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CHAPTER ONE

THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

From his bird's eye view, he peered into the foggy bay, as if his solution might be out there just beyond his sight.

Why was he hesitating to take his life? All he had to do was lean forward from the railing and simply freefall into the treacherous depths below, yet he felt as compelled to stay as he did to jump. It wouldn't be painless, but it would be quick, and a lot less painful than this life, he figured.

He felt so hopeless, with no more reason to live. And yet he wanted to.

Oh, how he wanted to.

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I'm not a big fan of crowds. That's why I chose very early on a Tuesday morning, when there are fewer tourists, to walk across the iconic Golden

Gate Bridge. I wanted to get a good sunrise picture for an upcoming publication and the bridge offered an ideal place from which to take the photo. The forecast hadn't mentioned fog, but typical for San Francisco, fog came from nowhere that particular morning. Pea soup. I was deciding whether to turn back or wait for it to clear when I noticed the shadowy figure in the fog about twenty feet from me.

Someone had climbed over the steel railing and was perched precariously on a narrow ledge—and just as precariously on the edge of this life. The ledge was actually about a 30-inch-wide beam, spanning 220 feet above the icy, gray waters of the San Francisco Bay.

As I carefully approached, I saw it was a young man, in his early to mid twenties, with short blondish hair. I was fully aware that a sudden move or the wrong words from me could end in tragedy, so I said a quick prayer for wisdom.

I began by gently asking for his name, telling him mine, and that I'm a Christian and would like to talk with him.

He seemed startled by my approach, but he remained fixed in his spot. "Is that some sort of stage name, for people who need a ray of hope and a little comfort?" he replied wryly.

I assured him that it was my real name and that all I was asking was for him to listen. I'm aware that experts often say to get a suicidal person to talk, but I was afraid talking about his problems

may prompt him to jump, and I didn't know how much time he would give me. So, funny as it may sound, I *did* want to give him a ray of hope and some comfort, as quickly as I could. "Even as difficult and painful as your circumstances are right now, you still have tremendous worth. I believe that I can give you some good reasons not to take your life," I said.

"I've already made up my mind. I'm going to jump. You can't tell me anything new that I haven't heard before," he informed me. "And when I jump, what are you going to do? You're going to walk away a failure. Your little speech didn't work. Your little 'God solutions' are irrelevant to the big problems that I have. I've got friends who died and God didn't help them."

"What's your name?" I gently prompted again.

"I'm not giving it to you."

"If you've already made up your mind to jump, you have nothing to lose by listening. Will you give me your word that you won't jump until you hear me out?"

"Why should I give you my word?"

"Okay. You don't know me and you don't know what I'm going to say," I admitted. "Will you let me tell you what happened to my friend's brother?"

"I couldn't care less what happened to your friend's brother. But go ahead," he sighed. "Tell me about your stupid friend's stupid brother."

I wasn't sure how to read his attitude, whether he was still on the verge of jumping or willing to

listen, but every minute he continued to talk with me was giving *me* a ray of hope. I continued, “My friend’s name is Stuart Scott, and this actually happened in Utah in 2012. A group of masked men with knives took Stan, his younger brother, knocked him out, cut open his chest, and took out his heart. And no one did a thing to stop them.”

“Seriously, that’s one of the sickest things I’ve ever heard. There is so much evil in this life!” he exclaimed, his agitation level rising. “That’s the kind of thing that gets me so depressed. Everywhere I look I see nothing but horrible things happening. And so how is this supposed to make me change my mind about killing myself?”

“As it stands, you think it was horrible,” I quickly told him. “You only think so because you’re missing some vital information. What they did wasn’t bad. It was good.”

“Go ahead, Mr. Wise Guy. Change my mind,” he mocked.

“They were surgeons.”

“What do you mean?”

“They were heart surgeons who put on their masks, took their scalpels, knocked the man out with anesthesia, cut open his chest, took out his diseased heart that was killing him, and gave him a heart transplant. Those brilliant men saved his life!”

“Oh,” he said, meekly.

“*Oh* is right. Just thirty seconds ago you thought that what they did was evil, but now with the missing information you’ve had a radical change of

mind. Just three little words changed your mind from something being despicably evil to being wonderfully good. That little bit of information gave you another perspective, so that you could see the truth.”

“Okay... point made. What’s that got to do with me standing on the edge of this bridge? It doesn’t change my mind about jumping. I’m still going to do it.”

“No, the point hasn’t yet been made,” I said. “The point is, you’ve made up your mind to take your life, but I’d like to share some information that will give you another perspective. Your life matters, but you think life isn’t worth living because you are seeing your situation from your limited point of view. All I’m asking is that you listen to a few words that I believe are going to change everything for you. Will you please hear me out? Just let me run through the reasons that I believe will show you that what you are doing is the wrong thing to do. I don’t mean morally wrong. I mean ‘wrong’ in the sense of it not being in your best interest.”

“Okay. I get it. If the information is as radical as you say it is, and it does change my perspective, I give you my word that I won’t jump. But I don’t think it’s going to happen.”

“Let’s give it a try,” I said with a sense of relief. “But I need to know that you won’t take offense at anything I say. This is because I’m going to talk

about God and other things that may make you feel guilty.”

“You make me laugh. I’m on the ledge of the Golden Gate Bridge, about to jump. I have never felt this bad in all my life, and you think you’re going to make me feel worse?” He shook his head in disbelief, then added in utter defeat, “I already feel guilty. I feel about as alone as anyone can get. There is no point and no purpose in existing any longer. And you know what? I don’t even believe in God; I believe in science and reason. So you have an impossible task. But go ahead. Do your thing.”

“Thank you,” I replied, greatly encouraged. I knew that *nothing* was impossible . . .