

CHAPTER ONE  
OVERDOSE

*July 4, 2000*

The lovers finished at the same time; neither disappointing the other. Their bodies, wet with perspiration, momentarily stuck together as each deeply sighed with satisfaction. Robyn rolled off him, kissed him on his cheek, and quickly jumped from the bed. She picked up her cell phone and took four provocative pictures of herself.

She walked naked past him, forgetting to turn off the video camera, and then disappeared into the master bathroom. Charlie noted in the last few hours she'd disappeared in there several times.

Charlie, exhausted, tried to gather his thoughts to resume the argument. He refused to give up on her. He loved her and hoped she could straighten out and change her destructive ways.

He'd arrived Friday from New York and went straight from the Nashville airport to Hewes City, twenty-five miles away. He'd come at the request of Robyn's sister, Valerie, to convince her she needed to go into rehab. He'd investigated the alternatives and settled on Cumberland Heights, a world-renowned treatment facility.

They argued for hours without any resolution, so he changed tactics and drank tequila straight up with a saltshaker and limes.

He felt ashamed; however, he thoroughly enjoyed the sex marathon. He now knew it was a huge mistake to buy into her addiction.

She needed to slow down. It was like she was spinning out of control, and as that thought crossed his mind, she flew out of the bathroom. Charlie looked into her intense green eyes dilated like two large black olives surrounded by a green rim. She was high on something. Her shoulder-length auburn hair was up, revealing her exquisite neck and shoulders. He loved to kiss her neck; she responded favorably every time. She danced around showing off her sculptured body and taking photos of herself.

Charlie watched as she grabbed a pill bottle from her nightstand and downed the pill without water. He noticed for the first time a small amount of white powder and a syringe on the nightstand. He blinked and tried to make them go away. They didn't.

She grabbed a large vibrating sex toy, posed, and took several more pictures. Charlie hoped the toy would satisfy her. His respite was broken when she spoke in rapid sentences: "Let's go again! Let's go again!"

In a weak protest Charlie reminded her, "I thought you had a splitting headache. Don't you think we should take it easy? We just finished ten minutes ago. I really don't want to take another Viagra. I've already taken the maximum dose."

"I'm better," she said. "My headache just disappeared. Let's go again. Take the damn pill."

Once in the bed she handed him the cell phone and demanded that he take photos of her clean-shaven pubic area. As he snapped, Charlie saw that she was bleeding in the femoral region. He yelled in an authoritative tone, "You're bleeding like a stuck pig. Get some gauze and put pressure on it."

He couldn't believe she was self-injecting in her groin. She jumped

out of frame, went into the master bathroom, and then returned to the bed and started dabbing between her legs with a gauze pad.

Charlie yelled, “No, put pressure on it!”

She did, and the bleeding stopped

Charlie got out of bed and looked out the window at the courthouse square. The town had constructed a makeshift bandstand. Facing the audience was the mayor at a podium with an American flag draped across it. There was a Norman Rockwellian feel to the scene.

Just then fireworks exploded in the sky, lighting the courthouse dome with the various colors pressed against the blackened sky. Charlie forgot his troubles and relished the beauty of the moment.

Robyn grabbed him around the waist and brought him back to reality. She pulled him down onto the bed and planted a wet kiss a few inches below his belly button. She moved her lips the length of his body until they were nose to nose. She straddled him and began to rock back and forth. She was quick, less than ten minutes. At the moment she climaxed she stiffened and fell backward off the bed.

Charlie rushed to her side.

“Are you all right?”

She struggled to speak, “My chest feels real tight, like a hippo is sitting on it.”

He checked her pulse, which was racing. The color had drained from her face, and she was short of breath. He knew she was in distress. He started to call 911, over her protests.

“I need an ambulance at 512 4th Avenue immediately. I’ve got a twenty-seven-year-old female in cardiac arrest.”

She strained to crawl toward her nightstand, mumbling something about hiding her drugs. The effort was too much for her, and she collapsed facedown on the carpet.

He dropped the phone when her body hit the floor. He rolled her over, but she had little reaction. He checked her airway; it was clear. He put his second and third fingers on her carotid artery, looked at his watch, and counted to himself. Her pulse was racing, and her breathing was shallow, but evident.

She whispered, "Keep them out of my bathroom."

He looked around the room. Dirty dishes were everywhere; they'd been eating takeout and having sex since he'd arrived on Friday. He thought about the bathroom. The master bathroom was Robyn's drug haven. He'd intentionally used the spare bathroom, content to be blissfully ignorant. He knew he wouldn't have time to sanitize the entire scene before the ambulance arrived.

He glanced over at Robyn's nightstand; there were a pill bottle, syringe, mortar, and white powder strewn across it. Quickly using his cupped hand, he pushed the white powder into the nightstand drawer, and using a Kleenex, he wiped down the nightstand. He picked up the bottle, mortar, and syringe with the tissue and deposited them in the drawer carefully without leaving his fingerprints.

Charlie had more immediate problems, though. He needed to put on some clothes. He went to the other side of the bed and picked up his pants and shirt that were draped over a chair. He continued to watch Robyn as he moved around the room. Not bothering with underwear, he pulled on his pants.

He glanced at his watch; it was ten fifteen. He started unevenly buttoning his shirt, looked over, and saw that Robyn had stopped breathing. He rushed to her side, and he performed CPR. He got her breathing again and sighed with relief.

Another two minutes passed. Then loud knocks jarred Charlie away from his focus on Robyn.

He leaped from the bedroom floor toward the front door and opened it. Two paramedics burst in: one very old, and the other very young. The younger one carried a collapsible gurney, and the other held a duffle bag of equipment marked *Hewes City Fire Dept.*

The older EMT took charge and barked at Charlie, “You gave us the wrong damn address. This is 521, not 512.”

Charlie defensively responded, “Your dispatcher transposed the numbers. I know where we are.”

The experienced paramedic knew better than to engage a distraught person and dropped the argument. He turned his attention to his patient. He ripped open the Velcro bag, and the two professionals went to work.

Still focusing on Robyn, the senior one began peppering Charlie with questions: “What’s she on, sir? I can smell alcohol. What else? How long has she been in distress?”

Charlie knew the EMT needed answers fast. He paused, gathered his thoughts, and in a commanding tone began answering the questions: “It’s Doctor, not sir! Since Friday night the patient has consumed at least two liters of vodka, smoked several joints in front of me, over my strong objection, and disappeared several times into the bathroom. Robyn’s an addict. I don’t know what else she may have taken. She’s also taking three prescription medications.”

Charlie went to the nightstand on his side of the bed, and before he retrieved three bottles, without notice, he grabbed a Kleenex, so he could hand them over without leaving his prints. He left one bottle on the nightstand. “I don’t know which of these she’s taken, but she regularly takes hydrocodone, Xanax, and Prozac. I don’t know from whom she got these prescriptions. It wasn’t through me.”

He strongly suspected that the drugs and the needles were in

the bathroom somewhere. He absolutely knew what was in the nightstand drawer but remained silent. His silence was a lie. Charlie weighed the option of coming clean with the truth but forced himself to remain silent, justifying his silence by Robyn's plea.

The senior paramedic with gloved hands put the three vials into a plastic bag.

"What's that bottle?" He pointed to Charlie's nightstand.

"It's mine." Charlie picked up the bottle and handed it to the EMT.

He examined the label and asked, "Viagra, isn't that the new drug that's supposed to enhance sexual performance?"

"Yep, and it works." Charlie glanced over at Robyn.

He handed the bottle back to Charlie and returned to his patient. Charlie stuffed it in his front pants pocket.

The younger EMT established a line, and they lifted the naked Robyn onto the gurney. The white-haired paramedic resumed his questioning. Charlie thought the man did not quite believe everything he said. He didn't look in either nightstand; if he had, he would have hit pay dirt.

"Can I look in the bathroom so I can inventory what other drugs she may have taken?" asked the EMT.

Charlie got scared for himself and for Robyn. He looked hard at the paramedic and again in an authoritative tone told him, "There are dozens of pill bottles in the bathroom. She could have taken anything. You need to focus on your patient. She's in real distress."

"Doctor, what is your relationship to the patient?"

Charlie pondered the question a few moments. "She's my fiancée. I came down from New York for the long holiday weekend to convince her that she needed to go into rehab. We broke up because of her drug use."

“What was the patient doing immediately before cardiac arrest?”

Charlie knew the senior paramedic already had the answer to his question. There was no point in lying. She was stark naked. What else could they have been doing?

“Sex! She climaxed and then went into cardiac arrest! Rather than ask me a bunch of irrelevant questions, let’s get her to the hospital. I’m riding in the ambulance. Move it!”

Charlie grabbed his shoes and followed the gurney out the door. He locked up with his key. At the elevator, the group was met by two Hewes City police officers. Officer Bobby Pew, a former University of Tennessee running back, in a deep southern drawl addressed the older paramedic whose nameplate read *Mackey*, “What’ve you got, Mac?”

“Drug overdose. He’s the boyfriend, and he’s a doctor.”

Officer Pew turned to Charlie. “What’s she on, Doctor? Is it prescription or street drugs?”

Charlie wished he were somewhere else, anywhere else. He tried to muster the courage to respond. He could tell that the black officer was listening carefully and about to weigh the truthfulness of his answer.

“She’s an addict. I know she’s been drinking and smoked some weed, but I don’t know what else. She has done a lot of drugs the last few years. I can’t say for sure what she’s on right now.”

“Do we have your permission to search the apartment? Maybe we can find a pill bottle or evidence of what drug she’s taken,” Officer Pew asked.

Frightened now, Charlie strained to understand the last question in part because he was nervous but also because of Pew’s heavy accent. Charlie slowly repeated the question before he responded. The last thing he needed was legal problems. He’d had his fair share of them over the last few years, and he wanted no part of this.

He replied, "Absolutely not! The apartment's already locked up. We've got to get to the hospital. I'm riding in the ambulance. Let's go!"

Charlie surprised himself. He was proud of his commanding tone.

The officer backed down and stated he'd follow the ambulance to the hospital. What he didn't say and Charlie didn't know was that he directed Officer Dawson to call the station and report the overdose. Dawson was to stay behind to meet backup to secure the premises as a possible crime scene.

After the patient was loaded, Mackey jumped behind the wheel, looked at his watch, and called dispatch, "This is unit 12. It's ten twenty-nine, and we're leaving 4th for the hospital."

Charlie reflected, *I failed to get her into rehab, but I saved her life just now. Robyn's sister won't see it that way, though. She'll unfairly blame me. The last thing I want to do is face her, but damnit, I will.*