

# Voices of Evil



T M H . W R I T E R

# Voices of Evil

Romantic Suspense

By: **TmhWriter**

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# **Table Of Contents**

**Chapter 1**

**Chapter 2**

**Chapter 3**

**Chapter 4**

**Chapter 5**

**Chapter 6**

**Chapter 7**

**Epilogue**

**Other Books By This Author**



**About This Author**

# Chapter 1

Mason adjusted the collar on Chance's neck and pulled once to ensure it was properly adjusted. He gave the dog a quick rub on the head while it danced a little with its tail.

"Hey buddy, come on," Mason said, standing from his crouch. He held the chain firmly in one hand, opened the door with the other, and stepped out into the outer room.

"Hey, my big girl," a woman's voice said. It was Mrs. Patterson. She was a regular at Mason's dog home. She had purchased Chance from him when it was still a puppy. The dog ran off ahead of Mason to its owner, and they did a little kissing and face licking ceremony.

"Why doesn't she look different?" Mrs. Patterson interrupted the kissing to ask Mason.

He laughed and answered, "It's been barely a week, Jules. Come on, give her some time."

"Are you sure that she is, you know?" Jules asked, using her hand to form a curve over her abdomen as a means of describing a pregnancy.

"We do not know for sure at the moment but give it another couple of weeks, and we'll be able to tell," Mason nodded.

"Alright, I hope it goes well," Jules crooned, holding Chance close to her body. She had brought in the dog to be crossed with another male dog at Mason's dog facility. She simply could not wait to have puppies.

"I assure you, it will," Mason said as he gave her a knowing, assuring smile. Throughout his life, he had had to deal with hundreds of eager owners. He had even been one a couple of times, and so he knew exactly how she felt.

"Hey baby, Mason cleared me to take you home. Shall we?" Chance simply pranced in the direction of the door to show her willingness. Mason and Jules followed after her, having a little distraction.

"How is Peter?" Mason asked, referring to Jules' husband.

"He's alright; he traveled upstate to see his sister again," Jules replied.

"Oh, what's the matter this time around?"

"Nothing, he said that he missed her and that they had some important family discussion," Jules replied.

Mason could tell that she was not as unbothered about the matter as she sounded. He had been friends with the family for years, and he knew all about Peter's frequent trips to see his sister, a sister that had never thought to return the courtesy. Peter said that she did not like Jules because Jules put up with her husband picking his sister over her for several months in a year for a very long time.

"I'm sure it's something important," Mason said.

"Ugh! Please don't give me that," Jules replied. They had gotten to her car at this point, and she opened it for Chance to get in.

"You know I'm beginning to think that he goes there to see someone else. Maybe another woman," Jules continued.

"What?" Mason said.

But it was not because he did not understand what she had said. It was because he did not even hear it, to begin with. Her voice sounded far away, and so did the traffic noise on the road right next to them.

His head began to spin, and he realized that he needed support.

"... Are you alright, Mason?" Jules stopped complaining to ask as soon as she noticed something was wrong.

"No ..."

That was the only word Mason could get out of his mouth before he lost the ability to stand. Chance barking loudly with half of her body outside the window was the last thing he saw before darkness. He was unconscious by the time he hit the ground.

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*"I wish the fat old fool would just fall one day, break a fat leg or two, and then I can have my man all to myself."*

*"I mean, what does he see in her anyway? He should be married to me. Me and not her! I just wish she would drop dead one day, very soon."*

Mason slowly came to the consciousness of himself. Even before opening his eyes, he could tell that he was in a hospital. There was no way it was not a hospital room because of the feel of the bed he was lying on, the beeping of machines all around him, and the smell in the air. Aside from the machines beeping, it was quiet in the room. However, in his head, there was quite the

opposite. There were voices, male voices, female voices, and child voices. There were voices everywhere, and they all had something to say. Some were distant, and he could not pick out the words. But one of them was so close; it sounded like she was right next to him.

Carefully, he opened his eyes and looked around. A nurse was standing right next to his bed. She was adjusting an IV line that led into his arm. She had a pleasant face, totally devoid of the terrible words that were supposedly coming out of her mouth.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hernandez. It's good to see you awake," she said with a bright smile.

"What happened to me?" Mason asked with his raspy voice.

"You had a blocked artery leading to your heart, and so we had to do a bypass. You've been out for almost a day," she answered.

"What!" There was a puzzled look on Mason's face.

"It's nothing to be worried about, Mr. Hernandez. If you commit consistently to our instructions, you'll heal up just fine," she said reassuringly, flashing him a smile.

"Oh, who brought me here?"

"It was Mrs. Patterson. She has been here all morning, and she just left a few minutes ago. She should be back before nightfall. Now, that's enough chatter; you should go back to rest. I'll let the doctor know you're awake, and he'll be here to talk to you soon." A few seconds after their conversation ended, the voice resumed in his head.



*"Dead, dead, dead; I wish she'd just fall from a staircase and die instantly! Poor Marcus will be so broken, but I'll be right there to swoop in and ...."*

"Why are you telling me these things?" Mason suddenly asked. He could not take the maliciousness in her voice anymore.

"Telling you what things?" She asked, looking at him, a confused look on her face. Even as she asked that question, the voice came again.

*"Once I get married to Marcus, I won't need to ever work at this stupid hospital, attending to silly people that should rather be dead."*

"Jesus Christ!" Mason muttered. It was not the venom in her words that surprised him as much, it was the fact that he was looking right at her, and those words had not come from her mouth. He could swear that it was her voice that was speaking, though.

"Are you alright, sir?" The nurse asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. I think it's the medications messing with me; I could swear I heard you talking," Mason replied, still baffled.

"Must be the medications," she agreed. "I'll take my leave now; the doctor will be with you in a bit."

"Alright, nurse. Thank you very much."

After the nurse walked out of the room, Mason was left alone with his thoughts. He was not exactly surprised about the bypass surgery he had to have. His dad had gone through the same at some point before the car accident that killed him.

He could barely concentrate on any particular line of thought without the voices in his head interrupting. It was deafening in there. And he could catch excerpts of conversations of different people. Conversations people would usually not share with anyone, not even their closest friends; conversations with themselves, literally.

It had to be the drugs. They were making him hallucinate; hear things that were not real. He was still trying to shut out the noise when he heard voices, real ones this time, outside his door.

"Alright, Dr. Mulligan, I'll be sure to send the documents over," a male voice said.

"Thank you very much, Charlie. See you around," the second voice, definitely belonging to Dr. Mulligan, said.

Then the door opened, and a male doctor dressed in white overalls walked in.

*"Look at this fucking asshole. Who does he think he is strutting around the hospital and giving orders like he's a king or something? One of these days, you'll be too sick to work, and I'm going to take your office."*

Mason heard this loud and clear but noticed that the man's mouth was not moving.

"What the fuck," he said.

"Hi, Mr. Hernandez, I'm Charlie Brach, and I'm your on-call doctor," the man said.

Mason was too stunned to reply. Now, he was faced with the probability that all the stuff he had been hearing were people's

thoughts. The more he thought about it, the more sense it made to him. It explained the episode with the nurse earlier and how she said everything without speaking out. "Oh shit," he muttered.

"Are you alright?" Dr. Brach asked, with a concerned look on his face.

"Can I know the medications you put me on and their side effects?" He asked as his mind ran wildly.

"Yes, you can. I could have a nurse bring you the information you need. But first, you have got to calm down." As the doctor spoke, he took a look at the machine monitoring Mason's heart rate. It was starting to beep faster.

"I can't. Something is really wrong," Mason replied, shaking his head vehemently. "When do I leave here?"

"If everything goes well, by the end of next week," Dr. Brach replied.

"That means I'll be here for another ten days or so?"

"Yes. Is there something you don't like about your room? We'd do our best to make you the most comfortable you can be."

"What? The room is fine, thank you."

Mason ignored the doctor and got lost in his thoughts. The voices in his head were still there. However, none was coming from the doctor at the moment. So, from the way the man was looking at him, he was sure that the man was thinking something. So how come he was not hearing it? Was his prediction about being able to hear people's thoughts wrong?

"Hey, what are you thinking?" He asked.

"What?" The doctor was surprised to hear that question.

"Go on, tell me. What are you thinking about?"

"Mr. Hernandez, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to put you to sleep. I can't risk having you this triggered."

As he spoke, the doctor picked up a syringe, filled it with liquid content from a glass vial, and then inserted the contents into Mason's IV.

"No, don't do that; I don't want to sleep. I want to figure out what the hell is happening to me," Mason protested. But as the seconds passed, he got less and less vehement.

He began to feel drowsy, like he needed to have some more sleep. Then his eyes closed, and against his will, he fell asleep. Yet, the voices were still in his head.

## **Chapter 2**

It had been five days since Mason arrived at the hospital, and his healing process was going on very well. The doctor said that if no complications came up after surgery, he would be free to go home in about three days. It was good news to Mason because he was starting to get tired of the hospital food. Although Mrs. Patterson came by every day with bags containing light homemade food that she made for him, eventually, he always still had to eat food from the cafeteria once in a while.

However, despite how excited he was to leave, there was one thing that kept holding Mason back. He discovered that he could now hear the thoughts of people. At first, it had been frightening

for him, and he tried to fight it as much as he could. But the first day passed, and so did the second, and by the third day, he started to realize that maybe it had come to stay.

He did some research about it online and found nothing that made sense. However, one site advised that people who found themselves having this special gift should do their best to understand and tame the gift, rather than give it control over them. Mason started to accept it, although he did not think it was a gift as much as a curse.

This was because he could only hear people's evil thoughts. Not the good ones about how happy they were or how grateful they were about something; instead, it was the malicious ones about how they wanted someone who made them unhappy to have a terrible accident and die, or how they wanted to kill themselves. Or how they wished the US president would get assassinated.

Mason had to admit, some of the thoughts were funny and made him laugh hard. In contrast, others were just pure venom whose knowledge he would pay a fortune to get rid of. The good thing was that he now had some control over the voices. Rather than being in noisy disarray all over his head, they were now filed in an orderly manner. They no longer disturbed his line of thought or distracted him when he was having a conversation.

It was one of those days when it took Mrs. Patterson a while to show up, and Mason was starting to get hungry, so he decided that he was going to go down to the cafeteria; it would allow him to leave his room anyway, which he had not done in almost a day.

He got out of bed, adjusted his hospital gown, and then walked out, dragging the stand containing his drip beside him. He took the stairs down to the first floor. It was just one flight, but he was slightly out of breath by the time he arrived.

"I badly need to get back in shape," he muttered beneath his breath.

He stood at the entrance of the cafeteria and looked around. There were a whole lot of voices coming into his head from here. One thing he knew for sure was that he did not want to be seated near anyone who had an evil thought. But finding that one person was going to be a long stretch, so the best he could hope for was to find someone with minimal evil thinking.

He walked through the cafeteria, and his attention was suddenly drawn to a young woman sitting by herself at a table at the far end of the room. She was sipping from the cup of coffee in her hands slowly and staring out at the hall. Although she was quite attractive to look at, it was not the beauty that called Mason's attention. It was the fact that there was not a single evil thought coming from her.

Mason quickly made his order and then walked towards the lady's table." Hello, I'm Mason," he said.

She looked up at him, and a small smile curved her lips.

"Hi. Evelyn," she replied in a gentle yet firm voice.

"Do you mind if I sit with you?"

"No."

Mason slid gently into the seat opposite her and sighed in relief.

"Sorry," Evelyn said with a hint of compassion in her voice.

Mason was not the type to accommodate pity, but it was not so bad coming from her. "Thank you," he replied. "What are you in for?"

"That sounds an awful lot like we're in prison," she replied with a laugh.

Her laugh had a quality that made Mason's ears tingle. It was sweet and nice and made him want to laugh back. "Thank God we're not," he replied, joining in her laugh.

"Well, I'm not a patient. I'm here for my mother. She had a heart attack," Evelyn replied.

"Oh my God; how is she now?" Mason asked.

"She's much better. She can't wait to leave, but the doctors want to keep her here for another couple of days."

"I can imagine why she does not want to stay. I'm not a fan of hospitals myself."

"What are you in for?"

"Bypass surgery. My heart decided to follow in the footsteps of my dad's," Mason replied.

"Ouch, that must be hard." Once again, the compassion in her face was unmistakable.

"It's alright. My doctor says I can leave here in three days if I keep up with this pace," he replied.

"Great news," she smiled.

A waiter brought Mason's meal, and without wasting any time, he dug into it. "Would you like to know why I came to sit next to you?" Mason asked suddenly.

"Why?"

"Because you had no evil thoughts running through your mind," he replied.

"No evil thoughts? How do you know that?"

Mason delayed for a while, contemplating whether it was a good idea to tell her. The truth was he needed someone to confide in about his newfound gift, and sometimes, it was easier to talk to a stranger than to someone you already knew. There was something about Evelyn that just made him feel at peace. He decided he was going to tell her. "So, I know that this might sound ridiculous, but I can hear people's evil thoughts."

"What do you mean? How is that even possible?" Evelyn asked.

Mason went ahead to explain to her how he had woken from surgery to find out that there were voices in his head and those voices belonged to people. Evelyn's face throughout the story showed that she did not believe a single word he said. "I know you do not believe me. Here, let me make it easy for you. I need you to think of something evil right now. Anything, just think about it."

"Come on, Mason, this is ridiculous ..." she started to object.

"Evelyn, please, I need you to believe me. Oblige me this one time, please."

"Okay, just this one time."



They went silent for a few seconds, during which Evelyn was thinking, and Mason was hearing her thoughts.

"What did I just think?" Evelyn finally asked.

"I wish the idiot that is my father would just get lynched by an angry mob or run over by a car or killed by a mountain lion," Mason quoted her word for word.

"Jesus fucking Christ!" Evelyn exclaimed, her eyes wide with surprise and excitement, and fear. "How the hell did you do that?"

"I told you, I can hear these things," Mason replied, shrugging.

"I don't know whether to stand up and walk away from here or sit and keep talking to a freak," Evelyn said.

"Ouch, that hurt."

"I'm sorry, I'm just so ... I've never seen anything like it before," she apologized.

"I understand. Me neither," Mason replied.

"Let me think of something else and see if you get it," she said excitedly.

"Alright, just make sure it's a bad, bad thing."

Over the next ten minutes, Evelyn kept imagining all the worst scenarios that she could, and Mason kept telling her imaginations to her in words. Eventually, she was convinced beyond measure that he was not lying. "So why have you told me this?"

"Well, because I needed to tell someone but also because there is something about you. You managed not to think any evil

thoughts until I asked you to. Now that's a scarce thing in my experience over the last few days."

Evelyn smiled. "To be honest, I like you too. You seem like a good guy."

"I am, indeed. So, friends?" Mason asked, stretching out a hand.

"Friends." Evelyn took his handshake, and they smiled at each other.

"So, aside from getting into people's heads, what do you do?"

"I'm a dog breeder. I've got a building where I breed, adopt and sell dogs."

"Wow, that's impressive. I love dogs."

"Everyone should. What do you do?"

"Well, I'm in grad school. When I finish in a few months, I'll get a job in finance."

"Lofty."

They kept the conversation on for a half-hour before Mason began to get tired. Evelyn needed to see her mother also. She walked him up to his room and helped ensure he was safely tucked into bed. Before leaving, they made plans to meet at the cafeteria by noon the following day. As he watched her walkout, a smile spread across his lips. He imagined many things, and not all of them were church-worthy.

## Chapter 3

The following day, Evelyn and Mason met at the cafeteria as planned. They talked some more, shared their view on some things, and got more comfortable around one another. As a game, he would tell her some of the evil thoughts of people he heard and ask her to guess who said those things. Sometimes she could, but most times, she could not.

"Alright, here's one last one. Guess this; it's by a female. *'I hate men. God, I hate men so much! I wish all the men in the world could be wiped off in a flood, and only women will be left'*. Tell me, who is that?"

They had left the cafeteria by this time to go to a sitting area on the hospital's first floor. Evelyn looked around the lobby. Many women were coming and going, of different ages and sizes.

"A woman who hates men ..." she mumbled over and over again, running her eyes over the room. After about a minute, she suddenly stopped on one particular woman. A nurse was seated at the counter by the nurse station. She was in her mid-thirties had receding brown hair and dark eyes. She was wearing a frown on her face and forcefully typing numbers into the computer.

"Come to think of it; I've never seen that woman with a smile," Evelyn said.

"Me neither," Mason replied with a chuckle.

"I'm guessing it is her then."

"Correct," Mason announced.

"That wasn't so hard!" Evelyn whooped.

"I guess it wasn't."

Evelyn glanced at her wristwatch and said, "My mom should be awake by now. I should get going."

"Aw, alright," Mason replied. Her intention to leave made him sad, and he could not keep it away from his countenance.

Evelyn noticed and asked, "Would you like to come to say hi to her?"

"You mean to your mother?" Mason asked, taken aback by her offer.

"Yes. She's pretty nice, and I'm sure she'll like you."

"Really?"

"Yes, really, Mason. I mean, what's there to not like?" Evelyn asked, smiling up gracefully at him.

"Wow, Evelyn, that is a nice thing to say," Mason replied.

"It's the truth," she nodded. "We might want to keep away from my mom the fact that you can hear people's evil thoughts. That's simply going to freak her out, or at the very least, make her very uncomfortable."

"Sure, I can do that. I mean, I've not told anyone else about it. So, it could be our own little secret," he said, staring at her intently.

"I like the sound of that, Mason," Evelyn replied, her voice tender with emotions.

"Me too."

They stared at each other for a while, smiles on their faces, and had dreamy looks in their eyes. "Are we having a moment here?" Evelyn asked.

"Yes, I think so, and talking about it just kind of spoils it," Mason replied, and they both laughed.

The sound of their laughter caught the attention of the nurse-who-hates-men, and she looked at them with a scowl.

"Oops, looks like we've annoyed the wrong person," Mason said amidst laughter.

"Come on, let's go," Evelyn said, helping him up.

As they walked past the counter, the nurse-who-hates-men muttered in a mean tone, "You know, if you are looking to get better, you would have to spend more time resting in your room rather than strutting around the hospital talking to women."

Mason and Evelyn stopped in their tracks, shocked at what the woman said. "Thanks for the advice, ma'am," Mason responded and was about to keep walking, but Evelyn was not having any of it.

"You know, maybe the reason men hate you is that you are a mean, angry, ugly, hairless lump of bone and fat," Evelyn said.

"What?" The woman screamed. A red blush -embarrassment- began to rise from neck to her cheeks.

Holding Mason's hand, Evelyn slowly walked away from the counter. "Is it stairs or elevator?"

"Let's do stairs," Mason replied.

As they climbed up the stairs, he said, "That was badass."

"She had it coming," Evelyn replied. "I've seen her speak rudely to a few patients, and I was not going to let her do that to you."

Mason felt warm on the insides at those words; standing up for him made him feel safe and protected. He loved that.

When they got to Evelyn's mother's room, they met her awake. "Hi mom, how are you?" Evelyn asked, walking to the bed to place a kiss on the woman's head.

"I'm alright. I woke up just a few moments ago," the woman replied.

She was a beautiful woman, and she looked strong and healthy. Mason guessed that she was in her late forties, and despite that age, she was still beautiful. She looked quite familiar, like he had seen her face somewhere before, but he could not place it. In the end, he concluded that it was simply the striking resemblance between her and Evelyn that made it so.

"I brought a friend to see you, mom. Meet Mason. Mason, meet my mother."

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Wood. Evelyn has told me quite a lot about you," Mason said, moving forward and stretching his hands out for a handshake.

"Hello, Mason, it's nice to meet you. You're a patient here?" Mrs. Wood asked, assessing his dressing.

"Yes, I am. I came in for a bypass. Evelyn told me you had a heart attack," Mason replied.

"That was the second one in two years. What is it with these hearts? Why do they like to slow us down?" Jackie asked, making Mason laugh.

"Maybe it's their way of telling you guys to take it slow since you won't listen through any other way," Evelyn replied.

"That's all she ever talks about; how I need to take things easy," Mrs. Wood said with a scoff. "Have a seat, Mason; let's chat. What do you do?"

Mason settled down into one of the chairs close to the bedside while Eve sat next to him. "I'm a dog breeder, ma'am," Mason replied.

"Ma'am? Don't call me that; it makes me feel old. Call me Jackie."

"Jackie," Mason nodded. Then his eyes widened in recognition. "Holy shit! You are Jackie Wood?" He exclaimed.

"Yes, what have I done this time?" Mrs. Wood asked with a funny, innocent look on her face.

"You're the owner of the pharmaceutical company! I knew you looked familiar, but I could not tell where the connection was from!"

"Look, I have another fan, Eve," Mrs. Wood beamed at Evelyn.

"Are you kidding me? Of course, you do. I've always been a fan. Your medicine works wonders on my dogs; they are all I ever get," Mason said excitedly.

"I'm glad about that, so how long have you been working with dogs?" She asked.

"For almost ten years now."

"And how has the experience been?"

"Great. I love my job," Mason replied.

Over the next half hour, Mason chatted with Jackie Woods, and they bonded exceptionally well within the short time. Later, as Evelyn walked him to his room, he asked, "Why didn't you tell me your mom was a billionaire?"

"It never came up," Evelyn replied with a shrug.

"Wow, since she already has money, why does she still have a lot of stress?"

"She just can't take a break. Her work is all she knows. It's like her whole life will fall apart if her work is taken away from her," Evelyn replied.

"I understand. I feel that way sometimes also. You know, these few days out of the Dog Centre have made me very restless. I cannot wait to resume work," Mason replied.

"What is the doctor's say about your discharge?"

"That should be in two days."

When they got to his room, Mason asked Evelyn to come in. She obliged him and helped him to bed.

"Can I call you Eve, like your mom does?" Mason asked.

"Yes, of course. I'd like that," Evelyn replied.

"Thank you, Eve," Mason said, his voice possessing a tender quality.

"You're welcome, Mason."



There was a moment of silence, during which they simply stared at each other. "I had a nice time talking with you today," Mason said.

"I did too. Talking to you is so easy, almost like it was meant to be," Eve replied.

"Maybe it was."

"You think so?" She asked with uncertainty on her face.

"Get into bed with me, Eve," Mason asked.

Evelyn nodded, got out of her shoes, and gently got in next to Mason. She laid on his right side, placing her head gently on his chest while he wrapped his arms around her.

When they were all settled in, Mason said, "I do have this feeling that we will fall in love with each other, Eve, and maybe remain together for the rest of our lives."

"That does not sound like such a bad idea," Eve whispered.

"Are you sure?" Mason asked.

"Yes, I am. I'm just going to trust the process, see where things lead us."

"Me too, Eve, I will try," Mason replied.

Gently, Eve raised herself on her elbows and leaned down to place her lips against Mason's in a soft kiss.

## **Chapter 4**

*Six Months Later*

"Hey honey, I'm going out for a walk; I'll be back soon," Mason called out to Eve, his girlfriend and roommate.

"Alright, babe," Evelyn replied from the bathroom.

Mason was almost out of the doorway when Evelyn shouted, "Hey babe, are you still there?"

"Yes, I am. What's up?"

"Could you stop by the store and get me some chocolate on your way back"?

"Yeah, sure," Mason replied.

"I love you."

"And I love you."

Enough time had passed, and Mason had healed up from his surgery. He and Eve fell in love and started a relationship within that time too. Things had gotten serious enough that he asked her to move in with him. She thought twice about it before agreeing. Evelyn was almost done with grad school already, and she had less than a month to go to her final exams.

On the other hand, Mason still kept on with his dog breeding Centre. On that end, everything was going great. On weekends, they would drive up to Jackie's mansion and spend the weekend there, having all the fun in the world.

As Mason walked, he could not help thinking about all the difference Evelyn's presence was making in his life. He was genuinely happy and convinced that he was in love for the first time. His psychic ability to hear people's evil thoughts was still present. At first, he had thought that it would stop when he left the hospital. Then he had thought it would stop when he finished with his medications. Then he had thought it would stop when he

resumed back to work full-time. Yet, months after he successfully did all of these, he could still hear things.

At this point, he had given up on ever going back to normal. He was beginning to enjoy his gift. It had saved him a lot of times from dealing with the wrong people. However, a part of him felt like he was wasting his potential. He believed that the gift had been given to him for a reason, and he was not maximizing the purpose just yet. There had to be a way to get from the basic realm into a more advanced realm.

He walked faster and faster until he broke into a run. He maintained a consistent pace for about twenty minutes before finally deciding that he needed to rest. Lucky for him, there was a bench close by. Mason sat on it and tried to catch his breath. The voices that had taken a break during the run slowly resumed, evading his headspace.

The few minutes he spent running per day was the only time he was free of the voices. It was why he had gotten consistent with his daily aerobics. After a few minutes of catching his breath, he was getting ready to begin his return journey when a loud voice cut through his head.

*"Jackie Wood has got to die. She has got to die, and the sooner it happens, the better for everyone. Once she's out of the way, I'll be able to take over the company, make it mine, and become a billionaire ...."*

Mason was shocked to his bone marrow to hear those thoughts. What?" He exclaimed, too low for the man who thought

those thoughts to hear. The man was a passerby, and at this point, he had almost walked past Mason. He was bald and stout and walked way faster than you would expect him to, considering the length of his legs. "Did I hear wrongly?" Mason asked himself. No, that didn't happen. He had heard the name loud and clear; it was Jackie Wood, his girlfriend's mom.

Mason immediately shot to his feet and began following the man; he had to hear more, find out more about how they planned to take out Jackie.

The guy continued, *"I'm going to have to discuss the details with the rest of the team; nothing can go wrong; we cannot afford it. The death has to be smooth, clean, undetectable ...."*

Suddenly, the sound of a ringing phone pierced the evening air. It belonged to the bald guy. He picked the phone out of his pocket, answered it, and thereby cut short his thought flow.

"Shit," Mason muttered. He needed to hear the rest of the plan to know how best to defend Jackie from those who wanted to take her life and steal her legacy.

But today, luck was not on Mason's side. A cab cruised the street, and with a stretch of his hand, the bald man stopped it and climbed in. As it zoomed off, so did the voice of his evil thoughts inside Mason's head. "Damn the fucking distance," Mason cursed and immediately turned around and began running in the direction of home.

Half an hour later, Mason bounded up the steps to their house. "Eve!" He screamed out as he entered the house.

"In here," Eve replied from the kitchen.

Mason made his way there and immediately started talking. "There's fire on the mountain. You would not believe what I just heard a man think as he walked past me. They are going to kill Jackie, Eve. They have plans in place already. They want to kill her and take over the company ...."

"Hold on, Mason," Evelyn cut in. "You are not making any sense right now; I need you to calm down and talk to me slowly. Take a deep breath, and then start again," she said, laying her hands on his chest in a calming gesture.

Mason did as he was told and then narrated the story of how he had been sitting and heard the guy walk past, plotting Jackie's murder in his head. "Sadly, I didn't hear how he planned on doing it, but he did mention that there was a team. He got a phone call, got into a cab, and left, and there was no way I could follow him."

"Oh, my goodness; who on earth would want to do this?" Evelyn said, sinking into the closest chair. She was no doubt disturbed by the news.

"I have no idea. Do you know if there is bad blood between Jackie and some people at the office?" Mason asked.

"None that I know of, we should probably ask her," Eve suggested.

"We've got to be smart about it because she cannot know that she is being targeted for murder," Mason said.

"Yeah, that's just going to get her paranoid and restless. She doesn't need any of that anxiety right now," Evelyn agreed.

"We'll dig in and try to find out what's happening, but first things first, we have to find a way to keep her safe. We should hire a private security service to put a detail on her -"

"Why not hire the cops?" Eve cut in.

"You know we don't have any valid evidence that she is under attack. I mean, we can't possibly say that I overheard someone's evil thoughts," Mason replied.

"How about we make up something to give them? Like a death threat or something ...."

"That's not only going to upset Jackie, but it's also going to get the attention of the bad guys, and they're going to want to either hurry plans or go underground. Either way, it's too dangerous. At least this way, we have the element of surprise," Mason explained.

"Hmm. I'm not so sure about this," Evelyn replied, stood up, and began pacing.

Mason caught her before she went too far and held her in his arms. "Listen to me, Eve. I promise nothing bad will happen to Jackie. We'll do everything we can to protect her. My friend Ed owns a private security company. We could always employ them to watch Jackie. And then we will make sure we spend more time with her while at the same time trying to find out who could be behind all of this," Mason said assuredly.

"Baby, are you sure?" Evelyn asked.

Mason took a while before answering. "To be honest with you, no, I'm not. But it's our best chance," he replied.

"Alright then, contact Ed. I'm going to call mom now, let her know we are coming to spend the rest of the week," Evelyn said.

"Good. I love you, Eve," Mason said.

"I love you, Mason," Eve replied, smiling slightly.

"Now, let's get to work."

They both pulled out their phones and began dialing. Mason had placed a two-person 24-hour detail on Jackie within five minutes, starting from that moment. Their duty was to watch and protect her without knowing that she was being watched. Later that evening, Mason and Evelyn packed a bag each, locked their doors, and made their way to Jackie's mansion.

## **Chapter 5**

About two months had passed since Mason heard the plot against Jackie Wood's life. So far, there had been no attacks. Mrs. Woods was doing well, oblivious to the threat and that her every step was being monitored by Ed's private security agents. Mason and Evelyn had done their best to ensure that they spent a lot of time with Jackie, although it had been challenging because she was almost always working. Yet, they had done it.

By this time, a lot of their fears had died down. However, Mason and Evelyn knew that they could not reduce their watchfulness. Doing that would most likely mean certain death for Jackie. This was because the main reason the bad guys had not attacked yet was that they had not gotten an opening for it yet.

Mason and Evelyn decided to keep it that way for another couple of months.

Hopefully, they would be able to get to the bottom of it and find out who was behind everything within that time. It was Evelyn's last day at grad school on this particular day. She was finally finished with that aspect of her life and was looking excitedly forward to the next phase -getting a job and settling down.

Mason was excited for her. He knew how hard she had worked, trying to build a future for herself that was not dependent on her mother's success. Evelyn was very strong-willed and insistent on her dreams, and Mason was very proud of her. He had decided to take her to dinner to celebrate this big win. However, it was no ordinary dinner. He had plans to ask her the most important question he was ever going to ask anyone in his life. Mason had been thinking about it for a while, and he was sure that he was ready to take the big step. His only hope was that Evelyn would be too.

*"If I could just grab that baseball bat hanging on the wall and bash in his skull with it,"* Evelyn's voice swam into Mason's head. He turned around in surprise, a questioning look on his face. But his surprise melted into joy when he set eyes on Evelyn. Immediately his eyes landed on her, and she flashed him a smile that made his insides go flip flop. He had never seen Evelyn, or any other woman for that matter, look as beautiful as she did, standing right there in front of him. She was dressed in a beautiful pink



dress wrapped around her body like a second skin. The dress pointed out every curve of her amazing body, and as she climbed down the stairs towards him, Mason was so tempted to get down on his knees and propose to her right there.

"Why did you do that?" He asked when she was standing right in front of him, and he could finally find the strength to talk.

"Do what?" She asked.

"Catch my attention like that," he replied.

She laughed and said, "I did not want to have to speak, and the only way you would hear me is if I thought something bad."

"Well, it worked," Mason said, joining in the laugh. You look so beautiful tonight."

"I feel good," Evelyn said, spreading her arms out wide and doing a little spin on her heels.

"That's great, shall we?" Jason asked.

"Yes, we shall," she replied, taking his hands. Together they walked out of the house and got into the car. Mason was driving, and he started the car and backed it out of the driveway.

"How is Chi?" Evelyn asked. Chi was one of the latest additions to Mason's dogs. She had been found on the roadside, pregnant and malnourished, and brought to the Dog Centre. Mason immediately took her in and tended to her, and now she was doing great.

"She's doing just fine," he replied.

"When is she due to deliver?"

"I think in a couple of weeks."

"I can't wait to bring her and her puppies home," Evelyn crooned. The moment she set eyes on the dog, she had fallen in love with it, and Mason had promised to bring it home to her as soon as she gave birth to her pups.

They kept conversing idly until they arrived at the restaurant that Mason had made reservations at. They walked in and were led to a couple's booth towards the room's far end. Evelyn's favorite drink, Champagne, was brought and poured. It was time to make a toast. "You have no idea how proud I am of you and how much I love you. Here's a toast to bigger and better wins," Mason said.

"To bigger and better wins," Evelyn replied.

They clinked glasses and drank.

By the time Evelyn dropped her glass, a shiny diamond ring in Mason's hand was pointed at her.

"Oh my God, Mason, what are you doing?" Evelyn asked, surprised.

"Evelyn, since the very first day, when I walked into that hospital cafeteria and met you sitting there, having no evil thoughts run through your mind, I knew you were special. I know we've only known each other for less than a year, but those days have been the best of my life. I love you sincerely, more than I've ever loved any other woman. And I can think of no better way to spend my life than to spend it with you."

He paused for a while, smiling up at Evelyn. At this point, there were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Mason," she moaned.

“Would you marry me, Evelyn Wood?” Mason asked, getting down on one knee.

"Yes, I will marry you," Evelyn cried out. "Yes!" Mason slipped the ring onto Evelyn's finger and rose to his feet. Their lips met in a passionate kiss that was interrupted by the waiter clearing his throat to alert them that their dinner was ready. They walked hand in hand and got into their car about an hour later.

"Let's go home, fiancée," he said.

"Let's go have sex, fiancé," she said, her eyes twinkling brightly in the dark.

"Yeah, I like the sound of that," Mason said, laughing as he started the engine.

## **Chapter 6**

The sound of the telephone ringing in the living room woke Mason. He opened his eyes slowly as the noise pierced the bubble of silence that had existed only a few seconds earlier. Thankfully, the phone stopped ringing. Mason rubbed his eyes and turned over to his side. Sleeping right next to him with one hand over his stomach was Evelyn. Her hair was tousled around her face, and her mouth was slightly open.

The ring on her finger twinkled from the reflection of light coming from the window, and it caught Mason's attention. Instantly, the events of last night rushed into his head. After dinner, they had returned home, grabbed some bottles of wine,

and downed them while dancing to loud music. Then they had drunken sex and crashed like rocks. The phone started ringing again.

"Arrgghh," Mason groaned as he got out of bed and made his way out of the room. "Hello," he said groggily into the phone after picking it up.

"Mr. Hernandez, something is very wrong with Mrs. Wood; she has been throwing up all morning and can barely speak. We're on our way to the hospital right now. Could you please meet us there?" A hysterical young woman screamed into the phone.

Mason recognized the voice. It belonged to Joy, Jackie's cook and housekeeper. "We'll be right there," Mason said and returned the phone. Immediately, he raced into the bedroom, turned on the lights, and shook Evelyn awake. "Eve, you have to wake up now," he said with an urgency to his voice.

"What's happening?" She asked sleepily.

"Your mom is sick. They are rushing her to the hospital as we speak. We've got to get going," Mason answered, getting off the bed and running to his closet.

Evelyn shot up from bed speedily. "Jesus Christ, Mason, it's happening," Evelyn said. Quickly, she scrambled off the bed and began getting dressed.

Ten minutes later, Mason was speeding down the road in the direction of the hospital. They were told that Jackie was being attended to when they arrived there. Joy and Jackie's driver, Tim, were outside the ER's waiting room. Also, the two private security

agents were standing by the door, doing their best to blend in as random people. They gave Mason and Evelyn subtle nods as they walked in, and Mason nodded in return.

"What happened?" Evelyn asked.

"She was about to get into the car, all dressed for work when suddenly, she doubled over and started coughing and vomiting. She seemed to be in a lot of pain and could not answer when I asked her what was wrong. So, I helped her into the car and was about to start coming when Joy ran out of the house. Together, we rushed down here."

"Did she have breakfast this morning, Joy?" Mason asked.

"Yes, she did. She got dressed for work and then came down to have breakfast as usual. When she was done, I told her goodbye and didn't know anything was wrong until I heard Tim shouting," Joy narrated her account.

"And the doctors have not said anything?" Evelyn asked.

"No. They're still in there with her," Joy replied.

Just then, the door opened, and a doctor dressed in a white coat walked in. "Miss Wood," he said, walking towards Evelyn.

"Hi, Doctor Yusef; how is my mother?"

"Her condition is quite critical, but she's stable for now," the doctor replied.

"What happened exactly? Have you guys been able to detect what's wrong?" Mason asked.

"Test results are not yet back from the lab, but the symptoms she's showcasing are synonymous with poisoning," the doctor said.

"Poisoning?" Evelyn and Mason chorused together.

"Yes, like I said, though, we can't tell if that's accurate until the test results are back," the doctor said.

"And how long will that take?" Mason asked.

"An hour or two," the doctor said. "I'll let you know as soon as there are any new developments."

"Alright, doctor. Thank you very much."

After the doctor left, they turned to look at each other.

"You think it's the guy's plan coming in place?" Evelyn asked.

"Yes, it's the only thing that makes sense. They haven't been able to get her through any other means, and so they decide to go through another means," Mason said.

"But to do that, they would have to have had inside help," Eve pointed out.

At the same time, their eyes went straight to Joy and Tim, having a conversation with each other

"How long has Joy worked for Jackie?" Mason asked.

"Joy had worked for two years or thereabouts. I'm not sure of the exact figure."

"What about Tim?"

"Tim has been with my mom a little while longer, maybe three years."

"Do you trust them?"

"Well, I've not had any reason not to. They both do their jobs effectively and mind their businesses. As far as I know, mom has never had any issues with either of them."

Mason nodded slowly, deep in thought.

"So, what do you suggest we do? Take them in for questioning?" Evelyn asked.

"First of all, we wait for the results to be back from the lab. Then we put more security on Jackie to ensure they can't get to her in the hospital," Mason said. "If the results show that she was poisoned, we'll watch Joy and Tim very closely, monitor their movements, phone calls, and bank transactions if possible."

"Alright, that sounds like a good idea," Evelyn said, nodding.

"But why would they help her to the hospital if they both poisoned her? It doesn't make any sense," Evelyn suddenly asked.

"You're right," Mason agreed. "Since it was Tim who started rescuing her first, maybe it's safe to say that he doesn't have a hand in it."

"Or that's what they want us to believe. Take a look at both of them; they're so closely knit. You think one would take action without telling the other?"

"I really don't know what to think," Mason said. "Fingers crossed, okay?"

"Okay," Evelyn mouthed. Worry and concern were etched deep into her face.

"Come here, babe. She'll be fine, okay? And we'll get to the bottom of this," Mason said, drawing her into his arms and holding her close.

"I hope so. I really do. I just can't afford to lose her," Evelyn cried.

"And you won't, I assure you," Mason said.

## **Chapter 7**

When the test results came out, it was confirmed that Jackie Wood had been poisoned. The doctor said they had found traces of a deadly toxin in her waste products, undoubtedly ingested. When Evelyn and Mason heard the news, they confirmed that an insider had poisoned Jackie. And since the poison was ingested, it had to have been administered by someone who had access to her food. The only person was Joy. "What's next?" Evelyn asked Mason as they were seated in their bedroom.

"I suggest we watch her for a couple of days. She's not a professional at this, and it's to be expected that she will make a mistake very soon. Especially because the mission was unsuccessful, whoever contacted her will reach out to her soon.

"Mason, are you sure about this? What if she takes off or something? She's literally our only link to the bad guys, and if we lose her, no telling how they are going to strike next," Evelyn complained.

"I already put some security on her; if she tries to make a run for it, she'll be caught," Mason said.

"So, until then, we just sit and do nothing?"

"Not do anything; we wait. I assure you; it will be sooner than you think," Mason said.

"Alright then, I'm going to the hospital now. Want to come with?"



"No, I'm going to remain here for a couple of hours and catch up on some work," Mason replied.

Mason walked with her to the door, said goodbye, and walked back in when Eve left. He went to the study, which had floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the mansion's back and front. He had brought some of the paperwork from the Dog Centre back home to work on. He settled on one of the chairs in the room and got to work.

About twenty minutes later, movement coming from the back of the house caught his attention. Mason stood up and walked to the window to see what was happening. He saw Joy outside the house, speaking with someone he could not see. There was a tree next to the person, which blocked Mason from seeing who it was.

At first, it looked casual. However, he noticed that Joy's movements were frantic, almost desperate. Mason could not shake the feeling that this meeting would be their much-needed break in the case. Mason hurried out of the room and down the stairs towards the back. He got out of the house in time to see the familiar outline of a man walk away. He was stout, had short legs and a head free of hair. "Jesus Christ," Mason muttered. It was the same guy whose evil thoughts he had heard three months ago.

Mason watched Joy, and the man concluded their discussion. Joy returned to the house, and the man began walking away. Mason knew that he had to do something. Sadly, he was not armed, and he was sure that the bald guy was armed. Yet, he could

not afford to lose the guy now that he had him so close. He was going to take his chances.

"Hey! Stop," Mason shouted, catching the man's attention. As expected, the bald guy broke into a run. Mason followed suit. Luckily for him, the man did not have much to offer in physical fitness. His short legs prevented him from moving as quickly as Mason could. And when he saw that Mason was closing in, he brought out his secret weapon: a gun.

He stopped running, turned around, and aimed the gun at Mason.

Without any warning, he fired. Mason ducked behind a tree and remained there while the bald guy kept firing. As soon as the shots stopped, the chase restarted.

However, Mason had lost a lot of distance due to the disruption. The chances that he would catch up with the man were very slim. Suddenly, a man came out of a corner of the mansion and tackled the bald guy to the ground. Within seconds, he was disarmed and knocked out. "Tim?" Mason asked in surprise when he got closer. "How did you know to do this?"

"I noticed a few weeks ago that Joy was beginning to act strange. After what happened to Mrs. Wood, I began to suspect that she had a hand in it and began to watch her. I saw this man here," he pointed to the bald guy still lying unconscious on the floor, "when he arrived and then heard the gunshots. I only came to see what was happening and knew that I had to do something."

"Wow. That was an interesting turn of events," Mason said, surprised to the core. "Do you have a phone with you?"

"Yes," Tim replied, pulling his phone out of his pocket.

"I'm going to call 911 now. I need you to go check on Joy. Make sure that she does not leave your sight."

"Alright, Mr. Hernandez," Tim nodded, handed the firearm to him, and walked towards the house.

After calling the police, Mason placed a call to Evelyn and told her about the recent developments. When the police arrived, the bald guy, whose name they now knew to be Fernandez, had regained consciousness. Mason narrated the story from the beginning, and Evelyn and Tim. When Joy was questioned, she confessed immediately.

She had been approached by Fernandez, who promised to give her twenty thousand dollars to poison Jackie's meal. He gave her half of the money before the poisoning. However, since the operation had been unsuccessful, Fernandez had refused to give her the rest of the money. That was what he had come to discuss at the mansion. After all the statements were taken, the police took their leave, along with the criminals.

"How is Jackie?" Mason asked when he was finally alone with Evelyn later that day.

"She is alright. The doctor said the poison was almost entirely out of her system. She is out of the woods. All we have to do now is to wait for her to wake," Evelyn replied.

"And wake she shall," Mason said, holding her close. "I'm so glad everything is finally falling in place."

"Thank you so much for standing by me, baby. I do not think I could have done this without you," Evelyn said, laying on his chest.

"You are never going to have to do anything by yourself again, Eve," Mason replied.

"I love you so much, Mason."

"I love you too, Evelyn."

Their lips met in a kiss that went on for minutes until they were naked down to their underwear. "I have an idea," Evelyn said in between their make-out.

"You do? What is it?" Mason asked as his hands ran over her breasts.

"Let's get married tomorrow," Eve whispered into his mouth.

"You mean this tomorrow? And isn't Jackie still in the hospital?" Mason asked, pushing Evelyn away from his body to look her in the eyes.

"Ouch, that's right. I forgot about that," Eve said, laughing. "Well, can't we do it in the hospital?"

"Oh, come on, that would not be befitting. I hate hospitals, remember? And so does Jackie," Mason pointed out.

"But I want to get married to you as soon as possible," Evelyn pouted.

"And you shall, my love. I'm not going anywhere."

"Oh, oh, I have another idea," she said excitedly. "Let's do it as soon as mom's out of the hospital. It doesn't have to be anything big; just a couple of friends and family and a priest."

"Alright, whatever my queen wants," Mason replied as he spread open her legs and penetrated her wetness.

## **Epilogue**

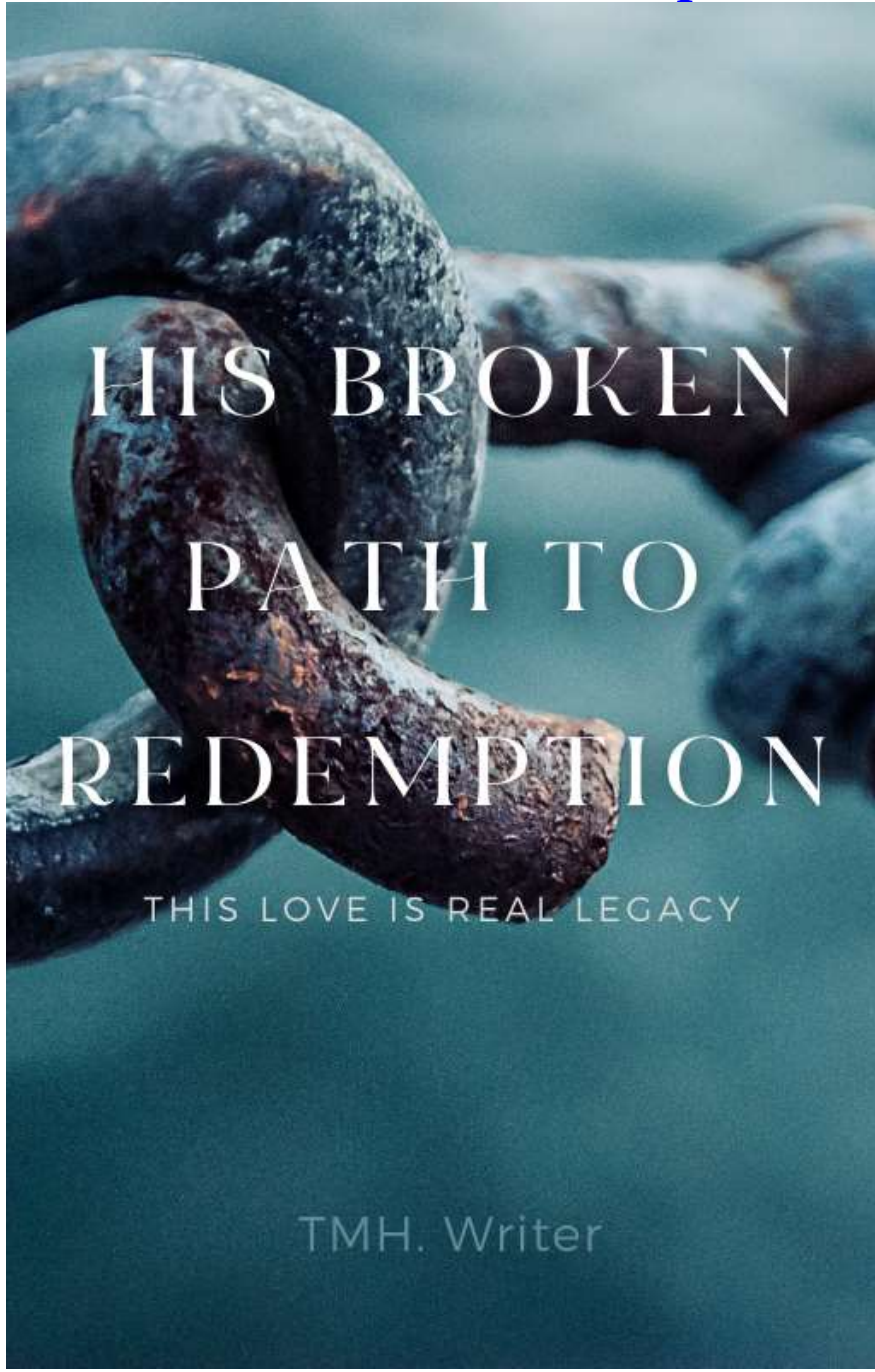
Two weeks after being admitted, Jackie Wood gets out of the hospital, perfectly healed. The following weekend, Mason and Evelyn get married.

Joy and Fernandez are tried for attempted murder alongside their other accomplices and sent to jail.

Mason keeps on hearing people's thoughts, and eventually, he puts it to some good use by assisting the police with arrests and working with Ed Jones and his team to solve mysteries.

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## About This Author



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I started writing poetry at an early age. I have transitioned to writing fiction novels and have debuted the first book in the Romance series This Love is Real on Kindle Vella.

Besides fulfilling my lifelong dream of writing, I use my analytical and creative skills to solve IT problems full-time for a well-known Retailer. I have worked in the IT industry for over two decades. I hold advanced degrees in business and information systems. I currently reside in Dublin, Ca, with my husband of twenty years.

Like my [Facebook](#) page to get updates.

Contact me @ [info@tmhwriter.com](mailto:info@tmhwriter.com)

