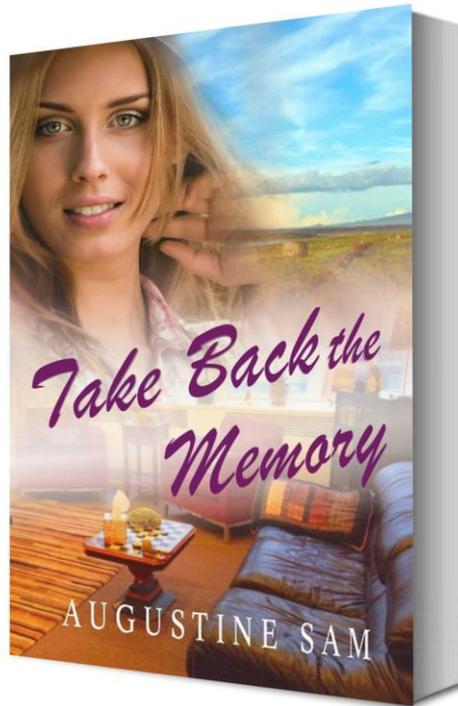


Book Excerpt



TAKE BACK THE MEMORY

By

Augustine Sam

Chapter One

The door of the consulting studio swung open at 9.00 a.m. and Dr. Wilson, a slender, pipe-smoking clinical psychologist stuck his hoary head in the doorway. His face lit up at the sight of Paige sitting cross-legged in the cozy waiting room.

"Hello Dr. Lyman," he smiled courteously, "I had no idea you were here already."

Paige glanced up, her face a frozen scowl, and gazed at him. She had expected them to be on first-name basis this morning; the unexpected formality fazed her quite a bit.

"Good morning, Dr. Wilson," she said wryly. "Sorry I'm early, a habit, I guess."

"Oh, that's all right," he said quickly, the smile on his lips waning. "I'll be with you in a minute."

She nodded and looked away as he disappeared back into the consulting room. Left alone, she gazed across the lounge. The psychotherapist's studio was illuminated by the sun's rays through an opened Venetian blind, and the balmy sunlit ambiance fascinated her.

"Like the cheery whisper of an admirer after a heartbreak," she said wistfully and rose.

As she did so, echoes of distant traffic momentarily brought her to a state of mental alertness. Palms sweaty, Paige walked to the window and opened it. She gazed, mesmerized, at the sun-drenched avenue on the breezy late September morning and noted the peak time for fall foliage in New York was weeks away yet. She closed the window.

Shrugging, she walked back to her seat and plopped down. Her hand trembled slightly on the black zebra-print clutch bag in her lap.

"Darn," she mumbled, her thoughts turning to her daughter, who had convinced her to come.

"I shouldn't be here, Diane," she whispered savagely. "I just shouldn't."

Anxious to gain control of herself, she heaved a sigh and leaned back on the comfortable davenport, puckering her lips.

She wore a rose-tinted shirt with a low-cut neckline that revealed plenty of cleavage. A cherry, handcrafted silk scarf encircled her neck. Knee-high black boots matched the color of her fringed skirt, accentuating its beauty. Angry with herself for letting Diane convince her to come, she sat up, agitated.

She started at the sound of a latch unfastening, as the door of the consulting room swung open again.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Dr. Wilson said from the doorway and then walked to where she was sitting.

Paige rose slowly. Her eyes on his face, she smoothed her skirt and noticed his courteous smile had not waned completely. Without altering his gait, Dr. Wilson thrust his hand in front of her. Paige took the outstretched hand and shook it gently.

"Can I come in now?"

"Yes, please do," he said, gesturing with his hand.

Clean-shaven, he wore no tie. His fawn-striped shirt, unlike hers, was buttoned all the way up. Expensive clothing testified to a successful practice. He wore black semi-brogues and walked with a slight shuffle. Paige followed him into his office, full of expectation.

"Please sit down." He indicated the black, buckskin couch. "Would you like some coffee?"

"No, thank you."

Paige sat on the familiar couch. As she gazed at him from the corner of her eyes on the chair that should be hers, the magnitude of the moment escaped her.

In the magnifying silence of the room, Dr. Wilson sat composed on his standard, comfortable chair, the tip of his pen held against his lip the way men who smoked would usually hold a pipe. His eyes remained on her, and hers were on his. For several seconds their eyes locked; at first warily, like two professionals trying to find a meeting ground, a starting point.

"Diane made me come," she said, frowning. "Frankly, I don't know why I'm here."

"You're here to talk to me," he said, crossing one leg over the other. "I guess both as a colleague and as a patient, and I'll love to listen to you as much as I've loved reading your work."

She uncrossed her legs and quickly re-crossed them, and then she leaned back on the couch, her fringed skirt shifting upwards. She noticed his eyes, unlike those of most men, remained on her face and not on her legs.

"Don't patronize me. Even my own daughter thinks I'm going mad. Don't lie to me. You think so, too, but I can still sit on that chair and listen to patients."

"You certainly can," he responded indulgently. "You were one of the best. However, we both know things aren't the way they used to be. If you were on this chair, the first thing you would tell the patient would be to admit their situation and talk to you about it." He paused a moment. "I think you have admitted that much within you," he said without looking at her. "That's why you allowed Diane to convince you to come. So, let's talk, my friend. Let's talk about the situation."

Paige regarded him suspiciously. *Let's talk about the situation. Talk about the situation?* Dr. Wilson's words jangled in her head like the howl of a campanile. What was there to talk about?

Irritation rose inside her like the beginning of a toothache. Yet, she knew he was right. Things were not the way they used to be. In the course of her checkered life and career, especially in recent years, nothing was the same. It hurt her quite a bit the way everyone seemed to think she had gone mad, the way she had been transformed from psychiatrist to patient.

"Be frank with me," she said. "Do you think I'm crazy?"

"Aren't we all?" he laughed mirthlessly. "Come on, this is not about you being crazy."

"What is it about?"

"It's about you and me having a nice little talk so we can understand how things are."

She was silent for a while. She wished he could give her a reason to scream. She wanted desperately to scream at someone this morning, so why not this psychologist, with his calm, upper-class manners? After what seemed like a long time, she realized, not without some satisfaction, that he was determined to be courteous with her this morning.

"I'm at a loss," she whined and turned on the couch to face away from him. "I don't know where to begin. I don't even know what to talk about. I mean, there are so many things to explore."

"Let's start with the endearing subject of your book. Are you convinced you want to tell it as it is?"

"Yes."

"Everything?"

"Every little detail."

He watched her calmly. "I know you've never been afraid to bare your mind, but between me and you, is there any aspect of this memoir that disturbs you a bit?"

"Yes." She turned and smiled at him. "But an autobiography has to be frank. What's the point writing it if you are going to shy away from the ugly part? I can't keep it all inside. I want to let it out."

"Very well," he said, his eyes agreeing with her. "Maybe we should talk about some of the traumatizing aspects of the experiences you have recalled and want to write about."

She gazed at him without a word. Her mind began to tumble backward slowly, very slowly.

"I think it all began with a simple act of love," she said at length, her voice surprisingly nostalgic. "A simple act of love," she emphasized, "between me and Bill when we were kids."

"I'm listening."

She sat upright on the couch. "My life is like a soap opera," she muttered, grimacing. "A distressing *mélange* spiced with love, heartbreak, and a hidden truth. It will silence your thoughts."

"I take it you loved this Bill."

"Don't interrupt me," she snapped at him and the psychologist pursed his lips but did not smile. "What Bill and I shared wasn't a sensual scream, okay? We were kids."

"Okay," he mumbled, nodding.

“We grew up together in Kenya,” she told him. “We were on an unending safari. Bill was a handsome Irish boy. You must understand, there weren’t many white boys around to connect to, so I fell desperately in love with him and thought I would marry him someday.” She paused and stared at the rug on the floor of the consulting room, her thoughts a riot.

She hated to remember that back then while she was nursing her infantile dreams of matrimony, Bill’s father was formulating a different program for his son. “Into the service of God you’ll go,” he had told the boy. “A priest, that’s what you are going to be.” Paige glanced up sharply and thoughts jangled in her head. It might have been different, she mused, if Bill had been a Protestant Irish and not Catholic.

She gazed at Dr. Wilson’s shoes as memories flooded her mind. She tried to speak and her voice broke, but the psychologist’s gentle manners soothed her. She and Bill had attended the same school for expatriate kids in Nairobi, she explained. After the boy’s primary school education, his father bundled him into the junior seminary in Ireland, and the world was never the same again. With all contact between them lost, she willed herself to be heartbroken for long, sad years while Bill went on to earn a degree in Theology and was subsequently ordained a priest, or so she thought.

“Did you eventually recover from this heartbreak?” Dr. Wilson said.

“Maybe I did, in my own way.”

“What happened when you recovered?” He spoke warily.

Her eyes didn’t meet his. “A different passion engulfed me then.”

“What kind of passion?”

“Maybe you’ll call it vengeance.”

“Was it vengeance?” Dr. Wilson, like her, uncrossed and re-crossed his legs.

“Yes. A strange kind though.”

Their eyes locked. “A strange kind of vengeance, you say?”

Paige nodded and looked away. “It was priesthood that caused Bill to jilt me,” she said in a defensive voice. “So, I figured a settling of scores might heal me.” She paused, sighed, and then spoke. “I decided to wage a very personal war against priests.”

Dr. Wilson slowly narrowed his eyes. “You mean, like secretly assassinating priests?”

“No,” she frowned, staring at her skirt.

“But a personal war...”

“A personal war that made nonsense of their vow, if you know what I mean.”

“Not really.”

She gritted her teeth. “I seduced them, damn it, and then I made them suffer.”

Wilson gaped at her, “You seduced priests to get back at Bill for abandoning you for priesthood?”

“Yes.” She looked up at the psychologist now. “That is only part of the story.”

End of Sample

About the Author

Augustine Sam is a journalist by profession, a novelist by choice, and a poet by chance. A bilingual writer and an award-winning poet, he is a member of the U.K. Chartered Institute of Journalists. He was formerly a Special Desk editor at *THISDAY* newspapers, an influential *Third World* daily first published with the *Financial Times of London*. He later became a correspondent for Central Europe.

He was the winner of the **Editors' Choice Award** in the *North America Open Poetry Contest*, sponsored by the National Library of Poetry, USA and was invited to be inducted into the International Society of Poets. He won the Merit Award from this society as well as having his poems published in two international anthologies: *Measures of the Heart & Sounds of Silence*.

Augustine's complete collection of poems, *Flashes of Emotion*, listed on **BookAwards.com**, was the 2015 Finalist in the International Book Award Contest. His first two novels, *Take Back the Memory*, a thought-provoking women's fiction, and *The Conspiracy of Silence*, a mystery/thriller, were both awarded the prestigious **Readers' Favorite** 5-star seals.

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