

my face and trudge off toward the office.

"I have noticed that you smile, even when you are obviously not happy. You are smiling now actually." I reach up, touching the corners of my mouth. I hadn't realized that I am smiling again. I don't feel like it, but I can't seem to stop. "Do you do this often?"

"Yes." I sigh in grim acceptance. "People expect that of me. I'm the moral support of the office. Even when people are having the worst day on record, they always say that they feel better for a couple minutes when I'm around. How can I take that away from them?"

"So you sacrifice your true emotions so that other people will be happy? I don't think that's very fair."

"You're probably right, but I like it when people feel better. I feel a little better, too."

"You've been seeing me for a while now. I wish you wouldn't try to lie to me. Why do you really do it?" He raises his eyebrow at me. I hate it when he does that. I can't help but tell him everything.

"I smile because people don't hang around people who are depressed all the time. What do I really have to smile about? I live in an empty room, the one person that I have ever had real emotion to can't return them, and I don't have one friend who knows to talk to about it. I can't be my real self around people. I even use my middle name with these people. I feel like I'm leading a double life with them."

"I noticed that you used a different name on the registration than what you call yourself. Tell me about that. Why do you feel like you need to use that name?"

"Because that name is everything that I'm not. That name is confident, happy, and fun. People like to see that name in the hall. People like to be around that name. That name gets asked to go places. That name actually

enjoys the life that it has, I enjoy the life that name has. I'm nothing like that name, my life sucks compared to that name.

I grew up in a rural part of the country. I didn't fit in. Everything that others were doing just didn't interest me. I spent my nights at home, wondering where I went wrong. I remember being awake after everyone else in the house had went to sleep crying because of the loneliness. Then one night, I decided that I was tired of not fitting in. I decided that I wouldn't cry anymore. The next day was when that name took over. Almost instantly, I was having fun, being invited to places and people were interested in my life, too. When I moved away, I just kept being the name. No sense messing with something that works."

"When was the last time you let you be yourself?"

"I don't remember."

"Try to let yourself come out here, it will be alright."

"I don't remember how."

"Try anyway." I sit back in my chair, unsure about how to proceed. My once empty head is now filled with voices, all screaming in objection. A chorus of doubt to forestall my transformation. Images of an empty apartment, the feeling of the cold morning floor, and the echo of deafening all silence run through my mind at bullet speed. I see myself in the mirror, old and wrinkled. Then, from the maelstrom comes a hand, reaching to pull my fragmented mind through the chaos. It's his hand. I feel his smile, warm and radiant. It dispels the darkness from around me. I feel myself emerge.

I feel the first drops fall on my hand. I look to the ceiling for a leak, and then realize that it is me that is leaking. My hand reaches cautiously for my face, scared of my discovery. They are there for the first time in years, tears, real tears. They accelerate,