a maze, continuously searching for solutions while bumping into barriers that keep him or her from staying clean.

It's a maze in which too many alcoholics and addicts find themselves trapped. Relapse rates for rehabilitation centers hover between 60 and 80 percent, a distressing volume of failure for a $40 billion industry into which abusers and their families pour so much time, money, and emotional currency.

The truth is, by my midforties, I had learned every lesson I needed to learn. Now I was learning how to ignore them. There were more pertinent matters for me to master: the most efficient ways to buy and smoke crack; how best to hide my use.

Those were the sorts of things I became hyperfocused on—not my failures at attempting to get clean but my successes in buying and using without getting caught or hurt or killed during some random drug-buy mix-up. Walking into a park in a high-crime neighborhood to buy crack at 4 a.m. was no different than playing Russian roulette with two shells in the chamber. In some places, it was like playing with five shells—and still, I was willing to spin the chamber again and again.

So off I went to see Puma St. Angel.

I arrived at Dulles International Airport at 7 a.m., three hours before my flight's scheduled departure, a nod to the ridiculous amounts of time it now took me to accomplish even the most mundane tasks. Before getting out of my car at the airport garage, however, I took a hit off a pipe to hold me over. Two hours later, I was

thing but causing more pain by sticking around. What would be so bad about us being together?

Love . . .

I told family back in Delaware I was working on my sobriety—whatever the hell that meant at that point. Here's what it meant: nothing. I'd gotten good at telling stories like that.

It worked for a while. My girls would call; I'd tell them how much I missed them, that I'd see them soon, then hang up and cry for an hour. I'd do the same with Natalie and little Hunter. I'd end those calls feeling more alone and despondent and addicted than ever, with nowhere to turn and so turning away from everything, filling with self-pity—the addict's go-to reflex—and believing that they'd all be better off without me. How very fucking convenient.

Dad called, too, of course. I'd tell him everything was fine, all was well. But after a while, he wasn't buying it. My responses grew increasingly terse and intermittent. When I finally quit answering his calls altogether, along with my daughters', which only happened in the most extreme circumstances, he sent in the cavalry: my uncle Jim.

Uncle Jimmy is my best friend in the world and Dad knew that if his younger brother asked me to do something, I'd do it. Uncle Jim has his own superpower: he gets things done. So he jumped on a plane to Los Angeles, pulled me out of a room in the Hollywood Roosevelt, and said, "I found a place. Let's go."

I went. He checked me into a rehab center in Brentwood, where I stayed clean for about two weeks. I then lived in a rental off Nichols Canyon, in the Hills, with a sober coach. It was great—the beauty, the peace, the support—right up until the moment I relapsed.

My lesson after a spring and summer of nonstop debauchery: no lesson at all.

Just that it was awful.

Unimaginably awful.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SAVED

By the time my plane touched down in Los Angeles in March 2019, I had no plan beyond the moment-to-moment demands of the crack pipe.

I was committed to one thing: vanishing for good. That was my lone, next-level goal. No matter how low I'd been before, a voice deep inside had always fought to pull me out of my nosedive. It's why I'd allowed my uncle Jimmy to haul me from a West Hollywood hotel room months earlier and escort me to a rehab center. That turned out to be an unsuccessful three-week stab at sobriety, but it still left me with a glimmer of hope and striving to climb out of my ditch. It's why I sought out something as fraught and audacious as ketamine therapy when I drove up to cold, gray Massachusetts that winter, as botched and pathetic as the attempt turned out to be.

I would take one step forward and ten steps back—but I was still taking steps. I didn't want to drown in addiction's quicksand. I did not want those attempts to fail.

I just couldn't make them work.

I longed for a connection with someone outside of addiction's airless bubble—someone with whom I had no past, no baggage, and to whom I owed neither explanations nor apologies. I wanted to have conversations with someone who wasn't a dealer or gangbanger or bouncer or stripper. Three years earlier, even as I'd craved those hotel mini-bottles of vodka in Amman, I could still sit across from the king of Jordan and discuss the plight of Syrian refugees, Middle East dynamics, and the existential obligations of being a great man's son. I thought then that maybe that was my addiction's low point—I thought that was the sound of me hitting bottom.

Back then, I still hoped to paint again, still hoped my journal entries could someday turn into a book, still dreamed of hugging my daughters tight every day. If I could find some new treatment, some new approach, some new . . . *lifeline*, I thought I could still claw my way back out.

During the nearly four years of active addiction that preceded this trip to California, which included a half dozen rehab attempts, that's what I told myself after each failure. As bad as it got, I believed what Beau had believed: good or bad, it was all part of the process.

Stepping off the plane this time at LAX, however, it was clear that all of the options I once clung to were now pipe dreams. I consciously stopped even pretending I would get better. I dove headfirst into the void.

It's hard to describe just how paralyzed and hopeless you can become in your addiction, how you can reach depths you never thought possible, and then drop even further—in this case, uncom-

prehendingly further. This period felt more dangerous, more fatally alluring, than any time before. I surrendered completely to my grimmest impulses. I was like someone picking out a firearm in a pawn shop, fully aware I was choosing a certain kind of death.

Disappearing was the only thing that gave me solace. It meant an end to pain. It meant I didn't need to think about how much I was disappointing my brother, even though I knew Beau would never think of it that way. I quit writing him letters, feeling as if I didn't have anything authentic to communicate to him anymore. Disappearing meant freedom from feeling. Thinking that you have something to live for obligates you to muster the courage and energy to fight.

I didn't want to fight.

I finally silenced the dialogue that I'd kept up inside my head about getting clean and rebuilding my life. It was ridiculously easy: I just drowned it out with more and more drugs. Now I never thought, as I always had at some point in the midst of my previous binges, *I'm just going to do this until . . .* I no longer said *until.* I no longer finished the sentence. I gave up on everything. I stopped trying to fool others into thinking I was okay. I stopped trying to fool myself.

I was done with finding my way back into the world I had known my whole life. I was done trying to figure out how to return to a law firm. Done with the world of politics, of figuring out how to go out on the campaign trail with Dad, if it came to that, as I would have in any other election year. Done coming up with excuses for why I lived where I was living and why I did what I was doing.