

Chapter 1

I wake up on the floor in darkness.

Faint artificial light filters in through a window, which doesn't make sense because there aren't any windows in the wine cellar. But I'm not able to deal with that question until I figure out why I'm on my back in a pool of liquid that's seeping into my clothes.

That and I can hear Sammy Davis Jr. singing "Jingle Bells."

When I sit up, something rolls off of my body and onto the floor with a hard, hollow *thunk*. It's a bottle. In the faint light coming in through the window, I watch the bottle roll away across the floor until it comes to rest against the wall with a *clang*. It's an empty bottle of wine. And the wall isn't a wall but the base of the Whirlpool oven.

I'm in the kitchen.

On the digital LED display at the top of the range, the clock changes from 12:47 to 12:48.

My head is pounding. I don't know how many bottles of wine I've consumed, but I know I started drinking before lunch. The impetus for my wine binge is as clear to me as the

digital numbers of the oven clock, but I have no idea what happened to the last twelve hours.

Or how I ended up in the kitchen.

Or what I'm sitting in.

Part of me doesn't want to know. Part of me just wants to believe that it's nothing more than fermented grapes. That I somehow managed to get out of the wine cellar and into the kitchen and then passed out, dumping the contents of the bottle of wine onto the floor. Except the front of my clothes aren't wet, only the back, and since the bottle was on my chest when I woke up, I couldn't have spilled wine on the floor without soaking my shirt.

I put my hand down into the puddle, which is congealed and sticky, then bring my hand up to my nose. It smells sweet. At first I think it's yogurt or strawberry preserves, until I put my finger in my mouth.

It's Baskin-Robbins strawberries and cream ice cream. My father's favorite. He keeps at least two quarts of it in the freezer at all times. What I don't understand is what it's doing on the kitchen floor. Then I turn around and stagger to my feet and understand why.

Three quarts of Baskin-Robbins are smashed open, their contents melted and spreading out across the floor. Surrounding them are boxes of frozen vegetables, packages of frozen meats, containers of frozen juice concentrate, and half a dozen ice cube trays, their contents melted and mixed in with the ice cream, forming a pool of defrosted frozen items.

Oh shit, I think. What the hell did I do?

Not that it really matters. My parents are going to ship me off to a zoo when they get back from Palm Springs. Unless they wake up in the morning and my father is upset enough about what I've done to cancel their trip and ship me off to a research facility out of spite.

I don't know what I intended to accomplish by dumping the entire contents of the freezer onto the kitchen floor, but I figure it would probably be a good idea to try to put back what I can and clean up the rest of it before my parents wake up. But when I open the freezer, I discover there's not any room.

My parents are in the freezer. I can see hands and legs and feet and my father's face staring out at me from the second shelf. His head is in a large Ziploc freezer bag, as are the rest of my parents' body parts. Or most of them. When I open the refrigerator, my parents are in there, too.

All the wine I've drunk is suddenly trying to find its way back into the bottle and I barely make it to the sink before I throw up. Actually, it's more like reverse drinking. Just wine and a little stomach acid. But no chunks of Mom or Dad.

Our relationship wasn't always like this.

Sure, there were the standard growing pains and disagreements most parents and sons encounter.

Hormones.

Independence.

Latent Oedipal desires.

But when your only son reanimates from the dead, it creates an entirely new dynamic that your average parents just aren't prepared to handle.

After all, it's not like there's a handbook for dealing with spontaneous resurrection. That's the technical term for zombies you hear thrown around by experts on talk shows and news programs, as if they know what it's like to be a reanimated corpse. They have no idea of the emotional fallout from a rapidly digesting pancreas. Or how hard it is to keep your tissues from liquefying.

My father was a de facto expert. And by "de facto," I mean he was the only one who considered himself an expert on anything.

Plumbing.

Politics.

Personal hygiene.

“You know, Andrew, you can get rid of those blackheads by using olive oil and vinegar.”

He actually believed this. Fortunately, he let Mom do the cooking. Otherwise, I would have been the only kid in my school eating arugula salad with sliced pears, Asiago cheese, and a benzoyl peroxide dressing.

Don't get me wrong. My dad wasn't an idiot. He just always thought he was right, even when he had no idea what he was talking about. He would have made a great politician.

However, I do have to give my father props for his choice in refrigerators. My mom wanted one of those Whirlpool side-by-side models, but my father insisted on an Amana bottom freezer. Said it was more energy efficient, drawing cold air down instead of up. He also claimed it provided better use of shelf space.

While my parents' heads and most of their limbs are tucked away inside the freezer, their bodies from hip to shoulder are stuffed into the refrigerator. Had it been a side-by-side model, I never would have been able to fit their torsos on the shelves. Thanks Dad.

On the CD player in the living room, Dean Martin is singing “Auld Lang Syne.”

Staring at my parents stuffed into the Amana bottom freezer, their torsos crammed between the mayonnaise and the leftover Thanksgiving turkey, their heads sealed in Ziploc bags, I'm overcome with a surreal sense of disbelief. From the expression on my father's face, it appears he's just as surprised as me.

Maybe none of this would have come to pass had my fa-

ther taken the time to understand what I was going through instead of treating me like a pariah.

Or maybe I'm just kidding myself.

Maybe everything that happened between the accident and now was inevitable.