

**Regret**  
**in**  
**Triptych**

**by**  
**Chris Wesley**

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used ficticiously. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The Mining Town of Charlemagne, Colorado is loosely based on Gilman, Colorado.

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*Regret in Triptych* takes place approximately:

\* 11 years after the events of the upcoming book *Like Clutching Faith*.

\* 13 years after the events of the upcoming ebook *Night of the Long Knives*.

\* 14 years after the events of the upcoming book *What This Light Might Shine Upon*.

\* 15 years after the end of the upcoming book *Outliving Emotional Ghettos Wielding a Tec-9 Heart*.

**The full tale of some of the events talked about in this story will be found in the titles listed above.**

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This book is dedicated to all  
whose lives have been  
touched by cancer,  
regardless of type.

# One

There was that old familiar start inside my chest upon first seeing her again.

Oddly, directly preceding that moment was a few seconds where my mind was trying to place how I knew this woman.

But it all came back burning with brilliant light flashing across me and landing on the man she was holding hands with.

"Andros?" Lindsey Falco almost screamed with enthusiasm. With our eyes already connected, there would be no pretending that I didn't see her. "Long time no see, how've you been?" This last part was far more tentative, as if she remembered something between her initial greeting and the question that followed.

I felt like I put my smile on one lip at a time, but she and my replacement in her life were gracious enough to act like they didn't notice. He was CEO of a company I secretly bought stock in after they'd married.

"I'm great." I said, lying.

"I'm glad to hear that." She said, not calling me out for the lie.

The sympathy in her eyes and voice offered up subtitles for our dialogue as we spoke in the kind of code that sounds like a completely different conversation to anyone who didn't share our history.

When asked what she's been up to, she mentioned the new vegetables she planted and how she was dealing with the "snail invasion". What I heard was "Operation Domesticate Me", as she referred to married life behind *The Domesticator's* back, was in full effect.

I admitted that my life had been quiet and looked to remain so for the foreseeable future. She nodded in silent acknowledgement. She knew what that really meant was that there was no music in my life at the moment. The melodies were in hibernation and I had no idea when the cold would break so I could start writing and recording again.

At one point, I tried to pretend not to notice how her right hand crept from her side to the strap of her fanny pack until her index

finger found the pink ribbon buttoned onto it. She rubbed it with her finger like I imagine you would a lamp while trying to summon a genie out of it.

She bought that ribbon shortly after my replacement for her in my life was diagnosed. Her eyes flicked towards the twitch of the right side of my mouth. I disappeared from everyone who knew me the morning after my wife's funeral, until now, seven months later.

This already wasn't going the way I planned in my head. The very sight of Lindsey, my old friend and one time lover, had pulled me back to almost the same state I was in before I left, like the past several months never existed. At least not emotionally.

*The Reason My Stock Was Worth \$297 A Share* let go of her hand and excused himself to gather up their son who was attempting to coax a Praying Mantis off of a tree branch and on to his waiting palm.

"Don't see too many of those around anymore." She said looking at the insect and trying to allow me to determine how deep I wanted to get for now.

"No." I said. "Not those or butterflies."

She gave me a wry smile at my reference. We had met at the Butterfly Gardens in Victoria, British Columbia when I was 19 and she was 23. She was with a friend and I was alone. Walking through the gardens, we crossed paths a few times and I wondered mutely how she could wear a black leather jacket in that closed environment with all the heat and humidity and not appear to sweat. The place was like a Green House, all enclosed and bordering on stuffy.

Once, after they had passed, I looked back after her. The letters D and K dominated the back of her jacket stylized into the logo for the punk band The Dead Kennedys.

Later on, while reading a placard about a particular species of butterfly, a little kid near me caught one and held it up between his chubby little fingers for those of us around him to see. It was an innocent gesture, but...

"You let that go this very instant young man!" A hunched over old man yelled at him. Even bent over from age, he was a good six



feet tall and shook a huge pointing hand in the boy's direction. "You shorten the life of the butterfly and damage its wings when you catch them like that. Never handle their wings! It kills them."

The boy was so startled, that he parted his fingers and the butterfly flew away. The old man gave the boy one last menacing look and then turned away, muttering to himself and shaking his head. The boy ran in the opposite direction screaming for his mother.

"Wow. Can you imagine the damage grandpa would do in the pit?" I heard from behind me. It was the punk girl again with her friend standing beside her.

The pit she referred to was a slam pit. A place, usually at the foot of the stage at concerts with aggressive music where fans push and/or slam into one another to the music.

"Do you mean after he fell down and people started trampling and getting tripped up by him?" I asked her.

She looked at my T-shirt. It had an album graphic from the heavy metal band Iron

Maiden on it. She smirked at me. "What do you know about slam pits metal boy?"

"It's my circle of life...I've got anger issues." I responded, referencing the circular pattern many slam pits took on.

She wore a Mohawk then, six inch spikes of rebellion jutted out from her scalp and bisected her head, top to rear. We discovered that not only were we both visiting from America, but we were both local to the suburbs of Los Angeles and had each other's phone numbers before the conversation was over.

Throughout the exchange, her friend stood glowering at me in quiet disapproval. Even years later, that friend never grew to like me. I was fine with that though, I never liked that friend much either.

"You worry me, you know."

Her words pulled me back into the present. With her husband occupied, she dropped the code and spoke directly. Even if the tightness hadn't been present in her voice, the fact that she said 'me' instead of 'us' lent a severity to her statement-made it personal between she and I.

Over the years, after we realized that we weren't the stuff of successful romance, so much of our relationship became shared with those that we dated and eventually married, that little outside of our coded conversations belonged to just the two of us.

"I know." I made no effort to hide the shame I felt over this. "Since Nicole's funeral, I haven't felt very...I don't know. I needed to be truly alone for awhile. Away from anyone who I care for."

She looked puzzled, but didn't ask for me to explain myself. I was glad for that.

A couple of hikers passed by us on the trail. I watched as they went on past her waiting family. Her husband had his back to us, keeping himself between their son and our reunion.

He knew just as she did that I was here to see her. I never hiked this trail, unless accompanying them and it was common knowledge Lindsey was here every Monday evening without fail. I wondered if he suspected that I had hoped he'd be working late today.

"Is there something I can do?" She asked.

I measured potential outcomes of several answers and settled on "No." I let out a deep breath. "I just needed you to see that I'm still alive. That, and..." I restrained a sob and shrugged trying to maintain my composure.

The loss was suddenly fresh again. She hugged me then, a spontaneous clutch that pinned my arms to my sides. I rested my chin on her shoulder and noticed some gray hairs mingling with the black strands pulled back into a single pony tail and thought how old we're all becoming. How little time we have left.

She unwrapped her arms from around me and took my hand, dragging me towards her family. "You don't get to be alone today." She told me.

When we reached her husband, she slipped her other hand in his and we continued on up the trail with their son running in front of us.

The conversations stayed light and focused on the drama inherent in their family life and my grief changed its pitch to a low hum like living close enough to hear the speeding traffic

of a highway, but far enough away that you stopped noticing it until visitors brought it up.

Just as I realized the comfort of slipping back into the presence of someone whose every new sentence was understood, rather than interpreted, *The Resident CEO* went all management on me.

"So. What are your plans now that you're back, Andros?" He wanted to know.

"Breathe."

"That doesn't sound like much of a plan." He warned me.

"I don't know about that. How much can *you* accomplish without breathing?"

He made a show of looking at my shoes. I looked down at them myself, saw nothing unusual and asked him "What?"

"Sorry, I was looking to see if you had started wearing Birkenstocks like the other hippies."

"Good thing for you love isn't free, without the ability to pay for it, you would've stayed a virgin until Lindsey took pity on you."

His face flushed to the color of intended violence. Lindsey had stopped holding both

our hands by this point of the hike, but she was still between us and waved her arms establishing a human barrier between the two men in her life. "Okay idiots. Settle down." She told us both.

We both settled, but the other idiot refocused the conversation on all the different social events he and Lindsey had been attending. I supposed it was to make me jealous, so I intentionally made the noises you make when someone is talking to you while you're trying to answer an email using your cell phone. This went on for some amount of minutes until he mentioned a name that seized my attention.

"Did you say The Barbara Branch Dance Company?" I asked him.

"Yeah." He glowed with the telling of this like he was pregnant. "A client gave me tickets to their show at The Music Center downtown. I saw them during a business trip in New York a few years ago and can't wait for Lindsey to see them."

He was looking at me as he said this, so he noticed the instinctive jerk of my head towards

Lindsey to gauge her reaction. He looked at her as well, then back at me trying to catch any communication between us and figure out what was going on.

She faced forward, her expression blank, pretending nothing just happened. I looked forward as well then, saying nothing.

He let it go, but based on his sudden silence, it wasn't something he was going to forget. It was the course of several minutes before he seemed to stop trying to catch any covert messages sent between Lindsey and I.

Their boy, oblivious to all the tension the adults were engaged in, continued to scamper ahead of us, and announce loudly everything he found of interest. I honed in on his energy and wondered what kind of father I would have made.

A half hour later, *The Walking Olive Branch* apologized for his comments. He blamed his testiness on work stress. I said that I was sorry as well and we both gave the appearance of making up. Lindsey didn't have brothers, so she might or might not have had a clue that

this was an unspoken, mutually agreed upon cease fire until she wasn't around.

After exiting the trail, we walked the extra mile back to their home, leaving both of our cars where we left them before the hike.

It was never said, but I knew that she was afraid if she let me drive, I might disappear again, maybe for good this time. One near suicide and people monitor your behavior much more closely. But she had misinterpreted my initial anticipation anxiety, or at least a part of it.

During my time away, I realized that if I was going to be able to live with myself, there was something I had to confess to her even though I knew what the answer was likely to be.



## Two

Their routine upon getting home from their Monday hikes was for Lindsey to make dinner while their boy bathed and put his pajamas on. *The Man Of The House* apparently just loitered until there was food.

He claimed to want to get a right brain perspective on some issue that was plaguing him at work and asked if he could have me all to himself while dinner was being prepared.

She looked a question at me and I gave her a nod indicating that it was all right.

He led me across the foyer through a sitting room and into his home office. He closed the door behind us after we were in the room. I stopped about ten steps in the room. He didn't offer me a seat.

"I'm surprised that you remembered our Monday evening hikes." He began. "I usually miss them these days with work and all, but I'm sure you already knew that. I'm glad I was able to make it tonight and catch you." He said

the last part so that catching me could be interpreted a few different ways.

He walked past me over to a wet bar set up in one corner of the oversized room. They had been living in this house three years, and this was my first time in here. There were small award statues all over the place. Everything else was made of wood and looked impressively expensive. The man certainly knew how to make and spend money.

"So what are you looking for new perspective on?" I asked.

"Oh, we have time to get to that. Scotch?" He had already poured himself one, took a sip and looked up at me for my answer.

"No, thanks. I only drink with friends."

He chuckled and didn't correct me.

Instead, he changed the angle of the conversation. "I hear it said that single malt scotch is not just for the rich anymore. I disagree, but let's consider those that believe that nonsense. First, they don't understand the art of the serving of scotch, asking for ice cubes or water so that some of the flavors are hindered. Then, they

receive this prize unaware that at a minimum, a cognac snifter is required with its wide mouth, slight taper to focus the aroma and clear glass so the liquid's color can be appreciated along with the taste." He held his glass up to his face in demonstration of admiring the Scotch. "Of course in my home, I only use a true scotch glass, which bears all those traits, but is a bit taller. Do you know why I'm telling you this?"

"Because you know I don't care and you're hoping to bore me to death." I said.

He gave me a tight smile. "I say this because, some people like to think that they can have the things people like me can possess, and they may even garner the illusion that they have obtained a thing, but in the end, they will only muck the entire affair up with their ignorance." He walked over to a painting he must have commissioned of him and Lindsey and stopped a few feet in front of it, facing it with his back to me. "You must miss her a lot." It was a statement.

I looked at the painting from where I stood. She was wearing a blue sleeveless gown as

opposed to a dress and was seated in a red velvet cushioned chair, he loomed over her shoulder like some kind of English Royalty. She didn't look at all like the woman I know, all serious and noble-like. The omission of the scar that should have run down her left forearm courtesy of a murderer that picked the wrong victim, literally and figuratively was almost an offense. She'd always felt like that scar was a testament to her inner strength and she'd worn it like a medal earned in combat. I couldn't imagine her wanting it removed no matter how proper the painting was supposed to look. She probably made him keep the painting in here where she didn't have to look at it.

I couldn't see his eyes, but was pretty sure he was looking at her in the painting too.

"Are you referring to my wife or yours?" I inquired.

He stood there quiet as if I hadn't said anything, then "You know a lot of people were looking for you after you disappeared. The woman I love drove by your house daily for a few weeks looking for you. Not to mention a coordinated search between her and your other

friends of every local establishment you've ever frequented. That lasted a month."

"She can be persistent." I agreed.

"Enigmatic would be the word I'd choose."

"Is she the project you need my help with?"

He turned to face me. "I'm wondering what you came back here for. I've watched you all evening and there's something that you've been waiting and watching for. You stink of anticipation for something and I want to make sure it isn't for something you'll come to regret."

I'd been hoping I wouldn't regret it myself.

He glared at me. I yawned. Out of reflex, I also casually looked for bulges that might betray a hidden weapon under his clothing, did a quick scan of the area near him for any weapon he might be able to reach before I closed the gap between us, ran down his known list of physical ailments such as his problematic left knee and noticed how high he kept his center of gravity.

Based on what I saw and knew about his lack of fight training, he wasn't likely to enjoy an altercation with me, in case that was where we were headed. Then again, you never really

know what you're dealing with until you go there.

We stood looking at each other for awhile, until I grew tired of his face. I walked over to one of the guest chairs set up in front of his desk, sat down and crossed one leg over another. The chair wrapped itself around me as I slowly continued to sink into it like quicksand.

The leather upholstery was supple enough, however, to not mar the distinguished look I was attempting to cast by making farting noises as I adjusted myself while being enveloped by the seat.

He raised an eyebrow at me, then took a seat on his leather Captain's Chair behind the desk. The height of his chair put him almost two heads taller than me! With the plunge from my chair, even the desk came up to my neck. I suddenly felt like a child in the principal's office. I straightened my posture on instinct.

Well, that was a stupid move, I told myself, he wanted me to do this. Then I wondered how he convinced me to sit here thinking it was by

my own choice.

I decided to go on the offensive and inform him that the reason most post-coital friendships don't work is because of the people who come after. Jealous of a shared history they feel excluded from, worried over imagined comparisons of sexual performance and a sense of impotence when it comes to affecting what is considered constant temptation between two people with no mystery left between them. I also told him "What I'm here for has nothing to do with you".

"Do you think that's why I've never liked you much? I'm jealous?"

He laughed then. Out loud. In genuine. For awhile.

I noticed during his interlude into hilarity that the lighting flattered his appearance so that while seated at his desk, there was a certain drama about him. The contours of his face and upper body took on an imperial quality. I looked down at my own skin and I appeared jaundiced. Did he really pay someone to design even the lighting in his home office to

give him tactical advantage from his desk? I looked toward the ceiling and noticed the subtle way the recessed lighting had been 'flagged' as my cinematographer friend would have put it, so different lights were focused in specific directions.

After wiping a tear from one of his eyes, he explained "No. I'm not jealous. It's because you're kind of like a woman. So emotional and always talking about feelings. I really questioned Lindsey's taste in men when I found out you two once dated each other. Actually, since I have you here, I have to ask, did yours and her menstrual cycles ever sync up? I hear about that phenomenon at the office when our assistants share an office too long."

Even though I knew he was gaming me, I still wanted to punch him. The height advantage he had combined with the lighting and his words had the perfect psychological influence to infuriate and unsettle me. And those were just the weapons I recognized he was using. There was surely something I was missing, otherwise I wouldn't have sat down in the first



place. There was no way I was going to take him here. Not like this.

I considered the implications of getting out of that stupid chair, guessing that there was possibly something worse in store for me if I played into that hand, when Lindsey's voice spilled out of an intercom speaker on *The Anointed One's* desk with a single word of explanation. "Dinner!"

"And here you had me so close to where you wanted me." I said trying to appear not at all disturbed by this little exchange.

He smiled using a facial contortion that showed perfectly straight white teeth in a way that gave the impression that he could kill and eat me right here and now if he wanted to. No guessing why he was so successful. I decided then to buy some more stock in his company, even though I'd never tell him that.

He got up and with a small amount of trouble extracting myself from the suction of the seat cushion, I did the same. He had already walked past me and turned the lights out on me trailing him as he exited the room.

I followed him into the kitchenette area where the table had already been set. I sat next to Lindsey and he sat across from her. She was watching how he and I were reacting to one another, he was watching how she and I were doing the same. I tried to look conspicuous to both.

She had made a simple dinner of boxed Macaroni and Cheese with Hot Dogs. He had attempted to send her to private cooking lessons with a chef he knew, but she refused. She had such a passion for culture that sometimes people forgot, that for her, it was something internal and meaningful. She didn't care about pretensions and airs of sophistication, so she only bothered with the refinements that truly touched her and rejected the rest with near prejudice.

She asked if my right brain helped and he told her it didn't.

He pursed his lips in mock touché when I added "At the wages he was offering, he could only afford two firing neurons, he sadly misjudged my fee structure."

She laughed, called after their missing son with a shout and then got up from the table to retrieve him.

"So how is the music business treating you? Bankrupt yet?" He asked me once she was out of earshot.

"I'm on hiatus with music for now."

"For how long? You must be about in foreclosure on your house by now. I could buy it and if you qualify, rent it to you."

"I don't know for how long." I said ignoring the foreclosure part. "My relationship with music is complicated." I answered honestly and felt like I made his last point about being a woman. It didn't matter that being highly emotional was what connected people to my art. He had managed to take the violence that had shaped my early life so completely, and stripped it of all its inherent testosterone. At least for the moment.

He gave me a look I couldn't read and we sat there quiet until Lindsey returned with their prodigal son in tow.

"Can we play Yahtzee after dinner, mom?" their son asked as he sat down.

"Of course we can." She told him.

After everyone had started eating, *The Head Of The Table* took advantage of the first break in conversation and asked Lindsey if there was something he needed to know about their going to see the Barbara Branch dance event. He turned his head so that we were both visible in at least his peripheral vision.

Lindsey said no. She went on to say that she was looking forward to seeing it.

I was prepared for this to come up again and filled my mouth with a bite of her Macaroni and Cheese.

It was a guy named Malcolm that had introduced Lindsey to cultural events like dance at a Barbara Branch event downtown almost 20 years ago and ironically, he was the person who had opened Lindsey up to the possibility of enjoying these types of performances, being happily married and having a family. Before him, she had no interest in any of that.

Then he committed suicide and his over-controlling TV personality mother made sure the press latched on to Lindsey instead of herself as

the most likely cause Malcolm decided to die.

I could see why she never bothered telling *The Great Scotch Man* about it. He was competitive about everything and who knew how he would take only being a by-product of what Malcolm instigated in Lindsey's life.

After dodging that question, Lindsey took over directing the conversation, always steering it into superficiality whenever something could possibly get deep. After dinner, we played Yahtzee.

We gambled during the games for M&Ms with each of us starting with 40 of them. I had one left when the boy's dad took him down the hall to tuck him in. I ate it and finished off my glass of wine.

"I'll refill that for you, come in the kitchen with me." Lindsey said.

I followed her and sat on a barstool next to the kitchen island as she opened another bottle. She refilled both of our glasses and leaned over the island propping herself up by the elbows on the top of it.

"So. No music right now, huh? Does that

mean you aren't going to perform while you have writer's block?" She asked.

"It isn't writer's block. It's...something else. But no, I don't think I'll be performing again anytime soon either."

"Do you think this is permanent?"

I shook my head. "I'll figure something out. I always do. Besides, pain and heavy emotions have always fueled my art."

"Speaking of pain, are you really not going to explain that scar on your forehead? That wasn't there when you left."

I put my hand to it. I had forgotten that it was even there. "I cut myself hopping a fence." Now it was her turn to laugh at me. This time though, I laughed as well. She asked "What are you doing climbing fences at your age? Where were you at?"

"Charlemagne."

She stopped laughing. "Charlemagne, Colorado? They closed that place down a decade ago."

"Hence the fence." I cringed at the accidental rhyme.

Charlemagne was a mining town, in the

mountains outside of Denver and owned by the company doing the mining.

I had stayed in Nicole's house there, while working for my arch nemesis Tessa Carrillo allegedly writing Tessa's sophomore CD. The reasoning I was told was because Nicole had the sole piano in town and since Tessa was born and raised in Charlemagne, writing the songs there gave the CD a nice public relations angle. The truth of why Tessa brought me there was something else entirely though. They had shut the mine down a little over 10 years ago because of EPA violations.

"Why..." I heard Lindsey say, but that was all she got out of her mouth before she rethought her line of questioning, made a motion with her hands to erase the word hanging between us and instead asked "How did you get there? It was deep in the sticks when it was populated."

"You don't want to know the details. You'll just be upset." I told her. "I thought I had to go there though, to close that chapter in my life."

"Did it work?" She asked.

I shook my head in response.

"When did you go? How long did you stay there?"

"I went right after Nicole died. I stayed about a week. I made sure I was prepared for the snow, brought the type of rations a sporting goods salesperson local to the area suggested and squatted in Nicole's old house at night and ventured around the town during the day while I considered things. It was eerie there, the way the wind would blow through the dead houses and offices for the mining company."

"Did it feel like she was there with you?" Lindsey asked.

I hadn't planned this conversation well enough to anticipate that question. Lindsey's lips formed a tight line across her face now, obviously revisiting Malcolm's suicide. Her psychiatrist said that her hearing him speak to her after his death was merely ruminations, but those ruminations arguably saved her from a stranger bent on killing her. Neither of us left that experience entirely sure where her psychosis ended and where, or if, the paranormal began.



"No." I said. She seemed to exhale a held breath. "It was just me there. Alone."

"Did you want her to be there with you?"

"I don't know."

We sat there through another glass of wine each, quiet. Then...

"After you disappeared, everyone assumed I knew where you were, but wasn't telling. I finally got so irritated at people pressing me about it, I started telling them that you ran off to be with some hot chick you met on the Internet. I told them it probably wouldn't last long because it was just grief sex." She said this leaning towards me across the kitchen's bar counter. Her expression was full of mischief and her face was close enough for me to smell the chardonnay on her breath.

I had a brief flash back to the times when we were a couple and could only afford to buy a bottle of Boone's Farm screw top wine each because we were both broke during that stretch. She lived in her sister's house with her brother-in-law and nephew and I was living with my mother then, so we would finish off

our bottles of cheap wine while spending nights parked behind a local super market because the cops didn't patrol back there possibly interrupting our drunkenly lustful explorations of each other. Motel rooms were a luxury item reserved for special occasions.

"Are you so sure I never did?" I teased, but there was no joy in my smile.

"Yes. I am." She was serious, but I chuckled in spite of myself. It sounded like a sad cough to my ears.

After a pause, I looked up at her.

This wasn't exactly the opening I had been waiting for, but...

...her husband walked into the room.

I heard the words "Not much of a fighter, huh? You're lucky." come out of my mouth instead of what I was hoping to get out into the open.

"What?" He shook the notion that I was describing him out of his head. "Oh. No, he doesn't fuss much when we lay him down unless there's a program on television that catches his eye. That's part of the reason we

like when he opts for family games in the evening."

He was trying to be nice now that we had Lindsey for an audience. I did the same.

"That's smart." I said, then "I should go. It's getting late and I should get my car."

"You've been drinking the past few hours." She said. "Stay the night. We can pick up both our cars in the morning."

I looked over to her husband. He was clearly thinking of how best to approach this. Lindsey's handling of her relationships was an area no one wielded influence over her with, and we both knew this.

Before any protest could be mounted, she confronted the most obvious argument and pointed out that we had both parked in front of homes near the entrance to the hiking trail, so it wasn't like our cars were calling any special attention to themselves for a single night.

"Besides, there's no place I have to be until noon tomorrow. I have plenty of time to get my car in the morning." She finished off, looking triumphant.

"If it isn't a problem? Sure." I said.

She smiled. Her other half turned around and was headed up the hall before I could see his reaction. "I'll get the guest room ready then." He called over his shoulder.

Beneath her smile, her face was set in that resolute way she had about her sometimes. There would be no changing of her mind regardless of the consequences of me staying the night. He had no say in the matter.

A lot of banging and sounds of the rough handling of things came from the bedroom I was going to sleep in that night as he readied it. It must have taken a lot of effort to make that much noise.

The exclamation point to the loud rebuttal coming from down the hall came in the form of what I assumed was their bedroom door slamming shut.

"I guess I'm not sleeping in our bedroom tonight." She said. There was no remorse in her voice.

# Three

Lindsey opened a new bottle of wine. Holding it, she motioned for me to follow her.

Once we got into their sitting room, Lindsey turned on a few dim lights then complained of the cold and hit a switch on the far wall lighting an electric fire place. Unlike most of those that I had seen, the flames in this one reached as high as they would if there was actually wood burning in there. She bent down in front of it, arms outstretched towards the flames to gather in the heat. As long as I had known her, she had always run cold. Anything under 72° F, and she was complaining.

I once bet her over the exactness of her temperature threshold saying it couldn't be that precise. For a month, every time the temperature topped off at 71° F or less, she called it and took my \$50 with a remark I won't repeat.

I sat down on the couch and crossed my leg, resting my right ankle on my left thigh just above the knee and watched her.

When she felt warm enough, she straightened up, walked to a shelf and picked up a tiny remote control. A few silent button presses later and a tap-in on acoustic guitar strings brought in the band with piano accents soaring over a sea of acoustic guitar, upright bass and percussion. A cello broke above and dipped below the surface with grace and woe. The sound wafted into the room from all sides through hidden speakers. I recognized the song and artist immediately and her lamenting refrain pleading with her lover to be allowed to continue. The desire and anticipation in her delivery and the arrangement pulled me a little out of myself.

Lindsey had refilled my wine glass and taken a seat in front of me on the carpet sitting Indian Style while I was taken in by the music and the sensations it brought up. It was Lindsey's voice that brought me back to her after the song had finished.

"I never would have thought to look for you in Charlemagne. Is that why you went there? To make sure no one could find you?"

In the pause between her question and my answer, another song began. There was another count in before the instruments kicked in.

This time it was a guy who took things up to the four before giving way to an acoustic guitar and upright bass walking in melodic step with each other while a ringing guitar expanded the meditative swell. I waited for the voice I knew was coming, but it had been awhile and I couldn't remember how the lyrics began. They spoke of distance and as the woman singing traversed it, I was breathing it in again, like old, familiar times of calm and comfort.

"No. I went there because even though our romantic relationship technically began in California years after the last time I was in Charlemagne, it was like the town was some kind of prequel for us. Do you remember her Bronco? Did you ever notice the stain on the floor of the back seat? There was a floor mat there, but it didn't quite cover all of it."

"Eewwww. No!" She swatted the leg I had crossed over the other down to the ground with a forceful slap.

"Not that kind of stain, stupid! It was a blood stain from when she took me to the emergency room in Leadville after Tessa's mom had shot me the first time I went to Charlemagne. That was the first time Nicole and I had met, at least after a fashion. It wasn't exactly a meet and greet moment."

Lindsey wore an expression of half-shock, half-realization. I hadn't been the cause of a look like that on Lindsey's face in years. It felt good. "How did I not know that was her that took you to the hospital that night?"

"Why would you? At the time, there was nothing between her and I. She was just a random person then. That's my point. It's like all that was pre-history for what we eventually became and we never saw it coming and it all took place in that stupid town that I almost never knew existed and frankly pretty much hated. I was there to rekindle some of that spirit of before-ness. The build-up to Nicole and I, the couple. I needed it. The oncologist told us that no case of cancer is typical. The same goes for coping with your wife's death."



I had been looking at my half empty wine glass as I told Lindsey this last part, and when I looked up at her, I could feel her studying me. I smiled, inviting her to know more, then raised my glass, finishing it off.

Lindsey did the same with her glass, set it down, stood up and stretched with her arms raised above her slim, muscular 5 foot 10 inch frame. Then she turned to me in profile and extended a hand towards me. "Come." She said.

I took her hand and pulled myself off of the couch. Smoothly, she drew me into the center of the room, empty of furniture, then spun into my arms so that we were chest to chest, cheek to cheek. In the song, the woman singing was warning about losing time while Lindsey and I folded into each other, feet planted, our bodies swaying together like trees gently bending back and forth by a metered wind without either of us needing to take the lead.

After the song receded into silence a new tide washed in on a current of piano notes and that ever present ache in the center of me began to grow in urgency. Lindsey followed

now as my movements responded to the increasing lift of the music and for a brief moment we stood slightly apart on a precipice of a dying note. A golden cast flickered across Lindsey's face from the fireplace and then the song's title, a word of praise, filled the room like a four syllable prayer.

That word repeated until it released the song into the next verse and I swept back into Lindsey's embrace, taking her up again into the cadence of my grief. As time passed, I was becoming aware that Lindsey and I were back in our coded way of communicating with each other, excluding the world around us from our true conversation. But there was no one there to exclude.

The recording was of a live show and we winded down as the music transitioned to clapping. We were body against body. I put my lips beside her ear and asked through her falling hair "You know why I'm here?" There was hope in my voice.

Lindsey pulled me just a little closer as the next song began with the admission of being a

sinner. It was like having my remorse speak from outside myself. This was Lindsey's answer. She knew why I was there and the last of my resistance gave way. I put my lips back up to Lindsey's ear as the singer in the background counted off all the reasons she was thanking someone for loving her and I brought Lindsey back with me to a sun lit living room fourteen months ago. I was sitting on an ottoman with my favorite guitar in hand and my world sitting on the couch in front of me.

It was Nicole's birthday and I was about to perform a song I had written for her as part of her present. Before starting the song though, I made like the old Blues players, telling her a lead-in story of the woman the song was about before beginning it.

It was a tale about strength and comeuppance about how her beautiful spirit had twice conquered breast cancer. How even a double mastectomy couldn't rob her of her allure.

The telling of it was an emotional one, building in intensity and as I neared the end of it, I began with the guitar riff, a slow sliding thing at

first that finally held in a rabid vibrato full of the scraping sound of the metal slide on my ring finger traveling over the diagonal winding of the three thickest guitar strings.

My head dropped as with one last swipe of my pick hand, my fret hand slid down the fret board straight into a romp, the rhythm bouncing like the confidant hips of a woman in a juke joint challenging her dance partner "To handle this!" and then my voice came in raspy, like dirt beneath finger nails. Remnants of the work and frustrations of the day that never got clean enough for the night to not have to hide some of it.

The verses coupled pain with the resistance that overcame it as I cited specific moments of awe inspiring perseverance she embodied, building an increasing tension so that the refrain, a guttural howl slinking melodically into the air, became like two fists raised triumphantly overhead while standing over the limp body of a fallen opponent.

My right foot, once tapping toes in time to the beat was now my whole leg lifting the guitar

straddled across my thigh into my strumming hand, pulling back down through the guitar pick's upswing only to bounce off the floor for another round as I slid hungrily into the second verse.

It was the sound of praise bordering on worship and on the final turnaround of the song, the speed of it had the groove on edge, in danger of being lost and unrecoverable. I rode it home though, the sweat dripping from my face onto the front of the guitar only to mingle with the slippery wetness left by the forearm providing anchor for my pick hand.

The howl that closed the song was more animal than human as it escaped from the center of me, causing my head to crane towards the ceiling of the room and keeping it there even after there was no sound left coming out of me, but the catching of my breath.

My eyes were closed, so I wasn't aware of my wife's pounce until she had put both lips and teeth on my exposed neck while ripping the guitar from between us. We crashed on the back side of the ottoman, urgently tugging

down and hiking up clothes until we were engaged in a thing of savage beauty.

Three days later, we were sitting in the doctor's office getting the horrible news that the cancer was back. Again! She shrunk into herself somehow then, taking less space in the world than ever before since I knew her.

She had no fight left and the cancer was more aggressive with each reoccurrence. She had decided before we came in for the results, that if there ever was a next time, she was going to let it run its course.

Two events, years apart made a sudden terrifying connection in my mind and my heart as they searched for someone or thing to blame. First, there was the warning from an old man to an unthinking child warning him never to handle a butterfly by its wings, then there was the song I had just written and performed for Nicole.

Was it possible that I had captured Nicole by her proverbial wings? That I had shortened her life? That in some nonsensical way, my arrogance was going to kill her?

It was a stupid thought, that I had jinxed her with that song. I knew that, but it persisted. That link. It became a direction for my anger and helplessness.

There were times I came close to sharing what was nagging at me with Nicole, but each time, the same questions stopped me. What if she needed someone to blame too? Was it possible that she might finish out her last days hating me for what I did to her, even if the notion was absurd? After all, there was part of me that wouldn't let it go and I wasn't the one dying. Was it worth the risk of bringing such a thing up?

I had stopped playing music altogether following that appointment until Nicole began insisting that I play something for her. I resisted at first, but she said she missed it, so I would pull out my acoustic guitar with the prettiest sound and play for her, but never that song. I swore to myself, that song would never see life again.

She never asked for it, so I never had to make an excuse for it.

Lindsey kept me close through my expulsion

of regret, cradling me, allowing me that small bit of privacy that came from being so close to her physically, that my confession was made without the ability to make eye contact with her. Face to face, would have been too intimate a connection for such a confession.

I had expected a more severe eruption of grief from myself in the telling of what happened prior to Nicole's last prognosis, but the bouts of horrible keening seemed to have passed.

When Lindsey sensed I was done speaking, she mildly pushed me back so that we were eye to eye. "Nicole suspected that might be why you had stopped playing, but she was afraid to bring it up in case she was wrong. She didn't want to risk putting something like that in your mind if it wasn't already there." Lindsey motioned her head in the direction of what I assumed was a speaker as a single acoustic guitar announced the beginning of a new song. "Nicole had given me this playlist in case I discovered she was right after she was gone. She said these songs in this order would open you up like no amount of counseling would ever



do. I already knew your emotions always rise closer to the surface when the room is dark."

There was a glimmer of new regret that panged inside me, as I began mentally ticking off the things that could have been different towards the end, but Lindsey read it in my expression and reminded me "There was no time wasted between you two. You both spent her last days lovingly taking care of one another in the best way you knew how. You can't ask for more than that."

I knew the truth of that in my core and accepted it easily. I was a little surprised I was able to do that.

I considered the time and care Nicole put into creating this playlist and how lucky I was that Nicole and Lindsey had been close. Nicole understood the rare bond Lindsey and I shared and I took a moment to thank God for the both of them being in my life.

As fatigued as I was from everything, I realized I needed to return to my life, not tomorrow morning, but now. I told Lindsey I had to go.

She put up no resistance and walked me to the door while pulling my car keys off of my key ring. "You can get your car keys tomorrow." She said, then handed me what keys were left.

I stepped from out of the door into the brisk night air. Lindsey had closed the door behind me quickly to keep too much cold air from coming into the house. Fall was showing its first signs of life with the falling temperatures.

It was a 45 minute walk home and as I came closer to it, more and more memories made with Nicole rose like bright phantoms to illuminate the landmarks.

On Perry Road, there was the restaurant location that couldn't sustain a business. Every time someone opened a restaurant there, it would fail and then someone else would move in and try their luck next.

Nicole and I would bet what kind of food was coming next with each new closing.

The front window showed a special on Tacos good during any televised NFL game. Before my disappearance, the place was Italian.

On Grove Ave., one street down from the

turnoff to our block, was the stoplight Nicole maintained hated her. It didn't matter what time of the day or night she came to it, it would turn red on her. At first, I told her that was ridiculous because it would be green for me sometimes like any other street light, but after she mentioned that, I noticed she was right. We never caught a green light at that intersection if she was in the car.

The street was empty, so I went on ahead and crossed against the red. I guessed, the stop light didn't even like the memory of Nicole.

Halfway across the street, my mind began playing one of Nicole's favorite songs and I remembered the first time I heard it, stopped at this very light.

I was driving, and usually, the person at the wheel got to choose what we listened to, but that day, Nicole demanded to control the radio. As we waited for the light to turn green, Nicole said she was done with worrying about that stupid stop light and put the song on.

She joined the woman singing from the first syllable, leaning to and fro in her seat to

the rhythm of the song while crooning to me romanticized visions of what was happening in Paris to a melody every bit as beautiful as the notions it was provoking of the city.

Nicole was fascinated with the thought of us visiting the city. She would say things like Paris deserved a love like ours, even if it only had us for just a few weeks.

I laughed at how excited she was getting over Paris and the song so she punched me in the arm as she finished a line of lyrics and began singing the refrain "There will never be a better time to choose to love..." with all the heartfelt belief she possessed.

We didn't think about it at the time, but those words were so true. It was about three years before the cancer came back, but we never did make it to Paris.

The song played in my head now, over and over again until I was standing on the sidewalk in front of our property. I traced the lines of the dark hull of the house we laughed so much in. How lonely would I be in there now?

I stood there more feeling than thinking,

capturing the ambiance of so many slivers of our time together that I became light headed.

Then, with a large exhale, I began the march towards the front door with the kind of intent usually reserved for jumping into cold water, hoping that the initial shock would quickly fade, knowing that either way, those first moments of immersion were going to be far from comfortable.

*Regret in Triptych* is a first glimpse into **The Wilderness**. A transmedia story-world looking into the charged nature of the human condition and the different ways it affects our relationships, both with ourselves and one another.

Join **Andros Koresh, Lindsey Falco** and other personalities from **The Wilderness** as they strive towards fulfillment and struggle with their respective places in life, love, career and family. Their stories will be told through my upcoming books, short stories, poetry, visual art, music releases and live shows.

For more info, visit: [www.chriswesley.com](http://www.chriswesley.com)

## Artists and songs referenced in Regret in Triptych.

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### *Songs during the seduction:*

“Want of My Desire” - Author’s imagination.

“The Journey Home” - Author’s imagination.

“Hallelujah” as performed by Molly Zenobia  
from her album: *November Antique*

<http://www.mollyzenobia.com/>

“Thank You For Loving Me” by Jamila Ford  
from her album: *Enough*

<http://www.jamilaford.com/>

### *The memory of Nicole singing with the radio:*

“In Paris, It’s Already Evening” by Amy Raasch

<http://www.amyraasch.com/>

No payment was exchanged for the artists mentioned in this story. All of them simply write amazing music. I highly recommend them! Visit their websites to learn more.

## Acknowledgements

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Special Thanks go out to more people than I could ever remember in a single sitting, but I'll do my best and if our name isn't printed here, it doesn't mean I'm not thankful for your support.

These lists are harder to make than they look.

**NOTE: This list is in no particular order, so please don't see who is listed above you and send me hate mail...**

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**Indelible Ink** it is an awesome experience to serve on the Board for a Non-Profit dedicated to keep literary arts alive in Pasadena. It is also an incredible gift to experience the talents brought in for the Indelible Ink events.

## About the Author

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Chris Wesley was eight years old, the first time he caught the attention of a crowd with his storytelling. Seven children stood captivated as Chris told of the time when the family's pet Doberman Pinscher became engaged in a horrendous fight with his father, ending with his dad killing the dog with a knife. It was fifteen minutes long and a lie. But then, fiction is like that.

Since that day, Chris has written music reviews and a music business column for Night Moves Magazine, acted in independent movies and plays; wrote, cast, directed, shot and edited an independent short movie, started bands and gone solo. He's generally been what some politely call "a wise guy". That means he says things, he probably should have kept to himself. He does this often. But then, smart asses are like that.

He is the creator of The Wilderness, a transmedia storyworld where he gets to write fiction, say things he shouldn't, create visual art and record music that the radio would likely poop on if given the chance. He has fun with this. But then, independents are like that.