



### *Chapter One Meet Miles.*

Dread gripped Miles Chaplin as he entered the administrative wing of the sprawling public university. Maneuvering around other college students in the broad institutional hallway, he wearily pushed open a worn wooden door labeled "Guidance Counselor."

Inside, Miles paused as he saw four lines of three or four anxious college students standing before four overworked assistant counselors.

Stepping weakly, Miles resigned himself to his latest idea: he had exhausted all other available options. Despite his efforts to navigate the last four years with some aim and direction, he had ended up broke and almost broken. Worse, his interests, choices, and enthusiasms had wiggled, giggled, and then slipped away.

For almost two decades, Miles convinced himself that pursuing an education would fill the gaps in his imagination even if his mind was "difficult," idealistic, artistic, and often impractical. But after four years of college, he had fallen out from everything and nearly everyone. Moreover, Miles' belief and faith had dissipated like a vanishing fog.

"Next," the assistant counselor called gently.



Miles approached the desk, “Hi, Miles Chaplin. I have an appointment with the Dean.”

The assistant counselor glanced up. "He’s running behind schedule, but he managed to squeeze you in. Five minutes," she handed Miles his hefty academic file and gestured toward the door labeled "Associate Dean's Office."

“Five minutes?” Miles smiled in spite of his dark mood, accepted his academic file, and passed the assistant's desk. Miles approached and rapped on the Dean's Office door.

"It's open," a gruff voice echoed.