

# Mutual Isolation

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It was 6:00 AM and he had survived a cold night in the mountains. The winds had picked up and the day promised to be even colder. Although he was from the city, he had managed over the years to learn a few survival skills. This day they would keep him alive. His thoughts kept on returning as to why he was there, alone, in the mountains on a cold and snowy winter day. He had all he needed, a good job, many friends, and a warm apartment. He always loved the mountains but from afar. Living in Colorado he had those views every day. They were so inviting and so he decided to reach for those snowcapped peaks. He needed

to get away and climb up to the heavens. What drove him to this action on this day?

To understand let us go back 6 months. Daniel is a 38-year-old engineer with a position in a highly selective firm focusing on creating new innovative engines. These were not simple engines but those that would one day be used in the future to reach Mars and beyond. His firm had a lucrative contract with the Space program, and he was the lead engineer of this project. He is a handsome young man with alluring features. Tall, well-built and with dark brown hair and eyes, he is always followed by women and men wishing for more than friendship. His charismatic smile would light up a room. Yet Daniel was focused on his work. His mind and days remained in his daily calculations and engineering designs. His goal to create the perfect engine that can obtain speeds faster than those known to man. To say he was driven was to minimize who he is. He is so much more. Brilliant, yet down to earth. Never imposing his brilliance on others. He was

the ultimate team player and respected by all that worked with him over the years. He shared his ideas and would not expect credit. When received it he was humbled and made sure that all knew that it was indeed a team effort. Yet he was an excellent leader with the ability to see the big picture and plan the future. He was sought after by many competitive firms because he had a reputation in the industry. Yet Daniel was committed to his firm, his first job upon receiving his doctorate degree in engineering and he felt his last job when he was to retire. Financially over those ten years he had received many bonuses and promotions so that his retirement would not need to be more than another 10 years from this day. Yet I digress. So, what happened 6 months ago to change Daniel and drive him to this cold and unforgiving mountain? So, this is where our story begins.

It was a rainy day with no prospect for the evening. Daniel was walking home to prolong his journey, for as much as he loved living alone, this particular evening,

the thought of being alone concerned him. Along the way he passed a nice restaurant and the thought of not having to cook dinner took over. He entered and asked for a table for one. He was seated at the back, not unusual for a lone diner. A waitress came to his table and as he looked up, he felt a kinship with this lady standing before him. As the evening passed and the crowd dissipated, they found themselves still talking as if they had been friends for years. They returned to his home and spent the night talking. It was dawn and both needed to return to their normal life. For this one night they found each other and knew this was more than friendship. She said her name was Sarah. She was just two years younger, an aspiring writer, with long brown hair, sparkling brown bedroom eyes and the perfect smile. Her sparkling smile could light up a room. He felt feelings that he had never felt before. As they parted that morning, they promised each other to meet again later that day. All day at work Daniel could not focus. Her eyes, her smile was on his mind and had encompassed his heart. His anticipation

of the evening to come was evident and the source of jest for his curious co-workers. He left work that day as early as was possible with the hope of having time to prepare for this first date. Although simple, Daniel always dressed stylishly and well-coordinated. He chose his perfect outfit and went out the door with a simple red rose for his new companion. He arrived at the restaurant and was seated at the perfect table. His eyes were focused on the door awaiting her arrival. They had said to meet at 6:30 pm and it was now an hour later. Maybe she was simply delayed. He was a patient man and waited until 8:30 pm. It was at that time he called her cell but received a message that her phone was no longer in service. He approached the owner and asked for this young lady. He was told her name was Sarah. The owner did not recognize the name. He proceeded to describe her to the owner. "Oh yes, Andrea, yes, she worked here", answered the owner. He was setback by the name and the past tense. The owner proceeded to tell Daniel that Andrea resigned just two hours ago. She said that she had to leave to be with a

sick family member and would not be returning. Daniel's smile of anticipation was crushed in a matter of moments. This young woman came into his life unexpectedly and left in the same way within a matter of several hours. Daniel felt loss for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in his life. He left the restaurant and made his way home not understanding what had just happened. He was so sure there was a bond between them, a connection. But why was it now broken. Was she not ready? And what of the name? Which one was real, if either one?

Hours became days and days became months. There was no sign that Andrea would return. He called often and left messages, but they remained unanswered. Daniel began to lose faith that he would ever see her again. His concentration at work was fading. He could not understand how someone that surely bonded with him could suddenly leave without a word. What drove her to hurt him in this way? Was there something he said or texted that scared her away? He read and reread all his texts and

played all their conversations back in his mind. Nothing stood out. She did not seem visibly disturbed by anything he said or wrote. But then again do we really know what someone might be thinking. If only he had spoken to her when she was planning to leave. Could he have been able to convince her to stay. He would never know. The only clue that the owner of the restaurant offered Daniel was that it was urgent that she leave immediately. She took very little with her. A few clothes, one or two books, and a backpack. The rest remained in her apartment and offered no clues. Daniel proceeded to pack up all he found for the landlord wanted to rent the apartment if she was not to return, which was his understanding. Daniel placed the few boxes in his trunk and proceeded to drive up into the mountains. He felt a need to get away and so he did. Daniel had never taken a vacation from his work, and he had saved up three months' time. This was a good opportunity to use that time, maybe not entirely. He felt a sense of loss and needed a place to grieve. Daniel's friend, oldest and dearest friend since childhood,

has a log cabin in the woods atop a hill in the western foothills of Pikes Peak, Colorado. A magnificent view of Pikes Peak's Sentinel Point could be clearly seen while children snuggled up in the large sunroom. This four bedroom mountain log home was where Daniel spent his best years. It sits on 4.8 acres and is nestled among the pine and aspen trees. Daniel stood on the picturesque wrap-around deck and his memories reemerged as he listened to the stream that cuts across the property, and watched the soaring hawks, deer, fox, chipmunks, curious squirrels, the Colorado black squirrel and dozens of species of birds such as stellar jays, hummingbirds, woodpeckers, and many other songbirds play in the woods. He even occasionally had a visit from a mother moose. At 9,600 feet above sea level, the sky is blue, the sun is warming, and the stars at night are brilliant. This cabin offered Daniel the isolation he was hoping for. Although the log cabin appeared to blend into its wooded environment, the inside was totally modernized with an upstairs and downstairs living rooms both having large screen HD



TV's. The upstairs master bedroom also had a large TV. Wireless internet was available throughout the home as a plus but for Daniel at this moment in his life, it was not particularly important.

Daniel's early years were spent not far from Pikes Peak, and he would often stay with his friend Jonathan. They called their home in the mountains a winter chalet. Jonathan had a large family so the house could easily accommodate up to 10 occupants with 4 bedrooms and each bedroom having its own private full bathroom. The spacious master bedroom for Jonathan's parents had a poster king bed with cozy comforters. The lower level had three bedrooms. One bedroom had a king sized bed for Jonathan's older sister, and the other two had queen sized beds for Jonathan and Daniel. The last bedroom had 2 sets of full size bunk beds for younger brothers. To accommodate an additional guest the lower level included a family room with a sleeper sofa. The theme throughout this cabin was festive as if Christmas was residing there all

year long. It was a creative paradise from the moment you walked in the front door to the glassed-in sunroom at the far side of the house, complete with its' own pellet stove for warmth, full futon, game or crafter's table and chairs, and of course the mountain view. As Daniel stepped through the original interior door into the living room, he was greeted by the beautiful stone fireplace and a comfy leather couch to sink into. The upstairs attic bedroom/study is just like an adventure into times past with creaky bookend steps included. Situated in the treetops and lit by a skylight, this is a space with coves, one of which houses a real library desk for a writer. This was Daniel's favorite place to write. All of the woodwork and flooring dates back to the cabin's 1930 original beginnings. It was owned by Jonathan's ancestral family. Jonathan would stay there often as an adult after his parents moved to Massachusetts. He offered a home to Daniel while he was in Europe for a few months. Daniel was happy to accept this invitation to a home surrounded by such beauty.

Daniel was content staying in the cabin even though his heart was breaking. His thoughts would return often to Andrea and his need to know what happened. He decided on this clear blue sky morning to take a drive down the mountain into the town at its base, Manitou Springs. Manitou Springs was a small town at the foot of the mountain on the western side. It was the terminus of the Pikes Peak Highway that led back to Daniel's temporary residence. With a population of less than 5000 residents the town had a well- defined Main Street with many unique businesses. Close to the foot of the mountain one would find a historic restaurant called the Cliff House at Pikes Peak. It was known for "an atmosphere of Victorian romance and opulence dating back nearly 150 years". Daniel knew this restaurant but was never a patron. On this day he decided to treat himself to a lone dinner. He was led to his seat at a table for two with views of the mountain. Daniel felt a kinship with this mountain and its 14,000 foot summit. The highway would take him to

the summit, and he was considering driving it one day. As he was reviewing the menu a young waitress dressed in formal wear approached to ask if he wish for a drink.

“Good evening, sir, welcome to the Cliff House. My name is Jennifer can I offer you a drink?”

The voice sounded familiar to Daniel, and he looked up. Although the hair was short and darker, the face was the same. This was Sarah or Andrea, now Jennifer. He stared at her with confusion.

She too realized that this was Daniel. “Jennifer, have we met before?”

“No sir, I do not think so.” She seemed nervous and concerned.

“Then I must be in error. I apologize. I will have a gin and tonic to start, thank you.”

Daniel saw the desperation in her eyes and decided to hold off asking any further questions.

None of this made sense to Daniel, but he thought it best to let it rest for now and just enjoy his dinner.

He was happy to see her but also disappointed by her confusing message. Could this simply be a look a like that in his mind he turned into Sarah. The night they spent together was so real and embedded in his daily thoughts. This must be her, he convinced himself so. The dinner progressed and his appetite diminished with each exemplary course. Jennifer kept her distance and ended this interlude with the check.

“Sir, I have your check. I hope you enjoyed the meal. Can I pack it up for you to take home?”

“Thank you for your service, Jennifer. Yes, that would be fine. I live up the mountain at the 9600 feet mark and it

would be good to have something for later. I hope we will meet again soon.”

“Sir, your views must be beautiful.”

“Indeed, they are. I am staying at the residence of Jonathan Mathers, an old friend that is away currently.”

Daniel was hoping that this information would be of use to Sarah. To Daniel, this young woman would always be Sarah, regardless of her aliases. He was not afraid that she was a criminal and he would be putting himself at risk. He trusted his judgment and he had come to trust her. He was sure he was right. Daniel returned home with a smile on his face. He knew she would somehow find him.

Days passed and silence and loneliness began to emerge once again. Maybe he was wrong about Sarah. Maybe this was not her, or if it was, maybe she did not wish to pursue a current relationship. On the mid-morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> day,

there was a knock on the door. Daniel answered, thinking it might be a friend of Jonathan. As he opened the door there was the young lady he knew as Sarah standing there.

“Hello, I am sorry to intervene, but I wish to see you again, Daniel.”

“Then you are Sarah, indeed.” “Yes and no, may I come in.” “Of course, you can.”

As Sarah walked in, she turned and hugged Daniel snugly. Daniel kissed her on the cheek and led her to his favorite room, the sunroom.

“Daniel, I am so sorry that I left before our date, but I had no choice. US Marshalls took me away and brought me here. I was not allowed to talk to anyone. Talking to you now is a violation and would not be approved of, yet I feel I must confide in you. Daniel, I trust you and hope my trust is well placed.”

“Sarah, may I call you Sarah?”

“Yes, but that is my name and could be potentially dangerous for me and you.”

“What would you prefer?”

“Let us stay with Jennifer for now.”

“Then, Jennifer, you can trust me. I formed a bond with you the night we met. I cannot explain it, but I trust you implicitly and I hope you can trust me as well.”

“Daniel what I am about to tell you must be kept in the strictest of confidences. My name is Sarah Thornton, and I am in the Witness Protection program. I am to testify against a known criminal in a Federal trial next month. He has threatened to kill me if I proceed. He has already eliminate two other witnesses, one of which was his wife. My life is at stake if he finds me. That was what had



happened that day, that is why I was quickly removed from my residence before our date and relocated here to a small mountain community with a new identity. In my former life I was an accountant. I was hired out of college by a firm that had an excellent reputation and paid well. It was my dream job. My boss was what appeared on the surface to be caring and supportive. My fellow employees were a pleasure to work with. All was perfect until one year later. It was late at night, and I was reviewing our accounts preparing for an external audit. Something appeared odd in the numbers. At first, I thought I was just tired for it was past 12 midnight. I repeated my calculations, and the answer was the same. I could not account for the discrepancy, so I decided to address it with my boss in the morning. As I was about to leave, I saw my boss in the parking lot talking to someone I did not know. The man looked odd but again I did not appreciate at the time who he was. The next morning before speaking to my boss I was reading the paper. There was an article about the arrest of a criminal and his picture was that of the man I had

seen the night before. I was curious about why my boss was talking to this man. I was so naive and trusting at the time. So I asked him. He became immediately agitated and told me to never speak of this again to no one. I apologized and told him I would do so. He calmed down and left the office abruptly. Yet his reaction intrigued me. I decided to do a little digging.”

Daniel listened intently as Sarah continued with her story.

“My boss had a safe in the office that only he had access to. I watched one afternoon as to the combination and when he was away on a business trip and I was alone in the office, I opened the safe. Inside I found stacks of \$100 dollar bills and several black books. Inside were lists of transactions with dates and amounts. I realized at that point that this business was a front for money laundering. I decided I had to make copies of the books and make sure they were returned to the safe in the same positions, not to illicit suspicion. I turned

all this information to the Feds, and they followed up. I was asked to be a witness and I agreed. The death threats began coming in anonymously at first, but I knew they were from my boss. The US Department of Justice insisted I quit my job and go into the US Federal Witness Protection program. The United States Federal Witness Protection Program is a witness protection program administered by the United States Department of Justice and operated by the United States Marshals. I was to leave immediately with them and sever all ties to my old life. The most important rule of the program is that witnesses must not make contact with former associates such as my friends at work or unprotected family members. They also must not return to the town from which they were relocated at any time. I could not tell anyone what was happening, not even my parents nor my sister. I just disappeared.”

“That must have been awful. Did they ever find out that you were safe?”

“No they just know I am still missing. I am hoping I can contact them once the trial is done, and my boss is sentenced. Contacting them would have put both them and I in danger. Telling you this right now is putting you in danger.”

“Do not worry about me. I can take care of myself. I am now worried about you. How safe are you here?”

“I am far from home in a small town in the mountains of Colorado. My marshals believe I am safe.”

“Where are you staying right now?”

“I am staying at the Cliff House hotel for now until a residence in the town can be found for me.”

“Would you like to stay here with me?”

“I cannot impose and put you in danger more than I already have done.”

“Sarah I would like to help and keep you safe. If you stay here, you are helping me. Please accept my invitation to come live here. There are many bedrooms, and you will have your own space.”

“You will have to be vetted by the Marshalls, would that be, okay?”

“I have nothing to hide and that would be fine.”

That afternoon two Marshalls came to Daniel’s door and discussed with him what needed to be done. The house was isolated at 9600 feet with no neighbors. It was the perfect location for mutual isolation of these two people, but it was also difficult to defend in case of invasion.

Sarah wanted to continue working at The Cliff House because she did not wish to depend on Daniel. The Marshalls were her constant companions for the next three weeks, as was Daniel and all was well. The entire purpose of the witness protection program is to keep the witnesses safe so that they can testify at trials that could convict members of organized crime such as Sarah's Boss. Perhaps the riskiest part of the process is when the witness returns to testify. A great number of precautions are taken, and security is maximized at this time. Sarah was told that witnesses have been brought in past cases by mail trucks, helicopters, and fishing boats. Sarah was to be flown in and brought in through a side door of the courthouse. It was two days before the trial and arrangements were being made to fly Sarah back to her hometown for the trial. The Marshalls were staying at the house in the upstairs bedrooms overnight to insure all precautions. The next morning they were to head out to the airport at Colorado Springs. Although the second largest airport in Colorado it would be less known by the assailants.

They would be taking a standard United Airlines flight to their destination. Daniel insisted to go with Sarah and permission was granted by the Justice Department. It was 4am and Daniel could not sleep. He proceeded to go downstairs and check on the perimeter through the installed cameras now surrounding the house.

He returned to the kitchen with its large floor sliding doors. The alarms were on, but he noticed something odd. He turned on the back lights and the chairs had been moved. He was sure he had secured them under the outside dinner table before they went into the house for the night. They were now away from the table. The alarm was still on so maybe he was imagining something that was not there. Daniel kept a good set of knives in a butcher block on the counter. One 8-inch Chef's Knife was now gone. This could not be his imagination. There was someone in the house. He ran as fast as he could to the upstairs bedrooms. Both marshals were now gone. Their throats were slit while sleeping. He took their guns

which were untouched. He knew that Sarah and he would be next. He ran back downstairs to where Sarah was sleeping. All appeared quiet. He quietly woke up Sarah and told her to hide. There was a hidden door in the back of the armoire in the bedroom that led to the Laird's Lug (the Lord's Ear). It was a hidden alcove large enough to stand in where all could be heard from within the room. Daniel placed Sarah there and took her place in the bed. Daniel and Jonathan had discovered this alcove when they were young looking for C.S. Lewis' Narnia. As the assailant entered the room, Daniel was ready under the covers with gun in hand. When the assailant pulled back the covers with knife in hand, Daniel shot twice. The assailant was dead before he hit the floor. Daniel told Sarah to come out and she heard him clearly and emerged from the Armoire and into the room. Not sure if there was only one assailant, Daniel searched the house while Sarah called the US Marshal contact number and the local police which were aware of who she was. There was evidence of a break in that did not trigger the alarm



because the alarm was disengaged for just long enough for the assailant to enter. The incident was investigated by the local police, and it was determined that it was a clear case of self-defense. Daniel was soon cleared. Sarah was permitted to leave with the US Marshalls and testified at the trial. Her testimony led to the jury's decision of a guilty verdict and a sentence that would take him out of society for a long time. Although her position was compromised, Sarah chose to exit the Witness Protection program.

With time she was able to live a normal life once again. Mutual isolation was no longer needed, for now Daniel and Sarah were able to share mutual togetherness.