

An excerpt from
To Forgive, Divine
 by Joseph Aragon



(JOYCE opens a filing cabinet and rifles through it. She pulls out a folder of newspaper clippings and hands it to NICK. He opens it.)

JOYCE: You were bound to find out sooner or later. Might as well hear it from me first.

NICK: “Student Killed in Attempted Robbery.” *(reads some more)* You had a brother.

JOYCE: Jim. Yeah.

NICK: I’m sorry.

JOYCE: Why? You didn’t shoot him.

Don’t even bother reading the rest. It’s boring. Some asshole bursts into a convenience store, shouts something about money, shots are fired, people start bleeding. Like a bad Crimestoppers video.

NICK: How many people were shot?

JOYCE: Just him and me.

NICK: . . . You?

JOYCE: Yup. One in the chest, two in the right shoulder. *(beat)* How interesting am I now?

NICK: I’d say you’re downright engrossing.

JOYCE: Well, there you have it. The Enigma solved.

NICK: . . . Wow . . . This is . . . You’ll have to forgive me, this is . . . wow.

JOYCE: Have I really changed that much in your eyes?

NICK: . . . Yes. Is that wrong?

JOYCE: No. I should be used to it by now, I guess.

I still can’t get over how stupid the whole thing was. The guy who shot us—Michael Sawchuk of 812 Selkirk Avenue—what a fucking idiot! Can’t hold up a fucking convenience store without spazzing out. Then there’s the police,

the doctors, the lawyers, especially that defense attorney, fuck I wanted to claw that bitch's eyes out—

. . . Sorry Nick.

NICK: Not a problem. You know what the shortest prayer in the world is?

JOYCE: What.

NICK: “Fuck it.” It's a very honest prayer.

JOYCE: Fuck it. Fuck it, fuck it, fuck it, fuck it, fuck it! . . . Sure beats a round of Hail Marys.

It was senseless, Nick. It didn't have to happen. He didn't have to shoot, I had the fucking till open, I was giving him the money! I dunno, something spooked him?—set him off somehow? I don't understand—

. . . this isn't healthy . . . this fucking pamphlet!— . . . You know what, forget it. Mother was right, just— . . . forget it.

(JOYCE takes the pamphlet, crumples it.)

NICK: Wait. Lemme ask you something. How have things been since then. This was—two years ago, it looks like?

JOYCE: Yeah. My therapist said the first year is the hardest, when you hit all the holidays and anniversaries. This year was a little easier, with the trial out of the way.

NICK: So you and your mother are coping well?

JOYCE: You saw yourself how “well” we're coping. We try to avoid each other when we can, which, unfortunately, isn't often, thank you Saint Ignatius. Mother buries herself in her work. Spends a lot of time with her potluck pals from parish council. And me, I've got school. And I've got Dreidel Boy. That's my pet name for him now.

NICK: That's precious.

JOYCE: It's not the healthiest way of coping, but there it is.

NICK: Did you have nightmares, mood swings, things like that?

JOYCE: . . . I used to cry a lot. Uncontrollable sobbing fits, they hit without warning, not much anymore though . . . Nightmares. Still have 'em . . . And I jump at sudden loud noises. A balloon pops, a car backfires—ridiculous how many times I've freaked out. It's Pavlovian.

And I've become slightly agoraphobic. Jim and I used to take walks outside, talk about stuff. Gorgeous spring day, blue sky, I used to love it. Now I can't go anywhere without looking over my shoulder. I turn wide when I walk around corners. And as for the outdoorsy beauty-of-Nature thing . . . I can't see it anymore. The world has become a very ugly place for me. So many horrible things happen in it.

Yeah, I know. I never used to be this cynical. I was a happy girl. I was cheerful and sweet and blissfully ignorant.

It's been two years. How come I'm not feeling at least a little better? I went to a fucking shrink! I even tried praying, a little. Things just— . . . *(trails off)*

NICK: *(taking the pamphlet)* Is that why you came to me with this?

JOYCE: . . . I just wanted to know if you knew anything about it. Not like I was actually gonna—you know . . .

NICK: Why not?

JOYCE: Well—c'mon, Nick . . . It's nuts! The last thing I want to do is meet this guy face-to-face—I mean—what do I have to say to him?

NICK: Starting a dialogue can be a healthy thing, you deal with unresolved issues—

JOYCE: What's unresolved? He killed Jim, he got convicted, he went to jail, case closed. Literally. Neat and tidy.

NICK: It's never that simple, Joyce.

JOYCE: What, you're gonna tell me he's really a nice guy who fell in with the wrong crowd?

NICK: Well what was his upbringing like?

JOYCE: Broken home, dad was a drunk, all that shit. God knows the defense was trying to play it up. And I know where you're going with that and I don't buy it. Not everyone who comes from a broken home turns into a murderer.

NICK: Yeah but the environment doesn't exactly promote an alternate career choice.

JOYCE: Why the hell are you defending him?

NICK: I'm not defending him. I'm just trying to get a balanced view here.

JOYCE: Is my view that skewed? Am I really that blind to reason?

NICK: No. But you're definitely not impartial.

JOYCE: . . . You know what? Fuck it. Forget I even brought it up.

NICK: Joyce—

JOYCE: Forget it! I'm not gonna listen to you make excuses for him! Michael Sawchuk is an evil murderous prick and that's that!

NICK: Joyce listen! . . . Okay, fine, I'm clueless, all right? I don't know what it's like to have three bullets rip through me and God willing I never will. But I do know that you have an opportunity here. For healing. You said yourself you weren't getting any better. This could be just the thing to get you in the right direction.

JOYCE: How!

NICK: By sharing your stories. By telling yours and listening to his.

JOYCE: And why should I give a fuck about his story!

NICK: Because he has a right to tell it.

(Pause.)

JOYCE: What?

NICK: He has a right to tell his story. He has a right to be heard.

JOYCE: . . . And what about Jim. He had some rights too.

NICK: . . . Joyce—

JOYCE: Fuck you, Nick.

(JOYCE exits. NICK is alone.)



End of Excerpt