

# SUMMER'S PATH



## ALSO BY SCOTT BLUM

### *WAITING FOR AUTUMN*



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# PREFACE

The following story came to me shortly before the release of my first book, *Waiting for Autumn*, after that book had already been written. Because *Summer's Path* chronicles the three months prior to the setting of *Waiting for Autumn*, the decision was made to initially release it as a downloadable e-book before the first book came out in hardcover. And although the e-book touched many lives and I received several incredible letters from people who thanked me for sharing it, there was something that didn't sit right with me.

I didn't understand what bothered me at first—it just didn't feel finished. But I had already committed to releasing it before *Waiting for Autumn* came out, and I'm still glad that I did. However, with the benefit of seeing *Summer's Path* through the eyes of others, I was finally able to discover what was missing.

Even though the books are very different, the process of writing them was remarkably similar. They both came to me nearly complete in an instant as a download from the universe, and they both drew on many of my own personal experiences.

However, instead of having the benefit (or the burden) of my own life to communicate, as I did in *Waiting for Autumn*, I was tuning in to the lives of others in *Summer's Path*.

What I didn't realize while writing was precisely how we are connected to the people we're closest to. Of course I knew that we're all connected and are ultimately one and the same. But what I wasn't consciously aware of until later was that the connections that we forge with others are ultimately based on the common experiences we share. And when writing about others, the most profound insights come from those experiences that both the writer and the subject can relate to. It seems obvious in retrospect, but the way this manifested itself while writing the first version of *Summer's Path* was that I subconsciously contributed my own blind spots to others when telling their story. I didn't want to face certain difficult parts of myself while writing, so it was easier to leave them out altogether, and that's exactly what I did.

This book deals with some very difficult subjects that many of us will have to confront sometime in our lives. And through the writing process, I was fortunate enough to delve inward and reclaim several pieces of myself that I had successfully buried

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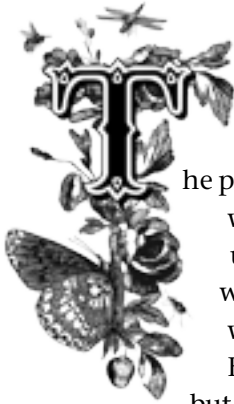
deeply for as long as I could remember. Thankfully I was given a second chance to retrieve some of the most sensitive pieces that had been missing, and it's a privilege to be able to share them in the two additional chapters near the end of this book that weren't included in the original e-book.

I believe that difficult experiences are gifts from the universe to help us on our journey. When we take the time to integrate *all* of our experiences with our present (not just the "positive" ones), we are able to draw from our entire past and ultimately begin to share our hard-earned wisdom with others.

And in that spirit, I am honored to share with you *Summer's Path*.



# CHAPTER ONE



he pain in his abdomen was getting worse. It had been waking him up every night for the past week, and on this night he wasn't able to fall back asleep. He knew that he needed to rest, but sometimes walking around relieved the burning sensation that crept up at the base of his esophagus.

Don slowly pulled the covers back and quietly got out of bed, careful not to wake his sleeping wife. Suzanne was still working full-time as a bookkeeper for a small paper company while trying to take care of him. He felt guilty for what he was putting her through, and although he couldn't contribute

financially, the least he could do was not wake her up in the middle of the night.

Making his way down the narrow hallway of their one-bedroom craftsman, he could see the full moon peeking through the open drapes. Their house was at the bottom of the foothills of town, but it was still up high enough that he could see the twinkling lights of Eugene that dotted central Oregon's Willamette Valley. It had taken them several years to save up for their first house, and it had been a badge of pride for them when they finally moved in.

However, Don couldn't shake the feeling that one day soon they might need to sell it and resume renting. He had been an engineer for a local semiconductor company since graduating from Oregon State University, but when a multinational had acquired the firm three years ago, it began to systematically "reduce redundancies" one department at a time. Unfortunately, Don's department was nearly decimated on a day eighteen months prior that he referred to as "Black Friday." He couldn't find another job in Eugene because his skill set was too specific, and when he got sick, he wasn't able to move to another city with a larger job market.

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In the kitchen, Don caught sight of the microwave clock: 11:11. It was the third time in less than a week that he had casually glanced at a clock when it was that time. He wasn't superstitious, but the pattern was becoming regular enough to notice.

He began to look through cabinets and drawers for some antacid pills to help his stomach pain. In the back of his mind he knew they probably wouldn't do any good, but it was a habit and seemed to bring him emotional comfort even if there was no physical relief. When he opened the drawer containing the tarnished silverware that he and his wife only used during the holidays, he noticed a large stack of unopened bills from the hospital and various doctors he'd seen recently. He had been dreading this day ever since being admitted to the emergency room late one night, when the pain was so unbearable that he could hardly move. And although the hospital had to treat him, he couldn't forget the knowing look from the admitting nurse when he told her that he didn't have any insurance.

Don carefully removed the stack of bills from the silverware drawer and sat in the middle of the kitchen floor, fanning the envelopes around him in a semicircle. The envelope windows from the hospital bills revealed a rainbow of colors, starting

with white, then progressing to more vibrant shades of yellow, orange, green, blue, and red. After they were sufficiently organized by color and size, he began to open the bills one at a time and glanced at the past-due amounts while placing them in front of him in two stacks—one for the emptied envelopes, and one for their contents.

At first he was calm, but as he opened more and more envelopes, he began to get angry. How could they charge this much for just a couple of days' worth of visits? And other than a few pain pills, they hadn't given him anything that helped. Most of the time was spent with doctors who didn't even know what was wrong with him, but they all charged full price even though they were absolutely clueless. And when they *finally* did figure out what was ailing him, they weren't sure how to deliver the diagnosis: "The good news is, we now know what's wrong with you . . ."

Being diagnosed with cancer at thirty-nine years old was one thing, but leaving Suzanne to pay off the hospital bills after he was gone hit him hard. The doctors couldn't agree on exactly how long he would live, but they all said that it wouldn't be more than six months. And although pancreatic cancer wasn't curable, the doctors presented many

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options that could be tried to temporarily improve the quality of life during his last few days.

But judging by the mountain of medical bills that Don had collected in the flurry of hospital and doctor visits during that initial two-week period, there was no way he could imagine spending any more of Suzanne's money just so he might die with slightly more comfort. The pain was excruciating at times, which was why he had gone to the emergency room that first night, but seeing how much money he had spent just finding out what was wrong temporarily numbed him.

Suzanne stumbled into the kitchen, rubbing her eyes. "What's the matter?" she asked. She looked down and saw the bills surrounding her redheaded soul mate. "Oh, you found those."

"Why didn't you tell me these came? Were you hiding them from me?"

"I wasn't hiding them. I just couldn't bear to open them. Is it bad?"

"It's devastating. It's obscene how much they charge. I counted twelve different doctors I didn't even see who billed me for things I can't even pronounce. If they're going to charge that type of money, they should at least have the decency to stop in and introduce themselves."

“They’re probably not used to treating people without insurance,” she said sadly. “We probably should’ve been married sooner.” She nearly choked on the words as her eyes began to well up.

Don had proposed marriage to Suzanne more than a decade prior, but she hadn’t been able to bring herself to marry him. Not that she wasn’t fully committed, but she didn’t want to let the government dictate what she considered to be a sacred agreement between two individuals. The fact that marriage was a state-sanctioned contract with financial incentives angered Suzanne to her core—love shouldn’t be bought or sold. They had held a private commitment ceremony nearly five years ago, and in the end, even their families hadn’t acknowledged their marriage because they weren’t invited to the ceremony.

As the years progressed, their “statement” didn’t seem to mean anything to anyone but them. Although that had initially been the point, it slowly began to make things more and more complicated, especially when it came to health insurance. The policy provided by Suzanne’s employer didn’t acknowledge domestic partners, so Don had remained uninsured since he’d been out of work.

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Following the diagnosis, they finally went to the county courthouse and signed the papers to become officially married. But afterward they discovered that Suzanne's company's policy excluded a spouse's pre-existing conditions, so Don's cancer and related symptoms wouldn't be covered.

"In my mind we've been married for years," said Don. "We did it our way, and it was beautiful." He, too, was thinking about how much easier things would be if he had insurance, but he blamed himself for losing his job. He never regretted keeping their marriage private, although he couldn't forgive himself for being laid off. If he would have made himself more valuable, or if he wasn't so shy, he could have become friends with the new executives and might still have his job.

"But the insurance—" Suzanne couldn't stop her tears from flowing, and turned away from her husband as she silently cried.

Don crawled over to his wife and softly caressed her long brown hair. Seeing her break down made his heart hurt because of what he was putting her through. "I'm sorry," he said, the words barely audible as they caught in his throat. "I'm sorry for leaving you."



## CHAPTER TWO



ver the next few weeks, Don's depression deepened. He seldom got out of bed, and he refused to eat more than a couple bites of bread a day. He found that the less he ate, the weaker he became. And the weaker he became, the more he would sleep, which gave him a temporary reprieve from the intensifying pain.

When he did emerge from bed, he would often gravitate toward the kitchen to open the silverware drawer. Every time he did, he would find more and more late notices piling up. They had nearly doubled in volume, and although there were very few entirely new bills, the late fees were quickly compounding, and the paper they were printed

on became more vibrant in color. Additionally, the doctors' assistants began to leave answering-machine messages under the guise of concern: "The doctor would like to schedule a follow-up visit to discuss how you're feeling, but we need to take care of your outstanding invoice first. Please call as soon as possible, and we can work out a partial-payment plan if that's more convenient."

As his pain continued to worsen, Don began to research the costs associated with various treatment options. He knew it was a temporary fix, but the pain was becoming unbearable and he could barely function.

"I think it's time to go back to the doctor," Suzanne said one afternoon when she discovered her husband doubled over on the floor of the bathroom.

"There's nothing they can do," replied Don.

"They said that they could make you feel better."

"How? It's not exactly a curable disease."

"But they said that different treatments could make you more comfortable. Don't you think we should try chemo at least once to see if it helps?"

"Once isn't going to make any difference. Besides, do you know how much it costs? We still

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haven't paid a dime to those first doctors who didn't even know what they were doing. And the most expensive bill is the oncologist, who's the one we need to go back to for the chemo."

"We can start paying him a little every month so we can keep the treatments going."

"So we can go into even more debt? I don't think so."

Don had been researching how to pay for the chemotherapy treatments, and he couldn't figure out a way to make it work. He knew that they would probably let him start the treatments and perhaps allow him to continue until he succumbed to the disease. But the cost, even by the most conservative estimates, would burden Suzanne with financial hardship for many years to come. It was also likely that she would have to sell their house just to keep the collectors off her back for the first few years. And even that wouldn't be enough to take care of it all. He already knew that *he* had a life sentence—he wasn't going to impose another one on his wife, just because she had the unfortunate luck to fall in love with him.

"Some things are more important than money," Suzanne said softly. "I can't stand to see you in so much pain."

“Maybe I should just leave,” he said. “Maybe my time is over.”

“Don’t even joke about that!”

Although Don had never said it out loud, it was something he had been thinking about for a while. When he first confronted his mortality after being diagnosed with cancer, he had to admit that he was afraid of dying and wanted to put it off as long as possible. He’d also made a promise to himself when he first met Suzanne that he would always take care of her financially, whether he was alive or not. Being able to do so after he was gone was his promise of immortality. And the thought that he would simply cease to exist, without leaving even a little bit of money to her, made him feel like his entire life had been a waste of time.

But the main reason Don didn’t want to die was because he didn’t want to leave Suzanne. His mother had died of cancer when he was only two years old, and his father had died of it when Don was a freshman in college. He had always felt abandoned by his parents, and he vowed that he would never be responsible for leaving anyone he loved, for any reason.

“Can I get you a pain pill?” Suzanne asked.

“They don’t work anymore—keep them for yourself.”

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He didn't know how much longer he could tolerate the pain, but the thought of acquiring more medical bills felt even worse than his physical discomfort. Although the thought of ending his own life had initially repulsed him, it began to make more and more sense as a viable alternative. If he could work out the details to minimize the trauma inflicted on Suzanne, she might eventually forgive him and agree that it was the best solution for everyone.



Later that week, Don had an intensely vivid dream that felt incredibly real. It started in a light-filled tunnel swirling counterclockwise, with the path he was standing on remaining still. As he walked closer to the light, he saw his deceased father gesturing for him to go away. He was drawn closer in order to speak with him, but his father began to fade as he approached the spot where he'd been standing. Then the entire tunnel dimmed to blackness, and he could hear footsteps walking toward him.

As the ominous sounds grew more intense, he became acutely aware that he was standing

completely naked. He felt vulnerable as he tried to cover himself with his hands. After several minutes, the footsteps were silenced and he could hear a figure breathing loudly immediately in front of him. As he tried to calm himself, he couldn't help but feel that there was something familiar about the sound of the breath.

Slowly, the figure came into focus as the light around them began to brighten. The man standing there was of medium build and dressed entirely in white. Don strained to make out the details of his face and then rubbed his eyes in disbelief. After his focus completely returned, there was no mistaking it—the person who was standing before him looked exactly like Don himself. It was a feeling similar to looking in the mirror, with two major exceptions: there was twice as much energy emanating from the reflection, and the figure's movements didn't correspond to his own.

Don's focus returned to the fact that he was standing there naked, and when he looked down, he was relieved to find that he was now fully clothed. He was wearing exactly the same outfit as the person in front of him, yet his own was completely black. He imagined that there was some significance to the fact that he was clothed in black

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while the other was in white, but he was just happy he was no longer naked.

There was a long silence while the two stood staring at each other, until Don finally said: "Hi."

"Hello," said the *other* in a voice that was nearly identical to Don's.

After another uncomfortable silence, Don finally asked the only question he could think of: "Who are you?"

Without pausing, the man answered, "I'm Robert—nice to meet you."

Robert stretched out his hand in a greeting, but Don just stood there looking at it, dumbfounded. Robert retracted his hand after a few seconds, and Don felt a smirk creep onto his face. The smirk widened into a full smile, and within seconds he began laughing hysterically. He continued to laugh for over a minute and then doubled over at the waist and slapped the ground next to his feet as tears streamed down from laughing so hard.

"Robert!" exclaimed Don in between chuckles. "That's classic! I finally meet my doppelgänger, and his name is Robert! Of course your name is Robert—why wouldn't it be?" He didn't know why the name struck him as funny, but it did. There was something ironic about a supernatural experience having such a common name.

“So, Robert”—he tried unsuccessfully to suppress his laughter—“what brings you here?”

“I’m here to help you.” Robert was getting noticeably annoyed.

“Help me? Help me with what?”

“With your transition. Anything you don’t understand or anything you could use some extra help with.”

“My transition?” Don’s laughter stopped instantly. “What transition?”

“Your transition to the next dimension—the next stage of your journey.”

Don took a few moments to reflect on these words. “Are you the grim reaper or something?”

“Not exactly.” It was now Robert’s turn to laugh. “I’m more of an advocate. I’m here to help you transition in whichever way you choose.”

“You mean you’re here to help me die?”

“That’s oversimplifying it a bit, but I guess you could say that.”

Don felt a chill on the back of his neck. “Are you the angel of death?”

“I wouldn’t say *the* angel of death, but I’m certainly one of them.”

“You mean there are more than one?”

“Of course there are. Do you know how many people die every day? There wouldn’t be time to do

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anything meaningful if there was only one of us.”

“I have a question,” said Don thoughtfully.  
“Why me? And—why now?”

“Everyone ultimately takes the same journey,  
and now is your time to be on Summer’s Path:

*Spring flowers wither  
Honey Moon condenses light  
Summer’s Path begins.”*

Robert smiled after reciting the haiku, and patiently awaited Don’s response.

“Um, okay. I guess I’ve never really understood poetry,” said Don. “What do you mean by ‘Honey Moon condenses light’?”

“The Honey Moon is the first moon of summer—the moon that celebrates the summer solstice.”

“Okay . . . but how does that *condense light*?”

“After the first day of summer, the days begin to shorten. Leading up to summer, the days grow longer, so it’s easy to take light for granted. But as they get shorter, every second of light must be cherished.”

“Is *light* a metaphor for something?”

“Light is our life force—the energy we need to exist. Whether you call it a metaphor is up to you,” Robert laughed.

Don let Robert's curious words sink in before continuing. "It's ironic that it's called a *honeymoon*, like after a wedding. Don't you agree?"

"Not at all," replied Robert. "Actually, I can't think of a better word to mark the beginning of a life together."

Don sat down on the narrow path and put his head into his hands as he remembered *his* honeymoon with Suzanne at Crater Lake. He knew life was short, yet he couldn't help but feel he had been careless with his time with his wife. It saddened him to realize that he *had* taken his years with Suzanne for granted. And now it seemed as if he had once again come to a major crossroads. He needed to decide if he should let the cancer take its course or if he was prepared to shorten the process.

At that moment, the sound of a hundred voices began echoing inside his head. But the voice he kept hearing the loudest was Suzanne's: "*Don't even joke about that . . .*"

After the voices faded, Don slowly stood back up and looked deep into Robert's eyes, trying to decide if he could trust him, and if he actually *could* help with the transition. "Okay, you have my attention—what can you do to help?"

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"I can start by giving you advice about how to make your transition easier."

"Like what?"

"The first thing you need to do is get your affairs in order. You don't want to unnecessarily burden your loved ones once you pass on."

"But I don't have any money."

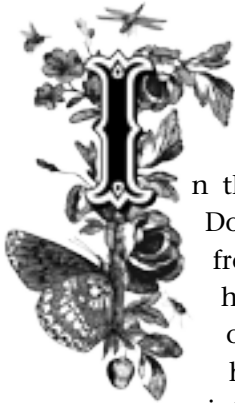
"Yes, but you do have obligations, and that's even more important to figure out. I recommend you visit a lawyer immediately."

"A lawyer?" Don questioned. "Why do I need a lawyer? What should I ask?"

Robert had already turned and was walking away. He waved without looking back, and before fading into the distance, he said, "I'm an advocate, not a babysitter. Just go see a lawyer, and come back to me after you have the answer you need."



## CHAPTER THREE



In the days following his dream, Don felt strangely disconnected from his body. He could see and hear everything that was going on around him, but it was as if his emotions had been packed into cotton and everything around him was happening in an adjacent room—almost as if he were watching a movie in a drive-in theater with the sound box turned down. He could tell that Suzanne knew something was up because she kept asking him if he was okay much more frequently than she used to. But in reality, Don hadn't felt any pain since meeting Robert, which was a welcome reprieve. And although he wasn't

convinced that Robert was real, their conversation definitely made him think.

After nearly a week, Don was still wondering why he needed a lawyer. He tried to come up with different reasons, but it just didn't make any sense. Nobody was suing him, and *he* didn't want to sue anyone himself. He'd thought about suing the hospital and doctors for being so incompetent, but in reality they had eventually recommended an oncologist who *did* know what was going on. And realistically, the cancer had been brewing undiagnosed for quite some time, so there was probably nothing they could have done.

Then one morning as Don habitually shuffled through the late notices, he had an epiphany. What if a lawyer could figure out a way to get out of paying the hospital bills? If there was a way that he could clean up all the medical debts before he died, Suzanne wouldn't be burdened with paying them off.

He couldn't escape the feeling that Suzanne would feel crushed under the weight of the debt as the years progressed. The ridiculously high interest was already beginning to accrue, and with just the bills they had already received, Suzanne would be in serious debt for the next fifteen years. And the

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new bills kept coming—it seemed that every week there was another doctor who finally got around to sending an invoice.

Don began to get excited about the possibility that a lawyer could help make the debt go away, and immediately thought of his friend Eric whom he had gone to Oregon State with. They had both been in the engineering program, but Eric had decided he wanted to make more money, so he enrolled at an East Coast Ivy League school to become a lawyer when his undergraduate work was done. After graduating, he had returned to Eugene, where his well-off family had given him the seed money to start his own practice.

He and Don had gradually drifted apart, primarily because Eric had relentlessly hit on Suzanne once when he'd had too much to drink, and it made her very uncomfortable. Don told her that Eric treated everyone like that, but she was convinced that he had crossed the line, and didn't want anything to do with him ever again. Eric lacked an inherent tact, which made him a great lawyer but a less-than-ideal dinner guest.

Don found the phone book and dialed his friend's direct line.

"Eric, it's Don."

“Hey, bud, what’s up? How’s the sexy chica?” Eric always called Suzanne “the sexy chica,” which didn’t help her view of him.

“She’s great. Are you still dating . . . what was her name?”

“Which one?” Eric laughed. “I don’t remember who I told you about. I’m seeing a few sexy chicas myself. Chronic bachelor, I am.”

Don attempted to join in Eric’s laughter, but he couldn’t. After several years of the same conversation, Don just felt sorry for him. “Hey, Eric, I have a professional question for you. Do you have time for a quick meeting?”

“I always have time for you, bud—let me see.” Eric covered the phone with his hand and yelled something to his assistant. “You’re in luck: my eleven o’clock just cancelled. But if you can’t do it today, it’s going to have to wait until next month. I’m going on safari for six weeks in Botswana. I’m leaving tomorrow. Gotta get back to nature, you know. It’s going to be mind-blowing. Elephants and tigers and shit.”

“Wow, Botswana. That’s cool. But, yeah, I’d love to chat today at eleven o’clock.”

“Okay, that’s great.” Eric put Don on speakerphone and began talking to someone else in his office. “See ya at eleven, bud.”

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Don got cleaned up and prepared to drive across town. He had never been fond of driving before his diagnosis, and although he still had his beloved Land Cruiser, he had seldom driven it since he lost his job. He was worried that the battery would be dead since the car had been sitting on the street for so long, but it started right up, and he made his way downtown.

Eric worked in one of the nicest buildings in Eugene—a large white stucco with an atrium in the center that was filled with natural light. After signing in with the security guard near the entrance, Don took an elevator to the top floor.

“I’m here to see Eric,” he said to the receptionist who greeted him as soon as he entered the plush offices. Her imposing wood desk was perched in front of three large cherry-wood bookcases that contained an impressive collection of matching yellow-leather volumes.

“I will let Mr. Williams know that you’re here. Please make yourself comfortable.”

After several minutes, the receptionist led Don to Eric’s office and gestured for him to enter. Eric was wrapping up another phone call and looked exactly the same, except that he had put on a few extra pounds. The added weight suited him nicely

and gave him a physicality that finally seemed to match his personality.

“Hey, bud—great to see you.” Eric walked around his large mahogany desk and stopped in his tracks, looking Don up and down. “You look like shit! What happened to you, bud? Are you okay?”

Eric’s frankness always seemed to catch Don off guard. “Um, I guess that’s part of what I want to talk to you about. Can we sit down?”

Eric gestured to a small leather couch in the corner of his office next to a floor-to-ceiling picture window. Looking out across Eugene, Don could see the neighborhood he lived in and tried to find his house.

As he sat down in the overstuffed couch, he noticed a small black digital clock resting on the end table. Don rubbed his eyes with his palms once the numbers came into focus: 11:11. He subconsciously held his breath until the last digits turned to 12.

“Thanks so much for seeing me last minute . . . it really means a lot. But I have to let you know, I really can’t afford—”

“Your money is no good here,” Eric interrupted while waving his arms wildly. “You saved my ass in the dorm that day, and I’ll never forget it.”

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Don remembered when Eric's parents unexpectedly arrived at his dorm one morning while Eric was still out partying from the night before. "Those were the days . . ." said Don.

Eric laughed. "So what's up?"

"Well"—Don sighed deeply—"first of all, I have cancer."

"Shit, man. Oh, shit. Shit, shit, shit. That totally sucks. Shit. Is it serious? What am I saying? Of course it's serious. Just look at you! Oh, shit. I'm so sorry, man. What kind?"

"Pancreatic."

"Oh, shit. That's what got your pops, right?"

Don nodded.

"They don't really know what to with that, do they?" Eric kept shaking his head. "What do your doctors say?"

"They give me anywhere between three and six months."

"I need a drink." Eric sighed loudly as he opened a discreet mahogany cabinet that was filled with a collection of whiskey bottles and crystal tumblers. "You?"

"No, thanks."

Eric poured himself a large glass and sat back down. "So what can I do? Anything, man. Anything."

"You know I got laid off at the semiconductor plant?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, my insurance ran out about a year ago."

"That sucks. So you need money. How much is it?"

Don told him the amount of the medical bills so far.

"Wow, that's a lot. Okay, okay. Let me see. Yeah, I think I can do that."

"Thank you, but I'm not asking for money." Don knew Suzanne would flip out if she found out that Eric had paid off their medical bills. It was true that Eric hit on every female he met, but he really did scare Suzanne that night, and Don could imagine the possibility that his friend might use the money as a way of staying in her life after he was gone. He felt very protective of Suzanne as he repeated in a firm tone: "I'm not asking for money."

"It's no problem, really. What's money for, right?"

"Seriously, Eric, I won't accept your money. But I do need your expertise. Is there any way we can get out of paying the medical bills altogether?"

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"Hmm, lemme think. Did they ask you to sign anything when you were admitted?"

Don nodded. "A bunch of things."

"Yeah, they wouldn't forget that—too much liability. If you want to bring by a copy of everything you signed, I'll look through it, but it seems like a long shot."

"Okay."

"The only way to get out of paying medical bills is to file for bankruptcy or to die." The filter between Eric's brain and his mouth didn't always work: "Sorry, man."

"No prob—"

"Wait," Eric interrupted. "That's it. You're dying, right? So that means the bills transfer to any legal heirs or assigns, and if there are none, they get written off by the company and go away!"

"I thought about that, but that means Suzanne would still have to pay them."

"Maybe not. You're still living in sin, right?"

"What?"

"You never got married."

"Yes, we got married—I told you that."

"I don't mean some bullshit commitment ceremony; I mean *really* married. Did you ever file papers with the courthouse?"

“Yes, we recently did that to get insurance—  
but it was too late.”

“Pre-existing condition?”

“Yep.”

“Well, you can get a divorce.”

Don had already thought about that, also, but after waiting several years to finally wed Suzanne, there was no way he would intentionally taint their marriage just to save a few dollars. Their love was the most beautiful thing he’d experienced in this lifetime, and now that they were officially married, that was the way he was going to die.

“You can run up all the new bills you want,” said Eric, “and Suzanne would only be stuck with the old ones. Go back to the doctors and get all the treatments you need. Get the best room they have. Tell them to spare no expense.” Eric let out a loud belly laugh.

“I wish it was that easy,” replied Don. “They’ve already made it perfectly clear that I need to start paying before I get any more treatments.”

“You should go to my friend Dr. Bernstein. He’s the best oncologist in Eugene.”

“I did. That’s who’s harassing me for the money.”

“Yeah, he’s pretty shrewd,” said Eric with a hint of admiration in his voice. “However, I’m sure he’ll

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accept a partial payment. Let me pay enough to keep Bernie happy, and you can keep your treatments going.”

Don shook his head.

“Okay,” said Eric. “But let me know if you change your mind. The offer stands.”

“Thank you.”

“Sorry. I wish I had better news.”

Although Don didn’t like the answer, he was happy he had come. He now knew for certain that Suzanne would be responsible for all of the medical bills he incurred, which convinced him once and for all that he didn’t want to do anything else that would add to the debt. “That’s okay,” said Don, feeling somewhat defeated. “It helps more than you know.”

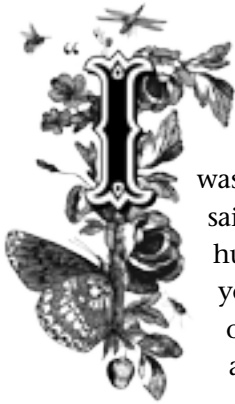
Don got up and shook his friend’s hand before walking to the door. “Thanks again.”

“Don’t mention it. Let’s get together when I get back from Botswana.”

Don knew this was the last time he would ever see Eric, but he decided not to end the visit on a downer. “Absolutely,” he said with as much enthusiasm as he could muster. “Enjoy your trip.”



## CHAPTER FOUR



was thinking . . .” Suzanne said softly while stroking her husband’s hair. “What would you say to putting your seed on ice so we could have a child after you leave?”

Don burst out laughing. “My ‘seed’? My ‘seed’?! Where did you get that from? Can’t you even say the word?” It was the first time he had laughed out loud in a while, and it felt good. “What am I, a tree, now?”

His laughter was infectious, and Suzanne also let a smile emerge. “Okay, your *sperm*,” she laughed. “I would like to save some of your *sperm* so we can have a baby after this is all over.”

Don's seriousness returned in an instant. "We've talked about having children before."

"I know—the world is a horrible place, and there are too many people in the world . . . blah, blah, blah. I just thought things were different now."

"Yes, things are *much* different now!" Don waved his arms to emphasize the point. "I'm about to die from a genetic disease, and there's no way I'm going to impose my defective genes on a baby!"

"They don't know for sure if it's hereditary."

"My *mother* died of cancer. My *father* died of cancer. My *grandfather* died of cancer. And now *I'm* going to die of cancer. How much more sure can you get?"

"I just thought . . ."

"No, you're *not* thinking—that's the problem!"

Suzanne began crying, and she pulled away from Don when he tried to comfort her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean it."

"I can't talk to you when you're like this," Suzanne sobbed while wiping the tears from her cheek with the back of her hand. "This isn't just about you. I have feelings, too, you know."

He took a deep breath and spoke slowly, with as much compassion as he could: "I know. But I *have* to put an end to this cruel joke of a family line, once

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and for all. Just like my parents should've done. I don't want to leave you alone, but *that* is not going to happen."



The next night, Don saw Robert in his dreams for the first time since their initial meeting.

"So you talked to a lawyer," said Robert.

Don wondered how it was possible for this man in his dreams to know what had happened in his waking hours. Then it came to him in a flash: "Oh, I get it. You're just a figment of my imagination. You're not really your own person, are you? I've just created you with my subconscious mind in order to help work through some issues. Classic psychology."

"Don't be silly—of course I'm my own person. It's true we're all connected in one continuous energy field, but I understand you well enough to know that's not what you meant."

"Then how did you know I went to see a lawyer? And why do you look just like me?"

"Don't think too much. You're going to need to trust me if this is going to work. You need to use your heart, not your head. I want you to get quiet

right now and feel what's happening. Doesn't your intuition know that what I'm saying is true?"

Don closed his eyes and tried to tune in to his heart. It wasn't something he was used to, but once he was completely open to what he was feeling, there was a knowing . . . a complete understanding that what Robert was saying was indeed true. His mind continued to doubt, but the knowing emanating from his heart filled his entire being, and he felt unusually at peace with that knowledge.

When Don opened his eyes, he saw Robert standing in front of him. He still *looked* like Don himself, but there was a glow surrounding him that was much different.

"I have a question," said Don after a long pause.

"What would you like to know?"

"Why do I keep seeing clocks with the time of exactly 11:11? Does that mean anything?"

"Of course it does," replied Robert. "The universe has a long history of using different signs to grab the attention of people who are on their spiritual path. And in recent history, it's become quite common for the universe to use clocks as signposts to reassure people they're on the right track."

"Like a burning bush?"

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"Let's hope you don't have to see a burning bush before you pay attention."

"Yeah," laughed Don. "What would the neighbors think?"

Robert smiled. "Until your intuition becomes stronger, the universe will give you periodic hints to let you know that you are *in the flow*."

"'In the flow'? What does that mean?"

"In the flow of the universe. In some ways it's remarkably similar to a river. For example, if you lie down on the bank of a river, you won't go anywhere. But if you surrender to the current within the river itself, you can travel for miles without any effort. And the *flow* is the current of our destiny."

"Everybody always talks about the difference between destiny and free will. I guess you don't believe in free will."

"I absolutely believe in free will—unfortunately."

"Why is that unfortunate?"

"Because the universe has a well-crafted plan for everyone, and most of us ignore it our entire lives. We are so arrogant that we think we know more than anyone else about what's better for ourselves, and therefore we do everything we can to try to *force* our will into existence. Which is why

most people struggle with life so much—they are so busy trying to live a life they think they want, instead of surrendering to the one that has already been destined for them.”

“So, following your destiny is easier than exercising free will?”

“Absolutely.”

“Well, I guess I’m lucky,” said Don sarcastically. “I guess my life will be much easier now that I’m in the flow.”

“It doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to *like* your destiny; it just means it will be easier to get where you’re destined to go. But more important, you can never take your destiny for granted. Destiny isn’t a destination—it’s a path. You can follow your destiny every day for a week, a month, or even a year and then fall out of it in a matter of seconds. What *is* lucky is that right now you’ve been given signs to reassure you that you’re on the right path. But don’t get too used to them, because soon they’ll disappear.”

“How will I know I’m on the right path after I stop seeing 11:11?”

“You’ll need to develop your intuition, and then you’ll be able to feel it without any external cues.”

Although Don wasn’t fully convinced that his life was predestined, it had begun to make more

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sense once Robert explained that he still had choice whether to follow what had been planned or not. Sometimes Don wished there was an instruction manual that explained how life really worked. It seemed unfair that he'd had to wait until he was about to die before learning how he should have lived.

"Okay," said Robert, "let's get on with it. Unfortunately, your physical pain will be getting a lot worse very shortly."

It didn't take much for Don to believe this. The burning in his esophagus had returned during the past week, and the pain had begun to spread throughout his abdomen.

"You have a choice," Robert continued. "You can live with the pain and let the cancer take its natural course—which will not be easy. Or you can find another doctor who will agree to treat you without insurance. Dr. Bernstein *had* to treat you at first because you were a referral from the emergency room. But since you haven't paid him, he's no longer obligated to continue. I'm sure there are doctors somewhere who will treat you for free, but there isn't one in Eugene. And you know what the lawyer told you about their fees."

"That Suzanne will have to pay for everything after I'm gone."

Robert nodded.

“But isn’t there another option?” Don couldn’t escape the feeling that there was something else he could do.

“Good—you’re listening to your inner voice. However, I think you already know what the third option is. That’s the real reason I’m here, isn’t it?”

Don felt a chill run up his spine to the back of his neck. He *did* know what the third option was. He had been trying to avoid it at all costs because of Suzanne, but at this point he felt that he ultimately didn’t have a choice. “I could end my own life,” he whispered.

“Is that what you want?”

Now that Don had finally said it out loud, he knew there was only one answer. “Yes,” he said after a long silence. “I think that’s the best thing to do.”

“Okay, then. We’d better get started while you still have your strength.”



# THANK YOU

I hope you enjoyed reading the first four chapters of *Summer's Path*. If you would like to continue reading, the full story is available as a hardcover book from your local bookstore, on-line retailer or at my website: **[www.scottblum.net](http://www.scottblum.net)**.

Thank you for joining me on this journey, and I wish you the strength and resolve to surrender to your destiny no matter where it may take you.

– Scott Blum



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Scott Blum** is the best-selling author of *Waiting for Autumn* and the co-founder of the popular inspirational website DailyOM (**[dailyom.com](http://dailyom.com)**). He is also a successful multimedia artist who has collaborated with several popular authors, musicians, and visual artists and has produced many critically acclaimed works, including a series featuring ancient meditation music from around the world. Scott lives in the mountains of Ashland, Oregon, with Madisyn Taylor—his wife, business partner, and soul mate.

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