

# Memory

The rain had been falling for three days straight when Marcus finally decided to answer the door. He'd been ignoring the knocking, the doorbell, even the phone calls, but something about this particular visitor made him pause. Through the peephole, he could see a figure standing on his porch, hunched against the weather, face obscured by shadows and a hood pulled low.

"Come as you are," Marcus whispered to himself, remembering words from long ago. He turned the lock.

The person on his doorstep was someone he hadn't seen in fifteen years. Rain-soaked, disheveled, looking nothing like the polished professional he'd once been. This was Alex—his old business partner, his former best friend, and eventually, his bitter enemy.

"I know you probably don't want to see me," Alex said, water dripping from his jacket onto the worn welcome mat. "But I needed to come. I needed to... I don't know. Remember, maybe?"

Marcus stood frozen in the doorway, caught between the impulse to slam the door and the strange pull of nostalgia. The years had changed them both. Where Alex had once been sharp-dressed and confident, he now looked weathered, uncertain. And Marcus himself had retreated from the world after their falling out, after the company collapsed, after the lawsuits and accusations and betrayals.

"Take your time," Marcus heard himself saying, though he wasn't sure if he meant it as an invitation or a warning. "Choice is yours."

Alex stepped inside, leaving muddy footprints on the hardwood floor. They stood in the entryway, two middle-aged men surrounded by the ghosts of who they used to be. The silence stretched between them, filled with the weight of unspoken words and unresolved anger.

"Do you remember the beginning?" Alex asked quietly. "When we were going to change the world? When we stayed up all night in that tiny apartment, drawing up business plans on napkins?"

Marcus did remember. He remembered the excitement, the friendship, the shared dreams that had felt so real and possible back then. Before the success came. Before the money changed everything. Before Alex had made the decision that destroyed everything they'd built together.

"I remember," Marcus said, his voice rough. "I remember all of it."

They moved to the living room, where Marcus poured two glasses of whiskey with shaking hands. The amber liquid caught the dim afternoon light filtering through rain-streaked windows. They sat across from each other, separated by a coffee table and years of hurt.

"I know you think I betrayed you," Alex said, staring into his glass. "And maybe I did. Maybe I was so afraid of losing everything that I made the wrong choice. Maybe I was a coward."

Marcus wanted to be angry. He'd practiced this conversation in his head countless times over the years, had rehearsed all the things he would say if Alex ever showed up at his door. But sitting here now, looking at his old friend—really looking at him—he could see the toll the years had taken. The guilt, the regret, the loneliness that mirrored his own.

"I don't have a gun," Marcus said suddenly, the words surprising them both. It was an odd thing to say, but somehow it felt important. "I mean, I'm not armed. I'm not dangerous. I'm just... tired."

Alex looked up, confusion flickering across his face before understanding dawned. "Neither do I. I'm not here to fight anymore, Marcus. I'm not here to defend myself or make excuses. I'm just here because... because I miss you. I miss us. I miss who we were before everything went wrong."

The rain continued to drum against the windows as they talked, tentatively at first, then with growing honesty. They talked about the company, about the choices they'd made, about the friends they'd lost along the way. They talked about their families, their failures, their regrets.

As the afternoon faded into evening, Marcus realized that this moment—this conversation—was what he'd been waiting for without knowing it. Not for an apology, exactly, though Alex offered several. Not for vindication, though he felt something like it. Just for this: the chance to sit across from someone who had known him when he was young and hopeful, someone who remembered the same dreams and disappointments.

"You can stay the night if you want," Marcus offered as the whiskey bottle emptied and the hour grew late. "The couch is comfortable enough."

Alex nodded gratefully. "Thank you. I wasn't sure where else to go."

As Marcus gathered blankets and pillows, he thought about memory—how it could be a burden and a gift, how it could trap you in the past or free you to move forward. He thought about friendship and betrayal, about the thin line between love and hate, about the courage it took to knock on someone's door after fifteen years of silence.

That night, for the first time in years, Marcus slept without dreams of revenge or regret. And in the morning, when Alex quietly gathered his things and prepared to leave, they shook hands like the old friends they had once been.

"Take care of yourself," Marcus said.

"You too," Alex replied. "And Marcus? Thank you. For letting me come as I am."

After Alex left, Marcus stood in his doorway for a long time, watching the street where his old friend had disappeared around the corner. The rain had finally stopped, and the sun was trying to break through the clouds. He thought about calling his sister, whom he hadn't spoken to in months. He thought about leaving the house, maybe taking a walk through the neighborhood he'd been hiding from for too long.

The past would always be there, a collection of memories both bitter and sweet. But maybe, Marcus thought as he closed the door and turned toward the bright kitchen where morning light was streaming through clean windows, maybe it was time to stop letting those memories be the only thing that defined him.

Maybe it was time to remember how to live.