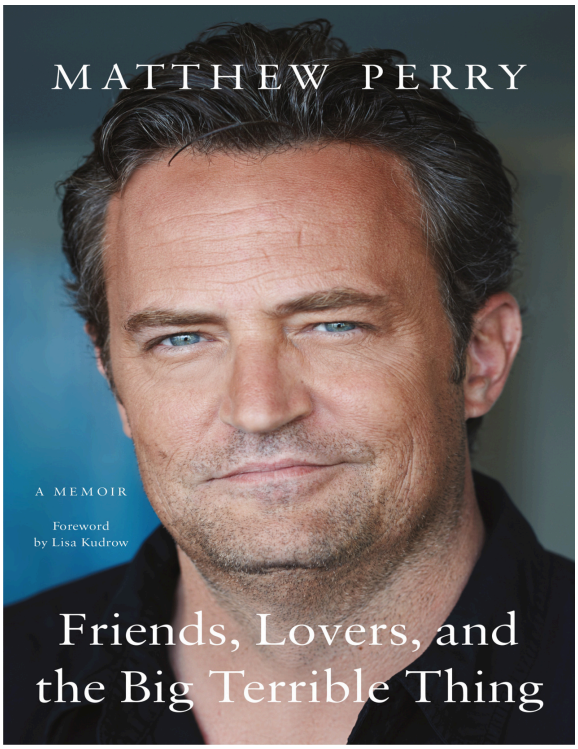


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For all of the sufferers out there.
You know who you are.

The best way out is always through.
—Robert Frost

You've just got to see me through another day.
—James Taylor

Foreword

by Lisa Kudrow

“How’s Matthew Perry doing?”

Over the many years since I was first asked, it’s been, at different times, the most asked question for me. I understand why so many people asked it: they love Matthew and they want him to be OK. Me too. But I always bristled at that question from the press, because I couldn’t say what I wanted to say: “It’s his story to tell and I’m not authorized to tell it really, am I!” I would have wanted to go on to say, “This is very intimate personal stuff and if you don’t hear it from the actual person, it is, to my mind, gossip and I’m not gossiping about Matthew with you.” Knowing that no response at all could do more damage, sometimes I would just say, “I think he’s doing well.” At least that doesn’t amplify the spotlight and maybe he can have a fraction of privacy as he tries to deal with this disease. But truly, I wasn’t exactly sure how Matthew was doing. As he’ll tell you in this book, he was keeping it a secret. And it took some time for him to feel comfortable enough to tell us some of what he was going through. Over those years I didn’t really try to intervene or confront him, because the little I knew about addiction was that his sobriety was out of my hands. And yet, I would have periods of wondering if I was wrong for not doing more, doing something. But I did come to understand that this disease relentlessly fed itself and was determined to keep going.

So, I just focused on Matthew, who could make me laugh so hard every day, and once a week, laugh so hard I cried and couldn’t breathe. He was there, Matthew Perry, who is whip smart … charming, sweet, sensitive, very reasonable and rational. That guy, with everything he was battling, was still there. The same Matthew who, from the beginning, could lift us all up during a grueling night shoot for the opening titles inside that fountain.

“Can’t remember a time I wasn’t in a fountain!” “What are we, wet?” “Can’t remember a time I wasn’t wet … I!” (Matthew is the reason we are all laughing in that fountain in the opening titles.)

After *Friends* I didn’t see Matthew every day, and I couldn’t even hazard a guess with regard to his well-being.

This book is the first time I’m hearing what living with and surviving his addiction really was. Matthew has told me some things, but not in this kind of detail. He’s now letting us into Matthew’s head and heart in honest and very exposed detail. And finally, no one needs to ask me or anyone else how Matthew’s doing. He’s letting you know himself.

He has survived impossible odds, but I had no idea how many times he almost didn’t make it. I’m glad you’re here, Matty. Good for you. I love you.

—Lisa

Prologue

Hi, my name is Matthew, although you may know me by another name. My friends call me Matty.

And I should be dead.

If you like, you can consider what you're about to read to be a message from the beyond, my beyond.

It's Day Seven of the Pain. And by Pain, I don't mean a stubbed toe or "The Whole Ten Yards." I capitalize Pain because this was the worst Pain I've ever experienced—it was the Platonic Ideal of Pain, the exemplar. I've heard people claim that the worst pain is childbirth: well, this was the worst pain imaginable, but without the joy of a newborn in my arms at the end of it.

And it may have been Day Seven of Pain, but it was also Day Ten of No Movement. If you catch my drift. I hadn't taken a shit in ten days—there, there's the drift. Something was wrong, very wrong. This was not a dull, throbbing pain, like a headache; it wasn't even a piercing, stabbing pain, like the pancreatitis I'd had when I was thirty. This was a different kind of Pain. Like my body was going to burst. Like my insides were trying to force their way out. This was the no-fucking-around kind of Pain.

And the sounds. My God, the sounds. Ordinarily, I'm a pretty quiet, keep-to-myself kinda fella. But on this night, I was screaming at the top of my lungs. Some nights, when the wind is right and the cars are all parked up for the night, you can hear the horrific sounds of coyotes ripping apart something that is howling in the Hollywood Hills. At first it sounds like children laughing way, way off in the distance, until you realize it's not that—it's the foothills of death. But the worst part, of course, is when the

howling stops, because you know whatever has been attacked is now dead. This is hell.

And yes, there is a hell. Don't let anyone tell you different. I've been there; it exists; end of discussion.

On this night the animal was me. I was still screaming, fighting tooth and nail for survival. Silence meant the end. Little did I know how close I was to the end.

At the time, I was living in a sober living house in Southern California. This was no surprise—I have lived half my life in one form or another of treatment center or sober living house. Which is fine when you are twenty-four years old, less fine when you are forty-two years old. Now I was forty-nine, still struggling to get this monkey off my back.

By this point, I knew more about drug addiction and alcoholism than any of the coaches and most of the doctors I encountered at these facilities. Unfortunately, such self-knowledge avails you nothing. If the golden ticket to sobriety involved hard work and learned information, this beast would be nothing but a faint unpleasant memory. To simply stay alive, I had turned myself into a professional patient. Let's not sugarcoat it. At forty-nine, I was still afraid to be alone. Left alone, my crazy brain (crazy only in this area by the way) would find some excuse to do the unthinkable: drink and drugs. In the face of decades of my life having been ruined by doing this, I'm terrified of doing it again. I have no fear of talking in front of twenty thousand people, but put me alone on my couch in front of a TV for the night and I get scared. And that fear is of my own mind; fear of my own thoughts; fear that my mind will urge me to turn to drugs, as it has so many times before. My mind is out to kill me, and I know it. I am constantly filled with a lurking loneliness, a yearning, clinging to the notion that something outside of me will fix me. But I had had all that the outside had to offer!

Julia Roberts is my girlfriend. *It doesn't matter, you have to drink.*

I just bought my dream house—it looks out across the whole city! *Can't enjoy that without a drug dealer.*

I'm making a million dollars a week—I win right? *Would you like to drink? Why yes, I would. Thank you very much.*

I'd had it all. But it was all a trick. Nothing was going to fix this. It would be years before I even grasped the notion of a solution. Please don't misunderstand me. All of those things—Julia and the dream house and $1 million a week—were wonderful, and I will be eternally grateful for all of them. I am one of the luckiest men on the planet. And boy did I have fun.

They just weren't the answer. If I had to do it all over again, would I still audition for *Friends*? You bet your ass I would. Would I drink again? You bet your ass I would. If I didn't have alcohol to soothe my nerves and help me have fun, I would have leaped off a tall building sometime in my twenties. My grandfather, the wonderful Alton L. Perry, grew up around an alcoholic father, and as a result, he never touched a drink in his life, all ninety-six long, wonderful years of it.

I am not my grandfather.

I don't write all this so anyone will feel sorry for me—I write these words because they are true. I write them because someone else may be confused by the fact that they know they should stop drinking—like me, they have all the information, and they understand the consequences—but they still can't stop drinking. You are not alone, my brothers and sisters. (In the dictionary under the word "addict," there should be a picture of me looking around, very confused.)

In the sober living house in Southern California, I had a view of West LA and two queen-size beds. The other bed was occupied by my assistant/best friend, Erin, a lesbian whose friendship I treasure because it brings me the joy of female companionship without the romantic tension that has seemed to ruin my friendships with straight women (not to mention, we can talk about hot women together). I'd met her two years earlier, at another rehab where she had been working at the time. I didn't get sober back then, but I saw how wonderful she was in every way and promptly stole her from that sober living rehab and made her my assistant, and she became my best friend. She, too, understood the nature of addiction and would come to know my struggles better than any doctor I'd ever seen.

Despite the comfort that Erin brought to the situation, I still spent many sleepless nights in Southern California. Sleep is a real issue for me, especially when I'm in one of these places. That said, I don't think I have

ever slept for more than four hours straight in my entire life. It didn't help that we'd been watching nothing but prison documentaries—and I was coming off so much Xanax my brain had fried to the point where I was convinced that I was an actual prisoner and that this sober living place was an actual jail. I have a shrink whose mantra is "reality is an acquired taste"—well, I'd lost both my taste and smell of reality by that point; I had Covid of the understanding; I was completely delusional.

There was nothing delusional about the Pain, though; in fact, it hurt so much I'd stopped smoking, which if you knew how much I smoked, you'd think was a pretty sure sign that something very serious was wrong. One employee of the place, whose name badge might as well have read NURSE FUCKFACE, suggested taking an Epsom salts bath to alleviate the "discomfort." You wouldn't take a Band-Aid to a road traffic accident; you don't put someone in this much Pain in water filled with his own sauce. But reality is an acquired taste, remember, so I actually took the actual Epsom salts bath.

There I sat, naked, in Pain, howling like a dog being ripped to shreds by coyotes. Erin heard me—hell, people in San Diego heard me. She appeared at the bathroom door, and looking down upon my sad, naked form as I writhed in Pain, she said very simply, "Do you want to go to the hospital?"

If Erin thought it was hospital-bad, it was hospital-bad. Plus, she'd already noticed I wasn't smoking.

"That sounds like a pretty damn good idea to me," I said in between howls.

Somehow, Erin helped me out of the bath and dried me off. I started to put my clothes back on just as a counselor—alerted by the slaughter of a dog on the premises, presumably—appeared at the door.

"I'm taking him to the hospital," Erin said.

Catherine, the counselor, just so happened to be a beautiful blond woman to whom I had apparently proposed upon my arrival, so she probably wasn't my biggest fan. (Not kidding, I had been so out of it when we'd arrived that I'd asked her to marry me, and then promptly fell down a flight of stairs.)

“This is just drug-seeking behavior,” Catherine said to Erin as I continued to dress. “He’s going to ask for drugs at the hospital.”

Well, this marriage is off, I thought.

By now, the howls had alerted others that there were probably canine entrails all over the bathroom floor, or someone was in real Pain. The head counselor, Charles—think: male model father, homeless mother—joined Catherine in the doorway, to help her block our expected exit.

Block our exit? What were we, twelve years old?

“He’s our patient,” Catherine said. “You don’t have the right to take him.”

“I know Matty,” Erin insisted. “He isn’t trying to get drugs.”

Then Erin turned to me.

“Do you need to go to the hospital, Matty?” I nodded and screamed some more.

“I’m taking him,” Erin said.

Somehow, we pushed past Catherine and Charles, out of the building, and into the parking lot. I say “somehow” not because Catherine and Charles made much of a fuss about stopping us, but because every time my feet touched the ground, the Pain became even more excruciating.

Up there in the sky, looking down on me with scorn, caring not for my agony, was a bright yellow ball.

What’s that? I thought through paroxysms of agony. *Oh, the sun. Right* ... I didn’t get out much.

“We have a high-profile coming in with severe abdominal pain,” Erin said into her phone as she unlocked the car. Cars are stupid, ordinary things until you’re not allowed to drive them, at which point they become magical boxes of freedom and signs of a successful previous life. Erin lifted me into the passenger seat, and I lay back. My belly was twisting in agony.

Erin got into the driver’s seat, turned to me, and said, “Do you want to get there fast, or do you want me to avoid the LA potholes?”

“Just get there, woman!” I managed to say.

By now Charles and Catherine had decided to up their efforts to thwart us and now stood in front of the car, blocking us. Charles’s hands were