

PROLOGUE

Present Day

I can't look up without seeing it.

But it's not there by chance. It's precisely centered on the wall opposite my desk. Blown-up in black and white. I cannot escape it. Framed in imported Japanese wood more expensive than the laptop I use to write my story. It's just one of the thousands of pictures I've taken in the last decade. Maybe hundreds of thousands.

But only that one picture hangs on the wall facing my desk.

A small, faceless crowd at a distance. A figure on a nearby sidewalk dressed in a white suit. A plain wooden casket with only a few flowers. Two men playing saxophone, one more on trumpet, one on trombone. One woman singing at the front of the marching caravan, one more twirling a parasol, and two more simply following along.

In a life tattooed by mistakes and heartache, both inflicted and received, the photo symbolizes my most treasured accomplishment and the anguish it caused me.

Acknowledgments

And it means more to me than the Pulitzer it won.



Charles Millward was born a brilliant musician.

Not exactly a brilliant *player* of music, but a remarkable musician all the same. He once told Mr. Dalton's 5th grade class on Parents' Day that if you listed America's top ten thousand saxophone players he wouldn't make the list.

"Now kids, if the list *only* includes men who play the sax, and *only* men born in January, and *only* those with four smelly toes on their left foot because the fifth never popped out while I was cooking in Luke's grandma's belly, then I *might* make the list . . ."

The kids laughed.

"But," Dad added, "*only* if you made it the top ten thousand *and one*."

The kids laughed even harder, and I grinned in the big cheesy way that only a 5th grader totally enamored with his father can.

Then came Dad's punch line. "And I'm the *and one*."

No, Dad's fat, clumsy fingers didn't love the sax as much as his heart ever did. In college he was self-taught on guitar and could find his way around almost any instrument. And though he became quite good on the piano, enough so he could survive on tips at local bars, I think his soul loved playing the sax most.

He heard music when others didn't. We learned through the

years that Dad even thought in musical notes. Mom said he spoke that way too, in meter, with an ebb and flow, pausing, building strength, a crescendo, a long finish. A deep breath.

I always wondered if he read music the way I looked at photos, or like Pavarotti sang, Michelangelo sculpted, or Orson Welles made movies. Even as a child I remember noticing Dad's eyes dance from note to note as he played the songs he had scribbled in a ragged leather journal held together by two fat rubber bands.

Sometimes at night he'd bring in his journal and his guitar and play me a song at the foot of my bed. The sax was his most prized possession, though his Gibson acoustic wasn't far behind. I didn't care that his voice would often crack and fall. The melodies sold the songs.

"Every note tells a song's story," Dad liked to say. "And every song, no matter how short, has a second verse. You just have to find it."

It took me a long time to learn what Dad meant. I don't think Mom ever did.

Still, I do think she loved my father.

Except when she was high.



The doctor first prescribed sleeping pills for my mother in June of 1990.

They worked.

Mother slept through the rising temperatures of Fort Worth, Texas, through our cul-de-sac's Fourth of July celebration, and into the dog days of August.

The country prepared for war in Iraq.

Dad watched.

Mom slept.

And Dad never left her side. Not when his job at one of the country's top architectural firms was threatened. Not when the sleeping pills didn't satisfy her anymore and he discovered Vicodin in an Advil bottle on her nightstand. Not even when she begged him to take me far away and let her fade from this life.

"I won't," he said.

My father clung to his complicated, braided rope of faith. He said one day Mother's soul would surface again and she'd return to the elementary school and the students she once loved. The girls made her construction-paper cards with white tissue-paper flowers glued to the front. The boys made cards, too, adorned with blue Dallas Cowboy stars and football helmets.

Everyone missed Mrs. Millward.

But no one ached for her like Dad.

I've seen every Sunday night, inspirational made-for-TV movie where towering heroes in death's grasp never give up their positive attitudes. They somehow muster the strength to encourage others to love more, to forgive, to live their lives better. Jack Lemmon

died that way in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, so did Ronald Reagan playing Gipp in *Knute Rockne: All American*.

Optimism. Spirit. Readiness for whatever hides just beyond the light.

I wish that had been Mom. Just one year after Grandma's accident, Mom took every pill she could find, including some Dad had locked in his den, and took a nap she hoped would be her last.

Dad found her dead in their bed.

Her head was under her pillow, hiding from the world even at the very end.

She left the world bitter and cursing. She cursed the pharmaceutical companies for making the drugs that stole her will. She cursed the doctors she'd begged to prescribe them. She cursed God for making her dependent on pills. She even cursed Dad for not leaving and making a better life for the two of us.

Mom died hating her husband and his premonitions, hating the rain, Mexicans, the sun, her therapist, mornings, Sundays, Barbara Walters, and sometimes me.

But mostly I think she just hated God.

Four days later, at her funeral, a dozen mourners passed by her casket and whispered good-byes and condolences. They thought she looked at peace. So warm and restful.

I thought she looked every bit as cold as she had the last year of her life.

I'll never forget Dad's unfinished eulogy. His voice cracked as

he began reading the lyrics to a song he'd written for Mom during their courtship. He made eye contact with me and began to weep. He covered his eyes with one hand and pounded the other on the pulpit so hard it tipped to the right and almost toppled. His word-for-word remarks, scribbled on white 5x7 cards, scattered on the floor.

Dad's best friend, Kaiser, a man he'd worked with side-by-side at their firm, gathered up the cards, put them back in order, and finished the eulogy.

Kaiser read about Mom and Dad's first meeting at a science fair in high school, about Dad's premonitions, their joy at my birth, the hole in his heart that wouldn't be healed until he saw her again in the house he'd build for them in heaven.

When Kaiser finished, he set the cards aside and added some impromptu words of his own. He thanked my father for his years of friendship and pledged to stand by him the way Dad had stood by Kaiser during some challenging times of his own.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Charles Millward has been there for all of us. He was there for me when I almost lost my job a few years back. He defended my honor when others at work wouldn't. There's no other way to say it, he saved my bacon." Kaiser pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose hard three times, getting louder with each honk.

Someone's little boy in the back row giggled before his mother's hand clamped across his mouth.

“You all know it’s true,” Kaiser continued. “Charlie would walk to the end of the longest road in Texas to help anyone here. He was there for his wife when life got so hard none of us could imagine it. It wasn’t easy for Charles to watch his dream girl, his one true love, struggle through this last year. But he was there no matter what.” Kaiser looked at Dad and seemed to wait until the rest of us were looking at him, too. “Now it’s our turn to be there for him.”

Dad slumped into the chair next to me on the front row and I draped my arm awkwardly around him. His body shook.

I cried, too, but mostly for Dad.

The next decade-and-a-half passed by like a Texas thunderstorm. Lightening quick. Not enough rain.



Today is like any other in our microscopic Manhattan studio apartment. I’m alone. Around me and within easy reach are my four angels: my 35-millimeter old-school camera (a Canon EOS 1v), a ridiculously expensive digital (a Canon 1DS Mark III), my baby (a MacBook Pro), and my sweet Jesse (a saxophone).

Meanwhile, my angel is almost certainly sitting at her City Hall desk arguing with her cubical-mate about Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens or last year’s World Series. In between rounds they will cooperate long enough to write grants and chase music edu-

cation funding for the city's more than six hundred elementary schools. She will twist arms, use more salt than sugar, offer to pick up a check personally at their home if necessary, insist on emailing an MP3 file of a recent concert at the Brooklyn Music School.

She's not trained in this field, but she's become an expert anyway. And she'll win. She always wins.

Tonight at home she'll playfully gloat and tease me about my desk. It's an organized mess. Invoices, photos, proof sheets, and catalogues sit in staggered stacks near the back edge in a line. They hang an inch off the edge, daring my feet to kick them to the floor like heavy broken parachutes for the second time this afternoon.

I'll remind her of my favorite NYU professor's theory: Desks were made for propping up feet. Most of Larry's lectures were given from his squeaky chair at the front of the mini-auditorium, and his feet, shoeless but always hidden in navy blue dress socks, rested on the front edge of his desk as he lounged backward.

Larry is a good man. It's no stretch to say I learned everything I know about the eternally intimate relationship between life and the lens from that man. That was his phrase, "eternally intimate."

"Luke Millward owes his career to Larry Gorton." At least that's what my colleagues say when they see my work in *National Geographic*, *Time*, or on the front page of a top-50 newspaper. They're right.

After all, Larry's the one who talked me into going to New Orleans.

CHAPTER

1

Monday, August 29, 2005

New Orleans was underwater. The storm had come; the one the Gulf had always feared. Hurricane Katrina brushed Florida as a Category 1, killing eleven and leaving a million in the dark. Then it strengthened over the ocean and made landfall twice more, unleashing its fury on the Gulf Coast like a woman scorned. No mercy. Thousands fled before impact; thousands more stayed.

The footage was numbing.

Fats Domino was reported missing. So, too, were countless other musicians who had built the city but whose names we wouldn't know.

The French Quarter was mostly spared the flooding, but blocks away the water had baptized homes, businesses, nightclubs, and the homeless.

Fox News' Shepard Smith was standing on Canal Street. He tossed the segment to an unrecognizable reporter three miles away

who was on a small fishing boat in the Lower Ninth Ward. The reporter gestured to a body twenty feet away—face down, arms and legs spread out, like an upside down snow angel. “It’s hard to imagine what these people endured in their final moments. Impossible. Back to you, Shep.”

Cameras captured water gushing over one levee while a helicopter dropped giant sandbags on a gaping hole in another.

A dozen residents stood on the roof of a fourplex apartment building. They’d made a cross with paper towels. A voice described what we so clearly saw for ourselves and asked viewers to imagine what it must feel like to sit so helpless on an island.

A mother nursed her baby under the privacy of a brown bath towel, and we wondered how long her milk would last without food or clean water.

Every channel had the same images. They came from slightly different views and were painted with their own set of dramatic adjectives. But the images were the same.

A man named Bernard was wading to the Superdome.

Bernard’s wife, Donna, was missing. Seventy-one years old. She had gone to check on their daughter and her two grandbabies a few blocks away. He hadn’t seen her since the levees broke. She needed her heart medication and would die without it.

“Anyone watching, anyone, please, anyone watching, please watch out for my Donna. And pray, please, that she’s waiting for me on dry ground.”

I didn't remember praying since 2002 when turbulence tossed my plane around before landing in Salt Lake City for the Winter Games. I closed my eyes and began to whisper.

My cell phone rang.

PANGLE REALTY

Jordan Knapp and I had been dating for five months, a record for me. She'd become the best friend—who just happened to be a girl—that I'd ever had.

She was confident, but self-aware and never condescending. Beautiful and graceful in a crowded room without being distracting. Average height. Natural blonde hair that seemed to grow an inch every time I saw her. Real. Pleasantly imperfect hourglass build. Reliable. A problem solver. A Realtor. One of the most talented guitar players I'd ever known. A textbook self-starter. Punctual.

Always punctual.

“Hey, Baby.”

“Hey, Jordan.”

“Just got a contract on the place in midtown. The condo.”

“Toldja you would.” I flipped back to Fox from CNN.

“Yes, you did. Let's celebrate over Italian food tonight?”

“Sure.”

“I'll be at your place at seven. Cab to Little Italy?”

“Seven.”

“Hey, Baby, you OK?”

“Of course.”

“Luuukey.”

“Jooordy.” Punctual *and* perceptive.

“What’s up, Luke? What’s going on?”

“We’ll talk tonight,” I said, watching the flickering images and listening to a reporter describe why some doors already had white X’s and others didn’t. *Dead bodies.*

“Good. See you at seven.”

We hung up the way we always did, without the obligatory conventions of good-bye or love or longing. I did love her, or at least being around her. Being in her universe.

Maybe I just loved knowing that this was the most useful relationship I’d ever had. Where she saw a future together, I saw the next movie, ball game, dinner date, or daytrip to the country. So while the *spark* wasn’t there yet, the *like* sure was.



Jordan and I met at NYU. She’d been a law student; I was studying photojournalism.

We met at a birthday party for someone neither of us knew and we clicked as friends. She was a willing ear, an attractive one, sure, but we never noticed each other romantically. In time she became bored with law school and earned her real estate license. We hadn’t crossed paths for almost six months until a chance en-

counter at a club in Atlantic City where we discussed organized religion, relationships, Wendy's fries versus McDonald's fries, and the career ladder for detectives.

"Luke, listen to me again, it goes like this."

Eye rolling.

She laughed. "Seriously, it goes like this. A Sleuth is the highest you can get. It goes Private Eye, then Junior Detective, then Detective—like if you go to school or the police academy for a diploma. Then if you're top-notch, I mean the best, and your peers recognize you that way, you become a Sleuth."

"Sleuth."

"That's what I said. Sleuth."

More eye rolling.

"OK, OK," she continued. "Think about *Magnum P.I.* Tom Selleck played a private investigator, a good one mind you, and de-li-cious on the eyes, but he wasn't a detective because he didn't have the piece of paper or formal training."

Now I added laughter to the eye rolling. "You've lost it, Jordan. You've jumped the shark this time."

"So in closing . . ." She flipped her hair and acted as if she hadn't heard me.

I liked it.

"The tasty Tom Selleck could never become an actual Sleuth, because he didn't have enough respect from his peers. He was too much a renegade. You need industry support to reach—"

“All right! I give, Matlock!”

“Now *that* guy could have been a Sleuth—”

“You win!”

“It took you long enough.” She pulled her hair toward her right side, draping it over her shoulder, and let linger a style of smile that I’d never seen from her before. Seductive. Soft. “I hope it doesn’t take you that long to ask me out.”

It didn’t.

We left the club and I bought her a strawberry-topped Belgian waffle at an IHOP in Jersey.

“Make a bet?” she asked.

“OK. I’ll bite.”

“If I can eat this waffle in five minutes or less you have to take me to any restaurant I want for our first *real* date.”

“How about three?” I countered.

“Four.”

“Deal. And if you *can’t* eat that ginormous waffle in four minutes or less?”

“I’ll teach you to play the acoustic as well as I can.”

“Chomp chomp!” I taunted.

Two weeks later we ate at the Rainbow Room in the RCA building. The meal was so expensive I could have paid for personal lessons from Eric Clapton.

CHAPTER

2

I couldn't turn the TV off.

I had plenty to do the week Katrina rearranged the Gulf. I was on deadlines to deliver photos to two clients and was already a week late on delivering a rough cut of a DVD slideshow I'd created for Jordan's real estate broker.

But I just couldn't turn it off.

The final death toll would be hard to pin down, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco said in a news conference. She was taking a beating from the national press which some felt was unfair. Mayor Ray Nagin also had his critics for what they called his dramatic exaggerations and tendency to place blame everywhere except on his own shoulders. Images of submerged and abandoned yellow school buses filled TV screens and newspaper front pages. But above all, FEMA had become the easiest target. Federal bureaucracy. Washington, D.C. mentality. A useless Bush crony. A disconnected president.

None of that mattered to me. Not as I heard another explanation of how the levees failed and Lake Pontchartrain had taken eighty percent of the city prisoner. Not as I watched a woman sob on live national TV that her twin sons were missing. Nine years old. Former Haitian refugees. One was wearing a red tank top and the other his favorite New Orleans Saints T-shirt.

I'd never felt such raw emotion for anyone not sharing my last name.

I changed the channel. Bernard was on another network. He had arrived at the Superdome but had yet to find his wife. He carried a wallet-sized picture of her. He was drinking a Dasani.

“Good, someone got him water. Keep looking, Bernard, you’ll find her.” I didn’t mean to say any of that out loud, but I did.

I flipped to MSNBC. They reminded us the hurricane hadn’t only been cruel to New Orleans. For half an hour local NBC reporters in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi went national to tell their stories. Hellacious devastation in Long Beach, Mississippi. Power outages in Mobile, Alabama. Fires everywhere. Hospitals shuttling patients out of state. Neighbors helping neighbors.

I opened my laptop and visited the Red Cross Web site. I donated a hundred dollars to their Katrina Disaster Relief Fund and bookmarked the page.

I turned the television channel again. An unknown but attractive, well-groomed, female reporter was outside giving an update

on the state of the Superdome. The sun was beating down on those camped along the sidewalk and cries could be heard all around her.

In the background, a black man knelt over a body covered from the neck down with a gray bedsheet. He pulled the sheet over the body's head and turned toward the camera, screaming in agony.

Bernard.

Tears began to drop for a man I'd never meet face-to-face and for the woman he loved.

I found yet another channel offering wall-to-wall coverage, but I don't remember which. They were showing a series of still shots set to a slickly produced dramatic soundtrack—

A body in a grassy median, covered with a stunningly vibrant American flag.

National Guard troops arriving on helicopters.

The roof of the Superdome. Most of its tiles are ripped in half or missing completely. The building best suited to handle high winds in all the Crescent City is in trouble. *Bitterly ironic*, I thought. *Water is leaking in. Hope is flooding out.*

Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour hugs a woman outside a temporary shelter.

Mormon missionaries hand out cases of water in a church parking lot.

A man and a teenager paddle three young children down a street in a canoe. A fire burns behind them in an upscale neighborhood.

Jason F. Wright

Cars stuck in an alley, buried under ten feet of water. They look like colored marbles at the bottom of a mud puddle.

A young, tall black man pushes a dead woman—probably his mother—in a wheelchair.

A red Chevy Cavalier sits in a hotel swimming pool.

A man sits alone on an overpass, clutching a black case. *I wonder if it's a saxophone.*