

Praise For

IN AND OUT OF MADNESS

N. L. Snowden has written an astonishingly powerful novel. It grabbed me from the first page and didn't let go. Don't miss this one. **Cassandra King**, author of the *New York Times* best seller, *The Sunday Wife*.

Ms. Snowden has succeeded notably with a rare account of a person whose life has been punctuated by the vacillations of endogenous mood disorder, and the adaptive responses elicited in others close enough to be affected by these colorful and bewildering fluctuations. A compelling novel based on the real life vagaries of a human phenomenon that could potentially move us to a better understanding of other biogenetic mysteries of life. **Allie C. Boyd, M.D.**, the psychiatrist who treated N. L. Snowden for bi-polar disorder.

"The book tells a story that never gets told. Booze and infidelities often lead to madness in the spouse. I travel through out the mental health system as a peer all over the United States. This is true of the people in our system. Many are abused and mistreated women who are shelved. Snowden tells her story for herself and all women. If you want to understand what is really happening today in America and mental health read this book." **Moe Armstrong**, *founder of peer advocacy in the mental health and veterans administration, has been on Good Morning America, Sixty Minutes, and Nightline advocating for mental health and veterans.*

N.L. Snowden's *In and Out of Madness* gives us marvelously detailed evocations of the impact of sexual trauma, disassociative processes and bipolarity in one woman's journey toward self-actualization and autonomy. Lee, the narrative's heroine—she has real grit—struggles to escape horrendous early childhood abuse and neglect and her subsequent embedment in the "love of her life," the sex addict, Joe Thames. Wounded early on, Lee bravely, tirelessly, struggles to escape the burden of her past. Suspenseful, at times harrowing, her story is filled with ironic twists that exhilarated and liberated. Snowden expertly takes Lee—and the reader—to those places in Lee's history where past and present conjunct, intimate the future. We care for Lee. Her journey enthralls. **Sam Pirro**, *author of Wooings*

N. L. Snowden's *In and Out of Madness* is raw and real. Snowden's brutal honesty is only rivaled by her fresh delineation of deceit and betrayal. With uncanny courage, we see Lee Thames' struggle to please and then rise to meet impossible odds. When I started reading, I got the impression it was a story of insanity; however, after a dozen pages I knew I was reading something special. *In and Out of Madness* is a page-turner. You will be captured and will not be able to let go until you flip the last page.

The theme for me is not madness but a woman's unconditional love for Jolly, her daughter. No matter how much turmoil Lee suffered in her personal life, her love for Jolly remained a constant. Her marriage to a sexually addicted man caused her life to spiral out of control, yet nothing changed her from being a world-class mother. Her husband's sickness was the catalyst for her unrestrained, erratic behavior. Snowden, with the skill of a wordsmith, weaves the pages like a spider building a web. Be aware when you start you won't be able to put *In and Out of Madness* down. The story pulls back the sheets and shows the beauty and the ugly side of sex as only one who has been there could paint. You will feel Lee's joy and suffer with her being used. If I were to write one sentence I would say, "This book is reality in words."

Jack White, *Mr. White is in the Texas Hall of Fame as an artist and writer.*

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A fictionalized account of a true
experience

N. L. Snowden

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This book is based on a true story but is a work of fiction.
Any resemblance to people living or dead is purely
coincidental.

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In and Out of Madness

N. L. Snowden

This book is dedicated to my daughter, who is my best friend, and the person who pushed me, pulled me, and encouraged me.

ALSO,
A special thanks goes to Bristol-Myers Squibb for making Abilify, which literally saved my life and turned my illness around.

In and Out of Madness

N. L. Snowden

IN AND OUT OF MADNESS

1

One of us has to die.

Bright light showed as red spots on my closed lids. A searing pain in my gut awakened me the same as every morning, but this time it hurt worse as they removed the NG tube from my nostril. Horrific anguish from the endless tubes vexed every orifice. I had no idea where I was or what was going on. Groggy was an understatement.

I remembered sitting in my recliner when the phone rang. Jolly calling me. My mind worked, although the rest of me felt paralyzed. I tried telling her that I loved her. I heard Jolly's voice, but I couldn't understand what she was saying. Soon, I heard a vaguely familiar voice and felt someone shaking me.

"Lee, wuh-wuh-wake up, can you hear me?" I recognized the voice as belonging to Tom, our local town cop whose number Jolly kept on her phone's speed dial.

I thought I was sipping a glass of tea. I sensed a prick and a burning sensation in my arm. That part I did remember, though I thought it had just happened. Turns out it was when the EMTs found me passed out in my chair. The pain had awakened me the night before for a few seconds. Life wasn't fair, even in death.

I tried to open my eyes. They were too heavy to get open all the way, but I squeezed one into a slit. A blinding light assaulted me, and the red spots faded. There were strangers leaning over me. The strong smell of alcohol burned my nose as a nurse unhooked the IV and pulled it out. She cleaned the stick and bandaged it.

“You know, you are wuh-wuh-one lucky lady.”

The voice I heard sounded like he screamed at me from far away. Tom’s voice again. I managed to open my eyes and look at him, and he was really there this time.

“Have you returned to take me to a mental hospital?” I asked.

“I’m here mainly as a wuh-worried friend, Lee. But, yes, if the doctors decide to send you back by ambulance to Birmingham, my job is to see you go agreeably.”

“How did I get here? What happened?”

“Jolly called me last night and said you’d taken an overdose. Wuh-wuh-when I got to the house, you’d locked all of the doors. She had you on one phone and me on her cell phone. She gave me permission to kick the doors in to get to you. I kicked in the outside studio door then the locked pantry door. You wuh-wuh-were out but still breathing. The ambulance arrived shortly after I did, and the EMTs wuh-worked on stabilizing you. They brought you to the hospital here in LaGrange. Her call saved your life.”

I was too drugged to make much sense out of what he was saying to me, but I comprehended that I’d nearly killed myself and Jolly had saved my life. The thought of Jolly was the only thing that made me grateful to be alive.

The aftermath of the self-hatred still clung to my spirit. I wasn't sure that getting saved had been what was really best for me. Then I thought about what I'd almost done to Jolly. In spite of the brain fog, my thinking was clear enough to feel a deep shame.

At last, no machines induced their rhythmic check on my life. A young doctor came in and assessed my situation with a brief question.

"Do you still want to harm yourself?"

"No." That was the truth. I'd learned my lesson by coming so close to taking my life. "Are you going to put me in a mental hospital? I have an appointment with my psychiatrist in Birmingham tomorrow afternoon."

Because I had the appointment the next day, they let me go home. Tom drove me back to Senora, Alabama in the police car. He was kind and helped settle me.

* * *

"Tell me about two nights ago, Lee," said Dr. Hopkins. "When you had to go to the emergency room."

"I don't remember too much. I know I was mad as hell at Joe. I vaguely remember wanting to kill myself. God, earlier in the week I asked my neighbor who's been keeping my daddy's gun to let me have it back. She refused to give it to me."

He leaned back in his chair, and his mouth twitched in a nervous tic. He spoke in a fast monotone that was often hard for me to understand because of my hearing problem. For a man of sixty-three, he was still quite attractive. I'd heard rumors that he was Birmingham's best catch.

As I talked, I shook my right foot in figure eights.

"I only wanted it for protection, now that I'm a single woman." I looked up and spoke in rapid-fire sentences. "You know, I wish I'd gotten that damn gun back. God, I would kill *him*. In fact, if I could think of a way, I'd do it right now. No, I wouldn't kill him. Uh-uh, I'd shoot him in his dick and paralyze him. I'd stand there and watch the fear in his eyes as I aimed the gun at his beloved crotch."

I uncrossed my legs and stretched both feet toward the doctor, kneading the air with each foot, back and forth.

"Then I'd laugh as he screamed in agony," I said, "and I'd gloat over the blood as it drenched his hands. I'd stand there for a minute and listen to him plead with me to call for help. He'd watch me unplug all of the phones, grab his cell phone and take them with me. I'd leave him in pain, begging me to come back and help him. I'd laugh all the way back to my car. I'd drive with the convertible top down, radio turned up, and cruise home smiling to myself."

Dr. Hopkins's face looked pale. In a sad but frustrated voice he said, "You have certainly complicated things now. I'm required by law to write your ex-husband a letter telling him that you want to kill him and that I think you are serious and sick enough to do it. In the meantime, I'll write orders for your commitment to the mental hospital."

"No! I don't want to go to the hospital."

Suddenly, my inexhaustible joy turned into a deluge of tears and slurs as I realized he was going to lock me up. I begged him not to make me go. He summoned his office manager, Marilyn, and they called the unit to prepare a room for me. She wanted to drive me,

but I told her I could drive myself, since I'd need a way to get home once the hospital released me. I kept protesting that I didn't have any clothes, toothbrush, etcetera, and no one to take care of my pets. The look on their faces told me that I was a lot sicker than I realized. I shrugged and followed Marilyn out to the parking lot.

We drove to the unit, and things were different from the other times I'd been there. First, I was going right on in, there would be no long wait in the emergency room. Second, Joe was not there letting me know that he'd take care of everything for me. The worst sense of loneliness since we'd split up overwhelmed me.

I watched a nurse look at her watch and log me in at three fifteen on May 5, 2003. They handed me papers to sign. The first one she gave me would allow them to file for the insurance. Well, since Joe had recently burned me by not paying my medical bills, I read this paper carefully. Sure enough, in small print were the words that signing on the line below meant that I would be responsible for the bill. I pushed the paper back, refusing to sign it.

"Why don't you call my son-of-a-bitching ex-husband to sign this? He's the one who is mandated by the court to pay these medical bills."

They tried to humor me by saying that it was okay and that I didn't have to sign it. One of the nurses asked the other if she needed to go through my purse. By this time, Marilyn had returned to Dr. Hopkins's office. When I heard that they were going to lock up my purse, an eerie feeling came over me. That was my last and only possession, and I'd be damned if I was going to let them take it.

“Last time I was up here, a lady had things stolen out of her purse,” I said desperately.

“That’s impossible. They are locked up in a safe.”

In the past when Dr. Hopkins had hospitalized me, Joe always took my purse home with him. He brought me books, some clothes, and I knew he loved me, would miss me, call me, and visit me. Normally, he would be happy to see me when I got well. This time I’d be alone. Jolly was too far away and couldn’t miss school. Joe wouldn’t give a shit anymore. Besides, Jolly hadn’t told him I’d nearly killed myself. She’d handled it all alone, sure that Joe wouldn’t want to help.

The nurse walked toward the door that would bring her out to get me and take me up to the floor that had power locks and double sets of doors. I’d be strip-searched, given one of those bare-buttied gowns and not be allowed to drink when I was thirsty. No, I couldn’t do this!

As the nurse reached for the door handle, I picked up my purse and my keys and ran for the front door.

“Lee, come back! Let us help you. Now stop, we can help you!”

I heard the panic in her voice. They had goofed and allowed a seriously psychotic patient to escape. I kept on running and quickly unlocked my car’s door and darted in, rapidly relocking all of them. By then she was at my window.

“Come on, Lee! Don’t do this.”

I turned the key, started the car and backed out. I gave it a little too much scoot juice, and it made like a wave as I sped away. My heart pounded. I was afraid they’d have a guard or the police coming after me. I knew not to speed and draw attention to myself, so I settled

down and headed for home. Once I got out of Birmingham's city limits, I became frenzied. It was drizzling, but I pulled off the road and let my top down. Driving in the rain—in that air bubble of protection from the wet—made me bold as I accelerated. Feeling invincible and fearless on the slick roads, I blasted it to eighty and made it back home in record time.

Because I was frenetic and angry, I fishtailed my silver Miata into the driveway. Slamming the door in frustration, I glanced at my watch. It was five after six. Walking back from the mailbox, I thumbed through the bills and junk mail without interest until the invitation addressed to Joe and Lee Thames appeared. Word we'd split up hadn't made it to that circle of friends yet.

"Damn you, Joe! I'm going to get you for what you've done to me."

I said this to summon the courage I needed for what I had in mind when he got off work: I was going to kill him. I just needed to lure him back to my house tonight and wasn't sure how to do it, since our last face-to-face conversation had ended in a physical fight. I felt aghast and thrilled by my thoughts, but not enough to stop these overwhelming urges—even as another part of me wanted to wash such thoughts away.

I needed to get inside my house and lock the doors—I'd just eloped from a psychiatric inpatient facility and knew the police would be looking for me.

I opened my glove drawer and put the gun into it, feeling the cool metal as it slid underneath the soft kid leather. I knew no one would think to look in my bedroom for a gun, because everyone knew my neighbor kept my gun safe from me. Since I was mentally ill, I couldn't

purchase one. On the way home from seeing my doctor, I'd tricked Jessica, my neighbor, into giving it back to me. I'd lied and said my sister was staying with me and wanted to take it back to Meridian, Mississippi with her, and Jessica had trusted me to take the gun straight home to my sister.

Touching its smooth surface gave me a sense of power. I knew I was going to do something about the pain Joe caused me. I'd tried to forgive him and let go of the past, but he kept doing things like lying to me, flaunting his women, and generally treating me like shit, even though he lived thirty minutes away from me in his own apartment. These things forced me to focus on confronting him and trying to control him. Now my moment of looking into his lying eyes and watching him suffer drew near. My destiny called me as I shut the drawer and heard that grating, squeaking sound a dresser makes when it is too old for its drawers to open and close easily. A cut-glass vase of wilted yellow roses stuck out on the dresser. Although I'd cut them only the day before, they appeared to have given up—like me.

I felt my pulse increase as I remembered what had inflamed me enough to want to act in a way that I shouldn't. God, how far had we come, how low had we stooped, and how wretched was my life? Right now, on this fine spring day, I didn't care about anything. I didn't care about Joe or me, not even my daughter Jolly. I didn't care that I'd probably lost Dr. Hopkins, my psychiatrist in Birmingham. I didn't care that I was fixing to mess up my life. All I cared about was stopping this madness and pain.

By now, an APB probably chattered on every police radio in the state. The drive from Birmingham to

my home in Senora had taken less than three hours, since I'd raced home in my sporty coupe as though I were the next Triple Crown winner. Although a drizzle had shrouded the road, I'd enjoyed the mist on my face. My freedom from the mental hospital invited me to live dangerously. I was high.

I was realistic enough to expect a knock on my door at any minute from our only local police officer, Tom Vanguard, who would cuff me and drag me back to The Pit, as we crazies called it. Senora is a little hamlet on the far eastern side of Alabama—a small town with less than two hundred fifty people, including those in our cemetery.

Despite the risk, I stayed home. All I could think about was that smirk on Joe's face. I wanted to slap it off. No, I didn't want to slap it off; I wanted to blow it off.

Would this be over in record time like my drive home? I thought about the gun in the drawer—I'd worked hard lying in order to get it back. More pressing to me was my anxiety about losing my doctor.

Worrying about losing Dr. Hopkins almost made me rational, then the voices started again and I acknowledged what I had to do. Damn! It was only six fifteen.

I knew there were only two solutions to this problem. One was to kill myself, and the other was to kill Joe. The voices told me that my only hope for serenity was to be ready when Joe got home from work so I could bait him into coming to my house.

The phone rang. I jumped.

"Damn telemarketer!"

I remembered my father's gun in the drawer. At that moment, I cherished the illusion of taking it out,

aiming all my frustrations on the ringing phone. I fantasized about hearing the answering machine pick up, and as I heard one of their familiar mispronunciations of my name, pulling out the gun and blowing the telephone into blue dust.

My own voice on the answering machine interrupted my dark sentiments: *I'm writing, or I'm out horsing around. Please leave your name, number, and a brief message, and I'll get back in touch with you, unless you're my ex-husband or a telemarketer.*

I heard the low beep.

"Mom?"

I lunged to pick up the phone, nearly tripping over the bed in the process. I answered the phone slightly out of breath.

"Jolly, don't hang up. I'm here."

"Are you okay? I've been worried sick. You told me Dr. Hopkins ordered a room for you at South Park, then you called and said you'd run away."

"Jolly, I'm fine."

"Mom, do you want me to call Tom and let him take you back up there? I'm afraid. I'm worried that you're going to kill yourself."

"No, Angel. I'll be okay. I needed to come home."

I sat down on the bed, untwisting the telephone cord while listening to Jolly. I heard a waver in her voice. I felt guilty for upsetting her again, especially after two nights ago when I'd ambitiously tried killing myself. Now I was pulling this stunt on her. Jolly was my best friend in the world. She was level-headed and remained calm in crises. She'd proven she could handle a very difficult situation—saving my life from three hours away.

“You know, Mom, you almost succeeded the other night. God, please don’t leave me alone. I love you. Daddy’s not worth losing your life.”

Good, she seems to understand that he has to be the one to die.

“I was upset with your dad, not suicidal.”

I heard her gulp as she bravely tried not to cry and upset me.

“You are a wonderful mother and a talented person. You have to realize that you don’t need Daddy to be happy. I know it’s hard now. One day you’ll realize you are better off without him.”

“Angel, I’m fine, really I am. I just couldn’t bear the thought of going into a mental hospital alone. Your dad went with me every other time. His strength encouraged me not to be afraid.”

“Mom, he’s not good for you now—try to grasp that.”

“But he always stayed with me until they took me up on the lockup floor. He called me and he visited me. Jolly, he was good to me when I needed him the most.”

While sitting on the bed, I aimlessly drew my name in the dust on the headboard with my index finger. Thinking of happier times with my ex-husband almost ambushed me off my course. I softened my feelings toward Joe—somewhat.

“Angel, I knew that the loneliest feeling in the world was realizing they were going to lock me up and no one would be there. You’re too far away, and you can’t afford to miss any of your classes. I wouldn’t have had a soul on visitation days.”

Just thinking that literally had my heart hurting. For a minute, I wondered if I could die from a broken heart.

“They were going to lock up my purse. Without it, I wouldn’t have had a way to call. If I couldn’t call you and give you my PIN number, you couldn’t have called me.”

“Mom, Dr. Hopkins wouldn’t have put you in the hospital unless he thought you were sick.”

Ignoring her words, I went on. “God, I froze with pure fear. I realized I was crazy. Going to a mental hospital would have made me sicker, not better. Returning home saved me. I needed to calm down.”

I surveyed my dusty calligraphy. Disgust welled up within me that my bedroom was nasty. Housekeeping was low on my agenda now, although I’d always kept my house picked up and neat. On a beauty kick, I had surrounded myself with china, crystal, silver, and fresh cut flowers from my yard.

“I promise you, sweet girl,” I said to Jolly, “I’m not going to try to kill myself. Why, I’m back here in the bedroom right now fixing to go to bed. I’m okay. Really, I am.”

“Mom, please don’t do anything stupid. It’s hard to trust you.”

I tried to reassure her in my most convincing voice. “I’ll call you first thing tomorrow morning. I’m about to take my sleeping pills and grog out.”

“How many will you take?”

“I swear to you I’ll only take the two prescribed by Dr. Hopkins. You get on back to studying.”

“Yeah, right. That’ll be easy to do now.”

"I'm going to e-mail Dr. Hopkins while I'm lucid and see what he says to me," I added. "I hope I haven't screwed things up to the point that he won't be my doctor anymore. After I hear from him, I'll e-mail you and let you know what he says. I know he was legally obligated to have me admitted to the hospital, but I don't believe he personally thought it would have been the best thing for me. I know coming home was the right thing for me to do."

I knew Jolly would gauge that I was a little too peppy, which meant trouble, so I slowed my speech down, trying to sound normal. "Night, night, sweet Angel. Mommy loves you."

"Night, Mom, I love you too. I'll call you tomorrow morning as soon as I get up. Go on to bed and take it easy. Take care of yourself." There was a pause. "Mom . . ."

"What, Angel?"

"Oh, Mom, please don't do anything to hurt yourself again. I couldn't stand it if I lost you. Try to remember how much I love you and need you."

"I swear to you I will never try killing myself again. Go on and do your thing. I'm okay. Talking to you has helped me." I paused then said, "And, Jolly . . . thanks for saying that you needed me. I thought right now that I needed you and you didn't need me anymore. That does give me some hope that I'm not a total fuck up."

I hung up the phone with a sense of sadness in my heart.

I knew I needed to take some Lithium to calm down. I poured myself a glass of milk and took a dose. Then I started running my bath. I knew the hot water would help the Lithium to work better. Wanting to relax

in a hot bubble bath, I lit some candles as the tub filled. Lilac-scented candles cast their soft light and sedated me. The hot steam soaked through my skin, however it didn't come close to warming my icy heart.

I listened to the water as it lapped the edge of the tub each time my hand moved, cutting a heart shape. The hot liquid etched itself into my fingers. The bubbles piled up like white gloves with open fingers, one bursting on my nipple with a soft *phfffft* sound.

Then I remembered when taking a bath had terrified me.