

• SACRIFICES

Jay, 18, was put into prison at age 15. He was a drug dealer. He was also charged for his involvement in a murder. Jay was a bright kid who had been doing well in school before this occurred, but family chaos drove him to search out companions. Unfortunately, they were the wrong companions. All of his friends belonged to a gang. Jay found their deep commitment to each other inviting. His loyalty to them overrode his loyalty to his abusive, drugged-out father and his passive mother. Though his sister and mother begged Jay to sever ties with the gang, he got more deeply involved with them, selling drugs and skipping school. His mother even threw out her no-good husband to calm Jay's home atmosphere, hoping to convince him to get out of the gang. But he didn't get out. Currently, his mother and sister visit the prison infrequently because it breaks their hearts when they do. Today, Stacey, 17, is visiting her brother, Jay, in prison to ask him an important question.

JAY: It's been a long time. Haven't heard from you all in a long while.

STACEY: Mom was here a month ago, right?

JAY: Try three months ago. For a *whole* hour.

STACEY: Well, it's been a hard time, Jay. Real crazy busy too.

JAY: Oh yeah. Me too. Life's real crazy busy here too.

STACEY: Look, I know it's hard to understand, but Mom and I can't stand—

JAY: (*Getting angry.*) I'm busy *all* the time! I'm living in a giant roach motel, see? It's a real motel kinda place. The accommodations suck. Anyway, I got a lot of exterminations to handle. So real busy. Real, real busy here! You can stomp all you want, but they don't die. Nothing vile ever dies here.

Ever. The more vile, the more it won't die. The cockroaches are like little Arnold Schwarzeneggers—they're huge and foreign. Like eight inches long or somethin'. I'm a fan of the rats actually cause they eat 'em.

STACEY: That's gross. That's disgusting.

JAY: If you think *that's* bad, you can imagine what it's like to watch the guys eat the rats then.

STACEY: (*Disgusted.*) Uuh.

JAY: I'll bring you one of my cell mates next time you visit. Not one of the guys, the giant roaches. *If* you visit. Big *if* there.

STACEY: Look, are we gonna start this again, Jay?

JAY: (*Shakes his head.*) Nah, I'm not startin', Stace. (*Sharp, teasing.*) I was just saying that you can take a creature back to your biology class—a little souvenir of your visit with your loser brother, the inmate. You can do a whole show-and-tell on it. Maybe you can even dissect it for Ms. Hampton to get some extra credit. The anatomy of the prison creature—not pretty—no, but oh so interesting.

STACEY: Look, I'm sorry, Jay.

JAY: I'd volunteer my body to your science class if I thought it would get Mom's attention. But I doubt she'd even notice. But, hey, don't be sorry. None of you. I know, you all got a life. And I, I got the talk shows—Oprah, Rosie, and the psychobabble flavor of the month.

STACEY: Okay. So this is the guilt trip part of the visit.

JAY: (*Seriously.*) It's not just a guilt trip. I'm trying to tell you something. I'm trying to tell you that it's hard as hell being here. Every day I wish I were dead. But what's harder than that is thinking no one cares whether I die or not. No one ever visits. Visits give me some spirit to go on another month or two. Because then I actually think maybe you do care.

STACEY: Oh, Jay. I want to come more often. I just can't stand to see you here. I'm frustrated, ya know? I know what you're capable of. I know what you can do.

JAY: Me capable? Still? In what way? Think about it. I'm an

eighteen-year-old with no education, no friends, a mother and sister who don't seem to give a good . . . whatever. And I'm facing ten more years in this hellhole. I don't think I'm capable of anything anymore. But, hey, maybe you could fill me in.

STACEY: (*Beat.*) Hope. You're still capable of hope. But every time I come I see how you've given up, given in. Just like you did with the gang. And school. I hate that! It's not like you!

JAY: No, it's not like *you*!

STACEY: You could be out in less than five years. You'd be under twenty-three. That's a beginning.

JAY: Can you really blame me for losing hope in a place like this?

STACEY: Who else can I blame? For being here in the first place. I mean, I'm pissed at you! You had brains! You were smart, and you just threw it all away!

JAY: Yeah, I also had a father who liked to shoot up and throw me down stairs daily. And a mother who just let it happen.

STACEY: Oh, come on. She didn't just let it happen. I lived there too. She tried to get help. She threw him out way before you were even arrested the first time.

JAY: Ten years too late.

STACEY: She tried to get you away from those guys. We begged you over and over.

JAY: Yeah, whatever.

STACEY: How dare you?! Mom did everything she could. She took on two jobs to keep you at St. Joseph's. She knew you needed a good school. She did everything she could—

JAY: (*Yells.*) I know!! (*Beat.*) But where was *he*? Doped up maybe? Hangin' with some woman maybe? Where was *he*? Selling some stuff? Beatin' on her face? But did she dump him? Did she ever notice that I had to protect her over and over again? That I had to fend for my own life with him?! Did she?!

STACEY: Yeah, she noticed. She just didn't know what to do.

JAY: (*Laughing.*) Oh yeah, that's an easy answer. I stayed with them to escape from Dad. Because I had to.

STACEY: Yeah? You had to? I told you those "friends" would get you arrested or dead within a year. I told you what would happen, Jay. You knew the drug dealing was gonna get you. But you made your own decision. So stop blaming Mom! And everyone else!

JAY: Why did she stay with him for thirteen years? Do you ever wonder that?

STACEY: (*Sbrugs.*) She loved him.

JAY: Why?

STACEY: For what he was when she first met him I guess. Not what he was to us. I don't think we ever knew him—the real him. Until maybe now. I do. And good or bad, he is our father, Jay. Not a beast.

JAY: Well, he may be *your* father, but he's not mine. I don't have one.

STACEY: He'd like to visit you.

JAY: (*Beat.*) Since when?

STACEY: He's been begging Mom for the last few months. She didn't say anything because she knows how you feel about him.

JAY: Let him beg. I'm not going to see him. I'd kill him if I saw him.

STACEY: He just wants to meet once. He's changed. Trust me.

JAY: Great. Great news for him. Get a little rehab, did he?

STACEY: Yes, actually. He's been drug-free for the last couple of years. He's different. Nicer. More quiet than anything. He's even a good listener I've found.

JAY: (*Sarcastically.*) Oh great. He oughta counsel. And I'm sure he's suddenly taken God as his Lord and Savior too.

STACEY: Well, as a matter of fact . . .

JAY: I knew it! Of course he turned to God so he can be forgiven for his sins. (*Beat.*) Wait a minute. You don't expect me to forgive him? (*Stacey doesn't speak.*) Oh man! You've got to be kidding me? Forgive and forget, is that it? Well,

I won't forgive. Because I can't forget. Every night I dream—the screams, the torture, the thrown furniture, the broken bones and bruises. I dream about it. I try to stay awake so I won't dream, but I can't. I scream in my sleep. I've scared the other inmates. I dream about your bruised face on Halloween. And watching Mom's glasses shatter one night and hiding under my bed with the wires digging straight into my back because I was so terrified of him. You know! How do you forget these things?! How?! How do you forget them all?!

STACEY: I didn't forget. I can't either. But I put them away.

JAY: Where? Where do you put them? I've tried that. But they don't stay put away. *(Beat.)* Why do you think I joined those guys? To help me forget everything. To just hang out and shoot pool. And when we got to beat the crap out of somebody, I was ready.

STACEY: Mom and Dad made a lot of mistakes. We all did. But at least we're all still alive. We have a chance to set things right.

JAY: Oh really? This is alive? Ya know, if this is alive, I'll tell ya, I'd like to be dead. Dead sounds nice. Maybe that's what you could do. Bring me some dead pills. I wish sometimes I was the dead kid lying on the floor that night.

STACEY: Don't say that.

JAY: Why not?

STACEY: I thought you said it was horrifying—his death.

JAY: No, watching AJ shoot the kid was horrifying. Real unexpected, ya know? I thought we were going to rough him up a bit for snitching, but I didn't think . . . Yeah, that shot was . . . There was so much blood. The sound was so loud—the shot was so loud. And I couldn't get my head around what had just happened. *(Beat.)* But actually, looking at his face, the kid's face, afterwards, lying there so quiet, he seemed real peaceful. And happy.

STACEY: So kill yourself. Be happy just like him. Throw away

your brains. Your chance to reverse this life. Your chance to tell stories. And write. You still write?

JAY: *(Shrugs. Beat.)* Some.

STACEY: There must be lots of material to draw from in here.

JAY: I already had plenty.

STACEY: You could get a GED.

JAY: I already did.

STACEY: You did? That's great news!

JAY: Yeah, whoopee. I'm working on college credit now. All ready for the future. For the big prosperity of my brilliant life. For the hope to come back.

STACEY: Well, you must have some hope already or you wouldn't be doing all that. And I think it might help everyone if you—

JAY: I know what you're gonna say. I'm not lettin' him. I don't give a hell how he's changed.

STACEY: He begged me to convince you. He's here. Outside.

JAY: What?! How dare you?! Tell him to go home!

STACEY: He just wanted five minutes to say hello. To, to apologize.

JAY: To apologize? And I'm just supposed to accept it? *(She's silent.)* Don't you get it? He's why I'm here! This is his fault! I don't care what you say. He ruined our lives. He continues to ruin mine! Every few minutes I think about how much I hate him! How I'd like to slam his head into those prison bars just like he slammed me day in and day out for ten years. Slam, slam, slam, slam, slam, slam, slam—

STACEY: He's dying.

JAY: *(Beat.)* What?

STACEY: You don't have to kill him. He's dying.

JAY: *(Beat.)* Oh. That explains the God thing then. And the rehab. Everybody always gets all religious and repentant when they're dying. They suddenly see the light. Get all Mother Theresa-like. They suddenly get real scared about going to hell. Well, he can apologize to his God almighty. He doesn't need to apologize to me. Because I don't accept.

STACEY: And that's it? That's final? You don't even want to see him for five minutes?

JAY: What's wrong with him?

STACEY: Cancer. Lung at first. But now it's spread.

JAY: *(Beat.)* Why now? I mean, why didn't he come to my trial if he was so sorry?

STACEY: He did. *(Jay's eyes widen.)* He sat outside the courtroom. Left before you'd see him. He didn't want to upset you.

JAY: *(Beat.)* I don't understand. I don't understand how I'm supposed to forgive him. Or why I should give him the satisfaction.

STACEY: Maybe he's not the only one who'd benefit from it.

JAY: What do you mean?

STACEY: I mean, maybe it would free you—free all that anger you've been holding onto. Of all that anger that you don't know where to put.

JAY: Maybe it would just make me more angry. That he does this now. So he's dead and off the hook. Where were his apologies when I was seven, hiding under the bed with the metal springs digging into my back? Where was he then with all his "sorries"? *(She shakes her head.)* He's really here?

STACEY: Yeah. He was silent the whole way. I think he was praying you'd say yes.

JAY: I'm sorry, Stace. I know you mean well, but I can't talk to him. I can't let him off the hook. He can die like I've lived—thinking I'm a horrible person!

STACEY: Come on, can't you reconsider this a little bit?

JAY: No! I'm not going to reconsider! I can still make choices here! That's all I have. This is my decision, so keep out of it.

STACEY: Jay, don't be stubborn! Listen to me this time! This will eat at you for the rest of your life. This is a chance to put it to rest. You don't have to see him after today. Just hear him out. You don't even have to accept his apology.

But he'll validate everything you've said and more. He did with me. And his words will put things to rest!

JAY: How could I trust that he would validate anything? How could I trust him at all?

STACEY: You trust me, don't you? I've never steered you wrong.

JAY: But I hate him, Stace. I hate him like no one else I've ever known. Why should I give him the satisfaction?

STACEY: Because it may stop the dreams. I don't know for sure, but it's worth a shot. Right? There's no point in hating and wanting to kill him anymore, Jay, he's dying. He's gone.

JAY: Yeah. Well, tell him to come back some other time. I'll think about it maybe.

STACEY: He only has a month or two. So I don't know if there'll be another time. I beg you, Jay, be stubborn with anything else, but this once, listen to me! Do this for you. Do this so you can hear how right you've been all along. So you can hear him say, yes—that's the truth of what happened. He wants to admit it was his fault, so you'll know you're not a horrible person. Then maybe you wouldn't hate yourself so much. And you'd find some hope again. You don't have to forgive him. You can just listen if you want. *(Beat.)* What do you say? *(Long pause.)*

JAY: *(Firmly.)* Five minutes.