

CHAPTER 7

The moon is full. The dark sky is clear, and stars, possibly even a planet, are out. It is about 1:00 a.m. While everybody in his house is asleep, Pete is in his backyard, sitting alone, smoking a joint and enjoying the scenic sky while listening to one of his favorite Mac Miller songs.

About halfway through the song, the music stops as his phone begins to ring. He answers a FaceTime call from Zack. On the other side of the camera, Zack is also smoking a joint. This brings joy to Pete, reminding him of the countless times they used to smoke together and all the laughs, stories, and memories.

“Hahaha, see?” Pete says. “Even if there’s a few hundreds of miles between us, we’re still gonna smoke together.”

“Of course, we have to keep traditions alive,” Zack says. “So, how was the big night? Did you have fun celebrating?”

“You know, it’s the same old same old. My parents throw me a get-together, and it’s their friends. And then Ron stands up and gives a speech about how proud he is of me to be a banker and all the BS.”

“And they still think you are excited to become a banker because...?”

“Well, it’s probably because I am a pathological liar and have been faking enthusiasm about this my whole life.”

Zack is irritated. He only wants two things for his best friend: for Pete to feel happy and fulfilled. Yet the two knew there was one problem. Pete’s definition of fulfillment is misconstrued. Throughout his whole life, Pete has been chasing the feeling of making other people happy or proud. He has been so focused on what others think about him and how proud people are of him that those feelings have replaced the definition of fulfillment in Pete’s eyes.

Becoming a banker would fulfill him because he would make his family proud but also make him miserable. However, if Pete did something creative, it would make him happy. He is afraid of disappointing his family by not following in their footsteps.

Zack takes a big hit of his joint, inhales and exhales, and then begins to rant at his friend over the phone.

“Dude. Why are you doing this to yourself? You need to grow some balls and tell them you want to be a writer. We all know that you are fucking great at it; your work speaks for itself. Also, that is something that *you* actually want to do and enjoy doing. Do you really think it was easy telling my dad that I was not going into the family business of selling textiles and that I was going to apply to dental schools? Absolutely not, but I wasn’t going to let what other people want to dictate my happiness. And you should not either. I have been telling you this for years, man.”

Unexpectedly, Pete begins to laugh. It’s only a small chuckle at first, but then he continues to laugh hysterically for at least fifteen seconds. Pete laughs because he knows Zack is correct and that humor has always been one of his most vital coping mechanisms.

“That was not a joke,” Zack says, “but okay. Maybe no more smoking for you, my friend.”